

The Diasporic Cookbook as Chronotope, a Review of *Kitchens of Hope: Immigrants Share Stories of Resilience and Recipes from Home*

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Edited by Linda S. Svitak and Christin Jaye Eaton, with Lee Svitak Dean, and published by the University of Minnesota Press, *Kitchens of Hope: Immigrants Share Stories of Resilience and Recipes from Home* (2025) fits neatly into the popular genre network of cookbooks that blend essay with recipe, mixing memoir with meals perfected over generations. But this book doesn't simply share the legacy of Liberian rice bread or summer beet soup. It explores the migration of these dishes and their cooks, contextualizing stories of displacement and development. Because of the breadth of this book, Mikhail Bakhtin might describe this collection as a chronotope of sorts, a configuration of time and space that "takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (qtd. in Bemong & Borghart, 2010, p. 4). Through Omedi Ochieng's lens of chronotopian humanitarianism, this book is a rhetorical tool for feminist scholarship seeking to counter a Eurocentric understanding of how and why people and stories move around and through the world.

As a manifestation of the literary chronotopian framework, this text allows readers to view migration as a series of events involving people and settings constructed over time. Here, stories and recipes serve as structures for time-space made physical. For readers seeking a positive rhetorics of migration, the ability to read about and then recreate food from someone else's kitchen is literally the production of meaning.

Kitchens of Hope offers a forward, an introduction to the book, and an introduction to The Advocates for Human Rights, a Minnesota non-profit representing immigrants and refugees, through which many of the featured cooks are connected. Each of six chapters thematically links narrative and recipe through "community, resilience, opportunity, justice, hope, and celebration." While every successful migration story certainly blends elements from each theme, shaping the book this way artfully allows readers to move through space-times experienced by the storytellers as they recall their journeys to and across the United States—and how food and community sustained them.

"This book originated as an effort to collect the mealtime memories—the recipes—of those who had left their home countries behind for life in the United States," write the editors in the introduction, "The Importance of Stories." It's clear that "[t]hese stories offered more than the stark numbers that often define

immigration of people from one country to another” (xv). But the editors do include data: From Cuban cook Concepción De La Caridad Diaz Morgan, or “Conchy,” readers learn that between 1960 and 1962, more than 14,000 unaccompanied minors were sent to the U.S. from Cuba through a covert operation that promised family reunification but often led to children being placed in Catholic boarding facilities. Concepción was one of those children. She didn’t see her mother again for 20 years, and family reunification came in waves over the decades. Today, Conchy has a family of her own, and “her children love picadillo and make it at home.” Her recipe for this common dish includes beef, tomatoes, onions, peppers and garlic, a variation that differs from the Puerto Rican or Colombian versions I am familiar with. And in this lies the beauty of blending story and recipe in this book: Readers understand how the cook and her dish have come full circle, spanning countries and childhoods.

As the daughter of a Colombian immigrant, I’ve been a life-long advocate for migration stories—especially those of other first-generation Americans such as myself, who love foods from their homeland but don’t often have a way of explaining them to young friends who grew up on chicken nuggets or the simplicity of salt and pepper. The growth of the ethnic cookbook-as-memoir genre has made it easier for people to learn about others through something we all share, the need for food, and the memories of childhood kitchen tables. Food and story, much like visits to my heartland, Colombia, have connected me to my heritage and helped me learn about other countries and cultures, transcending place and time.

Colombian Verónica Cadavid González is another author who narrates a story rooted in statistics and data, including in this book her recipe for *Bandeja Paisa*, a platter of meat, beans, arepa, salsa and plantains. Along with it, she documents the fact that more than eight million Colombians are internally displaced, living in their homeland, but no longer in their home, due to decades-long conflict. Her story illustrates that migration isn’t always about leaving one’s country, and that testimony, as much as protection, is a form of empowerment.

Today, I live in rural Minnesota, four hours from the Advocates for Human Rights office in St. Paul. Whether I’m referring undocumented families to them or supporting U.S.-born students, I use diasporic food and literature as rhetorical strategies made physical, so students recognize that both food and story are sustenance. For other educators working at the intersections of history, rhetoric, and culture, this collection provides a unique opportunity to engage with students through something they are already experts in: what they grew up eating and why. From there, opportunities unfold for discussions of transnational feminist approaches and humanitarianism over time, allowing students to understand how these concepts, like recipes, shift over time and context. Because the book is not a standard government report on immigration, the blending of personal story with data provides a guide for scholars and writers to consider effective ways of countering “official” or stock stories about migration.

Through the invitation to experience foods from kitchens once outside the U.S., this text upholds the editors’ goals of collecting “mealtime memories,” and it also provides additional outside resources. The final pages share further readings related to immigration and the human right to safety, as well as resources for acquiring the ingredients needed for the recipes. Regardless of the location of the story being told or the re-

sources shared, hope, resilience and celebration abound, focusing on what's been maintained and developed, rather than lost, as these cooks find ways to adapt to and influence new cultures and cuisines.

Like any skilled cook, Bakhtin isn't the only scholar to have understood the essence of the chronotope. Ochieng has approached the concept not just as a "historical-spatial-phenomenological" construct but also a "critique of the historiographical, social scientific and philosophical assumptions" made primarily about Africa, but extending to all "non-Western" time-places (123). He re-imagines a space-time framework for engaging in humanitarian work that encourages interaction, understanding and even support without the Eurocentric desire to intervene as a savior.

I came to this book with a desire to learn the recipes and stories within it while also supporting the work of an important nonprofit (The Advocates for Human Rights will receive the author's proceeds). Beyond complementing the genre in which it fits, this book also conscientiously models for students humanitarian writing by and about the displaced.

Kitchens of Hope, rich with stories, people, and places that make Minnesota a savory mix all its own, expertly fosters benevolence but moves beyond saviorism by centering lived stories of immigrants and refugees. Through weaving in the work of The Advocates for Human Rights and shaping a narrative that underscores agency without ignoring challenge, this book is a model for Ochieng's vision of a chronotope. It is a guide, a critique and a form of connection that offers readers their own way into understanding our interconnectedness and our momentary place in the world.

Biography

Marcella Prokop (she/her) is pursuing a PhD in English through Old Dominion University. Her research on community creative writing workshops explores intersections of identity, advocacy and counterstory. Her writing has appeared *Ploughshares*, *PANK*, and other publications. Her poetry chapbook, *Pan de Alma*, is forthcoming from FlowerSong Press in 2026.

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