

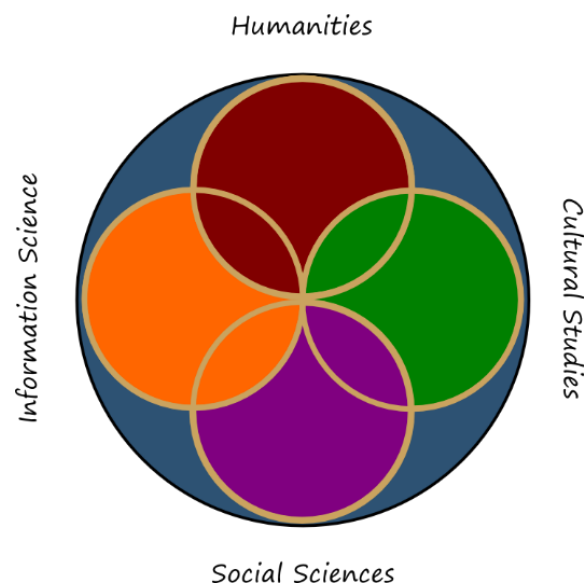
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Intergenerational Trauma and Culinary Psychogeography: Jhumpa Lahiri's Multigenerational Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how intergenerational trauma studies, food practices, and psychogeographic theory converge in Jhumpa Lahiri's fiction, introducing the term "culinary psychogeography" as an interpretive lens. Close reading of *The Namesake*, *The Lowland*, and selected stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* reveals how food practices act simultaneously as archives of inherited trauma and as vehicles for psychological repair over successive immigrant generations. The study integrates trauma theory, food studies, and psychogeographic criticism to demonstrate that domestic culinary zones—most notably the kitchen—function as emotionally charged landscapes wherein traumatic memory is both inherited and reframed. The analysis shows that specific cooking rituals, techniques of food preparation, and shared dining practices generate intricate psychogeographic maps that spatially and temporally intersect characters, allowing for the retention and reconstruction of wounded cultural memory. The findings enhance ongoing scholarship on trauma transmission in diasporic fiction and establish culinary psychogeography as an effective analytical instrument for uncovering the spatial complexities of memory and recuperation in immigrant storytelling.

Keywords: *intergenerational trauma, culinary psychogeography, Jhumpa Lahiri, food studies, cultural memory, diaspora literature*

Intergenerational Trauma and Culinary Psychogeography: Jhumpa Lahiri's Multigenerational Narratives

Jeetendra Nagorao Deshmukh

The meeting point of trauma studies and culinary practice in contemporary immigrant fiction constitutes a distinct and only partly charted terrain for literary analysis. While trauma transmission in diaspora writing has attracted wide critical attention and scholars have catalogued the emblematic role of food in cultural identity, the intersection of these strands has yet to receive sustained appraisal. This study advances the hypothesis of “culinary psychogeography,” a term describing the emotional mapping performed by food practices as they traverse familial generations. Jhumpa Lahiri’s multigenerational fiction offers a particularly fertile arena, for her narratives consistently expose the entangled temporality of memory, the sedimentation of trauma, the structuration of space, and the formulation of culinary identity in immigrant households (Zubair 3134).

Initial trauma scholarship, charted by Cathy Caruth and fortified by psychoanalytic models, oriented itself toward the immediate psychic fallout of catastrophic events (Balaev 146). Recent advances, however, have redescribed trauma as a transgenerational phenomenon, with Marianne Hirsch’s “postmemory” illuminating the mechanisms by which events the second generation has never witnessed nonetheless imprint upon its subjectivity (Zubair 3136). Concurrently, food studies have illuminated culinary practice as a force for transmitting memory, securing identity, and forging communal bonds, findings especially salient in diasporic settings (Kumar 173).

This study responds directly to an acknowledged deficiency in current scholarship by introducing an integrated theoretical framework that merges trauma studies with psychogeographical analysis. It investigates how food practices generate emotional cartographies that mediate both healing and the transmission of memory. Psychogeography, as articulated initially by Guy Debord, denotes the analysis of the subtle laws and diverse effects exerted by an environment—whether deliberately configured or not—upon individual mood and conduct. When this dimension is oriented toward domestic culinary settings, it exposes kitchens and dining rooms as multi-layered emotional territories in which intergenerational trauma is simultaneously archived and circumvented, creating conditions for potential resolution.

The study theorizes that Lahiri's oeuvre illustrates culinary practices as intricate mechanisms by which intergenerational trauma is both conveyed and negotiated. These practices draw psychogeographical networks that secure cultural memory even while opening corridors for healing that traverse generational divides. A close examination of particular culinary vignettes, ritualized cooking episodes, and the micro-space of the kitchen in Lahiri's texts demonstrates that food is, to borrow Strand's term, "concretized trauma" (153) while simultaneously furnishing routes toward psychological recuperation and the preservation of cultural continuity.

Literature Review

The prevailing body of critical literature on Jhumpa Lahiri has concentrated on the dynamics of diaspora, cultural hybridity, and the transformation of identity within postcolonial paradigms (Kumar 172). Scholars have systematically traced the trajectories of Lahiri's characters as they negotiate the immigrant condition, illuminating the tensions of belonging, the pain of displacement, and the tensions of cultural assimilation. Within this corpus, food imagery has commanded sustained attention, with researchers arguing that culinary rituals serve both as badges of ethnic identity and as conduits of longing for lost homelands.

Nevertheless, the prevailing scholarly consensus tends to construe food as a fixed emblem of cultural purity, neglecting its fluid capacities to mediate the intergenerational transfer of trauma and the recuperative rituals that may counteract that transfer. Following Kumar's assertion that "culinary preferences can foreground the problem of 'not-belonging'" (173), few studies have traced how those preferences simultaneously enact subtle processes of healing across family lineages. Moreover, a spatial reading of Lahiri's domestic geographies has yet to mature, with kitchens being understudied as sites that coalesce memory, injury, and identity within materially imbued, psychologically charged boundaries.

Trauma Studies in Literary Criticism

Since its articulation in the 1990s, the multidisciplinary body called trauma studies within literary criticism has sharpened its analytic orientations, transcending earlier emphases on the traumatic event's purported "unspeakability" to confront the informed variety of affective, temporal, and contextual frames whereby extreme events imprint consciousness and culture (Balaev 146). Current theoretical trajectories acknowledge that trauma can be apprehended and assimilated through diverse modalities, including literary account, ritualized beholding, and somatic memory, insisting upon the coevalness of representation and reparation.

Central to these efforts has been Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, which elucidates how descendants of survivors can, without having witnessed the original violence, bear affective and mnemonic burdens whose prototypes they nevertheless assimilate from archival testimonies, familial stories, and visual traces (Zubair 3136). The heuristic permits a fine-grained reading of second-generation immigrant texts by mapping how the earlier generation's psychical injuries transpose into seemingly intact yet emotionally saturated life narratives that nevertheless index fractures of the preceding past.

Scholars are now redirecting attention from the quasi-clinical to the collective, reconceptualizing trauma not solely in terms of individual pathology but as a transmission circuit that implicates social structures and cultural memory. Investigations of inherited traumas in diaspora communities, for example, have foregrounded how narratives of armed conflict, communal eviction, and wartime displacement circulate through ritualized mourning, collective folklore, and somatic performativity, ensuring that the survivors' injuries animate the life worlds of the succeeding generation without the mediation of direct witness (Strand 149).

Food Studies and Psychogeography

Food studies scholarship has established that culinary practices are pivotal to identity formation, cultural continuity, and communal solidarity. Quantitative and qualitative work has illustrated that "food and cooking can function both as a vehicle and as a remedy for intergenerational trauma" (Strand 153), indicating that culinary enactments are layered, fraught therapeutic processes. Analyses of immigrant populations reveal that cooking scripts facilitate "the adaptation of their native culinary habits, as well as the adoption of new eating habits," while nonetheless anchoring individuals to their cultural provenance (Saadat 424).

In diaspora studies, the brand of "culinary nostalgia" has gained traction, with scholars documenting how immigrants "fulfill such feelings as nostalgia, homesickness" through the production, consumption, and ritualized preparation of dishes redolent of their homelands (Smart 157). Yet the extant literature has not sufficiently interrogated how these nostalgic repetitions might also operate concurrently as mechanisms for the reworking and integration of traumatic memories.

Psychogeographical theory provides a nuanced lens for investigating the intersection of space and emotional experience. Current psychogeographical studies focus on the interplay of silence and dialogue in particular spatial constellations, thereby demonstrating how built environments modulate psychological conditions. When this approach is

directed toward domestic settings, it reveals the kitchen as a crucible of emotional charge and mnemonic resurgence.

Theoretical Framework

The present study distills a methodological synthesis of trauma studies, food studies, and psychogeography to explore how culinary practices delineate emotional geographies in Lahiri's oeuvre. This triangulation allows the analysis to register food practices both as sites where trauma is inscribed and as arenas where recuperative labour is performed.

From trauma studies, the foundation is Hirsch's postmemory model, which the analysis extends by foregrounding the corporeal vectors through which traumatic knowledge circulates across generations. Whereas postmemory is often framed in terms of narrative, this study insists on the significance of gesture, flavour, and routine. Here, "Familial and Affiliative Postmemory" delineates the dual modality of transmission: intimate, through immediate kin, and expansive, through cultural and communal memory-sharing networks (Zubair 3136).

The framework integrates scholarship from food studies that interprets culinary practices as multivalent cultural texts. Meal preparation, consumption rituals, and the orchestration of the domestic kitchen are conceived as "techniques of nearness" that "draw the magic of the past" into the lived present while simultaneously authorizing novel cultural negotiations (Kumar 173). Through this lens, the act of cooking is reclassified as generative cultural labor rather than mere custodianship of inherited forms.

Rooted in Debord's initial assertions and recent iterations, the inquiry explores how domestic culinary environments delineate emotional geographies that modulate psychological states and trigger mnemonic activation. Kitchen spaces are scrutinized as arenas where "the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment" exert measurable influence upon characters' affective inclinations and behavioral trajectories.

The conjoined frameworks yield the heuristic of "culinary psychogeography": an analytic matrix that delineates the emotional terrains forged by alimentary practices and that simultaneously permits the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the redemptive potential of healing across the intersecting axes of space and time.

Culinary Trauma Inheritance

Lahiri's stories consistently reveal how traumatic histories crystallize in the everyday ritual of cooking, materializing the phenomenon Strand names "concretized trauma" through food (153). Affected subjects reproduce

suffering in the kitchen by transmitting three interrelated mechanisms: the vocational gestures, the food preferences that emerge from privation, and the ceremonial routines that carry the affective weight of earlier wounds.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima's kitchen becomes a cryospheric archive of her emigration's centrifugal violence and the aching rupture of cultural intimacy. Each moment dedicated to spices and tempering in her Cambridge apartment does not merely safeguard a cuisine; it translates dislocation into actionable memory. The narrator's unsentimental scalpel reads every gesture: the kneading, the measured pinch, the hovering pause—gestures rehearsed lonelier still in exile, gestures that outperform memory by encoding affective distortion into the food. The fragrance of mustard seeds frying, once a sensory delight, becomes the mnemonic residuum of rupture; the bite of the lentil soup, a remembrance of rationed childhood. The everyday practice is thus stripped of sheer nostalgia; it becomes a crucible where the subject is simultaneously fortified and undermined, rehearsing trauma anew in the rhythm of flame and measurement.

Gogol's circumscribed yet charged engagement with Bengali food during adolescence and early adulthood illustrates the intergenerational circulation of culinary trauma. His avowed distaste for his mother's cooking exceeds the latitudinal posturing of adolescence and stands as a deliberate repudiation of the dislocation that these culinary practices bear. The psychic load of these inherited food memories appears in his visceral aversion to Bengali restaurants and his settled taste for American food, disclosing an unarticulated awareness of the traumatic residue packed within his cultural gastronomic inheritance.

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* delivers yet clearer instances of political trauma sedimented within acts of eating. Subhash's recollections of rice at the table shared with Udayan before his brother's plunge into the Naxalite insurgency acquire thereafter the load of subsequent bloodletting and absence. The unpretentious distribution of rice thereby thickens into a record of irrevocable alteration, serving as the lingering, textural relay of a domestic space that once harbored unqualified innocence. The novel declares with merciless clarity that quotidian repasts can morph into persistent loci of traumatic fixation, wherein the taste of loss is rehabilitated repeatedly through the drag of sensory recollection.

Gauri's withdrawal from the cooking rituals she once embodied seems to carry the weight of generational trauma rather than straightforward sorrow. After Udayan's assassination, the very act of grinding spices or rolling out luchis becomes unbearable, severing her link to the nurturing identity she once cherished. The rupture is inheritable, passing to Bela, who grows up a stranger

to the kitchen rhythms of her ancestors; the absence signals how traumatic loss reformulates the cultural inheritance usually passed through everyday meals.

Jhumpa Lahiri's story "Mrs. Sen's" offers a careful investigation of how culinary practice becomes a vessel for unresolved injury. Mrs. Sen's fixated sequencing of the fish—scaling, soaking, frying—points to more than a longing for Calcutta; it signals a defense against the chaos of her uprooting. When Mrs. Sen instructs Eliot about the precise way to cut the tail or the ideal swirl of the mustard oil, she exorcises the rupture by moralizing it, transforming injury into a lesson. Those gestures of memory ultimately gesture to a collective kitchen that the colonial present has unreachable; the fish, momentarily liberated in oil, carries the weight of a diaspora that has settled into her hands like the long, clean skeleton left behind.

Psychogeographical Mapping of Kitchen Spaces

The domestic kitchens inhabiting Lahiri's narratives emerge as intricate emotional geographies wherein the residue of trauma intersects daily tasks, a phenomenon here termed "culinary psychogeography." These environments adhere to a logic drawn from memory and affect rather than utilitarian function; the choreography of objects and movement therein both reveals and modulates the inner lives of the inhabitants.

The Namesake's Ashima enacts her diasporic exile within a Cambridge kitchen meticulously choreographed to contain the shock of separation. Its layout—specific corporate bins of masalas, allocated recesses for the sharp-edged instruments of familiarity, and ritualized routes between fire and counter—fabricate a habitable zone within the foreign. These fixed points and habitual gestures perform a defense against cultural void; they instantiate a territory where the sensory and the mnemonic coalesce, giving currency to Strand's paired observation that food and cooking embody a "dual nature—at once concrete and abstract, material and symbolic" (153).

The narrator's sustained focus on Ashima's movement across the kitchen reveals the psychogeographical weight of the space. Her fluid choreography—an almost choreographed sequence of reaching, measuring, and stirring—illuminates an atlas of micro-locations: the precise shelf height of the mustard oil, the nook for the besan, the angle of the countertop against the ceiling lamp. This intimate choreography, wreathed in a familiar light, stands in stark contrast to her hesitance in shops, subways, and university hallways, where the angle of a stranger's gaze feels like a new spice she cannot identify. Because the kitchen, for Ashima, bends to her body's memory and the rhythms of her recipes, it qualifies as a psychogeographical zone of adventure. Here, amid the clatter of pressure cookers and the quiet patience of simmering daal,

cultural work—identity, memory, choice—can occur, even when the larger city presses the immigrant subject toward fraying and marginality.

Memory, in these kitchen-oriented stories, is an affective geography, mapping the soul through the precisely measured pocket of air beside the stove. In each text, characters encounter involuntary memory through a triad of sensory inflections. The first is a volatile cloud of asafoetida that hitches a ride on an open window and scalds the present with a flash of childhood knees beneath a verandah. The second is the staccato rhythm of a knife against a cutting board, which paradoxically punctuates silence and contracts the kitchen's temporal space toward a family-market cadence. The third is the silver-toned clang of the steel karahi, which refracts beneath the sink light and briefly overlays the kitchen with an ancestral map of midnight feasts and reprimanding grandmothers. Each instance ruptures the linearity of migration, propelling the subject backward—or upward—into a simultaneity of previous selves and lost, intimate topographies.

The Lowland illustrates how kitchen environments become contested terrains of both traumatic avoidance and engagement. Following Udayan's death, Gauri's retreat from culinary practices signals a psychogeographical fracture, recasting a once-nurturing site of marital fusion and cultural transmission into a zone saturated with intolerable grief. That the kitchen, once suffused with shared gestures and familial recipes, now constrains Gauri's routines reveals how domestic geographies can, with a gradual logic of preservation, transform into places of exclusion mandated by the desire for psychic survival.

Shifting kitchen architectures across generations underscores a second register of culinary psychogeography. Bela's configuration of the North American kitchen, with its novel layout and mechanized aids, does not erase familial precedents but reorganizes them into a landscape that is simultaneously continuous and ruptured. Her culinary lab inherits the emotional residue of Gauri's subtly mourned routines and, by offsetting them against glass-fronted cabinets and energy-conscious appliances, articulates a mobile emotional geography of diaspora. In this way, the very change of countertops and votives enacts a wider cultural negotiation while preserving the ghostly contours of inherited grief.

Surveying these kitchens hence allows one to discern how effective geographies operate at overlapping scales. The siting of a butcher block, the alignment of a spice jar, and the calibration of a thermometer yield microtopographies of recollection, yet their distribution within the overall dwell autography—configured against the hush of the corridor or the thrum of the stairwell—recalls larger dynamics of cultural translation and psychic

accommodation. The domestic sphere, therefore, is revealed not merely as a backdrop to individual recipes but as a lattice where memory, migration, and the heaviness of unfruitful longing are ceaselessly reheated.

Food as Healing Mechanism

While Lahiri's tales reveal how food preparation can crystallize the burdens of intergenerational trauma, they also chronicle the same activities as agents of psychological repair and cultural revival. This study terms the process whereby traumatic legacies are assimilated and potentially alleviated through cooking "culinary therapeutics." Such practices, originally custodians of sorrow, are recast as crucibles for psychological restoration.

Healing manifests as characters forge altered attachments to ancestral dishes. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's late embrace of Bengali flavor during his affair with Moushumi transcends mere wistfulness; it signals an inner preparedness to confront, rather than flee, the buried anguish he long skirted. His rediscovery of once-repulsed spices becomes an index of maturation whereby inherited grief, once sealed behind tapas, enters a zone where it may be elaborated and released.

The remedial power of cooking is clearest in scenes where characters—grandparents, cousins, lovers—gather at the stove. Such collective enactments, recurring in Lahiri's oeuvre, permit words unsaid in therapy to surface amid the rise of steam and the scrape of the ladle. The rhythms of chopping and stirring bind separate layers of the psyche, enabling trauma to circulate and dilute in communal broth, a feat solitary reflection alone can seldom manage.

The Lowland illustrates how food preparation becomes a subtle medium for confronting survivor's guilt and the intricacies of grief. Subhash's steady embrace of the cooking duties once routinely managed by his mother signifies more than the demands of daily sustenance; it initiates a form of deliberate psychological labor. By assuming the nurturing role, Subhash deliberately enters the circuits of memory that link his present self with the phantom of his brother. As he learns to recreate the dishes that Udayan once relished, he engages in what might be called a private liturgy of remembrance, one that merges grief work with the slow redrafting of identity. Each cut of the knife, each fragrant seasoning, becomes a dialogic encounter in which loss and the survivor negotiate the terms of coexistence.

The narrative "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" illustrates how communal repasts can carve out restorative moments for the communal processing of collective trauma. The recurrent dinners that unite Lilia's household with Mr. Pirzada turn the dining table into a provisional site for confronting the rumblings of political violence raging in distant Bengal. Within

the predictable choreography of serving and eating, both the adults and the children articulate, albeit obliquely, the anxieties that the news reports can only abbreviate. The carefully defined rhythm of the meals fashions a temporary enclave of order and intimacy, a bulwark against the numbing uncertainties that otherwise encroach. Within this circumscribed geography of food and talk, reminders of rupture transform into weak signals of psychological resilience, allowing grief and horror to be metabolized in manageable, digestible portions.

The healing capacities of culinary practice are inextricably linked to the intergenerational transmission of cooking competencies. When elder figures impart traditional recipes and techniques to younger kin, the exchange becomes an act of cultural transfer whereby the raw material of trauma is metamorphosed into cultural capital. This pedagogical moment allows both the elder and the youth to renegotiate their attachment to cultural artefacts once burdened by traumatic memory, re-framing said artefacts as repositories of generational wisdom.

Key to Lahiri's explorations is the assertion that culinary practice possesses the power to forge emergent cultural identities that neither merely perpetuate the inherited tradition nor entirely sever cultural ties. Characters who re-engineer customary dishes—altering ingredients, recalibrating cooking modalities, or fusing disparate culinary heritages—perform an act of imaginative cultural labour in which the imprints of inherited trauma are reconstituted as a durable cultural vivacity and an abiding psychological fortitude.

Discussion

The present analysis indicates that culinary psychogeography in Lahiri's narrative cycle doubles as a vehicle for the transmission and the alleviation of trauma amidst her multigenerational immigrant families. The three focal domains—inheritance of culinary trauma, psychogeographical delineation of kitchen space, and the role of food in recuperative practice—collectively illustrate the ambivalent yet generative capacities that food customs embody when immigrant subjects confront the residues of intergenerational suffering.

Taken together, the results advance the proposition that acts of cooking may be understood as what trauma theorists, following Winnicott, might term "transitional phenomena." These enacted rituals allow subjects to oscillate between the interior imperatives of the psyche and the exterior exigencies of culture. Within the act of preparing and sharing food, narrative subjects both acknowledge the weight of inherited cultural duties and elaborate novel modalities of self-assertion and creative re-authorization. Such a duplex

efficacy cultivates a psychological elasticity that eludes both a reductively preservative pedagogical posture and a totalizing assimilative outcome.

The psychogeographical emphasis of the inquiry further demonstrates that domestic interiors qualify as emotionally stratified environments that condition trauma remediation in ways beyond the reach of conventional clinical frameworks. The axial organization, olfactory topography, and rhythmic choreography of kitchen life generate structured occasions for mnemonic reactivation, affective articulation, and integrative processing, thereby enlarging the register within which cultural adaptation ordinarily is understood. These space-embedded processes both intersect with and amplify more publicly enacted stratagems of adaptation, troubling the distinction between private memory and collective cultural negotiation.

The implications of these findings reach beyond literary criticism to propose refined methodologies for examining trauma mediation within immigrant communities. The observation that routine domestic chores can perform advanced psychological work indicates that clinical practice may be enhanced by deliberately integrating culturally specific habits and the domestic architecture that already offers restorative potential for the populations under study.

The argument further clarifies that intergenerational trauma circulates not through explicit storytelling or overt psychological exchange, but through the enfolded routines and spatial configurations that structure daily life. Accordingly, effective trauma remediation may demand a concerted focus on material conditions, architectural layouts, and embodied rituals, rather than the exclusive reliance on dialogic therapeutic modalities.

Conclusion

This research has established that Jhumpa Lahiri's multigenerational tales articulate complex mechanisms through which culinary practices double as containers of inherited trauma and as conduits for psychological repair. The cultivation of culinary psychogeography as an interpretive framework contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of how emotional topographies are constructed and traversed within the ostensibly banal labor of home cooking.

The study deepens trauma studies by revealing how traumatic memories become interwoven with cultural practices so that they can be both archived and altered across generations. Lahiri's narratives argue that cultural conservation and psychological repair need not be at odds; when individuals engage creatively with ancestral cultural forms, they can achieve both continuity and change at once.

Mapping psychogeographical dimensions, the analysis shows that domestic interiors serve as richly layered emotional arenas that condition the experience and assimilation of trauma. In particular, kitchens, far from being merely utilitarian, are deliberately configured emotional geographies that promote specific kinds of memory labour and cultural renegotiation.

For the general field of literary study, the research formulates culinary psychogeography as an effective interdisciplinary lens that sheds light on previously overlooked facets of immigrant writing. By integrating spatial critique, trauma theory, and food studies, the framework discloses how cultural memory circulates not only through narratives but through material practices and the arrangement of environments.

The findings invite scholars, clinicians, and community organisers alike to reconsider resilience and healing within immigrant groups. By affirming that culinary rituals fulfil intricate psychological roles, they argue for community-based programmes that leverage already available cultural resources rather than relying on externally devised therapeutic protocols.

Future inquiry could productively expand this analytical frame to additional immigrant authors, explore the role of digital platforms in reshaping the transmission of culinary cultural memory, or analyze the constraining effects of climate change and food scarcity on the sustaining rituals of traditional foodways within diasporic identities. Operating within the construct of culinary psychogeography, such studies would reinforce an interdisciplinary foundation for probing the intricate entanglements of trauma, cultural memory, spatial displacement, and therapeutic re-creation in the literature of the modern global diaspora.

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