

Dissecting Edible Identities: A Critical View on Food Heritage and Neoliberal Governmentality

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The recent entry of food into heritage and cultural management frameworks has unveiled and prompted food's potential to convey interests within the fields of cultural and political entrepreneurship. Today, many countries frame their "national cuisines" as instruments of "soft power". Indeed, culinary cultures have become important components of fashionable concepts such as gastrodplomacy and nation-branding, which are reflective of a culturally-oriented regulatory and marketing rationale committed to promote national and nationals' competitive identities. The heritage regime –the politics of heritage-making– has preeminently positioned food as a cultural and social connector; as a potent vector that brings together and catalyzes positively connoted differences between generations, places, and social (ethnic, gender, political, class) groups. However, cultural difference can also be put in settings of fictional dialoging, and thus obscure the controversial and less desirable aspects existing within past and present intercultural relations, as well as both past and current trends of inequality. This presentation intends to address the complexity and the uses (and abuses) of food heritage through a critical theoretical approach that highlights the hierarchies of power and the neoliberal take on cultural heritage management. To do so, I will first depict contexts, actors, and decisions in food heritage available in Peru and other countries, and then juxtapose the bureaucratically supported notion of cultural heritage with an alternative notion that I have termed "unspoken cultural heritage".

Raúl Matta (Lima, 1979) is doctor in Sociology of the University of Paris – Sorbonne Nouvelle (2009). After postdoctoral stays at the Free University of Berlin and the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD – Paris, France) he is now Research Fellow at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology/European Ethnology at the University of Göttingen and director of the project "Food as Cultural Heritage", funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Since 2010, he conducts critical research on the cultural, social and economic impact of food heritage-making and other cultural and political uses of food. His research interests, reflected in various journal articles and book chapters, include food studies, the anthropology of cultural heritage, and urban sociology. He is also co-coordinator of the project FoodHerit, funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR).

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