

LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

At the Postnational Table: Food, Fantasy, and Fetishism in *Tastes Like Cuba* by Eduardo Machado

Nieves Pascual Soler

University of Jaén, ES
npascual@ujaen.es

This article explores the transition from nationalism to postnationalism through food in *Tastes Like Cuba: An Exile's Hunger for Home* (2007), by playwright Eduardo Machado. The framework used is Sigmund Freud's narrative of the Oedipus complex. I suggest that the exilic condition of Oedipus and his rebellious behavior make the Oedipal narrative a useful tool for approaching the postnational rejection of the oppressive nature of the nation. I replace the phallus as the source of pleasure with food, and argue that the memories that ensure the continuity of the nation are largely alimentary. A study of what Eduardo Machado eats or refuses to eat to keep recognizing himself as Cuban leads me to explore ways in which the nation shapes subjectivity and the subject informs the postnation, adding to the scholarship on Cuban American literature.

Este artículo explora la transición del modelo nacionalista al postnacionalista en *Tastes Like Cuba: An Exile's Hunger for Home* (2007) del escritor cubano Eduardo Machado. El marco teórico es el de la narración del complejo de Edipo según Sigmund Freud. Se sugiere que la condición de exilio de Edipo, así como su rebeldía hacen de esta narración una herramienta útil para analizar el rechazo postnacionalista de la naturaleza opresiva de la nación. El falo como objeto de placer se sustituye por la comida. Argumento, pues, que las memorias que garantizan la continuidad de la nación son, en su mayor parte, alimentarias. Un estudio de lo que Eduardo Machado come o deja de comer para continuar reconociéndose como cubano me lleva a investigar las formas en las que la nación moldea la subjetividad y el sujeto moldea la postnación, contribuyendo de esta forma a la investigación y difusión de la literatura cubana-americana.

Introduction

In *The Physiology of Taste*, the philosopher of gastronomy Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1949, 1) claims, "The destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves," or that nations are what they eat. Over the past ten years the link between food and identity has been broadly investigated by looking into the dishes that signify one's nationality, as opposed to foreign cuisine (Ichijo and Ranta 2015; Pilcher 2012; Wilk 2009). Scholars agree that food is a powerful ideological tool and, in the words of Susanne E. Freidberg (2004, 47), "was central to campaigns of national building" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: "These campaigns helped to build not just the imagined community of the nation . . . but also its imagined table: that is, the nation's foodways." With *foodways* she refers to the conditions and contexts in which food is produced and consumed. In the twenty-first century food continues to be central to identity; still, the globalized and exilic reality of the present has forced the nation-state to take postnational forms that have altered the imagined community of the nation and what is laid on its table. I study the transition from the national to the postnational table through *Tastes Like Cuba: An Exile's Hunger for Home* (2007), written by playwright Eduardo Machado in collaboration with Michael Domitrovich. Before proceeding, I must start with some conceptual clarifications on the definitions of *nation* and *postnation* that I am working with.

Nations and Postnations

In "National Narratives, Postnational Narration," Donald E. Pease (1997, 7) claims that nationalism names "the form narcissism assumed in its passage from an individual to a state fantasy." In his view, national narratives circulate the fantasy that the state reproduces the desires of the individual instead of producing them. This

fantasy creates a community of sameness through symbols and archetypal images that become installed in the collective unconscious. To sustain the illusion of homogeneity, the national narrative celebrates its difference from other nations through the trope of originality. Basically, this means that the nation claims its uniqueness by recovering a lost origin, as old as time, within itself. Likewise, internal differences are repressed and then rechanneled into the abjection of minority groups.

The figures of race, class, and gender that cannot be integrated into the national narrative because they threaten its narcissistic demands are abjected as simulacra of those it fully integrates. In essence, Pease's idea is that minority groups are internalized and repressed as copies of the national model. When the repressed returns, "the 'knowledges'" (Pease 1997, 8), that is, the memories and experiences buried in the unconscious of the national order, rise to the surface of the narrative. At this point the individuals who live in conformity with the national simulacrum become aware of the fact that national identity is an artificial construction that depends on their externality to be complete. In the wake of this recognition, a gap opens between the symbolic and the actual social conditions that national narrativity had covered over. According to Pease, the postnation turns the national narrative inside out and upside down so that the individual comes into possession of his or her own story. When Pease (1994, 13) writes that "a way of living the postnational narrative [is] a rediscovery of . . . oneself," he suggests that postnationalism rehabilitates an individualism reconciled with differences of race, class, and gender.

The instrument that facilitates the return of the repressed in the postnational narrative is the postmodern artifact. It "refers to the activity whereby the fundamental assumptions that guaranteed the givens within the grand narratives . . . are identified as contestations between the already constituted and social materials not necessarily reducible to but nevertheless apparent in, the internally constituted categories of class, race, and gender" (Pease 1994, 9). Even though Pease does not say as much, his postmodern artifact bears resemblance to Sigmund Freud's fetish object, in that both substitute a reality that is disavowed because its acknowledgment would provoke traumatic levels of anxiety. In fact, the totality of Pease's social theory lends itself to a transposition into the framework of psychoanalysis: the narcissism of the nation as formulated by him mirrors the repressed unconscious of Freud and the rise of the postnational echoes the emergence of consciousness. Their theories differ in the content they assign to the repressed: for Pease it is largely social; for Freud it is largely sexual.

I suggest that the knowledges repressed by the nation are largely alimentary. By way of a symbolic order the nation covers over the social and sexual materiality of food, absorbing different foodways into its narrative of sameness. I previously referred to the association between food and nation. As to the nature of the bond linking alimentary and sexual desire, it was already recognized by Freud (1905, 197) in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," where he argued that "the object of both activities is the same; the sexual aim consists in the incorporation of the object, the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important psychological part." Food will play such an important part because it is through eating that the ego resolves the Oedipus complex. But this requires elaboration.

Castro/ation in the Cuban Oedipal Narrative

For Freud the individual is socialized by passing through the three stages of the Oedipus complex. The first stage, when the complex is in the foreground, is driven by pleasure, which is ensured by repressing the reality of differences. The needs of the infant are provided by the mother: the breast is the object of the infant's desire. Even though the mother is the source of intense physical gratification, it is the father who regulates the union between mother and child by taking away the breast object. During the second stage, which occurs at puberty, the child develops feelings of hostility toward the father, whose place the child wishes to take. At this time the threat of castration becomes real, and pressured by reality, the subject strives to repeat the experiences of the early period of his life to achieve gratification. Repetition is played out through fetishized objects.

The third stage corresponds to the resolution of the complex and the emergence of the ego ideal, which to Freud (1914, 101) is never a purely individual phenomenon but "also the common ideal of a family, a class, or a nation." The complex can be resolved in a "normal" and natural or in a negative, inverted way depending on whether the fetish object masks or commemorates castration (Freud 1924, 177).

In the first case, the fetish "saves the fetishist from becoming a homosexual, by endowing women with the characteristic that makes them tolerable as sexual objects," that is, a woman's phallus (Freud 1927, 154). It creates an illusion of wholeness that erases any memory of lack in the subject (Freud 1927, 155). The natural resolution of the ego ideal is heterosexual: the son loves the mother (or rather, her substitute) and reconciles

himself with the father, whom he supplants. Reconciliation and substitution are effected through a totem meal that constitutes the beginning of the patriarchal order.

In the inverted version a "*stigma indelebile*" of the horror of castration is imposed on the son, who, as a consequence, wishes to be penetrated by the father (Freud 1927, 154, original italics). This happens because the fetish is treated "in a way which is obviously equivalent to the representation of castration," making it impossible to forget the loss of the object of desire (Freud 1927, 157). When the repressed is recalled the ego "liberates homosexual libido" (Freud 1914, 100). This generates a feeling of guilt that "originally," Freud (1914, 100) explains, "was a fear of punishment by the parents, or, more correctly, the fear of losing their love; later the parents are replaced by an indefinite number of fellow-men," among whom, we are led to infer, guilt disappears (see also Freud 1921).

Freud is unable to explain why some people become homosexual while others fend homosexuality off by creating a fetish that fills the empty space of repression. I believe that his inability is due to the paradox at the center of the natural resolution of the complex. That homosexual desire must be refused to operate according to heterosexual norms not only places homosexuality at the origin of the myth but also challenges its organizing principle; the implication being that homosexuality neither negates the natural nor inverts its order but is perfectly straightforward.

This is precisely the argument of Emilio Bejel (2001) in *Gay Cuban Nation*, his study of homosexuality as the master metaphor of Cuban nationalism. In this book he explains that Cuban-socialist nationalism inherited the contempt for homosexuals held during Fulgencio Batista's regime (1952–1958) but went further and politically institutionalized their abjection. Their institutional exclusion from the island of Fidel Castro, "the supreme macho Father," reinforced the cultural belief that "that homosexuality arises from a boy's early identification with his mother and alienation from his father" (Bejel 2001, 146, 102). Bejel writes that "Cuban educators and doctors" expounded "the psychoanalytic theory" and "emphasized Freud's stages of sexual development" so that "strict measures [would] be taken in the sexual education of boys from a very early age" (102). Significantly, the state adopted the Oedipal drama as the organizing point for Castro's "project of 'virilization'" (103). The figure of a "new man" (99), very macho and Oedipal, was created for a new nation, "more nationalistic" (96) than ever and even more homophobic. Bejel's thesis is that the enormous efforts to expel the queer body from the Cuban national narrative indicate that homosexuality is necessary in delineating its limits. Far from marginal, then, homoerotic relations are central to the Cuban nation.

Other theoreticians have followed a Freudian orientation to examine the psychological factors that inform nationalism and the way nationalism leads to a particular kind of psychology. As they do, I find in the Oedipus myth—its patriarchal logic, the threat of difference that lies at its heart, and the conflation of the public and the private in its imagery—a useful narrative for examining the links between masculinity and patriotism. Furthermore, the exilic condition of Oedipus and his rebellion against "the symbolic pact whose norms wounds his narcissism and his impulse for genital—or, rather, anal [and oral]—control" (Kristeva 2000, 78) make him a useful figure for investigating the socially disenfranchised nation.¹

In what follows I use the programmatic Freudianism expounded by Cuban-socialist nationalism to deconstruct Cuban (post)national subjectivity. I read the rejection of the normal Oedipal trajectory as the rejection of the oppressive nature of the nation and, accordingly, examine the postnation as an inverted Oedipal narrative. I replace the phallus as a source of pleasure with food, and the closet of the nation with the kitchen. I suggest that the three stages in which the Oedipus complex develops organize Eduardo Machado's desire for food in *Tastes Like Cuba*. In the analysis of his autobiographical narrative, I take the following equivalences as a point of departure:

- nationalism = repression of internal divisions = first stage of the Oedipus complex
- postmodern artifact = fetish foods = second stage of the Oedipus complex
- postnationalism = emergence of the ego ideal of minority figures = negative dissolution of the Oedipus complex

¹ Anthony Smith (1991, 4), for instance, begins his work *National Identity* with a discussion of the Oedipus myth and argues that it "reveals the way in which the self is composed of multiple identities and roles—familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender." More akin to the perspective adopted here, though, is Daniel Boyarin's (1997) *Unheroic Conduct*; Boyarin links the positive Oedipus to nationalism and Freud's disavowal of the negative Oedipus to his disdain for the queer diasporic Jewish masculinity. See also David L. Eng's (2007) *Racial Castration*; he characterizes diaspora in terms of queerness and articulates his argument around Freud's law of castration.

Machado's resistance to Cuban nationalist narrative takes place through food, which, as suggested already, fills identity through categories of race, class, and sexuality. In the context at hand, castration is to be understood not as anatomical genital mutilation but as lack of food (read: hunger) or of food ingredients, as when a national dish is prepared without the products it is supposed to contain.

At this point, it should be said that the food-ration system established in Cuba in 1962 and the Special Period in Time of Peace of the mid-1990s changed the diet of Cubans. New recipes for classic dishes were officially disseminated through cookbooks or "manuals" that, in the words of Hanna Garth (2014, 361), "represent[ed] and convey[ed] one ultimate authority: that of the state" and "direct[ed] human behavior." In them ingredients that were "essential to prerevolutionary Cuban cuisine" (Garth 2012, 66)—such as "beans, *viandas* (tubers), and pork" (Garth 2013, 97)—but could no longer be found in the market, were replaced with different ones "to create dishes similar to what [Cubans] were accustomed to eating" (Garth 2014, 362). Significantly, Garth (2014, 371) highlights that "these changes in the food system do not appear to have changed the . . . conceptualization of Cuban national cuisine." She accounts for "this stability of national cuisine" through "the motivation and work of Cuban individuals, who slowly shifted their practices of food acquisition and preparation to adapt to the new food system" (Garth 2014, 371). It is only fair to note, however, that individual motivations were induced from the political situation of the nation and that the culinary work of Cuban individuals was directed by the state. It is possible, then, that the reason for the stability of Cuban cuisine is related to the cultural amnesia imposed on Cubans rather than to their individual desires.²

A propos of the food substitutions that Cubans began to eat after the revolution, José Antonio Ponte (1997, 69), in *Las comidas profundas*, writes that "to eat in Cuba is to metaphorize" (my translation). To illustrate this process of symbolization, he describes how four or five years before the writing of his book, the sales of meat burgeoned on the island, when there was no meat. Suspicious, the police decided to investigate. They discovered that these ersatz steaks were created from a cargo of cleaning cloths that had previously disappeared (Ponte 1997, 66–67). The cloths had been cut into four pieces and submerged in tanks full of lemon juice, where they macerated for a few days. Afterward, they were disguised in beaten egg and sandwiched between two slices of bread.³ Ponte says that the lie was identified as such by chance. According to him, neither a breach between reality and sign nor any pain in the stomach annulled the trope. In quality, structure, appearance, and mouthfeel, the simulacrum was as it should have been. That the meat tasted authentic revealed that Cubans had already forgotten the sensation of its taste. In light of this, it appears that far from creating a consciousness of identity loss, food fetishes inaugurated a new nationalistic cuisine that forgot the past and sated the palates of the new macho men—heterosexual, homophobic, and, consequently, oblivious of the time before what I refer to as "Castro/ation."

The following section introduces the autobiography. The choice of an autobiography as the terrain for studying the (post)nation has been determined by two considerations. One relates to the "structural alignment . . . of [post]'nationalist' memory with the inner premises and conventions of modern biography and autobiography" (Anderson 1991, xiv). The other concerns Machado's incorporation of recipes in his text, which makes possible its use as a cookbook to study the ingredients of the dishes that feed the mouths of the (post)nation. The section on the culinary unconscious focuses on the first stage of the Oedipus complex, the pleasure principle, the libidinal bond of Machado with his mother, and the authority that his father exerts through his recipe for *arroz con pollo*. The section on fetish foods examines castration during Machado's first years of exile in the United States. The last section deals with food consciousness and cooking activism. It describes the totem meal that seals the desire of the son for the father, which Freud, of course, left unwritten. It argues that the postnational narrative helps Machado manage his guilt over homosexual desire and cooking in his own Cuban way. I conclude by discussing the possibility that Machado's handling of food is symptomatic of a Cuban diasporic subjectivity.

Tastes Like Cuba

In *Tastes Like Cuba* playwright Eduardo Machado tells the story of his family's escape from Cuba after the 1959 revolution, their arrival in the United States, and his struggle to come to terms with exile through eating and cooking. Written with Michael Domitrovich, this autobiographical text describes growing up with

² For the promotion of cultural amnesia after the revolution, see Benítez-Rojo (1989); Guerra (2012, 353–367); Hamilton (2012, 117–147).

³ Daína Chaviano (1998, 101–102) tells the same story.

a well-to-do family in the town of Cojímar, near Havana. His idyllic life is broken when Fidel Castro takes power. Castro nationalizes business and the Machados are left destitute.

Rumors that Castro is going to send the children to Russia to be indoctrinated in communism prompt Machado's parents, Gilda and Othon, to fly their young sons off to Florida to live with relatives. A few months later the parents join the children and the family moves to Los Angeles. There, Machado decides to pursue an acting career. Convinced that acting is only for "fags" (Machado 2007, 180), Othon tries to keep him away from the theater. Yet Machado is adamant. To date he has written more than fifty plays and has garnered as many awards and grants, including a Rockefeller Foundation playwriting award in 1985, a Ford Foundation grant in 1993, National Endowment for the Arts grants in 1981, 1983, 1986, and 1999, and two nominations for Best American Play by the Association of American Theater Critics in 1994 and 2001. Cuba, food, homosexuality, exile, and his family are present in most of them. In 1999 he first returned to Cuba and has returned several times. Because *Machado* is the surname of the family, to avoid confusion I refer to the narrator as Eduardo.

The Culinary Unconscious

Tastes Like Cuba opens with "the smell of boiling milk" (Machado 2007, 1).⁴ In the kitchen grandmother Cuca is brewing coffee. She "relied on her minimalist functional gadget, her *teta* [Spanish for "breast"], nothing but a piece of cloth stitched around a metal hoop with a wooden handle" (2). After coffee is poured and topped with milk, Cuca "added one, two, three spoons of Cuban sugar." At once toasts are buttered and Eduardo knows "one thing for sure. All I had to do was dunk the bread into the cup. Chew, sip, and heaven in the morning was possible" (3).

While Cuca's *teta* creates a bond with the maternal figure (incarnate here in a lactating grandmother), milk is the nectar that stimulates the child's sensual appetites. To Eduardo, "sensuality is everywhere in Cuba, and even at seven I could feel it all around" (32). All around him is food. The smell of the *mojo* used to marinate pork—"That smell is simply at the center of my being," he writes (36). The taste of empanadas and the flavor of *escabeche* trap him in a state of complete fullness, a reverie—"my *escabeche* reverie," he says (50)—of self-sufficiency that renders him "completely immobile" (126).

This sense of immobility and wholeness invites a look into the primary narcissism that happens to the child from around six months up to around six years. The "'introversion' of the libido" to the ego (Freud 1914, 74) that takes place at this stage protects the child from reality by creating a fantasy in which there is no hunger, because gratification is instantaneous. According to Freud (1914, 74, 89), the child seeks himself as a love object, loses the external world, and renounces "the initiation of motor activities for the attainment of his aims in connection with those objects" that give him pleasure, "maintaining a blissful state of mind." For Eduardo, heaven is possible in the morning, at midday, and at night, because by eating he enters a state of narcosis that dulls his senses to the ethnic, gender, and class divisions in the island. The ethnicity and gender repressed in Eduardo's symbolic order can be illustrated through three food reveries that set him into a trance: *moros y cristianos*, paella, and Fernando's *arroz con pollo*. I address the foreclosure of class realities through his loathing of barbecued goat. As to the first dish, "the most quotidian dish even in Cuba today" (Machado 2007, 42), he writes the following:

The dish is officially called *Moros y Cristianos* (Moors and Christians), in which the black beans represent the Moors and the white rice the Christians. It is certainly a Cuban dish, but its name comes from the Spaniards who occupied Cuba in the 1500s. Their reference dates to the Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula between the eighth and fifteenth centuries. Occupations and conquests, racial and holy war, all in one little dish. How could anyone eat knowing there was such conflict in leftover rice and beans? Well, I certainly didn't let it stop me. (29)

Drawing on the founding father of Cuban anthropology, Fernando Ortiz, Anna Cristina Pertierra (2012, 40) affirms that rice and beans "is a powerful metaphor for the connections and disconnections that inform Cuban understandings of race." On the one hand, it recalls the Spanish colonization of the island and Spain's fight to drive out the Moors when Columbus discovered the New World. On the other hand, it brings to mind the African origins of the plantation economy in Cuba during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Pertierra 2012, 41). Eduardo, of white Cuban descent, represses the memory of slavery; otherwise, eating would bring anxiety and threaten the ecstasy of fullness. The memory of colonialism remains, but

⁴ All citations to *Tastes Like Cuba* are to the 2007 edition.

only in the name of the dish that, paradoxically, does not indicate its origin: the name comes from the Spaniards, but the dish is Cuban.

The question of origins is closely linked to narcissism and self-sufficiency. Like the self-sufficient individual, the self-sufficient nation perpetuates itself by virtue of originality. In *The Cuban Condition*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat (1989, 31) theorizes that canceling the knowledge of novelty constitutes one of the primary practices of colonialism: “one of the most insidious types of colonialism is the onomastic or conceptual, the situation that arises when the originality or distinctiveness of the home-grown is explained and rationalized using foreign categories, as if we could grow the guavas but needed someone else to package the paste.” He further maintains that for Cuba to achieve an original “cultural identity, there [has] to be a recognition of the island’s insularity,” its “*insularismo*” or “*aislamiento*, in both the geographical and psychological senses of the word” (Pérez Firmat 1989, 3). Eduardo claims this *aislamiento* in the culinary sense, rebelling against the onomastic and conceptual colonialism of the island by explaining the foreign using vernacular categories. It may happen, as in *moros y cristianos*, that the name fails to indicate the real origin of the dish or that the homegrown version of the dish is better than its foreign antecedent and, therefore, a new creation. Such is the case of paella.

Even though Eduardo acknowledges that some exchange of foods has taken place between Spain and Cuba, on the specific subject of paella—“Spain’s most famous contribution to the world’s table” (La Balle 2012, 272)—he is of the opinion that the Cuban paella served at La Terasa is of superior quality than the Spanish counterpart. The story is the following: On a road trip with his grandfather Oscar, they arrive at La Terasa, a bar for fishermen in Cojímar, where meals “were an everyday miracle” but “nothing was as good as *paella*” (Machado 2007, 28). He writes that “the *paella* never disappointed. It was not dry, like some Spanish *paella*, but moist like it was swimming” (28). In the belief that taste is truth, by dismissing the original as not being as good as expected, Eduardo subverts the legitimacy of Spanish paella, which becomes associated with the false. The underlying assumption is that the copy paella is authentic, whereas the original paella is a simulacrum of a superior form, as if Spaniards grew the guavas but Cubans packaged the paste.

I return to simulation in the following section. Suffice it to say for now that if the origins of paella are a matter of debate, Eduardo’s origins are clearly situated in the kitchen, where men are “forbidden to cook, and God help us all if they so much as picked up a plate” (9). Despite this prohibition, the dish that holds the family together is his grandfather “Fernando’s *Arroz con Pollo*,” “legendary in my family” (8). Eduardo understands Cubanness through Fernando’s recipe: “I think every family has a recipe like this, and if they don’t, they should” (8). Family members have the habit of reproducing the recipe, albeit slightly altering its ingredients to make it personal. For the narrator, however, reproduction must be literal, made to look and taste exactly like the original: “making *Arroz con Pollo* will always start with Fernando’s recipe” (8).

It should be noted that Fernando acts as Eduardo’s father because Othon hardly spends time with the child and pays little attention to him. For the most part of the narration Othon is absent. Be that as it may, despite the fact that Fernando is an exception to the rule that men do not cook, his masculinity or what Bejel (2001, xvii) calls the “Cuban nationalist masculinity”—that is, the model of macho behavior for all Cuban men—is never challenged. Fernando’s voraciousness for food and women mark him as macho. Contrary to Cuca, who “dined only on demitasse plates” (Machado 2007, 6), Fernando’s appetite knows no limit. Concerning this issue, Susan Bordo (1998, 18) explains that manliness and voraciousness are close associates: “it is a mark of the manly to eat spontaneously and expansively”; women, in contrast, are not “permitted to lust for food.” If the ample rations that Fernando devours masculinize him, the cigar smoke, the wine and the “Pedro Varga [*sic*] or Nat King Cole [playing] on the record player” (Machado 2007, 7) in the dining room by the table where his lunches are served, sexualize him as a “demon” whose enticements lead anyone to debauchery. In the words of the narrator, “Fernando was like a demon, tempting with delicacies impossible to refuse” (7) that inevitably “turned any saint to sinning” (7). With this image Fernando’s dining room transposes into a boudoir inviting women to give in to the temptation of his food.

That *arroz con pollo* inspires the family legend positions Fernando as the paterfamilias around whose food the identity of the family is formed. The point is that Eduardo, who makes of his family experience a metonym for national identity, builds his *patria* around the food of the father. That these meals of *arroz con pollo* bond the members of the Machado family together leads me to think of their totemic properties. In “Totem and Taboo,” Freud (1913, 137) argues that the totem meal, which is the beginning of social organization, was a feast of kinsmen—an older organization than family life—that sealed their “identity of substance.” The totem bond was a sacrificial animal that represented the father. In Freud’s rendition of the

history of kinship, the father was killed and devoured by the son so that the son could succeed him. In eating his father, the son accomplished identification and reconciliation. Of interest is that Freud substantiates his claim of food-as-father with Sándor Ferenczi's case of little Árpád and the chicken that snapped at his penis. His interpretation highlights that the chicken, which stands for the father and his castrating power, is eaten by the child as evidence of his wish to castrate his father (Freud 1913, 130–132). In the current case of totemic family dining, it is the food of the father rather than the father as food that is devoured. Other than that, totem fantasies continue to be woven around chickens.

On another level, the image of plenty, created by Fernando's voraciousness, supplemented with the long meals of the family at the dining table and the presence of "maids" in the household (Machado 2007, 9) has little to do with the "malnutrition and starvation . . . rampant" in Cuba before Castro (Houston 2005, 116). Eduardo closes his eyes to poverty as he closes his mouth to foods that taste of hunger and want. Upon visiting Regla, a small town across the bay from Havana, with Oscar, he reflects: "I never liked Regla because my father used to drag me there to visit my godmother, who was poor and had a lot of kids . . . whenever she hears my father was coming, she would make barbecued goat. I hate goat. Dry and mealy, it's like eating chewy hair or shredded carpet" (31). Barbecued goat plays out the drama of difference between the symbolic and the social. Since eating it would disturb the coherence and narcissism of the national narrative, the child Eduardo develops a phobia that saves him from emptiness and the threat of castration.

Fetish Foods

Eduardo's phobia ends and the real threat begins when Fidel Castro enters Havana, after which food is no longer about pleasure but need. Then "food was rationed more and more" (56), and the family had to survive on "stale bread and butter with plantain omelettes" (53). The situation worsens on October 31, 1961, when eight-year-old Eduardo and his five-year-old brother, Othon, board a Pan Am plane in Havana and fly to Miami as part of Operation Peter Pan. At his uncle Tatan's house in Hialeah, Florida, both children are condemned to eat "SPAM and all its permutations" (70): "It was an exercise in gustatory sterility" that causes his "tummy [to] ache" (71). Pain starts to dissipate after their parents arrive in the United States a year later and rent a tenement apartment in downtown Miami: "We still ate SPAM, but with mother cooking it was like an adventure . . . breaded SPAM, SPAM Chili, SPAM with Pineapple, and SPAM *Croquetas*. She even chopped the SPAM and fried it until it was crispy, adding it to garbanzo beans with a little tomato sauce. It wasn't chorizo, I knew that much, but it was close" (82).

Eventually, Eduardo's mother lets her imagination experiment with other non-Spam ingredients to prepare Cuban sandwiches (99), *boliche* (104), and *bistec empanizado* (106): "It was all worlds better than the SPAM experiments, though nowhere near as good as Cuba" (101). As they move to Los Angeles, meet other Cubans, and the family grows bigger and richer, Eduardo's mother grows bolder: "My mother used the gatherings as an opportunity to expand her culinary repertoire" (127), which came to include *palomilla* steaks (138) and even Fernando's *arroz con pollo*. This she cooks without saffron: "Instead [of saffron] she used *bijol*, a sinister mixture of annatto seed extract and various dyes and flavorings that would give the appearance of saffron without the expense. There was only one piece of chicken per person, but there were plenty of *petit pois* and *pimientos* on top. . . . We were neither here nor there. . . . In between. So-so" (83).

So-so but still "not close enough" to Cuba (106), at least for Eduardo. Strictly speaking, for his siblings, "dinner tasted exactly the same" (83), but for the narrator, Gilda's dishes were all "a little too inauthentic for the purist in my belly" (130). For him the absence of saffron (whose expensive nature made it inaccessible) marks the limit of a simulation that erects borders between Los Angeles and Havana. Distinct borders emerge not only at home but also in restaurants, community feasts, and supermarkets. So it happens that in 1966, on a trip to Miami, the whole family eats at every Cuban stand and counter they come across, "So we could feel like we were in Cuba" (163). Flavors, however, by Eduardo's words, were "disappointing to say the least. We ate only Cuban food, and that should have been enough, but, of course, it wasn't" (171), because for him "some things are truly lost in translation" (263). It was not enough either when the family moved to Panorama City, within the San Fernando Valley, in a complex filled with Cubans. At the Sunday socials Cuban women gathered, exchanged recipes, and cooked. Sometimes they prepared "communal *croquetas*" (130). Other times they made "American pot roast" (129) that, as far as the narrator is concerned, "was second rate *boliche*" (130). Often they re-created what Eduardo views as the Mexican version of Cuban tamales. They had to be Mexican because the fresh corn, the "pork and aromatics distributed evenly" (125) in the center of the Cuban delicacy, cannot be found in the Grand Central Market in downtown Los Angeles. In his view, "the

tamales were good, don't get me wrong, but between the dry corn *masa* and the lack of corn husks" (130), they did not taste like Cuba. His experience is not unpleasant but is distressing in ways that can be neither adequately addressed nor contained by the group of Cuban neighbors. Closer to home than the Grand Central Market is the Food King supermarket on Sherman Way, where the Machados normally buy their groceries. Still, there are "no *guayabas*, mangoes, or papayas in sight, not even a lime. . . . And there were certainly . . . no *naranjas ágricas* [*sic*]. . . . No *yuca*. No *malanga*" (103), making it "impossible to be authentic" (106). Suddenly Eduardo, who does not tire of talking about "the lack of real food in Los Angeles" (119), understands what his mother aims at: "If she could make some part of every meal she cooked look and taste like Cuba, maybe then her children would not forget where they came from" (100).

There is something intrinsically fetishistic about Gilda's meals in that they try to cover the absence of the island and, within the same movement, commemorate its loss. Unlike his family, who is happy to misidentify difference as the same, Eduardo does not forget that these are just American foods passing as Cuban. Forgetting becomes impossible when Fernando himself, who lives in Los Angeles, cooks his own *arroz con pollo*: "Grandpa Fernando had a surprise for us. . . . He was going to make *Arroz con Pollo* with what he claimed was a new secret recipe. 'It will taste just like Cuba,' he said" (172).

Despite his promise, for Eduardo the dish turned out to be "different from the stuff he served in Cuba," because of secret ingredient that Fernando refuses to reveal. After dinner Eduardo complains of "stomachache, even a mild headache" (174). His pain, which reminds readers of the stomachache he comes down with after eating Spam, is caused—we later learn—by the addition of "a can of Campbell's Condensed Cream of Asparagus Soup" (198). The reason Fernando notices what others deny relates to what David L. Eng (2007, 129), echoing Lee Edelman, calls "reverse fetishism."

In his theorization of the sodomitical primal scene of Oedipus, Edelman (1994, 185–186) posits that there is an inversion of fetishism in that the reality disavowed is a presence instead of an absence: "In order to uphold the law of castration, the gay man must be cut off from the social prerogatives associated with maleness, signified by the penis, precisely because the vision of male-male sodomy shows that the penis has *not* been cut off as castration should demand" (original italics). Eng (2007, 129) describes this reworking of fetishism as "not seeing what there is to see." This refusal to see things naturalizes heterosexual relations and maintains hegemonic forms of privilege. In the case at hand the potential for trauma is also arrested at the organ of vision. Fernando's dish looks like Cuba, allowing the family to recover the originary totality that is related to the relationship between mother and child. It is the organ of taste, though, of whose benefits Eduardo's brothers appear to be emasculated—meaning that they do not taste what there is to taste—that prevents Eduardo from neutralizing the trauma caused by the presence of Campbell's soup. Whether this deviance in taste from the family norm is *indeleble* or not, predetermined or acquired, is of no consequence (the narrator does not account for its origins); what matters is that it generates a feeling of incompleteness in Eduardo, who, at this point, is not conscious of his homosexual desires.⁵ After this experience Eduardo comes to the realization, "Maybe I didn't need Cuban food to feel whole after all" (210). And, maybe, Cuban food can no longer make him feel whole after all.

The impossibility of finding wholeness through Cuban food is confirmed during his first visit to the island on the occasion of the Latin American Film Festival, after which he feels "not complete" (295). Full of expectations he is taken to his first *paladar*, where he will be eating breaded pork cutlets with *moros* and *yuca*. To his surprise, the *moros* "were a little dry," the pork "a little bland," and the *yuca* "very unpleasant. Was this what I had been waiting for?" (272). He decides to postpone judgment until he eats *paella* at La Terasa. To his dismay: "The *paella* was nothing like it used to be. No lobster, shrimp, or spoonfuls of briny liquor, just well-made yellow rice with some fish . . . they substituted powder for the costly whole filaments" (284). Upon realizing that the rationing system under the Cuban socialist state replicates the logic of substitution that governs his family's kitchen in the United States, Eduardo decides that Cuba no longer tastes like itself. When the food of the father is found to be lacking in Cubanness, castrated as the food of his mother, Eduardo takes the father's place and starts to cook in order to recapture the taste of the island that he remembers.

⁵ After Eduardo comes out as gay, his sense of taste liberates him from the incomplete status that is placed on queers. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with Eduardo's textualization of his homosexual body through taste. On taste and other carnal processes through which bodies are materialized as queer, see Holland, Ochoa, and Tompkins (2014); Tompkins (2015). Nor is it within my scope to discuss the relationship between taste (in the double meaning of "sensation" and "knowledge") and Eduardo's artistic vocation, but it is clear that through taste and art he repositions himself from a state of emasculation to a state of completeness.

The Postnational Meal

Eduardo starts to cook after he meets Hariette Bradlin. By marrying her at nineteen—she is forty-two at the time—he becomes father to eight daughters from her two previous marriages (192). Hariette introduces him to fatherhood and to “a brave new world [of] food” (194) reduced to salads and bloody steaks:

Cubans don't eat salads. The only thing more foreign to us than blood in beef is fresh vegetables. Hariette liked both. . . . I panicked the first time I saw her cut into a steak. Medium rare and bloody. Yuck. . . . I couldn't bring myself to have a meal with her. It was all a little too foreign, and besides, the idea of partaking felt almost treasonous at the time. . . . What if, by eating at this woman's table, I was making a decision I didn't understand? . . . Would I get lost? Would I recognize myself? (194)

For Eduardo food is not just about belonging but about remaining Cuban, being accepted as Cuban and deciding not to de-Cubanize himself. That Hariette replaces Eduardo's mother in his affections becomes clear when he affirms that “the prized role of the most important woman in my life was . . . played by someone new, someone not my mother. No wonder the salad felt like a betrayal” (164). It felt like a betrayal even though or precisely because Hariette does not replace Gilda in the kitchen. That it is him, Eduardo, and “not the girls,” as tradition dictates, who attends to “the business of running the kitchen” (9), turns the tables on patriarchy. Not even when he asks Fernando, his masculine ideal, to teach him how to cook is gender hierarchy restored in the household. “Come and cook with me,” Fernando admonishes his grandson, who, after a few lessons, “became the newly crowned king of chicken and rice” (198).

Although he learns to cook from his grandfather, Eduardo's relationship to food is marked neither by voraciousness nor heterosexual desire. On the one hand, Eduardo wishes to lose weight. Having decided upon an acting career, he starts a diet that reminds readers of Cuca and her restrictive habits. On the other hand, he comes out as gay: “while I had always been a little bisexual, once I hit my thirties I could feel my sensual pendulum swing toward men exclusively” (243). Thereafter he ends his marriage and moves to New York, where he finds his identity “nationally and sexually,” and culinarily (299).

Before that, in 1971, his father, Othon, had already perceived that “something was fundamentally wrong with Eduardo” (180). Eager to prepare himself for a future on the stage, the adolescent joins the high school choir. Instead of supporting his singing: “My father made it clear [that] singing was something only ‘fags’ did” (180) and handed him over to a psychiatrist whom he entrusted with the task of curing his effeminacy. This is hardly surprising when we consider that Othon epitomizes quintessential Cuban *machista* values and believes, like Freud, that homosexuality turns spontaneously into art. For Freud (1908, 190), the homosexual who cannot detach himself from the traumatizing reality of castration transforms it into art. Othon makes the connection and insists that his son comes back to his normal state.

Eduardo does not give up his dream. At the age of seventeen he starts acting professionally and in 1980 commences to write plays, under the tutelage of Maria Irene Fornés. To a certain extent she takes the place of Hariette: “Hariette left . . . and what followed was three months of writing and eating every day with Irene” (222). Two favorite dishes of his at the time are Dominican *bacalao* and *tostones* with *mojo*, for which he provides recipes (220–226). Although “she was in culinary command” (220), Eduardo proves to be the cook. This succession of women who do not cook makes him occupy a distinctly “feminine” role in their relationships. Eventually his association with Fornés becomes strained and breaks, but Eduardo acknowledges that she “altered the course of my career, my life, my very way of being” (213). From her he gains the confidence to critique heteronormative relations in his plays, the ability to experiment with avant-garde tones and styles, and an alternative sense of Cubanness that involves crossing the borders marked out by the nation.⁶ Through her teachings, Eduardo becomes aware that national identity is the product of difference and not a unity at all. Clearly, this awareness shapes him as a writer: “Writing became a conscious act of rebellion against those who tried to stop me from being myself,” he claims (238). That notwithstanding, the sense of guilt persists: he cannot get rid of the anxiety of betrayal that accompanies the staging of his plays. Proof of this is the performance of *Broken Eggs* in Miami in 1988. His extended family comes to the theater: “the audience . . . booed from the first line. They . . . screamed obscenities like ‘faggots,’ ‘communists,’ and ‘whores’” (243). Eduardo's feelings are a mixture of apprehension at revealing secrets—both his and his family's—fear of their judgments, and pain at being misunderstood: “It was

⁶ Tiffany Lopez (2003, 79) writes that Fornés recognized “the importance of her Cuban background [but] declare[d] herself equally Latin, European and American, each of these cultures having historically, economically, and culturally shaped Cuba, and by extension herself as a writer.”

hard," he says, "that the Miami contingent would never understand me or my work, be it fact, fiction, or somewhere in between" (243).

Unlike them, Fernando understands Eduardo. It was only Fernando, "the distant, the brutal, the coldest of them all; it was he who actually understood me" (197). Eduardo comes to this conclusion after Fernando confesses that he sacrificed himself so that his grandson could be an artist: "He leaned closer to me and whispered as I turned to look at him. 'You are why I did it,' he said. 'Did what?' I asked. 'Struggled, got myself into a place of financial importance. I wanted one of my children or grandchildren to be you, to be an artist'" (197). Fernando avoids being overheard because understanding his grandson situates him in a context—as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1986, 107) puts it—"of fearful, projective mirroring recognition." By whispering this to his grandson, Fernando secretly deflects the negative attributes associated with the macho figure. In one fell swoop, he becomes close, tender, and warm. Fearfully, the father positions the homosexual son at the center of the family's narrative and, hence, at the center of the nation. When the other stops being peripheral to the nation and becomes its origin and its end, the authentic-simulacrum dyad crumbles and the straight-gay opposition dissolves into a continuum on which gays can be considered straight and vice versa.

In *Rethinking Chicana/o and Latina/o Popular Culture*, Daniel Enrique Pérez (2009, 13) theorizes this continuum through the figure of "the queer macho," a man who "dismantle[s] the negative stereotypes that are often associated with each of these figures." Following upon the work of Jaime Manrique and José Piedra, he argues that queers, "typically associated with Latino men . . . who exhibit effeminate behavior" (12) have the "*cojones*" that traditional machos lack to fight against "the limitations that [the] categories of sex [and] sexuality impose on them," be free from them, and make visible "their nonnormative bodies and stories" (13). Through visibility they "play a role in removing . . . others like [them] from their historically abject state" (13).

Fernando does not have the *cojones* to speak his recognition out loud, but he makes it visible by empowering Eduardo with the attribute of being his successor in the culinary lineage. That the exchange between the macho and the queer macho happens in the dining room, just before the grandson becomes the new king of chicken and rice, is significant. Through this cooking gesture Fernando performs the words he whispered, making the removal of the homosexual son from his historically abject state emphatically visible. Furthermore, by placing the food of the homosexual other on the national table, he gives visibility to the nonidentical ingredients of national dishes. By introducing difference into what passes for the same, he lets us see what there is to see: there is no origin internal to nationality. Consequently, Cuba can never taste like itself.

Only when the paterfamilias confesses and makes visible his sympathy is Eduardo relieved of the guilt of betrayal. At this moment he resolves not "to hold on to [his] old persona to exist recognizably" (243). The compulsion to repeat the past is brought to an end at the end of the book when the narrator decides to bring to light "the darkest, most-hidden, gender-bending side of myself" (244) by cooking his own *arroz con pollo*. If Fernando's recipe gives him a headache, he will make his own: "I took the memory and I made it mine. . . . Tastes change. Memories blur. I don't think any information is ever true for long. If you want to be part of something, you've got to take it and make it yours" (350).

If Eduardo is right, if memories change and no memory is ever true for long, then there is no authentic taste and to pursue the taste of authentic Cubanness is a nonsense endeavor. To be Cuban he must be authentic to himself, to the taste memories of his own creation: "My God," he thinks, "I have come so far from my roots, I have become my own creation" (245), meaning that the origin of Cubanness lies within himself. This origin is not about *aislamiento* but *integración*. His own version of Fernando's dish, "Eduardo's *arroz con pollo*" integrates the following:

I use chicken thighs for flavor and heartiness, "like Cuban chickens." . . . Sour oranges remind me of my youth. There's red onion and bell pepper to be just a little different: like the rebellion of leaving home at sixteen. Fresh asparagus recalls my days surrounded by hippies, who never would have touched a cream of asparagus soup. There is plenty of saffron to meet the high-minded demands of my father, and pimientos and white wine to bring all the flavor and delicacy of my mother. I use Valencia rice, from Spain, to honor my family's origin. . . . I am proud to say that even with all these influences, there is still one voice that comes through. This is my dish. My way. My *Arroz con Pollo*. (353–354)

Eduardo's creation combines the food of the father with the food of the mother, the wealth enjoyed as a child in Cuba with the poverty of exile, fresh vegetables, and Cuban chicken. The dish, which no

longer resembles Fernando's *arroz con pollo*, is Eduardo's declaration of independence from the state of Cuba—"I was a person without a state," he writes (255). By way of acknowledging the origins of ingredients, he acknowledges the originality of the "other." By way of mineness, he claims a self aware of the conditions that made repression possible, distant from the narcissistic ego of his infancy. By way of cooking "just a little different," he takes center stage and adopts an activist stance with the goal of creating his Cubanness through "Indian, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, and French food[s]" (310), mixing them to his taste: "And then it hit me. I didn't care. I didn't want to compare them. . . . There was no way to get it back. And anyway, I no longer wanted to be the kind of Cuban that let what was lost get in the way of the beauty and joy and life and food that was staring me in the face" (337).

It does not follow that he forgets; simply, he does not allow obsession of the past get in the way of the beauty and joy of the present. Many totem meals happen in between New York and Cuba with Cuban chickens and without them. The food at these feasts is neither the container of a yearning for fantasy nor the means to compensate for the memory of a traumatic loss. The food that stares Eduardo in the face is inside a reality outside simulacra and substitution. Eating continues to bond the family together, but the family whose "identity of substance" (Freud 1913, 137) it seals is composed of Michael, Carlos, Julio, Iván, and Fidel, a community of queer machos who shamelessly cook and gather around a dining table where they recognize themselves as whole.

Conclusion: Food Deviants

In light of the above, I must ask if this reading can be situated in the context of a larger body of work. Do Eduardo Machado's food negotiations have life beyond *Tastes Like Cuba*? As a matter of fact, many of his plays are autobiographical and deal with food in some way. Remarkable in this sense is his 2011 *The Cook*, where the betrayals and traumas of the revolution are fought entirely in the kitchen through Gladys's garlic chicken. The tropology of food reappears in *The Modern Ladies of Guanabacoa*, *Fabiola*, and *Broken Eggs* (compiled in the 1991 *The Floating Island Plays*), to name but a few. Characters in them revel in the flavors of "fried bananas, rice and baked fish," "pork," and "Cuban cake," along with "salad[s] [and] chicken cacciatori," without feeling that Cubanness is being eaten out of them (Machado 1991, 3, 100, 210).

Just as Machado stages the vicissitudes of Cuban politics through eating and cooking, other male autobiographers in the diaspora materialize their attitudes toward Cubanness in their relationship with food. Memories of what Cuban food is may differ. For Evelio Grillo (2000) in *Black Cuban, Black American*, for instance, the emblems of the nation are bologna sandwiches, pig knuckles (23), and *serrucho* (28), which is all the meager budget of his family could afford. That notwithstanding, the passage from the nation to the postnation always takes place through foreign foods that awaken the subject to a feeling of Cubanness that he did not carry within himself before and help complete his identity of class, sexual orientation, and race. Solely when Grillo (2000, 34) is introduced to "hamhocks, collard greens, and black-eyes peas" cooked in the African American tradition does he reconnect to his black *cubano* self, a self not tied by nationalism but by Cuban nonetheless.

Carlos Eire's (2010) *Learning to Die in Miami* starts with a chicken sandwich and Eire arriving at the camp for airlifted Cuban children in South Florida in 1962. The "Pan Americano" and the "colorless" chicken "offends" and "scares the hell out of [him]" (2–3). Soon, however, he determines to become "an American and forget about being Cuban" (19). To that purpose he gobbles up foot-long hot dogs (89) and every other food "so totally American" (89) that "the crushing burdens of the past" are forgotten (22). As he grows and eats other dishes, he comes to the realization that these American foods neither contradict nor undo what he really is, a Cuban living in America. Instead, they help him adjust his "connectedness to Cuba" (16).

Likewise, Richard Blanco (2014) begins his very funny memoir, *The Prince of Los Cocuyos*, about growing up in the Miami suburb of Westchester, with food, or rather, with Castro's rationing of food and the lack of sugar on the island. Blanco is careful to separate "*our* food" (original italics) sold at the Cuban bodegas from the "American foods" at the Winn-Dixie on Coral Way (8). They were "from two different worlds" (18) and should not be mixed: "You had to be either Cuban or American; you couldn't be both" (12). However, after he eats his *abuela's* "*Cubaroni*" (cheese with macaroni, chorizo, and pimiento) (20), he concludes that pouring the fat of *carne de puerco* over the lean slices of Thanksgiving turkey (32), accompanying *el café con leche* with a bowl of Froot Loops (42–43), and topping chorizo with Easy Cheese (16) make sense in his own version of Cubanness.

These texts give evidence of deviance from the norms of national cuisine. They suggest a certain queering of the exilic condition that happens in the mouth. I would say that the palate of the exiled disturbs the logic of sameness written on the national tongue, tasting and feeding its subversion through

different appetites. Obviously, to delineate the contours of a collective postnational Cuban formation, it would be necessary to look at a greater body of foodways. Yet, despite the limitations of this study, it may provide a useful psychoanalytical framework for future research regarding food and identity in American postnational autobiographies by Cuban men.

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Author Information

Nieves Pascual Soler teaches English literature at the University of Jaén. Her research interests cover cultural studies, feminism, food, and popular culture. She has coedited *Masculinities, Femininities and the Power of Hybrid in U.S. Narratives* (2007); *Feeling in Others* (2008); *Stories through Theories, Theories through Stories* (2009); *Rethinking Chicana/o Literature through Food: Postnational Appetites* (2013), and *Comidas bastardas* (2013). Her work has appeared in journals such as *Mosaic*, *Style*, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, and *Food, Culture and Society*.

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