

“Cornmeal Pancakes to Stave Off the Apocalypse”: Ordinary Food in “Poison” and Future Home of the Living God

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Introduction: Apocalyptic Narratives and Ordinary Food

Apocalyptic narratives have some pitfalls.

Visions of “the end of the world” can discourage adaptive thinking and ignore that for many communities, the end of the world has already occurred or is ongoing. April Anson describes such narratives as “settler apocalypse”: “stories that tell of the end of the whole world but are, in reality, specific to white settlers,” whose colonialist-capitalist world is threatened by forces such as climate change (63). But what if one replaces “the end of the whole world” with “the end of *a* world”? As Jessica Hurley and Dan Sinykin suggest, “apocalypse is not singular and universal” but rather “plural and particular” (453). Apocalypses are culturally specific, and they can recur, disrupting the Western sense of a singular future event to be avoided.

This idea of iterable apocalypse infuses Indigenous speculative texts such as *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) by Métis author Cherie Dimaline, who remarks that “everything we write is post-apocalyptic. . . . the worst thing I could write about . . . was stuff that had already happened” (Dimaline quoted in Talbot). A sense of today’s world as postapocalyptic is “almost commonplace” among Native North

American thinkers, according to Grace Dillon (8). But this does not foreclose the possibility of additional apocalypses; *The Marrow Thieves*, for instance, depicts the catastrophe of residential schools recurring in the future and retextured by climate change. I would distinguish, then, two strands of apocalyptic narrative: a hegemonic form that depicts apocalypse as a singular future event, versus an anti-hegemonic apocalypticism—including but not limited to what Dillon calls “Native apocalypse”—that attends to past, ongoing, and future disruptions (8).¹

Proceeding from the premise that apocalypses recur, this essay investigates how two recent fictions recast relations between the apocalyptic and the everyday by depicting what I call “ordinary food”: food that is normalized in the current global food system, and therefore emblemizes the harms that such a system renders commonplace. Rather than “ordinary” labelling a discrete set of foods produced in a particular way, I categorize fictional foods as “ordinary” when a character perceives them as such—whether that character is normalizing a processed food or a homemade pancake. I am interested in what is revealed by conflicting notions of ordinariness and by how those notions shift (or don’t) as characters confront apocalyptic events. To this end, I will briefly consider ordinary food in “Poison,” a postcolonial short story by white South African author Henrietta Rose-Innes, before a longer examination of the novel *Future Home of the Living God* by Ojibwe author Louise Erdrich.

In comparing settler South African and Native North American fictions, I will critique industrial food culture across places with differing but resonant experiences of settler colonialism and white supremacy (ongoing histories in which I am implicated as a white settler American and postcolonial scholar). I will also suggest connections across South Africa and Native North America as spaces where “food sovereignty” has become an important activist term, across food regime theory and the energy humanities, and across postcolonial and Indigenous studies. Postcolonial and Indigenous studies have long shared certain commitments yet struggled to talk together, largely because of perceived differences around the temporalities and modalities of colonialism, according to Jodi Byrd and Michael Rothberg (4). Adding to the body of connective work across these fields and to growing conversations on postcolonial and Indigenous speculative fictions, this essay locates anti-hegemonic apocalypticism and ideas about food as spaces of postcolonial and Indigenous resonance. Specifically, I note connections drawn by both Rose-Innes and Erdrich among ordinary food, petro-modernity, and the temporalities of apocalypse—connections that inform their depictions of speculative futures.

Defining apocalypticism as a preoccupation with world-shattering catastrophe, “Poison” and *Future Home of the Living God* both fit: they are speculative fictions in which a sudden rupture radically changes characters’ worlds. And yet, these narratives refuse the idea of absolute or singular rupture by blurring lines between the apocalyptic and the ordinary. Rose-Innes and Erdrich, I contend, develop anti-hegemonic apocalypticism by depicting conflicting and unstable ideas about what foods are ordinary (or disastrous). Portrayals of ordinary food infuse their narratives with a sense of the always-already-apocalyptic, revealing the quotidian violence baked into what I call a settler petro-food regime: a system that normalizes both settler colonialism and fossil-fueled food production.

Both “Poison” and *Future Home* locate critiques of industrial food at gas stations, making hypervisible the intimacy between industrial food production and petroleum. By depicting gas-station food and other comestibles as simultaneously ordinary and catastrophic, these stories break up white-centric apocalyptic imaginaries in two ways: they expose modes of privileged refusal to take apocalypse seriously and paradoxically they also note that apocalypse is old news, as demonstrated by already-disastrous relations with food. Locating alienated eating as emblematic of the settler petro-food regime and of neoliberal individualism, these narratives also suggest that transcending this regime and surviving apocalypse requires a reemphasis on relationality. The main character of “Poison” takes false comfort in industrial food, refusing relations with others; “Poison” thus offers a self-conscious exposure of settler inertia in the face of apocalypse. *Future Home*, by contrast, goes beyond denaturalizing the settler petro-food regime to examine two potential “alternatives”: individual bourgeois veganism versus relational Native food sovereignty.

Food Regimes and Food Sovereignty

My analysis is informed by scholarly and activist work that has problematized the global food regime and advocated community food sovereignty. Centuries of imperialism have prompted the globalization and hybridization of food-producing plant and animal species, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley describe: “new material resources . . . changed human bodies and national cultures as New World foods such as tomatoes, potatoes, maize, chili peppers, peanuts, cassava, and pineapple were transplanted, naturalized, and creolized all over the globe, while Asian and African crops such as sugarcane and coffee became integral to the plantocracies of the Americas,” which were based on the appropriation of Indigenous lands and

enslaved and indentured labor (13). Picking up on such patterns, food regime theory pinpoints that geopolitical power inheres in systems for producing and distributing food. The first “global food regime” arose around 1870, structured around European imports of food from settler states (Friedmann and McMichael 96–97). A second global food regime emerged after the First and Second World Wars, when industrialized agriculture in the United States created surpluses and motivated impositions of food “aid” in postcolonial countries, destabilizing local agriculture (Sodano 254). Now, a neoliberal-industrial food regime spurs climate change as well as global inequality. The “Green Revolution,” which promised to cure hunger by increasing agricultural yields, has sabotaged farmers in the global South—who are incorporated into monocultural export economies on disadvantageous terms—while increasing the carbon-intensiveness of food production and centralizing profits with multinationals (Zerbe; Shiva).

Industrial food systems are not mere side effects of empire but technologies of settlement in what Kyle Powys Whyte calls “settler-industrial states”: polities that carve out “settler homelands” utilizing “industrial means.” These means range “from military technologies to large-scale mineral and fossil fuel extraction operations to sweeping landscape-transforming regimes of commodity agriculture,” i.e. physical alterations of landscapes and ecosystems to cultivate “settler-industrial foods” (Whyte “Indigenous Food Systems” 3, 9). In the settler polity of the United States, the reservation system slashed Native access to food-harvesting lands, while industrialization polluted soils and waterways. Native starvation in the era of the government “ration” system morphed into high rates of obesity, diabetes, and other health problems as colonizers replaced Native foods with high-starch, high-fat foods (Gilio-Whitaker 31, 81). Disrupting land access and foodways has also capacitated settler colonialism and racialized governance in South Africa. Shortly after the settler Union of South Africa formed, the Native Land Act of 1913 decreed that Black South Africans could only own land in “reserves.” Displacing four million people and disrupting cultivation and cattle-rearing, this act forced Black South Africans into wage labor and lay foundations for apartheid. While postapartheid South Africa (unlike today’s United States) can be described as “postcolonial,” the transition from apartheid to multiracial democracy has not delivered on promises such as land reform; hunger and the dominance of white-owned commercial agriculture are ongoing problems.² Environmental injustice not only arises from locating toxic industries and disposal sites near marginalized communities, but also stems from “wrongful disruption[s] of Indigenous food systems”

and land access, as Whyte argues in the context of Native North America (“Indigenous Food Systems” 4).

In response, movements for food sovereignty seek to revitalize culture; address hunger and malnutrition; and pursue political, economic, and environmental justice. At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali in 2007, an assembly of over 500 food producers and activists from 80 countries defined food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Declaration of Nyéléni). The term has since been taken up by grassroots movements around the world, with transnational alliances forming through the farmer/activist group La Via Campesina. The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC), founded in 2015, brings together preexisting environmental justice groups, farming cooperatives, landless movements, and trade unions to organize for fair, democratic, and environmentally sound foodways (Food Sovereignty Campaign Coordination Committee). In Native North America, food sovereignty projects rebuild access to traditional foods, with goals such as improving health (cultural, spiritual, and bodily); nurturing relationships (within a community, with other Native communities, and with seeds who are “living relatives”); independence (from external companies); and also *interdependence* on equitable economic terms (e.g. reestablishing pre-colonization trade routes and reciprocity between different Native communities) (Hoover 62-75). While many food sovereignty projects protect native plants and revive traditional food production, these are not fantasies of returning to some “pure” past before food globalization. Instead, they are concrete strategies of adaptation for the future, emphasizing education and “future generations” who will lead the movement forward (Hoover 81, 82).

Food sovereignty projects respond to longstanding existential threats to colonized and marginalized communities. However, their urgency may become obvious to a broader constituency amidst climate change. According to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the global industrial food system now produces 21–37% of total net anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, second only to the fossil fuel industry (IPCC 10). While this estimate attempts to include pre- and post-production aspects of the global food system (such as transportation), it bears reemphasizing that a carbon-intensive food system not only creates its own emissions but also supports the fossil fuel industry. Commercial agriculture depends on petroleum, not only for the transportation of food, but also for inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. The food system is thus a central feature of what

Jennifer Wenzel calls “petro-modernity”: an ongoing era in which petroleum-based energy has distorted expectations, “promising wealth without work and machinic work without physical labor” in ways that obscure the environmental and human devastation caused by a petroleum-based global society (126). Gathering together food regime theory, Whyte’s concept of settler-industrial foods, and Wenzel’s petro-modernity, I suggest that “Poison” and *Future Home of the Living God* make visible a “settler petro-food regime”: a globalized food system based on the *normalization* of settler colonial appropriation of lands, food-producing species, and other resources; carbon-intensive food production and distribution; labor exploitation; agro-biodiversity loss; and geopolitical and environmental inequalities (including those that persist within postcolonies). Normalization is key here: what empowers this regime is the fact that it seems ordinary. Such perceptions of ordinariness animate the apocalypticism of Rose-Innes and Erdrich, as I will now discuss.

Snacking through Apocalypse in “Poison”

Emergent Capetonian writer Henrietta Rose-Innes has intrigued scholars with the environmental and urbanist dimensions of her fictions, yet her depictions of food have received little comment.³ “Poison,” the 2008 winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing, takes place after an imagined industrial accident: a chemical explosion has provoked a disorganized evacuation of Cape Town. The protagonist Lynn is out of gas, stranded at a petrol station on the city’s outskirts. Having waited “terribly late” to evacuate “despite all the warnings,” Lynn figures white refusal to confront apocalypse (311). Implicitly characterized as a white cis-woman, she begins the story as one of many stranded motorists but becomes the only person left: Lynn avoids three opportunities to depart because she hesitates to join multi-racial groups, suggesting the disinterest of the privileged in collaborating across difference.

Rose-Innes connects such white stasis to private car culture: Lynn cannot imagine pooling her petrol with others, nor riding in a minibus “taxi” (a mode of collective transit associated with commuters of color); she will leave only in her own car or with “[r]escue services” (318). But Rose-Innes also connects Lynn’s inertia to another facet of petro-modernity: industrial food. Lynn waits amidst “the fried-egg smell of the [petrol-station] cafeteria” with red plastic seats “just as she remembered them from childhood road trips. Tomato sauce and mustard in squeezey plastic bottles crusted around the nozzle. . . . [R]acks of chips over the counter, shelves of sweets, display fridges” (315). The

petrol station is characterized as a quintessential space not only of car culture but of processed food. While the lack of petrol signifies collapse, the plenty of ordinary foods—not just some chips but “racks of chips,” “shelves of sweets,” multiple “fridges”—lulls Lynn into imagining everything might be okay. Consuming chips and Coke enables Lynn’s refusal to depart, locating industrially-produced food as a false comfort in the face of environmental crisis:

Warm Coke: it seemed the electricity had gone. . . . Lynn started distractedly picking at the strip of aluminium that bound the edge of the table. It could be used for something. In an emergency. She opened a packet of cheese and onion chips. . . . [S]he was feeling happy, in a secret, volatile way. It was like bunking school: . . . a day cut out of the normal passage of hours. Nothing was required of her except to wait. . . . She hadn’t eaten a packet of chips for years. They were excellent. (316–17)

This passage displays Lynn’s simultaneous denial that the “emergency” is now, and delight at escaping the monotony of daily life. With the suspension of normalcy, Lynn indulges both in inaction (“Nothing was required of her except to wait”) and in unhealthy foods, which she apparently does not eat as a matter of habit. Snacking provides Lynn the comfort of bad behavior and even the sensation that the emergency is fun. This absurd yet understandable feeling indicates Lynn’s failure to conceptualize an environmental crisis on an appropriate scale: she treats a city-wide evacuation as though it were a minor deviation from routine, like breaking a diet or “bunking school.” Industrial foods offer Lynn an illusion of plenty created by what seems ordinary—if a bit unhealthy—in a settler petro-food regime. “Poison” exposes the falseness of this comfort: not only is settler-industrial food unhealthy, it is premised on colonialism, labor exploitation, and the reckless resource use that is driving the climate crisis. The ordinariness of damaging consumption patterns offers a problematic respite from confronting such problems.

Rose-Innes underscores this false comfort in a juxtaposition between Lynn attributing curative powers to industrial food, and Lynn physically experiencing indigestion. Descriptions of Lynn feeling “the poisons gush out of her” as diarrhea suggest that the airborne toxic event is making her sick (320). Yet Lynn thinks junk food can address her symptoms. When she first eats some chips, “she felt the salt and fat repairing her headache” (317). When Lynn feels queasy, “She sipped Coke; it helped with the nausea” (333). Meeting an old woman behind the petrol station, Lynn gives her some chips and observes that she,

too, “seemed restored by the chips” (330). Imagining that industrial food can mitigate chemical poisoning encourages Lynn to remain at the petrol station, as she reassures herself by taking an inventory:

Approximately fifty packets of potato chips, assorted flavours. Eighty or so chocolate bars. . . . Maybe thirty bottles of Coke and Fanta in the fridges, different sizes. Water, fizzy and plain: fifteen big bottles. . . . How much fluid did you need to drink per day? . . . Would drinking Coke be enough? Surely. So: two weeks, maybe three. The survival arithmetic was easy. . . . [R]escue would come long before then. (323–24)

Finally, Lynn is strategizing like someone in an emergency. But if Cape Town is experiencing an airborne toxic event, then Lynn’s “survival arithmetic” is wrong: having plentiful food persuades her to indulge her inertia and remain where she is being poisoned. By virtue of her non-digestion of junk food, Lynn avoids her last opportunity to leave: as the old woman departs in Lynn’s car with her grandson (who has obtained petrol by bicycle), Lynn hides in the bushes, both because she fears the grandson and because she is busy “vomiting a small quantity of cheese-and-onion mulch into the stinking grass” (332). Ordinary food falsely convinces Lynn that she can outlive an environmental crisis without taking action, and that she need not form relations with people different from herself. “Poison” thus underscores the deceptive allure of industrial foods, which are produced by exploitative and carbon-intensive means but normalized in the settler petro-food regime, making them seem ordinary to Lynn. These foods epitomize the stultifying false plenty and anti-relational individualism of petro-modernity.

“Poison” ends with Lynn locked into deferral, assuring herself that “[s]ooner or later, rescue would come . . . And when this was all over, she was definitely going to go on a proper detox. Give up all junk food, alcohol. Some time soon” (334). Rose-Innes puns on “detox,” in that Lynn leverages this dieting-culture term to downplay the literal toxic event (the explosion). And yet, is attributing toxicity to junk food really so silly? Given how much harm to biosphere and human workers (not to mention the consumer) can go into a can of Coke, perhaps the crisis that Lynn downplays is, on some level, not much worse than any other day. People’s worlds are destroyed all the time in ways spurred by the consumption of such ordinary foods. In this sense, a settler petro-food regime is always-already apocalyptic.

So what relationship between the everyday and the apocalyptic does a focus on food bring into view? Ordinary food works two ways

in “Poison,” underscoring white stasis and retreat to false comforts but also leavening a sense of sudden crisis with a message that everyday consumption patterns constitute ongoing catastrophes. The petrol station—a quintessential space of car culture, of arrested movement, and of processed food—is described in terms that underscore this ordinariness of the apocalyptic: “The sun came through the tinted glass in an end-of-the-world shade of pewter, but that was nothing new; that had always been the colour of the light in places like this” (315). This is a simultaneous invocation and refusal of apocalyptic rhetoric, treating an “end-of-the-world” feeling as an everyday phenomenon, “nothing new.” Rose-Innes’ petrol station is a paradigmatic site of the always-already apocalyptic petro-modernity instantiated in the food system. With this idea of apocalypse expressed by the petro-food patterns that settler colonialism has rendered ordinary, I turn now to *Future Home of the Living God*.

Ordinary Food, Food Sovereignty, and Meat-Eating in *Future Home of the Living God*

An important voice in Native North American literature, Louise Erdrich has long foregrounded food as a way to critique the alienation of settler culture, privileging embodied experience and relationality with human and nonhuman others (Winter 48). Food also offers Erdrich an idiom for exploring disrupted worlds and dystopian possibilities, much as Joni Adamson finds a focus on altered futures of food to be common in Native North American speculative texts (Adamson 216). Set in the near future, *Future Home of the Living God* contrasts a revitalized Ojibwe nation to a settler polity in which environmental instability provokes reproductive unfreedom. The narrator, Cedar, is a late-twenties cis-woman of Ojibwe heritage, raised in Minneapolis by settler couple Sera and Glen Songmaker. The novel opens with a sudden environmental disruption: biological evolution starts careening “backwards.” (This evolutionary crisis operates as an open-ended speculative device, allegorizing real-world processes such as climate change or the sixth extinction.) De-evolution prompts panic about human reproduction and an apocalypse of settler society. Cedar, who is pregnant, shelters at home until captured by a neo-Christian Right state that detains pregnant people. Escaping with Sera’s help, Cedar hides with her Ojibwe birth family until imprisoned again. Meanwhile new solidarities and resistances emerge, and Ojibwe sovereignty resurges.

Before recounting these changes, *Future Home* paints a fading American settler order as experienced by Cedar and her adoptive

family. The Songmakers buttress themselves against the burgeoning crisis with an ordinary meal:

[Sera] succeeds in making two perfect pancakes. . . . [T]here's expensive real maple syrup from Canada because maples here no longer produce. Sera has always loved presenting Glen and me with . . . made-from-scratch chicken soup when we were sick, with bowls of garlic mashed potatoes when we were sad, and now, with cornmeal pancakes to stave off the apocalypse. (60)

Sera shores up the family's sense of normalcy through culinary gestures, making sickness, sadness, and even "apocalypse" feel better. Normalcy for the Songmakers means a class-specific set of gastronomic pleasures, such as imported syrup. As Winona LaDuke recounts, once "all the maple sugar and maple candy in North America was produced by Native people;" however, these products were commercialized within settler industrial foodways, displacing Native producers and necessitating Anishinaabeg efforts to purchase and preserve lands where maple sugarbush grows (LaDuke *All Our Relations* 133, 130). It is unclear if Cedar is familiar with maple syrup's Ojibwe history; in her reality, climate change has halted maple syrup production in Minnesota. Syrup thus marks three overlaid temporalities of apocalypse: the historical disruption of Native foodways; the future climate in which maple syrup is an expensive import (marking the Songmakers' privilege); and the burgeoning de-evolution scenario in which white, middle-class settlers are bracing against "apocalypse."

"Cornmeal pancakes to stave off the apocalypse," I contend, exemplify two functions of ordinary food in anti-hegemonic apocalypticism. First, much like chips and Coke in "Poison," these pancakes manifest a white person's effort to maintain normalcy, and thereby represent white reluctance to face crisis. Carrying on with everyday cooking and eating can constitute an emotional retreat to the domestic, downplaying emergency; in this register, the eating patterns of Erdrich's white characters stand in for failures to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and other catastrophes. Yet foods coded as normal can also index the break-up of settler apocalyptic imaginaries: if white-centric narratives tend to categorize apocalypse as a singular future event, Erdrich's depictions of ordinary food mark apocalypse as iterable (as encoded by the maple syrup) and even as quotidian. Unremarkable food commodities remain omnipresent in *Future Home* even as they are anticipated to become scarce. This familiar object-world, twinned by descriptions of uncanny re-evolved organisms, makes the novel's dystopia eerily like our present. Punctuated by such representations of

ordinary food, an apocalyptic scenario that might seem like a sudden rupture instead manifests as continuous with present-day problems, underscoring the already-apocalyptic features of the settler petro-food regime. Yet Erdrich also imagines food relations otherwise, asking readers to compare two potential alternatives to the settler petro-food regime: bourgeois veganism and Native food sovereignty.

Food is a constant point of reference through which Erdrich's characters register normalcy and disruption. As the de-evolution crisis progresses, Cedar hides at home with her baby's father Phil, who scavenges foods that had been ordinary. When Phil "score[s] crackers and cheese," Cedar bursts into tears: "I can't bear it—crackers and cheese! It reminds me of all the wonderful normal times that I have eaten crackers and cheese with my parents or friends. . . . I've never appreciated how comforting and convivial those times were" (114–15). Once-ordinary food epitomizes the "wonderful normal" comforts of Cedar's privileges within the preceding settler regime, indexing middle-class white fears of losing such privileges. Cedar experiences this loss as someone who holds intersecting white and Ojibwe identities: she is culturally white—raised by white parents within settler society—though ethnically half Ojibwe. (Cedar's "adoptive" father Glen turns out to be her biological father. At the novel's outset, Cedar connects with her birth mother and begins to develop an Ojibwe identity; however, the end of the novel finds Cedar trapped within white spaces.) To mourn crackers and cheese, though understandable, is imperial nostalgia: a longing to continue enjoying an order that oppressed others, including Cedar's own Ojibwe relatives. Ordinary food indexes white desire for stasis, as does the bizarre food that results from mapping current culinary expectations onto re-evolved organisms. Cedar experiences this after she is detained, complaining about the chicken soup ("apparently chickens are not chickens anymore—they look like pale iguanas") and the "salad with odd thick leaves and gnarled tomatolike vegetables" (251, 252). "I miss food," Cedar tells her fellow detainees, hoping that "[m]aybe cows will stay the same, only tougher" (252). This wish indicates Cedar's nostalgia for food privileges within the previous settler order, and thus her culturally white inertia.

Yet by creating a sense of continuity with the past, appearances of still-ordinary food also reframe the de-evolution crisis (which had seemed a sudden rupture) as part of an ongoing ebb and flow of apocalyptic experience. Cedar serves an almost-normal microwave dinner: "Phil got hold of a case of Cup Noodles. . . . The gas went out on the gas stove and we don't know how to get more, but with the electricity still going, our microwave works. Soon we have hot noodles, and we

sit around the candle, slowly spooning them into our mouths" (117). Cedar and Phil's lives are changing—the gas is gone—and yet emphasis falls on those comforts of petro-modernity that remain available: electricity, the microwave, Cup Noodles. Food epitomizes the mundane still present in the rupture, mitigating the totality of collapse and inviting readers to reframe apocalypse as itself ordinary.

By underscoring the persistence of the ordinary during settler apocalypse, Erdrich invites readers to conversely imagine the crises already present in the settler petro-food regime. When Cedar visits a supermarket early in the crisis, she buys practical nonperishables but also carbon-intensive "luxuries": "A bottle of juice, a crisp New Zealand apple, a stack of stoned-wheat crackers, and a ball of mild white mozzarella. . . . How long, I wonder, will there be a snack like this to eat—cheese from a cow milked in Italy, crackers packaged in New Jersey, fruit squeezed in Florida, an apple from the other side of the world?" (70). In a system that Cedar recognizes as unsustainable, supermarkets make such luxuries available every day for middle-class consumers. Buying an apple from the other side of the world seems mundane but is carbon-intensive and likely capacitated by troubling labor practices. Drawing the reader's attention to this, Erdrich denaturalizes the global supply chains that structure the settler petro-food regime.

Future Home thus suggests that the global food regime, ordinary to many middle-class consumers, is both headed for collapse and already catastrophic. This system facilitates some people's convenience, comfort, and dietary preferences by exploiting the labor, bodies, and cultures of others. When stocking up on groceries, Cedar is on the privileged end. Yet her Ojibwe heritage and gender make her a target for exploitation, as evident in Phil's fantasies:

Like so many Minnesota boys, Phil was raised on dairy products bearing the image of the Land O'Lakes Butter Maiden . . . a lovely, voluptuous Native girl . . . holding out a dish of butter. Like so many Minnesota boys, Phil folded her knees up to make breasts. He gazed at her 1/16" shadow of cleavage while eating his toast. She was a constant in his life. . . . [H]e confessed that after he met me, the Butter Maiden had started to haunt his dreams. She walked off the blue and yellow box in . . . high-heeled leather moccasins. She looked like me. How flattering, I said, meaning the opposite. (83)

This passage marks the ordinariness of exoticism: exploitative marketing is a comforting "constant" for the privileged. The butter package kindles Phil's excitement about possessing a Native woman, marking

the acculturation of “Minnesota boys” into an acquisitive cis-heterosexual masculinity. Land O’Lakes has exploited such colonialist eroticism to sell butter, until dropping the Native woman from its packaging in early 2020. (Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, a member of the White Earth Nation of Ojibwe, thanked the company for this change, noting that “Native people are not mascots or logos” [Scinto]). Native images have similarly been exploited to sell paddy-grown rice as “wild rice,” undercutting Ojibwe ricers who have harvested from lakes for hundreds of years (LaDuke *Recovering the Sacred* 172–73). Phil’s fantasies demonstrate how a settler petro-food regime normalizes such exoticism and colonialist-patriarchal exploitation.

While *Future Home* exposes this food regime, the novel also disenchants individualistic alternatives. Cedar’s adoptive mother Sera is described as vegan and “annoyingly phobic about food additives,” epitomizing bourgeois modes of opting out from industrial food (4). Cedar’s Ojibwe family, the Potts, are associated with comparatively working-class food sensibilities (despite being financially comfortable) via their business, a gas station. They take Cedar and her adoptive parents to tour the gas station: “We examine the pumps, then walk into the store, up the candy and condiments aisle, down the utilities and snack foods aisle, over the fast-food cases and the pressurized latte machine” (41). As in “Poison,” the gas station links two consumption regimes emblematic of petro-modernity: car travel and industrial foods. The Potts are implicated in both, signaling how they have been interpellated into settler capitalism (from which they will later diverge). Tension threatens when Sweetie, Cedar’s biological mom, serves Sera an impromptu hot dog:

Sera has often held forth on the thirty-nine different deadly carcinogens contained in cheap hot dogs. . . . And then there is the meat itself. . . . I don’t know how to rescue her. For that hot dog is an innocent gesture of pride and conciliation. It says so much. *Thank you for raising my daughter. . . . I . . . want to be friends. . . .* Yet it is a chilling object, a powerful nexus of poisons representative of dumb, brutish animal suffering.

Sera raises the thing to her lips. I see her take a bite.

One bite, another.

She eats the whole thing, smiles, and says, “Thank you, that was good.”

Child, if I ever . . . deride my adoptive mom's fierce virtues . . . just remind me of that gas-station hot dog. . . .
I saw her, at that moment, as a hero. (41)

This scene destabilizes a dichotomy between “bad” versus “good” foods, acknowledging multiple meanings of the gas-station hot dog. Coming from Sweetie the hot dog is an ordinary food that invites kinship, whereas it is noxious to Sera. Sera lets the hot dog mean what Sweetie intends: suspending her own vegan values to make kin, she chooses to be in relation with Sweetie even in the oppressive context of an unhealthy food regime rather than retreat into her privilege. Eating the hot dog is significant because Sera's vegan values are themselves important. Yet Sera's veganism is also naïve, inasmuch as it is structured around “opting out”: individualized consumer choices available only to the privileged cannot fix this food regime for everyone, even as veganism does mitigate one's participation in carbon-intensive and cruel factory farming.⁴ The scene suggests that flexible, context-dependent values can facilitate new relationships; this openness allows Sera to become allies with a wide range of characters, joining a network that rescues detained pregnant women (and sustaining Cedar on the run by feeding her scavenged industrial foods).

While the hot dog scene disenchants individualist “alternatives” to settler-industrial foods, *Future Home* locates genuine alternatives with foodways grounded in relationality. This emerges through the changing relations to food of Eddy, Sweetie's husband. Erdrich initially characterizes Eddy as a depressed intellectual, for whom processed foods offer wan comfort and opportunities for self-deprecating satire. In an excerpt from his memoirs called “Even Gas-Station Food Can Save You,” Eddy writes: “Today I did not kill myself because of the sweet foam on the top of a cheap cardboard cup of cappuccino . . . swept . . . onto my finger, which was slightly redolent of windshield wiper fluid. . . . I inhaled tones of vanilla, then . . . [m]alt dextrose and a resonance of airplane glue with a scorched plastic finish. . . . Awful and Superb!” (30). Eddy's depression arguably results from embeddedness in the settler petro-food regime; he lacks traditional foods and presents gas-station food as a paltry opiate that keeps him minimally willing to live. At the same time, Eddy takes a perverse pleasure in food products laced with synthetics: his mock-sublime merges the unhealthy and “Awful” with the “Superb!” as he describes the “implacably rich marriage of salt and sodium, corn and hydrogenated grease, vegetable gum and number-five red” in cheese nachos (30). Tasting “windshield wiper fluid” and contemplating “gas-station food” as a category, Eddy presents the intimacy of processed foods with car culture,

underscoring the centrality of settler-industrial foods to petro-modernity. Linking the mundane to the gourmet—“redolent;” “implacably rich marriage;” “tones;” “finish”—Eddy also parodies a sommelier categorizing wine or a super-taster reviewing a dish; his ode to gas-station food satirizes both cheap and bourgeois eating practices. Eddy’s memoir laments a life of processed food while mocking a foodie culture that actually operates within the same settler petro-food regime.

As the settler order destabilizes, Eddy transforms from wry critic of the settler petro-food regime to architect of community alternatives. Eddy emerges from his depression and leads a resurgence of Ojibwe sovereignty via reconfigured relations with food:

[N]ow, Eddy gives speeches. . . . He plots strategies. Thinks of survival measures, ways to draft our young people into working for a higher purpose. Where to get seeds. Pigs. Cows. Flocks of chickens. He wants to make the reservation one huge, intensively worked, highly productive farm. He’s got gangsters growing seedlings in the grow-lighted aisles of casinos. . . . “We’re gonna be self-sufficient, like the old days,” he says. (226–27)

Just as Eddy’s experience of petro-modernity centers on gas-station food, a key component of sovereignty is redeveloping “self-sufficient” Ojibwe foodways. Depictions of food thus complicate *Future Home’s* apocalyptic register in yet another sense: the settler apocalypse becomes a Native opportunity to rearticulate food sovereignty. Reflecting tenets of Native food sovereignty projects, Eddy works to build resilient new community structures, educational programs, and ways of obtaining food. Eddy also takes into account how globalization has changed food systems, making non-indigenous nonhuman animals such as pigs, cows, and chickens (as well as native turkeys, discussed below) part of his plans for future food. Erdrich’s references to food mark not only settler stasis in the face of crisis, and not only the dailiness of apocalypse, but also a chance for real alternatives to the settler order.

Eddy’s vision diverges from Sera’s bourgeois veganism both in that it is community-based rather than individual, and in that it involves the consumption of nonhuman animals and their products. Indeed, a strict vegan ethos could easily become hegemonic towards Native food sovereignty efforts: the enforcement by settlers of hunting and fishing restrictions has been a recurring mode of disruption to Native foodways, and traditional hunting and fishing practices (not just cultivation) matter to Native food sovereignty projects (LaDuke *All Our*

Relations 133–34; Hoover 85–86). Yet there are shared principles at work here. While the gas-station hot dog epitomizes meat that would be produced by a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO), the modes of meat-eating encouraged by Eddy later in the novel resist such unethical and carbon-intensive production, as a vegan ethos would. For example, the Potts hunt and pluck their turkeys themselves for Thanksgiving, rather than buy industrially-produced meat (247). Indeed, the kin-making capacitated by the hot dog (despite its problematic production) presages the building of relationships around ethically sourced turkeys. Cedar, who is hiding on the reservation, cultivates a relationship with her Ojibwe family in part by plucking and cleaning turkeys hunted by Eddy. The scene is about relations with uninvited newcomers, too. Cedar’s biological sister Little Mary asks whether Thanksgiving dinner must include the “pilgrims,” referring to various hippies and Catholics who have been passing through the reservation seeking shelter (247). Eddy initially suggests that the Ojibwe community will not share: “They are on their own. . . . We’ll feed our elders, our children, and our warriors. Maybe not strictly traditional, but hey, learn from experience. First Thanksgiving, we ended up with our heads on pikes” (248). Eddy notes the importance not only of remembering histories of genocide but also of providing for the tribal community first, which is an important tenet in many Indigenous food sovereignty projects (Hoover 70). And yet, Cedar narrates, “of course we end up making all of the food on the reservation, and feeding absolutely everyone” (248). Cedar is eventually kidnapped from the reservation by some of the “pilgrims,” connoting a repetition of settler betrayal (248). This could be read to imply that the community should have excluded outsiders in self-defense. Yet in this novel, Ojibwe-led efforts to decolonize territory and foodways remember but transcend historical violence, and also include non-Ojibwe actors. This emphasis is encouraged by visions of multiracial solidarity not only among Native and white characters—such as Eddy, Sweetie, Little Mary, Cedar, and Sera—but also in the connections that Cedar forges with Asian American minor characters, such as her mailman Hiro and her roommate in detention Tia Jackson. While the turkey scene invokes the violent history of Thanksgiving and the iterability of colonialist violence by the “pilgrims,” it simultaneously holds out hope for new solidarities and alliances, as realized through Eddy’s own flexibility and through the vehicle of turkey-eating. *Future Home* contemplates multiple food ethics—finding both faults and redeeming features in bourgeois veganism and even a gas-station hot dog—and holds at once the potentiality and the dangers of forming new coalitions. Erdrich thus avoids a moralistic binary between “good” versus

“bad” eaters or foods. The novel firmly suggests, however, that positive alternatives necessitate the reclamation of power from the settler petro-food regime, the rejection of white supremacy, and an emphasis on relationality.

Conclusion

If a disjuncture between Indigenous and postcolonial studies has been the “post” in postcolonial—the impression, even if inaccurate, that the field portrays colonialism as “over,” leading to differences in how past and present are narrated (Byrd and Rothberg 4)—then perhaps these fields can find common ground in speculative futures. Both “Poison” and *Future Home*—examples of postcolonial settler and Indigenous speculative fiction, respectively—transcend a dichotomy between the apocalyptic and the everyday, imagining futures in which ordinary food underscores the everydayness of apocalypse. While sudden events do rupture characters’ worlds, the vector of ordinary food creates a sense of continuity with historical and present violences, situating apocalypse as recurring and even quotidian rather than singular. Across the contexts of Cape Town and Minnesota, Rose-Innes and Erdrich each make food central to their critiques of settler colonialism and petro-modernity, with ordinary food indexing the normalization of fossil-fuel overconsumption and white hesitation to address crisis. Both texts also raise questions of whether and how white people will participate in the new societal structures occasioned by settler apocalypse: with Lynn’s avoidance, or with Cedar and Sera’s attempts to make kin. Both Rose-Innes and Erdrich suggest the need to adapt, collaborate across the lines of difference, and transcend a settler petro-food regime, in order to survive apocalypse. Erdrich moreover imagines how a collapse of the present settler order might spur the resurgence of Ojibwe sovereignty and the construction of more just and resilient social structures. Rethinking relations with food, as with petroleum, is a fundamental starting place for these efforts—and thus a generative space for further thought across Indigenous and postcolonial work.

NOTES

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1. Scholars in Indigenous, Black, and postcolonial studies have elaborated various versions of a distinction between hegemonic and anti-hegemonic apocalypticisms: see Anson, Ford, and Oh. Dillon characterizes “Native apocalypse” narratives (part of a broader category of “Indigenous futurisms”) as stories that begin from the premise that apocalypse has already befallen Native peoples, and therefore imagine futures or alternate histories in which “Natives win or at least are centered in the narrative” (8–9).

2. The African National Congress (ANC) promised to redistribute 30% of good farmland within 5 years of taking power in 1994 but adopted a “willing-seller, willing-buyer” policy (Bond 84). With this neoliberal approach, only 7.5% of land had been redistributed as of 2017 (Clarno 34).

3. See Wenzel’s discussion of “Poison” in the introduction to *The Disposition of Nature*, as well as Akpome, Kruger, and Williams.

4. See Harper for a discussion of how vegan ethics are complicated by the racially exploitative transnational sourcing of vegan products (and of how “white ignorance” elides these complexities).

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