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**Home is Where the Kitchen is:
Rinco's Restaurant (2009) and *Little Forest* (2014, 2018)¹**

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The kitchen has taken up new significance in Japanese literature and cinema, particularly in work by women writers and directors. To name a few, Yoshimoto Banana opens her debut novel *Kitchen* (*Kitsuchin*, 1988) with an observation on the kitchen: 'The place I like best in this world is the kitchen. No matter where it is, no matter what kind, if it's a kitchen, if it's a place where they make food, it's fine with me' (1993: 3). *Kamome Diner* (*Kamome shokudo*, Ogigami Naoko, 2008) centers on a diner in Helsinki, where the Japanese owner/cook Sachie, with the help of two other Japanese women, tries to cater *onigiri*, Japanese rice ball, to the taste of local customers. The diner becomes a space to forge a bond among women across national and cultural boundaries. Another woman director's work, *Rinco's Restaurant* (*Shokudo katatsumuri*, Tominaga Mai, 2009) features a small restaurant built by Rinco, who returns home from the city after her savings were stolen by her Indian boyfriend. Although the original manga *Little Forest* (*Monthly Afternoon*, 2002-5) was drawn by a male artist Igarashi Daisuke, and the director of its Japanese film adaption (2014), Mori Junich, is also a man, in the 2018 Korean adaptation, woman director Yim Soon-rye begins the segment 'Winter' with Hye-won making a bowl of rice and simple cabbage soup in the kitchen, after her arrival at home which had been unattended for several years while she was away.

In these works, the kitchen functions to underscore the female protagonists' desire to secure a space needed in order to create a new interiority for herself as well as for others. Yet the space is not merely a symbol of feminine space of social restrictions and domestic labour but rather a space to reinvent the self. The protagonist of Yoshimoto's novel, *Mikage*, is orphaned after the death of her grandmother, who had been her sole caretaker after her parents passed away when she was young. She now finds herself sleeping in the kitchen by the refrigerator. The kitchen, often associated with maternal nurture, is taken by the young female protagonist as a space of comfort in the absence of any parental figure. In his interpretation of Banana's work, Murakami Fuminobu claims, 'by deconstructing the sexual and food desires, and the bedroom and the kitchen, the structure of Banana's *Kitchen* subverts the modernist binary oppositions of the self-stranger, self-family, and heterogeneity and homogeneity ideologies' (2005: 66).

A similar dynamic is found in *Kamome Diner* and *Rinco's Restaurant*, both of which are literary adaptations. Based on Mure Yoko's novel with the same title, *Kamome shokudo*, the film withholds specific reasons as to why Sachie has moved to Helsinki in the first place, except her pointing out to Midori that the common 'national ingredient' of Finland and of Japan is salmon. Yet the other two Japanese characters, Midori and Masako, both of whom are aimless, wandering tourists from Japan, find themselves in the process of helping Sachie attract new local customers. *Rinco's Restaurant* is an adaptation of Ogawa Ito's novel *Shokudo katatsumuri*, which literally translates as Snail Restaurant (the English translation of the novel is titled *The Restaurant of Love Regained*). An animated musical sequence opens the film, briefly summing up Rinco's backstory. She ran away from home when she turned fifteen; after she finds her Indian boyfriend has stolen the money she saved to

open a restaurant, she loses her voice out of shock. She visits her childhood home, where she opens a small restaurant called Snail Restaurant. The Japanese manga, *Little Forest*, which yielded two film adaptations in Japan and Korea in 2014 and 2018 respectively, evokes a sense of ‘ur’ home through the space of the kitchen, where Ichiko or Hye-won, the female protagonist of each adaptation, cooks for herself and friends.

The films mentioned above are more than just ‘foodie films’ in that food is intimately tied to female characters’ (transnational) desire, helping to create a sense of new interiority. Drawing on *Rinco’s Restaurant* and *Little Forest*, this essay first examines the significance of the kitchen in relation to the female protagonists’ homecoming. The relationship between kitchen, food and character indeed constitutes an intriguing triad that challenges how to articulate the audience’s pleasure in imagining the taste conveyed through different sensorial modes: the verbal vs. the visual-auditory. The loss of Rinco’s ‘voice’ may be seen as diminishing the film’s capacity to impact the spectator, as it eliminates a handy tool to communicate ingredients and other knowledge required to appreciate a dish. I instead focus on the transformative aspect of divergent modes of media storytelling manifest in the films and their original source texts, when the taste of ingredients and dishes must recourse to different senses. This essay is concerned less with the textual differences between the two film adaptations of *Little Forest*, than with their commonality in depicting the mother-daughter relationship as well as in transferring the sensuous nature of food and cooking in the kitchen onto the cinematic medium. Instead of interpreting the loss of voice or the less frequent recourse to the verbal to express taste as a lack of discursive agency, I argue that the kitchen becomes a ‘choric’ space for female

protagonists where the relationship between mother and daughter is reconfigured in order to remake themselves.

1. Homecoming: 'Serving the Self'

Kendra Marston (2016) traces the spatial trajectory of contemporary Hollywood 'travel romances' *Eat Pray Love* (Ryan Murphy, 2003) and *Under the Tuscan Sun* (Audrey Wells, 2003), in which white female protagonists leave home to rediscover themselves. Through travelling to places such as Indonesia, India and Italy, the protagonists learn to bracket the neoliberal demands represented by the United States, and to appreciate alternate values in the region by acquiring local knowledge. Increasingly more travel films follow a similar spatial trajectory including such films as *Paris Can Wait* (Eleanor Coppola, 2016) and the male travelogue, *The Trip to Spain* (Michael Winterbottom, 2017).

Except for *Kamome Diner*, where the Japanese protagonist opens a restaurant in Helsinki, the spatial trajectory portrayed in the Asian homecoming films follows the opposite direction. All three—*Rinco's Restaurant* and both Japanese and Korean film adaptations of the manga *Little Forest*—showcase young female protagonists, who unwillingly return to lead a village life, after having unsuccessfully attempted to secure a stable job and savor an urban lifestyle. In the context of South Korea, the theme or trajectory of homecoming prevails across both documentary and fiction films. Youngmin Choe (2015) examines contemporary Korean documentaries such as *Faces of Seoul* (*Seouleui eolgul*, Gina Kim, 2009), *Home from Home* (*Endstation der Sehnsüchte/Dokil Maeul*, Cho Sung-hyung, 2008) and *Border City* (*Gyeonggye dosi*, Hong Hyung-sook, 2002), all of which are directed by women filmmakers; in particular, Choe pays attention to the extent to which this spatial trajectory and

temporal return complicates, and helps to reconfigure, the idea of nostalgia. The latest example of female homecoming could be found in the Hong Kong film, *The Lady Improper* (*Fei fen shu nü*, Tsang Tsui-shan, 2019); the female lead, Siu Man, after her divorce, returns home to the restaurant, which has been run by her chef father.

Regardless of the seemingly opposite trajectories of their respective journeys—Hollywood cinema’s moving away from home vs. Asian films’ homecoming—the aim of their journeys is similar: to regain the self. To consider whether both trends could be read as a critique of neoliberalism, where individual, ‘authentic’ values are bulldozed by neoliberal forces and/or tainted by the desire for professional success and dreamed cosmopolitanism, one must tease out the spatial and temporal implications of the idealized bucolic life: both the ‘kitchen’, in which the protagonists and the spectator alike slowly immerse themselves and learn to appreciate, and the idea of ‘return’.

What Marston calls the ‘fantasy of universal sisterhood’ materializes ‘through the mobilization of idealized women, played by idealized stars’, and tourist space ‘operates as a training ground for this female tourist seeking her enlightenment’ (2016: 4). In these films, foreign territories such as India and Indonesia ‘offer her the opportunity to share her newfound knowledge, create affective bonds with local women’ (2016: 5). Female protagonists in *Rinco’s Restaurant* and *Little Forest*, however, fail to acquire the prerequisites to reach the status of globetrotter; Rinco’s dream of opening an Indian restaurant in the city is shattered when she discovers that her partner has disappeared with the money she had saved. Her cosmopolitan dreams and upward mobility are circumscribed, leaving her no option other than to go back home after many years of hardships in the city.

The division between urban and village life in the films, however, is not as sharp as it initially appears; it is better characterized as the cosmopolitan imaginary being embedded or vicariously appreciated in their local lives. Rinco's boyfriend was Indian, and she also worked in a Turkish restaurant in the city. The first dish Rinco cooks for Kuma, a local man with whom she is acquainted from childhood, is curry. The novel underscores that Rinco makes use of pomegranate to make the dish, inspired by an Iranian recipe; while in the film, the reason for using the same ingredient is rooted in Rinco's childhood memory of Kuma, who once handed over the fruit to young Rinco. Further, Kuma was married to a foreign national; in the film, he refers to his estranged wife as 'siñorita'; while in the novel her nationality is specified as Argentinian (Ogawa 2011: 34). This *mélange* of multiple nationalities of characters, cuisines and ingredients makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact national identity of the dish, other than employing such obscure terms as 'fusion' and 'cosmopolitan'. The reception banquet that Rinco prepares for her mother's wedding at the end of the film is clearly international. Each dish is marked by the national flag of its origin and placed accordingly on the world map, which is placed as a tablecloth. In *Little Forest*, Ichiko has grown up in an isolated place both spatially and psychologically, due to her home's distance from the town center and sometimes weather conditions; yet she did experience the tastes of foreign sauces such as Worcestershire sauce and Christmas savories. In the Japanese film adaptation, after having moved to the city, Ichiko is amazed at the rows and rows of global brands of Worcestershire sauce and Nutella spread stocked in the grocery store aisles, as she firmly believed that those were her mother's own inventions. In the Korean adaptation, Hye-won's mom cooks *crème brûlée* to cheer up her daughter who has been bullied at school.

If the journey for Hollywood protagonists is to reinvigorate and regain their ‘authentic’ selves at the expense of, according to Marston, reinforcing white hegemony, Asian counterparts are led to ‘regress’ to their childhood homes. Marston notes how ethnic minorities (always subsidiary characters in the US context) and exotic places are exploited in the travel romance films, only to help the white middle-class women protagonists achieve what is lacking in their urban environment: ‘*Eat Pray Love* and *Under the Tuscan Sun* champion what bell hooks has termed “eating the Other” as a fantasy liberation strategy for those middle-class white women’ (2016: 12). In contrast, both Rinco and Ichiko reunite with family or friends in the local setting, and learn to acquire and re-appreciate local knowledge and values. They are ‘serving the self’ instead of ‘eating the Other’.

Rinco is very keen on incorporating seasonal, local ingredients in her cooking, but the idea of the self is more complex than simply consuming the local food. One major difference in storytelling between the novel and its film adaptation, *Rinco’s Restaurant*, lies in the description of the process involved in acquiring and preparing ingredients. One of the most elaborate meals served in both novel and film is the six-course meal offered to the town’s mistress, who has been mourning the death of her partner. Rinco serves the mistress from the fruit cocktail to dessert, from which the mistress regains her physical strength as well the will to live. She, like Rinco herself, barely speaks. *Samgetang*—a Korean style of chicken stew dish cooked with *ginsaeng*—is served prior to the main courses of risotto and herb crusted, roasted lamb-rack. While the film only shows Rinco’s hands elegantly stuffing the chicken with ingredients, which she then puts in a clay pot to bring to a boil, the novel painstakingly describes the slaughter of the chicken, which Rinco had witnessed a few days prior:

Seeing it [the chicken] floating in its beautiful golden brown soup, I thought back to when the chicken had been slaughtered just several days back, with the butcher twisting its neck, pulling down on its legs, plucking the feathers from its throat and then slicing an artery with a sharp knife, leaving the chicken flapping its wings as blood dribbled down its body (Ogawa 2011: 73).

Rinco's recollection here leads her to elaborate on her ethical duty as a chef; she declares that she must do her best to perfect the dish; 'I'd caused a life to be taken for the sake of my dish' (Ogawa 2011: 73-4).

Later in the novel, following the wish of Rinco's mother Rurico, her pet pig named Hermes is taken away and slaughtered, to be used as the main ingredient for the wedding banquet. After a short, yet powerful description of the agony the pig has to undergo when subjected to the hands of a local butcher, Rinco states that she needed to 'take [it] all in' (Ogawa 2011: 162). In contrast, in the film, the comparable scene is replaced by a silent moment of farewell between Rinco and Hermes; it shows a few shots of Hermes on a small blue truck, presumably being transported to the slaughterhouse, leaving behind Rinco and Kuma who see her off. A shot of Rinco's reserved but sad face is shortly followed by a scene of her preparing pork in her kitchen. Her respectful treatment of the meat—cutting, rubbing and stuffing—intercut with a shot of Hermes being petted provides visual continuity, as well as a rupture between the different stages of Hermes' life and death.

Similar textual differences exist in the Japanese adaptation of the manga *Little Forest*, with perhaps opposite effects. The two-volume manga consists of various

segments named after either local seasonal ingredients, such as *taranome* (*dureup* in Korean, aralia elata shoots), or dishes, such as candied chestnuts (*marrons glacés*).

The Japanese adaptation features a scene where Ichiko is invited by a local farmer to kill ducks, which have been used for catching insects in the rice field. Although a comparable scene is omitted in the Korean adaptation due to director Yim who is an advocate of vegetarianism, in the Japanese one, the process of killing, skinning and carving a duck is certainly less visceral in the drawing than on screen.

It is subject to debate which mode of representation—direct or indirect, subject to the medium in question—is more powerful in engaging the audience. Jennifer Barker, for instance, notes the intricate push and pull in contemporary food industry documentaries such as *Food Inc.* (Robert Kenner, 2008), where the camera not only exposes the deplorable conditions of factory farms, but also occasionally turns away from sights that would horrify the viewer; ‘the turn away breeds more interest...the suddenness of the cut away express[es] both the attraction to the object of disgust... and our repulsion from the possibility of getting close enough to see it, to which the camera responds by pulling away’ (Barker 2011: 72). Regardless of the presence or absence of a visceral depiction of Hermes’ death, which would affect audience members differently, both the novel and the film, I suggest, raise a similar question with regard to the act and outcome of caring.

Belinda Smaill, in her discussion of contemporary food industry documentaries such as *Our Daily Bread* (*Unser täglich Brot*, Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005) and *Food Inc.*, recourse to Jennifer Wilkins’ concept of the ‘food citizen’, which underscores both consumer rights to have access to adequate information on treatments of sources/products, as well as the responsibility involved in taking up citizenship: eating responsibly (2014/5: 81). The source novel of *Rinco’s Restaurant*,

The Restaurant of Love Regained, more clearly states an ethical responsibility with regard to food preparation (and possibly waste). It neither philosophically considers animal rights; nor does it aim to persuade the audience to adopt vegetarianism. Yet the novel certainly invites the audience to consider the outcome of care or caring as does the film. In both media, cooking often begins with Rinco's careful handling of ingredients, with her holding them and praying as if she is a goddess who serves food in front of an altar (Figure 1). In the film *Little Forest* (2014), Ichiko is less sentimental in her attitude toward ducks, although she is portrayed as very compassionate toward the ducklings in the shots juxtaposed; in the present moment, her dispassionate expression foregrounds the process—how carefully she sharpens the knife before carving and plugs the feathers out of the duck after it has been boiled in a pot. With the duck Ichiko earns for her labor, she grills, makes stocks and side dishes, and savors them all at home.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE. Rinco prepares each ingredient with attentiveness and care.]

Rinco's Restaurant comes to a surprising ending, when Rurico asks Rinco to cook the pig Hermes for her wedding. Hermes is treated as more than a pet: sometimes like a child to Rurico, and other times like a sister and even mother to Rinco. At one point in the film, Hermes and Rurico are visually 'interchangeable', with both similarly staged and posed. On the sofa by the window in Rinco's restaurant, only two are seen lying down: Hermes and Rurico (Figures 2-3). Rurico's wedding is celebrated despite the death awaiting her, with all the guests fully aware of the fact that her life, like that of Hermes, will come to an end shortly. Rurico's decision to serve Hermes is based on anthropomorphic projection: 'I thought we'd eat Hermes. She'd like that too. Otherwise she will be so sad when I'm gone. Do you

think you could do that for me? It's my last wish' (Ogawa 2011: 158). To what extent, however, could Rurico's wish here be interpreted as an alternative to capitalistic consumption or even as cannibalistic?

[INSERT FIGURE 2-3 HERE A visual parallel between Hermes and Rurico underscores their unity or interchangeability.]

A small community in a village used to be, and may still offer, an alternative to industrialized, mass production. In advancing what he terms, 'moral vegetarianism' broadly construed, David DeGrazia considers the moral permissibility of traditional family farms, which provide a friendlier environment to animals whose lifespan is not curtailed by industry practicality and consumer preferences, as in factory farms (2009). That is, he suggests that the killing of an animal in such environments should not be ethically condemned or should at least be assessed through different terms (DeGrazia 2009: 160). But still Hermes is treated as a companion, not raised as an animal to be consumed. Jennifer Brown pays attention to Karl Marx's comparison of capitalism with cannibalism in order to foreground 'the irrationality of a system that devours itself' and further coins the term, 'white cannibalism' to explain the dynamic of cannibalism from within—'the self as cannibal' rather than 'the cannibalistic other' (2013: 13).

Although Rurico could be seen as 'the self as cannibal', her strange, almost cannibalistic wish to eat her own pet-companion, I suggest, signals more the reciprocal nature of a relationship between caretaker and recipient, whether it is a pet or a child. Rinco's respect of Rurico's last wish points to the aim or outcome of nurturing and caring, which is to make the other, part of oneself: literally in the case of Hermes, and metaphorically in the case of maternal love. The death of Hermes, which coincides with that of the mother, serves as a 'vehicle' for Rurico and Rinco to

finally address the tension between them, which was originally based on the latter's mistaken belief that she is an illegitimate child born outside marriage. As part of Rurico's wedding, the film inserts a fantasy sequence of Hermes literally being a vehicle for the ride of mother and daughter in the sky, on whose back they rejoice (Figure 4).

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE Only in the fantasy sequence is Rurico able to provide the care that Rinco longed for as a child.]

The inward journey of the Asian homecoming drama is in contrast to the Hollywood travel romance films—moving back home rather than moving outward to foreign tourist spaces—but the narrative outcome is similar in that it helps the female protagonists earn self-esteem. Where the two depart is in the way that the protagonists reach that endpoint: 'eating the Other' vs. 'serving the self'. Marston notes that for Hollywood protagonists, 'the search for the authentic self is thus reliant on a validation of one's fantasies of cultural difference' (2016: 13). The history of the Other (ethically or culturally) is erased for the sake of imagined non-capitalist values and the white protagonist's pleasure. The opposite trajectory provides Asian protagonists with self-sustainability and worth. In both Japanese and Korean film adaptations of *Little Forest*, the voice-over of Ichiko and that of Hye-won constantly convey local knowledge of how to grow and harvest crops and fruits—the ingredients for both their dishes and contentment. The bucolic life in these films indeed presents the spectator another fantasy of stress-free country life, while for these protagonists, it presents a process one must undergo in order to re-learn the values and self-worth lost in the pursuit of urban life. After the death of Rinco's mother, Rurico, the last customer at Snail Restaurant is Rinco herself, erasing the divide between the self and other that typically characterizes the chef-customer relation. Rinco's act of cooking

and serving herself a pigeon dish enables her to break her silence, with the exclamation, ‘*oishi!*’ (delicious).

Even so, the Hollywood travel romance and Asian homecoming films have something in common with the values assigned to the local as a pre-modern space imagined to be complementing and curbing the progress or development ideology. The re-appreciation of country life requires the protagonist to adjust her sense of linear time to that of the cyclical time that governs the country. Ichiko, in *Little Forest*, consciously considers the changes and transitions in her life: her moving from home to the city, then back home. She sees her eventual settlement in her hometown as a ‘spiral’: a renewal of, instead of return to, the lifestyle and values of which she’s been unappreciative. Should the ‘voiceless’ Rinco then be understood in relation to this idea of ‘re-appreciation’ of, rather than a ‘regress’ to, her childhood?

2. Voiceless Chef; Speechless Customers

Loss of voice or silence, which often signals lack of agency in Classical Hollywood melodrama, provides a motif that narratively and stylistically challenges the film adaptation of *The Restaurant of Love Regained*, the narrative backbone of which consists of a series of new dishes Rinco creates for her customers. Rinco primarily communicates with others by either showing cards with prewritten phrases or writing on a notepad: a premise that creates a stylistic challenge for the cinematic rendition of food. The first-person perspective of the novel easily conveys Rinco’s thoughts, frustrations, and emotions, and provides information on the ingredients and dishes created. In contrast, Tominaga’s decision not to assign any voice-over to Rinco forces the film to recourse to subsidiary characters’ expressions and explanations to

imagine the taste of Rinco's dishes in the absence of her dialogue. One may be reminded of the psychoanalytic approach that articulates gender difference in terms of the threshold of voice and language (or the symbolic) which are often coded in masculine terms; Rinco seems to have returned to a pre-verbal stage or at least pre-school period; her handwriting on the restaurant sign is 'like that of a preschooler', Ogawa describes in the novel (2011: 59).

Kaja Silverman points out that there is a constant slippage in film theories between the 'voice-as-being' vs. the 'voice-as-discursive agent' (1988: 44). In Classical Hollywood Cinema, it is the latter that female protagonists or characters lack; the character who lacks voice can neither transcend the physical and material constraints of the visible body, nor is equated with the apparatus external to storytelling. 'Far from being a privileged condition, synonymous with soul, spirit, or consciousness,' Silverman notes, 'interiority in Hollywood films implies linguistic constraint and physical confinement—confinement to the body, to claustral spaces, and to inner narratives' (1988: 45). Sexual difference, according to Silverman, is mapped onto the contrast between interiority and exteriority, and voicelessness and voice, where woman is often assigned to the former (1988: 54). The kitchen, not only in *Rinco's Restaurant* but also in both of the film adaptations of *Little Forest*, is small and recessed: the female protagonists appear to find comfort in this private space, which is distanced from the social order where they lack agency. Despite their equation of female protagonists with the interiority of the space of the kitchen, the Asian homecoming films escape the problematic dichotomy Silverman identifies in Hollywood films. Although break-ups with their boyfriends all contribute somewhat to the female protagonists' homecoming, these male characters do not embody the 'transcendent Other' (Silverman 1988: 12) that guides the narrative or governs

cinematic discursivity. Ichiko's marriage to an out-of-towner at the end of *Little Forest* is elliptical as well as unexpected, while Hye-won's love interest with a local man, Jae-ha, is open-ended. If there is any character that carries the discursive functions in *Little Forest*, it is the absent mother.

The kitchen in *Little Forest* could better be characterized as 'chora', where female protagonists long for a unity between mother and child. Silverman draws on the concept of *chora*, an idea suggested in several writings by Julia Kristeva, and explicates it as a 'choric fantasy'. According to Silverman, for Kristeva *chora* embodies contradictory values: both a pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic 'utopian' space and figure that integrates mother and child, as well as a 'chaos' that awaits differentiation and will subsequently be abjected (1988: 102-3). The kitchen could be seen as a place of *chora* where the child is integrated with, yet must eventually differentiate from, the mother. The female protagonist invites her local friends – Yuta and Kikko in the Japanese adaptation; Jae-ha and Eun-suk, in the Korean one – but the kitchen is predominantly a solitary space. Silverman claims that the choric fantasy for Kristeva is 'most fully showcased within infantile language' which allows the subject to elide rationalized discourse and to instead access the archaic mother (1988: 106); the maternal voice figures in the sonorous envelope which is distant from the symbolic order (1988: 102). In *Little Forest*, once Ichiko (or Hye-won) returns home from the city, she retrieves the taste from her childhood by cooking, which prompts frequent flashbacks to the past. Ichiko (or Hye-won)'s voice-over explains the best time and way to harvest and explore local ingredients—the wisdom which was handed over from her mother. In the Japanese film adaptation, the use of graphic match or split screen further underscores the unity of mother-daughter relationship and the

continuity between the past and the present, with Ichiko visually replacing the mother or the two being temporally conjoined.

Ichiko or Hye-won was raised by a single mother, who left home without any clear reason when her daughter reached the end of her high school days. To what extent then, is Ichiko (or Hye-won)'s communication with her absent mother through emulating her mother's cooking and recipes to be seen as pre-symbolic? I would suggest that it is part of the process of reinvention rather than regression. It is the kitchen wherein the female protagonist models herself after her mother but must leave her behind. The choric fantasy, argues Silverman, does not need to be mapped onto developmental psychology or psychoanalytic postulation on the triad of subject, symbolic order and language. Ichiko and Hye-won, unlike Rinco, fully articulate their thoughts through voice-over. Silverman pays further attention to the fact that Kristeva prioritizes not only the pre-symbolic communication between the mother and child, but the 'maternal attentiveness' that provides access to the maternal voice (1988: 106). It is both the familiarity and the attentiveness of the mother's cooking through which the female protagonist in *Little Forest* acknowledges the maternal presence (and its value) despite the mother's physical absence from the solitary space of the kitchen.

Ichiko (or Hye-won) repeating her mother's recipe should then be seen as part of the process of remaking, reconfiguring the relationship of mother-daughter. Susan Johnston, in her analysis of the film *Julie & Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009), claims, 'to cook is to make... but to cook the recipe from *Mastering*...is to remake as well' (2012: 272). *Julie & Julia* juxtaposes two female protagonists, Julia Child who begins to learn how to cook in France as well as writes with two other authors, her first cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*; and Julia Powell, who

challenges herself to cook and blog all of the recipes from Child's book in 365 days. Yet, Johnston construes the act of 'remaking' as reinvention; repetition 'must be... accompanied by creation, by a reinvention of the familiar world and shaping it into something new' (Marciniak, 2007: 62, cited in Johnston 2012: 273).

In contrast to the kitchen in *Little Forest* which is filled with the memory of the mother, Rinco's restaurant is built new from scratch with the help of Kuma; 'I wanted to turn my eatery into a mysterious space—one that would feel both familiar and completely new to anyone stepping into it for the first time. Like a secret cave in which you could find yourself' (Ogawa 2011: 47). Rinco furnishes the diner with a small sofa where customers can rest after a meal if they wish, and serves as a refuge for her to crawl into in case tensions arise with her mother. The relationship between Rinco and her mother, Rurico, differs from that of Ichiko or Hye-won and her mother, whom she admires. Rinco's mother has been far from 'motherly': an unfit mother in the eyes of young (and adult) Rinco. Rinco finds her mother, who has been running her own bar called Amour, too sexy and flirtatious with men. It is only after her mother's death that Rinco regains her voice, as if her re-entry into the symbolic requires the death of the mother. However, in *Rinco's Restaurant*, the change from the pre-symbolic (voicelessness) to the symbolic (voice) is not neatly mapped onto that from the unity to the separation of mother-daughter, as Rinco actively defies her mother until she learns of her mother's impending death.

Rinco's loss of voice certainly reflects the initial lack of agency on her part after the disappearance of her boyfriend. But voice is considered in the novel as if it is an organ or a faculty of which one could rid oneself. Rinco muses over whether her voice will completely disappear as she no longer uses her vocal cords:

I wondered if my voice had simply exhausted and I felt that if I were to poke at my throat with a pair of tweezers then my voice might actually fall out of my body and abandon its home forever. But even if that did ever happen, I wouldn't really mind. After all, I still had my cooking—my dearest ally. And you don't need a voice for that (Ogawa 2011: 119).

Her voice is a faculty of which Rinco views she could dispense, and it is replaced by other senses—cooking. Unlike in Silverman's framework, here lack is construed not negatively but positively. Rinco's lack of verbal expressivity enhances her capability to cook, and helps her to reach out and relate to the marginal. The mistress, for whom Rinco prepares a six-course meal, whispers '*gochisosama deshita* (that was delicious)'; the novel states, 'this was the first time I'd ever heard her voice and I found it sensual, refined and smooth' (Ogawa 2011: 79). Although neither scene made it into the film adaptation—the rabbit that Rinco cares for on behalf of a girl, and the grandfather whose family will take him to a nursing home after the final family meal together at her restaurant—both are associated by Rinco through the lack of ability to speak; 'after all, neither of them spoke, and both of them wore the same steel expression' (Ogawa 2011: 110).

Without this explicit self-reflexive musing over the voice, the film adaptation instead assimilates speechless customers to voiceless Rinco through their muted expression during meals. Whether it is Kuma, the first customer, the shy girl Momo and her crush, or the mentioned mistress, while they are eating, they barely make any utterance until the end of the meal. After thanking Rinco, Kuma shovels the curry she cooked for him into his mouth. He ends his meal in tears, reminiscing of his 'siñorita'. No remark is made on the dish in between moments. Momo and her crush only

mention ‘*oishine* (delicious)’ while smiling at each other when they eat the soup served by Rinco. Only a group of local women customers, who have gathered for an afternoon tea party, chat and appreciate the décor prior to the food being served. But one of the customers is startled to find a worm in her sandwich, which results in the group leaving without finishing their tea. It is as if true appreciation of food should be solitary or pre-verbal: the customer’s verbal communication is unnecessary to, and even interferes with, the true appreciation of food in Rinco’s kitchen.

Any verbal communication in the cinematic adaptation is secondary to the film’s inviting of the spectator into Rinco’s culinary world. During the process of her cooking, the camera sometimes caresses the ingredients before cutting to Rinco, who cooks by the butcher’s block in the middle of the kitchen. The camera shows the ingredient or finished dish from above in order to present a clear view without recourse to either Rinco’s point of view or a customer’s tasting (Figures 5-6). Such immediacy of the cinematic rendering of food can be appreciated by the spectator without any voice-over, or even before witnessing the customers’ reactions to a dish. Speech is not required to enjoy the food (or at least its look). Modern philosophers such as David Hume who advance theories of taste would disagree, but taste here in the novel is construed as a faculty that can express and/or be registered prior to any fine verbal articulation. This understanding of taste is even more evident in the film, with its reliance on visual-auditory as opposed to verbal modes of communication.

[INSERT FIGURE 5-6 HERE Overhead shots of dishes that Rinco serves to her customers or guests.]

The mother’s letter in all three films—Rinco’s *Restaurant* and the two adaptations of *Little Forest*—marks another turning point for the female protagonist, which leads to a coda. Some could be characterized as ‘the written female voice-

over,’ as Silverman terms it (1988: 58), where the letter is read with the voice-over of the daughter then continued by that of the mother; the letter in the Japanese adaptation of *Little Forest* is never read out loud word by word, although Ichiko mentions some of the content in her voice-over. After what is written is only partially disclosed to the spectator, both Ichiko and Hye-won once again leave their hometown. The friends in town muse over whether Ichiko (or Hye-won)’s departure to presumably the city is another transition or platform for a permanent return home; it is the male voice-over of Yuta (or Jae-ha) that explains the process of planting onion seedlings, which requires another stage of replanting in fertile ground for a year’s growth—a metaphor for the time needed for Ichiko and Hye-won to fully integrate into the local.

Silverman criticizes the limitations of Kristeva’s choric fantasy, the unity of which can be interrupted with the acquisition of language by the child or its ability to speak; ‘for Kristeva, to speak is necessarily to occupy a “male” position; even the maternal voice can be heard only through the male voice’ (1988: 113). To what extent this male voice-over usurps the discursive anchor of both the female and maternal voice-over throughout the film remains to be debated. This paper is less concerned with the compatibility or contradiction between Freudian psychoanalysis and Kristeva’s notion of chora, or between feminism and chora, as Silverman thoroughly discusses in her chapter on the maternal voice. Perhaps it would suffice to point out that the male characters’ explanations in *Little Forest* are given post-facto, rather than a narrative device that derives the female protagonists’ leaving of their hometown. The power of the male position here does not amount to the role assigned by Kristeva to the ‘male’.

The idea of chora, nevertheless, helps articulate the function of the kitchen in these films, which thematically and stylistically links mother and daughter. The space

of the kitchen in *Little Forest* is where the symbolic or social order does not interfere with the unity between subject and object, yet also where the subject must differentiate herself from the object. The notion of chora helps to articulate such a space, where the female protagonists' desire for the mother and the necessity to reinvent herself manifests not through disavowal, but instead through an embracing and understanding of the other (mother's attentiveness). In contrast, Rinco's voicelessness is perhaps tied to a different kind of relationship that is beyond the symbolic, or better to the faculty of taste.

Conclusion

Unwanted homecoming indeed provides each of the three female protagonists, Rinco, Ichiko and Hye-won, an occasion to appreciate the home and their relationship with the mother. Rurico in *Rinco's Restaurant* has been viewed as an incompetent mother, and Rinco acts more like a mother until the end of film. Rinco prepares food for her, and it is Rinco in the end, who marries off her mother. In the novel, describing her emotion after giving permission, Rinco wonders 'if perhaps this is the way fathers feel when they give a daughter away at the altar' (Ogawa 2011: 156). Yet, the roles of female characters switch, not permanently adhering to one or the other. Two thirds into the film, Rurico confesses that Rinco was not in fact an unwanted child from the affair. Rurico was instead impregnated by artificial insemination. This story is again told through an animated musical sequence, similar to the one in the beginning of the film, with the same tune. This revelation not only helps Rinco to 'redeem' her self-regard, but also turns the overt sexuality of Rurico into a form of charade or narcissism. She has remained a 'virgin', cherishing her memory of love with her high

school sweetheart, Shuichi. Although Rurico's reunion with her sweetheart Shuichi enables them to finally tie the knot, it is only following the diagnosis of her terminal illness, which would shortly take her life.

Sexual maturity, as John Whittier Treat claims in his analysis of Yoshimoto's work, is forbidden to *shojo* (girls/girlhood) (1993: 364). Likewise, Rurico remains in the realm of *shojo* perhaps until she dies. Treat provides an insight in assessing death, a frequent trope, in Banana's stories. It often functions to demarcate 'the *shōjo jidai* a neatly self-contained, self-referential object of desire' (Treat 1993: 379). He states that deaths in Yoshimoto's novels seem to 'function less as important topics...than as the means for dramatically punctuating "youth" not from "adulthood" but from what is "not-youth"' (1993: 379). Rurico could redeem herself as mother only in fantasy and after her death. In a fantasy sequence during the wedding banquet, which is absent in the original novel, Rurico and Rinco fly in the air on Hermes' back. Rurico temporarily fulfills her role as a mother, holding and protecting Rinco from behind, who seems to be afraid of flying. Rinco further learns of her mother's love only after she passes away. Familial roles and responsibilities shift between Rurico and Rinco, from that of mother-daughter, to that between sisters, to daughter-father, back to mother-daughter. This subverts the traditional parent-child hierarchy governed by patriarchy, yielding a lateral parity.

The physical absence of mothers in both adaptations of *Little Forest* could be compared to the death of Rurico, which signals the eventual termination of the liminality associated with girlhood. In the flashbacks, both mothers provide care for their daughters as well as transfer the hands-on knowledge of seasonal ingredients and food. But their sudden disappearance supposedly marks the beginning of leading their own lives away from 'home', as themselves not as the mother, leaving behind

the liminal space of mother-daughter, where they could act like sisters at times, protected from the threat of patriarchy. The daughters' return home to re-live their girlhood without their mothers the second time around, is a counterpart to the mothers leading their own lives away from home. The opposite trajectory of leaving and coming home helps all four appreciate and reestablish their self-worth.

The films examined here transfer the relationship of mother-daughter from a Confucian hierarchical order of parent-child to that of fellow *shojo*. *Shojo* sensibility shared by the mother and daughter enables their reconciliation and their re-appreciation of each other's significance via remaining in, or returning to, the time of *shojo*. As Yoshimoto Takaaki, who is an acknowledged Japanese writer and the father of Banana, points out, what *shojo* want is 'not a human relation on the basis of love and hate, or unification and competition, but a situation in which they feel at home' (cited in Fuminobu 2005: 82).

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