

When Postcolonial Historiography Speaks: Immersive Culinary Storytelling in Jovanni Sy's *A Taste of Empire*

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Abstract

This paper argues that Jovanni Sy's *A Taste of Empire* (2017) functions as a potent work of culinary theatre that advances a robust political critique through the framework of postcolonial historiography. The play, which takes the form of a live cooking demonstration, enables the seemingly benign format of a celebrity chef show to deconstruct the complex histories of colonialism, corporate greed, and cultural erasure embedded in a single Filipino dish: *rellenong bangus* (stuffed milkfish). By mapping the journey of the ingredients onto the historical trajectory of the Philippines, from Spanish and American colonization to the contemporary injustices of globalized food systems, Sy transforms the culinary act into a powerful narrative performance, embodying the principles of ethical gastronomy. Through a unique synthesis of immersive storytelling and sensory engagement, the play engages its audience in a confrontation with the ethical implications of the food on their plates. The intersectionality of (post)colonial race, class and gender, as domains of privilege/oppression in *A Taste of Empire*, re-introduces the play as a model for a socio-politically conscious theatre, using the shared experience of food to explore implications of food sovereignty, ethical sourcing, and cultural identity.

Keywords: Postcolonial Historiography; Culinary Storytelling; Ethical Gastronomy; Planetarity; Resistance; Sensorial Engagement

عندما ينطق تأريخ ما بعد الاستعماري: سرد قصص الطهي الغامرة في مسرحية "نكهة المطبخ الإمبراطوري"

مستخلص

تطرح هذه الورقة البحثية تحليلاً لعرض جوفاني سي "طعم الإمبراطورية" (٢٠١٧) يُقدّم تجربة فريدة في مسرح الطهي، فتقدم نقداً سياسياً ساخراً ولاذعاً لفعل الاستعمار وتوظف هذه الورقة البحثية التأريخ ما بعد الاستعماري منهجية واضحة. إذ تستغل المسرحية، التي تتبدى كعرض طبخ حيّ، شكلاً مسرحياً قد يبدو مباشراً لتجربة طهي نوع من الأسماك ولكنه حقيقة يقوم بتفكيك التاريخ المعقد للاستعمار، وجشع الشركات، والمحو الثقافي المتجذّر، متخذاً من طبق فلبيني واحد: ريلينونغ بانغوس (سمك اللبن المحشو) رمزا لهوية ما بعد الاستعمارية. ويقوم العرض بتتبع رحلة المكونات على المسار التاريخي للفلبين، من الاستعمار الإسباني والأمريكي إلى الظلم المعاصر لأنظمة الغذاء العالمية، فيحوّل الكاتب العمل الطهوي إلى عرض سردي قوي يجسّد مبادئ فن الطهو الأخلاقي. من خلال توليفة فريدة من السرد القصصي الغامر والتفاعل الحسي، هنالك تُشرك المسرحية جمهورها في مواجهة الآثار الأخلاقية للطعام على أطباقهم. حيث أن التقاطع بين العرق (ما بعد) الاستعماري والطبقة والجنس كمجالات للامتياز/القمع في مسرحية "نكهة المطبخ الإمبراطوري" يعيد قراءة المسرحية كنموذج لمسرح واعٍ اجتماعياً وسياسياً باستخدام التجربة المشتركة للطعام لتكشف عن آثار السيادة الغذائية والمصادر الأخلاقية والهوية الثقافية في ضوء مبادئ الاستدامة وحث جمهور المسرحية على تكوين نظرة مستقبلية للغذاء قائمة على الصالح الكوكبي

كلمات مفتاحية: الحكي الطهائي ؛ الطعام أخلاقياً ؛ التفاعل الحسي ؛ تأريخ ما بعد الاستعمارية ؛ المقاومة ؛ الصالح الكوكبي .

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Introduction

Drawing on the famous rhetorical question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Spivak 66), this paper postulates that culinary theatres are brilliant sites for voicing out misread or mistaken histories. Despite the fact that food studies, as a discipline, has recently gained popularity, postcolonial studies demonstrate “belated” interest in the culinary (Roy 161). The colonial enterprise is deemed responsible for exploitation of natural resources in the East and the New World in addition to commodification of human resources especially from Africa. Food’s metaphorical extrapolation is crystallized as food is an identifier or a social descriptor of personal choices and affiliations (Coghlan 1,4; Roy 164; Ibrahim 3-4). Colonialism has brought spices from colonies of the East, to European upper classes, whose popularity has later been replaced by sugar from the New World which has been cultivated by the weary slaves from Africa (Roy 165-67). From a different lens, the colonial race has impoverished the colonies which have been drained without any progress or betterment even for the peasants and workers on those plantations (qtd. in Coghlan 3). The historical density attributed to food from a postcolonial point of view resembles the fecundity associated with the culinary experience – as raw materials are transformed into a delicious meal. In this respect, culinary theatres are seen as a research-led practice that combines two resistance models identified in the postcolonial discourse. These are resistance-as-subversion and resistance-as-transformation (Bhandari 93). Emphasizing cultural negotiation where human subjectivities are shaped along with rejecting essentialism, resistance-as-subversion celebrates cultural diversity and interaction (93). On the other side, resistance-as-transformation is reconciliatory in order to establish a social platform that procures social change (96). Such combination is of affinity to postcolonial historiography which is replacing the well-established Subaltern Studies because the latter has limited its scope to the Elite/Subordinate discourse (Xupeng 412-13). Compared to Subaltern Studies, postcolonial historiography attempts at

rejecting the unilinear interpretation of history, emphasizing “difference and diversity of historical expression” against the totalizing Eurocentrism as well as re-evaluating the rationale of Western historical readings (396). The different perspectives that each of the abovementioned approaches adopt clarify the gap between the subaltern doubt of the ability to speak, in Spivak’s question, and the affirmative condition reflected in the title of this study. In other words, this paper proposes that postcolonial historiography represents a steadfast processing of the historicist Eurocentric interpretation of the world rooted in the philosophy of the Enlightenment; that centralizes the European experiment of progress as a universal yardstick to which the rest of the world, the periphery, should aspire and passively adopt. In contrast, postcolonial historiography aims at creating identities and knowledge that defy Western domination.

The period between 2005 and 2010 has witnessed a sprawl in the field of food studies; both intellectually and practically. More food critics and experts become attached to the field ranging from agricultural methods and industrial techniques to just consumption practices and rates. Such interest involved a growing consciousness with food as in creating quality standards; for instance, labels like “organic or fair trade” are put on different foods to validate food production chains (Thompson 65). In fact, food activism has grown to involve discussions of “normative dimensions – the reasons and rationale – of food” together with issues of social justice and sustainability, leading individuals to better dietary choices (Thompson 61). Food ethics or ethical gastronomy, commonly in circulation, identifies food safety, its impact on the environment and the welfare of animals as core objectives. Although food studies have developed as an interdisciplinary field by the turn of the twenty-first century, the interest in food as a literary device with affective significance is traced back to the early twentieth century with Marinetti’s Futurist practices such as the *caffè concerto* – where food and drink are served during comedic sketches (Carruth 88; Berghaus 4). Associating symbolic connotations to food is found in the work of the structuralists Levi Strauss and Roland Barthes who consider food a “cultural capital” reflecting social privilege and discrimination and a “collective source of identification” (qtd. in Coghlan 2, 4). This means that food turns to be a storyteller highlighting pivotal history of people’s lives. In 1985, the Association for the Study of Food and Society has been established to officially examine the relationship between society and practices of food. Despite the fact that Food Studies, as a term, has originated in the 1990s to describe interdisciplinary work, devoted to the inspection of food norms and routes, across the disciplines of anthropology, sociology,

women studies, history and cultural geography, it has not been till 2001 when *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* has been launched that gastrocriticism is unlocked to the humanities (Coghlan 2). Contemporary trends in food studies involve “food porn” which describes common engagement with food experiences from behind the screen; “foodie culture” where food trials are centralized; and “prosumerism” which refers to the production of digital food material by common people (Ibrahim 8).

A Taste of Empire (2017) (from now on *ATE*) blends the subject matter of ethical gastronomy with postcolonial historiography. Inquiries intrinsic to ethical eating, such as questioning the origin of food, production methods and work conditions related to its production, are seriously interlinked to post/colonial history. In direct tangency with postcolonialism is ethical gastronomy’s dedication to cultural ownership; which generally highlights issues of cultural appropriation. Food is significantly studied as “an intersectional locus, as a point of contact” (qtd. in Thompson 69) where individuals are vulnerable to variable axes of oppression and privilege. For instance, food becomes privilege for the healthy, the able and the rich – with different accessibility levels. Also, food is oppression for the diseased, the disabled and the poor. Not only does class offer a variable experience of food, but gender and race also do. One example is handling food as a “venue of particular relevance to women” (Thompson 72). Generally, intersectionality is a study of conflicting interests that generate respective oppression. The paper, through such combination, suggests that *ATE* is a timely version of what can be called postcolonial planetarity. In this condition, postcolonial resistance and reconciliation occurs within the framework of planetarity so that embossed anthropogenic practices shall be evaded.

Objectives and Research Questions

This paper investigates the culinary experience presented in the play to highlight storytelling as a culinary practice accentuating food as a working metaphor in the theatre. In an attempt to examine the immersive environment created by the playwright, this study tracks the means by which the culinary experience involves the audience sensorially. A site-specific performance in the first place, *ATE* invests in the cooking plateau, be it a kitchen or a park as decided at the beginning of the play (Sy, Setting), to read the relationship between food and history from a planetary point of view. The intersection of history, food and the sensory with the narrative structure of storytelling promotes ethical responsibility on the part of the audience. Therefore, this study attempts at answering the following questions:

- 1- What is the role and impetus of storytelling when it comes to the theatrical culinary experience? To what extent is ethical gastronomy related to post/colonial contexts?
- 2- How does postcolonial historiography read the post/colonial situation in light of planetarity?
- 3- Within the culinary event, how far is audience sensorial engagement empathic?

The Carnavalesque Rellenong Bangus

ATE is a play that belongs to culinary theatres where Jovanni Sy, a playwright and an actor, prepares and cooks one of the most significant dishes in the Filipino cuisine. Rellenong Bangus (stuffed milkfish) is a national dish in the Philippines that is connected to celebrative atmospheres denoting high hospitability on the part of the host towards their guests. The dish takes over an hour to be prepared and needs a skillful chef to go through the evacuation process keeping the skin of the fish intact. Then the meat of the fish is sauteed with vegetables and a specific spice mix to be put back into the fish. Culturally, the milkfish is a remarkable Filipino sign. This fish, indigenous to the Pacific Ocean, reflects the Philippines diversity and compatibility to several historical and ecological conditions. Historically, the fish discloses the country's positive involvement with its marine ecosystem. Theatrically, rellelong bangus connects Filipino's colonial to postcolonial periods where the festive dish parodies history through the exhaustive yet artistic handling of the fish in preparation and cooking. Preparing the stuffed milkfish is a taxing cuisine job starting with the first handling of the fish; descaling, evacuating inner bowels and deboning, till stuffing, frying and presenting it into the final dish. It is worth noting that the dish has been planned to be cooked by Chef Maximo Cortés whose unexpected absence is overcome by Sous-Chef, the second-in-command chef, Jovanni Sy to step in for the demonstration. As Sy is cooking, he is telling the audience the story of the fish from the ocean to the table interwoven with commentary on global food production and circulation with a special focus on the imperial history of the Philippines. At the end of the cooking and the storytelling, the audience are served the rellelong bangus to their tables for sample taste.

Jovanni Sy's *ATE* is a historiographic presentation of food foregrounding an ethnographic approach to contemporary global food pathways. The metaphor of the milkfish, the national Filipino dish, overwhelms the play as a backdrop that deploys several layers of meaning upon the culinary experience depicted. The fish is collectively used as a synecdoche of imperialism in the Philippines since its early formation.

The journey of the milkfish from the ocean to the dining table in the restaurant parallels the history of colonialism, capitalism and food pathways to and from the country.

Cooking the Storying: Storying the Cooking

ATE foregrounds the synchronic activities of telling the story and cooking the dish. Neither is interrupted throughout the play. Both are continually proceeding with minor alternative stops. Storytelling in the play takes the shape of a dining scene where the host and the guests are gossiping, one of the famous activities associated with food settings and also one element that attributes commensality to the setting as a whole. This “staged ritual of social aggression” (Ferry, Dining Sc. One) marks social rejection of the gossiped at character who is usually confirmed to having violated a social or ethical norm that is not accepted by this eating group. Borrowing the same setting, Sy establishes a code where the imperialist or the colonizer is rejected neither to enjoy the commensality of the event nor the ability to socially bond. By the end of the play, a sense of equilibrium is constructed as the audience are oriented to the reality of the imperial enterprise exemplified in the appropriation of labour and natural resources of the (ex)colonized. The play under study is remarkably a blend of food and history within a synaesthetic framework rooted in storytelling and sensorial perception by which the culinarian appears as a thinker and a philosopher who is aesthetically responding to the gastronomical stimulus (Lee 3-4). The interplay between the symbolic significance of the fish and its culinary presentation is foregrounded through the utilization of storytelling and sensorial engagement of the audience. These two devices contextualize the tenets of ethical gastronomy leading to highlighting food as a medium of postcolonial historiography, cultural appropriation and resistance along with communal exploration. Appreciating food, from this perspective, foregrounds the bangus as metaphor to the (postcolonial)citizen who is globally victimized through patriarchal structures. Similar to the bangus, whose bowels are extracted to be replaced by outside stuff, is the colonized citizen whose identity is molded into the norms of the Eurocentric colonizer. This image is recurrent as Piag, a junior inspector at Imperial Seafood, is likened to the bangus (Sy, Part 3). Sy precisely explains such analogy in one of his interviews (Ricepaper).

Storytelling within the culinary, a practice that crystallizes postcolonial historiography in *ATE*, diverges in three quintessential trajectories: ethnographic historiography, ethical gastronomy and culinary sensory immersion. The interplay between these three foci is believed to procreate a social platform where the Eurocentric gaze at the World is

marginalized giving vaster spaces for comprehensive planetarity to disseminate. In other words, the treatment of the (post)colonial condition in *ATE* weaves a new version of resistance that is armoured with a planetary outlook as compared to the bordered globalism or Eurocentrism. Simply, planetarity foregrounds all forms of living on the planet – no matter the species – and most importantly, planetarity has deep faith in relational being as the most convenient existence mode in the twenty-first century (Elshazly 75, 77). From this perspective, binary oppositions are completely discarded. Postcolonial resistance is indirectly deployed in the play in two modes: subverting the colonial narrative and change through transformation. It is via culinary storytelling that the audiences interlinks both modes.

The play presents an oral historical account of imperialism as Sy, the Sous-Chef, is cooking the rellenong bangus. The play traces colonial exploitation across different phases of Filipino history. The Philippines, under three different colonizers at different ages, has experienced draining up of resources as well as re-configurations of identity into a hybrid being. Sy's storytelling indirectly clarifies that the industry of food has been and is still serving the needs of imperialism then globalization. *ATE* is made up of nine parts, starting with setting the culinary scene and ending in serving the sample taste plates to the audience. A quick account of chef Maximo Cortés, who, similar to the notorious Godot, never arrives catches the attention of the audience at the beginning. Chef Maximo is the renowned chef and owner of “three three-Michelin-star restaurants: *Imperius* in Tokyo, *Il Duce* in Rome, and his flagship halal restaurant in Kabul: *Warlord*” (Sy, Part 1). Maximo's halal restaurant – which avoids using foods that are prohibited as per Islam – highlights religion as pivotal to the culinary experience (Hayit 51). The three restaurants Chef Maximo owns reflect a global overview of the world as their locations in Japan, Italy and Afghanistan reflect economic growth and resilience; classical colonial power and domination; and military oppression/resistance, respectively. This order highlights the play's epigraph that reads “[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Sy, Epigraph) – a viewpoint that is demonstrated as the storytelling unfolds. At the same time, it standardizes barbarism in all contexts of domination. The names of Maximo's restaurants illustrate the power dynamics of imperialism and dictatorship. *Il Duce*, for instance, is an Italian word, that literally means the leader, and historically is the title of Benito Mussolini, the Fascist leader. A satirical tone sets the scene of the play as Chef Maximo's “style

of cooking known as imperial cuisine™” (Sy, Part 1) is introduced and as we know later that he owns a cutlery line under the same name.

Subverting “colonial hegemony and authority of colonial knowledge production” (Bhandari 94), the play deconstructs the colonial narrative by showcasing consequent inconvenience and disparity in the colonies. Imperial knowledge is introduced at the onset as the prime source of basic knowledge; for the Sous-Chef states that it was Chef Maximo who has told him about his Filipino background and that the origin of rellenong bangus “very much reflect[s] the Spanish presence in Filipino culture” (Sy, Part 2). In alignment with postcolonial historiography as to challenge “the legitimacy of Western historical concepts and historical knowledge” (Xupeng 396), the play shows axes of oppression and privilege where peoples are set at contrasting and unequal distances. As the milkfish is a Filipino national descriptor that has shaped the economy of Dagupan for ages (Sy, Part 3), ethnographic historical accounts are disclosed to the audiences where they know that the Aeta tribe are “the legendary fishermen of Dagupan” (Part 3) who employed ancient Filipino fishing methods, which sustained their graceful living. In sharp contrast, the newly adopted corporatized methods not only smash the poor, but also jeopardize individual health and planetary welfare; in the past “bangus were harvested in the wild in nets cast from boats [led by] the hard-working people . . . of the Aeta tribe” (Part 3). Sy affirms that the Aeta are stubborn people who have never been influenced by Spanish colonialism, American imperialism or Japanese occupation simply because “they do things their way” (Part 3). The Aeta has always maintained a tight bond with nature as they honoured “the gods of sea and sky. Thanking the sun [and] finding fish by listening to the rhythm of the waves and the song of the wind” (Part 3) the time industrialization breaches such bond. Yet, they have fallen for globalizing and capitalist systems. In contrast to his Aeta ancestors, Piag decides to join the working staff at Imperial Seafood, a state-of-the-art bangus processing factory in Dagupan. The breach that happens as Piag notifies his father is embodied in the bloody cut Sy made in the fish he is preparing on the cutting board shown to the audience on the projector. Simultaneously, Piag’s quitting is justified by disclosing the reality behind Istak, his father, Aeta living:

But just take a look at the life Piag was rejecting. A typical day for Istak meant fifteen hours of gruelling work on a boat that, by all rights, should have fallen apart years ago. And after all that, Istak and family would still have to sell the day’s catch to the local shops

and restaurants. . . they're reduced to hustling their wares like some common door-to-door salesman.

By the way, this palette knife that I'm using is from the Maximo Collection™ of deluxe kitchen tools.

(Sy, Part 3)

Sy synchronizes Istak's suffering and Maximo's set of knives to reveal different layers of oppression. Istak long working hours are not sufficient for the family, Piag who quits to escape this suffering is still suffering as a worker on the Imperial Seafood company, and they are both circumscribed by the Imperial experience from everywhere. On the other side, Sy tells the audience that providing for the high demand for bangus in the Filipino villages is the most significant benefit of having the Imperial Seafood factory in Dagupan as the factory produces "ten thousand times the yield of the Aeta tribe" (Part 3). Though superficially satisfying, it turns out that such productivity changes consumption rates, lifestyles and even squashes a wide category of people in need. Piag, by the way, is dismissed after being promoted because the factory later shuts down in Dagupan and moved to China, with lots swiftly growing industrial opportunities. The playwright tells the audience that factory is exporting bangus overseas so that it becomes available to "people like you" (Part 3), the elite. Evidently, "[a]s Fanon notes, the production of the hunger of the native was not epiphenomenal to colonialism but part of a fundamental structural process at work" (Roy 168). Due to big quantities of the bangus in Dagupan produced by the Imperial Seafood plant, its price has sharply dropped. Consequently, the villagers are impoverished with little access to such big quantities in contrast to the elite audience who "couldn't even get Filipino bangus at [their] local grocery" (Sy, Part 3). Synchrony between storytelling and cooking proceeds with more images of oppression through food. Sy mentions that food garnishing, molecular gastronomy as an example, is a historical practice since the French Revolution. Decorating tables with a centerpiece made of sugar, pastry and marzipan "right after this very harsh winter that destroyed French wheat crops . . . was a blessing that the peasants had this work of art to lift their spirits when, they were starving" (Part 6). Again, Sy refers to the contradiction between workers and farmers, on the one hand, and the elites in a society, on the other. He explains that the Parisian rich have been celebrating the designed centerpieces while the poor suffering hunger on the streets. The tomato Sy is holding to prepare for the dish reminds him of Carlos Ramirez, a fifty-year-old fictional Mexican migrant worker, who "looks and feels much, much older" (Part 6). Similarly, the sous-chef declares that he too

suffers unjust work conditions with Maximo as he has got no pay raise for ten years, yet he understands that in case he complains “the master would’ve had every right to replace me” (Part 8). As hunger denotes absence (Chansky and White 2), the poor are marginalized through commercial food practices.

Imperial Cuisine™ is a satirical title that serves as an allegory for the exploitative nature of the global food industry. Chef Maximo represents the corporatized, profit-driven food industry that values branding over tradition. Remarkably the global circulation of food in imperial routes becomes a fact by the end of the play. Other than being a real commodity, food serves the needs of imperial expansion philosophies that govern world trade through power dynamics. This means that food is a political force utilized by well-established global economic powers for expansion and affirmation. In this sense, food is quite manifested as a cultural battlefield where identities are preserved or abolished. The Americanization of food in widely expanding franchises across the globe quite demonstrates the idea. Pizza Hut, McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, to name the most popular, are working examples for this. Almost all societies have been impacted by such Americanization and America has, successfully, affirmed American food style worldwide. Sy mentions:

Up until the late 1800s, Filipino cuisine was a fusion of indigenous and Spanish cookery

. . . At the turn of the century, Filipinos saw a whole new empire emerge and a new world of flavour open up to them . . . / Although the Americans only officially ruled for a half-century, they had a profound and lasting effect on Filipino culture and cuisine. (Part 5)

The relationship between Maximo, his cutlery and his businesses constitute the overall image as the audience understand that Maximo’s Imperial Seafood produces huge amounts of bangus which it sends directly away to the homeland. Imperial Seafood closes the factory at Dagupan because the workers the corporate owners want their share “to grow 5,10,15 percent every single year” (Part 8). The corporate model threatens the continuity of local populations and ecology in exchange of profits. Migrant workers are granted job openings which the elite refuse to do, yet they are the reason the elite get objects at cheaper prices. In this sense, the play introduces a new memory account that archives imperial oppression through the culinary highlighting the fact that imperialist structures invest in precarious labour force. The Filipino dish is invaded by the Spanish spices and vegetables to modify its innate constituents

shapeshifting it in a cosmopolitan figure. In other words, this dish chronicles the history of the Philippines. Ironically, the national dish has nothing indigenous except the skin and even the name of the country is after the Spanish emperor, Philip. It turns out that appropriating cultures through food is an ancient practice. American franchises are only the updated and more sophisticated form. As cooking, Sy narrates that *sofrito*, a mixture of onion, garlic, tomatoes sauteed in olive oil, is a basic item in the stuffed milkfish recipe. This national dish gets much of its flavour through a Spanish component – not even Asian. Then the playwright discusses the story of Spanish coloniality in the Philippines as the majority of the indigenous people rejected Spain's

generous offer of civilization [which] forced Spain to cull thousands of lawless natives in order to keep the peace and bring them into the modern world, just as . . . with the backward savages of the Americas thirty years earlier. (Sy, Part 4)

The chef states that the Spanish has taken over Filipino indigenous lands to, as claimed then, modernize agricultural systems. On the contrary, the people have been left in hunger as the land has been used to grow different crops as sugar can and tobacco with revenues flowing back to Spain. He adds that the *sofrito* itself is, ironically, not Spanish: the garlic, onion and olive oil belong to Asia and the tomatoes are Mexican. While the play catalogues centuries of oppression, it ultimately frames the act of cooking and sharing *rellenong bangus* as an act of cultural preservation and resistance. Sy, a Filipino-born Chinese artist who lives in Canada is an embodiment of the *rellenong bangus* metaphor. The play centralizes a Filipino story and a Filipino dish on a Canadian stage, asserting its value and complexity. The fact that the play has been translated into Cantonese along with other Asian accents, continues to subvert the colonial narrative as well as annex more space for self-expression of the colonized. A female version of the play where a female chef stars the performance appeared in 2024, which emphasizes the intersectional state that the play engenders.

The question of ethical gastronomy is generally shaped through compatibility with sustainability. Preoccupied with food, ethical gastronomy attempts at investigating food systems from ecological, cultural and economic dimensions to ensure global interconnectedness and to foster cultural specificity ("Ethical Gastronomy"). For this purpose, ethical gastronomy foregrounds good food practices that positively contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and the benefit of other creatures on the planet. *ATE* questions communal responsibilities in terms of interconnectivity and relational existence on the planet. The

overall picture designed by the play is emphasis on reciprocal influence. Sy explains that the American fast-food popularity has “exploded [a]nd so have Filipino waistlines” with 15% of the population being diabetic with the expected complications of blindness and fainting (Part 5). In other words, the ethical in gastronomy is the relationship between concepts of sustainability and the handling of food together with adequate access to nutrition. The play highlights several violations of ethical gastronomy. On various occasions, the playwright exposes examples of food insufficiency especially in the case of the underprivileged. Ethical gastronomy criticizes exploitative practices associated with food as in monopolization through corporate bodies, the methods of producing/consuming food. The play bluntly discusses inappropriate work conditions, prioritizing preferences of higher social classes as well as anthropogenic practices towards animals. Sy mentions how Maximo has taught him, as a young boy, the “proper way to force-feed a goose for foie gras” (Part 6). By the end of the play, Sy states that cheap labour is intrinsic to the imperial system:

Why make anything personal? That Filipina taking care of your kids and that old guy picking your tomatoes and that idiot who cooks your fish? Why did I bother telling you our names? Who cares?

This is the key to Imperial Cuisine™ : you get to eat the world. Anything you want is yours – no matter how expensive – because Piag and Carlos and Bong-Bong [the name he gave to the bangus he is cooking] and me . . . we always pick up the bill.

(Part 8)

Although the majority of Sy’s storytelling in the play goes to ethnographic historiography, the play dwells on the intersection of global food with issues of shortage, healthy diets and pharmaceuticals. The play encourages the preservation of identity through cuisine, which can reverse universalization and cultural appropriation. From an ethical gastronomy point of view, the “homogenization of taste” done under globalizing discourses creates “a uniform cuisine . . . that destroy[s] cultural heritage” (Bebler and Güneren 10). In Part 1, the narrator in the video emphasizes that this is “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to a handful of elite connoisseurs – a private demonstration” (Sy). Such classification illumines discursive capitalist systems and, at the same time, recalls the Elite/Subaltern distinction.

Culinary Sensory Immersion

Engagement with food in any way, be it cooking, eating or evaluating, is a sensorial experience in the first place. *ATE* invests in such

sensual dimension to create an immersive experience based on the involvement of the senses to enhance mental and emotional perception on the part of the audience. After supplying the audience with numerous and vivid examples of multi-layered dehumanization across imperial history, *ATE* challenges its audience “now that you know something of the histories that inform this meal [rellenong bangus], the stuff this meal is made of . . . do you still want to eat it?” (Verdecchia, Foreword). Eventually, served the rellenong bangus, the Sous-Chef tells them to “enjoy [their] little taste of empire” (Sy, Part 9). The inspection of the sense of taste characterizes culinary theatre. In *ATE*, the audience encounter working out their taste buds twice: as served the amuse bouche, with its bursting flavours at the very opening of the play, and as served the sample plates of rellenong bangus at the end. Even when the audience do not experience taste during the demonstration, the guests at a food setting are lured by expectations of tasting the dish. Being preoccupied with the expected outcome of the dish emphasizes sensorial immersion. The time taste and smell are central to the culinary experience; excessive concern goes to taste, in *ATE*, since it is here a test or gauge of empathy on the part of the audience. *ATE* foregrounds the olfactory experience as the audience go through the live experience of cooking with all emitted smells of fish, spices, garlic and onions. The fact that the audience are in tangency with these stimuli imprints the storying activity into a corporeal experiment that may activate some personal experiences about private culinary memories. Therefore, the audience become active participants in the event since they have witnessed the deconstruction, understood the history, smelled the ingredients, and tasted the result. This multi-sensory journey encourages a deeper form of reflection, transforming the act of eating from a mindless habit into a conscious, political act.

Employing projectors creates an intermedial environment by which the play interlocks imperial, capitalist and globalist economies in a metonymy of exploitation. Every step and ingredient in the recipe are demonstrated onto the screen as if the audience are experiencing a three-dimensional experience where the image echoes the real objects they already observe as the cooking proceeds. As the process of cooking the fish is being zoomed in like that, the central metaphor of the milkfish is redundantly concentrated. In addition, the projection of names and images of historical or cultural figures expands space of expression of forgotten or marginalized histories. The live coverage of different steps of preparing and cooking the fish on the cutting board transmits a documentary-like atmosphere; which is believed to open more channels of expression. This is intensified as pictorial description of the

impoverished indigenous due to corporate industrialization of local fields. Additively, the video sequences that depict the housing conditions of migrant workers, only a tiny filthy mattress and a bucket for shower, materializes their suffering. The elite shareholders in Imperial Seafood only care about getting cheaper tomatoes at the supermarket the time Carlos is doing “a job that none of [them] want to do” (Sy, Part 6). Overall, the projected material enhances the play’s pivotal argument against economic exploitation.

The sense of hearing (and listening) summons various mental metaphors embedded in the pun effect reflected in the play’s language. Sy explains that Chef Maximo believes “[i]t isn’t Imperial Cuisine without a little blood” (Part 3). As Sy elaborates further steps of cooking the fish, “[n]ow we snap his spine . . . at his neck . . . and at his tail” (Part 3), the sentence infers about the situation of Piag who is fully controlled by the capitalist work system. It is believed that the spine marks the past, how Piag has divorced his traditions to join the new system; the neck denotes being suffocating at the present time; and the tail denotes the loss of direction for the future. Hearing crystallizes the play’s perspective towards resistance as reconciliation. It is through listening to the culinary/historical account that the play constructs a social platform for the oppressed where they address the elite. Hopefully, both parties reconsider the angle from which they are gazing – or better both look forward to an efficient planet.

Conclusion

This paper has clearly shown that postcolonial historiography reifies a new version of postcolonial resistance which sartorially fits to the twenty-first century. Twinned with ethical gastronomy, postcolonial historiography portrays resistance-as-transformation. Through studying *ATE*, it is evident that antagonistic forms of expression rooted in the dichotomy of Colonizer/Colonized or Self/Other are discarded in celebration of new directions of existence in compliance with interconnectivity and relational being. The play at hand introduces a new version of postcolonial resistance discarding violent acts of rebellion and stereotypical rejection. On the other hand, the play prioritizes the planetary situation in the twenty-first century where sustainability and relational being are most demanded. Introducing this contemporary situation as a result of long decades of colonialism that shared in draining up the colonies foregrounds the outstanding role of gastronomic identity. The implementation of postcolonial historiography as a fresh lens to the postcolonial situation introduces accessible retrospection about and from the past in addition to providing more opportunities to re-shape traditional

boundaries. From another perspective this approach overcomes the essentialist pitfall that subaltern studies have gone through leading to its fading out. Subaltern studies focused on studying history of the subaltern as separate from the colonial experience. Other than being challenged by mostly appropriated information of the Indian subaltern, the programme researchers are caught in the very same exclusionist discourse they have attempted to avoid. This paper has unlocked the potential of culinary performance to social and political critiques. Culinary storytelling portrays the play's powerful indictment of colonialism and corporate capitalism. Sy transforms the stage into a space of critical inquiry, challenging the audience to reconsider their relationship with food as an artifact of history and a product of contemporary global economics. The play's central thesis, articulated through irony and direct address, is clear: everything we eat tells a story, and those stories are often deeply political. Sy direct and tangible involvement with food and the audience revisits political theatre from a wholly different lens; the dinner plate. Respectively, the play manages to evade mainstream revelations that stem out of colonial history when the framework of ethical gastronomy is adopted as an updated lens incorporating planetarian interests.

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