Illegible Multiculturalisms: Making, Digesting, and Translating Empanadas and Doenjang-jjigae within Digital Monolingualism

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Abstract: In this essay, we draw parallels between the processes of cooking and writing, emphasizing our personal investment as authors and cooks. Reflecting on our experiences cooking empanadas and doenjang-jjigae, we delve into the challenges of translating multicultural food experiences into publishable forms. We develop the concept of "illegible multiculturalisms," and center the power of remaining unidentifiable within digital monolingualism, reimagining multiculturalism pluralistically. We advocate for alternative narrative forms and more inclusive futures for publishing while recognizing the embodied nature of food practices and critiquing reliance on imperialized infrastructures in scholarly work.

Keywords: Food, Migration, Legibility, Multiculturalism, Digital Monoculturalism

The processes of cooking and writing are often parallel. The author/cook begins with a hunch or craving. They will follow a recipe or a stylistic format; pick appropriate tools for the task; prep ingredients and data; pour effort and time into the work process; sample, taste, read, and reread; share the dish or draft with an audience (or scrutinize it themselves!); find ways to improve the dish or draft; make iterative adjustments until the product satiates the reviewers.

Cooking and writing are also similar in that the author/cook has a personal investment in their work and its ultimate audience reception. This is a process of translation from an initial drive to a final product, which involves iterative evolution. We might think of this initial hunch or craving in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1972) notion of *desire*—an investment to create and share. These desires are then coded by various structures that shape and limit the potential of those desires (i.e., language or kitchen tools). Thus, the processes of writing and cooking can lead to frustrations as

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personal desires are coded by particular structures of belonging and unbelonging. What we present here are our reflections on organic frustrations arising when uniting these two worlds to produce a writing/cooking project.

In this article, we interrogate what we call *illegible multiculturalisms*, focusing specifically on the mediated, technic processes of translating migrant foodways into written and publishable products.[1] We use the concept of legibility to explore power relations in identity formation and draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1972) theory of "coding flows" to discuss how our multicultural identities are always being mistranslated and re-bordered by linguistic structures and deemed unfit for canonical publishing expectations. Illegible multiculturalisms are a positional, pluralistic, experiential take on the dissonance between multiculturalism (singular) as a utopic ideal that irons out the differences that it acknowledges and the lived experience of nonwhiteness, global mobility, and cultural hybridities that is only partially legible to that utopia. Multiculturalism (singular) is inherently category-producing: it *makes* race, ethnicity, national identity, and other categories of "culture" visible to whiteness in ways that reify them as deviance from the norm. Since lived experiences are difficult for demographic data to make legible, however, we question what it means (and what it could promisingly mean) to be illegible, particularly through our twinned culinary and scholarly struggles throughout this project. We ultimately ask if there is comfort to be found in remaining illegible, in the inability to fully capture and name our experiences and, through them, our senses of self. We also ask the reader to imagine alternative forms of narrative sharing and better futures for publishing.

We began our work by leaning into this multicultural category production. *Empanadas* and *doenjang-jjigae* are two dishes of major cultural significance within our (the authors') multicultural experiences as second-generation Chilean/ and Korean/Americans, respectively. We prepared these dishes to engage, first individually and later collaboratively, with our cultural heritages and their entangled traditions, memories, and emotions. Following a small but growing body of scholarship on ethnographic food-work (Antoniou 2004; Brady 2011; Moldes 2017), we both took notes in the form of audio recordings as we gathered recipes, prepared ingredients, cooked, and consumed empanadas and doenjang-jjigae. We chose recording and production tools that were at once accessible and familiar to us and, in the moment, felt suited to the task.

As we started turning these recordings into written products with an end goal of publication in an American academic journal, we encountered two unexpected difficulties in translating and structuring our experiences. First, the technological

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1. We use the terms "translation" and "mistranslation" in this article in two senses. First, we often describe the linguistic shortcomings associated with the technological process of changing between Spanish/Korean and English. Second, we discuss the set of processes associated with cooking and writing that attempt to conform our multifaceted identities to existing coded binaries. These two understandings of (mis)translation often overlap, and both involve the active practice of changing the subject at hand.

infrastructure that mediated our notes often rendered unintelligible results. The recording and transcription software could not capture the messy sounds of the kitchen and did not understand our switching between English and Spanish or Korean. Second, as we wrote, we found it challenging to translate our experiences into stories that were legible to ourselves and fit within the model of a journal article. The smells, tastes, and feelings of cooking and the memories they engendered felt incomplete in written form and constricted by a traditional paper model. Both the cultural and the technical translation apparatuses we were using—first from memory and sense to language and then from voice recordings to textual inscriptions—could not encapsulate the essence of our Americanness/Chileanness/Koreanness. Even in Microsoft Word, our last names drew the wavy, scarlet ire of spell-check. Our research tools and sharing formats stumbled over our identities in this encounter with digital monolingualism, as though our languages and identities were monolithic absolutes.

Using a slightly unconventional format and style, we attempt to turn our foodways into writing while highlighting the nuances of illegible multiculturalisms. We begin by centering existing conversations on academic and culinary production and the possibilities of ethnographic methods for broaching these topics. Then, we explore scenes from our respective cooking processes and recordings, analyzing the logistic and symbolic difficulties that come with combining the digital and food worlds and in the memories and feelings that cooking elicits. We next discuss our reflections on the cooking process and when alienation emerges when translating data into a final product. We ultimately conclude by discussing the concept of illegible multiculturalisms and its ramifications at the intersection of food and digital studies.

Parallel Translations

For this project, we used cooking as inspiration to elicit connections with our cultural heritage, capitalizing on the intimate link between culinary practices and the proximate senses (taste, smell, and touch) and its clear, material relevance to accessing memories, emotions, and feelings. We consider cooking a form of ethnographic inquiry, which Jennifer Brady (2011, 322), drawing on Lisa Heldke (1988), suggests "recognizes bodies and food as sites of knowledge and engages researchers as researcher-participants in reflexive, collaborative study that explores the ways in which the embodied self is performed relationally through foodmaking." Engagements with everyday scents, flavors, and textures provide fundamental links to memory, and culinary and gastronomic activities provide the supersensory stimulation necessary for these connections. As Marcos Moldes (2017, 95) notes, "The 'realness' of cooking, through its sensuous nature, provides a tangible sense of place and identity." Moreover, the "symbiotic relationship"

between memory and the senses ties quotidian perceptions to significant facets of self-hood (Choo 2004). Mixing ingredients with your hands or squeezing a lemon can produce emotions like pleasure or embarrassment or influence attachments to national belonging or sexuality, for instance (Antoniou 2004; Mann et al. 2011). In this article, we follow the authors cited here who offer methodological innovations responding to the embodied turn within the social sciences and humanities by grounding the eating body as a viable interpretive tool (Wacquant 2005).

The standing question is how these culinary ethnography methods made us more sensitive to the challenges of coloniality through digital monolingualism and academic publishing work. The crossover was infrastructural. Both our cooking and our writing/recording processes were fundamentally technic—that is, contingent upon the cyborg communion of human and machine. In this, we recall Deleuze and Guattari's (1972) sense of connection and disconnection between machines (and the recording of such processes) upon our felt senses of identity. Both cooking and writing lay bare technic subjectivation: they are processes of subjectivation and subjection—of "self-ing" and of being "selved" by exterior forces—that rely upon technological infrastructures digital and otherwise, from laptops and microphones to pots and pans. The objects of our connections and disconnections infrastructurally shape the material conditions of identities and knowledges.

Infrastructural processes are central to histories of race, empire, and global mobilities. The contested, racialized, and marginalized forms of cooking and eating share with digital monolingualism not only an infrastructural technics for daily life and being/becoming but also a role in the daily workings of empire. We understand imperialism as the assertion of particular hierarchies and power relations on both global and inter-personal scales (Loomba 2015, 27–28). This is perceptible through both the anti-global rejection of othered sensual experiences like the smell of kimchi (Ku 2018) or through the rejection of non-standardized Englishes, construed as patterns of error instead of valid articulations of thought (Bartholomae 1986; Young 2010).

Food scholarship has both a fascination with ontological and subjective intertwine-ments. However, the relationship between cultural scholarship on food and global mobilities is uneven. Anne Kershen ([2002] 2016, 5) positioned food as gravitationally central to migrant experiences, both as reason for flight and as means of economic mobility—foodways act both causally and symptomatically in histories of global mobil-ity. In another study, Pat Caplan (1997, 1) offered a deep literature review of food work, reaching back to Claude Levi-Strauss and others. They teased out three central themes in food scholarship: dynamism in food practices, food's entwinement with identity and subjectivation, and ties between food and health. These perspectives largely portray migrants entering and integrating with British societies.

In other contexts, scholars discussed Atlantic Slave Trade foodways (Carney and Rosomoff 2009), the ambivalence of surveilled eating for people of color (Ku 2018),

and agricultural politics on the Korean peninsula under Japanese colonialism that included the erasure of nearly all of the 1,400 indigenous strains of rice that once grew there (Yoo 2022). In these subaltern, minoritized, and postcolonial contexts, peoples and states have concretized connections between food and national/ethnic/racial identity (Oum 2005; DeSoucey 2010). However, many such accounts—particularly those written and published in Euro-American journals and presses—center histories of food and migration through the migrant/homeland binary. The term "migrant" has historically been used to designate social undesirables as part of a broader matrix that Shalini Randeria and Evangelos Karagiannis (2020) generatively argue produces un-citizenship and rightlessness as much as citizenship. In scholarly oversights like this one, we have reinscribed this violence upon global mobility.

Work on digital publishing on the aggregate has reproduced similar forms of epistemic violence, broadly reflecting long-standing problems in Euro-American academia. In the 2012 volume *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, Tara McPherson published the chapter "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White?" which poignantly analyzes the parallel histories of racialization and computing to inquire after the lack of discourse around race at a digital humanities conference that they attended. The gulf was, McPherson concluded, a product of modularity's conceptual influence as an epistemic framework. Centrally, modularity operates on a framework of siloing and operational isolation: race and digital humanities were not touching because of modular assumptions about what these two fields covered (McPherson 2012). McPherson's epistemic history of modularity helps to explain why, despite some excellent work discussing race, empire, coloniality, and monolingualism, these subjects are not in active conversation with each other.

In a similar vein, Isabel Galina Russell (2014, 309) considered foundational questions in digital humanities scholarship and community, particularly in grappling with "digital humanities for and by whom?" Russell effectively points to vibrant digital humanities scenes outside of Anglo-academia, but many of them center in Europe. As Christopher Patterson (2020, 3) explains, it is not by pure coincidence that digital humanities' heatmap aligns so well with that of imperial centers versus peripheries. He writes that digital humanities embodies, through its emphasis on openness and accessibility, an open world empire: "Though only three of the 188 digital humanities centers in the world reside in Asia, Asia has long functioned as the crucial transit point for the manufacture, engineering, development, and consumption of digital technology. The point here is not to refuse forms of transparency and open access but to ask to what extent imperial violence today hides not in darkness but in plain sight" (3). This plain sight is clear in the work of Lorella Viola and Paul Spence (2023, 1–2), for example, who argue compellingly that the dominance of English-language platforms and Anglocentric digital practices scaffolds the devaluation of other ways of communicating. Echoing previous work like Dal Yong Jin's (2013) concept of platform imperialism,

Viola and Spence map out ways that platformization subjects digital discourses, scholarly and otherwise, to coloniality. Herein lies the violence of digital monolingualism, wherein most roads lead to English-language, Euro-American journals often edited by English-speaking, Euro-American academics. This is a publishing infrastructure whose roots dig deeply into the same imperial and colonial forces.

Culinary and scholarly practices thus share a similar problem: both are fundamentally reliant upon technologies and media, digital and otherwise, that form always/already colonized material infrastructures. We recognize these technological objects as part of a broader web of Patterson's (2020, 2) *open world empire*, an imperial form perpetuated through a hegemony of gloss-overs. Our subsequent findings and reflections presented here are the organic outcome of our positionally informed encounters with these open world imperial infrastructures at moments of breakage or failure—that is, when we, as mixed-race scholars of color, were forced to slow down and recognize the messiness of the infrastructures we were trying to leverage to commune with our non-white halves.

In our exploration, we analyzed personal memories, emotions, and feelings elicited by cooking and eating empanadas and doenjang-jjigae. Nicholas made empanadas (*empanadas de pino*, specifically), a combination of seasoned beef, raisins, boiled egg, and olives encased and baked in a flaky dough. Matthew made doenjang-jjigae, a soybean paste-based stew of green onion, tofu, potatoes, and mushrooms seasoned with garlic and *gochujang* (red pepper paste). We both independently took notes (in the form of audio recordings and written memos) on the experiences that emerged as we gathered recipes, prepared ingredients, cooked dishes, and consumed empanadas and doenjang-jjigae. We then spent time individually navigating through our transcriptions and memos by writing reflections on our mnemonic processes and experiences before jointly synthesizing our notes into a written product.

At the time of our culinary autoethnographic work, we were not particularly critical about the recording tools we were using because our focus was more pointedly on culinary processes, culinary tools, and the ways those became technologies of the self. It was our point-blank encounter with forms of imperialism and coloniality that made us pause and rethink what our publishable findings might look like. Thus, in our reflections and theorizing, we grapple with the assorted feelings and remembrances brought about by the sights and sounds of our kitchens and the textures, scents, and flavors of our foods. Washing, chopping, mixing, assembling, boiling, baking, sampling, and sharing food prompted moments rich with curiosity, gratification, pleasure, frustration, acceptance, alienation, recognition, and novelty. We traveled through time and space through our food-induced memories, flowing through global and local attachments and fluctuating between the presence and absence of (be)longings. Perhaps unsurprisingly, turning these already nebulous, sensual flows into black text on white pages brought its own challenges throughout the writing, revising, and publishing processes. We were

struck by the ways that both cooking (particularly in the age of food photography) and scholarly publishing elevate end products over processes: we skip past the food blogger's life story to see the dish's photo and recipe; we might drag ourselves back to Zotero to satisfy a skeptical reviewer; we yearn for that CV line or citation metric as we strive to advance our careers. In response to this special issue's call to action, we felt that refocusing on process—not method, but *process*—offered the most interesting questions and conversations about how a piece of scholarly work simmers to perfection (or, at least, completion).

This article focuses on the difficulties of multilingual and multicultural scholarship by interrogating research and publishing's increasing reliance upon imperialized and imperializing infrastructures digital, linguistic, and epistemic. Our gravitational center, however, is our shared, unexpected encounters with imperialization that repeatedly subjected us to recognition of our own minoritizations. These are the findings that surprised us.

Both cooking and scholarly publishing are technic processes: they rely upon, are mediated by, and operationalize available communions between human and technology. If the technics of scholarly knowledge production are mediated by the affordances and limitations of the media, platforms, and technologies du jour, including linguistic standards, then the hegemonic structures involved in making, translating, and publishing scholarship contain layers of illegibility that demand uneven work for scholars to navigate. We entered this project cognizant of the challenge we would face in making culinary processes legible as written scholarship, but what further emerged was the additional challenge of navigating imperialized technic processes while doing so. We found that the line between human and technology blurred, and we were reminded that this blurring itself has been imperialized through difference's objectification via concepts like race (Chun 2011), geography (Mignolo 2011), and spatialization (Siegert 2015). Monolingual and monocultural norms have circulated and accrued inertia within a publishing world that has become increasingly dependent on processing infrastructures that privilege standardized English as the lingua franca. The reliance upon these norms reifies imperial systems through absolute ties between languages, cultures, and spaces, flattening the nuanced, situated nature of epistemic work long documented in the marginalized areas of the humanities and social sciences (i.e., Haraway 1988; hooks 1992; Chuh 2003; Chen 2010; Taylor 2021; Dial 2022). We must interrogate these systems; otherwise, we risk marginalizing knowledge production and circulation from the margins of Euro-American metropoles.

In what follows, we dive into our cooking processes and the act of translating and transcribing our experiences into text. Building on the scaffolding set by the above scholarship in food and digital studies, we explore our efforts to produce and capture the memories and feelings associated with our global identities.

Section I: Making a Mess

Spatter—Nicholas

When I think of the digital world, notions of isolating, cold, scopic-centric engagements with the non-human come to mind. This frequently stands in staunch contrast to the world of food—of experiences characterized as organic, polysensory, warm, substantiating. What happens, then, when these worlds meet? I wanted to digitally capture the *essence* of my experience making empanadas—the feelings, emotions, and memories.

I set up my laptop with a Zoom call open to record the audio and visual stimuli of the cooking experience while I narrated what I was feeling. But there were problems. My laptop was clunky and fragile, and the way I cooked was messy and disorganized. I oriented the laptop camera toward the sink as I began. Washing my hands caused the first problem. I could not hear my voice over the spray of the water. Then, I had to carefully clean the water droplets that landed on the laptop, worried that the laptop would get waterlogged and stop working. Next, it was over to the stove. I placed my computer precariously on the toaster on the microwave (see Figure 1). Like cooking, my writing process is messy. Many open files and online tabs populate the screen as I jump between ideas and jot down the rough draft. My kitchen counters offer a similar

Figure 1. Ready to make the beef and onion filling for the empanadas. Laptop is set up nearby in an attempt to record the experience.

playground space to accrue onion peels and stray granules of salt as I move around the room. But bringing my laptop into the kitchen highlights the incompatibility of some tech to transfer between words.

I caramelized onions and added beef to a cast-iron skillet. The grease spatter still reached my computer and interrupted my vocal description of what was going on. My hands were dirty, covered with flour from making the dough, and as I reached over to adjust the laptop, I was cautious that my fingers did not leave traces of food on the laptop keyboard. Unsuccessful, I had to take some time to wipe the keyboard off again. Those Instagram influencers make it look so easy (they are better equipped and experienced than me, though)!

And yet, from making to recording to writing about cooking empanadas, something feels lost in translation. As a recording from my cooking experience describes:

> *How could I ever convey this experience to you, my audience? The feelings of the cast iron burning my hand as I rotate it for even heat; the nostalgia around memories of my grandmother rolling out dough on her green kitchen table; the joy of my brothers' laughter as they dig into their third empanada. Any description feels incomplete and like a disservice to the history imbued in the empanada-making process.*

Now I season. Heavily. Cumin, paprika, pepper, cinnamon (just a pinch), salt (lots of it to pair with the sweet onions). And merkén, a smoked and dried ají. *I'm at a street-side feria in downtown Concepción with my father. He asks a vendor about the merkén he is selling. Stuffed bags weighing a kilo are neatly placed on a blue blanket resting on the sidewalk. The corners of the blanket are tied to a rope so the vendor can grab his products and run if the pacos (police) come, to accost him for selling without a permit. "A quatro luca la bolsa. Viene del sur. Potente. Fresco" (~$5 for the bag. It's from the South. Powerful. Friesh.) the vendor advertises. My father buys four or five bags. We plan to later smuggle them in our suitcases through customs, divide them into dozens of small Ziploc bags, and give them as gifts to friends in North Carolina, Michigan, and Washington (from coast to coast). We're fulfilling requests of friends hooked on the spice brought from Chile on trips past. As dealers, our clothes will smell of merkén for days to come. We won't complain, though, about the lingering reminders. Of home.* Seasoning always seems to be the most controversial part of any dish. My parents used to playfully bicker over salt—always too much or not enough. Seasoning is where cooking becomes an art—impossible to encapsulate in writing. Or if written down, written with instructions like "enough cumin" or "a hint of cinnamon" or "salt until ready."

As I cook, sometimes it feels as though memories emerge in spatters. As I start to assemble the filling, fragments from remembered pasts flood in. I begin to stir the meat in the pan. *I'm in Chicago. We don't have a rolling pin, so I improvise and use a bottle of*

wine. It's a Chilean red from the vineyard my younger brother recommended. It supports Chile, I guess. And it won't break the bank. I prepare the additional fillings by cutting the boiled eggs into eighths, opening the cans of sliced black olives, and soaking a cup of raisins in water to make them extra juicy. *I'm in St. Paul, at my college house on Hague Ave. My housemates form an assembly line. I roll the dough, then Meredith places the meat, then Katie the egg, then Nikki the olives.* With the fillings placed on the dough, it's time to fold. It's hard to explain how to fold empanadas without a demonstration. Others are way neater and faster than I am at folding. *I am in North Carolina. My brothers are on their way over to visit my parents' house where six trays full of empanadas—products of my mother's and my efforts the night before—rotate through the oven and fill the house with a heavy, warm scent.* One by one, the empanadas come together. Trays filled, I coat them with an egg wash and sprinkle sea salt on the tops. I make my way over to the oven to finish the bake. *My mind wanders over to Concepción where I'm surrounded by old friends from my middle school days who have come to visit while I'm in town. We're walking around town, around our old hangouts, and enjoying the nostalgia, a beer, and an empanada from a park vendor. After all these years, I am still taken by the trees in Parque Ecuador.*

Perhaps, in contemplating the notion of "spatter," we find a metaphor for the inevitable gaps in translating the intricacies of feeling into food culture then into the digital realm, leaving room for the ineffable to linger beyond the confines of technology. Certain aspects of experience—emotions, nostalgia, and the profound history embedded in process—cannot be fully captured in culinary production or conveyed within the confines of a published piece, just as certain dimensions of identity cannot be represented in language, even if institutions attempt to render them as such.

"Not Quite" Alienation—Matthew

While plenty of my recorded content spoke to joyful associations with doenjang-jjigae, as I simmered it, I also simmered loneliness built through years of multifaceted alienation. I cooked and consumed experiences of being "not quite" Korean/American through two memory sites—the public school lunchrooms where I went to middle school and high school and differences between my mother's recipe and other relatives' recipes—and in those experiences' embeddedness in other forms of alienation through mismatched cultural practices. My attachment to doenjang-jjigae follows Robert Ji-Song Ku's (2018) argument that food, for Korean/Americans, is held in deep ambivalence as both a dear cultural artifact that cannot be long discarded *and* the root of fears of rejection, ridicule, and shame. Ku argued that, through pungent foods like kimchi and others, Korean/Americans experienced the hyphening of their American identities. Thinking through Ku's work, I found that this project, despite the many joys of doenjang-jjigae, also helped

me remember many hyphenating experiences, encounters with the "-ish" of my Korean-ness that have shaped my personal and professional life ever since.

My Koreanness, as perceived through these memories, was intertwined with my level of comfort—a sense, recalling Sara Ahmed (2007), of being able to melt into the space and place around me. While this was achievable at home with my mom's cooking and my brother and my eating, it was disrupted in both school and extended family spaces, where I felt a slight, perpetual "out-of-placeness" despite passing in both contexts as belonging. My sense of "-ish" was omnipresent. I think of this "-ish" as a comparative framework between myself and what Patterson (2020, 58–59) terms the "Asiatic." Asiatic refers to a partial, datafied, aesthetic sense of Asian-ish that permeates Euro-American orientalism. It prioritizes "Asian-ish enough" over specificity. My sense of "Korean-ish" results from my questioning whether I present Korean-ish enough to round up to "Korean." My unease has frequently derived from answering no.

This was not a purely internal process, though. My memories as I cooked doen-jang-jjigae included external assertions of my being "not quite" Korean-ish enough. An uncle, for example, once laughed and waved a fish eyeball at me, clutched between his chopsticks, because I didn't want to eat it. But there were other times, outside of fam-ily, where my comparative struggles were made public. At school lunches, I ate more chicken patty sandwiches than Korean meals because the former were more portable. Short lunch times and tables with limited space meant that the Korean table set with *banchan* (side dishes) was less logistically feasible. Chicken patties also kept my Kore-anness less visible and less legible. Eating "white-ly" afforded me the safety of culinary passing in addition to my visual passing. I recalled in my notes bringing *gimbab*, a typ-ical Korean hand roll well suited to school lunches, to school:

> *I guess people or kids my age would see gimbab and they would ask whether it was sushi because . . . it's a hand roll, and that was what hand rolls looked like to them. So in a way there's that sort of Othering through . . . idiom. It's, "Your food, isn't this; it's this thing that I already understand." And so . . . that was pretty disorienting as well . . . there were foods that I didn't . . . show to people because there's a part of me that I think was afraid of the rejection . . . 'Cause I did not get a great reaction from folks. Very like, no, you're wrong. And I was like, bro, I am Korean.*

In this memory, it is not gimbab that is out of place, but the knowledge of a hand roll *as gimbab* that is out of place. This knowledge—an expression of Koreanness—was unwelcome in these shared lunch spaces because it failed to match those publics' imagination of the Asiatic. As argued by Chen (2010), the cultural imaginary is foun-dational to forms of imperial and colonial privilege and subject formation, so in lunch spaces, where my lunch was platformed and exhibited at the table space, I was brought

face-to-face with American epistemic privilege. Gimbab failed to compute within that lunch room's Asiatic imaginary. To my peers in Texas, Japanese sushi was acceptably Asian, but Korean gimbab was not.

Viewed through the assemblage of social space (Wiley et al. 2010), this experience reveals a fluctuation in subjectivation based on systems I interacted with or was embedded in. In systems like public school and lunch, the fraught, contentious, and erasive relationship between American multiculturalism, globalization, and diaspora produced tension with individual experience as a byproduct of forming a colonialist, Asiatic cultural imaginary. This particular example reveals public school lunchrooms as multiculturally anti-global—they are sites where only specific kinds of globalization get to happen and where others are relegated to private space, never to be seen by white eyes, smelt by white noses, or accidentally bumped by white elbows. Much like area studies departments or "ethnic" restaurants, encounters with Asiatics depend on encoding rules enabling white agency. Othered knowledges are siloed off, only to be accessed when called for and always in a limited way.

The inscription of this memory through my neurological mnemonic processes facilitated the channeling of desire toward a path free from such ridicules, to the point that I desired some degree of erasure. This parallels (or, perhaps, shadows?) the dynamics of academic epistemography, particularly in digital forms and spaces. Writing, editing, and revising are processes of making our work and ourselves worthy of visibility and invisibility all at once. We want our work to be published, but to "fit in" and avoid sticking out in ways that make us more vulnerable, we adhere to linguistic and genre standards. We allow ourselves to be standardized, and we yearn for that standardization.

In the context of cooking, memory, and identity, Bernhard Siegert's (2015) work on grids as cartographic structures producing belonging *and absence* in the service of modern conceptualizations of order provides a useful framework for recognizing the multifaceted and multispatial processes of alienation in action. If alienation might be described by Deleuze and Guattari as a sense of discord between the self's desires and procedures of Oedipalization for which we have been trained to yearn, then my memories reveal this alienation as the friction of redirecting desire to match the recorded standards of the social, back toward the comforting grid where Koreanness belongs. At school, doenjang-jjigae and gimbab were out of place. Eating bab, doenjang-jjigae, and other *banchan* in a school lunchroom presented logistic challenges, transforming gimbab into sushi.

Palate Cleanser

We offer you a moment to pause—a breath to reflect before taking your next bite.

Section II: (In)Digestion

Authenticity—Nicholas

I have to make the dough that will house the empanada filling. I start mixing with my hands, pressing a stick of butter into flour until all that remains are pea-sized chunks. Add an egg, water, and distilled white vinegar. I mix again with the heel of my hand until the dough is shaggy. This muscle memory of working with the dough sparks a memory. The girlfriend of a close buddy asks for my recipe after an empanada lunch in Chicago. She is not the first person to request the recipe, so I decide to type it out and send it to her, a handful of other friends, and my parents. My mother brags about my empanadas to my grandmother and is always amazed that I make the dough from scratch. She admits her shame from buying premade dough at the Mexican supermarket in our town. I have shame too. While the meat filling is a family recipe, the empanada dough recipe comes from the website allrecipes.com. I found it after a quick Google search. I feel like a fake, using a recipe that thousands of others use, one so removed from my grandmother's way of making it. Who knows if it's even a Chilean recipe? It's hard to tell if my interventions—like the allrecipes.com recipe or using soy sauce to flavor the meat when I was in college—are ridiculous bastardizations or welcomed developments. Regardless, I find solace in the fact that they're original to this moment.

I spent my childhood between hometowns in North Carolina and Santiago. I was introduced to a variety of languages, foods, people, and experiences in both locations. However, I found it difficult to genuinely belong in either community—I felt a sense of internal in-betweenness and external outsider-ness. In Chile, students ridiculed my Spanish accent, while in the United States, I acquired pejorative nicknames based on my brown skin. I found myself tied to binaries of belonging. Either Chilean or American. Learning to navigate categorizations was often a linguistic battle—debating terms and finding new ways to describe my identity to myself and others.

Language is an imperfect tool. As James C. Scott (1998) and Benedict Anderson (2006) have shown, both national belonging and statehood are dependent on structures of language exchange. Language, particularly in the form of print capitalism, creates categories and binaries. For instance, national identity gets linked to what language you speak, what foods you eat, what songs you sing. Furthermore, you are either part of that identity or you are outside, other, foreign. Language here reduces complexity and binds identities into categories. From these categories, individuals are rendered legible and subjectable. States wield the power to control who belongs and where they belong.

From the lens of empanada making, in many ways, I self-imposed categories of belonging onto my relationships with the cooking and writing process. How do I describe feelings that I feel I cannot put into words—extreme longing, anxiety around

getting it *right*, or personal tastes and distastes? Moments that feel so ephemeral and impossible to tie down are reduced to words on a page.

I am reminded of Marcos Moldes's (2017) encounter with dulce de leche. He feels anger, frustration, and a sense of ownership over *his* culture after a white woman at a coffee shop butchers the pronunciation of his favorite sweet from his Uruguayan childhood. He later reflects on the limitations of his frustrations and the unchanging, forever iterative nature of creativity within culinary production. In my empanada making, this process of reflection and attributing meanings to what were initial gut reactions was essential. Our immediate reactions are conditioned into cultural scripts, coded into Oedipalized structures. It is in the pause that we can put a name to our feelings and recognize the structures that prompt our reactions.

They're out now—golden brown on top and still sizzling. I sit to eat and take a bite. The mouthful lights up my senses and entertains my sensibilities. The textures, flavors, and temperatures remind me of family and friends and of other times I enjoyed the flaky crust and juicy harmony of meat, egg, olive, and raisin filling. *Don't most global cultures have some version of meat wrapped in dough? Dumplings, samosas, beef Wellingtons, sfeehas, kreatopitas . . .* I take another bite. I taste my ethnicity, my heritage, my homes, my identity, my insecurities, my artifice and originality. I taste my Chilean*ness*, my second-generation adjustments, my transnational connections. I taste my history and my present. I have become empanada, and it has become me. Transubstantiation (Mol 2008).

Transcribing Alienation—Matthew

Perhaps unintuitively, my sense of alienation peaked after my recollections were captured by my phone's sound recorder app. I wanted to be able to look at them and skim them quickly without having to listen to the recording again, so I used a program called Descript to automatically transcribe my work. Descript is a subscription-based multimedia editing platform that features speech-to-text transcription and allows users to edit audio and video files by directly editing the transcript itself. I thought letting Descript transcribe and then editing the transcription would be relatively meditative labor. What I discovered, 2.5 hours and dozens of diverse corrections to "doenjang-jji-gae" later, was exhaustion.

Descript's automated transcription saved me transcribing labor, but the task of editing to account for my use of Korean words quickly turned into translating the transcription from Standard American English (SAE) into Korean/American. The recording technology necessary for recording my memories in this differently legible way not only affected the ways I could access my memories. It reproduced the alienation already affectively built into them.

In the screenshot example from the transcription (see Figure 2), all manner of linguistic crime comes to the fore: *miyeok-guk* became "Mexico"; *deok-guk* became "duck goop." Descript was a hot mess. Descript did not speak Korean/American. And, as has been well documented in scholarship across many area studies literatures, the burden of emotional labor of correcting, educating, contextualizing, and translating fell back onto me as the person of color, as the Chinaman, as the foreigner.

This technical, digital experience of alienation revealed several things. First, it illustrated the tension-infused subjectivation process of Koreanness through a blunt example of the individual versus the essentialized standard in written form. Second, it reminds us that memory is always mediated by some form of recording, whether that be spoken language, handwriting, a hard drive's magnets, or Descript's translation of electronic captures into digitized word processing magnetically stored on a computer in some data center in Arizona or North Carolina.

Dialectically, these points show that Korean*ness* is a subjectivation process that is digitally mediated by mnemonic technologies, the prosthetic apparatus that enables and limits our ability to recall an essentialized version of the "authentic" that encodes and directs our desires. Korean/American subjectivation necessarily takes place backlit by an essentialized Koreanness mural constructed by people around us and by our cultural experiences in the social because the term "Korean/American" captures and flattens plurality through language. Thus, there is also an internalized recording of essentialized authenticity inscribed upon our memories by mnemonic technologies. This is a key factor in how a body's desiring production is coded to *seek* Korean-American and Korean-Americanness atop the body without organs. Recalling food, cooking, or other cultural techniques of identity-making through an identity term is to recall recorded codes of an identity we apply to our own desires. In so doing, we seek the very means of our self-discipline. The body without organs is our panopticon, and it is constantly reconstructed through our travels into the mnemonic archive and back out again.

that was the play. Right? I mean, I, I know I loved things like you know, Google serve like a seaweed soup. I love Mexico. I love duck goop, which is. A rice cake soup usually consumed around new years. But the fan would let me have it around my birthday as well. Typically I think because I was born pretty much January babies.

Figure 2. Screenshot of raw transcript in Descript before editing. The spoken notes were as follows: "I mean, I, I know I loved things like, you know, *miyeok-guk*, which is like a seaweed soup. I love *miyeok-guk*. I love *deok-guk*, which is a rice cake soup usually consumed around New Years. But the fam would let me have it around my birthday as well, typically, I think, because . . . I was a January baby."

Section III: Illegible Multiculturalisms

Cooking and writing are parallel acts of translation—they turn feeling into deliverable products for consumption. The tools and ingredients that are used to cook and write impose structure and limits upon that initial desire. Whether it is a rolling pin or a transcription software, technologies mold opaque intent into legible, digestible form.

We cooked empanadas and doenjang-jjigae in an attempt to engage with our identities, picking dishes that we had cooked (or had cooked for us) many times before. Making and consuming these dishes nourished our bodies and sparked our minds to wander to memories of meals past. But the act of translating our cooking-induced experiences, emotions, and feelings into a publishable piece was a frequently frustrating process.

On the one hand, this was our first time treating these dishes and the cooking process as a data-gathering encounter. How does one record and report on the subtleties of scents, the lingering pain of a burn from a pan handle, or the longing remembrances that accompany a tasty bite? Ephemeral experiences are fleeting. Cooking is messy. The loud sizzle of oil or spray of water made computer keys sticky and rendered audio recordings obscure. Our computers could not code a smell or taste into binary. Even our vocal descriptions of what we were encountering were muddled by the transcription software that saw *miyeok-guk* become "Mexico." The spatter of the kitchen and the polyvocal dimensions of our experiences were alien to the digitally monolingual machines that coded us.

On the other hand, we had difficulties digesting our cooking experiences into understandable stories, particularly within a typical publishing format. Many moments were characterized by being "not quite": not quite puzzle-pieced into categories of national identification, not quite fitting in at the school cafeteria, not quite sure about the flavors of the dish, not quite sure if grandma would approve of you using a recipe from allrecipes.com. We were measuring our identities—their validity, (in)authenticity—against our own expectations of how others would perceive us. In short, through the technic and personal translation of our cooking experiences, our polyvocal multiculturalisms were rendered illegible. While cooking felt freeing because it is polyvocal, writing about the cooking experience felt incomplete, unfinished, and misrepresentative.

This incompleteness expresses our framework of illegible multiculturalisms. In this case, our use of illegibility is inspired by the work of Sarah Sharma's (2020, 174–75) "Manifesto for the Broken Machine," in which she argued that the distribution of justice, particularly in the context of technologies and misogyny, depends upon the datafication of people, upon every entire person being rendered information, not just information*al*. In that vein, she argues that contemporary articulations of techno-masculinity and misogyny treat women and people of color as themselves technologies or machines whose existence centers on the epistemic zero-point of white, male pleasure/

utility. The endgame of social justice to these groups that oppose feminism and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), argues Sharma, is one of perfect legibility of all people as information and of seamless integration of that information into this complex of techno-masculine whiteness's pleasure. Informational legibility is the crux of this woman/PoC-as-machine idea, and those who fail to assimilate cleanly into manospheric colonization are seen less as rebels than as failed creations: "If women don't want to fulfill their positions within a patriarchal society, there are other toys and technologies that will do this work. The imagined technological future is one in which social justice is no longer demanded because all of the seemingly malfunctioning parts (nonconforming subjects) can be discarded and replaced" (Sharma 2020, 173).

Sharma's conceptualization of feminists and people of color as Broken Machines, as technologies epistemically colonized for white, male pleasure that are not working as intended, is centrally important to our "illegible" part of illegible multiculturalisms. In our reflections, we often found that our illegibility as figurative machines emerged via the literal machines we used to record, code, clean, and write this piece—such as Descript, which struggled to render Korean/American into English. This often made us feel alienated, like imposters, as only partially authentic. Sharma's work tells us that this means that we are not conforming to structures of legibility prescribed by the literal machine's positionality, that we were interpreting these technic interactions as articulations of our inadequacy, for an adequate object of translation would be perfectly legible. Our feelings of alienation express Brokenness. Therefore, our illegibility lies in the ways that our polyvocal inputs (the sounds, sensations, and vocalizations of cooking) become, deviate from, and resist univocal, colonized recording processes presented in our technic interactions. Recording, writing, and publishing attempt to render our polyvocal inputs univocally legible. Our illegible multiculturalisms become such in the context of being encoded and bent toward a univocal purpose.

We pair "multiculturalisms" with illegibility to strike at the heart of the former. As applied rhetorically, fiscally, and economically, multiculturalism inherently assumes legibility and produces categories: it relationally produces sets of univocalities under the guise of polyvocality. Kandice Chuh's (2003) argument in *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* highlights the way that white, liberal-humanist multiculturalism produced in the United States expresses the oxymoronic, ambivalent acknowledgment/disavowal of historical hierarchization and power imbalances as both factual and no longer relevant to the present, multicultural moment:

> Multiculturalism, contradictorily . . . occludes and effaces the historicity of racism and the deep-rootedness of racialization as a technology through which the United States . . . has perpetuated a self-stylization as the achievement of the universalist Enlightenment values of equality and liberty. This kind of multiculturalism manages at once to sediment Asian

> Americanness in a narrative of otherness that achieves cohesiveness through an emphasis on (previous) exclusion and powerlessness, and to erase the continuities of the materialities underwriting such positions by insisting on the irrelevance of the past. (Chuh 2003, 6)

This oxymoronic definition of multiculturalism captures precisely the same dynamics that Sharma argues render feminists and people of color as Broken Machines. If multiculturalism is a utopic ideal wherein we—as a society—have "beaten" racism, sexism, and social injustice, then it has occurred by rendering everyone as perfect sets of information that are utile to the same colonizing complex of white, male, techno-masculine pleasure. While these categories are typically produced as univocal applications relative to a white, male zero-point, the term continues to both embody and profit from polyvocal potential. Sharma's deeply dystopic scenario in which all Broken Machines can be replaced with other, functional, and legible machines is the very foundation of the utopic ideal of multiculturalism, wherein the end goal of social justice is the disavowal of that which impelled it in the first place.

What we offer in illegible multiculturalisms, then, is a framework of subversion of both of these expectations. As Sharma argued that we should be proud to be Broken Machines, we argue that we should be proud that our experiences, lives, processes, and practices are illegible. As Chuh argued that multiculturalism apprehends polyvocality in the service of univocality, we deploy *multiculturalisms* to argue for a re-centering of that pluralism as representative of our experiences. In combining the two, we have theorized Illegible Multiculturalisms as myriad pathways for recovery and re-empowerment, whereby we can re-cast our illegibility and polyvocality as a deviance carried out and lived with a prankster's childlike glee. Though reacting to oil spattering one's laptop gleefully might feel like the shortsighted chaos of teenage chicanery, our interactions with pots, pans, spices, circuits, codes, and pixels have shown that such technic moments reveal our emotional investments in being legible. Recalling Deleuze and Guattari's metaphorical mass of connecting and disconnecting machines driven by desiring production, we find in cooking a fecund surface where our connections between and among machines are recorded and fall back upon themselves. We sense the feelings of our hand leaving the hot pan handle, of disconnecting our nose from the scent-laden steam, of the moment our eyes see the *result* of the connection between our voice notes and the transcription software. Our initial recordings of painful disconnection reflect an Oedipalizing standard. Why shouldn't we *enjoy* being thought to love Mexico instead of *miyeok-guk*?

Retrospectively, we should not have been the objects of ridicule, the deviant *anthropoi*, the Broken Machines. Instead, Descript, Sound Recorder, Microsoft Word and the coloniality that they represent *failed* to make us less than what we are. Within these technic moments, we were not the failing students. The machines that could not read us just didn't get the joke.

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