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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Cooking in the Past and for the Future in Latin America

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This essay reviews the following works:

Cooking Technology: Transformations in Culinary Practice in Mexico and Latin America. Edited by Steffan Igor Ayora-Díaz. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Pp. vii + 196. $39.95 paperback, $114.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781474234689.

Taste, Politics, and Identities in Mexican Food. Edited by Steffan Igor Ayora-Díaz. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. xii + 228. $42.95 paperback, $131.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781350066670.

Food and Revolution: Fighting Hunger in Nicaragua, 1960–1993. By Christiane Berth. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. Pp. xi + 283. $50.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780822946045.

Sancocho de Mico. By Felipe Castilla Corza. Bogotá: Universidad de la Sabana, 2018. Pp. 82. $13.68 paper. ISBN 9789581204458.

Hungry for Revolution: The Politics of Food and the Making of Modern Chile. By Joshua Frens-String. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. Pp. ix–xiv + 322. $34.95 paperback, $85 cloth. ISBN: 9780520343375.

Gastropolitics and the Specter of Race: Stories of Capital, Culture, and Coloniality in Peru. By María Elena García. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. $30 paper, $85 cloth. Pp. ix + 320. ISBN: 9780520301900.

Food in Cuba: The Pursuit of a Decent Meal. By Hanna Garth. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020. Pp. ix + 232. $26 paperback, $105 cloth. ISBN: 9781503611092.

Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Science of Plant Biodiversity. By John Hartigan Jr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Pp. xxviii + 346. $27.00 paperback, $108.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780816685356.

Eating Puerto Rico: A History of Food, Culture, and Identity. By Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. Pp. xvi + 388. $40 paperback. ISBN: 9781469608822.

The Neoliberal Diet: Healthy Profits, Unhealthy People. By Gerardo Otero. Translated by Russ Davidson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 256. $34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781477316986.

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Rice in the Time of Sugar: The Political Economy of Food in Cuba. By Louis A. Pérez Jr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. Pp. xii-xiv + 264. $35.50 paperback, $99 cloth. ISBN: 9781469651422.

Substance and Seduction: Ingested Commodities in Early Modern Mesoamerica. Edited by Stacey Schwartzkopf and Kathryn E. Sampeck. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. Pp. xvii + 220. $27.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781477313879.

Quinoa: Food Politics and Agrarian Life in the Andean Highlands. By Linda J. Seligmann. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 201. $25 paperback. ISBN: 9780252086885.

Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States. By Heidi Tinsman. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. Pp. xi + 363. $29.95 paperback, $104.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780822355359.

Migrant Marketplaces: Food and Italians in North and South America. By Elizabeth Zanoni. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 273. $32.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780252083297.

Food scholars know that defining cuisines is never as simple as restaurant descriptions on Google maps might suggest. Foodways in Latin America are diverse and have been subjected to multiple upheavals, and studying them with any degree of honesty requires understanding both lived experiences and broad historical perspectives. One of the most compelling things about food studies is precisely this ability to span and link across such scales of analysis. Food is a daily, personal act that intimately links diners to global networks of trade, migration, and states. The best food scholarship refuses to be bound by heuristic devices that would obscure such complicated relationships rather than illuminate them.

The books I discuss here fit squarely into that research tradition. They span five hundred years of history and cover many regions of Latin America. Some focus primarily on cooking techniques (Ayora-Díaz's *Cooking Technology*), cuisines (Ayora-Díaz's *Taste, Politics, and Identities in Mexican Food* as well as Ortíz Cuadra), production (Seligmann), and consumption (Garth; Tinsman) while looking far beyond the immediately local. Others reverse this focus, concerning themselves primarily with large-scale questions of state policies (Otero; Tinsman; Berth; Pérez), transcontinental migrations (Zanoni), or global scientific communities (Hartigan), they nevertheless return to "tasteful" writing about how food is experienced at the level of grower, cook, and diner.

Looking at the *longue durée* of Latin American food, one can point to several historical upheavals that affected most of the region. The two most transformative (or, more accurately, catastrophic) were the Columbian Exchange and the rise of industrial agrofood. The former, named in 1972 by Alfred Crosby, was not a specific event per se but a series of culinary movements that began in the early sixteenth century and continue until today.[1] (For example, many "superfoods" that have recently fascinated Western consumers have been long appreciated in Latin America; the recent global commodification of quinoa and açai berry shows that the Colombian Exchange is an ongoing process.) It is difficult to imagine contemporary Europe's cuisines without potatoes or chocolate, Mexico's without pork or beef, Italy's without tomatoes, Africa's without maize, or Asia's without chilis. This worldwide movement of plants and animals (as well as people and microbes) is now so taken for granted that my undergraduate students often cannot identify where specific foods were domesticated or eaten before 1492. This "exchange" might superficially appear

[1] Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (1972; Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

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celebratory, but it was accompanied by violence, pandemics, slavery, and the catastrophic loss of many cultural practices and foodways.

The rise of industrial agrofood is far more recent and intimately linked to two concurrent transformations. The first was the rise of Green Revolution industrial agriculture techniques after World War II, which promoted large-scale monocropping over indigenous, small-scale, and local agricultural techniques. This was an ill-advised shift away from polyculture techniques based on deep knowledge of microclimates, plant varieties, and sustainable land use. The result was a loss of biodiversity, an increase in pest problems and use of chemical pesticides, widespread contamination of water and land, devaluation of agricultural knowledge and labor, and an increasing dependence of farmers on global markets. It also broke the "nutrient cycle" between domesticated plants and animals. Chemical fertilizers were needed to support plant agriculture, and toxic animal waste was concentrated in feedlots—rather than each of these "problems" being the solution to the other. The rise of industrial agrofood paralleled the economic transformation towards neoliberal ("free trade") economic policies in the 1980s and 1990s, including trade agreements such as NAFTA (1994), that undercut small-scale (and often indigenous) farmers in favor of large-scale industrial agriculture.[2]

Throughout these historical transformations, food continued to be the heartbeat of daily life. Global transformations are experienced writ small at the quotidian level of meals, cooking, and provisioning—and those daily actions, in turn, constitute the global transformations themselves. This is an inherently dialectical process, one that is always-already linking the largest global scales to the most intimate acts of eating.

The concept of cuisines is thus rightly shown by these works to be mere shorthand or heuristic framework for understanding such dialectics, rather than being stable or clearly delineated representations of the dining habits of clear-cut groups of people. Cuisines are dynamic and active parts of creating identities within unstable contexts. The books reviewed here all focus on such change and ambiguity, positing authenticity as at best a construction and at worst an illusion. People cook and eat through migrations, violent revolutions, the imposition of new state policies, and personal crises—but always in ways that express creativity, care, and selfhood.

There are two iconic quotes that make multiple appearances in these works. One is the challenge of French gastronome Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin: "Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you who you are."[3] The other is Claude Lévi-Strauss's observation that food animals are "chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think,'" a quote that is often broadened theoretically to apply to all foods rather than just meat.[4] Although these quotes originate in very different contexts, both point toward what has become an axiom in food studies: food creates people in ways that go beyond the merely nutritional. It is by growing, raising, hunting, butchering, preparing, storing, and cooking specific ingredients and dishes that we become particular kinds of humans: ones defined by gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and other identities. The only universals in human cuisines seem to be cooking and food taboos; no human eats everything that is edible.[5] Given the wide variety of foods that we omnivores can consume, what one *chooses* to eat always reflects back on what kind of person one is—or wishes to be, or wishes to be perceived to be. Food thus responds simultaneously to cultural, social, and nutritional

[2] Alyshia Gálvez, *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

[3] Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste* (1825; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1994), 13.

[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 89.

[5] Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin 2007); Richard Wrangham, *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

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needs, as well as to the pragmatic realities of being grown, processed, transported, cooked, and consumed before spoiling.

One of the challenges I faced in writing this review is that I could never do full justice to any of the works discussed. My hope is to bring these works into conversation so that readers can pursue reading them with more background on how they might relate to one another and to the larger scholarship. I therefore focus on four theoretical commonalities that emerge here: race and identities, gender, migrations, and state politics and the rise of neoliberal diets.

Race and identities

In the introduction to his edited volume *Taste, Politics, and Identities in Mexican Food,* Steffan Igor Ayora-Díaz states: "Regarding the politics of taste in Mexican food it is probably best to advance a seemingly controversial statement, one that highlights the tensions manifest throughout this volume's chapters: there is no such thing as 'Mexican food'" (6–7). This claim is amply supported by the contributors to the volume. Lilia Fernández-Souza begins with a call for "tasteful archaeology" ("A Touch of Pre-Columbian Maya Flavor") shown through her delicious descriptions of pre-Columbian tamales. Mario Fernández-Zarza ("The Flavors of Corn: A Unique Combination of Tradition and Nature") discusses how maize continues to be a staple of the Mexican diet, although it is denigrated by elites in favor of wheat and threatened by industrialization. Sarah Bak-Geller Corona ("Gastronomy and the Origins of Republicanism in Mexico") describes how nineteenth-century calls for Mexican culinary sciences posited gastronomy to be an ancient and universal art hearkening back to the ancient Greeks, and thus modeled aspirations for a republic based on the ideals of science and reason. In other words, Mexican cuisine has long been a project connected to ideas about the Mexican state.

Several pieces in this volume focus specifically on Mexican alcohols. Héctor Hernández Álvarez ("Alcohol Consumption Patterns among Different Social Groups during Yucatán's Gilded Age") is a historical archaeologist investigating Yucatán's gilded age (1873–1927) that resulted from the export of henequen. He shows the division between elite consumption of imported beer and wine and lower-class consumption of aguardiente—which was largely bottled in the leftover bottles of imported alcohol. Ronda L. Brulotte ("A Taste for Agave: The Emerging Practices and Politics of Mezcal Connoisseurship") discusses how previously lower-class mezcal has recently been "discovered" and reimaged by elite connoisseurship, similar to coffee and wine. Jeffery M. Pilcher ("Dos Equis and Five Rabbit: Beer and Taste in Greater Mexico") discusses the historical contrasts between pulque and beer and the ways that beer itself has shifted meanings over time to become "local."

Food-focused contributions to this volume show similar subtlety towards shifting histories of meanings. Ayora-Díaz ("Making and Changing Yucatecan Taste in Yucatán: Innovation and Persistence in Yucatecan Gastronomy") describes the different responses that Yucatan locals have toward restaurants' culinary innovations as they debate what constitutes "real" Yucatecan food. Gabriela Vargas Cetina ("The Life Delicious: Taste and Politics in Mérida, Yucatán") considers intersections of food, music, and sociability over the course of the annual cycle of celebrations, festivals, and tourism. She also outlines recent conflicts over "noise" in the form of music played in downtown Merida restaurants. Jeffery H. Cohen ("To Eat Chapulines in Oaxaca, Mexico: One Food, Many Flavors") looks at the different perspectives on *chapulines* (grasshoppers) in Oaxaca, including rural everyday consumption, urban elite nostalgia, and as a touristic challenge. Two chapters, one by Paulette Kershenovich Schuster ("Diffused Palates: The Evolution of Culinary Tastes of Jewish Mexicans Living in Israel"), the other by Christine Vassollo-Oby ("Defining Sanitized Taste and Culinary Tourism in Cozumel, Mexico"), discuss how Mexican food

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changes when consumed in nonlocal contexts. The first considers the experiences of Mexican Jews living in Israel, where Mexican restaurants are often operated by Israelis and cater to local tastes. The latter looks at food offered to cruise-ship tourists docked in Mexican ports, who are consuming not local food but a globalized, Mexicanish cuisine. And finally, Ramona L. Pérez ("The Taste of Oaxaca: It's to Die For!") talks about how the specific taste of Oaxacan foods comes from lead-glazed ceramics, an issue that puts health into tension with the taste of home cooking.

This volume highlights that national cuisines are political projects more than culinary ones. The term *Mexican food* is useful everyday nomenclature, but it is not, and has never been, a stable category. This is also true of Andean cuisines (with which I am more familiar). Many Andeanist anthropologists have shown how meals can reveal how ethnicity, race, and gender intersect in contexts of power and inequality, and how such identities can shift over the course of a lifetime.[6] There is inherent difficulty in trying to describe daily practices that must constantly shift to meet the pressures of personal taste, hungry children, state policies, unequal access to ingredients, desires to enhance status, and a million other social pressures.

Tensions between food and identity were central even in the initial encounters of indigenous Americans, Europeans, and Africans that marked Latin American in the early fifteenth century CE (While food also marked identities before then, none of the books discussed here focus on the pre-Columbian period, so I won't address that here). New cuisines emerged with the ethnogenesis of the early colonial period. Those arriving in the Americas—including Europeans seeking opportunities and African slaves brought by force—came into contact with those already there, and their cuisines, in complicated ways. The violence of plagues, conquests, and wars led to massive migrations and displacements. Colonial dictates attempted to prohibit foods seen as antithetical to projects of religious conversion (e.g., llama meat), or to restrict those that marked elite status through sumptuary laws.

This early colonial moment is described in Stacey Schwartzkopf and Kathryn E. Sempeck's edited volume *Substance and Seduction*. Chapters by eight scholars focus on ingestible substances in late pre-Columbian and early post-Contact Mesoamerica; all become important colonial commodities. The authors focus on the "thingyness" of these products: material realities of taste, texture, and odor that make them sensory experiences rather than abstract trade items. Sugar, chocolate, tobacco, pulque, and peyote bridge divides between food, medicine, and mind-altering substances. Schwartzkopf ("Alcohol and Commodity Succession in Colonial Maya Guatemala: From Mead to Aguardiente") expands the idea of "commodity succession," addressing not only changes in the uses of agricultural space but also transitions in the meanings of consuming particular kinds of alcohol in the rapidly shifting social landscape of sixteenth century Mesoamerica. Martin Nesvig ("Sandcastles of the Mind: Hallucinogens and Cultural Memory") shows how peyote consumption maintained its pre-Columbian use as a divinatory tool to find lost objects or missing people, and escape incarceration. It was quickly adopted by Spanish, African, and mixed-descent peoples in Mexico—and then came to be prosecuted by the Inquisition. (These themes also appear in Ayora-Díaz's *Cooking Technology*.)

Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra's *Eating Puerto Rico*, originally published in Spanish in 2006 and masterfully translated by Russ Davidson, covers the cuisines of that island from

[6] Marisol de la Cadena, "'Women Are More Indian': Ethnicity and Gender in a Community near Cuzco," in *Ethnicity, Markets, and Migration in the Andes: At the Crossroads of History and Anthropology*, ed. Brooke Larson and Olivia Harris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1995), 329–343; Benjamin S. Orlove, "Down to Earth: Race and Substance in the Andes," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 17, no. 2 (1988): 207–222; Mary J. Weismantel, *Cholas and Pishtacos: Stories of Race and Sex in the Andes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Mary J. Weismantel, *Food, Gender, and Poverty in the Ecuadorian Andes* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1988).

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pre-Columbian to contemporary times.[7] The chapters are organized around an individual food or category: rice, beans, cornmeal, codfish, *viandas*, and meat. For each, Ortíz Cuadra discusses the history of its agriculture, harvest, processing, and cooking in exquisite detail. He shows how dishes were modified due to economic limitations or as certain foods became available industrially (e.g., canned coconut milk). He directly addresses issues of how class inequality affected access to ingredients and cooking techniques. The result is a dynamic view of Puerto Rican cuisine through history. *Viandas*, for example, are a category of starchy tubers and vegetables that accompany a meal, and usually prepared by boiling in salted water. These crops (e.g., sweet potato, cassava, plantain) tend to be easy to grow and provide a cushion against the failure of other crops. They were also easily imported because they did not spoil in transit. But they do not all have the same history. Cassava, for example, was an alternative to wheat bread for many, but elite Spaniards looked down upon it (128); by the twentieth century the amount of land dedicated to cassava production had declined sharply. In contrast, sweet potatoes remain popular. Ortíz Cuadra argues this is because their sweetness "complements the hot, spicy seasoning characteristic of Arawak and African cooking" and the cuisines that developed from them on the island (136–137). This observation is emblematic of the author's approach; dishes are described so "tastefully" that one could almost cook from this book.[8]

Interestingly, Ortíz Cuadra decides not to include sugar as a central food, although he mentions it constantly in relationship to other dishes. Given how much ink has been spilled on sugar production in the Caribbean (most famously by Sidney Mintz[9]), I assume he made a deliberate decision to decenter it. Sugar is a strange beast—full of calories but lacking nutrition, it is an export crop that impoverishes those who do the actual work to produce it. These tensions are explored by Louis A. Pérez in *Rice in the Time of Sugar*. Cuba has not been self-sufficient in rice production since the eighteenth century (21–22), yet has one of the highest per capita consumption rates of rice in Latin America. The importance of rice is not merely nutritional; entire Cuban cookbooks were dedicated to it, showing its central importance in how Cubans understand their own cuisine (18). But while Cubans are fed with rice, the Cuban economy is fed with sugar; studies focusing on Cuba's workers, economy, and exports thus tend to emphasize the latter. Pérez challenges this focus and works instead to "situate rice at the center of the very way to think about the Cuban past" (23). Sugar production displaced that of rice in Cuba after the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) disrupted Haiti's sugar exports. By the 1920s, the United States and several Asian nations competed to supply rice to Cuba. Sugar dominated Cuban agricultural production until the 1950s, when it began to decline in global markets and voices within Cuba called for the diversification of the agricultural economy. Rice was promoted across the island through credit, land values increased, and more rice was planted (122–125). This led to conflict as Cuba imported less US rice; US rice interests attempted to bolster their interests through the US Department of State. The tensions came to involve, once again, sugar. A US senator claimed that Cuba was violating commitments to purchase US rice and that the United States should therefore not purchase Cuban sugar. Eventually Cuba's President Batista agreed to the import of US rice to protect the sugar industry, effectively hampering agricultural diversification efforts (151–158). Pérez notes, "Sugar had prevailed, at the expense of rice" (159). There is a lurking question here about the balance between

[7] Ortíz Cuadra passed away in early 2023. See Christina Morales, "Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra, 67, Face of Puerto Rican Culinary History, Dies," *New York Times*, March 20, 2023, sec. Food, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/19/dining/cruz-miguel-ortiz-cuadra-dead.html.

[8] On "tasteful" writing, see Paul Stoller and Cheryl Oakes, "The Taste of Ethnographic Things," in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 15–34.

[9] Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking Books, 1985).

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identities created through food consumption and food production; Pérez does a wonderful job addressing this tension in a nuanced way.

John Hartigan Jr.'s *Care of the Species: Races of Corn and the Science of Plant Biodiversity* asks how concepts such as identity and race function within scientific discourses. He offers an ethnographic analysis of maize breeders and researchers in Mexico, as well as botanical gardens in Spain. Hartigan pays serious attention to plants as nonhuman beings in their own right and not just locations for the projections of human concepts. He continually circles back to the involvement of humans in "care" through the growing and breeding of plants. Even though the concept of bounded species wilts in the face of complex questions of domestication, crossbreeding, and CRISPR, the idea of "race" persists in these scientific circles. Hartigan links this to the history of the term *raza,* which emerged in Italy and Spain in regard to high-status animals bred for elites and nobility, such as dogs and horses (33–36). He argues that the very idea of race begins as one that connects humans to animals in relationships of care and intentionality—so much so that Mexican scientists view the *raza* of maize as something that only happens in the field in relationship to growers, and disappears at the level of biochemical analysis (chapter 3). This reconfiguration of "race"—both in the scientific arena and as a historical term—has the potential to challenge common understandings about how ideas about race play out in Latin America.

Gender

Food studies has always been interested in questions of gender identity. Women are more commonly the cooks in domestic contexts. Gendered roles in the kitchen are reversed when cooking is treated as an elite art rather than a household chore; men dominate the world of elite gastronomy everywhere, including France.[10] This suggests that it is not food or cooking per se that are most closely associated with women, but rather under-compensated domestic tasks, whether food related or not. That question aside, a careful consideration of foodways offers a window into the lived experiences of women and into the spaces and resources that they control. It also focuses attention on their creativity as they innovate tastefully with what is available (or not) for feeding themselves and their families.

While Ayora-Díaz's *Cooking Technology* does not explicitly present itself as an edited volume primarily about gender, the contributors focus on the technologies that largely women use to grind maize, process cassava, and prepare meals. The contributors link the hands that wash, kneed, and cook food to global forces, such as international development efforts to "improve" cooking techniques or nutrition. Several chapters draw attention to long continuities in culinary traditions that persist despite the upheavals of the Conquest and colonial period. For example, Fernández-Souza ("Grinding and Cooking: An Approach to Mayan Culinary Technology") offers ethno-archaeological and archaeological data from Maya communities in the Yucatán showing continuities in the processing of maize. Grinding stones with maize starch have been found dating to nearly ten thousand years ago (19); *metate* grinding stones continue to be valued and passed between generations of women despite the ambiguous appeal of stoves and metal mills. It should come as little surprise that developmentalist attempts to replace *metates*, or to substitute maize with sorghum, have met with limited success, as shown by Julián López García and Lorenzo Mariano Juárez ("Technology and Culinary Affectivity among the Ch'orti' Maya of Eastern Guatemala"). Similarly, Hortensia Caballero-Arias ("From Bitter Root to Flat Bread:

[10] Rachel E. Black, *Cheffes de Cuisine: Women and Work in the Professional French Kitchen* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021).

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Technology, Food, and Culinary Transformations of Cassava in the Venezuelan Amazon") discusses how periurban indigenous women in Venezuela continue to prefer bitter cassava (manioc) to "sweet" varieties, despite the labor-intensive and skillful processing it requires. Claudia Rocío Magaña González ("Technologies and Techniques in Rural Oaxaca's Zapotec Kitchens") outlines how one Zapotec woman learned to cook large celebratory meals, involving different meals than everyday cooking and new techniques for cooking large amounts at once. Throughout this volume it is the labor and taste of women that keep cooking techniques alive and lead to the adoption of new culinary forms.

The work of women is not limited to the kitchen, however. Hanna Garth's *Food in Cuba: The Pursuit of a Decent Meal* challenges us to think about household food acquisition as an essential part of the global food chain, one that is too often overlooked (although it is touched on in Christiane Berth's book, on pages 104–111). Garth's detailed ethnography, conducted in Cuba's second-largest city of Santiago de Cuba, engages with multiple families spanning economic and social classes, and offers insights into the invisible women's work that keeps families fed. These experiences are raced and gendered, and poor Black women find themselves in the most precarious situations. Food rations from the state are essential and yet insufficient for "proper" eating. Although Cuba's socialist system ensured that few were truly hungry on the island when Garth did her research in 2010–2011, many struggled to find foods that fit their definitions of what constituted a "proper meal." Garth makes a clear distinction between having enough and feeling sated, between being fed and being nourished. She documents *la lucha* (the struggle) that women face to find rice, meat, and appropriate varieties of maize, often while also working outside the home. Garth shows how for urban Cubans finding food is a daily chore. In contrast to Otero's observations (below) about the shifts from "global" to "neoliberal" diets, Garth shows how *la lucha* is about struggling to maintain a local diet of fruits, vegetables, and fish that is specific to Cuba.

Migrations

The migrations of people—along a continuum of experiences from purely voluntary to completely coerced—are part of the history of Latin American cuisines. Margarita Callejo Pinedo's chapter in *Substance and Seduction* ("The Americanization of Mexican Food and Change in Cooking Techniques, Technologies, and Knowledge") investigates how chili con carne emerged in the United States from Mexican migrants' use of chilis, and later became standardized as an industrial product. As chili con carne became sold both as a spice mixture and as a canned product, it became integrated—albeit in a modified way—into "American" (e.g., US) cuisine. Sampeck and Jonathan Thayn's chapter in the same volume ("Translating Tastes: A Cartography of Chocolate Colonialism") uses GIS data to follow how chocolate moved across the Atlantic Ocean by tracking early colonial recipes for drinking chocolate. This requires translating original texts in terms of both language and recipe formats. This data allows the authors to compile how, and with which additions, chocolate was prepared in various locations and suggests how knowledge of chocolate might have traveled through Latin America and Europe. This data reveals clear regional differences in taste and how these changed markedly over time. I wonder how such a methodology might be employed in the era of internet recipes, where knowledge is dispersed through web pages and can travel independently from ingredients. Nevertheless, for historical studies this is an innovative and productive approach.

Elizabeth Zanoni in *Migrant Marketplaces* considers the Italian migration to the western hemisphere from the late nineteenth century until the interwar period between World War I and World War II. Zanoni analyzes primarily Italian-language media from New York City and Buenos Aires, including newspaper advertisements and chamber of commerce

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publications. These materials had two functions—to tie migrants into the idea of a global Italian community and simultaneously to integrate them into new cosmopolitan cities. Ironically, but unsurprisingly, some items exported from Italy to these migrants, such as canned tomatoes and tobacco products, were domesticated in the Americas. Food commodities were those "around which migrants defined and redefined themselves as gendered and global consumers" (6). Indeed, by the turn of the century, there was a thriving market of Italian-style goods manufactured locally in cities like Philadelphia, New York, and Buenos Aires by (largely female) Italian migrants. These goods competed with, and were sold alongside, goods imported directly from Italy. Zanoni shows how the "migrant marketplaces" that catered to Italians were inherently gendered and formed parts of nation-building projects in all three nations.

The last work I discuss here provides a segue into the next section. Felipe Castilla Corzo's monograph *Sancocho de Mico* focuses on the experiences of kidnapping victims of the FARC in Colombia in the 1990s and early 2000s, based on three published autobiographical accounts by victims and his own interviews with several others. Castilla Corzo carefully compiles and reconsiders their experiences with food while living as hostages in the Amazonian region of southern Colombia. The published accounts focused on meals long remembered by the authors, either because they were respites from daily life or because they were particularly noteworthy in other ways. They wrote about soda and cookies on special occasions; a night of dancing; beer or wine for Christmas; a glass of fresh-squeezed mandarin juice unexpectedly offered by a child; *natilla y buñuelos* for the New Year that offered bittersweet memories of home. The interviews conducted by Castilla Corzo offer more insight into daily food practices in this traumatic situation. Hostages (and their captors) consumed hunted game, including monkeys, peccaries, *lapas*, caiman, anaconda, and piranha and other fish. These meats supplemented rice, pasta, legumes (lentils, beans, peas), bitter manioc, and tropical fruits. Meals took forms familiar to Colombian cuisine, including stews (the *sancocho* of the book's title), tamales, and arepas. Sugar consumption, in the form of sugary drinks and soda, provided energy but little nutrition. Castilla Corzo highlights the tensions experienced by kidnapping victims between eating culinarily "ungrammatical" foods while staying healthy in captivity.[11] Although we do not hear directly from any FARC captors, victims' accounts suggest that they strategically used food to ensure the physical and mental survival of their hostages despite the hardships of the situation. Castilla Corzo's book is not about migration per se, but it does address how people forcibly moved to radically new circumstances experience those disjunctures through food. This work offers an entry point into studying how food and cooking allow individuals to survival traumatic situations; it also alludes to the ways that violence—whether directly through civil war, or indirectly through state policies—creates ruptures in eating that can have long-term detrimental effects.

States politics and the rise of neoliberal diets

The final theme of these collected works is the global (and continental) spread of "neoliberal diets." The rise of neoliberal economic policies is generally seen as an important turning point in global capitalism and in Latin American history. This historical shift is marked by Augusto Pinochet's 1973 coup in Chile, Ronald Reagan's presidency in the United States (1981–1989), Margaret Thatcher's term as prime minister of the United Kingdom (1979–1990), and NAFTA in 1994. Neoliberalism is hardly a neutral economic theory; many scholars have theorized that its tenants are often imposed through violence

[11] For a discussion of culinary grammar, see Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972): 61–81.

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and dispossession.[12] The books discussed here show that this global shift also involves local inflection points with major ramifications for local food policies and consumption patterns. Together, these books create a holistic picture of the large-scale changes food systems in Latin America that resulted from neoliberal economic policies over the past forty years.

In the neoliberal era, cuisines and daily eating are always in conversation with state powers that both facilitate and limit access to particular ingredients. Gerard Otero, in *The Neoliberal Diet: Healthy Profits, Unhealthy People,* offers a historical framework for thinking about how "food regimes" in Latin America have shifted over time (chapter 6). He suggests three major food regimes, the last of which begins after the 1970s with the rise of "neoliberal diets." At that moment, "food security" was seen as secured through international trade rather than threatened by it. In contrast to this optimism, neoliberal "free trade" permitted wealthier countries to import luxury items while poorer nations became more dependent on imports of basic foodstuffs (150–151). This moment was also defined by an increase in biotechnology, accompanied by intellectual trade protections on biological materials through patents (171; see also Hartigan). The neoliberal diet connects many of the contemporary changes in the food regime to changes in public health, migration, and inequality, all of which had wide-ranging and uneven effects.

Although the neoliberal diet caused a crisis of obesity (1), Otero wisely focuses on this as a social problem that requires structural solutions, even though it causes health issues in individual bodies. Industrial diets emphasize highly processed, "energy dense" foods that are easy to transport and cheap to buy. Such diets are promoted by specific state policies, the corporate concentration of agrofood businesses, and uneven accessibility to healthy food. For example, consumption of soda and meat has increased in most parts of the world, underwritten by massive maize production subsidized by the US government. Further inequality in food access stems from the ongoing concentration of the global food system in fewer hands.

Two books reviewed here focus specifically on food policies in twentieth-century Chile, offering case studies that suggest more nuanced and local approaches to Otero's models. Joshua Frens-String, in *Hungry for Revolution: The Politics of Food and the Making of Modern Chile,* argues that food access debates and discrepancies not only spurred the socialist revolution in Chile, bringing Allende to the presidency in 1970, but also sparked the conservative counterrevolution that supported the Pinochet regime after 1973 (9). Frens-String focuses on contemporary officials, politicians, and activists who were creating, resisting, and researching state policies about food. At the start of the twentieth century, Chile was deeply divided. Santiago was a center of modernity and prosperity, which could be observed concretely in a meteoric rise in wine and beef consumption. Meanwhile, in the Norte Grande (centered on the provinces of Tarapacá and Antofagasta), nitrate miners producing fertilizers for global agricultural markets lacked access to affordable food, and were often trapped in debt peonage (*el enganche*). The urban poor in Santiago also suffered from poor nutrition and food access. These inequalities ignited the famous meat riot of 1905 (30–36) which eventually led to the state taking a more active role in regulating food and housing markets. It also led to food access being seen as central issue for political movements connected to workers' rights.[13]

The development of synthetic fertilizers upended the Chilean nitrate industry, and workers migrated south to cities such as Santiago and Valparaiso. Then the Great

[12] David Graeber, *Debt, Updated and Expanded: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2014); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. (New York: Picador, 2008).

[13] See also Benjamin S. Orlove, "Meat and Strength: The Moral Economy of a Chilean Food Riot," *Cultural Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (1997): 234–268.

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Depression hit, creating massive unemployment and food shortages (47). Chilean workers found their buying power diminished and food access increasingly limited. The state responded by instituting new nutritional policies based on the emerging science around diet and health. The Allende administration was therefore "the culmination of, rather than a break with, decades of struggle to reimagine Chile's social and economic future" (2) that began in the 1930s with the political left's call for the state to ensure affordable food for its citizens.

Heidi Tinsman's book *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* overlaps in time and themes with that of Frens-String. Grapes were "the ultimate modernizing crop" (38) that tied Chilean agricultural production to US fruit consumption and changed consumption habits among Chilean workers. After the 1960s land reforms, fruit production in Chile skyrocketed; this bounty was reaped in the 1980s under the Pinochet regime. Chilean fruit workers of the 1980s used their wages to purchase imported items, such as used clothing and electronics. These items served to some extent as stores of value that could be pawned or sold in harder times (72). Even as more farmworkers were able to acquire TVs and refrigerators, the prices of basic foods rose and they spent more of their budgets on food, despite having poorer nutrition (81–82). Meanwhile, grapes were marketed in the United States as a healthy snack (chapter 3) as well as boycotted as a crop treated with pesticides that threatened the health of both its producers and consumers (chapter 4). Tinsman argues that this history shows us the potential for political action and labor organizing to confront agrofood industries.

The relationship between neoliberalism and national politics is also a central theme of Christiane Berth's *Food and Revolution: Fighting Hunger in Nicaragua, 1960–1993*, which focuses on food policy in Nicaragua from the 1950s to the 1990s. Her careful archival research draws on Food and Agriculture Organization data and archival materials from Nicaraguan state offices and international development groups. She challenges many assumptions about the relationships between malnutrition, food policy, and Nicaraguan domestic and international politics. Berth outlines how the Cold War played out through the end of the Somoza regime (1936–1979), the Sandinista revolution, the Contra War, and the Sandinistas' (FSLN) loss of the presidential elections in 1990. Under the Somoza family, unequal food access and malnutrition were widespread issues. Early Sandinista food policy was "optimistic," focusing for the first time on feeding a nation, and drew strong foreign support. Food donations addressed Nicaraguan food insecurity but also created dependency on imported foods (18). By the mid-1980s, the US economic embargo and Contra violence had encouraged domestic migration from rural areas to cities. Urban gardening became a government-encouraged form of patriotism in light of resulting food shortages. There were also tensions surrounding sugar, and the FSLN government encouraged Nicaraguans to consume less so that the nation could export more; the public was instead angered by the idea that there would be less sugar (especially white sugar) for their own use. By 1985 many Nicaraguans faced serious food shortages; as a result, the Sandinistas' FSLN party lost the presidential elections in 1990, and citizens continued to rely on remittances and food aid to meet basic needs (7). Berth argues that one of the issues that the Sandinistas failed to address was the different needs of rural and urban populations. She dedicates a chapter (chapter 7) to the distinct experience of the city of Bluefields and the Atlantic Coast, which has a different history with imported commodities than the rest of the country. It is this attention to detail that makes Berth's book so useful—she is meticulous about her data, noting throughout the limitations in available archives, and deftly combines written materials with interviews and other qualitative data. The result is a fully grounded account that avoids simplistic explanations for the long-standing issues of food access and malnutrition in Nicaragua while still fleshing out how neoliberal diets come to be and how they play out in daily lives.

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The inherent contradictions of neoliberal diets are also beautifully illuminated through two books about contemporary Andean foodways: María Elena García's *Gastropolitics and the Specter of Race: Stories of Capital, Culture, and Coloniality in Peru,* a thoughtful ethnography of the "gastronomic boom" of *novo andino* ("New Andean") cuisine, and Linda J. Seligmann's *Quinoa: Food Politics and Agrarian Life in the Andean Highlands,* about how the recent international quinoa boom is experienced in a rural community near Cuzco. In the first book, García discusses the recent elevation of Peruvian cuisine into elite, international culinary circles. She grounds this moment, widely touted as a success story, in a far less celebratory Peruvian history rife with social discrimination, racism, and violence. García frames this "Peruvian gastropolitical complex" (xiii) as haunted by the violence of the Shining Path conflict of the 1980s and the structural racism of Peruvian society. She persuasively argues that Peruvian gastropolitics is part of a "rearticulation of *mestizaje*" (7) that denies the violence enacted on racialized and gendered bodies, even as it insists on reinscribing those same categories to create dishes that can be presented as authentic or traditional. She argues that optimistic visions of Peruvian food (such as those presented by Gastón Acurio, Peru's most famous chef) rewrite the past to suggest a brighter future, where anyone who works hard enough can benefit from the gastronomic boom—so long as they also subscribe to the twin regimes of sanitation and capitalism.

García's interest in nonhuman beings is common in Andean ethnographic accounts of the relationships between indigenous peoples and *huacas* (sacred landscapes) such as mountains, springs, archaeological sites, and caves.[14] She extends this productively to consider the relationships between people and guinea pigs (*cuyes*), touching on the new interest in anthropology in human-animal relationships, and themes of "care" that resonate with Hartigan's book. García deftly navigates between these rodents as livestock animals, symbols, and beings in their own right. While guinea pigs have long been raised by indigenous women, who feed them kitchen scraps and serve them for special occasions, the recent boom in "traditional" foods has led to their industrialization. *Cuy* breeders and keepers make every part of the life cycle profitable by breeding larger animals, timing pregnancies as close as possible, and ensuring survival of more offspring. García shows the irony between breeders who "love" and "care for" their "little ladies" even as they plan their profitable "slow deaths." The use of *cuyes* as symbols in advertising, comic strips, and TV does not save guinea pigs from the violence inherent in industrialized livestock management.[15] Despite all this, García doesn't present a totally hopeless picture; she introduces many people working in Peruvian gastronomy who are optimistic about how this new focus on food can help marginalized communities, respond to climate change, and improve their own economic situations.

Seligmann's book is looking at the same globalization of Peruvian gastronomy, but from the point of view of rural agriculturalists navigating the challenges of a booming export market for quinoa, a crop they previously grew only for themselves. Seligmann's long-term perspective, from over forty-five years visiting the village of Huanoquite as an ethnographer, allows her to weave together the experience of this new quinoa market with the history of Peru's 1969 land reform, decades of developmentalist governmental and nongovernmental organization policies, changing infrastructure, and the threats of new mining concessions. She has a subtle approach to how local farmers (many of whom identify as Quechua) see the role of quinoa in their own diets and in the multiple economic systems that they inhabit. Like García, Seligmann presents the animate landscape as part of the social reality, both imbued with agency and pragmatically necessary for human

[14] Marisol De La Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2015).

[15] E.g., Alex Blanchette, *Porkopolis: American Animality, Standardized Life, and the Factory Farm* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

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survival. While she sets up the opposition between "soup and superfood," Seligmann never falls into the trap of seeing quinoa consumption in this village as something isolated from its success in the North Atlantic.

Neoliberal economic systems both globalize food and value it for connections to particular places. Economic inequality, ironically, can manifest in wildly different forms, from elite access to fine dining, to access to cheap global products such as sugar and ultraprocessed foods. The strength of these books lies in how they illuminate how actual people cook and eat in the spaces between these extremes.

Conclusions

These books put on full display the contradictions and tensions of thinking about Latin American cuisine over the space of the entire region and the span of more than five hundred years. They also suggest the difficulties we face in imagining what Latin American cuisines might become as we move into an increasingly uncertain future. The effects of climate change will have disastrous impacts on agriculture, access to water, and human well-being. What will this mean for the future of Latin American cuisines?

As I finished writing this piece in July 2023, I made a short visit to Tiwanaku, a village in rural Andean Bolivia, outside the city of La Paz, where I have conducted long-term fieldwork. On my previous visits (beginning in 2000), potatoes had always been the staple of the diet there. During my dissertation fieldwork (2002–2004), I kept a food diary for ten months, and in that data I can count on one hand the number of cooked meals that did not involve potatoes in some form. This didn't mean the diet was monotonous; there are dozens of varieties of potatoes cultivated in the region (and hundreds documented in the Andes as a whole) and many different forms of preparation. *Luk'i* potatoes might be eaten fresh, or freeze-dried. Freeze-drying takes several forms; in July (winter), when potatoes are processed, they might be frozen and eaten immediately as *chuño fresco,* or dried and later made into *chuño,* or placed in running water to make *tunta.* Other varieties of potatoes are better for soups, or eating whole, or roasting underground in *wat'ias*. Another variety takes on the taste of chestnuts when it gets a particular kind of worm in it, one that is large enough to remove easily after cooking. No one could tire of Bolivian potatoes. Bolivians I knew who had spent time in the United States would sometimes comment on our mere handful of potato varieties, all overly large, bland, and watery in taste.

But in 2023, after several years of poor agricultural production resulting from drought, potatoes have not grown well in this region of the altiplano. They have thus become expensive to purchase. One of my *comadres* explained that now, potatoes are for special occasions rather than everyday consumption, and are counted out carefully before cooking. As a result, the meals I shared during this visit often lacked fresh potatoes and were replaced with *chuño*, rice, or manioc. I even encountered, for the first time, the lowland tuber *walusa* (*Xanthosoma saggitifolium*), nicknamed *kirkincha* for its armadillo-like fuzzy brown skin that peels off to reveal a watery purple flesh. While not a potato, this tuber substituted for it on the plate and within Andean culinary grammar.

The idea of Andean cuisine without potatoes is almost unthinkable—and yet, even when missing, the structure of Andean meals was still completely recognizable. No doubt Andean cuisine, like many others, will change as climatic conditions shift even further. Watching changes like this happening in real time, we will do well to remember the inherent instability of cuisines in general, returning to Ayora-Díaz's observation that "there is no such thing as Mexican cuisine." Truly, Latin American cuisines have never

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been a clear or stable collection of ingredients and recipes. That is precisely why they have survived the upheavals of the region's past. Latin American cuisines are testaments to the determination and creativity of the region's cooks in facing uncertainties, now and in the future.

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