

The Taste of Conquest: Colonialism, Cosmopolitics, and the Dark Side of Peru's Gastronomic Boom

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R E S U M E N

Liderada por el chef Gastón Acurio, en el Perú se está llevando a cabo una “revolución gastronómica.” Planteado como un movimiento culinario y social, este boom gastronómico conlleva una promesa cosmopolita: unir a una nación fragmentada y exportar la comida y cultura peruana al mundo. Este artículo sostiene que la celebración de este boom oculta un lado oscuro: la marginalización y violencia hacia los indígenas y cuerpos no-humanos. En él examino el cosmopolitanismo de la cocina novoandina utilizando el enfoque cosmopolítico de Stengers y Latour, el cual sustituye la premisa de reconciliar conflictos en “un mundo” (la promesa cosmopolita) por la de examinar los conflictos que surgen en las conexiones parciales de varios mundos (la propuesta cosmopolítica de Stengers). Más allá del escenario urbano de Lima, este artículo contempla las consecuencias del boom gastronómico para el mundo indígena y el mundo menos visible de los animales andinos como cuyes y alpacas. [Andes, estudios culturales, gastronomía, Perú, pueblos indígenas]

A B S T R A C T

Led by chef Gastón Acurio, a “gastronomic revolution” is taking place in Peru. Framed as a culinary and social movement, this gastronomic boom offers the cosmopolitan promise of integrating a fragmented nation and exporting Peruvian culture to the world. This article argues that such a celebratory framing obscures a dark side of marginalization and violence against indigenous and nonhuman bodies. In examining the cosmopolitanism of novoandino cuisine, I draw upon the work of Stengers and Latour in utilizing a cosmopolitan approach that shifts our thinking from how differences might be reconciled in “one world” (the promise of cosmopolitanism) to the conflicts that arise in the partial connections between many worlds (Stengers’s cosmopolitan proposal). Beyond the world of urban upper-class Lima, I explore what this boom means for the worlds of Andean indigenous communities and the less visible nonhuman worlds of Andean animals, such as guinea pigs and alpacas. [Andes, cultural studies, food, indigenous people, Peru]

Over two centuries of racial mixture, of encounters and evasions, Peruvian cuisine has constructed a deliciously integrative experience. In the kitchen and in the pot, tastes, aromas and colors struggle, contest, negotiate and reconcile. Each one searches for its place and coexists with the other.

Ernesto Cabellos

There are more ways to be other, and vastly more others, than the most tolerant soul alive can conceive.

Bruno Latour

PERU IS IN THE midst of a gastronomic boom. The stakes of this new culinary moment can be illustrated by two recent encounters.

April 2, 2011: The Peruvian Invasion of Nebraska

In a promotional video, a red and white bus filled with Peru's most famous chefs, actors, musicians, and surfers enters the main street of Peru, Nebraska (population 569) with the explicit mission to educate North American Peruvians about their rights as Peruvians, paramount among these being "the right to eat well" (Promperu 2011). The video of this culinary act of liberation quickly went viral and marked the official international launch of *Marca Perú* (roughly, Perú™).

February 1, 2012: Ivan Thays Attacks

Ivan Thays, a Peruvian writer living in Spain, became arguably the most notorious Peruvian since Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán and former authoritarian president, Alberto Fujimori. Thays' offense? He posted a blog in which he described Peruvian food as "indigestible and unhealthy" (Thays 2012a). The reaction was swift. Within hours, editorialists, bloggers, chefs, and many others condemned Thays for his allegedly unpatriotic, even treasonous behavior. Chef Javier Wong noted that Thays' comments were nothing less than a "premeditated attack" on "the national brand" (Wong 2012a). In a televised interview, Wong gestures to the flounder he is filleting as he says "this is not indigestible," then brandishes his knife and tells the camera (and perhaps Thays): "this [knife] is indigestible" (Wong 2012b). Wong adds: "we [chefs] construct Peru, we don't destroy Peru" (Wong 2012c).

In contrast to these fighting words, Gastón Acurio, the chef most closely associated with the gastronomic boom, offers a more patient response: "Peruvian cuisine exists because of tolerance" and the collaboration of farmers, fishermen, and workers (Acurio 2012). In the face of conflict, Acurio returns to a theme that he has perfected not only as a marketing campaign, but also as a development plan: Peruvian cuisine will bring Peruvians together, and open the world to Peru.¹

The present study explores this cosmopolitan proposal. According to Acurio, this "gastronomic revolution" offers a new path to inclusion, prosperity, and peace for a country fragmented by colonialism, racism, and war. Given such promise, it is perhaps not surprising

that Acurio has attained almost saint-like status, while Thays has been widely condemned. As a Peruvian anthropologist based in the United States, I enter these debates with trepidation, but I do so because the stakes are not simply about national pride or culinary tastes. 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. Although some question placing human and nonhuman bodies in the same analytic frame, with a growing number of scholars I insist on this inclusion to call attention to the ways in which violence and domination are seen and not seen (Gaard 2001; Kim 2010; Pachirat 2011).

In examining the cosmopolitanism of Acurio and Peruvian cuisine, I utilize the *cosmopolitical* approach developed by Isabelle Stengers (2005) and Bruno Latour (2004), which shifts our thinking from how difference can be reconciled in “one world” (the promise of cosmopolitanism) to considering the conflicts that arise between many worlds (Stengers’s cosmopolitical proposal). As the Peruvian gastronomic boom has taken place largely in the world of urban upper-class Lima, it has been hard to see what it has meant for the worlds of Andean indigenous communities and the even less visible nonhuman worlds of guinea pigs, for example. This article is a preliminary investigation into the many worlds of Peruvian gastronomy. Rather than a thick description of these worlds, it offers a critical analysis of public representations and discourses that act as potential entry points for further ethnographic investigation.

Frameworks: Colonialism and Cosmopolitics

Two theoretical concerns guide what follows: the colonial and the cosmopolitical. One reviewer noted that the philosophical cosmopolitics of Latour and Stengers—with its focus on multiple ontologies and other worlds—seems incompatible with materialist critiques of colonialism and the brute forces of economic and racial fissures. I offer a different view. Stengers and Latour, rather than displacing colonial critiques, expand and deepen the analysis of domination and difference beyond one country, region, or “world” to a wider range of potentially intersecting fields of subjectivities, power, and resistance. This suggests that conquest is not simply, as Conrad put it, a matter of taking the world from those with “different complexions or slightly flatter noses than ourselves,” but entails the no-less violent imposition of a single ontology, as subcomandante Marcos says, “where many worlds fit” (Conrad 2012:11; Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente 2001:80)

Colonial legacies are all too familiar in Latin America. The formal end of colonial rule in the 19th century did little to alter the colonial order. While scholars often invoke the notion of “internal colonialism” to describe the enduring racialized inequalities in the region (Cotler 1982; González Casanova 1965; Rivera Cusicanqui 1997), Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000) has used a slightly different formulation—the “coloniality of power”—to refer to the knowledge and power relations that reproduce and naturalize hierarchical and exclusionary orders.² Such interventions are significant correctives to the powerful ideology of *mestizaje*—the notion that centuries of racial mixture have eradicated racial discrimination and created racial democracies. This language of racial mixture served

mostly to update an old nation-building language of homogeneity (“we are all mixed”), although in practice it did little to prevent discrimination against those who were seemingly not mixed enough (Wade 1997). This reinforces the lessons of internal colonialism: nationalist projects do not dissolve but rather deepen regional, racial, and ethnic inequalities (González Casanova 1965; Hechter 1975).

Acurio invokes the history of *mestizaje* explicitly³: “When I was a child, the word *mestizo* was pejorative; today it is our worth [*nuestro valor*]” (Acurio in Cabellos 2009). The use of the word *valor* signals not only strength and courage, but also a market value, suggesting that the promise of national fusion is linked to the marketability of Peruvianness. As Acurio puts it in reference to the *Mistura* festival:⁴

Perhaps *Mistura* is the fiesta we have been waiting for; where our emotional independence finally has arrived and together we can celebrate our ability to conquer the world. May the *campesino* be lauded much more than the chef that is featured in the famous magazine. May the most famous restaurant have a smaller clientele than the man on the street corner selling *anticuchos*.⁵ And may no one be bothered by the other, but instead may all help all, may all celebrate all, may all embrace all. From Peru we are helping demonstrate that our cuisine contains weapons more powerful and, of course, less bloody that can contribute to a world where justice and pleasure, ethics and aesthetics always go hand in hand. The dreams of *mistura* are large. History is just beginning. (Acurio in Perez 2011)

Acurio thus declares an emotional, ethical, and aesthetic independence. Peruvians no longer need to take their cultural cues from the global North. Indeed if the *Peru, Nebraska* video is any indication, Acurio is serious about “conquering the world” with Peruvian flavors.⁶

Of course, not everyone is in favor of this culinary civilizing mission. Ivan Thays made his displeasure clear in his response to the wave of criticism about his criticism of Peruvian food: “If there is something more indigestible than Peruvian food it is parochial patriotism. This . . . ‘boom’ is not that unifying force . . . but rather a marginalizing force, one that exacerbates the worst nationalism and intolerant, machista, homophobic and chauvinistic reactions of Peruvians” (Thays 2012b).

Thays takes his compatriots to task for their inattention to matters more serious than whether a Peruvian in Spain likes Inka-Kola or not. Why do people not worry, he asks, about the young people’s lack of understanding of the war between the state, the Shining Path, and other leftist forces that lasted two decades? In closing, he asks Peruvians to think about the historical significance of 2011, which marked the centenary of the birth of the great Quechua-speaking Peruvian novelist and anthropologist, José María Arguedas, “one of the greatest forgers of national identity and first-hand witness to its deep fractures” (Thays 2012b).

Arguedas was indeed one of the great critics of the colonial fractures of Peru. His novels were set in the Andean world and celebrate the vibrancy of Andean languages, cultures, and communities. His intellectual impact is profound. In fact, Arguedas may be the one literary Peruvian figure that both the culinary cosmopolitans and their critics claim as their own.⁷ His most famous novel, *Todas las Sangres* (1970), discusses racism, internal colonialism, and the power of indigenous people to organize, rebel, and contest those forces; its title

has often been used as shorthand for Peru's diversity. Chef Javier Wong describes his own vocation and ancestry in Arguedian terms: "food is what I have in my blood, all my bloods (*en mi sangre, todas las sangres*)" (Wong in Perez 2011). Similarly, Acurio, suggests that the magic ingredient in Peruvian cuisine, 'tolerance,' is the product of "a dialogical and respectful encounter of all the races [*todas las sangres*] that gave life to our culture" (Acurio 2012). Peruvian sociologist Gonzalo Portocarrero (2004:26) describes Arguedas' vision in terms that are not far from Acurio's: "breaking the 'colonial spell' . . . is only possible for individuals in communion with the other, and for . . . a nation, this self-affirmation . . . can only come from a dialogue of the present with the West and with the Andes." This is the Arguedian dream of decolonization: a vibrant dialogue of difference that would break with the old hierarchies and exclusions of the past. While Acurio and Wong seem to have the same dream, for Arguedas, the dream was possible not because of 'tolerance,' but because of the rise and rebellion of the excluded. Nevertheless, whatever their differences, aspirations from Arguedas to Acurio converge in the vision of making a new world of inclusions. This is a laudable goal, but it may not be enough. In order to understand what this narrative of cosmopolitanism and decolonization omits, it is helpful to move to the second concern mentioned above: the cosmopolitical.

To address a possible confusion head on, let us contrast *cosmopolitanism* with the *cosmopolitique* of Isabelle Stengers. As Bruno Latour (2004:454) explains "A Stoic or a Kantian will call cosmopolitan anyone who is a 'citizen of the cosmos' rather than (or before he or she is) a citizen of a particular state, an adherent of a particular religion, a member of a particular guild, profession, or family. Stengers intends her use of *cosmopolitics* to alter what it means 'to belong.'" Latour and Stengers do not assume there is *one* world in which our memberships conflict; their cosmopolitical approach emphasizes plurality, understood as "the unknown constituted by multiple diverging worlds and to the articulations of which they may be eventually capable" (Stengers 2005:995). As Latour explains, "for the Stoics, cosmopolitanism was a proof of tolerance; cosmopolitics, in Stengers's definition, is a cure for what she calls 'the malady of tolerance'" (2004:454). Acurio and others in the new Peruvian culinary movement seem to suffer from the same malady as they focus on their own world of beautiful mixture and tolerance.

A cosmopolitical approach would be attentive to other worlds that are partially connected to that of Acurio and others; it allows us to question the cosmopolitan chefs, as Stengers puts it, "in the presence of those that may turn out to be victims of their decisions" (2005:206). What are the other worlds of Peruvian diversity not foregrounded in the aestheticized cosmopolitan *Mistura*, but nevertheless partially connected to it? The most readily apparent are the indigenous and nonhuman worlds that for Peruvian gastronomy are visible largely as part of the supply chains that make things like Acurio's *cuy ravioli* (guinea pig ravioli) possible. The cosmos of indigenous communities and guinea pig farms are important sites for ethnographic inquiry because they stand in dependent relation to the culinary machine that seems to be at the center of the flows and frictions of this new moment of Peruvian cultural and economic possibility; they represent sites for agency and resistance that may lead to different articulations and assemblages than those presented at culinary festivals and in gourmet magazines.

Novoandino Cuisine

And you thought Paris was the culinary center of the world.

Gourmet Magazine

In Patricia Perez's documentary, *Mistura: The Power of Food* (2011), Acurio states that his mission is to "create the most beautiful restaurants in the world's most beautiful cities," so that "Peruvian culture can be appreciated as Peruvians think it should." Acurio studied culinary arts in Madrid and Paris, but since his return to Peru in the mid-1990s, he has spearheaded the development of nouveau Andean cuisine (or novoandino cuisine), the "beautiful fusion" of indigenous Peruvian products. "Our mission isn't just making restaurants," Acurio tells *Food & Wine* magazine: "What we are doing, really, is selling a country" (Sachs 2008:40).

Among the most important organizations supporting the marketing and selling of Peruvian food and culture (and nation) is Apega, the Peruvian Society of Gastronomy. Apega was created in 2007 with a mission to "build bridges of harmony between our peoples by revaluing the role of the producer in the food chain. Apega is the place where chefs and peasants . . . are all equal; we want to cook the same thing: Peru's progress."⁸ Apega promises "inclusion, quality, cultural identity, and biodiversity,"⁹ and is charged with planning and executing *Mistura*, the culinary festival.

In February 2012, I spoke with Mariano Valderrama, Apega's executive director, in his Lima office. I had many questions about Apega's role in Peru's gastronomic boom, but Valderrama wanted to focus on two points: promoting culinary tourism and Apega's work toward social inclusion. Interestingly, his discussion of tourism quickly turned to the challenges Apega faced in transforming Lima into Latin America's gastronomic capital. "People like you want to know more about Peruvian food because it is assumed that we have . . . made it," he commented, adding, "But there is much work that still needs to be done . . . especially in terms of creativity, hygiene, and the presentation of food and space."¹⁰

Valderrama went on to highlight the "problem of hygiene," which arose repeatedly during our conversation. "Unless you go to the more exclusive restaurants in Lima, it is difficult to find clean bathrooms, or even clean cutlery." Valderrama gave another example—the lack of a representative market where one could take tourists. Blaming municipalities for "not enforcing hygiene standards in markets," he cited this as one of the biggest obstacles to Apega's work. During *Mistura*, Apega deploys "hygiene brigades" to ensure the cleanliness of food stands, eating areas, and festival workers. The aesthetics of preparation and presentation of food for tourists, especially those traveling to Lima to eat, was of paramount importance. Valderrama also insisted on the need for "cleaning up Peruvian markets" so that tourists could "comfortably and hygienically stroll through our colorful markets." "Unfortunately," he continued, "our most representative market, *la Parada*, is *Calcutta*." Leaving aside the accuracy of this claim, this is a telling remark, as the link Valderrama makes between unclean markets and one of India's largest cities reveals assumptions about uneven development and racialized understandings around hygiene.¹¹ Nevertheless, Valderrama was clearly proud of Apega's work toward what he terms social inclusion. He repeatedly mentioned an "alliance,"

promoted by Apega, Acurio, and others between chefs and producers. Reminding me that they have worked toward this for only four years, Valderrama proudly stated that Apega had achieved much in promoting the revalorization of peasant producers and products. Apega finances publications that highlight native products such as potatoes, quinoa, and ají, and sponsors media trips to “zones of production” so that Peruvians can learn where products come from and who produces them: “This is about elevating the product, and elevating the self-esteem of the producer.” After years of political upheaval and economic depression, he said, “there is an increasing optimism in Peru that is about valuing cultural identity.”

Many Peruvians with whom I have spoken agree with this sentiment and note that the ongoing gastronomic revolution is one of the few things bringing Peruvians together. According to many, Acurio is reconstituting the nation through food. In a Facebook (2012) post, Acurio writes

Peru is the only country in the whole world where food is the most important thing. . . You go to Brazil, it's soccer. If you go to Colombia, it's music. But in Peru, you will understand that the most important source of pride is food. Peruvians have always been so diverse. . . but in the last 10 years, food's been able to unite us.

Gourmet magazine describes Lima as the “next stop” for sophisticated food (Fraser 2006) and *Food & Wine* touts Peru’s “world-class cuisine” (2008). Acurio says that by 2016, Lima will be like Paris: “People will come here just to eat” (Acurio quoted in Fraser 2006). In 2012, people were already traveling to Lima for “a taste of Peru,” or “a culinary journey to the land of the Incas.”¹² These culinary adventurers are of course looking for the exotic and beautiful packaging of tradition and authenticity, which is precisely what Valderrama and Acurio are trying to sell. In this sense, novoandino cuisine is an exportable and sophisticated version of what was previously regarded as local and backward. One of Acurio’s childhood friends makes this point: “‘When I grew up, if you ate guinea pig you were a savage,’ [he] says, biting into a leg of roasted organic guinea pig nestled in its bed of oca ravioli in a pecan sauce with Pisco” (Fraser 2006).

The development of “alternative” traditional dishes has been an important strategy in this move from “savage” to “sophisticated” cuisine. High-end tourists may want to taste guinea pig, for example, but a roasted guinea pig served whole on a plate, with eyes, teeth, nails, and even charred hair is unappealing to Europeans and Americans. Thus, Acurio and other chefs design dishes that retain exotic and traditional ingredients, yet, invisibilize these same products. Serving ravioli stuffed with guinea pig meat allows tourists to taste a “traditional” animal without actually having to see it. This “revalorization of traditional ingredients” was also at work in a project focused on traditional cheese production. This entailed “importing” a group of European experts to dairy farms in northern Peru; they worked with artisanal producers to develop a product pleasing to European tastes. Similarly, in order to understand how Europeans see and understand Peruvian authenticity, Apega joined forces with chefs and private businesses to hire a group of Finnish architects to help design “authentically Peruvian restaurant and market spaces.”

It seems a paradoxical solution to draw on European knowledge as a way to “authenticate” Peruvian tradition; yet, for Acurio and Valderrama this move makes perfect sense. It emphasizes *mistura*, or “beautiful fusion” as Acurio describes it: “The word *mistura* means

mixture, but Mistura [the festival] is a pretty mixture. Peruvian cuisine is a beautiful mixture.” (Acurio in Perez 2011) In Ernesto Cabellos’ (2009) documentary about food and long-distance nationalism, *De Ollas y Sueños*, Acurio expands on the significance of fusion for the global marketing of Peruvian cuisine:

In this moment, when fusion is a tendency throughout the world, when integration, globalization, . . . become modern concepts, Peruvian cuisine appears, *having fused cultures but in a very balanced, very reflexive, very consensual way over the last 500 years, and this is what makes it magical, what makes it so attractive.* (Acurio in Cabellos 2009; my emphasis)

Acurio cheerfully presents Peru as an exemplary nation, in which the cuisine has performed something magical, “balanced” and “consensual.” While such a statement is, of course, too good to be true—the violence of the last 500 years, not to mention the last 20 years, was hardly balanced or consensual—as a way to commodify Peruvian history and food, it is nothing short of brilliant. Indeed, one of Acurio’s strengths is to perform his own kind of magic in which the antagonisms of history and politics disappear.

Acurio’s Culinary Ethics

Acurio promotes “a culinary ethics that goes beyond mere pleasure” (Caretas 2011). He insists that this culinary movement must be guided by ethical principles that account for where food comes from and who benefits from its consumption. Using local ingredients, celebrating native producers, and training chefs from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, Acurio places ethics and aesthetics on the same plate: “Gastronomy and hunger simply do not go together. It is immoral to enjoy good food and lavish meals when you know that the fisherman who caught your divinely-cooked seafood lives in a shabby hut and must survive on next to nothing” (Acurio 2009). He adds

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 justice, social responsibility, the search for respect of the environment. (Acurio in Cabellos 2009)

In a striking visual representation of these ethics, news magazine *Caretas* featured Acurio as a modern-day Moses, ready to lead the chefs of Peru with a new set of commandments, featured not on stone tablets but on two sizeable flounders (Caretas 2011; Figure 1). They read

- (1) Collect and cook the products of our land, searching for their most beautiful sides.
- (2) Fight to recognize the labor of producers and improve their lives.
- (3) Celebrate our cultural diversity converting difference into virtues and opportunities.
- (4) Inspire diners to be moved by flavor and by an ethics that goes beyond mere pleasure.
- (5) Promote our culture throughout the world with our cuisine and our products.
- (6) Cultivate humility as an essential ingredient, resisting the temptations of vanity.
- (7) See the restaurant not as a destination but as a point of departure.



Figure 1 *Los Diez Mandamientos del Cocinero Peruano*, © Caretas 2011. “Los Diez Mandamientos del Cocinero Peruano.” 2178, 28 April.

- (8) May Perú be your home and may the world be your neighborhood.
- (9) Defend our traditions today and search for new techniques tomorrow with the same passion.
- (10) Contribute to a new world in which aesthetics and ethics, luxury and inclusion, excellence and humility, pride and tolerance embrace each other for ever.

At the bottom of the image, the editors note that these principles will guide a new generation of chefs as they engage in a “peaceful global battle to glorify Peruvian cuisine”

(Caretas 2011). The good news is clear. Eat well, according to the gospel of Gastón, and others live well.

Acurio is outspoken about the responsibility to eliminate discrimination and exploitation. For instance, he describes a culinary school he opened in a Lima shantytown as much more than a cooking school. “In our program, cooking is combined with learning the moral principles that are fundamental in the development of a democratic society” (Acurio 2009).

With an emphasis on beneficiaries, moral principles, and education for a democratic society, these words might describe a development program rather than a cooking school. However, this is Acurio’s point: food *is* development. It represents new opportunities for young chefs and new alliances among producers, consumers, peasants, and chefs.

In his hybrid cooking and travel show, *Aventura Culinaria*, Acurio travels throughout Peru always in search of “the best” Peruvian meal or ingredient. For many, encounters with Acurio seem nothing short of magical as an approving visit from him can generate significant financial gain. In one episode, Acurio discovers that the best anticucho is prepared by *la señora* Grimanesa, a female street vendor in Lima whose cart was located in a working-class area. The day following Acurio’s announcement on his show, some of the wealthiest Limeños lined up in their luxury cars, waiting to try the now-famous anticuchos. For many, this is a perfect example of the democratization of society, as the money from her new customers could ostensibly purchase a small restaurant. Here and elsewhere, Acurio smooths the contradictions of culinary capitalism. In an exemplary move of what Slavoj Žižek critiques as “cultural capitalism” (2009:52–57), Acurio’s success and wealth are unproblematic: he profits from inequalities of economic opportunity precisely because he is working to address them. As long as entrepreneurialism is infused by a blend of national solidarity and multicultural sensibility, Acurio’s argument goes, it fosters social inclusion. Acurio is hardly alone in disseminating this message.

For Peru’s gastronomic society, all this is the stuff of culinary and economic success. In a short promotional video for Mistura,¹³ Apega makes its case for the inclusive moment of culinary entrepreneurialism. Over images of fishing boats, colonial plazas, busy city streets, and street vendors, a narrator explains that Lima is a city of “sublime cultures,” where “flavors mix with memories . . . of the herbal drinks by my grandparents’ house, the anticuchos of Aunt Grimanesa that I ate with my dad, the market tamales that we would eat for breakfast on Sunday . . . all part of what is our cuisine, our collective palate, our national pride.” Seamlessly moving from family to nation, the narrator celebrates Lima as a “city where the dreams of a few are becoming the reality for all; the dream of a small group of chefs . . . , together with an emerging army of chefs in training, and the work of Apega, has spread to an entire nation.” Apega’s website describes Mistura almost in the language of Habermas, where “differences are left at the door”—Peruvian cuisine offers the promise of equality and inclusion. Yet, as Nancy Fraser (1990:57) contends, the Habermasian “bracketing” of social difference “usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates.” The Apega/Habermasian notion of the public sphere neglects the fact that real public spheres, as Fraser explains, are often constituted by a “number of significant exclusions” (Fraser 1990:57).

Hidden Worlds

Indigenous peoples are invisible in this [gastronomic] boom. The boom has been produced, created, and disseminated by certain characters, and these people are not indigenous.

Rendón¹⁵

As I prepared for a research trip to Peru, I worried about how to gain insight into indigenous perspectives on the culinary developments that, according to chefs and gastronomic experts, touched every part of the country. Short of time and seven months pregnant, my search would be confined to coastal Lima, which is not, however, far removed from indigenous worlds. It has become increasingly Andeanized by decades of migrations pushed by war and pulled by economic opportunities; Lima is home to many indigenous organizations and activists.¹⁴ The indigenous organization that has carried out the most work on food is Chirapaq, The Center of Indigenous Cultures in Peru. Its executive director, Tarcila Rivera, had just won a Visionary Award from the Ford Foundation for, among other things, her work on food sovereignty. On a very hot February day, I walked into Chirapaq's office. Though Rivera was busy, a member of her team, 'Nelson,' agreed to speak with me.

I told Nelson that I wanted to know more about Chirapaq's work on food sovereignty in Peru, but that I was also curious about the gastronomic boom. He smiled, and seemed surprised that I asked about the boom, which "Chirapaq doesn't do . . . [it] goes against everything we do". After that, he told me that another team member, "Rendón," would help me learn about the organization. Rendón was also surprised that I was asking about "the boom" in an indigenous cultural center. That sense of surprise itself suggested the limits of the inclusionary rhetoric of *novoandino* cuisine: it was not seen as including Chirapaq but rather as working against it. To understand this disconnect between the promises of inclusion and understandings of exclusion, it is helpful to consider the words of Peruvian chef Adolfo Perret:

[O]ne of the most spectacular things that the chefs of this country have done is the alliance between agricultural producers and chefs. Thanks to this we can see that social inclusion is real and it is a way for them [producers] to also deserve the applause that we [chefs] have obtained with the dishes of Peruvian cuisine. (Perret 2012:8)

This comment illustrates some of the concerns that Chirapaq and other indigenous critics have raised about the paternalistic claims to social inclusion: "We" (urban mestizo chefs) have done this good deed in creating and promoting an alliance with "them" (rural indigenous producers); because "we" are willing to share our applause and recognize "their" participation in our creation of delicious Peruvian dishes, social inclusion exists. Good intentions notwithstanding, this social alliance anchors indigenous peoples in certain places: they are producers, not chefs, or street vendors, but never celebrities.¹⁶ Social hierarchies remain remarkably unaltered by the magical space of *Mistura*; if anything, they are repackaged in glossy promotional materials that celebrate "a unique space where an entire nation feels harmoniously integrated" (Cabellos 2009).

The people I spoke with at Chirapaq did not feel harmoniously integrated. An influential indigenous organization with specializations in work with indigenous women, food

sovereignty and security, and the recovery and revalorization of ancestral knowledge, Chirapaq works closely with communities in Ayacucho, the highland department most affected by the political violence of the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁷ Rendón was disappointed that I was unable to speak directly with indigenous communities in Ayacucho, given that their voices are rarely heard. This was indeed a limitation of my research, yet the readiness to provide contacts there suggests that Chirapaq is at least in dialogue with the communities it claims to represent. Rendón then moved on to discuss three main concerns relating to what Chirapaq refers to as “food sovereignty and security.”

- (1) Malnutrition. Chirapaq links malnutrition not only to poverty and exclusion, but also to the devaluing of native products. Rather than cultivating traditional grains, tubers, and herbs for communal benefit, Andean producers are encouraged to focus on a small number of Andean products that bring in money, with which non-Andean foods, with fewer nutritional benefits, are bought. Chirapaq’s view of food sovereignty not only concerns the biodiversity of traditional foods, but also involves educating native peoples about their foods’ nutritional and medicinal value.¹⁸
- (2) Food habits. Rendón outlined a disturbing trend, especially among young people, of moving away from foods that nourish, both physically and spiritually. Instead, young people seek out industrialized chains. (Although McDonald’s remains too expensive for many, the McDonaldization of the Peruvian foodscape is underway with Pardos Chicken and Bambos chains.) The effect of these changing habits is that young people increasingly reject traditional foods.
- (3) Economic threats. Linking the above concerns was a larger structural worry about what Rendón called “the penetration of an economy based on productive chains and monoculture.” In other words, the new social alliance that linked chefs to producers seems to work much like traditional commodity chains in which some benefit much more than others.

According to people I spoke with at Chirapaq, the gastronomic revolution in Peru goes directly against their work in these three areas. The changing trends celebrate a few iconic Andean and Amazonian products—quinoa, awaymanto—which ironically serve to raise the price of these goods, making them less accessible to many rural communities, and encouraging producers to focus on a narrow range of goods to supply the growing demand.¹⁹

Rendón added two further significant concerns that are lost in the celebratory discourse.

- (1) The infringement of native intellectual property. Native peoples have long been concerned with the ways in which outsiders extract and profit from native plants, foods, and practices. Rendón discussed “the cooptation and domestication of Native products,” explaining the serious implications of this and highlighting how Andean foods are being incorporated by Western medicine, with few benefits flowing back to Andean communities.
- (2) Indigenous peoples are invisibilized in this boom, which “has been produced, created, and disseminated by certain characters, and these people are not indigenous.” The boom is centralized in Lima, with no talk of promoting gastronomic tourism in communities

or provinces beyond the capital, and key participants are white. Where Rendón asked, are indigenous peoples in this revolution? Nelson asked, “What is the Peru that ‘marca Peru’ is selling?”

This concern over representation is not simply a plea for inclusion (more indigenous faces in promotional videos is not what Chirapaq or other indigenous organizations want). It is concerned with who gets to set what Appadurai (2004:66) calls “the terms of recognition,” which are those “norms that frame social lives,” and which can work for or against specific groups of people.

As a partial response, Chirapaq was planning what Rendón reluctantly described as “a gastronomic festival.” He was hesitant because the gathering is about much more than gastronomy. The event is to take place in Ayacucho, and is intended to promote ancestral agricultural, medicinal, and culinary practices. It is not just about flavors or aesthetics but about nutrition and health; it will feature elders—communities’ knowledge producers. He emphasized the need for intergenerational transmission of knowledge, as without this it would be impossible to move forward since young people need to continue with these traditions. Finally, the event is not for tourists, nor is it about competing with Mistura, but rather it provides an alternative space for indigenous people to talk and learn about indigenous foods.

If Mistura aspired to be a Habermasian culinary public sphere, the alternative space in Ayacucho is closer to what Nancy Fraser (1990:67) calls “subaltern counterpublics,” or “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.” These spaces are not only parallel, as Fraser might say; they are also characterized by different logics. Moving from Habermasian terms to Andean ones, Rendón emphasized the importance of Andean cosmovisions for Chirapaq and indigenous communities. He told me that “the boom” offers no discussion of reciprocity, complementarity, or harmony: “we can obtain the fruits of the *Pachamama* (mother earth), but we have to give back, provide a *pago a la tierra* (payment to the earth).”

José María Arguedas celebrated communal life as one where people were renewed through work and festival, both of which were collective and horizontal. Without romanticizing Andean community life, Arguedas and other Andeanist scholars have noted that these communal practices resist hierarchy and provide dialectical interplays of communalism and differentiation. As my previous fieldwork in Cusco revealed, and several Andean ethnographies confirm, community festivals are spaces of collective labor and celebration but also, for the hosts, serious sacrifices (Portocarrero 2004; Urton 1992). Even the practice of feeding has significant secular and sacred purposes. Community members, mountain spirits, and devils in mines all require feeding, the practice of which “articulates relationships between social others, and maintains relationships between the living and the dead; and the offering of food and drink to the mountain spirits, *pachamama*, saints, and other divine powers keeps their vitalizing and animating life-energy in circulation so as to ensure fertility, productivity, and well being” (Sax 2011:162).²⁰ How different this is from Mistura, where individual chefs are celebrated, and leisure and aesthetics, not reciprocity or religiosity, are the central logics.

Like all critiques, Chirapaq's are contestable and there is no question that the chefs of Mistura would disagree with many of them.²¹ Moreover, rural producers and others connected to high-profile events such as Mistura certainly receive important material benefits.²² My purpose here is not to endorse all of Chirapaq's claims, but rather to reveal some of what gets obscured if we only focus on the inclusionary promise of Mistura. In the now hegemonic discourse of the power of Peruvian food, there is a need to slow down and explore other consequences of this boom, especially on those populations and bodies that do not benefit from the festival of flavors.

Invisibilizing Animals: Indigenous Guinea Pigs and Industrial Chickens

How can we present a proposal intended, not to say what is, or what ought to be, but to provoke thought, a proposal that . . . is able to "slow down" reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness?

Isabelle Stengers (2005)

Before leaving Chirapaq, I asked Rendón about animals, and if they too were being commodified in the boom. He said yes, and added that people in communities do not eat *only* guinea pigs or alpaca; in fact, they only eat them on special occasions, tending to eat very little meat generally. When they do, he said, it is more common to eat *viscacha* and *venado*.²³ All these animals, Rendón said, "have to be revalorized, rescued, but it must be done in a traditional way, not by serving them in Chinese boxes or cylinders."²⁴

The idea of "rescuing" animals was interesting. For Rendón, nonhuman animals deserved respect, but this did not mean that they would not be utilized for nutritional, medicinal, or religious purposes. During previous fieldwork, I saw guinea pigs used for both feasts and shamanic cleansings; I had also seen alpacas and llamas slaughtered for both market and religious reasons. Thus, I am not arguing that animal lives are better in Western or Andean worlds, but that we should be attentive to nonhuman beings in multiple worlds.

As novoandino chefs and others create new markets for guinea pig meat, it is perhaps not surprising that science has entered the picture with new techniques for breeding "super guinea pigs" (García 2010:28). A report by the Canadian International Development Research Center on the benefits of these "improved" guinea pigs ends this way:

These few techniques have provided peasants . . . with a simple way to improve their diet and, in some cases, their income. The only real losers are the guinea pigs whose life expectancy is shrinking inexorably from seven years to only a few months. But who among the guests at the fiesta is going to complain about such research results? (IDRC Reports 1988:3)

This kind of rhetorical move—the joking dismissal of the diminished life of a sentient animal juxtaposed with the enjoyment of fiesta guests—is one of many examples of the human tendency to obscure the "tracks" that animals leave in our worlds (Das 2006). For many, animal suffering quite literally goes without saying, yet that silence is itself a social product, the result of multispecies encounters and disencounters (*desencuentros*) in which

human pleasure is displayed, performed, and fetishized, while animal suffering is hidden and diminished.

Chirapaq's critique is useful here. The quote above suggests that super guinea pigs may help "improve peasant diets," but this is precisely what Chirapaq disputes. It sees genetic manipulation as problematic and in conflict with notions of food sovereignty. Genetically modified animals, or animals bred in confined spaces for profit (super guinea pigs are designed with large-scale export in mind), do not, in Chirapaq's view, improve the health and well-being of indigenous communities. Moreover, Chirapaq regards this use of animals as dirty, in the sense that Mary Douglas (1966:44) uses the term (dirt being "matter out of place"). These practices not only violate native notions of food sovereignty, but the additional violence of placing cuys and alpacas in novoandino packages dismembers not only animal bodies, but also severs physical and spiritual connections within communities.

Some scholars have made important connections between indigenous epistemologies and scholarship that decenters the human.²⁵ In allegiance with Stengers's cosmopolitical proposal, such scholars are pushing the boundaries of knowledge by taking seriously indigenous ways of seeing others, including animals, mountains, and rivers (de la Cadena 2010). In the Andean (and novoandino) context, these approaches have inspired me to consider alternative ethics of care and engagement with nonhuman others. For example, what can Andean indigenous understandings of human-animal relations teach us about the ethics of care and the various affective maps that orient our actions? Anthropologist Maggie Bolton documented the case of a Bolivian woman who refused to sell her llama to North Americans because selling a live animal had different spiritual consequences than selling meat. Her son recalled "My mother said, as my grandparents had always counseled, that [the llama] is a blessing from God, the Pachamama . . . it's one's life. So, you can't sell it alive" (Bolton 2006:541). How can we read this decision to kill, butcher, and sell the llama as meat, while refusing to sell her alive to visiting tourists?²⁶

This is not simply to project deep ecology or animal rights concerns into indigenous spaces. Rather, there is an emergent research agenda that requires the consideration of a wide range of ethical metrics. More radically, an in-depth multispecies ethnography, toward which I can only gesture here, would be an attempt to move beyond what Donna Haraway calls "the foolishness of human exceptionalism" (2008:244). Moreover, as Eduardo Kohn (cited in Kirksey and Helmreich 2010:562–563) observes, the call for multispecies analysis is not "just to give voice, agency, or subjectivity to the nonhuman, but to force us to radically re-think these categories of our analysis as they pertain to all beings."

There are serious consequences to the incorporation of traditional animals in the gastronomic boom. The increased demand for iconic Andean animals has led to a move away from artisanal breeding and slaughter toward more intensive (even industrial) agricultural models. While there is much to explore here, this shift implicates not only novoandino chefs and promoters of *Mistura*, but also development practitioners promoting the genetic management and intensification of animal husbandry in indigenous communities as a "culturally appropriate" strategy to alleviate poverty. They celebrate new practices and spaces, such as the expansion of guinea pig breeder farms (where female guinea pigs are continuously impregnated until they are slaughtered).

I visited one farm during a brief trip in February 2012. A technician explained that a female guinea pig that has just given birth will be ready to be impregnated again within one or two weeks. The violence inflicted upon guinea pig bodies is also visible online, as evidenced by the emergence of Internet guinea pig production courses offered by the Peruvian government and private businesses. These videos illustrate, among other things, how to castrate, kill, bleed, defur, skin, and butcher cuy. Increasing efforts to export guinea pigs to Andean immigrant communities abroad are another example of the ways in which animal bodies are dismembered and remembered.²⁷ An ethnographic examination of guinea pig farms, laboratories, or breeding facilities could offer insights into the life worlds of these sentient beings, and opportunities to explore the biopolitical underworld of the Peruvian gastronomic boom.

Andean animals are not the only ones affected by these processes. The Mistura movement, in its celebration of biodiversity, chef–producer alliances, and local products, obscures the fact that the chickens (and eggs) eaten in increasingly large quantities and used in novoandino restaurants and at the Mistura festival (which in 2011 boasted 400,000 visitors) are intensively farmed along the southern coast of Peru. These chickens are considered “local.” For the growing number of tourists arriving in Peru and planning to spend several days basking in the culinary glow of Acurio’s restaurants, “locally grown chicken” might have different connotations. Moreover, the internationalization of Peruvian cuisine championed by Acurio is explicitly a push toward trade-marking Peruvian food. As Acurio has said in interviews, “defeating and displacing the sushi bars, Chinese restaurants and Italian trattorias” with Peruvian restaurants is an important goal (Acurio in Cabellos 2009). As Peruvian restaurant numbers increase, what are the implications of this globalization for chickens, ducks, goats, and fish?

The marketing of indigenous animals as part of new culinary and development schemes offers an opportunity to ask new questions about one of the most overlooked forms of violence in the world today.²⁸ In the Andes, battery cages and the mechanized assembly-line slaughter of North American poultry, hog, and beef industries, like other modular models of industrialization, are on the minds of many state and business actors. For instance, agronomist Lily Chauca, the leading expert on guinea pig breeding in Peru, laments that cuy production is “forty years behind poultry.”²⁹ I asked Chauca if this really was the only direction for cuy production. She replied, “all [farm] animals have gone in this direction, and so it must be” (García 2010:30). The lessons learned about the violence of industrial agriculture in the United States and Europe, then, are relevant to understanding new uses of Andean animals in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

Concluding Thoughts

The video of Gastón Acurio and a bus load of cultural ambassadors rolling into Peru, Nebraska, was one sign that Peru’s gastronomic revolution was going global. The transatlantic debate between Ivan Thays and the novoandino culinary promoters was another. These debates can be understood as part of the cosmopolitanism of the Peruvian gastronomic boom. However, by moving from the cosmopolitan cheers of Mistura and celebrity chefs to the cosmopolitical critiques of Stengers and Latour, this article has illuminated the enduring

coloniality of Peruvian social relations and called attention to the nonhuman victims of culinary success.

After decades of war and authoritarianism, it may seem inappropriate to cast doubt on a moment of Peruvian triumph. Why not join the celebration of Peruvian cultural agency? After all, over the last few years, Peruvians have won a Nobel Prize in literature, an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film, and the economy grows at a surprisingly dynamic pace. These may be laudable achievements, but as Peruvian cultural critic Victor Vich once told me: “success is always obscene.” Indeed, these stories of triumph obscure the dark sides of exclusion and marginalization and the gray zones of struggle and compromise. Mario Vargas Llosa’s Nobel Prize represents a troubling development for those concerned with his negative and stereotypical portrayals of native peoples. His niece Claudia Llosa’s Oscar-nominated film *The Milk of Sorrow*, about the impact on women of political violence, provokes similar anxieties for those concerned with the long tradition of cultural and political ventriloquism, as nonindigenous people speak on behalf of indigenous populations. And the booming Peruvian economy is only understandable in the context of extractive industries, which have brought with them environmental destruction and social protest. Such questionable triumphs are cast in a cosmopolitical light in a recent essay by Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2010). Following Stengers’s call to “slow down reason,” and examining the partial connections between different worlds, de la Cadena explores indigenous arguments against mining, including those that invoke sacred mountains and glaciers that in Andean cosmologies carry formidable emotion and agency. Nazario, de la Cadena’s Andean cothinker, explains that the glacier Ausangate, a towering and magnificent presence in the department of Cusco, will not react well to open-pit mining, and will respond with avalanches and earthquakes. Nazario’s understanding of Ausangate is different from de la Cadena’s and my own, yet a cosmopolitical approach invites us to keep open the possibility of articulating multiple views of multiple worlds. As de la Cadena writes, “Although I would not be able to translate myself into Nazario’s ontology nor know with him that Ausangate’s ire is dangerous, I would side with him because I want what he wants, to be considered on a par with the rest, to denounce the abandonment the state has relegated to people like him . . . to denounce the mining ventures that do not care about local life; in a nutshell, to defend in his way, in my way, and in the way that may emerge as ours, the place where Nazario lives” (2010:362). Similarly, I cannot translate myself into the ontology of Chirapaq’s activists, or even do justice to the phenomenology of guinea pig or alpaca slaughter; I cannot even say with confidence that I want what they want, yet, if we can “slow down” the celebratory cosmopolitanism of Mistura, we may be able to see the dark side of the “boom” and the worlds it obscures.

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Notes

- ¹On new world food and coloniality in the Caribbean and Mesoamerica see Ayora-Díaz (2010) and Janer (2010).
- ²An exploration of this is beyond the scope of the present work but see Escobar (2004), Lugones (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Mignolo (2007).
- ³Acurio's emphasis on fusion goes beyond the Andes. He also explores the significant influence of Afro-Peruvian, Japanese, and Chinese cuisines. See Humberto Rodríguez Pastor (2000, 2007, 2008) on the multiple cultural currents in novoandino cuisine.
- ⁴Mistura, which also means mixture, is the name of the most important gastronomic festival in the country.
- ⁵Anticuchos are skewered marinated beef hearts.
- ⁶More could be said about the militaristic metaphors mobilized by Acurio and others: the Peru Nebraska video ends with the raising of the Peruvian flag in this small U.S. town; chefs are routinely referred to as soldiers and even revolutionaries; and the title of Jesus Santos' 2012 documentary about Acurio and Peruvian cuisine is titled *Perú Sabe: La Cocina, Arma Social* (Peru Knows: Food as Social Weapon): <http://www.perusabe.com.pe>.
- ⁷Other scholars have noted the important place of animals in Arguedas's work, particularly in *El Zorro de Arriba y El Zorro de Abajo* (Shea 2010).
- ⁸See www.apega.pe.
- ⁹<http://www.mistura.pe/apega/%C2%BFqu%C3%A9-es-apega>.
- ¹⁰All quotations from Valderrama are from the same interview in Lima on February 22, 2012.
- ¹¹For more on hygiene and race in the Andes see Orlove (1998), Weismantel and Eisenman (1998).
- ¹²<http://www.atasteofperu.com/>.
- ¹³<http://www.mistura.pe/apega/lima-capital-gastron%C3%B3mica>.
- ¹⁴Of course, indigenous worlds are not only rural Andean, but also Amazonian and, after decades of internal migration, even coastal and urban.
- ¹⁵All quotations from Nelson and Rendón are from the same interview in the Lima offices of Chirapaq, February 20, 2012.
- ¹⁶An exception is Teresa Izquierda, an Afro-Peruvian female chef who is part of the network of celebrity chefs brought together for documentaries and interviews.
- ¹⁷www.chirapaq.org.pe.
- ¹⁸I asked, is the boom revalorizing or commodifying indigenous products? Rendón observed, "They are using native products, but as culinary clichés; the revalorization of the [indigenous] peoples is absent." He said, "it is as if the products are simply 'there' to be taken, used, and exploited, but there is a lack of context and no attempt to understand them in history and tradition."
- ¹⁹Apega, Acurio, and others emphasize their efforts to promote and protect Peruvian biodiversity. Acurio is particularly against genetically engineered products, and supports communities and agricultural peasant unions. He influenced a law banning GM ingredients anywhere in the country for a decade (see Burggraf 2011; Occupy Monsanto 2012). However, the genetic modification of guinea pigs (specifically, the creation of "super guinea pigs," bred to 20 times their normal size) is ongoing, and it is unclear whether these animals are being used by promoters of novoandino cuisine.
- ²⁰See Johnsson (1986), Kroegel (2010) and Weismantel (1998) for ethnographic analyses of food and feeding in the Andes.
- ²¹One reviewer suggested that as a Westernized development NGO, Chirapaq should not be regarded as representative of an indigenous world. This is important, yet consistent with Stengers's emphasis on the intersections of many worlds, Chirapaq is precisely at the intersection of at least two worlds, functioning as what Xavier Albó calls a "hinge" between Western and indigenous worlds (2006).
- ²²See Servindi (2012) for a recent example of positive media attention regarding the collaboration between indigenous producers and Acurio.
- ²³Viscachas are Andean rodents related to Chinchillas; venados are Andean deer.
- ²⁴A Chinese roasting box (or *caja china*) is usually used to roast pigs. Peruvian cylinders (*cilindros*) are round barbecue grills (<http://www.cilindroperuano.com/>).
- ²⁵See Goldberg-Hiller and Silva (2011).
- ²⁶Space constraints do not allow a proper discussion about the place of gender here. Nevertheless, as women are often the primary care providers and killers of animals in rural communities, and male chefs receive the greatest

amount of media attention in the urban gastronomic boom, there are clearly gender dynamics in need of additional study. See Babb (1989), Kroegel (2010), and Weismantel (1998).

²⁷There is a move to link guinea pig exports to “markets of nostalgia” (*mercados de añoranza*). The targets are nostalgic Andean migrants, for whom consuming these animals (and other products from “home”) is one way to stay connected to families and communities, and to solidify national belonging.

²⁸Some scholars argue that the increasing demand for traditional Andean products is good news for Andean livelihoods (Healy 2001; Markowitz 2012). A broader anthropology of life, “an anthropology that is not just confined to the human but is concerned with the effects of our entanglements with other kinds of living selves” (Kohn 2007: 4), however, reveals a more complex web of possibilities and pain.

²⁹Quotes are from an interview with Chauca in Lima on August 20, 2009.

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