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Editor's Note

Sarah Lawson Welsh

"We are what we eat", or so we are often told, but we are also *how* we eat and *how* we talk and write about food. This special focus on Food and the Postcolonial originated as a Symposium called "Culinary Cultures", held in conjunction with the Northern Postcolonial Network at York St John University (UK) in May 2017. Starting from the premise that one of the most visible growth areas of interdisciplinary research in the last quarter century has been the popular and academic study of food, it sought to examine why postcolonial studies has been relatively slow to embrace the study of postcolonial culinary cultures and food histories[1] and it sought to 'bridge the gap' by inviting critical explorations of the intersections between the two discourses from a variety of perspectives. The resulting papers revealed a rich vein of thinking about food and the postcolonial and a provided a vibrant snapshot of young and established scholars working across and between different disciplines and making a significant contribution to the emerging strand of postcolonial food studies. Papers considered food preparation, cooking and/or consumption in selected literary, filmic, sacred and visual texts, including the complex history and meanings of Barbecue as traditional and "authentic" food in the Deep South of America; travel writing and the tourist gaze in Bali; advertising and the politics of the Fair Trade movement in Palestine; life writing, gender and oral histories in African and Pakistani diasporic communities in Britain; constructions of nation in colonial as well as contemporary menus and cookbooks; Keralan and Indo-Caribbean foodways and food histories; the hotly contested issue of culinary "authenticity";

postcolonial ecologies and environmentalism; intergenerational differences, food memories and nostalgia; gustatory experiences and the politics of taste.

The papers which have been selected for this special issue represent the subject at its most interdisciplinary, as the contributing authors consider both the territory-specific and the global dimensions of food and foodways. Astrid Schwegler Castaner and Muzna Rahman examine how contemporary writers and filmmakers are exploring the centrality of food within our globally connected world and the globalizing processes of different postcolonial contexts including a consideration of food and tourism and of food, diaspora and film. Others, including Muzna Rahman and Caribbean writer, Alecia Mackenzie, critically and creatively explore what happens when food "travels", and how transnational and/or diasporic artists can negotiate their identities through their relationships with food. Sarah Lawson Welsh and Shelley Angelie Saggar explore the politics of the postcolonial cookbook in very different contexts, by reading culinary text and paratexts for race, class, and gender in an early Barbadian cookbook and by considering problematic notions of authenticity and cultural memory against the constant anxiety of cultural erasure in a British-published Palestinian cookbook. A common focus in this special issue is on the ways in which contemporary postcolonial artists navigate tensions between the local and the global, the cooks and foodways of the past and of the present; the role of cultural memory, nostalgia and loss and the articulation and interrogation of concepts of culinary "tradition" and "authenticity" in postcolonial writing.

Sarah Lawson Welsh considers Mrs H. Graham (E.A.C.) Yearwood's cookery book, *West Indian and Other Recipes* (1911, 1932), an early West Indian cookbook compiled by a prominent white Creole woman on the island of Barbados in the early decades of the twentieth century. She argues that this rare printed cookbook from a primarily oral culture constitutes a fascinating early document which reveals much about the material culture, tastes

and codes of respectability of a colonial society starkly divided along class, gender and racial lines. In particular, the text sheds light on the Euro-Creole elite and the networks of a growing black and mixed-race middle-class keen to gain cultural and culinary capital and to consume material goods as a sign of their upward social mobility. Through her reading of "the paratextual elements of the [cookbook]" Lawson Welsh demonstrates how this text provides "a wealth of information about the material conditions of [cookery] writing, reading, printing and publishing in the West Indies, which in turn, shape our understanding of the [culinary culture] of the early decades of the 20th century" (Irving 2015, 203).

Very different kinds of consumer, and "consumptive practices", are considered in Astrid Schwegler Castaner's contribution to this special focus: those of the tourist. Schwegler Castaner considers how Simone Lazaroo's 2010 novel *Sustenance* explores Australian identity and positions the Asian as other within the context of Balinese tourism. She argues that "Australia's multicultural policy has based its promotion of such acceptance [of the other] on the consumption of difference through non-threatening cultural items such as food." However, whilst such consumption is frequently constructed as an enriching and "exotic" experience for the tourists, "the privilege of the consumers, the Anglo-Celtic Australian mainstream, stays unchallenged". Castaner considers how Laazaroo's novel focuses on food and uses consumptive practices to critique "the binary definition of Australian identity through its neo-colonial relation to Asia in general, and Bali in particular".

Shelley Angelie Saggar discusses how culinary memory belies anxieties over cultural erasure in Joudie Kalla's 2016 cookbook *Palestine on a Plate,* a text published in Britain to great acclaim. Saggar shows how having never visited her ancestral homeland, Kalla invokes a reconstructed "gendered ancestral memory" in order to "re-present Palestinian culture to [a] mainstream western [audience]". She argues that Kalla's cookbook is riven with anxieties about cultural erasure but also characterized by some "problematic notions of self-

exotification" as she tries to "market her book as preserving an 'authentic' Palestinian cultural inheritance". Ultimately, Kalla succeeds, concludes Saggar and Palestine is "represented [...] as a vibrant, living culture to be celebrated, not mourned".

Finally, Muzna Rahman explores issues of food and transition in Ritesh Batra's 2013 film *The Lunchbox.* Named after the Indian dubba system of food delivery which enables home cooks to send freshly cooked and individualized dishes to working family members, the film "explores issues of belonging, tradition and progress in contemporary India", argues Rahman. Indian cuisine is itself a "traditional diasporic symbol" and the lunchbox a kind of cultural shorthand for a range of meanings including national belonging and nostalgia for home. Rahman argues that "By evoking, re-working and subsequently re-deploying th[is] […] diasporic symbol […] *The Lunchbox* self-reflexively addresses and tests the boundaries of diasporic narratives and explores issues around globalization and transnationality". Ultimately, she concludes that the film is "ambivalent about late modernity's progressive project in India "choosing instead to "advocate[e] for creative and adaptive solutions […] to the alienation and loss of home experienced by characters in the film".

These new interventions in the burgeoning field of postcolonial food studies testify to the centrality of food to many postcolonial texts, though each article, importantly, represents an informed and culturally specific reading rather than the adoption of a universalizing framework. Indeed, in their deployment of diverse methodologies, the authors signal exciting new critical and theoretical possibilities opened up by this kind of intersectional or interdisciplinary approach to the rich feast which is postcolonial writing.

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Notes

[1] Some notable exceptions in the literary arena include Loichot (2013) (on Francophone Caribbean writing), Roy (2010), and Mannur (2009).