



RECOGNITION AND TRANSCULTURALIZATION: FOODWAYS IN CYNTHIA SHEARER'S *THE CELESTIAL JUKEBOX**

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Abstract

Food is central to the sense of identity and imbued with regional identity. Recently, scholars from different disciplines have focused more on foodways and its relation to regional identity and culture. With its rich and diverse food culture, the U.S. South is like a mosaic of foodways. Southern spaces, culturally and spatially reconstructed through global movements and multiculturalism, have been constantly introduced new food habits and cultural experiences since the arrival of the first immigrants to the region. The food culture that the immigrants brought to the U.S. South contributed significantly to reconstruction of cultural identity because immigration introduces possibilities of change in food and eating habits. Within this context, this paper attempts to analyze the integral role of the foodways in Cynthia Shearer's 2005 novel *The Celestial Jukebox*, and discuss how foodways and immigration, through dialogic character of the foodways, reconstruct southern identity with possibilities of diverse, multicultural, and more global South that escapes from biracial, exceptional, and monolithic structure.

Keywords: Locality, Foodways, Ethnicity, Religious Identity, Southern Food.

INTRODUCTION

This article opens a new perspective on food studies by analyzing how foodways are used as markers of identity, ethnicity, and locality in a selected literary work. This paper departs from previous foodways studies extending the scope of foodways reading it as a semiotic system that introduces dialogic interaction and recognition. The term food habits (a.k.a. food culture or foodways) is used to describe the manner in which human use food. Foodways is a set of behaviors and beliefs that define what we eat and who we are. Pamela G. Kittler et al. state that "food [...] demonstrate affiliation with culture [...] and are associated with security and good memories" (2012, 3). Beth A. Latshaw defines "foodways" as "the customs, beliefs, and practices surrounding the production, presentation, and consumption of food," or more simply as "the intersection of food and culture" (2013, 100). These definitions highlight the ontological and epistemological relationship between foodways and identity.

In this paper, I will take the terms *transculturalism*, by Fernando Ortiz, and *politics of recognition*, by Charles Taylor, to analyze the integral role of foodways in Cynthia Shearer's novel, *The Celestial Jukebox* (2005). I aim to analyze how foodways and immigration, through a dialogic character of the foodways, aim to reconstruct southern identity with possibilities of diverse, multicultural, and more global South that escapes from biracial, exceptional, and monolithic structure. I start by reviewing the literature on foodways and discussing how existing scholarship has informed the theoretical background of this paper. I then move to close examination of the relationship between food and identity in *the Celestial Jukebox* based on three markers.

Anthropologically speaking, food, thus eating, is nourishment of the body and soul. However, most of the time we do not consume whatever we find because in many cases ethnicity, religion, culture, and many other factors influence our food choice. Food historian and theorist Massimo Montanari argues that "food is [a] culture" (2006, 32) because considering the ways human interact with food, we can define food as a language, dialogue, and communication that introduces possibilities of recognition. Since food has its logic, grammar, and message, we regard it as a system of communication. Roland Barthes explains that food is a system through which we can demarcate cultural identity as well as group and individual identity (Montanari, 2006, 32-3). The U.S. South, in this regard, with its rich and diverse foodways, attracts the attention of scholars from various disciplines that constitute the theoretical background of this paper.

It might be irresistibly delicious food and its rhetoric, its cultural, historical and political role that generated scholarly interest which resulted in exceptional works. Among them are John Egerton's seminal work *Southern Food: At home, on the Road, in History* (1987), Rick McDaniel's *An Irresistible History of Southern*

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Food: Four Centuries of Black-Eyed Peas, Collard Greens & Whole Hog Barbecue (2011), Paul Knipple and Angela Knipple's *The World in a Skillet: A Food Lover's Tour of the New American South* (2012), Elizabeth S.D. Engelhardt's works: *Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food* (2011), and *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South* (2013, co-edited with John T. Edge and Ted Ownby), Marcie Cohen Ferris's *The Edible South: The Power of Food and the Making of an American Region* (2014), and Angela Jill Cooley's *To live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South* (2015).

In *Southern Food*, Egerton writes, "food in the South is more than a social and cultural phenomenon; it has economic and political and religious dimensions as well" (Egerton, 2006, 2) because each ethnic group has its unique way of preparing and consuming food. Southern food, as Egerton points out (2006, 2) "has been central to the region's image, its personality, and its character." Food, is such a distinctive characteristic of the South that "no other form of cultural expression, not even music, is as distinctively characteristic of the region as the spreading of a feast of native food and drink" (2006, 2). On the significance of southern food for the southerners and region, Egerton writes:

The South was not the only region in the country with an abiding interest in food-related activities, nor was it necessarily the first to develop such an interest. But as the first half of the twentieth century came to a close, it seemed fair to say that no other region had been more obsessively preoccupied with food throughout its history, and none had made it more a part of its culture and traditions. In every generation, in every social and economic group, and in every locale, Southerners had made food a central focus of their lives. In different ways and for different reasons, they had all come to the same conclusion about food: Fix plenty, make it irresistibly good, and share it around. (2006, 2)

Egerton's articulation that food has historical, cultural and racial signifiers is reflected in modern art and literature that highlight and depict the paradigm shift in defining culture and identity in contemporary southern spaces. The shift in foodways plays significant role in recognition, transculturalization, and thus hybridization of the region through reconstructing new foodways that ultimately change the perception and rhetoric of the region and regional identity because, as Kittler et al. note, many of the foodways introduced through immigrants "have been modified through contact with [southern] culture and, in turn, they have changed and shaped [southern] food habits" (Kittler et al. 2012, 1).

In *Writing in the Kitchen: Essays of Southern Literature and Foodways*, David A. Davis and Tara Powell state that "food is one of the most resilient markers of ethnicity, which is why immigrant communities often maintain food traditions even as other practices assimilate into the mainstream" (Davis and Powell 2014, 6). However, it cannot be denied that immigrants influenced and even changed some eating habits in the region. Davis and Powell note that "southern foodways, [...] developed from the use of available ingredients prepared with available methods, so in the condition of modern life, fast-food fried chicken-in addition to the enormous influx of ethnic foods and mass-marketed products available in modern grocery stores-is southern food"(2014, 7). They further state that "the self-conscious act of preparing or eating traditional southern food, therefore, is a deliberate act of performing southern identity" (2014, 7). In their book, *Consuming Identity: The Role of Food in Redefining the South*, Ashli Quesinberry Stokes and Wendy Atkins-Sayre suggest: "Food can be offered/read as a symbol of an identity and/or a region. It can define and authenticate a region, allowing a stronger sense of belongingness. It can be used as a symbol of gender performativity. It can also bring people together, emphasizing commonality. [...] southern food has the potential to cross racial, class, ethnic, religious, gender, and geographical boundaries, bringing a wide variety of consumers together" (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre, 2016, 192). The role of food bringing people together enables communication, mutual respect and understanding which emphasizes commonality and collapses the walls that we built between "we" and "the Other."

Southern spaces, culturally and spatially reconstructed through global movements and multiculturalism, have constantly been introduced new foodways and cultural experiences since the arrival of the first immigrants. The food culture that the immigrants brought to the U.S. South enriched southern foodways and shifted the way people prepare and consume food. In that sense, southern food, as Rick McDaniel notes, "has roots that run deep into European, Native American and African culinary traditions" (McDaniel, 2011, 5). Due to interaction with diverse groups, each group introduced others to their native foods, along with ways of growing, preparing, preserving, serving and presenting them. They also adapted cooking techniques of one another; in many cases, the foods we consider 'Southern' bear the mark of all these cultures. Similarly, Knipple and Knipple state that "the southern food that we cherish today is a product of all these people-the immigrants who made the South what it is today. The South and its



foodways, they note, “continue to grow and evolve with new generations of immigrants who are redefining southern cuisine one dish at a time” (Knipple and Knipple, 2012, xviii).

1-Foodways and the American South

In contemporary South, foodways became more diverse with Asian and Mexican foodways along with African America, Native, European, and Creole foodways. For example, Cajun Cuisine was born in the bayous of Louisiana, African American cuisine was efficient first in rural, then urban South, Scottish-Irish cuisine in Appalachia, Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, Native American cuisine-Chickasaw, Choctaw and Cherokee –and Asian food in Delta Mississippi. Each of these food preferences has its rhetoric and discourse that continue to define racial, regional, and religious identities that fuse in southern spaces. This evolving dynamic culture is portrayed through the food introduced by immigration. As Egerton writes, “the food is not just Southern; in a historical sense, at least, it is also Indian, British, African, Hispanic, Creole, Acadian, French, German, Greek, Italian, even Asian” (Egerton, 2006, 5).

In their special edition to the *Global South*, Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer remark that “the U.S. South is not an enclave of hyper-regionalism but a porous space through which other places have always circulated” (McKee and Trefzer, 2006, 679). In *The Celestial Jukebox*, Shearer illustrates this porousness and the South as a global space for immigrants and changing foodways in rural southern spaces. This circulation is visible not only through the demographic change but also through the culinary change which intertwines simultaneously preserving the authentic southern foodways and integrating new recipes into the southern kitchen, which rhetorically introduce links between cultures that negotiate porous boundaries and offer recognition and acceptance creating multiplicity that would enrich southern culture and foodways. This negotiation, as Egerton highlights, creates “social and cultural evolution of the South” that opens possibilities to cross racial, religious, gender, ethnic, and class boundaries (Egerton, 2006, 4). The negotiation also transcends the historical status of foodways in the South as regional foodways and responds to the widespread un-recognition, inequality, political, and economic polarization of the region.

To better portray the infusing role of the foodways, I will use the term *Transculturation* by Cuban cultural anthropologist Fernando Ortiz who uses the term to capture the importance and magnitude of conquest and colonialization, but also the dialectic nature of such events regarding the resultant cultural flows, interfaces, and mutual influences. This mutual influence incurs mutual recognition and a paradigm shift that initiates reconfiguration and reconstruction of the dynamic southern foodways that embrace multiculturalism and novelty as opposed to static traditional foodways, “a term loaded with racial stereotype and privilege” (Cooley, 2016, 6).

2-Foodways as a Signifier

In this part of the paper, *The Celestial Jukebox* is analyzed as a case study to portray the role of foodways in Cynthia Shearer’s fictitious southern world. Set in the fictional twenty-first-century town of Madagascar, Mississippi, *The Celestial Jukebox* depicts the changing face of a rural southern space. Problematising historical notions about the region, the text envisions a more global and hybrid southern landscape with immigrant labor, casino business, music, and foodways. The setting, Madagascar, is a microcosm of the new U.S. South and mirrors these changes that have to come to the American South as a whole. The setting is taken from actual places, yet every image in this fictitious setting is a combination of imagination and actual local and global stories that aim to open the reader’s mind to global connections and possibilities. Thus, it implies a global rather than suggesting a specific and unique or exceptional place, and tells many stories that intertwine in the southern space. In other words, the text embodies the fact that southern food generates southern transculturalism through the foodways. In so doing, the text and the setting avoid specific temporality and allow the reader to relate the story and the setting to any place or situation around the globe through the rhetoric of foodways. By including regional and ethnic foodways, *The Celestial Jukebox* enlivens southern foodways by constructing an active hybrid space as a social product that is open to outside influences. In this vein, foodways in *The Celestial Jukebox* can be analyzed under three subcategories that contribute to regional foodways as a whole: religious identity, locality, and ethnic identity.

3-Foodways as a marker of religious identity

One of the most significant rhetoric about the foodways in *The Celestial Jukebox* is the relationship between food and religion. Many religions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism have certain foods that the followers cannot consume, while there are still others that have variations. In Islamic and Jewish law,¹ for instance, there are specific rules for the preparation and consumption of food. Judaism forbids a combination

¹ For detailed information on Jewish dietary laws see Daniel S. Silber’s THE JEWISH DIETARY LAWS AND THEIR FOUNDATION made available by *Digital Access to Scholarship at Harvard* at <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/8889478>



of dairy and meat products. Similarly, for both Muslims and Jews meat is inconsumable if it has not been slaughtered according to the rituals described in their holy books. The food as a marker of religious identity is highlighted in *The Celestial Jukebox* through the Mauritanian protagonist, Boubacar, who travels from Mauritania to Madagascar, MS to unite his uncles. At the Memphis airport, Boubacar meets a black soldier who offers him a ride as there was nobody to meet the boy at the airport. This act opens a plethora of infusions and transculturalization the following sections of the paper aim to discuss.

Shearer's text focuses on the rhetorical potential of food, through which the text acknowledges differences, depicts southern values and "provides one powerful means contributing to a sense of individual, regional, gender, and ethnic identity" (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre, 2016, 189). On their way to Madagascar, the soldier suggests Boubacar having "some of the barbecue" (Shearer, 2005, 20). Barbecue is the first food that comes to the soldier's mind which is intricately tied to region's foodways. However, his rhetoric acknowledges different foodways and the role of food as a religious identity marker when he says, "Wait-you Islam? They got chicken" (2005, 20). This acknowledgment highlights several characteristics of the South: hospitality, recognition, and respect for different belief systems and foodways. Through this discursive act, the soldier establishes a strong link between religion and foodways and creates a space for dialogue and mutual understanding that negotiates identity, exploration, and evaluation processes.

The soldier's rhetoric emphasizes the symbolic role of the food that "takes shape as a decisive element of human identity and as one of the most effective means of expressing and communicating that identity" (Montanari, 2006, xii). "If food is to be treated as a code," as Mary Douglas points out, "the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relationships being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries" (Douglas, 1971, 61). Thus, through foodways rhetoric, the soldier crosses invisible boundaries, and his discourse creates a space of inclusion that facilitates communication and recognition of any identity. While an aspect of culture, the foodways has a functional role; it also has a significance value which is juxtaposed to other signs to construct complex communication.

The discourses about food "can reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self-understanding, as well as our interesting and problematic understandings of our relationship to social Others" (Narayan, 1975, 64). The soldier knows that Muslims do not consume pork and he encodes the message that transacts boundaries to include the newcomer in his communication and build a cross-cultural understanding and respect, which is an act of inclusion. The representation of foodways in the soldier's rhetoric can be used as a tool through which we interpret individual and collective value systems that bridge cultures. This process operates as a way of easing the adjustment to life in the South. The soldier's discourse acknowledges the fact that foodways are the last layer of culture to erode. He is aware of the fact that in a barbecue place, there might be an important staple of southern foodways: pork, which is forbidden for Muslims. Therefore, he suggests that the boy may have "chicken." In so doing, the soldier introduces the concept of food voice suggesting that "what one eats or chooses not to eat communicates aspects of a person's identity or emotion in a manner that words alone cannot" (Hauck-Lawson, 2004, 7). The preparation and consumption of food functions as a ritual that connects people to their religio-cultural heritage. Thus the food reinforces Boubacar's distinctiveness and dissolves the symbolic boundaries to improve recognition and acceptance of functioning social identity. The role of food on identity, religious or ethnic, is negotiated through signification and recognition. In other words, the soldier, by being so sensitive in foodways, recognizes the value of each other's difference.

To accentuate the role of food as a source that creates commonality, Shearer does not give a name to the black soldier. The interaction between the nameless soldier and Boubacar emphasizes the link "between recognition and identity" (Taylor, 1992, 25). In *The Politics of Recognition*, Charles Taylor explains that recognition and identity "designate something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being" (1992, 25). If we accept that our "identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence," (1992, 25) the soldier's rhetoric embodies this recognition through foodways. The soldier's act, as Kathleen LeBesco and Peter Naccarato succinctly write, "serve[s] as a vehicle through which ideological expectations about [...] identities are circulated, enforced, and transgressed" (2008, 1). By respecting the food choice of the Muslim boy, the soldier suggests that foodways may act as a signifier and ultimately ushers politics of equal recognition which is crucial for the survival of a healthy community.

4-Foodways as a marker of locality



The recognition that the foodways introduced is not restricted to immigrant foodways. It also highlights historical aspects of food preparation and consumption. The soldier and Boubacar arrive at the Celestial Grocery run by Angus Chien, a Chinese immigrant and the owner of the Chinese grocery. The soldier asks Angus whether he has “got any of that good barbecue?” (Shearer 26, emphasis in original). Angus’s response highlights the history and racialized form of foodways; “pit man died here a while back [...] Ain’t has no goot [sic.] barbecue since then.” (Shearer, 2005, 26). The dialogue reminds the reader of the biracial history and food preparation traditions in the South. It also politically recognizes the role of a “pit man” who was an old black man painstakingly tend the fire and smoke the meat that is used for barbecue. Angus’s rhetoric complicates how modern food is prepared and implies that though barbecue is uniquely a southern food, the way it is prepared has changed with time. Angus’s rhetoric questions, as Cooley writes, “many of the racial, class, and gender assumptions that formed the basis for white supremacy in the New South” (Cooley, 2016, 5). Despite the changes in preparation, *The Celestial Jukebox* communicates the fact that “accents and attitudes and lifestyles may change, but fondness for Southern food persists” (Egerton, 2006, 2). It also highlights that southern food is “far from being static, however, [they are] constantly evolving, a dynamic facet of diverse regional culture” (Cooley, 2016, 6).

Shearer’s text depicts the diversity of foreign and local food that is fused in shopping carts of southerners. Through the diversity of foodways, the text complicates “local food talk” and offers hybridization through a white southern character, Ranie, who teaches the neighborhood children how to roll out cookies and “always [come] home with bags full of over-priced food: free-range chicken, apple smoked sausage, tamari almonds, fresh hummus, sushi, flowers flown in from Sao Paulo or Provence” (Shearer, 2005, 355, emphasis added). While she was maintaining traditional foodways that strengthen identity and belonging to a community by teaching to the children of the neighborhood how to cook, she buys foods such as hummus and sushi that become among the staples in modern southern consumption habits. In local-global binary, the text engages existing rhetorical discussions on “eat local,” or buy local. While Ranie was shopping for food at the Big Heart, the narrator describes the scene as follows:

[Raine] admired the cheeses from England, the breads from Italy. She compared all the tomato options. The ones from Holland were more expensive than the ones from California. But most expensive of all were the ones grown just a few miles outside Memphis, the ones that would taste like real tomatoes. It seemed a sign of something ominous and confusing, the way the pricing ensured that only the well-heeled got to eat locally grown tomatoes picked that same morning. *The tomatoes of our youth*, said the little sign, which had a photo of a 1950s housewife in heels and pearls, serving her children a lunch of tomato sandwiches and a glass of milk. (Shearer, 2005, 356)

Through the narrative discourse, the text complicates and problematizes the distinction between local and global as Ranie finds the food produced in other parts of the world admiring and tasty, while the local is pricy that only wealthy can afford. On the rhetoric of “eating local,” John R. Thompson, referencing Kenneth Burke, explains that “eat local” [is a] text rooted in a place, a setting or environment that calls other things into existence” (Thompson, 2012, 66). The existence of other items warrants recognition to them. Thompson suggests that the phrase “eat local” “is aimed at differentiating a given place from a larger globalizing world that de-centers people and places” and argues that the word “local” “summons the local-global binary to salience” (2012, 66) and thus equal recognition for both.

In another setting, the local-global binary is acted upon when Boubacar meets Sarah, who runs the Cloud Nine Club. He was looking for the national steel, the guitar he wants to buy. The first thing that the reader notices in the restaurant is the sign, which says, “FRIED FROG LEG \$3 DOZ;” (Shearer, 2005, 251, emphasis in original). The sign brings global to local through fried frog leg which is a Creole food reminds he reader of the French influence. Talking to Sarah, Boubacar states that he is “straight off the boat” (2005, 254) to imply that he is a foreigner here and does not know socially accepted manners and foodways. Thus, “food talk” becomes an icebreaker and shows the humanity in us when Sarah, with conviviality and friendliness of a southern lady, offers Boubacar: “well you need a taste of my greens” (2005, 251). She initiates a dialogue that would construct mutual understanding and recognition through the delicious rhetoric of food. She serves Boubacar traditional local food, “a deep bowl full of fragrant, steaming greens and a fat square of spongy cornbread” (2005, 251).

Sarah displays southern hospitality, which Egerton explains as: “whether in the home or in public places, the food traditions that had become a part of the Southern culture by the 1940s could be summarized under a single descriptive heading: hospitality” (Egerton, 2006, 38). The hospitality of serving food to a stranger “proved to be a durable tradition in the South” (38). Sarah’s action also highlights the significance of



foodways as a communicative and semiotic system. In a semiotic system, signs and symbols are used to communicate including linguistic and paralinguistic communication. Following this hospitality, Sarah tells Boubacar that he can work in Sarah's place to save money to buy the guitar he has been looking for some time. Here at the Club, he learns how to cook some southern staples, such as catfish, when Sarah "set him to the task of dipping raw pieces of catfish into cornmeal, and dropping them into hot, bubbling oil," (Shearer, 2005, 257-8) which brings local-global binary into salience, borrowing Thompson's phrase. By teaching Boubacar how to cook catfish, Sarah unconsciously becomes a symbolic bridge that connects diverse cultures and foodways creating multiplicity and transculturalization.

The rhetoric of foodways in *The Celestial Jukebox* stretches the boundaries of the region and connects it to the larger souths creating multicultural foodways. In so doing, foodways become a narrative that connects the region not only to its past but also to the globe. In this sense, the Celestial Grocery is a permeable space where local people, immigrants, tourists, and thus different foodways meet and fuse. Latshaw notes, "Migration reshapes the southern landscape, the preparation, consumption, and celebration of southern food is looked upon as a cultural medium one turns to when expressing a regional identity today" (2013, 109). The Celestial Grocery serves different foodways from traditional southern breakfast – scrambled eggs, cinnamon rolls, and coffee – to immigrant food such as tamale. Angus hires a Honduran lady, Consuela, as a cook in his store and asks her if she "can cook American? Scrambelt egg (sic)? Hamburguesa?" because he believes that "[they] ain't had a good tamale in this place since Reagan was president" (Shearer, 2005, 93, emphasis in origin). He is not the only one who wants to eat a good tamale. Dean Fondren, a white farmer, also states that "he could not remember the last time he'd had decent tamale" (2005, 92). This desire to have decent or good tamale embodies the fact that the foodways create permeable boundaries which at the same time contribute to the recognition of ethnic foodways. As John T. Edge states "it was from the merging of cultures that foods like the Mississippi Delta hot tamale were born, a food with only a passing resemblance to the Mexican tamale that may have inspired its creation" (Edge, 2012, xv). Edge exemplifies how food becomes hybrid and a signifier of local.

As the text highlights, southern foodways put their touches on preparation. By adding different ingredients such as traditional corn husks with a standard filling of pork, people created a transcultural food that is a combination of local and foreign tastes. In *Eat, Drink Delta: A Hungry Traveler's Journey Through the Soul of the South*, Susan Puckett emphasizes this change: "visitors are [...] discovering the culinary oddities of the region. From one end of the Delta to the other, old time tamale makers wrap cornmeal cylinders filled with spicy beef or pork in corn husks or parchment" (Puckett, 2013, 2). The rhetoric of tamale and innovative ways of preparing and serving it epitomizes "the possibility for boundary stretching when it comes to the Southern food" (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre, 2016, 195).

When Angus Chien first arrives in America as an immigrant, he eats a tamale, which he believes is southern food. A dialogue between Angus and Aubrey Ellerbee, an African American farmer, epitomizes the role of foodways as a cultural medium to express regional identity. Angus says:

"Aubrey, you know what was the first American food I ever put in my mouth?"

"No, Angus. Tell me what was the first American food that you ever put in your mouth"

"It was tamale, and it was hot. It was given to me by an old colored fellow on the street in Vicksburg."

(Shearer, 2005, 135-6, emphasis in original)

Angus's food narrative exemplifies how foodways are rhetorically constructed and become powerful means to contribute to the regional identity. Now, in his grocery store, Consuela cooks tamale and hot food, and mostly Mexican workers fill the shop for lunch. The following passage portrays changing demographics and food voices in contemporary southern town:

Angus saw a group of workers he'd never seen before, all Hispanic. During the noon hour, the place was full for the first time in years. *Mamatica, Mamatica*, they called her. Every table was ringed with white-shirted backs bent over plates of Consuela's food. It was, for an hour or so every day, the way it once was before everybody local it out for the factories in Memphis, and he knew the satisfaction of giving hot food to hungry people so they could push away from the table and go work hard. (Shearer, 2005, 124)

From Angus's critical point of view, the text, through foodways, touches on the sociopolitical history of the region that implies "food practices had the potential to undermine white supremacy" because in Angus's place people of all ethnicities "had the opportunity to dine out [...] in a manner that depended more on socioeconomic status and less on race" (Cooley, 2016, 8). This demographic diversity is caused by migration to the urban spaces to work in factories. This movement not only changed to demographic of Angus's customers most of which are faces he does not know, but also the way food is prepared and



consumed. One thing is almost the same: the satisfaction the people get from the southern food. The food narrative of the text invites different ethnicities to gather around the table and create an assemblage that would reinterpret and reconstruct regional identity that would reflect the energy and taste the food have. Shearer, by using, various narratives to display the relationship between food and memory, aims to explain the development of identities that are defined through foodways.

5-Foodways as a marker of ethnic identity

Region and ethnicity are often intertwined. Susan Kalčík notes that “each regional and national narrative cuisine is a culinary hybrid, with an elaborate stratigraphy of diverse historical layers combined into a usable and evidently satisfying structure” (Kalčík, 2001, 44). She further states that “foodways can be charged with emotion and significance for both old and new Americans because the food is potentially a symbol of ethnic identity” (2001, 44). Shearer’s text is abundant with the examples of the multiplicity of foodways in the South. Boubacar and his uncles live across the Celestial Grocery. Their kitchen, which was “fragrant with meat and onions cooking in spices,” (Shearer, 2005, 149) bears the characteristics of Mauritania and the impact of religion on food choices. In addition to this domestic space, there are some public places that introduce similar spicy food into the southern locales. When Boubacar finds a Lebanese restaurant while he was wandering in Memphis, he buys *falafel*, a Middle-Eastern food, which reminds him of his home, “Lebanese is practically North African, which might as well be home. He unwrapped the falafel, already tasting it” (2005, 349). Another day in West Memphis Boubacar and Wastrel, an elderly Mauritanian, go to “ABYSSINIA ETHIOPIAN RESTAURANT” in which he “smelled spices and cooking meat,” and the lady cooking the food “smelled like his mother: coriander, garlic, and fenugreek” (2005, 334, emphasis in origin).

Through these African tinges, *The Celestial Jukebox* emphasizes that food is rhetorically constructed, “but also sends messages on its own through sound, smell, scent, touch, taste, and the accompanying memories that are triggered through the experience of the food” (Egerton, 2006, 190). These restaurants become culture centers for ethnic groups and introduce new tastes to the local community. Cultural geographer Elizabeth Chacko in her study about Ethiopians in suburban Washington D.C. states that “in a setting characterized by residential scattering, Ethiopians stay connected and flourish as a society through activities that bring them together” (as quoted in Hanchett, 2013, 177). In *the Celestial Jukebox*, Ranie with her daughter Callie drives to the Abyssinia Ethiopian Restaurant where “the food was hot and comforting, lamb and beef and chicken and vegetables” (Shearer, 2005, 362). The owners ask Ranie and her daughter if they want any forks, yet Callie seemed to enjoy eating “her mouth full, her fingers stained” (2005, 362). They learn to eat the food with their fingers as the immigrants in the restaurant do as a signifier of understanding, reinterpreting and sharing their cultures. Thus, this space, similar to the Celestial Grocery, becomes a centralized place where foodways, cultures, ideas, and tastes fuse. Through these spaces, the text achieves providing “a significant and meaningful way to open up a dialogue in the region” and promoting recognition (Stokes and Atkins-Sayre, 2016, 5). Egerton writes that “out of its complex and troubled history, the South has evolved a curious and fascinating mélange of food customs and traditions” (Egerton, 2006, 34). He further states that “these customs and traditions cut across the dividing lines of race and class, age and sex, politics and religion and geography” (2006, 34). The border crossings serve to mutual respect and understanding that introduce equal recognition to the inhabitants of fictional Madagascar.

Southern Foodways Alliance considers food as a racial and geographical healer. On their website they write, “a common table,” a transracial space “where black and white, rich and poor, [local and immigrant] –all who gather –may consider our history and our future in a spirit of reconciliation” (Shearer, 2005, 340). Shearer’s text portrays this type of reconciliation and consumer equality in a chapter called “Ceremony for the Giving of a Name.” This chapter also exemplifies the “commonality,” and “the sense of belongingness” that Stokes and Wendy Atkins-Sayre suggest (2016, 192).

It is very symbolic and significant that Angus organizes the ceremony on the fourth of July, which brings another significant politics of recognition through historical memory. The symbolic marker has the potentiality to cross racial, class, religious, ethnic and gender boundaries. The guests in this specific event remind us of the “common table,” which Southern Foodways Alliance describes. Around the table, we see a blend of cultures, ethnicities, and locality. Angus invited: Dean Fondren and Aubrey Ellerbee. He invited all the Africans. He invited all the Telephone Pioneers, and the Reverend Calvin Dearbon and the Mighty Sons of Destiny, and told them to bring their instruments. He invited Sister Aurelia from the Rescue Mission, and the man who drove the Cohnkrell Banana Company truck. He invited someone who worked for the Ibrahim Bros. Funeral Home and told him to bring some folding chairs [...] He invited Marie Abide and mentioned that it would be nice to have some roses.[...] Angus wanted Consuela to be there too (Shearer, 2005, 340).



The party was organized for the giving of a name to Angus's cousin's child. The narrative voice describes this gathering "somewhat like a church supper, with hot murky casseroles and arsenal of layer cakes made by Baptist and Catholic ladies who seemed amazed they cooked from the same recipes" (2005, 341). The food becomes a common ground and acts like a magical unifying force that gathers people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds creating recognition and tolerance that glues the society around common goals and future ambitions. It is interesting that the guest no matter what religion, sect, or ethnicity they belong to gather around a table that is reminiscent of church supper consisting of unique southern flavor.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have used foodways as a symbolic marker of identity in Cynthia Shearer's novel *The Celestial Jukebox*. I conclude that Shearer through foodways embraces transcultural foodways that disengage long historical representation of the South etched in the American imagination. Including global cuisines, her text invites readers to recognize the novelty of southern cuisine that transforms the foodways and the conceptions about the region, which is historically associated with poverty, slavery, and backwardness. The new foodways, as the text suggests, significantly change cultural policies that are associated with southern modernity and multiculturalism. Thus, the text celebrates the enriching and unique effects of immigrants, like Angus Chien, Consuela, and Boubacar, and documented and undocumented immigrants, on thriving southern foodways. The rhetoric of foodways in *The Celestial Jukebox* transforms nostalgia and misrecognition into the rhetoric of recognition, innovation, and transculturalism, all of which divorce an ideology of traditionalism leading to more vibrant and thriving southern foodways and southern society that annuls dichotomies and binaries embracing diversity.

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