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The Choreography of Chaotic Appetite in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, Joanne Harris's *Five Quarters of the Orange* and Bassma Alkhateeb's *Bitter Orange*

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Abstract

This article explores the chaos-oriented genre of culinary arts as presented in the culinary narratives of Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), Joanne Harris's *Five Quarters of the Orange* (2000) and Bassma Alkhateeb's *Bitter Orange* (2015). In this reading, a cross cultural contribution to the existing scholarship on chaotic culinarity and gastronomy is addressed. In particular, the article redirects the main theories and critiques that have been established and espoused in food studies through a revisionist interpretation of food writing in order to reread certain culinary methods, especially violent gastronomy, and maternal relationships in light of the geography of the kitchen in the addressed novels. Revisionary readings of food and gastronomy literature beyond redemptive or restrictive polarities of gender, age, political orientation, nationality, cultural identification, and social class are mainly proposed.

Key Words: Gastronomy, food studies, cultural studies, culinary novels, culinary mechanisms, chaotic culinarity

Introduction:

This article explores the chaos-oriented genre of culinary arts as presented in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989), Joanne Harris's *Five Quarters of the Orange* (2000) and Bassma Alkhateeb's *Bitter Orange* (2015). The signification of food has been changing throughout the decades. Food has been interpreted as "a vehicle of protest or an agent of change, not merely a passive vessel to reflect cultural norms" (Mannur 116). This article extends the scope of food literature scholarship as it projects the correlations between food and identity formation in different cultural settings. The essay suggests revisionary readings of food and gastronomy literature beyond redemptive or restrictive polarities of gender, age, political orientation, nationality, cultural identification, and social class.

To understand the significance of this article, one must understand the importance of gastronomy as "the G-word seems to best communicate the ways in which food is political-and-poetic, cultural-and-environmental, personal-and-theoretical" (Szanto 2). In this sense, the significance of the gastronomical elements exceeds the preconceived ideas about food and provides new personal, cultural and political spirit to it. It is highly important to define the addressed societies of the novels as pre-modern societies that are, according to Cote, characterized by poverty, spread of epidemics, wars, and lack of medical knowledge, etc. In such societies, the process of identity formation is not a choice, rather a predestined cultural imprint. One is born in a certain cultural setting, then "simply assumed and fitted into the culturally prescribed roles that his parents and grandparents had themselves adopted" (Cote1). In this sense, people who refuse to fill such roles face familial and societal refusal as they break the norm or tradition. The heroines

of the addressed novels May, Tita, Framboise and Gertrudis are rebels against the predestined familial and societal structures. Thus, their identities do not follow the pattern of custom copying, so the process of identity formation in their cases "can be rather chaotic" (Cote 2). They represent the heralds of deconstructing familial/societal structures and imprint their surroundings with a similarly chaotic stamp.

Like Water for Chocolate is set during the Mexican revolution of 1910 and depicts the story of Tita, a young woman in love with Pedro, who finds herself confined by the family's tradition that prohibits the marriage of the youngest daughter as she is required to serve her mother until she dies. Her major role as a caretaker is cooking for the family after the death of her Nancha, the original cook of the farm and her nanny. The events take place mostly inside the family's kitchen where Tita can find her true relief and affirmation of her own power through cooking.

In *Bitter Orange*, May is a dyslexic girl who falls in love as a child with Doctor Taim, her aunt's fiancé. She narrates her story as she prepares the feast for Taim after waiting a lifetime to see him and confess her love. She finds her own voice when she leaves her mother's house and learns how to cook in her grandmother's kitchen. Both Tita and May suffer from troubled mother-daughter relationships. They are depicted as master chefs who try to win the hearts of their lovers through their well-crafted recipes and artistic dishes.

In *Five Quarters of the Orange*, Harris presents a phenomenal narrative on the French kitchen through a structure that projects two concurrent timelines. The first-time frame presents the past adventure of a little girl called Framboise Dartigen who is the daughter of the best cook in the village, Mirabelle Dartigen. The other time frame registers Framboise's current struggle to reclaim

her mother's kitchen without revealing her identity, or the culinary secrets of the Album that she inherited from her mother. Ultimately, the narratives archive, in a parallel manner in each of the addressed novels, two wars within varied spheres. The wars are between France and Germany during the German Occupation on one hand, and the war between Framboise and her mother inside the kitchen on the other; the civil war in Lebanon and the war between May and Aisha; and the Mexican revolution and the war between Mama Elena and Tita.

Theoretical Background:

In his study to understand the anthropological connection between humans and food, Claude Levi Strauss connects between language and food in *The Culinary Triangle*. Strauss proposes that "if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food" (36). In this sense, the process of cooking gains a highly cultural significance as it transfers what is raw to a sophisticated cultural-specific production: "In any cuisine, nothing is simply cooked, but must be cooked in one fashion or another" (Strauss 37). The structuralist approach of Strauss addresses the binaries of "raw/cooked" and "nature/culture" on the basis of a cultural system that employs structural relations among its components. However, this hierarchy of power and the fixed binaries that revolve around space and food are readdressed by Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*, Joanne Harris's *Five Quarters of the Orange* and Bassma Alkhateeb's *Bitter Orange.*

In an attempt to understand identity formation, one cannot "overlook the power and significance that memories have on the construction of identity" (Baker 11). In this regard, the addressed novels introduce nostalgic culinary narration. In *Five Quarters of the Orange*,

Framboise returns to her mother's house to reclaim the culinary geography of her mother and keep her heritage safe. So, the narrative goes between two timelines of the happy and exciting past and the troubled present in an attempt to resolve the chaos. In *Bitter Orange,* May's narration of her life happens as she prepares the feast for the love of her life, Taim, in Beirut. The process of cooking the final feast is interrupted by the nostalgia of her past that has led her to the final meeting with Taim. Tita experiences the pleasure of aromas that "have the power to evoke the past" (3) in the kitchen. As such, culinary narratology provides a new aspect that affects identity formation of women in what Cote described as "pre-modern societies" (2). Food nostalgia has been identified as "the recollection of purposive evocation of another time and place through food" (Swislocki 219). The gastronomical nostalgia "is undeniable that our understandings of self are interrelated to these senses and that food experiences have great association with them" (Baker 22). So, memories about food and cooking are essential in understanding the chaotic identities of the heroines who break free from the prescribed roles of the pre-modern societies of Lebanon, France, and Mexico.

While other researchers discussed the impact of culinary nostalgia on identity formation, the issue of violent gastronomy and its impact on the identity formation of women is still unexplored. Thus, this article addresses deciphering the connection between violent gastronomy and identity formation in a cross-cultural manner to understand the connection of societies where matriarchs rule.

Discussion:

1. **Castrating Emotions:**

Like Water for Chocolate is set during the Mexican revolution of 1910. The revolution, also referred to as the civil war, lasted for almost ten years and ended the 30- year dictatorship and the establishment of constitutional republic. Esquivel mirrors the revolution of the public sphere by presenting a culinary revolution in the private sphere which aims at dethroning Mama Elena. In this "familial" war, Tita employs chaos combined with her culinary skills to achieve liberty. The symbolic function of food in *Like Water for Chocolate* is interconnected with the maternal relationship between Tita and Mama Elena who is a merciless matriarch. The characteristics of the oppressor -matriarch caused the clash between Elena and her daughters, especially Tita who is the first victim of her mother's dictatorship. Tita, according to traditions, is doomed to a bondage-like commitment for her entire life since she has to take care of her mother until her death. Such absurd tradition of selfish control is fostered by Mama Elena who claims the "enslavement" of her daughter as her legitimate right as a matriarch. Mama Elena perceives in Tita's emotions and passion a great threat to her empire and initiates a psychological warfare to "subdue her youngest daughter" (Esquivel 5). To guarantee full obedience, Mama Elena refuses Pedro's marriage proposal for Tita and offers Tita's sister as the alternative bride-to-be. Mama Elena feels her youngest daughter's rebellious reaction against her orders when she announces that Rausora is going to be Pedro's bride, so she forces Tita to be responsible for the preparations of the wedding feast as a punishment.

For Mama Elena, food and cooking are associated with dominance as she "uses food as a path to dominance, not as a form of nurturing or emotional connection" (Divya 6). To dominate, the matriarch resorts to violent gastronomy as a culinary mechanism of control over Tia's favorite activity. So, the menu for the wedding feast contains 20 dishes including castrated chickens along

with the huge cake for Pedro's wedding. Tita and Nancha are ordered to castrate 200 roosters and fatten them for the wedding feast. The following extract is essential to understand the violent gastronomical and psychological techniques of Mama Elena:

> Tita raised her eyes and looked at her. She felt like screaming, Yes, she was having problems, when they had chosen something to be neutered, they'd made a mistake, they should have chosen her. At least then there would be some justification for not allowing her to marry and giving Rosaura her place beside the man she loved. Mama Elena read the look on her face and flew into a rage, giving Tita a tremendous slap that left her rolling in the dirt by the rooster, which had died from the bungled operation. (Esquivel 9)

Tita is even subjected to verbal, physical and psychological violence by her mother in an attempt to subdue and harness her passionate existence. As a matriarch, Elena is threatened by Tita's liberal ideology that jeopardizes hierarchy, familial norms, and matriarchal power. The existing scholarship on *Like Water for Chocolate* presents Tita as the helpless victim. For instance, Puccinelli depicts "the kitchen itself as a region of exile" (7) for Tita and Nancha who are marginalized and kept in their respective kitchens as victims of the matriarch. However, one can read the scene of food poisoning in Rosaura and Pedro's wedding as projection of Tita's agency, which is beyond the victim's role. Such communal food poisoning could be defined as the first chaotic move against the authority of the matriarch.

It becomes obvious that Elena deploys her own symbolically violent food mechanisms to impose her own identity that projects gender superiority and power, reenacts the role of the male

suppressor who controls the public space, and exerts her power over everyone in the farm. However, Tita becomes able to challenge her mother's tyranny by mastering her violent food mechanisms of castration. Unlike May's reaction to violent food, Tita's coping mechanism is manifested through reenacting violence in what seems to be a battle to reassert domination over the space of the kitchen: "She realized that you can't be weak when it comes to killing….It occurred to her that she could use her mother's strength right now"(Esquivel 18). Tita's preparation of the wedding feast and the communal food poison stands as a representation of Tita's broken heart, whether intentional, according to Elena, or unintentional as a natural outcome of compulsory cooking during a psychological breakdown (a broken heart). The feast is a reaction of "food violence" against the inconsiderate community that celebrated the wedding of Pedro and Tita's sister. In this case, food poisoning stands as a violent reaction to Elena's violent gastronomy.

2. Bloody Dishes:

The violent food mechanisms mentioned earlier in the article are connected to the chaotic imprint that is employed by the daughters to achieve their freedom. As mentioned earlier, Elena prohibits the union of the lovers Pedro and Tita and tries to separate them completely by initiating communication barriers. To overcome the obstacle of "NO communication" with Pedro, Tita uses her cooking skills to navigate through a sensory and non-lingual communication with her lover. When she becomes the cook of the ranch, Pedro gives her a bouquet of roses to congratulate her on her well-earned position. However, Mama Elena orders Tita to throw the roses away and asks Pedro to stop communicating with Tita and admiring her cooking. She does so to relieve his wife from jealousy that is heightened by Rosaura's inability to cook:

> Tita clasped the roses to her chest so tightly that when she got to the kitchen, the roses, which had been mostly pink, had turned quite red from the blood that was flowing from Tita's hands and breasts. She had to think fast what to do with them. They were beautiful. She couldn't just throw them in the trash; in the first place, she'd never been given flowers before, and second, they were from Pedro. All at once she seemed to hear Nancha's voice dictating a recipe, a prehispanic recipe involving rose petals. Tita had nearly forgotten it. (Esquivel 18)

Tita decides to use the dear flowers to create a unique dish for the flaming feeling she has when Perdo presents her the flowers. “Quail in Rose Petal Sauce,” in this sense, stands as a culinary and textual metaphor that is liberated from fixation. The dish represents Esquivel’s attempt to break fixed structures and present new chaotic varieties. So, Tita remodels the recipe and uses quail since it is available, in addition to the bloody flowers that have been used for the sauce. Tita “decided to revise the recipe slightly, just so she could use the flowers” (Esquivel 18). Such revision in the traditional recipe represents Tita’s will to revise and readdress the old traditions starting from the kitchen, which is also liberated from the imprint of restriction. When Pedro tastes the food, “he couldn’t help closing his eyes in voluptuous delight and exclaiming: ‘It is a dish for the gods!’” (Esquivel 20). In this context, the importance of food in enhancing communication and shaping identities has been addressed before by many scholars. For instance, Komori examines the semiotics of food in the construction of identity and addresses the daughter’s identities in light of “Quail in Rose Petal Sauce.” Komori demonstrates that

> It is Tita who penetrates Pedro’s body in an inversion of the usual gender roles in sex. In assuming the male role of penetration, Tita foreshadows Gertrudis’ role as an army general, a “typically” aggressive, masculine

> role. However, as this comes without a permanent rejection of her mother's authority as Gertrudis' role does, Tita cannot yet construct a solid identity. Nevertheless, it is a beginning. (64)

So, Tita presents a vivid image of Mama Elena who seems to be a brutal killer: "Unquestionably, when it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, detaching, dispossessing, destroying, or dominating, Mama Elena was a pro" (Esquivel 43). Mama Elena's violence replaces any supposed motherly tenderness. Thus, there is gastronomical imprint on identity formation as Tita reenacts her mother's violence in the preparation process: "you have to be strong or it just causes more sorrow" (18). Tita creates a dish to honor her love to Pedro by using roses as cooking ingredients instead of throwing them as her mother has ordered. The reactions of the sisters after eating the Quail is a reflection of Tita's own psychological chaos as it is poured into the dishes that she designs. In this sense, Tita's violent gastronomy is extended to achieve psychological chaos that is projected differently for each character. However, the process of cooking, presenting and eating "Quail in Rose Petal Sauce" does not help Tita to claim autonomy and liberation. Unlike Tita, Gertrudis's reaction after eating the Quail liberates her from sexual and psychological fears as she breaks away from the fixation of her mother's tyranny. Gertrudis "breaks away violently from the old, repressive regime to pursue her autonomy and develop a new identity" (Komori 63). And while Gertrudis achieves total autonomy and sexual liberty as she breaks the maternal prison, Rosaura never achieves an autonomous identity and remains a replica of her mother as she expresses her wish of repeating the vicious circle of the unjust matriarchal tradition.

3. Revenge is a Dish Better Served "bitter":

As previously explained, Elena employs violence to control her daughter's life. So, Tita employs chaotic culinary and spatial mechanisms to fight back and win her freedom. To reclaim her right as the woman of the kitchen, Tita returns to the farm when Mama Elena is attacked and injured. Unlike Framboise's memory renewal comeback to Les Laveuses and May's invasions of the communal kitchens, Tita's invasion is conceived by Mama Elena as coldblooded revenge served through bitter food as Elena apprehends reversal of violent gastronomy. To save her life, Elena claims that Tita is poisoning her food. Eventually, Elena denies Tita her position as the cook and replaces her with several cooks who could not tolerate the dictator for long. As such, the food security of the matriarch is threatened by Tita's culinary mechanisms which remind her of Rosaura's wedding food poison. For Elena, Tita's food is never an aphrodisiac, as the case for Gertrudis, but a threat to her power, space, and life.

For Mama Elena, Tita is an anarchist who is ready to use violence in order to end matriarchal oppression. So, she accuses Tita of poisoning her food as she was afraid that Tita would use violence against her. Eventually, Tita feels like a fool for having returned to the ranch to care for her mother. It would have been better to stay at John's house without ever giving a thought to the fate that might befall Mama Elena" (Esquivel 60). Though Tita knows that she would only be relieved by the death of her mother; her reaction towards her weak mother is not as violent as Elena claims. Instead, she projects culinary indifference as a response to the maternal accusations. Mama Elena's violent language of dictatorship does not include irrelevant indifference that Tita projects when dealing with her weak and paralyzed mother who has been violent with Tita. Elena, with the psyche of a cruel matriarch, expects a violent revenge as the counterargument to her own violence

against Tita. However, Tita shocks her mother by adding more indirect chaos as she utilizes culinary indifference instead of violence as a response to matriarchal violence.

4. Violence and Food Security:

Five Quarters of the Orange (2001) by the English author Joanne Harris presents a different representation of chaotic and culinary implications to gain freedom from the matriarch. The novel is narrated through Framboise's view as a child and as a widow according to the alternating timelines. The first timeline is set in a German-occupied French village during World War II, and the second is set in present-day France as the widow Simon goes through a different war in her mother's old farm.

Violent gastronomy has a different motivation in *Five Quarters of the Orange* as Mirabelle's violent gastronomic mechanisms have an economic implication in addition to behavior modification through violence. Just like Mama Elena, the widow Mirabelle is under the pressure of running the farm and raising the children alone during war. When the August rain spoils much of the fruit harvest, which jeopardizes the family's food security, Mirabelle makes her children collect the remaining blacked fruits that were filled with wasps to make jam and liqueur for winter. Mirabelle operates as a bad boss of agro-food industries as she gives gloves to her children to collect the fruits and face the painful stings of wasps while she only monitors the process. Mirabelle has a feeling of being a victim of life, war, widowhood and motherhood. She acts as if her children are responsible for her misery, which is not utterly wrong, so they should pay their dues. In a world ruled by matriarchy, culinarity gains a violent trait. The mother assigns dangerous chores for her children who were both scared of wasps and terrified of their mother's anger. Their

behavior is controlled by fear. When Reinette is not able to cope and starts nagging, she is dragged inside and "Reinette began to scream more loudly, each scream punctuated by a sound like the crack of a small air rifle" (Harris 87). The violent method of Mirabelle is not only a behavioral modification of her daughter, but also an economic impact since the family is faced with the danger of food insecurity for the winter. So, Reinette, with her beauty and tenderness, acts as a princess in a manner that defies the matriarch's orders which endanger the food security of the family and adds more pressure on the mother.

5. Food-Wagon Wars:

There is a circle of violence in *Five Quarters of the Orange* that starts with the violent and enforced eviction of Framboise away from her mother's kitchen (a fixed geographical location that produces national gastronomy). Such violence ends with Framboise's battle to regain the status of her Ceperie (which is located in her mother's renovated kitchen) after the invasion of the food wagon (a mobile kitchen that produces exotic gastronomy). Framboise returns to her mother's farm as she realizes that "the way out of chaos is to return to the place where one began" (Rossiter 80). She returns in an attempt to find peace and resolve all the chaos of her childhood. Framboise goes back to rebuild her familial space in silence since the community forced her family to flee as they called her mother "Nazi whore" (Harris 160). So, the effacement of her real identity is not a sign of shame, like in May's case, but a sign of fear. Her gastronomical existence in Les Laveuses is characterized by nostalgia and fear. The memories of her past in the farm which are guided by

her inheritance of the Album, where her mother has kept her recipes and insights, have the major impact on her food as they represent the basis of her culinary knowledge.

However, the state of constant fear of her community, particularly her nephew who wants to reclaim his right of the album and its recipes, plays a non- negligible role in her culinary practices and leads us to question the nature of her dishes. Her nephew and his wife, a modern celebrity Chef, aim at claiming the recipes of the Album as their own to build an empire of restaurants by using the old, traditional culinary techniques of Mirabelle as they claim that they want to "keep the Dartigen name alive" (Harris 65). In order to get the recipes, Laure resorts to emotional abuse, psychological pressure, threats, economic pressure, and even violence. Laure sends her brother incognito to Les Laveuses with a food wagon. The modern chef aims at threatening the rootedness of the traditional cuisine represented by Framboise's creperie by introducing the exotic mobility of modernism represented by the grease wagon as described by Framboise. The addressed novels present the kitchens of the matriarchs as fixed locations that represent fixed power structures.

In *Five Quarters of the Orange*, Harris presents the idea of kitchen mobility which is manifested through the food wagon. Boise moves to her mother's farm and creates a Creperie which is a replica of her mother's kitchen that utilizes the same recipes in the same geographical location. The culinary mechanisms used by Boise to preserve the family secret and heritage can be seen as a method of reconciliation with the mother. Unlike the icons of rebellion against familial structures, Tita and May, Framboise aims at reconstructing the historical structures of the Dartigen family in the same abandoned geographical location, Les Laveusesat the bank of the Loire. Framboise's familial solidity is maintained through buying the farm from her brother Cassis to

"keep the place in the family" (Harris 2). There is a different cross spatial war between Boise and Laure (her nephew's wife).

It is important to highlight that the war between Framboise and her mother is a spatial one in which food is used by Framboise the child to control the mother and gain freedom. Then it becomes a method to preserve the memory of Mirabelle when Boise becomes old. In this case, food is defined in terms of mutability as it provides different meanings in different timeframes for the same people. The relationship between Boise and her mother evolves throughout the narrative and moves from the stage of hostility through food to the stage of sustaining her memory through preservation of culinary secrets.

The violent imprint of Mirabell's food is belated which adds to the impact since she has to carry this burden for a long time before making peace with her past. Boise faces physical violence in an attempt to protect her familial legacy and traditions, namely the recipes of her mother in the album. Boise's reaction can be read as a familial and cultural pride. She attempts to protect the familial identity of her food which will be reflected in protecting its cultural identity since her mother's food and recipes are part of French cooking culture. Framboise emphasizes that "the day Crêpe Framboise has to compete with a grease merchant in a trailer is the day I pack up my pots and pans for good" (Harris 71). Boise plays a role in the circle of violence which does not really define her as helpless victim, but as a warrior who forms and protects familial and culinary heritage from foreign invaders.

6. **Olfactory Maternal Assassination:**

There is role reversal of violent gastronomy in *Five Quarters of the Orange*, as the daughter is responsible for violent food mechanisms that target her mother who falls as a victim of the evil and exotic olfactory orange attacks initiated by her daughter. Framboise applies a devilish scheme to induce severe headaches for her mother (who hates the smell of oranges) through using peels of oranges that diffuse more aromas: "I closed the kitchen door for maximum effect; and the scent of orange invaded the room once again" (Harris 54). The peels are placed in the kitchen and the bed of her mother to ensure that the headache would last longer. Like Tita and May, Framboise uses food for her spatial invasion. Since she wants to liberate herself, invading and conquering the space of the mother is the key to such liberty. Tita invades her mother's kitchen and May invades the communal kitchens. However, Framboise's spatial invasion targets the mother's farm, house, kitchen and profession as she attempts to recreate a life that mirrors her mother's life in Les Laveses. To invade the kitchens, the protagonists use food and gastronomy. The relationship between Framboise and Mirabelle in *Five Quarters of the Orange* is a culinary/maternal relationship in progress. Conceived through cooking and narration practices, the maternal relationship evolves and becomes open to reconciliation. Mirabelle is described as a distorted figure who can only dramatize her love to her children through heart-warming dishes, but never through verbal articulation. Framboise has a long and indirect war against the authority of her widowed mother. As a child, Boise discovers her mother's weakness and manipulates her way to freedom by metaphorically "killing" her mother through oranges as she navigates her olfactory war towards freedom. However, Framboise, the child, recognizes her mother who is not able to provide emotional support as her enemy. She cannot perceive the real enemy represented by Tomas the German soldier who employs Boise and her siblings as spies. They give him information about

people in Les Laveuse. In return he gives them chocolate, magazines and oranges, but most importantly his time and attention. The war in the first part of the novel is between Boise the child and her devilish mother in the kitchen of the mother. However, in the second part of the novel, Boise fights a battle to keep the heritage; Framboise inherits the book after her mother's death and starts a journey towards deciphering the cookbook that would lead to self-discovery of her mother. Critic Ursache rereads the relation between women and food in *Like Water for Chocolate* and claims that there is reconciliation between women and cooking. This reconciliation would present the woman in the kitchen as a goddess. The space of the kitchen becomes an altar because cooking is the new religion. However, the reconciliation *in Five Quarters of the Orange* is extended to reach the damaged mother-daughter relationship as well.

7. Hunting Birds and Cutting Wings:

Bitter Orange (2015) by the Lebanese author Bassma al-Khateeb reflects the period of the civil war in Lebanon as there is a smaller culinary war between May and Aisha in the bigger frame of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) known as the civil conflict as well. The national and domestic wars in Lebanon are reflected in al-Khateeb's novel as she presents the holistic image of war in the public sphere in addition to the main fighting parties, May and her mother Aisha in the private spheres. The domestic war stems from Aisha's refusal and lack of motherly affection towards her daughter. Al- Khateeb presents the difficult nature of war and its ramifications; especially on the culinary front. In light of war, survival stands as the main element connected to culinaruty as "the

priorities were about surviving" (Kitous 1). So, survival is the key motivation for May's father as he pursues his violent hunting career to provide for his family during the difficult circumstances of the civil war. May's father and her grandmother use violent methods to ensure food security for their families during war. In this sense, culinary mechanisms, such as violent gastronomy, are a reflection of reality and a response to chaotic characteristics of war.

May's diplomatic gastronomic mechanisms can be viewed as a reaction to her father's violent food. She has always been addressed as (bnt alsahbe: the daughter of lottery man) because she looks like him. Her father, a hunter and lottery man, kills birds as a trophy for lottery winners: "My father arrived, preceded by the smell of blood as he hunted the birds with their shaky feathers" (al- Khateeb 19). The café (her father's market) is a haunted place for May who tries to discover the public sphere as she hoped it would be more interesting than the matriarchal private sphere where she is faced with hate, marginalization and sarcasm. The private sphere, ruled by all the matriarchs, who are depicted as eternal creatures compared to the fragile men who die early. While women rule the culinary world of the private sphere with an iron fist and spread fear, there is also "a fear of getting in the café since it is men's world and that they would kick out the intruders" (Al- Khateeb 103). However, the café visitors have a different opinion as they highly appreciate eating the birds. So, they are all engaged in this lottery activity to win a meal of tiny birds. The violent process of killing the birds twice (once by hunting shotguns, then by slaughtering) is not acceptable for May as she "never appreciated it" (al- Khateeb 19).

The whole process of hunting, gambling, winning and eating the birds is described as male-dominated and gendered. However, such activities are not described with envy, rather with disgust as al-Khateeb indirectly addresses the traits of toxic masculinity in the Lebanese culture to

highlight the gap between public and private spheres. May finds herself stuck between the two violent spheres. There is a clash between the spheres which results in inducing more chaos and shapes her identity with fear, shame, and indifference. She finds herself an outcast in the public sphere and an outcast in the matriarchal private sphere. However, she possesses a trait that would enable her to curve her way into existence just like the bitter oranges do by offering their flowers to make orange blossom water, May offers her culinary skills as a way to compensate for her ugliness. By mastering cooking, she invades the kitchens of the matriarchs so that they would need her and acknowledge her existence.

Another factor that has impacted May's food identity is her grandmother's profession as the manufacturer of agro-food industries, mainly orange blossom water. The process of extracting orange blossom is described as extracting the soul of a flower by taking its beauty and perfume away. May's food trauma pushes her to describe her grandmother's work as "violent." However, the outcome of such practice is so divine for food and the human spirit as it is sprayed in funerals to awaken people who faint out of sadness. Such explanations make extracting orange blossom water a process of heroic sacrifice rather than what looked like arbitrary killing (for May the child) as the case of her father's practice.

This violent impact on May's identity coined by her society for being the lottery man's daughter and grandchild of the orange blossom water maker leaves deep negative impacts that are translated as insecurities when May becomes an adult. Her manners are met with the highly sophisticated manners of the "bourgeoisie" society in Beirut where Bulgur is replaced with pizza. So, her simple accent is considered a retarded joke and her baked fingers do not reflect hard work, but poverty. May, the dyslexic, ugly, poor and unwanted child, is freed from gendered boundaries

and expectations. So, she moves freely and discovers the components of both spheres before realizing that the public sphere is a dystopian destination as she is mucked and ridiculed for her ignorant character. Her mother's violence pushes May to seek other motherly figures who, despite their differences, fail to mother her properly. Her grandmother is there for her, but her poverty stigmatizes May and Fatima who want to live according to societal norms. Her culinary mechanisms, especially speed, are used as a compensation for being poor, ugly, dyslexic and unwanted. Her societal invasion stands as a coping mechanism for all her insecurities.

8. Gastro Diplomacy:

May's interest in her community increases after losing her family (when Aisha kicked her out) as a result of their last battle for the sanitary towels. Aisha refuses to provide May with sanitary towels and leaves May to suffer during her menstrual cycle without any regard to her needs, emotions, and pride. This fight pushes May to live with her grandmother and leave her mother's house. To reclaim her status in the community, May learns cooking from communal kitchens. Aisha is a horrible cook according to her own mother "when she cooks, she burns the pans" (al – Khateeb 45). May masters the skill of cooking by observing all the women around her as she "watched and learned from women" (al- Khateeb 41). So, her skill as a cook is developed over time through hard work and practice to defy the tyranny of all matriarchs. May uses food as a method for spatial invasion to compensate for being the abandoned child. Every matriarch has needed May at some point, especially before Eids to prepare the beauty product of (Halaweh) that is made by cooking "sugar, water, some drops of lemon juice and spit" (al- Khateeb 56). May did not like going to their houses to prepare (Halaweh), but she loved the validation and sense of importance. Even that she is not considered beautiful by these women, their beauty rituals are

never complete without her skills as a cook. The societal invasion provides May with a sense of self-worth and validation, so she activates gastrodiplomacy as a reaction to maternal abuse. May's cooking signifies refusal as she grapples with the idea of violent food and chooses different culinary mechanisms. She enters the kitchen wearing a head scarf as if she is entering a holy place according to the Islamic culture. May says that the headscarf "provides comfort, serenity and the freedom of moving between foods and dishes" (al -Khateeb 40). Though May mentions that the scarf is used for hygienic purposes, its significance goes beyond mere cleanness since she describes cooking as an act of pure love in a form that resembles a pure religious belief. To compensate for her lack of proper verbal ability, May relies on the "practices of sharing, preparing, and eating food" to "create and convey human interaction" (Cognard-Black 3). Cooking for May becomes her essential technique and medium of self-expression and creation to compensate for her stuttering and sense of inferiority. Though many people cannot see the point of her love for cooking, May hates people who consider cooking an absurd activity and claims that they "are not able to see that it is art" (al- Khateeb 251).

Conclusion:

Violent Gastronomy demonstrates the impact of violent food mechanisms on women's identities. It presents a cross- cultural contribution to the existing scholarship on the architecture and psychology of culinarity. However, cultural diversity, gender or age differences, and other ideology-constructed stratifications are disclaimed through the excavation of intrinsic chaos.

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