



# COMMUTER SPECIAL

Peregrine Bermas  
Christian Alfaro

## *FOREWORD*

When we began this project in 2014, we were undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Chicago. We proposed a food memoir at the intersection of gender and women's studies, Asian American history, and art as social practice. It would be written from two perspectives because there are always so many stories to tell. After a decade of friendship between us, collaboration was just a matter of setting the table. Our tummies demanded it. Within academia, we were learning how to let our bodies lead.

Our recipes are adaptations of Filipino food we have always known but had never cooked before. The following pages boil down a semester of long hours on the Metra and the grind of working student life. We made most of the dishes late at night, for ourselves, quickly realizing that maintaining a practice of self-nourishment was also labor.

Other meals we curated to share. Navigating our relationships to home included crossing private and public places. The first gatherings we had were in our parents' houses, with people who had shaped our early experiences with food. In the spring we brought our work to campus. At the time we both worked as educators at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. We made a meal for our colleagues in the Residents' Dining Hall - historically a site for dialogue around food. We cooked for the Asian American Studies Program faculty, many of whom were our mentors, in their office building. Finally, in plein air we broke pie crust at the campus Asian American Awareness Month kick-Off event. Each gathering was a learning experience and grew context for the food, our questions, an end product (was there an end product?), etc.

This project was partially funded by an Asian American Studies Expo Grant to support undergraduate research. It is part of the UIC AANAPISI Initiative supporting the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and English language learner students at the University of Illinois at Chicago and is fully funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions Program.

We are immensely grateful.

## How to Write a Cookbook

Scholars like Anita Mannur reference the “unwritten rules” of popular fusion cookbooks: which ingredients can be fused and how they can be plated to create end products palatable enough for mainstream consumption. As 2nd generation, US-born Filipinos, we considered our place in global conversations happening around fusion food and cultural authenticity vs. co-optation.

Within the conventions of fusion, we can see patterns in the kinds of produce, spices, and condiments that are “new” and “exotic,” and others that are Classic. The traditions and histories plated together often erase complex journeys of place-making and histories of imperialism, the end product a white Eurocentric composition in the name of globalization that masks State-sanctified repression of people of color.

The “quiet addition” of traditional Asian cuisine has again and again signified its “arrival” into the modern foodscape, rhetoric not coincidentally reminiscent of the stereotype of Asian peoples quietly assimilating into what is known as the US, and the Model Minority myth.

These connections were ever-present as we adapted traditions that began overseas to a Midwestern American food geography, and prepared these meals to be shared.

We were also weary of recreating the food our parents and grandparents would prepare. Revisiting these foods meant confronting the memories and realities of generations of cultural negotiation. What would we find in the pot? What would we say at the table?

*“Trust your work.”*

*- Nayyirrah Waheed*

*To us*

*“Consumption is never a complete process.”*

*- Martin F. Manalansan IV*

*JANUARY*

## Our First Meal CA

At first sight, *tortang talong* (eggplant omelette) is not that visually appealing... at least the way my dad makes it. If Tim Burton adapted Dr. Seuss' Green Eggs and Ham, he would probably take inspiration from my dad's *tortang talong*: A scrambled greasy slop of army green, off yellow, and brownish gray. But the smell! There's nothing like the comforting smell of breakfast eggs, especially when it's doused in soy sauce.

He would cook and serve it with *sinangag* (garlic fried rice) for breakfast. Sizzling minced garlic cloves on the wok wafted in every room of our house. My dad would shut every bedroom door to make sure none of our personal things were stained with that garlic smell. I would sneakily leave my door slightly ajar.

While it may not be pretty, it tastes pretty [insert expletive] good. Thinking back to my first encounter with *tortang talong* I remember the house smelling so good and wondering what my dad was preparing for me to devour before I headed off to the bus for school. I ran down the stairs, nose flared and stomach crying out like a demon, completely ready to take part in the most important meal of the day. My hungry eyes lost their appetite as soon as it saw the garbage green mush that sizzled in the pan. My dad was frying Oscar the Grouch.

He would cook the *tortang talong* often and it took me a while to actually enjoy eating the scrambled mush. What gives it that distinct color is the soy sauce that is added to the eggplant and egg mixture. This recipe was passed down to my dad from his dad. This version of *tortang talong* was the only way I've had it until Peregrine brought her mom's recipe to cook at the Resident's Dining Hall Kitchen of Hull-House.



We decided that we would walk to a grocery store within walking distance from Union Station and UIC, to buy the ingredients: half dozen eggs and two eggplants. After leaving the store, the excitement flooded my body as we made the trek to Hull-House. The frozen air of January Winters in Chicago may have played a factor as well. It was pretty awkward for our first cooking session specifically because it was being done at Hull-House. Hull-House has an industrial kitchen that was used in the early 20th century to provide meals for the Social Reformers of that era. Staff occasionally prepare shared meals in the space. This was our first time cooking in the kitchen.

We allocated two hours in total for prep and cooking three dishes, eating, and discussion. Peregrine started with her mom's *tortang talong* recipe which called for grilling eggplant halves. She used a steel cooking grate to grill the eggplant, peeled off the skin, soaked the halves in a beaten egg mix, and fried it in olive oil. It was my turn to replicate my grandpa's recipe. I have never sauteed eggplants with garlic before, and it showed. I cut the eggplant in half instead of cutting it in thinner slices. It took so long for the eggplant to dissolve into a mush that Peregrine had already started picking at her cooked *tortang talong*. And to make matters worse, kitchen did not have soy sauce. The finished product did not look like Oscar the Grouch. We set the food in Hull-House white Crate and Barrel. It did not look appealing and it was not the tastiest either. There were a few things that weren't in our favor like the awkward cooking setting, my inability to saute an eggplant, and no soy sauce in stock.

Time and time again, I settle in my discomfort concerning the look of the dish. Why did I care if it was "ugly"? Is Filipin@ food pretty? Growing up in White suburbia, I was afraid to serve my non-Filipin@ friends the food my dad prepared because I felt ashamed of the way the food looked, smelled, and tasted. I had this perception that they would judge me by the food that I ate because it didn't match their American palates. I even questioned the photogenic quality of the *talong* recipe for this cookbook and only then did I begin having conversations with Peregrine about it. Why did I trouble the aesthetics of *tortang talong*, but never do the same for foods like greasy pizzas or double cheeseburgers?

\*We are not here to present pretty and professional snapshots and tastes of Filipin@ cuisine. We are presenting our histories, our lived experiences that are not always pretty and packaged for fun and easy consumption.\*

## Tortang Talong Recipe

Serves 3-4 people

1 Eggplant

4 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp of minced garlic

2 eggs

½ cup of soy sauce

Crush, chop, dice or do whatever you need to do to 3 cloves of garlic to make it look like minced garlic. Before slicing the eggplant, please be sure to wash it. Some folks will tell you that the dirt is gonna get cooked anyway, but let's just take every precaution anyway. After rinsing, slice the eggplant into thin slices about a quarter of an inch thick. Put a pan on the stove at medium high heat and place the olive oil, minced garlic, and as many slices of eggplant that covers the pan surface. Cover the pan and let it saute for about 10 minutes. While you are waiting for the eggplant to dissolve, which may seem like forever, beat the eggs into a separate bowl, and pour in the soy sauce. Add the green/brown egg mixture to the dissolved eggplant and mix it in the pan using a spatula. Put it on low heat and cook for another couple minutes. Plate and serve!



## Garlic Sinangag Recipe

3 cups cooked rice

3 cloves of garlic

1 tbsp of olive oil

Salt

Place all the ingredients in wok on medium high heat. You can mince the garlic or halve them. Taste the tortang talong before adding salt to the rice. You don't want both dishes to be super salty! It all depends on your taste. The saltiness from the soy sauce complements the warm and mild rice. The cooking process should only take about a couple minutes. You don't want to burn the rice or else it will harden!



## ANOTHER LATE NIGHT PB

The second meal we cooked together was a late dinner at my house, sometime in January. Many of the Pilipin@ dishes I know are meat-based stews, so as a vegetarian, I had no idea where to go from tortang talong.

*(From memory, my favorite dish is kaldereta, the way my papa makes it: slightly spicy tomato base with peppers and large halves of gritty potato and slow-cooked, tender, fall-apart beef hunks served over steaming white rice. This was a birthday meal.))*

My mom's recipe for *pinakbet/pakbet* calls for pork, but for this project we made a vegetarian version\*. Cooking pinakbet for the first time was surprisingly simple. The vegetables were picked up earlier that night from a local produce market. They were shiny and colorful and crisp. Christian and I chopped them up loosely while my mom chatted with us from the other room.

For the past year I've been staying with my family in Elgin, IL, a large suburb two hours west of Chicago. Our little townhouse is the kind of place where the rooms can never be completely quiet. The lighting is lazy and warm, reflected off walls the same burnt orange as our three pets: Nelson, Kovu and Boodah.

My life has been punctuated by moves to and from the city, different houses and environments, different faces. Uprooting is something I learned how to do well. For now I am a commuter, wandering between houses. I have yet to find or build a large community, but I have my pods. I remember the scents and tastes of home. These too are roots.

### \* HOW TO EAT VEGETARIAN:

The most popular Pilipin@ entrees in the Western world will contain meat or fish. If a veggie-only meal is desired, common practice is just to omit any meat from the recipe. Still, for many Filipin@s meatless meals are considered cheap variations of traditional fare.



### PINAKBET (SERVED 4):

- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- A thumb of fresh ginger, minced
- 1 yellow onion
- 2 large tomatoes
- 1 eggplant
- 1 *ampalaya* (bitter melon)
- 2 handfuls green beans
- ½ orange squash (kabocha is my gourd of choice)
- High heat cooking oil
- Salt to taste
- (Okra is also used, but we forgot to buy some)

Cooking times and amount of ingredients are estimated and vary by region, season and household tastes, but a consensus is not to cook down the vegetables so much that they turn to mush. Keep the integrity of that eggplant, yo.

After mincing garlic and ginger, chop all the vegetables to bite size and set aside. Heat up a large skillet on medium setting. Add cooking oil to coat the pan, plus a little more. Sweat garlic, ginger and chopped onion in the pan. Add squash, with enough water to cover the slices halfway. You can throw in some salt at this point too. After five minutes, add tomatoes and cook for five more minutes. Add the eggplant and green beans. Cook for five minutes. Add the bitter melon – don't mix, or the bitterness will take over your pakbet! - and cover the pan for another 10 minutes, or until the vegetables are soft. Donezo and ready to serve!



*TASTE: The pakbet was hot and fragrant; rich jewel tones of the cooked eggplant skin, green ampalaya (ribbed skin texture), and orange squash cubes. Softness complemented by slight crunch of green beans and lightly steamed ampalaya. Sweet, melting, hint of salt, tomato freshness, ampalaya had a bite, green beans added texture. My parents said the ampalaya was not bitter. My dad had seconds.*



The food opened portals to the past: I remember a childhood of smoky backyard celebrations and *kamatis*... In the booming 1990s we always seemed to have diced tomatoes - as sides for barbecue or grilled tilapia, clouds of vibrant orange-red floating in a bowl of sinigang - or served fresh with white rice and *alamang*. My grandpa had a small garden in our backyard, of tomatoes and apples and ampalaya and green peppers and eggplants, and my grandma grew roses. If I caught him planting, my grandpa would let me sprinkle seeds over holes he had dug into the soil (I was more interested in following the migration of worms and millipedes, rolie polies sliding in the palm of my hand, the flash of an opalescent beetle or the papery wings of a butterfly).

Anecdotes shifted from regional dishes (my mom is from Baguio City, PI, an area known for the sticky dessert *sundot-kulangot*, which translates to picked snot), to animal care (Christian watched a dog being skinned for a meal at a family party), to American brands that have become staples in PI culture (Del Monte, Dole, Carnation, SPAM, Kraft). My mom was amazed at how easily the memories flowed while eating the food in front of us.



Later into the night, bellies full and satisfied, we pulled ourselves out of our chairs to make *kamote que*, or caramelized sweet potato slices. In the Philippines, kamote que and banana que (made with fried plantains), are common street foods. Easily prepared in batches, the sweets are served on skewers and sold by vendors throughout the day.

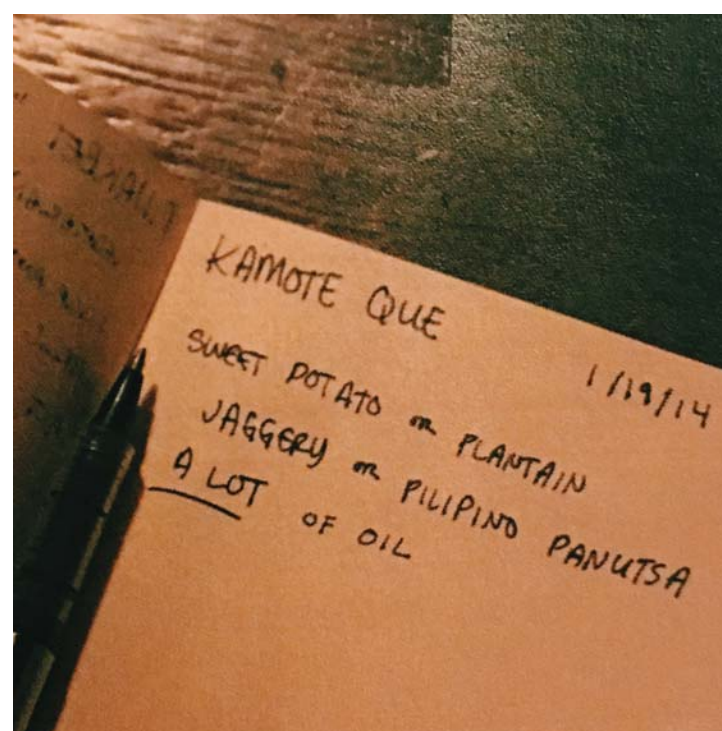


#### *KAMOTE QUE (SERVED 5):*

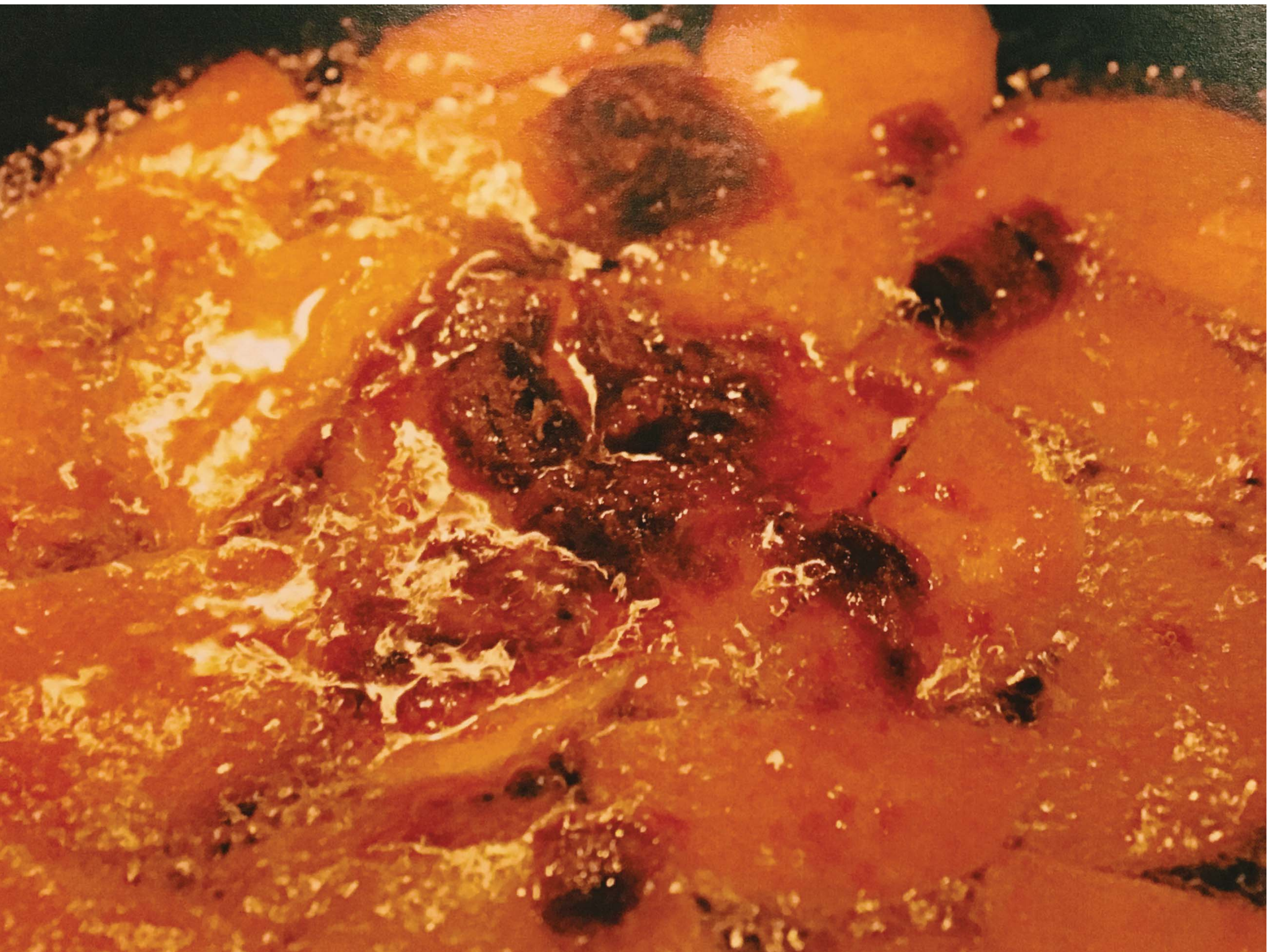
We pan-fried the kamote instead of deep-frying it. If you want to go there, start with 1 cup of oil.

½ cup high heat cooking oil  
4 sweet potatoes  
½ cup shaved *panutsa*, or packed brown sugar

Heat oil in a medium pot (large if deep-frying) or deep pan. Peel sweet potatoes and cut crosswise into ½ inch slices. Sprinkle brown sugar (*panutsa*) into the oil. Add sweet potatoes and fry for 10-ish minutes, flipping occasionally to encourage sugar to stick each slice. Transfer to a napkin-covered plate. If you can restrain yourself, allow to cool before serving. If not, we won't judge you.



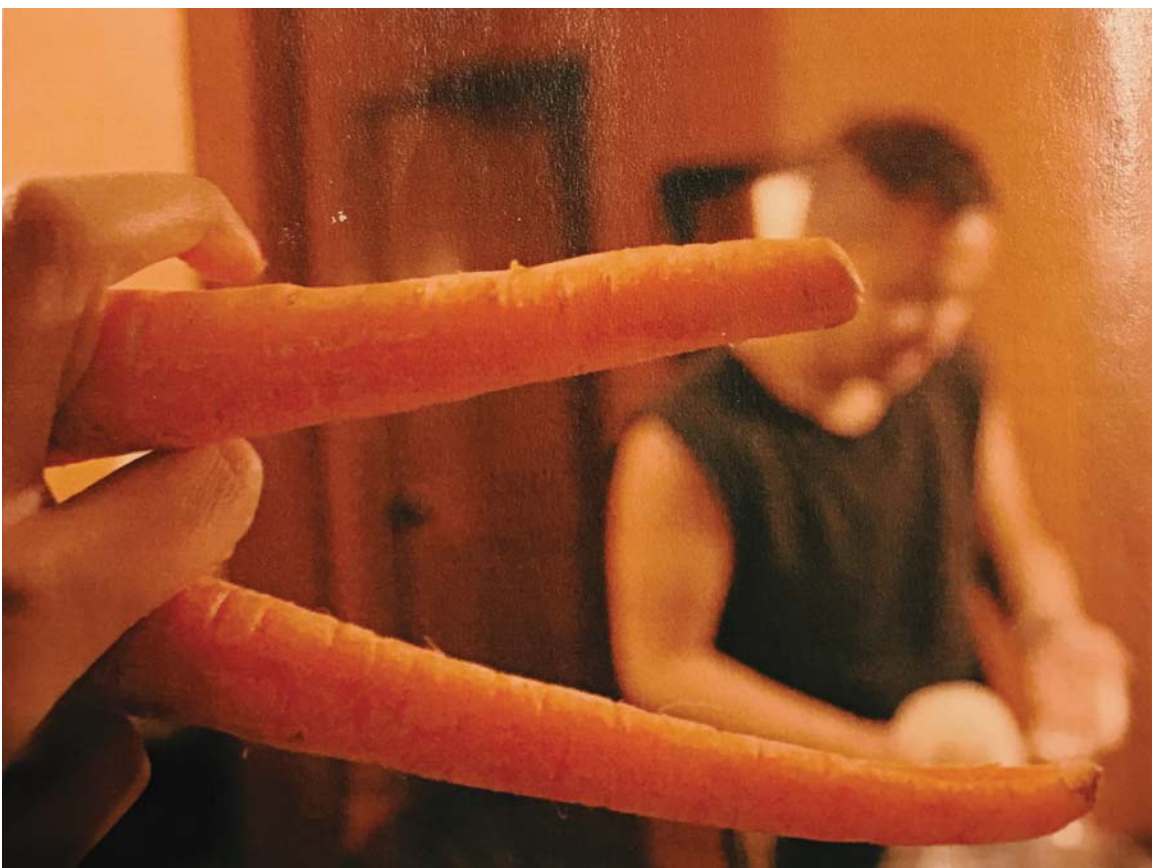
*TASTE: Indulgence. Chewy inside with hardened caramel sugar on the edges. Comforting.*



*FEBRUARY*

# A COLONIAL KITCHEN

## PB



VEGGIE EMPANADAS (MADE 8 EMPANADAS, PLUS 1 THAT GOT AWAY) :

Recipe adapted from *Kawaling Pinoy*

2 ½ cups flour  
2 sticks butter  
1 teaspoon salt  
3 tablespoons sugar  
1/3 cup ice water

1 onion, diced  
1 clove garlic, minced  
2 potatoes, peeled and diced  
2 carrots, diced  
½ cup frozen peas, thawed  
1 bell pepper, diced  
¼ cup raisins  
½ cup tomato sauce  
½ cup water  
1 tablespoon oil  
Salt and pepper to taste (I snuck in some cayenne pepper, too)

1 egg  
1 tablespoon milk (pretty sure we only had almond or soy milk for anything made for this book)  
Pinch of salt



There is a rich history at the center of any given Filipino dish. It's more fun than your high school textbook (especially if said textbook was written, edited and published by dead white men). Mexican empanadas, for example, along with widespread militarized settlement, forcible conversion to Catholicism, and the Roman alphabet were brought to the islands via Spain.

Prep da pie crust ahead of time: Cut butter into cubes and freeze for an hour. In a bowl, whisk together flour, salt, and sugar; chill those friendlies in the refrigerator until the butter is ready to be difficult for you (30 minutes).

Work butter into flour mixture until the two become one, with small butter flecks. If you don't have a pastry mixer, it's easiest to just get in there with your hands.

Slowly pour water into flour-butter and use hands to mix until just combined. Gather dough and press into a ball. If the dough is too crumbly to hold together, add a little more water, a tablespoon at a time. Wrap ball of dough with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for two hours.

Preheat oven to 375° F.

Heat oil in a pot over medium heat. Add potatoes and cook about five minutes. Add the onion and garlic and sauté until fragrant. Add tomato sauce and water and bring to a boil. Lower heat and add carrots and raisins. Cook until potatoes and carrots are tender and liquid is reduced. Season with salt and pepper. Drain excess liquid in a colander.

Grab dough from the fridge and roll out to ¼ inch thickness. Using a small inverted bowl, cut into the dough to form about 12 circles (this number depends on the size of your bowl). Trim excess dough and put aside.

Lay one circle on a clean, flat surface and spoon a small amount of filling into the middle. Be careful not to add too much filling, or the dough will break apart. Use fingers to fold the dough in half over the filling. Press the edges firmly with a fork to seal them together. Repeat with remaining dough and filling.

On a lightly greased baking sheet, arrange prepared empanadas. Brush their cute little tops with egg wash mixture of egg, milk, and salt. Bake for 25 minutes or until lightly browned. Allow to cool and transfer from baking sheet into your mouth.

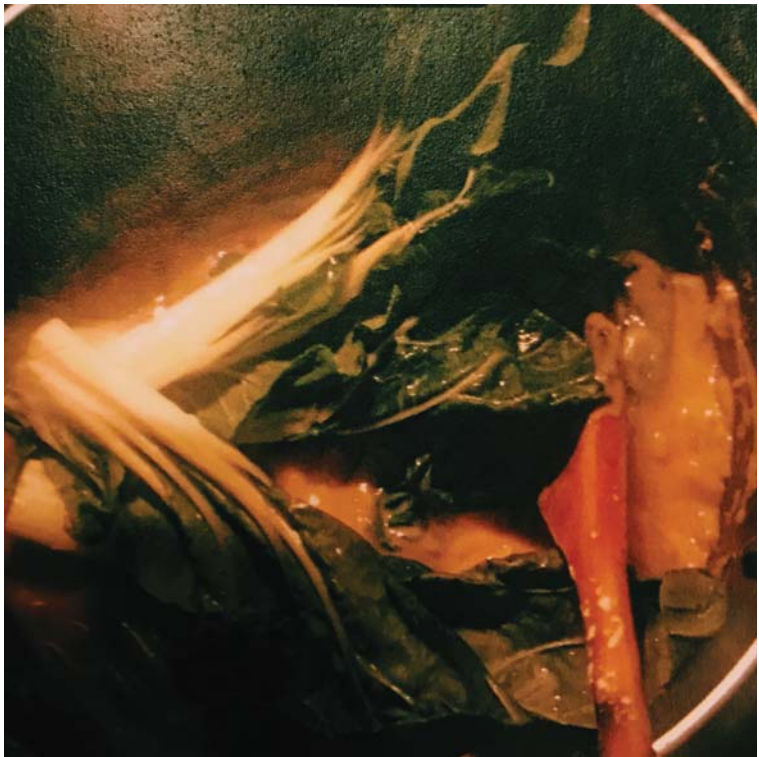
When my family visits my grandma at her home in Chicago, she sends us home with bags full of canned and boxed goods. In February, our tea cabinet held five tubs of peanut butter. It's like she had known we were going to make *kare-kare*.

KARE-KARENG GULAY (SERVED 4 PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T VERY HUNGRY BECAUSE IT WAS WAY PAST THEIR BEDTIMES):

- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 onion, diced
- Some oil (exact measurement)
- 2 handfuls green beans, ends cut
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup peanut butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water (or more, to desired consistency)
- A pinch of cornstarch or rice powder (again, to desired consistency)
- 6 leaves bok choy
- 1 eggplant, chopped to bite size
- Salt and pepper to taste



After cutting up all the veggies, heat enough oil to coat the bottom of a medium-sized pot. Sweat garlic and onion in the pot until fragrant. Add the peanut butter, water, and cornstarch and mix to desired sauce thick-ness. Add eggplant and allow to cook for five minutes. Add bok choy, green beans, and seasoning. Cover and simmer on low heat until eggplant is soft, stirring occa-sionally.



*MARCH*

## ON NOT EATING MOLDY SANDWICHES PB

"To consume culture in all its varied forms, or to be nostalgic for cultural artifacts, is as much about imagining an inclusive future as it is about commemorating nostalgic memories of the past."

- Anita Mannur

Back in the Hull-House kitchen, we packed each of our co-workers a brown bag full of memories: *chamorado*, Filipin@ spaghetti with hot dogs, Yan Yan, *pancit* with soy sauce, Hawaiian bread and ham sandwiches, fried SPAM and white rice, toast with butter and sugar, dried mangoes, coconut juice. We grew up with these flavors in a middle class white suburban foodscape of french fries, orange chicken, and Pizza Hut Wednesdays. It's impossible not to remember the cafeteria as an environment hostile to unfamiliar foods, the pressure to assimilate and reject our lunches from home, the shame internalized by our adolescent desires to belong and simultaneous guilt of knowing that these now-othered meals had been prepared by our parents with familiarity, care, and love.

*I remember eating my lunches discreetly, and for a long time not eating them at all, giving my sandwiches up to mold in shades of green and black in their plastic wrap, forgotten under a world history textbook, a manifestation of some tragic poem.*



FILIPIN@ SPAGHETTI (MADE,  
LIKE, 6 MOCK SCHOOL LUNCHES):

1 quart water  
Big pinch of salt  
½ package spaghetti noodles  
2-3 beef franks  
½ bottle red pasta sauce  
½ bottle banana ketchup  
(where the magic happens)



In a large pot, bring water and salt to boil. Place spaghetti in the pot and reduce heat to medium, par-cooking the noodles to just-before *al dente*. Drain out most of the water. (At this point I would throw in minced carrot for added texture and \*nutrients\*). Slice beef franks crosswise and add to the pot. Mix in pasta sauce and banana ketchup and let sit on low-medium flame, stirring occasionally, until hotdogs are heated through. Adjust sauces and seasonings to taste. Serve hot, any time of day, topped with cheese, or with a roll of *pandesal*.



*TASTE: SPAM! Salty chewy greasy! I don't eat this canned meat anymore, but objectively it tastes best sliced thin, sizzling off the stove and crispy on the edges. You'll need more rice than meat, and add a fried egg too, and maybe some ketchup, and - what?! There's jalapeño SPAM now? That sounds delicious.*





Before my mom packed me sandwiches, she would send me to school with food to share. I remember her sealing up a container of pancit for my fourth grade teacher. We had just moved from our first house in Chicago to a suburb called Bartlett, and my new home room teacher “loooooooved Filipino food.”

I don’t know if at that point in my life I was concerned that Ms. Whitman \* was probably unfamiliar with the many regional variations of popularized Filipino food like pancit; or if I wanted to protect my mom’s home cooking from the judgment of a white American woman; but I was so scared that the food my mom proudly fried in her wok was not the food my teacher was familiar with. I was scared that she would reject it, and with it, me. So, no matter how often she asked, I never gave her my mom’s pancit.

*\* Name has been changed*

#### VEGGIE PANCIT (MADE, LIKE, 6 MOCK SCHOOL LUNCHES) :

½ onion, diced

1 cup carrot, made fancy small with a julienne peeler your dad bought you for Christmas (yes, you asked for one) because KITCHEN HACK ALERT it makes awesome veggie noodles

1 cup cabbage, shredded

1 cup green beans, chopped to bite size

1 package vermicelli (rice noodles)

At least 1, but up to 2 cups soy sauce

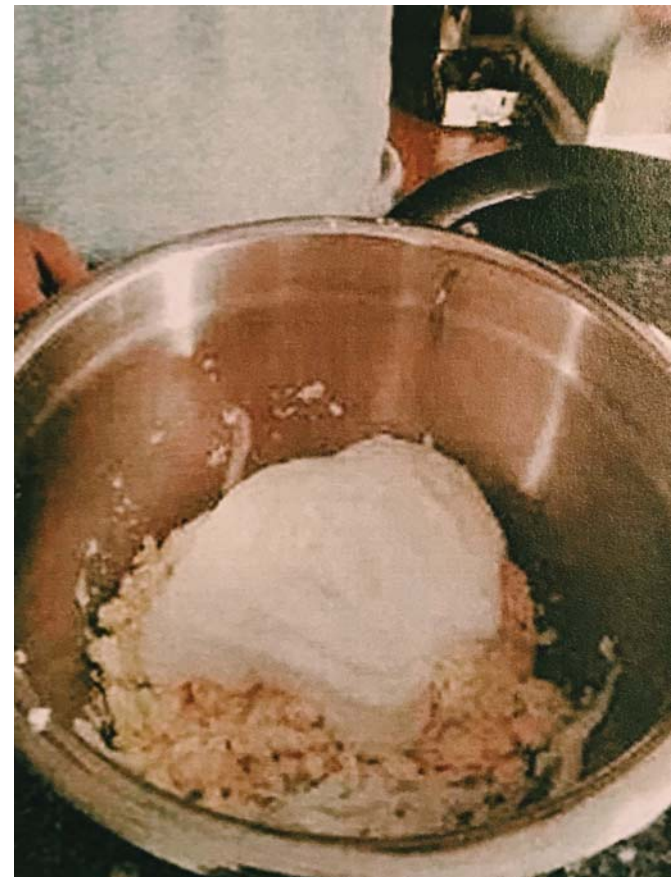
Stir-fry! Cut up all the veggies and set aside. Pour soy sauce into a wok with the onions on high heat. When these friends come to a boil, add noodles. Then add carrots and stir continuously, adding green beans, then cabbage. Keep the contents moving until the noodles are cooked through and the greens are bright. The vegetables should retain freshness, crunch, and color.

## “ALLEZ CUISINE!” CA

The beginning of March, Peregrine and I planned to do our second dessert recipe: cassava cake. Often conflated with yucca, the cassava plant is distinct in its fan shaped foliage, while the former has a spiky appearance. In Taino language, the cassava is referred to as *yuca* so it's no wonder there is confusion between cassava and yuca. The roots of the plant (*kamoteng kahoy*) are prepared and grated for many *kakanin* or *malagkit* desserts in the Philippines. Cassava was a pre-Colombian food staple for people in the Americas and through Spanish and Portuguese conquest, there was a growth in cassava production in South America, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. The root is made into beverages, purees, soups, powder, rice, and more. For a cassava cake, the cassava acts as the rice that makes the cake sticky. Coconut and condensed milk are used to sweeten the cake.

Dessert is an appreciated part in Filipin@ cuisines, as it can be used to end a significant meal, accompany all kinds of festivities, and signify class status. Whenever I would tag along with my parents to Filipin@ parties in Chicago, we would check out the dessert table to see whether the hosts put all their money and effort to getting or preparing the best *kakanin* for their guests to enjoy.

I actually used to confuse cassava with coconut. When shredded, they both taste similar. But as most *kakanin*, the main ingredients include coconut milk, condensed milk, and glutinous rice. My dad gave me the recipe to use for this baking session. He took me to the Laotian store to buy the necessary ingredients. He told me to double up on the ingredients and I asked why that was needed since it was only Peregrine and I cooking. It turns out he wanted to bake a cassava cake too and compare it with the one we were going to make. After Peregrine and I made our version, my dad began to make his. I knew Peregrine could feel my discomfort. It was like we were on some *Food Network* competition show where my dad was the *Iron Chef* and we were the brave chefs who were ultimately at an experiential disadvantage. My dad is a perfectionist. You know how a lot of suburban dads try and create their own “man caves” in the basement of the their homes? My dad didn't need that because he had the kitchen. It was his space where he could execute dishes with precision and ease. I had every right to feel intimidated, but it made the baking session a lot more interesting. In the end, I liked the version Peregrine and I made better than the sweeter version my dad made. I mean his was good too.



## Cassava Cake Recipe

Serves 6 people

1 pack of grated cassava

1 pack of grated coconut

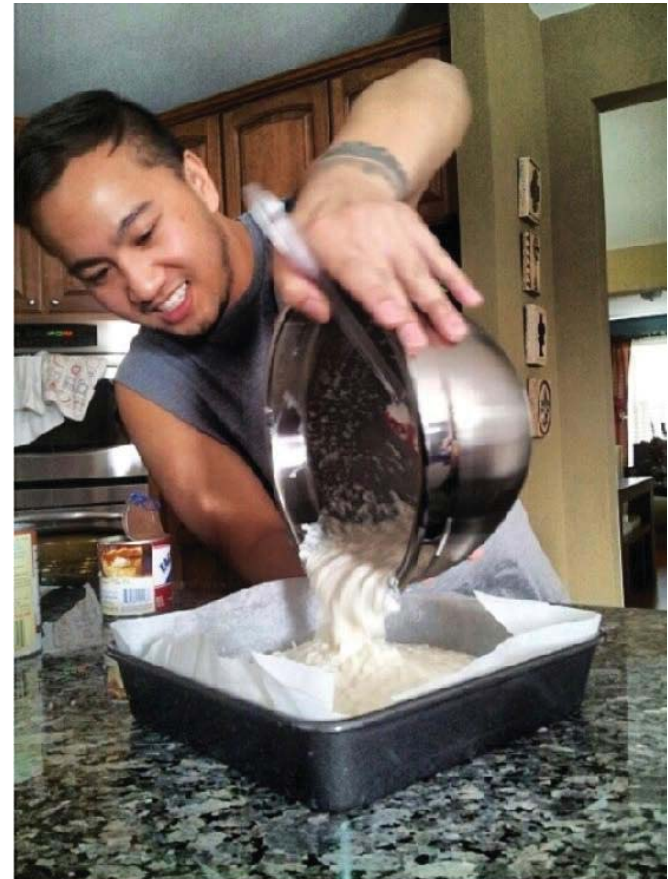
1 can of coconut milk

½ can of condensed milk

½ cup of water

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Place and pour all the ingredients into a mixing bowl. Mix. I like to taste the contents to see if it needs to be sweeter so you can adjust the sweetness by adding sugar or more condensed milk. Place the mixture into a square or rectangular baking pan that is lined with parchment/wax paper (circle pan if you're feelin' adventurous) and then into the oven. Watch for about 10 minutes. Make the sweet top layer during this wait.

TEXTURE: I always had to preface to my non-Filipin@ friends about the sticky, gooey texture because I knew they wouldn't be used to something like cassava cake.



## Sweet Top Layer

½ can of condensed milk

½ can of coconut milk

Mix both milks together. Parmesan cheese is sometimes generously mixed in with it as well. This might be strange for some folks, but cheese in Filipin@ cuisine is used both savoury and sweet. Look up cheese ice cream! Grab the cake out of the oven and check to see if it's cooked by sticking a toothpick in the cake. If the toothpick comes out sticky and wet, it still needs more time in the oven. If the toothpick is clean coming out, pour the milk mixture onto the surface of the cake and place it back in the oven. Keep an eye on it for about another 10 minutes and be careful of the top layer burning. Take it out when it's finished and let it cool before you serve. If you're hungry, get ready for a burnt tongue.



*APRIL*

## PROCESSING OUR WORK SO FAR CA

The Asian American Studies (ASAM) faculty and staff occasionally held “Brown Bag” Lunch Sessions to gather and eat around a presentation. This was an opportunity to share our processes and products of love and labor, thoughts about food politics and highly processed Filipin@ American foods. Our presentation would go over the sources we were reading, glimpses of narratives through our oral storytelling of personal experiences with certain foods, a taste of some of the recipes included in this book, and ultimately the many possible paths this cookbook project could take.

My anxiety levels were through the roof. The Brown Bag took place on the 8th floor of University Hall, but it felt like my brain was in the basement and my heart was on the 28th floor. Keep in mind that we’re also full time students reaching the end of the year with our own personal projects and part time jobs. The night before, we prepared four meals to serve. The white walls of the room we presented in gave me doctor’s office vibes: sterile and tense. It was a great contrast to the familiar faces a jubilant auras of the faculty and staff. Even then, both Peregrine and I felt pressure going into this lunch presentation thinking that we would get grilled with questions, questions that I would not even know how to answer forcing me to rethink this whole project. While this cooking and sharing process was supposed to be therapeutic, I can’t ignore that while I felt anxious, at one point I felt triggered by the mere essence of the food, the uncomfortable yearning to regain what I suppressed, to connect with my family and fellow Asian Americans, and to come face to face with our “authentic” selves.

The presentation ended up being really comfortable and the friends that surrounded us fueled us with encouragement. During the brown bag I shared the discomfort a budding queer Filipin@ youth can feel at Filipin@ parties. They even got a good laugh at the competitive direction of our cassava baking session with my dad.

I don’t even know how Peregrine and I were able to fit issues of highly processed foods, imperialism, notions of essentialism and nostalgia, and the family into a less than one hour presentation, but we did. I still grapple with ways in which we can promote healthier environments that highly process mental health in academia. We were doing a lot and even with faculty assurance, we still felt it was the two of us buried in work. I think it would be an interesting side project to pair mental health with nutrition in terms of bringing about sugary and high fat content within post-war legacy Filipin@ foods. I don’t think I’ll ever give up the meats, the high sodium, and the extreme sweets. The spam sliders were a hit! How Peregrine is able to resist SPAM, I will never know.



## SPAM Sliders

Yields 7 sliders

1 can SPAM (any variety)

Hawaiian Sweet Bread (6-24 rolls)

Pepper Mayonnaise

4 tbsp olive oil

SPAM: Spam Classic, Spam Hot & Spicy, Jalapeño Spam, Spam with Black Pepper, Spam Low Sodium, Spam Lite, Spam Oven Roasted Turkey, Spam Hickory Smoked, Spam Spread, Spam Bacon, Spam Cheese, Spam Garlic, Spam Teriyaki, Spam Chorizo, Spam Boricua, Spam Macadamia Nuts, Spam Turkey, Spam Tocino, Spam Portuguese Sausage

Heat the olive oil in a pan on medium high. A can of SPAM can yield at least 7 slices so slice them crosswise. (You can slice them thinner if you like your SPAM extra crispy!) Place the slices in the pan carefully! When the hot oil comes into contact with the wet slices, the oil can splash at you. Check the SPAM every minute to see if it needs to be flipped. There is no need to worry about undercooking it because SPAM can be eaten "raw" straight out of the can. (That's not my thing though) Slice 6 rolls of Hawaiian bread in half and spread pepper mayo on the inside. Pimento cheese, a cheese spread with diced pimento peppers, is also really tasty, but I always need to keep some Lactaid chewables nearby for my sensitive stomach. Place the crispy SPAM in the rolls and serve!

## Maja Blanca

Serves 8-10 people

1 15oz can of corn

1 can of coconut milk

½ cup of water

½ cup of cornstarch

1 pack of grated coconut

My mother loves to make an easy *Maja Blanca* which means oven-use is not necessary. You basically drain the can of corn (sweetened or unsweetened) and place it in a medium sized cooking pot. Place the rest of the ingredients into the pan and let it come to a simmer on medium heat. Make sure to stir the mixture every few minutes to make sure the bottom contents are not sticking and/or burning. This will take at least 15 minutes. You can serve it hot or cold.





### Macaroni Fruit Salad

Serves 8-10 people

15 oz can of fruit cocktail

½ box of macaroni pasta

1 can of evaporated milk

½ can of condensed milk

1 tsp salt

Water

Fill and boil a pot halfway filled with water or just enough to have the macaroni pasta underwater. Add the salt to season the noodles and keep them from sticking. Stir the pasta and just taste a macaroni and if the texture is to your liking, then it's done! Drain the pasta through a strainer and pour cold water onto it to stop it from cooking. Place the pasta into a mixing bowl. Drain the fruit cocktail and pour that into the mixing bowl. Pour the evaporated and the condensed milk in the bowl and mix. Taste it to see whether it needs more evaporated milk. My parents like to add chopped pieces of American cheese and they place it in the fridge to cool. After an hour or so it's good to serve.

### Adobong Green Beans

Serves 4-6 people

½ cup Vinegar

½ cup Soy sauce

1 pack Green beans

3 cloves of garlic

1 tsp salt

*Bagoong alamang* (fermented shrimp paste)

You can use meat if preferred (chicken, pork, squid etc)

Whenever I'm in Filipin@ American circles or talking to friends who have tried Filipin@ cuisine, *adobo* is always deemed a favorite, whether it's adobong pork, chicken, or *sitaw* (green/string beans). Originating in the Iberian peninsula, many Spanish and Portuguese colonies have taken on this type of marinade cooking. It involves cooking the raw food in a mixture of vinegar, soy sauce, garlic, and salt. Place the liquids in a pan on medium high heat with cracked cloves of garlic. If meat is being used, place the chunks in the pan, cover and let simmer for 30 minutes. Place the green beans in the pan and cook for 20 minutes until the sauce is reduced. Serve with steamed rice and a teaspoon of bagoong alamang on the side! My dad likes to fry the green beans after soaking in the sauce/marinade in another pan to add a crisp texture.



# BEING A PART / APART

## PB

"I want a damn paradigm shift already." - Christian Alfaro

The University of Illinois at Chicago recognizes Asian American Awareness Month in April. In case you weren't aware, one quarter of UIC students identify as Asian American (2014).

We were given a table at the AAA Month kick-off celebration to share one last meal for the cookbook. The public event would be held outside, at the concrete plaza between Lecture Centers A-E, also known as "the Quad."

The Quad as a constructed social environment is inherently a space for performance. Perceptible shifts in demeanor – a walk, a laugh, clinging to a group – on a larger, collective scale reveal the conscious exchange of observing and being observed. I tend to take alternate routes across campus.

It was a chilled Wednesday morning. Surrounded by tri-fold posters marked with acronyms for the various Asian American student organizations on campus, we were a mostly-unannounced table of free Pilipin@ pastries. Although we had scribbled the words "HELP YOURSELF!" onto our butcher paper tablecloth, we found ourselves feeling estranged in this place of negotiated inclusivity.

Our spread: hot cups of gooey and rich *champorado* accompanied an abundance of homemade *puto*, small loaves of *bibingka galapong*, and just-baked mini-pies filled with young coconut. Unwrapping the trays revealed memories from a night of mixing, rolling, simmering, steaming. The feeling of shaping home was still fresh from the kitchen, but now a stark contrast to the discomfort arising in my body as we prepared to give away these labors of love. I was hit by a wave of familiar doubts, *Why have we come? Do we belong here? Do we have something to prove?* Crowds of students, administrators and faculty shuffled past us, and the discoveries that had inspired me in the intimacy of past meals suddenly seemed too private to be shared here. *Were we trying to convince them that our food was good?*

Meanwhile (cue the carnival music), our performances seemed to have already been plated in front of us as one part model minority, one part friendly exotic. Here we were, the hospitable Filipin@s presenting traditional fare, representative of an engaged, scholarly Asian American community, strangers smiling encouragement to try new food that was small and cute, different but palatable, two unwilling poster children of multiculturalism. I wonder if our faces gave away that the table was actually reserved.



*Diversity is just another term for multiculturalism, the façade of which assures equality in both access and representation, while, according to Lisa Lowe, "simultaneously masking the existence of exclusion by recuperating dissent, conflict, and otherness through the promise of inclusion." What structures are in place, which disallow belonging in an institution that is celebrated for its diversity?*



BUKO PIE (YIELDS 1 LARGE BUKO  
PIE, OR ABOUT 12 MINI PIES):

*Buko* is young coconut.

We used a premade pie crust, cuz need time to study and stuff, but here's what you need for the filling:

2 cups fresh or frozen coconut slices, thawed to room temperature  
¾ cup sugar  
¾ cup coconut juice  
¾ cup coconut milk  
1/3 cup + 2 tablespoons cornstarch

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Line a baking dish with crust for the pie bottom. Combine all ingredients in a large pan and cook on medium heat, stirring continuously, until thick.

Pour cooked mixture into the baking dish and cover with top crust, crimping the edges of the crusts together with the tines of a fork. Optional: You can bring in some egg wash action at this point, brushing the top crusts with a mixture of egg and a splash of water or milk. This will give the pies a golden sheen. Bake for 20-25 minutes and cool.

Refrigerate until you are ready.

*"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."*

*- Arundhati Roy*



## CHRISTIAN ALFARO

What was seemingly a four month project turned into a four years... well we took a break from May 2014 to October 2018... and in that time, I've unravelled more things about myself and my relationships to family, friends, and food as well. Re-reading my passages transported me back to my college self, someone I thought was in his "prime", but also someone whose prose still managed to be void of personality. I'm thankful for this journey back. It's a chance to edit my writings, work alongside Peregrine, my co-conspirator, and reflect on the work. Throughout the years I've developed a stronger connection with my family, but continue to still feel like I'm isolated in the larger Pilipinx Chicago community. And looking back, it connects to my gut reflex to build a facade, an aesthetic that is "unapproachable"... a means to protect myself. That's why I couldn't connect to folks at the Asian American Awareness Kickoff event. Maybe I didn't want to be the hospitable Filipino. It's still something I'm working on just like this cookbook. The timer goes off, but things are still a cookin..

Queer Filipinx artist Christian was born in Chicago, Illinois and raised in the suburbs of Bartlett and Elgin. He earned his BA in Gender and Women's Studies and Minors in Asian American Studies and Art History at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2014. He maintains subtropical plants to pay the bills, but dabbles in Horticultural Therapy and dreams of one day having a space to offer therapeutic services. At the moment, his creativity and magic is expressed through his Drag persona, Delilah.

## PEREGRINE BERMAS

*Lifetimes ago we sat down to write a proposal for Commuter Special. This project is so close to my heart. By the end of the semester I think we realized it didn't feel right to use food as a tool for intervention, the way we had intended in the Quad. We were just beginning to reflect on our complex sense of loss and pride and care, sacred work. And I think beyond that we really wanted to be seen. We wanted to belong.*

*The practice of articulating childhood memory to myself and my families, and to strangers who looked like me or didn't, revealed traumas I would spend the next few years naming. Once we opened up to listen to our bodies, the stories were there. The book shows painstaking research and hours of editing and curation, and also how scared, how angry, how defiant, and how full of love we were, and still are.*

*On the edits: It feels very vulnerable even today to think these words might be read by someone else, but I also hope that it happens. It was so challenging to re-read them ourselves and not project too much of our present vocabulary and understanding onto who we were then. We've made a lot of jokes about that and who we "used to be," but I believe it is an important part of the work to celebrate what we accomplish together as well as reflect on what we are still learning. And sit with those layers. In many ways it has been liberating to see connections between what our concerns were then and what we're working through now.*

*Looking back, we want to acknowledge that UIC was both a site of tension and a bubble of privilege. I am grateful for both. We had originally created this book to be a resource for the Asian American Studies Program (now Global Asian Studies), so a lot of it is site-specific to the campus up to the year 2014. It is a horcrux and a time capsule.*

*Since 2014, we have watched the Chicago Filipinx foodscape shift to its current state of visibility. New American restaurants continue to popularize upscaled "fusion" and further gentrification in hoods of color. Meanwhile, Pilipino-owned businesses and organizations are making our culture known to the public on our terms. Community-based educational workshops around food and wellness are spaces for our people to gather. Christian and I are making cassava cake tomorrow afternoon.*

*Peregrine Bermas, undisciplined artist, is Islander in diaspora. They guide movement, meditation and artmaking. They live in love in Chicago.*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A list of our resources

The recipes passed down from our parents and their parents

Marie and Marlon Bermas

Chris and Ramela Alfaro

Professor Anna Guevarra

UIC Asian American Studies Faculty and Staff

*Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader* edited by Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV, Anita Mannur, 2013

*The Filipino-American Kitchen: Traditional Recipes, Contemporary Flavors* by Jennifer M. Aranas, 2006

*The Adobo Road Cookbook: A Filipino Food Journey-From Food Blog, to Food Truck, and Beyond* by Marvin Gapultos, 2013

Anthony Bourdain *No Reservations* S5EP5, 2009

Panlasangpinoy.com

Kawalingpinoy.com

*Way of the Ancient Healer: Sacred Teachings from the Philippine Ancestral Traditions* by Virgil Apostol, 2010

Thesaloproject.com

The UIC Heritage Garden

Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective's work in pods and pod mapping

"Art and Appetite: American Painting, Culture, and Cuisine" at the Art Institute, 2014

"Ethnic Cuisine: the significant 'other'" by Ashis Nandy, 2002-03

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine\\_cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine_cuisine)

*Bento Box: Japanese Girlhood in America* by Linda Furiya, 2006

*Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* by Lucy Knisley 2013

*Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia* edited by Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, 2012

*Sweetness and Power* by Sidney Mintz 1985

Raj Patel's written work

*A Taste of Serendib* by Mary Anne Mohanraj, 2003

“ASAM 230 Cultural Politics of Asian American Food” course

*Serve the People: A Stir-Fried Journey through China* by Jen Lin-Liu, 2008

*Culinary Fictions* by Anita Mannur

*Biting Through the Skin: An Indian Kitchen in America's Heartland* by Nina Furstenau, 2013

*Memories of Philippine Kitchens* by Amy Besa and Romy Dorotan, 2006

*Rude Food: The Collected Food Writings* by Vir Sanghvi, 2003

“The Political Economy of Samosa” by Virinder S. Kalra, 2004

“The Changing Popular Culture of Indian Food” by Ashis Nandy, 2004

*Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, Min Zhou, 2000

*Julie and Julia* by Julie Powell, 2005

“Culture Ingested: On the Indigenization of Philippine Food” by Doreen Fernandez, 1994

Arundhati Roy’s talk at the closing rally of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2003

*In Defense of Filipino Food* by Claude Tayag, 2010

