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FOOD, RACE AND WORKING-CLASS IDENTITY: *RESTAURANTES POPULARES* AND POPULISM IN 1930S PERU¹

... And tell me, which President looked to the future? It was, believe it or not, [Sánchez] Cerro. I fully recognize that he was able to look to the future and ... he grabbed the rich [by the neck] and took part of their wealth, you there [he said], you're going to give me potatoes, you're going to give me yucca, you're going to give me sweet potatoes, he told them, to feed the poor neighborhoods, you bring me rice, meat, you tell me you have five hundred cows, well then, kill only five cows, otherwise, slash-slash, I'm going to snuff you too, and then, no!, you have to do what Nine-Fingers [Sánchez Cerro—who lost one of his fingers during a military uprising] says. He was a strange president. What did he do? He'd bring out the military officers, the soldiers, [and he would say] you here, you're going to cook, and he'd go off with the trucks to the poor neighborhoods with the food, all ready to eat, the people should not be dying of hunger he would say, but *he saw that that too was indecent, so he built the comedores populares* [sic]. Who inaugurated them? One-eyed Oscar R. Benavides, but who started them? [Sánchez] Cerro [my emphasis].²

This article examines the creation, in the 1930s, of restaurants, known as *restaurantes populares*, which were funded and run by the Peruvian state in order to “solve the urgent problem of [the provision of] easy, comfortable and healthy nutrition to the popular classes.”³ The study of these restaurants, I suggest, provides a useful perspective from which to examine the interplay of state formation, populist politics, and class formation in the 1930s, a

¹ I am grateful Jelke Boesten and to two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions. I also wish to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Leverhulme Trust, which made possible the research upon which this article is based. Abbreviations used in the footnotes: Archivo General de la Nación (Lima)/Ministerio de Interior (AGN/MI); Archivo General de la Nación (Lima)/Prefectura de Lima (AGN/PL); Public Record Office/ Foreign Office Papers (PRO/FO).

² Testimony of Andrés Delgado in Taller de Testimonio, *Habla la ciudad* (Lima: Municipalidad de Lima Metropolitana/Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1986), pp. 25-26. My translation.

³ AGN/MI/327/Particulares, Comisión Ejecutiva de los Restaurantes Populares to Director de Gobierno, 17 June 1932.

decade marked by the Great Depression, which had a deep impact on Peru, resulting in high levels of unemployment in cities and the export industries, and by the emergence of political parties of the left—the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP) and the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA)—and of the right—the Union Revolucionaria (UR)—purporting to represent and guide the working class. Most studies of this period have tended to focus almost exclusively on the relation between the political parties of the left and the labor movement.⁴ Historians have paid little attention to the social policy, including the restaurantes populares, of the Sánchez Cerro and Benavides governments, or have tended to see it as a mere instrument in a broader policy of cooption (or “incorporation”) and repression of the organized working class. In so doing, historians have echoed contemporary interpretations, particularly those formulated by APRA and the PCP but also by more neutral observers such as the British minister to Peru who noted in 1936 that the real objective of the restaurantes populares was “to combat labor discontent and communistic ideas.”⁵ Yet, as the testimony reproduced above suggests, some contemporaries saw the restaurants in a different, far more positive, light.

I argue in this article that working-class Limeños perceived the restaurants as a welcome solution to material *and* moral needs. The restaurants, which attracted a large number of costumers if official statistics are to be believed, were successful because, in a context in which urban workers had become largely dependent for affordable food on eateries run by Asian immigrants, the restaurantes populares provided an alternative place for

⁴ See José Deustua and Alberto Flores Galindo, *Los comunistas y el movimiento obrero*, in Alberto Flores Galindo, *Obras Completas I* (Lima: SUR, 1993 [1977]); Baltazar Caravedo, *Clases, lucha política y gobierno en Perú 1919-1933* (Lima: Retama Editorial, 1977); Aníbal Quijano, *El Perú en la crisis de los años treinta* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1985 [1978]); Carmen Rosa Balbi, *El Partido Comunista y el APRA en la crisis revolucionaria de los años treinta* (Lima: G. Herrera, 1980); Adám Anderle, *Los movimientos políticos en el Perú entre las dos guerras mundiales* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 1985); and Piedad Pareja Pflucker, *El movimiento obrero peruano de los años 30* (Lima: Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 1985). For a study that focuses on the personal appeal of populist leaders, see Steve Stein, *Populism in Peru: The Emergence of the Masses and the Politics of Social Control* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

⁵ PRO/FO 371/19800, Wilson to Eden, 21 April 1936. Denis Sulmont has called the social measures of the 1930s “right-wing populism.” Baltazar Caravedo sees the measures as a product of a “neutralizing alliance” between the state and a new industrial bourgeoisie. Julio Cotler views the measures as a way of “undermining the citizenship’s support for APRA.” Adám Anderle stresses the “political dividends” that resulted from the measures. See Denis Sulmont, *El movimiento obrero peruano en el Perú, 1900-1950* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1975), pp. 167-169; Baltazar Caravedo Molinari, *Burguesía e industria en el Perú, 1933-1945* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1976), p. 129-131; Julio Cotler, *Clases, estado y nación en el Perú* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1992 [1978]), p. 252; Adám Anderle, *Los movimientos políticos*, p. 284.

workers to eat and socialize but also, and perhaps more importantly, where certain values central to the construction of a working-class identity could be re-affirmed and reinforced. This identity—based on values such as decency, respectability, sobriety, and cleanliness—was constructed experientially and discursively in various spaces, such as the workshop, the factory, the union hall, and the worker press.⁶ But it was also constructed in contradistinction to a racialized Asian identity, characterized (according to Peruvian workers) by degeneracy and uncleanness.⁷ As I show below, the construction of a racialized Asian identity, as the “Other” to the Peruvian worker, extended to a representation of Asian migrants, particularly shopkeepers and restaurateurs, as exploiters of the working class and of the “Asian” food that workers consumed as disease-ridden and innutritious. As such, by providing an alternative to Asian, particularly Chinese eateries, the *restaurantes populares* came to play an important role in both the politics of consumption and the construction of working-class identity in early twentieth-century Peru.

The *restaurantes populares*, then, proved successful because they provided spaces where the construction of difference with Asian immigrants could be performed and, therefore, re-affirmed. But this performance of identity was possible because *in their design* the restaurants emphasized the same values that workers viewed as essential to their identity. The restaurants were indeed part of a political process of “incorporation,” as other historians have stressed. They were intended to undermine the appeal of the militant parties among the working class by providing work for the unemployed (during the construction phase) and cheap meals (once they were operational). But as I show below, they were also designed in such a way as to confer a set of values, such as respectability, sobriety, punctuality, and cleanliness, through their architecture, furnishings, and service. As such, the

⁶ See, among others, Piedad Pareja, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo en el Perú* (Lima: Ediciones Rikchay Perú, 1978); Peter Blanchard, *The Origins of the Peruvian Labor Movement, 1883-1919* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1982); Steve Stein, ed., *Lima obrera, 1900-1930*, 2 volumes (Lima: Ediciones El Virrey, 1986-1987); Julio Portocarrero, *Sindicalismo peruano, primera etapa 1911-1930* (Lima: Editorial Gráfica Labor, 1987); Luis Tejada, *La cuestión del pan: el anarcosindicalismo en el Perú* (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura/Banco Industrial del Perú, 1988); and Cynthia Sanborn, “Los obreros textiles de Lima: Redes sociales y organización laboral 1900-1930” in Aldo Panfichi and Felipe Portocarrero, eds., *Mundos interiores: Lima 1850-1950* (Lima: Universidad del Pacífico, 1995), pp. 187-215.

⁷ For a similar point, in different geographical contexts, see Jeffrey Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity: Immigrants, Minorities and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), especially chapter 2; and Gerardo Rénique, “Race, Region, and Nation: Sonora’s Anti-Chinese Racism and Mexico’s Postrevolutionary Nationalism, 1920s-1930s” in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, eds., *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 211-236.

restaurantes populares were indeed elements in a political project that sought to combat “communistic ideas” but they were also elements in a “civilizing mission” that corresponded to increasingly prevalent ideas about, on the one hand, the socially backward and yet politically dangerous character of Peru’s urban working classes and, on the other, the social role of the state in shaping society through its influence in various fields, including public health and nutrition. In this sense, the analysis offered here of the restaurantes populares provides greater insight of the anxieties and aspirations both of Lima’s urban working class and of the leaders and architects of “populist” social policy in 1930s Peru.⁸

FOOD AND THE LIMA WORKING CLASS

In recent years, historians have started to recognize the importance of food and food consumption as subjects of inquiry. In particular, special attention has been given to the interplay between food and (national) identity.⁹ As Gary Alan Fine suggests, “the connection between identity and consumption gives food a central role in the creation of community, and we use our diet to convey images of public identity.”¹⁰ Arnold Bauer has suggested that “an integrative, national cuisine drawn from the indigenous base as in

⁸ In this sense, this article seeks to contribute to an ongoing reassessment of the history of labor and the “populist” state in Latin America pioneered in studies such as Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); John D. French, *The Brazilian Workers’ ABC: Class Conflicts and Alliances in Modern Sao Paulo* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in Sao Paulo, 1920-1964* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Thomas Miller Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile’s El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Karin Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises: Political Cultures and the State in Chile, 1920-1955* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), among others.

⁹ For a pioneering work in the Latin American context, see Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Quoted in Warren Belasco, “Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field,” in Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds., *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 2. Of course, philosophers, psychoanalysts, sociologists and anthropologists have studied the interconnection between food and culture for some time now. For a sample of such studies, see the essays in Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). An early interpretation of the socializing and identity-conferring power of food and eating was formulated by Georg Simmel, who noted in 1910 that “communal eating and drinking, which can even transform a mortal enemy into a friend for the Arab allows us to overlook that one is not eating and drinking ‘the same thing’ at all, but rather totally exclusive portions, and gives rise to the primitive notion that one is thereby creating common flesh and blood.” See Georg Simmel, “Sociology of the Meal,” in David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 131.

Mexico did not emerge in Peru. Or perhaps that can be put another way: Peru's food regimes drew from so many sources that by the 1940s and 1950s no single contribution could appear dominant." Like its nationalism, according to Bauer, Peruvian cuisine—constituted by Andean, European, and Asian components—was "more fragmented" than in Mexico.¹¹ Of course, the fact that Peru's cuisine is fragmented like its nationalism does not *a priori* imply a degree of causality between the two. We should not necessarily see fragmented cuisines as indicators of fragmented nations or polities.¹² Nevertheless, though there is no *a priori* linkage between a country's cuisine and the character of its politics of national identity, food and, by extension, nutrition is clearly central to the politics of any society. To the extent that fragmented cuisines may reflect fragmented societies, the politics of such societies is likely to be shaped by conflicts over food that reflect these fragmentations. This is particularly true of a society like Lima in the early twentieth century, one of the most multiethnic and cosmopolitan cities in the western hemisphere. As I suggest below, food was at the centre of a number of conflicts in the early twentieth century that were shaped by class, race and (although not discussed here in detail) gender. In particular, in the first decades of the twentieth century, food, its price, quality, and availability, played a key role in shaping the politicization of the urban working class. Nowhere is this role more salient than in the food riots that gripped Lima in May 1919, provoked by rising food prices.

Although historians disagree about the causes of the rise in prices, the events of May 1919, alongside the general strike of December 1918-January 1919, were a pivotal moment in the history of the Lima working class.¹³ Augusto Ruiz Zevallos suggests that in the changes that resulted from those events, "we can find the beginnings of the populist state and the historical and social roots of the programmatic proposals of the main political move-

¹¹ Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 194.

¹² As historian Malcolm Deas once pointed out with characteristic wit, Northern Ireland is as fragmented a society as one is likely to find, yet one would be hard pressed to infer this from sampling its cuisine. Malcolm Deas, comment at a seminar, Latin American Centre, University of Oxford, c. 2000.

¹³ The events are studied in detail in Peter Blanchard, *The Origins of the Peruvian Labor Movement, 1883-1919* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1982). In the late 1970s, Rosemary Thorp and Geoffrey Bertram challenged the widely held belief that increases in food prices were linked to the expansion of export crops such as cotton and sugar, by arguing that the land devoted to foodstuffs remained constant during the first decades of the twentieth century. More recently, Augusto Ruiz Zevallos has suggested that previously unexamined sources confirm that the percentage of land devoted to foodstuffs fell in the period. See Rosemary Thorp and Geoffrey Bertram, *Peru 1890-1977: Growth & Policy in an Open Economy* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978); and Augusto Ruiz Zevallos, *La multitud, las subsistencias y el trabajo. Lima, 1890-1920* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2001).

ments of the twentieth century—such as APRA, Christian Democrats-PPC, Acción Popular and the left-wing parties—which were basically urban and preoccupied with subsistence and employment.”¹⁴ Certainly, Augusto B. Leguía, who rose to power that same year on the shoulders of Lima’s working class, was quick to introduce a series of measures, including a decree that established that landowners had to devote at least 15 percent of their land to foodstuff production and a price cap on meat sold in markets and in butchers’ stores, as well as greater controls aimed at eradicating speculation, which, taken together, contributed to a fall in the price of most major foodstuffs.¹⁵ These measures were part of a broader package of policies ostensibly aimed at improving the condition of urban workers, which included the extension of the eight-hour working day law to all industrial workers; a cap on house rents that did not exceed ten Peruvian pounds (Law 4123); a law that projected the construction of a hundred houses for “native-born blue-collar workers and public employees who have served the State for more than five years”; and the creation of a Labor Section in the Ministry of Development, whose functions included gathering statistical material on labor, inspecting industrial establishments, and settling both individual and collective disputes. Historians disagree as to the moving forces behind these measures. For some, measures such as the eight-hour day law were evidence of the success of anarchist agitation. Others see such measures as resulting from a growing identification between social legislation and modernity among a new professional class.¹⁶ But there is little doubt that the measures signaled the increasing political importance of the urban working class.

The food riots of 1919 provide the most visible (and explosive) evidence of how food and nutrition played key roles in the constitution of the collective identity of the Lima working class in the early twentieth century. In particular, the food riots suggest that the “politics” of food were intimately linked to class and, particularly, racial conflict in the city. According to Vincent Peloso, though the coastal diet had traditionally been rich, rising food prices in the early twentieth century contributed to a worsening of the average worker’s diet.¹⁷ In particular the coastal diet had included large quanti-

¹⁴ Ruiz Zevallos, *La multitud*, p. 213.

¹⁵ Ruiz Zevallos, *La multitud*, pp. 207-09.

¹⁶ See, for example, Cesar Levano, *La verdadera historia de las 8 horas: una epopeya heroica de la clase obrera peruana* (Lima: s.n., 1964) and David S. Parker, “Peruvian Politics and the Eight-Hour Day: Rethinking the General Strike,” *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d’histoire* 30 (1995), pp. 417-38.

¹⁷ Vincent Peloso, “Succulence and Sustenance: Region, Class and Diet in Nineteenth-Century Peru,” in J. C. Super and T. C. Wright, *Food, Politics and Society in Latin America* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), pp. 54-59.

ties of meat, which was transported to Lima from the central highlands. However, as pasture land was turned to wool production for export, meat became increasingly scarce and expensive. According to Ruiz Zevallos, the subsistence movement, as well as the riot of May 1919, and their concrete political goal—a greater say in the production and commercialization of foodstuffs—rather than responses to a situation of famine, were, in the final analysis, the result of a desire to retain the popular diet.¹⁸ This was a (class) struggle that pitted the dietary traditions of the urban poor against the interests of the agro-exporting elites. At the same time, the struggles to preserve the popular diet were explicitly racialized, since Asian, and particularly Chinese, merchants were blamed for the rise in the price of meat. As one newspaper article noted: “The Chinese merchants who have monopolized the provision of meat constitute a vast parasitic organization, which is fed and encouraged by the tribute paid by the majority of consumers. The profits of these Chinese merchants represent a large sum that radically increases the price of meat.”¹⁹ As in Paris, New York and Mexico City, as I show below, in Lima too the commercialization of meat and “the unfettered marketplace clashed with principles of subsistence, health, and hygiene.”²⁰ In the Peruvian capital, however, these clashes were shaped by anti-Asian racism.

Claims about Chinese merchants and the rising price of meat reflected broader racist assumptions among Peruvian workers about Asians in Peru and Chinese and Japanese “culture” more generally.²¹ The grievances expressed by Lima’s working class over the availability of meat became highly racialized, since Asians were singled out for blame for the scarcity of meat and its high price. But they were also highly gendered and sexualized, since meat traditionally has been perceived as male in culinary discourse and its consumption has been associated with manliness. As a result, the debates on the changing character of the popular diet dovetailed with a broader anti-Asian racism that constructed the Chinese and Japanese, on the

¹⁸ Ruiz Zevallos, *La multitud*, p. 150.

¹⁹ *La Razón*, 10 May 1919, cited in Ruiz Zevallos, *La multitud*, p. 162.

²⁰ Roger Horowitz, Jeffrey M. Pilcher, and Sydney Watts, “Meat for the Multitudes: Market Culture in Paris, New York City and Mexico City over the Long Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 109:4 (October 2004), p. 1059.

²¹ On anti-Asian racism see, Adam McKeown, “Inmigración china al Perú: Exclusión y negociación,” in *Histórica* XX:1 (July 1996), pp. 59-92; Mary Fukumoto, *Hacia un nuevo sol: Japoneses y sus descendientes en el Perú* (Lima: Asociación Peruano Japonesa del Perú, 1997); Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, *Herederos del Dragón: historia de la comunidad china en el Perú* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2000); and Jorge Bracamonte, “La modernidad de los subalternos: Los inmigrantes chinos en la ciudad de Lima, 1895-1930,” in Santiago López Maguiña et al., *Estudios culturales: Discursos, poderes, pulsiones* (Lima: Red para el desarrollo de las ciencias sociales en el Perú, 2001), pp. 167-88.

one hand, as morally and sexually degenerate (and therefore of questionable manhood), and, on the other, as threats to Peruvian masculinity (given the tendency to represent them as seducers and exploiters of women but also because, by keeping meat prices high, Asians threatened the vitality and virility of Peruvian males).²² An article published in *El Obrero Textil* in late 1919 illustrates this well:

Do not forget that this degrading race is in large measure the cause of our misfortune. It hoards and monopolizes all the principal goods, and feigning a fictitious scarcity, employs it to squeeze us at will and to deny us another piece of bread for our little ones. It makes its money from those centers of vice, perdition and gambling where many of you go to leave the sweat of your brow, your tiredness, your sorrows, and your week's hardships; in this way, a short time from now, you will end up in jail, in hospital, or in the cemetery while it returns to its country to enjoy a fortune so easily acquired at the expense of innumerable victims.²³

A month later, a similar article in the same newspaper suggested that:

. . . the people and the proletarian class see very little difference between a Chinaman and a Japanese, both constitute a degenerate and harmful plague for the people. There you have the hairdressers who lowered the old prices so low that they pushed out the Peruvian hairdressers and then increased prices by a factor of four. There you have our sisters and daughters dragged into prostitution by one group [of Asians] and squeezed out by another of their jobs as seamstresses, with which they helped us to feed our little ones. There you have the poor ice cream makers and juice makers replaced by those disgusting Japanese *raspadilla* [an ice-based refreshment] makers of cadaverous complexion and slitty eyes, with blackened nails and swarming with flies.²⁴

As these and other sources reveal, Peruvian workers viewed Asian immigrants as racially degenerate, as direct competitors for jobs and, more generally, as exploiters of the working class. Yet, as anarchist proselytizers writing in the

²² Although, naturally, not all members of the Lima working class espoused racist views of Asians (as I show here, anarchist workers explicitly rejected the racism), there is considerable evidence that such feelings were widespread among urban workers in Lima. On the role played by racism in articulating social hierarchies in early twentieth-century Peru, see, among others, Gonzalo Portocarrero, 'El fundamento invisible: Función y lugar de las ideas racistas en la República Aristocrática', in Aldo Panfichi and Felipe Portocarrero, eds., *Mundos interiores: Lima 1850-1950* (Lima: Universidad del Pacífico, 1995), pp. 219-59; Nelson Manrique, *La piel y la pluma: Escritos sobre literatura, etnicidad y racismo* (Lima: SUR, 1999) and Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

²³ *El Obrero Textil*, 6 December 1919.

²⁴ *El Obrero Textil*, 13 January 1920.

pages of *Los Parias* stressed, far from undermining the economy, health and morality of workers, Asian businesses had become an integral and necessary part of the working-class economy, by providing not only the cheapest food available, but also a number of other goods and services at affordable prices:

The laborer who today kills his hunger for twenty centavos in a Chinese eatery, could not do so for forty or fifty centavos in a national or European diner (*fonducho*). And what we say about food goes for footwear, clothes etc. The people know, they can sense it at any time; and yet, because of that lack of logic so common among sectors of the rabble, some turn against those who favor them by blindly seconding the plans of their exploiters. The laborer and the rich artisan who scream stridently for the heads of the Chinks [*macacos*] have filled their bellies in a Chinese restaurant and draw the energy for their screams from the Chinese stew. The Sinophobe magnate who cannot be cured by the medical doctor, the healer, or the waters of Lourdes, turns for help to the Chinese doctors.²⁵

As this source suggests, in the early twentieth century, Asian restaurants became one of the main sources of food for the urban poor.²⁶ However, far from recognizing the contribution that Asian restaurants made to the popular diet and to the nutrition of the poor, both elite and working-class contemporary observers identified Asian food as a source of disease.²⁷ According to an article published in *El Comercio*, the elite's newspaper, in 1901: "In those *fondas*, which, unfortunately, are used by those who—because of their poor economic situation—cannot afford to go elsewhere for food, everything, from the crockery to the utensils employed by the Asians in the kitchen, lack the necessary and indispensable cleanliness required to avoid them becoming sources of infection."²⁸ Similarly, the Confederación de Artesanos, an

²⁵ *Los Parias*, Año VI No 48, June 1909.

²⁶ As another article noted: "especially in Lima, poverty would be all that much greater were it not for the Chinese traders, who, sober and content with little gain, sell cheap goods, making them accessible to the poorest of all." *Los Parias*, Año IV No 43, September 1908. Abelardo Gamarra penned a description of one of the Chinese 'fondas' in 1907: "a single Chinaman serves two hundred patrons and from a whole street away one can hear his beckoning call, rice on its own, meat with rice, steak, pudding ['aló solo, cane con aló, cane sola, bite, dulce requesón']. One can see the throng of people coming and going, hardly sitting down, fed in one minute. Dishes are set down and taken away and everything is presented [to the customer]: the menu, the bread, the tea, all is presented as if moved by a spring." Quoted in Fanni Muñoz Cabrejo, *Diversiones públicas en Lima, 1890-1920: La experiencia de la modernidad* (Lima: Red para el desarrollo de las ciencias sociales en el Perú, 2001), p. 168. On the development of Chinese restaurants, or *chifas*, as they are known in Peru, see Rodríguez Pastor, *Herederos del Dragón*, pp. 213-266.

²⁷ On the association of Chinese immigrants and disease, see Humberto Rodríguez Pastor, "La calle del Capón, el callejón Otaiza y el barrio chino" in Panfichi and Portocarrero, *Mundos interiores*, pp. 397-430; and Marcos Cueto, *El regreso de las epidemias: Salud y sociedad en el Perú del siglo XX* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1997), esp. Chapter 1.

²⁸ *El Comercio*, 31 January 1901 (evening edition).

umbrella artisan organization, called for regular inspections of these establishments: "this measure is requested clamorously, since the working class, which, for the most part, consumes those meals, suffers the consequences of the poor quality of ingredients that are used in those restaurants."²⁹

The centrality of class and race to the politics of food were equally evident in later decades. One study of Limeños' diet published in 1942 concluded that though the intake of calories was sufficient, it was far from adequate. There was a marked lack of meat, milk, eggs, cheese, fruits, vegetables and bread.³⁰ These conclusions are borne out by Leoncio Palacios's study of Lima's working-class households in the 1930s.³¹ As Palacios shows, food represented half of a typical working-class family's total expenditure, with housing and clothing together amounting to a quarter. Among the poorer families in the Palacios' sample, expenditure on food reached as much as 58 percent of total expenditure. When expenditure on food is broken down we find that 26 percent of the food budget was spent on cereals; meat and fish accounted for 20 percent, while vegetables represented another 19 percent. If we take into consideration the price differentials between meat and bread or rice, (in 1930 a kilo of beef cost 1.07 soles, a kilo of bread 0.34 soles, and a kilo of rice 0.43 soles) it is not surprising that meat was consumed only sparingly.³² Palacios estimated that on a weekly basis the average working-class family consumed some 3 kilos of beef, 4 liters of milk, 18 kilos of vegetables (potatoes, sweet potato, manioc and greens), 12 kilos of cereals (bread, rice, pasta, corn and flour). In addition workers consumed 3 kilos of sugar and 12 kilos of firewood. According to Palacios, average meat consumption in Peru (i.e. not just Lima, where consumption is likely to have been considerably higher than the average), at 10 kg per person per year, was a third of that of France, and a fifth of that of Norway. Moreover, again not surprisingly, Palacios found that the better-off working class families had a better diet than the poorer families: as incomes rose, certain food groups, typically meat and milk, replaced others, such as potatoes

²⁹ *El Comercio*, 12 July 1901 (evening). This theme was reworked regularly in the press in the 1900s. As Fanni Muñoz notes, "in several issues of the magazine Fray K. Bezón, edited by the progressive and liberal Francisco A. Loayza and published from 1907, one can find several caricatures that ironically portray the lack of cleanliness of the Chinese. One can see images of food prepared in Chinese restaurants made with rat, cat and dog meat. The Chinese are presented as rachitic persons with long hair, dirty nails and a sinister gaze." Muñoz, *Diversiones públicas en Lima*, pp. 168-169.

³⁰ A. Bedoya, "Balance Alimenticio de Lima, Callao, y Balnearios" in *Revista Médica Peruana* XIV:158 (February 1942), p. 54.

³¹ See Leoncio M. Palacios, *Encuesta sobre presupuestos familiares obreros realizada en la ciudad de Lima, en 1940* (Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1944).

³² Wilma Derpich, José Luis Huiza and Cecilia Israel, *Lima años 30, salarios y costo de vida de la clase trabajadora* (Lima: Fundación Friedrich Ebert, 1985), p. 52.

and bread. The diet of most workers in the sample, however, was “almost exclusively energetic,” meaning that a greater consumption of cereals compensated for the lack of meat or vegetables in the diet.³³

As the above suggests, class played a key role in determining the diet of Limeños. The unbalanced diet of the working class was a result of the low purchasing power of average Limeños and the high prices of food products. However, and most important, the unbalanced diet of Limeños was blamed not only on poverty, but also on a shift in food culture towards “Asian,” particularly Chinese food. As one observer noted: “in no small measure, the excessively calorific nutrition of the citizens is a product of the growing importance of Asian nutritional customs among the population (an excess of rice over bread, potatoes, and greens, etc).”³⁴ In the 1900s Asian food had been perceived as a source of disease, in the 1930s it was also blamed for the malnutrition of the poor. As has happened with other minority groups in other historical and geographical settings (such as the Jews or the Roma in Europe in the past and “asylum seekers” in Europe at present), Asian immigrants and their “culture” in early twentieth century Peru were targeted both by elite and popular sectors as the source of a variety of problems that ostensibly had little to do with their presence in the country, or (ironically) that in some cases, as with the provision of cheap and nutritious (and, one might add, rather splendid) food, they were helping to solve. That such targeted (and often violent) discrimination happened is hardly surprising given that it was legitimized by elite racial discourse and that, in most cases, attacks (both verbal and physical) on Asians went unpunished.³⁵ Yet at the same time the targeting of Asians served an obvious, if somewhat perverse, purpose for urban workers. In constructing Asian immigrants as immoral, disease-ridden, and exploiters of women, urban workers sought to affirm their own morality and decency, in short, to construct a sense of collective identity in contradistinction to an “Other” provided by Asian immigrants. In doing so, the Asian food, and the Asian restaurants, that they had come to rely on were equally “Othered” as unhealthy and innutritious in the first case and filthy and contaminating in the second.³⁶

³³ Palacios, *Encuesta*, pp. 168-69, p. 192.

³⁴ A. Bedoya, “Balance Alimenticio de Lima, Callao, y Balnearios” in *Revista Médica Peruana* XIV:158 (February 1942), p. 54.

³⁵ As was the case in May 1909, when a mob of hundreds of urban workers attacked Chinese businesses and individuals in the city. See Ruiz Zevallos, *La multitud*, pp. 103-21.

³⁶ This is not to say that the food prepared in Asian restaurants was necessarily healthy or nutritious. It is likely that in many cases it was not. But then, it was also probably no more unhealthy or innutritious than that offered in restaurants owned by Peruvians.

RESTAURANTES POPULARES AS POLITICAL PROJECT

The restaurantes populares were one of a number of measures directed at organized labor that were implemented by the Sánchez Cerro (1931-1933) and Benavides (1933-1939) governments.³⁷ These measures consisted of state-run programs, such as work creation schemes for the unemployed, the beefing up of institutions such as the Labor Section, as well as new legislation aimed, according to government propaganda, at easing the impact of the world slump on the Peruvian working class. Most important of all, in 1936, the Benavides government created a Social Security Law for blue-collar workers. The original law creating the restaurants in 1932 projected the construction of eight restaurants in Lima, two in Callao and one in each of the *balnearios* (the seaside districts of Miraflores, Barranco and Chorrillos). Meals were to be priced at 0.30 soles.³⁸ In addition to a loan of 500,000 soles, the state introduced a tax on cigarettes to fund the restaurants.³⁹ By April 1936, three had been built in Lima and one in Callao. In 1938, the Dirección de Previsión Social boasted, some 8.6 million “*comensales*” had made use of the restaurants.⁴⁰ By 1941, the mining town of La Oroya too boasted such a restaurant.⁴¹ The construction of the restaurantes populares dovetailed neatly with the state work-creation schemes. Responsibility for the budget, construction and operation of the restaurants was given to the Junta Departamental de Lima Pro-Desocupados, a new state agency charged with addressing the rise in unemployment in the capital, which, Benavides claimed, was better placed to “make use of such works to reduce unemployment.”⁴² By the

³⁷ State-run restaurants were a feature of other political projects in the early twentieth century, including Bolshevism. See Mauricio Borrero, “Food and the Politics of Scarcity in Urban Soviet Russia, 1917-1941,” in Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds., *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 258-76.

³⁸ To get a sense of the value that this represented, we may consider the fact that according to a 1938 menu from Santiago Cordova’s “Restaurant El Morro Solar” in Chorrillos 0.30 soles bought a costumer a single dish of steak and rice, whereas a costumer in the Restaurante Popular would get a full three course meal for the same amount. “Menú del día,” 9 November 1938, Restaurante el Morro Solar (Lima: Librería e Imprenta El Misti, 1938).

³⁹ Pedro Ugarteche, *Sánchez Cerro: Papeles y recuerdos de un presidente del Perú*, v. IV (Lima: Editorial Universitaria, 1969), pp. 31-6.

⁴⁰ Perú, Ministerio de Salud Pública, Trabajo y Previsión Social, Dirección de Previsión Social, *Acción social del estado en el Perú* (Lima: s.n., 1938), p. 6. These restaurants were aimed at *obreros*, or blue-collar workers. A white-collar restaurant was created in the early 1940s but its existence was short-lived in part because *empleados*, white-collar workers, resented the fact that blue-collar workers also made use of the restaurant. See David S. Parker, *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900-1950* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 205. It is likely however, that poorer *empleados* made use of the *obrero* restaurants on a regular basis.

⁴¹ [Antonello Gerbi], *El Perú en marcha: Ensayo de geografía económica* (Lima: Banco Italiano-Lima, 1941), p. 305.

⁴² Quoted in Junta Departamental de Lima Pro-Desocupados, *Memoria del 1 de enero de 1935 al 31 de diciembre de 1936* (Lima, 1936), p. xlviii.

early 1940s, the *restaurantes populares* were being used also to feed Lima's growing population of schoolchildren. According to one set of statistics, the three central *restaurantes populares* in the capital had provided meals to more than half a million schoolchildren per year between 1942 and 1944.⁴³

The Benavides government presented the *restaurantes populares*, and other similar measures, as elements of a broader statist "social action" or, "corporatism," which, the government claimed, stood above partisan politics:

In general terms, [corporatism] represents the middle ground between individualism and socialism. It harmonizes the rights of man with the permanent interests of the State. Corporations, the unitary organizations of the productive, cultural, or other forces, are the foundations of social organization. The State protects private initiative, which it considers the most efficient instrument for the [pursuit] of the national interest, but at the same time, it subordinates individual goals to the higher goals of the nation. It organizes production according to a rational plan and with the invigoration of the nation as its purpose, [thus] eliminating conflicts between capital and labor.⁴⁴

Rather than representing elite interests, the state thus claimed to stand above them and adopted a role as arbitrator between the two great social actors, capital and labor.⁴⁵ As President Benavides himself noted in 1939: "As part of a close, fertile, and creative solidarity, the principles, norms, and postulates of an authentic social justice reign today in Peru. To have achieved this, as I have done, is one of my greatest satisfactions as a president."⁴⁶ In this rhetoric, the pursuits of social justice and state autonomy meshed to form the supporting structures of new and "modern" (rational) state-building and nation-building projects that aimed at revitalizing the nation-state ("the invigoration of the nation as its purpose") by suppressing class conflict in favor of class harmony. This rhetoric was indeed backed up by significantly expanded state

⁴³ See Junta Departamental de Lima Pro-Desocupados, *Memoria del 1 de enero de 1942 al 31 de diciembre de 1944* (Lima, 1946), p. 5.

⁴⁴ Quoted in José Ignacio López Soria, *El pensamiento fascista* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1981), p. 101.

⁴⁵ This rhetoric was clearly inspired by Italian corporatism, but, as Orazio Ciccarelli has shown, Benavides "obviously had no intellectual commitment to fascism" in contrast to what contemporary critics claimed and some historians sustain. See Orazio Ciccarelli, "Fascism and Politics during the Benavides Regime, 1933-1939: The Italian Perspective," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 70:3 (1990), p. 432. Although wrapped in a corporatist discourse, the rhetoric, and the policies that derived from it, was more likely a pragmatic response to the economic and political circumstances that Benavides encountered when he rose to power.

⁴⁶ "Mensaje presentado al Congreso del Perú por el Sr. General de División Oscar R. Benavides, Presidente Constitucional de la República, 1939," quoted in Roberto Mac-Lean y Estenós, *Sociología del Perú* (Mexico: UNAM, 1959), p. 160.

capacity.⁴⁷ Thanks to a rapidly improving economy, public expenditure rose from 91 million soles in 1932 to 221 million in 1938, with much of that invested in expanding the road network, while institutional development led to a proliferation of state institutions, such as new ministries (including a Ministry of Public Health, Labor and Social Foresight).⁴⁸ It is less clear whether increasing state capacity translated into increasing state autonomy. The rhetoric of corporatism as social justice was, in many ways, no more than rhetoric: though it claimed to stand above elite interests, repression in this period was clearly aimed at labor, not capital. An in-depth study of the social policies of the 1930s is required. But, as the analysis in the following section of the motives behind the creation of the restaurantes populares suggests, these policies were more than simple ploys to undermine support for APRA or the PCP.

There is little doubt that both the Sánchez Cerro and Benavides governments used social policy with a clear political intent. Arguably, statist “social action” formed one part of a two-pronged “populist” strategy aimed at curtailing industrial unrest and labor militancy.⁴⁹ The other part, as is well known, consisted of intense but selective repression of labor organizations and political parties of the left. In practice, the boundary between statist social action and repression was often blurred. In May 1931, in the middle of the general strike, the government issued a decree that suspended all civil liberties whenever a strike was declared.⁵⁰ More important, in early 1932, congress passed the Emergency Law, which handed the government unlimited powers to repress labor and political opponents. The political tension was raised as confrontations between the government and the radical parties became increasingly violent. The massacre of hundreds of Apristas in Trujillo in April 1932 by the army was followed in 1933 by the assassination of President Sánchez Cerro. In this increasingly volatile context, the “social action” policies became increasingly political, i.e. increasingly perceived and used as political tools in the struggle to neutralize an organized working class that was thought to be increasingly militant and potentially revolution-

⁴⁷ State capacity is understood as “the ability of the state to affect society, which in turn implies an ability to collect information, to influence people, and to control resources.” See Alan Knight, “The Modern Mexican State: Theory and Practice” in Miguel Angel Centeno and Fernando López-Alves, *The Other Mirror: Grand Theory through the Lens of Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 214-215.

⁴⁸ See David P. Werlich, *Peru: A Short History* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 201-220; Peter F. Klarén, *Peru: Society and Nationhood in the Andes* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 276-281.

⁴⁹ Populism is, of course, a debated concept. For a useful conceptual discussion, see Alan Knight, “Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, especially Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30:2 (1998), pp. 223-248.

⁵⁰ *La Tribuna*, 31 May 1931.

ary. Certainly, both APRA and the Communist Party saw the statist social action as a thinly veiled strategy to weaken their political appeal to organized labor. APRA, in particular, claimed (with some justification) that many of the policies implemented by the Benavides government had been lifted from its 1931 electoral program, while the PCP denounced the policies (and the Benavides government) as “fascist.” Arguably, the government’s “borrowing” of the Aprista project was evidence of the relative strength of APRA and organized labor, and the relative weakness of the government: the government had little choice but to offer what the opposition was offering. “The point was to show,” Gonzalo Portocarrero argues, “that the State could do what APRA was demanding.”⁵¹

This seems to have been the case with the *restaurantes populares*. APRA claimed that the government’s *restaurantes populares* were a mere copy of its own *Comedor Aprista* No. 1, which it had set up in November 1933 at No. 1073 Pobres Street, and which was shut down by the government on 31 January 1934. In the political opening of mid 1934 that followed Benavides rise to power, the *Comedor Aprista* was allowed to reopen, enabling the party to make improvements to its “comedor” while two new “comedores” were planned. The party boasted: “with financial resources A HUNDRED TIMES SMALLER than those available to the *Restaurante Popular* of the Development Ministry, we are successfully developing an Organization Plan to address the very real need of the People to have access to cheap, abundant, and hygienic food.”⁵² Prior to its closure, the *Comedor Aprista*, the party claimed, had been a success, it had even been profitable, despite the fact it had been set up with almost no money at all (according to one document the ‘capital’ of the comedor was a mere 1223.31 soles while the *restaurante popular* No.1 in Huaquilla Street had a capital of 154,874.59 soles): “Results so far: a constant increase in costumers, which we cannot meet because of a lack of economic resources; very high satisfaction among both natives and foreigners, because of our technical organization and nutritious food; Achievement of profits [. . .] which will be used to establish new *Comedores* and to serve as a fund for the ‘Tahuantinsuyo’ National Cooperative, as well as to improve our services in benefit of the needy classes and to establish other Cooperatives.” By contrast, the government’s *restaurante popular* No.1 had been a failure despite the “numerous resources” that Law 7612 provided and the fact that “with these resources one would have

⁵¹ Gonzalo Portocarrero, *De Bustamante a Odría: El fracaso del Frente Democrático Nacional, 1945-1950* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1983), p. 49.

⁵² AGN/PL/3.9.5.1.15.1.16.56, ‘Partido Aprista Peruano, Cooperativa de Comedores, Economía del Comedor, N. 9’ [15 October 1934].

expected that most of the problems associated with the provision of food to the working classes would have been solved.” Although 2000 people made use of it on a daily basis, the restaurante was losing money and failing in its objectives to provide cheap food for the working class, as indicated by the fact that one congressman had requested that the restaurante be sold off “because it is chipping away at the national budget”: “this congressman’s request indicates that the management of the Restaurant has failed to come up with a carefully studied plan to provide cheap and nutritious food to the People, without it resulting in the bankruptcy [of the Restaurant] or the shrinkage of resources required to expand that project.”⁵³

The above suggests that the statist social action of Peruvian governments in the 1930s, of which the restaurantes populares were a key element, corresponded, as others have suggested, to an attempt to “incorporate” labor into a new “populist” hegemonic project.⁵⁴ Through their statist social action, these governments “incorporated” workers by offering material benefits in exchange for political quiescence while, at the same time, through repression, they broke up militant unionism and the political parties of the left, thus neutralizing alternative political projects. In this sense, the restaurantes populares and, more generally, the provision of cheap food for the urban working class, could be seen as one of several arenas of political contestation between the Sánchez Cerro and Benavides governments and APRA and the PCP. It was both a symbolic arena and a brick and mortar one, since, for a while at least, workers were able to choose between the state-run restaurants that were situated in central Lima, the districts of La Victoria and Rímac, and in Callao, and the APRA-run comedor in Pobres Street. But that choice ended when, during the political closure of late 1934, the authorities closed down APRA’s comedor. Although it may be true, as APRA claimed, that the government’s restaurantes populares were uneconomical, in the years that followed, workers made use of them in large numbers.⁵⁵ If avail-

⁵³ AGN/PL/3.9.5.1.15.1.16.56, “Partido Aprista Peruano, Cooperativa de Comedores, Economía del Comedor, N. 9” [15 October 1934].

⁵⁴ On “incorporation,” see Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ The success of the restaurantes populares can perhaps be gauged from the fact that in the campaign for the 1936 presidential election, which was cancelled by Benavides, the Unión Revolucionaria called for a further expansion of the state’s role in overseeing public nutrition and for an expansion in the number of restaurantes populares: “We want a strictly supervised public nutrition; the prohibition of excessive speculation and profit associative with the sale of foodstuffs; severe penalties for those who adulterate food; the Public Nutrition Agency [Dirección de Alimentación Pública], to be given sufficient power to take control of the production, transport, and commercialization of foodstuffs; and the large-scale expansion of restaurantes populares, milk programs, and school refectories.” *Boletín del Partido Unión Revolucionaria* (Abancay), No. 1, August 1936.

able figures are to be believed, in the first three months of 1937 the four restaurants in Lima were visited by some 536,300 comensales [diners].⁵⁶ In 1938 alone, as we saw, some 8.6 million comensales made use of the restaurants.⁵⁷ As such, as traditional historiography contends, it seems sensible to argue that the success among Lima's urban workers of the *restaurantes populares*, and, by extension, of the other elements of statist social action, was the result of the capacity of the Benavides government to mobilize state resources to (a) repress the political opposition and (b) to create laws and institutions that in helping to improve, however marginally, the material conditions of urban workers effectively neutralized militancy and undermined the appeal of APRA, and to a lesser extent the PCP, among the working class. The creation of the *restaurantes populares*, therefore, was a typical populist measure and, furthermore, the fact that workers were drawn to, or duped into, making use of the services that the restaurants provided could be seen as evidence of the limited development of their class consciousness.

However, such an interpretation is unsatisfactory. As a number of historians of labor in twentieth-century Latin America have shown, populism in the "classic period" was a dynamic process, shaped from above and below, and cannot be adequately accounted for by approaches that focus narrowly on "incorporation" or "integration."⁵⁸ Populist politics in the 1930s and 1940s were the outcome of complex negotiations between populist leaders and clients, particularly the organized labor movement; negotiations that involved the distribution of both material and, just as important, symbolic benefits. As Daniel James suggests, "Peronism meant a greatly increased social and political presence for the working class within Argentine society. [. . .] There are, however, other factors that need to be taken into account in assessing Peronism's social meaning for the working class—factors which are far less tangible, far more difficult to quantify. We are dealing here with factors such as pride, self-respect and dignity."⁵⁹ Workers were drawn to Peronism because of the concrete material gains that resulted from "incorporation" but also because it entailed "an expanded notion of the meaning of citizenship and the workers' relations with the state, and a 'heretical' social component which spoke to working-class claims to greater social status, dignity within the workplace and beyond, and a denial of the elites' social and cultural pretensions."⁶⁰ But crucially, this was no mere instrumental relation-

⁵⁶ *La Voz del Obrero*, No. 19, 19 May 1937.

⁵⁷ Peru, Ministerio de Salud Pública, Trabajo y Previsión Social, Dirección de Previsión Social, *Acción social del estado en el Perú* (Lima: s.n., 1938), p. 6.

⁵⁸ See, in particular, James, *Resistance and Integration* and French, *The Brazilian Workers' ABC*.

⁵⁹ James, *Resistance and Integration*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ James, *Resistance and Integration*, p. 263.

ship: Peronism was shaped by its constituent forces. As James pithily notes, "Peronism in an important sense defined itself, and was defined by its working class constituency as a movement of political and social opposition, as a denial of the dominant elite's power, symbols and values."⁶¹ It was the Argentine working class that gave Peronism its political purchase.

Although Peru developed no comparable hegemonic project, like Peronism, the Peruvian governments of the 1930s, as we have seen, "preached the need to harmonize the interests of capital and labor within the framework of a benevolent state, in the interest of the nation and its economic development."⁶² As I have noted above, most historians have tended to see this discourse as little more than rhetoric and have portrayed the social policies that derived from it as no more than ploys to undermine support for the new radical political alternatives represented by APRA and the PCP. As such, these historians have failed to take seriously the social policies of the governments of the 1930s and have rarely been concerned with how workers experienced and perceived them, or to put it another way, with how statist social action was shaped from below. As a result, urban workers in Peru in the 1930s have tended to be seen as objects of the political projects of APRA or the PCP or of the "reactionary" projects of the Sánchez Cerro or Benavides governments. But, with few exceptions, they have yet to be examined as subjects of their own history. By looking at what drew workers to the *restaurantes populares*, I want to suggest ways in which we may begin to rescue Peruvian workers from what E. P. Thompson famously called "the enormous condescension of posterity" while at the same presenting a more complex interpretation of the motivations behind the social policies of the governments of the 1930s. It is, of course, difficult if not impossible to get into the minds of Limeño workers in the 1930s and to know with any certainty what considerations influenced their decisions to eat in one of the four *restaurantes populares* that existed in Lima. There are, of course, obvious reasons why workers ate in the restaurants. They were cheap and some meals, such as breakfast, were free for children.⁶³ But, by itself, the cheapness of the restaurants cannot explain why workers were drawn to the restaurants since cheap food was available elsewhere (in street stalls, markets, and, in Asian restaurants). In order to understand, therefore, why workers chose to eat there, we need to consider the "social meaning for the working class" of the *restaurantes populares*. The analysis of a particularly rich document, I suggest, can help us to do so.

⁶¹ James, *Resistance and Integration*, p. 39.

⁶² James, *Resistance and Integration*, p. 34.

⁶³ *La Voz del Obrero*, No. 19, 19 May 1937.

RESTAURANTES POPULARES AS CIVILIZING MISSION

Los restaurantes populares del Perú: Contribución al estudio del problema de la alimentación popular, published in Santiago, Chile, in 1936, was prepared by the Peruvian government and presented at the Labor Conference of the States of America [Conferencia del Trabajo de los Estados de América], organized by the International Labor Organization.⁶⁴ The book—which is 50 pages long and includes a number of photographs, illustrations and text—was used to showcase one aspect of the Benavides government's statist social action to an international conference on labor. Significantly, the book trumpeted the restaurantes populares as a success and as a blueprint that other governments in Latin America could copy: the book had been prepared as a result of “the fact that the organization of the Peruvian restaurantes populares is considered worthy of imitation or study in other countries.”⁶⁵ In this sense, the book provides an invaluable perspective on how the Benavides government sought to present its achievements in relation to labor to an international audience, and most important, to the ILO. In particular, this document is an expression of (a) how the Benavides government perceived the urban working class that the restaurantes populares were aimed at and (b) how the government understood its role vis-à-vis that working class. According to the book's “Presentación,” the restaurantes populares were conceived as both “true laboratories for the study of the effects of an adequate nutrition” and “schools of hygienic education for the people.” As this suggests, notions of science, education and public health were uppermost in the minds of the architects of the restaurantes populares. The restaurantes offered, on the one hand, an opportunity for controlled experimentation and the application of science to the nutrition of the working class, and on the other, ideal settings for educating the working class in notions of proper nutrition and public health.⁶⁶ As such, the restaurantes populares can be seen as an element in a broader “civilizing mission,” through which modernizing Peruvian elites, echoing similar processes elsewhere in Latin Amer-

⁶⁴ Available sources say little about who were the ideological architects of the restaurants, although what evidence exists suggests that Edgardo Rebagliati, a lawyer who played a central role in the creation of Peru's social security system, was a key figure. Along with Manuel B. Llosa, Peru's foreign minister, Rebagliati co-signed the introduction to the book.

⁶⁵ This may have had some results. In 1937, the Chilean National Nutrition Council established restaurantes populares with identical goals to the Peruvian restaurants. See Carlos Huneeus and María Paz Lanas, “Ciencia Política e historia: Eduardo Cruz-Coke y el estado de bienestar en Chile, 1937-1938,” *Historia* (Santiago), vol. 35 (2002), pp.151-186.

⁶⁶ As such, they represented a local example of worldwide development in the early twentieth century: the growth of food and nutrition science and the increasing role of the state in regulating the production and commercialization of food. See David F. Smith and Jim Phillips, eds., *Food, Science, Policy and Regulation: International and Comparative Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

ica, sought to instil “modern” habits and values in a population considered both culturally and racially backward.⁶⁷ Shaped by the realization that racial improvement resulting from mass European immigration was unlikely to occur (for many, the preferred option), the “civilizing mission” of Peruvian elites drew on Neo-Lamarckian eugenic ideas prevalent at the time, which suggested that the provision of a corrective social environment could lead to a general improvement in the “race,” i.e. in the “quality” of the population.⁶⁸

The “civilizing” function of the restaurants is made explicit in the book through three central themes: science, dignity and quality. The idea that the restaurantes populares were organized along scientific principles is present throughout the book. The location of the four restaurantes populares, according to the report, had been “subject to careful study.” Similarly, the purchase of food was subject to precise estimations and “results from a calculation based on its consumption in a short period of days (from 8 to 12) and its conservation in perfect conditions,” as were the meals: once a menu was approved, “we proceed, immediately, to calculate the rations, in conformity with our size and weight tables, which are deduced, experimentally, from individual consumption, which is constantly observed and corrected, taking into account the average daily attendance of costumers.” Like the purchase of food and the preparation of meals, the design of the restaurantes was a result of scientific study: the plans of restaurants (included in the book) allowed “a swift functioning and efficient distribution which facilitates the inspection of services, the attention to costumers, and the movement of the restaurant staff.” Indeed, “when calculating the structures [of the building] we have tried to keep obstructions to circulation to a minimum”; “the dining hall, the kitchens and the service corridors are sizeable and bereft of columns”; “in the rooms where a need for more light would have represented a considerable cost, we have reduced the number of columns.” It is worth noting that although the absence of columns and, more generally, of obstacles to the circulation of waiters and costumers was presented as resulting from a careful scientific assessment of how to provide the most economic and efficient service, it also facilitated supervision. The idea of restaurants as “panopticons” is similarly found in a section entitled “Customer service—control measures,” where one of the roles of the service staff is defined as, “the strict vigilance over the integrity and conservation of all

⁶⁷ See David S. Parker, “Civilizing the City of Kings: Hygiene and Housing in Lima, Peru,” in Ronn Pineo and James A. Baer, eds., *Cities of Hope: People, Protests, and Progress in Urbanizing Latin America, 1870-1930* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 153-178.

⁶⁸ On the influence of neo-Lamarckian eugenics in Latin America, see Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

service utensils in use.” Meanwhile, all the restaurantes employed a “guardianeria,” whose function was to “[avoid] agglomerations and [ensure] the calm circulation of customers.” Finally, we learn, “the doors of the restaurant are subject to a strict vigilance.”

The other idea that is present throughout the book is the notion that the restaurantes populares would help dignify the worker by providing him (and her) with an environment where a series of values were upheld and honored and where he could learn to espouse those values by making them his own. Indeed, the function of the restaurantes was not only to “provide workers with healthy, abundant and cheap nourishment” but also to provide them with the means to “save comfortably their physical and moral patrimony.” The food was not only cheap; it was “pleasant, comprehensive, adequate, and *harmonious*” (stress added). The conferment of values was both explicit and, more important, implicit or subliminal. In all four restaurants, “notices have been put up discretely on walls in different areas, inviting costumers, courteously, without judgment: to take care of the building ‘that belongs to the People’, to remove their hats, to wash their hands, to not spit on the floor, etc.” Nationalism, or indeed, xenophobic tendencies are given a nod: “both in the construction and in the installation of the restaurants we have given priority to native-born workers, artisans, white-collar employees, suppliers and managers, as well as to locally-sourced building materials.” But values are also intended to be conferred by the restaurants themselves and, in particular, by workers’ experience of them. Hygiene is underlined throughout: in the Almacén “the most exacting hygienic precautions” are observed; food is placed on shelves that “ensure its ventilation and isolation from the floor and all types of contamination,” while “the cleanliness of the restaurant and the observance of strict hygienic conditions in its maintenance, [which are] uppermost concerns of the Management in accordance with regulations, have been maintained to this day, a fact that has met with the warm approval of costumers and visitors, and resulted in highly favorable comments in the press.” Punctuality is similarly stressed: food was served from 11 am to 2 pm for lunch and 6 to 9 pm for dinner, “precise times.” In combining scientific organization and values such as hygiene and punctuality, the book suggests, a dignified atmosphere was achieved in the restaurantes. The “mood” of the restaurants was described as “dignified and hygienic,” while the architectural style was “sober and beautiful.”

Yet a third and perhaps more surprising theme is present in the book: quality. Quality is central both to the restaurants as structures and to the restaurants as a service offered to workers. The use of high quality materials is stressed throughout: “all building material—of the highest quality.”

The toilets “can compete with the best in establishments of this type”; “electric services have been installed with first-class materials”; “the furnishings and appliances can be classed as top quality.” Similarly, the quality of the service is emphasized. Each employee was assigned a separate uniform (“Cooks: white jacket and hat, blue kaki apron; Controllers: white overalls; Dining hall waiters: white jacket and apron, with a numbered badge on the lapel; Cutlery waiters: black jacket and white apron, also with a numbered badge.” As photographs in the book reveal, waiters were impeccably attired and the service was carefully choreographed:

[. . .] After being welcomed at his arrival to the restaurant, the costumer is guided by the porters to the ticket window, and thereafter to the dining hall, and shown to his table. Two waiters approach the costumer. The ‘dining hall’ waiter takes the costumer’s ticket and the ‘cutlery’ waiter sets down five pieces on the table: a spoon, a fork, a knife, a teaspoon, and a paper napkin. [After the meals and coffee or tea are served] the waitressing operations terminate, under the strict vigilance of ad hoc employees, who will have verified the order and exactitude of the service personnel’s movements, either in the opportune revision of the cutlery and meals served to each costumer, without omission or delay, or in the observance of the outmost politeness with the clients, receiving in a friendly manner every request, complaint or observation, which they will try to address to the best of their abilities.

The careful planning involved in waiting on costumers responded to various goals: “on the one hand, the greatest customer satisfaction, resulting not only from the quality and abundance of the meals, but also from the courteous and affable treatment that is provided, without distinctions or preferences” and “the precise, speedy, and opportune nature of the personalized service, exempt of mortifying delays.”

Why the insistence on science, dignity, and quality? No doubt it helped to “sell” the restaurantes and more generally the state’s “social action” to the international audience at the Santiago conference, by presenting it as undeniably modern and enlightened. The conference gave an opportunity to the Benavides government to showcase the progressive character of his regime: by emphasizing the care and attention that had gone into designing, building, and running the restaurants, Benavides sought to make a point about his government’s policies towards labor more generally, and indeed, about the nature of his government and its achievements in other fields. As delegates to the conference, it is likely that that is how we would have read the book. As historians, the book offers a more interesting interpretation. As suggested above, and as my analysis of the discourse that dominates the book—with its insistence on science, dignity, quality—seems to confirm, the restaurantes popu-

lares can be seen as an element in a broader set of “civilizing” measures. As David Parker, Marcos Cueto, and others have shown, at the turn of the twentieth century, new professional sectors, particularly lawyers and physicians, started to identify the urban poor, Lima’s version of the Parisian “dangerous classes,” as both culturally and racially degenerate and a threat, both biological and political, to the social body, and to implement measures (of a medical and policing nature) to counteract those threats.⁶⁹ In Peru, as elsewhere, these measures were pioneered in the sphere of public health (particularly with respect to (a) unsanitary housing and its perceived contribution to the development of epidemic disease such as bubonic plague and (b) prostitution, which was blamed for the spread of venereal disease) but soon after became extensive to nutrition (probably as result of a growing awareness of the debilitating effects of gastrointestinal disease). The establishment of the *restaurantes populares*, in this sense, corresponded to the high point of state intervention in the sphere of popular nutrition in the early twentieth century.

The analysis above suggests a more complex interpretation of the motives behind the creation of the *restaurantes populares*. At one level, yes, the restaurants fulfilled a “populist” political role. By providing employment to workers and cheap meals, it was hoped, the restaurants helped to neutralize the appeal of radical alternatives. But, at another level, the *restaurantes populares* were clearly the product of a confluence of ideas about (a) the character of a Limeño and, more broadly, Peruvian population, increasingly perceived through a scientific or “medicalized” gaze influenced by eugenic thinking, and (b) the role of the state, and of a modernizing elite associated to the state, in “improving” that population through the inculcation (often by way of “modern” institutions) of specific values and habits, such as cleanliness, punctuality, and respect for order. Naturally, the political and “civilizing” motives overlapped and reinforced each other, since the idea was that the *restaurantes populares* provided an environment that would help to mould the urban poor into model workers, who, once in possession of the values conferred by the restaurants and their environment, would instinctively shun the radical political alternatives.⁷⁰ It is in this sense, as I sug-

⁶⁹ Parker, “Civilizing the City of Kings.” On the association between public health and the civilizing impulse of modernizing elites, see also Marcos Cueto, *El regreso de las epidemias: Salud y sociedad en el Perú del siglo XX* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1997); and, for the nineteenth century, Jorge Lossio, *Acequias y gallinazos: Salud ambiental en Lima del siglo XIX* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2003). On housing policy, see Thomas Crupi, “Nation Divided, City Divided: Urbanism and its Relation to the State, 1920-1940,” in Proyecto Historia Uni, ed., *Construyendo el Perú II: Aportes de ingenieros y arquitectos* (Lima: Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería, 2001), pp. 155-177.

⁷⁰ Lack of space prevents a discussion of the gendered dimension of the conferment of values in the *restaurantes populares*. However, the presence of “family only” dining areas and the provision of free

gested above, that the restaurantes populares offer a useful perspective from which to examine the interplay of populist politics and state formation in 1930s Peru. But we can take the analysis further, albeit more tentatively. The emphasis on science, dignity, and quality may have helped sell the restaurantes populares to the international audience in Santiago but it may also explain why workers were drawn to them. This becomes apparent when we place the restaurantes populares within the broader discussion of the politics of food in early twentieth-century Lima. This means placing the restaurantes populares alongside Asian restaurants, which, as I suggested, had become a key source of nourishment for the urban working class. It also means placing the restaurantes populares alongside the racist and xenophobic working-class constructions of Asian food and Asian food establishments. Finally, as I will attempt to do by means of a conclusion, it means placing the restaurantes populares within constructions of working-class identity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I argued in the first part of this article, although the urban working class became increasingly dependent on Asian restaurants for cheap food in the first decades of the twentieth century, it reproduced elite racial discourses about Asian degeneration, immorality, and disease. In stressing their racial and moral distance to those who, in the end, provided them with an affordable means of subsistence, urban workers attempted to affirm a sense of collective identity based on the absence of those negative characteristics assigned to Asian immigrants. Asians became all that “Peruvian” workers were not, or aspired not to be. The logic that underpinned the construction of difference between “Peruvian” workers and Asian immigrants was the same logic that underpinned the construction of difference between the restaurantes populares and the Chinese restaurants: the restaurantes populares were all that the Chinese restaurants were not.⁷¹ The opposition between the restaurantes populares and the Asian restaurants was stressed in an article published in 1937 in the newspaper of an artisan organization:

One of the most feasible concerns of the present government is to provide the people with good and cheap food. This has been the motivation for the cre-

meals to children suggest that the intellectual architects of the restaurants also hoped to contribute to strengthening traditional gender roles and to the state's maternalist policies. On maternalist policies in this period, see María Emma Mannarelli, *Limpías y modernas: Género, higiene y cultura en la Lima del novecientos* (Lima: Ediciones Flora Tristan, 1999).

⁷¹ This raises the question of whether this was what the architects of the restaurantes populares had intended in the first place. I believe that this is unlikely. It would have required a degree of intellectual sophistication (and cunning) in matters related to working-class identity that was uncharacteristic of the time.

ation of the Restaurantes Populares. But the Japanese continue to run a series of diners [*fondines*] and most cafés in Lima. Especially in Lima, the Japanese have monopolized this type of business. But what worries us is not that they are monopolists. It is, rather, the way that they work. These people, their businesses, and the products they sell, show little sign of hygiene and of a concern for cleanliness and of the beneficial effects of salubrity. The conditions in their businesses leave a lot to be desired and represent a great danger for *those who have become accustomed to frequent them*. Hence the need to exercise a strict control in order to ensure that all these businesses are run in such a way that they provide excellent hygienic conditions.⁷²

Unlike the backward or degenerate Asian restaurants, this article appears to suggest, the restaurantes populares were modern and scientific. They were comfortable, clean, and hygienic. The food was nutritious and healthy. The atmosphere was dignified.

Admittedly, direct evidence of an opposition between Asian restaurants and restaurantes populares among Lima's working class is limited. But it is significant that, as the epigraph to this article shows, Limeños' recollection of the restaurantes populares half a century after their creation still associated the restaurants with notions of decency. This seems to confirm that what attracted Limeño workers, at least a considerable proportion of them, to the restaurantes populares was not merely the fact that cheap food was available. In being (or being perceived as) the very opposite of supposedly unhygienic and indecent Asian restaurants, the restaurantes populares provided workers with an environment in which their desire for respectability and their aspiration to decency could be further reaffirmed and played-out or performed. Indeed, it could be argued that eating in the restaurante popular became, in the late 1930s, one of the most accessible and affordable forms of making a claim of decency for Lima's workers. In this sense, the restaurantes populares could be seen as having become indispensable to the affirmation of a working-class identity that depended, in large measure, on the construction of difference with Asian immigrants. Tellingly, the values that the architects of the restaurantes populares sought to inculcate in Lima's working class were the values that the workers saw as their own; indeed, that they saw as the values that made them different from or superior to the Chinese and Japanese. It is this ironic and yet revealing coincidence that, I would argue, largely explains the success of the restaurantes populares. It

⁷² *La Voz del Obrero*, No. 19, 19 May 1937. Note the change in stress from Chinese to Japanese restaurants, a reflection of broader anti-Japanese sentiments in the late 1930s born out of fears regarding Japanese militarism and the belief that Peru's Japanese community were preparing the way for an invasion.

also points to the need to take seriously (and to try to get a sense of) workers' self-perceptions, anxieties and aspirations, when thinking more generally about the social policies of the 1930s, the nature of populism and corporatism, and Peruvian, and Latin American, working-class history.

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