

‘ALIMENTARY ASSEMBLAGES’ AT INTERSECTIONS:
FOOD, (QUEER) BODIES, AND INTERSECTIONALITY
IN MARUSYA BOCIURKIW’S *COMFORT FOOD FOR BREAKUPS:
THE MEMOIR OF A HUNGRY GIRL* (2007)

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ABSTRACT

Clearly devoted to the analysis of various issues of belonging, the work of Marusya Bociurkiw, a Ukrainian-Canadian queer writer, director, academic, and activist, examines culture, memory, history, and subjectivity in a fascinatingly unique way. Such a thematic composition is, however, not the only aspect that visibly marks and unities Bociurkiw’s multi-generic oeuvre; what clearly stands out as yet another distinguishing characteristic that Bociurkiw’s works have in common is the idea that seems to stand behind their creation – an impelling notion that “[t]o have one’s belonging lodged in a metaphor is voluptuous intrigue” (Brand 2001: 18). Consequently, what Bociurkiw’s works vividly portray is the writing-self “in search of its most resonant metaphor” (Brand 2001: 19). In one of her works, *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007), this metaphor is food as the art of food-making and the act of eating become here a crucial background against which the issues of belonging are played out. The aim of this article is thus to show how Bociurkiw finds her way of discussing various aspects of subjectivity by means of writing about food, whether about preparing it, tasting it, or recollecting its preparation and tastes. Ultimately, however, the article is to prove that food in Bociurkiw’s memoir not only reflects identity but is presented as a vital site of intersectionality. Thus, embedded in intersectionality discourse, and particularly instructed by Vivian May’s *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (2015), the analysis of *Comfort Food for Breakups* is carried out from an interdisciplinary perspective because it is simultaneously grounded in food studies theory, i.e., the ideas developed by Elspeth Probyn in *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities* (2000), confirming, in this way, that vital connections can and should be made between the two, ostensibly unrelated, fields of study.

Keywords: Intersectionality; food/food studies; queer bodies/writing; memoir; Canadian literature.

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1. Introduction

Clearly devoted to the analysis of various issues of belonging, the work of Marusya Bociurkiw, a Ukrainian-Canadian queer writer, director, academic, and activist, examines culture, memory, history, and subjectivity in a fascinatingly unique way. Each of her multi-generic oeuvre² constitutes thus an idiosyncratic discussion of the aforementioned issues; yet, it seems that in creating all of them Bociurkiw was inspired by the same idea that “[t]o have one’s belonging lodged in a metaphor is voluptuous intrigue” (Brand 2001: 18). Consequently, in one of her works, namely in *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007), Bociurkiw reveals how the writing-self is “in search of its most resonant metaphor” (Brand 2001: 19) as Bociurkiw’s memoir virtually sates its readers with a food metaphor that reverberates powerfully throughout the entire text. Clearly, the art of food-making and the act of eating become here a crucial background against which the issues of belonging are played out. Indeed, it is by means of writing about food, whether about preparing it, tasting it, or recollecting its preparation and tastes, that the writer finds her way of discussing subjectivity by exploring what Beth Brant calls “[t]his desire to peel back the husk of memory, the hungry need to find the food that is waiting inside” (2000: 26).

Food as a concept used to examine various aspects of identity is of course not new. If we confer a rich body of food studies literature, we will see that the idea of food is not considered merely as a physiological way of sustaining a human body, but, rather, it is ubiquitously explored as a cognitive, experiential, and/or ontological phenomenon that defines subjectivity.³ Yet, based on my analysis of Bociurkiw’s memoir, the aim

² It includes a volume of short stories, *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994); a collection of poetry, *Halfway to the East* (1999); a novel, *The Children of Mary* (2006); two memoirs, *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007) and *Food Was Her Country: The Memoir of a Queer Daughter* (2018); ten documentary films (e.g., *This is Gay Propaganda: LGBT Rights and the War in Ukraine* (2015)) as well as academic (e.g., *Feeling Canadian: Television Nationalism & Affect* (2011)) and online writing (available at rabble.ca or *Daily Xtra*). My reading of Bociurkiw’s oeuvre in the context of intersectionality is to be found in my work in progress, “‘The Crossing of Borders’ and Intersections: Presenting and Practising Intersectionality in Marusya Bociurkiw’s Works”, an ongoing habilitation book project, which I have started during my fellowship at the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald, Germany, in 2014–2015. This article constitutes a shortened and revised version of some of my book’s original chapters, which I also presented in the form of my fellow lecture (“Queering and Politicizing Culture: Intersectionality in Marusya Bociurkiw’s Works”) at the Krupp Kolleg in March 2016. For published versions of my work, see Suchacka (2018a, 2018b), in which I discuss intersectionality in Bociurkiw’s online and film work as well as her short stories and poems, respectively. See also my article, Suchacka (2020), which analyzes Bociurkiw’s work in the context of ‘ethnic resonances.’

³ See, e.g., Caplan (1994); Lupton (1998); Probyn (2000); Ashley et al. (2004); Korsmeyer (2007a); Belasco (2008); Barthes (2013); Carrington (2013); Counihan (2013); Williams-Forsen (2013).

of this article is to prove that food not only reflects identity⁴ but shows, in fact, that identities cannot be separated and analysed “in isolation” (Anzaldúa 1991: 254) because “[i]dentity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender” (1991: 252) as all of its aspects are instead “constantly in a shifting dialogue/relationship” (1991: 253). Consequently, I would like to put forward a thesis that food is presented in Bociurkiw’s memoir as a vital site of intersectionality. Such a line of argument suggests an innovative stance, taking into account the fact that a great number of works analyzing the connections between food and the idea of intersecting social categories or related issues⁵ rarely, if ever, approach the subject adopting a perspective grounded explicitly in intersectionality theory. Instead, these analyses are mainly situated within food studies discourse. In intersectional theorizing, on the other hand, food metaphors have been applied but for the purpose of, as Ann Phoenix identifies it, “eschew[ing] intersectionality . . . to find other conceptualisations that do similar work”, such as “a metaphor of sugar” developed by Ivy Ken (Phoenix 2011: 139; see also Choo & Ferree 2010: 133) or “the metaphor of . . . mayonnaise” suggested by Maria Lugones (Phoenix 2011: 140).⁶ Thus, what this article strives for is a discussion of literary representations of food and intersectionality that would integrate both discourses. Grounded in the theory of

⁴ Besides the works exploring food as expressing and/or constructing identities enumerated in the previous footnote, a reference should also be made to other valuable sources. For example, Antje Lindenmeyer’s article “‘Lesbian Appetites’: Food, Sexuality and Community in Feminist Autobiography” (2006), which, as its title suggests, explores the interconnections of food and (sexual and ancestral/communal) subjectivity in lesbian autobiographical writing. Both Groß (2013) and Klooss (2000) examine food and its connection to various identity issues as presented in Canadian literature. A number of contributions to a volume edited by Korsmeyer (2007b) discuss food and identity from various perspectives; see, e.g., Khare (2007); Carmichael & Sayer (2007); Yi-Fu Tuan (2007); Trubek (2007); Sutton (2007); Proust (2007 [1913]); James (2007); Heldke (2007); and Seremetakis (2007).

⁵ See, e.g., the works referenced in previous footnotes.

⁶ Ken’s article is particularly insightful about an interactive, experiential, constructive, contextual, dynamic, processual, and mutually constitutive nature of social categories and their relations, which I also find pivotal for their understanding, and which I hope my discussion also makes evident. However, my focus on food in this article is not to elaborate on the nature of these categories and related to them processes as such because this has already been extensively conducted in various food studies analyses. Similarly, while I agree with Ken’s suggestion that “conceptualizing the dimensions of these structures [race, class, and gender] as intermingling foods that get produced, used, experienced, and digested enhances our theoretical understanding of their relationships” (2008: 169), I do not share her view that terming social categories as “intersecting” or “interlocking” is particularly flawed (Ken 2008: 152, 154, 169). Consequently, my reference to food is not to seek any more appropriate metaphors of intersectionality, or even, as the title of Ken’s article suggests, analogies that would go “beyond the intersection”; on the contrary, the main purpose of this article is to look at literary representations of food and acts related to it (preparing/touching/cooking/consuming food etc.) as circumstances or sites that reveal and emphasize the intersectionality of identities.

intersectionality, the following analysis will involve food studies conceptualizations aspiring, in this way, to contribute to an effective interdisciplinary perspective on vital connections between the concepts in question.

2. Reading food as a site of intersectionality: Theories and methods

Working towards a discussion of literary representations that explore the aspect of intersectionality through food references calls for specifying the theoretical and methodological approach adopted for this purpose. As mentioned above, my approach to identity and issues related to this concept is instructed by intersectionality discourse. The idea of intersectionality has a long history, which can be traced back not only to the twentieth-century political and activist work of Black and women of color feminists but even to the earlier nineteenth-century debates of Black feminist intellectuals (May 2015: 10, 20).⁷ As a field of study with its particular use of the term itself, introduced by Kimberley Crenshaw in her seminal essay from 1989, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex”, ‘intersectionality’ has been continuously re-examined by various critics whose different approaches to the concept resulted in its multiple definitions and theorizations,⁸ which, however, revolve around one general and commonly agreed upon idea that intersectionality “approaches lived identities as interlaced and systems of oppression as enmeshed and mutually reinforcing” (May 2015: 3). I should explain here, therefore, that my understanding of the notion follows Vivian May’s conceptualization presented in her *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (2015). May’s critical approach to and explanation of the concept is quite complex, but its general framework focuses on four main “facets” (2015: 33) of intersectionality that May characterizes as complementary (2015: 33–34). Consequently, May analyzes intersectionality as “an epistemological practice”, “an ontological project”, “a radical coalitional political orientation”, and “resistant imaginary” (2015: 34; emphasis in original).⁹ In this article, however, I apply May’s “ontological” understanding of the concept to expose what such a perspective primarily aims at – i.e.,

⁷ See also Crenshaw (2000: 220–221, 224–225); Brah & Phoenix (2004: 75–79); Davis (2008: 72–73).

⁸ See, e.g., Hill Collins (1998); Brah & Phoenix (2004); Knapp (2005); McCall (2005); Prins (2006); Yuval-Davis (2006); Valentine (2007); Zack (2007); Davis (2008); Warner (2008); Choo & Ferree (2010); Taylor, Hines & Casey (2011); Dhamoon (2011); Phoenix (2011); Carbin & Edenheim (2013); Bastia (2014); May (2015).

⁹ In my ongoing book project, from which this article comes, I look at Bociurkiw’s ways of presenting and practising intersectionality in her works applying all of the “facets” (2015: 33) that May specifies as defining for intersectionality. For a published version of my work in progress that also addresses May’s ontological idea of intersectionality but analyzed in the context of Bociurkiw’s short stories and poems, see Suchacka (2018b).

“account[ing] for multiplicity and complex subjectivity, [and] reconceptualis[ing] agency” (2015: 34).¹⁰ This, however, will be achieved not by referring solely to May’s intersectionality theories but by extending the perspective to the field of food studies and support it with a line of reasoning developed by Elspeth Probyn in *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities* (2000).

As an invaluable contribution to the development of food studies theory, Probyn’s *Carnal Appetites* may be seen as equally vital for intersectionality discourse if we take into account the premise that Probyn’s work is based on, i.e., her suggestion “to think about identities in another dimension, through the optic of eating” (2000: 11). In Probyn’s view, such a perspective not only allows us to recognize the significance of identities, but it also opens up new possibilities to understand them:

my argument is that eating sends us off in unexpected directions and orders alternative connections. As eating reactivates the force of identities, it also may enable modes of cultural analysis that are attentive to the categories with which we are now perhaps overly familiar: sex, ethnicity, wealth, poverty, geopolitical location, class and gender. (2000: 9)

In this vein, Probyn aims at uncovering the unknown realms of discourses commonly perceived as thoroughly revised or even exhausted. Approaching them from a perspective of food, Probyn in fact embarks on her project of discussing the idea of intersectionality. Although the term itself is not mentioned by her as such, its concept stands out prominently when she states: “Eating . . . becomes a visceral reminder of how we variously inhabit the axes of economics, intimate relations, gender, sexuality, history, ethnicity, and class” (Probyn 2000: 9).

Probyn’s unorthodox outlook on intersectionality becomes key for my reading of Bociurkiw’s memoir for another equally important reason; her approach is strongly defined by her focus on bodies. As she explains, “Eating, I suggest, makes these categories matter again: it roots actual bodies within these relations” (Probyn 2000: 9). As a result, Probyn’s objective is to detach her theory from a common tendency in food studies literature, which reinforces the idea that eating validates identity, and instead she aims to transfer attention to a variety of what she calls “alimentary assemblages” because such a perspective enables us to observe how different bodies merge and, in this way, produce alternative forms of existence (2000: 8). The idea proposed by Probyn is thus particularly instructive for my analysis of Bociurkiw’s memoir because

¹⁰ Besides the two major objectives of intersectionality read as an ontologically complex phenomenon, May also enumerates the third one, i.e., its “attend[ance] to simultaneous privilege and oppression” (2015: 34). However, as stated above, in this article, I will focus only on the first two aspects.

it helps me to see food as a possible, and powerful, manifestation of intersectionality as understood and defined by May, namely as “ontological complexity” (2015: 44). Consequently, I would like to integrate Probyn’s and May’s perspectives to explore how Bociurkiw’s presentation of food and “eating places different orders of things and ways of being alongside each other, inside and outside inextricably linked” (Probyn 2000: 32), revealing simultaneously what intricacies such “*interconnections*” (May 2015: 8; emphasis in original) very often involve and what roles (queer) bodies may have in this respect.¹¹

3. “Alimentary assemblages” at intersections

Focusing on food and eating as sites of identity allows me to read Bociurkiw’s literary practice of intersectionality through, as stated above, Probyn’s theorization of “the different forms of alimentary assemblages . . . [thanks to which] we see glimpses of the types of intermingling of bodies that suggest other ways of inhabiting the world” (2000: 8). Bociurkiw seems to address this point in her memoir when she identifies food and eating as a vital way of enacting various self-defining interrelations which prove that we can “inhabit more than one ‘world’ and . . . be more than one self” (Lugones in May 2015: 44). Thus, in the introduction to the last section of her memoir,¹² we hear her confess:

It took me years to understand food’s elemental connection to the body. Food connects us to the world. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin wrote about eating: ‘The body here transgresses its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart....’ The food we ate in that suburban house in a small Canadian city connected us to a small village in western Ukraine and, in fact, to all cities of Europe. (Bociurkiw 2007: 118)

Bociurkiw’s alimentary perspective allows her not only to recognize the multiplicity of her subject positions, for example, her ethnic and cosmopolitan self, but also to see them as crucially “interlaced” (May 2015: 3), discovering, at the same time, that her subjectivity is located at other, perhaps less obvious or still unfamiliar, intersections. This illuminating self-observation about the compoundedness of her existence is again confirmed when she continues to explain that her alimentary experiences enabled her self-definition to reach other levels beyond any straightforward or conventional meanings: “But now I know

¹¹ See also Lindenmeyer (2006), who refers to Probyn’s theory (2006: 471–472).

¹² Bociurkiw’s memoir is divided into four parts or sections (“Mama’s Kitchen and Beyond,” “Food for the Soul,” “Food Voyages,” and “Food for the Body”) that include a different number of chapters.

how eating itself links me to ways of being in the world that are excessive, subversive, even forbidden" (Bociurkiw 2007: 118).

Consequently, Bociurkiw's memoir includes a number of other recollections showing food as a way of challenging the fixed and the given, and opting for the insurgent and the alternative.¹³ In this way, the writer again questions any ontological meanings rooted in the "'single-axis' forms of thinking about subjectivity and power" (Crenshaw in May 2015: 3), showing instead that the intricacies of our manifold, intersectional subject positions need to involve an oppositional stance to gain a "'matrix' worldview" (May 2015: 3) that would be non-hierarchical, "wide in scope and inclusive" (2015: 3).¹⁴ In "Food Voyages", for example, Bociurkiw illustrates how this intersectional, "matrix orientation" (May 2015: 5) can be developed through eating and savouring food as well as through pleasure brought by these experiences. This is evident in her recollection of her youthful travels with her friends, during which she literally tasted other ways of being: "In Rome, we wandered the streets and parks with reckless abandon, singing, flirting with Italian boys, nibbling on crusty bread and ricotta cheese, taking long, lusty swigs from a bottle of Cinzano concealed in a paper bag" (Bociurkiw 2007: 93–94). Recalling how they derived pleasure from their bodily beauty and sexual freedom through food (Probyn 2000: 77), Bociurkiw manages to capture the idea that "[p]leasure . . . , sex and eating . . . are all about breaking up the strict moralities which constrain us" (Probyn 2000: 77), which we hear her confirm when she states, "I could feel our propriety fleeing from us, like a sweater caught up in a drift of wind" (Bociurkiw 2007: 94). Elsewhere in her memoir, Bociurkiw proves this point one more time when she gives an account how her passion for art and her conscious choice of it as her academic interest to be studied at "a small art school on the far-away coast of Nova Scotia" freed her from a way of life that social expectations prescribed for young women like her (2007: 112). Discovering new pleasures in life meant eventually rediscovering her life in general, and food was again one of the main forces leading her towards her emancipation:

My own culinary traditions and ritual foods were born on this jagged piece of coast. I'd never eaten a turnip or a squash until I moved to the east coast, food too reminiscent of trauma to be allowed to my parents' home. I savoured miso, and tahini, and brown rice for the first time. Food was only part of the story, but it

¹³ As Lindenmeyer states, "the possibilities of expressing allegiance to or resistance against class, ethnic, gender or familial positions by preparing and eating or not-eating food are endless" (2006: 479). For food as a means of different forms of resistance, see, e.g., Caplan (1994: 28); Lupton (1998: 55–59); Ashley et al. (2004: 13–14, 139); Heldke (2007: 386–387); Belasco (2008: 8, 15–34, 24, 28–29, 44–45); Carrington (2013: 208); Counihan (2013: 175).

¹⁴ This is briefly how May defines what she calls "matrix orientation" (2015: 5), a key aspect of intersectionality (2015: 3).

symbolized various forms of liberation: vegetarian soups that could feed a tableful of artist-housemates or an entire lesbian-feminist collective; produce and cheese from a food co-op; recipe books that reminded you of the planet you were on and your responsibility to it. (Bociurkiw 2007: 112)

Clearly, relishing food is presented here not only as a way of experiencing pleasure but as a way of experiencing “ontological complexity” (May 2015: 44) that works beyond any (self-)classifications imposed by “‘single-axis’ logics” (2015: 37). As Bociurkiw shows in her memoir such a way of thinking has been formative for patriarchy and its traditional gender-role assignments.¹⁵ She challenges the heteronormative and heterosexual foundations of the family and the domestic when she describes her conflicted relations with her own family whose structure is based on a patriarchal gender-role division that imprisons the woman – her mother in this particular case – in the sphere of the domestic.¹⁶ And again, it is food, and here more particularly, the circumstances of its consumption, that expose not only how compound one’s subjectivity is but also how strongly the intersecting forces of power influence it. Consequently, in Bociurkiw’s descriptions of her family’s get-togethers at the dinner table, we witness her complex position as a daughter who is both involved in and yet clearly distances herself from these culinary performances of patriarchal power and allocation of voice. Being more of an observer and outsider than a participant and an insider, we see that she clearly rejects the ideological grounding of her family in how strongly she still feels connected to one of its members, i.e., her mother. Her close bond with her mother notwithstanding, she recognizes at the same time that her position is markedly different from the position of her conventionally-minded and tradition-oriented mother (2007: 170) as, contrary to her mother, she is “childless . . . and single” (2007: 23), a traveller and a professional: an academic, a writer, and an activist.

Consequently, what Bociurkiw clearly portrays here is that intersectionality as describing “ontological complexity” (May 2015: 44) should not be understood “merely as plurality” (44) but rather as “constituted by . . . internal differences and dissonances” (Carastathis in May 2015: 41) that our “inseparably intermeshed” (May 2015: 41) positionalities frequently involve.¹⁷

¹⁵ Probyn calls such an approach towards life an “embedded and corporeal nature of thinking ethics, or an etho-poetics of food and sex” (2000: 75; see also 64).

¹⁶ See Gopinath (1997: 729–730); Lupton (1998: 39–43, 59–63); Ashley et al. (2004: 128–133); Lindenmeyer (2006: 470); Belasco (2008: 44–45).

¹⁷ May recognizes the aspect of “identities . . . [being] ‘internally heterogenous, complex unities’” (Carastathis in May 2015: 41) as quintessential for what she calls “a both/and philosophy of the self” (May 2015: 41), i.e., “at once diverse and self-contradictory in its identities, and yet also a cohesive whole capable of shifting its social identifications from context to context” (Barvosa in May 2015: 41).

She shows that “one can ‘be’ in opposition, be ‘selves’ that cannot mesh without distortion, harm, or erasure” (May 2015: 44). Interestingly, she manages to capture this idea by looking at her ‘self’ again through the lens of her food memories. Reminiscing about her sexual relationships, she points out that “ancestral tradition mixed with queer” may be a very complex affair, “a bittersweet, uneasy recipe for trouble” (Bociurkiw 2007: 147). She elaborates on this observation when recalling one of her partners, TJ, and the significance that their love affair had for her: “I cooked for her as I had never cooked before: Spanish appetizers, Thai curries, and Italian tortas landed before her in dizzying, delectable profusion. Without realizing it, I was connecting back to a lost territory: the place where two rivers met, my femininity and my ethnicity. Powerful and deadly; sweet and sour” (2007: 136).

Yet, illustrating the workings of internal differences and possible inner tensions, Bociurkiw also highlights the outside disparities that define our relationships with the other people (May 2015: 41).¹⁸ The writer makes this evident when she describes the differences between her mother’s and her own experiences that have deepened their miscommunication and provoked a conflict between the two women. The daughter perceives her mother’s lack of acceptance as a sign of dispossession, and so, as if reverberating Anzaldúa’s observation that being deprived of one’s identities is a form of colonization (1991: 253), we hear the daughter compare her relationship with her mother to that of “a benevolent monarch greeting her distant queer subject,” a relationship that could only be based on “[t]he imprecise moments of love” between the two (Bociurkiw 2007: 75).

Likewise, Bociurkiw exposes how different our subject positions are despite the apparent similarities that we might also share with the other people when she describes her sexual relationships (May 2015: 41). In “Grilled Salmon”, her love affair with another woman is again defined by the culinary, and so, Bociurkiw elaborates on “its gustatorial highlights” (2007: 125) by enumerating meticulously the type of food the two lovers prepared and consumed at a given time. These culinary descriptions serve to accentuate the difficulties that soon arose in their relationship, leading to its end (2007: 125). Through the

¹⁸ Exploration of difference clearly lies “at the heart of intersectionality” (Phoenix 2011: 138). In May’s view, the aspect of difference should always be considered on individual as well as group levels because “[g]roups, and not just individuals, are understood as internally heterogeneous from an intersectional model” (2015: 41). Focusing on difference rather than solely “emphasiz[ing] sameness” (2015: 37) is expressive of the already mentioned “both/and” (2015: 41) perspective adopted in intersectional thinking (2015: 26–27), which enables us to consider a variety of identities and experiences in a more inclusive way, recognizing that they can be “both . . . *the same as and . . . different from*” each other (2015: 37; emphasis in original).

recollections of her unsuccessful liaisons, Bociurkiw shows therefore that, as in the case of her family relationships, she approaches the discussion of her relations critically.¹⁹ She “locates herself in a web of relationships of difference and similarity” (Martin 1993: 288)²⁰ by revealing points of connections between her beloved ones and herself, as well as by admitting to the failure of her relationships due to the uncompromised diversity of experiences or expectations that these relationships also comprised. With respect to her love affairs, Bociurkiw points to the fact that even similar experiences, such as a common ethnic background of the lovers, are not a guarantee of the relationship’s success (2007: 145–147). Consequently, the constellation of diverse lesbian experiences and lifestyles depicted in Bociurkiw’s food recollections necessarily reminds us that there are points of “connection *and* disconnection between the various assemblages we inhabit” (Probyn 2000: 77; emphasis added).²¹

Referring to her complicated, family or sexual, relationships, Bociurkiw draws our attention to another crucial aspect of intersectional subjectivity – namely, the extent to which it is marked by its “relational position to a multiplicity of others” (Alarcón in May 2015: 43). The idea that our subject positions are influenced or even defined by the contextual positioning of the other people is visible, for example, in Bociurkiw’s recollections of her mother’s illness, in the face of which the positions of the two women shifted in as much as the mother suddenly became “the beneficiary, the dear one, an inheritance flowing upriver from daughter to mother, instead of the other way round” (Bociurkiw 2007: 137). A similar reversal of roles, thanks to which the relationship between the mother and the daughter could take yet another, more reciprocal, form, occurred after the funeral of Bociurkiw’s brother when the two women took turns in cooking for each other to “give . . . [themselves] a reprieve from the slow, hard labour of grieving” (2007: 78). In Bociurkiw’s detailed descriptions of the food the women cooked, prepared, or organized for each other, food again functions as a means that facilitates the merging of different identities – it is no longer solely the mother who is expected, in a conventional, patriarchal understanding of the motherly role, to feed, and the child who is to be an object of this role performance; eating and feeding are the

¹⁹ A critical approach towards family relationships is an important feature of lesbian autobiographical writing. See, e.g., Martin (1993) who discusses both a “complex and critical” perception of “family” as presented in the contributions to Moraga and Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back* (1993: 286).

²⁰ Martin’s statement is her remark about Minnie Bruce Pratt’s discussion of her (dis)connections with her family in her autobiographical essay, “Identity: Skin Blood Heart” (1993: 288).

²¹ See also Martin’s analysis of lesbian autobiographical texts revealing necessary disparities between lesbian experiences and identities often taken as “self-identical” (1993: 277). Such differences as exposed by the culinary are also discussed by Lindenmeyer in her discussion of Dorothy Allison’s “A Lesbian Appetite” (2006: 476).

functions that both the mother and the daughter fulfill here.²² Clearly, the fact that the mother and the daughter become “both ‘eaters’ and ‘feeders’” (Lindenmeyer 2006: 470) for themselves becomes a ground on which communication between the two women can take place. This is confirmed by Bociurkiw when she states, “Food creates a kind of dialogue between us, an implicit assent missing in other aspects of each other’s lives” (2007: 77). In this context, food facilitates a visceral connection between the women predicated upon the idea that not only our multiple identities intersect but that they intersect meaningfully with other people’s identities,²³ or using May’s terms, that “everyone is socially located in multiple, overlapping ways” (May 2015: 23).

Such a recognition of “multiple registers of existence” (Alarcón in May 2015: 43; see also May 2015: 21) and their influence upon each other again stands out prominently in Bociurkiw’s memoir when she acknowledges the importance of a decade-long, culinary tradition that spans over three generations of women in her family. And so, while she admits that she “picked up her culinary skills from . . . [her] mother” (2007: 145), she also appreciates her grandmother’s influence on her way of cooking, eating, and feeding, and, as a result, on her intimate relations with other people, her queer lovers including:

I serve food for my lovers the same way she [the grandmother] did. Always, an excess of food, it’s rude to make only enough. Always, an eye on the beloved’s dish—‘Here, have some more,’ and before you know it, just like my Baba, I’ve cunningly refilled my lover’s plate. Trust me, my butch lovers never go away hungry. (Bociurkiw 2007: 147)

The constellation of subjects whose positions intersect with one another is further delineated by Bociurkiw by means of many other food reminiscences, and each memory is evoked to emphasize an empowering meaning that Bociurkiw clearly assigns to the depicted people, her encounters with them, and the influence they exerted upon each other, showing that “subjectivity is not just multiple, but coalitional” (May 2015: 41).²⁴ For example, recalling Jim, an artist and her “first

²² Lindenmeyer identifies such a portrayal of being simultaneously an “eater” and “feeder” as challenging gender norms, which she sees as a strategy common to lesbian autobiographical writing (2006: 470). For a discussion of social, gendered perceptions of cooking and feeding, see, e.g., Lupton (1998: 39); Ashley et al. (2004: 132–133, 182); Belasco (2008: 46–47); Carrington (2013: 200).

²³ See also May (2015: 21, 43–44, 223–224).

²⁴ Using the term “coalitional”, May refers specifically to a “coalitional approach to subjectivity (whether individual or collective)” (2015: 41) that encompasses the “both/and” (2015: 41) idea encapsulated in a statement that “we are the *same and different*, simultaneously” (2015: 42; emphasis in original). On a collective level, “both/and, same/different thinking” (2015: 41) becomes key for the formation of groups as it enables the fulfilment of “their potential to organize around ‘heterogeneous commonality’” (2015: 41). While I do not focus in the following analysis of the selected examples from Bociurkiw’s memoir on elucidating how

gay male friend”, Bociurkiw talks about his house in Halifax, particularly his “huge basement kitchen” that accommodated crowds of various people (2007: 113). In her depictions of this room, which conventionally stands as the most iconographic site of the domestic, Bociurkiw “queers the space of . . . ‘home’” (Gopinath 1997: 738). She challenges its patriarchal construction by showing the kitchen as a space of resistance to patriarchal and heteronormative gender binaries, i.e., as a site where not only women but also other “marginalized” subjects can find their “way of self-expression” (Counihan 2013: 174).²⁵ Thus, Jim’s kitchen is a place which not only gathers a group of queer friends and lovers, but which also becomes a forum for their intellectual discussions:

Judith, a visiting filmmaker from Toronto, is busy marinating asparagus spears when we arrive, and then moves on to bread several pounds of scallops. I lay out an appetizer platter of smoked halibut, mackerel, and salmon. . . . Dinner is a deliciously mismatched potluck: garlic pasta and fried scallops; Andreas’ spicy baked chicken; Jim’s gigantic salad. As we indulge in the sweet, soft scallops and throw back glass after glass of cheap Italian wine, I watch as a transformative exchange of ideas—about film, about theories gleaned at the conference, about the checkered history of this house—intensifies across Jim’s well-worn kitchen table. (Bociurkiw 2007: 113–114)

Depicting this recollection, Bociurkiw conveys the idea that “sharing food” may be tantamount to “creating community” (Lindenmeyer 2006: 478). Yet, it also broadens the notion of ‘commensality’²⁶ by showing it as shaped by “a doubled reconfiguration of both [food and sex]” (Probyn 2000: 70). Bociurkiw’s account of Jim’s kitchen is thus an instructive example of how the domestic can and should be redefined. While the kitchen is presented here as a queer space, which “denaturalizes the linkages between heterosexuality and the domestic” (Gopinath 1997: 740), the food and its preparation are shown as vital sources of personal empowerment and the development of interpersonal queer relationships (Belasco 2008: 44).²⁷

Such an emancipatory potential of food comes to the foreground one more time when Bociurkiw recalls her sexual affairs; in “Chocolate”, for example, she

similar or different the depicted identities are, I am quoting May’s words here to emphasize this empowering “potential” for creating collectivities, which May emphasizes in her study and which has influenced my understanding of Bociurkiw’s literary presentations.

²⁵ I base my statements here on the observations made by Counihan in her study showing that much as food and “food work” (2013: 175) can constitute “a symbol and channel of oppression” (2013: 176) for women, it can also be a liberating force in their lives (2013: 174–175, 181). See also Ashley et al. (2004: 13–14, 138–139); Lindenmeyer (2006: 479); and Belasco (2008: 44–45).

²⁶ Belasco refers to the concept as “the community-building function . . . of social eating” (2008: 30). See Probyn (2000: 9, 146); Belasco (2008: 19, 28, 39).

²⁷ See also Ashley et al. (2004: 13–14, 138–139); Lindenmeyer (2006: 479); Counihan (2013).

talks about the impossibility of building up a new relationship only to show how it has eventually fostered an opportunity for another form of attachment. “[A] generous slice of chocolate truffle cake” given to Bociurkiw as a sign of care and comfort by a friend and then offered by Bociurkiw to a newly met lover “stimulate[s] . . . not sexual desire but a new friendship” (Bociurkiw 2007: 123). Likewise, as we learn from a different account presented in the same chapter, another “chocolate layer cake festooned . . . with hearts, and symbols of queerness”, seals a similarly close intimacy between Bociurkiw and her friends by “transform[ing] . . . [their] bitterness” about their unsuccessful relationships into “passionate queer friendship”, becoming, in this way, not “just a cake” but “a political statement” (2007: 121).

The idea that food may create an opportunity for more than a declaration, transforming an inspiring interaction into a political action is portrayed by Bociurkiw when she recollects a Thanksgiving dinner celebrated with her friends soon after the events of 9/11 (2007: 61). Bociurkiw describes how the gathered “fell into conversation with relief” (2007: 62) because it restored their sense of security utterly destroyed after the attacks (2007: 61). Their anxious conversation turned from recalling their personal experiences of 9/11 to discussing a variety of unresolved socio-political issues that the tragedy brought again to the centre of public attention (2007: 63–64). Bociurkiw recalls how “[a]s long-time social activists, we were seeing forty years of feminist and anti-racist work crumble before our eyes. Increased border surveillance and racial profiling; no skepticism, let alone dissent. . .” (2007: 64). Their shared political standpoint fostered thus their need for further unity (2007: 61), and so their gathering to share a meal acquired a special meaning – their way of resisting omnipresent “fear” (2007: 62) and restoring a sense of common humanity:

A raucous humour spread through the room as we talked. I moved back and forth between kitchen and living room, putting the potatoes on, stirring the sauce. I was flushed with the heat of the stove and with the pleasure of a house full of people, a kitchen in benevolent culinary chaos. . . . We talked until eleven at which point turkey was pronounced officially cooked. Roasted garlic was mashed into the potatoes, salad was tossed. We crowded around my ridiculously small kitchen table, and together we ate the turkey along with the stuffing, the *tsimmes*, Cynthia’s rhubarb chutney, and Kim’s homemade cranberry sauce. (2007: 62, 64)

Sharing food highlights in this way their psychological and emotional need for human companionship, but it also becomes an incentive for solidarity on a political level as they move on, even more convinced about the need for their activist work (Bociurkiw 2007: 64).

In another recollection, Bociurkiw continues discussing the idea of solidarity and reveals its further dimension; she portrays it not only as a result of an intellectual gathering of activist subjects but also as a result of a physical, bodily

experience. Referring to her stay in socialist Nicaragua, where she went “with a group of activists . . . to help pick coffee beans”, Bociurkiw talks about the local people’s poverty that is conspicuous in all spheres of their lives, particularly their daily diets lacking in food variety (2007: 42). Provided with the same meals over a month, Bociurkiw and her fellow activists soon come to learn that theirs is the position of the privileged, for whom eating means not only consuming but savouring food, an experience which the underprivileged are completely deprived of (2007: 42). And so, experiencing a way of living that, in socio-economic terms, is so much different from their own, they develop sympathy and understanding, which becomes embodied as it is perceived by them in physical terms; as Bociurkiw concludes, “We learnt *solidaridad*—solidarity—through our bodies, and not just our minds” (2007: 42; emphasis in original).²⁸

Bociurkiw’s recollections that I have discussed so far reveal various dimensions of intersectionality that the writer illustrates by means of her alimentary references. Consequently, her food memories and stories show how eating, feeding, and cooking can be seen as circumstances at which multiple subject positions intersect and how manifold and intricate processes these intersections involve. Clearly thus, food presented by Bociurkiw in her memoir becomes an alimentary site of intersectionality that can be read in “*ontological*” terms as illuminating “multiplicity and complex subjectivity” (May 2015: 34; emphasis in original). And yet, Bociurkiw’s memoir also reveals processes in which “the vector of food leads [us] into other areas” (Probyn 2000: 62) of intersectionality as “an *ontological project*” (May 2015: 34; emphasis in original). Hence, what we may observe in many recollections as the one discussed above, i.e., Bociurkiw’s memories of her activist work in Nicaragua, and more specifically, her alimentary experience of fostering solidarity with the local people, is that Bociurkiw devotes special attention to the body. In this way, the writer manages to express how intersectionality can be read as

²⁸ May points to “solidarity” as foundational for “intersectional politics” (2015: 51; see also 2015: 4, 48) or, in her other terms, “a radical *coalitional political orientation*” that an intersectional approach presupposes (2015: 34; emphasis in original). The two recollections from Bociurkiw’s memoir, i.e., the scene depicting a gathering of fellow activists at a Thanksgiving table and her reminiscence of her activist, collective work in Nicaragua, may be read as literary examples depicting May’s conceptualizations in this respect. Interestingly, the latter example can also depict May’s idea about intersectionality as “an *ontological project* that . . . attends to simultaneous privilege and oppression” (2015: 34; emphasis in original). Although Bociurkiw’s recollection does not elaborate on the activists’ position as belonging to the oppressed, the readers are familiar at least with Bociurkiw’s experiences. Therefore, her comments about her and her fellow activists’ realization that class difference strongly differentiates them from the local people may be seen as illustrating May’s idea that “we occupy social positions and engage in knowledge practices that . . . can be understood as sites where both marginalization and privilege play out simultaneously” (2015: 23).

instructive for “reconceptuali[zing] agency” (May 2015: 34).²⁹ This is particularly visible when Bociurkiw recollects the following:

A butch enters my house for the first time, offering me a bottle of wine with boyish awkwardness. She notices there are candles everywhere and a mess of vegetables, bottles, and pots, on the kitchen counter. I take my future lover by the hand, lead her to the kitchen, give her a glass of wine, place a plate of cheeses and sliced baguette between us. And then I cook while my future lover watches me covertly: I swish the saucepan over the flame, tossing in slivers of shallots, deglazing with wine. I serve the food finally and my lover's eyes and body meet mine. (Bociurkiw 2007: 146)

While the scene visualizes how “blurred [the] boundaries between food and sex” (Probyn 2000: 62) may be, and how both, food and sex, are physical, bodily experiences (Probyn 2000: 60), it draws our attention not only to their “corporeality” (2000: 61), but primarily to the body itself. Evidently, the body functions here as an active agent – “a multitude of surfaces that seek out contact with other surfaces near or far” (Probyn 2000: 61). The coming together of bodies that the scene depicts is thus underpinned by the dynamism of the connection established not only through the direct touch between the two bodies of the lovers but also through the touch of the food by one of them and the careful observation of this touch by the other. In this way, we see how eating, as Probyn suggests, sets off a chain of bodies that intersect “rhizomatically in different permutations, and through those connections attract yet more surfaces, bodies and touch” (2000: 76).³⁰ This on-going “intermingling of bodies” (Probyn 2000: 8, 70) is, however, both a corporeal and cognitive process because “from the physical reaction as we bite into something, past experiences also flock to accompany the savouring of the moment” (2000: 60). Thus, rephrasing Probyn's ideas, we may say that Bociurkiw presents food as enacting the intertwining of different subject positions that spring from one another multidirectionally across time and space

²⁹ What May understands by this objective is that intersectionality shifts its focus on agency away from “a deeply liberal concept in its philosophical sense . . . [of] a rational, free-willed, choosing agent” (Bilge in May 2015: 46) to the understanding that we can “act within oppression yet also . . . be impeded by systemic structures of possibility and constraint” (2015: 47). Therefore, it is rather what “constitute[s] the subject” (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall in May 2015: 40), i.e., “the social dynamics and relations” (2015: 40), rather than “the subjects (and categories) themselves” (2015: 40) that is pivotal for an intersectional outlook on “agency and personhood” (May 2015: 47). Consequently, besides “lived experience, social location, and historical context”, May also enumerates “[e]mbodiment” as informing an intersectional perception of subjectivity (2015: 40); hence, my interpretation of Bociurkiw's emphasis on the body as “reconceptuali[zing] agency” (May 2015: 34).

³⁰ Probyn bases her idea on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of the rhizome that is multidimensional, non-hierarchical, and wide-spreading (Probyn 2000: 60–62, 75–76). See also Lindenmeyer (2006) referring to Probyn's use of this theory (2006: 472).

“between individuals and collectivities” (Probyn 2000: 70), creating “new connections” (2000: 70). But what stands behind these processes, actively stimulating their occurrence, is the body, or the amalgamation of bodies, vested with power and agency.

Bociurkiw visualizes this “intermingling of bodies” (Probyn 2000: 8, 70) and their performative action effectuating diverse “*interconnections*” (May 2015: 8; emphasis in original) not only by discussing her sexual relationships but also by dwelling upon her generational location within the matriarchal line of her family. As already presented, Bociurkiw effectively detects the subjectivities of her grandmother, mother, and herself at the intersection of the culinary. What is, however, even more fascinating to observe in this respect is the fact that Bociurkiw finds a point of reference to her mother and grandmother through the body and the physicality of food: “I walk into my mother’s kitchen . . . ; there’s my mother, bending over the stove and delicately picking perogies out of the boiling water, with the same anxious bend of back as Baba and those same swift, graceful hand movements” (2007: 14-15). The complexity of intersectional subjectivity/intersecting subjectivities is envisioned here within a visceral context that emphasizes the role of the body and elevates the importance of its active agency in producing vital liaisons. We see thus how, using Probyn’s terms (2000: 76), multiple “surfaces” mingle here: the food touched by the mother “open[s] up” her body and links it via her movements to the body of her mother, who, in the past, performed the same gestures preparing the same type of food. That now these gestures and movements are immediately recognized as familiar by the grand-/daughter becomes a crucial point of connection between them – as Bociurkiw admits, “The way I know how to make pastry links me, over time and space, to the ways of my mother and grandmother: the sway of my body as I roll the dough; the movement of my hands as I pat and patch the dough into the pan” (2007: 131).

Bociurkiw’s focus on “alimentary assemblages” (Probyn 2000: 8) and their interrelatedness becomes central one more time when Bociurkiw’s reflections turn to Jacky and Bobby, her friends from “the Vancouver art community” (2007: 87). The three friends, “queer—lesbian, bi, and transgender—and all of Ukrainian descent” (2007: 87), meet for a barbecue that Bociurkiw decides to prepare to comfort Bobbie after her father’s recent death. As the story unfolds, we witness how queer and ethnic subjects connect when, rephrasing Probyn’s idea (2000: 61), their corporeal “surfaces” meet through the physical contact with food and the digestive act of eating:

I had prepared a large amount of barbecued chicken, planning for leftovers, but it all got eaten. Just like me when my father died, Bobbie was furiously hungry. She had seconds and then thirds, of everything. The chicken was tangy, sweet, and

slightly charred. The yams had been coated in olive oil, lime, and rosemary, quartered, and the grilled; soft on the inside, crisp on the outside, I passed through garlic-basil mayonnaise to dip them into. (Bociurkiw 2007: 89–90)

But these bodily intersections also take place on an affectional level. And so, “precise connections . . . [are] thought and enacted” (Probyn 2000: 70) between the bodies located in the present and those belonging to another space and time by means of personal memories and emotions that the three friends share with each other. Eating their dinner, they rework their family traumas, verbalizing their pain felt at the time of the death of their family members, and so sharing their similar experiences of grief with each other: “Being Ukrainian, we were used to conversations about death, where you eat and drink and even laugh with extravagance, amid the spirits of those who have gone ahead” (2007: 90).

However, revising their ethnicity, they reappraise, at the same time, their sites of queerness. For example, recalling the point of her father’s final days, Bobby confides in her friends how “[s]he stopped being a girl” and “wore boys’ clothes,” experiencing in this way “a father-son moment” that became “a final gift to his dad” (2007: 89). Consequently, the conversations of the three friends over food enact the intersection of their similar subject positions, shared experiences, and familiar emotions and create for them an opportunity to discover another dimension of the familial – its broader, communal sense which goes beyond any biological affinity. As Bociurkiw states at the end of her account: “I knew, even then, that it was all of a piece: the sadness and longing of our elders; the nearness of death; the deep pleasure of tradition; and the comforts of a meal of roast chicken and friends who were, in some wide, tribal sense, family” (2007: 90).

4. Conclusion

Bociurkiw’s creative and critical exploration of her memories vividly portrays how food may function as a site of intersectionality that can be understood as a particularly complex ontological phenomenon (May 2015: 34). Examining the entanglement of intersectional subjectivity, Bociurkiw’s memoir shows thus how the familial is indivisible from the ethnic and cultural as well as the communal; how all of these are deeply implicated in the domestic and private, which, on the other hand, can never be readily separated from the sexual and vice versa. Likewise, female, feminine, and feminist positions mutually influence artistic, activist, and political subject positions. Food in Bociurkiw’s text becomes therefore a vital means of exploring this compound state of being or, using Probyn’s words, “the tangible links between what we eat, who we think we are, how and with whom we have sex, and what we are becoming” (2000: 77). Yet, the compoundedness of intersectionality is communicated in Bociurkiw’s memoir not only through the idea that our multiple identities are interrelated; what this text also shows is that “we

[are] all implicated in each other” (Brand 2001: 166) as “[b]odies. . . connected rhizomatically” (Probyn 2000: 76) with other “bodies . . . , surfaces prepared for the touch of other surfaces” (2000: 76), becoming a network of “alimentary assemblages” (2000: 8) in dialogue with each other.

The aspect of dialogue is thus pivotal in perceiving food as a site which expounds the ontological intricacies of intersectionality if we recognize that food with its most immediate performance, i.e., the act of “[e]ating is a kind of conversation [in itself] . . . , in which each party contributes” (Heldke 2007: 389), and for which the presence of each constituent including the “presence of eaters, of tasters” is “necessary to the very existence of a work of cuisine” (Heldke 2007: 390). This both performative and experiential act³¹ can therefore be recognized as elevating the importance of intersectional bodies in communication with each other, marking them as constitutive for the entire process.

As a literary text, Bociurkiw’s memoir is, consequently, a discursive presentation of this process. The food stories and memories in *Comfort Food for Breakups* depict how, when preparing and consuming food, we become “alimentary assemblages” (Probyn 2000: 8) actively engaged in enacting various “interconnections” (May 2015: 8; emphasis in original). Yet, *Comfort Food for Breakups* also goes a step further as Bociurkiw has stretched its narrative and generic limits by including the recipes of the food that she discusses in her recollections. In this way, Bociurkiw allows her readers to understand food as a site of intersectionality not only discursively by reading her food recollections and interpreting them but also performatively by following the recipes provided by her in the memoir, “com[ing] to this experience with a history and a set of experiences of . . . [their] own” (Heldke 2007: 389). Creating an opportunity for the readers to enact their own intersectionality via her food recipes, Bociurkiw creates, at the same time, an opportunity for new dishes to be made and eaten, new stories to be told, and new memories to be shared. Through her memoir, she opens thus new possibilities to envision intersectional subjectivity in unique, alimentary, terms defined by a sprawling conglomeration of “bodies” taking part in a fascinating and continuous revision of this “[f]lesh of . . . [her] rewritten flesh: bodies whose queer desires for food, for love, for sex, rend the world apart, and create it anew” (Bociurkiw 2007: 118).

³¹ See Heldke who discusses food and eating, and more precisely, “the work of cuisine” as an “experience”, referring to John Dewey’s consideration of “the work of art as an *experiential* entity” (2007: 389; emphasis in original).

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