

Creating Tastes and Tasting Creatively: Race and the Semiotics of Peruvian Cuisine

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Abstract: *During the past two decades, Peru has seen a dramatic expansion of restaurants and attention to its cuisine at home and abroad, a phenomenon known locally as the “gastronomy boom.” One effect of the gastronomy boom is a surge of enrollment in culinary schools, with young people of varying racial and class backgrounds converging on low- and mid-priced technical institutes in Lima in hopes of becoming Peru’s future celebrity chefs. In this article, based on participant observation in two such institutes, I analyze the processes by which students’ individual senses of taste are standardized and transformed in the name of forming diverse students into professionals. Drawing on the concept of linguistic style, I show that local ideologies of taste have long allowed cooking to be both an index of race and a substance through which racial difference is instantiated. I then show that socializing students to produce a new, “creative” cuisine – cuisine built on violating expectations about how culinary features should co-occur -- encourages students to think of themselves and their foods as commodities rather than representatives of race or region. As such, the practice of a “creative” cooking style semiotically links Peruvian hopes for greater intercultural understanding and hopes for the country’s economic development to the embodied and sensorial practices of individual culinary students.*

Keywords: cuisine, taste, race, style, Peru

The culinary students chose Ana to plate their dish. It was 6:00 pm on a Tuesday in early July 2012, nearly the end of one of the last classes in the Basic Techniques course at the LaCucina culinary school in Lima, Peru.¹ Paolo, the instructor, had started the class by demonstrating how to prepare a tuna terrine, a dish made by lining a pan with blanched spinach leaves and spooning in a mixture of tuna and béchamel sauce. Now the students, divided into two groups, were finishing their attempts at replicating his example. Some were running back and forth to the sinks, washing dishes; some were collecting garnishes from the table in the front. Ana, a Japanese-Peruvian teenager who was largely recognized among her peers as the most artistic and detail oriented of the group, took over transferring the terrine to the plate.

Paolo had plated his sample terrine as one long loaf of tuna under a layer of carrots and zucchini. Ana cut hers into thirds. As she topped them with fried strings of carrots and leeks, her vision started to become apparent to the group. “They’re *makis*,” she said finally as she stepped back from her work.

Paolo, passing behind each group and monitoring their progress, smiled at Ana and nodded his approval. “What creativity!” (*Qué creatividad!*) one of her classmates said in appreciation.



Figure 1. Ana’s “makis” made of tuna salad

Ana and her classmates were students in the preparatory program at LaCucina, a large culinary school in Lima that enrolled a diverse population of college-aged students in programs that lasted anywhere from three months to two years. These students were some of the youngest participants in what is known locally as the “gastronomy boom” (*boom gastronómico*), an expansion of Peruvian cuisine that has both spurred the Peruvian economy and become a national symbol for progress. During the past decade Peruvian restaurant chains have spread widely around South America and Europe, and an estimated 3% of Peru’s GDP is attributed to restaurants within the country (Economist 2014). Peru is home to an official gastronomy society, an internationally-known culinary festival called Mistura, and two of the top twenty restaurants in the world (William Reed Business Media 2014). It is also home to a much-articulated belief in the potential for cooking to be an agent of social change. On one level this belief is founded simply on the notion that an influx of money will improve life in Peru. As profits from culinary tourism and export have increased, so have hopes for the ability of those industries to benefit broad swaths of the population. But on another level cuisine has become powerful because it is an apt symbol for unity in a country where people have often focused on difference. As Peru’s celebrity chefs emphasize the idea that all Peruvians have a good sense of taste – and, furthermore, that any Peruvian can capitalize on that taste to create a business – cooking has become a more and more potent symbol for the changes that might occur if all Peruvians harness in their own ways the talent they have in common.

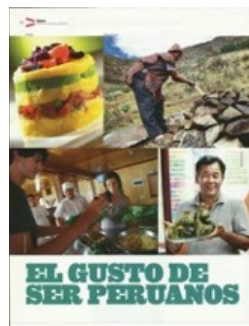


Figure 2. A 2011 magazine article (“The Pleasure/Taste of Being Peruvians”) celebrating culinary diversity (Perich 2011)

Lima's culinary schools, many of which either did not exist or existed in a much-reduced form twenty years ago, are ideal locations in which to study the day-to-day transmission and impact of these ideologies. For one thing, these schools embody some of the most commonly articulated hopes of the gastronomy boom, as they are the locations where young aspiring chefs enroll in an effort to emulate their culinary heroes. At the same time, these schools are also potential sites of differentiation and exclusion, as they are the places where cooks are most visibly socialized into the expectations of the gastronomy boom. In an effort to examine these socialization processes, I conducted sixteen months of ethnographic research in Lima, focusing particularly on participant observation in LaCucina and at a tourism institute called Cenfutur, where I attended class, participated in group projects, and joined students outside of school as though I were one of them.²

In both of the culinary schools where I conducted fieldwork, creativity was a central goal to which students aspired. Midterm exams, like the festival competitions they imitated, required that students compose "creative" dishes within a limited period of time. Teachers often required their students to compose "creative" recipes featuring particular ingredients or techniques. In LaCucina's preparatory program there was even a class called "Creativity" that was meant to foster a sense of experimentation. Succeeding at these tasks and having one's work or personality described as creative, as Ana's was, could have substantial benefits, rhetorically linking a cook to economic success, patriotism, and an international community of culinary professionals celebrated for their innovation. Ana herself experienced these rewards on a smaller scale; she was one of the most academically successful students in her program and by the end had gained a coveted position as a teaching assistant. But while the incentive to be creative was clear to many of the culinary students and professionals I met in Lima, the sheer ubiquity of the term raises questions about the broader significance of "creativity" and how it came to be so frequently attached to people and objects. What was it about a cook's actions or the food that he or she produced that merited the label of "creativity?" How did other students learn that this was an appropriate description? And why has the measurement of creativity found such resonance in Lima's culinary schools and in the professional milieu that surrounds them?

In this article I address these questions by analyzing the socialization processes in Lima's culinary schools from a semiotic perspective, taking inspiration from several concepts in linguistic anthropology. Following scholars of language socialization, who hold that people are both socialized through language use and socialized into language use (cf. Ochs and Schieffelin 1984:276), I show that processes of learning to taste and cook in Lima are both the product of broader ideologies of personhood and race and the mechanism by which those ideologies are instilled and reinforced among young Peruvians.³ To explain this connection, I first chart how culinary features co-occur in Peruvian cuisine, explaining how individual elements can be selected and combined to produce meanings that are understood in the culinary community as signals of race and regional origin. Second, I detail the locally salient ideologies about taste that make these features meaningful as both indexes and icons of the groups of people who produce and eat particular segments of Peruvian cuisine. Finally, by analyzing recent moves toward "creativity" in cooking as a violation of expectations about how culinary features should co-occur⁴, I show how the socialization of students to engage in "creative" culinary practices is also a way of socializing them into broader ideologies about race and progress in Peruvian society. With these understandings it becomes clear, first, how culinary habits are seen as particularly powerful indications of types of personhood in Peru and, second, how a focus specifically on "creative" food allows culinary schools to promote a specific category of personhood – a kind of cosmopolitan entrepreneurship – that has increasingly become the ideal for young Peruvians like Ana and her classmates.

Styles of Taste

Lima's culinary museum, the Casa de la Gastronomía, contains two enormous maps of Peru that link pictures of typical dishes and culinary natural resources to specific regions of the country. In the museum, as in discussions of Peruvian geography elsewhere, the maps divide Peru into three, separating the country into distinct regions of jungle, mountains, and coast.⁵ This representational strategy has the effect of dividing Peruvian cuisine into sets of regional recipes while uniting those recipes through spatial contiguity. Foods that in real life might exist throughout the country are in the museum firmly confined to specific locations. Furthermore, each region of the country has its own emblematic culinary traditions and history, but when seen on the map they are all located within the political and social entity that is Peru.



Figure 3. Displays at Peru's gastronomy museum circa 2011, mapping Peru according to natural culinary resources (left) and typical dishes (right)

The stereotypical associations between geography and cuisine that these maps illustrate were remarkably well codified during the time that I conducted research in Peru, with wide agreement among chefs, culinary instructors, and gastronomy society officials about the salient regions into which Peruvian cuisine should be divided and about the ingredients, techniques, and dishes that mark these regions as distinct. Notably, however, this expertise was not widely shared among Lima's general population or even among beginning culinary students. Many people I met during my fieldwork had opinions about the food in other parts of the country, but if they were not cooks or well into their training to be cooks, their knowledge was generally limited to opinions about the food elsewhere being "strange" (*raro*) or "different" (*distinto*). The specific content of the gastrographic map in the Casa de la Gastronomía is not, in other words, something that all Peruvians carry with them as an agreed upon form of tacit culinary knowledge. It is instead a learned set of stereotypes promoted by a group of culinary experts and very explicitly taught in culinary schools.

In both of the schools where I conducted my research, the inculcation of these conventionalized associations between place, people, and food was an explicit goal of both theoretical and applied classes. Almost all theoretical classes, regardless of the subject, required that students produce a

semester-long group project in which they conducted research on a single Peruvian ingredient or region. Each of these presentations highlighted either the origins of the assigned ingredient or dish or the relevant foods found in the assigned region, with students typically creating a PowerPoint presentation in which they listed key elements of climate, history, and cuisine. In a typical semester a student might produce four or five such reports and listen to several dozen others, finding him- or herself quizzed each time on key associations between food and place. These lessons were further reinforced in kitchen-based classes. In both schools, cooking lessons routinely began with short explanations of cultural and historical context for ingredients and dishes. In LaCucina's Peruvian Cuisine class, for instance, Chef Clara would start each lesson by writing the name of the pertinent department on the whiteboard and then telling us which foods we should remember when we thought about the area. On the first day of the class devoted to Tumbes, the northernmost department of Peru, Clara indicated that we should remember the sea (*el mar*), mangroves (*manglares*), and the most famous product of those mangroves, the *conchas negras* (black clams). Throughout the course she then gave a series of multiple choice and free response exams that tested these kinds of associations, encouraging students to remember which regions were associated with which foods.

From a semiotic perspective, each of the culinary features emphasized in these types of lessons at Cenfutur or LaCucina can be thought of as an index of a Peruvian region, a sign linked to a place by virtue of its contiguity (Mertz 1985; Silverstein 1998). Furthermore, as Lima's culinary students were learning to recognize these indexes as significant – that is, as they were learning to associate particular elements of cuisine with particular places and people -- they were also learning the underlying ideologies behind those associations, acquiring the explanatory mechanisms by which it makes sense to think of the northern coast when tasting cilantro or of the jungle when discussing yucca. These explanatory mechanisms in turn encouraged a view of cuisine in which groups of culinary features could be expected to co-occur. With the knowledge that students received about regional variation in Peruvian cuisine, they would be unsurprised to see that a dish containing cilantro also contained *chicha* (a corn beer used to macerate meats in northern cuisine) or that a food served in a traditional clay pot contained native potatoes or chuño (freeze dried potatoes) from the mountains.

As groups of co-occurring features, these sets of culinary traits are partially analogous to categories of linguistic varieties like registers, dialects, or styles. I want to emphasize that they are only *partially* analogous to these phenomena because cuisine lacks several of the characteristics that scholars have pointed to as crucial to making language a special kind of object. For instance, cuisine cannot be said to be grammatical or ungrammatical the same way that language can.⁶ Cuisine also lacks the ubiquity that makes language an advantageous object of study; while everyone eats, not everyone cooks. Finally, while some people consciously see food as a communicative resource, cuisine lacks the wide variety of conscious and subconscious features that allow for the most sophisticated analyses of language contact or the effects of metapragmatic judgments.⁷ (For instance, it is difficult to argue that cuisine has an analogue to phonological variation, which linguists have suggested is often particularly subconscious.) Nonetheless, there are several considerations from linguistic anthropological work on the interaction of different language varieties – particularly in work on style – that are especially helpful in understanding the ways that students are socialized into their roles as chefs and the semiotic roles that cuisine occupies in Lima at large.⁸

Styles, like other categories of linguistic variation, consist of sets of co-occurring linguistic and non-linguistic features that are salient in a particular social context as a means of differentiating patterns of speech and groups of people from one another (Irvine 2001). Crucial to this idea is Roman

Jakobson's insight that linguistic features exist as parts of both syntagms and paradigms; that is, any element of an utterance gains its meaning both from the features that are contiguous with it and from the fact that the element occupies a slot that could be interchanged with a similar word or phoneme. As Jakobson explains, "If 'child' is the topic of the message, the speaker selects one among the extant, more or less similar, nouns like child, kid, youngster, tot, all of them equivalent in a certain respect" ([1960] 1999, 58; see also Caton 1987). The selection of one feature over another can thus serve a function that is more than referential; as linguistic anthropologists have shown, within any given speech community, when a person selects a given feature in this way, he or she may also index aspects of his or her identity, relationship to other members of the community, or stance toward a group or idea (Gal and Irvine 1995; Hill 1999; Rampton 1999; Silverstein 1985). In this sense a style is a set of selected and combined features that serves not just to mark a person as belonging to a certain group but also to distinguish his or her practices from those of other styles (Irvine 2001).

Thinking about cuisines as sets of contrasting styles is analytically useful for several reasons. For one thing, it facilitates an examination of culinary practice in which recognizable dishes and genres of cooking are made up of individual but co-occurring features. When a person has a recognizable style of cooking, some of the features he or she employs are shared with others' styles of cooking and, by virtue of locally salient ideologies about tastes, are imagined to be linked to particular groups and values. Furthermore, a crucial aspect of style as it is theorized both in linguistic anthropology and in cultural studies is that a single feature of a style can index other features associated with it (Gal and Irvine 1995; Hebdige 1979; Silverstein 1985). Depending on how the feature is employed, it can signal a person's membership in the group associated with the style, or it can signal his or her opposition to it, a phenomenon sometimes known as "styling the other" (Hill 1999; Rampton 1999). For instance, when my classmate Ana plated her terrine – a dish that the teacher had indicated was a classic French preparation – she used one element of Peruvian-Japanese cooking style, the typical presentation of makis, in conjunction with a dish that in ingredients and preparation resembled the teacher's European template. Her choice to present the dish in this way could serve several semiotic purposes. As the only Peruvian of Japanese descent in the class, Ana might have been indexing her ethnicity, her prowess with Japanese cuisine, or her stance toward European or Japanese cooking (as, for instance, her choice could be read as an attempt to inject a sense of play into an otherwise staid dish). Her work might also have served to highlight other elements of the style associated with sushi restaurants in Lima, such as her attention to detail, her cosmopolitanism, or her relative affluence. My classmates' reactions would then signal their own familiarity with these traits. But what, then, does calling the dish "creative" signal?

Seeing Ana's choice in plating her dish as a stylistic feature that indexes other elements of a style is the first step to understanding how the idea of creativity operates in a culinary context. In order to understand why the word "creative" could be so readily applied to Ana's work, though, it is next necessary to understand a bit about the ideologies that give meaning to the different elements of culinary styles in Peru. As linguistic anthropologists have noted, it is not the mere existence of variation between linguistic features and styles that gives the features meaning but rather a community's understanding of how those features connect to other aspects of social life (cf. Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998). These ideologies work as a bridge between language use and broader social phenomena, serving as the reason why certain characteristics are taken to be important and why particular linguistic features are taken to represent broader values. In other words, judgments that a language is particularly formal or informal, educated or uneducated, or high or low stem from their connection to a broader ideology about the kinds of people who speak in certain ways and whether or not those people and ways are good or bad.

In Peru the interpretation of cuisine is subject to an analogous set of beliefs that might be called a taste ideology. As the gastrographic maps and the curricula of Cenfutur and LaCucina might suggest, this ideology is rooted in the idea that foods are linked to particular places. Importantly, however, Peru's taste ideology is not just limited to motivating the indexical connections between ingredients and regions that I have already described. It is also connected to broader beliefs about the formation of Peruvian bodies and about the ways people's tastes and abilities are acquired. Racial and regional categories in Latin America have long been based not only on phenotype but also on more malleable characteristics like clothing or occupation. In this view, racial categories are aggregates of characteristics that accrue over time, arising from repeated experiences with particular objects, smells, tastes, and places. Differences in activities and consumption patterns in the Andes have thus long been believed not only to signal membership in racial and ethnic groups but also to physically constitute different kinds of "sensory realities" (Colloredo Mansfield 1998) and ultimately different kinds of bodies and people (Earle 2010; Pilcher 1998). Crucially, different categories of Peruvian bodies imply differences in power that date to the colonial period, with signs of whiteness seen as naturally more prestigious than signs of indigeneity (Abercrombie 1996; de la Cadena 2000; Weismantel 2001).

For centuries cuisine has played a key role in these ideologies of difference and rank, serving as the logical connection between the contrasting categories of work and place in which people in different regions engage and the embodied distinctions that supposedly arise from living in these sensory milieus. Anthropologists noted during the 1980s and 90s that rural indigenous foods contrasted with whiter, urban, or mestizo foods both in terms of ingredients and preparation, with indigenous foods containing more tubers and legumes, tending to be blander, and generally cooked and served in one pot as opposed to many smaller dishes (Orlove 1998; Weismantel 1988). These foods were not only conceptualized as naturally segregated but also as potential contaminants to each other. Even twenty years ago, white or mestizo Peruvians eating the same food as Indians would often re-cook it so as to maintain the distinctions between the two groups (Harris 1995), and middle-class restaurants serving the typically lower class *cuy* (guinea pig) would provide accessories like *towelettes* to remove the scent from the fingers (Morales 1995). Anthropologist Benjamin Orlove explained that these processes of separation were crucial because "habitually to eat certain foods and to wear certain types of clothing can be taken, not merely as reflecting or displaying Indianness, but as constituting it" (1998, 209). These constitutions of race were in turn linked to other features; meat created not only mestizo bodies but also strength (Orlove 1997), while potatoes were associated not only with indigenous bodies but also low status and dirt.⁹

When I entered culinary school in Lima in early 2012, the distinctions between these compartmentalized, racialized categories of food and the associations they carried were not quite as stark as they had been in the mid-1990s. As tourism and globalization had grown increasingly prominent in Peru during the intervening years, government programs and corporate initiatives had begun to market indigenous foods (as well as folkloric music and clothing) to foreigners as connections to an idealized Inca past. Further, as they marketed these formerly stigmatized signs of indigeneity, the same programs and corporations often spoke of the goal to create a more egalitarian Peru that would allow indigenous citizens the same opportunities as the descendants of white elites. In this environment, *cuy* had become the centerpiece of meals served (without *towelettes*) at Lima's most expensive restaurants; it had also become a cartoon character that could be found on T-shirts and coffee mugs. Quinoa and purple potatoes, once decidedly indigenous foods, were now available at supermarkets around the world. But even as students and instructors in the culinary schools I attended spoke openly of their hopes for racial equality, they still often explicitly described the relationship between taste, place, and bodily constitution as the

source of variation both among seemingly similar ingredients and among the vastly different kinds of people who ate them.¹⁰ Integral to this belief was the notion that some of these variations in ingredients were tastier and more valuable than others. This variation in quality was in turn a commonly cited reason for the dietary and occupational differences between people who lived in different regions of the country. In each location, the instructors said, cooks had adapted their techniques and tastes to the foods that were ideally suited to their regions, such that people in the mountains knew how to cook with a wide variety of potatoes, coastal dwellers knew every way to prepare the fish that lived in the ocean, and jungle inhabitants were experts in preparing exotic fruits.

These longstanding and widespread beliefs about the interlinking relationship between place, people, and food were rarely articulated as explicitly or with such regional precision outside of the culinary schools as they were within them, but the taste ideology underlying the regional stereotypes of Peru's gastrographic map was so familiar to the general public that it often emerged as a self-evident fact in conversation, much like the analogous beliefs about a natural one-to-one correspondence between territory, people, and language that linguistic anthropologists have noted throughout Europe and beyond (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Woolard 1998a). The term in Peruvian Spanish that refers to the concept of personal taste, *sazón*, is imbued with assumptions about the deterministic role of a person's place-based sensory experiences on his or her cooking. As other scholars of Latin America have noted, the phrase *buena sazón* (good taste) is often used in a general sense as a way of explaining that someone makes good food, but the word *sazón* also has very specific connotations of a cook's personality and culinary knowledge, referring not just to a person's general culinary skill but also the unique, personalized flavors that he or she imparts to a dish (Abarca 2006; Adapon 2008). The Peruvians I met in and outside of culinary school described *sazón* as an ineffable skill that necessarily intertwined with a cook's unique history. In this view, *sazón* both arises from and communicates to others a cook's life experiences and personal traits; a well-prepared dish might reflect not only a passion for food or cooking but also the cook's love of his or her homeland or a tie to a grandmother who passed along the dish's secrets.

Just as language ideologies connect individual features of language to recognizable stereotypes and stances, this concept of *sazón* connects personal taste to other features that signal one's place in society. *Sazón* may be narrated in the public sphere as an individualized expression of the self, but these racially inflected assumptions about culinary ability reveal a connotation of *sazón* in which taste is not personal and idiosyncratic at all. Rather, it is a fundamental part of what makes a student or chef a recognizable member of Peru's hierarchically ranked racial, geographic, and socioeconomic groups. For instance, a young sushi chef once joked with me that it was impossible to be hired at his restaurant if you weren't visibly Asian. When I teased him that this sentiment sounded like discrimination, he laughed and said it was okay because the Asians in Lima really did make sushi better than other people. They had grown up with the ingredients their whole lives, he said, so they knew them better than anyone could learn later.¹¹ It's like if you're going to get *anticuchos*, he continued, referring to the popular kebab-like street food made of marinated beef hearts. Of course you would look for a black woman to sell you *anticuchos*, because Afro-Peruvian hands (*manos morenas*) give the meat a particular, preferred *sazón* (see also Walmsley 2005).



Figure 4. Mannequins at Peru's gastronomy museum in 2011, illustrating typical saleswomen of beverages and desserts at the turn of the century. The accompanying text explicitly notes the typical race of each vendor.

In keeping with the idea that sazón comes from the heart, an important part of Peru's taste ideology is that true sazón comes not from formal education but rather through interactions with family, beginning in one's infancy. Chef Clara, my Peruvian Cuisine teacher at LaCucina, described this process for me during an interview near the end of my time at the school. I asked her what she was thinking about when she corrected our dishes at the end of each class, and she began to describe how she perceived her own acquisition of taste:

For me it's something natural... let's see, how do I explain it? It's... look. I think that it's a matter of... I grew up in a family with good taste. It's, well, how is it? I don't know. But the food is delicious, full of flavor. It's not exaggerated, you know? Everything is balanced when my mother cooks. [...] My mother had good sazón, my grandfather had good sazón, and so one goes on living in an environment with good sazón. So if something shows up that isn't cooked well [...] you say "No, this isn't right." (Interview, November 30, 2012)¹²

Many of the people I met during my fieldwork explained their culinary knowledge in terms similar to the ones that Clara used, describing sazón as something that naturally arises from childhood experiences and family influence. Clara positions herself as having a particularly notable lack of agency; she describes her sazón as having developed simply through her experience eating her family's cooking over a period of time.¹³ But while other people I spoke with during my fieldwork imagined a more explicit transmission process of cooking (typically one in which children watched and helped their elders), they all agreed that taste and culinary style normally arose from daily childhood interactions, not from recipes or rules. Janet, a maid who lived in one of Lima's surrounding shantytowns, explained this process to me in the context of lamenting its disappearance. She told me that in her area of Lima the traditional method of teaching children to cook had been completely interrupted; in the past, children had acquired sazón from their parents by cooking alongside them, but in her neighborhood the parents were away at work all day. This parental absence had a doubly negative effect on the transmission of culinary knowledge, she said, because the children were not only deprived of learning how their parents cooked but also of eating the food they would have made. Eating takeout fried chicken and pizza instead of meals at home, they had no chance of acquiring sazón the way their parents had because they weren't being exposed to the flavors that would serve as exempla.

One of the consequences of this view of taste acquisition is that foods are reflections not just of a cook's personal sense of taste but also his or her past. In other words, if an eater possesses the appropriate knowledge about which kinds of experiences lead to which kinds of expertise and flavors, a bite of a dish will render the cook's family history and personality legible to the eater.

Furthermore, the fact that eating is the source of sazón suggests a relationship between cooks and eaters that is stronger than contiguity, a relationship in which something of the cook is transmitted through his or her food to the people who eat it. This presumed equivalence between the characteristics of foods, cooks, and eaters is reflected in the shared terminology for people and cuisines. People from the provinces and their food are both described as “rustic” (*rústico*); both the peoples and cuisines of Cuzco and the northern coast (where the pre-Inca civilization of the Moche lived) display “traditional” influences that are directly opposed to Lima’s *criollo* (creole) traits. In semiotic terms, this process is known as iconization or rhematization, meaning that the connections between foods and people that were once recognized as historical or conventional (that is, indexical) seem instead to be connections born of a similar “inherent nature or essence” (Irvine and Gal 2000, 37; see also Gal 2005, 2013).

In this context, culinary school curricula that emphasize the links between places, people, and cuisines are not only teaching students to recognize and imitate culinary styles from across the country. They are also teaching students to manipulate iconic representations of the racial differences that have long divided Peru. Given the supposed unifying role that cuisine has in Peru, then, the next pertinent question to ask is how the manipulation of these icons has become an appropriate solution to bridging these supposedly insurmountable differences. To answer this question I turn to a more detailed description of how students are taught to cook in Lima. As I will show, this process draws heavily on the Peruvian taste ideology in which cooking styles are iconic representations of people and places, but it also discourages students from cooking in the very ways that, according to this ideology, would actually make a cook’s dishes authentic representations of his or her background. Students may enter culinary school with personal sazón, but they exit as workers who cook with “creativity,” a style of cooking founded in notions of diversity and hybridity rooted in the market rather than in the body.

Tasting Widely, Tasting Creatively

Late in LaCucina’s spring semester, Chef Clara assigned the Cocina Peruana class to divide into groups and prepare a research project on one of the coastal regions we had studied. As part of the project we were to cook a typical dish from the region and bring it in for evaluation. When the day came to present the reports, one of the groups presented a dish that had been made so badly that several students told me later that it was appallingly inaccurate. The group had chosen to make *ají de gallina*, a chicken dish made by mixing cheese, hot peppers, condensed milk, bread, and nuts in a blender and cooking the mixture with shredded chicken. Chef Clara critiqued the dish kindly during class, but when I interviewed her the next day, she brought up the dish as a particularly egregious failure, specifically a failure of something called *paladar* (literally, “palate”):

Chef Clara: Yesterday there was a group in your section that presented an ají de gallina. It wasn’t anything like it was supposed to be, in terms of the color or the taste or the texture. [...] I couldn’t fail their dish because they simply made a recipe. But they didn’t give it -- they had no idea about what an ají de gallina *is*. Because if they did, they wouldn’t have presented it that way. It was a dark color, it didn’t have enough bread. [...] They lost the identity of that dish.

Amy Lasater-Wille: So you could say they didn’t have sazón?

CC: I think so, [they didn't have it] incorporated into themselves – [they didn't have] *paladar*. [...] What happens, I think, is that I approach [cooking] with the knowledge of what's authentic – It's my food, it's my cuisine, so I have it registered [mentally]. You tell me a dish and [...] I have it incorporated here. "Ají de gallina: yellowish color, shredded chicken, texture that's not too compact..." you know? And it's all there. [...] I imagine that, for example, let's say you have an Argentine who knows meats. I think that he would say: juicy, pink, that thickness, you can't do it this way [...] That is, I think that *all* cuisines have to have certain characteristics that you're going to retrieve or that you have to incorporate or remember inside yourself. (interview, November 30, 2012)¹⁴

A litany of characteristics that her students had neglected to produce, Clara's description of my classmates' failed dish sounds at first blush like the regionally-based sets of indexical associations that she taught students during her *Cocina Peruana* classes. Just as each region had a set of dishes and ingredients associated with it, so too did each dish have a set of characteristics that made it recognizable as what it was. In comparison to the lists of ingredients or dishes that served as indexes of regions, however, the set of criteria by which Clara judged the *ají de gallina* was based much more firmly in sensory experience, something she hinted at when she told me that the students' downfall was more a failure of *paladar* than *sazón*. *Paladar* translates to English as "palate," both in the sense of the physical palate in the mouth and the aesthetic appreciation of food. If *sazón* is the culinary expression of an understanding of flavor, *paladar* is the internalized version of that understanding, the ability to taste and to identify flavors rather than the ability to cook. As Clara indicates in her critique of my classmates, this ability to taste is just as important as having *sazón*. In this particular case, the problem with the deviant group's *ají de gallina* was not exactly that the students had made something badly but rather that they were lacking something far more fundamental, the experience that would have enabled them to make this particular food well or to evaluate their own work during or after the process of making it. They had, as Clara said, "no idea about what an *ají de gallina* is."

When culinary instructors at LaCucina and Cenfutur spoke about their aims in educating their students, they often mentioned the need to teach students the kinds of criteria that Clara mentioned when she explained to me her students' failure of *paladar*, characteristics like the color and texture of the sauce and the appropriate cut of the chicken. Chef Juan, the basic techniques teacher at LaCucina, described the goal of his lessons to me as helping his students to develop an expansive *archivo mental* (mental filing system) in which a chef keeps all of his or her experiences with food. To this end he and his fellow instructors encouraged his students to taste as widely as possible and to taste their food frequently throughout each of his classes. Students carried a fork or a spoon with them at all times in the upper arm of the left sleeve of their chef's jackets, and teachers often reminded them to use them with the statement "Hay que probar," which means "You have to try it" or "You have to taste." "Probar" in these contexts sometimes referred to the importance of tasting things that were entirely new to the students, though it also referred to the necessity of tasting whatever they were making at the moment, both because it was important to know what a dish tasted like in each stage of development and because it would be difficult to correct the seasoning later.

Several teachers connected the project of developing a culinary sense memory to an ideal of cosmopolitanism, telling the class that a chef must travel around the country or work abroad in order to taste widely. Others encouraged students to simulate the experience of travel through

class activities and assignments. Many cooking classes began with a demonstration period, during which the teacher might pass around an ingredient or dish that he or she knew to be unfamiliar to the students. Paolo did this with some frequency at LaCucina, passing around a bowl of cornhusks boiled in achiote one day and a container of an unfamiliar combination of peppercorns the next. When Chef Juan's Techniques class made hollandaise, he roughly chided anyone who avoided tasting it. In each of these cases, the teachers explained their assignments as necessarily being about tasting widely. The knowledge used to form *paladar* came from personal, embodied experience, and it required constant work, repetition, and attention.

Crucially, although building the ideal *archivo mental* involved the explicit project of tasting widely and frequently, students were not meant to be building up an indiscriminate mass of sense memories. For one thing, instructors saw some sense experiences as more valuable than others, and they were all too aware that the most valuable were often also the experiences that were the most difficult for poorer students or students from the provinces to obtain. Chef Clara was distressed that her students couldn't make an *ají de gallina*, a relatively upper class Lima-based dish, but no chef ever lamented in the same way that his or her students were unfamiliar with *inchicapi* (a dish from the jungle) or *sangrecita* (a much less elite Limeño dish). Likewise, some valuable flavors would only be available to cooks who had the means to travel internationally; others were expensive or available only to those cooks who had the means to secure internships at the most exclusive restaurants in Lima. When Chef Juan told me during an interview that he had valued his exposure to unfamiliar flavors like foie gras during an internship at one of Lima's best restaurants, I asked him about other flavors that students might have experienced before their time at LaCucina. Thinking of a trend in Peruvian cuisine toward experimenting with jungle foods, I asked if perhaps a student's childhood exposure to jungle fruits might eventually serve as an advantage when developing a palate or looking for a job. Juan thought for a moment and then shook his head. "No," he said, "It just doesn't matter. Unfortunately, what matters is that they're familiar with things like caviar and foie gras."

In addition to privileging some sense memories over others, instructors taught students that the ideal *archivo mental* was something orderly, a systematized knowledge of how different combinations of ingredients and techniques worked together to produce flavor. At both LaCucina and Cenfotur instructors taught this orderliness through rules, ratios, and sets of terms, each of which linked the process of cooking with the eventual taste of the food. The first day of Chef Clara's Cocina Peruana class, for instance, consisted of a lesson in how to prepare different kinds of *aderezos*, the mixtures of sautéed onion, garlic, and blended peppers or cilantro that form the basis of most canonical Peruvian dishes. Clara explained to us that *aderezos* could be fit into a typology; a basic *aderezo* contained only onions, garlic, salt, and pepper, while a yellow *aderezo* also contained *ají amarillo* (a smoky, slightly hot, yellow pepper) and a red *aderezo* contained *ají panca* (a red pepper related to paprika). Beyond these initial classifications lay a series of additional rules: onions must always be sautéed before adding the garlic, the onions and garlic should always be added in a particular ratio, and the salt should be added immediately afterwards and in copious amounts. Clara further explained to us what sorts of deviations in flavor we would notice if we failed to follow these rules. When she tasted our dishes at the end of each class, these were the procedures she often commented on, asking us if we could taste that the garlic was overcooked, the onion too overpowering, the salt added too late in the process.

Like the regional styles of cooking that the instructors at LaCucina and Cenfotur taught their students, these sets of rules and techniques made up a recognizable set of co-occurrence features that might be called a style, a style that was explicitly thought of as indexing formal culinary education. Administrators and teachers at LaCucina and Cenfotur intended this style to be similar

to what students learn in culinary schools around the world, a strict system of techniques for cutting and cooking foods that dates to the origins of the restaurant in France (Trubek 2000). The first month of classes in LaCucina's Culinary Techniques class, for instance, featured lessons in how to properly cut vegetables in precision cuts like julienne or brunoise. One week our homework consisted of cutting a kilo of onions into three-millimeter cubes and bringing it in for Chef Juan's approval; the next week we cut nine potatoes into nine different cuts ranging from one-centimeter cubes to one-millimeter-thick sticks.

Chef Juan was a particularly avid believer in the role that precision cuts played in separating informally trained cooks from culinary school graduates, and he swore that he could tell the difference between a formally trained cook and an amateur by the way they talked about cutting their ingredients. When we learned about cooking techniques, one by one, in the months afterward, he would remark upon them the same way: a trained chef from anywhere in the world would hear a seemingly imprecise term like "braise," "bake," or "sauté," and know exactly what kind of heat, timing, and equipment were involved in the process, while a layperson would only know the colloquial meaning of the words. Juan noted that it was thus easier to work with people who had been formally trained; they all knew the same shorthand and could be trusted to replicate dishes in the same way. But beneath this praise of the sheer utility of knowing how to cut and cook properly, Juan was also expressing a commonly held opinion about the kinds of people who could employ the French-derived standards as opposed to those who couldn't, contrasting precision with haphazardness and care with ignorance. He was not the only one. Our instructors harshly rebuked irregular cuts not only as errors that would affect the eventual dish's flavor but also as signs of a lack of discipline.

At the same time that it was an index of culinary education and discipline, the systematized style of cooking was also an index of Frenchness. Indeed, this was part of the point of teaching the techniques in the first place, since instructors wanted their students to be able to travel widely and for their cuisine to be appreciated on an international scale. Their lessons about cooking methods thus included both explicit and oblique reminders of their national origin. In the basic culinary techniques classes at both schools, instructors included an introductory lecture in which they credited the French with the development of the precision cuts we were learning, and several instructors regularly referred to the cuts by their French names rather than their Spanish translations (such as *julienne* in French instead of *juliana* in Spanish). Furthermore, instructors presented the curriculum in both schools in a way that positioned Peruvian cuisine as marked and French cuisine as unmarked. At LaCucina Peruvian cuisine was relegated to its own course, while the "techniques" classes, supposedly free of national affiliation, largely featured French recipes like omelets, chicken cordon bleu, and steaks with wine sauce. Finally, even Peruvian dishes were taught to students in ways that were beholden to French techniques. When Chef Clara described an aderezo to her Cocina Peruana class, she described it as containing onions cut in brunoise; when instructors at Cenfutur explained the size of potatoes in a dish called cau cau, they described it as the precision cut Macedonia (a cube cut to one centimeter on each side).

The fact that the techniques taught in culinary schools had the potential to index both technical competence and Frenchness presented the instructors and students that I met with a conundrum. For the most part they were pleased with the idea that the formal training they received could serve as a kind of culinary lingua franca, allowing Peruvian chefs to work at restaurants around the world. At the same time, however, they were proud of the fact that Peruvian cuisine had (until recently) developed without the influence of the international culinary scene, and one of the joys of the gastronomy boom was that it celebrated the culinary knowledge that any Peruvian might have, including the humblest "señora" working as a street vendor. Peruvian cuisine's greatest strength, in

this view, was that it had come from generations of locally-based expertise. The idea that this knowledge could be seen as inferior to the system of French precision cuts was galling.

In response to this conundrum, many of the people I met in Lima's culinary schools had developed a set of compromises in an attempt to index the technical competence of French techniques while still maintaining elements of Peruvianness.¹⁵ The most common strategy for striking this balance was to include characteristic elements from regional or ethnic cuisines in an otherwise French dish, much as Ana did when she formed makis out of an otherwise French terrine. This strategic act of fusion was precisely the kind of cooking that students and instructors labeled as "creative," and from a semiotic perspective the terminology makes sense. Recent work in semiotics, drawing on work in poetics (Bauman 1984; Briggs and Bauman 1992) and the notion of frame analysis (Goffman 1986), suggests that what people recognize as creativity often consists of a slight violation of co-occurrence features or improvisation within a set of rules that then becomes labeled as "creative" or as a new style (Chumley 2013; Sawyer 2003; Wilf 2014). This idea of creativity as a violation of co-occurrence features makes it very easy for a culinary student to make a "creative" dish by inserting an element of a style from one Peruvian region into the recognized style of another country or region. Such a dish would then be simultaneously creative (because it is a form of improvisation or violation of expectations), technically competent (because it relies on knowledge about culinary styles that is associated with professional training), and Peruvian (because it contains at least one recognized feature belonging to a regional cuisine). Interpreted through the lens of Peru's ideology of taste such creative dishes would be particularly strong indexes of a cook's Peruvianness at the same time that it indicated the ability to adhere to internationally recognized standards. Crucially, however, these dishes are subject not just to ideas about taste and cuisine but also to ideas about creativity as a personality trait. These are the notions of creativity that give culinary decisions like Ana's – and, on a broader scale, the gastronomy boom as a whole – such salience in Peru, as I next explain.

Creatividad in the Kitchen and Beyond

When the culinary students and instructors I knew referred to a dish or person as "creative" in the kitchen, they were not inventing an evaluative term out of nothing. Rather, assessments of "creativity" have proliferated recently in several different spheres, each of which has the potential to influence how the term is used in Peruvian kitchens. For one thing, "creativity" has become a prized trait throughout the international culinary world, not just in Peru. It has been particularly associated with the rise of molecular gastronomy, a cooking technique in which chefs deconstruct dishes as a means both of subverting diners' expectations and of drawing attention to the essential qualities of foods. One of the most famous practitioners of molecular gastronomy, Ferran Adrià, famously presented diners with a menu of entirely new dishes every season until his restaurant closed in 2011. Adrià's maxim, "Don't copy," served as a guideline for himself and his employees as they attempted to avoid copying even themselves. That this goal would be called "creative" is a label that Adrià has seemingly embraced, as his restaurant employed an intern to serve as an assistant of creativity (Abend 2011), and his new project, the El Bulli Foundation, is meant to be a "think tank for creativity" that will then promote creativity in the work of other chefs (Borden 2015). Adrià's success has made this goal of "creativity" stylish in many places around the world, and it is likely not a coincidence that Peru's gastronomy boom, which owes much of its international clout to Adrià's well-publicized trips to Peru (see Contreras 2011:C1-2), particularly values the culinary trait for which Adrià is most known.

At the same time that creativity has become a buzzword for chefs on an international level, it has also become an emblematic aspect of Peruvianness outside of the kitchen as well as within. Inca Kola, a lemongrass-flavored soft drink to which many Peruvians attach a sense of pride and

patriotism (Alcalde 2009), today markets itself under slogans like “*Con creatividad todo es posible*” (With creativity everything is possible) and “*Creatividad Peruana*” (Peruvian Creativity), depicting scenarios that emphasize Peruvian ingenuity in the form of entrepreneurship. Peruvian newspapers have increasingly lauded the supposedly inherent creativity of Peruvians and the opportunities that this shared skill will afford Peruvian entrepreneurs (*empresarios*) (cf. Giuffra 2012, 48). And I often heard Peruvian “creativity” cited as a vernacular explanation for other people’s businesses successes, sometimes as a wry commentary on tactics that the speaker did not particularly approve of. (This was the case when Alicia, an administrator at LaCucina, told me that Peruvians are good at setting up under-the-table businesses because “el Peruano es ingenio; el Peruano es creativo” [Peruvians are ingenious; Peruvians are creative].)

This emphasis on a particularly entrepreneurial type of creativity as a nationally shared Peruvian trait may also be linked to a broader, international trend in which the term “creativity” has become a shorthand for a particular kind of economic personality. As anthropologists have repeatedly noted during the past two decades, the rise of neoliberalism on a global scale has promoted a specific mode of “neoliberal agency” that values individualism and entrepreneurialism (Ganti 2014; Gershon 2011). Emily Martin describes this form of personhood as based on the assumption that people are like businesses, “a collection of assets that must be continually invested in, nurtured, managed, and developed” (Martin 2000, 582). In this context, creativity can be seen as just one of several potential assets, something that individuals or businesses can cultivate for themselves as a means of gaining an advantage over other workers. At the same time, the broader notion of “creativity” as the ability to innovate and flexibly respond to challenges makes it an appealing catchall term to describe the state of mind that individuals and businesses should embody overall.

The Peruvian gastronomy boom’s emphasis on the possibilities of individual sazón as a driver of sales has fit particularly well into this neoliberal notion of personhood and the attendant notion that successful businesses and people are necessarily creative. Anthropologists have noted that neoliberal economies encourage workers to think of themselves as bundles of marketable traits or skills (Urciuoli 2008); Peru’s gastronomy boom encourages cooks to think of themselves as embodying bundles of marketable flavors and techniques. Tellingly, the pedagogical techniques at Peru’s culinary schools, which formally educate students in the stereotypes that underpin Peru’s regional cooking styles, do not encourage students to express themselves using the sense of taste or sazón with which they entered culinary school, even if they themselves have *manos morenas* and make excellent anticuchos. Instead they encourage students to take on the elements of their regional styles that might be profitably incorporated into an eventual product, to nurture regional traits that make them more attractive workers. In other words, they teach students to violate culinary co-occurrence features in ways that make a successful dish or chef “creative” but that can also be attributed to the cook’s racial or regional background – his or her presumed (and in many cases, explicitly cited) sense of sazón.

It is this combination of the iconic aspects of food and a neoliberal belief in the economic power of creativity that makes Peru’s gastronomy boom such a powerful social symbol. In the context of Peru’s taste ideology, changing how someone cooks or eats actually changes him or her as a person. The act of circulating a series of new, “creative” foods to the country and the world is thus a potentially transformative act; it delivers elements of sazón, the essence of a diverse set of cooks, to an increasingly wide swath of people whose own experiences with flavor -- and possibly even the substance of their bodies -- will be changed. With an increasing number of government programs suggesting that the sharing of diverse customs will lead to unity, Peruvians can see the dissemination of diverse foods as an opportunity for national improvement. Granted, as an economic solution in which true mutual understanding or integration is rejected in favor of moves

toward recognizing otherness as a commodity, the supposed embrace of all varieties of Peruvian sazón (including those of poorer or indigenous Peruvians) in the context of the gastronomy boom is similar to the moves toward “neoliberal multiculturalism” that Charles Hale describes with some ambivalence (2006). (This ambivalence is all the more justified in the context of acknowledgements of enduring hierarchies of taste in Peru, like Chef Juan’s comment about the importance of tasting foie gras rather than jungle fruits.) But Peru’s ideology of taste provides an interesting wrinkle in this familiar story of conditional acceptance. As a system of belief in which the ingestion of iconic foods is actually thought to create an understanding between cook and eater – and ultimately, through expansion of the palate, a change in the eater -- Peru’s taste ideology supports the idea that eating diverse, “creative” foods really might provide a means toward some form of intercultural understanding.

Just as importantly, the emphasis on a new, shared culinary style of “creativity” as a particularly Peruvian trait reinforces the idea that inventing and selling foods will set the country apart on an international stage that has long seen Peru as a supporting player. If -- as newspapers and television commercials suggest -- all Peruvians have the potential to be particularly talented culinary entrepreneurs, the dissemination of Peruvian foods will bring not only social benefits but economic ones. Particularly in an environment in which “creativity” can refer to culinary prowess, Peruvian heritage, and neoliberal progress all at once, it makes sense that hopes for Peru’s economic development would be so strongly tied to its culinary expansion. The ever-growing presence of culinary tourists and reports of Peruvian restaurants abroad only strengthen this tie, as they provide visible, causal links between cuisine and influxes of money. In this context, Ana’s French terrine makis, like the many other “creative” dishes that I saw during my fieldwork, were far more than riffs on a cook’s personal sense of taste or even a clever combination of iconic flavors from different parts of the world. They were signs of the hope that Peru will one day be a powerful, internationally recognized source of culinary expertise, “creativity” spurring an entire nation’s success.

Acknowledgements: Portions of the research on which this article is based were funded by the National Science Foundation (Award #BCS 1155923), New York University’s Annette B. Weiner Graduate Fellowship in Cultural Anthropology, and the ZEIT-Stiftung Bucerius PhD Scholarship in Migration Studies. I also thank the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, where I was an affiliated researcher during my fieldwork.

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Endnotes

(1) LaCucina, like the names of the individuals affiliated with it, is a pseudonym. The students and instructors at Cenfutur asked that I use their real names and the real name of their school. [↗](#)

(2) I conducted 16 months of ethnographic research from August 2011-December 2012. In addition to conducting participant observation at Cenfutur and LaCucina, I also conducted research on culinary texts and interviewed culinary students, instructors, chefs, restaurant owners, and members of Peru's national gastronomy association (APEGA). [↗](#)

(3) See Ochs, Pontecorvo, and Fasulo 1996 for an application of work on language socialization to a study of the socialization of taste. [↗](#)

(4) See Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz 1978 for a discussion of the violation of expectations about co-occurrence in language. [↗](#)

(5) See Orlove 1993 for an account of the development (during Peru's republican period) of the now seemingly self-evident division of Peru into coast, mountains, and jungle. [↗](#)

(6) Several structural anthropologists who pioneered work in the anthropology of food argued that cuisines and meals do operate according to a grammar analogous to that of a language (cf. Douglas [1975] 2008), but in more recent work on the social contexts that give cuisines meaning this approach has been largely abandoned. [↗](#)

(7) See Duranti 2003, Parmentier 1997, Shankar and Cavanaugh 2012, and Silverstein 1976 for discussions of the special place of language among semiotic resources. [↗](#)

(8) Here I am choosing to draw primarily on the literature on linguistic style for two reasons. First, the term has a history of applying to nonlinguistic as well as linguistic features (cf. Eckert 2000; Hebdige 1979; Hewitt 1993). Second, it is a term that can refer broadly to several different types of social distinctions, while the other terms assume particular sets of differences between users of different varieties. Register traditionally refers to how language changes in social context, while dialects refers to changes due to characteristics in the speaker (Irvine 2001). These distinctions are not mutually exclusive, but as will become clearer later in the chapter, the taste ideologies at work in Peru connect culinary variation both to circumstance and to the cook's social identity, making the analogy with the other terms at times misleading. [↗](#)

(9) This association between potatoes and low status dates back at least to the Inca period, when corn, a state crop used for rituals, was contrasted with the potato as a subsistence crop for use by lower status highlanders (Murra 1960). [↗](#)

(10) Part of this ideology was similar to the French term *terroir*, the notion that a particular environment imparts a "taste of place" to foods through factors such as the soil and water (Leynse 2006; Trubek 2008). While I never heard the French term itself in the culinary schools I attended, at least a few instructors were clearly aware of the concept, referencing the fact that Europeans held the relationship between taste and place to be as significant as Peruvians did. [↗](#)

(11) This belief in the seemingly natural skill of people who grew up with ingredients and cuisines is similar to language ideologies from around the world that posit that it is difficult to learn a language well later in life because a second language is learned rather than felt or that a person's mother tongue holds a special, privileged place in one's heart (cf. Handman 2007; Schieffelin 2007). In Peru, as in other Latin American countries, variations of these language ideologies have influenced policy since the colonial period, providing the justification for conducting religious services in Quechua and other indigenous languages (Mannheim 1991) and informing debates over the potential of indigenous languages in classrooms to erase achievement gaps (García 2005). Significantly, anthropologists have described the perceived iconic connection between language and categories of personhood in Peru in much the same way that the people I encountered in my own research

described the connection between race or class and sazón -- as something that accrues naturally and indicates something about a person's childhood and fundamental characteristics rather than something that could be learned later in life. [↗](#)

(12) Para mí es como algo natural... a ver, como explicarlo, no? Es que... mira. Yo creo que acá es un tema... Yo he crecido dentro de una familia de buen paladar. Eso es... ahora. Como es eso? No lo sé. Pero la comida es muy rica, muy sabrosa. Este... no llegaba exageraciones, no? Todo es muy equilibrada, mi mama. [...] Mi mama tenía muy buena sazón, mi abuelo buena sazón, entonces uno como que va, viviendo en el ambiente de la buena sazón, entonces si viene algo que no estuvo bien cocido, bien... [...] tu dices no, esto no está bien. [↗](#)

(13) This view of taste acquisition is reminiscent of views that Edward Sapir put forth in "The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society," in which he suggested that individuals behave "in accordance with deep-seated cultural patterns" but that they are largely unable to articulate the rules of those patterns ([1927] 1974, 35). [↗](#)

(14) C: Ayer había un grupo dentro de tu sección que ha presentado un ají de gallina. No tiene relación con el color ni con el sabor ni con la textura. [...] No puedo descartar el plato porque lo han hecho simplemente así, una receta. Pero no han dado, no tenían ningún idea de lo que es un ají de gallina. Porque si sí, no lo habría presentado. Era un color amarronado, no tiene tanto pan, en fin. Hay varias cosas... y no se presenta con arroz, es una entrada. Entonces, han perdido esa identidad con ese plato. ALW: Se puede decir que no tenían sazón? C: Yo creo que sí, incorporado en uno. El paladar. [...] Lo que pasa es que creo que como vengo del conocimiento del auténtico o... es mi comida, es mi cocina, entonces yo tengo ya registrado, tu me dices un plato y yo tengo. [...] Ya lo tengo aquí incorporado, "Ají de gallina: color con tonalidad amarillenta, deshilar tranches de pollo, textura no muy compacta..." entiendes? Y está todo, pero [...] yo me imagino, por ejemplo, vamos a poner un argentino que conoce de carnes, pienso que tiene que decir: jugoso, rosada, de este grosor, no puede entrar una cosa así. [...] O sea, yo creo que *toda* cocina tiene que tener algunas ciertas características que tú vas a rescatar o tienes que incorporar o grabados en ti. [↗](#)

(15) These strategies bear some resemblance to the linguistic strategies that speakers in zones of language contact employ; in both cases people who are able to (at least partially) manipulate multiple languages or semiotic styles may consciously use elements of the style associated with the less politically powerful group to assert the value of the group as well as its modes of expression (cf. Gal 1987; Irvine and Gal 2000; Woolard 1998b). [↗](#)

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