

“Tides of Untold Stories: Subaltern Subjectivities in Maritime Food Geographies”

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Women’s Agencies in the Confectionery Trade of Eighteenth-century Barcelona

This paper examines the social, cultural and intellectual forms of female agency in the manufacture and distribution of sweets in eighteenth-century Barcelona. Additionally, I consider the ways in which production and consumption of these food products, made mainly from sugar, may have formed feminine subjectivities.

The link between sweet taste and femininity is long-standing, and some historians have studied certain aspects of this connection in different geographies and historical periods. Less well understood is how women perceived and engaged with sugary food at a time when sugar was becoming a more affordable commodity in Europe. In this paper, I address how women of different social status and occupations —aristocratic and bourgeois housewives, convent nuns and street sellers—assumed, (re)appropriated and developed particular uses and meanings of sweets. For instance, the production and sale of home-made sweets enabled some convent nuns and shopkeepers to actively participate in the local food market, challenging the city regulations and the patriarchal guild system.

Drawing on trial records, account books, and municipal regulations, I highlight the role of women in shaping urban economies and food identities. This study offers a new reading of sweet foodstuffs, moving beyond grand narratives dominated by men as central actors in the global history of sugar. Furthermore, it shifts the focus of recent scholarship away from European courtly circles and Atlantic colonial trade towards a Mediterranean and non-courtly urban area, providing a new geographical area of study and a distinct scale and context in the substantial historiography on global commodities.

Kathleen Burke

Enslaved cooks at the Cape of Good Hope

This paper traces the stories of enslaved cooks in the eighteenth-century Dutch Indian Ocean Empire. It focuses on the stories of enslaved cooks in Cape Town, a port city established by the Dutch East India Company in the mid-seventeenth century to provision its ships travelling from Europe to the Company’s headquarters in present-day Indonesia. Even though the purpose of establishing the port city – achieved by incremental land dispossession from the indigenous Khoi people – was explicitly tied to food provisioning, few scholars have examined the role of the Cape from the perspective of food history, or sought to unpack the complex entanglements of empire, categories of race, gender and class, and food production, preparation and consumption in the port city.

This paper situates Cape Town within the global context of the eighteenth century Dutch Indian Ocean Empire by showing how enslaved cooks from Indonesia and India influenced colonial cuisine at the Cape. Despite colonial ideologies which sought to categorise them along gendered, raced and classed lines, colonists placed value on the skills of enslaved cooks to ensure their own well-being. By examining the cooking and eating practices of colonial households, we can begin to unpack the influence these enslaved cooks had on creating a new global cuisine which had never before existed in the culinary context of the Cape.

Valeria Mantilla Morales

Labourers of the Magdalena River: Food and Riverine Geographies

The Magdalena River is one of Colombia's most important fluvial networks. Home to abundant flora and fauna, it has also served as a highway to people, goods, and food for centuries, running from Colombia's Andean region to its Atlantic coast. It has given life to so much, that anthropologist Germán Ferro describes it as a "river-world" [*río-mundo*]. This study focuses on one of the central figures present in this river-world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – the figure of the *boga*.

Bogas were male labourers made up of free African and afrodescendants hired by merchants and travelers to navigate the Magdalena River. They rowed boats transporting food supplies like cane sugar, honey, wine, cacao, plantains, salted meats and fish, and wheat flour. Rowing for months, they stopped at key ports, loading and unloading their cargo, braving unruly waters, and even fighting off snakes and caimans who threatened their travels. In local lore, they were almost amphibians. Their toils earned them the reputation of being the biceps of the region. Through textual sources and artwork, this paper accesses these labourers' sense of place, visualizing their importance to riverine life. The region's dependence on their labour and their knowledge of the river allowed *bogas* to act as go-between communicators between the merchants who hired them and the river itself. This also gave them the kind of social leverage and opportunities to create a collective image of the region's political geographies, challenging the limits of their status as "free people of colour."