



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of American Culture and Literature

**FOOD, IDENTITY AND BLACK MASCULINITY
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHEF MEMOIRS WRITTEN
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

Gül VARLI KARAARSLAN

Ph.D. Dissertation

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22/07/2022

Gül Varlı Karaarslan

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ETİK BEYAN

Bu alıřmadaki bütn bilgi ve belgeleri akademik kurallar erevesinde elde ettiđimi, grsel, iřitsel ve yazılı tm bilgi ve sonuları bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduđumu, kullandıđım verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapmadıđımı, yararlandıđım kaynaklara bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunduđumu, tezimin kaynak gsterilen durumlar dıřında zgn olduđunu, Prof. Dr. Meldan Tanrısal danıřmanlıđında tarafımdan retildiđini ve Hacettepe niversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstits Tez Yazım Ynergesine gre yazıldıđını beyan ederim.

22/07/2022

Gl Varlı Karaarslan

To my mother, Gülizar Varlı
who nourished my body
and my soul...

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ABSTRACT

Varlı Karaarslan, Gül. *Food, Identity and Black Masculinity in African American Chef Memoirs Written in the Twenty-First Century*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara, 2022.

This dissertation analyzes Jeff Henderson's *Cooked: My Journey from Streets to the Stove* (2008), Marcus Samuelsson's *Yes, Chef* (2012), Michael Twitty's *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History* (2017), and Kwame Onwuachi's *Notes from a Young Black Chef* (2019) and examines their portrayal of the black chef. Written by African American chefs in the twenty-first century, the works provide an alternative reading of the intersections of food, identity, and black masculinity while narrating the culinary journeys of African American chefs. In their food memoirs, chefs give details of how they have developed a culinary interest and built their culinary careers upon their connection with food. In their works, the chefs redefine African and African American food and foodways as a significant element of black cultural identity. The chefs underline the significance of food culture in African American culture and define black cooks and chefs as leading figures who contribute to community-building. The memoirs also expose the racial and gendered discrimination the chefs have struggled with throughout their life and culinary journeys. The chefs critique the white hegemonic masculinity that defines the boundaries of ideal manhood in the mainstream culture and culinary masculinity in the kitchen culture. By focusing on the intersections of food studies and masculinity studies, this dissertation analyzes how African American chefs reconstruct African American food and foodways and the black male chef image. This study also examines how the chefs adopt narrative structures of autobiographical tradition in their memoirs to address the current issues concerning black subjectivity, black culinary culture, and black masculinity. In the contemporary period, black chefs as impactful social figures offer a progressive understanding of black culinary culture and black manhood with the black chef image portrayed in their life narratives.

Keywords: African American Chefs, Culinary Masculinity, Black Masculinity, Food, Foodways, Black Cultural Identity

ÖZET

Varlı Karaarslan, Gül. *Yirmi Birinci Yüzyılda Yazılmıř Afrikalı Amerikalı Őeflerin Anılarında Yemek, Kimlik ve Siyahi Erkeklik*. Doktora Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Bu tez, Jeff Henderson'nın *Cooked: My Journey from Streets to the Stove* (2008), Marcus Samuelsson'ın *Yes, Chef* (2012), Michael Twitty'nin *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History* (2017), ve Kwame Onwuachi'nin *Notes from a Young Black Chef* (2019) bařlıklı eserlerinde siyahi Őef kimlięinin tasvirini inceler. Yirmi birinci yüzyılda Afrikalı Amerikalı Őeflerin eserleri, Őeflerin mutfaktaki yolculuklarının yanı sıra, yemek, kimlik ve siyahi erkeklięin kesiřme noktaları üzerine alternatif bir okuma sunar. Yemek anı kitaplarında, Őefler yemekle olan baęları üzerinden yemek kùltürüne ilgilerini ve mutfaktaki kariyerlerini nasıl geliřtirdiklerini anlatırlar. Afrika ve Afrikalı Amerikalı yemek kùltürü, siyahi kùltürel kimlięinin önemli bir ögesidir. Őefler de yemek kùltürünün Afrikalı Amerikalı kùltüründeki öneminin altını çizer ve siyahi ařçıları ve Őefleri topluma yön veren řahıslar olarak tarif eder. Anı kitapları aynı zamanda Őeflerin bireysel hayatlarında ve mutfaktaki yolculuklarında karřılařtıkları ırka ve cinsiyete dayalı ayrımcılıęı açığa çıkarır. Őefler toplumsal hayatta ve mutfakta ideal erkeklięin sınırlarını belirleyen hegemonik beyaz erkeklięin eleřtirisini yaparlar. Bu çalıřma, yemek çalıřmaları ve erkeklik çalıřmalarının kesiřim noktalarına odaklanarak, Afrikalı Amerikalı Őeflerin Afrikalı Amerikalı yemek kùltürünü ve siyahi erkek Őef kimlięini nasıl yeniden inřa ettiklerini inceler. Bu çalıřma, aynı zamanda, Őeflerin anı kitaplarında, siyahi kimlięi, siyahi yemek kùltürü ve siyahi erkeklik gibi güncel konuları ele alırken otobiyografi geleneęinden gelen yazma biçimlerini nasıl kullandıklarını inceler. Güncel dünyada, siyahi Őefler etki sahibi toplumsal figürler olarak siyahi yemek kùltürü ve siyahi erkeklięi ilerici bir anlayıřla yorumlamıř ve bunu yařam anlatılarında siyahi Őef imgesiyle tasvir etmiřlerdir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Afrikalı Amerikalı Őefler, Mutfaktaki Erkeklikler, Siyahi Erkeklik, Yemek, Yemek Kùltürü, Siyahi Kùltürel Kimlięi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL	i
YAYIMLAMA VE FİKRİ MÜLKİYET HAKLARI BEYANI	ii
ETİK BEYAN	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
TURKISH ABSTRACT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1 REVISITING THE OLD SOUTH: SOUL FOOD, MEMORY, BLACK SUBJECTIVITY, AND MASCULINITY IN MICHAEL TWITTY'S MEMOIR, <i>THE COOKING GENE</i>	24
1.1. Michael Twitty and His Reconnection with the Soul Food.....	25
1.2. The Significance of Soul Food in African American Culinary History.....	26
1.3. The Old South as an Archive of Memory	30
1.4. Altering the Object Position of Black Food and Foodways.....	40
1.5. Altering the Object Position of Black Subjectivity and Masculinity in the Kitchen.....	44
CHAPTER 2 CLAIMING A KITCHEN OF HIS OWN: BLACK CULINARY CULTURE, MASCULINITY, AND A NEW CHEF IMAGE IN KWAME ONWUACHI'S MEMOIR, <i>NOTES OF A YOUNG BLACK CHEF</i>	50
2.1. The Traces of Black Bildungsroman in Onwuachi's Memoir.....	51
2.2. The Roots of Kwame Onwuachi's Culinary Style.....	57
2.3. Black Chef in White World of Fine Dining.....	61
2.4. Popular Culture and Culinary Performance.....	69

CHAPTER 3 PORTRAIT OF A BLACK MAN AS A CHEF: URBAN BLACK MASCULINITY, PRISON CULTURE, AND “COOKING” IN JEFF HENDERSON’S MEMOIR, <i>COOKED</i>	75
3.1. Generic Features of Jeff Henderson’s Memoir: Cooked.....	76
3.2. The Cool Pose and Manifestations of Black Masculinity.....	77
3.3. Black Masculinity and Prison Culture.....	82
3.4. Building a Culinary Career in Prison Kitchen.....	86
CHAPTER 4 BUILDING A HOME: BLACK DIASPORA, FOOD, AND CITY IN MARCUS SAMUELSSON'S MEMOIR, <i>YES, CHEF</i>	99
4.1. Black Diaspora and Changing Black Subjectivity.....	100
4.2. Marcus Samuelsson and His Culinary Pathways across the Atlantic.....	102
4.3. Reconnection with Africa and Personal History through Culinary Journeys.....	109
4.4. Establishing a Culinary Home in Harlem, New York.....	113
CONCLUSION	126
WORKS CITED	137
APPENDIX 1: ORIGINALITY REPORT	150
APPENDIX 2 ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM	152

INTRODUCTION

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes "I, too" (1926)

It is a fact that representations of food and food culture have become more visible in popular culture in the last decades. In the contemporary period, food is not only a solid entity consumed for its nutritional elements; it also provides an understanding of culture and identity. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, in his work *Physiology of Taste* (1770), draws attention to the close connection between food and identity with a famous aphorism, "Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are" (8). In the United States, the diversity of culinary cultures has brought a valuable new dimension to understanding food and foodways as a medium to discuss cultural identity within a historical context. Along with the rising interest in food in popular culture, the chef's image has been transformed into a public figure in the twenty-first century. Moving from the private sphere of the kitchen into the social sphere, the chef has evolved to be a celebrity figure both on traditional media and contemporary social media. Esteemed as public figures, chefs started to appear on various media platforms

sharing their food, restaurants, and culinary styles, as well as their personal views on the current political and social debates. This evolution has also necessitated an alternative definition of the chef image.

The rising fame of food culture and the impact of celebrity chefs have become visible in the literary scene, as well. The popularity of food culture and life narratives merge in food memoirs. While food memoirs are written by an extended range of authors, including “cooks, restaurant critics, farmers, poets, bloggers, and novelists” (Jurado 53), chefs contribute to the genre with their life narratives narrating their culinary journeys of becoming acclaimed chefs. In food memoirs written by chefs, food is introduced as a vital component of cultural identity that chefs adopt to investigate personal, professional, social, and cultural issues. The chefs’ memoirs offer the chefs’ personal history with a blend of memories, family recipes, stylish pictures, savory food presentations, and history of ingredients.

Food is the central medium in memoirs written by black chefs to express their connection to black culinary culture and history. While a considerable amount of scholarly work is available on black female cooks and chefs’ contribution to the American cuisine, black male chefs’ contribution to the social and political agenda through their cookbooks and food memoirs has garnered inadequate acknowledgment in scholarly studies. Therefore, food memoirs composed by black male chefs possess a considerable potential to disclose black culinary culture and its dynamic relationship with various agendas, including black cultural identity, culinary masculinity, and gendered and racial codes in the food industry and mainstream American culture. This dissertation investigates how contemporary food memoirs written by black chefs contribute to the redefinition of black cultural identity by examining intersections of food and foodways with black subjectivity, cultural identity, and masculinity.

The dissertation centralizes four contemporary memoirs penned by influential black chefs in the American culinary scene. The central argument of each chapter focuses on how the chef’s connection to food, cooking, and the kitchen discloses the racial and gendered dynamics within a historical and cultural context. While chef Michael Twitty

investigates the history of soul food and the origins of Southern culinary culture in *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (2017), Kwame Onwuachi lays bare the racial and gendered dynamics of celebrity chef culture in his book, *Notes from a Young Black Chef: A Memoir* (2019). Meanwhile, Chef Jeff Henderson emphasizes imposed stereotypes on black masculinity with reference to prison masculinities in *Cooked: My Journey from Streets to the Stove* (2008) since he built a personal connection with food and cooking during his imprisonment. Lastly, Chef Marcus Samuelsson explores African cuisine and African diaspora culture through his culinary journeys across the transatlantic in his famous memoir, *Yes, Chef!* (2012). Although each chef uses food as a medium to express their personal connection to food and cooking, the themes foregrounded in the narratives and narrative styles change drastically. Hence, each chapter uses different theories and approaches to elaborate on black food history, cultural identity, national and transnational food culture, black masculinity, and black diasporic identity. This dissertation also aims to explore the narrative styles applied in the memoirs and opts to answer the question of how black chefs follow and subvert the traits of autobiographical, male, black literary traditions, such as slave narratives and black bildungsroman, to redefine black subjectivity and masculinity. Ultimately, it is claimed that black chef memoirs are powerful narratives of life that provide a reconfiguration of black culinary culture and a multidimensional representation of black cultural identity and black masculinity at a transcultural level.

THE FUNCTION OF FOOD MEMOIRS IN THE AGE OF POST-TRUTH

In the introduction of the *Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, Maria Dibattista and Emily O. Wittman predict that the present era will be classified as the time of “everybody’s autobiography” in the future by stating the fact that today, everyone can narrate his/her life story which could reach the bookshelves, with voracious readers enjoying the genre (1). However, the term autobiography often leads to disputes among critics since it usually does not correspond to the diversity of the genre in contemporary writing (Dibattista and Wittman 1). In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson adopt life writing or life narrative as a

broader term enclosing autobiography, memoir, and other self-reflexive writings (4). Drawing on the difference between autobiography and memoir, Smith and Watson contend that while autobiographies encompass the author's entire life, the framework of the memoir is restricted to "a period of experience rather than an entire life span and offered reflections on its significance for the writer's previous status of self-understanding" (3). Neal Wyatt concurs with Smith and Watson and define the memoir as a narrative that presents "a slice of a life remembered and recounted as much for the author as for the reader" ("Memoirs" 82). In line with the rising popularity of foodie culture in the mainstream media, food memoirs have been bourgeoned in the twenty-first century.¹ Food memoirs are works in which "the personal story of a great chef, struggling home cook, and knowledgeable foodie is explored" and "insider secrets of food culture" are revealed (Wyatt, "Food Writing" 1). In keeping with this idea, Melissa Brackney Stoeger provides the following description: "Food Memoirs and Autobiographies incorporate food as a major element of the writer's experiences. The writer is typically either employed in a profession related to food, such as a chef or has a passion for food that plays a big role in their life" (4). Chefs from different social and racial backgrounds contribute to the genre with their memoirs.

Food memoirs can be examined as personal, cultural, and ethnic history records, emphasizing the connection between food and cultural identity. Within this context, culinary/food memoirs, or in other words, narratives of gastrography, contain stories in which personal identity, ethnicity, and cultural memory intertwine. Food serves to reflect both personal and cultural identity. As Warren Belasco puts forward, "[f]ood is more than an amalgam of biochemical nutrient. What we eat has enormous significance as a medium for personal recollection and collective identity" (*Food* 26). In ethnic food memoirs, for instance, the description of a specific food may refer to "the remembered pleasure of eating the food with the politics of hunger and scarcity as a sign of class or

¹ In his book, *Memoir: A History*, Ben Yagoda provides a comprehensive review of contemporary memoirs and points out that from the beginning of the twenty-first century, along with their popular adaptations into Hollywood movies, memoirs had an avid readership. According to the statistics, the categories of personal memoirs comprise seventy percent of total book sales. In *Food Lit: A Reader's Guide to Epicurean Nonfiction*, Melissa Brackney Stoeger posits that food has become a catchy topic for memoirs, and following addiction and criminal memoirs, food memoirs have become part of the popular sellers with a great demand from readers.

economic positioning. It may discuss particular diets as indicative of colonial regimes” (Smith and Watson 149). Smith and Watson define food narratives written by ethnic writers as “a way to tell stories of family and nation, ethnic heritage, and diasporan mixing” (148). Food narratives enable authors from various ethnic backgrounds to explore cultural, political, and economic aspects that shape their life through food and foodways. Julie Rak expresses that, in the contemporary period, underprivileged groups may benefit from the power of life writing to “shape and record individual lives” (2). Commenting upon the constructive power of life writing, Rak contends that

[f]or many writers who belong to minority groups [. . .] alternative forms of autobiographical representation make “autobiography” operate as a discursive field where issues about ethnic identity, alternative historicity, and [. . .] a minority subjectivity can be addressed. (2)

Reflecting on personal and cultural history by centering on food as the primary subject enables authors to redefine their subjectivity. Barbara Frey Waxman defines food memoirs as “personal histories and confessions of the memoirists,” highlighting the bonds between food and “cultural identity, ethnic community, family, and cross-cultural experiences” (363). Accordingly, black chefs use food memoirs to contemplate a new definition of black subjectivity. The chefs give voice to black chefs and cooks who have been invisible in the mainstream American culinary scene.

With an emphasis on its narrative structure, Waxman describes food memoirs as memoirs that “chronicle the growth and development of the memoirist through the lens of food memories, in narratives, that either begin with childhood or that interpose frequent flashbacks to earliest formative experiences” (364). Black chefs use the narrative structures of the bildungsroman and slave narratives to emphasize the hardships they go through in their culinary journeys. Smith and Watson define bildungsroman as narratives that focus on “the formation of a young life as gendered, classed, and raced within a social network larger than the family or the religious community” (120). Black chefs’ memoirs are presented as coming-of-age stories focusing on the chef’s struggle to build a culinary style. The memoirs also foreground the chef’s “gendered classed and raced” (Smith and Watson 120) position in the mainstream American culture tracing the narrative structure of the bildungsroman. The

food memoirs written by chefs narrate how their growing interest in food and cooking developed into a profession despite the oppressive social conditions.

Personal narratives are burgeoning in various art forms as opposed to “misinformation and disinformation” in the age of post-truth (Swanson xii). *Oxford Dictionary* defines the term post-truth as “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (“Post-truth”). The period after 9/11 is defined as the age of post-truth by numerous critics to address the contemporary period during which truth has been exhausted due to the “misinformation, disinformation, and political polarization” and endorsed through “fake news” circulated through multiple media platforms (xii), “damaging nationalist rhetoric and divisive politics that wash across our television screens and mobile devices with unnerving frequency” (xvii). At such a time, personal narratives are treasured since they disclose avid personal experiences, and their intersections with identity, culture, and politics are regarded as more sincere in their representation. Food memoirs written by black chefs seek to provide their audience with a close reading of the contemporary reality of black subjectivity in the United States. However, critics also spotlight the intersections of the truth and life narratives as the narratives are constructed upon the narrator’s personal memory. Still, as Smith and Watson state, life narratives promise a connection with the truth as a genre.

The presentation of the autobiographical self emerges as a debatable concept within the critical framework of life writing since “the life narrator depends on access to memory to narrate the past in such a way as to situate the experiential history within the present” (Smith and Watson 22). Smith and Watson separate the autobiographical “I” in memoirs into five distinctive categories to provide a more critical framework. The real “I” refers to the author whose name the reader sees on the cover page (72). The narrating “I” “tells the autobiographical narrative “(72), and the narrated “I” is “the protagonist of the narrative, the version of the self that the narrating “I” chooses to constitute through recollection of the reader” (73). Lastly, the ideological “I” is the notion of subjectivity “culturally available to the narrator when he tells his story” (76). Smith and Watson’s conceptualization of the autobiographical “I” can be adopted while reading black chef

memoirs. In the food memoirs, the real “I” stands for the black chef introduced with a name, surname, and a photograph taken in a professional kitchen setting. The narrating “I” is the chef who evaluates his life story through his connection to food and foodways. While building the “narrated I,” the chef often focuses on the periods determining their culinary journey. Since black chefs as narrators are critical of white dominance, the ideological “I” functions in the memoirs to unleash the gendered and racialized discrimination they encountered while pursuing their careers; in this sense, not only food memoirs written by black chefs are essential to following the chefs’ culinary journey, but they are also powerful narratives that disclose gender and racial politics. In her book, *Food and Masculinity in Contemporary Autobiographies*, Nieves Pascual Soler indicates that “male writers and readers with a passion for cooking gird their masculinity through food autobiographies, doing gender by doing genre” (8). Accordingly, the narrative structure of the food memoirs written by black chefs manifests the condition of black subjectivity linked to the cosmopolitan black culinary culture and black masculinity. So, it would be significant to provide insights into the intersections of food, gender, masculinity, and race.

INTERSECTIONS OF FOOD STUDIES AND MASCULINITY STUDIES

As a newly burgeoning field of study, food studies adopts alternative approaches to food, varying from historical, nutritional, and ecological to ethical readings. In the literary tradition, food is addressed as a symbol, representations of which often mirror traits of characters, places, and time. However, these one-dimensional treatments that interpret food merely as an artifact of everyday life do not correspond to the emerging questions concerning cultural identity in the agenda of cultural studies. In the article entitled “Food as a Cultural Construction,” elaborating on food habits and the social value of food in Hua culture, Anna Meigs puts forward that food should not be analyzed from a single perspective as a physiological and nutritive element since it forges noticeable social meanings and functions (351). The critic further emphasizes that food is considered a dominant cultural marker in sociological and anthropological contexts through which intersections of identity politics, gender roles, class habits, and cultural codes of a community are manifested (Meigs 351). Food is closely connected to

identity, taste, family ties, ethnic background, personal memories, and cultural legacy (Belasco, *Food* 16). In “The Anthropology of Food,” Robert Dirks and Gina Hunter evaluate studies that treat food as a cultural marker reflecting “ethnic, regional, and national identity” (9). Recent studies show that the intersecting lines of food, gender, race, and class intrinsic to individual and cultural identity construction are foregrounded within an interdisciplinary framework.

Along with anthropology, gender studies is considered a significant field that contributes significantly to food studies by exploring the dynamic relationship between food and gendered identity. Food culture has never been gender-neutral (Cairns et al. 591). Therefore, feminist scholars are inclined to explore how food and cooking are associated with women’s “caring work” and how cultural and social definitions of food endorse unequally established gender roles (Cairns et al., 592). Food production is unquestionably categorized under women’s domestic chores in American culture. Correspondingly, cooking has been “central to the performance of hegemonic femininity and being able to cook traditionally stands for a mother’s love and a woman’s competence to be a wife” (Vester 66). In the division of labor, the kitchen is traditionally defined as a female sphere of food production where the woman is the homemaker. While some feminist critics interpret the kitchen and cooking as an empowering female sphere where women connect with their roots, others associate cooking with unpaid labor and the modern enslavement of women (Belasco, *Food* 4). However, cooking is defined as a language for self-expression: the memoirs frame women in the domestic kitchen using cooking to show love, care, and remembrance. Food memoirs written by women often focus on the home kitchen by forming affective bonds between food, cooking, family members, emotions, and memory. Jessica B. Harris and Maya Angelou stand out as major figures focusing on junctions of food, blackness, and gender with their food writings.

Nevertheless, men’s relationship with cooking and the kitchen is built on opposite grounds. This imposition leads the public space to become a male-dominated sphere gradually. As such, the gendering of the kitchen starts with the industrialization of food products in the late nineteenth century. Factories completed processes such as

“butchering, milling the grain and distilling” on behalf of men, leading to men’s withdrawal from their domestic kitchen responsibilities (Vester 63). Along with the rising demands of dining-out culture, the fast-sliding doors of restaurant kitchens were opened to male cooks and chefs. This public space is more “suitable” for men since cooking at a restaurant is associated with hard work, discipline, and long and odd working hours (Vester 73). The kitchen outside the home is described as a challenging masculine space with harsh working conditions and competition. On the other hand, it also offers economic independence, freedom, self-reliance, and privileges. Contrary to the female food writing with family and home as its kernel, in their narratives, male chefs recount the kitchens where they learned cooking and food preparation, like restaurant kitchens or industrial kitchens, and focus more on the social networks and food business.

In her book, *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities*, Katharina Vester underscores that male cooking is positioned as a privileged gender performance as opposed to female cooking. While female cooking is essential for survival and regarded as a domestic role, male cooking is often considered a luxury. So, when men cook, they are not less manly. Cooking becomes another way men claim independence and masculinity (Vester 66-68). The image of a male cook is constructed upon what a female cook is not. He is individualistic, independent, creative, and, most importantly, not bound to the house kitchen. As well as being defined in direct opposition to female cooking, manly cooking also leads to the abjection of men from subaltern masculinities and different socioeconomic backgrounds; in other words, like white masculinity, male cooking is

[. . .] abjection of alternative masculinities, since texts dealing with manly cooking commonly dismissed gentleness, affection, and caring as undesirable traits in men or marginalized men who came from non-dominant cultural and racial backgrounds by stating that there was only one right way to eat and cook to be a real man: the urban middle-class way. (Vester 68)

In this respect, black men are also excluded from the luxury of ‘manly cooking’ due to the abject position of black masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a framework to set the boundaries of a fixated type of masculinity that dominates the mainstream culture and defines the normal. Accordingly, culinary

masculinity is defined by centralizing the hegemonic masculinity that gives the center stage to white, heterosexual men.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND CULINARY MASCULINITY

Masculinity is a general concept with physiological and psychological dimensions that affect domestic and social spheres. Traditionally, men's privileged position in society over women is equated with dominance and power. However, with the rise of masculinity studies, manhood is treated as "a fluid and emergent construction" (Miller, "Incarcerated Masculinities" 155). The dominant understanding of masculinity may be classified under the definition of hegemonic or ideal masculinity. R. W. Connell, in his book *Masculinities*, gives the classical definition of hegemonic masculinity as the accepted gender practices that affirm the superior position of men over women in society (77). This subordination is not limited to women; hegemonic masculinity also creates a privileged class of men (Connell and Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity" 832) who establish control over other men as well "economic, political and social order" (Hill Collins 74). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity denotes "gendered power relations among men" (Connell, *Masculinities* xviii).

Ideal or hegemonic masculinity promotes several critical features of manhood. According to Doyle, first and foremost, men should be dominant and in control. They need to express their masculinity through competition with other men economically and socially. Because men need to be aggressive and robust, they are not expected to be soft, kind, or gentle, with feminine characteristics (28). Ideal men are also likely to be heterosexual and sexually dominant in their relationships (White and Cones 116). Yet, this fixated definition of masculinity does not embrace alternative masculinities as it elevates a particular group of men in society. Erving Goffman defines the boundaries of this privileged group in the American culture as follows:

In an important sense, there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record in sports... Any male who fails to qualify in any of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (Kimmel, *Manhood* 5)

Hence, hegemonic masculinity's ideals and social practices reflect the privileged position of white men. They are "accepted, rejected, and performed by men from diverse social class groupings, racial or ethnic groups, ages, and religions" (Hill Collins 79). White American men envisage 'the real/ideal manhood' by identifying binary oppositions that exclude "the others." Consequently, hegemonic white masculinity is directly opposed to "women, gay men, poor and working-class men, boys and black men" (Hill Collins 79). While providing privileges for the men who come close to it, hegemonic or ideal masculinity expels any group of men who do not meet its standards (Mutua, "Introduction" xix).

In her study evaluating black masculinity within the framework of the American racial agenda, Patricia Hill Collins regards hegemonic masculinity as a social construction that engenders the polarization of white masculinity and black masculinity. The critic extends the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity by defining it as "the dominant form of masculinity, in any given society, as well as marginalized and subordinated masculinities that characterize the experiences of men whose race, class, religion and ethnicity, age, sexuality, or citizenship category placed them within subordinated groups" (79). Thus, similar to other subaltern masculinities, the boundaries of black masculinity are built upon and limited to negative stereotypes imposed by the dominant ideology. Marable Manning believes that stereotypes imposed upon black identity are inscribed in the entire culture:

What is a black man in an institutionally racist society, in the social system of modern capitalist America? The essential tragedy of being Black and male is our inability, as men and as people of African descent, to define ourselves without the stereotypes the more extensive society imposes upon us and perpetuates and permeates within our entire culture through various institutional means. (26)

In his article elaborating on the significance of stereotypes, Walter Lippman handles stereotypes as powerful concepts since individuals interpret the reality by internalizing the patterns of stereotypes (19), which often depend upon "what others imagined" (59). The critic further emphasizes the significance of stereotypes by claiming that "a stereotype may be so consistently and authoritatively transmitted in each generation from parent to child that it seems almost a biological fact" (93). Therefore, it is vital to debunk racist stereotypes fixating on the black masculine subjectivity to fight racial

discrimination. In her book, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2003), bell hooks examines black male identity in relation to the stereotypes imposed by white supremacy in the contemporary world. hooks points out that traditional stereotypes that construct black masculinity set the foundations of not only gendered but also racialized discrimination, and “negative stereotypes about the nature of black masculinity continue to overdetermine the identities black males are allowed to fashion for themselves” (*We Real Cool* x). According to hooks, black males face racialized and gendered discrimination starting from school since, up to that point, they live in black neighborhoods (*We Real Cool* 32). Also, biographies and autobiographies of black men² portray the racial discrimination and harassment black boys had to endure at school (hooks, *We Real Cool* 35). In their narratives, black chefs foreground different reflections of racial discrimination that they have gone through starting from childhood. Following black autobiographical tradition, food memoirs written by black chefs also emphasize the mistreatment of black boys at schools; as hooks underlines, the failure of the education system most often led black men to engage in street culture. Moreover, the media and everyday culture remind young black men that the “street will be their only home” (hooks, *We Real Cool* 26), and unless they break the norms, they will not access economic power (26). In their memoirs, Kwame Onwuachi and Jeff Henderson foreground the narrative of their childhood and boyhood to show how effortlessly they got involved in street culture criminality and violence.

The discriminative practices of hegemonic masculinity necessitate redefining black masculinity within an alternative theoretical framework. In her article, “Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities,” Athena D. Mutua regards the “American ideal,” or hegemonic masculinity, with patriarchy at its core, as a hurdle for progressive masculinities. In line with this idea, the critic restructures the definition of black

² hooks in her book refers to Richard Wright’s book *Black Boy* (1945) and Nathan McCall’s *Make Me Wanna Holler* (1994), and Jarvis Jay Masters’ *Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row* (1997) as works that draw attention to a biased educational system that destroys black male self-image. With a similar concern, in his recent memoir, *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching: a Young Black Man’s Education* (2016), Mychal Denzel Smith underlines how difficult it is to escape from stereotypes associated with black masculinity. Every day, black men are exposed to media bombardments of thug and gangsta culture. Mark Anthony also highlights that “many black men are all too aware how slippery the slope is from black men to thug-nigga” (7).

masculinity³ by emphasizing the liberation of personal and public lives as the focal point of the theory:

Progressive black masculinities are exemplified by men who take an active and ethical stance against all social systems of domination and who act personally in concert with others in activities against racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, class, and economic exploitation that limit the human potential of the black self and other-selves. (“Theorizing” 7)

As an attempt to liberate black men from the domination of hegemonic white masculinity, Mutua proposes that progressive black masculinity, as an ethical project, envisions providing black men self-definition and supporting the “potential of the black self and others” as opposed to gendered, racist, homophobic and heterosexist impositions and dictates of the dominant ideology. Such a perspective can also be traced in black chef memoirs as chefs challenge the dominant ideology in their restaurants and as social mediators. The chefs advocate equality and underline that they are against any type of gendered, racist, homophobic remarks in the kitchen on various platforms. The food memoirs written by black chefs also embody practices of progressive black masculinity.

In their memoirs, the chefs challenge not only racialized but also gendered representations of black manhood with single narratives. This aspect of the black chef’s culinary standing can be read as resistance to a one-dimensional model of black masculinity. Mutua underlines that although black men benefit from the privileges of masculinity that black women cannot access, they, in different media, struggle due to the “gendered racism” that causes “one-dimensional” representations of black masculinity (Mutua, “Revisiting” 79). Through their life writings, Black chefs reject

³ In the collection, *Progressive Black Masculinities* (2006), providing a variety of discussions on contemporary black masculinities, Athena D. Mutua emphasizes the notions of domination and transformation in the definition of the term; *progressive masculinity* or, in her words, the twin term; *progressive black masculinities*. In Mutua’s view, it is ethically problematic that even though black men are eager to rebound white male supremacy and end racial discrimination, they remain silent towards multiple ways of subordination of women, children, other men, or black sexual minorities. Accordingly, while theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities, Mutua proposes that along with racial discrimination, progressive black masculinity must resist any gendered, class-based, or sexualized discrimination that ethically constructs any hierarchy or subordination.

this one-dimensional representation of black men and reconstruct the link between black masculinity and culinary culture.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CULINARY MASCULINITY

Hill Collins states, "In the United States, hegemonic masculinity is installed at the top of a hierarchical array of masculinities" (81). Thus, it can be anticipated that hegemonic white masculinity sets the lines of culinary masculinity. The characteristics of ideal/hegemonic masculinity are explicit in the structure of culinary masculinity. The ideal chef image is presented with the macho/crude chef image who is merciless, demanding, aggressive, self-reliant, and competitive. This image of the chef also defines the boundaries of the working atmosphere; the kitchen is defined as a working environment that is "male-dominated and highly competitive" (Burrow et al., 674).

Nevertheless, adopting such a demanding culinary personality is not usually easy. Based on their interview with Chef John Smith, Burrow and Yakinthou observe that chefs often struggle to embrace the idealized chef image, which is "an extreme, highly gendered, often fantastical image of what it means to be a chef" (674). This ideal image is often endorsed by media portrayals of white celebrity chefs like Anthony Bourdain or Gordon Ramsey. They have been influential figures in setting the norms of culinary culture globally. Concerning the crude image, Johnston, Rodney, and Chong draw attention to the fact that "[c]elebrities are not simply living, breathing brands, but icons that communicate social norms, stereotypes, and aspirations for the viewing public. Food celebrities are no exception; they communicate cultural values through mediated performances on television and through their cookbooks" (4). Considering their domineering role in culinary culture, one can claim that white chefs construct culinary masculinity in line with ideal masculinity, sustaining the dominant position of white, heterosexual men as a privileged group in the culinary world. Accordingly, if not all, white chef memoirs dominantly manifest the white males' privileged position in the social and cultural spheres, including the contemporary culinary American scene.

White chef memoirs are written from the hegemonic white perspective with the privileges that white men maintain effortlessly. Thus, in the narratives, white

subjectivity in relation to race, class, gender, and sexuality is not problematized, and the chefs keep silent about this privileged status in the memoirs. Among the many, Anthony Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly* (2001), Gordon Ramsey's *Humble Pie* (2006), and Jonathan Reynolds's *Wrestling with Gravy* (2008) can be taken as pioneering examples to represent the main traits of food memoirs written by white male chefs. The chefs enjoy the privileged position of being white and male authority figures with an influence on popular food culture. In her article "Men Eaters," Angelica Michelis describes Bourdain's *Kitchen Confidential* as his "testosterone-fueled memoir of life as a chef presented the professional kitchen as a battlefield" (446). Michelis determines the centralization of homosociality in the professional kitchen and the representation of food experience in a sexualized manner as the two significant factors that reveal Bourdain's desire to depict cooking as a masculine practice (446-47). As such, the memoirs written by white chefs also describe the chef's relationship with food by glamorizing the male ways of cooking.

While black chef memoirs posit common traits with food memoirs penned by chefs from diverse racial backgrounds, they are in stark contrast to memoirs written by famous white chefs. Since black chefs aim to subvert the one-dimensional understanding of African American culinary culture and black masculinity, their memoirs depict the traits of progressive masculinity. Mutua underlines that progressive black masculinity embodies an "intervention" (Mutua, "Theorizing" 9) against institutionalized white hegemonic masculinity, sets the standards and defines the normal. By positioning "black self-identity" at its center, progressive black masculinity "[. . .] intervenes to disturb the normal economic, cultural, and structural workings of white supremacy and consciousness" (Mutua, "Theorizing" 9). As opposed to the monolithic narratives constructed upon black and culinary masculinity, the memoirs address the multidimensionality of black subjectivity by disturbing the hegemonic understanding of culinary masculinity. In the memoir, black chefs prefer to build constructive alliances with women rather than coupling food with the female body in a sexualized manner. They discuss how cultural and political dynamics of race, gender, and class shape the food community, fine-dining culture, and celebrity food culture. The chefs also portray the kitchen as a place of communal healing and growth instead of a

battlefield. By writing memoirs, chefs aspire to present the multidimensionality of black masculinity and claim their place in the American culinary culture. Mutua concludes that people who contributed to “[p]rogressive masculinities project viewed black identity as multiple, multilayered, and various and the black community as multiple” (11) with a “race-conscious approach (“Theorizing” 11). Similarly, the black chefs represent progressive masculinity, display hybridity/multidimensionality of black identity, and resist custom-made racial stereotypes that do not reflect their individuality.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FOOD NARRATIVES AND THE CONTEMPORARY BLACK CHEF MEMOIRS

Due to their close association with gender politics, food is a social concept associated with ethnic identity in food memoirs written by ethnic writers. Accordingly, food is essential to African American subjectivities (Wallach, *Every Nation* xx). Among the many black culinary historians, Jessica B. Harris, Tipton Martine, Thelma Golden, and Edna Lewis honor African culinary history as a source to rediscover, reconstruct and reclaim African American subjectivity. As Wisecup claims, African Americans have used their “knowledge of food” both for survival and as a form of resistance (5). In like manner, Jennifer Jensen Wallach, in the introduction of her book, *Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Slavery to Obama*, explains the great importance of studying African American culinary history:

[F]ood practices have continued to be sites of resistance and vehicles for identity construction for African Americans. [. . .] African Americans [use] food as poison and as magic, as a means of expressing a uniquely black aesthetic and as a way of rebelling against the limitations of culinary stereotypes, as a survival mechanism for an isolated black community and as a vehicle for asserting full belonging to the US nation-state. (xxii)

Exploring African American foodways is a vehicle for understanding how black subjectivity, gender roles, masculinity, ethnicity, and diversity intertwine. Since food and foodways can be “decoded to reveal multiple meanings” (Wallach, *Deceitful Pork Chop* xxi), African American food history possesses the potential “to recover lost details about the material, spiritual, and social realities of the black experience in the United States” (Wallach, *Deceitful Pork Chop* xxii). Moreover, black chefs have been

socially visible and influential figures in the American political and culinary scene. Among the many, James Hemmings (1765-1801) stands out as a prominent figure who gained visibility as an African American chef and influenced American culinary understanding. Hemmings was born in Virginia as an enslaved man. He was the first African American chef trained in Paris and cooked for Thomas Jefferson as his chef for over thirty years. Thomas J. Craughwell asserts that Jefferson and Hemmings's culinary partnership brought a new dimension to the colonial culinary culture and contributed to the adaptation of American foodways (3-4). Following James, African American chefs have continued to be influential figures in the American political and culinary scene. In her book entitled *The President's Kitchen Cabinet*, Adrian Miller emphasizes that black cooks and chefs cooking for the American presidents at the White House used their power to influence the political agenda of the time, starting from the presidency of Washington to Obama. According to Miller, African American chefs have shaped both the presidential foodways and African American politics (3). The black culinary narratives follow a similar trend and aim to contribute to the social and political agenda by focusing on the interactions between food, race, and black identity.

A survey of black culinary history would often start with a reference to black female cooks working in the plantation kitchens. In many cookbooks of the time, the emphasis on women's domestic position leads to the portrayal of women in the house kitchen. In contrast, black men's writings foreground the "author's experiences as cooks in the public domain" (Witt, "Intersections" 107). While black women's recipes for the household were archived as cookbooks, black men contributed to food-related writing with housekeeping texts focused on the "domestic economy" (Zafar, *Recipes for Respect* 6). Rafia Zafar describes "cookbooks, hotelkeepers' guides, novels, and memoirs as revelatory venues for Black authors' deployment of foodways to elevate their social status, attain civil rights, and present a dignified professional self to the public" (*Recipes for Respect* 2). The first publications on food targeting black American men are cookbooks, including guidelines for domestic workers. *The House Servant's Directory* (1858) is credited as the first housekeeping book. Written by Robert Roberts, an African American employed as a butler in Boston, the book contained house management tips and recipes for young black men willing to work as butlers. Critic

Katharina Vester emphasizes that the book valued hard work and contributed to “the emergence of new self-perceptions of black manliness” (72).

Similarly, Tunis Campbell’s *Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers Guide* (1848) addresses young African American men who work as servants or waiters. They guide them to earn a living as independent men. Toni Bullock’s *The Ideal Bartender* (1917) provides soup recipes and housekeeping tips (Zafar, *Recipes for Respect* 6). These early works often reinforce American values such as hard work and endurance and, at the same time, reinscribe the ideals of hegemonic masculinity by accepting the superior position of white men (Vester 71). On the other hand, the tradition of sharing tips and recipes to guide young black men has become a source of inspiration for black chefs who have published cookbooks over time.

Rufus Estes’ book, *Good Things to Eat* (1911), is noted to be the first cookbook written by an African American chef. In the first pages of his cookbook, Estes provides brief autobiographical information under “Sketch of My Life.” Born into slavery in Tennessee in 1857, Estes was the youngest son of a family of ten and became the only son left. Due to his mother’s deteriorating health, he needed to work hard, which opened his path for his culinary career at an early age. Estes ends his narration by expressing his gratitude to white patrons who encouraged him to write the book (ix-x). He shared his recipes and tips for food preparation without any personal sketching in the following pages. The book was written for the use of black men who wanted to be employed in the public sphere. Relating to Estes’s cookbook, Rafia Zafar foregrounds the significance of similar guidebooks and cookbooks as they contextually enable “to write the history of a nascent black middle-class cohort of hospitality entrepreneurs” (“Using African American” 140). As well as the hybrid structure of food memoirs, there is also an influence of masculine narrative traditions. Like cookbook autobiographies of the earlier period, black cooks’ and chefs’ food memoirs and narrative cookbooks use male writing conventions. As Zafar expresses, “Estes’s life connects him generically and historically with antebellum autobiographies such as Frederick Douglass, who also described his first job for wages and his lack of formal schooling, and Reconstruction-era coevals like Booker T. Washington” (“Using African American” 146). Therefore, it

will not be wrong to claim that black male chefs have adapted narrative traits of the African autobiographical tradition in their cookbooks, food autobiographies, and memoirs starting from an earlier period.

The experience of being black cannot be excluded from masculine identity. Although their way of life and motives differ in various ways, being a black man or, more theoretically, in Mutua's words, gendered racism challenges black chefs in their career paths. Following a similar line, Chef Jefferson Evans, in his autobiography entitled *Why Do People Treat Me the Way They Do?* (2016), describes his story of becoming a pioneering black chef as the first black graduate of the Culinary Institute America in 1947. Evans begins his book with the narrative of his childhood in the family house and gives details of their dietary habits and farming culture. Like Estes, Evans could not attend school regularly and get proper education since they had to gather crops and raise livestock. His lack of education caused him to change several jobs and cities. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, Evans writes that it was challenging to find a proper restaurant position since most restauranteurs hesitated to employ a black chef in the 1950s. Evans started teaching at the Culinary Institute in New York as the first black male chef, a position in which he was also challenged by racial discrimination. In the "Introduction" of the book, Evans's grandson presents him as a role model for young black men as he says: "He reminds me of Frederic Douglass, not just the way he looked but in what he did, breaking down barriers" (Evans 1). Evans's autobiography exposes the discrimination black men had to endure in the twentieth century. The chef, somewhat informally, narrates how he educated himself and faced racial discrimination. Evans points out race and class as two domineering concepts that shaped the American culinary scene with a focus on individual liberation.

The patterns of the black autobiographical tradition are also visible in contemporary food memoirs written by black chefs. Each chef, through his memoir, contributes to diverse representations of black manhood and stands as a real-life role model. By cooking and writing, black chefs literally and figuratively combat racial inequality and contribute to the reconstruction of black cultural identity. In a way, they promote attentive masculinity concerned about the future of younger black men. As public

figures with their memoirs, they aim to guide the younger generations. To encourage the young black population to chase their dreams, Marcus Samuelsson republished his memoir under the title of *Make It Messy: My Perfectly Imperfect Life* (2015) as a young adult edition. Chef Jeff Henderson published *If You Can See It You Can Be It: 12 Street-Smart Recipes for Success* (2014), a book with a narrative structure that resembles the foundational housekeeping guides, including recipes and business tips for culinary success. Black chefs' advocacy for equal rights indicates the significance of the chefs' political and social role as a figure with public visibility in African American society.

Since food is a significant factor in forming black cultural identity, there is a new interest in the transcultural connections between African American culinary culture and black diaspora food and foodways. Charlotte Boyce, in her article "You Are What You Eat?" posits that food "has been intrinsic to articulations of identity," especially in diaspora cultures, revealing "much about individual subjectivities and collective identities" (284). Moreover, discovering transcultural connections between food and foodways enables black chefs to build links between their subjectivities and black culinary culture. They broaden the scope of black subjectivity through transcultural networks. In his book entitled *Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy uses the twin term Black Atlantic to describe the transcultural position of black subjectivity. As the critic highlights, beyond any national boundaries, black cultural experience exists within the network that draws links between Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and America (2). Accordingly, in their writings, black chefs look for their roots in Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean and reinterpret what they find in the American framework. The chefs use transcultural foodways as an alternative channel to reflect the diversity of the black cultural experience. Building transcultural connections through food and foodways also brings an alternative reading of African American culinary history. Therefore, reading the memoirs from a transcultural perspective can reveal the current politics of black subjectivity and the ambivalence of black foodways in the twenty-first century.

The contemporary memoirs studied in this dissertation demonstrate the multidimensionality of black culinary culture and black masculinity that debunk

monolithic representations of black cultural identity. In this framework, The First Chapter analyzes Michael Twitty's memoir, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (2017). Chef Michael Twitty defines Southern-originated soul food as the primary source of reaching his African American culinary legacy. By writing an autobiographical text, the chef attempts to redefine the image of soul food and black masculinity as dominant concepts of black identity. Twitty identifies himself as an African American, gay, Jewish man looking for his cultural roots. He asserts that cooking in the kitchen enables him to get in touch with the cultural memory of his ancestors. Following an examination of African American soul food and food politics in the South and a discussion of the construction of identity through food and cooking, the first chapter intends to analyze how the chef subverts the stereotypical perception of African American culinary culture and black masculinity and how he claims his subjectivity in the American kitchen as a black, Jewish gay chef. This chapter also dwells upon the intertextual connections between the slave narratives and Twitty's memoir as the author reverses the slave narratives and journeys from the North to the deep South to unbind himself from the invisible chains of traumatic memories of enslavement which is necessary for his identity definition.

The Second Chapter explores Onwuachi Kwame's memoir *Notes from a Young Black Chef: A Memoir* (2019) by centralizing the chef's approach to food and cooking as a way of self-expression. Onwuachi's narrative details the experience of growing up as a black man in America. In times of personal crisis in his youth, he hooks up on cooking as a vital aspect of his family culture and tradition, which becomes his lifeboat to escape from a drug dealer's life. Accordingly, the chapter focuses on how the narration follows the traditional bildungsroman genre as a culinary coming of age story. The chef continues his narrative by detailing the challenges of becoming a young black chef in the fine-dining world. The chef expresses that the world of fine dining is defined by the norms of hegemonic white masculinity that leaves little or no space for chefs from different racial and social backgrounds. Though challenged by the racial stereotypes and social hierarchies surrounding him, the chef manages to establish his self-expression through cooking as a young black man. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates how

Kwame Onwuachi debunks the negative stereotypes attached to the black culinary culture and black masculinity through his performance in the kitchen.

The Third Chapter elaborates on the effects of street culture and prison culture on black masculinity in Jeff Henderson's memoir *Cooked: My Journey from Streets to the Stove* (2008). In his memoir, Jeff Henderson portrays the black male experience in relation to the street, the prison, and the fine-dining world. Like Onwuachi Kwame, Jeff Henderson's story starts with a portrayal of a young black man engaged in street culture, violence, and crime. The narrative also demonstrates how power dynamics among African American men and other minority groups function to construct black masculinity in prison culture. As the chef lays out, the prison kitchen becomes a microcosm where social hierarchy is evident, and the division of gender, class, and race can barely be manifested. However, prison life gives Henderson a chance for transformation; he comes out of the prison kitchen as a chef. This chapter demonstrates how Jeff Henderson deploys the criminal stereotype assigned to the black male identity and reconstructs "the cool pose" as a chef through food and foodways.

The last chapter argues the transcultural status of African diaspora cuisine in Marcus Samuelsson's memoir, *Yes, Chef* (2012). In the memoir, Samuelsson narrates his story of adoption from Ethiopia, growing up in Sweden, and coming to America as a young immigrant chef. The memoir focuses on his experience in the United States as a chef from the African diaspora. Samuelsson tells the story of how he integrated into the African American community from the perspective of an immigrant in the twenty-first century. Hence, his food journey leads him to find his African roots in his culinary travels across America, Europe, and Africa. Thus, the fourth chapter examines African American and African diaspora foodways and their interactions with black masculine identity. The transcultural spirit is also recaptured in Samuelsson's famous restaurant, The Red Rooster, in Harlem, New York. Hilton Als describes his first visit to the Red Rooster with the following words, "Marcus celebrated [blackness] in a different way. Without jettisoning blackness, he introduced blackness to what he knew of the world through his travels in Ethiopia, Sweden, London, and Paris" (9). Therefore, the fourth

chapter also argues how the black chef reconstructs a sense of place through culinary roots and routes.

To conclude, although mainstream culture tends to categorize black subjectivity, culinary culture, and masculinity under one-dimensional stereotypes, African American people have found alternative mediums of self-expression. Among the many forms of cultural expression, black food and foodways have stood out as a source of survival and resistance in African American culinary history. In the twenty-first century, using their visibility in popular culture, black chefs have adopted food and foodways to advocate equality and give voice to the diversity of the black experience. Food and foodways have become an alternative source of self-expression for black chefs to resist racialized and gendered discrimination. Black chefs reconstruct black culinary culture and black masculinity as multidimensional entities in their food memoirs.

CHAPTER 1

REVISITING THE OLD SOUTH: SOUL FOOD, MEMORY, BLACK SUBJECTIVITY, AND MASCULINITY IN MICHAEL TWITTY'S MEMOIR, *THE COOKING GENE*

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth.

.....
And I, who am black, would love her
Langston Hughes, "The South" (1926)

The Old South
With soul food in its mouth
and I, who am African American, must know her."
Michael Twitty, *The Cooking Gene* (2017)

Paying homage to Langston Hughes with reference to his poem, "The South," the lines above mark the beginning of Michael Twitty's memoir, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey through African American Culinary History* (2017). With the book, Twitty aims to develop a broader perspective of African American culinary culture and his personal connection to African American culinary history. By writing a life narrative that foregrounds African American food history and its transatlantic connections with African food and foodways, the chef redefines the concept of black foodways and the position of black cultural identity. This chapter centralizes the idea of African American food culture as an archive of memory. It analyzes how Twitty subverts the stereotypical perceptions of African American culinary culture by articulating a lineage through personal and cultural memory of the Old South. Twitty also intertwines his memoir with politics of race, gender, and sexuality. The chef uses black culinary history and his personal history as an archive to debunk the racist and sexist constructions of black subjectivity. Therefore, the chapter also investigates how Michael Twitty, a black American Jewish gay chef, subverts the prejudiced conceptions of black subjectivity, black food, foodways, and black masculinity as he reconstructs the kitchen as his personal space in the American culinary scene.

1.1. MICHAEL TWITTY AND HIS RECONNECTION WITH THE SOUL FOOD

Michael W. Twitty (1977-) presents himself as a food practitioner, food author, culinary historian, cultural interpreter, and historical chef working on the legacy of African, African American, and Jewish diaspora foodways (Twitty “About”). Twitty writes about the current trends in African American food and African culinary history on his food blog *Afroculinaria*. The website has been awarded as the best food and culture blog by *Saveur*. Along with the articles on the website, Twitty shares his reflections on African American cooking practices on various platforms, including talks, conferences, academic meetings, and cooking practices on plantations, where he explores black food culture in the times of chattel slavery.⁴ Written after seven years of research, his memoir *The Cooking Gene* is the product of the Southern Discomfort Tour Project initiated by the chef in 2012. He won two James Beard Awards for the best food writing book of the year with his memoir in 2018. The memoir is the first published book of a planned trilogy. (Twitty “I’m Gay”). Twitty intends to write two other books, focusing on Jewish food and African American masculinity. The author defines his book in the “Author’s Note” as a narrative stemming from myriad sources:

The Cooking Gene is a work of narrative nonfiction intended to weave together elements of genealogical documentation, genetic genealogy, first-hand accounts from primary sources, the most recent findings of culinary and cultural historians, and personal memoirs. (TCG 427)

The book begins with reminiscences from Twitty’s childhood and continues with explorations of African American culinary history. Twitty traces his personal history and ancestry through food. While the narrating “I” refers to Twitty at two levels, both as a chef searching for his personal history and as a culinary historian, the narrated “I” tells

⁴ In the profit-oriented Southern colonies, the economies of which largely depend upon sugar plantations, African slavery gradually became chattel slavery giving slaves a “chance of minimum existence” (O’Rourke 56). According to Mason I. Lowrance, Jr., a slave was basically “‘chattel property’ of his master” as the slaves had “no claim to any property, no right to vote in any election, no right of inheritance, no right to a legal marriage, no claim for his children, [. . .] no legal or moral redress for any actions taken against him by owner or overseer” (xxvii). If any of the plantation rules were violated, slaves were cruelly punished (xxvii). Black authors and critics often define chattel slavery as a source of collective trauma resulting from the dispersal of black families.

how he developed his culinary style and his culinary journeys to the South, intending to uncover his family history. Twitty's family genealogy⁵ required him to visit the South: "I wanted to know everything about the populations whom I shared genetic affinity. I was looking for some part of the Southern story, the Southern food history in my body" (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 125). The visits connected him with his ancestors, such as his grandmother, who lived on the Southern plantations, and his white great-grandfather, who owned a plantation in the South. As well as documenting his personal history by exploring his connection to Southern food and foodways, the chef also investigates African American culinary history. As a culinary historian, he both retrieves Southern history and sheds light on soul food's cultural and political significance in African American culture. Twitty composes an alternative narrative of black food and foodways and devotes one chapter to the history of corn, cotton, and sugar that had significant cultural and political impacts on black history. To couple African American culinary history with his narrative, Twitty uses the generic hybridity of the memoir genre and enriches his narrative with personal memories, family recipes, personal photography archives of his tour, and historical documents laying bare the politics of food in the Southern plantations.

1.2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SOUL FOOD IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CULINARY HISTORY

Closely attached to African American culture, soul food prompts discussions concerning identity politics and African American history. Whether soul food is healthy or unhealthy and whether it should be associated with Southern American cuisine or only with African American identity are among the central questions that critics refer to in their attempts to distinguish the characteristics of soul food. It is problematic that

⁵ Michael Twitty, in the chapter entitled "0,001 Percent", shares the test results of the genealogy test and genetic ancestry. His DNA shows he is "African 69%, European 30%" (131). His genomic markers have similarities with multiple nations, including West African, Southern African, sub-Saharan African, British, Irish, East Asian, Southern Asian, Finnish, and native American DNAs. By sharing the results in detail, the chef juxtaposes the complexity of black subjectivity with the monolithic narratives that white society categorizes black people under. The results are used to demonstrate that black people belong to "multiple biogeographical populations" (135) and blackness has global and transcultural connections that trespass national boundaries and "ethnic, cultural, racial, and genetic" (135) constructions of identity.

black cuisine is frequently labeled as “slave food, the master’s leftovers, southern food, country cooking, down-home cooking, [...] Negro food” (Miller, *Soul Food* 9) by the dominant culture. As opposed to this negative representation, black authors and historians contemplating black food prefer to define soul food as heritage food that embodies African American identity, history, and culture. In *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine, One Plate at a Time*, Adrian Miller chronicles the development of the black culinary tradition and emphasizes that the origins of soul food start with “The Slave Food Period,” covering the years between 1619 and 1865. The period covers the Atlantic slave trade and the settlements in the Southern plantations. Miller states that “[t]he migration and concentration of slaves in the Deep South was a pivotal moment in the soul food history” (16), adding that starting from that time, African food culture has played a significant role in the development of soul food and Southern food culture. In line with Miller’s view, William C. Whit also states, “From Africa, the immigrants brought biological entities and traditions of food utilization that were new to America” (47). Hence, the Atlantic slave trade was not only about human trade; food exchange also occurred, and new cultivation methods began to be practiced.

Food was a significant component in the Slave Food Period. Robert L. Hall states that African people introduced the cultivation of yams and rice to America. Ironically, the demand for a slave workforce in food production increased the African population in the New World (Hall, “Medicinal Plants” 35). While items like palm oil were used to rub enslaved people to make them look young and healthy, yams, rice, and peanuts were served to enslaved people during the voyages (Hall, *Historical Analysis* 35). Starting from the Middle Passage, black people also used food to protest against slavery. Feeding the enslaved people during the voyages was challenging since they rejected eating the food served on the ships (Miller, *Soul Food* 14). Moreover, they continued to resist slavery through food in their daily lives on the plantations:

[S]laves took opportunities to actively shape their diet and resist the master’s hegemony. They pilfered from the master’s food storage areas. They sneaked additional food out into the fields and cooked it when the overseer was not closely watching them. [...] Daily life on the plantation, with respect to food, was certainly a cat-and-mouse game, and while the planter-controlled access to food, slaves were proactive about improving their own nutrition (Miller, *Soul Food* 26).

In this regard, soul food critics also value soul food as a symbol of black resistance and surveillance. Primarily, unveiling the history of soul food provides the untold stories of enslavement in the Old South. So, it is necessary to delve into the stories of the South to make them visible in American history.

Following the Emancipation, during what Miller terms “The Down-Home Cooking Period,” the black people who migrated from the South to the North felt the urge to create a sense of home resembling the “Old Country.” However, reestablishing familial ties and making sense of home was not easy for African Americans since slavery had dissolved domestic relations and the concept of home. At this crucial point, food comes to the fore as a vital element that helps preserve the idea of having a home and community. During the period, black-run restaurants started to showcase in cities and provided a familiar taste and place of comfort for black migrants; in Miller's words: “Eateries offered an oasis — a place where you could get familiar food in a familiar setting — albeit in alien locale” (Miller, *Soul Food* 39) As Miller asserts, food and shared culinary traditions functioned as a language to “re-create home and to build a community” (8). Therefore, food is an essential cultural element of recreating, sharing, and commemorating. Accordingly, Dodson and Gilkes define food as a “mythopoetic” element in the cement of the community formation: “[i]n moments of eating; the community is reconnected, African antecedents and New World parallels are unconsciously nurtured, kept alive, and included” (520). Although urban life meant encountering harsh economic conditions, scarcity of food sources, and housing problems, sharing food contributed to building a sense of community and bonding during the period.

With the Civil Rights Movement, soul food gains a political stance in the second half of the twentieth century. Until then, the term was common in black churches in the South, referencing spiritual life in the first half of the twentieth century. Celebrations, holiday events, and black church gatherings were places where the best food was showcased (Miller, *Soul Food* 31). At the time, the church was still the leading center for social gatherings. Church food, therefore, was given an elevated status. In the black churches, black people got together and shared whatever they had on the table and called it

“feeding the soul” (Miller, *Soul Food* 42-43). In the 1940s, the word soul was also associated with music. Aside from its spiritual connotation, the word evolved to have a more secular meaning with this shift.

Soul food started to have political connotations in line with the Black Rights Movement of the 1960s. The 1960s was a time when black people desired to reconnect with their African roots. This social shift was visible in music, attire, hairdos, and food (Miller, *Soul Food* 44). Miller defines the period that starts from the 1950s as the “Soul Food Period,” during which food is adapted creatively to support political activism (*Soul Food* 260). By cooking, black women working in the domestic service at white houses and older women born into slavery contributed to the cause (Edge 24). Men and women sold pound cakes, potato pies, pork chops, and rice to raise funds (Edge 23). Fried chickens and cakes were served during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and lunch counter sit-ins at stores and schools contributed to the political struggle (Edge 17). Soon, sit-ins became a popular form of resistance in different places like restaurants in the South, and food became a symbol of equal rights. Black college students protested white-only lunchrooms with sit-ins at the counters (Miller, *Soul Food* 43). They demanded their right to have equal access to food. The consciousness about food grew with the growing pride in self and race (Harris, *High* 206).

During the Soul Food era, food was served as a political metaphor to unite the black community fractured by migrations (Miller, *Soul Food* 260). As well as the private home kitchen tables, local black restaurants became gathering places for the activists. “The food that flourished in these restaurants during the 1960s and 1970s came to be known as soul food because it fed the spirit as much as the body on the long march to institutionalized equality” (Harris, *High* 201). Food activism ignited the soul of civil disobedience (Harris, *High* 206). Within this paradigm, soul food was considered an essential aspect of African American resistance and survival at the heart of the African American tradition (Harris, *High* 212). In other words, food was used as a social denominator to raise racial consciousness and pride. According to Helen Mendes, the author of *The African American Heritage Cookbook* (1971), soul food not only represents African American identity but also strengthens the sense of community:

Soul food unites African Americans not only with their people's history but with their contemporary Black brothers and sisters around the world. Food is a symbol of love; today, as never before, Blacks are learning to love their color and each other. It is appropriate that when they and their friends meet that they should share this new-found love— Soul food. (85)

In the given excerpt, Mendes discloses that soul food evolved as an essential means to embrace and comprehend African American history and culture. Therefore, many black food authors treat it as a building stone in constructing African American identity. Studying the history of Southern American cuisine may make the personal and collective narratives explicit (Edge 6). These cultural narratives matter as they demonstrate the characteristics of the South and reveal the intersections of cultural identity, gender, ethnicity, and subjugation (Edge 6). In keeping with Edge's reading of African American identity, in Twitty's narrative, black cultural memory and personal memory are linked to disclose the close relationship between the history of soul food and the contemporary black culinary culture. Michael Twitty, a culinary historian, attempts to fulfill the unrecorded history of African American cuisine. His visits to the Southern plantations established the grounds to create a counter-history of black culinary culture. His reading of African American culinary history unearths and compiles food-related historical records, documents, recipes, and familial memories from plantations. Twitty, a culinary historian, investigates the plantation kitchen and treats African American food and foodways as historical artifacts. By offering a wide range of information on culinary history, the chef questions the established hierarchies surrounding African American food and foodways.

1.3. THE OLD SOUTH AS AN ARCHIVE OF MEMORY

The urge to delve into food history necessitates working on personal and cultural memory. Memory is closely connected to the sense of self, as it plays a central role in constructing identity and the autobiographical self (Rowlands 127). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson emphasize the substantial position of memory in life narratives: "The life narrator depends on access to memory to narrate the past in such a way to situate that experimental history within the present"(22). Memory is closely connected to the sense of self, as it plays a central role in constructing identity and the autobiographical self (Rowlands 127). With such a frame of mind, Twitty defines his relationship with food

and cooking as “an act of memory” that enables him to reconnect with the past. His research on the history of soul food prioritizes the coupling of the past and the present in African American culinary culture. The chef defines cooking as preserving “names, memories, places, and people” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 82). Twitty’s memoir, in this regard, can be identified as a work in which autobiographical memory functions as an agent to reconstruct black cultural memory. However, it was challenging for Twitty to reach the collective memory of the South: “And nobody talked; slavery was nightmare fuel and trauma food. Nobody wanted to talk and talk about their lives in slavery, and those who did only gave the barest of the details. [. . .] The ‘Burned Country’ was not the only enemy of our collective memory; we were” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 84). Twitty believes that although it unleashes sensations too painful to endure, the Old South must be examined to understand black identity completely. First and foremost, the South signifies the place where African Americans settled, and African American identity was forged. For Twitty, the South represents a rich resource for black history and culture:

The Old South has a history of black America, with its roots driven from Africa. Thus, it also embodies the history of Africa with Africans who contributed to the development of the Southern economy. The Old South is a forgotten Little Africa, but nobody speaks of it that way. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* xii)

While it is frequently depicted as an undesirable place to look back upon due to traumas of chattel slavery and blatant racism, for Michael Twitty, the Old South is the primary source to examine to define personal and communal identity thoroughly. In the book’s preface, the author describes the Old South as a place “where people use food to tell themselves who they are, to tell others who they are, and to tell stories about where they’ve been” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* xii). As the description suggests, Twitty develops a different approach to the Old South as a food historian and culinary researcher. He believes what remains on the plantation is the direct source that needs to be unveiled and analyzed to truly understand chattel slavery and the origins of soul food. The chef acknowledges that the history of the Old South preserves the foundations of black identity, culture, and memory. Adrian Miller underlines that “the migration and concentration of slaves in the Deep South was a pivotal moment in soul food history” as the South consisted of “more than 46,000 plantations, each inhabited by more than twenty slaves” (*Soul Food* 16). Chef Twitty also aims to shed light on the history of the soul food culture with his journeys to the plantations. Combined under the title of

“Southern Discomfort Tour,” the journeys enable Twitty to revive cultural and culinary memory:

In 2011, I remembered that I had started to forget where I came from. I became aware of my own apathy and amnesia. I had a responsibility to study the generations before me and use that to move forward. So I worked with my then partner to craft a crowdfunding campaign called the “Southern Discomfort Tour.” My goal was for us to travel the South looking for sites of cultural and culinary memory while researching my family history and seeing the food culture of the region as it stood in the early twenty-first century. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* xv)

Twitty’s memoir compiles his planned visits to the South to tap black cultural memory and record those parts of black history that contribute to the black literary tradition. Watson and Smith identify the function of memory in life narratives that focus on collective remembering as to preserve, pass and construct collective memories “to reconstitute fragmented communities” (26). In this respect, the Southern Discomfort Tour cannot be regarded simply as a personal journey through which the chef acknowledges and positions his subjectivity in line with his family history. By constructing a collective narrative of the South, he contributes to reconstructing African American cultural memory. Twitty uses the journey motif as a significant trait of black autobiographical writing.⁶ In black literary tradition, the journey from the South to the North is interpreted as a substantial movement for initiation “on a metaphorical level, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge” (LeSeur 76). In Twitty’s memoir, the journey also provides a symbolic passage for the narrator’s identity quest. In his journey from the North to the South, he seeks spiritual and intellectual freedom that echoes the black narrative tradition of slave narratives. Resembling the narrative structure of slave narratives, Twitty’s journey helps him to be liberated from the

⁶ Black literary tradition of autobiography becomes popular during the nineteenth century with slave narratives (Watson and Smith 120). From over six thousand works, Frederic Douglas’s pioneering work, *Narrative Life of Frederick Douglas: An American Slave* stands out as a signature work, the narrative style of which had a great impact on African American fictional and nonfictional narratives. Harriot Jacob’s narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is yet another significant example (Watson and Smith 120). Following a similar narrative pattern, slave narratives begin with a short autobiographical briefing of the author’s familial roots, place of birth and white masters. The narratives depend upon the memories of the narrator who highlights the dehumanizing effects of slavery and the challenges that the enslaved people had to endure on the plantations such as scarcity of food, poor living conditions in the cabins, merciless slaveholders, and masters, broken familial bonds. The narratives continue with the personal awakening of the ex-slave and how s/he resisted slavery and eventually escaped from the South in search of freedom.

burdens of the past, traumatic experiences, and archived memories of slavery, both on a personal and collective level. Escaping from the South in search of freedom, black people left their cultural legacy together with traumatic memories. Therefore, Twitty feels the urge to revisit the South to “remember” his family history and recover the black culinary heritage left behind. The chef starts a journey from the North to the South and sets out for a journey of *discomfort* to reconstitute African American culinary history.

In the article “The Generation of Postmemory,” Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as “the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only using the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (106-07). Though Twitty is a member of the third generation, he encounters the transmission of trauma and post effects of enslavement as part of his personal memory. Thus, he is urged to unearth his personal and generational history in the South. In this respect, food, another transgenerational entity, enables Twitty to trace his past. The chef chronicles his familial and culinary roots in the plantation through foodways. In her article, Hirsch continues her discussion with a provoking question by asking whether a specific memory can be transformed into action and resistance (104). In Twitty’s narrative, the memories embedded in the plantation remain an archive for him to come to terms with the past and amnesia. As Twitty once more elucidates, the primary aim of his visit to the South is to recover from personal amnesia: “I was becoming someone fading from who I was and where I came from, just in time for the rest of the world to catch amnesia with me. I began to have the urge to see the places, imagine the ancestors whose lives I could barely know otherwise, and taste the food” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 11). With such motivation, Twitty endeavors to reanimate the souls of his ancestors by cooking soul food on the plantation tours. The practice gives him the ideal venue for remembering, reimagining, and rewriting African American food history. Thus, as an answer to Hirsch's question, by writing an autobiographical work that heavily depends upon personal and generational past, Twitty both resists the traditional representation of black history and looks for “the repertoire’

of embodied knowledge absent from the historical archive” (Hirsch105). Thus, he envisions transforming the fragmented black identity through African American culinary history.

Twitty defines remembrance and reconstruction of the past as fundamental for African Americans to understand the roots of black identity (Twitty, “The Persistence of Memory” 176). Diane Barthel-Bouchier also identifies tangible heritage as a marker of collective memory. She remarks, “[t]angible heritage whether small as a simple artifact or as large a whole cultural landscape, serves to provide physical evidence of the past. [. . .] This attachment can be relatively untouched by time or may have undergone significant changes” (221). As so, food remains a tangible heritage that kept the African American community united despite the geographical shifts. Therefore, he defines soul food as “memory food,” through which black community can recover collective memory. In the following lines, the chef asserts that narratives of soul food enable black people to connect with stories of their ancestors and their untold history:

And as for soul food—the cuisine of racial distinctiveness, the memory cuisine of the great-grandchildren of the last generation born in slavery—would it become a cuisine of ethnicity, a bridge to the past, and a road to new possibilities for black food of the future? (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 403)

As the passage above suggests, black food and foodways can be translated as a “tangible heritage” of the collective memory transmitted in time. In this regard, Twitty defines soul food as “heritage cuisine” concerning a shared culinary history. Twitty believes uncovering food history would tell a lot about African American identity. Therefore, by building an empowering lineage with soul food, he releases the memory of his ancestors.

Food, as an archive of memory, carries the collective history, in the African American case, the times of enslavement. Twitty emphasizes that his food heritage would enable him to repair the links that have been destroyed and are necessary to reconstruct African American culinary history. Food encapsulates black people’s “ancestral legacy,” and as the author describes, it is a way to feel “your way into the past” and heal the scars of the past that are “gateways” for “individual and group survival” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 21). Resonating with Twitty’s stance, in her book, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and*

Imagination (2002), which focuses on memory works, British film scholar Annette Kuhn draws attention to how pieces of cultural memory interconnect with personal and collective histories and lay bare the agencies:

[M]emory work makes it possible to explore the connections between “public” historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, class relations, national identity and gender, and “personal” memory. In these cases, histories outer and inner, social and personal, historical and psychical coalesce, and the web of interconnections that binds them is visible. (5)

The critic draws attention to the significance of documenting personal memory to reclaim history and further argues that memory works have the potential to remember the things that were “buried deep in their past and long-forgotten” (6). Similarly, Twitty believes that re-memorizing the black experience and foodways during enslavement is necessary to speak the unspeakable. He regards making culinary history as a way of reclaiming the identity and history of the underprivileged groups/minorities:

And nobody talked; slavery was nightmare fuel and trauma food. Nobody wanted to talk and tell all about their lives in slavery, and those who did usually only gave the barest of details. [. . .] The “burned county” was not the only enemy of our collective memory; we were. We have inherited precious little, thanks to shame, economic discontinuity, and fear. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 84)

In his journey to the South, Twitty investigates how the kitchen turned out to be a place of harassment for black women and young black men. The kitchen was designated as a heterosexual domain. The invented image of a black cook is often a black female figure working in the white masters’ kitchen during the enslavement. As Doris Witt articulates, “the mammy cook has been invoked to help constitute ‘whiteness,’ ‘masculinity,’ and ‘heterosexuality’ as normatively unmarked, interarticulated identities” (14). The dominant culture imposed the stereotypical figures of a mammy cook, like Aunt Jemima, who happily and devotedly cooked for and nourished the white household. In actual fact, however, the kitchen was a menacing space that witnessed enslavement. However happy the stereotypical image of a black cook is, it is an undeniable fact that the kitchen of the white household was a space of violation. Twitty draws attention to the kitchen as a space of collective trauma in the times of slavery:

The kitchen in slavery was a sinister place. The kitchen is where we acquired the eyes of our oppressors, their blood and bones and cheek-blush. Perhaps more than any other space during slavery, the kitchen was the site of rape after rape, sexual

violations that led to one of the more unique aspects of African American identity—our almost inextricable blood connection to white Southerners. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 107)

As indicated in the passage above, the real struggles the black people went through are not reflected in the images created by white supremacy. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the history of the plantation kitchen to reach a coherent self. Although it is a place of trauma during the times of enslavement, the kitchen is, at the same time, a place that nourishes the body and the soul. Black feminist critics have aimed to empower black women by building a bond between black mothers and daughters through their shared history in the kitchen. In the article “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens,” Alice Walker defines the black women’s gardens as a place of female wisdom, creativity, shared history, and healing space (51-52). Likewise, as opposed to its dark visage, Twitty regards the plantation as a source of ancestral wisdom and a space of healing.

By discovering the food, foodways, and the transatlantic voyage of African food, including rice, yams, beans, and corn, Twitty informs his reader about how the food and foodways adapt to the new land underlining the vital role food plays in black resistance and survival. To further his argument, the chef also draws a link between the soul food, the black body, and cultural memory. According to him, the history of soul food parallels the history of the black body, which also biologically and culturally carries, respectively, the history of Africa, the Middle Passage, the settlements in the South, and the history of slavery, resistance, and freedom. Since he traces the cultural rotation of the food through Africa to America, food history contributes to the chef’s personal effort to follow the family history. Twitty builds a link between food and the body and regards food as part of corporeal existence. For Twitty, food, first and foremost, nourishes the human body. Black people carry the wisdom of their ancestors through their bodies since they managed to survive by feeding their bodies the right way under harsh conditions. Twitty exemplifies how the remembrance of a specific type of food carries personal and cultural memory concerning the first solid food he consumed as a baby:

My first solid human food was cornbread mashed up in potlikker, the stock left over from a pot of Southern greens. That’s the oldest baby food known to black

people in America, going back to the days of slavery. [...] I grew up with a grandmother who would make cornbread several times a week and take any that was left over the next day, crumble it into a glass of buttermilk, and eat it out with a spoon. The glass streaked with lines of buttermilk and crumbs grossed me out. But when I asked my grandmother why she did it that way, she replied, without explanation, “At least I didn’t have to eat it from a trough.” Although I wouldn’t know this until many years after she died, my grandmother was referring to a very real thing. When enslaved children on large plantations were toddlers, they were put in the care of an elderly person, usually, a woman whose job was to keep them out of trouble and feed them at midday. The midday meal was usually placed in a trough, the likes of which a horse or hog might use to feed from, using the same mixture a hog might be fed, or worse. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 199-200)

Like most black babies, Twitty’s first solid food, crumbles of cornbread juiced with vegetable stock, signifies food’s position as a cultural and political agent. Thus, the solid food created out of cornstarch for black babies reflects the hardship of finding food for black people and the culinary skills of black people with its nutritious ingredients, which contributes to the cultural significance of corn and green leaves in African American culinary history. From this vantage point, Twitty considers soul food produced in the home kitchens as part of the historical memory that black people continue to keep in their physical bodies.⁷ Thus, food history and the black body connect the living and the dead. The author affirms that the primary purpose of his writing about food is “to dig deeper into [his] food and family roots and routes [. . .]” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 12). As so, he follows the relationship between body and cultural memory through “the stories of [his] own bloodline and body” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 12). In Twitty’s view, the body becomes the direct place that witnessed slavery: the black body carries the cultural memory of African American people. Since the food consumed becomes the human body, stories about soul food reveal the alternative history of the black identity. This dynamic relationship between food and the body, carrying history, memory, and wisdom of the ancestors, demands a new definition of the connection between black foodways, black body, and black subjectivity.

⁷ The chef draws attention to the biological connection between food and body and the fact that the food consumed becomes part of the physical human body. He conceptualizes an alternative understanding of cultural memory, emphasizing the connections of history, culture, and human genes. In this respect, he regards the food consumed as a capsule that carries the history of the black body.

Twitty interprets cooking in the plantation kitchens as a ritual to reconnect with history. With such a performance, he aims to couple African American history with black foodways to propose a culinary history that genuinely belongs to African American people. Watson and Smith locate rituals as “part of the texture of memory evoked in the life narrative” through which people gather “to remember, reenact and reaffirm” (22). Twitty’s culinary performance in the Southern plantation kitchen reframes the conditions during the time of enslavement. It enables him to trace black subjectivity on multiple layers, including personal memory, African American cultural history, and culinary culture. With his memoir, Twitty attempts to reconnect with his black culinary roots, which function to collect elements of personal and cultural memory.

My entire cooking life has been about memory. It’s my most indispensable ingredient, so wherever I find it, I heard it. I tell stories about people using food, swap memories with people, and create mnemonic feasts out of that conversation with this fallible, subjective mental evidence. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 11)

Twitty’s memories of food open a path before him to move beyond personal memory to collective cultural memory, enabling him to share “mnemonic feasts” with the black community. He emphasizes the significance of ‘sharing’ stories as it is through such stories that the untold piece of African American culinary history is reconstructed. Similarly, the recipes he presents serve to reconnect with the collective past. For instance, he introduces persimmon beer, an African American beverage dating back to enslavement. Twitty learns this recipe from his grandmother and serves it as a festive drink that reminds him of the African American experience. The chef builds transcultural links between African and African American foodways with the history of the beer, as its fermentation technique and flavor remarkably resemble African beer produced with a similar procedure in West Africa. The transcultural history of persimmon beer contributes to the recovery of African American culinary history.

Similarly, Twitty places food as an adjunctive material that replenishes personal memory. As a converted Jewish black cook, he explicitly emphasizes that Jewish culinary culture provided him with the necessary grounds for reuniting with history, tradition, and memory, inspiring him to create a lineage through food. The chef points out that in both Jewish and African American culinary cultures, food functions as an archive of memory:

Jewish food and black food crisscross each other throughout history. They are both cuisines where homeland and exile interplay. Ideas and emotions are ingredients—satire, irony, longing, resistance—and you have to eat the food to extract that meaning. The food of both diasporas depends on memory. One memory is the sweep of the people’s journey, and the other is the little bits and pieces of individual lives shaped by ancient paths and patterns. The food is an archive, a keeper of secrets. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 70)

Twitty is mainly interested in and inspired by the Jewish culinary culture with its roots in ceremonial cooking. He interprets the traditional feasts as cultural texts: “Jewish food is a matter of text expressed on the table. Entering the Jewish foodscape changed my life” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 70). He further articulates his admiration for Jewish culture as it has the power to reinterpret and renew itself through food and folk culture (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 70). According to the author, intertwined with myths and stories, food protects history, both in Jewish and African cultures:

In Jewish culture, much like continental African and African Diaspora cultures, food is a mnemonic device. Whether it’s matzo or hoecake, our civilizations value symbolic food and passing down foods and food memories from generation to generation, and with the stories as history pushes us across the globe. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 72)

As Twitty posits here, food is a mnemonic device in diaspora culture that helps preserve history and personal stories in Jewish and African American cultural memory. Food, as an archive of memory, carries the collective past, in the African American case, the times of enslavement. As such, it can provide a connection between history and memory. The chef points out that in both Jewish and African American culinary cultures, food functions as an archive of memory:

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Food functions like an umbilical cord that connects the chef with his roots. As he expresses by remembering the traditional ways of cooking, he reconnects with the collective wisdom of the past and African American cooks. Seeing himself in the picture of “African American culinary past” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 67), the chef

attempts to “re-member” himself to African American culinary history as a black Jewish chef.

1.4. ALTERING THE ABJECT POSITION OF BLACK FOOD AND FOODWAYS

Depending upon the relation between the ethnic group and the mainstream ideology, the cuisine of immigrant groups is treated by the dominant culture in two ways; either the food of the ethnic group is adapted and consumed, or it is undesired and rejected as a political agent. As Adrian Miller points out, “[d]epending upon the motive, ethnic food labels can benignly describe ‘the exotic things’ that a group of people eats or malignantly stigmatize the strange food of foreigners” (*Soul Food* 46). While elements of Asian and Mexican cuisine like sushi or taco have been transformed to take their place in the American palate, black culinary habits are often stigmatized and othered in line with racial politics. Within this context, black food might be identified as part of the abject identity. From a psychoanalytical perspective, in her well-known essay, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), Julia Kristeva makes the founding definition of the abject as:

A powerful feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep away oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace us from inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous, and also the feeling of the impossibility of doing so— whence the element of crisis which the notion of abjection carries with it. (Kristeva 135-36)

Kristeva defines the abject as a powerful notion that is fundamental to defining the boundaries of identity. To determine the self, it is necessary to define the “abject.” The abject possesses the unwanted, external notions separated from the self. Therefore, it symbolizes the undesired qualities of the identity desired to be kept distant. Kristeva further elucidates that an item of food may represent the abject. The food as the abject is described as filthy, ugly, or waste (2). Appropriating Kristeva’s definition of the abject, Dorris Witt argues that white culture defines black food as undesirable and unwanted, articulating the othering of black identity about the food (85). The culinary habits of black people are often stigmatized by white society and associated with filth and

disgust. Witt strengthens her argument by giving an example of a hog: black people were to consume the waste parts of the hog meat during enslavement. The lower parts of the hog, which are unwanted, undesirable parts of the pig, became associated with black food culture in time (Witt 86). This type of abjection not only reflects the white perception of the food consumed by the black community but also creates an ambiguous stance with respect to determining black cultural identity.

The concept of abjection can also be traced in Twitty's memoir. The memoir features a rich reading of abjection regarding food, race, and masculinity. As Miller explains, different from other ethnic cuisines, soul food is regarded as 'poverty cuisine' and did not gain popularity in mainstream culture (*Soul Food* 261), which shows not only racialized but also class-based dimensions of African American foodways. In the memoir, Twitty expresses his acceptance of the stereotypical perception of black foodway by narrating how he rejected black cultural identity and culinary heritage as a child: "I have to confess two things about me as a little kid: I hated soul food, and I didn't really like being black" (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 25). Twitty's food loathing exposes the political narrative that associates food abjection with black identity. As evident in Twitty's lines, food is a political agent with a role in the construction of selfhood and indicates the internalization of the abject position. Likewise, in the narrative, the refusal of traditional food is closely tied to shame and self-hatred, concomitant to the centrality of being black. The chef's loathing of the traditional food at home during his early childhood can be explained with reference to Kristeva's ideas concerning the link between food and abjection: "[f]ood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (2). Soul food possesses an undesired image, and, as Twitty puts forward, "In the black community, arguments and stigmas about soul food as slave food continue to this day" (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 355). This view also resonates with Twitty's stereotypical perception of soul food in his childhood memories. Accordingly, as a child, he identifies soul food with slave food; "I did anything and everything to avoid the smell and savor of "slave" food. And I didn't really understand why people ate that shit. Literally, I didn't get it—nobody explained to me the cuisine of want until much later" (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 34). Parallel to black identity, soul food, in this paradigm, represents blackness with its "smell and savor."

Twitty condemns traditional food and, as a child, he rejects consuming it since he directly associates it with being black. In fact, by dismissing soul food, he leaves the assigned black identity attached to food.

In mainstream culture, several food stereotypes condemn black eating habits by associating the food consumed with grease and filth. As Miller exemplifies, the images of black people eating excessive amounts of black-eyed peas, fried chicken, and watermelon reinforce “weird food” stereotypes (31). In Twitty’s case, this negative attachment also leads to the rejection of consuming soul food, which continues well into adulthood. As he reveals, his rejection of consuming soul food is rooted in unpleasant racial connotations: “I didn’t like eating watermelon, and to this day I confess I will not eat it in front of white people—” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 33). Even as an adult, Twitty’s feeling uncomfortable while eating watermelon presents the strength of racial stereotypes and negative connotations attached to black eating habits. Along with the rejection of soul food, Twitty mentions that as a child, he was eager to adapt to the white eating culture, symbolized by hamburgers as opposed to cornbread; “my palate and nose were soon tainted by fast food, and I had no need for most of the African American heritage cooking that surrounded me” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 2). In this way, Twitty exposes the white hegemonic stereotypes that influenced his perspective of African American heritage cooking as a child and adult by demonstrating his problematic relationship with traditional food.

One of the significant reasons for Twitty’s food loathing as a child is the stereotypical and racialized image of soul food. In this respect, studying nutrition unpacks “how culture, food and power interplay” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 410). Discussions on soul food reveal the ideologies where issues of food, race, and class intertwine. In her book, *Black Hunger*, Dorris Witt discloses the idea that analyzing food practices is a way to observe the “othering” of blacks (80). To frame the dynamic relation between soul food and identity, in her own words, “the dialect between soul food and selfhood,” she highlights the idea that black identity and, in a similar fashion, black food is under-acknowledged and “othered” within a racial, political agenda (81). Accordingly, one of the focal points of *The Cooking Gene* is the link between the racialization of soul food

and African identity. Twitty identifies soul food as “the most remarked and most maligned of any regional or indigenous ethnic tradition in the United States” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 5). Eventually, the one-dimensional representation of African American heritage cooking mirrors the position of African American subjectivity. The chef highlights how starvation and poverty were attached to blackness in mainstream media: “To be African was to be naked, dirty, covered in flies, and starving on TV. For the cost of a cup of coffee, I was but little removed from the starving Ethiopians and beleaguered South Africans” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 121). However, these negative illustrations of Africa do not reflect the reality of the African continent. Twitty underlines that black people adapted African agricultural knowledge and cultivation techniques to raise cotton, rice, and sugar in the South.

Nevertheless, the black experience is associated with backwardness. In the memoir, Twitty draws parallels between the abject position of black culinary culture and the undervaluing of the black contribution to the Southern economy. The injustice black people face as regards cultivating and growing food is spotlighted in the following excerpt:

The Old South is a forgotten Little Africa, but nobody speaks of it that way. Everything black folks gave to the aristocracy, and plain folks became spun gold in the hands of others—from banjos to barbecue to Elvis to rice and cotton know-how. Everything we black Southerners kept for ourselves, often the unwanted dregs and markers of resistance, felt like markers of backwardness, scratches of the uncivilized, idolatry, and the state of being lost. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* xii).

The chef also critiques historical texts displayed at plantation museums since they depict African Americans merely as servants (Twitty, “Paul Dean” para. 7) and black labor power simply as “unskilled labor.” Twitty once more underlines that African food and foodways brought by the enslaved people shaped the palate on the plantations. (Twitty, “Culinary Injustice” 7.43). However, black culinary culture is either situated in the abject position or, as the chef explains, culturally appropriated and introduced as Southern cuisine (Twitty, “Culinary Injustice” 7.53), stripped from its racial connotations. Through appropriation, the best parts of the soul food culture are popularized under the umbrella of Southern cuisine, and the undesirable aspects are attributed to black foodways.

Twitty expands his argument to emphasize the intersections of soul food, race, and class. To highlight racial inequality in terms of food policy and hunger, he opens a discussion on culinary injustice. In one of his talks, he defines culinary injustice as; “what happens when the descendants of historically oppressed people have no sovereignty over their culinary traditions and essentially go from a state of sustainable production and ownership to a state of dependency, mal/undernutrition” (“Culinary Justice” 13.10). In his speech, Twitty emphasizes that black people still live under poor conditions. Despite their rich contribution to the Southern American culinary culture, they have no claim on the land. By revising food history, he demands acknowledgment of the actual contribution black people and black cooks made to Southern American cuisine.

To inspire future generations, Twitty underlines the healing power of African American culinary traditions with a focus on the multilayered definition of food in African culture: “Our food was never just food. It was medicine and a gateway to good fortune, and a mystical lubricant between the living and the dead” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 365). Twitty indicates that in African culture, food possesses the spiritual power to transform the body and soul. It also provides a space to connect with the collective wisdom of the ancestors. Thus, as a culinary historian, he urges black people to reclaim their culinary traditions, which he believes would provide reconciliation and healing: “This is about food being a tool for repair within the walls of black identities. When you are oppressed, how you survive your oppression is your greatest form of cultural capital” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 411).

1.5. ALTERING THE OBJECT POSITION OF BLACK SUBJECTIVITY AND MASCULINITY IN THE KITCHEN

In the African American context, the stereotypes concerning food and race also reinforce a similar dichotomy regarding gender. Black identity is often problematized by hegemonic or ideal masculinity that privileges white heterosexual males and marginalizes any alternative type of masculinity. As Doris Witt clarifies, white, rational, self-interested, autonomous, heterosexual male defines qualities of “the subject” of

Western humanism (80). As opposed to white subjectivity, black manhood is objectified, and any alternative form of black masculinity is considered abject. This position attributes negative characteristics to black manhood and makes it harder to define the boundaries of the black body and subjectivity. As Miller puts forward, different from other ethnic cuisines, soul food is regarded as ‘poverty cuisine’ and did not gain popularity in mainstream culture (*Soul Food* 261), which shows racialized and class-based dimensions of African American foodways. Twitty comments upon the abject position of being a black boy in American society with two words from Russian and German:

Toska: Russian. According to Nabokov’s translation of the Afro-Russian author Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, it is “a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause . . . a longing with nothing to long for.” *Fernweh*. Back to German, “a longing and homesickness for a place you have never been.” These words explain my childhood weirdness. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 66-67)

The longing and anguish expressed in the passage are due to the abject position of black subjectivity. The “defined I” in the quoted text suffers from a sense of unbelonging and craves acceptance of his subjectivity. The chef also narrates the sensation of being in an abject position with a Hebrew word meaning “to be at a narrow place.” The kitchen enabled Twitty to overcome his feeling of in-betweenness and construct his self-expression.

In the introduction to his book, *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*, Darieck Scott contributes to the debate concerning black masculinity and abjection from a fresh perspective. The focal point of his essay is the intersections of race and gender in the formation of black subjectivity. The critic, with reference to Franz Fanon, defines blackness as “a ‘problem’ rather than an [. . .] ethnic heritage” (14), and he furthermore puts forward that blackness is a product of “a form of abjection” (13). Scott proposes that to be liberated from this abject position of black subjectivity, one may emphasize “the queer position of black identity,” emphasizing the multilayered structure of black identity. He believes queerness about blackness possesses an opportunity to subvert the imposed stereotypes (14) and potential for “identity formation” (15). Putting Scott’s notion of the queer into practice, Michael Twitty rejects the imposed racial and gendered stereotypes. He presents an

alternative black male experience by prioritizing his being a “... black, gay, Jewish” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 14) chef by cooking in the kitchen.

Twitty articulates an alternative performance of his gendered identity by building an alternative connection with food and cooking. He portrays the kitchen as a secure space for self-expression. He points out the immense significance of the kitchen in his life as follows: “The kitchen was my crib” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 26). By this, the chef emphasizes the significance of the kitchen as a medium through which he reconfigures his subjectivity in relation to race, gender, and sexuality. Starting from his childhood, Twitty enjoyed working harmoniously in the kitchen with his maternal grandmother. His profound relationship with his grandmother and mother gives him an alternative connection regardless of the stereotypical categories targeting black men. Commenting upon the stereotypical perception of the relationship between black men and their mothers, bell hooks asserts that the mother's dominance in the black community is criticized since it results in the emasculation of black males (hooks, “Black Masculinity” 88). As opposed to the imposed image, Twitty, through food and cooking, volunteers to build a strong relationship with the female lineage of his family.

Moreover, this interaction in the kitchen guides him to find his self-expression. In the memoir, the chef presents the home kitchen as *chora/womb*⁸ regarding African culinary culture. In Twitty's wording, the kitchen is “a ritual space, an altar, a face of spirits, usually a female entity representing motherhood and nurturing, the pot itself a kind of womb” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 13). Twitty's description of the kitchen as a spiritual, nurturing, reformative place enables him to redefine the relationship between black American men and their mothers. Like the womb, the kitchen provides him with the essential grounds where he adopts food as a language to reflect the queer position of black identity. Besides, the kitchen functions as a narrative space where Twitty goes back and forth to rediscover pieces for his self-image:

⁸ Rather than a place of the heterosexual order, the kitchen functions as a semiotic space without the existence of the symbolic order of the father. In Twitty's narrative the kitchen can be read as a semiotic place where he reconstructs his subjectivity as a black gay man. The kitchen, like *chora/womb*, protects and nurtures his subjectivity. Since there is no linear understanding of time in the kitchen, cooking turns out to be a healing, recreative activity for Twitty.

I bring all of this into the historical kitchen with me: politics and race, sexuality and spirituality, memory, brokenness, repair, reclamation and reconciliation, and anger. I bring in moments from my own childhood and wince sometimes at the feelings of mourning and pain I get from them. Moments of shame and failure, moments of incredible love and affection. (*Twitty, Cooking Gene* 23).

Along with his close connection to women in his family, Twitty sustains the visibility of his subjectivity as a queer black man. Twitty expresses his subjectivity about his position as a queer black man in the kitchen. He discussed his sexual orientation with his family for the first time in the kitchen: “Our kitchen was also the place I came out to my mother at the age of sixteen. The kitchen table, to us, was a place of worry, argument, and resolution, and I had no idea where else we should have the conversation” (*Twitty, Cooking Gene* 40). As indicated in the quotation, the family kitchen provided him with the space for self-expression.

By expanding his food networks, Twitty establishes bonds with people with similar concerns. It is important for queer people to build a friend zone, referred to as a family. The queer family creates an alternative to the traditional heteronormative family. Twitty feels the loss of his mother’s friendship at the time he was eager to reveal his gender identity as she does not permit him to speak about gay issues on media as she utters, “Why do you always have to be the fucking oddball of the family? Why? You lost your best friend” (*Twitty, Cooking Gene* 42). On the other hand, the family culture in queer communities is an empowering one fulfilling the acceptance of identity. Within this family, the queer individual can perform subjectivity instead of fulfilling the abject position in the heteronormative family. He defines the family he builds for himself concerning the German word, *familiensinn*: “*Familiensinn*: German, the feeling and sense of family connection. I longed for it. I cultivated it despite the pain it has often caused me—family is not easy to seek or create” (*Twitty, Cooking Gene* 66). As he exemplifies in the memoir, on one of his tours, he comes to regard a woman who keeps her family recipe box as someone belonging to his own family: “She and I were both gay, both Southern, both Jewish, both converts, both avid cooks: there was immediate *familiensinn*” (*Twitty, Cooking Gene* 78). Twitty expresses that it is difficult but life-changing to seek and create the “sense of family connection” (*Twitty, Cooking Gene* 66). By building his community, he subverts the idea of the traditional heteronormative family and celebrates multiplicity.

In the memoir, Twitty defines the primary pillars of his culinary style by identifying himself as a “black, gay, Jewish man” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 14). The chef rejects the coupling of gay identity with good cooking since this concept implicitly reinforces the hegemonic understating of queer masculinity. The image of the good cooking gay man is closely linked to representations of queer men lacking masculinity (Connell, *Masculinities* 143). Twitty expresses his confusion since he does not fit in this affiliation: “In fact, I was very confused because I envisioned myself based on my father and my grandfather, and I didn’t see myself as passive” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 41). As such, the chef rejects constructing his culinary style on qualities attributed to queer men regarding cooking and the kitchen. He critiques the stereotypical idea that endorses queer men as cooks:

[A]uthors like Shahrazad Ali said black men were being ruined by confusing their roles. Books like hers alleged that cooking made black men gay and that black gay men could cook better than women [. . .] that was something that really impacted how I viewed myself in the kitchen. I knew I was different, but I didn’t connect cooking to the idea of being gay. (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 41)

As highlighted in the excerpt, Twitty rejects the cooking-gay-man stereotype endorsed by hegemonic masculinity and insists on his stance in the kitchen as a black man. In the following passage, he also emphasizes that he would instead relate his position in the kitchen with the male lineage of his family: “I had so many men who cooked in my family that the idea of cooking as gay was not part of my world. I hated that stereotype; I didn’t see myself as a woman or even a woman and didn’t think cooking particularly belonged to women or men” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 41). By that, the chef redefines the traditional heteronormative definitions of cooking and masculinity.

Twitty demonstrates progressive black masculinity with his kitchen performance and relationship with food and cooking. Athena D. Mutua defines progressive black masculinity as “performances of the masculine self that rejects notions of domination and validate and empower black humanity” (7). Regardless of the masculine identity constructed upon power and competition, Twitty asserts that he was content with his books; “I was confused because I wanted to be “the man,” yet I didn’t engage in a lot of masculine pastimes. [. . .] I had books, and I felt like my engagement with them, and my knowledge was my masculinity” (Twitty, *Cooking Gene* 41). Moreover, in an interview,

he expresses his discomfort about the stereotypes imposed upon black manhood that exclude his intellectual style: “But apparently if you’re big and Black and male, and you don’t have a football in your hand, but have a book in your hand instead, you’re worth nothing.” (“*them*”). For Twitty, the body and fame dichotomy creates discrimination within the food community. Twitty observes that he has little visibility both in black and gay media due to his body image as a “big” black gay man, something which contradicts with the classy, popular chef image (Twitty “I’m Gay”). In a magazine interview, Twitty affirms that what he did in the cooking circles would be much worthy of attention only if he were close to the popular gay chef image imposed by the media (“*them*”). He draws attention to the ideal chef image set by the media with the following words: “If I was a cisgender, heterosexual-looking, gay-appealing naked white man with a chiseled body who was cooking, I’d be the darling of gay media” (“*them*”). The fixated image of an attractive white gay cook also depicts the hegemonic notions of masculinity disregarding black queer subjectivity.

In conclusion, Twitty’s culinary journey to the South combines his personal history with the history of soul food and contributes to the reconstruction of an alternative narrative of African American culinary history. As a food historian, he explores his personal and black cultural memory through food since food and foodways encapsulate black cultural memory. Twitty reframes the plantation kitchen as a site of personal memory, black culinary history, familial wisdom, and collective trauma. Twitty uses his traveling memory to unveil the legacy of African American culinary culture in the South rather than to suppress the traumatic experiences in African American history. By composing a memoir that compiles the micro-histories of food items, family memories, and historical documents, he creates a “counter-culinary narrative.” Twitty also portrays a progressive black chef image. His understanding of the home kitchen and familial bonds rejects the stereotypical understanding of African American manhood. By defining his subjectivity and masculinity through his reconnection with culinary roots and routes, Twitty reflects the multidimensionality of black cultural identity.

CHAPTER 2

CLAIMING A KITCHEN OF HIS OWN: BLACK CULINARY IDENTITY IN KWAME ONWUACHI'S MEMOIR, *NOTES OF A YOUNG BLACK CHEF*

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

.....
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now

Langston Hughes, "Mother to Son" (1960)

It is a fact that culinary culture has become part of popular culture and generated a social fervor through a variety of TV shows, cookbooks, food blogs, and food presentations on social media accounts. With the influx of foodie culture as part of popular culture, chefs have also gained social visibility and are credited as celebrity figures. One of those famous chefs is Kwame Onwuachi, who gained popularity on the American culinary stage at an early age. His memoir, *Notes of a Black Young Chef* (2019), is his coming-of-age story that narrates the chef's challenging culinary journey from the Bronx to the world of fine dining. As can be assumed, it was a challenging journey since the chef had to dispel racialized and gendered stereotypes that are imposed on black manhood and the black chef image. Accordingly, following a reading of Onwuachi's work with reference to black bildungsroman, this chapter attempts to analyze how the chef constructs black culinary style by centralizing the intersections of popular food culture, black culinary culture, and black masculinity. The chef dislocates the assigned gendered and racial identities upon him and claims his own space through his culinary performance. He transformed his restaurant into a culinary stage where he

could display the multiplicity of black food culture through his culinary style depending on his African American, Nigerian, and the Caribbean culinary roots. In the end, the chapter claims that Onwuachi, as a black chef, recasts culinary performance and reconfigures the traditional celebrity chef image to promote social transformation and racial equality for the black community.

2.1. THE TRACES OF BLACK BILDUNGSROMAN IN ONWUACHI'S MEMOIR

Kwame Onwuachi is an influential black chef in the popular American scene. Onwuachi grew up in the Bronx and spent two years in Nigeria in his paternal grandfather's village as a teenager. After a couple of years of selling drugs, the young man decided to transform his life through cooking. Upon completing his culinary education at the Culinary Institute of America, Onwuachi worked at various kitchens across the United States and developed his culinary style. The young chef gained public attention following his appearance on *Top Chef* as a competitor in 2016. Onwuachi wanted to use his public visibility as a celebrity chef to become a prestigious restaurateur. However, his first high-end restaurant, Shaw Biju, closed in three months and was censured for the high costs. Onwuachi's efforts resulted in his favor with his second restaurant, Kith/Kin, which brought him appreciation and publicity. The chef followed the traces of his Afro-Caribbean roots in Kith/Kin's kitchen, attracting the multicultural community in Washington. Following his success at Kith/Kin, Onwuachi was regarded as one of the most successful young chefs in the contemporary American culinary scene. His name was listed among the most successful "30 under 30" by Forbes in 2019 (Hansen). The same year, he accepted the "Food and Wine Best New Chef Award" and the James Beard "Rising Star Chef Award of the Year" for 2019. Upon receiving the James Beard award, the chef paid tribute to black history and black culinary ancestors before him: "Fifty-four years ago was when the last restaurant was integrated, and Jim Crow was lifted. And here I am, my ancestors' wildest dreams" (qt. in Hansen). In his award speech, Onwuachi emphasizes that it has not been easy for black American cooks and chefs to gain visibility on the American culinary stage. Therefore, as a black chef with visibility, he reclaims black people's contribution to American culinary history.

Kwame Onwuachi's memoir *Notes of a Black Young Chef* (2019) can be read as a culinary coming-of-age story. Therefore, the traditional narrative style of the bildungsroman can also be traced in Onwuachi's memoir. As a subgenre of the novel, a bildungsroman is identified with its thematic focus on developing the main character's growth into manhood from boyhood. In her analysis of African American and West Indian novels in relation to the European bildungsroman tradition, Geta J. LeSeur identifies specific characteristics distinctive to black bildungsroman. The critic believes the portrayals of black children are different from those of their white counterparts "because of the facts of Black history alone, the trappings of class and color, and the general circumstances of home, family, and community (LeSeur 21). This thematic pattern in the black bildungsroman can also be traced in Onwuachi's memoir. The chef provides details of his childhood concerning issues of blackness, class, and black masculinity.

In *Ten s the Age of Darkness: Black Bildungsroman* (1995), LeSeur starts her analysis of African American bildungsroman by stating that "Childhood, as presented in the African American bildungsroman, is depressing, like America's Black history" (4). Likewise, Onwuachi, in his memoir, highlights how challenging it was to build personal resilience due to the racial and gendered codes that surround him starting from the early years of his life. Schools are identified as the primary places that contribute to the individuation process of the characters in a bildungsroman (23). However, rather than a place of individual growth, school as an institution turns out to be a place where black children start to experience racial discrimination. bell hooks confirms that the educational system often fails to educate the black poor and blames black children for their failure (*We Real Cool* 37). One can also observe in Onwuachi's memoir that starting from school, black children are often challenged by the negative labels attached to their identity. Onwuachi narrates the discriminative attitude of teachers towards black boys as follows:

Many of the teachers, however, were middle-aged or older white women, and they approached us — ten-year-olds — like we were dangerous. They wielded their power like prison wardens. And in their fear, I saw reflected back an image of myself I hadn't seen before. At the same time, I saw the power my friends possessed, how they could manipulate using fear. As our teachers reprimanded us and, when that didn't work, suspended us, I saw how the kids around me dealt with

this anger and frustration. They turned their faces to stone and deadened their eyes like those of statues. They became hard and menacing, and as I saw it then, that hardness meant strength (Onwuachi, *Notes* 59)

As emphasized in the quotation, the teachers at school, as the power holders, assign stereotypical roles to the black kids by labeling them as dangerous. Including Onwuachi, the black kids respond to this racist attitude with anger which they associate with power. During childhood and adolescence, black males struggle with social and psychological challenges in establishing identity, identifying the self, building up and fostering stable relationships, and fighting against racism (White and Cones 132). Onwuachi also describes how he internalized the labels attached to his identity as a black child: “Soon I had cemented my reputation as a troublemaker, and I thought If the suit fits, wear it” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 53). As Onwuachi puts forward, it is difficult to act out of the boundaries of the attached stereotype since the power holders like teachers regard it as normative. Onwuachi underlines that at schools, young black boys are identified as troublemakers: “As has been shown over and over again, black kids are more likely to get into trouble for the same behaviors white kids engage in, and I certainly could feel the story that I was a problem taking shape around me” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 54). As Onwuachi expresses, black masculinity is preset, predetermined by the white values, so they could only act as “problem kids” in the white culture.

Onwuachi’s portrayal of his childhood proves that it is difficult to resist the imposed stereotypes of black manhood. In mainstream culture, black masculinity is often associated with violence and crime (hooks, *We Real Cool* 32). It is challenging to “escape the imposition of racist stereotypes” (hooks, *We Real Cool* 40). Onwuachi also narrates how easily he indulged in violence, crime, and drugs when he engaged in street culture. He underlines in the following lines that violence was a standard part of everyday life in the blocks: “Violence, actual violence and the threat of it, permeated Webster. I saw my first murder when I was sixteen” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 92). Black boys use violence to maintain social control and to feel powerful (hooks, *We Real Cool* 46). In the memoir, Onwuachi gives insights about how black boys experienced power through violent acts: “[t]hat fight had awakened something in me, namely power. In a way I had never felt before, I could finally control my world, and the mechanism to do that was violence” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 90). As a result, Onwuachi associates power with

violence: “They became hard and menacing, and as I saw it then, that hardness meant strength” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 59). Since he could not express himself on an alternative platform, it was not difficult for Onwuachi to be inclined to criminal acts that are normative in street culture. Soon, he was part of the drug-selling gang; “Saying you sell drugs is like saying you sell cars” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 95). As the chef emphasizes, the acts of violence and crime shape black masculinity.

The journey motif is yet another feature of the bildungsroman that can be traced in Onwuachi’s memoir. LeSeur underlines that in African American tradition, the male hero, who often has distinguishing qualities, starts a journey to transform his life: “In the traditional Black form, the hero [. . .] sets out on a journey through the world, obtaining guides who represent different worldviews” (18). Recognizing that she had lost control over his actions, his mother deemed it necessary to send him to Nigeria. Although it was not a volunteer journey, Onwuachi’s visit to Nigeria greatly impacted his understanding of racial consciousness and black subjectivity. Living with his grandfather in Nigeria as a young black boy helped Onwuachi gain a broader perspective by recognizing the sense of wholeness in black identity. W. E. B. Du Bois describes the concept of double-consciousness to define the feeling of “twoness” that African American people experience since they constantly evaluate their subjectivity from “the eyes of the others.” For Du Bois, “[o]ne ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (xiii). In Nigeria, Onwuachi understood the damaging effects of the double consciousness in his life in America. In Nigeria, not only did he internalize the Nigerian food tradition, cooking ways, and appreciation of the everyday food ritual, but he also recognized that he could feel proud of his African legacy during this visit:

We were just boys, students, some of us better than others. What we weren’t were problems. At the time, I couldn’t put into words or thoughts exactly why I felt the way I did — lighter than usual, more joyful than I was in the Bronx — but now I know that this was it. I was fundamentally not seen as a problem first and a person second. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 71)

His journey to Nigeria provided Onwuachi with a new perspective to reevaluate his understanding of black subjectivity and cultural identity. As opposed to devaluing

himself with double consciousness, he experienced what social inclusion and social acceptance meant in Nigeria. For instance, at school, rather than being charged for their blackness and masculinity, black boys “were just boys.” (71). Through such a journey, as a child, Onwuachi had a chance to internalize his black identity and felt the concept of belonging to a place free from the burdens of the assigned identity to black boys in the United States: “what it meant to have space, space at home, space to be who I really was without being penned in by what people thought I was” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 75). Eventually, his journey to Nigeria led to an individual transformation: “Since I had returned from Nigeria, I had stopped using the N-word at all. I was proud to be black, proud to carry the name Kwame Onwuachi, an African name, a black name. I was nobody’s Negro, and I was nobody’s nigga” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 83). However, upon his return to the United States, he quickly adapted to the street culture again: “Returning to the Bronx felt like stepping back onto a stage and into a character I knew well. Ibusa was a stage too, of course, but with a different cast, a different audience, and very different scenery. [...] But as soon as I got back home, virtually from the moment I landed, that old rebellion flooded back” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 78). Onwuachi emphasizes how difficult it was for him to reject the stereotypical roles assigned to black subjectivity as a young man. Nevertheless, Onwuachi breaks this circle by constructing a culinary identity.

LeSeur emphasizes that in African American tradition, different from the European, the historical and social factors that shape the individual’s identity dominate the black bildungsroman (21). Although he benefited from the guidance and wisdom of his grandfather in Nigeria, in America, Onwuachi felt a lack of guidance in his life as a black child, “I haven’t waited to be summoned for my big moment by a tap on the shoulder from a mysterious, benevolent stranger. It doesn’t work that way where I’m from. You make your own opportunities where I’m from” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 7). Like other young black men around him, the lack of a guiding figure in his life urges him to become a self-made man. However, it is also challenging for black men to achieve this ideal:

I’d been kicked out of more schools than most people ever attended. I’d gotten into college but expelled because I couldn’t kick my ambition to be a drug kingpin.

Growing up, I'd had near misses with violence, near misses with the law, near misses with almost everything that moved. Some friends had been shot, others had died, many had ended up in jail, not just because they were black or poor — which is close to an indictable crime in America but because they had gotten themselves into the types of hairy situations that end in lengthy sentences or full stops. To escape, perhaps, I had always kept pushing forward, applying constant pressure to the future in the hope that some avenue would open up. So far it had worked, which is why I found myself at the CIA. Eventually, though, I knew I wouldn't be able to find an exit in time. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 156)

As can be deduced, Onwuachi achieves the self-made man image by constructing his culinary identity. Josée Johnston (et al.), in their analysis of celebrity chefs' identities, adopt the term "the self-made man" as a culinary image that reflects the *culinary persona*.⁹ As the critics suggest, a self-made man refers to the "life-changing, food-related narratives of upward mobility" (17). In that sense, Onwuachi's story foregrounds the archetypal self-made man tradition by narrating how Kwame from a poor background, reaches culinary success and his American Dream. Chefs from marginalized racial and classed groups, specifically black chefs, favor portraying their life through the "self-made man" narrative (18). The celebrity chefs who adopt the "self-made man" as a culinary persona centralize the 'rags-to-riches' stories in their life narratives. Rather than artistic abilities and culinary talent, the narrative focuses on the struggles that challenged the chef through his culinary journey (18). In his memoir Onwuachi also indicates that his success story follows the traits of the classical 'rags-to-riches' story: "In the story, I told myself at the time, I had tunneled through adversity and narrowly avoided bad breaks to emerge triumphant at the apex of fine dining. It was a simple rags-to-riches tale, a narrative as smooth and solid as an on-ramp. I had, in short, come to believe not only in myself but in the Kwame story I told others" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 248). As a result, one may conclude that the rags-to-riches reinforce the American ideals such as hard work and individualism at the end of his coming-of-age story. The chef articulates his culinary style upon the foundational archetypes of

⁹ In their comprehensive research entitled, "Making change in the kitchen? A study of celebrity cookbooks, culinary personas, and inequality," Johnston, Rodney, and Chong use culinary personality and culinary persona as two key terms to define celebrity chefs' culinary identity. While *culinary personality* is adopted as a term to refer to celebrity chefs as individuals, *culinary persona* refers to the self-constructed images of celebrity chefs publicized through various media including social media, TV shows, blogs, books, and cookbooks. The critics analyze the culinary personas that male celebrity chefs represent under several subheadings, namely, homebody, home stylist, pin-up, chef-artisan, maverick, gastrosexual, and the self-made man.

American identity. Presenting his coming-of-age story, he claims his space as a black chef in the popular American culinary scene.

2.2. THE ROOTS OF KWAME ONWUACHI'S CULINARY STYLE

There are two main strains that form Onwuachi's culinary style. The chef prioritizes the home kitchen as a creative space to experiment with food and cooking. Like Michael Twitty, Onwuachi is inspired by his mother's home cooking and defines the kitchen as the core of house life: "The kitchen, as I said, was the heart of this home but not because of the food. It was the family spirit that gave the room its magnetic power" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 50). The chef foregrounds his mother's home cooking during his childhood and his memories of cooking together with her in the home kitchen as the initial steps of his culinary career: "These flavors—all of them—are my first language, even if the syntax and grammar have evolved with time" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 13) and regards his mother's cooking as foundational in his culinary style: "There was always something bubbling on the stove or cooking in the oven. She, like me, gravitated there to find a moment for herself" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 26). Black mothers are stereotypically portrayed as central figures limiting young black men from self-achievement.

Contrary to this stereotypical image, Onwuachi's depiction of his mother as a role model represents an alternative model for motherhood, subverting the conflicting portrayal of the black mother-son relationship. Starting from his childhood, Onwuachi benefited from his mother's experience and efforts in the kitchen and her position in the catering business. They constructed an alternative relationship through food by cooking together in the domestic sphere and at the food market.

The second reformative place that provided a new perspective to Onwuachi's understanding of food and cooking was the kitchen of his grandfather's house in Nigeria. During his visit to Nigeria, Onwuachi gained an experience in African culinary culture. Observing and helping his aunts in the kitchen, he learned more about Nigerian flavors and ways of cooking (Onwuachi, *Notes* 67). Different from the masculine tradition, Onwuachi celebrates the domestic roots that nurtured him. Johnston Leer

emphasizes that the dominant image of the white male chef is often portrayed as separate from the boundaries of house and home cooking in a professional setting (Onwuachi, *Notes* 17). In this respect, what distinguishes Onwuachi's narrative from the white chef memoirs is the description of the domestic kitchens. He portrays the house kitchen as a source of inspiration in contrast to the competitive homosocial structure of professional kitchens. The chef indicates that his connection to both house kitchens constructs the kernel of his culinary success. This alternative connection to the home kitchen challenges the traditional white chef narrative that often depicts the industrial kitchen as a battlefield.

The chef also defines the house kitchen as a resort that enables him to feel the family spirit to reform himself during the chaotic years of his early youth. His emphasis on the house kitchen as a transformative place is what distinguishes Onwuachi's understanding of food and foodways. While he felt the urge to transform his life as a drug-dealing college student, he made a radical change in his life by deciding to become a chef. Cleaning up his house kitchen and cooking at his student apartment is a metaphor for this personal transformation. The chef narrates how he made this life-changing decision in the following lines:

It was right after the 2008 election, and on CNN some commentator was talking about how historic the victory was. The commentary was cut with footage of Obama, all smiles and hope and change. I had never felt so alone or so rootless. I was hungover, strung out, and depressed. When I looked at what my life had become, at who I had become, I felt a total estrangement. Something about seeing Obama on the television and, when I turned the set off, seeing myself in the reflection, brought my situation into clear focus. I felt the world was moving forward without me. For the past year the closest I had come to cooking was mixing the Nutcrackers in my dorm room. That morning, though, I felt an irresistible need to make something, I didn't care what. I raided my kitchen to see what, if anything, I had. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 107)

The political victory of Obama forced Onwuachi to question his subjectivity as a black man. Cooking in the kitchen of his student apartment encouraged him to transform his life and make progress as an individual. As he emphasizes through cooking home food, he felt secure when "[t]he smells of home filled the house" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 108). Leer explains that the white masculine chef image is often built on the chef's professional connection to cooking as a source of making a profit (Onwuachi, *Notes* 19). Onwuachi

prioritizes the home kitchen as a place of personal growth, self-realization, and reformation. With such a shift in the meaning, he challenges the traditional depiction of the kitchen and culinary masculinity that maintains the norms of hegemonic masculinity.

Onwuachi also underlines that he built his culinary style upon the foundations of African American culinary history and culture. He draws attention to the connection between the contemporary American culinary culture and African American history. The chef points out that contemporary black subjectivity cannot be thought inseparable from African American culinary history:

Like any black man in America, I've felt the effects of enslavement through time. Though for me the shackles have been figurative, they're nonetheless very real. In ways spoken and unspoken I bear the offspring of the wounds, welts, and scars whose victims are memorialized beneath me. Like them, I live with the contradiction between what this country says it is and what it really is, as my mother and father have, as my brothers and sisters have, and as my ancestors have too. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 9)

Undeniably, the traumatic experience of enslavement significantly affected contemporary black cultural identity. In this respect, Michael Twitty defines cooking as an act of remembrance. From a similar perspective, Onwuachi approaches cooking as a way to reach black cultural memory and culinary culture: "It's that I'm cooking for all the people, and to tell all the stories, told and untold, remembered and forgotten, housed in the floors below me" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 8). The chef finds himself responsible for reclaiming the significant roles black chefs and cooks played in American culinary history:

As for the thousands of black and brown chefs—dubbed cooks, domestics, servants, boys, and mummies who were kept out of restaurant kitchens or overlooked within them—they were beyond consideration. Their work, like them, was invisible. Invisible men and invisible women cooking invisible food for invisible children. So I get that it must be confusing for those who criticize me as an ingrate upstart—how can I pay dues to people who don't exist? (Onwuachi, *Notes* 8)

Onwuachi, as a black chef, prioritizes the visibility of black cooks and chefs before him and demands the visibility of black people's contribution to American culinary history. He further emphasizes that, by cooking, he contributes to the recognition of black

cooks, chefs, and culinary history: “We must realize that those few stories told on the floors below stand for the many that aren’t. In my own way, I am trying to do the same through cooking. Keeping their stories alive” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 11). The chef defines keeping black history alive as his responsibility. Onwuachi starts his memoir with a reference to a special event at the Museum of African American History and Culture.¹⁰ For the event, he planned to blend African American and African culinary styles in the menu; the chef expressed that his food at the table would embody the stories of black chefs and cooks before him along with his own:

The purpose of this museum is to resurrect the dead, to honor their lives, to celebrate their progress, to remember their suffering, to never forget their stories. This building is an argument that these stories, traditions, this suffering, this history, matters. In three weeks, I will open my restaurant and with it, I’ll have a chance to add my voice to that chorus. To prove that my story, like the millions of voices behind and beneath me, matters. As I push open the kitchen door, the last of my smile fades and I get back to work. I’m standing on stories, and this is my own. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 21)

Onwuachi expresses that African American History Museum is one of these sights where the multidimensionality of African American experience is visible. The chef also presents his culinary journey as an extension of black chefs’ stories by cooking in the museum kitchen. Onwuachi uses food to reflect the transcultural elements of his culinary style through the food on the table. Each meal served at the table is an alternative expression of intersecting aspects of black culinary culture. Therefore, the food chefs put on the table not only bridges the past and present but also present and future since the food represents the dynamics of these intersecting identities that are alive, constantly changing, and becoming. While the guests taste the black chefs’ food, they also observe and interact with the artists who reflect the dynamic rhythm of black culture through the food.

Nevertheless, unlike Michael Twitty’s approach, Onwuachi is not eager to define his culinary style in relation to soul food tradition: “I have absolutely nothing against that good ol’ southern food. It’s what I ate down in Baton Rouge, what I ate for most of my

¹⁰ Built in 2000, the Museum of African American History and Culture, located in Washington DC, is a well-respected place where on certain occasions, black chefs are invited to cook concerning African and African American culinary traditions. As a black chef, Onwuachi was also invited to create an African American-themed menu for a special event in the Museum.

childhood. But it isn't me; it's simply what the world expects of me. And I would never submit to that" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 68). The chef points out several reasons why he does not prefer to base his cooking on the Southern black tradition. Initially, he wants to go against the stereotypical, monolithic representations of black culinary culture: "The belief that African American cuisine couldn't rise above the Mason-Dixon line was exactly the sort of stereotype I wanted to destroy. Though southern cooking had played a huge part in my own upbringing, it wasn't the entire story" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 231). In Onwuachi's understanding, centralizing southern food as the primary source of black culinary identity would be limiting since black chefs develop their culinary identities benefitting from myriad sources.

2.3. BLACK CHEF IN THE WHITE WORLD OF FINE DINING

In the contemporary cultural scene, restaurants and food attract more public attention than malls, sports, and other cultural events. Going to fine-dining restaurants with chef flags has become a social event in the United States (Zukin xii). In line with this social inclination, Onwuachi describes his culinary style as part of this global restaurant culture: "It's a fine-dining, modern American, globally influenced restaurant that tells my life story through food" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 232). In the memoir, the chef highlights the challenges of claiming a space as a young black chef in fine-dining restaurants. He stresses the centrality of hegemonic masculinity and white male supremacy in the fine-dining world. Onwuachi claims a place in the fine-dining restaurant culture and challenges the typical understanding of a black chef cooking traditional Southern/soul food. However, white dominance in the fine-dining world does not allow chefs from different racial backgrounds to feel a sense of belonging:

Fine-dining lines are as white as the tablecloths that cover the tables and the patrons that sit around them. And, from my experience, being the only black guy on the line makes you stick out like a minor note on a major scale. No one lets you forget you don't belong. Though it's gaining more exposure now, the kitchen is about as immune from racism as it is from sexism. I've felt this firsthand in every single kitchen I've worked in, from the closet-sized belly of a cleanup ship to the gleaming stainless-steel show kitchens of three-Michelin-star restaurants. Sometimes racism takes the form of ugly words and actions. Other times it remains unspoken, communicated by hostile looks and secret snickers. But the most corrosive form, and often the hardest to address, is not being seen at all. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 15)

The chef draws attention to racism and sexism as two domineering concepts that shape the power dynamics at fine-dining restaurants. In *Gender and Power* (1989), Connell states that unequal social structures can be understood by examining social interactions, practices, and institutions (92-93). The context of social networks can be adopted to understand the intersections of race, masculinity, and food in the fine-dining world. As the chef puts forward, even when working at well-known fine-dining restaurants, he is reminded that he does not belong to the fine-dining world due to his racialized and gendered identity. However, racial discrimination is not always visible. Onwuachi puts forward that he is frequently exposed to racist remarks in the fine-dining world, explicitly or implicitly:

The most insidious kind of racism isn't always being called the N-word. At least that's shameless enough to get you fired. It's the unspoken shit, the hard-to-prove, hard-to-pin-down, can't-go-viral day-to-day shit. It's being passed over, time and time again. It's having opportunities you know you earned never materialize. It's that no matter how hard you work, it's never good enough. It's not even seen. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 298)

The chef identifies the invisibility of black chefs and cooks as a manifestation of racism in the kitchen. The power relations in the kitchen impose the dominance of white men as the controlling power in the kitchen. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity is a tool for maintaining organizational control (107). He defines the organizational control as “the ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideas and define morality, in short, to assert hegemony, is also an essential part of social power” (107). Unequal power dynamics in the kitchen show that the white men possess the organizational control, and as a privileged group, they set the terms in the kitchen. Onwuachi's experience in the restaurant kitchens also reflects practices that prove the dominance of white hegemonic masculinity through which the subordinate position of people of color is fortified. To illustrate this, Onwuachi refers to the racist jokes in the kitchen hidden under the cloak of friendship. In one instance, at T.J., a well-known fine-dining restaurant, a coworker teased him by saying:

‘No black people eat here anyway.’ He laughed, and I could tell he expected me to laugh too. This clearly racist aside was either a plank to walk or a bridge to connect us. If I acted as offended as I felt, the label of ‘difficult’ or ‘politically correct’ or

really just “problem” would be even more deeply imprinted on me. If I laughed, not only would I be betraying myself, but I’d be giving Flint a pass. I kept my face still as the night and nodded. It was not a gesture of acceptance. It was not a gesture of resistance. It let Flint know that I recognized his move for what it was: a racist jab masked as a gesture of friendship. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 209)

The kitchen is not the single space where Onwuachi encounters racist remarks. The social norms based on the standards of white hegemonic masculinity control black men’s lives in the institutions and the social sphere. Connell states, “[t]he relations of power function as a power structure” (107) through which cultural patterns and social structures are produced. Onwuachi draws attention to the criminal potential attributed to young black men as a challenge he encounters outside the restaurant kitchen and hinders his motivation to work. He narrates a police intervention while returning home at a late hour due to the night shift at the restaurant:

Before asking me for my driver’s license and registration he asked if I had any weapons in the car. I could tell he wasn’t used to seeing a black kid in his town. The fear came off him like stink from roadkill. Black male. Early morning. Suspected perp, natch. That I was returning from a night shift didn’t cross his mind. The latest generation of black kids who have to soft-shoe their way around authority with this deferential bullshit. Yes, sir. No, sir. I felt like screaming ‘Don’t you have anything else better to do than pull me over for a broken taillight at two in the morning?’ On the other hand, I wasn’t going to give this guy an excuse to beat me up or worse on the side of a backcountry road. (Onwuachi, *Notes* 170)

As illustrated in the quotation, black men are victimized as potentially dangerous men that necessitate police control. As a black male, Onwuachi recognized his vulnerability and how easy it is to be labeled as a criminal. Mutua expresses that “the ideology of white supremacy is deeply written into the conscious and unconscious patterns of people’s social behavior and the very systems, institutions, and structures of American society” (*Progressive* 7). Onwuachi’s experience as a black chef also indicates how challenging it is to be a black chef in the American culinary scene when one’s individuality is systematically hampered by gendered racism.

Onwuachi uses food as a vehicle through which he resists racism in the culinary world. He uses his culinary performance to expand the framework of black culinary culture. His performance in the kitchen can be read about gender and racial performativity. In *Gender Trouble* (2006), Judith Butler treats gender as a cultural construction reproduced through the performative repetition of norms. She delineates gender

performativity as follows: “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (32). Butler also presents gender performativity as a linguistic and theatrical performance (xxvii) and accentuates that since gender is culturally constructed, it is possible to transform the meaning of stabilized norms surrounding it (11). Based on Butler’s theory, numerous critics in their articles look for ways to transform gender performativity into a racial discourse and interpret the construction of racial subjectivity concerning racial performativity. In her book, *Racial Imperatives*, one of those critics, Nadine Ehlers, deploys Butler’s formulation of gender performativity and elucidates that race is also performative. In her exploration of racial identity, Ehlers asserts, “All racial subjects are formed through the compelled and never-ending recitation of norms associated with particular categories of race” (23). As a black chef, Onwuachi rejects the assigned gendered and racial identities that label him through his culinary performance. Therefore, the theoretical framework of performativity can be adopted to understand Onwuachi’s culinary performance since it opens arrays for a discussion focusing on the intersections of black subjectivity, culinary culture, and masculinity.

Coupling performance with performativity to analyze the black performer’s identity, Petra Tournay-Theodotou maintains that the white audience expects the black performer to embrace “the assumed identity” assigned to him on the stage as in real life. The critic further explains: “In a racist environment, the performer’s assumed identity is therefore seen as his ‘true’ identity. White America demands these eternal repetitions of its fantasy for its confirmation of the stereotype and for its security” (96). Like black performers, black chefs are also expected to confirm the culinary stereotype of the black chef. Even in the fine-dining culture, they are expected to adapt and serve the typical menus reflecting Southern culinary culture or soul food. For instance, when he opened his first restaurant, Onwuachi received direct criticism from a food critic who emphasized that a black chef would not be accepted as a professional unless he cooked within the framework of the African American culinary tradition:

The dinner was amazing, absolutely amazing,” she began. “It’s clear you know how to cook.” I waited as she paused for an uncomfortably long time, searching, it seemed, for what to say next. “The problem is, Kwame, and I hate to say it, but

America isn't ready for a black chef who makes this kind of food." "What kind?" I asked. "Fine dining: velouté. What the world wants to see is a black chef making black food, you know. Fried chicken and cornbread and collards. (222)

The young chef was given the message that he would not be accepted in the fine-dining restaurant culture unless he embraced the assumed identity that predetermines the chef's culinary style. As Tournay-Theodotou stresses, this stereotypical categorization has been deliberately imposed on black chefs "for security," aiming at preserving the hierarchical power relations between white chefs and chefs of color. However, such an affirmation would not reflect Onwuachi's culinary style. He regards the stereotypical performance of a black chef cooking typical black food and being appreciated by the white world as an "ugly play of degrading black culture for the benefit of white people" (231). As indicated in the quoted text, Onwuachi cannot express his true self within the borders of this limited, predefined black culinary identity; therefore, he looks for different ways of self-expression.

Onwuachi aims to destroy the stereotypical images of African American foodways through his performance in the kitchen. Accordingly, his initial goal with his first restaurant, Shaw Bijou, is to deconstruct the classical understanding of high-end restaurant culture. To start with, his first restaurant was in a unique, historically significant place: "the Shaw neighborhood was founded as a free slave encampment in the 1800s. It had been home to D.C.'s black cultural elite for decades. It was a hotbed of jazz and art in the 1920s and 1930s, a sort of Harlem of the South" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 234). By choosing Harlem as the location for his first restaurant, Onwuachi wanted to create a bond between Harlem's artistic and cultural legacy and his food as a channel of self-expression. As a black chef, Onwuachi regards food and foodways as an alternative medium to present his life narrative artistically.

In the memoir, cooking gradually evolves into a performance with the development of the chef's culinary style. While the restaurant and the kitchen become the stage to assert his subjective position, food becomes the script that narrates Onwuachi's culinary journey as a young black chef. In their evaluation of the intersections of food and performance, Lindenfeld and Langellier posit that shaping daily life practices, "Food preparation, consumption, and the narratives we create about and through food are, by

their very nature, performative” (1). Onwuachi envisions his food as an extension of his identity: “This was my food, an extension of who I am, and so I cared, probably more than I ever had before” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 215). Therefore, he looked for ways to share his life narrative with his audience in the restaurant.

To achieve this, he adopted the restaurant’s menu as an open book that reflects the milestones of his rags-to-riches story. He expresses his motivation to design such a menu with the following words: “I was attempting to execute at a much higher level than I ever had, and at the same time create something much more personal than I’d attempted before. The menu I settled on was truly autobiographical, and he adds that this attempt might ‘quite literally’ be read as ‘my life story told through food’” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 213). Onwuachi centralizes food as an autobiographical element and shares it with his audience: “ [. . .] my life story could be translated into food and that audiences, guests, diners, wanted to consume both. I had found a way to convert through food, not just the warmth and love of my upbringing but also the struggles I’d faced. Whatever my next step was, I knew I needed to capitalize on this” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 230). To achieve this, he garners the food on the menu with personal, autobiographical touches reflecting his culinary style. Each dish on the menu is served with a preface telling “the Kwame story” related to that specific dish (Onwuachi, *Notes* 248).

With such an inventive style, Onwuachi attempted to subvert the high-end restaurant culture in two ways. First and foremost, treating food as a self-narrative enables him to promote the multidimensionality of his identity as a black male chef. At the same time, he challenged the common understanding of classical, French-oriented, high-end restaurant menus where the dishes are presented isolated from their stories. Sandra M. Gilbert asserts that “restaurants are in some sense theatrical arenas, with meals at upscale venues a favored form of bourgeois entertainment, in which diners perform not only for their own tablemates but also for others in the room, even the servers and the *maître de*” (76). With Shaw Biju, Onwuachi transforms the high-class habit of having dinner and adopts culinary performativity to reflect on his personal story. The kitchen,

in that sense, evolves into an expressive space where the chef constructs his culinary performance.

The failure of his first restaurant due to high pricing did not discourage Onwuachi from leading a new path, although he received bitter criticism from the famous gastro world. As the executive chef of a new restaurant, Kith/Kin, Onwuachi shifts his focus from his personal story to his black culinary legacy (Krishne “A Young Chef”). In a magazine interview, the chef defines his experience at Kith/Kin as another form of self-expression: “[. . .] this felt a lot more like me. It was like a coming-of-age” (Krishne “A Young Chef”). He destroys the stereotypical representations of black-owned restaurants by offering his interpretation of food that reflects the diversity of the Southern, Nigerian, and Caribbean culinary cultures in a fine-dining setting. Accordingly, the critics evaluate his restaurant with the following words: “The atmosphere is fine-dining, and the food is Afro-Caribbean, exploring the influences of his mother’s Creole and Jamaican roots and his grandfather’s Nigerian heritage” (“Chef Kwame”). In an article he wrote for *Food&Wine*, Onwuachi highlights that often the food created by chefs of color is judged from a solitary perspective. In his own words: “In the culinary industry, we are so often judged for our African, Caribbean, African American, and Latin food by people who have little to no emotional or cultural connection to it” (Onwuachi, “A Jury of My Peers”). Dining at Kith-Kin was also a memorable experience for people of color since the high-end culinary culture is biased against black chefs and black customers. Kith-Kin becomes a success story for Onwuachi, attracting people with its African and Caribbean culinary notes in a high-end restaurant atmosphere (Lewis “Kwame Onwuachi”). Korsha Wilson, a black female restaurant critic, defines being a critic and diner at fine-dining restaurants as a challenging experience:

From being asked for a drink by white patrons to being told a different wait time for a table (or told there are none at all), restaurant dining rooms too often act in accordance with the same racial hierarchy as the rest of the world. [. . .]. Experiences like these are constant reminders to people of color that they’re an “other” in dining spaces. (“A Critic”)

Wilson’s experience as a critic also illustrates how black customers are exposed to biased attitudes at fine-dining restaurants. Considering Butler’s theory of performativity in the framework of race, Wilson is expected to perform, eat, drink and act in preset

manners attributed to the black customer's identity. Different from this demeaning experience in mainstream culture, Onwuachi defines Kith/Kin's position as follows: "Kith/Kin was a special place because you were able to see people inherently celebrate their own culture while celebrating a special experience. [...] People were finally able to go out and get dressed up, but still eat oxtails and curry goat and jerk chicken and propose in the dining room" (Lewis "Kwame Onwuachi"). Thus, coupling fine-dining restaurant culture with African and African American culinary culture is a significant attempt to subvert the white hegemonic norms. The restaurant does not only provide a space for Onwuachi to perform as a black chef but also for customers to engage in black culinary culture in an upscale restaurant atmosphere. Moreover, as Wells observes, in Kith/Kin, "he [Onwuachi] established himself as a national talent and a leading voice for Black workers in the culinary profession" (Wells, "Kwame Onwuachi"). As the executive chef of Kith Kin, Onwuachi uses his visibility not only for his own credit but also for the black people working in the food sector.

In her article entitled "Is Race a Trope?" Debby Thompson states that racial identity is both a fact and a trope (Onwuachi, *Notes* 127) and adds that there is a shift in models of identity in American theatre. That is, the character's identity is interpreted as a representation of a transnational and transcultural entity, and the character's actions are read as manifestations of the character's interior identity on stage (Onwuachi, *Notes* 128). The same framework can be applied to understand the black chefs' performance on the American culinary stage. As Thompson suggests, the black chef's corporeal reality in the restaurant kitchen maintains intersections with African American history and culinary culture. Therefore, the black chef's identity on the culinary stage occupies a place as a transnational as well as a transcultural entity. Onwuachi also underlines that he adopts black culinary culture in his cooking: "I was making food that came from my culture, from black culture. I was saying that this culture is worth something, worth a lot, actually. That I was worth something. Underneath the reaction to the price tag, this was the white-lash rage that seethed" (Onwuachi, *Notes* 234).

Moreover, he highlights the transcultural connections of his food: "I want to cook my own food. I'm Nigerian. I'm American. I grew up on Creole and Jamaican food. I've

been working in fine dining now for a long time. I want to cook whatever that is.” (Onwuachi, *Notes* 211). The chef emphasizes the multidimensionality of the black experience through his food. Therefore, he stresses that the food industry needs to open space for diversity, and he hopes to be part of this progress by paving the path for chefs of color (Onwuachi, “A Jury of My Peers”). He celebrates transcultural black culinary identity by expanding the boundaries of soul food culture since black culinary culture in the twenty-first century is far beyond the limits of the Southern/soul food and is in an unceasing interaction with African, Caribbean, within the framework of black transcultural culinary culture.

2.4. POPULAR CULTURE AND CULINARY PERFORMANCE

Starting from the first decade of the twenty-first century, becoming cult, celebrity chefs hold the power “to reach millions of people through a multimedia empire -- with books, restaurants, TV shows, and even commercial endorsements” (Ari Shapiro, “America’s Insatiable Hunger”). Chefs from different ethnic backgrounds have also become acclaimed figures challenging hegemonic culture's ideals by introducing various culinary cultures. In his article entitled “Understanding Popular Culture,” cultural theorist John Fiske draws attention to the production of meaning and social identity in popular culture in relation to the dominant-hegemonic culture, the boundaries of which are marked by the white, capitalist, patriarchal system. The critic expands his ideas on the connection between the popular culture and the subordinate: “Popular culture is always a culture of conflict; it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate” (119). Drawing on Fiske’s ideas, Kathleen Lebesco and Peter Naccarato also assert that popular culture has the potential “to empower the “masses” by giving them a voice in a society that privileges elites, both aesthetically and politically” (7). Putting theory into practice, chefs from subordinate cultural groups manifest their cultural identity through food in the kitchen. Through their food and kitchens, chefs of color defer the white hegemonic culture that tends to singularize or even silence alternative culinary identities. For chefs of color, their culinary performance becomes a channel to construct an alternative culinary identity

instead of the stereotypically racialized identities imposed by the dominant culinary culture.

In addition to its social impact, food culture has an economic impact since it directly interacts with the customers and expands “value within capitalist commodity culture” (Lebesco and Naccarato 1). Joan J. Henderson, in his article, “Celebrity Chefs: Expanding Empires,” attempts to define the critical features of profit-making activities of modern celebrity chefs and points out that since their cooking skills and restaurants, the chef’s personality is also on public display (617). From this vantage point, one may also observe that Onwuachi capitalizes on his food and story as elements of his culinary style as a well-known chef. As an entrepreneur, he elaborates on his food and his personal story as his culinary capital. Along with claiming a space in the fine-dining world, Onwuachi constructs a TV image to gain visibility as a chef. He evaluates having social visibility as a TV chef as an initial step into the culinary business:

In some circles, there’s still a stigma attached to reality television, a belief that there are real chefs and TV chefs. The former climb up the ranks, unseen and unheard, in other people’s kitchens. They pay their dues slowly and come to fame after years of toil, if at all. The latter, on the other hand, find fame first and figure out the particulars afterward. There are risks to both approaches, but by 2013 reality TV was clearly one of the best ways to build. (224)

While gaining popularity, Onwuachi recognizes that popular culture tends to singularize his culinary identity. However, he interprets this as a standard procedure to create TV personalities, as Johnston (et al.) expresses: “celebrity chefs are discursively represented, packaged, and legitimized as culinary personas. Knowing that producers with more focused identities are more likely to appeal to audiences, achieve acceptance and be successful” (Johnston et al., 4). Likewise, Onwuachi finds the TV version of himself less approachable since TV heightens his confidence to the point of arrogance (220). As the chef points out, TV programs openly distort the multidimensionality of identity and force the chefs into two-dimensional characters suitable for the screen. In the flow of his writing, Onwuachi discovers a strong link between his representation on TV as a TV persona and his gendered racial identity as a black man. In this way, the chef draws attention to one-dimensional depictions of black men in the mainstream culture. According to him, the prefixed identities of TV personalities extend from the boundaries of the TV kitchen to real life for men of color:

And yet, I realized, this wasn't anything new, not to me and not to any other minority. In some ways I had prepared my whole life for reality television. Ever since I was born, I had been made aware that the world saw me in one way, thanks to the color of my skin, regardless of how I saw myself. This was a lesson learned on the streets of the Bronx and in the dining rooms of Baton Rouge and in the kitchens of Per Se and EMP (220)

Onwuachi as a black chef, prioritizes his racial identity as a dominant element that shapes his TV personality. The chef emphasizes that stereotypes imposed on young men transform their real-life experiences into performances. In this respect, a young black man obtains a limited chance to find self-expression due to the boundaries framing his subjectivity. In his article entitled, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender," John Tosh states that cultural media such as popular media are a powerful means of establishing "many of the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity" (43). As Tosh postulates, "the role of the mass media in taking up and reinforcing the dominant expressions of masculinity is central to the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity in modern societies" (44). Likewise, Onwuachi believes that negative racial stereotypes attached to black male subjectivity through popular culture harm black men since they encourage them to experience real life similar to what they see on TV. This is problematic since popular media often portrays young black men as one-dimensional characters.

Onwuachi's memoir comes to a close with the narration of the failure of his first restaurant, "Shaw Bijou." However, his self-expressive style continues to constitute his culinary persona through social media. About celebrity chef culture, Ruth Reichel posits that the customers identify with the chefs upon feeling an affinity that attracts them to their restaurants or reading their books (Shapiro "American's Insatiable Hunger"). Symbolically, customers consume "the popular chef image" and the food on the table. Therefore, transforming the black chef image and changing the traditional white hegemonic food culture from within is significant for the representation of black culinary identity. Accordingly, the chef uses his visibility as a TV chef and capitalizes upon this social image to claim a place in the culinary world. John C. Henderson observes that along with presenting their culinary skills at restaurants, celebrity chefs publish books and engage in social media to gain public attention as a business strategy (617). Onwuachi also constructs a culinary persona targeting popular culture. Besides

his memoir, his engagement with traditional and popular media, including TV shows and social media platforms, contributes to constructing this culinary persona. To reinforce his image in popular culture, the chef also published a young-adult version of his memoir, and a movie adaptation is planned to be released. With all he has done, Onwuachi can be defined as a celebrity chef. Nevertheless, rather than being called a “celeb chef,” he prefers to be presented as a chef with visibility as he regards this politically more correct to identify his position in the culinary world.

Since April 2021, Onwuachi has participated in The Bravo’s *Top Chef* as the judge. Onwuachi’s position as a judge drew media attention and was significant as it raised the visibility of black chefs as leading figures in culinary culture. In addition to racial performativity, gender performativity can be adopted to read the popular chef identity Onwuachi constructs. The chef’s corporeal existence as a judge is culturally coded not only as a black person but as a black man. By adopting racial performativity in the kitchen, Onwuachi also adopts gender performativity as a coping mechanism against the stereotypical black masculine identity on the screen. In other words, he gives a performative response to stereotypical representations of black masculinity in popular culture.

In the program, Onwuachi’s constructive approach to the contestants subverts the traditional narrative and challenges the complete authority of the white judge. As Guy Redden highlights, famous white chefs such as Gordon Ramsey, Marco Pierre White, and Anthony Bourdain constructed the famous chef image. Moreover, those white chefs with visibility set the culinary standards. The white chefs personify “hyper-masculine professional TV chef[s]” who comment upon “the other’s” cooking without mercy and bring the aggressive and competitive nature of the industrial kitchen to the screen. (126). Rebecca Swenson also underlines that the chefs as authority figures in food programs “promote a version of masculinity tied to hierarchy, success, power, speed, and stamina” (49-50). Contrary to this traditional image, Onwuachi’s performance as a judge promotes an alternative understanding of masculinity. Rather than an authoritarian, merciless judge, he portrays an engaged, motivational, constructive figure encouraging participants to elevate their culinary skills. How the chef interprets

masculinity becomes significant for manifesting the black culinary identity. Taking a sit as the judge, he consciously reconstructs the black chef image by playing with racial codes, gender codes, and dress codes. By doing that, he subverts the crude chef image by manipulating the dress codes on the screen. For instance, he wears bright, colorful jackets matching his nail polish. By constructing an alternative black chef image, he challenges the gender and racial codes.

In addition to reconfiguring the popular chef image by emphasizing blackness, Onwuachi also uses the kitchen as a political platform to contribute to social change. The chef announced his leaving Kith-Kin through Instagram, emphasizing racial equality. The lines manifest Onwuachi's understanding of a chef who celebrates and promotes diversity in the kitchen:

This isn't easy, but it's necessary. Yesterday was my last service as the Executive Chef of Kith/Kin. Opening Kith/Kin was a dream, for me and for many. It was a dream for the 272 slaves from Georgetown that sailed down the Potomac, leaving from right in front of where Kith/Kin stands, not knowing where they'd end up. For the 77 slaves in 1848 that were trying to achieve freedom by commandeering a ship from the wharf with the goal of equality. A dream for the Native Americans and Africans who met here, where these buildings stand, trading ideas and practices in order to survive. This place was for dreamers, least notably me, but dreamers who maintained faith that one day their culture would be accepted as equal and significant. The road has been tough, the journey sometimes treacherous, but what truly brought us joy was our ability to contribute to make Washington, D.C. a place where those dreams can come true. A place where everyone is welcomed, where the inaudible have a voice, and anyone can be themselves. (@chefkwameonwuachi)

As Onwuachi expresses, the way to social transformation is not to limit other people's dreams. The chef invites his followers to embrace the multidimensionality of the American dream with an open heart. That is also what Onwuachi tries to achieve through cooking as a black chef. Onwuachi uses his popularity in popular media to draw public attention to racism. For instance, following the death of George Floyd, with the caption "tired," Onwuachi shared an Instagram post: "We must end this violence. We must end dehumanizing black people. We must end these attacks" (@chefkwameonwuachi). He wanted to draw public attention to the #blacklivesmatter movement by opening a debate on violence toward black men.

Onwuachi is also engaged in community projects as an activist. During the pandemic, the chef contributed to “COVID Activism” by voluntary cooking. When Kith/Kin closed its doors to customers, he went to the Bronx, where he spent his childhood, to cook for World Central Kitchen. World Central kitchen served free meals for the Mott Haven residents and medical workers during the crisis. Onwuachi interprets his volunteer cooking experience as a way to contribute to the community (Wells, “Kwame Onwuachi”). Drawing such a culinary persona, the young chef inspires social change and promotes equal welfare for the black community through the kitchen. Onwuachi believes chefs have a fundamental role in social change and regards his role as an essential element for social change. Likewise, in one of his interviews, the chef describes the restaurants as models for community relief (Onwuachi, “Covid Activism” 9.47-10.07). The chef also believes that cooking enables social healing since, while cooking, what becomes significant is caring for the other.

In conclusion, Kwame Onwuachi brings a new perspective to the fine-dining world by narrating his culinary journey through his restaurants and cooking. By doing that, Onwuachi attempts to deconstruct the stereotypical representations of black men, black chefs, and black culinary culture. Through his performance as a chef, he challenges the established, white-oriented structure of the fine-dining world. Onwuachi’s narrative is an example of how black chefs reconstruct the American culinary culture with counter-narratives. The interconnection between the black culinary culture and the chef’s culinary style is not only reflected in the memoir. He also demonstrates the hybridity of his culinary style in traditional and social media. Also, by engaging with his readership actively through social media, Onwuachi embraces a social role as a chef who promotes resilience for the black community. With his distinctive culinary style, the chef claims a space for the transcultural black culinary culture in the American culinary scene.

CHAPTER 3

PORTRAIT OF A BLACK MAN AS A CHEF: URBAN BLACK MASCULINITY, PRISON CULTURE, AND “COOKING” IN JEFF HENDERSON’S MEMOIR, *COOKED*

We real cool. We
 Left school. We

Lurk late. We
 Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
 Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
 Die soon.

Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool” (1959)

In her landmark poem “We Real Cool,” Gwendolyn Brooks portrays the street culture and the cool image that defines the margins of the black male experience in urban, more specifically ghetto inner-city life. The poem describes the cultural circle to which black men belong. As the poem illustrates, street culture includes drinking, dancing, singing, and striking in the streets for black men engaged in street culture in urban ghettos. Various critics examine the connection between black masculinity and street culture to shed light on gendered and racial dichotomies that shape black subjectivity. As such, the social practice in the streets significantly affects the construction of black masculine subjectivity. In urban ghettos, young black men adopt “the cool pose,” defined as a social image and survival strategy by critics Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson in their book, *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Men in America* (1993). Enlightened by their critical approach, this chapter focuses on Chef Jeff Henderson’s memoir, *Cooked: From the Streets to the Stove, from Cocaine to Foie Gras* (2008). Henderson centralizes the dilemmas of urban black masculinity and his culinary journey in his narrative. Henderson starts his memoir by narrating how he indulged in street culture, adopted “the cool pose,” and engaged in illegal activity. As the memoir draws to a close, he emerges as a chef out of prison; he subverts the assigned roles and claims a

redefinition of “the cool pose” as a black chef. This chapter discusses Jeff Henderson’s memoir *Cooked* by adopting Billson’s “cool pose” terminology to expose the gendered and racial dichotomies that shape black masculinity. By constructing a culinary career, Henderson dislocates the impositions of white hegemonic masculinity over black masculinity and redefines the cool pose through his culinary style as a chef. The chapter also tries to evaluate how the coupling of criminal memoir and food memoir functions together to reflect the multidimensionality of black masculine subjectivity.

3.1. GENERIC FEATURES OF JEFF HENDERSON’S MEMOIR

Jeff Henderson is an award-winning African American chef, author, and motivational speaker with visibility in food media and the fine-dining world. He is known as the first African American chef de cuisine at Caesars Palace, a famous hotel in Las Vegas, in 2001, and he continued to work as the executive chef at various famous American restaurants, including Bellagio (“Jeff Henderson Bio”). The chef is also known for community projects that attempt “to change the lives of “risk” youth through the power of food” (Holland and Novak 34). The chef’s eagerness to contribute to community-building projects stems from his personal story. Leading his life as a hustler, Henderson’s connection with food and cooking starts in the prison kitchen. His story caught the media’s attention and appeared on numerous TV programs, including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *People*, *USA Today*, and *Food Network* (“Meet Jeff”). Also, in his New York Times Bestseller memoir, *Cooked: From the Streets to the Stove, from Cocaine to Foie Gras*, Henderson details his transformation story through food and foodways.

To start with, Jeff Henderson’s memoir shares common traits with Kwame Onwuachi’s story in terms of the narrative structure that resembles the black bildungsroman. Nevertheless, the chefs prefer to detail different developmental periods of their life to highlight the influence of racial and gendered stereotypes in the construction of black subjectivity and masculinity. While Onwuachi details the street culture and its effects on him through his childhood, Henderson’s memoir details the effects of street and prison culture that shaped his life from boyhood to adulthood. In the memoir, the defining I’

refers to the present perspective of the chef, and “the defined I” portrays the chef’s transformation from a street hustler to a famous chef at three different stages. Henderson’s narrative uses various generic features of life writing to disclose the multidimensionality of black masculinity and subjectivity. The chef starts his narrative with a spotlight on his childhood as a black boy narrating his gradual isolation from mainstream society, his engagement in street culture, and indulgence in criminal activity. The second part of the narrative detailing the ten years Henderson spent in prison provides a close reading of prison masculinities. This part of Henderson’s narrative echoes prison memoirs since Smith and Watson identify prison narratives as “a mode of captivity narrative written or after incarceration,” centralizing “the shifts in consciousness occasioned by imprisonment” (210). In his memoir, Henderson blends the features of food narratives and prison narratives to highlight the reformative impact of food in his life. By doing that, he manages to reflect the multidimensionality of the black experience.

3.2. THE COOL POSE AND MANIFESTATIONS OF BLACK MASCULINITY

At the beginning of the twentieth century, W. E. B. Du Bois defined the “problem of color-line” as “the problem of the twentieth century” (15). As Du Bois proclaimed, “the color-line” determines social, political, and cultural conditions that shape black subjectivity and practices in mainstream American society. The twentieth-century marks when mass migration to the cities started for the black population hoping for better living conditions. However, city life brought new dilemmas for the black community. Manning Marable interprets the twentieth-century migrations to the industrial Northeast and Midwest as the source of another type of “racial exclusion and stigmatization—the urban ghetto” (1) and adds that employment, schooling, health, and housing were the primary “institutional barriers” that limited racial access to sources and opportunities (Marable 2). As discussed in the previous chapter, black people face institutional obstacles that manifest injustices and racial discrimination starting from their school years. Tamara R. Buckley states, “[b]lack adolescent males are often perceived as threatening, underachieving, and hyper-masculine, which is reinforced through media outlets and psychological research that portray them as a monolith rather than a

heterogeneous group with multiple intersecting identities” (2). Facing discrimination at schools, black boys isolate themselves from mainstream society and find self-expression through street culture. Mark Anthony Neal believes that the media portrayals of black men often present negative connotations with an underlying belief that black men are “criminally and violently inclined” (*Looking for Leroy*, 5). Many critics also agree that the media portrayals of black men distort reality and encourage black men to engage in street culture. bell hooks draws attention to the fact that black men are told that they would not be able to obtain money and power unless they break the rules (*We Real Cool* 26). hooks also underlines that the media idealizes the brute¹¹ image to portray black men. The mainstream culture imposes images on young black men built upon hegemonic masculinity:

A biased imperialist white-supremacist patriarchal mass media teaches young black males that the street will be their only home. And it lets mainstream black males know that they are just an arrest away from being on the street. This media teaches young black males that the patriarchal man is a predator, that only the strong and the violent survive. (hooks, *We Real Cool* 26).

Various critics describe the cool pose as a strategy black men have developed to maintain their subjectivity within the white stream culture that often demeans their existence. In their seminal work, critics Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson elaborate on the definition of “the cool pose” as a dominant image at the core of black masculinity. The critics assert that black men exhibit “a sense of inner control, strength, balance, stability, confidence, and security” (9) by adopting the cool pose and add that “[c]ool helps him deal with the closed doors and negative images of himself that he must confront on a daily basis” (9). From a similar perspective, Joseph L. White and James H. Cones III define the cool pose as “a form of self-presentation designed to

¹¹ Historically, in parallel with the black brute stereotype, the fear of black freedom has given rise to negative associations overshadowing black masculinity following the Emancipation. “[P]ost-emancipation images of African American men as rapists and thugs,” as Hill Collins puts forward, presented them as strong and wild men “who could not handle their newfound freedoms” (75). The black brute stereotype typically labels black men as “primitive, temperamental, violent and sexually powerful” (Hall, *Skin Color* 28). The discriminative definition of black manhood, later on, led to the dangerous association of black men with violence, crime and rape (Kimmel, *Manhood* 66). The coinage of black men with violence reflects the fear of black masculinity in the dominant culture (Brown “Terrordome” 199).

show others that the person is on top of the things, that everything is under control. It is an assertion of masculinity that enhances pride, dignity, and a sense of personal power in a society that offers African American males a limited range of options” (92). Moreover, for black men living in the inner cities, the cool pose is a “performative response” (Majors and Billson 1) or a “critical performance of the self” (Harris, *Boys* 26). In the light of Harris’s discussion, one may interpret “the cool pose” as a performative response to white hegemonic masculinity.

Through the cool pose, black men prove their existence and gain visibility since they feel powerful as part of the social groups in the street. Harris defines black masculinity as “a replication of idealized norms (whiteness and masculinity) in the non-ideal field of blackness” (*Boys* 32). Black men engage in crime to obtain power and privileges of hegemonic masculinity through illegal ways. Henderson grew up in South Central Los Angeles with her mother, sister, and grandparents in poor conditions. His father left the family when he was two years old. He admits that he started stealing money at an early age and recounts that at the age of thirteen, he was “an accomplished minor thief. [He] was failing in school, getting suspended, and not listening to anyone” (Henderson, *Cooked* 19). As Henderson expresses, he initializes ideals of hegemonic masculinity manifested through commodity culture. He idealizes the notion of hegemonic white masculinity as he equates masculinity with economic power and commodity:

As I got older, I started getting hungry for things that required more money than my mother’s twenties and my aunties’ loose change could buy. I got tired of seeing the white boys on TV and in Northtown with brand-new bikes and nice clothes. I started getting away with doing wrong. It became a way of life. In South Central L.A., it was a common one — you could be a thief one day and a victim the next. (Henderson, *Cooked* 16)

As indicated in the given excerpt, it is common for black boys living in ghettos to engage in criminal activity. Their social alienation motivates black boys to find illegal solutions to gain access to wealth and luxury. Yet another reason for Samuelsson’s desire to have power and money was his mother’s working conditions and the white male abuse she had been going through: “I wasn’t letting anything keep me from my dream to move us all away from the ghetto and get my mother out of that shipyard — put money in her pockets, get her out of debt, and send her on plush vacations”

(Henderson, *Cooked* 53). Hence, Henderson felt a sense of accomplishment when he had easy access to power and money through engaging in illegal activities.

Street culture gives black boys from underprivileged social classes a space to express their masculinity. Accordingly, Henderson portrays the street as an attractive space for black boys offering a homosocial environment based on “—parties, drama, cars, and gangbanging” (Henderson, *Cooked* 22-23). As a young black boy, Henderson narrates how he got easily engaged in the street culture and took his friend “T” as his role model. Henderson illustrates T as a hustler model that young black men look upon:

T had a PhD in game. He was a jack of all hustles: a car thief, a master manipulator, and a jacker. He was so fucking charismatic; the women loved him. Even his sidearm showed his style. T carried with him at all times a pearl-handled .25 semiautomatic pistol in his back pocket. He used to have what you call a snatch bar, a tool mechanics use to pull dents out of car bodies, but T used his snatch bar to yank the ignitions out of steering columns so you could start them up with a flathead screwdriver. T and his crew would go out, break into a car, snatch the ignition, and sell off the car in pieces. (Henderson, *Cooked* 32-33)

Though involved in various types of crime, a hustler¹² is a strong figure that takes the attention of young black males and is respected as the portrayal of “the cool.” The cool pose draws a masculine image that is “independent, always in control, and emotionally detached. Tough talk and aggressive posturing are valid ways of expressing coolness” (Majors and Billson 29). Moreover, adopting the cool pose offers young black men a sense of belonging to a group (White and Cones 92). It contributes to constructing the homosocial street culture and group identity. Along with gestures, language, and movement, clothing is part of the definition of the cool pose. As Henderson expresses, the gold rope chains, diamond rings, or diamond-encrusted Rolex are possessions that symbolize wealth and power (Henderson, *Cooked* 149). Moreover, the clothing and accessories can be decoded as manifestations of the cool pose: “We were clean and had fresh done-up Jheri curls and perms; everyone was draped up in their 14k gold rope chains, and gold nugget rings with diamond chips and sporting top-of-the-line alligator and suede shoes” (Henderson, *Cooked* 50). Henderson portrays the permed hair, golden

¹² Charis E. Kubrin defines “Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas” as three significant figures that portray the “street code.” In popular culture, the hustler lifestyle promotes images of black men as criminals and gangsters in a gang culture in which violence is normative (360). The hustler/thug lifestyle attracts young black men with easy access to money and power (364).

chains, diamond rings, and suede shoes to strengthen the cool impression that can be read as an emblem of black masculinity in the street culture.

bell hooks underline that it is the “market-driven capitalist society” that imposes “gangsta culture” (25) as a norm for young black men; “Every day black males face a culture that tells them that they can never really achieve enough money or power to set them free from racist white tyranny in the work world. Mass media schools the young in the values of patriarchal masculinity. On mass media screens today, whether television or movies, mainstream work is usually portrayed as irrelevant, money is god, and the outlaw guy who breaks the rules prevails” (26). The capitalist values shaping young black men’s lives are also visible in Samuelsson’s life narrative. Even though he does not use it himself, Samuelsson started to sell drugs and led a gang, driven by the easy access to money: “I didn’t smoke weed, I didn’t drink, and I rarely carried a gun. To me, it was all about money, status, and helping my family out of poverty. I was on the paper chase. I didn’t care if they were Crips, Bloods, or East Coast niggas. It didn’t make a difference to me. I just wanted to sell my product and stack my bank” (Henderson 46). Besides, he was motivated to continue his life as a drug dealer to attain the economic privileges of the American Dream: “I was twenty-two and untouchable. I was becoming relaxed and flamboyant. Mostly just sitting back counting cash, I was living the American Dream” (Henderson 61). Carried away by economic power, Henderson never questioned whether what he did was ethical or not. Until his imprisonment, he was blind to his reality. Henderson narrates his recognition of his criminal inclinations as follows:

In all my years of dealing, I never fully realized until then just how far people would go to get high. Drugs were just business to me, a way to get the things I wanted. I just wanted to feed my family better. I wasn’t about the gangster shit; I wasn’t killing anyone. Anyway, that’s what I’d told myself. All that time, I’d been blind. (Henderson 116)

The three main pillars of street culture are violence, crime, and drugs. Moreover, this triplet leads to the criminalization and imprisonment of young black boys. With regards to racialized criminal identity and confinement, Athena D. Mutua believes that it is still necessary to explore the “gendered and racial oppression of black men” and the position of “the male hetero subject” and its intersections with the politics of race (“Black

Masculinity” 9). With a similar approach, Victor M. Rios explores the correlations between street culture, violence, and crime as factors shaping Latino and black boys’ lives. Rios claims that the system “hypercriminalizes” the boys from disadvantaged groups, starting from school and leading them to prison or death (2). Henderson was one of those underprivileged boys who was arrested for smuggling drugs across the Mexico border, resulting in his imprisonment for twenty years. He manifests his blindness towards his reality as he feels angry rather than guilty upon his imprisonment: “I wasn’t even thinking about trying to get my life together. [...] The white man had just given me nineteen and a half years. [...] I just wanted to lift weights and kick it with my homies” (Henderson, *Cooked* 110). He also underlines that he did not feel guilty about his criminal records. Neither did he recognize his failure nor insight into the harm he gave to society by being a drug dealer.

3.3. BLACK MASCULINITY AND PRISON CULTURE

Often neglected as a field of study, prison confirms to be a powerful place characterizing black masculinity. It obtains a primary state, and what is more, it “is infused into black popular consciousness and culture” (77). Mumia Abu-Jamal further claims that prison culture constitutes much of what belongs to the daily life of African American men and becomes part of the popular culture and everyday life (77). Therefore, prison culture is the focal point of chapter three with its powerful impact on black manhood. Majors and Billson emphasize that prison culture cannot be considered separately from the street culture. As prison is depicted as an extension of street culture, black men continue to adopt the relaxed pose in prison. Henderson states that in prison, black men indulge in activities similar to social movements in the street: “In prison, everybody had an angle, a way of making the time pass. Everyone did their time their way. Some guys were into drugs, some guys gambled, played basketball, reminisced about the streets” (Henderson, *Cooked* 112-113). By doing that, black men resisted change since they regarded their prison experience as a subplot of their life on the streets: “Me and my homies were exactly that: the same fools we were on the streets. Throughout the prison, all of the inmates had created these little communities, in part to try to keep on being the person they were on the outside.” (Henderson, *Cooked* 146).

Normalization of prison culture as part of black men's life led to black men's resistance to transforming their lives in prison.

Race and ethnicity stand out as significant factors that shape masculinity in prison. Henderson states that prisoners were engaged in groups defined by their racial identity: "blacks with blacks, whites with whites, Latinos with Latinos" (Henderson, *Cooked* 103). Furthermore, Henderson underlines that each racial group had its precise dynamics that shape prison masculinities: "White boys, Asians, and Latinos all had their own times. It was very macho and competitive. I had to gain strength to defend against [. . .] in case anything went down again" (109). Black men in prison generally engaged in groups of people that they were acquainted with in the streets. Nevertheless, despite the fierce disputes in the streets, the gangs from the same cities unite in prison, which Henderson describes as follows: "On the streets of Diego, a lot of those brothers were from different gangs and didn't get along. But in prison that didn't matter because you grouped up according to the city you were from" (105), and he adds that he directly became part of the gangster groups representing the outside world and street dynamics: "On the outside, I'd always tried to stay clear of the Bloods / Crips bullshit. But inside, most of my homies were Bloods, and that made me a Blood in the eyes of most Crips" (107). It is a fact that the group identity in prison provided a sense of power, security, and a connection to the outside world by preserving the dynamics of the homosocial street culture.

The fact that black male prisoners faced discrimination in prison culture proves Athena Mutua's idea that discrimination against black men is an implicit part of various cultural practices ("Black Masculinity" 9). White supremacy played a significant role in classifying racial groups in prison, which is also observable in the methods of the prison guards; Henderson emphasizes: "Even in prison, the white inmates got more love than the blacks and the Mexicans. There were guards on the yard with long pony-tails, tatted-up, ex-military and biker types who ignored it when the Aryan boys broke the rules" (140). Henderson also underlines that the black guards pushed black boys harder to prove that they were committed to their position:

But sometimes we'd get stuck with these redneck or house nigga guards, as the black inmates called them, who played favorites with the kitchen workers. [...] The

house nigga ones were always trying to prove themselves to the lieutenants by being even harder on the blacks than the white guards. We could only get a break from a handful of black guards, like P and Fish, who came from the hood. (Henderson, *Cooked* 140)

With a motivation to change his life, Henderson did not want to engage with the street gangs. Within the black community in prison, one of the most dominant groups was “the brothers,” which significantly shaped black masculinity in prison culture. “The brothers” was a group identified by race and religion. They represented the Sunni sect of the black Muslim community that was the followers of Malcolm X.¹³ Following Malcolm X’s teachings, the Sunni black sect approached life less aggressively and more comprehensively. Yet, another earlier religious sect was “The Nation,” which adopted a more radical philosophy. Both groups had a significant impact on shaping black masculinity in prison. The Nation of Islam followed the founder of the sect, Elijah Muhammed’s teachings. The Nation aggressively accused white supremacy of every problem black men encountered: “brothers talk about hating the white. They put everybody down, blamed everyone for the black man’s problems” (Henderson, *Cooked* 118). Henderson presents the Nation of Islam’s disputable discourse:

[T]he fiery rhetoric that the white man is the devil with blue eyes and blond hair. The white man brought drugs into the country; the white man enslaved us; the white man systematically mixed his blood with the black man. At the end of the tape, Why? Why, after four hundred years in this country, are black men and women still oppressed, depressed, broke, imprisoned, and held back? (Henderson, *Cooked* 119)

Although Henderson observed that The Nation’s worldview was aggressive and radical, his interactions with Black Muslim groups enabled him to gain a new vision of black identity. As Henderson emphasizes, the groups helped him to gain a different perspective on black history and black identity politics. The Black Muslim groups emphasized black consciousness and pride as Henderson expresses: “some of the things the Black Muslims talked about caught my interest. They said that the black man had built civilizations, kingdoms before we came to the wilderness of North America”

¹³ H. Bruce Franklin, in *Prison Literature in America: Victim as Criminal and Artist* (1989), notes that the Nation of Islam significantly impacted black criminals starting from the 1940s. In the 1960s, Malcolm, with his self-discoveries, brought a new perspective to understanding the political dynamics that shape criminality and black masculinity in American culture (236). Therefore, *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (1965) occupies an important place in American prison literature.

(Henderson, *Cooked* 118). The counter-history created by the black Muslim groups opposed the stereotypes imposed on black identity, emphasizing ethnic pride.

Ironically, as opposed to his limited interaction with other masculinities in real life, Henderson could engage with different people in prison, which broadened his worldview. As a result, he became more confident, intellectual, and conscious of his black identity (Henderson, *Cooked* 122). Moreover, he interacted with men from different religious groups in prison: “All my life I was only exposed to Christianity. I didn’t know anything about Muslims, Five Percenters, Black Nationalists, Jews, atheists, or Jehovah’s Witnesses. Of course, I knew there were other religious groups, but I knew nothing about them” (Henderson, *Cooked* 120). In addition to learning about other religious philosophies, His engagement in different homosocial groups with men from different races channeled him to reconstruct his self-image regardless of the stereotypical portrayals of black men. For instance, he discovered his intellectual potential in prison by participating in a reading group, including white men. The support he received from the reading group enabled him to build a more self-sustained inner voice:

Unlike anyone else I’d ever been around, they told me I was smart. Maybe they were just trying to flatter me, but they were the first people who ever said anything like that to me. [...] Their encouraging words helped me to believe in myself and to have confidence that I could make something of myself upon my release. It was still many years off, but life after prison now seemed a real possibility. I had given up on everything, on life; now I was planning for it. (Henderson, *Cooked* 156)

His contact with different groups of men broadened Henderson’s vision in prison, introducing him to different life philosophies. Following his decision to change his life, his interactions with men from various backgrounds helped him reframe his self-image. He had limited contact with the thugs and hustlers who continued the street culture in prison to foster such a transformation. However, it is not easy to break away from such a strong stereotype that defines the borders of the street culture and prison culture; as mark Anthony Neals underlines, it is quite challenging for black men to resist the thug lifestyle that is embraced by the popular culture¹⁴ (*New Black* 7). Henderson explains

14 Negative black stereotypes have been maintained, subverted, exaggerated, and reproduced in popular culture dominantly through music. While read as a response against the dominant white

the difficulty of such a transformation since there is an established hegemonic narrative that constantly criminalizes black men: “it’s hard to tell a man in his forties who’s been hustling all his life to change. And it’s not something that can just be done overnight. Hell, it took me eighteen years” (Henderson, *Cooked* 263). Moreover, black men and boys engaged in such a circle often close their eyes to a tragic ending. Henderson draws attention to this fact concerning the death of his close friend T in the street:

He had always been so smooth and had escaped death and long prison stints many times. But no one was untouchable. I realized then, staring into T’s pale, frozen face, that it could have been me in that box many times. I’d been stabbed; I could have been snatched off the street and tortured to death like one of the Twins or murdered in prison. It was an overwhelming moment. I got my head together and told the congregation that T had raised me, instilled confidence in me, and taught me how to feed my family and escape poverty, to be streetwise and tough. (Henderson, *Cooked* 263)

In addition to mourning for the tragic death of a beloved friend, Henderson draws attention to the street-prison connection that eventually brought about his friend’s end, like many other black men. As he emphasizes, T was one of the many black boys who lost their lives, got wounded, imprisoned, tortured, or murdered (Henderson, *Cooked* 263). Not often could black men escape from the street-prison loop since the diversity of black male identity was not recognized, and black man “is relegated to a stereotypically pathologized position” (Alexander 74). Therefore, it is challenging to escape from normative representations of black masculinity.

3.4. BUILDING A CULINARY CAREER IN PRISON KITCHEN

culture and a protest of the black masculine condition in the urban ghettos at the beginning, the performance of rap and hip-hop music opened controversial debates following its popularity in the mainstream culture. Henry Matthew stresses that at the turn of the twentieth century, popular hip-hop culture influenced the construction of urban black masculinity and shaped the definition of contemporary black masculinity. Hip-hop culture portrayed “[a] particular type of black masculinity—one defined mainly by an urban aesthetic, a nihilistic attitude, and an aggressive posturing” (119). Therefore, rather than a tool for protest, various critics, including Mark Anthony Neal, argue that hip-hop culture encouraged young black men to engage in street culture with all the negativities it brings, including violence, drugs, and criminal acts.

Henderson's memoir differs from the other chef memoirs studied in this dissertation since it can also be categorized as a criminal food memoir. To start with, Henderson's connection to the kitchen is different from the other chefs since he learned to cook in the prison kitchen. Unlike Michael Twitty, Kwame Onwuachi, and Marcus Samuelsson, Jeff Henderson did not have a close connection with his mother's or father's cooking or the house kitchen in his early years. He neither appreciated the house kitchen nor conceptualized it as an alternative language to express himself. Henderson, *Cooked* The chef defines the notion of home cooking as a way of showing love and care and appreciates the traditional role attributed to women in the domestic kitchen. Accordingly, Henderson portrays his girlfriend Carmen as a capable home cook: "She was a good home cook as well, so she was a natural in the kitchen. Her mother had taught her to be domestic and family-oriented" (Henderson, *Cooked* 59). The chef did not develop an interest in African American food traditions, either. He narrates that during his childhood, he and his sister enjoyed consuming American popular food: "so it's not like Moms didn't feed my sister and me. But we craved junk food. We wanted Church's chicken, Jack in the Box, McDonald's, all the stuff we didn't have money for" (Henderson, *Cooked* 15). As Henderson expresses, his entrance into the kitchen is not linked to familial ties or personal attachment to taste or black cultural identity. Instead, he develops his culinary skills as a chef in prison to construct a new life. As a result, the memoir provides a genuine insight into the intersections of prison, food, kitchen, and black masculinity.

Henderson's memoir blends generic features of criminal memoir and food memoir, enabling him to reflect the black masculine subjectivity from a broader perspective. *Cooked* also portrays black masculinity by providing a multidimensional spectrum illustrating black male experience from different facets of life in the prison kitchen—the significance of food changed for Henderson during his imprisonment. For one thing, food was precious in prison culture since it was limited. Therefore, it is regarded as a privilege since one might obtain it through visitors or relationships built with people working in prison and who have a connection with the outer world:

I cleaned the unit after the 10: 00 P.M. count. My favorite smuggled-in meal was a carne asada burrito with beans, cheese, sour cream, and guacamole from Roberto's Taco Shop. I ate every one of those meals like it was my last because there was

always the chance my officer friend could get busted. I didn't even brush my teeth after those treats because I wanted to savor the flavor all through the night. (Henderson, *Cooked* 90)

As Henderson confirms, food becomes a bridge that connects him to the outside world while in prison. Metaphorically, during the visits, by consuming the food in the visitors' room, Henderson states how privileged he feels: "For me, eating food from those machines was like going to a restaurant. Dad would spend an hour or two briefing me about everyone in the family and the outside world" (Henderson, *Cooked* 110). These lines show the significance of food in prison. As Ugelvik claims, food has the power to connect the prisoners with the outer world, and she defines food as "a mean of 'escape,' a way of transcending the institution's concrete walls" (54). Therefore, food means more than just a nutritious entity in prison culture. For Henderson, the taste of the food that family members brought or any food different from the standard also promises the world outside.

Henderson's personal growth in the kitchen starts with an unexpected journey. He was assigned to work in the kitchen area, which required hard work as a punishment. However, at the end of the first day, he was motivated to work in the kitchen upon recognizing the privileges: "I could keep on being a pot man. Then Officer Parnell came in and handed around cinnamon rolls and more bananas. I was sold. I still hated the scrubbing, but I was starting to catch on that the perks of being in the kitchen were worth more than just eating better" (Henderson, *Cooked* 133). Henderson emphasizes that the prison kitchen was a privileged place to work, which had its unique inner dynamics and power politics. It provided nourishment and a secure shelter. Therefore, working in the kitchen was an opportunity since "you could eat as much as you wanted" (Henderson, *Cooked* 106). Moreover, cooking opened an alternative space for Henderson to discover his potential. It challenged him as a new space demanding hard work, repetitive action, and progress. As he manifests, "[t]here were times when I wasn't sure that the kitchen was for me. I wasn't ready to die over a piece of fucking chicken or get beat down because I chose to sell my share of bananas at a marked-up price" (Henderson, *Cooked* 145), and he adds that "[t]he competition in the kitchen was intense at times. [...] But the pressure while cooking was nothing compared to the constant presence of danger as I walked the serving line, restocking the two hundred

pans of food for the servers” (Henderson, *Cooked* 145). Although the tension and hard work put pressure on him, Henderson did not give up working in the prison kitchen as it nourished him physically and mentally.

T. Ugelvik examines the prisoners’ connection to food in Norwegian prisons and defines food of imprisonment as a metaphor for resistance, claiming autonomy and identity (55). The interactions between food, race, and religion expose the kitchen's hierarchal rules, racial boundaries, and power relations. For instance, Henderson puts forward that racial segregation was visible in prison, starting from the dining hall: “The dining hall was so tightly segregated, even the Jews had their little pack over by the windows. There were guards for the main entrée, but you could get seconds on starch and vegetables” (Henderson, *Cooked* 106). In addition, religion played a domineering role in the prison kitchen as Jewish people had a privileged position. Therefore, Jewish holidays were celebrated in prison with a variety of food. Henderson notes, “Every white guy, I soon learned, wanted to be a Jew — especially around the Jewish holidays (Henderson, *Cooked* 138). Likewise, the bakery was dominantly controlled by Jewish prisoners. There were no black cooks, and only white people had the privilege of working at the bakery:

Only white people were working in the bakery section: After receiving came the first big kitchen, the bakery. There weren’t any brothers working the bakery; the white boys had it sewn up tight. They’d been there for a long time already, and no one ever left the bakery since it was one of the most coveted jobs in the kitchen. The bakery churned out doughnuts, maple bars, twisters, bear claws, cakes and cookies, and some unique items that never hit the chow line. My favorites were the cinnamon rolls. (135)

Research on criminal justice during incarceration emphasizes that the programs, including food and cooking, contribute to constructing new identities for the prisoners (Smoyer and Kjaer 7). Smoyer and Kjaer also point out that “food may also be used to fortify and construct gender, religious and ethnic identities and to create new non-criminogenic identities” (7). Henderson also creates “a non-criminogenic identity” through food and foodways. The kitchen isolated him from the racial dynamics of prison culture and provided him a space for self-evaluation: “The kitchen made me face it head-on. It stopped me from pretending that I did nothing. I could no longer hide from it or ignore it. I had to move on, and eventually, these thoughts drove me to want to be

in the kitchen all the time” (Henderson, *Cooked* 146). Furthermore, his gradual transformation from a street hustler to a cook drastically changed Henderson’s social life and the people around him. He started to spend his time in the kitchen with other cooks rather than with his friends from the street:

[H]omies in the other pens started seeing less of me as I began spending more time in the kitchen and studying the world. [...] I spent more of my time watching Big Roy and all of the other cooks. I thought about cooking all the time. I even wrote down some of Big Roy’s recipes and looked them over at night when I was in my cell. By the light from the small lamp I had, I committed those recipes to memory and went over each step again and again. I was learning to cook and was proud of how quickly it came to me. Enough that I started sharing my cooking experiences with my family, telling them how I’d cook for them when I got out, how I’d one day have my own restaurant. (Henderson, *Cooked* 148)

For Henderson, food became a way of freeing himself from imposed stereotypes of black masculinity. He adopts food as an alternative language to build constructive relationships with other cooks and family members. Moreover, his social network gradually changed in line with his performance in the kitchen that providing him a space to dream about a future as a chef.

Food memoirs generally trace the narrator’s connection to the kitchen and observe how the narrator gradually becomes a cook or a chef. Henderson’s memoir also follows this traditional pattern. The reader is provided with a lens to look at how the chef develops his cooking steps and culinary identity by glancing at his interactions with the chefs as his mentors. These interactions are significant in Henderson’s life since his connection to the kitchen starts at a late age in prison. However, it is essential to point out the bonding between Henderson and the chef when Henderson met Big Roy, the first chef he worked with. With the southern touches, Big Roy’s food reminded him of his grandmother’s kitchen: “His food always reminded me of the flavors of my childhood and being in my grandmother’s kitchen” and adds that as black prisoners, they appreciated “the southern touches in his food” (Henderson, *Cooked* 141).

Moreover, Big Roy provides Henderson with insights into food and cooking that turns the action into a passion: “Big Roy put love into every dish, and breakfast, lunch, and dinner were always on time. Big Roy truly understood the importance of food to an incarcerated man” (Henderson, *Cooked* 141). The chef figure provided values and ethics

of the kitchen as Henderson developed his culinary persona. For instance, Henderson internalized Big Roy's connection to the food and kitchen: "He gave us his heart and soul in the kitchen and knew that" (141). Big Roy motivated Henderson to ground his new identity in the kitchen: "'Jeff if you want to get down with us,' Big Roy bellowed from behind me, 'I need you to wash and prep the chicken. [...] you still want to get down in the kitchen with me; this is your chance.' [...] didn't know shit about mass production cooking, or restaurant cooking, or any non-crack cooking!" (Henderson, *Cooked* 144). As a culinary role model, Big Roy encouraged Henderson to become part of his team. By observing Big Roy, Henderson learned how to cook and saw how a black chef could support the black cooks and inmates with his culinary skills.

Following Big Roy, Friendly Womack was the second chef who successfully ran the kitchen and helped Henderson develop his cooking skills. Henderson portrays Big Roy and Friendly Womack as talented chefs with sharp leadership qualities: "Friendly reminded me of Big Roy. Both had a great palate, demonstrated strong leadership, were very talented at seasoning food and were organized in the kitchen" (Henderson, *Cooked* 162). On the other hand, unlike Roy, Womack was more supportive of the black brotherhood, as Henderson emphasizes: "The only real difference between the two of them was that Friendly took care of everyone, including the brothers, without much money. And Friendly was really messy. Within an hour, the kitchen had food all over the place" (Henderson, *Cooked* 162). Chef Womack helped Henderson to broaden his cooking portfolio: "After my salad training, Friendly broke me in on the lunch menu, where I learned to make lasagna, meatloaf, meatballs, smothered pork chops, and my favorite, fried chicken" (Henderson, *Cooked* 163). Also, Henderson had the privilege of obtaining Chef Womack's fried chicken recipe which he shares with his readers as one of his signature recipes: "fried chicken had been my favorite food — I ate it every chance I could, but I never knew how to fry it myself. When Friendly gave me his recipe, I thought I was the mane" (Henderson, *Cooked* 163). Thus, working with positive black chef models, such as Big Roy and Friendly Womack, contributed to Henderson's culinary identity. He learned to love cooking, care about nurturing others, and feel responsible for the kitchen staff, black men, and the community. Thus, he internalized their culinary style.

Henderson's memoir shifts from a criminal memoir to a food memoir, thematically moving from crime and punishment to food and cooking. The memoir reveals the chef's progressive connection to food and how he came out as a chef from the prison. Henderson shares his culinary journey, challenges, and how he developed his culinary style in various prison kitchens. Working in the kitchen provided Henderson the mobility to work at different prison kitchens across the United States. His shift to Vegas motivated him since "[t]here were no fences, no barbed wire, no gun towers. And there was no stench of tension between gangs or races" (Henderson, *Cooked* 161). As he was eager to earn a culinary degree, Henderson's culinary journey took him to a third prison from Vegas to Alabama. However, the food program designed for the prisoners closed there indefinitely, making him feel depressed (Henderson, *Cooked* 168).

Moreover, Henderson also had the opportunity to run a kitchen in prison, allowing him to lead a kitchen crew. Eventually, during his incarceration, he gained culinary experience that enabled him to reconstruct his old understanding of black identity and masculinity. As a result, he dared to invest in his culinary identity following his release. In Henderson's experience, food and cooking become an alternative response to debunk the stereotypical representation of black masculinity. In other words, the chef redefines the white perception of black masculinity with the cool chef image by deconstructing the strategic "cool pose." Henderson also transformed his outlook after coming out of prison since his perspective and gestures are part of the street culture. In other words, he needed to change the negative impacts of the cool pose he adopted in the street. Henderson narrates this transformation as follows: "On the outside, I was what was acceptable for a black man in corporate America: clean-shaven, earring hole covered up; I even toned down my walk so that I wouldn't swagger and come off as ghetto during interviews — I've got a pretty good stroll" (Henderson, *Cooked* 2). As well as his image, he aimed to reconfigure his attitudes and posture not to stand out while working at a corporate company.

Henderson knew it would not be easy for him to take a culinary position in a restaurant kitchen. However, he was determined to stay away from the street culture: "I wanted to

stay away from everyone from my past because I wanted to be sure I was strong enough to resist my old criminal urges—and I always felt like the Feds were watching” (Henderson, *Cooked* 183). Hearing the voices of top black chefs who created their own space in the American culinary scene, including Patrick Clark, Marcus Samuelsson, and Robert Gadsby, motivated Henderson to build his culinary style as a black male chef. Upon reading a magazine article on famous black chefs, Henderson wrote a letter from prison to Robert Gadsby, appreciating his success: “I wrote Gadsby, that brothers actually cooked cuisine on that level because in all the food magazines and books that I read during the last few years I had never seen any African Americans in them” and he adds that the visibility of black chefs in popular culture encouraged him to write this letter: “But when I saw you guys in *USA Today* of all newspapers, I began to dream bigger” (Henderson, *Cooked* 178). Following his release from prison, Henderson looked for black brotherhood to achieve his dream position in the kitchen seeking support from the thriving black chefs as mentors.

Another black chef Henderson found life-long guidance and support from is the black celebrity chef, Robert Gadsby, who runs his restaurant RG Fine Foods in New York. The famous chef becomes Henderson’s first culinary role model in real life, introducing him to the fine-dining world. While introducing himself to Gadsby, Henderson felt the urge to express his criminal records: “Before I tell you anything else about myself, I want you to know that I’m a nonviolent, first-time offender, and I fell in love with cooking, discovered a passion for it, while I was incarcerated” (Henderson, *Cooked* 182). Yet, he recognized that Gadsby was eager to build a relationship with him as a black chef:

I knew that he wanted to help me because I was black. He was giving me opportunities to move up that few others got in his kitchen, and he gave me private cooking lessons when the rest of the crew wasn’t around. He made it his mission to share what he learned from Joël Robuchon, Alain Ducasse, and Thomas Keller. (Henderson, *Cooked* 26)

Robert Gadsby is an acknowledged chef in the food business as a talented, hardworking, and visionary chef. Gadsby made his restaurant a success story by entitling his food ‘Progressive American Cuisine,’ with a focus on taste and presentation regardless of

racial context. Therefore, he constantly encouraged Henderson to construct his culinary style in the kitchen:

It's the way you handle the food. Jeff, you were in prison all those years lifting those big ol' dumbbells and such. But don't you notice that every time you put the garnish on top of the fish, it falls off? You need to relax — you're manhandling the food. You have to handle food with love and respect, and then the food will respond to you. You'll get it. Don't worry. (Henderson, *Cooked* 188)

As a chef, one may observe that Robert Gadsby did not prefer to develop his culinary style on black culinary culture with touches of soul food. Instead, he chose to follow the mainstream standards that would bring him success since he targeted the mainstream American palate. The chef also urged Jeff Henderson to be “colorblind” in the kitchen: “Jeff, in this business, it's not about the brothers. It's not about the Latinos or the whites. It's all about talent, it's all about passion. Get out of the brother business” (Henderson, *Cooked* 189). In line with this, Gadsby rejected Henderson's interest in soul food:

And how many times do I have to tell you that you have to break yourself away from that soul food anyway, Jeff? You need to start broadening your palate if you want to have any hope of becoming a real chef. You need to start eating and tasting new things. That is the only way you will ever grow in the food world. (Henderson, *Cooked* 194)

Henderson believes that Chef Gadsby does not associate his style with soul food and African American culinary culture since he developed his culinary style as a black man with a British background. He reflects Gadsby's impactful standing in the culinary world with the following words:

Nothing was cool about Robert. You'd think he was a white guy in blackface. A lot of professional African Americans in L.A. didn't understand him. It may have been his British background. But I thought I understood him. He just wanted to be recognized among his peers, and his peers were white professional chefs. My take on the whole culinary game was to earn respect among my peers as well, but my peers also included people in my community and my family. (Henderson, *Cooked* 195-96)

Although their understanding of black culinary culture is different, Henderson respects Chef Robert Gadsby as a successful chef who fulfills the dominant white stream food and restaurant culture requirements. Gadsby portrays the ideal chef image as Henderson

portrays Gadsby's presence in the kitchen as the "presence of a four-star general" (182). Accordingly, Gadsby emphasizes the fierce competition in the food business as follows:

When you work for me, I'm going to train you to take people's jobs, and hopefully, you'll never lose your job to the next guy down. Every day that you work in this business, someone who wants your job will always be lurking over your shoulder. So, you have to bring your A-game to the kitchen every single day — whether it's cleaning chickens, deboning fish, creating that night's special, or just scrubbing toilets. Don't take it personally. I am going to make a chef out of you." Then he patted me on the back. (Henderson, *Cooked* 187)

In the dominant understanding, the close competition and tight schedules necessitate the kitchen crew to be self-disciplined, fast, and flawless. Robert Gadsby's philosophy as a chef conforms to the white chef standards. His actions fulfill the traditional crude chef image pushing the kitchen crew hard: "But one thing I didn't understand was his aggression, the way he spoke to his crew. He was very hard on the Latino guys, barking at" (Henderson, *Cooked* 187). Although Henderson respects Gadsby's position as a black man in the fine-dining world, he does not internalize the crude chef image as an ideal chef in the kitchen.

Chef Gadsby increased Henderson's visibility in the fine-dining world; however, he also admitted that he is usually not eager to employ black chefs: "I was initially hesitant to offer you any position at all," he notes and adds, "To be honest, I've had some bad experiences with black men working in my kitchens" (Henderson, *Cooked* 183). Gadsby's attitude is not different from the mainstream culinary world, where racial stereotypes discriminate against black chefs regardless of their potential. This reflects the structural racism that dominates the food business and can be defined as culinary racism. Henderson also posits the idea that black chefs and cooks struggle in the culinary world with fixated racial identities depending upon racial stereotypes:

I figured he probably didn't expect that from me. Black cooks had a bad rep in the food world. We were stereotyped as having anger problems, being lazy and combative, and cracking under pressure. Robert proved them wrong. Sterling proved them wrong. And I was going to prove them wrong, too. (Henderson, *Cooked* 209)

Henderson indicates that each black chef with a success story debunks the stereotypes attached to the black identity that also presents itself in the culinary culture.

Unfortunately, culinary racism is primarily visible in the fine-dining world, and the kitchen inherits historical and social stereotypes that define black food, masculinity, and subjectivity. As a result, black chefs cannot find a position in the fine-dining world as quickly as white chefs.

In kitchen training, Gadsby introduced Henderson to social circles and networks, leading him to become a chef at a fine-dining restaurant. Henderson observes that black chefs do not have visibility in the fine-dining world. At dinner, he accompanies Gadsby; he asks him: “Doesn’t it bother you that there are no brothers in any of these kitchens?” I asked him. ‘Not even the dishwashers.’ Robert rejected that argument once again. He didn’t believe there was any racism” (Henderson, *Cooked* 196). Although Gadsby did not confirm, Henderson believed that systematic racism influences food politics and black chefs’ position in the fine-dining world. Black chefs are invisible in the fine-dining world. For instance, when he applied for a chef position at a high-end Italian restaurant, “Terrance.” Black coworkers at the restaurants were surprised to see a black man as a chef: “As I set up shop in the prep kitchen, one black waiter named Kenny seemed very interested in what I was doing. ‘Man,’ he said, ‘I never saw a brother in here before trying out for a chef gig.’ ‘Well, you’re seeing one now.’ He laughed, telling me, ‘I like your style’” (Henderson, *Cooked* 242). Henderson comments upon the perplexed eyes on him as follows: “They had probably never seen anything like me: a black man who could really cook” (Henderson, *Cooked* 11). On the other hand, he still emphasizes that it has been challenging for him to follow a culinary path with a criminal background.

It was sometimes challenging for Henderson to manage the kitchen staff since they questioned his authority as a chef. For instance, upon his request for more discipline in the kitchen, some kitchen crew members drew a caricatured portrayal of him on a board at the restaurant entrance. It was difficult for him to regulate his emotions and take action upon actions that could be interpreted as racist assaults. The chef reflects on his confusion towards such a portrayal as follows:

A couple days later, I’m opening up for lunch, and I see a drawing on the blackboard where we listed the daily specials for the waitstaff. It’s a rendition of a

black man: big lips, Afro, with glasses. Looked just like me with hair. I called security and employee relations—right after I snapped a picture of the caricature with the digital camera I always keep in my knife kit. Over in employee relations, this woman asked me if I felt offended. Of course, she wanted me to say no so that I couldn't sue. "I look at it in different aspects," I said. "One aspect, it's a picture of a beautiful black man. The other aspect is that it's a racist gesture and a ploy to get me to bitch up and ask to be moved to another restaurant." (Henderson, *Cooked* 248)

For black chefs, the high-end restaurant kitchen becomes a space where black subjectivity resists white supremacy. Nevertheless, by keeping calm after such a racist attack, Henderson was promoted to a higher position at the restaurant, allowing him to become the first black chef to run a high-scale restaurant.

Along with claiming a space in the kitchen, Henderson emphasizes the significance of community building as an extension of his culinary identity. For one thing, Henderson redefines the black chef as a conscious member of society. In a way, Henderson aims to attain public attention as an asset of his culinary journey. He sets this mission as a public speaker even during his imprisonment. The chef expresses what motivates him to espouse such a public persona: "Speaking to the next generation of young people who were headed down the same path I went gave me a sense of importance. I felt the power of my past working to undo my wrong, which helped drive me forward" (Henderson, *Cooked* 165). Henderson also contributes to this new image through social activism through projects targeting the black community. Hence, upon his release from prison, Henderson actively built teenage awareness programs with other chefs and communities and started up the non-profit organization, the West Side Foundation (Henderson, *Cooked* 255). His culinary journey and his public persona took media attention. By narrating how he comes out of prison as a chef, he inspires young black people with his story of transformation.

Chef Jeff Henderson deploys the one-dimensional, stereotypical representations of black manhood through his transformation story. As a culinary hero, he transforms the racial and stable cultural constructions of black culinary identity and masculinity by changing from a criminal into a culinary star. Henderson's culinary style challenges the existing stereotypes cast upon black manhood while establishing a culinary persona that is hard-working, talented, and successful. Furthermore, he builds a culinary philosophy similar

to Kwame Onwuachi. Both chefs break the patterns that trap them in street culture through culinary activism. As such, it will not be wrong to claim that Henderson represents the cool black chef as the culinary hero of the twenty-first century. If one regards Henderson's memoir as a reflection of his culinary identity, his life narrative can be evaluated as a counter-narrative that broadens the meaning of a culinary memoir. The chef challenges pernicious stereotypes about black masculinity and reconstructs the definition of "the cool pose" for a healthier depiction of black masculinity. This new definition of "the cool" is what defines Henderson's culinary style and promotes social transformation and racial equality for the black community. It can be concluded that, as a chef, Henderson contributes to the reconceptualization of black culinary identity as much as black masculinity.

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING A HOME: BLACK DIASPORA, FOOD, AND CITY IN MARCUS SAMUELSSON'S MEMOIR, *YES, CHEF!*

So,
here you are
too foreign for home
too foreign for here.
never enough for both.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo, "Diaspora Blues" (2015)

Diaspora and migration studies postulate critical approaches to encompass the array of black cultural identities in the contemporary critical perspective. In 2005, Sam Roberts wrote for the *New York Times* that "[f]or the first time, more blacks are coming to the United States from Africa than during the slave trade" ("More Africans"). The critic draws attention to the fact that since the 1990s, more black migrants entered through the U.S. border across the Atlantic. Consequently, one in three black residents of New York is now foreign-born (Roberts, "More Africans"). Critics Percy C. Hintzen and Jean Muteba Rahier also underline that although this diversity has led to inevitable economic, political, cultural, and social reformations (2), the cultural diversity of the black diaspora has mainly remained unrecognized (6). Roberts suggests that it is necessary to redefine "what it means to be African-American" in the contemporary period to understand the implications of this rapid transformation ("More Africans"). Marcus Samuelsson is an Ethiopian-born Swedish-American chef, restaurateur, and author who has obtained visibility in the American culinary scene. His life narrative, *Yes, Chef!* (2012) offers a broader view of the black diaspora and black culinary culture. This chapter treats Marcus Samuelsson's memoir, *Yes, Chef*, as a narrative that portrays the cultural dynamics of the black diaspora in the United States in the contemporary period and examines the representations of black culinary culture and how it interacts with black cultural identity, city, and black masculinity. In the chapter, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of the rhizome is adopted to understand the correlation between food and space in the memoir. Samuelsson uses "rhizomatic webs" among

cities, food, and foodways across the transatlantic and represents the African diaspora identity as a cosmopolitan chef.

4.1. BLACK DIASPORA AND CHANGING BLACK SUBJECTIVITY

Before examining Samuelsson's contribution to black culinary culture, it is necessary to provide a brief survey of the scholarly studies that address diasporic identities. Postmodern French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduce the *rhizome* as a philosophical concept in their seminal study, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Borrowed from botany, the *rhizome* is a term defining a plant stem that "produces shoots above and roots below and is distinguished from a true root in possessing buds, nod's" ("Rhizome"). The theorists juxtapose the genealogy of root/tree and rhizome as alternative ways to articulate and interpret meaning. From its roots to its branches and leaves, the tree motif represents a unitary pattern of life. The rhizome is a system of "multiple roots" (Deleuze and Guattari 6), possessing the potential to grow from multiple sides with asymmetrical shoots, roots, and buds. Therefore, the rhizome opposes the linear unity encoded in the tree and possesses the potential to subvert the hierarchical system: "[t]he rhizome offers some hope of bringing about a kind of 'liberation' from structures of power and dominance" (Taylor 9). The rhizome builds assemblages and connections between different structures in multiple ways: "a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze and Guattari 7). Moreover, the critics define the rhizome's connections and chains as "rhizomatic maps and movements" (14) that offer alternative ways of connectivity. Characterized by movement, the rhizome promotes production and reproduction rather than inheriting a fixated position.

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome as a multifaceted, asymmetrical entity, in the process of becoming inspired postcolonial theorists Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy to reconceptualize black diaspora identity. Christian Chivallon suggests that Hall's revision of black diaspora identity and Gilroy's concept of the black Atlantic provided new paradigms to interpret the position of the black diaspora in the Americas (358). In

his “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1994), Stuart Hall situates the issue of cultural identity as the central question to evaluate the representations of black subjects. According to Hall, rather than a complete production, diaspora identity is “always constituted within not outside representation” (“Cultural Identity” 222). He further emphasizes that diaspora subjectivity is constantly in the process of becoming: “Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 235). In line with Hall’s understanding, in his book, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy deploys Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome within the framework of the black diaspora culture. Chivallon explains that in Gilroy’s reading, “the roots are henceforth replaced by that of rhizomes” (360). Gilroy coins the term black Atlantic to envisage black diaspora subjectivity and defines the black Atlantic world as “a webbed network” (4), as a structure with a “transcultural and international formation” (4). For Gilroy, “routes” rather than “roots” define the diaspora identity and its connection to place. He claims that black subjectivity is constructed upon the routes/ journeys across the Atlantic, connecting Africa, Europe, and America (4). So, the history of the black Atlantic is “continually crisscrossed by the movements of black people” (16). For Gilroy, the routes/networks of the black Atlantic possess the potential to bring black people together (34). As such, the various stories of black people constructed upon their experiences across the black Atlantic landscape reconstitute black subjectivity and cultural identity.

Reading Samuelsson’s memoir within such a theoretical framework provides a broader understanding of black diaspora identity and culinary culture. Marcus Samuelsson presents the complexity of diasporic identity—as one in the process of “becoming” as well as “being” (225). Samuelsson uses food as a rhizomatic entity to conceptualize black culinary culture through transcultural culinary routes or rhizomatic webs across the Atlantic. These culinary “routes” give him the necessary grounds to examine his biological roots in Ethiopia and his cultural roots in Sweden and blend them with his career in New York, specifically Harlem. The chef builds rhizomatic webs to reconfigure his transcultural position through culinary routes.

4.2. SAMUELSSON AND HIS CULINARY PATHWAYS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Marcus Samuelsson was born in Ethiopia and raised by an adoptive Swedish family in Sweden. Starting from his childhood, Samuelsson embraced food as a self-expressive medium and attended culinary school as a teenager. Following years of culinary journeys across various kitchens and restaurants throughout Europe, Samuelsson started to work at a Swedish restaurant in New York, where he achieved the Michelin Star. He also received the 1999 James Beard Foundation Award for “Rising Star Chef” and the 2003 award for “Best Chef in New York City” as the executive chef of Aquavit. Samuelsson appeared in well-known American food shows such as *Inner Chef*, *Urban Cuisine*, *Top Chef Masters*, *Chopped*, and *The Taste* (“Marcus Samuelsson”). Unlike the black chefs studied in the previous chapters, Samuelsson represents the black diaspora culture in the American culinary scene through his transcultural allegiances. The chef published his first cookbook, *Aquavit: And the New Scandinavian Cuisine* (2003), in which he evaluated Swedish cuisine internationally. Following his visits to Africa, Samuelsson decided to reconfigure the representation of African culinary culture on a global scale. He attempted to raise the visibility of African cuisine with two cookbooks entitled *The Soul of a New Cuisine: A Discovery of Food and Flavors of Africa* (2006) and *Discovery of a Continent-Foods, Flavors, and Inspirations from Africa* (2007). Via his cookbooks, Samuelsson contributes to constructing the black cosmopolitan chef image in a transcultural foodscape and challenges the monolithic representations of black culinary culture. Following his experience of working in a multicultural kitchen at Aquavit, Samuelsson wanted to claim his place as a black chef in the scope of fine American dining. However, his first attempt to establish an African restaurant with Merkato did not live long enough to bring him the anticipated response. The chef decided to settle and continue his life and culinary career in Harlem, New York. He eventually established his dream restaurant, Red Rooster, in Harlem. In Rooster, Samuelsson uses food as a medium to share his transcultural position and to discover African American history in Harlem. Samuelsson also published cookbooks that present his fusion of African and African American food and foodways. In his cookbooks, *New American Table* (2009) and *The Red Rooster Cookbook* (2016),

Samuelsson attempted to build intra- and intercultural bridges between African, African American, and diaspora foodways. Samuelsson successfully represents the black cosmopolitan chef image in a transcultural foodscape and challenges the monolithic representations of black culinary culture and history.

Samuelsson's memoir concentrates on the narrative of his childhood in Sweden, his travels as a chef, his meeting with American culture, and his reunion with Africa. Thus, one may claim that his cultural identity is constructed along "routes" across the Atlantic triangle. Samuelsson was born in Ethiopia in 1970. At the age of two, Samuelsson lost his mother due to the tuberculosis outbreak after she courageously saved his and his sister's life by taking an arduous journey from the village to the hospital on foot. Samuelsson opens his memoir with the narrative of how he lost his mother and of the void caused by this early loss. Since Samuelsson has no memory of his biological mother, he attempts to reconnect with her by exploring the herbs and tastes of traditional Ethiopian food: "I have never seen a picture of my mother, but I know how she cooked. For me, my mother is berbere, an Ethiopian spice mixture" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 4). Samuelsson introduces berbere, a signature spice frequently used in Ethiopian kitchens, to feel the connection between himself and his Ethiopian mother. At the same time, he appreciates his mother's self-sacrifice to prevent his death:

I sometimes imagine the woman's breath who not only gave me life but delivered me from death. I sometimes reach into that tin by my stove, take a handful of berbere, sift it through my fingers, and toss it into the pan. I watch my wife cook, and I imagine that I can see my mother's hands. I have taught myself the recipes of my mother's people because those foods are, for me, as a chef, the easiest connection to the mysteries of who my mother was. Her identity remains stubbornly shrouded in the past, so I feed myself and the people I love the food that she made. But I cannot see her face. (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 4)

The chef addresses his emotions by using food as a signifier to narrate his reconnection with his mother and his personal history. Like Michael Twitty, Samuelsson defines food as a way of creating memory: "As chefs, we definitely are in the memory business: We are creating a memory with ingredients" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 207). First, as observed in the food memoir tradition, Samuelsson traces food and foodways as a marker of personal memory. Therefore, food becomes a rhizomatic entity that enables connectivity with the past. In her article, "Post-Blackness and Culinary Nostalgia in Marcus

Samuelsson's 'Yes, Chef,' Badia Ahad, The critic, offers a detailed reading of the dynamics between post-blackness and nostalgia. She interprets Samuelsson's connection to his mother as an attempt "to reconstruct the past and reproduce the self through the creation and consumption of food—it becomes a way of filling the void of his maternal loss and a sincere approach to reclaim some aspect of her identity" (9). However, Samuelsson's connection to Ethiopian food and his mother is not limited to "recreating memories of a never-experienced past" (9). Food enables Samuelsson to build "rhizomatic webs" across the Atlantic triangle without the boundaries of time and place. Inspired by Ethiopian cuisine, the chef revitalizes memories of his mother and, at the same time, restores a connection with the land.

Like Kwame Onwuachi's memoir, Marcus Samuelsson's memoir can be read as a bildungsroman in that the chef narrates his childhood in Sweden as a black boy in detail. Following the unexpected death of his mother, Samuelsson and his sister were adopted by a Swedish family. His transcultural journey begins with this unusual start in life, moving him from Africa to Europe. Samuelsson's relation to his Swedish family shows a similar display of commemoration and regeneration through food and cooking. As much as his nostalgic connection to the memory of his biological mother, the chef feels attached to his personal history and family in Sweden. Samuelsson regards the period he spent with his family during his childhood as precious since it gave him strong roots to develop his identity. Accordingly, the memoir describes his Swedish family's expressions of love, care, and support. Samuelsson narrates his adoption story and his childhood from his present perspective: in the memoir, "the defining I," is the famous black chef with a well-known name earned in the popular American culinary scene. Since he left Ethiopia at the age of two, Samuelsson's childhood memories and narrative depend on his elder sister Linda's adoption memory. Eventually, the narrative demonstrates narrative gaps. Therefore, "the defined I" is also structured as a hybrid identity since the narrative of his childhood is constructed upon a blend of Samuelsson's memory, his elder sister Linda's memory, and stories told by their adopting family.

Samuelsson's memoir follows the traditional pattern of food memoirs: like Michael Twitty and Onwuachi Kwame, Samuelsson developed a culinary interest during

childhood. He learned to appreciate good food in his grandmother's kitchen. For young Samuelsson, his German-grandmother, Helga, was an archetypal culinary model who revealed her love through food and cooking. His grandmother not only cooks for the family but also encourages Samuelsson to participate in the cooking process by calling him "my little helper" (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 20). The chef indicates that his first food memory "would not be a single taste, but a smell – my grandmother's house" (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 20). The lines prove that Samuelsson established a close connection between food and place from childhood. The vital importance of the grandmother's kitchen in Samuelsson's memory signifies the priority of the relationship between identity and location. The chef indicates that his grandmother's kitchen is essential to his culinary memory. The chef cherishes what he learned from his grandmother: "I felt like her hands always shadowed mine in the kitchen—she had the instinct, I had the technique, and together we were unstoppable" (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 162). He pays tribute to his grandmother for building different layers and textures naturally: "It's so funny to me how, today, we celebrate braising as some refined, elegant approach, when it's the same slow cooking method Mormor used" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 21). Samuelsson proudly follows his grandmother's example in the kitchen, adopting it to modern culinary understanding.

His grandmother's kitchen is not the only place where Samuelsson developed cooking techniques. The time he spent with his father in his village Smögen enabled him to develop his understanding of food and foodways as a way of life. His connection with the sea village also proves that Samuelsson used food to build rhizomatic webs starting from his childhood. In Smögen, he indulged in fishing and cooking seafood. His interaction with fishers and his father's relatives like Uncle Torsten enabled him to experiment with different cooking processes. Moreover, the time he spent in the village with his father and uncles provided him with male role models:

Later, I'd often think of men like Torsten and Stellan as I made my way up the punishing ladder of the world's finest kitchens. Those Smögen men and I count my father among them, were unafraid of hard work. They were their doctors, therapists, and career counselors. I constantly reminded myself they would never quit a job because of the name-calling, plate-throwing, and brutal hours common in a professional kitchen. I made it my business to be tough in the ways that they were tough on the inside, where it counted. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 30)

Samuelsson also states that while preparing fish for the first time, he recognized the significance of food and its association with the place “Although I was still a kid and years away from any thought of becoming a chef, I was learning the beauty of food within a context: how important it is to let the dishes be reflective of your surroundings” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 34). The ambiance of the village and the seafood contributed to his identification of the place with food. He recognized how the landscape manifests itself through food and foodways. For Samuelsson, the act of cooking is a multilayered process shaped by the spirit of the place and time. “Chefs are trained, but inevitably our strength as flavor builders goes back to our childhoods and the tastes and combinations we learned as a kid. It’s why I’m so comfortable with gravlax and meatballs and why, even in Harlem, you’ll see those dishes on the menu” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 303). The chef uses Swedish foodways that stimulate him to share his childhood on the restaurant menu.

As much as his connection to food and foodways, Samuelsson also foregrounds his experience of growing up as a black boy in Sweden. Samuelsson realizes his racial identity was a barrier to feeling connected since it was not quite common to come across black people in Sweden during the 1980s. Therefore, he identifies racial labeling as a significant factor that shaped social life in Sweden that made him feel like an outsider. Samuelsson illustrates this by using the Swedish word “Blatte,” meaning “someone who was ‘dark’ but, more, someone who was an outsider. It wasn’t quite as charged as the term nigga that was favored among hip-hop-loving black people. Still, it was a term that made liberal-minded Swedes deeply uncomfortable” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 43). Samuelsson suggests that, like the offensive word “nigga,” in the United States, “blatte” was a derogatory word with undertones of racial discrimination and social labeling, used to situate individuals as outsiders in Sweden. While he expresses that he did not face the systematic racial discrimination that African American men met in the United States, he still faced racist manifestations that made him feel othered:

Once we got to school, there were comments that were more curious than cruel at first. And as I got older, as a boy, there were more than my fair share of taunts and playground fights. Still, it’s important that you know that growing up black in Sweden is different from growing up black in America. I have no big race wounds. And I owe that to Anne Marie Samuelsson. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 36)

Even though he emphasizes that he did not struggle with the systematic racism deeply rooted in American culture, blackness became a central issue for Samuelsson and his sister Linda, especially during their school years. For Gilroy: “Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness” (1). Although he and his sister were raised by a Swedish family and led the Swedish way of life, they had to endure racist remarks. For instance, “negerboll” cookies with Sambo¹⁵ images on their package had become a way of teasing him. The chef explains that boys at school often threw their packages at Samuelsson’s table: “A little Sambo had long been used for advertising negerboll cookies in Sweden, and I felt a sense of dread anytime I saw a boy open a package of them at lunch because I knew that the wrapper would soon be coming my way” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 39-40). Moreover, at school, he encountered emotional, verbal, and physical violence due to his skin color:

When Boje called me a neger, when he threw an American basketball at me and tried to hurt me, physically and emotionally, I had to ask myself for the very first time—was I different? How was I different? And in the same way that five-year-old Linda had kept vigilant for months on end, the question occurred to me for the very first time—where was home? Was this place it? (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 39)

Although Samuelsson was culturally integrated into Swedish culture and society, he was not accepted as a Swedish boy. The chef addresses how he was socially labeled a “black boy.” Moreover, as he grew into adulthood, he observed a gradual marked change in people’s attitudes “I’d been adopted as a toddler. Culturally and linguistically, I was Swedish. But as I got older, the more I could feel people respond to me as a young black man instead of a cute little black kid. The subtle shift in the body language of strangers was something I never discussed with my parents” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 44). As the author narrates, he was treated differently from his sister with the assigned identity of being black and male, packed with racialized and gendered stereotypes. As a result, he could not feel a sense of belonging to the Swedish cultural identity as a young black man. Neither did he have roots to form his cultural identity upon blackness, something which led him to experience the double consciousness. Gilroy defines the

¹⁵ The characterization of Sambo emerged during the early periods of colonization (Boskin 7). The caricatured figure of Sambo was portrayed as a childlike character and similar to a child; he is cheerful and docile (Boskin 12). By fostering such an image, the white master established “a childlike dependency,” leading to a “social conditioning” that gave complete control of the black slaves’ lives to white masters (White and Connes 24).

two different versions of artistic subjectivity either as being “rooted in” or “routed through” (3). This sense of unbelonging caused Samuelsson’s “disattachment” from Sweden as “home” since he did not feel “rooted in.” Therefore, racial discrimination can be considered the most crucial factor that triggered his questioning of the connection between identity and place and led him to look for routes to build alternative ways of life.

As a teenager, Samuelsson adopted cooking as a medium through which he could express himself independently of the racialized and gendered identities imposed upon him. He recognized that he could voice his transcultural position through food: “It was in me already, the desire to mix cultures and foods” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 55). In the memoir, Samuelsson briefly overviews the Swedish culinary scene during the 1980s. At the time, the culinary schools in Sweden valued French culinary culture above the traditional Swedish cuisine. While Swedish restaurant culture was beyond the notion of fine dining, Swedish restaurants gradually drew global attention (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 55). Therefore, Samuelsson decided to pursue a culinary career by traveling across various European countries. He worked at high-end restaurants in Sweden, Australia, and France. Samuelsson also worked at a cruise ship that enabled him to taste the food from different coasts of Europe and Africa. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the “rhizomatic map” can be applicable to comprehend Samuelsson’s traveling identity as a chef since he uses food and foodways as a medium utilizing which he could explore different cultures.

In their accounts of the “rhizomatic map,” Deleuze and Guattari stress that “the map is open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any mounting, or reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation” (12). Samuelsson develops rhizomatic webs or, in other words, culinary routes to find his voice as a black chef. The chef continued traveling across Europe, America, and Africa, enriching his culinary repertoire. Traveling to various restaurants in different countries helped him recognize how ethnic food fuses with other cultures. Ahad underlines that in

Samuelsson's position, "the act of chasing flavors emerges as a pursuit of a space with which to identify and reconcile, though not collapse, the collectivity of cultural, ethnic, and racial experiences by which he has been constituted. Through the manipulation of food and flavor, the chef, as both a historian and an architect of taste, self-fashions through culinary style" (Ahad 8). Thus, he constructed his culinary style by weaving rhizomatic webs across the continents through food and foodways. The routes have enabled him to evolve, enrich and redefine black subjectivity as well as black culinary culture.

4.3. RECONNECTION WITH AFRICA AND PERSONAL HISTORY THROUGH CULINARY JOURNEYS

Though his culinary journeys expanded his views on food and foodways, Samuelsson's cooking was heavily built upon Swedish and French traditions. However, in 1999, the popular food magazine, *Gourmet*, made an offer that opened a new page in Samuelsson's life. The magazine suggested that the chef plan culinary trips to explore African foodways and share his reflections (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 217). The chef accepted the offer since he considered it an opportunity to reconnect with Africa: "As a chef, I'd found a more comfortable way to reconnect to Africa: through its food" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 226). Samuelsson started to interpret food and foodways as a common ground where he would be able to engage much more closely with African culture: "Why didn't I know more about African food? Why was I so clueless about Ethiopian cuisine when it was the country of my birth? How, in more than a decade of chasing flavors, could I have overlooked an entire continent so completely?" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 216). Africa provided Samuelsson with new routes and webs. He, metaphorically, "tasted" the land to envisage black cultural identity. As a result, he has created an instinctive connection to Africa and African foodways and subverted the Western narrative of African cultural identity.

In Samuelsson's life, food functions primarily as a language: "Food and flavors have become my first language" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 283). Moreover, food supplies Samuelsson with the necessary grounds to interpret life and construct his identity.

Accordingly, he defines food as the significant element that shapes his life: “Food’s my only bag. It’s my gig, my art, my life. Always has been, always will be. I’m always battling myself – the part of me that says I can and the part of me that says I can’t. My greatest gift has been that the part of me that says ‘I can’ is always, always, just a little bit louder” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 284). His culinary journeys unravel the new parts of his personal hi/story resembling Michael Twitty’s journeys to the South to investigate African American culinary history and his family history. However, Samuelsson also felt that he had to revisit his ancestors' land and explore the black notes in traditional Southern cooking to revive the cultural memory. Samuelsson also seeks to find his connection to Ethiopia by discovering Ethiopian food and foodways. As the chef says, “After all, I’d just learned a piece of my past. Like so many of the Ethiopian dishes, I learned to make over the years, [...], dish by dish, adding texture and layers to the African heritage I so longed to know” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 224). Through this journey, Twitty gained a personal understanding of soul food and African American foodways. Like him, Marcus Samuelsson explored African food and foodways and valued them as a central part of contemporary black culture across the globe, including his own story.

After obtaining his chef title, Samuelsson approached Africa through food and foodways. In other words, he felt comfortable connecting with the unknown parts of his past through food. Therefore, visiting Ethiopia was not merely a culinary project for Samuelsson since he would be in the land where he was born. What Samuelsson recognized first in Ethiopia was his physical similarities with the people around him:

In those two weeks, I saw my own face reflected a thousand times over, which not only gave me a sense of belonging unlike I’d had anywhere else in my life but also a deep reminder of how fate had steered my life on such a different course. I’d see an eleven-year-old version of me with a cardboard tray of tissues and gum set up at an intersection. I’d see my own face dashing into coffee shops, my own hands using a branch to sweep the sidewalk in front of a butcher shop. I’d see an old and bent version of me, wearing a blanket-like gabi shawl in the cool of the early morning, his hand cupped and extended as he chanted his plea for money. “Birr, birr, birr.” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 220)

Like his first arrival in New York, the physical similarities with black people around the city led him to build connections with people and places. He felt more than a guest in

Africa due to his physical resemblance to people. This familiarity enabled him to develop a sense of connection with people and places.

Samuelsson uses his culinary skill and persona as a safe bridge to approach the lost parts of his personal history attached to Africa, his African family, and his sense of belonging. Food and foodways encouraged Samuelsson to collect the missing pieces of his account. First and foremost, he found the courage to meet his biological father. Accordingly, he defines his first visit to his father's land with the following words: "On the plane from New York to Addis, I was so aware that for the first time in my adult life, I was traveling not as a chef, chasing flavors – but as an orphan, chasing history" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 241). As Deleuze and Guattari put it, the "rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (10). Accordingly, though Samuelsson spent over thirty years of his life separate from his father, through the rhizomatic webs, he was able to reconnect with "the old line." However, the idea of this reconnection made him feel uneasy. Therefore, he intended to present this visit to Africa as a journey to explore Ethiopian food and foodways:

When I look back on it, I can see clearly that work was a buffer from all the question marks and possible disappointments that might await me in Ethiopia. If I did not get to meet my father, if he was a disappointment, I could change course and focus solely on cooking and the food feature that we were creating for the magazine. But at the time, it wasn't anywhere near as clear, and I told myself that the day I was going to meet my birth father was merely a side trip, like the afternoon I had spent learning how to make injera with the old women in the hut. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 241)

Meeting his father and his relatives in Ethiopia provided Samuelsson with a broader perspective on the cultural dynamics of the African way of life. As well as reconnecting with "the old line," he was able to constitute what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as "new lines" (10). The visit challenged him: "I struggled to keep the judgment out of my eyes and out of my voice" (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 247). As he built new connections with his Ethiopian family, Samuelsson wanted to impact their lives: "I feel deeply connected to them, deeply invested in helping them live better lives, and that has turned out to be one of the most complicated undertakings I've ever faced. We are family, and yet we are separated by not only an ocean. We are separated by language, culture, religion, and

class” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 246). Samuelsson tries to create connectivity through culinary routes since he feels separated from his biological family by economic and cultural factors like language, religion, and class. While in the United States, he puts his efforts into demolishing “the single stories” of Africa and African foodways with his books and restaurants; the chef puts his efforts into encouraging girls’ schooling in Africa. Consequently, he helped his sisters to continue their education in the city (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 247). Moreover, his connection with his biological family opened new routes for Samuelsson and his European and Ethiopian families to travel across the black Atlantic routes.

Meeting his father and his African family encouraged Samuelsson to learn more about his personal history. For instance, Samuelsson’s reunion with his father encouraged him to meet his daughter Zoe, whom he supported financially but neglected to meet or contact. The chef asserts, “Meeting my father and knowing that I had been loved by him despite his decades-long absence gave me the courage to meet my daughter” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 250). Upon meeting his father, Samuelsson understood that his 14-year-old-daughter also had the right to meet him:

After traveling to Ethiopia, to a village that did not exist on any map and sitting with my father in his dirt-floored hut, something changed: I realized that meeting my daughter was not at all like orchestrating the perfect restaurant meal. All I needed to do was give Zoe what my father had given me: my own flawed self, without excuses or promises. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 250)

In the memoir, Samuelsson explains that when he worked in Austria, Zoe’s mother Birgitta announced that she was pregnant and wanted to keep the baby. Samuelsson gives details of the relationship as he does not wish to reproduce the absent black father stereotype in his own life. Upon meeting his daughter, he aimed to build such a connection through food:

It was eerie to stand there and see her move through the kitchen like my grandma Helga – not trained, just a natural. We even laughed in the same way. Everybody noticed it. It was a lot like meeting my brothers and sisters in Ethiopia. We didn’t grow up together, but we had these little commonalities that let us both know that we were not strangers – we were connected. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 255)

By using food as a language, the chef looks for reconciliation between himself and his daughter, Zoe. He again uses food as a medium to build a bridge between himself and his

daughter and tries restoring an unlived part of his personal story through food and foodways.

4.4. ESTABLISHING A CULINARY HOME IN HARLEM, NEW YORK

As well as detailing Samuelsson's experience in transatlantic routes that cherish his culinary understanding, the memoir dwells on how the chef finds his voice in New York. Sam Roberts asserts that New York draws most black migrants in the twenty-first century ("More Africans"). According to Hintzen and Rahier, [m]any black immigrants enter social locations of racial accommodation without participatory experiences or transgenerational memories of segregation" (6). This new migrant movement requires an alternative reading of black individuals who do not define their racial identity through memories of enslavement, segregation, or experiences of systematic racial discrimination (Hintzen and Rahier 6). In other words, even though contemporary African American identity politics currently influence them, African diaspora culture needs to be evaluated from a fresh perspective (Hintzen and Rahier 6). Correspondingly, Samuelsson narrates his experience in New York as a member of the black diaspora. For him, New York is a hub that reflects the vibrant, transcultural, and transnational space. Arriving in New York for the first time was a stimulating experience for Samuelsson:

My plane touched down at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, and when I stepped into the terminal, the first thing I noticed were all the black people. They were everywhere. Black gate agents, black flight attendants, black baggage handlers, black cashiers, black cab drivers. Black people, everywhere I turned. The second thing I noticed was that no one was looking at me differently. No, scratch that: No one was looking at me at all. Right then, I knew I'd come to the right place. (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 134)

Different from his experience in Europe, the transcultural atmosphere of New York enforces Samuelsson to redefine his sense of belonging and connection to a place. He was pleased as he did not stand out due to his skin color since "no one was looking" at him at the airport. As opposed to his sense of unbelonging in Sweden and Europe, New York has become where he feels a sense of belonging. The chef states: "I just knew that of all the places I'd lived, New York was where I fit in best, and I was willing to give everything I had to get back there" (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 174). Deleuze and Guattari's

notion of rhizomatic identity, also visible in Samuelsson's self-narrative, develops into a new form with Samuelsson's connection to New York. The chef further illustrates this connection to the place: "So much of what drew me to New York was the chance to blend in, to not stand out for once because of the color of my skin" (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 209). Furthermore, he could make transnational connections in New York. He met people from the African diaspora, themselves raised in Europe and now living in the United States:

None of us talked about it – we were guys, after all – but we all felt more accessible in New York than we had at home; we were no longer such oddballs. We all had other black friends, and everybody did his thing. Everything we moved to New York for was happening for us: diversity, music, excitement, creativity (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 146).

As emphasized in the quotation, members of the black diaspora feel a sense of belonging in New York. In the memoir, New York functions as a rhizomatic center" where diaspora cultures come across and fuse. Such a transcultural space enables Samuelsson to recognize the connection between place and transcultural identity:

New York was different. There were divides along the lines of race and class, but whereas ethnic Swiss-owned Switzerland and the ethnic Swedes owned Sweden, everybody in New York had a stake in where they were. Maybe you had to have a place this big to allow there to be a hundred different New Yorks living side by side, but almost everyone I saw seemed to move with a sense of belonging. (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 141)

Therefore, New York becomes a convenient space for Samuelsson to examine black cultural identity. Moreover, Samuelsson's visit to New York provided him with an alternative experience to explore the construction of black subjectivity and black masculinity. The memoir displays the perception of African Americanness from Samuelsson's perspective, depending on his European background. Samuelsson experienced living in a black community in the United States for the first time: "When we went to parties in Harlem, I realized their whole world was completely black. Maybe there'd be some Puerto Ricans involved, but otherwise, it was all black. On the one hand, that was the opposite of my upbringing. On the other, it was just as homogenous" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 143). He self-examined his sense of belonging in his interactions with the African American community. As the chef says, "At times, it felt like a cultural test: What would it take for me to belong? Was the color of my skin enough?"

(Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 143). At the same time, his European perspective appears in Samuelsson's reading of African American culture and masculinity. He observes that the performance of black masculinity in the United States was embedded in African American lifestyle, including language, clothing, and entertainment. Since Samuelsson did not have the mutual signals that African American men shared, his performance of black masculinity was regarded as distinctive by his African American friends:

Casey's friends either worried that I was some kind of cop or were amused by me: I was black but not black. I played soccer, and they played basketball. I had darker skin than almost all of them, but the poor command of their language and even poorer command of style – my Levis were too close-fitting, my Doc Martens were not Tims, and it took me a while to shift from my blown-out Hendrix fro to the fade I finally adopted for the rest of my stay. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 142-43)

With his experiences in Harlem and inner-city life in New York, Samuelsson recognized black masculinity performance identified as “the cool pose” in his previous chapter. Samuelsson acknowledged that the black masculine identity is constructed and performed separately from the mainstream culture in the United States.

The fact that Samuelsson achieved a prestigious standing in the early stages of his career does not mean that he did not face racial and social discrimination. While cooking and being in the kitchen gave him comfort, Samuelsson emphasizes that, at the same time, he had to endure racial prejudice in professional kitchens: “Yet, professionally, I struggled to overcome the constant subject of race. I didn't want it to go away. Color is not just what I see in the mirror; it's how I cook and how I live. But inevitably, when people bring race into the professional arena, it's never as rich, complicated, or tasty as I would like” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 209-10). The chef discusses the challenges of being a black chef in contemporary culinary circles and the distinctive role of race in the fine-dining world, particularly in the United States. He questions the inherited racial discrimination in fine dining since restaurants are not eager to hire black cooks and chefs: “Had they ever had a black cook in that kitchen? Would they ever? It was becoming clearer and clearer to me that black people were almost by design not part of the conversation about fine dining” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 151). In contrast to the current position of black cooks and chefs in the kitchen, Samuelsson draws attention to the fact that, while historically black chefs built the

American culinary tradition, in the contemporary period, they still strive to find a place in the fine-dining world:

Sometimes I think my success makes others forget that it isn't easy for a black person to make it as a chef in America. Our ancestors, who built the culinary foundation of this country but were only referred to as "the help," would be shocked to learn that there are more black men and women who are partners at law firms than black men and women who are executive chefs at the top restaurants in this country. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 273)

As he witnesses the invisibility of black chefs in the New York fine-dining scene, Samuelsson aims to open the paths for black chefs. Samuelsson also aspired to become a chef and defined the ideal chef as someone with the power to protect people's freedom rather than oppress them. Moreover, the kitchen is often described as a place where ideal masculinity is reproduced as the chefs are expected to adopt identities that comply with hegemonic masculine ideals (Burrow et al., 675). In an interview, Samuelsson provides a candid insight into the restaurant industry from the perspective of a progressive chef. He addresses two significant issues that need to be changed in the fine-dining sector: racial and gendered discrimination. Although he identifies race as a discriminative factor, he emphasizes that gender is also a decisive factor in the fine-dining world: "I don't want to just change the race dynamics in a kitchen. I want to change the gender dynamics in professional kitchens" (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 293). Moreover, the chef highlights the lack of black and female chefs' visibility in restaurant kitchens dominated by white norms.

Samuelsson points out four major factors that explain why black people are invisible in the food sector. Firstly, black-owned businesses such as diners, soul food shacks, and restaurants in Harlem were exchanged with food chains in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, small family businesses could not keep on (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 212). Besides, black working-class parents were not eager to see their children work in a kitchen, which they regarded as a service industry. Moreover, black people still could not obtain the financial resources to start a business as quickly as white people could. Lastly, Samuelsson draws attention to racism as one of the primary factors for black invisibility in the fine-dining world. He emphasizes that being black still equals

unskilled workers and is associated with unskilled work in American, Swedish, and French kitchens (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 212-13).

Consequently, he finds himself responsible as a chef for contributing to the visibility of black culinary culture and supporting black chefs: “I have been a witness to the poor quality of groceries available in Harlem, the lack of healthy food options, the whitewash of New York’s fine-dining scene – in the kitchen, among the staff, and among the guests. I’m activating myself to lead” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 303). Samuelsson reflects the multivocality of African culture and diaspora identity through the kitchen. Unlike Michael Twitty, Onwuachi Kwame, and Jeff Henderson, Marcus Samuelsson’s culinary persona is based on diasporic black food and foodways. He expands black culinary culture by fusing French, Swedish, and African cooking in his kitchen. Samuelsson puts his efforts into elevating African food and advancing the position of black cooks and chefs in gourmet, refined dining culture.

With Samuelsson’s contribution, African American culinary culture reaches beyond national boundaries. His first cookbook project also exemplifies his aim to reflect this transcultural perspective of African culture. Instead of a home cooking book, the chef preferred to create a cookbook centralizing African food and foodways: “What I wanted to do was the book I longed to own but had never seen – a cookbook that could serve as a bridge between my home in Manhattan and my roots in Ethiopia” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 227). The chef intended to work on such a book project when he recognized that even the best bookstores, rich in their culinary sections, lack variety in black food and foodways and that contemporary African cuisine are non-existent. In this respect, one of his aims became giving a voice to the unheard:

When I came back from my trip to Ethiopia, I went straight there, only to find that Africa was almost nonexistent in this world. [. . .] I could find an entire wall in Italy, with whole shelves devoted to each of its regions and endless rows on France, Spain, and Mexico. The Africa section was one Time-Life book from the 1950s and a handful of wonderful but tradition-focused books by the culinary historian Jessica B. Harris. Where was contemporary Africa? Where were the recipes? (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 227)

Samuelsson wanted to make Africa visible both on the plate and on paper. He started a one-year journey to complete the stories and recipes he eventually compiled in *The Soul*

of a *New Cuisine*. His aim with the cookbook was to build bridges among African cuisines by delivering “a comprehensive array of authentic recipes from all over the continent” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 227). He wanted to create interactions among African countries through culinary culture with the book. Besides, he aimed to show the connections between African and American cuisine with everyday ingredients, including foie gras, okra, and seasonings. Lastly, he aimed to criticize the stereotypical representation of Africa as a continent that struggles with famine:

At this point, I knew that the chefs would be curious – we are by nature an inquisitive bunch, and they would respond to new and interesting ingredients, just as they had to wasabi or salsa. This was trickier territory because as soon as you talked about Africa and food, many Americans only associated the continent with famine. I wanted to go beyond that stereotype, to recognize that every country has a middle class, every country has rituals and celebrations around food. Every country has a cuisine. (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 227-28)

With his book, Samuelsson claims a place for African culinary culture and subverts received perceptions of Africa. According to Hall, Africa in colonial discourse is associated with “underdevelopment, poverty” (“Cultural Identity” 233). Samuelsson interprets African food through a transcultural cosmopolitan lens rather than foregrounding poverty or impoverishment. Samuelsson explains how Africa is portrayed on American TV and mass media in the following lines:

if you live in the United States, the images of Africa that come across TV screens and newspaper headlines sometimes seem to be all about war, corruption, and impoverishment. Everyone’s seen the pictures of small, malnourished children with flies walking across their faces, crowding around Red Cross sacks of rice. All of that is true. I know there is a great need, and I know it because I visit orphanages every time I go to Ethiopia. I’ve come face to face with the images (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 261)

As people’s portrayal of Africa is limited to what is promoted in the media, Samuelsson got severe criticism for opening an African restaurant and ignoring social realities such as poverty and impoverishment: “People would ask me: ‘Is it in bad taste to have an African restaurant when so many people are starving there?’ And every time, no matter how many times I heard it, the question was like a punch in the gut. I got versions of it on a weekly basis” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 261). Samuelsson highlights the mainstream understanding that undermines African food and foodways. Contrary to the mainstream understanding, Samuelsson was courageous enough to reflect the abundance of African

culinary culture by including the tastes from the continent. He responds to this negative image by using African elements in the kitchen, “the book was a way for me to open up a dialogue with Americans about the flavors of Africa, but to get even more people past the stereotype of Africa as ‘the needy brother,’ and instead to see its bounty and its flavor, I knew they would need a more direct experience. They would need to taste” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 260). By presenting African flavors in his cookbooks and the fine-dining world, the chef wanted to emphasize the richness of African food culture. Samuelsson notes that even in Africa, the exclusive restaurants were serving European food and that cooking in an Ethiopian way was undervalued even in Ethiopia. For instance, his inquiry about to use of ingredients of traditional Ethiopian cuisine was uncommon in luxurious hotels in Ethiopia: “When I suggested using some Ethiopian ingredients in our dinner, I got blank, slightly embarrassed looks. The Sheraton Addis Ababa, I was told, did not serve Ethiopian specialties” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 225). Therefore, he aimed to encourage Ethiopian chefs and cooks to work in international kitchens to create a new narrative of Ethiopian food and foodways (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 225). Likewise, the chef fuses ingredients of African cuisine in his kitchen to remember, reform, and redefine black culinary culture globally. For instance, he prefers to present “the cool image” of Africa using blending art with food in a fashionable way:

But what I also knew was that this view of Africa as only deprivation was distorted. It was a lie. There are middle-class Africans. There are sophisticated restaurants in cities from Johannesburg to Cairo. Even among the poorer people, there are rich traditions of celebrating with food. I wanted to bring some of that to American audiences to show there’s not just one version of the African food experience. I wanted to capture African cool. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 261)

Samuelsson’s aim of “capturing the African cool” through his cuisine corresponds with Nigerian-Ghanaian author Taiya Selasi’s reading of African diaspora culture. In her article “Bye-Bye Barbar,” published in 2005, Selasi proposes that the twenty-first century is an age that necessitates redefining “what it means to be African” and attempts to conceptualize the characteristics of this new migrant/ diaspora identity. The author coins the term “Afropolitan” by combining the words “African” and “cosmopolitan” to define the cultural identity manifested through Africans who spent a considerable amount of their lives in the Americas and European countries. She underlines the significance of celebrating African culture and diversity through vivid portrayals of

cosmopolitan Africans in the contemporary world (Selasi, “Bye-Bye Barbar”). Likewise, Samuelsson’s works demonstrate that he prefers to reflect modern black diaspora experience through his profession rather than a pessimistic picture. The chef believes it is essential to find creative ways to reflect African culture in the public sphere. Accordingly, he defines his purpose as a black chef at multiple levels: “When I think about my purpose as a black chef, the mission seems clear: to document, to preserve, to present, to capture, to inspire, and to aspire” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 310). From such a perspective, his gastronomic projects evolve to create a shared culinary narrative. The chef not only foregrounds black culinary contribution but also celebrates the interactions of diverse cultures and the fusion of ethnic cuisines that shape New York’s culinary landscape. His promotion of African flavors and taste in the American culinary scene also reflects “pride” in ethnic food rather than shame resulting from systematic racism.

For Samuelsson, the restaurant becomes an ideal space to “produce and reproduce” (Hall, “Cultural Identity” 235) and share his interpretation of the black cultural identity in contemporary America. Samuelsson made his first attempt to open a room for African culture with Merkato 55. Defined as “a pan-African restaurant” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 256), Merkato represented the African marketplace of African city life and culinary culture in New York City. The chef aimed to present the richness of food culture in the African continent concerning the open-air markets called “Merkato” as a rich site that reflects Africa’s flavors, tastes, and smells. The chef defines the marketplace as a space where one can feel the pulse of life in the city in African countries. He shares his observation with the following words:

an entire lane is dedicated to butter merchants, an entire city block set aside for sellers of traditional clothing, woven white cotton with embellished hems. Donkeys were everywhere, standing in for pickup trucks, for dollies, for forklifts. I spent hours in the spice aisles, fingering nuggets of frankincense, buying packets of black cumin or deep orange mitmita, just so I could smell them later in the filtered air of my hotel room. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 221)

Samuelsson envisions African food as a multicultural entity. Therefore, he wanted to emphasize African influences in American foodways rather than the authenticity of African food and dishes. He tried to draw attention to the transcultural culinary

connections: “what I wanted was to show the many ways in which American and West Indian food links back to Africa, how strong the flavor connection is between Senegal and North Carolina, how the cuisine of Mozambique resembles the foods of Portugal” (263). Though it attracted a multicultural audience, the chef did not regard Merkato as a culinary success since it was short-lived and criticized for addressing a limited audience.

Samuelsson went on to open a new restaurant in Harlem, a vibrant hub nourishing black diasporic cultures and welcoming people from diverse backgrounds. The cultural diversity of Harlem and New York makes the place suitable for Samuelsson’s second restaurant *Red Rooster*. The chef declares his new Harlem restaurant his “new culinary home” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 288). In Harlem, Samuelsson felt at home and rooted: “I spent so much of my life on the outside that I began to doubt that I would ever truly be in with any one people, any one place, any one tribe. But Harlem is big enough, diverse enough, scrappy enough, old enough, and knew enough to encompass all I am and all I hope to be. After all that traveling, I am, at last, home” (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 313). Harlem hosts multiple communities from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. The cosmopolitan texture of Harlem enabled Samuelsson to identify the city as his home since his hybridity would find its place in this multicultural tapestry. The chef identifies with the place so much that he starts his memoir with an anonymous poem that celebrates life in Harlem:

Chant another song of Harlem.
Not about the wrong of Harlem.
But the worthy throng of Harlem.
Proud that they belong to Harlem.
They, the overblamed in Harlem,
Need not be ashamed of Harlem.
All is not ill-famed in Harlem.
The devil, too, is tamed in Harlem.
Anonymous, circa 1929

In a way, Samuelsson defines Harlem as a rhizomatic center where he interacts with a transcultural audience. Besides its current position, Harlem’s historical legacy can be regarded as the first thing that inspired Samuelsson to start a business there. Harlem reflects African American history in multiple ways. The streets and architecture embody

the Civil Rights Movement's narratives and the Harlem Renaissance's reformatory soul. During the Harlem Renaissance, arts and performance became significant aspects of expressing black identity. Moreover, food and restaurants in Harlem also stand for the cultural legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, where soul food, defined as a significant factor that shaped black identity, served as part of the political agenda; Samuelsson describes the vibrant cultural history of Harlem as follows:

From the time I first arrived in New York, I knew of Harlem's reputation as the mecca of black America. I had seen the photographs of Harlem in its glory days – stylish men in bespoke suits, women so well dressed that they'd put the models in Vogue to shame. I knew that Harlem was music: from the Apollo to the jazz clubs that were incubators for new renditions of blues, improvisation, and swing. I knew that Harlemites loved to dance, to pray, and to eat. I made my way to the churches and the clubs, the restaurants, and the old-school saloons. But for the first time, I began to notice how beautiful Harlem was, how magnificent its architecture was. (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 279)

Samuelsson shows Harlem as an inspirational hub where the past and the African American historical legacy meet the present and the multicultural crowds.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, food has become an artifact that carries cultural and ethnic connotations in numerous restaurants in the American culinary landscape. Within the American culinary framework, black food and foodways are interpreted as alternative media that contribute to the expression of black subjectivity in the contemporary cultural landscape. In a review, Lola Ogunaike draws attention to the connection between food and art. She interprets Marcus Samuelsson's food philosophy and the act of cooking as a symbol of "The New Harlem Renaissance." In the article, the critic comments upon a party organized by Samuelsson and museum director Thelma Golden to celebrate Samuelsson's African cookbook, *The Soul of a New Cuisine* (2006) and asserts that the ambiance of the place, food, and music present contemporary African culture:

An African-accented meal inspired by recipes in his newest cookbook, *The Soul of a New Cuisine*. Samuelsson is playing a CD called *Afrikya* that he put together of all the music—African and African-inspired—that he heard as he crisscrossed the continent researching his book; the compilation, to be released this fall by Rasa Music, includes Cape Verdean, Arabic, Afro-Cuban and Bahian sounds. Like Samuelsson's book, the CD mirrors the cultural exchanges between Africa and the rest of the world—Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. ("The New Harlem Renaissance")

Harlem is an open stage for people from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds to express their creativity in various artistic ways. Parallel to the black musical tradition, black food is a resource for the African American community and a response to mainstream American culture. In his memoir and cookbooks, Samuelsson refers to Jazz and the black musical tradition established in Harlem. Samuelsson describes his restaurant, Red Rooster, as a place to feel the rhythms. Samuelsson, *Red Rooster* 3). Accordingly, on the contents page of the *Red Rooster Cookbook*, the restaurant's menu resembles a musical composition in musical lines. (Samuelsson, *Red Rooster* 3). He draws connections between jazz musicians composing music and his cooking style as a black chef.

The chef builds a similar relationship between musical performance and culinary performance. He emphasizes the black music tradition as a cultural trophy that guides him to explore cooking in an artistic manner. He asserts that, like Jazz musicians, he improvises in the kitchen and interacts with his soul through cooking in the kitchen: “In jazz, a musician who is striving for a new kind of perfect is said to have gone ‘deep in the shed.’ That’s what happened to me at Belle Avenue. It went from being a gig—a highly coveted one, but a gig all the same—to being my laboratory, my studio, my church” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 72). Samuelsson emphasizes that improvisation provides an underlying tone to develop his culinary style. Moreover, as a chef, Samuelsson adopts “the call and response element”¹⁶ in his kitchen while building relationships as a chef with his customers. Since he values the historical connection with African American history, he offers food to the elders of the neighborhood in return, for which he asks for their personal stories. Eventually, he dedicates *Red Rooster: The Cookbook* to the people of Harlem: “To the people of Harlem, especially the generation before mine who cared, restored and fought for uptown, to make sure Harlem would be a special neighborhood in the greatest city- a place I’m lucky to call home” (*Red Rooster* 3). This connection with the city and its inhabitants is reproduced in the kitchen and served as food at the table. Samuelsson also adopts “the call and

16 Clemens Wöllner defines “call and response” as a significant component of free jazz improvisations. In improvisations, musicians encounter one another and create a composition in a “spontaneous collaboration” (1). While one musician starts to play, the second responds to the improvisation, and the roles are exchanged (1). As a result, musicians create cooperatively and “transform the musical material of the other” (3).

response” element of Jazz performances to cooperate with his audience on social media. He adapts his restaurant's menu, Red Rooster, following the response he receives from his social media audience. As a result, the food on the menu becomes a collaborative construction.

Samuelsson’s culinary style erodes national borders. Like Michael Twitty, Samuelsson builds his culinary philosophy upon multicultural pillars that construct his cultural identity. Therefore, food on the plate is an artistic expression of black culinary culture and their identity for both chefs. Furthermore, for both chefs, cooking is a way of preserving and claiming African and African American culinary history. As performers, they achieve such a stance through their culinary performance in numerous kitchens by experimenting with ingredients and cooking techniques until they find self-expression:

I’m documenting Harlem’s history at the Rooster, preserving the history of African American cuisine while presenting it through my unique Swedish-Ethiopian lens. I want to capture the imagination of New York’s dining communities, inspire a new generation of chefs, and I aspire always to make food that makes a difference. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 310)

In such a historical and artistic place, Samuelsson’s restaurant, *Red Rooster*, represents a song of Harlem, reflecting the diversity of the site and the hybridity of the chef’s identity. As much as a musical landscape, Harlem is portrayed as a cosmopolitan foodscape in Samuelsson’s memoir. Ogunaike suggests that Samuelsson uses food as an artistic medium to reflect his personal history and Harlem’s diversity. As can be deduced, Samuelsson established his subjectivity as a black chef upon the place, taste, and visuality in Red Rooster, Harlem:

The menu had to tell the story of all of Harlem’s residents – Latin, Southern, Caribbean, Jewish, and Italian. When I cook, I see faces: I see my grandmother and her smile when I make meatballs. When I make my flan with condensed milk and whipped chocolate, I try to honor all the young Latinas from Spanish Harlem for whom this is a signature dish. My take on dirty rice – shrimp with curry rice – is a tribute to the many multiracial Jamaican families who are a mix of black, Indian, and Chinese. I want to do them all justice. (Samuelsson, *Yes Chef* 300)

By using the kitchen as a transcultural space, Samuelsson creates menus for the restaurant inspired by musical notes reflecting the multiracial population of Harlem and elaborates on the fusion of black foodways with various culinary cultures.

In addition to the food on the menu, Red Rooster, as a place, contributes to the representation of black diaspora culture. Like the food he presents flavored with African herbs, the restaurant's design represents the contemporary black diaspora culture with a sophisticated ambiance, adaptation, and harmony. As much as his individuality, Samuelsson defines Red Rooster as “a new incarnation of a legendary Harlem hotspot” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 278). Samuelsson, in his restaurant, wants to fuse Harlem’s black history with the contemporary black diaspora and various ethnic cultures that shape Harlem today. Hence, the restaurant can be read as an embodiment of what Samuelsson thrives to achieve as a chef. In Red Rooster, he creates rhizomic routes through food across time and place: “You cannot take a train to Addis Ababa, but you can take it to Red Rooster, where I’ll happily make you a plate of doro wat and serve you the finest selection of Ethiopian coffees and teas” (Samuelsson, *Yes, Chef* 312). Samuelsson uses the kitchen as a space to reflect the transcultural connections of food and foodways. As a social mediator, he invites his customers to gain a new vision of black food and foodways and opens a space for dialogue.

In conclusion, Samuelsson’s life narrative offers a new insight into understanding the multivocality of the black diaspora and how it contributes to the diversity of black subjectivity and culinary culture in the United States. Starting from his childhood, the interaction between food and place played a significant role in Samuelsson’s culinary understanding. His experience of exclusion led him to acquire a traveling identity. As a result, Samuelsson used rhizomatic webs/routes across Europe, Africa, and the United States to find his culinary style and explored transcultural connections between black food and foodways. Eventually, Samuelsson defines Harlem, New York, as his home, the city where he was determined to build his culinary place. Samuelsson regards Harlem as a rhizomatic center to start his culinary explorations across the transatlantic. His journeys provided him with personal and cultural memories carried with food and foodways since food encapsulates time and place. As he travels across borders, he can interpret the meaning of cooking as a transcultural traveler. As a result, Samuelsson offers a broader perspective on African diaspora culinary culture and aspires to inspire future black chefs to contribute to the black American diaspora.

CONCLUSION

Black people have adopted food as a powerful tool to resist and challenge white dominance starting from the voyages of the Atlantic Slave trade. Moreover, African food and foodways are adopted by black people to cultivate the land in the New World. Although black food culture sets the foundations of Southern cuisine and agriculture, black food and foodways have been addressed with negative stereotypes and offending portrayals in the mainstream culture. Food and foodways are essential in constructing African American cultural identity. As a marker of cultural identity in African American historical context, food reveals the “social, political, cultural worlds of individuals and groups” (Wallach, *Every Nation* 196). Food and foodways have been considered a social and political medium and adopted as an instrument for resistance, reformation, and healing by the African American community. Using food as a political instrument, black people dealt with white supremacy and racial discrimination. In the twenty-first century, black culinary historians and researchers have aimed to debunk the negative representations of black food and foodways in mainstream culture and brought a renewed perspective to comprehend African American culinary history. Numerous critics regard African culinary culture as a source to rediscover, redefine, and reclaim African American identity. The research focusing on African American food and foodways has appreciated the remarkable contributions of black cooks and chefs in American culinary history. Correspondingly, with their rising visibility, black chefs brought new momentum to conceptualizing black food and foodways at a transcultural level. With their performance in and out of the kitchen, the chefs continue to subvert the monolithic representations of black culinary culture, black subjectivity, and black masculinity.

By cooking, black chefs fight against the limiting perception of black culinary culture and aspire to a new understanding of black cultural identity. African American food and foodways have long been defined within the boundaries of soul food and Southern cuisine in the mainstream culture. However, this limited perception singularizes the black experience since African American culinary culture continues to interact with African, Caribbean, European, and other ethnic food and foodways. In her famous TED

Talk entitled “The Danger of a Single Story,” the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie narrates her personal stories to explain how people are influenced by “the single stories” they heard about a particular group of people, countries, nations, and cultures. She draws attention to the fact that people readily accept single narratives due to unfamiliarity. However, neither cultures nor human beings can be oversimplified under single narratives.

Consequently, at the end of the talk, the author invites the audience to be open to dialogue and value individual stories without prejudgments. As Adichie suggests, black chefs depict the ambivalence and complexity of the black experience and dispel the one-dimensional understandings of black culinary culture. For African American chefs, black food and foodways have provided an alternative channel to resist “the single narratives” that mainstream culture imposed upon blackness.

The chefs’ performance in the kitchen enables their self-expression through food. Thus, their food is an inseparable part of their subjectivity as Kwame Onwuachi defines food as an extension of the chef’s personal story. Therefore, food and foodways can be read as an alternative way to create life narratives. The chefs textualize the food they prepare in the kitchen to narrate their multilayered personal stories. African American people have used alternative mediums to reflect African American experience and black cultural identity.

Black musical tradition serves to protest the stereotypical perception of black cultural identity as well as black manhood. Black musicians have built transcultural bonds across Africa, Europe, and America by using music as a cultural agent. Like black musicians, black chefs have adopted food and foodways as an alternative medium to textualize black cultural identity in the twenty-first century. Black culinary culture is an indispensable part of the foundations of contemporary African American subjectivity. This aesthetic connection between food and music also emphasizes the relationship between art and black culinary culture. While chefs become artists who use their plates as a canvas for self-expression, restaurants function like arthouses that open their doors to genuine guests eager to taste the diversity of black cuisine. The food at the table

represents the chef's cultural identity as a tangible entity. Therefore, food symbolizes the chef's place in American culinary culture and the African American interpretation of American identity, history, and landscape. Through their artistic performance, the black chefs contribute to transforming the contemporary American foodscape.

In their memoirs, black chefs also draw attention to the singularization of black culinary culture. Michael Twitty in *The Cooking Gene* shares his remarks on soul food and Southern food following a seven-year journey to the South to unleash personal and cultural history. With his culinary performance replicating his ancestors in the Southern plantation kitchens, the chef emphasizes that the foodways that black people adopted to survive during enslavement are much harder than one may imagine in the modern world. Twitty's approach to food not only exposes the richness of black culinary culture in Southern history but also creates an awareness of food as a powerful cultural entity that black people adopted to survive and resist the white hegemony. The narrative also debunks the grand narratives built upon black food and foodways with documents, personal archives, and family memories. Moreover, depending on the knowledge of his genetic connections to Africa and Europe, he emphasizes the genetic diversity of the black community as opposed to the one-dimensional understanding of black subjectivity. The chef aspires to create a new understanding of black cultural identity through multicultural and transnational connections of food and foodways and reclaims the rich history taken away from the black community.

Like Twitty, Onwuachi also defines African American food and foodways as a significant element of his culinary style. Both chefs reclaim the well-deserved position of their ancestors on the American culinary stage. However, Onwuachi also emphasizes that changing the typical representation of a black chef who builds his culinary style upon soul food is necessary. As opposed to this stereotypical image, Onwuachi portrays a black chef image who has a diverse culinary background. In his memoir, *A Young Black Chef*, Onwuachi also exposes the gendered and racialized images imposed on black men starting from childhood. The chef emphasizes that this stereotypical description leads to double consciousness in young black boys.

Moreover, these one-dimensional representations continue to shape black masculinity through media and popular culture. Onwuachi's narrative also exposes how black culinary culture and chef image are restricted to stereotypical figures in popular food culture and the fine-dining world. As a chef with visibility, Onwuachi attempts to destroy these restrictive images by using his restaurant as a stage to perform his life narrative via the menu accompanied by personal stories about the food on the table. Moreover, his constructive and inclusive approach portrays a progressive chef image as an alternative to the crude chef image in television programs and media platforms. Besides, he stresses the multicentered structure of his culinary style combining elements of African American, Caribbean, and Nigerian culinary cultures.

Unlike Michael Twitty, Kwame Onwuachi and Jeff Henderson highlight the racial and gendered discrimination they encountered while growing up in the United States. Jeff Henderson emphasizes the hardship of fleeing from the singular narratives cast upon African American men in his memoir, *Cooked* from a different perspective. In his life, cooking serves as an alternative medium that enables him to demolish the fixated life patterns that he used to be part of as a drug dealer and construct a new lifestyle as a chef. Since Henderson was not interested in the kitchen before his imprisonment, his approach to African American food and foodways differs from Michael Twitty's and Kwame Onwuachi's understanding. Although he was encouraged to develop his culinary style by the standards of intercontinental restaurant kitchens, he found it necessary to build a connection with African American food and foodways. He reconnects with African American culinary culture and the legacy of soul food as a source of personal healing. The chef also regards this link as necessary for reconciliation at the individual and communal levels.

Unlike the previous three chefs, in his memoir, *Yes, Chef*, Marcus Samuelsson represents the black diaspora culture and its significance in the transcultural culinary scene as a black immigrant chef. Samuelsson's story stands out with the transcultural connections that define his subjectivity. The chef also uses his transcultural standing while building his culinary style. By adopting his personal story and infusing Ethiopian, Swedish, and African American foodways, Samuelsson celebrates the hybrid and

multivocal aspects of black diasporic identity and culinary culture. He approaches African American culinary culture and African American masculinity from a different perspective as a black man who grew up in Europe. His European background allows him to start his profession at an upscale restaurant in New York.

Meanwhile, Samuelsson observes the dynamics of African American culture and masculinity. The chef decides to start his restaurant in Harlem, New York since he believes Harlem is the most convenient place to reflect his experience through food and foodways. Samuelsson's culinary understanding represents the transcultural texture of the black diaspora.

The capacity of food to construct meaning without the boundaries of time and space makes it a powerful tool to resist mainstream culture. Therefore, the chefs adopt food as a mnemonic device to encounter personal and collective memory. They attempt to transform the traumatic history of the black Atlantic voyages, chattel slavery, and their connections to Africa on individual and collective levels. Making connections between African American and African culinary culture offers a fresh understanding of black identity reversing the rupture of time starting from the period of enslavement. Black chefs build links between their personal history and black food and foodways across the Atlantic and rewrite the history of black culinary culture. This perspective also contributes to healing past wounds through a rich culinary legacy. Michael Twitty achieves this by providing alternative micro-histories of food items like cotton, sugar, and rice. He values soul food as the symbol food of black resistance and resilience.

Kwame Onwuachi also reflects the significance of soul food in American culinary history. He regards African American culinary culture as a cultural legacy and a rich resource of his culinary style. Michael Samuelsson uses food as a mnemonic device to encounter his personal history. He recovers his separation from his mother and Ethiopia by building transatlantic webs through the Atlantic and constructs his culinary style upon the transcultural pillars of his identity. For the chefs, food emblemizes healing, nourishment, renewal, multivocality, and versatility. The knowledge of contemporary black foodways and culinary traditions provides recovery, and the chefs move towards reconciliation in their personal lives.

Black culinary culture serves as a source of self-expression for black chefs and encourages an open dialogue through food and foodways. Unlike the white chef memoirs focusing on the competitive and cruel depictions of the industrial kitchen, black chefs address black cultural and culinary legacy through their definitions of the house kitchen. Twitty, Onwuachi, and Samuelsson share a similar perspective in their interpretation of the house kitchen. The chefs identify the kitchen as a hearth that nourishes them physically and spiritually. The chefs also use recipes in their memoirs to link their personal history with black cultural identity and African and African American history. The recipes enrich the chefs' life narratives by underpinning the richness of African American culinary legacy.

To start with, Michael Twitty shares his grandmother's Southern recipes and family recipes like West African Brisket, Beaten Biscuits, or Hoecake to address the personal and cultural significance of soul food and Southern food in African American history. Like Twitty, Onwuachi also receives recipes with personal and cultural significance. For instance, he highlights the importance of archiving stories of black cooks and chefs before him by sharing a gumbo recipe to celebrate the African American culinary legacy. He also shares the Egusi Stew, a Nigerian recipe, to indicate the transcultural connections of African American food with African culinary culture and how it represented harmony in his house. Jeff Henderson shares the fried chicken recipe, with the title Friendly's Famous Buttermilk Chicken Recipe, which can be read as a symbol of his transformation in the kitchen through food and foodways.

Food memoirs written by black chefs offer a line of inquiry upon the intersections of black masculinity and post-racial discussions. The twenty-first century also marks when the crisis of black masculinity has become a central issue. The shootings of unarmed black males and police brutality have become significant discussions in the media. The recent death of George Floyd (2020) reminded all of the previous deaths of black men, including Eric Garner (2014), Michael Brown (2014), Walter Scott (2015), Alton Sterling (2016), Stephen Clark (2018), and Daunte Wright (2021) ("Black Lives Matter"). #metoo and #BlackLivesMatter have become two major movements that protest gender- and race-based discrimination and violence. In their memoirs, as well as

in their social agenda, black chefs also underline the significance of the representation of black masculinity. All four chefs, in their memoirs, highlight that they have struggled with the racial discrimination and biased views of mainstream culture in and out of the kitchen: The memoirs also open various possibilities for discussing social, political, and cultural dynamics of racial discrimination and masculinity.

The chefs' narratives make the white male privilege in the food industry visible. Their manifestations also challenge the prevalent crude chef image constructed by white male chefs. In their memoirs, the chefs resist the white heterosexual hegemonic masculinity that dominates the kitchen culture. While Michael Twitty protests his invisibility as a black Jewish gay chef, Kwame Onwuachi disturbs the image of a black male by using his style and body as a text to be deciphered by popular culture. His use of rainbow colors, shiny blazers, and nail polish receives public recognition and challenges norms of ideal masculinity. The chefs diverge the traditional dualities constructed upon race, gender, and sexuality and pave the way for a progressive period on the American culinary stage. They envision a culinary future with inclusion and co-liberation and put their efforts into eliminating sexism and racism to create a culinary space where human beings support and protect one another.

The chefs continue to weave links between their personal history and the black culinary culture on various platforms, including new books. In the "Foreword" he wrote for Chris Smith's *The Whole Okra: A Seed to Stem Celebrations* (2020), Twitty draws a link between the origins of okra in Africa and its adaptations as a fundamental element in African American cuisine (Twitty, ix). Likewise, his recently published cookbook, *Rice: A Savor the South Cookbook* (2021), combines recipes from African and African American culinary cultures with a focus on the central role of rice in African American history. Through the lens of a food historian, Twitty shifts his focus from personal memory to the cultural memory carried through food. By writing such a book, the chef aims to create a counter-archive. For Twitty, rice embodies black culinary history and, as a transcultural entity, it carries stories of black people. Twitty's second memoir, *Koshersoul: The Faith and Food Journey of an African American Jew* (2022), published

as a sequel to *The Cooking Gene*, explores the conjunctions of Jewish and Jewish diaspora food and foodways.

In the cookbooks they publish, the chefs adopt generic features of the memoir. The recipes are linked to the chefs' autobiographic narrative and the pillars they built their culinary style. A year after he entered the publishing world with his memoir *Cooked*, Chef Jeff Henderson published his first cookbook; *Chef Jeff Cooks: In the Kitchen with America's Inspirational New Culinary Star* (2009), which introduces essential recipes that can be prepared at home without much effort. His subsequent cookbook, *If You Can See It, You Can Be It* (2012), includes tips and recipes since it serves as a guidebook for young people who are inspired to become chefs. Since Henderson intended to write a guidebook, the cookbook consists of a personal narrative along with the recipes. While building up his career on the screen and getting much public attention with his colorful and outspoken culinary style, Kwame Onwuachi also published a recent cookbook, *My America: Recipes from a Young Black Chef* (2022). As the title suggests, Onwuachi offers his interpretation of American identity reflected through his recipes and claims his space in the American culinary landscape. Lastly, Marcus Samuelsson's cookbook, *The Rise: Black Cooks and the Soul of American Food* (2020), combines recipes with photographs and biographies of black chefs worldwide. By compiling such a cookbook, the chef celebrates the black culinary culture and claims a proper acknowledgment of black chefs and cooks at a transcultural level, and once more expresses that black food matters.

Black chefs have a habit of redefining black subjectivity about the American Dream based on their experiences as black men in their memoirs. While white chefs enjoy the benefits of white privilege with stardom and luxuries of commodity culture, black chefs are challenged because of racism. The image of a black chef is built upon the ideals of the American Dream, as cooking enables upward mobility. This image is well-adapted to American culture as a "rags to riches" story since chefs achieve successful professional life after the challenges they face. Therefore, it will not be wrong to claim that through food memoirs, black chefs open up a narrative space to reclaim their place

in the American culinary landscape. Black chefs also reinterpret the American dream as an inclusive concept to reclaim an American identity.

Moreover, African American chefs become new role models by redefining black manhood. The chef stands out as a social figure, like a community leader who has the merits of adaptation and communication and who, in his way, accomplishes “the American Dream.” This evolution contributes to the revision of black masculinity and the reformation of gendered identity. Unlike the white hero who achieves his dream, the black chef stands out as a communal figure. While the white savior “helps” disadvantaged groups from a privileged position, black chefs promote volunteerism. Therefore, instead of functioning as ‘saviors,’ they actively participate in social projects supporting their community. This communal standing is visible since they define a chef’s social role as a person who takes public responsibility. Black chefs as acclaimed social figures emphasize the significance of social contribution and activism as an extension of their culinary identity. They feel responsible for building healthy identities. Therefore, their performance in the kitchen expands from the kitchen doors back to the street with a social agenda.

The twenty-first century can also be defined as the century of self-enterprise. In a similar strain, to be visible in the culinary market, the chefs treat their culinary persona as their capital. The chef image can also be interpreted as a product expected to be consumed by consumer culture within a late-capitalist framework at first glance. With the rising popularity of food culture, the chefs have gained public attention and made a profit. In this respect, Memoirs, menus, restaurants, and social media images of the chefs can all be read as reflections of the culinary personas the chefs have constructed. Nevertheless, black chefs use their popularity to create social impact and put their collective efforts into supporting transformative justice and equality. They strive to make a positive impact on the African American community.

The chefs not only use social media to raise their popularity but also their visibility to impact community opinion. Marcus Samuelsson expresses that he deliberately creates a virtual society on Twitter. What he shares gives his followers a glimpse of his life as a

black chef from the black diaspora. Likewise, Kwame Onwuachi also purposefully uses social media to address social and political issues concerning the black community. Black chefs portray themselves as public images against racial, gendered, or sexual discrimination and are concerned about equality in and out of the kitchen. In this way, the progressive chef image they have constructed broadens the meaning of black culinary masculinity. The chefs vocalize social and culinary discrimination based on race and gender and promote social and economic opportunities for people of color as restaurateurs. Moreover, they aim to elevate black food and foodways through traditional and popular media, trespass black food culture, and compose a transcultural presentation of black food as cultural mediators. Therefore, one may also claim that the chefs, as celebrity figures, present themselves as social mediators who reinforce equality. They become the spokespeople of the black community, voicing black subjectivity. They have evolved to be impactful figures who influence black cultural and social agendas.

The chefs promote social progress, racial justice, land justice, and food sovereignty as issues they participate in as members of the black community. Thus, it will not be wrong to claim that cooking is a form of taking political action for African American chefs. In his talks, he defines himself as a culinary activist; Michael Twitty underlines the importance of culinary justice for the black community and advocates land justice. Kwame Onwuachi uses social platforms to speak up against racism and sexism that black people, specifically black men, encounter in mainstream society. Marcus Samuelsson takes action to foster his sisters' education in Ethiopia rather than merely support his family financially. Likewise, Jeff Henderson has been actively engaged in projects targeting young black men's education. The chefs' activist standing also evidences that they interpret cooking as a performative action. Kwame Onwuachi's volunteer cooking during the COVID-19 pandemic can be read as an act of culinary performance. It is evident that the chefs actively engage in the black social and political agenda and regard their personal stories as part of that agenda. Therefore, their actions promise a more profound transformation of the community. Consequently, the chef also has a communal role in society.

In conclusion, the black chefs attempt to restore the richness of black culinary culture and claim their long-deserved place in American culinary history. They believe black food and foodways have served and will serve as a center to build future resilience for the black community. To achieve that, they interpret cooking as a subversive practice to alter the stereotypical representations of black foodways and black masculinity. The chefs' individual stories interweave and present the present directions of black culinary culture and black chefs' position in the modern American foodscape. Within such a context, black chefs' conceptualization of food and foodways and their food writings cannot be considered separately from one another. Every time a black chef enters the kitchen, he reshapes black culinary subjectivity through his performance and broadens the representation of black culinary culture. Accordingly, their life narratives evidence, remark, and propose multiple facets of black culinary culture, cultural identity, and black culinary masculinity. In this respect, the chefs celebrate the African American cultural and culinary legacy by building links among African, African American, and various culinary cultures. Still, they continue to expose one-dimensional, biased representations of the black male images in the mainstream culture and promote a progressive black male image that crosses the boundaries of the fictitious images imposed by the dominant culture. They use food and foodways to discover their potential and portray black male chefs as men who have the merits of changing their personal life and communal spirit. Through cooking, they promote collective healing for the black community.

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APPENDIX 1: ORIGINALITY REPORT



**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ph.D. DISSERTATION ORIGINALITY REPORT**

**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT**

Date:22/07/2022

Thesis Title: Food, Identity and Black Masculinity in African American Chef Memoirs Written in the Twenty-First Century

According to the originality report obtained by my thesis advisor by using the Turnitin plagiarism detection software and by applying the filtering options checked below on 07/07/2022 for the total of 136 pages including the a) Title Page, b) Introduction, c) Main Chapters, and d) Conclusion sections of my thesis entitled as above, the similarity index of my thesis is 4 %.

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I respectfully submit this for approval.

22/07/2022

Name Surname: Gül Varlı Karaarslan
Student No: N15245605
Department: American Culture and Literature
Program: American Culture and Literature
Status: Ph.D. Combined MA/ Ph.D.

ADVISOR APPROVAL

APPROVED.

 Prof. Dr. Meldan Tanrısal



HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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DOKTORA TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORJİNALLİK RAPORU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 22/07/2022

Tez Başlığı : Yirmi Birinci Yüzyılda Yazılmıř Afrikalı Amerikalı Őeflerin Anılarında Yemek, Kimlik ve Siyahi Erkeklik

Yukarıda başlıđı gösterilen tez çalışmamın a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriř, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluřan toplam 136 sayfalık kısmına iliřkin, 07/07/2022 Tarihinde tez danıřmanım tarafından Tumiťin adlı intihal tespit programından ařađıda iřaretlenmiř filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmıř olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 4 tür.

Uygulanan filtrelemeler:

- 1- Kabul/Onay ve Bildirim sayfaları hariç
- 2- Kaynakça hariç
- 3- Alıntılar hariç
- 4- Alıntılar dâhil
- 5- 5 kelimedenden daha az örtüřme içeren metin kısımları hariç

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Tez Çalışması Orijinallik Raporu Alınması ve Kullanılması Uygulama Esasları'nı inceledim ve bu Uygulama Esasları'nda belirtilen azami benzerlik oranlarına göre tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içermediđini; aksinin tespit edileceđi muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluđu kabul ettiđimi ve yukarıda vermiř olduđum bilgilerin doğru olduđunu beyan ederim.

Geređini saygılarımla arz ederim.

22/07/2022

Adı Soyadı: Gül Varlı Karaarslan
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Anabilim Dalı: Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı
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Statüsü: Doktora Bütünleřik Dr.

DANIřMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.

Prof. Dr. Meldań Tanrısal

APPENDIX 2 ETHICS BOARD WAIVER FORM



**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
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ETHICS COMMISSION FORM FOR THESIS**

**HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
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AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT**

Date: 22/07/2022

Title: Food, Identity and Black Masculinity in African American Chef Memoirs Written in the Twenty First Century

My thesis work related to the title above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on animals or people.
2. Does not necessitate the use of biological material (blood, urine, biological fluids and samples, etc.).
3. Does not involve any interference of the body's integrity.
4. Is not based on observational and descriptive research (survey, interview, measures/scales, data scanning, system-model development).

I declare, I have carefully read Hacettepe University's Ethics Regulations and the Commission's Guidelines, and in order to proceed with my thesis according to these regulations I do not have to get permission from the Ethics Board/Commission for anything; in any infringement of the regulations I accept all legal responsibility and I declare that all the information I have provided is true.

I respectfully submit this for approval.

22/07/2022

Name Surname: Gül Varlı Karaarslan
Student No: N15245605
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ADVISER COMMENTS AND APPROVAL

Prof. Dr. Meldan Tanrısal



HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ETİK KOMİSYON MUAFİYETİ FORMU

HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 22/07/2022

Tez Başlığı: Yirmi Birinci Yüzyılda Yazılmış Afrikalı Amerikalı Şeflerin Anılarında Yemek, Kimlik ve Siyahi Erkeklik

Yukarıda başlığı gösterilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır,
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
3. Beden bütünlüğüne müdahale içermemektedir.
4. Gözlemsel ve betimsel araştırma (anket, mülakat, ölçek/skala çalışmaları, dosya taramaları, veri kaynakları taraması, sistem-model geliştirme çalışmaları) niteliğinde değildir.

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Kurullar ve Komisyonlarının Yönergelerini inceledim ve bunlara göre tez çalışmamın yürütülebilmesi için herhangi bir Etik Kurul/Komisyon'dan izin alınmasına gerek olmadığını; aksi durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

Gereğini saygılarımla arz ederim.

22/07/2022

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