Introduction

This entry covers the place of food in its relation with war under four headings:

(I) Logistics – It was not till the nineteenth century that the term logistics came to
designate organized administrative military science. For a military or semi-military
organization, just as more generally, part of what this science is about is the management
of the production, storage, maintenance, and the flow of supplies between some point of
origin and the intended consumers of the supplies. The administrative management of
supplies is, among other things, the management of food and its social relations. In the
case of war, the logistics of the food needed by military forces gets complicated by the
strategic and tactical weaponization of food. The section on logistics attends to the
military importance of solving logistical problems regarding food, some solutions, and
some of the legal constraints placed on the solutions.

(II) Strategy and Tactics – The Ancient Greek strategos was the military commander who
planned a war or a campaign, and ever since then the term strategy has been used to refer
to a plan that given a war’s or a military campaign’s goals offers the guidelines for the
achievement of these goals. Strategy is concerned with the linkages among the many
engagements that have specific objectives and are guided by tactics. In the case of food
and war, strategy and tactics together determine forms of the weaponization of food. The
section on strategy and logistics reviews some of the ways in which food has
weaponized either strategically or tactically.

(III) Gender – Women and men have had and continue to have different roles in relation
to both food and war. The gendering of women’s and men’s relations to food in war is
entwined with logistics and necessarily gets complicated by the weaponization of food by
strategy and tactics. Because during wartime nonmilitary women though not nonmilitary
men get assigned specific tasks in relation to food, some restructuring their peacetime
roles and others mobilizing these roles, it is important to discuss food in war and its
relation to gender. The section on gender analyzes some aspects of the triadic relation of
gender-food-war.

(IV) Normativity – The relation of war and food is normed culturally. It also continues to
and should be framed by ethico-political normative constraints. Some of these constraints
are customary, other legal, and many are still on the ethico-political normative horizon
that is created by variously motivated wish lists that are developed and adjusted by,
among others, academic ethicists and political theorists, religious leaders, and human
rights activists who struggle against the weaponization of food. The section on
normativity examines some of the primary ways in which the relation of food and war is and could be normed ethico-politically.

The entry as a whole is semi-casuistic in methodology, relying on cases, not all paradigmatic, to illustrate and develop its main points. Its bibliography is selective, not only because comprehensiveness seems impossible in the case of food in/and war but also because this is an underthematized topic.

Logistics

The Third Amendment to the US Constitution, which came into effect on December 15, 1791, states:

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

The third amendment has never been explicated by the US Supreme Court and has surfaced constitutionally only in the discussions of privacy in Griswold v. Connecticut (1965) and that of limitations of executive power in Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer (1952). And yet, James Madison found it necessary to include it as one of his set of just 12 amendments to the constitution, all designed to create and safeguard specific civil and political freedoms. He did so because of colonists’ objections to the English practice of involuntary billeting, which required colonists to provide English soldiers both lodging and food, and he relied on the traditions of English law, which protected English citizens from involuntary billeting. Complaints against involuntary billeting were among those the colonists voiced in the Declaration of Independence and have previously brought to the attention of the King of England, appealing to him as his English subjects whose rights were violated. These rights were guaranteed legally by the 1679 Anti-Quartering Act of the English Parliament that applied to private homes and public structures in times of peace and war alike and the 1689 English Bill of Rights, which includes a right protecting its bearers against involuntary billeting (Fields and Hardy 1991).

Involuntary billeting solved an important logistical problem that was understood quite early in the history of organized war. Thus, one finds Thucydides noting in The Peloponnesian War (431 BCE) that the shortage of necessary food supplies forces armies to retreat and to enter into agreements with their enemies that they would have preferred to avoid. Caesar adds to these observations in The Gallic Wars (58–50 BCE), noting the Roman custom of expecting the hosting of Roman troops from allies and conquered peoples alike and pointing out that a smart strategist plans for shortages, as he did in 54 BCE, when realizing that he was unable to quarter all the Roman legions under his command together for the winter and so split them and the burdens of their hosting among multiple areas and Gallic tribes.

Armies have to be sheltered, clothed, and fed during war, and standing armies have to be sheltered, clothed, and fed during peacetime as well. In the Wealth of Nations (1776), Adam Smith suggests that, however unproductive their labor, the services of a standing army composed of disciplined specialists are needed by modernizing/modern countries such as England of his time. Smith expects the provisioning of a standing army
to be financed through a state’s treasury and argues for local requisitioning of shelter and food for troops that are stationed at a distance, as in the case of Britain’s colonies, including the future United States. Billeting, whether voluntary or not, can be done through formal requisition but shelter and especially clothing and food can also be acquired via pillage. Witnesses in England’s colonies and elsewhere have claimed that sometimes it is quite impossible to distinguish between requisitioning and pillage.

Pillage was a common and accepted practice of war. Even after being outlawed, it has remained a common enough practice during violent conflict. The first legal document that prohibits versions of pillage and is still taken seriously legally as part of the documents that together elaborate current International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is the 1863 Leiber Code – General Order No. 100 – which was prepared by Francis Lieber and issued by President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War. By the time of the Civil War, the United States had enough experience with the organization and provision of specific food rations to its soldiers and both the Union and the Confederate armies ate similar foods, though over time the rations of Confederate soldiers grew smaller. In addition, due to extensive logistical problems and bad planning, the Confederate army did not have enough food supplies in depots or available for requisitioning and its soldiers turned to foraging (Ballard 2004).

Strategy and Tactics

In his 1812 campaign against Russia, Napoleon Bonaparte discovered that an army in need of foraging can be starved into defeat. As part of their defensive strategy against the Grand Arméé, the Russians instituted a scorched-earth policy so ruthless that they left nothing of value for the advancing Napoleonic forces, which were used to living off the land. The Russians learned from the Portuguese who 2 years earlier, in 1810, successfully used slash-and-burn tactics against Napoleon’s army. Napoleon did not learn from his failure in Portugal, a fact that surprised Carl von Clausewitz. Clausewitz believed that Napoleon was a strategic genius who, unfortunately, was disposed to taking some unnecessary reckless risks. Among his comments about the 1812 campaign is this one: “it is undeniable that the lack of care over supplies was responsible for the unprecedented wastage of Napoleon’s army on the advance and for its wholly calamitous retreat” (1984/1832, p. 339).

Clausewitz centered military marches as a means to decisive battles and, therefore, thought of food and other necessary supplies under logistics, though he was aware that the need to feed soldiers has been used tactically and strategically in defensive wars, as in Portugal and Russia, and in offensive wars as well. One of the most successful offensive uses of an army’s need (and the needs of the civilians on whose behalf it was fighting) for all kinds of supplies occurred almost 50 years after the failed Napoleonic campaign in Russia, when the Union relied on a tightening blockade to win its war against the Confederacy in the American Civil War. While prohibiting pillage and requiring humane treatment of civilians and enemy soldiers alike, the Lieber Code did not prohibit blockades. The Union’s blockade strategy, known as the “Anaconda Plan,” was developed by the General-in-Chief of the US Army Winfield Scott. The actual Union strategy put into action modified Scott’s original plan to permit more military engagements than Scott wanted to pursue. Even in its modified version, the blockade,
which basically starved the South, was key to the Union’s success (Smith 2011).

In current warfare, blockades have become less important strategically since militaries have become better at logistics and soldiers in combat or at outposts that are removed from their bases are supplied with Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) that are well calibrated not only nutritionally but also in order to appeal to many tastes and meet diverse religious restrictions. But the blockade has remained a tool of war. Thus, for example, in 1982, the United Kingdom blockaded the Falkland Islands after Argentina occupied them during the Falkland War and Israel has blockaded Gaza since 2007. In addition, blockades have been used by the United Nation’s Security Council, NATO, and similar coalitions.

Blockades are lawful under international law but only when governed by specific rules. Among the legal constraints on blockades is section 54 of Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, which bans strategies and tactics that involve the destruction of food supplies or/and the means to grow food in an area of conflict. Section 54 states:

Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive.

**Gender**

International law’s protection of civilians against starvation, whether in the case of blockades or the use of scorched-earth policies or slash-and-burn tactics, may have been agreed to because of sexism, which in times of war and in warlike violent conflicts is expressed in gendered treatments of soldiers and civilians. Indeed, even the distinction between “soldiers” and “civilians” tends to be gendered (Carpenter 2006). One can find a representation of the gendering of war already in the Iliad and Odyssey (800 BCE) with their reference to a war fought by men over access to one woman – Helen of Troy – while another woman, Penelope, waits patiently and faithfully for her husband, though she too is the subject of an intense competition for access.

Both Helen and Penelope were confined to and by Greek domesticity but they were not expected, unlike women in World War I and World War II England and the United States, for example, to reconceive the home as a “front” and the feeding of their families as a “contribution to the war effort.” War had to become total war in its twentieth-century version and involve the mobilization of the whole population in order to reshape daily life and deploy women to accomplish much of the reshaping. The totalizing of war in England during World War I brought with it the organization of the Land Army, which started its activities in 1915. Its members worked as field laborers growing food mostly on land confiscated by the British Government under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) of 1914.

By 1917, about 260,000 women worked as field laborers in England and the United States instituted its own Women’s Land Army, both of which were remobilized in World War II (Carpenter 2003; Kramer 2008). Wartime women field laborers, like their
much better known counterparts, wartime women factory workers, filled positions otherwise held by men. At home, in the domestic private sphere, as well as in in-between spaces of public food production, such as victory gardens, or food preparation and service, such as in charity dinners, women continued to perform along the lines dictated by their gender roles, though in a manner reconfigured through state interventions.

In both world wars, among the serious supply problems was food, resulting in inflationary prices, which exasperated class divisions and increased social instability. Rationing, less successful in World War I than in World War II, was not enough, especially since it was accompanied by an informal market in rationed goods and rationing cards that undermined some of the intentions for rationing. States, therefore, turned to women in their domestic roles to solve the complex set of food shortages and related social problems they faced. They addressed women as wartime homemakers and told them that their “real and most important battlefield was the kitchen. There women could – and should – fight the war and prove their patriotism by cooking and serving the right kind of foods in the right kind of ways” (Bentley 1998, p. 31).

For mainstream United States, due to British influences that can be traced back to colonial times, the “right foods” and the “right way” defined dinner as consisting of a large portion of a high-status food, such as meat, served together with two complementary foods, such as bread and vegetables. During World War II, the US government successfully changed the mainstream understanding of the “right foods” and the “right way” by introducing the forerunner of the 2011 US Department of Agriculture “plate” and its predecessor, the 1992 “pyramid” – the “basic seven.” An interesting and quite significant difference between the “basic seven” and the 1956 simplified version of “basic four” is that meat features in the fifth place among the “basic seven” and in the first place among the “basic four.” Indeed, “meat” is the first word one reads on the “basic seven” list, calling attention to both meat’s recovery as a high-status food and the United States’ ability to sustain its prosperity while the Cold War was going on.

The “basic seven” offered a list of the “right foods” but just eating the foods on the list did not exhaust the meaning of eating the “right way.” The “basic seven” had to be eaten in the “right quantities,” as defined by gender, age, and even occupation differentiated caloric needs. In addition, their “right production” was expected to be quite economical. Home food production in the form of gardening and canning, though labor intensive and in many cases an additional burden for women, many of whom now also worked outside the home, defined the “right ways to produce food,” with canning adding the benefit of saving foods for seasons during which gardening is impractical.

Normativity

“Right” is a normative term. In the United States, in the case of the relation of gender, food, and war during World War II, the set of criteria used to distinguish between the “right” and “wrong” foods, the “right” and “wrong” quantities for their consumption, and the “right” and “wrong” modes of their production were also used to distinguish between the “right” and “wrong” ways to perform gender, thereby norming gender. As wartime criteria they had another use – norming patriotism by distinguishing “patriots” from those who failed their patriotic obligations, a failure that was usually attributed to the moral character flaw of akrasia or weak-will (Veit 2007).
Most of the norms that appear to seamlessly connect gender, patriotism, and food are cultural. Some are legal. Exchanges on the informal market in rationed goods and rationing cards during World War II were prohibited and punishable by law, adding a clear negative incentive to the shaping of conduct by new cultural norms. In international society, law is among the most important instruments norming engagements in war. International law prohibits all but for defensive wars, thereby prohibiting wars whose goal is the acquisition of food by force, though it is among the more usual kind of resource wars that are increasingly caused by the growing needs that are coproduced by capitalist globalization and climate change. The alternative to war is a more equitable division of access to the means of food production and food itself, among the goals of global justice, a realizable though at present utopian normative ideal because thus far it has not mobilized enough institutional support.

The prohibition on food-as-resource wars is not only legal but also ethico-political and falls under the jus ad bellum branch of the just war theoretical framework, which is concerned with the normative justification of and thus normative constraints on engagements in war. Like current international law, current jus ad bellum principles permit only defensive wars. If one could construe the denial of food or access to food as a form of aggression, then such a denial could serve as a basis for a claim to have a just cause that justifies a serious consideration of an attempt to secure food by violent means. But, a just cause is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for an engagement in war, and in the case of food, its force as a condition is mitigated by the existence of international aid. Recent warnings by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, however, do point out that food insecurity is unacceptably high, especially in countries that experience protracted violent crisis that compromises the supply of food, food production, and access to food. Food insecurity, then, becomes a cause of and exacerbates further violence.

Food, even if primarily a resource that is required to address basic human needs, is rarely merely a simple means. Food is a significant part of any culture and at least some foods can count as a “cultural property.” As such they ought to be protected by the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. But, the convention, which mentions, books, artworks, and archaeological sites, does not mention any foods. And yet, the French, for example, consider their wines to be a national cultural treasure. The Nazi German elite concurred with this judgment. As a result, starting in June 1940, the Nazis transferred French wines to Germany by direct looting (as in the stealing of 80,000 bottles from the cellars of Paris’s La Tour d’Argent), Nazi takeovers of famous wine production houses (such as Moët and Chandon in the Champagne region, which began business in 1743 and was known for supplying Europe’s royalty, aristocracy, and its wealthy families), or the coercive reduction of the price of all the wines the Nazis purchased through the monopolization of demand, the offer of under market value, and the punishment of noncooperation with fines, prison, as well as deportation to labor and death camps (Kladstrup and Kladstrup 2001).

The protection of food-as-cultural-property falls both outside existing international law and outside current just war theory. Just war theory is basically minimalist in its construction of human needs. To the extent that food, its production, and access to it are protected within the theory, it is by the macro- and micro-versions of the principle of proportionality. Both versions of the proportionality principle set normative
constraints on the harms and damages of war and require engaging in cost-benefit analyses that weigh harms and damages against specified goods. The principle of macro-proportionality is a *jus ad bellum* principle that requires a prediction about the overall harms and damages and overall good that are expected from a war. The principle of micro-proportionality is a *jus in bello* principle that requires predictions regarding the harms and damages and goods that are expected from specific acts of violence undertaken in a war. Because a consequentialist calculus is used in the application of both versions of the principles of proportionality, they can protect food only to a limited extent. The logic of such a calculus necessarily permits some harms and damages in general and will permit some harms and damages that are caused by the weaponization of food. This is why under certain conditions, attacking food supplies, fields, food factories, roads that are used to transport food, and the like, may all be ethico-politically permissible.

The *jus in bello* principle of discrimination, which requires that distinctions be drawn between combatants and noncombatants, can be used to protect food for noncombatants. The principle identifies who is and who is not liable to intentional attack. Its various interpretations assume that noncombatants are not liable to intentional attack. One could argue that an intentional attack on food is an intentional attack on the people who need the food that is attacked. If noncombatants are not liable to attack, then the food of noncombatants ought to be protected (Thomas 2005).

The *jus post bellum* branch of just war theory, which is concerned with postwar justice, can contribute to the protection of food, if and only if one allows considerations of the postwar goals of a just war to play a decisive role in the case of both *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. This is Immanuel Kant’s approach in *Perpetual Peace* (1795). According to Kant, peace is the only goal of a just war that has intrinsic value and so constrains even the engagement in defensive wars, let alone actions during a war, demanding that both not undermine the possibility of postwar peace. Kant’s argument could be used to protect food at least insofar as its destruction might undermine peace. This argument is, however, weak and a different Kantian idea, that of human dignity and the normative demand to not undermine it, can be mobilized to create much stronger protections of food. Such an argument might actually be launched not only to protect food-as-resource but also food-as-cultural property, though in order to argue that food must be protected as cultural property, one will have to mobilize communitarian assumptions about the importance of group membership to personal identity and therefore to one’s sense of one’s own dignity.

A Kantian sort of argument could be advanced when human rights are mobilized to protect food. But most human rights arguments for the protection of food are much weaker than a Kantian argument that centers human dignity because they treat food merely as satisfying a basic need. While human rights arguments might be weaker in an ideal sense, in practice they are the stronger ones because a basic right to food in the case of armed conflict is protected by international law (Pejic 2001). Under the 1998 Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court, intentionally starving civilian populations is a crime of war. And according to a complex body of international law, the doctrine of double effect, which is used to excuse some unintended consequences, cannot be easily invoked in the case of food. The law requires that if food or access to food is destroyed, relief agencies be allowed to distribute the food that people need. From the perspective of concern with human dignity, the problem of transforming an independent population into one dependent on relief agencies for the fulfillment of its basic needs is
extensive. This has been recognized by the United Nations and it has started to mix its normative terms in order to be able to act on Jean Ziegler’s claim (n.d.):

> The right to food is a human right. It protects the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. The right to food is not about charity, but about ensuring that all people have the capacity to feed themselves in dignity.

References


