

Book Review

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Steffan Igor Ayora-Diaz (ed). 2016 *Cooking Technology: Transformations in Culinary Practice in Mexico and Latin America*. London: Bloomsbury.

Over the last four decades, anthropologists, historians, and other scholars have carved out an important disciplinary niche for the study of food, including from technological perspectives. Steffan Igor Ayora-Diaz's edited collection, *Cooking Technology: Transformations in Culinary Practice in Mexico and Latin America*, is a small but useful addition to this corpus that provides some welcome detail to scholarship on contemporary Latin American kitchens. Using a broad definition of cooking technology that encompasses ingredients, tools, and techniques, the contributing authors successfully show the dynamism at work in the region's cooking spaces.

Organized after a 2013 session at the American Anthropological Association's yearly conference, *Cooking Technology* consists of twelve chapters plus an introduction and an afterword. It is divided into three thematic sections: 'Refiguring the Past, Rethinking the Present,' 'Transnational and Translocal Meanings,' and 'Recreating Tradition and Newness.' As the title suggests, this collection devotes most of its attention (five chapters) to Mexico. Guatemala, Costa Rica, Cuba, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Brazil receive a single chapter each. The Southern Cone outside of Brazil is noticeably absent.

In his introduction, Ayora-Diaz points out that the bulk of recent anthropological scholarship on food and cooking technology in Latin American societies focuses heavily on technological persistence in rural contexts. This collection, he states, aims instead to emphasize changes and negotiations in the kitchen and to "challenge the received wisdom that cooks tend to be conservative in the Latin American context" (1). Far from being isolated redoubts of tradition, kitchens instead constantly negotiate with and reflect global, local, and translocal transformations in alimentary technology and meaning.

The first chapter is Lilia Fernández-Souza's "Grinding and Cooking: An Approach to Mayan Culinary Technology." Fernández-Souza catalogues the changes that grinding stones, hearths, and pit ovens have undergone since the precolonial period in Yucatán. She emphasizes the recent supplementation (though not replacement) of these technologies with electric or gas-powered

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appliances observed in the town of San Antonio Sího, which are representative of similar changes taking place in rural kitchens across the peninsula.

Julián López García and Lorenzo Mariano Juárez's excellent "Technology and Culinary Affectivity Among the Ch'orti' Maya of Eastern Guatemala" follows. They detail how, at various points since the 1980s, developmentally-minded actors have attempted and largely failed to supplant established culinary technologies like *metates* (grinding stones) and clay *comales* (griddles) with mechanical mills and novel stove designs. In García and Juárez's analysis, modernizers have failed to account for the "cultural affectivity involved in the use and adoption of culinary technology," an omission that is itself symptomatic of a wider neocolonialism in their interactions with the Ch'orti' Maya (38).

Chapter Three is Hortensia Caballero-Arias's "From Bitter Root to Flat Bread: Technology, Food, and Culinary Transformations of Cassava in The Venezuelan Amazon," in which she walks the reader through *casabe* (a cassava-based flatbread) production in three communities near Puerto Ayacucho. Adaptations like the use of gas-powered graters have altered some of the steps and techniques involved, but the broader technological system (the social relations of production, the final product, and the perception of the process itself) of *casabe* production remains intact and free of any tension resulting from technological transformation.

The final chapter in the first section is Claudia Rocío Magaña González's "Technologies and Techniques in Rural Oaxaca's Zapotec Kitchens." Through two case studies, one of a house kitchen and another of a community kitchen, González offers a peek at how Zapotec women negotiate ideas of regional cuisine (itself heavily laden with ideas of ethnicity and tradition) by modifying the spaces, technologies, techniques, and ingredients involved.

Margarita Calleja Pinedo begins the second section with "The Americanization of Mexican Food and Change in Cooking Techniques, Technologies, and Knowledge," a reflection on the transformation of Mexico's *carne con chile* into the United States' *chile con carne*. Pinedo draws from cookbooks in the *Feeding America* collection. She describes the dish's origins among women street vendors in San Antonio and moves through the processes of industrialization, commercialization, and kitchen transformation that 'Americanized' it into the familiar product now found on supermarket shelves.

Chapter Six is Steffan Igor Ayora-Díaz's "Home Kitchens: Techniques, Technologies, and the Transformation of Culinary Affectivity in Yucatán," a study of cookbooks, appliances, ingredients, and techniques in northern Mérida's urban kitchens. Ayora-Díaz describes a foodscape in flux since the 1970s. Present-day trends (visible in the changing technoscape of Mérida's kitchens) are towards experimentation, fluidity of taste, and a mixed affectivity towards Yucatecan food as it was fifty years ago.

Chapter Seven is Ramona L. Pérez's "If You Don't Use Chilies from Oaxaca, Is It Still *Mole Negro*? Shifts in Traditional Practices, Techniques, and Ingredients Among Oaxacan Migrants' Cuisine." Pérez's essay is a study of culinary nostalgia and adaptations among Oaxacan migrant families in California, Baja California, and Texas. She argues in favor of studying food nostalgia

more closely, pointing out that keeping memories of home intact through food can be a powerful comfort for migrants enduring the difficult transitions their movements imply.

Chapter Eight is Jane Fajans's essay, "Changing Cooking Styles and Challenging Cooks in Brazilian Kitchens." Fajans describes a recent rise in the financial and social emphasis placed on food and its technological accoutrements in Brazilian upper- and middle-class homes. Factors behind this shift include fine-dining restaurants' revalorization of domestic ingredients and techniques, an expanding media culture, and governmental institutions promoting national fare and food-related material culture.

The final chapter in this section is one of the collection's finest. Anna Cristina Pertierra's "Global Dimensions of Domestic Practices: Kitchen Technologies in Cuba" examines the relationships between politics (both domestic and global) and Cuban kitchens after the revolution. A comparison of two women in Santiago de Cuba illustrates how the island's dual economy manifests in the kitchen: those with access to a cash income outside of government salaries tend to have better-appointed and more reliable kitchens than those without. For the rest, state distribution and subsidization schemes like the 2006 "Energy Revolution" are important sources of appliances. Pertierra describes the Energy Revolution and its effects on Cuban kitchens, highlighting the relationships between political structures, economic precariousness, and domestic environments.

The third section starts with Raúl Matta's "Recipes for Crossing Boundaries: Peruvian Fusion." Matta describes the recent emergence of a "Peruvian fusion" haute cuisine (141). Drawing on dishes and interviews from two high-end Peruvian restaurants, Matta describes how chefs take ingredients (tubers and guinea pigs in this case) from their domestic contexts and repackage them per the aesthetic and technical rules of western gastronomy, thus catering to a global audience that is increasingly open to the 'exotic.'

Juliana Duque Mahecha also focuses on restaurants in Chapter Eleven, "Forms of Colombian Cuisine: Interpretation of Traditional Culinary Knowledge in Three Cultural Settings." Mahecha considers the tension between culinary change and permanence in Colombia's rapidly changing foodscape, where national cuisine is in increasingly high demand and promoted by state actors. Colombian fine-dining restaurants, comfort-food establishments, and marketplace stalls fulfill this demand but employ different mixes of local and international techniques and ingredients through which traditional cuisine is variously interpreted, exoticized, and commodified.

The final chapter is Mona Nicolíć's "Cooking Techniques as Markers of Identity and Authenticity in Costa Rica's Afro-Caribbean Foodways." Nicolíć examines the relationships between food culture, authenticity, and tourism in Puerto Viejo de Talamanca's Afro-Caribbean community. Here, globalization has challenged regional cooking techniques, but tourist demand for a romanticized experience of Caribbean food has spurred a degree of conservation. Nicolíć argues that these techniques (she used *rondón*, a stew cooked in coconut milk, as an example) are a form of embodied cultural capital for the community, serving as sources of income and as signposts that assist in the maintenance, performance, and construction of local identity. The volume ends with a

brief but helpful afterword from Carole Counihan, who touches on the volume's key themes and concludes with several questions upon which further research (or reflection) might be based.

Overall, *Cooking Technology* is excellent. One of the volume's few shortfalls is that its twelve chapters, introduction, afterword, and notes are squeezed into a mere 183 pages. Readers may well find themselves (as I did) wishing that the authors had more room to elaborate and to bring in further research, though this may also lie with the volume's origins as a conference session. In addition, anyone interested in the Southern Cone countries will be disappointed with their lack of representation herein.

Those quibbles aside, *Cooking Technology* is to be applauded for challenging prevailing notions of the tradition-bound Latin American kitchen. It leaves the reader no doubt that kitchens of all description are mutable spaces where technological, political, social, cultural, economic, and historical forces are sharply felt and negotiated. *Cooking Technology's* length and internal thematic divisions make for easy inclusion in course reading lists. It will be of interest to scholars studying or teaching the recent history and anthropology of Latin American food, material culture, and domestic spaces.