

The Fast and the Fusion Class, Colonialism and the Remaking of *Comida Típica* in Highland Ecuador

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Introduction

In this chapter I examine the way that *comida típica* (defined as typical, local food) is being reconfigured and reproduced, and interplays with class subjectivities, in the greater Cuenca region of the Ecuadorian Andes. Goody famously argued that 'culinary differentiation... is linked to a particular kind of hierarchy, with distinct styles of life' (1982: 105) and demonstrated not only that food is a marker of social differentiation, but also that the relational valuation of foods and food-sites is structurally informed by class position and social hierarchies¹. Expanding on this thesis, I look to identify the orientations – in time and space – that underpin class-based eating practices. These orientations – whether directed towards the precolonial past; Spain and the colonial encounter; North American modernity; or global cosmopolitanism – are one of the scaffolds on which class distinctions are built and performed. Furthermore, they are woven into the very fabric of regional belonging, and provide social actors with the means through which to create differing class-based regional subjectivities. Being Cuencano – and eating Cuencano – is, I argue, a very different experience from the subject position of, to draw on the ethnographic examples discussed below, those living within migrant-peasant households, a member of the lower urban classes, a North American retired expatriate aspiring to an alternative

¹ See also Bourdieu (1984), Roseberry (1996) and Weismantel (1988), to name just a few examples of work that demonstrates how the consumption of certain foods and food spaces are expressions, and constitutive, of class and regional affiliations.

lifestyle, or a middle-class professional concerned with the erosion of cultural heritage. Throughout, I aim to show that these different actors invoke divergent notions of 'local' Cuencano and global foods, and entwined within this are conflicting perspectives on the region's historical, and current, political and economic relations, and its place on the national and world stage.

The boundaries between local and global have, of course, been blurred, with a number of studies demonstrating the creative process through which global elements and commodities, including food, are incorporated, refashioned and reimagined in culturally meaningful and locally specific ways (Miller 1995, 1998; Jin 2000; Watson 1997; Wilk 1999). As Wilk (2002) shows us, the global – rather than homogenizing and eradicating local diversity – can become a sign of local distinctiveness. Yet, as Caldwell (2004) points out, these discussions often imply that distinctly local traits and practices, into which the global is incorporated, can be isolated and identified; although, in highlighting the culturally specific local processes through which McDonalds becomes 'domesticated' in Moscow, she arguably falls into a similar trap. Consequently, in their efforts to blur the global-local dichotomy, these studies can ironically reinforce those very same distinctions they seek to challenge, and 'the local' continues to be reified. This chapter moves forward from this platform and argues, through the lens of fusionism and creolisation, that there is no 'authentic' local core. Rather, I aim to demonstrate that the production of 'typical' foods is an ongoing dynamic process of creolisation in which dishes are not only remade as Cuencano, but the meaning of 'local' itself is also redefined from relative class position. My own position is therefore akin to Appadurai's (1996) argument that the local is continually produced, and I elucidate how these processes are informed by, and dialectically shape, class relations and the orientations in space and time on which they are, at least, partially founded.

As such, I use the term 'creolisation' purposefully. Caribbeanists have been critical of the term's use to account for the politically benign process of multicultural 'mixing' outside of the Caribbean *oikumene*², arguing that it exclusively refers to the process of culture building within the violent context of

² See, for example, Featherstone (1995) and Hannerz (1987).

slavery, colonialism and the plantation system (cf. Mintz 2010, Mintz and Price 1992, Sheller 2003). Yet in making this argument they have drawn attention to the power dynamics that characterise creolisation, and it is these deep political structures that I am interested in exploring in the non-Caribbean, yet colonised, context of Cuenca. Moreover, both Caribbeanists and those who have used the term creolisation more widely point to the ways in which cultures should be seen in processual terms, with Hannerz calling for us to focus on the inter-relations – rather than the autonomy – through which diverse cultural practices are created (1987: 550-55). Hence he, like Mintz, suggests that creolisation implies the absence of an incumbent ‘local’, and points to a more historically continuous process of globalisation through which the local is produced; a thread that has been taken up in relation to food practices by Wilk’s (2006) account of the creation of creolized, yet also Belizean, ‘cuisine’. It is these core sentiments – the lack of an incumbent local and the continuous production of local(s) through interplay framed by structural inequities – that most accurately reflect the making of *comida típica* in Cuenca.

However, not all foods are discursively acknowledged by Cuencanos as creole, and this paper focuses on three food sites and four social groups. First I examine rural cultural fairs, in which *cuy* (roast guinea pig), amongst other dishes, is publically celebrated as a symbol of tradition and local culture by the professional middle-classes (thereafter middle-classes), but less so by the migrant-peasantry. I then turn to address Kentucky Fried Chicken, which expatriates and some members of the middle-classes regard as a homogenizing, North American import, but the lower urban classes, particularly the younger generation, see as a continuation of a long history of cultural encounters. Finally, I turn to the restaurants ‘Tiestos’ and ‘El Maiz’, both of which market ‘fusion cuisine’ to a middle-class and expatriate clientele.

Drawing on Goody (1982), and also Bourdieu (1984), I ask why these three sites are subject to differing valuations of fusionism and creolisation, and argue that class informs the ways in which foods are variably categorised and publically celebrated. In particular, like Goody, I show that higher value foods – and food practices – tend to be those that are initially deemed exogenous, for example rice

and the European meal structure. Unfortunately *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* bypassed the Americas, but Cuenca, as will become evident, has been subject to many of the processes that Goody describes in relation to both Africa and Eurasia, including increasing mass access to industrial and 'exogenous' foods, the elevation of peasant food and its creolised transformation into *haute cuisine*, and the reiteration of both social and culinary hierarchies. Yet, while I agree with Goody that we can see 'conflict over cuisine as a facet of class (ibid: 136)' and aim to elucidate some of these tensions in a Latin American context, my analysis is far less structurally inclined and clear cut, and I show that competing categorisations of food are not fixed, as Goody shows in relation to, for example, forms of alcohol consumption in Ghana (ibid: 184-5), but rather overlap and are in a state of continual flux. Goody's analysis, as he himself hints, is problematised by globalisation and he suggests that industrialisation and the mass importation of foreign foods potentially 'rubs out' internal differences (ibid: 3). The ethnography from Cuenca questions this assumption, and demonstrates that differentiation has not diminished with the easy availability of once-luxurious, rare and expensive foods, but has rather taken on new forms. We thereby have to go beyond 'class' as an explanation and identify the spatio-temporal sites that underpin class dynamics and in turn, the valuations of particular foods and food sites in an historically globalised context.

Before continuing, a brief note on the class structure in Cuenca may be helpful. Not unsurprisingly in a region that was subject to Spanish colonisation, class and ethnicity intersect, and although all of my Cuencano research participants of all classes define themselves as *mestizo* (mixed-race), there are multiple levels of *mestizo*-ness that are just as much based on cultural attributes and performances as they are skin tone. Hence, surnames, level of education, profession, dress, mannerisms, and food practices all contribute to, and reflect, one's class. These distinctions are also spatial, with those from the city generally being regarded as more 'cultured' – read higher class – than those from the *campo* (countryside), a topology that also plays out in Cuenca's restaurant scene. As such, cultural capital and class performance (Bourdieu 1984) is just as important, if not more so, as economic income and, although the peasantry and lower classes are historically more impoverished than their 'whiter', more urban counterparts, the

enhanced mobility of the lower classes (fuelled by remittance incomes³), the emergence of a burgeoning middle-class, and both inward and outward migration is potentially disrupting the established class order. Consequently, this discussion focuses on the public, rather than domestic, food performances⁴, and much of what I describe below can be interpreted as a series of public challenges to, and reassertions of, social hierarchies and class distinctions.

Cultural Fairs: Promoting Cañari or *Mestizo* Foods

The 'Jima Health Fair', as it was entitled, took place in the eponymous village, a small rural community still defined as '*campo*' despite declining smallholder agriculture and increasing – remittance fuelled – urbanisation in the form of large villas and parking lots. Jima, like many of its neighbours, is a migrant exporting village, and it is against the backdrop of rising remittance prosperity, conspicuous consumption, and shifting labour relations that the Jima Tourist Foundation promoted the health fair as a cultural event. The Foundation is an organisation that was instigated by the Peace Corps and is managed by middle-class professionals who tend to commute in from Cuenca city. The ostensible purpose of the fair was to encourage the migrant-peasant class to follow a healthier lifestyle and, in addition to the formal presentations, villagers were encouraged to set up informal market stalls selling 'healthy food'. Guidelines were firmly laid down; there were to be no carbonated drinks, lager, hamburgers or fries on sale – a prohibition seemingly in accord with the fair's objective – whereas *cuy* (a dish that is relatively high in fat) served with rice, potatoes and corn, *empanadas* (deep-fried cheese-filled pastries), and corn-based products including *chicha* (a beer) were not just allowed, but encouraged.

'These are our traditional foods', proclaimed Jorge, the chair of the Foundation and a head teacher, to the congregated villagers, 'the Incas were here, but not for very long. Before the area – all of Síg sig canton – was Cañari, and it is our Cañari traditions and Cañari foods that live on today.'

³ The average monthly income of the migrant-peasant household with whom I conducted fieldwork is US\$250-400. In contrast, the salary of one of my middle-class, urban participants, who is a school teacher, is US\$150.

⁴ I have addressed domestic food practices elsewhere. See Abbots 2009, 2011 and 2012a.

The *mestizo* town of Jima has Cañari origins and traditions, and *this* gives us our culture' (my emphasis).

Thus the sanctioned dishes were presented as originating from a space and time that not only predates Spanish, but also Incan, colonisation. This claim is not surprising when situated within a broader political context that has seen the state and the governing classes shift from the previously hegemonic discourse of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* (cultural mixing and whiteness) towards pluriculturalism.⁵ As I have argued elsewhere (Abbots 2009) this re-orientation towards the Cañari past not only serves to construct the greater Cuenca region as culturally distinct from its national rivals, but also reasserts nationalist sentiment by establishing distance from its, current politically unattractive, historical affiliations with neighbouring Peru.

The Foundation's definition of *comida típica* as Cañari was not, however, reproduced in the stall-holders' presentation of the dishes on sale. These sellers were drawn primarily from the migrant-peasant class, and their definitions of dishes revealed a greater level of ambiguity than may have been expected from reading more structural, dichotomous accounts of indigenous and exogenous foods (cf Goody (1982), see also Weismantel (1988)). I found this ambiguity consistently in the culinary discourse of the migrant-peasantry, and during the health fair they focused on the Jimeño-ness of their food, as materially manifested in the flavour of the meat:

We have delicious local *cuy* here, fed on local grass. Our *cuy* is the healthiest, most natural and the tastiest. It's fed on local grass for a delicious flavour (Felicia)

The migrant-peasantry also inverted the objective of the fair, and used it as an opportunity to publically display the extensive contents of their kitchen, their use of mechanised spit-roasting machines, and their employment of domestic servants. Or, in other words, they used the fair as a site to express their social mobility and modernity, not their Cañari heritage.

⁵ See Stutzman (1981) and Whitten (1981) for a detailed discussion of the ways the discourse of *mestizaje* promotes an ideology of 'whitening' rather than mixing.

As Felicia's sales pitch above indicates, the migrant-peasantry also see *cuy* as typical and being 'from here', but the 'here' invoked is less fixed to the Cañari past than the 'here' of the middle-classes, as epitomised by Jorge's presentation. This lack of reference to the indigenous past is commonplace among the lower rural classes who, contrary to the arguments put forward by Weismantel (1988) – and also in tone by Goody (1982) – tend not to make distinctions between Spanish and indigenous foods. Rather their definitions of *comida típica* are more ambiguous, sometimes conflicting and often contradictory, and when asked to divide typical foods into indigenous/Cañari and white/Spanish domains, members of migrant-peasant households were unable, or unwilling, to make distinct correlations between dishes and social categories. I say 'unwilling', because, at times, when the issue was pushed, my research participants would emphasise the indigeneity of Other people's foods, while distancing themselves from them. But indigeneity in this context is not associated with a fixed Cañari domain, but rather an unspecified past. As Anita, who always used white flour, illustrates in relation to the correct method of preparing *empanadas*:

You should use wholemeal flour; it's the indigenous way, like the *indígenas* at the health fair. You remember, they used wholemeal flour, it's the proper way: it's how they made them a long time ago.

Anita's distancing between her own practices and those of the *indígenas*, also suggests that the migrant-peasantry's ambiguous definition of *comida típica* can be understood with reference to their current class position. Adding more nuance to Goody's (1982) thesis, Bourque (2001) notes the symbolic resonance of foods is relative to the subject position of the consumer, and shows how *mestizos* in the city do not regard their consumption of *cuy* as compromising their *mestizo*-ness, while those in an 'Indian' peasant village take steps to publically distance themselves from the meat, as it is understood to compound their Indian-ness. Thus, in the rural context the 'low' social status of the meat is exacerbated, and dialectically compounds, the lower status of the consumer, whereas the negative associations of the dish are absorbed and nullified in the higher status urban setting. A similar process occurs in Jima, and the middle-classes, by being more structurally anchored to Spain – through profession,

education, surname, and living in the city – can socially afford to orientate themselves ideologically to the Cañari past and ‘low’ foods. Whereas the migrant-peasantry, whose mobility is relatively recent, are still carrying the ‘baggage’ of being a member of the rural lower classes. Their *mestizo*-ness is not as secure, and they are consequently not in a social position to participate in ‘low’ consumption practices that potentially symbolically draws attention to their ‘indigenous’ side. As such, differentiation occurs, and culinary hierarchies produced, but this is not as neat or fixed as Goody (1982) infers.

This is not to state that the Spanish and precolonial histories of particular dishes are not of any import to the migrant-peasantry, as it potentially informs their understanding of the relative status of some foods. For example, *cuy* is always domestically cooked over bonfires in the hidden spaces of the back yard or publically roasted with the help of domestic servants and assorted kitchen paraphernalia, whilst pigs, introduced by the Spanish, are generally slaughtered, butchered and spit-roasted in full view on the front lawn. Rather, the migrant-peasantry’s reluctance to classify foods as Spanish and Cañari suggests that these historical distinctions, or orientations, are less meaningful to them than they are to the middle-classes, and this, at least in part, is due to their position in the social order. They therefore circumnavigate the negative social connotations of eating low status ‘indigenous’ food, such as *cuy*, by refusing to acknowledge the category. Thus, instead of defining foods based on whether they are Spanish or Cañari, they combine both together under the general, rather hazy and elastic rubric of ‘from here’.

This argument does not, of course, necessarily suggest that the migrant-peasant class define *comida típica* as creole for, in general, they rarely attempt to locate the specific geographies and histories of dishes. Yet, they do commonly define *comida típica* as the ‘food of our ancestors’ and it is strongly associated with kinship. This implies a creole sentiment; all my research participants define themselves as *mestizo* and their ancestors are also understood to be mixed-race, or creole. Others may not always see the migrant-peasantry in this way, but the threads of pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial histories are entangled in each individual’s personal biography: by dwelling in Jima they have thus created a

mestizo village, with *mestizo* traditions. 'Here' is therefore a distinctly creole place. Jorge, above, may prefer to emphasise the Cañari aspects of *mestizo*-ness, but the migrant-peasantry do not have recourse to this category. It is absent from their classificatory process. And, it is this very absence of defined sites, and its replacement with *mestizo*, that can be seen as indicative of the extent that creolisation has occurred. The lack of ability, or desire, to disentangle these threads indicates not only the salience of both the pre-Hispanic and Spanish pasts, but also the extent that they have become melded together. Moreover, from their subject position, the migrant-peasantry appear to have little political incentive to disentangle the Cañari threads of *comida típica*, whereas the middle-classes are both in a socio-economic position and have the ideological inspiration to do so. These different ideological class-based orientations become even more pronounced in terms of fast food and the relative engagement with multinational chains, and it is to those that I now turn.

'Global' Fast Food Chains: Keeping Traditions Alive

The multinational Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) is the most popular of the fast food sites consumed in Cuenca, particularly among the semi-rural and urban lower- and lower-middle classes. This popularity is not limited to the younger generation; teenagers and students are regular visitors, but so are office workers, teachers, petty entrepreneurs, and, on Sundays, many families will head to the malls on the outskirts of the city for the primary purpose of sharing a meal at KFC. The only social groups who are conspicuous by their absence are the increasing number of North American expatriates, older members of *Los Noblos*, a 'white' landed and political elite class who trace their ancestry to the Spanish *hacendados* (hacienda owners), and members of the middle-classes. This division is not surprising and reflects the spatial-temporal orientations of these social groups. Like the migrant-peasantry, many of the younger generation and the lower classes are the children and wives of global migration, and have husbands, sons and brothers living, semi-permanently, in the United States. Since major economic collapses in the late 1980s and 1990s, gendered migration has been the primary economic strategy for the majority for lower class rural and urban

households. Consequently the consumption, and display, of USA symbols, whether in the form of architecture, clothing, or food has become a key mechanism for expressing the robustness of transnational kinship relations and the reputation of migrants, both as economic providers and moral family men (Abbots 2012a). Thus the increasingly prosperous lower classes, funded by remittances, are forging new sites of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) and routes of social mobility, and are no longer looking to emulate those above them in the social order.

As indicated by the food prohibitions and presentations at the Jima Health Fair, this form of conspicuous consumption is a source of alarm to the middle-classes, who have adopted a number of measures to curtail the social and cultural changes being instigated by migration and remittance prosperity. Likewise, the presence and popularity of the multinational chains is both a source of disappointment and consternation to the expatriate community, who have moved to Cuenca to 'live a simple life, away from all those industrialised food chains'. Thus KFC challenges their romantic notion that living in Cuenca will be 'like living in the 1950s in the USA' (unattributed, International Living website, 'Why Ecuador', accessed 18 March 2010) by epitomising, in their eyes, the worst form of industrial, pathogen-laden form of food production and North American cultural imperialism. As Josie sighed on sighting a branch of KFC: 'I can't help but think that we export the worst of American culture to these countries – it's embarrassing'⁶.

In contrast, those eating in the multinational chains tend to regard their presence as a symbol of regional and national strength, and see KFC and Burger King as illustrative of Ecuador's, and Cuenca's, arrival, and integration, into the global economy. 'Why shouldn't we have them; everybody else has' was a common refrain. Moreover, the absence of a McDonalds restaurant in Cuenca, in comparison to its presence in Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador's first and second cities, is a source of constant irritation that is felt so strongly that a Facebook campaign entitled 'Bring McDonalds to Cuenca' was recently initiated. Postings to this site suggest a strong sense of regionalism runs alongside a fear that

⁶ See Abbots 2012b and 2013 for further discussion.

Cuenca is somehow 'less outward orientated and global' than its regional rivals. Thus regional tensions between Cuenca and its larger cousins are being played out through 'global' symbols, and there is a sense that the multinationals validate Cuenca as an equitable player on the world stage.

In contrast to the commonly cited fears that global chains are leading to the homogenisation and eradication of 'local' cultures and food practices – a view that is also commonly expressed by expatriates and the middle-classes, who regard the offerings of the chains as 'dangerous' and contaminating to culture (see also Abbots 2012b, 2013), Cuencano consumers of KFC emphasise both the strength, and the fluidity, of the regional creole cuisine. This strength is epitomised by Rafe, who used KFC's adapted menu, with its *menestra* (bean stew), rice, french fries and chicken pieces, as material evidence of creolisation stating; 'our traditions, our food is very strong – they [KFC] are having to adapt to us'. Rafe thereby draws attention to the 'grammar' (cf. Barthes 1997, Douglas 1999) of KFC's offering, explaining how it reflects the structure of a Cuencano meal:

you have your chicken pieces, and you've also got potatoes, and rice and *menestra* too – if you go to Raymipampa [a popular Cuencano café for locals and tourists alike] or Los Canibales [a Cuencano chain of spit-roasted chicken restaurants] you'll get exactly the same.

Rafe's understanding of KFC could be seen as a form of appropriation or 'domestication' (Caldwell 2004), as he incorporates the global into the local core, thereby inverting the power dynamic commonly presented by proponents of McDonaldisation theory (cf. Ritzer 2010)⁷. Yet the Cuencano meal presented as regionally 'typical' in this context is not one that is authentically and originally 'local', pre-Hispanic or even Cañari. Rather it is creole, with two of its main

⁷ Although originally a theory of production that argued 'the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more of the sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world' (Ritzer: 2010:4), McDonaldisation thesis has been applied to seemingly homogenous consumption practices, with any aspects of the contemporary world 'escaping' McDonaldisation being either traceable to a 'pre-modern' age or understood as postmodern responses to McDonaldisation. The argument suggests that the rationality of McDonalds replaces indigenous and 'authentic' meanings and forms with its own 'McDonalds' sets of values and practices. At one level, it is thereby a thesis of cultural imperialism and global homogenisation. See Ritzer (ibid) for examples.

components, the rice and the chicken, being introduced by the Spanish *conquistadores*. This creolisation is recognised, especially among consumers who are live and work in more urban or 'professional' contexts. As Marcelo described;

The Spanish took many things out of this country, many things – potatoes maize, and fruit, pineapple, papaya and bananas. They brought in white rice. White rice used to be called rice of the castle, because castles were the only place it went to. Only the Spanish could eat it. The Indians didn't eat white rice. It was a rich man's food; now, now we all eat it.

In addition, Marco incorporated rice, chicken and pork into his definition of *comida típica*, telling me, 'when the Spanish came they ate these foods, and the indigenous people saw the Spanish people eating it and wanted it too, so they started eating it and it became typical of our food'.

Marco's and Marcelo's comment appear classically Goody; the emergence of a new social hierarchy produces a culinary hierarchy, with the exogenous food of, in this context, Spain being consumed by those situated within the higher ranks of society. Marco further hints at a Bourdieusian process of emulation. The lower classes – the masses – follow the culinary trends set by those above them in the social order as the, previously exogenous, foods become more readily available; a process that Goody suggests would 'rub out' social differentiations (1982: 3). However, as the divergent views on KFC and *cuy* indicate, and as I discuss more fully below, these differences are not diminishing but are rather being reasserted.

So here we see a conscious identification of Spanish foods, and a different emphasis from that portrayed by the Jima Tourist Foundation and the rural migrant-peasant class, who respectively either played down, or could (or would) not identify the influence of, Spanish colonialism in their definition of *comida típica*. This orientation to Spain not only knits another site into the creole fabric of typical Cuencano food, but is also used by consumers of KFC to highlight the fluidity and openness of the category. This process was clearly articulated by Carlos, who, in response to my question of whether hamburgers could be, or are, *comida típica*, called upon the 'food of the ancestors' definition to explain that 'in four to five generations, we will be the ancestors, and we're eating hamburgers,

so of course hamburgers could be *comida típica*'. He was supported by Jenny, who introduced the concept of 'fusion food' into the conversation, saying; 'hamburgers are made with local ingredients now, local sauces and served with local dishes, and this keeps traditions alive, it's a mixing'.

Carlos and Jenny continued to invoke the discourse of *mestizaje*, emphasising the fluidity, adaptation and creolisation of Cuencano people and their foods, and questioning the very notion of tradition. They interpret Cuencano food practices as being open to change and in a constant state of flux: constructing *comida típica* as the product of a series of multiple cultural encounters. In locating contemporary notions of 'fusion' food within a centuries old process of miscegenation and colonisation, they stressed dynamism over static traditions, and questioned the notion of an authentic local 'core'. Carlos, Jenny and Rafe are all children of migration (cf. Parreñas 2005), with fathers living in New York, but they were also conscious that as *mestizos*, they were the products of colonial relations and historical globalised trade, and from this subject position *comida típica* cannot be regarded as timeless, but rather has to be seen as being subject to continuous change. Traditions are 'kept alive', not through constant repetition and protection, but by fusing existing food grammars with new ingredients and introducing new dishes formed of Cuencano produce.

Theirs was not, however, the only approach. Other avid consumers of fast food, from the same social group, created distinctions between *comida típica* and global fast food chains, arguing that the existence of the latter reinforced the former. From this perspective, multinational fast food brands and traditional local cuisine are regarded as mutually enforcing, and a number of my participants would point to the increased visibility of cultural fairs and restaurants specialising in *comida típica* as evidence of a robust regional food heritage. As Sara told me; 'fast food helps us protect our traditions, because it makes us more aware of them; it highlights them' and Victoria surmised; 'I may be here with my laptop and modern clothes and go to Burger King, but I will still

teach my children our traditions – my daughters will still know how to cook *cuy*⁸.

Yet, this perspective also implies recognition of the potential permeability of *comida típica*, and it is therefore not as far removed from the views of Jenny and Carlos as it initially appears. There is a sense in this discourse that boundaries must be reinforced, often by eating *comida típica* only with kin and during festive occasions, otherwise traditions, rather than being kept alive, will change beyond all recognition. As such, this more static, 'keeping the two spheres distinct' approach appears closer to the views of the Jima Tourist Foundation and the middle-classes. But there is also a sense among the urban lower classes, particularly with the younger generation, that the realms of fast food and *comida típica* can sit harmoniously alongside, and mutually reinforce, each other, either through a process of fusion or by encouraging public recognition and valuation of 'traditional' food. Furthermore, although some, for example, Jenny and Carlos, constitute themselves as products of multiple global encounters, and others, like Sara and Victoria, construct their position as being more akin to 'having a foot in both camps', all demonstrate that being a global citizen does not detract from being Cuencano; a view that challenges the middle-classes interpretation of lower class consumption.

The desire of expatriates and the middle-classes to eradicate 'fast food', in the form of multinational chains and their products, from the Cuencano foodscape, and the manner in which they conceive this form of consumption as damaging to cultural heritage, further, perhaps ironically, reinforces the notion that *comida típica* is not impervious to change and influence. As the views above suggest, it is also counter-productive, with the lower classes reading cultural fairs as a 'permission slip' to continue consuming fast food. Yet to depict the middle-classes as inherently inward looking would be misleading, as they commonly eat in self-styled 'fusion' restaurants, a number of which are understood to have both North American and European influences. It is to two of those restaurants that I now give my attention.

⁸ See Abbots (2012b) for a fuller discussion of the interplay between heritage and fast foods within this social group and Abbots (2011) for an account of the role of *cuy* in a transnational, migratory context.

Tiestos and El Maiz: Facilitating Cosmopolitanism

The restaurants *Tiestos* and *El Maiz* are part of an emerging culinary scene in Cuenca that markets 'fusion cuisine'. The variety of restaurants in the city, and the range of food available, has increased dramatically in the last two to three years, and while the high-end European-style restaurants that have been part of the Cuenca establishment for many years remain – echoing Goody (1982) – popular with the upper echelons of society, the 'contemporary' fusion restaurants are the preferred option for the burgeoning urban middle-classes and the expatriate population⁹.

The El Maiz menu opens with an introduction to the role 'the sacred grain' played during the pre-Hispanic era, before explaining that; 'joining the new Ecuadorian food movement, we include fusion cooking on our menu', and listing a range of dishes under this heading that include: mushroom *quinoa*, served with parsley potatoes; chicken in a Zambo¹⁰ seed and white wine sauce; *quinoa* and corn gratin with cream, white wine and mozzarella; and pork medallions in a tamarind and sherry sauce. Tiestos has a similar offering, proudly presenting steak in a blackberry and *ishpingo* sauce, chicken in a curry and macadamia nut sauce, and *caldo* with meatballs. Sitting alongside these proclaimed 'fusion' dishes, in both restaurants, are the 'traditional' dishes of *caldo*, *seco*, *mote pillo*, *llapingachos*, trout, beef and pork, the latter three served with french fries. The setting for the presentation of this extensive range of dishes is self-consciously rural Latin America: miniatures of the *Chola Cuencana* (a folkloric female peasant¹¹) sit on each table at Tiestos, and their images adorn the pale ochre walls and, as in El Maiz, there is an abundance of wood, flowers and terracotta urns.

⁹ I examine the obvious ironies and contradictions of a social group seeking an alternative, 'simple' life consuming 'industrial' and 'exogenous' foods, and dining in 'fine restaurants, in Abbots (2013).

¹⁰ A form of pumpkin/ squash.

¹¹ See Abbots (forthcoming) for further discussion of the politics of the *Chola Cuencana* image, and the role she plays in country – city relations. See also Weismantel (2001, 2003).

Expatriates and the urban middle classes alike generally regard the offerings of both restaurants as 'typical' Cuencano fare. *High Life*, a Cuenca blog orientated towards the expatriate audience, reviewed El Maiz in an article entitled, 'Checking out the *comida típica* scene' (2011) and, of the restaurant's aim to 'rescue the gastronomic identity' of Cuenca, the author writes; 'what a great idea, I thought, in a world where most people want to identify with what they see on American television'. However, many expatriates and Cuencano professionals also asserted a discursive distinction between the foods they regard as typical of the peasant class – *cuy*, rice, spit-roasted pork and maize – and the more 'civilised' typical food they consume. In making this distinction, they not only render the *comida típica* of the peasantry as timeless and unchanging, often consigning it to the realm of cultural heritage, but also acknowledge the influence of the United States and Europe on their own 'civilised' *comida típica*. Fusion can be typical and local, it appears, when served in a more exclusive, middle-class setting, but creolisation is less valued, and recognised, by the patrons of these establishments in the foods consumed in lower class, or mass-market, contexts. Moreover, in contrast to their views of KFC as a homogenising danger, the pronounced influence of the USA and Europe is regarded as a marker of quality in 'fusion' restaurants, and publically celebrated. As Bryan noted when first introducing me to Tiestos 'you should see the desserts there, they're just like you would get in San Francisco'.

Bryan continued to explain that it is not just the ingredients and the way they were combined that made the dishes akin to those of 'home', but also the style in which they were presented. This extends to the structure of the meal. As Quentin proclaimed over his coffee in Tiestos 'now, that what I call a civilised meal!' When asked to expand on this, he proceeded to list the meal structure; 'good *entrees*, the bread with the dips and relishes, a nice main course with well cooked meat and tasty sauces, a nice beautifully presented desert, wine and good service'. Likewise, at el Maiz, Chester stated 'now this is what I call fine dining! The presentation of the food, it's so elegant and nicely presented, nicely laid out'. He continued to compare the meal he had just enjoyed to the Other typical 'low' Cuencano meal that Rafe was so proud of, complaining;

all those platefuls of rice – I don't know how they eat all those carbs – and meat with bones in – and don't even get me started on the chicken feet, urgh! It's the one thing I haven't gotten used to here yet, the bones.

North American service standards were also seen to be a marker of quality, if somewhat out of the norm. As Billy observed of the Tiestos chef;

he knows about good food and good service, and you can't get that combination in this country. They don't understand service. But he just does it right, he could be a case study for a MBA programme.

Similarly, while reminiscing on a previous meal at Tiestos, Chuck commented;

I had this great soup and main course, and man, I'm full after that, and I don't want any dessert, but he [the chef-owner] says you must try this and he brings me out this great big dessert, and so after all of that I order a cappuccino, and this massive coffee comes out. He knows how to do it right – he'd do well in Chicago, or New York, that restaurant is good enough to do well in the cities, or the burbs, back home.

These sentiments of the expatriate community were also reflected in the views of the urban middle-classes who also stressed the elegance and sophistication of the food on offer, and the environment in which it is consumed. However, service was less of a recurring motive in their evaluations of the restaurants, and they drew less explicit comparisons with the United States, but rather identified the Cuencano ingredients, describing how they had been used creatively, and valuing the mixture of different styles and stressing how it was similar, yet different, to the Other typical Cuencano food. Higher-end, defined 'fusion food' is therefore understood to have a different grammar from the food of the masses, and it this emphasis on the setting and style of the dishes that, I suggest, helps ensure that the meals on offer at Tiestos and El Maiz are acknowledged not only as 'fusion', but also as supporting Cuenca's food heritage, while the lower-class, 'popular' North Americanism of KFC is condemned as damaging and homogenising.

It becomes evident, then, that the production of 'higher-end' fusion food in Cuenca is resonant with Goody's (1982) discussion of the ways in which *haute cuisine* typically takes elements of 'indigenous' peasant foods and elevates and

transforms them through the introduction of 'exogenous' elements. As Goody states, '[i]n terms of class and cuisine, the higher in the hierarchy, the wider the contacts, the broader the view. Thus the higher cuisine inevitably had to acquire ingredients from 'outside' (ibid: 105). Yet in this case – where there is wide availability of imported ingredients that are easily accessible by the masses – 'local' and 'low' foods are mediated through scarcer US service standards and European meal grammars, not foodstuffs *per se*. The importance of 'differentiation' through food (ibid: 103) thereby remains but finds new forms, beyond ingredients and luxurious exogenous products.

The popularity of self-styled fusion restaurants among the middle-classes and expatriates can also be explained by the manner in which they bridge the most salient spatio-temporal sites for these groups. Expatriates come to Cuenca looking for 'a simple life and simple food' and to escape North American agro-industry and complex food chains. Yet these aspirations are very quickly contained by the reality of everyday life in Cuenca, and they not only find multinational fast food chains, but also discover that typical, lower class, meals are not to their, sensory and cultural, taste (cf Bourdieu 1984). The Cuencano middle-classes also have a need to orientate themselves to sites of cultured sophistication and prestige, while keeping a foot anchored to what they regard as 'local'. Due to the value placed on cultural 'whiteness' under *mestizaje* nation-building programmes and colonisation (cf. Stutzman 1981), these sources of prestige have historically been European, although more recently 'other' sites of modernity, such as Japan, have also started to come to the fore. And, as the previous hegemonic discourse of *mestizaje* is challenged by ideologies of pluriculturalism, there is renewed interest in the pre-Hispanic past. Moreover, both expatriates and the Cuencano middle-classes alike take measures to distance themselves from sites they regard as being potentially homogenising. These are commonly regarded as North American, but are conceptualised as a more mass-market, and lower class, North America than the sites with which they knowingly engage. They do not regard their celebration and patronage of restaurants such as Tiestos and el Maiz and their castigation of KFC as contradictory, because from their subject position the two food spaces are poles apart, echoing Goody (1982) one is 'high cuisine', the other 'low'. As such, the

former is sophisticated and elegant, reinventing peasant 'tradition' and keeping it alive by incorporating valued 'exogenous' elements, whereas the latter is seen as over-riding cultural heritage: a perspective that, I hope to have made clear, diverges considerably from the perspectives of the urban and rural lower classes.

Conclusion

Tiestos and El Maiz take the grammar of North American and European cuisine, and populate it with Cuencano ingredients. KFC adopts the grammar of a Cuencano meal and populates with a secret blend of herbs and spices. Whereas, the Jima health fair takes an acknowledged 'cultural heritage' dish of *cuy*, associated with kinship and private consumption, commodifies it and changes the manner of its production. Which food space is more typical? And which is more or less creole, or fusion? As this brief journey through the three sites above indicates, there is no authentic local core of Cuencano food, but rather a range of cultural encounters and multiple sites that are variously selected and woven together in the production of *comida típica*. The process of placing these foods into the categories of local and typical, fusion, and/or exogenous threat, is informed by class position and political dynamics and, as I have argued, indicative of broader orientations.

At one level, the food hierarchies and the entanglements of social and culinary stratification, as laid out by Goody in *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (1982), are realised in Cuenca. Those in the very highest positions of Cuencano society, particularly the older generation, continue to occupy the 'white' food spaces of colonial style restaurants. Expatriates, the rural and urban middle classes may publically celebrate 'simple' peasant food and, at times, promote 'Cañari' culinary heritage to the rural lower classes, but rarely eat these foods themselves. These social groups all vilify KFC as a symbol of North American cultural imperialism and discursively render the fusionism of fast food invisible, while also celebrating the North American and European grammars of higher-end self-styled 'fusion' restaurants. Meanwhile, the urban lower classes orientate to the USA but do not regard this as compromising their Cuencano-ness, and they draw

on the history of colonialism, emulation and *mestizaje* to demonstrate the ways in which Spanish foods have become *comida típica*, as well as highlighting that KFC is just one link in a long chain of cultural encounters. The consumption practices of the rural migrant-peasantry are also orientated towards the USA, although they less readily identify with definitions of foods as Spanish or Cañari, but will identify 'indigenous' food in the practices of those seemingly less *mestizo* than themselves.

Yet these divergent valuations also show that the Cuencano foodscape is not as structured, fixed or neat as Goody's argument suggests. Rather it is complex, with all the groups discussed defining *comida típica*, and valuing its various aspects, in different ways. Yet, all, in their own way, indicate the inherent permeability of the category and suggest that the malleability of its definition lies in a long history of encounters and creolisation, of both people and their food. Currents of cultured and non-cultured, modern and traditional, urban and rural, white and indigenous, Spanish and Cañari, and local and global can all be identified in the multiple classifications of foods in Cuenca. In this chapter, I have attempted to move beyond these crude and simplistic dichotomous constructions and I hoped to have shown that *all* the foods discussed can be regarded as creole, and that the recognition of creolisation (or lack of) vis-à-vis certain foods is shaped by class relations. The valuations of specific spatio-temporal sites, as indicated through food, provide the foundation of class in Cuenca and, while these relations are structurally informed, they are also not clear-cut, but rather shift across contexts and intersect with generation, ethnicity and urban/rural divides.

The circular flows of people, money, goods, corporations, and ideologies are resulting in a renegotiation and contestation of Cuencano class dynamics, and actors of all classes are redefining what it means to be Cuencano and to eat *comida típica*. Being Cuencano, and eating Cuencano, is an intrinsically creole practice; there is no authentic local core that incorporates and appropriates the global, nor a global that is potentially damaging to the local. Rather Cuencanos are both global and local citizens, navigating the terrains of multiple spatio-temporal sites and selecting, interpreting and weaving together elements in the

creation of their own unique subjectivities. Throughout this chapter I have contended that the variable classification and assessment of a diverse range of foods as 'local' and 'typical' can thereby be understood as a valuation of different places and times. These places and times could be theoretically defined as 'external' or 'global', but doing so would perhaps serve to create another false local-global dichotomy. In contrast, I have looked to dissolve these categories. In other words, I have not argued against the notion of a local, but am saying that what comprises local differs significantly, is class based, and is shaped by the differing spatio-temporal orientations that underpin class relations. Moreover, this process of selecting and combining sites – or creolisation – is contested, and in bringing their own site to the fore, actors render those of others invisible, silent and of less value.

Redirecting questions away from how the 'global' is domesticated and appropriated by, and blended with, the 'local' – moving towards, instead, a model that conceptualises and acknowledges foods as inherently creole – potentially provides us with new insights into the processes of globalisation. The recognition that foods are products of an historical continuum raises new, and additional, questions regarding the politics and power dynamics of creolisation and the extent of its acknowledgement (or not) by certain social actors. Moreover, relating how these processes of culinary valuation both reflect, and produce, class relations and subjectivities can not only help further illuminate the ways in which subjectivities are produced and performed through recourse to food, but can also deepen our understanding of the ways that 'conflict over cuisine becomes as 'a facet of class' (Goody 1982: 136).

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