

Repasting: A Metonymy

Scott Alves Barton

Let us repair for some repast.
— Iain Banks

Last summer I received an invitation to attend a performative repast to honor the lives of the inhabitants of Malaga Island, Maine. In 1912 a community of predominantly African descendants were evicted from their land on the island. Lives were lost and nearly forgotten. The repast and the rites performed that day were meant as a corrective to that racist state project. Prior to the event, throughout that afternoon, and since then I have reflected on repast as a concept, as a rite within African American community traditions, its presence within my own life, and within literature and history.

The repast as a *lieux de memoire* (site of memory) has a global cultural resonance addressed throughout this essay, typified by engaging with literary sources that include Naylor, Morrison, Melville and Shakespeare to better contextualize the concept of repast. One of the goals is to better understand repast as a metonymy, the act of substituting a word/phrase, a quality or something associated with it; or as a “thing” or event that is a symbol or mimesis for something else. Thus, while repast has a lineage in Medieval Norman through Elizabethan and Middle French history, literature and oral discourse, it has a particular signification within various African-American and African Diaspora commensal cultural practices. Following Connerton, the repast ritual mnemonically harnesses food to incorporate memory into the body, concretizing the moment and the prepared dishes as symbol and sign to foster signification (Connerton 1989:58-9).

Poetics of the repast event as a culturally significant moment in the “food-ritual-memory” dialectic where preferencing the symbolic in ritual practice is

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transcribed overtop of everyday existence (Sutton 2006:159). Consider how Sutton describes the transmogrification of home-baked breads whose rising doughs were stamped with religious symbols. The fresh loaves were brought as church offerings, where priests sprinkled crumbs into sacramental wine become metonymic symbols for the deceased now "named" to the saints (Sutton 2006:34). Food thus provides structure to the lives of the living, and the legacies of the dead. And "food acts" as metonymy literally call to mind other food acts/commensal moments, as well as the people ascribed to them, often revealed through discourse at table, and symbolic dishes served there (Mintz 1996: 97).

As metonymy, repast is first a meal consumed by a group with a shared social location as family, members of a specific community, or cultural group. Symbolically this commensal moment is often held in celebration to honor individuals, communities, or important events transforming the simple act of ingestion to one where favored foods of the honor are prepared for them, or as a memory of their legacy. By consuming foods that refer to individuals within the social group metaphorically the guests consume the spirit of that person, embodied by foods that they favored, or excelled in preparing, thereby recalling their contribution to the community as a shared public act. Similarly when consecrated as an act of memorialization for the deceased, repasts as an acknowledgement of the dead in a public sphere—also allows the living to exist without the need to exert effort as they grieve and appreciate the life that now exists as memory. Finally to consider repast in an Afro-Diaspora context, where honoring our elders and the departed ancestors who exist among us necessitates an engagement with traditional African religious dogma, which will be addressed in this essay.

Gentlewomen, gentlemen. Before we settle into the marvelous repast that is awaiting us, pray bear with me as I extend our warmest regards to the nuptial union of Mr. and Mrs. Winston Alcott. God, Willie whispered, does he always talk like that? . . . That nigger's unreal. (Gloria Naylor, 1985: 86)

The definition of repast is broad. It can range from an informal spread, a bite to eat, or, be a sumptuous feast that is celebratory or funereal. For many African-Americans it solely relates to homegoing ceremonies to honor the dead. A repast is a metonymy for a refection as well as the ritual practice applied to this commensal meal. Consider another repast at Thomas Downing's, the famous oysterman, restaurateur, abolitionist, founder of United Anti-Slavery Society of the City of New York, and owner of Thomas Downing's Oyster Bar at 5 Broad Street:

It was fashionable for ladies and gentlemen, whole families – the most respected of the city – to enjoy a repast which would cause their sons and daughters...to long for frequent repetitions. Ladies and gentlemen with towel in hand, and an English oyster knife made for the purpose, would open their own oysters, drop

into the burning hot concaved shell a lump of sweet butter and other seasonings, and partake of a treat. (Harris 2013: 123)

Perhaps the most emblematic repast that illustrates how a meal can have agency as a commensal reflection to honor and appreciate someone, (in this case living not deceased) is the celebratory meal Toni Morrison described in her novel, *Beloved*:

. . . if Halle made it, God do what He would, it would be a cause for celebration...So when Sethe arrived—the idea of a whoop moved closer to the front of her brain... [Baby Suggs] had decided to do something with the fruit worthy of the Stamp Paid's labor and his love. That's how it began... From Denver's two thrilled eyes it grew to a feast for ninety people. 124 shook with their voices far into the night. Ninety people who ate so well, and laughed so much, it made them angry. They woke up the next morning and remembered the meal-fried perch that Stamp Paid handled with a hickory twig, holding his left palm out against the spit and pop of the boiling grease; the corn pudding made with cream; tired overfed children asleep in the grass, tiny bones of roasted rabbit still in their hands...Baby Suggs' three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe's two hens became five turkeys...Loaves and fishes were His powers—they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. (Morrison 1986:160-165)

Sethe a former slave had been living with her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, and her eighteen-year-old Denver, Sethe's youngest child. They arrive in Cincinnati at #124 having been freed from bond through the agency of Stamp Paid, an Underground Railroad conductor. Stamp Paid, their actual and metaphoric savior brings these women two pails of rare, delectable, sweet, blackberries. His intervention and the epiphanic berries initiate a desire for repast. This repast demonstrates that pleasure exists in the liminal space between joy and excess. They reveled in their salvatory moment. Free at last; cause for jubilation, "a celebration of blackberries that put Christmas to shame" (Morrison 1986:91). Yet, their provisioning of this banquet angered some of the townsfolk. Suspicious neighbors asked where and how did they have the right to such excess; overstepping their place with unwarranted pride. Morrison explicitly aligns this feast to Christ's feeding the multitudes with loaves and fishes; from meager victuals He produced a banquet. These marginalized women's hopes and prayers provide sustenance of the highest and most delicious quality for their community. The negative reception suggests that these women do not have the privilege to celebrate given their social/economic status. Threading through all the bounty and deliciousness there can also be taint to a repast (Zauditu-Selassie 2009).

Re.Past.Malaga

On Thursday July 12, 2018 Myron M. Beasley designed and curated *Re.Past.Malaga*:

Malaga sits at the mouth of the New Meadows River in Casco Bay near Portland, Maine. This memorial supper and performance was created to commemorate forty-seven island residents of African, Indigenous, Portuguese and mixed-race descent who were evicted from the island in 1912. It is said to be one of the most shameful events in the state of Maine's history (Rosenthal n.d.). The goal had been to sell the land cheaply to private developers who would then build an exclusive resort. The inhabitants were deemed mentally unfit, removed, many were sent to the Maine Institute for the Feeble Minded, banished from the state; or died. This day and repast honored the lives lost and the lives of the descendants who have lived in the shadow of shame. Ingredients were locally sourced from organic gardens and farms, produced from heirloom grains and foodstuffs by local artisan bakers and chefs and served by high school students in nineteenth century costume who lived in Phippsburg on the shore near Malaga. The day was marked by sorrow, joy, and healing.

Repast of sorrow

While repasts can beget joy, they also honor sorrow. A repast may serve as an offering of thanksgiving. Repasts following tragedy engaged not solely African Diaspora cultures, but Elizabethan England as well. Following the theme of loss, Laertes conversation with Claudius in Hamlet illustrated how repast and death are sad twins. Upon learning of his father's death, Laertes vows to avenge the death by repasting the murderer with his blood (Hamlet 4.5. 4-11).

For many the idea of a repast is always already a harbinger of death and the meal served to grieving relations following the interment.

Eva knew what she was doing. Always had. She had stayed away from Sula's funeral and accused Nel of drowning Chicken Little for spite. . . That made every gesture an offense, every off-center smile a threat, so that even the bubbles of relief that broke in the chest of practically everybody when Sula died did not soften their spite and allow them to go to Mr. Hodges' funeral parlor or send flowers from the church or bake a yellow cake. (Morrison 1973: 172)

In Toni Morrison's second novel, *Sula*, Eva's actions demonstrated that Sula had not been "funeralized" properly. She received no wake-vigil, or any of the other traditional rituals such as a funerary repast. Nor did any of the women "leave their quilt patches in disarray to run to the house" overtly showing their attention to the deceased through the cessation of work and household order—their domain. To transition without a repast leaves the dead and the living without physical and spiritual nourishment.



Malaga Island mother and child: “Deuce of Spades,” 1907 Boston Postcard Company, Maine State Museum, Peter Roberts Collection

Throughout the African Diaspora a repast is frequently aligned to the funerary meals served during a wake or following a funeral as a respite from the irruption of one’s passing. Traditionally the dead lay in state in their family’s parlor and a meal was served in the adjacent dining room for the mourning family and for the people who came to pay respects for the deceased. The soul is on the threshold of flight and needs tending as do the grieving. In Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, the wake is: “the track left on the water’s surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow,” A disruption to black existence as abrupt as Maafa that thereby necessitates nurture and healing; a rationale for repast (2016:3).

For some, repasts are an excuse to amplify the conviviality of bringing a group to table. Yet, within an African Diaspora construct, they are deeply situated within our memorialization of the dead, and as a means of sustenance for the family grieving at the foot of the casket to sit vigil and also for the community to lend support. Bringing food to the dead and the living is both a symbolic offertory to the deceased and a reaffirmation of life in its nurture of those sitting in vigil.



Headstone for three Malaga Island children

Our family's repasts

On both sides of my family we always ate well whenever there was a repast, although there were variations at each table it was served. These repasts wherever they were served, were a meal, and too often a banquet. A time to gather together, set, share stories, rest and enjoy family. They reflected our polyglot culture and extended the range of what "soul food" could be. Grounded in our love for each other, repasts honored the celebration of a birthday, an anniversary, a promotion, the newly born; or the deceased. I attended my first funeral and funerary repast for Constance Seale, my mother Sylvia's maternal grandmother when I was nearly six. The shock of her; beautiful, yet a corpse became deeply embedded in my memory. Decades later great-grandma Constance and her repast remain etched into my consciousness. Everything was confusing and frightening. Great grandma beautifully laid out in a casket dressed all in white with the first head of white hair I had ever seen. My mother suggesting that I sit with her at the casket. Watching as she cried and kissed her grandmother. Shortly thereafter she told me how much fun we, great grandma and I, had had together. I was unnerved, frightened. The subsequent repast and those familial foods with their familiar aromas, and deliciousness softened the solemnity and fear for me. We all needed refreshment

and rest for body, mind and spirit; the essence of repast. As always there was enough to satisfy everyone with one of their favorite dishes and have some for the next day, and the next, or as long as the vigil would be kept up. Repast meals were quite particular and distinct from daily or holiday meals. These ceremonial meals signposted particular specifics of one's regional and cultural identity.



Great Grandma Constance and an unidentified niece

A few years later I learned the hard way that Grandpa Cordell, Cordell Hull Barton, my daddy's father, had descended from slaves, Indigenous and in part from whites; hence our surname, Barton. As a new reader I was allowed to open mail addressed to my name or to the Barton family. I opened a "Barton family" bait-and-switch promotion marketed to discover one's British family crest and thereby find your kin. The letter stated that our surname was already in the registry. Since my father had left home very young I saw this blessing as a means to learn and meet more of his people. I nagged daddy for weeks when he came home from work. Finally, he told me that those people did not want to know us even though we shared a last name. They were probably related to the people who

owned Grandpa's daddy in Columbia, Tennessee. Learning where we come from stems as much from the stories of our forbearers as from the foods they imparted to us that appear on our repast tables.



Place setting, *Re.Past.Malaga*

Grandma Pauline, Pauline Saxon, Cordell's wife was said to have come from a long line of free blacks primarily from Providence, Rhode Island and Fall River or New Bedford, Massachusetts. That was just as abstruse for my grade school mind as our potential British ancestry. Where did she come from, to have always been of free lineage? All of those folks are gone, and I never got better clarification than that. Daddy's hometown, Fall River, is about 160 miles south of Maine, but closer than it is to his father's birthplace of Columbia, Tennessee. In Grandma's kitchen, and at their repasts I ate Grandma Pauline's codfish cakes; or, grew to like them. But I had an instant love for her Narragansett flint corn Johnny cakes, steamed brown bread, baked beans either Great Northerns or the creamier Golden Eyed, liberally seasoned with salt pork and molasses before they were set in her cast iron pot to bake for hours. Grandma Pauline made all manner of chowders; New England boiled dinners, and her famous "Congo bars". Many of these foods present at Fall River repasts, echoed similar flavors served at *Re.Past.Malaga*.

This New England "soul food" was distinct from Grandpa Cordell's yen for chicken fricassee, pickled pig's feet, and cornbread; or my mama's mama's West

Indian peas and rice, fungi, escovitch fish, her wheaten Johnny Cakes, souse or cocobread. Wherever the table was set growing up, we ate locally, seasonally and heartily. Clifford, my daddy said when he was young like me, lobster was poor man's food, and that's how and where he grew to love it so much. My mother made all of these dishes in addition to fried chicken, BBQ ribs, mac & cheese and yams.



Barak's molasses cornbread, dry-hopped cider and Marfax bean ragout

Yet Sylvia, my mother, truly cooked little other southern fare, outside of the iconic dishes Pauline had had to learn to cook for Cordell and passed down to her. Although Pauline was an excellent cook when she married Cordell, she had had to learn his mother's southern repertoire. Through design or default young Clifford, my father came to love Southern and New England cooking. As an adult I realized he kept his personal supply of commercially made cornbread in the freezer to supplement his meals and bring Tennessee to our table. Had I only been able to taste dishes blindly, I would have been able to identify which branch of my family was hosting a homegoing meal. From many pots we are one.

I bring up these various repasts to contextualize commensal traditions within the African Diaspora for a few reasons. First to highlight the fluidity of African Diaspora foodways, to reinforce the comfort and pleasure often associated with repasts, and finally to identify New England as a mutable, not a monolithic culture. Contextualizing the food served at *Re.Past.Malaga Island* will better situate it within African Diaspora culinary culture and identity politics.

Historically, Malaga Island was seen as a racialized space, a fly in the buttermilk of Maine. Hegemonically, Maine specifically and New England generally is not thought of as a black space. Yet, that story, "Grandma Pauline is from generations of free black people in New England" affirmed our presence, if not precisely our status or origin story. Somehow there is a through line of the African Diaspora in Maine and New England's buttermilk.

Throughout New England there were black settlements, enclaves of manumitted or self-determined formerly enslaved residents: fisher and oystermen, navigators, scholars, abolitionists, professionals, tradesfolk, and working class.

People like Oney “Ona” Judge, Solomon Northup, Phyllis Wheatley, Crispus Attucks, Robert Roberts, Daisy Turner, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois and many others. Similarly, the food—brown bread, Johnny cakes, chowders and boiled dinners—can just as easily have influences on African Diaspora culture as they can and do have to French, English, and Portuguese antecedents. Similar to my own bloodline, Malaga’s population was African, Indigenous, Portuguese and/or Creole. Malaga’s racial intersectionality also defined the structure of the *Re.Past.Malaga* memorial. Implicitly and explicitly the *Re.Past.Malaga* menu and performative events reflected cultural and regional diversity.

The culinary semiotics of the menu designed and executed by chef, Leslie Oster, refers to the aforementioned cultures. Chef Oster structured the meal by thoughtfully choosing local artisanal products, seasonal organic produce, local fish, heirloom Marfax beans, and iconic regional recipes. Beginning with the Nezinscot Farms sun, or cold-brewed tea and Urban Farm Fermentory’s hard cider (dry hopped) both are popular beverages derived from centuries old artisanal traditions.

The ragout of golden-brown beans, known as Marfax or Marafax beans cooked with salt pork speaks to the Europeans and the Columbian Exchange when pigs were first introduced to the Americas. But more explicitly they refer to First Nations traditions. Local to the Maine coastal larder this “poor man’s meat” was fundamental to Native diets. Colonial settlers consumed beans adopted from the First Nations custom of cooking beans and maple syrup with bits of venison or fish and corn, ultimately substituting pork for the venison or fish. Historically the beans were cooked in a “bean hole:” a rock-lined fire pit in the ground where the pot of beans was buried to slowly cook from residual heat held by the stones, similar to a New England clambake (Obelnicki n.d.). Chow-chow, a home pickled condiment of cabbage, green tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, sweet and or hot peppers, turmeric and mustard showcasing local garden’s bounty is ubiquitous on African-American and white southern tables. Chow-chow is often seen as English dish due to the inclusion of mustard and flour paste, yet immigrant Chinese railroad workers introduced it to the southern U.S. in the 1850s (Sohn 2005:50-54; Tyree 1878:281-285).

Within this menu of historic dishes, even the bread, a sourdough fortified with heirloom cornmeal, elicited a poesis of precarity, “The realization came from when I was building my bread oven and realizing that if I ever had to repair that thing I would have to climb inside of it...” Freeport’s master baker/artist Barak Levi Olins’ intersection of his heritage as a Jew, raised to be conscious of the Holocaust came to realize implicit disjuncture within his relationship to oven that sustained him. Additionally, Olins’ Abenaki Corn Molasses Bread linked two key heritage foodstuffs and cultures; first molasses a key byproduct of the Triangle Trade, (the bartered exchange between Caribbean colonies, New England states and European nations of foodstuffs, sugar, rum and tobacco, for enslaved

Africans), and the First Nations flint corn famed for its early yields, hardiness, superior taste and nutritional quality. Bands of the western Abenaki people grew corn for centuries. This flint was the only type to survive and produce a crop in Vermont during the 1816 infamous “Year Without a Summer”, when killing frosts marked the summer months and snow fell in June. Corn stocks as hardy as those Malaga island inhabitants (Halloran 2012; Slow Food n.d.).



Re.Past.Malaga table, chowder, cider and flowers

Summer berry, Malvern or Hydropathic puddings, are chilled, layered and weighted mixtures of fresh ripe fruit, sugar, sometimes jam or pastry cream and stale bread or cake. They became popular in late nineteenth century England, where they were served at pastry-phobic health farms. The first published British versions appear between 1870-1904. It may also be influenced by New England First Nation’s “strawberry-meal-bread,” or dried blueberry and corn mush puddings, and also bears similarity to the *Virginia Housewife’s* Fayette pudding. The last reference implies that enslaved cooks also made or adapted this dish (Heritage 1894; Jewry 1870; Poynter 1904; Randolph 1800:127; Williams 1643:96-97). Chef Oster’s menu choices affirm the diversity, depth and breadth of nineteenth century New England and Maine cookery. Laced throughout the meal was a clear subtext of the legacy of enslavement and colonialism that uprooted cultures, mixed cuisines and races, and complicated origin stories and taste/s.

Provisional Ingenuity: Chowder/Chaudière

Yet potentially the most symbolic dish at the Malaga *Re.Past.Malaga* was the salmon and salt cod chowder. Herman Melville’s nineteenth century novel *Moby Dick* featured chowder throughout the book:

Oh! Sweet friends, hearken to me. It was made of small juicy clams, scarcely bigger than hazelnuts, mixed with pounded ships biscuits, and salted pork cut

up into little flakes! the whole enriched with butter, and plentifully seasoned with pepper and salt...in good time a fine cod chowder was placed before us— Chowder for breakfast, and chowder for dinner, and chowder for supper, till you began to look for fish-bones coming through your clothes. (Melville 1970:83-84)

I argue that the elasticity of chowder in New England is analogous to gumbo's fluidity in southern Louisiana and Alabama, whether based in roux, okra or filé, seafood, wild duck, andouille, or a combination. Clam is chowder's favorite hero, seasoned with salt pork, onion/celery, potatoes, milk/cream and crackers. The earliest antecedents were made with fish, or simply vegetables such as corn or leeks. Numerous chowders appear throughout the eastern seaboard, creamy, tomato-based, clear full-bodied clam broth and highly spiced. Malaga's fish chowder reflected the pre-eminence of both fish (salmon and salt cod) that historically have run all along the Georges Bank to the Bay of Fundy. Salting and drying cod in the sun is a foundational preservation method throughout New England in addition to being a fixture in the Triangle Trade as a bartered food to feed to and/or pay for the enslaved in the Caribbean as well as reserving the higher quality stocks for their masters (Kurlansky 1998).

"Chowder" is generally thought to derive from the French *chaudière*, due to the French populations in the Canadian Maritimes and Newfoundland, not the sixteenth century Cornish word, *jowter*, a peddler or hawker of fish. A metonym, in both instances it refers to the making of a dish, "to chowder" or to have a *full chowder-party*, a picnic at the seaside where chowder was the principle dish, as well as the pot in which it is cooked in; *chaudière*. *Chaudière* derives from *chaud*, French for, "hot" which stems from the Latin *calderia*, hot pot, or cauldron.

Chowders like gumbo have influences from Native American cookery as well as the French, English and to some degree Africans. The dish can be traced across the Atlantic to the fishing towns of New England—Boston, Mystic, Nantucket, New Bedford—It's also believed French soldiers who had been shipwrecked around the Maine coast were short of supplies and used all they had salvaged from the ship to survive. Into the boiling *chaudière*, (a footed cast iron pot with a strong handle) that was either hung over a fire or set into hot coals they added clams they had gathered and cooked them with pork, crackers and potatoes.

By the 1750s chowder recipes existed, with the first ever chowder recipe published in the *Boston Evening Post* September 23, 1751. *The Oxford English Dictionary* traces the word chowder to the fishing villages along the coast of France from Bordeaux to Brittany. There are also early European references made in the Cornwall region of Southwestern England and in the Brittany region of northwestern France. These two regions are located across the English Channel from one another. When the ships returned from the sea, every village had a large *chaudière* waiting for a portion of each man's catch, to be served later as part of the community's welcoming celebration. Amelia Simmons', *American Cookery*, the first

cookbook authored by an American had fish chowder in its 1800 second edition. It called for bass, salt pork, soaked crackers and a side dish of potatoes, pickles, applesauce or mangoes, parsley garnish (Mariani 2014). Chowders also owe a great deal to First Nation's corn soups,

Green corn, when nearly ripe, is gathered, roasted on the cob before the fire, or on top of the stove, then shelled, dried over the stove, or in the sun, in an evaporating basket...then put away in a bag or barrel for future use. Grain prepared in this manner is called... 'dried parched corn.' To cook, place a quantity of the corn in a kettle, and boiling water and boil for half an hour, drain, add fresh water, then some kind of meat. Boil for an hour and season with salt (*Iroquois Parched Green Corn Soup*; Waugh 1916:96).

The metonymy of chowder or *chaudière* being both pot and soup indicates that the dish, and the act of making something hot have both literal and figurative meaning. In French, *faire chaudière*: *Tenir une auberge où l'on peut apporter son repas qui y sera réchauffé ou cuit*. Literally: to make boil, or figuratively to have an inn or refuge where you can bring your meal to be warmed or cooked. The safe haven where this hot repast will be served concurrently celebrates the dish, the vessel, the venue and the meal. Finally, the *chaudière*, as pot or cauldron has its origin in mystical and sacred arts. The *Re: past* chowder was a cipher for all of those ubiquitous chowders that historically had laid in wait for homecoming sailors. This final refuge, a metaphor of home was a traditional restorative, yet this chowder functioned as a homegoing course. It was a bridge marking the passage between life and death to further honor the memory of the original forty-seven inhabitants of the island.

In *Macbeth* we see that cauldrons were also central to Shakespeare's, dramatic narratives,

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw...
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.
Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. (*Macbeth* 4.1.105-125.)

Cauldrons have long been associated with mystical arts and sacred rites. In pre-Elizabethan English history within some Wiccan traditions as well as in Celtic mythology, cauldrons relate to the goddess Cerridwen. In the *Mabinogion*, Welsh oral prose stories transcribed in Middle Welsh in the 12th–13th centuries cauldrons that were useful to warring armies. In the second *Mabinogi* tale of Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr, *the Pair Dadeni* (the Cauldron of Rebirth) was magical. Dead warriors were resurrected when placed in this cauldron although they returned as mutes, who were alleged to lack souls. These warriors could return to battle until they were killed again. Cauldrons symbolize not only the goddess but also represent the womb, as a container and a producer of

nourishment. And, when placed on an altar the cauldron as a tool made from the iron ore represents the earth (Davies 2008).



Salmon and salt cod chowder

While unfortunately no deceased Malaga island warriors were actually resurrected on this auspicious day, the Malaga Island *repast* was not without its own dynamic rituals. Metaphorically we registered their names and their “co-presence” among us. Each individual diner called one resident out; one by one. Names; people sitting on the air, nesting on the ferns surrounding our tables, slowly decaying in the bay’s wind; yet now not forgotten. Aisha Beliso-De Jesús defines “co-presence” as an ontology unique to African Diasporic religions where there is a sensing of a multiplicity of being felt on the body, through spiritual practice, in the mediatization of rituals influenced by the divine and ancestral spirits (2015:9-11). Another ritual, one of the first was the pouring libation to the ancestors by Master of Ceremonies, master gardener and state representative, Craig Hickman.

***Ijuba* – To Give Homage**

We assemble, we assemble to acknowledge the true stories and disrupt the myths. By assembling we memorialize.
We will call out their name, we will hear narratives,

We will eat food. We will remember, we will repast.

Feasting in the name of our ancestors; we will pour libation. (Beasley 2018)

The pouring of libation, *mojubar* (I give homage) is a prominent facet in Yoruba culture, a reverence given before all religious and social events¹. Homage and praise are given to the ancestors, the *orixá*, Olodumare, (the Yoruba pantheon's supreme god) and to one's teachers/godparents. Libation is poured as a prelude to any endeavor to be initiated, after surviving a challenge or trauma, or when the spiritual welfare of an individual or community needs tending to, "And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings" (Karade 1994: 63-64; Anderson and Amed 2003; Nehusi 2016; Ayim-Aboagye 1996; Exodus 25:29).

We may not initially savor deliciousness of the funerary repast, but in grief we still need nourishment. Sometimes the joy on the palate can ease the troubled mind, albeit briefly. Ingesting foods made as a loving testament to a life, or lives lost synaesthetically brings the person, the memory of their life into the bodily consciousness of another as the repast meal becomes a part of the body of the living diners. In traditional West African religious practices such as Candomblé, Vodoun and Lucumi all of the deities to be honored in ceremony must be ritually and virtually fed their own idiosyncratic repast. By cooking their favorite dishes and placing them at the foot of each sacred altar the gods are called to aid their mortal flock and observe the rites performed in their honor. The opening *xiré*, or circle dances bring the satiated deities, *orixá* into the bodies of their supplicants, mounted in trance to communicate to the community. Generally, near the end of the ceremonies, the congregants, neighbors and guests will be fed this same sacred banquet, now blessed by the gods as a priest blesses the Catholic sacrament. That which has been made holy is brought within the body of the living to nourish and nurture them physically and spiritually. Traditionally the foods offered to the *orixá* must be returned to their domain within a prescribed time following the virtual and or actual feasting. Thus, the water deities meals are placed in rivers, under waterfalls or in the ocean, and earth *orixá* have their victuals placed in the crotches of tree branches, by the tree's roots, or on rocks to degrade into earth itself. The rotting matter, a fertilizer completes life's cyclical nature, enriches the waters or earth. And provides insurance that there will be more food for the next generation of hungry mouths and gods. By anointing the Malaga soil with water from his glass Craig Hickman's gesture continued this honored tradition.

Yoruba oral history states that God granted Eshu Eleggba the force to make all things happen and multiply, *àṣṣe*. Upon receiving his dominion, Eshu although he could have, did not subordinate those around him; instead he gave a huge commemorative feast to share his newfound prestige, and to honor God for the treasures of *àṣṣe*, a repast (Thompson 1984:18). In Yoruba tradition a celebratory

¹ See <https://youtu.be/eZzp8GzWpYk>

banquet can be served to the entire community or as an individual ritual offering, an *ebó* that provides a means of sustenance and fortification. *Eborí eledá*, the ritual feeding of an individual's head and the energy place there by Olodumare, (God) is one of the most important Yoruba religious offerings that can be made. *Eborí* reinforces the energy initially given through the *emí*, Olodumare's breath, the gift given at birth which provides personal power, wisdom and *àṣẹ* to each newborn. Through *eborí* the supplicant's head is placed in harmony with its divine counterpart and the *orixá/s* aligned to that individual. Fruits, vegetables, or a sacrificial animal may be used in this ritual offering that bridges the gulf between mortals and their deities, thereby assimilating them into one another. The *orixá*, one's ancestors, and also malevolent spirits can thus speak to humans, assess their needs, and provide a path towards their destiny. Humans respond by returning *àṣẹ* to the *orixá* completing the circuit that is the essence and sustenance of life. *Ebó* is therefore the most effective healer, ordering the individual and collective universe with peace, clarity and direction. *Re.Past. Malaga* was an *ebó* to the Malaga residents and to the deities; and a commensal tonic for those at table (Bellegarde-Smith 2004:170-184).

Those who are dead are never gone

Hear more often things than beings: the voice of the fire listening, hear the voice of the water. Hear in the wind the bushes sobbing; it is the sigh of our forebears.

Those who are dead are never gone: They are there in the thickening shadow.

The dead are not under the earth: they are in the tree that rustles, they are in the wood that groans, they are in the water that sleeps, they are in the hut, they are in the crowd, the dead are not dead.

Those who are dead are never gone, they are in the breast of the woman, they are in the child who is wailing and in the firebrand that flames. The dead are not under the earth: they are in the fire that is dying, they are in the grasses that weep, they are in the whimpering rocks, they are in the forest, they are in the house, the dead are not dead

— Birago Diop. (Raboteau 2004:13-14)

Epistemologically, honoring and communing with one's ancestors and deities is a fundamental tenet of African Diaspora religious dogma that also pervades one's daily existence. Our ability as humans to create and receive individual offerings, *ebó*, or collectively gather for repast in joy or sorrow better prepares us to understand where we are, where we come from, and where we are going. The victuals and the ceremonies that consecrate them as holy allow us to be intimately in concert with our own consciousness, with the nuances of our environment as clearly delineated in Diop's poem, and most importantly with those who came before us, and the deities we reverence. Thus in our homes throughout the African

Diaspora, at table, and on Malaga Island the repast refines our socio-cultural definition and anchors the power to make things happen; *à g.*

As a conclusory postscript I cannot ignore the reality of the audience demographics at *Re.Past.Malaga*. Where the tone of the event was steeped in African Diaspora cultural identity politics and practices, the guests largely typified Maine's population as majority white; and also were complexly intersectional vaguely recalling the diversity of Malaga's African, mixed race, First Nation's residents. Those descendants of the original residents were appreciative that the repast symbolically and literally called out the names of their ancestors, yet in so doing it called them out for being partially African, which is counter to their phenotypic appearance as "white passing". What does this Diaspora intersectionality mean when performed to a largely white audience? The central arguments in Nicholas Jones' recent book describes "*habla de negros*", black voices as a performativity in early modern Spain that has identical currency here (2019). I have previously identified that Maine and New England has a long history of African, and African-American residents, often invisible in plain sight, while concurrently contributing to and altering the dialectic of being a New Englander or Mainer by their presence. Acknowledging a minority voice as an agentive voice for themselves, and their community, and for the majority culture is a clear reason that honoring the Malaga islanders in the public sphere Afrocentrically is a necessity. Cueing the entire group to the various Diaspora temporalities of the metonymies at table concurrently honor the deceased islander and the living people of color within these local publics.



Re.Past.Malaga china

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