FORTIFYING OR FORGING DIVIDES: FOOD CULTURE THEORY AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN T.C. BOYLE'S *THE TORTILLA CURTAIN* AND JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *UNACCUSTOMED EARTH*

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INTRODUCTION

The two diasporic novels this thesis will focus on, *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), provide a "transformative site of constant renegotiation of the migrant's identity" (Mardorossian 22). This process is made visible through various signifiers as the migrant characters negotiate class, ethnic, racial, gender, and (trans-) national identities in their host countries: dress, language use, and eating habits all communicate messages that are both private affirmations and public displays about who they are. It is the role of food culture in relation to immigrant identity construction that I will focus on. Food anthropologist Eugene Anderson contends that food is only second to language in conveying a message about identity. Moreover he describes food as a "communication" of belonging or exclusion from various socially constructed groups ranging from class to ethnicity, and he examines the role of food "in the process of defining one's individuality and one's place in society" (Anderson 171).

In fiction about immigrants food also plays a signifying role. According to Roland Barthes, "Food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes [sic] information; it signifies" (Barthes 24). Adhering to or rejecting certain food acts and food communities signifies how characters perceive themselves and wish to be perceived by others; food acts simultaneously show "a surrender to pressures to assimilate and an articulation of difference" (Williams 78). The way characters communicate their identities through food and food acts uncovers two key insights into identity: identity is constructed and this construction is ongoing. Instead of being a fixed, unitary entity, Stuart Hall and others have argued, identity is a positioning, multiple and contingent, and food culture is one way to produce and perform identity. Food theory, then, is a useful analytical tool to study diasporic fiction as a "transformative site." In both T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*, food behavior

of the migrants exemplifies the ongoing vacillation between the desire for assimilation and rejection of the host culture.

In *The Tortilla Curtain*, the characters' food consumption signifies a divide between the white majority and the immigrant population, presenting an us versus them dichotomy of which Boyle is critical. A more individualized treatment of migrant identity construction is presented in the short stories in Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth*. Here the food behavior of the migrants exemplifies their struggle to reconcile their conservative Indian home identities and their public American identities. Ultimately this reconciliation presents a more hopeful representation of migrants where the migrants have agency in their identity formation and gain an understanding about the (identity) struggles inherent in their parents' migration.

First, chapter 1 will outline the general principles of food culture theory, examining more closely how insights from the field of anthropology can be applied in a literary analysis. This chapter will also lay the framework for how and what food signifies in terms of class, gender, and ethnic identities, and what the performance of these identities communicates in terms of inclusion and exclusion into a certain group. It will moreover explore why immigrant fiction is an apt genre for this application, and how and what food and food acts signify in fiction about diasporized characters.

In the subsequent two chapters, I will present a close reading of the pervasive trope of food practices in relation to the construction of migrant identities in the two literary works that serve as my case study. While both works feature immigrant characters, the type of immigrant they represent differs greatly: illegal, impoverished Mexican immigrants in *The Tortilla Curtain* and documented, middle- to upper-middle class Indians, many of whom are second-generation immigrants, in *Unaccustomed Earth*. The different demographics of these works will serve to widen the scope of the application of food culture theory to literature. Superficially the two works have over twenty years between them, and they differ in form: the

first a novel, the second a collection of short stories. Moreover, the authors' own cultural contexts provide contrasting backdrops against which to analyze their works: T.C. Boyle is a white American male author, using shifting focalization from an illegal immigrant to a native-born American whose liberal views gradually disintegrate; Jhumpa Lahiri is a second-generation Indian immigrant who explores the perspectives of both her and her parents' generation. What the works do share is a representation of immigrants and a culinary discourse which functions as a signifier of identity. What precisely is being signified and the purpose of the signaling will be the chief focus of chapters 2 and 3.

CHAPTER 1:

Food Theory and its Application in Literature

Performing and interpreting an identity through food choice is not limited to the immigrant experience. In this chapter, I will first discuss food culture theory in general before examining its applicability in immigrant fiction. Food functions as an identity marker, and it can serve to signify both a person's individual and group identities. Food anthropologist Eugene Anderson views food as a "communication" of identity that defines "one's individuality and one's place in society." As Anderson asserts, "food communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyle affiliation, and other social positions" (Anderson 171). He uses the example of someone announcing, "I'm a martini person myself" (176). This "martini person" is distinguishing himself from others—say, beer drinkers—and communicating how he wants others to see him—perhaps as a discernable, sophisticated individual. Another example from pop culture is the popularity of Cosmopolitans among women during the prime of *Sex and the City*. By aligning their drink orders with the drink orders of the women on the hit television show, these women were communicating their own urbanity and female independence.

In his essay "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" (1961), Roland Barthes defines food as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior" (Barthes 21). On a larger scale than the cocktail examples, Barthes assesses the significance of two superabundant foodstuffs: sugar in America and wine in France. He refers to both in their respective cultural contexts as "institutions" that "necessarily imply a set of images, dreams, tastes, choices, and values" (Barthes 20). He argues that the fact that an American's sugar consumption is twice that of a Frenchman's in no way means Americans innately like sugar more than Frenchmen. What and how a group consumes goes far beyond taste or geographical climate and terrain. Sugar in America and

wine in France are two modes through which to communicate a national affiliation, and their consumption reveals how a group constructs its (national) identity. Drinking a Coca-Cola in America or a Beaujolais in France signifies belonging and adherence to a prevailing lifestyle. In other words, sugar and wine are not merely products, but instead an "attitude" that is "bound to certain usages that have to do with more than food" (Barthes 20).

The field of food studies emerged around the time of publication of Barthes' essay in 1961, and was established in the 1970s, attracting scholars from the fields of sociology and anthropology. One of its pioneers, the French structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, presents a system of oppositions to decode humanity's relationship with food. In "The Culinary Triangle" (1966), Levi-Strauss points out that cooking is a "truly universal form of human activity"; just as no society is without a language, there is no society "which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food" (Levi-Strauss 28). Arguing that the way a society cooks unconsciously defines its structure and underlying belief system, he analyzes how societies are structured around certain binary oppositions: raw and cooked; fresh and rotten; boiled and roasted food. Each state communicates a different social status depending on the culture. For example, boiled food could impart a more developed and refined culture than roasted food: where the roasted product needs only fire, the boiled makes uses of both water and fire. While in other cultures, the less a food is cooked or transformed by humans, the more social prestige is ascribed to it. The contemporary Western social prestige attached to sushi and cold-pressed juices is an example. Therefore, while the binaries remain stable, the value attributed to them may change. Overall the theoretical basis of the culinary triangle echoes Barthes in that it suggests that "[meaning] does not derive from things themselves, but from the way one speaks about them or behaves towards them" (Levi-Strauss 34).

Citing Levi-Strauss's diagram of food oppositions as groundbreaking, social anthropologist Mary Douglas analyzes the codified patterns of food consumption in her

seminal article "Deciphering a Meal" (1972). After giving Levi-Strauss credit, Douglas points out that he fails to take into account "the small-scale social relations which generate the codification and are sustained by it" (Douglas 62). While Levi-Strauss focuses on the universal, Douglas focuses on the particular. She breaks down the elaborate patterned rules of each meal, depending on the social, cultural, or religious context. She argues that "the meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies" and that this meaning expresses the "different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries" (Douglas 69, 61). A simple example she provides is the different set of rules that applies to the transaction of having a drink or having a meal with someone: the former presumes distance and the latter intimacy, and each has its own social rules imbedded in its structure (Douglas 68).

This theoretical framework of food culture studies was furthered by several other anthropologists in the 1990s. Paul Fieldhouse, Carole Counihan, and Penny Van Esterik all consider the boundaries demarcated through foodways, publishing influential works about the meaning-making capacity and the social significance of the messages communicated through these foodways. Their works overlap in the analysis of how and what foodways communicate about both the individual and the collective. Fieldhouse focuses on foodways outside of the United States, having discovered through his work as a doctor abroad that the consumption of food goes far beyond its nutritional function. Counihan and Van Esterik, who both also individually write about gendered food issues, co-edited an extensive collection of articles that track the evolution of food culture theory. Their book *Food and Culture: A Reader* (1997) starts with articles by Barthes, Levi-Strauss, and Douglas (among others), and ends with chapters about food and globalization and twenty-first-century disruptions or transformations of our food systems (e.g. biotechnology, the obesity epidemic, and organic food as a gentrified commodity). All these authors have contributed to legitimizing the field of food and

culture studies, laying the groundwork for the theoretical claims upon which I base my analysis.

Crediting these earlier authors for shifting the focus of food studies from production to consumption, Eugene Anderson's *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture* (2014) offers a broad-reaching analysis of global foodways. Anderson calls his own approach a "biocultural" one, simultaneously looking at human biology, economics, and culture. He therefore writes extensively about the biological reasons why humans eat certain foods and about the different messages individuals communicate with each food choice.[1]

Each of the aforementioned studies involves a general, wide-reaching analysis of foodways. A food studies scholar of both public and private food practices who focuses specifically on immigrant foodways is Krishnendu Ray. His research centers on different ethnic groups in America, particularly South Asian immigrants. Ray has authored several publications about the function and meaning of ethnic restaurants in American culture, but he also explores what immigrants' domestic food practices communicate about their identity construction. In one such study of domestic food practices, *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households* (2004), Ray writes about the relationship between home cooking and migration in Bengali-American homes, including his own perspective as an immigrant. He defends his focus on the home when he writes, "Food locates us. Discussions about place steer us homeward and home inevitably leads to the hearth—the focus of the household" (Ray 300). A major theme of his book is showing how immigrants struggle to redefine themselves in a new context, emphasizing the tension between the nostalgia-inducing food of the homeland and the different culinary encounters with the new country that express an attempt to belong to the new culture. Using this tension, Ray highlights the importance of the immigrant's relationship with food in understanding his/her identity construction. For a

[1] Anderson notes that a chapter on art and literature would have enriched an understanding of how and what food behavior communicates about culture and identity, but this was outside his expertise (Anderson 6).

displaced person, the food of the homeland takes on a new meaning, and the migrant households Ray writes about—similar to the households in *Unaccustomed Earth*—are defined by the culinary situations in which they are located. Their rejection of or adherence to the different food communities reveals how they perceive themselves and others around them. I will use several of Ray's ideas in my analysis, including the discussion about how immigrants modify the culinary traditions of the American holidays of Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July, and what their revised versions communicate.

While some of the aforementioned publications, all written by social scientists, use media and literary examples as supporting evidence, they rely mostly on empirical research. Fiction written about (not necessarily by) immigrants is a particularly fecund source to examine food culture theory. In her 2001 book about postcolonial identity, Keya Ganguly writes, "It is difficult, if not impossible, to think of immigrant Indian existence in the United States without at the same time thinking of Indian food" (Ganguly 123). So intertwined is the Westerner's notion of the foreign other with the food s/he cooks that the one invokes the other automatically. This invocation is reductive and in some cases even negatively charged. For instance, multiple derogatory names for ethnic groups emerge from the foods they eat: think of the German "kraut"; the French "frog"; and the Mexican "beaner." On a recent episode of the popular HBO series *Veep*, Julia Louis-Dreyfus's character, the President of the United States, cannot recall how to pronounce the surname of her mother's Indian doctor, Dr. Mirpuri. Fumbling, she addresses her simply as "McCurry."[2] While intended for comedic effect, the reference indicates the casual, conventional tendency to define the ethnic "other" through food, regardless of the other's level of education or gender.

Yet this identity, so often ascribed by someone else, is obviously a social construct. More generally an individual's identity, instead of being a fixed set of defining features, is a

[2] "Mother." *Veep*, season 5, episode 4, HBO, 15 May 2016.

construction that shifts and changes, dependent on a myriad of contexts. Hall describes this non-essentialist notion of identity construction as a "positioning" (Hall, *Questions* 26). Through an ongoing process of "resisting, negotiating, and accommodating" the normative or prevailing values with which one is confronted, individuals communicate and perform their identities (Hall, *Questions* 14). The Indian, Mexican, or Chinese immigrant in America is performing an identity just like everyone else, and, part of this performance, is the adherence to or deviation from particular food norms and practices across cultures. The Indian immigrant who struggles to recreate the popular *chanachur* snack with American ingredients is performing a different identity than the Indian immigrant who claims to have lost his taste for *dal*. These performances say something about how each perceives himself and wants others to perceive him. The way someone interacts with foods provides a profusion of meanings outside of simply eating. "Eating combines biological necessity with cultural significance," argues Terry Eagleton in *Edible Ecriture* (1997). "If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food—it is endlessly interpretable" (Eagleton 204).

Interpreting the cultural meaning of food is one of the central themes in Ganguly's *States of Exception: Everyday Life and Postcolonial Identity* (2001), in which she resolves to forge the divide between anthropological scholarship that focuses on general demographic changes and "the everyday experiences of most postcolonial subjects" (Ganguly 3). Her research focuses on the daily discourse of a community of Bengali immigrants living in New Jersey, and she studies how they construct their identities through, among other things, what and how they eat. This approach to gaining a more complete picture of the immigrant experience through the analysis of the seemingly mundane can apply to the analysis of immigrant identities in literature. Applying food theory to literary analysis is precisely what Anita Mannur advocates in *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*. In this 2010 book, Mannur explores the subjective formation of diasporized identities through "the

organizing thematic" of food. She cites Ganguly's research as an epigraph to her introduction, and in the introduction itself Mannur opens with an example that confirms Ganguly's assertion that the immigrant's identity is often interconnected to food.[3] Mannur comments on a speech given by Lalit Mansingh, the former Indian ambassador to the United States. In Mansingh's speech about the Indian diaspora, he compares Indians to coconuts.[4] Mannur finds fault with this association, especially since the resilience which Mansingh is presumably invoking with his coconut metaphor applies only to successful, prosperous Indian immigrants. In other words, Mansingh's food analogy excludes a large portion of the diasporized Indian community and in turn flattens a diverse group of people. Mannur also points out that the metaphor is racially-charged, "coconut" being a term applied to Indian Americans who identify themselves as white. She references other (notably food-related) labels used in various communities to indicate the same white identification: "Oreo" in the African American community; "Twinkie" or "banana" in East Asian communities; and "apple" among Native Americans. She uses Mansingh's analogy to show both how inextricably food is wrapped up in how we perceive the other and why this essentialist identification is problematic.

Arguing that the study of food and food practices belongs not just to the social sciences, Mannur demonstrates that immigrant identities and attitudes towards immigrants can be unraveled through the signifying role of food in works of immigrant fiction. She argues

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[3] The quote Mannur uses in her epigraph (and which I cite earlier in this chapter) is "It is difficult, if not impossible, to think of immigrant Indian existence in the United States without at the same time thinking of Indian food" (Ganguly 123).

[4] Mansingh's speech was delivered in 2003 at an awards ceremony for the diasporic publication *Indians Abroad*. His exact quote, as cited in Mannur's introduction, is as follows: "I was looking for some kind of symbol which would represent the success of Indians abroad, something that would symbolize what they have gone through in their long history...Indians have gone abroad, have lived in the most challenging environments in the world and they have done well. Indian coconuts have done very well abroad. Now, what is the coconut famous for? It grows on sandy soil, requires very little water, and requires virtually no maintenance. In other words, send an Indian anywhere, just let them be, with minimum nourishment and watch the tree grow taller and taller until it dominates the landscape. That is what I think the Indian Diaspora is like."

that food "vitally articulates" key constructs of identity and provides an "alternative register through which to theorize gender, sexuality, class, and race" (Mannur 24, 19). Although she writes only about South Asian diasporic fiction, Mannur's analysis can be applied to diasporic fiction in general. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the exploration of this "largely unexplored terrain" (18), taking the literary trope of food as a "theoretical point of entry" into the construction of "diasporic formations" (Mannur 19). Another important work, about literary foodways is Lorna Piatti-Farnell's *Food and Culture in Contemporary American Fiction* (2011). Albeit not focused solely on immigrant fiction, it is very relevant, as it argues how "the act of eating serves as an important means through which social and ethnic exclusion or inclusion is perpetrated" (Piattti-Farnell 12). The "exclusion or inclusion" of the "other" through food practices, I will show, is a major theme in *The Tortilla Curtain* and *Unaccustomed Earth*.

It is useful to look at a few examples from other works of immigrant fiction to establish how identity construction and performance can be signaled by food. In Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), set in Kalimpong, a small Himalayan town in West Bengal, the Indian character of Jemubhai Patel signifies who he is by what and how he eats. His schooling in England as a young man (where his classmates relentlessly teased him, saying he stank of curry) leaves him snobbish and disdainful of the Indian way of life. After his return to India, he maintains English sensibilities to an irritating fault, insisting on scones for tea and eating even *chapatis* with a fork and knife instead of with his hands. Jemubhai condemns others who eat differently as less civilized, as he does to his granddaughter's tutor Gyan, a lower-class local student who hesitates with the cutlery at his place setting. Additionally, the sisters Noni and Lola rehearse a similar performance of English, rather than Indian, identities. From their stewed pears with cream to their marmalade jar emblazoned with the British coat of arms, their performance is so deliberate it is comedic. Desai clearly

ridicules their positioning, in much the same way as, we will see, Boyle does the pretentious eating and cooking habits of his white American characters.

The other half of *The Inheritance of Loss* is set outside of India in America. This half is focalized through the illegal immigrant Biju, who is akin to one of Boyle's two protagonists, the Mexican Cándido. Like Cándido, Biju, the son of Jemubhai's cook back in India, lives an impoverished life as an undocumented immigrant. In New York Biju works almost literally in the underbelly of American ethnic cuisine, serving in a number of roles from dishwasher to line cook. During one of his jobs as a Chinese food deliverer, he observes the strange contradiction in the food consumption of the American poor. For only a few dollars, they can buy a heaping pile of General Tso's Chicken, prompting Biju to conclude that, "In this country poor people eat like kings!" (55). He fails to grasp the codified food rules of America where lower class foodways are signaled by nutrient-poor, quantity-rich portions, and middle to upper class foodways operate inversely, valuing scarcity over excess and nutrition over empty calories. This distinction is likewise portrayed between the two social groups in *The Tortilla Curtain*.

Another pertinent example of immigrant fiction where food plays a significant signifying role is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013). A novel involving a migration and a return, the development of the Nigerian protagonist Ifemelu is mirrored by what she eats. Her journey in America begins as a poor immigrant in Brooklyn eating cheap fast food. Thirteen years later she is an artist-in-resident at Harvard eating healthy, organic fare. She is just one example in the novel of how individuals "[climb] the social pyramid with [their] mouth[s]" (Anderson 187). Perhaps the most obvious example of the signifying capacity of food is when Ifemelu visits a hair salon—a moment that opens and frames much of the novel. While Ifemelu snacks on baby carrots and granola, the hair braiders—women of a lower class who more recently emigrated from Africa to the US—eat the same greasy

Chinese takeout that Desai's Biju delivers in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Ifemelu's identity as a middle-class female who has adopted American middle-class food habits is signified by her food choices and accentuated by the different food choices of the other African women. Their General Tso's Chicken signifies their lower-class immigrant identities, and this contrast is strengthened when one of the braiders scoffs at Ifemelu's snack, telling her, "that not food" (43). Both Boyle and Lahiri also use contrast to sharpen their characters' identity constructs, demonstrating how within this realm of migrant fiction, "culinary differences throw socio-cultural boundaries into sharp relief" (Piatti-Farnell 105).

Adichie's *Americanah* presents another similar and worthwhile reference point for many of Lahiri's stories. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she struggles to reconcile her two identities. This vacillation between her American and Nigerian self is highlighted by her food behavior. Eagerly consuming all the Nigerian food she missed while living abroad, she nevertheless finds herself yearning for certain American culinary habits. She feels ashamed for harboring tastes for steamed instead of boiled vegetables, aware that these food preferences are perceived as haughty—or "Americanah"—by other Nigerians. She even condemns other Nigerians for demanding the American standard of food, and she cringes when a fellow returning Nigerian refers to Western food as, "The kind of things we can eat" (422). Eventually in *Americanah* Ifemelu seems to reach a middle ground between her American self and her Nigerian self, a reconciliation that many of the characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* also reach.

While I do not intend to make my own identity construction a central part of this research, I would be remiss if I left out my own culinary perspective. As an American immigrant in The Netherlands, I regularly field questions about food that supposedly defines the American. Dutch people react surprised to learn I am a vegetarian ("but all Americans love hamburgers?"), and alternatively their assumptions seems validated when they note how

much coffee I consume ("Americans and their free refills"). Just as Mannur argues, I am defined by others—in this case as a meat-loving, coffee-guzzling American—on the basis of a set of culinary assumptions that supposedly form my essential national identity. At the same time, I cannot deny that the food choices I make signify features of my self-constructed identity. The fact that I consciously do not eat meat says something about my rejection of the American love for meat and the factory farming system behind it. I am deliberately making a statement by disavowing this staple of the American diet, and "the beliefs and behavior surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food" (Counihan 2). Moreover, my vegetarianism signifies both my race and socio-economic status, as the majority of vegetarians in America are white, middle-upper class (Maurer 8). In this way, I am confirming my belonging to these demographics. Additionally, my consciously healthy food choices signify my gender, as I adhere to the "so virulently enforced cultural codes of [female] thinness" in the West (Counihan 127). Finally, I must include my own connection to the immigrant food nostalgia about which Ray writes. Just as Ray's Bengali-American families—and Boyle's Mexican and Lahiri's Indian characters—attempt to recreate food from their countries of birth, I too sentimentally prepare food from America. Ironically my most iconic American dish that I am known for in certain Dutch circles is a seven-layer bean dip that undoubtedly is more connected to Mexican fare. Literary scholar Daria Tunca writes about this non-essentialist aspect of food. She points out that pizza and French fries—two ubiquitously American foods—originated outside of America. Their Italian and Belgian roots "serve to demonstrate how pointless cultural essentialism can be." Instead of existing as finished, isolated products, cultures are constantly undergoing changes and are not "entities around which artificial boundaries can be drawn" (Tunca 304). This notion of artificial culinary boundaries can serve as a metaphor for the geographically-constructed boundaries dividing nations.

This nostalgia for American (Italian/Belgian/Mexican) food is no more virulently felt than during the quintessentially American celebrations of the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. On these two days, I signify my American identity through the preparation of patriotic red-white-and-blue cupcakes and (vegetarian) hot dogs in July and traditional candied yams and pumpkin pie in November. With my "ethnically coded" food choices, I am communicating my nationality, and to some extent distinguishing myself from the native population (Mannur 49). As we will see, both Boyle's novel and Lahiri's short story collection include the latter of the American holidays. Their characters' culinary relationships with this holiday feast tellingly signify their attitudes towards and beliefs about America and its cultural food traditions.

Finally, the content of this research is relevant to the increasingly globalized world and politics. In his 2004 book *Food is Culture*, Massimo Montanari references Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's 1825 book, *The Physiology of Taste*, a work that was a commercial success and has been described as a "landmark in the gastronomic literature" (book jacket 2002 edition). Brillat-Savarin prefaces his book with twenty aphorisms, one of which is "Tell me what you eat: I will tell you who you are" (Aphorism IV). This notion of defining a person by what he or she eats is rendered problematic by today's globalized world where we are simultaneously more mobile and exposed to a wider range of culinary experiences through this mobility. The British foreign secretary Robin Cook's now famous "Chicken Tikka Masala" speech (2001) epitomizes the transformation of our global and culinary landscape.[5] Through a food analogy, Cook argues that immigration has (positively) influenced and enriched the lives of both the immigrants and the native citizens in England. The question of

[5] In his speech to the Social Market Foundation in London, Cook exemplifies the union of cultures in England through this popular meal. "Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Massala sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy." This and more extracts from Cook's speech are available in the 19 April 2001 edition of *The Guardian*.

why Indian fast food is the number one British take-out says more about the *positioning* of British national identity and the British attitudes and beliefs than merely the homogeny of their taste buds. The popularity of Indian food in Britain could reflect a nostalgic attachment to the colonial empire and, at the same time, a more diversified culinary terrain. Therefore, food has become an increasingly "necessary path to reimagine the terms" applied to immigrant populations "in the wake of multiculturalism's ostensible interest in navigating 'difference'—racial, ethnic, cultural" (Mannur 19). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that this communication is only part of the picture. The themes concerning the portrayal and treatment of (illegal) immigrants prevail in a contemporary global climate where in 2016 Western citizens are casting votes for referendums that isolate and for candidates who ostracize. Both Brexit and Donald Trump's presidential campaign serve as sharp examples as to why Boyle's 1995 novel—which opposes a privileged white view of immigration with that of an undocumented immigrant—remains, over twenty years later, food for thought.

Unlike Boyle, Lahiri came to the U.S. as an immigrant, and her immigrant background heavily informs her writing, providing a different kind of food for thought. Lahiri herself serves as an example of the non-essentialist nature of identity: born to Indian parents in London and raised in America from the age of two, she has navigated the vicissitudes of multiple cultures her whole life. While she has frequently contended the labeling of her work as autobiographical, she does concede that many seeds of her fiction originate from her own reality growing up Indian in America. For instance, her Pulitzer Prize-winning first collection of short stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* accesses memories from the Bengali community in Rhode Island in which Lahiri grew up (Lahiri, "Maladies of Belonging"). In a 2006 article written for *Newsweek*, Lahiri recounts a childhood "shuttling between" both sides of the hyphen in the term so often applied to her: Indian-American. Her essay "My Two Lives" unpacks Lahiri's attitude towards her Indian and American selves. She describes how at home

she ate traditional Indian food with her fingers, while she would carefully hide her customary way of eating along with other parts of her immigrant identity from her American friends (Lahiri, “My Two Lives”). The second-generation characters in *Unaccustomed Earth* do just that, living one way with their parents at home, and another way with their school friends and then later in their adult lives. This act of performing one ethnic identity in the private realm and another in the public is an ever-present feature in immigrant fiction. One way of analyzing this performance and its cause and effect is through foodways.

CHAPTER 2:

Exclusivity and Preservation: Food as a Barrier in *The Tortilla Curtain*

There are two intersecting plotlines in *The Tortilla Curtain*: a Mexican couple struggles to build a life in America and a group of white Americans struggles to keep them out. This conflict—symbolized by the high wall the white Americans erect around their properties—invites questions about land borders, immigration, and both blatant and implicit racism. Initially the white residents justify the construction of the wall as a means to keep out coyotes; however, gradually it blatantly becomes a way of keeping out the illegal immigrants who could burglarize their homes. (Ironically these illegal immigrants are the ones who are contracted to build the very wall meant to keep them out). As the novel progresses, the coyote and the immigrant become interchangeable in the discourse of the white residents. As Heather J. Hicks notes, "the coyote's transgressions of domestic borders also must be read allegorically for immigrants' transgressions of national borders" (47). This allegory is most obvious when, in the early chapters of the novel, one of Kyra's (notably white) dogs is taken from the backyard by a coyote. Later, after her second dog is also caught by a coyote, her response is to demand an even higher fence. At the same time, when a home in the neighborhood is burglarized, many community members call for a fully enclosed wall and gate that will keep out criminals and wildlife alike. Yet the wall's erection communicates more than a wish to secure material possessions; it also signifies the white residents' ardent desire to secure their identities in the face of the "other." As Hicks argues, the novel "suggest[s] that what Mexicans most conspicuously threaten is whites' possession of whiteness itself" (Hicks 47). The construction of "whiteness" by racializing the Mexican "other" is metaphorically represented by culinary tropes. This construction is made visible by its juxtaposition with the Mexican "other," revealing the fabricated parameters of gender,

class, and ethnicity within which both groups construct their identities—albeit the room to do so is more limited for the Mexican immigrants.

The title *The Tortilla Curtain* already indicates that food signifies the divide between white America and the Mexican other. Not only does the title incorporate a recognizable staple of Mexican cuisine, it also uses it to denote a barrier. Its allusion to the Cold War and the Soviet Union's Iron Curtain connotes an imposed and impenetrable—albeit intangible—border. The border in the novel is not the physical wall with Mexico called for in the political rhetoric of the 2016 campaign trail, but it is a cultural boundary that prevents any kind of understanding being formed between the privileged white American citizens and the illegal Mexican migrants. In *The Tortilla Curtain,* this refusal to connect is represented as a *culinary* boundary. Clearly noteworthy is Boyle's inclusion of a ubiquitous Mexican food that is not only prominent in the Mexican kitchen, but also a mainstay in American-Mexican, or Tex-Mex, cuisine.[6] Ironically, while the food is used to allude to a *boundary* with the word "curtain," in reality the tortilla is a culinary *binder* akin to the Italian pizza or the Belgian French fries, which Tunca uses to illustrate the futility of cultural essentialism (Tunca 304). While these food products are widely recognized and often associated with their country of origin, they are just as frequently consumed elsewhere.

Boyle incorporates another allusion with the novel's epigraph from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*: "They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable" (epigraph). This quote is from a scene in Steinbeck's 1939 novel in which two gas attendants are discussing their recently-departed customers, members of the Joad family whose story the novel narrates and who suffer one hardship after another (much like *The Tortilla Curtain*'s Cándido whose own name

[6] In his 2012 book *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*, which explores the 125-year evolution of Mexican cuisine in the United States, Gustavo Arellano writes, "Mexican food is as much of an ambassador for the United States as the hot dog, whether either country wants to admit it or not" (5).

alludes to Voltaire's equally desolate Candide). In Steinbeck's novel "they" are the "Okies," American farmers from the Oklahoma "dust bowl" who are hit hardest by the Great Depression. Diminished to an animal-like existence by their poverty, they travel around the American West in a state of desperation, searching for any scraps of paying work they can find. With his epigraph Boyle links the 1930s "Okie" migrants with the contemporary Mexican migrants: both live hand to mouth and are driven by their impoverished circumstances to seek out any paying work they can find—no matter how back-breaking or demeaning. With the quote from Steinbeck's classic novel, Boyle prompts the reader to wonder to whom the pronoun "they" refers in the story ahead. Additionally, who are the "we" passing judgement on "them"?

In Boyle's novel, the American economy is in a vastly different state than in Steinbeck's Great Depression era, and the "us" versus "them" dichotomy to which Boyle alludes is clear when considering the time and place in which he is writing. At the time of the original publication (1995), illegal immigration was a prominent topic in the American news, particularly in the states bordering Mexico. T.C. Boyle, a California resident himself, has credited the inundation of news stories about illegal Mexicans crossing the border as the impetus for writing his novel. In a 1994 interview with the *Montreal Gazette,* he explained it as a means to work through his own feelings about illegal immigration.[7] Mexicans, who account for approximately half (52%) of the unauthorized immigrant population in the United State today, were the largest group of illegal immigrants during the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to the Pew Research Center, immigration during this time period was steadily increasing, and the estimated number of illegal Mexican immigrants residing in the U.S.

[7] Boyle said he was unsure how he felt about the influx of illegal immigration in his state, and writing about the topic was "[t]o see how I feel about the situation" (Smith). In her article about whiteness in *The Tortilla Curtain*, Hicks cites the same quote from this interview.

increased by four million from 1996 to 2007.[8] Back in 1994, reflecting the growing angst of Californians, residents voted to pass Proposition 187. This legislation removed any kind of social services for illegal immigrants and adequately reflected the state population's fear that immigrants were draining the resources meant for them, the legal citizens.[9] As mentioned before, this fear of having property stolen or destroyed by illegal immigrants plays a major role in the novel. In this chapter I will show how food signifies this desire to maintain control and how this control over body and property signifies the attempt to restrict individual and group identity.

The physical setting of Southern California allows Boyle to explore the contested space where these groups have struggled to live together. There is a long Spanish history in the state, most notably its near eighty-year period of Mexicanization from 1769-1846. During this time the Spanish flag ruled, yet the state was populated mostly by Mestizo settlers from Mexico. Today the Latino population (predominately Mexican or second- or third-generation Mexicans) outnumbers the white population. However, this statistic only includes the legal citizens or residents, and California is one of the six U.S. states that together account for 60% of the population of unauthorized immigrants.[10]At the same time, among the population of California are the type of nature lovers who founded the Sierra Club and champion the Slow Food movement.[11] These environmentalists are living alongside the influx of migrant workers who harvest the organic almonds and artichokes the former group so avidly consumes on their hikes and in their kitchens. Ironically, the ubiquitous California concept of "farm to table" extends no further than the transaction of food: often those farming the food remain unknown

[8] The Pew Research Center—a non-partisan American research institute—runs a regularly-updated website dedicated to reporting research on immigration in The United States. *Pewhispanic.org* specifically follows and analyzes the immigration trends of the Hispanic population. The organization predicts that by 2060, the Hispanic population in California will account for 60% of the state's total population.
[9] Robin Dale Jacobson examines the motivations and uncovers the fears behind the supporters of the voter initiative in *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate Over Immigration* (2008).
[10] Ibid.
[11] See Leitch.

and invisible, or even—in the case of *The Tortilla Curtain*—a source of fear for those preparing and consuming it at their tables. With his novel, Boyle is highlighting the irony of this situation. While these privileged white Californians (sometimes self-righteously) identify themselves as protectors of the environment and promoters of sustainable living through how and what they eat, they simultaneously fail to extend the thoughtful approach they have towards the environment to the less privileged members of society living in their backyards.[12]

Boyle highlights this contradiction with the character of Delaney Mossbacher, a white American, and one of the novel's two protagonists. A resident of Arroyo Blanco (literally "white stream" in English), Delaney is on his way to the recycling center with his quintessentially American "mayonnaise jars and Diet Coke cans" when the story begins (16). As he negotiates the windy roads, he collides into the novel's other protagonist, the illegal Mexican immigrant, Cándido Rincón. Delaney, a self-proclaimed "liberal humanist" and nature columnist, begins his transformation into a bigot the moment of this collision. Prior to striking Cándido, Delaney lived in an isolated bubble of whiteness and in willful ignorance of the "other's" existence. From their initial encounter, Boyle immediately uses food to signify the identity constructions of these two characters. Before heading to the recycling center, Delaney is introduced while eating an "omelette aux fines herbes" at the French eatery Emilio's (16). This consumption of fancy restaurant fare in the middle of the day already hints at his social status. Pages later, at the moment of impact, Delaney notices how a "sack of *tortillas (Como Hechas a Mano*), clung to the man's crotch as if fastened there" (19). Delaney's observation about the tortillas accomplishes two things. First, it immediately defines his victim as a racialized other. The stylization of the word "sack" (suggesting some kind of bulk or bargain purchase) and the Spanish "*como Hechas a Mano*" (handmade) signify Cándido's class and ethnicity. Moreover, the French "omelette aux fines herbes" that

[12] In the *Encyclopedia of American Social History* (1993), historian James Gregory writes that "California enters the 1990s poised either to move forward into a new era of pluralist understanding or backwards into familiar cycles of conflict" (1132). The Mossbachers and their neighbors represent the latter.

Delaney was consuming only a few moments prior to the accident had no italics, while the tortillas are given italics, underscoring their foreignness, and hinting at their undesirability in the eyes of the group of white Americans in this novel. Secondly, the fact that the tortillas are "fastened" to Cándido's "crotch" suggests that his (masculine) identity is reduced and essentialized through what he consumes. To Delaney and the other white Americans, Cándido is first and foremost Mexican rather than a man. The reduction or dehumanizing of the immigrant identity through what s/he eats is exactly what scholars Ganguly and Mannur are critical of (Ganguly 2001; Mannur 2009).

This tendency to define others through their food shows how this agency to construct identity is often stripped from the immigrant him- or herself. As Brown and Mussel point out "Mainstream Americans frequently use foodways as a factor in the identification of subcultural groups," employing the traditional food and ingredients of the "other" as "a set of convenient ways to categorize" (Brown and Mussell 3). This categorization frequently connotes pejorative sentiments. In Boyle's 1990 novel *East is East,* the protagonist internally refers to the whites as "butter-stinkers" and the blacks as "cannibals."[13] Similar negative characterization is applied in *The Tortilla Curtain* when the white American teenager Jack Cherrystone, Jr. destroys the Mexican Cándido's camp, scrawling "BEANERS DIE," in dark red paint (64). The derogatory name originating from one of the staples of the Mexican diet displays how the immigrant is reduced to his signature cuisine. Jack Jr.'s act of vandalism shows how "food and culinary practices hold an extraordinary power in defining the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'" (Lupton 26). In the case of the teenage Cherrystone and the Mexican Cándido, the "us" are the privileged white with their seemingly limitless food options, and "them" the impoverished Mexicans living hand to mouth. This dichotomy is affirmed and reaffirmed by the cooking and eating practices of both groups, highlighting how

[13] Like *The Tortilla Curtain, East is East* presents contrasting points of view through alternating perspectives and explores the themes of race, class, and how our perceptions of the "other" are steeped in self- and collectively constructed prejudices.

social distinctions are generated and maintained through the contrasting foodways and underscoring the wider context of social injustice.

The structure of the novel strengthens the contrast between the two groups by alternating focalization between the upper-middle class Delaney and his wife Kyra and the illegal Mexican immigrant Cándido and his wife América. Food also frequently serves as both the link between chapters and the element that highlights the differences between them. For instance, a scene focalized through the Mexican characters ends with Cándido speculating about the canned sardines his pregnant wife might have been able to buy with a day's earnings (88). The subsequent passage, focalized through the white American, opens with Delaney rushing out to buy imported pasta for the mussels marinara he has been simmering on the stove for hours (92). The fact that both their meals feature seafood on opposite ends of the price spectrum—canned sardines and fresh mussels—sharpens Boyle's deliberate comparison. Another example is when a chapter set in the canyon where the illegal immigrants hide out closes with Cándido roasting sausages over a campfire and swilling cheap wine out of a gallon jug. The next chapter on the mountainside opens with Delaney basting tofu kebabs "with his special honey-ginger marinade," while Kyra indulges in her "weekly glass of Chardonnay" (159). The "glass-topped table by the pool" where Kyra lifts "morsels" of tofu and oyster mushrooms to her lips while sipping Perrier (159) is a far cry from Cándido crouched over his campfire, "using a tortilla like a glove" to pull the sausages "off the stick and feed them into his mouth" (157).

The novel's structure further serves to expose the tendency to essentialize the food identity of others by confirming the conjectures of each character about the other. When Delaney pictures the immigrants as eating unrefrigerated tortillas with "cold mashed beans dug out of the forty-nine-cent can" in one chapter (22), in the next Cándido is clutching those same unrefrigerated tortillas while his wife reheats leftover "pinto beans burned into the

bottom of the pot" (27). Kyra's recollection of nudity, campfires, and huts from a tour she took in Mexico (143) is repeatedly reenacted in the camp of Cándido and América (although their crude living conditions are imposed upon them by their circumstances). It works the other way around as well. América, dreaming of the mangos and oranges from her homeland, fantasizes about owning an American house with a kitchen equipped with a "gas range and refrigerator" (37). The next chapter focalized through Delaney opens with just this kind of kitchen. He is cutting up the fresh fruit for which she was just longing as he prepares breakfast for his wife and her son Jordan. Likewise, Cándido bitterly imagines the white Americans leaving "half-eaten lobsters and beefsteaks on their plates," and indeed the white characters are often depicted as leaving unfinished food. These confirmations highlight the injustice underlying foodways about which each group is aware but unable or unwilling to do anything.

The structural preoccupation invites a more in-depth comparative analysis of how the two couples perform their respective identities in terms of food and food practices and how established class, gender, and ethnic boundaries are "maintained by eating differences" (Counihan 126). It is important to note that the categories of class, gender, and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive. A food act that communicates a certain class could also be gendered or racialized. For instance, Kyra's breakfast of "twelve separate vitamins" and "half a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice" (59) says something about her adhering to the "culture of thin" that is wrapped up in the gender identity of the white wealthy female (Counihan 127). In her chapter on "Food Rules in the USA" in *The Anthropology of Food and Body*, Carole Counihan notes "the higher one's class, the thinner one is likely to be" (Counihan 123). Kyra's mineral supplements reveal how she subscribes to the middle-upper class sensibility that food needs to be modified.[14] This one meal positions her in alignment with all three

[14] Jenna Hollenstein unpacks which demographic groups are most likely to supplement their diet and why in the chapter "Who Takes Dietary Supplements" in her book *Understanding Dietary Supplements* (2007).

identity constructs, and signals that identity performance is not only a public display of group belonging, but also "a private affirmation of identification" which ensures that a "sense of belonging is constantly reinforced" (Fieldhouse 122).

Kyra consistently signals her gender identity through her food choices. In addition to her regimented diet, she limits her alcohol intake and commits to a regular exercise routine. At different points in the novel she is seen dipping her fork into "no-fat" salad dressing instead of pouring it on top, consuming a weekly glass of wine, and swimming laps in their backyard pool. Early in the novel, she reflects on how she and her husband identify themselves as "joggers, nonsmokers, social drinkers, and if not full-blown vegetarians, people who were conscious of their intake of animal fats" (41). Her self-imposed restrictions on what and how much she consumes exemplify "Western women's strong concern to control their food intake," which functions as "a metaphor for their efforts to control their own bodies and destinies" (Counihan 100). Strikingly, Kyra's own hyper-control stands in opposition to the Mexican's complete lack of control over their own food choices.

In addition to exercising control over her own food consumption, she likewise controls exactly what her son Jordan may eat. Along with the vitamins he too must take with breakfast, she insists upon "the full nutritional slate" that includes fresh fruit and grains and plenty of fiber (41). She herself seems less concerned with her own nutritional intake outside of how what she eats affects her figure. She is rarely depicted finishing any meal (more often she leaves food on her plate), and most references to her consumption involve the drinking of calorie-deplete Diet Coke, designer water (Evian or Perrier), or black coffee. Notably, the Styrofoam cup out of which she drinks her black coffee indicates her own disregard of the environment when making food choices. Unlike Delaney, she eats organic food not because she cares about the environment, but because it is both healthier and more exclusive; its

consumption signals her narcissism and adherence to the norms of the groups with which she identifies.

While she is the one who dictates what her child eats, it is Delaney who prepares not only her son's breakfast, but all the meals in their household. This inverse of traditional gender roles underscores how the characters identify themselves as a modern couple. This liberal façade remains rooted in their kitchen, contrasting with their reactionary views about immigration and their determination to maintain their own privileged isolation. Boyle highlights this ironic discrepancy through their last name of Mossbacher. This appellation is not far off from the term "mossbacks," meaning unprogressive types who remain stagnant, committed to the traditional values of the past.[15] Their conservative world view contrasts with their so-called family values, underscoring the hypocrisy of their lifestyles. Kyra, a career-driven realtor, places her work above her family. As the couple is already financially secure due to an inheritance of Delaney's, her career-drive has more to do with image than earning. Delaney claims to having no problem with Kyra's being the main breadwinner, and he enjoys the luxury of having time to prepare elaborate dinners each day. Nevertheless, in public, they adhere to more traditional culinary roles, for example when the couple hosts a Thanksgiving dinner and Kyra takes charge. According to Janet Siskind, at Thanksgiving traditional "gender roles and family hierarchy are reaffirmed" (Siskind 54). The white couple is performing one identity privately and another publicly, which is not unlike the identity performance of the Indian-American characters in Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories that will be discussed in chapter 3.

Also noteworthy is that Delaney's development from an emancipated homemaker to a more traditionally masculine avenger is signaled by food. In Part One he comes across as

[15] A few critics have observed the significance of their appellation as well, including Hicks (2003). Hicks also points out the "plethora of Jacks" in the novel that flag Arroyo Blanco as a "bastion of white culture" (46), and the names of the Mossbacher's pets that allude to past British literary figures whose works are imbued with nostalgia for the age of aristocracy in England.

unhindered by traditional gender roles and stereotypes. For example, his drink preference of (only one) Sauvignon Blanc is a beverage that is light and calorie-poor, two descriptions more often ascribed to female comestibles. This preference for white wine is offset by the hyper-masculine Jack Cherrystone's Scotch (no ice) and the Mexican Cándido's Budweiser ("The King of Beers"). As Delaney grows increasingly bigoted, he signals a more masculine identity. He drinks (more than one) beer on Thanksgiving, and, after purchasing a gun, he drinks hard liquor with Jack. His carefully-constructed food and drink limitations give way to more reckless, alcohol consumption. Once he begins his vigilante surveillance of the community, he no longer spends hours in the kitchen concocting his own special marinade for artichokes or waking up early to prepare Kyra's fresh juice and Jordan's high-fiber morning meal. He eats hurried, simple dinners and either distractedly burns the morning toast or sleeps through breakfast.

In contrast to the progressive façade of the Mossbachers' gender performance, Cándido and América vigilantly rehearse traditional gender roles. Cándido exchanges his meager pay for discount groceries, and América prepares their meals. Moreover, Cándido imitates the traditional role of hunter, a role that links him to the coyotes aggravating the white residents of Arroyo Blanco. Cándido kills birds and lizards to prevent spending their cache of money on food, and in a gesture ripe with masculinity, he plucks the birds and fries them in lard, "heads and all" (170). Even though his wife will not eat them, he takes satisfaction in sucking the miniature bones clean, "the satisfaction of the hunger, the man who could live off the land" (169). Further in this chapter I will discuss later events that serve to strengthen this comparison between the Mexican couple and the coyote. At the start, after Delaney hits Cándido with his car, the couple's distribution of food tasks is disrupted. As their rations dwindle and Cándido remains unfit for physical labor and hunting, he begrudgingly allows América to try to find work. His shame at his wife having to get a job functions

antithetically to Delaney's own nonplussed attitude towards his own wife's work demands. Cándido defines his shame by his inability to provide food, viewing himself as a "broken-down father who couldn't feed himself, let alone his family" (172). His masculine identity is stripped away by his failure to provide food, while América's own feminine identity is amplified through cooking and eating. Unlike Kyra, she craves food and fullness. When she earns a paycheck, she imagines how she and Cándido will "stuff themselves till their stomachs swelled and their tongues went thick in their throats" (113). As they walk happily back from the convenience store together, their mouths covered in the "shared sweetness of a chocolate bar" they have just hungrily consumed, América's contemplation of the feast before them is steeped in sexual language:

> They would fill their stomachs and lie on the blanket in their hut and make love hidden away from the world. They would eat the sardines with the white bread first, while the fire settled and *hamburguesa* meat snapped and hissed…they would dip into the hot grease with their tortillas to take the edge off their hunger, and the meat would form the foundation of the stew till at eleven or maybe even midnight they would pour steaming cups of it from the pot. All that. (113)

Food is very much tied up in América's sexuality, and her pregnancy heightens the association. This union between food and life resonates when Cándido contemplates the growing life in his wife's womb as she nakedly squats over the fire "busy with the meat, the pot, the onions and chiles and rice" (114-5). While preparing this feast after her first day of paid labor, América is aware that her husband feels hurt that he has "a woman earning his keep" (116), and she tries to distract him as she cooks in an attempt not to de-value his masculine identity. This scene of the naked and pregnant América cooking over a fire starkly contrasts with the pre-planned, carefully-timed dinners in Delaney's kitchen. As Hicks points out, the white couple's commitment to structure is a symbolic rejection of "the freedom and sexuality" of the Mexican couple (Hicks 55), and this applies to their food behavior as well.

This contrast between control and recklessness reflects the different classes that the two couples represent through their interactions with food. In the face of excess, Delaney and Kyra impose restrictions upon their eating, while the Mexican couple indulges in excess in the face of restrictions. The former couple consume elaborate, pretentious meals that signify their privileged class. The ingredients for these meals are purchased at markets that offer delicatessen items and cater to the wealthier classes. The American supermarket chains Whole Foods and Trader Joe's are real world equivalents that foreground the environmental concerns of the middle and upper classes represented by Delaney in the novel. Rachel Slocum describes these stores as "white spaces" that promote exclusivity and privilege, separating people on the basis of "their ability to consume" (Slocum 2007). Delaney signals his consumer ability when he runs out to Gitello's to pick up pasta. Even though the impetus for the trip had been only pasta, Delaney immediately considers what else they might "need," and he fills his basket with the imported pericatelli pasta along with "two baguettes, a wedge of Romano, a gallon of milk and a jar of roasted peppers" (93). This urge to consume luxury food items also aligns Delaney with his ethnic-racial identity (in line with Slocum's argumentation), a topic I will discuss later. For these white Americans the act of consumption is secondary to the primary desire of ownership—the more exclusive the items to be owned, the better. Notably the Italian imports Delaney purchases are unitalicized, signaling their acceptability and how their accessibility is taken for granted by the privileged whites.

In fact, this European delicatessen reflect the distinction Boyle makes between what immigrants are "acceptable" to a certain layer of American society and which are not. He exemplifies this selective acceptance through the food choices of the white, upper-middle class characters: Delaney's preparation of French salad niçoise and Italian mussels marinara, and Kyra's open houses with French Brie, Danish soda bread, and Japanese sushi. They eat and serve only a certain type of foreign fare, and their choices indicate a certain ranking

system of ethnic preference. In her 2012 book *Fashioning Appetites: Restaurants and the Making of Modern Identity*, Joanne Finklestein argues that "Food and its manner of presentation have become symbols of social differentiation" (Finklestein 31). She writes extensively about how "social distinctions are symbolized through food" and the "system of ranked preferences" these distinctions produce (Finklestein 197). The Mossbachers' patronage of a fashionable Indian restaurant with valet parking, the sushi place Tarzana, and the popular French restaurant Emilio's communicates their acceptance of the ethnic groups with which these places are connected on their own terms.

This "social differentiation" symbolized by where they eat and shop operates in opposition to where Cándido and América eat and shop. Forced to go to Li's Market, the discount grocer, their own ranking system is based on who looks at them with the least disdain. At Li's, Cándido notes the immigrant owner does not view him as an animal. Here they purchase typical American junk food alongside ingredients to prepare Mexican dishes. They are far removed from the white privileged position of picking and choosing among luxury goods, and they could not even purchase the gallon of milk Delaney bought in the previous example, as they have no means to keep it cold. Also, unlike the American couple, they have no spending power to explore unfamiliar cuisines, and their purchases manifest the diet of the poor. Poverty is signaled by a diet high in sugars, fats, and starches. The starch, which constitutes the bulk of the diet, varies depending on the ethnic group. Whatever the starch—potatoes, Indian fry bread, tortillas—it is consumed to achieve satiety, not for its nutritional value (Fitchen 390). Moreover, their lower—or even invisible—class status is emphasized through their paltry homestead centered around a campfire. América bitterly muses how "every time she wanted a cup of coffee she had to gather twigs and start a fire" (174). This thought directly contrasts with the ease with which Kyra, a few pages earlier, pulled into a convenience store and bought a coffee made by someone else (174).

Their lowly status is no more keenly foregrounded than when Cándido realizes he will have to expose América to looting the dumpsters of fast food chain restaurants. They will have to seek out sustenance amidst the trash of the very type of restaurant that the privileged whites scorn. When Cándido dives into the Kentucky Fried Chicken dumpster, he is oblivious to the "dark quick shadow that shot out from beneath the bin," disappearing under the fence beyond the parking lot (203). This ambiguous shadow emphasizes their reduction to animals, and the motif of the fence harks back to the coyotes darting under the Arroyo Blanco fences. At this moment América fully realizes their dire position as coyote-like scavengers in this foreign country:

> All at once she understood: garbage, they were going to eat garbage. Sift through it like the *basueros* at the dump, take somebody else's filthy leavings, full of spit and maggots and ants. Even at their lowest, even in Tijuana in the dump they'd been able to scrape together a few centavos to buy steamed corn and *caldo* from the street vendors. (203)

While identity is a positioning, this scenario provides another instance where the immigrants are reduced to a state where they have no capacity to position their own identities. Their circumstances instead signal their lack of agency and reduction to an animal state that echoes the epigraph's "they ain't human." This animal state is reinforced chapters later following the Thanksgiving fire that forces them out of the canyon. While the residents of Arroyo Blanco Estates are only temporarily evacuated from their homes due to the fire, the Mexican couple loses all their worldly possessions and resorts to living behind theses massive homes in a hut fashioned with parts from a doghouse and complete with dog bowls for cook pots. More significant is the stolen food they eat in this part of the novel: fruit and vegetables, pet food, and even the pets themselves. The circle of comparison with the scavenging coyote is complete when Cándido—like the coyote who ate Kyra's dogs—kills and eats the Mossbachers' cat.

The link to the coyotes' scavenging also signals once more how the Mexican couple's ethnic identities are superimposed upon them by others. With the intent of discussing the building of the wall (to keep out the coyotes) and a gate (to keep out immigrants), the men of Arroyo Blanco convene at Dominick Flood's house. Flood, a known criminal under house arrest, has committed crimes whose white-collar nature exempt him from condemnation. His wealth, signaled by his huge property and lavish cocktail parties, permits him membership to their group despite his criminal record. As the group participates in this opulent men's club, coyotes howl in the distance. Jack Shirley (one of the novel's three white Jacks) comments that "the natives are getting restless" (165). One of the other Jacks replies that maybe "they" want to join them for coffee and brioches, "tired of raw rat or whatever they're eating out there" (165). Both Jack Shirley's use of "the natives" and his respondent's "they" function ambiguously. The two men seem to be referring to the coyotes that just howled; however, they could also refer to the white man's attitude towards the Mexicans who they fear are "getting restless" and thus endangering their property. The reference is furthermore reinforced by the fact that Cándido has been reduced to eating rat himself, cooking an opossum over his campfire a few chapters earlier. Yet rather than invite them in, these men advocate the building of tall fences at the back of their properties to keep out the (wildlife) animals and a locked gate at the front of their properties to keep out the (Mexican) animals. Tucking into their French pastries, these men strive to preserve their white isolation, a desire signified by their unwillingness to share their food. Their constructed foodways "are an affirmation of [their] cultural identity" and are therefore "not easily given up" or shared with others outside of their group (Fieldhouse 76).

Moreover, the use of the word "natives" in Jack's comment is significant. This scene takes place in Part Two: *El Tenksgeevee*—a play on the way the Mexicans pronounce the American holiday of Thanksgiving. Siskind contends that this "construct of 'natives' as non-

humans has incorporated many others," expanding to encompass a range of non-white immigrant groups. This new group is "more likely to share the symbolic and actual fate of the Native Americans" left out of the mythical version of the Thanksgiving story (Siskind 55). The construction of Thanksgiving contains two narratives originating in Puritan New England after the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620. The underrepresented narrative is the dispossession and dislocation of native people by white settlers; this historical fate of the Native Americans is either skimmed over or skipped entirely in public education. The other narrative, and the one ascribed to by the dominant culture and taught broadly in American schools, features European settlers sharing a meal with the compliant and grateful Native Americans. In this whitewashed account, the shared meal is symbolic of the civilizing of the natives, and its mythical quality "lends an aura of naturalness and inevitability to the invasion and colonization of North America" (Siskind 55). It operates as a self-righteous justification for social injustice on the part of the whites. This second part of *The Tortilla Curtain* contains a retelling of the Thanksgiving story, parodying the already existing revisionist history at play. Ironically, while Thanksgiving functions to validate for Americans theirs as a nation of immigrants, in Boyle's retelling the Americans work to eliminate immigrants.

In Boyle's version the white community at Arroyo Blanco Estates plays the part of the European settlers, and Cándido and América assume the role of the Native Americans. Delaney even refers to himself as "The Pilgrim of Topanga Canyon" in his nature column, and in the first chapter of Part Two, a link is established between the Mexicans and the Native Americans through the character of América. Contemplating their lifestyle of camping out and cooking food over an open fire, she likens herself and Cándido to the "Indians" who once lived in the open air (125). América's dream, however, follows the path of *the* American Dream. It mimics the mythicized account of the Pilgrim-Indian story, wherein she and Cándido eventually overcome their hardships and look back on them fondly. Yet the

traditional narrative of what actually happened to the Native Americans is reprised in the novel (and confirms Siskind's assertion about the "other"). Just as the European settlers and their descendants displaced the indigenous population in North America (including those residing in what was once Mexico before the conquest of a large part of Mexican territory in 1848), the contemporary white Americans perpetuate the cycle of oppression. They too behave self-righteously and invoke the law to maintain their inhumane treatment of the "other."[16]

At the same time, the white Americans continue to uphold the fictionalized, sanitized version of the Thanksgiving story, preparing elaborate meals and recalling fondly the Thanksgivings of their childhoods. Kyra plans a traditional meal that seems mainly intended to communicate their status as upper-middle class white Americans.

> Roast turkey with chestnut dressing and giblet gravy, mashed potatoes and turnips, a cranberry compote, steamed asparagus, three California wines and two French, baked winter squash soup and a salad of mixed field greens to start, a cheese course, a home-blended granite of grapefruit and nectarine, and a hazelnut-risotto pudding and crème brûlée for dessert with espresso, Viennese coffee and Armagnac on the side. (210)

Her menu pays homage to the traditional institution of the American Thanksgiving (turkey, dressing, gravy) while simultaneously signaling their combination of health and environmental concerns (steamed asparagus, local wine, seasonal squash soup, mixed field greens). The addition of European elements (granite, risotto, Crème brûlée) reaffirms their whiteness and communicates their worldliness.

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[16] Examples of historical legislation detrimental to the Native American population are the various Indian Appropriations Acts in the 19th and 20th centuries that gradually divested them of their landrights. Another notable government decision is the Indian Removal Act of 1830 that displaced thousands of tribes across the country, a journey known infamously as the "Trail of Tears." In the novel, the white characters call upon the law to shut down the labor exchange where the illegal immigrants sought work. Moreover, the context of the novel is set in a California that recently passed Proposition 187. This piece of legislation eliminated social services for undocumented immigrants. See *https://history.state.gov* for a comprehensive list of historical and contemporary legislation.

Despite having already bought nearly everything for their meal, the couple stops at Gitello's to pick up "a few extras." In the same way as their narrative about America's founding is sterilized, so too is the place where they buy the ingredients for their Thanksgiving meals. Cándido characterizes the American supermarket as antithetical to a Mexican market full of rich smells. He ruefully bemoans "these people sanitized their groceries just as they sanitized their kitchens and toilets" (112). Yet, as mentioned earlier, the white Americans fetishize the commodities for the sake of their status as commodities, not for their smells or flavors. They perform an ethnic identity that is "frequently predicated on a form of control that is based on access to material goods" (Hicks 51). At Gitello's, Kyra "piles the cart high with bright irresistible packages," in a scene that highlights American consumerism and veneration of superabundancy (211). Boyle invokes the Thanksgiving image of the cornucopia to describe the goods in the market. Watching his wife participate in this sacred American rite of consumer excess, Delaney feels a wave of love and passionately kisses Kyra "beneath the Diet Pepsi banner, under the full gaze of the lights" (211). This combination of advertising and gazing lights alludes to the gazing eyes of the Dr. T.J. Eckleburg ad in F. Scott Fitzgerald's quintessentially American novel *The Great Gatsby*. Likewise, the overflowing cart mimics the scene where Jay Gatsby throws stacks of bespoke shirts from his closet. However, in Fitzgerald's novel, the optometrist's dilapidated advertisement resides in The Valley of Ashes amidst the poor immigrants. Here, in the bright setting of Gitello's, far from the canyon where the Mexicans have set up camp, consumerism is thrumming, emblazoned with lights, and the thrill of perpetuating it generates the lust that, as I pointed out earlier, the Mexican couple feels when they consume actual food. As Hicks notes "the abundance of material goods is the source of libidinal energy for the white couple" (Hicks footnote 22).

The food that Cándido purchases for their "*El Tenksgeevee*" meal could not be more different from Kyra's conspicuous feast. His "cornucopia" is limited to canned tomatoes and rice, and, instead of the three different California Chardonnays Kyra is serving, Cándido chooses between the patriotically red-white-and-blue Budweiser and Pabst Blue Ribbon beers (216). Often the Mexican couple's groceries are a mixture of food from their homeland (beans, hominy, tortillas) and processed American foods (white bread, chocolate bars, beef jerky). This mixture signifies how they still cling to the comfort of what they know and yet eagerly desire to be a part of the land in which they now live. Emblematic of this idea is the scene in which Cándido and América hungrily consume the bread and sardines in the parking lot. The description of "North American bread baked in a factory and puffed up light as air" emblematizes their reverence for it. Both sexual desire and the desire for upward mobility in America are signified as Cándido greedily consumes the canned sardines, "lick[ing] the golden oil from [América's] fingers" (115). In addition to recreating food of the homeland, América—who has been away from home for a much shorter time period—yearns for dishes from her childhood: "*romeritos* stew her mother made on Holy Thursday" and "a mole sauce so rich and piquant with *serranos* it made the juices form to her mouth just to think about it" (79). In another context, Delaney ironically writes about how to eradicate coyotes with a "noxious paste made of ground serrano chilies" (182). The more noxious and inhospitable her American surroundings become, the less she dreams about cooking in her own American kitchen, and the more she longs for the food from her Mexican kitchen. Cándido, in contrast, seems more resigned to his identity as an illegal immigrant, coyote-type figure. His fantasies about food are located in America/América.

As Cándido pays for his goods on Thanksgiving, two other patrons give him the promotional turkey they just received for spending more than fifty dollars. Bird in arms, Cándido runs down the canyon to surprise his wife, "thinking of beer and the turkey and

America" (218). Again his thoughts of America are wrapped up in food and drink. He finds her sitting at their island camp "like a statue in the stand," invoking the Statue of Liberty, and reinforcing the American identities they are so eager, yet unable, to perform. By having their roasting turkey set the canyon aflame, Boyle strengthens the idea that these immigrants are held fast by the identities created for them. They are performing on the wrong side of history, reenacting the white Americans' food tradition and are ultimately punished for it. The Mexican couple is forced to live on within the boundaries and categories that the dominant culture imposes upon them, while the white Americans have the agency to construct and perform their own identities, working to protect and preserve their whiteness.

The fire in the canyon destroys the Mexican couple's meager homestead, while it merely inconveniences the white Americans who return to their homes after the danger passes them by. By having the drama culminate on Thanksgiving, Boyle bolsters the point he is making about history repeating itself. This reenactment of the first Thanksgiving is complete: the "Indians" are violently driven from their land and the "Pilgrims" retreat to vehemently defend their self-constructed boundaries. After the fire, Delaney redoubles his efforts to entrap Cándido, whom he blames for the disaster. Armed and angry, he discovers the Mexican couple's shelter during a thunderstorm that unleashes enough torrential rainfall to cause a massive mudslide which propels the Mexican family and Delany down the mountain. The muddy conclusion of the novel offers no solution to the struggle between the two groups. As the Mexican couple cling to the roof of the post office after just losing their baby in the avalanche, Cándido spots a "white face surge up out of the black swirl" (543). The face belongs to Delaney, a man who has jeopardized Cándido's life on multiple occasions. Despite everything, Cándido reaches out a helping hand. While it seems like a hopeful gesture, the same injustice is nevertheless being perpetuated: once again the Mexican couple is left with nothing and Delaney is saved. This moment is significant in the larger cultural context of

American society: even though the white American is becoming a statistical minority in the "black swirl" of non-white identities, he still wields the majority of the power. The Mexican couple's loss of hope is represented in the loss of their daughter Soccoro. Her name means "help" in English, and her demise is what leaves Cándido with a free hand to provide help to Delaney. Just as with the disproportionate distribution and consumption of food in the novel, we are again reminded through this final act that help is not always given to those most in need of it, and the position of privilege remains firmly in the hands (and mouths) of the white Americans.

CHAPTER 3:

Feeding Both Sides of the Hyphen:

Second-Generation Foodways in *Unaccustomed Earth*

The title of Jhumpa Lahiri's 2008 *Unaccustomed Earth* adequately encompasses the broad themes that thread the short stories in her collection together. Unlike Boyle's title, which insinuates a divide, Lahiri's includes an opportunity. Where the word "curtain" in *The Tortilla Curtain* signifies a barrier, the word "unaccustomed" implies potential since the unknown is merely *not yet* customary. This distinction between division and possibility neatly summarizes the different kind of immigrant stories represented in the two works. Whereas the focus of Boyle's novel shifts between an illegal Mexican immigrant and a white American, Lahiri's stories focus primarily on Indian immigrants who are all legal permanent residents or citizens of the U.S. While the demographics are markedly different, how and what food signifies about identity performance remains a constant. The major distinction is the distribution of agency between the immigrant groups. Boyle's immigrant characters have little say in how others perceive them, and they are often reduced to negative stereotypes by the white American characters. The Mexican immigrants' lack of (choice of) food and drink parallels their lack of room to construct their own identities. The characters in Lahiri's short stories possess more resources and therefore more agency in affirming and communicating their identity to themselves and to others. Their food and drink choices exemplify the control they have to construct and perform their own identities.

Like Boyle, who quotes Steinbeck in *The Tortilla Curtain*, Lahiri too evokes a canonical American author in her epigraph. Her epigraph contextualizes the title "Unaccustomed Earth" in a quote from "The Custom-House"—Nathaniel Hawthorne's introduction to his iconic American novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).

> Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn-out soil. My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth. (Epigraph Lahiri)

In this quote Hawthorne imparts the belief that in order to thrive, humans should not remain stagnant and perpetuate tradition, but instead seek unfamiliar ground. In the same paragraph, Hawthorne rebukes the man who forms an unhealthy bond "to the spot where his successive generations have been imbedded" and whose identity is passed down to him through his ancestors regardless of his own interests and ideas (*Scarlet Letter* 4). This epigraph effectively sets the tone for Lahiri's short stories about the experiences of first- and second-generation Indian families in America. The verb "strike" coupled with the possessive pronoun "their" in its prediction that his children "shall strike their roots" ascribes agency to the migrants. This sharply contrasts with Boyle's Steinbeck epigraph, where the Joad family possesses little or marginal control over their "fortunes" and are defined by others.[17] Furthermore, the use of the word "roots" in the Hawthorne quote evokes the popular but contested roots metaphor for migration. In the epigraph it refers to the potato —an American dietary staple—and introduces the link between food and migration.[18] Moreover, just as "food brings the memory of the soil into our very contemporary life" (Barthes 24), in this epigraph the trope of the soil

[17] In *The Grapes of Wrath*, after the gas attendant tells his co-worker that he cannot imagine living like the destitute Joad family who "ain't human," the second attendant responds: "That's 'cause you know better. They don't know any better" (Steinbeck 299). By writing them off as a lesser, animal species, the gas attendants essentialize them as ignorant and nullify their human identity in the same way the members of the Arroyo Blanco community do to the Mexican immigrants.

[18] Stuart Hall, Liisa Malkki, and others are critical of the way roots metaphors of migration essentialize and fix migrant identities to places (Hall 1996; Malkki 1992).

prompts readers to consider to what extent the children of immigrants in the pages to follow have flourished (or not) from the "unaccustomed earth" in which they were planted.

The sheer ubiquity of food in Lahiri's short story collection invites a reading of the stories in relation to food theory. Lahiri herself acknowledges the importance of food in a 2006 article "Family Values":

> Like most children of immigrants, I'm aware of how important food becomes for foreigners who are trying to deal with life in a new world. Food is a very deep part of people's lives and it has incredible meaning beyond the obvious nutritional aspects. My parents have given up so many basic things coming here from the life they once knew - family, love, connections - and food is one thing that they've really held onto.

Self-consciously revealing how identity is "enacted through consumption" (Ray, *Curried Cultures* 7), Lahiri's work offers an answer to Krishnendu Ray's questions about the migrant's table: "What can the eating and cooking habits of migrants tell us about amalgamation, assimilation and pluralism? How does food relate the native to the migrant, and the ethnic to the universal?" (Ray, *The Migrant's Table* 4). She shows what food signals in terms of the multivalence of identities and explores the common ground in the food patterns enacted by both migrants and natives. Laura Ahn Williams' thoughtful and oft-cited paper on foodways in Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize-winning first collection of short stories *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) is another confirmation of the presence and signifying capacity of food in Lahiri's fiction. Williams discusses how Lahiri "invests food practices—the things characters eat and the ways they eat them, as well as how characters related to the preparation of food—with significance that speaks to conditions of migration and diaspora" (Williams 70). Likewise, in *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*, Mannur devotes several pages to *The Interpreter of Maladies* and extensively references the food preparation in Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003). Surprisingly, she explicitly dismisses *Unaccustomed Earth*

as a collection lacking in culinary discourse (Mannur 151). However, I will argue that in these stories too food and food behavior signal a performance of identity. The elision of the detailed food preparation that is so present in Lahiri's earlier fiction is purposeful, signifying a difference or shift between first- and second-generation immigrants. *The Interpreter of Maladies* focuses primarily on the first generation of Indian immigrants, a group that only occupies the periphery of *Unaccustomed Earth*. Just as the foodways of the first-generation immigrants are imbued with "significance that speaks to conditions of migration and diaspora" (Williams), so too are the different foodways of their children. The shifting foodways of this second generation reflects the ongoing vacillations between roots and routes and reaffirm the non-essentialist nature of identity production that Stuart Hall theorizes.[19]

All of the eight stories *Unaccustomed Earth* are primarily focalized through female second-generation immigrants whose parents emigrated from India before their birth. None of the Indian mothers held jobs after immigrating to America in neither *The Interpreter of Maladies* nor *Unaccustomed Earth*, and, while their husbands worked outside of the home, they ran the household, doing their best to recreate Indian food and perpetuate Indian values. While these mothers uphold the historical tradition of immigrant women most heavily carrying the responsibility of preserving their culture within the domestic sphere, their children are likely to work outside of the home, leaving the proverbial hearth unattended (Counihan, *Anthropology of Food* 13; Mannur 57). This task of preserving Indian culture and food is left partially or wholly unfilled by the second-generation immigrants in Lahiri's collection.

The final three stories revolve around Hema and Kashuik, a second-generation daughter and son whose families socialized in the same Bengali community in America. My analysis will include observations on this cycle of stories, as well as two other stories: "Only

[19] See chapter 1 for more on Stuart Hall's theories of identity construction within the diaspora.

Goodness" and "Heaven-Hell." The three narratives share the setting of American northeastern university towns; just as southern California is an apt locale for the type of immigrant presented in *The Tortilla Curtain*, so does Lahiri's setting fit with the demographic of immigrant she depicts: 70% of Indian-Americans aged 25 and older held college degrees in 2010—2.5 times the rate of the overall U.S. population.[20] It therefore makes sense that in each of the collection's stories, universities in some form are alluded to as part of the narrative of both the first-generation immigrant parents and their second-generation immigrant children. In the former narrative of the first-generation immigrants, the father/husband is a PhD candidate in a medical or engineering field at a prestigious American university. For their offspring, the university experience alluded to includes undergraduate and graduate studies, the schools just as esteemed. This high level of education among Indian-Americans correlates to their high median household income: $88,000 in 2010. This figure is much higher than the $49,800 median income for all Americans and the $66,000 for all Asian-Americans households in the same year.[21] The first- and second-generation immigrants Lahiri portrays would fit Ambassador Lalit Mansingh's image of the coconuts who maintain a "hard shell" through a sparse and difficult student lifestyle and ultimately succeed in occupying the American middle-upper class.[22] This uniform socio-economic status disallows a meaningful analysis of what food communicates about class; therefore, my analysis of Lahiri's work will concentrate rather on gender and ethnic identity constructs. Significantly, Lahiri's Indian-

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[20] According to the Pew Research Center, this striking percentage of highly-educated Indian immigrants can most likely be accounted for by the type of visa under which they enter the U.S. A large portion of Indian immigrants are issued H1-B visas that are allotted to skilled foreigners in "specialty occupations." The Pew website's fact sheet (pewresearch.org) shows that in 2011, Indians were granted 56% of the total H1-B visas issued.

[21] Moreover, Pew's findings indicate that 28% of Indian-Americans held positions in scientific and engineering fields. They also cite a 2013 American Community Survey that reports the percentage of work-age Indian-Americans in management, business, science, and arts as more than two-thirds of the total Indian-American population.

[22] In his speech to Indian-Americans (2003), Mansingh foregrounds the roots metaphor for migration. He asks "What is the coconut famous for," and answers, "It grows on sandy soil, requires little water, and requires virtually no maintenance. In other words, send an Indian anywhere, just let them be, with minimum nourishment and watch the tree grow taller and taller until it dominates the landscape. That is what I think the Indian Diaspora is like."

American characters are economically much more aligned with Boyle's white American characters than his impoverished immigrant characters. Regardless, Lahiri's Indian-Americans come from vastly different backgrounds and culinary discourses than the white Americans in *The Tortilla Curtain*.

Central to the narratives of all the second-generation immigrants in *Unaccustomed Earth* is their—conscious or unconscious—wrestling with how much of their identity is Indian and how much American. The culinary trope of food and drink signifies this struggle. In other words, these children of immigrants labor to reconcile the private Indian lives they lead at home with their parents and within the Bengali community and the public American lives they lead at school and work among their (non-Indian) contemporaries. Their dual, sometimes clashing, foodways exemplify how they operate within "the unsettled boundaries between private and public" (Ray, *Curried Cultures* 16). This reconciliation is more present during their adolescence, as they simultaneously navigate the transformation from child to adult. In *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels* (2003), Jennifer Ho examines how young protagonists negotiate the "classic instability" of adolescence and the "uncertainty of ethnic identity" (Ho 6). These children of immigrants are more open and malleable than their parents who immigrated to America as adults, and this openness is reflected in their willingness to try multiple cuisines (Ho 120). Their first-generation immigrant parents worked to reconcile the geographical and cultural space between America and India and between the shifting definitions of home and abroad. Food and food practices remain a way in which to reproduce and reaffirm their Indian identities within their diasporic community. In all of Lahiri's works, the first-generation immigrants take part in such a community comprised of other Bengali immigrants. Within this community they strive to preserve Indian traditions and food within an American context, cooking, eating, and celebrating with each other, instead of with most of their relatives still living in India. Their

tight grip on Indian culinary traditions communicates their commitment to maintaining their own Indian values while concurrently signaling their rejection of American traditions and values. These first-generation immigrants are less equipped to explore the possibility of co-existing identities than their offspring, and, in most of the stories, the parents remain committed to performing an Indian identity even after living in America decades. Their children's food behavior, in contrast, communicates an identity less Indian and more American. In the stories I will analyze, their adherence to or rejection of the traditional Indian kitchen often parallels their adherence to or rejection of traditional Indian values. Whereas the dichotomy presented in Boyle's novel is between the white American and the foreign "other," the conflict in Lahiri's collection is more intimately between parent and child, and between the second-generation immigrant's private and public selves.

In the first story "Only Goodness" the protagonists are the second-generation siblings Sudha and Rahul. Focalized through Sudha, "Only Goodness" traces the course of Rahul's alcoholism from his teenage years into adulthood. The older sibling, Sudha embodies the stereotype of the dutiful daughter who appeases her parents' conservative sensibilities. She works diligently around the house and at school and is accepted into the prestigious University of Pennsylvania. During her childhood she also works hard to repress the shame she feels when her Indian and American selves collide. Because her parents remain oblivious to her struggle, she silently endures the embarrassment she feels about "the funny things their mother occasionally put into their lunch boxes" (105). In her public life, Sudha does not want to communicate an identity different from that of her peers, and the "potato curry sandwiches that tinted Wonderbread green," represent the part she wishes to conceal (105). Nevertheless, because she remains aware of the responsibility she has as a daughter to first-generation immigrants, she hides this shame from her mother. A *New York Times* book review entitled "Wonder Bread and Curry: Mingling Cultures, Conflicted Hearts," articulates how Sudha

carries this understanding into adulthood, like many children of immigrants who are haunted "by the burden of their families' dreams and their awareness of their role in the generational process of Americanization" (Kakutani 2008).

Sudha's younger brother Rahul, however, shows no awareness of such a burden, and he communicates a more American identity than his sister, starting in his adolescence. The story opens with Sudha recalling how she introduced both coffee and beer to the teenage Rahul when he came to visit her at college. Shortly after his visit, Rahul regularly drinks coffee instead of tea and frequently asks his sister to buy him six-packs of beer. It is not surprising that Sudha is the one who insists on hiding the Budweiser from their parents, while Rahul does not seem to mind if their parents find out. In several of Lahiri's stories, both coffee and beer are only consumed by the children of first-generation immigrants and actively avoided by their parents. Devout Hindus, many of the parents abstain from alcohol, and they all drink Indian-style tea over American coffee. In addition to Rahul's preference for coffee, he prefers to eat outside of the home at the American restaurant where he works, and he only picks at the Indian food his mother prepares. His parents catalogue his different food and drink behavior and poor decision-making with his rejection of their Indian values. Sudha comments on "her [mother's] need to blame America" when Rahul winds up in jail on a drunk driving charge (105). When the nineteen-year-old Rahul brings his white American girlfriend home for lunch, she refuses the rice their mother serves. The pair's announcement of their engagement triggers a fight, and "the Darjeeling brought out for special occasions grew too strong in the pot, the reddish-brown *pantuas* still crowded together in their serving bowl" (113). The untouched Indian food and drink represent Rahul's rejection of his Indian identity, as this final meal marks a break with his parents.

Sudha observes a middle ground between her parents' abstinence and her brother's recklessness, as "[t]he idea of excess, of being out of control, did not appeal to [her]" (95).

This middle ground represents the positioning of Sudha's ethnic identity. On the one hand she still eats enormous amounts of home-cooked Indian food "when she sat at her mother's table" (96), yet she rarely eats it elsewhere. She obediently helps her mother cook when she is visiting, but she prepares only non-Indian food outside of her childhood home. However, as mentioned earlier, these stories do not offer the elaborate descriptions of Indian food preparation we find in Lahiri's first collection of short stories. Their absence reinforces the shifting paradigms of second-generation Indian identity.[23] Even though Sudha marries a British—and not Indian—man, he himself is emblematic of her middle-ground positioning. Sudha notes that Roger is more acceptable to her parents than an American would have been, and the atmosphere at the meal during which they announce their engagement is pleasant where Rahul and Elena's announcement of their engagement is disruptive. Their parents find it easier to relate to Roger because of his accent and because he, unlike many Americans, does not drink coffee (111). His preference for tea instigates what Douglas describes as the "flash of recognition and confidence" when someone exhibits similar food or drink behavior and allows Sudha's parents to identify with him.

Sudha's wedding is a mixture of Western and Indian food and drink rituals. Even the main course signals this coexistence, as tandoori chicken is a familiar dish in American-Indian restaurants.[24] After relocating to London, Sudha communicates an adult identity (e.g., eating olives and cheese with wine) and an English one (e.g., preparing steak and roasted

[23] There are several incidents in *The Interpreter of Maladies* where the first-generation immigrant women attempt to recreate typically Indian food with American ingredients, unable to get it quite right. The daughters in *Unaccustomed Earth* occasionally cook Indian food in an attempt to recreate the food not directly from India, but from their mothers' Indian-American kitchens. Like their mothers' unsuccessful attempts to recreate food from their homelands, the daughters too cannot replicate the tastes from their childhoods. Ruma in the short story "Unaccustomed Earth" is a good example. She spends days before her father's visit cooking Indian food from scratch where typically she would use pre-packaged spices and sauces. As her father eats the food, Ruma apologizes for it not being like her mother's.

[24] In her compendium *The Routledge History of Food* (2014), Carol Helstosky writes about the "tandoori and curry formula" that permeates the American's expectations of Indian fare.

chicken with potatoes). The evolution of her identity positioning is most strikingly signified through her son Neel. While she maintains the popular Hindu tradition of *Annaprasana*—a food ceremony celebrating a child's transition from liquid to solid foods—she also feeds Neel characteristically English Weetabix and digestive biscuits. These overlapping culinary choices reveal the multivalent quality of identity and how "[e]ach of these identities has its intrinsic form of expression in food" (Montanari 89). Furthermore, rather than merge to form one identity, these multiple identities "coexist" (Montanari 90). As Lahiri herself matured, like Sudha, she learned to live comfortably in a world of coexisting identities. In "My Two Lives" Lahiri reflects on how as a child she tried earnestly to hide her Bengali custom of "eating rice and dal with [her] fingers" from her American friends. She reflects how her efforts to hide each side from the other resulted in feeling untethered and lacking a firm sense of identity. As an adult, she no longer self-consciously conceals her Indian identity, yet she continues to navigate "the contradictions inherent within the notion of Indian American" (Mannur 180). Lahiri writes that still "the traditions on either side of the hyphen dwell in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, one outshining the other depending on the day" (2006).

The Bengali community to which Sudha's parents belong in "Only Goodness," plays a more conspicuous role in the next short story, "Heaven-Hell." Revolving around food preparation and consumption, this diasporic community functions as a space to "celebrate cultural cohesion" and "provide[s] a context for performance of group rituals" (Brown and Mussel 5). Subscribing to such a group means reenacting a collective ethnic identity, and, to some degree, rejecting another (Fieldhouse 77). Gender roles are likewise reenacted within these groups: the women spend hours (sometimes days) preparing elaborate meals from scratch and additionally do the serving and cleaning up. Food signals a distinction between the genders within this particular community, and its "provisioning often reproduces female subordination by requiring women to serve [and] satisfy" (DeValt, qtd. in Counihan 13).

While the parents in Lahiri's stories cling to these groups and gender hierarchies, their children give them little value apart from their place in childhood memories. "Heaven-Hell" is one such childhood account. Like "Only Goodness," it is focalized through a daughter who is trying to make sense of the past. Through adult eyes, Usha attempts to reimagine her mother Aparna's experience of immigration, which started when she moved to Cambridge as the young bride of an Indian graduate student. Usha situates her account in the retelling of her mother's relationship with a family friend named Pranab Kaku. Encouraged by Aparna's Indian dress and accessories, Pranab approaches Aparna and Usha on campus one afternoon. He is immediately invited back for tea which leads to dinner and subsequently a permanent place at their dinner table.

Much of Pranab and Aparna's relationship is communicated through food. Hailing from the same area of North Calcutta, they share common experiences and know "the same holes-in-the-wall for the best *jelabis* and *moghlai parathas*" (51). Aparna's homesickness and nostalgia for India are signaled through the elaborate dishes and snacks she prepares for Pranab who declares himself "starving" upon arrival and "stuffed" upon departure (50). Before his visits, Usha recalls how her mother could not wait to go out when Usha returned from school. After Pranab enters their lives, Usha's mother is often in the kitchen preparing special treats, "rolling out dough for *luchis*, which she normally made only on Sundays" (51). Through this process of cooking and eating, Pranab and Aparna are diminishing the loneliness they both feel in America—she trapped in a loveless marriage, and he as a newcomer. As time passes, Aparna continues to perform a solely Indian identity, while Pranab grows increasingly American and falls in love with a woman outside of their Indian community.

The first time Usha's family meets Pranab's new girlfriend is food-related. Deborah comes for dinner and subsequently begins to attend the weekend gatherings of the local Bengali community. The introduction of the white American Deborah into the Bengali

community provides a good opportunity to analyze how “the act of eating serves as an important means through which social and ethnic exclusion or inclusion is perpetrated” (Piattti-Farnell 12). While Deborah gamely eats with her hands and tastes everything on offer, Aparna complains of how she has to spice down the food for Deborah and feels too embarrassed to include a fish head in the dal (54). Deborah is blatantly signaling her wish for inclusion in Pranab’s (ethnic) community; however, it is both the community’s rejection of her and Pranab’s own wish to communicate a more American identity that override Deborah’s attempts. Despite Deborah’s urgings for a more diverse wedding ceremony and guest list, Pranab overrules her, a decision that culminates in their traditionally American wedding where Usha’s family are the only Indian guests. Right before his wedding, Usha’s parents have Pranab over for “a special meal to mark the end of his bachelorhood” (55). This meal also effectively marks the end of his identification with his Indian self, standing out as “the only Bengali aspect” in a “strictly American” celebration complete with a large American wedding cake (55). At the reception Usha’s mother scoffs at the food, even proclaiming the special vegetarian meal she is served “inedible” (56) and refusing to eat it. Her unwillingness to eat American food and her dismissal of the wine offered to her signify how firmly she performs a traditional Indian identity, rejecting the American food and wine as “inedible” and “impossible” (60). Ho rightly avows, "Food is a critical medium for compliance with and resistance to Americanization” (Ho 3). In contrast to Aparna’s, Pranab’s food behavior signals his assimilation to, rather than rejection of, American culture.

Bitterly disappointed by his interethnic marriage, Aparna severs her ties with the man she used to spend hours cooking for and eating with. Symbolic of this separation is a broken tea cup Usha finds in the trash. It is the cup out of which Pranab always drank and which her mother smashed in the culmination of her sense of his betrayal. The tea cup also emblematizes Pranab’s ethnic identity, which the women in the Bengali group agree Deborah

"stripped" him of (58). Years later, Usha's family is invited to another traditionally American celebration at the home of Pranab and Deborah. They are hosting a Thanksgiving meal that will include both her American family and his adopted Bengali family from the Cambridge days. Usha notes how her parents typically did not observe the traditions of Thanksgiving: "the ritual of a large sit-down dinner and the foods that one was supposed to eat was lost on them" (59). By opting out of America's most food-centric holiday, Usha's parents are again communicating their resistance to assimilation through food behavior. Conversely, Usha performs her own Americanized identity by joining in, peeling apples in the kitchen and drinking beer outside her parents' line of vision. Like Sudha's parents, Usha's abstain from alcohol, and Aparna shakes her hand over her glass whenever anyone tries to pour her a drink. Similar to Kyra's Thanksgiving menu in *The Tortilla Curtain*, the meal in "Heaven-Hell" is traditionally American and full of excess and choice. There are two turkeys and a selection of wines and pies, and while Usha's mouth waters at the spread, she sees her mother predictably disapproves of the food, knowing she will describe it as "bland and tasteless" on the ride home (60).[25] Their opposing reactions reveal how they position themselves as less or more American.

The story closes with Usha acknowledging a growing sense of pity for her mother who maintained the traditionally Indian gender roles in a foreign country. Usha realizes how bored Aparna must have been when "her only job, every day, was to clean and cook" (59); if she complained about her loneliness, her husband would tell her to return to Calcutta (where she likewise would spend her days in the kitchen). As Gloria Anzaldúa asserts, "the construction of ethnic identities cannot be disaggregated from ascribed gender roles" (Anzaldúa xvi). Similarly, Aparna cannot perform a traditionally Indian ethnic identity without adhering to the patriarchy in which it is imbedded. Steeped in despair after Pranab's marriage, Usha's mother

[25] In "The Long Way Home" (2007), Lahiri writes about how her own mother "condescended towards Western cooking," also bemoaning its blandness.

almost sets herself on fire in a fledgling suicide attempt. Both Usha and her father remained unaware, as their mother and wife "was in the kitchen boiling rice for [their] dinner, as if it were any other day" (63). Consonant with the other second-generation immigrants in Lahiri's stories, Usha's memories of her mother are inextricably bound to the kitchen.[26]

Similar to the previous two stories, the final, three-part narrative is focalized through second-generation immigrants, switching between Hema and Kaushik. The first part, "Once in a Lifetime," takes place during their adolescence when Kaushik and his family return to the United States after an attempt to move back to India. This story is written from the pre-teen Hema's perspective. She writes in the second person to an unaware Kaushik about how she experiences his family's month-long stay in their house. Her recollections are filled with references to food interwoven into her understanding of him and his family and how they differ from her own. Each story in this cycle signals time and place through food. This first story from childhood includes the big, traditional Bengali meals that exist in the memories of all the grown-up second-generation immigrants in this collection. Hema recalls the tight-knit Bengali community in which her family socializes and whose gatherings revolve around the extravagant Indian dishes the women prepare. Food and cooking form the backbone of their parents' friendships; because they were "both equally alone" in America Hema and Kaushik's mothers regularly grocery shop and cook together before the Coudhuris move back to India (167).

The narrative opens with two successive meals prepared in honor of Kaushik's family by Hema's mother. First, Hema recalls the elaborate preparations for their going-away party when she was just a child: "the rooms filled with the smell of lamb curry and pullao" (166).

[26] Wenying Xi (who cites Lahiri's *The Namesake* in her introduction) devotes a chapter to linking the maternal with ethnic identity formation in *Eating Identities* (2008) in which the (traditionally female) caregivers play a central role. Xi asserts that "eating, cooking, and talking about one's cuisine are vital to a community's wholeness and continuation," and "the destiny of a community depends on how well its nourishes its members" (19).

Years later her mother is preparing an elaborate welcome-back dinner: frying "thick slices of eggplant to serve with the dal, filling the room with a haze of smoke" (171). Somewhere in-between these two meals, the two women diverge, and Kaushik's parents now signal a more cosmopolitan, Western identity despite having lived in India the past few years. While Hema's parents continue to perform traditional gendered Indian identities, the Coudhuris exhibit different behavior than they did before they left Cambridge years before. Hema overhears her mother lamenting their refusal of seconds at dinner and judgingly discussing the alcohol Kaushik's parents now drink. Bewildered, Hema's mother tells her husband that "Bombay had made them more American than Cambridge" (174), a claim evidenced by their food and drink consumption. For instance, the Coudhuris have "mysteriously acquired a taste for things like steak and baked potatoes" (180). The consumption of beef is restricted by the Hindu diet many of the first-generation immigrants follow, and, when it is eaten in other stories in the collection, it is only by the second-generation immigrant children or white non-Indians. Hema's mother's complaining when the Coudhuris take them out for this American fare is akin to Usha's mother's remarks about the food at Pranab and Deborah's wedding and Thanksgiving meals. Moreover, Kaushik's mother "was no longer interested in cooking" (179). In fact, her husband dotes on her instead, behavior that baffles Hema's mother and leads her to believe he overindulges her.

The only dish Kaushik's mother actually prepares is neither Indian nor American, but rather an English trifle. Throughout their stay, Kaushik is sullen, enthusiastic only when his mother prepares this dessert that is foreign for Hema and her family. His failure to bring his dishes to the sink or serve his own food prompts his father to comment that "[e]ven in Bombay we managed to raise a typical American teenager" (176). Yet Hema, who has only ever lived in America, is obedient and industrious. Interestingly, Hema's mother advises her to cut Kaushik slack, telling Hema that Kaushik is "adjusting," which is "something [she'd]

never had to go through" (178). Kaushik is the only second-generation immigrant in the collection who has actually lived in India, spending his formative years alternately in Massachusetts and Bombay. He develops into a rootless adult, and in the third story, "Going Ashore," he reflects on his life as a war photographer who "drifts around the globe" and whose origins are "irrelevant" (226). He takes pains to place roots nowhere, and he has an ambivalent relationship with Indian food and his Indian background, feeling no nostalgia for either.

This ambivalence is already present in the second story when he visits his father outside of Boston during a Christmas break from college. "Year's End" takes place two years after the first story, following the death of his mother and the remarriage of his father to an Indian woman with two young daughters. Written in the first person, Kaushik describes his initial encounter with his new stepfamily. As he walks into his father's house, the smell of cooking hits him, and he realizes the dinner table has been set just for him. This moment, marking his arrival home from college, parallels the elaborate homecoming dinner celebrating his family's arrival from India. Both meals feature traditional Indian food prepared in American kitchens by women who still uphold the traditions of their homeland. His own mother's preference for simple, modernist decoration—from the chrome floor lamp to the kidney-shaped cocktail table—clashes sharply with her husband's new wife's traditional Indian tastes. This contrast is reinforced by the Indian print tablecloth the new wife has draped over the white fiberglass table that Kaushik's mother "had never allowed a cloth to cover" (190). Kaushik also immediately notices the jars of pickles, the "translucent *luchis*," and the "dal and vegetables arrayed in a semicircle" (190). Even though his stepmother is not yet physically present, the food and its arrangement are telling. Kaushik associates this elaborate spread with "the old-fashioned, ceremonious way" his grandfathers would eat in patriarchal Calcutta, "being treated each day like kings" (192). He notes the formality of the

presentation and uncertainly contemplates the best way to approach all the dishes to which his stomach is no longer accustomed. When he does meet Chitra, his father's new bride, she performs the role of a solicitous hostess, trying to stop Kaushik from carrying his own plate to the kitchen and eagerly and repeatedly asking him what she can get him to eat or drink. He notes how she "hovers" over his father and eats privately in the kitchen once everyone else has finished (196). Chitra has constructed her identity around the traditional gendered role of Indian wife, in the same style as most of the first-generation immigrants in *Unaccustomed Earth*, including Aparna in "Heaven-Hell" and Sudha and Rahul's mother in "Only Goodness." It is no surprise that Chitra and Kaushik's father quickly relocate to a more populated Boston suburb in closer proximity to other Bengalis and an Indian grocery store.

Kaushik's disgust of Chitra's servitude communicates his own Western and second-generational identity. His own positioning away from Indian traditions becomes more apparent in juxtaposition to Chitra and her children. When he refuses tea at breakfast, Chitra seems confused at someone not wanting tea in the morning. Rahul in "Only Goodness" also prefers coffee, he too ambivalent about his Indian background. When Chitra and his father visit Kaushik in Rome years later, he orders her tea with milk at each restaurant, as she vocalizes her dislike of Italian coffee. Furthermore, the tea Chitra makes with separately heated milk and "too much sugar" (204) contrasts with Kaushik's store-bought black coffee, just as his Dunkin' Donuts Boston Cream contrasts with the *chanachur* snack mix she brought from Calcutta. After he catches his new stepsisters looking at pictures of his deceased mother, Kaushik storms out of the house. He drives aimlessly up the coast for days on end, stopping only to eat. When he recounts this unplanned trip as an adult, he mostly recalls the food, still savoring "the taste of diner coffee" and the "gummy chowder and greasy eggs" that were filling, "as if no other food had nourished [him] before then" (213). This simple fare symbolizes a turning point in his life where he lets go of his childhood.

Another turning point in Kaushik's life is also signified through the nourishment of simple food. In the third story "Going Ashore," Kaushik reconnects and falls in love with Hema in Rome. Just as in the final pages of "Year's End," "Going Ashore" includes vivid descriptions of the simple food they share: "The food was plainer, bowls of ribolita, bread without salt, bittersweet hot chocolate in the afternoons. As they ate their meals and rested their feet from walking, they, too, felt fortified, tranquil, much like the town" (232). This food fortifies in the same way as the diner food on Kaushik's Christmas break journey, and in both cases the food is prepared by strangers outside of the home. The elaborate descriptions of the Italian food Hema and Kaushik share invoke the elaborate meals of their childhood prepared by their mothers. At the same time, their story is being rewritten as something new and theirs, disconnected from their Indian-American upbringing. Yet it is both their mixed American and Indian backgrounds that initiate their reunion in Rome. They reconnect over "pumpkin tortelli" (227) at an Italian couple's celebration of American Thanksgiving. Hema has been invited because Edo and Paolo know she is alone in Rome, and Kaushik is invited with the promise that another Indian would be there (who turns out to be Hema) as well as an American (who, homesick, brings an apple pie). This invitation prompts Kaushik to reflect how, even though he has not spent any time in India since his youth, by others he is "always regarded as an Indian first" (226).

Lahiri has a similar realization about her own identity in her 2015 book *In Other Words*. In this (mostly) non-fiction book, Lahiri explores the multivalence and ephemerality of her identity through reflecting upon her connection with Italy. Despite her Bengali-American upbringing, Lahiri feels an inexplicable pull towards this European country. After several visits to various Italian cities throughout her life, Lahiri moves to Rome in 2014 and here writes a book in Italian. Lahiri's analysis, which is first and foremost a linguistic one, also underscores the non-essentialist nature of identity production. At the same time, she

draws attention to the tendency of others to define her on the basis of their own expectations of who they think she is. She laments how her husband Alberto is accepted as a speaker of Italian because of his Latin American (and therefore more Mediterranean) appearance, while she—the more proficient Italian speaker of the two—is often responded to in English. Recounting similar experiences in America, where her Indian appearance has some surprised she can speak English so well, she describes her frustration at these "borders" she will never manage to cross (*In Other Words* 137). Her examples show how the (conscious or unconscious) assumptions others make can nullify an individual's efforts to perform a certain identity. The typification of the Mexican characters as tortilla-eating, property-encroaching villains in *The Tortilla Curtain* is a more extreme example.

In the last pages of the final story about Hema and Kaushik, both are on the verge of making major changes in their lives. Hema has consented to a traditional marriage in India and Kaushik to a desk job in Hong Kong. Unlike their parents, who lived out traditional lives within a larger Bengali community, Hema and Kaushik have lived their adult lives as unmarried and unmoored adults—Hema through a long-term affair with a married man and Kaushik through ceaseless travelling. They define themselves on different terms than their parents, and food signifies this divergence. Hema only mentions Indian food in the context of the past and about her mother's—not her own—cooking. She savors the local fare in Italy, drinking espresso and not tea (unlike Chitra during her visit), and the only dishes Hema prepares are simple Italian meals with fewer than five ingredients (in contrast to her mother's Indian dishes with dozens). The Italian food Hema and Kaushik share together is not the rich, heavily-spiced dishes their mothers prepared, yet part of the nourishment they gain is from the connection they had established eating those meals of their childhood together. During one of their shared meals, Hema silently acknowledges her own attraction to Kaushik as linked to a "time and place to which they'd lost access," an attraction akin to how their parents were

attracted to one another "only for the sake of their [shared] origins" (229). On their last night together, Hema finds a parallel with her parents' rituals and the Italian post-dinner custom of *passeggiata* where the men and women walk with their own gender group, "segregated as [their parents] once tended to be at parties" (234). This casual remark over "vin santo and a slice of chestnut cake" (233) is a subtle reminder she is about to enter the traditional world of their parents through her upcoming marriage. Hema admits her envy of these small-town Italian men and women who eat and talk in each other's company each day. She laments: "I've never belonged to any place that way" (233). Kaushik's own "rootless" identity is highlighted both through the lack of food in his fridge and his ability to "adapt to so many cuisines throughout his adult life" (235). Yet something in his reunion with Hema has left him nostalgic, and the rice and curry he eats after their separation leaves him feeling "strangely sentimental" for the food of his childhood (235). Here food signifies his longing for the connection his parents sought within their Indian-American communities. Together again outside of America, both he and Hema seem to realize how their parents must have felt all those years ago as new immigrants in Cambridge. In the same way Hema registers she has never "belonged to any place," Kaushik concedes that Hema "was the only person he'd met in his adult life who had any understanding of his past" (236).

Ultimately their crisscrossing culinary paths reveal the constant negotiation and maneuvering of their evolving identity constructs. All the second-generation immigrants—Hema and Kaushik, Sudha and Rahul, and Usha—have struggled (and continue to struggle) to reconcile their private Indian selves with their public American selves. Their navigation between these two ethnicities echoes Lahiri's own aforementioned struggle to reconcile "one side of the hyphen with the other" (Lahiri, "My Two Lives"). As adolescents, the characters work to distinguish themselves from their Indian parents, but as adults they stop denying or hiding their Indian identities. They even acknowledge—and in some cases admire—their

parents' struggles to re-construct their identities abroad. The stories I have analyzed all reflect on the second-generation narrators' attempt to find clarification of or explanation for their past, and their melancholy recollections are infused with what Lahiri describes as feeling "suspended rather than rooted" (*In Other* Words 111). The ways in which they hover above both ethnic identities without fully assimilating to one or the other is signaled by their "co-existing" foodways. These foodways function "to enact identities that are always unstable and in flux" and indicate how they position themselves differently throughout their adolescence and adulthood (Williams 77). In other words, their fluctuating identity positionings support identity construction as "a process of articulation" where "there is always 'too much' or 'too little,' an over-determination or a lack" (Hall, *Questions* 6). Planted in "unaccustomed earth," these characters perform the "constant agonistic process of struggling with, resisting, negotiating, and accommodating" the contrasting values and norms they face growing up between two cultures (Hall, *Questions* 14). While the narrators eventually learn to more aptly balance their Indian and American selves at the close of the stories, none of the stories presents real closure. Williams also notes a lack of closure in *The Interpreter of Maladies*' stories, but posits that Lahiri's culinary discourses nevertheless "open up spaces in which marginalized identities generate a sense of agency and difference with transformative and productive potential" (Williams 78). In *Unaccustomed Earth*, the foodways signify the transitional generation's assimilation (in contrast to their parents' rejection of such assimilation), as they "strike their *roots*" in America. At the same time, their foodways represent the internal struggle they face reconciling the consequences of their parents' *routes*.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of the trope of food and drink in T.C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Unaccustomed Earth* shows how meaningful such an approach is in examining the construction and performance of identity in migrant fiction. Overall, this analysis supports Barthes' theory that "food signifies" and moreover aligns with Hall's theory of identity positioning. The culinary discourses in the two works I have analyzed signify gendered, classed, and ethnic identity constructs within the space between the migrant and the native-born (*The Tortilla Curtain*) and first- and second-generation immigrants (*Unaccustomed Earth*). This in-between space is forged in Lahiri's short story collection, as most of the second-generation protagonists come to view their multivalent identities as co-existing instead of conflicting. In Boyle's novel, however, the divide between the two groups remains not only unforged, but is widened. The ambiguous ending suggests unchanging paradigms rather than a space for mutual understanding.

In *The Tortilla Curtain*, food and food practices signify the barrier that prevents understanding between the white Americans and the illegal Mexican immigrants. The Mexican Cándido and América live hand to mouth, preparing meals over an open campfire that are a combination of re-created dishes from their homeland and processed American junk food. Their food choices are limited, dictated by their impoverished circumstances. These circumstances likewise limit their capacity to construct their own identities, and they are often reduced to negative stereotypes by the white American characters. When their access to labor is cut off, the Mexican couple is reduced to an animal-like state, scavenging in dumpsters and backyards like the coyotes that roam the Topanga Hills. Just as the white Americans try to keep the coyotes from encroaching on their property, the fence they erect communicates their

desire to keep the Mexican migrants out as well.[27] The white Americans own culinary discourse communicates this desire to preserve their world of privilege where "[w]hite bodies stick together, thereby making food space exclusive" (Slocum 532). This space which Delaney and Kyra Mossbacher inhabit paradoxically calls for hyper-consumption yet insists upon dietary restrictions to maintain the desired body type. Moreover, their elite status is signaled by the consumption of organic goods and patronage of upscale ethnic restaurants. This compulsion to control and need for exclusivity illustrate how vigilantly they work to preserve their whiteness from the foreign "other."

In Lahiri's short story collection, the protagonists' parents work to preserve their Indianness, while their children adhere more readily to American identities. A major difference between the Boyle's novel and Lahiri's short stories is the familiarity of the foreign in the latter. Whereas non-European, so-called "ethnic" cuisine is italicized and signaled as something exotic in Boyle's novel, in Lahiri's short story collection, Indian food is not represented as foreign, but as familiar, and therefore does not require demarcation. Furthermore, Lahiri's Indian-Americans have more space to negotiate their identities on their own terms than Boyle's illegal Mexican migrants do. Boyle's migrant characters are repeatedly struck down in their attempt to reenact the American Dream, while Lahiri's characters—who are middle-upper class like Boyle's white Americans—have the agency to "strike their roots" into the "unaccustomed earth" of America, meeting only the resistance of their parents who adhere to a less American identity themselves. Nevertheless, in *Unaccustomed Earth* both parent and child possess choice, something unattainable for the Mexican characters in *The Tortilla Curtain*. This contrast confirms Homi Bahbha's assertion that "not all negotiations are the same, and limits of choice or agency greatly influence how

[27] Hicks writes: "the coyote's transgressions of domestic borders also must be read allegorically for immigrants' transgressions of national borders" (47).

identity is negotiated" (Bhabha 22). While my analysis has shown the importance of gender and ethnic constructs in identity production, it also shows how class functions as the gatekeeper that allows or disallows a person to negotiate his/her own identity.

The case for food as a textual modality is strengthened with the presence of America's most food-centric holiday in both works: Thanksgiving. Boyle's novel reaches a climax on Thanksgiving Day, and four of the eight stories in Lahiri's collection mention the holiday in some way. In *The Tortilla Curtain* the divide between the two groups is strengthened through the contrasting Thanksgiving meals. The dinner Kyra prepares features an elaborate spread of traditional, European-based dishes. The meal Cándido buys consists of rice, beans, and Budweiser. When he is given a promotional turkey by a fellow patron at the grocery store, he and América eagerly prepare the bird over their campfire. When this attempt to perform an American culinary ritual literally goes up in flames, they are once more displaced and left without possessions. This revised version of the Thanksgiving narrative—where the Mexican couple assumes the part of the Indians, and the white Americans the Pilgrims—exposes the hopelessness of the former's struggle to write themselves a new script in the New World.

In *Unaccustomed Earth* Thanksgiving signifies resistance or adherence to Americanization and is indicative of the overarching culinary dichotomy between the first- and second-generation immigrants. While the second-generation immigrants participate in the holiday, their parents deliberately ignore it. They instead celebrate special occasions and *Indian* holidays within their own diasporic Bengali community. Their children, as adults, have no need for such a community, and their celebrations encompass both American and Indian traditions. Sudha's hosting of the rice-eating ceremony *Annaprasana* is an example of a second-generation immigrant still upholding the traditions of her Indian parents. Moreover, in two of the short stories, the Thanksgiving meal is recreated as something non-essentially

American. In "Going Ashore," the "pumpkin tortelli" served by the Roman host Edo shows the Thanksgiving dinner situated in a global context.

Overall Lahiri's interpretation is more hopeful, as the interstitial space in which her characters develop is ultimately a productive space that yields acceptance and understanding. As her protagonists transition from adolescence into adulthood, they struggle to reconcile competing Indian and American identities. Through this struggle, these second-generation immigrants gain an understanding of their parents' own struggles to reposition their identities after migration. The culinary discourse in *Unaccustomed Earth* differs from Lahiri's earlier works about first-generation immigrants in which elaborate descriptions of Indian food permeate the pages. Nevertheless, the elision of these descriptions and the inclusion of American and other culinary habits reveals how differently these children of immigrants communicate their identities that are situated on the hyphen of Indian-American and within a global context. In contrast, Boyle's novel depicts a reality where the ruling white majority is unable or unwilling to accept a more globalized world that includes a diverse population of ethnicities and classes. Instead of opening a dialogue about integration and co-existence, the white Americans hold town hall meetings about building a wall to protect themselves from interlopers. They remain literally and figuratively closed off and are willing to sacrifice the foreign "other" to preserve their own white identities. Despite having been written over twenty years ago, the reaction to the presence of non-white bodies in America still resonates. President-elect Donald Trump's proposal to build a wall between the U.S. and Mexico echoes the situation in Arroyo Blanco Estates. In both cases, the wall is a manifestation of white America's fear of the foreign "other," no matter how manufactured the fear may be.[28] If

[28] Boyle's assessment of immigration comes from concern by his state about limited resources as a result of the influx of unauthorized immigrants in the 1990s. Trump's own assessment has no such relevant context, as, according to the Pew Research Center, the number of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico has stagnated and even declined since 2009. Trump's campaign manufactured and perpetuated a threat that has avowed explicitly racist attitudes that, in Boyle's novel, are more implicit.

inclusion means relinquishing white privilege, then exclusion becomes the course to preserve it. The importance of exclusivity in the white Americans' foodways reinforces this idea. Boyle highlights the futility of such an approach with his ending. A mudslide—no doubt a result of the trauma to the mountainside caused by the wall's construction—takes down both the white Delaney and the Mexican Cándido and América.

As living in a globalized context becomes increasingly relevant, the need to forge mutual understanding among groups grows increasingly important. Both works offer potential outcomes: Boyle's novel shows the dangers of building barriers and Lahiri's short stories demonstrate the possibility of co-existence. Dissecting the motives behind how we and others communicate various ethnic, class, and gender constructs, is one step forward on a path of understanding. The lens of food culture theory is a cogent point of entry, and the understanding and potential breaking down of culinary barriers can lead to more significant dissolution of other constructed borders.

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