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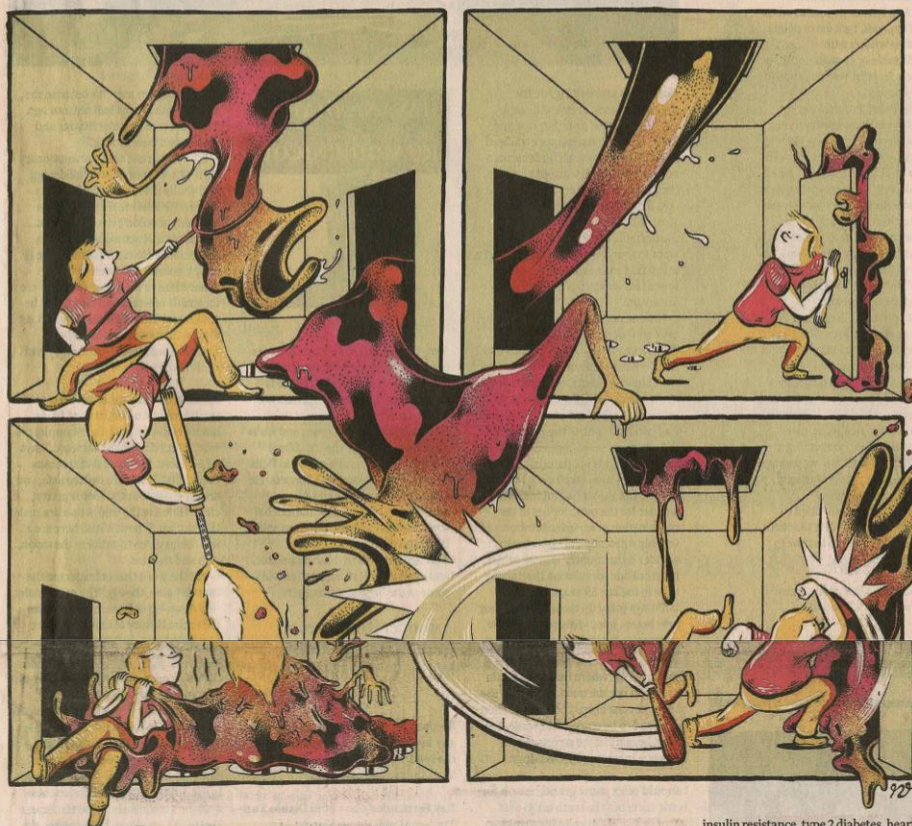
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How to take on Big Sugar and win

A libertarian by instinct, *Camilla Cavendish* masterminded the new sugar tax. In the face of rising obesity we have to start treating sugar as nicotine, she argues

A few weeks ago I was interviewing medics in Boston, where I'm spending time researching the challenges of the ageing society. We were discussing the explosion in chronic diseases that is making people old before their time, and one said something that stuck with me. "Parents are literally killing with kindness," he said, describing one of his patients, Susan, an 11-year-old girl who weighs 360lb. She's not even a teenager, but she already suffers from type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. If she makes it to 50, he said, she will probably be in a wheelchair.

There was a brief moment, four years ago, when America seemed to have reached peak obesity. Sadly, that hope was dashed. Almost four in 10 American adults now qualify as obese and the people putting on weight fastest are teenage girls such as Susan. The awful truth is that it is now normal to be fat. People of average weight are in the minority.

The UK is not far behind. One of many things our two nations have in common is our sweet tooth. In trying to ward off obesity, we are fighting our addiction to sugar. And we are up against an industry that risks rapidly becoming the 21st-century equivalent of Big Tobacco.

I hope that doesn't sound hysterical. Back in 2015, when I worked in Number 10 Downing Street, there was a mortifying moment when I was called a "health fascist" by one of David Cameron's other

From main: illustration by Renaud Vigourt; celebrity chef and health campaigner Jamie Oliver



advisers. We had just come out of the prime minister's office, where I had been arguing that we should tax fizzy drinks. I was taken back to hear myself described as fascist. I'd been against the smoking ban, I'd campaigned to legalise drugs, and I loathe the nanny state.

The trouble was, I had come up against the horror of the obesity epidemic. As a mother, I'd experienced the full force of peer power. As a board member of the English hospital regulator, the Care Quality Commission, I saw hospitals widening doors and reinforcing beds for super-sized patients whose illnesses could often have been prevented.

In Britain, one in 10 children are already obese when they arrive at primary school at the age of five. That doubles to one in five when they leave primary school, aged 10 or 11. And the most vulnerable are the poor – those living in areas that, according to a new study by the University of Arkansas, already have an "ecology of disadvantage".

Consumers are understandably confused. For decades, we were warned off saturated fat. A profitable industry grew up selling "low-fat" processed foods. But these are a con. To make them tasty, manufacturers stuff them with carbohydrates and sugar. These create spikes in blood sugar levels, which lead to addictive cravings when blood sugar falls. The health consequences are dire:

insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and obesity. Big Food offering low-fat cakes is the equivalent of Big Tobacco offering low-tar cigarettes. They make us feel better about ourselves, while keeping us hooked.

The tragedy is that some scientists have known about the pernicious effects of sugar for 40 years. In 1972, when health experts were wondering how to explain an explosion in heart disease, the leading British nutritionist John Yudkin argued that sugar was the main culprit, as it increased blood levels of triglycerides. His book, *Pure, White and Deadly*, pointed out that people had been eating butter and other fats for decades: what had changed was their consumption of sugar. But Yudkin's research was so successfully rubbished by food manufacturers that many of his papers were not even accepted for publication. Industry successfully – and deliberately, according to documents recently unearthed at the University of California – shifted the blame to fat.

What we now know is that sugar is as addictive as cigarettes. The American paediatric endocrinologist Robert Lustig has argued that sugar switches on the same hormonal pathways as nicotine. This explains why so many people never lose weight eating low-fat foods. It explains the explosion in type 2 diabetes. And it explains why it's so hard to wean oneself off sugar.

None of us are immune. I read Lustig while I was working as a leader writer and columnist at the Times. Battling exhaustion after my third child, and sitting opposite a dear friend who practically maintained Coca-Cola, I fell into the habit of needing a Coke and chocolate bar before every deadline. Since I was filling copy every day, my consumption of sugar was considerable. And pretty soon the chocolate bar was no longer a single small, elegant Green & Black's, but a string of Yorkie bars.

This kind of "mindless eating" has been brought to life, hilariously and poignantly, in experiments by Brian Wansink of Cornell University. In one, he gave stale popcorn to two groups of cinema-goers. One group got big buckets. The other got giant buckets so large that researchers assumed no one would finish them. When the movie ended, the people with giant buckets had scoured them clean. They'd consumed 50 per

cent more popcorn than the others. When told this, most were astonished.

Wansink opened my eyes to just how much we humans are influenced by our peers, and by portion size. We won't stop until we've finished the bucket.

Michael Bloomberg understood this intuitively. As mayor of New York he tried to ban jumbo-size sodas in 2011. The soft drinks industry could have looked at itself, and at the dire effect it was having on citizens, and agreed to row back a little. Instead, it took him to court and won, on the grounds that the Mayor had over-reached himself in attempting to interfere with the "personal autonomy" of New Yorkers.

Soda makers might legitimately have thought that people denied one jumbo soda would simply buy more. But it turns out we humans don't work quite like that. Three years after Bloomberg was defeated, in the first comprehensive global study of obesity policies, McKinsey & Co concluded that the single most effective policy to combat obesity would be to reduce portion sizes.

McKinsey was one of the first organisations I turned to when I became head of the Downing Street Policy Unit. I found some of the health campaigners shrill. I wanted us to target what worked, not launch an all-out assault on lifestyles. And so did Cameron, my boss. He was instinctively wary of the nanny state. He did, however, regret not having introduced minimum alcohol pricing, which might have

Westminster the city of temptation in London, which had transformed school lunches, built school playgrounds, taught parents about nutrition, and even developed a popular TV programme to curb obesity. We looked at Mexico, where a sugar tax substantially reduced fizzy drinks purchases by the poorest. We sat down with Jamie Oliver, the celebrity chef and health campaigner, who presented the prime minister with a framed graph showing how poor children fare worst from the onslaught of junk food. That graph sat by the prime minister's desk for months. And it was that argument – that obesity hurts the poor, and that

sugar drives obesity – that convinced him about the sugar tax.

The tax could never be enough on its own. But we did hope it would reduce purchasing – especially by the teenagers who were getting, unbelievably, a third of their daily calories from fizzy drinks. We also hoped companies would respond by taking sugar out of their products. By designing a tax with two bands, Chancellor George Osborne created exactly the right incentive for companies to reformulate. Responsible brands and companies such as Suntory-owned Lucozade and Tesco have done so. Coca-Cola has held out, not wanting to dilute its legendary taste.

To be fair to Big Food, many companies argue that they are simply selling what people like. They point out that everyone is free to eat kale if they choose, and that most people

The awful truth is that it is now normal to be fat. People of average weight are in the minority

consume in moderation. They also feel that demonising food and drink is unfair, and that government should be doing far more about exercise. All of these are perfectly legitimate arguments. My problem is that they don't deal with the reality of a public health crisis brought on by our inability to

We live in a world where temptation lurks everywhere: in the next aisle or before the next TV slot. There is considerable evidence that children are deeply influenced by advertising, and a number of countries, including Canada, are making strides to curb it. Although England already has restrictions on advertising of unhealthy food to children, these don't cover online marketing, or some of the most popular early evening family shows. As a result, many children are assaulted with ads for junk before the 9pm watershed.

Continued on page 2

BOVET

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Beyond the Incas

Peru | After 35 years of hunting Inca ruins, *Hugh Thomson* takes a new tour that focuses on the country's often overlooked colonial heritage

Driving down Peru's Valle Sagrado, I watched cattle grazing on old Inca terraces. Smoke drifted from the fields where farmers were burning stubble, hummingbirds flitted around the groves of eucalyptus trees. Looming over the valley were now-topped Andean giants, crowned by the 6,271-metre-high Sacantay.

I have been coming to Peru for 35 years, either to lead expeditions looking for Inca ruins or to write books. On one memorable occasion I brought my whole family, so the children could spend a term at a Peruvian school.

The Valle Sagrado – the “Sacred Valley” that connects Cusco to Machu Picchu – has become a place I know well. I’ve seen it change from a sleepy rural backwater to a place dotted with smart hotels; since Peru achieved political stability, the number of tourists has rocketed, particularly those from the US. But it has kept its charm.

The river Vilcanota was canalised here by the Incas, who built ingenious terraces in the most vertiginous of its slopes. The valley has always been a centre for agriculture. To either side of the road, I could see a patchwork of smallholdings growing the maize for which the valley remains famous.

There’s a reason they’re all small holdings. In the 1970s, a series of agrarian reforms were passed that were some of the most radical in South America. A left-wing military government, with a lasting legacy that is still bitterly resented by some.

As a result, many of the grand old colonial estate houses, the haciendas, were left to rot. But with Peru’s increased prosperity, some of the original owners have been able to restore these haciendas and promote the considerable attractions of the country’s colonial past to visitors, like me, who all too often previously have just come for the Inca ruins.

Now Mariel Mosquera and her enterprising Anglo-Peruvian travel company Aracari have arranged for guests to visit and sometimes stay in a range of these private haciendas. So I awoke to find myself in what must be the largest bedroom I have slept in. Everything in haciendas tends to come on the grand scale.

As the only guest at the Hacienda Huayocari, I had breakfast with the owner José Ignacio Lambarri in his garden filled with roses, agapanthus and agave plants. The hacienda lay at just over 5,000 metres and had stunning views across the valley. José told me the story of what had happened to his family at the time of the agrarian reforms.

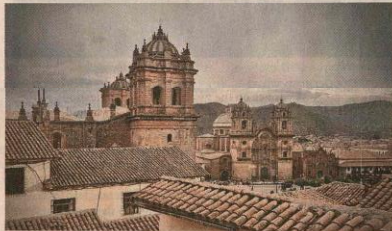
His grandfather once had 180 hectares of cultivable land. After the redistribution, he was left with just 40. His grandfather would have lost the hacienda and the remaining land as well, had it not been for his reputation as a good *hacendado*, an estate owner who always looked after his workers.

A hacienda is halfway between a farm and a country house. Even the grandest still have strong agricultural associations and most are built from adobe. Typically, they are centred around a large patio, often filled with orange trees and bougainvillea, and with a series of stone arcades leading off to palatial reception rooms. At the end of Hacienda Huayocari’s dining room was a large fireplace, as winters in the Andes can be cold, with enough wrought iron in its tub fender to fence a municipal park.

A modest and engaging person, José Ignacio had never measured his dining room. We paced it out together at 90 feet. Not bad for a private house.

Rode down the valley on a Peruvian Paso horse, another colonial legacy bred over generations so their smooth, rolling gait could make long journeys across this wildly mountainous country more comfortable. At Sarapampa, after a ride of some 15 miles, Yussef Sumar hosted me at his restored hacienda. His father had similarly lost almost all his land (some 500 hectares) but had later managed to divert the river Vilcanota to reclaim a little bit back.

The large hacienda was set back from the river and we ate lunch out on the sunny terrace. The food prepared by Yussef’s wife Yasmin could have been on the poster for the new *cocina andina* that has been sweeping Lima, London



Clockwise from main: hacienda owner José Ignacio Lambarri (centre) riding Sagrado; Palacio Nazarenas in Cusco inside Hacienda Huayocari; Casa de Aliaga; La Compañía de Jesús, Cusco



and New York: peppers stuffed with both white and black quinoa, the Andean grain I had seen growing up and down the Sacred Valley; followed by alpaca tenderloin in a creole dressing and finishing with one of the great pleasures of any visits to Peru: ice cream flavoured with the exotic jungle fruits that have come from the Amazon, such as tree tomatoes or eggfruit.

The farm here specialises in growing the large white corn for which the Cusco area is well known. Yussef showed us one of his antiques – a brutally laborious hand plough once used by the Quechua Indians before the Spaniards brought the welcome innovation of beasts of burden strong enough to pull a field plough; a reminder that they did not just bring destruction.

For Peru still has an equivocal relationship to its colonial past. The Spanish occupation lasted for three centuries and its influence continued long after independence. Peru, however, now likes to position itself as a pre-Columbian country. New presidents are inaugurated at Machu Picchu. The statue of the

first conquistador, Francisco Pizarro, was not so long ago taken down from Lima’s main square.

But it would be absurd to ignore the many contributions that the Spanish left behind. Most visitors naturally tour Cusco as the old Inca capital it once was, visiting the sun temple, the Coricancha, and the extraordinary ruins on the hill above, Sacsayhuamán. However, that is to miss the fine colonial houses built on

‘A lot of money came through here – and the conquistadors were never shy about spending it’

the foundations of Inca palaces. Many have wonderfully worked Spanish balconies and doorways, often painted in bright blue or dark green to stand out against the plain whitewashed walls.

I stayed at Cusco’s La Casana hotel, a luxurious conversion of a very early colonial building. It brought back strange memories, as I had slept there 20 years ago when it was still in ruins and multiple occupancy, with holes both in the floorboards and in the roof. Now that it had been restored, one could clearly see the fine, slim brickwork around the arches, often the sign of an early 17th-century building.

Just opposite was an even more startling conversion of a colonial building. Until 1977, the Palacio Nazarenas had been a convent. When the last six nuns left, the building stood empty for many years before Belmond (formerly Orient Express) took it on and, in 2012, relaunched it as a luxurious hotel

and spa, the only one in town with an outdoor pool.

I had lunch with Elizabeth Kuon, an anthropologist who now works with Aracari and spent decades with Unesco restoring both Inca and colonial buildings after Cusco’s devastating earthquake of 1950. We ate on a terrace above San Cristóbal church, with the Spanish red-tiled roofs of the historic centre of the city laid out beneath us in a compact and well-preserved way. Peru’s strict conservation laws have forced even Starbucks and Subway to shelter modestly in historic buildings.

We had a clear view of La Compañía de Jesús, the magnificent colonial church built by the Jesuits on the foundations of an Inca emperor’s palace, which caused outrage in 17th-century Peru by trying to be bigger than the cathedral next to it in the main square.

“What you have to remember,” Elizabeth told me, “is that the diocese of the archbishop of Cusco extended as far north as Panama. Peru was the centre of viceregal Latin America, and Cusco was directly on the silver route from Potosí to the coast and Lima. A lot of money came through here – and the conquistadors and their descendants were never shy about spending it.”

When they reached the viceregal headquarters in Lima, they were even less shy. The cathedral on the main square of what Pizarro founded as “the City of Kings” has been remodelled several times because of earthquakes. It was built on alluvial soil near the river, so heavy stone columns were not thought advisable and the architecture is lighter than many contemporary buildings. But there is plenty of gilt colonial bling on show in the side chapels.

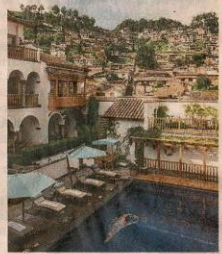
The skeleton of Pizarro was discovered in a box under the altar 40 years ago and is now displayed in a glass cabinet by the cathedral entrance. It has been authenticated both by DNA matching with his descendants, and by the wounds that seem to correspond to those he received when assassinated by rivals as he prepared for mass one Sunday in 1541.

Just behind the cathedral is the extraordinary well preserved Casa de Aliaga. The first de Aliaga helped the illiterate Pizarro compose his letters to the Spanish court back home. Aracari arranged for me to meet the current count – Gonzalo de Aliaga, Count of San

“Sixteen generations of my family have lived uninterruptedly in this house since the conquest,” the Duke told me. “And that holds the record for continuous colonial occupation anywhere in the whole of South America!”

One reason for this longevity was that, as Spanish aristocrats, they had always backed the crown in any of its often vicious disputes with the colony – until the day when a republic was so clearly arriving that they judiciously switched sides and stripped the chapel of its silver plating to help fund the independence movement of Bolívar and San Martín.

The hacienda Santa Rosa just outside Lima also opened its very large doors to me so that I could find out more about the Paso dressage horses, a speciality of its owners, the Navarro Restegui family, who have been schooling them for decades. It’s close enough to the Pacific for guests like me to be able to take horses cantering along beside the surf. Carmen Restegui and her daughter did so wearing the traditional white colonial riding clothes that Limeños would have worn during the long years of the *virreinato*, the viceregal period when their city was



at the heart of a huge colonial empire.

Carmen is also a well-known contemporary artist whose striking and politically radical pictures are placed beside the traditional family portraits around the dining room. Contemporary art is nailing something of a boom in Lima and in the hip districts of Barranco and Miraflores there are almost as many *galleristas* as baristas.

On my final day in Peru, I went to track down the statue of Pizarro that was moved from the main square of Lima by a populist mayor some 15 years ago. It had been dumped unceremoniously in the edgeclans of a small municipal strip between Lima’s expressway and the remains of the old colonial walls that once ringed the city. Seated on his horse, the face of the old conquistador stared out unloved and unwanted as he brandished his sword. This was the man who once famously drew a line in the sand and asked which of his fellow Spaniards wanted to cross and help him conquer Peru.

But like an old family piano, Pizarro’s presence is too large for the country to hide him away completely. The colonial legacy will always be part of Peru’s history, and one that needs to be properly celebrated and understood.

Hugh Thomson’s books include ‘The White Rock: An Exploration of the Inca Heartland’ and ‘Cochineal Red: Travels Through Ancient Peru’ (both Weidenfeld & Nicolson)



DETAILS

Hugh Thomson was a guest of Aracari (aracari.com). It offers a bespoke eight-day trip staying at Haciendas Huayocari, Sarapampa and Santa Rosa, and hotels including Belmond Palacio Nazarenas and Inkaterre La Casana in Cusco and Villa Barranco in Lima, from \$5,666 including excursions, transfers and domestic flights. British Airways (ba.com) flies direct from London to Lima, from about £600 return

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