



Choux Questionnaire: Ian Mosby

A riff on [the well-riffed Proust Questionnaire](#), the CFS Choux Questionnaire is meant to elicit a tasty and perhaps surprising experience, framed within a seemingly humble exterior. (And yes, some questions have a bit more craquelin than others.) Straightforward on their own, the queries combined start to form a celebratory pyramid of extravagance. How that composite croquembouche is assembled and taken apart, however, is up to the respondents and readers to determine. Respondents are invited to answer as many questions as they choose.

The final question posed—*What question would you add to this questionnaire?*—prompts each respondent to incorporate their own inquisitive biome into the mix, feeding a forever renewed starter culture for future participants.

Our Choux Questionnaire respondent for this issue is Ian Mosby. He is a historian at Toronto Metropolitan University whose work spans food, Indigenous health, and the politics of settler colonialism. His first book, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front*, won the Canadian Historical Association's 2015 Political History Book Prize, and he has written extensively on numerous other subjects, ranging from the history of monosodium glutamate and anti-Chinese racism to the long-term impacts of hunger and malnutrition in residential schools.

What is your most powerful sense?

I have a disturbingly sensitive nose. It means that my feelings of pleasure or disgust while I'm around food tend to be magnified, for better or worse. Some of my best memories are smells, especially the smell of freshly made bread slathered with butter at my grandmother's house, accompanied with the metallic tang of frozen-concentrated orange juice that she always had at the ready. To this day, opening the door to the smell of onions and garlic being fried bring a feeling of total, uninhibited joy.

On the other side, a single off smell can ruin an entire mood or meal. Since childhood, for instance, the smell of canned corn has made me nauseous for reasons I can't really understand. I have memories of sitting at the table long after everyone else left until I ate all my vegetables, feeling genuinely ill but unable to communicate why. It also means that I can't have certain smells in the house. I know for a fact that I love the flavour profile of asafoetida in cooking but, if it's in the house, it's basically all I can smell, no matter how well I seal the container or how far I shove it back in the cupboard.

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DOI: [10.15353/cfs-rcea.v13i1.794](https://doi.org/10.15353/cfs-rcea.v13i1.794)

ISSN: 2292-3071

On the plus side, being extremely sensitive to the smell of spoiled meat, black mold, rodents, rancid oil, and other nasty things has probably saved me from quite a few unpleasant meals.

With which cuisine do you most identify?

My maternal grandparents were Doukhobors and some of my best childhood memories are of eating my grandmother's freshly made Doukhobor dishes like cottage-cheese stuffed pyrahi. Doukhobor borscht, in particular, is such a wonderful and strange food. Unlike most borscht, beets are used mostly for colour (the soup is pale pink) and are actually taken out of the soup before it's finished. Instead, the base of Doukhobor borscht is cream, cabbage, potatoes, dill and butter and it's simultaneously so simple yet so rich and extravagant.

In terms of my actual everyday food consumption, though, I don't eat much in the way of Doukhobor cuisine. While I try to mostly eat plant-based foods, I've never managed to become a full vegetarian like my Doukhobor kin. I also like my food spicy and heavily spiced and... that's not really a Doukhobor flavour profile. I love beans more than anything and am at my best when cooking things like hearty soups, stews, curries, and ragouts—anything cooked slowly over the course of the day at low heat. But I hate cooking on weeknights. It's such a slog but one that I have to do anyway.

What is your most treasured kitchen implement?

The first truly nice piece of kitchen equipment I ever splurged on was a cherry-red Staub Dutch oven that I

found on sale at a local shop on the Danforth in Toronto. I've used it nearly every week since and it works just as well as the day I purchased it twenty-some-odd years ago. It's both a beautiful object and just a ridiculously functional piece of equipment. The platonic ideal of a pot, I think, and I suspect it'll outlive us all.

What is your idea of a perfect food?

Perfection is the enemy of the good, for the most part, but I'm struggling to find a single critical thing to say about split red lentils. From the unexpectedly peppery smell they give off when you start cooking them to the fact that they're ready in nearly an instant and are nearly impossible to overcook, I can't say enough nice things about these precious legumes.

Of what food or food context are you afraid?

Watching hunger being used as a tool of genocide in Gaza, watching the nearly unchecked rise of global fascism, watching unhoused and hungry people brutalized all around us, all while new pipelines getting forced through Indigenous lands while the climate changes and the world burns. Our collective futures are at stake, yet our food system continues to be controlled by some of the worst global actors—people who are both contributing to and profiting handsomely from all of this. It's terrifying and enraging and clarifying.

What question would you add to this questionnaire?

What sustains you through the hard times?