are deemed ancient in origin but in reality have been adapted to Western taste buds. Adopting the ideas of Dean MacCannell, Molz discusses how authenticity, often conflated with tradition, is perceived as an antidote to the rootlessness of modern society.

Similarly, the American baby boomers discussed in the Liz Wilson’s chapter have embraced the notion of “healthy Asian” food because it manages to package together multiple forms of exoticism, not only as a cultural alternative to the West but also as a representative of “ancient” and more environmentally responsible foodways. For Wilson, exploration of “authentic” ethnic food is not merely a form of escapism; it is a way for conflicted middle- and upper-class Westerners to find a counterweight to their cooptation into a “McDonaldized” society (as George Ritzer has coined it). Hence, the ethnic cuisine is eventually deexoticized and assimilated into the Western individual’s culinary identity, but compartmentalized within a dualistic mainstream-counterculture personality that seems to be one of the prerequisites for contemporary postindustrial life.

A somewhat different and more poignant example of this type of juxtaposition is found in Eve Jochnowitz’s ethnography of Cracow’s Szeroka Street, “a Jewish theme park in a country where few Jews survive.” Szeroka Street and its array of Jewish restaurants and food shops provide a locale for Poles to come to terms, in varying ways, with the Jewish past that has nearly been obliterated from their society. In some ways, Szeroka Street provides a safe zone where the important influences Jewish food had on the prewar, urban, Polish diet can be experienced as a form of nostalgia, while the eventual decimation of Jewish society and the anti-Semitism that is a part of that history can be temporarily put aside.

Assimilation of cuisines through compartmentalization can lead to culinary identities that are context specific. The Mormon missionaries in Jill Terry Rudy’s chapter seek to reaffirm their American identity while stationed in foreign countries by going to great lengths to procure, prepare, and consume foods that remind them of home. However, once they return home, they make a point of preparing the foods of their host societies for their fellow Americans, thus demonstrating how they adapted themselves to the host culture. It is thus hard to draw a clean line around which types of consumption are “touristic,” since what seems mundane at home may be exoticized when abroad.

One case study that illustrates a multitude of assimilative processes is Miryam Rotkovitz’s examination of changes over time in the interplay between kosher dietary restrictions and ethnic foods among American Jews. Until the culinary revolutions of the 1970s, kosher foods outside Ashkenazic cuisine were rarely available; adventures into treif Chinese restaurant food therefore allowed New York Jews to display their cosmopolitanism while compartmentalizing it within the specific context of restaurant meals. In succeeding years, however, the sheer availability of kosher foods of every ethnicity (including mainstream American foods such as Oreo cookies) has made it unnecessary to violate dietary laws while experiencing nearly every element of the ethnic culinary spectrum. Hence, paradoxically, the increasingly cosmopolitan Jewish culinary identity has coincided with ever-stricter observation of the dietary laws. Yet this very freedom to assimilate ethnic foods has served to weaken the distinct identity associated with American Jewish cuisine, which in turn has caused some religious leaders to complain that the laws no longer serve their intended social purpose.

The investigation of culinary tourism helps to show how “tourism” is part of a larger process of identity formation. For individuals in many contemporary societies, it is a never-ending process of seeking out and assimilating the exotic in order to avoid the trap of being caught in the mainstream and then finding that the mainstream has shifted to encompass their new identity. It would be interesting for scholars to investigate what role, if any, this process has had in the major culinary movements of recent decades, including nouvelle cuisine, Slow Food, and the rise of East-West fusion.

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The Migrant’s Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households
Krishnendu Ray
x + 241 pp, Illustrations. $21.95 (paper)

The Migrant’s Table is a story about an overlooked aspect of globalization. While globalization discourse often focuses on the “Americanization of the world” (p.6), Krishnendu Ray turns to the trajectory of peoples migrating to the metropole. What happens to mundane matters of immigrant life in this new place, and what do these changes tell us about the globalization and modernization processes? By examining food practices of West Bengali immigrants, Ray “illuminate[s] the ambivalence of modern actors toward locality, community, and authenticity and toward the home and the world” (p.11).
Ray’s study relies on a mix of research methods. (The book’s genesis is his Ph.D. dissertation at the State University of New York at Binghamton.) He uses several conventional data sources—a survey of food practices, ethnographic data, secondary literature in anthropology and sociology—along with his own personal experience as an Indian immigrant in the United States. Ray also draws heavily on the fictional and nonfictional work of Bengali Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and other diasporic Indian literary figures, including V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie. It is rare to find a sociologist who cites philosophical and literary works by Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Garcia Marquez. Indeed, it is Ray’s willingness to tread nonconformist waters that makes The Migrant’s Table not only innovative and intellectually stimulating but also a pleasurable read.

His research makes several important contributions. By pairing his recent survey of Bengali-American food consumption with the findings of a 1969–1970 US Agency for International Development survey of food habits in Calcutta, Ray pieces together a rich description of pre- and postmigration food practices. In the end, he concludes assimilation “will eventually happen, but the more interesting thing to study is what happens on the way there” (p.72).

For example, while breakfast and lunch change radically for reasons of convenience, time, and tastes, dinner retains some semblance of the traditional Bengali meal of rice and fish. Yet an intermingling of American and Bengali cuisines is apparent where new ingredients such as turkey are introduced. Ray also observes that many Bengali seasonal and life cycle food rituals are lost upon migration and replaced by new secular rituals such as the North American Bengali Conference. Children further complicate the adaptation process. In short, challenges to a simple assimilation thesis abound.

Relocation and changes in consumption patterns have meanings for ethnic identity. While American food is consumed with glee (albeit with initial trepidation) and Americans are identified with affluence and a cool smartness, a certain disdain for American culture is also manifest. “To be like an American...reeks of hedonism, irresponsibility, and the decay of proper gender roles” (p.110). Bengali-Americans thus play out the Orientalism argument in reverse. At the same time that Americans have technology and economy, Bengalis have “culture”—an asset in an era when ethnicity is valorized. The sense of self in relation to the old and new is complex. Ray concludes: “There is an embrace of ‘otherness’ or recoil from it depending on the context and the contingent intentions of the performative self. All of this is underlined by an ambiguity about identity, where complementary duality is tolerated” (p.113). Ray’s findings notably complicate Gans’s 1970 notion of symbolic ethnicity that assumes a low cost to identity assertion. Although there may be a certain ambivalence toward ethnic identity that makes identity assertion contextual and contingent, there is nevertheless an eager attempt to “do” authentic ethnicity, whether it is through the display of at least one “ethnic” plant in the Bengali-American home or the stockpiling of Bengali cultural capital by way of food, clothing, music, and language.

While there is some overreliance on the three Bengali-American households constituting the ethnographic sample, the narrow representativeness and interpretive subjectivity inherent to Ray’s core method is overcome in part by the surveys. Whether his findings based on this select sample can be generalized to other immigrant groups is empirically questionable and open to further testing. Ray’s select group of probashi (expatriates) is mainly West Bengalis who migrated to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s and are affluent middle-class Hindu professionals. Even so, sociologists and food scholars alike will find his work informative. By studying consumption in the private sphere in light of larger global-historical contexts, Ray highlights the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, generations, and globalization—thus enabling an understanding of identity formation and dynamics that does not parcel out neatly in statistical models. Sociologists can learn from his original approach to the social world, while food scholars will definitely find his thick description of food practices intriguing. Gender scholars, too, will benefit from his chapter on the division of household labor in Bengali-American households.

—Samantha Kwan, University of Arizona

Our Overweight Children: What Parents, Schools, and Communities Can Do to Control the Fatness Epidemic
Sharron Dalton
Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004
292 pp. $24.95 (cloth)

In recent years, media of all sorts have brought us the message that vast numbers of American adults and children are obese and that their numbers are soaring. It is an unwelcome message, one that has occasioned hand wringing from some, finger pointing from others, and disbelief from many. The skeptics may be influenced by a combination of denial—the natural human reaction to bad news—and the whiff of conspiracy that seems to permeate articles about the epidemic. These articles make frequent reference to the