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CONSUMING IDENTITIES: CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND FOODWAYS

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B.A., University of Houston – Clear Lake, 2018

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts

Department of Communication Studies
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

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by
Christos Patelis

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the field of Communication Studies

Approved by:
Sandra Pensoneau-Conway, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University
April 9, 2020

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

CHRISTOS PATELIS, for the Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies, presented on April 9, 2020, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: CONSUMING IDENTITIES: CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND FOODWAYS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Sandra Pensoneau-Conway

This paper explores the author's hybrid cultural identity in terms of foodways.

Autoethnography is used as the method to discuss the paternal—Latino, and maternal—White, foodways that the author has inherited. The author discusses how these foodways constitute his hybrid cultural identity as neither Latino nor White, yet both Latino and White simultaneously.

DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated to my grandmother Yvette Ivy McCain for her endless love and support of me, which she continues to give in spirit. It is also dedicated to my mother, Melody Ann Patelis, for imparting in me her enduring spirit. Lastly, this paper is dedicated to my mentor and friend, Dr. Andrea Michea Baldwin, who brought me to the mountain.

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HEADING 1

INTRODUCTION

My Yiayia, or grandmother as we say in English, is known throughout my family for her cooking. She had to learn how to cook while working in kitchens throughout New York City after emigrating from Honduras to the United States in the 1950s. It was how she scratched out a life for herself in this land of opportunity, among the city lights that were so different from her Central American fruit farm upbringing. Among the buildings that reached for the skies, she reached for the stove, and with a “click-click-click,” the gas that she cooked over became the spark of family. It was in the kitchen that my grandfather, a poor Greek immigrant, found Yiayia, her thick black hair and brown skin glistening with the work of feeding the party that he was attending. I don’t know what she was cooking, but it must have been good because he always said he decided that they would be married then and there. So, Yiayia is known throughout my family for her cooking.

Even at almost 90, Yiayia brings a dish to every family gathering. Often, she brings the one we love best: her macaroni and cheese, or, as she jokes, her “Mickey Rooney,” named for the U.S. American actor that she loves, and perhaps because her accented English made it hard to say the dish’s name like her White neighbors did. Her macaroni and cheese is made like a typical U.S. American mac n’ cheese, rigatoni noodles covered in a cheese-milk-egg mixture, baked in a pan until set as the perfect, gooey consistency. It’s the food that I grew up on. It’s the food that I grow homesick for.

Until recently, I never thought about this as odd. “Mickey Rooney” was just what we ate. I didn’t think about why she never made any Honduran or Maya food for us growing up until I asked her for some of those recipes. She doesn’t remember any. Her mother, Rosa Macariegos,

was one of the Maya people, the indigenous populations found throughout Central America. Grandma Rosa, as I called my great grandmother, was orphaned as a child when her parents died and was sent by her aunts to live and work for a wealthy Guatemalan doctor. It is unclear if the doctor thought of Grandma Rosa as his child, the help, or a mixture of both, but I do know that Grandma Rosa learned to cook what he liked while living with his family – and he liked baked macaroni and cheese, not the Maya food that Grandma Rosa had during her childhood.

Grandma Rosa spoke three languages before she died in the 1990s: English, Spanish, and a rare Maya dialect that was spoken in her childhood village. I asked Yiayia what it was called, and she can't remember, just like she can't recall any Honduran or Maya recipes anymore. Just like I can't recall them either. These foods have been displaced from our familial memory, and we only speak Spanish and English now. That third language is long forgotten by us, just whispers of where we come from slipping through our fingers. I have the recipe for that baked macaroni and cheese somewhere at home; maybe I'll lose that one day, too.

What is gained and what is lost when we cook? How does the food we put on the table reflect our identities? As someone with a white mother and Latino father, I've always been concerned about my own identity and heritage. How do I make room for both identities when I set the table? Studying food as a communicative and performative facet of identity production allows me to do that sense-making. Food exists as a concrete cultural artifact that we can study to better understand a group; what a people ate is often linked with their identities. So, if I establish a genealogy of my family's food practices, perhaps I can learn more about where I come from and how my hybrid identity is substantiated through my own foodways. Furthermore, when thinking about mine and my family's foodways, I can better understand my hybrid cultural identity: how I exist as both White and Latino. This paper serves to illustrate hybrid cultural

identity through an autoethnographic exploration of mine and my family's foodways. After all, French gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin once supposedly proclaimed "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are." Therefore, talking about my relationship with food will provide valuable insight into how hybridity is enacted.

This relationship is contingent upon an understanding of identity as a continuous, repetitive, process. As such, I briefly introduce the idea of performativity to establish this understanding of identity. To be performative, means "being or relating to an expression that serves to effect a transaction or that constitutes the performance of the specified act by virtue of its utterance" ("Performative", n.d.). For instance, when communicating we use performative utterances to enact something – "I now pronounce you husband and wife" and "I declare this meeting over" are both examples of these utterances (Austin, 1975). Derrida (1988) then expounded that the success of these utterances is contingent upon their ability to cite related past events or circumstances. Similarly, performativity can be understood in terms of actions, not just language. Judith Butler (1990) notes that identity consists of "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 270), or performatives, meaning that when we enact identity we do so by repeating past actions that align, consciously or unconsciously, with the identity that we want to or are socialized to possess. For example, gender identity is often thought of as a "stylized repetition of acts" that draw upon past examples of how gender was performed. Identifying as a man might involve wearing less-colorful clothing and perhaps growing out facial hair – performatives commonly associated with masculinity or "maleness" in more recent Western culture. These are the associations that we then cite when they are reproduced via our stylized repetitions; they are references to a socially constructed and accepted canon of how-to identify as one thing or

another. We communicate our identities in terms of these mimetic performatives, thus when we no longer repeat something, we no longer enact that identity.

In this essay, then, I respond to the following research question: What can a narrative understanding of foodways tell about how foodways intersect with hybrid identity?

Foodways, defined as “the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period,” (“Foodways,” n.d.), represent our understanding of an entity and its relationship with or behavior concerning food. Studying foodways allows insight into other aspects of a culture, for example, Diner and Cinotto (2018) use foodways to explicate the Jewish diaspora. Foodways are often citational; they allude to others’ behaviors and performances with food. Thus, foodways can also be thought of as performative. When we cook, we take out and look at the physical recipes that we keep in little wooden boxes next to our cookbooks. The recipe cards are written in black ink – the handwriting of our ancestors telling us how to make the same food they made – how to enact our cultural heritage via food. When we make the food they made, we produce them, their identities are (re)presented through our bodies as we perform cooking. After the meal is made, we consume these same identities, sometimes eating the same food that our grandparents and their grandparents did, sometimes forgetting their cuisines. Or, we engage in an entirely different set of behaviors, which cites a whole host of other foodways. In this way, what we cook/eat can be thought of as a way we constitute our identities, a means to either enact heritage or distance ourselves from it by changing a recipe or making something new.

I choose autoethnography as my methodology to explore this phenomenon because it allows me to provide my unique insight as a biracial person who exemplifies hybridity. In the essay that follows, I use performative autoethnography to investigate my relationship with and

consumption practices of food as a site of cultural hybridity and identity (re)creation. As Mohan J. Dutta and Ambar Basu (2013) explain, autoethnography “becomes a process of endless reflection, a reflection on reflexivity, to the point of deconstructing the self and the self’s text and opening it up for further scrutiny/interpretation/negation and re-orientation” (p. 157). More specifically, autoethnography allows me to create a linkage between my person and the phenomenon of hybridity; my body and memories are sites of this phenomenon. I articulate my voice in this way to establish an ethic of representation that runs counter to dichotomous narratives of ethnicity, refuting the fixing of identity as one thing or another. As bell hooks (1995) writes, “representation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonization of the mind” (p. 3). So, in this way, I assert my subjectivity to archive my struggle with cultural identity, a story that is not unique to me alone. Further, I choose to write autoethnographically because it would otherwise be easy to never consider my own white-passing body. It is easy to distance myself from the immigrant bodies that are persecuted for their inability to pass as “U. S. American” or “White.” It is easy to dismiss my privilege, and I write autoethnographically so that I may not do so. Autoethnography requires me to narrate my subjectivity in a way that productively negotiates the tensions of privilege and struggle that are simultaneously present throughout my body.

Finally, I wish to discuss the structure of this paper. First, I will provide a review of extant literature relevant to my argument. Specifically, I hope to put this paper into conversation with research linking foodways and identity and further explaining hybridity. Next, I hope to provide a performative, autoethnographic history of my own foodways as a means to instantiate my hybrid cultural identity. These autoethnographic pieces serve to explicate food and foodways as a

site of cultural hybridity. Lastly, I conclude this paper by reiterating the linkage between food and foodways and hybridity.

HEADING 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I believe that food, culture, identity, and communication all clearly intersect. While researching for a performance that I wrote and acted in called *Nourish*, I came to Hauck-Lawson's idea of food voice. Hauck-Lawson (1998) theorized that food could serve "as a nexus in social interaction – that is, the place, use, and appearance of food – can serve to identify and make known the position, values, and actions of individuals and groups of people" (p. 21). So, while food should not be equated to culture or identity, studying how food is used or consumed can provide important glimpses into how people communicate identities, and therefore, tells us something about culture. When people cook, they put a little bit of themselves into every ingredient: we speak through our food that way. The food cooked contains a bit of our voice; it is an expression of meaning that silently speaks to the traditions and culture of whoever prepares it. In that way, food is a vehicle for transmitting meaning and value to whoever eats it. What we eat, what we don't eat, and how we eat are inexorably linked to who we are. We reproduce culture symbolically through the foods we prepare and our consumption rituals. Dinner is an extension of identity. Despite food itself being ephemeral, we carry its meaning as every ingredient becomes a part of us.

So, studying mine and my family's foodways could potentially lead to a greater understanding of how I enact my identity. I use this relationship with food as a means to explicate a performance of hybridity – how I perform via foodways present throughout my life. In the following section of this paper, I seek to contextualize my argument by placing it in conversation with extant research regarding food and foodways, identity in terms of foodways,

and the intersection between foodways, power, and hybridity. Lastly, I provide a brief overview of autoethnography, my chosen methodology.

Food and Foodways

Studying food and foodways, or how our culture and food practices intersect, is key in developing an understanding of the development of culture, identity, and power within the world. After all, food is central to the human experience; therefore studying “people’s relationships with food can speak volumes about the people” (Miller & Deustsch, 2009, p. 9). For example, through their desire for sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, and various spices, Europeans colonized the world and established a Western hegemony in order to control the production of food, an industry built upon the backs of slaves (Belsasco, 2008; Mintz, 1979/2008). An understanding of food preservation methods such as drying, pickling, salting, and refrigerating was core towards this expansion because they supported great expeditions and voyages into the world (Goody, 1982/2008). Similar to deciphering the etymology of a word, delineating and studying food and foodways highlights the concrete cultural developments and interactions between people throughout history. Human relationships with food provide insight into how we exist in the world; our relationship with food is indicative of our facet of the human experience.

Food has been treated as a signifier from which meaning is signified within the Western world, such as the use of bread and wine during some Christian communion traditions wherein bread represents the body of Christ and wine represents his blood. Barthes (1961/2008) echoes this sentiment in his germinal text, *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*. Barthes examines food and food consumption as not only a site of nutritional value, but “also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (p. 24). The human relationship with food is marked by our

need to apply meaning to it, to develop cuisine from amalgams of ingredients thrown into pots. Five years later, Claude Levi-Strauss (1966/2008) developed the culinary triangle of raw, cooked, and rotted, wherein cooking was considered linguistically as a language that “unconsciously translates its structure-or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions” (p. 47). This means that cooking is a process of communicating the signification and sublimation of food into a cultural concept. Borrowing an example from Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1999), this idea can be better understood by comparing how in Japanese culture raw fish commonly equates to sashimi (a cuisine) whereas in U.S. cuisine, raw fish does not usually make us think of anything other than raw fish. The material, raw fish, is signified differently based on cultural constructs that are extant in Japan and typically absent in the U.S. De Certeau, Giard, and Mayol (1998) write of cuisine and culinary preparation as a site of the everyday that confers an understanding of how to be-in-the-world:

‘Doing-cooking’ is the medium for a basic, humble, and persistent practice that is repeated in time and space, rooted in the fabric of relationships to others and to one's self, marked by the ‘family saga’ and the history of each, bound to childhood memory just like rhythms and seasons. (p. 157)

This process of “doing-cooking” is a persistent, coercive, symbolic communication of the norms and values that one should maintain as part of a cultural system.

Lastly, LeBesco & Naccarato’s (2008) *Edible Ideologies: Representing Food and Meaning*, explains that uses of food as a means to communicate are “not simply tools of seduction or devices for the exercise of repressive power – they are also occasions for the resistance...” (p. 1). In this manner, foodways are a discourse through which power flows between people as a catalyst for domination and subjugation. These scholars show that foodways

are communication phenomena that have historical precedent and are valid and valuable when ascertaining processes through which and during which culture, identity, and power are maintained, transformed, and resisted.

Foodways are usually neutral until placed into a socio-cultural context whereupon they are interpreted and given meaning. Foodways can be viewed as symbols and thus investigated to ascertain the many branching paths taken to arrive at how a certain perception exists. Similar to Barthes' (1964/1977) understanding that symbols can create their own meanings distinct from the object symbolized, food, too, is signified by those who produce, prepare, and consume it. Further, foodways are devised as a sort of symbolic rhetoric as mentioned by Young, Eckstein, and Connolly (2015):

Foodways is where history and culture meet through networks of production, distribution, and consumption. Foodways stresses the interconnected nature of what it means to dine, cook, share a table, pop in at a grocery store, patronize a local farmers' market, go vegan, boycott a mega-conglomerate, reside in a food desert, read labels, vote this way versus that, and so on. (p. 198)

Therefore, a nuanced symbolic understanding of food and foodways allows us to better understand implicit discourses occurring within practices of production, preparation, and consumption. These symbolic interpretations coexist with established rhetorics which, together, then shape individual behaviors.

Symbolic interpretations of food reconstitute the food and allow it to become a vehicle of meaning. For example, one such symbolic interpretation revolves around meat. Within the U.S. and many other Western countries, meat and the consumption of it are distinctly interpreted as heteromasculine (Buerkle, 2009). Meat and meat consumption are conceived of as promoting

virility, energy, and sexual prowess. This symbolic view of meat exists as a predominant characteristic of Western masculinist hegemony as articulated by Derrida's (2008) neologism carnophallogocentrism, or the conditions within Western thought that allow for a privileging of human over nonhuman and man over woman. Carnophallogocentrism can be described as a "structure of thought" (Tait, 2019, p. 53) that centers Western, meat-eating men as dominant and powerful. Derrida uses *carno*, stemming from the Latin for flesh, *phallo*, from the Greek for penis, and *centrism*, to locate an identity that typically had much power in the construction of language and culture: meat-eating men as a hegemony. To consume vegetables or to become vegetarian/vegan is to be considered effeminate and therefore deprivileged due to the loss of one's masculinity. Thus, meat and meat consumption, within a Western masculinist hegemony, is intrinsically tied to a person's value. One need only think of fast-food restaurants to validate this claim. Carl's Jr. commercials frequently eroticize the consumption of hamburgers by featuring femme models in lingerie, sexually eating them. The men in these commercials ogle the models, visually consuming the women along with their hamburgers that are inevitably dripping down the model's breasts. In these commercials, the model is a part of the sandwich, clearly served up for the company's heterosexual, cis-male target market. Similarly, Burger King's "Manthem" commercial, a parody of the feminist liberation anthem "I Am Woman," "engages in a parodic emancipation of men from feminine domestication made material in diet" (Buerkle, 2009, p. 83). This emancipation and proposed return to masculinity, Burger King argues in the commercial, is achieved by men eating foods like hamburgers.

Another example of how food can carry meaning lies in the dessert, halo-halo, which exists as an amalgam of symbols that are representative of Filipino culture as a whole. Made in a parfait glass, the dessert contains shaved ice, yam ice cream, fruit slices, shaved coconut, gelatin,

evaporated milk, sweetened beans, and sometimes much more. It is symbolically representative of the numerous cultures present in the Philippines; in fact, its name when directly translated from the Tagalog means “mixed” (Gupa, Maiquez, & Narciso, 2009). This provides valuable insight into how Filipino culture is enacted. Similarly, the Portuguese dish, bacalhau com natas, or salt cod with cream, is popular within Portuguese communities throughout the world. Baptista (2009) writes an historical account of bacalhau highlighting its ability to travel well due to being salted which is important to a people characterized by the concept of *saudade*, or a national Portuguese spirit that travels wherever they do. Salt cod is a dish central to the Portuguese people because it symbolically represents their travel, resilience, and national spirit. Preparation of it is both a symbolic remembrance in addition to a kind of protection of cultural identity (Baptista, 2009).

Further, food consumption can be thought of as a performance of everyday life. Drawing from Erving Goffman’s (1956) text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, I note that food and foodways carry a sort of socialization within our performance of them. When we enact the doing of preparation, cooking, or consumption practices we are, in fact, not the originators of our action, but are filling a predetermined role/satisfying a requirement as set by a coercive, larger socio-cultural structure. For example, one’s taste is certainly not singularly their own, but due, in part, to a socialized set of expectations concerning how food should be. In fact, as Bourdieu (1979/2008) explains, “it is clear that tastes in food cannot be in complete independence of the other dimensions of the relationship to the world, to others, and to one’s own body” (p. 35), which reinforces the notion of food and foodways as a type of performance of self in everyday life. Further, how we develop relationships with food are byproducts of our enculturated bodies. Food and foodways cannot, and should not, be totalized and essentialized as culture or identity,

but rather understood as a hugely complex system of ever-changing relationships that explain how a culture came to be, exists in its current form, and how it may develop in the future.

Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1999) describes three junctures of food and performance: to perform is to do, to perform is to behave, and to perform is to show. To elaborate and introduce food and foodways to these junctures, performance is to do can be best understood as a “the production, presentation, and disposal of food” (p. 2); performance is to behave encompasses protocols dictated or imposed by larger contexts onto food and foodways, and performance is to show can be conceived of as a “move towards the theatrical and, more specifically, towards the spectacular” (p. 3), or how food and foodways are showcased and elevated in the everyday. For example, performance is to do could be thought of as the actual cooking of food – reading through a cookbook and creating a dish. Performance is to behave can be exemplified by Grandma Rosa cooking macaroni and cheese for the family she lived with, even though it was a dish foreign to her. Finally, performance is to show can be thought of in terms of programs we see on the Food Network, the Julia Childs and Rachel Rays who inform generations of bakers en masse by showing how to both do and behave in a certain way. I am most interested in Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s second juncture of food and performance – as a means of behaving in certain ways under certain circumstances, or how foodways can exemplify my hybrid identity. So, again, performances of the everyday illuminate an understanding of the nuanced relationship between food and culture.

In this section, I have described and substantiated food and foodways as a valuable and rigorous field of research. Additionally, I have tied foodways to communication studies, noting how we communicate through foodways. In the next section, I tie identity and foodways together

to underlie my argument that hybrid identities can be better understood through their relationship with food.

Identity and Foodways

The first, and perhaps most obvious, understanding of food and foodways as a performance of self in everyday life is the act of cooking. Cooking is a recasting of ingredients into the personal: flour and butter, mixed together in a pan over heat, forms a roux. This roux is then turned into a base for a savory souffle, bechamel, macaroni and cheese, or gumbo dish. Two ingredients create a paste that is central to French gastronomy. The reach of colonization throughout the world is evidenced by usage of the roux within U.S. American, Eastern European, and Creole cuisines. We end with a dish that tells a culinary story of movement from the castles of France to the kitchens of humid Louisiana. The making of food is ingrained with a collective unconscious of memories preceding it. In this way, cooking becomes the “sensory experience and skill/technique [of] making and marking collective and cultural memory, and thus, identity, and difference” (Herakova & Cooks, 2017, p. 240).

The recipes we make are a way to remember the past so that we can exist in the present; in this way cooking can be considered a performance of cultural continuation. This may be why during the Holocaust Jewish women trapped within the harrowing walls of Terezin, emaciated and dying, chose to write down their family recipes together (Drews, 2008). They were not cooking these recipes in the internment camps but instead hoped that their grandchildren might one day inherit these recipes and regain a stolen history. When we perform cooking, we are inherently performing all the situations and ways that we have come to conceive of the world, thereby enacting our culture through how we move about the kitchen or wherever we are to cook.

Second, food and foodways as a performance of identity in everyday life can be conceived of as a consumption practice. Consumption here means how we choose to consume or abstain from food. Consumption practices at the micro are always related to the meso and macro levels of a culture. For example, anorexia nervosa, or a state of being wherein a participant chooses to severely restrict consumption, has been thought of as an exacerbated consumption performance of coercive and harmful gender norms (Spitzack, 1993). This performance is enacted as a means to conform to socio-cultural pressures regarding the subjective, idealized (often woman's) body as thin, fit, etc. Moreover, these performances of consumption can often be thought of as acts reinforcing larger socio-cultural expectations of those enacting them (Scott, 2008). Conversely, consumption practices can also reconstitute and redefine normative values. For example, food-centered advocacy tourism through small-scale farms where tourists/visitors are allowed to participate in consumption activities such as milking and drinking fresh cow milk have shown to be particularly effective at inciting activist movements against large-scale agribusiness (Spurlock, 2009).

Third, these performances of identity in everyday life do not only exist in the intimate spaces where we live, but are also framed, concretized, and disseminated by means of media, specifically television. Discourses present in mass media frame food and foodways as sources of messages through which meaning and value can be ascertained by the viewer (Hanke, 1989). Further, Hanke (1989) writes that "public discourse on the subject of food and cooking can be studied as a source of messages about food habits, culinary practices, and the meanings and values that are attached to food and its preparation and consumption" (p. 222). This means that the publicized performances involving food and foodways confer precepts to those that view them. There is an abundance of television shows concerning food and foodways within the

Western world. From Gordon Ramsay and Rachel Ray to *Top Chef* and *Kitchen Nightmares*, performances of cooking and consumption are ever-present within pop culture, showcasing food and foodways, and thus influencing “our lives as a relevant marker of power, cultural capital, class, gender, ethnic and religious identities” (Parasecoli, 2008, p. 2). Performances of everyday preparation and consumption practices are elevated through the medium of television and are reified, replicated, and reperformed by those that see them and thus construct a culture informed by socialized expectations.

Considering food consumption practices as a performance of everyday life provides valuable insight into how culture is enacted in the minutiae of our daily lives. How we enact or remove ourselves from a culture is delineated through these foodways. These foodways are echoes, reaffirming or resisting socialized expectations within a community. Sometimes these performances are indicative of a more political contestation of cultural identity.

Food is perhaps one of the most political substances on this Earth. Civilizations are razed in an effort to secure it, peoples are enslaved to produce it, and identity is marked by what food, if any, one consumes or even has access to. Understanding consumption practices of food as performance of the everyday necessitates that they are understood as contextualized within systems of power. This is not a winner-takes-all, dichotomous approach to power where people either possess it or lack it, but rather a flowing, ever-shifting understanding of power. With that understood, I am interested in the impact that a dominant culture has on a subjugated one. How has the subjugation of my immigrant family evidenced itself through my hybrid identity? This is intimately tied to the relationship between food and power.

In this section, I discussed foodways and identity. Further, I detailed how foodways exist as a performance of everyday life, closely tied to identity. Finally, I established a linkage

between food and power. In the next section, I study the relationship between foodways, power, and hybridity.

Foodways, Power, and Hybridity

Food and foodways can exist, certainly, as means through which domination is enacted on a people. In the U.S., ethnic minority and lower-income communities typically have less agency when comes to access to food. This is due to a myriad of reasons, some being red-lining and gentrification, but also, in part, due to historically receiving what is left over after wealthy whites consume quality and offer up offal through false largess (Cherry-Chandler, 2009). Additionally, “low-income neighborhoods usually exhibit far higher concentrations of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores as compared to many other neighborhoods which have more affluent middle-class or upper-class families living in them” (Purnell, 2019, p. 44). Access to food is restricted due to a hegemony that is perpetuated through classism and racism so that the subjugated must find unique foodways, such as boiling pig entrails in detergent to make them palatable. These acts of necessity inevitably push them further from the nexus of normativity and whiteness. Further, the presence of white, wealthy celebrity chefs and lifestyle experts on popular media such as Julia Child and Martha Stewart provides glimpses into privileged, white worlds while acting, in reality, as means to perpetuate what food culture in the United States “should” be (LeBesco & Naccarato, 2008). Abroad, food and foodways are used as a means of domination, too. In Australia, the inability to access certain foods and the inability to perform foodways has been used as a means to promote acculturation and assimilation of refugees, often to the detriment of immigrant families who no longer feel that they can support their families and are often alienated by foods and foodways that are unusual to them (Agutter & Ankeny, 2017).

Thus, food consumption and preparation exist as highly politicized facets of the everyday where culture is constantly contested. As Counihan (1999) asserts:

Food is a prism that absorbs and reflects a host of cultural phenomena. An examination of foodways—behaviors and beliefs surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food—reveals much about power relations... for every coherent social group has its own unique foodways. (p. 6)

To study food is to study culture – contestations and hybridizations of identity. So, it is easy to see how a linkage between foodways, identity, and power can be made since both are so closely intertwined. This negotiation of power and identity is something that is of particular interest to hybrid identities, or people who are biracial or multiracial. How is power negotiated when half of your ancestors have historically subjugated the other half?

When I discuss cultural hybridity, I dismiss the desire for some fictional singular identity. Rumi Sakamoto (1996) further explicates that “giving up the desire for a pure origin, hybridity retains a sense of difference and tension between two cultures but without assuming hierarchy. It is not a new identity but a new form of identity” (pp. 115-116). I am neither singularly Latino nor White, but both simultaneously. Stemming from his work in linguistics, Bakhtin (1981) theorized hybridity in terms the mixing of two different languages. The hybridization of language was, for Bakhtin (1981), a core reason that languages change, “by means of a mixing of various ‘languages’ co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect” (pp. 358-359). I think of this hybridity as extant within my own body. Two languages, Spanish and English living within me, both contesting for utterance, for release. Instead of language, however, this “double-ness” is my cultural identity, my way of being in the world. It is a disruption of the strict fixing of identity predicated by the modernist paradigmatic approach, existing “betwixt-and-between,”

as Victor Turner (1974) writes, in the liminal space between one culture and another (p. 85). Marked by their capacity to transform, “such identities are continuously being made and remade through social interactions” (Young, 2009, p. 141). My hybrid identity exists not as White or Latino, but as both at the same time, yet something entirely different, too. My heritage remains connected to my ancestors but distinct from my Anglo mother or Latino father. I am both, and neither.

So, I choose to investigate this space, in-between my mother and my father. The space where I come from on the family tree, where lines connect, and my name—“Christos”—is written down. For me, there is no better way to investigate than with food. My father and his Latino family had their own foodways, informed by emigrating to the U.S. My mother’s Southern White family had a vastly different relationship with food. Both of these foodways were and are present throughout my life. A hybridization of foodways, as evidenced by my body, by the things that were put on my plate and that I continue to cook. Perhaps I am who I am partially because of the things I was fed.

Autoethnography

The word autoethnography stems from three distinct roots: *auto*, meaning self, *ethno* meaning culture, and *graphy*, meaning writing. Combined together, auto-ethno-graphy could be understood as writing to understand culture through the self. Doing autoethnography involves using personal experience to explicate concepts, trends, and theories in a way that empowers subjectivities. As bell hooks (1991) famously said:

I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was

happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. (p. 1)

Autoethnography allows researchers to make connections between their personal history, their hurt, their identity, and theory. Narrating the personal is a way for us to “create a relationship embodied in the performance of writing and reading that is reflective, critical, loving, and chosen in solidarity” (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013, p. 19). Autoethnography is a unique qualitative method because of its capacity to link theory with stories. Specifically, I use autoethnography to link foodways, hybridity, and my own identity. Further, because autoethnography asks researchers to “write about the material experiences that provide the discourses that construct their lives” (Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, Leathers, 2008, p. 56), it aligns and mirrors my desire to use foodways to explicate my own hybrid construction of identity. Autoethnography allows for agency in the explanation/exploration of my own identity while simultaneously contextualizing my narrative within the broader theory of hybridity. Thus, my experiences and subjectivities become valuable sites of academic inquiry, hopefully spurring future discussion. In the following section, I outline my chosen method, autoethnography. First, I will provide a brief history of the method, then I will explain the purpose of using autoethnography as a method, and, finally, I will detail why I specifically use the method.

Autoethnography grew as a methodology for four core reasons: an understanding of the limits of quantitative research and a growing appreciation for qualitative approaches, heightened ethical and political research concerns, the absence of narrative and human emotion from research, and a re-centering of the importance of identity in research (Jones, Adams, Ellis, 2013). Functionalist and positivistic research used for generalization and prediction did not fit the needs of contemporary researchers. Drawing from Foucault’s (1976/1980) understanding of subjugated

knowledge, that “we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (p. 93), research in the social sciences underwent a crisis of representation (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). During this crisis attention was drawn to the absence of certain subjectivities, identities, and narratives in research. In turn, qualitative researchers sought out emancipatory methodologies that embraced subjectivities of the researcher. This emphasis on identity—on understanding the epistemological value in reflexively negotiating researcher subjectivity—led to the production of autoethnography. The ethnographer’s field notes, became the autoethnographer’s diary. So, what then becomes the purpose of autoethnography in academic research?

Again, drawing from Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013), autoethnography has five main purposes: to disrupt research norms using personal narrative; to build upon and value personal experience; to work through hardship, offering insight to others in the process; to serve as a written reclamation of one’s voice; and to be accessible to those who may not be used to the jargon-laden writing that is ubiquitous throughout the academy. Autoethnography disrupts research norms by eschewing a desire for “objective research that decontextualizes subjects and searches for singular truth” (Spry, 2001, p. 710). Instead, the power of autoethnography lies in its ability to lay-bare our identities and engage them with others. Autoethnographic narratives reflexively detail the author’s positionality, their emotions, their humanity, and, importantly, their difference. These narratives engage the reader, intertwining the self of the author and other of the audience. Thus, autoethnography providing alternative ways of knowing the world, “but also offers great possibility for changing it” (Madison, 2012, p. 189). Engaging in autoethnography allows us “to know (epistemology), evaluate (axiology), become (ontology),

and do (praxiology) our selfhood – our sense of being – in the world” (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 560).

In this paper, specifically, I use autoethnography to investigate my lived experience as a hybrid individual via a narrativization of my own foodways. I engage in autoethnography because I believe that hybrid voices represent an historical minority in the academy, and my voice provides valuable insight into multiracial and biracial identities. I choose autoethnography because it allows me to show the value of investigating one’s foodways as a means to personally engage in identity. Foodways are frequently bound intimately in human emotions and memories, so autoethnography, which holds emotion and memory in high esteem, provides a unique method with which to make sense of my own foodways more so than other methods. Furthermore, writing autoethnographically allows the reader insight into how I understand my own hybrid identity, something that I have always struggled with. Doing research in this way, then, hopefully empowers the reader to discover how they might be hybrid, too. Perhaps reading this research will allow great comfort to those, like myself, who encountered great discomfort when bubbling in their identity on scantrons.

HEADING 3

THE IN-BETWEEN

My Father

There are very few naturally occurring foods that are white. Many are cream-colored, like mushrooms, or off-white, like cauliflower, but pure and true whiteness is something a bit rarer still. Milk is white, though. White like snow falling on a Midwestern evening and condensing into a glass, condensation on the outside and refreshingly cool on the inside. Milk is white, but I am off-white, my family is off-white, mixed-raced folks representing the America-as-a-melting-pot ideal that no one really subscribes to in a country so replete with racism. In a country where whiteness is the default state and any deviation from it is like drops of color in milk, shifting the brightness darker and different. Spoiled milk.

It's Christmas morning and my younger siblings are busy ripping away at presents on the living room floor underneath my parent's 7-foot-tall plastic tree. My dad, a notorious morning grump, already had his cup of coffee this morning, black no cream or sugar, and went to the fridge to get butter for his bran muffin. This is the same breakfast that he's eaten for the past 20 years or so. So, Dad walks to the fridge, opens it, and then all hell breaks loose: there is no milk in the fridge. He starts accusing me and my siblings of drinking the last bit of it, "you know we always have milk in the house," he says visibly disgruntled in that special way dads have. After a lengthy investigation, Dad hands me a large amount of cash and tells me to "go to the grocery store and buy 6 gallons of milk," which I don't object to. I know better than to object.

But it's Christmas morning, and all of the grocery stores are closed, and I have \$50 in milk money, nevertheless I start driving in vain to procure some dairy. We live on the edge of the suburbs, so at first, I drive to the nearest grocery store, about ten minutes away: closed. Then I

drive to the further grocery store, about 20 minutes away: closed. I pass multiple minimarts: closed. Then I see it, the holy grail, a gas station that is not only open, but practically bursting at the seams with business. I park, get out still wearing my ugly Christmas sweater and pajama bottoms, and enter the store, visually scanning the beverages behind the glass for telltale signs of my white prey. Diet coke? No. Wine? Maybe later. Milk! There it is, in the corner of the store and they have it all, I've hit the jackpot. One percent, two percent, skim, half and half, heavy cream, I think they even have soymilk. So, I grab as many gallons of milk as I can muster, my hands cramping from the number of containers in each hand. I wait in line, pay for them, and bring them home.

I pull up – Dad is outside smoking, and this huge smile breaks across his face. It's as if I have given Dad the best Christmas gift he'd ever received. We always have milk in the house. That is one of Dad's rules, ever since I was little. When we didn't, he would be anxious and annoyed, particularly around meals because he would always have a huge glass or two with whatever we were having for dinner. Burgers and milk, soup and milk, steak and milk. I think my family drank more milk than we did water. And not skim milk, mind you, the real stuff, the creamy 2% milk that comes in plastic jugs marked with red labels announcing important information about itself. When poured into a glass, it makes a particular sound, unlike water. Milk makes a deeper, thicker sound as you pour it, coating the sides of the glass in a hazy residue. Served cold, milk is always somehow colder than water, colder than ice, flowing from the glass to your lips, over your lips, bathing your tongue in ivory as you gulp, gulp, gulp it down on a sweltering Texas summer night.

There is a certain luxury to milk. One that Dad really never had access to as a child growing up in Richmond Hill, a lower income neighborhood in the New York City borough of

Queens. Dad grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood to two parents that were definitively not the “norm.” My Dad is named Spyro, pronounced in a way so that it rhymes with the word hero. But people don’t pronounce his name that way, they always say “Spyro” like it’s the beginning of the spiral. I guess that’s better than being called “spic,” which is what he grew up being called by the neighborhood kids and their parents. Spyro the “spic” was his name in middle school and high school. When he moved to Texas at 17 with his family, they just called him a Mexican like they do to me to, which is a just more socially acceptable way of saying “spic” when you put hate behind it. Because if your skin is dark, like his, and your mother speaks Spanish, like his, and you have to respond back in the same language, like he does, then you’re a Mexican to anyone lighter than you in Texas since, even though Central America stretches an expanse of over 1000 miles, we’re all really just the same-old Mexicans.

Milk is my Dad’s security. Having milk in the house makes our house more “American” and less ethnic. Imbibing milk somehow makes you more American than you were, somehow whiter than you were, it privileges your class over your ethnicity – it shows that you can afford the good stuff. After all, Dad grew up in a household without milk, without that whiteness in the fridge, the same whiteness he was lacking when he was relentlessly called racist names. He would ask Yiayia to make macaroni and cheese, so that they could eat the same dinners that his white friends ate, so that he could be a little bit more like them. He eschewed his cultural heritage because owning up to it was hard for him, violent at times, unsafe to own up to at times. He shoves his culture to the side of his plate and drinks milk instead. It’s easier than being called Mexican, and who can blame someone for wanting it easy for once. I certainly can’t - I’m guilty of the same thing.

Every semester that I've taught CMST 101 at Southern Illinois University, I always do the same identity exercise on the second day of class. On the chalkboard I write, "Sex," "Gender," "Sexual Orientation," "Ethnicity," and "Class." I ask my students, if they feel comfortable, to label my identity in terms of these categories and their reasoning why. There is always a general sense of discomfort whenever I do this activity: no one wants to call me gay, students are hesitant at first to answer why they think I'm male, and, the one that makes me most uncomfortable, how to define my ethnicity. Students are always stumped by my ethnicity and the answers are almost always all over the board. Usually someone says "Greek," and Greek is not an ethnicity (it's a nationality), so I put "White" on the board, but then students affirm that I am not white. Students have thought that I might have some south Asian heritage, "maybe he's Native American" one student says from the back. I see a bit of myself in my students, as I watch them grapple with where to plot me, their discomfort when people answer with ethnic identities that they don't agree with, because I recognize that same discomfort I've felt my entire life. Last semester though, I had a student give a defeated sigh and slump over. "What's wrong?" I asked, thinking that the activity had offended her. "I don't know," she said, "you're just too dark to be white, but too white to be black." I was really taken aback, I might have even laughed out of discomfort, because this is the way I've thought about my ethnicity for the majority of my life. The liminal space between whiteness and nonwhite-ness, existing as neither, unable to find a seat at the cafeteria. Unable to fill out those profiling questions on state standardized test, intrusively asking your race or ethnicity.

I exist at the intersection of three competing cultures—Greek, Honduran, and U.S. American—and for as long as I can remember my ethnic identity has existed in an in-between space: neither Latino nor white – never feeling like an American. I struggle with what to call

myself in a way that establishes my uniqueness, and so I come to terms with calling myself “biracial” instead of just reducing myself to one cultural category. But I am not completely comfortable with this term, either. Being biracial seems to be a lot like identifying as queer—it’s a liminal space, neither here nor there, nebulous and ambiguous. It’s an uncomfortable space to negotiate, yet I have to negotiate it constantly, for to decisively determine my ethnicity would be to erase my ancestry. I will always be the thirteen-year-old boy sitting in a classroom, taking a standardized test, forced to pick which “race I most closely identify” with by bubbling in a circle with a number two pencil, terribly confused because I know that my white grandma grew up in Texas, and my Latina grandma grew up in Honduras and I love both of them too much to forgo either, so I bubble “Other.” I talk about being biracial as somewhat of a burden because I am forced to consider who I am supposed to be more than my colleagues with the privilege of not being “mixed,” but in reality, this ambiguous space that I exist in is a gift. Since I am neither here nor there, I am allowed to be both and none. I am not free from the expectations of my skin color, but I certainly have more freedom than others. This understanding of difference, the one that stems from the discomfort of classifying myself, helps me understand that difference should not exist to establish and categorize uniqueness but rather be employed to transgress hard lines of identity. I both am and am not Latino/White so I may cross each boundary freely. Though that doesn’t mean I don’t long for things to be easier. That doesn’t mean that on some days, I just wish I could be just white.

I was taught from an early age to be an American. To my parents that meant middle-class and white. Granted I had a leg up on the game because I was born half-white, half-not – a beautiful in-between baby. Part of being successful meant acting white and forgetting the other half of me. It meant trying to “fix” my hair to be more like the people I saw on TV. It meant

being Republican throughout my formative years and internalizing the racism that was inflicted on my father, inflicting it on others, passing it along like a disease, because I thought no one would know that my heritage was the product of non-white immigrants if I asked people darker than me if they were legal. It meant not growing up eating the foods of my heritage. Not eating the nacatamales or pastelitos de carne that Honduras is known for. It worked, too.

The fact that I'm in grad school, right now, writing this, proves it. Proves that forgetting myself, growing into this expectation that my grandparents, father, and myself had of whiteness allowed me more agency than people who I share a cultural heritage with. I am ashamed of it. I wish I could communicate with my grandmother in the tongue that she was raised in, and I wish that I knew more about Honduras. I still feel like a fake whenever I say that I'm biracial because a part of me always questions whether or not I'm allowed to claim an identity that I have worked so hard to push out of my blood, yet still persists in my DNA.

When I think of cultural assimilation, I think of the foods that my family eats. The milk that is always in the fridge. The things that I eat have allowed me to disavow my heritage; instead of pupusas, we ate macaroni and cheese. In becoming American, in centering my belonging in my expectations of whiteness I have thrust out the non-white parts of me. Who is this helping? My father has voted Republican in every presidential election since he has been of voting age. I supported conservative politics from a very young age because that was who my Greek grandfather and Honduran grandmother supported. I remember that when Trump was elected my dad would make deportation jokes about people that looked "illegal"—people who had the same color skin as him. My grandmother still doesn't support any progressive politicians, but she hasn't visited Honduras since Trump has been in office. I asked her why one time and she answered that she's worried they won't let her back in.

I read an article in the *New York Times* by Caitlin Dickerson (2019) a short while ago about a sixteen-year-old youth from Guatemala who was held inside a U.S. Border Patrol cell in my home of Houston, Texas. His name was Carlos Hernandez Vasquez and he died on May 20, 2019. He was detained, like many other Latinx youth, for trying to come to the United States, for crossing an arbitrary border illegally. Security footage shows him stumbling to the toilet in his cell, collapsing, and then laying still for four hours. They didn't find him until the morning, when he was pronounced dead. He had the flu.

Carlos Hernandez Vasques grew up in a small town outside of Guatemala City, it's a three-hour drive from where my grandmother grew up in Honduras. I started crying when I read about him, because he is exactly who I was trying to rid my body of. Through my complicity in whiteness and cultural assimilation, I push what little of our shared heritage that is left out of me. I push away the memory of pain that my family has endured because of our difference: being called "spic," being asked if my grandmother was legal, being told that I might have a chance to get into good PhD programs because I am Latino. I sometimes wish I could be all-white like my mother, like the milk in the fridge at my home. But I cannot and should not wish such things. Because no matter how much milk I drink, I will never be fully white.

When I was young, and my Papou, or grandfather, was still alive I would often spend the day at his house with him and my Yiayia. He was a Greek immigrant who initially came to the United States illegally, and I was always so enthralled in the stories that he would tell me. They were so different from what I was used to hearing. Stories of the small village that he was raised in called Daphne and located in the mountainous mainland of the country. Stories of when the Nazis raided his village and he had to escape to a local mountain with goats to prevent Mussolini's troops from stealing them and leaving his family to starve. Stories always told over

lunch: cucumber and tomato sliced up with a little olive oil, salt, and pepper. Simple. Unfussy. Food that we only ever ate in the privacy of my grandparent's home. Food that Papou had grown up on.

Papou loved to show off. We were a middle-class family, but he loved to spend money in public to show how he had "made it." I remember going out to dinner as a family often when we were young and him ordering prime rib or filet mignon, the expensive cuts of meat. He used to lean over to me while cutting them and say in thickly accented English, "agori mou, your stomach does not have a window." For a poor Greek farmer, food was the ultimate display of wealth. What you had in your belly, or what you lacked, differentiated those with and those without. The food on your plate was integral in showing how well-off you are. Access to quality foods, the good cuts of meat, was essential in delineating his class, and by extension the qualification for our family to belong. Your stomach doesn't have a window; people can't see how good you're eating, but they can see what's on your plate and hopefully that will make them forget about the thickness of your accent. After all, Papou would never be able to escape how people othered him throughout his life. He lived in the United States for 50 years but was always considered foreign.

Papou and I are both named Christos Spyros Patelis. It is a Greek cultural tradition for the first-born son to name their first-born son after the paternal grandfather. Papou went by Chris, and when he was alive, I was little Chris to Americans. Around Greeks, I became Christaki and he regained the -tos at the end of our names. After he died, I started going by Christos. I have the privilege of an accent-less voice to guard my name, but sometimes I understand why he went by Chris instead. Whenever I introduce myself to people and they recognize the Hellenic influence on my identity, they immediately say how much they like Greek food. To them, I am like the

souvlaki or baklava or gyros they enjoy, always pronounced poorly and without care because my identity is just something exotic to be consumed by them, too.

I was socialized very early to enact class through food consumption. Eating the good cuts of meat in public to shield me from my otherness. If my grandfather was perceived as wealthy enough, maybe that would diminish his foreignness. After all, being an American is being white, and being white is being wealthy. So, if we're pretending to be wealthy, we're that much closer to being American. But we will never be. Not as long as people compliment me on "my people's" cooking and my "olive" skin.

My Mother

There is a small red house in the tiny town of Dickinson, Texas that is of great importance to me. You can take interstate 45 South through Texas, exit left on highway 13, drive some ways and take a left, over the railroad tracks, onto DePalermo road. There are five houses on this road, all of them single-story homes that would be considered run-down by folks with money, but the important one is the red one: my grandparent's home. Family lore has it that my Papa met my Mema when she was out buying groceries with her aunt one day at the local market. It was love at first sight, and I believe them. They were together for more than 60 years, raised four children together, one of which was my mother.

As with any Southern family, food was central to Mom's upbringing. There were her favorites, like Mema's cornbread and carrot cake, and her not-so-favorites, like the green gelatin salad that was in vogue during the 70s and 80s. Instead of a fireplace to gather around, they had the dinner table. Supper was served promptly at 6 PM, and if you were late you probably went to bed hungry. That was just how things were done. In many ways, they were the idealized U.S. American family: white, lower-middle-class, comfortable. For my Southern family, food was

never a way to make up for your otherness, for what you lacked. Food was instead the thing they carried with them from generation to generation, signifying their place here in the United States. Unlike Yiayia, Mema had the handwritten recipes of her mother, passed down in a little, hand-carved wooden box that now rests in my own mother's kitchen. A box that will one day be in my kitchen. These recipes are my White family's proof-of-origin, that we've been here for a while, that we're "American." Yiayia has no such box of proof, instead she relies on her Green Card to show her belonging. Our family recipes show so much more than just measurements and directions, they substantiate our claims to our culture. These recipe cards prove that we are Southern, they prove that we've been here and have a right to that name because they are the same recipes, made in the same ways as people in this region have been cooking them for decades now. What's paradoxical is that there is so little writing on these recipe cards, yet they provide such strong linkage to their culture—much stronger proof than anything my immigrant grandparents could do to prove their American-ness.

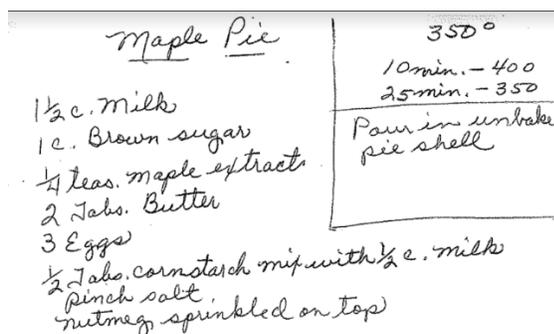


Figure 1 Maple Pie

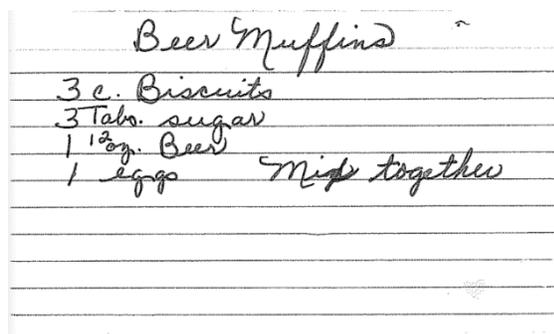


Figure 2 Beer Muffins

Pecan Pie - Unbaked Pie Shell

1. 3 Eggs (beaten)
2. 1 Cup Sugar
3. $\frac{3}{4}$ Cup White Corn Syrup
4. 1 Cup Chopped Pecans

mix all ingredients & place in pie shell. Bake 1 hour at 325° or until inserted knife comes out clean.

Figure 3 Pecan Pie

I love these old recipe cards, because they represent a different side of my history. They are my link to Mema, who, though no longer here, still is heard when I make her food. It is a great privilege to pull a notecard out of that ornately carved wooden box and recognize the memories that come along with it. In many ways, that little wooden box, filled with innumerable recipe cards, penned in cursive is the heart and soul of Mom's family. Whenever I make one of these recipes, it's as though Mema is still cooking with me in the kitchen. It is frequently said that smell and memory are intimately linked, so that when we smell a familiar scent, we are flooded by memories from our past. Smells waft through the air as I make these recipes, so that the air, instead of being filled by aroma, is replete with memory. Memories that I inhale as my cornbread is baking, or as I grate carrots for carrot cake. It's like being transported from my kitchen in Illinois, to Mema's kitchen in Texas, with the sunflower embroidered napkins and the small porcelain cow figurine on her windowsill above the sink. Cooking then becomes like going home.

During my first year of graduate school in Carbondale, IL, I decide to have Thanksgiving dinner at my small apartment. I don't think I should go home for the holidays because it feels as if I have just moved here, and I want to acclimate to what Illinois winters felt like. My phone rings, I look at it and in big, blocky letters the screen says "Mom," so I pick up. "Do you want

me to come up and visit you for the holidays?” She asks, though she’s not really asking, she’s more so telling. “Of course!” I respond back to her. So, we make plans to have her come up for the week we have off for Thanksgiving break, and my wonderful Mom drives the 13 hours it takes to get from Houston to Carbondale. I invite my friends via a Facebook event, get a headcount, and plan a menu.

Now, Thanksgiving dinners have always changed around for me. After my parents divorced when I was ten there was really no set menu for Thanksgiving, it varied widely depending on whose house I went to. The only thing that I always wanted was Mema’s cornbread dressin’, and thankfully Mom brings the recipe with her from Houston.

Thanksgiving day comes around and we busy ourselves in the kitchen, chopping, sautéing, and boiling, until the only thing left to do is roast the turkey and make the dressin’. Mom takes lead on this, and I stand back, she’s a pro after all. She whisks together ingredients to make the cornbread batter and puts it in the oven to bake. Meanwhile, she prepares the other ingredients – cutting vegetables and aromatics that will eventually make their way into the dish. I take out the cornbread from the oven when it’s done, a magnificent heap of fluffy golden goodness. We then take a break, like we always do, to cut ourselves generous portions of the cornbread, slather on a dab of butter, and silently nibble away at our slices. It’s a moment that happens every year we make the cornbread dressin’, an unwritten line of the recipe that is necessary to making it. After our brief moment of quiet noshing, we return to the task at hand. First the cornbread is crumbled into small pieces, then the vegetables are dumped unceremoniously into it, the mixture is stirred vigorously until well-combined, next broth is poured over the mixture, so it doesn’t become too dry when you finally bake it all together. Once baked, I pull out the dish and remark at the golden crust that has formed and inhale the aroma

that now permeates my apartment. It's the best smell in the world, and it now contains the memory of cooking my first dinner away from home with Mom.

These recipes represent the collective memory of my White family. The recipes we've collected over the years read like diaries. In fact, I associate certain dishes with specific people: "Deviled Eggs" belong to Aunt Val-Val, the "Beer Muffins" have been reclaimed by Mom. Though there aren't signatures on any of these index cards, I can tell you exactly who created each recipe. The typed recipe card, titled "Carrot Cake," belongs to Mema.

Mema's carrot cake was the crowning achievement of any decent family gathering we had. I remember that sometimes we would have big family reunions at Kelley's Country Cookin', a small chain of southern-style restaurants in Texas, and Mema would always bring along the carrot cake she made in a traveling case, despite the restaurant offering their own. Mema's was better anyway. This carrot cake was so good that, even after my parents divorced, Dad would frequently ask me to get Mema to make me some so that he could have a slice.

During my second semester of graduate school, my phone rings and, again, in big, blocky letters the screen says "Mom." Only, this time, it isn't good news. "Mema had a stroke," Mom says, "you should come visit her, to say goodbye." So, the next day I fly from St. Louis to Houston where Mom picks me up. We speed through traffic, to North Houston, and when we get there, I go into the room where Mema is. She's asleep, breathing shallow breaths as I sit down next to her and whisper my goodbyes. She was gone a few hours later.

But people are never truly gone, are they? A few weeks later I found her carrot cake recipe while going through some old keepsakes that reminded me of Mema. I spent a moment just looking at the recipe card, whispering the recipe soundlessly, line-by-line. There was a meeting at school that day, and I had just enough time to go to the store for ingredients. So, I

made Mema's carrot cake and brought it with me to the meeting, because I wanted to share a bit of her with my colleagues. Because everyone deserves to know what love tastes like. Because cooking what Mema cooked is a way to keep her memory alive.

Cooking, for my maternal family, is a way to celebrate our history. It is a process through which the voices of our ancestors speak and still have seats at the dinner table. The memory of us, encapsulated in a little, carved wooden box that remains in Mom's kitchen, next to all her cookbooks. One day, part of Mom will be in that box, so I can still visit her. One day part of me will be, too. It is my proof-of-origin and the resting place of my memory. A family tree of recipes.

The In-Between

"Spic" – the name placed on my father
at the Whataburger one day after soccer.

We just wanted hamburgers like the others.

But this old, white woman rolled down her window – and yelled –

SPICK!

Because our skin gets tan in the Summer,

and I no longer resemble my mother -

whose long blonde hair prompts strangers to applaud her for adopting me

- though I'm her's.

"But agorimou" says Papou,

"Your stomach doesn't have a window so how can they tell how well you're eating"

The implication being – they can't.

They have no idea what makes me up.

When I was a child,
I thought that the food Yiayia and Papou ate in their own home was disgusting,
but now I only taste the memory of their heritage on my tongue,
and the regret that I yearned for “American” meals instead.
Perhaps... they would be happy that I’m whiter than them,
but I refuse to erase the memory of where they come from
though I don’t have the recipe cards to prove that.

Then again,

I am the boy of many names
in many different kitchens –
Pobrecito, Agorimou, Tweety, Young-man, Clifton, Chris, Christos -
and perhaps my body can be read
like a recipe instead.

HEADING 4

CONCLUSION

When I was in the fifth grade, my class was given the opportunity to dissect owl pellets. I jumped at the opportunity, enthralled at the possibility to know what an owl might pass. We sat on stools in our chilly science room, elbows propped up on the black tabletop as the teacher passed around the requisite materials: tweezers, scissors, gloves, steel trays, and then, finally the owl pellet. It was the dusty brownish-grey oval, sitting on a paper towel in the middle of the tray. My group went about the task, carefully excavating the excrement for hidden remnants of the owl's prey. Some small bones, a little grass, nothing too interesting, just glimpses into the small life of another creature. Our teacher asked us to write small paragraphs detailing how we thought the owl's life might have been – was food abundant or scarce for them? Did they have any favorite foods? So, my lab partners and I plotted the life of this owl on pieces of paper. A lifetime surmised from food.

This paper is a dissection of sorts. My own life, my foodways laid bare on a silver tray, for the reader to look through and better-understand my expressions of hybrid identity rooted in two vastly different families. I wonder how a reader would respond to my narratives regarding my Latino heritage and my lauding of my White family's recipe cards. Perhaps that hybridity is not two parts equal, but a process through which I ebb and flow between facets of my identity. The autoethnographic sections of this paper serve as artifacts voicing different parts of my identity as I work through them under the context of foodways. Maybe the reader can see themselves in the mirror of my language and investigate their own hybridity.

Simultaneously, this paper also constitutes a sense-making. It is my vocalization of identity, defined as hybrid. I work through this paper as a means to answer if hybridity can be

expressed through foodways, if it appropriate to call myself as such. My father's foodways represent my minority, subjugated identities. As I write about my father, I better understand how my "otherness" has been expressed via food. How my immigrant family has understood food as a means to "fit in," and how I have internalized that despite not having an accent and speaking English fluently. For my father's family, food is often the door through which we escape our identity, how we prevent others from calling us hate-filled epithets. Through my father, my foodways are informed by their capacity to allow us to disidentify with a culture: we no longer cook Honduran food, we make Mickey Rooney.

Alternatively, when I write about my mother I am reminded of the strong bond between food and identity. Foodways can represent heritage, history, and memory in ways that are so deeply rooted to your own body. In writing about my mother's family, I recognize the great privilege of never having to perform anything other than your own heritage, something that my father's family has not been able to do. The recipes that my mother's family prepared are indicative of their Southern Whiteness, they "fit in" to the area within which they cook.

My foodways are hybrid. I am both concerned with my otherness and able to rely on the privilege of my whiteness. In this way I become the familiar-other to many, constantly wrestling against being classified as not-White-enough and not-Latino-enough. Similarly, I resist being classified as just Latino or White. It feels uncomfortable to be referred to as a person-of-color, because I know that I have the privilege of having lighter skin than my father, but perhaps that discomfort is due, in part, to how my father's foodways taught me to conceal our heritage, too. Likewise, it feels like a lie to just call myself White.

This paper can be thought of as a negotiation of my own hybridity via foodways. My autoethnographic sections detail two foodways that occupy my body at the same time. Through

writing autoethnographically, I am able to communicate the messiness associated with hybridity: these foodways don't fit together neatly like puzzle pieces, instead they are watercolors that have been painted closely and blend together, or the blending flavors of food on a plate that has been filled. I disrupt modernist notions of a fixed identity; I am not a fillable bubble on a scantron.

Furthermore, I have used food to discuss identity in a way that not many researchers have yet done. I have discussed how my foodways inform and communicate a hybridity, a subject that deserves greater attention as more multiracial individuals join the academy. In the future, I will continue to work with food, identity, and hybridity to discover alternative modes of identification such as in Viet-Cajun food in Houston, Texas or the Spanish-French gastronomy of the Basques in Europe. How do they communicate hybridity through their own fusion-cuisines? There is much valuable research left to be done in this area.

When I write that "I am the boy of many names," I define myself as hybrid. I am not just one name or another, I am always many different names. My identity is neither White nor Latino. My foodways are not one or another. I am both, at all times. Two sides, a blend of heritage inside of my body, both informing and informed by my foodways. Let these words be the recipe of my hybridity.

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