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**Where Only Ghosts and Tourists Come to Dine:
the Creole and Cajun Cuisines of Southern Louisiana and the
Commodification of History.**

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A Thesis in
the Department of Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

Where Only Ghosts and Tourists Come to Dine: the Creole and Cajun Cuisines of Southern Louisiana and the Commodification of History.

Bertie R. Mandelblatt

This thesis interrogates the ways that the material biographies of the Creole and Cajun cuisines of southern Louisiana undermine and ultimately betray the discursive fictions that they are typically required to perform in popular culinary discourse. The thesis begins with an investigation of the contemporary literature concerning the commodity, commodity fetishism and consumption, particularly in the arena of cuisine, in order to better understand how the commodification of cuisine enables specific fantasies regarding American colonial history related to race and ethnicity. After elaborating the concept of the biography of the object, the thesis studies six specific recipes in detail. The historical trajectories of key ingredients in the recipes are traced in order to explore the ways the development of cuisine in 18th-century Louisiana related to the violent interaction between French and Spanish colonists, Native American peoples, and the enslaved West African labour force. The thesis concludes by reconceptualizing the cuisines of Louisiana as diasporic cuisines.

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Introduction: Cuisine, Consumption and the Everyday.

This thesis investigates how the Creole and Cajun cuisines of Louisiana enable the elaboration of several American fantasies or fictions related to the seamlessness of national formation: more specifically, these fictions are of a colonial/frontier past, of national and cultural autonomy and of the central 'melting pot' metaphor. Arjun Appadurai argues that "...consumption is now the social practice through which persons are drawn into the work of fantasy...[:] it is the daily practice through which nostalgia and fantasy are drawn together in a world of commodified objects."¹ It is in this sense that the consumption of Creole and Cajun cuisine, constituted by a set of commodified food items and specific modes of representation, draws people into a fantasy of American colonial history. In short, contemporary representation and consumption of these cuisines permit both the production and the consumption of the central fictions of American nationalist rhetoric.

However, as commodities, or systems of commodities, these cuisines have biographies which undermine and betray these fantasies, and the manner in which they are represented and consumed. Investigated historically, they testify on the one hand that the United States was borne out of violent inter-colonial conflict, involuntary migration and genocidal relations with Native peoples. On the other, these cuisines reveal the degree to which American national autonomy

¹ Arjun Appadurai, "Consumption, Duration, History," *Stanford Literature Review* 10, 1-2 (1993): 30.

is a relatively recent, artificial construct; as a nation, the United States is rooted in the imperial ambitions of several European nations, and in the trajectories of other New World settler colonies, Canada and Haiti in particular. This thesis will be propelled forward by the capacity of commodities to function as "... complex, mutable and mobile sites of social relations, cultural identity and economic power,"² as geographer Noel Castree has described them.

Historian Thomas Holt has addressed the capacity of food and the practice of consumption to perform these multiple functions at once. He writes:

Major activities are born of germs contained in everyday practice, because it is at that level that the group and the individual can and must plan and organize their time and apply their means. A woman buying a pound of sugar, for example, has a doubled aspect: hers is at once a simple gesture but one within which are inscribed complex social relations. Her action not only expresses but makes possible a global structure of imperialist politics and labor relations that racialize consumption as well as production.³

The "simple gesture" that Holt describes brings questions of macro-level imperial histories, the social construction of race, and global practices of production together within the arena of the daily (micro-level) consumption of food and drink. In a similar rhetorical gesture, Jamaican Briton Stuart Hall also addresses the laden trope of sugar: " People like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries ... I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of

² Noel Castree, "Commentary," *Environment and Planning A* 33 (2001): 1520.

³ Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100, 1 (February, 1995): 10.

English children's teeth ... Because they don't grow it in Lancashire, you know. Not a single tea plantation exists with the United Kingdom."⁴ The everyday practices of eating and drinking concurrently mobilize numerous levels of power, and the individual commodities being consumed contain within them the capacity to expose histories of imperial aggression, diasporic culture formation and colonial New World relations.⁵

This thesis takes this conceptual condensation of meaning in food and drink as a point of departure for an investigation into the ways food can materially function as a fundamental articulating device, tying the contemporary consumption of Creole and Cajun cuisines in southern Louisiana back to the histories of European colonization in the Americas that led to their formation. However, it is essential to remember that these cuisines do not exist in any pure form – the transcription of complex cultural practices into the print medium, as evidenced by cookbooks, has substantial implications for the manner in which these practices are later understood. Therefore, the processes of the contemporary commodification and representation of these cuisines, as well as the practice of consumption itself, become enormously significant components of this investigation.

⁴ Stuart Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King, (Binghamton, New York: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991), 48-49.

⁵ Throughout the thesis I will be referring to both the New World and the Old World. I do this with the full understanding that these concepts are culturally constituted; indeed, the manner in which the New World was historically constructed is a major concern of this thesis.

This thesis will explore what will be clear is an 'unseen sociality' in Castree's words, that lurks beneath the surface of these two inter-related sets of cuisines associated with the historical regional cooking of southern Louisiana. This exploration will elaborate two specific, historically-constructed social contexts that refer us, via the trajectories of displaced foodstuffs, utensils, cooking methods and associated cultural knowledges accompanying voluntary and involuntary migrations, back to the fantasies of national coherence outlined above. These two social contexts embody central ruptures in these fantasies of an authentic American cultural identity; the first is the violent interaction between the initial French settlers and the Native American tribes inhabiting the Mississippi delta region that occurred with the founding of the colony at the turn of the 18th-century, and the second is the set of relations that governed the slave society that Louisiana became early in the 18th-century.

The Creole and Cajun culinary traditions are rooted in this history of place, more precisely in the 18th-century French and then Spanish colony that was founded on the Mississippi delta by the French-Canadian, Pierre LeMoyne, sieur d'Iberville in 1698. Typically, Creole food is considered more delicate and more sophisticated than Cajun food; it is considered to be the urban cuisine that developed out of the kitchens of wealthy plantation owners in New Orleans, incorporating many elements contributed by the African slave labour force within an overall French system of cooking. Cajun food, on the other hand, is hardier, simpler and more connected to rural southern Louisiana, in particular to

the bayous where many Acadian (hence “Cajun”) immigrants settled when they arrived mid-century subsequent to the Grand Dérangement of 1755 which left them exiles from Port Royal. Throughout the thesis, however, I will be interrogating this easy divide between the two cuisines, as it plays a significant role in the process of commodification I am examining.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to Creole and Cajun cuisines, focusing on the ways the distinctions between them have been deliberately manipulated. I will examine various theoretical models of the commodity and the commodity fetish relevant to the consideration of cuisine. Here the concept of the biography of the commodity will be elaborated in more detail. This concept refers to the ways in which (some) objects can pass through a commodity phase, commodification being one stage in the life of some objects. In other words, these cuisines were not always commodities, not always subject to contemporary kinds of fetishization. These ways of eating *became* commodified, and as specifically contemporary systems of commodities, they perform certain discursive functions. This chapter concludes with an examination of two particular junctures in the commodification process: first, the move into textualization that occurred with Creole cuisine at the turn of the 19th-century when the first explicitly designated Creole cookbooks were published. The second juncture is the heyday of Cajun cuisines that occurred with the explosion in the popularity of Cajun cooking styles and products in the 1980s

and 1990s, tied in large part to the marketing efforts of the chef, Paul Prudhomme.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis will explore two specific social contexts that I have elaborated which lurk directly below the surface of the commodity fetish. In order to investigate cuisines as both agglomerations of disparate objects with specific biographies, and as cultural practices, I will examine a set of six recipes, three in each of the second and third chapters. The recipes will be discussed in terms of a select number of ingredients. After a brief discussion of the recipe itself and its textual framework, I consider the dish as a whole and its context within the culinary repertoires of Creole and Cajun cuisines. Subsequently, I trace the historical lineages of the ingredients I have chosen, that is, I will explore their migratory routes, and the ways they were adapted into culinary cultures.

Chapter 2 will address the first of these two contexts: the initial interaction between the French colonizers and the Native American tribes with whom they came into contact directly after their arrival. Within the cosmology of American nationalism, the United States sprang into being at the end of the 18th century, a fully-fledged nation, and the embodiment of Enlightenment virtues of liberty and democracy. However, as a material trace of transnational migrations of humans as well as plants and animals, the three recipes I have selected reveal another story. They expose how French exploration, colonization and settlement of the lower Mississippi valley around the turn of the 18th century constitutes a disjunctive collision with the Native American tribes who inhabited this region.

Chapter 3 will treat the second social context, which chronologically follows from the first. It is the one created by the transAtlantic trade in West African slaves that from 1719 until the end of the Civil War completely dominated social and cultural relations in the U.S. South in general, and in Louisiana in particular. The massive enslaved African labour force is a critical element in any discussion of cuisine in Louisiana. Not only were slaves responsible for physically preparing and serving food within domestic environments, but to a great extent their pre-existing agricultural and technological knowledge was called upon during the crucial period in which the plantation system was being formed, and the cultivation of food for a growing colonial population was being organized. In both these arenas, domestic and agricultural, African culinary traditions were an enormously significant factor. In contemporary descriptions of Creole and Cajun cuisines, this factor is shockingly trivialized and diminished. The ubiquitous figure of the silent black cook in popular cookbooks of the cuisines of southern Louisiana is a heavily laden rhetorical device which I will explore in depth.

Another vitally important consideration in the writing of this thesis is the textual representation of cuisine in popular culinary discourse. Indeed, as the research and writing involved with this project advanced, it became impossible to downplay this aspect, and my examination of the commodification of colonial history through cuisine became, in part, an examination of textual representation. In the Old World as well as in the New, cuisine is employed,

through the popular medium of cookbooks, to tell stories about national identity and national beginnings⁶ – to smooth over the jagged contours of the unfolding national narrative. The question always remains, however: what precisely *is* the story they are telling? *The Border Cookbook* is an American cookbook explicitly devoted to conceptualizing the transnational nature of the border area between the U.S. and Mexico, and to its embodiment through cuisine. The ability of cuisine to mediate and smooth over the threat to American cultural autonomy posed by the ambiguities of this area is made clear from the book's outset: in the foreword to *The Border Cookbook*, the Coyote Café chef Mark Miller writes:

The homey gutsy foods of the border are full of big flavors, flavors that feed the soul and the spirit. These are the dishes that have sustained the people of the Southwest – from the early natives to the tourists who come from the city on weekends to see the “real America.” ... This amphitheater of nature is no place for timidity; the people are strong and honest, and the food here reflects the spirit of both the land and its people.... Wherever they're found, these foods refuse to be overlooked. “Here I am”, they say. “This is what I stand for. Take me or leave me.”⁷

As a reader, however, I am left wondering: what exactly *do* these foods stand for? Or, more precisely, what are they being made to stand for? What is their role in mapping an American cultural identity that simply subsumes centuries of violent conflict between Spanish and English colonizers, and between them,

⁶Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, 1 (January 1988): 3-24; and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que vivan los Tamales!: Food and the Formation of Mexican National Identity* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

⁷Cheryl Alters Jamison and Bill Jamison, *The Border Cookbook: Authentic Home Cooking of the American Southwest and Northern Mexico* (Boston, Massachusetts: The Harvard Press, 1995): ix.

subsequent “American” settlers and the many indigenous groups that have moved along and through the Southwest? When Miller writes that this cookbook “show[s] that the way people eat, more than their political allegiance, defines who they are...” and that it “shows how the dishes of the border unites the people of Mexico and the southwestern United States in one kitchen,”⁸ he is effectively demonstrating the discursive potential of cuisine. Specifically, he is making cuisine perform a fantasy of American culture formation that represses, and therefore indelibly contains, historically embedded systems of difference and differentiation. What makes his statements vis-à-vis this cookbook fascinating for my purposes is that he, and the texts accompanying the “cuisine” elaborated in the book, purport to *accommodate* difference and to address the transnational nature of southwestern United States.

That cuisine lends itself to this type of strategic manipulation is remarked upon by Arjun Appadurai when he writes that “the cultural notion that food has an inherently homogenizing capacity ... is itself converted from a metonymic hazard to a metaphoric convenience in the contexts where sharing, equality, solidarity, and community are, within limits, perceived as desirable results.”⁹ That is, cuisine is a perfect vehicle for nationalist rhetoric because, in general, food “moves around all the time. It constantly shifts registers from the sacred to the everyday, from metaphor to materiality, it is the most common and elusive of

⁸ Ibid, xi.

⁹ Arjun Appadurai, “Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia,” *American Ethnologist* 8 (1981): 507.

matters.”¹⁰ More significantly, however, as a rule, food is consumed communally. This commensality easily takes on metaphoric proportions which can be inflated and distorted to represent visions of social and political union that serve nationalist ideologies of all hues.

A less grandiloquent example of this phenomenon, which brings us to Louisiana, is John Egerton’s preface to his well-known exploration of Southern cuisine.¹¹ In this text, still heavily dependent on the positivism noted in the example of *The Border Cookbook*, Egerton writes of the southern U.S. that “... in this historically unique region of the United States – unique for a great many reasons, good and bad – food has been perhaps the most positive element in our collective character, an inspiring symbol of reconciliation, healing and union.”¹² Here, at least, is a veiled reference to the centuries-long transAtlantic trade in West African slaves which permitted the foundation and development of a profitable colonial market economy, and hence the permanent settlement by Europeans of the southern part of the continent. Of course Egerton couches this reference in familiar and comforting language which, in fact, addresses the happy resolution of this discord: presumably, the positive outcome of the Civil War and the subsequent “healing” that has taken place between whites and blacks in the U.S. That Egerton should find Southern food a symbol of this

¹⁰ Elspeth Probyn, “Beyond Food/Sex: Eating and an Ethics of Existence,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 16,2 (1999): 217.

¹¹ John Egerton, *Southern food: at Home, on the Road, in History* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

¹² *Ibid*, viii.

reconciliation and healing, and not of the original conflicts is a further example of Appadurai's point on the metaphoric uses of commensality. That is, Egerton's preference for associating food with the recovery from the Civil War, and not with the War itself, signals the conceptual slipperiness of food that Appadurai highlights.

Even these short descriptions of the ways Southern food has been popularized point to the overwhelming presence of colonial histories within culinary discourse. For this reason, historical investigation is a major methodological component of this thesis. However, the thesis itself cannot be a comprehensive history of any aspect of colonial Louisiana, neither of the development of its culinary traditions nor of the shifts in ethnic status or race relations. In the section below, I provide a relatively brief outline of the major historical events related to transformations in populations in Louisiana, beginning in the 16th-century with the initial European colonizing endeavours and concluding with the arrival of the last wave of émigrés from the ex-colony of St. Domingue in 1809, which irreversibly transformed the social and cultural climate of Louisiana. This outline is intended to function as a guide to the historical period in question, and readers can always refer back to it for details that would appear only awkwardly in the body of the thesis.

The first Europeans to spend any amount of time in the lower Mississippi Valley accompanied expeditions commissioned by the Spanish crown in the 16th-century. Subsequent to Cortès' and Pizarro's enormously profitable (from the

Spanish perspective) successes in Mexico in 1519, and in Peru in 1535 respectively, the Spanish were eager to follow up with more exploration of the Gulf Coast. Alonso Alvarez Piñeda (1519) and Hernando de Soto (1539-1542) headed two ultimately unsuccessful Spanish expeditions; neither of them unearthed anything the Spanish crown could identify as wealth, and it abandoned its plans for the region.

The next Europeans to set foot in the Mississippi delta region were those accompanying the French expeditions led in 1672 and 1679 by Canadian fur-trader Louis Jolliet and the French Jesuit, Father Jacques Marquette. These trips were followed by the more ambitious ones of 1681-1682 and 1686, led by René-Robert Cavalier de La Salle, who undertook to explore and to lay claim for France, in the name of Louis XIV, to all of the territories drained by the Mississippi and its tributaries. La Salle, a native Frenchman and prosperous seigneur and businessman in New France, named the territory in tribute to the French king in 1686, but did not establish a settlement as he was murdered by his own men while still searching for the site on the mouth of the Mississippi that he had located on his first expedition.¹³ In order to accomplish these tasks, Pierre Le Moyne, sieur d'Iberville, a native Canadian and the eldest of eleven Le Moyne brothers, was commissioned by the crown to organize an expedition and found a royal military outpost at the mouth of the Mississippi river. He and his younger brother, Jean-Baptiste, sieur de Bienville, established bases at Biloxi

¹³ Ibid., 43-44.

(1699), at Mobile (1701), which remained the administrative centre of Louisiana until 1722, as well as bases further north in the Illinois country.

Most of the personnel involved in these ventures were French or Canadian soldiers and Canadian *coureurs-de-bois*, used to the colonial conditions of New France and France's official assimilationist policies concerning Native peoples, which contrasted starkly, for example, with the English exclusionary tactics towards the indigenous inhabitants of Virginia. Indeed, Iberville's first steps in the incalculable territory claimed by France under the name of Louisiana were to ascertain the breadth of the Native presence along the coast and further inland, and the nature of the tribes' relations with each other. The reason for this interest, in Louisiana as in New France, was always to build up Native allegiances with the French to serve in their ongoing rivalry with the English to the east.¹⁴

The early settlements of the new colony were quickly realized to be economic failures by the French crown, which was in any case too preoccupied with the War of the Spanish Succession taking place at this time in Europe to provide the necessarily substantial material support. None of the first "settlers" were farmers even if the swamps, marshlands and sandy soil of the delta region had been able to support familiar types of agriculture, and so even basic subsistence was an impossibility. At several points in the first decade of the 18th-

¹⁴ Jerah Johnson, "Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of 18th-century French Ethos," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1992) 31-32.

century, military commanders had to allow the colonists under their control to take refuge with Native tribes for long periods of time in order to avoid famine and mutiny.¹⁵ In 1712, the responsibility for the colony was relinquished to a wealthy French financier, Antoine Crozat, with the understanding that he would have a fifteen-year monopoly on its trade in return for sending "two ships a year, ten emigrants of either sex, and transport to the colony twenty-five tons of goods for the Crown."¹⁶ Despite engaging in high levels of profiteering (as the Le Moyne brothers had done before him), Crozat was unable to realize a profit with the colony, and so in 1717, handed it back to the French crown which, in no better position than five years before, immediately turned it over to a joint-stock company, John Law's Compagnie des Indes. The control of Louisiana rested with this proprietary company until 1731, at which time the company collapsed due to its inability to make a profit and control passed back to crown.

John Law, a hugely successful Scottish banker in France, also had been granted the exclusive rights to the French-controlled slave trade along the Guinea coast, as well as other substantial monopolies within the French New World empire (to Canadian beaver and tobacco, for example), and thus in 1719, the first shipments of West African slaves began arriving in Biloxi, Mobile and the newly established settlement of New Orleans (1718); individual slaves of

¹⁵ Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: the Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 194; Johnson, "Colonial New Orleans", 33.

¹⁶ W. J. Eccles, *France in America*, (Fitzhenry and Whiteside Limited, 1972) 161.

African origin had been living in Louisiana before this date, but they had arrived with their owners. The Compagnie des Indes was required to populate the colony with settlers as well as slaves, and thus the famous influx of French *engagés* began, as well as large numbers of Swiss and German migrants. But it was the *engagés* who set the scene for the first stable, eventually urban, colonial population in Louisiana:

Throughout France the prisons, the workhouses, the back streets of the towns, the countryside, were combed for able-bodied vagrants, men sentenced to the galleys for dealing in contraband salt and tobacco, army deserters, common felons and prostitutes. They were rounded up and marched to the Atlantic ports for shipment to Biloxi.¹⁷

Needless to say, the vagrants, petty criminals and prostitutes who ended up in the new French colony were neither inclined nor equipped to become farmers of any sort, and Louisiana's ability to continue as a permanent settlement depended solely on the continued importation of West African slaves and the exchange of food with Native Americans. The majority of slaves to arrive directly from Africa came during the rule of the Compagnie des Indes: from a total of 514 slaves in 1722, three years after John Law's company took control, the number of slaves had risen to approximately 3500 by 1731. By the end of the French period (1763) that number had risen to 6000, due mostly to natural increase.¹⁸

¹⁷ Eccles, *France in America.*, p.165.

¹⁸ Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters and Slaves: the Spanish Regulation of Slaver in Louisiana, 1763-1803*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 5.

The colony passed to the Spanish through one of the provisions of the Peace of Paris, which formally ended the Seven Years' War, known as the French and Indian War in North America, between England on the one hand, and France and Spain, on the other; this war ended conclusively in North America with the loss of Québec to the English in 1759. The Spanish were slow in assuming control however, and didn't formally take possession of Louisiana until 1767. Louisiana continued as a Spanish colony, with Spanish governors who encouraged immigration as best they could, in particular, welcoming the Acadian refugees, thousands of whom made their way to Louisiana from Acadia (Nova Scotia) during the thirty years following the Grand Dérangement in 1755.¹⁹

The next big shift in the colonial population of Louisiana occurred following the Haitian Revolution on the French colony of St. Domingue, which, inspired by the French Revolution, began in 1791 and continued through to 1804. Waves of white plantation owners and the slaves who decided to move with them, poured into New Orleans during a twenty-year period, doubling the population of the urban centre in 1809, when the last great migration arrived. Needless to say, the disposition of this flood of suddenly dispossessed and reactionary white slave-owners and the slaves who remained loyal to them, had an enormous influence on the increasingly restrictive social and political climate

¹⁹ Bennett H. Wall, *Louisiana: A History*, 2nd ed., (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Forum Press, Inc., 199) 72.

of Louisiana. During this time, Louisiana had been returned to the French by the Spanish who had never been convinced of its value, and, in 1803, Napoleon Bonaparte decided to sell the territory to the new nation of the United States of America, under the administration of Thomas Jefferson. The Louisiana Purchase, famously, doubled the size of the U.S.A.

This stretch of time between 1686 when LaSalle founded the colony and 1809 when the last émigrés from St. Domingue arrived, introducing a substantial creolized, New World French-identified population to Louisiana that confronted and destabilized the existing one, is the period which pertains most directly to my historical investigation of the cuisines of southern Louisiana. It is during this period that the two populations I am interested in – Native Americans and West African slaves – collided most violently with the French and Spanish colonizers. And it is to this colonial period that contemporary culinary discourse refers when it invokes the cosy images of exotic Otherness that are so crucial to the commodification of these cuisines.

So, in conclusion, this thesis upholds that Creole and Cajun cuisines, as material cultural traces, point directly to the fundamental clashes that European colonization in the Americas represented. These traces are present in the specific ingredients of recipes that exist today as textual representations of these cuisines, as well as in the everyday cultural practices of cooking and eating. Both may be studied historically for what they reveal about power relations and the social roles lived out by the different players who found themselves in everyday

contact with each other. This thesis will interrogate the ways these cuisines have become commodified over the 20th-century, and then investigate six recipes in depth in order to demonstrate how the historical trajectories, or biographies, of individual ingredients undermine the discursive functions they are required to play in the contemporary practice of consumption. Indeed, the ambiguities rife in these practices are reflected by food writer John Thorne's description of New Orleans as a "... place where only ghosts and tourists come to dine" from which I have taken the title for the thesis.²⁰ It is this combination of ghosts and tourists that signals the commodification of colonial history at play.

²⁰ John Thorne with Matt Lewis Thorne, *Serious Pig: An American Cook in Search of His Roots*, (New York: North Point Press, 1996) 235.

Chapter I: Creole and Cajun food today: Commodification, Consumption and the American multicultural imaginary.

The first words uttered by the park ranger leading the tour of the French Quarter I took during a recent trip to New Orleans, and who incidentally grew up in the Midwest, were: "You all must think you've left the United States!" As it happened, my impression of the previous two days was of how intensely and unexpectedly American the tourist core of the city was, despite everything I'd read that indicated the contrary. I was awestruck by the degree to which every culinary aspect of the city that lay within my range revolved around not just a sale, which I had entirely anticipated, but also a branding strategy and a package. The renowned French Market, referred to over and over again as the first and the most sustained location for the exchange of foodstuffs in the early settlement consisted of one row of stalls with slightly overlapping collections of a staggering number of miniature bottles, jars, envelopes (of sauces, marinades, spice rubs, and drink mixes), and celebrity-chef authored cookbooks. A few tired bunches of bananas and a box of oranges made up the only unprocessed organic matter in sight.

What could be *more* American, I wondered, in the sense of what the culinary historian Donna Gabaccia calls a distinguishing characteristic of American eating habits: a "... taste for standardized mass-produced processed dishes..."? The fact that the huge majority of these bottles, jars and envelopes claimed a "local" provenance is not as significant as it might appear, given that,

as Gabaccia writes further on, “[r]egardless of cultural origin, foods that are mass-produced for a national market generally lose their ethnic identities in the United States.”²¹ In this way, although brands such as Hongryhawg Products, J.T. Pappy’s Gator Sauce Company, Caribe Soul Voodoo Sauce, and Seminole Swamp Seasoning indubitably call upon variations in New World regional cultures and histories (of Louisiana, the Caribbean, and Florida, respectively) as authenticating strategies for the construction of the brand, the familiar methods of industrialized and mass-produced packaging assure American consumers of a safe and standardized “food experience.”²²

This translation of complex New World histories of colonial activity, the slave trade and cultural mixing into a series of neutered and recognizable physical products is contained within the process of commodification that lies at the heart of this thesis. This chapter will examine models of the commodity and the commodity fetish that theorize the mutability of objects or commodities and attempt to elucidate the capacity commodities possess to be so prone to imaginative manipulation. Specifically, I will investigate how the commodification process has strategically differentiated Creole and Cajun cuisines, and how race and ethnicity have been socially constructed through

²¹ Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 226.

²² For a discussion of the ambiguities inherent in the concept of culinary authenticity, see Ian Cook, Philip Crang and Mark Thorpe, “Regions to be Cheerful: Culinary Authenticity and its Geographies,” in *Cultural Turns/ Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geography*, eds. Ian Cook, David Crouch, Simon Naylor and James R. Ryan, (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000), 109-139.

them. According to the popular culinary discourse I saw in play in New Orleans, the culinary use of the term “Creole” when related to cuisine refers exclusively to the relatively sophisticated, French-informed urban cooking of New Orleans, while the term “Cajun” refers to the rougher, simpler, backwoods culinary tradition of the Acadian immigrants, also of French extraction, living on the bayous and areas flanking the Mississippi River. In both of these essentially reductive scenarios questions of race, ethnicity and cultural mixing are all elided. In the first Creole scenario, the black cook who was responsible for physically preparing food during the years of the slave-powered plantation system remains a shadowy figure behind, and completely separate from, her implicitly white mistress. In the second scene, jovial (white) Cajun families boil crawfish and catch frogs in the swamplands of the Mississippi delta, seemingly untouched by the machinery of slavery that characterized 18th-century Louisiana, and the social and political relations it engendered. This chapter examines how the process of commodification has operated at two precise junctures to bring about the historical manipulations embodied by these two vivid scenes. The first juncture is the textualization of Creole identity that occurred at the end of the 19th-century with the publication of the first Creole cookbooks, and the second is the late 20th-century Cajun food craze which fixed in place the conceptualization of the Cajun so much in evidence in contemporary New Orleans.

To return to this contemporary re-presentation of colonial history, the fact remains that the tourism machine in New Orleans does market the city, and

Louisiana as a whole, according to a slippery social imaginary in which a mainstream conception of American national identity is elided in favour of the exotic and the foreign -- hence the words of the park ranger to the effect that we, as tourists, had somehow found ourselves in New Orleans outside the familiar, outside the United States. This sense of a cultivated exoticism surfaces in many ways on the public face of the city, and of the state as a whole. Marketing aimed at tourists meshes easily with popular literature and media to produce a:

... general portrayal of Louisiana ... reduced to the sensational, the garish, ... the gothic,... and the pseudo-Cajun. Fabricating such a heritage promotes Louisiana tourism, creates jobs, sells souvenirs, and draws people to Bourbon Street and to Harrah's. Creole cooking, Dixieland jazz, crawfish, Cajun music, casinos, and New Orleans ghosts attract vacationers and visitors as effectively as Disney World in Orlando or Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco.²³

This marketing strategy selects certain commodified cultural artifacts, predominantly food, music and popular literature, to represent the "exoticism" of Louisiana in a multitude of saleable forms. My culinary experience in New Orleans demonstrated the breadth and range of branded products that this strategy produced, and venues in which it was possible to consume them. From the French Market at one end of the spectrum, and the legendary high-end restaurants such as Antoine's and the Commander's Palace at the other, the tourist market in New Orleans supports a vast array of cafés and restaurants to greater and lesser degrees deliberately enmeshed in the marketing web of "the

²³ Vaughan B. Baker, "Mad, Bad, and Dangerous: Conceptions and Misconceptions of Louisiana's History and Heritage," *Louisiana History* 42, 3 (2001): 267.

garish,... the gothic, ... and the pseudo-Cajun." Similar scenarios play out in the Zydeco and jazz music scenes, and in the booming market in popular literature that features ghosts, vampires, and rotting, semi-tropical landscapes.²⁴

To a large extent, the source of this "exoticism" can be located in the colonial and early republican history of southern Louisiana, and contemporary commodified cultural products such as foodstuffs and entire cuisines are, in fact, material embodiments of both the history itself and this manipulation of history. Because the foundation myth of the U.S. revolves exclusively around a tiny group of Protestant religious dissidents from England, references to the lengthy and complex histories of the French and Spanish presence in the South and Southwest are represented as outside "the norm", even in those places like Louisiana in which such histories are manifestly and inescapably present.²⁵ Consequently, in the popular imagination the mere mention of these histories continues to elicit, and is manipulated to elicit, a vague sense of otherworldliness, and of foreignness, to be further reinforced by the infinite accumulation of commodified goods actively re-presenting certain selectively abbreviated historical episodes.

²⁴ See, for instance, Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, or James Lee Burke's detective fiction.

²⁵ "Historians of the United States ..., if they consider the histories of Spanish Florida ... and French and Spanish Louisiana ... at all, generally treat French and Spanish explorations and settlements as a brief, curious prologue to the "real story" of United States history that begins in Jamestown in 1607 and is the story of the expansion of anglophone civilization across the face of the continent." Paul E. Hoffman, "Spanish and French Exploration and Colonization," in *A Companion to the American South*, ed. James B. Boles, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 24.

As a result of these manipulations, the early histories of Louisiana concerning the disastrous early French settlements on the Gulf Coast at the turn of the 17th-century, the 18th- and 19th-century transAtlantic slave trade, the plantation economy that was established on its back, and the formation of a substantial mixed-race population from French, Canadian, African, West Indian, Spanish, and Latin American immigrants mid-18th-century, are all easily subsumed in colourful and nostalgic colonial imagery. The contemporary legacies of these histories, the widespread racial inequality and race-based poverty levels in New Orleans, are simply not present, nor are they sought after. Instead, potted histories of picaresque French-Canadian pirates and languid Spanish aristocrats represent a charming “foreignness” effortlessly contained within a familiar and unthreatening American setting, and function to strengthen a conception of American national identity in which all references to the relations of power underpinning the formation of the nation are repressed.

The biographical trajectories of two inter-related cuisines, Creole and Cajun betray the contemporary fictions of national identity affixed to them by the commodification process. Interestingly, the very distinction between Creole and Cajun cuisines is somewhat nebulous and often arbitrary. A typical example of the cursory kind of division often applied to them is as follows:

While there are similarities [between the two cuisines], Creole is the sophisticated, worldly urbanite and Cajun is the provincial country cousin. The inhabitants of New Orleans created Creole cuisine, a subtle group of dishes utilizing spices and rich sauces. The Cajuns, having

settled at a later date in more remote areas of the Louisiana countryside, had to improvise with ingredients readily available in the bayous.²⁶

In other words, Creole cuisine is the legacy of settlers of direct French extraction who arrived in Louisiana in 1699, and its period of refinement can be traced through the first half of the 18th-century up to 1763 when the French lost the colony to the Spanish in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War. Its central characteristic is the preponderance of influences it absorbed from the other populations in the urban centre of New Orleans during this period; the most notable influences belong to the Native tribes of the Gulf Coast and Mississippi delta and the slaves of direct West African extraction who began to arrive in 1719, as well as to those slaves arriving via the European colonies in the Caribbean basin. These slave populations immediately constituted the labouring class in Louisiana, and was thus responsible for the cultivation, preparation and processing of food crops such as rice, corn, sugarcane, beans, squash, and other vegetables, and for the actual cooking and serving of meals. Other secondary characteristics often attributed to Creole cuisine are the presence of milk- and cream-based sauces, and the preference for meals made of several small, separate and relatively delicate dishes.²⁷ Again, the celebrated refinement of Creole cuisine is directly attributable to the availability of free labour; it is a cuisine, in other words, explicitly constructed around centuries of race relations that

²⁶ Bethany Ewald Bultman "A True and Delectable History of Creole Cooking," *American Heritage*, December 1986, 66.

²⁷ Peter Feibleman, *American Cooking: Creole and Acadian*, (New York: Time-Life Books, 1971), 11.

dictated that black labour in the fields and in the kitchens was controlled by white male and female owners.

Acadian, or Cajun, food on the other hand derives from the original French Acadian settlers who, dispersed during the Grand Dérangement from Port Royal (Nova Scotia) by the British in 1755, made their way eventually towards the largest and closest French Catholic colony, Louisiana. Many of them sailed for France before returning to the New World, or settled temporarily in the Caribbean or along the Florida coast, so the period of their arrival in Louisiana stretched for some 30 years from 1756 to 1785. As noted, they established their settlements in the bayous and marshland region of southern Louisiana now known as Acadiana. Typically they farmed or trapped their own small plots of land, did not own slaves, and had much less contact with the multi-ethnic urban population of New Orleans. Hence, without either the leisure time or free labour required to develop a sophisticated cuisine, the foodstuffs and the methods of cooking were rougher and simpler. Cajun food is often called one-pot cooking and ingredients can include opossum, squirrel, crawfish, wild ducks and those vegetables that could be cultivated within the difficult ecosystems of the Mississippi delta.

However, despite unmistakable differences in the cultural and historical legacies of each population described above, the cuisines themselves refute such clear-cut divisions. Cookbooks that discuss Creole and Cajun cuisine in any detail at all inevitably return to the fact that at their core, Creole and Cajun

cuisines strongly resemble each other. The texts that insist on some level of innate differentiation predictably invoke highly romanticized and essentialized historical narratives to illustrate the two poles.²⁸ These deliberately exaggerated false distinctions are, of course, cultivated and exploited by contemporary marketing strategies which dictate that products must be recognizably different from each other in order to be branded and to be desirable. The fact remains that even a cursory analysis of the cuisines themselves reveals inter-related histories of cultural mixing.

The examples of the patterns that run through all the traditional cooking of southern Louisiana are legion. To begin, many of the ingredients themselves can be found in both cuisines: both the roux, as the thickening agent for gumbo, and the “holy trinity” of onion, celery and green pepper that forms the basis of seasoning are French above all, and thus are found in both Creole and Cajun kitchens; equally, hot red pepper of the Tabasco and other varieties were introduced by the Portuguese to Africa from their colonies in the Americas in the 16th-century, and then accompanied Africans back across the Atlantic where they form a fundamental element in all New World African-inspired cuisines from Louisiana to the Caribbean to Brazil.²⁹ More generally, it was impossible for any segment of the tiny colony of Louisiana to remain completely isolated from the others during the 18th-century. The degree to which *all* settlers were dependent

²⁸ See, for example, Feibleman’s two characters, the Creole “Madame X” and the Cajun “Madame Y” with which he opens *American Cooking*:... 8-11,.

²⁹ John Thorne, *Serious Pig*..., (New York: North Point Press, 1996), 282.

on the ingredients that could be cultivated (and were already being cultivated elsewhere in the colony), or obtained in trade from Native peoples cannot be exaggerated. As food writer John Thorne observes (somewhat romantically), often the designations of Creole and Cajun are more a matter of fictitious self-representation than anything else:

What, then, is the difference [between the two]? ...[T]here is more to a cuisine than the taste of its dishes: the imagination has its hunger, too. People who eat the same food may still conceive it in very disparate contexts and taste it accordingly. The Creoles themselves, ... claim for it those ... French bedfellows, sensuality and economy, a combination equally characteristic of Cajun cooking. But while the Cajuns eat and smack their lips and think themselves fine fellows for making a feast out of what the servants of the plantation house... toss to the pigs, Creoles taste and then sigh for a past when such meals were an act of virtue as much as of necessity.

In other words, the same meal can serve two very different discursive purposes in the process of cultural self-representation.

In essence, as all cuisines before and after them, the cuisines of Louisiana began as the food systems that provided sustenance for the early settlers, and then for the growing colonial populations in both urban New Orleans and the more rural areas. Thus throughout the 18th-century, Creole and Cajun cuisines were not considered distinct from each other - nor had either adopted the label "cuisine" in the way that even by the early 18th-century French or Italian cuisine had, with all of its associations with deliberate experimentation, professional chefs, and court life. Indeed, both Creole and Cajun cuisines were extended cultural practices drawing on the pre-existing knowledge of the active players

who prepared the food – knowledge that ranged from agriculture techniques needed to cultivate certain crops,³⁰ to food preparation and actual cooking methods – and on the foodstuffs available and familiar enough to the colonists to be incorporated.

Michel de Certeau's definition of cultural practice is useful here because it highlights the ways the multi-level complexity of cuisine precludes it from being interpreted as a text; it is essentially a time-based performance that exists in relation to past performances, and that permits the "dweller" to elaborate a social identity within a geographically circumscribed area:

... a cultural practice ... is the more or less coherent and fluid assemblage of elements that are concrete and everyday ... or ideological..., at once coming from a tradition (that of a family or social group) and reactualized from day to day across behaviors translating fragments of this cultural device into social visibility, in the same way that the utterance translates fragments of discourse in speech. A "practice" is what is decisive for the *identity* of a dweller or a group insofar as this identity allows him or her to take up a position in the network of social relations inscribed in the environment.³¹

For these reasons, for well into the 18th-century, "cuisine" in Louisiana was produced from whatever the colonists and their entourage were able to draw from their own culinary traditions *within* the constraints imposed on them by the new landscape and the contingency of their positions as interlopers. And the first active players involved in these practices in the early colony were most

³⁰ See chapter 3 for a discussion of West African slaves in Louisiana and the cultivation of rice.

³¹ Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2, Living and Cooking*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 9.

certainly the Native groups that supported the first Frenchmen who arrived and attempted to settle the area permanently in 1699. This support took the form of actual cooking, showing the colonists how to sustain themselves in the swamps and the marshlands of the Mississippi delta region, and the trading of foodstuffs.

The first major shift in the way these cultural practices were carried out occurred with introduction of West African slaves to Louisiana in 1719, and the development of an exploitative slave-based plantation economy throughout the 18th-century. Not only did the enslaved West Africans bring with them their own assorted culinary knowledges related to agriculture and food preparation but, as already noted, they were immediately forced into taking on the roles of cooks and kitchen staff for the white slave-owning elite. As well as introducing specific food elements that would later be considered essential to Creole/Cajun cuisines, this new way of organizing labour established a pattern of race-based power relations in the kitchen that underlies the creation of these “cuisines” of Louisiana, and of the Southern U.S. in general. Almost every discussion of Creole or Cajun cuisine, no matter how superficial or positivist, mentions the ubiquitous black cook responsible for its quotidian “reactualization,” in de Certeau’s words.

The rampant ambiguities and tensions related to intimate black/white interaction within the context of slavery are condensed within this figure of the black cook ensconced in the kitchen interior. However, the racial politics inherent in this figure are never problematized or even directly addressed within

discussions of the development of Creole or Cajun cuisines. In discussing the much-overlooked centrality of the black presence in culture formation in the South, the white scholar Margaret Jones Bolsterli remarks:

It was possible for Blacks to be isolated from Whites, in that a Black field hand working under a Black driver might seldom or never have come into close contact with whites. But the children of the White planter and overseer would have been cared for and cooked for by Blacks. And it was to the level of being waited on hand and foot by Blacks that most Whites aspired.³²

Bolsterli's point, I think, is that, regardless of the ability of black or white Southerners to isolate themselves physically from the Other, it is clear that there was never a point at which southern consciousness could, or can, escape the deeply entrenched psychological structures of power and powerlessness that are the legacies of all slave societies.

It is this inter-racial cultural complexity that is not simply erased, but strategically redeployed and re-presented through the process of commodification of the profoundly resonant site of Creole and Cajun cuisine. To some extent, the discourse surrounding all cuisine of the southern U.S. uses barely veiled and politically evacuated references to the Southern colonial past to exploit the contemporary market for culinary products with a "historical flair." Creole and Cajun cuisines amplify this pattern because the histories of the slave trade common to all Southern cultural artifacts are intermingled with histories of the presence of foreign Others, who, while white and therefore

³² Margaret Jones Bolsterli, "The Very Food We Eat: a Speculation on the Nature of Southern Culture," in *Southern Humanities Review* 16 (Spring 1982): 125.

glamorous according to contemporary marketing policies, are still vaguely unsettling because they are un-American. Hence the exoticism, hence the continual, completely unsubstantiated references to the “foreignness” of New Orleans that I encountered during my visit. But how are these histories actually transformed and commodified via culinary products? And more importantly, what is it about the commodity, as an entity, that permits or even encourages these deceptions, these erasures?

To begin with an examination of the commodification process in general, much contemporary scholarship on consumption and commodification takes the central aspect of Marx’s definition of the commodity – the distinction between exchange value and use value – as a point of departure. In this definition, products are “social hieroglyphics” in which the use value, “the substance of objects”, or the real use to which they can be put, exists in contrast to the exchange value, “the form which makes them interchangeable,” a social abstraction which represents the “secret” to be deciphered in the hieroglyphic.³³ The basis of this secret is the human labour required in the production process, and in evolved capitalist systems, the commodification of labour results in the object, or commodity, concealing the truth about the conditions of its own production. This act of deception is commodity fetishism. Interestingly, as Charles Levin indicates in discussing Lukács’ reading of Marx, although

³³ Charles Levin, *Jean Baudrillard: a Study in Cultural Metaphysics*, (London: Prentice Hall, 1996), 57-58.

commodity theory is clearly grounded in the economics of production and exchange, Marx located the phenomenon of commodity fetishism within the realm of the human imagination:

...the term "fetishism" also seemed to allude to the cognitive problems posed by the capitalist system. Clearly, the consequences of the rise of the exchange value system were not only social, but epistemological.³⁴

This placing of human cognition at the centre of the life of objects has powerful and unmistakable implications for the consideration of how value is imaginatively bestowed upon and withdrawn from objects such as foodstuffs.

Many theorists have applied the concept of commodity fetishism to foodstuffs and food systems. The geographer David Harvey, for example, writes in a much-quoted passage about the silence inherent in the commodity, and taking the figure of the veil from Marx, about the veil of fetishism which needs to be drawn back from the commodity:

The grapes that sit upon the supermarket shelf are mute: we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they are from. We can, by further enquiry lift the veil on this geographical and social ignorance and make ourselves aware of these issues ... But in so doing we find that we have to go behind ... what the market itself reveals in order to understand how society is working. We have to get behind the veil, the fetishism of the market and the commodity.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., 58.

³⁵ David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination," in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, 3 (1990): 423.

And, further on, he repeats: "We need to penetrate the veil of fetishisms with which we are necessarily surrounded by virtue of the system of commodity production and exchange and discover what lies beneath it."³⁶

Harvey's use of the veil metaphor here is a clear-cut use of Marx' theory of the commodity fetish; in Harvey's view there is a finite set of identifiable conditions that cannot be apprehended through the commodity itself because of the way that it has been made available to us. The very ease and anonymity of its arrival and availability eradicates any traces of the human labour that was, and is, always required to produce the commodity. Equally the social and economic relations that govern its production and exchange are erased. Therefore, Harvey issues a moral imperative to resist the veil of appearances and mute surfaces, to expose what "lies beneath", and in such a way, exert the proper kind of consumer agency via boycotts or public protests.

However, there have been many critics of the most obvious implication of this commodity-fetish model, namely, that to simply "unveil" the commodity will reveal certain truths about its conditions of production, will automatically defetishize the object and will permit the consumer to interact in a moral fashion with the commodities she consumes. The most common criticism concerns the lack of attention paid to the act of consumption itself, and to the multifarious ways consumers interact with commodities. That is, critics assert that Harvey's theory focuses exclusively on the sites of production and spatially dispersed

³⁶ Ibid.

labour and hence “fails to take seriously the semiology of commodity surfaces.”³⁷ Similarly, critics point out that Harvey and other scholars on the left are “clearly positioned in opposition to the excessive and carnivalesque possibilities of modern consumption”³⁸ and that they “retain an emphasis on the powerlessness and the passivity of the consumer.”³⁹ Such a position, they argue, necessarily privileges scholars and academics to the detriment of ordinary consumers who do not have access to the kinds of information essential for making such decisions.

Moreover, how is it possible, query the critics, to *conclusively* identify the origins of any commodity? Can the true identities of Creole and Cajun be located and pinned down, and if they can, how is it to be accomplished?

Here the issue is linked to the politics of representation. Although the commodity itself has a specific history and set of conditions of production, how is it possible to accurately represent these in order to allow consumers to make ethical decisions? As Castree observes: “Marxists have typically found it hard to name these sociospatial origins without essentializing places, cultures and localities.”⁴⁰ Because, of course, despite claims of exactitude and realism, this process of naming is as vulnerable to the distortions of signification and

³⁷ Noel Castree, “Commentary” ... 1520.

³⁸ Philip Crang, “Displacement, Consumption and Identity,” *Environment and Planning A* 28 (1996): 57.

³⁹ Peter Jackson, “Commodity Cultures: the Traffic in Things,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* NS 24 (1999): 98.

⁴⁰ Castree, “Commentary” ... 1520.

representation as the “veils” it wishes to dispel. As geographer Philip Crang notes about this process:

... knowledges of commodity biographies do not simply escape the circuits of cultural meaning and value creation with which other forms of knowledge are bound up ... [such] deeply textured accounts are just as imbued with the kinds of broad discourses of cultural differentiation as the superficial glosses of geography as image...⁴¹

These questions strike at the heart of this thesis because my investigation of the biographies of the commodities represented by Creole and Cajun cuisines cannot, in fact, provide an exact historical representation of the conditions of its production. Even were it within the scope of this project, my investigation cannot empirically pin down the *truth* at the heart of the formation of these cuisines.

Castree reworks the questions anticipated by the Marxist deconstruction of the commodity fetish when he asks “What does a commodity represent? ... Who, what and where are ‘crystallised’ in commodity bodies?” He thereby opens up the possibilities of “unnamable” sites which nonetheless exist on a discursive level and have material consequences. His question becomes: “... how is it possible for critics of global capitalism in the early 21st-century to name – to draw social and geographic boundaries around – the sites commodity fetishism ‘hides’ when those sites no longer exist *sui generis*?”⁴² Working with this question as a point of departure, this thesis interrogates the material historical trajectories of these two inter-related popular cuisines in order to elaborate the ways they

⁴¹ Crang, “Displacement...,” 57.

⁴² Castree, “Commentary,” 1522.

undermine the discursive fictions that the commodification process has attached to them. However, one of the tools needed to accomplish this task is a more flexible and robust definition of the commodity itself, one that addresses the restrictions of the strict Marxist model of commodity fetishism, and begins to answer the questions posed by Castree and Crang.

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's model of the commodity is invaluable in this regard because he introduces the concept of the biography of the object, which permits analysis of how it can change form over time. Clearly this approach is essential to my argument, which investigates how culinary ingredients, methods and practices have been transformed over time and through the process of commodification itself. Additionally, Appadurai extends the breadth of Marx' definition of the commodity by incorporating into it aspects of consumption as well as of exchange/distribution and production - stating that the entire *trajectory* of commodity deserves study, because all of these aspects, in essence, define the manner in which objects are commodities. Related to this, he focuses on the concept of the "commodity situation" in which all objects may find themselves at various points in their lives, as opposed to simply applying the concept of the "commodity" to some objects and not to others. This treatment of the commodity is particularly useful here because it provides a framework for analyzing a complex grouping of practices and objects that have been transformed over time into commodities of different forms.

Appadurai's concept of the commodity situation deserves closer attention here. It is made up of three inter-related aspects: the commodity phase of any "thing," which I will address below; the commodity candidacy of any "thing" (the likelihood within a certain cultural framework that an object will become a commodity); and the commodity context in which a "thing" may be placed (the "social arenas" in which commodities perform their functions).⁴³ In my argument concerning the contemporary commodification of Creole and Cajun cuisines, the second aspect, the commodity candidacy of these food systems would revolve around the reasons that these regional cuisines entered commodity situations so explosively in the 1980s, in a country with no national cuisine to speak of.⁴⁴ The last aspect of the commodity situation, the commodity context, could refer to the French Market, the entire spectrum of high- and low-end restaurants providing "authentic" Creole and Cajun food in New Orleans, the home kitchens of people trying to replicate recipes they read in *Chef Paul Prudhomme's Louisiana Kitchen*, and the shops and factories where the multitudes of miniature jars, bottles and envelopes of Creole and Cajun products are filled and processed.

Most importantly for my discussion however, the first aspect of the commodity situation, the commodity phase of the object, pinpoints the capacity

⁴³ Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13-16.

⁴⁴ Sidney Mintz discusses in some detail the absence of what he calls an American national cuisine in his *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture and the Past*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1996), 106-124.

of objects to transform themselves, to take on the commodity fetish at a specific point in time. It refers to the *biographies* of things:

... things can move in *and* out of the commodity state, ... such movements can be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant. Though the biographical aspect of some things (such as heirlooms, postage stamps, and antiques) may be more noticeable than that of some others (such as steel bars, salt or sugar), this component is never completely irrelevant.⁴⁵

This temporal quality is of particular consequence here because, clearly, the manner in which Creole and Cajun cuisines have been conceptualized and consumed has changed enormously over the 300 years of their existence. The ways these cuisines are currently made available, represented and consumed are not simply the natural result of an accumulation of historical knowledge related to them, or of recent increased interest. Specific aspects of these changes in consumption patterns have been deliberately engineered and then manipulated in order to build a market and, inevitably, to maximize profits.

Ian Cook and Philip Crang apply the concept of commodity fetishism to the culinary realm in order to conceptualize the "double commodity fetish."⁴⁶

This model is concerned with the construction of two discursive elements inherent in the commodification of culinary objects: the first element is the strategic ignorance inculcated by the commodity fetish, and the second element is the reverse, the strategic knowledges which are also generated through

⁴⁵ Appadurai, "Introduction ..." 13.

⁴⁶ Ian Cook and Philip Crang, "The World on a Plate: Culinary Culture, Displacement and Geographical Knowledges," *Journal of Material Culture* 1, 2 (1996): 132.

commodification. That is, not only do commodity bodies actively deceive by withholding information about the conditions of their production (thereby producing ignorance), they also deceive by producing knowledges of an intentionally distorted kind. In a sense, this bringing together of the ignorance and knowledge of the fetish addresses the shortcomings of the strictly Marxist model, which stresses the aspects of production and exchange to the exclusion of consumption. That is, the double commodity fetish takes into account the active ways consumers interact with commodities, however mired in inaccuracies and exaggeration these ways are.

The double commodity fetish provides a useful theoretical framework for considering the 19th- and 20th- century histories of the commodification of Creole and Cajun cuisines, and the kinds of fictions that have become associated with them. In charting this course, two specific junctures stand out as central to the commodification process. The first is the translation into textuality between 1885 and 1900 of the complex array of foodstuffs and culinary techniques that made up the cuisines, and the second is the Cajun food craze of the 1980s and early 1990s.

The dynamics of power that dominated the culinary realm in Louisiana throughout the 18th- and 19th-centuries certainly underpinned the myth of Creole culture captured by the first printed cookbooks that documented this cuisine. Two such cookbooks appeared simultaneously in 1885: *The Creole Cookery Book*, compiled and edited by the Christian Women's Exchange of New Orleans; and

La Cuisine Creole, written anonymously by the journalist Lafcadio Hearn. Fifteen years later, the largest New Orleans newspaper, the *Times-Picayune*, issued its own cookbook, *The Picayune Creole Cook Book*, in part, as John Egerton observes “... to preserv[e] the kitchen artistry of the Creole negro cooks of nearly two hundred years ago, carefully instructed and directed by their white Creole mistresses. The newspaper’s editor feared that ... emancipation and Reconstruction would eventually bring about the demise of Creole cooking.”⁴⁷ In all three cases, these cookbooks were published explicitly to codify, record and preserve the 200-year old culinary legacy of that shadowy, ill-defined and ever-shifting group, the Creoles of New Orleans.

An investigation of the nature of print, as a medium, is critical to any examination of cookbooks, particularly as the initial function these books performed was to fix in place, to make permanent, a set of directions that was essentially fluid and contingent upon local conditions. Benedict Anderson notes that 18th- and 19th-century notions of nationalism coalesced around the medium of print – “... the independence movements in the Americas became, as soon as they were printed about, ‘concepts,’ ‘models,’ and indeed ‘blueprints.’”⁴⁸ Following the same discursive trajectory, the textuality of these early cookbooks first fixed in print selective aspects of historically constructed culinary practices (usually ingredients and cooking methods), and then, by default, became the

⁴⁷ John Egerton, *Southern Food*:... 114.

⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*:..., 81.

“model” and even “blueprint” for the material embodiment of Creole culture. It is in this way, in the earliest form of the commodification of these cuisines *per se* (as opposed to the commodification of individual ingredients in it), that the form of Cook and Crang’s double commodity fetish begins to become visible: both the constructed and strategic ignorance of the cultural conditions underlying the formation of Creole “cuisine”, and the selective knowledges concerning whitewashed aspects of colonial history.

Lafcadio Hearn’s book is of special interest because of his personal status as an outsider and temporary resident of New Orleans. It is of singular relevance that the first individual compiler in print of Creole recipes should be so far from being Creole himself. Of English and Greek extraction, Hearn was an immigrant to the U.S. and spent only 10 years in New Orleans (1878-1888), during which he worked as a journalist, short-fiction writer, translator and reviewer for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, producing thousands of half-fictitious sketches describing his impressions of both the urban centre and of southern Louisiana. Many of these short textual pieces dealt explicitly with the vagaries of Creole culture, including the cultural tensions produced by the co-presence of the New Orleans white Creole elite, the Creoles of colour (mixed race African-Americans, of West Indian, French, Spanish and African extraction), and the northern Anglo-American interlopers, whose presence in New Orleans since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 was, in the late 19th-century, still grimly resisted by the

aristocratic inheritors of the “European” Creole legacy.⁴⁹ In this way, Hearn was contributing to an already elaborate cultural mythology surrounding Creole culture. Reconstruction and the aftermath of the Civil War had intensified racist nostalgia for the pre-war days, and an entire literature was already in place extolling the glories and refinements of European white, Creole supremacy.⁵⁰

Hearn was, in fact, the quintessential external observer of Creole cultural life – as well as compiling the 1885 cookbook, he published the first printed collection of Creole proverbs, entitled *Gombo Zhèbes: A Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs* in the same year, not coincidentally named after a Creole culinary dish. Much like the Midwestern park ranger leading my tour of New Orleans’ French Quarter, Hearn’s position outside the culture he was describing permitted him to view it as a self-contained whole, and subsequently to represent it as a cohesive entity, or series of entities, with identifiable attributes and modes of operating. Although the *Times-Picayune* and the Christian Women’s Exchange, both local bodies made up of the Creole elite, also published Creole cookbooks during this time period, these were corporately-compiled texts, and they were not placed within the larger cultural discourse surrounding the Louisiana Creole that Hearn’s was. His *La Cuisine Creole* was a deliberate attempt to insert cuisine into this discourse as part of his process of cultural documentation. In any case, the

⁴⁹ S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Press of Mississippi, 2001), xi-xxvii.

⁵⁰ See the novels of George Washington Cable, a contemporary of Lafcadio Hearn’s, for a rebuttal of these views.

process of culinary textualization, beginning with Hearn, is clearly a significant step towards the commodification of this ethno-cultural group. Appadurai notes the similarity of the process that occurred in 20th-century India, and points to the ways that such necessarily artificial labels operate within a context of postcolonial relations:

It is worth noticing that [the] authors [of regional cookbooks] are either transplanted and uprooted professionals ... characterizing cuisines that they have themselves learned in a cosmopolitan context, or they are self-advertisements by articulate urban members of a particular ethnic group who seek to publicize its culinary wares... It should be noted that these small ethnological cameos hark back to the potted portraits that are the stuff of ... ethnographic encyclopedias ... where tribes, castes, and linguistic groups were often metonymously captured through the use of the ... distinctive piece of material technology.⁵¹

In this way, at the end of the 19th-century the Creoles of New Orleans began to be defined ethnically through cuisine, a process that not only publicized a culinary tradition to the nation as a whole, but also actively enabled the elaboration and commodification of the concept of Creole culture itself.

A similar but more intensified process took place with Acadian culture approximately a century later with the Cajun food craze that began in the early 1980s and dwindled out in the mid-1990s, although traces of the now-familiar character of the swamp-living crocodile-wrestling yodeling Cajun can still be recognized today in various forms of non-food advertising. Indeed, the marketing patterns established by this national short-lived rage for Cajun food exist in Louisiana still: they are precisely what I witnessed in my culinary tour of

⁵¹ Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine..." 16.

New Orleans. For the most part, however, this marketing strategy is no longer independently employed by companies not associated with the local tourist industry.

Although knowledge of Acadian towns and parishes certainly existed throughout Louisiana in the 19th-century, Cajun "consciousness" per se is an invention of second half of the 20th-century. Interestingly, the first movements towards ethnic self-definition within Acadian communities coalesced around their linguistic status. In the late 1960s, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was founded to arrest the further decline (and eventual elimination) of oral French in the state, and almost immediately small local printed cookbooks devoted to the cuisines of Acadian parishes began appearing (1967).⁵² The already-cited volume, *American Cooking: Creole and Acadian*, was published in 1971 as part of the Foods of the World series: it popularized the romance of Louisiana's colonial history and set in print the characters of the white Creole and white Acadian for the national Time-Life Books audience.

However, it wasn't until Paul Prudhomme, who had opened his restaurant K-Paul's in New Orleans in 1979, decided to take his business on the road that the local cuisines of rural, French-speaking Louisiana began to resemble something other than the multitude of other regional American

⁵² Michael James Forêt, "A Cookbook View of Cajun Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 23, 1 (Summer 1989): 23-36.

cuisines. In 1983, Prudhomme opened a K-Paul's in San Francisco, and following upon its success, published a cookbook in 1984 based on such signature dishes as Blackened Redfish, Cajun Popcorn, Shrimp Creole and Crawfish Étouffée created and recreated each night in his restaurant kitchens. By 1985, a K-Paul's was operating in New York, and Prudhomme had brought out his own line of spices called Cajun Magic and owned a consultancy service training chefs for "Cajun" restaurants around the U.S. By the end of the 1980s, "Cajun" was a seasoning that would guarantee the popularity of any food product it was applied to: Frito-lay, Burger King, and Kraft as well as a multitude of smaller Louisiana-based companies all marketed products that bore the label "Cajun" - Cajun Spice Ruffles potato chips, the Makin' Cajun line of dinners and sauces, the Cajun Whaler fish sandwich, and the Cajun Injector, a syringe pre-filled with a spicy sauce to be injected into meat, were all products on the market by 1988.⁵³

As the commodification of Creole food did before it, the popularity of Cajun food, and its transformation into an infinite series of brands and products, depended heavily on a larger discourse around it, a discourse that similarly addressed issues of colonial history, racial hierarchies and national identity. Where the mystique of Creole culture in the 19th-century depended on a fascination with the demise of white supremacy in the rarefied "European" air of southern Louisiana, Cajun charm was being similarly marketed in 1985 as quintessentially Other, although still safely within the bosom of America: this

⁵³ John Maines, "The Road to Mamou," *American Demographics*, May 1988, 45-47.

paradox is central to the containment and commodification of cultural difference within the cuisines I am discussing. *Business Week*, reporting on the Cajun food phenomenon, neatly captures the two aspects of this paradox:

What's the attraction fueling this kind of growth? Explains Michael Culp, a restaurant analyst ...: "Cajun is dangerous, exotic, and glamorous." And apparently a type of food whose time has come. In these days when national pride sells, Cajun is pure Americana.⁵⁴

The juxtaposition in this passage of exoticism and Americana, although superficially disjunctive, illustrates the ways cuisine can effortlessly embody such discursive contradictions. And critically, within the Cajun marketing machine, any reference to current or historical racial politics is absent: despite lengthy histories of racial mixing in rural Louisiana, Cajuns are represented as the uniformly white descendants of white francophone immigrants.

The means by which this Otherness was materially translated into culinary culture during this period of Cajun hyper-marketing – the commodity phase of Acadian culinary culture – was almost exclusively through the use of hot peppers. The popular press that covered this marketing phenomenon dutifully passed this narrow focus on to its readership. "Pass the Tabasco – Cajun is hot ... Americans have started to appreciate a bit of a burn,"⁵⁵ journalists wrote, "Food companies that substitute the word 'Cajun' for 'spicy' in their

⁵⁴ Jo Ellen Davis, "Blackened Fish, Red Beans and a Coke to go, Please," *Business Week*, November 11, 1985, 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

products are enjoying spectacular results.”⁵⁶ Prudhomme himself conceptualized the essence of Cajun food as being about pain management – “ ... as Prudhomme explains, the idea behind Cajun cooking is to ‘stay just this side of the threshold between pleasure and pain. If you cross the threshold people won’t enjoy the food.”⁵⁷ Although all the cooking of southern Louisiana historically makes liberal use of hot peppers, as all African-derived cuisines do, the commodification of Cajun cuisine meant that this one culinary technique became its single recognizable and saleable feature. In a similar fashion, a single person, Paul Prudhomme, and a single dish, Blackened Redfish, became synonymous with Cajun cooking.⁵⁸ These processes of reduction and simplification inherent to commodification were observable in the textualization of Creole culinary culture in 1885. A century later, in a context of large-scale, industrialized food processing, packaging and provision that created an explosion of physical food products, they resulted in an even narrower conception of the culture behind the cuisine. In both cases, Cook and Crang’s double commodity fetish – the strategic construction of both (distorted) knowledge and ignorance – is visible in the commodity bodies represented by the Creole cookbook and Prudhomme’s Blackened Redfish.

⁵⁶ Maines, “The Road to Mamou,” ... 45.

⁵⁷ “Cravin’ Cajun Cooking,” *Newsweek*, January 14, 1985, 73.

⁵⁸ Incidentally, this dish and indeed the culinary process of ‘blackening’, in which meat or fish coated in spicy breading is thrown into a red-hot skillet, were completely invented by Prudhomme. There is no historical antecedent to either one.

In conclusion, the fictions inherent in the commodity fetishes of Creole and Cajun food depend on the manipulation of certain aspects of colonial history of Louisiana, aspects that encourage the containment of the legacies of violent systems of differentiation that emerged out of a slave-based plantation economy. In a much-cited article within the contemporary literature surrounding consumption practices and identity formation, bell hooks asserts that these acts of historical (mis)representation within the process of commodification depend on decontextualization. She argues that:

... the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated *via* exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization.⁵⁹

While there is substantial criticism of hooks' argument, its relevance to my own is quite evident. The romantic 19th-century vision of the tragic white Louisiana Creole, lurking beneath the promotion of Creole cuisine, gains its appeal from the excision of references to the inability of the original French settlers to adequately control their environment, and to their dependence, first, on the magnanimity of Native peoples and subsequently on a brutal slave regime to simply sustain a permanent colony. Similarly, 1980s' Cajun "glamour" depended on the absence of racial and linguistic ambiguity in the representation of this population, as if such discrete boundaries could be maintained over a

⁵⁹ bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1992), 31.

century. Both of these selective histories are essential decontextualizations. However, in some ways hooks' contention resembles Harvey's central argument that unless the veil concealing the conditions of production is lifted (or history properly contextualized) by some external source, consumption furthers the deceptions inherent in global capitalism and is a fundamentally oppressive act. The biographies of the commodities of Creole and Cajun cuisines themselves constitute the means by which these deceptions can be challenged and ultimately opposed. In the following two chapters, I will trace the histories of selected aspects of these two cuisines in order to demonstrate how they tell the story of their own afro-Creole past and undermine the fictions of American national identity visited upon them.

Chapter 2: New World Foods / New World Discourses: the Construction of a “Harmonious Cuisine.”

“This harmonious cuisine, born out of the mixture of cultures, evolved because of Louisiana’s geographical isolation, plus its settlers’ hardships, pride, instinct, and the Latin cultural desire to eat well.”⁶⁰

The Creole and Cajun cuisines that developed out of the lower Mississippi valley through the 18th- and 19th-centuries are consummate material and culinary embodiments of the patterns of migration and contact that formed colonial Louisiana. This chapter will address the first of these patterns – the initial French contact with the many Native groups that inhabited the Mississippi delta and the cultural incommensurability that it produced. Following a discussion of the form of the recipe itself as a research text, I will examine three recipes in detail in order to develop two related points: the first, that France’s establishment of a colony on the mouth of the Mississippi delta was the result of a complex geopolitical imperial strategy which ultimately failed its objectives; and the second, that the borders between the tiny French settlement and the indigenous groups that inhabited the region, particularly as illustrated by the exchange of food, were characterized by Native agency and French powerlessness. Both of these points function to destabilize the central myth of American cultural autonomy which lies beneath the neutralizing perspective of the ‘melting pot’ or ‘gumbo of culture’ metaphors.

⁶⁰ Bethany Ewald Bultman, “A True and Delectable History...” 66.

As textual traces of cuisine, Creole and Cajun recipes as they appear in both contemporary and historical cookbooks, are complex discursive sites and, as such, cannot be read transparently. Recipes are abbreviated outlines of specific ingredients and methods, essentially guides to action, and in their printed form, they necessarily engage in the processes of standardization and decontextualization that are endemic to the medium of print.⁶¹ These processes are particularly relevant here because recipes are transcribed, compiled and then printed expressly to capture the complex cultural practice of cuisine, as opposed to other types of printed matter which are intended solely to construct a linear argument or expound a point of view, for example. Of course all printed material has an elided cultural context, but the fact that in the notation of recipes this context is either entirely absent or (as in contemporary cookbooks) creatively and strategically deployed, problematizes the straightforward reading of recipes as factual historical accounts of culture formation. The following two chapters use six specific recipes derived from a number of sources and, for this reason, an explicit methodological discussion of the recipe is necessary. In addition to the above definition of the recipe as guide to action, I will elaborate why I have selected certain recipes, and how they will be integrated with an historical analysis of the French construction of the New World in Louisiana.

⁶¹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, (London: Methuen, 1982).

To begin, I will be using the concept of biography to describe the historical trajectories of recipes. As I have outlined in the previous chapter, my use of biography is rooted in the notion of the social life of objects and commodities found in cultural anthropology, and in material culture studies in particular. The concept is useful here because it permits me to bring together the unit (the recipe and the dish as a whole) and its constituent parts (the ingredients, the description of cooking steps) within a certain historical timeline. That is, employing the concept of the biography of a recipe allows me to consider how individual ingredients, no matter how foreign in origin to each other, came to be put together in one dish at a certain time within the colonial development of Louisiana. Furthermore, it allows me to consider how the dish itself came to take on a certain “personality” over time, to develop certain symbolisms and associations with the people who originally prepared and consumed it. And, inevitably, as food preparation and distribution in Louisiana (and elsewhere in the US) became dominated by processes of industrialization, these symbolisms and associations in turn gave rise to the specific kinds of commodity fetishes discussed in Chapter 1.

In considering the biographies of recipes then, I am treating the recipe as a living organism with multiple parts that exists in both time and space. Certainly any discursive analysis that makes use of the recipe must take account of how the cultural practice of cuisine and its representation in print make manifest changing dynamics of power in the realms of national identity, ethnic

self-definition and gender, amongst others.⁶² In this thesis however, my focus is on how the biographies of recipes undermine the fictions related to national identity which Creole and Cajun cuisines currently perform, not on the representation of these cuisines. For this reason, while I will spend some time discussing the cookbooks from which I draw the recipes, my primary interest in this section is the historical formation of the cuisines themselves.

As for my more specific methodology, I have chosen three recipes for this chapter, and three for Chapter 3. I will focus on between two and four ingredients from each recipe and use them as a point of departure for the historical analysis which forms the thematic structure of each chapter. It is essential to remember however, that the ingredients and methods I am drawing out are not exclusive to only these recipes from the Creole and Cajun culinary repertoire, nor are these ingredients exclusive to the one recipe I am drawing it from, out of the six that I am using in this thesis. For example, although I discuss the roux used to make gumbo in the section on “Duck and Sausage Filé Gumbo” later on in this chapter, a roux is also the basis of the “Creole Okra Gumbo” that appears in Chapter 3, but I will not bring it up in that context. Similarly, although hot red pepper (tabasco and cayenne) could easily be used in four of the six recipes, I will only discuss it in the section devoted to the recipe for “Red

⁶² There is a growing literature in the textual analysis of cookbooks that addresses these issues. See for example: Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds., *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, (New York: Routledge, 2002); Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002); and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que Vivan Los Tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

Beans and Rice.” The reason for this interest in culinary categories is that, by its very nature, all cuisine entails a necessarily high level of overlap in ingredients and method – certainly six dishes drawn from two interrelated culinary traditions will contain many of the same elements.

I have chosen recipes that illuminate in specific ways the discursive analysis of the ethnic formation of colonial Louisiana that they accompany. However these recipes do not encapsulate any definable ethnicity, either individual (such as French or Choctaw) or collective (such as Louisiana as New World gumbo). My work with recipes in the following two chapters resists this categorization, this desire to proclaim a certain dish French and another African or Native American. Not only is it essential to see how factually both dishes are probably both French and Native American or African through specific cultural histories of contact and migration, but also it becomes discursively imperative to see how it was impossible in the French New World of Louisiana to be French *without* also being Native American or African. In order to dispel the popular notion of a “harmonious cuisine,” the imperative that necessarily follows is to see how these conjunctions and disjunctions did not simply exist concurrently, but were mediated through social and political hierarchies. The conscious desire to capture and contain ethnicity through named culinary practices is fraught with ambiguities, and it is a running theme of this thesis. However, as the relation of foodways to history is fluid and multiplex, so the relation between ingredients and analysis is neither one-to-one nor unidirectional.

In this chapter, my three selected recipes, and their biographies are used to explore the originary discord which led to the discovery by the French of the mouth of the Mississippi, and to the founding a French colony – in sum, to the extension of the French New World southwards from Québec, down the heart of the continent. There are two basic corollaries to this point, as mentioned. In the first instance, the constituent parts of these recipes – the ingredients that make them up – mark the enormous upheavals wrought by initial European contact in the area in the 1690s, and they point to constantly thwarted and constantly evolving European geo-political ambitions (French, but also British and Spanish), which revolved exclusively around the desire for Old World gain. Secondly, these foodstuffs and their biographies are signs of the initial attempts at settlement of the new colony in an already inhabited geography, of the porous and violent nature of the border between French settlers and the multiple indigenous groups, and of the various ways the border itself was negotiated. Both of these key elements of Creole/Cajun cuisines fundamentally contradict the fantasy of a neutral and voluntary mixing of peoples that underlies popular culinary discourse.

As this chapter treats the initial founding of Louisiana and the interaction between the French and Native Americans, the focus will be on approximately the first 30 years of the French presence in Louisiana, up until the introduction of West African slaves was seriously undertaken, starting around 1726. The analysis is not strictly chronological however, as I will also discuss in this section the

arrival of the Acadian (1758-1785) and Haitian (1791-1810) emigrants, and the consequent transformations in French New World identity. Chapter 3 will take the slave trade as a point of departure, examining in more detail the ways the African diaspora and the social construction of race underlie all culinary culture of Louisiana, and the South in general. The three recipes I will use to structure my assertion in this chapter are: "Duck and Sausage Filé Gumbo," "Cush-Cush," and "Shrimp-Stuffed Mirlitons."

The first recipe is drawn from Peter Feibleman's *American Cooking: Creole and Acadian*, one of the principal post-war texts documenting this culinary tradition. Published in 1971, it prefigured the Cajun food craze of the 1980s and although Feibleman heavily romanticizes and essentializes Creole and Acadian identity, the clichés invoked later to familiarize the consuming public with Acadian food are notably absent. The book is one of the American volumes in the Time-Life series of cookbooks entitled *Foods of the World*. The many volumes of this hugely popular series were published between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, although all of them have been reprinted since then. The series was internationalist in scope, introducing a newly affluent American middle class to the national and/or regional cuisines of Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. The American volumes formed a miniseries within the larger series, and they outlined and elaborated "regional"⁶³ cuisines of the United States (the

⁶³ Again, see Sidney Mintz (1996) for commentary on the possibility of regional cuisines in the United States.

Northwest, the West, the South, et cetera) based largely upon ethnic makeup and patterns of settlement, in this way delineating the parameters of a national identity in culinary terms.⁶⁴

Recipe #1: DUCK AND SAUSAGE [FILÉ] GUMBO⁶⁵

1 pound chaurice or other hot sausage, skinned and sliced into 1/2 inch rounds
Vegetable oil, if needed
2 five-pound ducks, each cut into 8 pieces
4 teaspoons salt
freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup flour
6 tablespoons brown roux
1 cup finely chopped onions
1/2 cup finely chopped scallions
1 cup finely chopped celery
1 cup finely chopped green peppers
3 quarts warm water
1/2 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1 1/2 teaspoons ground hot red pepper (cayenne)
1/4 cup finely chopped fresh parsley, preferably the flat-leaf Italian variety
Filé powder
6 to 8 cups freshly cooked long-grain white rice

In a heavy ungreased 12-inch skillet, fry the sausage over low heat, turning the slices frequently with a slotted spatula until the bottom of the pan is filmed with fat. Increase the heat to moderate and, turning the slices occasionally, continue to fry until the sausage is richly browned. Transfer the sausage to paper towels to drain. There should be about 1/2 cup of fat in the skillet; if not, add vegetable oil to make up that amount.

Pat the pieces of duck completely dry with paper towels and remove any large pieces of fat. Season the birds with 2 teaspoons of the salt and a few grindings of black pepper. Roll the duck in the flour to coat the pieces on all sides and vigorously shake off the excess flour.

Brown the duck, five or six pieces at a time, in the hot fat remaining in the skillet. Turn the pieces frequently with tongs and regulate the heat so that they color deeply and evenly without burning. As they brown, transfer the pieces of duck to paper towels to drain.

Warm the roux over low heat in a heavy 12-quart enameled or cast-iron pot. When roux is smooth and fluid, stir in the onions, scallions and celery. Stirring

⁶⁴Jonathan Norton Leonard, *American Cooking: the great West*, (New York: Time-Life Books, 1971); Dale Brown, *American Cooking: the Northwest*, (New York: Time-Life Books, 1970); Eugene Walter, *American Cooking: Southern Style*, (New York: Time-Life Books, 1971).

⁶⁵ Feibleman, *American Cooking:...*, p. 194.

frequently, cook over moderate heat for about 5 minutes, or until the vegetables are soft. Mix in the green peppers. Then, stirring constantly, pour in the warm water in a slow, thin stream and bring to a boil over high heat. Add the sausage slices, the pieces of duck, the remaining 2 teaspoons of salt, the Tabasco and the red pepper. When the mixture returns to a boil, reduce the heat to low and cover the pot partially. Simmer the gumbo for 2 hours. Remove the pot from the heat and, with a large spoon, skim as much fat from the surface as possible. Stir in the parsley and 2 teaspoons of filé powder, and taste for seasoning. The gumbo should be hotly spiced and may require more Tabasco and/or red pepper. Ladle the gumbo into a heated tureen and serve at one, accompanied by the rice in a separate bowl. Traditionally, a cupful of the rice is mounded in a heated soup plate and the gumbo spooned around it. Present additional filé powder for those who like gumbo with a stronger flavor.

Gumbo, as a dish, is the Louisiana equivalent of the American melting pot; it is a culinary metaphor signifying the egalitarian amalgamation of numerous, potentially antagonistic ethnic groups within the body politic of contemporary Louisiana. Feibleman presents here a recipe for a filé gumbo, one of the two major families of gumbo in Louisiana (the other being okra gumbo which I will discuss in the next chapter). The two types are distinguishable through their thickening agents, filé powder (powdered sassafras root) and okra respectively. I include two recipes for gumbo, one for each of the food chapters in this thesis, because of the immense metaphorical weight that this dish is obliged to carry in discussions of Louisiana's colonial past. Examples abound of the way gumbo is continually invoked to represent the ethnically and racially mixed populations that resulted from colonial conditions throughout the 18th century, and to disavow reminders of violence, conflict and resistance. It is explicitly intended to indicate that these potential conflicts have been successfully neutralized, that all of the disparate groups have willingly and consciously laid aside any original

differences of traditions or opinions in order to fulfill their civic duty. The metaphor of gumbo, I would argue, contains a reference to colonial history and/or the slave trade that the melting pot metaphor does not, which makes the presumption of egalitarianism even more insidious.

The usage that appears on the web site of the Louisiana State Museum is perhaps the most telling example of this ideological agenda:

The promise of prosperity brought people to Louisiana, voluntarily or by force. Among the many ethnic groups on colonial Louisiana were people of French, Canadian, Spanish, Latin American, Anglo, German, and African descent. No one of these cultures dominated in the eighteenth century, and along with Native Americans, they provided the initial ingredients for Louisiana's famous "gumbo" of cultures.⁶⁶

This short text succinctly demonstrates how the fantasy of seamless and uncontested colonial history has come to be naturalized and how the ethnic/racial Other can be contained in culinary terms through the figure of gumbo. Two fundamental elements are present in it: the decontextualized listing of ethnicities (as hooks' argument suggests) and the insistence on the egalitarian nature of social relations. An analysis of the gumbo recipes themselves, however, tells another story.

The makeup of the recipes that I examine are marked by the juxtaposition of food items which had no way of appearing together on one plate before French contact. That is, prior to 1699 these food items had no relation to each

⁶⁶ "The Cabildo: Two Centuries of Louisiana History," Louisiana State Museum, <http://lsm.crt.state.la.us/site/cabildo/cabildo.htm>, November 26, 2002.

other at all, let alone a natural, or “harmonious” affinity with each other. It is in this sense that an investigation of the biographies of these recipes can destabilize and ultimately undermine the discursive fictions which they are forced to perform in contemporary culinary discourse. The ingredients themselves – and their histories and migratory routes – are signs of the disjunctures between the Native tribes that inhabited the Mississippi delta and the early movements of the French down the Mississippi towards the Gulf of Mexico. They further signal how the ways the contacts between these two groups were negotiated and regulated in the early settlements. The foundation of what we recognize as Creole/Cajun cuisines must begin with the landscape and human cultures encountered by the French in their first exploratory expeditions from Québec in New France to the mouth of the Mississippi by Jolliet and Marquette in the 1670s, and then by LaSalle in the 1680s.⁶⁷ How then are these pre-French contact landscapes and cultures present in Creole and Acadian cuisines? Secondly, what is the larger discursive significance of the factual histories that lie behind the recipes? That is, how do these histories subvert the fictions related to ethnicity and national identity that contemporary commodity fetishism of the cuisine of southern Louisiana embodies?

In this recipe for Duck and Sausage Gumbo, there are several ingredients that could be considered indigenous to the Mississippi delta (the duck, the

⁶⁷ Please see the historical outline of colonial Louisiana in the Introduction for more details.

onions and scallions, green pepper, amongst others), but the filé is the ingredient that authors are always eager to discuss in relation to the Native presence in the delta area. In this sense filé has taken on a disproportionately large discursive life relative to other indigenous foodstuffs present in all Creole and Acadian cooking. It is through filé that the “Native” element is incorporated in the cosy language of one-liners of the recipe-as-New World. Indeed, it is through filé that the Native population is constituted in the fiction of the melting pot that Louisiana cuisines embody, in Feibleman’s cookbook as well as in many others.⁶⁸ In a rhetorical gesture similar to the Louisiana State Museum’s “gumbo of cultures” cited above, Bultman writes:

Louisiana cuisine, whatever else it might be called, is the literal melting pot of America. In a pot of gumbo served today in a traditional New Orleans house, there is a French roux, African okra, Indian filé, Spanish peppers, Cajun sausage, all served over Chinese rice with an accompaniment of hot French bread made by one the city’s finest German bakers.⁶⁹

Setting aside for the moment Bultman’s egregious error concerning rice which I will address in the next chapter, filé here stands in for the multiplicity of Native American tribes that occupied the lower Mississippi Valley. Filé itself, which is the powder made from the dried and then pounded leaves of the sassafras plant, was certainly known and used by Native Americans in this

⁶⁸ Peter S. Feibleman, *American Cooking: ...*, 18, 39; Patricia Perrin, “Louisiana French Foodways: The Perpetuation of Ethnicity in the Lafourche Area,” *North American Culture* 2 (1985): 6; Egerton, *Southern Cooking...* 25, 112, 123; and with more care and detail, John Thorne, *Serious Pig*:...215-216.

⁶⁹ Bultman, “A True and Delectable ...,” 66.

region. Equally, the French, English and Spanish colonists along the Georgia/Carolina/Florida coasts had been making use of the plant for medicinal and other purposes as early as 1562,⁷⁰ and it was quickly incorporated as a cooking ingredient in soups as a thickening agent. As such, it became known as *filé*, from the French word “fil” meaning “thread,” because it turns stringy if the powder is actually boiled with the soup. For this reason, it is added as the soup is being served, and typically left on the table for diners to add more of as they wish.

The larger questions remain: What histories of colonial interaction and colonial violence are revealed by the presence of *filé* in the recipes of the Creole and Cajun repertoire? And, how does the rhetorical use of *filé* as a metonym for a Native American co-presence in the “gumbo of cultures” of Louisiana conceal and trivialize the disastrous diminution of Native Americans themselves through the 18th-century? Although the total number of Native Americans who inhabited the territory of what is today considered Louisiana numbered around 150,000 in 1699 on the eve of the founding of the French colony, their number dropped precipitously to less than half of that by the end of French control in 1763.⁷¹ The three nations that dominated this region were the Natchez, the Choctaw, and the Chickasaw, although there were many smaller tribes that inhabited the Gulf

⁷⁰ Russell M. Magnaghi, “Sassafras and its Role in Early America, 1562-1662,” *Terrae Incognitae* 29 (1997): 10-21; Raymond Sokolov, *Why We Eat What We Eat: How Columbus Changed the Way the World Eats*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 174-177.

⁷¹ Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans*, (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 20.

Coast area (the Pascagoulas, the Mobilians, the Biloxis), the lower Mississippi area (the Chitimachas, the Atakapas, the Ouachas), the central river area (the Tunicas, the Quapaws, the Taensas), and the Red River area (the Natchitoches, the Avoyelles, the Doustionis).⁷²

All these Native tribes, but particularly the three major nations of the Natchez, the Choctaw and the Chickasaw, were deeply implicated by the web of alliances that the French immediately set about constructing upon their decision to found a colony. This affected the kind of French-Native interaction that developed in larger settlements, such as New Orleans after its founding in 1718, Natchez quite far upriver, and Mobile, on the Gulf Coast. There was an active rivalry between the Chickasaw, who were officially allied with the British to the east in the Carolinas, and the Choctaw, with whom the French consequently sought alliances. This rivalry was ultimately used against both nations, as the French official policy changed from one of strategic alliance to one of indiscriminate extermination in the early 1720s. As for the smaller Natchez nation, although the administrators of Louisiana had maintained official alliances with it into the 1720s, the Natchez Uprising of 1729 provoked by continual seizure of Natchez land by the French, was the most serious threat to the survival of the colony to that date and broke the back of Natchez autonomy in the

⁷² Daniel H. Usner, Jr. *American Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley: Social and Economic Histories*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 35.

region.⁷³ These complex early histories of official deception, of misalliances, and of policies of genocide, which are naturally much more intricate than I have the space to elaborate here, are never referred to in Creole or Cajun cookbooks, nor in cultural histories of these cuisines. Small references are made to the bounty of the Native Americans, to their magnanimity and generosity, as if these two qualities dominated French-Native American relations. And in the recipes themselves, *filé* stands in for this diminished presence, for these displaced, exploited and exterminated thousands.

The other two ingredients that I will discuss from Feibleman's *filé* gumbo recipe are the "brown roux" that is the basis for the gumbo, and the sausage. Both are fundamentally French food items, although that term itself is certainly more complex than it appears to be. More importantly though, the juxtaposition of dried sassafras leaves with roux and sausage is a literal, material signifier of the incommensurability of the French presence in the lower Mississippi valley, indicated by the ongoing history of French-Native American skirmishes and uneasy alliances that concluded with the catastrophic drop in Native populations and regional power. The combination of these three food elements has become so thoroughly naturalized in cuisine through the practices of repetition and representation, that it becomes difficult to conceive of them as being fundamentally disjunctive. Nonetheless, without the conditions that governed the early French presence there, conditions that were initiated, organized and

⁷³ Ingersoll, *ibid.*, 21.

manipulated for the commercial benefit of the French crown, such a combination would never have come into being. The recipe must be seen as a tool which permits the simultaneous reading of histories otherwise elided in the deliberate discursive manipulations in contemporary cookbooks.

The roux, or flour liaison, was a sauce-making technique that had been incorporated into French cooking a hundred or so years before the French settlements along the Gulf coast. Borrowed from Italian cuisine via Catherine de Medici's marriage to Henri II of France in 1553, the roux - an equal mixture of flour and fat cooked together preceding the addition of other ingredients in sauces, soups and stews - soon became a standard element of French cooking, both of the "high" cooking of the French court and of the everyday cuisine of city dwellers.⁷⁴ It is generally agreed that despite whatever precarious differences distinguish Creole from Cajun cuisines in Louisiana, both are consciously French-identified and both use the roux as a thickening agent for gumbos, étouffées, and other thickened soups and stews. Today, the roux is still a basic sauce- and soup-making techniques of all cuisines derived from the European tradition.

The exact provenance of roux in the cooking of southern Louisiana of the 18th century is not, however, nearly as easily traced as its movement from Italy to France. The designation "French" meant many different things in different

⁷⁴ Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking: the Science and Lore of the Kitchen*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1984), 329-330.

contexts during Louisiana's colonial period. Roux could have accompanied the early forced migrants arriving directly from the prisons and workhouses of France in the Crozat regime (1712-1717), and when the colony was administered by the joint-stock venture, the Compagnie des Indes (1717-1731). Although it seems less likely, it may have come with the French-Canadians who founded the settlements, either *coureurs-de-bois* or the seigneurial family of "merchants-pirates-commanders,"⁷⁵ the LeMoynes, who founded New Orleans and governed Louisiana almost single-handedly in its early years. Equally, roux could have accompanied later arrivals from the French colonies on the Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe or Martinique. There was constant movement of bodies, supplies and cultural knowledge between the outports of the French New World, particularly amongst those in the Caribbean basin. Finally, the Acadian refugees from Port Royal (coming from multi-year sojourns on the eastern seaboard of the U.S., and in France) began trickling into Louisiana in 1756 and continued to arrive until the 1780s certainly had traditions of French cooking all their own, including the use of the roux.

The second French ingredient I will extract from Feibleman's gumbo recipe has a similarly convoluted biography: the sausage, in his words "chaurice [a French spelling of chorizo] or other hot sausage." The other possibilities to which Feibleman refers here would be either andouille or tasso, both sausages strongly associated today with the French influence on Creole and Cajun cooking

⁷⁵ Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

of Louisiana; both are made primarily of pork and include red pepper as a seasoning. The origins of all three sausages point to the presence of the Spanish in the Caribbean and along the Gulf Coast, which significantly predates the arrival of the French. As described in the Introduction, the first European to spend time in this area was Hernando de Soto in 1542 during his overland exploratory journey that anticipated Jolliet and Marquette's descent down the Mississippi by 130 years.

The reason that chaurice, andouille and tasso denote these Spanish competitors to French hegemony in the New World is that the pork that made up the sausage used in this dish had arrived in the New World with the Spanish as early as Columbus' second voyage to Hispaniola in 1493.⁷⁶ Until that time there were no swine of any variety in the New World, but their introduction, along with other Old World flora and fauna, proved spectacularly successful. The reasons for this success are easily explained: pigs, along with the horse, cattle, sheep and goats that were imported within the first 60 years of Spanish colonization, had no natural predators in their New World environments, and were troubled by few New World diseases. Alfred Crosby, in his investigation of the biological consequences of European colonization in the Americas, describes the introduction of swine this way:

One who watched the Caribbean islands from outer space during the years from 1492 to 1550 or so might have surmised that the object of the

⁷⁶ Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1972), 74-79.

game going on there was to replace the people with pigs, dogs and cattle. Disease and ruthless exploitation had, for all practical purposes, destroyed the aborigines of Espanola by the 1520s. Their Arawak brothers in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Jamaica followed them into oblivion shortly thereafter.⁷⁷

These herds of pigs soon ran wild, and even more than the other imported domesticated animals, proliferated in the Caribbean. Remarking on this pattern, the Spanish deliberately introduced them to all the their New World colonies in order to supply the settlers with a familiar foodstuff. Certainly by the mid-18th-century, 250 years after the Spanish had arrived in the Caribbean, pork would have been relatively easy to procure locally by the French settlers of Louisiana from any colonial port. The sausage itself is usually not considered Spanish in Louisiana: chaurice, andouille, and tasso, are all cured pork sausages associated with the French, although andouille, for example, differs significantly from the European French sausage of the same name.⁷⁸ Clearly, designating these sausages and the roux, "French" belies the deep cultural complexity of the French presence in the New World, and it denies the ways that French settlers borrowed heavily from other Europeans in their culinary traditions.

The next set of interconnected recipes is for a dish centred around the most primordially significant native American foodstuff that exists, but that has been thoroughly entrenched in the culinary repertoire of the Acadian immigrant community. Mary Land, the author/compiler of the recipes for Cush-Cush

⁷⁷ Ibid., 75.

⁷⁸ Florence Fabricant, "On Food: Cajun's Andouille Burns Bright on Menus across the United States," *Nation's Restaurant News*, October 5, 1998, 47-48.

below, published two important cookbooks devoted to the cooking of southern Louisiana, *New Orleans Cuisine* (1969) from which these recipes are drawn, and *Louisiana Cookery* (1954). She was one of the grand dames of the 20th century Creole/ Acadian culinary tradition⁷⁹ whose work predated the explosion of publishing that occurred after Paul Prudhomme's popularity meant that there was a Cajun cookbook on the list of every cookbook publisher in the country. Her books are encyclopedic in scope and style, drawing on a similar kind of generalized fascination with the historical underpinnings of Louisiana's cultural formation as Lafcadio Hearn's.⁸⁰ Her work is almost forgotten today, and neither of her books has been reprinted.

Recipe #2: CUSH-CUSH⁸¹

Originally known as Couscous in the Far East this exotic dish has long been a part of Louisiana fare. In Louisiana, it all called Coush-Coush. Coush-Coush Caille is a dish of Coush served with clabber for breakfast.

4 cups [corn] meal
2 cups milk (scalded)
2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt

Eggs may be added and spices and raisins. Chunks of meat or fowl may be added. Cook either in the oven or in an iron skillet on top of the stove. One tablespoon brandy may be added.

COUCHE-COUCHE

⁷⁹ "Landmarks of Louisiana Cuisine: the Cookbooks of Lena Richardson and Mary Land," <http://www.tulane.edu/~wc/text/cextbooks.html>. (October 20, 2002)

⁸⁰ See Chapter 1, p. 38-40.

⁸¹ Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1969), 212-213.

Couche-Couche is a famous Acadian dish which is really corn meal mush sweetened with sugar and fried brown. The mush is also served at breakfast with coffee.

Brought originally to Louisiana by the slaves from the East Indies, this corn meal concoction soon became a part of the daily meal. The word must have originated from the Arabian dish Couscous, and the Arabian KusKus. In the early days of Louisiana, the mush was first called Couscou.

The couch-couch of the Evangeline section of Louisiana is made of three cups corn meal mixed with one and one-half teaspoon baking powder and one teaspoon salt. Add two cups of milk. Mix and pour into an iron skillet which has been heated with one-half cup cooking oil. Cover and let cook on a slow fire until done (about twenty minutes). Serve with cream and cane molasses as a dessert or for breakfast.

These recipes are for a common New Orleans breakfast dish also known as coussou and coush-coush, and are variously associated with the Acadian exiles, West Indian slaves, and even "Middle-Eastern" couscous.⁸² As with the circuitous and multiplex routes of roux, the means by which cush-cush arrived in Louisiana cannot be traced with any exactitude. It is indeed possible that the Acadians and/or West Indian slaves who found themselves in southern Louisiana in the 18th-century brought with them a dish already derived from New World corn-based diets in Port Royal (Nova Scotia) or the plantation settlements of the Caribbean islands whence they came. And of course, maize had been introduced by the Portuguese and the Spanish from their New World colonies to the Guinea coast of Africa in the 15th- and early 16th-centuries. Its cultivation quickly spread and one theory asserts that it became one factor behind the population explosion which subsequently fed the trans-Atlantic slave

⁸² Feibleman, *American Cooking ...*, 136-137; Howard Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo and all that Jazz: a New Orleans Seafood Cookbook*, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 28-29; Mary Land, *New Orleans Cuisine*, (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1969), 212-215; Diane M. Spivey, *The Peppers, Cracklings and Knots of Wool Cookbook: the Global Migration of African Cuisine*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 267.

trade.⁸³ By the end of the 17th-century, the period in question here, maize was one of the basic foods provided to newly-captured slaves during the Middle Passage; when the West Africans who were brought directly to Louisiana encountered it in the Mississippi delta region, they certainly would have been able to prepare familiar (Old World) recipes with it. As for the Middle-Eastern connection, throughout the medieval era North African Moorish traders, eating wheat-based (semolina) couscous, had trade routes that extended southwards towards what became the western slave coasts, and so their nomenclature may well have influenced the names given to a dish similar in dietary function, colour and texture.

As for the main ingredient itself, corn, or maize, is the one foodstuff that logically could symbolize the Native groups encountered by the French and other Europeans, the foodstuff that had performed that function for various Native groups themselves (Aztec, Olmec and Maya, for example), in contrast to the metonymic uses to which *filé* is put. Cultivated in Mexico since 3500 B.C., corn had spread through the wet lowlands of Mesoamerica, Peru and North America by 500 B.C. where it formed the carbohydrate base of the diet

⁸³ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* ..., 185-187; Robert L. Hall, "Savoring Africa in the New World," in *Seeds of Change: a Quincentennial Celebration*, eds. Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 169.

throughout this vast region, alternating with manioc, quinoa and potatoes in those dry highland regions which could not support its cultivation.⁸⁴

Early French colonists encountered corn throughout North America, from the Gulf of Saint Laurence and the Great Lakes regions of New France down the centre of the continent to Louisiana, and it, along with beans and meat, was certainly one of the first trade items offered by local Native peoples to the first French settlers.⁸⁵ The ubiquity of corn is reflected in the various guises it took: an 18th- century Frenchman noted along the Mississippi “...42 styles [of cooking corn] each of which has its special name.”⁸⁶ The complete domination of corn as a dietary staple across a widely varied human and physical geography explains this multitude of usages. It has survived in the contemporary form of tortillas, which still constitute the basis of Latin American and Latino-inspired culinary traditions throughout the Americas, as well as the cornbread, corn pudding and the celebrated hominy grits of the southern U.S. In fact, the preparation of grits depends on the Choctaw technology of mixing coarsely-ground cornmeal with alkaline lye to improve corn’s nutritional content and to prevent pellagra in a corn-based diet.⁸⁷ Interestingly however, rice remains the carbohydrate base in

⁸⁴ Betty Fussell, “Translating Maize into Corn: the Transformation of America’s Native Grain,” *Social Research* 66, 1 (1998): 58-63; Jane MacLaren Walsh and Yoko Sugiura, “The Demise of the Fifth Sun,” in *Seeds of Change: a Quincentennial Celebration*, eds. Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 23-25.

⁸⁵ Daniel H. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers and Slaves ...* 193-195.

⁸⁶ Fussell, “Translating Maize...”, 50; Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves ...*, 205.

⁸⁷ Stanley Brandes, “Maize as Culinary Mystery,” *Ethnology* 31, 4 (1992): 333.

Louisiana, alone amongst all the states in the United States, a fact which I will elucidate in the next chapter.

The next recipe is drawn from Leah Chase's *The Dooky Chase Cookbook*, a cookbook that was compiled from the recipes used in the kitchens of the Dooky Chase Restaurant. This restaurant, which opened in 1941, is one of the oldest African-American owned and operated restaurants in New Orleans; its head chef Leah Chase, daughter-in-law of the original proprietor, is one of the few African-American chefs who has been publicly recognized, despite the explosion in interest of the 1980s and 1990s in the culinary traditions of Louisiana.⁸⁸ The persistent neglect of the fundamental involvement of African-Americans in the creation, documentation and maintenance of Creole and Cajun cuisines precedes this late 20th-century phenomenon, however. Indeed, it is clearly tied to the histories that I am discussing here of white populations taking ownership for the agricultural, technological and culinary achievements of a largely black labour force that happened throughout the 18th- and 19th-centuries in Louisiana.

Creole Feast: 15 Master Chefs of New Orleans Reveal Their Secrets, published in 1978, explicitly sets out to address this blatantly racist discursive pattern in the culinary discourse that surrounds cuisine in Louisiana. As the chef authors Nathaniel Burton and Rudy Lombard argue in their introduction, through the

⁸⁸ Bouchon, Jolène, "Big Easy Dining: Dooky Chase," *Epicurious*, Condé Nast, http://www.epicurious.com/eating/e03_restaurants/neworleans/dookychase.html, November 26, 2002.

complex colonial histories that involved considerable cultural mixing and that produced Creole and Cajun culinary traditions “... the single lasting characteristic ... is the Black element.”⁸⁹ This element has been repeatedly trivialized, diminished and caricatured whenever food is discussed in Southern literature, and this disavowal has taken specific forms:

The 1850s images of mammies, slaves, marchand ladies singing “Bel callas tout chauds,” pickaninny art and the ‘beloved’ but economically and socially slighted female domestic cook are still entrenched in the social history and cooking literature of today.⁹⁰

Although the centrality of the slave trade and the physical and cultural labour performed by the thousands of West African slaves who arrived in Louisiana is the focus of the next chapter, it is important to highlight here how the figure of the black cook underlies every aspect of the discourse surrounding the cooking of Louisiana. Leah Chase is one of the 15 chefs celebrated by *Creole Feast...*, and the following recipe is for a popular vegetable dish that appears in many Creole and Cajun cookbooks.

Recipe #3: Shrimp-Stuffed Mirlitons⁹¹

6 large mirlitons
water
1/2 cup butter
1/2 lb. smoked ham (ground)
1 cup chopped onions
1 lb. shrimp (peeled, deveined and chopped)
1/2 cup chopped green onions

⁸⁹ Nathaniel Burton and Rudy Lombard, *Creole Feast: 15 Master Chefs of New Orleans Reveal Their Secrets*, (New York: Random House, 1978), xv.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Leah Chase, *The Dooky Chase Cookbook*, (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1990), 174.

2 cloves garlic (mashed and chopped)
1 tsp. salt
1 Tbsp. chopped parsley
1 tsp. white pepper
1 1/4 cups plain bread crumbs
1/4 tsp. paprika

Cut mirlitons in half and remove seeds. Place in pot of water; boil for 15 minutes or until tender. Drain off water and let cool.

Scoop out the pulpy inside of mirlitons, keeping shells intact; set aside.

Melt butter in pot. Add ham and onions, cooking until onions are soft. Add chopped shrimp and stir well. Add mirliton pulp to mixture, mashing as it is added. Add green onions, garlic, salt, parsley, and white pepper. Let cook for 20 to 30 minutes. Mixture might be a bit watery at this point. Tighten mixture with 1 cup of the bread crumbs. Fill the mirliton shells with the mixture.

Toss together the remaining 1/4 cup of bread crumbs and paprika. Sprinkle this mixture over each filled shell. Back in preheated oven at 375 degrees for 15 minutes.

The two ingredients from this recipe that I will investigate in detail are the mirliton, a kind of squash, and shrimp, one of the several kinds of seafood with which Creole and Cajun cuisine is typically associated (the others being catfish, crawfish, oysters and crab). Both squash and shrimp are native to the Americas – all varieties of squash were unknown to Europeans before arriving in the Americas. They appear together in this essentially European-derived recipe, involving the processes of stuffing vegetables and then covering them with bread crumbs to be baked in an oven. In France, this final sprinkling of bread crumbs is known as “gratiner,” and the completed dish is “au gratin.” The term “au gratin” has passed into North American English as being associated with cheese, but the original meaning referred merely to a light coating of bread crumbs.⁹² That this process should be applied to squash stuffed with shrimp, in a dish

⁹² Irma S. Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker, *The Joy of Cooking*, New York: Penguin Books, 1964, 342.

firmly entrenched in the Creole and Cajun culinary repertoire,⁹³ is a clear marker of the awkward imposition of cooking methods familiar to colonists and settlers upon the unfamiliar ingredients in a new environment.

That the mirliton should be stuffed with shrimp is certainly not unexpected. The presence of so many varieties of seafood must have been one aspect of the new landscapes with which French and French-identified settlers felt comfortable. Fish and shellfish of all kinds abound in the swamplands of the Mississippi delta region and along the Gulf Coast, as do some less familiar varieties of amphibians (alligators as well as turtles and frogs.)⁹⁴ For this reason the ubiquity in Creole and Cajun cuisine of shellfish such as shrimp, crawfish and crab in particular, denotes a longstanding affinity with this universally available source of protein. Seafood was, of course, even more accessible to those who lived in close proximity with it, and for this reason, it was a central part of the diet of the Acadians, or Cajuns as they were soon known, who settled in the swamplands of southern Louisiana.

The reason this particular group of immigrants did not establish itself in the urban centre of New Orleans is historical. By the mid-1760s when the real influx of Acadians arrived, southern Louisiana was in the midst of transforming

⁹³ See the following cookbooks for other versions and discussion of this dish: Jessica B. Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons: Africa's Gifts to New World Cooking*, (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 84-85; Feibleman, *American Cooking:...*, 97-99; Howard Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo and all that Jazz: a New Orleans Seafood Cookbook*, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978), 86-87; Egerton, *Southern Food:...*, 126-127.

⁹⁴ See Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo ...* chapters 4-9 for an in-depth examination of the role of seafood in the cooking of southern Louisiana.

itself from an impoverished French colony barely maintaining a permanent population into a prosperous plantation society based on enslaved and thus cost-free African labour and on an international market for indigo. The Acadians, disembarking at New Orleans from the Atlantic seaboard, from the French colony of St. Domingue on the island of Hispaniola and from France, were penniless and unconnected to the political and social urban elites in the new colony. Consequently, they settled south and west of New Orleans, along the Mississippi River and bayous such as Lafourche, Attakapas and Opelousas, where they set up small subsistence-level farming communities. As Acadians continued to arrive into the last decade of the 18th-century, they repeatedly sought out already established Acadian rural settlements, more-or-less outside the realm of the plantation bourgeoisie.⁹⁵ It is thus that the Acadian immigrants became inextricably associated with shrimp, crawfish, frog and alligator.⁹⁶

As to the origins of the second ingredient in this recipe, while all varieties of squash are native to the Americas, the mirliton is not necessarily native to southern Louisiana. It is known as the chayote, or chocho, in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean islands and in Latin America, and as the christophene in the former French colonies of the Caribbean. Indeed, this pale, bland tropical vegetable is most commonly associated with the Caribbean and Latin America,

⁹⁵ James H. Dormon, "The Cajuns: Ethnogenesis and the Shaping of Group Consciousness," in *The Cajuns: Essays on their History and Culture*, ed. Glenn Conrad, (Lafayette, Louisiana: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1983), 233-251.

⁹⁶C. Page Gutierrez, *Cajun Foodways*, (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1992).

and at least one account claims that it was brought north to Louisiana by the Spanish during the time of their control of the colony (1769-1803).⁹⁷ Like several of the other foodstuffs whose migratory routes I explore in this thesis, however, the mirliton clearly would have been available in a multitude of ways outside direct importation through official colonial channels. Assuming that there had been no contact between the Choctaw and Natchez tribes of the Mississippi Delta and the Taino tribes of the larger Caribbean islands (today's Hispaniola, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Jamaica) during which the squash could have been transplanted onto the Gulf Coast, there was constant and considerable inter-colonial contact during the French occupation of the territory. Regardless, as with andouille and tasso, the mirliton squash remains a material marker of the massive Spanish presence that controlled the areas directly to the south and west of Louisiana, in what is today Texas, throughout the Caribbean islands, down into Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Chile. At the time of the French founding and settlement of the new colony of Louisiana, this presence had already been in place in some parts, Hispaniola for example, for over 200 years.

This constant movement of foodstuffs, following colonial trade routes back and forth across the Atlantic, around the Caribbean basin, and up and down the eastern seaboard belies the myth of cultural authenticity attached to the Creole and Cajun cuisines of Louisiana. Even more importantly, it necessarily points to the kinds of relations of power that governed this (literal)

⁹⁷ Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo* ... 26.

traffic in the Atlantic world subsequent to Columbus in 1492. Although these ingredients appear together quietly in these recipes, their silence harkens back to the muteness of David Harvey's grapes on the supermarket shelves: the contemporary commodification and textual representation of these historically constituted food systems naturalizes and celebrates their proximity, but cannot completely obscure the violent conditions under which they were first thrown together.

If these trajectories could have been followed by cooking ingredients and methods necessarily accompanying colonial subjects, the ways these trajectories became established must be interrogated. What were the essential reasons that these French-identified colonizers and settlers arrived at the Gulf Coast at the turn of the 18th-century, and how did they and their early settlements interact with the native populations already present? What *is*, in fact, the nature of the early social relations crystallized within the foodstuffs of these now commodified cuisines?

In general, "... the colonies which the European powers founded were initially established for the exploitation of the parent state....,"⁹⁸ although this exploitation took on different forms throughout the New World and was achieved with widely varying degrees of success. If the New World colonial endeavour constituted a continuum with the Spanish in Mexico and Peru at one

⁹⁸ Donald J. Lemieux, "The Mississippi Valley, New France and French Colonial Policy," *Southern Studies* 17 (Spring 1978): 41.

end, with her American gold seized by Cortès and Pizarro functioning as a model and incentive to England and France,⁹⁹ surely the French in Louisiana were at the other end. By all accounts, and compared to the French experience in Canada and certainly in the West Indies, the French settlements along the Gulf coast that culminated with the founding of New Orleans, were a dismal failure for the entire period that France maintained control over them.¹⁰⁰ Far from providing a profitable source of commerce, they did not even justify their own economic existence as they never succeeded in sustaining themselves without the continued support of the French crown. Moreover, within 70 years of the French settlements at the mouth of the Mississippi and with the conclusion of the Seven Years War in 1763, any dream of French control in North America had to be abandoned.

The French objectives in founding a colony at the mouth of the Mississippi were centred around two conceptualizations of a European New World presence. The first and foremost goal was related to inter-European imperial rivalry -- to extend the French presence down the middle of the continent from the Great Lakes and to establish a French base between the recent English settlements in the Carolinas to the east and the Spanish settlements in Mexico to the west, in order to stop either other colonial power from politically dominating

⁹⁹ "For the first years or so the English and French voyages to the Americas were conceived very largely as an attempt to imitate Spanish successes." Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 64.

¹⁰⁰Lemieux, "The Mississippi Valley, New France, ..." 39; W.J. Eccles, *France in America...* 158.

the lower Mississippi valley.¹⁰¹ The second objective involved 17th-century mercantilist economic policy -- to generally "increase the sale and consumption of French products,"¹⁰² and more specifically to provide a base for profitable commerce between France and the well-established Spanish colonies to the south and to the west of the Mississippi delta. It is impossible to separate these motivations and the kinds of intercultural contact that they engendered from the material cultural traditions, such as cuisine, that they produced.

While this contact occurred between imperial powers, it was primarily forged between the French and the Native American groups living along the lower Mississippi valley. The nature of these border regions, particularly as they took form around the exchange of food, goes a long way towards undermining the imperial fantasies of control, fantasies that imposed the social spaces of a new France, a new Spain, and a new England upon landscapes already long inhabited. It is essential to remember that when the French were first moving into these areas at the turn of the 17th-century, and indeed throughout the 18th-century, these borderlands were constantly in flux, and power relations amongst French and Natives were unstable. As historians Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron observe of early American borderlands: "...frontier regions [were] the site of intense imperial rivalry and of particularly fluid relations between indigenous peoples and European interlopers...[B]y the early 19th-century, as empires were

¹⁰¹ Bennett H. Wall, *Louisiana: A History*, ... 18-19; Jerah Johnson, "Colonial New Orleans," ... 28-29.

¹⁰² Lemieux, "The Mississippi Valley, New France", 41.

succeeded by nation-states and imperial rivalries faded in North America, ethnic and social relations rigidified.”¹⁰³

The fluid social relations and sudden reversals of power that characterized the early French/ Native American border regions of the lower Mississippi valley are clearly illustrated by the patterns that emerged in the exchange of food. Indeed, food functions exceptionally well as an optic through which to view early border relations, as food exchange was a major sphere of interaction that bore upon official administrative policies as well as upon informal, face-to-face transactions. Moreover, the availability of food marks the relative levels of power between the consistently antagonistic groups present during the early years of colonization. For example, the French were obliged several times during the first 15 years of the colony’s existence to send the French and French-Canadian settlers to live with nearby Native American tribes because they would have literally starved to death otherwise.¹⁰⁴ Indeed the first regulated interactions between the French and indigenous inhabitants were organized around the need for food, as they were throughout the New World; supply lines with France were tenuous, local Native Americans had surpluses of maize, beans, meat and deerskins they were willing to trade, and the new settlers, most of whom were soldiers and *coureurs-de-bois*, were not interested in

¹⁰³ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review*, (June 1999): 817.

¹⁰⁴ Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves:...*, 194; Gilbert C. Din, *Spaniards, Planters and Slaves....* 4.

the slightest in becoming agriculturalists. Significantly, the first recorded political conflict occurred amid accusations of food profiteering: those heroes of New France, the leMoyne brothers, Bienville and Iberville, were accused of monopolizing meat obtained from Native Americans for which “... the king’s merchandise” had been traded, and of then marking up the price in order to maximize their own profits.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, food played a vital role in the establishment of the early frontiers between French colonists and the various Native Americans groups they encountered and attempted to manipulate. The early market for food permanently changed settlement patterns of Native Americans as certain tribes moved closer to French settlements in order to benefit from trading opportunities; equally, the French were forced to accommodate themselves to a large extent to the dietary possibilities in their “new” land. These accommodations laid the foundation of a new cuisine that would emerge and solidify with the introduction of slavery in the 1720s. To claim, however, that this cuisine was, or is, in any way “harmonious” as Bultman has suggested, is to deny the colonial relations condensed in the histories of these cuisines.

¹⁰⁵ Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves:...*, 195.

Chapter 3: The Creole in Louisiana and the Development of a Diasporic Cuisine

"The close-fisted stinginess that fed the poor slave on coarse corn-meal and tainted meat... wholly vanishes on approaching the sacred precincts of the great house ... There ... the table groans under the heavy and blood-bought luxuries gathered with pains-taking care..."¹⁰⁶

In the previous chapter, I examined how Creole/Cajun cuisine embodies the first of two major patterns in the formation of New World subjects subsequent to the arrival of European colonizers in Louisiana: that of initial contact with Native Americans, and of the rupture and of incommensurability that the juxtaposition of ingredients constitute. The second pattern, the focus of this chapter, is similarly crystallized in the material trace of cuisine: the social construction of race and racial hierarchies inherent in the slave society that New Orleans and southern Louisiana developed into during the early decades of the 18th-century. I begin by contextualizing the introduction of African slaves to Louisiana in consideration of the absolute centrality of the slave trade to the development of the colony. Subsequently, again using recipes as a point of departure, I will trace the development of these cuisines through the histories of migration of specific foodstuffs, and of their introduction to the culinary repertoires I am investigating. Throughout these cultural histories, I will be interrogating the ways popular culinary discourse has adapted, co-opted, and distorted various aspects of colonial histories and the slave trade. Finally, I will

¹⁰⁶ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 107.

explore how the concept of the African diaspora can function as an alternate theoretical framework in which to view the cultural formations that cuisine constitutes.

The culinary discourse to which I refer has an extremely active role to play in the commodification process that lies at the heart of my project. Just as recipes of the essential Creole and Cajun repertoire reflect the incommensurable juxtaposition of Native Americans and French, they also betray the presence of these West African slaves who carried out the labour required to permanently settle southern Louisiana and to build the plantation economy that emerged mid-century. These recipes also reflect the extent to which African culinary agency in the face of literally catastrophic living conditions – that is, the ways enslaved West Africans physically sustained themselves, and created new food systems out of the little that was available to them – has been taken over by contemporary popular culinary discourse of the southern U.S. in general, and of Creole and Cajun cuisine from Louisiana in particular.

These discourses wax eloquent about the bounteous gifts of Africa present in the culinary cultures they are describing, as they do of those of “native” America. Similarly, some serious scholars who write about food extend themselves so far as to discuss the African core of southern culture in the U.S.¹⁰⁷ What is conspicuously absent from both levels of discourse is the recognition

¹⁰⁷ Robert L. Hall, “Savoring Africa in the New World,” ... 161-169; Margaret Jones Bolsterli, “The Very Food We Eat: ... 119-127.

that such a core threatens at the most basic level the formation of American cultural identity based on fantasies of an autonomous New World nation, sprung fully-fledged from the efforts of a small group of white, European-informed colonial beginnings. It is a discursive disavowal of the first order that such material signs of a colonial past rooted in slavery should then be re-presented in the contemporary commodified form of these historical cuisines as signifiers of exoticism and Otherness.

The social hierarchies produced by systems of plantation-based slavery were utterly central to the permanent colonial population that took root and eventually flourished throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. These hierarchies are also utterly central to the development of a culinary culture heavily dependent on the thousands of West African slaves for domestic and agricultural physical labour on the one hand, and for their pre-existing technological and culinary knowledge and skill on the other. Processes of racialization and creolization were central to these local systems of social differentiation between slaves and slave-owners which marked the development of the early colonial population. The term "Creole," already in widespread use in the New World, emerged from these processes and was adopted not only to describe the cuisine that emerged but also a new kind of colonial subject. Indeed, the history of the

usage of "Creole" in Louisiana as a cultural signifier is long and well-documented, and a summary of it is in order here.¹⁰⁸

Many scholars prefer to use "Creole" to simply signify anyone born in, or anything native to the New World in general, or to Louisiana in particular. In this usage, slaves were Creole if they were born in the colony, or if they were imported from another European colony in which they were born; similarly to speak of a Creole aristocracy would refer to local elites, and not to foreign-born French or Spanish gentry. However, this neutral reading uses location, as opposed to race or ethnicity, as the determining factor of creolization, and it belies the depth and the complexity of the cultural hybridity that lays behind the term. All usages of "Creole" bear within them some relation to the implicit threat to "fixed ideas of settled identity"¹⁰⁹ posed by the process of creolization, which necessarily destabilizes colonial authority. Martiniquan theorist Edouard Glissant,¹¹⁰ Jamaican poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite,¹¹¹ and Martiniquan novelists and theorists Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant¹¹² have all extensively theorized New World creolization in the

¹⁰⁸ See Joseph G. Tregle, Jr. "On That Word "Creole" Again: A Note," in *Louisiana History*, 13, 2 (Spring 1982): 193-198 for a summary of this history; and see Virginia R. Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986) for a comprehensive treatment of it.

¹⁰⁹ Chris Bongie, "Resisting Memories: The Creole Identities of Lafcadio Hearn and Edouard Glissant," *SubStance* 84, (1997): 154.

¹¹⁰ Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

¹¹¹ Edward Kamau Braithwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*, (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974).

¹¹² Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

Caribbean. They have interrogated the patterns of domination and cultural assimilation, the denial of the cultural centrality of Africa to the formation of New World slave societies, and the potential for resistance that forms the theoretical core of the term "Creole." In general, two alternate visions of the possibilities of creolization are produced: one which conceptualizes it as fusion, where a new cultural formation is created out of two potentially antagonistic antecedents, the other visualizes it as "a raceless chaos ... produc[ing] no new forms, but rather [a] ... restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity: a radical heterogeneity..."¹¹³ In Louisiana, the histories of the slave trade and colonial contact reflect the ambivalences of these patterns of transculturation; in the 18th-century, categories of race, class and caste intersected to produce, for example, a population designated by the fraught terms "Creoles of color" or "*gens de couleur libre*" (free people of colour.)¹¹⁴ The disingenuous use of the term "Creole" in contemporary culinary discourse, and in the overall marketing strategy I witnessed more generally in Louisiana, denies the legacies of these burdened histories.

The transformation in cultural identity implicit within the term "creole" was as much an immediate economic necessity as a social inevitability. For one

¹¹³ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 25.

¹¹⁴ This mixed-race group was marginal to both black and white communities, was legally free, and often owned slaves. For more information, see: James H. Dormon, "Louisiana's 'Creoles of Color': Ethnicity, Marginality and Identity," *Social Science Quarterly*, 73, 3, (September, 1992): 615-626; and Laura Foner, "The Free People of Color in Louisiana and St. Domingue: A Comparative Portrait of Two Three-Caste Societies," *Journal of Social History*, 3, 4, (Summer 1970): 406-430.

thing, the establishment of a permanent settlement which would grow to generate enormous wealth for its administrators did not by any means follow automatically from the simple act of founding of a colony – not in Louisiana, nor in any other New World colony. As we saw in the last chapter, the colony in the early decades of its existence was characterized by extreme contingency and by the near-complete dependence on Native peoples who either lived in the area of contact, or moved into it for reasons of trade (as they did in Jamestown, in Québec, and in Roanoke). Left to their own devices, the unlikely assortment of French, Canadian, Swiss and German immigrants who arrived at the ports of the French Gulf Coast in the early 18th century could never have created a huge profit-generating colony out of the swamps of the Mississippi delta, a colony of such riches and potential expansion that the president of the new republic, the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson, as well as James Monroe and the rest of the American political elite rejoiced at the purchase of it in 1803 from Napoleon.¹¹⁵ The early Europeans were “both unwilling and ill-prepared to deforest the land and cultivate the soil”¹¹⁶; they had neither the necessary agricultural knowledge, nor the inclination to create a productive colony out of the isolated outpost in which they found themselves.

¹¹⁵ American enthusiasm was, of course, also due to the enormous geo-political value of Louisiana. For more detail, see: Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, *Tangled Destinies: Latin America and the United States*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 1-9.

¹¹⁶ Daniel H. Usner, “From African Captivity to American Slavery: the Introduction of Black Laborers to Colonial Louisiana,” *Louisiana History* 20, 1 (1979): 25.

The single factor that enabled such growth in both the colonial population and colonial wealth – in Louisiana, as elsewhere in eastern North America – was the transAtlantic trade in West African slaves, and the ensuing free labour it provided to the European colonists. From the first moment of permanent settlement there had been attempts by the colonists to enslave the Native peoples they came into contact with, but (again, as elsewhere), these attempts came to naught. The reasons were manifest: “[e]nslaved in small numbers and too close to their communities of origin, ... Indians proved to be an insufficient and recalcitrant labor force.”¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, the first census taken in Louisiana in 1708 indicates the presence of 80 Indian slaves (a mix of Chitimacha and Alibamon prisoners of war), amongst a population of 122 soldiers and 77 settlers. Even at this early date, however, the administrators of the colony knew that their ability to force a profit-making economy out of the Mississippi swamplands depended on the availability of the same coerced black labour that, by the early 18th-century, was being used throughout the French West Indies and in Spanish and Portuguese Latin America. As historian Barbara Solow argues:

... firm and enduring trade links between Europe and America were not forged without and until the introduction of slavery; ... the eras of privateering, chartered companies, and the early staple trades were not preludes to development, but rather unpromising beginnings leading to stagnation...¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Daniel H. Usner, “Indian-Black Relations in Colonial and Antebellum Louisiana,” in *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*, ed. Stephan Palmié, (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 146.

¹¹⁸ Barbara L. Solow, “Slavery and Colonization,” in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara L. Solow, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

This is the fundamental truth that lies just beneath the surface of all of the African-inspired cuisines of the New World, including the Creole and Cajun foodways of southern Louisiana: that these cuisines, as well as the possibility of sustained New World settlement were dependent on the physical labour and cultural knowledge of the 10 million living slaves forcibly brought to the Americas over a period of four centuries. European colonies from Virginia to the Carolinas, from New Orleans, Havana and St. Domingue to Cartagena, Quito and Bahia, all depended on the massive body of enslaved West African labour for the production of surpluses that permitted permanent settlement. The diasporic cultural formations such as cuisine that exist in all of those places today are directly related to these centuries of busy transAtlantic traffic in slaves.

Africans began arriving in Louisiana in 1719, imported by the Company of the Indies (one of the chartered companies that Solow mentions), which supplied a total of between 5500 and 7000 slaves during the time it had administrative control of the colony (1719-1731).¹¹⁹ These 12 years formed the period of the

¹¹⁹ There is some debate over the exact numbers to arrive: see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: University of Louisiana Press, 1992); Daniel H. Usner, "Indian-Black Relations..."; Thomas Ingersoll, "The Slave Trade and the Ethnic Diversity of Louisiana's Slave Community," *Louisiana History*, 37, 2 (Spring 1996): 133-161; and Peter Caron, "'Of a nation which the others do not Understand: Bambara Slaves and African Ethnicity in Colonial Louisiana, 1718-1760'" in *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, eds. David Eltis and David Richardson, (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1997), 98-121.

heaviest traffic in slaves that Louisiana would ever see.¹²⁰ By the time the Company of the Indies relinquished its monopoly, the population of the lower Mississippi region was 1,721 white settlers and 3,600 African slaves.¹²¹ During these years Africans arrived from a wide range of points along the West African coast, although once in Louisiana, the catch-all ethnic label “Bambara” was applied to them.¹²²

In any case, the stage was set for the creation of a slave-driven plantation economy in the French colony, in which the black majority, both necessary and feared, formed the central core. The foodways that formed slowly over the course of the 18-century in Louisiana are rooted in this black majority: they are rooted in their agricultural and domestic labour, in their cultural knowledge of cuisine, and in the ways these became intertwined. As I shall elaborate below, the West African labourers sold into bondage in Louisiana naturally drew on their own pre-existing systems of agriculture and cuisine in the culinary labour they performed for the slave-owners – this labour consisted of the cultivation of their own crops (rice, tubers, okra) in swampy and riverine landscapes often more familiar to them than to their European and Canadian owners, and of the

¹²⁰ Jerah Johnson, “New Orleans Congo Square: an Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation,” *Louisiana History* 32, 2 (Spring 1991): 125-126.

¹²¹ Usner, “From African Captivity to American Slavery:...” 48.

¹²² In her ground-breaking study of slave population of the Pointe Coupée parish, historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall contends that the Africans imported during this era were an unusually culturally homogenous group, because they all came from the Senegambia region of West Africa. Other scholars have disagreed with her view, claiming that Pointe Coupée Parish is not representative of the lower Mississippi as a whole, and the label “Bambara” must be problematized.

preparation of food in ways similarly embedded in their own traditions. Indeed, as regards to the cultivation of rice, labourers were often selected by slave traders *because* of their agricultural knowledge and skill, specifically in view of creating a local population that would be able to sustain the colony as a whole as the European colonists clearly could not. Historian Thomas Ingersoll asserts that this feature was unique to Louisiana in documented history, although it seems unlikely that no other slave society engaged in this practice: "... the Louisiana slave trade ... represents the only clearly recorded, early North American example of the acquisition of African slaves specifically for their agricultural skills – in the cultivation of rice."¹²³

Geographer Judith Carney whose research on rice I will return to, raises the question of provision grounds to discuss the agency that slaves possessed in relation to agricultural and culinary knowledge.¹²⁴ Provision grounds were "the botanical gardens of the dispossessed,"¹²⁵ the small plots of land apportioned to slaves by slave owners upon which they could grow their own produce. They existed in all slave cultures from Virginia to Brazil; these plots varied greatly in size, as did the significance of the food cultivated therein within the overall diet of their owners. But certainly the crops grown on these plots of land were selected by the slaves themselves; these foodstuffs were often of African origin

¹²³ Ingersoll, "The Slave Trade and the Ethnic Diversity...", 135.

¹²⁴ Judith Carney, *Black Rice: the African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 155-159; see also Beth Fowkes Tobin, "'And there raise yams': Slaves' Gardens in the Writings of West Indian Plantocrats," *Eighteenth Century Life*, 23, 2 (May 1999): 164-176.

¹²⁵ Carney, *Black Rice* ... 156.

and were consciously introduced into the creolized regional foodways that emerged during slavery.

The cuisines that grew out of the colonial conditions of 18th-century Louisiana are equally rooted in the deep divisions between race and class that immediately emerged in the new slave society, and in the contradictory and ambiguous ways these social hierarchies developed over the course of the century. Just as wild ducks, sassafras and roux point to the innately unharmonious conditions of Native American and French interaction along the frontiers of the 17th-century Mississippi delta, the figure of the ubiquitous black cook in Louisiana cuisine, and the presence of such ingredients as okra, rice, pepper, and sugar are material traces of the thousands of West African forced labourers, and of the machinery of slavery that brought them across the Atlantic and kept them there. My argument is that the histories of the appearance, movement and use of these foodstuffs function as a tool that can assist in the recovering of these intertwined histories. Three recipes, all chosen for their monumental place in the repertoire of Creole and Cajun cuisines and for their specific association with African-American history in the southern U.S., are “Creole [Okra] Gumbo,” “Sweet Potato Pie,” and “Red Beans and Rice.”

Deliberately, I begin with a second recipe for gumbo, which appears here in metaphorical symmetry to the first gumbo recipe, “Duck and Sausage [Filé] Gumbo.” These two forms of gumbo – filé and okra – respectively signify the two central figures of ethnic and racial Otherness, Native Americans and

African-Americans: “Could it be that okra gumbo originated in the city, where black cooks were more numerous, and filé gumbo was created in the country, where native American influence was greatest?”¹²⁶ Indeed, as the central culinary metaphor for the mixed-race colonial population, gumbo represents, encapsulates, and contains the limits of difference permitted in the deceptions of contemporary food fetishism related to colonial beginnings. As already noted, these deceptions can be seen in the Louisiana State Museum’s gumbo of cultures,¹²⁷ and its insistence on the neutrality and egalitarianism of colonial social relations, despite the institution of slavery that regulated them. Equally, as in Bultman’s sense of the recipe as nation, gumbo functions as a decontextualized narrative that ties individual foodstuffs to easily differentiated groups of people, reducing the massive movement of vastly diverse populations of West Africans to a single foodstuff, okra.¹²⁸

This recipe for “Creole [Okra] Gumbo” is drawn from white southern food writer Howard Mitcham’s first cookbook – it is a standard gumbo recipe in which okra as used is a thickening agent. (I have added “okra” to the title in order to differentiate it from the gumbo recipe I discussed in Chapter 2, “Duck and Sausage [Filé] Gumbo,” in which filé was used as a thickening agent.)

¹²⁶ John Egerton, *Southern Food: At Home, On the Road, In History*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 123.

¹²⁷ See p. 53.

¹²⁸ See p. 55.

Recipe #4: Creole [Okra] Gumbo¹²⁹

5 lb. fresh heads-on shrimp
12 live crabs
4 dozen oysters, and their liquor
1 chicken, about 2 lbs.
1 lb. stewing beef, diced small
1 meaty ham bone
1/4 lb. country ham, diced
4 strips bacon
3 large onions, chopped
2 green peppers, chopped
6 scallions with their green leaves, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup chopped celery
1/4 cup chopped parsley
3 lbs. fresh okra, sliced
4 large Creole tomatoes, peeled and diced
2 bay leaves
1 tsp thyme
2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1/2 tsp cayenne
1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
4 tbsp salt (or more)
6 quarts stock or water (or more)
4 tbsp butter and 4 tbsp flour (for the roux)
steamed rice

The operation requires several utensils, a big skillet, a big stew pot, and several smaller pots for steaming.

First the roux: ...¹³⁰

Serve the gumbo in large preheated soup bowls. Place a half cup of rice in the bottom of each bowl and ladle the gumbo over it, making sure that each bowl get a generous share of all the elements – shrimp, crab, and oysters...

Gumbo, as a dish, is certainly ubiquitous in the cuisines of Louisiana, although its main characteristics – length of cooking; low cooking heat required; co-presence of carbohydrates, protein, and vegetables; cooking vessel; and method of assembling the ingredients – resemble the hundreds of other hearty,

¹²⁹ Howard Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo...*, 40–41, 44.

¹³⁰ I will selectively abbreviate recipes as I do here when their length would interrupt the flow of the discussion. When I do abbreviate them, the excerpt will include the list of ingredients and the directions germane to my argument.

soup-like, one-pot meals that emerged in the regional cooking of colonial North America. In the southern United States alone, there are similar recipes attached to other specific geographies – the Brunswick stew in Virginia, the burgoo in Kentucky, and the terrapin in Maryland, for example.¹³¹ This correspondence is not at all surprising, considering that this extremely efficient method of cooking which makes the most of scarce foodstuffs, cooking fuel and human labour is central in the cooking traditions of those with few resources, be they in Greece, Nigeria, Québec or Louisiana. The only distinction claimed by gumbo recipes is that they are based on a roux, as mentioned in the last chapter, and that they fall into the two camps of okra or filé.

Why does okra contrast with filé and how has it come to represent Africa in the ubiquitous gumbo recipe-as-nation? Okra, as a vegetable, is a small green pod that can grow up to 9 inches. It has a viscous, sticky texture, and when sliced and cooked in the gumbo, it functions like filé powder to thicken the final dish. For this reason, the two are never used together. Without a doubt, okra did come to Louisiana with West Africans who came as slaves, and was deliberately cultivated by them for culinary purposes, although there is no specific documentation of its introduction.¹³² Unlike other ingredients I have discussed such as roux, corn and sausage, the route it took to arrive in the Mississippi delta region was probably fairly direct, although it could have been additionally

¹³¹ Egerton, *Southern Food:...*, 276.

¹³² Feibleman, *American Cooking:...*, 38; Egerton, *Southern Food:...*, 304; Carney, *Black Rice ...*, 159.

imported by African slaves from the French colonies of St. Domingue, Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, as there was much traffic between these colonial outposts.

However, as I have pointed out, the west coast of Africa is a very large place and citing this provenance without further detail constitutes little more than a banality. In his examination of African food crops that were transplanted to the New World, the food writer Raymond Sokolov investigates the region called Kwaland which stretched from Ghana to Nigeria and gave rise to the Dahomey, Oye, Asante and old Benin kingdoms who all spoke variations of the Kwa language. Reviewing the unpublished work of food scholar Stephen Alpern, Sokolov writes that "...for two millennia farmers in the region have probably been growing native yams, millets, sorghums, rice, cowpeas, okra, gourds, watermelons, fluted pumpkins, groundnuts, malaguetta and Benin pepper...".¹³³ Many of these crops, okra among them, moved with the 17th- and 18th- century forced human migrations from this area, and were subsequently cultivated in areas with large populations of slaves. One of the most popular anecdotal comments appended to okra gumbo recipes is that the "African" word for okra is "gumbo", and hence the name of the dish. Mitcham delves more deeply than most into this assertion, presenting one claim that "gumbo" is the word for okra of the Tshi from the Gold Coast, and another that it is a

¹³³ Raymond Sokolov, *Why We Eat What We Eat: ...* , 77.

Portuguese corruption of “quillobo,” the word for okra used by natives of Angola and the Congo.¹³⁴

Just as corn constitutes a richer culinary signifier than filé of the multitudes of Native American peoples whose physical and cultural survival depended on it for thousands of years, there is an ingredient which supercedes okra in its centrality to the continued existence of West Africans in the New World, and in its testimony to their technological, agricultural and culinary expertise. This ingredient is rice. Mitcham’s recipe for “Creole gumbo” is not alone in requiring rice as an accompanying carbohydrate: all gumbo recipes call for it, and many other dishes from both the Creole and Acadian culinary repertoires do as well – beans and rice, jambalaya, and crawfish étouffée, to name a few dishes from these repertoires. Indeed, despite enormous dietary changes in the 20th-century, Louisiana is still one of the few states in the United States in which rice continues to be the great staple.¹³⁵ This centrality of rice in the diet of southern Louisiana has a long history rooted in the Southern institution of slavery, and the thousands of West African forced migrants who constructed the agricultural and culinary base throughout the South (in Virginia, Georgia and the Carolinas, in particular) in the 16th-, 17th- and 18th-centuries.

¹³⁴ Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo*...., 25.

¹³⁵ Market and Trade Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Rice Situation and Outlook Yearbook,” November 2000, RCS-2000, <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/reports/erssor/field/rcs-bby/rcs2000.pdf>, November 10, 2002.

The introduction of rice-growing systems in which rice was cultivated on plantations worked by slaves occurred in the Carolinas (1670s) and in Virginia (1640s) before there was even a permanent settlement in Louisiana – these systems would lead to the economic boom in “Carolina gold,” as the rice there was known, in the 19th-century.¹³⁶ In the case of Louisiana, there is documented evidence that barrels of seed rice were on the first two slave ships that arrived from Senegambia in 1719.¹³⁷ However, that the rice *accompanied* the slaves, and that its successful introduction constitutes a testament to *their* pre-existing agricultural skill was a much-debated fact before the historians Peter Wood (1974) and Daniel Littlefield (1981) conclusively addressed the question within the context of the centrality of African slave experience to the creation of American culture.¹³⁸ Previously it had been argued that European plantation owners had adapted Asian varieties of rice that they had encountered in their colonial activities in China and elsewhere.

Carney has noted the similarities between rice cultivation systems on the western, or “rice”, coast of Africa (Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia) and the wetlands of the Southeastern United States and the Mississippi delta region. She concludes that there can be no doubt that from methods of

¹³⁶ Judith Carney, “The African Origins of Carolina Rice Culture,” *Ecumene* 7, 2 (April 2000), 3.

¹³⁷ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana ...*, 10.

¹³⁸ Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, (New York: Knopf, 1974); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in South Carolina*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

production to methods of consumption, the arrival of rice represents the transplantation of an entire knowledge system from West Africa to the New World. A corollary of this conclusion is that this transferal was as dependent upon the unacknowledged cultural labour of slaves, as much as upon their physical labour. More importantly for my purposes, she accurately names this research into rice as "... a narrative of the Atlantic slave trade ... [in which] the knowledge of how to grow rice provided slaves with the ability to negotiate the terms of their bondage while providing a subsistence staple to maroons throughout Latin America."¹³⁹ Rice provided the enslaved labour force with a degree of agency while concurrently building colonial social and economic structures; equally, its historical trajectory and, more generally, this abbreviated biography of Mitcham's recipe for okra gumbo, functions as a lens through which to view colonial relations in Louisiana and in the larger South. This view fundamentally contradicts the cosy imaginings of 20th-century food columnists who prefer to neutralize references to colonial history and to flatten out cultural histories of cuisine into decontextualized, one-dimensional lists of ethnic Others.

Just as rice strikes to the heart of the system of bondage which permitted the New World to establish permanent settlements, sugar is a foodstuff in which entire histories of servitude and New World economic development are crystallized. While the ubiquity of rice in Creole and Cajun recipes is a material sign of the usurping of pre-existing West African culinary and technological

¹³⁹ Judith Carney, *Black Rice...*, 1.

expertise, sucrose derived from sugarcane is a substance whose very development cannot be separated from the legions of slaves required to cultivate and extract it. Along with rum and molasses, the two most commonly circulated byproducts of New World sugar plantations, sugar worked its way into the repertoire of both sweet and savoury recipes of the southern U.S., the Caribbean, and Latin American because of its universal availability. The next recipe serves as a bridge to a more detailed discussion of sugar and its legacies, as well as of sweet potatoes, of yams, and of the reverse movement of native American foodstuffs eastwards across the Atlantic accompanying slaving vessels.

Jessica Harris, from whose cookbook, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons: Africa's Gifts to New World Cooking*, I have drawn this recipe, is one of highest-profile popular scholars of African-American culinary culture and soul food in the United States today. With Leah Chase and John Egerton whom I have already discussed, she is a founding member of the Southern Foodways Alliance, affiliated with the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. On the Epicurious website – the site sponsored by Condé Nast in support of the magazines *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit* – she has a column focusing on black history, and its culinary heritage.¹⁴⁰ Her publications include such titles as: *The Welcome Table: African American Heritage Cooking*; *The Africa Cookbook: Taste*

¹⁴⁰ Jessica B. Harris, "Historically Delicious: Jessica B. Harris Leads Us into the Kitchen for a Lesson in Black History," *Epicurious*, Condé Nast, http://www.epicurious.com/eating/e04_blackhistory/harris.htm, November 10, 2002.

of a Continent; and *A Kwanzaa Keepsake: Celebrating the Holiday with New Traditions and Feasts*. Even a cursory glance at these titles reveals how Harris unequivocally insists that the food she is describing perform certain narrative functions in relation to history. For example, these titles discursively assert that African-American heritage (via food) is essentially welcoming; that Kwanzaa, an “African” equivalent of Christmas only recently adopted by Americans, links the history of the African presence in the U.S. and food to celebration; and that, finally, the relation of Africa to the New World in terms of food is one of giving gifts. The biographies of two ingredients in the following recipe, however, narrate a different history.

Recipe #5: Sweet Potato Pie¹⁴¹

1/4 cup butter
1 cup dark brown sugar
1 1/2 cups boiled mashed sweet potatoes (approx. 4 medium-sized potatoes)
1/2 cup applesauce
2 eggs, lightly beaten
1/3 cup milk
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon grated lemon peel
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 9-inch pie crust, completely baked and cooled

In a deep bowl, cream the butter and the brown sugar until they are light and fluffy. Add the cooked mashed sweet potatoes and the applesauce. Next add the eggs and beat vigorously. Continue to beat while adding the milk, lemon juice, lemon peel, vanilla, nutmeg, and salt. Continue beating until the mixture is creamy and smooth. Pour the sweet potato mixture into the fully baked pie crust and bake the pie in a 425-degree oven for 10 minutes. Reduce the temperature to 325 degrees and bake approximately 35 minutes, or until firm. (A knife should come out clean when inserted in the center of the pie.) The pie should then be served warm. Some prefer it served at room temperature.

¹⁴¹ Jessica B. Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons: . . .*, 169.

It is clear from the introductory and complementary texts that Harris inserts into this cookbook that she is a competent factual historian; these texts describe the similarities between African and African-American culinary cultures in terms of ingredients and methods in great detail. However, the role and meaning of the transAtlantic slave trade in the “reciprocal flow of foodstuffs” that she outlines is curiously elided. Obviously unable to avoid the subject of slavery and of the forced displacement of millions of Africans onto New World soil, she writes around it, using, for example, the neutral figure of an unbroken line linking two continents across the Atlantic to introduce *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons*.... “In my mind’s eye there is a crescent, a sinuous imaginary line that begins on Mauritania’s coast and sweeps downward along Africa’s palm-fringed beaches...[it] continues to sweep across the Atlantic carrying with it music, gesture, speech, dance, joie de vivre, and ... yes, food.”¹⁴²

In a similar rhetorical gesture, she later describes the culinary labour of slaves as triumphal: “Their cooking would become the basis for a variety of New World cuisines that triumphantly mix the cooking methods of the Old World – Africa – with the culinary bounty of the Americas...”¹⁴³ In both these examples, her texts disavow the historical reality of the conditions under which slaves constructed their own lives as well as the lives of those who owned them. On a broader level, Harris transforms foodways, and culture in general (i.e. “music,

¹⁴² Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons* ..., xi.

¹⁴³ Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons* ..., xiv.

gesture, speech, dance”), into mere apolitical accoutrements of people in transit. While claiming to celebrate cultural mixing, paradoxically she evacuates these cultural practices of the power of their own history, as well as of the enduring significance they can hold in the lives of those who engage in them.

The sweet potato, the main ingredient in Harris’ recipe for sweet potato pie and an integral element of all Southern cuisines, is a foodstuff with a transAtlantic history that refutes Harris’ rhetorical positioning. Throughout the South, Louisiana included, sweet potatoes are prepared in a multitude of ways, many (but not all) of them involving the addition of sugar. Egerton writes of the popularity in the South of sweet potatoes “[...] baked, boiled, steamed, mashed, candied, made into croquettes, and baked in pies...” such as the one in Harris’ cookbook.¹⁴⁴ It performs a different function in this chapter than most of the other foodstuffs I discuss - okra, rice, sugar, and beans - because the sweet potato, unlike those other crops, was exclusively a native American plant until it began to migrate with the advent of New World colonization in the 16th-century. As such, the sweet potato is only one of the significant number of American crops that through their eastward migration across the Atlantic have literally transformed the way much of the world eats: other examples of carbohydrate staples that moved from the New World to the Old include manioc, maize, potatoes, and the American varieties of beans. Examples of fruits, vegetables and

¹⁴⁴ Egerton, *Southern Food ...*, 306; see also Leah Chase, *The Dooky Chase Cookbook...* 181-183 for sweet potato recipes.

other types of foodstuffs include such well known foodstuffs as tomatoes, avocados, cocoa and chocolate, squash, and peanuts.

The study of the monumental consequences of the introduction of such plants to Africa, and from there to the Middle East, Europe and Asia is known as the study of the Columbian Exchange. The literature concerning the Columbian Exchange focuses on how the post-1492 transfer of all manners of organic material, including germs, seeds and foodstuffs, across the Atlantic affected subsequent global events.¹⁴⁵ In most of these publications, however, the central events which gave birth to this “exchange” – the transAtlantic trade in West African slaves, and the New World institution of plantation slavery – are simply treated as factual causes. Indeed, the terminology itself erases the crushing imbalance in power that permitted these events to unfold, and accompanied their unfolding – the notion of “exchange”, for example, either anthropomorphizes foodstuffs in the assumption that they moved of their own accord back and forth between the New World and the Old, or assumes equality between the actual human agents (slavers and the enslaved, for instance) on either side of the Atlantic.

Again, a close examination of the conditions of the migration of the sweet potato, for instance, belies these reductive scenarios. Columbus first encountered

¹⁴⁵ The best known example of this literature is Alfred W. Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange:* Another publication treating this topic in depth is *Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Celebration*, Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis, eds., (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

this tuber on his first voyage (1492) to the island of Hispaniola, the first European name given to the island currently divided by the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Indeed, the sweet potato became strongly associated with the Spanish colonizers and the New World foodways that emerged from contact with them throughout the 16th-century, and worked its way into Latin American cooking where it is still featured heavily. In his contribution to the literature of the Columbian exchange, Sokolov writes that:

Hispanic America, the original home *Ipomoea batatas* [the most popular species of sweet potato], seems to be the richest source of sweet potato dishes, and Elisabeth Ortiz's standard, *The Complete Book of Caribbean Cookery*, catalogues two sweet potato breads [...]; sweet potato chips; a sweet potato crust for chicken pie; a dessert paste; a pone; and a tart.¹⁴⁶

The sweet potato is commonly confused with the yam (the *Dioscorea* species) which is an Asian native but which was widely cultivated in West Africa at the time that Spanish and Portuguese slavers began heavily investing in their burgeoning trade in slaves. The English word "yam" derives from Spanish (*yāname*), French (*igname*), and Portuguese (*inhame*) corruptions of the original West African word. The confusion between the two species probably arose from the attribution of the African word for "yam" to a tuber (the sweet potato) which performed the same function in the indigenous diet of Spanish America in which slaves found themselves. Indeed the sweet potato would have been familiar to them even before they landed in the New World because both tubers, although

¹⁴⁶ Sokolov, *Why We Eat What We Eat: ...*, 192.

more commonly yams, became essential food items in the diet of the Middle Passage. They formed an integral part of the spartan diet provided to the crews of the slaving ships, but more importantly to their cargo, the millions of Africans who made the voyage across the Atlantic alive.¹⁴⁷

Both yams and sweet potatoes are currently cultivated in West Africa, but the Old World location in which the sweet potato had its most lasting effect was China. Sweet potatoes, as well as maize and peanuts, had reached China in the middle of the 16th-century as a result of the Spanish occupation of the Philippines in 1565. For reasons such as its high yield, the relative ease of its cultivation, its rapid adaptation to Chinese growing seasons and systems of water control, it quickly flourished and is often attributed to the explosion in the Chinese population in the 18th-century.¹⁴⁸ To visualize this movement as a “sinuous line” in Harris’ terminology, we would have to follow the route of the sweet potato from Hispaniola and the other Spanish-controlled islands of the Caribbean across the Atlantic to Spain, and thence across the Mediterranean Sea and down the west coast of Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, up the east coast, across the Indian Ocean, through the Straits of Malacca and into the South China Sea. It is a line determined by the power of 16th-century Spain, which a mere 40 years after its undreamt-of-successes in the pillaging of gold and the toppling of indigenous

¹⁴⁷ Hall, “Savoring Africa in the New World” ..., 163.

¹⁴⁸ William H. McNeil, “American Food Crops in the Old World,” in Herman J. Viola and Carolyn Margolis, eds., *Seeds of Change: A Quincentennial Celebration*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 54-55.

social structures in Mexico and Peru, expanded eastwards into Asia for the same reasons. It is a line describing a movement that was in no way neutral, inevitable or pre-determined, and the sweet potato is historically and materially rooted in the exercises of power that propelled this line forward.

The addition of sugar to sweet potato that we see in Harris' recipe for sweet potato pie is a pattern remarked on by both Egerton and Sokolov in their lists of both sweet and savoury foods featuring sweet potatoes. This pattern both signals the Spanish colonial influence on the development of cuisines in the Louisiana, and the appearance and early ubiquity of sugar, a foodstuff-cum-commodity which is perhaps the culinary ingredient mostly tightly tied to the trade in West African slaves, and the New World plantation system that grew out of it. Sidney Mintz is the groundbreaking historian whose seminal work, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), first explored the relationships between a number of factors: first, European, specifically British, colonial power structures; second, the plantation system that developed around the cultivation of sugarcane, and that was subsequently applied to the cultivation of rice, indigo, cotton and coffee; third, the slave labour force that permitted its development; and, lastly, the commodity of sugar itself. His work is particularly relevant to me as he analyzed both the production and the consumption of sugar; that is, his study examines in detail the deliberate creation of a European market for the substance which made its producers millionaires many times over.

Although sugarcane was widely cultivated in ante-bellum Louisiana, in particular along the Mississippi River and the many bayous of the state, no European colony on the North American continent was ever really able to compete with sugar produced in four other European colonies: in the first instance, with the sugar plantations of the Caribbean islands, in particular of the French colony of St. Dominique (the most profitable French New World colony by the late 18th-century, and the most productive sugar colony in the Caribbean)¹⁴⁹ and the English colonies of Barbados (beginning in 1627) and Jamaica (beginning in 1655); and lastly, with the sugar plantations of Portuguese-controlled Brazil, in place by the turn of the 17th-century.¹⁵⁰ The plantations on these French, English and Portuguese colonies can be considered the final destination of fully two-thirds of all of the West Africans to survive the Middle Passage and to be forced into slave labour in the New World.¹⁵¹ The estimates of the number of Africans imported to work on Brazilian sugar plantations alone during the 200 years it controlled the European sugar market are between 3,300,000 and 3,600,000.¹⁵²

It is in literally unimaginable numbers that the Portuguese, Spanish, French and British slave trades drew in and crushed whole populations of West

¹⁴⁹ José Morales, *The Hispaniola Diaspora, 1791-1850: Puerto Rico, Cuba, Louisiana, and other Host Societies*. Dissertation. University of Connecticut, 1986. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1987, 6.

¹⁵⁰ Bennett H. Wall, *Louisiana: A History*, ... 138-139; Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 32-37.

¹⁵¹ B. W. Higman, "The Sugar Revolution," *Economic History Review*, 53, 2 (2000): 229.

¹⁵² Robert E. Conrad, *World of Sorrow: The African Slave Trade to Brazil*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 25.

Africans, while creating new economies and new populations in the Americas based around the production system feeding the market for a new commodity, sugar. It is a trade that operated for almost 400 years, between the late 1400s when the Portuguese first began experimenting with the plantation system on the Atlantic islands such as Saõ Tomé and Fernando Po, on which enslaved Africans from the nearby coast of West Africa cultivated sugarcane, and 1888 when the last country, Brazil, finally outlawed it. An 18th-century Frenchman traveling in the Americas, J.H. Bernadin de Saint Pierre, captures how the fundamentally mercantilist relationship between the Old Worlds of Europe and Africa and the New World of the Americas was made both possible by and material in the form of its commodities:

I do not know if coffee and sugar are essential to the happiness of Europe, but I know well that these two products have accounted for the unhappiness of two great regions of the world: America has been depopulated so as to have land on which to plant them; Africa has been depopulated so as to have the people to cultivate them.¹⁵³

It is in this sense that the bodies and lives of these millions of people are intimately tied to the sugar industry, from the institutionalizing of the plantation structure, to the creation of a sugar market and the supply/demand economics that fed the new European capitalism that developed out of it. And it is in this sense that sugar represents what B. W. Higman identifies as a revolution, alone among the multitude of other historical revolutions to take its name from a commodity. Considering the consequences of this revolution, he writes:

¹⁵³ Cited in Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, ... iv.

It was sugar above all that enslaved people, created plantation economies and slave societies, and shaped the modern world in ways other crops and commodities could barely approach.... Sugar made possible the great transformation, a disastrous development from so many points of view, and on this ground deserves to be associated with the revolution it engendered.¹⁵⁴

Sugar plays a role unlike any of the other foodstuffs I am investigating. It is not even really a foodstuff in the traditional sense, because it has no nutritional value at all in its purest form, sucrose. More accurately, it is a New World food product. It is absolutely essential to this discussion of food, slavery and culinary discourse, however, because its very ubiquity in contemporary food consumption mirrors the ways in which New World slavery provided the necessary economic springboard for subsequent generations of European settlers.

Unlike sugar, the two ingredients that I will investigate in the final recipe are native American crops that quickly became associated with the slave cultures of the southern U.S., and have since become completely integrated into the lexicon of both a generalized Southern culinary culture, and the Creole and Cajun cuisines of southern Louisiana in particular. This last recipe is for "Red Beans and Rice," drawn from John Thorne's *Serious Pig: an American Cook in Search of his Roots*, and the two ingredients I will examine in detail are beans and hot peppers.

¹⁵⁴ Higman, "The Sugar Revolution," ... 229.

John Thorne is the co-publisher of a bi-monthly newsletter on food and culinary matters entitled *Simple Cooking*, and he has separately published three volumes of collected essays drawn from this serial. The essays reflect a substantial interest and competence in historical investigation within a textual framework that is unapologetically personal. His capacity to write from personal experience, and to relate his own position to the larger issues of human contingency, geography, and power inherent in all culinary discourse is particularly striking. Unlike most food writers who deliberately involve their own lives in their texts, he rarely resorts to generalized, romanticized clichés – related to either the foods or his own involvement with them – that appear to permit easy comprehension by the reading public.

This recipe is Thorne's interpretation of a southern Louisiana variant on the classic beans and rice dish found in all the cuisines of the southern United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America, where it also has such names as Hoppin' John (the Carolinas and the larger U.S. South), *morros y cristianos* (Cuba) and *feijoada* (Brazil).¹⁵⁵ The combination of beans and rice, which nutritionally forms a complete protein, was absolutely fundamental to the diet of slave cultures that formed the basis of New World settlements. Its centrality is due mainly to the fact that its two main ingredients were universally available to

¹⁵⁵ Thorne devotes a chapter of *Serious Pig...*, entitled "Rice and Beans: the Itinerary of a Dish", to this dish: see *Serious Pig...*, 278-316. See also the following references for other treatments of beans and rice: Egerton, *Southern Food...*, 295-297; Feibleman, *American Cooking: ...*, 43; and Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons...*, 105-107.

slave populations, either provided to them by slave owners, or grown in the individual provision grounds that provided so much sustenance to generally under-nourished slaves. Moreover, because the combination of rice and beans forms a complete protein, and is thus nutritionally complete, the dish is, in some ways, the bare minimum for sustaining life. For this reason, it has immense metaphorical power in the narrating the history of the presence of Africans in Louisiana, and elsewhere in the South.

Recipe #6: Red Beans & Rice: Master Recipe¹⁵⁶

1 pound (about 2 cups) red kidney beans [soaked 6-8 hours, or overnight]
One ham bone with plenty of meat and fat still clinging to it, sawed in half or cracked (a firm, well-placed blow or two with a hammer will do the trick), or half the amount of pickled pork ... or (worst option) ¼ - ½ lean salt pork, cubed and boiled in ample water for 10 minutes to reduce saltiness, then strained.
1 pound smoked Creole sausages or the same amount of some other spicy, garlicky cured sausage, like chorizo or kielbasa
2 medium onions, coarsely chopped
1 small bunch flat-leafed parsley, minced
1 bunch (6-8) scallions, finely minced, including the green tops, ½ cup of which reserve, uncooked. (note: scallions are called “shallots” in New Orleans, but scallions are what is wanted.)
2 large bell peppers, one red, one green, both cored, seeded, and chopped
2 medium carrots, peeled and finely diced
2 celery stalks, finely diced
4 cloves of garlic, minced
Generous pinch of dried thyme (or a sprig of fresh, to be fished out at the finish of cooking)
1 or 2 bay leaves (to be left whole and also removed at the end of cooking)
At least 1 small hot, red pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped fine, either fresh or dried, or a generous hand with the Tabasco bottle
Salt and pepper to taste (go carefully with the salt if using the bone and scrap meat from a country ham or the salt pork).
Sufficient rice to feed all eaters...

Put the prepared beans in a large, heavy pot with a cover. Pour over 2 quarts of good water ... cook the beans for 1 hour.
Add all the ingredients except the rice.

¹⁵⁶ Thorne, *Serious Pig*:..., p. 294-296.

Bring the cooking liquid back to a simmer and taste for seasoning.
The beans should be done in another 1½ hours. ...
When the end of the cooking hoves into sight – the beans are soft and savory, the sauce
thick and richly flavored – cook the rice. ... Serve and pass around the following:

TOPPINGS: ... Mandatory are the reserved minced scallion tops ... but other options ...
include: vinegar, hot sauce, sweet relish, catsup, cane syrup, chopped raw onion, and/or
hot peppers marinated in vinegar. One informant told me that her great-grandfather kept
hot pepper plants in his garden right by the kitchen door, so that he could pop more
peppers into the vinegar jar whenever its potency started to flag. Hot pepper sauce is a
necessity ...

As Thorne notes later in this chapter, the original subsistence-level bean
and grain dish would have been a combination of beans with some form of corn
meal or corn mush, and not rice because rice itself was not cheap and universally
available to slave populations until well into the 19th-century. This corn and
bean combination, which also makes a complete protein, would have been very
naturally drawn from a diet that can only be described as pan-American, in the
sense of that it supplied the dietary structure of Native Americans throughout
continental North America from "...Canada to Florida and west to Arizona"
according to one account.¹⁵⁷ This diet was made of the combination of corn,
some variety of bean and some variety of squash (also a native American crop.)
This combination formed an "alimentary trinity that supported Meso-American
civilization when the Spanish arrived ..." ¹⁵⁸

As I have already discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the
recipes for Cough Cough, corn itself was spread widely across the Americas by

¹⁵⁷ Diana Erney, "Corn, Beans and Squash ... Long Live the Three Sisters," 43, 8 *Organic Gardening*, November 1996, 37-42.

¹⁵⁸ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* ..., 172.

the time of European colonization in Louisiana, constituting the primary staple in the diet of many diverse peoples. As well as being eaten together, corn, beans and squash were grown together in the agricultural system known as intercropping or companion planting. According to this sophisticated agricultural technique, corn was first planted in rows, followed by bean plants after the corn had grown several inches. The corn stalks provided support for the vining runner beans, and squash was planted amongst the corn rows. During the growing season, the squash foliage kept the ground moisture high, and when turned under after harvest, the beans plants added needed nitrogen to the soil.¹⁵⁹ These three crops were known as “the three sisters” amongst the six nations of the Iroquois confederacy in the northeast, which view their union as sacred, but this culinary system served Native American populations throughout continental North America, and into Mexico and Peru.¹⁶⁰

When rice became cheap and universally available following the boom in Southern economies in the 18th- and 19th-centuries which was based on slave-cultivated rice, it took the place of corn as the central grain in the dish. The new dish, beans and rice, became identified with the black slaves who had access to its main ingredients, but could afford little else. Hence, the two central elements of this dish as it has historically evolved are unfailingly: rice, specifically an

¹⁵⁹ Julian Armstrong, “A taste of tradition: the ‘three sisters’ have been part of aboriginal cuisine ever since the Iroquois began growing crops,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 17, 1999, F1; John Vivian, “Garden Special, Part II: the Three Sisters,” *Mother Earth News*, February/March, 2001, 50-53.

¹⁶⁰ Reay Tannahill, *Food in History*, (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), 244-256.

Asian species adapted to the New World by African labour; and native American beans, of which there are a staggering number of varieties. Crosby lists 17 native American kinds of beans,¹⁶¹ but the most common New World varieties used for similar kinds of beans and rice dishes prepared and consumed by descendants of slave cultures throughout the Americas are the black beans of Cuba and Brazil, the black-eyed peas of the Virginia and the Carolinas, the pigeon peas of the larger Caribbean, and the small red kidney beans of southern Louisiana.

Thorne concludes his recipe for red beans and rice with an admonition that seasoning such as Tabasco sauce or other form of hot peppers is imperative. And so with this final ingredient I return to the foodstuff which in the late 20th-century has become the central signifier for Cajun food at the very least, and to some extent, for all food from southern Louisiana. As I discussed in the first chapter, hot pepper is the single ingredient characteristic to these foodways that was seized upon in the commodification process to represent and market the host of brands and products that emerged in the mid-1980s. And it is a particularly appropriate foodstuff with which to conclude this discussion of recipes, ethnicity and national identity in the United States, because the name itself in its many guises – pepper, chili pepper, or hot pepper – contains similar kinds of confusions, misunderstandings and misappropriations as do the words

¹⁶¹ Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange...*, 172.

“America”¹⁶² to describe the continents of the western hemisphere, and “Indians” to describe the indigenous inhabitants of the “new” lands. That these three exercises in the naming of New World phenomena bear such resemblance to each other comes as no surprise.

Both sweet and hot peppers belong to either the genus *Capiscum frutescens* or to the genus *Capiscum annum*. Both are New World natives, and neither is at all related to black pepper, which belongs to the genus *Piper nigrum*. On his initial westward journey across the Atlantic, Columbus was primarily in search of a more direct route to the wealth and spices of Asia than the existing one, which was plagued by lengthy delays and the depredations of a host of middlemen throughout central Asia and the Middle East. Black pepper was widely known, widely used and extremely expensive in Europe: pepper was what Columbus was after, and pepper is what he claimed he found in 1493, in a oblique metaphor that immediately turned into a misnomer. In his journal he wrote: “The land was found to produce much *aji*, which is the pepper of the inhabitants, and more valuable than the common sort: they deem it very wholesome and eat nothing without it. Fifty caravels might be loaded every year

¹⁶² “America” was the name bestowed upon the two unfamiliar continents of the western hemisphere on the first map to show them as separate entities from the Asian continent, drawn in 1507 by Martin Waldseemüller, a German cartographer. Waldseemüller was honouring Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian navigator who accompanied two heavily publicized expeditions to North, Central and South America in 1499/1500 and 1501/1502.

with this commodity.”¹⁶³ Invaluable sources of vitamins A and C, both varieties of *Capiscum* had been widely cultivated throughout Meso-America from 2000 BC in some parts, where they formed an essential nutritive element in the diets of these regions. As for the early European grasp of the situation, “*aji*” still refers to hot peppers in Spanish; in English, “pepper” continues to signify the cultural ambiguities of the exploration and discovery of a New World.¹⁶⁴

Whatever the etymological roots of the word, hot peppers were instantaneously although selectively popular in the Old World, and spread with astounding alacrity. By 1542, the Portuguese had brought them to Goa on the western coast of India where they were being cultivated on a large scale; soon after, *Capiscum* reached the Portuguese colony of Macao, from where they spread into Sichaun (China) and south-east Asia; and by mid-16th century they had been adopted by the Slavic people of the Holy Roman Empire in central Europe, where paprika is still a central ingredient to many traditional dishes. Similarly, early Spanish and Portuguese slavers introduced *Capiscum* to the west coast of Africa in the 16th-century, and by time of the development of the Creole and Cajun foodways in southern Louisiana, it had been integrated into local African cuisines, and was being transported back to New World slaving ports such as New Orleans with the thousands of enslaved West Africans. The two varieties associated with African-derived New World cuisines throughout the Caribbean

¹⁶³ Cited in Richard Schweid, *Hot Peppers: Cajuns and Capiscum in New Iberia, Louisiana*, (Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press, 1987), 13.

¹⁶⁴ Jane Maclaren Walsh and Yoko Sugiura, “The Demise of the Fifth Sun,” ... 23, 27.

and Latin America, Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Brazil in particular, are Malagueta and Guinea peppers.¹⁶⁵

There is a traditional lore regarding *Capiscum* in Louisiana, however, that contains striking contrasts to these histories. This a lore about *Capiscum* that is omnipresent in Creole and Cajun cookbooks, and that is mythologized by the Cajun marketing machine. It never mentions the Spanish and Portuguese slavers, never mentions the African Guinea or Malagueta pepper, and never mentions that the presence of hot peppers in all culinary traditions of southern Louisiana is incontrovertibly tied to the African foundations of these traditions. Perhaps it might mention Columbus, but the next historical figure to appear is a white New Orleans native, Edmund McIlhenny, who in the 1850s was given some seeds of hot peppers from a soldier returning from the Tabasco region of Mexico. He began growing them in his garden, and in 1868 began bottling a sauce he called Tabasco Pepper Sauce. This sauce is still made from Tabasco peppers grown and processed on Avery Island in New Iberia Parish in southwestern Louisiana, which with Cayenne peppers are the most common variety of *Capiscum* in the state.¹⁶⁶ This discourse neglects to point out that by the late 19th-century when Tabasco Sauce became widely available, Creole and Cajun cuisines had already existed in some form for 150 years at least, and were already

¹⁶⁵ Sokolov, *Why We Eat What We Eat: ...*, 128-132; Harris, *Iron Pots and Wooden Spoons: ...*, p.58.

¹⁶⁶ Schweid, *Hot Peppers: ...*, 58-65; Feibleman, *American Cooking: ...*, 155-158; Mitcham, *Creole Gumbo and all that Jazz:...*, 35-38.

making significant use of a variety of hot peppers because they were an integral feature of the diasporic cuisines of those who were preparing them.

Tabasco Sauce, along with Trappey's Mexi-Pep and a handful of other hot sauces with long histories of production and consumption in Louisiana, were thus the forerunners of the hundreds of tiny little bottles I encountered in my trip to New Orleans, the tiny little bottles that decorate every bar, every tourist office and the desk of every travel agent in the city. These bottles are the result of the explosion in the production of "Cajun" manufactured goods in the 1980s and 1990s, and are quite consciously used to market the city and state. These bottles are also the quintessential miniaturized containers of a popular culinary discourse that deploys contradictory notions regarding the familiar (American) practice of consumption and an exotic, carefully constructed Cajun identity. This discourse is necessarily woven around a selective reading of the colonial history of Louisiana which excises references to the slave trade that it cannot represent in a benign and paternalistic fashion. The three recipes I have traced in part here have histories that break this internally coherent but ideologically constructed chain of signification. Indeed, the foodstuffs themselves, both metaphorically and materially, constitute its most powerful obstacle.

Conclusion

To turn the material histories I have been elaborating in the chapters above on their head, what is gained in the conceptualization of the cuisines that emerged out of 18th-century Louisiana as diasporic cultural formations? Paul Gilroy, whose work on delineating the parameters of the Black Atlantic has been enormously influential, has defined diaspora as a "... relational network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering."¹⁶⁷ This framework extends the understanding of the social and cultural connections between Louisiana as a slave society and the other New World colonies that were similarly dependent on the labour of enslaved West Africans. My discussion of these recipes has returned over and over to connections between the cuisines of Louisiana and of the Caribbean basin, for example.

Additionally, the concept of "diaspora"" permits a critique of the "natural nation, spontaneously endowed with self-consciousness"¹⁶⁸ that lies behind much of the culinary discourse I have been analyzing. This discourse rests on the presumption that the cultural hegemony of the tiny minority of white, European colonizers and settlers in colonial North America was unchallenged and that their gesture of self-empowerment in 1776 reflected their fantasies of

¹⁶⁷ Paul Gilroy, "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity," in *Identity and Difference*, ed. Kathryn Woodward, (London: Sage Publications in association with the Open University, 1997), 318.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 328.

power in some real way. Necessarily, then, this discourse thus reduces the multitude of ethnic Others to the status of exotic accessories.

James Clifford adds an aspect to the definition of diaspora that broadens its relevance to culinary matters. He calls it a “practice of dwelling (differently),”¹⁶⁹ and therein opens the way for diaspora to be conceptualized through everyday cultural practices related to dwelling: clothing oneself, caring for children, preparing food and eating, all the multitude of activities that contribute to sustaining an everyday rhythm, and that permit continuity, even in the face of catastrophic living conditions. And in this way, Clifford’s use of dwelling returns us to the locus of power that is contained within food, within the modalities of its production and its consumption. Recipes, and the histories of the formation of the cuisines of southern Louisiana tell many stories at once. They are narratives of the brutal transAtlantic trade in West African slaves that supplied the French, then Spanish and then American territory with a labour based that allowed its continued existence. They are narratives of the attempted extermination of the many tribes of the lower Mississippi. Equally, they are narratives of the agency of the dispossessed; of the ways thousands of displaced Senegambians were able (and also unable) to actualize power in the agricultural, technological and culinary arenas for themselves on a day-to-day basis. All of these narratives go far towards undoing the damage of ahistorical culinary

¹⁶⁹ James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 9, 3, (1994): 321.

discourses which endeavour to render invisible the conditions that led to their creation.

Revisiting the challenges posed by the critique of the commodity fetish contained in Chapter 1 means, however, deciding whether investigating the biographies of Creole and Cajun cuisines does justice to these narratives of the dispossessed. In other words, the questions remain: Can we, as consumers, bypass the systems of culinary fetishes attached to these cuisines that have become so naturalized through the practices of representation I have been describing? And do the kinds of biographies of recipes that I have elaborated have a role to play in disrupting the continued commodification of colonial history?

Cook and Crang state that increasing the knowledge about commodities might *intend* to destabilize the power of the commodity fetish but it, in fact:

... can only wish away culinary and other consumer cultures' roles in flexible self-identification and pleasurable sociality, and position itself in opposition to the hedonistic possibilities of modern consumption.¹⁷⁰

They claim that, contrarily, they are drawn to critical approaches that concentrate on the surfaces of the commodities and that play with the chains of signification imposed by the commodity fetish. In its most extreme form, this approach would entail "... the pursuit of a radical passivity that refuses to find or construct meaning at all and that thereby resists reclaiming cultural difference

¹⁷⁰ Cook and Crang, "The World on a Plate:...", 147.

into an economy of the self.”¹⁷¹ Cook and Crang themselves prefer “... to rough up commodity surfaces, playing on and with them with the aim of recognizing , perhaps creating, moments of rupture in a cultural fabric that appears all too continuous.”¹⁷²

The providing of knowledge as a critical practice, they assert, implies that there is *a* truth to be told, and it implies that this knowledge in itself provides an avenue for ethical consumption, once consumers are correctly informed of it. In other words, Cook and Crang link to the provision of any kind of knowledge to the exosing of the truth, or the lifting of the veil that Harvey argues for in his description of the mute grapes on the supermarket shelves. Consumption itself, they maintain, is a vast arena of differentiated practices; the ways in which consumers interact with products cannot be predicted, and they certainly have little to do with the accuracy of the information consumers are furnished with concerning the products in question.

While this approach recognizes that the act of consumption itself is an active one – and, indeed, celebrates this sphere of activity – it remains locked within the chain of signification in a manner which denies, I argue, the power of the social life of the object that I have been outlining here. It is useful to return to Castree’s definition of the commodity as a “... complex, mutable, and mobile

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

[site] of social relations, cultural identity and economic power.”¹⁷³ This definition highlights how commodities have the capacity to mobilize multiple levels of power above and beyond the sphere of consumption. The sugar that Thomas Holt describes a woman buying, or which is Stuart Hall at the bottom of an English teacup, embodies histories of slavery, colonization, and displacement that are not dependent for their power on the way the sugar is consumed. These histories cannot be wholly contained within the act of consumption, although it is clearly possible to consume without knowledge of them.

Perhaps the significant difference between the critical approach that Cook and Crang outline and the one I outline resides in the role each approach envisions for the critic. My focus in this thesis has been in setting in motion a kind of analytical apparatus that disrupts the commodity fetish by bringing together multiple kinds of discourse that surrounds food and the development of cuisine, in all of its interdisciplinary. Indeed, the challenge of this thesis has been to integrate writing of all kinds surrounding food and cuisine in order to better understand “the doubled aspect” of food consumption in Holt’s words, or to discover where the “unseen sociality” lies, in Castree’s. Tracing the historical trajectories of individual ingredients, or constructing biographies of recipes will not intervene in some concrete way in the manner in which Creole and Cajun cuisines are represented and consumed by real people, in the United States and elsewhere. Frankly, I agree with Cook and Crang regarding the unpredictability

¹⁷³ Castree, “Commentary,” ... 1520.

of the ways in which products undergo commodification and regarding the vastness of the arena of consumption. I agree with them so much so that I cannot see how the playful attitude of scholars and critics towards commodity surfaces, the "...reworking [of] surfaces ... into symbol[s] of hyper-exotic kitsch and camp..."¹⁷⁴ serves as a useful intervention. Indeed, the two worlds of the consumption of commodities and critical writing so rarely connect, that to tie the latter to the former *as a means of intervention* seems naïve.

There is much to be gained, however, by bringing together another set of worlds that rarely connect: that is, the discursive worlds surrounding food that inform each other so infrequently. The effect of keeping these discourses separate is instrumental in the commodification processes that Creole and Cajun cuisines have undergone, and the fetishization of the Other performed by them. For example, the popular culinary discourses that I have been engaging with through my analysis of recipes seldom take seriously the histories that they regurgitate in small bits and pieces. Often food writers and compilers of cookbooks simply refer to other works on their topic, and repeat the same kinds of simplistic, metonymic associations of peoples, places and foods that have already been published. The result is that writing about food is evacuated of any historical depth, and the texts themselves become a series of heavily-burdened culinary clichés. Similarly, authors of agricultural or botanical histories of food are rarely concerned, in the first instance, with when, where and how individual

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

foodstuffs were combined to form culinary traditions that resonate in contemporary cuisines, and, on a more conceptual level, with the enormous social and political implications the development of cuisine holds for the formation of cultural identity. Sidney Mintz and Judith Carney are unusual in this regard, and their scholarship has been an invaluable resource in regards to the interdisciplinarity of my research.

These two kinds of writing, texts from popular cookbooks and agricultural/botanical histories, are only two of the kinds of discourse that I have attempted to bring together. The others are: histories of colonization and the slave trade; cultural histories of the formation of cuisine and of the Columbian Exchange; theories of diasporic formation, of postcoloniality, of contemporary consumption and of commodification; theories of material culture and the commodity; and, overwhelmingly, the recipes themselves.

Striking a balance between these discourses that remained true to the argument I set myself has been a gargantuan task, and it has taken surprising turns. I had anticipated that this thesis would have been primarily concerned with elaborating theoretical terms such “diasporic cuisine” in great depth, with tracing in detail the history of the term “Creole” in Louisiana, and with reworking a definition of creolization that related cuisine and the everyday to postcolonial culture formation. In this undertaking, I had assumed that using recipes as a point of departure would have entailed illustrating these points through the histories of foodstuffs themselves. I was quite deliberate in choosing

to work with food and cuisine, though. Because of its materiality and its rootedness in the everyday, it has enormous potential for the critical unwinding and rewinding of the “doubled aspect” of consumption and social relations.

Again in Holt’s words:

Power can only be realized at the level of everyday practice, and it is dependent – ultimately and inherently – on the reproduction of the relations, idioms and the world-view that are its means of action. In short, the everyday is where macro-level phenomena – politics, economies, ideologies – are lived.¹⁷⁵

I specifically did not want to investigate questions of creolization in Louisiana without using cuisine as a methodology, and I specifically did not want to invoke cuisine in some abstract sense, that is, without seriously considering the recipe as a text and as a point of departure for historical inquiry.

What I did not anticipate in my conscious attention to the specificities of food within the larger conceptual framework, however, was the manner in which food itself would dominate the thesis. Or rather, I could not have anticipated the ways that following through with entirely necessary and inevitably abbreviated histories of foodstuffs would preclude, within the scope of this work, the more theoretical labour related to creolization as a process, the Creole as a figure, and the diaspora as a construct. The involved cultural histories of individual ingredients literally had their own biographies within this thesis, biographies that could not have been truncated without sacrificing conceptual consistency.

¹⁷⁵ Holt, “Marking:...,” 10.

Clearly, the tremendous challenge of interdisciplinary research resides in the exact process that I am describing, in the weaving together of different discursive strands in aid of an argument which tries the constraints of any single one of them. The use of historical methodologies, in particular, was a multilayered undertaking, because a major thrust of the thesis is the problematizing of conventional historical narratives, be they short texts appended to recipes, or detailed investigations of a precise event.

Finally, I end with a return to Castree's central question: "Once one defetishizes the commodity, where and with whom does its sociality lie?"¹⁷⁶ The conclusion of this thesis must be that, as the theorists of commodity fetish I have engaged with have stated, it is clearly impossible to definitively identify sociospatial origins of commodities. As these cultural histories of Creole and Cajun cuisines have demonstrated, individual foodstuffs such as rice, okra, filé and roux are defined by nothing so strongly as their continual movement. To attach them in an essentialist way to specific populations or geographies undoes the power that their variegated histories possess. Rather, the task must be to rework the conceptualization of the commodified form, in this case cuisine, in such a way to permit the explicit expression of its evolution through histories of conflict and oppression. To conceive of both Creole and Cajun cuisines as cuisines of the African diaspora returns to them the power of their afro-creole past.

¹⁷⁶ Castree, "Commentary," ... 1523.

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