Studies in Canadian Literature
Études en littérature canadienne

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Volume 47, Number 2, 2022

Special Section: Black Lives Matter
Dossier spécial : Black Lives Matter

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108327ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1108327ar

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Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)
1718-7850 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this document

Boeckner, M. (2022). Trinidadian/Canadian Food and the Fiction of Belonging in David Chariandy's Brother. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, *47*(2), 132–152. https://doi.org/10.7202/1108327ar

Trinidadian/Canadian Food and the Fiction of Belonging in David Chariandy's *Brother*

McKenna James Boeckner

> Diasporic communities are formed through the processes of memory, which bind vertically through generations and horizontally across individuals. Diasporic subjectivities emerge not simply from the fact of geographical displacement, but also from the ways in which forgotten or suppressed pasts continue to shape the present. . . . And so we carry an anger that is not our own. *We have cravings for tastes we cannot name*.
>
> — Lily Cho, "Diasporic Citizenship" (106; emphasis added)

Whereas white immigrants to Canada have been "growing more likely to express a sense of belonging to the nation, among second-generation black [Canadians], only 37.0% felt it possible to articulate a strong sense of belonging" (Chariandy, "Fiction" 819). This is a statistic with which David Chariandy begins his 2007 academic essay on second-generation Black writing in Canada. Surveying the writings of these second-generation Black writers, from André Alexis to Dionne Brand, Chariandy develops the working theory that what defines this collective genre is "a fiction of belonging," in which the idea of "belonging has been revealed as a fiction" (828). Using the politics of representation that theorist Stuart Hall reads in Black British literature as a framework, Chariandy proclaims second-generation Black Canadian literature to be populated by protagonists who "have grown up [here], but have been made to feel . . . that they are outside" (821), or, in the words of Brand, made to learn a "way of being in the world" fully aware of how "they'd never be able to join in what their parents called 'regular Canadian life'" (47). Moreover, this disarticulation of a monolithic or mosaic nation of Canada is experienced, Chariandy argues, not through conscious communication of often overly complex official histories but through states of "unconscious transmission of affect" beyond words, an "unwilled circulation of feel-

ing" (826). Being and occupying space in a diaspora become a process that he describes, rather, as "soulful" (828).

Reading Chariandy's recent novel *Brother* (2017), I found myself questioning how it might fit into his own definition of this affect-based "fiction of belonging." Chariandy is a second-generation Trinidadian born in Scarborough, Ontario, after his parents immigrated from Trinidad in the 1960s, and, indeed, the pages of his novel are infused with the familiar panoptic surveillance, racial profiling, and institutional violence that give rise to the recurring themes of the genre that he writes about academically. Given that the illustration on the novel's hardcover edition has a record player front and centre, the most obvious answer to this question would be the soul found in the musical mixings of the *djeli* Jelly, and both Michael Bucknor and Mark Campbell have explored the use of music in the novel: the latter by arguing that Black music "remixes the rupture of diaspora" (par. 1), the former by analyzing how the homo-social bonds that develop around music provide "both an escape from and a fortress against dominant culture" (par. 6). Alternatively, the cover of the paperback edition of *Brother* depicts the Rouge Valley, "a scar of green running through [the Scarborough] neighborhood" (18), in which the narrator and his family recurrently lose themselves to ecological vibrancy — and both David Chariandy himself and Camille Isaacs have provided affective ecocritical examinations of the text: the latter by reading the Rouge Valley as a natural monument to "exist[ing] before and outside official classification" (par. 3), the former by explaining the Trinidadian family's distinctly anti-colonial practices of finding in the Rouge Valley "momentary relief from the city's often negative gaze" ("Acknowledgements" par. 10). Looking beyond initial cover-inspired responses, however, I want to articulate how cultural food and food practices also provide an affective locus for Chariandy to navigate his fiction of belonging, to articulate the liminal affective *ways of being* that diasporic second-generation Black Canadians (un)occupy, and to sketch in languages beyond the verbal distinctly Trinidadian complications of a monolithic Canadian space. That Chariandy's other published novels, *Soucouyant* (2007) and *I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (2018), feature scenes steeped in the intersections of food, nation, and belonging makes visible a particular trajectory in his creative work that I seek to highlight in *Brother*.

(Un)Belonging

Because belonging, and the fiction that encapsulates it, have been theorized by Chariandy to define this second-generation Canadian experience across several publications, including his doctoral dissertation at York University (2002), I want to begin by briefly elaborating this theoretical basis, which I use in my extended analysis. In "Black Canadas and the Question of Diasporic Citizenship," Chariandy clarifies how the concept of belonging provides an alternative to the readily available terms with which we articulate nationhood, such as citizenship — which historically has excluded people of colour in Canada — and multiculturalism — which allows too easily either sedative ideations in which race does not matter or hierarchical demands for "authenticity" (325-29). In both this essay and his dissertation, Chariandy underlines how early Black Canadian writing by Austin Clarke, Dionne Brand, and George Elliott Clarke betrays "grave doubts as to the extent to which [state-sanctioned multiculturalism and citizenship] may genuinely achieve collective belonging and justice within modern nation-states" ("Black" 332; "Land" 2). If these state-sanctioned epistemologies represent "the rules of utterance formation which, in a given society, organize the sayable" ("Land" 12), then belonging provides an episteme for self-defined affective and felt realms beyond proscription and based upon first-hand experiences, often expressed in "alternative politics and poetics" (14). Cultivation of these marginalized expressive states born from "diasporic legacies of victimization and struggle" has the potential, Chariandy asserts, to "contest the larger political community" ("Black" 334). If minoritized subjects in Canada are expected performatively to "re-script their belonging as implied or directly represented by the official discourses and institutions of the nation-state," then those minorities who "opt to demystify or radically reject the representation of minority belonging" thus reveal the concept of true belonging within friendly conceptions of a Canadian nation as a "myth or illusion unaccompanied by deeper and broader forms of justice and inclusion" ("Black" 329).

In this essay, I reinterpret the "alternative politics and poetics" of diasporic legacies in culturally distinct food practices and food-based writings as loci of national identity expression, navigation, and struggle. Although I draw from various food theorists — such as Roland Barthes, Lily Cho, and Amanda Wise — I first want to introduce briefly the concept of "culinary citizenship" as developed by Anita Mannur: that

is, "a form of affective citizenship which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain subject positions via their relationship to food" (13). Highlighting specifically the multiplicity of definitional possibilities inherent in our individual relations to food, Mannur discusses how the "[d]ivergent but related models of 'culinary citizenship' cast food into a complex web" or weighty epistemological space in which we can read individualized navigations of "official and traditional models of national definition" in ways similar to how Chariandy reads "belonging" in poetry (13). By staying attuned to the semiotics, affective responses, and discursive potentialities inherent in food practices and food writing, Mannur argues, we can distinguish more acutely cuisine as a "placeholder for marking cultural distinctiveness and as a palliative for dislocation" (13) and, I venture here, a placeholder for Chariandy's fiction of belonging. In later sections of this essay, therefore, I will read the performative rescripting of belonging in terms of the gustatory traditions of mainstream "Canadian food," exploring how a self-aware self-presentation can function to reveal as fiction an assimilated culinary citizenship. In the next section, however, I intend to focus solely on representations of traditional Trinidadian dishes within *Brother* and, indeed, how the dishes function as a vocabulary vehicle to express the complicated politics of nationhood, the politics of being through culinary citizenship.

Callaloo/Pelau

> Together we are like a delicious plate of pelau. When you're making a pelau you will put rice, peas, carrots, chicken, . . . coconut milk, hot pepper and so on. The individual ingredients have their own flavours and tastes, their individual nutrients; their own purpose.
>
> — Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar (qtd. in Esposito 61)

Brother begins in a present-tense Scarborough set ten years after the murder of Francis, the brother of second-generation Trinidadian protagonist Michael, by the Toronto Police Services. In this present, Michael lives with his largely non-verbal mother, Ruth, who appears to be worn down by daily mundanity and is especially averse to discussing her complex history and Trinidadian heritage (see, e.g., 64). It is therefore jarring for Michael when, on the date that would have been his brother's birthday, his mother comes home with bags of "dried peas, herbs, spice powders, a cloth bag of rice, [and] leafy greens sticking out the top" amid other ingredients, including "dasheen" from the "West Indian grocers a few

blocks west" and begins to cook by way of articulating her space in Canada (34). Familiar as I am with the semiotic presence of these dishes in writing of the Caribbean diaspora, I initially interpreted the provisions as ingredients for pelau — a rice-based dish baked in seasoned broths with meat, pigeon peas, and other vegetables — and callaloo — a one-pot stew defined by leafy dasheen greens[1] — often competing meals for the title of the national dish of Trinidad and Tobago (Esposito 52, 60).[2] Ruth's culinary progress, however, falters in disorienting "moments of drift" and anxious "panicked eyes [and] trembling hands," and in the end what emerges is not pelau and callaloo but many ingredients untouched and what might be a loose interpretation of pelau served with lentils (Chariandy 35) — an altogether unorthodox combination.[3]

That Michael lacks an explanation of Ruth's progress in the kitchen and resultant meals might be chalked up to a continuation of his mother's despondent behaviour after the death of Francis; nevertheless, I want to read Ruth as having agency in ways similar to how Chariandy provides Adele, the mother in his first novel, *Soucouyant*, with intentionality despite her advancing dementia. In many ways, Ruth's location in the kitchen is much more lucid than that of Adele, who is often found surrounded by ingredients that do not make any identifiable meal, including a "blender full of eggshells, an empty tuna fish can, [and] a dollop of mayonnaise," and the narrator observes that "a recipe has slipped a few times in Mother's head" (44). Yet the narrator of *Soucouyant* still understands his mother's obliviousness in that "forgetting can sometimes be the most creative and life-sustaining thing that we can ever hope to accomplish" (32) — disoriented culinary presence articulating the fractious demands of national belonging. The uncomfortable and anxious space of Ruth's kitchen in *Brother* similarly becomes an affective microcosm, I argue, of how the Trinidadian family's existence in Canada is divided in moments of drift and trembling hands, in forgotten and remembered national dishes. Whether or not the unnamed and left-aside "leafy greens" are those used in callaloo cannot be argued definitively, I allow, but I want to claim tentatively that the leaves are a metonym for the often opposed dish to pelau, if only to provide a legible structure in analyzing Ruth's agentic navigations of cooking in Canada akin to how the competing dishes occupy contested space in contemporary discourses. This speculative analytical position is authorized arguably by neighbours who often leave the same contrasting rice/stew dishes of

"pilau with okra, [and] a stew chicken unmistakably Caribbean," on the family's doorstep (37).

Much food theory on diasporic or transatlantic communities leans toward how food can work to connect individuals to their departed countries and communities. Early theorists in the genre of food literature read cuisine as an "indicator of social identity" (Leeds-Hurwitz 90) or a "badge of identity" comparable to "symbols of national belonging such as coins, anthems, costumes and ceremonies" (Palmer 175), and similar veins of criticism continue, as with Giuseppe Balirano and Siria Guzzo, who conclude that "consumption and production work to create and maintain cultural and linguistic identities alive" (xviii; see also Lawson Welsh 202). Although I do not deny that there is some cultural comfort found in cooking — or that contemporary writers of the Caribbean diaspora such as LaShonda Barnett, Kyle Dargan, and Carlus Henderson foster food traditions as beautiful, if not complicated, self-actualizations — I tend toward the line of food criticism that began with Roland Barthes in understanding food practice as a more complex "system of communication," a language with a "veritable grammar of food" that "develops beyond its own ends, replacing, summing up and signalising other behaviours" (Barthes, "Toward" 29; see also Barthes, *Mythologies* 2 ff.). In introducing readings of food consumption beyond biological necessity or gustatory pleasure, Barthes offers in particular the example of the dairy bar, in which consuming sugary drinks as leisure activity can indicate distinct tastes and values that define American society broadly ("Toward" 20). Fittingly for my analysis, Sarah Lawson Welsh reviews how the long history of "what is eaten and how it is eaten" is used as a language in articulating and complicating identity within stories of the Caribbean (206) — a perspective that I adopt on food presence in *Brother*.

It is worth noting, then, how both callaloo stew and pelau rice have considerable political and discursive significance in Trinidad and Tobago. Eleonora Esposito tracks the rhetorical value that the dishes have gained in political articulations of nationhood on the islands, "embody[ing] different degrees of heterogeneity and homogeneity" (46). Agreeing, Wiebke Beushausen and her colleagues articulate how callaloo traditionally has been used by politicians to "emblematize the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the Caribbean" as collaborative blend (14; see also Clarke 220; Laban and Ramlachan 349). Nevertheless, both Esposito and Beushausen and her colleagues argue that contemporary

callaloo discourses function more as a melting-pot metaphor despite progressive aims of an early era, a "rather romanticized . . . 'happy hybridity' [that] oftentimes conceal[s] conditions and lived experience[s] that stem from asymmetries in power structures" left over from colonialism in a country whose national motto is "unity in diversity" (Beushausen et al. 14; see also Khan 55). In quoting the acceptance speech of former Trinidad and Tobago prime minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar (see the epigraph to this section), elected in 2010, Esposito demonstrates how pelau offers an alternative metaphor for diversity in which distinguishable ingredients "have their own purposes" (61), a chunky rice dish rather than a stew, a mosaic metaphor for marked differences rather than the melting pot that is callaloo.[4] Such thought is echoed in the rhetoric of Austin Clarke, a literary figure to whom Chariandy has dedicated not only much of his academic career but also (as one reviewer of my essay pointed out) *Brother* itself; pelau, for Clarke, is akin to the various nationalities "thrown in and mix up" in Trinidad, notably in contrast to pepperpot (an evolution of callaloo; see Harris 290), seen to blend and "stick" "warring nations . . . together" (Clarke 236, 226).[5] That such binaristic constructions cannot grasp the extent of the diversity in Trinidad and Tobago is not taken for granted; however, as much as they exist in discourse, callaloo and pelau function as metaphors for competing recognitions of cultural mélange, for different conditions of belonging, conditions that Chariandy complicates by locating his characters divided, much like Trinidadian nationhood, among these dishes and their rhetorical significances.

Combining Barthian food-as-language theory with existing food-based Trinidadian discourses, therefore, we can interpret the lurking presence of callaloo and pelau in *Brother* as a non-verbal affective language for how Michael's family understands their place in Canada as a nation, a symbolic gesture of culinary citizenship that acts as a microcosm for larger socio-economic factors. Returning, then, to Ruth's cooking, perhaps we can read callaloo as a metaphor for the family's desire to belong in Canada, a melting away or forgetting of the cultural distinctiveness that ever-present racial profiling latches onto, a dish that Ruth moves away from by leaving aside the symbolically indeterminate leafy greens; pelau, conversely, becomes a metaphor for the desire for cultural uniqueness, for the transatlantic connectedness to past lives and histories, differentiated within the larger nation, a dish that causes Ruth anxiety in asserting cultural distinctiveness. The space of the kitchen,

bifurcated between these dishes and desires, acts, consequently, here and throughout the text as a locus of the internally divisive cycles of seeking the fiction of belonging within a Canadian nation.

This bifurcated struggle of modes of being in Canada as represented through food practices is congruent with second-generation Black Canadian writing as Chariandy sees it. Indeed, using the arguments of Rinaldo Walcott that to "becom[e] a full citizen in a nation like Canada is to learn to forget," Chariandy articulates an "unfittedness between the subject of blackness and the subject of Canada" integral in coming to terms with the "fiction of belonging" ("Fiction" 823). This argument is reminiscent, of course, of Ernest Renan's early musings on nationhood that "the essence of a nation is that all individuals . . . have forgotten many things" (11); but also, and more appropriately for this article, it is compatible with Lily Cho's haunting assertion, with which I began this essay, that diasporic subjects "have cravings for tastes we cannot name." Michael, as a second-generation Black Canadian, similarly notes how his connections with his Trinidadian heritage arrive "vaguely in . . . *tastes*" (*Brother* 8; emphasis added);[6] his struggle to become incorporated into the larger Canadian society is haunted by a perpetual feeling of cultural difference more distant and undefined for him than for his mother but similarly rooted affectively in the palate. It is therefore notable that, when neighbourhood friend Jelly uses Ruth's kitchen later to cook a dish of "vegetables [with] dried peas [and] rice" that again resembles pelau, that marker of cultural difference, Michael feels his eyes "tearing up" and must leave for work at the Canadianized grocery store Easy Buy known to sell Oreos and other mass-produced snacks rather than cultural foods (91). Although his tearing up is attributed to his "weakness for fried hot peppers, Scotch bonnets in particular" (91), it could also signal linguistically an affective response to a forgotten heritage, fleeing a pelau diversity and wanting to be read simply as Canadian. His life, along with his claims to Canadian nationhood, is just like his mother's: caught between food prominences, bifurcated between nations phrased in terms of culinary citizenships but belonging fully to neither one.

In an aesthetic reversal, Chariandy depicts the perpetually empty apartment that Michael returns to after work as bustling now with the crowds of the neighbourhood's Black, brown, Asian, and white young adults "eating Jelly's food and leaving dirty plates scattered" (95). It is almost as if the cultural differences that define the Scarborough neighbourhood have been revived or given space through Jelly's pelau or,

indeed, the absence of the melting-pot callaloo. Furthermore, it appears as if, in the intervening period between Michael's departure from and arrival at the apartment, the pelau somehow has caused Ruth to exhibit her strongly hidden heritage: Michael is revolted by both these "low-lifes" and the fact that "on the coffee table before them is a small green suitcase, the one Mother used decades ago to move to this country, the one she now uses to store pictures and memorabilia, . . . opened wide for anyone to see, pictures of Mother's life before this one" (95). Reading this scene through the language of food allows us to conclude that what Michael fears in this situation is not the presence of diversity — indeed, he notes in hindsight that the crowd was "beautiful" (95) — but the open expression of a cultural pelau and how Jelly's pelau has cracked his history open not only for the larger community but also, notably, for the Toronto Police Services, members of which have shown up to the apartment because of a noise complaint — an often used excuse for racially motivated police presence, as evident later in the novel. In this way, the presence of and affective reaction to pelau embody for Michael a fraught relation to cultural differences, one that not only recognizes the beauty of heritage celebration and shared memory creation but also acknowledges how such celebrations are simultaneously profiled and prohibited in the nation of Canada.[7]

Perpetuating this haunted fiction of belonging in Canada, the following pages shift back in time to the months after Michael's childhood friend Anton was killed, when, "every day, neighbourhood kids were stopped by the cops" to be "prob[ed]" by racially charged questions (99). When we next return to the present, Michael sets to work "cleaning the kitchen" (107) in ways similar to how his mother "scrubs" at already cleaned dishes and instinctively empties kitchen cupboards after Francis dies (166) — an impossible task of cleaning away those haunting remnants of pelau by way of removing ethnicity. If national belonging is bound up in food as discourse, then a happy finding of identity within cultural foods is not possible for Chariandy's genre of second-generation Black Canadian writing. Indeed, even cultural spaces such as Desirea's Barbershop fail and become replaced by mass-produced restaurant chains such as Happy Chicken and Tim Hortons by the end of the novel: Canada emerges as a monolithic, whitewashed nation of food.

(Dis)Comfort Food

> When I was younger I used to love reading recipe books. [They were] a glimpse into lives of people very different from me and also [a way of] trying to figure out, you know, conduct. How do people act in different circumstances in the right way? I always felt I was getting at it the wrong way: obviously there was something wrong about me, [or] I'm getting it wrong all the time.
>
> — David Chariandy ("He Ain't Heavy" 21:00-22:30)

In the previous section, I traced the representations of Trinidad and Tobago's national dishes in David Chariandy's *Brother*, choosing to read the dishes as linguistic signs through which Chariandy articulates the bifurcated space for second-generation immigrants of colour. In this section, I want to go back in time to focus on the flashbacks that punctuate the present day of the novel. Perhaps because of her perpetual absence — Ruth works long hours rooted in the "sweat and throat rot of exhaustion and missed meals" (146) — there is little reference to the Trinidadian dishes in these vignettes of Michael and his brother, Francis, growing up in the Scarborough suburb. Instead, American- and Canadian-owned companies and their "comfort food" products provide the only formative food memories for the children, including Sprite, Corn Syrup, Jell-O, and Molson Canadian.[8] Although the boys would "try to be good" (11) by eating the dinners prepared by their mother of "cook-up and greens, or rice and stew chicken" (10), perpetually they would "find high up in the kitchen cupboard the other tastes [that they] craved" (11-12). Their defining desires and psychological drives, therefore, fermented as children in relation to those name-brand foods of the nation in which they lived. This is only more apparent when Chariandy, by way of solidifying the integrity of these food products in the boys' upbringing, links learned desires for food to their sexual developments: watching foreign-language films to see "a couple seconds of boob" and then infomercials for the "Ronco food dehydrator [and] Stupid beef jerky" (12) or, more explicitly, Michael's "masturbating with *Mazola Corn Oil* to the women's underwear section of the Eaton's catalogue" (21; emphasis added). Mass-produced food products thus become incorporated into their identities in formative ways; however, as I argue in this section, this amalgamation of "comfort food" as a central developmental pathway to identity, in lieu of what that categorical label would suggest, causes a fractious internal bifurcation in ways similar to the callaloo and pelau of the

previous section, a pervading sense of having always performed national belonging wrong.

Accordingly, here I want to zero in on the moments when the boys leave their mother's apartment to read the food landscapes (or foodscapes) of Scarborough. In a recent interview with the *Semi-Prose Podcast*, Chariandy discusses the "good food" scene in his hometown, the setting of the novel. Speaking specifically about the "mashed up cuisines of the Caribbean," he briefly catalogues the "different kinds of what some people would call ethnic foods" in the suburb-turned-city (Chariandy, "He Ain't Heavy" 10:12). Reviewing the history of food in this region of the Greater Toronto Area, Camille Bégin and Jayeeta Sharma detail further how Canada's business immigration programs developed the suburb into interlocking "networks of foodways [that] overlap and combine to create place-specific diasporic sensescapes" that play a key role in "expressing, living, and remodeling identities and livelihoods" in Canada (56, 59). Despite this cultural vibrancy, however, Chariandy notes that he always felt a lurking sense regarding his family's food consumption as if "there was something wrong about me, [or] I'm getting it wrong all the time" ("He Ain't Heavy" 21:00-22:30). Providing a potential source of Chariandy's affective dissonance, Bégin and Sharma underline the racial tensions that have followed these "sensescapes," or sensual landscapes, through development, beginning with early xenophobic legal complaints and public harassments directed toward immigrants and their restaurants by the Central Agincourt Ratepayers Association and continuing in the present with racially charged arguments over community gardens (64). The underlying history of food in Scarborough resembles Amanda Wise's claim that "food is frequently at the centre of much intercultural contact, figuring prominently in the deeply contested terrain of race, ethnicity and cultural diversity," often creating an "urban unconscious . . . permeated by mistrust, suspicion, and competition" (83, 97).[9] If we also follow her conclusion that "the consumption of food always needs to be understood in relation to the settings in which it is consumed, the affective or dispositional nature of each gustatory experience" (107), then we can read Scarborough as a bifurcated foodscape in which to articulate the complicated nature of culinary citizenship or lack thereof for Michael and Francis, a space in which Chariandy's fiction of belonging plays out in a broadly defined Canadian space and at a gustatory developmental level, with brand names acting as our semiotic signposts.

Early in *Brother*, consequently, we watch the pleasure-driven preteen boys sneak out of their mother's apartment through the kitchen to survey the "intersection of Markham and Lawrence" (14), the locus of major culinary expansions in the 1980s and 1990s (Bégin and Sharma 63), roughly the time period in which the flashbacks take place. The boys' subsequent bypassing of the pan-diasporic food products of "spices and herbs under signs in foreign languages," "vegetables and fruits with vaguely familiar names," and "ice-cream with 'back home tastes'" for the "Double-Bubble" and "Fun Dip" at the Heritage Value convenience store can indeed be read as a following of their formative desires for mass-produced snacks (14-15). In Camille Isaacs's somewhat chastising analysis of the novel, this is a form of product-focused amnesia by the author and characters "forgetting or neglecting contentious histories and obscuring the stories that do need to be heard" (par. 8). Returning to Barthes's gustatory semiotics and his understanding that "food brings the memory of the soil into our very contemporary life" ("Toward" 27), while also minding Wise's aforementioned assertions, it is also possible, I argue, to read this bypassing as a self-aware avoidance of marked diaspora caught in the food-based culture wars of early Scarborough or a buying in to a fiction of belonging. In this alternative reading of *Brother*, we can find Michael and Francis's specific choice of "Klondike bars and Eskimo Pies" in the convenience store, food brands that notably appropriate cultural identities for Eurocentric consumption and colonial national construction, as a conscious or an unconscious performance of assimilation through food choice for the "asshole" owner who racially profiles the two young men and "despise[s] the dark stinking guts of every other immigrant" (15). On a semiotic or discursive level, their tastes for treats reveal less a natural developmental progression for children in Canada and more a struggle for representation in a nation such as Canada, a performative amalgamation or assimilation, a generalized loss of learned gustatory tastes that connotes the "necessary part of becoming the modern individualistic" Canadian (Sutton 299). It is symbolically significant in *Brother*, therefore, that this vignette ends with the two boys empathizing with the "heroes masked and misread" in the comic books of the convenience store, their verisimilar "secret origins, their endless war with darkest evil" (15), and is followed immediately by a scene divulging Francis's night terrors stemming from Scarborough's sounds of police and sirens, gang violence, and fractured foodscapes (15-16).

It is perhaps important to note here that a growing number of food theorists explore the positive and productive nature of food-based acculturation in which diasporic subjects navigate nationhood. Jamal Ahmad, for example, interviews racial minorities in the United Kingdom and finds agency in second-generation immigrant consumption of mainstream English foods, a navigation of the duality between conforming to European standards and undertaking adventures outside parental or cultural restrictions (222). Indeed, such legacies arguably are part of Trinidadian heritage, as Jeffrey Mantz articulates: Trinidadian food histories have been marked forever as distinctive "by creatively and strategically incorporating diverse elements into a localized answer" (325; see also Lawson Welsh; and Ross) — amalgamating Kentucky Fried Chicken (Wilson 118), Coca-Cola (Miller 64), and barbeque (Mantz 325) into the internalized beliefs of what it means to be Trinidadian, despite government efforts to localize food (Wilson 118). Although acknowledging the affective power of felt "changes in the original culture patterns" in both the diasporic setting and the diasporic subject that accompany acculturation (Ahmad 221), this narrative does not map easily onto Chariandy's characters and their gustatory relations. Indeed, I tend toward theorizations that view food as a heavily discursive space, an unstable basis for identity formation always, constructed and deconstructive, multidirectional and fluid; I return, therefore, to theories that find complexity rather than a romanticized narrative of progress. If food, Barthes reminds us, is "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior" rather than simply a consumed object ("Toward" 24), then it is hard to view consumption practices, whether in assimilation or differentiation, as anything less than sites for what Wise calls "experiences of cultural anxiety and disjuncture" (82).

Turning back, then, to the secret boyhood ventures beyond Ruth's Trinidadian kitchen, those Scarborough scenes of potential gustatory enjoyment are thus always haunted by an anxious self-awareness. Although the boys appear, in the words of Dionne Brand, to "twist [themselves] up into the requisite shape" of Canada by "go[ing] on as if [they] didn't feel or sense the rejections, as if [they] couldn't feel the animus," a pervading sense that they are wrongly performing Canadian belonging, similar to that which Chariandy himself felt as a cookbook-reading child, betrays a growing awareness that "this [is not] a possible way of being in the world" (47). Indeed, venturing a continuation of the

food's alimentary journey beyond the end of the text, I want to argue instead that we find the brothers' overindulgence in and enjoyment of mainstreamed "comfort foods" by way of performing a belonging prophesies gastronomic discomfort as punishment or repercussion, internalized visceral fear of being unfit for Canada, and compounded guilt in leaving behind their mother's cooking and bypassing the pan-diasporic foodscapes. Returning briefly to the masturbatory Mazola Corn Oil, it is perhaps telling that Linda Murray Berzok discusses how sex and consumption "share psychological attributes as two of life's greatest pleasures" yet also paradoxically become "the source of much psychological conflict, guilt, and shame" (264). Francis's intrusion into and chastising of this oiled scene of sexual discovery allude to an inherent dissonance in Michael's psychosocial development toward mass-produced foods. Belonging, as performed through food consumption, for Michael and Francis, always carries, then, a current of impossibility, a promised paranoia, and a foundational fiction.

Finally, I want to zero in on the semiotic significance of Chariandy's representations of restaurants in *Brother*. When bypassing the cultural foodscapes of Scarborough, the two boys note "restaurants with an average expiry date of a year" that advertise food specific to the Indian subcontinent yet also display "urgently in red marker [a promise to] also serve, whenever asked, the mystery of 'Canadian food'" (15). Lily Cho reads similar compromises in menu options as "texts of survival" (*Eating* 56), in which so-called ethnic restaurants are "negotiating and alleviating the perceived threat of their otherness" in order to profit in a Canadian foodscape (56). Such Eurocentric pandering, in her words, is a "self-conscious self-positioning," or an "echoing of the logic of racist exclusion whereby Chinese [in her context] is not Canadian" (56), a factor that Chariandy recognizes in *Soucouyant*, in which the narrator sees that Scarborough's "Heritage Day parade was being revamped these days to recognize 'people of multicultural backgrounds,' 'not just Canadians'" (60). This analysis can be extended to the self-conscious self-positioning of Michael and Francis (in *Brother*) as they dine at the burgers-and-fries restaurant Steak Queen in a later flashback.

A chain restaurant established in 1979 and known locally for extremely affordable burgers, fries, and souvlaki (Pataki), Steak Queen provides the setting in *Brother* for Michael and Francis to reunite after Francis has run away from home because of heavy police surveillance following the shooting of a neighbourhood friend. In ordering a "feast,"

he receives almost every item on the menu in large quantities: "Two steaks on buns and two burgers, as well as fries and onion rings, two deluxe milkshakes made extravagant with whipped cream and cherries and extra syrup," alongside "full-sized salads with Italian dressing 'for the vitamins'" (80). Moments after this overindulgence, Francis reveals to Michael that he has found a home address for their long-absent father (82). It is easy to read this "feast" as a forgetting — an aligning with the burgers and fries that, as Cho acknowledges, often compose the "Canadian food" of "ethnic" restaurants and discursively "situate the idea of Canada within the terrain of whiteness" (*Eating* 53). The amount of food also signals a lack of formality that Wise has argued allows immigrant youths to "carve out a sense of belonging to a global youth culture, culturally diverse friendship networks, and to wider society" (89) in *Brother* by shedding the aesthetics of difference in those foods that have become part of their identity in the aforementioned pivotal years. Nevertheless, the scene of supposed comfort in this Canadian belonging is punctuated by gestures of discomfort that signal self-conscious anxieties: Francis "drum[s] his hand nervously on the table" (80) as they eat their fries and only speaks to his brother "in the window's reflection" about the ways to carry oneself "to let the world know you're not nobody" (81). Instead of digging in or enjoying the gustatory sounds of smacking lips and happy mouths, the brothers "feasted quietly until [they] had nothing but fries nibbled at the ends" (80), a performed synesthetic lack that becomes associated not only with masculine food practices (Bourdieu 37) but also with the dulled or forgotten gustatory stimulations associated with becoming Canadian, as noted above (Sutton 299). The brothers' display of numb liminality counteracts the viscerality that so far we have come to associate with food, food memory, and food sensation.

As we read the semiotics of the foodscape, then, or Wise's "material, ritual and social settings in which food is consumed" (107), this anxiety betrays the boys' self-aware self-presentations, their attempts to negotiate survival in Canada. Indeed, it is worth noting the infamous legacy that Steak Queen holds in the Greater Toronto Area as the restaurant in which then-mayor Rob Ford was filmed swearing about vague "serious shit, bro," in mock Jamaican patois in 2014, obviously drunk after publicly swearing off alcohol ("Rob Ford"). It was later revealed in police records that the now-closed Etobicoke location of Steak Queen was a usual haunt of the drunken mayor and that staff members encouraged

his culturally inappropriate actions. As Amy Pataki points out, the restaurant even "erected a makeshift shrine out of the ensuing newspaper articles" about Ford's cultural appropriation and displayed "Ford campaign magnets behind the counter" during his campaign. Although this legacy would not have been established in the 1980s setting of the flashback in *Brother*, and Ford's location was in Etobicoke, on the other side of the city from the Scarborough location in the novel (though it might be interesting to imagine a young and boisterous Ford sitting near the boys), the restaurant chain's name might spark these resonances for contemporary Canadian readers in and after the year of publication in 2017. The space is marked, therefore, with culturally significant reminders, flooded with an atmospheric resonance of micro-aggressions and racial tensions. Indeed, "the man at the cash register" who "seemed doubtful about the order" that Francis placed "until Francis put his money on the counter" (80) echoes both the Ford legacy and the larger racial tensions of the Scarborough foodscape, chiefly the racist convenience store owner who earlier profiled the boys as Black and poor. This legacy is further complicated and bifurcated by the mention of "several cans of beans and tuna, as well as some rice, condensed milk, and a bag of apples," that the brothers previously bought for their mother spoiling in the summer heat in the back of the car as they eat (79). Much like Chariandy's academically articulated diasporic experience, the linguistic locus of culinary citizenship provides an atmosphere ever haunted by the undercurrents of racial micro-aggressions that fill the Canadian restaurant and the boys' real or imagined anxieties of having forgotten their culture in the back of the car. Although on the surface this scene can be read as a moment of enjoyment, of assimilation or acculturation, this reading runs the risk of forgetting the ever-bifurcating fiction of belonging with which diasporic, second-generation immigrant experience is hauntingly coupled — and of romanticizing food as magically healing rather than fractious and symbolically weighty. The comfort food barely seems to fill the boys; moreover, any gustatory pleasure feels stifled instead in Francis's self-conscious concluding assertion that "you've got to carry yourself better and think about your look" (81) or, returning to Cho's fundamental conclusions on "ethnic" restaurants, his "presentation of [his] continuing exclusion" by way of surviving in Canada (*Eating* 57).

Conclusion

In the final pages of *Brother*, Jelly returns to Ruth's kitchen in the present, this time inspiring less panic in Michael despite cooking an improvised meal of "bitter green[s with] fried rice [in which] each grain sit[s] miraculously on its own" (177), a dish of Chinese origin but linguistically signalling the rhetorical distinctiveness of the Trinidadian pelau analyzed in the third section of this essay.[10] In this affective shift from flaring diasporic panic to a seeming joy, I initially read a settling into cultural difference, a "resistance and abrogation through which cultural continuity is maintained" along the lines of early diasporic food theories (Balirano and Guzzo xviii). Although I anticipate the argument that this is indeed a compromise — an appropriation of Canada to articulate a Trinidadian space — I also recognize how this is a dangerously romantic reading that food theorist Anita Mannur's article on diasporic food and nostalgia would strongly discourage: "Such utopian desires imagine eating to be a solution to the fractious malaises of the world but are predicated on sentimentalized and dehistoricized understandings of the power of consumption" (27). This is an important point, and indeed reading food in these last pages should represent only the inevitable blending of the self with the environment in ways that Chariandy articulates in his academic declaration that second-generation Black Canadians "are porous subjects who are radically and inevitably intertwined with the fates and experiences of others" ("Fiction" 827). Nevertheless, we cannot forget how, thus far, for Michael in *Brother* Canada is typified by his father's inability to find a rental home or work that would accept "a man like him" (82), by a woman who pointedly leaves a bus stop at which he and his brother sit (120), by "neighbourhood boys who . . . learned to carry themselves tough" (121), and by "middle class white kids" who appropriate Black culture and blatantly use racial slurs at a DJ competition (125). Canada is a place where store clerks pin down his family with attentive "Can I help you's" (151), murderers on the news are specified as "Black" (155), and Francis is read as violent and murdered by police (159). Canada is a place where people of colour are "marked by language and religion and skin" (38) and, I would add, their differentiable food practices. With the final word of the novel — "Volume" (177) — harking back to the setting in which Francis died as well as the aforementioned racially motivated "noise complaint," difference as articulated by the effervescent pelau is reinstated: pelau

becomes a place to articulate a sense of Canadianness, perhaps, but also and always a marker of non-Canadianness or of having performed Canadianness wrong, a reminder of that theme that ties together second-generation Black Canadian stories: a fiction of belonging.

Consequently, I began research on David Chariandy's *Brother* with the hope of finding food theory that would back up a trajectory toward a happy ending, in which the final shared meal represents a new way of being in Canada. That was an overly romantic aim that suggested an easy possibility for the Trinidadian family to find home and safety in their cooking, home within Canada through the kitchen. Through my research on food theories and specifically those pertaining to diaspora and the Caribbean, I quickly came to understand that this reading of *Brother* is overly reductionistic and potentially, being a white critic distant generationally from my family's immigration, ethnocentric. Food is an articulation of pain, of diaspora, of loss as much as it can act as an articulation of sustained and embodied difference. If Canada, as I have explored, is a space marked by extreme racial profiling, then the second-generation Trinidadians growing up in Scarborough follow a narrative in which the idea of "belonging has been revealed as a fiction" through the linguistic possibilities of the food that they cook, consume, desire, or crave (Chariandy, "Fiction" 828). If this affective space of unbelonging in the genre is located in an "unwilled circulation of feeling" (826), then in *Brother* it is lodged in the soulful space between callaloo desires for integration and pelau desires for distinctiveness, between the performed assimilations of "Eskimo Pie" or "Canadian food" and the pan-diasporic "'back home tastes' of mango and khoya and badam kulfi" (15). In *Brother*, this fiction of belonging focuses on Trinidadian immigrants' food, culminates in their cooking, and negotiates through their diasporic reactions to foodscapes and nostalgia.

Notes

[1] Dasheen as a root vegetable is not used in callaloo stew — only the plant's leaves are boiled down. However, its mention adjacent to the unspecified greens resonates, at least, in mental recall of the defining leaves of the stew's dasheen bush, perhaps symbolically illegible to Michael in his positionality between nations.

[2] For Trinidadian/Caribbean storytelling that centres callaloo and/or pelau, see Barnett; Clarke; Collins; Dargan; Henderson; Harris; Laban and Ramlachan; and Ross.

[3] Austin Clarke memorably expressed that friends who requested side dishes to Trinidadian pelau should "go to hell!" (240).

[4] Although I do not point to or make use of the fact in my analysis of Chariandy's novel, I find it important to note that callaloo and pelau have genealogical roots/routes in the Afro-Caribbean majority population and the Indo-Caribbean minority population in Trinidad, respectively, and thus carry an undercurrent of the historical tensions between these cultural groups (see Khan 60), a distinction increasingly complicated by writers such as Austin Clarke, Jessica B. Harris (in an interview with Baltasar Fra Molinero and Charles I. Nero), and Marlon Bryan Ross, who tune in to the improvisations, creolizations, and complexities inherent in Caribbean food origins. Somewhat bypassing these connotations of each dish for the purposes of this essay, I use instead how each becomes a semiotic signal in similar, but not uncomplicated, ways as the mosaic and melting pot metaphors that (falsely) define the distinctiveness and assimilation population structures of Canada and America. Chariandy, as I will argue, complicates this metaphoric construction by exploring the liminal, uncomfortable space between binaries — a position perhaps immediately apparent to him and his protagonists as sons of Afro-Caribbean mothers and Indo-Caribbean fathers.

[5] Other writers and storytellers who follow this rhetorical lineage of the dishes include LaShonda Barnett, Carlus Henderson, and Betty Laban and Angella Ramlachan (in an interview with Nicole Ramlachan). These dishes with their weighty significance do have contrasting meanings depending on the writer: poet Merle Collins, for instance, recognizes how the consistency of callaloo is not uniform and draws our attention to the distinctly Carribean, in the words of essayist Marlon Bryan Ross "hardy blending that occurs where the heat hits the pot at the bottom," (Collins 240; Ross 92; see also Khan 54), but even they play with the predominant semiotic position of the dishes.

[6] Notably, Chariandy uses similar language in *Soucouyant* when he expresses that "stories buried deep within our sleeping selves" are "shaken by vague scents and tastes" (32).

[7] Although I acknowledge here the presence of public and state-supported cultural celebrations, I refer more broadly here to the often undocumented realm of the private, the panoptic surveillance under which immigrants of colour are marked and proscribed with aesthetics of difference. As I will review in the next section, racial tensions in Scarborough have long focused on the burgeoning cultural food industries, practices, and expressions in the region (Bégin and Sharma 64).

[8] *Soucouyant* features brothers similarly shifting away from their family's food toward Crisco, Molasses, and Happy Chicken — a recurring rhetorical trope in Chariandy's literary work.

[9] Such public food institutions as sites of contested intercultural contact are common settings in Chariandy's oeuvre. Chariandy begins his newest publication, for example, by assessing foodscapes as sites of intergenerational relationality, cultural bifurcation, and racial profiling. His autobiographical narrator is at "one of those grocery-store buffets" and details how the fiction of belonging shoulders itself in racial prejudice when a white woman pushes past him in line, disrupting sensory belonging, to refill a glass of water, exclaiming "I was born here. I belong here" (*I've Been Meaning* 1-2). *Soucouyant* features similar scenes (e.g. 50).

[10] Interestingly, Henderson's short story about seeking familial pelau after cultural disconnection echoes Chariandy's description of the rice here, in which each "grain must remain separate and delicate when served" (35), signalling a shared discursive meaning between the dishes.

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