

# GLOCALISED FOODSCAPES: THE SELF, THE OTHER AND THE FRONTIER

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*Abstract:* While food is capable of mediating between different cultures, opening kitchen systems to all sort of inventions, crosses and contaminations, it is also the space for domestication and adaptation. This has become particularly evident in contemporary glocalised foodscapes, where migratory flows, travels and the development of media systems have made the processes of translation across different food cultures increasingly evident and consistent, affecting (much faster than in the past) the existing culinary “traditions” and becoming part of them. The distinction between the global and the local dimension has thus progressively blurred, making established meanings and identities no longer clearly defined, but rather expressed through several and multiple interpretations. It is therefore essential to understand the semiotic processes underlying such interpretations, and the way they contribute to the definition of contemporary food meanings and identities. This paper deals with these crucial questions by focusing on some relevant case studies related to the Peruvian food-sphere, whose recent development and success on a global scale has been promoted precisely by means of an emphasised process of glocalisation operated by local food services and haute-cuisine chefs that have become famous worldwide.

*Keywords:* food, glocalisation, identity, otherness, translation.

*Our glocal horizon seems to place us in this space of interplay between the heterogeneity of the real and the (social, historical, cultural, or, in a wider sense, semiotic) formations that, by articulating borders, conflicts, contradictions, do create possibilities – albeit imperfect and contingent ones – of sharing and identification.*  
Franciscu Sedda (2014)

## INTRODUCTION

While food is capable of mediating between different cultures, opening cooking systems to all sort of inventions, crosses and contaminations, it is also the space for forms of domes-

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tication and adaptation<sup>1</sup>. In fact, as Claude Fischler (1990) remarked, on the one hand, our need for food variety drives us to adapt to environmental changes and explore a multitude of new foods and diets (*neophilia*). On the other hand, we also tend to fear the risks associated with new food products and sources (*neophobia*), thus opting for prudence and opposing innovation. Like other systems of the semiosphere (Lotman 1984), food is in constant transformation and re-definition, through – more or less gradual or “explosive” – processes that mediate between boosts and resistances to change.

This has become particularly evident in contemporary glocalised foodscapes. Even though distance trade and geopolitical arrangements (e.g. colonial expansions) have made products and practices spread globally since ancient times, linking distant places and cultures of the world<sup>2</sup>, with today’s migratory flows, travels and media systems the processes of translation across different food cultures have become increasingly evident and consistent, affecting much faster than in the past the existing culinary “traditions” and becoming part of them. Hence, the distinction between the global and the local dimension has progressively blurred, making established meanings and identities no longer clearly defined, but rather expressed through several and multiple interpretations (Matejowsky 2007: 37).

It becomes therefore essential to understand the semiotic processes underlying such interpretations, and the way they contribute to the definition of contemporary food meanings and identities. After a brief introduction to glocalization and its study, the following paragraphs deal with such crucial questions by focusing on the specific field of public food service and especially haute cuisine, which – as Stephen Mennell (1985) remarked – represents a crucial aspect of food culture and evolution, which relies on formalised codes for regulating both the practices of preparation and those of consumption of food. More specifically, we will focus on relevant case studies related to the Peruvian foodsphere, whose recent development and success on a global scale has been promoted precisely by means of an emphasised process of glocalisation, especially as



a result of the activity carried out by local services and chefs that have become famous at the international level.

From a methodological point of view, we will rely specifically on the tools offered by the semiotics of culture. In cultural settings, in fact, different types of food, culinary techniques, eating events, and rituals are “signs and texts that are part of a culture’s overarching network of meanings” (Danesi 2006: 533). Culinary traditions and practices, in other words, form part of the semiosphere, the realm within which semiosis (and so the production, the exchange, and the reception of all information and communication) exists:

ingredients, dishes, and practices can be interpreted as carrying meaning and used to infer information about their makers, their cultures, and their environments. At the same time, they can be produced to carry meaning, becoming effective tools of intentional communication (Parasecoli 2011: 647).

Drawing on these considerations, we will pay particular attention to the collective imaginary of contemporary Peruvian haute-cuisine glocalised foodscapes, intended as the socially shared depository of images – or, more generally, figures – directing and regulating the imaginative paths of cultural encyclopaedia (see Eco 1975) according to the dual dimension of an “internal imaginary” (i.e., “the cultural pattern for the production of images and figures”, Volli 2011: 35 [our translation]) and an “external imaginary” (i.e., “the material system of production and storage of [these] images”, *ibid.*).

## GLOCALISATION

The term “glocalisation” has been increasingly adopted to highlight “the interpenetration of the universalization of particularization and the particularization of universalism” (Robertson 1992: 100). Modelled on the Japanese concept of *dochakuka*, originally referring to the adaptation of farming techniques to one’s own local condition and then transposed to the business world (see Robertson 1995: 28), the expression

stresses the processes of syncretism and hybridisation brought about by globalisation. In fact, according to Nederveen Pieterse (2004), globalisation can be seen in different ways: a first view depicts it as a clash of cultures, recalling the idea of clash of civilisations described by Samuel Huntington (1996); the second conception highlights a process of homogenisation and erosion of difference, relating to the so-called process of “McDonaldisation” of society introduced by George Ritzer (1993); the third perspective rather conceives globalisation as a process of hybridisation and synthesis, mainly consisting in crossbreeding, borrowing and adjusting products and techniques to the local dimension. In this third sense, globalisation and glocalisation are seen as interdependent dynamics:

The problem of simultaneous globalisation of the local and the localisation of globality can be expressed as the twin processes of macro-localisation and micro-globalisation. Macro-localisation involves expanding the boundaries [of] locality as well as making some local ideas, practices, and institutions global [...]. Micro-globalisation involves incorporating certain global processes into the local setting (Khondker 2005: 186).

Accordingly, Jean-Loup Amselle (2001) remarked that all societies are crossbred even within themselves: building on James Clifford’s concept of traveling cultures (1997) and the researches carried out by Ulf Hannerz (1987; 1992) and Édouard Glissant (1990) on the idea of creolisation, he rejected a conception of globalisation as a collision among previously pure and intact elements, rather defining it as the encounter among already hybridised and heterogeneous systems, which relies precisely on the confrontation between the global and the local dimension.

Such processes evidently affect the food domain. On the one hand, in fact, a number of local products and practices have abandoned their original places to impose themselves on a global scale, deeply transforming contemporary foodscapes:

Ethnic food [...] has become a fundamental presence in Western food cultures: from the several *döner kebabs* shops filling up the streets where we walk to the many *sushi* bars and the more and more



ubiquitous Eritrean, Senegalese, or Asiatic restaurants, the offer of “the food of the Other” in our societies is extremely broad and varied. Ethnic shops (such as *balal* butchers, Chinese bakeries, or Mexican stores) are increasing in number, and in many cities markets the local products are increasingly complemented with spices, vegetables, and other foods required for the preparation of exotic dishes. Furthermore, this same phenomenon has progressively become popular on a wider scale, affecting large distribution chains: in North America and Europe, for example, recent decades have seen the growth of foreign foods on supermarket shelves, sometimes in sections specifically devoted to ethnic food (e.g. soy noodles, Mexican *tortillas*, chilli sauce, spring rolls, or sushi), and sometimes even next to local and more common products (e.g., basmati rice, coconut milk, or exotic fruits) (Stano 2015a: xxiii).

On the other hand, global codes and aesthetics have permeated local cuisines and gastronomies, imposing “recurring, vaguely codified set of material objects, environments, practices, and discourses which materialize in cities throughout the world in coffee places, restaurants, and food halls” (Halawa, Parasecoli 2019: 387; see Parasecoli 2016; Halawa, Parasecoli 2021). This has resulted in a “decentralized sameness” (*ibid.*), which makes food places around the world look similar, regardless of their actual location and the particular products and services they offer<sup>3</sup>.

These dynamics incessantly redefine the values and meanings associated to food, promoting “an ongoing and multi-layered process of intercultural and intersemiotic translation, [which] involve[s] ‘national’, ‘religious’, ‘ethnic’, ‘class’ and other semiospheres at the very same time, as well as asymmetrical relations of power” (Sedda, Stano forthcoming; see Sedda 2016). In order to better understand such issues, after a general overview of the Peruvian foodsphere, we will deal in the following paragraphs with two relevant examples of globalisation characterising it: Nikkei cuisine and the Novo Andean phenomenon.



## THE PERUVIAN FOODSPHERE: VARIABILITY AND GLOCALISATION

On its website *Peru Travel*, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism promotes Peruvian gastronomy by placing particular emphasis on its – both natural and cultural – diversity:

La riqueza de sus tierras y su diversidad cultural hacen del Perú un país de exquisita y variada gastronomía. Cada ciudad tiene un plato típico con un sabor inigualable. Miles de productos del campo y decenas de culturas vivas, que por siglos han compartido un solo territorio, terminaron creando una infinita oferta, donde sólo el paladar debe elegir. [The richness of its lands and its cultural diversity make Peru a country of exquisite and varied gastronomy. Each city has a typical dish with a unique flavor. Thousands of products from the countryside and dozens of living cultures, which for centuries have shared a single territory, ended up creating an infinite offer, where only the palate should choose]<sup>4</sup>.

This perfectly matches the name chosen by the Peruvian Gastronomy Association (*Apega*) for the annual fair that it organises since 2008 in the city of Lima, *Mistura*, which is also based on ideas such as diversity and inclusiveness:

En Mistura todos nos reunimos para celebrar nuestra tradición, creatividad, identidad y diversidad. Para nosotros, la Sociedad Peruana de Gastronomía, este es el espíritu de la feria, el mismo que compartimos desde nuestra fundación en el año 2007. ¡Mistura #SomosTodos! [At Mistura we all come together to celebrate our tradition, creativity, identity and diversity. For us, the Peruvian Gastronomy Society, this is the spirit of the fair, the same that we have shared since our foundation in 2007. #WeAreAll Mistura!]<sup>5</sup>.

This description significantly relates elements that are generally conceived as antithetical, such as tradition and creativity, and identity and diversity, further emphasising the importance of the values of mixture and exchange suggested by the etymology<sup>6</sup> of the name chosen by *Apega*.

Accordingly, both scholars and chefs have insisted on the diversification and variety characterising the Peruvian food-sphere, both materially and culturally. The menu served by



Virgilio Martínez at his restaurant *Central*, for instance, stresses the extreme environmental and food variability of Peru, making the idea of “altitude” the basis of a peculiar conception of the Peruvian gastronomy, as we will consider in detail below. Indeed, Peru is characterised by a number of microclimates, originated by the typical variations of altitude in the Andean *cordillera*, which allow a wide variety of crops on a relatively small stretch of land (Brush 1976). While mountainous areas are the place for quinoa, the coast is where limes and grapes are grown, and the jungle is where *yucca* roots and fish such as the *paiche* (i.e. the largest fish in the Amazon River) can be found. Each type of food is also characterised by an extreme “internal variability”, as well exemplified by the case of potatoes, whose production includes more than half of the 5,000 varieties consumed in the world.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, such variability is not limited to the material level, encompassing the cultural dimension: the mixture of flavours in Peruvian cuisine reflects the variety of cultures that have arrived in the country over time and in particular in the last 500 years. During the Spanish colonisation (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century), for instance, the Peruvian food-sphere incorporated not only ingredients, but also recipes and practices of European and Arabic origin. More recently, the Chinese and Japanese migration flows (19<sup>th</sup> century) gave origin to the now popular *Chifa* and *Nikkei* culinary styles, and the food aesthetics and sensibilities they brought with them.

Such a variety involves an unceasing movement of “translation” between different food codes, that is to say, as etymological studies point out (both in the case of the Latin verb *traduco*, *-ēre* and that of the noun *translatio*, *-ōnis*), a “passage” of elements across different systems (see Kasperek 1983; Stano 2015a). However, as Maurizio Bettini (2012) suggests, translation is much more than a simple passage of elements, since it involves a process of metamorphosis that implies both *change* and *maintenance* of meaning:

The *conversus* text is certainly another text, since it has changed its *form*. However, it has maintained some *documenta* or *indicia* of its previous condition. At the same time, [...] certain elements, which



were already present in the original form, represent a sort of metaphorical or metonymic premonitions leading to the new [...] form. (Bettini 2012: 55 [our translation]).

Traditionally, two tendencies have been highlighted: on the one hand, “domestication” tries to adapt the system (or, in our case, the foodsphere) of origin to the system (or foodsphere) of destination, “bringing the author to the reader” (Schleiermacher 1838) in order to minimise its strangeness and make it intelligible; on the other hand, “foreignization” emphasises the need to “bring the reader to the author”, focusing on the source code and striving to preserve its foreignness and diversity. Such dynamics are very interesting when dealing with Peruvian gastronomy, and especially with two of its major trends, which combine both universalising and particularising tendencies: the “Nikkei cuisine” and the so-called “Novo Andean cuisine”.

## NIKKEI CUISINE

Among the various culinary crossbreeds that have developed in the Peruvian foodsphere over time, the so-called “Nikkei phenomenon” is the one that has garnered more attention, recognition and appreciation both nationally and internationally, also intersecting with the “Novo Andean cuisine” – with which will deal in detail in the next paragraph.

The term *nikkei* derives from the Japanese word *nikkeijin*, which denotes Japanese migrants and their descendants living abroad. In this sense, Nikkei cuisine can be considered the cooking of the Japanese diaspora (Hara 2015). In particular, there are two countries that, for historical reasons, Japanese migrants have chosen as their destination: Peru and Brazil. Although Peru has a smaller Nikkei population than Brazil, its geographical configuration (and especially the fact that it is bordered by the Pacific Ocean, such as the eastern coast of Japan) has allowed a greater permeation between the Japanese food code and the local foodsphere, providing a fertile ground for Nikkei cuisine.





Between 1899 and 1930, when the first Japanese migrants began to move to Peru to work as farmers, the Nikkei community appeared as a close-knit ethnic group, partly due to the great discrimination it suffered and partly because of its culture (Takenaka 2003, 2004). Since then, the Nikkeis have come a long way to become one of the most successful and respected communities in Peru. Today, Nikkei Peruvians hold prominent positions in business, education, health, art, and politics, and their gastronomic culture has become one of the most famous and representative of the country (Takenaka 2017). However, while assimilating and adapting to Peru, the Nikkei community has maintained a strong attachment to its native culture, resulting in a marked hybrid identity. The famous Nikkei artist Eduardo Tokeshi described this phenomenon by means of an evocative gastronomic metaphor, that is, as “a bottle of soy sauce filled with Inca Kola” (*ibid.*), with double reference to the bottle of Kikkoman soy sauce present in every Japanese house and the most popular carbonated drink in Peru.

And food is not just a metaphor of such a hybridisation process. According to Morimoto (2010), the encounter between the Japanese and the Peruvian semiospheres began precisely in the domestic space of the migrants’ kitchens, where they tried to replicate what they used to eat in Japan using local food and tools instead of the traditional ingredients and instruments that could not be found in Peru. Over time, these forms of translation were progressively incorporated into their culinary practices, giving rise to a new “tradition” – i.e., Nikkei cuisine. Towards the 1920s and 1930s, the number of Japanese immigrants involved in restaurants and catering services began to grow<sup>7</sup>, until they became a significant presence in the late 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Nikkei culinary crossbreeding moved from the private to the public sphere, imposing itself as a space for fervent gastronomic experimentation (Tsumura and Barrón 2013) or – to use the expression adopted in most contemporary descriptions of Nikkei cuisine – “fusion”.

It is worthwhile noticing that such a space does not function according to random or uncontrolled associations, but is rather regulated by specific operations of selection and legiti-



mation of certain ingredients and practices in detriment of others. Let us consider, for instance, a representative Nikkei dish: the so-called *maki acevichado*, which combines the quintessential Japanese food (i.e. the *makimono*, a type of sushi), at least on the level of collective imaginary, with the Peruvian food par excellence (i.e. *ceviche*). Both of these foods are characterised by great versatility, which has certainly favoured the creation of the hybrid form of *maki acevichado* – which, not surprisingly, includes a number of varieties and recipes. In his book *Nikkei Cuisine: Japanese Food the South American Way* (2015), Luiz Hara stated that, regardless of the peculiarities of each recipe, the peculiarity of *maki acevichado* consists in combining the techniques of preparing sushi with the use of *leche de tigre* (literally, “milk of tiger”), that is, the special sauce used in Peruvian ceviche, usually mixing it with mayonnaise and some spices. The result is, in Lévi-Straussian terms (see Lévi-Strauss 1958), a plate composed of an *exogenous central* element (i.e., the roll, which also prevails at the linguistic level, with the work “maki” in a dominant position) and an endogenous peripheral one (although it is generally innovated and different from its original form, including mayonnaise and spices). However, it should be noted that the type of roll adopted in the case of *maki acevichado* is the so-called “California roll”, that is, a North American “translation” of the typical Japanese *makimono* with the rice on the outside and the *nori* seaweed inside (which is known as *uramaki*, or “backwards maki”), around the filling (which, in the recipe mentioned by Hara, is made of avocado – another typical North American variation – and fried prawns – which mark another process of translation, since in the Japanese tradition of *washoku* the fish is essentially raw and sushi itself was born as a fermentation technique to allow its conservation, see Stano 2015a, 2016). As in other American variations, moreover, rice is in turn surrounded by an outer layer of raw fish (in this case, tuna). On the other hand, it should be noted that, exactly as in other Nikkei dishes (which usually combine the ordered, delicate and meditative elements of Japanese cuisine with Peruvian spices and daring flavours, see Tsumura, Barrón 2013), the exogenous element is the least marked in terms of



flavour, while the endogenous element, although peripheral, is tastier and therefore predominant on the gustative level.

Such a configuration seems to be echoed at the symbolic level: although some chefs insist that Nikkei food “is not Japanese food with Peruvian ingredients, nor Peruvian food with Japanese ingredients, but is a unique cultural mixture” (“Kaikan magazine” 2015, in Takenaka 2017), most scholars and cooks (see, for instance, Acurio 2006; Morimoto 2010; Tsumura and Barrón 2013) promote Nikkei dishes as Peruvian products – as well exemplified by the crucial role played by Nikkei cuisine in the menus of the initiator of the Novo Andean cuisine Gastón Acurio, as we will see in detail below.

Finally, it should be remembered that the Nikkei phenomenon was labelled and made popular by non-Nikkei Peruvians: although related to renown chefs from Japan, such as Nobu Matsuhisa and Toshiro Konishi, who arrived in Peru during the 1970s and, in the attempt to adapt Japanese food to the local taste, invented several Nikkei dishes, including the famous *tiraditos* (see Takenaka 2018), Nikkei cuisine was baptised as such in an article that the Peruvian poet and food writer Rodolfo Hinostroza published in the newspaper “La República” (Balbi 1997; Tsumura, Barrón 2013), expressing his euphoria for a *chita*<sup>9</sup> with pepper prepared by Humberto Sato, an emblematic Nikkei chef.

## NOVO ANDEAN CUISINE

The expression “Novo – or New – Andean cuisine” refers to the culinary style emerged in Peru at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup> thanks to some local gastronomes who have been promoting pre-Hispanic food traditions, rescuing and revaluing a number of indigenous ingredients – such as *quinoa* (or *quínoa*), *achira*, *maca*, *yacón*, *ají*, *mashua*, etc. –, as well as the culinary practices of the so-called “Andean cuisine” that originated in pre-Columbian times within the Inca civilisation. However, it should be noted that this is not simply a return to the past, but rather a “re-creation” or, to recall Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), a “(re-)invention” of the Andean tradition,



which is based on a translation process both on a temporal level, with the re-interpretation of ancient elements and practices in a modern key, and on a spatial level, with the adoption of ingredients, aesthetics and techniques from other cultural contexts – such as the contemporary European gastronomic universe (and also the Japanese one, as the great presence of Nikkei dishes in the gastronomic offer of several Novo Andean restaurants attests).

In order to analyse the details of these translation processes and their effects of meaning, we will consider in the following paragraphs two representative figures of the Novo Andean culinary phenomenon: Gastón Acurio and Virgilio Martínez.

## GASTÓN ACURIO

Gastón Acurio is the icon of Peru's contemporary gastronomic boom. Born in Peru in 1967, he studied cooking in France, where he met his wife Astrid Gutsche. He went back to Peru with her in 1993, and in 1994 they opened the restaurant *Astrid&Gastón* in the Miraflores District, in Lima. Initially, the restaurant offered classic French dishes, but very soon Acurio began to combine the European cuisine with which he had come into contact during his period abroad with the local gastrosphere, which at that time was still rather unknown outside of South America. Thus, he contributed to the creation of Novo Andean cuisine, which he still promotes through his restaurants in Peru and abroad,<sup>11</sup> and also thanks to the associations (such as Apega and the Pachacútec Foundation) he has founded, the books and television programs he has written and hosted, and the various initiatives he has sponsored (especially *Mistura*, which has become one of the most important food fairs in the world and the symbol of Peruvian gastronomic culture).

Acurio's media representations are particularly relevant to the analysis of the collective imaginary of Novo Andean cuisine. In the trailer of the documentary *Finding Gastón/Buscando a Gastón*<sup>12</sup>, directed by Patricia López in 2014,



for instance, the connection with the Peruvian territory is marked since the beginning: Acurio appears on the screen from his back, while looking towards the sea, with a thoughtful expression. In the background, the waves of the sea break on the coast, also dominating the acoustic dimension. After some seconds, the chef's voice comes in to clarify the reason for such a state of reflection:

There comes a time when you tell yourself [...] “Hey, hang on one second. You are in a restaurant, you are cooking [...]. But you are feeding the people who are lucky like you and are able to afford it. Is that what you want from life? Is that why you became a cook? To lock yourself in this restaurant, close your eyes and ignore your surroundings?” (0:20-0:53).

Then a pre-Columbian native song is added to the soundtrack, while the screen shows images of indigenous people in the fields, on boats, working in restaurants, etc., suggesting the nature of the change that followed such a reflection, making Acurio – as the voice-off clarifies – the symbol of the “history of a country and its cuisine”. So, the trailer ends with a close-up of the chef who, looking at the camera, now with a confident and firm expression, says: “My name is Gastón Acurio, I’m from Lima and I’m a cook”, with a significant perlocutionary act driving the listener’s attention to the connection between his geographical origin and the food domain.

In fact, as we anticipated above, there came a time when Acurio drastically changed the menu offered at his restaurant, abandoning the classic French cuisine he initially served, to pay more attention to his own Peruvian origins. However, it must be noted that although references to the indigenous roots of Peruvian cuisine are constant and particularly remarked in all of his creations and communications, they are not the only ones: “This year – the chef declared in an interview on the occasion of the launch of a new menu for *Astrid&Gastón* in 2017 – we celebrated two ideas, one was recognition to all the communities that have arrived to our country in the last 500 hundred years and mixed their food cultures with the ancient [P]eruvian food culture. And the second was the imagination of communities that are just arriving such as Venezuelans, or others that didn’t arrive

yet, like Thailand, Venice, Mexico, Sichuan, India, Morocco” (Fine Dining Lovers 2017). His current menu indeed reflects this idea of a translation that is both local and global, synchronous and diachronic. Consider, for instance, dishes such as *Tiradito Lima-Sichuan* (made with tofu and other ingredients and techniques typical of the Chinese-Peruvian translation operated by the *Chifa* cuisine), the *Atún Bonito Lima-Belén* (where the Peruvian gastrosphere meets the Arab food culture, including elements such as “quinua tabulé”, “hummus de pallar” and “harissa de ají mirasol”), *Pasta con erizos y limón* (whose description clarifies very well the different levels of translation assumed by the dish, making Nikkei cuisine become the endogenous – i.e., local or “Peruvian” – element<sup>13</sup>: “*como un Alfredo pero hecho por un nikkei*” [like and Alfredo but cooked by a nikkei]), and even a vegetarian ceviche (“when we ate all the fish”, which calls on new trans-local food styles to reinterpret one of the emblematic dishes of the Peruvian gastrosphere).

It is worthwhile noticing that a translation process concerns here only the ingredients and culinary techniques adopted, but also the aesthetic level, that is to say, the very conception of taste, understood as a synaesthetic experience in which various sensory dimensions take part<sup>14</sup>. This is the case, for instance, of the dishes *Cuy Pekinés* and *Dim sum cuy*, which not only combine the guinea pig, a typical food from the Peruvian Andes, with Chinese techniques for cooking it, but also clearly alter the presentation of the dish: the unitary totality characterising the way the *cuy* is served in traditional Andean cuisine (i.e. entire, regardless of how it has been cooked) is abandoned in favour of a process of partition that removes what does not meet the contemporary aesthetics – which originated in the European and North American culture (García 2013: 511), but has soon become a global, “decentralised” code, in a regime of secret (“it does not seem what it is”, see Greimas 1966). Here the dynamics underlined by Bettini (2012) play a crucial role, and two contradictory tendencies emerge: while trying to recover the local culinary heritage, Acurio’s dishes re-interpret it through a global standardised aesthetic regime – with the risk that, in excess of foreignisation, Peruvians them-



selves end up perceiving their food as exotic as that of other continents (as lamented by Lasater-Wille 2015: 23-24).

## VIRGILIO MARTÍNEZ

While Acurio can be considered the principal initiator of Novo Andean cuisine, its main representative worldwide nowadays is Virgilio Martínez, chef of *Central* (elected best restaurant in Latin America and fourth best restaurant in the world in 2015 and 2016). In 2017 Martínez was the protagonist of an episode of the acclaimed Netflix series *Chef's Table*<sup>15</sup>, which points out both the analogies and the divergences between him and Gastón. In fact, Martínez is often represented in the same position Acurio had in the trailer we analysed above, that is, from his back, while looking with a thoughtful expression at the natural landscape around him. However, the filmic dimension suggests a substantial difference between the two cooks' aptitudes: Virgilio's face is generally out of focus, while the camera insists on the natural environment surrounding him. Only at a later stage the chef's face becomes well defined. Martínez's personal and professional story are thus presented as more complex and articulated than Gastón's:

When I came to Lima to open Central [after spending ten years travelling and cooking abroad], I wanted to create the next step for Peruvian cuisine. I wanted to communicate Peru in a way that people never seen before. But when people came to the restaurant, most of the people said, "It's great. It's fantastic. You make me feel like I'm in London, I'm in New York". I felt there's something wrong. People shouldn't be saying that. People has to day that, "You make me feeling like I'm eating in Peru". I realized that my biggest difficulty was...was me. I was confused about what type of food I was going to serve. I was very influenced by ten years of being abroad. I was doing European cuisine with this Peruvian touch. There was something missing...this lack of identity. I realized that, yeah, I had to do a few changes (36:12-37:37).

Then the chef decided "to travel one year to do some research about Peru", in search of "inspiration". He found such



inspiration in the Andes, and more precisely in the terraces of Moray (in Quechua, “Muray”), an experimental farm of the Incas, where he became familiar with a different way to look at the world: “While most people see the world in a horizontal way, people in the Andes have another way to see life. They actually see the world in different levels and altitudes. They see the world in a vertical way, not in a flat, horizontal way. That was it for me”. Hence his new conception of cooking, and also of his innovative menu, arose.

But it is not simply this. Both the filmic and the profilmic dimension insist on the role of “translator” played by Martínez, who “cooks” (i.e., a cultural activity *par excellence*, as remarked by Lévi-Strauss (1965)) what nature offers him in different ways: several scenes show us how, even before modifying food materials and forms in the kitchen, Virgilio “investigates” and “discovers” the substances with which he comes into contact, sometimes thanks to the help of indigenous women – who are presented as holders of a specific knowledge (knowing how to do and knowing how to be) that has disappeared in modern Lima; and other times as a result of his own attitude – as Gastón Acurio affirms in the same episode of *Chef's Table*: “Virgilio’s menu makes you feel. It makes you think. It makes you discover in areas where you thought you already discovered everything [...]. It’s great”. Such a discovery concerns above all with the idea of edibility, which is deeply related to the processes of signification and translation of the food code (Stano 2015b): the various scenes depicting the “neophilic” Virgilio tasting (and testing) various seeds, plants and even animal meat, underline the passage of such substances to the edible regime, as a result of a transformation that passes first of all through their recognition and cataloguing (and it is not a case that the foundation of *Central* has been accompanied by that of *Mater Iniciativa*, a biological and cultural research centre directed by Malena Martínez, Virgilio’s sister). This is relevant in material terms, since it has allowed knowing and classifying a number of new species (such as the *cushuro*, a bacterium from the Andean lakes that Martínez serves in his plate *Mil Medicinales-3680m MSL*), as well as on a symbolic and cultural level, since, as the so-called





“principle of incorporation” (Fischler 1988, 1990) suggests, by the act of eating, we incorporate our identity, as well as otherness. And in the dishes served at *Central*, otherness comes into play in different ways, that is to say, by recovering ancient local products and practices that were hidden and unknown to the majority of Peruvians; and by re-inventing and innovating such products and practices, namely by “translating” them into contemporary food aesthetic codes, which rely on external models and views: “Exoticism and tradition come together in the ideation of a nouvelle cuisine inspired by unseen ingredients and reinvented by adventurous and nostalgic taste-seekers” (Fonseca 2005: 100).

## CONCLUSION

The cases analysed above describe only a part of the Peruvian foodsphere, which is very wide and varied. However, they are representative of how such a foodsphere has managed to establish its identity, that is, in an explicit relationship with otherness and through a peculiar twin process of globalisation of the local and localisation of the global.

As we highlighted, in fact, both the cuisine of the Peruvian-Japanese and that of Acurio and Martínez seem to be based on the ambivalence between a “here” and a “there”, the endogenous and the exogenous, the Self and the Other. This does not surprise: no identity is possible if not in relation to otherness, that is, as *a posteriori* construction resulting from conflicts that are only momentarily and partially pacified. Relatedly, the examples analysed in this paper show that gastronomic systems are not fixed nor immutable, but rather incessantly (re-)constituted as a result of continuous processes of hybridisation and transposition – that is, of translation – between different systems and dimensions. Recalling Paul Ricoeur (1990), we might say that food identity is not simply a form of selfhood (an “identity-idem”) – that is, a static dimension of uninterrupted continuity – but rather a form of “ipseity” (“identity-ipse”) – that is, a dynamic process of continuous



(re-)identification of the Self, which implies otherness to such an extent that it cannot be grasped without it.

This evokes what Lotman (1992) observes in relation to cultural processes: semiospheres do not develop exclusively according to their own laws, but continually integrate a series of collisions with other systems, which affect them from the outside. In other words, each system of signification (and foodspheres make no exception) is a structure inserted in an external world, which attracts such a world towards its interior, and successively releases it in a processed and (re)“organised” way, according to the laws of its own language. As highlighted by Bettini and discussed above, such processes of translation imply both change and maintenance of meaning. However, as the analysed examples show, they can occur in different ways.

The case of Nikkei cuisine suggests a gradual and rather predictable process, based on continuity, which has favoured the naturalisation of the Japanese food code into the Peruvian foodsphere, transforming it from “exogenous” (or, in Lotman’s terms, “foreign”, as it was in the beginning, when the first Japanese migrants moved to Peru) to “non-endogenous” (or “non-native”, when they started substituting Japanese products and tools that were not available in Peru with local substitutes) and “non-exogenous” (or “non-foreign”, that is, Nikkei cuisine served to Peruvian customers at restaurants and praised – and actually established – by local writers and experts), and finally even to “endogenous” (or “native”, as it happens in the above-discussed case of Acurio’s menu). Reorganised according to the laws internal to the Peruvian foodsphere, the Japanese food code has been gradually glocalised, mainly encountering acceptance and recognition – both at a local and a global level<sup>16</sup>.

On the contrary, Novo Andean cuisine takes on a sort of “explosive” character, since it is based on a more sudden and punctual modification<sup>17</sup>. Although ensuring a certain degree of attachment to the local reality and tradition, it openly proclaims its intention to project a “new” look onto it, as its very definition affirms. This involves a marked process of “purification” of the traditional Andean products and practices, which



are constituted – or better re-constituted – globally, regardless of the cultural, social and symbolic relations that they embody, thus becoming “material and natural elements available for novel cultural formations” (Sedda, Stano forthcoming). In fact, as we highlighted above, unlike Nikkei cuisine, the Novo Andean phenomenon is based on translation processes concerning elements that are already endogenous (local), but are re-elaborated through an exogenous – and “decentralised”, that is, global – code, namely the gustative aesthetics of present day’s *haute cuisine* and “gastromania”<sup>18</sup>. The above-analysed translation operated on the guinea pig served by Acurio is emblematic in this sense: the Peruvian chef employs a typical local element, but eradicates it from the local techniques and practices generally adopted for cooking and eating it. The result of such a “purifying” act is a “neutral” element that can be easily combined both with external elements typical of other localities (e.g., the Pekinese cuisine) and the global aesthetics of contemporary gastronomy. Not without concerns and criticism: the main representatives of the Novo Andean phenomenon (and especially Acurio) have been accused of promoting forms of “culinary colonialism” and infringing the intellectual property of indigenous peoples, exploiting their practices and knowledge and making them fade into the background of their own “culinary discoveries” (see, for instance, García 2013; Lasater-Wille 2015).

This highlights the crucial role played by chefs in regulating food translations (see Sedda, Stano forthcoming): they intervene not only on the diffusion, but also on the (re)semantisation of food products and practices, with evident effects on power relations. On closer inspection, this happens also in the case of Nikkei cuisine: evidently, in fact, the operations of selection, substitution and adaptation of food ingredients, tools and techniques operated initially by the first Japanese migrants in the domesticated space of their kitchens and then by Nikkei chefs in the public sphere of their restaurants imply these same processes of purification and translation, also reflecting on the level of social recognition and prestige. However, their gradual character made them less evident, while the more explosive characterisation of Novo Andean



cuisine has made it more likely to encounter opposition, emphasising the risk of “betraying” otherness carried about by translation processes (see Stano 2015a: 223).

Nonetheless, as Lotman (1992) reminds us, gradual and explosive processes do not exclude each other, but rather co-exist and interact in the cultural space. In fact, when moving from private kitchens to the public space of restaurants, Nikkei cuisine underwent a momentary outburst, because of the different addresser it had to confront with – which actually “sanctioned” its official establishment, as we highlighted above. On the other hand, Virgilio Martinez has opted for more gradual translations, lessening the explosive character of the first Novo Andean experiments by Acurio and emphasising the need for a continuous approach. After all, the food domain seems particularly suitable for both dynamics: since food experiences are generally based on superficial curiosity rather than on deep and funded knowledge, they make otherness assume the form of a “palatable” and easily incorporable element, thus allowing cultures to recognise themselves as different and separate, but not necessarily irreconcilable (La Cecla 1997). While boundaries mark the difference between identity and otherness and “control” the passage of elements from one side to the other, food rather seems to be a frontier, that is to say, an area of mediation and negotiation where the local can intertwine with the global, the endogenous can meet the exogenous, the Self can (con-)fuse with the Other, and vice versa, marking points of passage or translation that are never fixed nor established in a univocal way, but rather incessantly re-created through the sometimes silent, but always present and active, force of glocalisation.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See in particular Montanari 2006; Stano 2015a.

<sup>2</sup> Involving not only food products, but also – and especially – practices of preparation and consumption, rites, systems of valorisation, images of one’s self (i.e. construction of local and national identities, self-understanding of social and cultural groups, etc.) and the others (i.e. migrants, ethnic communities, travellers, etc.), as well as changing cultural, social and economic hierarchies incessantly redefining the boundaries between groups and nations, identities and alterities (Geyer, Paulmann 2001).

<sup>3</sup> More specifically, Halawa and Parasecoli call this phenomenon “Global Brooklyn”, highlighting its glocal connotation and insisting on the fact that “regardless of the social background and cultural proclivities of patrons and entrepreneurs, the overall result of the circulation of Global Brooklyn can be defined as ‘decentralized sameness’” (Halawa, Parasecoli 2019: 398).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.peru.travel/es-pe/gastronomia>. The emphasis put on food and eating is not casual, nor an isolated case. Culinary tourism – e.g. “the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of the Other, participation including the consumption – or preparation and presentation for consumption – of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered as belonging to a culinary system not one’s own” (Long 1998: 181), in fact, has become a fundamental component of the tourism experience and industry (Pavageau 1997; Poulain 2007; McKercher, Okumus, Okumus 2008). For a broader discussion and analysis of contemporary forms and practices of gastronomic tourism and their effects, see in particular Espeitx 2007 and Stano 2013.

<sup>5</sup> <http://mistura.pe/nuestra-historia>.

<sup>6</sup> The term *mistura* derives in fact from the Latin *mixtus*, past participle of the verb *miscēre*, which means “to mix”.

<sup>7</sup> According to Takenaka (2003), in 1930 45 per cent of Japanese immigrants owned small businesses, mainly related to food (60 per cent).

<sup>8</sup> According to Morimoto (2020), at that time approximately a quarter of the Nikkei population owned or worked in a restaurant.

<sup>9</sup> The *chita* (genus *Anisotremus*) is a marine fish, which lives along the American coasts.

<sup>10</sup> The founding dish of Novo Andean cuisine is thought to be the *gran olla Huacachina* (lit. “great Huacachina pot”), created by Bernardo Roca Rey in 1986. The phenomenon has then reached an international scale in the last decade.

<sup>11</sup> Since the inauguration of *Astrid&Gastón* in 1994 in Lima, Acurio has opened 34 restaurants, devoted to different specialties of Peruvian cuisine (including *cebicherías* like *La Mar*, Chifa food restaurants like *Madam Tusan*, Andean *chicherías* such as *Chicha*, creole *anticucherías* like Panchita and even chocolate shops like *Melate Chocolate*) in several countries around the world (including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Spain, the United States, France and Mexico).

<sup>12</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sA9S0PpwSC0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sA9S0PpwSC0) (last access: 29/11/2020).

<sup>13</sup> The wide range of Nikkei dishes characterising Acurio’s menus are also relevant in this sense.

<sup>14</sup> Especially the sight, which has always played a crucial role in the selection and consumption of food, and today has become as important as – if not even more than – taste itself in the gastronomic experience (see in particular Ashley et al. 2004; Finocchi 2015; Marrone 2014, 2016; Stano 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Season 3, episode 6 (2017); available at the link [www.netflix.com/watch/80075164?trackId=13752290&tctx=0%2C5%2Ceeb9fd44-1f3b-4baa-a169-266c6fa46106-43764210%2C%2C](http://www.netflix.com/watch/80075164?trackId=13752290&tctx=0%2C5%2Ceeb9fd44-1f3b-4baa-a169-266c6fa46106-43764210%2C%2C) (last access: 29/11/2020).



<sup>16</sup> In fact, Nikkei cuisine has garnered international attention and recognition, expanding beyond the Peruvian borders (with a growing number of restaurants offering Nikkei food in various cities, especially in North America and Europe).

<sup>17</sup> In this sense, it is also interesting to consider the emphasis put on “inspiration” – which Lotman relates to explosion, defining it as “conjoining the under the impact of some kind of creative tension” (1992 [2009]: 36) – in the collective representations of Novo Andean chefs.

<sup>18</sup> I.e., the contemporary “mania” for food, mainly resulting from its mediatisation: not only do we eat food, but also and above all we talk about it, we describe it, we comment on it, we share its pictures on social networks, thus investing it with multiple meanings and values that in turn evidently mediate our gastronomic experiences (Marrone 2014).

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