

Force-Feeding: Consumption and Sexuality in Frank G. Paci's *Black Madonna*

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: Informed by calls to re-evaluate the relationship between Canadian literature and power in the wake of Canada's sesquicentennial, this paper examines Frank G. Paci's *Black Madonna*. Paci's 1982 Italian-Canadian novel played a significant role in early discussions of Canadian multiculturalism. This paper reassesses Paci's representation of the protagonist Marie, a second-generation Italian-Canadian woman. Using Judith Butler's concept of the construction of the gendered body and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, I analyze Marie's struggle for control over her sexuality and consumption, and her rejection of her Italian mother's cultural ideals. Through applying the frameworks of gender performativity and abjection of Otherness, this paper argues that Marie's disordered relationships with food and her sexuality are a result of the pressure on second-generation female immigrants to perform cultural identity while simultaneously assimilating into Anglo-Canadian culture. I contend that Marie's rape fantasies and sexually transgressive encounters are indicative of the corporeal tensions faced by female immigrants in Canada. Her bulimic abjection of Italian food acts as a physical manifestation of the abjection of immigrant cultures by both Canadian multiculturalism and second-generation immigrants themselves within multiculturalism. This reassessment of *Black Madonna* provides a framework for re-reading early multicultural texts through a nuanced understanding of the relationship between multiculturalism, gender, sexuality, food, and trauma.

Introduction

Studies in Canadian literature often focus on second-generation immigrants' difficulty consolidating their identity as a result of differing ideals between their two cultures. Frank G. Paci's second novel, *Black Madonna*, was published in 1982 at the onset of official multiculturalism in Canada, which was a pioneering policy tasked with maintaining cultural freedom, but widely criticized for being performative or symbolic. Paci is a foundational Italian-Canadian novelist, and this novel plays an important role in the discussion of early multiculturalism and the female Italian-Canadian

immigrant experience, focusing on cultural duality. Throughout the novel, Italian-Canadian protagonist Marie rejects Italian food, as paralleled by her rejection of her mother, Assunta, and of her Italian heritage. Early in the novel, Marie changes her Italian name from 'Maria' to 'Marie' and loses her grasp on the Italian language as she attempts to conform to Anglo-Canadian culture. As a heterosexual and cis-gendered woman, Marie grapples with her sexuality and food aversions, which repel her from her Catholic Italian mother's ideals of femininity and evoke gendered relationships with food and consumption. Paci juxtaposes Marie with her mother Assunta, as Assunta represents the old

country traditional ideals Marie constantly rejects. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and body inscription, this paper examines Marie's repulsion of the food her mother forces upon her and the shame she experiences around her sexual desires. Ultimately, I map the complex relationship between consumption and abjection in the novel through an examination of Marie's relationships with her body, sexuality, and food.

The limited criticism available on *Black Madonna* tends to focus on Marie's return trip to Italy at the end of the novel,¹ with critics interpreting the return trip as a reconciliation between Marie, Assunta, and Marie's Italian heritage after Assunta's death. I argue that this approach is problematic because it risks accepting an easy closure of Marie's life-long struggle with her mother and her heritage. Solely focusing on reconciliation undermines the impact of Marie's struggles. Daniella Zanchi's 2017 essay is a notable source that resists this pattern, suggesting that the mother-daughter relationship between Assunta and Marie is not easily reconcilable at the end of the novel. My paper expands on Zanchi's exploration of consumption and abjection as processes previously neglected by other critics. However, these processes provide valuable language for considering the complex relationships between Marie, her body, and her identity. This essay builds upon Zanchi's reading of Marie's unhealthy relationship with food to demonstrate how these relationships mirror the sexual boundary transgressions and sexual violence that occur throughout the novel. Paci intentionally connects these relationships at the climax of the novel, when it is implied that Marie is sexually assaulted while she enters a dissociative fantasy about consuming the food she had previously restricted herself from. Using Zanchi's reading of the novel to closely examine these relationships, this paper fills a gap in current scholarship on Italian-Canadian literature. I introduce valuable analyses of the traditional Canadian multicultural novel with a focus on cultural dualism in the context of a female, white-passing protagonist struggling with disordered eating and sexual violence. I contend that patriarchal and societal expectations

around female consumption pressure Marie into controlling her eating habits to conform to North American beauty standards. Her transgressive sexual fantasies about losing control reflect her subversive desire to resist restrictive codes and maintain control over her body and mind. The boundary between her escapist fantasies and the reality of her lack of control is mediated by Marie's relationships with her sexuality and food. This mediation illustrates how alienation from oneself and one's culture are intertwined and physically manifest within second-generation immigrant women navigating Canadian multiculturalism. Marie's relationships with her body and sexuality shift as her fantasies are challenged when she faces sexual violence. This shift demonstrates the ways in which patriarchal attacks on the female body negotiate power imbalances and restrain corporeal female agency.

Throughout this article, I use two main theoretical frameworks to discuss Marie's relationships with food, her body, and her sexuality. The first framework is Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, as described in her 1982 book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. For the purpose of this paper, abjection is defined as the process of casting something off as separate from the subject, or the norm (Kristeva 2). Kristeva often depicts the abject as food, and abjection as an attempt to separate food from the body through an expulsion, something that becomes impossible once the food has touched the mouth and become 'part of' the body. Spitting out or vomiting blurs the boundaries of subject (the body) and abject (the repulsive food), and causes the subject to abject part of itself in the process: "I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself" (3).

The second framework used in this paper is Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and bodily inscription, as described in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. In short, gender performativity theorizes that gender roles and gender itself are performances based on socially constructed behavioural expectations rather than expressions of true

gender identity. Butler suggests that gendered behaviour can be socially inscribed on the surface of the body as markings that establish the socially constructed concept of gender. In addition, she theorizes that the permeability and impermeability of bodily boundaries constitute the difference between inner and outer in the same way that Kristeva's theory separates subject and object. Understanding *Black Madonna* through the lens of abjection and bodily inscription assists in tying together Paci's interconnected and overlapping scenes of food repulsion and sexual transgressions.

Consumption

Marie's restrictive diet is reminiscent of the oppressive patriarchal expectation that women serve men, and that high caloric food be reserved for men as the 'leaders' of the family. Carol J. Adams describes the way that "Women... engage in deliberate self-deprivation, offering men the 'best' foods at the expense of their own nutritional needs," a concept that may be internalized in Marie's disordered eating (4). Marie has witnessed the ways in which Assunta embodies this concept in her own consumption by always pushing the rest of the family to eat before herself. In addition, Marie's growing aversions to Italian food, and eventually to almost all foods, lead her to feeling "disgusted with herself" (Paci 100). Marie's weight is constantly monitored by her father before his death, who says that she is "too thin [and looks] like a sheet of paper;" her brother Joey, who sees her as "a walking skeleton;" and her husband Richard, who gets "angry at her for not taking better care of herself" (96, 176, 113). Laura Wright argues that "eating disorders serve as dysfunctional rites of passage for women in a society that does not allow for legitimate and transformative female rites of passage" (77). Through a normalization of gendered eating habits and female dietary oppression, eating disorders become prevalent for women in societies where thinness is glorified in popular culture. In a similar vein, Monica O'Brien argues that anorexia itself is a version of Foucault's panopticon, and that "[a]norexia is a power struggle [in which] the oppressor and oppressed lurk within one person: the anorectic

is comprised of prison guard and prisoner, the invisible figure in the tower of her mind and the scrutinized criminal body monitored constantly" (O'Brien 96). This policing of the female body not only by a patriarchal society, but also by women themselves, sets the precedent of the woman as lower class, even criminal in nature, and perpetuates a cycle of female oppression. Marie plays into this cycle by policing her eating habits vigilantly and having men in her life monitor her weight and food consumption, further oppressing her bodily autonomy by removing her agency.

Marie's disordered relationship with food reflects the difficulty second-generation immigrant women in Canada have negotiating two cultural identities: familial identity and Anglo-Canadian identity. Marie's strained relationship with her body stems from her internalization of Western beauty standards and rejection of her mother's standards of Italian femininity. Early in the novel, Marie views her waist as "a sort of lumpy mass" and acknowledges that "her weight had always been a problem" (Paci 31). She is "determined to diet herself into a figure that would satisfy anyone's standards" to conform to Anglo-Canadian cultural standards (31). Roxanne Naseem Rashedi describes this second-generation "cultural identity [as] liminal, split between two worlds" and examines the "cultural disconnect [that results in an] internaliz[ation of] the opposing notions of how [one] should act, feel, and ultimately, be" (39). For many immigrants who face the compounding effects of alienation due to skin colour and other forms of racialization, the privilege of potentially appearing Anglo-Canadian to escape discrimination and feel as though they have assimilated into Canadian society is unattainable. Since Marie's ethnicity allows her to 'pass' as Anglo-Canadian, Canadian standards of beauty seem to be realistically attainable, and she believes in her ability to alter her body in a way that appeals to these standards. It is important to note, however, that North America has a long history of racism towards Italian immigrants, including the establishment of Italian-Canadian internment camps during World War II, Italo-phobia associated with both the Ku Klux Klan and lynching in the United States (the

largest mass lynching in US history was of 11 Italians in 1891, prompting former Louisiana governor John Parker to describe Italians as “just a little worse than the Negro, being if anything filthier in [their] habits, lawless, and treacherous”), and the initial labeling of Italian immigrants in America as ‘non-white,’ with much of this racism based on the ‘ethnic’ appearance of Italian people (Falco). Paci’s interpretation of this history situates his Italian protagonist in a Canadian context during the 1980s that is not immune to these stereotypes based on appearance. Marie believes that the status affiliated with Canadian beauty standards is attainable to her through losing weight because her ethnic appearance is sufficiently muted to pass as white, so her internal cultural battle takes place on the dietary field. As Enoch Padolsky argues, “food ultimately becomes a struggle between two cultural spaces, Canada and Italy, and how they can be reconciled in Marie’s body” (“You are” 22). By denying herself Italian food and eventually food altogether, Marie attempts to assimilate into Anglo-Canadian culture. Marie is often grouped with other Italian immigrants based on her family’s home in a predominantly Italian neighbourhood and her cultural differences from her peers. She engages in a constant battle to break out of her stereotyped position as an othered, Italian-Canadian student belonging to a specific subset of abjected individuals in Sault Ste. Marie, and instead to be perceived as an image of the Anglo-Canadian subject. Through controlling her eating habits, Marie’s struggle with consolidating her identity takes place at the level of the feminized body, in which the attacks on her Italian heritage are leveraged on her innately Italian body.

For Marie, Assunta and her Italian dishes serve as physical representations of the Italian culture she is rejecting. Just as Marie begins to try to regulate her diet, she quickly realizes that she has “underestimated the obstacle of her mother” (Paci 31). Assunta relentlessly pushes Marie to eat larger portions of her meals, making it nearly impossible for Marie to maintain her diet. In contrast to Assunta’s relationship with food, based on her experience of nearly starving in

Italy before immigrating to Canada, Marie consciously chooses to refuse food in order to achieve a standard of slimness desired by North American women—women with the *privilege* of dieting. Marie’s relationship with her mother is exacerbated by the alienation faced by second-generation immigrants. Lisa Bonato examines how the second-generation liminal cultural identity affects immigrant Italian mother-daughter relationships, and how “the daughters experience difficulty identifying with either their Canadian or their Italian contexts” (4). As Marie struggles with “her lumpy waist [that] continu[es] to be a source of embarrassment,” her relationships with both her mother and her own body grows increasingly fraught (Paci 33). Michela Baldo notes that “sharing food is a fundamental expression of Assunta’s cultural heritage,” so Marie’s rejection of this food is simultaneously a rejection of her mother’s Italian heritage (80). Marie feels that her mother “threatens the consolidation of her Canadian identity,” and her rejection of Assunta’s Italianity comes through a rejection of Italian food, leading to the eventual development of her anorexia nervosa (Tuzi 98). Marie’s increasing struggle against Assunta and her Italian food culture reflects the internal struggle she faces against her own body, as she increasingly grows uncomfortable with her appearance, and restricted eating becomes the solution to both of Marie’s conflicts.

Leaving Sault Ste. Marie for university further exacerbates Marie’s problems, reducing the control Assunta has over her eating habits while simultaneously driving Marie further from her Italian heritage, both physically and emotionally. Marie eventually “stop[s] eating Italian food altogether” and begins eating very little, besides “cottage cheese, wheat germ, oats, and natural yogurt” (Paci 100). In rejecting the food she used to eat, Marie abjects both the food and her mother’s Italian ideals. According to Julia Kristeva, “food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection,” and Marie’s food repulsion acts as a direct result of her rejection of her mother’s worldview and relationship with food (2). For Marie, her mother represents outdated Italian gender roles and patriarchal ideals of femininity,

which Marie rejects in favour of a different kind of patriarchal femininity focused on Canadian beauty standards and body image. Italian-Canadian women like Marie “are situated in a unique position where they are marginalized doubly through gender and ethnicity resulting in their portrayal being dominated by the themes of alienation and the split self” (Bonato 38-9). Marie acts as a prime example of the ‘split self,’ constantly clashing with her mother as she fights for control over her body in the context of her mother’s strict Italianity. While Marie loses weight by restricting her diet, she also “los[es] her temper fairly easily” and “ha[s]to control [herself] in order to think clearly” (Paci 100). While her grasp on her eating habits is highly regulated and develops into an eating disorder, her body and temperament slip further out of her control, which is deeply disturbing to her. This continued grappling for control over her body and mind frustrates her relationship with her body. Additionally, Marie’s changing appearance introduces yet another wedge between her and her family, acting as a physical reminder of her abjection of Italian food, and by extension, her family.

As Marie gets older and tries to create her own family with her husband, Richard, her muddled relationship with consumption continuously forces her to confront what she has abjected in her own culture. Although for most of the novel, Marie does not consume very much food at all, at certain points she binges on food and “she had even thrown up when Richard had forced her to eat a plate of spaghetti he had made for dinner” (Paci 100). At Assunta’s Christmas dinner, the first time Marie has returned to the Sault in months, she finally loses control and fights back at her mother’s insistence that she eat. After “reach[ing] her hand into the bowl of ravioli, grabb[ing] a handful of the hot slippery pasta, and quickly stuff[ing] it into her mouth[,]” Marie’s “stomach beg[ins] to heave [and] she spew[s] some of the pasta onto the table in a fit of coughing” (103). In putting the food in her mouth and then spitting it out, Marie engages in the process of abjection described by Kristeva: “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same

motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself” (3). Because the meal represents Assunta and Italy, in abjecting the food, Marie abjects the part of herself she wants to lose. Kathryn Robson argues that often texts focusing on anorexia as a form of abjection “avoid extensive descriptions of the abject body... so that the emphasis shifts from appearance and weight and onto what is ingested, digested, vomited or refused” (114). Paci spends a significant amount of time focusing on what is rejected as abject, although descriptions of Marie’s physical appearance and the effects of her anorexia transitioning into bulimic abjection remain. In spitting the food out, she abjects her relationship with her mother and her Italian heritage. This abjection is a further attack on her body, physically altering her body in an unhealthy way as a means of detachment from her Italian culture.

While Marie’s abjection separates her from her Italian culture, her bulimic binge eating initially combines the abjected Italian food with her body, the subject, making it impossible to ever separate herself fully from the abject. At different points throughout the novel, Marie binges on the food she restrains herself from normally, “eating and drinking ravenously, the food at times spilling out of her mouth” (Paci 181). These scenes occur when Marie is under emotional distress: to prove a point while fighting with her mother, in a hallucination after drinking at a party, and while intoxicated and mourning her mother’s death. Straying from typical representations of bulimia, in which binge eating is represented as moments of weakness or craving, Marie is repulsed by food and abjects it because of disgust rather than guilt. Kristeva represents food abjection in a vivid passage reminiscent of Marie’s bulimic scenes: “When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of the milk... I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body... nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it” (3). As Marie forces herself to consume the food that she has grown averse to, “she could feel the sauce flowing down her throat and onto the collar of her muslin dress... she

felt nauseated... her stomach began to heave" (Paci 103). "[T]he spasm and vomiting" give Marie a way to expel the abject, but just by touching the abjected food, she has absorbed it as a part of herself, and the ability to fully expel it as abject is gone (Kristeva 2). Kristeva describes the process of vomiting Marie experiences as "giv[ing] birth to [her]self amid the violence of sobs, of vomit" (3). In losing control of her ability to keep food down, her body becomes conditioned to abject Italian food even when she seeks it out in these emotionally driven moments. Since Italian food is at the core of Marie's heritage and upbringing, she can never fully deny herself of this consumption, even though her body responds with abjection. This rejection of her Italian heritage and of her mother results directly in a rejection of herself, because she has developed a disordered relationship with food consumption which has altered her relationship with her body and identity.

Sexuality

In a need for control over her body that parallels her strict diet, Marie attempts to repress her sexuality and sexual desires to conform to patriarchal ideals of femininity. At the same time as she is fighting to maintain control over her sexuality, her fantasies revolve around losing control of her body. Her "urges cause... her constant embarrassment and revulsion," leading to a continuous internal battle for control over her body and mind (Paci 76). Marie regularly dreams about "faceless men breathing down on her," visions that create a "befuddling daze that seem[s] to paralyze her mind. All sensation was focused in between her legs" (76). Marie's fantasies seem to revolve around being sexually assaulted or raped by these faceless men. Although research on the prevalence of rape fantasies was limited when *Black Madonna* was written, Paci anticipated the current discourse on rape fantasies and gestures to some of the psychological reasons behind these fantasies. Applying Jenny Bivona and Joseph Critelli's 2009 study, in which the majority² of female undergraduate participants stated that they had experienced rape fantasies, Marie's fantasies could be categorized as "erotic-

aversive rape fantasies," because she experiences a range of emotions from arousal to disgust and fear at the experience (41). As Bivona and Critelli argue, "rape fantasies allow women with high sex guilt to avoid the blame and anxiety that would accompany a consensual sexual fantasy. Because the fantasy involves force, she cannot be blamed for its sexual content" (33). For Marie, forced sexual fantasies allow her to fantasize about sex without feeling as though she is transgressing the cultural and religious boundaries she grew up with. However, because she enjoys these fantasies, she still attaches guilt and shame to her subconscious desires and feels that there is "absolutely no-one to talk to" because of her embarrassment about her fantasies (Paci 76). Despite the alienation Marie feels, current research demonstrates that rape fantasies are not uncommon in young women, and the emotional reactions to experiencing these fantasies can differ greatly. Marie's high sex guilt stems from her upbringing, and although she is ashamed by her fantasies, they allow her body an outlet from the strict control she enforces on it.

Marie's guilt and disgust at her body's unconscious reactions to her rape fantasies stems from the desire to repress her sexual fantasies in order to conform to normative cultural ideals around female sexuality. Marie's fantasies about being taken advantage of culminate when she watches "a movie [in which] a couple of men... contemptuously manhandl[e] a rather arrogant woman before raping her. The scene had such a disarming effect on her that she had orgasmed in her seat" (Paci 76). In addition to her growing contempt for her body, Marie feels that her uncomfortable sexual fantasies and masturbation make her "unpardonable[and] unclean" and she ostracizes herself from the church and from her Catholic mother to avoid attending confession (Paci 77). Johnson et al. argue that "a woman with strong religious observances... may experience increased sexual guilt and shame with rape fantasy," indicating that this ostracization from the church stems from her beliefs that her body is not upholding the ideals of her religion (178). Christianity, and Catholicism in particular, are known for having strict rules about

sexual activity, including masturbation, which often causes young people to struggle to balance their sexual desire and their religious beliefs. In part because of her strict Italian-Catholic upbringing, Marie develops an unhealthy relationship with her body and her sexuality. The sexual desires she experiences as a teenager mutate into something she feels is out of the 'norm' and thus attempts to further suppress. Despite distancing herself from her mother's power over her body, Marie begins repressing her needs and enforcing control onto herself.

While Marie's fantasies revolve around losing her autonomy around sex, her own later experience with sexual violence forces her to re-evaluate her relationship with sex and food consumption. This re-evaluation produces a confusing range of emotions about the loss of control she experiences during an actual assault. Marie uses her education as an escape from her mother and the expectations of domestic feminine servitude and completes her undergraduate degree before moving into a master's program. In a pivotal moment during her graduate studies, Marie is at a residence party, and after drinking a "few ryes and cokes [that] produce... a strange sense of euphoria," she sits down with a friend who leaves her alone with "a young [male] Lebanese student" (Paci 112, 111). She then begins hallucinating, imagining that she is devouring "her mother's Christmas meal" spread out in front of her: the turkey and pasta that her mother had served just a week prior (112). The description of this consumption is highly sexual, beginning with an "aching" in her stomach and the feeling that "if she didn't take it right then she'd die" (112). Marie imagines "reach[ing] over and touch[ing] the length of the bread loaf. It felt silky soft on the surface but firm underneath" (112). This phallic description of the food, followed immediately by the "turkey... slippery with oil," contributes to the ambiguity of what is occurring in this scene (112). Although Marie consumes the bread and meat before the ravioli, the most quintessential Italian Christmas food in the spread, she still ravenously consumes the same meal she had previously abjected. As

she consumes the feast, it becomes difficult to distinguish herself from the abject as she begins to "assimilate" the abject into herself (Kristeva 3). This highly sexualized description of Marie's experience is further complicated by the position of the perpetrator as Lebanese. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes how men from 'the Orient' "are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization," Western stereotypes that Paci problematically invokes in his depiction of the Lebanese student (131). The suggestion that a Lebanese student sexually assaults Marie while she is intoxicated problematically evokes entrenched Orientalist stereotypes that position him as a threat to women within Anglo-Canadian society. One of the commonly suggested explanations for women to experience rape fantasies (especially at the time of *Black Madonna's* publication) is to avoid the guilt associated with voluntary sexual fantasies and place the blame on an external, predatorial individual. Paci similarly places the blame on an external force meant to be depicted as even more 'Othered' than Marie. This equation of the transgression of Marie's body by an Oriental sexual force with gorging on food problematically implies that men from the Orient are incapable of controlling their sexual urges around women. Paci connects this supposed threat with Marie's incapacity for denying herself this meal, and doubly removes Marie's guilt about the experience because it is both non-consensual and perpetrated by a dangerous external force.

Consumption and Sexuality

Marie's experience of sexual assault transgresses the boundary of her previous rape fantasies. While some of her consumption during the assault seems to be pleasurable, as she had fantasized, her dissociation and loss of control in a non-consensual act while intoxicated upsets her afterwards. As she continues to hallucinate, consuming the turkey and its "juicy delicious flesh," the sexual descriptions build: Marie's "body arched. She could've screamed with pleasure" (Paci 113). This leads up to an orgasmic climax, an "overwhelming force" resulting in "a warm delicious

flood of release" (113). In contrast to her original rape fantasies, where "all sensation was focused between her legs," during her dissociative state at the party, "all sensation focused around her mouth," directly connecting her sexuality and food consumption and problematizing her rape fantasies through subverting her expectations (76, 113). This scene represents the moment when Marie's body is completely out of her control and the boundaries of her body, as described by Judith Butler, seem to be "polluted... by virtue of the boundary trespass" as she is changed by the sexual assault (32). Marie's experience with the uncertainty of what had happened to her in Butler's terms is a "reinscri[ption of] the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines" (132). Butler argues that the boundaries of the body are vulnerable, and "any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment" (132). Although Butler uses the concept of permeability to discuss the discourse of pollution that marked homosexuality during the AIDS epidemic, I argue that permeating body boundaries without consent is a loss of regulation and a form of unregulated permeability, especially in the context of problematic societal discourses on female purity and sexuality. For Marie, the sexual violation of her body alters her perception of sex and food as she is unable to repress her sexual urges and binge eating in that moment. In both her binge eating dissociation and the implied sexual assault occurring during this dissociation, the boundary of her body is permeated by these transgressions, causing "the limit of the body [to be] systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions" (131). Although Marie's earlier rape fantasies are not necessarily abnormal, they are not an accurate representation of rape. As Charley Baker notes, "the reality is never the same as any naïve fantasy, and the two should not in any way be equated" (81-2). The novel's comparison of her rape fantasies to what appears to be a lived experience of sexual assault later in the novel illustrates the transgression as starkly different

than Marie's expectations. She is left feeling uncertain and uneasy about what had taken place, rather than satisfied as she had experienced in her fantasies, suggesting that forceful sexual fantasies are not and should not be equated with sexual force in reality.

For Marie, losing control over her body breaks down years of sexual and dietary repression, and the sexual assault complicates her relationship with consumption and power. Once she is back in her own room, Marie admits only to herself that "she wasn't sure of what had happened. And that frightened her more than any of the possibilities" (Paci 114). This uncertainty stems from the way she lost control of her body, subconsciously giving in to "what her body couldn't deny her any longer" (113). Marie loses control of both her sexual boundaries after repressing her sexuality for so long, and her dietary boundaries, gorging herself on bread and meat, foods she had been averse to for years. In the sexual assault scene, Marie hallucinates eating the very same Christmas feast that she had abjected at her mother's Christmas dinner days earlier. After being assaulted by the Lebanese student, she throws up, and within her vomit, "she could smell the ravioli and the turkey of the Christmas dinner" despite not eating anything on the night of the assault (116). Marie vomits both after eating the meal at her family Christmas dinner and after eating the meal in her dissociative state during the assault. This connection reminds her of what she has abjected, and therefore what she has lost: her Italian culture. The dissociative state takes her back to her loss of control at her mother's table as she gorged herself on ravioli, and both events result in a bulimic abjection regardless of whether food was consumed. Losing control over herself in a pleasurable way is still something she fantasizes about but continues to suppress, because soon after the assault, she laments that her husband Richard "could never bring her to the point where she lost herself" (114). By bringing up this lack of "total surrender" immediately following a scene in which she experiences being completely out of control, Marie states that "she had never [experienced total surrender] and perhaps was incapable," implying that

the assault was not the combination of pleasure and total surrender she fantasizes about (114). Marie's break in control over her sexuality and consumption acts as an outlet from the years of careful repression of her body, but once she returns to reality, she continues to suppress her sexual desires and fights to maintain her strict regulation.

As Marie confronts her expectations of sexual encounters and the reality of her assault, she continues to grapple with her conflicting Italian and Canadian qualities, two identities she is unable to reconcile within herself. Marie's eating disorder intensifies up to the point of her assault, heightening her rejection of Italian culture as she has "learned to eat different types of food" than her mother's "lavish meal for Christmas dinner" (Paci 101, 100). Her strict policing of her eating habits reflects Adams' argument that "Women, second-class citizens, are more likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat" (4). Marie consumes turkey meat at her mother's Christmas dinner, but her regulation of her eating prevents her from taking any ravioli, the most Italian food at the table, until her outburst at her mother leads her to rapidly consume and abject the pasta. After she is assaulted, she finds ravioli in her vomit despite never consuming it that night. The meat itself, more representative of North American Christmas food culture, is not the subject of her food aversions. Since the turkey was sexualized in the assault scene, her consumption of this meat represents a release of her sexual restraint. Marie has subconsciously internalized Anglo-Canadian patriarchal ideas about consumption as a woman, feeling the need to take smaller portions and eat more vegetables than carbohydrates and protein, but also gravitating towards traditional North American rather than Italian food. As she transitions into adulthood, Marie's aversions widen to "anything having to do with her mother's

particular dishes [and she finds] herself unable to eat chicken anymore, or spare ribs, or steak, or broccoli, or veal, or even crusty bread" (Paci 100). In addition, the foods she gorges on, described in her earlier hallucination during the assault, are meat and bread, some of the most calorie rich foods associated with masculinity and power within a patriarchal society. Adams argues that within "the mythology of patriarchal culture, meat promotes strength; the attributes of masculinity are achieved through eating these masculine foods" (11). The meat in Marie's hallucination is highly sexualized and used to convey the implied assault that occurred at the party, but the consumption of meat in both meals is indicative of years of restricting herself from consuming these 'first-class foods.' Marie's desire to eat less calories contrasts starkly with her mother's Italian ideas of consumption, in which her food should be eaten until it is gone, and portions are always larger than the number of people eating together.

Conclusion

Throughout *Black Madonna*, Marie's relationships with her mother, food, and sexuality are complicated by her heritage as an Italian-Canadian second-generation immigrant, and her continued struggle for bodily autonomy. She grapples with disordered eating as a result of both body dysmorphia and her strained relationship with her mother's Italian ideals of consumption and traditional gender roles. Split between her desire for a de-rooted Anglo-Canadian identity and her Italian heritage, Marie attempts to abject her Italianity, striving to reach the goal of assimilation through her eating habits, bodily control, and appearance. As a young woman, Marie struggles with sexual fantasies that deviate from her mother's Catholic ideals. Her sexuality acts as a wedge driven between her and her mother, followed by her repudiation of Italian food. In creating these barriers between herself and her mother, she also barricades her relationship with her heritage. Marie continues to struggle throughout the novel with food abjection and her sexuality, concepts that reach a critical point when she is sexually assaulted. Her relationship with

food continues to deteriorate as she emaciates herself. These complicated relationships between Marie's food, family, and sexuality represent the difficulties of navigating the complexities of identity as a second-generation Italian-Canadian woman. Paci's novel provides a commentary on the state of Canadian multiculturalism in the 1980s for women and the particular pressures they face in navigating multiculturalism, and how this plays out at the level of the body. Reading the novel through the lens of abjection and body inscription provides a framework for re-reading early multicultural texts with a new understanding of the relationships between food, gender, and sexuality.

Notes

¹ See, for example: Baldo, Ferraro, Litvack, Padolsky, Sciff-Zamaro, and Zucchero.

² 62% of participants experienced rape fantasies; 91% of participants were heterosexual.

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