

ABSTRACT

Title: IN QUESTIONABLE TASTE: EATING CULTURE,
COOKING CULTURE IN ANGLOPHONE
POSTCOLONIAL TEXTS

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This dissertation produces an extensive and intensive study of the culture of food in postcolonial literature and cookbooks that describe particular regions and cultures. It treats novels and cookbooks that depict food and eating in Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean to argue that while both cookbooks and novels depict as unstable the connection between food and culture; the key difference lies in the manner in which each genre describes that instability.

The study uses memoir cookbooks (cookbooks that use the autobiographical accounts of their authors as a method of organizing content and providing context for recipes) and literary depictions of cooking and eating to trouble the neat tautology that establishes food and home as interchangeable cultural signifiers of equal weight. It evaluates the work that cookbooks do by comparing them to representations of cooking, eating and food in representative novels that frame depictions of citizenship and the nation in deeply ambivalent terms even as they depict delicious meals, well-laid family tables, and clean, productive kitchens.

The dissertation studies cookbooks and novels to illustrate how the text under consideration act out the concerns that structure postcolonial critique. If regional cookbooks provide obscured or incomplete insight into the cultures they purport to authentically depict, then the novels under study provide openly ambivalent accounts of cultural identification. The study begins by examining how pan-cultural cookbooks do the work of drawing multiple nations beneath the aegis of the global—and how this work fails to engage the problematic cosmopolitics of globality as revealed in two South Asian novels. It then examines African texts to analyze the difficulties that press bodies into motion—hunger and impoverishment, political disenfranchisement and oppression, and attenuated relationships with cultural traditions. The dissertation then moves to America via the Caribbean, examining diasporic longing in Cuban expatriates and the manner in which regional cookbooks and memoirs construct the past by reinventing the spaces that their authors have left behind.

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Globe at the Table.....	50
Chapter 2: The Excesses of this World.....	106
Chapter 3: “And there’s only my imagination where our history should be”	167
Epilogue: Pangs	214
Notes	249
Bibliography	306

INTRODUCTION

A cuisine is already a form of writing.

— *Paul Magee*

I begin this dissertation, not with a personal culinary recollection, but with a literary one: a tomato sandwich.

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the remembered flavor of a tomato sandwich plays a significant role in the temporality that binds the book. The taste forms a gustatory link that binds Rahel and Estha to the awful memory of their separation and its tragic cause. The sandwiches that her brother eats and that she can taste evoke for Rahel the memory of Estha's return to his father. Her tongue remembers this taste as he lunches on them while riding the train that splits the twins from one another, this flavor conveyed from one tongue to another in a moment of empathic transmission (5). The twins remain separated until adults, and Estha stops speaking entirely. His tongue, which tastes the sandwiches and empathically shares their flavor with his sister, is locked by a silence that permeates his entire being (13). The sandwiches represent the terminus of remembered events that lead up to the moment of their consumption and Estha's verbal shutdown at the beginning of the text—and their delicious flavor becomes the accelerant that unleashes those memories in the form of the narrative that follows. They mark the bookends that identify the conclusion of the story (a conclusion that appears both at the beginning and then at

the end of the book) and they arrive in their tiffin in the story's fragmented aftermath that is presented at the novel's opening moments.

Similarly to the banana jam in this novel, the sandwiches that Estha eats constitute structural figurations, tropes that determine how signification and temporality function in the text. From chutney jars to roasted venison, food tropes in postcolonial fiction do heavier work than the mere arousal of nostalgia—they invite a complex critique of location and displacement, of memory and lived experiences, and of the ways in which daily living acts out the abstractions of cosmopolitanism, subalternity, and ethics. Their evocative nature provides a powerful, readily recognizable, immediate means of prefiguring the themes they represent.

Likewise, nonfiction culinary collections—recipe books, culinary memoirs, autobiographical cookbooks—bear even heavier freight of remembrance and cultural contiguity. However, the technical, “factual” nature of their accounts invites, not formal or thematic critique, but acceptance and uncritical reception. Cookbooks seem so innocuous in their task, particularly when the authenticity of their accounts is supplemented by an autobiographical account that lends the collection added credence. However, the same concerns outlined in postcolonial theory and fiction also arise in culinary autobiographies written in postcolonial contexts—concerns about displacement and diaspora, cosmopolitan outreach, subalternity and empowered expression, and the ethics of writing and consumption.

In this dissertation, I undertake a study of culinary autobiographies (a category of texts that includes culinary memoirs, autobiographical cookbooks, and autoethnographic cookbooks)¹ and postcolonial fiction from the Caribbean, India, and

Africa. My study examines these works through the lens of postcolonial theory and food studies to determine how the depictions of domesticity under construction in these different genres actually work to undermine the very ties to family and nation that they purport to define and reinforce. My study illustrates how, contrary to conventional notions that food images signify cultural contiguity and the comforts of home, food images in postcolonial contexts underscore the disruption of domestic spaces. They point toward the attenuation of the ties that bind, and draw into sharp relief the spaces of yearning that impel writers of culinary autobiographies to compile recipes and memories as parallel endeavors of recovery. My study examines how culinary autobiographies do their work in shadowy ways, how they elide what they elide and why, and outlines how the food images in postcolonial novels can offer a tool that can clarify these elisions.

More importantly, my work offers a refutation of the argument that cookbooks, recipe writing, and culinary culture should be treated as unambivalent cultural referents. For example, a recent argument set forth by Paul Magee in a 2005 issue of *Postcolonial Studies* states that critics ought to treat regional cookbooks—and, by extension, the regional/cultural aspect of culinary autobiographies—as technical manuals that instruct in the production of culture. He writes:

We've basically ignored technical literature like cookbooks, where the function of representation is less to provide a veridical statement about some supposed reality, or *thing-in-itself*, [italics his] than to put in motion, and so replicate, a series of practices. After all, the recipes one finds in the works of writers like Roden go much further than typical ethnography in representing

the Middle East. *They allow for its effective recreation elsewhere. A recipe in Roden is more akin to a computer program, a chemical formula, or even a musical score, than a depiction.* (4, italics mine)

While arguments such as his extend the theoretical considerations of form to include cookbooks, his comments are also deeply troubling.² They demonstrate a notable lack of reflexivity that threatens a retrogressive textual approach. In other words, postcolonial critics stringently analyze novels, poetry, drama, films, and even social habits using theory as a sieve to assure that no thoughtless particulates escape the theoretical eye. In spite of the cautionaries articulated in the field's foundational texts, Magee suggests that we treat cookbooks as cultural profiles:

If I am the first critic to accuse Said of failing to include the recipe for cold stuffed vine leaves in his purview of "Western conceptions of the Orient," it is because I believe that such recipes do indeed "instrumentally depend on" the cultures from which they emanate. I am suggesting that we treat cookbook writers as cultural theorists in their own right, and take seriously their claims. (3-4)

In this argument, the critic has been seduced by the *dingmagie* of food to such a degree that recipes function as cultural technical manuals, and cooking, consumption, and recipe writing collapse into a single practice that is not only interdependent but is also interchangeable. This establishes a tight, tautological relationship between eating, cookbooks, and culture, because they are all "technical phenomen[a]" that participate in the production of culture (8-9). Magee views the reluctance of critical engagement with cookbooks as a reluctance to link the technical

dictum of recipes with culture as a practice. In other words, critics shy away from the specificity of recipes as a means of acting out the abstractions of culture, in part because they wish to moor the concept-metaphor of culture *in situ*. This confines the various iterations of the concept-metaphor of culture within the bounds of orthodox literary conventions and forms.³ In spite of themselves, critics do not wish “cultures” to travel.

Critics who share Magee’s view have a point. Food practices can serve as a means of ingress into cultural practice, and eating authentically can measure proximity to cultural acceptance. What better way to signify openmindedness and equanimity than to smile at the proffered dish, enjoy it enthusiastically, and offer a clean plate for a second helping? However, the extremity of this non-critical reception of culinary records and habits shields them from the controversial approaches to which postcolonial critics rightfully subject all forms of representation. These arguments suggest that, as technical manuals, cookbooks offer representations of culture that should not be treated as representational, or even with the skepticism to which we subject historiography; instead, because of the materiality of their subject, cookbooks should be treated as unquestioned facts because cookbook writers “have a theory as to how culture can be translated through time and space” (Magee 5). But the task of the translator here should be questioned because the translator must not only clarify language—he or she must also make clear the cultural practices that outline the contours of everyday life.

To follow this line of argument means that cookbooks stand to receive a “pass” of sorts: they become the textual equivalent of the native informant—never to

be questioned, never to be suspected, evading analysis as virtuous exemplars of the cultures they represent.⁴ To adopt this posture would mean that the motives that impel the creation and shape of cookbooks and their representations would never be subjected to the degree of analysis to which many thinkers subject cultural production both within and outside the embrace of the discipline of postcolonial studies. If ethnographic works such as Beverly Bell's *Walking On Fire* are self-conscious endeavors, then the failure of regional cookbooks to engage in their tasks with the same measure of reflexivity illustrates a certain measure of atavistic, essentialist yearnings as they relate to matters of taste and texture. Our eyes close as flavors, warmth and coolness, softness and crunchiness, meld with memory. The tongue becomes the most exposed, most vulnerable part of the body, connected to the most intimate sense of our personal histories—sensory experiences and recollections that we seek to protect. Like a nasty sweet tooth craves chocolate, regional cookbooks allow postcolonial critics to indulge in all sorts of bad habits that we endeavor to shed: trust in the native informant, cosmopolitan impulses that set aside considerations of privilege, flattened or foreshortened depictions of difference. Couple these with the concept that the flavors on tongue allow connection with and knowledge of a culture, and postcolonial critic falls right back into the company of such miscreants as Claude Levi-Strauss. We surrender our entitlement to boo and to hiss and to throw rotten vegetables as we yield to an anthropological, ethnographic (re)turn that postcolonial theory has consistently worked against and critiqued: we end up right where we began with *The Raw and the Cooked*.

Postcolonial criticism's foundational texts caution subsequent critics against failure to challenge the treatment of post-colonial texts as ethnography. In 1989, Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin write about the dangers that readers and critics confront as they encounter the ethnographic characteristics of postcolonial literature:

The danger in 'transcultural dialogues', such as those represented by some traditional anthropological texts, is that a new set of presuppositions, resulting from the interchange of cultures, is taken as the cultural reality of the Other. The described culture is therefore very much a product of the particular ethnographic encounter—the text creates the reality of the Other in the guise of describing it. Although the post-colonial text can operate as ethnography, its use of language incorporates the warning that the site of the shared discourse—the literary text—is not the site of a shared mental experience, and should not be seen as such. (57-61)

Regional cookbooks pose open invitations to readers to treat their contents as ethnographic works, substituting shared mental experiences with shared material encounters: by preparing and consuming the foods of other cultures (even allowing for substitutions for otherwise unavailable ingredients) I can acquire detailed knowledge of a culture in ways that testimonials cannot match. Including biographical details compounds the crime: the testimonials and cultural depictions acquire the added dimension of personal experience. However, regional cookbooks do not merely pose challenges to cultural transmission and authenticity. They also establish the cosmopolitanism of the reading/cooking audience. This fractures the postivism that Magee suggests is a regional cookbook's greatest virtue.⁵

From Diaspora to Dinner Table: Theoretical Paradigms

This dissertation positions itself at the juncture between discourses on cosmopolitics, diaspora, and subaltern subjectivity, set against the backdrop of domesticity and daily life. The location of displacement has conventionally been the ship (a common trope in Caribbean postcolonial fiction such as Caryl Phillips' *Atlantic Sound*) the highway (Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon*) trains (Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*) and airports (Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*). The family table, however, is typically situated in the home and is a reassurance of cultural continuity and stability (Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* among others).⁶

Postcolonial theory tends to follow suit. Critical methodologies adhere to a strict politics of segregation. Manu Goswami's *Producing India*, for example, identifies railways as "metonyms of a colonial modernizing project":

[They are] mediums for the reconfiguration of social space, and as producers of a hierarchical, fragmented, and contradictory topography of social encounter and exclusion. As a privileged vector of colonial state space, railways not only enabled the massive and unprecedented circulation of peoples and commodities within boundaries of colonial India. They were also key sites for the institution of the colonial political economy of difference, the refashioning of everyday experiences and collective self-understandings, and the shaping of a range of categories of practice. (104)

In other words, the representation of railways in postcolonial literature thematizes the production of a nation along continua of difference, mobility, and development.

However, once critics turn to the production of the nation through analysis of the family table, the discourse radically changes registers: notions of fixity and language of conjuration prevail. For example, Keya Ganguly writes about the practice of eating Indian cuisine in “the (new) world”:

Culinary activity functions as a sort of “technique of nearness,” gathering up into present space the magic of the past and permitting the imagination of ideas, objects, and events that are no longer available or repeatable except in a relay through food matters. Eating well and in the company of others, then, is about not paradise lost, but paradise regained...The very taken-for-grantedness of alimentary customs—seeing the elaborate meal as a representation of an unquestioned Indianness—allows people to come to terms with their emergent and upwardly mobile investments in bourgeois individualism. (136)

This means that, in a world defined by fluctuating identity formations, food habits work to still the body, to bring it to rest in cultural states defined by their fixity, their surety, their appeal to authenticity and rootedness. The table constitutes a concrete, tangible space where nations are imagined—and then conjured.⁷

This dichotomy yields the cosmopolitan impulse that foregrounds many studies in food culture. Food Studies criticism outlines culture on the move. The culinary adventurer exemplifies this notion: this eater demonstrates her open-mindedness and acceptance of difference by eating and cooking foreign fare. The availability of obscure ingredients—strange fruits and vegetables, exotic spices—

attests to the encompassing embrace of globalism and the ready appetite for cooking and eating abroad without leaving one's own kitchen. The encounters between the culinary adventurer and new flavors do not merely signify the curious palate. They correspond to the connections between people of different origin—eating becomes a means of cross-cultural conversation. In *Cosmopolitanism*, Anthony Appiah writes about these encounters:

[T]he points of entry to cross-cultural conversation are things that are shared by those who are in the conversation. They do not need to be universal; all they need to be is what these particular people have in common. Once we have found enough we share, there is the further possibility that we will be able to enjoy discovering things we do not yet share. That is one of the payoffs of cosmopolitan curiosity. We can learn from one another; or we can simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. (97)

This easy cosmopolitanism translates well into matters of taste. Savory flavors, delicious ingredients, similar cooking methods and familiar dishes open new culinary frontiers, which promise introduction to different modes of life as they are lived. The encounter may be one-sided (I consume, but do not directly interact with the cultural subject) but the objective remains the same: “mak[ing] sense of each other in the end” (97). I cannot stop an Indian woman in the street to share the *bhel puri* I just prepared, but her life in Mumbai becomes a bit less abstract in my imagination as I relish its spicy bite and delightful textures.

Food cultural studies treat this endeavor with a degree of skepticism, one that echoes resoundingly—albeit in different terms—in postcolonial theory. The terms of

food-based cultural engagement about which thinkers should be wary appear in Lucy Long's collection entitled *Culinary Tourism* and again in *Exotic Appetites* by Lisa Maree Heldke.⁸ While each text approaches the concept of how to eat at home abroad, the concept that analogously structures each thinker's approach is that of a troubled cosmopolitics. The manner in which eating and travel maintain an overdetermined relationship with the nation invites consideration of the ways in which eating and traveling should be assessed as exercises in cosmopolitical (dis)engagement.

If, as Pheng Cheah writes in "Given Culture," "the concept of hybrid culture is formulated in polemical opposition to both the canonical concept of culture that grounds philosophical cosmopolitanism and the anthropological concept of culture that leads to multiculturalist relativism" (292), then culinary autobiographies represent the unstable intersection of these notions, drawing them out of their polemical oppositions and into uneasy exchange with one another. This means that culinary autobiographies both constitute and critique hybrid cultural moments. They represent an in-between state that creates slippages between concepts of culture. Culinary autobiographies—in keeping with most regional cookbooks—act out the principle that the universalized virtue of a good meal will bring all bodies to the table to eat. Most people enjoy a wide range of tastes and textures; the array of recipes put on display by a regional cookbook surely seeks to satisfy the generally shared aesthetic of balanced flavors and well-prepared dishes. The central function of the recipe collections found in culinary autobiographies is that of fundamental notions of taste—most bodies come to the table with the same hunger. However, these notions of taste

are not the only compelling features that define the cosmopolitan characteristics of regional cookbooks and culinary autobiographies. Each culture profiled in each volume is treated as a whole unto itself, “an organic and coherent body” (292) shelved beside other organic and coherent bodies. Each is marked by difference; all have been given equal weight. However, these books also do their work in pernicious ways that parallel the work performed by the ethnographic and cultural exhibitions that James Clifford profiles in *Routes*: their approach forecloses “local cultural futures by museumizing cultural otherness” (Cheah 292). In other words, the effect of seeking “authentic cultural alterity” locks culture into frozen forms, disallowing deviation. The recipe exemplifies this tendency—it provides a cultural snapshot that attests to a perfected version of a specific action intended to manifest the culture under consideration. Even if adapted to conform to available ingredients and an uninitiated palate, the recipe sets itself forth as a cultural mode that excludes inventiveness and experimentation—once adulterated, the recipe no longer can claim authenticity with certainty.

At the same time, the culinary autobiography paradoxically attempts to define itself as an exercise in hybrid cultural theory, staging radical cosmopolitan agency as an extension of a process or activity that manifests culture through encounters of/with difference. Preparation of exotic fare highlights cultural difference, thus bringing into being the cultures depicted in the texts whose recipes cooks prepare. However, the outlines that distinguish cultures from one another come into sharp focus only in conditions of difference. Homi Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* presents the (idealized) mechanic of this operation: the table becomes the third space of enunciation.

However, Pheng Cheah treats these encounters with a degree of skepticism that handily applies to the work that cookbooks do. He argues, “the accounts of radical cosmopolitan agency offered by hybridity theory obscure the material dynamics of nationalism in neocolonial globalization” (291-2). Culinary autobiographies written in postcolonial contexts will not account for these dynamics even as they represent a materiality that reaffirms nationalism, because the nationalism they depict elides the plurality of subject positions that comprise the postcolonial nation-state, presenting these nations in idealized form, refracted through the lens of a single subject position (the *I* that witnesses the nation and its culture). These texts indulge in the production of “a depoliticized population that identifies the nation’s well-being with the state’s well-being” and with the satisfied appetite (Cheah 318).

These are not the only elisions that trouble (and yet power) culinary autobiographies. Theories of diaspora as they are applied to the production of culinary representations immediately invoke the identity politics that structure these texts—politics that cookbooks immediately elide.⁹ In “Diasporic Communities and Identity Politics,” Ryan Bishop and John Phillips argue that, “diasporic communities result from the power of sovereignty to expunge those who oppose it and are, indeed, the manifestation of this power” (164). I would add that the violent purgations that create diasporas do not restrict themselves to the heaves of regime change, civil strife, invasion, and conquest, even in the Asian-American contexts that Bishop and Phillips treat in their article entitled “Diasporic Communities and Identity Politics.”¹⁰ These purgative forces include economic duress: famine and impoverishment also move people from place to place. A wide range of factors that mobilize groups of people

thus marks diasporic communities. This means that, rather than happily blooming in foreign lands as a testament to the benevolent energy of globalization, the powerful magnetism of more developed nations, and the popular culture they promulgate, many diasporic groups represent the forces of abjection that expel them from their places of origin.

The focus on the individual in diasporic research is paralleled in the anecdotal nature of culinary autobiographies, which risks the narrowing of the field of study. This risk principally entails “unduly and unnecessarily delimiting the diasporic research enterprise. Diasporic communities require a widening reading of their experience if the utopian discourse of cosmopolitanism operative within globalization is to be substantively challenged” (Bishop and Phillips 175). This constitutes yet another reason why reading cookbooks as technical manuals for the production of culture proves deeply problematic: to avoid offending the sensibilities of the consuming audience, the cultures and historical circumstances that establish the contexts of their production are subject to abbreviation, simplification, and removal at a distance.¹¹

Novels provide the most readily legible means of observing the operations of abjection that diasporic communities suffer. It bursts forth in works such as *The Farming of Bones* and *Brother, I'm Dying* by Edwidge Danticat. The awkwardness of diasporic integration into the fabric of a host culture becomes the subtext of Bharati Mukerjee's *Jasmine*. Alienation, isolation, and the sense of feeling adrift where one should feel welcomed feature as prominent themes in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*.

Culinary autobiographies obscure these operations, even as they depend upon them to stimulate their creation.

Can the Subaltern Cook? Third World Appetites and Subaltern Subjectivity

Culinary autobiographies position themselves at the convergence of multiple vectors of the subaltern, in ways that define subalternity as a microphysics of power rather than an identity formation (see my discussion of this trend below). Culinary autobiographies written in postcolonial diasporic contexts allow the author to position herself as a subaltern citizen who can tap into the power of cookbooks as a means to reclaim citizenship and belonging. The narrative follows the story arc of disenfranchisement, exile, individual bewilderment, cultural recovery, and finally, imaginary repatriation. In certain contexts, cookbook writing places pressure on the figure of the subaltern, warping and distorting it as authors invoke and then shed subalternity as a means of establishing clear positions of authority. Rather than adhering to the figure of the peasant, as Partha Chatterjee characterizes the subaltern in much of his work, or to the figure of the Third World woman who takes shape in Chandra Mohanty's writing, the domestic become a space in which subalternity assumes new forms at the behest of the writer and becomes a dynamic subject position. The threat of erasure haunts the cultural practices and the identity formations by which the author defines him- or herself. Cookbooks offer reassurance through record. Moreover, these books highlight the process by which subalterns can lay claim to subjectivity: *I am now dislocated from the culture in which I was subaltern; this is my cultural experience, and I will do more than simply speak about*

it—I will instruct in its reproduction. Instead of confining the overturn of the status of the subaltern to the speech acts that give tongue to their practices of everyday life, cookbooks grant additional force to the articulations of culture that their writers seek to recover by moving these articulations into the realm of widely dispersed actions. Rather than confining the definition of subalternity to the Third World peasant, the new subaltern becomes the members of the diaspora in need of the mediation of the cookbook writer.

Recent studies in subalternity recast the concept by inviting consideration of cosmopolitanism and citizenship, concepts that comprise central preoccupations of the cookbook form. Gyanendra Pandey’s “Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories” first traces an abbreviated history of subaltern subjectivity, identifying the Third World peasant as the archetypal figure defining subalternity, then recasts that figure by advancing citizenship as a means of refining this particular identity formation. Pandey describes “the [initial] task of subaltern historiography [as the recovery of] this underdeveloped figure for history, to restore the agency of the yokel, recognize that the peasant mass was contemporaneous with the modern—a part of modernity—and establish the peasant as (in substantial part) the maker of his/her own destiny” (273). This concentration on the Third World peasant serves as a productive beginning but, as Pandey suggests, the preoccupation with the subaltern subject diminishes the possible interventions to be made on behalf of subaltern citizens: “lower-class, lower-caste, immigrant and other minority communities—women, gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities, to take one kind of example—who have been granted the status of citizens (rights-holders, inhabitants, subjects of the state) without

becoming quite ‘mainstream’” (Pandey 276). These bodies stand at the periphery of “the community, the village, the ward and the polis,” and Pandey’s remarks observe their difficult citizenship. As groups, they have acknowledged belonging in the body of the state; yet their difference from the normative identity formations that mark “proper” citizens of the state leaves them outside conventional history. In other words, these subjects of the state represent groups that experience only partial enfranchisement. Pandey’s argument states that observing these bodies is less about recuperating their histories and asserting claims to belonging in its fullest sense as it is enjoyed by citizens in the mainstream than it is “about historical agency broadly defined, and about belonging—in a society and in its self-construction. That is to say, observing subaltern citizenship is about the living of individual and collective lives and the limitations on that living, about “the potential for life and creativity in given historical circumstances, and the restriction of that potential” (Pandey 275-6).

Meanwhile, Jamil Khader’s work reconfigures subalternity by unmooring it from its connection with the nation-state and putting the subaltern into motion. Similarly to Partha Chatterjee, Khader’s definition of subalternity is bound up in the terms *oppressed minority* (77) and *second-class citizen* (63). However, Khader introduces the concept of subaltern cosmopolitanism, combining features of minor transnationalism and discrepant cosmopolitanism. Subaltern cosmopolitanism becomes a variant of discrepant cosmopolitanism—one cosmopolitanism among many, defined by a certain measure of solidarity and likeness with other subaltern forms. Khader’s particular definition of subalternity relies upon a concentration on race, class, gender, sexuality, and vulnerability to forces of displacement. It responds

to the call “for a politics of transethnic and transnational solidarity, grounded in conscious alliance and affinity rather than identical histories, desires, or locations” (77). Khader argues that subaltern citizens reconfigure the diasporic cultures in which they find themselves by engaging with other subalterns of different origin and ethnicity. In this way, the concept of the diaspora no longer yearns for or opposes points of origin; instead, transethnic and transnational dialogue disengages diaspora from the binary that conventionally gives it definition, particularly in the context of the Caribbean exile (77). Consequently, subaltern cosmopolitanism opens the ground for a “transnational politics of solidarity [through the abrogation of] the ethnic subtext underpinning diasporic identity formations” (79).

Because these reconfigurations yet depend on specific identity formations, they only tangentially address the types and degrees of subalternity expressed in the cookbook form. Cookbook writers who find themselves in positions of subalternity in the nations they leave behind can use their exotic origins to empower their voices in new cultural contexts. However, this thesis proves reductive. Newer considerations of subalternity instead grant insight into the cookbooks that have yet to be written. For example, Haitian autobiographical and autoethnographic cookbooks do not populate the shelves of a local Borders bookseller; Indian cookbooks however, occupy broad swathes of territory in the section dedicated to foreign cuisine. The second wave of Indian immigration into the Americas is marked by an influx of middle-class citizens with access to financial and educational privilege.¹² Meanwhile, analyzing *Brother, I Am Dying* as a noteworthy example, the archetypal Haitian immigrant experience is one of flight from the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, a nation ravaged by

oppressive regimes and civil strife. The reason for the dearth of Haitian regional cookbooks may be twofold: because Haiti is a nation archetypically comprised of subaltern subjects, these writers lack access to the engines of print production that facilitate the compilation and distribution of culinary memoirs; additionally, if the face of a nation is that of a subaltern subject, such nations do not easily conform to the food tourism that characterizes the manner in which many regional cookbooks treat the spaces they represent.

If culinary memoirs collapse nations into the space of a single subjectivity, or establish tautological relationships between cultural practices and the subjects who perform them, then the Haitian cookbook memoir's lack of a significant market share may be attributable to that nation's continued metonymic depiction as a subaltern state: a nation that lacks access to the resources that enable international economic mobility.¹³ This subalternity is further represented by the fact that the majority of Haitian cookbooks are not only pan-Caribbean, but also seem to be written in small print runs issued by charitable organizations, many of which are faith-based, and who use the books as a fund-raising tool.¹⁴ These books trope Haiti and Haitians as quaint but troubled, appealing but desperate, backward but hopeful. Haiti's lack of access to the powers of media representation in the US means that the nation falls subject to the benign portrayals that we see in these cookbooks, but also in ethnographic texts such as *Walking On Fire*.

Yet the images in these cookbooks are perhaps as coercive as those associated with such phenomena as the dirt cookie. Widely publicized in 2008 (and still in wide circulation at the time of this writing) this image rippled through American media

outlets, inciting pity and alarm that a poor nation so near to the US suffered such crippling poverty that its citizens were moved to subsist on not just marginally edible fare, but dirt. In the Haitian diet, the dirt cookie is a snack or a dietary supplement. The scarcity food moved this comestible from the periphery to the center, supplanting the dietary mainstays that Haitians suddenly found themselves lacking such as rice and beans.¹⁵ However, the dramatic images of women making cookies out of mud and feeding them to their children provoked an outpouring of support that created the secondary problem of the media's depictions of Haiti in such limited terms: the entirety of a troubled nation and its suffering population collapse into a smear of mud on a starving child's tongue.¹⁶ This points toward a tertiary reason why Haitian cookbooks are not as widely available, and certainly aren't structured in memoir form—for many expatriates, the memories there are perhaps too bitter to even attempt to link them to comforting associations of home, and many such as Edwidge Danticat's uncle in *Brother, I'm Dying* do not wish to return there. This leaves us with the image of a starving nation expelling its émigrés in violent convulsions.

But this reading is a facile one, and oversimplifies the shape of the nation in its culinary representations. However, it also reveals the manner in which troubled, unstable nations resist the diasporic blurring that Carol Bardenstien alleges that cookbooks do, the decomplexification of “the relationship of the diasporic subject to the homeland” (29). “What might at first appear to be the straightforward nostalgic recollection of food of the homeland from positions of exile, is sometimes far more complex upon closer examination; the complexity gets blurred in retrospect”

(Bardenstien 29).¹⁷ Depictions of the nation soften around the edges—except in those cases where historical traumas so sharpen memories that they can still cut.

Diasporic displacement provides fruitful terrain for analyzing how subalternity changes or can be overturned, underscoring its structure as a microphysics of power. Culinary autobiographies thus provide another means of reconceptualizing subalternity as a relationship between subjects as well as between subjects and the nation-state rather than simply as an identity formation. Spivak's earliest definitions of the subaltern constitute this figure as "differential space." While the trajectory of her treatment of the subaltern has moved from simply observing the subaltern to attempting to "learn how to learn from the subaltern" (a relationship whose structure emerges in her lecture entitled "Imperative to Reimagine the Planet") the subaltern's basic features remain throughout the body of her work. For Spivak, the subaltern is that subject who exists "without access to the lines of social mobility (rather than the name of a difference)" and who has "also always been in binary opposition to the nation-state, as it is now to the so-called international civil society." For Spivak, "There are no subaltern nations, to quote Hardt and Negri," and "the subalternism...of the contemporary NGO culture and world governance enthusiasts is a recoding and reterritorialization of the U.S. doctrine of Manifest Destiny." Furthermore, she identifies the problems that emerged from her seminal essay entitled "Can The Subaltern Speak" as "the problem of subjectship and agency and...the call to build infrastructure (in the colloquial and not the Marxist sense) so that agency would emerge...I saw agency as institutional validation, where a subject formation

exceeds the borders of the intending subject.” People who lack this narrowly construed definition of agency fit into the category of the subaltern.

The “differential space” that constitutes Spivak’s earliest notions outlines both the core imperatives that drive cookbook compilation as well as the primary problematic that troubles the practice. Diasporic citizens who find themselves in new cultural contexts are certainly thrust into a culturally differential space: for example, Madhur Jaffrey, Rani, and Raghavan Iyer all experience severe bouts of homesickness that move them to collect recipes that remind them of home.¹⁸ The friction between two seemingly irreconcilable cultural loci creates a differential space where, if we apply Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity, culture comes into being (32-39).

However, differently aligning this differential space reveals that culinary autobiographies exist only by purposefully creating specific blind spots to obviate subaltern states other than those affirmed by the writers who produce them. Recipes become oubliettes that swallow intracultural difference. As culture comes into being in cookbook form, it effaces all categories of differences other than the cultural. It fails to accommodate the differences in agency and power that threaten to compromise the integrity of the account by allowing willful omissions to alter the text, both as it is written and as it is lived. The cookbook form’s articulations ostensibly allow endangered practices to flourish through their dispersal. Cookbooks allege to convert the body performing these activities on a daily basis in a faraway place from a subaltern into a subject by transforming the table into a text upon which the subaltern can write, her actions translated by the cookbook writer who learns from

her the methods that he records. However, the writer must practice a necessary selectivity, making clear determinations of those for whom he will speak and how he will shape their practices to best represent the culture he portrays. This selectivity blots out cultural difference. The adjudication of this process of transforming subalterns into subjects (the cookbook writer finding tongue to speak, or allowing recipes to speak for particular forms of alterity under threat) relies heavily on the sensibility of cosmopolitanism rather than a negotiation of discrepant cosmopolitics, and it is this sensibility that smoothes over the raw edges of a difficult history.

At Home in the Kitchen: Postcolonial Domesticity

The backdrop against which all of these issues play out is the domesticity that stands in for, represents, and works through nation and cultural belonging. The concept of gender as it is inflected in depictions of the domestic constitutes a place of slippage and instability, even as conventional domestic forms seem entirely within the province of femininity. Culinary autobiographies and the cookbook form allow us to interrogate the kitchen as a woman's principle domain, particularly as it relates to the production of culture, empire, and postcolonial citizenship. As Anne McClintock argues in *Imperial Leather*, the attachment of the female gender to domesticity does not segregate this sphere from the imperial project. On the contrary, it actively participates in the imperial project by ordering the spaces of the home: an orderly home represents an orderly empire. Configuration of even the most minute aspects of this space entail regulating its processes and assigning it gender: where the conquest of the empire requires a masculine presence, the management of the home requires a

feminine touch. However, her argument convincingly attempts to shear the domestic from the feminine by presenting domestic spheres associated with masculine imperial praxis. Using the example of a Pear's Soap advertisement, she argues that, "[i]mperial domesticity is a domesticity without women" (31). The imperial project's gravity pulls the domestic sphere from its customary orbit, masculinizing a previously feminine sphere. However, this reading treats only an advertisement of a man shaving. Her argument shifts when she describes the gender of domestic labor, opening consideration of texts that instruct in the maintenance of an orderly home—texts that were aimed at women. *The Anglo-Indian Cookbook* is clearly a gendered text with a colonial agenda, constituting a female-gendered domesticity to oppose a masculine-gendered public sphere. Because the domestic colonial subject was a woman, the domestic sphere remains gendered female. This gender determination persists as the domestic space configures the nation in specific ways. In other words, the association between gender and domesticity is always already unstable, depending on how and to what purpose domesticity is to be deployed. However, one thing is always certain: domesticity still rallies to the call of the nation.

The link between gender and domesticity does not shift as the representation of gender participates in the public discursive configurations that determine the shape of the nation. Through her examination of "the rival and shifting representations of the Indian woman in British imperial and Indian colonial and postcolonial writings after 1857," Sangeeta Ray's *En-Gendering India* seeks to complicate the relationship between gender and representations of "nationalist [and imperialist] subjectivities" (Ray 9-10). Her study disentangles women from solely participating in the domestic

by outlining their representation as actors in the configuration of the nation and by overturning the primacy of masculinity as the defining gender formation determining national identity. Seeking to unmoor gender from its customary confines, Ray draws attention to the manner in which the Indian woman is deployed as a “sign and subject” by various national histories and historical fictions.

However, while Ray’s study adeptly complicates the entanglement of gender and the nation, the entanglement of gender and the domestic remains one of the given precepts that determine how we think of the private sphere. Kitchens are spaces in which the quiet, daily production of culture remains yoked to the feminine even as women become public actors. The tenacity of the connection between femininity and the domestic is the product a “cult of domesticity” that has overdetermined the relationship between gendered domesticity and the production of the nation.

The cult of domesticity does not seek to divest women of power as it opposes and complements public spaces. When domesticity is gendered, it is stereotypically gendered as feminine, offering an empowered space where women can reign without challenge, specifically because the kitchen is a space veiled from the eyes of men. Mira Kamdar’s memoir, *Motiba’s Tattoos*, details her family’s origins, and locates as its epicenter the diminutive figure of her grandmother, Motiba. Motiba’s kitchen represents an excellent example of a feminine, domestic space, the power of which is constituted by obscurity from the eyes of men. Motiba’s kitchen is “the one room in the house that was off-limits to men. In this exclusively female zone,” it is Motiba who holds supreme power (Kamdar xiii). As long as the space “[does its job], the men in the family were kept in the dark about exactly what went on in the kitchen.

My sense, even as a child, was that as long as food was delivered when and as expected to the dining room, the men had no call to interfere” (Kamdar xiii). Consequently, the kitchen holds its secrets, such as the *dohkla* batter that spills on the floor and is scooped back into the bowl: Motiba’s philosophy in this matter is that “What the men don’t know won’t hurt them” (Kamdar xiv). Additionally, the women in the kitchen enjoy a measure of freedom as gendered social constrictions relax: “In the kitchen, *saris* were allowed to slip immodestly off heads, and all manner of gossip was bandied about with impunity” (Kamdar xiii). The enclosure of this space bestows power upon the enclosed—within the framework of the domestic, the woman truly is queen of her domain.

As McClintock’s ambivalent assignations suggest, the gender of domestic spaces are actually rendered in ambivalent terms in many culinary autobiographies that reveal the unstable gendering of this space. This trend is particularly notable in South Asian texts. For example, as she describes in *Climbing The Mango Trees*, Madhur Jaffrey’s childhood cook was a man. While her mother managed the space of the kitchen by managing staff, keeping accounts and drawing up shopping lists (46) the production of the delightful dishes Jaffrey enjoyed and that comprise a number of her most memorable encounters with food were produced by the hands of a man. Yamuna Devi suggests that men administer this production closely because of the manner in which food production and consumption are linked to purity and ritual cleanliness. Devi learns his craft at the knee of an Indian Swami named Srila Prabhupada, who “explains the workings of a Vaishnava kitchen in India”:

He explained that cooking was a spiritual for a Vaishnava, much like meditation—a means of expressing love and devotion to the Supreme Lord, Krishna. He touched on more than external standards, relating the subtle effects a Vedic lifestyle creates in the kitchen. (xiii)

This entails regulation of the space in terms that are fully as strict as any other, but in masculine terms and in accordance with a different standard—the politics of religious observance rather than colonial management:

No matter what its size, the Vaishnava kitchen is divided into two areas: one for preparation and cooking and another for storage of staples, cookware, implements, and cleanup...A cook bathes and puts on clean clothes before entering the kitchen, then sits comfortably on a low stool and uses the floor as a countertop space. Only kitchen shoes or no shoes are allowed in this area, as it is kept spotlessly clean. (Devi xiii)

This means that the instructor who teaches Devi the techniques he details in *Lord Krishna's Cuisine* is less a cook or even a chef than a priestly figure who teaches cooking as ritual, eating as rite.¹⁹

At least in the case of Indian cooking, the gender of the domestic is complicated by inflections of class and caste. This formulation seems to hold true in other culinary representations in postcolonial literature. In Chris Abani's novel *Graceland*, the protagonist named Elvis is trained in domestic tasks detailed in a journal left to him by his deceased mother. However, this training proves useless as Elvis finds himself lacking the cultural contexts that would allow him to engage with the contents of the journal in meaningful ways: there is no kitchen that he can use to prepare the recipes

that are his birthright. This means that Abani contrasts an idealized cultural orthodoxy (domestic, gendered female) against a series of much more complicated cultural and political exigencies to illustrate how certain knowledge formations cannot support the actually lived lives of the citizenry. In the case of both *Graceland* and *Indian* cookbooks written by men, the gender construct here is invoked only as necessary to serve specific ends. Women's work is only women's work when it is used to either represent an empowered space, or a disempowered subject position. In "actuality," the gendering of kitchen spaces is a mixed place—men cook for women, for other women, and for themselves, where the need to resuscitate national and ethnic identity trumps the need to preserve gendered labor distinctions.

I hesitate to suggest that recipe collections are entirely invested in producing the domestic as such because, as Anne McClintock ably argues in her work, the domestic is richly configured and at times internally contradictory. Consequently, the idea that entering a kitchen and tossing ingredients together produces a particular type of domesticity is perhaps the same degree of oversimplification that I attempt to deconstruct in this dissertation. As such, my interest in this work is less in the construction of domesticity (from which this dissertation shies, even as it is drawn by its inexorable gravity) than it is in how cookbook compilation and cultural depictions in postcolonial novels refract the rituals that construct daily life. However, as Michel de Certeau studies in volume two of his study, the practice of everyday life is difficult business to theorize. Consequently, food tropes in literature remain small, relatively insignificant gestures easily lost in the broader sweep of history. Even if theorists are much more practiced in the theorization of abstract concepts—supplementarity,

cosmopolitics, subalternity—the practice of everyday life manifests the properties of these wider theoretical concerns. As de Certeau’s study suggests, the mundaneness of the habits of daily life—eating, washing, toileting—must be made visible because daily life is indeed important to consider in the theorizing of larger, more abstract concepts. This dissertation’s underlying objective is to provide a means of accomplishing this work, imbedding the practices of daily living within the larger theoretical paradigms that they enact.

The Culinary Record: Wider Theoretical Concerns

The postcolonial novel form represents an ideal counterpoint to the genre of the culinary memoir because the novel can accommodate all that cookbooks either cannot or will not acknowledge.²⁰ The expansiveness and adaptability of the novel is already a well-observed characteristic of the form—Bakhtin’s observations of the heteroglossia and dialogism of the novel articulate the novel’s capaciousness. He describes three basic characteristics that distinguish the novel:

- (1) its stylistic three-dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-linguaged consciousness realized in the novel;
- (2) the radical change it effects in the temporal coordinates of the literary image;
- (3) the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely the zone of contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness. (11)

The novel is “plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review” (39). However, its emergence carries with it a concrete political burden that abstract analysis of the novel form often fails

to address. Timothy Brennan links the emergence of the novel with the emergence of the nation, stating that the novel accomplishes its work by “objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles...Its manner of presentation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation” (49). It is crucial to note that the terrain that novels map is an uneven one where languages meet and muddle, and where heteroglossia represents, not an easy comingling of difference or even an abstract engagement with different forms of speech, but a contested space of social and cultural difference as it is encountered in quotidian imperial life, in an empire whose citizens found themselves encountering different languages and cultures. Consequently, novels become politically charged—a charge that the cookbook genre generally dismisses.

As the novel refutes the epic, the postcolonial novel refutes the novel form. Engaging Bakhtin and Benjamin as points of reference, Timothy Brennan maps the features of the postcolonial novel. He argues that these texts insist on preserving memory, sometimes replicating historiographic and journalistic forms, and they “deliberately moralize recent local history sketching our known political positions” (56). Unlike the novel, the postcolonial form borrows from the miraculous. These refutations of the novel form segregate the postcolonial novel from its forbears; however, the postcolonial form’s eruption from the periphery (instead of disseminating from the imperial center) means that the body of its readership is established beyond the borders of the postcolonial novel’s national origins. According to Brennan, the postcolonial novel appeals to an international readership because the

preferred forms of cultural transmission within the borders of the postcolonial nation are newspapers, films, poems, music, and television. The immediacy and transparency of these latter forms appeals to a broader audience suffering illiteracy and other privations, an audience lacking the leisure time that contributed to the rise of the novel in Europe (Brennan 56). This means that the postcolonial novel bears the unwelcome burden of serving as a cultural ambassador bearing an ambivalent message. (In this way, the postcolonial novel bears striking similarity to the cookbook genre.) About the postcolonial novel, Brennan writes:

Almost inevitably it has been the form through which a thin, foreign-educated stratum (however sensitive or committed to domestic political interests) has communicated to metropolitan reading publics, often in translation. It has been, in short, a naturally cosmopolitan form that empire has allowed to play a national role, as it were, only in an international arena. (56)

Novels map the nation.²¹ They adhere to nationalism's aesthetic and ideology that, according to Brennan, implies uneven distribution even in its earliest forms (59).

The postcolonial novel represents an evolution of the form as it reflects the emergence of the postcolonial nation. Meanwhile (despite Brennan's apparent misgivings) they respond to the ethical imperatives of postcolonial criticism to acknowledge this inequity and attempt to address it in meaningful ways. The analysis of the Third World novel "is always a comment on the responsible practice of interpreting the images of *today*—how to place them, how to give them perspective, how to discuss the way they reflect a submerged history while turning it into a contemporary, instantaneous shadow" (Brennan 67). The stress he places on

responsible hermeneutics reiterates the importance of the ethical task to which postcolonial criticism sets itself: if Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* represents postcolonial theory's nascent shape, then its founding premise is that of responsive, responsible reading practices that do not fail to include a complete accounting of the structures of power that shape colonial and neocolonial cultural production.

However crucial they are to the understanding of the postcolonial novel, these formal features are eclipsed by the basic range of postures that it can adopt. The postcolonial novel can embrace an array of reactions to and interrogations of the nation, and it is this range that expresses the power and promise of the form. Including nationalistic themes, "[t]he variations [of the novel] range from outright attacks on independence, often mixed with nostalgia for the previous European *status quo*...to vigorously anti-colonial works emphasizing native culture...to cosmopolitan explanations of the 'lower depths,' or the 'fantastic unknown' by writers acquainted with the tastes and interests of dominant culture" (Brennan 63).

This register represents the ultimate failure of the culinary memoir genre—its engagement with the nation suffers a necessary foreshortening and flattening effect that collapses its representations into a single dimension. As exercises in writing, culinary autobiographies succumb to the iniquities that plague the practice—and then promptly sidestep them. Recipes constitute acts of writing that presume to stand as exceptions to writing: they are not representational, but factual; they can assert uncontested claims to veracity; they signify real practices, real people, real culture in real spaces.

Culinary autobiographies can make these claims because recipe writing and culinary autobiographies resist the dialogism of literary production. Recipes themselves claim to stand alone as perfected literary objects, dicing culture into neat, uniform pieces: measurements and procedures are precise, rendered in stark, choppy language, sometimes accompanied by cultural exposition that provides additional context in which to read them. Culture is ossified. Instead of evolution and adaptation, recipes instate the logic of substitution and perversion. One might convincingly argue that cookbooks are dialogic in that they participate in the wider frame of cultural discourse by establishing and renewing contact between readers, writers, and culture. However, cookbooks fail to allow the fuller discourse between texts—they are not intertextual. They do not open themselves to exceptions and violations, or to any contradictions. Instead, deviations from expected cultural norms are embraced within the larger context of cultural action.²² They become normalized, contextualized. Consequently, they become frozen. They actually fail to participate in the very production of culture that they set forth as their central premise. Cookbooks are not marked as contradictory, as produced within a space of stress and conflict. Bakhtin’s analysis of language provides the perfect analytical context: culture is dynamic; “It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language” (272).²³ As utterance, as articulations of culture, cookbooks mark the death, the entombment of culture.

Derridean supplementarity provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between culture and culinary representation. It also provides an avenue

for considering how forms of these representations can evade dialogism through their connection with cultural practice. The relationship between culinary autobiographies and the concept-metaphor of culture is the same as that between writing and presence.²⁴ Cookbooks serve as attendants to the concept-metaphor of culture, enlarging its corpus, defining its shape, articulating it as specific practices.²⁵ They offer a “plenitude enriching another plenitude,” serving up a rich cultural landscape outlined in specific detail.²⁶ Cookbooks claim to stand in for culture. They testify to its presence and manifest it, and can offer such a compelling substitute that readers can claim to acquire expertise simply through the act of reading. The cookbook form maintains an interdependent relationship with culture as a concept-metaphor: each defines the other, as culture renders cookbooks intelligible, and as cookbooks offer a reference guiding cooks in the practices of cultural (re)production.

However, the cookbook form can only operate in the place of a lack. It requires a vacancy to fuel its operations, and these vacancies are not simply those that gape between bodies on the move and their points of departure, or the pasts that culinary autobiographies often seek to reconstitute (although these certainly do constitute the needs that I outlined above). To state simply that writers finding themselves at a loss for cultural contexts also find themselves enabled to write about culture itself also does not completely capture the nature of this vacancy, although cookbooks and culinary memoirs certainly do address it. The lack is far more fundamental, for it afflicts the form itself as an exercise of writing. The cookbook form itself inserts itself into the void left by culture’s presence. If it creates an image

of the concept-metaphor of culture, then it is only because the *aporia* at the heart of culture demands an intervening form to give it voice and shape.²⁷

These two significations comingle in ways that render them inseparable, even as each occludes the operation of the other.²⁸ They work in complicity with one another to maintain mutual silence. It may be the case that regional cookbooks always emerge outside of the cultural contexts that they describe: they erupt in spaces of difference, coming into being only against the backlighting of other cultural loci. In this way, they offer a means to initiate the outsider, working to establish a delicate balance between the familiarity of a domestic account and the estrangement of cultural difference. However, it is perhaps more apt to state that culture only ever comes into being as an externalized presence: it exists solely as an *aporia* around which history and practice conglomerate, a space that yearns for the conceptual holism that is its defining feature. However, even this reading evades the impulse that links cookbook writing to culture—and which forms a source of its deepest frustration. This tension lures cookbook writers back to the table again and again. The cookbook represents an exterior form, not merely because it is written, and not merely because it always takes its form outside of the cultural contexts it describes. The manner in which cookbooks are written—the parceling out of ingredients, the substitutions, the forced march of cooking techniques—places them outside of the very concept of the cultures that they describe. They constitute an alien form that in its turn highlights the alienation of the writer.²⁹ Yet a consequence of this relationship is that it offers no relief.³⁰ It can never completely overcome the mark of emptiness.

To maintain the cookbook's credence, it is necessary that readers forget the vicarious nature of these two significations—hence its principle danger and its seductive charm.³¹ The cookbook itself so skillfully serves its purpose that the reader can easily forget not only the supplementarity of the cookbook form (it stands in for culture but can do so only when a space of lack has been opened) but the aporia at the heart of the concept-metaphor. The seductiveness to which cookbook readers fall prey yields a blindness that occludes the object that allows readers to see the shape of culture. In other words, the eye skips over signification.³²

This reading, however, neglects to treat a crucial component of culinary representation. The key concern that serves as the cornerstone of every cookbook ever written is the investment in lived practices, in the gathering together of these aspects of the quotidian-as-real. As such, cookbooks do not remain solely in the realm of pure signification. They presume to represent: to reconstitute these experiences and serve them to the reader. Consequently, the concept-metaphor around which the cookbook form must circle constitutes the source of the panic that cookbooks refuse to express.

This means that cookbooks simulate the cultural terrain occupied by culinary practice. However, because of the aporia that constitutes the concept-metaphor of culture, they map territory that comes into being only after the fact: instead of imitating cultural mannerisms, cooks bring culture into being as they prepare meals according to dicta recorded in the pages of cookbooks. Consequently, cultural vestiges become the principal flavoring agent of culinary practices, their extraneousness made visible in the form of adulterated recipes and the incompatible

descriptions that sometimes accompany them.³³ For example, Mira Kamdar memoir entitled *Motiba's Tattoos* contains a recipe for *undhiyu*; above its directive to simmer the dish for two hours, Kamdar describes how traditional practice entails sealing the ingredients in a clay pot to bake (67-8).

Whatever claims cookbooks make toward documenting real practices, by providing directives that allow the cultural simulation in the kitchen, recipes unmoor themselves from the real by imposing systems of exchange and interchange that establish a critical lack of reference to the very practices that they claim to document. This is clearly seen in the repeated caveats that often appear in the introductions and descriptions of cookbooks and recipe gathering: *This was learned at my mother's knee; she never measured anything, but my measurements will yield her results*. This jarring dissonance between “lived experience” and recipe writing is not the grating of representation and reality; it is instead the rough edges where simulation brings together two completely different methods of simulating culinary experiences. This system of simulation hides its lack of reference behind clear directives that promise consistency in reproduction and authoritative accounts that corroborate them.³⁴ The emptiness of the concept-metaphor is concealed.

Herein lies the source of the panic coupled with a demand for seduction.

Baudrillard writes:

When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality—a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance

have disappeared. Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us—a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that is everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence. (6-7)

Simulation thus answers the panic of the emptying out of the real. Baudrillard's analysis provides two different vectors of thought that can explain the panic as it drives cookbook production. The first addresses the lived experiences of the writer. As her lived experiences (aggregating beneath the concept-metaphor of culture) disappear into the distance and into the past, haunting the diasporic writer who must adapt to changes in her quotidian existence, "nostalgia assumes its full meaning" and the writer engages the rubric of culinary autobiographical form to construct a simulation of the culture she left. The second and more abstract is that the concept-metaphor of culture itself demands nostalgia to assume its fullest form—hence the investment in authenticity and true accounts. Bhabha's model of cultural production coming into being only in encounters of difference reveals the urgency of the enterprise, particularly in diasporic conditions where cultural configurations must endure under constant threat of erasure.

I am not suggesting that cooks do not cook, nor am I suggesting that food is not eaten, nor that certain practices fail to proliferate in certain spaces. Furthermore, I do not wish to completely foreclose the observation and recording of these practices—living bodies do eat foodstuffs, and lived lives are indeed the source material for culinary autobiographical accounts. However, cookbooks share the

“deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial” on multiple levels. Analysis of the form constitutes “[c]laiming catachresis from a space that one cannot not want to inhabit...yet must criticize” (Spivak, cited in Bhabha 183-4). Once we set aside our unwavering faith in cultural presence and its reproduction on the field of representation, critical attention falls upon the needs to which culinary representations respond—and it is these needs that shape the text in crucial ways. The culinary-function emerges as ethnographic assumptions fall to the periphery—where this dissertation suggests that they properly belong.

In this dissertation, I use the term *representation* very loosely. I purposefully avoid the terms *misrepresentation* and *deception*, because these terms have associations with truth and truth-telling that contradict my interest in the manner in which cookbooks engage, support, and reinforce the concept-metaphor of culture. About this, Baudrillard states, “Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom)” (6). As I have argued at length in this section, there is no there there to stand as the subject of culinary representation. However, rather than burden this dissertation with terms such as *culinary simulacra*, I will restrict its use here, especially as I contrast culinary autobiographies against representations of cooking, eating, and culinary culture in novels and memoirs. The term *culinary simulacra* is perhaps best used in the formal analysis of how cookbooks engage “real” practices, work that is already underway in projects to which I have already alluded to above but that is ultimately beyond the scope of this project. My work remains within the realm of representation (even as I perhaps establish a false parity between the

opposing work of simulation and representation); I have therefore chosen the term *representation* to ground my studies of the texts under consideration.

Cooking Culture and the Culinary Paradox

Food cultural critics in other disciplines have already established means of reading cookbooks against the grain—and also of reading them beside novels, poetry, and drama by using the same analytical tools that critics apply to these genres. Anne L. Bower’s book entitled *Recipes For Reading* argues that “food writing has literary merit. [She] reads cookbooks as fictions because they have settings, characters, and plot—all necessary components of literature” (Avakian and Haber 18).³⁵ The culinary autobiographies addressed in this dissertation are set in—or even between—diasporas, and the plot usually follows a specific story arc: The writer leaves home, then pines for home as the diasporic space in which she finds herself proves culturally challenging; the writer then revisits food as a means of reuniting with her lost home.

The categories I use in this dissertation have been established by Tracie Marie Kelly’s essay entitled “If I Were A Voodoo Priestess.” Her article describes three different categories of cookbooks: the culinary memoir, the autobiographical cookbook, and the autoethnographic cookbook. She establishes these categories based, not on the ratio of recipes to memoir, but on methods of storytelling that she argues are means of structuring the texts. Of culinary memoirs, she writes: “[T]he main purpose is to set forth the personal memories of the author. Food is a recurring theme, but it is not the controlling mechanism. Within the texts, there may or may not

be recipes.” She notes the different purpose with which memoirs task the recipes they include by observing that recipes are not indexed. She writes:

“While this may seem a minor point, when recipes are not indexed, the author is decidedly emphasizing the importance of the *story* in contrast to the recipes...When the recipe index is missing, the intent is for the reader to focus on the life story, not to carry the book into the kitchen and pull out the pans. The recipe is part of a deep description, a Proustian gesture (from the viewpoint of the cook), wherein the reader can read the recipe, imagine the cooking, but then keep reading...these un-indexed recipes are incidental, not integral, to the understanding of the moment, illuminating a memory while perpetuating the recipe-sharing tradition. Often, recipes of this kind of culinary autobiography are separate from the flow of the prose, set apart in tone and appearance from the rest of the text. (Kelly, 256)

Mira Kamdar’s *Motiba’s Tattoos* (which I analyze above) represents this form, as do Anthony Bordain’s *A Cook’s Tour* and Madhur Jaffrey’s *Climbing the Mango Trees*.

The second is the autobiographical cookbook, “a complex intermingling of both autobiographical and cookery traditions...Such texts do not necessarily favor one element or the other; rather, the authors try to balance and illuminate the inter-elemental nature of how the recipe reveals the life story” (Kelly 257). In these books, the author may “[suspend] the action in order to give detailed instructions for preparation of food associated with that memory” (Kelly 258). Writing of her exemplar, Alice B. Toklas’ cookbook, Toklas intended the book is “to be read for enjoyment: “[T]he cookery instructions and her memories...could not be separated.

Not only are her intentions toward her readership multiple (read, savor, create, ingest) but her plural narrative voices (moving between storyteller, culinary instructor, and history teacher) reflect her complex objectives for the text” (Kelly, 258). Culinary and narrative forms intertwine into separate but inseparable, individuated but interdependent components. Kelly writes:

Because they are part of the self that is being revealed in the prose, the recipes are not removed from the prose flow. As well, the recipes are indexed, conveying the notion that the author wants the book and its reader to move readily between the reading room and the kitchen. The text can be read as autobiography alone, it can be used as a cooking reference alone, or it can be used for both simultaneously. (Kelly 258)

Edouardo Machado’s *Tastes Like Cuba* exemplifies this form. This text details the author’s movement from Cuba to the United States, flavoring the narrative through the placement of recipes at the end of each chapter.

The third is the autoethnographic cookbook, which profiles the author as a member of a group and offers the recipe collection as a means of reimagining that group in increasingly complex ways. These books include autobiographical artifacts that stand in as cultural supplements: photographs, maps, family trees, and stories. Kelly writes, “The intent is to provide the recipes to others in the recipe-sharing tradition, but the author also intends to teach people outside of her particular family, community, or region. We learn how to prepare the food; we also learn the traditions that mark the food as exceptional or ritual” (Kelly 260). The pedagogical objectives combine with the author’s narrative objectives, but along stringent disciplinary lines:

By the inclusion of nonrecipe items, the author leads us further into her life and community by making available other documentation of lifestyle and history. This is an essential step in contributing to the idea of veracity in the stories, biographies, and the recipes themselves. By including intimate artifacts, the author is trying to sidestep the problems of narrative associated with autobiography (Is this really how it happened?) while also providing vital context for the foods represented in the recipes... That food now has meanings presented with it, embodying values, patterns of behavior, and community standards. The recipe becomes signifier of self and community position.

(Kelly 260)

This means that the recipes reinforce the “truth” value of one another, lending one another credence and weight. *New Indian Home Cooking* by Madhu Gadia typifies this category, as does Raghavan Iyer’s *The Turmeric Trail*. Madhur Jaffrey’s *World Vegetarian* also works along this continuum, although her concern breaks apart the regional considerations that often delimit the category of the autoethnographic cookbook. Instead of working regionally, she works globally, establishing herself, and by extension, her reader as cook and traveler, as global citizens.

Kelly’s categories depend only very loosely on delicate ratios of recipe, narrative, and ethnographic profiling. Culinary memoirs, for example, represent one end of the spectrum at which narrative accounts outstrip recipes that may not appear at all. At the other rests the autoethnographic cookbook, in which the recipe collection adheres to a specific cultural task. As with all categories, the distinctions between them slide along and combine with one another in innovative ways: Mary

Urrutia-Randelman's *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen* combines the autobiographical cookbook with the culinary memoir form because each chapter of her work features a lengthy autobiographical essay followed by a collection of recipes, each accompanied by a paragraph describing its positioning in relation to the preceding essay. In other words, her work is organized in segments—a miniature culinary memoir interspersed with autoethnographic sections. Chris Abani's *Graceland* contorts the culinary memoir form by offering a fictive account interspersed with recipes that ironize the account. His text offers an anti-memoir, a critique of the culinary memoir's celebratory tones. Additionally, the author extracts the recipes in the novel from a journal that the protagonist's mother compiles—an autoethnographic cookbook cum commonplace book.

To accomplish its objectives, the dissertation presents a complete alimentary trajectory from ingestion to excretion, presenting the postcolonial table as a filthy place that cookbooks attempt to sanitize. This filth is not simply literal in certain cases (the organs and offal that people eat in truly exotic cooking)—it is also metaphorical. It is the dirty politics of discrepant cosmopolitanisms, differences in privilege, civil unrest and communal violence, histories of oppression and graft, all of the unsavory cultural bits that trouble the nostalgic recollections that prompt people to assemble recipe books. Recipes sweep the table clean, presenting not just altered, adjusted recipes that appeal to the reader's palate, but also sanitized histories that allow the reader to imagine the space in appealing ways. In other words, history and location flavor each dish—and it has to taste good if the writer wants the reader to eat it.

I begin the body of the dissertation in India and imagine the nation's movement outward into the world. The first chapter entitled "The Globe at the Table: The Cosmopolitics of Madhur Jaffrey's *World Vegetarian*" examines how Madhur Jaffrey's *World Vegetarian* unites the twinned virtues of cosmopolitan liberalism and vegetarianism. It compares the cosmopolitan subjectivity created by the cookbook (an autoethnographic text that imagines Jaffrey and her audience as global citizens) with that of *Hungry Planet*, an ethnographic text that profiles nations by examining a week's eating by a typical family, and with depictions of kitchens in *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. This chapter argues that the cosmopolitics of *Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian* exemplify a breed of cosmopolitanism that has been the subject of recent complication, if not outright discredit by such critics as Bruce Robbins and Timothy Brennan. *Hungry Planet*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *Fasting, Feasting* take to task the depictions of easy cultural traffic that Jaffrey assembles in her cookbook by presenting much more ambivalent forms of cultural interaction and translation. In fact, in the novels and the ethnography, the kitchen proves to be terribly difficult terrain through which to negotiate cultural transmission. My chapter concludes by suggesting that any shortcomings that Jaffrey's cosmopolitanism might exhibit are a product of the cookbook's form, which will not engage the notions of difference that a more politically responsive model of cosmopolitanism might demand, and that the global kitchen bears little resemblance to the international table that the cookbook lays before its reader.³⁶

The second chapter entitled “The Excesses of this World: *Graceland*, Memoir Cookbooks and the Fecal Order” examines impulse that propel people into movement. In it, I analyze the fictional culinary memoir featured in Nigerian writer Chris Abani’s novel *Graceland*, focusing on the recipe collection’s opposing impulses. I argue that its efforts to teach the protagonist, Elvis “what he needs to know” contradict its desire to package the finest features of his culture. As a result, this culinary memoir (both as the structure of the text and a literary device in the narrative) ironizes Elvis’ unease in his own country and thematizes the multitudinous social afflictions that trouble African postcoloniality. I then explore how the trope of the family table as the site of cultural neurosis thematizes African social issues attendant to gender and domesticity by examining Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* to highlight the centrality of the trope in African fiction. In both novels, meals become the site of deep anxiety. This sense of unease that a character feels in her own skin in her own nation, underlined by the presence of an intimate maternal cookbook that in the end fails to provide comfort resonates strongly in these three *bildungsromane*. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of Jeffrey Tayler’s travelogue, *Facing the Congo*, arguing that this travelogue and memoir brings to the surface those states about which cookbooks remain silent. The empty stomachs around the author become the register of the nation’s dysfunction and the desperation of its people; meanwhile, the author’s queasy belly becomes the register by which he measures his own unease in Zaire

The final chapter entitled “*‘And there’s only my imagination where our history should be’*: Memoir cookbooks, childhood memory, and migratory trauma” carries forward the argument I shape in the first two chapters by focusing on how memoir cookbooks evade describing the filth of the nation in order to flesh out its representations. This yields the paradox that comprises one of my central claims in this dissertation: cookbooks allege to provide accurate, complete cultural records; yet they can only do so through omission and negation. I outline these contradictory objectives in *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen*, an culinary autobiography written by Cuban expatriate Mary Urrutia Randelman and co-author Joan Schwartz, examining how her descriptions of Havana as a cosmopolitan city mount a strong—albeit indirect—critique of Revolutionary Cuba. I juxtapose this text against a canonical novel by Cristina García, *Dreaming In Cuban*, to emphasize the diasporic individual’s dysfunctional relationship with food and the cultural ambivalence with which postcolonial novels depict the connection between food culture and cultural authenticity. I conclude the chapter with an examination of Reinaldo Arenas’ *Before Night Falls*, a memoir recording the life and suicide of the exiled gay Cuban poet, author, and activist and a direct castigation of the Castro regime. In this chapter, I argue that Arenas’ memoir openly exhibits the outrage and frustration that Randelman’s text purposefully avoids because she seeks to reconstruct a lost Cuba by laying a table comprised of her favorite foods. However, the difference between the two texts lies in the manner in which each author treats the connection between abjection, subalternity and expulsion as Cuban nationals move into diaspora in the U.S. By constructing a careful cataloguing of cooking and eating in 1950s Havana,

Randelman's cookbook evades discussion of the manner in which the Communist state purged itself of undesirable elements that posed ideological challenges to the nation. Conversely, Arenas challenges the Cuban state by stressing his abjection and subalternity, subject positions that he highlights using images of his childhood self licking the ground and eating dirt to establish a connection between his body and the land that he has lost. Meanwhile, both authors use their relative states of exile to make a space in which they can reshape the nation from which they were purged and renew their claims to citizenship. The dissertation argues that the America to which Elvis flees cannot fulfill the promise of the idealized nation in his imagination. This failed promise constitutes the primary failure of the culinary autobiographic form, and underscores that it is the novel that can accommodate the cultural density that complicates diasporic belonging.

The dissertation's epilogue entitled "Food on the Move in the *Viet-kieu* Diaspora" draws together the concerns that I raise in the three previous chapters by comparing Mai Pham's memoir cookbook entitled *Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table* to Andrew X. Pham's travelogue entitled *Catfish and Mandala*. Both writers travel to Vietnam in an effort to reclaim cultural identification. Mai Pham finds reunification and reintegration, and uses tasty recipes to trope her renewal of cultural ties. Andrew X. Pham, however, suffers increasing degrees of alienation from the culture of his birth; this is troped by intense stomach pains and a queasy bowel that complement his fears of being robbed, injured, jailed, or killed as he moves through the country. This chapter takes to task the easy cultural traffic that this regional cookbook seek to create by comparing it to a memoir that establishes the uneasiness of the stomach as a

measure of cultural identification. Through its analysis of food and eating, the dissertation extends the postcolonial table into South East Asia.

CHAPTER 1: THE GLOBE AT THE TABLE

The Cosmopolitics of Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian

Eating's not a bad way to get to know a place.

— Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

The meals we eat do much more than reinforce our cultural affiliations: through them, we can also act out our various ethical and social views, articulating our politics as matters of taste. Vegetarianism represents a means by which we demonstrate our commitments to health and to the welfare of other living creatures; meanwhile, eating internationally demonstrates our commitment to and awareness of other cultures. Meals and menus reveal themselves to be staging grounds on which we array our political tastes; vegetarianism and cosmopolitanism arise as complementary virtues. Cookbooks respond to these ethical imperatives by providing ready references that allow us to expand our culinary palates: a seemingly inexhaustible array of vegetarian cookbooks sits alongside an even wider range of regional cookbooks that bring far-flung nations to the table.

If cookbooks allow us to exemplify particular virtues such as an awareness of and sensitivity to the world and the creatures that inhabit it, how true, how deep are the connections that cookbooks purport to forge? What version of these virtues appears at the end of the fork? This chapter will examine how Madhur Jaffrey's *World Vegetarian* unites the twinned virtues of cosmopolitan liberalism and vegetarianism. It will then compare the cosmopolitan subjectivity that the cookbook

creates with that of *Hungry Planet*, an ethnographic text that profiles nations by examining a week's eating by a typical family, and with depictions of domesticity and cosmopolitan kitchens in Anita Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, a novel by her daughter Kiran Desai. Food and eating form the central mode of interrogating the contours of the nation-state in the subsequent texts I examine, and recipes present the signature flavors of each culture under study. This chapter will argue that the cosmopolitics of *Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian* exemplify a breed of cosmopolitanism that has been the subject of recent complication, if not outright discredit. It will also suggest that any shortcomings that Jaffrey's cosmopolitanism might exhibit are a product of the cookbook's form, which cannot engage the notions of difference that a more politically responsive model of cosmopolitanism might demand.

Cosmopolitanism under Construction

In keeping with the expansive aesthetic of cosmopolitanism, the clear objective of *Madhur Jaffrey's World Vegetarian* is comprehensiveness. At 758 pages and more than 650 recipes for preparing dried beans, dried peas, lentils, nuts, vegetables, grains, and dairy products, the book gathers flavors and food styles from around the globe, organizes them in categories that make them easy to find, and presents them to the reader in a format that is easy to read, with instructions that are easy to follow. The text on the inside cover flap states that the book contains "dishes from five continents [that] touch on virtually all the world's best loved flavors for an unsurpassed selection of vegetarian fare." A thorough reference of global vegetarian

flavors, the text is global in its scope and in its expanse: for example, *World Vegetarian* contains more than 200 recipes for vegetables, with “at least a dozen recipes for eggplant alone” (Jaffrey ix). The book offers unfettered access to all corners of the globe: in a single meal, a diner can span several continents, sampling the local flavors from each. The book promises a coupling of authenticity and access, laying a realm of taste before the reader.

To achieve this, the book strives for limitless inclusiveness, both in terms of its content and its audience. The first line of the introduction claims, “This book is written for everyone” (Jaffrey viii). Although her next clause delimits the body of “everyone” by classifying its members according to their vegetarian status (as opposed to describing a Bennetton-esque world citizenry of all shapes, shades, and nationalities) the bolded typeface of the first places clear emphasis on the idea that the book’s audience is the entire globe: her book’s “everyone” is the raceless, amorphous mix of all of us, bound together in our need to eat and our desire to sample new flavors. If the book strives for comprehensiveness, then it also does not restrict its audience based on race or socioeconomic background. Jaffrey does not address only those who can afford fresh lychee or Kobe beef—her audience is both the “sophisticated food enthusiasts [and the] impoverished students” whom she sees waiting in the same line at the stand to buy Asian noodles in London. Rather than focus on diversity defined by racial differences overcome by universal commonalities, Jaffrey focuses on a diversity defined by socioeconomic difference overcome by the blurring of borders that make a wide variety of foods affordably available to a culturally heterogeneous body of diners.

World Vegetarian conforms in most ways to the conventional definitions of cosmopolitanism. In addition to its own goals of limitless inclusion and comprehensive cataloging, it also imagines the eater as a global citizen. This eater is already at home everywhere, and the cookbook provides the means by which she can dine everywhere at once: she eats at home in the world. However, the cookbook does not create the cosmopolitan subject, because it observes an already present condition. The imperative to write the book derives from Jaffrey's observations of globalism's pervasive effect on culinary culture. She notes, "We seem to be heading toward a softening of boundaries between all cuisines" (Jaffrey viii). She does not imply the erasure of difference, or the abdication of personal preference or cultural allegiance in favor of a complete lack of differentiation, where all influences converge in a single culinary tradition (the ultimate in fusion cuisine). While culinary traditions may share certain features that provide common ground across difference, Jaffrey does not suggest that all foods everywhere are the same. Instead, while her book highlights culinary commonalities and uses these to create meals based on shared flavor notes, she also describes the cultural specificities that mark each dish. She imbeds difference within a system of cultural exchange and interchange that equalizes their values.

The book centers on Indian cuisine, devoting the majority of the recipes to food from this particular country.³⁷ This may owe to Jaffrey's area of expertise, as she has published a number of books on the subject of Indian cookery.³⁸ *World Vegetarian* perhaps replicates the structure of Jaffrey's own cosmopolitanism, a cosmopolitanism that motivates the production of her previous books. These books participate in the construction of the nation in the same manner that Appadurai

observes in his article entitled “How to Make a National Cuisine,” but Jaffrey’s Indian cookbooks do their work from a position of recollective nostalgia, and are closely aligned with Jaffrey’s personal tastes.³⁹ If *World Vegetarian*’s concentration on Indian cuisine reflects Jaffrey’s tastes, its Indian center falls in line with the identity politics that govern Jaffrey’s sense of who she is: an Indian who enjoys flavors from all over the world; a global citizen who eats freely, yet savors the taste of home.

However, the cosmopolitanism that structures the book might reflect less an outreach toward the strange and foreign from a point of ethnic specificity than the admixture of cultural influences through the softening of borders, a cultural condition that Jaffrey notes in the previous paragraph. After describing contemporary food habits as the blending of multiple food traditions, she describes herself as belonging to a “mixed” family, in which she is an Indian woman married to an American. Her children have intermarried with other nationalities, “[bringing] in Italian, Irish, English, and French blood to...[her] grandchildren.” She describes two of her daughters as “Sinophiles,” particularly in culinary matters. Additionally, Jaffrey is widely traveled, describing her movement from continent to continent as a constant motion (viii). The book becomes an expression of a momentum that carries the body through encounters with other cultures, noting their differences while observing their similarities.

World Vegetarian also conforms to more general concepts of cosmopolitanism. For example, it offers a version of Kant’s vision of universality, substituting the table in place of the international marketplace. Rather than the

harmony of international commerce, Jaffrey proposes the harmony of international flavors, where the unifying elements of different dishes enhance the table as a whole.⁴⁰ Jaffrey imagines meals constructed of an assemblage of dishes representing different nations. Jaffrey's table is the ideal of the international community, complete with the moral imperatives of unity and freedom. Every serving suggestion implies the freedom of flexibility, where foods "can" be served stuffed into a pita, or "may" be served with meals consisting of dishes carrying influences of nearby nations.⁴¹ The ideality that structures the presentation and consumption of each dish might simply reflect Jaffrey's own objective of maximizing the flavor potential of each recipe; but her reach in some recipes spans nations. For example, fried okra with onions (*tali hui bindi*) from Pakistan can be served "with any South Asian, Middle Eastern, Greek or Turkish meal" (Jaffrey 254). The ideal menu that includes this dish represents a broad geohistorical expanse crossing the borders of a multitude of nations and obviating their political differences through the diplomacy of taste. This meal would exhibit a gustatory coherence that would unify its flavors (the mustard seeds in this dish would harmonize with the mustard seeds in stir-fried carrots and ginger with mustard seeds [*gajar no sambharo*] from India [Jaffrey 157]) and also would highlight the variety that is the hallmark of a good meal: differences in color and texture that make the things we eat interesting to the mouth. The differences in texture here, however, are not restricted to the direct sensations (taste, smell, and touch) of the food—they are also the differences in texture that mark out the specific characteristics of nations that Jaffrey both highlights and elides in her cataloging of recipes. Jaffrey never eliminates the boundaries that divide nation-states; she instead

focuses on the instability of these boundaries, even as they clearly mark out distinctions between cultures. Her book thematizes their lack of fixity by emphasizing the practices that destabilize them in contemporary culinary culture. *World Vegetarian* responds to, reinforces, and acts out the slippery nature of contemporary borders as they exist between nations, and imagines this slipperiness as the foundation of memorable, tasty meals.

In its presentation of cultural difference, the book also attempts to press the eater beyond a conventional, limited, local notion of vegetarian fare, and into a celebratory relationship with strange flavors and new techniques. Because the diner is already conversant with internationalized food traditions, the organization and presentation of all these influences in the form of a global cookbook is a consummate example of cosmopolitan intellectuality: as an eater prepares the recipes in the books, she “project[s] outside the self in an effort to understand alien values.”⁴² These values—flavors, techniques, adjustments to and expansion of taste—are in turn translated in “terms of local usage that belie their local origins.” The book thus serves as an “antidote” against the culinary backwardness of the limited American vegetarian palate, participating in the larger project of countering “discrimination, which it replaces with a consummate reason” (Brennan 667). Jaffrey captures this in her serving advice, which articulates each recipe as part of everyday eating and entertaining. For example, Jaffrey describes masala omelet (*masala omlate*) as “the most common omelet in India,” served widely and eaten with “just a slice of bread or toast.” The omelet also makes a “wonderful sandwich” (Jaffrey 535). The hot green chiles and chopped cilantro make an otherwise “ordinary” omelet international, but its

consumption normalizes the international omelet as compatible with Western breakfast practices: while differently flavored, this omelet is just like any other to be eaten with toast and a cup of hot coffee.

The strange and the exotic are also rendered familiar and tasty through the coupling of esoteric ingredients with those that are more mundane. For instance Jaffrey's Vietnamese pancake (*banh xeo*) recipe calls for a mixture of all-purpose and rice flours (Jaffrey 413). Pakistani batter-fried okra (*tali hui besan wali bhindi*) calls for okra and salt, as well as *garam*, or chickpea flour (Jaffrey 255). Plain basmati rice (*saaday basmati chaaval*) is made ultra-Indian through the cooking of basmati rice with whole cardamom pods (Jaffrey 375). Substitutions allow for the approximation of authentic flavors in the absence of a needed indigenous ingredient that is impossible to replicate or find outside the country of origin. Jaffrey's recipe for Peruvian potatoes in the Huancayo style (*papas a la Huancaína*) calls for a specific Peruvian cheese. In its absence (and perhaps in an effort to make the flavor of the dish imaginable for an American palate unacquainted with the taste of Peruvian cheese) Jaffrey substitutes feta. Because the yellow chilies that color and spice the dish are difficult to acquire, Jaffrey's version calls for yellow bell pepper to obtain the proper coloration and fresh hot green chilies to add heat (Jaffrey 272). The recipe for Chinese stir-fried hot peppers with ginger and garlic (*chow ching la jiao*) calls for long hot peppers; because they are difficult to find "in much of America, this would mean buying Italian hot peppers or long Korean hot peppers. Fresh Greek hot peppers, the kind that are pickled, will also do when available" (Jaffrey 263). Through substitutions, recipes preserve the ethos of otherness by instructing the eater

in how to achieve it through the use of familiar flavors and textures. Additionally, by spanning the globe, these substitutions erase locality and foreshorten cultural difference: Italian, Korean, and Greece can readily substitute for Chinese. Exoticism becomes equivocal as different differences slip into and out of the same slots. The result is an accessible exoticism that is not too foreign.

This means that the eater can indulge in or create an attainable, executable cosmopolitanism. Through cooking, the eater can leave home without ever leaving home. Jaffrey's recipe for collard greens with asafetida (*haak*) is a perfect example of the cosmopolitan dish that brings a nation to the table through the invocation of specific flavors that season a familiar ingredient (Jaffrey 220). Collard greens are recognizable to most Americans as a Southern delicacy, and are a staple component of the traditional African-American meal.⁴³ However, Jaffrey provides a Kashmiri method of preparing collard greens, cooking them in mustard oil. The recipe is further specified as a Hindu method of preparing the greens because of the use of asafetida. She indicates a substitution for the needed *suchvari*, a hard, round disc comprised of spices, mustard oil, and split-pea flour. Instead of breaking off and crushing a piece of *suchvari*, Jaffrey uses 1 tablespoonful of curry powder in the recipe. She also suggests cutting the greens into "fine strips" if the leaves are "older [and] coarser"; this method is not necessary if the cook can acquire the smaller, younger, tenderer leaves, which may be cooked whole and are the ingredient used in Kashmiri preparations of the dish (Jaffrey 220). The substitutions of sliced greens for whole and of curry powder for *suchvari* accommodate a marketplace in which the more authentic ingredients might be of limited availability.

The use of asafetida, however, marks an irreducible authenticity, as does the inclusion of mustard oil. Asafetida's signature stink is not subject to replacement by any other ingredient—in spite of the spice's description as similar in flavor and function as garlic or onions. Ironically, the herb's primary use in Indian cuisine is as a replacement for onions or garlic, herbs deemed unacceptable for Brahmin and Jain diets ("Asafetida," *The Epicentre*). And yet, asafetida's authenticity is an ambivalent one. Although "a trace of asafoetida is used in certain dishes of south India, Gujarat, Kashmir and Bengal," the spice is usually imported from Afghanistan (Achaya 10). India does cultivate it in Kashmir, which means that the Kashmiri method of preparing *haak* assumes an ethnic holism granted by the use of a native ingredient spicing a native dish ("Asafetida," *The Epicentre*). The herb nevertheless invokes an Indianness redoubled by Jaffrey's suggestion that the preparation is a Hindu one. If the majority of asafetida, a characteristic flavoring agent in Bengali cooking, is produced beyond India's borders, then the authenticity of asafetida functions in much the same way as that of chutney: the authentic earmarker assumes a static, fixed character that belies origins in motion. Ethnic identifiers are rendered unambiguous and incontrovertible.

Mustard oil also has a distinct, pungent smell and taste that is difficult to duplicate through substitution, and thus it too marks an element of irreducible authenticity. However, it displays its own ambivalent relationship with the very authenticity that it proclaims, primarily because of the silence with which Jaffrey deploys it in the text. Its authenticity is a function of its placement in Indian cultural practice: mustard oil has enjoyed prominence in Bengali cooking for centuries and is

not just ingested, but is also used in massages for both adults and infants. The seeds from which it is pressed are used in holy ceremonies—its connection with Hindu religious and cultural practice seems absolute (Achaya 167-9). What Jaffrey does not mention in her recipe is that mustard oil is packaged in two different varieties, with two very different levels of pungency. To properly flavor an authentic Bengali dish with mustard oil entails using the correct amount of the more pungent, more dangerous purple variety and heating it properly to diminish the quantity of the compounds that make it toxic. In fact, the chemical agent responsible for mustard oil's signature pungency is of such noxious toxicity that a cook should exercise caution when burning it off.⁴⁴

In 1998, India banned the sale of all unpackaged edible oils because 41 people died as a result of consuming adulterated mustard oil. According to Vandana Shiva, the resulting need for cooking oil would be filled by soybean oil produced by US-based multinationals (in fact, Shiva states that the popular view maintains that these US-based multinationals are the actual culprits who adulterated the oil, encouraging the ban and creating a vast market for what is actually an unsafe, inferior product). The backlash against the ban was immediate: food riots protested the displacement of a native product. Mustard oil and seeds flavor dishes prepared in each region of the country. Mustard oil “is the olive oil of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and East Uttar Pradesh” and is used as Ayurvedic medicine and for therapeutic massage (Shiva 23). The ban placed more at stake than India's signature flavor:

Clearly, a death knell has been sounded for the entire domestic edible oil industry, not for just mustard oil. Farmers will stop growing sesame, linseed,

mustard and groundnut in all their diversity since the markets for these crops will also be destroyed. India's agricultural biodiversity will be seriously eroded, hundreds of varieties will be driven to extinction, and, what is more, the livelihoods of millions of small farmers will be destroyed. Crucially, India's food production system will be more vulnerable to world financial volatility. (Shiva 23)

Shiva does not understate the peril of replacing mustard oil with soybean oil. This means that relationship between the mustard oil in Jaffrey's text and the banned cooking oil in Delhi might be even more complex: like the poor Delhi women demonstrating to retain access to affordable mustard oil, Jaffrey's recipe may insist on a measure of authenticity that preserves cultural practice from the ravaging erasures of the global economy.

The effect of including both mustard oil and asafetida in the recipe—both irreducibly authentic, yet both subject to replacement—is an uneven invocation of authenticity that boldly asserts itself as it elides its ambivalence. In other words, Jaffrey's account sets these ingredients forth as authentic, and then paradoxically suggests “authentic” replacements that can yield the same result. This elision is a necessary function of the manner in which Jaffrey constructs a global cuisine because it allows Jaffrey to articulate the global in terms of absolute values. If cultural elements can be rendered as absolute values, they are also rendered interchangeable—ingredients that approximate flavors and textures can substitute for authentic ingredients that are not subject to replacement. This contradictory invocation of the authentic constitutes a staple of culinary writing because, without it, recipes remain

locked within their borders. Jaffrey's introduction to the section of the text listing recipes for beans includes such a universalized image:

The oldest women of the house—generally my grandmother—would place a few handfuls of lentils, split peas, or beans into the big metal plates we each held. Quite automatically, we drew the legumes to the edge nearest our bodies. Then, in an ancient ritual, enacted as if in a half-remembered dance, we began pushing the lentils toward the far side one by one, plucking up and discarding all sticks and stones as we did so. Sometimes we sang, sometimes we gossiped, sometimes we were lost in our own silences.

As we were doing this in India, Chinese, Syrians, Mexicans, and Peruvians were doing the same in their own courtyards, gardens and kitchens.
(Jaffrey 3)

The culturally specific activity of a group of Indian women picking beans echoes the identical activity in households around the world. Removed from their cultural contexts and placed next to one another in a global system, cooking methods become universalized—their commonality renders them equivalent.⁴⁵ They serve to neatly draw the globe into a coherent culinary whole by establishing a uniformity that can only be achieved by placing individuated elements within a system of knowledge that levels their values, even as it acknowledges culturally specific points of origin. Additionally, this description instructs in the replication of domestic spaces—a tactic used to conform domestic spaces designed to support nationalist discourses.⁴⁶ In discourses of nationalism the private becomes the site of authenticity. And yet the precise instructions in replication and the erasure of national borders creates the

global community. In this way, Jaffrey achieves the paradoxical effect of outlining the shape of the globe by reinforcing the shape of the nation, thereby simplifying the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

As the poem that Jaffrey cites entitled “A Woman Cleaning Lentils” suggests, cooking “unites us all” in a way that the very global economy that grants us access to esoteric ingredients, divides and isolates us. Cleaning, cooking, and eating beans reminds us of “what our ancestors did to plow the earth and wrest from it foods to nourish us...something we of the supermarket culture have quite forgotten” (Jaffrey 3).⁴⁷ This very act of remembrance makes Jaffrey very thoroughly, very bodily Indian as it also unites her Indian woman’s body to other women’s bodies halfway around the world. The contours of the globe conform to the shape of each body participating in the “half-remembered dance” that will reinforce family and cultural bonds as it feeds other hungry bodies. However, Jaffrey has outlined a curious axis of remembrance: she cites India, China, Syria, Mexico and Peru as countries in which women still do the dance of cleaning beans. Women in the United States and Western Europe apparently do not participate, as they constitute the “supermarket culture” whose amnesia has unhitched its members from the rest of the world. South and East exemplify an earthbound globality that can teach North and West how to reconnect with the very substance of life. For Jaffrey, becoming global in this way entails an act of remembrance, where food recovers its links to the processes used to prepare it and to the other eating bodies around the world.

The Cookbook and The World

World Vegetarian imagines the world as a “marketplace of international delights,” offering a refraction of the concept as defined by Stallybrass and White. In Jaffrey’s marketplace, each recipe evokes its local identity, and then suffers the unsettling of that identity (Stallybrass and White cited in Brennan, 660). Within each recipe, this unsettling occurs from both within it and from outside it. Although each recipe evokes a specific, local identity, its ingredients and techniques are often imported from elsewhere as part of the culinary traditions of immigrant populations. For example, Jaffrey offers a Trinidadian Mango Curry that hails from Port-of-Spain (321). The dish is marked as Caribbean in a manner that elides the admixture that constitutes the Caribbean culture and gathers them all beneath the rubric of a single, specific island in the Caribbean. In other words, the list of ingredients implies that the Caribbean can be constituted of a brief list of ingredients that promise a Caribbean flavor. In this way the recipe unsettles Caribbean cultural formations in ways that replicate the repeating island that Antonio Benitez-Rojo describes. The recipe intimates and then immediately elides the fraught history from which it arises. Cultural differences and historical pressures are represented as a collection of happily comingling ingredients that result in a delicious dish.

The recipe’s proximity to other recipes from different places causes the second layer of disruption, an unsettling characterized by the friction between recipes as they rub against one other. Jaffrey’s recipe for Trinidadian Mango Curry sits next to an Indian recipe for Yogurt with Mango and Coconut (*manga pacchadi*), and just before Malaysian Pineapple Curried with Cinnamon and Star Anise (pineapple *pacchadi*) (320-322). Although these dishes share an Indian origin, Jaffrey labels

each dish with a different locale that the dish intends to evoke: *manga pacchadi* is Indian, mango curry is Trinidadian, and pineapple *pacchadi* is Malaysian.⁴⁸ Each dish participates in the marketplace by positioning itself next to others that share its essential features or even bear close familial resemblance, but which are made segregate and different because, in spite of their spatial proximity to one another, they point toward dispersed points of origin. This of course draws attention to the migrations of Indians across the globe and evokes the plantation economy that governed both the Caribbean and Malysia in the 19th century. The book thus relies on the same economics of troubled identities as the marketplace: the unsettling of a recipe's local identity erupts from within it, and then ripples outside of it.

Kwame Anthony Appiah provides a better model of the cosmopolitics that structure *World Vegetarian*. His model unveils the book's relationship with the globalism it portrays in its selection and arrangement of recipes.⁴⁹ In her introduction, Jaffrey suggests that the book obeys the same identity politics that she uses to understand her own place in the world: as a localized body inflected by international influences. If Indian recipes serve as the book's foundation, then the other recipes that commingle with them are not so much expressions of simple cultural differentiation as they are points of departure by which we can understand the book's rootedness in Jaffrey's Indian heritage and in her life as an American. The book also describes her own movement across the globe and the encounters with other cultures that she has experienced as citizen of the world and an Indian who lives in America. Her narrative is no longer linear (as it is in *Climbing the Mango Trees*) but instead describes that movement in a scattering of affiliations, links of similitude and dissimilitude that

provide a clear sense of a rooted self on the move in the world. As it describes the inflections that shade Jaffrey's own tastes in food, the book also reflects the logic that organizes the web of relations in Jaffrey's own family as its identities spread across the globe.⁵⁰ The book is therefore less a map of the world (as an abstract concept) than it is a map of Jaffrey's life and the lives of her family. The dispersal of her family across the globe and its negotiations of difference shape her cosmopolitanism. The text operates as an extension of Jaffrey herself; by cooking and eating the recipes in the text, the eater acts out Jaffrey's cosmopolitanism, becoming a secondary extension of her own internationality. Jaffrey, her family, the text and the audience become the various strands of a web of relations, and not just of the author's individuated encounters with difference.

Alternatively, as a record of Jaffrey's encounters with the daily living of other bodies in other lands, the book offers only the barest glimpse of the quotidian habits of people eating in other places. Jaffrey detaches each recipe from its cultural setting and places it in an array determined by its central ingredient rather than its placement in daily practice. She gives the reader only a taste of an exotic place before moving on to another, then another, then still another. Moreover, she attempts to conform each recipe to the audience's eating habits, rather than depict the recipe in its original social context. This means that the book could act out Jaffrey's *displacement*: being at home everywhere also entails being at home nowhere, especially if home is the repeated assemblage of habits that we act out everyday. Jaffrey's first books were the product of homesickness (see above); this book perhaps acts out the radical extension of that homesickness by illustrating the impossibility of a body to remain in a single

cultural milieu. The body's collisions with other cultures results in a jumble of adopted habits that shape a sense of home deeply differentiated from the very origin of the recipes she lists. This state of being at home in the world is often the bitter fruit of socioeconomic necessity. However, even if the diasporic condition is one chosen by the body adrift, unmoored from the nation at will, this body is still in a state of displacement, if not *misplacement*. The book reflects this condition in a range of diverse recipes linked primarily by their central ingredient, and secondarily by flavor resonances with other dishes.

Nevertheless, the book serves as an instruction manual teaching the reader how to derive pleasure from the movement of bodies across the globe, from the migration of bodies across borders and the collisions of culture that result from that migration. Although the book certainly suggests a measure of food tourism (using the book as a reference, I can cook, eat and live in the modes of Pakistani culture without ever setting foot in Pakistan) its more persistent imperative is to open a range of options to a vegetarian reader whose provinciality has closed her off from tastier recipes from around the globe, and whose palate is bored by the blandness of conventional Western vegetarian menus. However, rather than simply introduce the reader to the world of international vegetarianism through a country-by-country study of different flavors and textures, Jaffrey opens the text with examples of the always-already-present international inflections that shape our tastes. While her book enables the food tourism that cosmopolitans enjoy, its interest lies in describing how a vegetarian eater can best exploit the hybridization that is the natural result of cross-cultural movement—not to maximize nutrition, but to maximize pleasure. As a

sentiment rather than an ideology (Appiah 92) Jaffrey's cosmopolitanism is also an aesthetic ideal, in which the flavors of the globe can suffuse the everyday.

This aesthetic idea has its own ethical dimensions that fuse the imperatives that impel cosmopolitanism with those that impel vegetarianism. Pollan states that vegetarianism is a means of eating ethically because it entails a refusal of those production practices that include cruel, painful, thoughtless treatment of the animal body, or those organized around a denial of the animal's "animality": the rearing and slaughter of pigs within the framework of the industrial farming complex, for example, is subject to vegetarian denial because pigs are, from the beginning, simply meat; a pig raised for slaughter can never fully experience being a pig happily rooting around for food.⁵¹ Many vegetarians elect the vegetarian lifestyle as a means of protesting the politics of cruel use that subject animals to harsh treatment rendered invisible by the mirrored door leading to the butcher's department and prohibitions keeping journalists outside the walls of industrial hen-houses. If cosmopolitan eating in ancient Rome entailed eating exotic animals as an expression of epicurean taste, Jaffrey readjusts the aesthetic impulse that impels cosmopolitan dining to align with a culturally responsive—and more responsible—model. Her statement that Hindus have been eating vegetarian cuisine as part of an ancient religio-philosophical practice refocuses the cosmopolitics of eating elsewhere. In Jaffrey's model of consuming the globe, East instructs West in political responsibility by uniting the ethical imperatives that underlie vegetarianism and global awareness.⁵²

Not every thinker would agree that the global model that Jaffrey sets forth in her cookbook serves as a suitable model for eating responsibly, as responsive to

globality as it might be. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Pollan describes an ethical provinciality to counter the invisible network of widespread, perverse practices that shape contemporary American eating habits. We thoughtlessly abuse the animals and people who comprise the system of production that ends at our tables because we cannot see their suffering, and can therefore abdicate our ownership of the bodies in pain that salt our everyday eating. Citing Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, Pollan analyzes vegetarianism as one method of resolving this problem. However, this resolution opens problems as we potentially trade the suffering of the animal body for the suffering of the body of the migrant worker, for example. For Pollan, supporting small, regionally specific farms that practice balanced farming techniques offers the clearest means of eating responsibly because it resolves the dilemma of eating compassionately while supporting agricultural workers. He suggests the opposite of cosmopolitan eating, refuting the embrace of globalism by recalling how specific and local our eating bodies are. In this way, we can enter into a true accounting of what our meals really cost in terms of suffering, sweat and sunlight (Pollan 411).

For Jaffrey, this specificity and locality can only operate within a network of shared mannerisms, where my cooking methods echo those practiced by another woman inhabiting another point on the globe. Responsibility entails the acknowledgement of her existence by experiencing the bodily sensations of an aspect of her daily being. Jaffrey links this cosmopolitan imperative to vegetarianism because both impulses are tied to an already ever-present global citizenship—each reinforces the sense of global belonging opened by the other. Jaffrey writes:

[v]egetarian traditions have existed in China and India for thousands of years, and like the dietary rules and restrictions of Islam and Judaism, have been prompted by the strong religious beliefs of large numbers of people. There is, thus, a deep core to them that explains their endurance. (Pollan ix)

By cooking and eating, not just as a vegetarian but also as a world vegetarian, I enter into communion with multitudes.

Cosmopolitanism as a utopian vision—how the cookbook becomes political

Jaffrey's cookbook falls into a long tradition of “paradox[ically]” constructing “a political utopia... as aesthetic taste.”⁵³ This paradox is, according to Brennan, “endemic to cosmopolitanism's functionality” (672). This objective might have shaped the choice to place *curry mango* from Trinidad just after *manga pacchadi* from India. When Jaffrey writes that Trinidadian mango curry can be served with all meals from South Asia, Malaysia and the Middle East (321), it is likely that her judgment is based solely on aesthetic considerations. The flavors in Trinidadian dish harmonize with meals that share its cultural origins: Trinidadian food bears the influences of Indian cuisine (see above) so it complements meals from South Asia and surrounding regions that share India's culinary inflections. However, given the utopian objectives articulated in the book's opening lines (“This book is written for everyone”) it is entirely plausible that the kind of diner who seeks these recipes out does so in the spirit of food adventurism. It is equally plausible that the reader chooses vegetarian because of religious considerations or ethical choice. However, is also equally plausible that the reader might be of sufficient political engagement to

desire placing these dishes into proximity with one another to enact the cultural conversation in which their real-world points of origin cannot or will not participate. The aesthetic harmony of accompanying *curry mango* from India with Seasoned Sindhi Flatbread from Pakistan (*meetha loli*) acts out an easy cultural harmony between the two countries that belies the difficulty of achieving a lasting peace, when the friction between these two nations is as much a part of the national character of both actors as cardamom and cumin seeds.

This utopian impulse structures each meal, rendering it in the mode of the utopian performative. The internationality that is the subject of the staging in Jaffrey's meals is far more nebulous than the set of specific social issues that Jill Dolan analyzes in *Utopia in Performance*. In other words, a meal on its own cannot specifically critique feminism and politics in the way that a stage production—or a novel—can. However, in spite of its nonspecificity, Jaffrey's staging of a utopian internationality is neither any less purposeful, nor any less profound as it acts out global peace in its own small way.⁵⁴ The eater is not elevated into a moment of difference that dissipates, however, because Jaffrey calls attention to the internationality of the everyday; instead of introducing the eater to a moment that gestures toward a much better world and then passes, Jaffrey normalizes those gestures, making them part of daily practice. Rather than confine those moments to an exhaustible duration, Jaffrey configures them in ways that make them repeatable, reiterable, and reifiable.⁵⁵ It is true that the moment of taste bursts and fades into remembered sensations of pleasure—according to Anthony Bourdain, author of *A Cook's Tour*, the most memorable meals are those that are linked to specific moments

in our personal histories. A perfect meal is as shaped by “context and memory” as it is by the deft hand of the chef (Bourdain 6). A chief ingredient for Bourdain’s perfect meal is the injection of a significant measure of nostalgia, a mourning for the irretrievability of the moment, and it is this longing that marks the desire for certain tastes.

The utopian globality under construction in Jaffrey’s book largely disposes of this nostalgia by weaving bright flavor notes from everywhere into the context of my quotidian. The *masala omlate* that becomes part of my morning routine gestures toward the internationality of its origins, signifies my awareness of the intimacies of early Indian mornings, unifies my own raised fork, lifted toast and tipped coffee cup with its invisible other half-a-world away. But the omelet becomes a morning habit, a normal part of my daily or weekly routine. Even in its difference, it slips neatly into the recognizable wedge otherwise occupied by my western omelet, or my cheese and mushroom omelet, deftly replacing it by a cosmopolitan act of sleight-of-hand. The intense burst of chilies and cilantro on the tongue evoke sunrises I may never experience on a continent that I may never visit; the sparkle of spices on the palate transports me to an imagined point on the globe, setting me in sync with diners from everywhere else at home.⁵⁶ This act of imagination seasons each dish in *World Vegetarian*, making each meal as much a symbol of international solidarity as it is also a sustaining repast to nourish the body. The utopian imperatives that structure cosmopolitanism do not erupt on the tongue and fade, but pervade the recreation of those moments as they become part of the pattern that structures my everyday movements.⁵⁷ In this way, utopia really is “no-place”: it is a small doing, a *gestus* that

moves us toward the contemplation of a global peace by placing diners in conversation with one another across the globe.⁵⁸

The Failure of the Cosmopolitan

The cosmopolitics of *World Vegetarian* posits cooking as a form of intervention, where preparing dishes from everywhere serves as a means of bringing the world to the table, the global into the home. The meal becomes the utopian model of global awareness. But is this form of intervention sufficient? Is it responsive enough?

As Kwame Anthony Appiah outlines his cosmopolitical model, he does so with the objective of shaping cosmopolitanism in ways that render it an appropriate stance from which to view the world. Timothy Brennan and Pheng Cheah, meanwhile, are much more critical, arguing that cosmopolitical models must carefully assess their features to achieve their objectives of transcultural understanding in ways that are similar to those desired by Appiah. For these theorists in particular, cosmopolitanism continues to carry its heavy ethical burden, forming globally responsive, responsible subjects. Although each author treats the topic differently and with differing degrees of approbation and trepidation, the cosmopolitan subject that critics of cosmopolitics construct shoulders the burden of understanding her place in the world and the complexity of her relationship to other people in it. This awareness shadows her movements as the subject acts out the cosmopolitan ethos of sensitivity and acceptance. Madhur Jaffrey's cookbook presumably fits neatly into the

overarching ethos that each theorist shapes, providing a method of acting out cosmopolitan sensibilities in the everyday.

However, Jaffrey's model cannot meet the objectives stipulated by politically sensitized models of cosmopolitanism of the sort that Pheng Cheah outlines because her book exemplifies the model of an unresponsive cosmopolitanism rooted in a materiality divorced from other materialities. While Timothy Brennan does desire a cosmopolitanism that concerns itself with the materialities of contemporary global life, Jaffrey's book acts as an oddity that allows the eater to elide particular aspects of this materiality, even as I act out global awareness and cultural understanding in every meal. Her book provides a material condition for cosmopolitanism—but it isn't terribly radical (Cheah 21). As seductive as it might be, Brennan might suggest that the type and degree of cosmopolitanism at play in *World Vegetarian* falls far short of its putative objectives. It “ruffles no feathers” (Brennan 672). In fact, similarly to Brennan's failed hero, the cultural critic, the book acts in a manner that is “consonant with power” by echoing the message set forth by established structures of power that reify oppression and inequity:

National sovereignty is said to have been transcended, the nation-state relegated to an obsolete form, and the present political situation is seen as one in which newly deracinated populations, NGOs, and web users are outwitting a new world order in the name of a boldly new, only partially defined, transnational sphere. (Brennan 672-3)

The book participates in the “[friendly] cultural discourse of cosmopolitanism” (Brennan 673, de-emphasis mine). Even as it participates in the project of presenting

a flavorful globe of delights for an enlightened cosmopolitan palate, the book seems less interested in the larger project of addressing or acknowledging the inequities that shape its primary audience. From their access to the book (priced at \$40US) and the ingredients its recipes require to their very inception, Jaffrey's audience is the product of materialities from which its text seem to shy away out of aesthetic necessity—precisely because her audience comprises the beneficiaries of global inequity. The book is another means by which a diner can experience the “euphoria of good will” without having to actually exercise it (Brennan 673). Jaffrey achieves this by furthering the project of “popular transnationalism” along manifold valences (Brennan 673).

Jaffrey predicates the book's appeal to “everyone” on the idea of an already-existing global communalism. However, her observation of the global inflections that persist in everyday eating provides a poor foundation on which to rest a cosmopolitical vision of cuisine. Her book bases its premise on the idea that the blurring of borders that brings diners into conversation with other food traditions creates the sense of solidarity necessary for a politically responsive model of cosmopolitanism. However pervasive the condition she observes happens to be, solidarity is a separate sentiment that must unite with simultaneously practiced gestures to transform them from mere activity into something shared. As Cheah writes, “An existing global condition ought not to be mistaken for an existing mass-based feeling of belonging to a world community (cosmopolitanism) because the globality of the everyday does not necessarily engender an existing popular global political consciousness” (31). This means that the image of good will and good eats

that Jaffrey uses as the cornerstone of her book, that of the SoHo noodle shop patronized by diners from all walks of life, is less about belonging to an international community than the accessibility of cheap “international” food to those who will pay for exotic tastes. Meanwhile, while the women around the globe clean their beans, they engage in a simultaneous action that might resemble, but does not actually draw them into solidarity. The question is therefore not how the customers in the line share food traditions from other nations, but rather how the powers of globalization shape “the world as fetish,” where particularized forms of exoticism becomes mappable, transportable, and commodifiable. The book participates in the transfer of internationality as a good subject to exchange, but does not inform the reader of how to conceive of that internationality beyond the stage of an abstraction given the limited form of taste—eating internationally becomes a gesture toward the world at large, but one that lacks a sense of how to actually achieve a global harmony that lasts beyond the duration of the meal.

The book indulges in the fiction of the creation of “new ‘world subject’” described by Brennan as “not bound by the laws and territorial limitations of locality—or indeed...happy in [his or her] uprootedness” (673-4). Brennan’s narrow use of the term to describe “new diasporic communities, unrooted and resourceful” (673) perfectly defines Jaffrey’s sense of herself and her family. She is an Indian who lives outside of India, travels widely, and has a deep affection for the food and cooking techniques that she encounters in other countries. Other books that she has written, such as *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, originate in a body of recipes she collected while living in America and suffering a deep nostalgia for home cooking (see above).

It is easy to imagine that a large part of the audience would be non-resident Indians who share her longing for a taste of home. This book follows the trajectory of her travels as they move her in a single line out of India, to America, then explode in a starburst of destination points scattered across the globe. She exemplifies the new “world” subject who celebrates the multiple belongings that fracture any identity based solely in location.

Brennan does examine the materialities that attend these new subjects, so his definition depends directly on economic realities that shape the lives of people living in systems that unequally distribute wealth. Jaffrey’s book engages in the task of creating these very subjects through acts of interpellation. She creates the happy diaspora of the world vegetarian: already alienated because of the “unnatural heavens” with which vegetarianism has arrived in the West (Jaffrey ix), the book celebrates the idea that this body of individuated culinary rebels has now come into its own and can gather together into a denationalized, deracinated, global body of always-already present vegetarianism. Indeed, vegetarianism itself is no longer limited to bland local offerings: “Pickles, chutneys, salsas, and sauces, important flavorings for vegetarian meals, are flooding our supermarkets” (Jaffrey ix). Vegetarianism in the West becomes globalized as international flavors reshape the conventions of the vegetarian palate.

However, Jaffrey’s “new ‘world subject’” does not limit herself to just vegetarianism. His uprootedness is an ideational position given materiality through the act of eating. This fictive subject comprises Jaffrey’s primary audience and is the diner that she sees eating Japanese soup at a counter in Portland, Oregon, or Italian

fare in an Indian hotel (Jaffrey viii). The accessibility of international food serves as a democratizing power that crosses boundaries of class, culture and race: Asian noodle restaurants in London care to “waiting diners, sophisticated food enthusiasts, and impoverished students” who wait in a line that “snakes through Soho’s narrow lanes” (Jaffrey viii). Given that “[w]e live in a new world where each of us not only knows at least a dozen other food traditions—other than the one we were born with—but are on close and easy terms with them,” (Jaffrey viii) this world subject could be anyone anywhere eating anything.

The greatest difference between Jaffrey’s world vegetarian and the “new ‘world subject’” that Brennan analyzes is the degree to which Jaffrey and her subject participate in the creation of the subject position. The fictiveness of Jaffrey’s world subject does not place her solely in the distorted imaginings of an author with a distorted vision of transnational harmony. The book’s successful print run suggests that the “world subject” is a fiction in which both the author and her audience equally participate. Jaffrey imagines the “world subject” as the “everyone” for whom she writes the book; however, I imagine myself as a “world subject” as I buy it, read it, and then cook and consume the recipes listed in its pages. The cosmopolitan “world subject” is not simply the object of a failed or deluded imagination. Its ubiquity as a desirable social formation has elevated it to the level of performativity, rendering it an identity that I can invoke, exaggerate and shed.

The irony that underlies Brennan’s possible objection to *World Vegetarian* is that eating is inextricably bound in the material conditions of the everyday. Brennan’s grievance is with academics whose abstract treatment of international relations serves

to further divorce cosmopolitanism from political activism. The book's political imperative, one that Brennan might argue as utterly insufficient to address the global inequities that impel it, is one of consumption as activism. Ours is a rifted world, splintered into sects by religious, racial, ideological difference; cooking can heal the breach by bringing different cultures to a single table. A cook can act out her enlightened political awareness by enacting cross-cultural solidarity in the quotidian acts of nourishing the body. Instead of an abstract notion, world peace structures daily living, is a part of every meal.

But this act is centered on the model of consumption as a political response. While Jaffrey's book concentrates on the mechanisms of production that set a global table, its ultimate end is consumption—the joy of cooking resides in both the pleasure of preparation and in the savoring of the dish. In this case, the filled belly, the tantalized palate and the gustatory pleasures of cross-cultural dining fall in line with the model of consumption as a political stance. Cooking internationally therefore absolves the eater of real activism: cooks and food enthusiasts are politically active without being political because they have gesticulated toward world peace. Here, however, the gesture falters: the performance of international awareness at the table lacks critical engagement with the world that such eating purports to embrace. The savoring of global taste by itself does not move the eating body toward revolutionary changes that balance the unequal dispersal of wealth, end oppression, and settle international conflicts.⁵⁹

Instead of critical engagement with the problems of inequity and the suffering of invisible bodies who live nations away, eating globally allows me to acknowledge

those bodies, then absolve myself of responsibility toward them. Eating globally gives these nations value, establishing their presence on my plate. But, once consumed, their exhausted cultural capital leaves unanswered the thorny question of how actually involve myself in the difficult task of addressing global inequity.

Scott L. Malcomson suggests that, “philosophy is of limited use in thinking about cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan’s challenges are not in theory, but in practice” (Malcomson 238). While he speaks of the use of classical philosophy and Kant to understand the mechanisms of cosmopolitanism, his preference for practice as a means of negotiating cosmopolitanism opens a specific question with which cookbooks wrestle when they entangle the multinational lives of their writers with recipes and family lore: if cosmopolitanism must be negotiated through cultural practice, does any practice that brings cultural difference into play suffice as a cosmopolitan moment? If it does, is it sufficient? Is it enough to declare that, through cooking in a cosmopolitan fashion, I am indeed cosmopolitan? For Jaffrey, cosmopolitanism is not just an ideal to be bandied about in a discursive mode. It is a “variety of actually existing practical stances.” (Cheah 21) What is produced here is food—which itself acts out allegiances and alliances of the she who prepares and she who eats. Timothy Brennan would perhaps concede that the world vegetarian does embody the ideals of cosmopolitanism, but the cosmopolitics that a cook acts out when using Jaffrey’s book to prepare a multicultural meal are not responsive to the differences that they purport to highlight in their performance.

Foregrounding inequity: What the World Really Eats

Madhur Jaffrey's cookbook assumes the task of unifying the world by bringing its delights to the table. Other texts can ably critique and/or complicate this view because the task fits comfortably into their generic forms: novels and documentaries can provide detailed interrogations of these notions because that is their primary task. Regional cookbooks, as a catalogue of recipes, assume cosmopolitan ethnography as a parallel concern to listing recipes and defining techniques. However, these cookbooks can never provide a balanced account of the very topics they purport to treat.⁶⁰ Other texts in other genres can provide the commentary that a cookbook cannot. This may seem like a truism, but regional cookbooks set forth the premise that they can indeed reflect the many dimensions of various cultures, and that they can indeed accommodate the complex political exigencies that define the relationships between countries.

Hungry Planet provides a different lens through which to view the world. Similarly to *World Vegetarian*, it profiles the nation through food and eating habits. One might level the charge against *Hungry Planet* that it is deeply reductive, condensing entire nations into single snapshots of families surrounded by what they eat in a single week. At a glance, a reader can make general observations about the country: its relative wealth, the happiness and general wellbeing of its citizenry, and the healthiness of their diet. Yet, its reductive treatment notwithstanding, *Hungry Planet* achieves objectives opposite those of Madhur Jaffrey's more comprehensive cataloging of global food traditions. *Hungry Planet* lays bare the inequities between nations, graphically illustrating the monumental task of bridging the gulf yawning between those who eat well and those who cannot. The text underscores the

imperative of doing the difficult work of that bridging that gulf by photographing hungry people crouched beside a handful of millet (Chad, page 56), then on subsequent pages photographing a family surrounded by boxes of fast food and pounds of raw meat (China, page 74. Australia, page 22; USA, page 267). Furthermore, the book describes the political materialities—globalization, war, changes in economic conditions on both local and national levels—that allow families to buy the food they need (or want), or prevent them from accessing enough sustenance.

Menzel and D’Aluisio’s *Hungry Planet* might approach the model of appropriately practiced cosmopolitanism. Its task is ethnographic, and the limitations of space make even its expanse a limited view of the eating habits of “conventional” families from across the globe. And yet, unlike *World Vegetarian*, this text highlights the inequities and materialities that attend eating practices. It draws attention to the ubiquity of McDonald’s and KFC and their desirability to young people worldwide (Menzel and D’Aluisio 12, 94-5). It draws attention to famine in refugee camps in Chad, where thousands live and eat after fleeing Darfur (Menzel and D’Aluisio 57-67). It also features recipes from all corners of the globe, illustrating eating habits and cooking practices. Every country has a feature recipe that exemplifies a regional taste, so the meal I might prepare using this book as a reference would be just as global in its scope as one I might prepare using Madhur Jaffrey’s cookbook. The range of recipes is not nearly as broad, however, because *Hungry Planet* belongs to an entirely different genre. Its task is documentary: *Hungry Planet* profiles countries by providing a slice of daily culinary life. Such a meal might fail to observe the

conventions that earmark a good meal: instead of harmonious flavors and textures, a meal I might prepare from this text might be jarring in its dissonance.

Additionally, *Hungry Planet* highlights the irreproducibility of cooking conditions around the globe. For instance, D’jimia Ishakh Souleymane’s dried goat meat soup calls for a freshly lit fire, and for a handful of dried okra “pounded on a rock.” The measurement for both dry and wet goods is given in *coro*, which for water is approximately two quarts, and for dried grain is approximately one pound (Menzel and D’Aluisio 65). The problem for a contemporary American cook would be to figure out whether the approximation is greater than or less than the given equivalent. Determining the volume of *coro* requires an intimacy with the culture that can be best acquired by being part of it. The book therefore highlights the incommensurability of global eating practices and forces the reader to yield to a lack of epistemological mastery. If Jaffrey’s objective is to render the globe knowable via the table, then *Hungry Planet*’s objective may be to highlight the cultural opacity of culinary practices and quotidian experiences across the planet. By eating the *masala omlate*, I putatively can know India, according to Jaffrey; but by eating dried goat meat soup, can I really taste the privations suffered by a family living in a refugee camp in Chad, forced to stretch their rations? Can I even approximate its taste? Would I even prepare it correctly? Is it my right to suggest that I can know these things, that I can even cook competently?

Spivak would perhaps reply, “Absolutely, but with two conditions: never under the assumption of cultural mastery, and always in the spirit of *haq*.” Spivak defines *haq* as the “ ‘para-individual, structural responsibility’ into which we are

born—that is our true being...this structural positioning can also be approximately translated as birth-right” (*Imperative* 54). It is a stance characterizes by mutuality and equal footing in unsure cultural circumstances. Cookbooks translate ratios into familiar measurements and flavors into familiar ingredients. They enable the reliable reproduction of taste by standardizing techniques. This means that cosmopolitanism assumes command of the diction of the other. Cultural flexibility entails a measure of dexterity that allows the cosmopolitan to smoothly maneuver amid difference, and is a position attesting great skill. The use of *coro* and the inexactitude of its translation into familiar units of measurement mean that the chef can only attempt an approximation of the recipe—an approximation that may never duplicate the original that may be seasoned with a little grit from the stones used to pound the okra and with the woodsmoke of the fire over which it was cooked. *Hungry Planet*’s recipe never displaces the alterity of the conditions producing Ms. Souleymane’s meal—in fact, the alterity of these conditions remains a central feature of each recipe that the book describes.⁶¹ Yet, because Ms. Souleymane and the reader are both planetary subjects, her alterity is never separated from my own—we are both part of the planetary system that moved her to the camp where she builds her fire and measures out grain brought to the camp via donkey cart. Her conditions are not the negation of my own, they are not their opposite. They are associated with mine, which they contain.⁶² I am pressed into an engagement with her based on an observation of her practices.⁶³ Hers is one shade in a spectrum of relations in which I am also, but differently, implicated. I am therefore responsible for her, as is my right.

If the planet is “a catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right,” (*Imperative* 56) then *Hungry Planet* shapes a specific imperative that is tactically different from that set forth by Jaffrey’s text. The book challenges me to assert my right to claim my responsibility over the conditions set forth in its pages by laying those conditions before me in their complexity. The meal becomes a metonym, not just for a complete set of cultural mannerisms, but for the sociopolitical/historical conditions that necessitates them. The comparisons expose how global capital attempts to erase East and West and elide North and South as McDonald’s and KFC span the globe with an expansive reach. The uniformity of “McDonaldization” (and the uniformity of its effects) negates as it also affirms the unequal development of the world (Menzel and D’Aluisio 92-95). Its universal accessibility unveils an increasing measure of economic equality, even though certain countries (Chad; Greenland; Guatemala) may never construct one because the prices are out of reach for the average family. The profiles in the text graphically show commonalities that run along the lines of socioeconomic privilege. And yet, they also unveil the peculiarities of daily practice that create cultural differences—even those that are not subject to any particular indictment.

Hungry Planet also has its own problems of representation that are a product of the limitations of its form. At 288 pages, the book sets as its task the depiction of the planet’s eating habits. Rather than global in its expanse, the book is planetary in its reach, illustrating the disparities between nations. It is simultaneously a celebration of global difference, a critique of globalization, and an evaluation of the effect of global capitalism on the eating habits of the world’s citizenry. Because it must

accomplish these monumental tasks in such a limited space, each family becomes a synecdoche for the nation, and the week's worth of foodstuffs stacked around them becomes a synecdoche for daily living. This means that the Dudos of Sarajevo come to represent the entire population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the food stacked on the tables in their kitchen represents the day-to-day living that is impossible to represent in the book's pages (4 Menzel and D'Aluisio 6-7). The difference *within* the nation becomes much more difficult to accommodate: in most cases, only one family is under study. However, perhaps as a nod to cultural diversity, the authors showcase three families to exemplify America: the Cavens of California are white; the Revises of North Carolina are black; and the Fernandezes from Texas are Latin-American (Menzel and D'Aluisio 260-75). To illustrate the difference within the nation of Australia, the authors depict an aboriginal family and its white counterpart (Menzel and D'Aluisio 22-35). However, the authors overlook the enormous diversity in nations like India, depicting a Hindu family and its daily life without treating the communal differences that complicate the nation's political landscape (Menzel and D'Aluisio 166-73). For the purposes of *Hungry Planet*, India is a Hindu nation. Rather than the image of 600 million shards, we have a single family and its habits standing in for the entirety of the nation-state. The complex picture of the nation's cultural composition must step aside in favor of a standardized character that deeply elides the nation's history and flattens its diversity: Great Britain is the Baintons, a white family of four, although it could also be Nazneen's family, portrayed in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. France is the Le Moines of Montreuil, another white family of four; the face of the nation is certainly not that of the four youths in *Le Haine*: poor,

disadvantaged, marginalized, ethnically diverse. To better highlight the distinctions between nations, the book sharpens each nation's cultural outline along specific lines of gender and ethnicity, lines that eliminate difference within the nation to focus on the distinctions between them. If the faces of Great Britain and France are white, then they are also heterosexual—the book does not contain a single homosexual or childless couple, and does not feature single people living alone. It simplifies the definitions of nation and family in an effort to present a complicated planetary picture of complicated international relations that trouble the distribution of food to hungry mouths.

Cooking Across Cultures: Kitchens and Cultural Difference in Fasting, Feasting and The Inheritance of Loss

Bodies in transit who pause to eat at tables in other places often find that the kitchens that purport to welcome actually underscore the hostility and incommensurability of the cultural differences between she who feeds and she who is fed. Instead of mutuality and understanding, confusion and disorientation prevail. These themes emerge clearly in two novels by South Asian writers working in the US. Both Kiran and Anita Desai use kitchens and images of cooking to illustrate the difficulties that difference makes to people moving into diaspora.

Anita Desai's evocatively titled *Fasting, Feasting* uses food to trope emotional comfort and satiety—focusing on the difficulty of achieving these conditions with any lasting effect. The novel takes up the subject of domestic unrest, revealing the many, hidden fragmentations that separate and segregate the spaces of

those who share the intimacy of daily life. The first half of the novel features Uma, a South Asian woman who never leaves the proverbial nest. Her parents arrest her development when it becomes clear that she cannot marry well, and they foreclose her educational, spiritual, and employment opportunities to keep her lashed to the home. In the development of this character, Anita Desai does not choose the path of Tsitsi Dagarembga, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, or Jamaica Kincaid, shaping her protagonist in the form of a gifted girl whose natural talents obviously recommend her for better circumstances. Instead, Uma is painfully awkward, plain of face, and stunningly mediocre. She also suffers embarrassing epileptic fits that so mortify her family that, on the occasion of Aruna's marriage, she hisses at Uma, "Don't you *dare* do that at the wedding, don't you *dare*!" (*Fasting* 102) Uma's choices are limited to the domesticity of married life and the domesticity of her childhood home; when her marriage fails and she returns home in disgrace (*Fasting* 91-7) her parents allow her no alternatives, and she has no talents to force her case. Uma is therefore frustrated both intellectually and spiritually.

Desai's novel presents rigidly disciplined kitchens in both parts of the novel. In Uma's house, the table is produced through discrete rituals, each perfect in their execution and crucial in its own way. Something as simple as the peeling and eating of an orange and the dipping of fingers into a finger bowl signify the social order in the family. Arun's meals are administered with a vigilance that precisely measures how much milk he will drink (whether he wants it or not) and determines the precise timing of the boiled egg and meat broth that he will have. It is Mama who governs these ministrations, which she must report to Papa: "[W]hen Papa returned from the

office, he would demand to know how much his son had consumed and an answer had to be given: it had to be precise, and it had to be one that pleased” (*Fasting* 30). The table so disciplined that the disagreements determining what will be eaten constitute one of its rituals. The singular entity of MamaPapa moves in a predictable fashion—so predictable that the argument over the evening meal must happen to produce the meal that day:

Of course there were arguments between them, and debate. In fact, these occurred every day, at the same hour—when ordering the meals for the day. This could never be done without heated discussion: that would have gone against custom. It was actually wonderful to see *what fertile ground the dining table was for discussion and debate* [emphasis mine]. But it was also impossible to see that the verdict would be the same as at the outset—if Mama had suggested plain rice and mutton curry to begin with, then it would be that and no other, no matter what fancies had been entertained along the way: pilaos, kebabs, koftas... That was just part of the procedure.

The girls had learnt not to expect divergences and disagreements, and these occurred so rarely that they might not have recognised them when they did—if they had not been so acutely tuned to the temperature and the atmosphere of the house, so trained to catch the faintest inkling of any jarring, any dissonance. (*Fasting* 14)

The table here is a contentious space—although the contention here is farcical. This description renders the domestic as trained, repeated so often that disturbances are quickly suppressed.

The few moments of resistance against kitchen culture are never direct, for these are quashed almost before they take form. Instead, resistance assumes different forms that reconfigure the kitchen space and the norms that space reinforces. Sneakily tasted treats, for example, thwart food proscriptions determining the gendered domestic order. Already outside the confines of proper meals, the text presents these as moments of subversion that contravene the restrictive practices in the home. For example, Uma shares unripe guavas sprinkled with salt with Arun, a forbidden indulgence eaten in a “wickedly irresponsible” moment. The snack is a cruel one, “fruit so unripe that it set the teeth on edge and turned the gullet sore.” An unripe, salted guava is the last thing that should be eaten by a boy of such delicate constitution as Arun, however, the guavas present an opportunity to slip the bonds of his heavily regimented diet:

They closed their eyes and winced as the tartness rasped the tastebuds at the roots of their tongues. Even their ears crept, the fruit was so sour. They blinked their eyes shut and tears pricked the corners with salt. They opened them and laughed. (*Fasting* 33)

This shared moment of painful pleasure binds Arun and Uma as they both resist the stringent discipline of Arun’s diet. The prospect of getting caught is so alarming that the threat causes Uma to jump and catch her hair in the branches of the tree in which they are hiding. The collusion and the necessary furtiveness sweetens the snack all the more.

This constitutes the kitchen space both as a constrictive space of discipline and containment, as well as a liberal space of gendered freedom where social norms

relax (a rule cannot be broken if there is no rule to break; freedom cannot exist without oppression to give it shape). Mama describes subversive aunts slipping treats to girls who were forbidden to taste:

“In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family. But ours was not such an orthodox home that our mother and aunts did not slip us something on the sly.” She laughed, remembering that—sweets, sly. (*Fasting* 6).

The sneakily tasted treat upsets the conventional, gendered order of snack distribution. These harmless, unknowable acts do not hurt the men who do not know about them. The sweets given on the sly do not simply mark the subtle solidarity and hidden resistance of women working against orthodox family orders; they mark the porosity of the boundaries that establish gendered privilege acted out in the form of who gets to eat what. The eating they do on the sneak does not masculinize women, nor does the theft effeminize the men. Instead, gendered snacking spaces demonstrate that which is always already present: the fragility and instability of the domestic as it is ordered by the practices that define it. This is seen in the final clause of this passage: savored flavors and subterfuge, paired and inseparable.⁶⁴

The sneaking of snacks requires accomplices; in most moments, Uma seems solitary. When she chafes beneath the yoke, her frustration has few outlets that are often denied or withdrawn. Her subtle resistances emerge during service, when she reluctantly fulfills her duties in ways that clearly communicate her frustration and displeasure. These moments, however, fail to arouse a reaction and so are quickly

subsumed into the activity that Uma then completes. For example, when Uma is told to pass the fruit to her father, she thumps the bowl down before him. He ignores it. Mama then demands that a piece be peeled: “‘Orange,’ she instructs her.” Uma must acquiesce, as she “can no longer pretend to be ignorant of Papa’s needs, Papa’s ways. After all, she has been serving them for some twenty years” (*Fasting* 23). Later, after Mama interrupts a moment of literary pleasure taken after a morning cluttered by an oppressive number of menial tasks, Uma sulkily serves tea to her father. Mentally shouting the words of the poem she was reading in a moment of relative liberty, she prepares her father’s cup:

She sloshes some milk into the coffee. “Rosebuds. Wild waltz. Passionately,” she screams at them silently. She tosses in sugar. “Madly. Vows. Fulfill,” her silence roars at them. She clatters a spoon around the cup, spilling some into the saucer, and thrusts it at Papa. “Here,” her eyes flash through her spectacles, “*this*, this is what I know. And you, you *don’t*.”

He takes the cup from her, too startled to protest. (*Fasting* 137)

The exact knowledge that Uma withholds is less important than the acquiescence reluctantly wrung from an unwilling body. This moment expresses the fullness of Uma’s, of her irritation and lack of fulfillment. It is a lack of fulfillment that Arun never need feel: in the one moment of direct contravention of the domestic dietary order, he reveals himself to be a vegetarian (*Fasting* 32). Although he is initially prescribed a foul-tasting emetic as a remedy for his regrettable predilections, he holds fast to his convictions that seem unchallenged by the rest of the text, particularly because he escapes the confines of the home.

The latter half of the novel focuses on Uma's brother Arun, who achieves what Uma cannot and travels abroad to be educated. Lacking both the means and the desire to go home over the summer, Arun stays with the Pattons, relatives of Mrs. O'Henry who runs the Baptist mission in India. He finds life in the suburbs expansive and dismaying. Even the scent of the suburbs appalls him, as grilling meat constitutes the preferred culinary method—and is a nightly ritual in suburbia.⁶⁵ This means that the entire outdoors reeks of burning flesh: “It is the pervasive odour of the entire suburb on any summer evening” (*Fasting* 162). Suburbia is thus equated to dead flesh over fire. Arun wants little to do with it, and lives in terror of involving himself in the domestic intimacies of suburban living. His terror heaps the plates he sees filled each evening at the Pattons' house.

The oppressive kitchen spaces he finds in America bewilder him—they are marked by overabundance, a plenitude that creates enormous waste. Whereas MamaPapa's kitchen rituals regulated the actual production and presentation of food, Mrs. Patton's kitchen rituals concern themselves only with its acquisition. Shopping is a “career,” especially as Mrs. Patton must feed two different dietary preferences, and she is especially pleased by her competence as a shopper. Any shyness or demureness that she assumes in the home falls away once she steps into her element and wraps her hands around the handlebar of the cart. In the “chilled air and controlled atmosphere” of the supermarket, she masterfully instructs Arun in the ritual of food acquisition:

He learnt to follow her up and down the aisles obediently, at her own measured pace, and to read the labels on the cans and cartons with the high

seriousness she brought to the exercise, studying the different brands not only for their different prices...but for their relative food value and calorific content. (*Fasting* 183)

Shopping is a *techne* that produces the domestic; Mrs. Patton is more than willing to share her expertise in the science of gathering her ingredients. For her, the joy does not lie in eating the food she buys or even in preparing it; her joy “[lies] in carrying home this hoard she had won from the maze of the supermarket, storing it away in her kitchen cupboards, her refrigerator and freezer” (*Fasting* 184). This exercise entails its own ritualistic discipline, its own repetitive movements, its own logic of assortment. At home, the bags, cans and boxes preoccupy her as she contemplates them:

She slowly and thoughtfully put away each item after several minutes of holding it and considering it. Arun stands watching her purse her lips and occasional touch her mouth with a plump, freckled hand before she bends to put away the cat food or open the refrigerator and stack frozen cans into its icily illuminated spaces. (*Fasting* 161-2)

The act of gathering and storing is the terminus of food acquisition: “Arun...worried that they would never make their way through so much food but this did not seem to be the object of her purchases” (*Fasting* 184). Food is instead entombed, exhibited; shopping expeditions bring cultural artifacts into the home. Shopping does not provide ingredients for the preparation of dishes—it satisfies a sentiment. “Once it was all stored away in the gleaming white caves where ice secretly whispered to itself, she was content. She did not appear to think there was another stage beyond

this final, satisfying one” (*Fasting* 184). This food is not intended to be eaten: when Arun asks about finishing the food in the freezer before heading out to shop for more, Mrs. Patton scoffs in astonishment, saying, “What an idea? Whyever should we do that? What would we do in an *emergency*?” (*Fasting* 207) Her shopping stocks her kitchen with either artifacts or provisions to prepare for an apocalypse that will never come. The food is rendered useless, made inedible by the symbolic referents that it accumulates.

Meanwhile, Arun dreads the practice of producing the food he eats, in part because Mrs. Patton takes up vegetarianism, a habit she expresses a longing to have developed for a long time (*Fasting* 179). Her adoption of vegetarianism constitutes an expression of solidarity with and caring for Arun. She is genuinely interested in his culture and wishes to establish a rapport with him. However, he recoils from her interest. She fails to notice his resistance and dismay. Similarly to Raghavan Iyer, author of *The Turmeric Trail*, Arun must learn how to feed himself, but this new responsibility disturbs him. She does not see the “expression of woe” with which he assembles his food. His vegetarianism therefore underscores a cultural opacity that opens a chasm between himself and Mrs. Patton, one that ties his tongue: “How was he to tell Mrs. Patton that these were not the foods that figured in his culture? That his digestive system did not know how to turn them into nourishment?” (*Fasting* 184-5)⁶⁶ His yearning for home—the same yearning that drives cookbook writers such as Madhur Jaffrey to set pen to paper—is constituted by a “crav[ing for] what he had taken for granted before and even at times thought an unbearable nuisance—those meals cooked and placed before him whether he wanted them or not...that duty to

consume what others thought he must consume” (*Fasting* 185). In the face of an inability to even perceive Arun’s dietary needs and a complete lack of true cross-cultural understanding (“If she noticed his expression, she seemed incapable of doing anything about it” [*Fasting* 185]), her vegetarianism seems ham-fisted, inappropriate and intrusive. It is an insufficient gesture toward the global community and healthier living precisely because she fails to establish that crucial connection between herself and Arun characterized by *haq*. He is a foreigner, an object to be emulated and not a person to be understood.

In fact, the text critiques the exact model of vegetarianism that constitutes the founding principle of Jaffrey’s cookbook, a principle that Mrs. Patton upholds by encouraging Arun to prepare “Hindoo” food in her kitchen. Arun’s vegetarianism receives only a slightly warmer reception in the US than it does in India. Arun’s diet is restricted in precisely the fashion that Madhur Jaffrey seeks to liberate in her text: he has learned to hate the bland, raw foods that Americans assume every vegetarian will enthusiastically eat (*Fasting* 167). However, Mr. Patton resembles Papa when Arun tells him of his vegetarianism: he is taken aback by the rejection of manly meat-eating (*Fasting* 165-6), a posture that Papa assumes as he views vegetarianism as a rejection of colonial progress and Western education (*Fasting* 32). For Mr. Patton, vegetarianism represents a moral flaccidness, dietary effeminacy, and a puzzling culturally propagated confusion that categorizes cows as something other than food on the hoof. Mrs. Patton’s attempt to explain Arun’s culture and her adoption of vegetarianism fails to satisfy Mr. Patton and assuage Arun’s dismay. It instead reinforces his abhorrence of American suburban living.

The suburban kitchen dices culinary practices into jagged pieces, reducing shopping to mere collection and stranding people who eat, isolating them on culinary islands. Cooking simulates culture, simulates nourishment. Arun realizes that he has traveled halfway around the globe to “stumble[] into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing—which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised—but the unreal thing—clean, bright, gleaming, without taste, savour, or nourishment” (*Fasting* 185). The rituals of this clean, bright, gleaming space yield plates full of bleeding, greasy meat, larders full of uneaten food, inept vegetarianism that only awkwardly fits the lifestyle of the American suburbanite.

Melanie’s bulimia marks an attempt to resist the artifice she perceives around her. Melanie’s violently and voraciously ingests the overabundance that her mother brings home from the Foodmart—and then vomits it right back up. She dramatizes her objection against the ritualized acquisition of food that constitutes her mother’s principal contribution to the family’s culinary practices. One morning, when offered eggs she does not want, she shouts, “What do you think we all are—garbage bags you keep stuffing and stuffing?...I’m not going to eat any of that poison. Everything you cook is—poison!” (*Fasting* 207). Her vomit reifies the discardability of the food her mother buys, literalizing her thoughts of what the food really is: trash that is not yet crammed into plastic bags, food items rendered inedible by signification. She magnifies the obscenity of the plenitude in her kitchen by greedily devouring it then rejecting it by “sicking it up” (*Fasting* 204). Her dismay goes unnoticed by her

family. They comment on her habits, but do nothing until her breakdown on a camping trip forces the family's hand (*Fasting* 223).

The mode of purgation links intricately to the culinary domestic by providing an intense, violent indictment that realizes the frustrated desire for self-expression, freedom and escape that unifies the figures of the daughter in the text. Similarly to Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, the impotence of Melanie's rage turns its fury inward to ravage her gut, denying it sustenance or emptying it violently. While the stressors that prompt her nervous condition are very different from Nyasha's, and while she does not express the same interest in thinness as Lourdes, Melanie rebels against the overabundance of her table and the stultifying effect of suburban living using the same tactics as these women: starvation, binging, and purging. Melanie's eating disorder constitutes a mode of dramatic, spectacular resistance. She makes no substantive effort to conceal her "adolescent neurosis" (rendered treatable and trivialized by both her family's inattentiveness to her habits and the superficial progress reports sent home by the institution to which she is confined [*Fasting* 226]). She instead openly displays her disorder as an exhibition of her suffering. Binging on the tub of Chunky Monkey that she "[h]ungrily" eats, "[h]er lips part so she can cram the spoon in, loaded and dripping onto her chin, then diving down for more, and more, of the sweet, sticky, dribbling stuff with which she needs to satisfy herself" (*Fasting* 215). Her satisfaction here is not elusive, although her appetite merely flirts with satiation because of the magnitude of her ingestion. It is instead satisfaction of a different nature, itself transient. "In a little while, Arun knows, she will be blundering upstairs where it will come streaming out of her" (*Fasting* 215). As she "attacks" the

tub of Chunky Monkey ice cream (assaulting the food with the violence of her appetite) Arun experiences a moment of recognition:

[He] sees a resemblance of something he knows: a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest. How strange it is to encounter it here, Arun thinks, where so much is given, where there is both license and plenty. (*Fasting* 214)

Melanie's ineffectual protest and its similarity to his sister's thwarted desires lead Arun to the fundamental question that haunts the text, a question that he cannot answer: "What is plenty? What is not? Can one tell the difference?" (*Fasting* 215)

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* presents an even better example of cosmopolitical confrontations with difference. The novel is ostensibly about an aging judge and his granddaughter weathering political unrest Kalimpong, a small town on the Indian side of the Himalayas. However, the narrative splits into two pieces that converge at its conclusion. The cook's son Biju lives in New York and lives what seems to be a dissociated existence bearing no resemblance to the life he has left behind in South Asia. Biju, an illegal immigrant who works in kitchens, both exemplifies a particular cosmopolitanism as it draws attention to how cosmopolitanism may dwell in the province of privilege. Biju's experiences as a cook bring him into contact with people from all nations:

Biju at the Baby Bistro.

Above, the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian, Pakistani.

Biju at Le Colonial for the authentic colonial experience.

On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian.

On to the Stars and Stripes Diner. All American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below.

Plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived. (*Inheritance* 23)

Desai carefully selects the cooking experiences that the restaurants peddle—French, colonial, American—then exposes the origin of those experiences—non-French, colonized, un-American. A labor pool exactly opposite of that experience produces the dining experience that characterizes the restaurant. Biju’s education of the world outside Kalimpong happens in these kitchens, where the labor that produces regional dining originates in a body of immigrant men, most of whom illegally reside in America. The French restaurant where Biju works relies on the production of the illusion of regional cuisine prepared by bodies that speak French. When Biju fights with his Pakistani coworker, his employer’s objection is not that their conflict has floated upstairs into the dining room, marring the peaceful consumption of the meal with a violence that is out of place, nor is it that their conflict draws attention to the seamy practice of employing the dark and disadvantaged. He gets angry because their

fight disrupts the illusion of French regionalism upon which the restaurant bases its identity:

Do restaurants in Paris have cellars full of Mexicans, *desis*, and Pakis?

No, they do not. What are you thinking?

They have cellars full of Algerians, Senegalese, Moroccans...(

Inheritance 25)

Biju's employer will not shy away from the systems of exploitation that earmark the colonial experience, insisting that, if their fracas must drift upstairs into the dining room, they should speak French to preserve the illusion upon which his business is built. He is invested in manufacturing an authenticity that the truly cosmopolitan kitchen cannot accommodate. The irony in this circumstance is that his diners are not French: they are Americans in search of a regional taste that will underscore their own cosmopolitan expansiveness. Biju's presence in the French kitchen marks the limits of that expansiveness—his body and its origin are jarring, disrupting the production of a specific, international flavor seasoned to the taste of the cosmopolitan palate.

Biju's own cosmopolitan experience is also marked by confusion. He learns of difference complicated by the fact that Indians are everywhere: in Guyana, Guam, Madagascar, Chile, Kenya, Canada, Alaska, on the Black Sea, in Honk Kong and Singapore (*Inheritance* 24). The Indianness that distinguishes his flag from all the others planted in the kitchens where he works also establishes a commonality between the bodies that plant them—they are all different, and yet the same. Yet the distinctions and commonalities that mark the distances between bodies does not grant

Biju any clarity that allows him to mark his place in relation to the other people with whom he works: “There was a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York, but Biju was ill-equipped for it” (*Inheritance* 24). The moment that allows him this clarity is the arrival of “the Pakistani”: “At least he knew what to do” (*Inheritance* 24). After writing his father, Biju goes to war. The familiarity of the conflict allows him to map his placement in relation to the Pakistani, allowing them both to hurl familiar invectives at one another: “Pig pigs, sons of pigs, *sooar ka baccha*”; “”*Uloo ka patha*, son of an owl, low-down son-of-a-bitch Indian” (*Inheritance* 25). Biju and the Pakistani determine boundaries and borders: “They drew the lines at crucial junctures. They threw cannonball cabbages at each other” (*Inheritance* 25). The conflict between their countries becomes the defining feature that allows them to find their place in relationship with one another. The lack of rootedness that marks cosmopolitanism is actually a source of crisis for Biju; his hatred for the Pakistani allows him to determine his place in the world.

Hatred, rather than acceptance, structures Biju’s negotiations of difference in New York. When he meets Saeed Saeed, his earlier war with the Pakistani throws into confusion his notions of appropriate behavior around Muslims: “Biju’s admiration for the man confounded him...Biju was overcome by the desire to be his friend, because Saeed Saeed wasn’t drowning, he was bobbing in the tides” (*Inheritance* 85). Saeed possesses the ability to flourish in the difficult circumstances of illegal immigrant life. Biju’s admiration of this quality disrupts the intricate logical arrangements of difference that determines whom to hate and whom to like: “Saeed was kind and he was not a Paki. Therefore he was OK? ... Therefore he liked

Muslims and hated only Pakis? Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims? Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it was all wrong and hand over Kashmir? No, no, how could that be and—” (*Inheritance* 85). Saeed Saeed’s blackness also troubles Biju, who dislikes *hubshis*, but finds that his liking of Saeed Saeed threatens to render obsolete all racial differences. On the other hand, he discovers that all nations everywhere hate Indians (*Inheritance* 84-7). His contact with other nations in the kitchens in New York instructs him in rejection and racism, in troubled acceptance and exceptionalism. The outreach that make it cosmopolitan of Biju to befriend and admire Saeed marks out a confusion that places his present confrontations with difference into sharp conflict with his nationalist affiliations. It is a conflict that Biju never resolves: his confrontations with the proliferating difference in New York prove “overwhelming” in their multiplicity as he encounters a range of nationalities so lengthy in the listing and random in their assemblage that grasping that difference becomes an exercise in frustration (*Inheritance* 148-9). Here, cosmopolitanism is earmarked by confrontations with difference that yield irresolution, confusion, a lack of acceptance and failed negotiation.

It is quite possible, however, that Biju is an example of failed cosmopolitanism. He never adjusts to his conditions in New York, he never acquires a green card, and instead returns to Kalimpong in disgrace: as he travels home, the men who drive him toward Cho Oyu trick him into surrendering his cash and clothes. Biju must steal a woman’s nightgown to cover himself as he walks home (*Inheritance* 346-9). Although his homecoming is a joyous one (*Inheritance* 357), he asks himself

why he had left and berates himself for being a fool (*Inheritance* 349). On the other hand, Saeed Saeed is the picture of illegal immigrant success, marrying a white American woman to acquire his green card (*Inheritance* 134-5). Saeed projects confidence, expansiveness, limitless opportunism and utter unflappability: “Presumably, Saeed had been warned of Indians, but he didn’t seem wracked by contradictions; a generosity buoyed him and dangled him above such dilemmas” (*Inheritance* 87). In this way, cosmopolitanism divorces itself from privilege: Saeed has little but his wits and a willingness to work the system to get what he wants. However, his flexibility closely resembles that of the Indian students to whom Biju delivers Chinese food on a cold winter night:

They took to short hair quickly, were eager for Western-style romance, and happy for a traditional ceremony with lots of jewelry... They considered themselves uniquely positioned to lecture everyone on a variety of topics: accounting professors on accounting, Vermonters on the fall foliage, Indians on America, Americans on India, Indians on India, Americans on America. They were poised; they were impressive; in the United States, where luckily it was still assumed that Indian women were downtrodden, they were lauded as extraordinary—which had the unfortunate result of making them even more of what they already were. (*Inheritance* 56)

Biju lacks the poise of his counterparts in the novel, and he ends the story frustrated by his desires, shamed as he returns home empty-handed and wearing garish women’s clothing, but embraced, loved, welcomed by an adoring parent in a moment stripped of every affiliation but that of father to son. His encounters with difference

place him into contact with the material difficulties and complexities that trouble cosmopolitan belonging in the world at large. Furthermore, he fails at integrating himself into the communities of difference in which he finds himself, and the examples of success that he encounters only serve to illustrate the unreachable nature of the belonging that he desires. The irresolvability of the questions that he asks, the complexity of his encounters, and the manner in which they clearly illustrate the chasms of difference that yawn between bodies persists. He staggers when confronted by the hard work of traversing the spaces that separate us one from another (although some people make that work look so easy). Is it not true then, that all these incommensurabilities pluck out a truer cosmopolitanism than the models of comfort outlined by cultural critiques and the authors of cookbooks?⁶⁷

Evaluating a cookbook's cosmopolitics sets up an argument that the cookbook cannot possibly win and that kitchens fail to accommodate. Certain cultural forms defy definitions of appropriate cosmopolitanism because they cannot answer its political charge. Does this empty those gestures completely? Perhaps not: the forms of cosmopolitanism are varied, multiple in their tasks and objectives. The cosmopolitan cookbook answers a specific ethical need to act out, not just our affiliations and identifications, but also that desire to embrace difference that is at once a virtue and source of deep disquiet. The cookbook responds to the omnivore's dilemma as it pertains to making our everyday actions reflective of our philosophical attitudes. However, looking to a cookbook for a recipe for peace may leave us sitting at a poorly laid table.

CHAPTER 2: THE EXCESSES OF THIS WORLD

The Cookbook Form's Unwillingness to Report The News

What is the truth but the way things are?

— *J.M. Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year*

Broadly stated, dinner tables in African literature map anxious terrain. Food and eating constitute sites of excruciating neuroses—when writers focus on tropes of hunger, starvation, excrement, and (paradoxically) overabundance. The domesticity that this chapter treats provides the setting for its central concern: how *bildungsromane* that concentrate on food shape a critique of postcolonial politics in developing African nations. This chapter suggests that images of all things related to food—diet, consumption, hunger, appetite, excrement, depletion, excesses of food or waste—resonate in the imagining of Africa, both in terms of its individual nations as well as in terms of the continent as a whole. These images include visions of teeming hordes and tribal feuds, the specter of African cannibalism and ethnic violence, and the infinite march of emaciated bodies suffering from kwashiorkor beneath the helpless vigil of NGO aid workers; as they bind the continent from within, these images also persist in the West in ways that define the Africa in terms of bodily need. Because my interest lies also in recipes and depictions of food and food culture, I narrow my focus by examining food imagery, eating, excrement, and recipe-writing in Chris Abani's novel *Graceland*, family tables and eating disorders in Tsitsi

Dagarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus*, and Jeffrey Tayler's memoir entitled *Facing the Congo*.

My analysis of two third-generation Nigerian novels, a novel originating from Zimbabwe, and a memoir about the Congo written by a white traveler pursues three distinct yet interlinked arguments. The first is outlined above, and addresses the manner in which food—principally the lack of it—maps the African sociopolitical landscape as it is depicted in the texts that I study. The second pertains to the structure of the texts that I have selected. The three novels are examples of the *bildungsroman* and the memoir is structured around Tayler's *bildung*. I argue that the *bildungsroman* constitutes a crucial narrative structure to represent the advancement and development of postcolonial African nations as they are depicted textually. I have chosen these texts precisely because of the range of gendered experiences of the nation. *Graceland* features a black male protagonist and the protagonist of *Purple Hibiscus* is a black female. Meanwhile, although gender divisions in *Nervous Conditions* are clearly drawn, the novel complicates racial distinctions by depicting Tambu (the major protagonist in the novel) as a black female, but also by depicting Nyasha as racially muddled, a queer admixture of Igbo and British cultural mannerisms. Tayler's memoir traces the trajectory of a white man coming to consciousness as a direct result of his voyage to the Congo. In addition to addressing, the text also treats class and nationality as it examines the Zaire's impoverishment.

All four texts link to food, eating, waste, and starvation in significant ways that involve issues of domesticity. Each text treats the domestic as the setting for the work of the *bildungsroman*, precisely because it is the domestic that assumes

responsibility for sustaining the body. Each, however, represents the domestic as a failed, frustrated space, but does so in ways that comment differently on the gender and cultural politics of African postcoloniality. This chapter argues that the domesticity enclosed in recipe collections (such as that in Elvis' journal) cannot be experienced; the domestic is only rendered textually. There is space for functional domesticity neither in Nigeria nor in the Congo. Consequently, if Nigeria, the Congo, and the African continent are all conflated as a single cultural space metonymically represented within the domestic, then this space fails to provide for the citizenry's most basic needs—meaning that there is no grace in *Graceland*. *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions* represent a radically different relationship between representations of the domestic and cultural politics: the domestic does produce nourishment for the bodies at the table, but fails to sustain the characters in other crucial ways. Themes of overabundance and rejection therefore dominate these two texts.

Belonging to the third generation of Nigerian writers, Chris Abani's *Graceland* constitutes a *bildungsroman* tracing the maturation and eventual exodus of Elvis, its teenaged protagonist. Elvis represents an idealized citizen who experiences all the vagaries of Nigerian culture and politics. He experiences a comprehensive range of contemporary political issues in the space of a few days: the plight of the poor, the torture of prisoners and the corruption of the police, the underground markets in bodies and body parts that victimize the vulnerable. The trade in human flesh, the manner in which the poor are discarded and the corruption that festers at the heart of the nation state evoke the image of a hungry country that excretes the poor.

The figuration of children features prominently in third-generation Nigerian literature, but its deployment calls for a renegotiation of the structure of the *bildungsroman*. Madeliene Hron analyzes the management of adolescence in the canon, using the food metaphor of the *egusi* pot as a point of departure. While her analysis never concentrates exclusively on this image, the child body and the nourishing meal point toward the home and private life as the place of critique of public affairs (28). Hron argues that the figuration of the child is a perfectly suitable critical medium, not because of the return to an atavistic state of pre-development, but because of the manner in which “[t]he child in African literature is always intrinsically enmeshed in a cultural and social community, and thus must somehow negotiate ethnic identity or social status in the course of the narrative.”

In third-generation Nigerian texts in particular, it becomes apparent that the child’s quest for a sociocultural identity is inextricably linked to issues arising from Postcolonialism and globalization, often manifested in the context of repression, violence or exploitation. (29)

This recasts the *bildungsroman*: the childhood state at its beginning is not intimately linked to the individual immaturity that the protagonist must surpass. Instead, because of the communal enmeshment that Hron observes, “The space of childhood is a space of hybridity, possibility and, most importantly, resistance...of complex, on-going negotiation and articulation of difference that is perhaps not as readily accessible in the stable, socially structured world of adults” (29-30).

As a transitional, interstitial position, childhood also allows the negotiation of cultural difference, as children in third-generation Nigerian literature find themselves

not simply strung between the colonial and postcolonial, but straining to bridge the gap between Nigeria and Western influence. This tension emerges clearly in Abani's *Graceland*: its title character's name, his impersonations of that namesake, and his adoration of American films testify to it, and the compilation of his mother's journal signifies it. In this way, the Nigerian child-citizen metonymically represents the emerging nation. Hron writes:

In the same way that the child protagonist has to negotiate his/her place in postcolonial society, one deeply marked by Western influence and globalization, Nigeria finds itself having to define itself anew in the global world order. It too must establish a new sense of identity that dwells on its pluricultural values, myths, and traditions, but that also contends with the ramifications of increased Westernization and global capital, wrestling with such issues as economic disparity, social justice, and human rights. (30)

This reading of the child body invites an ethical consideration of her cultural and political setting. Therefore the *bildungsroman*—the narrative teleology of all the novels under consideration in this chapter—serves as a means of critiquing “the post in Postcolonialism,” finding fault only when it forgets the structures that govern its manifestations (Novak 35). In these novels, the disruptions and upsets that create the postcolonial must be remembered as a point of development lest their traumatic structure be forgotten.⁶⁸ The care of the child becomes a demand for a new global ethics to address the “‘no-man’s land’ of repression, corruption, poverty or violence that Nigerians often experience daily” (Hron 30) and that serve as the principal setting for Abani’s novel.

Graceland and Culinary Culture

Chris Abani's *Graceland* follows a teenaged protagonist through his financial, social, and cultural difficulties in Lagos, Nigeria. Among his many failed attempts to make money, Elvis works as an impersonator of the singer after whom he is named, dancing for white tourists on the beach, as a construction worker, as a dancer-for-hire at a club for wealthy expats, as a dealer packaging drugs for international transport, as an organ smuggler, and as a traveling actor. As he drifts from place to place and occupation to occupation, the narrative alternates between his early years in the 1970s and his difficult adolescence in the 1980s, finally culminating in his migration to the US. Elvis represents a Nigerian "Everyman" as he encounters the full range of social, cultural, and political situation that characterize life in Lagos. Unlike the Everyman of medieval literature, Elvis' encounters are literal, dangerous, and concrete—his body is beaten by the cops, desired by a wealthy Indian expat, painted to dance. The novel presents Nigeria as a confused country that comingles Igbo tradition, colonial remnants, military despotism, political resistance, the crushing poverty of a developing nation, and American popular culture. This cultural confusion strands Elvis, who must determine his own identity amid the chaos. His departure from Nigeria can be read either as a seizure of agency or a relinquishment of his citizenship as he severs ties with a nation that can ultimately offer him too little to flourish.

Abani's text represents the convergence of two communal spheres: the dual landscapes of childhood and domesticity. If the child and his development constitute *Graceland's* major figure and narrative structure of the novel, then the domestic and

its accompanying pedagogy provide setting and context. This means that the movement of the child body represents the commentary on the connection between community and civil society, whereas culinary imagery provides commentary on the connection between community and culture. While this dichotomy is neither strict nor perfect, the implication is clear: if the figuration of the child represents the risk of political disenfranchisement, then the disarray of the family table dramatizes the threat of cultural decay. The nurturing of this juvenile body allegorizes the multi-level social contract between citizen and state, and his starvation and neglect signify the failure of the state to fulfill it. The deployment of depictions of meals that sustain but fail to nourish, the ironic placement of recipes that refract portions of the narrative, and the epistemological failure of the cookbook in the text all point toward cultural erosion. Furthermore, these elements contextualize the trajectory of Elvis' adolescent body toward his moment of maturation and cultural disavowal at the novel's climax and conclusion.

The novel intersperses chapters with recipes, a psalm, and medicinal and magical herbs. Because *GraceLand* devotes the balance of its space to the narrative, the placement of the recipes as paratext makes them seem to be flavorful tidbits that spice the rest of the book.⁶⁹ The recipes seem like distracting snippets, enhancing the narrative by providing what seems to be a disconnected set of piquant details, standing outside the narrative and yet inflecting the text. They yearn toward cultural holism. The recipes do not really seem to play a part in the novel, and so are easily overlooked, easily ignored. Yet each recipe adheres to the logic of the paratextual, "it

disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy” (Derrida 61).

Leveraging the subtlety of their presence in the text, Abani invokes the power of cookbooks to convey a sense of culture when he includes an inventory of recipes in the novel. At a reading of his poetry conducted in 2006, Abani states outright that culture equals food, so he uses their inclusion to establish a sense of “intimacy”—an intimacy that implies knowledge. Like others of its kind, the cookbook that the reader might assemble using the recipes in the text provides “intimate knowledge of the culture,” which he is able to convey by giving a “taste” of Nigeria (Abani, 2006). Abani also states that he included portions of the journal in keeping with the logic that equates food and food practices with cultural identification. The journal provides the flavor of Nigeria that draws the reader into the text by providing the intimate knowledge he or she would need to understand the movements of the characters.

The recipes in Abani’s novel also introduce a different method of reading a cookbook’s pedagogical objectives. Foreign audiences might read cookbooks for the purposes of food tourism or culinary colonialism; citizens—both native and diasporic—read cookbooks in ways that signify adjusted relationships with the nation, relationships in need of mediation. The modes of mediation that cookbooks employ symptomize the distances, disruptions and desire for proximity and belonging that these particular audiences suffer.⁷⁰ These distances and the resultant need for mediation open a market among, for example, upper-middle-class children of Nigerian expatriates. However, as the cookbook in *Graceland* clearly demonstrates, this particular bridge that unifies citizen and state can also elicit an

unexpected sense of displacement and deep betrayal—sentiments that cookbooks seek to quell or ameliorate.

The analysis of the postcolonial table in my reading of *Graceland* will follow a trajectory that calls attention to the relationship between poor meals and their idealized depictions in recipes. First, I will examine the manner in which the novel depicts meals and domestic unity. Then I will examine the recipes themselves, observing the ironic relationship between the recipes and specific political and cultural moments in the narrative. I will then examine how the cookbook form emerges in the text as a vector of cultural knowledge that proves unable to respond to the pedagogical tasks to which it has been set. Finally, I will interrogate the knowledge formations that the cookbooks will not include—excremental states that constitute the unfavorable cultural and political settings in which bodies find themselves.

Graceland refracts meals that serve as family settings yearn for the kind of perfection that exist in the imaginary homes that Elvis sees in movies and on television. It splinters these meals into dysfunctional pieces. Comfort never feeds Elvis and sometimes does not feed her own children (*Graceland* 14). Furthermore, his father and Comfort live in “a solid impermanence that [is] confusing for him” (*Graceland* 49). More significant is Comfort’s family meal. In a scene that Abani detaches from other happenings in the novel, Comfort and her children dine in her flooded home in a slum across Lagos from the one in which Elvis eventually resides before he travels to America.⁷¹ This scene provides further commentary on the social

conditions that the characters suffer as a result of widespread social unrest and political corruption.

Dinner was served in watery silence, broken only by the occasional slosh as some undercurrent disturbed them. Tope, her youngest child, paused in her meal to watch a rat that had just swum into the room. Taking careful aim, she hit it on the nose with a lump of fufu. It shrieked in anger and swam out hurriedly, muttering under its breath about the indignities of mixing with the poor. Tope laughed so much that she dropped her small piece of meat in the water. In a flash she was down on the floor, rooting in the water for it. Her brothers, Tunji and Akin, laughed at her loss, but with a triumphant yelp she held up the piece of meat, inspecting it critically before plopping it into her mouth. Her mother regarded her with a bored stare and went back to her own food. (*Graceland* 314)

This is the first time in the novel that the reader learns the names of Comfort's children. They live in squalid conditions. Tope amuses herself with her food by flinging it at passing vermin that infest her home. The size of the piece of meat she drops and the hilarity of her desperation as she searches for it provide clear testimony of her impoverishment, as does her triumphant yelp when she finds it. Her critical inspection of the food would only yield superficial contaminants—it could never determine whether the meat she “plop[s] into her mouth” will afflict her with amoebic dysentery, E. coli, cholera, or any number of other waterborne illness largely eliminated in more developed countries. Her mother's impassivity indicates her disengagement. The family scene here inverts the ideal meal by serving up a mother

who seems to care less that her family eats dirty food in a dirty setting, and indicates the desperate conditions in which many Nigerians live as a result of widespread poverty in the country. The only laughter peals at the expense of another—an offended rat, a starving sister—and Comfort does not join in the amusement. Her detachment and passivity perhaps indicate that meal conditions that would shock and appall the ideal family are the stuff of everyday living for her. They also signify a disengagement from the family unit, a perversion of parenthood as she simply watches her children rather than playing with them or ensuring their physical safety. If the family symbolizes the nation, and if the meals shared at the family table measure the health of the nation, then the meals in this novel indicate a sickened nation either choking on its own excrement or starved into eating the barely edible.

Abani's structures this meal in a manner that provides a straightforward indictment of Nigerian politics as they affect everyday citizens. The meals that Elvis eats in the novel, however, follow a more complex structure, resonating with the foods that are the subject of the recipes that his mother includes in the journal. However, they only resonate—they echo and reverberate, repeating in imperfect form. Although several of the meals in the novel attempt to unify the people who eat them, the food Elvis eats fails to enact the cultural holism that the recipes invoke, and that Abani states will evoke his mother's physical presence in the text. Over dinner plates, Elvis forges bonds with other people, and these relationships prove useful later. However, the adult Elvis never eats a full meal in his own home in the company of his own family—the meal he eats at his Aunt Felicia's house is the closest he will come to enjoying a meal with his family, and its abundance points toward his

emotional and physical starvation at the hands of the family that should provide him with food (his father and step mother). The plenitude at her table points an accusatory finger at his deprivation at home (*Graceland* 164).⁷² Other instances of eating indicate fragmented social relations. His mother is dead, his step-mother does not feed him, he gives food to his step-siblings but does not eat with them (in fact, he barely interacts with them) and his father drinks quite a bit but does not seem to eat. Elvis rarely eats a home-cooked meal—he takes his meals in *bukas* and in the homes of other people. This is not to say that his interpersonal experiences at *bukas* are unequivocally bad. Elvis meets the King of Beggars at a *buka* and forms a relationship with the King after feeding him a meal (*Graceland* 30). Elvis meets Okon at a *buka* and feeds him as well (*Graceland* 47). In a wry gesture toward cultural holism, the meal of soup and fufu that Okon eats resonates with the recipe for bitterleaf soup and pounded yam (*Graceland* 16). The relationships Elvis forms over food, however, are limited in their power to unify and bind people to one another. For example, Elvis buys *moi moi* at a *buka*, then gives it to his step-siblings (*Graceland* 14). The feeling between them is present, but only tenuous and transitory.

Characters enact this cultural estrangement in the meals they eat throughout the novel. Most meals in the text are unfulfilling. Very few offer any kind of satisfaction. Elvis' dining at "cheap gutter-side buka[s]" prompts "wistfully [thoughts] of Oye's cooking as he hurriedly [eats] the tasteless food" (*Graceland* 14). For Elvis, the food is not evocative of culture—it is evocative of loss. Even treats offered as a reward falls short of its promise. As a youngster, Elvis cleans his father's room, "which was in itself an invariably bittersweet experience":

Tins of smoked kippers, baked beans, corned beef and exotic fruits all sat stacked, unused, unopened. Some, contoured into tortured shapes, were well past their use-by dates. Bought for some special moment that never seemed to come, they were eventually thrown away...Everything was thickly coated with dust before he was summoned to clean. He not only had to dust, but also had to move things and sweep under them. The trick was to pack them back precisely where and how he had found them; otherwise he would not get the reward: crumbling, stale, rice-weevil-infested cookies that always left him feeling cheated. (*Graceland* 143-4)

The food in his father's room will never see its intended end: the festive table for which they have been purchased will never be set. As a result, the food goes bad. Even the reward for the effort is spoiled: Elvis still seeks it, although the feeling of having been cheated persists every time he performs the task. This relates to the broken promise of the family: the absent mother, the uncaring father. Shortly after the account of the weevil-infested cookies that are the reward for cleaning his room, Elvis' father threatens his own son with a pistol when Elvis reveals that his uncle has been raping his cousin (*Graceland* 144-5). The disclosure yields none of the customary reactions that one might expect from a parent. No promise of protection. No assurances of justice. Just a gun barrel in the face and a threat that secures silence. Elvis urinates himself in his terror (*Graceland* 145).

The extra-edible arises in other noteworthy instances in the text. Abani uses feeding to trope the ruin of the ghetto in which Elvis and his father live: "All around, scavengers, human and otherwise, feasted on the exposed innards of Maroko. They

rummaged in the rubble as bulldozers sifted through the chaos like slow-feeding buffalo” (*Graceland* 303). But there are other instances in the text where the characters’ confrontation with nonfoods that seems like meals provide commentary that hints at wider political problems. Redemption calls upon Elvis to package cocaine into secure pellets that are to be swallowed by mules who will board planes to transport the drugs (*Graceland* 110). Elvis does not recognize that the pile of powder, the elastic gloves, and the electrical tape on the table are ingredients in a recipe that will yield a stomach full of an illegal narcotic. The other instance entails a moment of confusion: Elvis opens a cooler searching for food and drink, and instead encounters the heads and organs of people slain to provide organ and corneal transplants (*Graceland* 237). Elvis learns the fate of the children he transports—after crossing the border, they too will be killed and harvested of their organs. The cooler that transports the food is identical to that which transports flesh carved from the bodies of a citizenry to be consumed by rich westerners who will journey to Saudi Arabia for a heart, kidney or corneal transplant. These moments reveal exploited bodies—stomachs put to use, human heads and human organs treated like meat fresh from the slaughter. In these instances, Abani depicts the small, everyday doings that, when detached from their larger social context, seem insignificant enough: wrapping individual little packets of a pile of white powder; packing two coolers and a few children to take a car ride across the country. The connections between these acts and larger wrongdoings that involve powerful political figures (the Colonel foots the bill for both ventures) replicate the connection between “culture” in its broadest sense and everyday activities such as meal preparation and personal hygiene.

Cookbooks prepare us for only one end of our alimentation, tantalizing our palates with gustatory delights. They do not prepare us for the dishes that complicate our understanding of the nation, they do not prepare us for the crushing poverty and political frustration that constitutes the everyday living of many if not most of the country's residents, nor do they prepare us for the inevitable end for which all food is destined. Abani's tastes of the nation do not include instructions for the preparations of bush meat, for example, although the practice of eating simians arises in the text. Given our distaste for dirt and the possibly deadly result of contaminating the table with excrement, it entirely appropriate that they omit these concerns. However, also given the anthropological features that shape many regional cookbooks, and the sociohistorical task to which Elvis' mother's journal sets itself, this omission creates a particular dissonance in their epistemological efforts when authors deploy recipes in postcolonial fiction—the audience who reads them calls upon them to account for the aspects they cannot include. Meanwhile, the recipes remain obdurately mute, refusing to speak, editing the unsavory out of the reader's understanding of the shape of the nation. Silences reverberate and, in the end, the reader is left unsatisfied.

The presence of recipes in *Graceland* repeatedly marks a disruption that places living bodies out of sync with the movements of the nation. Consequently, this disruption appears as a series of interruptions within the text—the cookbook's form arises and disappears from chapter break to chapter break, its tone is dissonant in comparison to the rest of the novel. Rather than complement and complete the narrative, the generic distinctions here contrast, contradict, or make one another ironic.

The culinary echoes that bind the recipes to the narrative are even more pervasive than merely cross-references. They echo, and these echoes point toward cultural problems that afflict the nation. This relationship between the recipe and the narrative recurs throughout the novel: the recipes in the book resonate with episodes in the text, acting as a fractured mirror that imperfectly and inadequately reflects daily living in Nigeria as Elvis finds it. Elvis' mother's journal provides a recipe for roast venison (*Graceland* 207), and this recipe is grossly parodied whenever characters smell burning human flesh. Twice in the novel, characters smell burning human flesh and one description renders the odor appetizing. Elvis smells the burning flesh of a man who throws himself into the fire that consumes the clothes he hopes to sell (*Graceland* 74). Over a meal that Elvis feeds him, Innocent recounts the sensory oppressions of his time in the military. When his platoon of child soldiers encounters a burnt church, they scour the area for anything to eat. Innocent encounters the bodies of the slain congregation. "In the still smoking pews, [Innocent] saw the roasted corpses of the congregation. They had been shot, clubbed or macheted to death and then tied to the pews to roast with the church. The air was heavy with the stench of roasted meat, not nauseating, but actually mouthwatering" (*Graceland* 213). The odor is not the choking bitterness of burning; it is instead the savory scent of impending edibility. The word is purposefully evocative of domesticity and cooking. Like the earlier eating of the monkey (treated in greater detail below) it presses against the boundary of the permissible by referencing the familiar smells of food, the delicious odor of roasted meat and the savory taste and texture of properly prepared animal flesh. However, it places these acts in a context of the unacceptable. Placing the

roasted flesh in its exact proximity to and distance from acceptable practices conveys the atrocity of the moment. This functions in the same way as the uncanny, but where the sensations of the uncanny are vague and evade description, the sensations here are exact, perfect in their proportions: revulsion, terror, guilt.

If the burned, tortured bodies in the religious compound that Innocent finds exemplify the perversity and dispensability of the Nigerian body as it is represented in this text, then the body of the child soldier becomes a secondary register of this same perversity and dispensability, and its appetites convey its monstrosity. The discovery of the burnt bodies in the pews reverberates in the episode that Innocent recounts of child soldiers forced by starvation to eat a monkey.⁷³ The discovery of charred corpses refracts against the sensory impressions of roasted venison, and Abani replicates the structure of this refraction with the preparation of the monkey. The recipe that the soldiers follow to prepare it refracts the recipe for Yam Pepper Soup (*Graceland* 33) or with Fish Pepper Soup (*Graceland* 239). However, Innocent cannot bear to eat the soup because of the monkey's resemblance to a child. In fact, the monkey who struggles after being shot squeals like a baby, its cry cut short by the butt of a rifle (*Graceland* 312). However, eating the monkey becomes a measure of his masculinity in the eyes of his compatriots:

Everyone had teased Innocent about not eating the monkey. Called him a coward. A woman. Not a warrior. He pointed out how much like cannibalism it seemed. Captain swore at him, saying he would make him eat the next dead enemy soldier they came across. The boys hooted with laughter. (*Graceland* 213)

Eating the monkey proves his manliness and bravery. His resistance follows a syllogism: simians are very much like human beings; eating humans is wrong; therefore, eating simians is wrong too. Innocent attempts to set logical limits on eating practices, imposing civilization on situations that defy reason—the eating of a simian to fill a starving stomach, the use of children in combat, and the starvation of those juvenile bodies in a battleground. The hunting and eating of a monkey is simply one of the many horrors that strip them of the innocence for which Innocent is ironically named. It is over a breakfast of yams that Elvis’ father lays out the order of things violated by Innocent’s soldiery: “Good children do not concern themselves with adult problems” (*Graceland* 174). Innocent is indeed a child caught up in adult problems.

Innocent eventually falters under the pressure of the circumstances in which he finds himself. “The last time...he had given in to the taunting and taken a piece of the meat. Later he was sick, but he could not get the taste of it out of his mouth. The frightening thing was, he had enjoyed it” (*Graceland* 312). His enjoyment of the gustatory horror constitutes a measure of his trauma. His palate has been altered although he cannot stomach the practice, and his enjoyment shocks him. The trauma he suffers and his fear that he enjoyed it perhaps refracts the trauma of being a child soldier—the taste that the tongue cannot shed and the complexity of enjoyment both trouble the sensibility. This trauma shapes his behavior and Elvis’ relationship with him: “Watching him eat, Elvis felt a strange mix of revulsion and pity, yet did not know why. There was something else too—something that had to do with the terrified looks Innocent shot around the room” (*Graceland* 209). The journal his mother leaves

him cannot answer the question of Elvis' emotional complexity at the sight of his cousin, nor can it translate Innocent's terrified looks. These remain illegible for Elvis. They remain in the realm of the unknowable.

The eating of simians also resonates as a shadow of the debate surrounding bush meat. NGOs concerned with the preservation of endangered species in Kenya seek to outlaw the practice, which entails killing mountain gorillas for their pelts, teeth, and meat. In a country starved for protein, bush meat provides a limited, but viable source that serves as a source of black market income for a country also starved for money and for protein sources.⁷⁴ Political circumstance shapes the table, but regional cookbooks make no allowances for these practices—no African cookbook will instruct an eater in the preparation of gorilla, elephant, or orangutan flesh.

A persistent element in Abani's novel is a journal written by Elvis' mother. It is a book that he keeps on his person throughout the narrative and that he pulls out and flips through on occasion, occasions that manifest the contents of the journals between chapters. The recipes in the journal are the source for the recipes that intersperse the narrative. Similarly to the bag in which he keeps it, Elvis' mother's journal is a jumble of seemingly disparate things: "a collection of cooking and apothecary recipes and some other unrelated bits, like letters and notes about things that seemed as arbitrary as the handwriting" (*Graceland* 11). The recipes are part of an instructional text that Elvis' mother compiles shortly before her death. The journal fulfills two primary functions: pedagogy (teaching Elvis what he needs to know) and remembrance (logging important impressions in this life and recording what his

mother will need to remember in the next). As a regional cookbook, it becomes the voice of the missing maternal figure, allowing the author to “reconstitute” her body by creating a strong, domestic, feminine presence in the work. At the novel’s midpoint, “recipes turn to ritual at the center of the book,” allowing Abani to complicate the female body by changing it from mother to “goblin” or witch (Abani, 2006). The knowledge in the book is indisputable, resonating as timeless through both form and content, its certainty about its task, and its form. Elvis watches as “her spidery handwriting spread across the page as though laying claim to an ancient kingdom” (*Graceland* 44). The journal translates the oral into the written, and conveys tradition across generations. The “spidery handwriting” transcribes dictation by Oye, catching cultural mystique as it falls from his grandmother’s lips.

By purporting to teach Elvis “[t]ha things he should know,” Beatrice’s pedagogical objectives entail the segregation of useless forms of knowledge from useful ones (*Graceland* 37). She defends the choices of her inclusions from Oye, saying that “[she is] preparing him... [She is] teaching him things dat useless school cannot. [She has] taught him to sew, to iron, to cook, to read and to write at a level beyond his age" (*Graceland* 38). Her work is pragmatic, imparting the knowing that he will need to live everyday life: in addition to basic literacy, she grants Elvis literacy in cooking and self-maintenance. This means that the things Elvis needs to know connect him with his culture and, in her absence, with his mother.

Oye realizes the insufficiency of the cookbook’s contents, saying that “[i]t’s not enough” (*Graceland* 38). The most crucial knowledge that Elvis needs pertains to the illness that kills his mother, and her book omits it. When Oye says “[y]ou need to

prepare him,” (*Graceland* 38) she speaks specifically of death and dying, and the pain that accompanies the passage of people Elvis cares about. The journal fails to prepare him for inevitability that is hastened by his mother’s sickness—the inevitability and hardship of death.

Furthermore, the book omits specific cultural knowledge that Elvis needs, aspects of Nigerian life and living for which the journal lacks room. While it can teach him the preparation of culturally specific dishes that should allow him to flourish day-to-day in the embrace of a missing mother whose legacy promises cultural continuity, it fails to provide context for the quotidian events in which he actually finds himself. It cannot teach him the symbolism or significance of his manhood ceremony (*Graceland* 17-22). It cannot prepare him for the dysfunctional nature of the family his father assembles after her passing—it cannot fully supplement the lapses in Comfort’s care, nor can it instruct him in forging a meaningful connection with his step-brothers and –sister. It also cannot make space for Elvis’ rape or the murder of his uncle by his cousin (*Graceland* 198, 151-2). It cannot instruct him in the underground economies that are the most viable sources of ready income in Lagos, even as they exploit the bodies of other people (the swallows of the cocaine packages, the children whose organs will be harvested). It cannot prepare him for his torture at the hands of the police (*Graceland* 293-7). Most importantly, it cannot prepare him for the mysterious conditions surrounding his father’s death: the appearance of the spirit animal and its vengeance (*Graceland* 286-7). Elvis’ encounters are bewildering, never offering clear judgments of the country,

its people, its politics, or its traditions. The journal offers Elvis no method of deciphering their complex codes.

The circumstances that Elvis suffers throughout the novel tie the cookbook's tongue—and these circumstances become increasingly desperate as the novel progresses. The cookbook's value therefore lies, not in its content, but in its power to astonish and bewilder, a power that ultimately overtakes its form and renders it unintelligible. It becomes a charm to which Elvis clings. After his imprisonment and torture, Elvis “strokes the journal's cover, marveling that it has survived prison” (*Graceland* 311). He is amazed by its power to persevere as an object divorced from the power of its content. Abani repeatedly describes the writing as “spidery.”⁷⁵ It “lay[s] claim to an ancient kingdom,” one defined by memory and expressive of cultural continuity. But Elvis consistently has difficulty reading it (*Graceland* 146). By its conclusion, Elvis recognizes the illegibility of the journal, sees its opacity and accepts its failure: “It had never revealed his mother to him. Never helped him understand her, or his life, or why anything had happened the way it had. What was the point? Nothing is ever resolved, he thought. It just changes” (*Graceland* 320). He carries it in a Fulani pouch that hangs from his neck, along with an envelope of money and a postcard with his Aunt Felicia's American address written on it. As the cookbook loses its power to maintain Elvis' faith in his culture, the pragmatic utility of the money and the address increases. The book is revealed as talismanic, as a fetish object: evocative, but never revelatory.

This is, ultimately, the register in which many cookbooks shape the spaces they describe: they evoke them through taste and odor, but can never completely

evinced them. The power through which they conjure the essences of daily life in a distant place, this magic is revealed as simply an illusion. Elvis' understanding of how cooking is done creates a dissonance between the book and cooking practices as he knows them:

All these recipes, and yet nobody he knew cooked from recipes. That was something actors did on television and in the movies: white women with stiff clothes and crisp-looking aprons and perfect hair who never sweated as they ran around doing housework for the husbands they called 'hon.' (*Graceland* 146)

The illusory life the recipes evoke is the idealized life portrayed in Swiffer and Lysol commercials: one of housework without effort or dirt, of flawless meals that materialize from nowhere and grateful families unified over the dinner table. Yet the life lived on television and in movies is one of profound ignorance—without cookbooks (and, increasingly, prepared foods packaged in bags and boxes) meals remain unachievable feats.

At the same time, Elvis determines that the knowledge contained in cookbooks is utterly extraneous because no one who cooks well needs them. The ancient kingdom to which the spidery handwriting lays claim remains unclaimed after all. The cookbook becomes a dusty repository of knowledge never to be consulted by those who ostensibly are in direst need of knowledgeable directions. This may constitute a betrayal of form. Elvis interprets the cookbook as something that white people use—the book that his mother drafts follows the conventions of a literary form that is more intimately linked to the mass media that he imperfectly imitates—it is

fruit of an outside influence that has no bearing on or traffic with the everyday concerns of the hungry body. Similarly to all regional cookbooks, the cookbook in the novel assumes a cultural estrangement that the novel ratifies.⁷⁶

The gender implications of this lesson are plain—neither Oye nor his mother, nor any other female figure in the novel (Efua, Comfort) defines Elvis as a man. The family unit also proves an insufficient means of guiding Elvis into adulthood. His father attempts to define Elvis' manhood by guiding him through participation in a traditional ritual, but in spite of the transitory happiness he feels in the company of other men, the ritual proves ineffective (*Graceland* 18). It is the King of Beggars who identifies Elvis as having matured into adulthood by stating, "[H]e is making sense...De boy is becoming a man" (*Graceland* 280). Manhood is not only associated with knowledge, it is synonymous with it. Feminine knowledge lacks value—in fact, feminine knowledge betrays and disappears when events call for the epistemological, and even physical, vigor of manliness. And yet, feminine knowledge promises strength, connection to culture, reassurance and companionship. In contrast, the masculine knowledge into which Elvis matures reveals disenfranchisement and despair as its commanding structure.

The Excremental Politics of the Everyday: The Blind Spot of the Culinary Order

Cookbooks mark a particular process, but they can never address the secondary alimentary processes of conversion that are the end of eating. Shitting marks these alimentary processes, but in ways that the alimentary order disavows. The value of the material that is produced is nullified because it is never intended to

be retained—it marks the temporary. When this temporariness is linked to the land and the people who spring from it and live on it, bodies become discardable, usable things whose values are determined, not by cultural standards, but by how many cocaine pellets they can pack in their guts, or how many organs can be carved from their flesh.

Similarly to the child body, excrement has been noted as a significant trope in African postcolonial cultural production—again, as a means of critiquing the state. Its ordinary materiality works along the same axis of food culture: as a part of everyday life and a component of local oral traditions, the scatological gains renewed evocative power when it is deployed as a charged sociopolitical trope. In his excellent analysis of the scatological imagery in African postcolonial fiction, Joshua Esty writes: “Even when understood according to the representational codes of realism, however, shit has a political vocation: it draws attention to the failures of development, to the unkept promises not only of colonial modernizing regimes but of post-independence economic policy” (32).⁷⁷ These tropes at times risk opening accusations of self-loathing, where excremental self-identification indicates a clear indictment of the African nation to which one belongs.⁷⁸ However, according to Esty, the invocation of the excremental in African literature does not merely imply self-castigation or self-loathing. Joshua Esty implies that this structure remains in a simple binary: love/loathing, approbation/ castigation, approval/rejection. Instead, Esty writes, “excremental language is invoked...precisely in order to diffuse guilt and shame. At the level both of national politics and of individual ethics, excremental writing tends toward complex models of systemic guilt, rather than toward the sharp absolutions

and resolutions that attend moral or political binaries” (35). *Graceland* definitely bears out this structure. The issues that plague the nation are many: foreigners who amuse themselves at the expense of impoverished and exploited locals; powerful and corrupt military officials who use the bodies of the poor for personal gain; child soldiery; and infinite, small-scale oppressions that break apart the family structure, such as rape, abandonment, physical abuse, and failure to nourish and protect the most vulnerable members. The ways in which Elvis is failed by the social setting into which he is born are so profuse in number and range that determining solutions to them beggars the imagination.

Bathrooms and toilets trope the powerlessness and impotence characters feel in their own country, and become a metaphor for the (in)ability to endure the “crap” they see taking place around them. The excremental order does not establish a hierarchy as it does in the colonial excremental order, as analyzed by Warwick Anderson. Instead, although it outlines the power relations in the text in specific ways, it initiates a complex commentary on the nation’s inequity. In other words, rather than establishing an order from the top down, it comments on the social order from the ground up.⁷⁹ The text uses bathrooms to mark who has authority and control over the conditions around him, and who does not. The distaste and despair that Elvis experiences in toilet stalls trope his own lack of power. Elvis wonders how long he can hold his breath as he squats to use the bathroom, and how someone can endure the stench long enough to scratch the face off the mermaid painted on the wall of the toilet (*Graceland* 79). He is not the only character to experience these sentiments while in the toilet. His father awakens in the night and uses the bathroom, looking

into his pooling urine “as though he expected to divine what had woken him. As he poured the bucket of water in to flush it, he felt like his life was going down the drain” (*Graceland* 202). When the King of Beggars searches for Elvis at the various police stations in Lagos, he is told that the duty sergeant who can release him is on the toilet. When asked when he will return, the answer is, “When he shit finish.” When the King presses him for answers, the duty sergeant threatens to “soon go to toilet” to evade helping him. He becomes compliant once bribed (*Graceland* 291). Excrement and defecation determine the power relations in the novel—who gets to shit and who must wallow in it.

The tropes of shit and shitting link to Elvis’ interpretation of his own identity. In a manner similar to that in other African novels, these tropes expose the text to charges of self-loathing.⁸⁰ However, the text does not shy away from images of self-loathing and hopelessness—indeed, it courts them. Elvis recoils from the shit around him and in himself, shit that characterizes his sense of his own ethnicity and the character of his community. “While he waited, Elvis stared into the muddy puddles imagining what life, if any, was trying to crawl its way out...Shit, he thought, I look like shit” (*Graceland* 6). As he looks at the slum in which he lives, he notes its composition as a confused assemblage of modernity (cement, zinc sheets, clapboard and wood) and primitivism (it rises from a “primordial swamp). The ground and the people who live on it are described as filthy and animalistic:

[A] child, a little boy, sank into the black filth under one of the houses, rooting like a pig. Elvis guessed it was some sort of play. To his left, a man squatted on a plank walkway outside his house, defecating into the swamp below,

where a dog lapped up the feces before they hit the ground. Elvis looked away in disgust and saw another young boy sitting on an outcrop of planking, dangling a rod in the water. (*Graceland* 48)⁸¹

The scene describes the bliss of childhood play, and outlines a circle of life: that which is eaten becomes fertilizer to feed living bodies that will now excrete. However, this abundance of life is debased, repugnant, and vulgar. Elvis is shit. The slum in which he lives is shit. The people around him eat the reeking emissions that they excrete—a complete negation of the immaculate modes of domesticity featured on television. This interpretation of himself as shit marks both a characterization of his own brownness, and a certain vision of inferiority to which Elvis subjects himself.⁸²

Elvis' descriptions of himself fit the first form of “the symbolism of faecal [sic] inferiority and superiority” as described by John Inglis. He writes: “The [group] under verbal assault [is] described in terms of [its] allegedly ‘filthy’ [nature], labeled as being thoroughly ‘excremental’ in nature. In particular, their bodies are represented as being wholly faecally [sic] filthy in character” (Inglis 208). Inglis' analysis describes the dynamic whereby someone calls another person “a piece of shit.” Yet Elvis levels this assault against himself, engaging in repeated episodes of self-castigation—he calls himself shit, and the brownness of his skin does not signify Africanness. Instead, it signifies his shittiness. Inglis also provides a second form of fecal inferiority and superiority, in which “the alleged racial, national or class characteristics of a particular group can be represented as being neatly symbolized by their toiletry practices. Here the subordinate can be depicted as more faecally [sic]

uncontrolled and excrementally libidinous than their apparent superiors” (Inglis 208). Elvis looks around himself and sees a flood of sewage that is so uncontrolled that it replaces the earth itself. People defecate openly, they and their pets wallow in it, they fish food from it to it. Excrement stains and saturates each aspect of everyday life.

If the people are an embodiment of the land or spring from it, and if they identify with the ground beneath their feet, then Elvis looks at himself and the land to which he belongs and sees them both as extraneous, as discarded/discardable object, not just trash, but filth. He is extraneous at home. The self does not belong in its proper setting. The self is matter out of place in the very place it should be. He looks at his brown skin and sees the earth, but that earth is sewage. Elvis’ body and the earth of the nation confound the orderliness that determines the organization of citizenship in the nation. He, his brown skin and the earth that he makes his home all defy the schema of citizenship that determines Elvis’ belonging in the nation.

However, this is not to say that the landscape offers no power to the people on it—it merely offers none to Elvis. The hierarchies that organize the excremental order are not absolutely vertical. For example, the man who cleans the toilets is, if not respected, then certainly feared in his community. When young Elvis bangs out of the outhouse, the dung man stands before him, scowling as he asks for his money. Everyone knows where his money is kept because they have no wish to anger him, “because if he wasn’t paid on time, he left a stinky gift on the front step” (*Graceland* 64). Elvis witnesses the power that people who control the flow of shit actually have over the people they serve—the dung man, the duty sergeant. Elvis also witnesses his

cousin Efua's rape at the hands of her father. Like him, she remains helpless in the face of power (*Graceland* 188).

Cookbooks and the Excremental Order: Erasure and Effacement

The excesses that flood outside the confines of cookbooks map the contours of displacement: isolation, disinheritance, loss. The bodies in *Graceland* are thrust outside the systems that should guide and identify them—family, nation, culture, and customs—and, as a result, they lose their way, drifting unmoored, betrayed by the belonging they can never fully experience. The collection of recipes and odd bits of knowledge that Elvis' mother leaves him fails to teach him how to own his own shit, how to embrace the dirt of his own nation and reconcile its vices with its virtues.⁸³ The cookbook does an ambivalent job of managing the space of representation precisely because it so effectively effaces the filth of the nation. The presence of the recipes complicates the scatological indictment that the text levels against the nation because, while *Graceland* uses the mismanagement of domestic spaces as a means of commenting on the mismanagement of the nation, cookbooks maintain an interest in depicting orderly domestic spaces as a means of managing representations of the nation. This form of management involves the withdrawal of waste from the public sphere. The recipes in the novel dump their sewage into the other spaces in the novel, sounding wistful tones of longing as the reader trips across them in the text.

Elvis eventually learns the lesson that the journal cannot teach, and these lessons are a source of significant disappointment. "It had never revealed his mother to him. Never helped him understand her, or his life, or why anything had happened

the way it had. What was the point? Nothing is ever resolved, he thought. It just changes” (*Graceland*, 320). This revelation provides a non-answer to the question he asks at the beginning of the novel: “What have I to do with all this?” (*Graceland* 6)

While speaking to the King of Beggars, he experiences a revelation that unearths the depths of his impotence and despair in the face of the ills that afflict Nigeria: “I just realized that it is only a small group of people who are spoiling our country. Most people just want to work hard, earn a living and find some entertainment. Yet it seems that no matter how they try, they remain poor” (*Graceland* 280). He suddenly recognizes the futility of Nigerian postcoloniality—rather than liberation, the condition of Nigerian modernity holds the promise of impoverishment for the vast majority that it purports to benefit. He recognizes that shit remains shit, and that what seems to be progression is actually a transformation that does not change the essential nature of things. This lesson does not come from a book written by his mother, from the medicinal, religious and culinary catalogue his mother has left. It derives from Elvis’ lived experience in the country, from the bodily hardships he endures at the hands of the police, in the company of criminals, and among the ranks of the poor. The cookbook fails to accomplish its central task. The book was to have linked Elvis to his past, to his missing mother and, by extension, to Nigeria herself. It does not grant Elvis the sense of mutual ownership that citizenship might entail. It fails to teach him the lesson of possession.

Cultural belonging does not automatically guarantee the access to the avenues of social mobility that distinguishes subjecthood and subalternity.⁸⁴ Quite the contrary: cultural configurations hold the potential to either valorize the cultural

essentialisms that the subaltern body can represent (as in the case of the peasant women sorting lentils on page 3 of Madhur Jaffrey's cookbook *World Vegetarian*, discussed at length in Chapter 3) or to ossify cultural definitions with such fixity that access to social mobility becomes a moot concern, one obviated by the imperatives of cultural contiguity (as outlined by James Clifford's analysis of museums and museum culture). The diverse depictions of Nigerian social spaces clash with the spaces outlined in the recipe collection precisely because the question of civic engagement and social responsibility remains unanswered. Elvis' arrest and the novel's closing moments dramatize Elvis' subalternity and the journal's failure to address it: by being detained, tortured, then dumped on the side of the highway, then subsequently boarding the plane to the US, he is first violently ejected then voluntarily exits the social structures that determine his access to social mobility. In these two critical moments, the cookbook form as exemplified by both the interspersed recipes and the journal utterly fails Elvis epistemologically.

Eating Feminisms: Purple Hibiscus, Nervous Conditions, and the Female

Bildungsroman

Graceland is a novel with an encompassing reach; its concerns span the continent, touching upon a wide variety and range of issues pertaining to class and culture. Other African *bildungsromane* metonymically represent the nation, but concern themselves with a narrower set of interests. Similarly to *Graceland*, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions* both chart a trajectory of adolescent maturation. Also similarly to *Graceland*, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions* feature

dietetics as a principal trope. However, along with differences in gender, both novels featuring feminine protagonists also feature functional tables that actually produce nourishment. In fact, in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions*, characters sit and eat at amply laid tables, something that happens only once in *Graceland*, and then only as a means of highlighting the privation in other portions of the novel. These *bildungsromane* are framed through domesticity. A crucial distinction determines the function of meals in these texts: although the table is a highly productive space, it fails on other, metaphorical levels.

Purple Hibiscus traces its protagonist Kambili's negotiations between the conflicting cultural and social spheres that structure her daily life at home and the lives of her Auntie Ifeoma's family. Throughout the novel, Kambili shuttles between both, and her development in the text tests her capacity to navigate the complex familial politics that differentiate the two and pit them against one another. Her wealthy father's abuse oppresses her at home; her relative freedom at her poorer Auntie Ifeoma's house bewilders her at first, but later offers her comfort. The strictness of her home life complements the political upheaval that troubles the nation—upheavals that touch the daily lives of her aunt and cousins in the form of power outages that spoil food and paychecks withheld by the university at which Ifeoma works as a lecturer. Meanwhile, her traditionalist grandfather's death revives the religious rift between Eugene and his sister. In the course of the novel, Kambili blossoms socially and culturally, learning to evaluate her circumstances and generate her own thoughts about them. She determines that she can indeed acknowledge her love for an abusive, devout Christian father as well as for a traditionalist grandfather

she barely knows but comes to adore. She can balance these emotions against her mother's decision to poison her father and her brother's assumption of their mother's punishment. Eventually, she can meaningfully assess the differences between the meals she eats at home and those she eats in the company of her aunt and her cousins; she observes that Aunty Ifeoma's privations are also accompanied by laughter, while her meals at Enuke are emotionally austere. Her liberation is not the same as that enjoyed by her cousin Amaka, who can wear lipstick and dance to music with Igbo cultural connections. Kambili's maturation is much more subtle, and is marked by a certain circumspection that promises later development beyond the confines of the novel.

Similarly to the conclusion of *Graceland* (and *Facing the Congo*, as I will argue below) these novels end in a place of ambivalent success, particularly in *Purple Hibiscus* where Kambili's maturation is notably incomplete. She still seems shy and, if the fulfillment of the *bildungsroman* is measured in terms of the specific emancipatory forms of marriage and family, then she has not won Father Amadi as a husband. Instead of accepting Kambili as his wife and leaving the priesthood, he has traveled to Germany to serve at a religious post. Meanwhile, Kambili's family has been sundered by murder and political oppression: her abusive father Eugene is dead at the hand of his wife, Kambili's brother Jaja has been jailed for assuming her guilt, and Aunty Ifeoma and Kambili's cousins have moved to the US.

In spite of the scattering of the characters and the tragedy that weighs heavily at the conclusion of the narrative, the novel's verdict as it weighs the success of

postcolonial governance is a bit more charitable than that in *Graceland*. It is Auntie Ifeoma who observes the false starts of Nigerian democracy:

There are people...who think that we cannot rule ourselves because the few times we tried, we failed, as if all the others who rule themselves today got it right the first time. It is like telling a crawling baby who tries to walk, and then falls back on his buttocks, to stay there. As if the adults walking past him did not all crawl, once. (301)

This image is particularly evocative because, similarly to Abani's novel, the central figure who negotiates the text is a child. Additionally, this image allows the reader to view the end of the novel in a new light: Kambili is not as liberal in her cultural politics as her aunt and cousins, but she has made forays toward determining for herself the course of her life and the value of the people in it. If the reader castigates Kambili for ending the novel less outspoken, less brazen, less in command of her own star than the reader might wish, then this observation of incremental development perhaps intends to give that reader pause.

Much of the current range of postcolonial criticism of *Purple Hibiscus* focuses on the adolescence of the protagonist, or examines the entanglement of gender, development, and politics in the depictions of the Nigerian state.⁸⁵ In this way, the text engages similar themes as Tsitsi Dagarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, which focuses on the intellectual advancement and physical emancipation of its protagonist, Tambu. *Nervous Conditions* is a first-person narrative written from Tambu's perspective, and concerns itself centrally with her education and subsequent liberation from the poverty in which her parents and siblings must live. She moves away from

her home and into her uncle Babamukuru's house where she will attend the mission school and fulfill the intellectual promise of her dead brother, Nhamo. Gender divisions rift the novel, as do social distinctions and religious and cultural norms. The most significant moments in the novel concern Tambu's cousin Nyasha, who develops bulimia, a "nervous condition" that arises from her own struggles with her gender and cultural identity.

Although Tambu is the narrator and the protagonist, a great deal of the criticism surround *Nervous Conditions* focuses intently upon Nyasha's rituals of self-starvation and purgation. Much of this debate concentrates upon either her condition as a mode of feminist resistance or as a psychological locus from which to launch an evaluation of Zimbabwean subjectivity.⁸⁶ The text's treatment of food eating actually touches on two tables—that which Tambu leaves (her home in the village) and that at which she arrives (Babamukuru's home)—and the gastropolitics that govern both. The two settings of dining, eating, and kitchen management cannot be considered separately, for each comments on the other. If Kambili's table is marked by a dearth that arouses a reactionary activism in Nyasha—Clare Barker reads her anorexia as a form of hunger strike—then Nyasha's table is oppressively neocolonial, stringently disciplined by Babamukuru. Nyasha's anorexia does not merely represent a tortured body strung between two competing cultural poles; it is a locus of feminist, political resistance.⁸⁷

Dagarembga's use of two female protagonists who embody apposite poles of postcolonial childhood genders each young woman in ways that complicate each girl's claims to gendered resistance. However, because their political positions seem

so clear and absolute in their articulation, it is tempting to interpret them in an overly expansive light. Rather than read Nyasha as a competent activist using her own body as the site of resistance, she may actually embody a measure of youthful ignorance. Esprit argues that “[Nyasha] lacks the experience to react to anything politically. To say that she is so in control of her choices is to say that she is smarter than she is...She is not that complex—her reaction is almost faddish” (2009). Her fumbling attempts to give shape to her thoughts at the end of the novel certainly support this reading: her thoughts are rambling, her behavior erratic. She uses vague pronouns and abstract ideas: “They’ve done it to me... Why do they do it, Tambu, to me and to you and to him? Do you see what they’ve done? They’ve taken us away” (200). After shredding her history books between her teeth and demolishing her room, she says, “I don’t hate you, Daddy. They want me to, but I won’t... Look what they’ve done to us. I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you” (201). Reading Nyasha’s rage as an anti-colonial or anti-neocolonial resistance requires that the reader assign nouns to each pronoun, to give order to a disordered diatribe that is so frustrated that its expression quickly becomes physical. Extending this reading to Nyasha’s behavior at the dinner table means that, when she sees her cousins deprived of food and stops eating (52) and then rebels against her father by refusing to eat or by vomiting after binging, her actions grope toward a coherence that she has yet to completely learn. Her bulimia in this way is not activism—it points toward a lack of experience to formulate an adequate response.⁸⁸ In this way, as Kelli Donovan Wixson argues, food serves as the vehicle by which women in the text pursue agency.

The text critiques the politics of rural food production and agrarian culture, as it also critiques the culture of missionary education and its incompatibility with village life. The postcolonial table in *Nervous Conditions* does not simply posit a rejection of the colonial order; it is also a critique of neocolonial agrarian economy. Sitting at this table defies both the colonial entrapment of domesticity as well as an antiquated, agrarian culture that Nyasha—schooled in England, but ostracized in Zimbabwe—considers backward and deprived. Both tables are patriarchal in structure, and each serves as a site of oppression and revulsion in its own manner. However, the acts of eating and the meals that are served merely gesture in the direction of real resistance. Nyasha, for example, can only stop both her worlds from dominating her by refusing to eat. The table is a safe space for her to do this: by over-consuming then purging, or by obstinately refusing food, she sheds identity formations that she has the luxury to shed and is not required to claim to want to belong to any spaces. However, she only sheds identity through this act of refusal that can take place only in conditions of plenitude: her impoverished country cousins cannot adopt the same posture of resistance. Meanwhile, Nyasha does not assume identity or issue grand declaratives of her intentions. Instead, it is left to the reader to graft identity and meaning onto Nyasha—Clare Barker’s reading constitutes an ideal example of this mechanic in action. In comparison, Tambu is much clearer about where she belongs and who she is, and this unflinching clarity makes her the ideal narrator (Esprit 2009).

Readings that concentrate solely on Nyasha’s desire for liberation through refusing to eat and purging when she does neglect to treat Tambu’s observations of

how the kitchen serves as a means to discipline the female body and conform it to restrictive social norms. Domesticity remains the conventional destiny for all women in the novel and the agrarian economy treats with puzzlement those women who resist the gendered order determining divisions of labor and access to education. When Tambu is dismayed at the prospect of leaving school, her father is nonplussed, saying, “Is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it’s nothing. Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables” (15). Her only alternative is to appeal to her aunt Maiguru’s education. However, in spite of her education, Maiguru must govern the kitchen on Christmas when Babamukuru and his family visit the family compound, laden with enough food to feed twenty-four people (120-36). The work is extensive and exhausting, and Maiguru’s kitchen management places her in awkward positions when she must choose to serve spoiling or fresh meat because she must enforce strict rationing to make the food last for the duration of the holiday. To reconcile this difficulty, she doubles her labor, preparing a special pot of fresh meat for the patriarchy to eat in addition to the pot prepared for the rest of the family (135-6).

Tambu observes the women around her as she charts a course toward her own liberation, viewing other women in the text as examples she must avoid emulating (Wixson 230). She attempts to leverage the domestic in an attempt to escape it, using food as a means of earning her agency. She determines to grow her own maize and sell it to raise school fees that her family refuses to pay. However, Nhamo almost thwarts this attempt by stealing her corn, sneering, “What did you expect? Did you really think you could send yourself to school?” (16-21) This comment references

two different yet interlinked conditions of control that Nhamo suggests Tambu cannot escape. First, she should not pursue her education seriously because of her gendered social position that prefers the schooling of male offspring. Second, even if she could get into an advanced classroom, she cannot remain in there under her own power; someone else must pay her fees and, because of the logic that educates men and domesticates women, she is not admitted into the system of patronage that would grant her long-term support to complete her education. Her confidence is such that he openly gifts her mealies to other children; when she attacks him, menstrual blood streams down her leg, adding insult to injury (21-23). Her femininity is an unwelcome burden against which she seems to struggle in vain. It is only when an male teacher who sees her enterprising promise and obvious desire to educate herself intervenes on her behalf to secure funding for her schooling that she is able to attend classes without relying on her family for support (23-27).

The same contrast between domestic spheres of meal-based agency links the meals laid in Nsukka and Enugu. Rather than contrasting a privileged table against agrarian culinary culture and economy, the meals in *Purple Hibiscus* contrast traditionalist and Catholic domesticity, pitting two different models of modernity against one another. As they critique *Purple Hibiscus*, few critics discuss the comparably disparate table politics that distinguish Kambili's life at Aunty Ifeoma's house from her life at home. Mealtimes, food preparation and consumption constitute the domestic scenes that provide the sharpest commentary in the novel. It is no simple matter that a bowl of cereal eaten to prevent an upset stomach becomes a yardstick by which the reader can measure Eugene's cruelty (98-103).

This cruelty is ambivalently depicted, beginning with the “love sip” that appears on page 8. The tea that Eugene pours is so hot that the love sip he shares with his children (“because you shared the little things you loved with the people you loved”) scalds Kambili’s tongue so badly that she cannot enjoy peppery foods at lunch. However, it does not matter to Kambili, “because I knew that when the tea burned my tongue, it burned Papa’s love into me.” However painful the love sip might be, it is much more wrenching that Papa withholds it—in the absence of agony, there is also no love.

The teacup constitutes a site of deep ambivalence in the novel. The cultural signification of tea in *Nervous Conditions* been noted by Derek Wright who argues that, certain food figurations in the text such as brewing tea constitute the colonial footprint. Papa’s ritual of pouring his tea, inviting the children to partake in turn, and allowing the single, scalding sip bears striking similarity to the communion and is an inheritor of colonial food practices. As the recipe collection in Abani resonates with other moments in the novel, the love sip that scalds her tongue resonates with the scalding of Kambili’s feet because she knowingly “walked into sin,” and with the scalding of Papa’s hands because he was caught masturbating by the good father at St. Gregory’s. (192-7) In each of these instances, the love of a colonialist, patriarchal figure is burned into the flesh. This makes the tea a perfect choice for delivering the poisoning, and also explains Kambili’s reaction when Mama tells her of her method:

For a long, silent moment I could think of nothing. My mind was blank, I was blank. Then I thought of taking sips of Papa’s tea, love sips, the scalding liquid that burned his love onto my tongue. “Why did you put it in his tea?” I

asked Mama, rising. My voice was loud. I was almost screaming. “Why in his tea?” (290)

Although Kambili clearly has suffered horrific physical abuse by her father, the sharp, scalding purity of the love sip sanctifies the tea. Notably, Kambili does not object to the poisoning—she objects to the location of the poison. Additionally, whether to submit or resist the scalding becomes a measure of personal liberation. After a ferocious beating at Eugene’s hands, Kambili stays at Nsukka with Aunty Ifeoma and her cousins. Upon hearing about the student riots, she dreams that “the sole administrator was pouring hot water on Aunty Ifeoma’s feet in the bathtub of our home in Enugu. Then Aunty Ifeoma jumped out of the bathtub and, in the manner of dreams, jumped into America. She did not look back as I called to her to stop” (229-30). The figuration of tea here is indeed complex: if tea is a colonial signifier, then Ifeoma jumps out of one Western cultural paradigm (postcolonial Africa under the cultural influence of mission education) into another (exile in the US). The two conditions are interdependent—postcolonial political instability leads to flight.

It is the normalcy of the family table that underscores the tumult in the family. Kambili’s only clue on page 8 that something is amiss after Papa’s outburst is that he does not invite her to take her love sip. For her, the absence of the invitation does not mesh with the nonchalance of the family scene: she asks, “Why were they acting so normal, Jaja and Mama, as if they did not know what had just happened? And why was Papa drinking his tea quietly, as if Jaja had not just talked back to him?” (Adichie 8)

Family scenes at Kambili's home in Enugu are marked by their own nervous conditions. Each meal is characterized by perfection and a religious orthodoxy that overlays a tension capable of corroding whatever enjoyment Kambili may take in food she eats. Lengthy blessings precede meal service on page 11—Papa says grace over the meal for twenty minutes. The meals themselves are sumptuous: “Lunch was fufu and onugbu soup. The fufu was smooth and fluffy...the soup was thick with chunks of boiled beef and dried fish and dark green onugbu leaves” (Adichie 11-2). However, she cannot savor the meal, saying, “I was certain the soup was good, but I did not taste it, could not taste it. My tongue felt like paper” (12) Meanwhile, the silence at table is awkward and the efforts to break it seem contrived. When Kambili receives her grades and must inform her father of her failure to surpass everyone in her class, she finds herself unable to enjoy dinner: “The boiled yam and peppery greens refused to go down my throat; they clung to my mouth like children clinging to their mothers' hand at a nursery school entrance” (41). Good food sticks in her throat or sweeps past a nervous tongue unable to taste it.

The meals are hallmarked by efforts to cut the tension. The serving of cashew juice does nothing to ease it, and the delicious beverage instead highlights the strain:

Papa poured the yellow juice for everyone. I reached out quickly for my glass and took a sip. It tasted watery. I wanted to seem eager; maybe if I talked about how good it tasted, Papa might forget that he had not yet punished Jaja. “It's very good, Papa,” I said. (12-3)

As Jaja leaves the table inappropriately, Kambili gulps the juice in enormous swigs as a means of providing a distraction, using the gesture of enjoyment to hold together her family that is cracking apart before her:

I reached for my glass and stared at the juice, watery yellow, like urine. I poured all of it down my throat, in one gulp. I didn't know what else to do.

This had never happened before in my entire life, never. The compound walls would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani tree. (14)

Kambili does not avert the disaster. She simply chokes. She compares the tasty drink that she endeavors to enthusiastically enjoy to excrement. In a comparably dismaying scene, she later claims to enjoy the samples of the new biscuit that her father's plant hopes to sell. Jaja even says, "It has a fresh taste," a sentiment with which her mother agrees, declaring that the biscuit is "Very tasty" (Adichie 40). These compliments are hollow and disingenuousness—the family appeases Eugene to mollify his eruptions. Kambili efforts to enjoy her dinner simply defer her terror as she weathers her father's disappointment at her grades. At all times, the family steps carefully to prevent emotional or physical excoriation at his hands.

Similarly to Tayler's gastric noises and intestinal pain, stomach noises and discomfort become a register for tension in Kambili's immediate family, complementing the lavish, but awkward family meals that they eat at table. After choking on the cashew juice in an abortive show of familial bliss, Kambili retires with a cough and fever. The bowl of *ofe nsala* does not offer her comfort; instead, "the aromatic soup only [makes her] nauseated." Kambili then vomits in the bathroom (15). When Kambili must report to her father that she did not come first in

her class, she finds that her stomach is “making sounds, hollow rumbling sounds that seemed too loud, even when I sucked in my belly” (Adichie 40). These sounds may signify hunger, they may signify nervousness; the reader is given few cues to read them. At the beginning of the novel, Kambili seems to lack a rubric to connect the things she puts in her mouth with any gustatory sensation, or to connect the sensations in her viscera with any real meaning. Her tongue cannot taste, her throat cannot swallow, and her gut makes anxious sounds that communicate nothing.

The pain of Papa’s love and the complexity of Kambili’s happiness as she sips it compare with other, unambivalent moments of happiness that are also registered through taste. For example, after spending time with Father Amadi (who wins the totality of Kambili’s affections) Kambili recollects the afternoon as she rides home. “I had smiled, run, laughed. My chest was filled with something bath foam. Light. The lightness was so sweet I tasted it on my tongue, the sweetness of an overripe bright yellow cashew fruit” (180). The sweetness of the cashew fruit here in this moment of genuine happiness refracts the sweetness that Kambili fails to taste as she drinks cashew juice in a moment of contrived familial bliss. As she continues to recuperate in Nsukka from Papa’s most vicious beating, she stands on the veranda and smells the appetizing odors rise from the earth. “There was the smell of freshness in the air, that edible scent the baked soil gave out at the first touch of rain. I imagined going into the garden, where Jaja was on his knees, digging out a clump of mud with my fingers and eating it” (218). At this moment of intimacy and belonging, where Kambili and Jaja enjoy the relative freedom, good company, and homely comforts of Auntie Ifeoma’s hospitality, Kambili is moved to eat the inedible. This is not a moment characterized

by a hysterical aesthetic; it is instead a moment of intense pleasure and connection, exemplified by the sense that the earth on which she stands will nourish her.

The novel is thus ostensibly about Kambili's awakening, and this increasing awareness enables her to feel and decipher a complex range of sensations, pleasure chief among them. However, she also experiences increased sensitivity to the differences between the table laid in her home and that laid by her Aunt. For example, breakfast is carefully rationed powdered milk and okpa, a chickpea and palm-oil cake. Kambili notes that she can liberally use the powdered milk at her own home, and that okpa is only ever eaten as a snack (127). At home, she looks at her plate and thinks about how each piece of chicken on her plate would feed three people at Auntie Ifeoma's house (191). These discernments extend to other aspects of the home, such that she can make pointed evaluations of the quality of her home life, even if she cannot bring herself to speak to others about them. After returning home following an extended visit to Nsukka, she wants to communicate the difference between Auntie Ifeoma's house and the one in which she lives:

I wanted to tell Mama that it did feel different to be back, that our living room had too much wasted marble floor that gleamed from Sisi's polishing and housed nothing. Our ceilings were too high. Our furniture was lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted skin in the harmattan, the leather sofas' greeting was a clammy coldness, the Persian rugs were too lush to have any feeling. (192)

She learns that the plenitude in her home is still marked by an emotional—and cultural—famine.⁸⁹

Disciplined tables in the text mark the opposing poles of cultural politics. Eugene's table follows a strict discipline that is shaped by his missionary education and Nigerian cultural norms. The family prays extensively before and after the meal, Eugene must eat first, and the children may not be excused until he is finished (10-14). The benefits of his wealth and social position bring fancy biscuits and cashew juice to the table. The food is impeccable, delicious, and well presented. Expectations of each family member are clear; deviations represent familial crisis. The meals served at his table resemble those found in cookbooks, in movies, on tv—perfectly executed, but devoid of warmth. Meanwhile, Aunty Ifeoma must discipline her table differently, exercising economy in the preparation of every meal. In her home, yams must be pared with excruciating—and yet effortless—attention to retain as much of the flesh as possible (134-5) and she must quickly use rancid meat soured by repeated power outages (246). In this way, Ifeoma's kitchen management resembles Maiguru's: educated women are forced to strictly ration in ways that balance the assurance that every mouth is fed against questions of basic sanitation.

Facing the Congo and the Starvelings of Zaire

Similarly to *Graceland*, *Nervous Conditions*, and *Purple Hibiscus*, *Facing the Congo* fits the structure of the *bildungsroman*, where the protagonist's progression through the text follows a story arc of personal maturation. However, also similarly to *Graceland*, the memoir ends on a note of extreme disappointment and disillusionment. Both protagonists flee the country, and for many of the same reasons. The principal difference is that the author of *Facing the Congo*, Jeffrey Tayler, is a

privileged, white foreigner whose whiteness exposes him to personal danger. He cannot hide in the woodwork, he cannot disappear into anonymity. Elvis, however, constantly attempts to access the means of social mobility in his country and is either thwarted or endangered, or the opportunity proves transient. Instead, Elvis becomes one of the multitudes of the impoverished who populate the fringes of Lagos—and it is the desperately impoverished who terrorize Tayler in the course of his travels down the Congo. The memoir and the novel thus describe opposing poles of the experience of African hunger, yet they converge at the same point of exodus: neither man is significantly illuminated by his journey; both part ways with the country with the lesson of cultural illegibility and helplessness before the immobile edifice of the massive failure of the postcolonial project.

Although it is set in a different country with problems that seem to dwarf Nigeria's social issues, *Facing the Congo*'s structure presents the same themes that emerge in *Graceland*, but in hyperemphasized form, and with a magnified sense of cultural erosion and political disenfranchisement. If *Graceland* is an insider's view of African postcolonial culture, then Tayler's memoir provides an outsider's view, with the same tragic conclusion: helplessness in the face of postcolonial ruin. The issues that dismay Tayler are of a wider range than those treated in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous Conditions*. The city of Lagos bears striking similarity to Kinshasa. However, the view outside Kinshasa is much more shockingly impoverished than the countryside Abani describes.

In *Facing the Congo*, Jeffrey Tayler describes a pirogue expedition down the Congo River through what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. While Nigeria

and the Congo are not the same nation, and while Tayler is an outsider who never really seeks deep ingress into Zairean culture and politics, this text is an apt counterexample to *Graceland* because both feature a young man gaining knowledge both about himself and the nation through which he travels. Jeffrey Tayler undertakes his journey to undergo a personal transformation, one that will allow him to find a course in his life by achieving a feat that has killed many other white men in the attempt (xvii, xix). Both texts map negotiations of personal power within the borders of the African state, and both chart the protagonist's ultimate impotence to grapple with specific epistemological formations. At the conclusion of *Graceland*, Elvis accepts that his mother's journal has granted him no knowledge of the actual shape of Nigerian life and politics, and he boards a plane to America to seek a new life. What power and freedom Elvis thinks he has falls away from him as the novel progresses. At the conclusion of *Facing the Congo*, Tayler seems to grasp that facing the Congo does not simply mean confronting the challenges of the expedition; facing the place entails recognition of the human beings who live there and suffer at the hands of history—seeing their faces and acknowledging their living conditions even if one is powerless to change them.

As a global citizen (Tayler is an American living in Moscow, and is fluent in Russian, French, and English) Tayler learns the limits of his privilege and the vulnerability it produces. While he can always produce sufficient money and food to sustain himself throughout his journey, leveraging the power of his skin color and comparative wealth unsettles him because he works in constant terror that the Zaireans will see through the sham and possibly rob or kill him. Tayler learns that his

“drama of self-actualization prove[s] obscenely trivial beside the suffering of the Zaireans and the injustices of their past.” He also learns “to value what he [has] and strive to preserve it” (Tayler 260). If these lessons seem meager in the face of the grand spectacle of the failure of an African state, then they perhaps attest to an inability to know that Tayler confesses earlier in the epilogue. As he thinks about his journey down the river, he asks questions about his guide that seem to apply to the nation itself: “Why had I never managed to understand him or truly accept him? Why had I not been more generous with him?” He then acknowledges that he lacks the resources to do anything of “lasting benefit” for Desi, who “had risked his life in [Tayler’s] employ.” Tayler can apply no remedy from his vantage outside the system. After he has flown away to Russia, “[Desi] would remain in Zaire, living hand to mouth, struggling to provide for his family and church, knowing only his river and his faith” (Tayler 257). Tayler recognizes his intrusion as unwelcome, and learns a lesson that disallows the impulse that drives both conquest and NGO involvement: “If people wanted privacy, I would leave them alone” (Tayler 258). He does not breach the subaltern’s silence because a) he is not a subaltern himself, and b) he does not presume to speak on the subaltern’s behalf. Instead, he regrets that he cannot penetrate the cryptic silences to which he can only bear witness, and he agrees that the most ethical response that he can muster is to leave people in peace to live their lives. He reads his presence is unwanted and withdraws in a gesture of respect.⁹⁰

The travelogue recounts failure after failure, beginning and ending with Tayler’s failure to imagine the suffering of others or to account for his own reactions to that suffering. At the conclusion of the voyage, when the illness of his guide forces

him to halt, Tayler realizes this failure, stating, “In all my preparations, I had never imagined that it would be my guide whose health would fail and not my own” (Tayler 235). This realization, however, is immediately overtaken by terror about his personal safety.

He also fails to imagine the visceral nature of his response to the extreme poverty that he sees in Kinshasa—a visceral reaction marked by a nauseating rise of “pity and revulsion and shock...[that kept] at bay the fear [he] thought [he] would feel” (Tayler 35). The city he sees resembles “Hiroshima after the blast”—Kinshasa has been decimated by the very modernity that erected the structures that now crumble in the sun (Tayler 35).⁹¹ Its physical deterioration stands as a shocking testament to the dramatic failure of the postcolonial project. The unease he feels lodges in the pit of his belly and remains there, wrenching him when he sees or suffers an insult to his sense of how the world ought to be, dragging him out of himself in into the uncomprehending space that lies between two bodies. Throughout the travelogue, the stomach acts as the trope through which the reader can understand the power relations in the text. His terror and ill-ease manifest themselves in the form of nausea and stomach pains—sensations that counter and perversely complement the empty bellies around him.⁹²

The defining difference that distinguishes Tayler from the Zaireans resides in the stomach—he has plenty to eat, and they do not. The difference emerges repeatedly throughout the text. Onboard the Colonel’s boat, a teenager stops him and observes how well Tayler eats:

You are different from us. You eat well and this makes you strong. Everything about you shows you are rich and eating well. Your skin, your hair. You really don't have to work. But look at us. We row pirogues and this weakens us. We are a weak people, weak from hunger. (Tayler 80)

The boy recognizes his place in an alimentary order that measures wealth and health on meter marked by appetite and need. The world traveler is free to eat well; the Zairean is lashed to a life of privation. While paddling downriver, he encounters a group of children fishing and bathing in the river shallows. He hails a young fisherman with a greeting; when he recognizes Tayler's whiteness, he shouts back, "*Ey, le blanc! J'ai faim! Ey, venez ici!*"¹ Rather than accept his welcome, Tayler reads the hunger at the heart of the greeting as a threat, and paddles on. However, the Zaireans starve at home. This means that it is Tayler who is out of place—and matter out of place is filthy, obscene. He takes note of himself as an obscenity, a person out of place. He feels an "impotence and a weird outrage at [him]self for being there" (Tayler 81).

Yet the abundance that Tayler brings on the boat is not limitless—he has only enough food and money for the trip he has planned. This means that Tayler does not padlock his food stores out of malice—he does so to keep a hungry tide at bay because he lacks enough food to go around. The comparative limitless of Tayler's store means that he must stealthily dole out his charity in small increments to avoid a veritable horde of hungry people seeking a handout. He must lock his room to avoid theft that will strand him in a hungry country, hungry himself. He must also closely

¹ "Hey, white man! I'm hungry! Hey, come here!"

guard his terror, keeping his fear under similar lock and key. For example, when forced to check in with the SNIP official in Lokutu, he must act imperious to get through the transaction with him. As he does so, he feels like a “ham” (Tayler 169-73). He later pulls into Lisala to hire a soldier for protection on the last leg of the journey. As he approaches the bank, a group of drunken soldiers levels guns at him, “clos[ing] around” him so that they can escort him to the adjutant. He prepares to “ham-act” to avoid their harassment, trying to appear as though he “might crack a whip or kick some ass” (Tayler 209-10). The entire time, he is aware that his behavior is a sham, and that awareness haunts him, surfacing in a sense of ill ease that makes him jumpy in those moments where he is most vulnerable—alone in his tent or in his own bed. At one of the many camps that he strikes, he “lurche[d] awake, suddenly uneasy.” The humid heat and the high whine of the mosquitoes makes him want to “jump up and tear open [his] tent door” (Tayler 150-1) When he hears the sounds of a gorilla rambling around in the forest nearby (crashing through the leaves, snapping branches, grunting and breathing heavily) he calls for Desi, perhaps imagining an armed bandit searching the island for a camp to pillage and a white man to slay and perhaps cannibalize. When Desi assures him that is simply one of the many gorillas who live in the area, Tayler goes back to sleep, only to be awakened by a thunderstorm that sends his cookware bouncing into the trees and rips the tarp sheltering the mosquito tents. (Tayler 150-1) Tayler depicts the stunning violence of the storm in terms that also outline the degree of his terror in the face of the elements. While he never describes his fear in this moment, the imagery he uses leaves no doubt about the intensity of his emotions: he describes the thunder as “a cannonade. White

lightning fissure[s] the black sky; the river flashe[s] a horrid negative of itself in the violent light” (Tayler 151). As Desi runs to better moor the pirogue, Tayler describes his flashlight as “a mad bouncing beam in the drenching, swirling torrents” (Tayler 150) In another encampment, his anxiety and isolation spike as he realizes his reliance on Desi, resulting in vivid nightmares of a sinking barge on which he is trapped. He renders his dreams in terms that reveal the terror that lurks beneath the façade of confidence and control that he must use to sustain him:

We were going under! Laws and damages and court cases meant nothing now; words meant nothing; every skill and ruse and tactic I had learned in life before meant nothing to me now...water and death was real, everything else was false...now there was only submersion and open-mouthed gagging terror and river reeds entangling my kicking limbs in brown water and crocodiles and no escape...(Tayler 181)

In his dealings with the people aboard the barge, the men who try to rob him (197), the various officials and soldiers who impede his path with bureaucracy and demands for bribes, Tayler must maintain an image of mastery and command reminiscent of the poise of the colonial conqueror. However, perhaps as a commentary on the possible paper tigers used by Dutch, English, French, Spanish, and American agents seeking to solidify actual power in colonial contexts, Tayler reveals the need to weave a series of illusions that enable his mobility downriver: he is powerful, he has connections, he will shoot to kill if molested. But his act is a sham, and his gun is a dud (Tayler 198).

His unease and his fear surface as a nervous stomach that gives his discomfort a materiality that complements the actual hunger he sees around him. While his nausea and stomach upset might be attributable to other sources (the odor of either rotting palm nuts or the local palm oil plant in Yambinga, for example, or the tiny, stinky, bad-tasting bananas he buys and eats there [120]) they also symptomize his anxiety as he travels through the country. When he sees the “starvelings” of Kinshasa picking through piles of debris for sustenance, or too weakened by famine to move, he “[can] not stomach the sight, and turn[s] away” (Tayler 34-5). The visual impact of Zairean poverty moves Tayler physically: “Dust, decay, crazed men in uniforms, starvelings and cripples—it all hit me and I nearly broke. I felt nausea rising within me” (Tayler 35).

While on the Colonel’s barge to Kisangani, Tayler suffers nausea that might be attributable to seasickness, but it seems sharpest when he is unnerved by the journey itself. At the beginning of his journey, his optimism yields to nausea as he realizes that the proximity of noisy Zairean bodies would characterize his duration aboard the barge (Tayler 65). After his first meal onboard, he is still afflicted by a nausea that causes a discomfort that [complements?] the “knotty planks and scuttling roaches” as he attempts to rest (Tayler 66). This bout of nausea seems to subside only once Nze, the chief mechanic, offers him a quieter berth. In Lisala, Tayler must haggle with a local official to hire a soldier to protect him for the rest of the journey downriver, but Desi constantly interrupts the transaction in ways that significantly raise the price Tayler might have to pay. As he questions whether to trust his guide, Tayler suffers acute abdominal pains:

Later, after we returned to the hotel, I fell ill in the debilitating heat of late afternoon. Tormented by nausea, my intestines tightening into knots, I rolled from side to side on the lumpy mattress in my green room...On the river, I had held myself in check; here I could relax, but I felt that I might collapse into a mass of maladies. (Tayler 217)

Here, he also collapses into a mass of uncertainty. The danger of the previous days has shaken him. He questions why Desi interjects himself into the bargaining for the bodyguard, what shapes Desi's reasoning, and whether he would side with officials gouging Tayler for bribes should negotiations take a tough turn. Tayler also questions the look on the hired soldier's face as he takes and counts the advance he has been given, and ponders the gravity of the soldier's duties and of the job his guide has undertaken: "what if the soldier were to die? And what if Desi were to die? What would happen to his wife and daughter in Bumba and his family in Lokutu?" The mass of questions defy his ability to answer them, so Tayler "turn[s] away from them in that hot room...feeling hot pain knife its way through [his] gut" (Tayler 217).

Ironically, Tayler can quell his disquiet in the company of other people. The very people who unsettle both his mind and his stomach distract him from the anxiety they arouse. Once he is better able to find solitude and quiet on the Colonel's barge, Tayler discovers that the nausea he feels subsides only when he talks and laughs with the other passengers:

Still a bit sick to my stomach, I felt less than sociable, but for the first time in my life, with the crowd, the heat, the journey ahead, and the sheer strangeness and newness of everything I was experiencing, I found myself so shaky and

unsure of whether I would make from one day to the next that I had to rely on the conversation and kindness of others to keep my spirits high enough to eat, bathe, and sleep. It was either move and socialize or rest and be overwhelmed with nausea and anxiety. I toured the boat and made friends. (Tayler 68)

Only through human interaction can he quell his nausea enough to pursue the basic functions that sustain the body. Accompanied by a spurt of ill-ease, his nausea resurfaces when two pirogues attempt to board the vessel and are chased off by The Colonel, who states, “This is a terrible wilderness.” After The Colonel goes to bed, Tayler feels sick to his stomach and, deciding that traveling downriver alone would be too dangerous, decides to hire a guide (Tayler 110). Later, in Kisangani, diamond traders caution him of the perils of the journey by suggesting that illness and the weather present a clearer danger than the barge that ran over two Englishmen who attempted the journey, or the marauders who massacred eight Italians. (He “had heard of the macheteed Belgians and the capsized Peace Corps Americans.”) They add new entries to a “chronicle of death and failure [that he could] ponder during [his] last hours” as he prepares for the pirogue trip downriver. After the diamond traders wish him luck and depart, he is struck by nausea and panic that leave him “unsteady on [his] feet” and “nauseated” (Tayler 134-5).

Seats at the Table

The table in each text—its successes, its failures, or its absence—constitutes a means of critiquing the politics of the emergent nation. In *Graceland*, the domestic is idealized, but remains wholly within the realm of representation. The novel addresses a wide range of sociopolitical issues. Meanwhile In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Nervous*

Conditions, the table is productive, but complicated by a much narrower range of cultural politics. It becomes a contested space of comparison between different social norms that play out over dinner plates. In Tayler's memoir, the table evaporates, and the reader is left with a starving nation peopled by empty stomachs and flooded by excessive waste.

The failures of the journal that Elvis' mother writes are many. Its pages cannot contain the horrors that Elvis suffers and witnesses, horrors performed by the state, by his own family, and by his friends. It remains silent about these things because it will not speak about them—its silences are strategically deployed. Cookbooks competently address one end of our alimentation. However, when their objective purports to extend beyond this singular task, they relinquish the ability to articulate the very things they are called upon to say. Both *Graceland* and *Facing the Congo* reveal these aspects of postcolonial politics, and reveal the violence ravaging Africa's political landscape is actually a feature of its passage into post-colonial modernity. If this is the case then, like Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, the passage from adolescence to maturity is also marked by violence inflicted upon or witnessed by the protagonist. The violence in these cases is not abstract or distant—it is immediate, inflicted upon bodies that belong to or are close to the subject whose maturation structures the forces at work in the novel.

The patterns of movement that end the novel complete what the representations of the table initiate. The two texts featuring a male protagonist move outward from their place of location. *Graceland* ends with Elvis standing in an airport with a passport bearing a new name. The reader has no idea what will happen next,

alluding to the idea that the novel really is less about Elvis than it is about Nigeria herself. The unknowability of Elvis' story suggests that his exodus is both a point of departure for the next (unwritten) chapter of his story as well as an indictment of the land he leaves. Abani's novel is thus about migration. Tayler's memoir is about a journey into Congo, but ends with a different kind of flight. The text closely resembles *Heart of Darkness* with a white man venturing into the Congo and discovering unkind truths there about the effect of white Western actions in that space. After comparing all four texts, the question arises: what does it mean for the male protagonists that there is no domesticity, and that domesticity is distant, desired, or simply fetishized, and that the only recourse for them is flight? What does this tell us of the failure of the cultural?

Cookbooks render legible the illegible, and visible the invisible. They guide the transformation of a jumbled pile of meats, vegetables and spices into prepared food. Through a curious sleight of hand, they reveal processes that otherwise remains opaque: the change from one state to another. Raw ingredients often bear absolutely no resemblance to what they will become once they are cooked: meat begins as a living thing that snuffles and walks about, an animal that must be cut into chunks that are set over fire; bread begins as a pile of flour, a sprinkle of salt, a splash of water; wine begins as plump globules of juice suspended in groups depending from a vine. Cookbooks answer the question that chefs put to the ingredients arranged before them, the question of "Where do I begin?" They make the unimaginable both imaginable and realizable: we can see the steps laid out before us, and the ghost of the

raw ingredient infuses the finished dish. Food is demystified, its magic made mundane.

Regional cookbooks achieve this feat with cultures as well, demystifying exotic tastes and tools, and they often include histories and cultural lessons, personal anecdotes and historical profiles along with the catalogue of recipes. They demystify and make mundane the doubly unrecognizable ingredients and techniques that originate in foreign lands. But they do so equivocally, omitting the less charming aspects of the nation's cultural landscape. The photo of slaughtered monkeys tied and prepared for sale in a Zairean market do not evoke the same thoughts of gustatory delight that provoke Desi to demand one when he falls ill (Tayler 92, 234-5). The recipe that will give Desi the strength to continue the journey will never appear in a west or central African cookbook.

This does not mean that the recipes that do not completely reflect the cultures to which they are connected are completely separate from the texts that include them. In Abani's novel, the placement of the recipes is far from accidental or vestigial, and that the role they play is far more integral to the text than even Abani claims. The recipes refract, Nigeria, providing the foundation of a critique of its political culture, one against which the recipes assume ironic postures. This irony, however, is a result of the cookbook's inability to accommodate the historical burden that has been placed upon it because of an unwillingness to speak: if cookbooks claim to be vehicles of cultural knowledge, then their work remains incomplete because of the vast body of knowledge that they will not describe. It is perhaps the case that a cookbook is unable to speak about the less attractive aspects of the history and culture of the regions they

depict. However, cookbooks claim that they will grant a reader a measure of cultural expertise. Although they purport to grant cultural access, cookbooks are organized as an array of strategic silences, tactical omissions that limit that mastery to a flowery, celebratory rendition of history that scours cultures clean of unsavory taint.

CHAPTER 3: “AND THERE’S ONLY MY IMAGINATION WHERE OUR HISTORY SHOULD BE”

Memoir cookbooks, childhood memory, and migratory trauma

Imagination, like memory, can transform lies to truths.

— Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*

“Most days, Cuba is kind of dead to me. But every once in a while a wave of longing will hit me and it’s all I can do not to hijack a plane to Havana or something...Every day Cuba fades a little more inside my, my grandmother fades a little more inside me,” Pilar laments in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban* (137-8). This lament is the principle ingredient of the urge that compels diasporic writers to gather their recollections into memoir cookbooks: this urge couples an overpowering desire for return with the anxiety of irrecoverable loss. However, as the title of this chapter suggests, memoir cookbooks redraw the cartographies of both personal and political history as they perform the work of mapping the past. This means that the books are actually less committed to the task of recording and transmitting than they are to rewriting and revising: they bridge that gap that separates the living from the lost, what happened from what should have been, and home from exile. It would be facile to state that these cookbooks “take liberties with” the historical record, or that they “lie” or perpetuate “falsehoods,” or even that they provide proof positive of the subjective nature of historiography. Instead, the books perform their tasks in accordance with particular imperatives that serve the author’s need for recuperation and repatriation.⁹³

In this chapter, I interrogate *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen*, a memoir cookbook written by Mary Urrutia Randelman and Joan Schwartz. I read this cookbook within the context of diasporic exile as framed by Reinaldo Arenas' *Before Night Falls*, a memoir recording the life and death of an exiled gay Cuban poet, author, and activist, and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, a novel that straddles the divisions of past and present here and home in an exploration of the Cuban diaspora in the United States. All three texts have been written by bodies in transit—citizens of the diaspora who write to recover belonging (as in the case of Mary Arrutia Randelman) interrogate hybrid identities (as in the case of *Dreaming in Cuban*) or to express despair in exile (as in the case of Reinaldo Arenas). I argue that, similarly to the previous chapter, the figuration of the child constitutes a fertile ground used by both authors to frame a critique of the nation. However, in this chapter, the figurations of children and childhood are deployed to reclaim citizenship. They enable the staging of a recovery of their belonging to a nation that has ejected them from the body politic for reasons of belonging to the wrong class (Randelman) and practicing the wrong sexuality (Arenas).⁹⁴ The difference between the two texts is more than just a difference of genre or tone. If Randelman's memoir frames both the possibility of recovery and the reunification of the body with a state that no longer exists, then Arenas' memoir frames a demand for repatriation that is ultimately frustrated by the isolation of exile. His is a despair outlined in its starkest, darkest terms, and his book lays bare an inconsolable loss that has been considerably sharpened by distance, cultural attenuation and political disappointment. His memoir and the body of his fictional and poetic works exhibit the outrage and frustration that

Randelman's text must avoid because she seeks to reconstruct a lost Cuba by laying a table comprised of her favorite foods. García's novel, on the other hand, presents a wide-ranging exploration of all these themes, engaging food tropes to explore issues of belonging and exile.⁹⁵

Cuban cookbook writing, novel writing, and memoir writing present ideal opportunities to analyze textual formation of the nation when these works are written in exile. Similarly to Indian cookbooks (particularly those written by Madhur Jaffrey) Cuban culinary autobiographies are relatively abundant and usually allude to or indirectly reference political conditions that bring Cuban exiles to the US. In comparison, Caribbean cookbooks tend to be pan-Caribbean in nature, conflating the entirety of the Caribbean into one set of culinary mannerisms that do not belong to a single nation.⁹⁶ In this way, these works imagine the entirety of the Caribbean a single nation, with its individual islands disappearing and reappearing within the shadow of an invisible template. This tendency may explain the dearth of Caribbean cookbook memoirs—works of this type are not nearly as widely available as Cuban cookbooks and culinary autobiographies. Cuba's distinct national flavor (as it is depicted by Cuban expatriates) perhaps owes to the same cultural admixture that produces the Caribbean and, as Randelman's text suggests, it embraces these differences along with other cultural influences. For her, Cuba is indeed connected to other nations in the same way that other Caribbean islands and the larger framework of Caribbean culture are connected to global cultural paradigms and influences, but Randelman and Arenas have a vested stake in producing a counterculture that resists the political pressures that thrust them into exile.⁹⁷

These works also may reveal the blind spot in American dealings with exiles, one that opens the INS to charges of racism and preferential treatment. In *Brother, I'm Dying*, Edwidge Danticat laments the treatment of Haitian exiles (sent home to risk death at the hands of hostile political factions, detained in deplorable conditions, secluded from family and legal assistance) and questions the warm welcome that Cuban expatriates can expect. She frames her questions in terms of race—black Haitians can expect to be treated in an offhand manner, while their lighter Cuban cousins can advance successful pleas for asylum. It may be the case that the visibility and coherence of the Cuban autobiographical cookbook (and the comparable lack of Haitian cookbooks and culinary memoirs) may indeed be the product of the political visibility and economic privilege of the body of Cuban expatriates in the US.⁹⁸

Similarly to the rest of the Caribbean, Cuba resists easy categorizations: it is of the Caribbean, and yet stands apart, resisting and yet a part of the “meta-archipelago” of Benítez-Rojo’s imagination (4). It occupies a differentiated place in the Caribbean: it is of the islands and shares their turbulent cultural past; yet its communist governance and its fierce, clear assertions of its own distinct cultural character and history set it apart from the rest of the islands. At the time of this writing, it is not a member of CARICOM. Its experiences do not negate the “Caribbeanness” of the Cuban cultural experience; these experiences instead “differentiate it from other forms of experiencing the Caribbean” (186).⁹⁹ This chapter, however, is less interested in the connection between Cuba and the other Caribbean islands than it is in the relations between Cuba and the US, and the diaspora born of the flight of exiles from a revolutionary communist state.

Maria Urrutia-Randelman's *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen* principally conforms to the model of an autobiographical cookbook, the second of the three categories outlined by Tracy Mary Kelly. At 352 pages, it is divided into categories based both on each section's culinary category and the location of the memories that Urrutia-Randelman associates with the ingredients and recipes she catalogues in each section. However, each chapter also features a lengthy description of the author's life in the locations that are the site of her gustatory memories. In this way, the text also includes segments that resemble the culinary memoir—food is the principal theme gathering these memories. The text therefore is a hybrid of two culinary autobiographical forms.

The cookbook describes Cuba in idyllic terms. Cuba is “the magical island where [she] was born.” It is “a paradise, a place of dazzling light, tropical breezes, and starry nights” (Randelman xi). Cuba is less an island, a nation, a political unit, or even a community, than it is an inchoate sensation. Its magic is dispersed across the world in evocative fragments: “in a garden in Paris, on a boulevard in Barcelona, in the aroma of chestnuts on New York's Fifth Avenue” (Randelman xi). These function for her in the same way that the drenched crumbs of the madeleine function for Proust—they arouse bright bursts of nostalgia that erupt from small, everyday things that would otherwise go unnoticed or unremarked. Unlike Proust, however, the author recognizes the source of the magic as herself—the magic is not in the object. It “lives in [her]. It is [her] love for Cuba, never to be forgotten, deep, indescribable” (xi). If the magic resides in the author and does not reside in an outside source, then it remains portable as a lens through which she can view particularly resonant

experiences. It enables the formulation of a record that the author can compile, gather and keep. Randelman's book thus provides an exemplar of the memoir cookbook form because it demonstrates the mechanisms by which historiographies based in food practices reenact, distort, reform and revise identity and the nation.¹⁰⁰

However, Randelman's memoir draws strict distinctions between its tasks of cultural recovery and historiography, engaging in the former and resisting the latter. Like many regional cookbooks, it presents recipes as synecdochic of cultural practice. However, Randelman's recollections in the Introduction draw out the logic of the synecdoche even further. Not only does each recipe provide a fragment of cultural practice, but the entirety of the island collapses both geographically and temporally into the ten summers that she spent at various locations while she lived there. These are further collapsed into a landscape that is rendered in snapshots: each section of the text profiles a space that can be rendered as a sepia-toned photo with a caption. The narrative of the Introduction serializes impressions that the author strings together into a tour down Havana's most famous boulevards, into its restaurants, cafés, and residential neighborhoods. Because she is still a child, her perceptions perfect their subject:

[I]t possessed a kind of mythic beauty, with its broad, tree-lined and monuments standing brilliant in the sunlight. Its air was clear and bright, smelling of the sea. Its sounds were joyful, a mixture of automobile horns, trolley-car bells, the calls of lottery vendors and snack vendors, the clink of coffee cups in the sidewalk cafes, and the music of street bands. (Randelman xi)

The author teases this perfection out into a series of stops along a tour through Havana on a sunny summer day after being released from her boarding school. Her Aunt Titi (young, unmarried, stylish) crowds her Jeep with laughing nieces and nephews who accompany her on a shopping trip through downtown Havana. The author is outfitted for new sandals, and then rewarded with ice cream and a “mile-long hot dog.” She shops for American Ginny dolls at the F.W. Woolworth’s and eats chicken salad sandwiches on “American bread.” These are followed by “gooey banana splits.” When she and her family approach the counter, other diners rise to make room, “for Cubans would never be impolite to a woman with children” (Randelman xi-xii). Once the children retire to watch American television programs, the adults would amuse themselves in the afternoon and evening as they enjoyed cocktails and coffee at a café or enjoyed private parties, nightclubs or restaurants (Randelman xii). This single day comes to characterize what it is to be Cuban: this day is every day, and provides encounter after encounter with the staple experiences that confront all dimensions of Cuban life.

This serialization serves as the organizational principle that governs the arrangement of the book. Randelman organizes the content using the same convention that most cookbooks use: foods are grouped according to type. Randelman’s main categories follow the organization of a standard multi-course family meal. She begins with appetizers, and then moves to soups and stews, and then to meat- and fish-based main dishes, followed by rice, beans, and eggs. The only category that might seem out of order is the section cataloging salads, but this category also contains recipes that might serve as side dishes (such as the *yuca con mojo* [yuca with garlic sauce]

that typically accompanies pork dishes and is found on page 272) or salads that stands as main dishes in their own right (such as the *ensalada de arroz con pollo* [chicken and yellow rice salad] on page 258). The book then ends with a section of desserts followed by a section of drinks and cocktails. These large sections are then divided into groups of recipes based on similarities: for example the section of meat dishes groups pork, beef, and chicken dishes into discrete sections that transition easily from type to type. These transitions seem governed by resonances. The recipe for spicy garlic shrimp on page 186 relates to the garlic shrimp recipe on the following page, which relates to the shrimp in creamy coriander sauce on the page after that, which relates to the crab in creole sauce on the page after that, which relates to the crab and cornmeal stew on the page after that (Randelman 186-93).

While the arrangement of these sections loosely follows the procession of dishes that a diner would enjoy—appetizer, main dish, dessert—the structure of resonance constitutes the defining structure of the arrangement of recipes in the text, relating recipes one to another as well as to the past.¹⁰¹ In other words, she dresses each major ingredient in the garb of her memories. For these, the author provides a site that gathers the collection of recipes into a series of evocative experiences that connect the author to a specific place that was the setting of her childhood memories, and provides sepia-toned photos as a means of sharpening associations. For example, meats remind her of her times her mother spent at her grandmother's cattle ranch, while soups remind the author of her summers at La Majagua tobacco ranch, a tobacco plantation owned by her uncle, José Antonio Besu. The metonymic relationship that she establishes between soups and the tobacco plantation derives not

just from the fact that she ate there the meals that she catalogues in the section, but also from the idea that soups and stews present the ideal solution to the problem of presenting a substantive meal to a large group of people. Cooks “rely on hearty soups” thick with beans and plantains, and “robust stews...perfect for the worker’s lunches...what set Majagua’s stews apart from the usual beef or vegetable stew was that they were complete meals in themselves, needing no accompaniments” (Randelman 73). The plantation is represented as relatively self-sufficient—the fare is simple in nature in comparison to the appetizers and salads enjoyed in Aunt Titi’s company, and feature meats grown and hunted on the grounds along with homemade cheeses and fresh milk taken from the herd of dairy cows that supplies the family and staff. Randelman depicts the tobacco ranch as an idyllic place, “a place of abundance, generosity, and the riches of nature. It is no wonder that I remember it as a garden of Eden” (77).

If the chapters provide cultural cross-sections that allow for singular, particularized characterizations of the various facets of Cuban culture, then 1950s Havana becomes the cultural crossroads that allows the author to collect her memories in a single space in the Introduction. It is a cosmopolitan and comfortable place of leisure. American influences come easily with Italian, Spanish, French, and local fare. Just before describing a meal at Woolworth’s (a chicken sandwich and a banana split), the author describes the fare served at El Frascati, a restaurant in the Prado: it is “known for its Italian antipasto and its Cuban *yemas en Marsala*, a dessert rich with custard and Marsala wine” (Randelman xiii). Hollywood actors, “international glitterati,” and homegrown artists and musicians define the cultural

landscape and spread its influences to foreign shores. The Riviera Theater and the Sociedad pro Arte feature opera, musical, ballet and symphony orchestral performances; meanwhile, the Afro-Cuban beat that moves the city shapes the musical styles of Dizzy Gillespie, Xavier Cugat and Carmen Miranda, and is exported by Celia Cruz (Randelman xiii-xiv). From its food to its music and architecture, Havana embodies the cosmopolitan city where influences from other places and times converse freely and without dissonance or friction.

Randelman's cookbook negotiates the possible challenges to cultural authenticity in a manner that is as ambivalent as its negotiations of nationality and exile. Her descriptions of the cultural landscape that she left include the influence of American culture on everyday Cuban life—and in fact embrace them by placing American(ized) recipes on same footing as traditional Cuban favorites. She describes the F.W. Woolworth's with its "American bread" and banana splits, hot dogs, and American Ginny dolls that were the object of her desire (xiii). Her evening television habits include American programming (xiv). Her young, unmarried, Americanized aunt drives a new yellow convertible and, as she drives Randelman and her brothers to the Yacht, her "long scarf [flies] in the breeze à la Grace Kelly" (Randelman 12). And her Americanized aunt maps a culinary landscape that includes ham and fish croquettes, orange cake, and chicken salad (38-41, 303-4, 256-7).

The author can achieve this feat by incorporating American influences as an additional feature of continuing creolization, locating the admixture in the commercial enterprise of the department store rather than that of the sugar plantation.¹⁰² This shift defuses the trope, mitigating its complicity in entrapping

Cuban economic interests in ways that do not directly serve the Cuban people.¹⁰³

Randleman describes Cuban culinary culture as creolized in benign ways, “an amalgam of tropical and European elements” (1). She goes on to dissect the particulars of the creolized culinary culture that she enjoyed while living in Cuba, describing it in terms that allow the culinary culture to act as a historical record. She begins with a foundation comprised of indigenous culinary habits: Taino and Siboney Indians contribute a starchy base of “white sweet potatoes, squash, corn and yucca.” African slaves adopt these foods, while Spanish inhabitants contribute “saffron, rice, beans,” and fragrant simmering sauces. Indian and Chinese contributions comprise the final influences that Randleman details in this section (1-2). Notably, she breaks the paragraph here, then continues to describe the culinary incursions of “[c]ream and béchamel sauces, pilafs, and dishes prepared *a la Milanese*,” and of “American cooking of the 1950s” (2). This means that Randleman sets a distinction between (pre-)colonial and contemporary influences, segregating them into two separate sections that achieve the single effect of blurring wave after wave of transitions of power into a series of infusions and inflections that characterize Cuban cuisine. Randleman blurs the sharp distinctions that would segregate one food culture from the other by outlining the manner in which transnational commerce produces a blending of influences.¹⁰⁴

If, as Appiah notes, cosmopolitanism is more a sentiment than an ideology (Appiah 92) then the creolized space of Havana is the actualization of cosmopolitan ideals—Havana’s cultural admixture is cosmopolitanism at work. This means that, as she works to reconstruct 1950s Havana as a cosmopolitan, creolized space,

Randelman also endeavors to reconstruct her identity as a cosmopolitan rather than an exile or even an expatriate. However, to speak of cosmopolitanism simply as a “feeling” and creolization simply as a “process” simplifies the relationship between the concepts and downplays their dynamism.

At first blush, the conjunction between creolization and cosmopolitanism seems to invite consideration of Aihwa Ong’s ideas of flexible citizenship. She defines flexible citizenship in the following terms:

“Flexible citizenship” refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions. In their quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, subjects emphasize, and are regulated by, practices favoring flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes. These logics and practices are produced within particular structures of meaning about family, gender, nationality, class mobility, and social power. (6)

This idea might apply to the wealth and privilege that allow the characters in such works as Cristina Garcia’s *Dreaming in Cuban* to return to Cuba and move between the two nations, and it invites consideration of how their displacement complicates their identity as it is structured by their access to capital.

Drawing this particular comparison troubles the idea of flexible citizenship in two crucial ways. Ong’s definition of flexible citizenship depends heavily on the movement of global capital and upon the effect of this movement upon citizens who can move (or move this capital) with relative ease between nations, and does not treat

the other forces that create diasporas; my argument is principally concerned with how these other forces press people into troubled relationships with the states they left and the states in which they now live. These relationships only superficially resemble flexible citizenship, but they lack the implicit control and freedom of self-determination that Ong's definition implies. Although she troubles the manner in which Asian-Americans can lay claim to identity because they continue to be "trapped by an American ideology that limits the moral claims to social legitimacy of nonwhites," (a refraction of Ronald Takaki's argument) she still delineates a specific global subject that typifies the flexible citizen. Ong's definition does not directly treat the manner in which the politics of abjection thrust people into ambivalent relationships between nations. In this way, both Randelman and Arenas renegotiate their citizenship in ways that leverage, and then overturn or make use of their states of abjection.

However, no matter what her cosmopolitics, Randelman offers a cosmopolitan, creolized space to mount a critique of Cuban nationalism under the Castro regime. Her account leverages both concepts differently (although with some slippage between them) to achieve the singular effect of positing a difference that resists the homogenizing brutality of the Castro's nationalism. She presents a means of countering the cultural stagnation that is the implicit opposite of pre-Castro Havana.

Randelman defines Cuban cooking in terms of her own experiences in Cuba, and does not offer a cultural record that can simply reproduce cultural mannerisms. Even as she offers the "classic Cuban beef dish," *ropa vieja* (Old Clothes, or steak

hash in tomato sauce [121-122]) she includes dishes such as *vichyssoise de yuca* (yuca vichyssoise) where “the only thing about it that is Cuban is the yuca [and perhaps the optional dashes of Tobasco sauce that appear constantly in Cuban cooking and eating]. But cold potato soup was popular in Cuba, and this recipe substitutes our famous tuber for the potato” (Randleman 99). Randleman attempts to assemble a faithful record of what she ate, and seems less interested in collecting dishes that offer archetypical Cuban flavors. In other words, Americanized dishes of the 1950’s can be classified as products of the Cuban kitchen because they fed Randleman and her family in that place, at that time. For example, the category of salads that Randleman presents most closely aligns with contemporary American notion of salads as molded objects imprisoning fruit, meat, or vegetables. She writes:

In the Cuba of my childhood, 1950’s popular American cooking, leaning heavily toward canned fruits and vegetables, mayonnaise, and cream cheese, set the standard. “Salad” meant chicken, fish or ham salad dressed with mayonnaise and molded. “Fruit salad” meant canned fruit cocktail, perhaps mixed with fresh fruits and cream cheese and mayonnaise and decoratively molded.

Except for Basque Tossed Salad, combinations of tossed greens were unusual, and lettuce leaves were more often found lining a serving platter containing rich chicken or seafood molds. (Randleman 241)

For some palates, these salads may seem a ridiculous artifact of what some might describe as a regrettable time in American cuisine.¹⁰⁵ But these dishes serve as the substrate in which cultures can easily mix. *Ensalada de camarones, fruta, bomba, y*

aguacate (shrimp, papaya, and avocado salad) stands as an exemplary recipe that combines foreign and local influences: “[t]his beautifully composed salad is not traditionally Cuban, although all the ingredients are” (Randelman 260). These recipes function similarly to the accounts of Randelman’s childhood habits—they demonstrate that the space of her youth offered an easy and delightful blend of American, European, and Cuban cultural influences. Her cookbook unifies the spaces of her past and present in ways that allow her to lay claim to an identity that straddles borders both within the country (Cuba is already a transnational, cosmopolitan space) and outside it (she is a Cuban abroad). By reclaiming Cuba in ways that render its nationalism in ambivalent terms, she can rewrite herself and her fellow expatriates as transnational citizens rather than exiles.

The author depicts the landscape itself in rich, vibrant language that underscores an unambivalent beauty, suggesting that the intensity of these sensory impressions belongs wholly to Cuba. While her entire account is painted in bright colors and vivid effects, her descriptions of *la fuente de la India* and Havana’s sunsets are the most florid in the section. The fountain near the capitol building features “Neptune [sitting] with his dolphins, surrounded by spray that seemed to crystallize in the sunlight” (Randelman xii). Later, as the bright afternoon sun sets, it “provid[es] Havana’s most stunning visual effect”:

The magnificent sunsets never disappointed, with their fiery changing colors and, finally, the gently fading light, signaling that evening had come and soon the city would burst into fantastic color. Luminous fountains that flowed

crystal clear all day magically splashed red, yellow, blue, and orange under colored lights at night. (Randelman xiv)

In these accounts, Cuba's power transubstantiates light and water, transmogrifying them into crystal. Fiery colors burst and fade, and sheets of water assume impossible colors. The magic of these moments is the splendor of visual effects that the author suggests are impossible to replicate in their entirety anywhere else.

These accounts also feature magical alterations of time and space. The use of crystals and crystallization in her descriptions of fountains evoke the idea of beauty preserved. They become visual fragments signifying the defiance of the nostalgia that creates them: time cannot pass, space will not change; therefore loss will never inflict pain. Manipulation of space and time bring disparate influences into easy exchange with one another. The modern and the neo-classical converge in the spaces of residential neighborhoods whose architecture had been shaped for an entire century by the School of Beaux Arts in Paris (the Havana School of Architecture had diligently followed its teaching for almost 100 years) but that now feature "sleek modern homes in the Bauhaus style" (Randelman xiv). The author finds echoes of these residential spaces in Rome, Paris, and Madrid. This means that the everywhere of Havana (Madrid, Rome, Paris, itself) can indeed be found everywhere else, and throughout time. However, Cuba brings this everywhere into a single space—and it is the only localized everywhere that can be home.

The author admits that her visions are those of a child: uncomplicated, simple, idealized. As such, they have no shades—only tints and hues. The tobacco plantation's staff lives a life organized around the labor needed to produce the crop.

The meals that they ate appear in the section of recipes for soups and stews, but the workers' bodies and the specificity of their everyday lives disappear into the backdrop of a life of leisure enjoyed by the privileged family that owns and manages the plantation. A child would perhaps notice these people, but would actually be more focused on the adventure of exploring the plantation on horseback (Randelman 73). The tobacco plantation undergoes revisions that include or omit details that allow the author to render it in perfected terms.

The more prominent subject of this revision is *el Caballero de Paris* (the Gentleman from Paris) “a long-haired, bearded eccentric dressed in a flowing robe...[who] wandered the streets [of Havana] constantly” and appears in the Introduction. The author describes her previous fear of him as “unfounded” and “comical, as we fled from the gardens and crouched on the floor of the car whenever he came near. Anyone who was a child in the early 1950s remembers him with a grin” (Randelman xiv). A frightening apparition of mysterious origin—of foreign extraction, possibly homeless, possibly dirty, possibly dangerously insane—becomes merely an oddity, a colorful character in the pageant. The fear of beating, abduction or molestation becomes “unfounded.” His terrifying aspect is rendered in harmless tones, and she can smile as she remembers him and share that smile with any childhood friend that she happens to meet.¹⁰⁶

As her memories paint the previously terrifying Gentleman from Paris as a harmless eccentric, the author's childhood recollection allows her a refuge from the political difficulties that result in her exile. She writes herself as lacking the political awareness to formulate a nuanced response to the movement of Cubans from Havana

to Miami. This lack of nuance becomes the principle agent of omission that flavors the book's aesthetic.

As children in prosperous, postwar Cuba, we had inhabited a very special world. We had lived a joyous, hopeful, and privileged life, but there was a price to be paid for our privilege...Had I remained in Cuba longer than the first ten years of my life, no doubt I would have had a political point of view, but I left with a child's perceptions and memories, and I treasure them.

(Randelman xvii)

She accepts the limited vantage point of her childhood perceptions, and perhaps even derives a certain pleasure that those memories are in fact enhanced by these limitations.

This means that the movement from citizen of the state to citizen of the diaspora assumes the structure of trauma: it happens as a series of events that convey their import only after the fact. The exile itself is an unexpected stop added to a busy schedule one summer day, and is rendered in terms that depict it as a pleasant visit that stretches beyond its proper term. The departure from Havana is described as stripped of its political context: a line of people wait at the American Embassy in Havana to get papers to travel to the United States, and this line piques the interest of a curious child. Randelman "smile[s] at the prospect of a great adventure, not knowing it would alter drastically the course of [her family's] lives" (Randelman xv). Until she begins school, she sees the trip in terms of its temporariness—"[i]t seemed like a delightful vacation and quite temporary" (Randelman xv). It isn't until she begins school that she recognizes herself as a citizen of the diaspora. She pleads with

her parents “to be taken back to Cuba,” to “return to [their] home” (Randelman xv). In response, her mother advises her to adapt to her exile: “Never look back... Sometimes a broken toy can’t be put together again” (Randelman xv). It is unclear whether her mother speaks of the political situation, the inability to reassume a position of privilege in Cuba, or the impossibility of return.¹⁰⁷

The broken toy might simply trope the fundamental loss of citizenship that creates the condition of exile. The “loss of [their] country” is the heaviest burden, heavier than “hardship, separation from loved ones, and difficult adjustment to a strange new place” (Randelman xvii). By placing this loss in the third person, Randelman’s account downplays the depth of the loss that she, her family and other exiles like them feel, and that her collection of recipes seeks to assuage—contrary to the exile and flight in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Her discomfiture and complaining is a rumor that she hears from her mother, secondhand information that seems to describe someone else. The need to return home, balanced against the impossibility of return, results in a condition that demands a redress that is perpetually withheld:

[Their exile is] a form of banishment. It is a severing from one’s homeland, a rift between here and there, a longing unsoothed, the terrible sense of unbelonging... For Cubans today, both on and off the island, a profound sense of exile and alienation persists. One doesn’t ever feel fully at home in Havana or Miami, Madrid or Mexico City. New lexicons have evolved inside and outside Cuba that reflect starkly different realities. Invariably, something or someone is missing from the picture. (Garcia, cited in Vickroy 112)

It is this loss and distance that compels the composition of the cookbook, a displacement that Carol Bardenstein suggests is a necessary component of how cookbook memoirs shape the past. The need for reconciliation created by the unbridgeable gap between here and there, past and present impel writers to draft cookbooks that preserve and communicate cultural mannerisms in an effort to recover the unrecoverable. The histories that they write (and I use this term in its looser sense) contort and control the histories that they remember in ways that service this need for reconciliation. This is perhaps the distinction that segregates memoir cookbooks from other regional cookbooks: they proffer individual experience rather than “objective” facts as the historical/political/geographic foundation from which they launch their projects. The history (like Randelman’s magic) resides within the self, shifting historical methods and the origins of authority.

Randelman’s exchange with her mother reveals two ambivalent definitions of diasporic citizenship: one defined by adoption of a different citizenship and that accepts that there is no space to which the body might return; and the other defined by an insistent longing.¹⁰⁸ Randelman’s formulation of diasporic exile reinforces the notion of cultural citizenship as a performative act.¹⁰⁹ A Cuban-American can lay claim to cultural belonging through the act of cooking and eating—the processes of everyday life. This is perhaps why the cookbook form is ideal for portraying the past that Randelman seeks to recover by compiling her favorite recipes and connecting them to specific locales and experiences. Because the author’s losses remain in the realm of the aesthetic, the cookbook perhaps constitutes the most meaningful form of their recovery. It isn’t just a catalogue of recipes, nor is it narrative. The book is an

invitation that the author extends to her audience, a means of making the madeliene's evocation a portable, repeatable act by linking recipes to specific personal, historical moments. It allows its authors to create a space that draws both sides of the hyphen into easy exchange. She is stranded in both place and time, and the yearning for recovery and transmission craft the cookbook and allow her to frame its contents in the terms of her own remembrances. In a fashion similar to other cookbook memoir writers, "she situates her engagement with food and cookbook-writing both as a direct result of the experience of being in exile and as the "fruit of nostalgic longing" for the food of a world from which she, like the others from whom she came to collect recipes, had been absented" (Bardenstein 354). She writes the book as a means of communicating, not the reality of Cuba, but the fantasy of it to her brother Calixto, who was born in exile and never knew the Cuba that the author had shared with her other siblings.¹¹⁰ She also crafts this elaborate fantasy for the nieces, nephews, cousins and other Cuban-American children whom she wishes to teach the "traditions of Cuban life and food" so that they might remain "alive" (Randelman xvii). This act does not merely seek to preserve Cuban culinary customs, it also grants Cuban-Americans ingress into a remembered past that they would otherwise never know. The cookbook form here serves as a new configuration of memory, one that is created by recollections aroused by the experience of "radical displacement of exile" (Bardenstien 355). The trauma of separation from the body of the nation-state prompts Randelman to embark upon the project of reassembling Cuba from the fragments of the practice of daily living that structured her childhood on the island.¹¹¹ In this case, food practices and recipe collecting intersect, not just with gender, class,

and ethnic affiliation, but also with political affiliation, childhood longing, cosmopolitanism, and globality, and the use of the fluidity of food practices as a means of historiography.

However, this creates an imagined community of repatriated Cubans who return to a utopian vision of Cuba as it once never was—they move from being citizens of nowhere (who live in exile) to being citizens of nowhere (who live, at least temporarily, in a space that does not exist). In this way, they challenge the shape of the nation. They create a space of cultural belonging by revising economic and political structures to accommodate a class that is disenfranchised by the Castro regime. Randelman invokes a crucial component of the Cuban-American experience, and that is the desire for return and repatriation. This prompts the memoir form that shapes the works that I study in this chapter. Renaldo Arenas' work builds on this desire, whereas Randelman's text is predicated by it. Laurie Vickroy writes:

The Cuban situation of trauma and exile is a unique one. Mark Falcoff observes, "While all the revolutions of modern history have produced sizable exile communities, in no other case has the diaspora been so proportionately large, so well organized, so geographically concentrated and so physically proximate to its country of origin. The result is a cultural hybrid—a community that is functionally American, but dwells spiritually in a cloud of imminence." Imminence refers here to many Cubans' sense that return will eventually be possible. (111)

Randelman remains in this mode of thought as she writes. She will not accept the broken toy. While the repatriation and return of the body remains an impossibility,

gustatory repatriation allows Cuban-Americans to return. A facet of this repatriation, however, relies on multiple valences of hybridity: American cultural influences, acknowledgement of Spanish and French influences, as well as something uniquely Cuban. However, the author recognizes that the Cuba she knew as a child and that she frames in recipes no longer exists and possibly never did—it is “the fantasy of Cuba” that she had experienced as a girl (Randelman xvii). The “true picture of the country [she] left in 1958” is an image of a space devoid of political exigency, untouched by time, and characterized by constant pleasure (Randelman 1). Randelman remains deeply invested in the project, not in spite of these caveats, but perhaps because of them.

This means that the Cuba that Randelman depicts in her book conforms to the Foucaultian concept of a utopian space.¹¹² It is perfect, dreamlike, and tailored to please. It is shaped to offer nothing that an émigré could not love. It eases nostalgia even as it sharpens desire. It opposes the heterotopias of downtown Havana and the American Embassy that Randelman left in 1958 because it only hints at what she could not understand, and either excises or revises that which she might find unfavorable or difficult to include. The Cuba of Randelman’s imagination exists in “a kind of void” inside which she arranges individuals and objects: an aunt, a Jeep, a fountain, F.W. Woolworth’s, restaurants, buildings, boulevards, the Gentleman from Paris. These she colors with bright sunlight, vivid sunsets, and lit fountains.¹¹³ Her recipes offer easy combinations of Cuban, American, and European influences, where nothing tastes cloying or dissonant. Her account inclines toward completeness in the same fashion that any scale model of a city or country inclines toward completeness,

but both the vehicle and her child's memory impose limitations that the model cannot accommodate. If she asks her Cuban-American readership to return to Cuba with her via this mechanism, then the space they seek to occupy is no space at all.

The cookbook itself functions differently if we view it, not as a means of creating or recreating a particular space, but as a method by which the author negotiates her own citizenship and that of her readership. If we view the text as a vector by which Randelman determines her cultural (dis)placement, then the book is not a utopian space, but instead functions similarly to a Foucaultian mirror through which the author views herself, her family and, by extension, the Cuban-American community in which she finds herself.¹¹⁴ The Cuba that she defines in the text by cataloguing recipes and associating them with specific experiences that allow the reader to overdetermine the recipes as signifying a "true picture of" Cuba presents an image toward which she yearns, as her placement on American soil exerts its own inescapable gravity. This "mixed, joint experience" that constitutes both utopia and heterotopia reveals the author to her readership and perhaps to herself (as all catalogues of desire do). It allows her to see herself as Cuban because she performs Cuban identity in each meal. She remains connected to her nation of origin even as she lives in exile. However, it complicates her placement in the reality that she inhabits by granting her connection and belonging through the preservation of culture, even as it underscores loss, distance, and the unrecoverable elements that fall away when people permanently leave or are forced out of the spaces that they claim as sources of identity.

Poisons and Sweets: Food Images in Dreaming in Cuban

Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* provides a means of mediating between the various subject positions that this chapter has outlined above. The book follows the movements of four female characters united by blood but tied to Cuba in ways that are much less clear. The narrative switches between first-person when Pilar narrates and third-person when she does not, and contains letters written by her grandmother to her first love. The geographic separation and political differences between the Pilar's mother Lourdes and her grandmother Celia string Pilar between countries, between nationalities, and between familial factions. The novel opens with Celia peering vigilantly across the water, guarding Cuba against an impending American invasion. Meanwhile, Lourdes has immigrated to the US and owns her own successful bakery that is itself a tribute to US capitalism. Her daughter—born in the US to a pair of Cuban expatriates—longs for Cuba, and undertakes her own quest for belonging. Meanwhile, Pilar's aunt Felicia is dangerously insane: dead husbands, maimed men, neglected children and suicide attempts litter her personal history.

Cuban practices food in the novel do connect to ritual, if not to cultural authenticity—particularly when Felicia cooks. A noteworthy example of a ritual that overlaps with authentic food practices is the herbal remedy in which Pilar steps herself to find clarity; she must obey the recipe she is given, preparing the bath by sprinkling herbs into running water (201-3). However, this connection to ritual does not mean that Cuban cooking (especially when Felicia is in the kitchen) represents unambivalent cultural holism. Gestures of kindness expressed through food are treated with skepticism. For example, Felicia refuses to eat the “greasy meats that

slide on wax paper” that her mother brings her after she maims her husband. Perhaps it is lack of appetite, but she alludes to a much more crucial reason why she cannot eat: she also cannot speak, her tongue tied by grief that swells in her dreams (83).¹¹⁵ For Ivanito, eating is an equally powerful expression of solidarity. He refuses food that Celia brings him: he does not want to betray Felicia (87). Meanwhile, Felicia’s delicious meals hide a malice that she unleashes in destructive moments prompted by her delusions and obsessions. It is while frying plantains that she drops a rag into the oil, walks over to a napping husband who beats her and infects her with a variety of sexually-transmitted diseases, lights the rag with a match, and then drops it on his face. “Hugo awoke and saw his wife standing over him like a goddess with a fiery ball in her hand...She laughs when she recalls her husband’s screams, the way he bolted out the door, his head a flaming torch” (82). The odor of the cooking plantains, the sulfur of the match, and then her husband’s cooking face and hands mix to create an olfactory record of a moment of retribution and self-emancipation from a brutal, unfaithful spouse (82).

Similarly to the preparation of the plantains and the cooking of her husband’s flesh, other meals that Felicia prepares are equally delicious, equally deadly, and equally marked by her madness. The ritual preparation of the coconut ice cream creates a delicious treat that she shares with her son. The recipe for preparing them begins with the acquisition of the ingredients:

There’s a bin full of coconuts at the bodega. Felicia trades in her remaining food coupons for every last one...Then they go door to door, hunting for more coconuts...At home, his mother removes her tunic and slippers. She takes a

hammer and rusty chisel and shatters each coconut, scraping the blinding white, perfumed flesh from the shells. Ivanito helps her blend the coconut with egg yolks, vanilla, condensed milk, sugar, cornstarch, and salt, and holds the empty tin vegetable-oil containers while she fills them with the mixture.

Together they arrange them in the freezer. (84-5)

The ice cream is the product, not of cultural holism or belonging, but of Felicia's rich delusions that express themselves in dietary obsessions. The coconut ice cream is not a one-time treat, nor is it even a dessert enjoyed after every dinner or with every lunch. Felicia and Ivanito eat coconut ice cream everyday, for every meal, for an entire summer, with "star-shaped meringues" made of the egg whites not used to prepare the ice cream. "She serves [them] with the ice cream day after day, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. His mother believes the coconuts will purify them, that the sweet white milk will heal them" (85).

In this instance, diet is indeed ritualized and it feeds the soul. However, to do its work, it must operate with the frame of faulty logic lacking grounding in a sane mind. This pairing of delusional obsession with skillfully turned-out meals soon turns dangerous. Whispering cryptic aphorisms, Felicia pairs her maddened ramblings with a delicious dinner:

Ivanito goes with her to the bodega. This time, they buy a whole chicken, two pounds of rice, onions, green peppers, and all the sweet plantains in the store. His mother cooks an *arroz con pollo* and leaves the plantains warming in the oven for their dinner...Ivanito helps his mother set the table for two...His mother serves him huge portions of chicken and rice, filling his plate twice.

Ivanito eats three of the warm plaintains in brown-sugar syrup and drinks mango juice chilled with ice. His mother speaks to him constantly. (87-8)

The family scene here—a chatty, bubbly mother feeding her son delicious, authentic fare—appears innocuous enough: it is deeply touching and evokes the comforts of home. Dessert—delicious, sweet, the perfect end to a hearty meal—reveals his mother’s full intention: “[Felicia] crushes pink tablets on the last of their ice cream. Hard, bittersweet shards” (89). The delicious meal is intended as the vehicle of a murder-suicide.

Meanwhile, food represented in US contexts constitutes a major vector of cultural belonging in the novel, with distance from the foodstuffs proliferating in the nation of origin constituting the yardstick measuring assimilation. Purveyors of food map the ethnic landscape in New York: recently opened Arab shops line a street in Brooklyn, selling pistachios, figs, grains and dates (García 72-3). The evocative nature of the foods on display and for sale ventures far beyond simple national or cultural identification. A box of dates sparks a contemplative moment for Lourdes as she thinks of “the centuries of fratricide converging on this street corner in Brooklyn” (García 73). This moment reverses the Proustian madeleine—instead of intense personal memories spurred by a spoonful of wet crumbs, the effects of globalism and history collapse into a box of fruit bought by an immigrant woman who strolls down a busy street. As she passes the shops, Lourdes ponders the points of origin of other cultures, but disavows her own. A baker of cupcakes and sticky buns, she “considers herself lucky”:

Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention... She wants no part of Cuba, no part of its wretched carnival floats creaking with lies, no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her. (García 73)

Other vendors selling more exotic wares signify a continued allegiance to distant cultures that recede even further into the distance as cultural difference locks “their passions lying stiff and untranslated in their breasts” (García 73). Meanwhile, she sells “Grand Marnier cakes and napoleons with striped icing and chantilly cream... Sacher tortes... Linzer bars with raspberry jam, éclairs, and marzipan cookies in neon pink. In the summer, there’ll be fresh peach strudel and blueberry tarts. In the fall, pumpkin pies and frosted cupcakes with toothpick turkeys” (García 18).

Food never remains within the realm of nourishment, nor even within the realm of aesthetic pleasure; it consistently bears a heavier freight. Where other immigrants sell foods reminiscent of exotic spaces, Lourdes sells American fare at her Yankee Doodle Bakery. It is no accident that one of Lourdes’ happiest memories is eating roasted peanuts at a ballpark (68). From her baked goods to the edifice itself, the bakery allows Lourdes to channel American capitalism as though it were a form of mysticism. Once she orders the red, white, and blue signs with her name printed on them, she “[feels] a spiritual link to American moguls, to the immortality of men like Irénée du Pont” (García 170). By selling baked goods, Lourdes participates in an idealized America, one in which she fanatically believes. Food is not the object; it is the vehicle by which she can participate in American capitalism, and her bakery becomes the site of Anti-Castro democratic activism. However, this participation

means that Lourdes' employment practices become questionable. She hires Pilar for twenty-five cents per hour after catching her masturbating in the bath; Pilar scoffs, "like I'll get pure pushing her donuts around" (García 27). She also hires and trains Mirabel Navarro, a pretty Puerto Rican girl from the neighborhood, teaching Mirabel how to see food as money ("See. This Florentine alone weights forty-three cents" [García 67])—and then firing her when Mirabel's own capitalist desires move her to steal fifty cents from her employer. The bakery thus constitutes an archetypal immigrant employment experience for both shopkeeper and employee, where induction into American capital culture comes at the cost of exploitation. There is, however, bad faith on both sides of the contract: exploitative employment practices foster theft, in turn fostering distrust and foreclosing the possibility of cross- or even intra-cultural solidarity.¹¹⁶

Lourdes also participates in American food culture with enthusiastic fervor, "convinced that she can fight Communism from behind her bakery counter" (García 136). She imagines her establishment as a chain, "Yankee Doodle bakeries stretching across America to St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, her apple pies and cupcakes on main streets and in suburban shopping malls everywhere" (García 171). The food she sells is hyper-American—it typifies American fare, and furnishes the idealized American table, a table Lourdes brings home to her family:

Mom makes food only people in Ohio eat, like Jell-O molds with miniature marshmallows or recipes she clips from *Family Circle*. And she barbecues anything she can get her hands on. Then we sit around behind the warehouse

and stare at each other with nothing to say. Like this is it? We're living the American dream? (García 137)

This same food appears in Randelman's cookbook, American transplants that participate in the construction of the Cuba. Here, Lourdes brings Main Street, USA, home to her own family in form of recipes in magazines and barbecues behind the house.

If Lourdes loudly proclaims her allegiances with American capitalist democracy through her business and her culinary mannerisms, her fluctuating weight hints at a more ambivalent relationship with nationality. She vacillates between two extremes: emaciated and obese. Lourdes' appetites are intertwined: she eats ravenously, gaining weight, and sexually ravages her husband until he begs her to leave him alone (20-1). Early in the novel, she acquiesces readily to her physical cravings, gaining 118 pounds. Soon after she arrives in New York, her appetite for both sex and food dramatically increase (García 20). Once she arrives in New York, while her father is dying, Lourdes seizes onto American culinary practices with gusto, gorging herself, eager to satisfy her appetites. In this way, food may signify shifting loyalties on multiple levels. After he has died, she then cultivates an anorexia that descends upon her accompanied by sudden abstinence. At first, she dreams "continually of bread, of grainy ryes and pumpernickels, whole wheat and challah in woven straw baskets. They multiplied prodigiously, hung abundantly from the trees, crowded the skies until they were redolent of yeast" (20). Her body becomes bulky, ponderous: "The flesh amassed rapidly on her hips and buttocks, muting the angles of her bones. It collected on her thighs, fusing them above the knees. It hung from her

arms like hammocks” (20). Her body’s bulk does not compromise its agility: “[t]he heavier she got, the more supple her body became. Her legs looped and rotated like an acrobat’s, her neck swiveled with extra ball bearings” (21). However, her weight evaporates once her father dies and she stops eating. Lourdes “welcomes the purity, the hollowness of her empty stomach...She feels transparent, as if the hard lines of her hulking form were disintegrating” (167). Her multiethnic bread dreams yield to a desire for personal purity: “[s]he envisions the muscled walls of her stomach shrinking, contracting, slickly clean from the absence of food and the gallons of springwater she drinks” (167).

Her enthusiasm for sticky buns is replaced by an enthusiasm for over-exercise. She finds food repellent: “She can’t even look at it without her mouth filling with the acrid saliva that precedes vomiting. These days, it’s nearly impossible to endure even her own bakeries—the wormy curves of the buttery croissants, the gluey honey buns with fat pecans trapped like roaches in the cinnamon crevices” (169). The image here is discordant—“fat pecans” and “buttery croissants” sound perfectly lovely, but the croissants and the pecans evoke images of vermin and infestation. Similarly to the food that Felicia prepares, the food imagery here comingles the savory with the unsavory. Meanwhile, Lourdes personal commentary on her weight loss is consistently upbeat. She spends a week’s profits at Lord & Taylor’s on a size six red-and-black Chanel suit with gold buttons—her diminutive size becomes a source of pride and triumph. She understates the personal cost of her new body: her doctor advises her to wean herself back onto food in spite of her desire to remain pure and clean. However, her resolve, the “[w]illpower” to which she attributes her success,

quickly give way to appetite. She sees herself as “a whore, a life-craving whore who fed on her husband’s nauseating clots of yellowish milk” (169). At Thanksgiving, her resolve falls prey to a taste of turkey that opens the floodgates of her yearning. She begins to gorge on the food: creamed spinach, leek-and-mustard pie, sourdough bread, and a rhubarb-apple betty topped with cinnamon crème anglaise that she devours without assistance (172-3). During a trip to the Frick Museum the following day, she stops to buy prodigious amounts of food:

hot dogs (with mustard, relish, sauerkraut, fried onions, and ketchup), two chocolate cream sodas, a potato knish, lamb shish kebabs with more onions, a soft pretzel, and a cup of San Marino cherry ice. Lourdes eats, eats, eats, like a Hindu goddess with eight arms, eats, eats, eats, as if famine were immanent.
(174)

In the space of twenty-four hours, her weight already begins its uptick.

As she inhabits her various bodily states while claiming ideological fixity, the Lourdes views herself as undergoing a constant process of self-reinvention. She is not a slave to her appetites; she just does not bother to master them. She never intends to stop eating—she just does. Instead of imposing it, she succumbs to the discipline of the body. She begins gorging without intention: when the turkey goes “straight to her veins” and “her mouth is moving feverishly, like a terrible furnace” her appetite once again overtakes her (173). Ultimately, in spite of the fixity of Lourdes’ ideology, Pilar characterizes her as “arbitrary and inconsistent,” adding that “[she] always believes she’s right” (140). Her dietary oscillations bear out an inconsistency that she will never verbally admit.

Pilar occupies the same subject position as Mary Urrutia Randelman, emigrating at the age of two, taken to the US at a very young age, her connections to her nationality severed at the hands of adults following ideological principles. Unlike Randelman, however, Pilar remembers the ideological opposition that sunders the home. Childhood does not blur her recollections:

I was sitting in my grandmother's lap, playing with her drop pearl earrings, when my mother told her we were leaving the country. Abuela Celia called her a traitor to the revolution. Mom tried to pull me away but I clung to Abuela and screamed at the top of my lungs. My grandfather came running and said, "Celia, let the girl go. She belongs with Lourdes. That was the last time I saw her. (García 26)

Pilar's own political allegiances are indefinite, but only because she is aware of her own uneasy hybridity. The moment of rupture from her nation is traumatic, characterizes by a tug-of-war between her capitalist mother and her communist grandmother. The sense of being pulled in two different directions persists into Pilar's adolescence, a feeling that Randelman addresses in the composition of her cookbook. Randelman's memories are less distinct, lacking one critical feature: she knows nothing of the politics that drive her parents into exile and change the face of the nation. Pilar, on the other hand, knows of the revolution and knows that her grandmother and mother occupy opposing ideological poles. If Pilar's own position is amorphous, then the quest to define her ideological and cultural position comprises one of her principal tasks in the text. Randelman's narrative lacks this teleology: if the present has been broken by a politics of which she is only dimly aware, learning

about it long after the fact, then the cookbook reconstitutes the past by perfecting it. Pilar can consciously choose among a range of ideological positions. She does not have to select between the black-and-white views to which her mother holds (García 26) and that Celia acts out in her vigils on the beach. Nor does she have to evade political responsiveness. She can instead act with ideological clarity, saying, “I’m afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I’d have to return to New York. I know now it’s where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here. How can I tell my grandmother this?” (236) She reaches an understanding that evades both Randelman and Arenas: she understands that her identity is a complex thing that cannot be resolved by a simple return to a place that she only barely remembers and that is a home that really is not home. Hers is a troubled hybridity. It is this revelation that shapes her actions when she finds Ivanito at the airport, about to enter into exile himself: she hugs him, and lets him go, then lies to Abuela Celia, saying that she could not find him in the crowd.

Edible Earth: Gay Cuban Activist Exile and the Demand for Repatriation

While Randelman attempts to formulate herself as a transnational citizen who desires reconnection with a facet of her identity, and where García outlines an ambivalent cultural space, Arenas openly mourns the loss of his Cuba, even as his accounts decry the sexual and creative oppression that he suffered there. The trajectory here is one that begins with an idealized space, moves into difficult exile, and ends in a state of deep disillusionment, the disappointed hope of the body in exile. If Randelman’s account is one of wistful recollection that hints at the depth of

her loss and her separation from a Cuba that is the subject of her childhood imagination, Arenas' is an account of constant struggle against oppressive forces. However, he too wishes to recover the setting of his childhood and desire reconnection with the very earth into which he dug fingers and toes and which even formed his crib.¹¹⁷ His desire is even more basic, more material than Randelman's. It is as simple as Pilar's desire for her Abuela and Lourdes' unequivocal rejection of Cuban national ideology. However, the yearning here is one that invokes the excremental imagery found in *Graceland*, only it has been transported onto American soil. If Elvis seeks to escape his excremental nature, then Arenas' memoir marks a return to a difficult excremental politics: the exile moves from shit, to shit.

The materiality of Randelman's memories is formed by the acts of cooking and eating; the earth, the sea, and the flesh form the materiality of Arenas' memories. This materiality is a feature of the text from its opening, and asserts itself as a governing trope that determines the structure of the memoir. Arenas' text is arranged in a circular fashion, opening with his death, and ending with a letter sent posthumously to several newspapers. His first memories, however, are of standing naked at the age of two, then bending down to lick the ground (Arenas, 1, 27). This first memory asserts a specific bond with the land, a bond of taste that he can remember as he writes years later, just before his suicide in New York. Similar to Randelman's relationship with Cuba, the foundation of Arenas' relationship with the country that he left is gustatory: he remembers the taste of the country he left, and the memory that lingers on the tongue provokes a powerful nostalgia that compels his pen.

The crucial difference between the Arenas and Randelman, however, is that the gustatory in Arenas' account is linked with filth. He does not glorify his dirt-eating and in fact takes pains to demystify the practice: "to eat dirt is not a metaphor, or a sensational act. All the country kids did it. It has nothing to do with magical realism, or anything of the sort. One had to eat something, dirt was the only thing we had plenty of, and perhaps that was why we ate it" (Arenas, 11).¹¹⁸ He eats dirt in the shed, which is "the place next to the house where the animals [sleep], that is, the horses, the cows, the pigs the chickens and the sheep" (Arenas 1). The feces of the animals that share the territory that he inhabits and which becomes the subject of his childhood recollection, i.e., the farm, have possibly contaminated the dirt that he eats. Describing this dirt in bucolic or pastoral terms neglects to account for both its contamination by animal shit and for the generative effect of the dirt in his gut—Arenas purposefully scours his accounts free of any bucolic resonances. He describes himself as "a skinny kid with a distended belly full of worms from eating so much dirt" (Arenas 1). The worms, however, do not simply remain in his gut, happily sharing his meals and laying their eggs. They burst forth violently and with horrifying effect:

One day I had a terrible bellyache. I did not even have time to get to the outhouse and used the chamber pot that was under my bed...The first thing that came out was a huge worm, a red creature with many legs like a centipede. It was jumping up and down in the pot, no doubt enraged at having been expelled from its home in such a violent way. I was deathly afraid of this

worm, which now appeared in my dreams every night trying to get into my belly while I embraced my mother (Arenas 1).

The worms in his belly present the specter of revolted expulsion that perhaps exemplifies a series of vectors of his own displacement given corporeal form. If we resist the reading of his body as simply an exile demanding reunification and read his body as the equivalent of the Cuban state, then the expelled worm exemplifies the state's movement to expel the undesirable: the criminal, the mentally ill, the dissident, and the homosexual. In this case, the subject of the state's acts of expulsion gets the privilege to expel, to jettison the filthy, horrifying offal that infects his bowel, and to discard it. However, it haunts his dreams as he haunts Cuba: the Cuban government clings to the body of its national pride and heterosexual family values (here perhaps symbolized by the body of the mother) and terrorizes undesirable bodies that it subjects to repeated acts of ejection because of its paranoia of corruption and uncontainable filth.

However, this reading oversimplifies the relationship between the abject and the state. This filthy little boy opposes the clean, groomed, well-fed child that forms the subject who remembers Cuba in Randelman's account. Instead, this child would perhaps experience a complicated solidarity with the Haitian child whose mud-smearing tongue illustrates a troubled relationship with the ground beneath his feet. Randelman may represent a form of exile, but she underemphasizes the abjection of her body and that of her wealthy parents who fled Castro's revolution. Arenas, however, glorifies his abjection, rendering it in almost celebratory terms even as the filth bursts from his gut in terrifying ways. According to Benigno Sánchez-Eppler,

Arenas' memoir presents an insistent demand for reentry.¹¹⁹ Where Randelman's cookbook positions childhood as a means of resisting revolutionary Cuba through actions of misremembering, forgetting, omission, and revision that defy the politics that pressed her family into exile, Arenas aggressively asserts the filthy child as the undeniable "insult" that will not allow the state to present itself in perfected form—he demands the reintegration of the abject with the state.¹²⁰ If we associate Arenas' earliest memories of himself with the child who is the subject of "My Lover The Sea," the child transforms from the figure of nostalgic recollection to an emblem of resistance:

I am that angry and lonely child of always,
that throws you the insult of that angry child of always
and warns you:
if hypocritically you pat me on the head
I would take that opportunity to steal your wallet. (ll. 17-20)

This child is the furious specter of poverty, "of imminent terror / imminent leprosy, imminent fleas, / of offenses and the imminent crime" (ll. 22-24). While this child is urban whereas Arenas' childhood is rural, the figuration of filth operates similarly: shit is; it insinuates itself into the body (politic) and will not be dislodged no matter how diligently the stain of it is scrubbed.¹²¹ The child with mud on his tongue thrusts himself into the imagination and will not walk quietly into obscurity and silence. He will dramatize his abjection and dare the onlooker to attend to his needs. Arenas assumes the subject position of the beshitted/shitty body: he haunts the nation that endeavors to imagine itself in specific terms as a specific community comprised of

specific members, he haunts the structures that administer privilege; and he answers the state's oppressive gaze with clear-eyed reminders of why he arouses such persistent paranoia. He has been ejected through acts of marginalization. However, unlike the Haitian child with the mud-smearred tongue, he does not invite the onlooker to gaze upon him. Instead, it is he who looks, he who challenges. From the margin, he dares the state to forget him.

Rather than read the rationale behind this unstable signification of the fecal order as simply the abjection of the dissident body or the expulsion of the homosexual (two separate categories of transgression) we can read the expulsions of the worm from his body and of his body from the state as multiple, layered, interrelated and overlapping vectors of persecution and exile. Arenas' homosexuality compounds his political dissidence as his political dissidence compounds his homosexual transgression and as his creativity and celebration of the arts compound both. His body and the record of his life shuttle between these three intersecting sites that terrorize the state. Because the text is organized both temporally and geographically, each chapter functions similarly to the sections that organize Randelman's cookbook: each site marks a memory that is embellished by the particulars that happen there (what is eaten, who is fucked). The crucial difference between the two memoirs is that Randelman's memoir stabilizes time as she eats from space to space; each site captures the past in a gustatory snapshot.

In contrast, Arenas' movements from space to space increase in momentum and violence. Sites in the memoir expose him to the oppressive mechanisms of the state, while others are valued because of the opportunities of escape or escapism that

they offer him. The trajectory of the text is increasing disenfranchisement resulting ultimately in exile.¹²² While at his aunt's house, he fears not only the police, but also his "aunt's vigilance, which to [him] was much more dangerous" (Arenas 145) because she threatens to expose his homosexuality and his writing because of her proximity to his most intimate spaces. His paranoia spikes when he must evade the gaze of both his family and the police.

This means that Arena's account is not necessarily heterotopian—it is dystopian. Arenas describes the effect of its efforts as a series of multiple disruptions. Arenas' descriptions of furtive poetry readings that recur throughout the text subvert the authority of the state by gathering gay, dissident poets in spaces that allow them to share their works and ideas. It doesn't matter what impulse gathers these groups together—homosexual longing and community, political resistance, or creative desires—they are all stamped out by the uniformity of state-sanctioned violence. Whether these gatherings were driven by creativity, activism, or homosexuality, they share an overlapping principle that governs their suppression. To disrupt these sites stamps the life out of homosexual desire, creative expression, and political freedom. Thus, to oppose the two memoirs by arguing that the landscape of Randelman's memoir is utopian while Arenas' depicts a series of heterotopias simplifies the dynamic of overlapping interests that powers Arenas' text: to be gay is to be dissident is to be creative, with Arenas representing the intersection of transgressive spheres. Just as physical spaces in which gays/writers/dissidents gather become the intersection subjected to sudden, violent suppression, Arenas' body signifies his exile. A body in perpetual motion in the state of Cuba and then outside it, Arenas stands as

a “very pointed example of how sexuality makes people move and how moving affects the practices of the representation of sexuality and the investment in some sort of return” (Sánchez-Eppler, 154).

Arenas’ exile bears only passing resemblance to Randelman’s exile. He initially accepts the rhetoric and ideology of the Revolution, in spite of its edicts against his homosexuality (Vickroy, 112-3), whereas Randelman’s limited discussion of her family’s movement into exile intimates that her family’s wealth and their resistance against communist ideology drive her movements into diaspora. However, the two authors share the need to write and to repeat in ways that resist the oppression that exiles them from a nation for which they both express deep longing.

Though Arenas did not identify with most Cuban exiles, many of the potentially traumatic features of their exile are reflected in Arenas's own life and works. These features include suffering the loss of homeland, a fragmented or diminished sense of self, a sense of homelessness and dislocation, isolation, and alienation. Much of this is replayed in the loss of Arenas's manuscripts through confiscation and the importance of their recreation in order to retain his identity as a writer, a man, and a Cuban. His response to these traumas is manifest in his obsessive textual recreations of what has been lost. Repetition is an attempt to master traumas, Freud and others have observed, but can also indicate emotional stasis and possession by the past. His work indicates that Cuba is a formative and continuing influence, and he attempts to recreate it as part of a process of testifying to injustice and redressing wrongs. (Vickroy 112)

Both books operate in accordance to the same imperatives: they return bodies to their spaces of origin in response to the demands of particularized forms of nostalgia. They reread and revise Cuban history by syncretizing an already syncretic space.¹²³

Randelman uses the cookbook form to resurrect a historic moment by tapping into the pathos of its culinary culture, while Arenas revises history using his memoir to revise the sexual politics of the period and expose its oppressive practices.

However, as both authors engage the mechanics of abjection that create particular diasporas, both authors also engage their states of subalternity by reinforcing the idea that it can be thought of in dynamic terms: it is a shifting position marked by a subject's power or lack of power to speak or determine how s/he will be heard. Both authors use the diaspora as a space in which they can do the work of the subaltern: recasting history in an effort to articulate a claim to the nation that they had been denied. They break the silence using a range of tactics that also revise the state.¹²⁴ However, the primary similarity between the two works is that they both work through the trauma of ejection that thrust both writers into exile. Sanchez-Eppler writes: "Cuban displacements come through as a process of leaving hell to go nowhere, in a succession that creates a simultaneity of layered memories and experiences that leave the subject both out of time and out of place" (157).

Writing, Eating, and Subaltern Mobility

Each of the texts under consideration in this chapter is written along the vector of a sharp nostalgia that underscores the desire for repatriation articulated by the author or the main characters. In keeping with the conventions of the form,

Randleman's cookbook is written along this vector. It serves as a method of mediating the author's movement from past to present, from Havana to Miami, from childhood innocence to adult experience. Arenas' memoir registers his outrage. The novel *Dreaming in Cuban* however, does the most ambivalent work of exploring the complex notions of national belonging, particularly as the country from which these individuals are exiled either no longer exists or ejects its citizens so violently that the conditions for remain well within the realm of the imaginable. It is novels that permit exploration of these notions, in ways that cookbooks and even memoirs will not.

Randelman's account omits both the heterotopic and the dystopic in favor of a bright, sunny, uniform image of a Cuban nation. Pilar's understanding is more heterotopic in nature: she recognizes that belonging is not absolute; the body can straddle cultural divides. But she also recognizes that bodies with one foot in one nation and another in the diaspora can straddle these divides with weight pressed more on one leg. She reaches this understanding prior to putting her cousin on a plane that will transport him to the same difficult exile that she must reconcile as part of her own development. Arenas' understanding is utterly dystopic in nature, containing all that Randelman's account will not include, and simplifying the moments of exilic despair that Pilar must feel in those moments where she feels unmoored from both cultures.

These works stand together as distinct but related stages of the work that Subaltern Studies hopes to accomplish. The omissions and purposeful misremembering that shapes the historiography in Randelman's cookbook perhaps underscore the silencing pressure of the state as it opens a new lexicon for articulating the state while foreclosing another. Her omissions are silences that open a space for

wishful thinking and idealization. Arenas represents the next step in historical recovery. If Arenas' work focuses on the frustration of living in a repressive state, then he has been given voice and uses it to shout, decry, and revise. Meanwhile, García's work places emphasis on the ways in which exiles can reinvent themselves in ways that overturn any possibility of being relegated to subaltern status.

Another way to view each author's position relative to the state involves recasting the subaltern. By engaging abjection as a state of being cast out or denied placement within the politics of the country, each author recasts subalternity by disconnecting it from Marxist politics, and refracting its relationship with the peasant class. This contorts the definition of subalternity as articulated by Partha Chatterjee in *The Nation and Its Fragments*. Instead of confining the subaltern to a specific nationality and class status, the Cuban subaltern is actually an individual of privilege who has been disenfranchised by the revolution.¹²⁵

To read subalternity in this way allows subalternity to become a real politics of liberation because it gives voice to those who otherwise stand outside structures of power that oppress them, looking in mutely without the capacity to change or even give meaningful discursive shape to their lives as they are lived in the world. Subaltern states are more accurately defined in terms of their relationships with power, particularly with regard to who can best articulate the dimensions of citizenship and (re)patriation. Gayatri Spivak's definitions of the subaltern as lacking access to lines of social mobility applies here to those exiled by political conditions that do not welcome all citizens, or that change the structure of social mobility such that previous models no longer apply.

However, these authors perhaps realize the generative capacity of a life in exile. Speaking of Arenas' creative processes, Vickroy writes:

Not only Cuba, but his exile from it, broadens his consciousness and fuels his imaginative ability for recreation. "Living in exile has brought me the world of nostalgia, it has offered me a series of things that I never would have experienced in Cuba. Perhaps my fortune has been the historical, social, and personal calamities I have suffered, which have given diversity to my creative experience" (Arenas, cited in Vickroy, 115)

If Subaltern Studies entails certain risks, then the works under consideration in this chapter may offer a means of interrogating subaltern speech without overwriting it.¹²⁶

Rather than use subalternity as merely a stamp that allows us to fix the identities of certain voices as they relate to the nation, we can read subalternity within the microphysics of power that determine who will speak and what they must say.

Additionally, we can consider how subaltern voices will emerge from their silences.

Their expression needs a measure of distance, which can come in the form of an interlocutor. However, diaspora offers its own means of serving as an interlocutor, by creating the space needed to grant subjects the room and voice to speak. The risk of exile threatens silence: Arenas may fear that, because he is a citizen of nowhere, his body groundless and spinning in space, his shouting may fall upon deaf ears.

I conclude the body of this dissertation with Reinaldo Arenas' excoriating account of a frustrated creative life in Cuba and rootlessness in New York for several simple reasons beyond maintaining the balance of the arrangement of the works I study here. The first is that this text is a memoir that is not about food, but instead

focuses on excrement and discarded bodies. The states in which Arenas finds—or perhaps loses—himself constitute the very states from which Elvis flees. The second is perhaps more crucial to the studies of culinary autobiographies and postcolonial novels. Elvis' mother's journal contains a muted celebration of identity through food that purports to educate him and sustain him in his travels; similarly to Jaffrey's work, it provides Elvis a compass by which to orient his wandering body. However, it fails. Arenas' memoir concludes my study by complicating these celebrations of identity and exile through food. What happens to culture at the end of the fork? What happens when the food on my plate claims to set my feet on foreign ground? Arenas would perhaps say to Elvis the same thing he might say to anyone audacious enough to launch oneself into the cultural breach relying on faulty maps and inflated hopes.

EPILOGUE: PANGS

Moving, Eating and Being in the Vietnamese Diaspora

When you sample a new dish you are cannibalizing an entire culture.

— Dinh Linh, “Food Conjuring,”

When a lay reader opens a cookbook, he or she is most obviously looking for an easy, quick recipe to make a tasty meal. When looking for a good Vietnamese cookbook, for example, a reader may seek a reference that provides procedures for preparing Vietnam’s signature foods: *banh xeo* or Vietnamese crepes, claypot catfish, or *pho*. It is safe to say that any worthwhile Vietnamese cookbook will teach an observant and obedient reader how to assemble and present these dishes. However, the Vietnamese cookbook performs work other than the mere cataloging of recipes. Most cookbooks do, but the Vietnamese cookbook has a special relationship with its English-speaking diaspora—particularly those cookbooks that blend the functions of cataloging recipes with those of cultural recovery. In addition to offering descriptions and statistics about the country, some cookbooks include family photos that preserve and publish the autobiographical details that distinguish *this particular chef* from the many others who write about Vietnamese cooking. Recipes share space with anthropological, and on occasion, archaeological functions. The books also serve as a form of travel literature that uses cooking as a form of representation of the nation. Not only does the reader witness the travels of the writer, but also s/he is transported to the country with every meal s/he prepares. The cookbook becomes reference,

record, and script, while the table becomes the daily staging of nationality. The table becomes a representation of the nation, a map of the self who eats.

To reveal how cookbooks go about the work of staging national affiliations, this chapter will examine how the Vietnamese cookbook packages Vietnamese food culture for consumption by an Anglophone readership; the essay will then compare the cookbook's work of staging nationality to the biographical narrative of a traveler who goes to the nation that is the subject of the staging. Like many Vietnamese cookbooks and novels (both fictive and biographical), the books under discussion in this essay insistently affirm the centrality of food to Vietnamese culture.¹²⁷ The pervasiveness of eating in the practice of Vietnamese daily life means that food gestures toward every aspect of Vietnamese identity: as an offering to the ancestors, as the centerpiece of every celebration, and as a way of sharing love and binding the family, cooking articulates Vietnamese culture as fluently as its language. The culture's focus on food underwrites the logic of cooking Vietnamese food and traveling to Vietnam as assertions of a sense of belonging to Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese culture certainly shares this characteristic with many others. The centrality of food as an expression of cultural affiliation discourages any cultural packaging that ignores other aspects of cultural identity. This means that cookbooks cannot describe food practices without describing the daily living and special occasions that serve as a setting for those practices. In the Vietnamese cookbook, this packaging of culture does not entail a simple cataloging of recipes with their accompanying lists of ingredients. The metonymic slippage between the author's daily life and cultural identity means that describing the cultural quotidian as a setting

for cooking and eating involves inextricably entangling the author's biographical details with her recipes. These cookbooks point toward a living, eating writer who fully participates in the food culture of her birth.

Mai Pham's *Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table* provides an excellent example of a cookbook that enmeshes culinary catalogs with the biographical record of a Vietnamese woman who goes home to recover her roots.¹²⁸ In this cookbook, Pham presents a series of reunifications with her family, her culture and her country of origin as embodied in the unity of the meal. Readers and chefs reproduce and repeat these reunifications each time they prepare Vietnam's signature dishes. Conversely, Andrew X. Pham's biography, entitled *Catfish and Mandala*, troubles the seamlessness of this unity, of the settled stomach returning to the land of the body's birth, and of the portability and performativity of cultural practice. Andrew Pham's biography presents a *viet-kieu* (Vietnamese expatriate) who, like chef Mai Pham, seeks to return home. Like Mai Pham, his biography explores the concept of cultural admixture that structures Vietnamese food culture. However, unlike Mai Pham's experience in Vietnam, Andrew Pham's return to the country complicates the narrative of a homecoming presented in the cookbooks. The representationality of the cookbook as a form of travel literature contrasts starkly against others that situate the body of the traveler in the very place that is the subject of representation. Whereas cookbooks reiterate the centrality of food to a healthy Vietnamese life, Pham's constant references to illness place his upset stomach in the tropological center that food would normally occupy. However palatable the concept of cultural mixture might be when thinking of food, Andrew Pham's stomach pains signify a pluralism

that creates enormous difficulty for him as he tries to reintegrate into a culture that repeatedly thwarts his desire to assimilate. He faces repeated confrontations with situations and people who call his identity into question. His feelings about his people are ambivalent, as the narrative repeatedly vacillates between censure, respect, an intense desire for acceptance and inclusion, and the ever-present dread of being murdered, mugged, or imprisoned.

In this chapter, I will use Foucault's theory of heterotopias to clarify the interplay between the cookbook and the biography as two forms of travel literature. In his analysis, Foucault describes heterotopias as the "space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and knaws [sic] at us... a heterogenous space" (23). Whereas heterotopias constitute the confluence of multiple sites, utopias comprise "sites with no real place. Utopias are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down" (24). Mai Pham's cookbook therefore constitutes a Foucauldian utopia as she seeks to situate Vietnam by serving it to the reader who will consume its cuisine. Andrew Pham's travels to the country of his birth, however, reveal the multiplicity of sites and situations that comprise his sense of belonging in the United States and in Vietnam.¹²⁹ His reactions to and understanding of how he navigates between the sites that constitute his identity are perhaps best expressed in the physical discomfort he feels throughout his bike tour of Vietnam. The dysentery that torments him reveals itself to be a specialized sort of motion sickness as Pham negotiates the heterotopias of the *viet-kieu* diaspora. The

utopian visions of reunification presented in the cookbooks contrasts sharply against the narrative of the traveler who finds himself shuttled violently between heterotopias of his memory and ethnic identity. This contrast might be explained as merely the difference between representations of representations and representations of actual experiences. However, this essay posits that the actual site of difference between the two modes of writing and travel have to do with the latter's acknowledgement of the difficulties of difference that trouble reassimilation into a culture of origin, difficulties that cookbooks work diligently to subsume and conceal.

This chapter represents a bridging of the work done in food studies with studies about other diasporas in the US. This work has already been undertaken by Lily Cho in her text entitled *On Eating Chinese: Chinese Restaurants and the Politics of Diaspora*, as well as Jennifer Ann Ho's *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels* and Wenying Xu's seminal work entitled "Masculinity, Food, and Appetite in Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* and 'The Eat and Run Midnight People.'" This chapter engages with the food discourse attendant to studies of the Asian-American diaspora, but also does so by connecting it to existing discourses in postcolonial studies that study food and movement. Along a much more personal axis, this chapter also represents a return to beginnings: this work came into being in the summer of 2005 as part of the University of Tübingen-University of Maryland Joint Graduate Research Initiative, and was accepted for publication by *Cultural Critique*.

Arjun Appadurai's examination of Indian cookbooks provides a lens through which we can read Mai Pham's cookbook as achieving effects other than the mere

cataloging of recipes. Appadurai's argument analyzes how Indian cookbooks represent a particular, postcolonial nationality; in the analysis, he reveals the instability that shakes the ground these cookbooks occupy as they attempt to smooth over political fissures. Appadurai's arguments concerning regional and ethnic cookbooks in India can also apply to books written by *viet-kieu*, Viet-French, or Viet-American chefs who return to Vietnam, then write cookbooks in English that chronicle their experiences in the country. Like their Indian counterparts, the representationality of Vietnamese cookbooks politicizes the daily practices of private life. As they catalog and preserve recipes, cookbooks also perform the work attendant to the building of the nation. Vietnamese cookbooks do not just describe cuisine; they also serve as travelogues that describe *viet-kieu* returning to homes they were forced to leave either shortly before or shortly after the end of the Vietnamese Civil War.¹³⁰

For Mai Pham, the cookbook does not simply assemble the recipes that she remembers eating in her childhood; it is also a travelogue detailing a homecoming. She notes the signs of progress that mark the burgeoning wealth and development in the country: "The streets are more crowded and the rooftops get higher. The market stalls are bursting with new merchandise, from yet more types of rice paper to the latest tennis shoe designs" (M. Pham, 1). Her book marks the economic changes that have pushed the country toward prosperity. These changes, however, remain in the public sphere. The details of her childhood have endured the passage of time:

As I walked around her home, the same house where generations of my family had lived, I noticed that all the furniture, including the family altar, was still there. The picture of my grandfather—that handsome man with shoulder-

length hair—still graced the altar, along with burning incense and offerings of fruit. And the kitchen, it still looked exactly the same. No walls, just a thatched roof supported by large beams. There were two clay stoves and a barbecue pit, all fueled by the coconut husks gathered from the plantation. It was in this modest kitchen that my grandmother prepared many splendid meals, and it was here that she instilled in me a passion for cooking. (M. Pham, 3)

Mai Pham feels no displacement from her ancestral home because, while Vietnam has changed around it, her home has remained static. The furnishings are the same and, more importantly, the altar to which her family prays to its ancestors is also unaltered. The rootedness exemplified by the practice of ancestor worship and symbolized by the unchanging altar is also practiced everyday in the kitchen: not only is Mai Pham continuing the traditions she learned at her grandmother's knee, but she is practicing skills inherited from the *ong ba*, or ancestors (7). Her cookbook then marks yet another step in the seamless continuity between those who practice and eat now, and those from whom Mai Pham inherited her techniques.

Pham reaffirms her links to the country through practices of consumption as well. Each time she eats *pho*, cooks a Vietnamese dish, or entices a reader to cook and eat the foods she learns from her family and friends, Pham reestablishes the link between her body and the country. Her cookbook reveals the symbolic power of *pho* as a representative Vietnamese dish. Only once she has eaten *pho* are her ties to her homeland completely renewed (4). In fact, the power of this food to reaffirm her connection to Vietnam spans the entire globe. When her family first arrives in the

United States, *pho* offers “a taste of home,” “comfort and solace” to ease the trauma of displacement. After her family’s assimilation, its reassuring reach widens. No matter where she is, whether in California or abroad, “*pho* will lurk in the background, ready to nourish and sustain [her]” (52). This assurance affirms the globality of home, the homeliness of the global, that is a feature of diasporic living: no matter where she travels, she will find a Vietnamese diaspora that will serve her the symbolic dish that links her to her country of origin. This means that the table itself stands as a performative representation of the various affiliations that underwrite who we are.

To render the table a recognizable gesture of national affiliation that is legible within the scope of a cookbook requires the particularization of Vietnamese cuisine into bodies of knowledge, a feature shared by regional cookbooks about other ethnic cuisines.¹³¹ Mai Pham’s cookbook reflects the systematicity of the ethnic or regional cookbook as it describes the key characteristics of Vietnamese cuisine, analyzes its regional distinctions, and investigates foreign influences. The cuisine of southern China introduced key influences such as the use of chopsticks, stir-frying, noodles, ginger and tofu; European explorers introduce tomatoes and peanuts; French rule introduces butter, yogurt, baguettes, and coffee; trade with neighbors introduces curries and spices. Vietnamese cuisine retains its “unique character” through the use of fish sauce, the reliance upon fresh aromatic herbs, and the “distinctive style” of eating morsels of meat or seafood encased in a wrapper of rice paper or lettuce. Pham goes on to cite the key regional differences that earmark the culinary traditions of the mountainous North, the imperial seat at the center of the country, and the warm,

fertile South. These regions are designated by cities: Saigon *is* the South; Hue *is* the imperial center; Hanoi *is* the North (7-9). These names, additionally, familiarize the landscape and its regions to the western reader. Describing the country's history and geographic layout in these terms enables the mapping of culinary culture, allowing the reader to analyze each recipe's origins and influences. Thus, the recipe endures subjection to the forms of literary and historical knowledge that allow it to be rendered as an artifact of cultural knowledge. A set of recipes therefore encloses and acts out the history of the country as a cultural crossroads within which various differences are subsumed and sublated.

These differences open the way for the production of "ethnic cameos": regional culinary differences reduced to archetypes subject to replication, repetition and redistribution.¹³² Whereas Appadurai analyzes gastroethnic imagery, the regional differentiation described in Vietnamese cookbooks is defined by spatial distance, ideological affiliation and historical significance. Not ethnic or religious difference. Instead of tribal or religious differentiation, Mai Pham's description of Vietnamese culinary habits is based on the political differences that distinguish territories. Dishes prepared in the South demonstrate colonial French influence in the uses of bread and stylizations of French dishes using local ingredients (for instance, *banh xeo* are crepes prepared with coconut milk and rice flour). Because Hue is cooler and was the imperial seat, dishes prepared in that region take on a particular character: they are elaborate, elegant, and small in their portion sizes to accommodate meals of multiple courses. Because the North suffered severe privations during the war, its cuisine is "simple and straightforward," reflecting the need to stretch ingredients to maximize

flavor and extend food supplies: “Dipping sauces are made saltier so that they can be eaten with lots of rice. Soups are mostly clear broth with vegetables and only a little meat. Sticky rice is served without the rich mung bean paste and the shredded coconut toppings common in the south” (M. Pham, 9). The stress placed on regional differences does less to indicate objectionable culinary habits that become salvos in ongoing intranational conflicts of varying types and intensities than to indicate how political allegiances that sundered the country have marked its culinary production.¹³³

The Vietnamese cookbook therefore reinforces the perception of a homogenous culture shaded only through regional variation. However, according to the Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam is home to 54 different ethnic groups divided into hundreds of subgroups and sub-subgroups. The choice to organize the book regionally rather than ethnically completely occludes Vietnam’s ethnic diversity—a glaring omission given that, just before launching a description of Vietnamese cuisine as differentiated only by region, Pham poses in a photograph with a Hmong tribeswoman (4). Although she obscures ethnic differentiation in her cookbook’s organization and its presentation of culinary style, ethnic difference still emerges through the figuration of the tribeswoman’s body, a body that Pham encodes through the absence of ethnic difference anywhere else in the text. The reader comes to know Saigon, Hanoi, and Hue, while the tribeswoman stands for Vietnam in ways that are much less clear. If she is Vietnamese enough to stand as an authentic, legible representation of her country, why does her cuisine not figure at all as an organizational principle in the text?

The answer may be that the Hmong tribeswoman works most efficiently as a cipher that marks the outline of Vietnamese ethnic identifiability by standing for Vietnamese ethnicity as a whole. (The regional cookbook is also a race cookbook, implicating the concept in all its varied forms.¹³⁴) The Hmong tribeswoman bears the burden of the text's ethnicity, allowing it to be shed by other sections of the text that are most concerned with normalizing Vietnamese cuisine (as demonstrated below). The country's relative homogeneity further eases the choice. Organizing the book geographically and not along the lines of ethnicity perhaps reflects that 87% of the country belongs to the largest ethnic group. Because only 13% of the country belongs to 53 other ethnic groupings, the author can safely choose another method of classification to organize Vietnam's culinary traditions, even as she grants the country its ethnic diversity in the images that embellish the book.

The regional distinctions that differentiate Vietnam's culinary landscape are not an entirely benign structure, however. Culinary regional differences reflect the country's political differentiation. In Pham's retelling, culinary differences reenact the country's history, where Southern dishes are marked by the region's complicity with the West, and Northern dishes by the privations and austerity resulting from the ravages of war and the rejection of western cultural influence. Mai Pham's cookbook, like its Indian counterparts may "represent the friendly end of a traffic in interethnic images that has its seamy side," with the crucial difference being the nature and context of the interethnic imagery at play (Appadurai, 18). Instead of basing these cameos in ethnic differences, the "seamy side" of Pham's trafficking deals in political affiliations that, even if only suspected, might have resulted in confiscation or

destruction of personal property, imprisonment, re-education or execution.¹³⁵ As such, ethnic categories in Vietnam do not constitute the primary divisions between groups. Instead, these categories are secondary to the regional distinctions that split North from South. People who hail from the South sometimes find themselves adrift in conversations with Northern people because of the difference in dialect. Though they speak the same language, a Northerner risks not being understood by a fellow countryman because his accent sounds so strange in Southern ears. The regional distinctions of diet and dialect point toward regionalized political divisions that split the country, divisions exacerbated by both the recent Civil War and over a century of colonial rule.¹³⁶

Like other Vietnamese cookbooks, Mai Pham's text works to include the country's history in its explanations of the origins of recipes. And yet she excludes certain foods, dramatizing a selectivity that expurgates unsavory elements from the kitchen.¹³⁷ Examples of this selectivity abound throughout the cookbook, but the most prominent appears in her description of how to enjoy *pho*. The guidelines instructing the epicure how to order the dish in a restaurant mentions the various cuts of meat that a diner might enjoy, ranging from "rare to well-done beef, to briskets and meatballs, even tripe, tendons, and so on" (56). However, in spite of the availability of tripe and tendons in most *pho* restaurants, Mai Pham's recipe mentions only using beef sirloin (54). The description for *pho ga* (Vietnamese rice noodle soup with chicken) includes "exotic parts of the chicken," presumably giblets, skin, and "immature (unlaid) chicken eggs"; the recipe omits these "exotic" parts, calling for shredding the whole, boiled chicken that served as the base for the broth (59-60). The

directives for the epicure's restaurant experience reach for a degree of authenticity from which the recipe—the directives that instruct practice in the home—recoils. This selectivity might be explained by her considerations of fat and cholesterol content, her attention to keeping the dishes as “healthy” as possible, or to the availability of “exotic” ingredients. (The first page of Pham's book describes the chicken seller on his way to the slaughterhouse; fresh organs and immature eggs might not be as readily available in American supermarkets that purchase packaged poultry from large industrial farms.) However, the omissions might also acknowledge the potential squeamishness of her audience, and a desire to avoid embarrassment. While it gives the epicure a tour of an exotic locale, the book's choice of ingredients places special emphasis on establishing similitude between the culinary habits of the exotic locale and the visiting epicure, even as it attempts to emphasize the differences that distinguish the two. The result is a difference that isn't *too* different or shocking, but which preserves those distinctions that offer a source of delight.

This means that Vietnamese cookbooks, like other ethnic cookbooks, conceal identifiably authentic dishes that readily become the target of food-based ethnography. While the recipes in the book are identifiably Vietnamese through the criteria the Pham's food history has already established, none is so alien that it cannot be prepared in a western kitchen, and none threatens to revolt, upset or unnerve its audience. The cookbook makes an effort to base dishes in ingredients readily available in any western kitchen, though they are embellished and garnished by “exotic” spices and sauces, like srirachi chili sauce, *nuoc mam* (fish sauce), ginger, or cilantro. Familiar cuts of familiar meats are used in meat-based dishes: a whole

chicken cut into pieces or shredded, or breast or thigh cutlets comprise many of the chicken dishes, and sliced sirloin or pork shoulder comprise many of the beef and pork dishes. Any unfamiliar ingredients are still palatable to the senses. Pham's book describes pandanus leaves as a fragrant alternative to jasmine, but she omits recipes using jackfruit and its larger, even more pungent cousin, the durian (213). Pham provides no recipes or serving suggestions for *cha lua*, a sliced snack meat that is similar to bologna, and is often purchased as a loaf wrapped in a banana leaf (which gives its outer edge a pleasing tea-like flavor). Her *pho* recipe does not include *bo vien*, meatballs that are often purchased prepackaged, and which ideally have a soft, spongy texture owing to their fat and gristle content. (She does provide a *bo vien* recipe, but it uses ground chuck and has no gristle [69-70].) Notably absent from any of the cookbooks are any dishes based in blood. Slices of congealed pork blood, along with *cha lua*, are staples in *bun bo hue*, Hue style beef noodle soup, yet Pham's recipe calls for neither (61). Nor does her *bun bo hue* recipe call for a slice of pork hock, complete with its fat, skin and bones. Boiled fertilized chicken or duck eggs, grilled dog flesh, grilled squid, roasted cuttlefish, sliced snake, roasted stingray and fried field mouse are also absent from the cookbook.

These dishes occupy a cultural niche that the Vietnamese cookbooks seem loath to explore for a number of obvious reasons. A description of Vietnamese food written by Hrayr Berberoglu, a Professor Emeritus of Hospitality and Tourism Management specializing in Food and Beverage, provides a perfect example of why Vietnamese cookbooks avoid "exotic meats" in their recipes:

While some of the protein sources of Vietnamese revolt western gourmets, to one who is starved, there is really no difference between beef and dog, or for that matter field mouse, toad, bat or king cobra. African nations eat meat from animals which western gourmets would rarely think, if ever, acceptable. Dog meat may be grisly and sinewy, but if properly cooked, can be acceptable. Mostly it is grilled, but what may look and taste somewhat unusual is a bowl of steaming liver, lungs and heart.¹³⁸

The effect of this passage is immediate and shocking. Vietnamese and African cuisines are both sharply differentiated from western food habits; exoticized and racialized, the cuisine and its practitioners are rendered unfamiliar, repugnant, and primitive. Only in the dirty, lawless, poverty-stricken Third World would an epicure find a body that deems a bowl of cooked organs appetizing. It is no surprise then, that cookbooks written by *viet-kieu* chefs present the country's best face to a western audience, omitting unsavory details.

Another reason for the absence of more “exotic” dishes might lie in the gender politics of eating and drinking. Andrew Pham’s biography details his travels through the country, beginning with his landing in Saigon. When Andrew Pham arrives in the city, his cousins take him out to drink and they continue to drink almost every other day until he leaves. He describes visits to “street-corner saloons, Vietnamese equivalents of the Spanish *tapas* bars that serve little food dishes to accompany alcohol.”

We squeeze ourselves into child-sized plastic chairs and drink beer from plastic one-liter jugs and nibble on barbecued beef, steamed intestines, pan-

fried frogs, and boiled peanuts. We eat goat stew and drink goat liquor, two parts rice wine mixed with one part fresh goat's blood. (82)

In a little corner bar outside Saigon, Pham is served a shot glass of rice wine containing the still-beating heart of a cobra. When he balks, deflecting a series of arguments that seek to persuade him to drink (including the argument that it will make him virile) his cousin tells him, "Drink up. You said you want to be Vietnamese. You want to try everything we do. It doesn't get more Vietnamese than this."¹³⁹ Pham then drinks, though he promptly retches onto the floor (A. Pham, 83-84). The call to identity succeeds where the appeal to masculinity fails. Ethnic affiliation is primary, even if that which is ingested is immediately regurgitated.¹⁴⁰

Notably, no women are present in these bars, except for the women who work there as servers or as part of a flesh trade offering services that range from chatting and kissing to compensated sex.¹⁴¹ The places where an epicure might procure the authentic exotic excluded from the everyday domesticity, seem also to be spaces that exclude the participation of women. The drinking of the cobra's heart improves libido, according to one of the men in the bar. Pham's cruel Uncle Hung and the men in the bar where the meat is prepared are the only characters in the book who eat dog. Three soldiers who threaten Pham are depicted eating platefuls of organ meat.¹⁴² The eating of "exotic" meats seems a gendered activity, one in which only drinking men partake. Like cruelty and soldiery, vice remains the province of masculinity. Eating the exotic authentic, like holding liquor, being able to tolerate strong alcohol, wearing a uniform or indulging in cruelty and confrontation, is an activity as intimately tied to machismo as it is to poverty and ethnic exoticism.¹⁴³ Vietnamese cookbooks, on the

other hand, are solely interested in recreating the domestic and eschewing the more unpalatable aspects of the public sphere. Gender divisions seem absolute.

It is the sanitized table that is home. The disciplines of food science and chemistry mark the domesticity produced in the practice of cooking from cookbooks: proportions are carefully governed, temperatures carefully regulated, surfaces and utensils kept meticulously clean to prevent “cross-contamination” by raw meats.¹⁴⁴ This might indicate the curiously western practice of cleanliness that marks the regulation of the domestic spaces of the kitchen and bathroom. Cleanliness obfuscates rather than reveals their practices dealing with blood and viscera. Cookbooks indicate the need for kitchens and tables in particular to remain places of cleanliness because they serve as the sites where cooks produce domesticity, a domesticity that bears upon the blood and viscera of the eating body. The polluted table would not simply signify the intrusion of blood, dirt, germs, and viscera where they are unwelcome: a polluted table would also sicken the guest or family member for whom the cook prepares the meal, either because the microbes contained in a meal contaminated by feces and poorly cooked organ meats would attack the stomach of the diner, or because the revolting spectacle of blood and guts on a plate would chase the diner from the table. Vomit and excrement must suffer necessary banishment from the table because they point toward a poorly managed cooking space, one that serves up disease and death instead of nurture and nourishment.

Whether their omissions compromise the authenticity of the Vietnamese cuisine that the authors of the cookbooks labor with such diligence to present is perhaps not the question. We might instead ask which spheres of domesticity are at

play in these books, and how closely the books seek to mirror or occlude the practices and rhythms of everyday life.

Displacements or Eating Where We Are

It is through these negotiations that the table becomes the nation, reduced to portable size, intelligible even from a distance. The book and the table are not merely metonyms, they are supplements that compensate for the absence of the thing they replace. Their containment of the nation allows for a reduction of its history into a manageable dimensions: rather than the scarred, starved, burned body, or the woman whose womb produces deformed children, centuries of colonial occupation and decades of civil strife become inflections that flavor a savory. The representationality of the table does not merely displace the complications of Vietnamese history. It renders those complications palatable to different senses. Vietnamese cookbooks celebrate the variety of influences, and render them enjoyable to the epicure. The French bring the gift of bread, butter and asparagus, trade with Thailand and Cambodia colors dishes with curries and spicy sauces. Although cookbooks offer a simplified, celebratory rendering of Vietnam's cultural landscape, they reveal the segregations and divisions that parcel knowledge, allowing for its management and dissemination.

The effect of this management is that the reader can exercise control over his or her experiences in Vietnam. As a food tourist, the reader can wander into the country and out again simply by turning a page and imagining the taste of the food based on its descriptions. S/he learns the context of the cooking and imagines how the food might be eaten, whether as a course in a holiday feast or as a part of everyday

dining. The reader can experience as much immersion in the culture as s/he wishes, withdrawing as desired, or practicing the same selective reading as the author of the text. The reader can choose what enters the field of perception, just as s/he alters the recipes in the text to fit the ingredients available at hand or to accommodate tastes or food allergies. Because the reader engages only virtually with the actual space of the nation, there is a freedom ignore or consider aspects of the nation. The epicure does not have to think of the silent beggar that would hover at his or her elbow while s/he tries to eat. The fragments of knowledge provided in the text allow for the management of the reader's perceptions of the country on either end of the readership transaction. When the reader has had enough, s/he can close the book. Both cookbook and biography shrink Vietnam into dimensions that can fit in a knapsack or on a bookshelf.

The dialogism of the text takes on an added dimension once we consider the exigence of cookbooks. They constitute an invitation to act, to do something in accordance to the imperatives that constitute the bulk of the book. The management and containment that mark those portions of the text addressing the country's dimensions, population, and cultural habits constitute key features of any anthropological or cartographic analysis of the nation. But the cookbooks add a dimension of performative participation that is absent from anthropological descriptions of cultures and geographic descriptions of space. From the safety and comfort of the home, the epicure can explore the world through the work of reproducing culture in the kitchen.

Actually going to the country, however, puts the body at the mercy of the nation, its climate, and its people; their acceptance or rejection becomes the meter by which the subject measures his or her cultural affiliation. The body cannot control the country's effect on it. Physical comfort becomes a powerful metaphor depicting the subject's sense of placement in these negotiations. The stomach's comfort equates to the settled or unsettled diurnal existence of the traveler in the nation to which he wants to belong. Dysentery becomes an allegory for the variety of rejections that beset the traveler: his rejection of the country, its rejection of him, both signified by the wounding of the body and the disruption of its natural processes and rhythms.

The disruptions that unsettle the body's natural rhythms and its placement in the nation serve as central motifs in Andrew X. Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*. Anita J. Duneer's analysis of Andrew Pham's quest posits the centrality of the mandala as a figuration of wholeness for which Pham quests in the text.¹⁴⁵ However, Pham's experience is marked by repeated disruptions and disjunctions that he struggles to overcome. The circularity of Pham's journey represents his attempt to make both ends of his life, both poles of his identity, meet as a whole even as he attempts to comprehend the new Vietnam that has eclipsed the country of his memory.

This entire set of interactions, along with Andrew Pham's own relationship to his country, is mediated by the body's intake and output. By eating *pho*, for instance, Pham reconnects with the country he left as a child. But he does not achieve this reconnection through the taste of the soup as much as through the textures of the experience of eating it. In fact, his description of eating *pho* in his homeland is rather unpleasant:

At a shed with a concrete slab floor, we slurp down vile bowls of beef noodle soup. I eat with one hand and swat flies with the other. Viet, the scientist, comes up with a bright idea and beckons our waiter, a shirtless ten-year-old boy, to bring us the electric fan. Sure enough, it banishes the flies, but blows the road dust right into our faces and soup. No one else seems to mind, so I buckle up and slurp my noodles, determined not to be “Viet-kieu crybaby.” Maybe when grit and grime infuse every cell of my body, I will be truly Vietnamese again. (126)

While eating the same dish that binds Mai Pham to a homeland that she rediscovers, Andrew Pham experiences a different private search for attachment to the nation. The difference lies in Andrew Pham’s coupling of eating with nationality through images of contagion: as he eats the “vile” soup, he also eats the earth upon which he travels. Once he has eaten enough it, once it has saturated his being, then he might have the right to reclaim the attachment to it of which his distant cousins take as much notice as they take of the dirt blowing into their food.

The desire to be one with the country, to be one of its people, the desire for infiltration into a culture that he only vaguely knows is countered by the actuality of the country’s infiltration into him in the form of dirt, of the microbes scrupulously scoured from western dealings with food and waste, and in the form of illness and contagion. This infiltration has a graphic effect upon Pham’s physical person: the country itself seems to sicken him as he travels through it, and the spectacle of his illness becomes a central trope of his struggle to reconcile himself to his homeland. At no point in his journey is he ever completely comfortable in his own flesh.

Whether called out of his nationality (he is consistently mistaken for Korean, Russian, Japanese or “half-and-half”) or wracked by fever, weakness and stomach pains, Pham never comfortably inhabits the space defined by his own body. The result is that he is constantly aware of his own physicality:

My head feels thick, my stomach hurts. Too much liquor paired with chili peppers and fried anchovies at the bar last night. I feel dry, scooped out. (122)

I tell Grandaunt and Granduncle that I am going out to the beach house to recuperate. Saigon’s smog and heat have given me a persistent hack. I cough up black phlegm and have recurring stomachaches which medications stem but cannot dispel. The latter problem concerns me most because on the road I will be eating whatever is convenient, and diarrhea is a fiendish curse when you’re in the saddle—as I discovered in Mexico. (123)

He falls victim to his own corporeality: his mortal, frail body may succumb to the illness that afflicts it; its materiality opens the way for the misinterpretations that push him out of the categorizations in which he desires inclusion. Unlike the food tourist in a comfortable chair reading a cookbook, Pham’s body actually suffers in the very spaces that the cookbooks represent. While a body that consumes but does not defecate identifies the reader of the books, Pham’s journey through the country places defecation as a central preoccupation, and it torments him throughout the biography. His discomfort separates him from the people around him, allowing him a sometimes-useful alienation that Pham uses as a shield to ward off unwelcome conversation. When an innkeeper attempts to persuade him to enter a business deal, Pham uses the excuse of illness to get rid of him:

I wince and grab my stomach, doubling over, grunting.

He jumps to his feet. *“What’s wrong? Stomachache? Is it the food?”*

“Maybe. Maybe it’s something I ate on the bus,” I moan, lying.

“Yes. Yes, it must be the food you ate on the road. You should never buy food on the side of the road. Very risky.”

“Excuse me. I have to go to the bathroom.”

“Yes, yes. But what about the tour?”

“I’m too sick to think about touring,” I cry, pushing him out and locking the door. (154-155)

But his sickness is not entirely a ruse. While the lie seems to relegate his entire illness to the realm of falsehood, he might simply be lying about its source. His sickness didn’t start on the bus—it began shortly after stepping off the plane. Deciding to press on after four days of debilitating illness in Phan Thiet, Pham observes, “Recovery of any sort isn’t my strong suit and I haven’t been sick in years—not even a cold—until I set foot in Vietnam” (185). The very ground beneath his feet sickens him, in spite of his desire (however ambivalent) to belong to it.

Whereas the Vietnamese are a “skinny people obsessed with eating,” Pham becomes a man obsessed with defecation.¹⁴⁶ At each point in his travels, he mentions his dysentery, conveying graphic details when the disease terrifies him:

It feels like a maniac is tenderizing my gut with an ice pick. I get on the toilet just in time as my gut empties itself. It keeps coming. My insides turn inside out. I’m being eviscerated. I look down and watch my heart emptying into the toilet bowl. I am feverish but covered in gooseflesh. My head throbs. Few

things will put the fear of God into me as effectively as seeing blood gushing out where it shouldn't be. (305)

[The next] morning is worse than the last. I sweat in my sleeping bag, unable to move. ...When I manage to throw my feet on the floor, I go directly to the toilet and enjoy another bout of bloody diarrhea. The water in the toilet bowl is so dark with blood I can't see whether there are maggots in my stool. I fall back into bed. I am going to die. Perhaps something is eating me from the inside. (306)

As an American, Pham could thrust aside the spectacle of the other end of the body's ingestion of the country: white porcelain bowls, toilet paper and wetnaps, sewage systems, and the privacy of the bathroom work to conceal the workings of the flesh; the meat department's enclosure behind a steel door means that shoppers disconnect the processes of slaughter and butchery from the wrapped meats they purchase. Dysentery, however, means that the troubled bowel threatens to violate the confines expressly drawn to contain it: Pham must rush to get to the toilet so that he does not soil himself; blood has entered where it should not; his heart is not in his chest, but in his bowel. Pham is not only at the mercy of his sickened body, he is at the mercy of the spectacle of its movements. The bloody stools serves as a graphic reminder for Pham, not just of his own mortality, but also of his decreasing lack of control over the definitions that form the boundaries of his person. He can no more control the movements of his upset bowels than he can the labels that misinterpret his ethnicity in the country of his birth.

Foucault's description of heterotopias offers the clearest way to understand this shifting. But the manner in which Foucault describes heterotopias makes them seem like solitary experiences; we constantly move between these spaces and, while they are not superimposable upon one another, we may find ourselves, not just at the juncture between sites, but also moving between junctures, between heterotopic sites, much as a street eater moves between vendors. How people find and define themselves in the heterotopias that constitute the formulative sites of culture and identity seems to be an altogether separate practice that falls outside the scope of Foucault's analysis. The illness that Andrew Pham experiences may be the disorientation that results from his grappling with the heterotopias in which he finds himself.

The biography represents Andrew Pham's negotiation of his ethnic identity as an uneasy shuttling between his sense of his American cultural affiliation, his Vietnamese ethnicity, and the belonging to neither or to both. The first sentence Pham writes about himself describes his gender, citizenship and ethnicity: "I am a Vietnamese-American man"(10). Pham's description continues with his characterization of himself in terms of his appearance and predilections—predilections that mark his cultural affiliations in particular terms. In his description of himself, Pham details a series of characteristics, proclivities, and preferences that, when taken together, give the reader a rough outline of his persona:

In my work boots, I am of average height, of medium build, and not too ghastly of face. I like going to the movies and reading novels in cafés. If I had to choose one cuisine to eat for the rest of my life, I'd take Italian without

hesitation, though I do harbor secret cravings for hickory-smoked baby-back ribs and New Orleans gumbo. And I like buying cookbooks more than cooking. I enjoy tennis, basketball, baseball, football, and, lately, yes, hockey—from the bleachers or in my La-Z-Boy. My choice daily wear is a pair of five-year-old Levi's and a mock turtleneck (I have a drawerful, all the same size, same brand, different colors). I don't wear yellow, red, orange, or anything bright: they complicate the laundry process. No G-string underwear. Socks, plain white or black only. (10)

His preferences (which include certain foods and the purchasing of cookbooks) mark him as curiously American, even as they disperse his preferences across a series of cultural influences. In this paragraph and through those that follow, Pham describes the various heterotopias where, when taken together, we find *him*. And yet the very situatedness that these individuated characteristics describes is not exclusively American. It resides no place but within the collectivity assembled by Pham's personal habits and preferences.

The next series of paragraphs describes Pham's cultural history as one of a series of displacements from the heterotopias and heterochronies of his past, where he tracks backward through an uneasy confrontation with an American teacher's understanding of the war to a recollection of his father's imprisonment. These memories immediately follow Pham's description of himself, and are much more specific in their situatedness. The result is that the person who is a collection of habits, likes, and dislikes shuffles between these preferences, habits, characteristics

and memories. The traveling that Pham does throughout the biography seeks to draw these different sites into a meaningful, intelligible *gestalt*.

The sight of his childhood home converted into a clinic sets off a cascade of displacements. The site itself has physically changed: the front of the building has been pushed back to make room for motorbikes. It is no longer even a home—its entire purpose has changed (unlike Mai Pham’s home, which has remained unchanged). The nurse who greets him does not welcome his presence at first because she fears that he is a *viet-kieu* who has returned to reassert his property rights. She fears displacement by the displaced. When it is clear that he has come for no material reason, she allows him to tour the clinic, an event underscored by his own feelings of displacement from a space over which he wishes to assert ownership rights that run much deeper than those conveyed by the material:

The building seems new, small, strange. There is nothing left of my youth. ... The staff and patients begin to stare, which makes me feel misplaced. What was I thinking? Did I really believe that coming here would bring back dead memories? I guess I was hoping something miraculous would happen. ... Too many things changed. Too much time passed. I’m different now, a man with a pocketful of unconnected but terribly vivid memories. I was looking to dredge up what I’d long forgotten. Most of all, I am wishing for something to fasten all these gems, maybe something to hold them in a continuity that I can comprehend. (A. Pham, 98)

Standing outside the clinic, Pham notes that “it feels infinitely odd that I am standing in the same place where I had played as a boy, twenty years ago” (A. Pham, 98). This

moment perfectly fits within an inverted definition of the uncanny: rather than an unfamiliar place that is familiar because it resembles a place where he has been, this unfamiliar place is terribly familiar because he has been here before, though he no longer recognizes it. His memories are disconnected from the site where they originally took place, and he has been *misplaced* because of the disconnection. According to the formula set up in this scenario, if we are constituted even in part by our memories, and if we cannot recover them because the original site where they were formed has changed or disappeared, then the part of ourselves that we can claim through these memories has been lost—*misplaced* rather than shoved aside or put elsewhere (*displaced*). There is no place, no setting for his memories; all he has left is a jumble of gems, a handful of stones that rattle around within him, vivid in their intensity, but lacking fixity. Pham's disorientation emerges as an increasingly urgent illness.

The upset bowels might also signify something more than an unhappy body at the mercy of a foreign place, or an isolated individual marooned from his past. Anita J. Duneer analyzes Andrew Pham's sense of flux at the end of the biography as an expression of a postpositivist sense of self. His description of himself as a "chameleon" with "no center, no truer sense of self than what he is in the instant," a "mover of between" (339) suggests for Duneer "the perfect unity of self with the cosmos":

a mandalic spiritual completeness attainable only to the most supremely enlightened. Andrew's physical journey has come full circle, but his journey of self-identity resists an easy resolution. Both sides of the hyphen are integral

to Andrew's Vietnamese-American identity, but his narrative demonstrates his ambivalence towards both sides of his double-natured mandalic soul. (Duneer, 218)

This unity with the cosmos is a shifting, changeable thing, one that refuses to remain constant in spite of the intimations of constancy, permanence and stability offered by the idea of circularity and the unified self. This emerges in his answer to the question posed by his cousins: "What will you do in America?" His enlightenment makes the response simple, clear, automatic, "a drop of water from a blue sky: 'Be a better American'" (341). However, Duneer's explanation of the lack of an easy resolution still yearns for the mystic completion disavowed by the shuttling between categories that defines Pham's ambivalence as he inhabits both sides of his hyphenated identity. Her elision of the violent shuttling that characterizes Pham's ambivalence is understandable, given the mystic completion demonstrated in his putative enlightenment at the end of the biography, and his apparent ease in inhabiting his interstitial identity. But the petty actualities of daily living that make this shuttling a demonstrable, identifiable activity, trouble the abstract mysticism of the in-between space that Pham inhabits according to Duneer's argument. Even with the clarity and simplicity of the response, the daily activities that make it happen are not easy or automatic. They require constant revision, revisiting, change and shift.

We see the work of revision and shifting at play when Pham learns to reconcile his own dual, hyphenated identity. At the end of the narrative, Pham presents the beginning of the resolution to his difficulties: he hints at an acceptance of the movement between the categories that define him by settling into the rhythms of

the spaces around him, rather than by quelling the intense vacillations between the categorical, temporal and spatial sites that situate his identity. Settling into these rhythms and moving with them, rather than stilling their motions, is the key to peaceful living. Milton Dawes argues that human beings live within a cluster of individual and collective rhythms that allow us to manage our individual movements as we seek to fit within the collectives in which we find ourselves. These oscillations organize and regulate daily living. Describing cultures entails describing how people make, manage and fit within the rhythms shared by large groups of people. Because we live in a world that is in constant flux, understanding the rhythms that move the various groups to which we belong can help individuals remain “in step” with the world around them. The time he spent away from Vietnam had put Pham out of step with the Vietnam he finds when he returns. Settling into its rhythms and rediscovering how to live in the space where he finds himself when he steps off the plane might have allowed Pham to adapt to the demands of living in the home he had left. The awful shuttling that disrupts the rhythms of his person might have settled into an easier oscillation that he might have been able to predict, and to which he might have adapted with much greater ease.

Toward the end of the journey, his acceptance of what each instant delivers allows him to reconcile himself with the ghosts that haunt his past, with both his new home in America, and with the home he left as a child. He spends three days on the beach near Ca Na, sleeping by the ocean and playing. At the same time, he gives up taking the next leg of his journey (336-338). He also gives up the desire for certain

interpretations of his body. While frolicking in the surf with an old woman, he allows her to read him however she wishes:

She says something in English, but I can't understand her, so I keep smiling and nodding. She laughs, I laugh with her. She tries a phrase in French. I shake my head. Never thinking I could understand her, she prattles in Vietnamese, It is beautiful, no? Very beautiful, very peaceful here, isn't it?

I smile. (338)

Pham offers little reaction to her probing of his identity. He subjects himself her trials to understand him with little more than a smile, allowing her Vietnamese to wash over him without declaring himself “one-hundred percent undiluted fish sauce!” He no longer seeks to belong, instead allowing belonging to come to him in small moments of acceptance: in a seed-spitting contest with a group of children, in kind words offered without consideration of whether their hearer will understand them (336). Instead of reminding the woman of their “shared history,” instead of disappointing her with his “commonality,” he evades any context:

...I let her interpret my half-truths. At this I am good, for I am a mover of between. I slip among classifications like water in cupped palms, leaving bits of myself behind. I am quick and deft, for there is no greater fear than the fear of being caught wanting to belong. I am a chameleon. And the best chameleon has no center, no truer sense of self than what he is in the instant. ...Our skin of history casts no shade on this moment. (339)

In this moment, Pham's biography presents a perfect example of a hybrid identity moving through the Third Space of enunciation. Bhabha's Third Space does not

merely intervene between discursive formations. It also characterizes every material encounter that shapes Pham's understanding of his cultural placement. Bhabha writes:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code.... It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity.... It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.

(37)

If the location of culture lies in the interstices between the domains of difference, then Pham's shuttling between categories is a graphic example of exactly how Bhabha's Third Space is articulated through the concrete practices of every day encounters. Pham himself dramatizes Third Space through his own ambivalence. He reads himself as a signifier of Vietnam's troubled history, interpreting his encounters with others as their reading of that history as it is written through his cultural hybridity. But, instead of reading him as simply a signifier of particular historicized moment, we might consider the significance of the everyday that structures Pham's encounters

in the biography as moments that enact the Third Space. Cultural hybridity (as Aravamudan argues in *Tropicopolitans*) does not reside merely in the realm of signs: it shapes the space between bodies as they move through the individuated dramas of daily living.

All cultural moments are constituted in hybridity. About this, Bhabha writes: “it is the ‘inter’—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (38). Pham’s residence in the interstices means that he accepts his mobility between categories of determination. However, his interstitiality carries with it a burden of signification that thrusts cultural difference and Vietnam’s difficult history into sharp relief whenever he encounters any native body on his journey. Pham wrestles with the weight of this burden throughout the biography. By accepting that his nature is one of constant change, motion, flux and renegotiation, he learns to allow his momentum to ease the burden’s weight—or to even change its nature—as he rides the hyphen that structures/deconstructs his own identity. The woman on the beach can think what she wishes about Pham because she will not catch him wanting to belong in either sense of the term. He does not reflect a desire for it, nor the lack of it. He slides between fixed truths with ease.¹⁴⁷ Instead of vacillating, Pham learns how to oscillate, how to find the rhythm that characterizes the spaces around him and move with them. This slippage is a source of distress for Pham at the earlier legs of his journey, as he slides between categories that bump against him painfully. Now that he is finding the rhythms of their movements as enacted by other people, he can negotiate the space he inhabits between them with much greater ease. With his decision to remain on the

beach and play, to end his journey near Ca Na, and to allow the woman he meets to label him, Pham might be doing exactly what the rhythms of the moment demand. Instead of impressing his own will and expectations upon the situation in which he finds himself, he allows himself to adapt to it, as a chameleon shifts color to match the surroundings in which it finds itself. Pham recognizes and settles himself into those rhythms that determine where he is. Had he given himself more time, perhaps Pham might have found himself caught up in the rhythms of Vietnam, much as tourists allow themselves to be caught in the rhythms of the *nem nuong* grills, but on a scale accessible only through the habits of daily life.

The cookbook and the travel narrative are both utopian spaces because neither is a real place in which we can find society at play. Both offer representations of real spaces. But the cookbook and table consciously erect a non-place that stands analogous to the real spaces of society. Furthermore, the cookbook and table allow for the reproduction of the “settledness” of categories that actual eating practices seem to defy. The table serves up reenactments of the connections sought by both Mai Pham and Andrew Pham in their real social interactions with their relatives. The utopia under construction in the kitchen allows for a measure of control that the real interactions evade—a lack of control that is exemplified by Andrew Pham’s dysentery. Whereas the cookbook instructs a reader in how to reproduce a space that enacts unity and cultural affiliation, the biography dramatizes the concepts of hybridity and heterotopianism in a manner that makes them expressions of a body moving among and between the categories that define it. The sublimity of the Vietnamese table and the illness of the *viet-kieu* body enact the divisions that splinter

the identities of those who find themselves wondering about the homes they find
wherever their feet happen to land.

NOTES

¹ Traci Marie Kelly's study of cookbooks entitled "If I Were a Voodoo Priestess" is the source for generic distinctions that organize the texts I study. I borrow her term *culinary autobiography* to describe the overarching category that gathers the subsets of cookbooks that autobiographers compile. I provide fuller applications of her subcategories below.

² The issue containing Magee's comments advances the discussion that Arjun Appadurai initiates in "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," an exemplary article on South Asian regional cookbooks. Many treatments that reference this work do so under the rubric of food studies. However, Magee's work advances the consideration of cookbooks in postcolonial contexts. While this work has been ably undertaken in issue 78 of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, which treats postcolonial food writing in Canadian cultural contexts, few analyses of cookbooks and food culture do so explicitly within the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies.

³ I frame the concept-metaphor of culture in greater detail below.

⁴ Meanwhile, the subject position of the native informant has been subjected to rigorous examination by postcolonial criticism. See Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* for her arguments that analyze the exposure and foreclosure of this figuration. Meanwhile, Aijaz Ahmad's "Languages of Class, Ideologies of Immigration" criticizes the formation of the native informant as a privileged position that authenticates documents translated from other languages.

⁵ Postcolonial theory mounts a sustained critique of positivist practices, viewing positivism as a powerful tool used to secure colonial rule and reinforce the imperial order. Magee, however, argues that the (arguably) undeniable connections between culinary practices and their points of cultural origin “problematiz[e] the anti-positivism we imbibed in the 80s and 90s, when Postcolonial Studies was first making its institutional presence felt” (7). According to Magee, cross-cultural culinary practices are already positivist in nature, and are a step in the direction of understanding culture as a technology (7-9). His unambivalent acceptance of the positivism of postcolonial culinary practices and their representations in recipe collections therefore intends to enervate postcolonial critical practices both by reaffirming that cultures are transmissible through reproduction of cultural practices (10) and by renewing the link between criticism and creativity (16).

⁶ While Selvon’s novel depicts diasporic displacement, his novel also features a welcoming meal that characters prepare as a means of easing the transition for others who find themselves making new homes in new lands.

⁷ See my discussion below of the connection between culinary autobiographies, culinary culture, and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Cookbooks represent the conjunction between these notions, where cookbooks participate in the imagining of the nation, as they manifest its various forms. Simon During’s *Secular Magic* provides an excellent means of understanding the language of conjuration and evocation attendant to culinary culture.

⁸ Lucy’s Long’s collection entitled *Culinary Tourism* analyzes the connection between tourism and eating foreign fare, examining the critical (and yet understated)

role that eating and food play in the touristic encounters with difference. Principal to her approach are a series of precepts that associate eating exotic foods with negotiations of familiarity and otherness both within and outside the borders of one's own nation. Her study confines itself to "eating otherness" in the United States, but would certainly prove apt were it applied to eating abroad.

Conversely, Lisa Heldke's *Exotic Appetites* treats eating exotic fare with a measure of trepidation, calling into question the manner in which food adventurism can constitute an act of cultural colonialism. While she doesn't not openly disparage or discourage eating exotic fare, she calls upon those among us who eat foreign cuisines to reflect upon the moral implications of our everyday eating practices, especially those that represent cultural crossroads.

⁹ Meanwhile, novels treat the problem of identity formation in changing contexts with candor and complexity. Bakhtin's analysis of the dialogism of novels provides an excellent framework for understanding this difference: novels are dialogic while cookbooks generally are not. Cookbooks are exclusionary, specific, and work in the realm of ideation. As such, they set themselves forth as perfect, isolated from other cookbooks. There is no cross-cookbook conversation. Cookbooks are not dialogic at all. While I treat this difference in greater detail below, full consideration of the structure and historical role of the novel is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

¹⁰ In the article under consideration, Bishop and Phillips explicitly restrict their treatment to Southeast and East Asian diasporas in the United States, and they trope as insignias the different factors that create diasporas. Bishop and Phillips' argument, however, readily applies to most populations on the move. For examples of the range

of factors that move people into diaspora, consult Paul Gilroy, Hector Tobar, Peter Winn, Ronald Takaki, and Steven Vertovec. These writers all provide useful references that outline the mechanics by which diasporic populations are “marked” by the factors that press them into motion. One of the more noteworthy examples of this distinction is the different insignias worn by the first wave and second wave of South Asian migration into the Americas (Vertovec, Takaki). While both migrations are marked by economic exigency, the first wave that moved into the Caribbean in the 1800’s wears the insignia of privation, where the second wave that moved to the US in the 20th Century is often marked by a certain measure of privilege: where unskilled peasant labor constituted the first wave, educated, privileged members of the middle and upper classes constituted the second.

I include all of these thinkers in the same context—movement along trajectories that result in residence overseas—because to segregate them geographically does not acknowledge the complex interplay among diasporic citizenships: Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* dramatizes this most ably by arguing that to isolate blackness in African-American and Afro-British segments would not acknowledge the fluidity of the diaspora, and the plural belonging that characterizes its functions, not merely along the axis of origin to terminus, but along the axes of multiple termini. Another key example of this complexity: V.S. Naipaul. A member of the Indo-Caribbean (already a citizen of the South Asian diaspora) he emigrated to England, involved himself in the Caribbean diasporic groups that gathered and wrote at the imperial center.

¹¹ Carol Bardenstien analyzes these tendencies at length in her essay entitled, “Figures of Diasporic Cultural Production: Some Entries from the Palestinian

Lexicon.” Her work provides the vocabulary for identifying the operations at work in many forms of diasporic cultural production and its accompanying body of criticism.

¹² Cf. Note 8 above.

¹³ See my exploration of Spivak’s definition of subalternity below. She disavows the notion of a “subaltern state.” I discuss the idea below.

¹⁴ Examples include The Mountain Maid Self Help Project’s *Mountain Maid Best Made Cookbook: A Complete Guide to Haitian Cooking Including Creole, French, Modern, and Fun Recipes* (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Mountain Maid Self-Help Project, 1980) and the International Child Care Association’s *Hope for Haiti: Favourite Haitian and Caribbean Recipes* (Mississauga, ON: International Child Care, 2006).

¹⁵ I address the supplement in greater detail below, but as the concept applies to cookbooks as a cultural praxis.

¹⁶ This dramatic image can be found on the page outlining Bright Hope International’s Dirt Cookie Drive (http://www.brighthope.org/group_resources/dirtcookies.php_). The page header screams “EAT DIRT COOKIES SO HE WON’T HAVE TO” next to an open-mouthed Afro-Haitian child exposing a tongue coated with mud. According to the page, the cookies that sponsors will sell taste foul: “They are a symbol of poverty and an emblem for you to encourage others to join the cause of relieving suffering. While 100% organic and edible, they are salty and the taste stays with you...just like the Haitian version.”

¹⁷ Maria Urrutia-Randelman’s culinary autobiography constitutes a perfect example of this blurring—the subject position that organizes her cookbook memoir is that of a child only partially aware of her political positioning relative to her nation of origin.

This allows her to idealize Cuban cultural spaces by detaching them from political exigencies. I study this text in greater depth in Chapter 2.

¹⁸ Madhur Jaffrey's *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, Raghavan Iyer's *The Turmeric Trail*, and Madhu Gadia's *New Indian Home Cooking* each feature introductions that cite nostalgia as the motivation for compiling the text.

¹⁹ This characterization of men in the kitchen here is very different than the phenomenon of the celebrity chef, where gender distinctions are certainly thematized, but where celebrity offers a measure of equal, although differentiated opportunity. Rachel Ray's photo spreads in FHM stand shoulder to shoulder with Alton Brown's position as host of *Iron Chef America*. Contrary to the practices they allege to perpetuate, these personalities are very much public, divorced from the very kitchens they render because the kitchen works in idealized terms: abundant tools; perfect, prepped ingredients; the apex of kitchen tech readily accessible, perfectly arranged countertops and burners that maximize efficiency. Culinary celebrities often tap into the domestic as a means of advancing themselves as a franchise: cooking and culture as commodity. This means that their celebrity translates across spheres. Hence, it is no shock that Padma Lakshmi can move from celebrity chef to television (hosting several seasons of *Top Chef*) to producing designer jewelry. Gordon Ramsey has much more in common with fictional chef Gareth Blackstone than with your average British housewife—he is foul-mouthed, abusive, attractive, larger than life in the kitchen, a man to be feared as well as loved. However, the division between televised kitchens and domestic practice often breaks down: Ramsey's *The F Word* works to bring professional cooking techniques into contact with everyday life, as he instructs

a young British woman in the perfect preparation of a steak by teaching her touch techniques to distinguish between rare, medium, and medium well-done meat.

The celebrity chef, who brings masculinity and entrepreneurship into the kitchen, diverts domesticity, a diversion readily seen in the cookbooks these chefs produce. The objective of these books often works counter to any kitchen practice. *The Big Fat Duck Cookbook* by Heston Blumenthal, a 532-page tome published in 2008 and detailing the history and techniques of molecular gastronomy, is designed, packaged and priced (at US\$250) to sit elegantly on a coffee table and wow readers with the machinery and chemistry that defines the foams, vapors, powders, spheres, and deconstructed dishes that define the practice (Anderson).

Further consideration of the celebrity chef is beyond scope of this dissertation.

²⁰ Timothy Brennan groups the novels under consideration in “The National Longing for Form” under the rubric of the Third World novel. I will not edit his term, but I will instead use the term the *postcolonial novel* to group the novels under consideration in my work. At the time of his writing, the use of the Third World as a descriptor of the global South or the numerous developing countries emerging from postcolonial rule opposed not only colonial rule, but also neocolonial incursion. Arif Dirlik’s *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* provides an excellent analysis of the problematic construction of the Third World. Additionally, Spivak challenges the structure of “Third Worldism” in *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Neil Larsen’s “Imperialism, Colonialism, Postcolonialism” undertakes an examination of the terminology that

structures the critical approaches in postcolonial studies. In his interrogation, he dissects the term “third world” and examines its evolution into Postcolonialism.

²¹ Cookbooks, however, do not. They map culture. Unlike the nation, culture is a homogenous terrain, available and accessible to all comers, a vehicle by which subjects can imagine the nation, a space that is no space (utopian) and that reconciles and absorbs difference. I examine this tendency at length in Chapter 2.

²² I examine this tendency at length in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

²³ In fact, I would stipulate that his observations touching upon the subject of language would extend to include most, if not all, cultural production, and do not restrict themselves to the novel form.

Spivak provides a clear elucidation of the concept-metaphor in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. I apply the structure of the concept-metaphor to “culture.” The term is “used in such a way that you cannot locate an adequate literal referent for the word.” It is “a regional question in a larger order which would subordinate it first to the domain of general ontology, subsequently to that of a fundamental ontology, and finally to the question of the truth of being itself” (126). These terms are “necessary and irreducible” signifiers of catachretic states. They constitute “false analog[ies]” (127) bound up in the systems which give them shape. Each concept-metaphor depends upon series of assumptions that themselves depend upon a series of assumptions, that ripple outward from a poorly defined central concept that itself can be understood only in terms of its metaphoricity. And yet these terms are not completely vacant—they link to history, to other symbolic structures, and to the body

in a complex interplay that defines their usage. The aporia at the heart of the concept-metaphor creates the vacancy that can be filled by the supplement.

²⁵ Derrida writes: “The supplement will always be the moving of the tongue or acting through the hands of others” (147). Recipe writing and compilation, coupled with autobiographic and autoethnographic details, forms that the supplement must take.

²⁶ Derrida writes:

[T]he concept of the supplement—which here determines that of the representative image—harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. (144-5)

²⁷ Derrida writes:

But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. (145)

²⁸ Derrida writes, “Each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other” (145).

²⁹ Derrida writes:

But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to

that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it. Unlike the *complement*...the supplement is an “*exterior* addition.” (145)

³⁰ Derrida writes:

As a substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. (145)

³¹ Derrida writes that “there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of a speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only *supplements*” (144).

³² Derrida writes:

Blindness thus produces that which is born at the same time as society: the languages, the regulated substitution of signs for things, the order of the supplement. One goes *from blindness to the supplement*. But the blind person cannot see, in its origin, the very thing he produces to supplement his sight. *Blindness to the supplement* is the law. And especially blindness to its concept. Moreover, it does not suffice to locate its functioning in order to *see* its meaning. The supplement has no sense and is given to no intuition. We do not therefore make it emerge out of this strange penumbra. We speak its reserve. (149)

³³ Baudrillard writes:

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no

longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—*procession of simulacra*—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*. (1)

³⁴ Baudrillard writes:

[T]he whole system becomes weightless, / it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.(6)

³⁵ However, Bower reads these texts along strictly delineated gender lines, arguing that the exclusion of cookbooks from formal consideration reflects a gender-based lack of acknowledgement by a “patriarchal literary establishment” (Avakian and Haber, 18).

³⁶ The placement of the reader slips in my study, sliding between the reader who cooks, the reader who collects cookbooks, the reader of the novel, and the reader of the dissertation. This slippage is purposefully elided because these positions often overlap, particularly in novels that also present recipes and culinary autobiographies that present the story of the author alongside the recipe collection. Broadly speaking, the reader in Chapter 1 is unproblematic—the model of this reader is relatively conventional and comes to the text with specific assumptions that the text attempts to answer. This model is exposed as untenable as the dissertation progresses. Full

consideration of readership and reader intentionality, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

³⁷ The index devotes five and a half columns to recipes from India. No other country has as much space devoted to its recipes.

³⁸ Titles that Jaffrey has published include *A Taste of India* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1986) *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's, 1983), *Madhur Jaffrey's Illustrated Indian Cookery* (London: BBC Books, 1994), *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (New York: Knopf, 1973), *Madhur Jaffrey's Quick & Easy Indian Cooking* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), *Indian Cooking* (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Barron's 2003), *Madhur Spice Kitchen: Fifty Recipes Introducing Indian Spices and Aromatic Seeds* (New York: Carol Southern Books, 1993), *Foolproof Indian Cooking: Step by Step to Everyone's Favorite Indian Recipes* (Etobicoke, Ont. : Winding Stair Press, 2002), and *Flavors of India: Classics and New Discoveries* (New York: C. Southern Books, 1995). Many of these titles have been republished internationally, or are revised editions.

³⁹ In his article entitled "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," Arjun Appadurai describes how culinary references (both in terms of cookbooks and stereotypical eating habits) become a register by which to map the nation. In *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's, 1983) Madhur Jaffrey substantiates Appadurai's argument, but from a position of recollective nostalgia. In the Introduction, she describes her desire to learn Indian cooking as a means of reconnecting with her distant home (7). Jaffrey is not the only author to observe this methodology: Raghavan Iyer's *The Turmeric Trail* (New York:

St. Martin's Press, 2002) for example, uses recipes as mile markers to structure a biographical narrative. In Iyer's book, food provides a context for his memories, weaving the transient experience of taste and texture into the weft of his life.

⁴⁰ This follows Pheng Cheah's reading of Kant. It is useful because Cheah focuses on the moral imperatives set forth by Kant's model of cosmopolitanism (290-1).

⁴¹ Panna Thakrar's spicy corn with sesame seeds and tomatoes (*tamatar varu makai nu shaak*) "is excellent with breads," which allow the dish to showcase its international versatility: "[i]t may be rolled inside a tortilla or an Indian chapatti or stuffed into a pita bread along with some Tahini sauce" (174). Jaffrey's recipe for pumpkin or Hubbard squash cooked with Bengali seasonings (*Bangali kaddu*) "may" be served "with most Indian meals," but Jaffrey also "like[s] to put this dish together with Palestinian rice with lentils and browned onions" to obtain an "international feel" (289). Okra with tomatoes (*mayai wara bhinda*) "may be served plain, the way it is [presented], or, as is more common among those of Indian-Muslim descent in Uganda, with a topping of scrambled eggs or even an omelet" (253).

⁴² Brennan's history of cosmopolitanism as laid out in "Cosmo-Theory" begins with an examination of George Simmel's "empha[sis of] the economic and colonial form of cosmopolitanism as an ethos":

In Simmel's considered opinion, cosmopolitanism conformed to a kind of law colonial expansion whereby urban centers (metropolitan regions) justified their encroaching power over geopolitically dispersed, and therefore vulnerable, territories. The process in his view assumed the coloring of an implacable, beneficial logic. (666)

⁴³ Until my father's heart attack, my mother would prepare collard greens, often in combination with mustard greens or kale, by boiling a smoked hamhock or pieces of salt pork in the largest Dutch oven we owned. Then she would chop cleaned greens into a sink full of cold water. She would clean the greens by soaking them to loosen the sand, then rubbing them until they squeaked. (Before soaking, my grandfather would first noisily slap the soil and insects from the collard greens that he grew. My mom learned how to prepare her greens by watching him prepare them.) The cleaned greens would then be stuffed into the pot. After chasing the last floating pieces in the sink, she would drain the water, add a generous shake of garlic salt and a dollop of chicken or bacon grease to the pot, close the lid, and let the greens boil until the stems were tender. After my father returned home from his illness, she chose to leave out the salt and the grease, using smaller portions of smoked turkey neck to acquire the characteristic smoky flavoring. She serves greens at every holiday meal.

My mother always makes too many greens, and usually freezes portions. These she digs out of the freezer and thaws alongside frozen chicken wings or legs that she fries. We eat these with mashed potatoes and gravy or macaroni and cheese. Collard greens are also part of our New Year's meal, which also includes Hoppin' John (black-eyed peas and rice) and seafood, usually fried fish, scallops or shrimp.

⁴⁴ According to Shankar Bhattacharyya, who posts to [rec.food.cooking](#) about the proper methods of cooking with mustard oil, the oil must be "treated gently" because, not only will improper heating compromise its flavor, but "[a]llyl isothiocyanate[, the chemical agent in mustard oil that is responsible for its distinctive flavor,] has been used as a chemical weapon, incidentally, so if you do heat the oil up, avoid getting a

lungful. The quantities in the oil will not do you any harm, but a lungful can be quite annoying.” While his warning does not approach the dire nature of the FDA’s abjuration, he does note that a cook should exercise a measure of care when handling the ingredient to ensure her personal comfort.

⁴⁵ This follows the same method of globalization that Spivak describes, where “[g]lobalization is achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere.” (*Imperative*, 44)

⁴⁶ Anne McClintock examines this relationship at great length in *Imperial Leather*. I outline her argument in the Introduction of this dissertation.

⁴⁷ Mrs. Patton of Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* arguably suffers from this amnesia.

⁴⁸ Jaffrey acknowledges the shared Indian heritage of the two *pacchadis*, stating that, “Even though *pacchadis* originated in South India and in their motherland are fruit- or vegetable-based yogurt dishes, once they traveled East with migrants, they began to take new forms” (322). Unlike its Indian progenitor, the recipe for pineapple *pacchadi* does not use yogurt. According to Jaffrey, “This may well be because many East Asians, being lactose-intolerant, have no milk-based dishes in their culture.” Another difference that Jaffrey attempts to accommodate is the Malaysian use of fresh hot red chiles instead of the dried chiles that appear in her Indian *manga pacchadi*. Because these chiles are not as easy for her to find, she substitutes the dried chiles, but states that softening them will allow for proper incorporation (322).

⁴⁹ Appiah describes “rooted cosmopolitan” as:

attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural peculiarities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to

other, different, people. The cosmopolitan also imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in a natal patria, so that the circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora. (91-2)

⁵⁰ Appiah writes:

Many would, no doubt, spend their lives in the places that shaped them, and that is one of the reasons local cultural practices would be sustained and transmitted. But many would move, and that would mean that cultural practices would travel also (as they have always traveled). The result would be a world in which each local form of human life is the result of long-term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization—a world, in that respect, much like the world we live in now. (92)

⁵¹ Pollan contrasts the USDA's recommendation to dock a hog's tail as a means of combating the problems of infection that arise in industrial farm practices with Joel Salatin's use of pigs to make compost. Docking tails combats infection because, in even their most demoralized state, pigs with docked tails find a bite from a pen-mate too painful to bear, whereas depressed pigs with undocked tails will allow their tails to be chewed and sucked. Porcine infection is reduced, not by ameliorating the conditions that create suffering, but by enhancing them.

On the other hand, Joel Salatin's farm produces bacon and compost by building a system "predicated on what he calls 'the pigness of the pig'":

What distinguishes Salatin's system is that it is designed around the natural predilections of the pig rather than around the requirements of a production system to which the pigs are then conformed. Pig happiness is simply the by-product of treating pigs as pigs rather than as 'a protein machine with flaws'—flaws such as pigtails and a tendency, when emiserated, to get stressed. (219)

⁵² It is precisely this sentiment to which Mrs. Patton appeals when she cites Hinduism (as practiced by "Hindoos" [*Fasting* 164]) as the template for her own vegetarianism and leverages Arun as a type of native informant to validate her new culinary practices or, more correctly, their adjustment to accommodate her new eating habits.

⁵³ Brennan, 672. Brennan, however, critiques novelist Fernando Pessoa's manifesto for the periodical *Orpheu*. Similarly to Pessao's vision of how *Orpheu* will serve as a "denationalized" gathering point for "real modern art," Jaffrey's book hopes to "accumulate within it all parts of the world." The typicality of the modern eater is captured in her Introduction, where she observes how global eating habits have become normalized as international fare leaps across boundaries. The difference, however, between their two visions (a difference that Brennan seems to overlook) is that denationalization is not synonymous with internationality—while Jaffrey's *World Vegetarian* does attempt to further the project of erasing borders and boundaries that define national spaces, she never completely strips a dish of its national identifiers. In fact, preserving these markers and providing others in the form of labels and anecdotes are key features of her project, even as she presents the recipes in a denationalized, globalized space.

⁵⁴ In *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan defines utopian performatives in the following manner:

They are small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (5)

⁵⁵ Dolan notes that the utopian performative is marked by an element of melancholy because it passes: “[Plays and performances] allow fleeting contact with a utopia not stabilized by its own finished perfection, not coercive in its contained, self-reliant, self-determined system, but a utopia always in process, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experience” (6).

⁵⁶ More importantly, this description of the practices of eating a *masala omlate* evokes Benedict Anderson’s concept of imagined community. His argument is based, however, upon the precepts of a sharply articulated nationalism. Conversely, I argue that Jaffrey’s imagined communities emerge out of an utopian cosmopolitanism. This reimagines discourses of nationalism within cosmopolitanism, and reconfigures the imaginary communities that structure civic life by offering alternative, transnational models.

⁵⁷ This is in keeping with Michel De Certeau’s analysis of the manner in which daily practices create culture. He writes:

How can one find the right words, words that are rather simple, ordinary, and precise, to recount these sequences of gestures, bound together over and over

again, that weave the indeterminate cloth of culinary practices within the intimacy of kitchens? (199)

Jaffrey proffers the recipe as a way of recounting that series of gestures.

⁵⁸ Dolan argues that utopian performatives are related to the *gestus* theorized by Bertolt Brecht,

actions in performance that crystallize social relations and offer them to spectators for critical contemplation. In some ways, utopian performatives are the received moment of *gestus*, when those well-delineated, moving pictures of social relations become not only intellectually clear, but felt and lived by spectators as well as actors. (7)

⁵⁹ Jill Dolan writes that, in addition to the promise of a “better later,” utopian performatives also “critically rehearse civic engagement that could be effective in the wider public and political realm. These moments...provoke affective rehearsals for revolution” (7).

⁶⁰ By way of comparison, Rombauer and Becker’s *Joy of Cooking* constitutes a comprehensive catalog of recipes, tools and techniques, with 59 pages devoted to the index alone. The joy that cooking evokes derives entirely from the pleasure of hands pressed into soft dough, the musky scent onions leave on the hands before a brisk scrubbing with halved lemons, the satisfaction of a well-prepared meal, and the weight of a tired body after a task well done. It is not linked to political action, and the pleasures are familiar rather than exotic.

⁶¹ A notable exception is the incursion of fast food restaurants, which the book treats in detail. Each depiction of fast food stresses its appeal to children and the relative uniformity of both the food and its associated iconography (12-3, 94-5, 266, 275).

⁶² Spivak writes, “If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us, it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away[.]”

(46) This means that the distance that separates me from other people in the world is not as vast as oppositions and segregations based on economics and ethnicity would suggest. We are all part of the same planetary system—far-flung and closely clinging in the same moment.

⁶³ My interaction with her may act out the formulation that Spivak describes in the following terms:

I need to learn from you what you practice, I need it even if you didn’t want to share a bit of my pie; but there’s something I want to give you, which will make our shared practice flourish. You don’t know, and I didn’t know, that civility requires your practice of responsibility as pre-originary right. (78)

This activity provides the support for a mutual rethinking that enables “diversified social tact, persuasion rather than coercion” (80).

⁶⁴ This moment is reminiscent of the spillage of the dokhla batter in *Motiba’s Tattoos*, a moment that I examine in the Introduction. The lesson that Motiba teaches the women in the kitchen is that what the men do not know will not hurt them.

⁶⁵ This also reveals the gendered culinary order in suburbia: women cook in the house, men cook on the grill.

⁶⁶ Mrs. Patton's own body also seems to lack the capacity to convert food into nourishment. Her eating creates her shapelessness (211). Her food has not nourished her: it instead lays on her body in blobs and folds.

⁶⁷ Biju's experience accords closely with the model of discrepant cosmopolitanism set forth by James Clifford in *Routes*. He writes:

As Stuart Hall has argued in a provocative series of articles, diasporic conjunctures invite a reconception—both theoretical and political—of familiar notions of ethnicity and identity. Unresolved historical dialogues between continuity and disruption, essence and positionality, homogeneity and differences (cross-cutting “us” and “them”) characterize diasporic articulations. Such cultures of displacement and transplantation are inseparable from specific, often violent, histories of economic, political, and cultural interaction—histories that generate what might be called *discrepant cosmopolitanisms*. In this emphasis we avoid, at least, the excessive localism of particularist cultural relativism, as well as the overly global vision of a capitalist or technocratic monoculture [cf. *The World is Flat* by Thomas L. Friedman (New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)]. And in this perspective the notion that certain classes of people are cosmopolitan (travelers) while the rest are local (natives) appears as the ideology of one (very powerful) traveling culture. (36)

⁶⁸ Amy Novak writes:

Both Abani's and Adichie's novels critique the post in Postcolonialism when it ignores the way that trauma lingers and repeats itself in the present. In these novels

there is no end to colonialism, only a transformation of US and European policies and methods. Conquest and slavery are replaced by the creation of a market that relies heavily on the import of European and US products and by the fueling of tensions between classes and ethnic groups in the name of this continued trade. (35)

⁶⁹ Brian Richardson provides an extensive interrogation of the paratext in *Narrative Beginnings*, citing Gérard Genette's definition of those elements of the text that give it materiality and context. The paratext constitutes all the "'auxillary' discourses that surround, serve and present a text" (30). Genette further divides the paratext into the "peritext" that designates elements that are physical features of the text, and the "epitext" that designates elements that are not part of the text but which serve to provide context, such as interviews, correspondences, articles, essays, and diaries.

Derrida complicates the neat division between text and paratext by introducing the concept of the *parergon* in his essay by the same title. The *parergon* is that which is part of the text yet outside the text, not of the text yet inseparable from it. Rather than exist as a classification outside the work, Derrida indicates that the paratext that frames the text occupies an ambivalent liminal position neither entirely within nor entirely outside the text, because it occupies the "invisible limit to (between) the interiority of meaning...and all the empiricisms of the extrinsic which, incapable of either seeing or reading, miss the questions completely" (61). This blurs the clean distinctions that determine what is text and what is not.

⁷⁰ Carol Bardenstien's "Figures of Diasporic Cultural Production: Some Entries from the Palestinian Lexicon" treats these tendencies in detail as they pertain to cookbooks written in Palestinian diasporic contexts.

⁷¹ Chris Dunton's "Entropy and energy: Lagos as city of words" provides an excellent interrogation of Lagos as both a generative as well as a catastrophic site. His study concentrates on the depictions of the city in a series of novels that are set there.

⁷² The structure of this moment appears in other postcolonial literary depictions of eating and drinking, where contentment and enjoyment serve to enhance senses of suffering and discontent. For example, Mr. Biswas watches Ajodha drink a glass of milk with a relish that Biswas has never felt. The enjoyment that he sees becomes a foil to his own persistent discontentment. I analyze this moment at greater detail in my article entitled "Unmaking Home in *A House for Mr. Biswas*" (*Territorial Terrors: Contested Spaces in Colonial and Postcolonial Writing*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007. 55-70).

⁷³ Incidents of monkey-eating incident occurs in both this novel and in *Novel Without a Name*, which is set in Vietnam during the Civil War. In both, a called upon to eat a primate cooked by his squad, and is ridiculed for not eating it. They each overcome their revulsion long enough to taste. Innocent's experience with eating the monkey refracts that which occurs in *Novel Without a Name*. In these texts, eating monkeys is a horrifying, but acceptable practice because of the serious deprivation that the characters must endure; necessity drives them to do that which might never do during times of peace—including killing other people and dealing with their own dead. In both novels, the eating of simian bodies is a masculine activity that measures both the strength of the protagonists (a measure they fail to meet) and that tests their ethical superiority (which both ambivalently pass—the taste lingers, but so does the horror).

⁷⁴ Shortages of meat in the provisions supplied to African countries such as Tanzania, the Congo, and Gabon. have spurred the practice of hunting endangered species for food. The absence of meat from much of these relief packages symbolizes a “failure of relief organizations to meet the basic needs of their charges” (Barclay). Karl Ammann’s striking images of these foods complement the report in a gruesome, shocking manner, focusing on the heads, hands and eyes of primates, or upon bound animal bodies trussed for sale in markets (Ammann).

⁷⁵ In addition to appearing on page 44, the description of the writing as “spidery” appears on pages 11 and 146.

⁷⁶ In “Transmissions Interrupted,” Carol Bardenstein describes a cookbook written by a son who learns recipes and techniques at the knee of his mother; he cannot overtly state that he learned such a thing from her, because cooking negates his masculinity. Bardenstein writes:

[I]nstead of emanating from the author, as the stories do, the actual line of transmission for the food/recipe component of this cookbook-memoir is apparently far more complicated than first seemed to be the case and has largely been submerged from clear view. In this chain, women (Shihab’s mother and his wife) who are still “in the kitchen” have the intimate and embodied knowledge of food preparation and play a vital and substantial role in the provenance of the book’s recipes. Shihab’s role in the chain of transmission is crucial as well—without it none of his mother’s embodied knowledge would have reached the printing press. For reasons that are not altogether clear, Shihab has not made the details of the chain of transmission

visible to his readers, particularly the degree to which his knowledge was dependent on the knowledge of other people (women) in the process. Thus, while it might have first appeared that this was an instance of a reconfiguration along gender lines on multiple levels, on closer scrutiny it appears to be a more limited but still substantial and noteworthy such reconfiguration. It is clearly the case, however, that neither Shihab's taking on the untraditional role of being involved in transmitting cultural and food knowledge in the form of a cookbook-memoir nor the new, if somewhat submerged, lines of transmission of food knowledge would have emerged if not for the rupture of exile. The dislocation of exile has played a substantial role in shaping reconfigurations of the transmission of food and cultural knowledge as articulated in *A Taste of Palestine*, both in terms of the texture of the portrayal of Palestine and along the lines of gender. (Bardenstien, 374)

He produces a much more effective version of what Elvis' mother leaves Elvis by taking transcription directly. He is exactly opposite: he is in exile, Elvis is at home; he writes the cookbook, Elvis reads; his cookbook is clear, Elvis' is indecipherable. This moves us to ask the following questions: What would the cookbook have looked like, had Elvis written it? How might its function have changed in the text? Might his disillusionment been sharper? He seems to relinquish whatever claims to the ancient kingdom that his mother's handwriting might have mapped.

⁷⁷ Esty writes, "To the extent that excrement serves as a sign of failed development in these novels, it becomes part of a vexed political (and interpretive) question. Is shit the residue of colonial underdevelopment or evidence of failed African government?"

(32) Because Abani's work is less interested in the colonial-postcolonial distinction than it is in critiquing the emerging Nigerian nation, the answer when applied to his text would perhaps be that shit is evidence of failed African government, as well as residue of global neglect.

⁷⁸ Esty writes: "Of course, the danger of an excremental vision as profoundly disillusioned as, for example, Armah's is that political distinctions become impossible—or that disillusionment is converted into a complete rejection of African life" (35)

⁷⁹ This practice of troping is in keeping with the prevalence of scatological imagery that "emerges as an index of moral and political outrage" in postindependence African fiction. In "Excremental Postcolonialism," Joshua D. Esty argues that "[m]ore searching forms of analysis are required...to explain the remarkable currency and symbolic versatility of excrement in the postcolony—to account for shit's function not just as a naturalistic detail but as a governing trope in postcolonial literature" (22-23). Esty's study advances an argument set forth by Warwick Anderson. Esty writes:

Anderson draws attention to the crucial role played by clean bodies—imagined in almost transcendental terms—in the modernization and development enterprises of colonialism. In particular, Anderson describes the methods by which U.S. colonizers produced an image of Filipino natives as unsanitary and excremental. Anderson's history of this rhetorical and epidemiological debasement provides a good point of departure for a study of excremental images in the *postcolonial* era, when shit begins to operate counterdiscursively. In postcolonial writing, shit can redress a history of

debasement by displaying the failures of development and contradictions of colonial discourse and, moreover, by disrupting inherited associations of excrement with colonized or non-Western populations. (25-6)

Esty's work "[picks] up where Anderson leaves off...address[ing] shit not so much as a material object but as a powerful 'discursive resource' within a new symbolic order" (26).

⁸⁰ Esty analyses Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, remarking upon the "harsher critics [who] observe that *The Beautiful Ones* betrays a deep distaste for its own setting":

[T]he narrator's recoil from the shit-ridden city is not simply an abstract device but a visceral rejection of public life in Ghana. His bleakly excremental vision leaves Armah open to charges that he represents a self-loathing view of his society that internalizes colonial-era denigrations of the third world...Armah takes pains to lay bare the neocolonial and historical dimensions of Ghana's situation; indeed, he uses excremental language throughout to describe uneven development as a particular combination of surplus and shortfall produced by the legacies of European imperialism. (32)

⁸¹ A similar moment arises in Tayler's memoir: he watches a man defecate off of the bow of the boat, while another fishes from the same water. As an outsider in a position of privilege, Tayler does not have to endure drinking polluted water: he can drink bottled water that he shares with the Colonel and his men.

⁸² This formulation seems to hint at abjection, suggesting that Elvis is rendered abject by the circumstances in which he finds himself. Elvis actually inverts and complicates the definition of abjection.

If we assume that Elvis is the subject who jettisons the abject, and Nigeria is the abject, then his subject position defies abjection, because he in fact leaves the abject instead of casting it out or purging himself of it. Nigeria's filthiness certainly fits the form of abjection through its disorderliness, its refusal to establish and maintain boundaries, and its pervasive perversity. We can never know whether Elvis casts Nigeria out of himself, exorcising the nation from his identity, although his adoption of Redemption's name suggests that he does as he undergoes a process of renewal that begins with stepping aboard a plane to America. Nigeria reveals itself to be a massive complex of contradictory notions that fail to untangle themselves into a rational, working state, and Elvis seems to leave it in a state of barely lucid bewilderment.

If we assume that Nigeria occupies the subject position in relation to Elvis as the abject (the novel might actually be less about Elvis than about Nigeria) then Elvis defies abjection. While his incompatibility seems to demand an expulsion, and while he lacks a measure of weight or value in the novel (he is shuttled from place to place, circumstance to circumstance, without clear causal involvement) he lacks many of the qualifying characteristics that render a thing abject. He lacks the power to challenge Nigeria except as a passive ideal that endures insult after insult—Elvis can only gaze on in puzzlement and bewilderment, lacking the facility to even interrogate what happens to him. He is the novel's frail, imperfect, suffering moral center. He is

interested in music, books and dance. He is generous (if not completely altruistic) and other characters seem drawn to an essential “goodness” that he seems to radiate—a goodness that provokes Redemption to gift him with a passport and a new name.

Within Elvis resides a seat of purity and desire assailed by the traumas he suffers in the novel. However, he repudiates very little. The state, however, persists in its uncleanliness. Instead of purging itself of the corrupting forces that warp its political landscape, any purgation jettisons all virtues—art, literacy, beauty.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, Elvis is not cast out. He leaves Nigeria, perhaps to challenge the country from a different shore. The blankness that the novel opens after its final passage leaves the reader guessing about whether he even arrives at his destination. Even if the novel is Elvis’ *bildungsroman*, this particular lack of closure suggests that the novel is ultimately about Nigeria—once Elvis departs, the reader remains in Nigeria, fixed in place as he exits the text. This African story does not leave African shores. This means that the novel is less Elvis’ story than it is Lagos’ story. And if it is Lagos’ story, then it wallows in an acceptance of its own paradoxically filthy beauty, expelling from itself the clearest voice of goodness and change. The nation is never purified. Kristeva’s equation is reworked by the perverse mathematics of the post-colonial state.

⁸³ Warwick Anderson’s thoughts about the excremental order are especially apt here: it is control of one’s excretion that marks modernity. The problem in Graceland is not that people shit; it is that their excretion is so uncontained that it seeps into every aspect of everyday living, becoming a defining element of everyday existence.

⁸⁴ This dissertation prefers Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's definition of the subaltern, in part because Partha Chatterjee's configuration of subalternity does not accommodate the urban body that might experience equal disenfranchisement. Elvis' repeated attempts to make money and his failure to cultivate sustained financial success illustrate his disenfranchisement.

⁸⁵ Among others, see Hewett, Heather. "Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation." (*English in Africa* 32.1 (2005): 73-97) and "Beyond the Odds of the Red Hibiscus: A Critical Reading of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" By Anthony C. Oha (*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.1, no.9, August 2007, 199-211), as well as in Hron's article, cited above.

⁸⁶ For a wonderful analysis of the manner in which Nyasha's self-starvation negotiates issues of famine and health, see Clare Barker's "Self-starvation in the context of hunger: Health, normalcy and the 'terror of the possible' in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*." (*Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44.2 (2008): 115-125). Other thinkers who offer excellent ingress into the novel include Clare Counihan's "Reading the figure of woman in African literature: psychoanalysis, difference, and desire" (*Research in African Literatures* (2007): 161-81).

⁸⁷ Kelli Donovan Wixson cites recent studies that argue that Nyasha's eating disorder has a deeper cultural signification and note that Nyasha's diagnosis reveals a blind spot in the treatment of eating disorders suffered by women of color. Because they fail to fit the conventional profile of the anorexic woman (white, middle to upper-class, Western) they are often excluded from studies examining the illness (229).

⁸⁸ Wixson's reading of the conjunction between food, economy, and women in the text reinforces this reading. She writes that "[Nyasha's] illness can be understood as her only available response to the double-alienation of being a Western-educated female who has returned to Africa and cannot reconcile those two sets of conflicting cultural values" (229).

⁸⁹ Aunty Ifeoma's family follows much more closely to the faith of her traditionalist father, whereas Eugene has chosen to break from the rest of the family to follow Catholicism. Yoked to religious choices are cultural ones. For example the musicians that most appeal to Amaka are "indigenous" and "culturally conscious" (118). Kambili's repeated observations of the absence of laughter and music in her house therefore intimate her perceptions of a cultural vacuum that drains color and life from her home. Meanwhile, Kambili is chastised for bowing to an Igwe and for failing to bow to a bishop (93-4)—religious affiliations confuse her decisions regarding cultural mannerisms.

⁹⁰ This reaction directly opposes Gayatri Spivak's concept of *haq*, or "responsibility as right," which I explore in great detail in Chapter 3.

⁹¹ This constitutes another difference between Lagos and Kinshasa. It is perhaps the case that conditions in Lagos are not quite as desperate, given that Elvis' account includes fast western tourists and active, multiethnic nightclubs; meanwhile, Tayler depicts the entirety of Zaire as hostile to foreigners, including Kinshasa.

⁹² The use of stomach pains, nausea and diarrhea to signify a lack of belonging emerges often in novels, travelogues, and autobiographies that feature displacement as a central concern. Alexandra Fuller's autobiography features a scene in which she

drinks from a drum of river water and falls violently ill (176-9). This signifier of a body out of place, rejected by the very land on which she stands, appears in a work that describes a life structured by the transformation of Rhodesia into Zimbabwe. However, even this signification is rendered ambiguous: a meal of sadza nourishes her back to health, and she resolves to never leave Africa (179).

⁹³ In this way, this chapter pursues the same paradigms as Carol Bardenstein's argument in "The Gender of Nostalgia." She is less interested in "the reductive purpose of exposing an inconsistency that would invalidate the claim to food" than she is in exposing "an indication or symptom of some of the unique operations of memory and collective identification":

its fluid formations and reconstructions that proliferate around food—the recollection of food, the preparation, consumption, and writing/talking about food, the transmission of knowledge about food—in particular contexts of the radical displacement of exile" (355).

⁹⁴ While my study perhaps more properly belongs within the framework of Latin American studies, I situate a postcolonial examination of these Cuban texts in keeping with the theory of the repeating island as articulated by Cuban author and critical theorist Benitez-Rojo and within the framework of diasporan studies and other theories of exile.

⁹⁵ This chapter will concentrate solely on Arenas' memoir. While I will engage selections from his poem entitled "My Lover the Sea," consideration of the larger body of his works is beyond the scope of this argument. However, the themes of excrement that I pursue later in the chapter refract in his works such as *The Color of*

Summer, while *Singing in the Well* provides an excellent opportunity to examine dysfunctional domesticity. I have chosen his memoir for the reasons outlined above.

⁹⁶ In this way, Caribbean culinary writing enacts the syncretic, polyrhythmic, chaotic cultural character of the Caribbean described by Antonio Benitez-Rojo in the introduction of *The Repeating Island*. He suggests that the cultural admixture, fluidity, and indistinctness of the Caribbean is yet bound by features of the Caribbean that one can “sense.” At the center of the Caribbean exists an island that is none of the islands on the map—and yet is all of them. He writes:

That original, that island at the center, is as impossible to reach as the hypothetical Antilles that reappeared time and again, always fleetingly, in the cosmographers’ charts. This is again because the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago..., and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center. Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea what a vengeance [...] (3-4)

If culinary autobiographies rely on the shape of the nation to articulate a specific biographical response then Caribbean cookbooks must define that which resists definition and pin it to the map—something that Benitez-Rojo states is impossible to do and something that globalization and global capital do with paradoxical ease. As I shall argue in this chapter, this is not the case for Cuba, which has a distinct cultural outline that is, as we see in the case of Reinaldo Arenas, the product of a concerted effort of the Cuban government and its management of the arts. It is against this distinct cultural outline that Randelman writes her cookbook.

⁹⁷ Both works were written during a time in American history where the US held heavy sanctions against Cuba, limiting exports and imports, and severely restricting travel. At the time of this writing, the Obama administration is working to lift those sanctions to improve relations with Cuba, and endeavor met with a mixed reception.

⁹⁸ In many ways, this resembles the surplus of Indian cookbooks crowding bookstore shelves; the Indians who wrote them belong to the middle class and share an immigrant experience that benefits from access to education, wealth, and social privilege. For more about this, see footnote 3 of Phillips, 2006.

⁹⁹ Benítez-Rojo writes this in reference to Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's work, clearly characterizing it as participating not just in Cuban literary culture, but in the larger canon of the Caribbean.

¹⁰⁰ Bardenstein writes:

[F]ood is a central component or trajectory along which personal and collective memory is articulated retroactively, after displacement. The cookbook memoir written from within the experience of exile is a particularly rich site for exploring relationships between food and memory, constructions of collective memory and cultural identity, the experience of exile, and the ways that nostalgia mediates between the past and the present, shaping and reshaping both in the process. And at least in part because of cultural assumptions that associate food preparation and knowledge with a female gendered sphere, and because of the persistence of associations of the female and the "maternal" in particular, with a conflated home/homeland and with nurturing and providing nourishment, the cookbook-memoir written from the

experience of exile also offers new insights about how food and memory, and the relationships between them, get restructured in gendered ways. (358)

While her cookbook presents an open invitation for the consideration of the ways in which gender operate in both the cookbook memoir and Arenas' text fuller address of this dimension of both works remain beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is noteworthy that, no matter the cultural alignment of the dishes that she presents in the cookbook, the cooks that prepare the meals are invariably feminine—her unmarried, culturally ambiguous Aunt Titi serves more cosmopolitan fare for upper-class gatherings, whereas her other aunts and female cooks feed the residents and at the plantations and clubs that locate her dishes (see below for a fuller discussion of the location of culture[s] that serve as sites of longing in Randelman's text).

Meanwhile, Arenas identifies heteronormative, masculine forces as those that erect the framework of his sexual oppression. However, he constructs a heteronormativity under constant assault by his irresistible sexuality. It is vulnerable to, tempted by, and frightened of his desire, and furtively indulges in encounters with homosexuals that it overtly decries. Full consideration of Arenas' depiction of state-sanctioned hypocrisy in Cuba's treatment of homosexuals and homosexuality are also beyond the framework of this essay and has been ably addressed by Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, who argues that Arenas' memoir positions his homosexual body as a monument in exile demanding repatriation.

¹⁰¹ This arrangement follows the same logic as that determining the relationship between recipes and narrative in Chris Abani's *Graceland*.

¹⁰² In Benítez-Rojo's analysis of Augustín Acosta's work, he focuses intently on the connection between culture, economy, and power as located in Augustín's descriptions of the sugar plantation and "the sugar harvest as a historical process" (116). Interestingly enough, he observes that Cuba's absorption of African culture did not occur on the grounds of the sugar plantation, liberating Afro-Cuba of its allegiance to the forces of plantation-based labor that shaped the presence of other African groups in the Americas (principally African-Americans in the US). Instead, he observes that the earliest forms of Antillean culture on the island were shaped by Afro-Cubans employed in "the leather economy, produce cultivation, public works, and domestic service" (68).

¹⁰³ Benítez-Rojo's analysis of Acosta's radical poetry notes that the poet pairs powerful North American sugar mills with the image of battleships moored on the island. The sugar industry subjugates the people. Benítez-Rojo writes:

To Acosta, Cuban reality has not moved toward progress, it has remained trapped by the *zafra* [The Cane Harvest]'s centripetal force, and it keeps spinning around it. Yankee power has succeeded Spanish power, one founded on conquest and colonization, the other on military intervention, battleship squadrons, the Platt Amendment, and above all, capital investment in the sugar industry. (117)

To place this poem and Benítez-Rojo's analysis into perspective, Acosta writes in the late 1920's. Urrutia-Randelman's memories are located in the 1950's. However, it would be misleading to simply say that the superimposition of the sugar's power is

not tied to a specific political interest, and therefore adheres to no cultural body.

Instead, the structure of its power repeats. As Benítez-Rojo writes:

[F]rom that time until now, anything that threatens the sugar-producing order, whatever the political and ideological nature of the group managing the power of the sugar mill, is always called anti-Cuban. In reality, ever since the Plantation was first set up, sugar has been carrying out a national security policy that first saw itself as anti-abolitionist, later as anti-independence, then it called itself “democratic” and now “revolutionary.” At bottom this national security policy has not changed substantially, it has repeated itself while adjusting to Cuba’s historical realities... Thus sugar is the same as fatherland, and to produce sugar is to be Cuban. (114)

And in all cases, sugar is violent, aggressively asserting its power as its structure repeats (126).

¹⁰⁴ In this way, Randelman participates in the larger framework of nationhood and belonging as outlined in the Caribbean. However, full consideration of the placement of these Cuban works in the Caribbean literary canon is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the work of nation-building undertaken by works written by Cubans in exile distinguishes it from the pan-Caribbean nationalism that characterizes other works written in the Caribbean diaspora.

¹⁰⁵ For satirical commentary on classic salads of the 1950s, see James Lilek’s *Gallery of Regrettable Foods*. An example of a typical salad that the site profiles that might resemble the *ensalada rusa* (mixed vegetable salad) featured on page 249 appears in volume 1 of *Knudsen’s Best* (<http://www.lileks.com/institute/gallery/knox/7.html>).

Ensalada de pollo de Titi (Titi's chicken salad) perhaps would resemble the salad featured in volume 2 of the same cookbook series (<http://www.lileks.com/institute/gallery/knudsen2/2.html>). While James Lilek's series pokes (often unkind) fun at the photography and food products that were featured in mid-20th Century cookbooks, it also cheerfully documents the role advertising played in assembling and marketing these books. Lileks writes on the site's mainpage:

They're not really recipe books. They're ads for food companies, with every recipe using the company's products, often in unexpected ways. (Hot day? Kids love a frosty Bacon Milkshake!) There's not a single edible dish in the entire collection. The pictures in the books are ghastly—the Italian dishes look like a surgeon got a sneezing fit during an operation, and the queasy casseroles look like something on which the janitor dumps sawdust. But you have to enjoy the spirit behind the books—cheerful postwar perfect housewifery is taught in every book. Sure, you'll fall short of the ideal. But what's an ideal for if not to show up your shortcomings?

(<http://www.lileks.com/institute/gallery/spec.html>)

Perhaps it is the case that Cuban cooking represents the successful marketing techniques, not just of the companies that sponsor the books, but also of the cultural mannerisms and perfected kitchen culture that are equally the subjects of the book's instruction. Full consideration of the nuances of the relationship between Cuban culture and American advertising, marketing, and media culture is beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹⁰⁶ This figure is actually more closely aligned with the lemondrink man in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. He too seems harmless, eccentric, a purveyor of sweets and fizzy beverages. His goodwill masks nefarious intent, and the harmless aspect reveals its power to exploit and victimize the weak. The lemondrink man offers Estha a piece of candy in what appears to be a moment of kindness, then sexually molests Estha as the candy dissolves on his tongue. Estha then vomits in the bathroom after washing the Lemondrink man's semen from his hand (Roy 96-9). In an odd twisting of Proust's madeleine, the syrupy slide of candy in his mouth and the lemony fizziness on his tongue (both going down and coming up) become reminiscent of a moment of deep injury and horror that turn into terror: the friendly banter that the lemondrink man exchanges with Ammu soon after hides a warning that ensures Estha's silence. *If you tell, I will come after you and hurt your family* (Roy 104). The image of the harmless eccentric conceals a violent reminder that the fixity of caste cannot insulate anyone from exploitation and trauma. This horrible fact is this truth that Estha stirs into the banana jam in the shed, and that sets in motion the events that sunder the family. Where Roy's narrative explores the rippling effect of this figure's touch on the family, Randelman's narrative drains him of his power to injure and to harm, locking him into a configuration that places him in the context of a sweet, brightly lit memory.

¹⁰⁷ These moments describing Randelman's departure and exile bears striking similarity to Pilar's desire to return to Cuba to relearn her heritage and renew her connections to her Abuela, as well as to Lourdes's disavowal of Cuban cultural space.

¹⁰⁸ Her realizations place her in a space reminiscent of that occupied by the old men who sit in the café in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*: they speak constantly of returning home, but never undertake the voyage (185). They live in a place of permanent temporariness—never at home, and never able to return to the point of origin defined ostensibly as *home*.

¹⁰⁹ From Lily Cho's review of Martin Manalansan IV's recent study in gay Filipinos in New York:

Building on the work on cultural citizenship by Renato Rosaldo, Aihwa Ong, and Lisa Rofel, Manalansan understands citizenship as a profoundly performative act in which membership is not so much bestowed by the state once and for all but repeatedly scripted and enacted. Thus, Manalansan's call for comprehending citizenship through performance asserts an unwavering claim to citizenship even as he maintains a fierce and consistent critique of it. (469)

¹¹⁰ Just as Pilar bears a desire for Cuba as she imagines it to be—a Cuba that she does not share with her cousins.

¹¹¹ Vickroy argues that the trauma of displacement, which affected wealthy Cubans who looked to the US as a model and protector, expecting that the US would remove Castro," prompted the nostalgic exercise of reimagining Cuba:

Though [removal of Castro] was never realized, [displaced Cubans] maintained their need to return and yet recreate Cuba elsewhere in the interim. This recreation has occurred in Miami, albeit nostalgically. David Rieff's psychologically revealing book analyzes the lingering wounds of Cuban

exiles, which produce a fixation on the past, extreme anti-Castro politics, and fantasy structures of return and triumph. Their identities are exclusively bound up in culture and place, though these obsessions have begun to wane with subsequent generations of Cuban Americans thirty to forty years later. (111-2)

The cookbook participates in this recreation by resurrecting a prosperous pre-Revolutionary Cuba characterized by its cosmopolitanism and American influence.

¹¹² Foucault defines utopias as “sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (Foucault, 24).

¹¹³ Foucault writes of the heterogeneous spaces that we inhabit:

[W]e do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another. (Foucault, 23)

¹¹⁴ About mixed experiences that combine elements of heterotopias and utopias, Foucault writes:

[T]here might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there

where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (Foucault, 24)

¹¹⁵ The trope of the tongue stopped by grief appears in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. I treat it on page 1 of the Introduction.

¹¹⁶ Notably, Mirabel is an immigrant as well. The trope of immigrants hiring immigrants as a means of accessing cheap labor arises elsewhere in postcolonial and diasporic literature. For example, Chang Rae-Lee's *Native Speaker* features a Korean shopkeeper who hires immigrants who have freshly landed as a means of indoctrinating them into American capital culture—although he underpays them, exploiting their labor. The trope arises in film as well: for other examples of cross-cultural exploitative employment practices, please see *Crash* and *La Ciudad*. Both films feature immigrant admixture in diasporic contexts in the United States.

¹¹⁷ Arenas writes: “My first crib was a hole in the dirt, dug by my grandmother. In that hole, which was waist-deep, I learned to stand up. My grandmother had used the same technique with all her children; stuck in that hole, I would crawl around on the dirt floor” (27).

¹¹⁸ With this comment, he makes a vast distinction between his writing and that of Alejo Carpentier, whose writing and political allegiances he derides (76, 90). However, he does describe the unique sensory experiences of the earth after a rain, and implies that the rubbing of dirt into the cut umbilical cord provides a link to the earth determined by the strength of the body to withstand contamination (Arenas, 27).

¹¹⁹ Arenas’ memoir “demand[s] one more displacement after death: the exiled queer nationalist turns himself into a monument and awaits reentry as a sexually charged, cultural and political presences back in the Cuba he left” (Sánchez-Eppler, 154).

¹²⁰ This complicates the demands for repatriation that structures the reader’s response to Arenas’ posthumous work as Sanchez-Eppler argues:

[H]e keeps moving with his sexuality, and...the vector of his displacement out of Cuba, out of his past, and out of his closet, creates a corresponding vector of return in memory and narration, to both the places and the times left behind. Some would label this “nostalgia,” deride it, and leave at that. Yet, if the life of the author plays itself out primarily under the pressure of the outward vector that pushes Arenas to his exile, the force exerted by the vector of return will continue to operate in the reader’s response, structured then as the reader’s return, and efficacious, both for the living reader and the posthumous author, as a manner of *repatriation*. The return of the child to a

pansexualized Cuban countryside, the return of the young man to a repressively hypereroticized revolutionary Cuba, and Arenas's final framing of his Works and Figure as a monument demanding readmission back into Cuba, will all be discussed [in the essay] as repatriating performances staged by the queer Cuban nationalist in exile.

¹²¹ Benigno Sánchez-Eppler reads Arenas' childhood in connection with his homosexuality as an adult, because in subsequent chapters, Arenas outlines his burgeoning sexual awareness by describing its formative moments: a crowd of young men bathing in the river and his masturbation as he thinks of it (7-9), mutual penetration with a cousin (11), riding a horse as he feels the pressure of an uncle's erection in his backside (13-4). These connect Arenas' sexuality along a continuum whereby he critiques the repression of adult homosexuality along a range of valences. These structure his memoir as a demand for inclusion made from both cultural and spatial margins.

¹²² In Benigno Sánchez-Eppler summarizes Arenas' life "roughly as a succession of decades lived in different cultural or social spaces, and with different levels of exclusion from social and/or political enfranchisement" (155). He clarifies this statement by stating:

Reinaldo Arenas writes through a period of Cuban history when Cuba's traditional homophobia becomes most visible and most virulently symptomatic. This period spans the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. It includes: the triumph of the Cuban revolution, with its initial campaign to eradicate all practices of the commodification of sex in the early 1960s; the internment in

the Military Units for Aid of Production work camps (UMAP) of a long list of social undesirables, prominently featuring homosexuals during the mid-1960s; the intensified codification and criminalization of homosexuality in the new Constitution and the new Family Code in the 1970s; the expulsion through Mariel of people with compromised social standing in 1980; and the need throughout the 1980s, both in Cuba and U.S.-Cuban communities, to respond to the onslaught of AIDS. All these developments form the preeminent backdrop for Arenas' highly denunciatory testimonial narratives, which he develops with his own volatile proportions of fiction, history, and autobiography. (note 1, 180-181)

¹²³ Syncretic “processes realize themselves through an economy in whose modality of exchange the signifier of *there*—of the Other—is consumed (“read”) according to local codes that are already in existence; that is, codes from *here*.” (Benitez-Rojo, 21)

¹²⁴ About subaltern silence, Williams writes:

As I see it operating in Subaltern Studies, “silence” forms the basis for a three-part trajectory: 1) There is an imposition of silence by a colonial or neocolonial state through mechanisms such as official historiography and middle-class discursive hegemony—a process fueled by domination and greed. This forced silence is largely the domain of the colonial elite, and is manifested in the entire field of discursive power in venues of official historiography, literature, journalism, documentation, etc. 2) An insurrectionary act of drawing attention to that silence, calling it out, mapping its genealogy, and identifying the hypocrisy of its boundaries—a process

fueled by resentment. 3) A revisionary act of speaking from that silence, giving it a voice, an identity, and eliminating its absence—a process motivated by optimism (however naive). These last two trajectories are the domain of the postcolonial/subaltern scholar, writer, citizen, or intellectual. (163)

These acts of breaking silence do not figure as prominently in Randelman as they do in Arenas, who grants equal weight to the suppression of his creative voice as he does to the surveillance of his sexuality.

Later in the article, Williams describes how silent characters use their silence to defy authoritarian persecution.

¹²⁵ Partha Chatterjee actually raises the idea of this formation on page 37 of the text, where he analyzes the *Kathāmrta* as a text that reveals the subalternity of an elite.

¹²⁶ O’Hanlon writes: “We must ask ourselves whether we are in danger in using it [that is, the textual space opened up by the new “voice”] to turn the silence of the subaltern into speech, but to make their words address our own concerns, and to render their figures in our own self-image” (cited in Williams, 172). Her anxiety more aptly applies to project such as *Walking on Fire*, which assembles translations of interviews with Haitian women from varying socioeconomic backgrounds—the editor acknowledges her position as a white, middle-class feminist in the text. However, O’Hanlon’s views also apply to the politics of reading and interpretation that determine the discursive use of texts marked by the subalternity of the authors. For example, reading Arenas’ memoir within the context of his oppressed homosexuality *or* within the context of the suppression of his anti-Revolutionary writing does not

acknowledge the synergy of these two modes of exclusion. He is not simply an exiled *homosexual* Cuban writer, or an *exiled* homosexual *Cuban* writer; he inhabits the space of all of these conditions, which is why reading him as a member of a queer diaspora is perhaps the best means of parsing out how each of these spheres of difference inflect his momentum out of Cuba and into exile.

¹²⁷ Among the cookbooks that cite food as especially central to Vietnamese culture are Nicole Routhier's *The Foods of Vietnam*, Corinne Trang's *Authentic Vietnamese Cooking: Food from a Family Table*, Mai Pham's *The Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table* and *The Food of Vietnam: Authentic Recipes from the Heart of Indochina*. The identification of food's centrality to the culture is usually stated in the Introduction as part of an ethnographic description of the culture. Like Mai Pham's book, which is central to this analysis, Corinne Trang's *Authentic Vietnamese Cooking: Food from a Family Table* posits food as central to her family's cohesion, even as it highlights her own hybridity (see below).

Many novels reinforce the idea that food is a central focal point of Vietnamese culture, functioning as a lens through which characters can interpret their lives. Cao Lan's *Monkey Bridge* and Duong Thu Huong's *Paradise of the Blind* feature food as sites of cultural recovery and family unity. Both novels thematize food's ability to smooth life's rougher edges by putting relations with people in their proper perspective. Conversely, the protagonist of Duong's *Novel Without a Name* is obsessed with famine, which serves to trope his country's chaos. Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* features cooks as figures of both cultural dislocation and of limitless mobility. One of the cooks in her novel is none other than Ho Chi Minh (Uncle Ho).

Food and eating also serve as moral compasses: Ho Anh Thai's short story entitled "The Goat Meat Special" features a civil servant whose appetites transform him into a potential meal; he has to hide from his neighbors so that he is not mistaken for food.

¹²⁸ Mai Pham's book shares this feature with other Vietnamese cookbooks. Corrine Trang, for instance, details her family history in the cookbook, including family photos and a dedication expressing gratitude to her parents for "giving [her] the best of both worlds" (5). The introduction to the book tracks her father's family's movements from China, through Cambodia and into Vietnam as it also mentions the French influence of her mother's family. Trang's book, body and table become a series of metonyms for Vietnam and its cuisine: based in a Chinese past, influenced by Cambodia, France and other Southeast Asian cultures, Vietnam's position as a cultural crossroads emerges in the performative space of the body cooking a meal in accordance with this book's recipes (15).

Nicole Routhier's *The Foods of Vietnam* includes biographical details in the description of the author on the jacket and in the Preface. The introduction of the book, however (like many other regional cookbooks) includes a detailed description of the country—its geographical position, its shape and regional divisions, its history and influences. The result is a country whose dimensions, environment and character can be imagined by those who will never visit it. Moreover, though the reader might only have read this book, s/he can assert authoritative knowledge of the country because the text offers statistical and dimensional management of the space it occupies both on the map, in the restaurant, and at the table.

¹²⁹ These features might categorically distinguish regional cookbooks from travel narratives: regional cookbooks might seek to serve the nations they represent to the food tourist who reads them and uses them as a reference. This means that cookbooks seek to familiarize the reader with the country and its culinary habits. Travel narratives may serve the country to a reader but, unlike cookbooks, travel narratives rely on a degree of exoticization. The contrast between Mai Pham’s cookbook and Anthony Bourdain’s *A Cook’s Tour*, for example, reaffirms this particular dichotomy. However, the centrality of food and excretion to Pham’s travel narrative dramatize the effect of unsettled presence in a foreign country—an unsettledness that cookbooks, even as they reveal the mobility of their authors, work to conceal.

¹³⁰ The Vietnamese never refer to their struggle for independence as the Vietnam War; it is the American War, or the Civil War.

¹³¹ Regional cookbooks provide their American middle-class audience the “*systematic* glimpse of the culinary traditions of another” that Appadurai identifies as the basis of organization of Indian cookbooks. Like the Indian cookbooks Appadurai analyzes, other ethnic or national cookbooks “also represent a growing body of food-based characterizations of the ethnic Other. These two functions [—systematicity and food-based characterization—] are distinct but intimately connected”(15). Yet, to limit their audience to middle-class Americans seeking culinary thrills ignores the aspect of the Vietnamese cookbook that appeals to second-generation Vietnamese-Americans raised in an American cultural context. This audience has a curious relationship with ethnic Otherness, one that these cookbooks work to deconstruct (or reconstruct) in their texts.

¹³² Appadurai writes:

These small ethnological cameos hark back to the potted portraits that are the stuff of government gazetteers and ethnographic encyclopedias from the colonial period, where tribes, castes, and linguistic groups were often metonymously captured through the use of the telling custom or the distinctive piece of material technology. What we see in these many ethnic and regional cookbooks is the growth of an anthology of naturally generated images of the ethnic Other, a kind of ‘ethnoethnicity,’ rooted in the details of regional recipes but creating a set of generalized gastroethnic images...Such representations, produced by insiders and outsiders, constitute reflections as well as continuing refinements of the culinary conception of the Other in contemporary India. (16)

The Otherness under construction in Appadurai’s analysis is not just between Indian and non-Indians; it is between different ethnicities and religions that share space in the country.

¹³³ Appadurai writes:

The construction of, and traffic in, culinary representations of the ethnic, regional, or linguistic Other has one dimension that is not reflected in the new cookbooks. These books, whether national or regional, uniformly contain positive ethnic stereotypes; but the orally communicated images of the culinary Other are often less complimentary, as in other parts of the world throughout history. Thus,

South Indians are said to eat (and enjoy) excessively runny food that trickles down their arms to the elbows, Gujuratis are said to eat “sickeningly sweet” food, Punjabi food is said to be heavy and greasy, Telugu food to be inedibly hot, Bengali food to be smothered in pungent mustard oil, and so forth. (18)

This “seamy side” of the traffic in interethnic imagery underscores the ethnic, religious, even caste differences in India that cookbooks subsume into regions. The differentiation—and intranational friction—in Pham’s cookbook is based in regional distinction rather than ethnic difference.

¹³⁴ Roxann Wheeler’s *The Complexion of Race* traces the history of the concept of race, marking its beginnings, not as a distinction between shades and hues, but as a difference between regions, nationalities and even families.

¹³⁵ The cookbook downplays the gravity of regional affiliation in Vietnam that Andrew Pham’s biography dramatizes. The biography reveals how significant these distinctions are, and how necessary it became to conceal (or reveal) them during wartime. Pham Van Thong, Andrew’s father, served as a propaganda director for the Nationalist Army—and the Viet Cong hated the propagandists even more than they hated American GIs (A. Pham, 17). Had Pham’s father confessed his profession during his imprisonment, he would surely have been executed. In cookbooks, the regionalized political distinctions that Andrew Pham’s father does not dare admit for fear of death now yield interesting characteristics that lend texture and interest to a meal.

¹³⁶ Nicole Routhier's Introduction to *The Foods of Vietnam* resists this emphasis on the influence of 19th and 20th Century politics on Vietnam's culinary culture, claiming, "this has left the rich and diverse culture of the Vietnamese people relatively unexplored" (8). Nevertheless, even after cataloguing the foreign influences that have shaped Vietnamese cuisine, she points out, "the Vietnamese are quick to point out that their cuisine, like their country, is divided into three regions, each with a distinct culinary tradition" (10-11). Furthermore, while her description of the regional differences and foreign cultural influences on Vietnamese cuisine does include the influence of China, it also includes a description of French influence as well (9).

¹³⁷ Appadurai notices this same trend in the Indian cookbooks that he analyzes, noting that their selectivity reflects the conflicts in allegiance of the writer:

Most of the ethnic or regional books are selective in specific ways.

When written by insiders, they represent fairly complex compromises between the urge to be authentic and thus to include difficult (and perhaps, to the outsider, disgusting) items and the urge to disseminate and popularize the most easily understood and appreciated items, and to promote those already popular, from one's special repertoire.

Outsiders who write these books, on the other hand, end up including easy-to-grasp and more portable examples from alien ethnic or regional cuisines, partly because their own tastes for the exotic are first nurtured in restaurants or other public eating contexts, where the subtleties of that cuisine (which are often domestic) have been pared down. In both cases, one of the results of the exchange of culinary

images is the elimination of the most exotic, peculiar, distinctive, or domestic nuances in a particular specialized cuisine. (17)

¹³⁸ Arguably, Anthony Bourdain's *A Cook's Tour* exoticizes food in the same fashion as Berberoglu's description, to the end of constructing a different kind of food tourism, one that thrives on the adventurism of eating what the audience might deem unpalatable.

¹³⁹ This scene raises the question whether all natives eat what they dare the *viet-kieu* to eat: is there something special about the *viet-kieu* that forces them to have to "prove" their cultural belonging through excessive deeds?

Andrew Pham's narrative certainly follows a logic of belonging established by certain weights and counterweights: he uses amounts to trope how Vietnamese he is. He describes himself as "one hundred percent Vietnamese," then later adopts a businessman's adaptation of the American idiom to describe himself as "whole undiluted fishsauce" (63, 260). In drinking the cobra's heart and in eating dirt at the roadside stand, Pham seeks to become "truly Vietnamese" (84, 126). In these contexts, *viet-kieu* is a slight, or "sounds like a disease" (65, 125). To counterbalance the weight of his foreignness, he eagerly undertakes deeds that natives would never have to undertake—such as touring the entire country on a bicycle (or, in the case of Mai Pham, touring the entire country at all; provinciality becomes a privilege of being a native).

¹⁴⁰ He then promptly throws up the inassimilable symbol of pure Vietnamese identity. Keeping it down, or even enjoying it would indicate a resolution that Pham has yet to reach within the context of the biography. Furthermore, it raises the question of the

difference between vomit and dysentery. Though vomiting means that the object has not passed through the body—it is rejected outright—for the purposes of this essay, the two serve the same purpose: both trope the conflict of the body with something that has entered it.

¹⁴¹ The Vietnamese Social Affairs Ministry admitted in 2001 that the number of sex industry worker might have numbered over 100,000, although independent estimates placed the figure closer to 600,000 (“HIV soaring among Vietnam's sex workers”). These sex workers can be found in massage parlors, karaoke bars, and nightclubs, and even might be offered to someone going to a “dim light coffee” café (Amit Gilboa). Throughout his journey, Andrew Pham is repeatedly assailed by prostitutes offering sex for money, or even offering marriage.

¹⁴² When a truck runs over a dog outside Hanoi, a group of villagers drag the carcass into a nearby diner that advertises its main dish as a three-quarter view of a dog's head. Immediately, Pham is nauseous as he recalls the first time his Uncle Hung coerces him into eating dog flesh. His uncle, who eats the dog meat as he drinks, orders him to eat it; the silent threat of a beating awaits a refusal. When Pham does eat, his Uncle laughs at him, telling him that he will be reincarnated as a dog in his next life (243-244).

Later in his journey, Pham stops at a hut to get a Coke. Aside from the salutary benefits of the caffeine (energy), sugar (more energy) and carbonation (scrubs the dirt from his throat), its familiar taste keeps him rooted as he journeys through the country. He encounters a cluster of soldiers sharing a plate of “boiled gizzards curly like cashews, pig hearts sliced like truffles, and intestines chopped up like rigatoni.”

One of the men eats from a bowl of blood pudding. (Notably, Pham compares each of the organ meats to a food item familiar to his western audience.) The soldiers harass him because he can afford a Coke that, at sixty cents per can, is equivalent to a third of a day's pay. The difference between Pham (an expatriate) and the soldiers (poor possessors of a country he has come to reclaim) assumes metonymic significance in a can of soda and a plate of organ meat (310-314).

¹⁴³ The gender politics of eating that emerge in Pham's biography might reflect his use of food as a site to negotiate gender distinctions. He writes his story based on what he knows, and he knows very little about the worlds of the women that he meets, because he is never invited into their kitchens. Pham describes the women in his cousin's family as "mysteries," and can only relate to them in terms of their marriageability and their domestic labor—labor that he never gets to see (85). Pham travels through a country that he describes in sharply gendered terms because, as a man, there are sites of domesticity that do not welcome him. There are, in fact, very few instances where Pham eats home cooking: he does not describe the home-cooked meals he might have eaten at his relatives' home; the rest of the book is written on the road, where he eats in inns and restaurants, and on the move. One of the rare exceptions is the home-cooked meal he receives in the house of the old man who prepares clay pot catfish—the signature dish of Vietnam (265). The absence of descriptions of domesticity might reflect his own sense of drifting through the country, exiled from the culture.

In comparison, Duong Thi Huong's *Paradise of the Blind* describes a domestic scene in which the female protagonist, her mother, aunt, uncle and cousins enjoy a dish of

tiet canh (duck's blood custard) garnished with "fine strips of duck liver, crushed garlic, and peanuts." (Phan Huy Duong and Nina McPherson, trans. [New York: Perennial, 2002.] 176-177) Fresh herbs accompany the dish, and everyone partakes of it in a family scene that carries celebratory overtones.

¹⁴⁴ The insistence on measurements rarely determines the amount of an ingredient included in a home-cooked recipe. Most people learn how to cook by watching and helping in the kitchen, as Nicole Routhier observes in the Preface (5).

¹⁴⁵ The mandala appears as a central trope in the biography in the form of the bicycle wheel as well as in the structure and purpose of the return that defines his journey. Pham wishes to reunify himself by reconciling with the land he left as a refugee many years earlier (Duneer 204).

¹⁴⁶ The politics of shitting absorbs Pham's attention throughout his travels. His illness stands as a measure of his intestinal fortitude, his ability to endure the hardships he encounters in the course of his journey. It earmarks his alienation from the country with which he wants reconciliation. It also marks the boundaries of the western privilege that repeatedly becomes a source of embarrassment in Vietnam: western standards of culinary cleanliness become a crippling liability in their absence. Pham cannot drink the water, he cannot eat the ice, nor can he eat uncooked vegetables, fruits or herbs. Throughout the biography, his refusals threaten to become impolite rejections that he must carefully negotiate. Additionally, each heated confrontation with people who identify him as *viet-kieu* takes the form of asserting superiority over a visitor who thinks himself better than the natives. Pham's upset stomach becomes

an uncomfortable reminder of a division of class that has emerged as a result of the perceived privilege of escaping a war-torn Third World country.

By way of comparison, shitting becomes a political focal point for action groups in the slums of Mumbai. According to Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City*, the crowdedness of Mumbai presses the movements of the bowels to a central position in the attention of any newcomer to the city. Finding or making places to shit means that spaces become subject to divisions of class; as a result, political action groups assemble to demand clean facilities for a function that many westerners either take for granted or completely ignore (Mehta, 53, 126-128).

¹⁴⁷ The concrete practice of residing in the in-betweens that Pham uses to establish a connection with the woman on the beach also used by Henry Park in Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, and for much the same purpose, intimating that the practice is not exclusively Pham's nor the province of the Vietnamese diaspora. Henry Park describes himself as "an amiable man" that the audience may know:

I can be most personable, if not charming, and whatever I possess in this life is more or less the result of a talent I have for making you feel good about yourself when you are with me. In this sense I am not a seducer. I am hardly seen. I won't speak untruths to you, I won't pass easy compliments or odious offerings of flattery. I make do with on-hand materials, what I can chip out of you, your natural ore. Then I fuel the fire of your most secret vanity. (7)

This method of addressing cultural and ethnic hybridity carries with it the risk of invisibility or self-erasure, a prominent theme in Lee's novel.

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