



Queering *Striated* Food Politics: Tropical Postg(l)ocal Precarity in Romesh Gunsekera's *Reef*

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Abstract

The inoperativity of *striated* narratives of food politics stands caught up by patriarchal practices of identity formation entailing codification of different sexualities in terms of 'rigid' territories and strata and therefore cannot but conform to the irresistible snares of tropical postg(l)ocal precarity embodied by the disseminating strands of neoliberal capitalism. It thus calls for the actualization of *queering* to decimate 'rigid segmentarities' of *striated* food politics, which seeks to work in tandem with the territorializing movements of tropical postg(l)ocal precarity backed by the structures of patriarchal normativity. *Queering striated* food politics in the context of Sri Lanka strikes up an epistemic departure from the practices of culinary stratification of sexualities and eventually takes up *rhizomatic* movements both to call the nuanced liaisons between *striated* food politics and tropical postg(l)ocal precarity into question and suggest a 'smooth politics' in the form of a nomadic 'war machine'. *Queering striated* food politics thus entails a strong resistance against the patriarchal culinary incarcerations of sexualities, taking substantial recourse to Romesh Gunsekera's novel *Reef*.

Keywords: Queering, Tropicality, *Striated* Food Politics, Tropical Post(g)local Precarity, *Smooth* Politics, *War Machine*, Romesh Gunsekera

Introduction

...a queer assemblage, is reshaping the terrain of
South Asian queer diasporas.
— Puar, 2005, p. 122

Post-queer therefore works towards a politics of becoming
where experience and theory are dialogically
connected without reducing experience
to theory and theory to experience.
— Ruffolo, 2009, p. 28

Whereas renowned anthropologist and cultural critic Claude Lévi-Strauss ingeniously contends in “The Culinary Triangle”: “...indeed, the cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw, whereas the rotted is a natural transformation” (2013, p. 41), thereby pointing at the correlational becomings of cooked, raw, and rotted as an epistemic triumvirate in so far as the transformation of the culinary identity of the state is concerned, it actually speaks of a structuralist undertone that gets defined by territorializing strands of capitalism, which in turn employs structured foodways only to subject heteronormative sexualities to the ‘rigid’ interplays between coding and overcoding, territories and strata. Unlike the structuralist culinary grammatology articulated by Lévi-Strauss, Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas in their introduction to *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food and South Asia*, point to the urgency of falling back on postg(l)ocal culinary insights that may prove useful in understanding fluid and diverse aspects of South Asian culinary spatiality. They argue that, “South Asia is a new hub of intersecting global networks nourished by proliferating material and symbolic transactions propelling bodies, things, and conceptions across national boundaries.... Thus food is a particularly productive site to interrogate a new iteration of something old, because it links not only the global to the local, but the mind to the body and beyond” (2012, p. 11). Their words reflect how culinary spatiality in the context of post-1990s South Asia turns out to be a ‘productive’ site for epistemic contestations which include culinary territorialization of non-heteronormative sexualities.

In the context of tropical postg(l)ocal precarity, it needs to be mentioned that Sri Lanka, as part of South Asia, particularly falls under the notion of “tropicality”—a European construct that was intentionally devised to facilitate colonial encounters. In other words, colonial rulers engineered tropicality in line with the notion of exoticism so as to foreground cultural supremacy of the West over the tropics. In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire quotes Pierre Gourou to underline how the material potentials of tropicality were deliberately reduced to foreground the material-cultural agency of non-tropical locales: “it is cultural elements developed in non-tropical

regions which are ensuring and will ensure the progress of the tropical regions toward a larger population and a higher civilization" (1972, p. 37). According to this colonial imaginary, the temperate non-tropical locales are understood to be civilized and culturally sophisticated, while non-temperate tropical zones are held up as the material-cultural "other"—the existence of which accounts for the epistemic linkages between the politics of stratification and exoticism. Put simply, "Tropicality refers to how the tropics are construed as the exoticised environmental Other of the temperate Western world" (Lundberg et al., 2022, p. 2). In short, the epistemic formation of tropicality is an ongoing "colonial project" (Benitez & Lundberg 2022, p. 2) which is primarily premised on European exoticism and acts to invisibilize the inherent dynamic matrix of tropical materialism. Considering the European construction of tropicality in contrast with the fluid actualities of tropical materialism, it could reasonably be contended that Eurocentric epistemic configuration of tropicality is fraught with fault lines and hence requires a counter-epistemic *queering*. In this context, food becomes an important marker of sexualized identity formation, for the choice of certain food items which follow their specific and structured preparations and consumptions divulge a wide range of sexualities in tropical culinary-carnal spaces. And, interestingly, in the post-1990s, the practitioners of tropical postg(l)ocal precarity embodied through the gradual dissemination of neoliberal capitalism tend to employ *striated* food politics to territorialize the becomings of non-heteronormative sexualities so as to exert patriarchal power over them.

Following David V. Ruffolo's elaborate articulation of 'post-queering queer' in his *Post-Queer Politics* (2009), this article calls for *queering culinary spaces* that co-extensively unfold in alignment with the strictures of tropicality so as to liberate non-heteronormative sexualities in culinary *borderspaces*. In other words, here, *queering the tropics* is intended to be discursively reworked in *line* with Deleuzo-Guattarian grammatologies to encounter the *rigid* culinary spaces dominated by heteronormative individuals. At this point, it needs to be clearly stated that whereas *striated* food politics is understood to be a form of culinary practice that bears a rigid and hierarchized structure of culinary spaces and works in tandem with the dictates of patriarchal heteronormativity, *queering striated* food politics, instead, entails an epistemic encounter with the governing precepts of *striated* food politics, intending to foreground the inoperativity of *striated* narratives of culinary politics in the context of Sri Lankan cuisine which at times conforms to the arboreal frameworks of colonial tropicality and at other times gives room to *queering* tropicality in order to take up various *directions* and *dimensions* at its disposal.

This article seeks to put the spotlight on how the distinctive culinary micropolitics of Sri Lankan cuisine allow *queering* as an effective discursive tool to develop a culinary critique of (neo)colonial tropicality that largely upholds the political commands of

patriarchal heteronormativity. Rightly has Puar conceived the need for a ‘queer assemblage’ to unsettle the structured formation of one’s sexual identity under the aegis of neoliberal patriarchal politics. At this point, one may stop and think: What does *queering culinary spaces* entail? And how is it going to help one expose the pitfalls of tropical postg(l)ocal precarity, which seems to put *striated* food politics into practice, resulting in the culinary destratification of non-heteronormative sexuality? Following the culinary reflections of Kathleen C. Riley and Amy L. Paugh in *Food and Language: Discourses and Foodways across Cultures*, where they state, “Food is frequently talked about as a form of language” (2019, p. 174), this article argues that *queering the culinary spaces* linked with Sri Lankan cuisine can be employed as a tenable epistemic instrument, not just to call *striated* food politics backed up by tropical postg(l)ocal precarity into question but also to link up culinary-carnal desires with the differential logic of ‘smooth space’ which may function as a nomadic ‘war machine’ against the patriarchal culinary incarcerations of non-heteronormative sexualities. In order to contextualize these critical contentions, Romesh Gunsekera’s novel *Reef* (1994), positioned extensively in the context of Sri Lankan cuisine, is taken into account to explain how *queering culinary spaces* may lay out deterritorial ‘queer assemblages’ in order to stage nuanced ‘critical encounters’ among culinary spatiality, queer sexuality, and tropical postg(l)ocal precarity. In short, Gunsekera’s *Reef* is critically taken up to elucidate the deterritorial operations of *queering culinary spaces* as an epistemic tool as tropical postg(l)ocal precarity makes steady advancements in the queer relationship between the protagonist Mr Salgado and his male cook Triton.

Pitfalls of *Striated* Food Politics and Postg(l)ocality

Coming out suggested emerging from confinement and concealment into the open, a movement from secrecy to public affirmation.
—Spargo, 2000, p. 30

Practices of preparing and eating food are, of course, highly sensual and sometimes sexual.
—Probyn, 2000, p. 61

The above quoted reflections clearly point to how cultural narratives of queer identity call for an onto-epistemic “coming out” to liberate the forms and (trans)formations of non-heteronormative sexuality “into the open” and, importantly, show a nuanced correspondence between the alimentary and sexual in so far as the culinary politics of sexuality is concerned. Here, it needs to be understood that *queering* the tropics helps one foreground the pitfalls of *striated* food politics, which is frequently taken up by the practitioners of neoliberalism to contain the *aleatory* movements of culinary-carnal desires. Whereas the notion of tropicity is construed in alignment with the precincts

of patriarchal heteronormativity, *queering* the tropics seeks to destratify the zone of culinary-carnal desire to foreground its distinctive abilities in putting up strong resistance against territorializing operations of *striated* food politics. *Queering* the tropics additionally entails intellectual disruption of Eurocentric tropicality, which stands fractured from within inasmuch as it does not speak of the fluid dynamics of the tropics, which could well be comprehended through the actualization of *queering*. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari acknowledge that what “regulates the obligatory, necessary, or permitted interminglings of bodies is above all an alimentary regime and a sexual regime” (1987, p. 90). Following this critical reflection, one may add that the practitioners of tropical postg(l)ocal precarity aim at regulating the ‘interminglings of bodies’ reflected through the crossovers between ‘an alimentary regime and a sexual regime’ to make these conform to the workings of ‘strata’ and ‘territories.’ Thus, a sort of *striated* politics is put into practice to incarcerate the communicative power of food. Here one may be reminded of the following critical reflection which points at the impossibility of putting food into the straightjacket of codified signification: “this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies...it is a real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication (2013, Barthes, p. 24). This suggests that, whereas eating food is a physical activity, consuming food turns out to be a psychosocial activity that corresponds to the unconscious consumption of cultural traits. In other words, when individuals eat food items, they do so at the physical level to satisfy their hunger, but at a deeper level, this speaks of the consumption of certain cultural traits that condition the preparation, production, and circulation of those food items. One may here further deduce that because of the communicative power of food, one may hardly incarcerate the becomings of the food in terms of *striated* politics, which, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, suggests that in, “*striated* space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another” (1987, p. 478). The implication here is that a subtle employment of *striated* politics entails realignment of the consumption of food items in tandem with the unfoldings of postg(l)ocalities. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai lays down the subtle workings of globalization in terms of five “-scapes”:

The central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization.... The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models.... I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscapas, (b) mediascapas, (c) technoscapas, (d) financescapas, and (e) ideoscapas. The suffix -scape

allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes. (1996, pp. 32-33)

Appadurai indicates that contemporary unfoldings of postg(l)ocality do not conform to the binarized logic of a 'centre-periphery' model and, more importantly, stand inclined towards the differential and *smooth* operations of different "-scapes," which work by carrying out complex disjunctures in coded cultural systems. What is important to note here is that food, an important marker of cultural heterogeneity, does not stand aloof from being impacted by the strands of postg(l)ocality which simply speak of the complex intermingling of a global and local cultural ethos (setting the question of authenticity aside). One may add that conditions of postg(l)ocality could be used to expose the inoperativity of *striated* food politics, which presumes a sort of foreclosure on the communicative prowess of food, which, like a signifier, leads eaters to come to terms with the cultural specificities in which it is produced.

At this point, it is important to pose the question: is postg(l)ocality actually a hindrance to the operation of culinary semiotics? Although the notion of postg(l)ocality seems to be worthwhile for questioning the limits of *striated* food politics, it actually functions as a hindrance to the practice of *striated* food politics, following its inherent epistemic loopholes. For example, although the idea of postg(l)ocality seems to be charged with quanta of 'differential repetition' and thus is expected to work against the logic of *striated* food politics, in contemporary times, postg(l)ocality rubs shoulders with neoliberal precarity, which renders the nuanced operations of postg(l)ocality a *reducible totality* and thus cannot but fall prey to the stratifying and territorializing strands of *striated* food politics, which basically takes recourse to 'strata' and 'territories', 'blocks' and 'codes' to 'trace' representative abilities of food. In "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics," Judith Butler explains precarity as a "politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (2009, p. ii). What this critical reflection suggests is that an act of precarity is a territorializing practice that works in tune with the dictates of the neoliberal elites and thus becomes a state machinery against marginalized people. Following the operative logic of precarity, it can be argued that postg(l)ocality loses its timbre in the pervasive presence of precarity and becomes a state machinery by means of which practitioners of *striated* food politics attempt to align the workings of food with the logic of biopower. But *striated* food politics conditioned by the trajectories of postg(l)ocality stand fraught with epistemic pitfalls, which include erroneous epistemization of capture, closure, and cessation in understanding the differential resistance of food, which can hardly be "traced." This, in reality, calls for the actualization of *queering* to decimate the 'rigid segmentarities' of gendered culinary desires conforming to principles of patriarchal heteronormativity.

Queering Culinary Desires: Unfolding *Smooth Politics*

In the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory.

—Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 479

Through queer theory, the hegemonic centrism of heterosexism as practiced and taught throughout academic life, thought and writing, is being challenged to justify itself or to 'get out of the kitchen'.

—Whittle, 2005, p.117

Whereas in "Gender Fucking or Fucking Gender," Stephen Whittle calls for putting the notion of queer in a gender context, noting that it "would be naive to interpret queer theory without reference to them" (2005, p.116), Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox, in their introduction to *Queer Theory*, attempt to problematize the notion of "queer" itself, thereby pointing to the aleatory movements of singularities involved in the construction of sexualized resistance against otherwise "gendered" bodies: "What does it mean to describe oneself as queer? Is 'queer' an adjective, a noun or a verb? Is 'queer' something that you do or something that you are?" (2005, p.1). They suggest that, ensconced between "an exultant identity" and a "derogatory label," the notion of queer seems to deny any epistemic categorization despite maintaining a nexus in reality. This means it is quite difficult to pinpoint the existence of queer, for it neither stands rooted fully in the physical action of an individual nor finds a permanent home in the sexualized body. Opposed to this viewpoint, one may contend that instead of attempting to locate the 'points' of *queer* existence, it is important to put the emphasis on the onto-semiotic fluidity of *queering* as a *forcefield* that allows non-heteronormativity to strike up a differential relationship with the dynamicity of desires, thereby defying and denying the *closures* and *captures* of patriarchy. At this point, one may be reminded of an article titled "On the Very Possibility of Queer Theory," where Claire Colebrook raises the following important question to open up the epistemic horizon of 'queer': "Is queer theory a reflection on what it means to be queer, or does the concept of queerness change the ways in which we theorise?" (2009, p. 11). She seems to argue that instead of assuming an *essentialist* understanding of 'queer', one has to delve deeper into the *eventual* becomings of *queerness* to figure out the performative conditions of non-heteronormative sexuality. This suggests that an act of *queering* entails striking up a relationship with the Outside, which stands capable of divulging sexed stereotypes that heteronormative individuals seek to uphold. Rightly, Colebrook has thus argued that to "perform as queer is to maintain and demand recognition for that which has, hitherto, exceeded the bounds of cultural recognition" (2009, p.15). Thus, performing queer seems to enable one to take up differential trajectories to explore the enormous potentials of the Outside. Colebrook holds that "there is difference or relationality from which points of stability and recognition

emerge" (2009, p. 16), and therefore, it is argued that the differential performance of *queering* seems to result in the recognition of the aleatory movements of singularities that account for the *swerving* potentials of culinary desires. Put in other words, it would be an act of epistemic futility if one attempted to *trace* the being of culinary desire in terms of rigid sexual binaries, and thus, it is contended that *queering* culinary desires may entail progressive decimation of sexualized understanding of culinary spatiality in *pro rata* with the denial of structures and strictures, captures and closures, by which gendered patriarchy rules the roost. Whereas Colebrook underlines the importance of the "syntheses of difference and repetition" (2009, p. 16) in figuring out a differential logic of *queering*, Verena Andermatt Conley in "Thirty-six Thousand Forms of Love: The Queering of Deleuze and Guattari" reminds one of the need to take note of the fluidity of desire to make sense of the transformative becomings of *queering*: "There are only flows of desire that are one and the other" (2009, p. 31), thereby pointing at "a preliminary liberation of an *energy* of desire" (2009, p. 32). What this suggests is that *queering* culinary desires calls for the liberation of rigidly sexualized identities that leave culinary spaces caught up in stasis and subsequently leads one to make sense of the 'productive' abilities of culinary desires. Taking this further, *queering* actually stands charged up with 'production of the new'¹ that gets actualized through the nuanced correspondences between 'difference' and 'repetition':

The new, with its power of beginning and beginning again, remains forever new.... (Deleuze, 1994, p. 136)

Difference inhabits repetition. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 76)

(Being = Difference = the New) (Smith, 2008, p, 151)

It is important to note here that *queering* culinary desires not only aims at underlining *differential flows* of desires that cannot be reduced to a sizable totality but also points to aleatory movements of singularities—the precipitation of which forms sexualization of gender identities. In fact, in "The Sexed Subject in-between Deleuze and Butler," Anna Hickey-Moody and Mary Lou Rasmussen place the emphasis on "a movement towards" (2009, p. 37), which can define *queering* as a 'repetitive' logic of becoming—a *forcefield* that refuses to be subjected to the arboreal structures of heteronormativity.

If patriarchy aims at governing the expressions of gender identity in terms of stasis and blocks, *queering* could be invoked to question the operative grammatology of gendered patriarchy inasmuch as it works by "embracing the non-reproductive order of sex (that is, the bio-social order of reproduction) by inventing, rather than

¹ In "Introduction: The Production of the New", Simon O'Sullivan and Stephen Zepke explain at length how one may find the logic of differential repetition useful in figuring out "the *production* of production, and thus the genuine production of the new" (2008, p. 1).

constituting, sexuality" (Parisi, 2009, p. 73). Thus, *queering* could be useful in precluding culinary desires from being subjected to *striated* politics, inasmuch as *queering* resonates with 'inventing' instead of 'constituting'. Furthermore, an actualization of *queering* could allow differentiating culinary desires to differ in alignment with 'lines of flight' and thus may turn out to be a powerful tool to question the limits of *striated* culinary politics. In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze and Parnet argue that the importance of an assemblage lies in its power to form "alliances" (2007, p. 69), which are "not attributive, but rather conjunctive" (1990, p. 267). This means that an assemblage could be understood as "a sum but not a whole" (1990, p. 267). Following this Deleuzean understanding of assemblage, it can be argued that *queering* actually leaves culinary desires in an assemblage, and therefore the latter needs to be articulated with the help of multiplicities. In other words, culinary desires cannot tenably be tied to specific gender identities because desire is onto-epistemologically productive in nature. As the productive potentials of culinary desire stand embedded in the differential repetitions of itself, any reductive approach to stratify culinary desires would be an exercise in redundancy.

In this context, the epistemic might of *smooth* politics needs to be articulated to lay out the 'unfolding' of culinary desires beyond the limits of *striated* food politics. In *The Fold: Leibniz and Baroque*, Deleuze reflectively argues:

Unfolding is thus not the contrary of folding, but follows the fold up to the following fold.... Folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release. Contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution...to unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to fold is to diminish, to reduce. (1993, pp. 6-9)

Deleuze articulates that the act of 'unfolding' is not opposite to closure; rather, it tends to 'fold up to the following fold,' and therefore, the 'unfolding' stands charged up with the power of production. Following the logic of Deleuze's '(not)unfolding,' it is contended that *striated* food politics cannot make sense of the aleatory movements of culinary desires that actually work by the logic of 'unfolding', owing to its differential repetitions at the level of intensity. In short, culinary desires cannot reasonably be associated with certain gender identities inasmuch as such desire constantly 'unfolds' itself in alignment with 'lines of flight'. In this context, *queering* may be a reasonable tool to lay out culinary desires' proximity to the workings of *smooth* politics, which prioritizes 'trajectories' over 'points.' *Smooth* politics entails the production of *smooth* spaces, which, unlike *striated* spaces, allow nomadic movements to take shape. Thus, it can be argued that *smooth* politics caters to the necessary conditions for culinary desires to unfold rhizomatically, so that it cannot be reduced to any sort of gendered categorization. *Queering* here functions as an epistemic impetus or a deterritorializing

force to liberate culinary desires from the strata and territories of gendered heteronormativity. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze observes: “Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle, and that’s where you have to get to work, that’s where everything unfolds” (1995, p. 161). It is the middle that stages the deterritorial becomings of things and thoughts, which operate in tandem with the grammatology of ‘unfolding’. Taking resort to this critical insight, it can be argued that queering culinary desires results in the foregrounding of *smooth* politics, which facilitates culinary desires to stand in the ‘middle’, thereby denying to give in to the gendered configurations of heteronormativity.

Queering Striated Food Politics: Negotiating Romesh Gunsekera’s Reef

Desiring a relation with the power(s) of an irreducible other alters dominant power structures through desire, creating what Deleuze and Guattari call an ‘unnatural alliance’.
—MacCormack, 2009, p. 136

Whereas in “Unnatural Alliances,” Patricia MacCormack underscores deterritorial power of desire in cutting across power relations and subsequently points out “the pure indeterminate” (2009, p. 139) nature of queering, Luciana Parisi, dwelling on the same idea, refers to the logic of becoming, which stands at odds with history. Becoming is “an always collective desire: a swerve in the continual sequence of events” (2009, p. 75), or what Deleuze calls in *The Logic of Sense* “a differential of matter” that is quite “unassignable” (1990, pp. 269-270). This suggests that queering happens to be an experience of the ‘middle’ that does not allow culinary desires to fall prey to the pull of gendered stratifications of heteronormative sexuality and calls the epistemic limits of *striated* politics into question. Pitted against this context, one may be reminded of Romesh Gunsekera’s *tour de force* novel, *Reef*, which, apart from being an excellent literary documentation of the endangerment of marine species conditioned by the pervasive trajectories of neoliberal capitalism, is also a rich instance of a culinary novel that uncovers the literary possibilities of queering culinary desires, set against a backdrop of Sri Lanka’s rising ethno-political unrest. As Anita Mannur contends in *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*:

Gunsekera’s novel [*Reef*] is not traditionally queer in the sense that it does not foreground gay sexual practices between the male characters, but the term “queer” is useful in naming Triton’s presence as a disidentificatory one that disrupts the home space resulting in a queering of that space. (2010, p. 64)

Mannur rightly points out that Gunesequera's novel does not conform to the traditional representation of queer identities; rather, the author chooses to give a *new* shape to *queering* by means of placing it in the context of culinary spaces. The novel is a literary documentation of culinary desires put into *queering*. Interestingly, *Reef* is contextualized in Sri Lankan tropical specificities which include Lankan recipes. Whereas Eurocentric tropicality puts culinary-carnal desires under certain heteronormative structures, Gunesequera's *Reef* attempts to liberate culinary-carnal desires in line with the becomings of 'mood'—psychosomatic becomings of which account for rhizomatic movements of culinary-carnal desires. "I could see the meal was going to be a success even before anyone had taken a single mouthful: the mood was right, and mood, I am convinced, is the most essential ingredient for any taste to develop. Taste is not a product of the mouth; it lies entirely in the mind" (1994, p. 87). Furthermore, whereas *striated* food politics proceeds by the logic of territorialization, Gunesequera considers food and politics together to underscore how the culinary-carnal seems to overpower the upheavals that rattle the political *status quo* of Sri Lanka. *Reef* also shows how *striated* food politics fails to help readers to map the nuanced interactions between culinary and carnal conditioned by overlapping trajectories of fractured tropicality and patriarchal heteronormativity. It eventually calls for going beyond the structured (neo)colonial notion of tropicality and makes room for *queering* to foreground a *culinary-carnal* continuum that onto-epistemologically denies *captures* and *closures* of fractured tropicality.

Garbed in the form of fiction, Gunesequera's *Reef* is an elaborate narration of Sri Lankan cuisine—which at once sets the tone of the work and at times prepares readers to come to terms with the literary manifestation of *queering* which may be useful in questioning the tenability of *striated* food politics. *Reef* narrates the tale of Mister Salgado who finds remarkable interests in a wide range of Sri Lankan food items which are usually cooked by Triton, a skilled and private cook cum comrade to Mister Salgado. As the novel unfolds, readers are introduced to the fervent fascination of Mister Salgado with food—a *cultural signifier* that brings Triton, the narrator of *Reef*, closer to his master:

At night, when alone, he usually liked to eat bread and western food: *courses*. Small discs of fried meat and creamy mashed potatoes that disappeared without a trace into his body. Corned beef was a favourite. He ate it with a *seeni-sambol* that burned the roof or your mouth. When, eventually, I became his cook as well as everything else, I created a special hash.... (1994, p. 8)

This revelation of Triton is profoundly important for a couple of reasons: firstly, this textual excerpt brings out how Mister Salgado's strong likings for varied food items

spurs his culinary desires to take on the challenges of being at times forlorn; and secondly, delicious ‘courses’ play an instrumental role in drawing Triton physically and psychologically closer to his master, thereby pushing readers to critically take stock of the growing non-heteronormative intimacy between them. The opening sequences of *Reef* are indicative of how Triton attempts to call the restriction of culinary desires within heteronormative spaces into question and prepares readers for a *queer* critique of the gendering of culinary desires. In this regard, it needs to be stated that *Reef* does not depict conventional queer subjects, for neither Mister Salgado nor Triton explicitly proclaims queer subjectivity. Unlike conventional representations of queer subjectivity, *Reef* posits the relationship between Mister Salgado and Triton in contrast with a number of heteronormative relationships including that of Mister Salgado and Lucy-amma, the female cook in Salgado’s residence, and Mister Salgado and Miss Nili, among others—thereby leading readers to make sense of the deterritorial grammar of *queering*. In other words, *Reef* lays bare how culinary desires shape a non-normative relationship in a domestic space called the kitchen which is otherwise held in gendered terms. It is useful here to refer to Mannur’s reflection in *Culinary Fictions*: “*Reef*’s espousal of a politics of non-normativity enables desire that can be labeled homosocial or homophilic marks how a nonconsummated form of same-sex desire can emerge within the heterosexual structure of domestic space” (2010, p. 64). This attests to the fact that Triton does not come closer to his master Salgado out of the promise of sexual gratification, but out of the deterritorial flows of culinary-carnal desires that question patriarchal gendering of culinary domestic spaces like the kitchen.

It is interesting to note that Gunesequera’s *Reef* stands in an ambivalent position as far as the explicit representation of queer subjectivity is concerned. Although the text does not ‘name’ the ‘nonconsummated form of same-sex desire’ as queer, it nonetheless includes instances of *queering*—a subversive non-heteronormative practice that puts patriarchal gendering of culinary domestic spaces like the kitchen under examination. For instance, there is one point in the fictional narrative when Miss Nili visits the residence of Mister Salgado who offers her *love cake* prepared by Triton. While responding to the curious query of Miss Nili regarding the preparation of the *love cake*, Mister Salgado reveals in delight:

‘Triton made it,’ my Mister Salgado said. *Triton made it*. It was the one phrase he would say with my name again and again like a refrain through those months, giving me such happiness. *Triton made it*. Clear, pure and unstinting.... ‘Your cook?’ *Your life, your everything*, I wanted to sing pinned up on the rafter, heaven between my legs. (1994, pp.64-65)

The above quotation shows profound bearings on the ‘queer’ relationship between Triton and Salgado conditioned by deterritorial flows of culinary desires. Although there is no promise of sexual consummation, Triton gets into a state of inexplicable sexual arousal when Salgado proudly recognizes the arduous efforts of Triton in preparing the *love cake*. The careful use of ‘my,’ while referring to the passionate utterance of Salgado, divulges the fact that Triton makes a ‘queer’ entry into the flirtatious relationship between Salgado and Miss Nili. Triton’s ‘queer’ presence in the refrain renders him extremely happy and this happiness can be found as a literary insinuation of *queering* which constantly questions the domineering presence of heteronormative sexuality in the process of gendering culinary desires. Triton has been steadfast in becoming a ‘life’ and ‘everything’ to Salgado who boldly recognizes the fervent efforts of Triton in front of Miss Nili.

This exposure cum recognition is important from another point of view: patriarchal gendering of culinary desires is to a large extent conditioned by the pervasive trajectories of tropical post(g)local precarity which disseminates *striated* politics of rule. The following example from *Reef* attests to this contention: “All over the globe revolutions erupted, dominoes tottered and guerrilla war came of age” (1994, p. 45). This literary reference connotes that whereas *striated* politics, an epistemic offshoot of tropical post(g)local precarity, rides on late capitalism to reconfigure geopolitical relationships between nations, Triton’s *queering* presence, encapsulated in his desire to hear praise from his beloved master, seeks to liberate gendered incarceration of culinary desires that actually stand wedded to the deterritorial grammar of *smooth* politics: “however confident I was about the perfection of what I produced, like everybody else, I needed praise. I needed his praise...I felt stupid to need it, but I did” (1994, p. 66). Moreover, nomadic functionality of *smooth* politics finds further elaborate articulation in the following instance, which highlights the *swerving* potentials of culinary desires embodied in the seductive nature of food:

He needed his privacy to feel comfortable.... There was no security in the eating in the company of a lot of people; attention always got divided. Only the intimate could eat together and be happy. It was like making love. It revealed too much. Food was the ultimate seducer.... Always eat at the end, then you can eat copiously, deservedly. (1994, p. 98)

This instance reflects the seductive potentials of food, which trigger culinary desires to follow aleatory movements of singularities that cannot be encaged by *striated* food politics. It is this act of *queering* that makes room for culinary desires to strike up a departure from the ‘points’ of *striated* food politics and subsequently liberates culinary desires to move in tandem with the differential ‘trajectories’ of *smooth* politics. In other words, *queering* culinary desires actually enables Triton and Mister Salgado to find a

‘middle’ that in turn helps them choose ‘lines of escape’ against the imprisoning ‘points’ of structured heteronormativity which gives no ‘security’ to the act of eating in gendered spaces. It means that whereas gendered spaces stand determined by the forces of tropical post(g)local precarity, which leaves ‘queer’ eaters caught up in various culinary (in)securities, the act of *queering*, which empowers culinary desires to take up ‘trajectories’ over ‘points’ ultimately allows ‘queer’ eaters to feel ‘together’ and ‘happy’. So, it is quite clear that the text itself subscribes to the need for *queering* to interrogate the dominant strands of *striated* food politics. This critical reflection can be corroborated by Mannur’s observation in *Culinary Fictions*: “Triton and Salgado’s relationship queers the text insofar as Triton’s ability to effect gustatory pleasure in Nili—ironically—nourishes and nurtures his relationship with Salgado” (2010, p. 66). Furthermore, *Reef* draws a parallel between eating food and making love, which suggests that just as making love cannot be put into any epistemic straightjacket, so too eating food, either in the presence of Triton or in solitude, cannot be understood within rigid presuppositions. By calling food a seducer, Triton indicates that his culinary skills, followed by his intense interests in culinary practices, enable him to sexually attract his Master although there is no promise of sexual consummation of culinary-carnal desires. Triton’s ingenious efforts to bring forth the seductive potentials of food actually facilitate his ability to translate *queering* into action, and subsequently, to drive readers to take note of his sexual inclinations towards Mister Salgado.

Queering culinary desires finds another explicit manifestation when Triton speaks about the preparation of yellow rice and chicken curry:

Mister Salgado brought home two scrawny chickens with heads bigger than their legs. I was tempted to dice the birds to make the flesh go further, but it might have ended up nothing but bone then; it would have been too risky. Instead I made the sauce thick and doubled the chilli. The hotter the better: if not the meat then let the chilli be the challenge. They could all suck their teeth and wag their smart tongues and perspire. *Triton, this is really hot!* they would say. Hotty hot, wow. Blows my mind...*Currylingus*.... (1994, p. 140)

This fictional reference points at the nuanced intersections between culinary desires and sexual desires and, more importantly, does not point at possible consummation. It thus lays the groundwork for *queering* to take shape and lets it liberate culinary desires from gendered depictions of sexual arousal. Whereas on the one hand, *Reef* delineates how contemporary society stands impacted by “conspicuous consumption” (1994, p. 135), on the other hand, Triton’s *queering* of culinary desires speaks volumes to the recognition of non-normative sexual relationships in the gendered culinary spaces conditioned by the forces of tropical post(g)local precarity. The use of sexually

provocative words is intended to subject culinary desires to the practice of *queering*, which foregrounds *smooth* movements of culinary desires that do not necessarily end in sexual consummation but trigger differential sexual arousals in those individuals having ‘queer’ orientations. Moreover, this quoted passage reveals Triton’s ingenious routing of *queering* through the culinary articulation of recipes in sexually alluring terms, which remain obscure to Miss Nili. In other words, Triton routes *queering* through culinary tropes, possibly because he does not look for sexual consummation; rather, he seeks to give voice to ‘queer’ sexual arousals, among others. Thus, Mannur rightly deduces in *Culinary Fictions*: “Eating together becomes a partial substitute for sexual gratification. By preparing food with an eye toward pleasing and seducing Salgado, Triton gives voice to a desire that can escape detection, even by Nili” (2010, pp. 66-67). Although Mannur does not directly call for the epistemic decimation of *striated* food politics, it is argued in this article that Triton’s “culinarily disidentificatory acts” (2010, p. 67) are qualities inherent to the epistemic stature of *queering*, which delimits culinary desires from being subjected to the post(g)local precarity-driven *striated* food politics that works by *closures* and *captures*.

Conclusion

It is necessary to reach the point of conceiving the war machine as itself a pure form of exteriority, whereas the State apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model, or according to which we are in the habit of thinking.
—Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 354

There is not a single way in which food and sexuality relate to each other in literature, but...the relationship is complex, productive, and ripe with meaning.
—Vester, 2020, p. 135

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explain the notion of the ‘war machine’ in connection with the becomings of nomads who tend to defy and deny structures and strictures of the state, which stands afraid of the deterritorial becomings of the ‘war machine’. The exteriority of the ‘war machine’ exists in its own ‘metamorphoses’ and, more importantly, does not find ‘war’ at its epistemic end; rather, it stands as a seamless layout of ‘lines’. What is important here is to note that the ‘war machine’ has profound bearings on ‘smooth’ space. As Deleuze and Guattari explicitly pinpoint in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “we have seen that the war machine was the invention of the nomad, because it is in its essence the constitutive element of smooth space” (1987, p. 417). Taking recourse to this contention, it can be argued that *smooth* politics can operate as a veritable ‘war machine’ against the structured workings of *striated* food

politics espoused by tropical post(g)local precarity inasmuch as it stands as a “field without conduits or channels” (1987, p. 371) and wedded to “nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic” (1987, p. 371) multiplicities. In this context, *queering* actually allows culinary desires to take up the deterritorial logic of *smooth* politics, thereby registering a form of subversive resistance to the structured workings of *striated* food politics, an epistemic spin-off of tropical post(g)local precarity. It suggests that by working out *queering striated* food politics, faultlines in the epistemic configuration of (neo)colonial notions of tropicality may be exposed, for stratified tropicality does not allow room for nonheteronormative culinary-carnal desires to depart in *lines* with ‘smooth politics.’ Sri Lankan cuisine, in short, offers a veritable springboard for non-conformist culinary-carnal desires to find ‘smooth’ alignments with deterritorial becoming.

Gunasekera’s *Reef* undoubtedly makes literary room for *queering* to work as a deterritorial force against the structured perceptions of gendered patriarchy. Possessed by the singularities of ‘unfolding’, *queering* facilitates Triton to foreground *culinary-carnal* desires so as to win the love of his Master, who reciprocates in terms of showering praise on him right in front of Miss Nili. In spite of its non-conformist stance toward the traditional representation of queer subjectivity, Gunasekera’s *Reef* excels at de-stratifying *culinary-carnal* desires, giving a literary embodiment to the onto-epistemic and ontopological fluidities of *queering*. And, in working out the rhetoric of *queering*, Gunasekera’s *Reef* not only materializes Will Stockton’s claim in *An Introduction to Queer Literary Studies: Reading Queerly*: that “If literature is daunting, texts are inviting” (2023, p. 186), but subsequently invites scholars to stall *culinary-carnal* desires from the *captures* and *closures* of *striated* food politics and facilitates scholars to subject the overriding precepts of tropicality to the *nomadic functions* of *queering*.

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Acknowledgements

I am genuinely thankful to the reviewers who meticulously reviewed my work and gave constructive feedback for its qualitative improvement.

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