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The state of the field and debates on gastronationalism

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Abstract

The article reviews recent development in scholarship on gastronationalism, or more broadly, food and nationalism. It finds while the concept of gastronationalism *per se* has not been rigorously developed, scholarship of food and nationalism in general has been developing fast. A major development in the study of gastronationalism is the introduction of the everyday nationhood/banal nationalism perspective, which in turn diverts the focus away from the state's intervention, a point emphasised by Michaela DeSoucey. The review of the field suggests that a renewed focus on the role of food in the interaction between state actors and international organisations would further refine the concept of gastronationalism. As for the study of food and nationalism, efforts to integrate findings from existing case studies to produce an overall understanding of society are needed.

Introduction

While she maintains the term 'gastronationalism' was first used by William Swart in unpublished conference papers (DeSoucey 2010: 450), Michaela DeSoucey is widely credited to be the first to promote the use of gastronationalism in an academic publication. DeSoucey has proposed the concept of gastronationalism as a way of challenging the one-dimensional understanding of globalisation that it was a homogenising force which was dominant at that time. She sees gastronationalism as a useful angle to capture a juxtaposition of 'the dialectic produced by globalism's homogenizing tendencies and the appearance of new forms of identity politics' (*ibid.*: 433). According to her, it is a defence mechanism to be deployed mainly by the state when symbolic boundaries represented by food are perceived to be violated or under threat. DeSoucey illustrates the point with an example of what she terms as 'French foie gras politics'; in order to fend off increasing opposition to continue producing foie gras, largely on the bases of animal welfare concern, the French government applied for and obtained the EU PGI label, 'Canard à foie gras du Sud-Ouest'. By doing so, the French government managed to secure the future of foie gras as a small-scale, artisan product whose authenticity and legitimacy is guaranteed by an international organisation. In other words, the French government used the EU to protect its nationalist interest to overcome opposition which was based on more universalistic concern. In her words, the concept of gastronationalism as she has investigated 'signals the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as well as the use of national sentiments to produce and market food' (*ibid.*). Gastronationalism is therefore conceptualised by DeSoucey as a tool to understand food and politics in an increasingly globalising world with a focus on state actors.

The term has proven to be very popular and been taken up by serious journalism, specialist blogs and trade magazines as well as in the academia. The current article reviews the state of study of gastronationalism and investigates what kind of debates are taking place.

Gastronationalism and its development

There is no doubt that DeSoucey's article, 'Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European Union' published in 2010, has been seminal. The Social Sciences Citation Index reports that the article has been cited 100 times as of July 2019. Together with Melissa

Aronczyk's national branding, gastronationalism is an innovative intervention to the study of nationalism in the past decade. By proposing and promoting gastronationalism, DeSoucey has arguably legitimised the study of food and nationalism in a broader framework of food and politics.

Surprisingly, though, the concept of gastronationalism as DeSoucey has proposed – with a focus on state actors and international organisations as the promoter and provider of institutionalised protection of food items in reference to international relations – is not systematically pursued. What seems to have happened is an eruption of scholarly interest in food and nationalism in various forms. One of the examples is Milanese (2010). As the piece was published in the same year as DeSoucey's seminal article, it is highly unlikely Milanese's study is inspired by DeSoucey's work on gastronationalism. However, despite the claim that it is a semiotic study, Milanese's turns out to be a fine study of top-down use of nationalism in food in Peronist Argentina. She describes how Beef, in particular, was used by the state as a tool of populist nation-building. The scope of investigation is wide covering the governmental policies on food informed by science/medicine as well as the balance of payment and political economy. It offers a very nuanced analysis of an increase in beef consumption: it is a mark of raising living standard as well as re-instating masculinity of Argentinians. The article successfully captures the Peronist government's paternalistic stance towards the Argentinians: the government is looking after the population by making its policies on food security and nutrition very visible. Milanese also notes an unintended consequence of changes in the governmental policy to promote a more balanced diet away from the beef-centric one. The newly officially sanctioned diet – by both the medical professionals and the government – turned out to be highly nutritious contributing the improvement in the nation's health. The new diet also entrenched the gendered division of labour in terms of preparing good food. Milanese (2010) analyses a range of questions regarding how the state uses food, a topic which other works in the ensuing years continue to explore.

Another piece of work which deals with food and nationalism without referring to gastronationalism, which is also contemporary to DeSoucey (2010), is Raeton (2010). As a study of the ways in which Finns have negotiated material and symbolic boundaries represented by food in the new environment, i.e. as a new member of the EU, its scope of investigation is similar to DeSoucey's. The perceived need to renegotiate the boundaries of Finnishness represented by food was felt, according to Raeton, because of Finland was trying to establish itself as a respectable member of the EU – it is a study of nationalism in its interaction with international relations. While the background to the investigation – the relationship between the EU and its member states – is shared, Raeton adopts discourse analysis as a main method of investigation. Consequently, its analysis is focused on newspaper articles rather than the government's policies. In this regard, Raeton's analysis moves away from an investigation of top-down nationalism and appears to incorporate the framework of banal nationalism as proposed by Michael Billig (1995) or the everyday nationhood approach proposed by Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008). The concept of banal nationalism draws researchers' attention to the ubiquitous ways for the state to instil the boundaries of 'our country' and the mentality to prioritise it without resorting the use of violence, and as such it is a another approach to top-down nationalism. The everyday nationhood perspective, on the other hand, shifts the focus of investigation to how ordinary people in their ordinary life make sense of and perform the nation. Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) argue in the majority of cases, this is done unreflexively through routinised practices. Both banal nationalism and everyday nationhood approaches emphasises the unremarkable ways in which nationalism works in society. Raeton then proceeds to identify four types of discourse on food and Finnishness: the role of food in the construction of Finnish national interest; concern with food safety linked to re-appraisal of Finnishness; to lead the

EU as well as to fight against evil forces of globalisation; reproduction of Finland as a superior and safe-guarded place for the nation.

The simultaneous publication of DeSoucey, Milanesio and Raeton on the theme of food and nationalism regardless of reference to the term, gastronationalism, suggests that by the beginning of the 2010s, the time was ripe for scholars to give serious attention to food in their investigation of nationalism which tends to be conceptualised as something to do with the state.

DeSoucey's approach is faithfully adopted by Cisela Welz's (2013) investigation into the difficulties the Cypriot government has faced in securing any official status for Halloumi. The article provides a useful summary of the EU's scheme of geographical indications (GIs) such as protected designation of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indication (PGI), which is the key to an investigation into gastronationalism as a tool the state deploys, and its discussion of the difference between GIs and trademark is particularly helpful for the novice in the field. What Welz does better than DeSoucey is to highlight the entanglement of nationalism and the workings of international society, a point which has been emphasised by Ichijo (2017) and by Billig (2017) in response to the former. Ichijo (2017) argues that UNESCO, an international organisation which ostensibly works for cosmopolitan ideals of peace through mutual understanding, is in fact reinforcing the nation-state based framework through its work including the intangible cultural heritage list. The gastronomic meals of the French, for instance, is worth protecting because it represents the essence of Frenchness, and it has to be protected by all UNESCO member states precisely because of its Frenchness, it is an indispensable part of our common heritage. Furthermore, the complexity which is brought by globalisation in ordinary life is aptly captured by Welz (2013: 41): 'The case of a Cypriot cheese re-invented by a German entrepreneur to cater to German residents with a Turkish background is, then, a telling example of how associations with place and culture are employed by the food sector in order to "re-enchanted" food products and target specific consumer groups.' Welz's study shows, as DeSoucey has attempted, that globalisation is not a one-dimensional, homogenising phenomenon but something that entices and entrenches nationalism in our world. Food, because of its materiality and symbolism, can capture this dynamic very effectively.

Somewhat aligning to what Raeton (2010) did, Wright and Annes (2013) introduces the perspective of banal nationalism in their investigation into the debate on halal hamburgers in France in 2009-2010. As they focus on discussions conducted in the national newspapers, DeSoucey's emphasis on the role of the state in understanding gastronationalism recedes to the background. Wright and Annes identify, in the debate on halal hamburgers introduced by the fast-food chain Quick, defensive gastronationalism which sees the halal hamburger as a threat to French national identity. Wright and Annes (2013) argue that the newspapers have produced three frames to discuss the halal hamburger: the republican ideal, free market and cultural diversity frames. Each frame considers the halal hamburger as an issue to do with boundaries of French citizenship. By extending the scope of gastronationalism, nationalism expressed in the realm of food, in the direction of banal nationalism, the article highlights the role of food in the social production of meaning of the nation.

Another recent intervention in this regard is Johnathan Leer's investigation into food TV shows (2018). Having defined gastronationalism as proposed by DeSoucey as 'a range of material and symbolical practices related to food and products that promote nationalism on the micro and macro-levels of societies' Leer chooses to link gastronationalism with the banal nationalism perspective and to focus on the role of media in promoting gastronationalism. He then embarks on an analysis of two food TV shows, *Le Chef en France* (2011-2012) with the leading celebrity chef in

France Cyril Lignac and *Jamie's Great Britain* (2012) with Jamie Oliver. Leer makes two major points: gastronationalism is being normalised in Europe and that a distinction in gastronationalism, monocultural and multicultural, is emerging. While these points are valid (and most likely accurate), the article does not develop the concept of gastronationalism further; rather, the article emphasises that gastronationalism is yet another sub-unit of nationalism, and as such it would reflect what is happening at the level of nationalism, thus normalising the concept in the study of nationalism.

While the term gastronationalism has proven to be popular, a review of the field suggests that the concept has not been rigorously and systematically developed in the direction DeSoucey (2010) has indicated as a tool of the state to negotiate its ways in a globalising world. There is no major monograph on gastronationalism or gastrodiploacy, but there are a number of articles and book chapters that has 'gastronationalism' as a keyword. In these works, gastronationalism tends to be understood as nationalism expressed in relation to food. This raises a few questions: what is gastronationalism? What does it bring to the study of nationalism? In order to address these, we need to review developments in scholarship on food and nationalism.

Food and nationalism

There are a number of publications on food and nationalism or national identity in the form of case study of a particular country or a food item in the past decade. The majority of these works is done by historians, anthropologists and sociologists as well as those from Business Studies interested in branding or marketing. Contribution from Politics and International Relations is still few, though there have been some attempts to tackle food and nationalism at the more theoretical level as we shall see.

Among the works by historians, there are Kwang Ok Kim (2010), Taylor Sherman (2013), Jayanta Sengupta (2010) and Rachel Berger (2013). Following the method of social history, Kim (2010) provides a concise postwar history of food in Korea (more precisely, South Korea) capturing how the state's food policy shifts in response to geopolitics and domestic development. It describes how the government was trying to divert people from rice to wheat-based diet in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War in response to geopolitical situations. Further on in the 1980s-1990s, what the government was addressing was no longer raw geopolitics but a competition between global modernity setting a certain type of diet as a norm and nationalism focusing on what was 'authentically' and 'traditionally' Korean such as dog meat. In the same period, cultural activism to protect and preserve 'national foods' under the idea of '*sinto buri* (body and earth are one)' came to the fore. Here, Kim (2010) shows how cultural nationalism and food science came together to promote 'traditional' food/diet and triggered public backlash against the equation of modernity with western ways. The article offers a helpful overview of shifts and changes in major forces that influence the relationship between food and nationalism taking the case of South Korea as an example.

The remaining three pieces are all focused on India. There could be many reasons for this but the strength of scholarship of history of India as well as the postcolonial dimension of Indian society appear to loom large among the three pieces. Sherman (2013) provide detailed description of shifts and changes of food-related policies in post-independence India with a wealth of reference to primary sources, which helps interested researchers to further pursue any of the themes discussed in the piece. Sherman traces the evolution of the relationship between food security and nation-building and highlights the importance of food security in securing independence. Sherman's investigation focuses on the Indian state.

In contrast, both Sengupta (2010) and Berger (2013) take a more holistic approach to the question of food and nationalism in India echoing the works such as Arjun Appadurai (1988) and Partha Chatterjee (1993) which focus on the realm of the 'private' in the development of Indian nationalism in general. As a study of colonial society, Sengupta (2010) deals with the contrasting use of civilizational distinction by various actors in colonial Bengal in their efforts to define who the Bengalis – and by extension, the Indians – were. More clearly in line with Chatterjee (1993) and also with Appadurai (1988), Berger (2013) investigates 'the house' as a site of struggle between Indian middle class and imperialists. While it does not make use of the concept of gastronationalism, it elucidates on how food and related devices were used to forge a nation and provides insightful discussions on the gendering and sexualising of food consumption. Both highlight the efficacy of focusing on food in investigating nationalism: food is both material and symbolic. As Kim (2010) has touched upon, the modernising government would focus on the materiality of food in reference to food security, geopolitics and the nation's health. However, food is at the same time symbolic which could be used both by the state as DeSoucey (2010) and Milanesio (2010) have shown and non-state actors such as activists, commercial sectors and housewives as discussed by Kim (2010), Welz (2013) and Appadurai (1988). In other words, Sengupta (2010) and Berger (2013) have shed more light on a unique quality of food as an object of analysis in the context of discussing modernity because it is simultaneously material and symbolic.

Another group of publications can be very roughly labelled as cultural studies due to their concern with representation and semiotics. These are presented by anthropologists, sociologists, linguists and those in cultural studies. They focus on representation of obesity, i.e. body images in France, England and Germany (Carof 2017), of agriculture in Japan (Greene 2018) and milk in Mongolia (Thrift 2014). Simons (2010) investigates the semiotics of the Pavlova in New Zealand and Australia and Pascual Soler (2017) the semiotics of food in in a play. Let us review what insights these works bring to the study of food and nationalism in turn.

Solenn Carof's work on the idea of 'national body' is rather tangential on the study of food and nationalism let alone gastronationalism. However, the question whether there is a 'national body' that 'would reveal norms, values, and practices specific to a country' (Carof 2017: 58) has the potential to touch the core of national identity and nationalism. Carof pursues the question by looking into the ideas of fatness/obesity in France, England and Germany using both quantitative and qualitative data; in addition to gender, age, socioeconomic background, immigrant origin, national 'philosophy' about obesity shapes public representation of fatness/obesity are used. While the investigation does not directly address gastronationalism or food and nationalism, it suggests another way in which the nation can be regarded as a moral community in reference to food.

Barbara Greene (2018) argues that the rise of agrarian nationalism in Japan since the beginning of the 21st century reflects the permeation of the government's concern over food security into popular culture. Here, agrarian nationalism is conceptualised as a belief that domestically produced food is safer and better for older adults in charge of feeding their families. She investigates her thesis using *manga* which arguably has helped spread agrarian nationalism from the government to urban, younger generations. Greene's work sheds light on how a top-down initiative can reach a section of population which could be difficult for the government to reach by mobilising popular culture. In other words, Greene's work shows how the state works on society, a classic theme in the study of nationalism.

Eric Thrift (2014) provides a very interesting and careful case study of 'food and nationalism' in Mongolia. Taking a scandal about the 'authenticity' of a national food item, *tarag* (drinkable yoghurt) as a cue, Thrift carefully disentangles the complex entanglement of industrialisation in the form of change in lifestyle with the nomadic past as the golden age, science/medicine (what is nutritious and safe and what is good for the nation's health), culture (the idea of milk as pure, as white, as maternal), heritage and the hostility to the Chinese. What is interesting in his analysis is that while there is reference to civilisation in the discourse of pure milk and despite its focus on 'purity', there is no reference to race. In a similar vein that three pieces on India reviewed above, Thrift's piece highlights why the food-and-nationalism angle is a useful approach to the study of society; it is where a number of factors that matter to us come together, and as such, an investigation based on the food-and-nationalism approach can yield rich results.

In reference to semiotics, Nieves Pascual Soler (2017) carries out an orthodox analysis of a play, *Tastes Like Cuba* by Eduardo Machado. It turns out to be a conscientious examination of literary text and does not tell much about food and nationalism let alone gastronationalism. On the other hand, Simons (2010) offers insights which are relevant to food and nationalism. In investigating the social construction of meaning of Pavlova historically, Simons (2010) sheds light on the relationship between femininity and nationality in the midst of industrialisation and globalisation. He shows that the golden age of cake and biscuit baking in Australia and New Zealand in the first four decades of the 20th century coincided with a low female employment rate in the time of nation-building and that the arrival of labour saving devices such as the mechanical egg beater and the rise of cookbooks added further dimensions to the meaning of Pavlova. As food preparation is predominantly seen as a female activity, Simons (2010) shows that a focus on food and nationalism can shed light on the question of gender in social relationship.

Another group of literature can be labelled as political economy or policy focused. There is a work on political economy of food and globalisation (Duval-Diop 2015) which argues that the nation-state has not been subverted by globalisation. Another piece of work is on development and its political ecology (Hausermann 2018) which has rather tangential relevance to both food-and-nationalism and gastronationalism. Conker (2018) touches on the role of infrastructure in the process of nation-building in his study of water nationalism in Turkey. While it is not very relevant to our current concern, that is, gastronationalism or food and nationalism, the article provides a summary of history of state- and nation- building in Turkey which would be useful for those interested in the case of Turkey. In this regard, Aya Hirata Kimura (2011) has more direct relevance to gastronationalism and food-and-nationalism. In her investigation into the state and its food policy as an instance of governmentality in Japan, Kimura (2011) focuses on neoliberalism and what she terms 'responsibilization' where the government constructs the food problem as a problem brought about by unaware or irresponsible individuals. She argues that *shokuiku* (food education), an idea that was introduced in 2002 which later became the government's policy, was the Japanese government's response to the crises in the food system including the fast deterioration of domestic agriculture, trade liberalisation which led to the further decline in the self-sufficiency rate and food-related scandals. She further shows that by combining food 'reform' policies with top-down cultural nationalism, the government has succeeded in framing a problem for a government as a problem of individual morality, thus embodying neo-liberal governmentality. In reference to our concern with gastronationalism and/or food and nationalism, Kimura's focus on the development of neoliberal governmentality turns out to be relevant and it has the potential to suggest a new route to develop the concept of gastronationalism further.

Furthermore, there is an intervention in reference to ethics by Simon Estock (2015) which deals with ethics and food security though rather tangential to gastronationalism or food and nationalism. From a more conceptual angle, Daniele Conversi (2016) discusses a reconfiguration of the concept of sovereignty in reference to food sovereignty. While not directly relevant to gastronationalism and food-and-nationalism, Conversi (2016) argues that the concept of food sovereignty has helped recover basic meaning of sovereignty in the globalising world by combining cosmopolitan and ethno-cultural orientations and that food sovereignty represents a new form of control of territory. These two pieces again show that an investigation into gastronationalism or food and nationalism has a lot of potential because food is normative as well. The normative aspect of food directly links to the role of the state as the protector of its integrity and its capacity to protect and provide for the populace.

In reviewing the development of scholarship in the field of food and nationalism, we cannot overlook two recent monographs: *Food, National Identity and Nationalism* by Atsuko Ichijo and Ronald Ranta (2016) and *Food, Politics, and Society: Social Theory and the Modern Food System* by Alex Colás, Jason Edwards, Jane Levi and Sami Zubaida (2018). The former is a possibly first ever attempt to systematically engage with food and nationalism as a sub-field of nationalism studies that has been long neglected. By applying the 'food-and-nationalism' axis to different levels of politics – from the private to the state and to the international – Ichijo and Ranta (2016) shows the utility of the angle as a method of investigating the world we live in. The volume examines a wide range of issues: from a bottom-up creating of nation through 'performing the nation' in devising recipes for Japanese style pasta sauce and actually cooking and consuming it to reaffirm the boundary of the Japanese nation (Ch. 1), the ways in which the Arab-Palestinians in Israel perform the nation through food (Ch. 2), the ways in which the corporate sector enforces the importance of attaching nationality to food (Ch. 3), an example of Meiji Japan in imposing a top-down idea of the ideal diet for the nation (Ch. 4), the ways in which the government would project itself to the world through gastrodiploacy (Ch. 5), how the issue of whaling has been transformed from a question of resource management to the one about norms ('is it OK to eat whales?') (Ch. 6) and how UNESCO, an international organisation ostensibly working for cosmopolitan ideals, in fact works to entrench the nation-state system through its intangible cultural heritage list (Ch. 7). As the first attempt to systematically apply the 'food-and-nationalism' angle to different levels of politics, the volume still has rough edges, but it has shown why the 'food-and-nationalism' angle is very useful in the investigation into our society and established food and nationalism as a legitimate subject of investigation in nationalism studies.

Colás *et al.* (2018) takes a broad sociological approach to the politics of food. What is particularly relevant to our concern here is Chapter 8 'Identity: Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Religion'. It places the relationship between food and nationalism broadly within the expansion of modernising capitalism and globalisation: 'The existence of a variety of rival and contested national food cultures is a key condition for the formation of personal identities in the modern world. But, as we shall see in this chapter, contemporary processes of globalisation are reinforcing ideas of distinct ethno-nationalist food cultures while at the same time eroding the institutions and practices of ethno-national and religious membership.' (*ibid.*: 131). The chapter presents a clear argument about food as a banal way of achieving national integration overcoming the aristocratic and bourgeois contempt of peasants. It discusses the role of diasporic community in standardising 'national' food, i.e., pizza as an Italian food item by the Italian-Americans in the United States. The chapter emphasises the modernity of 'nation' in reference to capitalism and later stages of globalisation and argues that society trumps nature in forming national/regional cuisine as seen in the construction of Indian cuisine and the Mediterranean diet: 'Construction of national cuisines have a sociological basis in the processes of

modernity and capitalism that entail urbanisation, common educational curricula, military conscription, common public spheres of media and communications, and social and geographical mobility, bringing people from various regions and ethnicities into common intercourse and participation in urban cultures.' (*ibid.*: 149).

Neither of these two volumes is on gastronationalism *per se*, but both represent efforts to develop theoretical and methodological angles to study society in reference to food and nationalism. This represents tangible development in scholarship on the relationship between food and nationalism.

The latest addition to the field is *The Emergence of National Food: The Dynamics of Food and Nationalism* edited by Atsuko Ichijo, Venetia Johannes and Ronald Ranta (2019). As a volume that investigates under what circumstances national food emerges or does not emerge drawing from a range of case studies, it is not a systematic theoretical contribution to the field. However, by drawing from examples from Portugal, Mexico, the USA, Bulgaria, Scotland and Israel, to mention but a few, and by investigating various stages of national food – its birth, emergence and decline - the volume illustrates ways in which various social forces work together to shape social and political realities concerning food.

Conclusion

The current review of the concept of gastronationalism has found that while the term has been widely welcomed, it has not been developed in the way Michaela DeSoucey has suggested. While there are some works which attempt to develop DeSoucey's original focus on the behaviour of state actors in the international arena, many works that use DeSoucey's concept tend to incorporate the perspective of banal nationalism or everyday nationhood to use gastronationalism as a tool for investigation as to what meaning is attached to food in a particular country as an expression of nationalism. The review has also found that there has no major monograph on gastronationalism *per se* and the scope of the development of the concept of gastronationalism is still wide open.

When turning one's attention more broadly to food and nationalism, the review has found that scholarship in this area has been very active and interesting, and important insights have been put forward. What is particularly encouraging in this area is that attempts have been made to systematically study food and nationalism in reference to various levels of politics, thus demonstrating the utility of the 'food-and-nationalism' angle as a tool of investigating the world we live in.

These observations bring us back to the question: what is gastronationalism? As pointed out earlier, by mobilising the concept of gastronationalism, DeSoucey has provided an alternative approach to understand how state actors interact with one another and with international organisations in the global arena in reference to food. In particular, she has shown how to apply sociological analysis to international relations making the most of the unique characteristics of food of being simultaneously material and symbolic. In this regard, DeSoucey's gastronationalism is a distinct analytical approach in the study of nationalism. However, other scholars have used gastronationalism to indicate an expression of nationalism in reference to food, which is, at the end of the day, indistinguishable from any studies on food and nationalism without using the term. It follows, then, for the concept of gastronationalism to retain its utility, efforts to understand what role food plays in the interaction between states and international organisations should be made paying particular attention to the state's unique characteristics as a social actor, i.e., its coercive and regulatory powers, as well as the entanglement of nationalism and the Westphalian order. As for food and nationalism, as there are

ample excellent case studies of a particular country or food item, the logical step to be pursued is to integrate various insights into an overall understanding of the world we live in. It is expected these attempts will highlight the permeation of nationalism in all aspects of life, which in turn should help us achieve more accurate at the same time as nuanced understanding of our life.

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