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## Media Effects on Cultural Perceptions as Seen in Food Media and Food Cultures

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MEDIA EFFECTS ON CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS AS SEEN IN FOOD MEDIA AND  
FOOD CULTURES

by

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B.A. May 2013, Old Dominion University

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## ABSTRACT

### MEDIA EFFECTS ON CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS AS SEEN IN FOOD MEDIA AND FOOD CULTURES

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Old Dominion University, 2021  
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Everyday people all over the world watch food media. These engagements happen through multiple media outlets -- both new and old -- such as documentaries, streaming platforms, and television. Through these outlets, viewers can immerse themselves in a group's culinary culture from the comforts of their residences. What happens when viewers engage with these cultures has been fabricated for consumerism and hegemonic balancing. This thesis will examine and critique how these platforms have created conditions for a change in cultural definitions and representations. Audiences in the United States are shown these changes when they are shown a specific group's cultural products that contradict what the group members have traditionally engaged with and consumed. While these forms of engagement, consumption, and observation can be looked at using multiple lenses and historical contexts, what is key to each examination is questioning how media create engagement and consumerism with these forms. Some key questions that I plan to answer include: How are erasure and misrepresentation of the culinary culture portrayed in media? How are new media outlets following traditional tropes and creating sites of discourse? How are practices of redefining the Other affected by media representation? How does audience engagement cement these new definitions? The last two questions are the most important as a consumer of food can choose how to engage with their own culture, the culture of another person, or a mix of the two. Is it possible that with new media platforms, ones that mix media and hands-on consumer engagement, the audience becomes part

of the definition process? What will the consumer and, in large part, society do when they are told by people who immigrate/migrate into their community that the dish they have always perceived as true was a fabrication? Using an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, it is the aim of this thesis to shed light on how these processes are performed every day.

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Cachi, Mirta, Donell, Joni, La Familia.....Lo Hice!!!!

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## INTRODUCTION

Food is something that humans need to eat in order to survive. This is not speculation but a law that cannot be refuted or challenged. How we engage with food is a different story. For many individuals in the Western world, the dishes they choose reflect many things such as emotion, desire, availability, choice, and culture. The last two reflections are the most important as a consumer of food can choose to engage with their own culture, the culture of another person, or a mix of the two. The consumer engages with these dishes and believes that their cultural encounter is based on what they perceive as authentic. How do societies engage and understand culture when their engagement has been predicated upon fabrication? This question is an important one that I am trying to answer in this thesis. Who creates the perception that food is authentic or not? Is it the person who is creating the dish, is it the person whose culture invented the dish, or is it the person/entity who mixes both cultures? Is the choripan representing Argentina and Argentinean culture the same as the choripan shown on tv by the individual who has never been to Argentina but has learned cooking techniques and has “insider” knowledge? Is the choripan reflective of more than its physical symbol? Can a food item and engagement with the item be reflective of engagement with the culture itself? Or is engagement with falseness only going to create systems and mechanisms where the artificial eventually surpasses the real?

While these forms of engagement, consumption, and observations can be looked at using multiple lenses and historical contexts, I will look at food through using three core questions. How is the media creating the definition of a culture’s culinary authenticity when they show misrepresentations that are predicated upon fabrications and assumptions of falseness? How do post-colonialism societies reconcile not only their identity after colonialism but also engagement

with the concept of the West versus the Other? Do mechanisms of appropriation and assimilation reflect narratives and actions of colonization of cultural resources? Lisa Heldke creates not only an interesting definition of culinary colonialism in a contemporary space but also offers understanding into how the West engages with the Other. Heldke says that individuals collect culinary appetites of the Other, like exploration medals;

We food adventurers regard the different-therefore-exotic Other as authentic in part because of that Otherness—and we regard the Other as someone from whom we are entitled to collect and extract portions of their culture, in order to adorn our own. (Heldke 42).

This thesis will also explore how culinary exploration can stress a binary between the Other and the West. Through actions such as appropriation and assimilation, the binary is enforced because the West is viewing the Other as weaker and unable to support itself post-colonialism. In this thesis we will define Other as any other society outside of the concept of the West. Then it must be examined how are dishes such as cashew chicken then viewed because it was invented in the United States but is only associated with Chinese cuisine and bodies? Does a refusal to consider this dish part of Americana cuisine constitute a form of systemic oppression? Not only is the aim of this thesis to engage with these systems of definition and discourse but to also critique and offer insight into processes that are lived out in kitchens around the world.

## METHODOLOGIES

To effectively explore, critique, and highlight the research questions and problems, consistency needed in how I accessed my media resources. There are countless combinations in which an individual can access Netflix, Prime Video, and Food Network Kitchen. In consideration of access, the documentary could have been purchased/accessed through five different formats such as YouTube, Google Play, and iTunes. The television show was only accessible through Netflix. Using a specific application meant that I had to use a device that supported not only the app but also in-app purchases. After much consideration I decided to use a device that not only provided an easy method of entry, portability, popularity among the general public, and a consistent viewing and navigation experience. Having a consistent viewing experience is critical because it creates a consistent baseline compared to experiences across various platforms. If multiple streaming devices were used to access all of the information, then there would be interference in how everything was not only viewed but also engaged. Engagement is vital because users will have a different viewing experience when they have to tap a screen to perform command function on their phone or tablet versus a keyboard or controller. Through performing research, I decided that using a smart TV streaming device would offer the affordability to be able to access all of the streaming platforms and the application built into one cohesive unit. I decided that using an Amazon Fire Tv Stick 4k was the course to go. This not only created organization and cohesion, but it also allowed the analysis and research to be performed on a common platform that regular audiences use. Accessing these resources in the same way as the average person would supports understanding how the viewing experience influences how we perceive the world and ourselves.

The Fire Tv Stick offered everything that was needed to create a consistent viewing experience. At the time of purchase, it was also the most affordable out of all of the options available. The device allows for easy portability and if transferred between televisions, the screen, layout, and navigation points remain the same. Since this is not based on either an Android or iOS operating system, it does not favor one over the other. Lastly, it is very easy to download and navigate the applications and offers all media services that are crucial to my case studies.

To access the television show *Million Pound Menu* in the United States, Netflix was the only option I had available. This service is arguably the largest streaming service in the world, and its ability to provide users with new shows regularly is intriguing. The choice to use *Million Pound Menu* was made because not only was the show initially aired and shown in the United Kingdom before being distributed in the United States, it also shows how this problem is not just isolated within the United States. While the viewing audience throughout this process is perceived as American, there is a globalized aspect of this problem. If this problem is easily observed in the United Kingdom and the United States, then it can be observed in New Zealand with Maori cuisine and culture, Peru with indigenous cuisines, and even places where you see high growth rates and Western influences blending with that of their traditional culture.

In order to access the documentary *Search for General Tso*, there were more options available than for the *Million Pound Menu*. The documentary is available for purchase or paid to stream through platforms such as iTunes, Google Play, IFC, and Prime Now. I decided to use Prime Now because it was a cost-effective platform to watch the movie. Since the documentary was going to be viewed using a Fire TV Stick, it became advantageous to watch the documentary through Prime Now, the Amazon streaming service. This service allowed me to include a low-

cost monthly subscription to the Independent Film Channel (IFC) in my viewing plan. This channel allowed unlimited access to the documentary. This form of viewing documentaries through a subscription is becoming commonplace and presents a popular trend in media access. This documentary was picked because it challenged the action of creating labels and assumptions that are a part of the hegemonic process. The viewpoint in which this documentary was scripted, and shot did not look at the topic and questions at hand through a white/American savior, or pursuit-for-the-American-Dream lens. Instead, it looked through the lens of a member of the source community, and the interviews and scenes shot shed light on how this issue affects them and their community directly. This intimate cultural perspective not only opened up fascinating ways in which one can observe the hegemonic process being performed, but also how this is in agreement with arguments that other scholars are making.

The final case study involved the platform distributed by the Food Network named FoodNetwork Kitchen. This platform is less than six months old, so in terms of major branded applications, it is still in its infancy. With it being so new on the market, there is not a lot of user-generated content, feedback, and archival information such as similar food-based apps Yelp and GrubHub. What is intriguing about FoodNetwork Kitchen compared to other food-based applications is its ability to allow users to cook and order ingredients inside the platform. This encourages users to engage with the classes they are watching directly. This interaction creates a unique place where people's digital lives intersect with their physical lives through the process of cooking and consumption of food. The hybridity of physical/digital space creates a new way to observe the cultural hegemonic process. The design of this platform places the users interacting and engaging with the labels and appropriations developed by the media company who owns the platform. This is not seen in any other food-based application on this scale. This is viewed not

only as a hegemonic action because Amazon is the secondary/” silent” partner in this process. This provides a look at the effects neo-liberalism has in one's understanding of culture and identities. I decided that to experience the full potential of this application, the full-priced version of the application was needed as compared to the free one. Using the paid version unlocked a wealth of content and accessibility that the free version could not have. The only drawback of using the premium version of the application was that when viewing the cooking shows that their on-demand streaming service offered, I could not view the ads that users of the basic version had to watch. Yet when looking at the comparison chart, the website provided, I felt justified to give up this aspect of engagement to experience the platform at its premium content level.

## THEORETICAL STRUCTURES AND TERMS

### Intro

Creating an understanding of how the misrepresentations of food cultures and authenticity as tools that constitute actions of hegemony and erasure is vital. To better understand the theoretical and critical terms used, key scholarly arguments and interpretations are needed to create the framework for my arguments. Understanding how these arguments are positioned within the case studies is vital in understanding how the spaces and places discussed are viewed. The arguments within this thesis are observed using a cultural studies lens, in which we are engaging how these ideas of appropriation, re-identification, erasure, and forced assimilation of othered bodies are continuations of the colonization of spaces. Where once people profited from colonizing lands for natural resources such as gold, silver, and oil, there now has been a switch to the exploitation of cultural resources such as fashion, food, and clothing. These actions against othered culture(s) constitute not only actions of the commodification of cultural items but also represent the process of erasure and re-identification of these bodies. These terms are used as tools to help us understand how to interpret these processes and how these same systems create cultural engagement and perceptions. It is essential to mention that the viewpoint of the “Othered” is the primary lens in which I engage with these theoretical structures and key terminology in this paper. In understanding this process through the eyes of the oppressed, we gain awareness of how they must navigate their cultural spaces after appropriation and how their perceived cultural authenticity is challenged.



## Simulacra and Simulation

A key framework that I am engaging with within the thesis is Baudrillard's work with simulation and simulacra. His work with these systems offers a bridge that harmoniously meshes the theoretical frameworks and structures that the ensuing scholars present. Baudrillard deduces in his seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation* that society is no longer engaging with the real but instead is engaging with copies of copies (Baudrillard). From this perspective a dish becomes a simulacra when it is removed the context of its creation within the source culture to a commercial context outside of its source culture. The simulacra in this system of false engagements represents copies of objects that are no longer actual or never existed in a sense of realness. My following case studies are all constructed on media-based landscapes, and when instances of false representations are recreated under the guise of simulacra, one observes the artificial superseding the real. Through mass media and mass consumerism Baudrillard not only deduces that we are entering a point in society where we are engaging with hyper-realism but also a homogeneity of culture and consumerism. An example given within this context of engagement with this system is ginger ale. Over time companies like Schweppes have changed their ingredients and flavors and consumers still buy the products. Consumers swear that it is a traditional recipe since the company has been around since 1783. Consumers drink the beverage thinking it still has the traditional ingredients such as sugar when that has been replaced with high fructose corn syrup ("Schweppes Sparkling Water"). What the consumers do not realize is that through their years of loyalty to the brand they have been engaging with the simulacrum, and the company continuing its manufacturing process represents the simulation. Over time, the copy of the copy has supplemented the original. The following introduction of my theoretical structures and evidence will show that cultural appropriation and assimilation, as shown in media

outlets, are not only creating spaces where one's definition of authenticity is challenged but a commercialized authenticity is seen. It should be stated that not all instances of appropriation, hybridity, cultural destruction/erasure, selling-out, and assimilation are necessarily negative or harmful. There also needs to be reconciliation that these actions can be impactful and help with the preservation of culture and authenticity.

### Representation

There is a saying that a picture is worth 1,000 words because a picture is representative of so much. A picture can represent a moment in history, a culture, race, and even market value. That is because the picture is an item of representation that has the same power and significance as a verbal language in creating meaning and understanding. A representation is a structure which produces meaning through signs and symbols that construct conceptual maps. Scholars such as Hall, Bhabha, and Gannon have engaged in discussion around representation and how images/visual cues can have as much communicative power as verbal cues. These arguments show how food dishes have as much representation and cultural power when shown by the media as the chefs who are viewed as creators of culture. The space in which these meanings, translations, definitions, and engagements happen can be viewed as the Third Space of Enunciation. This space, also called the Third Space, was coined by Homi Bhabha. Bhabha states,

The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation. (Bhabha 53).

For Bhabha this space is ambivalent because when two cultures engage with each other the transference and redefinition become sites of action. These enunciative differences are special, because they are geographic and tangible when it comes to cultural products such as food, dress, and clothing. Stuart Hall's interpretation of representation offers a unique perspective on how we engage with nonverbal cues, especially in media-based settings. Hall discusses how we interact with these signs daily. This is evident in food culture where ingredients, dishes, eating techniques, even the names of dishes are viewed as representations that individuals have to translate when engaging with these signs. Hall discusses the concepts of a shared conceptual map and language which similar populations of people use to communicate and interpret the world. Hall says, "At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related 'systems of representation'" (Hall et al. 3). This shared synchronicity between language and conceptual maps is used to create meaning. In order for people to understand cultures and meanings, then these two systems are needed. Hall not only accounts for the various systems that create representation but also how they influence our perceptions of understanding. People navigate visual signs daily, and instead of looking at them as a flat form of representation where their meaning is a constant, Hall views visual signs as dynamic because the meaning behind these signs is continuously changing. Hall also includes a process in which visual signs can be appropriated, their definition erased, and redefined. Hall allows for the argument of visual representations that signs are, in essence, a visual language, that the communication derived from visual depictions has the same meanings and powers as that of verbal or written communication. What Hall discusses is how we use our conceptual maps and language systems to interpret and give meaning to visual signs. These acts of translation allow us to give meaning to visual systems and force us to find similar groupings. This translation is not a clear-cut method because as Hall says, "As the relationship

between the sign and its referent becomes less clear-cut, the meaning begins to slip and slide away from us into uncertainty” (Hall et al. 5)” What Hall says is that if there is too much static in understanding a visual image, then the meaning of the image becomes uncertain as well. These communication breakdowns are found within a linguistic zone based on what Hall calls "uncertainty" or for Bhabha the Third Space. In this zone are the functions of linguistics that change our perceptions of culture. Such as a moment that is lost in translation; for example, when Oreos in Argentina are made with different ingredients and versus their Americana counterparts. This zone in its amorphous nature is always moving and shifting allowing those who engage with it to create symbols and meanings in situation to space, time, and location. These slipped away meanings can be found in the simulacrum where the artificial can be seen attempting to reconstruct or replace the original.

Gannon also explores this amorphous zone in his work, *Cultural Metaphors*. Similarly, along the lines of Hall's and Bhabha's engagement, Gannon explores the areas where understanding and meaning can be changed using a linguistic lens. This linguistics viewpoint on meaning and representation in a classical word's sense mirrors the same sentiments that Hall has concluded about visual signs. Gannon describes his interpretation of this gray zone as a form of linguistic or interpretive flexibility. Gannon says,

It is the objects, events, and experiences that continuously vary: words have to follow suit when they are used. Words partition experiences but the experiences they partition are not identical: consequently, words have to be flexible to enable the most varied members of the set partitioned to be referenced by them” (Gannon 11).

This is an interesting way to analyze effects on how one engages with and perceives how words are used. Like Hall, Gannon believes there is a linguistic space of ambiguity that our understanding of words lives in. This system of understanding is not only where representation lives but also how they perceive Other cultures and bodies. Gannon calls the process where

people attempt to understand and comprehend symbols and signs as *particularization*.

Particularization explores how this system serves two functions; as a converter of the abstract forms to concrete and also serves as a mode of translation between two separate cultural systems. This zone of uncertainty in which particularization lives is provocative because while Gannon observes how it functions with words, it can also be observed within visual systems. This level of flexibility that both visual systems and words live in allows them to not only become symbols of oppression and destruction (i.e., hate group symbolism and the Doomsday Clock) but also can be co-opted by other groups and have their intended meanings changed. In this thesis, meals are a visual symbol. It can then be co-opted by and become associated with another group or meaning. This observation of how representation lives in this ambivalent zone is essential in understanding how multiple meanings and symbols can be claimed to represent the same group or culture. It is crucial that the linguistic zones in which authenticity and appropriation function are within this Third Space.

### Appropriation

An essential idea used throughout this thesis is the term cultural appropriation. In this context it must be viewed that appropriation is the co-opting of cultural products. In her book *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* Susan Scafidi writes that cultural products include tangible and non-tangible items such as: “cuisine, dress, music, dance, folklore, handicrafts, images, healing arts, rituals, performances, natural resources, or language...” (Scafidi 21). Of the list that Scafidi mentions within her scope are cuisine and rituals, but what also needs to be included is tradition, which will be focused on in this thesis. In this thesis tradition includes how the meal is cooked, the ingredients are used, consumed, and historical contexts. While cultural appropriation is not a distinctly Western phenomenon in this

thesis, I plan on viewing how this action happens in Western societies. It must be said when using the terms *Western* and *West* that they are based on historical and economic contexts, not geographic. These are complex terms that represent contexts that dominate the world's engagement with othered bodies and also engage with consumerism. Hall in his germinal work *The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power* discusses at great length the Other as a representation signifier. In cultural contexts looking at “Western” we mean the type of society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern” (Hall and Hall, *Identity and Diaspora* 142). This means that the Other or in Hall’s case the Rest is any other society situated outside of the Western. Using this scope of observation of the idea of actions perpetrated by Western societies, these actions are still situated within Baudrillard’s observations of the hyperreal. Baudrillard defines the hyperreal as; “It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal”. Both appropriation and assimilation are mechanisms of simulation and simulacra, depend on the hyperreal as space where they exist and are performed. This space is important because the hyperreal is a space where the artificial can be found. It is stressed that cultural appropriation is a conflict between the spaces of ambiguity and the space of definition of cultural products.

While cultural appropriation can be observed happening to individuals and populations within a country’s traditional population (i.e., the appropriation of Soul Food or Punk music), this thesis is primarily focusing on the appropriation of bodies and cultures within the geographic borders of one’s new country after immigration/migration. One can observe cultural appropriation using two distinct lenses of interpretation: as an act of erasure or an act of assimilation. Both of these acts serve as not only functions of the cultural hegemonic process, but also the enforcement of ideologies and capitalistic gains. When a culturally appropriative item

such as a food dish has become popular within a larger society, it becomes marketable, and an economic value begins to overshadow the cultural power of the item. Timothy Brennan's article "The Economic Image Function of the Periphery" investigates the profitability of culture.

Brennan in his article looks at what he calls the image-function of the periphery. According to him it is an examination of value and resources of cultural products and also a system that allows the West to engage with the rest of the world. According to Brennan, besides the economic and cultural theory that can adequately represent his process, it also calls for a space where,

The introduction of a middle space of exchange, where confusion reigns in order to enact the trickery necessary for a legal appropriation of others' goods: like the "sign" of structural linguistics, capitalism might be seen as a materialist variant of that tripartite mediated space known, in literary studies, as "representation" (Brennan 113).

While not directly stating that he is engaged with it, Brennan grapples with the same zone of ambivalence that both Hall and Gannon encounter. One of the ways in which this economic space can be interpreted is through appropriation. While in the field of academics, many scholars have attempted to define and create various interpretations as to what constitutes cultural appropriation. The scholarly definition which I am using for my interpretation as what constitutes an act of appropriation is by Helene Shugart in her article "Counterhegemonic acts: Appropriation as a feminist rhetorical strategy." Shugart states that appropriation as, "An instance in which a group borrows or imitates the strategies of another even when the tactic is not intended to deconstruct or distort the other's meanings and experiences-thus would constitute appropriation" (Shugart 211). In their definition, Shugart attests that appropriation is considered an act of erasure whether the action is done intentionally or unintentionally. In the context of their article Shugart is looking at these actions being performed by groups of people as a counterhegemonic strategy. Coincidentally, their article observes how appropriation can be used as a mechanism to shift the equilibriums that hegemony attempts to create. Their observations about

these actions being performed as a tool kit that reconstructs or redefines symbols and systems that have traditionally been used as tools of oppression can be reversed. Through this reconstruction of the definition, Shugart, also looks into how this action can be viewed as hegemonic balancing or forced assimilation. Shugart makes a key point about these actions when they say, “the original meaning, which may pose a threat to the appropriator, is deconstructed, distorted, or destroyed so that the perceived threat is undermined, and the agenda of the appropriator is advanced instead” (Shugart 211). This view of how appropriation can be used to challenge the original meaning is observed when this process is used as a tool to advance the *agenda* (ideology) of the appropriator. This key argument made by Shugart is observing appropriation as a deployment and redirection of power. Shugart is observing appropriation as a counterhegemonic process while I will be viewing it as hegemonic. When actions of appropriation occur, they are being performed in the Third Space that both Hall, Bhabha, and Gannon both describe. Cultural appropriation and assimilation should be observed as creating a construct and they are not amorphous in nature.

A key aspect of understanding how cultural appropriation functions; is seeing how this act is developed without the approval of the culture that is being appropriated. Individuals who are falsely engaging with cultural items, ingredients, traditions, and rituals but claim attachments as experts have been identified by James Young and Susan Haley as subject appropriators. It is noted that both Young and Haley observe subject appropriation as an individual action, however it can be observed that institutions, companies, and organizations are culpable of performing this kind of erasure and challenge to authenticity as well. “Subject appropriation occurs when members of one culture (call them outsiders for the sake of brevity) represent members of other cultures (insiders for the sake of convenience) or aspects of insiders’ culture.” (Young and Brunk



268). Subject appropriation is stealthy and destructive. The individual representing the subject appropriator can vary in form. In this thesis the subject appropriator will be represented by celebrity chefs and judges. These individuals represent Western cooking esthetics and commercialized systems. Their prestige allows these individuals to rewrite various aspects of another culture's authenticity. This is an indicator of Baudrillard's simulacrum and simulation process happening, and it poses questions of who creates the interpretations and definitions of the authentic in this process. An example is a food television host who goes on a culinary journey (that is scripted) to learn about a new culture. After this journey, often presented as an enlightening experience, the chef shows their insider knowledge of techniques, rituals, and traditions often in the form of a head to head culinary challenge. One such example of a celebrity chef undergoing this artificial enlightening journey is Gordon Ramsey and his show *Gordon Ramsey Uncharted*. This show follows Gordon as he travels through the world, engaging with cultures outside of his own through enlightenment campaigns and showing the world his newly discovered insider knowledge through head-to-head competitions with well-known chefs who are members of the community he has just encountered. Where great explorers of the past used to write and publish harrowing journals about their explorations and engagement with "savage locals" in these modern television programs you see chefs documenting their voyages with cameras and sound equipment. It can be viewed that this form of culinary exploration journeying is a continuance of the British Explorer colonizers and campaign cliché. Heldke defines this form exploration of culinary traditions, rituals, and ingredients of Othered bodies, both domestically and abroad, as *cultural food colonialism*. From this perspective, one can view subject appropriators as colonizers. However, in agreement with Heldke, the term *adventurer* would be more fitting, since eating and cooking occur at a location of exploration and not of conquest.

Heldke, Grey and Lenore Newman explore this topic of the appropriation of food cultures not only as a hegemonic act but also as an act of colonialism. When an individual(s) interacts with this neo-classical form of colonialism, they are not experiencing and engaging with a true experience; they are performing an act of cultural destruction and engagement with artificiality. Grey and Newman say that this experience in regard to indigenous cultures is, “not gastronomic multiculturalism but what we have here termed culinary colonialism: a historical transit from destruction and denigration of ingredients and cuisines, to forced assimilation to a Settler gastronomic norm, to cultural appropriation”(Grey and Newman 726). This viewpoint of the acts looks at appropriation, not only as colonialist, but also as economic. This act of appropriation using commodification is intriguing because it is not only an intangible construct (culture) given a speculative value at a cost of its ownership.

There is economic gain and profit from the destruction and denigration of culture because an entity such as a television host, reality television contestant, or cooking application can replace an existing ingredient with its own substitution for economic profit resulting in a redefinition of cultural items through subject appropriation. Kartomi engages with this idea of redefining cultural practices in their discussions with musical genres. While Kartomi is working with music and musical culture, you can observe parallel elements of how food cultures are engaged with Western elements. Kartomi views this process happening in three distinct elements, which are effects on subsequent generation, assimilation, and also the cultural(hegemonic) balancing of cultural capital. This last element is also the most interesting one because it can account for part of the rationale as to why you see appropriation used as a tool for creating cultural hybridity that over time supersedes the less dominant culture as the dominant symbol and model. That, as part of this evolutions process, allows the

immigrant/migrant culture to participate in their cultural practices parallel to the new hybrid (Western dominant) culture in which they live after essential aspects of their culture are absorbed or erased. Kartomi makes observations about this parallelistic practice in music as;

“It stands to reasons that where a subordinate group is induced or encouraged to practice the music of the superordinate group, this music will be at first grasped and performed in a reduced form, as dictated partly by the cultural vision of the subordinate group” (Kartomi 242). This statement looks into how the symbols that assimilation creates, or changes, are viewed by the subordinate group(s) and how the superordinate incorporates(enforces) these ideologies, traditions, and rituals onto the subordinate. The end result is that we see the parallel line between the subordinate and the superordinate on sperate planes, the hybrid creation caused by assimilation/appropriation intersecting between both parallel bodies. This creates a position where the superordinate circumscribes the subordinate. A give and take process of creativity is assembled where both will have their forms reduced; in this situation the dominant culture takes more while the non-dominant gives more. Kartomi discusses that harmonic balancing is not feasible when an immigrant/migrant population is in small numbers; instead, it can only function on a large scale. This form of balancing is not mutually exclusive to large immigrant/migrant groups as there have been actions of erasure and reinterpretation used under the guise of appropriation to smaller groups.

At the same time, it is observed that appropriation and its equally destructive parallel, assimilation, are not only actions of harm and violence but also challenges to the concept of cultural authenticity and ownership. It must be reconciled that by using hybridization, transculturation is evoked as its opposite. While looking into how newness enters the cultural sphere, Bhabha makes an interesting point. Looking at translations that are used to create

generalizations, both transculturation and hybridizations are part of the same experience, the experience of the migrant collective. While appropriation and assimilation are considered opposites, they are the same strategy: the continuance of culture. Looking into this concept alongside authenticity they are not mutually exclusive. If one observes authenticity as an absolute, then transculturation cannot happen. While viewing pure authenticity as a construct freezes culture; transculturation views culture as part of an evolutionary process. Then, if there is an absolute, even the most quintessential dishes such as *cacio e pepe* would be a simulacrum. In transculturation, the same dish is viewed as an evolution of Italian identities and ideologies. In looking at Western society's engagement with culture and the Other, hybridization and transculturation must be viewed as two concepts working in tandem. Jean-Francois Côté looks at this topic in his article "From Transculturation to Hybridization: Redefining Culture in the Americas", Côté looks at the works of Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation and Nestor Garcia Canclini's conceptualization of hybridization and comes across the same conundrum. Not only are both of these concepts working within the same forms of engagement but for Côté, "the perception of culture in terms of this process of transformation that occurs when different cultural practices are blended, suggests the recognition of a wider participation than the one engaged in defining national cultures in their former context." (Côté 136). Broader participation is a key and essential distinction because while both scholars are behind these luminary concepts, in order for both theoretical concepts to become mutually exclusive, a combination of theoretical lenses is needed. Using a multi-theoretical lens is needed for transculturation and hybridization to be used in cultural contexts. To create these hybridizations, Canclini observes that hybridization as an effect of post-colonialism is needed, and to account for Ortiz's transculturation, then incorporating the views of post-modernity is needed. This is important

because when these discourses are combined a process that recognizes and accounts for the evolutionary nature of culture is created, and the influences of nationalistic-based identities is created. This new process looks at the authentic as a corruption due in part by post-colonialism and capitalism. It recognizes and appreciates the influences that nationalistic and culturist-based identities have in the process of reconciling this corruption.

### Authenticity

A key theme within this thesis is the conversation of "what constitutes cultural authenticity?" It is important to state that authenticity is not only a single all-inclusive component but comprises from a totality of various cultural components and markers. Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman define the concept of authenticity appropriately when they state it is viewed as, "A positive quality of genuineness and originality attributed to objects, practices, or ideas, often to demonstrate the extent to which an initially authentic phenomenon has been compromised or drained of its value." (O'Brien and Szeman 859). Not only do Szeman and O'Brien view authenticity as a factor in determining cultural value, they also base the interpretation of authenticity on the definitions and valuations of the representations of various factors. These factors include practices such as tradition, ritual, performativity, and ideologies. These are crucial to understand originality as they can be viewed as historical and cultural contexts.

The two most important factors that are observed within food authenticity in this thesis are tradition and ritual. Using arguments presented by Tambiah, it is observed that ritual accounts for secular changes (as observed in subcultures and familial groups), but also rituals can serve as identifying markers. Tambiah states that, "Although neither linguistically nor ostensibly can one demarcate a bounded domain of ritual in any society, yet every society has named and

marked out enactments, performances, and festivals which one can identify as typical or focal examples of “ritual events”(Tambiah 126). As stated by Tambiah, ritual and traditional can be considered markers of authenticity. Tambiah also accounts for these markers to be simulacrum recreations of non-verbal representations and boundaries. An example, as seen in food cultures, is how each family engages with a specific dish. For example, the Thanksgiving meal. Every family cooks different dishes and engages with different rituals for various reasons (religious, cultural, political, economic, etc.), yet as part of collective group engagement, their meal represents part of Americana. Like a Thanksgiving meal, there is a ritual component involved that over time has been performed enough for the meanings and collective engagement for these traditions(rituals) to have become part of their genuine cultural experience over time.

This engagement with ritual and tradition, as seen in food cultures, was discussed by Andrew Weiss in his article “Authenticity”. Weiss observes how the aforementioned markers in culinary cultures create the perception of not only what is considered authenticity but also how authenticity is valued. What makes the arguments that Weiss proposes key to understanding authenticity in food is that he takes into account not only the multitude of variations that a dish can have but also the evolutionary traits culinary traditions can go through, either with or without, the consent of the culture. Weiss makes poignant arguments about this quest to understand authenticity. Ultimately, no matter what evidence is used to supplement one’s claim of what constitutes authenticity, discourse will continue, as authenticity is continuously changing and creating paradigm shifts in our understanding. Weiss goes on to say that,

The quest for identity often breeds polemic, and it is precisely the loose edges of the concept of authenticity, its openness and mutability, that make of it a polemical figure of discourse. The question is, whether such polemic is destined to freeze languages and recipes in time or to create new possibilities. (Weiss 74).

In his arguments, Weiss is looking into the nature of the ambivalence of the concept of authenticity. Not only is he looking into the mechanisms that allow this concept to continue to evolve and adapt to power struggles and capitalistic efforts that have become a theme in identifying groups of people. Weiss's thoughts on historical influences and change are essential because he observes not only that historical context is crucial for building a perspective narrative but also shows pivot points where change has occurred to maintain one's cultural identity. Weiss makes two crucial distinctions in his arguments about culinary cultural authenticity that I wish to highlight in my thesis. First, he states that authenticity is represented as a *configuration of cultural values* (Weiss, 75). This distinction is important because it creates the ability for tradition and ritual to be considered part of the configuration of cultural values. As part of a configuration or "sum total," this allows for individual, religious, historical, regional, economic, and geographic variances, which can be seen in differences in ingredients and techniques yet still constitutes part of the collective value in the configuration. In his sum total equation Weiss says there are three parts that remain constant, and that includes rituals, traditions, and historical contexts. The second distinction is knowing that to make a dish a signifying marker to a cultural group, there is a set number of variants in the recipes described by Weiss as; constantly revised, continually shifting, and distributed over a delimited geographic area (Weiss 76). This distinction recognizes that culture is always shifting based on natural and man-made events such as famine and war. Weiss's essential distinctions account for two things. First, the evolution of culture can be seen in food. Second, it creates spaces that take into account migration of goods and ideas across geographic areas. Last, and most importantly, it takes people into cross-cultural exchanges. These two structures are important in creating a groundwork in which you see the acts of appropriation and assimilation used as actions of erasure the sum total that Weiss is

engaged with is in many ways the same equation that Frantz Fanon talks about in *On National Culture*. Like Weiss, Fanon looks at the idea of a sum total as part of an equation of what constitutes a national culture. Fanon states;

For culture is first the expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos and of its patterns. It is at every stage of the whole society that other taboos and of its patterns. It is at every stage of the whole society that other taboos, values, and patterns are formed. A national culture is the sum total of all of these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external extensions exerted over society as a whole and also at every level of that society. (Fanon 50).

What is key for both Fanon and Weiss is that the sum total not only represents the extension of a culture but also accounts for the collective whole of the nation and not only the dominant group(s). Both scholars differ in what variable should be placed but both end up with the same result, that the equation always ends with the expression of a culture/nation. Cultural products such as food are both a resource and a physical expression of the sum total equation.

### Terminology

In this thesis, there is terminology that needs to be addressed. First is the use of the term *American* as a signifier for individuals from the United States. Instead of using the term *American* to represent individuals from the United States, I have used the term *Americana* instead. In the thesis, there will be colloquialisms that will use *Americana* instead of *Americans* to represent members from the United States have been purposely left out. When using the arguments of misrepresentation and erasure of values, it can be observed that using *American* is not only an example of a term used as a form of colonization but also creates a right of ownership over what can be considered coming from the region of the Americas. This is recollective of John Locke's work with *Terra Nullis* in which an agent has to mix their labor into the collective sum to claim ownership rights. Refusal to use the identifier *American* challenges the idea of ownership of the Americas and reduces an act of erasure. Thus the use of *American* to



represent a single group of people versus an encompassment of the people and culture of North America, Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean is not only contradictory to the problems that this thesis is aiming to work through, but it is what many activists all over the Americas have said for years, that it is an elitist and colonizing term that needs to change. I chose to use Americana because it is specific to the history and culture of the United States of America.

Alongside a careful consideration of Americana to represent culture and individuals from the United States, the use of the term migrant/immigrant is used interchangeably or together. That is because this thesis will be talking about individuals who are occupying spaces that are not traditionally theirs. While the individuals that I will be discussing have left their homeland for various reasons, the same theme is present: they are no longer in their homeland. They have to engage with the culture of their new land in some fashion. So, when the term immigrant/migrant is viewed, it needs to be remembered that this term is used interchangeably.

## CASE STUDY 1

### Intro

One of the most popular ways to engage with foods in media is through reality television. In various programs, audiences watch chefs battle it out with each other to see whose dishes can win the ultimate prize(s). These prizes vary in nature from the stereotypical prize pack to monetary awards. When it comes to minority chefs in this programming, extra attention is given to how their respective culture and identity are represented in these shows. How these chefs engage with criticisms that they need to assimilate or consensually allow their dishes to be appropriated can be tied to their results in the show. This creates a production of commodity values based on their cultural experiences as the Other.

Judges challenge the configurations of recipes, ingredients, and presentation. During these contests the judges, because of their explicit power in a contest and implicit power as representatives of Western society, challenge essential aspects of meals created by minority chefs. These challenges constitute acts of erasure on the minority chefs and the source culture. Whether changes happen by choice or a lack of awareness, the creations from minority chefs are detached from the source culture and commodified. This process occurs in a multitude of ways in many other shows. In the show analyzed for this case study, *Million Pound Menu*, chefs create two meals in competition to win money to start their own restaurant. In this show the commodification process occurs when judges ask for a change, the chef chooses whether or not to make the change, and the judge reevaluates the meal and the new version of this dish becomes part of the restaurant's menu.

Working with Stuart Hall's interpretation of representation, we see that "to represent also means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for." (Hall et al. 2). In these cooking shows, the dishes alongside the chefs become representative of their cultures. When a program falsely claims a recipe or ingredient to be of another culture, then that dish becomes part of the representational markup of that culture and identity. Western audiences and consumers will engage with this newly assimilated or appropriated dish that is created by generalizations of culture.

Looking at how simulacra is involved with Hall's statement, it is observed that these artificial items come into creation using simplified symbols and substitutions for these cultural items. Dishes that have remained untouched or changed for generations are swapped out for ones that attract consumers and create profit. In these cooking shows, the dishes become as important as the chef preparing the dish. People will associate which chef cooked which dish and what each dish represent. The winning dish will become as, and sometimes more memorable than the chef who prepared it. The dishes shown to the viewer become symbols and definers of the cultures that they are attempting to represent. When discussing how the assimilation of culture is pervasive, Casey Ryan Kelly states that it tries, "to assimilate the authentic experience of culture and color into the mundaneness of white identity without fundamentally challenging white Eurocentric privilege." (Kelly, *Food Television and Otherness in the Age of Globalization*). Not only is there a loss of authentic culture during the assimilation process, but it also becomes a hegemonic action. Through these acts of assimilation, the erasure of the Other is happening, and the conditioning of forcibly becoming Eurocentric as Kelly puts it, begins. The easiest way in which you see these actions being performed to food cultures is through food-based reality shows like *Million Pound Menu*, a food based reality competition show which has run for two

seasons since 2018, and features everything from assimilative tactics, erasure, and the misrepresentation of symbols of the othered body. After the show ends, viewers can observe attempts at engagement with the newly defined cultures that they watched. Engagement is observed through visiting eating establishments, social media participation, shopping for ingredients, using cooking platforms, and cookbooks, and judging migrants/immigrants based on these shows. Viewers are thus engaging with this version of cultural tradition which is observed under the veil of generalization which has been carefully crafted for both entertainment and erasure purposes. These generalizations are akin to what Weiss says, “One must avoid the risks of such generalization, as one must also eschew the fall into pure empiricism, which only permits consideration of particulars” (Weiss 75). Through wanting to engage with the generalized or stereotyped versions of these dishes, the audience wants to engage with a version of empiricism. Yet when the audience engages with these generalizations, they are actually engaged with the simulacrum. What is also seen within this risk of generalization is that only partial elements of a culture's sum-totality is taken into account; thus creating a situation where engagement with the artificial is perceived as a legitimate experience. The historical and traditional contexts are set aside for elements that advance capitalistic and ideological narratives of the dominant group. This form of inauthentic cultural engagement by society has a profound effect on members whose cultures are appropriated by society. They are placed into paradoxes where they are expected to perform these stereotypes and incorporate them into their cultural identity or keep their sum total intact and become an outcast to society. Essentially, their food culture has become mechanisms of cultural colonialization, commodification, and erasure, all serving as a function of hegemonic balancing.

### The Price for *Million Pound Menu*

Shows like *Million Pound Menu*, a show in which three groups of budding restauranters compete in two stages in front of a panel of investors who are also the judges. At first each group has to compete with one another to advance to the final round, a pop-up in Manchester, England. There, the chefs have to prove that not only is their concept feasible but worthy of backing from the judges. This turns the pop-up into a site of struggle because in order for these chefs to earn money, they have to adjust their dishes and cultures for the hegemonic base. This is evident with two minority chefs, seen representing the Philippines and India in episodes 1 and 2 of the second season. As part of their journey to win money, they had to change their food culture and traditions. At moments it might be a simple process, such as reducing the number of spices used, to the drastic like completely taking a menu item off because it has been deemed too cultural. Viewers are watching a journey in which these minority chefs are also serving as cultural ambassadors and experts. As cultural ambassadors, the chefs are showing the judges and audiences the traditions and rituals that constitute their respected cultures' authentic food culture. Yet as competitors, they must perform to win, but as minorities, they must also translate their identity, rituals, and traditions for the masses to understand. The judges are performing the role of not only cultural evaluators but also translators. Alongside the task of placing a value of these cultures against their own, the judges ask the chefs to change various aspects of the chef's traditions and rituals that make up their authentic cuisine through the process of appropriation.

While both minority chefs handle their role within the competition in different ways, there is one issue that neither can overcome: the connotations of having to perform their authenticity and questions of which aspects of tradition/ritual, they are willing to change for a cash prize. These cultures and dishes are being evaluated by the judges as low brow even though

they have high cultural value to the originator of the dish. The actions of the judge's critiques and request for the editing or erasure of a dish from the menus is viewed not only as an action of redefining of the chef's cultural products but engagement with the colonial signifier. This perspective that the judges give may be considered constructive criticism but can also be viewed as a site of creative difference. In his interpretation of these sights of cultural difference Bhabha would call the criticism of the judge instances of colonial signification. For the judge's expressive actions are creating a split between both cultures. Bhabha says that when this act happens, "It is in the enunciatory act of splitting that the colonial signifier creates its strategies of differentiation that produce an undecidability between contraries or oppositions." (Bhabha 182-183). Bhabha makes a poignant point here: the difference created by the colonial signifier not only is strategic in nature but also binary by force. The only way to reconcile this split that the judges create is to form a hybrid union between the two binaries that the judge's not only control but define using the Third Space. This aspect of having one's culture challenged by the more dominant neo-colonial system is akin to what Ien Ang says regarding post-colonial feminism in Australia. Ang discusses a similar struggle for othered bodies in feminist movements in Australia in which she observes how these bodies are assimilated into the mainstream feminist community to prevent an upheaval of the hegemonic structure. In her observations, Ang saw that Othered voices were contained within the broader framework of post-colonial feminism in Australia: "In such a case, difference is 'dealt with' by absorbing it into an already existing feminist community without challenging the naturalized legitimacy and status of that community as a community" (Ang). It is observed that the judges' feedback to restructure (forced assimilation) key cultural markers and components of their cooking to appeal to the society's taste preference is the same absorption effect that Ang observes. Whether the judges know it or not, they not only

become cultural gatekeepers but also define how British society perceives/engages with these cultures through their opinion. This power of the judges to force these chefs to adopt British sensibilities and tastes through appropriation is exceptionally subtle. There is no direct challenge of their cultural identity, but instead, they are subtle by using critical critiques of their food cultures to deal with them. This Western-centric versus the rest ideology that the judges are enforcing upon these chefs is similar to the process that Kartomi describes in music as:

Moreover, blanket judgements made against these musical genres are frequently based on Western aesthetic standards, which cannot appropriately be applied to a non-Western music. European ideas as to what constitutes musical sentimentality, crudity, or balance are not necessarily cross-cultural. (Kartomi 228).

While Kartomi is engaging with tradition, culture, and ritual in music, many of the practices described in their work parallels food studies in media landscapes. Much akin to what music critics are doing with non-Western sounds, these judges in *Million Pound Menu* are not only gatekeeping; but also performing acts of erasure, forced assimilation/appropriation, and enforces this idea of Western superiority over the rest. Within this framework, it can be observed that the judges are engaging with the world in a homogenous view in which there is little room for deviance from the conceptual maps that Western logic has about the world. The chefs are thus forced to engage with these ideologies about rituals and traditions that do not necessarily mesh or work together with their cultures. This use of blanket assessments and enforcement of Western tastes thus becomes acts of cultural hegemonic balancing and sites of difference. However, the judges are giving these chefs flexibility through the creation of hybridities based on the judge's standards.

### BBQ Dreamz

In the episode of the show titled “The Duck Truck, BBQ Dreamz & Jah Jyot-Fast Casual” one chef refuses to give up his food culture and power. It is challenging for each of the

three potential entrepreneurial groups hoping to make it through to the final round by cooking a single dish. What makes this even more daunting for minority chefs is that they have to convince the gatekeepers/judges that their dish and, in large part, their culture can be palatable for the British population. Chef Lee behind the restaurant BBQ Dreamz made it through the next round representing his Filipino culture and identities. Cuisine is represented as something that the British population is not familiar with and could be the next big trend. Arjun Appadurai discusses similar instances of how cookbooks attempt to create a national cuisine via their introduction in modern India. In his discussion he points out that the emergence of culinary trends is based around generalizations and stereotypes of the Other. Appadurai states, "In all these contexts, what are created, exchanged, and refined are culinary stereotypes of the Other, stereotypes that are then partially standardized in the new cookbooks." (Appadurai 7). These same observations that the judges are presenting to the owner of Jah Jyot are based on these culinary stereotypes and tropes that the judges want highlighted. Interests in his food culture include a question about whether his use of traditional items like duck and ox heart constitutes as too exotic and is based around such generalizations. The judge not only questions the traditions of his culture and cuisine but by doing so immediately gives this the "Other" connotation that creates a splitting of difference. The judge's line of questing is subtle with the creation of binaural difference being introduced with the statement, "You mention in your dec about nose-to-tail eating. Do you think there will be a challenge with some of the items on the menu? How do we think ox heart and duck heart?" (Jarmain, "The Duck Truck, BBQ Dreamz & Jah Jyot - Fast Causal"). At this moment, we see the owners Lee and Sinead become resistant to the change and refuse to give up their cultural power. Lee responds with; "It really is only for the people who are willing to take a risk," (Jarmain, "The Duck Truck, BBQ Dreamz & Jah Jyot - Fast



Causal”). This can be interpreted as only for the people who want to experience Lee’s culture as food adventurers and sidestep any generalizations that they could experience elsewhere. This refusal of allowing cultural exploration through a refusal to engage with their carefully crafted (artificial) experience is fascinating because the other judge beckons for that. The judge who created this difference between British culture and Filipino cuisine calls their concept not only difficult to translate into British society but also calls their food *offal*. This use of the term *offal* was not only does give the association of the food being garbage, but also connotes that the meats offered will be of the lower class or Third World variety. What the viewers see happening is not only a presentation of cultural products by the Other but how individuals who profit off their traditions and rituals speculate their potential for economic gains or losses. Chef Lee is not only aware of this process, but his actions shown in his negotiation of this process is reflected in the finalized menu. In this case, he is engaging the discourses that Hall remarks, especially noticing that the discourse is being made for those creating discourse and not for him.

The chef notices a distinct binary in which the configuration that constitutes as his authenticity is viewed differently from how the judge’s view. Heldke talks about this authenticity of the Other by Western bodies as; “The authenticity of this Other (indeed, the very project of authenticating) is established against a standard constructed outside the Other’s own culture, in the West, and for Western purposes” (Heldke 43). The chef is aware that his culture’s authenticity has been defined, compared to, and evaluated against Western standards. Hall, Brennan, Scafidi and Heldke are among a number of scholars who view the concept of the authenticity of the Other as something distinctly Western and post-colonial. This concept has become a global tool of recognition and comparison. This reaction shows the chef recognizing that if he creates a simulacrum based on the judges’ opinions; then he shifts his dishes and in

essence his culture is then usurped by the artificial. The chef is not only cognizant of his value as a person but also culturally, and he uses these systems of whitewashing for leveraging tools. Chef Lee is cleverly using their gatekeeping efforts as a bargaining chip and willingly assimilates other aspects of his culinary culture to protect other parts of his total that he deems as necessary for his identity and the identity of his culture to retain the right to call the dishes and ingredients as part of his and not an influence of British society. This attempt to claim the rights of a dish that the chef created with the judge's feedback harkens back to a statement that Scafidi makes about rhetoric and ownership, "The rhetoric of authenticity performs much the same social function as property ownership, placing the claimant group in a position superior to all other with respect to the item in question" (Scafidi 54). Not only can rhetoric and action be used to make claims of cultural ownership. The actions that the chef(s) perform thus must be considered a call for action and a negotiation of ownership for the dishes created and defined by him. This also sheds light into how Other cultures are valued and claims of right are viewed in Western societies. This economic and cultural valuation of the Other is what Brennan's article discusses. To Brennan both cultural ownership and this notion of the value of culture function within the same system. Brennan states that in this capitalistic system, "Capitalism cashes in on collectivist notions of common ownership others it destroys, using their self-sacrifice against them, and putting forth a for sale sign on that common ownership while arrogating to itself the role of the seller" (Brennan 119). While the chef knows that being part of this process means he will not only have to destroy or sacrifice parts or whole aspects of his culinary identity by engaging in this process he sells his culture to both the consumer and producer. The dynamic between the judge's evaluation process and the contestant is what Hall describes in his piece *Gramsci's Relevance or the Study of Race and Ethnicity* as not only an economic function but also a

dissemination method. Hall deduces that within Gramsci's work of the superstructure and the structure, there are modes in which economic values can become tools that not only create discourse but also advance narratives/ideologies that, “create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life” (Hall and Hall, *Identity and Diaspora* 30). It can be observed that through these judge's evaluations that they have the power to not only place an economic/societal value on these cultured goods but also are serving as tools in which to further create conditions in which the mainstream identity/ideologies can continue. One can see that the media's function as a form of cultural interaction and the dialog that it allows. The value of tradition and ritual in migrant/immigrant groups, as seen through their food cultures, represents an economic good to the superstructure. Thus, when a new culture and their cultural products are introduced to the superstructure from within, it is perceived as a threat and erasure, assimilation, or appropriation through various performed actions. Within reality food television, such actions are seen through judges' opinions, actions, roles, and place in the competition. This functioning as the superstructure of the judge's panel becomes a metonym of how society judges and values a culture through its tangible cultural items. That is why earning a high cultural evaluation and representation is so crucial in these formatted shows because it gives Othered groups a better chance to define how they want to be viewed by society through their ability to translate their culture into society themselves.

This ability to define one's self is important because not only does it allow for these minority bodies control over what is perceived and viewed as theirs, but also creates a boundary between what functions as appropriation and cross-cultural exchanges. This shown when one sees resistance from the chef behind BBQ Dreamz because not only economically does he see

the value of his food concept but also the value of his culture within mainstream British society. Brennan would view this process as something asymmetrical because no sacrifice or destruction is performed by the dominant structure. There is no question that in this process of competing in a reality-based show there will be a varying amount of power given and lost in order to gain the grand prize, but as a minority body, what is also gained and lost is the ability to define one's culture and values. The dishes chef Lee represents not only himself and his culture but also the community of Filipino ex-pats in the United Kingdom. These feelings of community are similar to what Barbra Shortridge says about one's interactions with food as a form of community building as; "Food strongly associated with an area can easily take on symbolic qualities, and their consumption can evoke personal nostalgia and community pride" (Shortridge 507). Thus, it is viewed that the dishes from BBQ Dreamz are symbols of national pride not only for his culture but also the traditions and rituals of Filipino individuals. This evocation of a constructed national pride in the sense of a national cuisine can be observed in Appadurai's examinations of national cookbooks. In his observations Appadurai sees that there is a paradox when creating an all-encompassing national cuisine, with both international and national audience engagement, that certain compromises have to be made. Certain regional, traditional, and ritualistic dishes will need to be either omitted or simplified to make way for dishes that can be easily re-created, recognizable, and representative of the collective whole and not a small portion. This is a hard situation because not only will some items be left out but there is a possibility that one region will be favored over the other in terms of representation. Seeing ingredients, dishes, cooking traditions, and rituals evokes feelings of not only communal pride but also as a reminder of the history and geography that comprises that culture's origins. This serves as a reminder of not only the past but also the present and how the group is situated against the West.

## Baba G's

These actions performed behind the BBQ Dreamz team are a stark contrast to what is seen by the chefs in the following episode, "Baba G's, KraPow, XXVI – New Asian." Alec and Liz the chefs behind Baba G's, an Indian burger company, show the reflections and effects of colonization of their food culture. The chefs already present an assimilated version of their culture's cooking traditions by mashing up Indian spices and flavors in the form of a hamburger. The chefs attempt to control the narrative through cross-cultural exchange that they initiate and control versus a refusal process. It seems that the judges like their use of mixing their identity of the "Other" with the familiarity of foods that people eat everyday. Despite their ability to control the assimilative narrative, the chef is questioned about his authenticity by a member of his community who happens to be a judge. This judge states,

*"Baba G's is a quirky project. He has inspired himself on India, but it's the new India."* (Jarman, "Baba G's, KraPow, XXVI - New Asian"), his take on this being on, as he calls it, a "quirky" project is puzzling because you see his confliction of being an individual with a similar ethnic background wanting to preserve his identity, but at the same time, he wants to see this fusion work. What this judge does next is shocking as a gatekeeper for British consumers; he distinguishes this as something separate from their ethnic journey by calling it, "British-Indian food Mark II" (Jarman, "Baba G's, KraPow, XXVI - New Asian"). This judge acknowledges that this dish is separate from traditional Indian cuisine but part of a new era in which it forces him to label Baba G's as something different. The judge observes this binary of a Western-food item, the burger, being closely associated with Indian cuisine. The judge creates an interesting distinction in knowing that Baba G's is much like the cookbooks that Appadurai talks about. In creating an all-encompassing concept that bridges traditional Indian flavors and spices with

Western dishes he leaves out various regions, religions, traditions, and rituals, including Hinduism, which represents the majority of Indians who follow strict dietary practices such as not eating beef. It must be noted that the ethnic and religious heritage of the purveyor of Baba G was not disclosed in the episode. The judge is stuck between two oppositions. Should he make money off his culture's identity and flavors by appropriating them or preserving the sum total of his cultural configuration against himself and others like him? The dilemma that the judge is going through is akin to arguments presented by Kelly in his work; *You Are What You Watch: Food Television's Culture War*, in which he observes a similar struggle with minority food culture in the United States. When discussing the struggle that tacos have come to represent, he says, "But, a taco is not just a taco; it is also a site of struggle over meaning of and right to define Mexican and Chicana identity at a political moment fraught with racial tensions" (Kelly, "You Are What You Watch: Food Television's Culture War" 17) this judge knows that these dishes from the purveyors of Baba G's are represented as cuisine that is representing their shared heritage and identity. It can be observed that the blend of traditional spices and any ritual elements behind the cooking of these dishes is viewed as a function of the preservation of ritual and tradition. The foods from Baba G's represent struggles with colonialism and racial tensions between British and Indian cultures. Observing the judge's critiques and request for softening of the spices because the blend is not what they are used to in Indian cuisine, is similar to how Appadurai notices that the evocation of exotic tastes that for many are predicated upon watered down or hybrid versions that are based upon previous engagement with hyperrealities. In this instance the chef and judge are working together to create a functional hybridity that defines their new space and perseveres their shared origins.

## The Grand Prize

Both chefs' receiving and earning money to make their dreams come to fruition creates an interesting perspective. Did the chefs win because their food was a success, and people genuinely thought it tasted good or did they win because people thought of the food as the exotic and novel? This harkens to the argument that Henry Jenkins makes;

Here's the paradox: to be desired by the networks is to have your tastes commodified. On the one hand, commodified expands a group's social visibility. Those groups that have no recognized economic value get ignored. That is said, on the other hand, commodification is also a form of exploitation. (Jenkins 346).

These chefs are faced with the same paradox that Jenkins described. On the one hand, they are not only realizing their dream of opening up their own restaurants while proudly owning/representing their otherness. Yet, on the other hand, this allows for increased exploitative acts of non-consensual cultural appropriation through subject appropriation that creates an atmosphere where appropriation and commodification are used as Shugart describes to advance the agenda of the appropriator. These advancing agendas can be viewed as the enforcement of oppressive ideologies or gatekeeping to prevent pivot points where the carefully crafted Western homogenous scale shifts. As these cultural groups gain more recognition due to the chefs' participation in these shows, the levels of culturally oppressive violence is observed. Looking at how audiences interact with the appropriated representations of food television is essential. For these acts of destruction of ritual and tradition to happen, a key component is how audiences are interacting with these final dishes, as shown in the show. These interactions can be viewed in multiple expressions of food adventurism such as; visiting one of the restaurants seen in the show, recreating a dish they observed, seeking one or multiple ingredients shown, or looking for similarly themed establishments. As part of the process, the audience switches from viewers to producers and consumers. For a person to engage with the dishes (and in large the

traditions/rituals behind these dishes) is distinct because they have to enter the world of the Other but do not want to give up their privilege. Yet, if this Othered world has key components fabricated through stereotypes, barriers of entry then become null and void, thanks to the privilege of being part of the colonizing society. That is why having the chefs change the sum total of their identity through a reconfiguration of cultural values is essential. That is why it is crucial to view appropriation of not only the physical dishes but also the rituals, tradition, and ingredients that constitutes a dish's authentic value. What is vital within all three of their frameworks is the role of the audience/consumer. Without their viewership and engagement, these systems of misrepresentation would only be a signal going one way without reception. The audience is key because, in the particularization process, they are the catalyst that allows the function to operate. Like Gannon, Shugart acknowledges the role of the consumer/audience in this process of cultural appropriation and calls them an *active producer of meaning* (Shugart). This role of action is observed when the consumer not only engages with these dishes through eating, a re-creation of the final version but, most importantly, acknowledges their engagement. Thus, this acknowledgment of engagement also represents the acknowledgment with the process of simulations and but most importantly simulacra. This is most commonly seen through the use of social media. An example would be a Twitter user who responds to what they see on the show by seeking out the dining establishments and trying dishes exactly how they observed them on the show, but once the shift from observer to producer of meaning happens, there is no way to reverse these courses of action. Members who later feel guilt for their actions can and have to denounce their actions/intentions of harm, but these regardless of the act the behavior of destruction and the replacement of the artificial as authentic has happened. While scholars like Hall and Weiss agree the critical function and role of meaning in the discourses around identity



is ever shifting and changing, it is the ability of the collective group(s) to interpret and create engagement around the tangibles that function within the role of authenticity. When an individual or group immigrates/migrates to a new place, the preservation of these meanings the group(s) has created through interpretation is key to maintain their tight-knit community. That is why seeing actions such as commodification, appropriation, and forced assimilation of their authentic voice constitutes not only functions of the colonization process, but most importantly, identity erasure. These minority chefs and their dishes represent valiant attempts at the refusal of this erasure process, and is the creation of a space in which these actions can be resisted, and definitions re-written.

## CASE STUDY 2

## Intro

One of the most iconic sayings in the world is “It’s as American as apple pie,” a 6-word statement that is one of the most loaded and racialized statements in the world. What makes apple pie a representative of Americana identity and values? What about the Other dishes that were created in the United States like chop suey, a Cubano sandwich, or spaghetti and meatballs to name a few? These dishes are consumed daily by millions of people all over the world, yet in the United States these dishes are not viewed as Americana creations. That is because these dishes have been labeled as ethnic dishes and given associations to the “othered” groups that traditionally have been victims of the hegemonic structure. The process of ethnicizing dishes created in the United States to the Other is not a phenomenon that happens only in the United States. What makes the United States exemplary in this process is how very few dishes are labeled quintessentially “Americana.” The Other dishes are given ethnic markers to groups that heteronormative society has subjugated and persecuted. A key component in this act is understanding why this is happening and this follows an argument by Ortiz, Robinson and Khan in their book *Race and Sexuality*. While talking about how individuals are racialized, the authors describe this act as,

“Individuals who came from various countries or regions that we have come to identify as black or white were consolidated into such groups through a very specific political, economic, and social process of a races and classes order. This racialization sustained such a powerful binary of whiteness and blackness” (Vidal-Ortiz et al. Intro).

Overall the process of ethnicizing food functions to maintain this binary. While they discuss this binary as whiteness and blackness, it should be noted that this binary can also be observed as America and the Other. This concept of the United States versus the Other is observed in the

dishes that are portrayed as Americana. Hedlke looks at how the Trinh Minh-ha uses the term difference as a discourse. Hedlke uses the term difference to create a space where where normative society uses the culture, bodies, and traditions/rituals of the Other as sites of engagement. Hedlke mentions that difference does have limitations and one key aspect is an unwavering questioning as to what created the difference. Hedlke states,

“While we long for difference, for an encounter with the “exotic Other” we long for that difference primarily as a means of enforcing our notions of ourselves. The Other’s difference, then, must fit into a premolded box, specially set aside for the purpose of difference.” (Hedlke 44).

This statement is interesting because it suggests that normative societies’ quest for the difference can be viewed as a reinforcement tool for systems that create binaries of the Other vs Americana. Then these pre-molded boxes that the Other has to fit into represent not only steps that restrict possibilities for acceptance into society but also reinforces Americana traditional values and patriotism. Examining the origins of these dishes shows how assimilation and appropriation are used as tools of reinforcement of this concept of difference. This is interesting because these actions create places of difference that support the function of Americana racial and ethnic values/systems as dominant. This is viewed creating a space where the Other’s dishes are separate and not equal.

### The Functions of Documentary

The documentary *The Search for General Tso* questions this process. How are food dishes given ethnic and racial indicators in the United States? How is this process of identifying dishes created in the United States representative of hegemonic and racial balancing? What do these dishes represent as a form of cultural representation? How can a dish like General Tso’s chicken become so widespread? Do the members of the cultures to which these dishes are attached have to accept this dish as part of their immigrant/migrant journey? Using three of the

four functions of documentaries as proposed by John Corner to analyze the *Search for General Tso* will illuminate answers to all the questions of inquiry. These functions are labeled in order as: The Project of Democratic Civics, Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition, Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective (Corner 48). These functions permit this documentary to be placed as a site of critique situated in time and not singly as a categorical piece. That is why each function described by Corner has been analyzed to show how it is situated within frames of inquiry and critique of the cultural processes that this thesis is analyzing.

While *The Search for General Tso* uses these functions to question, observe, and answer its documentary goal, what the producers inadvertently do is create a seldom seen insight into the cultural hegemonic process, from the beginning stages to how the cultural form is represented and seen in contemporary society.

#### The Project of Democratic Civics

The oldest function and arguably most dangerous use of documentary work is *The Project of Democratic Civics*. This function is used not only for publicity but also as a propaganda tool for maintaining hegemonic balance. The role of documentaries as a form of national/international advertising is interesting when the hegemonic power is being questioned and challenged. When these dishes are represented as dishes created by Othered bodies, the documentary challenges this production of propaganda. This is seen in the scene 8 minutes into the movie when food editor of Time Out, Shanghai Crystal Mo, discusses her interactions with the dish. An expert on both American and Chinese cooking, she states that her only interactions with this “Chinese” dish have been through consumption in the United States. Then she says “*I was surprised, I have to say that I haven’t seen it directly on a menu in China*” (Cheney). This

statement is then corroborated later when the film crew shows a photo of the dish to everyday people on the street. The people who see this photo are shocked because they have no idea what they are looking at! People responded with comments such as “*Never Seen It*” and the astonishing “*It doesn’t look like chicken. It looks like frog.*” This is a stark contrast to how the dish is presented in the United States. If you search for “*authentic*” Chinese restaurants or take-out nearby, you will see locations near you (for me it is 1.5 blocks away from my house) saying they are showcasing the real flavors of China. Observe how these menus and decor are marketed as an “*authentic*” Chinese experience yet dishes like cashew chicken and General Tso are highlighted on the menu. Many of these dishes include fortune cookies that are the simulacra engaged to appeal to consumers’ sense of adventure. General Tso’s chicken being called “*authentic*” Chinese represents this propaganda tool for American perception of Chinese culture. Stuart Hall points out that we view cultures through these representations. “Because we interpret the world in roughly similar ways, we are able to build up a shared culture of meanings and thus construct a social world which we inhabit together.” (Hall et al. 4). Not only is the act of a limiting one’s cultural configuration hegemonic act, but when the hegemonic powers construct a new perception of a group, then this new definition becomes the representation for the whole society.

These perceptions can affect multiple generations through actions perpetrated by individuals with privilege. These effects can be seen in how Chinese restaurants were viewed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when xenophobic citizens of the United States created negative perceptions of what meats were used in Chinese restaurants. Yong Chen talks about the negative perceptions that come from false accounts of Chinese immigrants eating rat meat in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chen said,

By the 1860s and the 1870s, negative attitudes toward Chinese food became increasingly hostile. Most revealing of this attitude is the increasingly frequent use of the word “rat” in descriptions of Chinese food. Close associated with the filthiness, disease, and barbarianism, “rat” portrayed a pungent image, painting the diet of the Chinese as being not only undesirable but also despicable. More important, it was also seen as an integral part of Chinese restaurants. The message is clear: the Chinese were not just eating such disgusting stuff themselves but serving it the public as well. (Chen 72.).

What is observed is that difference can be used to create fear and perceptions about the quality of food served in Chinese restaurants. That is why within this function, *Projection of Democratic Civics*, you see the documentary challenging the notion of propaganda construction. Propaganda as a hegemonic act changes the way the citizens of the dominant nation/culture view and engage with representations of the world. This not only influences changes in perceptions of cultures but also how culture is engaged with.

#### Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition

The second function as described by Croner is *Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition*. In this function, the role of a documentary is observing and reporting. In this aspect of the role that documentaries serve giving compelling evidence through the function of reportage is the most important for documentaries like *The Search for General Tso*, for when searching for answers, they try to show non-biases. Searching for the truth behind the origins of the dish tells a detailed history of Chinese food diaspora. Firsthand testimony played an important role in the documentary’s storytelling. The use of firsthand storytelling in the documentary offers insights on how the ethicizing of food as authentic to Othered bodies effects culture. Through the act of interviewing immigrants and their children similarly to a news story, it offers an account of victims of this hegemonic process. An interesting revelation in this journey of Chinese-Americana food cuisine is the story of how early Chinese owned restaurants were opened. The xenophobic laws and violence enacted against Chinese immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century made it difficult for these immigrants to work and become accepted members of society. Chen describes how many Chinese immigrants were forced out of mining and manufacturing jobs and into working in the service sector. One of the only viable jobs that existed for them was to enter the service industry in Chinese owned and operated restaurants. While they were able to carve out a space and earn an income, they still faced the same systems of inequalities that forced them out of their mining and manufacturing jobs. Chen talks about this development of Chinese restaurants as, “The lowly position of Chinese food in mainstream America’s restaurant market hierarchy has mirrored the inferior status of China both as a culture and as a supplier of cheap labor in the economy.”(Chen 40). These perceptions of inferiority forced the people who were able to find jobs to assimilate into American society. Chen discusses that these changes were *conscious attempts* because they not only accommodated to the tastes of non-Chinese individuals but also crafted their space of difference to appeal to both the “adventurous” eaters and normative society. Even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century culinary colonialism and food adventurism were practices that normative society practiced.

Quite clearly you see the working relation of Chinese ingredients, cooking techniques, and American taste/economic power. A hybridity of both cultures and cuisines is clearly present. This hybridity was forced due to the xenophobic and systemic oppression created by the dominant culture. This story, of adapting to an American audience and the indulging of cultural adventurism, is observed throughout the documentary. Like a news expose that one would see during their evening news program, a firsthand account of the process of creating a dish to pander to their oppressors is seen. A poignant first-hand account is given by the family behind Leong’s Asian Diner in Springfield Missouri. This family restaurant has been credited with creating the widely popular dish cashew chicken. The story behind the dish is that it was created

because David Leong wanted to appeal to Americans love of comfort food. The story about how and why he created this dish highlights an important notion: the hybridization of dishes and cultures does not always indicate actions of violence and destruction. It can also be viewed as preservation and survival. What is key in Mr. Leong's case is that he willingly translated and adapted his traditions and rituals into cashew chicken. This engagement and adaptation of spaces and places are recollective of Michel De Certeau's work in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau deduces that two distinct things (in this context, cultures) cannot survive in the same place. When it comes to culinary explorations, creating consensual hybridizations allows for cohabitation and engagement with simulations to create equilibrium. As De Certeau says;

The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (DeCerteau 117).

The actions of creating hybridizations reconciles the laws of the proper. Hybridizations are not only combining two distinct elements (cultures) but also creates instability between the two elements. Not only, as of the othered body, did Mr. Leong control the narrative surrounding his identity and culture's sum total, he also incorporated essential elements of Americana culture. Through these actions he created temporary stability and cultural growth. Through the engagement with the simulation of his cuisine, he was able to bridge two distinct and defined locations into a place that he defined on his own. Much like Kartomi's examples with cultural parallels, he converged linear paths at a single point through his hybridization. To preserve important aspects of his culture, to provide economic growth, and by means of consensual assimilation, he conceived of this dish, this hybridization. In this gatekeeping moment he potentially prevented an instance of asymmetrical appropriation. Yes, this created a generalization and a new symbol associated with his culture. However, as Weiss deduces about



authenticity and culture it's always evolving and adapting. What makes this story anecdotal to narratives of giving up cultural identities and assimilating to survive, is that this dish was created solely for the Americana audience using the knowledge and identities shared from China. At the time of the dish's creation there was a small Chinese population and this dish became an instant sensation. What the documentary did with the second function was show how it played the role of journalist. Instead of creating a piece of work based on speculation on how this hegemonic action is performed, it searched for actual evidence. Not only did this establish a timeline of when, how, and where these battles of hegemony have been performed, it this also created legitimacy through the use of credible testimony. Evidence presented in this journalistic manner makes it hard to refute the hegemonic actions happening and how they are portrayed.

#### Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective

The third classic function of documentary that is being employed here is that of the *Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective*. Not only is this the most radical function performed within documentaries, it is also this is the role of how the documentary is performs in the world. Documentaries have long been lauded for their ability to create discourse that ponders and questions the nomenclatures of the heteronormative state. In step with radical frames of thinking, we notice multiple instances where queer, critical-race, and post-colonial lenses are used to introduce these radical perspectives. *The Search for General Tso* does a great job in questioning and challenging these nomenclatures using a post-colonial methodology. In challenging these nomenclatures, you see that the documentary is not only engaging with this concept but also with the hegemonic process. The producers challenge the terms used by the state when discussing the Other, especially their culture. It is important to note that the terms and stereotypes often used when describing othered bodies are rooted in

colonialism. Throughout the movie the classical colonialist term exotic or the invocation of the exotic is shown. This use of the term exotic creates not only the connotation of the Other but also establishes a binary of the citizen versus the immigrant. This refusal to call the dish Americana is part of the narrative of Americana cooking techniques. Katharina Vester, when discussing Americana recipes and cookbooks, states that “Much cooking advice implicitly propagated anti-cosmopolitan and isolationist politics that translated into the dismissal of spices and other imported goods as well as a mistrust of exotic foods” (Vester 21). This key statement about the distrust of the “exotic” is important because it echoes the dismissal of Chinese food culture as imported into the United States. During this time frame in American history an isolationist push to create and nourish a distinctly Americana culture was happening. A refusal of outside influences was perceived as a boost to its manufactured cultural stasis. That is why we hear the term *Chinese Americana* in the documentary when a dish is “approved by the colonizers.”

This strategic use of a fill-in-the-blank term (insert ethnic group)-Americana label that is attached to all othered bodies is not only colonialist but also racist. This engagement with *Other-Americana* is important to view because while these immigrants/migrants may have been in the United States for a lengthy period of time and have adopted many aspects of culture in the United States; they will always be viewed as the Other coming from a distant land. Ronald Takaki talks about this in his book *Strangers From a Different Shore, A History of Asian Americans*. In the section “Hyphenated Americans: The Nisei Generation” he talks about the idea of a Japanese-Americana binary in Japanese immigrants/migrants and their children. While offering many traits valuable to society, Anglo-Americana society did not accept them and situated these people as the Other even if they were born in the United States. Takaki talks about an account by an individual named Aiji Tashiro. Takaki describes him so, “He spoke English

fluently and had even adopted American slang, dress, and mannerisms. But “outwardly” he “possessed the marked characteristics of the race” (Takaki 221). Tashiro and individuals who do not fit the typical Anglo-Americana characteristics are marked by characteristics of their culture that makes them the Other. Integration into society will not be achieved because of these characteristics. The systemic forces that exclude Chinese and the hybridized dishes into society welcomes and excludes them at the same time. That no matter what they do, adopt, assimilate, and self-appropriate, it will never be enough to lose the connotation of Other.

#### Documentary as Diversion

The final function as described by Corner is *Documentary as Diversion*. In this function the role of a documentary is to be lighthearted, enjoyable, and relaxed. Corner argues that this function of the documentary cannot work in tandem with the first three classical functions. Contrary to Corner’s arguments, *The Search for General Tso* demonstrates that all four functions can be used within the same documentary. It is observed how all the functions are working in tandem to deliver a piece that not only questions and challenges a structural system of oppression and racism by providing clear supporting evidence but also how this affects multiple generations of a minority group. This final function is observed multiple times throughout the piece. For example, when watching individuals interact with photos of what General Tso’s Chicken looks like is presented using entertainment and brevity. This scene could have been edited to make it appear that the search was a tiring process but instead the filmmakers asked everyday people. This diversion producing process was created multiple times in the movie including a relaxing scene where the crew and translators are drinking a traditional drink in China. The inclusion of relaxed commentary when viewing *Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition* lightens the tradition of documentaries. The relaxed atmosphere in which you hear the story of cashew

chicken provides another lighthearted moment. The story includes the chef's journey in the United States where he faced hardships such as violence and racism (which is shown in a more serious tone) but when the conversation is shifted to how he created the dish, the visuals used change the mood. The film shows how the dish is made because Mr. Leong was forced to pander to the taste of the region he was living in. While this is a sad reason for why this dish was created, with the family smiling it created feelings of upbeat spirits. Over half the interviews seen in the movie follow this aspect of using interviewing as a form of entertainment. When discussing aspects of racial and colonialist oppression seriousness is used when discusses actual events or people. This respectful tone is essential because it does not take away from the agency or the violence that these people went through. Yet when talking about generalizations the use of animation not only creates brevity but also is used when creating this alternative perspective. It must be noted that while this final function created brevity and lighthearted enjoyment it also provided an important place of reflection.

This documentary was created to challenge the hegemonic process, force one to think about Americana made dishes versus one's own food cultures and talk about how we perceive authenticity. While this documentary could have just been curated as a search for the creator of General Tso's chicken, instead, viewers watch a documentary that challenges hegemonic notions of genuineness in the forms of identity and also in the cultural products that comprise a groups authenticity. These two topics are explored all the time not only in academic circles but among immigrant and first-generation groups as well. It can be a simple conversation about the best place to get a choripan or who has real dulce de leche. The foundations used by Corner are essential not only in understanding the role of the documentary form in a society but also how this form affects societies and our identities. This concept of assigning ethnic boundaries to

another culture is not exclusive to Chinese immigrants and their cuisine. One can see this happening with Italian immigrants for a dish like spaghetti and meatballs. It needs to be noted that not all diasporas, including the culinary realm, are alike. Each group encountering this process will have different factors and conditions that influence their experiences.

Assigning ethnic boundaries also occurs when we see hybrid dishes that were created in the United States yet are assigned as unique to a race or identity. This documentary challenges the hegemonic institution by offering insights into how this practice happens. This hegemonic action forces immigrants who come to the United States to not only be judged based on these gross misrepresentations but also be forced to live in the constructs that these dishes have created. Essentially, when an immigrant/migrant arrives in the United States, they are labeled as coming from the “*land of...*” which is a social construct created for hegemonic action. When it comes to immigrant/migrant assimilation, the Other category is a label given to people who refuse to assimilate, people who refuse to give up their self-defined genuineness and people who fight against the appropriation of their culture and traditions. This process is akin to arguments Ien Ang makes when looking at the integration of Othered bodies in feminist movements in Australia. She observes how this rebellion against assimilation to “*white/Western hegemony*” is a difficult process. Ang says,

Any resistance to this overwhelming hegemony can therefore only ever take place from a position always-already ‘contaminated’ by white/Western practices, and can therefore only hope to carve out spaces relative to autonomy and freedom within the interstices of white/Western hegemony. (Ang 199).

Individuals who refuse to assimilate to pre-conceived notions and misrepresentations are already facing a tough battle. Sadly, they will have to accept that the traditions, ingredients, dishes taken from them non-consensually will never be returned. This challenges the notion that Western societies can adequately accommodate and appreciate the Rest, and suggests that the best course

of action is to embrace their role of the Other and engage with the world and society with their remaining power/authenticity and possibly also also continue to challenge the systems that are contaminating their identities. These are the fighters against the hegemonic process trying to build a future where their voices are equal to everybody else's at the table.

## CASE STUDY 3

## Intro

In October 2019, the Food Network released its platform titled *Food Network Kitchen*. This platform was created in conjunction with Amazon and promised individuals who wish to use the platform an experience with food and cooking that has never been seen before. In the official release of the platform the Food Network website, they says, "This new app will bring us into your kitchen like never before with hyper-interactive classes, on-demand video, Alexa support- and so much more" ("Welcome to Food Network Kitchen! A Ground-Breaking New App Experience"). This platform blurs the line between digital and physical spaces by creating a hybrid where an individual's tastes and preferences, as seen in their profile, become physically manifested. This creates a space where users have hands-on engagement with cultural traditions and rituals that are ripe with forced assimilations, acts of erasure, appropriations of rituals and traditions, and stereotyping that culminates in a sum total that challenges the authenticity of these othered bodies. User access to the special features offered, the content available, and layout of the platform create a space that allows users to learn and participate in misrepresentations and assimilations hands-on as cultural creators. This engagement creates a space where premanufactured cultural experiences, traditions, and rituals can be identified.

The kinds of appropriation highlighted in this case study are different from the other two studies. While the other case studies show how individuals, who are representative of these minority cultures, engage with the artificial, this platform has no such representation of the cultures being shown. So, the members of the cultures represented in the platform have no ability to contest what they see. In her work in understanding how cultural products function similarly

to intellectual properties, Scafidi looks into who has the ability to redefine and interpret cultural products and traditions. Scafidi states,

In the absence of legal intervention to establish property rights, the question instead revolves around who is entitled to assign form and meaning, or at least a semiotic range, to a cultural product; who can assert a right to define the normative use of a cultural product; or who may give permission to copy a cultural product. The issue of control does not arise when source-community members have exclusive possession of their cultural products and use them in a consensual manner. (Scafidi 53).

Scafidi's use of her legal background creates an interesting frame of view and use of the term consent in a legal way. In this framing of the term within this case-study, consent then means that source-community members, which includes immigrants/migrants and their children, have control over how their culinary traditions, ingredients, and rituals can be viewed and be defined. In the examples examined in this case study there is no reference to consent being given or expressed in the way the shows are aired. Though it must be said that there are segments, shows, and classes where members of the source community are included or have given their expressed consent to the dishes created and the engagement with their cultural symbols and definitions. While there are a few programs in the system of chef's cooking heritage dishes from where they are from, the same chefs are used in cooking segments, classes, etc. engaging with dishes outside of their scope of specialty. While the celebrity chef reigns supreme in drawing a crowd, they are actually engaging with the audience as subject appropriators and not cultural experts. This case study is viewing appropriation where members of the cultures whose traditions, rituals, representation, and traditions are not present and, therefore, cannot protest actions where erasure occurs and engagement with artificiality occurs.

### How the Platform Speaks

While navigating this platform, we can observe that there are three distinct groupings in which this blurring of the physical and the digital is happening. The primary method in which



you see this is through the live cooking class aspect in which users are in a live television format and can engage with each other and the chefs through an on-demand Q&A format. The second is through the carefully curated cooking shows that users can stream on-demand. They are followed by the third, which is how users can search the platform for dishes based on cultural perceptions or identifiers. These three elements allow those with control to easily manipulate and change how food cultures are represented. Each grouping should be viewed as tools that creates new mechanisms for food adventurism and the creation of cultural definitions. Throughout the platform celebrity chefs teach classes, host the shows, and gracing programs with “surprise” guest experiences. The visibility of celebrities thrown throughout the platform not only functions as showing the users the experts/cultural interpreters but also the cultural gatekeepers they will be engaged with. Paula Arvela observes that the celebrity chef has become a gatekeeper and cultural interpreter through food, Avela says;

Here, the role of chefs is paramount as they are given the function of cultural gatekeepers with the legitimacy to re-interpret culinary tradition with flair, producing culinary hybridity, which not only has high symbolic currency but equally ensure that cultural communication lives on. (Arvela 35)

When creating new meanings of culture, the use of celebrity functioning as expert opinion and persuasion adds credibility. In the case of consumer-oriented culinary outlets like this one, the chef not only functions as the gatekeeper but also the cultural translator.

The role of the translator is intriguing because they serve as the bridge between two distinct cultures and ensure that channels of communication remain open. It is observed how these translators are functioning within systems of representation and also the erasure of culture’s originality. The translator is compromising culture in the same way that O’Brien and Szeman talk about in their assessment of how authenticity is demonstrated. The bridge created through performance ensures cultural communication lives on to demarcate the spaces where

these two cultures can engage one another. What is observed is a predatory use of the concept of translator. In this case, the translator is one who is corrupting the use of the term authenticity for capitalistic means.

The chief function of the translator is also a physical embodiment of the particularization process that Gannon describes. The chef's embodiment of the particularization process is seen in two ways. First, they are converting signs, symbols, and definitions from one group to another. Secondly, they are serving as a bridge between two cultural groups. This engagement with the Third Space within the appropriator's performances allows the simulacra to be observed in dishes such as Gordon Ramsey's "matcha tart" ("Lucky Strikes"). Food bridges like the aforementioned dish created by subject appropriators allow the companies who share interests in both the appropriators and the platform to redefine cultural meaning and power without any repercussions. The redefinition and changing of cultural representations through appropriation or *commodification* indicates that the corporate structures have carte blanche to create meanings. This appropriative action as described by Dick Hebdige takes place in one of two distinct forms. Hebdige describes this form as, "...the conversion of subcultural signs (dress, music, etc) into mass-produced objects (i.e. the commodity form)" (Hebdige 94). While he is looking at subcultural products in the world of punk and early hardcore this same conversion process can be seen in cultural products like food. It is observed that within each of the groupings, the form is followed and indicative of the simulation process happening. The platform represents the conversion process by creating the mass-productions and defining the dishes and cultures they show. What is observed within this form is that cultural definitions and markers are continuously updated and changed under the guise of custom created content. The nature of content creators

using culture for “content” is that they are creating these hybridizations and substitutions for the sake of money and new users.

### What Does FoodNetwork Kitchen Look Like

It is essential to observe how the platform functions and is laid out. FoodNetwork Kitchen is available to download on devices running the iOS, Android, and Amazon operating systems. This means the platform can be used on smartphones, tablets, or compatible smart TV systems. The layout of the Food Network Kitchen will possibly change over time as new versions and upgrades are released to the public. Here is a description of the layout of the Food Network Kitchen on an Amazon Fire Stick: when entering the system, one is instantly taken to the Explore tab, which serves as the home screen. This pane highlights newly released episodes and seasons of popular shows, what upcoming cooking classes are being offered, video tutorials, and highlighted meal themes. To engage with the main navigation panel, users find that panes are located on the far-left side of the screen, and include the following areas: *Search, Explore, Shows, Classes, Recipes, Profile, and Settings*. Each pane has its pictorial icon for aesthetic purposes. User experience is broken down into two distinct segmented audiences, free users and members who wish to pay for enhanced features. Some key features are shared among the audiences, but features such as the live cooking classes, access to the on-demand cooking classes, and ad-free episodes of the streaming aspects are available only to people who sign up for a premium plan. Unless an individual uses a promo-code, the premium plan access can be used for free for 30 days as part of a trial program. After the 30 day trial has ended, users can pay \$39.99 at once for a full year's subscription or \$6.99 for a monthly subscription. While streaming, users can engage with the *Recipes and More* tab as their class or episode is being aired. This allows users to fast-forward and skip various parts of a class or episode based on the

dish they would like to learn about, save the recipe to their profile, read reviews, gain access to step by step directions, look at the ingredient list, see related recipes, and learn more about the chef. Right now, users can order and pay for groceries to be delivered based on the recipe (but not if they are using the Fire Stick).

This system of pay for use creates a situation where a company is capitalizing on cultural traditions, rituals, and ingredients that make up a culture's culinary authenticity and identity to capitalize on profits. This process of capitalization on othered bodies in technology is addressed by Christian Fuchs, "Information media are specifically cultural in that they enable the creation, co-creation, diffusion and interpretation of symbols, by which humans make meaning of the world (Fuchs 225). While not explicitly saying it, Fuchs is observing how media can not only co-opt symbols but also re-create their meanings as well. Through challenging the definition of a culture's rituals and traditions through erasure and misrepresentation, media groups can control how engagement is created, produced, and defined.

The system uses its ability to enact creation and definition by using food as symbols and representative markers of a culture's sum total in creating an understanding of their identity and authenticity. Users are not only encouraged to engage with this manufactured system of meaning by cooking the dishes but also to share it with other individuals through sharing options. By sharing the platform, not only do users encourage their social circles to engage with the same systems of cultural creation for capital but also increases the visibility and profits for the media company. This system of profit gain through cultural capitalization is seen when new subscribers or users join, and when individuals have ingredients shipped to their house. This creates a win-win situation for those profiteering from the tangible cultural products of others. No matter how one engages with the platform as a cultural or physical consumer, it allows the

corporations behind the platform to gain not only more power as a cultural creator but also profit as an economic entity. In his observations Brennan actually addresses the problem of media and entertainment industries creatively borrowing (appropriating) from civilizations during a trip to Las Vegas. Brennan states that,

“Ideas are routinely stolen from other civilizations and sold to a docile public without even a thought to paying for the goods taken. In an entertainment economy like our own, where fatuous scriptwriters in Hollywood are paid large sums for options on some microtwist to a clichéd story line (where, in other words, the concept is a very valuable commodity indeed), there is not even a hint that there might be a legal claim under the principle of intellectual property rights to folk healing or the copied designs of a theme hotel” (Brennan 119)

Although Brennan is applying his critique directly at what he is seeing in Las Vegas the same critique can be applied to the *FoodNetwork Kitchen* platform. Users are engaging with a platform that is selling them manufactured cultural products much like what Brennan observes in his trip. Brennan’s key and crucial point in his assessment is that there is capitalistic value in creating a commodity value out of culture and indulgences. The cooking show is a genre that captivates audiences by the indulgences of learning about cultures and identities that are foreign to them and how to cook new dishes. Intrigue drives this medium, but it also allows the users under the right circumstances to become adventurers and appropriators of the cultural markers they are observing.

Yeh and Her Brownies

The premise for these shows has mainly remained the same since a cook stands in front of a camera(s) and demonstrates how to cook a dish. What has changed, thanks in part to the evolution of the audience, is how these shows are viewed. With the rising popularity of streaming services, the *Food Network Kitchen* platform capitalizes on this. While navigating the interface, users can easily stream shows onto any of the supported devices that are available.

When a user enters the subsection titled *Shows*, one can have instant access to an extensive library of shows that have been carefully curated by the developers. At the time of writing<sup>1</sup>, users have access to the full seasons of over 21 shows such as *Guy's Big Bites*, *Everyday Italian*, and *Brunch @ Bobby's*. Users are also offered options of either watching a show highlighted by the network, or programming based on a great way to experience their version of contemporary cooking. At the current moment, the curated collections include “What to Cook Tonight”, “Build a Better Brunch” and “New Episode’s”. All the shows have one thing in common: they offer not only recipes that users can cook alongside the episode but also a complete ingredient list that people can use when they attempt to cook these dishes at home. On the sub-section, “New Episodes”, the latest available episode of the show *Girl Meets Farm* with the host Molly Yeh is titled “Falafel Night. This program is based around the mixing of Yeh’s Jewish and Chinese culinary roots with a “Midwestern Twist.”(Kirsten). The show uses Yeh's role as a celebrity chef to introduce new food cultures and concepts to audiences, create cultural capital, and gain credibility as an expert through their role as a celebrity and as the Other. She uses creative interpretation to appropriate culturally significant ingredients, rituals, traditions, and techniques in easily identifiable dishes. This use of creative interpretation can be viewed as strategic engagement with ambivalence. Her interpretation is viewed as engagement with the Third Space because Yeh replaces traditional and historical processes and recontextualizes and creates her own definition of these historical and traditional processes. In this episode, the dessert that is highlighted is "Turkish coffee brownies," is a bold example of pandering to the audience. Not once in this episode does Yeh acknowledge that the creation is just “inspired by” Turkish coffee and in fact does not contain any Turkish coffee at all. Instead, she allows the audience to

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<sup>1</sup> As of 1/5/20

perceive that this hybrid dish is part of Turkish culinary traditions when in fact it is a result of subject appropriation. The reason this dish is called Turkish coffee is the use of spices that are also used in the coffee-making preparation. Only dry espresso powder is used to gain a “coffee” flavor. Yeh is observed not only performing erasure of Turkish traditions and rituals but also creating a generalization using the same style flair that Avela eludes to when omitting her use of Turkish coffee in her ingredients. These generalizations and actions of erasure are challenges to authenticity that both Young and Haley discuss when defining subject appropriation.

With the theme of the episode being centered around Middle Eastern cuisine, it can be critiqued that Yeh is manufacturing a space of food adventurism by attempting to create Turkish coffee brownies. While this process is observed as re-structuring of a dish’s ingredient list, it emphasizes one of the discourses that Hall talks about. When discussing those with the ability to create change who do it just for the sake of creating change, Hall says “Every discourse constructs positions from which alone it makes sense. Anyone deploying a discourse must position themselves as if they were the subject of the discourse...” (Hall and Hall, *Identity and Diaspora*, 156). Yeh’s actions is viewed as subject appropriation to create change and discourse with flair because having she enjoys membership in West and can employ such actions without repercussions. By creating structural change of a dishes layout and representation shows that Yeh and the producers are creating conflict only because it makes sense to them.

The substitution process in coffee production Yeh used contributes to those generalizations of cuisines that Szeman and O’Brien talk about. They view the substitution of ingredients as not only a form of de-mythification but also creating the homogenization of flavors. Szeman and O’Brien claim that culinary generalizations such as Yeh’s are difficult to challenge because; “It is much harder to challenge the aura of naturalness that surrounds a form

of consumption that grounds itself in an opposition to corporate culture and appeals to a standard of taste defined by purity and simplicity” (O’Brien and Szeman, 81). Practices such as substituting ingredients and subject appropriation, such as what Yeh performs, can be viewed as a way of making a dish more palatable for the consumer-based engaging with new flavor profiles. This also makes it much harder to challenge these artificial (simulacra) notions when the ingredients used are part of the normative systems of traditions and rituals. Yeh performing as the expert is commodifying Turkish coffee and converting this cultural sign through the substitution of ingredients.

The generalizations Yeh highlights in her program are based on an artificial fabrications, and they also indicate a suppression of cultural products to further the homogenization of consumption. This substitution can be considered a violent act against Turkish culture but also represents an action to erase a cultural tradition that is on the *UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* (UNESCO - Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition). What is troubling is that UNESCO, within their guidelines for food culture to be considered intangible, it cannot be monetized by companies and governments. This list is functioning as a giant fallacy. While it needs to be acknowledged, the committee is comprised of members from all corners of the world. These people are mystifying cultural items based on Westernized aesthetics and ideals. This re-evaluation process based on the shared that mystifies the everyday is much like what Hall discusses with engagement with visual systems. Not only is this committee re-defining how we engage with these cultural products but also what they represent to one’s cultural value and claims of ownership. This process is of turning the everyday and mundane into the mythic harkens the same process that Roland Barthes does with the young African soldier in his legendary text *Mythologies* Barthes looks at turning the normal into the mythical or intangible as



a duality. He says, “The signifier of myth presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other.” (Barthes et al, 116). What UNESCO is doing because they are creating a list that has no value and foundation is part of this duality of both being empty and full. They are placing cultural items within a structure and defining their meanings. Lydie Moudileno talks about this process in her work “Barthe’s Black Soldier: The Making of a Mythological Celebrity” Moudileno talks about this de-mythification process as not only resituating historical contexts but pulling in the case of an item on the *UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage* list into a “material postcolonial world” (Moudileno 68). Not only does the application deliver an experience in which users can cook the recipe step by step alongside Yeh, but it also transforms them into cultural creators and profiteers off something that cannot be monetized. This process blends spaces where digital and physical engagement happens in tandem and allows users to become participants in the creation of redefinition and generalization of cultures alongside the host(s) and writers of the show.

### The Chorizo Burger

The rise of mixed media has appeared in an age in which media outlets look for the newest way to engage with audiences using rapidly evolving technologies. Mixed media refers to moments in which both the audience and the host interact with one another. This interaction commonly occurs in platforms through live streams and has become widely accessible on the platforms Instagram and Twitch. While this form of user engagement has been around since the beginning of the internet era with recent advancements in technology, a boom in their popularity has been seen. The platform offers not only real-world feedback but also the availability to purchase ingredients, placing trust into the platform that they are buying ingredients that are part of culture’s traditional cooking not a substitution. The form of engagement is a new and novel

way to engage with the creation of capital and culture. In the platform, there is a hyperreal illusion of a custom-curated/manufactured content used for profit-building and changing perceptions. This digital space not only shows a zone of illusion, it also uses the zone as a capitalistic tool. Brennan discusses these sorts of toolsets when he says “Capitalism, in short, artificially preserves what appear as traditional or precapitalist forms in order to achieve super exploitation and a hidden transfer from peripheral to core countries.” (Brennan 109). The use of illusion is part of the process of exploitation and creating structured boundaries in the form of how they show authenticity. This takes away the originality of cultural products and re-imagines them for capitalistic and systemic exploitation.

This form of mixed media entertainment can be seen in the *Food Network Kitchen* through their “Live Classes”, where the hosts can interact with the audience, and it also allows the audience to engage with one another. Once the class has started, users who wish to cook alongside the chef cook their meals similar to how an academic class is taught online. When a viewer has a question about the process, they can type a question that anybody from the chef, the producer, or even fellow viewers can respond. The chef has the power to respond verbally over the air, much like how a professor would answer a question during a web-seminar. Both premium and non-premium users can watch classes. The class schedule is easily accessible to users and offers users classes in the following themed selections: “Weeknight Dinners”, “Vegetarian, Eggs”, “Pork”, “Baking & Desserts”, “Cheesy”, “Mexican”, “Dinner Parties”, and “Brunch”. When looking at the only ethnically marked category, “Mexican”, we see a list of dishes that are Mexican inspired or a hybridity of various cuisines with Mexican ingredients. This is a unique space where one observes generalizations of multiple cultures fused into a single entity. Some classes that people engage with that are represented as Mexican food include

Gochujang Chili Nachos and Chorizo Burgers with Tomatillo-Avocado Salsa. The dishes in this category are continually updated when the creators of the classes teach lessons that create generalized and hybrid cuisines. “Mexican” is used as an umbrella term to encompass a whole nation of cuisines and does not take into effect the regionality of the cuisines much like the cookbooks that Appadurai discusses.

When a dish like the “Chorizo Burgers with Tomatillo-Avocado Salsa” (Food Network Kitchen) is highlighted as Mexican, this not only presents itself as a simulacrum of Mexican culinary culture but also takes away from the viability of regional dishes being shown. These actions in which Mexican food is labeled and presented follow the same history Mario Montaña describes in his article “Appropriation and Counterhegemony in South Texas: Food Slurs, Offal Meats, and Blood”. In this work Montaña describes the history of food cultures after the Southern Texas region became colonized by Anglo-Americans. In his assessment of how food from this region that was once known as Mexico, has become so beloved and popularized, he observes how the signs, symbols, and traditions of the Mexican food culture have not only changed through appropriation, misrepresentation, and assimilation to suit dominant society but can also be viewed as erasure,

The American food industry, enacting the principles of cultural hegemony, has effectively incorporated and reinterpreted the food practices of Mexican in the lower Rio Grande border region, relabeling them “Tex Mex” and further using that term to describe any Mexican or Spanish food that is consumed but Anglos. Although Mexicans in this region do not refer to their food as Tex Mex, and indeed often consider the term derogatory, the dominant culture has redefined the local cuisine as “earthy food, festive food, happy food, celebration. It is peasant food raised to the level of high and sophisticated art. (Montaña 328).

Much like what Montaña observes the same can be seen in how the platform is labeling and showing the classes as part of this process. This can be observed by engagement with the Bhabha’s Third Space because the developers are continuing the process where there is no

*primordial unity*. A creation condition, which allows process of signs/symbols to be appropriated and reappropriated over and over as the simulacrum, is seen. This dish not only caters to the food adventurers that the developers want to target with the simulacra, but it also ensures that they can continue claims of the ownership of the hybridity they create. Celebrity chefs who are observed to be well-traveled are used to appease the audience and lend the appearance as experts. For instance, this class is taught by acclaimed chef and critic Andrew Zimmern. Through his class on the chorizo burger hybrid mix, one can observe Zimmern as he makes a case of cultural creation and defines the terms and conditions of the cultural communication. In his critique of Jamie Oliver's show *Jamie's Great Britain*, Francesco Buscemi observes that the program not only engages with the simulacra but also defines culture within the program as a social construct. Buscemi says "Authenticity is the strategy through which food brands the nation. In so doing, the show acts as a means of cultural diplomacy." (Buscemi 47). In essence the class and Zimmern are opening one-way channels of communication. This is a conversion of these Mexican cultural signs not only for mass-consumerism but also diminishing the cultural power of Mexican people. This diminishment in the cultural power can be viewed in how Mexican immigrants/migrants are considered as lesser than in the rhetoric created by politicians. An instance where an individual who publicly and politically suppressed the rights of Mexican immigrants/migrants but still engages with their cuisine is the incident where former Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen ate at Todd English's Mexican restaurant MXDC Cocina Mexicana.

It is noted that the sum-total of culinary authenticity can evolve and incorporate aspects of hybridity into its culmination in the forms of new customs, traditions, and rituals. What is key to point out is that in doing so there should be a collaborative cross-cultural exchange happening. This hybrid is not only an engagement with the zone of ambivalence that Bhabha grapples with

but would be a successful use of the discourse of mimicry that he describes as a manifestation of difference. Thus, a paradox is created in which consumers are engaged with the simulacrum and believe that the dish they are consuming is credible. The developers and Zimmern do not attempt to caution the audience that this, *their take* (appropriation) of Mexican cuisine, is based on a lie as they are the ones creating difference. In the opening two minutes of the class, Zimmern says “Today we are making one of our simplest family favorites. These are Mexican burgers, pork chorizo burgers, call them whatever your like.” (Chorizo Burgers with Tomatillo-Avocado Salsa). Upon reviewing the whole class Zimmern does not bring up that the dish is a hybrid of multiple cuisines. He only points out that certain ingredients are hallmarks to Mexican cuisine and that certain ingredients like the limes you buy from the supermarket are the Persian variety. This refusal to let audiences know that they are engaged with subject appropriation and the artificial is predicated on racial disparities and is called *ex-nomination*. Roland Barthes first coined this term and process, and it describes when the dominant groups(class) create discourses to legitimize not only racial disparities but also the status quo. Szeman and O’Brien talked about this aspect of *ex-nomination* when they said; “*Ex-nomination* also works to legitimate the dominance of specific racial and cultural groups by failing to acknowledge, or “mark,” their distinctive qualities (e.g., white, heterosexual), thereby assuming their universality.” (O’Brien and Szeman 872) Through the refusal to acknowledge Americana influences and culture within the dish, a clear example of *ex-nomination* is shown. When the user sees this dish under the search option “*Mexican*” they see them as truthful because that is what they want to believe. While Barthes coined the term *ex-nomination* term, this discourse was also described by Stuart Hall in “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power”. While not directly calling it *ex-*

nomination, Montaña directly calls into the actions of what he has seen chefs like Zimmern create that legitimize the dominance of one group while castigating another. Montaña states that;

In incorporating folk foods, the dominant culture can succeed in neutralizing, reinterpreting, and setting boundaries that separate “acceptable” foods from those perceived as disputable or threatening. Many Mexican foods have been appropriated successfully with such strategies (Montaña 333).

While these discourses show that not only are the Chorizo Burgers with Tomatillo-Avocado Salsa an artificial creation, it also creates boundaries as to what is acceptable to call Mexican cuisine or not. When these in-home chefs engage with these dishes alongside the experts, they accept where the boundaries are being drawn. Not only do the home chefs become a part of this process but also become subject appropriators. While users may engage in the process as somebody wanting to learn or experience a new dish, their roles as cultural consumers change into creators when they recreate these dishes at home. This change occurs because when the user is watching a program or class they are just an observer and when they recreate one of the dishes they become cultural creators and definers. Much like Scafidi’s engagement about permission is needed to re-define cultural products and semiotics as creating sites of conflicts, these in-home chefs are agreeing with the corporation’s definition of culture when they re-create these dishes in their homes. Through this action, two-way cultural communication does not happen; instead, media producing corporations looking to increase their profits are creating the definition of a culture’s symbols, signs, and systems.

### The Search Option

The platform allows users to engage in this appropriative process through the search option. Users can conduct a search for a dish based on ingredients, chefs, cooking techniques, and cultural identifiers while searching for a class; the responses are curated with results based under the following categories; *Top Results, Classes, Recipes, Shows*. This user-dependent

engagement of the search results is provided by the developers. Much as the actions that are seen when selecting a cooking class, the same hegemonic function is observed when users engage with searching for a class, television show, or recipe based on the results generated by the system. While searching for a recipe, culture, or chef's work, the system also attempts to catch user engagement with fabricated "suggestions" based on their viewing history and what is considered trending. These veiled terms of suggestions and trending are continuances in which individuals engage with, collect, and view culture outside of theirs as items of pleasure that can be discarded once their usefulness has ended.

One such cuisine that is often found trending is Mexican<sup>2</sup>. If a user searches for Mexican as the culture in which they want to enjoy the cuisine, then they are given a plethora of fabricated options based around generalizations that the content creators have made. The "Top Results" tab shows the ten most popular searches for each of the three sections. With 30 different options that include top choices for classes, shows, and recipes, you observe a rate of 40% inauthentic representation of Mexican dishes. Some of these dishes shown included are "Mexican Lasagna Suiza", "Mexican Casserole", and "Mexican Meatloaf". Having the algorithm produce results is interesting. In *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, Safiya Noble makes a key point about search engines. Alongside their help in showing specialized results, they are also part of the commercial environment. According to Noble; "Search happens in a highly commercial environment, and a variety of processes shape what can be found; these results are then normalized as believable and often presented as factual." (Noble 24-25). You see use of the name Mexican as an umbrella term to house their interpretative creations of what is considered Mexican cuisine. These results create the partition of experience and culture that Hall discusses.

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<sup>2</sup> As of 1/5/20

The developers have molded, redefined, and reimaged the term Mexican for food when searching for food as a reference point for food adventures. This reference point creates a condition where people can believe that these results are true to the how this term is used if they were to travel to Mexico themselves. This presentation of artificiality as a substitution for the real is an indicator that simulacra are used for mass-consumption.

This lack of demarcation floods the results with what the developers dictate as representations of Mexican cuisine and heritage. The developers' role as cultural creators is acted out in a few ways: it labels cultures based on demarcated boundaries, challenges authenticity, participates in the redefinition of signs and symbols, and re-image cultural iconography for capital gains. When a user creates a search, the system automatically responds due to its coding and retrieves information inputted by developers and the owners of the platform. The developers have these cultures coded in a system in which, when searching for Mexican food, a constructed system shows the user what is labeled as Mexican food within the platform. This is a coded label in which this dish is determined to be a representation of Mexican culture. There can be individuals in the decision-making process who protest this label and are in an earnest effort against this process, but the outcome is still the same; the dominant group still gets the label they have created and given. In the sense of the search input-output binary, the use of Mexican cuisine forces the system to search for everything in the depository that is labeled Mexican. Following Hall's discourses these actions allow the dominant group to create a culture and cultural goods in place of an already existing culture and their products. This act of cultural creation for appropriation is not only hegemonic because it reduces the power of another group but also because it serves the purpose of de-constructing aspects of a culture's identity, tradition and ritual, and erasure of genuineness as viewed in authenticity to feed the monster named



globalization. What is most important for this hegemonic structure to function is user engagement. When these dishes are recreated, shared among social and community circles, or when the recipes are shared digitally, users are engaging with the labels created by the dominant heteronormative group. This action of creating something physical and tangible shows how digital spaces influence what we perceive as authentic and traditional. Throughout this process, the user is the most important person. This person has to feed into search-based parameters, what cultures they wish to engage with, and how they want to engage with them. The value of each label and cultural power in this system is dependent on how often it is searched and how often people engage with these dishes through recreating or sharing them.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, it has been shown how engagement with the 's food cultures and cultural products can be experienced and shown in various media-based formats. Media remains a popular outlet because individuals do not have to leave their home to engage with food pathways as both a consumer and a producer. Lucy Long talks about the ease in which these foodways can be accessed in everyday life. Long says “By turning normally routines activities, such as shopping, cleaning up, and storing foods, into tourist sites, we can more easily contrast and negotiate the sense of difference with the familiar” (Long 438-439). With media and multi-device platforms being so easily accessible, it only takes the movement of a few fingers, and a whole world of cuisines and cultures is at a person’s disposal. Once people had to travel to experience these dishes, they can be in-home food adventurers from their couch's comfort. The food adventurer does not usually consider how their role of consumer/producer impacts the cultures they are watching, that by watching these forms of media, they are engaged with a complex system that profits and distorts the cultures of the Othered. These distortions can become recycled repeatedly through engagement with the simulacra and Third Space, causing these items to supersede and eventually replace the real. For a culture to continue and sustain growth, evolution is needed. Evolution spurred on by simulation and the simulacra is not necessarily a bad thing, such as the case of Jah Jyot, who engaged with the process to win in their episode of *Million Pound Menu*. The issue arises when the simulacra are repeatedly engaged in for-profit building, oppressing cultural groups, and performed with no regard to the culture that influenced them.

The sum total is a term evoked in this thesis several times. Scholars such as Weiss and Fanon have poked and prodded in order to understand what the make-up of culture is and how, in the sphere of culinary cultures, it is expressed and constructed. As each example has shown, there is no set answer for the variables needed. What is common with all of them is engagement with rituals, traditions, and definitions from the past. This lack of a fixed set of variables should be viewed as a positive because it accounts for the amorphous and flexible nature in which culture evolves. These three variables offer a roadmap into viewing how these cuisines are constructed and developed in an amorphous nature. In his discussions about the representations of food and drinks, Paul Manning talks about the power of culinary cultures within the definition of one's identity and culture and as markers of cultural authenticity. Manning says regarding the representation of the supra ceremony in Georgia that, "The supra then begins by producing an orderly 'cultured' ritual diagram of durable social relations centered on a focal participant." (Manning 166). While Manning is looking at the focal participant as an individual because, in the supra that is key for the ritual ceremony, it is observed multiple times throughout this thesis that the focal point in a ritual or tradition can be the ingredients, cooking process, or even the symbolism behind the dish. This looking at symbolism and its meanings is reflected within the works of Bhabha, Gannon, and Hall, who look at where we draw these meanings from. For all three, they look beyond the physical planes and are engaged within a Third Space where people subconsciously create, destroy, and redefine these symbols and meanings. Bhabha takes this one step further, for within this Third Space lies not the place where the colonial past can be deconstructed but where cultures can engage with one another to create "shared" meaning.

It is also to be said that you see actions of erasure such as cultural appropriation and assimilation within the Third Space. These actions are performed for a myriad of reasons in the case studies, from assimilating one's "offal" dishes into Western society to introduce food adventurers to a new place of discovery, to corporations working in tandem to reconfigure a culture for clicks on their multi-media platform. All of these battles with appropriation and assimilation are engaged with one key concept, and that is authenticity. This is a heavy-handed term because each person engages, views, and interprets this term differently. Their own personal engagement with their culture's traditions, rituals, and stories definitely have a part to play in this. The television show, documentary, and multi-media platform each use their own definition of authenticity differently. These interpretations of how authenticity functions as a form of representation can be presented within food spaces. The performance of authenticity highlights not only the role of ritual and tradition when a member or member(s) immigrate or migrate but also their agency to define their own engagement within these spaces. This can be viewed with the menu presented in front of the judges, a hybridized dish created to feed their family, and the number of spices placed within a meat patty. When the commodification of culture by experts and subject appropriators occurs, as noted throughout this thesis, the erasure of multiple cultural markers is seen. Within the third space the actions of subject appropriators redefine the cultural products.

These are individuals like Yeh and Zimmern, whose engagement with appropriation can be considered as an act of erasure even if done unintentionally. Young and Haley talk about this condition that misrepresentation creates when an outsider creates credibility based on misrepresentations. When these outsiders can present their version of the cultural product through more saturating methods then these simulacra interfere with the original source's attempt

to present their own definition. Even if done unintentionally, these actions have consequences and force the appropriated bodies to assimilate, and their culture evolves to fit within new definitions faster than what they would have thought was possible. Their newly-created definitions create confusion as to who can define culture and identity, the individual or the system, and creates sites that put cultural ownership into play. That is why actions perpetrated by subject appropriators can be viewed as both volatile but also challenging to the culture(s) they are engaging with.

Finally, while it is noted that these concepts were focused on food cultures and spaces, it must be said that they can be applied to fields of study. These ideas can be used to frame how world-famous DJ's and musicians' appropriate genres of music as subject appropriators or how the representation and the creation of culture can be viewed as the simulacra in video games. By analyzing the multitude of ways that food is a mechanism of cultural appropriation, this thesis demonstrates how these ideas, theories, and concepts can be used to dissect and critique appropriation in interdisciplinary spaces.

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