

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha (eds)**, *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, Markets*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. ISBN: 978-1-4094-6925-4 (cloth); ISBN: 978-1-4094-6926-1 (ebook)

In recent years, consciousness about food has been brought to the forefront of the cultural and economic landscapes: it seems as though each day brings one into contact with new commentary on the so-called obesity epidemic, emerging studies about food deserts, donation boxes and food drives for the hungry, or debates about the crisis of global food prices. Underscoring the growth of ‘eat local’ movements, in 2007 the term ‘locavore’ was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Within this food context, urban community gardens proliferate, and it’s not uncommon to see Priuses donning ‘Buy local’ and ‘Have you thanked your farmer today?’ stickers. And yet, despite this burgeoning food consciousness amongst the white middle and upper classes, the global political economy of food access and production remains fundamentally unequal and racialized, as Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha’s edited volume so compellingly illustrates.

Within Geography, an exciting and burgeoning literature highlights the uneven dimensions of food landscapes through its focus on various themes, such as food deserts, food systems, and farm-worker labour. Geography stands well positioned to contend with these issues because of its focus on human-environment relations and its multi-scalar approach that connects global shifts to embodiment. Paralleling this expansion of literature on food geographies, there has been a surge in geographic scholarship concerned with race. However, with few exceptions (see Guthman 2008a; 2008b; 2012; Slocum 2006; 2007; 2011), these literatures have remained largely separate. Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha’s edited book importantly responds to this void. Moreover, as Julie Guthman points out in the Foreword to the collection, where the

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geographies of food and race literatures have combined most substantially is with respect to whiteness and alternative food practices—defined as “more ecologically sound and socially just farming methods, food marketing and distribution, and healthier food options across the U.S.” (Slocum 2007: 522)—and examining what Guthman has called colourblind “missionary practices”(2008a: 433). Slocum and Saldanha’s book prompts us to consider intersections beyond these foci.

The collection is thus timely as it brings together emerging trajectories of geographic scholarship at the intersections of food and race. The book aims to contribute to the geographies of food literature in two ways: first, by advancing an alternative theorization of race, which emphasizes the corporeality and materiality of race (p.2); and second, by expanding the environments and contexts where race and food become entangled *beyond* the spaces of alternative food practices to include examinations of dynamics such as post-coloniality and climate change. Slocum’s introductory chapter, ‘Race in the Study of Food’ reviews the landscape of geographies of food and race literature by highlighting two general strands of literature—the social constructivists and the new materialists—and potential future directions that the contributors to the book seek to work towards. The chapters following work together to illuminate the breadth of geographic, historical, cultural, environmental, and political contexts in which race is (re)constituted by and through food.

We found Dinesh Wadiwel and Deirdre Tedmanson’s chapter (‘Food in Australia’s Northern Territory Emergency Response: A Foucauldian Perspective on the Biopolitics of New Race/Pleasure Wars’) to be particularly compelling. The chapter illustrates how the Australian government’s construction of Aboriginal communities justifies neo-colonial government control and cultural assimilation. Also cogent is the chapter by Aaron Bobrow-Strain (‘White Bread Biopolitics: Purity, Health, and the Triumph of Industrial Baking’), which approaches whiteness

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from a different perspective by highlighting the gendered, cultural, and racialized constructions that resulted in packaged white bread becoming central to the American dinner table. These two pieces' particular strength lies in their narratives that illuminate how racialized discourses are constantly and recursively materialized in practice, while providing a theoretical framework through which to understand and analyze how race is being deployed.

One of the book's considerable strengths is its geographical and temporal breadth. Rather than emphasizing a politics of food in the industrialized global North, as is common in the literature, the book carefully constructs an analysis of racialized food landscapes that spans from Canada to South Africa, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade to contemporary migrants to New Zealand. This conscious approach clearly reflects Slocum and Saldanha's desire to decenter the Western sensibilities and contexts that have permeated geographies of food and race scholarship. In finishing the book, however, we couldn't help wanting to know more about the role of other contemporary and historical activists and social movements—such as La Via Campesina, Movimento sem Terra, and the lunch counter sit-ins of the civil rights era—in bringing the geographies of race and food to the fore. As the Newtown Florist Club Writing Collective point out in the book, “many of these historic efforts predate much of the discussion of food politics today as represented by the alternative food movement” (p.137).

From a theoretical standpoint, questions remain about of the framework that Slocum and Saldanha put forth at the beginning of the collection concerning the materialities of race. They state that, “racism is understood overwhelmingly in a representationalist framework (race as discourse), which keeps the agrifood literature from understanding fully corporeal and material importance” (p.2). However, as Audrey Kobayashi (2013) has pointed out, while social constructivists understand race to be discursively, and thus socially, produced, they do not deny and unlink it from the very real, material, physiological, and affective consequences of these

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discursive constructions. Many of the contributors to the collection illuminate the complex interplay between discourse and bodily, lived experiences. Perhaps rather than a theoretical flaw on the part of social constructivists, what Slocum and Saldanha point to is a dearth of empirical work regarding race, the body, and food. Contributors such as Judith Carney's ('Fields of Survival, Foods of Memory') and Mimi Sheller's ('Skinning the Banana Trade: Racial Erotics and Ethical Consumerism') point to potential ways in which the social constructivist and materialities frameworks could be synthesized. Both of these chapters link together food as corporeal and visceral experiences through manual labour, hunger, and taste with structural processes of racialization through slavery, colonialism, and capitalism.

Nonetheless, this volume has significantly advanced the geographic scholarship regarding race and food. It also opens up the geographies of food and race literature to a wider and deeper variety of empirical, theoretical, geographic, and temporal contexts, which pushes scholars to expand geographers' understanding beyond whiteness and alternative food movements. The book contributes greatly to the work of geographers exploring the complex and intricate intersections between food and race. Most importantly, it provides a springboard from which to imagine and act upon future opportunities and possibilities to enrich the geographies of food and race literature.

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