Ruining Dessert: On Chocolate Cake and White Supremacy in Poland

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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Washington
2021

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Jackson School of International Studies

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Abstract

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This thesis seeks to establish how deeply anti-Black racism has become ingrained in Polish culture through the everyday example of murzynek, a chocolate cake that became popular with home cooks in twentieth century Poland. Its name in literal translation is the diminutive form of an offensive racial epithet used to refer to a Black individual. In order to show how this cake is just one manifestation of mundane efforts to distinguish Poland as a white nation, where whiteness signifies power in a Western colonized world order, this series of essays approaches this example from multiple points of entry. Each chapter is bookended with fictional vignettes, a story across time and space of a family much like the author's family. Fiction grounds the main issues of racial superiority, working class struggles, and colonial desire in the real world by experimenting with anti-racist creative praxis. Because food is a tangible and comforting thread that connects us to our homes and heritages, inventing new stories through speculative fiction changes the narratives of race, empire, and power that circulate throughout Poland and its diaspora.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements …………………………………………………………………………… 2

Prologue
Wildest Imaginations, 2021 ..……………………………………………………… 3
Introduction ……………………………………………………………………… 4

Chapter 1
Second Shifts, 1981 …………………………………………………………..… 10
On Murzynek …………………………………………………………………… 13

Chapter 2
En Route to Chicago, 1990 ……………………………………………………… 22
On the Journey to Cocoa ………………………………………………………. 26

Chapter 3
Farmlands, 2016 ……………………………………………………………….. 33
On Colonial Desire …………………………………………………………….. 37

Chapter 4
California, 2003 ..……………………………………………………………... 45
On Making from Memory ………………………………………………………. 47

Epilogue
Bracing for Impact, 2021 ……………………………………...……………….. 55
Conclusion ……………………………………………………………………... 56

Appendix ……………………………………………………………………………….. 59

Bibliography ……………..…………………………………………………………….. 60

Acknowledgements

Nie pozwól rozpłynąć się skupieniu	Don't allow the lucid moment to dissolve
Niech nieruchomo trwa błyszcząca chwila	Let the radiant thought last in stillness
choć kończy się kartka i migoce płomień	though the page is almost filled and the flame flickers
Jeszcze nie dostajemy do siebie	We haven't risen yet to the level of ourselves
Powoli jak ząb mądrości rośnie wiedza …	Knowledge grows slowly like a wisdom tooth …

— Adam Zagajewski, trans. Renata Gorczynski

This work is first and foremost for my family, and for the families who surround my family, in the neglected towns and exploding cities and silent countryside of Poland. Even if you don’t recognize me anymore, I will always recognize you. Knowledge grows slowly, after all.

To my committee members, Professors Laada Bilaniuk, Sasha Senderovich, and Sasha Welland: I am grateful for your generosity, patience, and encouragement. Your feedback and support has given me the confidence to take this work into the world with open mindedness and conviction.

Love and respect to the hardworking members of the REECAS cohort, as well as my dear friend and fellow graduate student Elena Ramírez, whose help, advice, and nurturance made it possible for me to see this through.

The most heartful thanks to my mother for her unconditional love and support. And the deepest love to Mateo, without whom I would be a lesser woman.

Unless noted otherwise, all translations from the Polish are my own.

Prologue

Wildest Imaginations, 2021

The year is 1994, I am 23 years old, and I have just materialized in front of my grandparents, their children, and my grandmother's parents sitting around the kitchen table. The parquet floors creak under the weight of my sudden arrival, made possible by the twenty first century miracle of time travel.

I know I'm in the right place and time because the kitchen looks the way it did before it would be remodeled by the steady flow of American dollars saved from years of housecleaning. Six pairs of eyes stare innocuously in my direction, as if they could see only the enamel sink behind me. In front of them, bone white dessert plates resembling doilies hold laughably thin slices of what appears to be chocolate cake, no thicker than the width of a banknote.

Hello Wojtases. I am your granddaughter from the future. I have come to inform you that we are all racists.

My grandparents do not skip a beat. They deliver their lines as if they had been consistently forgetting them in rehearsal for a school theater production but have now become determined to hastily spit them out.

Of all the ways in which our kin have caused us shame—of all the ways our kin will cause us shame—of all the births out of wedlock, the clandestine gay cousin, the unfeeling and cruel mothers, the affairs, the brain tumors, the stolen heirlooms—you, by far, are the most shameful. You, alone, have somehow reached for the unreachable star of our alleged racism.

And while we're enjoying dessert, no less?

How could you ruin dessert like this?

Introduction

What meaning does making and eating dessert carry for Polish national and racial identities? This thesis seeks to establish how deeply anti-Black racism has become ingrained in Polish culture through the everyday example of *murzynek*, a chocolate cake that became popular with home cooks in the twentieth century. Its name in literal translation is the diminutive form of an offensive racial epithet used to refer to a Black individual. In order to show how this cake is just one manifestation of mundane efforts to distinguish Poland as a white nation, where whiteness signifies power in a Western colonized world order, I have crafted this thesis as a series of essays that approach this example from multiple points of entry.

The first chapter provides an overview of the implicated word, its history and complicated presence in contemporary Polish speech, along with some examples of its usage in cultural discourse. This chapter should inspire the reader to question how colonialism has shaped Polish racial identity, as signified by the language used to refer to non-white racial Others. The second chapter then moves into a discussion of the ingredient central to the chocolate cake—cocoa. The enduring legacies of colonialism are made obvious by an exploration of the cocoa trade, both past and present. It is important to establish how this system of power functions through this particular foodway, especially when linked to consequences of colonialism on racial formations across the globe. As such, the third chapter takes the reader to the specific example of Poland and aims to navigate the complex position of the country as both a colonial subject and aspiring colonial power, and the resulting racial ideologies that have stemmed from these histories. Finally, by engaging memories of baking and eating this cake, the fourth chapter attempts to reconcile the emotional dimensions of a beloved cultural touchstone with the practical realities of these systemic issues. In this chapter, I use my own nostalgic reflections of my family kitchen to identify opportunities to interrupt the casual racism that white Poles typically ignore.

Before diving into the story of this cake and its usefulness in speaking to broader topics on race and racism in Poland, I want to note how and why I will be writing about it. As I explain in greater depth in the following chapters, the word *Murzyn* is a common but offensive Polish word that lends its name to the cake I mentioned above, *murzynek*. Contemporary movements for anti-racism in Poland have paid particular attention to the vulgarity and violence of these words, both in academic and popular settings. One of the most prominent, current examples of a call to move away from offensive terminology has found traction over the last year. Following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, Black Poles created a new campaign to address issues of anti-Blackness in their own country. The movement, #DontCallMeMurzyn, gives voice to the community of Black people in Poland who must navigate a country that is presumed externally and internally to be racially and ethnically homogenous. Even among 97 percent of white residents, that still means that approximately one million people identify as people of color. Police violence, linguistic microaggressions, health discrimination—these issues and many more are felt acutely by the Black Polish population and largely unthought of by white Poles. The volume of #DontCallMeMurzyn, its visibility on social media and in news outlets, has led to an increase in awareness and a newfound commitment to learning about the realities of race and racism in Poland among allies of the movement (Mecking and Terry 2020).

Due to the ongoing calls to stop using this word, I will be writing the name of the cake as "m—— cake," except for when directly quoting from another source or in the sections of this thesis that are ethnographic fiction. I have chosen to create a multigenre text that pairs traditional, academic nonfiction with fiction in order to pull my reader deeper into the cultural experience of everyday racism in Poland. Because these fictional passages are based loosely on my memories and those of my family members, I want to preserve the context in which white Poles like myself hear and learn to use these words.

My family is among the white Poles about which I am writing in this thesis. In June of 1995, my grandparents and mother emigrated from Poland to California, where they began the new life that had been promised them thanks to a winning ticket in a visa lottery. They traded the unstable, corrupt conditions of post-socialist Poland for the stories of true democracy and endless resources in the capitalist West. In the mildewy kitchen of a generic, East Bay townhouse, my grandmother cooked and baked all her home foods. Life was supposed to be easier here. For twenty years, she watched over the kitchen countertop as her daughter and granddaughter grew up, mired in the US American lifestyle that everyone back home thoughtlessly admired, but that really only amounted to harder work for lower pay.

In the old country, everyone said of the United States that all the stores there were full of foodstuffs the people in Poland could never have imagined. At least that was true; my grandmother loved the stores in this country, the way they were always stocked to the brim with choices, grotesque in their abundance, inviting her to spend what little money she earned under the table cleaning houses and watching other peoples' children. Most importantly, she never doubted the availability of items that in Poland were elusive, like nylon stockings, citrus fruit, sturdy toilet paper, and cocoa powder. She fell head over heels for the excess of the United States. For this reason, I ate m—— cake in excess, too.

I was raised in a household permeated with immigrant neuroses. Each of my family members struggled with their own fears and anxieties about the realities of the United States, the new identities they were acquiring, and the past life that rapidly faded into a confusing amalgam of nostalgia and obscurity. In our intergenerational home, I watched my grandparents make sense of the racial diversity of our working-class neighborhood. They found many opportunities to show off their casual anti-Blackness, whether it was criticisms of the demographics of the discount grocery store or disparaging comments about suspect profiles shown during the nightly news. I was raised by my single mother, who decided early that she would shield me from nothing so I would always know the truth about the bitterness and hardships of the world. For long periods of time, I was sent back to Poland with one of my relatives, where I learned to speak Polish and developed my understanding of what it means to be an American in Poland, a Pole in America, and Polish-American.

Years later, I have supplemented my early childhood experiences with continued, deep personal and academic engagements with these and many other questions of identity. As I have interrogated the meaning of Polish identity, I have been forced to also reckon with whiteness and colonialism. Therefore, through the close examination of the story of m—— cake, I am investigating how these systems of power have molded what it means to be Polish. Its naturalization as a Polish culinary artifact reinforces a complex web of violences that feed on and into each other at the level of everyday life. Meanwhile, quite literally, Polish families like my own have fed on a cake that bears the name of a racist epithet predicated on global white supremacist ideologies bred by Western colonialism.

Although Poland never rose to the ranks of colonial powers like Germany, France, and Great Britain, and in fact has at many points in history identified itself with subalternity, it is currently a powerful, European nation-state with a disturbing commitment to ultra-right, ethnonationalist governance. This historical frustration with being unable to compete with or even emulate imperial and colonizing forces has manifested in an obsession with power through national identity and its link to whiteness. In fact, since the early twentieth century, contemporary attitudes of white Poles about white superiority have mirrored those of the citizens of Western Europe, while Poles of color lead demonstrations and campaigns for anti-racism, as evidenced by the example of #DontCallMeMurzyn. But this desperate grasp onto white supremacy as a means of accessing power comes as no surprise, especially as Poles may claim whiteness as entangled with their cultural heritage. Colonialism and white supremacy are like mother and child; even if Poland could not birth its own colonial empire, it can, and does, as a state and among its people, inherit and honor the legacies of Western colonialism by engaging in white supremacy, even in the most mundane of ways.

Why focus on the everyday? In the preface to her book *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*, Kristen Ghodsee writes:

> It is only by examining everyday life that we can understand that even in a time of great oppression, state violence, or radical social change, most people still wake up in the morning, get dressed, wash their clothes, eat, drink, fall in love, have babies, and grow old. It is good to remember that while people may vote only once a year, they eat three times a day. (2011, xiv)

Quotidian habits are valuable subjects of study insofar as they broaden our view of major global processes. Colonialism is an intercontinental phenomenon, and whiteness is a highly expansive concept. But by zooming in on the minutiae of daily life, we gain insight into the practicalities of these systems. What do white Poles incarnate do through, because of, in spite of their whiteness? How do they build relationships, how do they speak to each other, how do they eat? Without a study of the everyday, these questions are lost to the generalities of macro level analyses. The complex nature of this project has allowed me to pull from many different theoretical frames. I engage sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, postcolonial studies, critical food studies, feminist geography, and critical ethnography.

I hope this work serves as an intervention into the phenomena of everyday racism around which I grew up. As I previously mentioned, I am a child of Polish immigrants who spent long portions of her early life in Poland. And as for the parts of my childhood and adolescence in the United States, I spent nearly all of that time in a very Polish bubble. It is my belief that in order to interrupt racist behaviors in one's own community, it is most effective to do so in terms that are legible, approachable, and familiar to the community. Creative writing is the method by which I expect to lay the groundwork for critical interventions into the problematic habits of my community. Perhaps a story about a family's hunger for m—— cake is one way I can show my real family, and families like my own, how pressing the need to change our behaviors is.

To summarize: This thesis is not a definitive culinary history, nor is it a theoretical abstraction of a very real, very disturbing cake. It is a series of essays that move across space and time to explore the breadth and depth of a seemingly simple object. In the chapters that follow, readers will follow the dramatized story of the Wojtas family as they have lived and dined for the past few decades. They will learn about the meaning of racial vocabularies, confront the colonial roots of the cocoa industry, and grapple with what it means to be Polish.

Chapter 1

Second Shifts, 1981

When the town's church bells rang out at noon, dozens of women in itchy wool skirts and stiff cotton blouses moved from their posts in the fronts of classrooms to the breakroom. The schoolteachers at the *Liceum Ogólnokształcące* left their blackboards in favor of smokes and snacks. They always moved to lunch with more vigor than they brought to their instruction. If it were somebody's name day or birthday, there might have been a cake for all to share. Too slow to the kitchen meant finding only an empty metal pan, studded with crumbs.

The teachers ate their snacks tiredly, speaking contemptuously of their families and their students. They were all women unamused by the world. In those seemingly interminable years of the Cold War, the women were tired. The Polish Solidarity Movement against Soviet control of the country had invited a period of martial law, so the fate of the nation was left up to politicians who could not hear the voices of ordinary people yelling through their television screens (not that they wanted to). All the while, the women worked. They taught children, nursed the sick back to health, answered phones at front desks. After hours, with the turn of the house key in the lock, they punched in for their second shifts as tutors, cooks, and disciplinarians. Their exhaustion was compounded by the restlessness on the national stage.

Powerless to stop the bickering of state leaders, the women distracted each other with the steady turn of the gossip mill. Lately, it churned out rumors of who was leaving for the United States next. Some thought the émigrés were lucky. Others saw life in the West as the other side of the same coin. These conversations usually ended with a resigned sigh. "Każdy ma swoje." Politely, it meant, "Every place has its own struggles." More profoundly, it also meant, "Each country is its own load of shit."

“Who made this? It’s not bad.” Raised eyebrows scanned the room. The chocolate cake had vanished quickly out of its pan. “Can we have the recipe?”

One of the ladies reached for a scrap piece of graph paper. It was Krysia who had brought in the cake. As she concentrated on remembering her recipe, her thirty year old face contorted to the appearance of a fifty year old. She wrote it down: margarine, milk, flour, sugar, baking powder, eggs, cocoa. Mix well and bake. The little slip of paper made its way around the room, then around the school. It rode the current of notes passed among friends and colleagues, one of many in the shared collections of recipes exchanged by the women who worked at the school. This one was called *murzynek*.

Impossible as it might have been to get an impressed reaction from the teachers, chocolate cake usually satisfied not only for its taste, but also for its rarity. In those years, every grocery trip was a crapshoot. By the Communist Party’s standards, the average family had mostly enough to eat, but was it ever enough if it was the same thing, day in, day out? Special novelties like Mediterranean fruits and packaged snacks were hot commodities, gone in a flash from the store or hidden carefully in bags smuggled over two western borders—first between the Germanies, then into Poland. Individual foil wrapped candies were sliced into three pieces and divided carefully among siblings; bananas were sometimes sold by the half.

Cocoa powder, a diamond among gems, glistened with promises of simple but delectable desserts like m—— cake. Women held fast to their recipes, waiting to hear of any store nearby that might receive a limited shipment. They took their places in the long, snaking lines, praying for the elusive ingredient to still be in stock by the time they served their hour or two or three in the queue, just like everybody else. The shopkeepers bragged that it had come all the way from

Africa, after all. Sometimes, their patience was well rewarded. The following Sunday, the whole family might enjoy thin slices of rich, decadent, chocolate cake with their afternoon tea.

Back at school on Monday, the women gathered around the breakroom again, eating hard boiled eggs and ham sandwiches. They offered, in turn, their complaints for the day. Swapped scandalous intel. Aired out their pit stains.

One of them had spent her weekend in Krakow. “We saw someone Black,” said the woman that all the others called Miss Market Stall, because she was always making a point of telling everyone how much she had spent on something as if she were trying to sell it off again. What did she mean, black? “You know. Chodził sobie po mieście murzyn.” A Black man was walking around the city. Some of the ladies turned their heads. Krysia asked Miss Market Stall what he looked like. Market Stall announced her new observations with authority. Her excitement, laced with bemusement, took the same tone as if she were telling a story to her children.

The women quickly lost interest in this story, as Miss Market Stall spun a tale of a seven foot tall man with skin the color of coal and a shirtless chest that reflected light off the slick cobblestones. Her description was as unoriginal as any one of them had ever heard. In fact, the lengthy description she gave was pure invention—just like the imagined Africa from which the precious cocoa for m—— cake had come. It complemented that parodically named cake that she and hundreds of Polish women like her had come to fantasize about. In the Industrial District of the Shitty Town with the Sulfurous Factory where they all lived, m—— cake was just a story of lands far away, full of exotic foods and exotic people. Her domestic indulgence in that cake was a replication of reductive myths that led her to gawk at Blackness and malign it to her girlfriends in the school room.

But why should Krysia have cared? Every turn of a wooden spoon in cake batter, every slice of Sunday cake she served on neat, little plates, all of it was just a part of her most important job: to keep her family, her community, happy and fed. The choice of how she fed them was out of her control. Meanwhile, the PRL, PZPR, LWP, and USSR had all rapidly begun to fail the workers of the world ("United?" the people mocked) in the fight against capitalism.

The sirens blurted out the start of curfew, and slowly her husband and children and parents all retired to bed. After midnight, Krysia sat at the kitchen table picking at old slices of rye bread, picking out the doughy center and throwing the leftover crusts onto the floor for the depressed dog to swallow. She pressed the crumbling dough into an unappetizing mound in her palm and remembered how as a child she used to pretend it was like modeling clay. She flattened it with her other hand and tried to read her future in its cracks. Its moist folds stared back at her, curled into the shape of a mocking smile that told her: "This is all there is. This is all there will ever be."

On Murzyn

Presently and historically, *Murzyn* is the most widely used word for a Black person in Polish (Piróg 2010). Its usage is ancient and can be traced back to Proto-Slavic, the predecessor of all contemporary Slavic languages that was used across Eastern Europe from the second millennium BC until the sixth century AD. The Proto-Slavic word *murin* likely emerged at the same time as *maurus* from the Classical Latin of ancient Rome. These words were used to describe the inhabitants of northern Africa. From these roots, words like *Murzyn* developed across modern language, including *Mohr* in German, *Moor* in English, *мавр* (mavr) in Russian, and *mouřenin* in Czech. Throughout the Middle Ages, these terms were used as general identifiers of individuals who had darker skin than the Arab peoples with whom Europeans had already established economic and political relationships, including Imazighen[1] (Łaziński 2007, 48-49).

Over several centuries, these terms of racial identification have transformed across languages to name particular ethnic or national identities with more accuracy. The era of widespread European colonization and consequent mass enslavement of West Africans had a major impact on the language of race. The English word *Negro* came into widespread usage in the seventeenth century in both Britain and the United States, derived from the Latin root *niger*, meaning shiny black. Until the eighteenth century, words derived from *maurus* and those derived from *niger* were used more or less interchangeably, but the global impacts of the slave trade on racial formations throughout the modern world eventually replaced *maurus* altogether (Łaziński 2007, 48-49).

Although the English word *Negro* was once championed by Black leaders, including W.E.B. Dubois, white people in the United States appropriated the term and transformed it into a negative term. *Negro* was replaced in the mid-twentieth century by the word *Black*, and then *Black* was replaced in the late 1980s by the term *African American*; both shifts attempted to mark severances first from legacies of enslavement and Jim Crow, and later from racial discrimination and white superiority (Smith 1992, 499, 503). Likewise, similar words in European languages became replaced with terms that translate to *Black*, *African*, and *dark-skinned* (Łaziński 2007, 50). In Polish, words like *czarnoskóry* (*Black-skinned*) have come into popular use over the last few decades. Yet *Murzyn* continues to be used in casual conversation among speakers as well as in formal communications, for example in academic or political settings, even as some Poles have been attempting to replace the word in professional contexts and everyday language. Even though the word *Murzyn* predates the usage of *Negro*, the histories of Western colonialism, imperialism, and slavery became so significant in Poland that *Murzyn* took on the meanings of *Negro* when used by white speakers (I discuss the significance of these systems in greater depth in Chapter 3). Scholars argue that the word cannot be treated as a neutral descriptor of race but rather as an epithet that connotes inferiority (Łaziński 2007, 50; Ohia-Nowak 2020, 196). When used to describe a Black person, the word is offensive because it communicates ideologies of dominance, exploitation, and objectification.

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[1] Imazighen is the plural of Amazigh, the name for the Indigenous tribes of North Africa. The more common word for these tribes, Berber, is considered an ethnic slur by Imazighen (Kahina 2013).

In the online versions of the dictionaries *Wielki słownik języka polskiego* and *Słownik SJP*, the entries for *Murzyn* define the word simply: "a person belonging to the Black race." It is important to note that in the sections containing information about the usage of the word, both dictionaries state that the word is now considered to be offensive.

Diminutive forms of nouns usually do not have their own entries in a dictionary, but murzynek has its own unique definitions in both of the aforementioned dictionaries. Murzynek is defined first as a Black child and second as an offensive expression towards a Black man. In its diminutive form, created by the addition of the suffix *-ek*, the proper noun *Murzyn* becomes a mocking insult towards an adult Black individual. A second entry follows with the common noun murzynek. Its two definitions are: a type of cocoa cake; and a specially prepared coffee.[2]

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[2] In searches for the word *murzynek*, the references to strong, black coffee or to a coffee with chocolate syrup in it are few. This usage seems to be far less common, both historically and in the present day. Although it is significant that this word is paired with two food products whose histories and political economies are entangled in violent, colonial processes, in this thesis I will be focusing on the use of cocoa in the preparation of cake.

As gatekeepers of proper or acceptable language, dictionaries have legitimized the word murzynek as a part of the Polish language. Although online dictionaries are quick to denote the changing impact of such fraught terms, they fail to fully indicate their weight in society. To better understand the significance of the word, we can look to its most famous literary feature. In 1934, the beloved Polish poet Julian Tuwim published his poem “Murzynek Bambo.” Tuwim’s poem gained widespread attention after its 1935 publication in the popular literary magazine *Wiadomości Literackie* (*Literary News*), but initially it had been commissioned exclusively for a children’s school book by Marian Falski (Tramer 2016, 147). The famed Polish pedagogue Falski had just twenty years earlier revolutionized Polish reading curricula with the introduction of his series of entertaining and thorough reading primers that featured poems and other playful exercises for children. His texts remained in print with continuous updates for a variety of schools and age levels throughout the entire duration of the twentieth century.[3] This was where “Murzynek Bambo” made his debut: on page fifteen of *Czytanka dla II klasy szkół powszechnych miejskich* (*Reading Primer for the Second Grade of City Primary Schools*).

The poem consists of sixteen lines of text, arranged in rhyming couplets (Appendix 1). It tells the story of a young, Black boy named Bambo, his life and personality in his home continent of Africa. He is described as a studious child who loves to have fun by causing trouble at home. He naively fears that which he believes will whiten him—milk and baths—but the speaker concedes that Bambo is a good boy. The poem ends with a statement of collective regret, which the reader can assume is shared by the schoolchildren for whom the poem is intended, that Bambo cannot attend school with all of them in Poland.

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[3] Even I could not escape the newer editions of *Elementarz* when I was placed in Polish Saturday school by my family in the East Bay of California in the early 2000s.

Several Polish scholars have analyzed and critiqued "Murzynek Bambo" and Tuwim's larger body of work. Their analyses are varied and contradictory, some even going so far as to dismiss their peers' approaches to the poem. Among the most critical scholars is Marcin Moskalewicz. He uses a postcolonial lens to interpret the piece as a discursive artefact of Polish culture that actually reifies racist rhetoric, rather than tolerance or acceptance of difference, in the collective imagination of Polish society (2005, 260).

In his article, Moskalewicz invokes Foucauldian analyses of the Other and Edward Said's *Orientalism* to show how Tuwim's work belongs to a canon of literature that posits Western civilization as the savior of "primitive" or "savage" civilizations. The author dissects the poem, word by word, to demonstrate its consistency with colonial ideologies that desire physical and epistemological dominance over, in this case, Black Africa. Moskalewicz is unapologetic in his argument that this poem—particularly with its final two lines—is meant to relieve the reader's conscience of guilt over the benefits he reaps from colonial legacies while still reminding the reader that he holds the power in this relationship between the white self and the Black Other. And because the audience for this poem was never meant to be Black readers, it is crucial to explicitly state that these lines absolve white guilt. Murzynek Bambo cannot receive a civilized education alongside Polish children, but that's all right; he will remain a noble savage, untouched by the Western world but always available to the hungry eyes of the colonial voyeur—even if that voyeur is only a child himself.

Moskalewicz concludes his article by writing:

> Absołutne prawo do odrębnego komentarza nie zmienia oczywistego faktu odmienności Murzynka. Czy cełem przedstawienia tej odmienności była jej głoryfikacja, wskazanie na możłiwości jej przezwyciężenia, czy też, jak wedłe powyższej interpretacji, podniesienie jej nieusuwalnego cłiarakteru, pozostaje każdorazowo w gestii samego czytełniłsa. (2005, 270)

> The absolute right to a separate commentary does not change the obvious fact of the *Murzynek's* otherness. Whether the purpose of presenting this otherness was to glorify it, to reveal the possibility of overcoming it, or, according to the above interpretation, to raise its indelible weight is always up to the reader himself. (2005, 270)

Scholars with great differences of opinion have taken Moskalewicz up on his delicate concession to alternative commentaries on "Murzynek Bambo," and in fact they have gone so far as to challenge Moskalewicz on his statement that Blackness is positioned as an Other. These authors criticize his postcolonial approach and accuse him of reading too deeply into the sixteen short lines of this poem, referring to his methodology as "literary" or "interpretational" abuse (Tramer 2016, 145; Węgrzyniak 2016, 14). They write that the young children for whom his poem was created could not possibly identify the same issues that Moskalewicz has (Tramer 2016, 149), and that they themselves grew up reading the poem and do not feel that they have become vicious racists as a result (Węgrzyniak 2016, 14). To this point, Moskalewicz's article argues that children are uniquely susceptible to receiving strong messages about race, identity, and difference, due to their inability to critically examine new information and their innocent trust in the world (2005, 261). In his description of this phenomenon, Moskalewicz writes that children absorb implicit messages without questioning their meaning. As a child grows, he carries these early lessons with him and unconsciously allows them to fit into his sense of self and how he relates to the rest of the world.

Ironically, Moskalewicz's critics are the living proof of his thesis. I agree with Moskalewicz that "Murzynek Bambo" is an unquestionably problematic literary work that echoes white European desires for colonial power and the civilization of Black Africans. The strong, negative reaction to this critique by other scholars of literature is as fervent as those of ordinary citizens to any suggestion that such a normalized element of their culture, their nation, and their selves might be racist. (It may even be more emotional, seeing as they had devoted hours upon hours composing pages upon pages of peer-reviewed proselytizing to attack this idea.)

Though the defensive criticisms may be numerous, just as many scholars of race and power in Poland are echoing Moskalewicz's sentiments, crafting critical inquiries to further expose the relationships between colonialism, white supremacy, and empire in the everyday language of Poles. What is most important now in ongoing scholarship is practical data in which Poles—and especially Poles of color—are surveyed about the racial vocabularies that surround them. Dr. Margaret Ohia is one prominent scholar whose numerous papers on contemporary issues of anti-Blackness and xenophobia in Poland touch on the mundanity of racism in language, public education, and media and pop culture. Her recent paper "Słowo ‚Murzyn' jako perlokucyjny akt mowy" ("The word 'Murzyn' as a perlocutionary speech act") takes a pragmatic approach to the lived experiences of Black Poles, surveying and analyzing their day to day encounters with the normalized but offensive racial phraseologies that white Poles still use (2020).

Ohia's conclusion is straightforward: the impact of the word *Murzyn* on the recipient of the word outweighs the speaker's intentions. The continued use of this word and its derivatives cause harm to Black Poles, who speak to its connotations of racism and colonialism. Of course, simply removing the word from everyday use is not the solution to solving systemic issues within Polish society. Ohia calls for a larger, methodological act of restitution that will heal the processes of "dehumanization" that Black individuals in Poland face (2020, 209).

Let us return now to the main character of this thesis: The m—— cake. A comestible object is named for an individual who is already experiencing objectification on a daily basis—through microaggressions with his white peers, as through the institutions that his white peers have constructed and maintained; what does this mean?

In a linguistic study of words used for cakes that become associated with human beings, Marietta Rusinek finds that "the way man perceives food, particularly cakes … translates into a similar perception of people" (2012, 110). Moreover, Rusinek concludes that both in English and in Polish, the meanings of these words derived from culinary lexica become overwhelmingly pejorative. For many white Poles, the number of personal encounters with m—— cake far exceed their relationships with Black people. That is to say, white Poles have more frequently engaged with the material objectification of Blackness than with Black subjects. It seems obvious why m—— cake should be named so. The cake is a very dark brown, almost black in color. Maybe more esoterically, its primary and most coveted ingredient, cocoa, had been imported during the Soviet years from West Africa. Until cocoa became widely available in the new market economy, the cake's color and composition were uncommon in the home cook's repertoire. M—— cake signifies these feelings of rarity, exoticism, and foreignness—very much like the Otherness of *Murzyn*.

Thanks to scholars like Ohia, we have institutionally legitimated, practical evidence that the name m—— cake is offensive. Yet we can see from the response of scholars to a perceived attack on a beloved childhood relic that extricating these words from white Poles' vocabulary is more challenging than it seems. Why is this? The cake and the poem are safe objects onto which white Poles can project their white supremacy. Neither text nor confection can talk back to defend themselves. White Poles' stubborn adherence to "Murzynek Bambo" and m—— cake eliminates the risk of having to self-reflect and potentially surrender their power as white people, who would otherwise have to confront the justified and overdue anger and grief of their Black peers.

I do not want to naively pretend that one can so easily renounce the cultural touchstones around which one has founded one's sense of self. To be socialized with "Murzynek Bambo" as a white Polish child is to become indoctrinated in a world order that reinscribes Western hegemony and white supremacy at any opportunity it can—even over dessert. Many Poles say they have memorized "Murzynek Bambo" and can recite it by heart. Similarly, thousands of Polish women learned how to make m—— cake from memory, allowing their senses to move them through the baking process when they did not have an exact recipe. These cultural forms live within the white Polish consciousness and are embodied by white Poles every day, in the ways they care for their children, their families, and themselves. The reciprocal impact of these acts of care, however, is decidedly uncaring. The discursive violence against Black people that *Murzyn* / *Murzynek* / *murzynek* perpetuate is more important than the comforts of ignorance to which white Poles cling so desperately. In other words: Who cares about cake when Black Poles do not feel safe in their own home?

Chapter 2

En Route to Chicago, 1990

Krysia awoke with a start. A thick coat of cigarette smoke hung heavy in the air and irritated the dry, cracking skin on her forehead. She sat up straight and turned to her neighbor.

"How much time is left?"

"We are still on the tarmac."

"Excuse me?"

She blinked at the young man next to her. He stared back rudely as he licked his chapped lips. Krysia turned her gaze to the window against which he was leaning. Beyond the plexiglass, she saw planes taking off into a black sky.

The young man cleared his throat. "We are still on the ground. The plane hasn't taken off yet."

"How come? How can that be?" Krysia asked. "What time is it?"

"It's almost ten," the young man answered. "When everyone was boarding, the mechanics were fixing something with the controls." Krysia remembered some unclear announcement about this. "They thought they would be done with five, maybe ten minutes of a delay. But we've been sitting here like the fucking Pythia for three hours, excuse my language. Since you fell asleep, they've been coming on the speaker every 30 minutes to say that in 30 minutes, everything will be fixed."

The static of the intercom interrupted him, and he gestured to the ceiling knowingly. "Attention passengers. LOT flight number 001 with service to Chicago is now canceled. We will be reopening the doors momentarily. Prepare to collect your belongings and exit the aircraft."

Dozens of frustrated groans erupted down the length of the aisle. Behind Krysia, somebody seated in the smoking section threw an empty pack onto the floor. Somebody else spat on the floor. Disgusted as she was, Krysia had no time to dwell on the uncultured nature of her compatriots. She was more worried about how she was going to get to Chicago.

The idea of flying scared Krysia to an embarrassing degree. She was afraid of crashing, afraid of getting robbed, afraid of the popping in her ears, afraid of the pressurized toilet, afraid of everything. When her cousin had invited her to come stay with her in Illinois for two weeks to see if she too would like America, Krysia's family hounded her to go. Her teenage children begged her to buy them Levi's, cassette tapes, Hershey's candies, and t-shirts that said USA on the front. Her parents wanted her to go and ask her cousin for some nannying or housecleaning gigs, so that Krysia could return with dollars to put towards upgrading the family burial plot from concrete to granite. Although he wouldn't admit it, her husband Stasiek wanted her to go the most. He thought that if she went, she could see for herself how much better life was in the West. Then, once she would be fully convinced of the superiority of the United States, he could reveal to her the cash he had been secretly collecting for months to put towards everything they would need in order to finally emigrate. At their insistence, Krysia did what any good mother, wife, and daughter would do. She put her feelings aside and got on the plane.

"Won't they tell us what to do now? Am I supposed to get a new ticket? Is there another plane?" Anxiety swelled in her chest and came out in a series of angry gesticulations.

Though she was speaking mostly to herself, the young man turned to her with the same rude sneer he wore before. "How am I supposed to know?" he said. "And what exactly do you expect? This isn't America."

"God knows this isn't America!" she exclaimed, turning to face him. *And who are you to speak to me that way, you little shit?* she thought to herself. He couldn't have been older than twenty. Krysia fixed him with a look that dared him to talk back one more time.

Petrified though she was, Krysia had her own idea of what it would be like in Chicago. For over fifteen years, she listened keenly to the stories the other schoolteachers told about their friends and relatives in America. Everyone had someone in the West, but because the phone calls were expensive and letters were often intercepted, the women filled in details from their imaginations. When they spoke about America, reality and fantasy blurred. They made it sound like the promised land. In Chicago, strangers smiled at each other for no reason, as if they were crazy or maybe high. They said things like "thank you" and "excuse me," simply because they wanted to. In Chicago, there would be no litter on the streets. There would be no drunks laid over park benches. The stores would be full to the brim of everything Krysia could possibly need, and she fully intended to return with a suitcase full of packaged goods. She wanted to buy a real, American cookbook and break up the monotony of what she already knew how to make. She pictured herself back home, her daughter putting her English lessons from school to good use by translating the instructions for Krysia while she cooked something that would taste good with ketchup.

The passengers began to stand and shuffle in place with impatience. The young man stepped over Krysia's lap to retrieve a duffle bag from the overhead compartment. She watched him grip his bag with sweaty palms.

"Why are you going to Chicago?" she asked him from her seat.

He looked at her suspiciously. "To work."

"Work where? As what?"

“Wherever.”

“Do you have someone there?”

“An uncle. He runs a deli.”

“So, you will work in the deli?” Krysia looked more closely at him. He, too, had a look of fear in his eyes. In his hand, he clutched his passport, boarding pass, and both his national and university identification cards. She wondered if he had dropped out of school and if it had been his idea or his family’s.

“Just why are you so interested?” He ended their conversation. The exhausted line of people began to disembark the plane that had gone nowhere, and the young man walked away without looking back at her.

Krysia continued to sit and allowed the smokers behind her to pass before she gathered herself to find a new flight. Back inside the airport, she stood in the center of the terminal and stared at all the people rushing by. They all looked so downtrodden, and Krysia worried that she looked that way, too. *We don’t deserve this*, she thought to herself, reflecting on the previous years of national strife. Protest after protest, curfew after curfew, shortage after shortage, it had all taken a toll on everyone she knew. *When did things get so messed up for us?* She thought of the stories that her parents and grandparents left untold about the wars they lived through and decided that things had always been like this. She thought of the young man, sullen and stressed. Her own son had just entered university. She made a promise to herself that she would buy him a pair of jeans after all.

“What a hopeless place,” Krysia muttered under her breath. She walked outside to get some fresh air. A few steps away, a dead pigeon laid belly up on a vandalized, vinyl seat. *I don’t* *deserve this*, she thought, as she closed her eyes and imagined how she would feel once she finally crossed the ocean and set eyes on the Sears Tower for the first time.

On the Journey to Cocoa

In several instances of describing this project to peers and professors, I have been asked if I am treating m—— cake as a metaphor—for racial formation, for gendered labor, for colonial desire, et cetera. While I agree that m—— cake is symbolic of these concepts and many more, I am cautious so as not to treat it as a metaphor. Its presence in the Polish culinary tradition did not result by figurative means but by very real, ongoing systems of power that enslave, dispossess, and exploit land and people on a massive scale. The domestic manifestation of global processes is never metaphor; it is those processes incarnate on the smallest scale.

In this chapter, I borrow concepts from feminist geographies to make sense of the arrival of m—— cake to the Polish kitchen. In human geography, scale is used theoretically to understand relations and processes across space and time. Scholars differ in their definitions and usages of the term, so I am specifically utilizing the idea of scale as a level of analysis, through which I can assess qualitatively the conditions of the cocoa trade, from its colonial origins to m—— cake (Sayre and Di Vittorio 2009, 22). The cocoa industry stretches across the world at a global scale. Consumers encounter cocoa at the local scale. Feminist geographers have observed the limitations of the global/local binary, critiquing the ways in which the everyday, practical experiences of systems are ignored. It is therefore crucial that scholars also focus on the intimate, or the embodiment of social relations that are both consequent and constitutive of the global (Mountz and Hyndman 2006, 447).

The ability to consume chocolate cake anywhere beyond the land to which the cocoa plant is indigenous is a consequence of globalizing processes that make possible worldwide trade networks. Mountz and Hyndman state that the "scale of the body … allows one to explore global processes as intimate phenomena" (2006, 451). Eating happens at the scale of the body, but in a postcolonial world, to eat is to invoke the enduring legacies of global systems of power. The intimate moment that a Pole experiences lifting a dessert fork with a bite of m—— cake to her lips is resultant of 500 years of global transformation, which began 6000 miles away in what is now called Mexico.

In Poland, chocolate confections and cocoa products first became widely accessible to working-class and middle-class consumers in Poland in the nineteenth century, thanks to the emergence of chocolate factories following the Industrial Revolution. The great successes of famed confectioners like and Adam Piasecki of the Krakowska brand and Emil Wedel's eponymous catalog of sweets brought chocolate to the masses in the form of candies and bars. By the twentieth century, the masses had become accustomed to the taste of chocolate and welcomed it into their personal dietary habits (Popławski 2018, 125). Once Poland had transitioned to Communism and become the Polish People's Republic in 1947, new issues arose with regards to food access—namely, the inconsistency of consumer products and unreliability of state operated stores.

Throughout the 1960s to early 1970s, cocoa imports to the Soviet bloc came primarily from newly independent Ghana, with import numbers increasing each year. Ghana was a member of the Cocoa Producers Alliance, alongside Nigeria, Togo, Brazil, Cameroun, and Ivory Coast, which was established to protect cocoa prices and set economically fair trade standards with trade partners (Stevens 1977, 81). Of the West African cocoa producing countries, Ghana produced the highest quality cocoa in the largest numbers, which allowed the state to build prosperous relationships across the world. By the late 1970s, the Soviet Union was the second largest consumer of cocoa in the world (Stevens 1977, 84). Economic data from this time shows that the USSR purchased cocoa at prices far below its value. When trading in goods rather than hard currency, the USSR supplied industrial machinery that failed to withstand the climate in Ghana, yet it continued to accept cocoa, sometimes in excess of the plans laid out by Soviet economists who oversaw distribution of imported goods to consumers (Stevens 1977, 85). Only later would the USSR begin to send fuel instead of inadequate equipment. These dealings were observed by Ghana's neighboring states, such as Nigeria, which consequently hesitated to enter into similar contracts as those of Ghana (Stevens 1977, 92).

Raw cocoa imports to Eastern Europe were economically beneficial thanks to the technology that confectionary factories had to extract cocoa butter from the beans and resell it to chocolate makers abroad. Local consumers, meanwhile, saw fewer chocolate products on store shelves. Many Poles could only purchase cocoa powder off the black market via illegal, clandestine imports that made their way from the northern ports of the country to major cities further inland (Miłosz 2016, 51-52). There was a sense of ceremony around the coveted products that allowed for special baking projects like m—— cake. Cocoa was special not only in its unfamiliarity, but in the sense of decadence it bestowed unto the savvy family that managed to get their hands on it. The fervor for chocolate flavors became a part of Polish culinary tradition; cocoa had never been a Polish food, yet the desire for it places it within a sea of recipes for simple shortbreads, native fruit compotes, and unseasoned fried dough.

As much as cocoa does not belong as a native ingredient in Polish cuisine, however, neither does it belong in a West African culinary tradition. Across Ghana, Nigeria, and the rest of

West Africa, cocoa has not been a part of the daily food and drink of local communities. Instead, its importance has been political and economic, as it has earned the status of cash crop since the establishment of massive cocoa farms in the 1800s (Leissle 2018, 19). Since then, European demands—both Western and Eastern—have escalated the demand for West African cocoa.

Although the cocoa trade in West Africa predates European interests in the region, its presence there was made possible by colonial trade routes. The cocoa plant is indigenous to what is now known as Southern Mexico and the Amazon Basin; likewise, its oldest uses by humans can be traced to these parts of the world. Olmec communities used cocoa seeds to make drinks and consumed the fruit as early as 1400 BCE. Their interactions with native plants like cocoa were taught to neighboring indigenous groups throughout Central America and passed down to succeeding civilizations, like the Maya and Aztecs. Cocoa remained an important symbol of ceremony and culture, and sometimes functioned as a local currency, for over a thousand years, until the colonial Spanish conquest of Mexico under Hernan Cortes exploited production of the beans for monetary trade on a global scale (Leissle 2018, 42).

By the 1600s, cocoa had long since reached Europe by way of Spain. Through Europe, traders took it to South Asia, East Asia, and North Africa. In the early 1800s, the decimation of indigenous cocoa trees in Latin America combined with a growing demand for chocolate products in Europe spawned plantations in West Africa. Enslaved in their own lands by European landowners, African laborers were bound to cocoa farms throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century (Off 2007, 55). For example, the Portuguese, in the process of colonizing Brazil, also seized islands including Sao Tome and Principe off the coast of West Africa to facilitate the capture and transport of slaves. There, they left the cocoa they had pilfered from Latin America. Within several years, cocoa made it to the mainland, where African nations were already facing drastically exploitative conditions during the latter years of the transatlantic slave trade, as well as the beginnings of the European Partition of Africa (Leissle 2018, 52). By 1914, European states controlled over 90 percent of the land, politics, and economics of the continent, but even after the wave of independence movements in the 1950s and 1960s, neocolonial interventions dispossessed Africans of control over their economies (Higgs 2012, 172). Any previous attempts by West Africans to cultivate cocoa for their own local trade systems were superseded by European extractive policies and practices. The unequal trade agreements between Ghana and the USSR are just one example of the ways Europeans took advantage of the African market.

Today, the cocoa industry is still associated with the lasting legacies of colonial extraction and slavery. African laborers are still bound to cocoa farms, and about three quarters of the world's supply comes from African soil (Leissle 2018, 17). The complex system of cocoa plantations mosaicking the West African agrarian landscape have stripped it of its ecological and economic diversity (Popławski 2018, 125). Ivory Coast is now the largest supplier of cocoa to multi-billion dollar corporate buyers, but neoliberal policies have emaciated the local economy and resulted in a de facto system of slave labor to keep up with consumer demand in the Global North (Off 2007, 104). Cocoa is one of the most highly politicized foods on the planet, as unthinkable systems of violence disenfranchise workers on a daily basis, to the general ignorance of consumers.

In spite of their ignorance, however, consumers are inextricably linked to workers through the globalized cocoa industry. The intimate moment that a Pole experiences lifting a dessert fork with a bite of m—— cake to her lips is an act of communion with global processes upon which she may never even spare a single thought. Rare though it might have been during the years of Soviet control, cocoa crossed a threshold to arrive in Poland, a literal and symbolic border between those who farm cocoa and those who eat it. These borders were "reproduced and inscribed on the body in daily life where the state influences the body in the most intimate and far-reaching of ways," including how the state (and those subverting it through the black market) regulated production and imports of food (Mountz and Hyndman 2006, 452). The centrally planned economies of socialist states held the fate of the people's diets in their hands, as did they determine the circumstances of millions of workers whose countries' farmlands were dominated by European interests.

The extractive cocoa industry still operates in such ways. To sate the cravings of European consumers, the cocoa industry has become one of the most violently extractive systems in the world. The eating habits and desires of the inhabitants of European countries has led to a disastrous reduction of raw materials and food resources in the countries of the Global South (Gottwald 2009, 8). People suffer and die for Europeans' chocolate cravings. The cruel irony of this reality is that among Global North consumers, chocolate is largely thought of as frivolous, so its ethical concerns do not much affect their day to day thinking (Kennedy 2020). Unlike bread or milk, an absence of cocoa powder has likely never resulted in riots and protests in the streets. In the years following the October Revolution in Russia, Lenin and his followers actually decried chocolate as bourgeois decadence. After several decades of industrialization and development, Stalin took power and returned chocolate to the masses, promoting it as a luxury item to which all people should be entitled in order to live a more cultured life (LeBlanc 2018, 1). People across Eastern Europe still treated chocolate as an optional indulgence, but their cravings persisted. They must have; otherwise, the crises I only superficially outlined in this chapter would be of a much smaller scale, or perhaps even nonexistent.

The time about which I am principally writing, the Communist era, is remembered as years of paucity and instability—a stark contrast to the abundance and extravagance that chocolate connotes. During Communism, cocoa was only available to the Polish consumer sporadically and in small quantities. Yet even its scarcity had a major impact on Poles' sense of self—or more accurately, their sense of the Other. If the word *Murzyn* had been applied to the Black Africans who toiled over the cocoa with which white Poles would bake, and if it had metamorphosed to account for the disparaging overtones of Western colonialism, then what is m—— cake supposed to signify?

M—— cake is more than just an unfortunate name for a simple cake. It is a symbol, a metonym for the systems of power that made its existence possible in the first place. It is the intimate meeting of global processes made miniature, sweet, and easily digestible. The political economies of chocolate and Polish racial formations are entwined with one another. As colonial systems of power have been globalized, so have they been enacted at the scale of the body, among family or community members, over a shared dinner table upon which there may very well be m—— cake.

Chapter 3

Farmlands, 2016

“And for dessert, murzynek!”

Aunt Grażyna reached for the glass baking dish and started cutting thick slices of the deeply, richly brown cake. The first piece went to me, the next to my grandmother Krysia, then to my grandfather Stasiek, then my cousin Kacper. Grażyna served herself after running back to the kitchen to chase the stray cats away from the back door.

“Thank you for this spread, Auntie,” I said. “Everything you make is so delicious. Nothing tastes this good in America.”

“That’s because we make everything with natural products!” She sat back in her chair proudly. “The eggs are from my chickens. The vegetables are from the garden. Even the flour I buy from a man who still mills his own just a few kilometers down the road. I bet you don’t eat like this in America!”

I nodded in return with my mouth full of cake. Grażyna smiled and started to cut another slice for me, her own left untouched on her plate.

“I still have some!” I exclaimed, but she was already lifting it onto my plate and yelling over my protestations, reassuring me that I’ll have the rest of the dish to take back to my grandparents’ house with us. I stared down at my dessert plate, embarrassed for how spoiled I always was when I came to the countryside to visit my relatives. The plate was bone white and looked like a doily. My grandparents had identical ones that appeared so used up, I was certain that a too forcefully placed dollop of whipped cream would turn the ceramic into dust.

“Even in the cake, you can taste the difference,” she continued her lecture. “Murzynek always tastes the same, it’s always the same recipe. But what a difference from just using a fresh egg." My grandparents parroted Grażyna's words to affirm the indisputable superiority of homegrown foods. They talked over each other noisily, saying the same thing over and over again.

"Why is it called murzynek?" I asked. They couldn't hear me for the enthusiasm with which they all agreed with each other. If I didn't speak Polish, I would have thought they were arguing. I tried again. "Excuse me, Auntie. Why is it called murzynek?"

The conversation halted abruptly. Grażyna looked to me, then to my grandparents, then to Kacper, then back to me. She looked at me as if she had been approached by a prepubescent street urchin outside of the village church. She explained sweetly and slowly: "Because it's brown. From the cocoa."

Scarlet rose up my neck and cheeks. I could always tell when I asked these kinds of questions that people thought I was stupid. It made me absolutely crazy. Keeping myself from snapping at her was like keeping a muzzled rottweiler from lunging at a squirrel. My grandparents were smiling in the same manner they had when I was five years old performing a dance on the coffee table. They all found my perceived incompetency in the Polish language adorable. It was proof that I would always be their baby, not the nineteen year old woman with troubling opinions who needed to be reminded periodically that she didn't know what she was talking about.

"No, what I meant was—" I hesitated and thought of my mother scolding me to control my tone. I readjusted. "Why murzynek specifically and not something else, like kakaowiec or ciasto czekoladowe?"

Grażyna and my grandparents had already moved on. I turned back to the doily plate and sulked. Kacper whistled at me, and when I looked up, he was beckoning me to follow him outside for some air. The family told me to go, go, go with my cousin to spend some time with him, encouraging me to teach him some English and maybe he can teach me some Polish in return.

In the garden, Kacper and I laughed at the elders around the table. After twelve years of English lessons in school, his language skills were nearly perfect. Although my Polish had never been formally trained, Kacper reassured me that I spoke just fine. Polish is a difficult language to learn, let alone master, and I had done good by my family to keep my abilities in shape in spite of all the time I spent surrounded by English in the United States. In front of us, the chickens dug around in the mud and pecked at the currants trellising up the side of the fence.

“So, do you know why it’s called murzynek?” I asked him.

He shrugged. “Why do you want to know so bad?”

“Oh, just because. It’s kind of a weird name, don’t you think?”

“It’s just a cake.” He picked a few currants off the bush and popped them in his mouth.

“I know it’s a cake. I want to know why it’s called murzynek. It seems offensive.”

Kacper looked at me, his eyebrows raised and lips curling into a smile. “Are you joking?”

I told him I wasn’t, and that it seemed wrong to use that word to talk about cake. It didn’t seem so hard to me to just use a different word when I knew that that term wasn’t even the correct way to talk about Black people. I realized in that moment that because my grandparents had taught me to speak Polish and they were always saying *Murzyn*, I didn’t know any alternatives.

“Oh, who the fuck cares! There’s bigger problems in society than what your dessert is called.” When he shouted like that he sounded like his father, who only seemed capable of speaking in a yell. “We live out in the middle of nowhere, anyway! What *Murzyn* is here to hear us say it in the first place? Mother of God…”

I knew better than to react to his outburst. Everyone in my family had impulse control issues when confronted with something that made them feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. I promised myself I would leave it alone, but not until I asked one more question.

“Kacper, even if there are bigger problems, don’t you want to at least think about this one? You can’t just admit that it’s weird and wrong?”

He spat on the dirt patch beside him and kept his eyes fixed on the stain. “All my friends, all of their parents, they’re all trying to get to England to find work. They go there, or they go to Ireland or Norway or the Netherlands or wherever, and they deal with their own shit. Poles are discriminated against in these places. They think we’re poor and uncultured.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Don’t be obtuse. I’m just trying to explain to you that we have it hard, too. And nobody’s coming to our defense. But we have to go over there to make a living. Most of us don’t have a choice. So, I don’t see you going to England to ask English people why Slavs offend them so much. There’s barely any Black people in Poland, anyway.” He paused. “Actually, there’s barely any Polish people in Poland anymore. They all went West.”

We turned away from each other and stood in silence for a while. Staring over the boundaries of my aunt’s little farm, I watched a tiny, tin can of a car putter down the barely paved road. Wheat fields stretched out over the flat landscape until they met the woods, where only hogs and foxes and deer lived. Kacper was writing to someone on WhatsApp, probably his girlfriend, to tell her what an idiot his American cousin was. I didn’t care.

Grażyna popped her head out of the house to check on us. “Why so quiet? Kacper, be nice to your cousin! And make yourselves useful. Take those buckets and go pick some raspberries before they fall.” She went back to my grandparents and their raucous conversation resumed. Kacper sighed and put his phone away. He motioned for me to follow him through the garden. As we worked off the murzynek, he handed me the fattest raspberries to eat—a peace offering for his earlier impatience.

“I love it here,” I said to break the silence, “but I would want it to be better.”

“Will you let it go already?”

On Colonial Desire

In Chapter 2, I delineated the process by which cocoa has traveled across space via colonial movements around the globe. From its native soils across Latin America, to its now expansive plantations spread over West Africa, to its ignorant but satiated consumers in the Global North, cocoa has accumulated a rich history of movement due to the mobility of colonial actors. In the present chapter, I deepen my inquiry into the relationship that Poles have to colonialism, as Polish national identity has been frustrated by strict, binary divisions between ideas of who colonizes and who is colonized. In the Age of European Imperialism, whiteness was an exclusive currency that bought access to colonial power. Therefore, I am specifically interested in the ways that Poles have experienced racial ideologies projected unto them as colonial subjects, while they simultaneously attempted to define their own racial identities as worthy of participating in colonialism.

Colonialism has long been theorized as an enactment of white supremacy. Feminist scholar Andrea Smith writes of colonialism as one of three pillars of white supremacy, actualized in the world through the genocidal processes that colonizers inflict on Indigenous peoples and lands in order to take possession of the world (Smith 2016, 68). Sara Ahmed, referencing the work of Frantz Fanon, describes how colonialism is the process by which the world is made white and therefore comfortable for white people to move, act, and be freely (Ahmed 2007, 153). Aimé Césaire's essay *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) asserts the idea that colonial relationships are necessarily imbued with white supremacist ideologies that have allowed European colonizers to create the conditions for the racist subjugation of non-white peoples all over the Global South.

The aforementioned texts, alongside many other works belonging to the canon of postcolonial studies, present a dichotomy of colonizer and colonized, which are also often transposed onto a respective dichotomy of white and non-white. Attempts to study colonial and racial histories of Poland have moved scholars to approach fundamental ideas in postcolonial theory with greater nuance. How did Poles exercise their colonial power while also living as colonial subjects? Relatedly, how have Poles experienced whiteness, and how has non-whiteness been projected onto Poles? These questions complicate the dichotomous thinking that is common in postcolonial studies but nevertheless reaffirm the central idea that white supremacy and colonialism are closely interrelated.

Of all of Poland's thousand-year history as a nation, I focus here on the colonial relationship between Germany and Poland that developed in the nineteenth century during the height of the Age of New Imperialism and the Partitions of Africa. This era is particularly important as it shows most clearly the complexity of Polish positionality in a world order dominated by white supremacist colonial empires.[4] In an effort to compete with other Western European colonial empires, Germany developed a plan to seize Polish land and colonize its Eastern frontier. Although Poland had been a strong state for several centuries, partitions of the country organized by the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian empires in the late 1700s effectively erased the country from the map of Europe and weakened the nation. By 1850, Germany had reconfigured Poland as its colonial space, an Eastern frontier that needed to be dominated and filled with ethnic Germans. This imperial push into Eastern European space could allow Germany to earn similar status to other Western European colonial empires, like those of the French and British that had successfully established overseas colonies. Moreover, the German empire feared losing large swaths of its population to exciting, new settlements in the "Wild West" of the United States; the colonization of Poland would conversely maintain a strong nation of Germans across Europe as they instead settled the "Wild East" (Kopp 2011, 39).

This "Wild East"—and the colonial identity of Poland as a whole—was deliberately constructed through a program of discursive colonization. Where material colonization refers to the foreign economic, political, cultural, and territorial dominance over native land and peoples, discursive colonization serves as the necessary prerequisite to these processes. The process of discursive colonization establishes the "conceptual apparatus" of colonization by creating the relationship between a colonizer self—Germany—and the colonized Other—Poland (Kopp 2012, 6). Through discursive colonization, the capacity to be colonized becomes historical reality. One particularly notable example is Gustav Freytag's 1855 novel *Soll und Haben*, a story of a German traveler who braves the precarious lands of Poland in all their wild mismanagement and chaos. Freytag writes of Polish "natives" as dark-skinned, not unlike many of his contemporaries who also wrote of Polish characters as "black" or "Indian" in appearance, closely copying the descriptions of Native Americans in colonial Wild West literature (Kopp 2011, 37). These writers were sponsored by the German government to write popularly accessible stories of Poland's inability to govern itself, the barbarism of its people, and the responsibility of Germans to relieve the land of its incompetent native inhabitants in favor of more capable rulers. The invention of racial differences between the inferior Pole and the superior German was an instrumental step towards the empire's colonial entry into Polish space.

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[4] It is important to note that the experience of Poles living under imperialism is not contained to the nation's encounters with Germany. Contemporary studies of what it means to be Polish continue to complicate postcolonial theory by proposing that understandings of Polish identity also account for the nation's relationship to Russia as the Russian Empire's former colony, its dominance over other Eastern European nations such as Ukraine, and its longstanding challenges with Western hegemony (Mayblin, Piekut and Valentine 2016, 72).

The discursive and material consequences of Germany's imperial expansionist plans were devastating to Poles' sense of stability in both their land as in their identities. Although Germany lost its territorial holdings over the course of two World Wars, it nevertheless succeeded in characterizing Poles as "racially different and spatially distant" Others (Kopp 2012, 203). To cope with the tragedy of statelessness and misrepresentation, Poles turned even more ardently towards their own capacity to establish colonies in Africa and South America (Ureña Valerio 2019, 146). Between 1882 and 1910, expeditions by Poles to Africa left a lasting impact on Polish national identity, especially during the years of Poland's statelessness as it was partitioned between the Russian, Austrian, and Prussian empires. These journeys manifested serious commitments to overcoming the dominant ideas across Western Europe that Poles were racially inferior to neighboring ethnic groups and to asserting the Polish nation as worthy of participation in Western civilization.

After 120 years of statelessness, Poles were desperate for power on the European stage. After their travels in Africa, many Poles became interested in reaching for the same type of power under which they felt they had suffered, rather than building networks of solidarity with similarly oppressed African nations. During their late nineteenth century expeditions to Africa, Polish writers often expressed empathy and a shared identity with colonized peoples to whom they felt connected through colonial disenfranchisement (Ureña Valerio 2019, 118). Travel to colonies was associated with freedom and new possibilities for the survival of the Polish nation—a sentiment that could have easily lent itself to efforts towards liberation of all colonial subjects under the German empire. Yet following the loss of Germany's colonial possessions after World War I, Poles actually believed that their newly independent state should be entitled to the colonial possession of Cameroon because of the important relationships Poles established with locals who shared a similar, anti-German sentiment (Ureña Valerio 2019, 135). Poles were not interested in allowing Cameroon to enjoy its own freedom. Instead, they leaned into the colonial ideologies that had circulated in their own national discourses and attempted to conquer land overseas. During the interwar period, Poland took subsequent steps to actualize their colonial desires by forming the Polish Maritime and Colonial League, through which Poles were able to co-run plantations owned by Portuguese settlers in Angola (Balogun 2018, 2562). Furthermore, the Colonial League purchased Indigenous land in Brazil as well as plantations in Liberia, the latter of which they planned to expand to a full conquest of the country (Balogun 2018, 2563).

The interwar period of Polish colonialism produced discourses and plans that were almost identical to those of Britain, France, and Germany. In a new age of independence, Poles felt entitled to the same power that their Western neighbors had already established. Parliament member Jan Debski wrote in favor of colonization:

> We Poles, like the Italians, have the right to demand that export markets as well as areas for settlement be opened to us, so that we may obtain raw materials necessary to the national economy under conditions similar to those enjoyed by the colonial states. (Debski, 1938, as cited in Balogun, 2018)

Resource and land exploitation were the primary concerns for Poland's colonial ambitions. The state had readied itself to accumulate wealth by similar means as Western colonial powers—through slave labor. Consequently, Polish colonial discourses relied on the racialization of Black Africans as underdeveloped, sub-human laborers. [5] The "racist world order" created by Western colonizers was adopted by Poles, and the violent ideologies of racial difference were once again used to further colonial expansion (Balogun 2572). Through colonial desire, Anti-Blackness became a normalized part of the Polish national consciousness, as it already had throughout all of the Western world.

These histories show how Poles believed that emulating their colonial oppressors would free them. Poles have held onto the white supremacist logics of their imperial oppressors to exert their own national and state power, even if those attachments are expressed subtly. Today, scholars observe no meaningful differences between the attitudes of Poles and those of other Europeans towards Black Africans (Ząbek 2009, 71; Balogun 2020, 1208). Moreover, as I explained in Chapter 1, the language used by white Poles to describe Black identity is still entangled with associations of slavery and colonialism. The term murzyn erases differences in nationality and ethnicity, and that erasure facilitates the offensive objectification of Black Poles

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[5] In the same piece I reference earlier in this chapter, Smith writes of the "logic of slavery" as the second of three pillars of white supremacy (Smith 2016, 67). The institution of slavery during the colonial period constructed Blackness as an identity belonging to people who were naturally able to be enslaved due to their race.

(Ząbek 2009, 68-69). When paired with Poles' carelessness with which they use this term that has been deemed offensive, the word represents a cultural entrenchment in ideologies of race that stem from the colonial period, wherein a racialized Other is made inferior to justify the racist violence of land and human exploitation.

Thus far, I have been writing about race with the understanding that it is a socially constructed category through which racial identities are made meaningful. In the essay "Towards a phenomenology of racial embodiment," Linda Martín Alcoff writes of race as an embodied experience that has the potential to define the varying truths of individual subjectivities. Alcoff references classical phenomenology to argue the following: "Because race works through the domain of the visible, the experience of race is predicated first and foremost on the perception of race, a perception whose specific mode is a learned ability" (1999, 20). These perceptions are tied to cultural and historical contexts that differ across space and time. In the case of Poland, the German empire attempted to systematically create an image of Poles as non-white to justify their conquest of Poland. In turn, Poles became obsessed with proving their whiteness to the world to ensure that they would be perceived as white both in the West and among their own desired colonial subjects. Through the present day, the visibility of Poles' whiteness has protected their growing status as a European power, even though their colonies never established in Africa after all.

In spite of their failure to successfully contribute to the colonization of the Global South, Poles have nonetheless reaped the benefits of Western colonialism. I return to m—— cake to make my point as to how this has happened—how it is still happening. In Chapter 2, I discussed the legacies of colonial violence that have made possible such extravagant quantities of chocolate in the Global North. The consumption of extracted resources from the Global South is a privilege afforded to the Global North, a socioeconomic “space” that *earned* its power thanks to Western colonialism and has *maintained* that power due to white supremacist racializations of the Global South. White people are the beneficiaries of colonialism, even if they have not formerly colonized the world.

As the beneficiaries of colonialism, white people can be comfortable in a world that they themselves have molded (Ahmed 2007, 158). Referencing the classical phenomenological concept of motility—which is expressed with the statement “I can”—I draw on Ahmed’s work to show how whiteness begets the world. Who in the world might say “I can eat m—— cake” other than Poles? Let me be more general: Who might say, “I can extract resources from the Global South and glut myself on their abundance to my heart’s content?” I repeat Ahmed’s and Fanon’s words: Colonialism makes the world ready for white bodies—to eat, to indulge, to enjoy. Poles did not have to be in Africa physically to have the world be ready for them; they simply had to prove their allegiance to a colonial, white supremacist agenda.

Popular and scholarly interest persists towards the questions: What are Poles *really*? Are they white? Or did they become white? Do they belong to the subaltern? Or are they a Western power? Are they oppressed? I do not believe that any answer would be satisfying enough if it does not account for the ways in which Poles continue to be responsible for the subjugation of the Global South. Poles have historically aligned themselves with subalternity, yet they have never chosen to betray whiteness in favor of solidarity with colonized peoples around the world. Instead, Poles reach for a seat at the table of colonial powers to assert themselves as deserving of a stake in the Western colonial world order, and anti-Blackness remains unchallenged as it has for centuries.

Chapter 4

California, 2003

After picking her granddaughter up from school, Krysia usually got to work on dinner. When she checked the refrigerator, leftovers in reused plastic margarine and Cool Whip containers were stacked precariously on top of each other. There were enough boiled potatoes, chicken cutlets, and shredded beets to make some sort of meal for everyone that night. Krysia's sweet tooth thudded against her jaw, convincing her to spend the afternoon making a cake instead. She reheated some soup for her granddaughter, sat her down at the table, and took stock of what she had in her kitchen. Some mysteriously dated cocoa powder sat in the cabinet behind stacks of bouillon cubes and tinned fish. *Murzynek*, she thought to herself. She retrieved the recipe journal she had been keeping since before she married to keep the recipe open in front of her, even though she didn't need it.

The worn pages of the journal felt like papyrus in her fingers. Although it was barely 30 years old, its exposure to the elements of her home kitchen had badly damaged the friable paper. As she flipped through to find the recipe for m—— cake, she remembered all the time she spent handwriting the recipes she received from her colleagues at the school. Stickers and doodles placed in the margins by her children reminded her of how special all the desserts once felt. She sighed and fought to remember the first time she made some of them. All the baking projects blurred together, especially now that she lived within a mile's radius of at least five superstores, all full to the brim with multiples of everything. It was easier than ever for her to decide she wanted to make m—— cake or cheesecake or shortbread or whatever it was she craved. The only drawback was how much easier it was for her to gain weight as a result.

"What are you doing?" asked a small voice. Krysia's granddaughter had climbed over her chair to perch on the countertop. She was so thin and short for her age, and it frustrated Krysia that she never seemed to want to eat any of the food she cooked for her.

"Get down from there. I'm making murzynek. Do you want to watch?"

Her granddaughter nodded and stayed where she was on top of the counter so she could see Krysia's hands better. They remained in silence together as Krysia set the butter to melt on the stove and measured out all of her ingredients. Then, she began to narrate what she was doing, step by step. In between steps, Krysia paused to lecture her granddaughter about how things used to be. "During Communist times, it wasn't like you could just make this any time you wanted. I had to share chocolates with my brother and parents. We had to slice them into four little pieces. Did you know that?" The child listened earnestly to her grandmother, comparing her stories to the Poland she had already begun to get to know. She didn't know when or what the Communist times were.

"Your great grandfather used to loiter in the kitchen doorway on the blue steps. The same ones you always like to sit on when you go back. He would stand there and wait until I pulled something out of the oven, then he would wait for me to go do something else and cut a long slice off the edge for himself, like this." Krysia had poured the cake batter into a pan and drew a finger through it, flush against the edge of the glass. She lifted it to her lips to taste it and raised her eyebrows to give her granddaughter permission to do the same. "Good?" Her granddaughter smiled, sucking on her finger and wiggling up and down on the countertop. "Get down from there."

Krysia bent over tiredly to slide the cake into the electric oven that drove her crazy. It didn't bake the way her gas one used to. When she stood back up, her granddaughter had plopped herself down in front of a cartoon, her chocolate covered finger still in her mouth. Krysia sighed, looking down at the small mess she had made. Before she began to clean it up, she cradled the bowl in which she had mixed the batter under her arm, and using one finger, took her time savoring every last drop of chocolatey goodness, like a bear carefully scooping honey out of a beehive.

On Making from Memory

In the preceding chapters, I have treated m—— cake as the object of this study. The present chapter engages the embodied process of making m—— cake as a method of knowledge production. I draw on Jennifer Brady's elaboration of the research method she calls "cooking as inquiry" (2011) to show what the preparation of m—— cake has taught me over many years of making it.

Cooking as inquiry is a creative and unconventional method insofar that it involves foodmaking as the principal research activity. As the name of the method suggests, the act of preparing food becomes the stage upon which research questions are both asked and answered. According to Brady, the physical act of cooking allows for a level of embodied engagement with research that works against binary divisions between theory and practice, or perhaps more expansively, the separation of cognitive and sensory engagements with the world (Brady 2011, 322). For intellectual traditions that oppose the Cartesian binary between mind and body, cooking as inquiry is a particularly useful methodological tool.

Moreover, cooking as a means of finding answers to a research question can generate valuable information about how people perform identity, belonging, difference, power, and other aspects of life that social research methods aim to interrogate (Brady 2011, 324). The method's flexibility makes it adaptable to and accessible for any type of project that might additionally utilize ethnographic or other anthropological or sociological methods. Even if it is not featured as the primary methodological approach, cooking as inquiry can be a crucial step in the preliminary work required to formulate a research question and design. For the last four years that I have been thinking and writing about m—— cake and other Polish dishes, I have also been frequently cooking them and paying close attention to what is revealed to me in the process.

Food is everything to me. As a working-class person, I have found my primary sources of employment for several years in various restaurants; I am proud to say this will likely continue to be the case even after I have earned the Master of Arts degree for which this thesis is required. The everydayness of cooking—its presence in my life as a pleasurable activity, paid professional labor, unpaid academic labor, and everything in between—has made possibilities for intellectual projects more accessible to me as a graduate student who must work multiple jobs just to get by. My intimate relationships all revolve around food: I regularly teach my mother how to cook vegan recipes; my partner and I seduced each other by cooking together on our first date; all of my friends are eager and supportive taste testers, excited to follow me as I grow as a cook. Most importantly, across an uncomfortable, insurmountable gap of generational difference and emotional baggage, my grandparents and I find common ground swapping stories about food. Yes, even about m—— cake.

It should be clear by now that I have somewhat of an obsession with this particular cake. When I was younger, before I decided to dedicate the better portion of my higher education to intellectualizing cake, I learned to make m—— cake in my Polish-American kitchen. But even then, the process of baking alongside my grandmother was more than the commitment of a recipe to memory. There was also the pressure of committing her memories of m—— cake to my own. While cooking and eating both Polish and US American food, my grandparents frequently reminisced on the lives they had in Communist Poland. I listened about the bad—long lines, unreliable inventory, ration cards, the monotony of the food—and the not so bad—the relationships they built around sharing illicitly imported goods, the unmatched, fresh quality of locally sourced meats and produce, the resourcefulness of rural and city folk alike.

From my grandparents, I learned how much energy home cooks across Poland spent attempting to navigate intense limitations of the Communist economy that so drastically lacked in choice. Foodmaking therefore also necessitated a mastery of knowledge of the national food system, the legal repercussions of circumventing that system, and the risks of choosing to simply obey and wait for something good (Lakhtikova, Britlinger & Glushchenko 2019, 12-13). These lessons would be reaffirmed by the materials I found to back up my various projects on how people ate all across Eastern Europe during the Soviet years. Reading these histories—my family's histories—I felt as though I was remembering experiences that I had not even been alive to endure.

I realized that inheriting recipes also meant promising to be the keeper of my grandparents' memories of the late-socialist era in which they developed their own identities and ideas about the world. Like many other children of immigrants growing up in diaspora, my relationship to Polish cuisine has been mediated by my grandparents' relationship to Poland, which was complicated even more by their unique positionalities as immigrants who came to the United States in their forties (*and* who returned in their retirement to live in a totally different Poland over twenty years later). This is what is revealed to me when I make m—— cake: My memories of it are not my own.

Making m—— cake is a performance of my grandparents' nostalgia for the lives they lived before I was even a thought on this planet. As I mix the cocoa powder into melted butter, I recall the slower pace of life in Poland that felt impossible in the United States. When I pour the batter into a glass baking dish, I reminisce on the challenges of life under austerity and how perhaps these difficulties made us stronger, made us ready for immigrant life. I pause; I remind myself that I am not the immigrant, I was only raised by them. I may have been made tougher by my upbringing around people traumatized by their migration over the shattered Iron Curtain, but that struggle was my own, distinct experience. Pulling the dense, deliciously fragrant m—— cake out of the oven, I return to my fond remembrances of a Poland that exists only in my memory of someone else's memory, sepia toned and distorted by the impassability of time and space.

It is challenging to reconcile the nostalgia I have inherited from my grandparents with the future I envision based on my political convictions. In many ways, undertaking this project has felt like an act of betrayal. For my grandparents, the easy consumerism of the United States shined like the gates of Heaven; I can think of nothing more grotesque than the creativity-crushing consumption required of life in this country. For my grandparents, indulging in m—— cake was an act of joy, a rare reward for humiliating struggle; I am unable to look at chocolate without agonizing over where it came from, who had to die for it to get here, and what it says about me that I still want to eat it. Like many other children of immigrants, I do not want to shit on the memories of the people who wanted me to have a better life. At the same time, I know better than to delude myself into thinking that this is the best that life can be, or to pretend that life in post-World War II Poland was such a utopia. Like the ladies in "Second Shifts, 1981" say: "Każdy ma swoje."

I turn to Svetlana Boym's articulation of diasporic intimacy to make sense of my memory confusion. Arguing that it is "not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it," Boym elaborates diasporic intimacy as a phenomenon that holds close the contradictions of both pain and pleasure in being removed from one's homeland (2001, 252). A diasporic intimacy in Boym's terms creates the space for me to honor the transferal of memory that happens every time I make m—— cake and also allows me to sit with the feelings of discomfort and objection when I think about its name, its ingredients, and its legacy. Moreover, diasporic intimacy means that I can process these feelings at a distance from the homeland, away from the scrutiny of Poles who would criticize me for my fascination with what they consider to be an innocuous part of their culture. The baggage of deeply enmeshed, banal racism is as important for me to deal with as the sensory delight of eating cake. The ideology of diasporic intimacy allows me to do both.

For all the critiques I have of the contemporary food system and the ways in which it upholds colonialism and white supremacy, I do not subscribe to the belief that humanity should temper its desires for sensory pleasure in favor of ethical asceticism. It is important to eat what tastes good, but it is also important to think critically about why something tastes good. Because of everything I have carefully delineated about m—— cake —its problematic name, the immense problems around the sourcing of its principal ingredient—I cannot comfortably say that what I feel when I make and eat it is pleasure. Instead, I feel guilt, grief, and anger. At the most rudimentary level, the cake does taste good, but the emotional sensation that follows the sensory reception sours the whole experience. And there persists the issue of promising to be the keeper of my ancestors' stories for posterity, to absorb their nostalgia use it as an anchor for my own relationship to the world.

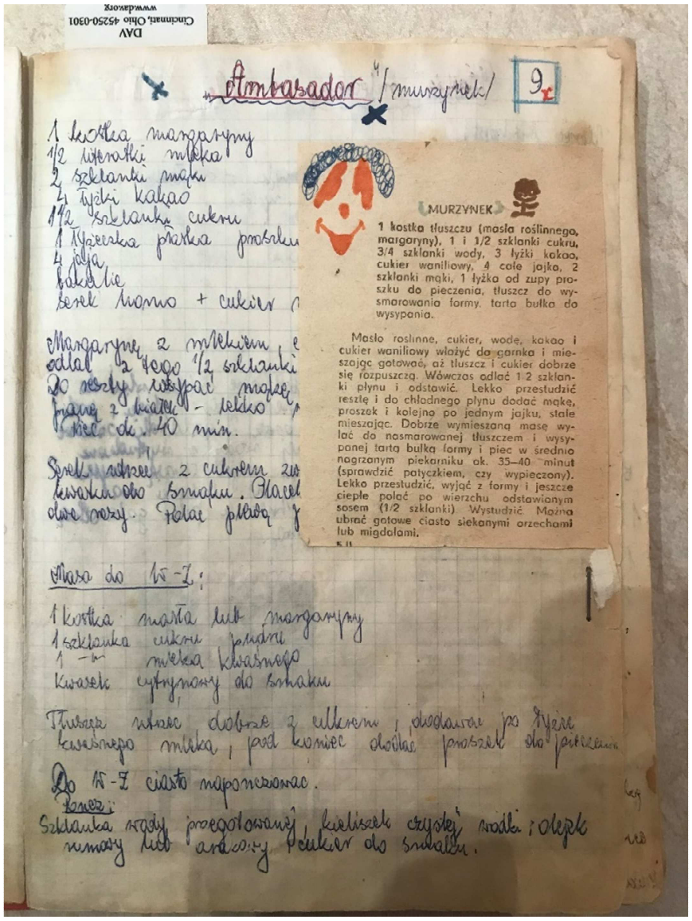
Boym’s concept of diasporic intimacy lives in her broader rumination on nostalgia among Russians and other Eastern Europeans who lived through the great transitions of the late twentieth century. Of nostalgia, Boym writes:

> Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. (2001, xvi)

Here, Boym’s conceptualization of nostalgia gives me hope. Instead of feeling trapped in my grandparents’ past, I can motivate myself to take responsibility for the impact it has had on my life. By holding myself accountable to telling my own story of m—— cake, as I have done in this thesis, I create an escape route from under the weight of nostalgic tales of chocolate cakes of yore. I can harness the courage to build a new relationship with m—— cake and commit myself to anti-racism without waiting for this possibility to surface in the memories that are not really my memories.

The truth is that I am nostalgic for an imagined past towards which I pray our future is headed. I yearn for pleasure, for justice, for community. Food is the lens through which I have chosen to work towards this pleasurable, just, communal future. In his book *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran Foer grapples with his vision of past, present, and future through the lens of, as the title suggests, eating animals. After the birth of his son, Foer reflects on the magnificence of possibility he felt as he came into his responsibilities as a new father. “We could retell our stories and make them better, more representative or aspirational,” he writes. “Or we could choose to tell different stories. The world itself had another chance” (2009, 10-11). I, too, wonder about what stories I will tell my children about the food their predecessors ate. When I teach them to make m—— cake, will I make them memorize the performance of nostalgia that I learned? Or will I give them a chance at righting what the world that preceded them has gotten so horribly wrong?

Writing these essays has been an exercise in building a new foundation of memories that I wish to pass on to future generations (and even more desperately wish I can make clear to prior ones). These are the memories that remind us that we had a chance at solidarity with the people who feed us, and that inspire us to wonder anew if that solidarity can be recovered. They reach backward to a time when the goal was to draw limits around extraction, rather than exploit Indigenous land for all it was worth. These new memories ask: “How could you live differently? … It doesn’t have to be everything. Each crystal of sugar counts” (Kennedy 2021). Each scoop of cocoa counts. Each divestment from white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism… it all counts.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"Ambasador" /murzynek/

1 kostka margaryny
1/2 literatki mleka
2 szklanki mąki
4 łyżki kakao
1 1/2 szklanki cukru
1 łyżeczka proszku
4 jaja
bakalie
serek homo + cukier

Margarynę z mlekiem, c
odlać z tego 1/2 szklanki
do reszty wsypać mąkę,
jajka z białkami - lekko
piec ok. 40 min.

Serek utrzeć z cukrem i
kwaskiem do smaku. Placek
dwa razy. Polać płatą

Masa do W-Z:

1 kostka masła lub margaryny
1 szklanka cukru pudru
1 -"- mleka kwaśnego
Kwasek cytrynowy do smaku

Tłuszcz utrzeć dobrze z cukrem i dodawać po łyżce kwaśnego mleka, pod koniec dodać proszek do pieczenia

Do W-Z ciasto naponczować.

Poncz:
Szklanka wody przegotowanej, kieliszek czystej wódki i olejek rumowy lub arakowy i cukier do smaku.

MURZYNEK

1 kostka tłuszczu (masła roślinnego, margaryny), 1 i 1/2 szklanki cukru, 3/4 szklanki wody, 3 łyżki kakao, cukier waniliowy, 4 całe jajka, 2 szklanki mąki, 1 łyżka od zupy proszku do pieczenia, tłuszcz do wysmarowania formy, tarta bułka do wysypania.

Masło roslinne, cukier, wodę, kakao i cukier waniliowy włożyć do garnka i mieszając gotować, aż tłuszcz i cukier dobrze się rozpuszczą. Wówczas odlać 1/2 szklanki płynu i odstawić. Lekko przestudzić resztę i do chłodnego płynu dodać mąkę, proszek i kolejno po jednym jajku, stale mieszając. Dobrze wymieszaną masę wylać do nasmarowanej tłuszczem i wysypanej tartą bułką formy i piec w średnio nagrzanym piekarniku ok. 35–40 minut (sprawdzić patyczkiem, czy wypieczony). Lekko przestudzić, wyjąć z formy i jeszcze ciepłe polać po wierzchu odstawionym sosem (1/2 szklanki). Wystudzić. Można ubrać gotowe ciasto siekanymi orzechami lub migdałami.

The author's grandmother's recipe journal entry for m—— cake.

Epilogue

Bracing for Impact, 2021

Of all the ways in which our kin have caused us shame—of all the ways our kin will cause us shame—of all the births out of wedlock, the clandestine gay cousin, the unfeeling and cruel mothers, the affairs, the brain tumors, the stolen heirlooms—you, by far, are the most shameful. You, alone, have somehow reached for the unreachable star of our alleged racism.

And while we're enjoying dessert, no less?

How could you ruin dessert like this?

The year is 2021, I am 23 years old, and I have been pouring years of my life into trying to figure out how to talk to my grandparents about the racist shit they say on a daily basis. I'm still afraid of the consequences. If I ever want to go back to Poland, to the home they made for themselves, for my mother, for me, I want them to love me. Most families in this place don't really do unconditional love, and I can imagine their shock and disgust if I dared to even suggest that they had some problematic ideas about Black people.

I would miss the parquet floors that creak under my weight as I sneak through the house at night to eat pickles and sliced bread out of the pantry. I always know I'm in the right place when I can eat the way I always want to be eating. The food here is fresher, and my grandparents' kitchen is huge. When they retired they remodeled it thanks to the steady flow of American dollars they had saved from twenty years of my grandmother's housecleaning for upper class California wives. I miss the two blue steps up to the kitchen I liked to sit on when I was little.

Two pairs of eyes stare innocuously in my direction, as if they could see only the stainless steel sink behind me. In front of them, bone white dessert plates resembling doilies hold sinfully thick slices of chocolate cake, as thick and moist as a bloated sea sponge.

"Did you want to tell us something?" my grandfather asks. My grandmother looks at me as if I am physically restraining her from enjoying her cake.

Leaning against the counter, I grip the edge and feel the cool metal of the sink against my clammy hands. "Yes," I say. I take a deep breath and brace for impact.

Conclusion

In 2020, Belgian food historian and cookbook author Regula Ysewijn published her book *Oats in the North, Wheat from the South: The History of British Baking, Savory and Sweet*. The dedication in this book is unlike any other that I had ever seen in a Western, white authored cookbook.

> I want to acknowledge that most of the cakes, gingerbreads and biscuits in this book would not have existed if not for sugar imports that were made possible due to slavery, which was particularly concentrated in the Caribbean islands of Barbados, St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua and Jamaica, and later Grenada and Trinidad in the 17th, 18th and 18th century, until the Slavery Abolition Act took effect on August 1, 1834—which unfortunately only resulted in partial liberation.
>
> Sugar has a cost, and that cost was paid by those held in bondage.

This is the very least those of us who owe our culinary traditions to the spoils of colonialism can do to begin confronting the true cost of our diets. As I have shown in the preceding chapters, this includes Poles, as well.

The presence of m—— cake in the Polish culinary canon reveals the indispensability of whiteness and colonialism to Polish national identity. Even though Poles never successfully colonized another nation, they have managed to maintain power by virtue of their allegiance to white supremacy and colonialism. When there were opportunities to put into practice their subaltern consciousness, Poles instead opted to grab for power much like their Western European peers. This is clear on every level, from the language that Poles still use to describe Black people, to the ease with which Poles can now access cocoa in their contemporary, free market society.

The everydayness of m—— cake makes it an especially useful bridge to exposing the everydayness of white supremacy and colonial desire among Poles during and after the socialist period. From my position in the Polish diaspora, as someone who grew up with these ideas and was heavily influenced by Polish ideologies of race, I am concerned with the ways in which the banality of racism is accepted as normal. This is not a uniquely Polish problem, as evidenced by Ysewijn's dedication. The beneficiaries of colonial power are few; its victims are in the billions. From the early years of Europeans' enslavement of Africans, to the contemporary issues plaguing food systems worldwide, the Global South has been indelibly shaped by the tastes of the Global North. These major processes have been taken for granted by those who are not forced to confront them on a daily basis. Everydayness begets ignorance.

My desire with this thesis has been to offer an interruption this harmful ignorance. I conclude with a brief discussion of ongoing efforts to bring racial justice to Poland as the nation is once again in a period of major transition, from liberal democracy to ultra-conservative oligarchy.

I am excited by the possibilities that this nascent racial justice movement holds for changing the tide of dominant racial ideologies across Poland. At the same time, I am cautious to place all my hope in the fate of a single movement. The activists leading #DontCallMeMurzyn are mostly young, Black women. They have been leading initiatives to get the attention of both Polish governmental and academic institutions as well as ordinary people in the country. By crafting petitions for language justice, leading educational seminars in person and online, and spreading social media campaigns across Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook, those working under the hashtag are cultivating a presence that is gaining more and more visibility every day.

So, what of the white Poles watching them across the country and around the world, on phone screens and in newspapers? We must commit ourselves to opposing anti-Blackness, today and every day. It is far past time to relinquish the power that Poles have found so hard earned through their attempts to prove themselves as worthy of being oppressors. In my wildest imagination, we can return to a similar moment that we faced in the past and try our chances at solidarity, justice, and liberation. What we give up will pale in comparison to what the world will gain.

Appendix

Murzynek Bambo (Little Negro Bambo)

Julian Tuwim, 1934

Author’s translation

Murzynek Bambo w Afryce mieszka, czarną ma skórę ten nasz koleżka.	Little Negro Bambo lives in Africa, Our little friend has black skin.
Uczy się pilnie przez całe ranki Ze swej murzyńskiej pierwszej czytanki.	He studies hard all through the morning From his first grade Negro’s reading book.
A gdy do domu ze szkoły wraca, Psoci, figluje - to jego praca.	And when he returns home from school, He fools around, gets into trouble – it’s what he does.
Aż mama krzyczy: “Bambo, łobuzie!” A Bambo czarną nadyma buzię.	Until mama yells: “Bambo, you rascal!” And Bambo purses his black lips.
Mama powiada: “Napij się mleka.” A on na drzewo mamie ucieka.	Mama says: “Drink some milk.” But he runs from his mama up onto a tree.
Mama powiada: “Chodź do kąpieli”, A on się boi że się wybieli.	Mama says: “Come take a bath,” But he’s afraid that he’ll be washed white.
Lecz mama kocha swojego synka. Bo dobry chłopak z tego murzynka.	But mama loves her little son. For there’s a good kid in that little Negro.
Szkoda że Bambo czarny, wesoły nie chodzi razem z nami do szkoły.	What a shame that Bambo, black and joyful, Doesn’t come along with us to school

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