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Epilogue: A Roundtable on Street Vending

THIS ROUNDTABLE IS PART OF a continuing discussion on the relationship between urban food practices, city liveliness, and everyday livelihoods. The preceding contributions present a global perspective on street food vending by acknowledging it as an important source of economic empowerment while underscoring its vital role in forging communities of care through embodied practices of cooking, chatting, and/or eating together. Sandra C. Mendiola García's discussion on the communal preparation of *chiles en nogada* is just one example of how the practical accomplishments of ordinary people engaging in routine and mundane activities build bridges across difference. The future of such ordinary activities, however, remains to be seen. As Jane Battersby shows, it will require that stakeholders make sense of how historical ideologies influence the ways that bureaucracies produce, use, and manage urban space. Rather than a closing statement, this Epilogue therefore seeks to foster conversation on the future of street food among multiple stakeholders: researchers in the humanities and social sciences, of course, but also urban planners, policymakers and legal practitioners, vendors, advocates, social entrepreneurs, and artists. By combining theoretical and empirical interventions with acknowledgments to lived experience, these dialogues can shed new light on urban provisioning and on the multiple—and multisensorial—uses of street food in growing cities.

Cities around the world are adapting to accommodate more residents than ever before. Many people relocate to urban areas in search of better opportunities in employment and income, while others move due to local conflict or climate displacement. This long-term demographic shift of migration toward expanding urban centers now means that, for the first time in human history, the majority of people around the world live in cities—a trend that is projected to escalate (United Nations 2018).[1] A direct consequence of these large-scale flows is that 1 out of every 29 people lives in a country that is different from the one in which they were born, a phenomenon of mass migration that Suketu Mehta (2019) identifies as a defining characteristic of the twenty-first century. Responding to this global moment, the City Food project examines the shifting social, cultural, and spatial dimensions of urban provisioning systems by engaging scholars, curators, public historians, and advocates across institutions. The project launched in 2014 with a symposium in New York City that was jointly hosted by New York University and the University of Toronto.[2] Since then, various initiatives followed in the form of workshop programming, experiential learning, and public engagement. In particular, a 2016 global integration grant from New York University supported further multidisciplinary investigations that revealed street food and globalization as components facilitating the last mile of the food chain.[3]

Since street food is a process of distribution that is integrally part of the urban food chain, it is then necessary for stakeholders to question what "street food" is, was, and what it can be (and for whom). In her literature review of street food as an ambiguous concept, Anneke Geyzen (2017) shows that streets are just one point of departure in analysis, and need not be the end point. This line of questioning does not interpret street food solely as a lens into broader social and political critiques; it is attuned to the spatial and material experiences of food, and to the stories of the cooks and tastemakers, the vendors and entrepreneurs, and the eaters and consumers who sustain growing cities. Recent work by B. Lynne Milgram and Manpreet K. Janeja reveal some of the ways in which street food, as a concept, can be highly flexible. Milgram's (2019) research in the Philippine city of Baguio unpacks vendors' responses to urban modernization initiatives; in an effort to sustain their livelihoods, vendors create a unique taste of place by refashioning storefronts and market spaces by literally moving their "street" food away from streets. Janeja's (2016) work on street food in Calcutta additionally illustrates how provisioning spaces extend beyond the confines of streets. Exploring what she calls the event of demarcating street food, she demonstrates that changing social intimacies can redefine makeshift and temporary places of urban foot traffic as spaces of hospitality. An expansive

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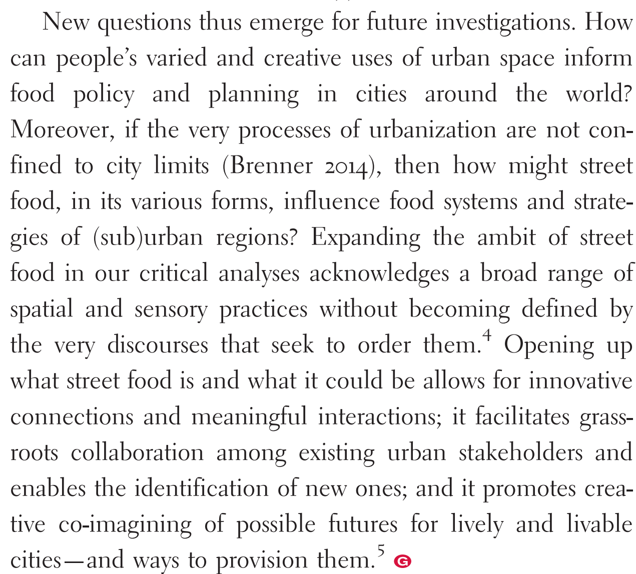
definition of street food can therefore encompass a range of affiliated provisioning practices in shared urban spaces among neighbors and strangers. These are adjacent conduits—of work, leisure, and ritual—such as fairgrounds, devotional sites, beaches, trains, transportation hubs, and even loosely organized collective kitchens, through which people communally exchange food (see, for example, Arabindoo 2016; Janeja 2016; Law 2001). They are the varied moments that are marked by improvisational uses of space, whether motivated out of necessity and an urgent need to survive, by opportunity and a desire to thrive, or by the right and desire to reclaim the city (Anjaria 2016; Hou 2010; Lefebvre et al. 1996).



New questions thus emerge for future investigations. How can people's varied and creative uses of urban space inform food policy and planning in cities around the world? Moreover, if the very processes of urbanization are not confined to city limits (Brenner 2014), then how might street food, in its various forms, influence food systems and strategies of (sub)urban regions? Expanding the ambit of street food in our critical analyses acknowledges a broad range of spatial and sensory practices without becoming defined by the very discourses that seek to order them.[4] Opening up what street food is and what it could be allows for innovative connections and meaningful interactions; it facilitates grassroots collaboration among existing urban stakeholders and enables the identification of new ones; and it promotes creative co-imagining of possible futures for lively and livable cities—and ways to provision them.[5]

NOTES

1. One estimate suggests that by 2050 approximately 67 percent of the world's people will live in cities (United Nations 2018).
2. For a description of the City Food project at the University of Toronto's Culinaria Research Centre, see https://utsc.utoronto.ca/culinaria/city-food. See, for example, Zanoni (2018) for a historical perspective on migration and markets.
3. See www.cityfoodresearch.org for more on this recent thread of the collaboration.
4. On the politics of classification in relation to the built environment, see Bowker and Star (1999).
5. This Epilogue is based on our perspectives from helping to build the City Food project at NYU over the last several years. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the project collaborators. We thank collaborators for their contributions to the project over time, and we also express our gratitude to Anneke Geyzen for her work with us on an earlier stage of the project. We accept responsibility for any errors or omissions in the Epilogue.

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