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Mexican-origin foods, foodways, and social movements: decolonial perspectives

Ciska Ulug

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explanation of the field. In my view, the book’s principal thrust is that there is no single problem and no single answer to unsustainable consumption.

Lisa Howard  
School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, UK  
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Around the world, activists, academics, and policy makers will agree that faults and fractures of the modern food system are embedded in social, environmental, and economic realms and further materialise into the lived experiences of communities. While campaigners (for example, the March Against Monsanto) are more recently taking to the streets, Indigenous communities have been quietly resisting the global industrialised food system and its backing colonial and capitalist forces for centuries, preserving their food and agricultural practices, knowledge, and beliefs. Highlighting these opposing voices, Mexican-Origin Foods, Foodways, and Social Movements taps into the knowledge and resilience embedded in Indigenous communities, and the urgency of further deconstructing colonial and capitalist structures through food, that will heal these communities and create more just and sustainable food systems and societies.

This edited volume is divided into three parts: Theorizing, Witnessing, and Organizing. The first, Theorizing: Decolonial Food and Movements, opens the reader to backgrounds of both food as well as the social movements surrounding them. While food sovereignty has been a much-celebrated term, the backing La Via Campasina movement comes under immediate scrutiny. Peña, in chapter one, questions its true reflection of workers’ interests, across the food chain, claiming that it is adjusting its discourse to satisfy Euro-centric policies and dialogues. In chapter two, Juárez similarly questions this term, critiquing gender dynamics and misogyny it provokes. These chapters initiate a discussion often returned to throughout the book, emphasizing decoloniality as a means for deconstructing gender norms, aligning with intersectional Chicana feminist and ecofeminist perspectives, also seen in chapters four, six, seven, and twelve.

The second section, Witnessing: Heritage Cuisines and Decolonial Foodways, concentrates upon the materiality of food and the practices built around them, to explore greater sociopolitical struggles. Crow begins chapter five with a symbolic and material analysis of artifacts used to survive the trek across the US/Mexican border, highlighting intertwining political and biological survival tactics. In chapters six and nine, Epstein and Valdovinos elaborate on the complexity of navigating such geopolitical and political identities through the exploration their personal autotopographies. Displaced and place-based food practices are shown also as a means through which diaspora and indigenous communities shape their sense of place and sense of self. Rodríguez follows a similar approach, leading the reader through her lessons, rather than her own narrative. The author argues food as a living praxis through which to “heal ourselves, our family and friends, and community”, a sentiment further resonated throughout the volume (206).

Lastly, Organizing: Decolonial Movements for Food Autonomy moves “beyond food” to present an array of inspiring actions seen in broader social and environmental movements, drawing upon community organisations such as Community2Community (C2C) and Familias Unidas por la Justicia, in Washington state and the South-Central Farm in LA. The social and economic inequalities of the
industrialised food system is evident across the food chain – from agricultural workers to fast food employees – as Madrigal elaborates in chapter thirteen. More than actions for food autonomy, this section expounds upon the embedded modes of knowledge production of such movements. For example, chapter fifteen traces how corn reflects struggles between traditional ecological knowledge and technologically-based data. The authors, Sanvicente and Carreón, describe the progression between these two, often conflicting, ways of knowing, via the rise of corporate power and the collective action against it. This divergence is further illustrated by Peña in chapter sixteen, reflecting upon alterNative ontologies of soil in contrast to technological assumptions of “the ways” to farm. This section highlights indigenous resilience, not only based in the preservation of heirloom crops, decolonial diets, and agroecological production (as evidenced in previous chapters), but also as collective mobilisation and solidarity to defend and navigate these very practices and biocultural diversity.

Throughout all three parts, authors share a unique contribution of narratives, recipes, stories, and poems, expressing intimate struggles in their communities, and connections to greater political conflicts. Chapters meander, sometimes off-track, through the minds of the authors. This is possibly also the editors’ intention to reflect the hybrid subjectivities in these voices, echoing the words of Gibson-Graham (2008) that “to change our understanding is to change the world” (615). While the critical question “is this enough?” might still stand, these narratives foreground the role of personal understanding towards collective strategies for restoring, reviving, and adapting Indigenous agro-food systems and traditions.

This book contributes to the growing scholarship around decolonising food, bodies, and societies, also questioning what does decolonial food actually mean? According to Peña, it is “not just a radical restructuring of our food system, it is the radical restructuring of the meaning of our food” (365). As illustrated by the authors, this implication extends into decolonising communities and healing these worlds. Peña continues that “decolonizations results when we transform our worlds by changing ourselves and retaining self-determination, dignity, and cultural integrity” (371). Thus, while many authors look at what it means to go “beyond alternative” (Wilson 2013), taking a decolonial approach of food moves the discussion towards alterNative, seeking to transform greater political and economic structures through building upon Indigenous practices, knowledge, and beliefs.

More than inform, this book puts forth a rallying cry to inspire and promote autonomous actions, stories, and research. While critics of social movements could argue attempts towards decolonising as naïve, climate change is evidence enough of the dysfunctionality of the status quo. Such calls to actions are more relevant now than ever, in the midst of ICE raids, suppression from the Trump administration, and acts of hate from radical white supremacists. For those seeking to transform food systems and communities, this book offers a point of departure in creating resilient, inclusive, and decolonial communities based in alterNative knowledge and practices.

References


Ciska Ulug

Department of Spatial Planning and Environment, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands
c.r.ulug@rug.nl

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