Restaurants as "Post Racial" Spaces. *Soul Food* and Symbolic Eviction in Bedford-Stuyvesant (Brooklyn)

Sharon Zukin

Dans Ethnologie française 2014/1 Vol. 44 , pages 135 à 147
Éditions Presses Universitaires de France

ISSN 0046-2616
ISBN 9782130628903
DOI 10.3917/ethn.141.0135
Date de mise en ligne : 26/02/2014

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Sharon Zukin
Brooklyn College and Graduate School of the City University of New York

RÉSUMÉ

Les restaurants comme espaces "post-raciaux". *Soul Food* et éviction symbolique dans le quartier de Bedford-Stuyvesant à Brooklyn
Pendant de nombreuses années, la prédominance de restaurants bon marché et de restaurants servant les plats traditionnels du Sud rural, dont beaucoup des migrants afro-américains étaient originaires, incarnait l'icône du ghetto américain. Les restaurants proposant de la *Soul Food* offraient un espace social où se pouvait se développer et se mettre en scène une identité « noire », et où, bien qu'ils ne soient propriétaires ni des bâtiments ni des magasins, ceux-ci pouvaient y jouir d'un sentiment de « propriété morale ». Toutefois, depuis quelques années, un mouvement de migration transnationale et de gentrification à Bedford-Stuyvesant, un quartier noir à Brooklyn, contribue à la diversification locale des restaurants, ce qui pose un défi à l'identité afro-américaine.
Mots-clés : Espace post-racial. Ghetto. Gentrification. *Soul Food*. Restaurant.

Sharon Zukin
Department of Sociology
Brooklyn College and Graduate School
City University of New York
365 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016
USA
szukin@gc.cuny.edu

When you climb the stairs from the subway station at Fulton Street and Nostrand Avenue in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a neighborhood of Central Brooklyn, you enter a bustling intersection filled with cars, buses, trucks, and pedestrians, nearly all of whom, you may notice, are not typically classified as "white." [1] Most faces are the shades of brown, from tawny golden to chocolate and ebony, which mark the African diaspora. But a few men wear turbans that signify they are Sikhs, others are in long, white djellabas and kufis, and several women cover themselves with the black hijab despite the heat of the sun on a summer afternoon. A few white faces appear, especially at the end of the workday, when young people with tattoos ride bikes or walk briskly through the crowd. This streetscape shows that, despite its historic identity as an African American ghetto with a still dominant black majority, Bed-Stuy now has an ethnically diverse population. Halal meat markets and Muslim-owned stores cluster near the Masjid At-Taqwa, a large mosque two blocks east of Nostrand Avenue. Meanwhile, residential streets to the north and south are active sites of gentrification

Fulton Street looks like commercial thoroughfares in many low-income neighborhoods in American cities, especially those with a majority of African American or Latino residents. Most stores are small and individually owned—shops that Americans call "mom and pops," in reference to their family ownership—but there are also large chain stores selling low-price merchandise and fast food. Whether the stores are large or small, their plate glass windows are plastered with posters promoting the wares sold within. Overhead, huge plastic shop signs scream for attention. On the sidewalk, racks of cheap blouses or jeans are set out to lure shoppers. There are cell phone stores, wig shops, and nail salons, which are all undesirable signs, as the

Photo 1 . Fast food intersection : the four corners of Fulton street and Nostrand Avenue. Photos by author.

director of the local business improvement district says, of the neighborhood's low status as a retail destination [field notes and interview, 2010].

The abundance of fast-food restaurants, in contrast to a lack of stores selling fresh fruits and vegetables, marks Bed-Stuy as a "food desert" [Zahilay, 2010]. According to one resident, typical places to buy meals are "bodegas [small grocery shops] and Chinese joints selling junk food" [Cardwell, 2010]. In fact, a fast-food restaurant presides over each quadrant of the Fulton-Nostrand crossroads. A "corner deli" sells sandwiches and "halal breakfast foods," a local take-out shop sells pizza by the slice, and franchise chains on the two remaining corners offer fried foods and burgers: the transnational KFC and Caribbean-themed Golden Krust. Nearby are a McDonald's and a Burger King, as well as many small, individually-owned restaurants with low prices, fluorescent lights, and plastic furniture.

Some are Caribbean take-out shops, owned by, and catering to, the area's longest standing immigrant population. Ali's Trinidad Roti Shop has been in business for 25 years; the line of customers waiting to place an order for vegetable- or halal meat-filled rolls sometimes extends all the way out on the sidewalk. The tiny A&A Bake and Doubles Shop, opened around the corner by another Trinidadian in the early 2000s, specializes in low-price sandwiches of curried chick peas or vegetable combinations like spinach and pumpkin, made with either thick pieces of fried dough ("bakes") or thin chickpea flour crepes ("doubles"), accompanied

by bottles of ginger beer. Newer, larger restaurants like Island Salad and Melanie's Juice Bar offer fruit shakes alongside traditional Caribbean curries, rotis, and spinach rice, and feature signs promoting healthy foods.

North of Fulton Street, the residential blocks are much quieter. Lined by trees and stately, brick and brownstone houses built in the nineteenth century, they offer a calm place for local folks to gather in twos or threes to pass the time on a sultry summer afternoon. Some residents lounge in plastic chairs on the sidewalk outside Laundromats and small bodegas, many owned by immigrants from Central Asia who do not reside in the neighborhood. Here and there, barbecue grills are stationed in the small front gardens, waiting for a weekend party. Despite the overwhelming presence of churches, social service agencies, and used furniture stores, some blocks show the gradual but nonetheless dramatic growth of stylish new restaurants, which are frequently understood as an effect of, or a prelude to, gentrification

New Italian restaurants and sushi bars may not erase all traces of the neighborhood's historic black identity. But it is clear that they complicate and transform it. The "soul food" kitchens that have been both a historic trope and a material base of culture in Bedford-Stuyvesant for many years are being modernized, globalized, and, to some degree, displaced. This raises profound questions for the future of African-American identity in urban districts like Bed-Stuy, where blacks are gradually losing their majority status. Are new restaurants in some ways "post-racial" spaces? In city after city, demographic changes, including the growing presence and diversity of immigrants, intersect with the media discourse that began after the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, casting the United States as a "post-racial" society where racial categories no longer matter.

So much economic inequality still separates blacks and whites that researchers scoff at the idea of an overall "post-racial" transformation [Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012]. Deep ideological differences divide blacks who voted overwhelmingly for President Obama's re-election in 2012 and most white men, who voted for his opponent. Yet when you walk through Bedford-Stuyvesant today, you wonder if the variety of new restaurants creates a new social space for developing and performing a "post-racial" identity. Or does the gradual disappearance of soul food restaurants suggest that the former ghetto's cultural identity is still dominated by race but is becoming more complex? In either case, traditional urban "black" folks are experiencing a symbolic eviction.

Photo 2. Women and children pause in front of a corner food store that testifies to the neighborhood's ethnic and cultural diversity. Signs on the window say the store accepts electronic payment cards which are part of the state welfare system (EBT), always found in low-income neighborhoods, and also sells calling cards, frequent in neighborhoods where immigrants live. Though these women are dressed as observant Muslims, the shop sign above the door features a large picture of a ham sandwich, which contradicts halal dietary laws. Photo by author.

■ Restaurants and racial identity

The paradigmatic identification of black folks with soul food reflects the historical formation of urban ghettos by migration, racial segregation, and economic inequality. American Blacks share the foodways of two great migrations: the African Diaspora, on the one hand, and the movement northward of African Americans from the southeastern states [Harris, 2011]. Soul food restaurants reproduce a "taste of home" in the rural southern cooking of the ghetto's most numerous residents: dishes like "chicken and waffles" or "ribs" that are deep fried, slathered in spicy sauce and barbecued, or cooked in lard, garnished by long-simmered greens with bacon. Though at first these foods were looked down upon by more affluent, highly urbanized blacks, by the 1930s they were adopted as the common culinary idiom of urban black communities [Poe, 1999]. For this reason, "soul food" became a popular term among all African Americans. With increasing "mainstreaming" of black cultural genres such as rhythms and blues or "soul music" in the 1960s and 1970s, soul food became a popular term among non-blacks as well.

At the same time, two processes of social and cultural change challenged the hegemonic identification of soul food with American black cultural identity [Opie, 2008]. On the one hand, growing numbers of black immigrants from the Caribbean, Panama, and Guyana settled in majority-black neighborhoods, especially in cities on the East coast like New York, and brought Caribbean ingredients and recipes to grocery stores and restaurants there. On the other hand, growing awareness of the importance of diet prompted concern about soul food's causal relation to heart disease and diabetes. Today, the prominence of restaurants specializing in fats and carbs, alongside a relative lack of grocery stores and supermarkets selling fresh fruit and vegetables, prompts anxiety among public health advocates about ghetto residents' high rates of obesity and diabetes [Larson et al., 2009]. In response, many urban blacks are changing their food habits. Even in Harlem, the "capital of black America," longtime soul food restaurants have closed down in recent years, while others have incorporated "healthy options" like vegetarian dishes into their menus [Williams, 2008].

If in nutritional terms soul food restaurants are unhealthy, as a social space they are an oasis of racial solidarity and belonging. Familiar recipes from "down home," a welcoming owner and servers, relatively low prices, and the visible racial homogeneity of most, if not all, participants create a "third space" [Oldenburg, 1989) between home and work where a black racial identity can be publicly performed. Some soul food restaurants become community institutions where local residents gather to eat and schmooze alongside politicians, ministers, and business leaders. The restaurant called Sylvia's in Harlem, whose founder Sylvia Woods was known as the "Queen of Soul Food," provided an obligatory lunch stop when Barack Obama visited New York during his 2008 presidential campaign [Gregory, 2012].

Though by the time Sylvia died her restaurant had evolved into a well-known destination for tourists, most soul food restaurants fail to attract non-black diners—whether it is because of their lack of comfort with the neighborhood, with the all-black atmosphere, or with the food. It is difficult, in other words, to separate perceptions of soul food restaurants from a complicated matrix of cognitive, evaluative, and social processes, focusing on the restaurant, its menu and patrons, and its local urban context, an area which has long been stigmatized by poverty, crime, and racial disadvantage.

■ "Moral ownership"

During decades of racial segregation and economic decline, African Americans who continued to live in ghettos developed a defensive sense of pride in their neighborhoods. Whether this reflected the "Janus-faced" process of ghettoization that increases solidarity as well as repression [Wacquant, 2012], or the long history of protests against local merchants for selling goods of inferior quality and refusing to hire blacks [Cohen, 2003], black residents showed a sense of "moral" ownership of the streets and stores over which they had no power. "I like Harlem because it belongs to me," says the fictional character Jesse B. Semple created by the writer Langston Hughes. "You say the houses ain't mine. Well, the sidewalk is—and don't you push me off" [Wacquant, 2012: 11; Deener, 2007]. This defensive pride has often led to a pervasive and corrosive suspiciousness of non-black merchants, who are seen as intruders and exploiters. During the urban riots of the 1960s, black looters attacked shops owned by whites. In the 1980s and 1990s, prolonged hostilities were exchanged after new Korean immigrants opened shops in majority-black areas in Harlem and Brooklyn, and riots following Rodney King's arrest took a toll on Korean-owned stores in Los Angeles (Min, 1996). The remaining white-owned stores in Harlem were not immune to similar confrontations and violence [Kasinitz and Haynes, 1996].[2]

Under these hostile conditions, few entrepreneurs wanted to open new stores and restaurants. Even fast-food franchises refused to locate in mainly black urban areas if illegal drug sales were highly visible [Ford and Beveridge, 2004]. During the late 1990s this situation began to change. Michael Porter, a professor at Harvard Business School, told retail corporations that they were missing out on an opportunity to make money in inner cities [Porter, 1995]. The Clinton Administration established empowerment zones that provided financial subsidies in some high-poverty areas for new business development [Zukin, 2010]. Moreover, the gradual movement of gentrifiers, both black and white, into neighborhoods that had been stigmatized as ghettos expanded the local market for better stores and restaurants. Newcomers opened boutiques, bistros, and cafés, becoming retail entrepreneurs who would serve their own taste community as well as that of longtime middle class residents [Zukin, 2010, 2012]. But placing bistros and cafés in predominantly black neighborhoods aroused a fierce ambivalence. A

new espresso bar could be both greeted with hostility as a sign of gentrification and imminent displacement, and welcomed as a harbinger of a better quality of life for all [Freeman, 2006; Papachristos *et al.*, 2011].

Today, a dramatic tension between moral and legal ownership persists in urban areas formerly known as ghettos. Though blacks often still lack legal ownership of much of the property there, including housing and businesses, they retain a strong sense of moral ownership of the community. This is experienced as a sense of belonging in public eating places such as the ribs joint and Dunkin' Donuts, and signified by suspicion of, or hostility to, the presence of other cultural communities such as those embodied by a trendy bistro or café. Traditional soul food restaurants confirm African Americans' moral ownership of the neighborhood—even if the buildings that they are in are not owned by blacks. By contrast, redevelopment that brings "better" restaurants, especially those that attract white customers, tangibly suggests that blacks have lost their place in the city. This is not just an issue in New York. The redevelopment of U Street, a commercial strip in a formerly devastated, black neighborhood in Washington D.C., has sparked a heated debate online about whether new restaurants and bars, many owned and patronized by people with no African origins, are erasing the area's historic racial identity [Crockett, 2012; Franke-Ruta, 2012; on Newark, New Jersey, see Allen, 2012].

In these urban areas, a growing market of young gentrifiers, both black and white, alongside longtime black homeowners, creates the opportunity for new restaurants, cafés, and bars to become spaces for performing a "post-racial" identity. In a different way, so do new restaurants that cater primarily to Muslim customers who may be immigrants or African-American converts from Christianity. In these spaces, social class and cultural capital may be more important signifiers than race.

■ "Do or Die, Bed-Stuy"

Bedford-Stuyvesant provides an interesting place to test the factors that shape restaurants as "post-racial" spaces. The neighborhood is the historic core of a large black ghetto, formerly known as "Brooklyn's Harlem" and now famous as the birthplace of the rapper-entrepreneur Jay-Z. Though a community of free blacks was established there in the 1840s, the entire district

Photo 3. A cacophony of signs welcomes customers to Soul Food Kitchen. Photo by author.

gradually shifted from a predominantly white to a black majority between 1930 and 1970 [Connolly, 1977; Wilder, 2000]. Rising poverty, high crime rates, and abandonment of property plagued the area for the next half-century. In few decades, it has become a home to migrants from many regions of the world as well as to longtime African American and Caribbean populations.

Between 1970 and1990 Bedford-Stuyvesant lost one-third of its residents and almost one-fifth of its households; 82 percent of the population was black and the remaining residents were Latino [Rusk, 1999]. Muggings and burglaries were often seen in broad daylight on Fulton Street, Bed-Stuy's major commercial thoroughfare, yet the police were either absent or unable to provide protection. Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* (1989) dramatized a seething hostility between the majority black population and Italian-American owners of a local pizzeria who, despite working hard in the restaurant every day, represented a hegemonic white culture to young, unemployed, black residents. Around this time a rap song popularized the defiant slogan "Do or Die, Bed-Stuy," which was understood as both the neighborhood's epitaph and a collective expression of its will to survive. As recently as 1999, a visiting urban researcher noted few positive signs [Rusk, 1999]. He saw a new Burger King franchise—but it had bullet-proof Plexiglas around the counter area. He visited a Pathmark Supermarket, the first new supermarket to come to Bedford-Stuyvesant in at least twenty years,

but it was built like a fortress. At the major crossroads of Fulton Street and Nostrand Avenue, the empty expanse of closed and shuttered storefronts was only relieved by street vendors hawking their wares.

This image contrasts dramatically with current conditions. The crime epidemic associated with crack cocaine abated during the 1990s. Street vendors were banned by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Many nineteenth-century houses have gradually been restored and are attracting new homeowners and investors, some from overseas. Most important, though the population remains predominantly black, the numbers of white residents have exploded, especially in the area to the west, near the multiracial, gentrified neighborhoods of Fort Greene and Clinton Hill, and in the east in and around the historic landmark district of Stuyvesant Heights [Roberts, 2011]. Today, restaurants in Bed-Stuy reflect all of these social, cultural, and demographic changes. Their menus, décor, owners, and customers construct a range of possibilities for developing and performing a racialized identity, varying from the "downscale" Soul Food Kitchen and the Halal Restaurant, both on Fulton Street, to the "shabby chic" Ms. Dahlia's Café, on Nostrand Avenue, and the "gentrified" Peaches, on Lewis Avenue in Stuyvesant Heights. These variations are expressed in, and moderated by, the restaurants' presence on websites, on social media, and in online reviews.[3]

My students and I carried out interviews and repeated ethnographic observations at Soul Food Kitchen, The Halal Restaurant, Ms. Dahlia's Café, and Peaches, between 2009 and 2012. We also looked at the restaurants' own websites; articles about them in online media, including major local newspapers and food blogs; posts about them on social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Foursquare (which, in contrast to the others, is a location-based social networking website for smart phones); and online reviews in major magazines, local newspapers, and www.yelp.com. Yelp is perhaps the most important online review site in the United States for local retail businesses and services, including restaurants. Established in the U.S. in 2004 by the founder of PayPal and other investors, within several years Yelp spread to Canada, Europe, and Australia. Its business model is based on developing online communities, connected to brick-and-mortar businesses, in different cities. By 2013, Yelp's U.S. website attracted 100 million unique visitors a month, and research showed that getting positive reviews on Yelp increases restaurants' revenue [Luca, 2011].

■ Soul Food Kitchen

A narrow storefront wedged between a Caribbean restaurant and a Chinese restaurant on Fulton Street, Soul Food Kitchen has been selling take-out dishes cooked in both Southern and West Indian traditions since the year 2000. As at many cheap, individually-owned restaurants and bodegas throughout the city, its façade is a visual cacophony of signs listing menu items and a flashing, scrolling LED (light-emitting diode) display. Small plastic flags wave in the air from wires strung out on the street. The flags, the awning, and many of the signs are in bright, primary colors: red, yellow and blue. Beneath the restaurant's name, printed in blue letters, the red awning announces: "Rotisserie House." This claim is reinforced by two large photo-realist images of a plump roasted chicken—one on the awning itself and the other on the canopy that stretches from the door to the sidewalk. Along the yellow edge of the awning you can read the names of the best-known dishes of southern barbecue: ribs, collard greens, yams, macaroni and cheese. But wait; a small sign above the LED display adds "Specials/ Jamaican Food." This theme is reinforced by a sign on the door for a peppery, grilled Caribbean specialty: "Jerk chicken wings, 99 cents"; another sign below offers a discount, "10 pcs for $9.00."[4]

Midway down the front window, more signs state the names of fish that presumably are also available: red snapper, crab cakes, tilapia, salmon, "frog legs," and king crab. The names of the fish confirm what yet another sign announces: "Seafood Heaven." Underneath, a pair of signs each proclaims "Fresh Soups Daily," beginning with cow foot soup, a Caribbean specialty. Below, another sign lists desserts, including Italian ices and "real fruit smoothies." The LED display adds "We Deliver." There are so many signs you can barely see through the window. Maybe that doesn't matter, for the door is open, even on the hottest days of summer. Unlike in most restaurants in New York City, there is no air conditioning. A large black fan on the floor whirs behind the ATM cash machine which is installed just inside the entrance. Most of the interior is occupied by an open kitchen area and a counter with two refrigerated, glass display cases, one along the right side of the restaurant, for cakes, and the other along the back, for prepared vegetable dishes. There are only two high wooden chairs, so customers stand while they wait for their orders to be prepared. Some of them watch a television which hangs from the ceil-

ing high above the counter. They have time to watch because preparing an order takes up to 20 minutes.

Behind one of the display cases, glass and stainless steel refrigerators hold bottles of soft drinks. Red and yellow signs taped on the refrigerator doors list dishes and prices; a small aluminum plate which is also taped on the refrigerator indicates the size of a $7 dish, and a larger Styrofoam container taped alongside shows the $12 size. Prices are low, portions are large. The food tastes fresh, and each dish is prepared to order. Despite the "old-style" signage and lack of amenities, the red velvet cake is topped with icing made with the traditional cream cheese, not a cheaper, vanilla-flavored frosting. The heavily sweetened, iced tea is supersize, though it is more expensive than at either McDonald's or another soul food restaurant on a side street. The owner of Soul Food Kitchen is an African American man in his 40s. Wearing a t-shirt and jeans, he stands behind the counter, taking orders and handing the finished dishes to customers when they are brought out of the kitchen by a Latino cook in a long white apron and uniform. When you want to buy a piece of cake but tell him you have no cash and only a debit card, he gives you a slice of cake for free and doesn't mention the ATM. He is a friendly man, chatting with a friend who stops by when there isn't much business. The friend compliments your sandals.

Another day, the owner is working in the back, and orders are taken by an older black man and a black woman in her 30s. The woman chats with a Latina customer while she waits for her order. The television news is reporting on the death of Don Cornelius, the creator of the television dance program *Soul Train* which was popular among young people, especially African Americans, from the 1970s to 2005. This leads the women to reminisce about music in the old days and, when they see a video clip of an old program, "Look at those Afros! I love it!," they say. When a couple of black teens come in, they also begin to talk about *Soul Train*.

When you visit Soul Food Kitchen, all the customers except the Latina are black. This doesn't mean there are never any white customers, for the photos of themselves posted by reviewers on Yelp.com, a popular website of online reviews, show a few white faces among more black and brown ones. Most of the 18 Yelp reviews are favorable, giving the restaurant an average rating of 4 out of 5 stars. Several reviewers claim a long familiarity with southern cooking; for this reason, they imply, their favorable opinions are all the more valuable. One reviewer praises the restaurant for "The Best Soul Food In Brooklyn!!!!" but most are only moderately pleased with the southern dishes, and some are more pleased with the delivery service. Because Soul Food Kitchen does not have a website or a presence on social media, these reviews are an important means of shaping its reputation and gaining new customers.

Menu, décor, owner, and customers, all confirm Soul Food Kitchen as a space for performing a traditional, black identity. Yet it is not a space where whites feel uncomfortable. One Yelp reviewer begins by establishing her racial and geographical distance from black culture: "Okay, so I'm a 30-ish white lady, from an almost all-white suburb, in New England. To say I am unfamiliar with what soul food should be is putting it kindly." But, she continues, "I really like this place. The food is good and the people at the counter are super nice." As the reviewer suggests, Soul Food Kitchen is experienced as a black space, yet it is a more open one than it might have been had it opened in 1990 rather than in 2000. A major sign of difference from the past: no Plexiglas barrier between customers and employees.

■ Halal Restaurant

The Halal Restaurant is located a few blocks west on Fulton Street, near the large Masjid At-Taqwa. Like Soul Food Kitchen, the restaurant sports red, yellow, and blue colors on its awning and canopy, and quite a few signs. There are so many signs that at first you think the restaurant's name is "No More Junk Food," as one side of the awning proclaims. But a neon sign in the window says "Halal Buffet & Juice Bar" and The Halal Restaurant has been the restaurant's name since it opened in 1986, apparently the neighborhood's first restaurant of this kind, connected to the mosque.

Prices are as low as at Soul Food Kitchen, but the menu, presentation, and décor are different. Food is prepared in back and presented for self-service in front on both a steam table or "hot buffet" and a salad bar. Dishes can be taken out or eaten in a seating area in the rear, where couches covered in rose-colored fabric are placed around long wooden tables. Instead of *Soul Train*, a basketball game is playing on the TV; a poem written by Shameem Chowdhury, entitled "Martin Luther King, Jr.," is taped to the wall, making refer-

ences to racial discrimination. The poet turns out to be the restaurant owner, a Bengali immigrant of middle age. Perhaps his identification with oppression is not imagined, for he tells you that he "would rather eat salt and bread with freedom than eat like a king" while being harassed, his elliptical way of describing how he made the decision to stop "working for others" and become a business owner.

Chowdhury has lived in Bed-Stuy since the mid-1980s but only took over the management of The Halal Restaurant in 1999, when it moved to Fulton Street from the mosque around the corner. His goal, he says, is to feed the Muslim community: "The idea is that the nation is not important. The religion is important. So I united all the food" (Skenazy, 1999). Islam's broad embrace is reflected in dishes ranging from Indian (tandoori chicken) to Caribbean (jerk chicken, fried plantains). Southern dishes like yams, black-eyed peas, and macaroni and cheese cater to African Americans, and there are tofu dishes for East Asians and vegetarians. A sign in the window signals to health-conscious customers that the restaurant offers a special brand of ionized water that is supposed to clear toxins from the body, and other signs list a variety of fruit juices and "peanut punch." While most dishes embody an ethnically diverse black cultural heritage, the absence of pork underlines The Halal Restaurant's difference from the soul food archetype.

You see mainly black customers during most of your visits, but the owner tells you that all types of people frequent the restaurant. "Jewish, Japanese, whites"—he says, nodding toward the white couple that sits down next to you that day. Most customers live or work in Bed-Stuy, though according to the owner, they have changed quite a bit in the past few years. Working class customers who used to spend lots of money have been replaced by new, more affluent residents. The newcomers do not patronize his restaurant, and Mr. Chowdhury is worried because business is slow. He can't depend on getting new customers from online reviews, for although Yelp gives The Halal Restaurant 4 out of 5 stars, only two people have posted reviews—one in 2010, and the other in 2011—and the restaurant has no website.

Mr. Chowdhury's anxiety is shared by other business owners on Fulton Street. Since the economic recession began in 2006, many low-income New Yorkers have lost their jobs. Neither affluent gentrifiers who own houses nor non-black college students who rent apartments in Bed-Stuy likely shop on Fulton Street or seek out a halal meal. Moreover, though worshippers come to the Masjid At-Taqwa during the day and immigrant taxi drivers stop by for their evening meal, the local halal restaurant market is competitive. Two other "halal buffets" cluster around the masjid, cheaper take-out food is sold at a "halal pizzeria" and a bodega offering "halal breakfast," and a more elegant Senegalese restaurant that is also halal is not far away. All these halal restaurants try to appeal to a black clientele of southern and Caribbean migrants and members of a global African diaspora. But they also create post-racial spaces with a dietary regime founded on Islam, a discourse of "healthy" food and drink to purify the body, and an explicit welcome to a multi-ethnic clientele. In these restaurants, religion and lifestyle rather than race are the cultural signifiers that matter.

■ Ms. Dahlia's Café

Only two blocks north of Fulton Street, Ms. Dahlia's Café feels very different from both Soul Food Kitchen and The Halal Restaurant. With its wooden floors, pressed tin ceiling, and pastel-colored walls, it has the shabby chic décor of cafés in Greenwich Village with a little "English country cottage" style.There are about fifteen seats at wooden tables and three more small tables out on the sidewalk in good weather. The menu claims that recipes have been handed down from Ms. Dahlia, the co-owner's aunt, a "southern woman, born in the turn of the [twentieth] century, a woman of refined tastes and sensibilities," who migrated to Brooklyn and "set up a 'Salon'" in her home. Lest customers think her recipes are too refined, the menu hastens to bring the description of its muse down to earth: "She loved a good story and a dirty joke even better."

In contrast to the "down home" references, the restaurant sources pastries from Balthazar, a high-status restaurant and bakery in SoHo, and offers menu items typical of stylish cafés everywhere, from muffins and croissants to salads, quiche, and grilled vegetable panini. Like many sit-down restaurants in Bed-Stuy, and in other New York neighborhoods as well, Ms. Dahlia's serves a weekend brunch, where health-conscious foodies and customers with high cholesterol levels can order an egg white omelet with vegetables and whole grain toast or "southern fried" chicken and waffles. Another special dish, "Biggie Bed-Stuy Breakfast," offers a subtle shout-out to the late rap performer

Biggie Smalls (real name: Christopher Wallace), who grew up in the neighborhood and was shot to death in Los Angeles in 1997, at the age of 24.

The café was opened in 2009 by two women, an African-American pastry maker and a former corporate attorney, born in Haiti, who owns the building and is also a partner in Vodou Bar next door. The manager and most of the employees are African American; the clientele is racially mixed and includes, according to the manager, "longtime residents, gentrifiers, and bloggers." Gentrification has brought both good and bad, the manager says. Among the good: the customers are more polite, they're patient while waiting for their orders, and they leave bigger tips. Outside, the streets are cleaner. The bad news is that customers now are passive-aggressive; their demands call for more scrutiny, which has already led to an unexpected visit by the health inspector. Also, several customers have posted negative reviews on Yelp about the restaurant's lack of organization.

Ms. Dahlia's is popular, though. Free wi-fi, strong coffee, and cucumber lemonade make it a comfortable place for young people, regardless of race, to hang out. Not surprisingly, in contrast to The Halal Restaurant and Soul Food Kitchen, Ms. Dahlia's is present on social media like Facebook and Foursquare. Though Ms. Dahlia's only gets 3.5 out of 5 stars on Yelp, the café has many more reviews than Soul Food Kitchen: 88 reviews, compared to the other restaurant's 18. The tone of the reviews differs, too. Ms. Dahlia's reviewers praise the "simply great soul-FULL cuisine," "the vibe," and the fact that it's "one of the only coffee shops of its kind in my neighborhood!" A reviewer who lives in Bed-Stuy says she likes to hear the young women who work in the kitchen singing along with rhythm and blues songs while they cook.

Prices are higher than at either Soul Food Kitchen or The Halal Restaurant. This probably prevents poorer, less desirable customers from entering. Even more important, aesthetic cues, like pastries, music, and décor, signal an aspirational style of consumption that may be too effete for some local residents but comforting to others. For blacks, it seems, Ms. Dahlia's signals respect for African American culture while providing a secure environment to socialize with other members of the middle class, a safe haven compared to the potential to be "stop[ped] and frisk[ed]" by police officers on the street. For whites, Ms. Dahlia's is "black" enough to gratify a desire for racial integration, but on "white" terms: they don't feel challenged by the cultural references or the food.

"This place is symbolic of the new kind of gentrification happening in Bed-Stuy," a reviewer writes approvingly on Yelp. It "involves professional whites and blacks enjoying nice cafés and bars together." In contrast, "places like Williamsburg [a hipster neighborhood in Brooklyn] are so old-fashioned, like the apartheid version of gentrification." This suggests that Ms. Dahlia's Café—black owned and managed, racially mixed in clientele—is experienced, at least by some customers, as a post-racial space.

■ Peaches

Peaches, a full-service restaurant serving modern southern cuisine, opened a few blocks to the east in 2008. The two co-owners honed this style for two years at their barbecue restaurant in Fort Greene, an adjacent area that was gentrified first by blacks and then by whites in the 1980s and 1990s. Like Ms. Dahlia's, where signage is absent, Peaches only states its name on the window. But the front door sports the maroon and white logo made familiar by Zagat, a print and online restaurant guide that was the first to popularize reviews written by ordinary diners. This logo shows new customers that Peaches is highly ranked by a broad array of diners who presumably share at least some of their tastes. Through the large plate glass windows, bordered in black, you see fabric-covered banquettes with cushions, wooden tables and chairs, and a large, black bar. There is no television; the only screens are those of customers' laptops. Walls are painted in mellow ochre or matte black, others are exposed brick, and the décor is dark but comfortable, especially when the sun streams in. In good weather tables are also set in a fenced garden to one side of the restaurant, providing another pleasant place to sit.

Though one of the Brooklyn-born owners is white, the other is black, and was raised in Bed-Stuy. His wife's grandmother, a southern woman like Ms. Dahlia, appears on the website as the restaurant's muse, in a narrative that recalls the café's. At the same time, both owners are classically trained chefs who have cooked in France and Spain as well as in the kitchens of highly regarded restaurants in Manhattan, and their menu emphasizes organic, locally grown, and healthy ingredients (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubXGTcJ8-7Q; http://www.nysun.com/food-drink/dixie-dining/49015/).

"The menus at Peaches are informed by regional American classics, refreshed," the restaurant's website says (http://www.peachesbrooklyn.com). "Lighter and fresher than is usually expected, Peaches reintroduces lost and sometimes forgotten dishes and satisfies a craving for longtime favorites." The multi-layered dishes, prepared in a closed kitchen in back, evoke sub-regions of the South from Maryland to Louisiana; they include "crab cakes—sweet corn and black-eyed pea salad," "smoked chicken and sausage gumbo—Carolina gold rice, scallions," "barbecue fries," and "watermelon salad—arugula, shaved country ham, lime, ginger." Soul food staples like grits and collard greens are cooked in olive oil rather than with bacon.

If the website and menu identify Peaches with an African American tradition familiar to black diners, they also speak to others who frequent the city's trendy restaurants. The greens are cooked in a "healthy" way. According to the menu, the meat in a burger is "hand ground," comes from a specific farm, and contains no antibiotics or added hormones. Despite the menu's southern roots, both the chef and a waiter featured in a photo on the website are white and dressed in hipster black. The service staff lives in the neighborhood and is racially mixed—visibly black servers and a white bartender on the day you visit—and so is the clientele, with a visibly brown and black majority.

The owners take care to align themselves with two kinds of local community: a taste community of foodies and creative producers and a social community of African Americans. "Located in the heart of Stuyvesant Heights," the website says, "Peaches is a neighborhood restaurant that caters to a growing roster of family and friends. We are proud to participate in all manners of community activities, social and charitable." That sounds very much like the discourse of new business owners in Harlem, who emphasize the need to "give back" to "the community," meaning the *black* community [Zukin et al. 2009]. But, the owners of Peaches add, "We also work carefully with local farmers and artists because we believe that a close connection to your neighbors is just a good idea." In other words, Peaches balances the social capital of the traditional black community and the cultural capital of new networks of foodies and the "creative class."

Peaches' strategies have succeeded, for it has become one of Bed-Stuy's stellar attractions. It has more than 150 reviews on Yelp and 3.5 stars. Though it has only 10 reviews on Trip Advisor, mostly from tourists, its rating there is even higher: 4.5 stars out of five. Three years after opening Peaches, the owners opened Peaches Hothouse, serving spicier, more explicitly southern food, in a former rib joint on Tompkins Avenue. The next year, they expanded into two more storefronts on Lewis Avenue, creating both a bar and a bakery-café. Along with Saraghina, a restaurant that was opened nearby, also in 2008, by two Italian chefs, Peaches and its offshoots establish a culturally desirable space where middle class diners feel comfortable, whether they are black, white, or Latino, or visitors from overseas.

■ Who owns Bed-Stuy?

Critics of gentrification focus on how the process displaces low-income residents from their homes when rents rise above a level that they can afford. They also blame "commercial gentrification" for a symbolic eviction that replaces cheap, familiar shops with more expensive, high status boutiques and cafés where longtime, low-income residents do not feel comfortable. When race intersects with class, an even greater sense of loss is felt. In brief, when gentrification expands into a neighborhood with a black majority, critics, including black residents, tend to see it as diminishing "black" space where African Americans exercise moral ownership. But such critiques fail to place the view effects of gentrification in a wider context of the city's changing demographics, on the one hand, and globally changing racial identities, on the other.

Impoverished by capital disinvestment, shaken by fears of crime, and depopulated by high incarceration rates and an illegal drug epidemic, Bed-Stuy for many years could not attract new residents or businesses. During the 1980s, an influx of new immigrants—Caribbean people and Muslims, both culturally different from most African Americans—began to stabilize the local community. They bought houses and opened stores; teams of men from the mosque drove away drug dealers. Change was sustained by community organizations and the police, and, from the early 2000s, by restaurants. Though a small number of new restaurants, beginning with Soul Food Kitchen, continued to offer a traditional space for performing a black, African-American identity, most challenged this urban racial archetype.

In contrast to Soul Food Kitchen, the other three restaurants that I have described have very differ-

ent relations to racial identity. The Halal Restaurant offers food that appeals to the neighborhood's black racial demographics, including African Americans, Caribbean people, and new African immigrants, yet it explicitly serves a religious, and thus an inter-ethnic cultural community. Ms. Dahlia's and Peaches also use cultural capital to transcend racial identity, but they provide another kind of aspirational space. Both promote the "authentic" culinary roots of African-American urban culture. But while Ms. Dahlia's menu regards southern food with a fond nostalgia, Peaches' menu "relocates" it from the ghetto to a racially neutral space. Both restaurants present soul food less as a racial heritage and more as a regional cuisine. This raises the restaurants' reputation among a broad public and that of the neighborhood as well. Unlike Soul Food Kitchen and the Halal Restaurant, Ms. Dahlia's and Peaches attract many white customers. Perhaps this is because, in addition to the differences in food and décor, the service staff at the two downscale restaurants is visibly black and brown, while the servers at the two upscale restaurants are black and white. They are African American, Caribbean American, and European American—and they are mainly local residents, reflecting the neighborhood's, and the city's, racial diversity.

In the near future the majority of residents in Bed-Stuy will continue to be black and many will be poor, especially in public housing projects. But new restaurants are reshaping the neighborhood's reputation as racially mixed and culturally desirable. These restaurants are a surprising source of pride to longtime residents. Conversations on the street suggest that even if many residents cannot afford to eat in them, they are proud that they are there. The only sign of discontent that I have heard came from a black public housing tenant. Though she is in no danger of losing her apartment, she is resentful that blacks are suffering a symbolic eviction from the neighborhood. "I feel that white people will be taking over," she says. "I also feel that 'we' are getting pushed out." Black homeowners say they are glad they no longer must go to another neighborhood to eat a good dinner, but they are sorry that "it took whites" moving into Bed-Stuy for better restaurants to open. "I love my neighborhood but I am torn," says a longtime black male resident. "I embrace the diversity, enjoy the benefits—like cops in the community, but on the flipside, I do believe in retaining culture. The neighborhood has lost its identity." This suggests that the more the neighborhood becomes multi-racial and middle-class, the less African Americans will feel a moral ownership of the community in terms of their race.

Moreover, Bed-Stuy's new habitus attracts a growing number of white chef-entrepreneurs who are attracted to the area's relatively low rents and emerging reputation. Some of them live there, too. In their hands, soul food's southern fried chicken and waffles becomes the multi-regional and multi-ethnic "deboned Cornish game hen with waffles, spinach, pineapple and maple syrup" [Leland, 2012]. Is this an *homage* or a self-indulgent conceit? If white chefs reduce soul food to an ironic trope, their restaurants will have further weakened African Americans' moral ownership of the neighborhood. ■

Notes

1. The author is grateful for the advice of her research partner Philip Kasinitz, the field work of PhD students Vanessa Paul, Benjamin Haber, Greg Narr, and Julia Nast, and the technical assistance of PhD students Laura Braslow and Jacob Lederman, all in the sociology program of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. This article also relies on the field work carried out by senior seminar students at Brooklyn College, especially Carol Webb and Najia Zayed.

2. In 1991, Rodney King, an African American resident of Los Angeles, was badly beaten by four police officers who had chased him while he was driving a car and forced him to stop on the road and submit to a search. The beating was videotaped by a man who lived nearby, and after it was made public, the police officers were put on trial for assault with a deadly weapon and use of excessive force while carrying out their duties. In 1992, after a jury found three of them innocent of all charges, and acquitted the fourth officer on one charge, people vented their anger by rioting in South Central Los Angeles, a predominantly African American and Latino district, and looting stores, many owned by Korean Americans. During the following days, more than fifty people were killed, and many more were injured.

3. The following discussion excludes restaurant chains, as well as independent restaurants owned by Europeans and American whites.

4. The term "jerk" derives from a Quechua word for dried meat, which becomes "jerky" in English. The culinary origins of this preparation begin with the forced migration of African slaves who were brought to Jamaica by Spanish colonists in the seventeenth century. When the British took control of Jamaica, many slaves escaped to the mountains and lived with Taino communities. The jerk seasoning mixture they created from African memories and native ingredients was used for both barbecuing and smoking meat; it survived through Jamaica's independence, was commercialized by Jamaican producers, and was transported around the world by the Caribbean diaspora [Cook and Harrison, 2003]. Today, "jerk" refers to a mixture of spices created in Jamaica which is used as either a marinade or a rub for dried meat.

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ABSTRACT

Restaurants as "Post Racial" Spaces. Soul Food and Symbolic Eviction in Bedford-Stuyvesant (Brooklyn)

For many years the "iconic" American ghetto was marked by the predominance of low-price restaurants and soul food restaurants serving traditional dishes of the rural South from which many African American migrants came. Soul food restaurants offered a comfortable social space for developing and performing a "black" identity, and a source of a feeling of "moral ownership" despite the lack of African Americans' legal ownership of most buildings and stores. In recent years, however, increased transnational migration and gentrification in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a Brooklyn black neighbourhood, have expanded the local market for different kinds of restaurants, which challenges traditional African-American identity.

Keywords: Restaurant. Post-racial space. Ghetto. Gentrification. Soul food. Restaurant.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Restaurants als „post-rassistische" Räume. *Soul Food* und symbolische Entmachtung im Brooklyner Viertel Bedford-Stuyvesant

Viele Jahre lang galten die billigen Restaurants, die traditionelle Gerichte des ländlichen Südens servierten, Gerichte also aus Gegenden aus denen viele afro-amerikanische Einwanderer stammten, als Ikone des amerikanischen Ghettos. Die Restaurants boten sogenanntes Soul food an und schufen zugleich einen Raum in dem sich die „schwarze" Identität entwickeln und in Szene setzen konnte. Wenngleich die Menschen weder Besitzer der Gebäude oder Geschäfte waren, so bildeten sie doch die „moralische Instanz". Seit einigen Jahren kann man allerdings z.B. im Brooklyner Viertel Bedford-Stuyvesant eine neue Herausforderungen für die afro-amerikanische Identität beobachten: Nämlich die Etablierung einer transnationalen Migrationsbewegung und damit einhergehend die Diversifizierung der lokalen Restaurants.

Stichwörter: Post-rassistischer Raum. Ghetto. Gentrifikation. *Soul Food*. Restaurant.