Cultural Globalization and the Soul Food Memoir: Austin Clarke, Ntozake Shange and Marlon Riggs

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1. Austin Clarke’s Toronto

I begin this consideration of Austin Clarke and the book *Pigtails ‘n Breadfruit*, offering two partial and tentative observations. The first has to do with recent media coverage of two fairly young chefs in North America, and the second concerns the emergence of the Canadian version of the television channel, The Food Network, known as Food Network Canada, in the fall of 2000. Both of these events have direct bearing on the reading and reception of Clarke’s memoir on cooking, in that they help us to place his work.

I begin here in order to suggest a connection with Clarke’s memoir, the changing world of contemporary haute cuisine, and what we might call the lifestyle “revolution” currently taking place in much of Western Europe and North America, including Canada. Moreover, I want to make some comments about genre. In other words, I want to probe the significance of the turn toward lifestyle culture from the point of view of black cultural studies. This probing is indeed necessary given that a number of black critics and cultural producers have recently attempted to use lifestyle themes as ways to interrogate their lives and the worlds around them. For example, in addition to Clarke’s memoir, consider the following, which in the name of addressing questions of life, culture and community, have turned to food and/or garden as metaphors. Witness Marlon Riggs (1995) *Black Is – Black Ain’t*; Ntozake Shange’s (1998) *If I Can Cook, You Know God Can*.¹

The turn to lifestyle cultures may cause some critics to dismiss these new interventions as another form of bourgeois excess, divorced from political concerns. Yet here, I agree with Franca Iacovetta, whose recent essay (2000) “Recipes for Democracy,” suggests that while we might be cynical of changes in food culture which involve the celebration of certain “ethnic foods” previously marked, by virtue of racist discourse, as dirty, smelly or unsavoury, we must also recognize the enabling possibilities of these shifts. Specifically, for the purpose of this paper, what is interesting is the enabling possibilities of this shift from the point of view of genre. In
other words, how can we, as black critics and cultural producers, intervene in this new genre, and re-write it from the point of view of our experiences, from those interior to the cooking cultures, as it were. In addition, the paper intends to provoke the following question: What are the ways in which the food and lifestyle revolution have caused changes in the genre of black studies, black cultural studies, and African American studies?

First, the two young chefs. Recently, both Susur Lee, formerly of Toronto’s Lotus restaurant, and now owner-chef at the eponymous Susur in Toronto, and Marcus Samuelsson, owner-chef of Aquavit restaurant in New York, have emerged with great fanfare and media hype as two exciting and innovative chefs. Within a very large group of fine dining chefs in North America from a range of cuisines and styles, they are being pegged as two of the ones to watch. In the fall 2000, *Gourmet’s* Lolis Eric Elie calls Samuelsson “one of the most innovative chefs in the world.” Samuelsson recently received the prestigious James Beard award as the most impressive young chef in the United States; he is known as the youngest chef ever to receive a three-star restaurant rating by the *New York Times*. In addition, he has been featured in *Gourmet Magazine* and television’s Food Network.

In Toronto, similar praise is lavished upon Lee, who appears to be ahead of his cohorts and competition by leaps and bounds. *The Globe and Mail’s* esteemed food critic, Joanne Kates, simply calls Lee “the king.” In addition to the *Globe* piece, the fall of 2000 saw Lee being featured by a series of local and national media outlets, like *The Toronto Star, Toronto Life*, and *Now Magazine*. In all of these reviews, he is deemed to be on his own when it comes to fine dining in Canada. In fact, judging by the recent media appreciation of him, Lee cannot be measured by the same yardstick, because his breadth of ingredients, technique, as well as his skill, make him almost unsurpassable.

A couple of things are worth mentioning by way of linking Lee and Samuelsson. First, is their age. Both have achieved culinary superstardom at a relatively young age. But second, and perhaps more importantly, what links them is the kind of chefs they have become. Specifically, I am referring to their status as chefs renowned in fine dining circles who, while being mindful and very skilled at classic French cooking techniques and ingredients, are also located significantly outside the French tradition and its Eurocentric list of ingredients and techniques. Or, perhaps more accurately, their location in North America does not compromise their use of other culinary traditions located elsewhere. In other words, their culinary styles are located, at least in part, outside the culinary canon in the West.
More to the point, they locate their culinary styles in places whose cuisines have only recently (if at all) become worthy of fine dining lists in the restaurants of Europe and North America. Lee, for example, is heavily rooted in both Chinese and pan-Asian culinary traditions. After closing down his first restaurant, Lotus, in 1996, he spent between 1997 and 2000 working as a food consultant to restaurant multinationals in Singapore. During that period, Lee, who was born in Hong Kong, frequently traveled back and forth from Canada to Singapore, and while in Singapore, traveled extensively in the surrounding region, such as Malaysia and Thailand. All of these trips, according to Toronto Life food writer James Chatto, were necessary in order to further develop and refine Lee’s cuisine. For Samuelsson, an Ethiopian-born orphan who grew up in Sweden and now lives in New York, the list of culinary ingredients in his repertoire is impressive. In addition to making Swedish food the stuff of fine dining (apparently not an easy task) Samuelsson has also managed to add a number of Ethiopian-inspired dishes in his restaurant’s menu, something extremely rare given the stigmatization of virtually all African ingredients and cooking techniques in fine dining circles.

The success of Lee and Samuelsson is not unrelated to the fact that they place themselves outside of the French tradition, and continually work against and re-invent it. Thus, while the success of Lee and Samuelsson is definitely related to skill, it is equally related to the way in which “external” ingredients are crucial to the cuisine. In other words, we might read these two chefs and their surrounding fanfare as part of a shift away from Europe and “classical” French cuisine in many of North America’s major cities. Moreover, and this prefaced what I will be arguing later in the paper, their success might directly be a result of the extent to which each chef is developing his own version of “soul” food. In addition, the popularity of Lee and Samuelsson may also be a product of larger cultural and economic shifts, and the movement of people and products as part of a form of cultural globalization Arjun Appadurai (1998) has referred to as “Modernity at Large.”

Speaking specifically to the need to imagine ethnicity as existing far beyond national borders, Appadurai coined a term “ethnoscapes” to deal with these changing realities. As he writes (1998: 33: italics in original):

by ethnoscapes, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.

It is clear that the creation and existence of several ethnoscapes, both new and old (e.g. Indian, Japanese, Chilean) have had a
tremendous impact on the politics of food, both at the level of production and consumption. Such shifts, I would argue, have made it possible for Asian-influenced cuisine, from places as distinct as Malaysia, Thailand, and Hong Kong, to emerge as significant cuisines in the mind set of many North Americans. It is worth noting that this form of Asian cuisine is totally different from the previously ghettoized space of “Chinese” food, consisting of won ton soup, chicken balls, etc. which was always relatively inexpensive and which dot the landscape of most cities in North America, from the very large to the very small, and which are often located in economically marginalized areas. In sum, forms of cultural globalization have in many ways allowed for the emergence of a new and public multi-cultural food discourse in the West, which was previously unknown, and perhaps previously unimaginable.

Interestingly, this has coincided, and perhaps been aided by, the emergence of “lifestyle culture” in North America in the past twenty years. This boom in “lifestyle” culture is typified by the boom in specialty cooking stores, celebrity chefs with their own television shows, the emergence of a plethora of food and wine magazines and a countless supply of new cookbooks. This shift has been part of an increasing trend towards cultural privatization, which finds middle-class folks spending far more time at home than they did in previous generations. Moreover, it has made a significant impact on public culture, and in a way that has been somewhat detrimental to urban public culture in North America.6

It is important to note that this trend towards cultural globalization is not one-sided. For example, in spite of the creation of culinary ethnoscapes and the significant deterritorialization of culinary cultures, Eurocentric forms of reterritorialization in food culture are persisting. In fact, speaking specifically of Toronto, where Lee is “king,” the Eurocentrism of most major dining rooms is quite striking, and is at odds with the ethnocultural make-up of the city and the huge presence of places like Chinatown, Little India and Kensington Market for most of the city’s inhabitants. This reality exists alongside the enormous success of Little Italy in Toronto’s West End, Greektown in Toronto’s East end, and the re-emergence of “classic” French bistro cooking in the city’s centre, where it seems that each week a new restaurant pops up, which is very similar to the one next door. These hegemonic practices act to limit the expression of racial difference and mark or the limits of otherness in the city’s main eating venues. After all, we might suggest that Greek and Italy, as well as Portugal, represent the place where white Europe ends and brown/black Europe begins, at least as far as the south of Europe is concerned. In addition, it is my experience that in other smaller cities across Canada, similar things are happening.
For example, at the level of labour, it is very rare, even in cosmopolitan places such as Vancouver, to find black servers and/or servers of colour at fine dining establishments, not to mention chefs. In smaller centres such as Edmonton or Halifax, it is unfortunately even rarer.7

Moreover, the major patrons of Toronto’s more exclusive restaurants, often residing in Toronto’s 905-area and commuting into the downtown, have benefited from economic and cultural shifts which have been increasingly right-wing and reactionary, and which are founded upon anti-urban backlash and the disdain for a version of multi-culturalism (albeit flawed) rare anywhere else in the world. Moreover, in other cities, the turf war is indeed a curious phenomenon. Thus, with social policy becoming increasingly conservative, and urban centres becoming increasingly multi-cultural, these struggles play themselves out in curious ways; the dining table, whether dining in or dining out, is often the place where these differences manifest itself.

This struggle brings me to my next point, which concerns the emergence of the Canadian version of the television channel Food Network, Food Network Canada in October 2000. While it would seem exciting to imagine Susur Lee or Austin Clarke on the channel, teaching us all a few tricks, their presences on the channel would be next to impossible given that they are simply off the imagined ethnoscapes of Food Network Canada. By contrast to the multicultural and cosmopolitan Canada which exists for many us, Food Network Canada chose to define Canadian cuisine in its most narrow sense, often defining it through a host of parochial stereotypes of Canadian cooking, which include the fiddlehead, pork and apple sauce, and the fact that the celebration of Thanksgiving is “in October, not November.” These so-called distinctions, which incidentally, work to mark both Canada and the United States as white, were made most apparent in the signature commercial of the network, which featured Canadian chef Ken Kostick spoofing the Molson “I am Canadian” ads and performing Canadiana. While the Food Network ad is meant as a spoof, a look at most of the major shows reveals the way that Food Network Canada reproduces these cliches, and offer a highly Eurocentric cuisine, suffused with a dollop of parochialism and backwardness, topped off with a superficial anti-Americanism.

This anti-Americanism, which deploys the famous manicheism of the melting pot versus the mosaic is seen as more fiction that fact given a quick perusal of the content of the American version of the channel. With such programs as East meets West with Ming Tsai, featuring the Asian American chef doing Asian translations of French “classics”; Hot off the Grill with white American Bobby Flay
basically doing Mexican food (which he calls Southwestern-French) as fine dining; and *Melting Pot*, which features a series of chefs who work outside of the Eurocentric cooking canon. As such, the range of ingredients and techniques offered on the American channel belies any easy stereotypical categorization of Americans as less multicultural than Canadians. Moreover, this comparison shows up the outdated and thoroughly Canadian practice of trying to keep racial difference at its borders or to certain ghettoized sections within Canadian cities and suburbs, while all the while claiming that “we” are more multicultural than “our” southern neighbours.

Which brings me to my readings of Austin Clarke’s memoir, *Pigtails ‘n Breadfruit*. But before I get to Clarke, I offer one more little detour. Consider the following quotation from Samuelsson in the *Gourmet* magazine feature:

> The future of cooking, according to Marcus Samuelsson, is personal. Soon, we will stop boxing great chefs onto narrow ghettos of national or ethnic cuisine. “What will emerge is an era of ‘personal cuisine’” he says, in which cooking will be defined by all of a chef’s influences.

While it is easy to read this as a statement of liberal humanism, it is also possible to think of it in light of the previous discussions. In other words, we may read this statement as one which rebels against national cuisine, made by someone who clearly has an uneasy relation to nation and nationalism, and seems to borrow what he needs from nation when he needs it. Samuelsson’s call for a post-national cuisine gives us pause to ponder this statement in light of what is an apparent contradiction between that and the particular logic of retracing, and the predominance of something called nation, which seemingly structures most of the writing on food in the current time, including the writing on food and black folks, in what I call the soul food memoir.

### 2. Food Genre

Undoubtedly, writers of the soul food memoir are tapping into the new excitement which is being circulated around lifestyle cultures. But specifically, these new memoirs are intended to add something to what is, by and large, still a very anthropological and stereotypical approach to ethnic and social difference which is still dominant within much contemporary writing on food. Moreover, we might read these writers at the nexus of two traditions, one new one old. The first is the historical and familial way of discussing, preparing and eating food in black communities across the diaspora, and the second is this new larger cultural preoccupation with food, from many parts of the globe. As such, these new memoirs are attempting to put into words the comfort that is derived from the eating of soul
food. Clarke, Shange and the late Riggs are putting forward memoirs which are derived from their hearts and bellies to deal with alienation, isolation, and hardship from within the space of blackness and black lives. In a sense, we might read the soul food memoir as a response to the parochialism found on Food Network Canada, and the general public ignorance and/or fetishization with both ingredients (e.g. okra, ackees, collard greens, and pigtails) and recipes (e.g. gumbo, pepperpot, rice and beans/peas) which, over centuries, have become local to black diasporic cultures.

Fundamentally, the soul food memoir reveals the existence of an axis of memory which allows us to understand food, and more importantly, our lives, far beyond the stereotype. This axis remembers food and its centrality to black popular culture through the primary logic of a retracing. The logic of retracing – which simply means that within the structure of the narrative, there is a continual recalling of origins – sets up an interesting dynamic and is not simply a way to remember dishes that were eaten and parties that people threw. Moreover, these memoirs allow for a special re-writing of black histories and popular culture from the point of view of the body, where food, needless to say, occupies a central place. This axis of memory is the place along which we retrace journeys, remember people and in effect, smell and taste the past. It most often is that which produces comfort and fond memories, while it could easily be used to recall troubling and uncomfortable moments.

These ideas, and the revisions to form in writing about food, emerge strongly in Shange’s *If I Can Cook*. Shange opens her book referencing the question of hunger in its various meanings, and writes (1998: 2): “I am drawn to visions of Africans, like me, during the Middle Passage. I want to know what we yearned for, dreamt of, talked about, if we could manage.” Shange’s memoir looks at how food works in the making of black pleasure and pain in the diaspora. More specifically, she wants to know how much yearning, which includes yearning for *food* has shaped the political and intellectual routes taken in African diaspora cultures. Further on in her introduction, she notes (1998: 3):

We can extrapolate the Middle Passage to the daily sojourns of homeless families in Washington, D.C. or Portland. We can be even more concrete and dwell on the experiences of the Haitian boat people, whose rafts, small fishing vessels, carried more black folks away from home to forcible detention.

Shange’s meditation, and her questioning of the meaning of hunger suggest that there is something vital in trying to recover histories of food, and the history of black attachments to these foods, as part and parcel of the story of blackness in the current context. At the level of form, Shange’s immeasurable contribution is to be able to offer a culinary re-reading of black popular culture. Her book, which
she refers to as (ibid: 3) “perusals of history, literature, vernacular, culture, and philosophy, ‘long with absolutely fabulous receipts’ (recipes)” is an attempt to chart and listen for the resonances of Africanist foods as they reappear across the diaspora, from Brazil, to Trinidad and Tobago to South Carolina. Shange’s work retraces the Middle Passage, as well as the movements of major black revolutionaries – Toussaint De L’Ouverture, Frederick Douglas, C.L.R. James and Maurice Bishop – in the course of her discoveries. If I Can Cook writes the food diaspora; each essay attempts to fuse memories of black politics with those of food. Vertamae Grosvenor, in her foreword to Shange, suggests that:

in the tradition of Dumas, Collette, Amado, and other writers, (she) understands the importance and connections of food and culture and how they are entwined in our everyday lives and manifest on our tables.

Clarke’s memoir is somewhat different only to the extent that it is not consciously concerned with genre, although it clearly is trying to make similar claims to Shange. If anything, Pigtails is a much more personal memoir, and is concerned with detailing the passage to Canada from Barbados and the establishment of a black life in this country. He begins in polemical style, with Clarke noting that food is (1998: 1) “a word that defines my life.” He goes on, one page later, to explain the power and importance of food to his life. In paraphrasing his mother, he notes (ibid: 2) that: “Food to her, as to me, is something very special, almost supernatural.” Such an emphatic and polemical beginning is worth underlining since it is difficult to find such programmatic statements in Clarke’s other works, specifically his memoir Growing up Stupid Under the Union Jack.

Clarke’s polemical style is exemplified in the imperative instructions that litter the book. It is as though Clarke suggests that there is no room for mistakes in the attempt to recreate culture. For example, in the chapter entitled “Bakes”, Clarke writes (ibid: 51): “Now, you have the water in a glass; you don’t need no measuring cup . . . You can use club soda instead of plain water, ‘cause you want bubbles in your bakes, to make them light, man!” These instructions offer a way of telling the outsider to Bajan cuisine how to cook, step by laborious step. For Clarke, and this links him with Shange in spite of their differences in style, is the connection of food to place. For both Clarke and Shange, each dish has a place and the memory of each dish recalls the memory of a certain place. Whether it is Clarke recalling an evening in South Carolina, his childhood in Clapham, or his bitterness about trying to stay warm on a cold winter’s evening in Toronto, the idea of a recipe without a place is unthinkable, and each recipe acts as a sort of culinary signpost, on a map of memories.

Moreover, Clarke uses the soul food memoir to come to terms with the women who raised him. In Pigtails, Clarke writes (1999: 8):
Always, in this village, I was surrounded by women – not the girls with whom I played girls games, like hide and seek, or dollies or house, but grown women. Severe and beautiful and strong; mysterious as the books I was reading; charitable, but willing on the slightest impulse to reprimand me for the smallest disregard for their status.

Curiously, despite a quasi-romantic attempt to heroize these women, the book offers a sensitive portrayal of the women of Clarke’s boyhood; and he does so here in a much more explicit way than in *Growing Up Stupid*. Moreover, the women in *Pigtails* seem to be layered in a much more intimate way than in some of Clarke’s fictional work, for example *The Bigger Light* and *The Origin of Waves*. Remembering the women in his childhood community seems to be Clarke’s way of remembering the past, and throughout the book, Clarke uses the memoir as a way to remember his mother, who, according to Clarke, “lived her life in full feminist independence, even before anyone in Barbados knew anything about single parents or independent spirited women.”

Interestingly Marlon Riggs, in *Black Is*, deploys the metaphor of gumbo, and the memory of family dinners to do a similar thing, which is to recall the women who raised him, specifically his mother and grandmother. Riggs’ mother plays an extremely important role in the film. Moreover, Riggs’ re-membering is also cross-cut by a deep and vulnerable meditation on the makeup of black communities and their methods of disciplining and punishing outsiders, especially those who challenge the norms of heterosexuality and hard masculinity. In addition, Riggs’ discussion goes on at the same time as he laments the fact that he hardly ever talked to his father, something similar to many other black gay male writers, including James Baldwin and Joseph Beam. Thus, Riggs, we need to read soul food as deeply ambivalent, in the way that memory often is, at once liberating and at once constraining.

Clarke’s invocation of women is similar to Riggs, and in some senses it allows us to read the soul food memoir as a place where black women’s voices speak in very interesting and sustaining ways. However, what is missing is Clarke’s memoir, and that of Shange, is a meditation on the ambivalence of food, and its tendency to reproduce hierarchical lines of power. As a result, the glorification of women in the soul food memoir has one potential problem – which is that by positioning women in this way means that there is a risk of reproducing patriarchal norms and stereotypes about black women as always nurturing, and or always relegated to the kitchen. Moreover, a related problem is that we read the past only through our mothers and thereby marginalizing their place in the present.

These problems aside, the soul food memoir is a crucial genre to address questions of memory, the gendering of the past, and the re-
membering of people and places. In addition, one of the other enabling things about this genre is the question of home, and what it means to locate and/or dislocate one’s self. To quote Grosvenor, we might read the soul food memoir as a testimony to the fact that although we may leave home, get rid of our accents, and change our names and diets, the aroma of certain foods will trigger warm memories and fill us with a longing and taste to return home.

Food, or the lack of it, clearly tell the story of home for Riggs, Clarke and Shange. As such, it is no coincidence that Marlon Riggs’ last video, Black Is, made while the author was dying as a result of AIDS-related illnesses, was a meditation on questions of black identity, wherein food and family were central.

The centrality of home to black food memoirs needs little explanation. In a way, this form of memoir represents another attempt to resist the anthropological pull found in most food writing (of which I spoke earlier), which acts to carnivalize and brutalize black popular cultures within its underlying imperative of translating black foods to a presumed white audience. Food and its centrality are often what is reached for in times of crisis, and it often emerges as an attempt to replace what has been lost through exile, dislocation and displacement.

3. The New Soul

In this third section, I attempt to connect the two disparate sections of the paper, which include a discussion of changing food demographics, the emergence of lifestyle culture, culinary preferences and the soul food memoir. Clearly, as I have shown, one of the key points of intersection is that the soul food memoir acts as a way to remember racism and displacement and the role of food in the fight against it. In other words, remembering food is inseparable from remembering, and resisting the parochialism of hostile countries. Moreover, there is no question that the return to traditions can also be a political dead end. A return to tradition isn’t always healthy; it may be held up in the face of forms of cooking which appear to be fancy and impure, and perhaps implicitly, queer, a position Clarke’s work veers somewhat close to. However, it must be said, and this is the success of the Riggs’ video, that home is always an unsettling place, and the drive to normalize, under the guise of food, can be very damaging. This is the place where I take issue with Clarke and Shange, who, in attempting to establish a place for the food of their memory, were unable to account for food as that which is displacing, alienating, and ultimately unsatisfying. Here, I am thinking specifically of the gendered way that food is consumed in produced, whereby generally, and seemingly
universally women are far more likely to be asked to help cook, and boys are far more likely to not have to prepare food, and swoop in to get the best cuts of meat, and or the sweetmeats, when the meal is ready to be served. In addition, it is also true that in discussing food in black popular culture, the question of body image among black women is a central one. Eating disorders, obsessions with diet, and looking like a proper woman are of central concern to black popular culture, and need to be explored if food is going to be a part of black cultural studies.

But in addition to the ambiguity of memory and the gendered way that this occurs, I offer one further enabling way to read the soul food memoir, which is against the grain of its own logic of retracing, as it were. Another look at Clarke’s location in Toronto offers an example of this. While it is clear that *Pigtails* is a Barbadian memoir, it is also an irreducibly Canadian story/text.11 This is clear if we consider the position of the reader. The reader, as mentioned above, is clearly someone unfamiliar with Bajan cooking, and thus someone who must be led through each recipe. In a way, and perhaps as a result of this, the voice of the author is two-sided. This is also true of Riggs and Shange. While it is clear that *Pigtails* is written in the first person of Clarke’s voice, it is clear that other voices also occupy the text as well. At times one could also read Clarke, not as speaking to the cooking outsider, but as remembering the voice of his own mother telling the young boy how to cook. Moreover, the Bajan recipes he marshals are often set up in attempt to set up a binary between what Clarke imagines as the spiritually bountiful Caribbean and the comparatively barren Canadian north.

This distinction, between the once-bountiful and the now-barren, is, albeit alluring, fictive and somewhat limiting. The reason this is the case is that it does not allow for a discussion of the severely hybrid and improvisational ways that immigrant cooking gets produced outside of “home,” where ingredients are scarce, and frozen foods must be substituted for fresh ones, and so on. In Toronto and in other diasporic places, new and incredibly hybrid cooking emerges out of both necessity and style, witness Susur Lee and Marcus Samuelsson. Moreover, Clarke’s emphasis on getting it right contradicts his earlier emphasis on improvisation, and the art of the creativity of the human senses over the deliberation of the written recipe. As Clarke himself admits, the book rests on a paradox (3):

It is ironical to be suggesting a book about food cooked in Barbados, because in every self-respecting Barbadian household the woman (who does most of the cooking, whether she is wife, daughter or maid) would not be caught dead with a cookbook… In this idea of having to be shown how to cook from the pages of a book lies an ineradicable assault upon the culture and character of Barbadian women.

Of course, Clarke is right. This is the supreme irony of the book, and it may speak to the irony and the ambiguity in the soul food memoir in general, which relies on remembering something that is ultimately gone, in the past. In the sense that Bajan cooking, and the black cooking described by Shange and Riggs, are rituals of slave food, or histories of improvisation, the question of recipes is really quite partial and halting. And thus, the soul food memoir is ultimately a hybrid text. As much as slaves coming from Africa may have wished to reproduce their cuisine, the conditions did not allow for it, and recipes took on oral forms, resided in memory, and were substantially altered. Perhaps it is for this reason that in *Black is – Black Ain’t*, Riggs, while telling us all about his famous recipe for gumbo, withholds the one part of the recipe which holds the gumbo together, which is the roux. Moreover, it might explain why there was no recipe for pigtails ‘n breadfruit in Clarke’s book of the same title.

This ironical hinge if you will, or the missing recipe (in Shange the roux is also a secret), might be the condition which enables the soul food memoir, because as much as Clarke wants to make this a Bajan memoir, the signature recipe is missing. Moreover, this omission suggests that his life, and the food within it, is not bound up in Barbados, and he is equally compelled to remember South Carolina, Kensington Market and other places. In that sense, *Pigtails* is a paradoxical text, and Clarke, who appears very committed to nation, comes close to Samuelsson, who eschews nation and sees “personal cuisine” as the wave of the future. Thus, as much as *Pigtails* is a Bajan story, it is also the story of many homes; and much like many immigrant stories, it is replete with twists, turns and re-turns. In a way, as these twists and turns tells us, we might suggest that “personal cuisine,” as well as being the way of the future, is also the way of the past.

**Notes**

1 In addition, consider Jamaica Kincaid’s (1999) *My Garden Book*. The book is about gardening, and thus outside my purview here, but it is definitely a significant black lifestyle memoir.

2 Keep in mind that the search for young “stars” is as frenetic as it is in other pop cultural realms, such as sports, television and so on. These designations are not completely divorced from the larger capitalist impulse to sell magazines, cooking equipment and so on.

3 While Lee is certainly familiar with classical French techniques, he did not apprentice there, but rather at the Peninsular Hotel in Hong Kong.

4 Please see James Chatto, Fall 2000.

5 Here I am making a distinction between economic globalization, which involves, for example, the creation of Free Trade zones, and the liberalization of trade policies, and the movement of goods across borders, with cultural globalization, which can be summarized as the continuous criss-crossing of
people and places, which help to make the world a culturally “smaller” space. Cultural globalization, it must be recognized, has existed far before what is now commonly referred to as globalization. While I recognize that these things are extremely interconnected, and while I recognize that economic globalization has also been around at least as long as European capitalism, a larger discussion here is outside of the purview of this paper.

6 While this direction is outside the purview of my paper, it is an area which needs much more investigation, both by myself and others.

7 In New York, this seems to be different.

8 In the fall of 2001, after a year of being on the air, Food Network Canada has changed somewhat. Ken Kostick, who was to be the Canadian version of U.S. superstar Emeril Lagasse, no longer is on the network. The three main stars of the network are now Rob Feenie, from Vancouver’s Lumiére Restaurant, Michael Smith of Maple in Halifax, and Christine Cushing. While the network is no longer insistent on cliche’d definitions of Canadian cuisine, the U.S. counterpart, which has added a number of shows focusing on cuisine from Asia and South Asia, is still far more multicultural.

9 For Baldwin, please see The Fire Next Time; and for Beam, please see his essay “Brother to Brother: Words from the Heart” in the book Brother to Brother.

10 For the latest particularly egregious example of racism and anthropology in food writing, see Anthony Bourdain’s (2001) A Cook’s Tour.

11 It is worth noting here that memory is a central feature of much of the fiction and non-fiction in Clarke’s body of work.

12 For more on this, see the Grosvenor foreword in Shange.

References

1. Books and Articles:

2. Videos: