

GENERATION FIVE: A CHICANA'S JOURNEY FROM BECOMING TO BEING IN
THE BIRACIAL KITCHEN

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DEDICATION

For my daughter, Evelyn Chan, because I didn't make it this far despite you, but because of you. You make me proud to be your mommy every day and you've made every effort worth it.

For Baby Brose, who joined us at the end of this journey—We can't wait to meet you. And for my great grandma, Maria, my grandma, Memo, and my mother, Jennifer, for giving me this story.

For every woman who raised me. Every mother who needs to be told that she matters. And every woman cultivating her own identity.

And to every single, working, mother in college, as evidence that it can be done, it has been done, and you are capable of doing it.

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Cultural rhetoricians work to decolonize research practices to make space for all possible realities, placing a particular emphasis on story as theory. As such, this thesis utilizes an auto-ethnographic approach to demonstrate how KC Chan-Brose struggled to construct her biracial identity as a white-passing Chicana and how she used food and cooking as a tool for reading and writing cultures.

Chan-Brose argues that cultural identity is made, or constructed, by people. With this argument, the oppressive notion of either/or, which implies that biracials must choose one culture and align themselves with that culture, loses power. This loss of power also challenges the notion of authenticity within cultures, positing the notion of authenticity as exclusionary, rather than inclusive. She examines her claim to color by storying her experience of coming to understand herself as biracial. She concludes that biracial identity is constructed from the mundane everyday experiences of our lives, and of both sides of our cultures.

Chan-Brose posits that we must acknowledge the ways our culture is constructed by the ways we speak, relate to one another, and understand ourselves, and then garner the authority over our own identities to influence our culture's construction. To model this, Chan-Brose proposes constructing cultural identity through the lens of fusion food and uses Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* and Malea Powell's *metis* to demonstrate both/and identities as viewed from biracials who have claimed their biracialness as their power.

Marilee Brooks-Gillies, PhD, Chair

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There's this story that I've told myself for as long as I can remember about where we came from, how we got here, who we are. The cast of characters, my family. The Diazes, we call ourselves, though only a few have maintained the surname. It began with the Diazes, My Great Grandpa Walter, and the Cavasoses, my Great Grandmother Maria. Now, through marriages and daughters and divorces, we have devolved into factions that don't tell the same story: Rickett, Voyles, Sims, Elsbury, Chan, Chan-Brose. But cumulatively, when strangers become friends or when stories are shared over meals that don't seem to match our new names, we are all Diazes.

The story begins in the garden, my knees pressed into the grass between plants, my blue jeans greedily soaking up the green moisture beneath them. In this scene I am kneeling next to my grandmother, Memo¹, picking serranoes. The peppers exhale their scent into the air as we pluck them from their arrow shaped leaves, microscopic droplets of green earth and heat dusting our fingers.

Memo, I imagine, is elbow deep in the leaves of the plant, eyes focused on something at its center that I cannot see. She seems to be looking across or between. Maybe she's peeking across entire generations, between realities. Maybe she's just determining which pepper to pluck next. She asks,

“Do you know the story of your great, great grandmother?”

Without waiting, she tells me of a woman named Esperanza with wild curls and gypsy skirts who came to America carrying only her copper cazuela full of jamaica flowers², her family recipes tucked into the wrinkles in her hands.

¹ pronounced mi/moo

² Known in the US as hibiscus flowers, these red blooms are brewed to make a vibrant and tart tea.

“She taught me how to make tamales,” she tells me in a voice that I’ve imagined as slightly accented, even though she has never spoken a lick of Spanish. “I learned to spread the masa on the corn husks before I could hold a kitchen knife, and how to fold them. That was the job for all of the little ones.”

As she speaks, her memories seem to carry her somewhere far away. She plucks a serrano and turns it over in her hands, examining how the sun glints off of its waxy skin. It’s the practiced motion of a fidgeter, a person who has been taught to keep their eyes down when they speak.

“It takes the whole family to make them. It’s what keeps us together.” The snap of the pepper’s skin breaking beneath the pressure of her thumbnail brings her back, and she eyes me, contemplating. “I think it’s time,” she smiles, “time that I pass her teachings on to you.”

The story falls into snippets now. I haven’t imagined transitions or dialogue, just fragments of scenes pushed forward by generic montage music.

- Memo and I dicing chilies and tomatoes across the table from each other.
- An endlessly simmering pot so large that is entirely impractical to feed our family of three.
- Tortillas puffing on a hot comal, singed fingertips flipping them over once and then into a breadbasket.

It’s only a story, a compilation of wishes and daydreams and what-ifs constructed to answer a question. For a long time, it was the only story I had. I would tell it to myself when I couldn’t find the answers that I’d been searching for about who I am or when those answers weren’t what I wanted them to be.

I am Mexican American. And I am white. I am Chicana, biracial, white-passing—a series of labels raging against each other in an attempt to tell one story of who I am, one way. I have tried each of these identities on like one might try on clothes at the mall, slipping into Mexicanness methodically, mimicking the markers that prove the culture hiding beneath my skin. My name Kristina, not Khirston, Diaz, not Sims, to my homeroom teacher in 6th grade. The lies I tell, boasting that *I love jalapenos*, when I really couldn't handle the heat. The Spanish-speaking classmate who figured out my secret, calling me *mapache*³ for two years to which I'd snap *I know what you said, cabrón*. But I did not, in fact, know what he said. And he knew it. My birthday party features a pinata shaped like a guitar, buñuelos, and a boy named Oscar that I have a crush on.

As I grow older people begin pointing it out, that my Mexican doesn't fit quite right. There's an image in my head of what I want to look like, but it's not the muted image I see in the mirror. Three dollars for box of *Revlon* #11 "soft black" disguises my yellow hair to look more like my mother—root touch-ups become constant and so do black rings in my sink.

Sophomore year at high school where I can count the people darker than me on one hand. My skin betrays me and my tongue stumbles over the rolls and curves of a language that is supposed to be mine. I retreat, shed my Mexican and let it drop to the floor in a rumpled pile and return to the safety of the whiteness with which I am supposed to be more familiar. In some ways I am, with my biscuits and bacon grease gravy and my love for Shania Twain; in other ways, not so much. I want *being* to be easier. I become

³ *Mapache* means raccoon, by the way, a nod to the dark circles under my eyes and my bleeding eyeliner. I had assumed he was calling me a curse word or a racial slur, but "raccoon" hurt just the same.

Khirston again. And Sims. I check the box for “white” on my driver's license application. Date boys with names like *Joe*, who have mothers with names like *Liz*, who work nine-to-five's at places like *Eli Lilly*. I don't share family photos with people whose family photos don't look like mine—exposure set to focus on to the white girl's smile, muting my browner mother and cousins to one dimension.

I don't serve *buñuelos* at my high school graduation party. I can't explain appropriation yet, or why it's not appropriation. I don't talk about my family anymore. I don't know how. I wonder whether I have the right to claim them anymore—my stories, my family, my Mexican, me. To claim my Mexican, I feel I must first prove my Mexicanness.

In graduate school I read Gloria Anzaldúa. She tells me in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, that “being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship” (84). She helps me to reconcile these stories I tell myself, shows me that they are important because they tell me who I want to be. But there is more. It is ok to be. Not just to want to be, not just to try to be. Just to be. I am introduced to cultural rhetorics, the “study and practice of making meaning and knowledge with the belief that all cultures are rhetorical and all rhetorics are cultural” which emphasizes the practice of making meaning and relationships, as well as the study of how others have done so (Cultural Rhetorics Consortium). For the first time, cultural rhetorics gives me validation and permission to make meaning out of what I am, not what others have told me I should be. I stop reading people, texts, situations, and ideas the way that I have always read—watching, analyzing, memorizing, mimicking. Instead I try to engage with the things I

had been reading by speaking to them, listening, participating, and asking questions, and from within these things I am reading, I begin to “build meaningful theoretical frames from inside” (Cultural Rhetorics Consortium). It takes more time this way, its messier, more work, and depends upon my own relationships with other people, with cultures, with the place and space in which I perform and reflect upon this practice. But it also validates the human experience, asking me to stop trying to tape and glue things down until they become the knowledge I seek, and instead to make meaning from the way things accumulate, interconnect, and be.

This practice pushes me to ask a new question: how do I situate myself in the stories that make me who I already am? As a child in the bliss of ignorance, before labels and identities, I knew who I was. Now, it is only through careful examination of myself, my cultures, of stories that do and do not belong to me, that I can come to know who I am again. I am a compilation of many stories. A constellation, as the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (CRTL) call it in “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics,” multiply-situated (1:2). From a cultural rhetorics orientation, I can identify as different configurations within the constellation of myself based on the position from which I view the interconnected clusters.

I am not “skewered” into place at my connective points, but rather, able to move fluidly across and between them— never the either/or, always the both/and (CRTL 1:2). Cultural rhetorics empowers me to claim my Mexicanness because it is my story, but it also tells me that Mexicanness is not all of my story. It can’t be. My whiteness is part of my story, my biracialness too. I am, as Jacqueline Jones Royster says in “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own,” a series of “individual stories placed one against

another against another” (30). These stories “build credibility and offer...a litany of evidence from which a call for transformation in theory and practice might rightfully begin” (Royster 30).

To engage in this transformation of theory and practice, we must first identify a starting place, a place from which we have been building knowledge and making meaning up to now. We must reflect on the way things are and why they are and who made them that way. So, let us begin here, by recognizing the ways our dominant narrative already constructs our realities.

The “who” is easy to identify. It is those in power, which for me, as a woman and scholar in America, is the Eurocentric dominant narrative of my country and my education system. Of course, the “who” that constructs my reality is much more complicated than that. It consists of years of history, of intentional and unintentional construction, of words that have been twisted, lost, or stolen, of mistakes, and of ourselves, even the marginalized, the women, the people of color, who are complicit and complacent in this system that makes up our reality.

The dominant narrative of our Eurocentric education system constructs our reality by saying that theory, traditionally, relies on language, which is simplified, uniform, and scientifically acceptable, in order to prove an idea (Powell, “Stories Take Place” 401-402). This is the way things are, valued for their conciseness and digestibility, whether it be in the explanation of a thing or the format in which the thing is presented—if the knowledge you construct can’t be replicated, shared, or taught, it doesn’t matter in our reality. This “way things are” explains how I made my original evaluation of my identity. I evaluated it through the same lens that I had been taught to use to determine a thing’s

credibility, realness, and authenticity. The Mexican identity I had been trying to mimic was based on the static representations of Mexicanness I'd been exposed to—images that I found on television and in the menus of bastardized Mexican restaurants. They weren't accurate, but they were consistent, widely shared, and easy to digest. These stereotyped caricatures showed me concrete qualities that could be directly associated with Mexicanness—Mexicans are loud, Mexicans eat spicy food, Mexicans speak Spanish. My attempts to be Mexican were influenced by my immersion in the systems created by the Eurocentric dominant narrative of my country and my education. Thus, the Mexican identity I mimicked needed to be simple enough to explain in a soundbite, be consistent and replicable, and prompt others with a similar understanding of the Mexican identity to label me as Mexican.

It makes sense that we make meaning this way. Academic scholarship, after all, is predicated on the fact that knowledge can be built and disseminated via writing, reading, and instruction. This is the motivation behind doing what we do as scholars, to answer questions, discover ideas, concretize them to the best of our abilities, share them, and enjoy the prestige of being recognized as contributing to the discipline. The “why” here is a for number of reasons. Things are the way things are because it's the way they've always been, and we have been rewarded for it. It is the system we recognize, and thus all try to follow to gain those rewards. Academics are hired and fired based on their ability to participate in the system.

In “Listening to Ghosts: An alternative non-argument,” Powell points out an innate flaw in this way of constructing reality, that these standard stories have “so much more involved in being able to have this story than the telling of it can hold. The having

spills over, the seemingly unutterable excess of story” (13-14). It is this need to standardize and simplify language and understanding that stops us from authentically making meaning. The caricature-esque understanding of Mexican culture that I had used as a model lacked complexity, thus so did my mimicry. I was able to speculate about Mexicanness and make predictions about what it might look like under familiar circumstances. But in order to truly be my Mexican identity, I had to be able to create from within my theory of Mexicanness and contribute to the story of it. My participation in the Mexican identity must further complicate that identity rather than simplify it. Instead of studying other people to learn mimic my Mexican identity, I needed to stop mimicking others and start considering my own state of being Mexican as valid. I needed to embrace the ways that *I* do my Mexican identity myself and determine my identity based on what I do, rather than what other Mexicans do or what I do not do.

But how does one *do* cultural identity? This question brings me here. Cultural rhetorics provides some answers. For one, cultural rhetorics tells us that the simple question of *what are you* cannot have a simple answer. The things that make us up are the everyday, the mundane, there is much to understand about those things—what they are, why they are, how they interact with one another. In a dominant narrative in which we are encouraged to condense ourselves, we are often taught the we should have one simple answer—a number preferably, and usually only the number one. But cultural rhetorics complicates. It does so critically and intentionally, asking scholars to engage with the everyday practices that build cultures and communities, rather than to objectify those practices in an attempt to objectively read them. As Andrea Riley Mukavetz puts it in “Towards a Cultural Rhetorics Methodology: Making Research Matter with Multi-

Generational Women from the Little Traverse Bay Band,” a cultural rhetorics orientation “rejects the idea that ‘everything is a text’ to be read and instead engages with the material, embodied, and relational aspects of research and scholarly production” (109). This differs from the scholarship of the dominant narrative, which tells me that I must pick, either researcher or researched, in that through a cultural rhetorics orientation, I must be both researcher and researched in order to understand the *how* of my cultural construction, not just the *who*. My answer to the question, *who are you*, is complicated to *how*. The answer is not a noun, it must be a story.

The predisposition of the dominant narrative of Eurocentric academia is to remove the complexities of identities and cultures in order to condense them into a soundbite that can be disseminated across a vast audience. The result, though, is that identities and cultures are essentially tokenized in order to be theorized about. When identities and cultures are theorized upon rather than from within, they don’t represent reality, they represent select exemplars of identities and cultures. The reality of identities and cultures is that they are constructed by people and have a reciprocal relationship with the dominant culture—acting upon, reacting to, and adapting from one another. This is why cultural rhetoricians have adopted the visual metaphor of constellations—to demonstrate the relationality and multiplicity of all possible realities (CRTL 1:1). As the CRTL state, using this metaphor:

allows for different ways of seeing any single configuration within that constellation, based on positionality and culture. We are thinking, for example, of the way that different cultures have different ways to draw relations between stars in the sky, and how naming those relations, those constellations (Ursa Major, the Bear, the Big Dipper, the pathway to Sagittarius) is an act of meaning-making. (1:1)

In practicing theory as story cultural rhetoricians resist this simplification, looking beyond the written theory to the human bodies, work, history, and relationships that make up a culture. These storied human elements approach questions of identity and culture not as if they have set answers, but as if those answers are still forming themselves as the stories take place. Soren Kierkegaard has been paraphrased as saying that life can only be understood backwards, implying that we will only be able to answer questions about who/how we are at the end of our lives, once they have been lived (164). But while we are alive our identities do not have a stopping point—we never stop becoming. And while cultures have living members, negotiate the absence of members, and influence other cultures, they do not have a stopping place. Cultures are continuously “built, shaped, and dismantled” by people through the stories of who and how we are and how we relate to one another (CRTL 1:1). We don’t have the luxury of knowing what will become of our stories while we are still living them, but we do have the capability to begin reading our stories aloud as we live them. We can make choices about how we relate to others, how we shape and are shaped by our cultures. We can take part in our stories as they evolve through the ways we *do* cultural identity. If we stop trying to figure out what we can become, we can focus on discovering who we already are—on what it means to be.

To better understand the relationality across our identities and cultures we have to look at the mundane practices that make up our everyday lives. We must examine and engage with, not the markers that others apply to our identities and our cultures, but the things we *do* every day to make our own identities and cultures. We must examine how each day we continue to *be*. How might I study the things about myself, my identity, and my culture that I take for granted? It’s like asking a person how to breathe. They can tell

you how they experience breath, but the nuance relies on understanding how their experience differs from yours. The shared action of breathing unites us, but the difference in perception and experience of it is what makes us different. To understand who we are, then, requires both critical self-reflection and an understanding of our relationship to others.

I began this journey of understanding myself long before I knew what I was doing. I had only my lived experience to build my identity from and no one else's to compare it. It wasn't until I going to school and regularly interacting with others that I had any idea that I was different. The curiosity started in the lunchroom in elementary school, when lacking in lunch money one day, I was forced to wait until the other students had been served before I could go through the line and get my cold lunch; two slices of white bread wrapped in plastic, a two ounce container of peanut butter, a wooden stick to spread it, and white milk all served on a Styrofoam tray. I could ruminate here on my sad story of humiliation; the public shaming as I marched through the line with the poor kids, being the last to sit with my friends who had nearly completed their hot meals, the cold bread tearing as I spread the hard peanut butter on it. These things all happened, and I didn't escape the experience unscathed, but it was this experience that led me to start asking questions.

While my classmates may have been disappointed with the open-faced peanut butter sandwiches I constructed, I came to prefer them. I didn't see the sandwiches as a punishment, but a treat. I didn't eat peanut butter sandwiches at home, you see, nor did I drink milk. My mother and I mostly ate hot meals, fast food or reheated leftovers from her waitressing jobs. Peanut butter and bread were simply not staples in our home. So at

school, I'd spread the peanut butter on thick over one piece of the bread. I ate them open-faced, the sweet, salty stickiness adhering to the roof of my mouth and warming as I closed my teeth over the bread, careful to avoid touching my lips. Then I'd chase the sandwich with the white milk, watery and creamy and refreshing, as my classmates eyed me with an expression of peculiarity that I don't think they truly understood. As time passed and my lunch money account refilled, I continued asking for the peanut butter sandwich kits reserved for the poor kids. The lunch ladies obliged, confused, for a while. But after a month or so, they began turning down my requests, directing me back to the hot lunches that I had never enjoyed. I stopped eating lunch altogether after that, gagging at the kids who put ketchup in their mashed potatoes and gravy, curious about the cardboard quality of the pizza that my peers so enjoyed. I wasn't able to participate the lunch swaps—*my chocolate milk for your carrot sticks?* And when I tried to explain my preferences, my friends took it as my condemning their food choices. As time went on, I began skipping lunch to go to library, where I flipped through cookbooks and the librarian snuck me twinkies and pringles. As I sacrificed my lunchtime bonding with my peers, my differences become more obvious to them and to myself. My eating habits allowed me to begin to ask why.

Food and the practices we do to create, consume, and understand food tells us a lot about our who we are. In "Cooking, recipes, and work ethic: Passage of a heritage literacy practice," Suzanne Rumsey tells us that "in the study of American ethnic groups, food has been viewed, like language, as an indicator of the degree to which the group has retained or shed its culture of origin. In fact, it has been argued that food is one of the last aspects of culture to be discarded, that food is particularly resistant to change"

(“Cooking” 71). As my experience in the lunchroom demonstrates, food is a form of social identity, solidifying group membership or alienating group members, based what one does and does not eat (Cosgriff-Hernández et al. 118). The cooking and eating of food is an “expressive behavior, relatively easy to observe, and heavily laden with symbolic meaning” (Lockwood & Lockwood 516). In this sense, food gives tangible form to culture because food is a manifestation of ingredients, techniques, and habits that tell different stories based on their relationality. For example, imagine we are creating a recipe that asks for flour (ingredient) to be mixed with water (technique) and consumed with other ingredients. This recipe could be a cut, boiled, and sauced as a noodle in one cultural community, but in another cultural community it may be rolled out, stuffed, and steamed to form a dumpling. The resulting recipe and how it will be consumed (habit) depend a number of configurations of ingredients, techniques, and habits. This is how food speaks. But it also listens. Royster calls voice “a phenomenon that has import also in being a *thing* heard, perceived, and reconstructed” (30). Food and the practices of preparing and consuming it are impacted by the traditions and personal taste preferences of those doing the cooking and the function the food is serving. Should the recipe make flour into a portable meal to fill laborers’ bellies on their way to the work as the dumpling does, or should it be eaten with a fork at a table while chatting with family? And like voice, its perception is skewed based on its relationality of the speaker/producer/consumer (Royster 30).

The ability to cook is a form of literacy, and as such is subject to the same reactions to change as literacy does. As cultures become more literate, their contexts, objects, tools, and needs change. In turn cultural communities adapt to those changes

(Rumsey, "Heritage Literacy" 576). Throughout a literacy event, the final recipe, the literacy artifact, is influenced by its context, the presence or absence of ingredients, techniques, habits, and needs. Based on these influences, the recipe can adapt to the changes it needs to. The event, and thus the artifact, arises from and is shaped by its social context (Rumsey, "Cooking" 91-92) It is this combination of "literacy artifacts or recipes, the literacy events of cooking and learning to cook, and the ways of conceptualizing these events" coming together that form literacy practice (Rumsey, "Cooking" 72-73). Rumsey takes this definition a step further, citing cooking as a heritage literacy: a lifelong, cross-generational meaning-making practice that is developmental, recursive, and accumulative. Heritage literacies demonstrate how people transfer knowledge from generation to generation and how "certain practices, tools, and concepts are adopted, adapted, or alienated, depending on the context" ("Heritage Literacy" 575). Heritage literacies are also multimodal, as Rumsey discusses. Quilting and bead working are heritage literacies because, though they lack words they maintain voices. Quilts and beadwork can be "read" based on their patterns. Beadwork, Rumsey explains, "codifies tradition, cultural practices, legends, and ways of viewing self within the world, clan and tribal affiliations, representational styles, and so on, depending on its functional and rhetorical purpose" ("Heritage Literacy" 576).

Food and cooking's multimodality is apparent in that there are multiple modes included in the process of making a recipe; "pen and paper recipes, images, spoken instructions, smells and tastes of food during preparation and at meals, the layout of a home or kitchen, movements between sink, refrigerator and stove, the layout and order of a recipe, and the tactile connection in learning to make pie crust" (Rumsey, "Cooking"

91). Food and cooking's multimodality is important because "the multiple modes evidence the ways that context and literacy interact" (Rumsey, "Cooking" 91). While it is now commonplace to find recipes online, for hundreds of years recipes were passed "largely through action, from mother to daughter, friend to friend" (Schenone xv). This, and the fact that multimodal literacies are best learned in context emphasize the importance of food to cultural community, in that the ability to produce the food of a specific community requires intimate connections with the community in both conversation and physical location (Rumsey, "Cooking" 91).

This social quality of food and cooking explains why heritage literacies are inherently recursive. Cuisine, like culture, begin from a common base created by a community of people with shared belief systems and practices. They fit a basic formula that is often loosely interpreted. This formula may be a set of ingredients or practices that are unique to a group of people and are often passed down, acting as a unifying factor. From this basis, the food itself, its preparation, and its consumption is altered by individuals or groups. Over time, food "takes on the characteristics" of those who create it, so that "its function can no longer be dissociated from the sign of that function" (Barthes 29). At this point it stops becoming and starts being. That dish, technique, or means of consumption becomes the new basis for other members to adapt, build upon, or apply. An example may look something like this—Memo has a recipe for arroz con pollo that she has made for our family for most of our lives. Her basic version requires rice, split chicken breasts, cumin, chili powder, paprika, and tomato sauce. Memo sears the chicken breasts and removes them, toasts the rice in vegetable oil, adds the spices tomato sauce, and chicken back to the pan, covers with water, and simmers until cooked. This is

a very basic version of her recipe, adapted from ingredients common to her culture and simple cooking techniques that were likely adopted from her mother, who had six children. We would sit at the dinner table and be served an entire breast, which we carved off the bone with a steak knife.

When she taught this recipe to me (which I have adapted in Picture 1), I was a newlywed with no children. I had consumed the meal since childhood, so I had a basic understanding of what it should taste like, but I had some variations I could apply to meet my family's needs. With the extra time and energy that I could put into meals due to not having children and my experience in the kitchen, I made the choice to boil the split chicken breasts, shred the meat, and use the chicken stock to cook the rice. This makes the whole meal more flavorful and allows for eating on the couch without a knife, as the chicken is shredded into the rice.

Memo's original version was formed from

Picture 1: (My) Arroz Con Pollo

(My) Arroz Con Pollo

Ingredients:

2 split chicken breasts
2-4 Tbls vegetable oil
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 onion, diced
1½ cup uncooked rice
2 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp salt
1 tsp cumin
1 tsp chili powder
1 tsp chicken powder
15 oz can tomato sauce
1 tomato, diced

This common Spanish dish appears in multiple variations across multiple Spanish-influenced cultures.

Directions:

Place chicken breasts in a small saucepan and cover with water. Simmer on medium heat for about 30 minutes until chicken pulls easily from the bone. Shred the meat and reserve the cooking liquid.

While chicken is cooking, use a high walled pan to cook onion in vegetable oil over medium high heat until translucent. Then add garlic and spices. Toast until fragrant. Add white rice to pan along with another glug of oil. Toast rice with aromatics and spices until slightly browned.

Add about 1½ cups of reserved chicken liquid to pan with rice. Then add tomato sauce, diced tomato, and shredded chicken.

Cover and cook on medium low heat for about 25 minutes or until rice is cooked through. Stir occasionally and add more liquid if it seems dry.

Serve with crushed tortilla chips, sour cream, and diced avocado and enjoy in front of the tv.

the basic ingredients and techniques of our culture and our family, though I cannot tell you exactly where each part of it came from. When I teach this recipe to my daughter, my technique of boiling and shredding the chicken and using the stock will be commonplace, the basic recipe she understands. By the time she teaches her children, my adaptation will no longer be an adaptation, but a basic characteristic of the dish. Over a few generations, that characteristic will no longer be attributed to me, but to our family as a whole. Cooking, then is greatly influenced by the culture and the individuals within that culture from which it originates, due to the personal effort it takes to learn how to create it. Reciprocally, cultural preferences and practices are also greatly influenced by its food choices.

Being a heritage literacy, as well as having the social qualities of multimodality and recursivity make food and cooking an excellent practice to engage with in order to develop strong sense of cultural identity. These qualities speak to the complexity of the stories of who and how we are. Food and cooking also resists the dominant narrative's oversimplification of the stories of cultures and identities by providing a way for an alternative set of voices to be heard in the telling of those stories. In "Writing Recipes, Telling Stories: Cookbooks as Feminist Historiography" Carrie Helms Tippen posits that recipes and cookbooks may provide an interesting antithesis to the dominant narrative, by giving women the power to impact their cultural communities. Like Rumsey's claim that food is one obvious way a culture passes on "intellectual inheritances" (Rumsey, "Cooking" 72), Tippen makes the powerful claim that cookbooks are "actively re-writing history with a rhetorical agenda" by positioning cookbook writers as "historiographers as well as rhetors, innovators of culinary knowledge, and agents of cultural power" (Tippen

18). Tippen cites Andrea Lunsford and Cheryl Glenn’s challenge of the exclusivity of “canonical rhetorical history [that] has represented the experience of males, powerful males, with no provision or allowance for females” (Tippen 15). In response, Tippen claims that we can look to recipes as antithetical to these canonical narratives because they allow their (mostly female) authors to construct “meaningful representations of themselves and their world” through story, thus telling different stories than the ones we are familiar with (Bower 2). Not only do recipes allow for a different voice to make their stories heard because they are a uniquely feminine way of making and disseminating knowledge, they also suggest a new format—the chronology of a meal, rather than the chronology of public events (17-18).

Tippen uses Patty Pinner’s 2006 cookbook *Sweets: Soul food desserts and memories* to play out an alternative history of the Great Migration⁴. First, Tippen uses two narratives to tell the story of the Great Migration as it we are used to hearing it. This male-centric narrative posits “violence and work” as the key themes of the time period, discussing males as targets of racial violence or as recipients of jobs (21). *Sweets* was written during the same time-period but does not mention violence or racism. Instead Pinner focuses women’s roles during the time period through recipes and memoir (19). Pinner’s story of the Great Migration focuses on how women struggled and succeeded to maintain their southern identities after being transplanted in the north. The recipe for *MyMy’s Pound Cake* is presented as evidence of how the family’s southern identity was maintained through their baking tradition and through continuing to use that food to bolster their church community. Pinner’s book challenges the dominant narrative by

⁴ The Great Migration refers to the movement of 6 million African Americans out of Southern to Northeast, Midwest, and West between 1916 and 1970.

rewriting the metanarrative of the Great Migration from being male-centric to focusing on the women in her family, and her individual family unit rather than her race as a whole. Through Pinner, Tippen positions food and cooking as a way of understanding and engaging with cultural identities and also a sphere of influence that has commonly allowed for marginalized voices, like my own, to have power over their stories.

Listening to the voices of food and the people and practices that create and consume it is a powerful strategy for coming to understand ourselves as people. Our examination of how we adopt, adapt, or alienate ourselves from food, food-related practices, and food communities tells the story of where we came from and who and how we are. Fusion food, in particular, may help biracials like myself cultivate a both/and identity by using the food that they construct in their own kitchen as a concrete representation that is informed by both cultures. Fusion food allows biracials to construct and complicate their own histories. In doing so their stories can longer be perceived as “‘simple stories’ to delight and entertain, but as vital layers of a transformative process” (Royster 35). This transformative process is the result of accumulation, a literacy practice that involves “having to piece together reading and writing experiences from more and more spheres, creating new hybrid forms of literacy” (Rumsey, “Heritage Literacy” 577). Finally, cooking fusion food can help biracials resist the dominant narrative, which advocates for tunnel-vision of each individual’s experience. It allows biracials to recognize the unique positionality of their biracialness as integral to both constructing their own identity and complicating our dominant narrative’s understanding of culture.

In Chapter 2, I discuss how being a white-passing Chicana has allowed me the choice about whether or not I claim my Mexicanness. I “look critically at my claim to color” by first storying my experience of coming to understand myself as biracial. This section discusses how my ignorance of my culture evolved as I recognized how my mother and I differed in how we were reacted to in public spaces as well as how our looks, and eventually our aesthetics, differed. Then I explore how discovering the language for my difference led me to mimic some problematic stereotypes of Mexicanness, due to their presence in the cultural vacuum created by my family not discussing our heritage with me. Most of these stereotypes revolved around food, which fortunately, became a starting point to understanding my culture as it gave me a material, everyday quality of my culture to begin to examine. While I don’t do much of that examination in Chapter 2, it sets the stage for Chapters 3 and 4’s food-focused approach to culture. This chapter culminates with the experiences of other white-passing Chicana’s attempting to negotiate their cultural identities. I conclude that biracial identity is constructed from the mundane everyday experiences of our lives, and of both sides of our cultures. In order to establish ourselves as both/and we must not only acknowledge the ways our culture is constructed by the ways we speak, relate to one another, and understand ourselves, and then garner the authority over our own identities to influence our culture’s construction.

In Chapter 3, I problematize the notion of authenticity. When we make claims of authenticity, we raise a number of important questions such as; How do we determine what is authentic? How trustworthy is our standard for measuring authenticity? And Who gets to determine what is authentic? I discuss how authenticity can be untrustworthy as it

is often rooted in nostalgia. Nostalgia can be a roadblock because it places a negative connotation on making any changes to nostalgic objects and traditions. But when we don't allow changes to these objects and traditions, we stop their evolution. I use my own family recipes to demonstrate the harmfulness of adhering to authenticity, and barbeque to discuss the potential of understanding authenticity as is definition's second entry in Merriam-Webster: "true to one's own personality, spirit, or character."

Finally, in Chapter 4 I propose constructing cultural identity through the lens of fusion food. I can construct my own cultural identity, one in which I don't have to choose to be authentically either/or, and can instead be authentically both/and. I demonstrate both/and by discussing fusion cuisine as inspired by cultures and experiences, engaged with them, not just constructed from its parts. I explore the notion of fusion by taking a trip to Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky. I also use David Chang's *Ugly Delicious* to discuss how over time, fusion food becomes part of the dominant narrative in which it is immersed. Chang and Edward Lee problematize the term fusion, and opt to label food inspired by multiple cultures, places, and stories as new American. I explore Gloria Anzaldua's *mestizaje* and Malea Powell's *metis* to demonstrate both/and identities as viewed from biracials who have claimed their biracialness as their power. From this, I choose to embrace my biracial identity.

CHAPTER 2: FORMING IDENTITY ON THE FRINGE

On the day I was born, my dad high-fived my grandpa, so the story goes, for “breeding the Mexican out” of the Diaz girls—like dogs or chickens. It’s a dig at the humanity of the young brown girl in her hospital gown, who hasn’t quite finished high school yet. The brown girl hears the comment but doesn’t respond. She is concerned with becoming a mother, my mother, at nineteen. The white boy father, though, he isn’t concerned. He knows he can step in and out of the label of “father” as best suits him, that the ties that bind don’t apply to white boys like him, who’ve already got one foot out the door. He stays long enough to claim me, names me Sims, like him. With me, the Diaz girls have been colonized, white-washed, bled dry of their color. My mother doesn’t have other children. She is the last brown girl, the last Diaz. And there isn’t so much as the decency to pretend it wasn’t on purpose. Our lives are a game between men and brown girls like my mother are the pawns.

It’s been nearly thirteen years since I’ve spoken to my dad, and this distance has helped me understand why it’s taken so long to claim this voice for my story. I was born 5lbs 2 ounces with a full head of pale golden hair and blue eyes and a single gift from my father; a handful of privilege that my mother and my mother’s mother and all of the women who came before us in a long line spanning from Mexico to Mercedes, Texas in the early 1900s had never been free to enjoy. With that privilege, I shouldered the expectations and dreams of all of those women before me in an unspoken way. I was the vessel for their stories, without the experiences of their suffering.

Unlike my ancestors, the color of my skin has given me a choice about whether or not I claim my Mexicanness. As such, I must “look critically at my claim to color” to

determine my “responsibility to my roots—both white and brown” (Moraga 28-29). I must start this process by first critically reflecting on how I came to discover and later claim my Mexicanness. In this chapter, I will share the story of my journey and discuss how that story has led me to recognize that cultural identity can be and is constructed.

To begin to tell this story, I must look back to a time when I didn’t know what it meant to be Chicana, or even to be white. Before I started kindergarten, I had little exposure to diversity. I grew up fairly isolated in my own makeshift community; my mother, Memo, and a slew of aunts, uncles, and cousins at Christmas time. My cousins and I spent our playtime betting on who could jump the furthest from the rickety orange swing set in Great Grandpa Diaz’s back yard, not asking questions about why we didn’t quite seem to match. My comparison between myself and my cousins probably only went as far as noticing that they, like me, had fingers and toes. Though the reality was that in this makeshift community, I provided the diversity, sticking out like a sore thumb to anyone looking on from the outside. From my positionality, though, this was my family, and kids don’t question family. To me, we all have fingers and toes, and we used them to swim and to share meals.

The problem arose when we grew beyond fingers and toes similarities. As I got older and became more aware of my appearance, my differences became more apparent. It started when I began to notice other little girls out with their mothers. I remember calling them a “matching set,” like the *Barbie* and *Kelly* dolls. Most daughters had hair that matched their mothers’ in color and in length, but not my mother and me. My blonde hair was long, thick, straight, while my mother’s hair was brown. Beyond the color, the behavior of our hair was different. I watched as Mom twirled her hair around the curling

iron, lock after dark brown lock, and then sealed it with a few spritzes from a hot pink bottle. She did this, not directly into her hair, but straight up into the air so that it would rain back down on her. The hairspray would disperse around the poorly ventilated “dressing room” which was our shared closet and settle on our clothes, where the smell lingered. My hair did not get along with the curling iron, though. It stuck to the barrel in clumps and heated to such a high temperature that the ringlets fell from the clamp of the iron and burned my neck. Even then, my hair wouldn’t hold the curl for more than 20 minutes. They undid themselves from my hair, falling away and leaving my heavy hair as straight as it had begun. As I struggled against my hair, I began asking more questions about why my mom didn’t look like me.

My mom tried to teach me to be beautiful, but I don’t think she really knew how. Everything she was, I was the opposite. Along with my hair, I had curves that seemed to have skipped her generation and made up for it on me. And my white skin was oily and acne-prone, not at all like hers. But she tried to help me get comfortable in my own skin, often by pulling me from class for the day to share an *Orange Julius* at the Greenwood Park Mall and get our nails *did*. We shopped in the stores that sold knock-off bags and jogging suits with rhinestone words across the butts. But I was enamored with the department stores, *Von Maur* and *Macy’s* and *Sears*, where women in pastel pant suits hovered with tiny crystal bottles of perfume that always seemed to run dry when we came near. Women sat in front of lighted mirrors, getting lipstick dabbed onto them by younger, prettier versions of the perfume pastel pant suits. I watched in awe as women walk up to the counters looking tired and pale and left looking like completely different women—eyes bigger, skin brighter. It was like magic, these lighted mirrors and pastel

pant suited women. They could make you look like someone else. They could make me look like my mother.

One day I climbed up in front of the lighted mirrors, my feet dangling from the seat as I ran my fingers across the shimmering tubes of lipstick. I selected a deep ruby red, twisted it up, and swiped it across my lips. In the mirror my skin glowed golden and the red of the lipstick contrasted my eyes, which shined bluer than I had ever seen them in the dressing room at home. I swiveled my chair around to find a young pastel pant suit behind me. I handed the tube to her with a smile and puckered my lips so that she could apply it to me like she did the other women. She twisted the lipstick back down into the tube and, without a word, clunked it back down to its spot among the others. Then she turned her eyes back to me, arms crossed, silent. Sensing I'd done something wrong, I slunk out of the seat and ran, head down, back to my mother.

The pastel pant suit's reaction to my using the lipstick made me even more curious about makeup. Every day for as long as I can remember, my mother did her make up the exact same way. I would sit and watch her pull deep red pencils and sparkling powders from her blue floral pouch and press them across her eyelids and cheeks. Always burgundy-lined lips, always clear gloss, always an extra swipe of mascara or two with the bristles so close to her eyeball that my own flinched shut. I began to puzzle through the things she left behind at her golden vanity after she left for work. I'd imagine that when I learned to place them on my skin just right, my face would transform to be more like hers.

"Can you teach me?" I remember asking her one day when as she traced the bow of her lips with a deep wine pencil.

“We’ll have to go to Penney’s or something,” she told me, “so they can tell you what your colors are.”

I had never before considered that I had “colors,” much less that those colors would be any different from hers. This must have been the moment that I began to understand, at some level, that her skin was different than mine. This notion of the difference in my mother’s colors and my own pushed me to begin conducting the type of discourse analysis that Victor Villanueva mentions in *Bootstraps: An American Academic of Color*.

Villanueva cites his professorial discourse analysis as his searching for a way to understand writing at the college level. Following a failing grade on a literature paper, which his professor had commented as having great imagination, Villanueva searched for a way to close the gap between what he saw and what his professors wanted to see. For Villanueva, this practice consisted of “go[ing] to the library; see[ing] what the course’s professor had published; try[ing] to discern a pattern to her writing; try[ing] to mimic the pattern (71). Villanueva would combine his knowledge of the basic five paragraph structure he learned in high school with what he learned from his discourse analysis of his professors’ writings, mimicking their patterns in hopes of translating his thoughts into a form they would consider viable. Over time, this process of discourse analysis seeped out of the academic sphere and into his personal life. He begins to study his girlfriends, consciously, in an attempt to learn, “what it means to be white, middle class” (Villanueva 72).

Like Villanueva I began to study the differences between my mother and me, identifying certain patterns as the language of her beauty and my plainness. Her warm

skin, I attributed to the pattern of the regular trips we made to the *Laundry and Tan*. As I watched episodes of *The Simpsons* and folded laundry, she slipped off to one of the tanning beds. By the end of the episode, she would emerge smelling like tropical burnt toast and fanning her face:

“I got some color, right?”

Color, I rationalized, was something that you “got,” something desirable that you had to be old enough to earn and put effort into sustaining. I begged my mom for permission to tan so that I could mimic her brownness. She begged the lady at the front desk, to no avail. I was relegated instead to summers laying out next to my mother at the community swimming pool. She carried a bottle of baby oil that she rubbed on her skin four or five times over the course of the day. After the tanning bed debacle, she offered some to me with little instruction other than to rub it in, sit back and relax. When, to mine and my mother’s surprise, my skin turned an angry pink, I chalked it up to the fact that I simply hadn’t earned my color yet. My mother had years of tanning under her belt, years spent baking under the sun like a clay pot in a kiln growing stronger and more herself with each application of heat. I had only been in the sun for a handful of years, I reasoned. I hadn’t built up my tan, which I imagined worked like muscle or callous, but I only needed to be patient, and catch up, when I was older, like her. I envied my mother’s color, but I knew that one day I would have some of my own. To be brown was to be beautiful, but it was also a way to be one step further from a father I didn’t care to know.

When I was given an assignment titled “My Family, My Heritage” sometime around the sixth grade, I put together that my mother’s color was only a symptom of her identity. The difference I had been seeking to understand was not limited to our skin

color, but rather our heritage. For the assignment we were asked to interview our family and research our culture. Then we had to make a tri-fold poster, a big one like the ones

Picture 2: Chamomile Lavender “Potion”

Chamomile-Lavender “Potion”

Ingredients:
2 tsp dried chamomile flowers
1 tsp dried lavender buds
¾ cup water
½ cup steamed milk
Honey to taste

Directions:
Steep chamomile and lavender buds in boiling water for 5 minutes.

Strain the tea into a mug, pressing with the back of a spoon to extract all of the flavor.

Steam milk with a frothing nozzle. You can also microwave milk in a quart mason jar for 45 seconds, place the lid on the jar, cover with a thick dish towel to protect from burns, and shake until frothy.

Top the strained tea with milk and sweeten with honey to taste.

Enjoy in bed while surfing the internet.

Memo despised my Pagan phase, as with most Chicana women who are particularly fearful of the stigma of the bruja. Brujas, or witches, were put to death during the Inquisition for their un-Godly practices. Regardless, the traditions of curanderas, those who practice herbal medicine and home remedies, has stayed with my family for generations.

for the science fair, about where our ancestors had come from, what their traditions had been, and what they valued. Ever the teacher’s pet, I jumped at the opportunity to do research and purchase supplies from the store, a first for me.

“What’s our family heritage?” I asked Memo, reading from the assignment sheet at the table while she chopped bell peppers from the garden—most of our dinners included bell peppers, tomatoes, some sort of meat, and a starch from a box. Memo had always been more interested in growing our ingredients than cooking them. Bowls and buckets on the counters held piles of misshapen tomatoes that were sometimes cooked into sauces and sometimes served sliced and sprinkled with sugar. Quart jars of spearmint and chamomile flowers became ingredients for my “potions” during my Pagan phase, deeply colored concoctions of flowers and roots stewed too long. I made the lavender and chamomile “potion” from Picture 2 for Memo, but she would only call it sleepy time tea. Bundles of lavender and echinacea hung from every curtain rod to dry. Memo’s creative spirit was

spent turning the herbs and flowers into crafts to keep around the house, but it ran out when she stepped foot onto the pink tile of the kitchen.

“Like where are we from? We’re Mexican.”

We’re Mexican? It hadn’t been a secret, but it hit me like it had been. This word that I had heard, not said but spit from the mouths of people at school. Mexicans were the people I’d always been told to avoid on the streets—dangerous, dirty. But then things began to click into place. I wasn’t bothered so much by the *Mexican* aspect as I was intrigued by the word *We’re*. *We* are Mexican, I recognized, *I* was Mexican. And all of the negative connotations fell away, because I could finally name why I was so different.

“I mean, you are only half,” she said, backtracking, “your dad was white.”

But half was enough for me. I took my newfound knowledge, the words “Mexican” and “heritage” to the internet and opened up a portal, it seemed, to a different world.

To be Mexican, the internet informed me, was to be brightly colored. It was to be big and bold and loud and sensual; to eat spicy and speak spicy and be feisty. It was Speedy Gonzales and the Chiquita banana and the Taco Bell Chihuahua and all of the stereotypes that had been created by the kind of person I looked like, to mock the person I was discovering I was. I didn’t recognize these characters as mocking or insulting, I was still too young for that level of questioning. To me, they were fascinating representations of my culture—Speedy Gonzalez was a hero, Chiquita Banana was beautiful and carefree, and the Taco Bell Chihuahua seemed like a pretty cool guy. I identified with these characters quite simply because they were my first answers to the questions that I hadn’t known how to ask about who I was. These caricatures of Mexicanness slipped into the vacuum created by my family’s silence about who we were.

So, I did what I had taught myself to do with my discourse analysis. I tried to understand these caricatures, memorized their patterns, and then I began to mimic them. I pieced together an identity in an attempt to play the part that I had pieced together from the cartoons, the food advertisements, anything that was readily accessible to a girl with little guidance, chronic insomnia, cable tv, and internet access. Long after my family had gone to bed, I stayed awake, eyes darting between the tv screen and computer monitor. And one night she appeared, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

“Once upon a time,” came a sleepy, sexy voice from tv, “in the land of bosanova, lived a girl named Isabella.” The narrator continues to tell us the story against a backdrop of lively, tropical music. Isabella, blessed with incredible beauty, is cursed with a motion sickness so severe that isn’t allowed to play with other children. Instead she entertains herself in the kitchen, working alongside the family cook, she grows up before our eyes through a montage of vegetable chopping. Remember that montage from the introduction? The one of Memo and myself chopping tomatoes with gusto? Yeah, this is where it came from. The story continues with Isabella meeting her husband, the dashing Toninho, who hides her beauty in the kitchen of his restaurant as he flirts with the guests. Isabella catches Toninho having an affair, to which he responds “Isabella, I’m a man, I have to be on top sometimes!” And then she takes her talent and boards a plane to America, barely managing her motion sickness in the process, and becomes a food show sensation. Never mind that Isabella Olviera is Colombian, not Mexican, or that the actress who plays her, Penelope Cruz, is actually from Madrid, *Woman on Top* became a powerful presence in my cultural vacuum. But it wasn’t just for the story, or even Isabella’s beauty. I found, in *Woman on Top*, that food could be a powerful marker of

one's culture. The passionate way that Isabella engaged with her food inspired me to begin cooking the food of the culture that I wanted to be a part of.

This isn't a new phenomenon. Food media, as Laura A. Lindenfeld puts it, has become "part of the fabric of our daily lives" (3). Along with it, though, have come concerns about ways that food media presents itself. In *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*, Elsbeth Probyn worries that food media promises a "return to the real things of life through eating" that most food can't actually live up to (3). Lindenfeld points out that discourse on food takes place where "citizenship, culture, identity, economic, and politics intertwine" and in doing so, food media helps to "co-construct identity, citizenship, and belonging" (4;5). While food has the ability to "slip across diverse kinds of boundaries" and be shaped by different kinds of narratives, food media tends to fail at presenting the complexities of the that discourse (4).

Another issue that this medium presented me with is that food and the Latina body often become interchangeable objects of desire. *Woman on Top* demonstrates this when Isabella's food emits a visible wisp of scent across the city, forcing all of the heterosexual men who encounter it to follow Isabella in a zombie-like stupor. Latin American women are often depicted in food media by "verbal epithets evoking tropical heat, violence, passion, and spice (Shohat & Stam 138). Lindenfeld also points out that films like *Woman on Top*, *Tortilla Soup*, and *Soul Food* demonstrate how easy it is to commodify ethnic difference by "inviting tourists to the virtual table" (16).

So, my process became even more problematic as I mistook the drama of these films to represent real life. Regardless of food media's problematic depiction of food and culture, it did set me on the right track. Food has been a constant and distinct presence in

my life, but not in the way the movies depict it. The Fabio-esque Italian lover, shirtless and rippling, never did spoon feed me Bolognese. My version was from Wisconsin and both his pecs, his pecker, and his penne arrabiata left something to be desired.

It did involve my mother, though I have no memories of covering our kitchen in flour from turning the stand mixer on high. I never chased her skirts through the farmers market or watched her haggle with the man who sold golden tilefish from blue Igloo coolers, though sometimes we did stop at roadside stands for boxes of strawberries and fresh peaches.

I grew up around food because my mom didn't believe in babysitters. She is, to this day, a career server. Mom's Mondays and Tuesdays have always been her weekends. The other five she usually pulled doubles at any number of casual dining restaurants. When I was little, I found myself stuffed into the booth of Ruby Tuesday's or Macaroni Grill for anywhere from 4-8 hours with little to entertain me but a three-pack of kid's meal crayons and a menu to doodle on. Mom would swing by now and again and fill up my Coke or drag me from my solitary table to wave me in front a table of customers or co-workers, a toddler waving a hand drawn picture, "look what I made!" Her voice would raise an octave:

"This is my brat."

I 'd cross my arms and scowl, unsure how to respond to these strangers talking at me about my cuteness. I would be bombarded with a bunch of rhetorical *well, aren't you adorable's* and then they would continue talk over me as if I wasn't there. Mom would smile, all teeth, no eyes, looking from them to me and back to them. Then I'd scurry back to my booth, never having said a word.

When the restaurant closed, Mom would bring me a little plastic basket, always broken, with snipped red and yellow bottles to help her fill up her salt and pepper shakers and the little packets of sugars. I'd take my time shuffling from table to table, knowing if I finished before she did, she'd ask me to vacuum the floor. I loved the way the smell of that cheap pre-milled pepper tickled my nose and the feeling of absolute bodily autonomy when I could order my body not to sneeze. When no one was looking, I'd rip open the white sugar packets and try to eat them. Sometimes I'd dump the salt on my hand and lick it. One time, in an attempt to look like a grown up in front of my mom's co-workers, I snorted it.

I think that's how they knew I belonged on the line.

I guess I got into the kitchen the same way most people do—with no parental guidance and by sticking things where they don't belong.

I followed Mom's footsteps when I turned 13, my first job hostessing at a family-owned Italian restaurant. I worked my way into the kitchen via one of the backline cooks who had a soft spot for me, scooping softened butter into little plastic cups and making out in the walk-in refrigerator. Family restaurants are rarely populated by family-friendly staff. Anthony Bourdain has already told those stories, though, in *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, his 2000 expose on the gritty and inappropriate reality of the restaurant industry. In just a few lines, Bourdain paints a pretty, not so pretty, but accurate picture: "an ounce of sauce covers a multitude of sins" (133). And of those employed by the restaurant industry:

You might get the impression from the specifics of my less than stellar career that all line cooks are wacked-out moral degenerates, dope fiends, refugees, a thuggish assortment of drunks, sneak thieves, sluts and psychopaths. You wouldn't be too far off base. The business, as respected

three-star chef Scott Bryan explains it, attracts 'fringe elements', people for whom something in their lives has gone terribly wrong. Maybe they didn't make it through high school, maybe they're running away from something—be it an ex-wife, a rotten family history, trouble with the law, a squalid Third World backwater with no opportunity for advancement. Or maybe, like me, they just like it here. (61-62)

I was one of these “fringe elements,” as was my mom and her mother before her, a waitress-to-manager-to-replaced with a white lady. But restaurants provided us home, long before the food became an important part of the picture. And homes scar people more than we are willing to admit, but mine made me who I am. Both the restaurant industry and food media rely on high levels of drama. For the restaurant industry there's drama in the kitchen—the drugs, sex, and rock and roll of it—there's drama in the dining room—the performance of presentation—and there's drama in the consumers—mmm's and ah's and *my compliments to the chef's*. In food media, the drama lies in “using food to change the course of narrative build-up” (Lindenfeld 8), while making Otherness commodifiable though representations lacking nuance and self-reflection (Lindenfeld 18). Food media is certainly problematic in its positioning ethnicity as “an issue of style and choice” rather than something that “impacts one on a daily basis” (Lindenfeld 17-18). But at the same time, isn't this ethnicity's issue of style and choice also a necessary conversation to have?

Though ethnicity is not a style or choice that my family has had, the question that frames this chapter revolves around that truth that I do have that choice, and that it's my responsibility to make claim my color by enacting that choice. I believe that the answer lies in the way I choose to mimic the styles of my culture's cuisine, but also in the ways do not. It would be ignorant of me to say that understanding my culture is done without mimicry of styles and stereotypes. All knowledge, after all, is based in mimicry—from

learning to speak to learning to perform open-heart surgery, we learn from watching others. But it is the step that comes after mimicry that lies at the core of my argument—adaptation. In order to participate in my culture, I must become familiar with the patterns of my culture, and then I must create from within my culture and contribute something new to those patterns. I must look at the way that my cultural identity is constructed by those who share it with me, but then I must also have the authority to contribute to its construction.

In order to choose what I contribute to it, I must first decide what about my personal identity will be a meaningful contribution to my culture. As Terese Guinsatao Monberg writes in "Writing Home Or Writing as the Community: Toward a Theory of Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service Learning Courses," we are often pressured "to encounter people different from themselves rather than to encounter something different within themselves or within their own communities" (24). By performing recursive spatial movement within my own borders, I can "listen for the deeper textures present in the place(s) (I) might call home (21-22). In other words, Monberg encourages me to begin looking inward for meaning, rather than outward, where the more easily recognizable drama takes place, because it is my contribution to my identity's construction that allows me to claim it as my own.

Monberg's words remind me that I should recognize that identity is constructed "as much through everyday life, leisure, critical consumption and popular entertainment" (Green and Cramer xi) as it does through the dramatic. Few things are more everyday than food, which Janet M. Greene and Carlita P. Cramer posit in "Beyond Mere Sustenance: Food as Communication/Communication as food" is "directly linked to both

ritual and culture” because it involves “repetition, expected behaviors, and roles for both the participants and the food” (x-xi), thus food is a form of culture, even in its ordinary state

For me this points to my issues of performing my Mexicanness based off the fabricated ideas of Mexicanness I could find, which were dramatic and entertaining. In searching so intently for my identity, I missed the markers of Mexicanness that were already present in myself and my family, and thus missed how we contributed to it. Our Mexicanness is apparent much in the way that my rescue mutt, Cisnero’s, pit bullness is apparent—only when you know what you are looking for. I adopted her from Indianapolis Animal Care and Control with the assumption that she was a Catahoula hound mix, as she had been labeled on her kennel. Cisneros’s face is half blue, half brindled and she has short hair and the lanky body of a Greyhound. As she became a part of our family her frame filled out from good food and lots of love and we began to question whether she was actually the bully breed. Once we started looking closely at Cisneros, her behavior made her Pitbull-ness obvious—it wasn’t not the shape of her head or haunches that confirmed it. It also was not the violent tendencies that we tend to label pit bulls with, rather, it was her need to be comedically baby snuggled as often as humanly possible. My hands-on experience with Pitbulls allowed me to identify her as what she truly was through a feature that those with less experience would likely label as evidence that she was not a Pitbull.

For my family, our Mexicanness is apparent in our powerful matriarchal structure formed from the combination of Mexican deities and ideologies and the ability to sustain children without fathers due to strong feminine ties. It shows up when we sing and dance

throughout our days by juxtaposing the funny lines we hear with catchy tunes we hum. Being Mexican is celebrating every holiday with food and not talking about mental illness. For me it's hidden in the reality that I didn't eat peanut butter or grilled cheese as a child, but snacked on garden tomatoes. Our Mexicanness is very apparent in our response to *we only have Pepsi products, is that ok?* No, no that's not ok, we are Coke people. The culmination of my desire to come closer to my culture and my family's dismissal of those desires led me to ignore the authentic ways in which we were already being Mexican, rather than performing it. I was looking for the malagueta pepper lip treatment, the communal grito as we dance under the stars, when I should have been seeing our regular late-night dinners and our all day snacking as part of our cultural identity.

Now I recognize that my struggle to develop my own identity was the result of racelessness which was imposed on me by my family. Racelessness is a term coined by Signithia Fordham, which Villanueva defines as the “denial of other-cultural affiliation, a denial of the collective, any collective; it is the embracing of America's dominant ideology, the ideology of individualism” (40). My family chose not to discuss race with me, implicitly, to protect me from the racism they'd experienced. But racelessness also leads to alienation. Once I became aware of my differences, regardless of my inability to name them, I lost the ability to maintain my fictive kinships. Villanueva discusses fictive kinships as being asked ““where is your raza' from one (community),” and being called ““a child of Mexican immigrants' from the other” (40). Among my family I didn't have enough raza, a term that literally translates to race but is used by Chicanas to describe someone as one of their own. In school, I had too much raza—the white girl with the

“Mexican ass,” the white girl with the Mexican mom. I couldn’t be fully adopted by the either community as the white girl who wasn’t quite white on the inside but wasn’t quite Mexican on the outside. This became increasingly problematic for me in my search for identity as Mamta Motwani Accapadi tells us in “When White Women Cry: How White Women's Tears Oppress Women of Color” that “each woman's experience is shaped by the internal expectations and external perceptions of what it means to be a woman within each of these racial communities” (209). My family had expectations for how I should be that differed from their ways of being, which led me to a state of confusion about where I fit in because when it comes to race “it doesn’t matter who we really are. What matters is what other people think we are” (Accapadi 210).

I can’t blame my family, though, for attempted to bleach me of the color that existed in my mind. Looking back, I recognize that my they didn’t tell me I was Mexican simply because it was easier for me not to be. My family had suffered generations of systematic racism that they couldn’t verbalize but they knew that the cause was the color of their skin. For five generations my family has applied a form of internal colonization to their children by “removing themselves from their own backgrounds” and feeling “ashamed of family customs and ways of speaking” (Harmon 203). Great grandma Maria, for example, started talking to herself, before she died; always mumbling, always in Spanish. It was as if years of words had bubbled up inside of her and now, she was boiling over. Grandma would chatter away to herself and eat deviled eggs in the corner. Every now and then I would sit next to her and ask, “what are you talking about, Grandma?” She would stop speaking and turn to me with this joyous grin and say, “oh,

nothing dear, just talkin’.” And as her brain began to unravel and her body grew weaker, her mumbling turned to singing.

I get it now, her singing.

For me to be born white, in the eyes of my family, was nothing short of a very a good thing. Like Cherríe Moraga in “La Güera,” my family thought that “being Chicana meant being ‘less.’” (Moraga 23). What family doesn’t want the best things for their children? My family encourage me to become anglicized so that I could more effectively pass in the white world, thus guaranteeing me a better future” (Moraga 23). My whiteness gave me an advantage the rest of my family did not have—to get an education, go to college, have a career. It gave me potential that my family literally didn’t see in their own reflection, but by some haphazard circumstance they were able see in me. It was easier for me not to know I was Mexican, they reasoned, because that would lead to my asking questions about race and privilege that they didn’t have the answers to. They didn’t recognize that in doing so they were inadvertently condemning me to antagonistic relationships with those who shared my Mexican heritage, because of my perceived favoring of my white identity (Villanueva 57). So, they hoped I wouldn’t notice and when I did, they hoped it wouldn’t matter.

But I did and it did.

Gloria Anzaldúa says that:

Possessing more than one heritage, people of mixed races are often pressured to choose one tribe over another or to adhere to the standards of ethnicity that are often contradictory, such as being too Mexican or not Mexican enough. People who refuse to pick sides and identify exclusively with one group trouble the majority, disturbing the dominant discourse of race. (Light in the Dark 73)

Villanueva echoes her, telling us that “biculturalism does not mean...an equal ease with two cultures” but rather “the tensions within” (39). Without a model of how to enact my whiteness or my Mexican-ness I waged an internal battle of identity that I didn’t know how to talk about. Like Moraga, having a foot in both worlds, I had to ask what my responsibility is to my roots—“both white and brown” (Moraga 29). I had questions, but they grew to be more complicated than the simple answer “your dad was white” could satisfy. The question evolved from from *why am I not brown like you* to *what does this color say about who I am supposed to be, who I am not supposed to be, and who I really am*. What am I? It’s a question that I am reminded of every time I am asked to check an ethnicity box—“White” or “Hispanic” or “Other?” The decision-making process rocks my pencil from box to box: *What is the context? Will I be rewarded for my Whiteness here or my Mexican-ness? Will I be punished? If I am rewarded, will it have been fair for me to not be wholly one or the other? Either/or? Do I have to be either/or? If I am not, will I ever be wholly, authentically me?*

Stephanie Elizondo Greist echoes these same questions in her autoethnography *Mexican Enough: My Life Between the Borderlines*. Greist recounts that she first began claiming her Hispanic identity while applying for scholarships and recognizing that her grades would not benefit her under the label of “White” (7). Upon receiving those scholarships, she recognized the complexity of her situation. Her ability to pass as white separated her from her fellow recipients because “Some were the children of migrant workers. A few had spent summers picking grapefruit themselves. Their skin was brown, and they had endured hardships because of it” (*Mexican Enough* 6). Griest was overwhelmed by guilt as she realized she had “reaped the benefits of being a minority but

none of the drawbacks” (6). In "Travel, Autoethnography and “Cultural Schizophrenia” in Stephanie Elizondo Griest's *Mexican Enough*" Maria Antonia Oliver-Rotger explains:

Stephanie’s environment taught her that you either had to be “Hispanic” or “white” (4), and that to be “white” was to be “smart” (5). It is within the institutional legacy of the racialization of the ethnic markers “Hispanic”/”Mexican” (meaning poor, working class, and with a poor command of English) as opposed to “white” (the middle-class, English-speaking Anglo-American) that, Stephanie made the “conscious choice to be white”(4). (114-115)

Griest’s choice evolved over time, however, to lead her on a journey to “speak the tongue of her ancestors” and “call (her)self a Chicana in any crowd—and believe it” (Around the Bloc 368). Griest’s search for origins marks a trend in our globalizing world in which biracials who are second and third generation removed from the cultural influences of their ethnic homeland are unable to develop a cultural citizenship, which can be defined as having “full membership in a group and the ability to influence one’s destiny by having a voice in basic decisions” (Oliver-Rotger 117; Rosaldo 402). One solution that has been proposed is for biracials to travel the homeland of their ancestors as tourists to “(re) assert, reaffirm and perform their heritage” (Coles and Timothy 12). Those two or three generations of removal are assumed to wipe the cultural slate clean for biracials, fully integrating them into American society because they have learned the language and the ways of America. But often this is not the case, as “two generations come and go and all that happens is the minority’s native tongue is gone” (Villanueva 19). These biracials have assimilated, moving as best they can out of marginalization into the dominant group. Still, others remain, like Griest, “alienated from one culture, not quite part of the new one” (Villanueva 48).

The prevalence of this struggle for biracials to culturally identify points to a greater need to share our experiences. Griest's experience led her to lessen the geographic distance between her Texas home and her Mexican homeland. She immerses herself in Mexico, where her culture is at its densest, in hopes that Mexicanness will rub off on her in the form of language, and in the form of *tranquilidad*. But she finds herself failing when she is confronted her coldness in interviewing a woman whose husband went missing in an attempt to cross the border. "Fria!" her Mexican-born cousin calls her for taking notes, objectively, "what gives you the right to come here, to write about us, to analyze us?" (*Mexican Enough* 91-92). It becomes clear that her research methods are too tainted by the dominant narrative of the US, "you think you are Mexican, but you are not. You know things from books, but you know nothing about our psyche" (91). The framework she has been taught is not engaging with her culture, as a cultural rhetorics orientation would, but only taking notes and listening to stories. Greist is left questioning whether finding oneself is perhaps a bourgeois concept (91).

Greist's inability to culturally identify may be due to her association of identity as bourgeois. The term bourgeois implies that finding oneself is something done through extensive searching, which requires time and money that most people don't have. This points back to my earlier argument, that identity must be construct from the mundane—identity is a state of being, not of becoming. Mathew Silito demonstrates what identifying by being may look like in his 2018 Cultural Rhetorics Conference presentation "Being Both/And: Understanding the Practice of Race While Being Biracial and White Passing." In his presentation, Silito engages with his struggles identifying with his Chicano self while white-passing in the US. Silito is attempting to find himself through a cultural

rhetorics orientation when he says, “Right about now, a lot of you might be wondering why this white boy is talking about race” Sillito says about halfway through his presentation, “One look at me announces my identity to the world.”

He has been sharing a story with his small audience at the conference about listening to his second-generation Chinese teacher of Psychology correcting a Mexican girl’s pronunciation of the word “Freud” in a way that Sillito identifies as performative of his biracial teacher’s whiteness and unnecessary. Sillito wonders aloud if the teacher would have focused so much on the pronunciation if he hadn’t been performing whiteness out of necessity, or if his awareness of the student’s need to perform her whiteness didn’t exist.

Sillito has the ability to question the nuance of this interaction because he is Mexican-American himself but as he explains, “I pass, at least, that is how my racial identity has typically been thought of. I have white enough features that I can deceive anyone who might look at me.”

Sillito’s own acknowledgement that his audience has identified him as “this white boy,” is intentionally both accusative and self-deprecating. Through his spoken emphasis on the word “this” and the choice of the word “boy” instead of “man,” Sillito acknowledges and slightly mocks his whiteness before then asking permission for his Mexicanness to be accepted. He understands that it looks off to his audience, this contradiction of his story and the image he has placed before his audience. He knows that they will likely not assign him authority he needs to make his story matter unless he performs both his whiteness, which, he’s already done by presenting at this academic conference, and his Mexicanness as evidence.

He assures us that “the difference between me and whiteness is a slip of language, a reference of parentage, a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it-get-out-your-microscopes kind of racial identity” in order to prove his point that his Mexicanness is almost present on accident and in small places and he must perform it in order to make it apparent. This statement agrees with Griest’s that “for a biracial, nothing is more humiliating than...trying to be half of yourself while the other half keeps intervening—getting caught” (*Mexican Enough* 7). Their goals are the same, they want to eliminate their imposter syndrome. They want, simply, to be the Mexican American’s that they are. But Greist, like me, begins her journey by performing and mimicking who she believes are the expert models of her identity.

Greist and Silito model that finding identity lies in the process, not in the goal. Returning to Monberg’s call for recursive spatial movement within one’s own borders, Greist fails where Silito thrives. Silito wants to be both/and. He does not wish for a return to his homeland, but rather for an acceptance of his biracialness in its present form.

These scholars lead me to recognize that I must aim to utilize my cultural rhetorics orientation and Monberg’s encouragement to dwell within my own borders in order to construct my own identity. In doing so, I must use Silito’s call for biracialness to be recognized as its own identity, with its own struggles, stories, and successes—I must identify as a both/and biracial. From these scholars, I have formed an approach for constructing my own cultural identity from the mundane everyday experiences of my life and of both of my cultures. In order to establish myself as both/and I must not only acknowledge the ways my cultural identity is constructed by my culture, but also how I influence my culture’s construction.

CHAPTER 3: AUTHENTICITY, AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE

“They only teach the men,” Memo told me, holding a tamale in her hand.

As she gently peeled the husk back like a banana, steam rolled lushly around the interior. I was sitting on the piano bench in the dining room and balancing a Styrofoam plate of tamales on my lap. We do this every Christmas, greeted by the burro statue on the lawn outside of my great grandpa’s house. Over the years our family has grown, forcing us find new and creative ways to smash ourselves in with our *primos*, some by blood, some by marriage, and some by great grandpa Diaz’s assertive hospitality into our patriarch’s home; overflowing into the entry way, sitting cross-legged on the floor of the kitchen, or perching on our spouses’ laps. We’d eat with our hands and chase too much, too-dry masa down our throats with Coca-Cola straight from the can. Foil pans and clay pots of food covered every available surface of the kitchen, fighting us for space.

“They only teach the men to make the tamales. You’d have to ask grandpa.”

Perhaps it was the feminist in me that recognized how access to my family recipes meant more than the ability to make a tasty meal. Being able to make the family tamales and enchiladas, I had parsed out, also provided a method for exercising power within our family (Tippen 25). The transfer of recipes from one family member to the next also transfers a sense of power, indicating a readiness to lead the family. In many households, this transfer of power comes from a child watching, studying, tasting, practicing, and finally, standing at the helm, and taking on the sacred responsibility of feeding the family (Cianciola 115). But my immediate family almost never cooked, so I would have to gain this power in a much more direct way—through permission from my Grandpa Diaz.

Grandpa Diaz had always been designated the holder of power. He had been the first, the Mexican man who, along with my great grandma Maria, had planted our roots here in the 1950's. He was, thus, the master of our culture and our narrative, and was authorized as the authentic source of culinary capital within our family (Tippen 25). In his old age, he'd become more of a mecca than a person—the home to which we are all pulled annually, a focal point. But his role in the family, for as far back as I can remember, has been to simply *be* the foundation, not to contribute to the bustle around it. I tried to picture this ninety-year-old man doddering around the kitchen, the syncopated movements of his arthritic hands somehow leveling out as he diced tomatoes and onions and cilantro. I tried to imagine his wife, grandma Connie, more than twenty years his junior, restricted from their kitchen as he did so—her buzzing energy relegated to checking the string lights that bordered the windows year-round.

The image never sat right in my mind.

Still, my desire to learn to make our family tamales led me to sit on the right arm of Grandpa's recliner every year, plucking out songs on the guitar and waiting for the day that he'd change his mind about this sexist tradition. I had a plan. I knew that in the 1990's the Diaz family pumped out only two boys amidst a gaggle of bouncing baby girls, myself included. This testosterone dry spot created an opportunity for me. As my Grandpa Diaz became less mobile and no boys stepped into his shoes, I anticipated it more and more. I imagined the day he'd give me permission, intuiting the enormous meaning that I had projected onto these kindred recipes. In this envisioning, he'd turn to me and smile his crinkly smile, his eyes communicating more than his throaty voice ever could.

He'd say simply "ok."

He'd give a slight nod and I'd know he was telling me, finally, that I am worthy of our family's legacy.

The key to this legacy was that those recipes were rooted in authenticity. The notion of authenticity, however, can be problematic. It raises a number of important questions which we will discuss in this chapter such as; How do we determine what is authentic? How trustworthy is our standard for measuring authenticity? And Who gets to determine what is authentic?

Growing up, I understood that my family recipes could provide a way for someone like me who was "emotionally distant from or marginalized within their communities" a special strategy for "interrogating the boundaries and conflicts that always exist" in my own community (Monberg 44). This strategy required a specific relationality to those recipes—they had to belong to my family, and they had to be taught to me by the one with the power to pass on our legacy—grandpa Diaz. So, while I could mimic what I found in the cookbooks I borrowed from the library or create my own version of our food, that wasn't the point. I needed to use the special strategy of cooking food that I identified with in order to gain my a sense of belonging in my family. As Tippen points out, specific rituals of cooking are as fundamental to the performance of authentic identity as the recipe itself (22). In my case, being taught my family's recipes created a connection with ancestors I had never known through continuous regional identity, community, and culture" (Tippen 23).

One of these recipes that I had awaited access to was the recipe for enchiladas rojas. Tamales were expected every Christmas, but enchiladas were a treat. They only

showed up every couple of years when there were enough hands to make both dishes. Though they weren't gourmet, by any means, they were the standard to which I judged all others. These were smaller in size, rolled into 6-inch corn tortillas and very simple tasting. You could identify each component in them, ground beef, white onions, cheddar cheese, and not enough salt. But the sauce remained a mystery. Red enchilada sauce is fairly standard in Mexican cuisine, but with all of the different dried peppers and spices, identifying the particular blend isn't easy. I tried to enjoy the enchiladas topped with guacamole salad from the restaurants we visited, but they never lived up to the standards our recipes had set. I attributed this to the enchiladas lack of authenticity—Mexican restaurants watering down their product to satisfy the white palate of most Americans. Over time, though, it became apparent that my issue was something much more deeply rooted.

This understanding of authenticity is rooted in nostalgia, and nostalgia has a tendency to be untrustworthy. In "Pie as Nostalgia: What One Food Symbolizes for Every Generation in America," Rachel S. Hawley tells us that:

Food is one of the most prominent elicitors of nostalgic sensations and is particularly unique in this regard both because of all of the senses that combine to create nostalgic emotions (smell, taste, touch, and even sound) and its presence as both ethereal and concrete object. (148)

Hawley demonstrates this with the story of a black man who is visiting his brother in Harlem, where he has never lived himself. The character remarks "“Whenever I come to Harlem I feel somehow as if I were coming home to some mythic ancestral home”" (Hawley 150). He is waxing nostalgic about a home he has never lived in because "it has become home to his family, and more importantly, his race" and nostalgia "retains the

capacity to impart charm and goodness to what at the time may have been experienced as ordinary and uneventful” (Hawley 147; 150).

The object of his nostalgia in Harlem is sweet potato pie which is “an object of both nostalgia and American national identity that transcends race barriers” (Hawley 150). We can see evidence of this in Barrack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign, when he used pie common ground between himself, the Ohio governor, and his mixed-race and working-class audience. After posing with the waitstaff for photos, Obama gave a speech in which every time he said the word pie (fifteen times) the crowd cheered. Obama was playing on the notion that pie, like most food, is a great unifying factor—one that all races and classes share. But Obama was raised by his white grandmother who didn’t have the culinary tradition of sweet potato pie, so it couldn’t have been a direct source of nostalgia for him (similar to the pie recipe from Picture 3, which I never had as a child, but still gives me that nostalgic feeling). Instead, this connection comes from Michelle Obama’s family. Obama uses the different kinds of pies and the location, a rural Ohio diner, to unite his multi-racial crowd around a shared American tradition. Pie is a collective nostalgic object.

Picture 3: Smoked Cherry Pie Filling

Smoked Cherry Pie Filling

Ingredients:
2 lbs frozen tart cherries
1 cup smoked sugar*
¼ tsp almond extract
Juice of 1 lemon
1 Tbls cornstarch
4 Tbls Maker's Mark

Directions:
Stir together all in ingredients in a medium sized saucepan.

Bring to a gentle simmer over a medium-low heat. Simmer for 5 minutes.

Cool to room temperature and use in your favorite recipe.

*You can order bourbon smoked sugar online, or you can spread sugar on a foil sheet tray and smoke over hickory chips for 3 hours on very low heat.

Enjoy in a double crust pie, ladled over ice cream, or in a bourbon cocktail.

On the subject of pie, here is a smoky take on my favorite pie fruit.

But as Hawley explains in her essay, nostalgia is untrustworthy. In her sampling of pies across the US “there was always something missing in the experience. The idea of a good pie completely overshadowed the experience of it” ... “There is something about the idea of a home-baked pie that makes people yearn with longing for something ethereal and nameless that can never be recaptured because that moment is gone. (Hawley 147). Nostalgia, then is something we construct in our mind. It is based in sentiment, but not reality, and thus is construction often sets us up for expectations that simply can’t be lived up to.

In “Cultural Appropriation, Authenticity and Gastronomic Colonialism” Kenneth Albala explains that nostalgia turns authenticity into a moving target. Albala questions whether “anything can be authentic but the thing itself, can anyone’s cooking ever be replicated outside of that one particular spot.” He wonders whether “the way our minds work influences our standards of authenticity in food. Like all memories, taste memories change over time as we remove the negative parts and embellish the good, or sometime romanticize a particular meal in the past in a restaurant or prepared by our mothers” (Albala). My family’s enchiladas certainly embellished the good, romanticizing those packed Christmases at the Diaz home, singing *Feliz Navidad* with my uncle Mike and great uncle Walt, and opening presents cross-legged on the floor of the living room. The nostalgia was reinforced at my cousin Marcela’s baby shower where she had somehow nabbed the recipe and prepared two large trays of them. I begrudgingly ate 3 servings of them, all the time resenting her for having gotten the recipe while I hadn’t. We were the same age, having babies a month apart from one another. In my mind I had put in the work for this recipe and she had gotten the reward, and the only reason I could

comprehend for this was that she was brown like the rest of my family. This status that I imposed upon her sealed the recipe's nostalgic qualities in my mind, confirming that they would always be out of reach for me, and thus making me desire them even more.

I later discovered that Marcella hadn't gotten the recipe from grandpa Diaz. She had bypassed her mother and her grandmother and went to the closest source she could easily contact—Grandpa Diaz's son, Walter Jr. Marcella hadn't restricted herself to the same relationality that I had. She didn't need permission to pass on our legacy, because it was hers to pass on. This seemingly simple step was one I had never even considered. My entire life I'd made assumptions about these recipes, assumptions based on my lived experience as an insider in the world, but an outsider in my family. I had made assumptions that these recipes were not meant for me, that I hadn't done enough of the work to earn them, that they had to be earned and awarded by one specific holder of power. Worst of all, I assumed, as my privilege led me to do, that everyone knew I was waiting for permission—that I would be handed these recipes, that I didn't have to ask. The nostalgia of the recipes had created a standard so high that I had decided I didn't have the right to them—but it wasn't true. What's worse, when I finally worked out the truth buried under all of this and asked for the recipe for myself, I didn't get a list of ratios of guajillos and anchos. I got a short message, one line: “oh the sauce is just the stuff from a can.”

It wasn't even a particular can—no specific brand, not special ingredients added, no standard technique for preparation. The “special” quality that I had attached to those enchiladas was purely sentimental. Nostalgia truly is a moving target—creating a much grander space for itself in our hearts than it needs to. One we notice the hollowness of

that space, there's nothing that can refill it. And we only have ourselves to blame. In order to avoid the trap of nostalgia, authenticity must have some standard to which each authentic item is measured against. The question of authenticity becomes: "who is the authority over the authentic and what kind of credentials could prepare someone to make a claim over a dish" (Albala).

In terms of my own family's cuisine, I had developed a negative connotation with making any changes that would make it less authentic, believing the recipes to be set in stone. These recipes told a very specific story that I sought to keep alive, an authentic history of who we were. I did not view myself as having the authority to alter these recipes, an action that risked stopping our family's evolution in its tracks. As Albala puts it, "once you have decided exactly how a recipe ought to be made and allow no variation you are essentially killing that recipe, you have made of it a historical artifact worthy only to be observed in a museum, not a restaurant or home kitchen." The recipe can no longer evolve or adapt, because what makes it authentic or traditional is its strict adherence to genre. Our dominant narrative's high value placed on authenticity limits opportunities for more knowledge to be made, for creativity to happen, for more stories to be take place.

Albala's statement informs us that in order to define authenticity, we must first ask ourselves who decides what is authentic? The dominant narrative in which we are situated does. Looking at the definitions of the two terms, authentic and dominant narrative, there are many similarities. The first entry for the definition of authenticity is "a thing's quality of being worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact" (Merriam-Webster). Parallel to that definition, a dominant narrative is a bit more

complicated. A dominant narrative is the concept used to explain why we tell the story of our culture to reflect the practices of the powerful in our culture.

The message, however, remains the same. A dominant narrative is viewed as the genuine or real version of a thing—a history, a culture, a cuisine—because it is determined by the majority. It gives us a “purity of purpose,” but it also creates a “sort of collective tunnel vision” which focuses our attention so that we “no longer see the range and variety of activities” that make us who we are (McKinney 5-6). We must acknowledge that “authenticity is a socially constructed category of identity that offers privileges to its members” opens a new world for those who haven’t traditionally been able to lay an authentic claim to identity (Tippen 22).

This concept of authenticity, though, is complicated when we try to measure a person’s cultural authenticity. To make the determination of one’s adherence to their cultural norms, we must view the culture as if it is dead. Just as Latin has become a dead language because there are no native speakers to continue its evolution, a culture dies when it stops adapting, growing, and changing. Cultures being enacted by living, breathing people, thus cannot be standardized, because they constantly have the opportunity to evolve. So, if we define authenticity based on its ability to be standardized, a culture cannot fit that definition. The definition of authenticity must evolve to make space for the process of evolution.

I propose that in determining the authenticity of one’s cultural identity, we use its definition’s second entry— “true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character” (Merriam-webster). This entry’s success is exemplified in Season 1 episode 5 of *Ugly Delicious*, entitled “Bbq.” This episode opens with food writer Peter Meehan driving to a Bbq

Pitmaster Convention to do research for a cookbook he has been working on for the past year: “If you're from a place that doesn't have a deep barbecue tradition,” he warns, “your entry into what barbecue is gonna be this kind of carnival-barker-style battle between places.”

As a viewer I am invited to vivid pictures of this battle, gory images of whole hogs split down the middle, blood and smoke and large men attempting to seduce me with displays fire and carnage both beautiful and horrible to behold. Meehan wanders through the metaphorical meat carnival when one pit master he encounters tells us that there are a few styles of barbeque: North Carolina barbecue, which is whole hog, vinegar, pepper; Nashville-style which is cooked really low for 24 hours; West Tennessee-style which focuses on dry ribs; and Texas-style which includes whole cuts of beef and brisket. Each place its own style which is true to its pitmaster's own personality, spirit, or character, each place equally as valid.

The camera returns its viewer to an opening scene of the episode where Chang, Meehan, and novelist Amelia Gray are gathered around pitmaster Adam Perry Lang's cutting board, risking their fingertips to snatch slices of smoked beef short rib. Lang isn't concerned with presentation here. There are no plates, no silverware, only his chef's knife and a stainless-steel countertop. Meehan opens the conversation: “Regional styles of barbecue are only, like, 120 years old. Like, before then, there weren't barbecue restaurants, so there wasn't an individual style.”

Chang interrupts, “that's what bothers me. It became regional because someone decided to take a chance and do something a little bit differently.” He's in his element

here, excited to be able to gush about food with those who really get it—you can tell by his hand motions and wide eyes, “and I hate when things become an institution.”

“That’s right,” Lang pipes in, “I think it’s a fight against homogenization. Rather than saying, “We’re better.”

The battle that Meehan has painted before us becomes something entirely different. It’s a fight to maintain tradition, but also to stay relevant; to stand out, experiment, adapt. Each style of barbeque is asking to become part of my story and in turn for me to become part of its story. I imagine adding more vinegar or using a different kind of woodsmoke. I imagine how integrating those styles into my own life will merge the barbeque’s story with mine.

The CRTL tells us that “all cultural practices are built, shaped, and dismantled based in the encounters people have with one another within and across particular systems of shared belief” (1:2). This way of making cultures and the practices that call them into being represents how cultures are relational and constellated. The different styles of barbeque are not in competition, rather, their regionalism is a marker of those who cook it maintaining power and agency by rebelling against a singular definition of the cuisine. The barbeque exists in different configurations of the culinary constellation—related to one another depending on the positionality of the viewer. Pitmasters parallel a cultural rhetorics orientation to define their style, not as a checklist of authentic practices, but as their own equally valid version of barbeque—one that is authentic to the pitmaster’s identity.

These pitmasters partially align with the first entry of authenticity’s definition (being worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact) by following the

agreed-upon rules that unite them under the genre of barbeque. These rules are namely that barbeque involves large cuts of meat that are cooked over open flame, smoldering coals, or smoke. In this culinary genre, pitmasters agree and cooperate. But like texts which serve different functions and audiences through different genres, all barbeque is not alike. Pitmasters differentiate themselves by creating their own genre of barbeque in order to meet the needs and tastes of their communities. Their communities have context for their regional style. The community knows what to expect and how to approach it. Pitmasters and consumers alike gain a sense of pride in and agency over their community in their participation in and contribution to this genre, which is discursively affected. This is demonstrated when Gray points that the pitmasters that she's known "don't say, 'This is better.' But they do say, 'This is mine'" (Bbq).

I didn't recognize that the food of my family could be mine, though. It always seemed like a question of better—and if mine did turn out better, it was a challenge to the institution of my family, not just to the recipes themselves. Food is a heritage literacy not only as it adopts, adapts, or alienates. It is also a heritage literacy because it is defined by the transfer of recipes from one family member to the next. The transfer of recipes transfers a sense of power, indicating a readiness to lead the family. This transfer of power comes with new choices to make about how the recipes will continue being passed down. My understanding of my positionally to my family made my younger self aim to pass our recipes down unscathed, more like forwarding an email than playing a game of telephone. This is because I held to the reality that Grandpa Diaz's ownership of these recipes and authority to designate who gets access to them endows him with the power to dole authenticity out, or in some cases, to withhold it. In my case, Grandpa Diaz had the

capability to bestow agency over my cultural identity to me by sharing these recipes, but reciprocally, I had a responsibility to accurately reproduce these recipes and reaffirm his status, reflecting his power back to him. A failure to do so or any perversion from my end such as swapping out authentic ingredients for those I can more easily access at my grocery store, would do the opposite.

So as grandpa Diaz aged, I watched our table grow less and less bountiful. The recipes that I hoped I could someday mimic began to slip away. Our tamalera had once been stuffed, layer upon layer, with steamy yellow packages. But now seemed scant and the tamales overcooked as too much heat swirled in the space between them. Where trays of different colored enchiladas once lined the counters, now there were only simple ground beef in red sauce, dried out from the lean grind of the meat. Still, grandpa Diaz didn't turn to me. Plastic containers of red and green cupcakes and store-bought apple pies accumulated on the "dessert dryer," a section of the laundry room used for serving sweets after dinner, leaving my little cousins' palates soft and unchallenged. I watched the branches of my family grow further from our roots, confused and frustrated. When we began eating tamales with forks and knives, which paved the way for sour cream, sriracha, and cheddar cheese on our table, I lost hope. Once we had determined our cousins' plus-ones' staying power on the way they ate tamales, but now even we smothered our tamales with condiments that hid the characteristic yellow corn flavor of the masa. I didn't know who we were anymore. I had associated our ability to maintain our ways of eating, generations removed from Mexico with the quantification of our Mexicanness. If I didn't know who we were how could I inherit our legacy?

I resigned myself to the belief that these recipes wouldn't be passed down to me because my mishandling of our recipes would become that of a colonizer, claiming that the version I'd made with my white hands is just as good, thereby devaluing the original. It would also reflect poorly on Grandpa Diaz, who would be perceived as handing out our secrets too easily, for giving me access to it in the first place. His job was to protect our family "against social and cultural assault" and "assist in the formation and protection of identity" (Tippen 25). My whiteness was that assault. It meant that I had no right to claim my family's recipes because in my white hands they would lose their authenticity. They wouldn't be truly Mexican anymore, they'd be tainted; Just another white girl profiting off of the backs of brown people like renowned chef Rick Bayless, a white man from Oklahoma who gained fame from "discovering regional Mexican cuisine and bringing it to the US" (Albala). Bayless has been accused of intellectual property theft because, though he does create a faithful interpretation of Mexican food, is able to charge much more than many Mexican chefs who are less able to advance their businesses due to their ethnicity. Another example of this would be the case of the two American women who opened Kooks Burritos in Portland, which specialized in a lobster burrito that the owners joked they had "peeked into the windows" of the kitchens of Mexican women to discover the secret to. Kooks Burritos was problematic because they "ripped off" recipes and sold them in direct competition with Mexican vendors (Albala). Though my profit would not be monetary, it would allow me easier access to the foods I loved, thus potentially loosening my desire to attend family gatherings. I would be able cook it and serve it to loved ones outside of my Mexican family and profit socially for my worldliness. Most of all, my ability to cook food that is authentically Mexican would blur the line between

cultures, proving that a white girl can be culturally Mexican, and proving that authentic Mexicanness is “a matter of becoming as well as being” (Monberg 30).

This tactic for passing recipes on, though, risks falling into another descriptor of authenticity—assimilation. There are few better metaphors to represent assimilation than the notion of the US melting pot. A quick internet search defines the melting pot as “a place where a variety of races, cultures, or individuals assimilate into a cohesive whole” (“Melting pot”). Once, our country cherished this metaphor and the concept of assimilation—the shedding of one’s past and beginning anew with every opportunity as those born in the US was the American dream. The use of the word “assimilate” in the melting pot’s definition implies an intention to absorb the bits and pieces of cultures into a cohesive whole. This is demonstrated in the early 1900s graduation ceremony of the Ford English School in which the school’s foreign-born students passed through a literal kettle-shaped melting pot prop. The students entered the prop wearing the traditional clothing of their cultures and carrying signs listing their native countries. They, then, emerged from the melting pot “dressed in neat business suits and waving small American flags” (Njeri). The audience celebrated and cheered as each person stripped themselves of their national identity, sacrificing it for the prestige of symbolically becoming fully assimilated into American culture. But that notion of blending that “was once considered the ideal” is less celebrated today as it has changed along with “the racial and ethnic nature of the nation” (Njeri).

Many now recognize that The US melting pot cripples us as we jump in. We expect to emerge with a sense of community, but instead discover that colonization and systematic racism rewards only those who have homogenized into that creamy white

emulsification in the pot, with some access to privilege. My culinary adventures have taught me the hard way that the melting pot cooking vessel, from which our metaphor is based, also paints a false perception that it is easy to maintain. Melting pots are finicky vessels. Overheat them for a just a moment or add the wrong ratio of liquid to fat at the wrong time and your mixture will abruptly separate into a mass of congealed fat floating in a dingy viscous liquid. This fatal error can almost ever be undone—trust me, my blender and I have tried. Once the mixture has separated each molecule must assimilate into its divided structure. It is either liquid or fat. Like the ingredients in a melting pot, biracials often must choose a side to assimilate to—an either/or, whether permanently or contextually. We are pressured to homogenize to the larger and immediately identifiable white mass of fat or be left behind in the undesirable liquid burning to the bottom of the pot. The choice seems easy, Sillito tells us:

In a world where whiteness means survival, means life, means the ability to walk around on a world stage with confidence, knowing I'm the main character in this show, the choice seems easy. Even the language of 'passing' itself suggests of moving into spaces and places that others are not allowed, to not be stopped at the entry. Or perhaps it means that my whiteness has been evaluated, given the grade, and I have passed where my darker siblings fail.

Most biracials have two options, it seems. The first option, we can try to remain whole by choosing to either embrace whiteness by “deceive[ing] a white world into thinking [we are] one of their own” or attempting to distance ourselves from whiteness by discarding the privilege that comes with it in hopes of being accepted into our corresponding communities of color (Sillito). The second option is to exist as a fractured state of self by trying to give and take, not always equally, not ever easily, but through conversation between ingredients as they become part of the fabric of one another. In

keeping with Sillito's metaphor of passing as spatial movement, when we pass, we must often leave parts of ourselves and our communities behind. The resulting "fractured self called into being by the invention of race" states we must "always be both white and not white" which inevitably leads to a failure to be both (Sillito).

Villanueva offers a third option, though with his more accurate metaphor, equally as violent, a stew but perhaps with more reward, in which, "some of the ingredients do not lose all of their original identity, though altered, taking in the juices from the other ingredients of the pot, adding to the juices; all of us...Americans, and all of us some things else (20). The stew metaphor allows authenticity to become a cooperation between stories of identity in which we choose to adopt some parts and adapt others, rather than a give and take of identity. As I argued in Chapter 2, in order to culturally identify, we must look at the way that our cultural identity is constructed by those who share it with us, but then also have the authority to contribute to its construction.

We can make our contributions based on a number of reasons—personal taste, access to new ingredients or discontinued access to old ones, or even based on external factors in response to need. Barbeque demonstrates adaptation in the evolution of barbeque in that it has been refined and adapted from peasant food. Peasant food is food that is prepared from accessible and inexpensive ingredients that are heavily seasoned to become palatable. The pitmasters of Owensboro, Kentucky have contributed to the construction of BBQ's identity, as well as Kentucky's identity, in its response to an 1816 tariff that increased the profit of wool production. As farmers raised more and more sheep, mutton barbeque became a regional style as a way to make use of sheep after they'd become too old to produce good wool. Mutton meat is tough and strong tasting,

but 12 hours of smoking and a mop of saltwater made the abundance of cheap meat into a tradition (Chamberlain). Owensboro pitmasters adopted their traditional barbeque techniques but adapted to the surplus of meat that most people didn't yet have a taste for. Now that technique has become tradition.

But where do we draw the line? When can we label adaptations of cultures as authentic, and when do we start to pull away from those labels? Chefs like Lang are raising the bar of what barbeque can be, but this comes with a price. The price is literal in Lang's case, as his *APL Restaurant* sells the beef short rib which was eaten by the bare handful in the opening scene of *Ugly Delicious's* "BBQ," cooked with a simple slathering of French's yellow mustard and a dry rub, at a whopping one hundred and sixty-eight dollars. Through their aptly named takeaway window "Hole in the Wall" they feature a shave prime steak sandwich for fifty dollars.

Do we still consider barbeque that is so far flung from its roots as un-finnicky peasant food as authentic? Does Lang's barbeque harm the traditions of barbeque when it is held up next to other traditional styles of barbeque? Does it take away from barbeque businesses owned by those who are less privileged? Or are the experiences that are different enough to warrant different labels? We have to question the story behind barbeque in order to understand how our dominant narrative has affected it. Lang is, indeed, a barbeque pitmaster—a hard-working and passionate chef that isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. But unlike most pitmasters who are trained by family members, Lang's training comes from French cuisine at the Culinary Institutes of America and under Daniel Boulud and Guy Savoy. We have to question whether it is his maleness, his whiteness, and his French culinary education, which is valued highly in both the

dominant narrative the US and the dominant narrative of the food industry, which allows to Lang be rewarded for his innovation. Lang could be perceived as genius, or he could be perceived as appropriating from pitmasters who have had to do much more to earn their living. His adherence to these dominant narratives enable him to mark his price tags up high and positions him as cultural and culinary authority. But this is also what makes the concept of authenticity so dangerous. Yes, Lang is creating the genuine version of a thing—he is an American male and barbeque allows for variation. How we choose to define authenticity tells us whether Lang is appropriating barbeque or whether he has a right to contribute to its construction.

Chang’s claim for authenticity in this episode seems to say that he does have the right: “Only Americans say, ‘That's not barbecue.’ No one from Beijing is saying ‘That's not Peking duck.’ It's a very American-centric way of looking at the world, and that's a wrong way to do it, actually.” His use of the term “American-centric” invokes the notion of the dominant narrative, in that the dominant narrative can be described as the “invisible hand” that guides both reality and perceived reality (Joy). It is this “invisible hand” guiding the way we define barbeque—we can’t point to who has done the defining, we just assume that that is the way it is because it is the way the majority understands it. With such a large body operating under this belief, we cannot challenge the belief directly, but rather internalize our own definitions while working in small sweeps for systematic change.

This wrong way of looking at the world is enacted in my family. Grandpa Diaz may have unwittingly drawn the dividing line between our cultures— the Mexicans on one side, and everyone else on the other— by being the genuine version of our cultural

identity which we measured ourselves against. But that line has been drawn, all the same. He didn't delegate the tamale making duties based on whether he loved anyone any less than anyone else. He did it because he had been designated the master of our family's dominant narrative and dominant narratives encourage things to remain as they always have been. Under the guise of this narrative, Grandpa Diaz likely never thought about his role within it.

It was I who was actively concerned with measuring our Mexicanness. I had come to understand being Mexican as some sort of baseline for belonging, which my whiteness inherently kept me from living up to. I thought I had to infiltrate my own family and perform my Mexicanness, just enough to fit in, but not so much as to make myself a caricature. I constructed an image of what being Mexican was supposed to look like from this baseline of characteristics that I had spent years trying, and failing, to perform. These performances were based on my family at holiday gatherings, which I had identified as real and authentic. I perceived these gatherings as the closest experience I could get to true Mexicanness. This is the only place I saw our culture celebrated, as if we had shed this skin of our everyday lives at the door and tossed it into the pile of our winter coats on the entryway floor. Off came the stiff, neutral-toned exterior. Off came the socially acceptable mask of soft smiles and muted voices that we wore around work and at the grocery store. And out came color and life and zazz. It was only when we were together, sheltered safely in the home in which we were all rooted, that I experienced my family embracing their sensual, loud, and feisty selves. Christmas at grandpa's was where we acted out the few truths from which our stereotype was rooted, and there was no one to call us out as frijoleros but ourselves.

In my need to live up to the standard of Mexicanness set before me, I instead alienated myself from my family. In my need to become authentic, I instead became the caricature of Mexicanness that I had been trying to avoid by basing my actions and even my definitions of Mexicanness on the stereotypes I'd studied, rather than reality. I had so focused on becoming, I ignored my own being—attributing characteristics to my family that may not even have existed. This idea of authenticity that I couldn't live up to was mine and mine alone.

This means that the years I spent feeling isolated by my whiteness were self-imposed, but it also demonstrates that I have had the power to determine my own authenticity all along. With this knowledge, I have the agency to move beyond the mimicry that I have always believed to be my only path and begin intentionally constructing a both/and identity that credits me as the authority in defining it from within.

CHAPTER 4: FUSION IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

In Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed how both cultural identity and authenticity itself is constructed. In Chapter 4, I will discuss what I can do with that knowledge. I can construct my own cultural identity, one in which I don't have to choose to be authentically either/or, and can instead be authentically both/and. Identity is constructed and I am encouraged by the dominant narrative of my culture to construct my identity based on what I perceive as the authentic versions of my cultures. Biracials like myself are caught in a game of proving ourselves between two cultures. Again, we refer to Monberg's call for "special strategies for interrogating the boundaries and conflicts that always exist inside any community (44)." Silito proposes such a special strategy, an alternative:

Rather than sitting in a space that forces us – the 'passers,' the 'biracial' the bleeding border bodies that are visitors to both whiteness and racialized identity and citizens of nowhere – to be either/or, to visit but never be home in a racialized self or to dissolve completely into whiteness, we have to transition to a both/and. This space of both/and must fully recognize the colonial world that grants privilege to its – to my – white body, while fully recognizing my right to operate outside of whiteness. The only way for the fractures to become a whole self, to restore the fragments of what was, is to reintegrate them into a cohesive whole. I am both white and racial, both majority and minority. Like Whitman I contain multitudes, even as I contradict myself.

To answer my earlier question *If I am not (either Mexican or White), will I ever be wholly, authentically me?* Silito tells me I can. He tells me that in order to be authentic to my self, as a biracial, I cannot keep trying to be either/or. I *must* make the conscious choice to be both/and. As he says, "my duality... is the only way to a complete self."

This breaks the authentic/inauthentic binary and recommends a new descriptor. To cultivate a both/and identity, we must adopt a term commonly used for the

construction of a both/and cuisine—fusion. Fusion, which is the result of joining two or more things together to form a single or entity, gives us a very direct metaphor for the biracial identity via cuisine. Fusion cuisine has become a broadly used term for food or cooking that incorporates elements of diverse culinary traditions. As such, it faces similar criticism as the biracial person—it is confused about its identity, it is often viewed as appropriation or mocking of cultures, and it is often considered white-washed.

Fusion cuisine has had a bad reputation in the food community because, done poorly, it can be “confusing or gimmicky.” This kind of fusion food is trendy and sometimes is merely fusion in its labeling—the caramel apple empanada for example, is typically merely an apple pie that is posing as Mexican. It is attempting to pass, likely as a creative dessert in a Mexican restaurant. It could be creative if it tried, but often it’s not. Poor fusion food is very easy to pick apart and categorize based on its various labeled components— a flour tortilla bowl for your salad does not make a Mexican meal, and a ramen burger infatuation will not make you more worldly. The components of poorly made fusion food are often forced together because the ingredients represent differing cultures, even if they don’t necessarily fit. However, this poor fusion food often does not have a deeper explanation for existing on the same plate except to be part of a forced mish-mash of cultures and styles—fruit sushi, the avocado latte, the cheeseburger pizza, all Frankenfoods with little new to say about themselves. Perhaps they are delicious and perhaps that is enough, but I believe that poor fusion food is performing in the same way biracials perform identities. Sometimes they pass, sometimes they fail. Fusion food done poorly and fusion people trying to identify with multiple cultures are locked in a state of becoming, but not really of being. Distracted by this state of becoming, biracials may

overlook that being is not static, but is a state of always becoming. Their effort to mimic takes their energy away from critically reflecting on who they are.

Done well, though, fusion cuisine is entirely different. It may help us to become more conscious of our dominant narrative by making us more aware of how “we’ve been conditioned to not to notice [the] everyday moments” that define us (McKinney 6). It is inspired by cultures and experiences, engaged with them, not just constructed from its parts. In many cases, these sorts of fusions become part of the US dominant narrative due to their seamless accessibility. Spaghetti and meatballs, for example, are a fusion food of Italian and American culture. Between 1880 and 1920, nearly 4 million Italians immigrated to America (Esposito). In the US, Italian immigrants who had come from poverty were able to nearly triple their income, making meat a staple as opposed to a luxury. Consumption also increased in quantity, taking meatballs from their traditional golf ball size to larger baseball sizes. There are two theories as to how spaghetti was introduced to the combo. One theory is that as it served to satisfy American clientele who were used to having a starch with their meal. The other theory is that spaghetti was one of the only Italian ingredients that was available to immigrants, and it provided a nostalgic element to their new wealth of ingredients (Esposito). This has led to a new genre of food that is recognized for their both/and quality—Italian American cuisine. This isn’t to say that American/and fusion food is superior due to its westernization. On the contrary, the popularity of fusion cuisine in the US points to a longing by American culture for complex voices that tell new stories of food.

Though it is common for elitists to point out that Italian American food is cheapened by its Americanness, this fusion is one of the most popular cuisines in

America, topped only by Mexican American and Chinese American fusions. The popularity of these fusions seems to answer Lunsford and Glenn's earlier challenge for a greater range of voices to contribute of the dominant narrative of our society. And it does, perhaps, show progress in the direction of understanding fusion cuisine as on equal par with authentic cuisine. Modern chefs like Edward Lee are voicing their opinions on this duality, pointing out that "authenticity... can be a hindrance, a means of exclusion, a distortion of history and inspires words such as 'true, genuine, and real which reek of a sanctimoniousness I've never thought belonged in the food community' (*Buttermilk Graffiti* 5-6).

But Lee doesn't like the word "fusion" either. The CRTL inform us that it is redundant to call cultural rhetorics *cultural* rhetorics because all rhetorics are cultural and all cultures are rhetorical. They recognize, however, the necessary evil of using the term cultural rhetorics as a "(hopefully) short-term intervention to mark our orientation to a set of intersecting, shifting, and variable methodological and theoretical frames and relationships" and to avoid the "temptation to try to demarcate the cultural, social, and physical away from one another into camps" (CRTL 1:2). Similarly, Lee encourages us to discard with the term "fusion" because fusion cuisine cannot exist without acknowledging the parameters of authenticity. One of the limitations of the dominant narrative of authenticity is that to define something as fusion "implies a kind of culinary racism, suggesting that foods from eastern cultures are so radically different that they need to be artificially introduced or "fused" with western cuisines to give them legitimacy" (*Smoke and Pickles* 8). To Lee, the term "fusion" implies a cuisine that has

been simplified for easier digestion by Americans.⁵ He proposes instead that we use the (hopefully) short-term intervention of the term new American.

Lee calls himself a New American chef, though he is aware that, like me, his face doesn't read as he wishes to be defined. Born in Brooklyn to immigrant Korean parents, Lee writes in the preface to his first book, *Smoke & Pickles*, that "the great thing about Americans is not the identity we're born with but our reinvention of it. We start with one family and then, magically, we are allowed to reinvent ourselves into whoever we want to be" (VIII). In 2014, Lee devoted an entire episode of his featured season of *The Mind of a Chef*, titled "American" to his definition of fusion food, saying that:

I think we're entering a new stage where people are understanding that American food is not hot dogs, hamburgers, and barbecue. American food is anything that happens in this country by any chef who has ever asked himself the question or asked herself the question, "What am I cooking?" How do I make food with these ingredients that are here and my culture and my history? Guess what, you've just had this very American dilemma that you don't have in Sicily, or in Provence, or in Syria or Korea. Because (in Sicily, Provence, Syria, and Korea) you don't have these issues, you just cook whatever your forefathers tell you, it's just a tradition. And so that's the beauty of American food is that it is limitless.

In *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, and Reality*, Anzaldúa says "we must unchain identity from meanings that can no longer contain it" (*Light in the Dark* 73). While we can't eliminate the labels and markers of a specific culture or cuisine, but we let go of their meanings. We can take power from our labels and markers by shifting perceptions and training focus on our faces, and take pride in that "the who-we-are is currently undergoing disintegration and reconstruction, pulled apart, dismembered, then reconfigured" (Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark* 74).

⁵ I agree with these implications but will continue to use "fusion" in this thesis for the sake of simplicity.

Fusion/New American cuisine gives a voice to biracials to construct “meaningful representations of themselves and their world” through the way they “discover, uncover, create our identities as we interrelate with others and our alrededores/surroundings” (Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark* 75). Fusion cuisine challenges the dominant narrative of authenticity, as its identity grows, not based in a colonized history, but of our interaction, as “we strategically reinvent ourselves to accommodate our exchanges. Identity is an ongoing story, one that changes with each telling, one we revise at each station, each stop, in our viaje de la vida (life’s journey)” (Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark* 75).

Not only do recipes allow for a different voice to make their stories heard by giving women power as Tippen discusses in “Writing Recipes, Telling Stories: Cookbooks as Feminist Historiography,” but fusion cuisine allows us to reinvent our stories. We are not tethered to identities that were constructed by our society, based solely in who our parents were, where our ancestors came from, or what we were fed as children. These aspects of our identities matter, but they don’t tell the whole story. Fusion cooking gives biracials power to claim our own space in the vast narrative of our histories, to take pride in what we have contributed, and to use our lives and experiences to help cuisine evolve as a whole.

Along with chef Lee, chef David Chang is also leading the call for a greater recognition of fusion food that is thoughtful, marrying the best aspects of different cuisines. Chef Chang is the James Beard award-winning chef and founder of Momofuku restaurant group, one of which, Momofuku Ko, has received two Michelin stars. Cited as one of the most celebrated chefs in the US, Chang was the first chef to be featured on PBS’s Emmy award-winning show *The Mind of a Chef*. He is also the creative force

behind *Netflix's Ugly Delicious*, which tackles the misconceptions, histories, and stories of cultures and food in a storytelling style that can be described as Bourdain-esque. Like Lee, Chang recognizes fusion as part of the continuing evolution of American cuisine. His shows hone in on those aspects of evolution, often pointing out how different cultures' cuisines are the roots of many of America's favorite dishes. He explores this in the second episode of *Ugly Delicious*, titled "Tacos," which explores how Mexican cuisine has become part of American culture over time, just as spaghetti and meatballs has.

In one scene of "Tacos," food writer Gustavo Arellano has just dribbled his taco spillage on the pages of *Taco Titan: The Glen Bell Story*.

"This is actually where the taco lost its soul," he says, sitting at a booth in eighty-year-old *Mitla Café*, a Mexican restaurant opened by Lucia Rodriguez from Tepatlán, Jalisco, in 1937 in San Bernardino (Tacos). The tacos from which he spills look jarringly familiar against a backdrop of chile rellenos and birrios, they are crisp-shelled and flowing over with diced tomatoes and shredded iceberg lettuce. Across the street from *Mitla Café* used to sit *Bell's Drive-In*, which sold hotdogs and hamburgers. But the owner, Glen Bell, had a different vision for how he wanted to make his fortune that was inspired by the long lunch lines for *Mitla Café's* signature ten cent tacos dorados. The problem, Bell was "some white guy from San Bernardino," and hadn't the slightest clue where to begin (Tacos). So, every day Bell would sit at *Mitla Café* and order a platter of tacos and study them. Bell befriended staff and family, "working his way into the kitchen in order to decipher the secrets behind the beguiling taco that was proving so popular in what was then San Bernardino's barrio district" (Elliott).

Rodriguez's tacos (which I've recreated in Picture 4) were based on the food she

Picture 4: Tacos Dorados

Tacos Dorados

Ingredients:
1 Tbls water
¼ tsp baking soda
12 ounces ground beef
1 cup vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped fine
1 ½ Tbls chili powder
1 ½ Tbls
1 ½ tsp ground cumin
1 ½ tsp garlic powder
Salt
2 Tbls tomato paste
¼ cup cheddar cheese, shredded

Directions:
Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Combine water and baking soda in large bowl. Add beef and mix until thoroughly combined. Set aside.

Heat 1 Tbls oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, then add chili powder, paprika, cumin, garlic powder, and 1 teaspoon salt and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant. Stir in tomato paste and cook until paste 1 to 2 minutes. Add beef mixture and cook, breaking up until cooked through 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer beef mixture to bowl; stir in cheddar until cheese has melted and mixture is homogeneous. Wipe skillet clean with paper towels.

Brush both sides of tortillas with 2 Tble oil and arrange tortillas, overlapping, on rimmed baking sheet. Bake until tortillas are warm and pliable, about 5 minutes. Place about 2 tbls of filling in each tortilla, then fold and press to close

Set wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet and line rack with double layer of paper towels. Heat remaining oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Arrange 6 tacos in skillet with open sides facing away from you. Cook, adjusting heat so oil actively sizzles and bubbles appear around edges of tacos, until tacos are crispy and deeply browned on 1 side, 2 to 3 minutes. Using tongs and thin spatula, carefully flip tacos. Cook until deeply browned on second side, 2 to 3 minutes, adjusting heat as necessary.

Remove skillet from heat and transfer tacos to prepared wire rack. Blot tops of tacos paper towels. Place sheet with fried tacos in oven to keep warm.

Enjoy tacos with passing extra cheddar, lettuce, tomato, sour cream, jalapeños, and the grungiest hot taco sauce you can find.

ate in Jalisco but were adapted to the ingredients available to her in the US. Bell would further adapt them to American tastes and a McDonalidized production model. He would make his fortune from Rodriguez's tacos in 1962, when he replaced *Bell's Drive-in* with the first ever *Taco Bell*. Rodriguez would receive nothing—no money, no credit, not even a plaque. This isn't a rare story, Farley Elliott informs

us in “Taco Bell Wouldn't Exist Without San Bernardino's Mitla Café,” but the Rodriguez’s don’t hold any resentment.

“How do you feel that your family's recipe, like, your heritage, was basically taken by Glen Bell and turned into a multi-billion dollar empire?” Arellano asks the new generation of Rodriguez’s in the restaurant, Lucia’s grandson Michael Montañó:

These tacos require a bit more work than making a trip through the drive-thru, but they are an entirely different experience. The use of American ingredients while retaining a strong Mexican backbone demonstrate the adaptability of Mexico’s cuisine.

We don't talk about it in terms of what could have been or what he did to us or anything like that. It's more of, ‘Look at our connection to the history of food in this country’...Mexican food had staying power, it always adapts... When you hear stories like salsa is the number one condiment, or tortillas are right there next to the Wonder Bread. That's what the country's about. That's what the immigrant story is about, is assimilating. But not only assimilating to the culture, but having that predominant culture assimilate some of your beliefs, some of what you do well, and make it part of the general population. (Tacos)

While Taco Bell can hardly be called Mexican food today, its roots are undeniably Mexican. Its adaptation took place through communication between cultures, imposing itself so well on American culture that the taco has become a part of American culture as much as it is of Mexican. On this corner off of Route 66, Mexico’s techniques, America’s ingredients, A Mexican’s labor, and an American’s innovation (read: colonization) came together to situate Mexican American fusion cuisine a mainstay in the US that Arellano quantifies by a familiarity to American identity so strong that even white supremacists will eat it. “I once put away a couple of white supremacists, in jail, and I found pictures of them...Del Taco burritos, which, that's awesome to me.” Arellano

tells us, “When you have white supremacists gorging on Mexican food and thinking that's part of who they are, that's a small victory unto itself.”

Through Chang and Lee’s lens, the concept of fusion no longer “evokes strange amalgams of ingredients that had no business being together on the plate, let alone in your mouth” (Celcila Lee). Culture, cuisine, and identity are all alive. If they are alive, they cannot be static. If they are alive, and not static, then authenticity, like nostalgia, is a moving target. No one linear story can represent them. When fusion is intentional and constructed it tells a different kind of story than we are used to hearing—it has more colors and a more languages to pull from to complicate those stories.

Lee calls the stories that make up our identities “encyclopedia entries,” but I would argue that even that description is too linear, too canonical. Our stories are messy and incomplete, some are completely missing, others exist but are never told. They do not fit in little boxes in little paragraphs under a singular identifier, many don’t have synonyms or antonyms (*Buttermilk Graffiti* 6). Our identities are constellated, just as our cultures are. We have tried to tell story of America as an encyclopedia, but it is too complex, which is how we’ve ended up with the dominant narrative we have today—telling the stories of mostly white men, but few else. Chefs like Bourdain, Chang, and Lee provide us a tool to tell our stories through the material representation of food that we can have agency over every day. The true story of America can begin to be told through food, as well. That is an America that I want to claim as my own. So, I took a trip to Lexington to find part of that story of America in the summer of 2018.

I chose Lexington for number of reasons. One of those reasons was inspired by a podcast, *Rhetoricity*, in which Steven Alvarez informed me that Lexington, Kentucky has

taken on a new pejorative name in the past 10 years, Mexington. Alvarez teaches “Taco Literacy” at the University of Kentucky, which is a placed-based approach to understanding the social and demographic changes taking place in Kentucky through the lens of food. Alvarez tells us “the South is experiencing a sort of Latinization” due primarily to the agriculture and horse industry (Lam). As more Mexicans move into the area, they bring regional cuisines from Veracruz, the Yucatan, Aguascalientes, Oaxaca, and Pueblo, creating a densely diverse hub for exploring Mexican cuisine and Mexican-American South fusion. I located *Tortilleria Y Taqueria Ramirez* ten minutes from our first stop. This place is exactly what I was looking for—more than half of the building was sectioned off by metal prep tables, separating our small plastic tables from an open kitchen and industrial-size tortilla making equipment. One wall was lined with glass coolers like those you find in a gas station. On the other side of those windows sat a mish-mash of *Jaritos*, aloe juices, and flan packed in clear plastic cups in one color and sheet trays of unidentifiable meat marinating in red sauce and covered with plastic wrap in another. I ordered a large horchata, easily the creamiest, yet most refreshing one I’ve ever had, and a nopale gordita—a corn tortilla that is puffed up on a hot griddle and stuffed with slices of meaty, dark green cactus paddle and pink pickled onions (which I’ve recreated in Picture 5). My husband ordered tacos de cabeza and chicharron, washing the gelatinous mass of pig skin down with a *liquada fresa*, a strawberry smoothie. *Tortilleria y Taqueria Ramirez* use local Weisenberger Mills corn, famous for its grits to make their tacos. Alvarez calls our attention to these Kentucky tortillas made with local corn because “that’s attention to the rich agricultural wealth of Kentucky, and for the ingredients that are available that create this hybridity.” This is an example of

fusion cooking from a cultural rhetorics orientation, as *Tortilleria y Taqueria Ramirez* “talks across boundaries” and engages the culture of Kentucky. The taqueria speaks its Mexicanness to Kentucky in its tortillas and tacos, and it hears Kentucky’s ingredients speak back to them, creating a tortilla as a physical manifestation of where the cultures constellate.

The second reason I chose to come to Lexington is that it’s (what I thought would be) a short drive to Louisville, which is the home of three of Lee’s restaurants⁶. After lunch, we checked into our Airbnb, a single room in a duplex with hardwood floors, a full-sized bed, and no curtains, owned by a young couple of schoolteachers. I laid in bed for exactly 23 minutes before maneuvering myself into a full-length black gown and heels and getting back on the road. We had reservations at *610 Magnolia*, Lee’s modern approach to Southern cuisine in the heart of Louisville—an hour and thirteen minutes away. Again, geography is really not my thing.

For all of the prestige of *610 Magnolia*, it was one of the most unassuming restaurants I have ever seen. Located on a backstreet riddled with potholes, *610* is recognizable from the surrounding houses by only its muted-sunflower yellow door. There is a neon sign that reads “610” in straight white script, but you can’t see it when the sun is out. Bright green patches of clover break up the sidewalk in front of the building, there is no parking lot, no cross walk, and the only sign that this might be a restaurant is a hand-painted liquor license on the front of the building. They gave us rye bread and sorghum butter and a small taste of “bubbles” to celebrate our anniversary. I opted for the 6-course tasting menu which includes Wagyu tongue on caraway johnny cake and a

⁶ I was wrong, its not a short drive. But it’s a drive we were willing to make 4 times over the course of our trip.

bourbon cocktail with honey and whey. And because I was in a dress and bad at geography and in Edward Lee's frickin' restaurant, I said yes to the optional shaved truffles on my ramp anellini and a second cocktail, vodka this time, with lavender, lemon, and rhubarb. Every course featured layers, not only in technique or ingredients, but of understanding—of cultural dwelling and engagement and humor. The amuse bouche, for example is called the 610 B.L.T and it tells the story of hungry and humble chef Lee preparing himself a B.L.T. before every shift. Lee chose to up the ante on this dish by making the everyday sandwich into a decadent single bite, mocking and yet highlighting his own simplicity. The "L" stands for liver in this instance, goose liver, bacon, and sundried tomato pate are spread on day old bread and nearly burned around the edges. It was unctuous and familiar and a little weird and set an extremely high precedent for the rest of the meal.

The 610 B.L.T was only overshadowed by Lee's "Bourbon Aficionado" which consists of drunken banana cake, chocolate Pappy Van Winkle maple syrup, dried corn, brown butter ice cream, and Lee's signature ingredient, smoke. It came layered intentionally slapdash in a drinking glass topped with a coaster which releases a puff of soft smoke as you lift it. The flavors and textures of this dish shouldn't have worked, but the corn was light and crunchy like *Lucky Charm* marshmallows, while still tasting vehemently corn-y, and the smoke has infiltrated all of the fat-based components giving them a kiss of earthy, carnal, richness. Lee has harnessed smoke, the untamable precursor to flame, as an ingredient so delicate he can infuse it into the bubbles of milk foam at the bottom of the glass.

This is how Lee innovates. He looks for new ways to use what's already there, new ways to tell the same old stories, new ways to shift our perspective on the things we take for granted. Anzaldúa gives an excellent visual for Lee's innovation in *Light in the Dark: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, and Reality*. "I sit on the knuckled roots of la Virgen's tree and talk to it when I'm feeling jubilant or when painful memories take over and the whispering waves can't sooth the pangs," Anzaldúa begins (*Light in the Dark* 23). But a severe storm damaged the tree one February, leaving the tree weathered gray and tattered in such a way that "the bright live tans and browns of the raw, newly cut wood and dangling trunk fibers looked like the folds of (La Virgen de Guadalupe's) robes," which she sees now every time she walks towards the tree (*Light in the Dark* 23). Anzaldúa's friends don't see La Virgen until she is pointed out to them, and then they can't unsee her. They point her out to their friends. It requires only a slight shift in perspective, but Anzaldúa says "it feels like the tree is teaching me how to perceive not only with the physical eyes but also with the whole body" (*Light in the Dark* 24). Lee seamlessly negotiates the "cracks between worlds," by relying on the "liminality and fluidity" that results from the rejection a singular identity" (Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark* 82). Thus, Lee gives us a new perspective on the things we once found mundane by engaging with his identity—the creative part of him that connects his Korean heritage to his Kentucky home through pickling, barbeque, and buttermilk. His identity shows up in his dishes like buttermilk, "never in the foreground, always as a platform to let other ingredients shine" (*Smoke and Pickles* ix). Lee complicates the food he cultivates in his kitchen based on his complex identity, and recursively, his identity is further complicated

by his food. He has “taken on the characteristics” of his multiple identities, so much so that he cannot be dissociated from the sign of that function” (Barthes 29).

Chef Lee helps me see identity through a different lens. He, like Tippen, presents a different narrative in which identity is constructed by assigning authority to the self, by engaging with the stories that what makes us who we are.

And now we come full circle.

All of our identities are fusions of information, “billions of bits of cultural knowledge superimposing many different categories of experience” (*Light in the Dark* 69).

Identity is relational. Who and what we are depends on those surrounding us, a mix of our interactions with our alrededores/environments, with new and old narratives. Identity is multilayered, stretching in all directions, from past to present, vertically and horizontally, chronologically and spatially. (*Light in the Dark* 69)

Anzaldúa and Powell view these relational, multilayered identities as positive

Picture 5: Pink Pickled Onions

Pink Pickled Onions

Ingredients:
½ large red onion, quartered and sliced thin as possible
½ tsp cracked pepper
½ tsp ground coriander
1 cup white vinegar
1 Tbls kosher salt
2 tsp sugar

Directions:
Pack sliced onions into a clean pint jar with pepper and coriander. Combine remaining ingredients in a glass measuring cup and microwave until in 30 second increments, stirring until salt and sugar have dissolved.

Pour hot vinegar brine over onions until the jar is ¾ full. Fill it the rest of the way with water, seal, and place in the fridge for 3 days. These pickles will keep for months in the fridge.

Enjoy on everything from tacos to scrambled eggs to salads. Or just eat them straight from the jar, like me

*Swap the onions for thinly sliced radishes and 86 the coriander for an equally versatile and amazing radish pickle.

The preserving technique of pickling has impacted cuisines across the world. These pickles are a common condiment in Mexico that add a sweet and tangy crunch to tacos, rice bowls, and salads.

attributes, though they are messy. Anzaldúa does so in her 1987 book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In this semi-autobiographical story discussing her life growing up on the border of Texas and Mexico, Anzaldúa defines the borderland in which identities converge as an open wound, a thin edge of barbed wire, and a third world for the Other (25). It is

characterized in Eurocentric American culture as an unnatural, in-between space in which cultures meet and overlap. The borderland is the cognitively the disorienting space between inner and outer worlds—between who we think we should be and who we really are. The borderlands are inhabited by the new mestizaje, a term originating from the arrival of Spaniards in Mexico in the 16th century which means a person of mixed indigenous and Spanish blood. The new mestizaje, however, has been adapted by Anzaldúa to represent the duality of consciousness, “like corn, the Mestiza is the result of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions” (106). The

mestizaje are able to develop a new perspective on the world by disrupting their lived dualities and transcending them to heal divides of culture, gender, class, and race.

In her essay “Blood and Scholarship: One Mixed-Blood's Story,” Powell addresses her multilayered identity when she calls herself a “mixed-blood” of Indiana Miami, Eastern Shawnee, and Euroamerican ancestry. She is a “metis,” a French-derived Lakota term that translates to English literally as a “translator’s son” (Powell 8). This returns us to the metaphor of identity as language/voices. Moraga asks to take this dialogue further, though, than mere translations. She calls for “the necessity for dialogue” (Moraga 29). This call seems to be answered by Royster, who complicates translator to negotiator, implying an engaging in and conversation between identities rather than just a speaking through them (34). For Royster, negotiating is not ““You talk, I talk,”” but rather better practices for exchanging perspectives, negotiating meaning, and creating understanding with the agreement for inquiry and discovery being “deliberately reciprocal” across identities (38; 33).

Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic kitchen brings food and language together to further extend this metaphor, the dialogic kitchen is the place in which one explores “the complexity of the human experience” by using a “dialogic orientation to address that experience” (Cianciola 106). Bakhtin informs us in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* that the food in the dialogic kitchen is always in conversation:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even past meanings, that is those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of dialogue. (170)

Cianciola responds in “Scenes from the Dialogic Kitchen: ‘Thinking Culture Dialogically’ in Italian American Narratives” that in the dialogic kitchen “countless, ongoing, unending, intergenerational conversations may be carried on between the living and the dead, both literally and metaphorically” (Cianciola 106). The dialogic kitchen, then, is a demonstration of cooking as a heritage literacy. The metis/mestizaje represents the multiple voices in the dialogic kitchen in conversation with one another. The metis/mestizaje has an advantage because their voices can understand each other.

They can negotiate and create, pulling from its multiple identities and translating them through the food they create. This answers Royster’s question of “what might happen if we treated differences in subject position as critical pieces of the whole, vital to thorough understanding, and central to both problem-finding and problem-solving” (Royster 34). Royster is asking essentially, what if being both/and is the only way we can be whole? As Cianciola explains, stories that are complicated by this sort of dialogue are a means by which:

intergenerational conversations persist and co-create meaning because the language of storytelling is unstable and unpredictable, whether it appears in actual dialogues between characters or in the implied ‘conversation’ created by the presence of the story itself or by the multiple meanings of words in various parts of the story... Thus dialogic narratives challenge an understanding of others as monologic, self-serving, ‘objects of consciousness’ rather than as authentic beings with a broad range of lived experiences. (109)

This raises two important points. First the metis/mestizaje dwells in a place of liberation from cultural limitations as they can use their “knowledge of the language and structure that compose the narratives that bind us as instruments to cut away those same oppressive stories” (Powell 9). Rather than expending their energy on the contradictions and ambiguities of racial performance the metis can use their mixed-bloodedness to the

advantage of themselves and others by acting as a moderator between cultures—physically, verbally, and ideologically. Second it reinforces the notion that identity is constructed, not innate. It is manipulatable and can be intentionally constructed internally and externally. Thus, the metis can feel authentically whole because their biracial-ness is not a performance, but functional and necessary—creating connections where they wouldn't have been able to form otherwise. As Anzaldúa says “I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of a new culture” (*Borderlands*, 389).

The metis does not have it easy, by any means. In fact, they shoulder a heavy responsibility for all of the cultures they represent. To do so, metis develop a tolerance for the contradictions and ambiguity of their dual identities and reveal “the deep irony that is always present in whatever way we choose to construct reality... expos(ing) the lies we tell ourselves and, at the same time expos(ing) the necessity of those lies to our daily material existence (Powell 9). The metis/mestizaje creates an opportunity for “genius to emerge from hybridity” the development of a peculiar expertise that extends one’s range of abilities well beyond ordinary limits, it supports the opportunity for the development of new and remarkable creative expression,” such as spirituals, jazz, blues (Royster 37).

Metis have the ability to hear and tell stories in spaces that exclude others based on authenticity, credibility, and blood. In doing so, they carve out a space of their own at the borders of those spaces. They become the border, as Sillito so eloquently says, “my biracial self is the product of this violence, this pain. I am the bleeding border.” These borders look different to different people because they happen wherever two peoples occupy the same space.

Stuart Hall tells us in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” that cultural identity is a matter of “becoming” as well as “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past.

Cultural Identity:

is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, reflections and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned. (225)

I am also the bleeding border.

I am Chicana.

I am New American.

That’s the story that I tell now myself, about where I come from, how I got here, who I will become, and who I am.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

“What is she mixed with?”

It’s a question I am asked every time I go the nail salon. For years, it was all I wanted, to be asked this question. But they aren’t asking about me.

They’re asking about my daughter.

They don’t ask it as if they have any doubts that she is mixed. When I tell people I am biracial, they respond with *oh, I never would have guessed*. When I tell people she is, they say *oh, I was wondering about that!* My identity can be hidden, my roots “are never exposed,” they accept me at face value and are shocked when there is a more complicated story underneath my skin (Villanueva xiii). My daughter, though, is a diverse cocktail of cultures: Mexican, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Chinese. And it shows. People are curious about her story before they know her name.

Eevee is five-years-old, as I write this conclusion. She is asleep across the room from me on my husband’s chest, exhausted from a day of chasing chickens, picking mulberries, and karate practice.

Ironic, that someone who spent their entire life wishing for brown skin like her mother, would have a daughter’s brown skin to envy as well. But of course, I understand what her skin means now. What, to me, had always been a quality of belonging and beauty, is actually a target on her back in the racist world we live in. And I have not lived the experience to prepare her for that.

Eevee is five years old and I want to teach her not to fear her skin. I want her to love it, every inch of it, every aspect that makes her unique. I want my daughter to have

Picture 6: Eevee's Favorite Horchata

Eevee's Favorite Horchata	
Ingredients: 1 cup uncooked white rice 2 qt boiling water 2 sticks of canela (Mexican cinnamon) 1 can evaporated milk 1 can condensed milk 1/3 cup sugar	Eevee fell in love with horchata this summer, proudly sharing it with her friends in the neighborhood as they rode bikes in the street. Her pride in her culture is beginning to take root.
Directions: Pour rice into a blender and pulse until rice granules break up into a course cornmeal-like texture. Then, pour hot water over rice and add both cinnamon sticks. Let sit for on counter until water has cooled back to room temperature. Pulse the blender* to grind the cinnamon in, then strain the mixture through a sieve lined with cheese cloth into a gallon pitcher. Pour in the evaporated and condensed milks and sugar. Stir and taste for thickness and sweetness. If it is too thick add a cup of water. Enjoy over lots of ice or add a splash to your cold brew coffee or vanilla buttercream frosting. *If your blender is too full, go ahead and strain some of the liquid into your pitcher before blending.	

the experience I always wished I had, but to do that, we have a lot of work to do in this world. I began that work by introducing Eevee to the recipes in Picture 6 and Picture 7. Let's hope that work continues here.

I found Esperanza— only her name was Amparo. My great grandmother Maria's mother, who came to Mercedes, Texas in the early 1900's from Mexico. My great

grandma Maria passed away, mercifully, about 8 months prior to the 2016 Presidential election. I didn't get to ask about her. But at grandma Maria's funeral her children lined up to speak. It was an impeccably long legacy of 7 children who each child had their own families and it was the first time I heard my family speak fondly of our heritage in my life. Since Amparo, my family had blended and blended with American spouses in an attempt to hide any association with our Mexican heritage, though never quite so successfully as my parents had in creating me. But when Arturo Diaz approached the podium to tell us about his mother he opened with:

“There’s a song about being proud so be an American, and mom was, but I think she was more proud to be Mexican!”

A weight lifted off the room as, for the first time I can recall, my family rejoiced at sharing in this identity of Mexican with each other. I had always had this undeniable itch to know more about my roots, but after grandma Maria’s funeral I started to scratch it. I looked through old pictures of her, tried to figure out exactly where she came from, who she was, why everything was so secretive.

I didn’t find those answers, but I did find Pati Jinich’s *Pati’s Mexican Table*. Pati introduced me to guisados and chiles en nogada, tasajo and enchiladas mineras. Pati led me to Aaron Sanchez, Marcella Valladolid, Enrique Olvera, and yes, even Rick Bayless. I had eaten a lot of Mexican food in my life, but now I became ravenous for it. I launched into the kitchen with chiles de arbol (and subsequently “spiced” us out of our apartments for half an hour), fresh masa, and radishes. I cooked and ate and cooked and ate to feel closer to my grandma Maria, but eventually I realized I was actually feeling closer to me.

Monberg writes that try to “encounter something different within themselves or within their own communities.” She encourages

Picture 7: Hoecakes with Strawberries

Hoecakes with Strawberries

Ingredients:
1 cup all purpose flour
1 cup good quality cornmeal
2 tsp baking powder
1 pinch of salt
2 eggs
1 cup buttermilk
1/4 cup vegetable oil

Directions:
In a large bowl, whisk the eggs, vegetable oil, and buttermilk.

Incorporate the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt.

Heat a lightly buttered griddle over medium heat and then pour about 1/4 cup of batter onto the griddle.

Cook for about 2 minutes on each side until yellow gold.

Enjoy with butter, cheap maple syrup, and sliced strawberries. Serve with horchata for an incredible a new American breakfast (or dessert).

This last recipe combines ingredients that are loved in both Mexico and Indiana; corn and strawberries. It helps me to claim my Mexicanness, but also my Hoosier-ness.

recursive spatial movement within one's own borders in order to "listen for the deeper textures present in the place(s) they might call home (21-22). We can recognize and extend our understanding of culture by analyzing how culture constructs our individual identity. Monberg's theory of writing home can be applied to the lives of all people in regards to constructing their identities through food, but it is especially applicable to those who are attempting to construct their biracial identities.

As a white passing Chicana woman, the struggle to be authentically white or authentically Mexican led me to question why one must choose an "either/or" approach in order to be authentic. And I found an answer. By listening to the deep textures of my home, I can construct my cultural identity not in what I lack in authenticity, but rather on the fusion of cultures that makes me up in the contact zone of those cultures in my kitchen. Cooking and eating fusion food is one way in which I can construct my identity as a both/and biracial woman because cooking depends not on authenticity, but rather adoption and adaptation. Listening to the words of CRTL and Monberg, I engage with what is already a part of me—inside my own borders.

Prior to this moment at my Grandma's funeral, Mexican food became my way in. With food I found a way to construct my identity, piece by piece, from what I could find of my great grandma and all of the women who came before her. I began to recognize that my identity had long been constructed by food, that every experience I've had working with food, preparing food, and eating food has told a story about who I am, where I came from, how I've evolved. Food, then, is a way in which we can enact recursive legacy, reaching back into our histories and forward into our futures.

I cannot control the world my daughter will grow into, only influence it in minor ways, only have hope. But there is one thing that I can control—I can give my daughter the tools to construct an identity based on who she chooses to be, and not in what the world assigns to her.

I am Chicana, and I am white-passing, and my daughter is mixed-race.

Our family is complicated and beautiful, just as cultural rhetorics tells me it should be. And we learn to negotiate that in our kitchen. That's how I began this journey—in the kitchen with my daughter. I began it making tamales with her, teaching her to spread the masa on the corn husks, to fill them with pork in red sauce that I make by boiling guajilloes and anchoes and straining and reducing. It's not how my family does it, though last year upon telling them about this journey I was embarking on, they realized it was time to pass the recipe on. They typed out the recipe on a word document in times new roman, nothing fancy, no frills, and handed it out to everyone in our Christmas cards.

The tamales that Eevee and I make, though, are my recipe—adapted from my family's yes. I am a Diaz, after all. I can never not be a Diaz. But I am also me.

Every time she sees the contact zone of my kitchen, she learns a little bit more about who she is, who I am, who we are as biracial women. Royster's words echo my feelings here. She says:

all my voices are authentic, and like bell hooks, I find it 'a necessary aspect of self-affirmation not to feel compelled to choose one voice over another, not to claim one as more authentic, but rather to construct social realities that celebrate, acknowledge, and affirm differences variety' (12). Like hooks, I claim all my voices as my own very much authentic voices, even when its difficult for others to imagine a person like me having the capacity to do that. (Royster 37)

My voices, working in across and between each other, cooperating and creating, give me power. And I need that power, as a woman in my family certainly, but also as a mother. This power allows me to construct my own authentic version of culture in my multicultural family. It allows me to make a better space for my daughter to be everything she needs to be to be whole.

It allows me to become.

And it allows me to be.

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Conferences

Chan-Brose, KC. "Practicing Motherhood: Navigating the Working Mother Identity in Writing Centers." East Central Writing Center Association Conference, May 2018, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Roundtable.

Chan, KC. "Reconstructing the Writing Center Narrative: Embracing Sex Politics and Demanding Our Worth." International Writing Center Association Conference, October 2017, Chicago, Illinois. Individual.

Chan, KC & Gabrielle Fales. "The Next Step: Student Governance and the Writing Center Legacy." East Central Writing Center Association Conference, April 2017, Southwestern Michigan College, Dowagiac, Michigan. Roundtable.

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