From Spaghetti and Meatballs through Hawaiian Pizza to Sushi: The Changing Nature of Ethnicity in American Restaurants

LIORA GVION AND NAOMI TROSTLER

THIS ARTICLE STUDIES AMERICAN RESTAURANT MENUS FROM THE 1960S throughout the 1990s as revealing a symbolic expression of ethnicity and as an indicator of ethnicity as a social construct. During this period restaurant menus shifted from adapting the form of ethnic dishes to the taste of their potential customers to constructing traditions of the ethnic communities in America. As part of this trend, ethnic culinary boundaries were obliterated in favor of an appropriation of ethnic dishes, and the creation of what appears to be a "multiethnic cuisine." Not only was one no longer surprised to find various ethnic dishes in a traditional local restaurant, one actually expected to be able to dine from a selection rich in ethnic dishes.

The objective of this article is threefold. First, it examines the changes in the form and content of ethnic dishes as they have appeared in restaurant menus over the years. Second, it looks at the kinds of dishes that have been accepted and the modification that followed their incorporation into the active dining repertoire. Third, it discusses the attributes of the growing interest in ethnic dishes in American dining as an outcome of movement toward becoming a multicultural society.

Cuisines are regarded for the most part as combinations of ingredients, dishes, cooking methods, and styles of eating associated with a national territory and its citizens (Douglas, "Food as Art Form" 84; Douglas, "Food and Culture" 1–3; Goode et al., 186; Brett 14; Douglas & Nicod; Prosterman; Levi-Strauss 937–40; Murcott 1983:

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85–87, 189; Finkelstein 34–35; Wood). Just as sushi implies Japanese, pasta and tomato sauce topped with Parmesan cheese connotes Italian and French cookery, according to Barthes (1983), is "Beefsteak, frittes, salade" (62–64). It is interesting, therefore, to examine the incorporation of ethnic dishes into the active public dining repertoire in multicultural societies, as it mirrors the incorporation of ethnic cultures into the culinary mainstream. What are the stages such a process undergoes?

The Changing Nature of Ethnicity

The modern notion of ethnicity coincides with a rise in nationalism, as the modern nation-state stresses the cultural similarity among citizens of a nation, as well as the differences between the dominant group and the immigrants (Eriksen 34). Ethnicity and ethnic identities, therefore, are social constructs, which are formed during interactions between groups of immigrants and a national culture. It is, as well as revealed by symbolism through public display as by any other factor (Lu & Fine 535), an ascribed aspect of personhood from which individuals cannot escape but can yet negotiate its meaning (Smith 27–33).

Ethnicity is easily expressed, without challenging power relations (Turner 407), through food (Alba 84–85). It was Van den Berghe who first looked at ethnic food as a social construct that developed in mutual contact since it was only after immigration that the immigrant realized the difference between his culture and that of the dominant group (393). Daily practices become anything ranging from exotic to bizarre, strange, and unacceptable. The possibility of bridging the cultural differences depended on their nature as well as the nature of the contact among the groups.

Much research related ethnicity and ethnic identities to the structure of the labor market (Bonachich), educational achievements (Collins), and the reproduction of a class system, according to which ethnic groups remained in the lower stratum of society (Eldering). Another line of research emphasized the cultural components of ethnicity, studying the forms and contents of ethnic knowledge. This process was studied by three different approaches: the melting pot, symbolic ethnicity, and multiculturalism.

According to the melting pot assumption, ethnics were to assimilate into the host society, contributing their distinctive traits in favor of

gaining acceptance and traits similar to those of the majority. Scholars such as Park (1925) and Glazer and Moynihan (1963) assumed that ethnicity was to disappear within three to four generations as ethnics married members of the dominant group, improved their position in the job market, moved to better housing, and afforded better education for their offspring. This approach was used for discussing the Americanization of ethnic food to fit the common American taste (Lu & Fine 538–39; Proseterman 127–28; Perkin & McCann 253).

Elaborating on the melting pot assumption, Gans argued that ethnics resorted to the use of ethnic symbols, as the third generation of ethnics has neither vivid memories of their home country nor traumatic experiences from their arrival to the new country (2–4). Their tradition obtains an exotic status to be savored occasionally in a museum or at an ethnic festival. The choices for showing allegiance to their ethnic heritage can be expressed through the incorporation of ethnic culinary traditions into both the private and public spheres (Alba 90–93). The symbolic construction of ethnicity, through popular stocks of knowledge then, allowed for what Lu and Fine referred to as a possibility to negotiate authenticity (541).

The growing call to enhance multiculturalism coincides with the notion that ethnicity has become a large stock of popular knowledge applicable upon request, among which ethnic dishes are a major route to the formation of a multicultural era. Multiculturalism runs along two pivotal axes. It challenges Western domination, allowing other forms of knowledge to penetrate the hegemonic hierarchy of knowledge by exposing the public to alternative information. Doing so enhances heterogeneity and calls into question the structure of the cultural power. Simultaneously, the multicultural perspective allows both the ethnics and the dominant groups to refresh their cultures, to expose them to the general public and to turn them into a commodity. This is how new narratives are created and relate ethnic contemporary identities with their histories and relocate them in a broader cultural context, one that calls for the recognition of ethnic diversity (Goldberg 9–11; McLaren 48–54; Lima & Lima 325; Constantino & Faltis 114–15; Rex 208–10; Eldering; Shohat 14–25).

In view of the emerging external expression of ethnicity in the culinary arena, this work looks at restaurant menus as a written record of the evolving culinary changes, with respect to the expression and practice of ethnicity. Menus allow a historical reading of popular forms

of culture and portray a social change in attitudes toward ethnicity, from a melting pot perspective to a multicultural era.

Restaurant Menus as Agencies of Popular Ethnic Knowledge

The article studies restaurant menus as agencies of culinary culture, which points out social attitudes toward the incorporation of ethnic food, into existing systems of knowledge (Beriss and Sutton 7–8; Ray 97–114). As agents of lifestyle they act as a symbolic expression of ethnicity as they cultivate foreign culinary knowledge for local taste, which moderates and regulates the exposure to ethnic foods and makes gastronomic tourism possible. We are aware that waiters could have an influence on the selection process from the menu. However, this article concentrates on what could be seen as an "identity card" of each individual restaurant rather than the actual selection made by diners, which could be influenced by an interaction with restaurant waiters.

Written texts in general allow readers to interpret, decontextualize, criticize, and reorganize knowledge. They conform to a rigid visual consistency and are adjusted to a fixed, predetermined space limit, taken for granted by both authors and readers (Goody, *The Interface* 159, 163, 115; Goody, *Cooking Cuisine* 132; Foucault 28; Ong 81, 101–02; Leach 10). Barthes emphasizes that a blending of styles and information is what assigns a text its uniformed fixity (146–48, 155–64). He sees texts as tissues of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture. Upon reaching the reader, the text achieves its unity, for the reader faces all citations inscribed therein and holds them together.

Although addressing the text as being created through reading, Barthes seems to disregard some of its emerging properties while attributing changes only to its content and ignoring its formal rules of composition. The structure of the menus implies, for instance, the domination of a classification system taken for granted by both the creator and the consumer, because they include some items and exclude others (Goody *The Domestication* 129). While throughout the menu each restaurant makes a claim for uniqueness and specialty, the desire to attract a large audience, as well as to make money, prompts the restaurant to appear familiar, and rely on common culinary conven-

tions. Menus make, therefore, an explicit statement about what is implicitly regarded as proper by modifying all that is different into a similar form (Gvion-Rosenberg 65).

Looking at restaurant menus one cannot ignore the uniformity of structure, applying to all culinary traditions seen, for instance, in the triadic structure that dominates the American meal. Entering an ethnic restaurant without any previous experience with that particular culinary tradition, the menu is to provide enough clues as to the nature of the socially defined appropriate meal. The position of the dish in the menu informs the customer as to its position in the meal structure. Successfully coping with the menu does not imply being a connoisseur but rather familiarity with a dominant meal structure that applies to all restaurants that operate in Western cultures (Gvion-Rosenberg 65–66). In this light it is important to study changes in the form and content of menus as revealing changes in the perception of ethnicity.

Methodology

Our data are drawn from a personal collection of over 1000 restaurant menus collected throughout the United States, from the 1960s through the 1990s. They represent various regions of the United States, each of which reflects upon major cultural traits. Because the origins of this analysis are from an eclectic personal collection the use of traditional methods of samplings would have been impossible. We therefore, intentionally, selected menus from which we could extract examples rather than a random selection of menus.

The East Coast, centering on New York City, is known for encouraging as well as introducing culinary novelties. Likewise is the West Coast famous for promoting health trends and integrating them into the daily practice of cooking. The Midwest stands for hearty American cooking, being the last to incorporate culinary novelties. Looking through the menus in a historical perspective one could not avoid realizing the changes in the nature of restaurants made available to customers from the 1960s through 2000. On the one hand, there has been an ongoing incorporation of new cuisines and customers could enjoy a more diverse repertoire, similar to culinary repertoires on the East and West coasts. Simultaneously, ethnic restaurants in the Mid West tended, more than their peers in the coasts, to modify their dishes

to their potential clientele's taste. This makes the Midwest a perfect geographical location for the study of the incorporation of culinary diversity in the United States.

The collected menus were grouped according to their regional location. They were then subdivided into "pure American," "pure ethnic," and a third group, in which ethnic influences had been incorporated either through specific or modified dishes. Within groups menus were assembled by decade: the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Each individual menu was then analyzed for the kinds of dishes it offered and ingredients (when provided), and the extent of the descriptive narrative and visualization of the featured item.

The overall outcome of our analysis of menus from the 1960s to the 1990s indicated that the repertoire of ethnic dishes expanded in two main directions. In the 1960s, restaurants were simultaneously segregating ethnic dishes and modifying those few that had penetrated American restaurants. From the 1980s, there was a growing tendency for menus to offer "pseudo-authentic" ethnic dishes, allowing a combination of East and West on one's plate, and with growing of kind and number of ethnic dishes selections. While restaurateurs in the 1960s tended to homogenize the limited number of ethnic dishes on their menus, mostly those that could be easily adjusted to the American palate, in the 1990s American restaurants not only included a large number of ethnic dishes, but also aimed at offering unique dishes, as well as inventing ethnic dishes, making their menu as unique as possible. And now, let the menus speak for themselves.

The "Culicentric" Era: Limited Presence of Ethnic Dishes Through the 1960s

Throughout the 1960s, ethnicity was neither integrated into the mainstream culture nor acknowledged as a distinctive entity. The ethnic repertoire was found mostly in immigrant neighborhoods. Restaurants told their version of ethnicity and controlled its form of propagation, dissemination, and contextualization by exposing Americans to the types of dishes that would appeal to their taste rather than to the food of the immigrants. Ethnic dishes were detached from the ethnics and redefined in articulation with the mainstream culture.

Ethnic dishes were placed in the menu along with mainstream dishes such as hamburgers, tuna salad, or a diet plate. *The Rice Bowl* (Chicago, IL), for instance, identified itself as a Chinese restaurant. Yet its menu chose to reflect on some popular assumptions about Chinese food in American culture. Via a bowl of rice, largely associated with a Chinese staple, on the cover, it attracted diners, yet, also suggested a list of "American Dinners" that included dishes such as sirloin steak, pork tenderloin, veal cutlet, or prime rib steak, all served with either boiled or French fried potatoes and mixed vegetables. *The Rice Bowl* was a vivid example of the melting pot assumption because it modified that which ought to be segregated.

Mexican restaurants followed the same principle, identifying themselves as "Mexican American." Such was *Armando's Mexican American* (Sacramento, CA) that "welcomes all amigos." It suggested choosing among tacos, burritos, enchiladas, tostadas, or dining on chiles rellenos de queso—cheese stuffed peppers covered with Spanish sauce. As an alternative one could choose New York sirloin, pork chops, a hamburger, or a hot dog for the children. Dishes, Mexican and others, were served with rice and beans, a choice of potato, and a salad.

Likewise, Italian restaurants such as the *Rosticceria* (Chicago, IL) suggested veal scallopini cooked with mushrooms and marsala served with salad and peas, or breaded veal cutlet served with spaghetti and string beans. The American touch was obvious in dishes such as spaghetti or ravioli with meatballs, an American adaptation of the Italian mode of serving pasta with meat sauce.

Pizza, especially, indicated the amalgamation of the melting pot vision because it showed how the Italian thin simple dough, tomato sauce and cheese, had to conform to the likes of an open grilled-sandwich. Diners were encouraged to "try our pizza" at *Stat's Open Kitchen* (Niagara Falls, NY). At the same period, when soup and sandwich were a popular lunch combination, this was translated in the Italian restaurant into pizza and soup, which was offered at *Mother Lode Baking* (Murphis, CA).

Generic restaurants modified ethnic dishes and integrated them into their menus in similar manners. Some served familiar dishes that did not challenge the dominant taste. *The Original Pancake House* (Chicago, IL), for instance, added an ethnic touch to the traditional American pancake by serving the same dish with an ingredient believed to stand for a foreign cuisine. Pancakes were described as Swedish when served

with lingon berry butter and as German when coming with lemon and powdered sugar. When served in their miniature version, they were designated Dutch Babies. Similarly, Hawaiian pancake suggested pineapple and tropical syrup, and in their Polynesian version they were rolled with cream and Cointreau!

Similar were the numerous inventions based on variations of the hamburger as served at *Rosticceria* (Champaign-Urbana, IL). Serving in the spirit of French cuisine, "Fromage Hamburger" consisted of a hamburger topped with Roquefort. The Cantonese hamburger was glazed with sweet and sour sauce, pagoded with pineapple, onions, green peppers, and lichee. The Italian burger was covered with buttered and garlic breaded pepperossine. Grapes and exotic nectar (sweet concentrated fruit juice), topped with a sweet and sour sauce and pineapple, accompanied the Thai burger. Banana fritters and water chestnuts turned a hamburger into a Polynesian dish, and the hamburger teriyaki came with teriyaki sauce (*Hippo*, San Francisco, CA).

Lu and Fine claimed the incorporation of ethnic dishes was to refrain from challenging the common meal structure (540–41). Restaurants practically enforced an American classification system on ethnic food. One's first impression in Chinese and Indian restaurants was that dishes were grouped according to their major ingredients: vegetables, beef, chicken, fish, chow mein, rice, and seafood. Yet, in the Americanized transformation, these classes of food were organized for first, second, and last course. Indeed, most Indian and Chinese restaurants suggested starting with appetizers or soups, proceeding with options such as seafood, beef, or poultry. Next came the rice, noodles, and vegetables meant to be side dishes.

To conclude, as active social agencies, restaurant menus, in the 1960s, overcame strangeness by inventing and redefining traditions so as to make them as familiar as possible to the American mainstream. Both the structure and content of the menu were instrumental, expressing the melting pot atmosphere.

The Invention of Ethnicity throughout the 1970s

Moving through the 1970s, restaurants started introducing ethnic food according to the framework of the dominant culture in the 1970s but constructed culinary traditions aiming to locate them within the

mainstream culture. Traditions, according to Hobsbawm, are often invented and recent in origin (1). They emerge when old traditions and their institutional carriers no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible. At times, new traditions are readily grafted onto old ones; and at times, they borrow symbols and moral exhortations from old ones.

Studying ethnicity through restaurant menus allows us to look at the way in which agencies of the dominant culture invent, not only their own tradition, but also that of the ethnic groups as well. However, the invention of tradition makes it also possible for ethnics to rediscover their heritage as part of their symbolic ethnicity, reflecting upon their grandmother myth of the old country.

Restaurants in the 1970s rarely reflected an interest in ethnic culture or in the people behind the food as only a small number of restaurants acknowledged the potential contribution of the immigrants' food to American cooking and the role of their food as an expression of culture. Touristy travels in the 1970s, and not daily encounters with the immigrant communities, opened the culinary arena to the incorporation of foreign knowledge and to its geographical setting. The presence of immigrants in the business district furthered the introduction and modification of ethnic food, because the customers were looking for familiar dishes for their meal break.

The acquaintance with the repertoire of ethnic dishes, then, was still limited and socially constructed. Despite the adjustment of the dishes, they did propagate some knowledge about the historical, cultural, and geographical aspects of the foreign land. Take, for example, *Emil's* restaurant located in Lansing, MI. The restaurant characterized itself as "a saloon with a feeling of history and people but a saloon, nevertheless." Emil DeMarco's, the menu said, first venture in his new country back in 1922 was a fruit stand, which stood on Michigan Avenue. Later, he started an ice cream parlor and got his beer license. Emil was, according to the menu, a successful immigrant:

> In his quiet, sometimes-gruff manner Emil commanded the respect of all who knew him. Nowadays the saloon expanded into a restaurant and on that menu is more than soup and spaghetti.

Biographical details that shed light on stereotypical images of immigrants were integrated into texts. They contributed to the invention of

traditions and symbolic ethnicity in the sense that they contextualized dishes in a setting that explained their origins, and the way in which they had changed. Examples of such a trend were portrayed by the *Tratoria* (NYC) and *La Villa* (East Lancing, MI), where diners could start with a selection of antipasti, described as "a tasty colorful meal in itself (with crispy lettuce) chopped meat and cheese, Italian peppers, green olives, raw onion rings, anchovies served in a large bowl, dressing of your choice." The dressing was a prime example of Americanization; an Italian menu would not mention salad dressing, olive oil, and vinegar would be self-administered for a salad. For less adventurous customers, minestrone or onion soups were suggested. Spaghetti was served with pesto, Bolognese, Amatricana (tomato and bacon). Lasagna Verde and fettuccini with procsuito were on the menu. Meat dishes included osso buco alla Milanese, turkey alla pappagaillo (with white Chianti and artichoke), or fritto misto alla Fiorentine.

Bringing forward national dishes, ingredients and cooking methods as major distinctive features underlying the fundamentals of national cuisines, then, constructed foreign traditions. This trend propagated changes in Mexican and Chinese restaurants as well.

In *The Old Town Mexican Café Y Cantina*, located in San Diego (CA) where many Mexican immigrants had settled, dishes were classified according to type. Each type stood for a different texture of the traditional staple—tortilla. Diners could choose among the crunchy taco, the soft rolled enchilada, the soft round burrito, or the fried tostada. All these came with traditional fillings, such as shredded beef, chicken, pork (carnita), or guacamole. Entrees suggested carne asada (steak topped with guacamole) New York steak, chili verde (pork with hot greens), or steak picado (beef cooked with bell peppers).

Chinese restaurants used the distinctive cooking method, such as stir-fried, in order to be recognizable. Gradually, the mention of dishes including ingredients such as pea pods, black or dried mushrooms, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, bean sprouts, dried shrimp, watermelon, cellophane noodles, five-spice powder, or oyster sauce appeared in the menu. The *Hong Ying* located in San Francisco (CA) used what was referred to as "Chinese vegetables" in some of its dishes. Moo Goo Gai Pan, for example, was made of white chicken meat with mushrooms, Chinese vegetables, and water chestnuts. For the Chinese customer, descriptions as such were irrelevant. Located at the heart of Chinatown, the restaurants served mainly locals. However, the menu

indicated a slow penetration of American customers as restaurants started socializing American diners into a Chinese mode of dining. For instance at the bottom of a menu diners were instructed to:

> Please give your entired order at the same time because in the real Chinese style we served everything together. NO ORDER EXCHANGE AFTER IT IS PREPARED (*originally in the menu*).

The above indicated that Chinese restaurants were easing the "acculturation" of the latter to the ethnic cuisine as shown by Lu and Fine (539–41; Barbas 669–70). As part of this trend, Americans were subtly introduced to patterns of etiquettes that were to be applied in these types of restaurant. While Italian restaurants manifested an emerging symbolic ethnicity this was not the case for Chinese and Mexican ones.

Trendy restaurants also underwent a similar transformation as their menu content allowed for the entrance of ethnic dishes, adding an ethnic flavor to traditional dishes. At *Clara's* in Lansing, MI, ethnic ingredients were used as a means of upgrading local dishes and of attracting the more sophisticated customers. One could mainly dine on hamburgers, pizza, or salads. As traditional as it was, the menu indicated a choice of twelve toppings to go with the hamburgers, such as a German sauerkraut and Swiss cheese hamburger or a pepperoni and provolone hamburger that indicated an Italian touch. This attempt to internationalize the menu was made despite a lack of culinary knowledge.

In *Café Oasis* in San Francisco (CA), ethnicity was more visible as the restaurateur could assume some previous knowledge and familiarity of his customers. The descriptions of the dishes were concise, and ethnic dishes were an integral part of the menu. For instance, linguini with clam sauce, chicken Bombay, bowl of saimin (Japanese noodles), Chinese beef, and fish and chips were all offered as luncheon specials without going into detail about the nature of the dishes.

The ultimate change in the 1970s, which would bring us into the 1980s, when ethnic dishes, as part of the menu, became the rule, was perhaps best reflected at *Chez Panisse* in Berkeley (CA). Basic ethnic dishes were upgraded to sophisticated yuppie trends, for example, calzone stuffed with procsuitto, goat cheese, mozzarella, and herbs. When describing pizza, one could not miss the detailed reference to the herbs

that were gradually becoming an integral ingredient of the dish. Pizza Mexicana, for example, included hot and sweet peppers, Monterey Jack cheese, cumin, cilantro, and oregano.

When ethnic knowledge became part of local culinary knowledge, more restaurants opened up to foreign dishes. This was a new vision of ethnicity because it admitted that the meeting between ethnicity and American culture was but a symbolic image of ethnicity and that the nature of foreign dishes had been modified. Because modified recipes were such an integral part of ethnic knowledge, it rather implied that there was some debate over the question of whether more modified dishes should be integrated into the cultural tradition and what form the new dishes should take.

In conclusion, then, the 1970s showed a shift from a discussion of ethnic dishes, in terms of modification of form and content to a discussion of the dishes as indicative of symbolic ethnicity. Dishes, although often modified, were placed in a context that presented them as part of a massive culinary repertoire. Traditions of the immigrants were acknowledged and were instrumental in reducing the suspicion of ethnic dishes. Their Americanization, by both ethnic restaurants and their American peers, made it possible to dare to experience more authentic dishes and visit ethnic neighborhoods and restaurants. They probably were also instrumental in what was being seen by the end of the 1970s, i.e. the installation of truly ethnic restaurants outside of the ethnic "ghetto."

Emerging Multiculturalism: The 1980s

A major development of the 1980s was an emerging culinary multiculturalism, and restaurants have become important symbols of postmodern life itself (Beriss 154; Trubek 36). This was manifested by four characteristics. First, there was a proliferation of what could be referred to as "transboundary" restaurants, which married two or more culinary traditions. Second "all ethnic restaurants" were more daring than before, elaborating their menus with dishes Americans were not familiar with. Third, a broad clientele; restaurant menus often relied on trends that attracted the American audience. Fourth, rather than having many ethnic corners, American diners gained access to a global culinary village, one in which every one was invited to taste and enjoy the food of his neighbors.

The proliferation of "transboundary" restaurants, and the tendency to serve more internationalized menus, gradually formed the cornerstone for a new bridge between cuisines. Customers were facing multiethnic menus that offered side by side, dishes from culinary traditions that had been historically separated. The mingling and mixing of cuisines implied not only a "bon ton" but also a multicultural convention to which traditional hierarchies and culinary patterns no longer applied.

Using *Chez Panisse* (Berkeley, CA) as an example of the transboundary menus and postmodern sites, one could best see how trends that started in the 1970s settled comfortably into the menus of the 1980s. *Chez Panisse* centered on mingling French with Italian dining. Alice Waters, the chef, allowed for a selection among fettuccini al verde with zucchini, basil, lemon, garlic, and olive oil; fettuccini with procsuitto, corn, and porcini mushroom or experiencing the Spanish taste with Paella alla Diavola, namely, sautéed chicken breast with a spicy tomato–wine sauce served with polenta. The French were represented by "Cuisse de Pork a la Broche": split roasted leg of suckling pig served with a confit of onions and apples, or by the famous "soupe Escarole": rich chicken broth with garden escarole lettuce, virgin olive oil, and Parmesan cheese.

Another trendy place that offered transboundary dishes was *Saloon* located in New York City. On the menu were homemade deep-fried won ton with salsa forte, mozzarella and pan-fried beefsteaks, tamales topped with basil and a Gorgonzola vinaigrette, stir-fried fillet with oriental vegetables, and a black bean sauce or angel hair pasta tossed with wilted dandelions and fresh corn relish or oriental sesame chicken with shitake and lo mein salad.

Food chains did not escape the tendency to design a multiethnic menu and married it with ordinary dishes. Take the example of *Houlians*, a nationwide chain functioning as both a bar and a restaurant. In the 1980s, one could dine there on French onion soup, escargots, or Acapulco salad—"a giant crisp flour tortilla piled high with shredded lettuce, cheese, tomatoes, scallions, black olives, spicy taco meat and guacamole." Dining on the specials one could choose Oriental spare ribs or tortilla spread with guacamole, topped with Mexican mild sauce and sour cream.

Going ethnic also applied to popular places such as *Eric and Me* in Chicago (IL) or the *Western Center and Zuni* San Francisco (CA). Fried

zucchini nachos served with jalapeno peppers, guacamole, and tortilla were an alternative to steaks, fried chicken, and fish. Another option was to start with "Pita pizza" topped with artichoke hearts and roasted peppers followed by fussili primavera or chicken zia Teresa. The latter were served with stir-fried vegetables, paella, or ratatouille.

Despite the multicultural atmosphere, family-oriented restaurants did not rush to integrate ethnic dishes into their habitual menu, probably so as not to upset their regular clientele. *Stouffer's* (Chicago, IL), for instance, a typical American restaurant, still offered sugar-glazed smoked ham, London broil, a Reuben grill, or an all-American cheeseburger. Novelties centered on "healthy aspects," offering yogurt with fruits and honey dressing or garden vegetables as a side order to the main course. *The Red Lobster and Anderson's Fox Farm Inn* both in Lansing, MI, served steaks, chicken and lobster with baked potato and a choice of a house salad or cole slaw. Even the trendy eateries in Oakland (CA) restaurants, such as *Mountain Jack* served lunches typical of the 1970s such as hamburgers.

Simultaneously, the outcome of the increased acquaintance with ethnic cuisine was a more adventurous and daring clientele to be catered to. At the *California Ravioli Factory* (San Francisco, CA) the repertoire was larger than a typical menu of Italian restaurants in the 1970s. Diners could choose among meat or cheese ravioli, tortellini, or fettuccini with Alfredo sauce. Alongside spaghetti and meatballs one could try pasta with pesto sauce, prosciutto, and ricotta or eggplant parmesan.

In the spirit of postmodern multiculturalism some local restaurants adapted the trend that has become a major characteristic of future American form of dining. Take, for example, *Carlos Murphy's Irish Mexican Café* in San Diego (CA). The combination of the Irish and Mexican traditions, having nothing in common, was unique to the café and best manifested in Carlos Murphy's biography, appearing on the menu:

> The product of a rich Mexican-Irish heritage, legend has it that Carlos is the son of a ditch digger from Dublin who left the Emerald Isle to seek his fortune In Juarez, Mexico . . . . . . As the luck of the Irish would have it, he met and fell in love with the beautiful young daughter of Juarez's leading hubcap magnate. They were married on St. Patrick's Day and the following Cinco de Mayo became the proud parents of a red-haired, black-eyed boy named Carlos.

The menu went on to describe the original life of young Carlos, who decided, after his parents left Juarez, to immigrate to the United States, with seventeen pesos in his pocket, to seek his fortune. After years of traveling and "getting thrown out from every bar between Dublin, California and Mexico City" he landed in San Diego and realized that something was wrong:

> Every place he went into was like a siesta. Carlos wanted a fiesta . . .. So Carlos decided to make fun a business, and soon the doors to Carlos Murphy's were open. And Carlos is doing his best to make sure the fiesta never ends.

The menu, aside from the objectives of the restaurant owner, offered dishes from various traditions. Taquitos and quesadilla were served with quiche Lorraine or crepes stroganoff. Hamburgers were topped with melted cheese, mushrooms, onions, or bacon.

The marriage of culinary traditions on one's plate has also led to another result: an emerging staged authenticity as ethnic restaurants started catering to the general population. Simultaneously, because the clientele lacked knowledge of the authentic kitchen, menus offered explicit descriptions of the ethnic dish. Menus in the 1980s became agents of "staged authenticity," defined as being that which is accepted as genuine or real, true to itself (Taylor). This implied both a growing tendency to try the food of the other and an acceptance of multicultural atmosphere because it placed ethnic culinary knowledge in an equal position to the American culinary knowledge. Moreover, it made menus vehicles for the incorporation and introduction of new cultures, turning authenticity into a discursive strategy for sociopolitical ends (Berman; Beriss and Sutton).

Take for example the *Ichiban Steak House* (Atlanta, GA) defined as "Atlanta's original and most popular Japanese steak house." The major attraction of the restaurant was titled "the Emperor Dinner," a selection of dishes prepared at the guest's table: the Teppan Yaki chicken, filet mignon or shrimps that consisted of breasts of boneless chicken, filet mignon or shrimps cooked "to mouth, watering perfection." The Combination Teppan Yaki steak and chicken was defined as "an Ichiban favorite—suits Imperial taste." Lacking previous knowledge about Japanese food and expanding on its descriptive narrative, a sense of authenticity emerged.

The Peking restaurant in San Francisco (CA) introduced its audience to the nature of Chinese cooking by a brief introduction that emphasized the centrality of cooking to the Chinese culture:

> Cooking, to the Chinese, is an art, which should delight one's senses. A well prepared dish, according to an old Chinese saying, should appeal to the eye by its coloring, to the nose by its aroma, to the ear by its flavor and taste. (in the menu)

Capitalizing the emerging enthusiasm for health food and fat-free dishes, restaurant owners located the culinary traditions within the framework of healthy cuisines. Appealing to this contemporary tendency to get to know the food of others and learn its distinctive traits, Chinese restaurants, such as the *Peking* restaurant mentioned above, specified the ways in which their style of cooking complied with contemporary trends:

> Eating Chinese had a relatively small intake of calories and a corresponding larger proportion of minerals, vitamins and bulk. The Chinese people do not need to diet, just because the Chinese diet is practically already a diet. Some people claim that we Chinese, men and women alike, look younger than our years. You certainly want to look younger, too and we'll always be pleased to be at your service here.

The *Hunan Restaurant* in San Francisco (CA) also attempted to match current health trends with the Chinese tradition, pointing to the relevance of the latter to contemporary American lifestyles. The owners claimed the food "provided high protein to meet one's daily needs and is low in fat and cholesterol to safeguard your health and to enhance your dining pleasure." Moreover, they guaranteed the observation of the following rules, all of which had a trendy healthy connotation:

- Use lean meat, poultry, and fish and trim off any visible fat.
- Use unsaturated oil in cooking such as sunflower or cottonseed oil to cut down the amount of fat in your food. No animal fat, lard is used.
- Use no sweets and sugars, which contain few nutrients and are high in calories. People become over weight by eating more calories.

- Avoid using excessive salt or sodium to limit the development of high blood pressure.
- Use fresh vegetables in our dishes. Vegetables are rich in vitamins, mineral, and fiber for achieving a heart healthy meal.
- Use a great deal of herbs and spices to flavor salads and many of our savory dishes.
- Use no MSG.

The descriptions, along with others, implied that a major culinary change was taking place in America. Customers were looking for specialties and aiming to root the dishes not only in the gastronomic and health arena, but also in a historical and cultural context, turning the ethnic restaurant into what Lu and Fine identified as a connoisseur-oriented restaurant (545–47). Take a dish like "harvest pork," served at *Hunan*, which was described as follows:

> During the harvest season, plantation workers work so hard that they need some kind of spicy and nutritious food to revive their utterly exhausted body. This dish serves the purpose.

Eating the dish did not necessarily reflect a symbolic identification with the workers so much as an intake of exotic flavor into daily life. It integrated with general gastronomic tourism, i.e. interest in the food of others rather than in the other, establishing a social norm of being open and ready to experience.

Italian restaurants appealed to connoisseur diners. In *Café Reggio* in San Francisco (CA), the typical Italian menu, which offered authentic traditional Italian dishes, was written in Italian. The English translation provided the sense of upgrading the dishes. *Pizza Uno*, originally from Chicago (IL), even suggested its own version of what was believed to be an Italian dish, although invented in the United States (Levenstein). Turning the pizza into "a dining experience rather than a snack" the client was told that:

> Ike Swell changed things back in 1943 when he created Deep Dish Pizza. Ike figured that if you combined some of Italy's old authentic recipes with impressive quantities of the finest meat, spices, vegetables and cheeses, Pizza could become a delectable meal.

That is to say that Ike Swell negotiated authenticity by recruiting the major distinctive features of American cooking: "impressive quantities"

of ingredients, baked in an iron pan (designated pie) gave a personal touch to the ethnic food and assigned it back to the ethnic as if it were their own. Swell was proud of his large quantities, warning his clients that they should: "Be careful what you order. Each Uno pizza is about twice the food content as the pizzas you are probably accustomed to."

Capitalizing on the emerging trend for healthy eating, Middle Eastern restaurants, like the Chinese, included in their menus narrative indications that the menu offerings were low in animal fat, used little meat, and were rich in vegetables. *Pasha* in San Francisco (CA) suggested Hariara (a Moroccan lentil soup), bureka (philo dough stuffed with either cheese, spinach, potatoes, or mushrooms), mezza (a combination of salads), and meuguez (a Turkish salad) alongside hummus, dolma, falafel, foul, baba ghanough, Imam bayladi, labaneh, and pickles. In the meat section one could find kebab, kefta, shish kebab, and a dish called prawns Sultan alongside a New York steak, quail, or kibbeh nayeh (raw minced meat mixed with cracked wheat and spices).

To conclude, the traditional ethnic restaurant in the "ghetto" gave way, in the 1980s to the mainstream positioning and even "bon ton" trendiness of dining in which the marriage of two or more culinary traditions, in the menu or on one's plate became the norm. In parallel, it legitimized the pseudo-ethnic restaurant and made it available to other than connoisseurs. This did not necessarily indicate a greater tolerance, curiosity, or respect for the immigrants. Rather it implied an attempt to include them in the American culture by selectively recruiting parts of their traditions for the American eating culture (Barbas 669–70). At the same time restaurateurs were also sensitive to the emerging changes in the American orientation toward food and health.

The Multicultural Ending: The 1990s

In the 1990s, one notices the active promotion of a multicultural atmosphere in restaurant menus. First, there was an assumption of previous culinary knowledge, as menus explained the nature of the ethnic dishes selectively. Dishes that had won popularity in previous decades no longer required a detailed description on the menus. Second, the acceptance of ethnic dishes became both a matter of personal taste and mainstream. While restaurant menus have lost the novelty

lingo, they came to describe dishes in a factual manner, probably because restaurateurs assumed that the audience had integrated the array of ethnic dishes and cuisines to the point that even the less suave customers would ask for them. This is why mainstream diners continued integrating "multiethnic" dishes that combined two or more traditions. Third, the yuppie trend in restaurants went on defining the culinary agenda by integrating and mingling health food with ethnic food. Fourth, the great tendency to include ethnic cooking throughout the last decades, forced a redefinition of American cooking. Both scholars and restaurateurs started asking what American cooking was (Mintz 106–24). As part of this trend meat came back into the diet albeit with a style of cooking that had adapted itself, to the new trends from heavy, creamy dishes to lighter sauces and reduced fat and sugar.

Despite the presence of many ethnic communities, Chinese, Italian, and Mexican restaurants established themselves within the mainstream culinary boundaries. Vietnamese, Central American, Eastern European, Hindu, and others raised transitory curiosity but have not incorporated themselves in the daily dining routine. The restaurants that were opened by the latter immigrant groups were frequented by the trendy diners and did not establish themselves as permanent features in the gastronomic milieu. Therefore, with the exception of clusters of ethnic restaurants, that had been present long enough and in a distinctive dining area of the city, such as East Sixth Street in New York City, which has been familiar for its Indian restaurants, others faded with the time. This was also the case with Chinese restaurants when connoisseurs started looking for new dishes such as dim sum, as opposed to the "chop suey craze" well described by Barbas (675–79). *Jing Fong Restaurant* located in Chinatown in New York City served only dim sum, and the menu was written in Chinese. This implied a large enough ethnic clientele frequenting the place and adventurous customers who would take a look at the particular dishes on the wagon and choose according to their liking.

Yuppie trends kept gaining prominence as part of the incorporation of ethnic foods. Once accepted by them, the trend was to gain popularity. There were two major fashionable traits. First, the demonstration of the latest fashion, to the extent that one would specify the kind of wood one's meat should be grilled over (i.e., hickory grill, mesquite). Second, the application of the most recent changes in one's diet, claiming that food should be both healthy and natural, in spite of the

incorporation of meat into the diet. *The Butcher's Shop* in Chicago (IL), *The Garden Restaurant* in Los Angeles (CA), and *La Playa Grill*, a Mexican restaurant at La Jolla (CA) were good examples of both. *The Butcher's Shop* was proud to offer,

> "great charcoal steaks," all on a hickory pit. From our impressive stocked display, choose your favorite steak from a variety of the biggest and best grain-fed beef direct from the Midwest. You be the chef and prepare it over a hickory charcoal put with your secret recipe and our fully stocked seasoning.

The Butcher's Shop was appealing to a number of characteristics of American contemporary dining. Not only were steak and potatoes back, but also they were integrated into the new excitement of yuppie cooking. Customers did not cook at home, they would stop on their way home from work to grab a salad or "take away" to eat at home. They would also barbecue their food on the weekend, mostly with friends. The restaurant allowed for a combination of both. One was to come to the restaurant, have a traditional American dinner—steak and potatoes—and yet be up to date. The food was grilled over the latest fashion coal—hickory—in a homey atmosphere with friends.

While meat-oriented culinary cultures regained their legitimacy, Middle Eastern and Far Eastern restaurants could now capitalize on their habitually healthy culinary tradition (olive oil, chick peas, tahini, salad, tofu, tempe, and sprouts). They did not have to make great changes in adjusting their menus to the audience of the 1990s. *The Good Earth* restaurant in San Francisco (CA) guaranteed commitment to both ethnic and healthy food dishes as an attempt to promote multiethnic and healthy dishes:

> We use ancient as well as modern cooking techniques from around the world to create satisfying taste experiences . . . . The Good Earth also features a much higher ration of carefully selected fresh fruits and vegetables to other foods. We prepare many of our entrees using the ancient art of Chinese wok cooking to retain the highest amount of natural flavors and nutrients.

Multiethnic and other transboundary dishes seemed to dominate *The Good Earth* menu. Vegetarian bacon bits were covering a spinach salad; the Mediterranean Delight suggested "an array of greens, cheese, vegetables, fresh mushrooms, marinated beans, olives, chopped eggs and

artichoke hearts." Dishes grouped under the category "Heartier Fare" suggested a combination of sautéed vegetables served with either tofu or cheese and accompanied by either brown rice or spinach noodles. The same decisions were applicable for the selection of a meat dish.

The Blind Faith Café (San Francisco, CA) went a step further, replacing meat with meatless versions of dishes and enriching its menu with a variety of ethnic dishes. One could dine on eggplant Parmesan, sautéed tempeh or tofu served with steamed tortillas, sprouts, steamed vegetables, over a bed of brown rice. As part of this trend, if one were to dine over pasta he or she could choose among udon nobi yaki—Japanese udin noodles—fresh broccoli, bok choy, and tofu served in a steaming ginger shiitake mushroom broth; linguine marinara; broccoli shoyu soba—wholesome buckwheat soba noodles stir-fried with tempeh, broccoli, and pea pods in tamari sauce; pasta pesto or pecan scallopini, which was composed of grilled vegetables.

In conclusion, transboundary dishes that consolidated culinary traditions that were historically and geographically segregated entities can typify the 1990s. This resulted in combinations that could not have been envisioned as recently as two decades ago.

Conclusion: Restaurants as Agents of Culinary Novelties

Restaurant menus were analyzed in this article as revealing symbolic expressions of ethnicity and as indicators of the latter as a social construct. The reading of American restaurant menus, from the 1960s through the 1990s, as social texts revealed the role of restaurants in general and ethnic restaurants in particular as agents of culinary novelties. As such restaurants have managed both to facilitate hostility and suspicion toward the food of the immigrants as well as to prevent the latter from challenging basic culinary assumptions to underlie dominant pattern of dining. This article elaborated on Barbas's major finding that Chinese restaurants have managed to attract a large audience due to their ability to cater to an American search for the "other" and the "exotic" yet posing little threat to most Americans. Through restaurants, just as through music, dance, fiction, or any other cultural aspect of social life ethnicity is made real and present in society.

The culinary habitués in the 1960s expressed the melting pot atmosphere. As active social agencies, restaurant menus overcame strangeness by inventing and redefining dishes to make them as fa-

miliar as possible to the American mainstream. Both the structure and content of the menu were instrumental, promoting culinary amalgamation. In the 1970s, dishes, although often modified, were placed in a larger context, one that presented them as part of a massive tradition. Their Americanization, by both ethnic and American restaurants, made it possible to dare to experience new dishes and visit ethnic neighborhoods and restaurants.

The traditional ethnic restaurant in the "ghetto" gave way in the 1980s to the mainstream of dining in which the marriage of two or more culinary traditions, in the menu or on one's plate, became the norm. In parallel, it legitimized the pseudo-ethnic restaurant and made it available to other than connoisseurs. This did not necessarily indicate a greater tolerance, curiosity, or respect for the immigrants. Rather it implied an attempt to include them in the American culture by selectively capitalizing on their traditions for the American eating culture.

In the 1990s, the zenith of a multicultural and postmodern era was manifested in the culinary scene. Menus served more daring dishes. Pseudo-authentic and yuppie-like restaurants were found side by side attracting different audiences. Simultaneously, there was an attempt, as we have seen, to go back to traditional American cooking—the meat and potatoes dinner—giving it a more modern and ethnic touch.

Based on our analysis, it is our conviction that menus can enable a study of the interaction between popular attitudes toward ethnic cuisines, social perceptions of means of acculturation, and the process of dissemination and demystification of ethnic dishes and cuisines.

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Liora Gvion is a senior lecturer of sociology at The Kibbutzim College of Education, Tel-Aviv, Israel. Her major interests are the sociology of food and the sociology of the body, second-generation immigrants, and the relationship between food and ethnicity. Her book on the political and social meanings of Palestinian food in Israeli society came out in July 2006 in Israel (Carmel Publishers, in Hebrew).

Naomi Trostler has worked in applied and clinical trial research at Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition, Faculty of Agriculture Food and Environmental Sciences, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Rehovot, Israel. She is trained and experienced in practice-based research. In recent years she has coordinated several Dietetics Practice Based Research studies. Earlier studies include investigating the effects of westernization, social and environmental changes, including food habits and life style, by immigrants, mainly from Ethiopia, developing and implementing culturally sensitive educational strategies for food and exercise as related to behavioral changes.

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