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The Politics of Colonial Authenticity: Food in a Galaxy Far, Far Away

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THE POLITICS OF COLONIAL AUTHENTICITY:
FOOD IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

A Thesis Presented to
the Faculty of the University Honors Program
Northeastern Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the NEIU Honors Program
for Graduation with Honors

Katelyn Juerjens
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ABSTRACT

In August 2015, The Walt Disney Company announced its plans for two new 14-acre additions to their already expansive theme parks: Galaxy's Edge. The new additions, which opened in the Summer of 2019, are themed as a never-before-seen planet within the multi-billion-dollar Star Wars franchise. Each park was designed to transport fans and tourists to a galaxy far, far way to experience foreign topographies, activities, adventures, and even food. This project looks at the representations of food and consumption across the Star Wars multimedia galaxy. Through exploring the menus circulating inside the Galaxy's Edge theme park alongside Galaxy's Edge tie-in novels, comic books, and the Galaxy's Edge Official Cookbook, I place the ways in which Disney participates in the violences of neocolonialism, racism, and patriarchy through its representations of food and consumption. While this paper mostly concentrates on Galaxy's Edge and its tie-in media to think about food and colonialism in a galaxy far, far away, I first turn to the original 1977 film *A New Hope* to highlight how food and colonialism have been an animating ideology from the onset. Food can be a tool of oppression, patriarchy, and white supremacy, doing both the work of maintaining cultural heritage for some, and erasing it for others. In a White supremacist ideology, food and consumption is used to articulate racialized difference. In the United States, as with most of the West, the terms “ethnic” and “exotic” are used to describe foods considered Other—not White. Through the exotification of real-world ethnic cuisines, Disney and Star Wars Whitewashes food, erasing the food's origins, histories, cultivation, production, and significance. Star Wars deracinates food from sites of racial and colonial violence and re-contextualizes it in a

fictional universe that obscures the history of Western imperialism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. However, while the Star Wars multi-media franchise and its mythological, world-building enterprise continues to, in many ways, uphold the colonizing ideologies of this world, progressive authors with a different point of view have found a way to occupy and critique the franchise from within.

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INTRODUCTION

In August 2015, The Walt Disney Company announced its plans for two new 14-acre additions to their already expansive theme parks: Galaxy's Edge (*Disney Twenty-Three*). The new additions, which opened in the Summer of 2019, are themed as a never-before-seen planet within the multi-billion-dollar Star Wars franchise (*Disney Twenty-Three*). Each park was designed to transport fans and tourists to a galaxy far, far way to experience foreign topographies, activities, adventures, and even food. (Funny enough, they still accept dollars and all major credit cards.)¹ The theme parks were built simultaneously in Orlando, Florida and Anaheim, California to the tune of one billion dollars per location (Im). Disney executives and Imagineers (engineers of creativity)² promised an “authentic” *Star Wars* experience in every detail, including immersive rides to hyperspace; characters from different worlds, planets, and species; and “authentic” details in architecture and atmosphere (*Disney Twenty-Three*). In the video shown to guests at Disneyland's 60th Anniversary celebration event in April 2016, Harrison Ford (who famously plays Han Solo) introduces what was then called “Star Wars Land.” The video announces to fans and future visitors: “You’ve watched the saga, now enter these authentic locales with your every sense engaged. You’re meeting droids and aliens, entering an other-worldly street market, actually tasting the local delicacies, and going upscale at the planets best dinner club. Or, for the truly adventurous, heading down to the

¹ I owe a debt of gratitude to Ryan H. Poll for this joke.

² “Walt Disney Imagineering is the creative engine that designs and builds all Disney theme parks, resorts, attractions, and cruise ships worldwide, and oversees the creative aspects of Disney games, merchandise product development, and publishing businesses” (“About Imagineering”).

local cantina” (Disneyland Experience). Galaxy’s Edge takes place on the planet of Batuu, which is—as the name suggests—on the edge of the galaxy, or on the Outer Rim, in Star Wars speak. Within the mythology of Star Wars, The Outer Rim is troped as a third-world region. In Star Wars franchise media, Batuu has been described as “primitive,” “savage,” and filled with “all kinds of scum and villainy,” terms also used by Ben Kenobi to describe Tatooine—another Outer Rim planet—in *A New Hope* (1977) (Dawson). When imagining and constructing Galaxy’s Edge theme parks, creators were purposeful in establishing this “primitive,” second-hand, impoverished, and crime-infested aesthetic which placed Batuu—and the Outer Rim—outside of civilization. From its earliest introduction, Disney was careful to create an “other-wordly” space, one that could be experienced with “every sense,” including through taste (Disneyland Experience).

While there are myriad texts exploring the world of Disney in the form of travel books and lighthearted, historical accounts written for Disney fans and collectors, serious cultural analysis has mostly ignored the theme parks and their relationship to mass culture. Scholars who have taken Disney’s conglomerate seriously have generally concentrated on mass media outside of the theme parks, such as films, television, and characters. In *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* (1995), coauthors and co-collaborators in “The Project on Disney” fill this gap in Disney discourse. Taking what they call an “alternative ride” through Disney World, the scholars critically analyze their experiences and observations, looking beyond the utopian façade. I use their theorizations on consumption, pleasure, and leisure to think more specifically about food and its representations inside the parks. Expanding this theme park discourse into the

resorts and hotels that are a part of the Disney World conglomerate, Jennifer Cypher & Eric Higgs write about Disney World's Wilderness Lodge resort and its "hyperreal" imitations of nature in their article, "Colonizing the Imagination: Disney's Wilderness Lodge". Borrowing from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), they refer to the resort as a simulacrum: a copy with no origin. In doing so, they critique Disney for dissolving authenticity and colonizing the imagination of tourists, manufacturing guests' understanding of what is real. I use their ideas of authenticity, imitation, and sanitized experiences to discuss Galaxy's Edge and its attempt at a sanitized experience of ethnic markets, foods, and cultures. Building on the discourse around Disney theme parks, the anthology, *Performance and the Disney Theme Park Experience* (2019) positions tourists as actors within what editors Jennifer Kokai and Tom Robson see as an immersive theatre space, rather than mindless consumers, as they claim previous scholars have done. I use many of the authors' ideas on Disney's artificially built environments and attempts at authenticity to discuss how the atmosphere manipulates guests' engagement and experiences. In the chapter, "What's Missing in Frontierland? American Indian Culture and Indexical Absence at Walt Disney World" author Victoria Pettersen Lantz, analyzes the representations and misrepresentations of First World people and culture within Disney theme parks, including the artificially constructed culture of the Na'vi from the Disney 2009 film *Avatar*. I use her analysis of the fictional but recognizable Na'vi people to explore Galaxy's Edge's artificial yet identifiable connections to Middle Eastern countries, culture, and foods. I also use Jill Anne Morris's essay "Disney's Influence on the Modern Theme Park and the Codification of Colorblind Racism in the American Amusement Industry," especially her ideas on the "tourist gaze" to put Galaxy's Edge in

context with other theme parks, as well as Disney's own history of exoticizing race and appropriating cultures.

While Disney theme parks have always excelled at creative and immersive experiences, when constructing the fictional planet of Batuu, they took world-building up to eleven.³ As guests walk into the park, they do so directly towards a gigantic Millennium Falcon—Han Solo's starship and an icon of the Star Wars franchise. Petrified trees dominate the landscape, serving as both an aesthetic signifier of the planet's age, and a barrier to create the illusion that guests are on another planet, rather than in another section of the theme park. Guests can build their own lightsabers or droids, purchase toys made only by a Batuan toymaker, fly the Millennium Falcon, and fight the First Order (Nystedt). Visitors can even download an app that turns their smartphone into a "data pad" to help them on their mission (Martens). All signage, from souvenir shops to the bathrooms, is written in "Aurebesh," the galaxy's official script. Storefronts, bathrooms, and garbage cans are aestheticized to look like they belong on another planet, and even Coca-Cola bottles served inside the park appear to be "thermal detonators"—or hand-grenades here on Earth ("Coca-Cola"). These sugar-filled thermal detonators have what vaguely appears to be the Coca-Cola, Sprite, or Dasani branding, but scuffed up as if it was just "pulled off a ship" and with the brand name altered to Aurebesh so as to look authentically in-world ("Coca-Cola..."). Disney cast members who work inside Galaxy's Edge are also expected to be fully formed Batuan citizens with unique backstories. This differentiates Galaxy's Edge workers from other Disney cast members, who, unless in full-body costumes, are only expected to be extremely

³ *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) reference.

helpful and unreasonably cheerful (Martens). Minor characters and references to the franchise's multimedia are hiding throughout the park for fans to find, yet the words "Star Wars," and "Galaxy's Edge" are forbidden within the spires' trunks in order to maintain the illusion that tourists are truly on another planet (MacDonald). To construct the Batuan aesthetic, Imagineers found inspiration from places such as "Turkey, Morocco and Jerusalem," spaces that Imagineering executive Chris Beatty says, "had a lot of conflict, a lot of history" (Martens). From construction to merchandise to cast members, all pains were taken to ensure an in-world, foreign aesthetic—one that relied heavily on establishing Batuu as an impoverished, economically struggling space.

While Disney promised Galaxy's Edge would be constructed around a world never before written about or shown in any of the franchise's many media forms, that would not mean that it would remain limited to the theme park experience. In conjunction with the theme park, Disney also published young adult novels, children's books, comics, toys, merchandise, and even a cookbook to tie-in to the "newly discovered" planet of Batuu. These multiple forms of media function to both advertise the theme park, as well as to create and sustain the illusion of an authentic, lived-in, and layered world. While there are many ways in which Disney is engaged in worldbuilding, one of the most important and prominent is through the medium of food. In fact, if we return to Harrison Ford's introduction, we can note the centering of food in selling this new world and experience. To recall, the video teases to potential visitors the opportunity of "actually tasting the local delicacies," demonstrating the significance of food and taste in constructing the narrative and aesthetic of Batuu (Disneyland Experience).

Food can be a tool of oppression, patriarchy, and white supremacy, doing both the work of maintaining cultural heritage for some, and erasing it for others. In a White supremacist ideology, food and consumption is used to articulate racialized difference. In the United States, as with most of the West, the terms “ethnic” and “exotic” are used to describe foods considered Other—not White. Through the exotification of real-world ethnic cuisines, Disney and Star Wars Whitewashes food, erasing the food’s origins, histories, cultivation, production, and significance. Star Wars deracinates food from sites of racial and colonial violence and re-contextualizes it in a fictional universe that obscures the history of Western imperialism, colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. In her book *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* (2003), Lisa Heldke explores the colonial attitudes embedded in what she calls “food adventuring”—a form of cultural appropriation in which mostly White middle-class Westerners use “ethnic” food as a way to experience an Exotic Other (xvi). The problem isn’t that Disney serves ethnic cuisine. Rather, the meanings and ideas that are carried into the treatment of the food is “strongly motivated by Western colonialism”—with “an appropriation of cultural practices” by a transnational “economic power” (Heldke xviii).

Critical food studies is one of the most exciting, developing fields in the humanities. In this field, food is used to frame a wide range of social issues, power structures, and cultural relations. As anthropologist Mary Douglas observed three decades ago: “Food is a field of social action” (Douglas). The interdisciplinary subject highlights how food is a medium of culture, politics, and transformation. Focusing on race and power specifically, Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha analyze race relations and globalization through the lens of food production and consumption in their book

Geographies of Race and Food (2013). Exploring the relations of power within transnational foodways, the book also argues for an acknowledgement of racial inequities in food production, hunger, and consumption, suggesting that previous scholars have been hesitant to explore racial relations within global food production. Amy Tigner and Allison Carruth's *Literature and Food Studies* (2017) is one of few books that explicitly connects critical food studies to literature specifically. As my project moves toward food imagery in *Star Wars* novels, this work is crucial as a model for reading literature through the lens of food. Moreover, it makes a significant and influential argument for the importance of critical food studies within literature and cultural studies, and I utilize their concepts to make this argument myself. In the chapter titled "Culinary Encounters: Food, Identity, and Colonialism" in the anthology *The Archaeology of Food and Identity* (2006), Michael Dietler discusses the impact of colonial encounters on modern foodways and identity formation, as well as food's historical impact on enacting colonialism. He argues that focusing on consumption within colonial and postcolonial studies is crucial for understanding the cultural significance of colonial relations and control. I use Dietler's ideas to demonstrate the strong historical connections between colonialism and food.

While more explicit, visible forms of violence like settler colonialism and slavery have been committed on racialized bodies throughout United States history, neocolonialism and the exotification of marginalized cultures continues this project. Through looking at the media that make up the *Star Wars* universe, I argue that food is central to Disney's worldbuilding—and moreover, this worldbuilding is a neocolonial project. The five book comic series *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* (2019) begins in the

planet's street market, known as the Black Spire Outpost, with the words: "You there! Can I interest you in a juicy Ronto Wrap? Best in this quadrant!" (Sacks 1). A droid asks the question as it holds up three taco-look-alikes and a glass of green milk. As another alien-type ponders the question, a young boy tries to steal a ronto wrap before the alien catches him, saying: "Look, kid, by your age, I had already pulled my first heist. If you're this bad at the game, you're eventually going to starve to death, so eat when you can" (Sacks 1). The very first frame of the comic establishes Batuu's outpost as a busy street market where crime and villainy takes place, as well as where a certain kind of food is produced and consumed. The Ronto Wrap featured in the comic is also available to taste inside Galaxy's Edge theme parks, serving as part of the comics narrative, a worldbuilding mechanism, and an advertisement to potential Galaxy's Edge visitors. In later sections, I explore other forms of Star Wars media that perpetuate, and at times critique Disney's neocolonial project. What each medium makes clear, is how central food is to the corporation's worldbuilding enterprise.

As established earlier, Disney Imagineers were purposeful in making Galaxy's Edge a "primitive," third-world space. This third-world aesthetic extends to foods served within the park, which according to Disney's menu descriptions are: "unique," "unfamiliar," and "exotic" ("Ronto Roaster"). Disney's goal was to create a world that felt "exotic" enough for tourists to feel like they're visiting somewhere foreign and yet "familiar" enough to feel comfortable (Biesiada). Batuu's main city hub, as well as Galaxy's Edge center of activity, is called Black Spire Outpost. The Outpost is described by Disney Imagineers as "an infamous stop for traders, adventurers, and smugglers traveling around the Outer Rim and Wild Space" (*Disney Twenty-Three*). At Galaxy's

Edge, creators aimed to create an “authentic” geography of poverty and crime, yet in a sanitized, safe environment. While they claimed that Batuu is brand-new and never-before-seen and its foods unique, the Imagineers used “third-world” spices and recipes found on their conflict tour to create the illusion of “authenticity.”

On Disneyland’s website, the company announces to the potential consumer: “You’ll find treats and surprises from across the galaxy, including cuisines inspired by diverse cultures spread across the stars” while later detailing that the themed establishments will “offer indigenous and off-world flavors that are worth strapping the family in for a trip to hyperspace” (“Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge ...”). In an attempt to create new and inventive in-universe foods, those in charge of the menus instead created bastardizations of ethnic cuisines, appropriating them and referring to them as “diverse” and “indigenous.”⁴ However, the fictional galaxy of Star Wars is not of our world. It exists, as the iconic opening sequence tells the viewer, “a long time ago,” and “far, far away.” In designing a world so closely inspired by real-world cultures, Star Wars suggests that the regions they visited for inspiration are not of our world or civilization either. The designers and world-builders copied and exoticized the cultures they visited, establishing them as Other and colonizing their history.

Disney is often recognized for its imaginative and creative worlds, characters, and attractions. Yet, in creating the food menu for Galaxy’s Edge, the corporation appropriated food of the oppressed for consumption of the wealthy. In an attempt at

⁴ In the United States, the term “ethnic” is often used to describe foods deemed as foreign, exotic, and strange—and very often reserved for those foods cooked by non-white Americans. However, as Stuart Hall contends, “the term ethnicity acknowledges place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity” (447). With this in mind and for the purposes of this essay, I will be using the term ethnic to describe foods whose cultures the dominant US culture fails to acknowledge and too often degrade, which actively perpetuates a range of violences.

diversity, the Imagineers behind the dishes troped ethnic cuisine as foreign, strange, and not Disney-like. One of the dishes to be featured on the menu at Galaxy's Edge is the Felucian Garden Spread, which appears to be falafel, hummus, pita and Israeli salad, most likely inspired by the design team's "conflict" tour through Jerusalem. On Galaxy's Edge menu, the dish is described as "meatless meatballs, with herb hummus, tomato-cucumber salad, and a pita bread" (Breznican). For many Middle Eastern people, and specifically in Israel, falafel, hummus, and Israeli salad have been eaten and served for centuries, while all three being served in a pita has been a street food staple since the creation of street food in Israel. Since all are made with relatively cheap ingredients, these foods have made it possible for Israelis to open their own restaurants as immigrants in new nations, make a living, and thrive in new cultures (Marks). According to *Wookieepedia*, the planet of Felucia, which the dish derives from, is "in the Outer Rim Territories [and] despite its perceived insignificance, its important location and resources led to several conflicts both in orbit and on the surface" ("Felucia"). This description of Felucia when paired with its similarities in cuisine, creates a startling comparison to Israel, its "perceived insignificance" and its centuries long conflict. Here, Disney's copying of Israeli food, steals and colonizes the nation's culture and culinary history. The signature dish at the restaurant Ronto Roasters in Galaxy's Edge is the Ronto Wrap, which in its promotional photo is stylized to look like a taco. The wrap is described as "barbecue pork accompanied by grilled sausage and coleslaw on a chalupa," (Breznican). The "chalupa," which in Mexico is made using masa and fried in a skillet, instead looks suspiciously like the pita used for the Felucian Garden Salad (Tatum 451). While the Ronto Roaster is intentionally designed to look like Mexican cuisine in order to appear

diverse, its lack of consideration for actual Mexican cuisine and culture delinks it from its original context. The menu also features Smoked Kaadu Ribs, named to contain kaadu—“creatures native and indigenous to the planet of Naboo”—meat or as the description explains, “barbecue pork ribs with blueberry corn bread,” as well as Yobshrimp Noodle Salad, described as “shrimp with marinated arrowroot noodle salad,” but suggested to contain the Star Wars shrimp, yobshrimp (Breznican). All of the foods featured at Galaxy’s Edge are named to appear authentically in-world to Star Wars yet are delinked from the real-world cultures and culinary dishes that inspired them, or even the ingredients they contain.

The most notable and recognizable food in the Star Wars galaxy is blue milk, which has been featured in Star Wars media since the original film. According to *Wookieepedia*, blue milk is extracted from banthas, which are large mammals in the galaxy used for transportation, and originally featured in *A New Hope* (1977) (“Bantha”). The beverage is notably only drunk on “Outer Rim planets,” or impoverished third-world spaces (“Blue milk”). While the 1977 film never visualizes who is doing the labor to extract the blue milk from the banthas and the production process behind the milk is never disclosed, at Galaxy’s Edge, blue milk is demystified when its recipe is revealed. The blue milk at Galaxy’s Edge is “plant-based dairy—essentially rice milk [. . .] and it’s soft-frozen, like a milkshake” as well as “sweetened and infused with berry and melon flavors” (Breznican). While the blue milk in the film apparently comes from an animal like our own cow’s or goat’s milk, the ingredient list provided by Galaxy’s Edge reveals its similarities to horchata, the Central American beverage made with plant-based milk and ground rice. In Mexico and Guatemala, horchata is sweetened with vanilla and

cinnamon and served as a refreshing drink with lunch or dinner. In the United States, horchata is frequently found on the menus of immigrant-owned Mexican or Latin American restaurants (Goldstein 341). However, at Galaxy's Edge, blue milk is delinked from the ethnic food it derives from and exoticized for its novelty, strangeness, and foreignness.

By using existing food items of “foreign,” ethnic cultures for the culinary customs of fictional war-torn planets, Disney's new theme park can be understood as a site of neocolonial violence. In “Eating Ethnic: Cross-Racial Encounters, Cosmopolitan Whiteness and the Senses, 1964-Present” (2018), John M Burdick discusses the ways that White Americans have used eating to articulate racial difference and construct identity through merging supremacy of Whiteness with a willingness to engage with non-Anglo foreign cultures—an articulation of Whiteness that is predicated on the appropriation of immigrant groups. Food—Burdick maintains—is a safe way for White Americans to experience racialized cultures. Disney's Star Wars has deracinated and transformed ethnic cultural foods into “authentic” Batuuian food. While creating a supposedly fictional galaxy of adventure and excitement, the park's creators simultaneously exoticized the cultures of real-world countries, people, and food. By choosing to gather their appropriations from countries in “the Orient” (Turkey, Morocco, Jerusalem), Disney participates in a new, corporate form of Orientalism. Edward Said defines Orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient” (9). This Western domination is accomplished by misrepresenting people and societies in The Orient as undeveloped and unevolved. Disney's representation of “authentic” Batuuian food Orientalizes the cultures they steal from. The cultural definition of “authentic”

ethnic cuisine is constructed through the identification of racialized Otherness which also implies the de-racialization of Western consumers (11).

This project looks at the representations of food consumption across the Star Wars multimedia galaxy. Through exploring the menus circulating inside the Galaxy's Edge theme park alongside Galaxy's Edge tie-in novels, comic books, and the Galaxy's Edge Official Cookbook, I place the ways in which Disney participates in the violences of neocolonialism, racism, and patriarchy through its representations of food and consumption. While this paper mostly concentrates on Galaxy's Edge and its tie-in media to think about food and colonialism in a galaxy far, far away, I first want to turn to the original 1977 film *A New Hope* to highlight how food and colonialism have been an animating ideology from the onset. In section two, I explore the Galaxy's Edge themed cookbook, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge: The Official Black Spire Outpost Cookbook* (2019) which continues the neocolonial world-building project that Disney began by creating and exoticizing foods around a third-world aesthetic, as well as Zoraida Cardova's young-adult novel *A Crash of Fate* (2019), which takes place on Batuu and explores the planet's food production as well as Galaxy's Edge's restaurants. From there, I turn to Delilah S. Dawson's novel *Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire* (2019) which critiques globalized industrial food systems through demolishing Disney's exoticizing world-building. In conjunction with these current forms of media, I argue that food has been a site of colonial signification since the origin of the franchise with 1977's *A New Hope*.

“LIKE JUNK FOOD FOR THE MIND”: DISSONANT FOOD PRODUCTION IN *STAR WARS*

Through multiple drafts, what became known as *Star Wars* (1977) progresses and reimagines a universe with diverse creatures and unfamiliar customs. Yet, while filmmaker George Lucas successfully envisions some aspects of a distant and far-off galaxy, many important other aspects of his own culture still subsist in the fictitious universe. This section explores how food in the *Star Wars* galaxy is a site of sexist and imperial relations. While the following sections will analyze how food is inextricable from questions of empire, this section will complicate this argument by turning more explicitly to gender. Rather than fetishize the film as a finished product, I wish to investigate the ways in which previous drafts of the film’s script and the film’s novelization form a nexus and expand our understanding of the fictional galaxy. If we read *Star Wars* in relation to previous drafts, the novelization, and the ideology and culture it was written in, we can analyze the film in its final form as well as its unfinished form. Through focusing this reading specifically on food in the galaxy, Lucas’s limited political imagination becomes evident. The eating, producing, and preparation of food in *Star Wars* can be analyzed to display the film’s ideological discourse.

While *Star Wars* has been credited for its progressive treatment of women in creating a strong female character in Princess Leia, the film is unaware of the necessary labor of women to the social production and reproduction of material conditions. The film’s protagonist Luke Skywalker is raised and cared for by his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru. Aunt Beru’s primary role in the film is caregiver and food producer. In fact, the

viewer only sees Aunt Beru in the kitchen preparing food, in the dining area serving food, or in the courtyard of their home, among the plants that provide their food. Lucas's imagination for food's creativity does not seem to extend to food's production. In the many drafts of his story, Lucas conjures up strange and unique means of sustenance for his characters. In the script's first draft, Luke's family eats their vegetables with "thanta sauce" and "bum-bum extract," while by the second draft they're drinking "blue milk" and Han Solo is served "a steaming bowl of Boma-mush" (*Starkiller*). As the drafts continue, each character undergoes a multitude of reimaginings. Their personalities, duties, even genders change. However, although Lucas is able to progress his story and characters through creativity and imagination, Aunt Beru remains static throughout multiple drafts. When describing her in the film's novelization, the *Star Wars* ghostwriter Alan Dean Foster writes: "Beru was not a brilliant woman, but she possessed an instinctive understanding of her important position in this household. She functioned like the damping rods in a nuclear reactor" (Lucas 52). Here, Aunt Beru is reduced to the function she provides as the 'damping rod' to minimize her husband's rage. What the film suggests, and the novel makes explicit, is that Aunt Beru's "important position" in the household is not a provider for her family but a buffer between her husband and the young man she raised from a child. In both the film and the novel, she remains physically fixed in the kitchen and dining area and ideologically fixed in 1970's America.

The film, novelization, and screenplays all continually mention and detail the process of moisture farming, which is understood as important and necessary for the galaxy. Luke and his uncle's role as moisture farmers is imperative for the desert planet they inhabit, as moisture cannot be taken from the ground but must be extracted from the

atmosphere. While this is important work, Aunt Beru's growing and cooking of food is equally important to their survival. However, her labor is not noticed or recognized in the film. In a landscape setting that is mostly sand and machines, the greenery provided by plants distinctly stands out in the first shot we see of Aunt Beru. Around the family's home, tall stalks of greenery dotted with edible plants for the family line the home's courtyard. Aunt Beru stands among the plants, tending to them. Later in the film, she is seen preparing food in the kitchen and serving the family their meal in the dining area. These instances are seen but not vocalized, and Aunt Beru's labor is never mentioned as the integral part of their survival that it is.

This representation is complicated, however, in the novelization of the film. As the novel depicts Luke contemplating leaving the farm, he looks over a desert landscape and is able to envision a near future where "soon, for the first time, those sands would blossom with food plants. The former wasteland would see an eruption of green" (Lucas 56). Luke's uncle is so hopeful about the future harvest, he believes they will be able to grow an entire new farm of edible plants from the current desert land. For Luke's uncle, his excitement over the harvest is monetary--for the "prospect of having a lot of money for the first time in his life" (Lucas 56). In previous drafts of the script, a more malicious Uncle Owen tells Luke: "Your father's dead. Don't ever forget who's taking care of you, giving you food, giving you shelter, and giving you the allowance in the first place" (*Starkiller*). Aunt Beru disagrees with her husband about how to care for Luke, but her opinion does not count, nor is she included in who is "giving food" and "giving shelter" to Luke. While Aunt Beru's support of the family is through her ability to provide love and sustenance, Uncle Owen's support is through monetary means, which both the film

and novel display as a more significant method of support.

Just as the film reveals its limited imagination when ideologically situating Aunt Beru in patriarchal 1970's America, the film also lacks the ability to envision a progressive world for the droids and the importance of their labor. Luke and his family reside on the desert planet of Tatooine where no obvious large-scale food production is visible or possible. Yet, when Luke, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Threepio and Artoo travel to the city of Mos Eisley and visit the Cantina, alcoholic beverages abound. Beverages of any kind would of course require large amounts of moisture, while alcohol would require even more in order to grow the fruits, vegetables, or grains required to create it through fermentation. While the clientele at the bar is a somewhat diverse, rowdy group of humans and aliens, the workers are a homogeneous group of men, who exclude droids from their establishment. As the quartet enters the bar, the owner yells at Luke "We don't serve their kind in here," pointing out Artoo and Threepio, the droids in Luke's company (Lucas 92). The bar thrives with an assorted group of alien figures, yet "mechanicals" or "inorganics" are not allowed to be served. The establishment seems to have no shortage of alcoholic beverages to go around, yet the labor that produces that alcohol is not only concealed but prohibited from being seen. Through Uncle Owen and Luke's earlier conversation, we have learned that the moisture vaporator droids are responsible for farming the air for moisture and extracting it from the atmosphere. Without these droids, the bar could not exist, and moreover, human or alien life on the planet could not exist. Yet, the droids that allow for the bar's business to flourish are disallowed from patronizing the establishment.

Just as the film is unaware of the necessary labor of women and droids, so too is the film unaware of the geographical and imperialist conditions. As I will show in later sections, this blindness in 1977 will continue into 2019 and the opening of Galaxy's Edge theme park. The scenes depicting Tatooine are filmed in the African desert country of Tunisia and borrows its name from the Tunisian city of Tataouine (Taylor 151). While Lucas's script was written before the crew visited Tunisia, the filming location does inform the film, and in many certain ways, opens it up for criticism. Tatooine is described in the *Star Wars* novelization as "a big hunk of nothing," "a forsaken place" and "a rock" (Lucas 20,23,29). The degrading manner that the land is spoken of, paired with the appropriated name Tatooine, creates a disturbing link between the fictional planet and the real, inhabited country that the film is shot in. The planet's colonizers and visitors speak begrudgingly of the desert land while the planet's indigenous jawas and Tusken Raiders are not given a discernible language with which to communicate to viewers. The land that Lucas chose to use and the structures that comprise the setting are structures that already existed in Tunisia. Traditionally, they were homes belonging to the Berbers, the indigenous people of Tunisia. The Berbers today wear colorful robes, but traditionally wore long, dark-colored cloaks with pointed hoods to protect them from the sun and heat, looking suspiciously close to the jawas of *Star Wars* fame. Similar to the film's treatment of the land, the jawas are also degraded in the film and its novelization, being described as "quasi-human migrants," "extraordinarily ugly" and "bipedal vermin" (Lucas 37, 38). Growing up in the Berber community, Mahboub Theouibi describes her own childhood home, relating its sense of community: "Brothers lived in the same room, cousins in another . . . Each room had a purpose." She points to a small room accessible only by

ladder, where the family stored food, and a stone for milling grains. ‘Everything was made by hand,’ she says” (“Star Wars”). Theouibi recalls her childhood as happy “despite hardships such as carrying water by camel from a far-off spring and the daily search for food” (“Star Wars”). While the Indigenous Berbers forged for food and water every day while living in the desert, technology makes this an easier task in the film, as droids can extract water literally from mid-air. Further, the cast and crew behind the scenes were able to have all the food and water they needed shipped into them from the closest city, displaying the harsh dichotomy between the two groups’ experiences inhabiting this desert land. The Berbers may have been forced to leave their homes years before the filming of *Star Wars* in search of an easier way of life, but the depiction of their culture and the appropriation of their homes and communities continues on through the film.

While in the film, Tunisia appears to be composed entirely of sand and desert, in reality, the coastal country’s shores have fertile, productive land. Today, 22 percent of the country’s labor force is in agriculture and twenty percent of the land is used for farming (“Tunisia – Agricultural Sector”). Tunisia gained its independence from France in 1956, just 21 years before *Star Wars* was released in theaters (“Tunisia Gains...”). In 1964, Tunisia’s newly independent government instituted socialist programs to help the country succeed without help from their former colonizers. One of these programs was the farm cooperatives, which granted ownership of all farmable land to Tunisian people for food production. Because of these cooperatives, Tunisia has been able to build a successful agricultural industry and is one of the leading producers of olive oil. Their olive oil is exported to countries like Spain and Italy, who re-bottle and re-label the olive oil,

exporting it as their own and rendering Tunisian labor invisible (“Tunisia’s Olive Farming Under Threat”). Rather than relying on industrial farming, Tunisia’s agricultural land is made up of small farms that use little or no pesticides or fertilizers although their precarious rainfall makes farming difficult. Floods and droughts caused by climate change has made farming even more strenuous, as the country’s shores are the only fertile land. Water scarcity is worse for Tunisians who live in rural areas, as water that has been tapped for recreational use is more available to city dwellers and must be hauled in from long distances to rural areas (Parsons). What the *Star Wars* films have done for Tunisia, is offer the country another industry through film tourism. For decades, Tunisian citizens were able to make a living renting out rooms in Berber homes and selling food and souvenirs to visiting *Star Wars* fans. However, war and “terrorism have all but destroyed Tunisian tourism and the thriving film industry that helped produce three of the six *Star Wars* films” (Cordall). In 2015, Tahar Kerig, Tunisian citizen and George Lucas’s personal driver said of the dwindling tourism: “It would be good if the Americans and Europeans came back. It’s very peaceful here” (Cordall). Today, agriculture is the primary industry in Tunisia and with worsening droughts, most inhabitants have either left to move towards the country’s shores or continue to live in deep poverty. For many years, *Star Wars* and its production provided the Tunisian people with jobs and new opportunities, yet the film has also possibly caused damage to the country through its depiction of Tunisia as a monolithic deserted landscape.

Where Tunisia and Tatooine compare, is the importance of women in agriculture, as well as the disregard for their labor. Anthropologists observing social and cultural relations in Tunisia in the 1960s found that women’s roles were restricted to domestic

duties while men completed all field work (Latrille 601). However, according to Martin Latrille, in his article “Honor, The Gender Division of Labor, and the Status of Women in Rural Tunisia—A Social Organizational Reading” (2008), women have longed played an important role in Tunisian agriculture (601). Many Tunisian women have worked as farm laborers or sharecroppers, yet these roles have been considered dishonorable for women to hold. Moreover, their essential role of reproducing and sustaining material conditions has been considered unrelated to and separate from the agricultural labor that the country relies on. While using their landscapes to make his film, Lucas disregarded or appropriated most of Tunisian culture. Yet, the patriarchal ideology he continued to preserve.

Star Wars continues to be an incredibly influential and significant franchise with millions of adoring fans. This alone makes it a credible target for criticism and examination. Yet, its creator George Lucas has said: “The people who are saying ‘it’s nothing, it’s junk food for the mind’ are reacting to the people saying, ‘this is the greatest thing since popcorn!’” . . . “Both of them are wrong. It’s just a movie. You watch it and you enjoy it . . . like a sunset. You don’t have to worry about the significance. You just say ‘hey, that was great’” (Taylor 259). I can certainly appreciate an entertaining film for entertainment’s sake, and I can definitely appreciate the greatness of popcorn, but unfortunately for Lucas, he has no say in how his film is received, or the meaning that viewers take from it. Whether or not Lucas intended for *Star Wars* to be what it has turned out to be is irrelevant. The film is contradictory not because of the creator or the viewers’ reading of the film’s meaning but because of the film’s relationship to its ideological origins. For *Star Wars*, its relationship to its ideological origins is

demonstrated through its inclusion of “blue milks” and “Bama-mushes” as well as its exclusion of the labor and cultures that created them.

EDIBLE EXOTIFICATION: COLONIZING FOODS OF THE EXOTIC OTHER

While Disney theme parks have always been a space of storytelling, Galaxy's Edge made that storytelling multi-media. Every character, every landscape, and every culinary dish has a backstory and a narrative. *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge: The Official Black Spire Outpost Cookbook* (2019) by Chelsea Monroe-Cassel and Marc Sumerak extends this project into recipe form. Narrated from the point of view of Strono Tuggs—an Artiodac from the Mid Rim planet of Takodana—whose nickname is “Cookie,” the book is at once a catalog of recipes, as well as a history lesson in Batuu’s galaxied foodways.⁵ The introduction of the cookbook follows Cookie’s beginnings as a budding gastronome to his current position as a successful chef running his own “food transport” (Star Wars speak for food truck) on the Outer Rim. As the narrative explains, after the restaurant he worked for as head chef was destroyed by the First Order, Cookie explored the Outer Rim in search of new flavors and studying local delicacies to pilfer “strange new spices, meats, and veg” from worlds he had never seen before, and filling his pantry with “exotic foods from dozens of systems,” for new recipe ideas (10). Cookie notes that “not all of them were winners, mind you. Some worlds have native cuisines that I’m not sure even a rathtar could digest. But even the worst dishes taught me something new about how to combine flavors—or, in some cases, how not to” (10). The “rathtar” that Cookie references is, according to *Wookieepedia*, “regarded as one of the most dangerous beasts in the galaxy” (“Rathtar”). First appearing in the film *Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens* (2015), director J.J. Adam is responsible for their establishment in the galaxy,

⁵ “Artiodacs were a fearsome-looking sentient species native to the planet Artiod Minor with tough hides, bulging arms, and deep, rumbling voices” (“Artiodac”).

but countless novels, films, toys, and comics have featured them since. (“Rathtar”). This in-galaxy reference serves as a linguistic signifier to Star Wars fans, maintaining the illusion of authenticity. Like the aesthetic signifiers in the theme park, all Galaxy’s Edge media must maintain the in-world barriers. Cookie is originally from a Mid Rim planet himself, which are generally more industrialized than the Outer Rim, although less economically affluent than the Core Worlds. His travels to the impoverished planets of the Outer Rim, searching for newer, more exciting cultures and “exotic” food and spices to exploit and steal from for monetary gain, is a form of colonialism—a colonial attitude and practice. Cookie’s attitude about native cuisines that he deems undigestible and “strange” establishes him, as well as his food, as somehow superior. From Cookie’s perspective, the Outer Rim planets he steals from are an inferior, third-world space. Right from the introduction of Galaxy’s Edge fictionalized cookbook, the narrative of Batuu is one of appropriating and profiting from the foods and cultures of the exotic Other.

While Cookie’s language attempts to signify a certain amount of respect and admiration for Batuu and Batuan people and culture, it does so with a patronizing and condescending gaze. He asserts that Batuu has been overlooked for too long as a location to live and work, yet describes the land as having a “rustic charm” and Batuan locals as being an “unsavory lot” who “at least always have an appetite” (12). Rather than Cookie identifying himself as one of them, he instead identifies what he can gain from them. He explains that he always docks at Black Spire Outpost, the center marketplace of the planet and a salient part of the theme park, because of its “easy access to fresh crops and exotic meats from the surrounding rural zones” (15). He also maintains that by parking his food stand at the edge of the busy market, “local vendors can hawk their wares, givin’

me access to fresh, local ingredients and my guests somethin' interestin' to gawk at while they dine" (18). By indicating that his guests are "gawking" at the local vendors, Cookie also establishes that his guests are not locals themselves, but are instead tourists to the planet of Batuu, analogous to Disney tourists visiting Galaxy's Edge. By placing his food stand in the market, he appears local and authentic to his off-world consumer-base from more industrialized spaces. The "gawking" Cookie describes can be seen as an exoticizing gaze at people in cultures with local and agricultural reliant markets, not unlike bazaars in many Middle Eastern countries, street markets in Asian countries, or even Chinatowns in the United States, which often serve as a kind of local tourism for White—ostensibly unethnic—Americans. Exploring Chinatowns specifically, Carla Almeida Santos, Yaniv, Belhassen, Kellee Caton explain that "tourism is a cultural site where hegemonic ideas about the superiority of the tourist's culture and the inferiority of the Other are manifested" (1010). Rather than eating and socializing with the local Batuan people and vendors, Cookie's customer base is presumably there to experience and "gawk" at the exotic Other.

In Zoraida Cordova's young-adult tie-in novel *A Crash of Fate* (2019), protagonist Izzy becomes one of Cookie's off-world customers when she is taken to his restaurant by her friend and Batuan local, Jules. The narrative quickly transforms into an advertisement for Cookie's Galaxy's Edge restaurant, Docking Bay Seven, as Izzy and Jules gush over the "fried Endorian tip-yip," which is "delicious, even cold" (111). Translated to English, "fried Endorian tip-yip" is simply fried chicken ("Endorian"). However, referring to it as such would break the illusion of world-making authenticity, as would revealing the recipe for "moof juice" which is presented as something strange

that Cookie concocted, and Izzy calls “pleasantly sweet and creamy” (112). According to the ingredients list at Galaxy’s Edge, moof juice is fruit punch, orange juice, and pineapple juice (“Moof Juice”). Disney’s commitment to world-building and authenticity is extended to the Expanded Universe, where authors become participants in the world-building, as well as pawns for advertisement purposes. Cookie also appears in Cordova’s novel, where he tells Izzy about his past experiences with the First Order. However, while the cookbook depicts this occurrence as something normal and every day, Cordova offers Cookie the space to process the trauma and anger, as well as grants Izzy revolutionary fervor and empathy in response. These two different perspectives on a single occurrence reveal the paradoxical ways that Disney’s commitment to world-building can be capitalized on. While Cordova positions Cookie as a victim to the First Order’s violences, cookbook authors Sumerak and Monroe-Cassel perpetuate Disney’s neocolonial project, making Cookie a participant in their colonial practices.

While Cookie employs local Batuuans at his food stand, he condescends to them and places them in a hierarchical labor structure. He says, “While I always bring along my own team of galaxy-class sous-chefs to staff the kitchen, I’ve come to rely on Batuu natives to run service in the front of the house. Thankfully, these locals are pros. They’ve seen plenty of food freighters come and go over the years, so they know how to adapt quick to new menus and big personalities. They’re some of the most efficient and courteous folks I’ve ever worked with, and they always treat my customers with the same respect that they show me” (18). By hiring Batuuans for front of the house jobs, Cookie has created an illusion of being authentic and local while still employing what he deems as “galaxy-class” chefs to do the actual cooking. By creating this facade, Cookie is

successful at appealing to customers from more “civilized” planets in search of an authentic Batuan experience, all the while exoticizing and Othering actual Batuan people and culture.

While Cookie’s restaurant establishes an exoticizing gaze that colonizes the culture and foods of the exotic Other, the recipes he provides creates a direct link to cuisines of real-world cultures. One such recipe features “Golden lichen,” which is described in Galaxy’s Edge media as a local delicacy found only on Batuu and is often used in cooking, decorating, and as a dye for clothing. Cookie cites the luxurious garnish as one of the reasons he continues to make Batuu his culinary home. It is also mentioned prominently in both Galaxy’s Edge tie-in novels and is speckled over artificial trees throughout the theme park. In the cookbook, however, the golden lichen used to make “Golden Lichen Tuile” is revealed to be turmeric. Turmeric is a diverse, cultural staple in India, but in Batuu’s logic, the colonized word and its cultures are silenced and remade into a fetishized form of “newness.” Turmeric’s origins can be traced back nearly 4,000 years ago to India where it was already being used as a spice for food, a dye for clothing, as well as religious rituals for Hindu people (Prasad). India still produces nearly all turmeric used across the world today, and consumes most of it as well. In India, turmeric is often used medicinally as a remedy, as a beauty product for women, and even in wedding rituals to keep harmful bacteria away (Prasad). Also like golden lichen, turmeric has been of much interest to colonizers throughout its history. Along with cinnamon, cassia, cardamom, ginger, and pepper; turmeric was a large part of the spice trade which began in the 15th century at arguably the beginning of globalization (Henriques). In order to capitalize on the spice trade market, wealthier and more powerful countries—such as

Portugal, Netherlands, and England—began colonizing Middle Eastern countries that had the climate for spices to grow and cultivate (Henriques). This led to hundreds of years of war and violent colonial rule for India, with spices being the catalyst. As Michael Dietler explains, “contemporary foodways and identities are in large measure the product of a long history of colonial encounters. Reciprocally, food has been a consistently prominent material medium for the enactment of colonialism” (Dietler 218). As the spice trade exemplifies, food has historically been an impetus for colonialism. This colonialism has assumed a new form today, whether that be through globalized food production that exploits workers in countries where certain foods are cultivated, or by more affluent Westerners under the guise of tourism and adventure. In the modern world, turmeric has been appropriated by the West as a trendy super-food for its medicinal properties, but white-washed from its cultural history. As food activist Javeri Kadri notes, the cultivation of turmeric “relied on enslaved people to grow, harvest, and transport goods” during European colonization, but that has been “completely scrubbed out of Westerners’ consciousness” (Krishna). Kadri also says that while technically colonization in India and the spice trade are over, its effects remain and have assumed a new form of economic control—neocolonialism. She explains: “The vast majority of the money from spice cultivation goes into the hands of corporate food companies and various middlemen, while farmers in India aren’t fairly compensated” (Krishna). Disney continues this neocolonial project when it brands turmeric as “golden lichen,” removing the spice from its home context, history, and culture.

Turmeric lattes have been popularized by Western yoga-culture and Gwyneth Paltrow’s health and wellness media conglomerate, goop (Sen). Many Indian and Indian-

Americans have voiced their opposition to the discourse around the beverage, noting its disconnect from its Indian origins in calling the drink “golden mylk,” as it is typically referred to in coffee shops and food blogs. As Mayukh Sen phrases it in his article “How Indian is Your Turmeric Latte?” (2017) “the drink may as well have come from space” (Sen). For many who grew up in Indian households, haldi doodh, or turmeric milk, is a medicinal tool used to treat a variety of ailments⁶ (Sen). Capitalizing on the trend, Galaxy’s Edge has their own version of a turmeric latte, which Cookie calls “Sunrise Caf” (167). Consisting of “an unusual spice blend” of coffee, milk, cream, and turmeric, the beverage is further divorced from its Indian origins, instead placing it in a galaxy far, far away (167).

While turmeric is the only named spice in Galaxy’s Edge, almost all the cookbook’s recipes and ingredients have their roots in colonized spaces here on Earth. Originating in India, Garam masala is used in many recipes in the cookbook, including in the recipe for “Saka Salt,” in which it is mixed with salt to make one of Kat Saka’s “signature flavor combos” (29). Back in The Milky Way galaxy, garam masala is a blend of spices that originated in Northern India. In Hindi, it translates to “hot spices,” not for its spiciness but for its warmth (van Wyk 30). While most garam masala blends contain some variation of the same spices and herbs, no specific blend is considered authentic. Rather than buying pre-blended, pre-ground garam masala, most Indian families create their own based on their preferences in flavor intensity and balance (van Wyk 30). However, none of this is evident in Galaxy’s Edge, where it is delinked from its origins. Instead, the credit for garam masala is given to Kat Saka, whose aesthetic and background further

⁶ As Mayukh Sen also points out, this is not true for all regions of India.

Orientalizes her and the spices she sells. Kat is a native Batuan and farmer. She is also the only Batuan that is illustrated wearing a head covering, which strongly resembles a hijab—the head covering worn publicly by many Muslim women. Yet, although Kat’s aesthetic is stolen from real-world cultures, her narrative is divorced from anything of this galaxy, exoticizing Kat and the food she creates.

While the recipes that make up the cookbook attempt to appear other-worldly in title and description, the ingredients, images, and descriptions link many of them to real-world countries and colonial foodways. In a recipe entitled “Tatooine Terrine,” the description Cookie provides is familiar to a dish we might find on Earth, yet nothing like a “terrine”—a French dish of molded diced meats—which the title suggests. Cookie relates: “Cookin’ in low-moisture environments ain’t easy. After all, to make a soup, you gotta have liquid. On most worlds, that ain’t much of a problem, but on desert planets like Tatooine, every single drop of water counts. A quality vaporator can usually collect enough moisture out of the arid air, but it’ll take a day’s harvest to fill a decent pot. Fortunately, this tasty terrine maximizes the moisture in the dish by drawin’ extra juices from a special breed of mushrooms that grows right in the vaporator’s excess condensation” (75). The recipe that follows, paired with the picture that prefaces the recipe, is clearly a Moroccan tagine, complete with the required conical shaped pot. By titling the dish with the qualifier “Tatooine,” the recipe suggests to Star Wars fans that the dish is derived from the planet of Tatooine, where fans first meet Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope* (1977), rather than Morocco, where the dish actually derives from. As Victoria Pettersen Lance argues, “the power to remove products of material culture from one specific context to another [. . .] is an important tool for maintaining Euro-American

hegemony” (55). By using all the ingredients and signifiers of the dish, yet divorcing it from its intended culture, history, and even its name, Disney solidifies the dish’s fictional status, making it so that consumers can more easily exoticize the affixed culture.

DISMANTLING NEOCOLONIAL FANTASIES AT THE EDGE OF THE GALAXY

World-building can be a mechanism to imagine and construct a more progressive, socially just and equal community outside of the violences of capitalism, patriarchy, and White supremacy. Activist groups, Indigenous people, people of color, artists, and authors have used world-building to conceptualize and work towards a radically different, socially just future (Streeby 148). However, world-building is also deeply connected to colonization and settler colonialism. As Allison Kavey explains in her book *World-Building and the Early Modern Imagination* (2010), “Explorers and colonialists built their own worlds, [. . .] employing a rich historical tapestry of ethnographic descriptions of the people they encountered to make sense of alien cultures” (2). This colonial world-building extends to the contemporary world in the form of neocolonialism. Today, world-building is employed by corporations like Disney as a strategy for financial gain. In anticipation of the opening of Galaxy’s Edge, Disney commissioned authors to write tie-in media such as young adult novels and comics to enhance the world building of Batuu, the planet that grounds the Galaxy’s Edge theme park. Delilah S. Dawson, author of the short stories “The Perfect Weapon” and “Scorched” for the fan magazine *Star Wars Insider*, as well as *Phasma* (2017) for the book series “Journey to *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*,” a tie-in novel for the film-forward franchise, was enlisted by Lucasfilm for the multi-media project centered around the theme park. From a critical vantage, authors of tie-in novels are afforded more freedom than the creators of the films. Without immense pressure of exorbitant film budgets and box office profitability that the films have to contend with, authors are given more creative control and are able to represent more

diverse narratives. The expanded universe unfolding in print media often focuses on different, unknown, or new characters than the films do, and the storylines are often more progressive and deal with more complex themes. While promoting her book *Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire* (2019), Dawson told *SYFY WIRE*, “I felt like this was a book where we had to deal with things we don’t see in *Star Wars*, insofar as people dealing with heavy trauma” (Spry). Along with giving space to explore the lasting impacts of trauma stemming from the violent events depicted in the movies, Dawson also offers the *Star Wars* universe its first woman-of-color lead. The protagonist for both of Dawson’s *Star Wars* novels is Vi Moradi, a woman described as having “burnished brown skin,” a demographic overwhelmingly underrepresented in the galaxy (Dawson 4)⁷. Dawson’s introduction of Vi has also given Disney theme parks their second Black interactive, walk-around character.⁸ The only other being Princess Tiana—star of *The Princess and the Frog* (2009)—Vi offers another possibility for young African-American fans and visitors to see themselves represented inside the parks (“Character Experiences”).

Despite having some autonomy to play in the *Star Wars* sandbox, however, authors do not have complete control nor unrestricted creativity over their projects. Dawson admits such when she tells *SYFY WIRE* that she was told by Lucasfilm executives overseeing the projects: “Don’t use this person or that person, take out this ship [. . .]” (Spry). Tie-in novels like Dawson’s *Black Spire* exist as two genres simultaneously: a novel and a tourist book serving as advertisement for Disney’s theme

⁷ See also: *Star Wars: Phasma* (2017) by Delilah S. Dawson.

⁸ Victoria Pettersen Lantz calls this representation “The Live Body”: A representation of a fictional character embodied by a living human actor (Lantz 56-59).

park. While Dawson is listed as the novel's author, it is important to keep in mind that the Walt Disney Corporation can be understood as a contributor, and even a co-author.

Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire takes place on Batuu and begins as *Star Wars* heroine General Leia Organa herself has sent Resistance spy and *Black Spire* protagonist Vi Moradi and her team to the planet as a potential outpost for the Resistance (8). The appeal of Batuu for the resistance is its invisibility and perceived insignificance. The planet is so far away from the Core Worlds that the First Order has yet to reach it. Leia explains to Vi: "To them, Batuu seems strategically useless. But to us, it's another spark of hope" (8). The hope for the Resistance is a safe place to collect ships, food, and fuel, as well as recruit more members for the Resistance. In different ways, both Vi and the First Order perceive Batuu as a forgotten, neglected space. The planet exists literally on the galaxy's edge, or "the last stop before wild space," while to those at the center of modernity—the Core Worlds—Batuu exists outside of civilization (*Disney Twenty-Three*). As early as their first announcement for Galaxy's Edge in 2015, Disney established its "remote" location, stating that "guests can travel to a never-before-seen planet and check out a remote trading port, one of the last stops before wild space, to help drive the Millennium Falcon" (*Disney Twenty-Three*). For Disney, the invented marginal status of Batuu is part of its appeal, where wealthier tourists can invade and colonize impoverished spaces as a colonial fantasy.

The population of Batuu is mostly clustered around Black Spire Outpost: the center marketplace of the planet where most of the economic activity takes place, as well as the focal point of the theme park at Galaxy's Edge. The Outpost consists, as Dawson's narration explains, of "local farmers, merchants, usual actors in the sort of not-quite-

savory economy that tended to grow around a spaceport” (34). Here, Dawson—and Disney—aestheticize the planet of Batuu around an informal, underdeveloped, “not-quite-savory” economy, furthering its exotification of developing countries, a vast, global spanning designation in which “93 per cent of the world’s informal employment” takes place (“Nearly...”). Disney Imagineer and creative executive Scott Trowbridge articulates the corporation’s cultural colonization when he explained that the “exotic markets of Istanbul and Marrakech” were “a great source of inspiration for the marketplace in our village” (“X-Wings...”). By linking Batuu’s unsavory marketplace to the bazaars of Turkey and Morocco, Disney exoticizes these cultures as underdeveloped. This exotification continues as Vi describes the marketplace as a place “where she could exchange credits for goods farmed or crafted by callused hands and taste food one step away from nature,” and where “people chatted with neighbors, wove on lap looms, or ground grains into masa and worn stones” and sold “handwoven baskets of fresh vegetables and fruit and mounds of powdered spices” (47).

Vi’s preoccupation with her food being “one step away from nature” suggests that food she regularly eats outside of Batuu, or outside of the Outer Rim, is further removed from where it is grown. According to *Wookieepedia*, this is a result of Star Wars’ galaxied foodways, which makes some planets strictly food producers, and some planets—mostly in the Core World or Inner Rim—strictly food consumers. The planets that exist solely for the purpose of supplying more affluent, urban planets with food are called “agriworlds,” as they are “devoted completely to agriculture” (“Agriworld”). These planets are scattered throughout the galaxy for easier access and are populated entirely by farmworkers and their families. They export produce and edible goods to

planets like Coruscant, “the capital world of the galaxy, as well as other ecumenopoleis” (planets that are covered entirely by cityscape and have no living ecosystem) (“Ecumenopoleis”). All of the agriworld planets are under the control of colonizers or corporations, with eighteen of them being controlled by a single company (“Agriworld”). While Batuu is not considered an agriworld as it does have other industries, it also does not regularly import foods grown outside of the planet, which are more often exported to wealthy Core Worlds without the infrastructure to grow their own. However, while Batuuans may be eating “one step away from nature,” guests to Galaxy’s Edge are not. Rather, Disney is relying on a colonial fantasy of rural, third-world spaces being somehow delinked from globalized food production.

Tourism is a form of escapism for people to experience places and cultures outside of their own culture, but tourism is also a performance and a “quest for an evasive authenticity” (Edensor 543). Borrowing from Dean MacCannell, Tim Edensor suggests that tourists “are searching for more ‘real’ experiences, perhaps by visiting non-Western cultures they understand as ‘traditional.’ However, they are doomed only to find a ‘staged authenticity’” (Edensor 543)⁹. This quest for “authentic” and “real” experiences extends to food, where tourists often participate in the fantasy of eating local and native cuisine. While they may be eating ingredients or dishes often found in the region they are visiting, “local” is often an illusion. Rather than sourcing from local farms; hotels, resorts, and tourist destinations commonly rely on imported goods (Telfer). As paradoxical as it is, barriers placed around our globalized food systems ensure that it is cheaper, more convenient, and more reliable to import foods from around the world than to source

⁹ For more on tourism as performance, see Dean MacCannell’s *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976).

locally (Telfer). Yet, tourists continue to seek out this fantasy of a local and authentic culinary experience, fetishizing the foods of developing countries as being closer to nature. As Disney participates in this natural fetishization of “natural” through their production of Batuu, so too does the corporation participate in primitivism¹⁰, supposing that developing nations exist outside of modernity and beyond civilization (Lovejoy).

While there is no concrete way of knowing what scenes and events have been shaped by Disney’s corporate influence, Dawson’s voice at times seems to be motivated by an outside authority. The book often coheres to Disney’s neocolonial project, while at times is critical of colonial structures of racism, sexism, and capitalism. As Vi walks through the Outpost, the plot begins to read less like a novel and more like an advertisement for Galaxy’s Edge restaurants. After she buys a shawl to help “fit in” with the locals, she smells “fresh meat, roasted with exactly the right spices by a culinary genius” (50). Here, the word “genius” negates the skills, work, and effort put into cooking in favor of a natural talent, perpetuating and participating in primitivism, where it is assumed cooking is not the result of training but an inherent gift, bestowed by being at one with nature. Dawson then describes the inside of “Ronto Roasters—a local favorite,” recounting exactly what a tourist would see when they visited Galaxy’s Edge theme park: “The meat was being roasted under the engine of a podracer” while “a smelting droid¹¹ watched the meat and turned the spit” (50). Vi even orders the “ronto wrap,” which she describes as meat made from ronto—a large desert animals native to the planet of Tatooine, the primary planet in *A New Hope* (1997 Special Edition)—

¹⁰ For more on primitivism, see *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (1935), by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas and *Literary Primitivism* (2017) by Ben Etherington.

¹¹ Smelter Droid: “A type of droid designed to work in the harsh confines of ore-extraction facilities” (“Smelter droid”).

wrapped in flatbread made in-house by “old women” (“Ronto” 50). This is not Dawson’s invention. Rather, as explored earlier, the Ronto Wrap is featured prominently at the Ronto Roaster’s at Galaxy’s Edge theme park. But there, tourists who ordered a Ronto Wrap would receive: “Roasted Pork, Grilled Pork Sausage, Peppercorn Sauce, and Tangy Slaw wrapped in Pita Bread” (“Ronto Roasters”). By naming menu items like the “Ronto Wrap” after in-world signifiers rather than their real-world inspirations or even ingredients, Disney occludes what the dishes are actually made of in favor of their neocolonial world-building that projects primitivist attitudes on to developing nations.

Still, Disney does not completely colonize the narrative. In section one, I discussed how the original *Star Wars* film treats droids as replaceable, interchangeable beings. However, Dawson changes this narrative. Her seemingly obligatory descriptions of the Galaxy’s Edge restaurant Ronto Roasters is interrupted by moments of critical work as she makes visible the labor that Galaxy’s Edge obscures. Dawson gives agency to the droid, who at the theme park mindlessly rotates the ronto meat, saying that Vi noticed him “muttering cheerfully to himself about his prospects for a more glamorous life,” while also recognizing the “old women” laborers responsible for the flat bread (50). In *Star Wars* media, droids are essentially robots, beings with artificial intelligence. According to *Wookieepedia*, they are “used in a variety of roles and environments, often those considered too menial or too dangerous for humans and other species” (“Droid”). Dawson, however, offers the smelter droid an inner life with aspirations, challenging Disney’s hierarchical narrative that confines the droid to “menial” or “dangerous” labor. While Disney mystifies the food, the meat, and the labor in the name of world-building, Dawson demystifies the ronto wrap’s material history.

Vi's primary objective while on Batuu is to set up an outpost for the Resistance. In order to do so, she needs to recruit new members, which proves to be difficult not because Batuuans are against the Resistance or support the First Order but because they are indifferent to either. Batuuans are aware of their perceived insignificance outside of the Outer Rim, so they imagine themselves as outside of Inner Rim and Core World politics. To Batuu, the struggle between The First Order and the Resistance doesn't seem to affect them. The First Order has largely forgotten about Batuu so an alternative, autocratic government has developed led by Oga Garra, a violent crime boss. While Oga is a tyrannical ruler, Batuuans are largely content with their position, as no one is "starving or begging or sick" (119). Food, or lack thereof, is shown to be the divider between Outer Rim planets that are susceptible to the First Order's control and those that are not. As Vi explains, "People with no hope, with no homes or food, are weaker and easier to control" (165). Vi's fellow Resistor and former Stormtrooper, Archex, relates how starving children would look at Stormtroopers like gods because they'd "never seen so much food and water in their lives" (70). Vi's frequent attempts to convince Batuuian citizens of their subjugated position often fail. While as a resistance spy, Vi has seen closely the realities of the First Order's violences, Batuu's remote distance has detached them from Core World politics, leaving them vulnerable. Vi's objective becomes not just to recruit members of the Resistance but to create an alliance with similarly marked outsiders.

Vi's working-class consciousness is demonstrated when she realizes that she should recruit from working-class Batuuans, like "farmworkers and dockworkers" rather than the farm owners and entrepreneurs, who she sees as either being too loyal to Oga or

having too much to lose (60). In order to earn credits to support herself and her companions, she takes a job at a junkyard. Vi is shocked by the humane treatment of the workers by their boss, Savi, and even unsettled by how “unusually clean” and “pleasant” the crew is “for folk who worked in a junkyard” (89). For Vi, it is impossible to imagine workers being happy and cared for and labor being fulfilling. For Batuan citizens, resistance is employers like Savi giving their workers free lunch and water and breaks in opposition to Oga’s tyrannical control over the planet. As native Batuan and junkyard owner Savi explains: “We can only wait and watch and listen, not guide. We hold a candle but will not light any fuse. We do protect the balance but not by shifting the scales” (294). While Vi can only presently recognize the need to fight physically, Batuan citizens see resistance in all its forms.

Within the unlikely space of the corporate-commissioned novel, Dawson finds moments of critical resistance. The First Order is undeniably a villain in all Star Wars media, but rather than make Stormtroopers faceless, heartless droids, Dawson instead makes a structural critique of capitalism through the First Order. When the First Order arrives on Batuu, one officer turns down food offered to him because “all the local foods looked rampant with sugar, salt, and spices. He vastly preferred his bland First Order rations” (309). While Vi may take pleasure in eating food “one step away from nature,” The First Order sees the food and spices as primitive, as well as the labor that goes into producing it. Stormtroopers such as the officer above are accustomed to getting their food from agriworlds, where the labor and laborers are made invisible. Here, Dawson utilizes the tropes of the First Order to critique the globalized industrial food system that obscures the violences of food production. She further intervenes in Disney’s colonial project

when she critiques capitalism's control over working bodies. Archex is a former Stormtrooper turned Resistance member and his injuries are so great that they keep him from fighting or working, although he cooks for the Resistance members daily and keeps the outpost running. To compensate, he carves trinkets out of wood to sell in the marketplace until Vi tells him: "You're worth is not measured by what you produce" (125). Although Archex's culinary and domestic labor is equally or more important to the Resistance as any other labor, his time in the First Order has socialized him into believing it isn't valuable. This viewpoint is also extended to the entire planet of Batuu and its perceived use value. The First Order's comprehension that the planet is insignificant is because of its lack of order and industry. It has no "mines, prison systems, orphanages, shipyards," and instead is "taken over by vegetation," and is populated by "parasites like simple farmers, shopkeepers, filthy smugglers" (131). The First Order can be seen as an allegory of the violences of capitalism and its insistence on constant production and consumption. While Disney's commitment to world building narratives and aesthetics in many ways perpetuates Western colonialism, it also allows the space for authors like Dawson to reveal the damages.

CONCLUSION

In *Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope* (1977), filmmaker George Lucas's imagination was in many ways ideologically limited by the culture that surrounded him. However, contemporary fans and followers of his work have subsequently been able to expand on his blind spots with their own, more diverse reimaginings of the galaxy that Lucas created. In addition to Zoraida Córdova and Delilah S. Dawson's work building a more progressive Galaxy's Edge, other texts in the Star Wars Expanded Universe have entered the galaxy, then transformed it. I want to end my project by turning to an author and postcolonial thinker who has written within the franchise from her own prospective, and in doing so, revealed the colonial relations at play within the *Star Wars* galaxy. In Nnedi Okorafor's short story, "The Baptist," featured in the anthology of short stories, *Star Wars: From a Certain Point of View* (2017), Okorafor relates a portion of the widely popular film from the point of view of Omi, the Dianoga or "trash monster" that threatens the life of Luke Skywalker in *A New Hope*. Okorafor is a Nigerian-American author, known best for her writing and work in Africanfuturism, which the author defines as "a sub-category of science fiction" that "is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people) and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa" (Okorafor). Embedded within Africanfuturism's imaginings of the future is a critique of the violences of the past and present. In "The Baptist," Okorafor makes this critique using narratives of food and consumption.

The Dianoga depicted in the film is a vicious monster, something that must be defeated in order to save the film's true heroes. However, Okorafor has empathy for the creature, giving it dimensionality, a back story, and an identity. Through Okorafor's story, we not only see the monster and its story as more complicated than originally presented, but begin to question who the villain really is.

In Star Wars mythology, the Dianoga species voluntarily "migrated from Voldran by stowing away aboard garbage ships," are regarded as a "nuisance" for nesting in sewage systems or other "appalling liquid that they could locate," and are "considered a threat, especially in urban areas such as Galactic City on Coruscant" ("Dianoga"). Their presence in bodies of water were considered an "infestation" and the creatures were killed when found, their flesh used to make "dianoga pie" and their spleens used to make "Dianogan tea" ("Dianoga"). Okorafor's story seems to address each of these descriptions directly, reimagining the Dianoga as a victim of horrendous violence at the hands of colonizers, rather than the "urban infestation" that the mythology positions them as.

While the Star Wars-canon online encyclopedia *Wookieepedia* limits the Dianoga's usefulness to their ability to become food to feed humans, Okorafor's story focuses on food and its connection to the Dianoga's identity and culture—and the potential loss of that identity and culture when Dianogas are captured and enslaved. In an interview in 2015, Okorafor said of her own identity: "Being raised as a Nigerian American is all over my work. That hybridity, the conflicts, the similarities—the fusion of those two cultures combining and conflicting" (Wabuke). In "The Baptist," Okorafor allegorizes her Nigerian American identity through the Dianoga, connecting the character metaphorically

to the transatlantic slave trade and its lasting trauma on enslaved people and their descendants. Okorafor's work also demonstrates an interest in food and its connection to one's identity and culture. In an interview in March 2018 while talking about food in Africa, Okorafor says, "food is so important . . . food is often the representation of culture and people" (Jao). Food for Nigerian Americans has an especially complicated past as it has been both a connection to their culture and a site of violence and brutality. In "The Baptist," Okorafor uses food to celebrate her African heritage while also challenging the violent American legacy of slavery.

In Okorafor's contribution to *Star Wars: From a Certain Point of View*, the Dianoga, named Omi, is not voluntarily migrating to another planet as the *Wookieepedia* page describes, but rather, is violently captured and stolen from her home by Vodrans. While she is traveling in a container on their ship, they feed her dried fish, which angers Omi. The narrator explains that "It was the taste of this fish that stoked Omi's already heated anger enough to make her escape attempt. Back home, everything had flavor, juices, salt, the spice of food the fish had eaten in their bellies. But these people kidnapped her and then fed her food that was an insult" (321). Omi is taken from her home in the middle of the night, put in a cage aboard a ship, and fed food, presumably what no one else would eat, and only enough to keep her alive. While Omi is determined to live, the food they give her only makes her miss her home more, and it is the bland, unfamiliar food that makes her attempt an escape from her container. Food for Omi is directly connected to her identity, culture, and home. Though she is not physically hungry, she remains spiritually starved for the sense of home that her cultural food provides.

Omi is eventually able to find and make herself a habitat in the garbage chute, the only place on the ship with “organic matter.” While in the container she is given food from her abductors, in the garbage chute she is able to turn the scraps into something resembling food from her home planet. On many slave ships traveling across the Atlantic, enslaved people were given “horse beans in slimy sauce” that many refused to eat. Often the ship captains would take indigenous African foods along with the enslaved people such as “yams,” “millet, rice, and black-eyed peas” to feed the slaves on the journey across the Atlantic, as a way to “maximize the survival of the human ‘commodities’ they forcibly migrated to plantation societies” (Carney 26). While these foods resembled the foods from their home, they were likely not prepared or cooked in any distinguishable way, but rather in whatever method was quickest and easiest. Those who refused to eat were beaten or had their mouths forced open “with a metal device that worked like a car jack,” so as not to lose lives, and consequently profits, from the sale of the enslaved Africans (Civitello 134). If food or water supply ran low because of unexpected weather conditions, starving people were thrown overboard, often still alive, as their deaths would be covered by insurance. Once sold and living on a plantation, enslaved people were fed as cheaply as possible with leftover scraps from the plantation owners. Usually, “weekly food rations—corn meal, lard, some meat, molasses, peas, greens, and flour—were distributed every Saturday” (Boston). The rations alone “were not nutritionally sound and could lead to ailments, including scurvy and rickets” (Boston). As a way to supplement their diets, many slaves planted vegetable patches around their quarters, using seeds brought over from Africa. These plants were initially disregarded by plantation owners who dismissed them as “slave food,” and therefore could be used solely by the enslaved

Africans to “ward off hunger, diversify their diet, reinstate customary food preferences, and to treat illness” (Carney 30). These food plants not only increased their chances of survival, but also connected them to their home and reunited them with their culture. In “The Baptist,” Omi is similarly able to reconnect with her home planet through her self-reliant food production. Though both have faced unimaginable violence and brutality, Omi and enslaved African people gain some semblance of home, health, and happiness through food. In this way, food becomes a site of agency and resistance, while still signifying the violence of slavery.

While Omi is able to make herself some semblance of home in the garbage chute of the ship, she is still on a “dead planet,” “a planet that was small and made of materials that would never know life” (327). She is living in a space where the other beings dump their refuse and where she is treated as waste. Her life in the garbage chute is happier because it allows for autonomy and freedom from her oppressors, but she is still away from her home and carrying the legacy of her abduction. For African Americans, this legacy is sustained through the continued systemic violent treatment of Black people in the United States, who continue to have less access to food and clean water than White Americans. Through food, Okorafor critiques America’s history of slavery and its continued impact on African Americans, while also celebrating African culture and its contributions.

Popular culture franchises such as Disney and Star Wars often reveal the power structures and ideologies that make up the cultures that they are produced in. While the Star Wars multi-media franchise and its mythological, world-building enterprise continues to, in many ways, uphold the racist, patriarchal, heteronormative, colonizing

ideologies of this world, progressive authors such as Córdova, Dawson, Okorafor, and many others with a different point of view occupy and critique the franchise from within. In other words, they enter the galaxy—and bite back.

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