The Politics of Responsive Cookbooks: Counter Gastronomy Collectibles in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*

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Abstract

This essay examines the politics of counter cookbooks whose role shifts from receptacles to responses that mobilize revolutionary culinary spaces in the war narrative of Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate (1989). *In particular, the essay redirects the main theories and critiques that have been established and espoused in culinary studies. In this reading of* Like Water for Chocolate*, a cross-cultural intervention in the existing scholarship on domestic spatiality and female identity is addressed. Esquivel's narrative features provisioning collectibles that encode the mobility of the kitchen as a repository of women's counter-discourses that not only reverse but also chaotically recreate the structured conceptions in the master war narratives. The kitchen in Esquivel's narrative compiles cryptic scrapbooks of recipes whose technologies of knowledge are either decoded or re-inscribed from one generation to another. Arguably, women's transgenerational gastronomic writings function as intersemiotic artefacts that activate performative subject positions in gendered households and varied social contexts that reflect the dominant power dynamics. So,* Like Water for Chocolate *decentralizes the impact of external wars, as it curates recipes that are ekphrazeined and recreated in foodways that empower individuals, galvanize new alliances, and decolonize female relations from the national/international ideologies of warscapes, cultural signifiers, and collective memory. The essay incorporates Homi Bhabha's theory on the relation between the codification of history and the art of collecting to examine the discursive relations between food and power. Ultimately, this study revisits the complex dynamics of foodways as narrative functions, especially in relation to social inequalities and justice as portrayed through literature and cultural narratives.*

Keywords: *responsive cookbook, counter-discourse, gastronomy, food justice, domestic wars, public wars.*

This essay focuses on a narrative that invites an analysis of how media spaces (traditional, cultural, aesthetic, embodied, mnemonic) are recreated to reposition wars in space and time in a manner that is transformative across political, social, cultural and personal spheres. In particular, this reading critiques how culinary recipes are militarized to mobilize wars that extend the ideologies of the external combat zones. The propagation of ideological wars, such as of civil wars or international invasions, is highlighted in the domestic

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wars between mothers and daughters in the narrative of Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989). The setting of this focal narrative presents two kinds of wars, the first is the political, national, and patriarchal war in the public sphere, while the other is the "political," domestic and matriarchal war in the private sphere. One can note the parallelism between the external wars in the narrative, on the one hand, and the internal wars, on the other hand. However, the narrative mobilizes the various social dynamics embedded in power structures that are associated with our daily food habits and culinary practices. In this regard, *Like Water for Chocolate* presents counter personal recipes that reveal how the dominant structured conceptions during wars are not merely reversed but recreated chaotically. Arguably, the essay demonstrates that as well as looking back to historical situatedness, cultural signifiers and personal memory, cookbooks mobilize action and promote activism.

The recent scholarship on the cookbook genre has displayed a shift in the reading of cookbooks from reflections of society, culture or history, into active forms of intervention into those spheres. In this regard, critic Laurel Forster (2023) demonstrates that: "rather than considering what the cookbook implies and reveals in terms of social history, recent food symposiums focused upon how cookbooks make an intervention in culture and politics. Cookbooks were seen less as records of socio-historical times past, and more as sites of cultural energy and assimilation in themselves" (246-247). Cookbooks are currently critiqued as reflecting a dynamic cultural agency, suggesting moments of cultural ambition, rather than passively holding a mirror to society as repositories of social history. As such, current cookbook criticism has focused on the changeable role of the cookbooks from repositories to active responses and dynamic forms, which presents a new turn in culinary studies. There was an emergent sense of the cookbook being actively involved in shaping culture, gathering people and groups together with purpose, and making an active statement. So, new food studies offered new approaches that highlight the discursive function of cookbooks as they intervene in cultural contexts, galvanize groups, empower individuals, and resist ideologies. One particular example is the issue of *Food and Foodways* in which cookbooks are presented as sources of group allegiances, or formation of new alliances and processes. The collection demonstrates that as well as looking back to historical situatedness, cultural signifiers and personal memory, cookbooks also mobilize action and promote activism. The essays in this collection examine the cultural and social arguments and events that have generated cookbooks and explore how cookbooks have spoken back to groups, be they readers, writers or communities. In discussing how cookbooks have responded to cultural arguments, cookbooks have a much more active role to play. Cookbook activism has also redirected the relation between food and identity politics. Warren Belasco (1989), for instance, has explored how the radically new and

alternative approaches of "countercuisine" cookbooks have influenced more radical food lifestyles. Katharina Vester (2015: 3-4) has considered how food discourses have produced and impacted upon American identities, where cultural representations of food, food power and ideologies create performative subject positions that defy the culinary consolidation of social, ethnic, and gender roles. Floyd and Forster (2003) reveal how recipes are sites of interaction between stories of "family sagas and community records, of historical and cultural moments or changes, and also personal histories and narratives of the self" (2).

The cookbook collectibles in the selected war narrative of *Like Water for Chocolate* display the alignment between countercuisine cookbooks and performative subject positions. The way cookbooks articulate female agency provides a hidden repository of counter-discourses that challenge established social conceptions. In this regard, many social and gender assumptions have shaped the world of cooking. In "The Culinary Triangle," Claude Lévi-Strauss identifies gender signifiers in varied recipes of the same food item:

> Boiled food signifies refinement and sophistication compared to roasted food. However, the consolidation of gender roles reversed these associations, as boiled dishes are often linked to familial intimacy and traditionally prepared by women. At the same time, roasted fare is associated with public celebrations and a more masculine domain. Not only have these assumptions shaped gender roles within families, but they have also shaped the male-dominated world of fine cooking in terms of prestige and social status. (2008: 1)

Like Water for Chocolate contributes a countercuisine cookbook that interrogates the culinary extension of consolidated gender roles to war settings and their master historical documentation. [1] In this regard, war scholarship reveals that many female writers tend to view war differently as they present stories about girls who suffer from injustice, pain, neglect, and betrayal within the bigger picture of war while they try to restructure their lives to survive the psychological, domestic, and public wars at the same time. For instance, the Nigerian author and critic Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie leads a new wave of writing about wars in presenting the narrative of the Biafran War as the big frame of the stories about certain individuals from different classes and political or religious orientations in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). This wave suggests a new reading of war stories and entails the construction of a new genre of novels that are not aligned with classical battlefield novels. Instead, they do tell war stories from different viewpoints to avoid what Adichie famously called "the danger of a single story". Arguably, Esquivel is not propagating a narrative on numbers, figures, and historical archives that shape a single story. Instead, she proposes a new way of telling war stories within a bigger frame that has a humanitarian touch. *Like Water for Chocolate*

displays varied provisionary collectibles that reflect the dynamics of consolidating socially restrictive roles to mobilizing personal histories. The narrative displays a curation of recipes that communicate empowerment, camaraderie, and decolonization of female relations from the national/international ideologies of warscapes, cultural signifiers, and collective memory.

Like Water for Chocolate is set during the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The revolution also referred to as the Civil War, lasted for almost ten years and resulted in the end of the thirty-year dictatorship and the establishment of a constitutional republic. Mama Elena is one of the subjects who has been oppressed by the patriarchal society and traditions and transfers such oppression to her domestic space. Mama Elena takes the dominating role in the family that consists of three daughters Rosaura, Gertrudis and Tita De La Garza. After the death of her husband, Elena finds herself a young widow with three daughters and a ranch to manage. The weight of responsibility, as a mother inside the house and a manager outside the house, has turned Mama Elena into a strict dictator. She controls everything around her including the destiny of her girls and assumes the role of not only a male dictator but also a higher power that takes the role of the punisher, a higher force of oppression. Mama Elena's control over her daughters is exemplified by what Foucault (1995) refers to as "rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement" (15). Following her husband's death, Mama Elena "becomes the man of the house" (Perez 2009: 13) and eventually impersonates the male oppressor. The attitude of the oppressive matriarch causes a clash between Mama Elena and her daughters, especially Tita who is the first victim of her mother's dictatorship. Tita, according to traditions, is destined to be a slave for her entire life since she has to take care of her mother until her death. This absurd tradition of imprisonment and enslavement is claimed by Mama Elena as her legitimate right, being a matriarch.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the conflicts between the daughters and their mother introduce technologies of warring cookbooks. Michael Antony (2008) argues that feminists propose false claims about war: "The feminists have claimed that war is a product of 'patriarchy' or male domination, but there is no evidence of this." (110) This claim is crucial for the understanding of private wars and their development in Esquivel's narrative. Women play major roles in both spaces as they resist both enemies: the matriarchal enemy in the private sphere and the patriarchal enemy in the public sphere. Esquivel showcases that the so-called masculine craft is no longer gender specific. Women are no longer absent in the external battlefield and the battlefield itself is no longer a gender-restrictive outdoor space.

The first act of culinary resistance in *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) is Tita's birth in the kitchen in a magical way that delivers tears, salt, and a baby. Tita

makes her "entrance to this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table" and "was literally washed into this world on a great tide of tears" (1). The image of Tita flowing into the world in a flood of tears prefigures the sadness and longing that will pervade her life. However, the salt accumulated from the tide of tears is dried to be used for cooking on the farm, which emphasizes the culinary gifts that Tita provides to the house. Being her birthplace, the kitchen becomes Tita's natural space, "where she spent most of her life from the day she was born" (1). Tita's birth also prefigures and signifies the motherly disempowerment of Mama Elena, who is now unable to produce milk (being devastated by the recent death of her husband) and consequently hands off Tita to the house cook, Nancha, who raises the child in the kitchen. Surrounded by the colours, smells, and routines of Nancha's kitchen, Tita comprehends the world in terms of food and in a way that is different from that of her sisters, Gertrudis and Rosaura. She enjoys her isolation in the domain of the kitchen. And food becomes her language of self-expression that supports her stand in the culinary war and her ownership of the kitchen.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the matriarch's psychological strategy is an authoritative intervention in culinary composition. The narrative demonstrates how the oppressive mother has a new target to control her daughters: "since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul" (Foucault 1995: 16). Mama Elena subjugates Tita's soul and quenches her intrinsic love for cooking by transferring and infusing her oppression as a new ingredient in Tita's food preparation. One major example is Tita's love for Christmas rolls which is violated by Mama Elena's announcement. Nancha and Tita "were together in the kitchen making Christmas rolls. As the name implies, these rolls are usually prepared around Christmas, but today they were being prepared in honour of Tita's birthday" (5). Using food-swapping terminology, Chencha indirectly comments on Mama Elena's plan to have Pedro marry Rosaura instead of Tita. Tita's first reaction reflects a limited assurance while she is cooking: "She would not accept what she had just heard." (5) Feigning calm, Tita proceeds with her inborn instructions for making Christmas rolls. However, Tita's innate culinary practice is interrupted by Mama Elena's intervention in the recipe: "When Tita was finishing wrapping the next day's rolls, Mama Elena came into the kitchen and informed them that she had agreed to Pedro's marriage to Rosaura." (5) With this announcement, Mama Elena quenches both Tita's desire for Pedro and her self-empowerment and healing through the food she makes: "And now she had to give him up. It wasn't decent to desire your sister's future husband […] She started to eat the Christmas roll Nancha had left out on her bureau, along with a glass of milk, this remedy had proven effective many times." (7-8) However, Tita's favourite recipe could not even cure her sadness. She is crippled by a feeling of cold. The warmth that Tita would usually get from her favourite food cannot end the coldness induced by

her tragic love. Tita's understanding of life through food fails to comfort her, and the inadequacy of food as an alternative to love becomes her new reality.

To sustain her authoritative position, Mama Elena resorts to a dismantle-to-rule plan. Her power has been directed toward cutting off all kinds of connections between all people in her house, especially Tita and Pedro. Elena specifically fights Tita's love for Pedro not only by forbidding their marriage but also by prohibiting any kind of communication between the lovers. So, gendered war is revisited since Esquivel's argument indicates that the feminist war against patriarchy is not the solution to gaining female freedom, as suppression is initiated here by a matriarchal authority. For Mama Elena, all forms of interaction pose a great danger to her authority. So, she forbids verbal communication. The lovers try to connect through Tita's recipes. For example, when Tita becomes the Chef, Pedro gifts her a bouquet of red roses. But Mama Elena orders Tita to throw it in the garbage. Even the smallest gestures of indirect contact have been monitored and eradicated by the matriarch. However, Tita uses the same roses to create her counter recipe quail in rose petal sauce, which becomes a source of communication with Pedro. Her food preparation becomes the artistic expression that empowers and enables her to connect with her lover while being at the table with Mama Elena: "That was the way she entered Pedro's body, hot, voluptuous, perfumed, totally sensuous." (21) The consumption of quail in rose petal sauce is of high importance for our understanding of the counter recipe. With that meal, it seems they have discovered a new system of communication, in which Tita is the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and Gertrudis the medium or the conducting body through which the singular romantic message is passed. Tita's counter culinary media of communication have also several effects on each character according to their effaced desires. However, Tita's passion remains the most essential of all. Some may read Tita's situation as that of a victim, but the consumption of quail in rose petal sauce presents her as a powerful figure who manipulates people by cooking. And the most important example is her impact on Gertrudis's life. By taking the essential role of the cook, the food security of the ranch becomes under her control since Elena is not a cook, but a violent killer: "Mama Elena was merciless, killing with a single blow. For Tita she had made an exception; she had been killing her a little at a time since she was a child." (18) The recipe resistance exceeds the geographical limitations of Mama Elena's cuisine and realizes remote physical connection despite Mama Elena's presence. In this sense, Tita succeeds in resisting the matriarch by claiming the recipe of what has been supposed to isolate her and turning it into a venue of creation and communication. Tita's resistance accumulates power through gastronomical composition and proves that, as a woman, Tita is not the victim of matriarchy but an active player in the war against the unjust authority of the matriarch.

Tita's Quail recipe creates a female camaraderie that also liberates Gertrudis from Mama Elena's power. Esquivel clarifies that passion, not gender, becomes the driving force that elevates the person to lead. The case of Gertrudis is the best example as she has been infected by a magical potion of passion after eating quail in rose petal sauce already cooked by Tita. The cooked petals had already been infused by Tita's blood as she held them "to her chest so tightly that when she got to the kitchen, the roses, which had been mostly pink, had turned quite red from the blood that was flowing from Tita's hands and breasts" (19). Tita's blood and Pedro's roses that transmitted love through food have "proved quite an explosive combination" (19) and had an intense effect on Gertrudis, who is whipped into a lustful state and flees the ranch in the arms of a revolutionary soldier. She defies her mother's authority, first by the public expression of her sexuality as she flees naked from the house on the back of the rebel's horse in one of the most daring scenes in the novel, then by ruling an army of men. Even though the main battle over authority is between Mama Elena and Tita, Gertrudis launches an equally destructive war with her mother when she escapes her home to invade the public sphere. Mama Elena burns Gertrudis's birth certificate and all her belongings to set a precaution for her sisters, especially the rebellious Tita. Gertrudis has been liberated by Tita's recipe to pursue her passion for leadership. Her skills and courage at war pave the way for her to be the general who rules an army of loyal and obedient soldiers. In this sense, Tita's gastronomical composition encourages Gertrudis's rebellion against the matriarch in the private sphere and the patriarchal authorities in the public sphere.

Gertrudis's journey can be read as the metamorphosis of the passionate rose. It is a story of becoming, even in the toughest deserts of Mexico, geographically and metaphorically. It starts in the kitchen when Tita presents quail in rose petal sauce which "precipitates her outrageous escape" (Chakraborty 2015: 5) and ends in the kitchen when Gertrudis orders her loyal, yet culinary ignorant, soldier to prepare her favourite dessert (cream fritters). Tita has left the kitchen to discuss her pregnancy with Pedro. Gertrudis, General of the Army, has found herself alone with a recipe: "Gertrudis read this recipe as if she were reading hieroglyphics" (Esquivel 1992: 88). Her power and success on the battlefield do not help her when it comes to the "batter field"! To solve the problem, she resorts to her authority over the loyal soldier Sergeant Trevino and commands him to prepare the syrup, or she will shoot him dead. Even though Gertrudis manages to be a national icon of resistance and rebellion, only domestically, she needs culinary assistance. When Chencha, the cook, refuses to help the General, Gertrudis resorts to her army and to Sergeant Trevino to ask about the cooking measures (90).

Esquivel manages to reverse the gendered roles in different recipes and proposes not equality, but rather neo-gender superiority in some instances.

Gertrudis, who lacks culinary knowledge, resorts to her authority just like her mother. But the victim here is the Sergeant who turns from a courageous fighter to a pastry chef to please his superior and save his life (92). Gertrudis's journey reflects new gendered dynamics in the battlefield and the kitchen: "Gertrudis' delegation of the baking shows her status as head of her community" (Komori 2010: 40). Gender equality is not the focal discussion in *Like Water for Chocolate* as Esquivel presents an anti-feminist perspective, not in the sense that it objectifies women but in the sense that it highlights female power without the considerations of patriarchy or the so-called masculine superiority. There is a war between men and women over spaces and freedom. The real war that the daughters fight is the war against matriarchy. Tita's battle may be limited to the culinary sphere, but Gertrudis's battle, even if not highlighted enough, is highly significant for today's women. It represents the battle of strong women who choose to live beyond the borders of their mothers' cuisine.

Tita leads another counterattack to intervene in her mother's recipes when the matriarch has been injured. Even though Mama Elena orders Tita to be the cook of the ranch in an attempt to control her inside the kitchen, she does not realise that by doing so Tita will dominate their food and the kitchen which is the heart of Mama Elena's space. The rebels have attacked Mama Elena's farm twice. The first attack caused Tita's nervous breakdown after the rebels violated the dovecote and "rounded up enough to feed the entire battalion for a week" (Esquivel 1992: 38). Even though Tita's birth has been described earlier as if she had been delivered by a wave of tears on the kitchen table, her real birth is when Dr. Brown has "found Tita naked […] curled up in a fetal position" (46). Mama Elena then asks Dr Brown to confine her to an asylum. The war against Tita has different consequences, and the psychological one is the most difficult. Mama Elena jeopardises Tita's sanity after tormenting and dislocating her from the community and keeping her a prisoner. The dovecote incident is highly metaphorical. In the same way that the bandits take all the doves to devour them, Mama Elena has devoured Tita's will to live and left her covered in pigeon droppings and feathers, so she may never fly from the matriarch's nest. However, Dr Brown intrudes to deliver Tita into life again by moving her from her mother's concrete womb to life, but first through a spatial incubator. The whole concept of motherhood is readdressed as new forms of mothering emerge due to different power dynamics between the characters. In this sense, Tita's exile from her motherland is a new and painful birth after which she becomes an empowered woman who knows her rights and fights for her place in the matriarchal world.

The second attack against Mama Elena was by a group of bandits who ransacked the ranch. The bandits' invasion of the farm has turned Mama Elena into a disabled matriarch and has anticipated Tita's final culinary invasion. So, her mother receives her in silence: "For the first time Tita firmly held her gaze,

and Mama Elena lowered hers. There was a strange light in Tita's eyes." (58). Even though Elena has exiled Tita and ordered Dr. Brown to put her in an asylum, Tita has returned to her mother's space. Many people may read this as an act of purity or kindness. However, by so doing, Tita's recipes invade the kitchen of her disabled mother and dethrone Mama Elena. Yet, Tita faces a culinary dilemma since whatever she cooks for her mother, the matriarch describes it as "nasty and bitter" (59). Mama Elena thinks that Tita is planning to poison and get rid of her in order to be with Pedro, but she does not verbalize her worries. Instead, she just refuses to eat anything that Tita cooks or offers. Tita resorts to other chefs to cook for her mother. Still, Mama Elena continues to believe that Tita is poisoning her food. The disabled matriarch uses verbal abuse with all the cooks that Tita hires, and resorts to chemicals to supposedly clean her gut from the toxins. Tita aims at relocating herself in the matriarchal space, but as a free cook and woman not as an oppressed daughter. For Mama Elena, Tita's return has been regarded with caution as it represents a threat to the matriarch. That is why "she refused to eat anything that Tita had cooked" (61). Gastronomy plays a vital role in Tita's domestic intervention as she manages to reclaim her space on the farm as the master chef despite her mother's refusal (Atieh & Deeb 2021: 6).

Tita's curated recipes become the historical framework that restructures *Like Water for Chocolate* as the main episodes of each chapter are centred around the preparation or consumption of the dishes that Tia's recipes feature. Theorists' references to curated books as functional collectibles that symbolise power within social and historical hierarchies and status structures are significantly relevant to the provisionary collectibles. In this regard, Homi Bhabha (1995) reflects on book curation as a historical reference of personal mobility. Writing about unpacking his own crate of books, he asks: "Does the order of books determine the order of things? What kind of history of oneself and one's times is coded in the collecting of books?" (5) In this regard, critic Laurel Forster (2023) demonstrates how Bhabha's reflection is relevant to her relation with the order of her cookery books (246).

Like Water for Chocolate is re-ordered in light of the chaotic memories that Tita's recipes yield. The narrative is divided into twelve chapters, one for each month of the year, and each chapter comes with a Mexican recipe that correlates to a specific event and meal preparation in Tita's life. The narrator of the story is Esperanza's daughter, nicknamed Tita after her great-aunt. She describes how, after the fire, the only thing that survived under the smouldering rubble of the ranch was Tita's cookbook, which contained all the recipes described in the preceding chapters and told "in each of its recipes this story of a love interred" (118). The recipes are curated by Tita, who rebels against the family tradition that confines her to a loveless life. Her insistent questioning (even though she does not petition Mama Elena directly) of her lot

in life can be identified as one of the feminist impulses in the novel. This refusal to accept an assigned and undesirable social role marks the beginning of Tita's path that ends with self-assertion and freedom. On the other hand, the recipes are correlated with different months. So, they function as the alternative calendar or historical timeline that documents Tita's life. Such culinary history becomes the counter record to Mama Elena's master narrative that follows the timeline of the general war. Tita's cookbook reorders and corrects the restrictive reading of her life in light of her wars with Mama Elena.

The way Tita curates her cookbook restores the originality of the recipe and affirms self-balance and self-assurance that does not lead to destructive bleeding or merciless killing. The curator Tita positions the recipe of "Chrutnuw Ro" at the beginning of the narrative. The order of this recipe makes it a framing narrative that emphasises Tita's need for healing and self-assertion. The recipe refers to onion-induced weeping and offers a tactic of placing some onions on the cook's head in order to stop the tears. The recipe articulates the possibility of resistance and healing that presents a counter-narrative to Mama Elena's master narrative of oppression. In line with this frame, the following recipes are responsive compositions to the internal recipes that are intercepted by Mama Elena's authoritative cuisine. For instance, the February recipe "Chabefa Wany Cake" is given precedence to the violated recipe that has been inscribed by Mama Elena for Pedro and Rosaura's wedding. The March recipe is another articulation of reinscribed self-awareness as it violates the original recipe in order to resist the mother's authoritative intervention in Tita's communication with Pedro.

The other curated recipes register Tita's progressive journey toward healing, balance, and self-assertion. The April recipe, "Turkey Mok with Almonoj", features care and tenderness that reflects Tita's motherly feelings when she nurses Roberto, the son of Pedro and Rosaura. The recipe highlights the need to have turkey fattened up properly. Again, this recipe is important as it reflects the sustainability of love, care, and nurture through food and ultimately transcends Mama Elena's attempts to separate Tita from Pedro by sending him, Roberto, and Rosaura to San Antonio. Similarly, Tita's May recipe "Northern-tyler Chorizo" is a call for self-control that avoids the continuation of boiling/anger that leads to violence and destruction. This recipe is a counter record to the federal troops' raid on the ranch and the ensuing loss of Tita's large dovecote which has her cherished doves and pigeons that she used to nurture with care. The June recipe, "Makiny Matcheo", is a composition of comfort and distance from Mama Elena's oppressive ranch. It defies the language of isolation that Mama Elena advocates, suggests a recipe for an inner fire that yields protection and self-care and replaces the exterior fire of wars and conflicts. The June recipe feeds the idea of "because I don't want to" in Tita's personality and initiates her journey toward independence and selfhood.

The curated July recipe "Ozc-Tad Soup" also features its purpose of effective healing: "Soups can cure any illness" (54). The July recipe is another component in Tita's cookbook that recognises healing as an effaced truth in the midst of wars (Esquivel 1992: 54). Tita's August recipe "Champanngo" refers to resilience through pain. The recipe's ingredients of finely chopped onions are linked to the first curated recipe that communicates the technique of putting onions on the cook's head to avoid weeping (65). This counter technique is still needed by Tita to exercise control over rage or the feeling of "like water for chocolate," referring to the preparation of chocolate, during which water is brought just short of boiling several times before use in the recipe.

The culinary collectibles of September and onwards register the empowerment of new relations that resist isolation and passive endings. The September recipe of "Chocolate and Three King' Day Bread" transfers power through nourishment, comfort, and family reunion. The composition of this recipe reiterates the mixing of several types of good chocolate beans (75). The preparation of this meal coincides with Rosaura and Gertrudis's return to Tita's cuisine where she offers remedies for Rosaura's indigestion and discomfort through her nourishing food and where Gertrudis finds connection and camaraderie with her sisters in the ranch. So, the chocolate recipe correlates with comradeship that, again, decenters the isolative impact of the master war that has been consolidated by Mama Elena. This female solidarity is galvanized in the October recipe "Cream Fritter" which instructs the need to maintain a low flame that allows the cream mix to thicken. This meal preparation simulates Gertrudis's need to listen with patience to Tita's articulation of desires in order to build steadfast support that encourages Tita's self-assertion. The November recipe "Bea with Chile Tezcucana-Tyler" communicates the need for the infusion of food preparation with joy in order to transmit positive energy. Like the beans that need to be boiled with baking soda (96), the food needs to be purified from the anger and toxic feelings that shape the conversation between Tita and Rosaura over her planned marriage to Pedro. The December recipe of "Chi in Walnut Sauce" recipe reflects the urgency to free the self from rigid social structures and cultural conceptions. The December recipe involves "shelling the nuts several days in advance" (107-108). This last recipe also signifies new beginnings and directions initiated by the cross-cultural marriage of Alex, John Brown's son, and Esperanza, which terminates a toxic legacy of oppression and destruction.

To conclude, Tita's provisionary collectibles create an alternative timeline that reverses the master war narratives that end with death and destruction. The order in which these recipes are curated in Tita's cookbook rereads the final scene of the ranch fire and the death of Tita and Pedro as an intervention that brings new hope for justice. The rearranged recipes articulate a culinary wisdom of activism that preserves history but embraces liberation.

As such, Tita's cookbook realises food justice as it shifts the role of her curated recipes from being militarised receptacles into active responses that mobilise performative subject positions and galvanise alliances that are decolonised from the dominant social moulds and restrictive cultural memories.

Notes

[1] María Teresa Martínez-Ortiz (2010) reads Esquivel's narrative as a cookbook that belongs to a traditionally considered feminine genre and is situated in war settings since the nuns in convents began to compile recipes to recover culinary history during the Mexican colonial period (167).

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