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Culinary Survivance: Maya Angelou's Gastrographic Writing

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Abstract

This article examines Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004) and *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart* (2010) by juxtaposing soul food recipes and memory in the context of black cultural survival, community building and historical circumstances. In her gastrographic writing, cooking, storing and sharing food within African American culinary and literary traditions (recipe books, cookbooks and food memoirs) signify a struggle for black survivance (survival and resistance) against white supremacy, discrimination and stereotypical grand narratives of slavery and Jim Crow years. In this regard, her soul food recipes and cookbooks reflect race, gender and class politics and empower black people with the linguistic power of communicating with their comrades/readers and writing their experiences from the nourishing and safe sphere of kitchens and dinner tables.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, food writing, memory, survival, community.

Küliner Hayatta Kalış: Maya Angelou'nun Gastro Edebiyat Eserleri

Öz

Bu makale Maya Angelou'nun *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004) ve *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart* (2010) eserlerinde, "soul food" yemek tariflerini ve anılarını siyahilerin kültürel ve toplumsal varoluş mücadeleleri ve tarihsel durumları çerçevesinde inceler. Angelou'nun "gastro-edebiyat" eserlerinde, yiyeceğin Afrikalı Amerikalı mutfağı ve edebiyatı (yemek tarifi kitapları ve yiyecek anıları) geleneklerine göre pişirilmesi, muhafaza edilmesi ve paylaşılması siyahilerin beyaz üstünlüğüne, ayrımcılığa ve tipik kölelik anlatılarıyla "Jim Crow" yıllarına karşı varoluş ve direniş mücadelelerini temsil eder. Bu bağlamda, yazarın eserlerindeki "soul food" tarifleri ve yemek kitapları ırk, toplumsal cinsiyet ve sınıf politikalarını yansıtır ve siyahilere yoldaşlarla/okuyucularla kurulan iletişimden ve besleyici ve güvenli mutfaklarda ve yemek masalarında aktarılan tecrübelerden gelen bir güç verir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Maya Angelou, yiyecek anlatıları, anı, hayatta kalma, toplum

> Women have conserved a whole world, past and present, in the idiom of food. In their personal manuscripts, in locally distributed community recipe compilations, and in commercially printed cookbooks, women have given history and memory a permanent lodging. The knowledge contained in cookbooks transcends generations. Grandmothers and mothers, sisters and aunts, friends and relatives of friends invest what tidbits and wisdom they can for the next generation.
>
> Janet Theophano (49-50)

> Some memories stem from a literal hunger, others from an appetite for a past metaphorically expressed through recipe collection.
>
> Rafia Zafar, "Elegy and Remembrance" (33)

Food is a survivance (survival, resistance and commemoration) strategy for the African American community and has multiple functions as a source of nourishment, (re)union and celebration.[1] It also possesses symbolic communal value by resisting and chronicling the horrors of slavery, segregation and dislocation. Writing through cookbooks and food memoirs (foodoirs) is an embodiment of voice and authority, and a counternarrative that challenges grand narratives through the consumption of food and words. The symbolic association between food and words represents the historical deprivations of African Americans since the days of enslavement. Gastrographic writing is an example of a survival narrative, which has individual and communal dimensions by moving from personal experience to communal history. Moreover, the emphasis on communal and cultural memory of recipes and ceremonial eating preserves the intrinsic sense of community with the polyphony of voices.

"Gastrography" is a term first coined by Rosalia Baena and identifies life writing with production, preparation and consumption processes of food. Publication of food memoirs relates culinary practices to "family and nation, ethnic heritage, and diasporan mixing" as variety of cookbooks, diaries and food memoirs indicate (Smith and Watson 148). Southern cuisine, especially the soul food tradition, reflects gastronomical, historical, autobiographical and communal identity in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes* (2004) and *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart* (2010). Angelou's *Hallelujah* and *Great Food* are regarded as cookbooks and examples of gastrography, specifically soul food memoirs. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiographical narrative that portrays African American culinary traditions (southern cuisine) by merging food with communal memory. These works reinforce generational legacy, historical experience and community building as means to freedom. African American women's cookbooks and recipes reveal their lives and struggles, which for far too long remained in the shadow of race, class and gender norms. As Rosalyn Collings Eves suggests, one needs to reconsider "oral traditions passed down through generations" and specifically "the transmission of material cultural goods, such as quilts, samplers, and recipes" (280). In this regard, Eves suggests that they emerge as "alternative rhetorical options," in contrast to discursive memory and grand narratives (280). In this article, Maya Angelou's

above mentioned works that combine food and memory in her survival and resistance narratives will be discussed, tracing her personal coming of age and the influence of the community, particularly the efforts of her foremothers, sisters and comrades. Angelou's recollection of taste and recipes are blended with historico-cultural circumstances of race, gender and class that shape communal response and practices. In that, Angelou's gastrographic survivance narratives function as a form of history writing by chronicling the stories of her family and African American community around the nourishing, safe and active network of cooking, storing and sharing food and wisdom.

A Brief History of African American Cuisine

Robert L. Hall states that the roots of southern culinary culture, including "soul food," are traced back to African foodways through the legacy of the Atlantic slave trade. As a matter of fact, in the southern cuisine, many ingredients such as "black-eyed peas, okra, sorghum, pigeon peas, leafy greens, watermelon, and sesame" were cultivated in Africa (Hall 305). As Hall further indicates, Africans raised certain crops such as "turnips, cabbage, eggplant, cucumbers, onions, chick peas . . . kidney beans, and lentils" prior to European merchants and colonizers (305). Furthermore, nourishing food staples (such as cassava and maize) were adopted around the 1500s and African slaves carried their culinary traditions to British colonies of the New World (Hall 305). African food was part of the Columbian exchange that mobilized people, commodities and cultural traditions.

African food and memory were quintessential to cultural adaptation in the New World and food emerged as a survivance mechanism in the American South by turning slaves' ungraspable past into edible daily reassurance. As Judith A. Carney and Richard N. Rosomoff also suggest, "Food is vested with symbolic ties to homelands left or lost. The emphasis on meaningful foods and familiar forms of preparation enriches the memory dishes with which migrants connect past and present" (185). In this regard, Carney and Rosomoff relate African slaves' "food preferences and cooking traditions" in the New World to their forced migration (185). Slaves were accompanied by memories of their homeland and African culinary traditions during the Middle Passage. Moreover, the colonial era permitted slaves to

cultivate crops in slave quarters, where they maintained African culinary culture despite their disorientation and bondage. Consequently, the recollection of African cuisine and its integration into British colonial society provided consolation and continuity by securing "subsistence and survival" (Carney and Rosomoff 185).

Additionally, African foodways further assisted and shaped the "global table" through the historical mobility of the African population and their encounter with new cuisines along the way (Carney and Rosomoff 186). African influences resulted in radical changes, particularly in the British colonies of the New World, because Africans (re)membered their ties with the land. In that, they maintained their agricultural roots through kinship networks and slave labor in the fields and kitchens of their masters (186). As Carney and Rosomoff elucidate, "African diaspora" cuisine is notable for its "humble beginnings and discrete ways" that found its way into the "plantation palate" (186). With this in mind, African American cuisine gives an account of "exile, survival, endurance, and memory" (Carney and Rosomoff 186). African slaves set the colonizers' table with symbolic empowerment and resistance to forgetting their past. Food, identity and community have adopted socially acceptable forms which seemed stereotypical, self-protective and productive to survive under ubiquitous white rule.

African American women integrated culinary history and recipes into their oral accounts. In fact, according to Toni Tipton-Martin, over four hundred cookbooks can be found in the University of Alabama's David Walker Lupton African American Cookbook Collection. In time, African American cooks made adjustments by substituting new ingredients and recreating the recipes, which Tipton-Martin calls "melting pot of recipe development and ownership" (117). However, white cooks' cookbooks dismissed the influence of "African and Native American techniques" on American and European culinary traditions. In such notable cookbooks, Tipton-Martin notes that recipes were popularized by neglecting their origins. Beyond their "utilitarian" functions, cookbooks and recipes are historical texts that reveal gender relations and domesticity (Tipton-Martin 117). Cookbooks and recipes intrinsically reflect the discursive workings of culture and politics within the society.

Although probably ghostwritten, Abby Fisher's *What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking* (1881) is considered to be

the first cookbook by an African American woman. Fisher gives direct cooking instructions with implied references to her life and social circumstances. Rafia Zafar interprets her work in this way: "However firmly Abby Fisher tried to keep out the world beyond her kitchen, her life as a Black woman erupted into her professional presentations" ("The Signifying Dish" 451). Zafar points out the interaction between cookbooks and "community histories, family memoirs, and autobiography" in the twentieth century (451). African American cookbooks after the 1940s, according to Zafar, represented "recoveries or recastings" about the community such as the *Historical Cookbook of the American Negro* (1958), financed by the National Council of Negro Women (451). Moreover, Zafar also notes that the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s popularized African American identity politics and culinary traditions through such works as *A Good Heart and Light Hand: Ruth L. Gaskins' Collection of Traditional Negro Recipes* (1968) ("The Signifying Dish" 451-52).

Tipton-Martin further explores the stereotypical African American woman cook by giving an insight into the Aunt Jemima cult of black culinary tradition.[2] The "Jemima code" signifies racist and sexist tokenism about African American cooks and cookbook writers who seem "naturally born rather than rigorously trained" in this field (Tipton-Martin 116). As Tipton-Martin puts it this way, the essentialist representation devalues their efforts by reinforcing the image of "passive and ignorant laborers incapable of artistry" (116). African American women were long trapped in domestic labor, especially white women's kitchens, "amid oppressive and inhumane conditions and imbalanced power dynamics" between slaves and planters (Tipton-Martin 116). Moreover, black women's cooking skills and recipes were part of oral tradition since they were kept illiterate and had to rely on daily encounters to maintain cultural legacy. Therefore, Tipton-Martin states that African American women "told stories on the front porch, or during special occasions and celebrations" and "taught cooking techniques while preparing dishes and sharing meals together at table" (116-17).

Thus, reading cookbooks is reading history of disrupted black community, slavery, disempowerment and white supremacy through culinary history and representation of black mammies and cooks in white and black kitchens. Besides race and community specific gender roles, class further separated white and black kitchens, recipes and

cookbooks. Cookbooks and integration of recipes into self-reflexive narratives reflect culinary traditions, even if they have changed in accordance with "contemporary tastes and fashions" (Theophano 51). As Janet Theophano indicates, food writing contains memories and tastes in textual forms, "savored as mementos of the past and a way of life that may no longer exist" (51). Thus, the act of writing honors recipes along with their contributors and immortalize them in a way with the power of the word. Theophano connects the written accounts of recipes to cultural identity struggle: "Used or not, unchanged or transformed, these recipes and the rituals in which they are embedded continue to shape a group's current image of itself" (51).

Angelou's Writing: Eating Black History, Cultural Recipes and Communal Habits

1960s Civil Rights Movement and 1970s Black Arts Movement sought to reconceptualize black identity, through which food became an integral part of the quest for communal authenticity and agency. As Laretta Henderson suggests, "Not only were systems such as art and politics evaluated and redefined, but also included in this redefinition was the human body and everything associated with it, including food consumption" (81). According to Henderson, soul food evokes African American collective suffering under enslavement with "cultural pride" since slaves and emancipated blacks consumed soul food. By the 1960s, Henderson viewed soul food as a unifying force within African American middle class and working class communities, so black identity struggle and soul food diminished class distinctions and political polarizations within the community (81-82).

Culinary writing and practices position one within the family and community in Maya Angelou's gastrographic writing. Angelou, in her multidimensional food writing, redefines herself in segregated Stamps, Arkansas, of her Momma and urban black neighborhoods of her mother as a daughter, mother, employee and writer. Angelou's definition of self and community reaches the present and future through her communication with her readers in a food-based space and community within the text. Angelou's recipes reflect a didactic and moralistic tone by means of the stories behind. Readers consume Angelou's "edible" memories by reading her anecdotes and cooking

her recipes. In "A Recipe for Remembrance," Rosalyn Collings Eves states that "recipes and foods can speak so tellingly to the history and values of a particular community, all cookbooks have the potential to serve as memorial texts—sites where memories are shared and memorial frameworks engaged in discourse" (285). Thus, Angelou's food writing serves as a textual commemorative site where Angelou shares personal and communal history and black culinary traditions with her readers.

In *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table: A Lifetime of Memories with Recipes*, Angelou embellishes African American culinary culture and recipes with her intimate recollections, storytelling and humor. "Pie Fishing" refers to her grandmother's (Momma Henderson's) lemon meringue pie, which she and her brother Bailey adored. Momma tells her grandchildren a story while making the pie. The story connects the tempting taste of lemon meringue pie to a black temptress, notorious for her fondness of young men. As the story goes, Mrs. Townsend invites George Wilson to dinner. Wilson accepts her invitation after hearing community's warnings and appreciation of her cooking. The story depicts Mrs. Henderson paradoxically as a church woman and an enchantress with magical food that Wilson eats voraciously: "When he puts his first bite of Mrs. Townsend's pie, it was hers. He was ready to marry her or let her adopt him" (Angelou Kindle location 232). Although Mr. Wilson runs away in a moment of distraction, he always remembers the lemon meringue pie. Angelou calls the recipe "Mrs. Townsend's Entire Young-Man Catching Sunday Afternoon Dinner" (Kindle location 255). Thus, Angelou shares the sweet cultural taste of the pie along with bitter societal mores as she integrates the recipe and the story behind it into her food memoir. In this way, she passes oral communal history and black culinary traditions to her readers with a sense of familial duty and communal fulfilment.

Accordingly, "The Assurance of Caramel Cake" relates Black culinary traditions to community with nourishing and competitive characteristics of cooking and sharing food. Quilting Bees, a group of women, share recent issues, gossips and their favorite desserts in Momma's store. Angelou remembers their gatherings as "the only nonlabor, nonreligious occasions where women could gather and exchange all the communities' good and bad news" (*Hallelujah!* Kindle location 345). Angelou appreciates the taste of Mrs. Sneed's "sweet potato pie," Mrs. Miller's "coconut cake" and Mrs. Kendrick's

"chocolate fudge," which is fit for Adam and Eve's last meal in the Garden of Eden (Kindle locations 348-50). She recalls its heavenly yet tempting taste like the forbidden fruit. Served to the Quilting Bees, Momma's "caramel cake," is also associated with some other occasion in which Angelou is misjudged at school. After sexual abuse and her abuser's death, her silence out of self-blame is misunderstood as "uppityness" towards the black community. Momma makes her caramel cake as a compensation for injustice and a sign of family support, so food becomes a remedy against wrongdoings. As Zafar also suggests, cookbooks and food memoirs contain recollection, loss and consolation: "Cookbooks and the recipes within them present opportunities for authors to script a self, tell an exotic tale, recall a history, or as I will argue, mourn a lost loved one or memorialize a vanished place" ("Elegy and Remembrance" 32).

African American women occupy a "safe" space within their large families, homosocial communities, churches and organizations, which makes them feel "truly heard – understood" (Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma 106). They gain linguistic power with newly gained voice and a sense of solidarity. These women are elevated to a state of self-acknowledgement and awareness of other women with positive encouragement. They are no longer burdened with dictations of social gaze as they feel "free to invent and reinvent themselves" (106). Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma also note "safe-space setting" characteristics of Angelou's kitchen in *Hallelujah!* and *Great Food* (106). As they suggest, "The kitchen is an important locale in Black women's writings in particular, as it serves as a safe space in which to gather, converse, laugh, love and support one another" (Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma 109). Historically, African American cuisine had a chance to survive and enrich through masters' fondness of slave cooking skills because "the kitchen and its resultant Soul Food cuisine formed one of the few areas where the artistry of African American slaves was appreciated" (Whit 39-40).

African American cuisine is the embodiment of African and Anglo-American influences in southern foodways as recipes indicate: "fried chicken and fish; barbecued pork; boiled greens . . . roasted sweet potatoes . . . corn bread, corn fritters, corn pone, cornmeal mush and hominy grits . . . field peas, and beans and rice" (Poe 10-11). African American preference of "entrails" such as "chitterlings" and "pigs' and chickens' feet" are part of southern culinary culture,

though they used to be undesirable remnants for white people (10-11). In "Momma's Grandbabies Love Cracklin' Cracklin,'" Angelou refers to the killing season of hogs and cows. It is significant as a communal activity and sustenance since they use every edible part (*Hallelujah!* Kindle location 519). People bring several parts of hogs such as head and intestines to Momma's store for cleaning and proper processing. Angelou memorizes "crackling bread" her Momma serves with the stew rather than the smell of raw meat in the store (Kindle location 526). In soul food cuisine, pork is a crucial ingredient in a variety of recipes. African Americans make use of any edible portion of pigs such as "stomach, ears, feet, other intestines, head cheese (brains), ribs, fat back, and hocks" (Whit 39). They became quintessential to soul food because they were also unwanted by white people (slave masters and plantation owners). Given less desirable parts of butchered animals, slaves learned to be creative cooks with bits and pieces of meat and other ingredients so that they could feed the slave community of house slaves and field laborers. As Janet Theophano insightfully reinterprets women's collection of recipes, "Cookbooks, then, besides describing foods, are records of women's social interactions and exchanges" (13). As Angelou's food writing indicates, women's memorization of recipes is a form of paying tribute to ancestors, family members, friends and mentors through food, formerly cooked and/or shared together.

Food preservation and consumption have been closely linked to technology, social circumstances and weather conditions. Without "refrigeration, freezing and canning technologies," meat was consumed in a short time (Whit 39). Therefore, Africans and Europeans used "salting and drying" to preserve meat and sugar for fruit whereas smoking, generally attributed to Native Americans, and pickling were other prominent food preservation methods, used in meat processing (39). In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou recalls the detailed food processing and canning in Stamps, Arkansas. People collaborated in the "killing season" of hogs and cows. Women of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and her Momma made pork sausages "with gray nose-opening sage, pepper and salt." She also recalls meat processing in the smokehouse, called the "curing process." The smokehouse and canning provided food supply for the segregated African American community: "Green beans, snapped always the right length, collards, cabbage, juicy red tomato preserves that came into their own on steaming buttered biscuits, and sausage, beets, berries and every fruit grown in Arkansas" (Angelou, *I Know* 24).

In the African American community, food plays ceremonial, religious and collective function. Regarding African Americans' Sunday meals, Rosalyn Collings Eves notes the restorative powers of food that evoke a sense of duty and belonging to family, church and community:

> Many of the Sunday dinner traditions, although individually recounted in the cookbooks, are strikingly similar because they stem from the same communal narrative that calls for an elaborate family meal after attending church. An additional social framework emerging in the cookbooks calls for the association of physical nourishment with emotional nourishment in keeping with the tradition of "soul food." (292-93)

In *Hallelujah*!, "Potato Salad Towers Over Difficulties" expresses African American values of communal standing, church membership and ritualistic meals in a similar way. Momma belongs to the Colored Methodist Church and the Presiding Elder is a frequent guest of her dinners whenever he visits the town. A typical Sunday meal is fried chicken and potato salad served with lettuce leaves. Angelou and Bailey Junior react to the Presiding Elder's ruthless manner of stuffing food on his plate. He violates the communal codes of eating in a ritualistic and proper way and disrespects food with his gluttonous appetite: "Each person was supposed to pick up the fork in the lettuce bowl and take one leaf up . . . then place it on the salad plate just to the left of the dinner plate. Then a spoon of potato salad would be placed on the lettuce leaf. That was how we did it, how everybody did it except for the Presiding Elder" (Angelou, *Hallelujah!* Kindle locations 612-13). William C. Whit comments on the Sunday dinner tradition in African American community, rooted in plantation slavery: "Saturday night usually was the distribution of slave provisions. This made possible the tradition of a larger than normal Sunday dinner—a tradition which has continued with minor modification in African American households down to the present" (39). Likewise, summer picnics in Arkansas is a community gathering for collective entertainment with music and good food, as Angelou recalls, "Pans of fried chicken . . . next to a mountain of potato salad crammed with hard-boiled eggs. Whole rust-red sticks of bologna were clothed in cheese-cloth. Homemade pickles and chow-chow, and baked country." (Angelou, *I Know* 138). The special occasion is a time to test and contest cooking skills of women

and family recipes, "guarded in the family like a scandalous affair" because, under judging eyes of the community, people serve their best food and eat in a proper way (138).

Food exposes the fallacy behind race politics and social manipulation that meant to homogenize the nation through segregation policies. However, southern food, "a vast world of meaning and symbolism and plain old eating," recasts the American South and race relations:

> [f]ood is entangled in forces that have shaped southern history and culture for more than four centuries. The cultural processes associated with food—production, regulation, representation, identity, and consumption—have taken on aliases such as agriculture, animal science, civil rights, consumption . . . domesticity, drink, economy, exchange . . . hunger, malnutrition, marketplace, nutrition . . . poverty, property, reform, segregation, slavery, starvation, sustenance. . . (Ferris 4)

Food coexists with social norms that regulate race and gender relations, ethnicity and culture, class distinctions and economy. In "Liver to Grow On," Angelou recalls the first frost when hogs and cows are butchered and how meat is processed and preserved by making sausages. Communal preparation of food stock (preservation of fruits, vegetables and meat) secures a whole year's consumption and communal self-sustenance in times of poverty and segregation. When Momma needs fresh meat, Maya and her brother, Bailey, are sent to the butcher to buy liver from the white section of the town, in other words, "man-eating animals' territory" (Angelou, *Hallelujah!* Kindle location 729). In *Hallelujah!,* her "Liver and Onions" recipe reveals black and white interaction across food on culinary and socio-economic grounds. Racist notions perpetuated the idea of difference due to prejudice and hegemonic concerns and glorified "separate but equal" norm despite its impracticality and the necessity of communal coexistence.

In African American community, food provides a peaceful form of protest and collective empowerment against white hegemony and injustices as Angelou's memories and recipes reveal. Race and class connections define food relations and shape politics between white and black communities: "Food practices in the twentieth-century South

contributed to the construction of race in a variety of ways. Whites used differences in food practices . . . to justify their preconceived notions of the supposed racial inferiority of the black race" (Cooley 190). In "Recipes from Another Country," Momma Henderson reaches Lafayette Country *Democrat* newspaper that publishes recipes of white women. When black maids of white households bring the issues, Maya reads and copies the recipes. Momma cooks white women's recipes such as "wilted lettuce" with slight modifications for her family, which indicates domestic defiance of segregation policies and implicit resistance to race politics with collaborative efforts: "Would she [white woman] think that a black grandmother was feeding her grandchildren the same dish she was offering to her privileged family?" (Angelou, *Hallelujah!* Kindle location 784). Momma's secret way of reaching "whites only" newspapers and recipes is an act of rebellion against white supremacy, which politicizes food, cooking and kitchen as a sphere of influence and activism. Southern culinary culture erases the border between two assumingly different and separate communities. Momma's cooking and recipes encourage civil disobedience, as Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma suggest, "In spite of the overbearing and inescapable racism, Momma is powerful enough to resist her own subjugation. Here in the safe space of her kitchen, she can prepare and enjoy what was intended for a white audience. She creatively reinvents an experience" (111). Likewise, in *Hallelujah!,* Angelou associates food with female liberation through her grandmother's initiatives. Momma Henderson is abandoned by her husband and left alone with her children. Her "Fried Meat Pies" recipe sustains her family and builds her business as the only black woman storeowner of the neighborhood.

Learning from Momma Henderson through Angelou's food writing, cooking southern food has potential to liberate black women from gendered and socio-economic oppression and ideological limitations. By cooking, serving and teaching southern recipes to Angelou, Momma Henderson puts her into the position of representing the community and women in her family. "Saving Face and Smoking in Italy" carries good old recipes of thanksgiving such as "roasted turkey" and "corn bread stuffing" to an international scene with sophistication. Angelou cooks them for a thanksgiving meal along with white male chefs. Cooking ethnic food turns into a display of black culinary tradition and capabilities of women cooks. Moreover,

tasteful food surpasses assumptions about race and gender: "I learned that day that a respect for food and its preparation could obliterate distances between sexes, languages, oceans, and continents" (Angelou, *Hallelujah!* Kindle location 1468). Food creates bridges across socially constructed differences and common ignorance as an appealing tool of communication. In this way, when writing about food, the writer integrates history and cultural legacy into gastrographic writing, as Zafar argues, "Popularly held misconceptions about Black cooks haunt, consciously or not, the African American woman, whether she is a chef or an author. When negotiating the intersections of memory, history, food and creativity, well might the Black woman author ask: In writing a recipe, can one also right history?" ("The Signifying Dish" 450).

Cooking and writing help Angelou survive and continue writing the crucial stages of her life. In *Hallelujah!*, southern food grants her satisfaction, consolation and temporary jobs in several occasions. She pays tribute to food in her food memoir by sharing soul food recipes such as "homemade biscuits" and "sausage." She evokes communal, familial and culinary bridges through creative, generational and therapeutic functions of southern food. (Re)membering the past via food and recipes results in an archive of personal and communal history writing, which Angelou feels obliged to pass onto new generations. The contribution of food and recipes to literature and ethno-cultural studies has long been neglected, because "much attention has been paid to the socializing function of commensality or patterned food avoidance, little attention . . . has been paid to the way in which culinary knowledge—shall we say 'recipes'?—function to demarcate social boundaries, especially if and when they become objectified as intellectual property or intangible cultural heritage" (Palmié 54). Therefore, in *Hallelujah!*, Angelou chooses to cook Arkansas style black-eyed pea soup, southern fried chicken served with homemade biscuits and New Orleans pecan pie to her gourmet food group as a self-acclaimed representative of southern cuisine (Kindle locations 1917-18).

Considering progressive aspects of culinary history and traditions, food is not only a "cultural creation" but it is also, as in the case of southern cuisine, a continual cultural "re-creation" (Whit 38). Soul food has become compatible with the needs and necessities of the time for African American community. Therefore, linking vegetarian food to soul food is a form of communal and cultural survival mechanism in Angelou's writing through a new interpretation

of southern cuisine. Angelou recalls her childhood years of Great Depression that transformed meat based southern diet with greens due to shortages of food and economic struggle. As she states, "The Depression . . . hit the South with a particularly heavy blow. Poor people who lived in a cotton economy and who were happy to have fresh meat once a month were challenged to find enough work to put the sparest vegetarian dinners on their tables" (Angelou, *Hallelujah!* Kindle locations 2467-69). It has not occurred to Angelou to find such a culinary connection between two seemingly different cuisines: southern and vegetarian foods until she decides to cook for her friends:

> although we did have chickens and cured meat, vegetables dominated our meals, whether we wished for it or not. Inventive cooks found ways to use the cured meat that was included in their cooked dishes. Each pot of greens was stewed with as much smoked or cured meat as the cook could afford. Country ham slices and boiled bacon slabs were offered at least twice a week, and one could be assured that it was definitely chicken on Sunday. (Kindle locations 2471-74)

As a result, recalling black community's historical trials and survival, she prepares "Tomato Soufflé," "Moroccan Stew" and salad recipes for her vegetarian friends. Lily Kelting views how "Southernness circulates outside the South through cookbooks" (362). As a result of her reading of recent southern cookbooks, Kelting defines the current trend as "The New Southern Food Movement," which depicts a transmission from "a set of regional, heritage foodways to a nationally recognized cuisine" (362). Thus, she adds that this new trend of southern food seems to be "open for hybrid or simply upscale reinterpretation" (362). Likewise, Angelou's food writing integrates recipes into different contexts varying from race, culture and gender specific experience, colonial legacies to contemporary approaches to food.

An Invitation to Angelou's Kitchen: Communal and Generational Reunion

In *Great Food, All Day Long: Cook Splendidly, Eat Smart*, Maya Angelou regards "M. F. K. Fisher, Elizabeth David, Jessica Harris, Margaret Visser and Jacques Pepin" as her sources of inspiration

and encouragement in writing her work (Intro. XIII). Angelou's health concerns, such as weight-problem-related "diabetes, hypertension, and high blood pressure" (XIV), become her main motivation to write a cookbook, embellished with memories. Her main statement to the reader is the possibility of weight control while cooking great food and eating moderately. In this manner, she addresses the reader:

> All recipes offered in this book can be prepared and eaten all day long, beginning with a glorious chili. You can have couscous with chicken drumsticks any time of the day or night. The food should taste so good that you will be satisfied with a small portion. If you are diligent about portions, then you can snack with smaller amounts all day long. (XIV-XV)

Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma claims that Angelou uses the "call and response" technique in her food writing, which depicts the nurturing relationship between her (the cook and writer) and Oprah Winfrey (sister-guest and coercer to write): "Angelou invites Winfrey to eat her food - the symbolic call - and Winfrey not only eats her food - the response - but she asks Angelou to pass on her recipes - resulting in another call - to which Angelou responds in the form of a cookbook" (109). In this way, Angelou and Winfrey rework "the sphere of African traditions" with the legitimization of "African diaspora" (Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma 109). Angelou's writing calls for reader response and urges women to gather in a homosocial setting (kitchen) and feel free to invoke ancestral muses such as mothers, grandmothers and kinswomen in a nonjudgmental space. Eating and writing about food are established as a means of expression and communication with each other.

In Angelou's food writing, recipes are written down along with stories and anecdotes as an act of loyalty and devotion to foremothers. Correspondingly, Janet Theophano recognizes the value of women's cookbooks as "matrilineal genealogies" which maintain kinship through generational acknowledgement. Known as women's "recipe books," cookbooks convey domesticity, gender roles and culture that nourished them (Theophano 86). Angelou's two cookbooks, *Hallelujah!* and *Great Food*, and autobiographical narrative, *I Know*, reflect generational legacies (her grandmother Henderson, mother and brother) and her friends' contributions (Oprah Winfrey and others). Angelou's above mentioned works recreate a textual bond

with the inherited knowledge of her ancestral women and forge new bonds such as mother-daughter, mother-son, sister to sister and author-reader relationships. As Janet Theophano notes, food writing represents social relations through "the exchange of recipes and the naming of contributors" (41). Thus, cookbooks, food memoirs or daily encounters around perception, preparation and consumption of food create culinary bonds and a shared ground of "alliances and affinity" which also indicate racial, communal, class given and religious norms (42).

In "A Brand-New Look at Old Leftovers," Angelou recalls her mother's (Vivian Baxter's) dream to write a collaborative cookbook by using the recipes they cooked together. The main theme of this chapter emerges from mother-daughter dream to use leftover food creatively: "We spent glorious afternoons and after-dinners imagining the wonderful dishes that could be created by adding just a few more ingredients. We imagined that a dish first served as a roasted entree would be very different if it appeared as a refried or boiled offering" (Angelou, *Great Food* 3). Angelou's recipes reflect the highly valued characteristics of southern culinary culture such as food economy and communal thriftiness out of the historical legacy of slavery. With the word economy in her writing, she juxtaposes the consumption of food and words as a writer and cook in an efficient way. Accordingly, she compiles her pork, beef and chicken recipes in a recycling manner. "Crown Roast of Pork," which is proper for "a grand dinner party" (5), is transformed into "Creamy Pork Hash," "Pork Tacos" and "Pork Fried Rice." She simply encourages her readers to use abundant tasty food through different combinations and moderate portions. Similarly, "Prime Rib: The Dinner That Never Stops Giving" evolves into "Open-Faced Sliced Beef Sandwiches," "Roast Beef Hash" and "Beef and Vegetable Soup." "Roasted Chicken" is served as "Chicken Tetrazzini" and "Chicken Curry" in different meals.

Myths and fairytales, according to Angelou, promise rewards and magical treasures and encourage people to embark on a journey for their desires, dreams and cherished wishes through magical transformations (Angelou, *Great Food* 61). She looks for a similar urge or culinary drive when it comes to cooking and eating food. She firmly believes that people consume food for their yearnings for a specific "cultural" taste, which is akin to a heroic quest for a great cause or out of magical temptation: "I have noticed that many people eat long

after they are filled. I think they are searching in their plates not for a myth, but for a taste, which seems to elude them" (61). Angelou's cookbook, *Great Food,* emerges as the great book of magic that reveals the wisdom of southern food and black culinary tradition to starving heroes (readers) in their respective journeys of reading and cooking the recipes. In this way, she defines "a bowl of savory clear soup served with a corn stick or a slice of irresistible corn bread" as "filling and fulfilling" (61). Angelou's recipes combine cultural culinary legacy with the sensory experience of eating and cooking ethnic food with the promises of satisfaction, pleasure and comfort to soul and body.

In the context of culinary exchange, African American culinary culture has merged African culture with American foodways through the history of colonization. In the plantations, African slaves "created the fusion cuisines and memory dishes that attest to the African presence in the Americas" (Carney and Rosomoff 117). Following the steps of African ancestors, in *Great Food*, Angelou blends southern food with South American influences in her recipes of "Pork Pie," "Mixed-Up Tamale Pie," "Pollo in Salsa," "Puchero and Corn bread" and "Pinto Beans." Regarding "Puchero and Corn bread," Angelou acknowledges cross-cultural bonds that formed foodways through the transatlantic slave trade that carried various ingredients to American shores. As Angelou points out, "Though the meat and chickpea stew known as puchero is widely known in Spain's Andalusia region and across Spanish-speaking South America, my particular version is inspired by the flavors in the rich Brazilian dish *feijoada*, a pork and black bean soup whose origins can be traced back to the arrival of African slaves on South American shores" (*Great Food* 69).

Recipes are not only records of family history, but they also provide a culinary space for giving and taking advice from an elder member of the family. Angelou's "A Pint of Soup" relates cooking to a family story about her Aunt Teresa (Tee). She is "known to be an excellent and generous cook" in the family and uses the promise of good food to have company (Angelou, *Great Food* 105). Good food is inviting to visitors who expects delicious meals from her. She gives Angelou some advice about cooking: "She told me she would cut up an onion and two cloves of garlic and put them in water to boil. When one of her friends came by, she would open the kitchen door and let the aroma invade the living room. The visitor would ask, 'What are you cooking, Tee?' Her answer would be 'A little bit of this and a little bit

of that'" (105). Home cooked food not only keeps company but it also creates a sense of home. Angelou comes up with her own scheme of cooking after her aunt's advice whenever she comes back home after a long time. She makes peace with her home in this way: "Try this ploy: Whenever the house resists you, the kitchen can be made into your ally. Start there first, and start with soup" (106). Then, she gives recipes of "Black Bean Soup," "Chicken Soup" and "Pumpkin Soup I." Regarding *Hallelujah!* and *Great Food*, Tasha Choma-Sampson and Tosha Sampson-Choma state that "Angelou invites readers to dine at her table, where she erects her own kitchen, makes us her honored guests, shares her stories, offers advice, and then encourages us to act on the information given" (105). Angelou honors the wisdom of her Aunt Tee by telling her story and offering her own scheme as a form of generational exchange and great valuation of food. She assumes the role of an aunt or elder sister giving advice to the reader through her food writing.

African American culinary tradition discloses a historically given diverse socio-economic, political and geographical web of influences through slave trade between African tribes and the Americas. The institution of slavery strictly positioned them within a labor based foreign culture, geography and economic system without legal protection, education and self-autonomy. Food and belief systems (spiritualism) provided only solace to harsh plantation life and race politics. An outcome of black historical experience and culinary culture, soul food, long associated with the slave diet of pork pieces, greens and grains, gained popularity during the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s. African American community looked for unique cultural identity markers in politics and life style. Soul food memoirs have promised voice, nourishment and individuation by challenging stereotypical roles of plantation mammies, aunts and servants. Maya Angelou's food memories and recipes in her gastrographic writing rework her family history and individual encounters to voice collective memory, communal experiences and African legacy. As Janet Theophano suggests, "although we think of cookbooks as the product of a single author, surprisingly, a cookbook is a communal affair" (11). Angelou's *I Know*, *Hallelujah!* and *Great Food* narrate black history, cultural traditions and communal experience. Angelou memorizes matriarchs of her family through generational legacy and uses food to touch upon black family unit, church service, Sunday dinners, summer

picnics, mother-child bond and even gourmet food among many other issues. Her writing style in *Hallelujah!* and *Great Food* is an invitation to her kitchen "where unity, acceptance, love, and encouragement flourish" (Choma-Sampson and Sampson-Choma 106).

Notes

[1] In "Aesthetics of Survivance," Gerald Vizenor explores the meaning and historical usage of "survivance" over the years. Vizenor views this term within the context of Native American experience of struggle, endurance and (communal and literary) survival: "Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name" (1).

[2] Aunt Jemima represents the stereotypical "Mammy" of the plantation (loyal house slave) to accompany the Uncle Tom image. It is also a well-known brand of pancakes and syrup, which indicates commercialization of reinforced race politics under the shadow of consumerism. Rafia Zafar points out racist and sexist degradation of African American cooks through the mammy stereotype: "The Black woman cook-overweight, decked out in snowy apron, undisputed genius of the American kitchen-is an image too well inscribed on the collective American unconscious" ("The Signifying Dish" 449).

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