ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: COOKING WITH MAMA KIM: THE LEGACY OF KOREAN WOMEN (RE)DEFINING CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY

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What is considered "authentically Korean," how those concepts are imagined, and in what ways authenticity is constructed through the vehicles of food and Korean motherhood is the core focus of this dissertation project. This study employs visual and discourse analysis, utilizing historical archives, vlog personalities, cookbooks, web portals, and various forms of food branding and packaging. Within the interdisciplinary field of Food Studies, the conversation regarding authenticity is a fundamental one, with varying work being performed to examine what and how it is employed, and who/what are the gatekeepers that determine the parameters for something as "authentic." The intervention into this conversation is to explore the ways that authenticity as a theoretical model has intersectional, subjective, or *adaptive*, potential. This entails employing the term "plastic authenticity," which is a

model of authenticity that favors the positioning of non-normative bodies (i.e., multiracial and diasporic) as brokers of cultural authenticity. In the end, this dissertation contributes to scholarship in Women's Studies, Food Studies, and Ethnic Studies by pushing the boundaries of how cultural/racial authenticity is constructed, and the ways that women and food have direct impacts as gatekeepers on this process. Analyses range from a historical timeline of Korean immigration to the U.S. with a focus on Korean women, an analysis of a popular YouTube chef, *Maangchi*, and her employments of the concept of authenticity, analysis of Korean food branding strategies and their claims of authentic Korean food in the U.S., and the website analysis of a mixed-race Korean community to explore the ways that authenticity is invoked by persons not traditionally deemed "authentically Korean." This research is critical, as it expands the field of research in Korean Studies to not only focus on women and mixed-race Koreans as historical *objects*, but as active agents in cultural production, meaning-making, and history writing.

COOKING WITH MAMA KIM: THE LEGACY OF KOREAN WOMEN (RE)DEFINING CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY

by

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Preface

The seedlings for this project were planted in 2010, when I was still working on a Master's degree at Old Dominion University. A dear friend of mine's mother passed away. My friend Teri is half-Japanese, and when her mother passed she said something particularly profound to me. "It feels like the Japanese has been ripped out of me." Stunned, for a moment, I couldn't comprehend what she meant by the statement, but she remarked how so much of her identity as a half-Japanese woman was fixated in her mother's memory. Her mother made her *feel* Japanese. Without her, she felt untethered to the culture she was connected to through her mother. Like a balloon leaving her hand, the loss of her mother brought the feelings of watching the Japanese in her disappear into the sky. I suddenly became deeply uncomfortable because I knew all too much of what she meant, as there is something deeply unsettling about the notion that someone else's existence is so deeply tied to your own sense of cultural and racial identity. Being half-Korean myself, I folded what she said like a letter and kept it close to my heart, in fear that someday this same deep feeling of cultural loss may cross my doorstep.

At a soul-affirming lunch a couple years later, Teri lamented that for the longest time, she couldn't get the taste correct for a Japanese spinach side dish, *Gomae*. No matter how hard she tried, it wasn't the same as her mother's. Then, one day she tried adding a dollop of peanut butter to the sauce and that was it! She recalled the deep feeling of closeness she felt with her mother at that moment. Through something as simple and mundane as food, she brought her mother back to life, if only for a moment. I left that lunch profoundly changed, and remember getting

in my car and weeping as I drove home. That kind of ugly cry where you can't see straight and your eyes start to swell shut. I sobbed for the hole in my heart that my grandmother made when she passed, my *halmoni,* who was my best friend and someone who's traditions and legacy I just never bothered to archive. In part because I was a teenager, and in part because we never think to record the daily traditions of the women around us. We tuck their cultural traditions away as a standard part of our day and move on until it's too late.

I proceeded to call my mother and collect all her Korean recipes that I could remember her cooking throughout my life, whether I liked the food when I was little or not. More than anything else, I felt that her food was the way for me to stay connected with hers and my own Korean identities. All of the little substitutions, the pinch of this, the scoop of that, I'm still a student of hers to this day. As a multiracial person, I've had difficulties locating myself in any number of cultural geographies, but I knew that more important than any cultural legacy she left behind, or how far away from my Korean identity I may ever find myself, her food would inevitably lead me back home.

Mothering and motherwork is powerful, and has a powerful pull on the ways that we make sense of ourselves within communities. It has a way of making us feel like members of a group, making us feel authentic. I don't look distinguishably Korean, nor am I natively fluent, but I know Korean food, and if I speak Korean, I know my mother will understand me. I remember getting so irate when I was younger, if someone, Korean or not, said I wasn't "really" Korean. I would immediately sass back by either showing a picture of me with my mother, or

demonstrate my knowledge of Korean food or Korean culture. It was important to me, and I realized that my argument was almost always fundamentally positioned around my mother as my "race receipt." My mother, her traditions, and her food were what made *me* Korean.

It got me thinking about what the deal is with the concept of authenticity and why it has so much power over us. It shouldn't matter whether or not anyone perceives me as authentically Korean or not. This is America, the land of radical individualism! Ironically though, this is when I realized that it wasn't just about me, but about other multiracial people, and in fact my mother as well. I would recall her talking about herself as a "bad Korean," comically lamenting about the ways that she has assimilated into Western culture over the years. If *she* didn't feel like she was authentically Korean, then how on Earth could she be *my* certificate of Korean authenticity?

That's what authenticity is. It is a confusing game of perceptions. It has mysterious origins. We aren't entirely sure when or how it'll pop up, but when it does, it matters. Different elements of a culture determine authenticity to different people. My mother isn't authentically Korean (anymore) because she doesn't live in Korea or participate in the daily life of Korean society. I'm not authentic because I'm only half-Korean and I am not natively fluent in the language. Yet, at the same time, my mother is authentic *because* she looks Korean and speaks the language natively, and has cultural knowledge and lived experience in Korean traditions. And I am authentic through participatory association in the culture, because she has instilled those values in me as well. Authenticity *begets* authenticity. This project emerged

from these contradictions. It emerged as a way to empower those of us that exist in a plane between authenticity and inauthenticity.

Dedication

For *halmoni.* You are our Korean-American legacy. We miss you every day.

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This has been a labor of love, and without the guidance and encouragement of a fantastic network of people, this dissertation would not be possible. First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful for the intellectual and professional guidance from my two advisors Seung-kyung Kim and Lynn Bolles. I would not be where I am or have the confidence that I do in my work or professional skills if it weren't for their investments in me. From multiple workshops to enhance my writing and networking skills, to lovely advice sessions over afternoon tea for mentorship, life planning, and writing advice, I am eternally grateful to have two advisors whose kindness and critical eyes over my research have gotten me to this point in both my writing and professional development.

I want to thank Psyche Williams-Forson for encouraging my thirst for writing about Korean food. Her brilliant advice and knowledge about material culture has been a cornerstone of my creative process, and she has shown me that the work I do is important and meaningful. Alexis Lothian has provided me with a renewed sense of faith that faculty aren't always too far removed from the struggles and concerns we face as grad students to show deep empathy to our process. Her kindness and thoughtful words have stuck with me, in particular throughout the tail-end of this writing process. Janelle Wong's advice and encouragement, particularly at the beginning stages of this process have been invaluable in shaping how I went about the research process, and provided me with a framework to think about data collection. I have been fortunate to have a committee that has believed in my vision from the

beginning stages, when my ideas weren't fully developed. They saw the value in my interventions, and for that I'm so thankful.

My long-time mentor, Jennifer Fish, has been a constant beacon of hope throughout this process. She has seen her fair share of my tears and anguish, joy and excitement, and shared deep laughter over jokes about interior design over the past ten years. She has always managed to provide me with a clear sense of direction and renewed spirits in all my endeavors. I credit her with making me love learning again at a time in my undergraduate career where I had no direction and no real goals. Since my very first class in Women's Studies with her in 2008, she's been inspiring me to be a better scholar and more thoughtful teacher.

A number of friends have been immeasurably helpful in this process as well. I could not be here without Donnesha Blake. We entered this doctoral program together, and what began as a stellar working relationship has turned into one of the most beautiful and mutually supportive friendships of my life. Sunhye Kim, who's been the big sister I never had and a dear friend, always keeps me positive yet accountable to myself and my goals. The three of us have been in lockstep throughout this entire doctoral program, and without their emotional support, writing sessions, and joyful gatherings around food, I would not be in the position that I am. My sister in life, Samantha Pinello, has been my ear from across the country and my guardian angel for fifteen years. Her constant check-ins and reassurance with supportive words and dog pictures have been a source of relief and cheerfulness throughout my entire college and graduate career. Dear friends Jocelyn Coates and Shannon James have always provided the levity necessary in this stressful process, always keeping me

laughing and smiling, and I'm thankful for their friendship. Teri Sheffield, my inspiration for this project and my reminder to always have a generous thirst for life and creativity, because of her I will forever see the beauty in the world around me.

The support of my family has been immeasurable. Their infallible encouragement of my scholarly pursuits has been a driving force for me to pursue greater and greater heights. My brothers, Patrick and Troy, for being the amazing cheerleaders they are, for feeding me and making sure I get out of the house during this lonely writing process. They have provided me a sense of balance and release from stress that only siblings can give. My partner Leo, for encouraging me to work harder even when my brain feels empty, and building a home with me where I feel sanctuary and companionship every day. My father, for instilling in me all of the very best virtues that I value today. His belief in hard work, humility, and a healthy dose of laughter and cheer has enabled me to realize my goals. I will always cherish the advice he gave me from elementary school when I had a choice to be the lead in the school play or to be an extra, saying that when given the opportunity to be talking turtle #4 or the lead frog in the play, to always be the frog, or you will regret it forever. I will always choose to be the leading frog in my life because of him.

Lastly, this is for my mother. She has had such a profound shape on my identity throughout my life. Since allowing me to express my truth and my creativity as a child, to reminding me that the most important part of the day is family dinner, she has been and always will be the voice inside my head. When I grow up, I hope to be as strong as her, as assertive as her, as kind as her, as wise as her, and to always hold my head high like her. She is my Korea, and the reason I do all of this.

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Introduction: Plastic Authenticity and the Myth of the Bad Korean

> Standing tall and prominent amongst the many Asian and Central American restaurants in the community, one place holds an unexpectedly cherished position in the collective memories of many second-generation Korean-Americans. I am personally unfamiliar with the *Sizzler* brand. Oh, I know it by name, but never have I managed to actually cross its doors.
>
> —Anthony Bourdain, *Parts Unknown* (2013)

In his hit show on CNN, *Parts Unknown,* author, chef, and wildly famous curmudgeon, Anthony Bourdain, travels to various locales around the world, trying different cuisines, offering commentary, all while being led around each episode by "natives" or "guides" to each region's unique cuisine on the hunt for authenticity. This project has a somewhat similar endeavor, to hunt down where authenticity lives and eats, where Korean mothers are our tour guides to help us wade through an ocean of otherness. In the second episode of its inaugural season, however, Bourdain takes a culinary and cultural tour around Los Angeles' Koreatown. In one segment, Bourdain meets up with David Choe, an artist, and multimillionaire, made rich by painting the murals in the Facebook headquarters and getting paid in stock for Facebook before it became Facebook. Choe's eccentric personality makes for good television, and he ultimately serves as a culinary tour guide for Bourdain into some of Koreatown's Korean hotspots. In a narrative twist, however, Choe takes Bourdain to the buffet chain, *Sizzler* (Parts Unknown 2013). Choe declares the spot a cherished one, where collective memories for many second-generation Korean-Americans are made, where,

in the rare event that Koreans are not cooking themselves, but “celebrating,” that this was the space in which it would occur.

On a show about finding "authentic" food by way of local cultural guides, a trip to Sizzler undermines that very fundamental concept that authentic Korean food or that "Koreanness" must be found in the confines of Korean homes or even in Korean restaurants. For a generation of Korean-Americans, meaning making, and shared identity construction was localized and configured outside traditionally assumed “Korean” spaces. In the case of this episode, like many, if not all of the others, “authenticity” operates as a narrative vehicle for defining the cultural standards of any particular community, with a repetitive formula. A tour guide is picked to “represent” a locale, and they determine the places to eat, which Bourdain and his approach by “going along for the ride,” corroborates and packages said authenticity to an eager audience. His seal of approval, often informed by the moans of satisfaction, or utterances of how “real” something tastes, confirms and validates a cuisine’s perceived authenticity to an audience perhaps unaware of that region’s food. It is a form of “culinary tourism”[1] for the viewer, where corporate cookie cutter ethnic restaurants are pushed aside in favor of the food trucks and hole in the wall restaurants that clearly have more “soul,” or are more *authentic*.

A phrase Bourdain repeats throughout the episode is “bad Korean.” David Choe refers to himself and is also referred to as a "bad Korean.” Other guests are referred to as "bad Koreans." This is a striking (and problematic) concept, fueled in part by histories of racism, but more deeply in narratives of “cultural food colonialism.”[2] The concept of being a “bad Korean” means betraying tradition and

what is considered the model of being a "good Korean," whether that means Choe having become a doctor instead of an artist, or a chef cooking with produce that is locally sourced rather than imported from Korea. Good and bad reinforce cultural parameters that imply that there is a singular mythic way to *be* Korean. This is precisely why David Choe bringing Anthony Bourdain to a *non-Korean* chain restaurant like Sizzler is such a profound act. Choe is refracting the common conceptions of authenticity regarding foodways into one where *experience* in a given space trumps expected ethnic flavors, foods, or aesthetics. "Koreanness" (specifically Korean-*Americanness*) became defined in relation to foodways, as it does in many of the episodes in the show, regardless of the ethnicity or region associated with the food; however, the space itself allowed for community building and identity construction in a way that was enunciated as distinctly *Korean*, without occurring in a space that specializes in, or even serves Korean food. Sizzler becomes a space within which the boundaries of authenticity are rendered flexible, or plastic, particularly for this diasporic community. This is a project about those *bad Koreans.*

That said, it is critical to situate my use of authenticity within a historical framework from which authenticity, as it is understood, circulates today. Regarding its relationship to concepts like sincere, natural, original, and real, Charles Lindholm notes,

> Unlike its cousins, authenticity stands alone; it has higher, more spiritual claims to make. In legal jargon authenticity means that signatures, documents, and paintings were actually authored by the person whose name is on them. In computer language authenticity

> indicates that a message received is indeed the same as the message sent, and that the sender is indeed the person who signed the message. For connoisseurs and collectors, a piece of period furniture is authentic if it's source can be traced, and if its characteristics mark it as fitting properly into a recognized category… by extension the same is true for individuals. Persons are authentic if they are true to their roots or if their lives are a direct and immediate expression of their essence. Similarly, collectives are authentic if their biological heritage can be traced and if the members act in the proper, culturally valued manner. (2)

While they are all relevant in the construction of authenticity, it is the subjective elements of authenticity that are most critical for this research. Lindholm correctly asserts that while authenticity is directly related to realness, authenticity is an abstraction or an *essence* we attempt to catch in a bottle and subsequently verify and validate, just to be sure we have actually captured it. It is no wonder, then, that scholars have been trying to make sense of it since the sixteenth century.

In the face of the collapsing feudal relationships in European society and the massive movement of individuals into urban environments, the concept of sincerity, or as it would become, authenticity, became a desirable trait as the "small town" (feudal lands) began to erode (Lindholm 4). More importantly, authenticity grew from the rising Protestant bourgeoisie class, where religious fealty became a way to practice purity or religious authenticity. Essentially, reaching inward to examine one's faith and repel sin set the stage for authenticity to become an act of

individualism. This, paired with the expansion outside of Europe (i.e., colonialism), created a mechanism with which to compare the various points in Europe with other locales from around the world. In essence, a sense of self awareness that one exists within a vast network of communities, but to be able to rank and hierarchize these various communities and cultures gave way to position authenticity away from "sincerity" in the religious sense, but a way to measure and quantify a sense of pureness or originality (5).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is often credited with the development of authenticity as it appears as a reflection of the "self." In his work *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1770), he examines the ways that people distinguish between the various facets of the interior self and whether one's expressions come from some deep part of oneself (authenticity) or whether it is motivated by something in the periphery (such as religion or society). Essentially, Rousseau argues that individuals are in a constant state of struggle with the inner self, and with the emergence of a decidedly more public sphere (in the case of the urban migration), our negotiations with the internal self and what gets portrayed is the basis for how we understand authenticity in relation to the individual. Civilization, then, is the downfall of the authentic individual, where the "authentic" individual is merely an amalgam of vanities seen through the eyes of others (Lindholm 9).

This notion of individualism was propelled forward by scholars like Søren Kierkegaard (1849) and Martin Heidegger (1927). Kierkegaard, mainly thinking within the realm of religion, condemns the social elements of the world, noting that mass culture (and by association, consumption) create voids within the self, therefore

leading to a lack of authenticity. More importantly, he proclaims that the self is an ongoing project of meaning-making, manifesting in concepts like identity (1849). Heidegger similarly ponders on authenticity in relation to the self, or what he terms *Dasein*, which is a relational concept. Temporal in context, he relates the self and the actions of the self to be predictive of who we envision ourselves to be (1927). Both of these iterations of authenticity are ones that position it as an internal concept, intensely subjective, informing and influencing existentialist thinkers and philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.

Around this time, Walter Benjamin's concept of the "aura" marked a shift in discourses and understandings of authenticity, where, like his analogy of the angel looking back on war and famine, authenticity looks back on history as a mechanism for its construction (1950). Regarding authenticity specifically, Benjamin, discussing works of art and the function of reproductions notes that authenticity or the "aura" of a work rests on the history with which it emerges, where reproductions detach objects from authenticity (1935). Essentially, Benjamin offers value in relation to authenticity, which is about a distinct sense of unique or a one-of-a-kind quality that gets interfered with upon entering the commercial marketplace.

Up to this point, authenticity has been configured as a matter of the self, and with the help of Benjamin, a self that has been historicized. The rise in existentialist thought, which took the concept of the self to the point where being authentic meant being true to oneself despite the impact of social stimuli in the periphery. Radical in its approach, existentialism preached a form of free will that implied that anything *but* following one's most fundamental desires was inauthentic. Without a clear set of

ethics or parameters for operation or application in a social world, this unfettered sense of self-gratification, while understood as "authentic," can breed destructive forms of narcissism with no regard for the self in relation to others. Where Heidegger and the existentialist scholars all positioned authenticity as something internal that was employed as an exercise for power (and eventually fascism), scholars began to imagine the duplicitous nature of authenticity, where authenticity was constructed on the backs of very specific histories (often subjective).

This self-involved notion of authenticity—understandably—came with many critics, in particular ones that believed that social responsibility is critical, and that authenticity actually *loses* its value when it is too heavily involved in self-centered notions of identity building (Berman 1970). Likewise, Theodor Adorno notes in his work *The Jargon of Authenticity,* that the very concept of an existential, or excessively self-involved form of authenticity, is fundamentally flawed, as it assumes that one can operate in a transparent relationship to the self without being influenced or guided by outside factors (1973). Essentially, conspicuous consumption in the name of living one's most authentic life is actually a counterproductive endeavor.

Contemporary takes on authenticity, then, while still positioning the self as a vehicle for authenticity, position it so in relation to society, culture, and ideology. The concept of moral/ethical subjectivity is an extension of finding the authentic in the self, however, from a space of transcendence rather than self-indulgence (Taylor 1992). Essentially, interior authenticity is still a worthwhile endeavor, but it must be sought out in relation to some form of collective *beyond* the self to be effective and not morally corrupt. Essentially, without some form of community within which we

can structure our identity and the values that we will uphold, authenticity is meaningless (Taylor 40). The discourse about the effectiveness and even importance of authenticity rages on; however, because the questions about *who* gets to decide, *what* histories are used to inform, *where* these histories originate (i.e., colonialism), and *how* authenticity actually operates concerning culture and consumption. Nonetheless, we exist in a discursive moment where concepts of authenticity cannot be imagined without also recognizing the value and importance of culture as an intersection in the construction of the self, while also positioning our sense of self (both individually and collectively) against the values and cultures of other communities (Ferrara 1998). In this moment, the concept of authenticity and the self in relation to others, then, is taken up in multiple academic discourses outside of philosophy, because at its root, authenticity is about ideology.

Within the interdisciplinary field of Food Studies, the conversation regarding authenticity is a fundamental one, with varying work being performed to examine what and how it is employed, and who/what are the gatekeepers that determine the parameters for something as "authentic" (Heldke 2005, Long 2004, Weiss 2011). My intervention into this conversation is to explore the ways that authenticity as a theoretical model has intersectional, subjective, or *adaptive*, potential. In the end, "Cooking with Mama Kim" contributes to scholarship in Women's Studies, Food Studies, and Ethnic Studies by pushing the boundaries of how cultural/racial authenticity is constructed, and the ways that women and food have direct impacts as gatekeepers on this process. Korean food and Korean motherhood are subsequently the vehicles for analysis. This research is critical, as it expands the field of research in

Korean Studies to not only focus on women and mixed-race[3] Koreans as historical *objects*, but as active agents in cultural production, meaning-making, and history writing. It is nothing new and nothing unique for women and multiracial bodies to be left from the table of historical construction, so this work is a contribution to an already large volume of feminist reclamation and reconstruction of the contributions of the marginalized in a given culture. Authenticity is a game of history while it is simultaneously a game of context, and those in positions to construct and define that history have a lot of power in defining the parameters of culture in general—i.e., in an age of globalization, where culture is a commodity, there is power in the ability to shape the who's, what's, and where's of a given group of people. Discourses about authenticity have failed to truly address contemporary issues of intersectionality. While class and nation have frequently been used as the standards by which the project of authenticity has been discussed historically, the intersectional nature of community, and the daily lived experience of existing within multiple communities, wrinkles these conversations. Only by centering the *victims* of authenticity can we begin to see authenticity's true radical potential.

Authenticity, then, is a spectral entity. It is a product of temporality and a product of authority, appearing and disappearing depending on who or what is uttering it into existence. Despite there being deep consternation in academic discourse surrounding the term and its application, authenticity still continues to be a framework for demarcating the insiders and outsiders of a given community. The danger in these demarcations lies when authenticity is deployed as a way to locate *specific* people outside of a given community. Likewise, a core question that

circulates and begs to be explored further from a feminist perspective is *who* benefits from authenticity. In the case of *Parts Unknown,* Anthony Bourdain surely did, and his pockets were lined as such. In the case of a mixed-race person, inauthentic by nature of *being*, utterances of subjective authenticity become radically liberating. For a corporation, declarations of authenticity may merely be ways to ratify conspicuous consumption into the fabric of how we imagine culture and the past. The discourse of authenticity is vast and spans multiple disciplines, and to untangle the implications of authenticity is as important as defining what it is. This project aims to intervene into these discourses by offering a mechanism to make organic that which is spectral. "Plastic authenticity," then, is a decidedly feminist vehicle for situating the concept of authenticity back to the self, but *directly* engaging with structures of power as a form of active resistance.

The framework for plastic authenticity owes its construction in part to a few contemporary imaginings of authenticity. Folklore scholar Regina Bendix first hinted at the plastic potential of authenticity in her association with language philosopher Uwe Pörksen's notion of "plastic words," which are words that have "come to mean so much that they really mean very little while nonetheless signaling importance and power" (104). Her assertion for authenticity to be included in that language family is a result of authenticity's increasingly interconnectedness with sociopolitics, aesthetics, and morality. While the concept of interconnectedness is critical to understanding plastic authenticity, my use of plasticity is at its core a similar construct; however, it slightly diverges in application and meaning. The nature of

plastic, while malleable, is also full of *potential*, rather than overworked to the point of meaninglessness.

Likewise, in his study on authenticity regarding tourism and staged authenticity, Dean MacCannell recalls Erving Goffman's metaphor of the stage, with a front end where performances occur and the back, where actors/members of a team retire to relax (590). He utilizes this metaphor as a means to describe the way that tourism, and more specifically, the tour group actually occupies a space in-between the front and the back, where one has a sense of an authentic experience by seeing the organization and certain workings of the back, while being shrouded in a veil of superficiality, where the "real" work in the back is clouded from view (MacCannell 595). This metaphor is a useful one for engaging how plastic authenticity operates, as it is constructed in these middle grounds. Plastic authenticity operates somewhere in between subjective authenticity and hegemonic authenticity. In the case of Korean-American authenticity, narratives of Koreanness reinforce a connection to hegemonic authenticity by way of experience (i.e., the Korean mother has experiences raising her children employing specific characteristics associated with authentic Koreanness), but the subject's actual position clouds these connections. As plastic authenticity is a framework for the marginalized, their experiences at once connote hegemonic authenticity, while also being intensely subjective (i.e., being multiracial or a diasporic body). An analogy to understand the application of this metaphor is embodied by the example of the second-generation multiracial Korean-American's declaration to their friends at a Korean barbecue joint that the bulgogi beef they are eating is definitely authentic because it tastes just like their mother's homemade

bulgogi. There is a tug-of-war between subjectivity (recalling their mother's recipes) and hegemony here (knowledge of what constitutes authentic bulgogi), and plastic authenticity situates this multiracial individual in the center of that ideological struggle.

The failsafe in *plastic* authenticity, then, is actually in its ability to exist in opposition to *authenticity.* Strange, surely, as they are both "authenticities"; however, "plastic" authenticity is the light in the wound of hegemonic authenticity. Plastic authenticity is a form of radical subjectivity that engages racial and cultural sincerity (Jackson 2005) and the myths and fictions of the feminist orator (Visweswaran 1994), in direct opposition to authenticity. Situationally, plastic authenticity is the agentic form of what Donna Haraway terms a "situated knowledge," where only those who are rendered *in*authentic are capable of performing plastic authenticity. Essentially, only those from a position of subjugation can have objective and transformative accounts of the world (Haraway 584).[4] It is a sword and shield *only* for those in the margins. That said, it cannot exist without the machinations of hegemonic authenticity. A governing body that says only people (insert foods, goods, ideologies, etc.) produced in this *particular* region or in this *particular* way, in these *particular* parameters, are authentic, has the power to define cultural authenticity to the world of outsiders of a given nation/community. However, only those expelled from that nation can embody a form of authenticity that disrupts the hegemonic authority on the authentic. They do so by refracting authenticity through a plastic filter, and engaging a form of decentering, by enabling new iterations of authenticity to validate and

vindicate the experiences of being in the margins. The mixed-race body and the diasporic body[5], are these expelled figures.

Cultural authenticity as it occurs currently cannot *exist* without those which are inauthentic to define what *is* authentic (Lewis 6). Without the mixed-body, without the diasporic body, the authentic body has nothing with which to base itself up against. Authenticity is a form of regulation, whereas plastic authenticity is a form of reconstruction. Scholars engaging in the discourse around authenticity, particularly in food studies have already posited that authenticity exists because the "Other" exists, but the outsider only defines authenticity insofar as they highlight that which is different from *themselves* (Heldke 2005, Long 2004). Hegemonic cultural authenticity is defined *within* the confines of a culture by those delineating who is *deviant* within that culture. The diasporic body or the mixed-race body, then, can never be culturally authentic within the framework of hegemonic authenticity, as they exist to position those within the parameters of "correctness" in a given culture as authentic. They can use the master's tools, however, and (re)define authenticity through means of accessing that which makes the authentic body authentic, yet suturing it into a narrative of otherness. The mixed-Korean body, employing Koreanness in a body that tugs at the fabric of what Korean *is*, can perform plastic authenticity simply because they are situated as an insider in opposition to what constitutes "Koreanness." Their declarations of their Koreanness are inherently subjective, and subversive, rendering authenticity plastic, but sturdy nonetheless.

What is considered "authentically Korean," how those concepts are imagined, and in what ways authenticity is constructed through the vehicles of food and Korean

motherhood is the core focus of this dissertation project. This study employs visual and discourse analysis, utilizing historical archives, vlog personalities, cookbooks, web portals, and various forms of food branding and packaging. The case studies presented serve as ways to illuminate the machinations of authenticity but in particular the ways that Korean women are positioned in and around those narratives. Whether it be as symbols of a cultural past, as active agents in cultural construction, or as "ghosts" in the narratives of their multiracial children, Korean women are key figures in the various ways that authenticity is iterated. For *diasporic* Korean women, however, the symbolic meanings behind their positions as cultural reservoirs become shifted in a way that allows for the women themselves to be and become vehicles for re-imagining the ways that history, culture, and by extension, authenticity, is constructed.

This dissertation intervenes on the topic of authenticity through four core body chapters. These range from an historical timeline of Korean immigration to the U.S. with a focus on Korean women (chapter one), an analysis of a popular YouTube chef, *Maangchi*, and her employments of the concept of "authenticity" (chapter two), analysis of Korean food branding strategies/packaging and their claims of "authentic Korean food" in the U.S. (chapter three), and the website analysis of a mixed-race Korean community to explore the ways that authenticity is employed by persons not traditionally deemed "authentically Korean" (chapter four).

The first chapter, titled *Making Korean America(n): A Historical Overview of Korean Women and Immigration to the U.S.,* I examine women's roles in the Korean immigration narrative in the U.S., focusing specifically on two case studies: one of

the first Korean women's community organizations formed by former "picture brides" of Korean sugar plantation workers in Hawaii in the early 1900's, and second, the news and media coverage of the first Korean "warbride" to immigrate to the United States. The "Korean Women's Society" was a small organization invested in church activities, language and cultural education for children, and transcontinental support of the independence movements from Japanese colonialism happening in Korea. They were a predecessor for future organizations and saw the emergence of the "warrior woman" label for Korean-American women, which were women who renegotiated the patriarchal gender roles in traditional Korean kinship systems. The second case study, on the first "warbride" named "Blue" by U.S. news media, provides an example of how non-Koreans imagined Korean women, particularly as they entered into relationships with American soldiers. Both case studies establish the importance of women in the Korean immigration narrative, but more importantly by highlighting their impact on the history of Korean culture in the U.S. more broadly.

Equally important as the history of woman-centered migration is the role that race plays for the Korean-American community within dominant U.S. racial structures. Occupying a "middleman" position, Koreans (and Asian Americans more broadly) are stand-ins for whiteness in specific circumstances (the examples explored are the legal cases where Koreans were upheld as surrogate whites when positioned in a larger narrative of anti-Blackness in the country). This position within the U.S. racial structure implies that Asians are still subjected to the oppression and stereotyping that accompanies being non-white; however, their position also implies a certain sense of "safety" when race intersects with consumption. This, when

intersected with a gender analysis, reveals the unique position that Korean women hold in the larger Korean-American immigration narrative.

The second chapter, titled *Swinging the Hammer: Maangchi as a Gatekeeper of Cultural Authenticity*, examines the ways that Korean women exert agency as cultural entrepreneurs in constructing brands that create (and expand) the parameters of authenticity. With millions of followers on social media platforms and her video channel, I utilize the YouTube cooking show and perform visual analyses on the cookbook of popular Korean chef, Maangchi, to analyze her "brand." This includes how she has established herself as an expert of what is "authentically Korean" by employing tropes of Korean womanhood/maternity in conjunction with the trope of the "happy" immigrant, which are contributing factors to her success. I employ and conflict with the theoretical framework of "racial sincerity," coined by John Jackson Jr., which posits that certain "performances" of race create "sincere" images of a particular group to outsiders, while also working to undermine racial authenticity for insiders in a community (2005). By analyzing Maangchi's performances of Koreanness as "plastic authenticity," I assert that she radically decenters the traditionally male (and specifically governmental) gatekeepers of Korean authenticity, and becomes a gatekeeper herself while reaping monetary and social benefits by curating what is considered authentic.

In the exploration of her bestselling cookbook, I outline how Maangchi asserts her position as an expert of Korean cooking through her invocations of Korean motherhood and her experiences as a "Korean housewife." Likewise, the ways Maangchi subtly performs her ethnic "excess" as a means to combat othering is

explored, like in her declarations of love for Korean "smells," and her resistance to apologizing for Korean sensory excess to her readers. Playing with the trope of the happy immigrant, Maangchi utilizes her image in ways that subvert and transgress these tropes, enabling her to subtly and (un)consciously critique systems of racism and xenophobia. As her path to success was paved in digital spaces, and she is in total control over the image she projects, she is uniquely positioned to assert a form of cultural authority over authentic Koreanness. Working herself into various formats (YouTube, cookbooks, a web portal *Maangchi.com*, and Instagram), she simultaneously acts a gatekeeper for authenticity while participating as a global citizen in an increasingly networked world.

The third chapter, titled *Straight from Mama Kim's Kimchi Jar: Branding Korean Food for Non-Korean Consumers*, I examine the various ways that Korean food being sold in the U.S. is branded. Examining the packaging of Korean food in both Korean owned grocery stores that cater directly to the Korean community, as well as general grocery stores for the public, I explore and compare the different branding efforts by native Korean vs. Korean-American companies. A specific focus is positioned on the way that motherhood and authenticity are employed as symbols and "stand-ins" for taste and quality to attract non-Korean consumers to view products as "authentically Korean." Likewise, the ways that authenticity has traditionally been used as an exercise in soft nationalism is explored, and how "plastic authenticity," then, acts as a form of cultural validation for Korean-Americanness. Being positioned as somehow unable to achieve real Korean authenticity as defined by the Korean government through the food philosophy of *hansik* (a philosophy that

positions Korean food's authenticity within the parameters of food only found and produced *in* Korea), Korean-Americans reframe authenticity through a gendered labor lens and by practicing cultural citizenship through notions of American multiculturalism.

Probing the question about what makes a "marketable" cultural identity, this chapter draws from the framework of Arlene Dávila, where she examines branding strategies to discern the ways that Latinx products and foodways are used to articulate cultural identity through capitalism. Specifically, I assert that corporate production is aimed at crafting a Korean cultural "brand" identity that is nation-centered, whereas Korean-American brands craft a woman-centered cultural brand identity that is fundamentally grounded in the quintessential American myth of the nation of immigrants. In all forms, I argue that Korean women are critical agents in constructing this racialized capitalist narrative, and they offer dramatically different ways to interpret how and why Korean cultural authenticity is conceived, produced, and disseminated.

Lastly, in chapter four, titled *Ghost in the Kitchen: Mixed-Race Korean-Americans (Re)Defining Cultural Authenticity*, I investigate the ways that authenticity is employed on the personal scale as a marker for racial/identity construction to occur. I intervene by specifically examining the ways that cultural knowledge and experience on the individual level can become markers for shaping community and validating individual iterations of authenticity. In essence, I consider the ways that Korean motherhood "haunts" mixed-race social spaces, to borrow from Avery Gordon's theoretical framework. I argue that Korean food and maternity become

spaces to exert cultural knowledge and a level of expertise to authenticate a racial/ethnic identity, which in turn is an act of embodying "plastic authenticity." Multiracial bodies are inherently inauthentic; however, plastic authenticity is a framework that allows for the expressions of identity and memory to resist this notion, while grounded in the experience and proximity to Korean women/motherhood.

This chapter positions mixed-race individuals as foils to the assumption that cultural authenticity requires either "native" status or a particular level of linguistic competency, in favor of cultural competency often linked directly to Korean mothers. I employ a focused case study, analyzing the website *HalfKorean.com.* The site is a large, bi-coastal community of mixed-race Korean-Americans with arms in multiple spaces across the internet to celebrate being multiracial. Traces, or hauntings, of food and motherhood, play a role in all elements of the site, and in different ways work to reinforce new and adaptable forms of authenticity.

The conclusion attempts to bring these examples together by discussing the implications and potential uses for the framework of plastic authenticity. Re-orienting the structure of authenticity allows those that were pushed to the recesses of cultures and communities to emerge. Plastic authenticity is as much an exercise in agency, however, as it is in deconstructing and pointing out the absurdity of authenticity in general. It is not lost on me that authenticity is a redundant and oddly mundane element to explore—powerful yes, but mundane nonetheless. This project attempts to make sense of the power associated with authenticity by using the vehicles of food and Korean motherhood to assert that it is what is hidden *behind* authenticity that is

critical to engage. Authenticity is not going anywhere so long as globalization and consumption are founded on the notions that consuming "difference" is a worthwhile enterprise. Plastic authenticity, then, attempts to expose this without sacrificing those most vulnerable and at risk in the exposure of the hypocrisy of authenticity—those in the social, economic, and cultural margins.

CHAPTER 1: Making Korean America(n): A Historical Overview of Korean Women and Immigration to the U.S.

> Gender is a total experience for women. Korean people tend to define women as wives, mothers, caregivers, or just simply as "girls," always with regard to their sexual behavior rather than to their individuality as persons. The primary intention of a woman-centered perspective is to make women visible first and foremost as individual human beings. This requires a restructuring of thought and values. Women must become valued in and for themselves.
>
> —Young I. Song (1998)

Introduction

Historian Mae C. Ngai states that "in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, 'race' and 'nation' were loosely conflated in intellectual discourse and in the public imagination… *Race, people,* and *nation* often referred to the same idea" (23). Fast forward to the post-World War I era, where "racial indigestion" and the emergence of eugenics facilitated the clear distinctions between race, nation, and citizenship, gives way to the national origins quota system, or an arbitrary way to racially classify people in order to construct and subsequently protect the concept of whiteness (25). These quotas and immigration restrictions set the stage for a complex Korean immigrant narrative, where lines of race were shaped and reshaped, and Koreans found the establishment of a Korean-American community facing trials and tribulations of fitting within an ever-changing socio-political system.

Young I. Song's above quote, then, seeks to also assert the role of women as active agents and essential actors in the Korean immigration narrative. By positioning women as central figures in the narrative of their own immigration, a clearer picture

of the Korean-American immigration narrative emerges (3). It also lends itself to new forms of critique and to add layers of richness that recovers and nuances the pivotal roles that Korean women played in creating the "Korean-American experience."

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the flow of Korean immigration to the U.S. very broadly. I touch upon two main periods of migration of Koreans to the U.S., which are pre and post-Korean war, including literature that outlines some of the socio-economic obstacles that Korean-Americans faced in the early points of establishing Korean communities and enclaves. I narrow this focus into an interdisciplinary approach to studying the distinct role of women in the construction of the Korean-American immigration narrative, their various paths to citizenship, and their socio-economic roles in establishing Korean-American communities, following a predominantly historical approach to the pre and postwar periods of migration. I then engage the concepts of nationalism that employ women as symbolic figures, and the complicated intersections of gender, race, and citizenship. Next, I engage literature concerning interracial relations between the Korean-American and African-American communities, particularly in the era surrounding the Los Angeles uprisings of the early 1990's. The function of this discussion is to illuminate how American investments in Black-White binaries has affected the racialization and immigration/settlement narrative of Korean-Americans in the United States. I aim to demonstrate the ways a unique migration pattern and racial hierarchization affected the Korean-American community. Lastly, I close with a nod to the ways that this historical literature serves as a backdrop for subsequent chapters of the dissertation project.

Journey to North America: A Brief Overview of Korean Immigration

The first wave of Koreans to the U.S. came in the form of migrant workers on the sugar plantations in Hawaii (Abelmann and Lie 1995, Espiritu 1997, Park 1997). Before the migrant laborers in Hawaii, the number of Korean migrants was believed to be less than fifty, comprised of mostly ginseng merchants, students, and political exiles (Park 7). The initial wave of laborers to Hawaii was overwhelmingly male, with small numbers of "Korean picture brides" allowed entry (Abelmann and Lie 53). Likewise, the specific movement of *Korean* laborers was initially employed to deter Japanese labor strikers that demanded higher wages and better working conditions, with the total number of migrant Korean laborers in the first wave of immigration at 7,226 (Park 9). Interestingly, this early male-oriented migration set in motion a shift in gender roles. Without women to provide domestic labor, patriarchal nuclear family structures were not transportable from Asia, so men had to learn domestic duties, and the few women (mostly picture brides) that were allowed to migrate ended up in more elevated social positions among the laborers (Espiritu 16). This shift in social position for early immigrant women would set the stage for a reimagining of power relations in Korean-American families and will be discussed in the following section.

The first move to the mainland of the U.S. saw Korean migrant workers entering southern California, where railway companies offered slightly higher wages than those in the Hawaiian plantations. In the years between 1904 and 1907, roughly one thousand Korean immigrants settled in San Francisco, right before the presidential “Oriental Exclusion” executive order took place (Choy 105). Korean

immigrants specifically secured jobs in orange-picking, as direct competition with Japanese laborers, creating competition through lower wages, and various other cost-efficient tactics for survival, such as building their own residences without finance or assistance from Americans (106). This period of immigration onto the mainland saw a spike in racial discrimination, well known in the era as the "Yellow Peril," where Korean immigrants battled a number of discriminatory practices, ranging from land to education discrimination, including such acts as the Webb-Henry Land Law, which prevented immigrants who were not allowed to become citizens from owning land (107). These policies created further bars to immigration for Koreans at the introduction of the Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924, effectively cutting off migration from anyone except Korean students admitted into American universities.

Similarly, after the Japanese colonization of Korea in 1910, and the subsequent immigration quotas of 1924[6], immigration slowed significantly, with the next big immigration boom occurring after the Korean war. At that period, Korean women became the central immigrants, making up the highest number from 1945-1965, at approximately 28,000—all of which were married to American men (Abelmann and Lie 58).[7] By estimates in 1980, over 50,000 Korean women immigrated by way of marrying American men, resulting in a particularly skewed gender ratio of Koreans in the U.S. (for example, in 1964, 82 percent of migrants were female) (58).

Thus, between the years of 1965 to 1981, Korean spouses to U.S. citizens comprised half of those naturalized as citizens (Abelmann and Lie 58). Their roles as anchors for family to immigrate were immense. Despite changes to the 1924 quota

act, the immigrant and nationality act was legislation that hierarchized and valued immigrants with particular professional affiliations, for instance, medical professionals, which by 1974, nurses were the third largest group of immigrants admitted to the U.S. (Park 15). The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, abolished the quota act, and favored a ranking of preferred professions of those allowed citizenship (colloquially noted as "the brothers and sisters act"), but was primarily angled toward "family reunification" (i.e. the close family of those already citizens) (Abelmann and Lie 67). In 1976, President Gerald Ford officiated a shift in the valuing of certain professions, downgrading those in medical professions/nursing from immigrating. The combined effect between this and the original 1965 abolishment of the quota act was not a shortage in the number of immigrants, but rather a shift in the *routes* of entry. Family reunification was a principle channel for immigration, and the previously established group of naturalized citizens (predominantly women) became the channel through which communities of Koreans were established (Park 16).

It is also critical to recognize the socio-political and economic push factors that caused such a massive rush in Korean immigration to the U.S. in the postwar reconstruction era of the 1960's and 1970's. This significant era of immigration replaced "military wives" as the chief immigrants, and the circumstances are intimately tied to South Korea's economic situation as well as the role of the United States. Sociologists Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich conclude a number of intersecting issues that contributed to the wave of Korean immigration to the U.S. during the 1960's and 70's, namely that "Koreans came to the United States as cheap labor and

that Korean immigrant entrepreneurship was a disguised form of cheap labor utilization by U.S. capitalism" (27). Korean labor was incredibly cheap for many reasons. First being that due to South Korea's postwar position leaving the economy poor and in-development labor was cheap, but also very critically was South Korea's position in the global capitalist hierarchy. As a result of wide income disparity gaps between the elite classes in South Korea and the working class, along with the U.S. presence in Korea for development for its own purposes, and the role of Japan as a major capitalist player in the region, Korean labor remained cheap and accessible—creating both a flow of development opportunities *in* Korea as well as a cheap labor force to immigrate from Korea to come to the U.S. (27).

In turn, this cheap labor was mutually beneficial for the Korean and U.S. economy, as the U.S. was receiving cheap imports and Korea was able to keep costs low and corner certain export markets (such as plywood, electric machinery, wigs, etc.) (Light and Bonacich 37). This cheap labor and growing income disparities caused many Koreans to immigrate for better opportunities, and as a result, shifting the gendered tide of immigration away from women married to American men, to a working class that was grappling with the hardships of a stratified class system in Korea and economically depressed opportunities in Korea. Similarly, the capitalist aims of the U.S. and Korean governments, in utilizing a cheap and exploitable Korean labor force worked in a way to boost both economies; however, an effect of this was a drain on the American working class (Light and Bonacich 66). Many of these income disparities, as well as oppressive government policies, such as restrictions on labor unions, as well as rates of pay well below the standard of living, Koreans found

themselves in a position in which immigration was economically viable, and the aforementioned legislation encouraging “family reunification,” made the already existing group of Korean immigrants created a perfect situation for smooth immigration and paths to U.S. citizenship.

With that said, these shifting channels of immigration also came shifts in the class makeup of those immigrating to the United States. While the previously discussed economic factors led to there being an exploitable working class labor force, there was also a very sizeable urban middle-class population that was immigrating for a myriad of reasons, including the aforementioned economic stratifications (and subsequent “squeeze” on the middle class regarding job availability and pay), as well as religious persecution (the Park Chung-hee administration saw “liberal Christianity” as a deterrent to capitalist success) (Light and Bocanich 122, 114). Thus, it should be noted that while a sizeable population of Korean immigrants was an urban middle-class population, the wage and prestige disparities between the U.S. and developing South Korea still facilitated an entry into the U.S. economy as "working class," mostly as those with educations and professional backgrounds were not moving into those professions upon immigration.

Nonetheless, where white-collar professionals had to seek new channels for immigration, the concept of "family reunification" opened the doors for the movement of the aforementioned working-class immigrants to the U.S. in large numbers as well (Abelmann and Lie 71). While amendments to legislation shifted the modes of immigration, the rapidly growing postwar economy of Korea also created an impetus for migration as well. Korea's swift economic growth, bolstered by

participation with the U.S. in the Vietnam War, rapid industrialization, and participation in global capitalism, class and status gaps in Korea also emerged. Korea's new export-oriented industries quickly replaced its agricultural center, displacing workers and valuing the educational elite (72). Immigration statistics then showed, through 1990, a steady decline of white-collar professionals, and a steady increase of laborers and clerical workers (76). Census data shows that throughout the 80's and 90's, New York and Los Angeles were the largest aggregations of immigrants at 103,000 in California and 33,000 in New York, and in 1990, 259,941 in California, and 95, 648 in New York (Park 17). This number is an undercount, however, and in addition to language and cultural barriers, long work hours kept Koreans away from the home, and subsequently for census counts—community leaders estimate that by 1989 there were around 200,000 Koreans in greater New York, and 300,000 in the greater Los Angeles area (17).

Despite immigrating from many different channels (through marriage, work, education, etc.), Koreans (as do many other immigrants) often settled into communities that centralized in certain areas, building complex networks of living, community building, and business. As a city with one of the largest concentrations of Korean-Americans in a city, Los Angeles paints a fascinating portrait of the ways Korean immigrants have settled into, influenced the local economy of, and created community in a given space. A 1990 community profile of the Koreatown in Los Angeles notes that Koreans own "42 percent of the commercial lots, 40 percent of office buildings, and 41 percent of the shopping malls in Koreatown" (Yu 4). Being the largest community of Korean-Americans in the U.S., this community profile

reveals a number of interesting facts about the characteristics of the Korean-American community, and the ways in which immigration has impacted the business and living choices of Koreans in the U.S. While this profile does not account for the nuances in economic and racial/ethnic systems for Korean-Americans around the entirety of the U.S., it does provide a useful view into some the ways that the Korean diaspora, affected by gendered migration and war, affected the economic livelihood and choices of Korean immigrants in the postwar period.

"Warrior" Women Working, Working Women "Warriors": Shifting the Korean-American Family

While these facts paint a picture of the immigration and settling patterns of Koreans in the U.S., the specific roles of Korean women as business owners, workers, and mothers in the postwar Korean diaspora is critical to explore. Likewise, it would be a disservice not to also nod to the ways that Korean women have been redefining the family and gender roles since their very first moves to the U.S. in the early 1900's. Korean picture brides and a small number of women immigrating solo initiated the shift in traditional gender roles for Korean women in the United States. Known as "warrior women," these were women that came to America with their children for work and opportunities in direct defiance with their husbands' wishes (Yang 168). Not only were they responsible for working outside and, for those with husbands, by supplementing their husbands' income, but they were also very involved in expanding the presence of their husbands and their families in very *public* ways, through community organization, as teachers, committee members, and as

church leaders (Kim 109). These community engagements were critical, because they did not simply expand women's influence via economic means (as working-class women *in* Korea have been working outside the home to provide financial assistance as well), picture brides and other Korean immigrant women were able to expand their own influence in these plantation communities through community service, creating women's clubs, and even creating organizations like the Korean Women's Relief Society to provide financial assistance to those in the community, and to promote community uplift (112).

Fig. 1 Photo of Maria Hwang with the organization "Korean Ladies Relief Society," quoted in the text as the "Korean Women's Relief Society" from: Lee, Yoon Oak. "황마리아, 하와이에서 독립운동을 하다" "hwang-ma-li-a, ha-wa-i-e-seo dog-lib-un-dong-eul ha-da" [Hwang Maria, Making an Independence Movement in Hawaii]. *Ohmynews.com*, 2017.

Maria Hwang, who organized and headed a number of these organizations, including the Korean Women's Relief Society, is an oft-cited example of the kind of participation in local and even transnational politics that Korean women in the U.S. were a part of. Known as a typical "warrior woman," Hwang openly defied her husband. Her husband having taken a concubine, she left him to move to work in the U.S., stating "I can no longer live under this circumstance with you. I am taking our children to America and will shame you in the future. These children shall become educated, and I shall become a wonderful person. You can remain as you are." She went to Hawaii in 1905, with her son eventually earning a law degree and serving as president of the Korean National Association (Yang 175). In 1913, Hwang headed the organization of the Korean Women's Society, which was engineered to facilitate Korean language education for children and to support church activities and promote solidarity. While it was relatively short-lived, it also participated in political acts like the boycott of Japanese goods. It did, however, lay the groundwork for the future Korean Women's Relief Society.

In March of 1919, inspired by the March First (*mansei*) movement in Korea that protested Japanese colonization, Korean women dressed in traditional *hanbok* and peacefully protested through the streets of Honolulu, singing Korean songs (Kim 112). Under Hwang's leadership, forty-one women from all over the Hawaiian Islands assembled to establish the Korean Women's Relief Society. Being politically active, this group eventually split into four chapters among the islands and were engaged in transnational affairs, including the raising of an estimated $200,000 through food sales, membership dues, and door-to-door sales of political pamphlets,

to send abroad for relief efforts (Yang 175). While heavily invested in soft forms of Korean nationalism, the organization promoted a central aim of unity and humanity, using the money raised to aid families of protesters killed in the March First movement. Despite taking on gendered projects like using food to raise money, Hwang and other "warrior women" utilized this very public platform to redefine and renegotiate traditional gender roles in America (Kim 113). These women had *influence* in this burgeoning community and shifted the landscape of passive assistance or solely domestic duties into ones where they had agency and *power* in their respective communities. These women served not only to redefine gender roles in early Korean settlements in the U.S., but it sets up a distinct *symbolic* relationship to both the "Korean family" as well as the U.S. and Korea as nations.

These unique migration patterns paired with the new role that Korean women played as pathways for extended family, new kinship patterns emerged in Korean communities. Eventually, women would overwhelmingly become the sponsors for family reunification, increasing their social standing in family systems, and these new social standings also began to work their way into the business endeavors of Korean immigrant communities (Park 97). By 1989, in Los Angeles' Koreatown specifically, the status of Korean-American women in income earning activities was 67.2 percent in total, virtually the same as it was in 1978, which was 67.3 percent. Broken down by age range, 78 percent of working Korean-American women were between the ages of 40 to 59, and the percentage of women below 40 was 62 percent (Yu 15). It should be noted, however, that despite these radical shifts in Korean women's economic contributions to their families, that household life still maintains a relatively rigid

separation in gender roles and divisions of labor, where Korean-American women are effectively being burdened with the double workday (Min 90).[8]

Korean women were not passive bystanders in the creation and economic development of Korean communities in the U.S. but critically essential agents. Small businesses in urban areas were being run by women, with business and contacts with family in Korea primarily executed by women, while male relatives often worked in businesses run by their daughters and sisters. By 1978, 34 percent of Korean-American women that were working in the Los Angeles area were business *owners* (Yu 16). By 1989 this number dropped to 28 percent, with a more than 100 percent jump in clerical and office work (whether this is performed in Korean owned businesses as well is unclear) to 26.2 percent from 13.4 in 1978, with a significant drop in women working in the "unskilled labor" force, with a drop from 35 percent to 16.7 percent (16). This data nods to a "class" shift in the Korean immigrant population from the postwar period up to the 1990's, with skilled labor and levels of education steadily rising, and with 50 percent of "professional white collar" working women and 38 percent of independent woman-owned businesses being run by college-educated Korean women (17).

What these statistics lend themselves to is more than just a shift in median income over time as a result of immigration with higher education and access to different resources (both economic and social), but that since the postwar period, Korean women have been actively engaged in income generating activities—disrupting traditional notions of Korean women's roles within family and business structures[9], both in the U.S. and in Korea. This resulted in shifts in not only economic

power within family structures, but also in how communication with family still in Korea (Park 99). Since America's kinship system is more horizontal (emphasis on sibling ties) versus Korea's vertical (father to son ties), the sister/daughter disrupts the duties traditionally held by eldest sons and becomes a central player for initiating immigration and the establishment of business and housing (104).

One especially gendered space of employment for women was in retail/service. In New York for example, as immigrant Korean communities began to settle, a large number of Korean women sought employment in the garment industry, but by the 1980's, when these industries shut down and sought cheaper sources of labor, Korean women moved into service and retail spaces, one in particular, nail salons (Lee and Kang 8). Given that this space was coded as "feminine," women predominantly served in leadership and management positions in these spaces (Lee and Kang 11). This, however, did not change the expectations held for Korean women regarding the responsibility to also be primary caregivers of children and having primary domestic responsibilities. Despite working outside the home and experiencing more significant gains in economic power, the persistence of gender role orientation persists (Kim and Kim 112).

Conversely, regarding the middle and upper-middle class end of the spectrum, women were establishing roots in the U.S. in family formations that allowed men to remain in Korea for breadwinning purposes and for the children of these Korean immigrant families to have educational opportunities in the U.S. Feminist anthropologists Seung-kyung Kim and John Finch, in their work "*Kirŏgi* Families in

the U.S.: Transnational Migration and Education" (2012), discuss the impetus for families to engage in these transnational family formations. They note,

> *Kirŏgi* families are part of the same struggle for status, although the context within which the struggle is occurring has been expanded to a global arena. Matrifocal *kirŏgi* families, with their absent (but still involved) fathers, are not too different from Korean families with over-worked salaried men as fathers… it is the whole-hearted commitment to motherhood that makes it possible for both parents to undertake the *kirŏgi* project. The split household is a stressful and expensive way to live. Both fathers and mothers speak of making sacrifices, but ultimately the responsibility rests on the mothers in their role as education managers. (494)

Thus, a range of classes of immigrants, and across a temporal span of five decades, Korean women have been engaging in business and familial endeavors to benefit their families. From the postwar period through contemporary period, Korean women have played a critical role in not only establishing Korean-American communication and immigration networks but have become critical factors in defining a "Koreanness" in the U.S. that differs drastically from the traditional roles women played in Korea.

Beginning in the early 1900's, Korean women have been adjusting to, and reimagining gender roles as circumstances changed, but they continued to do so throughout the wartime period in Korea. This period would mark a time of distinct gendered immigration patterns favoring the immigration of Korean women to the

U.S., but also a prominent role in redefining race for Asians in the U.S. on the Black-White continuum, but also in their roles as symbols for nation.

The Camptown Woman/"War Bride": Korean Women as Symbolic Figures

While the historical roles of Korean women in emerging postwar Korean communities created shifts and new kinship patterns for those communities, the role of "camptown" women or "war brides" provides an especially useful space of analysis, intersecting the conversations of migration, gender, race, and nationalism. Concerning the role of women in the postwar migration narrative, two critical themes emerge in the literature. The first recurring theme is the *immigrant and nation* theme. Immigration and nation are tied to a number of factors like gender, race, and in particular aspects of assimilation and the blurred line between foreigner and citizen. One of the particularly pertinent discussions, however, is that which frames the Korean women in various proximities to the ways that the countries are framed. Legal and policy discourses speak on a larger scale to some of these issues, as well as racial and cultural tensions that war brides face in interracial marriages.

Fig. 2 Still of "Blue" from Wayne Miller photo collection from: Miller, Wayne. "USA. Seattle, Washington. 1950. 'Blue' Morgan (nickname for Lee Yong Soon) in her inlaw's kitchen. She'd just arrived in America with her new husband, Sgt. Johnie Morgan." *Pro.Magnumphotos.com*, 1950.

A *Life* magazine article, released in November of 1951, featured the story of what the magazine deemed the *first* "war bride" to make it to U.S. shores. Titled "A War Bride Named 'Blue' Comes Home," this short article describes the love story of an American G.I. and a Korean civilian in their attempts to get married and to bring her "home." The article reads,

> Sgt. Johnie Morgan returns to the U.S. with a Korean wife who once walked 200 miles to be with him. As the troop transport *General M. M. Patrick* pulled into Seattle's harbor, the band on the dock loudly struck up *Here Comes the Bride.* Crowds cheered excitedly, whistles tooted. Seattle and the U.S. were welcoming the first Korean war bride

> to arrive in America, Mrs. Johnie Morgan, home with her sergeant husband.
>
> To soldiers in Korea Mrs. Morgan had been known as "Blue" because when she refused to tell them her name (it was Lee Yong Soon), they said, "Okay, you've got a blue sweater so your name's Blue." She first met Johnie Morgan (he was christened "Johnie," not "John") in Seoul in 1949 where Blue worked for the U.S. Army as a communications supervisor. By the time Korea was a word on the lips of every American, Johnie and Blue were in love. But love in Korea in 1950 was precious and brief. In late June, with the North Koreans coming in on Seoul, Johnie's outfit withdrew 200 miles south to Pusan, and Blue was left behind. Three weeks later, her feet bare and bleeding, Blue reached Pusan and Johnie Morgan. She had walked across the country to Johnie. "I knew then," says Johnie, "how much I loved the kid," and he asked her to marry him. It took five months for marriage permission to clear the Army. Then, after their wedding last Valentine's Day, which is Blue's birthday, Johnie passed up innumerable chances to return to the States until Blue's papers could be cleared…When the couple came ashore, Johnie's mother rushed up to kiss Blue. "I'm so glad you're here," she said.

This short article is part of a two-page spread with accompanying photographs. In part a story about love conquering the odds (and a 200-mile journey), this story also demonstrates the conflict between referencing a “war bride” in context with war and

with a narrative of assimilation. The subtext of this article and accompanying images position gender in conversation with her assimilation. Featuring photos of "Blue" correcting her husband's manners, and learning how to make "Carolina-style gravy" from her new mother-in-law, this is not so much an insight into the *relationship* of Johnie and "Blue," so much as it is a reference to the mundaneness of their everyday marriage despite overcoming the odds of war. "Blue" is positioned as a devoted, now *American* wife.

Interestingly, due to postwar Korean perceptions of America, Korean women's proximity to American men denoted a certain social capital within Korea because of his conflation with *America* (nation) and her potential to migrate. Sociologist Ji-Yeon Yuh notes, regarding America's position as a place of luxury, paired with the airing of television shows like *Dallas*, "the magical lure of America obscures the reality of its presence in Korea… it is the lure that the metropole exerts on its colony. It is all the stronger because America was seen as the liberator, not a colonizer… American heroism and generosity joined with American material abundance into an image of utopia" (35). Due to her social standing as a pariah, the war bride sees migration as a hope for a new future, and those in Korea see the American man as a link to America. On the other hand, once immigration occurs, Americans code her as eternally foreign, and the expectation to assimilate becomes a necessity, even though it still does not diminish her standing as a foreigner by nature of being Asian (Cho 2006, 2008, Kim 1998, Yuh 2002). In efforts to assimilate war brides, "Bride Schools" emerged to help erase their Koreanness. This includes things like making American style salads, learning how to cook and slice a turkey, describing the Bride School as "a service to

ease Korean women's assimilation into American culture, suggesting that escape from the camptown and assimilation into the United States are two sides of the same coin" (Cho 319). The war bride's status as a foreigner operates

Fig. 3 Still of "Blue" cooking from *Life* magazine from: Miller, Wayne. "Getting hints on Johnie's favorite, Blue learns recipe for Carolina-style gravy." *Life,* November 5, 1951.

on a different level than it does for full immigrant families where assimilation is not enforced to the same degree (specifically regarding cultural habits like food, religion, and cultural observances), and her status as a "yanggonju" (Western Princess) means she will never be "fully" assimilated (Cho 161). Marriage to an American man incites issues of citizenship and nationalism that are both oppressive and emancipatory at the same time.[10]

Deeply embedded in the discourse of immigration and assimilation is a unique relationship to American racial and ethnic categories. Interestingly, for the Korean war bride, particularly those immigrating during the 1950's and 60's, race was a particularly touchy subject, as racial segregation was transferred to Korean camptowns as well. New and complicated racial discourses emerged as a result. On the topic of the reproduction and complication of racial categories in camptown bars, Amy Lee and Joseph Tse-Hei Lee discuss how social spaces like bars were racially segregated.

> Bars were segregated. White soldiers would not go to the bars where black soldiers socialized and vice versa. Witnessing the discrimination towards African-American soldiers and their poor standard of living, Koreans internalized the racial prejudices that existed in American society and developed their own biases and stereotypes. It was common for the camptown prostitutes to be segregated according to the color of the men they slept with. The women who associated with Caucasian soldiers were considered 'higher class' than those who entertained black soldiers… As a result, they reproduced the same racial boundaries among themselves that paralleled American society. A racial and social hierarchy emerged among the military brides. Those women who married Caucasian soldiers often looked down upon those marrying African-American soldiers and there was hardly any interaction between the two groups. (Lee and Lee 460)

While these structures were reproducing themselves in the camptowns, women who had already immigrated then found the shock that their status (even if married to a white man) was, unsurprisingly, not white, despite the way that Koreans had imagined life would be in the United States.

Due to their foreign status, Koreans have been placed outside of social citizenry altogether or rendered invisible in America's racial hierarchy (Espiritu 109). This is only to be complicated further due to the model minority myths that circulate often implying that Asian Americans face no racial barriers (Kim 152). Koreans in general often find themselves sitting in the middle of racial discourses, simply by nature of their inability to fit within the binary.[11] The Korean military wife that is married to a Black man, then, while invisible due to her inability to fit within a racial paradigm due to her own racial makeup, is thrust into an altogether different racial discourse as a result of being married to an American that does exist within that binary framework.

Similarly, Korean military wives became symbols of tradition, femininity, or the "good ole days" for their American husbands. Ji-Yeon Yuh notes, regarding the ways that Korean military wives faced intersectional domination,

> It [domination] is most often expressed in demands that the women tailor to suit the needs of others. For example, they are expected selectively to retain traits to suit the needs of others. For example, they are expected selectively to retain traits of docility, deference, and domesticity that their husbands—in an expression of Orientalist prejudice—assume they possess as Asian women. These are the traits

> that the husbands often view as ‘better' than those of ‘modern' American women because they more closely match the characteristics of traditional, old-fashioned women. Since the 1970's, the women have also been increasingly asked to serve as a window into another culture and thereby to provide non-threatening multicultural experiences for Americans and to contribute to the multicultural milieu of American society, one that conveniently glosses over persisting racial and cultural inequalities (224)

These expectations of embodying arbitrary and limiting characteristics of femininity, paired with the expectations of military wives to assimilate into American culture effectively is a particularly binding position for Korean women to find themselves. They remedy these constraints, however, in small acts of resistance, namely in creating informal networks among other Korean military wives. As these women often symbolize ‘deviance’ to many Koreans, who view their choice to interracially marry as undesirable, creating networks among other Korean military wives serves as a way to retain and push back against the pressure of “Americanization,” while being able to express themselves and build a supportive community often denied by mainstream Americans and Koreans as well (227).

Perhaps the most important, if not the most discussed in the literature, are the concepts of gender and nationalism as it relates to the war brides (Cho 2006, 2008, Lee 2007, Moon 2007, Park 1997, Yuh 2002). The marking of camptown women as unchaste and sexual deviants by Koreans and as exotic sexual objects for Americans, Korean war brides often find themselves in isolation either in mainstream Korean or

American society (Yuh 14). There is an ideology that floats through the Korean public that reasons the exploitation of women through prostitution because it protects the virtues of some women, yet these women maintain the mark of a social pariah.

There is a critical gendered discourse happening within this framework that works to codify the Korean women but simultaneously make claims about the country of Korea as well as Western (American) imperialism. Women, then, become the site for a gendered nationalism and political dialogue (Cho 2006, Moon 2007). Korea's relationship with America is decidedly gendered, where America can exert dominance through skewed agreements that unfairly benefit the United States, rendering Korea in a subordinate, feminized position. To maintain a masculinist sense of sovereignty, Korea must subjugate and place shame on camptown women.[12] Interestingly, both Korean camptown women, and American G.I.'s stand-in for their *nation* when it comes to the topic of prostitution.

While the mainstream Korean public is tasked with subordinating women in camptowns to maintain a position of sovereign masculinity, the United States has also taken a gendered angle as well, to justify increased prostitution measures by positing gender equality as an impetus. "Public Act No. 7" (administered by the Korean interim government, pressured by the U.S. military) was an attempt by the U.S. to sidestep responsibility for the rate of prostitution by juxtaposing the U.S. presence against the Japanese colonization, decrying prostitution altogether. This act was designed to prosecute *both* prostitutes and their clients as an act to show no tolerance for "dehumanizing acts;" however, American soldiers were not prosecuted (Lee 468). Sociologist Na Young Lee notes, regarding the emancipatory rhetoric promoting

"gender equality" and "civilization" by the U.S. in the name of liberal democracy (which did not eliminate prostitution or secure and rights for prostitutes), that the actual purpose of the act was to reduce STD rates by regulating prostitution, "effectively disguising its engagement with and complicity in the continuation of military prostitution. The U.S. policy in Korea was shaped and sustained by contradictory impulses. The state-regulatory system inherited from Japan was abolished, but, in the effort to protect U.S. soldiers from STDs, a new system that paralleled the old one was successfully created" (Lee 469). Thus, gendered rhetoric is utilized to both secure and maintain ideological power over Korea by America, while simultaneously being used by Koreans to decry camptown women and their role in servicing American military forces.

Gendered discourse followed the camptown women into marriage as well, being branded as unchaste, impure, or sexual deviants by their fellow Koreans (Moon 145). By the mid-1960's, the U.S. military shirked any responsibility for the marriages that occurred (and were still occurring). Coded as "immature" or "improvident," the camptown women, now wives, were considered a problem. On this topic, Susan Zeiger states, "Prostitution, by the army's own analysis, was a "constructive" influence on troop morale—but only if contained in its proper place. 'Military prostitute' and 'military wife' were rigidly separate categories in military thinking" (213). This also resulted in the elimination of all associated military-sponsored assistance programs for war brides, like the previously mentioned "bride schools" and Red Cross medical services (213). Regardless of marital status, these women were permanently marked as deviants and unsuitable "wife material," a label

which has traveled with and vilified these women, and even in current movements seeking to amend issues of sexual exploitation and women's human rights.[13]

Each of these themes contain elements that overlap, but what the literature suggests overall is that the camptown women, and subsequent "war brides" occupy an interstitial position within various racial and nationalistic discourses. At any given moment, they may be coded in one way because they are women, another because they are sex workers, and yet another because they are considered a foreigner and outside of a racial paradigm. These themes open themselves up for rich analysis, and my own research interventions have emerged from the moments when a war bride shifts between being a "whore," an exploited woman, a foreigner, and a wife, highlighting the complexity of Korean women in the larger migrant narrative.

Not Black, Not White, But Other: Korean Racialization in the U.S.

Transitioning to the periods post-immigration, race, racialization, and interracial interaction are vital elements in the Korean immigrant narrative. The positioning of "Asian" as an interstitial category in the Black-White racial paradigm, along with media representation, are critical elements in constructing the migration narrative of Koreans in the U.S. Regarding critical race theory, in particular, concepts of race and its relationship to systems of power are key. "Racial hierarchization" becomes a concept that is frequently referenced, in which Koreans are imagined as surrogate whites in certain situations, receiving unfair advantages that Black people do not receive, creating a ranking in privilege amongst the three communities (Abelmann and Lie 1995, Espiritu 1997, Kim 2008, Lowe 1996).[14] For instance, in

the famous court case which was a major impetus for the targeting of Korean storefronts during the L.A. uprising, store merchant Soon Ja Du shot and killed Latasha Harlins, receiving a sentence of a small fine and probation. Sociologist Kyeyoung Park notes, "black community members could see that Du was treated as white because she killed a black. They could also surmise that she would have been sentenced as a black had she dared to kill a white" (66). There would be no way to critically examine interracial conflict without having a dynamic definition of race and to note the systems of inequality that create an environment from which interracial hostility can embitter among mutually oppressed groups.

One critical aspect to examine when considering interracial relations is the role of white media. It operates as a third party to the racial tensions happening in L.A., conspicuously flaring tensions, and negatively portraying both the Black and Korean communities (Abelmann and Lie 1995, Cheung 2005, Park 1999, Thornton 2011). Likewise, the media has a vested interest in describing details of conflict as culturally based, posing the Korean as incoherent of American business practice (they are cold and do not smile) and the Black community as being enraged and unduly vengeful (angrily targeting Korean stores), rather than highlighting the sheer lack of public policy to ameliorate urban issues like racism and poverty (Park 69).[15] This is a particular tactic that redirects the conversation from systemic racism to cultural misconception.

Similarly, in situating media as a space for analysis, there are three approaches concerning the ways it maintains a social status quo. The first approach is a *political economy approach*, which emphasizes how the wealthy control what and how

situations get reported, marginalizing voices of dissent. The second is the *production studies approach,* which recognizes that bureaucratic routines and social relations that exist within news organizations influence media coverage. The third, the *culturalist approach,* argues that media operates within and are constrained by discursive-ideological frameworks that justify racial and political systems already in existence (Kim 191). Each contributes to the ways that the hostility is analyzed and reproduced, as well as why efforts at coalition building are not, as it is not in the best interest of white media executives.

Putting the media, judicial systems, and concepts of racial hierarchy in conversation, then, creates a more wholesome picture of how the Korean and Black communities interacted with each other, but also in the ways that these "hostilities" were portrayed to the public. Even further what was *not* being shared with the public, which is critical coalition building (Choi and Kim 1999, Kim 1998, Thornton 2011).[16] Likewise, this is not just momentary or reactionary coalition building due to effects of the L.A. uprising and subsequent media coverage, but a long history of Afro-Asian solidarity. This began with the African-American community's practically solitary stand against the abrogation of Japanese-Americans' civil rights in the wake of World War II, or their lone stand in solidarity with Filipino union workers in the early part of the 20th century (Kim 6). Similarly, sociologist Michael C. Thornton, in an analysis of the preeminent Black news publication the *Los Angeles Sentinel,* charts that while much of white media was positioning news coverage of the L.A. uprising as a racial conflict between the Black and Korean communities, the *Sentinel* took an approach that stressed the importance of "interminority alliance," as opposed to interracial

tension (Thornton 1278). Likewise, this becomes a critical element in the larger Korean migration narrative, as the Korean community sutures itself into a historically Black-White racial narrative.

The media was similarly invested in coverage of the judicial element of the interracial conflict and its effects on conflicts. Favoring a triad[17] approach, it finds the court cases that occurred as a result of conflict to be an emblematic aspect of the hostility and points to the legal aspect as an impetus for rationalizing the hostilities and subsequent boycotts in Chicago and New York (Park 67). In a similar vein to the concept of the "surrogate whites" in the judicial system, rendering Koreans as "middlemen" serves as a way to reify the racial triad by situating Koreans in a manner that is conducive for the Black community to see the Koreans as receiving unfair economic advantages (Park 61). Koreans, however, are unable to claim a direct relationship to whiteness and the associated privileges, but use systems like rotating credit (*kye*) and other informal financial networks among the Korean community to open storefronts (Lee 123).[18] The middleman minority, then, generally occupies a middle status in a host society's class and racial framework. Pyong Gap Min and Andrew Kolodny apply the term to Koreans in reference to their role in between producer and consumer, noting "Korean immigrants' disadvantages for employment in the general labor market [a noted factor being language] have forced them into small business and that their middleman role has increased group conflicts and host hostility" (Min and Kolodny 134).

From a critical race standpoint, the middleman concept is developed in a way that demonstrates an investment in the conflation of race and culture. The conflation

points to structural understandings about racial categories, particularly when Asians occupy an "eternal foreigner" position, or one "outside the cultural and racial boundaries of the nation" (Lowe 6).[19] The construction of the Asian as a foreigner is arguably one of the most critical factors in constructing a racial narrative of Asians, and in this literature more specifically, Koreans. Critical race theory employs the term culture; however, not culture in the anthropological sense. Culture is used as a method of racial categorization when referring to Black-Korean hostilities (Park 68). Since these immigrants do not fit neatly within a Black-White racial paradigm, the overabundance of culture, referring to such things as language, food, religious attitudes, mannerisms that are *seen* by Americans as something that Americans *lack,* which is how Koreans are fit within the American racial discourse.

As for media criticism, larger structures that define the standpoint of white media point to and determine both the public opinion of interracial conflict, but are also indicative of unequal systems of power, particularly as it refers to the coverage of the boycotts (Abelmann and Lie 1995, Kim 1998). In a study tracking the rhetorical moves of media coverage of the 1992 L.A. uprising, Doobo Shim found that in trying to maintain an objective lens, the media consistently coded the African-American population as a "mob," as "senseless," and as "gangbangers," detracting from the political statement that the uprising made in response to the Rodney King verdict (Shim 79). Likewise, the media coded Koreans as reckless vigilantes, taking up arms to police their stores, when in fact this was a result of no response by police to their calls (82).[20]

Regarding the broader role of white media in the Black-Korean conflicts, there emerged a generational division in the beliefs of what was causing the tensions between the Korean and African American communities, with the younger 1.5 generation believing that it was white media which fueled aggressions between the two communities, and older generations believing that gang violence, and in turn the Black community was responsible for the violence toward Korean merchants (Min 106). Pyong Gap Min addresses this discussion directly, interrogating whether there was a causal connection between media coverage and victimization of Korean stores, and if so, would the absence of white media coverage have resulted in fewer Korean stores being targeted by violence or boycott, and finally whether white media *intentionally* encouraged Black-Korean tensions to minimize damage to "white society" (Min 107).

Part of his findings indicates that in fact, multiple cases of media coverage of Black boycotts of Korean business were in actuality favorable toward the Korean merchants, positing the possibility that while these were favorable articles to the Korean community, that the white media may actually have a predisposition toward being critical of Black boycott leaders. However, this conclusion was also met with the possibility that the white media coverage, while favorable of Korean merchants, actually worked to prolong the boycotts, by uniting Black nationalists determination to boycott rather than "give in to the 'White system'" (108). Min disagrees that white media *intentionally* fueled these tensions, favoring the notion that the news favors sensationalism across the board. He believes there is nothing at stake for white media other than commercial interests; however, when considered in conjunction with the

previous discussion about the power of "surrogate whiteness" to uphold white supremacy in various institutions, it would be myopic to discredit the socio-political investments that white media have, as well as economic investments it has in fueling tensions among minority groups rather than the highlighting the exclusionary and hostile policies and legislation that put both the Korean community and African-American community in these economic circumstances in the first place.

That said, part of the function of delineating interracial relations into this literature is to outline the ways that the Korean community not only grappled and adjusted to their own space as an "other" in a white supremacist society, but the ways in which the circumstances of race affected the creation of Korean-American communities and the larger perception of Koreans (Asians) more broadly. The intervention into these conversations diverges from simply tracking the migration patterns of Koreans into the United States. My investments are very gendered and raced, positioning Korean women at the nexus of the immigration narrative, and "Asianness" as a complicating factor in the dominant Black-White racial paradigm. Moving into discussions concerning identity and the shifting nature of Koreanness in the U.S., a woman-centered approach to immigration, and an awareness of the unique racial interactions that the Korean community had serves as a backdrop to more extensive discussions regarding Korean-American authenticity.

Conclusions

This chapter was intended to serve three primary functions. First, it provides a review of the existing literature regarding Korean immigration, which establishes

relevance to the study of the Korean-American population. Koreans have a long history of immigration to the U.S., and the immigration narrative has spanned more than a century. It has inevitably been shaped by war, U.S. immigration policy, and very importantly, capitalism. Korean immigration, dispersed over many years has proven to be invariably classed and gendered, and the communities that emerged, as a result, have had direct impacts on not only the racial position of Koreans but how Korean-Americans are perceived *as a people*, by non-Koreans.

Second, this chapter situates the role of race and race relations in the immigration narrative of Korean-Americans. The oft-cited "middleman" in U.S. racial politics, Koreans have occupied an interesting space in the American racial hierarchy, and their roles economically and symbolically (as described in the instances of surrogate whiteness), position the Korean-American community in one where their social position, in conjunction with the socio-economical circumstances for immigration, as a worthy community of study. More importantly, it establishes a precedent for how non-Koreans *perceive* of the Korean community in the United States. This racial paradigm, along with the associated stereotypes and controlling images of Koreans will have a bearing in the following chapters, where perceptions of Koreans, and subsequently "Koreanness," will shift and shape the ways that, specifically Korean women, brand themselves, are branded, and used to brand their children. This follows a long history in the U.S. of gendered and racialized branding[21], and this dissertation explores that regarding Korean women.

Third, and most importantly, it situates Korean *women* specifically as worthy subjects of study. Korean women have existed as major players in the immigration

narrative of Korea, acting as anchors for family reunification in the postwar era of immigration, but also as agents for change in familial power dynamics. Korean women have been at the forefront in establishing Korean businesses in the U.S., and have very much contributed to the Korean-American community in social and economic terms. Korean women have been key players in each wave of Korean immigration.

Likewise, Korean women have historically been utilized as *symbols* for nation, and have been deeply entrenched in the racial formation of Koreans in the Black-White racial binary of the United States. From their roles since the earliest days of Korean immigration, as picture brides in the Hawaiian sugar cane plantations, to their roles as business *owners* in the postwar creation of Korean communities across the U.S., Korean women have been at the forefront in establishing what it means to "be Korean" in the United States. Positioning women as both active agents in community building and economic uplift, as well as symbolic figures for notions of nationalism and memory/nostalgia, this ongoing project interprets the fundamental importance of Korean women as a means to (re)define Korean authenticity as it travels across the ocean.

In the following chapters, I will employ the elements discussed in this chapter as backdrops for my more extensive examination of Korean authenticity. Utilizing Korean motherhood and food as vehicles for analysis, I will examine the ways that Korean women have been direct agents as well as symbolic agents in determining what it means to be "authentically Korean." In the next chapter, I explore the gendered nature of food and how Korean women employ notions of gender/maternity

and race as a means of acting as "gatekeepers," or agents of Korean authenticity. I will explore how famous chef and YouTube personality, *Maangchi,* built her internationally successful brand of Korean cooking books and videos using tropes of motherhood and memory as ways of authenticating her brand to become a marker of not only Korean but female entrepreneurship, both cultural and economic.

CHAPTER 2: Swinging the Hammer: Maangchi as a Contemporary Gatekeeper of Cultural Authenticity

> There is a yangnyeom-tongdak place on every corner in Korea. Each one claims its own secret coating and batter mixture, but generally the chicken all tastes very similar. I love the funny names of some of the fried chicken chains: Very Large Chicken (Ahju-keo Chicken), Mother-in-Law's Chicken (Jangmonim Chicken), Son-in-Law Mr. Lee's Chicken (Lee Seobang Chicken), Wife's Mother's House Chicken (Jangmonimjip Chicken). The dominance of mother-in-law names is a nod to the long tradition of a woman serving chicken to her son-in-law as a sign of respect and celebration. When a son-in-law came to visit his wife's family in the countryside, they always expressed their appreciation by killing the best chicken and serving it for dinner, usually as chicken soup.
>
> —Maangchi, *Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking* (221)

Introduction

There is no shortage of chefs on television, and no shortage of celebrity cookbooks on the shelves of bookstores. Celebrities like the Chrissy Teigens or Rachael Rays of the world, offer up their favorite recipes, critiquing and tweaking traditional recipes, traveling and eating, making funny and punny quips to their viewers and readers, all the while using food as a vehicle to tell some kind of story of a place or a people. Anthony Bourdain, passing crass judgments to the "touristy" spots around the world to avoid in favor of the street vendor serving more "authentic" food. Chrissy Teigen, supermodel, touting her favorite "definitely-not-diet" foods. Becoming wildly popular, both celebrities/chefs' cookbooks are ranked in the top 5 of the New York Times bestseller list for cookbooks (NYTimes.com 2017). One part of the allure is the celebrity, but there is also something deeply personal about

cookbooks. Deeply cultural. The other part of the allure of contemporary cookbooks is as much in the recipes as it is the author of them, and most importantly the tidbits of their lives contained within them.

This is not new, by any means. Cookbooks have been the study of academics for decades now (Theophano 2). The seemingly mundane elements of daily life potentially gleaned from them are precious windows into peoples' lives in different eras. As Janet Theophano notes, "the themes in cookbooks are timeless: life and death, youth and age, faithfulness and betrayal, memory and forgetfulness… The cookbook, like the diary and journal, evokes a universe inhabited by women both in harmony and in tension with their families, their communities and the larger social world" (6). Cookbooks are spaces that are intimate. Somewhat ironically, however, in today's time intensely public, making them a handy space to perform a racial and gendered analysis of authenticity and its various modes of production.

This chapter examines the ways that Korean women exert agency in constructing brands that create (and expand) the parameters of authenticity. Focusing specifically on YouTube star and internet celebrity chef, Maangchi[22], I examine her cookbook, YouTube cooking channel, and her public appearances outside of the confines of her cooking show. Maangchi, whose American name is Emily Kim, and whose Korean name is Kim Gwang-suk (김광숙), was born in the southern most province of Korea in Imsil, and was raised in Yeosu. Earning a master's degree in education, Maangchi became a part-time professor before getting married, and moving to Columbia, Missouri, where she met a vibrant Korean expat community, sparking her quest to learn various regional cuisines of Korean cooking (Maangchi 2).

After divorcing from her husband, Maangchi moved to Toronto, Canada, before moving to Manhattan, New York, where she currently resides and films her YouTube videos.

My goals are threefold. One goal is to establish the way that Maangchi utilizes the term authenticity, and common notions associated with authenticity to give her YouTube channel/cookbook/website credibility. This includes references to her own experiences with Korean motherhood, the narratives of Korea and her rationales for how/why she became an expert of a particular dish she prepares. The second is a breakdown of Maangchi herself. What about her makes her attractive/credible to an audience? What makes her followers "consume" her media and buy into her brand of cultural foodmaking and storytelling? Lastly, this chapter also juxtaposes this contemporary example of branding and declarations of authenticity against a long history of the same gendered and racialized narratives that sprout up in and around foodways. Women being associated with food preparation and foodways is nothing uniquely Korean, but by establishing a history that intersects gender and race, I aim to explore how Maangchi both contributes to this history while also shifting it by employing a renewed sense of agency in the caricature—i.e., the friendly, funny, "everywoman" Korean auntie that she simultaneously reproduces and capitalizes off of. Her cookbooks and her "brand" are not a secret treasure for those who stumble upon it, to learn about her life and Korean culture, but something intentionally public. She is being the sweet giggling Korean auntie that invites you into her kitchen to cook with her while being digitally savvy, contemporary, and "millennial" in her

approach to her brand. It is a form of cultural entrepreneurship where authenticity is the product.

The contributing factor to my broader term "plastic authenticity" here implies that credible authenticity can also be constructed through artificial means. The caricatures she creates, the literal uses of the term "authentic," and the stories that Maangchi tells when she is cooking are deployed strategically in ways to make not just the food she cooks authentic, but her persona as well. Being an avid online gamer, Maangchi is no stranger to the creation of avatars, and my argument is that her "avatar," Maangchi, is no less authentic than her off-screen persona, Emily Kim, rather it is an exercise in embodying, gatekeeping, and marketing authenticity. She simply utilizes a different avenue for establishing authenticity and credibility. Take the opening epigraph for instance. The anecdote she recites implies both her status as "Korean," or an insider, but also invokes a gendered history. Korean women were not making "Korean fried chicken" for their sons-in-law in the 16th century, but she expertly weaves the historical importance of chicken itself into the fabric of a gendered Korea, somehow making Korean fried chicken seem somehow innovative, yet derivative, yet *authentic,* all at once. Brilliantly, she engages this liminal space where making fried chicken makes her hip *yet also* a devout and good Korean mother (in-law) to her millions of followers. The chef begets the authenticity of her food, but unlike many celebrity chefs, whose modus is to *point out* authenticity in the food they are exploring, Maangchi is a gatekeeper of cultural authenticity herself, peppering her recipes with stories that make her position as both an expert and an *insider*,

unflinching. Her popularity both by her followers, but also news media and "classic" chefs is a testament to the persuasive power of her "authentic avatar."

Opening this chapter is a historical read of gender, race, and foodways in the US, situating this history in a close read of Psyche Williams Forson's work with Black women and chicken, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs* (2006). Establishing this history leads this chapter into an examination of cookbooks specifically as a site of cultural meaning-making and memory making, including a close read of Maangchi's bestselling cookbook. Theoretical nods to John Jackson's concept of "racial sincerity" in his book, *Real Black*, buttress an analysis of the ways that Maangchi operates in a digital landscape. How she performs Koreanness while cooking Korean is a ripe space of analysis. Interestingly, Jackson actually dismisses racial authenticity, arguing that authenticity objectifies people and creates tropic elements that become stand-ins for race, so he employs sincerity as a way to maintain the subject themselves when having conversations about race (15). My argument, however, is that while sincerity does great work in recognizing the interiority and humanity of individuals, that the inherent "power" that authenticity holds is quite valuable, particularly when wielded by marginalized individuals rather than simply by an arbitrarily determined class of individuals. In essence, the "authority" in authenticity is, in fact, plastic and permeable and there is real power and agency in employing and embodying "authenticity."

Essentially, plastic authenticity is a conscious act of de-centering. Relocating the historically marginalized at the center of conversations about authenticity, and recognizing their subjectivity not necessarily as "truth," but rather an *informed*

performance. Enter Emily Kim's "Maangchi" avatar. Racial sincerity would argue the importance of analyzing Emily Kim herself and discarding Maangchi as an assemblage of stereotypes (which it *is* in many ways), but it is an assemblage that she is in control over, and one that makes Maangchi the real authority over "authentic Korean food." A line that finds itself permeating throughout all of these chapters is that "authenticity begets authenticity." By crafting a persona that people subsequently register as authentic (problematic or not), her *actual* products (her cooking), become authentic as well, making her a gatekeeper of Korean-American authenticity. In a world of Anthony Bourdains, picking cultures apart to determine what is and what is not authentic for the rest of us, a Korean woman having authority over what is authentic Korean food, and capitalizing off of it, is quite powerful.

Women Cooking up Culture: Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Philosophy and food scholar, Lisa Heldke, theorizes foodmaking as a "thoughtful practice," that rests itself in between theory and production (both mental and manual) (1992). Positing food as a central source of philosophical insight, she upsets the dichotomy between *art* and *craft.* Likewise, philosopher Deane Curtin posits that "through sympathetic attention to food, a sense of ourselves as bodily creatures can be revealed, and with that a sense of the value of the most ordinary (and vitally important) aspects of our experience" (9). Essentially, foodways are worthy spaces of observation, at once theoretical and corporeal, and legitimate spaces of knowledge production, and the women associated with them for generations are equally deserving of discussion.

A useful way of examining the role of women as it relates to food is to consider it through the lens of culinary labor as a means of developing ethnic identity and resistance. In an essay that explores the writings of many women of color, Benay Blend notes that the labor of food production, while something imposed on women for generations, is also used to assert forms of authority and reconstruct/reproduce cultural histories (156). Regarding the various writers cited, including authors such as Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldúa, Debra Castillo, and Pat Mora, she goes further describing the cultural and transformative nature of foodwork, stating,

> The activities of almost all [the authors] underscore the building of a woman's culture by locating the self within a collective identity and reclaiming the common labors of foremothers as a craft. Their use of an oral tradition to ally with and recuperate a sense of agency for the underclass becomes a metaphor for political and social struggle. Because it destabilizes certain predominant values that support the dominant culture, the culinary metaphor provides women writers with a discourse of resistance in which the self in relation to an ethnic group is powered. (Benay 164)

These authors are utilizing foodways as a space of empowerment and resistance, and also using it in conjunction with the act of storytelling as a way to build a "woman's culture" and to exercise a "sensuous" form of knowledge (Abarca 123). This is a particularly useful way of engaging with the act of foodmaking and foodways, as it balances the labor and the cultural practice of cooking with power and identity while being decidedly woman-centered. Food has been found to be a boundary marker

between cultures and to simultaneously bring people within a culture together. Studies have found the women that cook the food as well, derive autonomy and agency from their roles in cultural production, gaining cultural capital, despite the role of food preparation being one typically deemed private or oppressive, and being physically strenuous (D'Sylva and Beagan 2011). Thus, while the labor is decidedly gendered, the cultural impact and maintenance of community that food and foodways hold for various groups highlight the critical importance of this work.

This distinct cultural bond over the roles that women play in households and the broader cultural imaginary of their given communities is what drives feminist scholarship to center women in analyses and to recognize the radical potential of this labor. It is true the employment and coding of food with women can in some instances be read as problematic (when viewed through a strictly gendered lens), it is critical to note the possibilities and spaces of resistance that can be read. Patricia Hill Collins indicates, "a dialectical relationship exists between systems of racial oppression designed to strip subordinated groups of a sense of personal identity and a sense of collective peoplehood, and the cultures of resistance extant in various racial-ethnic groups that resist oppression" (Hill Collins 57). In efforts of radicalizing and recognizing the political potential of this space, it is critical to establish that foodways are meaningful and *participatory* spaces, where the issues of care and the investments in cultural production are considered radical and feminist acts (Curtin 15). Therefore, it is crucial to note not only the *existence* and pervasiveness of motherhood as a signifier for food but the actual role of mothers working in those spaces to survive as well as maintain cultural ties to heritage.

In a study regarding maternal foodwork, sociologist Joslyn Brenton discusses the ways that mothers grapple with the class and racial issues that come with navigating foodways. Employing the term “intensive feeding ideology,” she describes the ways that being regarded a “good” mother is synonymous with feeding children healthy food, requiring great financial resources and often at the cost of making food that is culturally relevant to a particular community (Brenton 2017). "Proper" displays of womanhood and femininity are often at stake regarding how families are fed, and more and more, this model of intensive feeding and a move to feed "organic," is as much a job as the labor-intensive act of cooking itself. Similarly, the act of feeding the family carries with it the role of upholding "domestic familiality," and is a touchstone of this form of labor (Mannur 52). This is in and of itself a reproduction of patriarchy, yet it inherently politicizes the space of the home, which is in no way a neutral zone. It is a space of discipline and for the reproduction of gendered divisions of labor; however, it is in this domestic space that slippages occur, and where we can read certain forms of authority onto the people tasked with the reproduction of these values, in large part through foodwork.

As noted previously, this space, where this work occurs, while historically gendered and inherently oppressive, it has proven to be a uniquely public space as well. The birth of the celebrity cookbook and the ever-growing interest in celebrity chef culture has infiltrated this formerly private space into one of genuine curiosity and interest from outsiders. Thus, the role of food, while being intensely crucial in the formation of identity and memory, and for the maintenance of community/family, it is historically women that have been at the center of that narrative and tasked with the

actual labor of producing the food. Similarly, women have been tasked with reproducing the cultural values associated with food as well. Women are at the center. Whether they have always been *capitalizing* off of this labor in ways other than symbolic cultural capital is another discussion entirely.

That said, intimately connected to the notions of gendered labor (regarding food), is women's role in creating a sense of nostalgia and memory of the home, or of childhood. Regarding the link between memory and the emotional dimensions of food, sociologist Deborah Lupton notes "given that food is an element of the material world which embodies and organizes our relationship with the past in socially significant ways, the relationship between food preferences and memory may be regarded as symbiotic. Memory is embodied, often recalled via the sensations of taste and smell" (320). This connection between food and memory also emboldens the link between food and women (motherhood). Similarly, environment and philosophy scholar Emily Brady takes a philosophical approach to how specifically smell and taste, influence aesthetic appreciation (2012). In a similar sense that Lupton argues, she contends that smell and taste invoke memories of past events and experiences, noting that memory becomes a critical component of the reflective activity of consumption (Brady 76). Similarly, memory regarding food spaces, the kitchen, in particular, are used as a vehicle to determine intergenerational (often matriarchal) relationships and to facilitate cooking discourses, or a *language* of "…artistic creation, manifestations of love, self-assurance, and economic survival" (Abarca 121).

Positing the experience of eating and community building with food practices, the physical nature of food, or the "authentic presence of food," as Deane Curtin puts it, layers in the act of eating (temporality) into the discussion of self/community-building, employing the "context" as a critical agent to consider (126). What, and how one eats is a critical conversation, as on the one hand it is a "*flexible* symbolic vehicle" one can use to express a sense of self-identity, but on the other, the act of eating something, say, culturally specific simultaneously invokes "*inflexible* cultural stereotypes" that link certain foodstuffs to particular communities (James 375). Thus, the act of eating is as important to consider as the food/foodways themselves (and who is cooking) when entering conversations regarding authenticity and culture. Sense of self and identity are significant factors concerning the employment of community regarding food.

Regarding identity as it relates to museum and memorial sites, sociologist Robyn Autry (2012) situates museums as spaces in which historical memory (in her case African-American history exhibits) get worked into narratives of identity formation. While not in any way directly referencing food studies, the discourse of charting and tracking collective "memory" as it relates to cultural identity is particularly salient to food studies, specifically in conversations regarding the use of memory in foodways as markers of collective identity. Historical memory is often embedded into a community, where memory moves beyond an individual occurrence and into a social space. Collective memories for communities often centered around food, or holidays where certain foods are prepared, act as a way to establish oneself as an insider in that given community (Sutton 2008). Memories about the way this

person or that person cooks some dish, the traditions, and preparation associated with that food, and the ways that the cook interacts with the space (we have all heard someone say something along the lines of "get out of *my* kitchen") all get woven into the fabric of social memory. Seeing as food and foodways transcend the private, to create distinct cultural lines and build communities, it is an intensely public space, worthy of study.

Thus, examinations of specific food spaces and their impact on collective identity and community (as well as the ways they are employed as tropes *onto* communities) has a long history, and one space that this is particularly salient is in the ways that Black women in the U.S. have been connected with foodways in both an economic sense and as imprinted on the cultural imaginary of the U.S. in general. Understanding the impact that food has on the ways that entire communities of people are imagined in the U.S. is particularly useful to this research and the examinations of Korean women and food.

Food studies scholar Psyche Williams-Forson, in her book *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (2006) traces the material history in the U.S. of the impact (both social and economic) that chicken has had on the livelihood, legacy, and image of Black women. Utilizing visual imagery, stories, oral histories, and testimonials, Williams-Forson paints a fuller picture of the cultural impact that chicken has had on a community and the ways that that image travels.

One of the key ways that Williams-Forson outlines the power of stereotypical and racist imagery are the ways they slowly build themselves in the psyche of those represented and the ways that they reinforce and imprint meanings onto material

items. Examining a range of reconstruction era postcards, photos, and other widely dispersed cultural ephemera (that ironically created *lasting* impressions) for the ways that they connect chicken to the African-American community, she notes the power that these images hold, beyond simple representation and the reinforcement of stereotypes. Williams-Forson notes,

> Culture here [regarding these images] becomes a code that entrusts its meanings to material objects. The ubiquitous nature of items like chicken makes it a useful, oblique device for representing the various assumptions that were ensconced in the stereotype. Its ubiquity and mundaneness allows these beliefs and ideologies to become part of the natural fabric of everyday life, a point made all the more poignant by the use of photography. (54)

The critical element to consider here is the way in which that which seems mundane is embedded with meaning and implies more than what is readily apparent. Taking the time period into consideration, the rhetorical strategies in this racist imagery intends to normalize a type of stereotype and the expectations of certain behaviors of an entire community after the end of slavery. Designed to divide and subjugate, the problematic nature of the images Williams-Forson analyzes are not merely in the images themselves, but what they represent. As she also describes, with the advent and widespread use of photography, these racist depictions were imbued with a sense of "realness," becoming an effective strategy for those producing them to imply that these were somehow factual or self-evident depictions of the community (Williams-Forson 55). This form of analysis, and recognizing the power in what seems

innocuous or mundane, is particularly useful in the following section, as chef Maangchi's image and persona will be analyzed through a similar lens.

Regarding Black women and the ways that images reinforce stereotypes as well as gendered divisions of labor, Williams-Forson discusses many instances in which the images of Black women with chicken, or more broadly in roles of cooking, care, and service, reinforced the circulating myths that Black women were/are symbolically associated with not just chicken but the labor and expertise it takes to prepare it (88). When paired with traditional notions of gendered labor such as motherwork, care, and the feeding of one's family, the narrative that travels is that women are not just tasked with the food preparation for families, but that history dictates that they are "good" at that labor, in fact, *experts* (89). While on the one hand this promotes the reproduction of racial stereotypes and patriarchy, one of the key takeaways from Williams-Forson's work; however, is that this history and connection between Black women and chicken is inherently problematic, the economic opportunities and abilities for Black women (mothers in particular) to preserve culture and tradition, position them uniquely as mediators between a community's sense of self-preservation and the representations proliferated in popular culture. She notes, "in their ability to control the 'symbolic language of food,' and to dictate what foods say about their families, women often negotiate the dialectical relationship between the internal identity formation of their families and the externally influenced medium of popular culture. In this way, they protect their families against social and cultural assault as well as assist in the formation and protection of identity" (Williams-Forson 92).

One of the significant contributions that this work makes is to trace a history of how images and visual culture are loaded with meaning that can create distorted and perverse narratives of entire groups as they disseminate through popular culture. That said, Williams-Forson extends beyond a cursory analysis of the image, recognizing that the abilities for women to become gatekeepers of culture, economically sustain families and communities, and become mediators between the public world and the private world of families/communities, cannot be ignored. While images (and undoubtedly their creators) actively work to reinforce white supremacy and patriarchy, it is myopic to assume that women are not mediating those images within their families and communities, or are somehow unaware of the ways they are being represented in popular culture. In many ways, this same principle applies to the analysis of YouTube star Maangchi, and how she is crafted in the public eye.

Cookbooks as Sites of Cultural Production: The Case of *Maangchi*

> This recipe makes me think of my grandmother, but not because it comes from her… Occasionally my grandmother would come to stay, and I was always excited to find out what snacks, like steamed sweet potatoes and corn, she would have waiting for us after school. I always said, "My grandmother is the best cook in the world!" She was so happy to hear my compliments. One day I came home from school and said, "Grandmother! I will make curry rice for dinner." "What is it?" she asked. She had never had it before. While she was eating my dish, she kept saying: "Delicious, delicious. My granddaughter is such a good cook!" My grandmother was the best cook I knew, so this meant a lot to me. This recipe is the one I made for her all those years ago.
>
> —Maangchi, *Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking* (43)

Historically, cookbooks have been used as a means of defining the position and role of women, in British and American society (Tobias 8). During the

upswinging trend of cultural production and consumption in the eighteenth century, cookbooks often replaced the simply oral tradition of passing recipes, turning cookbooks into primers of sorts, establishing the "boundaries of the female realm" (Tobias 9). Therefore, cookbooks contained more than recipes and tips for cooking, but put into print (thus public), the private sphere. Normalizing behavior and creating cultural boundaries and standards is a primary function, as now women across cultural lines now had ways to measure up their domestic skills (Tobias 11). Regarding the social networking potential of cookbooks, Janet Theophano, in her book *Eat My Words: Readings Women's Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (2002), notes,

> Cookbooks, then, besides describing foods, are records of women's social interactions and exchanges… From their cookbooks, we can learn about the writer and the social circles in which she travelled. Attributions in a recipe book marked the number and prominence of one's kins and friends, demonstrating the breadth of a social network and one's standing in it… Thus the recipe book became a register of the relationships that comprised at least a portion of a woman's social universe… in addition, the recipe book became a record of the individuals to whom they were connected through kinship and other alliances. (13)

There is a great deal to be gleaned from cookbooks, and specifically regarding women of color and immigrant communities, these books connect women across generations and national lines, as a means to preserve community in the face of social

change (Theophano 271). In contemporary times, the widespread release and sale of cookbooks position the contents in a decidedly a more public role, being produced not simply to chart relationships and define cultural lines, but to make money, while offering insights into a chef's life. In an age where one can find dozens of Korean cookbooks from a cursory search in a bookstore or online, the chef themselves, as well as the supposed "authenticity" of the food contained within is critical to set it apart from the dozens of other cookbooks for sale.

That said, deeply embedded in gendered and racialized notions of motherwork regarding cooking, YouTube persona and cooking show host, Maangchi, crafts a persona that on the one hand reinforces gendered divisions of labor, while simultaneously allowing Maangchi to reclaim what it means to cook something "authentically Korean." Utilizing stories and narratives that almost exclusively feature women in all stages of the meal (all the way from butchering to ingredient acquisition), and learning recipes and techniques from other Korean women, Maangchi's cookbook reinforces a narrative that on one hand, creates a somewhat problematic "primer for the Korean housewife," but on the other, is radically woman-centered, reclaiming the rights to the Western vision of Korean food's authenticity and expertise from the overwhelmingly male-dominated field of Korean cooking. Released in 2015, her cookbook, *Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking,* currently stands as the number one best seller in Amazon.com's "Korean Cooking, Food, and Wine" section, and number thirteen in the overall Asian cooking best sellers (of which only five ahead of her specialize in a particular region) (Amazon.com 2018). While David Chang, Roy Choi, and Edward Kwon are some of the most recognizable Korean

names offering a taste of Korea to the West, it is Maangchi's subtle and contemporary approach to building a fanbase that makes her "self" so lucrative and radical. Maangchi has the concrete numbers to prove her popularity and position her in a place of authority over Korean food.

David Chang, a darling of the haute food scene, a loud and brash “bad boy” much like his predecessor Anthony Bourdain, and literally questioning the concept of what it means to be authentic in his Netflix special *Ugly Delicious,* boasts incredibly economically viable restaurants, a Michelin star, and is on countless "chef to watch out for" lists. In a cursory internet search, David Chang brings up countless food oriented publications regarding his cooking, skill, persona, expertise, etc. For home chef Maangchi, however, the first page of search results reveal nothing more than links to her social media accounts. Upon inspection, however, Maangchi's scope of influence is nothing to balk at. Boasting nearly 160,000 page likes on Facebook, this pales in comparison to David Chang's 375,000 page likes, her Instagram boasting 116,000 followers to his one million. She shines brightest on YouTube, however, and in 2015, at only 619,000 subscribers, she had more subscribers than celebrity chefs Martha Stewart, Alton Brown, Ree Drummond, and Ina Garten *combined* (Moskin 2015). Currently, in 2018, Maangchi boasts nearly three million subscribers, eclipsing what was reported in 2015, when her cookbook first hit shelves.[23] When filtered by search content regarding cooking and similarly filtered by view count, Maangchi breaks the top ten of all YouTube chefs and number one for Korean cooking chefs.

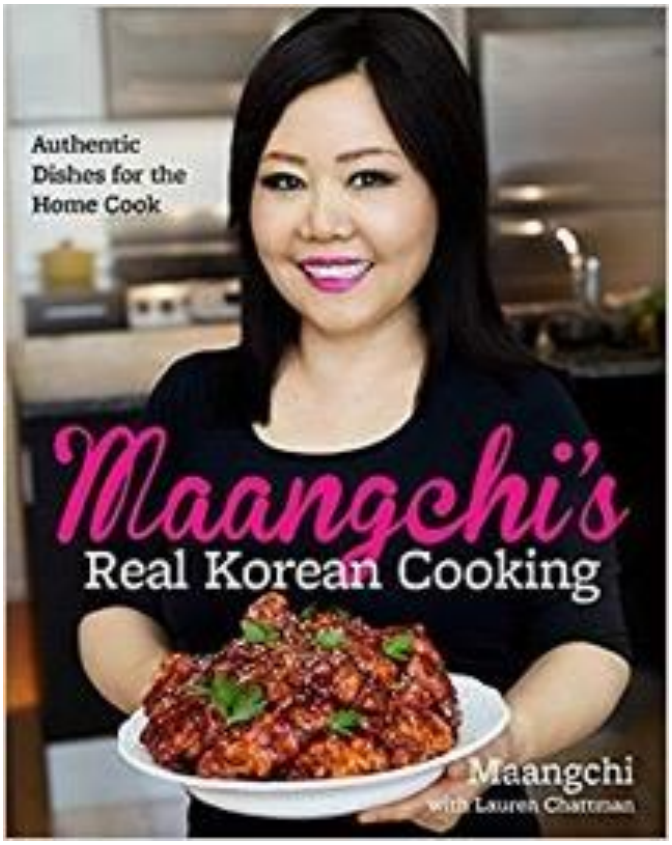

Fig. 4 The cover art for Maangchi's cookbook from: Brissman, Paul. "Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking." *Amazon.com,* 19 May, 2015.

The New York Times, in 2015 ran an article dubbing her "YouTube's Korean Julia Child" (Moskin 2015). This comparison in and of itself is worthy of dissection, but nowhere in the article is this comparison explained. What this alludes to, however, is that, much like the way that Julia Child's legacy has proliferated over the years, celebrity or not, she is a home chef that *happens* to be really good at what she does. Constantly referring to Maangchi as "Ms. Kim," the article first explores her marital status and the way that video games (*surprisingly*) led her to cooking videos. It proceeds to deconstruct her appearance, and how her life events such as divorce led her into online gaming, and at the urging of her children decided to focus her energies into a "more nourishing form of internet expression: cooking videos" (Moskin 2015).

Further noting that “although she presents herself as girlish and lighthearted, Ms. Kim is first and foremost a teacher, and a strict one at that” (2015).

The rhetorical function of the article, written in the time period around the release of Maangchi’s cookbook in 2015, is to paint a picture of *who* Maangchi is, and why she is here. She is a “home cook,” and these recipes are inextricably tied to her experiences as a mother and a Korean. It urges that Maangchi does not cut corners and sticks to tradition. This cookbook is for “authentic” Korean cooking, and if she does not do it correctly, she “will hear about it from the Koreans” (Moskin 2015). The *twist* is Maangchi's internet savvy. While gendered around her role as a mother to drive her to cook, utilizing her interest in digital spaces, the article notes her work as a counselor for Korean-American families that have suffered from abuse, noting that "to her, building community online was a natural extension of her life" (2015). Therefore, despite her moves into territory intensely gendered masculine (gaming and online spaces), this is merely an extension of her *femininity* and maternal sense of duty.

Her cookbook, then, is a unique rabbit hole into Korean cooking, including the philosophies of Korean food, the history of some dishes, the relevance to Koreans (mothers/ homemakers in particular), and even Korean brands of ingredients that she likes to use (Maangchi 2015). She also outlines her readers as those all over the world that have "wandered into a Korean restaurant," traveled to Korea, second-generation Koreans who grew up in America eating "their mothers' authentic Korean food but never learned how to make it," and adoptees who "left their homes when they were very little" (4).

What makes this cookbook such a useful space for analysis are how she injects *Koreanness* into the text. Beyond her recipes being Korean ones, and Maangchi being a Korean woman herself, she outlines many of the recipes with memories of learning the recipes, fond memories of eating the foods with other Korean women and women in her family. For instance, in the epigraph quoted above, in a recipe for "Korean-style curry rice," a meal that was brought to Korea from Japan, brought to Japan from Britain, and brought to Britain from colonizing the Indian peninsula, she couches this decidedly "global" recipe, touched by colonialism and globalization, in a memory of her grandmother, creating a sense of *ownership* over the recipe, and turning this global recipe into a decidedly authentic Korean recipe.

Visually, the cover art for Maangchi's cookbook reveals numerous details about the ways Maangchi chooses to construct her persona and her ethos as well. In typical cookbook fashion, Maangchi is positioned with a bright smile toward the camera. Interestingly, nothing about her dress/appearance readily gives away the stereotypical image of a Korean "auntie." Unlike the stereotypical image of the Asian auntie, rendered asexual, usually portrayed with a curly perm, graying hair, and an apron or decorated in some kind of cooking gear, Maangchi's hair is solidly black, and she has festive makeup and bright lipstick, and a fitted black shirt.[24]

Curiously, it is not in the image of Maangchi herself, but in the words surrounding her and the food she holds, which says so much about her positionality. The title implies that her cooking is in fact "real" (in comparison to "what," we do not know), and the tagline for her book reads "Authentic Dishes for the Home Cook"

(Maangchi 2015). Her use of keywords like "real" and "authentic" imply that she has a particular level of cultural knowledge and savvy about Korean food that in fact make her an expert in the cuisine. There is no indication of her expertise as a Korean chef such as her training, the popular restaurants she's opened, or even an "as seen on TV spot." The only information a casual viewer has to go off, who may not have been exposed to her online presence, is the image of Maangchi herself and the food she holds.

The food itself is of critical importance as well. Despite touting authentic dishes and real Korean cooking, Maangchi is pictured holding a plate of fried chicken. If she were presenting what would be quintessentially "Korean," nothing would stand in for Koreanness other than kimchi, which stands as the primary food symbol of Korea and Korean culture (Walraven 99). While Korean fried chicken has decidedly become a popular staple of Korean food in the West, much like "Korean-style barbecue," and it has its own method of preparation that is unique, it is still inherently a "fusion" food. The parsley that adorns the fried chicken is also not even an herb native to Korea. Interestingly, Maangchi constructs a dual narrative, one of authenticity and one of a new cosmopolitanism, of which fusion food is a hallmark (Mannur 184). Her youthful dress, her digital savvy (getting her start online), and the food choices she advertises imply that she is a global citizen, yet her use of terms like "authentic," continued references to Korean housewifery, and her maternal approach to teaching Korean cooking, she also maintains the socio-cultural capital that accompanies being a middle-aged woman in a feminized space like foodways.

Accordingly, her use of Korean fried chicken in conjunction with an ethos of authenticity, Maangchi attempts to reorient and control how we perceive of authenticity by balancing the expectations of traditional/patriarchal divisions of labor with the expectations of contemporary culinary cosmopolitanism. She engages in a transactional form of authenticity (Heldke 2005), where her ethos as a Korean cook for an imagined audience of non-native Koreans begets authenticity by nature of her *being* (and her constant pronouncements of authenticity as well). Thus the reader/viewer is led to assume that the food is authentic by nature of the way she crafts a kind of culinary mise-en-scène with the environment and her character, while simultaneously being able to sell popular fusion recipes like Korean fried chicken as authentically Korean as well.[25] She flexes with the plastic nature of authenticity by implying that *she* is what makes the food authentic, while also sticking to "tradition" in her food, imbuing the process with authenticity. Authenticity is no longer a static entity but a continuous game of hot potato between the viewer/eater and the producer/chef.

Despite this balancing act, Maangchi acts in opposition to the position that many Asian American cookbook authors take (as a response to systemic racist imaginations of Asianness), which is to position their Asianness in an inferior position as a means of cultural assimilation, so as not to present their race and ethnicity as a form of excess (Mannur 2010). She overtly and *excessively* enunciates her identity in a one-two strike, both as Korean woman and as a mother, in conjunction with the recipes.[26] In her recipe for "extra-strong fermented soybean paste" she states, "But there's no getting around the fact that when the soybeans

ferment, they have a very strong smell. I love it, but others call it stinky. I hope you will grow to love it the way we Koreans do, associating the aroma with the soulful fermented soybean paste stew so integral to our cuisine" (Maangchi 256). This stands in direct juxtaposition to the Asian assimilationist narrative often found in Asian celebrity cookbooks, as Maangchi makes more overt attempts to recognize a potentially "non-Korean" (or non-native Korean) audience, while sticking firmly to tradition, reiterating "realness" and "authenticity," even "soulfulness," as driving factors for the way she presents and cooks her food. In the example for "extra-strong" soybean paste, rather than implying an apology on behalf of Koreanness, or even offering up solutions to reduce the smell, she simply implores the reader to *learn* to love the smell. The (un)intended aftereffect of this refusal to submit and assimilate is a more "authentic" recipe.

She recalls and connects the sensory element of smell, what Westerners would deem "stinky," as a critical element of what makes the paste desirable. Anthropologist David E. Sutton refers to smell as a "prototypical symbol," connecting food to "episodic" (life-history) memories, therefore becoming powerful symbols when imagined in conjunction with foodways (310). Maangchi acknowledges the differences and potentially conflicting experiences American readers and cooks may have to the sensory elements of the cooking, yet chooses not to offer "alternatives" or fusions to satisfy American senses, instead choosing to reiterate that the smells, textures, and tastes are what make the food authentically Korean.

Despite not being apologetic for the smells evoked when cooking Korean food, Maangchi similarly uses the cookbook space as a way to air her experiences

with those that she felt she “offended” with her cooking. In a pointed yet poignant excerpt regarding “Korean Soup Soy Sauce,” she states,

> When I was young and my neighbors boiled their soy sauce, it used to perfume the whole town! Who said that it’s stinky? I love that smell! But not everyone does, not even all Koreans. I remember boiling my Korean soup soy sauce when I lived in Missouri, and my apartment manager knocked on my door. “What’s that smell? I got a complaint from your neighbor.” I was so embarrassed that I didn’t make soup soy sauce again for a long time, even after I moved to Korea.
>
> Now that I live in New York City, I make my own, but when the time comes to boil it, I pack it in my handcart along with a picnic lunch and a portable gas burner and take it out to Spuyten Duyvil Creek, at the base of the Henry Hudson Bridge at the northernmost point of the island of Manhattan. I boil it there, where no one will complain. (265).

In this excerpt, much like her aside in the soybean paste recipe, she asserts first and foremost that she loves the smell of the boiling soy sauce. She acknowledges that "even Koreans" do not all love the smell; however, in a move that becomes at once deeply personal and pointed, she shares the painful experience of being othered, in her recounting of being told by her apartment manager that her food was smelly, and how that revelation scarred her. It is at once an intimate account of her interior emotional response to being called out on her inability to "assimilate" and charged with sensory excess. Her ethnicity is "spatialized through a sensory framework," and she faced punitive consequences for her excess smells entering another apartment

(Mannur 185). Consequently, in a manner befitting assimilationist narratives, she was "disciplined" for a good while, choosing not to cook the foods that make up her cultural identity in fears of offending others. What is transgressive, however, is her pointed aside at the end of her statement, that she boils her soy sauce by the river, where no one will complain.

Interestingly, Maangchi refracts the moment onto the oppressor (white society), by literally taking her food public. While chastised for cooking her food in the *private* sphere of her home, she makes up for it by cooking it in a *public* park, ending with the words "where no one will complain." She takes what was deemed excess into a space where everyone can and does pass. Maangchi's refusal to compromise something so deeply embedded in her cultural tradition is noteworthy.

Maangchi being embarrassed by the smells induced from her cooking demonstrates the ways that immigrants are often "disciplined by the mechanisms of U.S. cultural citizenship" (Mannur 203). In a way, accounting for the smells evoked when cooking Korean food, she qualifies her love of these smells as being deeply embedded in her Korean identity. Rather than taking the approach that contemporary cookbook authors, particularly Asian Americans (Mannur 2010), often take by offering ways to compromise the smells of her cooking, Maangchi instead refracts the lens of responsibility on the viewer/reader, urging them to become more cosmopolitan home chefs, and couching her love of these smells in gastronostalgia. She readily employs a certain sense of agency in her position as a maternal figure to take charge of the narrative she is creating in her kitchen, softly with a chuckle and smile, reading us in advance at the possibility that the thought crosses our minds.

Discussing “Fermented Sardines,” Maangchi actually uses comparison as a way to sidestep being held responsible for the smells produced by her cooking. Regarding the recipe she notes, “after the long, slow fermentation, the fish becomes pinkish in color and very soft… Its powerful aroma reminds me of aged cheese—assertive in a good way” (266). Interestingly, she uses the aging process of cheese, something not practiced in Korea, but a distinctly European/American tradition (in the cultural imaginary at least), as a way to recall a direct comparison. This punts the onus of responsibility for the strong sensory reaction to colonizers themselves, noting that “like their cheese,” the smell of fermenting sardines is joyously assertive. Again, she refuses to be held responsible for and to bear the weight of an entire racial/ethnic group by answering for the smells of her culture by gently nudging that we *all* make foods that trigger sensory responses, and yet they are *all* good.

Aside from sensory and affective methods, Maangchi also establishes her ethos as a chef of "authentic Korean food" by reinforcing the modes of domesticity and femininity that has so long been a hallmark of foodways. Despite her bright and youthful appearance, wearing colorful wigs and bright lipstick, Maangchi buttresses these more colorful displays by establishing her ties to "tradition." In particular, she reinforces a strong network of women as her teachers and mentors in the cooking and learning process, citing them in a way that nods back to early cookbooks that were not intended for publication but to circulate among groups of women within social circles. She establishes her expertise and ability to construct authentic Korean cuisine as a direct result of the numerous Korean women who have informed this journey into expertise. Likewise, while this is an ostensibly public text, and Maangchi on many

occasions demonstrates her abilities to traverse as a global citizen (via her knowledge of fusion foods and the digital nature of her emergence), she firmly reiterates throughout her cookbook how Korean housewifery informs her approach to cooking. By repeatedly asserting that "this is how Korean housewives do it," she establishes a link to a gendered form of labor long imagined to be central to cultural survival and reproduction. She is performing cultural work as a cosmopolitan citizen, while maintaining roots in tradition and gendered labor, creating a particularly diverse persona that can exude an adaptive yet traditional form of Korean cultural authenticity.

In her cookbook, Maangchi references other women regarding her recipes on thirty-three different occasions. These are mostly her mother and grandmother; however, they also include female friends, local businesswomen, and even a home economics teacher from her childhood (2015). Likewise, all but one photo that is not directly food related also features women doing the food work or being near the food. Similarly, the intent of the mentions shifts between being employed as memories in little asides regarding certain dishes, and actually acknowledging that she learned the particular recipes from the women. In one recipe for "Mixed Rice with Raw Fish," Maangchi states,

> I learned this recipe from a raw fish expert who has prepared it thousands of times for demanding, hungry Koreans. I met Mrs. Park when I was a family counselor in Toronto. She worked at a Korean restaurant, where one of her main duties was in preparation of hoe-deop-bap [mixed rice with raw fish], and I convinced her to teach

> some of our group members how to make her specialty. Of course, this was also the perfect opportunity for me to learn from a real expert. (52)

Rather than displaying her knowledge of Korean food as omniscient, she defers to what she considers “real experts,” or other women. She even shows a traditional sense of reverence by referring to the woman as “Mrs” instead of by her first name.

This draws from a long tradition of recipe sharing and community building among women. Janet Theophano notes, "As women worked side by side in kitchens in varied relationships… they passed recipes from one family to another, their cooperative labor and exchange of culinary lore leaving as traces these imprints of social interaction… as we taste one woman's interpretation of a culinary creation, we remember that it is the result of many minds and many hands" (48). Sometimes the memories posted do not have anything to do with cooking the food, but more broadly the sense of community built from procuring the ingredients, such as her reflections of a New Year ritual, where women would gather to have their rice ground and steamed into rice cakes for New Year rice cake soup. She reflects on the ways that friends would chat waiting for the mill to grind their rice flour (Maangchi 73). As important as the recipes themselves, how women found themselves in community among other women is a critical element that Maangchi recognizes. In a form of experiential authenticity, by having the memories and experiences of making rice cakes "many years ago," she at once established a sense of credibility in how she learned to cook but also in the community of women she cooked among.

Maangchi even extends this sense of community outside of Korean women, reasserting that food preparation and procurement is a woman's space. In a squash porridge recipe, she recalls not being able to find the native Korean kind of winter squash, yet finding the help of a farmer at a farmers market that shared with her how she cooked her squash with brown sugar and cinnamon, leading Maangchi to realize she had found an American alternative (81). Similarly, she has small asides in some recipes that she calls "Maangchi and Friends" where she quotes interactions she has had with friends and subscribers. In one particularly poignant entry, subscriber "ChaMee" notes that she cried when she saw the recipe for sweet pancakes with brown sugar syrup, as it reminded her of walking through the markets in Seoul with her mother before she was adopted to the United States, to which Maangchi responded "ChaMee, I'm so touched by your story that it makes me cry now! Your mom would be proud of you if she knew you were making your own hotteok and thinking about her" (207). Fitting within the narrative of keeping the recipes woman-oriented, she also makes direct contact with fans and includes their reflections about the recipes with their networks of women as well. Maangchi is reproducing a sense of community while simultaneously redefining it to be inclusive of her readers as well. It renders the public nature of her cookbook to revert to being very intimate.

Along with centering her narratives and recipe acquisition around women, Maangchi also consistently makes direct invocations of Korean homemakers. While Maangchi grounds her cooking and recipes in authenticity and tradition, she also moderates certain performances of womanhood throughout the cookbook as well, asserting her knowledge of "what housewives do." More than a dozen references to

Korean housewives and the customs they perform and the values they reproduce are critical elements in establishing Maangchi's own sense of credibility. Aside from the fact that she herself identified as a housewife through much of her childrens' lives, for Koreans, and East Asians more broadly, the act of mothering is also an act of reproducing ideological state apparatuses. While her work specifically examines Japanese mothers and their foodwork for their families, Anne Allison employs Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus (1971)[27] in order to assert that the intense labor that goes into mothering, and in particular foodwork, "aestheticizes a certain social order" that is distinctive to a given culture (Allison 168). Maangchi's act of recognizing the role and significance that Korean homemakers play, then, is not merely a nod to food, but also acknowledging the deeply rooted social and *socializing* culture of Korea.

Most of her references to housewives are relatively short, blink and you will miss it type references, often not having much to do with the cooking or even the philosophy of a given dish. Such examples include sentences like “Most Korean housewives keep anchovy stock on hand so they can make a satisfying meal of noodles at a moments notice” (64), or “In the old days, every Korean housewife made her own hot pepper paste, and today many still do” (259). In this way, she is able to demonstrate a form of insider knowledge which lends to her overall sense of expertise with the cuisine, but also the culture. She is not instructing people how to become better Korean housewives, as that is not even her intended audience, but she is further demonstrating how this becomes a space where she is an expert. She becomes that

much more authentic of a vehicle to learn about Koreanness if she is also aware of the cultural impact that Korean women have on Korean foodways.

Interestingly, while not her intention, these iterations of Korean culture and womanhood in conjunction with the recipes also puts her in a different category of chefs than her male counterparts. With many male chefs being able to boast classic training, or even watching female relatives to learn their style, Maangchi asserts that the domestic roles/labor associated with *motherhood* are critical fixtures in what constitutes the authenticity of Korean cooking. As English scholar and historian Anne L. Bower, in her work regarding African American cookbooks and their capacity to narrate *history* as well as culture, notes that *The Historical Cookbook of the American Negro* was a deeply collective endeavor that offered Black women an opportunity to contribute to history and "narrate that history in a way that includes food, customs, and figures well known or less recognized" (161). In a similar fashion, Maangchi is reframing what Korean food means in a global cultural landscape, ensuring that her work and her contributions are deeply woman-centered, while simultaneously reorienting our notions of authenticity and the ideological elements of gendered labor for Korean women.

Doing Race "Right": *Maangchi's* Digital Presence

> … one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless 'culture,' in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into 'culture' in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavours of food… To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function

> as markers of 'class,' The manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it: the importance attached to manners can be understood once it is seen that it is these imponderables of practice which distinguish the different—and ranked—modes of culture acquisition, early or late, domestic or scholastic, and the classes of individuals which they characterize.
>
> —Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions* (xxv)

Maangchi's success is not just luck. Part of her ability to "sell" authenticity is to embody it and "demonstrate" her expertise. The critical element, however, is that her popularity is almost entirely dependent on her *audience* buying into her performances of Koreanness. As Bourdieu's epigraph suggests, the products that Maangchi produces are only authentic if her consumer is capable of making those distinctions and can recognize the authenticity she is selling. While she is not necessarily peddling a particular classed "lifestyle," per say, Maangchi *is* working within a class framework that allows for her iterations of Korean housewifery and motherhood to dictate how she is received as a chef. Presenting first as a good mother, second as a great cook, and lastly as an internet savvy global citizen is inevitably wrapped up in her ability and privilege to perform these duties and embody this symbolic Korean mother figure. Whereas Anne L. Bower (2007) warns us against hierarchizing authenticity regarding food, deeming anything other than "soul food" as somehow less authentic of a Black American experience, Maangchi is forced to operate from both sides of the spectrum. Her performances of race, and the food she cooks must be read as somehow mythically Korean, which involves her adhering to a particular social script with particular kinds of recipes and cooking methods, while her continued success depends on her ability to deviate from that script, introducing "fusion" food and somehow managing to suture that food into her "traditional"

narrative of authenticity. Again, her audience must *buy* this performance. As important as the food she cooks, Maangchi must herself be constructed into the paragon of Korean womanhood.

All of this lends itself to the expectation that authenticity is necessarily dangerous, or particularly tricky (Heldke 2005); however, when viewed through the lens of gendered and raced performance as well as active resistance, plastic forms of authenticity can emerge. Regarding the ways that performance turns history into spectacle in Ottoman restaurant spaces, Defne Karaosmanoglu asserts that racial and cultural performance renders the past into an "exciting spectacle," meaning that history is continuously reframed as new and exciting out of necessity (355). Translating a cultural past for a contemporary audience, then, is in and of itself an act of being a global citizen. The inherent danger in rendering history as a spectacle, of course, is the possibility that that very history will become exoticized or othered (355); however, I argue that Maangchi's nods to cultural history and "tradition" (as discussed in the previous section), and her performances of a pastiche-ish form of Koreanness for a digital audience are still legitimate expressions of Korean authenticity. Where Karaosmanoglu questions who gets to decide what is "new" or authentic (342), I assert that Maangchi serves as this gatekeeper, and reorienting how we conceive of "authenticity" is critical, as authenticity is powerful. Foodways are a particularly salient space to observe this plastic form of authenticity as well, as for many immigrant communities, it is through food that a community can negotiate the tensions about "home," citizenship, and authenticity (Mannur 185).

While not pretending to be an insider in a community she does not belong to (that would simply be violent and appropriative), Maangchi is actively capitalizing on the (often problematic) tropes of the "immigrant Korean woman"[28] in order to pursue a larger goal of spreading awareness and appreciation for Korean cuisine. As mentioned, Maangchi has an immensely large online following, particularly on her YouTube page, which is linked to her personal homepage *Maangchi.com* (2018). She boasts nearly 3 million subscribers to her YouTube channel, with an overall view count of her videos totaling over 320 million views (spanned over 200 videos) since her channel's creation in 2007 (Maangchi 2018). Where Korean cooking channels are a dime a dozen (any cooking channels for that matter), Maangchi has struck a chord with users. The foods she makes stick as close to "tradition" as possible, without significant deviations from what are considered "authentic" recipes, but her bubbly personality and position as the "happy smiling immigrant" enable a certain amount of freedom and flexibility on her part, as she can deliver an unassuming sense of multiculturalism without rattling any racial cages (Ahmed 2007). Through her racialized affectations and the use of mise-en-scène, and use of a "We," Maangchi constructs a cultural gatekeeping ethos. Consequently, while much of her success is owed in part to the racialized performances she espouses, is it merely a form of contemporary racial minstrelsy or a complex form of authenticity that can account for globalization and cosmopolitanism? Probably both.

Cultural anthropologist John L. Jackson Jr., in his book *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity,* would likely argue otherwise. Jackson discusses the ways that authenticity is actually a misleading and fruitless mechanism for

understanding performances of race, preferring instead to employ racial "sincerity." Regarding the scary unknowable world of the "real," Jackson notes,

> We would all prefer to cage that realness in some overarching frame or system, secure it with some kind of external anchor. Authenticity testing is an interpersonal master-form of just this predilection, this closed system of being and relating, but sincerity de-emphasizes that externality; it privileges the tenuousness of interpersonal knowledge. Sincerity highlights a willful subject who can always, of course, be faking it…This potential demands the vulnerability of intersubjective trust, even as we simultaneously seek signs of authentication… But the primacy of sincerity's route to the real (over and against authenticity's) privileges and epistemology of uncertainty and ambiguity. The real becomes a palpable darkness that flashlights simply blind us, all the more, from seeing. (86)

Authenticity has in the past been invested in quantifying the "real," and in effect reinforced hierarchies of power through maintaining grips to colonialism and orientalism. Sincerity offers us an escape from the need to construct truths, when, as Jackson states, those truths can be "fake." We must instead be focused on *self*-truths and being able to read people dialectically, as in, we must be able to orient ourselves and our positionality alongside the lens with which we view the world. This is all true, and to fail to recognize that means reproducing the very mechanisms which seek to other, as "authenticity" at its core is a game of exclusion rather than inclusion.

As a framework for understanding cultural power, authenticity (specifically in food studies) is an act of looking in and being satisfied with what you see. A world-famous chef, on his television program, saying that a specific Korean restaurant "off the beaten path" is authentic is what *makes* that place authentic, as his scope of influence is larger. The chefs in that restaurant off the beaten path, however, will be cooking off the beaten path with or without the famous television chef. Racial sincerity offers us a way to understand that subject position without being bogged down by quantifying whether that position is "truly" authentic, like whether or not that local chef uses canned meat just like the rest of the tourist traps, or whether the chef smiles a big happy smile to the culinary tourist or chooses not to acknowledge them as if they are a real "local." Sincerity and authenticity, then, are at war. Jackson states that they are "an embattled state of affairs that should not be dismissed simply because authenticity can often use notions of sincerity in the service of its own objectivist aims, or because notions of sincerity can sometimes seem like just another way of successfully passing other people's authenticity tests" (21). That said, we would be remiss to discard authenticity entirely, however, as it offers a number of unique benefits for the historically marginalized. While sincerity provides an escape from the production and dissemination of structures of power (i.e., racism, sexism, colonialism, etc.), it is still powerless without consensus.

Sincerity is what we hope authenticity is every time we buy into something being authentic. But why not just buy into the fiction? As discussed, racial performance is merely a spectacle anyway, as the history it draws from is subjective (Karaosmanoglu 2009). As Kamala Visweswaran notes, regarding a feminist

approach to ethnography, the "relationship between subjects and their histories as complex and shifting, yet not 'free,'" to be employed to describe particular "moments, social formations, subject positions and practices which arise out of an unfolding axis of colonization/decolonization" (12). Visweswaran explains, using conjuncturalism and the concepts of silence/betrayal, that what we read in between the words or in this case, the "performances" of race, are rich for analysis, as they must be read in conjunction with the given cultural and historical context at any moment (1994). Whether or not we perceive of a performance as being inherently truthful, if we reorient our gaze away from hard "truths," reading authenticity onto those in marginalized positions offers opportunities to find agency in that slippage between our correlations of authenticity and truth. Authenticity, then, becomes a radical act of decentering, and for marginalized groups participating as global citizens in a global market (like Maangchi and the internet), offers opportunities to push up against the very performances that supposedly define them.

For Maangchi, in an interview with "Talks at Google," regarding finding a job when she moved to North America, she notes, "My resume is not useful, because graduate school? Who cares? Immigrant. My English is not perfect" (Talks at Google 2015). She immediately recognized upon job searching outside of Korea that her position as an immigrant would limit the scope of opportunities afforded to her. Likewise, she says, "This is a very fascinating story. People ask me where are you from? And then, I know what it means. They see my face, right? So, even though I'm legally Canadian, I say, I'm Korean. So, legally Canadian, but waiting for my green card in America"[29] (Talks at Google 2015). She continues to narrate why she got into

cooking on YouTube and releasing a cookbook. Digital spaces are inherently participatory, and Maangchi is not ignorant of the benefits of a platform like YouTube. While she narrates issues of being rendered foreigner in the material world, digital spaces are ones where her ethnicity will not bar her from participation.[30] Having been an online gamer prior to releasing her videos, Maangchi is well aware of the mechanisms of digital community building. Her performances in her videos, then, are not blind performances but carefully crafted, yet *authentic* representations of certain truths of herself. By employing affect and editing that capitalizes on the "otherness" that she has already stated she is aware of, "the happy immigrant," she is able to build a fanbase and subsequently becoming a gatekeeper of what it actually means to be Korean, and more specifically a Korean mother. She is retroactively using traditionally deemed authentic modes of Korean motherhood to forge new terrain.

Regarding the trope of the happy immigrant, feminist and postcolonialist scholar Sara Ahmed examines the way that happiness operates to mitigate the feelings of discomfort of white people from what she terms "melancholic migrants" (Ahmed 2007). The melancholic migrant is an immigrant who just cannot seem to "let go" of their homeland and never ceases to hold onto what makes them different. Multiculturalism only works when those who are deemed outsiders are happy, and happiness is coded in terms of integration and assimilation into dominant (white) culture.

Fig. 5 Intro screenshot at the beginning of all of Maangchi's cooking tutorials from: Maangchi. "Maangchi." *YouTube.com*, 2018

For Maangchi, she actively employs affective cues and signs to her viewers and readers that read as particularly happy. This is not to say that she is not naturally a cheerful person, as it is beside the point. Maangchi's sunny disposition and performances of difference are *happy* performances of differences, able to be sutured cleanly into a narrative of multiculturalism. From the outset, Maangchi has a thick Korean accent which she does not hide, but unlike the popular representation of the angry (melancholic) Korean auntie in the liquor store, Maangchi presents as the opposite of this, at times in outlandish ways. Her opening bumper played in all of her videos is a close-up of her hands chopping an onion, which pans to her smiling holding a fish and a knife, with a happy tune whistled in the background, closing with a wink from Maangchi at the camera (Maangchi 2018). She is wearing heavy decorative makeup, including bright lipstick, highlighting her open smile. Similar to Psyche Williams-Forson's analysis regarding a similarly staged image for *Snowdrift Shortening* (2006), Maangchi "looks the part." She is happy, smiling, and with hair adorned with bright bows. Yet, despite her polished appearance, she is still

brandishing a large knife and a large fish, leaving the image open for interpretation. It is an almost dystopian satirical play on her position as the happy immigrant, juxtaposing a very classed image of a butcher with a happy aesthetic, all the way down to the coy wink to the viewer at the end. Do not worry, though, she is safe race!

Regarding her physical presentation, in a video for "Korean Twisted Doughnuts," she wears a large, curly, pastel purple wig with a giant pink bow made out of hair as she cooks (Maangchi 2015). She vacillates between dressing in colorful and youthful wigs and accessories, and wearing her hair simply in a bun with an apron. Even in an apron, however, she makes sure to highlight her appearance, with comments like "Fashion show! How do you like my apron?" proceeding to tell a story about buying it in an airport (Maangchi 2016). All of her outfit choices, while not stereotypical, position her in two ways: as a hip auntie, and as a mother. She utilizes this space in between to physically project both a sense of fun and "comfort" to her fans by proxy of her appearance. It is not every day that one sees a middle-aged Korean mother wearing bright purple wigs, but in each instance, Maangchi's outfits are positioned to buttress her fun and happy personality. It is harder to pin feelings of racism and xenophobia on a body that is performing multiculturalism as a happy object (Ahmed 2007).

Perhaps most noteworthy in her outward performances of race is the manner in which she personifies her thick accent. In every video, Maangchi has a thick Korean accent, as English is not her first language. She levies this would-be fallback by toying with her often strange encounters with the language. During close-up cooking shots in her videos, Maangchi regularly posts captions on the videos with

little phrases about the food, or onomatopoeias while the food is cooking. In a video for "Omurice," she says, "Next, it's my secret ingredient," and a caption pops up in the corner of the screen reading "'*Uh-oh!* Secret?' :)" (Maangchi 2017). In the same video, she adds butter to a pan, and the caption reads "Yep, yep! Dance, dance!" and further along as she melts cheese into the dish, the caption reads "'Maangchi, we are melting from your love!'♥♥♥" (2017). In a video for traditional kimchi, while chopping water dropwort, a caption reads "chopee, chopee, chopee!" and while chopping scallions, the onomatopoeia "choop, choop, choop!" is displayed (2014).

In her work regarding "gastroporn" and the performances of race in food television, women's studies scholar Ariane Cruz (2013) dissects the performances of the cooking show *Down Home with the Neely's*, examining the ways that despite the professional nature of the show, the Neely's are positioned as "racial counterfeits," performing a neo-minstrel archetype of "southern blackness," that is inviting and safe for white audiences. She employs the term "branded blackness" as a way to configure this type of authenticity that gets peddled across popular culture (327). The Neely's become commodified signifiers of a "safe" and inviting form of authentic Blackness. While the core construction of Cruz' term "branded blackness" is applicable to Maangchi as well, given that she is positioned in the same manner, as a safe, happy, inviting, Korean housewife, I believe that the medium of YouTube, and the internet more broadly, offer a sense of agency over her representation that corporate networks do not. She is not censored in the same fashion or constructed by a network of producers; rather, she constructs this image as a way to simultaneously critique the very system of representations that she is entangled.

Her affectations, then, will often be positioned directly at the viewer themselves as well. For instance, in a video for "Spicy Beef and Vegetable Soup (Yukgaejang: 육개장)," she says "Are you guys hungry? I'm so hungry!" with a caption reading "Hungry bungry! :)" (2016). Indirectly inviting the viewer to participate, she asks, while cooking potato pancakes, "'Who's potato's best friend?' :) 'Onion!' clap clap! :)" (2016). Her continual use of emoticons reinforces a happy, foreign, unassuming auntie figure. In a study regarding the ways that representations of Black women present success as it is paired with food, Fabio Parasecoli, analyzing Tiana's character in Disney's *The Princess and the Frog,* states, "Her representation as food provider, manual worker, as well as nurturer—all familiar roles for black women in American culture—assuages any potential anxiety in mainstream audiences about her professional success and her change of social status" (466). In a similar manner, Maangchi's immense success is in part in her ability to maintain a connection to a form of gendered labor, and her unassuming and endearing word choices highlight that she does not pose a threat to viewers. Her consistent attention to playing the part of the happy immigrant reinforces her safety in a space (online) where unfettered racism, sexism, and xenophobia can and do often disproportionately affect marginalized individuals.

While these are performances that undoubtedly recall racist and xenophobic imaginations of cultural assimilation and multiculturalism, this is not to say that Maangchi is unaware of what these performances *do*, nor is it implying that she is not at once always actively resisting assimilation and colonialism. Hearkening back to the discussion previously about smell, the sensory and affective nature of smell is critical

for creating and maintaining imagined community through memory. In her video "How to make Korean fermented soybean paste (Doenjang: 된장) & soy sauce (Guk-ganjang: 국간장)," she takes the viewer through the yearlong process of making Korean doenjang, which is a cornerstone of nearly all Korean cooking (akin to sugar in the U.S.). Regarding the smell of the fermenting blocks of soybeans, she states, "I love this smell… It makes my living room really, you can say stinky, I can say pungent, delicious smell." Later in the video, regarding the boiling of the stock to make soup soy sauce, she states, "In my house, I cannot boil. Because if I boil… smell smells, the house is full of smells. All of the neighbors, I'm living right in the middle of Manhattan the city, and probably I may get arrested" (2016). Maangchi is well aware of how smell functions, and for someone in a marginalized position like herself, her joking persona espoused in the videos allows her to make a coded social commentary on xenophobia, as a result of the fact that she has constructed herself as "harmless."

Likewise, Maangchi's ability to employ a mythic "We" in her videos and books is worthy of note. As described in the analysis of her cookbook, Maangchi actively employs terms like "we" when referring to native Koreans and the short stories she narrates during her recipes. For example, in her video "Korean soybean paste stew (Doenjang-jjigae: 된장찌개)," she states,

> Doenjang-jjigae is the most popular stew among Koreans. This is an almost everyday side dish, always eating with rice. I have never seen any Korean born in Korea who hates doenjang-jjigae! If you have any Koreans you guys see and say "you hate doenjang-jjigae? Please raise

> your hand." I can't see anyone. That much doenjang-jjigae is really important in Korean life. Doenjang-jjigae is not just a simple food. It has something to do with Korean culture, our ancestors, and also all this in Korean cuisine, without doenjang, you can't think about Korean cuisine. (2016)

Maangchi is firmly employing her knowledge about the connection of doenjang-jjigae to Korean people with such conviction, that she even challenges the viewer to find someone (born in Korea) that does not like the stew.

Similarly, in her recipe for making Korean doenjang quoted above, regarding the drying process of soybean blocks, she states, "Usually in Korea, we use rice straw, but hay also is working well. Hay will attract the bacteria in the air. Even if you don't have hay, still it attracts bacteria. So we are going to have some nice, good, delicious fungi in here" (2016). In the same video, pulling a large fungi cluster out of the top of her jar of fermenting doenjang, she notes "Beautiful white flower… Sometimes you see white, yellow, and even black. So, we just believe that this white flower if you have, you'll get rich. So my grandmother said, 'Oh you have white flowers, that means that you will get rich this year. So I'm lucky, isn't it?" (2016). Here, she is asserting her knowledge of the food, but also inputs a kind of mythos surrounding the cooking that she learned from her grandmother, a kind of insider knowledge. At the same time, she is also using "we" as a way to bring in her audience as if they are cooking with her. It becomes a community building exercise while establishing her role in another community of women.

Lastly, much like her usage of gendered divisions of labor in her cookbook, she also employs them in her videos. In her video “How to make gimbap (aka kimbap: 김밥)," she recalls memories of her role as a mother while couching that in a larger discussion about mothers' interactions with education, stating, "In Korea, we always make this special gimbap on So-poong day. ‘So-poong' means Korean children's school picnic day. And then we make extra delicious gimbap for teacher…in Korea, when I lived there, the beef was so expensive, but on So-poong day, like picnic day is exceptional. I buy the best quality beef and make this nicely with a lot of effort, and then to make it really pretty, and then give it to my children, ‘Oh, give it to your teacher!'" (2014). Here, Maangchi not only recalls memories of mothering but recalls explicitly *good* mothering. Noting how despite the price, making gimbap on this particular day to give to teachers, is a display of a sense of duty to perform motherhood well in a particularly public event like picnic day.

Conclusions

Maangchi serves as a useful model for understanding a plastic form of authenticity that is committed to radically decentering traditional notions of cultural gatekeeping. Whereas authenticity is a hotly contested and disputed term (Appadurai 1986, Bendix 1992, Heldke 2005, Jackson 2005), I argue that the inherent agency and cultural power that authenticity wields is particularly transformative for those in the margins. Whereas traditional forms of authenticity rely on truths espoused by “experts” (who in contemporary foodways usually means outsiders of a given community) (Weiss 2011), by centering those from the margins in the center of

narratives about authenticity, and creating a space that allows for flexible performances of race, gender, and global citizenship, authenticity can move from an act of exclusion to one of inclusion. The benefits of such are manifold. For instance, when cultural artifacts like cookbooks became considered worthy objects of study, significantly more nuanced images of daily life and society in different times and spaces emerged, and women's words became powerful tools to tell and construct cultural histories (Theophano 2002). Much in the same way, authenticity precipitates authority, and recognition and authority over one's culture and communities are critical for the maintenance and reproduction of cultural values.

This is not to say that authenticity does not have its limitations, however. Being that authenticity is directly correlated with power, and the ability to determine the boundaries for what constitutes the "real," it is inherently problematic and risks exploiting and appropriating the very communities it seeks to empower (Jackson 2005). It also runs the risk of reifying stereotypes and commodifying certain performances of race and ethnicity in ways that are not beneficial to the communities represented (Cruz 2013). For these critical reasons, the "plastic" framework of authenticity allows for subjectivity, trust in potential "fictions," and for cultural narratives and histories often pushed to the margins to be regarded with as much authority as those from the outside looking in.

YouTube chef and self-professed "Korean housewife," Maangchi performs her cultural identity in ways that assert authority over her imagination of what constitutes real Korean motherhood. Toying with the trope of the happy immigrant, Maangchi utilizes her image in ways that subvert and transgress these tropes,

enabling her to subtly and (un)consciously critique systems of racism and xenophobia. In many ways, as a result of the nature of her emergence on digital spaces, and without overhead authority controlling the image she projects, she is uniquely positioned to assert her own cultural authority over what she deems "authentically Korean." Now working herself into various formats (YouTube, cookbooks, a web portal *Maangchi.com*, and Instagram), she is not merely a gatekeeper for what is considered authentic but is also able to participate as a global citizen in an increasingly networked world. By balancing her adherence to traditions in her cooking tutorials and narrations of Korean motherhood, but being transgressive and contemporary in her dissemination of message (mainly being based online), she has redefined what it means to be authentically Korean. Where the following chapters examine how authenticity is branded, and how it is repurposed for mixed-race Koreans, Maangchi sets a precedent for understanding the ways that women can exert agency and control over cultural meaning-making and radically deconstruct traditional methods of defining and applying cultural authenticity.

CHAPTER 3: Straight from Mama Kim's Kimchi Jar: Branding Women onto Korean Food

Introduction

Fig. 6 Napa cabbage being washed from: author's personal collection, 2001.

Roland Barthes refers to food as a "system of communication," where the material nature of food intersects with context, behavior, and human interaction to become signifiers of certain elements of culture (29). In this photo of cabbage alone (Fig. 6), it is possible to draw any number of conclusions about what is being prepared. What is being prepared then begs the question, who is cooking the food? There is no immediate connection to a particular dish, a particular culture, or a particular person. When put in context with a picture of my mother and emo (aunties or 이모) *preparing* the food (Fig. 7), an entirely different narrative is communicated. There are clear gendered, raced, and classed *performances* of Korean womanhood

occurring. These photos of my mother and emo show them performing a fairly mundane task of collective Korean food prep; however, certain features like sitting on the floor, communally prepping food, and the use of large silver Korean bowls contribute to this “system of communication" Barthes references. In this narrative, the food becomes but one small aspect of a larger "Korean moment." These images in and of themselves are arguably quite commonplace for most Koreans, and this scene is quite common, contributing to a larger, temporally contingent, narrative of Korean women and their relationship to Korean food.[31] The Korean maternal figure and the subsequent performances of “Koreanness,” then, are also intimately tied to the branding of, and an integral to the perceived authenticity of Korean food in the American culinary imaginary.

Fig. 7 Korean women preparing Kimchi from: author’s personal collection

Further, it is critical to examine the ways that maternal figures are deeply coded within food, and more specifically how it travels and is imagined act similarly as signifiers. For Korean food, recipe and spice intersect with history and motherhood to create a cuisine whose supposed authenticity is underpinned by the women

imagined to be cooking it. Even the most cursory web search reveals a trend in the use and coding of the restaurant as being associated with women and the home. A small sampling of Korean-American restaurants includes: Mama's Korean restaurant, Mom's Tofu House, Mama's House, Mama Kim's, Auntie Kim's Korean Restaurant, E-Mo's (auntie), Grandma Tofu & BBQ, Grandma Noodle Korean Restaurant, Mama's Kitchen Cart, Emo Kimbap, Emo's Korean, and Big Mama's Korean cuisine. While the use of maternal and home-related terms in a restaurant branding is in no way exclusive to Korean restaurants (gendered branding has often emerged prior in soul food restaurants, and numerous ethnic food restaurants employ "homestyle"), I argue that the cultural history of Korean food in America directly contributes to the way in which it became gendered and is intended to be imagined by Americans. Likewise, this cultural history is also impacted by how native Koreans view Korean food.

Similarly, notions of nostalgia and memory are significant components to the corporate attribution of Korean food to Korean women, mainly as it creates ties between hunger, emotion, and memory in conjunction with people and relationships (Lupton 321). These relationships are bolstered by the fact that the immigration narrative for Korean-Americans is so woman-centered. Many backstories surrounding Korean-American brands recall immigrant mothers wanting to "share" their culture, creating unique tensions between narratives of foreignness and distinctly *American* ones. Also, an acute awareness of the financial success of foods products historically branded in maternal terms in the U.S. is critical to note. Most notably, the racially motivated history of branding "soul food" and various American cooking products

with images of mammy caricatures (like the figure of Aunt Jemima) is an American staple steeped in a long history of racialized and contentious imagery. Similarly, it is coded in contemporary products and restaurants in attempts to seem innocuous, like with the current branding of Popeye's Chicken mascot, "Annie the Chicken Queen" (adweek.com 2009). This history is alive and well.

Korean food follows in a somewhat similar tradition, with a number of food products marketed in a similar fashion[32]; however, "maternal" branding is not something exclusive to Korean food by any means. Any number of ethnic cuisines play on this trope, with "mama" or "auntie," appearing somewhere in the branding, and in many cases, Koreans have control over the image—but that does not indicate that these names and images do not still connote racial imagery for non-Koreans. From an economic standpoint, exhibiting caricatures of middle-aged Korean women in connection to Korean food follows a larger global food narrative that attributes home, hearth, and food with women. For Korean brands specifically, I argue that maternal branding is particularly frequent, in part related to a history of women-centered migration, and is in direct line with contemporary efforts to mainstream Korean food by Korean corporations and government entities. Similarly, Korean-American brands born and raised in the U.S. often employ maternal branding in ways that work to reify and project the *Americanness* of their brands. Thus, when it comes to Korean food in America, there is an overwhelming attachment to concepts like motherhood and the "home" with conventional Korean restaurants and food branding, but more importantly, performances of, at times, *perceived* authenticity.

This chapter explores some of the ways that maternity and authenticity get branded onto products, and subsequently what that does to how authenticity moves. At the outset, I explore how dominant conversations in food studies regarding authenticity function on and around Korean food, including explorations on the implications of non-traditional foodways like food trucks and contemporary investments in "fusion" food. Then, utilizing major Korean corporate brands and Korean government ministries invested in the global proliferation of Korean food, I argue that Korean companies associate Korean *womanhood* with Korean authenticity over the foods themselves, which are in many cases, pan-Asian ones. Lastly, I examine Korean-American "homegrown" brands and marketing strategies, arguing that Korean womanhood/motherhood is employed in concert with narratives of immigration and health to construct distinctly *American* brands touched with an ethos of Korean motherhood. The more duplicitous side of authenticity is explored here, where on the one hand, large corporations seek to employ authenticity through Korean women as a means to sell food that is not necessarily "Korean." On the other, it is employed by Korean-Americans as a way to regulate the tensions between long-held notions of eternal foreignness and the simultaneous desire to participate in the American capitalist dream.

Authenticity on the Move: Korean Food in the U.S. Cultural Landscape

Authenticity, as it relates to food, is especially temporally contingent, dependent on national political conversations, perceptions of the exotic Other, and even on agricultural food practice (Weiss 2012, Oum 2005, Heldke 2005). In a

discussion concerning how to quantify "authenticity" to Korean food and the Korean-American experience, sociologist Young Rae Oum attributes factors like "national consensus, normative preferences, historical consistency, customs, and uniqueness" to be critical in recognizing "authentic" food, but also in establishing a national cuisine (111). One of the more critical ways Oum engages with the shifty concept of authenticity (especially as it relates to immigrant communities) is in her use of coding and perception as critical tools for understanding how ethnic food moves, stating, "By calling certain food spicy or smelly, Americans seem to imply that they themselves are clean, pleasant, civilised, hygienic, good, and normal. In other words, the other side of the orientalist construction of Korean food is the construction of white American identity as the norm" (Oum 110). Establishing this "exotic Other" is critical in contemporary conversations regarding authenticity because, on both ends of the spectrum (the normative and the Other), authenticity juxtaposes against the authentic experiences of others (Heldke 386). To give an example, as a non-Korean, experiencing what one considers "authentic" Korean food is inevitably wrapped up in one's perception of how it differs from their own custom (Hirose and Pih 2011, James 2005)—i.e., though they may eat apple pie in Korea, apple pie is "authentically" American, so if a Korean restaurant serves you apple pie and calls it authentic, the buy in to that narrative is more at stake. Authentic Koreanness (as a concept), then, must push up to and be juxtaposed to what is considered authentic elsewhere. Hence, the concept of national cuisine is intimately sutured into the conversation of authenticity (Oum 2005), because it denotes a uniqueness from the national cuisine of others, effectively making the conversation of authenticity simultaneously both

personal and political. This conversation regarding authenticity and nationalism has also bled over into more recent discourses regarding “local activism” and “farm-to-fork” movements, conferring value onto “authentic” food practice and the work that does in food economies (Weiss 2012).

Consequently, authenticity is most often conceptualized concerning consuming food that, to *them*, seems as if it as close to the “real thing” as possible (Helkde 387). Lisa Heldke examines the ways that the spectator, or the consumer, shapes and, in many cases problematically, codes how cuisines are rendered authentic. She states, “we paradoxically seek that which we are, by definition, *least capable of identifying*,” further posing the question, “…under scrutiny, the very notion of authenticity begins to break down; why for instance, should ‘authentic’ automatically and in principle mean that a dish was prepared exactly the way an insider cook would do it, in its ‘native habitat’?” (388) [emphasis mine]. This emphasis on consuming something *authentic*, with authentic resting on the ways "a real Korean would cook it” (i.e., an expert), informs the saliency and successful employment and branding of Korean food in conjunction with Korean women. It is not a new phenomenon for food preparation to be imagined in direct correlation with women, and the authentic "experience," is as much about watching a Korean person's performance of the labor to produce the food as it is actually to consume the food. Korean people are absolutely capable of cooking unappetizing Korean food, and non-Korean people are absolutely capable of cooking delicious Korean food, but the operative element here regarding authenticity, however, is in the ability for the cook to embody what it means to be a cultural insider while cooking it. As will be

discussed, pre-packaged food also follows this same line of logic, where motherhood as a branding tool becomes a stand-in for the role of the mother herself (Srinivas 2013). While one is participating (insider or not) in the cultural rituals associated with being Korean (in the form of a packaged food or a home cooked meal), the intention by the eater is to consume that which is authentic, and the producer to produce something authentic. There is a transactional quality to authenticity that positions authenticity as a product peddled as a kind of understood Estée Lauder style gift with purchase (Heldke 2005). Kimchi is not authentic until authenticity is read onto it.

The ways that food enters into mainstream conversations often fluctuates between global and local, and branding does not just occur on the product level, but on the national and cultural level. Sociologist Janine Chi notes how we are in a moment of *global interest* in *local foods.* Branding *places,* then, often occurs through defining the unique culinary traditions of a place, but framing them in Western terms, or by disseminating recipes that are authentic and local to one place, but made with Western ingredients. She notes, "As specialty foods and products become synonymous with tradition, heritage, and belonging, they have also become integral to states' construction of national identity through tourism. Just as corporations and companies use marketing and advertising to promote a brand, so do states use tourism to promote and develop a distinct and unique national brand" (54). Branding authenticity also implies that the nation or region a food is coming from also aids in establishing authenticity. Paired with this, marketers utilize specific language and imagery to continually reproduce and construct images of not only types of food, but

the people imagined to be making it, for the people imagined to be consuming it (Cavanaugh and Shankar 61).[33]

Regarding expertise and "authentic" food, material culture and food scholar Psyche Williams-Forson unpacks the notions of authority and expertise regarding foodways, and how gender and culture are hot spots for analysis (2010). The notion that the figure cooking the food is as salient as the recipe for the food itself is a critical component for determining authenticity. Regarding shopping for and cooking with her Ghanaian husband, Williams-Forson notes the frustrations that, despite step by step instruction and seemingly correct flavor combinations, neither her, nor her husband could replicate the food in a way that left him "gastronomically fulfilled," leading them to seek advice and foodstuffs from the women in their culinary collective (sisters, aunts, and community grandmothers) (444). It is in these moments that the confluence of food and womanhood becomes evident. Despite exact recipes, and even a person directly from a particular culture (in this case a husband), the "culinary collective," or women that are deemed the experts, are deferred to for their expertise.

Similarly, the ways in which motherhood, not just as an act or in conjunction with a female body or womanhood, must be imagined in a system (patriarchal) that is as equally invested in the labor/production from said bodies. Barbara Katz Rothman, discussing motherhood as a *discipline,* notes that as "a response to the needs and demands that exist outside of the mother, shifts our focus from who the mother is to what she is doing" (155). This begs one to remove the concept of motherhood from being solely a corporeal one, but one that exists within a matrix of human interaction,

control, care, and nurturance, much like Roland Barthes describes when discussing food acting as a "system of communication," where the material nature of food intersects with context, behavior, and human interaction in order to become signifiers of certain elements of culture (Barthes 29). Regarding Korean branding, in this space, it is possible to see how Korean maternity is not simply restricted to images of Korean maternal figures, but ideologies that cross cultures and come to make meaning on certain objects/spaces—e.g., kinship systems (Park 1997). Thus, words like "homestyle," "made from scratch," and "homemade," also imply a material connection to motherhood even though mothers are not directly recalled. From a material standpoint, "homestyle" food is as much invested in the "who's cooking it" question as it is to the larger notion that "homestyle" de facto means an association with the home, with women, and various conventions of hospitality.[34]

For non-Koreans engaging with Korean food, then, these ephemeral and broad concepts of motherhood serve to authenticate the consumption and *participation* in "a Korean experience." This "taste for the exotic" is also deeply invested in notions of "access," where access to goods and supplies used in the cooking of ethnic (in this case Korean) food has direct and tangible effects on the possibility of ethnic restaurants to transgress community boundaries and become available for the greater public (Van Otterloo 2001)[35], or in many cases, for expatriates and immigrants to be able to access foodways for themselves (Cwiertka 2001). Similarly, the ways in which non-Koreans perceive those in the restaurant spaces is a critical factor in the permeation of the ethnic cuisine into broad spaces (Jang et al. 2009, Goode 1994).[36] In her work concerning ethnic relations and concerns of "accessibility" of Korean

restaurants for non-Koreans, anthropologist Judith Goode cites interviewees that said "If you go in there you feel like you're intruding, and it's supposed to be a business that anyone can go into. A friend of mine went in there and he was treated very nastily" (156). The author goes on to talk about strengthening bonds through Korean restaurants and stores embracing more open access policies toward non-Koreans, folding in the concept of non-Korean "experience" into the concepts of food tourism and branding.

Korean food, then, exists in a space much the same as the expected immigrants that run the kitchens. Non-Koreans eating in those spaces, while perhaps venturing in for a "taste of Korea," have very distinct "American" ideals about *service.* Koreans owning and operating restaurants that do not operate in a service standard befitting of those expectations in the American dining landscape, are, by nature of their inability to assimilate "correctly," what Sara Ahmed would deem a "melancholic migrant" (2007). By embracing policies aimed at the happiness or satisfaction of the American culinary tourist, immigrants are performing multiculturalism "correctly." Despite the "nasty" behavior the food patron receiving possibly being nothing more than indifference on the part of the Korean restaurant staff (as overt happiness and cheerfulness is by no means a Korean standard in Korean restaurants), the responsibility of the immigrant worker to portray a sense of innate happiness to see a non-Korean patron can be interpreted as a sign of racism, or an inability to "integrate." As Ahmed suggests, the only way "happy multiculturalism" works are for the "melancholic migrant" to "let go" of their difference or their pains of experiences with racism and xenophobia in exchange for

cheerful assimilation (Ahmed 551). The food should be authentic, yet the *performance* of one's otherness necessitates a happy performance, for integration to be considered a successful endeavor.

A recent discourse in food studies that complicates the concept of authenticity as somehow "fixed" is the (mainstreaming) emergence of the food truck, and "fusion" movements. Korean fusion food has become particularly popular in the cultural imaginary as of late, with popular cafeteria-style restaurants like Bibigo and in particular the "Korean taco," quickly becoming trendy mainstays across the country (Edge 2010). While on the surface, fusion food implies a mixing of cultural cuisines for a delicious new combination; historically, the concept of fusion food was more or less used as a mechanism to address immigrant "excess," or as a means for survival for immigrant communities in order to create foodways that would be embraced by the larger mainstream community (Mannur 2010). Likewise, the concept of fusion has implied a combination of an ethnic cuisine with cultural markers that denote whiteness (or more specifically the absence of other ethnic markers), and ultimately it is intended to be reflective of a particularly classed experience (Mannur 214).

For Koreans, meat was not traditionally consumed in a substantial fashion, so the popular "Korean BBQ" all-you-can-eat style joint is also a uniquely Western convention, exemplifying this move of utilizing fusion by means of increasing one's proximity to whiteness. As exemplified by their popularity (one would be hard-pressed to find a non-Korean who's reference point for Korean food is not somehow informed by "Korean BBQ"), Korean spaces enable "fusion" by means of the atmosphere and modes of service. Mannur notes, "In disarticulating culinary

signifiers from the overtly foreign and therefore negative connotations of otherness, fusion cuisine domesticates foreignness, rendering a culturally deodorized end product" (211). With the Korean taco (or Bulgogi taco) being by far the most widely recognized form of Korean culinary fusion in this particular moment, then, we see an interesting move away from modes of whiteness on the surface, supposedly a fusion from the vibrant Latinx and Korean communities in Los Angeles; however, the "taco" in and of itself is a food that has been appropriated by Anglo Americans from Mexico, re-coded safely as "Tex Mex" (Montaño 328). Thus, for Korean food to make the jump into mainstream foodways, sanitization of the "cultural odor" is necessary (Iwabuchi 2002). As will be discussed, part of this cultural sanitation is enabled by the ethnic connection of Korean food being to Korean women. The food does not necessarily need to be "authentically" Korean; however, the symbolic branding of Korean women is utilized as a safe stand-in for more "odorous" cultural markers like native Korean ingredients or recipes.

Likewise, the concept of the food truck shifts the idea of a food space like the "restaurant" as fixed, and the space in which one consumes food is a critical element in perceiving authenticity, so food trucks by nature of their construction shake up parameters for authentic dining experiences, while democratizing access to the cuisine. Food trucks essentially permeate community boundaries (Siu 2013, Wang 2013). One does not necessarily need to venture into Koreatown to consume "authentic" food. In his research on food trucks in LA, Oliver Wang offers a useful analysis of the ways in which race and specific communities can be targeted for their business, helping to "illuminate the social topographies of race and class in Los

Angeles" (89). He argues that food trucks inherently “activate public space” in their ability to impromptu show up at a space and attract people to utilize the space (80). The ability to target a specifically Korean audience is possible; however, the ability to move into distinctly non-Korean occupied spaces is particularly transgressive. The food truck can permeate social boundaries that have historically been erected to keep minority and marginalized publics out. The ability for relatively free will in the movement and use of space with the food truck and being the point of reference as to what constitutes authentic Korean cooking in this particular space is very interesting, particularly when juxtaposed with traditionally gendered storefronts that cater to predominantly Korean clientele. Concepts like fusion food and contemporary modes of delivery and service like food trucks present curious wrinkles in the ways that authenticity can be applied and defined, and as will be discussed, corporate entities along with individuals can deploy frameworks of authenticity in different ways as a means of capital and cultural gain, which presents some theoretical hurdles for a concept like plastic authenticity.

To Mom or Not to Mom, That’s the Question: Corporate Branding of Korean Food in the U.S.

The use and marketing of Korean womanhood in Korean corporate branding is wildly inconsistent. South Korean companies seem to have been unable to pinpoint a direct marketing strategy that works best for the branding of Korea-based Korean brands of food in the United States. In some cases, Korean aunties are plastered on boxes in animated form, aiming to situate authenticity through the symbol of Korean

mothers, like the mascot for food brand "Ajumma Republic."[37] Other times, famous K-pop stars are used to peddle brands, which is a popular tactic in South Korea selling brands in South Korea. In a commercial ad for Bibigo brand dumplings, K-pop sensation Psy is featured eating the various forms of dumplings to sell the brand (Bibigoglobal 2014). In other cases, distinctive "ethnic" markers are removed from the branding and packaging altogether, in a kind of ethnically "sanitized" version of the Korean food sold. And lastly, sometimes there are a bit of both tactics, where maternal figures are used to brand Korean food products that are not actually *Korean* food at all, but being sold by a Korean company, as is the case with "Annie Chun."

The function of this research is not to assert whether one tactic is more economically viable than another for a South Korean company, rather, to identify specific trends in the marketing and branding strategies of Korean foods in the U.S. culinary marketplace. In an era where sustainability, farm-to-table, locally-sourced and organic are 43-billion-dollar buzzwords for the globally-minded cosmopolitan millennial buying market (Meyer 2017), large corporations are having to employ broad marketing tactics to reach the broadest audience.

Interestingly, the ways that authenticity is sutured into these branding narratives is quite diverse; however, consumers are savvy, and the branding efforts of a giant corporate entity as somehow able to produce "authentic" food is a much tougher sell than it is for a home-grown business. It would be remiss not to address, however, that a large corporation might not even be in the *business* of selling authenticity. McDonald's has never made it their goal to tout their distinctly American authenticity— although it is arguable that McDonald's is *in fact* probably one of the

single most recognizably *authentic* American capitalist contributions to the waistlines of the world, for better or for worse. This goes to show that authenticity, while powerful, *does* have its limitations for the scope of its effect, depending on the context it is deployed by large corporations. Through attempts to globalize and essentialize diverse groups of people (in the case for Korean products—diasporic, native, mixed-race, adoptees, etc.), corporate attempts to market "authenticity" from a global scale, means brokering what representations stand-in for a diverse and global community (Dávila 7). I argue that authenticity for major corporate branding is arguably more prevalent when used to market products to diasporic communities or those with some knowledge of Korean language or culture, and the "sanitization" of ethnicity is a more prevalent branding strategy to the "general" or non-Korean consumer (at least in the minds of marketing executives). In part deep-seated racism and ethnocentrism, and in part a desire for "safe" multiculturalism, corporate entities walk the fine line between when and to whom to employ "authenticity" as a marketing tactic.

In her book, *Latinos, Inc: The Marketing and Making of a People* (2012), Arlene Dávila explores the ways that corporations created broad strokes representations of the global and ethnically diverse Latinx[38] population to create a distinctly specialized "Hispanic market." Spurred by recognition of this untapped market, beginning in the 1980's (in part by a recognition of the sharp rise in Hispanics revealed in the 1980 census) and in the era where the narrative of multiculturalism became a buzzword, corporations began trying to essentialize a very ethnically and culturally diverse population for the matters of marketing of products,

and branding lifestyle (Dávila 51). Resulting from these efforts to globalize "Latino," global and local marketplaces began to intersect, creating a singular Latina/Hispanic identity in the United States. In a relative flattening of the diverse cultural population, Dávila explores the ways that in the eyes of marketers, the Hispanic/Latina market was driven by three main cultural characteristics, which were the use of Spanish, familial ties, and strong connections to Roman Catholicism (66).

In particular, the continuous use of Spanish as a defining mechanism of Latina marketing reinforces the notion that speaking Spanish is synonymous with Latina/Hispanic identity. This presents a particularly easy mechanism for corporations to brand products aimed at this community, simply by nature of using a single language. Dávila argues,

> The irony is that in constructing a Hispanic market that is easily marketable—that remains safe, authentic, and ready for mass consumption—the industry ends up erasing the historical roots of the Latinos in the United States that arise from its very foundation, invalidating the political claims of Latino populations that are intrinsic rather than an external or recently incorporated segment of the U.S. population… These are Hispanics that we can market to, but also expel or banish, who will remain in their place, within their culture: the "nation within the nation," that is never really part of the "Nation." (87)

The unintentional reverberations this tactic (while economically successful) has had by bypassing over critical segments of the market, in particular, non-Spanish

speaking, and second- or third-generation Latinos, is that culturally speaking, these segments somehow become inauthentic members of this artificial imagined community.

Interestingly, most of the corporations that Dávila describes are U.S.-based corporations that are branding to a community within the larger imagined *American* community. For Korean foods, there has yet to be an exclusively *American*-owned corporation that is explicitly targeting Korean-Americans. Perhaps an untapped market, or not large enough of a population for large corporations to dedicate serious funds to creating a "Korean" or even pan-Asian "brand," Korean corporations find themselves increasingly invested in cornering this population through American branches of Korean corporation, and their varied attempts at essentializing the diasporic Korean community create interesting trends worthy of noting.

Korea has various cultural "ministries" dedicated to various arms of the socio-cultural landscape in Korea. A major aim of multiple ministries is the aspect of widening global outreach and the market reach of Korea, including the "Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism" (mcst.go.kr 2018), and the "Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs" (mafra.go.kr 2018). In particular, an arm of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, the "Korean Food Promotion Institute" (2018) is directly responsible with globalizing Korean cuisine. Regarding their globalization efforts, the website reads, "It is to make our food a cuisine culture that can be enjoyed by many people around the world. It is also to develop Korean Food, with its proven excellence as the basis. Also, by expanding the Korean cuisine culture both domestically and internationally, we help improve the business opportunities for

agriculture, forestry, fisheries, restaurants, tourism and culture. These improvements will boost the image of Korea through Korean Food Globalization" (2018). One of the major purposes of its establishment is to promote the Korean food industry, and specifically to "acquire competitive Korean food products and Korean restaurants around the world market, and create the basis for commercialization" (2018). While not directly implicating specific Korean brands, the larger goal of the institute is to generate interest in Korean food and to promote *domestic* revenue as a form of culinary nationalism (Cwiertka 2014). Believing that patronizing foreign foodways would adversely affect the South Korean economy, beginning in the 1980's the Korean government became active in campaigns advertising a form of "patriotic frugality" to foreign goods and services (Cwiertka 367). This mentality and the economic goal of globalizing Korean food through *Korean products* profoundly impacts how authenticity is managed from a nationalistic perspective. Authentic Korean food from a global standpoint means financing the domestic South Korean market. This has interesting effects on product branding, and also the distribution of Korean food outside of Korea.

The significant contribution of the institute, then, is in the creation of a Korean global food "brand" *Hansik.* One of the efforts of the brand is to certify Korean restaurants globally with a stamp of approval from the KFPI, a form of soft cultural power, aimed at creating a government-sanctioned notion of ownership of the authenticity of Korean food (Cwiertka 369). In an article sanctioned by the KFPI describing the manner that *hansik* has become an industry, regarding the philosophy

of *hansik* from an industrial perspective, author and professor of hospitality and tourism management, Kim Young-gab states,

> If hansik is to stay true to its existing definition, it must be 'Korean,' and it must be traditional in nature. These days, however, the "nationality" of our food is becoming ambiguous, and there is a big gap between traditional dishes and the dishes being made today. For this reason, the term may be in need of a redefinition of sorts. In my opinion, hansik should be deemed as food that is prepared mainly using ingredients produced or grown in Korea, food that has developed from the peninsula's rich culinary heritage and, though usually consumed by Koreans, can be enjoyed by anyone. (hansik.org 2015)

Reaffirming the *hansik* brand's (and by association the Korean government's) investments in Korean products while regulating the authenticity and globalization of Korean food, it is noteworthy to see how actual Korean corporations brand food products for what they imagine to be their culinary audience. Furthermore, while "hansik" is not officially a label on Korean food products (yet), it is invoked by Korean brands in their press and outreach, as noted by CJ brand Bibigo division chief, Yu Je-hyeuk, saying, "… the government's policy support to promote hansik is crucial" (Korea Herald 2013).

Despite the Korean government's insistence on regulating and maintaining what is considered authentic Korean cuisine, corporations take a couple of different approaches in branding their products. As discussed earlier, the use of women, and more specifically mother figures, in advertising and foodways is a way to maintain

connections with a shared past, or culinary nostalgia. For Korean food then, I argue that this form of branding and marketing is only performed by corporations when the imagined audience is primarily native Koreans, diasporic Koreans, or those that have some passing knowledge about Korean culture. While all corporations are looking to increase economic profits, and the widest net possible is a means to that goal, interestingly only foods that are either ready-made or frozen meals employ this form of branding. Tulasi Srinivas, analyzing pre-packaged Indian food and the ways that if functions for Cosmopolitan and global diasporic Indian families, notes, "Gastro nostalgia as related to mothers' home cooking is paradoxically the crux of the prepared food industry, as the symbolic and affective value of 'foods as mother made them' is invaluable. As more and more cosmopolitan women are haunted by a sense of loss of what they cannot reclaim, they turn to 'authentic' food to reclaim their identity" (Srinivas 370). For Korean food, this same notion applies, where images of the mother are employed in a manner for those increasingly burdened by the responsibilities of being global and cosmopolitan citizens. In particular, foods that have traditionally been prepared by women for families—i.e., pre-packaged meals or Korean *banchan,* in particular, are the specific foods that are branded in this manner, as a maternal stand-in for the busy mother to prepare the meals herself.

To examine the kinds of foods that make their way *outside* of South Korea, one of the largest grocery chains to cater specifically to the Korean community, with eyes toward the general public, is H-Mart. H-mart stands for "han-ah-reum (한아름)" or "one arm full of groceries." Founded in Queens in New York City in 1982, the chain now has locations across twelve states (hmart.com 2018). In a commercial spot

for the store, they advertise themselves saying, “thirty years ago, we had a dream. To introduce America to traditional Korean food and culture. Today we’re the number Korean-American supermarket. We started because we wanted to make our families feel at home, even though it was so far away. So we promised to lead the way for generations to come” (KillerSpiritPro 2012). Their tagline reads, “A Korean Tradition, Made in America, Since 1982” (2012). With a mission of integration from simply a Korean market to one that serves all populations, interestingly much of the food sold is very distinctly Korean in packaging and branding. There is very little packaging that features English as the predominant language for product description, indicating that the target audience is those that have some level of Korean cultural awareness to understand what products are which, or at the very least the products were *produced* with the intent of Korean consumption.

Fig. 8 Canned package of seasoned perilla leaves reading “(Our) Mother: Clean Perilla Leaves from: “Sesame Leaves in Soy Sauce,” *hmart.com*, 2018.

In all of the products sold through H-Mart, the only products that directly employ maternal imagery are the pre-packaged side dishes. The "mother" line pictured (Fig. 8) has a range of side dishes, from braised black beans to spicy versions of the perilla leaf dish, to braised anchovies. Thus, the branding of motherhood onto Korean food packaging is not universal, with Korean products most connected to the gendered labor associated with cooking that are branded in this manner. Perilla leaves alone are not maternally branded, nor is the soy sauce used to season them; however, in order to sell an actual meal addition that is reminiscent of the labor it takes to make the food, maternal imagery is used to inspire gastronostalgia and associate the side dish with those that a mother makes. Tulasi Srinivas notes, "the overriding narrative of loss for cosmopolitans is detailed through the emotional loss of 'home cooked' food that migrants feel" (371). It is through a dish that has historically been prepared, or "home cooked" by mothers that get branded this way for the product to stand-in for the emotional connection between mother and child.

The exception to this rule is the brand "Ajumma Republic," a subset of the Maeil Korean corporation. The brand offers sauces, ready-made meals, and snacks, "inspired by generations of authentic Korean cuisine," and touting "old-fashioned" Korean recipes (ajummarepublic.co.kr 2015). The logo touts the silhouette of a Korean ajumma's head, fashioned with a stereotypical "auntie perm." While one of the few overtly maternally branded product lines in the international marketplace for Korean food, the brand's history reflects a particular investment in maternal branding as well, as Maeil Foods was founded by a woman in the post-war era, a fact the

company positions as critical to its success. In a video commemorating the 70th anniversary of Maeil foods, the narrator states,

> Even though time and trends change, there is something that can never be changed. A mother's homemade meal straight from the heart. The food that we took for granted may be the most important thing in our lives. A hearty meal every day. For that, there is the Korean *Jang* which is fermented sauce in the flavor of *Maeil.* Mrs. Kim Bong established Kim Bong Jung Geun fermented sauce brewery in a poor and infertile place after Korean independence. It was during a time where conducting business as a woman was a difficult task and a rare one... throughout it all Mrs. Kim managed to keep the quality of her soy sauce in production. The persistence of Mrs. Kim in making her soy sauce and treating her customers as her family, kept it more than a sauce. She kept a family treasure. That was the start of Maeil Foods. (오수민 "oh-su-min" 2016)

For Maeil Foods, then, motherhood is branded directly into the fiber of the larger corporate entity's ethos itself. Reflective of this is their use of the sub-brand "Ajumma Republic" (Fig. 9) and the associations with authenticity that that entails.

Fig. 9 Ajumma Republic brand logo from: *ajummarepublic.co.kr*, 2015.

While not sold in H-Mart specifically, other international grocery chains also carry similar foods that fit within this narrative of "home-cooked," thus utilizing maternal imagery to evoke the emotional response associated with the cooking process. In an advertisement for a Korean food festival in Atlanta (Fig. 10), Korean Ottogi brand dumplings advertised with the slogan "It's not from Korea if it's not Ottogi mandu (dumplings)," written in a heart. Enjoying the dumplings are a young girl with her mother in the corner holding a dumpling in chopsticks exclaiming "Exactly! Made in Korea!" In the final caption, a message reading "vegetables are 100% Korean." This advertisement, while marketing what is seemingly a mother as a way to sell this pre-packaged food, it is also engaging with the previously mentioned narrative that positions foods grown and produced in Korea as more authentic, the image of the mother serves two functions. On the one hand, she is symbolizing the gendered labor and nostalgia for "homemade" dumplings, but she is also emphasizing a soft sense of Korean nationalism by touting that it is not Korean if it is not Ottogi brand, which is coincidentally 100% Korean. Being presented as an advertisement for a Korean food festival in Atlanta, Georgia, this image reinforces the notion that “made in Korea,” holds a particular kind of cultural power.

Fig. 10 Advertisement for Ottogi brand dumplings from: "아시안푸드페스티벌 참가업체 탐방 – 오뚜기" "a-si-an-pu-deu-pe-seu-ti-beol cham-ga-eob-che tam-bang – o-ttu-gi" (Asian Food Festival Participating Exhibition – Ottogi), *Atlantachosun.com*, 2013.

While these brands imply a particular knowledge over Korean food products as their branding is mainly in Korean, much like Dávila asserts in the use of Spanish in Latinx branding, the use of Korean only product branding isolates various segments of the market out of easy accessibility (2012). Non-Korean speakers, including non-native Koreans, second- and third-generation Koreans and mixed-race Koreans that do not speak the language are not included in the intended market. This by no means excludes them from participating in the consumption of these projects; however, it indicates that these products were not *imagined* for them.

Interestingly, as corporations attempt to expand their audiences for their products outside of the Korean and diasporic community, the "Koreanness" in the branding strategies begins to erode. Parent company CJ Group, touting itself as a "Total Lifestyle Group" (English.cj.net 2018), hosts two different sub-branches, "Bibigo" and "Annie Chun's," each other them offering radically different branding strategies than the previously discussed examples of Korean products. CJ Foods is a Korean company, but by examining their packaging and websites, it is obvious that the audience courted through Bibigo and Annie Chun's are very specifically non-Korean consumers.[39] Regarding the construction of otherness in and around foodways, Lucy Long states,

> Otherness is a construction by the individual as well as by the culture within which that individual moves. Foods are not inherently strange or exotic; the experiences of an individual are what determine the status of food, In this sense, tourism depends on a perception of otherness rather than an objective reality of an item's relationship to that individual… a food system physically removed from the familiar can automatically, though not necessarily, represent the unknown and therefore potentially strange. (24)

Bibigo and Annie Chun's attempt to encourage a sense of culinary tourism without too far a departure from the "known." While both selling "Korean food" in some capacity, they take two diametrically opposed approaches to branding authenticity into their mission. Where Bibigo erases Korean women in favor of "authentic

recipes" for healthy lifestyles, Annie Chun's brands Korean motherhood onto products and foodstuffs that in many cases are not actually Korean.

The website for the Bibigo brand expresses that Bibigo is "sharing the culture and flavors of Korea," while being a global brand. The "story" states, "bibigo, created by CJ CheilJedang, the No.1 food company in Korea with years of expertise in Korean food, takes 5,000 years of delicious Korean food history and updates it for today's modern lifestyles. Inspired by authentic recipes, bibigo is sharing the best in Korean foods and flavors, a healthy culture that is created from nature and man, with the whole world" (Bibigo.com 2018). Koreanness plays a subtler role in the visual arms of the website, with Korean foods and traditional settings like Korean temples displayed, but the actors in the photos embody a decidedly more multicultural feel. Interestingly, Bibigo also takes a subtle approach to suturing authenticity into the brand. By using the term "inspired by authentic recipes," Bibigo can operate in proximity to authenticity by means of the recipes, but being "inspired" by authenticity leaves the brand open to engage with globalization in a way that is not shackled to traditional notions of authenticity. Being "inspired" by authenticity allows flexibility and multiculturalism to emerge while still maintaining close ties to Koreanness.

Fig. 11 A diverse homepage photo for the Bibigo brand from: Bibigo, "Share Korean Flavor." *Bibigo.com/en*, 2018

Conversely, Annie Chun's approach to authenticity is grounded heavily in the aforementioned forms of maternal-oriented branding; however, Annie Chun's is a brand that sells pan-Asian cuisine. Focusing heavily on health and convenience rather than authenticity, Annie Chun's lets its Korean auntie mascot speak for its Korean origins.[40] In fact, in its brand "story," Korea is not mentioned anywhere, instead reading "Delicious, easy-to-prepare, Asian-inspired dishes that you can feel good about…that's our promise, and we don't take it lightly. It's what drives us each day to make our foods easier to enjoy and better for you, without sacrificing the vibrant aromas, flavors and textures that we all love" (Anniechun.com 2017). The only passing mention of authenticity as a phrase, is in their mission statement regarding "True Asian Flavors," reading "We love the bold, vibrant flavors of Asian cooking, and want to help you enjoy those same tastes at home. Each of our dishes is filled with flavorful spices and ingredients authentic to Asian gourmet" and that the recipes

"stay true to our classic roots" (Anniechun.com 2017). This iteration of authenticity implies that *Asianness,* and not a regional or cultural locale is authentic. The products sold also reflect this investment in pan-Asian, with foods ranging from flavored "seaweed snacks" to "organic potstickers." Arguably, Annie Chun's is not even in the business of actually selling authenticity, rather it is in the business of selling convenience; however, it *is* participating in a form of globalization, and its iterations of authenticity, tenuous or not, are worthy of note.

Fig. 12 The logo/packaging for Annie Chun's brand, a subset of the CJ brand from: Annie Chun's, "Organic Shiitake and Vegetable Potstickers." *Anniechun.com,* 2018.

Both brands establish their market pull by largely erasing localization from their branding efforts. Interestingly, the notion of distance is a unique one for these two brands, as their proximity to Koreanness (in the traditional sense at least) is

lengthened, however, the ability to localize the brands to a generalized “Western market” implies they are closer to their non-Korean intended consumer. A form of culinary “safe race,” consumers can consume Korea without having to travel in too close to the sun. Essentially, it moves Korean food from the realm of the *exotic* to the *palatable* (Long 33). The aesthetics of palatable multiculturalism and the notions of "safety" when being a culinary tourist, enable those to have a "taste for the exotic" without abandoning the safety of the familiar. As the Annie Chun’s website states, “It’s never been easier to enjoy the tastes of your favorite Asian restaurants in the comfort of your own home” (Annniechun.com 2017). Both Bibigo and Annie Chun's are brands readily found in conventional grocery stores like Costco, Walmart, and Target, and one does not need to travel to Korea (even in the metaphorical sense) in order to consume Korea.

Thus, corporate employments of authenticity are varied, yet a key takeaway is that the *goals* of employing authenticity are about representing *Korea* and a form of soft cultural nationalism. In the case of ready-made foods, maternal branding is prevalent, as gastronostalgia symbolizes a "utopian ideal of lost time," allowing for the cosmopolitan and global citizen reclaim a past that is symbolized by traditional gendered labor (Srinivas 369). The overarching message from Korean corporations, however, is that authenticity comes not from the recipe or even mothers, but from a product *produced* in Korea. As mentioned, corporations selling “home-made” or motherhood is a harder sell, as savvy consumers are more aware of those spurious claims of authenticity. The concept of "tradition" gets refracted through the lens of the source, or origin of the product, rather than through maternal symbolism, where

globalization is the ultimate goal of Korean food, rather than a narrative of authenticity. By framing globalization as an innocent attempt at spreading cultural awareness, the more sinister capitalist corporate aims of globalizing Korean brands become rendered as background noise.

In the following section, however, Korean-American companies utilize just the opposite approach. Often placed in contention with Korea-based corporations, home-grown companies selling Korean food in the United States *depend* on maternal branding as a way to reinforce a sense of authenticity *despite* not being located or produced on Korean soil. They are readily employing motherhood as a source of inherent Korean cultural authenticity in order to carve a space out in a market saturated by corporate goods backed by the power of governing bodies in South Korea.

A Mother's Love (Made in America): Korean Mothers as Markers of Authenticity

If a corporation has a difficult time branding authenticity to a savvy consumer, then it would be reasonable to see why, "authenticity" as a hallmark of *quality,* is readily employed by small and homegrown businesses. The proximity to the individual is narrower, and their personal narratives about history, gastronostalgia, and lived experiences feel less structured and mediated. Where corporate branding has no single approach to branding food, maternally branded Korean-American food is incredibly prominent for Korean-American small businesses. While hardly disenfranchised by any means, as they are still participating competitively in

capitalism, homegrown Korean-American businesses are *marginalized* in the competitive global market for Korean food. Systematically pushed out from being sold in Korean foodways, Korean-American brands that do not co-sign the *hansik* philosophy (as in using ingredients from Korea as well) must forge new paths in the American culinary marketplace. A framework of authenticity that is "plastic," then, allows for the act of radically decentering corporate and governmental bodies from having a total stake in defining Korean, and more importantly Korean-American authenticity, in terms of the cultural imaginary of the Korean nation-state. As I argue that there are distinct efforts to brand a form of Korean-*American* authenticity that is separate from the machinations of the South Korean "nation," plastic authenticity attempts to ascribe "realness" to spaces that have historically been deemed *in*authentic.

Under the impression that Asian Americans have no desire to assimilate into American culture, American corporations often overlook Asian American consumers as a market that is hard to tap and "less profitable," and are subsequently some of the most overlooked constituencies in global branding and marketing attempts (Dávila 230). Ironically, in the case of many Asian American immigrants, but in particular, native-born Asian Americans, they are actually far less receptive to "nationalistic and group specific modes of identification" regarding specific countries of origin (230). In the case of the brands explored here, notions of *Americanness* in conjunction with the maternal branding of Koreanness are highlighted very overtly. This pushes up against the notion that these brands and the people involved with them have somehow sacrificed their Americanness to highlight their Koreanness or vice-versa. While still

enmeshed in narratives of safe and happy multiculturalism, Korean-American homegrown brands are also practicing a form of resistance in their declarations of authenticity. By situating their Koreanness as distinctly authentic despite the removal from the authenticity that accompanies association with Korean citizenship, and through that authenticity project themselves as *experts* in the cuisine with visions to expose others to Korean culture, Korean-American branding efforts are employing a transgressive form of plastic authenticity that transforms communities.

There is no shortage of Korean restaurants in the U.S.[41], and many of them boast high-quality ingredients and "authentic" Korean recipes, some fusion, some traditional. Korean food in that sense has been elevated to some of the highest levels, entering the echelons of haute cuisine. It is also no surprise that when it comes to branding and marketing for these restaurants and the culinary landscape in general, they are overwhelmingly male-dominated. The interesting thing about restaurants is that they provide an "experience." As a form of culinary tourism regarding dining out Lucy Long states that it is "a way for American to explore not only the 'foreign' and exotic foods but foods closer to home. Foods thought to be familiar are turned into subjects for the tourist gaze when they are recognized as carrying identity" (13). Thus, restaurants engage with a very public form of culinary tourism, that begs the consumer to physically interact with culture in a way that deviates from their cultural norms.

As mentioned, the radical shift away from the brick and mortar style of food service, entities like the food truck are able to renegotiate the boundaries of what constitutes authenticity, backed by a unique method of delivery and consumption

which allows for a unique level of flexibility in the practice of cooking and employing authenticity.[42] This experience is worthy to note, as it creates shifts in the way to imagine culinary tourism. The Columbus, Ohio based food truck, "Ajumama" (a play on 'ajumma' and mama) brands itself as "Korean street food—fast and sassy." Owned by chef and entrepreneur Laura Lee, the boundaries of traditional dining are shifted, with fusion foods primarily being prepared and sold (including foods like Bulgogi Cheezesteaks and Spicy KBBQ Jackfruit Sandwiches); however, through the name and the mission, Lee situates this ostensibly contemporary food service in tradition. In her mission description, Lee states,

> Bringing a taste of Seoul to Columbus, Ajumama serves Korean street food without the 7000-mile road trip. Always fresh and sassy, sometimes sweet or hot, a lot of traditional with a little rock and roll, but way more than just BBQ or kimchi… The ajummas are famous the world over for their tenacity, sharp elbows, warm hearts, fiery tempers and loyalties as well as their amazing food. Walk up to a street cart or into one of the red tented pojangmachas that pop up on the streets of South Korea after the sun goes down and you will most likely find a smiling ajumma doing everything from serving, cleaning, cooking, and even giving advice sometimes from sunup to sundown. Ajumama was the result of creating a word that expressed how much we love and respect these wonderful ladies and their fighting spirits.
>
> (Ajumama.com 2018)

By nature of the delivery service, Lee is disrupting the “space” of food production and participating in a burgeoning and in many ways distinctly American business venture in a food truck (Wang 2013), while maintaining a particular sense of authenticity in the honoring of Korean women, and even Korean street food custom. Her distinct iterations of Korean cultural knowledge and employment of Korean gender roles, while traditional, are bolstered by her fusion menu and the fact that she herself is mixed-race. By nature of association and how she employs Korean culture, she is re-orienting culture in a way that creates new ethnic markers, and by design, new parameters for measuring and expressing authenticity (Kim and Livengood 1995).

In an interview with the Seoul Journal, describing her food as “authentic Korean fare with a creative American twist," Lee responds to questions about her classical training, her mixed-race background, and her culinary story. Regarding her philosophy of cooking, Lee notes that she finds commonalities between regional mid-western dishes and Korean ones, remarking that she maintains that the food has the "essence of being Korean" but just presented in a unique way (Al-Jamie 2018). Stating that she also handmakes all of her kimchi and sauces, Lee employs a distinct form of plastic authenticity. Lee herself is embodying the traditional notions of gendered Korean labor by preparing and serving Korean food with a philosophy grounded in tradition, yet the food she serves and her own racial and ethnic makeup would indicate otherwise. She positioned her philosophical approach to cooking around the figure of the Korean ajumma, so while some of what she cooks may only have a passing resemblance to traditional food, it becomes authentic through her

projections of her identity into that of a sphere of gendered labor, painting a gastronostalgic picture of Koreanness, just smothered in cheese sauce. For the culinary tourist, then, is their experience necessarily less authentic? She home-makes her kimchi, which is more than can be said for a lot of Korean owned and operated restaurants, and she is grounded in a long tradition, so her iterations of identity and authenticity are in fact legitimate and inherently transgressive.

For products, however, culinary tourism is closer to home. Where the food truck re-imagines "space" and delivery, the culinary tourist is still forced to engage with culture directly. For food products, consumers are bringing race into their homes and consuming it privately. Likewise, it is a uniquely gendered space. Since food is often correlated with gendered labor, Korean-American products are often imbued with maternal imagery and touched with stories that recollect a "Korean" past. The critical element of audience is one to consider here. Where Korea-based products have aims at globalization; their core consumers are Koreans (diasporic or not) and those that have some reference point for Koreanness. Motherhood is branded only in *meals* so as to replace the maternal act of cooking meals in an age of global citizenship. For Korean-American products, the audience is fellow Americans (Korean or not), and motherhood has a much different form of currency as a form of legitimation and authenticity in lieu of being made, or being *from* Korea in a geographical perspective.[43] Likewise, the products are not aimed at *globalization,* rather a form of ethnic *localization,* imparting Koreanness to U.S. consumers specifically, noted by their investments in “made-in-America” type identifiers and

their investments in distinctly American comfort food customs. Authenticity, then, is simultaneously an act of assimilation and a radical declaration of difference.

Fig. 13 A jar of Sunja's Medium Spicy Cabbage Kimchi from: "Sunja's Medium Spicy Cabbage Kimchi," *sunjaskimchi.com,* 2018.

"Sunja's" brand of kimchi at the surface fits within a straightforward narrative of maternal branding. Sunja employed herself in the logo, with her name written in a stereotypically "Asian-style" script. Her brand story recounts her as a native of Seoul, Korea, with a mission to introduce everyone to the "superfood" that is kimchi (Sunjaskimchi.com 2018). What makes her brand so distinct, however, is not just her investments in maternal oriented branding, but reframing kimchi not as ethnic cuisine, but as a "superfood." Toying with the idea of Korean food as healthy rather than new and exotic, plays on a long tradition of associating Korean food, or more broadly Asian food, with health. In an article regarding the ways that Asian food and Asian people are branded and presented to American "baby boomers," Liz Wilson states, "This idealized image of Asians as people who enjoy remarkably long and

healthy lives is so pervasive in the West that Asia can be invoked as an icon of wellness by purveyors of multicultural foods, food supplements, hygiene products, and remedies with the most minimal symbolic cues" (261). Sunja capitalizes off of this notion, and her entire brand, while helmed by an image of herself, is infallibly invested in orienting the consumer to the health benefits of kimchi. Her mission states "clean, healthy eating" are primary goals, she touts the raw, vegan, and probiotic elements of kimchi, and she even brands her kimchi as "unique" based on the fermentation process, incidentally used in all kimchi recipes. Her website notes, "Unlike commercial kimchi, Sunja's kimchi adds no sugar, no MSG or fish extracts and is vegan and vegetarian. Sunja's kimchi is low in calories, is fat-free and is a great source of digestible fiber, iron and potassium" (Sunjaskimchi.com 2018).

By aligning her product with health, a significant (and lucrative) corner of the food industry, she elevates her product outside of a niche or ethnic placement, but alongside health foods of all kinds. She bolsters this with large badges on every page of her website that indicate her food is "GMO-free," "Made in Vermont," and "Gluten Free, Raw, Vegan, and Probiotic" (2018). While branding herself as an expert on Korean food, and touting all of the health benefits, she has transcended being recognized solely for being "other," instead being regarded *first* as health food, and second as authentically Korean, even so far as being recognized by *Bon Appétit* as one of their favorite brands of kimchi (Cushing 2014). Afforded the label of authentic through branding via her ability to exude traditional physical symbols of Korean motherhood, and the fact that the kimchi is found in local stores, online markets, and

in Whole Foods, is evidence of her brand's broad appeal through the channel of health.

In an interesting shift from the "homegrown" aesthetic of Sunja's Kimchi (arguably part of her appeal), Suji Park's brand "Suji's Korean Cuisine," takes a different approach to her branding. While naming the brand after herself which inspires some forms of racial recognition, and featuring herself in a bio on her website, overall, Suji focuses on her professional resumé and ability to create foods that tap multiple markets as her branding strategy. In her bio, Park notes that she is an "award-winning international entrepreneur who built a career around her love of fine food. Her businesses provide cross-cultural flavors to today's consumers on both sides of the Pacific. Her U.S.-based endeavors; Suji's Korean Cuisine®-a retail food product brand- and Suji's Korean Grill®-a fine Korean dining restaurant-allow American consumers to experience the unique flavors of her native Korea. Suji is a graduate of the International Culinary Center in New York City" (Sujiskorean.com 2018). Whereas many of the Korean-American product lines use maternal imagery as a means for authenticating the food, Park favors noting her track record in branding and food production. Similarly, her logo reads "Korean Inspired," and "Made in USA" and her products, while distinctly more invested in Korean flavors and recipes than, say, Annie Chun's products, Park purposefully intersects her brand with "familiarity."

Not quite fusion, but the touch of American comfort ingredients, as she insinuates. Lucy Long elaborates on the power and symbolism of comfort food stating, "because of its primary function being the relief of stress, comfort food has

become recognized as a genre that is evaluated differently from 'regular' food… Presenting food as comfort food, then, means that the usual concerns for health … or other factors motivating our food choices can be suspended while we focus on the emotional and nurturing aspects of the food" (129). Framing that which is the "other" as comfortable and familiar, then, is a means of evoking the personal and emotional nature of food that an insider in a community would feel, and making that food translatable for a different audience. Suji Park offers foods such as "Kimchi Bacon Rice Korean Style Bento" boxes (ironically, a term for a Japanese lunchbox), in addition to frozen Korean style chicken patties (Sujiskorean.com 2018). Likewise, her global brand mission states, "Fluent in the languages and food cultures of Korea, Japan, and the United States, we consider ourselves 'translators' of food experiences. We preserve the authenticity and original intent of flavors but present these tastes in ways that are comfortable, wholesome and familiar" (2018). Her iterations of authenticity, while couched in an old-fashioned assimilationist narrative that assumes immigrants need to work to make others feel comfortable (Ahmed 2007), her investment in comfort is actually a jab at mainstream manufacturers for their inability to create authenticity. Stemming from an interview with "Frozen and Refrigerated Buyer," quoting Park, Denise Leathers writes,

> Last winter's Olympics in South Korea also helped spur interest in Korean cuisine, which has also gotten a boost from the growing number of Korean barbecue restaurants—not to mention food trucks serving Korean-inspired fare. The problem... is that most Korean-inspired products on the market currently are produced by non-Korean,

> mainstream manufacturers. So they're not delivering the authenticity today's consumers demand. (2018)

While only serving products that Park claims are "Korean inspired," this does not detract from the fact that she invoked authenticity as a way to brand them. Subtly re-inserting her "self" into her branding, the tradition of Korean cooking, while rendered "comfortable" for broad appeal, is authentic because *she* is authentic.

Where Sunja's Kimchi offers appeals to health through a "homemade" appeal in her packaging design, and Suji's Korean offers professionalism and comfort as means to establish credibility, Mama O's Kimchi and Mother In Law's Kimchi (MILK) shift the responsibilities of the consumer entirely. Like Ajumama's food truck, Mama O's and Mother In Law's Kimchi brands re-orient the act of culinary tourism. Ajumama's uses space and fusion as a means to assert new and engaging forms of authenticity, and Mama O's and MILK actively invite culinary tourists into the production process itself, narrowing the proximity between producer and consumer. Both brands of "home kimchi kits" where buyers can learn how to make kimchi themselves, guided by Mama O's and MILK (Kimchirules.com 2018, Milkimchi.com 2018). The consumer, then, engages with authenticity in multiple frameworks.

On the one hand, the maternal branding of both brands of kimchi insinuates the kind of insider knowledge and Korean womanhood that I have been arguing as a critical factor in recognizing these consumer goods as authentic. Likewise, in *performing* this act of Koreanness "with" Mama O and MILK, the consumer engages in the act of cultural negotiation by not only bringing Korea into their kitchens, but by

producing that authentic kimchi themselves, with a combination of their own and the provided ingredients. These brands leverage their *otherness* from being Korean by inviting an outsider into the *insider's* process of food production. It brings the concept of "homemade" to a new level.

Fig. 14 Mama O's Kimchi Making Kit from: "Mama O's Premium Homemade Kimchi Kit." *Mama O's Premium Kimchi.* Kimchirules.com, 2018.

Likewise, while mothers inspire both the Mama O brand and the MILK brand, and the mothers themselves are present in the advertising of the products, it is done so through the voices of their children. Where the mothers become representative symbols of Korean authenticity, their second-generation American children manage this symbolism and make the otherness and foreignness more palatable and less "dangerous." While cooking and selling Korean food, the children of Mama O and

MILK claim Americanness and complicate culinary boundaries. In this vein, regarding the representation of the second-generation subject in food media, Anita Mannur notes,

> To protect the nation from its own otherness, there must always be a way to affirm American exceptionalism while recognizing the presence of mixed and racialized bodies. To this end, many second-generation texts seem to pledge culinary allegiance to the United States because that gesture of avowal implicitly repudiates a connection with an elsewhere. And yet, paradoxically, the only safe way to articulate otherness might be through a culinary register, but only if eating otherwise happens over there, and not here… Diasporic affect here becomes a way to manage ties to other spaces, both spatially and temporally. (170)

The second-generation subject mediates the consternation between the diasporic subject (the Korean mother) and "America" (the consumer). Tempering the *excess*, authentic or not, of their mothers, Mama O's and MILK can invoke cultural authenticity while skirting notions of otherness simultaneously. Thus, authenticity is wrapped up in a series of brokerages between symbolic associations with Korean gendered labor but as distinctly *American* brands that consumers are invited to consume, both literally and figuratively.

Interestingly, despite their claims to authenticity, the narratives about fresh ingredients, or even tried and true traditional methods of food preparation, none of the four brands of kimchi appear in Korean grocery chains in the United States. This is

open to a number of interpretations. While it cannot be definitively proven that it was intentional, the Korean government and corporate investment in *hansik* enable the context for a form of cultural bullying to occur and it would not be the first historical instance of the Korean government stepping in to control the flow and production of Korean cultural goods abroad. Such was the case with Japan in the 1990's. As demand for kimchi in Japan had reached critical levels and skyrocketed the overseas Korean kimchi market, it officially sanctioned kimchi as the national symbol of Korea (Cwiertka 373). Japanese attempts to capitalize off of the popularity of kimchi by producing their own, however, was met with intense disputes from South Korea, going so far as to involve the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization to establish a global "standard" determined by Korea for production (373).

The same disputes happened over Korean *makgŏlli* (a type of rice wine) as well, setting a governmental and economic standard for the ways in which the Korean government responded to instances of perceived threat to the Korean market and culture (374). It should be noted, however, that Korea's contentious relationship with Japan for decades since liberation from colonization is in many ways responsible for these disputes. What it does do, however, is set a precedent for South Korea to dispute what does not fit within its parameters of *hansik.* By nature of their production in the U.S., Korean-American products would, therefore, be outside the bounds of what upholds *hansik*, so their conspicuous absence from Korean international food channels is noteworthy. Instead, all four brands find themselves in decidedly *non*-Korean spaces, like Whole Foods, Wegmans, The Fresh Market, Target, and Walmart. Whether it is by corporate bullying in the form of price

deflation for wholesale purchases or a more sinister and intentioned form of cultural and economic exclusion, it situates Korean-American food brands in the unique position to work through different channels and foodways not traditionally engaged by Korean companies. This results in an entirely different relationship with the non-Korean public, and thus requires different ways to brand cultural authenticity.

Conclusions

> Proximity has its own truth as a description of the condition of global modernity and this is generally of either a phenomenological or a metaphorical order. In the first case is describes a common conscious *appearance* of the world as more intimate, more compressed, more part of everyday reckoning… In the second, it conveys the increasing immediacy and consequentiality of real distanciated relations metaphorically. Here the connections that affect our lives (for example, the financial networks that tie our bank accounts into the global capitalist market or shared global environmental threats like 'global warming' which we confront) are made sense of *as though* they really bring us into closer contact.
>
> —John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (4)

Globalization and consumerism create curious parameters with which to measure or perceive authenticity. Authenticity in and of itself is about establishing forms of distance. Much like globalization shrinks distances between spaces over time and space, authenticity is about proximity. People and things are constructed in imaginary distances between the real and the unreal, the self and the other. As Tomlinson suggests in the epigraph, globalization reproduces a myth of proximity, where interconnectedness becomes a stand-in for *closeness.* Through consumerism, then, the ability to negotiate distances between people and cultures is also imagined. Authenticity then, while hotly contested and deeply problematic, offers a way to

broker how distance is created and imagined by those inside a culture and outsiders looking in. The framework of plastic authenticity, then, when examined through a lens that privileges and situates marginalized groups as the authorities of said authenticity, allows for a subjective and inclusive way of moderating the consternation between global consumerism and local culture.

The examples explored here attempted to illuminate the ways that businesses engage with and deploy authenticity as a means of branding and marketing products, and subsequently how their roles in the globalization and recognition of Koreanness circulates. In particular, I argue that the ways motherhood and Korean womanhood intersect into the branding and marketing strategies construct distinctive ways to interpret and apply concepts of authenticity. For Korea-based products, authenticity manifests itself in less conspicuous ways. Predominantly in the branding of ready-made and frozen meals, authenticity and maternal branding exist as stand-ins for the gendered labor that has historically occurred for those particular food items. Soy sauce or rice are not branded in maternal terms, rather foodstuffs that have historically been associated with gendered labor of production, get branded in maternal terms in order to ameliorate the cultural concerns of increasingly cosmopolitan Korean women. Branded and marketed primarily for Korean consumers both native and diasporic, and for those consumers who have a certain level of cultural awareness about Korean food, Korean corporations engage in performances of a soft form of cultural nationalism. Inspired by government-funded programs and backed by major Korean corporations, the notion of *hansik* is used to situate geopolitical concerns in the ways that Korean authenticity is constructed. Concepts

like “tradition” get framed through notions of “source of ingredients” over maternal symbolism. Rather than producing food that is necessarily “culturally” Korean, the goal of the Korean government and corporations is about globalizing Koreanness with an economic return. Authenticity is rendered an artificial means for the government to exert soft power through tactics like only recognizing food that is made with Korean ingredients, *in* Korea, as representative of *hansik*.

For Korean-American companies, however, authenticity has a much stronger currency. Directly in competition with globalized Korean goods, and rendered inauthentic in that narrative due to their production using American ingredients, declarations of authenticity are precious resources for the branding and sale of these products. In that capacity, maternally branded products are far more prevalent. Often enveloped in narratives of mothers and ajummas, Korean-American brands and products use this strategy as a form of legitimation. While still engaging in a consumerist marketplace, which in many ways is problematic and exclusionary, Korean-American companies utilize the figure of the Korean mother as a way to negotiate the tensions between having their legitimacy as Koreans questioned at the same time that their legitimacy as Americans is called into question both as businesses and as brands—such as the example of Sunja’s simultaneous employments of Korean womanhood on her packaging while brandishing the kimchi with “made in Vermont” stickers as well. While seemingly an innocuous figure of happy multiculturalism, the (authentic) Korean mother and her experiences operate in ways that push up against narratives that they, and by association, their products, are either illegitimate or excessively foreign. A framework of plastic authenticity allows us to

imagine how the figure of the Korean mother, in some cases symbolic and others agentic, has the power to ameliorate the cultural tensions that come from being othered in and outside of Korea, while also being an authority on what it means to be uniquely Korean-American.

CHAPTER 4: Ghost in the Kitchen: Mixed-Race Korean-Americans (Re)Defining Cultural Authenticity

> Ever since my mom died, I cry in H-Mart…you'll likely find me crying by the *banchan* refrigerators, remembering the taste of my mom's soy-sauce eggs and cold radish soup. Or in the freezer section, holding a stack of dumpling skins, thinking of all the hours that Mom and I spent at the kitchen table folding minced pork and chives into the thin dough. Sobbing near the dry goods, asking myself, "Am I even Korean anymore if there's no one left in my life to call and ask which brand of seaweed we used to buy?" When I was growing up, with a Caucasian father and a Korean mother, my mom was my access point for our Korean heritage.
>
> —Michelle Zauner, *The New Yorker* (2018)

Introduction

Authenticity is a peculiar entity. Its definition reads "of undisputed origin; genuine." Synonyms are real, legitimate, and valid. Its definition and the parameters of such change depending on who is articulating it, how many people agree on that definition, the relationships that people have to an object or place, and even the period or region in which a particular object or idea exists. In all cases, in a given object, authenticity is assumed to be inherently objective and measurable (Jones 182). People are also objects of authenticity, boundary objects of sorts, that fluctuate between reading as authentic in the physical state and as symbols of authenticity in the ideological state. This chapter is about the ways that people exercise in those fluctuations of authenticity.

For Michelle Zauner, a multiracial Korean-American, losing her mother to cancer meant losing her entry into Koreanness. Her mother, and the Korean food she consumed with her mother, became the boundary objects between her and her own

perceptions of being "authentically Korean." Weeping in the Korean grocery chain H-Mart demonstrates just how deeply culture and foodways interact with our perceptions of identity. In particular, Michelle connected this concept of eating, and the process of food preparation with her mother, which directly reflected onto her sense of self. She notes, "I can hardly speak Korean, but in H-Mart I feel like I'm fluent. I fondle the produce and say the words aloud—*chamoe* melon, *danmuji*... I remember the snacks Mom told me she ate when she was a kid… I wanted to like all the things she did, to embody her completely*"* (Zauner 2018). Authenticity is so tenuous, and her sense of authentic Koreanness is so dependent on her mother and the food associated with her mother. Material objects have power, then. Maternal labor has power beyond child-rearing and bodily nourishment. They become ways to position people as authentic even when their biology seeks to position them otherwise.

Traditionally, rendering people as authentic operates on two different levels. Sometimes we refer to people as authentic as a compliment about their personality, because they always "keep it real." Authenticity implies a form of honesty or *truth.* This directly influences the second form of authenticity we read onto people. It reads on bodies themselves. Authentic people are "real." Inauthentic people, then, are *unreal.* Bodies become boundary objects of reality, i.e., objects that are meant to maintain specific meanings in different spaces, places or times, and through the process of translation create meaningful and coherent messages about the object (Star and Griesemer 2015).

If certain bodies are considered authentic, then what do we do with the inauthentic ones? Do we discard these bodies from cultural memory? Destined to be erased from the fabric of a moment in time, to be deleted from a cultural memory of a place, of an imagined community of people.[44] Societies have systematically erased certain bodies for being some form of inauthentic, both in the written annals of a given society's history, but also *physically*. The mixed-race[45] children born through colonization and war have long been castoff symbols of mixture, of "tainted blood." Discarded and social pariahs, these individuals often face public scorn and have historically been ostracized. Forced to serve as mediators between cultures, but never earn a seat at the table of any culture, the "tragic mulatto" is a *body* that has existed throughout history as the foil to an authentic body. To have authentic bodies, one has to recognize *in*authentic bodies. Forever trapped in an ideological game of hot potato, mixed bodies are tossed back and forth between cultures, each one desperately trying to wash its hands clean of the responsibility for the creation of said body, while also exploiting and fetishizing the body's inherent difference. An act of consuming the Other, the mixed-body is, ironically, a symbol of authentic *"inauthenticness."*[46]

Surely, what we do with "authentic" bodies is also problematic. Rather than erasure, we envision a form of "hypervisibility," or *overrepresentation* of certain bodies in public culture (Fleetwood 16). Certain bodies get placed as exemplary figures of different cultures, different societies. Locked in particular moments in time, these bodies become idols of pure authenticity, be it the Marilyn Monroe that exemplifies the postwar white American ideal symbol of beauty—an authentic American—or the tragic case of Saartje Baartman, whose body was paraded around

in a grotesque display of "authentic" Africanness, positioned as a foil to the "better," the more "advanced" white European body. Even after death, her body on display for years, until her repatriation in 2002. Authentic bodies are as much a victim of time, culture, and memory as inauthentic ones, destined to be immortalized in the annals of history, ghosts haunting the memory of an imagined past, being used as sponges to scrub away the memory of the mixed bodies that taint that history.

From a racial perspective, society tends to problematically adopt and imprint stereotypes onto certain bodies, and create societal expectations for those bodies to perform specific actions or cues that are supposedly indicative of race. When people do not fall into these stereotypical roles, they are often subject to scorn or ridicule, rendered "inauthentic," or not "real." Words like "Oreo" or "banana" have been widely used as (problematic) colloquial terms to refer to Black and Asian people who are supposedly inauthentic. They imply that people may be "black" or "yellow" on the outside, but are "white" on the inside; traitors to their communities. For multiracial people, to be trapped between worlds is a regular occurrence, often read phenotypically in one way, but culturally lost in others.

Multiracial people are always put in the positions to "prove" the various elements of their identities to different groups. In an era where authenticity is inevitably wrapped up in tropes and stereotypes of different groups, multiracial people are tasked with exploring unique ways to assert cultural identities. When phenotype gives rise to suspicion, how do multiracial Korean-Americans enunciate their racial identities? By nature of their being, multiracial people complicate the notion of authenticity. They are *bad Koreans*. For people like Hines Ward, coded as

monoracial on the surface, they have to find ways to assert their Koreanness. There have to be ways in which multiracial people can assert complex racial identities not shackled to dominant racial constructs. For Michelle Zauner in the epigraph quoted above, and for many other multiracial individuals, it is through objects and bodies already rendered authentic that they attach themselves to, like their mothers and the foodways their mothers expose them to. Authenticity becomes plastic, something bendable, as a means of subverting the notions that say they are not authentic, into the very material conditions that *do* make them authentic.

My intervention to this problem, then, explores the ways that mixed-race Korean-Americans, despite racial "ambiguity," consciously assert Korean identities. As the previous chapters established how Korean women become gatekeepers of Korean authenticity (chapter 2) and simultaneously get coded and employed as symbols of authentic Koreanness for marketing and branding purposes (chapter 3), this chapter explores the ways that the figure of the Korean woman, more specifically the Korean mother, gets employed as a figure of authenticity for her mixed-race children. Utilizing narrations of motherhood, but also spaces of care and comfort historically associated with motherhood (aka foodways, ethnic socialization, and home care), I assert that mixed-race Korean-Americans utilize the longstanding and widespread symbolic role of Korean womanhood/motherhood to assert a form of cultural *expertise* to authenticate their identity. *Knowing* "real" Koreanness and having lived so intimately with the paragon of symbolic Koreanness (Korean mothers) gives way for these individuals to assert multifaceted identities, but also to

authenticate their Koreanness in ways that sidestep traditional modes of defining authenticity (i.e., phenotype, language, being an immigrant/eternal foreigner).

It is also a form of creating community, as these narratives of the "Korean household" become spaces of bonding among mixed-race people, where racial and ethnic configurations may dramatically alter the traditional ways that society codes community. Bonding over stories of their Korean moms, the Korean food they eat and love, Korean household customs like taking off shoes in the house and eating rice with every meal, people from a range of racial configurations create a new narrative of authenticity, one inevitably tied to the Korean maternal figure, be it a mom/*uhmma* (엄마), an auntie/*imo* (이모), a grandma/*halmoni* (할머니), etc. They find ways to render the rigid and unchanging notions of authenticity plastic—opaque and flexible. The very "rituals, ceremonies, and collective memories" that create the imagined communities which seek to erase the mixed bodies are the same techniques being utilized to develop alternative modes of authenticity that are in fact *in*clusive rather than *ex*clusive (Featherstone 52). These micro acts of resistance embody what the framework of plastic authenticity sets out to establish. Bodies that exist to reaffirm the boundaries of Koreanness via "blood quantum," much like their Korean mothers betraying national/cultural citizenship as diasporic bodies, are uniquely positioned to be the ones to (re)define the parameters of authenticity altogether.

This chapter explores the ways that Korean mothers (and all acts associated with motherhood) become ever-present ghosts of sorts, haunting the racial narratives of mixed-race Korean-Americans. At the outset, this chapter distills current literature regarding the motherwork of raising and socializing mixed-race children, as well as

discourses in the field of mixed-race (specifically *hapa*) studies. The first case study examined, and perhaps the most high-profile mixed-race Korean-American in the U.S. is the case of MVP football player Hines Ward, and the intimate ways in which race and racialization operate on mixed bodies, including his contentious and winding road to racial and ethnic acceptance. The second case study analyzed is the web community *HalfKorean.com*, which is a large community of mixed-race Korean-Americans that engage in community building and support. While different in approach, in both case studies, traces and memories of food, household custom, and Korean motherhood are employed as ways to authenticate their experiences as Korean, despite inhabiting the historically *in*authentic mixed body. The project of plastic authenticity, then, is about validating those experiences of otherness by these as legitimate claims to cultural authenticity.

Ethnic Socialization and Hapa Discourse

Mothers, mothering, and motherhood are not just critical elements to explore regarding food or the Korean-American immigration narrative. These figures often get tasked with the (gendered) labor of recreating a sense of racial/ethnic authenticity in their children. Regarding ethnic identity and socialization, some common terms used within family science and sociological discourses are "racial socialization" and "ethnic socialization." Under the umbrella of ethnic socialization is the critical aspect of cultural socialization. Similar to enculturation, cultural socialization includes practices like exposing children to important cultural history, music, food, cultural holidays, and language, etc. (Hughes et al. 749). This ethnic-racial socialization and

their relationship to youths' ethnic identity is a common object of study, likely linked to the fact that many socialization practices aim at instilling a sense of pride or community knowledge in children. Hughes et al. note, "aspects of cultural socialization— including an emphasis on ethnic pride and language use, exposing children to positive aspects of their history and heritage, embedding children in cultural settings and events, and having ethnic objects in the home—have been examined most often" (761).

That said, the role of mothers in ethnic socialization is a critical aspect of the aforementioned cultural practices. Some of the literature regarding mothering to biracial children specifically has to do with the way in which, and the extent to which, mothers offer messages and engage with their children regarding their racial/ethnic heritage, and how they encourage their children to face the world. Regarding biracial youth broadly, family studies scholars Alethea Rollins and Andrea Hunter note, "Unlike monoracial youth, without a clearly defined 'biracial or multiracial' group, biracial youth are socially positioned between hierarchically organized racial groups. Within the context of this racial ecology, parents prepare their children for what they perceive as their future position within a racially stratified society" (Rollins and Hunter 142). Using the data from a longitudinal study conducted with public use data from the MADICS (Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study), Rollins and Hunter aimed to determine the frequency and method that mothers, through active discussion, encourage and prepare their children for being biracial and the ways they will eventually encounter race in society. The questions to mothers revolved around the topic of how they planned to protect their children from racial

discrimination, and how they were teaching them special things to help them deal with discrimination, etc. (Rollins and Hunter 145). Their findings indicate that the majority of mothers to biracial children (64%) engaged in some form of racial socialization, with the highest being "self-development messages" (49%) (146). Self-development messages were messages to children "encouraging them to do their best, to be smart, and to be respectful," as opposed to "egalitarian socialization," which encouraged color-blindness, or “silence,” which was an absence of racial or cultural dialogue altogether (146). Children are taught early on that they are different, and that their *performances* are more important than ignoring difference.

In a similar study regarding ethnic socialization in children, psychology and development scholars Chase Lesane-Brown et al, found that 34.5% of multiracial families discuss racial/ethnic heritage with their children at a frequency of “several times a month” (in comparison to several times a year, week, or never) (Lesane-Brown et al. 459). Both of these studies shed light on the aspects of the direct and intended discussion of cultural, racial, and ethnic socialization, demonstrating that there *are* concerted efforts by mothers to make their children aware of both an ethnic history as well as the racial climate in a U.S. context. What is particularly pertinent from this study is that for mothers, race/ethnicity and culture are not passive household factors, but readily visible elements that are a critical component in their long-term goals of socialization with their children—which the studies also show their commitment to some form of socialization, being that the majority of mothers employed multiple types of methods (e.g., egalitarian socialization in some situations, silence in others, etc.) (Rollins and Hunter 146).

Socialization from mothers in particular, then, is an essential factor for youths' acknowledgment of their own racial/ethnic socialization in adolescence. In a study examining the rate of intimacy from youths with their mothers and their subsequent viewing of their mothers as primary sources of ethnic socialization (and even further, racial and ethnic pride), it was found that youths who perceived they had a greater sense of intimacy with their mothers were more likely to acknowledge their subsequent socialization as being "individually oriented," meaning that their perceptions and relationships with others were on an individual basis, and not socialized to necessarily think that their actions or self-perceptions were reflective of the larger ethnic/racial group (Pernice-Duca and Owens 41). Particularly salient, these studies establish how (Korean) mothers (within the larger umbrella of the Korean Household) become an agent for biracial *self*-identification and the ways that the relationship with the Korean mother directly affect both their own ethnic identity construction but also in the manner that they project it. Conversely, mothers become sites for biracial children to exert racial identities, as mothers are directly linked with the reproduction of cultural values.

Identity for multiracial children (*hapas* specifically), then, is also a critical body of literature to engage. Co-opted *as a* signifier (in many ways problematically) for all Americans that are of some Asian racial configuration, the term hapa derives from a Hawaiian term, hapa-haole (hapa meaning half, and haole meaning foreigner) (Rietz 146). One of the primary reasons for employing this term is to challenge racial frameworks in American racial discourse that do not account for the multiracial Asian population or to have a language to reflect some sense of community identity.[47]

Indeed, identifying even in broad categories like Korean, Japanese, and even Asian American, have distinct limitations for those in-between these monoracial classifications, as these simplistic categories are intended to express commonalities among its members.

As a result of the history of these categories, multiracial individuals must exert a conscious effort to at once embody multiple racial identities. Mary Bernstein and Marcie de la Cruz note, as a response to monoracial categorization,

> Individuals of mixed race add perplexity and ambiguity to preset expectations that people hold for individuals of a particular racial/ethnic background. Multiracial individuals may not "fit" into extant physical preconceptions of what black, white, Asian, or Latina/o people look like. More importantly, *how one chooses to identify* may determine how he or she is perceived by others. (Bernstein and de la Cruz 736)

Thus, there is a distinct possibility to embrace being of multiple racial backgrounds, and publicly marking oneself as mixed, regardless of the surrounding company, but the individual is tasked with doing so. For people of mixed Asian ancestry in particular, due to (often) phenotypic ambiguity, this notion of "doing race" and having race "done to them" leads to direct conflicts with notions of passing, and on the other end of the spectrum, for bold contestations of one's mixedness or racial diversity, exerting what Teresa Williams-León refers to as "no passing zones," where one, despite passing for another race, outwardly and consciously identifies their racial complexities (147).

Likewise, in various social contexts, the “squeeze,” or pressure to align with a particular racial category, is an often unavoidable issue that many multiracial people face. In particular, one's phenotype often plays a role in the ways they are categorized by others, but also in how multiracial individuals *perceive* their level of acceptance from a racial group (Khanna 125). In reference specifically to college students, Heather Gasser notes, “for the student to be accepted by either White students or students of color, the person may have to choose one of her or his racial heritages and deny the other” (Gasser 66), further stating “the Internet also provides a type of shield and may allow students who are struggling with issues of racial identity to be more comfortable exploring the ways a multiracial identity can be asserted” (67). A major impetus for multiracial individuals to engage with digital spaces is this ability to have control over the manner in which they are perceived. It is the agency to express, in a (relatively) safe environment, one's personal concepts of race as it applies to them that they can challenge "either/or" constructs and embrace multiple racial identities.

Alongside the use of the Internet as an environment conducive to self-labeling, for *hapas* specifically, it marks a space where commonality through unifying terms and signifiers creates a community that transcends specific national, ethnic boundaries, in favor of a pan-Asian thread of synchronicity. Even if the experiences, for example, of a hapa-Korean and a hapa-Filipino may be drastically different, the community can engage the larger racial structure of "Asian" to foster unity. Likewise, these terms do not act simply as tags to flag potential viewers/participants. They operate as tangible signs that define the community’s autonomy, but more importantly, that a unified, yet diverse, group actually “exists”

(Warschauer 6). They become the gatekeepers for defining how and what kinds of experiences denote racial/ethnic authenticity, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

This is not without implication, however. Therefore, if there is unison by nature of language, this does not necessarily account for the racial inequalities faced by those that "pass," via dominant constructs of social colorism, and those that do not (Khanna 2004). Common language acts as a positive force for intragroup recognition and embrace of diversity. On the other hand, this does not necessarily assume that those outside of the community will have such a discerning eye, and may still render the hapa as an outsider, or with another racial category. Jennifer Jones notes, "The level of diversity within multiraciality may also become problematic when we evaluate it in terms of constructing the collective. Representing a vast range of ethnic and racial combinations, multiracials frequently have difficulty ascertaining what is actually shared about their mixed-race experience" (141). In essence, mixed-race identity construction is involved, and not informed merely by the individual's choice, but by socialization within the family, the perceptions of others (including those within one's social communities), as well as the social institutions and racial classification systems which one resides.

The literature suggests that both racialization and self-identification are much more complicated than merely "having a Korean mother," being able to speak the language, or arbitrarily choosing to identify with one particular racial group. Cultural studies scholar Ien Ang speaks on how "maintenance of cultural identity" also brought with it maintenance of being "othered" and confirmation of minority status (Ang 30).[48] Thus, in her confirmations to people that she does not speaks Chinese,

she becomes coded as *not* Chinese, or in her words, a "fake" Chinese (30). The concept of racial and cultural authenticity is a critical one, not only for understanding identity construction in general but also for understanding the profound ways in which perception and experience shape our concepts of cultural authenticity and cultural capital. For multiracial families in two-parent households, then, these ideas of "realness" in conjunction with an ability to speak the language compound the move for mixed-race subjects to assert and be recognized within an ethnic community. Language, culture, and socialization get put in conflict, and it is the role of the individual to navigate this contentious plane.

Learning to *Feel* Korean: The Case of Hines Ward

> At first, I was embarrassed that I had a Korean mom. I was embarrassed that my friends all had to take off their shoes before coming into my house. It was tough when my mom spoke broken English to my friends, and their parents and people couldn't understand what she was saying, or she couldn't understand what they were saying. But, at the same time, I wouldn't have changed my life for anything. My mom is my hero. She is the reason why I am who I am today. When other kids were doing all the wrong things, I was doing all the right things because my mom wouldn't have it any other way. She taught me to never quit on anything in life. She taught me the value of hard work, sacrifice, and perseverance. Although she is a little woman, she ruled our house with a big presence. She is my rock… Working with other children with similar backgrounds as me, I have learned to appreciate more and more the value of my own biracial upbringing. And this has motivated me to reach out to biracial kids all over the world and let them know it's OK to be the way you are. It's a good thing. And I have learned to appreciate my own heritage more and more as I work with these kids in their struggles. Being biracial is not a curse. It is the best blessing God could have ever given me.
>
> —Hines Ward, *The Korea Times* (2014)

In an interview with Arirang TV, a Korean television station aimed at international audiences, two-time Grammy-nominated R&B singer, Amerie[49], discusses various aspects of being Korean and how she performs her identity within her music career. In an interesting turn in the interview, the interviewer, a Korean native working for Arirang TV asks Amerie, "when do you feel most Korean?" to which she briskly retorts "all the time" (Arirang Kpop 2010). This is a telling moment, and whether unconscious or not, emblematic of a larger conversation that many multiracial individuals more broadly feel at some point in their lives. There are moments where one must actively code oneself as Korean when their phenotypic physical appearance may not readily give away this facet of a given racial identity. So often, the racial ambiguity of mixed-race individuals lends itself to a sense of confusion for others in their attempts to categorize them into traditional monoracial categories. Amerie for example troubles the notion that she, as a mixed-race individual cannot at once *always* be Korean and *still* be Black. For MVP football player Hines Ward, the grapple with the relationship of his Blackness and Koreanness did not come as readily a retort as it did for Amerie. He has come a long way from feeling ashamed of his Korean mother to being elected to serve in the Advisory Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islanders, as well as a role as an ambassador of the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, alongside figure skater Yuna Kim (Cook 2010).

If we consider the monoracial model itself, multiracial individuals challenge the notions of "racial purity" and that somehow being "all Black" or "all Korean" is a necessary factor to be able to retain and outwardly reflect a Black or Korean cultural

heritage (Root 30). Hines Ward highlights the difficulty in challenging these investments. Ward, in a reflection of the ways that people perceived and subsequently welcomed or rejected him from socially being accepted within certain communities, notes, "Going to school, Black kids teased me because I was Korean, so it was hard to try to fit in with Black kids, because they always made fun of my Korean side. Well, trying to hang out with Korean kids, they always teased me because I was Black. Trying to hang out with White kids, they teased me because I was Black and Korean" (Sir Hypnotoad 2009).

By juxtaposing dominant social connotations of Blackness with a mixed body that defies the categorization (and thus, distinguishing stereotypes associated with those particular categories), it is possible to see how multiracial subjects utilize the space "in-between" through the process of *strategic muting*. This is the process of covering up aspects of one's identity at specific moments, borrowing from Imani Perry, to derive narrative agency and craft dynamic and nuanced public personas (2011). In the same manner, Hines Ward selectively enunciates certain aspects of his life as Korean to craft unique and multilayered racial and ethnic identities. While Perry's discussion is rooted in the concept of passing, the term is employed to show the shifting and malleable nature of Blackness and Koreanness for Ward. The mixed-race individual, then, is in constant negotiation with various borders that contribute directly to certain performances of race and culture that become necessary to enunciate a mixed identity. This is especially pertinent in a racist society that marks Blackness as negative/undesirable and Asianness as eternally foreign.

The context of Ward's upbringing is a significant step in recognizing the intersectional ways that gender, race, class, and the Korean Household contribute to his public constructions of a complex identity. He was born Hines E. Ward Jr. on March 8th, 1976, in Seoul, Korea, to father Hines Sr. and Young He Ward. After a year, the family moved to the Atlanta area (Hinesward.com 2014). Hines Sr. then left for a military tour in Germany, and after a year upon his return, the couple divorced. Hines Sr. convinced the family court that Young He Kim was unfit to raise Hines Jr. due to her inability to speak English proficiently (Greenfeld 2006). Hines was put into the primary care of his paternal grandmother from age two to seven, with visitation from Kim as she taught herself English and worked three jobs to secure housing for her and Hines. During this time and for the rest of his life, Hines would have minimal contact with his father, who was also raised by a working-class single mother (Greenfeld 2006). Showing his prowess for football in junior high and high school, Ward was initially offered a contract right out of high school to play baseball for the Florida Marlins, choosing instead to first play college football for the Georgia Bulldogs at the University of Georgia (Hinesward.com 2014). After college, he was recruited to the Pittsburgh Steelers, going on to receive the Superbowl XL MVP honor.

Ward found himself resentful of his mother being the only Korean woman and him the only mixed-race child in a mostly working-class Black community. He painfully reminisces ducking in the car when his mother would take him to school so no one would see him with her, looking back to see her crying (Greenfeld 2006). Ward overwhelmingly described his childhood in terms of *shame* over being in any

way marked as Korean, not fully owning a complex identity until adolescence, when respect for his mother helped him flourish and embrace a mixed identity (Greenfeld 2006). The ways he internalized and marked a mixed-race identity gets fixed in many ways through his Korean mother. News coverage of Hines Ward as well is fixated on correlating the revelation of his Koreanness as firmly rooted to his mother, with most stories directly citing his mother's Koreanness when describing Ward's rise to fame. In an interview with the LA Times, Ward notes, "My mom is the reason why I'm here today…All the values that she instilled in me, that's who my mom is: a hard worker, nothing ever given to her, worked her tail off. I am here today because of my mom" (Crowe 2006).

Racially speaking, the particular formation of being half Black and half Korean is unique in the American socio-political landscape. It is a configuration imbued with not only dual racial structures, but also in a rich and sometimes contentious history, with interracial tensions emerging between Korean-Americans and African-Americans. These have historically been between Korean store owners and Black customers in economically depressed neighborhoods in LA, Chicago, and New York. Likewise, the impact of the Korean War and historical military presence in Korea contribute to a unique movement of Koreans in multiracial relationships into the U.S., as well as the subsequent coding of Korean women in a particular way for decades. In the postwar decades, up through the late 1970's and early 80's, the vast majority of Korean women that married American men (particularly GI's stationed in Korea) were overwhelmingly assumed to be prostitutes and club hostesses, even if the majority of couples simply had met on or near camptowns because of convenience

and prevalence of American men (Yuh 12). Thus, coinciding with a U.S. history that coded Blackness in negative terms, Korean women were also coded as prostitutes, which must be taken into consideration when discussing interracial interactions between Black and Korean communities.

To provide a brief historical backdrop of interracial interaction/tension, in the case of mixed Black and Korean-Americans, the context that they identify with either their Koreanness or Blackness is inevitably marred in an American history in which relations between the African-American and Korean communities have, at times, been tenuous. There were two distinct incidents, paired with racialized (White) media coverage and an economic system that cut federal funding to social programs/shifted jobs out of the country that further crippled lower income areas (specifically economically depressed neighborhoods in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago), which set into motion a period of inter-minority racial tension. The first was a New York boycott of Korean business as a result of a dispute between a Korean storeowner and a Black customer, with the boycott predicated on the claim that the merchants "treated customers with disrespect and contributed to the exodus of capital from the neighborhoods where they ran their stores" (Kim 535). The other occurred on the heels of the Rodney King trial in Los Angeles when a Korean store owner shot and killed a Black woman during a physical disagreement/confrontation over a box of orange juice (535). Due to cultural misunderstandings and dominant racial stratifications that construct racial inequality differently for different racial groups, these events culminated in deaths of both Korean and Black citizens through interethnic conflict, resulting in a stained history. This is partly as a result of

attributing "model minority" status to Korean-Americans despite them having little political power or wealth, further stratifying the potential for unity via shared structural inequality amongst racially oppressed groups (Park 64). While this history by no means defines Black/Korean interaction in its entirety or in today's time, it does highlight the very different experiences various racial groups encounter with inequality and oppression, making a singular racial experience/history for a mixed Black and Korean individual as a potentially unique site of contention.

Thus, resulting from potential lingering cultural misunderstanding, the possibility for identifying outright as a "Black and Korean-American," may in some situations be increasingly difficult. There is at once a history of monoracial categorization that labels them as simply "Black" to the white majority, yet the history of tension contains the inherent possibility of alienation from both groups. This is not to say, however, that this particular history *prevents* or is an absolute when it comes to community interaction. It is to further nuance the complex relationship history has on the concepts of race and racial identification.

That said, there is distinct importance in the notion of self-imposed racialization. Specifically, mixed-race individuals must choose to *perform* a racial or cultural identity, which is often through performances of cultural knowledge. This is juxtaposed with the social racializing imposed *upon them* via social constructions of race and ethnicity, i.e., read as simply a Black or an Asian body, rather than a *complex* racial and ethnic body. Similar to W.E.B. DuBois' theory of "double-consciousness," the act of "seeing oneself through the eyes of others" becomes a way in which mixed Black and Korean individuals, when read in monoracial categories,

internalize and subsequently must perform their cultural identities, i.e. their complex racial/cultural/ethnic identities (7). For Hines Ward, then, acts like establishing his Helping Hands Foundation in South Korea for the benefit of multiracial children, or acts like posing in traditional Korean *hanbok* dress with his mother, act as subtle (and some not so subtle) ways of enunciating Koreanness.

Fig. 15 Hines Ward and his mother wearing traditional Korean *hanbok* from: Oh, Mina. "8 American Celebrities Wearing Hanbok." *SweetandtastyTV.com*, 25 July, 2013.

The other major factor that influences the identity construction of mixed-race Korean-Americans is the previously mentioned term, the "Korean household." This is largely centered on the tropes of Korean motherhood, which includes borders like linguistic ones, the tensions between American household customs and Korean ones (for example, removing one's shoes before entering the house), and importantly with food. Knowledge of Korean food and the Korean mother are more often than not vocalized facets of mixed-race identity as they serve to, in some forms, "authenticate Koreanness." It is important to note that, just like Korean food in the American

culinary imaginary is gendered, so is the Korean household, which acts as a critical factor in identity construction.

Pairing notions of "motherhood," food, and household customs, then, act as specific methods that half-Koreans employ to mark themselves as Korean. Hines Ward subtly enunciates his Korean identity. His connection is heavily rested in his mother, even showing some confusion toward his upbringing in a "Korean household." An article in *USA Today* about Ward reads, "At home, he didn't understand why his mother struggled with English, couldn't help him with his homework and made him take his shoes off before he walked in the door… He blamed his Korean mother for the teasing he got on the playground in suburban Atlanta." Ward notes, "I was ashamed of the person who instilled everything in me. I let the kids get the better half of me" (Wiseman 3). Even though he lacks the ability to speak Korean at a native level, he clearly invokes a Korean identity firmly through his mother. Very rarely does she actually weigh in on this upbringing or the Korean values she instilled, but is recalled strategically both by Ward and by those interviewing him, to make sense of his diverse background. In all of these instances, his mother haunts his narrative of identity, leaving traces of herself through the mouthpiece of her son. His Koreanness is acceptable because the Korean woman that raised him was such a paragon of the "Korean virtues" of hard work, discipline, and good food.

While initially a source of shame, for Hines Ward, he echoes these same memories of these customs as noted in the opening quote, that "I was embarrassed that I had a Korean mom. I was embarrassed that my friends all had to take off their

shoes before coming into my house. It was tough when my mom spoke broken English to my friends, and their parents and people couldn't understand what she was saying, or she couldn't understand what they were saying" (Han 2014). He later turns those very memories into the source of strength he had to become the Superbowl MVP that he is today, directly crediting the "Korean-style" upbringing of his mother. Likewise, in a common theme that will be discussed in the following section, food operates a source of pride and cultural identity for Ward, again hearkening back to his mother's Korean household, stating, "My favorite part of the Korean culture? I would have to say it's the food. I love Korean food, and I go eat Korean barbecue at least once a week with my wife and son. I have always loved Korean food because that's what my mom always fed me growing up. My mom makes the best Korean chicken wings and kulbi [sic] around my area" (Han 2014). His source of Korean identity directly informed by these forms of Korean care and motherhood, in experiences with Korean custom and values that dictate his perspective on his authentic Koreanness.

Blackness in terms of a social construct, then, is outwardly imposed via stereotypes and connotative imagery, and I argue that in the case of Hines Ward, Koreanness occupies an interior position. As a Black and Korean body is continuously read/portrayed in popular media as simply "Black," Koreanness must be invoked from the individuals themselves.[50] This has clear implications for the audience of the invocation because, at the point in which the conception of singular Blackness is troubled by Koreanness, the result is a dramatically altered perception of "color." The method of marking Koreanness on a "Black" body is employed in various ways by Ward. One particularly salient way that Ward enunciates his

Koreanness is to associate the virtues and values he has with Koreanness when his body does not give away the intended racial association. Regarding parenting style, he notes,

> I remember one day I got in trouble at school. The principal called my mom, and my mom told the school that she would be right there. My mom walked straight into my classroom, all maybe 4-foot-10 of her, and she paddled me right in front of all my classmates. My mom didn't play. She wanted to teach me a lesson I would never forget, and I have never forgotten it since… I guess you could say I will teach my son the "Korean" way when it comes to discipline and education. It worked well for me. And I'm sure it will work well for him. (Han 2014)

The "Korean way" gets evoked as a set of values and experiences, rather than simply as something quantified by phenotype or blood. He narrates this knowledge and expertise on being raised Korean, and the ways he plans to transmit this "lifestyle" to his son.

By nature of the term, any act of identifying as Black, Korean, or "Blasian" (Black and Asian) to others is considered as some degree of "public" behavior; however, enunciating and associating with various identity markers by nature of being 'hyper'public (hypervisible) via celebrity status is one direction of this research. Popular culture links directly with constructed notions of race, gender, and sexuality. According to visual culture scholar Nicole Fleetwood,

> In the contemporary context, the plenitude of Black bodies in advertising, entertainment, and dominant visual culture, generally

> speaking, occlude material conditions based on power imbalances. Specifically, the marketability and desirability of the Black body, particularly the Black male body, is premised on its very danger and aberration – its ability to move smoothly along a scale of international recognition as a popular iconic figure to one of the millions of Black bodies in the prison industrial complex. (Fleetwood 111)

Therefore, Black bodies that exist within the larger visual culture (the U.S. specifically) become embroiled in constructs that both exploit and connote specific designations as to how their bodies are being received and disseminated. On the other hand, within these dominant portrayals exist possibilities to subvert these notions. Concomitantly, celebrity figures like Hines Ward are interacting not only with cultural conceptions of Blackness, Koreanness, gender, and sexuality, but also the appropriation of these cultural conceptions via marketing, consumerism, hypervisibility, and cultural appropriation by outsiders of those racial/ethnic communities.

It is also critical to point out the ways that the concept of race is always invested in gender and sexuality. American studies scholar Michelle Wright notes, "the nationalist myth that produces a racial Other also insists on a heteropatriarchal structure wherein men and women who fail to conform to the idealized heterosexual relation of active male and passive female are also produced as Other" (6). For the mixed-race subject, then, multiple racial configurations interact with dominant heteropatriarchal understandings of gender and sexuality. Specifically, conceptions of femininity and masculinity as they relate to both Asianness and Blackness, create

very different parameters in which one fits within a heteropatriarchal system of classification. Interestingly, embedded in the intersection of "Asian" and "Black" (as connotative racial structures) is an almost diametrically opposed historical conception of masculinity/femininity and gender.

From a gendered perspective, for Hines Ward, the very nature of his performance in a masculine arena like sports (specifically football), undercuts the sexual associations with his mixed racial background. The Black male, via public discourse, is rendered as hypermasculine, and the Asian male as hyperfeminine. Hines Ward mitigates the associations with Asian-male femininity by successfully performing in a highly masculinized space (sports). Not only is he performing masculinity when playing sports; he is noteworthy, having received an MVP title and continued success after his sports career ended with him having a contract as an NBC sports analyst (wpxi.com 2012). Both his Blackness and his Koreanness trouble dominant cultural perceptions of either category. At the end of the day, he is still able to proudly announce his Korean heritage without the "social repercussions" of Asian-male feminine association because of his pronounced displays of traditional masculinity. Through sports, and being *successful* in sports, he can fluctuate between racial categories without shouldering the burdens of the gender/sexual associations with either.

It is the ability to trouble racial structure *selectively* that is such a valuable space of analysis. Here I return to Imani Perry's discussion of muting. While still considered an oppressive force, muting is a method of masking "critical expressions of identity," Perry further noting, "although passing was always seen as at best

resistant rather than truly liberating, the success of the 'covering' person of color is still often imagined as a sign of our dramatic transformation into an authentic salad-bowl culture" (136). If muting is the conscious or unconscious covering of various aspects of one's identity, then movement between and the push up against the borders of racialized connotations of Black or Korean people become possible. Ward actively rejects the notion that he has to identify in static terms. He regularly refers to himself as Black, Korean, and biracial interchangeably depending on the questions being asked and the audience he is engaging, showing a keen (and purposeful) ability to not just selectively mute, but also engage in wearing different "racial uniforms," by which he does not passively adopt different personas in different situations, but actively employs various elements of his identity strategically (Takaki 1989).

This is not to say that strategically utilizing being in-between two cultures is always a concerted and conscious effort on the part of mixed-race Koreans, but that it is an *inherent* site of transgression. For instance, Hines Ward capitalized on his Koreanness when he returned to Korea, earning him honorary citizenship and further the opportunity to establish a critical foundation for mixed children. Interestingly for Ward, however, the "claim" to him as a Korean did not happen until winning an MVP title, when prior his mother was shunned for having a mixed-race child.[51] His rendering of race as ambiguous, permeable, and contextually contingent nets him the opportunity to reimagine dominant monoracial categories both intentionally and unintentionally.

In essence, the Black-Korean subject is a dialectical one, formed from negotiations with interior Koreanness and dominant social connotations of Blackness,

in synthesis to create a multiracial/multiethnic body. The employment of 'dialectic,' borrows from Michelle Wright's use of the term. She references the Hegelian dialectic, stating "central to Hegel's philosophy of history is, of course, its dialectic structure driven by an *Aufhebung* that signifies continual progress, an 'overcoming' of the antithesis that necessarily leads to a 'synthesis'" (34). For a mixed Black and Korean person, then, this "synthesis" is the manner of their public perception. This is read merely as a body of color, or further, a Black body, based on historical monoracial categories. It is evident, then, that there is the possibility of embracing being of multiple racial backgrounds, and publicly marking oneself as mixed, regardless of the surrounding company, but the individual is tasked in doing so.[52]

For all mixed-race individuals, the ability to seamlessly be 'either-or' is invested in the manner that they mark themselves with whatever particular community they are interacting with; however, it is at once simultaneously invested in larger dichotomous national narratives about race (Black or white). Hines Ward goes out of his way to enunciate and assert a mixed heritage, and coincidentally the media was also quick to latch onto his mixedness. His mother became as much an object of his narrative as a football MVP as his skills on the field. Countless articles refer to his mother's tireless work to work multiple jobs to raise him, and as described, he directly refers to his success and his experiences with being Korean with his mother and her own experiences, going so far as to invoke her pain and bitterness to her harsh treatment *in* Korea for having born a biracial son. He notes,

> I was beginning to see how my Korean heritage and culture saw things. And I began to start feeling pride in my Korean side. This pride

> really increased when I received an honorary citizenship from the mayor of Seoul in front of thousands of people. I was so touched by that and by seeing the entire city of Seoul come out to thank and support me that it was at that time that I actually apologized to the Korean people for the bitterness and distrust I had had for all those years. I think that first trip to Korea in 2006 really changed how my mom and I both felt about Korean people. I have forgiven, and so has my mom. (Han 2014)

His inherited trauma from his mother directly influenced his bitterness toward Korea and subsequently Korean people. Not having lived in Korea since being an infant, he was so deeply invested in his mother's influence on his Koreanness, that he literally reproduced and bore her pain and bitterness that she had toward a country that rejected her and her child. Ward's relationship to his own Korean identity, but also Korea is a complex one, where he intermittently invokes his own experiences being called "Bruce Leroy,"[53] with his experiences in the Korean household, and his own mother's relationship to Korea and Koreanness. It shows that culture and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive, but part of a continually shifting discourse, filled with overlaps and slippages.

Thus, in a discussion about the ways that multiracial individuals perceive and project themselves in the process of identity exploration, Maria Root proposes that three processes occur; exposure/absorption, competition/stratification, and reflective appraisal (36). Her larger project examines how multiracial Asians challenge "full" Asian Americans to rethink concepts of race and issues with racism that occur within

our communities. These three processes define the ways that multiracial Asians' self-perceptions drive the reimagining of what it means to be Asian American. Particularly applicable to the online half-Korean community discussed in the following section, then, her description of the first process reads, "Exposure/absorption is the process of orienting and assigning meaning to new material. With input from others, one learns to interpret new information and absorb it into schemas through a schema of constructive differentiation or destructive differentiation" (36). This is particularly apt for theorizing the usefulness of the aforementioned notions of language and motherhood. In particular, taking motherhood and its influence on both identity, but also on its critical interaction with the Korean household, speaks not only to mixed-race individuals and their process of identity formation but also to aspects of "Koreanness" in the American cultural imaginary.

"This is a Korean house! Take off your shoes!": The Case of *HalfKorean.com*

> Tiger Woods, great Black golfer, nobody ever says he's an Asian golfer. Here's what I know coming from a mixed background myself. Barack Obama, half-Black, half-white, you can be the first Black president. Tiger Woods, half-Black, half-Asian, you can be a Black golfer. Steve Byrne… gook. I have been called gook, chink, pan face, slope, Short Round, Data, "I killed your dad in Vietnam," I heard all those things, okay? My last name is Byrne, and I've never been called Irish in my life. I was in Dublin on St. Patrick's Day going around "hey, kiss me I'm Irish!" "No, you're not." What the hell do I have to do? When you're mixed we gotta call you something, what do we call you? Here's what we call you. Whatever dilutes the water. Whatever kinda messes up the whitey, that's what you are.
>
> —Steve Byrne, *The Byrne Identity* (2010)

For Steve Byrne, being mixed-race means being read in one way despite heritage, but that a core facet of his experience being multiracial means being quantified in one's proximity to whiteness, or more appropriately, being quantified in his proximity *from* whiteness. It would seem then that racially, being "authentically white" implies an unmixed bloodline (despite how myopic and impossible it is to define that notion). Steve Byrne does not *get* to be white. He is coded Asian; however, there are surely many that would call foul and do not consider him to be "authentically" Korean either. What does it mean, then, to be "authentically" Korean? In many ways, ethnic authenticity is defined in terms of one's "blood quantum" to a given group of people, but there is an inevitable intersection of culture that factors into the equation. Does speaking Korean imply Koreanness? Knowing Korean history? What does it mean to "look" Korean? What about Korean adoptees to non-Korean families? Are they "more Korean" than Steve Byrne? In an age where celebrity and Olympic gold-medal figure skater, Yuna Kim, is widely noted as a model Korean, where do people like comedian Steve Byrne, football MVP Hines Ward, Grammy-nominated R&B singer Ameriie, or the thousands and thousands of other multiracial Koreans all around the world, fall in the configuration? Additionally, what does this configuration do for their ability to build community and exercise authenticity?

Building and finding community is an important facet of social life for all people, and for mixed-race Korean-Americans, that sentiment is no different. Many multiracial Koreans seek community in monoracial groups from either side of their heritage, and until recently, particularly in this digital age, there were no spaces where

mixed-Koreans could build community with other mixed Koreans. Enter the website HalfKorean.com, with a tagline “An online community for mixed-race Koreans” (HalfKorean.com 2017). Based on the U.S. west coast (primarily in LA and San Francisco), this web portal hosts a number of arms invested in fostering a sense of community-based around mixed-Korean heritage. The website boasts yearly meetup events, spanning from 1998 through 2017. The site includes a site-blog, interviews with prominent mixed-race Koreans, forthcoming links to relevant articles, a "Mixed Korean Tattoo Project," where Korean inspired tattoos on mixed-race Koreans are featured, a mission statement and group history, "Mix-Kor” merchandise, and even a vibrant social media presence (2017).

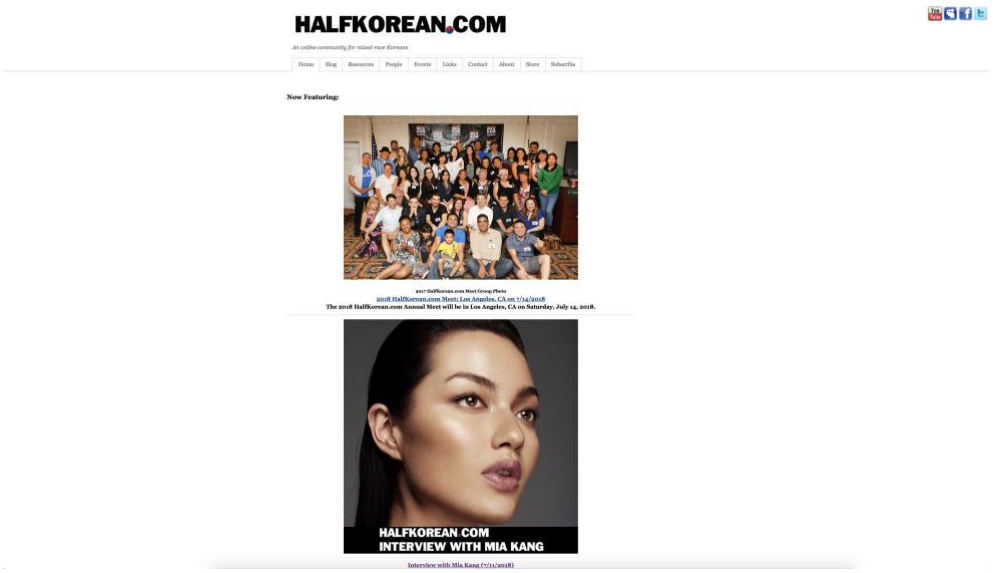

Fig. 16 Homepage from the HalfKorean.com community webpage from: Sanders, David Lee. “HalfKorean.com: An Online Community for Mixed-Race Koreans.” *Halfkorean.com*, 2018.

This chapter pays particular attention to the testimonials and interviews with prominent mixed-Koreans to discern the community's "methodology" of creating shared experiences. Issues of language, food, and the strategic recalling of narratives

of motherhood are employed regularly in ways that I argue foster community and denote cultural authenticity in ways that sidestep the dominant investments in linguistic fluency or phenotypic associations. This community actively redefines what it means to be "authentically Korean" by demonstrating a commonality of experience rather than authenticity through phenotype.

In a study of immigrant Koreans and the link between family cohesion and linguistic fluency, psychologist Irene Kim Park mentions "adolescents' Korean ethnic identity mediates the influence of family processes on native language fluency. More specifically, greater family cohesion was associated with stronger ethnic identity, which in turn was related to higher levels of Korean language fluency" (410). Interestingly, this study proposes that Korean ethnic identity is tied to a higher language competency. From the findings among the hapa community and other online communities catering to half-Koreans, however, linguistic capability is relatively limited, mostly to the conversational or affective level. Among interviews on the *HalfKorean* website with prominent half-Koreans, the majority do not speak Korean or speak very basic conversational Korean, often infantilizing their level of comprehension to that of a child, recalling memories of speaking Korean with mothers in youth, and then growing up to forget it. For instance, in an interview with Miss Miami USA 2013, Christina Sthair, she says "I only know the very, very basic like *anyonghasaeyo* (hello) and *kamsahamnida* (thank you) and *baegopayo* (I'm hungry)" (HalfKorean.com 2012). Actress Moon Bloodgood says, "My Korean is very informal and I sound like a child… I'm actually just very insecure about my ability to speak Korean because I speak it so informally" (2013). Singer-songwriter

Priscilla Ahn says her Korean is “child-like or beginner” (2011). Comedian Steve Byrne notes he was fluent “a bit when I was younger” (2010). Former Olympian Debbie Green notes, "I remember when I was in kindergarten and telling my mom that I was an American and that I was only speaking English" (2013).

In many cases, Korean linguistic capabilities are folded directly into memories of their mothers, recalling similar stories of "speaking it when they were young," and subsequently forgetting it, or even pushing back against their mothers' efforts to speak Korean with them, much like the case of Debbie Green. Actress Denyce Lawton says that she understands the language and can “communicate with my mom mostly” (2004). There is also a trend among interviewees that the narrative of language acquisition is sidelined by noting that their Korean is bad because their mothers wanted to learn English, as Priscilla Ahn notes, “… my mom didn’t teach me that much because she was just trying to get better with her English. Her English is very good now” (2011).

Former football linebacker, Ben Leber notes, “… of course, we would get the cuss words in Korean from our mom as she would be yelling at us and she would just switch it over because she would get frustrated trying to find the right word in English and then would just go off on us in Korean. We would know that she was really pissed when should would yell at us in Korean!” (2014). Interestingly, this knowledge of “only the cuss words” is not unique to Leber, with many interviewees responding to the question that their linguistic capabilities are limited to affective speech. MMA promoter Scott Coker notes, “…I am still able to decipher when I’m getting yelled at, I know all the foul words” (2016). Other prominent person

interviews that echo this same sentiment include television personality Michael Yo, journalist Yunji de Nies, and entertainer Steve Kim. In the case of speaking Korean, the narratives on the website are often overlapped and reminiscent of each other.

There are clear trends that speaking Korean happens with mothers only and Korean is affective at best and positioned temporally in childhood. In the case of reality TV personality Moogega Cooper, she literally positions her language acquisition in a direct line of cause and effect with her mother. Regarding learning Korean, she says, "…I'm learning and trying to make my mom proud" (2013). All of these cases, however, in some ways directly indict their mothers (not necessarily negatively) as the root of their struggles with the Korean language, couching the burden of the acquisition on mothers. Clearly, however, linguistic capability is not the defining factor of Koreanness for these half-Korean individuals, and Korean identity is sought out in other ways, many of which are sutured directly into their direct experiences with mothers or Korean women.

Instead, the uniqueness of non-native English speaking mothers with their children and the *lack* of Korean language fluency becomes an emergent factor of community building, rather than demonstrations of fluency. According to linguistic acquisition studies and childhood developmental milestones, by year three and beyond, children have deeply ingrained colloquial knowledge of language, understandable by adults, and shifts in speech from this point are generally stylistic (Lust 270). The utility of this fact, then, is that these linguistic slippages between English and Korean (in part informed by the Korean mother's role as primary caregiver) have documented effects on language acquisition and fix themselves

"permanently" on the subject.[54] It is in this lack of native linguistic capabilities that half-Koreans learn to (publicly) mark their Koreanness through different avenues—often through comical and endearing "Konglish" (slang for mixed Korean-English) interactions with a Korean mother, being able to "understand it" but not speak it, and even further, through Korean food. Flirtations with language that are not *speaking* but simply being *involved* with Korean then, becomes a way in and of itself to demonstrate authentic Koreanness, not necessarily in a national/citizen-based imagination of cultural identity, but firmly through the Korean mother.[55] Singer-songwriters and sisters, Meg and Dia Frampton note, "Meg cannot speak it but can understand a conversation spoken in Korean very well. It's kinda eerie. For example, my mom will be talking to someone on the phone for 20 minutes and then Meg will say, 'apparently our Aunt is getting new furniture and isn't sure if she spent too much money'" (HalfKorean.com 2011).

Therefore, there must be alternative avenues outside of native-level language ability for mixed-race Korean-Americans to assert a cultural identity. These alternative ways to demonstrate a knowledge of, and lived experience of Koreanness, constitute the "Korean Household." Aspects like food and household traditions are largely private and emerge as identity markers that the multiracial child selectively employ in order to exert a racial/ethnic identity that may not always be phenotypically evident or authenticated through native linguistic competency. One of these aspects of the Korean Household that become both identity markers and spaces of embodied socialization are the cultural traditions that, while not necessarily solely "Korean" per say, are traditions often dispatched when one speaks on their

Koreanness. Generational household habits like taking off shoes when entering the house, education being something of paramount importance, having Korean furniture/decorations and eating on the floor become signifiers of a lived experience within the specifically "Korean Household." This household is also decidedly gendered, with these traditions historically couched under the umbrella of motherwork.

All of these elements of embodied practice (household custom), the recalling of moments passed, and the construction of identity are individual ones, but in many ways informed by and through Korean mothers. While there are no actual interviews with Korean mothers on the *HalfKorean* website, their presence is felt throughout, particularly in the interviews and testimonials section of the site. Pictures of mixed-Koreans with their mothers and stories outlining their Korean identities in connection with their mothers litter the interviews. Very much in line with what sociologist Avery Gordon has discussed as "haunting," Korean mothers embody a spectral presence in the community, where they are decidedly absent, yet their touch can be felt in the crafting of life experience of Koreanness. Gordan says,

> If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life … The way of the ghost is haunting, and

> haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition. (8)

If Korean mothers are not actually *there,* the products of their presence are in the construction of the website itself. In interviews, very rarely are mothers ever mentioned in the actual interview questions themselves (questions favor broad strokes like "did you experience identity issues growing up?" or "what is your favorite Korean food?" or "was your family accepting of you?"), but the line of questioning and the subsequent trends for mixed-Koreans to narrate their experiences and identity in conjunction with their mothers illustrates the value and importance of Korean mothers in the formation of Korean *identity.* Interviewees choose to illustrate their constructions of identity in ways that privilege their experiences with their Korean mothers—for instance, the previous example of Moogega Cooper whose rationale for learning Korean is to literally make her mother proud, or in the case of professional MMA fighter James Moontasri, noting how his mother used to feed him *samgyetang* (삼계탕) with lots of ginger to make him strong (HalfKorean.com 2016). One can enunciate a sense of "authentic" Korean identity if the teacher of one's Koreanness is asserted as an *authentic* Korean woman. There is an underlying current that assumes the position that *authenticity begets authenticity,* regardless of blood or language acquisition.

Employing haunting is a way of analyzing the combined effect of experience with social systems that make suturing oneself, one's mixed self, into institutions that have blind spots and are unable to account for one's literal body. As described in this chapter, the concept of race in the United States is one that is heavily invested in monoracial categorization and subsequent ranking of those races. So much is the U.S. invested in this form of classification, that even races and ethnicities that fall outside of merely Black and white have problems suturing themselves into this dichotomy. The history of Asian, indigenous, and Latinx within a Black-White binary is equally troubled, so for a mixed-race person to practice the expected postmodern project of "individualism," they must find ways to engage with the liminality of racial categories and find the slippages. Being read as authentic is not merely about being hip, or having social capital, but about finding oneself in the shadows of social systems that are specifically designed not to accommodate you.

Avery Gordon asserts that "paying attention to the disjuncture between identifying a social structure (or declaring its determinate existence) and its articulation in everyday life and thought, I have hoped that working at understanding these gaps, the kinds of visions eradicate the gap—it is inevitable—but to fill in the content differently" (19). Building a community that circulates common experiences with Korean motherhood not only works to have people share common experiences but to literally authenticate the experience of operating in a space of liminality. Creating commonality fills that gap that social systems leave open. When one, by nature of *being*, is rendered as inauthentic, what work needs to be done to shift the rigidity of authenticity to be inclusive? It is more than just finding other mixed

people, but about asserting that one's experiences with race and culture are in fact real and shared by many people; that is the entire function of an imagined community. Korean mothers essentially become ubiquitous boundary objects of identity. Susan Leigh Starr and James R. Griesemer utilize this term as follows,

> Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a collective identity across sites. They are weakly structured in common use and become strongly structured in individual site use. These objects may be abstract or concrete. They have different meanings in different social worlds, but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is a crucial process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds. (176-7).

Narrations of Korean motherhood operate on one hand to demonstrate that there are certain ways to be Korean. Enunciating familiar tropes of Korean motherhood like learning how to curse in Korean from an angry Korean mom, or learning household custom, or learning what "real" Korean food is, while gendered and universalist in nature, serve as a way to authenticate the individual. No two narratives of Korean motherhood are the same, but by operating similarly in broad strokes, Korean motherhood becomes structured as a site of expression, and a recognizable trait in building a world that is comprised of people of multiple ethnic and racial combinations. For example, Hines Ward, who experiences the world being read as a

Black man, can have a translatable experience of Koreanness with Steve Byrne, who's racial configuration is white and Korean, because they can ground their hard work ethic, their knowledge of Korean food and custom, and their mothers' experiences with race and racism as sites of commonality. Though they personally will experience the systems of race dramatically differently, their mothers, read phenotypically on the surface as distinctly Asian, (assumedly) share a similar experience with U.S. racial politics. Korean mothers operate as this boundary object that links the various nodes of race in dominant social systems. Will Steve Byrne and Hines Ward experience "race" differently in the U.S.? Of course! However, their *Koreanness* is now undisputable as it is firmly rooted in a caricature and legacy of authentic Koreanness. Again, they become authentic because their mothers are rendered as authentic.

The experiences and interactions with the Korean mother become coded into tropes and trends that become ubiquitous signifiers of Korean mothers and an integral part of the Korean Household. Shifting back to the HalfKorean.com community, many interviewees narrate their experiences with their mothers in thoughtful and often comical ways. Yunji de Nies, regarding identity issues growing up, notes,

> My mother is that classic Korean mom. When I would start a new school year she would go to the teacher and would say, "Yunji is not challenged enough and make sure she gets extra homework." It was never enough according to her standards. I remember one summer in the third grade, I had to sit down for two hours a day for the entire summer and copy an entire children's dictionary word for word. I had

> to write the whole thing out. My mother is amazing, but I had a lot of resentment because she was so hard on me. It was like I would get an *A*- and she would ask why it wasn't an *A*. I never sort of understood that drive. But then went I went there and spent more time with my family and saw their education system and how hard they are pushed. What we go through compared to what my cousin's go through in terms of education are like light and day. They are so challenged and work so hard and are studying constantly. Then I understood a lot more about why my mom was so tough on me, and I appreciated it a little more. (2012)

For Yunji de Nies, then, in a question about identity issues, she directly places that in line with her experiences with a mother hyper-invested in her education, or as she puts it, a "classic Korean mom." Her experience of struggling with her mother directly correlates to her classic Koreanness. While she rounds out the anecdote in appreciation, she firmly fixes it in relation to her identity, with her mother becoming the object with which she can assert a kind of cultural knowledge about Korean women. Acknowledging that she's a "classic Korean mom" insinuates that this trait of overzealous educational investment is something endemic to Korean mothers, but also a quality that is widely enough known to assert without context. Her mother haunts this narrative of identity construction by being present and *constructive* without actually being there.

In a comedic turn, TV personality Michael Yo echoes a comical anecdote about growing up and his relationship to his Korean mother through an interview question regarding favorite foods. Regarding his favorite Korean foods, he notes,

> I don't like kimchi (김치), and I never got over the smell of it. You know what I mean? I'm not a big kimchi fan at all. My mom had so much of it in the house refrigerator that it stunk up the house, so they ended up moving to the garage refrigerator and then it smelled up the garage and the car. So when you would get into the car, you would smell the kimchi! It was awful! That kinda turned me off on kimchi. I love rice. My mom would cook rice with every meal. (2013)

In a similar vein, where her mother comes up in a question about her parents' acceptance of her job as a model, Lisa Fleming recalls, "Well, my Mom is just like 'You crazy I don't know you!' in her Korean accent. haha… Then, I just say, 'Don't worry Mom, I'm going to buy you a house,' and then she smiles like 'Whatever, I'll believe it when I see it'" (2009).

Ethnic comedy and the employment of the mother in a comical nature is by no means a unique occurrence to Michael Yo, Lisa Fleming, or even a uniquely Korean occurrence. In fact, mothers being the center of jokes spans many comedy acts from people of various ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Judy Gold, George Wallace, Kevin Hart, Steve Byrne, Jo Koy, Amy Schumer, George Lopez, etc.). That said, it is critical to reference arguably the most famous Korean-American comedian, Margaret Cho. While not multiracial, one of the most memorable and popular aspects of her stand-up routines are in the imitations of her mother. Part of the humor in her comedy is both

in her physical impersonation of her mother (hunching her body over, pinching her face inward, and squinting her eyes), but also in her transformation of a heavily accented voice and grammatically incorrect English. She plays on the stereotypes associated with Asian women that her mother embodies (crassness and being loud, misunderstanding of the intricacies/slang of the English language, making fun of white people, etc.) and in ways diffuses ethnic difference, creating a parody of mothers and motherhood in general, leading to her humor being translatable to a vast audience—her fan base is in no way solely or even the majority Asian Americans.

This form of ethnic comedy that Cho capitalizes on (and the use of the mother as a comedic fixture in general) is equally applicable to mixed-race individuals as well. It communicates an understanding of ethnic caricatures that travel, but narrating the Korean mother in comedy de facto conveys lived experience, which is a vital aspect of identity. Steve Byrne, in his comedy special *Happy Hour*, recalls a comical anecdote about growing up mixed and not fitting in, and venting that aggression and identity issues on his mother, noting,

> … I was angry, I was hormonal, I was always in my room, door locked, and who did I take it out on? My parents; the two people that loved me the most. My parents go over to my door and just try to say something nice, you know?
>
> MOM: (imitating mother's Korean accent) Hey! Hey! Steven! Hey Steven! Hey itsa mom...
>
> STEVE: REALLY?! (frowns)
>
> MOM: Heyyy! We gonna eat dinner, come eat with the family ok?

STEVE: (yelling) NO LEAVE IT IN THE MICROWAVE I'LL EAT LATER BY MYSELF CAUSE I HATE YOU!

MOM: Well I love you.

STEVE: I HATE YOU.

MOM: I love you.

STEVE: HATE YOU!

MOM: (whispers) Love you. (Happy Hour 2008)

Byrne later goes on to echo his fondness of his parents in his interview with HalfKorean.com, noting, "When you start at open mikes, it's usually a "bringer" show. You have to bring two audience members to pay a cover charge, and you get 5 minutes of stage time. My parents were my two audience members once a week for about 3 months. They were so very supportive of me and stand up. I owe a lot to them" (2010). In both instances, he is narrating experiences that would be common experiences for anyone growing up and experiencing puberty, or being in a situation that requires parental support, but he narrates them (in the standup special in particular) in a way that echoes what Margaret Cho does as well, in crafting a caricature, paired with broken English and a thick accent of his mother. He is employing them with the explicit knowledge that these tropes of Korean motherhood will be widely recognizable (if not problematic), but also assigns these memories as vital to his upbringing and his growth as a person.

Separately, food for the mixed-Korean community acts as a system of signs that constitute a "language" with which to mark themselves as "Korean." Among the various interviews on "HalfKorean.com," there were multiple references to food as

being signifiers of their Korean heritage. When asked if she eats Korean food, model and actress, Denyce Lawton, exclaims "Yes!!! I love Kimchi… all kinds (hate the fish sauce). I love kalbi, bulgogi, and japchae" (2004). Professional Korean-league basketball player Daniel Sandrin says, "I love pretty much all Korean food in Korea. Can't really stomach the 'Korean' food in America anymore," and ABC news journalist, Yunji de Nies states, "I love Korean food. When I get sick, I always get *samgyetang* (삼계탕). That just heals me. I'm very much into Korean food and can eat it every day" (halfkorean.com 2012). Every single interviewee mentions some knowledge of food, ranging from the widely popular Korean BBQ, *bulgogi* (불고기), and *galbi* (갈비), but in many cases expressing love for more unique Korean foods that are not nearly as common in the American cultural landscape like *nakji bokkeum* (낙지볶음/octopus) or *ojingeo bokkeum* (오징어볶음/squid) (HalfKorean.com 2017). Interestingly, Daniel Sandrin even employed knowledge of an imagined regional "authenticity" to native Korean food in his remarks about the food he loves in Korea versus what he cannot "stomach" in America. Further, more "authentic" food implied a more authentic Korean existence.[56]

Food becomes such an integral part of the identity formation process that it even becomes a site of contention when misunderstood by "outsiders." As director/producer Scotty Curlee states,

> What's interesting is, when I first got married, my wife didn't understand how important Korean food was as a part of my life. When I would eat Korean food, she would complain about the smell and

> would light candles and stuff. I used to get really offended by it because I felt that she wasn't just insulting my food but I took it as her insulting my heritage, culture, and people. Eventually, I learned that she didn't mean anything by it and now that I'm in my 30's, I've learned not to take things so seriously. (HalfKorean.com 2011)

Thus, Korean food acts as an agent to reify and substantiate a Korean identity and becomes a type of boundary object in and of itself as well. Food gets employed in individual narratives but is simultaneously translated to have different meanings for the mixed-race community as a whole, but the element of emotional attachment is strong in every case (Starr and Griesemer 2015).

It is important to note that the use of authenticity, specifically regarding food, but also in its application to the identity markers used to connote "authentic Koreanness," draws from the notion that authenticity is not fixed and inherently embedded in food/cultural habits, but is entirely subjective, depending on an individual/community's habits of behaving, styling, eating, and preparing food—in short, context-specific (Oum 2005, Heldke 2003). “Authentic” Korean food and its movement throughout America is dependent on context as well. “Authentic” Korean food in the larger American food landscape may have different defining factors than it does for multiracial families. Authentic food for the mixed-race subject is often invested in the food that specific mothers, grandmothers, and aunties are cooking. Professional fitness competitor, Natalie Penington notes, “my mom makes the best kimchi-jigae” (HalfKorean.com 2010). Food as a type of boundary object, then, is a core facet of cultural marking for the mixed-Korean, and when paired with

conceptions of race and community acceptance/building, it is possible to see how complex the process of identity construction is for mixed-raced Korean-American individuals.

Conclusions

Authenticity and indeed the Korean mother operate under a framework of what Avery Gordon calls "sensuous knowledge." Sensuous knowledge is a form a materialism that recognizes "the lived reality of ghostly magical invented matters" (205). Korean mothers are not ghosts, though. They are very real. Their presence, however, in the narratives of mixed-race Koreans is spectral. Their imprints can be seen in the stories and anecdotes, in a kind of profane illumination. They are socializing their children, sure, but their importance is more than just that of being mothers. Their *being* "is telling us something important we had not known; because it is leading us somewhere; elsewhere" (205). They perform feats of ethnic socialization on their children in order to prepare their children for the world, as any mother would do, but their presence as symbols of authentic Koreanness operate in a fashion that leads us to a different destination, one where, by nature of their *being*, they offer their power to their children to *be* as well; because *being* implies authenticity. It is social structures that seek to erase the bodies that society in a given moment chooses to ignore or to try and wipe clean.

Gordon notes, "to experience a profane illumination is to experience the sensate quality of a knowledge meaningfully affecting you… Sensuous knowledge always involves knowing and doing. Everything is in the experience with sensuous

knowledge. Everything rests on not being afraid of what is happening to you" (205). In both the case of Hines Ward and the various facets of *HalfKorean.com,* it is evident that identity construction for mixed-race Korean-Americans is a complicated process that is involved in the juxtaposition of bodies against dominant racial systems, and unique relationships to language and the Korean Household. In both cases, there is an undercurrent of a "path to pride," where identity issues and contentious relationships with race and ethnicity dictate unique struggles for mixed-race individuals to face. By performing points of cultural knowledge, however, they (un)consciously enable modes of connection between other mixed-race Koreans and inadvertently reconfigure what it means to be authentically Korean. In particular, it has been discussed that the role of the Korean mother is that of a ghostly figure. She is always present in the narratives of these individuals, in some ways in contentious anecdotes, and in other ones comical, but in all cases, Korean mothers and their motherwork operate as crucial agents in building a sense of authenticity among the mixed-race Korean community. By interpreting authenticity as a plastic space, or bendable, recyclable, and opaque, it is possible to envision the "least" authentic Koreans as distinctly authentic. This affords a great deal of power in identity and community construction.

As noted, authenticity begets authenticity, and by bonding over common narratives of Korean motherhood (or acts associated with motherhood), mixed-race individuals can narrate complex relationships to dominant racial structures, while also complicating them by highlighting their positions in the margins. These *in*authentic bodies become distinctly authentic by utilizing the very structures that seek to erase

them—memory and imagined community. Where memory and imagined community are historically employed in order to assert homogenous or rigidly structured societies, and to render certain bodies as authentic, and mixed ones as inauthentic, mixed-race Koreans employ these very structures to push back against those conceptions and prove once again that authenticity is not written in stone, but is in fact plastic, opaque, and malleable.

Conclusion: Sincerely, Authenticity

> Shame is the deeply felt and highly motivating experience of the fear of being judged defective.
>
> —Richard A. Shweder (2003)

Many of the discourses occurring in food studies around the concept of authenticity have to do with notions of cultural nostalgia and collective memory, which has been a through-line throughout this project. Women and traditionally feminized labor are core elements of this concept, globally. Whether they are Korean women in Korea or Korean women in the U.S., the global link between Koreanness and cultural community is in the mundane and everyday performances of Koreanness. Since Korean women have historically been tasked with maintaining the home and reproducing cultural tradition, women become key fixtures in defining what it means to *be* Korean. Likewise, foodways are a crucial byproduct of this feminized labor. Where women's labor is an extension and exercise of cultural citizenship (and in many ways a reproduction of Korean ideological state apparatuses), providing food and care for the family consequently becomes the tangible product of these cultural endeavors. Global imaginings of Koreanness, therefore, could not be constructed without women and without food as such a deeply embedded element of what makes the culture unique.

Thus, native Korean authenticity and its twin, Korean-American plastic authenticity (or insert any other locale), cannot exist without Korean women and Korean food as the symbolic vehicles with which to imagine and construct the parameters of Koreanness. The Korean women that cook up and reify the borders of Korean culture are the same diasporic Korean women that (un)consciously push up

against those very parameters as agents, symbols, or ghosts. Where Korea's economic and political impact is in its government institutions and boardrooms, it is the humble element of the everyday, the mundane, that explicitly connotes authenticity. It is the governing bodies and the "outsiders" to the culture, however, that attempt to bottle that authenticity. This project, then, aims to critique that form of soft power exercised by outsiders and regulatory bodies by imagining what authenticity looks like from those in the margins and also why it is vital in their identity construction. While it is arguable that authenticity has been deconstructed and whittled down to the point of meaninglessness, to those *rendered* inauthentic, authenticity is particularly impactful. To dismiss authenticity right when those in the margins are exercising it is an act of hegemony and cultural colonialism all over again.

To examine the role of Korean women in the embodiment of plastic authenticity, then, requires historicizing their periods of the diaspora from Korea. Global and local politics inevitably influence immigration, and when Korean women (but all immigrants more broadly) move to new locales, they are touched by the history and socio-political context that precipitated their movement away from their country of origin, and subsequently marred in the socio-political context of the receiving country. For this reason, my first chapter charted this immigration narrative of Korean women and the broader position of Asianness within an American cultural and racial context. I began by engaging existing literature regarding the Korean-American community as a means to establish the context for movement and immigration to the U.S. and to explain the larger role that Korean women played in that narrative. Likewise, the roles that women played as symbols of the nation in

times of war and immigration, and their subsequent roles as community anchors in the U.S. set the stage for their roles within the framework of plastic authenticity described in the subsequent chapters.

In chapter two, I applied the framework of plastic authenticity introduced in the introduction of this project to the case study of popular YouTube chef, *Maangchi.* Examining her bestselling cookbook and her digital presence, I attempted to situate her within a cultural history of studying and analyzing the foodways and social networks of women through the things they cooked and the things they wrote. I argue that Maangchi's success is due in part to her ability to navigate the terrain of being recognized for her otherness in America as the safe and happy immigrant, while also maintaining a distinct cultural knowledge and attachment to traditional modes of being a Korean mother and housewife. Likewise, while suturing herself into a narrative of safe otherness for consumption, I argue that Maangchi actively practices acts of resistance to assimilation, through affective means like recalling smell and through her evocations of authenticity—i.e., her racial and cultural *excess*.

Plastic authenticity, then, is a framework for understanding her performance of race as both a "sincere" one, but also one riddled with "fictions." Racial sincerity offers space for us to imagine Maangchi's subjective relationship to frameworks of power as an Asian immigrant, while recognizing the power in her fictions allows us to see her avatar/persona as "Maangchi" as a means of self-protection and active resistance to cultural sanitization. By invoking traditional modes of Korean authenticity through her knowledge of Korean culture, she can economically capitalize off of it while also performing a decidedly non-traditional form of global

citizenship and cosmopolitanism usually not afforded to Korean mothers. As a diasporic body that is rendered inauthentic by her renouncements of Korean citizenship, her ability to claim authenticity while participating in culture building that is ostensibly inauthentically Korean (when she cooks non-Korean food), she grounds her sense of authenticity in a form of participatory knowledge of Korean culture rather than her ability to necessarily cook exclusively Korean food. This performance, then, is perceived as both authentic and safe, allowing her space to (un)consciously critique systems of racism and xenophobia.

I examined the branding strategies of various Korean and Korean-American companies in chapter three. Authenticity is a particularly trendy way to brand difference, and in a rapidly globalized consumer market, the flow of Korean goods, both from Korean companies and from Korean-American companies, brand Koreanness in different ways for different imagined audiences. Where Korea-based companies like Bibigo do not employ authenticity as explicitly, the government-sanctioned use of *hansik* as a means to promote authentic Korean food is a way to funnel particular brands that contribute to Korea's economic and cultural influence to mainstream audiences. Their employment of motherhood in their branding is predominantly in the branding of ready-made and frozen meals, where authenticity and maternal branding exist as stand-ins for the gendered labor that has historically occurred for those particular food items.

For Korean-American companies, the use of the Korean mother is far more prevalent and salient for food products, as seen in the myriad forms of maternally branded kimchi. Korean-American companies utilize the figure of the Korean mother

figure (sometimes framed as an auntie, but maternal nonetheless) as a way to negotiate the tensions between having their legitimacy as Koreans questioned at the same time that their legitimacy as Americans is called into question both as businesses and as brands. While seemingly an innocuous figure of happy multiculturalism, the (authentic) Korean mother and her experiences operate in ways that push up against narratives that they, and by association, their products, are either illegitimate or excessively foreign. Plastic authenticity, then, allows us to imagine how, from a cultural citizenship standpoint, Korean motherhood is employable as a way to maintain the cultural expertise to Korea and Korean food while simultaneously exercising forms of American citizenship. These case studies also point to the relationship between global consumerism and the allure of "local" cultures, where plastic authenticity is employable as a framework to better understand the ways that Korean-American women and the companies they (and their second-generation children) build negotiate the act of capitalizing on their otherness while simultaneously resisting being othered.

Whereas chapters two and three explored Korean women both as agents and as symbols of Korean-American forms of authenticity, chapter four takes the framework of plastic authenticity and applies it to bodies that are diametrically opposed to notions of authentic Koreanness. By nature of being multiracial, mixed Korean-Americans are unable to stake claims in Korean authenticity due to historically entrenched notions of "blood quantum." Compared to their diasporic counterparts, who while rendered inauthentic by nature of their movement outside of Korea and inability to participate in the daily activities of Korean communal life,

mixed-race Koreans are barred from exhibiting cultural authenticity because they are not considered *Korean* at all. Plastic authenticity in this case, then, becomes a framework for asserting and claiming cultural capital as a means for certifying one's identity as authentically Korean. The Korean mother is structured as a spectral form of authenticity through which the mixed-race Korean can enunciate their position as authentically Korean. As authenticity begets authenticity, the cultural experiences and traditions of the Korean mother become a transmittable form of cultural capital that multiracial Koreans can draw from—no matter how much the mother may stray away from being considered traditional or whose performances are even perceived as authentic in and of themselves. Gendered tradition and labor in the form of motherwork (including household tradition, enculturation, and foodways), become the entry space for mixed-race Koreans to bypass "blood quantum," language acquisition, and phenotypic association, to assert *authentic* Koreanness. The "ghost" of the Korean mother is used both in identity construction but also as a form of cultural capital for community building through collective memories. By confiding in and having self-assurance in the shared experience of Korean motherhood, multiracial Koreans of any racial formation can bond and form community that spans various cultural geographies.

This project, then, is about those *bad Koreans*. Inauthentic, diasporic, mixed-race, bad Koreans. When I think back to my childhood, I realize the myriad of ways that I also embodied that notion. I am a "bad Korean." I am only conversational in Korean. I have never lived in Korea. I am not a medical doctor or a lawyer. I am mixed. As a child, my brother and I would gobble up kimchi right next to our mother

until one day; my brother told me that kimchi was a vegetable. Being the picky child that I was, I immediately turned my nose up to kimchi for years, refusing to eat what is considered the lifeblood of Korean food. Little did we know, she found ways to work her Koreanness into the meals we ate, whether it was randomly eating seaweed as snacks, renaming the (then) oddly sounding and hard to pronounce *doenjang-jjigae* to the more palatable "dooboo soup," or more simply finding a way to incorporate rice into *every* family dinner. Korean aunties were always in and out of the house, bringing their own mixed-Korean kids to play with my brother and me, while they caught up and chit chatted together. The chatter, cackles, and hisses of middle-aged Korean women are one of the most deeply embedded and fond memories of my childhood, and a sound I long for and miss profoundly. I still to this day hiss at my partner when he walks in the house with shoes on.

A self-proclaimed "bad Korean" herself, my mother believes that her kimchi is nowhere near the quality that my grandmothers was. She routinely remarks about how this or that she does is "not like other Koreans." When I ask her help translating something, she laments that her Korean language skills have waned over her decades living in America. At the same time, however, she has built a world of Korean culture in and around her life, seeping into the fabric of our home. She longs for Korean food when she has not eaten it in a while. She lights up and rubs my back when I talk about all of her Korean recipes I have learned to cook over the years. She occasionally talks about how she likes to go to the Korean market just to hear Korean people talking. Not to interact with them, but just to hear Korean people speaking around her. She has subtly built a uniquely Korean-American world for our family, and for herself,

quietly reverberating in the background of the busy "American" lives my father, my brother, and I lead.

These are not particularly unique anecdotes, though. There are plenty of multiracial Koreans that have similar memories and experiences encountering and embodying Koreanness in subtle and sometimes odd ways. There are plenty of Korean women who have left Korea to move around the world and feel that they have lost or given up a part of themselves. There are plenty of Korean adoptees who feel as though their skin attaches them to geographies that they did not grow up in. There are plenty of second- and third-generation Korean-Americans who do not speak Korean and prefer LA-style *galbi* (short ribs) over "traditional" Korean-fare.

The ecologies of shame are potent. As the epigraph suggests, shame over the fears of being "defective" drive us to seek out, or at least acknowledge that authenticity, or being *read* as authentic holds a particular kind of power over our heads. As Richard Shweder suggests,

> It is the anxious experience of either the real or anticipated loss of status, affection or self-regard that results from knowing that one is vulnerable to the disapproving gaze or negative judgment of others. It is a terror that touches the mind, the body, and the soul precisely because one is aware that one might be seen to have come up short in relationship to some shared and uncontested ideal that defines what it means to be a good, worthy, admirable, attractive, or competent person, given one's status or position in a society. (Shweder 1115)

We are all "bad Koreans" because we represent something that is not considered authentic. Whether it is by blood, by immigration, or by language, cultural barriers have been established that position certain performances and embodiments as authentically Korean, and others not. This is the seedy and divisive element of authenticity. It is precisely this obsession with quantifying "realness" that makes authenticity so problematic. This hegemonic notion, however, is riddled with folds and wrinkles that allow for slippages to occur, for authenticity is fundamentally dependent on otherness to exist. It is in this liminal space that the bad Korean bodies can enunciate narratives of authenticity that radically decenter the traditional modes of identifying, labeling, and privileging certain bodies and performances as authentically Korean. I argue that this act of refracting inauthenticity as an act of radical authenticity is an exercise in the framework of plastic authenticity.

It should be noted that my use of the term "plastic" in and of itself has been the subject of a bit of theoretical tension. My choice of plastic, while situated centrally in a number of disciplines that employ and theorize the nature of plastic as a metaphor, does not fully capture the total nature of the theoretical framework. While plastic is bendable, opaque, and moldable, when settled it is still somewhat rigid. Rigidity is fundamentally in conflict with the framework that I present and interrogate, so plasticity is inherently contentious. Elasticity on the other hand is a term that enables constant pushes and pulls, accounting for the varied ways that authenticity is employed and embodied. Likewise, elasticity is a means of enabling the framework to be more broadly applicable to different communities and subjects as well.

However, upon further reflection, the moldability of plastic into semi-rigid structures is actually quite useful. Likewise, elasticity as a concept does not have the same pull as "plasticity" in academic discourse. From being employed as a metaphorical object in both the varied disciplines of the humanities and even linguistics, plasticity seemed to be a more appropriate term to couch this framework within. Elasticity implies softness and an inability to settle into a particular state. *Plastic* authenticity, however, benefits from being able to temporarily embody rigidity, while highlighting the fragile and potentially problematic elements of authenticity. Plastic authenticity is a means for marginalized individuals to become gatekeepers of authenticity and to build community, but there is no failsafe from those communities in the margins from creating rigid barriers for entry as well. Queer, trans, working class, and other marginalized individuals may very well find themselves labeled "worse Koreans" in an already growing community of "bad Koreans." Thus, plasticity acts as both a nod to academic discourse but also tangentially as a cautionary tale—rigidity is tempting and dangerous when *any* community is able to freely exercise that power for the means of exclusion.

On the surface it seems that my investments in plastic authenticity position it simply as a foil to authenticity, which, by nature of its construction, simply cancels out hegemonic authenticity, effectively rendering authenticity meaningless. How can a term contend for the very validation that it seeks to gobble up? Plastic authenticity, however, is also a methodology for measuring power and resistance. Locating the power to evoke authenticity as an inauthentic body is a form of "situated knowledge," where only those on the fringes are capable of exercising agency in the ways that

their cultural experiences speak *about* them as cultural citizens that span multiple geographies. Throughout these chapters, I have utilized various case studies to examine how the framework of plastic authenticity applies to different groups of people in different context. Two things remain constant, however. First and foremost, each of these case studies positioned Korean women at the center. Second, foodways and concepts of maternal care have been core vehicles for plastic authenticity to be executed. This is not just a passing exercise in feminist analysis either, however, as women, motherwork, and foodways are critical agents in crafting this framework of authenticity for this particular group.

As this project progresses into the eventual book form, I hope to add two more chapters to broaden the scope of plastic authenticity even further. I believe that, as mentioned, shame is a particularly potent space of analysis. Where in this project I examined racial performance through sincerity and haunting, I would like to explore the framework of plastic authenticity through the concept of shame as a method for ameliorating the stresses of globalization and cosmopolitanism. I would like to examine contemporary representations of "young" Korean motherhood, exploring how shame operates to control and manage contemporary exercises of mothering in the forms of childcare.

Likewise, I would like to add another chapter on multiracial Koreans, to examine the concepts of racial fetishization in the age of the K-pop revolution. Specifically, I want to explore the ways that the commercialization and fetishization of mixed-race bodies, as an act of “happy multiculturalism,” contribute to the ways that utterances of Korean authenticity are employed and embodied by multiracial

Asians. Essentially, mixed-race bodies are fetishized specifically for their "otherness." The *in*authenticity of a body that is not wholly "one race" is a desirable trait, as it operates in close proximities to any given race, while maintaining a far enough distance to capitalize on and commercialize "difference." Mixed-race implies "safe" race, and my goal is to examine how, despite these circumstances, multiracial Korean-Americans enunciate forms of cultural authenticity through this framework of plasticity that I construct.

I also believe plastic authenticity is a framework directly applicable in many different spaces. In particular, with communities that have narratives of immigration to the U.S. that are deeply entrenched in the colonial relationship between the two countries, where race directly intersects with narratives of belonging and cultural citizenship. The South Korean economy is in many ways deeply enmeshed in the economic viability of the U.S., and the transmission of culture between the two nations after the Korean War created the parameters for this analysis, which contextualizes my ability to make the assertions regarding the perceptions of the two groups to one another (i.e., colonizer/colonized mentalities, "eternal foreignness," and political/economical dependency). Groups that have been directly impacted by American imperialism, whose subsequent movement throughout the U.S. cultural imaginary is affected in ways similar to that of South Korea would include the Philippines and many Pacific Island nations that were directly impacted by the U.S. in the eras during and after World War II, whose economies are also deeply involved with that of the U.S. In some ways, certain indigenous groups also fit within this framework as well, such as the colonization of the indigenous Hawai'ian nation and

contemporary debates about its sovereignty, including the cultural participation and even land claims of multiracial individuals regarding contemporary legal employments of "blood quantum" regarding the Hawai'ian Homes Commission Act.

This concept is not globally transmittable, however, as different immigrating racial and ethnic groups experience expectations of cultural citizenship differently. For this reason, I am hesitant to broadly apply this to just anywhere. While I think the nature of authenticity and the recognition of those from the margins is broadly applicable to any cultural group, and is a useful tool for determining how the "bad" individuals in any community reify the parameters for the "good" individuals, I believe that the distinct history of African-Americans in the U.S. and the contemporary political disputes about the movement of Latinx bodies in and around the U.S. complicate the instant applicability of this framework. These locales would require some nuancing regarding the relationships that the communities have to notions of American cultural citizenship, particularly in light of current debates about Latinx immigration and the talk of building "walls," and the continued systemic and institutional abuse of African-Americans in social, political, legal, judicial, and cultural spaces.

Likewise, as plastic authenticity is predicated on being in the margins, and hegemonic authenticity is invested in quantifying realness and normalizing particular qualities, this framework is also useful for discourses in queer and trans studies and disability studies as well. Both fields are encountering questions about ableism and heteronormativity, which in essence, are also exercises in authenticity. The able body

is an “authentic” body; the heteronormative body is an “authentic” body; the cisgender body is an “authentic” body.

While my analysis is applicable in other areas, however, I am mindful of what gets lost when the acute centrality of diasporic women and racialized bodies get shifted. As Donna Haraway suggests, there is danger in mythologizing and making methodologies out of the experiences of the oppressed without a healthy dose of self-reflexivity (586). So, it is worth noting that some *things* get lost when plastic authenticity becomes a “brand” in and of itself. Plastic authenticity at its core is about moving those in the margins to the center, but not *replacing* those in the center. Recall, plastic authenticity cannot exist without hegemonic authenticity, or it becomes hegemonic itself. Therefore, any framework that is established on "otherness" to operate is sticky and prone to problematics because its very foundation is predicated on that subjugation.

That said, being a “bad Korean” is a space of potential. While traditional notions of authenticity seek to erase these bodies from cultural legitimacy, their experiences are still within the framework of being *Korean.* Plastic authenticity seeks to ameliorate some of these tensions without throwing out authenticity altogether, because authenticity is powerful, and it has the ability to validate and enable community building to occur. At the end of the day, it is Korean women, and more specifically the Korean mother, and the cultural labor associated with mothering and foodways that enable these enunciations of identity to occur. The diasporic and the mixed body, then, regularly exercise forms of resistance to cultural control and legitimize themselves through sincere performances of identity and recollections of

shared experience. Authenticity is a ripe space of possibilities, and we should not discount it right at the moment when those most vulnerable to its snares are positioned to gain access to that very form of cultural gatekeeping that seeks to erase them.

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[1] The term, made popular in academic discourses by food studies scholar Lucy M. Long, is defined as "the intentional, exploratory participations in the foodways of an other—participation including the consumption, preparation, and presentation of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered to belong to a culinary system not one's own. This definition emphasizes the individual as an active agent in constructing meanings within a tourist experience, and it allows for an aesthetic response to a food as part of that experience" (21).

[2] This is a term referring to the penchant for foods of different cultures that has deep connections to Western colonialism and Imperialism, including the feeling of being able to freely borrow from, cite out of context, or in the case of Anthony Bourdain, make value judgements on the cultural position of insiders in the Korean-American community as a means of self-promotion (Heldke 395).

[3] It is critical to note the interchanging use of "mixed-race" and multiracial in this project. Mixed-race, a problematized term (as food is mixed, not people) incites memories of a particular moment in U.S. racial history, where miscegenation laws and blood quantum were predominant ways of classifying people and assigning citizenship. My use of "mixed-race," then, when referring to authenticity, and "multiracial" when referring to people outside of a historical/theoretical context is concerted. Mixed-race connotes "mixing," where the focus of the term is on the act of mixing itself rather than the subjectivity of the individual, so in discussions regarding authenticity, or more importantly how multiracial bodies are rendered "*in*authentic," I employ mixed-race in order to identify and recall a particular historical context that authenticity is undeniably wrapped in. Therefore, in chapter four particularly, where the community *halfkorean.com* is concerned, I employ "mixed-race," as the idea of "quantum" (which is steeped in its own racialized history itself) is subtly important in the construction of this community, where "half" is used to denote "whole."

[4] In her essay, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of the Partial Perspective" (1988), Donna Haraway states, "…there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful… there is a premium on establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depths. But here there also lies a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see it from their positions. To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic… The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions. On the contrary, they are knowledgeable modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts—ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively. The subjugated have a decent chance to be on to the god trick and all its dazzling—and, therefore, blinding—illuminations" (584). Essentially, Haraway recognizes that there is a distinct and recognizable power in the perspective of the subjugated. Likewise, while those who are not in the margins may romanticize this position for its ability to objectively view and renegotiate the world around them (plastic authenticity), it is inaccessible from those outsides of the margins. Like Haraway argues; however, it is still a "partial perspective," and plastic authenticity can only exist if hegemonic

authenticity exists. Plastic authenticity is the center of the Venn diagram between the circles of cultural authenticity and the view from outside.

[5] "Diasporic" body in this instance is used to include immigrant, second- and third-generation individuals, and adoptees as well.

[6] Informed partially by the growing popularity of scientific racism (eugenics), but also the classification of, and subsequent value ranking of immigrant ethnicities (on a scale from "white" to "colored"), the 1924 quota act was established to maintain higher rates of ethnically "white" immigration (Ngai 24). For example, in 1929 the quota for immigrants from Great Britain and Northern Ireland was 65,721, while the immigration quotas were 100, respectively, for China and Japan (28).

[7] It should be noted that this number, while gendered and a large number, was still a fraction of the total of Korean emigrants. As of 1961, 97.4 percent of all Koreans oversees resided in Japan (Light and Bonacich 103).

[8] Interestingly, Pyong Gap Min found a correlation between the total domestic work hours of Korean-American women and their level of education, finding that the more educated that Korean-American women were, the fewer hours of housework they reported doing. Likewise, the reigning hypothesis asserts that the more "culturally assimilated" a woman is, the fewer housework hours she would perform, however, because of economic segregation, they have achieved much lower levels of assimilation (Min 96).

[9] These figures presented are essential to juxtapose against the concurrent trends for women still living in Korea in the labor force. According to a 1980's Economic Planning Board study in South Korea, women's *total* participation in the labor force in 1980 was 38.4 percent, with less than one percent of that comprising of women in administrative or managerial roles (Cho 89, 94).

[10] This in-between status extends even into motherhood, where isolation as a foreigner plays out even in intimate family dynamics, with the husband and even the biracial children coded as 'American,' yet the mother remains in an unattainable state of immigrant status (Yuh 98). Due to location, the Korean military wife is more often than not in some close proximity to an American military base and away from other immigrant communities, and even in the case of her children, their participation in American culture is a fundamental directive to socially reproduce an American identity, further distancing the Korean wife and mother in a unique way that does not apply in the same manner for other immigrant Korean families (Yuh 98).

[11] The middleman minority generally occupies a middle status in a host society's class and racial framework. Pyong Gap Min and Andrew Kolodny apply the term to Koreans in reference to their role in between producer and consumer, noting "Korean immigrants' disadvantages for employment in the general labor market [a noted factor being language] have forced them into small business and that their middleman role has increased group conflicts and host hostility" (Min and Kolodny 134). While this speaks to Korean immigrants more broadly in economically, the Korean military bride occupies a similar position despite being in an interracial marriage.

[12] Going into this concept further, Ji-Yeon Yuh states, "To keep itself masculine and sovereign, it must banish the feminine and the subordinate. Camptown women, as prostitutes servicing the soldiers of a foreign power, are emblematic of the feminine

and the subordinate. They serve to symbolize all the humiliations that Korea suffers at the hands of the United States… for Koreans in the mainstream, it is necessary to condemn these women as whores and/or cynically praise them for patriotism as civilian ambassadors and earners of foreign exchange, all the while relegating them to the shadows. Only by doing so can they ignore/deny subjugation under a foreign power and the consequent shame, thus allowing the officially sanctioned discourse of Korean sovereignty and American benevolence to remain dominant. America's golden image is left relatively untainted, allowing Koreans to despise camptowns and camptown women even as they believe in America's rhetoric of freedom and opportunity and long for the material wealth, power and modernity that America symbolizes. In effect, the realities of U.S. influence on Korean society are interpreted as individual depravity—the women are prostitutes not because of Korea's circumstances and relations with the U.S., but because the women are morally corrupt" (Yuh 246).

[13] In a discussion regarding the "comfort women" movement (women forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese), Katharine Moon argues that the comfort women movements was initially allied with the political goals of the camptown women over women's rights, sexual violence, and militarism. She notes, "their differences over the moral legitimacy of the women in each category – former comfort women as chaste women who are forced into prostitution and slavery versus camptown women who are unchaste, voluntary participants in prostitution – ultimately split them apart… the comfort women gained ground nationally and internationally, they overshadowed the fledgling movement for camptown women's rights and welfare. These cases of conflict and competition are particularly regrettable, as the human, financial, and institutional resources available to address marginalized women's concerns in Korea are scarce in the first place" (143).

[14] One theory commonly attributed to the often-tense interracial relationship between Korean and Black communities in L.A. is "competition theory," or a competition over scarce sources (Joyce 32).

[15] Similarly, during and after the L.A. uprising, media coverage continuously portrayed Korean-Americans as "armed," brandishing weapons, being portrayed as "hoodlums," and aggressive with looters (Abelmann and Lie 40).

[16] In Chicago, for instance, a large-scale Community Mediation Project (CMP) was implemented with a grant of $230,000 by United Way to improve race relations, which included workshops to educate the communities of the other's cultural values and customs, including citywide cross-cultural events, in order to promote value of cultural pluralism (Choi and Kim 183).

[17] Triad refers to the sociological method of situating Koreans, African-Americans, and white media into a triangle-like relationship. It needs to be noted, however, that while triad assumes three actors, they are not equal, as white media is often purposefully rendered as a background aspect. The media's repetitive reference to Korean ancestry in conflict coverage is believed to reinforce negative stereotypes of Koreans in the eyes of the Black community (Park 67).

[18] Using Korean-owned nail salons in New York and New Jersey as case studies (with 60-70% of all nail salons owned by Korean immigrants), sociologist Joong-Hwan Oh

also notes that these rotating credit associations and the participation and membership in such are critical mechanisms of social support for immigrant small business owners/workers, particularly women, as they make up the majority of staff and ownership of this niche market (628).

[19] Imani Perry notes, "Asian Americans continue to be invoked as an exception to the inferior status of racial others, rather than simply incorporated into 'Americanness,' as Jewish, Italian, and Irish people have been. It is within that framework that we can understand the image of Asian Americans as 'eternal foreigners,' regardless of multigenerational Americanness, citizenship, or naturalization" (137). Further, from a standpoint regarding business, this "foreigner" status can often be portrayed as an "intrusive" position, juxtaposed against white Americans from a "nativistic" standpoint (Kim 170).

[20] Shim further states, on the subject of media portrayal, "during the four days of reporting on the riots, the narrative stream moved from conflict to solution (with the scenes of cleanup in the streets and of prayers at church). In the entire drama, blacks were the first villains that posed a threat to white civilization. Then Koreans were seen to attack blacks. However, Koreans are not the heroes or rescuers of the white society. Thus the video of Soon Ja Du's shooting functioned as background information for the Korean-Black conflict. With this video, evil Korean shopkeepers were depicted as the source of the black anger. By framing the riot as the result of minority on minority conflict, white responsibility for the riots is exempted" (87).

[21] Specifically; this dissertation draws comparisons between the branding and employment of stereotypical imagery of Black women in U.S. history with Korean women in contemporary moments.

[22] Maangchi means "hammer" in Korean. It is a nod to her online gaming avatar, which was a warrior that fought with a giant hammer, as Maangchi says, "a cool name for a tough girl" (3).

[23] There is also something to be said about the liberatory function of creating content on a platform like YouTube. Central to this thesis is Maangchi's *control* over her image and her brand. In a space like YouTube, while she shoulders the physical labor of filming and editing her videos, there is no one else controlling how she is presented other than herself. Regarding authenticity, despite whatever kind of persona she crafts and how much that diverges from "who she is in real life," her ability to be in control of that image lends to her credibility as an authentic cooking host. Likewise, her ability to directly interact with her fans and subscribers brings her into much more intimate proximity with them, interestingly reifying the "social" function of cookbooks and the oral tradition of cooking/tutorials in the era prior to the widespread commercialization of cookbooks.

[24] Psyche Williams-Forson, in the book *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (2006) performs telling visual analyses of images of Black women, examining the ways that the images speak to commonly held and widely circulated stereotypes and symbols of Black women in connection with chicken. She constructs a particularly useful model for historicizing images and understanding how images construct a social imaginary surrounding particular groups of people in particular temporal moments, and how those last. Williams-Forson sets a precedent

which I employ in my analysis as well, examining the ways that Maangchi's visual presentation contributes directly to how her performances of race are coded to viewers/readers of her cookbook/cooking show.

[25] Maangchi also couches her use of non-traditional ingredients in displays of authenticity by indicting her readers as the reasons for use of a non-traditional recipe. She creates a recipe for stir-fried kale, noting that it is "Westernized," but despite it not being authentic, that it works as a substitute (138). Likewise, in her Korean fried chicken recipe, she actually notes that ketchup is critical for the dish to in fact *be* authentic (220).

[26] Anita Mannur, in her book *Culinary Fictions*, describes the ways that various cookbook authors negotiate performances of Indianness with more considerable expectations about cosmopolitanism and assimilation. In one particular section of her essay, she discusses model and cookbook author, Padma Lakshmi. Mannur positions Lakshmi's presentations as a South Asian woman against her ability and actions that sidestep that association, in favor of one as a global citizen. These actions, as Mannur notes are crafted in a way to posture Lakshmi as a "good model minority," in her attempts to assimilate an ethnic palette without compromising the "Americanness" of her cooking, in order to be more readily accepted by American audiences (203).

[27] Louis Althusser (1971) notes social formation must simultaneously reproduce conditions of production while production occurs, meaning that the "productive forces" and the "existing relations of production" need to be in constant co-constitution. Specifically related to ideological apparatuses, reproduction of culture and social order are critical components. Unlike repressive apparatuses, ideology reproduces them and not force. Gendered labor such as foodwork and motherwork, then, are utilized as ways to produce productive citizens of a given nation.

[28] It is important to note that the use of the term "immigrant Korean woman," rather than being a conventional racial trope is more of an amalgam of stereotypes associated with the Asian American community in general, namely the status of "eternal foreigner." While Maangchi does not fit the boxes of the traditional forms of Asian female representation like the "lotus blossom" or "dragon lady," her affectations imply a status of other, or "foreigner."

[29] She has been living in Manhattan, New York, since 2008.

[30] This is not to assert, however, that online spaces are necessarily liberatory, as online spaces are also fraught with closed communities, racism, and xenophobia as well. Likewise, it is a privileged position to be able to participate in that environment as well, so those are not lost in this analysis. For Maangchi, however, she was able to find a space where her own position would be unquestioned, also knowing that "food" as content, "would never run out" (Talks at Google 2015).

[31] Amusingly, after sending me photos of herself and my emo making kimchi, my mother followed up rather quickly by sending me pictures of herself in the late 1970's, very jokingly saying, "mom's old days." Which, when having a conversation about authenticity and the relationships of women of color more broadly to food, an interesting thought emerged about how she perceives her "self" in relation to the food narrative I was creating in a very public conversation about food. Her relationship to Korean food, and ostensibly this performance of "Koreanness" is a dynamic one, in

which she exerted additional agency to say, albeit jokingly, "but wait, if you're gonna show them this, then you need to show them this too." She was well aware of the story I was crafting and wanted some say in how she would be perceived, particularly as the photos of her making kimchi showed her hair down, in her "cooking sweats."

[32] Without the long historical tradition of racist branding connecting Korean food to Korean women, the images do not operate in the same socio-cultural manner as the mammy caricatures do for Black women.

[32] While not regarding authenticity specifically, there are a number of studies occurring regarding the economic elements of marketing that gauge the success and financial implications in food packaging, noting that marketing teams are acutely aware of the need for branding to not only evoke an emotional attachment to products but that the larger parent companies also benefit from regionalizing products (Bronnenberg et al. 2007, Wu 2015).

[34] In a study regarding South Asian traditions of hospitality (2001), sociologists Helen Bush and Rory Williams conducted a survey of the hospitality habits of immigrants (South Asian and Italian) in the U.K., finding that for South Asian immigrants, more than half (66% of migrants) reported a keen importance of food in its associations with their culture and gendered notions of hospitality (121). Likewise, the investments in culturally specific food choices when cooking for guests were, for South Asians, reflective of a strong tie to ethnic identity in a racialized space (the U.K.), whereas for Italian women, hospitality was not dependent on any relationship to ethnic identity, instead, gendered divisions of labor. I draw somewhat similar conclusions for ethnic/racial minorities in the U.S., that for Koreans, food and service become spaces to maintain ethnic ties and kinship systems while exemplifying gendered spaces of labor.

[35] There are great differences in the understanding of Koreanness from non-Koreans in different regional spaces where not only Korean people, but goods and services are not readily available. What constitutes a "Korean experience" would arguably be vastly different in a non-metropolitan atmosphere with very few Koreans, even further with the possibility that there is little ethnic diversity *at all.*

[36] Soocheong Jang et al. create a quantitative study in which they ask non-Asian participants to rate their experiences with various Asian cuisines. They aggregate data based on factors such as cleanliness, visual appeal, and digestibility, to name a few. Their data for Korean food suggests its positioning as "a *quality, fresh,* and *aromatic* food emphasizing *spiciness* and *vegetable components,* but it seems to lack in being perceived as *digestible, looking pleasing, clean, healthy* and *attractive*. Thus, Korean restaurant marketers should take care to enhance its *visual appeal, digestibility,* and *cleanliness* attributes" (69). This highlights what it is that non-Korean consumers expect of, but also the scale that they evaluate their ethnic food experiences. In essence, this study offers advice on how not to serve the Korean community, but how to make their businesses attractive to a non-Korean community.

[37] "Ajumma" is a Korean word of reference for a middle-aged woman, usually married. A relatively close English equivalent would be ma'am or madame.

[38] References by myself post as Latinx, but for matters of citation and description of authored texts, Latino/Hispanic will be employed in line with quoted texts.
[39] Interestingly, CJ Brand Bibigo division chief Yu Je-Hyeuk, does enunciate the brands commitment for Bibigo to be a "mainstream" brand, highlighting different marketing approaches in the different sub-companies underneath the larger CJ umbrella. He notes, "We target the 'gyopo' (ethnic Koreans abroad) market with CJ's existing brands such as Beksul and Haechandle, while we tap the mainstream consumers with the Bibigo label" (Korea Herald 2013).
[40] Annie Chun herself is arguably only a tenuous nod to Korean womanhood, however. Given that Annie Chun's does not *specialize* in Korean food, but a rather pan-Asian fare, it is arguable that the mascot of Annie Chun is herself a pan-Asian assemblage. The name Chun is not exclusively a Korean surname either, so her connection to *Korean* authenticity is also fragile, as she more openly recalls motherhood and "home-cooked" rather than Koreanness.
[41] For an example of scale, according to the U.S. census bureau in 2010, there were 1.7 million (reported) Koreans living in the U.S. and while California has the highest number of Koreans living in total, the most densely populated area of Koreans is Bergen County, New Jersey has a population percentage of 6.1% of the population (57,144 persons reported) (United States Census Bureau 2016). Within that entire county, there are an estimated 150+ Korean restaurants (including independently owned and commercial restaurants).
[42] While a relatively new and popular form of commercial food delivery in the U.S., it should be noted that this countercultural move to shift the mode of delivery is not necessarily a *new* concept. Counterculture movements in the 1960's also shifted conceptions and imaginations of food and food service with the emergence of sustainability and with mass-market food production becoming suspect (Wilson 247).
[43] This concept of accessibility for American consumers is also inherently transgressive, as there are not linguistic markers that determine the Koreanness of these foodstuffs. Whereas Korea-based products often employ the Korean language as a primary indicator of Koreanness, Korean-American products are (un)consciously more inclusive to those in the larger diasporic Korean community who may or may not have linguistic levels of fluency.
[44] Mike Featherstone, in his work, *Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity*, discusses local communities in terms of cultural integration, which is the "generation of powerful, emotionally sustaining rituals, ceremonies, and collective memories" (52). Communities are imagined, created by the expectation of shared experience, and not simply by the creation of national boundaries.
[45] Reiterating what was outlined in the introduction to the dissertation, I employ "mixed-race" rather than the term "multiracial" as the (historically racialized) concept of quantum is subtly important in the construction of this community, where "half" is used to denote "whole." Mixed-race invokes a particular temporal context, where measurement of a person's "mixedness" was a critical element in determining how and where they fell in dominant U.S. racial categories. For this purpose, mixed-race is employed in this chapter. The problematic nature of the term is not lost, however.
[46] While bell hooks describes the concept of "eating the Other" in terms of sexuality

and sexual encounter, this concept of *consumption* holds true for the mixed-race body, where these bodies become "resources for pleasure" that are disposable and seen as "constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other" (hooks 23).

[47] There is also a large body of literature that examines the "Hapa movement" from a historical standpoint that should be noted. The Hapa Movement occurred in two waves. The initial Hapa Movement emerged from the Multiracial Movement that formed in the 1970's. The initial movement was comprised almost exclusively of families in Black-White racial configurations. Likewise, the movement leaders were almost entirely white, middle-class, suburban mothers of multiracial children whose particular goals were to adopt "colorblind ideologies," but also largely to seek the recognition of multiracial status on government forms and to make multiracial a category protected from discrimination. The first Hapa Movement, then, was invested in coalition with other communities of color, but also in developing "micropolitics" (politics intended to make changes outside *and* within the movement) aimed at challenging the Black-White binary in racial discourse (Bernstein and De la Cruz 725).

The second wave of the Hapa Movement began in the early 2000's. Various organizations began to build coalitions with other communities of color. One of the defining factors that differentiated this wave from the first was a change in strategy for addressing social issues, but also in the goals. The investment in micropolitics, notably a stake in being deconstructive in nature (echoing discourses in gender and sexuality from Butler) was a chief concern of this wave. This same shift to a deconstructive/poststructuralist theoretical investment is also evident in feminist discourse as well, and the blurriness between the second and third waves in feminism speak to the same concerns of the second wave hapa movement and where the movement stands today. To question existing racial structures of power and the hypodescent (one drop rule) that governs racial discourse was vital, as it shapes racial thinking by "constituting a truth regime that provides a cultural edifice in which racism and racist practices can flourish … Hapa activism is designed to challenge this truth regime at the interpersonal level through identity deployment strategies as well as to challenge state policies about racial categorization" (Bernstein and De la Cruz 727). There was a distinct move from an investment in politics of legal recognition, which constituted one of the aims in the first wave, and into a politics of identity, which sought to change the discourse about hapas completely.

[48] Ang's work is referring to Chinese families in which both parents are ethnically Chinese, so her work cannot necessarily be used to speak directly on behalf of multiracial families; however, her nod to language's power over racial/ethnic *authenticity* is especially valuable when studying multiracial individuals.

[49] At the time of the interview, Amerie spelled her stage name as such. Currently, she spells her name Ameriie.

[50] While I make the argument that monoracial categorization denies a mixed-race individual the opportunity to be read as having a complex racial identity, being read in non-essentializing terms can be equally as problematic. Terms like racially

"ambiguous," while not being invested in "either-or" classification, still partake in "dissection" in the Fanonian sense, by feeling a sense of entitlement in the gaze toward a racial other. For instance, when encountering specifically White onlookers, mixed-raced bodies are not surprisingly racialized based on perceived phenotype. Even in the disclosure of a mixed background, White observers often switch positions, noting their ability to tell the difference, in essence having a "narcissistic claim to omniscience" (Haritaworn 127). Therefore, I reiterate that while the mixed-raced body inherently defies monoracial categorization, it is the self-employed performances of racial identity that are truly transgressive.

[51] The "shunning" must also be taken into consideration with the fact that Hines Ward was *born* in Korea, so a shaming from Koreans onto his mother could be happening in a Korean *or* U.S. context.

[52] This does not imply, however, that selectively employing facets of one's ethnic identity means that the individual is not subject to the already existing systems of oppression and privilege depending on how others read them. Hines Ward for example, despite his enunciations of his Koreanness, is placed into a social construct that renders him a Black man, and thus the social and institutional oppressions that coincide with being a Black man in U.S. society still apply and affect him.

[53] This is a nod to the main character in Berry Gordy's 1985 film, *The Last Dragon.*

[54] Critical to note is that while this unique relationship to language often occurs between Korean mothers and mixed children, the nature of language acquisition is not *just* about (not) learning multiple languages. It is also intimately in conversation with historical notions of assimilation, a distinctly U.S. context, and the previously mentioned socially instructed role for Korean mothers to be heavily invested in their children's success. As evidenced by the "melting pot" assimilationist narrative in the United States, success, affluence, and upward mobility are in part dependent on an ability to achieve close proximity to a certain socio-economic class (white middle-class status). Patricia Hill Collins, concerning nationalism and U.S. national identity, states, "whites argue for English-only social institutions, and routinely castigate non-standard American English speakers and those whose social institutions do not match an assumed white culture" (10). Social assimilation and American institutions require English to maintain ideological notions of "nation," thus, there is a history of linguistic suppression in the American context.

[55] While this chapter examines cases in which mixed-race children are creating identity through a biological Korean mother, it should be noted that the "Korean Mother" as a symbol within the Korean Household is a signifier for a women-centered, maternal environment in general—i.e., grandmothers, aunts, and other maternal figures in charge of motherwork, cultural practice, and household childrearing would also exist under the symbolic umbrella of Korean motherhood.

[56] I aim to distance my analysis of Daniel Sandrin's nod toward "authenticity" from the realm of Orientalism and exoticism (even if he occupies a Korean identity to some capacity). In efforts to avoid reproducing the hegemonic notion that Western (in this context American) conceptions of "authentic" Korean food situate American imaginings of it as neutral or natural, my aim is to highlight Sandrin's knowledge and experience having had Korean food in multiple contexts as a demonstration of his

understanding of and ability to make value judgments on the quality of Korean food he has eaten.