

“Our” Culinary Heritage: Obscuring Inequality by Celebrating Diversity in Peru and the U.S. South

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Abstract

This article develops the concept of gastrodiploacy—or the use of food to enhance a region’s brand and image—through analysis of two cookbooks: *Heritage*, by Sean Brock, and *Peru: The Cookbook*, by Gastón Acurio. Each of these celebrity chefs mobilizes diversity and multiculturalism rhetorically to suggest that contemporary foodways are an authentic portal to racial harmony and inclusion. I argue that these chefs’ social position as men of European descent perpetuates the “white gaze” of contemporary public engagement with cuisine and foodways because the historic and contemporary contributions of marginalized groups become narrative props rather than authentic voices. By focusing on two sites—Peru and the American South—this article demonstrates the function of gastrodiploacy as a form of soft power that rhetorically undermines racial and class hegemonies while practically reinforcing them. The historical and social contexts of these two regions demand an analysis that incorporates discussion of the connections among foodways, culture, place, and power and consideration of linkages between the U.S. South and the Global South. From a sociological perspective, this article demonstrates the ways in which contemporary food movements often perform rhetorical maneuvers that obfuscate inequality by using white male voices to present foodways as common and universal.

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Personal Reflexive Statement

This project grew out of long-standing research and personal interest in the discourses that circulate in contemporary food movements. A previous research project on food justice activism in post-Katrina New Orleans explored the ways in which whiteness permeated those projects in ways that undermined their efforts to undo food deserts—a consequence of systemic racism. That work led me to a faculty appointment at the University of Mississippi, where I teach classes in Southern Studies, Anthropology, and the Geography of Food, Place, and Power, while also working closely with the Southern Foodways Alliance. That organization’s self-conscious consideration of racial and class privilege in Southern foodways scholarship and programming has challenged its members and readers to consider foodways in more critical and reflexive ways. All of this work, however, has revealed to me a deep and persistent need for scholars and activists who engage with food to take seriously the problem of white hegemony in our discourse and to cede voice and power to people of color and to those who labor within the food system.

Both Peru and the American South have experienced “culinary renaissances” in recent years, evidenced by a proliferation of celebrity chefs deeply and publicly committed to serving as cultural ambassadors to foreign and domestic publics. Accompanying the increasingly visible presence and influence of high-profile chefs and their fine-dining establishments are cookbooks, TV shows, films, podcasts, and other popular media that feature and celebrate seemingly disparate cuisines as distinctive products of particular places. In Peru, a handful of male chefs of European descent are widely celebrated not just for their culinary expertise but also for their ability to use foodways to promote social inclusion, economic development, and biological and cultural diversity. The chefs and writers of the modern Southern (U.S.) food movement also emphasize diversity and multiculturalism and aim to project an image of the South which is modern (yet mindful of the past) and connected to the rest of the nation and world. These curated images and efforts constitute what public diplomacy scholars have come to call “gastrodiplomacy,” or the use of cuisine and foodways to create, maintain, or enhance a country or region’s nation brand both at home and abroad.

This article develops the concept of gastrodiplomacy—and considers its implications for marginalized people living in postcolonial places—through analysis of two cookbooks: *Heritage*, by Sean Brock, and *Peru: The Cookbook*, by Gastón Acurio. Each of these celebrity chefs mobilizes diversity and multiculturalism rhetorically to suggest contemporary foodways are an authentic portal to racial harmony and inclusion. I argue that these chefs’ social position as men of European descent

perpetuates the “white gaze” of contemporary public engagement with cuisine and foodways because the historic and contemporary contributions of marginalized groups become narrative props rather than authentic voices. By focusing on two sites—Peru and the American South—this article demonstrates the function of gastrodplomacy as a form of soft power that rhetorically undermines racial, class, and gender hegemonies while practically reinforcing them. From a sociological perspective, this article demonstrates the ways in which contemporary food movements often perform rhetorical maneuvers that obfuscate inequality by using white male voices to present foodways as common and universal.

This article is organized as follows. Following this introduction, I discuss the historical and social contexts of Peru and the U.S. South as postcolonial places and draw on New Southern Studies scholarship to draw out the connections between the Global South and the American South. This context leads to a broad overview of literature on gastrodplomacy and on the connections among foodways, culture, place, and power. The remainder of the article is dedicated to an analysis of the two cookbooks mentioned above. These cookbooks can be read as representations of contemporary food movements that rhetorically celebrate multiculturalism and diversity while practically elevating and enforcing the primacy of white male voices. I also consider briefly whether these rhetorical maneuvers can offer any substantive gains for the communities they purport to celebrate.

Southern Contexts

Recent scholarship in Southern U.S. Studies has emphasized connections and flows between the U.S. and Global Souths. In fact, the so-called New Southern Studies draws on multidisciplinary perspectives to complicate traditional renderings of the American South as isolated, exceptional, and static (Monteith 2007; Ward 2014). Much of this work has positioned the U.S. South in hemispheric and global contexts (Ownby 2015) while not losing sight of the South’s relative liminality and contradictions (Aboul-Ela 2006; J. Smith and Cohn 2004). As Trefzer and colleagues argue, the concept of a “South,” when “unmoored from strict geographic associations, becomes a marker for power compromised by political and economic disenfranchisement and distributed unequally via the conventional hierarchies of gender, race, and class, then we can find ‘Souths’ in many places” (2014:2). Aulette (2012) takes this argument further by highlighting the shortcomings of the North/South binary both globally and within the United States. She writes, “North and South, on the one hand, quickly capture a critical cleavage within the global political economy, but they do not tell us about the gaps within the North and South by social class and among various nations within each category” (Aulette 2012:1548). Indeed, poor and oppressed people live throughout both the South and the North, as do those who are wealthy and powerful. Thus, “south” comes to represent particular social, political, and economic relationships forged in colonial contexts and maintained to varying degrees in the present.

Despite these efforts to contextualize the U.S. South, scholarship about or situated within the region has tended to maintain a national framework—considering the U.S. South in relation to the rest of the United States (and, in particular, “the North”; Monteith 2007:69). To the extent that Southern Studies scholars have actually engaged in work that is truly transnational or hemispheric in scope, that work generally looks at migration pathways into and out of the region (Cobb and Stueck 2005; Peacock, Watson, and Matthews 2005; Odem and Lacy 2009; H. Smith and Furuseth 2006). This work has added meaningfully to interdisciplinary efforts to complicate the region and its people and to move beyond tropes that alternately romanticize or demonize them. Seeing the South in (only) black and white has been a fallacy for a long time; contemporary portrayals of the South now depict its heritage and future as multiracial and continuously evolving. As we will see later, food has been central to efforts to project a diverse and multicultural South and to position the U.S. South as integrally connected to the rest of the nation and world.

One meaningful way to demonstrate this connection is to examine processes that are at play in the U.S. South and other locales. The similar ways in which Peru and the U.S. South are using food to rhetorically rebrand those regions as tolerant and progressive, yet rooted in heritage and history, are emblematic of broader connections between these two places. Through an examination of gastrodiploacy efforts, we can make meaningful connections among places that at first blush appear quite dissimilar.

Peru’s history of colonialism and displacement, followed by more recent waves of immigration, indigenous rights campaigns, and concerted state efforts to promote “multicultural development,” combines to generate a complex sociocultural landscape where questions of identity and nation are resonant. Scholars of multiculturalism and postcoloniality in Peru distinguish between multiculturalism and “interculturality” (*interculturalidad*). The former represents “the recognition of a reality (Peru is a country of diverse cultural and linguistic makeup),” while the latter aims to convey the practice of multiculturalism “in which citizens reach across cultural and linguistic differences to imagine a democratic community” (García 2005:3). The distinction García makes is an important one for examining and understanding the complexities inherent in celebrity chefs’ rhetorical engagement with multiculturalism.

Gastrodiploacy: Foodways, Culture, Place, and Power

Within this framework of complex and multilayered postcolonial Souths, characterized by anxiety and tension (both remorse and often nostalgia) for the past, food has come to play a crucial role in regional self-making and branding. In Peru, the state and local actors see cuisine as both a global asset and a local resource (Alvarez 2008). In 2007, the country’s Ministry of Culture declared Peruvian cuisine the “Cultural Heritage of the Nation” because its diversity is thought to be thoroughly representative of the country’s rich and diverse heritage and history. The 2007

declaration followed two and half decades of the institutionalization of Peruvian cuisine highlighted, most notably, by the creation of the Peruvian Association of Gastronomy (AGAPE) in the 1980s (Matta 2013). In the decades that followed, Peru experienced high levels of political violence and terrorism, which isolated the country from international trade and tourism (Matta 2013; Palmer 1994). In this context, cuisine (along with music, art, and literature) offered a rhetorical path forward, an opportunity to present an alternative—and more flattering—image of the country to both foreign and domestic publics (see Tegel 2012; Lavoie-Mathieu 2012).

In 2007, the same year that the Peruvian Ministry of Culture officially began celebrating Peruvian cuisine as “cultural heritage,” the organization AGAPE transitioned to the Peruvian Society of Gastronomy (APEGA). The newly configured organization established as its mission the promotion of gastronomy as a marker of national identity and sustainable development, with an emphasis on the values of diversity and inclusivity. Its vision for the year 2021 reads: “Peruvian gastronomy is recognized worldwide for its high quality, diversity and richness, and . . . the country is consolidated as the main gastronomic destination in the world” (www.apega.pe/nosotros/que-es-apega). Central to fulfilling this mission was gaining United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognition of traditional Peruvian cuisine as Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) (Matta 2013). (UNESCO had previously recognized “the gastronomic meal of the French,” “traditional Mexican cuisine,” and the Mediterranean diet under the ICH designation.) The application to UNESCO was unsuccessful,¹ but the multipronged effort to recognize, celebrate, and preserve Peruvian cuisine (and, by extension, its reputation) was set in motion and continues to be robust.

As Matta (2013:1) argues, the emergence and resonance of food into the political arena in Peru should be read as part of “an ambitious discourse about development.” In Matta’s assessment, the emergence and growth of APEGA, the application to UNESCO, and broader state efforts to promote Peruvian cuisine are intended to bring positive economic impacts while also leading to “social reconciliation in a nation shaped by historical and contemporary inequalities of race, class, and gender” (p. 1). This characterization crystallizes the prominent tensions underlying the practice of gastrodiploacy or “the practice of sharing a country’s cultural heritage through food” (Haugh 2014:9).

Scholarship on gastrodiploacy rests mostly within the discipline of public diplomacy, which speaks more to the strategies and practices of transnational public engagement, rather than to critiques of such engagement. Public diplomacy scholar Paul Rockower, for example, explains, “the most effective cultural diplomacy takes national traits and cultures, distills them to their most tangible forms, and communicates them to audiences abroad” (2014:13). Within this framework of cultural diplomacy, gastrodiploacy “seeks to create a more oblique emotional connection . . . by using food as a medium for cultural engagement” (Rockower 2014:13). Hence, from the perspective of public diplomacy, gastrodiploacy helps underrecognized or disparaged nation brands increase their cultural visibility

through the construction and projection of a national or regional cuisine. In the case of the U.S. South, a goal of gastrodiploamacy is to emphasize distinctive regional dishes and preparations and “to create nuance and understanding so that the American edible nation brand is seen as more than fast food dishes and giant consumer chains, and includes a deeper understanding of regional differences . . .” (Rockower 2014:15).

While some scholars have embraced the “rhetorical potential of food” to bring people together and redress historic wrongs (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre 2016), others are more critical of the notion that food has (or should be entrusted with) the emotive power to heal racial, class, gender, and other injustices. Kelting (2016) warns of the “entanglement of nostalgia and utopia” in the rhetoric of the New Southern (U.S.) Food Movement. In a study of several Southern food cookbooks, Kelting notes the tendency of those authors to engage rhetoric that is “unburdened by history” while also projecting a vision of the future of the South that is inclusive and multicultural (p. 3). Warnes connects foodways scholarship to Southern Studies critiques of ideas of “authenticity,” which, “like truth and purity, are always at risk of implementing a simplification or distortion of culture” (2013:354). Byrd reminds us, “what constitutes authentic Southern food is rooted in the history of racial oppression and the appropriation of foodways that began with African American women working in the kitchens of white plantation owners” (2015:104). “Authentic Southern food,” if such a thing exists, is most accurately a product of the violences of colonialism, Indian removal, enslavement, and cultural and resource exploitation by the white elite. Authenticity, then, must account for both appealing and less appealing elements of a cuisine or a culture, rather than “glossing over the reality of who has historically created and prepared Southern food” (Byrd 2015:104).

So while gastrodiploamacy offers a form of “culinary tourism” (Long 2003), which suggests that consuming the food of a particular place is an intimate (and “authentic”) adventure in coming to know that place, it also runs the risk of eliding historic and contemporary oppressions and of turning actual people and places into commodities to be experienced and consumed. Heldke (2003) critiques the practice of food adventuring as a component of white privilege. While acknowledging that she is among them, she criticizes “foodies” for their “often obsessive interest in and appetite for the new, the obscure and the exotic; and their treatment of dominated cultures not as genuine cultures, but as resources for raw materials that serve their own interests” (Heldke 2003:7). Johnston and Baumann (2014) similarly critique the “contemporary gourmet foodscape” for its dual enchantment with authenticity and exoticism, both of which flatten complex cultural landscapes and reveal significant tensions between “democracy and distinction.” “Foodies” seek out food that is democratic or “lowbrow,” or conversely “gourmet,” with the understanding that their elite knowledge and experience of the so-called hole-in-the-wall eateries reinforces their own status and distinction. This privileging of access and experience belies race and class privileges while commodifying and exoticizing racial, class, and ethnic “others.”

This scholarship is useful for situating the following cookbook analysis because it suggests a possible need for thoughtful consideration and critique of the rhetoric of prominent chefs—arguably those at the highest echelon of the contemporary gourmet foodscape.

Cookbook Analysis

A thorough analysis and comparison of gastrodiploacy projects and their consequences in Peru and the U.S. South would include attention to a variety of texts, events, individuals, and organizations. An analysis of that breadth is outside the scope of this current study, so I focus here on two cookbooks for what they suggest about the presence and role of male celebrity chefs in contemporary gastrodiploacy discourse: *Heritage*, by the American chef Sean Brock, and *Peru: The Cookbook*, by Peruvian chef Gastón Acurio. While these texts are not explicitly gastrodiploacy projects, in the sense that they are not principally invested in state or regional branding, I argue their tone and content suggest food can and is being used to project images of their respective regions as multicultural, tolerant, and progressive, yet meaningfully rooted in the past. They are therefore entangled with other, more explicit, efforts to alter and enhance regional branding and identity through a celebration of foodways.

Foodways scholars have long understood the discursive power of cookbooks; like other cultural texts, cookbooks can offer unique insight into the rituals, values, and broader contexts from which they emerge. In his now classic study of cookbooks in contemporary India, Appadurai (1988) demonstrates that cooking, and the presentation of cookbooks, convey a certain type of “expert knowledge” and thus display and reinforce class hierarchies. Through his analysis of cookbooks, Appadurai traces the evolution from cookbooks that venerate high cuisines, toward those that emphasize national distinctiveness. He argues that the construction of, and pride in, India’s national cuisine and its representation in cookbooks are wrapped up in postindustrial, postcolonial processes, “in which regional cuisines play an important role, and the national cuisine does not seek to hide its regional or ethnic roots” (Appadurai 1988:5). Cookbooks thus transmit messages about regional and national identity and can use food to convey a certain sense of cosmopolitanism or what Michaela DeSoucey (2010) has termed “gastronationalism.”

Gabaccia (2000) included an analysis of both community and commercial cookbooks in her seminal work on American “ethnic” cuisines, *We Are What We Eat*. She found that the production of community cookbooks in ethnic enclaves served cultural as well as economic purposes while projecting particular ideals of femininity and a veneration of tradition. The commercial cookbooks that followed emphasized the root of good cooking in family ties and loving mothers. These cookbooks characterized the food of immigrant communities as “discrete cuisines, frozen in some past time, unaltered by life outside the enclave community” (Gabaccia 2000:186). Gabaccia’s study of the cookbooks of immigrant

communities shows the way in which those products construct, attend to, reinforce, or challenge existing gender roles while endeavoring to document and preserve collective traditions.

As a component of her comprehensive historical and cultural analysis of Southern foodways, Ferris (2014) examines the production and use of Southern cookbooks during the past two and half centuries. The early 20th century, in particular, was characterized by a “New South” boosterism that both projected images of the South as modern and forward-looking, while also romanticizing “Old South” or antebellum mythologies such as dutiful slaves and graceful white wealth. Ferris notes cookbooks from this era were “laced with racial nostalgia” while reinforcing “white authority in a modernizing South” (p. 202). The authors of these cookbooks were almost entirely white women, although their recipes drew heavily from (and in some cases, outright stole) the creative capital of African American domestic workers.

Finally, a comprehensive study of cookbooks can reveal absences or erasures and the use of nostalgic depictions of a place or region to construct fantastic versions of its past and present. Tipton-Martin’s (2015) phenomenal bibliography of two centuries of African American cookbooks, *The Jemima Code*, offers a challenge to undervaluation of the influence of African American men and women throughout American culinary history. Kelting’s (2016) study, mentioned previously, uses contemporary Southern food cookbooks to examine the ways in which the “New Southern Food Movement” uses nostalgia to create “an antihistorical fantasy past,” thus posing “an aesthetic solution to a political conflict” (p. 3).

While there are of course numerous other examples of studies of cookbooks, I cite each of these because their analyses reveal themes that are instructive for the analysis that follows. The following section discusses and compares the two cookbooks according to the following features: their content, framing, and use of imagery; their presentation of dishes and ingredients; their characterization of the chef/author as an ambassador of his region; and their discussion of multiculturalism and the influence of women. These themes emerged from a careful review of the structure and content of the cookbooks, and following a study of other scholarship analyzing cookbooks, including those cited above.

Heritage and Peru: The Cookbook

Both *Heritage* and *Peru: The Cookbook* are in the genre of contemporary cookbooks that are more at home on a coffee table than in a kitchen. *Heritage* comes in at 335 pages, *Peru* at 432. The books are hefty and beautiful, full of glossy photographs. The recipes are complicated; with few exceptions, they are recipes that a typical home cook would find rather daunting. On a coffee table, where each of these cookbooks resides in my own home, the texts convey messages to visitors: The person who lives here is interested in cuisines and cultures both exotic and familiar.

Content, Framing, and Imagery

Starting with the titles and covers, we learn that each of these cookbooks conveys attachments to tradition and to place. In the introduction to *Heritage*, Brock situates his love of Southern food in his Appalachian childhood: “If you grow up like I did, you learn to appreciate food on a different level. You see firsthand the work that goes into getting food on the dinner table. You watch your family handle food with care and respect” (Brock 2014:13). He speaks lovingly of the people and natural surroundings that fostered his appreciation for the connections among food, place, and tradition. His hope for the book is that “it will inspire people to take the same journey that I have: to embrace their heritage and, most important, to celebrate what they find and share it with others” (p. 18). The cover art conveys this sentiment: we see Brock’s tattooed arms (one depicting a crest celebrating his home state of Virginia, the other a colorful sleeve of root vegetables and edible flowers) and in his hands an offering of vibrant heirloom beans.

As its title implies, *Peru: The Cookbook* serves as an introduction to Peruvian cuisine, as rendered by its most famous ambassador. The emphasis here is on the country itself. The cover design, which features a vibrant Andean-inspired textile pattern, conveys a veneration of indigeneity. Acurio’s (2015) introduction confirms this emphasis; like Brock, Acurio adopts a familiar tone to tell about his childhood—notably less humble than Brock’s—and also states his desire to “share the treasures of Peruvian cuisine with our sister nations” (p. 8).

The structure and organization of the books convey particular messages, as well. A cookbook whose sole purpose is to record methods for preparing foods will typically contain only (or mainly) recipes and will be organized by meal type. An encyclopedic cookbook, like *The Joy of Cooking*, will also include some instruction on technique and perhaps some tips on substitutions or where to procure ingredients. Sometimes functional cookbooks will include recipe headnotes that discuss these or other issues and include attribution or say something about the history of the dish. These two cookbooks clearly demonstrate purposes well beyond (or in place of) simply sharing recipes.

Heritage’s contents are organized as follows: Introduction, The Garden, The Mill, The Yard, The Pasture, The Creek and the Sea, The Larder, The Public House, The Sweet Kitchen, and The Basics. This unconventional organization—by place rather than meal type—situates *Heritage*, and Brock, within the pastoral imagery of a utopian south. These are places that readers may remember or may have heard about, but they are unlikely daily fixtures in the lives of people who are thumbing through a \$40 cookbook by a celebrity Southern chef and published by Artisan Press in New York City. Although its author’s roots are “authentic”—Sean Brock hails from Wise County, VA, “deep in the coalfields and hollers of the Appalachian Mountains” (Brock 2014:13)—the folksy portrayals of that place are emblematic of popular culture’s persistent fascination with the South as a place free from the spoils of urbanization and modernity (Cox 2013).

Acurio's book organization follows a more conventional format: *Peru* contains an introduction and chapters on Ceviche; Appetizers; Street Food; Soups, Broths, and Chowders; Rice, Stir-Fries, and Tacu-Tacus; Stews, Chiles, and Roasts; Desserts and Sweets; Drinks; Basic Recipes; and a glossary and index. Like other national-cuisine cookbooks published by Phaidon, *Peru: The Cookbook* is marketed to a cosmopolitan, English-speaking audience. The simple organization by dish type suggests an effort to demystify Peruvian food for outsiders, rather than romanticize or exoticize it. Dedicating the entire first chapter to Ceviche, a dish of cured raw fish that is arguably Peru's most celebrated culinary creation, highlights the primacy of that national dish, and the inclusion of a glossary acknowledges that the book will contain dishes and ingredients unfamiliar to most readers.

Multiculturalism and Diversity through Dishes and Ingredients

The presentation of dishes and ingredients in each of these cookbooks offers nods to the ecology of their respective regions and to the people who contributed to the creation of regional cuisines. Sean Brock has worked with Glenn Roberts of Anson Mills and David Shields (2015) of the Carolina Gold Rice Foundation to "recover the great tastes of the South" by resurrecting, cultivating, and cooking with old-timey seed varieties, particularly grains and legumes (p. xii). Many of these varieties had been cultivated originally by enslaved Africans and their descendants, but most became obscure or lost following emancipation (Carney 2009). Brock tells the story of the dish "hoppin' John" and his efforts to recreate its original textures and flavors, after a disappointing experience with the dish made from mass-produced rice and black-eyed peas:

Real hoppin' John lies at the soul of the Lowcountry—a metaphor of its history and culture. It embodies the marriage between the golden rice seed, which crossed the Atlantic to underwrite the elaborate wealth of Charleston, and the lowly cowpea, a West African native originally deemed fodder for cattle and for the slaves who had brought the rice to Charleston and grew it. The cultures and ingredients coalesce in this marvelous dish. (Brock 2014:15)

Here, Brock rightfully acknowledges the essential influence of enslaved men and women on the creation of contemporary Southern cuisine, and the tremendous wealth their agricultural knowledge and labor provided for the colonies, but elides a lingering irony. Despite his humble upbringings, Brock is now a wealthy and successful man himself, owing in part to the artful reconstruction of dishes and crops developed by enslaved men and (more often) women under trying circumstances.

Acurio (2015) also situates his country's cuisine within past relationships and processes but is somewhat more rosy and nostalgic in his portrayal: "We [Peruvian chefs] are convinced that our cuisine is the fruit of a long, tolerant relationship

among people and a treasure trove of ingredients that is the result of centuries of dialogue between our ancestors and nature” (p. 8). This linking of “our ancestors and nature” is consistent with Peruvian state efforts to attribute the bounty and magnificence of Peruvian cuisine to its cultural and biological diversity. Peru’s cultural heritage is a blending of indigenous, European (Spanish, French, and Italian primarily), West African, Chinese, and Japanese influences. Ecologically, Peru is characterized by tremendous ecological and biodiversity. The country contains a long coastline bordering a dry and temperate region, the Andes Mountains, and the Amazon rainforest. Each of these subregions offers a variety of ingredients, while the cuisine has benefited from a mixing of global cooking techniques and dishes. To describe this relationship as “tolerant” and characterized by “dialogue,” however, obscures the violent harsh realities of colonization and the massacre of indigenous peoples, followed by centuries of civil wars, the Shining Path terrorism of the 1980s and 1990s, and the persistence of racism and classism in the present day (Garcia 2013; Lossio 2007).

Brock also sees food as a tool for transcending violences of the past, which continue to mar the perception of the Southern U.S. region:

Southern food has enough soul to transcend region . . . The foodways are old and elemental but speak with the authority of a hard-fought past. The people in Charleston [South Carolina] deeply appreciate their heritage foods made with local ingredients, and they respect the people who still cook them. The ingredients come from people who revere them, and the methods are as sacrosanct as the ingredients. This food represents the living history of the Lowcountry, and I have always wanted to do my best to honor that. (Brock 2014:14)

There are several notable elements to this passage. First is Brock’s use of the term “soul.” *Soul* is generally understood as a “cultural mixture of various African tribes and kingdoms” that puts a “premium on suffering, endurance, and surviving with dignity” (Opie 2008:137). For a white man, even one descended from rural Appalachia, to claim soul for all Southern food is to disregard its particular genesis and importance for the black community. The notion of a “hard-fought past” also lacks a subject: *who*, in particular, fought hard in the past goes unstated. Other erasures permeate the passage: Who are the “people who still cook” heritage foods? We can assume that Brock is among them, but so too are unnamed people, many of whom are presumably women of color. So while Brock gestures toward the skill and labor of enslaved African Americans and their descendants, he fails to acknowledge them specifically here or to articulate how he honors their sacrifices.

Brock pays particular attention to the distinctive culinary traditions of the South Carolina Lowcountry (his adopted home) and, to a lesser extent, his childhood home in Appalachia. The culinary, cultural, political, and economic histories of these two subregions of the American south are distinctive. The cuisine and culture of the Lowcountry still demonstrate profound links to colonialism and enslavement. In a

2016 article for the food website “Eater,” Dixler traces the enduring culinary and cultural influence of the Gullah people, who trace their ancestry to enslaved West Africans, and who still reside in the South Carolina Lowcountry. Dixler’s article quotes the culinary historian Michael Twitty, who argues the characteristic dishes of contemporary Lowcountry cuisine “did not start in 1619, with the arrival of enslaved people to North America. These dishes and this culture go back thousands of years into West African History” and continue to influence cooking in the region (2016:n.p.).

Chef as Ambassador

A prominent theme in each of these cookbooks is the notion of chef as ambassador. Both Sean Brock and Gastón Acurio have won prestigious culinary awards and gained considerable fame and have been heralded for much beyond their culinary acumen. Both chefs own multiple restaurants, have written a number of cookbooks, and have hosted popular television shows.² Glowing reviews from other celebrity chefs and southern food authorities adorn the back cover of *Heritage*. Southern Foodways Alliance director John T. Edge endorses the book as “the real thing. An honest book. A koan to Southern people and places . . . You’re in the hands of a master.” Anthony Bourdain (not a Southerner, incidentally) applauds: “Sean Brock is one of the most important chefs in America. In looking back at the roots of our cuisine, while always also looking forward, he’s changing the face of American food in wonderful ways . . .” Such is the task of the modern chef: to be ever mindful of the past while charting a positive path toward a more hopeful future. The description of the book on its cover flap emphasizes Brock’s “mission to elevate Southern food into one of the greatest cuisines in the world” (2014:n.p.).

Acurio embodies these ideals as well. The son of a well-respected politician, Acurio has been encouraged to run for president. In the introduction to his cookbook, he acknowledges that when he dropped out of law school to attend Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, against the wishes of his parents,

times were different then [the 1980s and 1990s], and cooks were not cast in the wonderful roles they play today. We never imagined then that a cook would become a messenger of peace and solidarity among people, a spokesperson for educational, nutritional, and environmental issues, and, above all, a bridge to happiness for many people in the country, at sea, and in cities. (Acurio 2015:8)

This lofty vision has not gone unnoticed. Some say Acurio is the most famous and adored person in Peru (Perez 2014). He gained fame in Peru for his cooking, but arguably just as important has been his public persona as a champion for Peruvian culture and promoter of social justice. In a documentary about Peruvian cuisine, *De Ollas y Sueños*, Acurio proclaims,

In the coming years, the chef who is most loved, most legitimate, most applauded in the world, will be the chef who, while believing in excellence, beauty and creativity, also believes in the search for a better world, the search for social justice, social responsibility, the search for respect for the environment. (Cabellos 2009:n.p.)

Statements like this one are riddled throughout Perez's (2014) film, *Buscando a Gastón* (Finding Gastón), as well. The film is a mouthwatering portrait of Peruvian cuisine but the focus is Acurio himself and his obsessive commitment to make the world aware of the virtues and wonders of Peruvian food and culture. In a conversation with Acurio in Lima in 2016, he explained to me that the roles of contemporary chefs are complicated: Chefs need not only cook but also demonstrate the importance of cooking for cultural survival and use food as a portal to discussions about peace, love, and tolerance. In our conversation, Acurio also spoke of his political involvement; he has been involved with efforts to make fish meal production more sustainable and proposed and successfully ushered a bill through the federal government that mandates a 10-year moratorium on genetically modified crop production in Peru. When I asked Acurio if he thinks all chefs should be politically engaged, he answered, "no, but chefs, like everyone else, should be engaged with principles—they should be driven by something larger than themselves."

Women Cooks, Men Chefs

Finally, both Brock and Acurio engage discursively with the ideal of multiculturalism, as noted above, and the celebration of women. Brock pays homage to his grandmother in the introduction to *Heritage*; he refers to her as "the greatest influence in [his] life" (Brock 2014:14). Descriptions of his grandmother are ethereal: "My grandmother Audrey was a master of many crafts. If she wasn't in the kitchen, she was in the garden, and her understanding of both domains was truly a marvel. My formative years with her were filled with amazement and respect" (Brock 2014:13). Not to diminish from Brock's respect and admiration for his grandmother, which has clearly had a profound impact on his life and work, but a life such as that Brock describes was likely often a trying one. Statements like "you cooked what you grew, and you always knew where your food came from" (Brock 2014:14) reek of the sort of nostalgia that Guthman (2008) argues is "illustrative of the color-blind mentalities and universalizing impulses often associated with whiteness" and masculinity (p. 388). It fails to acknowledge structural changes in agriculture that have compromised rural livelihoods or to consider the possibility that women may seek some professional experience outside the home(stead).

Acurio's discussion of the women in his life strikes a slightly different tone. Coming from a privileged Limeño family, the woman who had the greatest influence on Acurio's (2015) culinary life was

a lady who helped my mother around the house—her name was Juana—who did not like cooking but who used to prepare lunch and pack our lunch boxes. But her dislike of cooking meant that the result was not always pleasing . . . It was thanks to the fact that cooking was not important at home that it became the most important aspect of my life. (p. 8)

This particular woman's failure to prepare adequately delicious food, we understand, inspired the young Gastón to learn to cook for himself. Acurio seems disappointed and puzzled by Juana's "dislike of cooking," failing, perhaps to understand that cooking was another on a long list of tasks for a woman working in "other people's kitchens," not necessarily a source of joy and inspiration (Sharpless 2010).

Acurio (2015) gives his mother more of a pass in the kitchen: "My mother had enough to worry about raising my sisters and me, so cooking was never one of her passions, and my four older sisters were also not enamored of cooking" (p. 8). Despite his mother's dispassion for cooking, Acurio mentions his mother repeatedly in the recipe section of the book; in the headnotes for the dish *frijoles escabechados*, for example, Acurio recalls fondly, "My mother used to make this dish at least once a week. The smell of the *escabeche* sauce and vinegar would fill the whole house" (p. 248). Cooking, then, was the expected provenance of women, and women cooked, whether they liked it or not. Notably, Acurio distinguishes between cooks and chefs. Acurio "became a cook" even though "a politician like [his] father did not necessarily understand why his son would want to devote himself to cooking" (p. 8). The implication is that cooking is women's work. A chef, however, has enhanced prestige and visibility: "We, the chefs of Peru, are . . . messengers. With honor and humility, we are ambassadors of our cuisine in the world . . ." (Acurio 2015:8).

Conclusion

In an incisive critique of what has come to be known as Peru's "gastronomic boom," García argues, "The new gastronomic boom requires critical attention because its celebratory glow obscures a dark side of continuing marginalization and violence against indigenous and nonhuman bodies in Peru" (2013:507). While García's critique focuses on the exploitation of indigenous communities and animals that become commodified foodstuffs, her articulation of a "dark side" to gastrodiplo-macy is instructive. She refers to the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano's (2000) framing of the "coloniality of power" as the knowledge and power relations that reproduce and naturalize hierarchical and exclusionary orders, offering this frame as a "corrective to the ideology of *mestizaje*—the notion that centuries of racial mixture have eradicated racial discrimination and created racial democracies" (García 2013:507). The reality, of course, is that exclusions and inequalities along lines of race and class persist in Peru, as in the American South. The Habermasian "bracketing of social difference" that García critiques, Fraser (1990) reminds us,

“usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates” (p. 57).

The good news is that gastrodiploacy’s “bracketing” of inequality is being actively challenged in both the Peruvian and Southern U.S. contexts, creating at least a potential for what Fraser calls “subaltern counterpublics” or “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 67). In Peru, the indigenous rights organization Chirapaq has developed an indigenous food festival as a counter to Apega’s annual *Mistura* festival, the largest food festival in Latin America. Chirapaq’s counterfestival will not celebrate high-end restaurant cuisine, but the indigenous ingredients and traditions that have inspired much of that cuisine. Crucially, the organization’s work situates *food* sovereignty within broader struggles for indigenous rights and landsovereignty (chirapaq.org.pe).

In the U.S. South, the “New Southern Food Movement” has generated a robust discussion about authenticity and appropriation but also about authority and power. At the forefront of this conversation are writers and chefs of color. During the summer of 2016, the Southern Foodways Alliance teamed up with Soul Summit—an Austin, TX, food conference led by and for people of color—to offer a retreat for a diverse gathering of Southern food writers and chefs to join in meaningful conversation about how to honestly value and honor the diverse history and future of the region. One of the participants of that gathering, the chef and culinary historian Michael Twitty, has issued a public invitation via his blog, *Afroculinaria*, to Sean Brock to share a meal they prepare together, along with honest conversation about privilege and debts (“Dear Sean, We Need to Talk”). The invitation came on the heels of Dixler’s article for *Eater*, referenced earlier, in which Twitty critiques the appropriation of Gullah cuisine or, on the other hand, its sustained erasure and overshadowing by downtown Charleston restaurant chefs, mostly white men. He warns of a pattern of white chefs “projecting ownership and making it about them, not even considering the people who have been marginalized and exploited” (in Dixler 2016:n.p.). The fallout from the *Eater* article was strong and swift, particularly from those who felt it cast Charleston in an unfairly negative light, and relied too heavily on the perspectives of people who don’t live there (including Twitty and Dixler herself.) After the backlash following the article, Twitty wrote the lengthy invitation to Brock on his personal blog, including, “My burden is in some ways heavier than yours—and that’s not your fault, but if you care so deeply for this food and where it comes from—and I know you do, you will help me lift a corner of this burden. I know you already do some of this locally—I want to seek a way to do this on a larger scale” (2016:n.p.). I am told that Brock has accepted that invitation.

Another of the participants of the Southern Foodways Alliance/Soul Summit conference, Tunde Wey, a Nigerian-born chef and activist living and working in New Orleans, co-authored an essay with Southern Foodways Alliance director John T. Edge in *Oxford American*. The article, “Who Owns Southern Food?,” also came

on the heels of the spirited conversation following the publication of Dixler's article for *Eater*. These sustained conversations are evidence of a reckoning within Southern food that is arguably long overdue. In the spirit of ceding space, I would like to close this article with some of Wey's own words, from the article he authored with John T. Edge:

... you have endorsed and celebrated the appropriation of black Southern food without consequence, and the consequences have compounded with interest. You have to return what you took to the place where it was, to the people to whom it belongs. And, after this principal has been repaid, the interest is due. You have to strip yourself of the marginal benefits of this appropriation willingly, with grace, or unwillingly by force and with shame. . . . So what will you willingly give up to ensure the Southern food narrative services properly and fully the contributions of black Southerners? (Edge and Wey 2016:n.p.)

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Notes

1. In a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Culture in May 2016, I learned that the application was rejected primarily because it emphasized "gastronomy and cuisine" rather than foodways. This was interesting to me because France had already been recognized explicitly for their haute cuisine. How curious that Peru needed to demonstrate the importance of humbler "everyday" foods.
2. Sean Brock won the 2010 James Beard Award for Best Chef: Southeast, and was a finalist for the James Beard Outstanding Chef Award in 2013, 2014, and 2015. In 2013, Brock hosted season two of the PBS series "Mind of a Chef." He operates three restaurants: Husk (Charleston and Nashville), McCrady's (Charleston), and Minero (Charleston and Atlanta). Gastón Acurio operates more than 40 restaurants in Peru

and globally. Some of these, such as the flagship Astrid y Gastón, in Lima, which has been ranked among the 50 best restaurants in the world, are high-end, and attract discerning diners from all over the world. Others, such as the chain T'anta, are casual and have locations in malls and airports. Acurio hosts a cooking television program, *La Aventura Culinaria*.

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