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Food and Restaurants: A Review of the Literature and Exploratory Observations of Restaurant Pivots in LA in the Time of COVID-19

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by

Donghyoun We

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Food and Restaurants:

A Review of the Literature and Exploratory Observations of Restaurant Pivots in LA in the Time of COVID-19

By

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles 2021

Professor Akhil Gupta, Chair

This MA project consists of: 1) a review of the literature on the study of food and restaurants within anthropology, as well as in the social sciences more broadly, and 2) a collection of preliminary observations regarding the transformations taking place within Los Angeles's restaurant industry due to COVID-19. Rather than attempt to cover the entire breadth of the anthropology of food, I primarily consider works that focus on the symbolic capacities of food as they relate to various dimensions of identity, the senses, and memory. Afterwards, I consider works that explore the ways in which these themes are refracted through and within restaurant spaces. Using these bodies of literature as an intellectual foundation, I conclude by posing a series of questions pertaining to the ongoing transformation of the restaurant in Los Angeles, which I plan to selectively take up and explore during future dissertation research.

The thesis of Donghyoun We is approved.

Kyeyoung Rose Park

Erin Katherine Debenport

Akhil Gupta, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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Introduction

I began writing this paper during the early, most uncertain months of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As I finish it a year later, a summer rife with promises of a return to pre-COVID-19 modes of social life seems just beyond the horizon, at least in the United States. I imagine all of us are ready to cast aside the anxieties, frustrations, and griefs of the past year, even if only superficially so. Still, I find it necessary to not only acknowledge COVID-19 but also begin with this acknowledgment since the writing of this piece is inseparable from the historic conditions under which it was written. Together yet apart, we experienced a moment which demanded a collective agreement to physically isolate and distance our bodies from others. The resulting widespread social disconnect, amongst other factors of the political and economic variety, contributed (and continues to contribute) to a general undercurrent of anxiety and uncertainty which defined our experiences within the current social milieu. Like many others who were fortunate enough to do so, I found myself turning towards food and the practice of cooking for emotional refuge, a brief daily reprieve from acknowledging the state of the world just beyond the walls of my apartment. In addition to seeking materialized comfort through the production and consumption of food, I also sought comfort in bittersweet nostalgic memories of past moments of commensality. To dine in a restaurant with family and friends without the looming threat of contracting a highly transmissible and oftentimes deadly illness is a simple pleasure that I certainly took for granted.

Over the past year, restaurants have moved quickly to adapt to the regulations set forth by the various cities within which they're located. Some have been successful although many others have been much less so. Even as a return to normalcy seem just within reach, the American restaurant industry continues to find itself in dire straits. Conventional understandings of a

restaurant as a physical and social space, as well as a place where taste and distinction are produced and consumed, are being challenged by our current political-economic reality as informed by COVID-19. This state of affairs leads to a number of questions that are, for me, intellectually generative (and, for restaurateurs, more pressing in a practical sense): How are new, adaptive forms of urban interaction and social engagement transforming "the restaurant"? How are smaller-scale, urban restaurateurs and other food entrepreneurs meeting this time of intensified financial precarity through alternative business models and strategies? How do digital technologies, food aesthetics, and different discursive tropes (e.g., appeals to ethnic or regional identity, notions of community, emotion, memory, etc.) become folded into their different responses to this moment of industry-wide crisis? How might these reflect larger social movements within the context of the United States that emerge under times of widespread duress?

Answering these questions with the depth each of them calls for is not the central concern of this paper, although I am interested in pursuing them more substantively in future work. At this time, I seek instead to offer my own exploratory observations regarding a few of the various responses chef-restaurateurs have made during a particularly dynamic moment of adjustment. These observations supplement a review of the existing anthropological literature on restaurants and food. After all, in order to understand the nuances of the shifts taking place in the way restaurants exist, operate, and fit into the social fabric of America, it is necessary to first understand the myriad social functions that restaurants and food have traditionally served pre-pandemic. How have restaurants acted as social spaces in which people congregate and physical spaces that define urban landscapes? What symbolic functions do food and cuisine serve, and how do these functions become subsumed, altered, and intensified within restaurant spaces? How

do food and restaurants act as mediums through which individuals display and define, amongst other things, personal identity, community membership, as well as taste and distinction? By virtue of restaurants being most immediately understood as entities which deal in the sale of food, I begin with a consideration of the anthropology of food and eating more broadly. Afterwards, I consider works within the literature that focus more specifically on restaurants and the individuals who operate them. To close, I recount my preliminary observations regarding the "pivots" (a colloquial term used in the restaurant industry to describe changes in restaurant operations) that a sample of restaurants in Los Angeles have made in light of COVID-19 and offer an analysis of the ways in which these pivots support the findings of earlier works, as well as how they offer opportunities for future study as the situation continues to develop.

Before I proceed, I would like to note that while I look primarily at literature from within the discipline of anthropology, I also consider a number of relevant scholarly works from other disciplines within the social sciences and humanities. The larger, emergent umbrella discipline of Food Studies facilitates (and perhaps even asks for) interdisciplinary collaboration and intellectual cross-fertilization. That said, by the same token, it would be unfruitful to attempt to cover all of the different domains of study that become subsumed within scholarship on food. The various directions that scholars of food have pursued run the gamut from food policy and nutrition to the poetics of consumption – and all of the combinations and permutations in between. For the purposes of this paper, I primarily review literature on food and restaurants that lend themselves to addressing the questions outlined earlier, which include (but are not limited to) works on various dimensions of identity, taste and social distinction, and senses and memory. Topics such as the relationship between food and gender, or between restaurants and hierarchies of labor (of which entire monographs could, and have, been written), become necessarily

addressed within many of the works I look at. That these topics and others like them do not in and of themselves constitute the primary sub-foci of the literature review portion of this paper is not to say that they are not worth exploring in a more dedicated fashion. However, the review of the literature presented in this paper is neither intended nor claimed to be exhaustive. Rather, my hope is that a broader consideration of these works will act as an early intellectual foundation that will help me make sense of some of the changes in the LA restaurant scene in 2020, through 2021, and onwards.

Early Anthropological Forays into the Study of Food

Again, considering that restaurants are primarily understood as entities which deal in the sale of food, I first survey the landscape of the anthropology of food and eating. While restaurants exist on every naturally inhabited continent on Earth, they are neither a universal nor strictly necessary facet of human life. Our absolute dependence on food for biological sustenance, on the other hand, is one of the few commonalities shared amongst all people. Put more simply: all of us must eat to live. Considering that this need for food is imperative for our survival, it is unsurprising, then, that food touches nearly every aspect of our lives, which renders it a potently generative object of study. Anthropologists have investigated the ways in which food is entangled with the domains of politics and economy, religion and ritual, gender roles and gendered experiences, agricultural practices and human relationships with the environment, and racial and ethnic identity, among others.

Admittedly, the coalescence of a dedicated anthropology of food is relatively recent, but food and eating practices have been of interest to anthropologists since the formative years of the discipline, even if they did not constitute the primary focus of the discipline's foundational works. Consider, for instance, Franz Boas's "Ethnology of the Kwakiutl," (1921) a paper

published to accompany the *Thirty Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*. This veritable tome of a text, which is based on Boas's fieldwork with the indigenous Kwakiutl people in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, extensively documents their cultural artifacts and practices, including those related to food. Four hundred twenty-eight pages are devoted to descriptions of various food-gathering practices, food-processing practices, and culturally relevant dishes. Boas's section on Kwakiutl recipes spans two hundred ninety-six pages alone. While the sheer breadth of this collection continues to remain impressive, "Ethnology of the Kwakiutl" exemplifies the shortcomings of Boasian anthropology, namely that of its propensity for salvage anthropology, which understands culture as being static and at risk of dying out. In light of this perceived threat, Boas's main concern was that of descriptive documentation, which, while extensive and incredibly detailed, did little to utilize food as a lens through which one could theorize the structuring of social systems, the ways social forces shape lived experience, etc. – questions that anthropologists have historically taken great interest in since Boas's heyday.

Other early anthropological works that take food as their partial subject, whether written around the same time as Boas's "Ethnology of the Kwakiutl" or shortly thereafter, begin to use food as a means to a theoretical end. In *Coral Gardens and Their Magic: A Study of the Methods of Tilling the Soil and of Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*, Bronislaw Malinowski is concerned primarily with agricultural pursuits on the Trobriand Islands, where "agriculture is paramount" and "the population as a whole would find enough sustenance from agriculture" in the absence of fishing and hunting (Malinowski 1935: 9). The primacy of agriculturally grown food crops such as yam, bananas, *taytu* (a type of tuber), taro, and bananas within the diet of the Trobrianders is made abundantly clear. In addition to being a pioneer of ethnography,

Malinowski is canonized as being a leader in the school of functionalist theory. His particular brand of functionalism understands every facet of culture and social structure to arise and exist in response to the physiological needs of the individual. Furthermore, he maintains that all aspects of social life are interconnected and work together in order to keep the larger structure of a society intact and its processes functioning. In *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, food and its production become central to Malinowski's argument that kinship, religion, social hierarchy, economy (through the famous *kula* exchange), and village political formation are functionally connected. Malinowski writes that, "[g]ardening, and effective gardening at that, with a large surplus produce, lies at the root of all tribal authority as well as the kinship system and communal organisation of the Islanders" (Malinowski 1935: 56). Similarly, in relation to beliefs in the supernatural, Malinowski notes that Trobriand "gardening is associated with an extremely complicated and important body of magic," which "appears side by side with [agricultural] work, not accidentally or sporadically […], but as an essential part of the whole scheme" (Malinowski 1935: 55).

Functionalism has long since fallen by the theoretical wayside as anthropologists transitioned towards alternative modes of thought that account for the complexities of dynamic social systems. After all, societies do not exist in a state of static, perfect equilibrium as functionalist work might suggest. However, in *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, we see the ways in which food has the capacity to act as a nexus around which various domains of social life overlap. In this way, we can come to understand food and the act of eating to comprise what Marcel Mauss famously described in *The Gift*: *Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* as a "total social fact," a phenomenon which is "at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological and so on" (Mauss 1966: 76-77). Importantly, these different

fragmented categorizations of social life and experience are not simply connected (as Malinowski described) – they are layered within and on top of each other. The various directions that anthropologists and other scholars of food have taken may seem to vary widely (and they do), but traces of each are present in the others. The politics of food and eating are mutualistically entangled with the poetic. Malinowski's work in *Coral Gardens and their Magic* is an early example of anthropological inquiry that demonstrates food's potential as a tool that can be used to examine the multiple dimensions of social realities as they act in concert with, and through, each other.

While theoretical paradigms as they were formulated in the early twentieth century might be less immediately relevant to contemporary anthropological practice, schools of theoretical thought from the mid-century continue to act as a reference point for contemporary thinkers today. Food played a role in the development of structuralist paradigms within the discipline, which we see in the works of structuralist visionaries, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas. While not quite as famous as his seminal 1962 piece, *La Pensée Sauvage,* Lévi-Strauss's "The Culinary Triangle" (1966) is also a notable academic contribution, particularly in the context of food studies. As one might expect given its title, Lévi -Strauss focuses his structuralist mode of analysis on cuisine and cooking in order to develop a triangular diagrammatic model that purportedly reflects a deeply-embedded and universal human structure that governs our understanding of food as cultural beings.

Lévi -Strauss posits that cooking universally exists "within a triangular semantic field whose three points correspond respectively to the categories of the raw, the cooked and the rotted" (Lévi -Strauss 1966: 36). Corresponding to these three physical states of food are three cooking methods – roasting, smoking, and boiling – which align themselves respectively with

the aforementioned physical states based on semantic affinity. Despite the fact that his model has three points, Lévi -Strauss invokes the oppositional binaries that is a hallmark of his particular brand of structuralism. Integral to the theoretical underpinning of the Culinary Triangle is the oppositional binary between culture and nature, but other binaries become folded into this larger binary as well. Roasting and boiling, for instance, become respectively aligned with nature and culture, as well as fire and water, unmediated cooking and mediated cooking, and the binary of unelaborated and elaborated states of food (i.e., raw vs rotten), among others. Interestingly, the oppositional binaries he proposes can be found, "differently formulated," in certain cultural contexts (Lévi -Strauss 1966: 38). While this may seem to detract from the validity of Lévi -Strauss's universalist theoretical approach, structuralism's case is actually strengthened. Specific cultural manifestations certainly interest Lévi -Strauss, but he is ultimately concerned with deeply-embedded, underlying structures of human experience. Despite the fact that two different cultures might understand the nuances of boiled foods and roasted foods in inverted ways, it remains that they acknowledge the units of this binary as being respectively aligned with the units of nature/culture, endo-cuisine/exo-cuisine, conservation/loss, male/female, and so on. This implies the presence of some abstract system of understanding that is deeply ingrained.

Critiques of Lévi -Straussian structuralism notwithstanding, the Culinary Triangle formulation suggests the ways in which food and its related practices (e.g., cooking) can act as symbols that map onto other concepts and systems of binary categorization. Mary Douglas similarly shows how food becomes symbolically loaded with meaning based on the object's place (or lack thereof) within the boundaries of an existing structural schema. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Douglas attempts to explicate human understandings of dirt, cleanliness and uncleanliness, purity and pollution, and the ways ritual

and social code become entangled with these notions. One of the most iconic chapters, "The Abominations of Leviticus," engages with these concepts as they relate to food and dietary restrictions proscribed within the Old Testament. According to Douglas[1], the reason that animals such as pigs and camels are considered unclean and unfit to be consumed or touched by the Jewish people is due to the fact that they do not fit within the boundaries of Jewish classificatory categories. Namely, she cites the fact that the Old Testament decrees animals which have a cloven hoof and chew their cud are clean and good to eat while those that do not possess both qualities are abominable and unfit for consumption (Douglas 1966: 42-43). Pigs and camels confuse this system of categorization: Pigs have cloven hooves, but do not chew their cud while camels chew their cud, but do not possess cloven hooves. They exist conceptually out of place and, considering that dirt is "matter out of place," they take on the symbolic charge of being dirty and, therefore, not good to eat (Douglas 1966: 45).

"The Abominations of Leviticus" is not the only structuralist meditation on food and eating which Mary Douglas bestows upon us. In "Deciphering a meal," a classic essay that schematically analyzes the patterns and structures of various meal types, Douglas makes the argument that food categories "encode social events" and thereby contain messages about "different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries" (Douglas 1972: 61). This conclusion likely seems less novel in our current moment. Indeed, the capacity of food to symbolically represent different positions within classed hierarchies as well as other forms of group membership has been central to a large swath of anthropological work on food since the mid-century period.

[1] According to Douglas in the original text of *Purity and Danger*, at least. In later years, Douglas critiqued her own arguments from "The Abomination of Leviticus." It remains an influential text nonetheless.

We might take Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), an incredibly influential work of food scholarship in its own right, to be an early example of such. In this book, Mintz provides a thorough historicized account of the way sugar, as a commodity and agent of cultural change, shaped the evolution of British industrial capitalism and powered its colonial enterprise (importantly linking England and other Western European nations to Africa and the Caribbean). The subjects of analysis are largely political and economic in their orientation, but the symbiotic connection that the political and economic share with the symbolic also becomes a critical component of the book. Mintz is interested in meaning. In his chapter where he recounts the history of sugar consumption in England, he notes that sugar was originally a symbol of wealth, power, and status. For the privileged and wealthy of sixteenth century England, hosting lavish banquets with ornate dishes made of sugar was a means of demonstrating their place in the upper echelons of social hierarchy. By consuming these saccharine symbols of power, banquet guests effectively validated and legitimated the power of the hosts. Given that Mintz is interested in the political, the economic, and the historical, he goes on to explain that this particular symbolic function of sugar dissipated over time as sugar became more accessible to the lower classes of English society. The associated increase in sugar consumption amongst the English working class was by capitalist design; The poor became addicted to the consumption of sugar (primarily through the vehicle of tea, jam, and pastries), which: 1) of course, fueled the sugar industry itself, and 2) fueled English industry writ large by providing the working class with a cheap source of easily-ingested calories which could be transformed into more efficient labor. Efforts were made by the wealthy to transform these sweetened products into symbols in their own right. Tea and the everyday ritual act of tea consumption, in particular, became (and remain) a notable symbol of English identity. Through

Sweetness and Power, Mintz supports Douglas's statement that food and eating can symbolize positions within hierarchies, group inclusion and exclusion, etc. He contributes to this conversation by also demonstrating that meanings inhered in food are understood differently by different categories of people – even within the same culture – and that these meanings change over time depending on the political context and economic conditions in which the foods and acts of eating are situated.

Jack Goody's seminal *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (1982) is similar in its theoretical orientation in that Goody also seeks to explore the symbolic as packaged with the material dimensions and historical contexts of classed societies. He asks why differentiated cuisines (i.e., high vs. low cuisine) emerged in Asia and Europe but did not develop in otherwise socially stratified cultures of sub-Saharan Africa. His working explanation largely centers differing technologies of agricultural production and technologies of writing and literacy (the latter being a particularly prominent and recurrent theme throughout Goody's larger corpus of work). By Goody's estimation, the development of the plough and systems of irrigation allowed for the accumulation of surplus quantities of various agricultural foodstuffs while technologies of writing allowed for the development of manuscripts that encoded existing culinary practices, thus enabling circulation and encouraging elaboration of said practices. These ultimately translated into the features that marked distinguished, elaborate high cuisines in Asia and Europe (e.g., complex cooking methods, costly imported specialty ingredients, etc.). High cuisines then came to symbolize corresponding high status in hierarchical societies by indexing access to these markers of distinction. Sugar's former status as a symbol of power and high class in England (as materialized in ornate, decorative sweets typical of aristocratic banquets) as described by Mintz in *Sweetness and Power* is a convincing example of what Goody describes,

albeit as an object within a narrower category of analysis (Sugar is the base commodity in question, which is materialized in the banquet setting as a number of ornate, sweet confections. These confections are, in turn, representative of the larger system of English haute cuisine as it existed at that point in history).

That this snippet of Mintz's historical analysis supports Goody's argument is perhaps unsurprising. *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* was published just three years prior to *Sweetness and Power*, making it likely that it informed Mintz's influential work on sugar as meaning-making agent. In fact, Mintz would later go on to describe *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* as marking a turning point in the anthropology of food and eating (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). This marks a turning point in my own paper. If *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* marks a transformative moment in the anthropology of food, what distinguishes more contemporary anthropological explorations of food and eating from earlier works? For one, the depth of ethnographic engagement has since become more intensive. Mid-century ruminations on food are not completely devoid of ethnographic engagement, but it is notable that a number of the influential early works are somewhat lacking on this front. Lévi-Strauss's "The Culinary Triangle," while provocative and influential, can be categorized as armchair theorizing. Douglas's "The Abominations of Leviticus" analyzes the dietary laws of the Old Testament rather than those who adhere to them. "Deciphering a meal" has an autoethnographic bent in that she begins her article with an analysis of the meals in her own household, but the paper is not based on ethnographic fieldwork otherwise. While Mintz and Goody both had years of fieldwork under their belt (in the Caribbean in sub-Saharan Africa, respectively), *Sweetness and Power* and *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*, as works in themselves, are historicized meditations on the cultures in question rather than active ethnographic investigations.

Food and "Local-," Regional-, National-, Ethnic-, Diasporic-Identity

Following general disciplinary trends, contemporary explorations of food have largely since become anchored in critically engaged ethnographic fieldwork. The range of thematic interests widen and also, to a degree, reflect various disciplinary trends and movements in anthropology. For example, food becomes an object through which scholars explore processes of globalization and the construction of local identities, transnational movements of both people and commodities, migration and the poetics of belonging, postcoloniality, and ethnic and racial identity, just to name a few. These particular themes are, in most cases, connected to each other and jointly inform the lived experiences of late modernity. In that vein, I transition at this point to reviewing a selection of more recent scholarly works (relative to those reviewed thus far) in which anthropologists and other social scientists make food – whether as object of production, consumption, or discourse – the lens through which they explore these topics, among others. Lest I give into temptation to explore all the dimensions of food scholarship, I have chosen to organize the selected works around the symbolic function of food as it relates to personal and group identities (e.g., racial, ethnic, regional), taste and social distinction, and the senses and memory. All of these become subsumed within the symbolic functions of restaurant spaces and restaurant work, which will be considered later on in this paper. I also acknowledge that it would be a challenge to engage with any of these topics substantively without considering the juncture between the symbolic, the political and economic, and historical contexts. These dimensions of social life are inextricably bound to each other (as demonstrated early on by Mintz, Goody, and their contemporaries) and necessarily surface within the discussions of the symbolic capacity of food and the restaurant.

Through her work, Mary Douglas demonstrated how food can be understood as a symbolic marker of boundaries, as well as a marker of inclusion and exclusion from the groups contained therein. This function is particularly conspicuous in the relationship between food and ethnic identity. For the most part, ethnicity is popularly understood as a category under which people can be grouped on the basis of shared characteristics, such as personal and familial geographical origin, spoken languages, etc. As anthropologists, we generally understand ethnicity in less objective, immanent, and static terms, but the ways in which social actors understand ethnicity on the level of the everyday remain important. They engender certain processes of identification with groups, within groups, and from outside of groups, both by individuals who are ascribing ethnic identity to others and those who are ascribing it to themselves. Cultural materials, of which food is an example, often become important symbols within these processes of identification. In "Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity," Susan Kalcik writes that these symbols "objectif[y]" social relationships that exist between people and groups, which are maintained by said symbols and others like them (Kalcik 1984: 45). In effect, we "tend to *see* groups through their symbols and to identify ourselves through [them]" (Kalcik 1984: 45). [2] As far as food is concerned, the old adage, "You are what you eat" and Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's famous line that inspired it – translated in English as "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are" – both come to mind (Brillat Savarin 2009 [1825]).

It is important to recognize that ethnic categories do not exist in isolation. Fredrik Barth argued that the continued significance of any single ethnic group depends on the boundaries that are constructed and maintained to distinguish them from other ethnic groups. I offer a simplistic

[2] Emphasis by original author

and simplified illustration: A "Brazilian" person who eats Brazilian food with the intention of validating their identity as a Brazilian is, at the same time, distinguishing themselves as being ethnically Brazilian rather than ethnically Armenian or ethnically Swedish, and so on.[3] The performative dimension of this act of eating may be conscious or unconscious (or somewhere in between) depending on the context of the specific instantiation of consumption. In nations such as the United States of America, where the racial landscape is understood through the lens of liberal multiculturalism, immigrants and their progeny may intentionally eat certain foods to affirm (or, in some cases, reject) their ethnic identity in the presence of others. In *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories*, Krishnendu Ray describes how second-generation Bengali immigrant children are compelled by their first-generation immigrant parents to eat "Bengali" food at dinner parties hosted by (and for) members of the diasporic Bengali community (Ray 2007). This symbolic gesture is meant to send other members of the diasporic Bengali community the message that the children (and, by extension, the family) have not lost their inherent Bengali-ness. They assert their Bengali identity and wish to be identified by other Bengali American community members as such. These same children might prefer to eat "American" foods in the privacy of their own homes or in the presence of non-Bengali American friends. In this particular case, the children may be attempting to mark themselves as normative "Americans" or, at the very least, attempting to minimize their Bengali-ness and general ethnic-ness. (After all, in America, the term "ethnic" does not exist solely as a referent for a genre of categories of identity. Rather, it also exists as a category in itself, which flattens and marks all non-white, non-Anglophone individuals as existing outside of the normative white center as

[3] The first instance of 'Brazilian' is put in quotation marks in order to acknowledge that nations and national identities are also imagined categories, as per Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

being an “ethnic” person). In the combination of scenarios described by Ray, we see how food qua symbol affords immigrants the opportunity to perform and, importantly, negotiate their ethnic identity within different cultural environs. They are not wedded to a singular vision of a monolithic ethnic identity (although that vision may be imposed on them by outgroup members). They are neither wholly assimilated nor wholly unassimilated beings. Instead, they have the agency to perform and claim variations of their ethnic identity within a spectrum of perceived-assimilation by manipulating their food habits. They send particular messages about their ethnic identity to both out-group and other in-group members depending on the situation.

The manipulation of food habits as a means of performing and negotiating specific identities is typical of transnational subjects, particularly immigrants whose migration is framed by postcolonial histories. Others have shown how similar projects can be taken up at larger scales by postcolonial entities, oftentimes for political ends. Selina Ching Chan describes how the meaning ascribed to *pancai* (a centuries-old Cantonese dish which consists of many ingredients cooked together in a single large vessel, meant to be consumed communally) shifted once it was appropriated and absorbed into popular Hong Kong cuisine (Ching Chan 2010). Traditionally, *pancai* was eaten almost exclusively in rural New Territory villages during ritual events, festivals, and large ceremonial celebrations. Its origin story connects the rural villages to the core of imperial China and, as such, consumption of *pancai* in the New Territory villages has historically affirmed their identity as Chinese subjects. In the 1990s, during a period of heightened anxiety over potential reunification with mainland China, Hong Kong officials organized a campaign to emphasize a uniquely Hong Kong identity. As a part of this campaign, *pancai* was notably appropriated and reinvented by urban Hong Kong as a “traditional” festival dish endemic to their cuisine. In this new regional context, *pancai* attained a new layer of

symbolic and political significance. It now represents Hong Kong's past as a political entity that, as a former British colony, existed largely outside the dominion of mainland China, as well as a region whose culture is distinct from that of the mainland. Annual celebratory consumption of the dish, at the level of the individual and at the level of the region, serves to commemorate a distinct Hong Kong identity and functions as a symbol of political resistance against what is commonly perceived as an increasingly encroaching influence from mainland China.

Given that food fulfills such symbolic functions in postcolonial contexts, it is unsurprising that food and cuisine are also politically charged symbols in current settler-colonial ones. Liora Gvion's *Beyond Hummus and Falafel*: *Social and Political Aspects of Palestinian Food in Israel* demonstrates the ways in which cuisine becomes an arena of resistance for Palestinians against the cultural hegemony of the settler-colonial state of Israel. For her, Palestinian kitchens act as a political and cultural context through which she can understand how food and culinary ideologies contribute to the ongoing construction of national and ethnic identities under conditions of great political tension (Gvion 2012). Importantly, the private domestic kitchen functions as a safe-space (oftentimes one of the few spaces in which Palestinians feel they have total agency) in which Palestinians – particularly Palestinian women – can preserve accumulated culinary knowledge, which itself functions as a cultural reservoir for a distinctly Palestinian-Arab identity. Food, in general, has a remarkable ability to traverse boundaries, especially between groups of people who live in close proximity and contact with each other. That said, in the context of Palestinian and Jewish communities in Israel, Gvion finds that culinary movement across cultural boundaries has been stymied. Any culinary movement that has occurred is informed by the political tensions between the two groups. She writes that "the infiltration of 'Jewish' dishes into the Palestinian kitchen has been limited to those that

suited the structure of the Arab meal," which symbolizes a larger resistance against the erasure of a distinct Palestinian cuisine in the context of Israel (Gvion 2012: 10). She also notes that Palestinians interpret the reciprocal limited adoption of Palestinian cuisine by Jewish Israelis as symbolic of a lack of respect that the Jewish people hold for Palestinian culture, food being a synecdoche for culture writ large in this case.

At times, food becomes a symbolic object of resistance against more abstract forces or phenomena (e.g., "globalization"[4]) and their accompanying political and economic effects. Alison Leitch's looks at *lardo* (an Italian cured pork-fat product) and its status as a product championed by the Slow Food movement as an example of such. The genesis of the Slow Food movement, which originated in Italy but has since spread to other countries across the globe, was purportedly inspired by the jarring scent of McDonalds French fries where it had previously not existed. To proponents of the Slow Food movement, fast food items and corporations represent an existential threat to the survival of artisanal and regionally distinct heritage food items that comprise different national cuisines. They symbolize a "homogenization of taste" and the "more negative effects of modern market rationalities," which ultimately threaten the continuance of cultural distinctness (Leitch 2003: 454). Leitch links anxieties over this perceived threat to deeper anxieties over the question of a collective European identity that consolidates (and thus blurs the distinctions between) different European nations and their respective cultures, as well as anxieties over the implications that economic globalization has for the continued production of local material cultures. For proponents of Slow Food, these anxieties become embedded in the

[4] By which I mean the phenomenon most commonly understood as "globalization" among First World nations – one based on trends in global financial and informational flows during the latter half of the twentieth century. Akhil Gupta has used the coordinated transnational movement of food products throughout history, and in different regions of the world, to productively critique the idea that "globalism" is one unique, distinct, recent phenomenon (see Gupta 2012)

fast food concept and materially embodied in specific food items like the aforementioned McDonalds French fries. *Lardo* and other artisanally produced heritage food products championed by the Slow Food movement act as countervailing symbols of the integrity of local distinctness and cultural differentiation. By electing to purchase, consume, and promote these foods rather than those of fast-food conglomerates, Slow Food proponents are symbolically making moral and political claims regarding the construction of European identity during a moment of increasing economic globalization and the perceived dissolution of cultural boundaries.

Sidney Mintz once charged that America has no national cuisine (Mintz 1996). In fact, he argued that national cuisines were nonexistent and that cuisines were instead formulated at the level of the region. While meant to be provocative, the statement is not necessarily unfounded; The French concept of *terroir,* which connects a specific food or drink product to a hyperspecific regional locale, adds credibility to this claim. Still, despite being imagined communities, nations nonetheless possess significant power as a socially legitimized unit of group identity. It goes without saying that they ground our understandings of transnationality and the experiences of transnational subjects, including the migrants who Ray studied in *The Migrant's Table.* They also contextualize the tensions that can exist between ethnic groups, which we see in Gvion's work in Palestinian kitchens under Israeli occupation. Indeed, in our current moment, even as postnational phenomena increasingly define geopolitics, the nation still holds potency as a category which is popularly understood to organize the world and its inhabitants. We can observe how a recent history of globalization has intensified the reification of nations, as well as the importance placed upon national identity in an increasingly (although unequally) connected world.

Food becomes an important symbol in nation building projects, as demonstrated by both Richard Wilk and Arjun Appadurai, among others. In "'Real Belizean Food': Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean," Wilk explains that food, as a meaningful form of material culture, became important to the construction of a Belizean national identity, which only began to emerge in earnest when the former British colony was granted national independence in 1981 (Wilk 1999). In the vacuum left by Britain's former colonial presence, food became an important pillar upon which a national Belizean identity could be constructed in its place. Appadurai also considered the construction of a national identity in postcolonial settings in his famous article, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India." Harkening back to Goody's work on literacy technologies, Appadurai notes the power possessed by cookbooks to not only represent but also legitimize social schemas through the codification of food knowledge and food-related practices (Appadurai 1988). The Nation is one such schema and construction, and it serves as a specific iteration of local identity which stands contra The Global. Leitch's work shows that proponents of the Slow Food movement use food as a symbolic tool through which they seek to maintain local identities (at levels ranging from the regional to national) and resist globalization's purported homogenizing effects. Interestingly, the creation of nations as means of claiming a distinct local identity in the midst of a globalizing world can have its own flattening effects. Appadurai notes that the creation of "Indian" cookbooks flattens and invisiblizes the distinctions between the cuisines of different regions and ethnic groups, all for the purpose of creating a manageable, digestible "Indian cuisine" (notably to the detriment of those ethnic groups who generally possess less economic capital and political power in a national context). This demonstrates food's utility a lens through which anthropologists can study the

dialectical tension that exists between The Local and The Global, as well as the contradictions contained within manifestations of this tension, as it relates to the construction of identities.

Food and Identity – Gender and Class

The symbolic capacity of food as it relates to ethnic, national, transnational, local, and global identities implicates the powerful connection between food and place. The lived experiences of people grouped together under the above categories, however, vary greatly on the basis of their multiple other identities, including those of gender identity and class. It follows, then, that the meanings ascribed to food and the manipulation of food-as-symbol also have gendered and classed dimensions. While these two categories cannot simply be detached from each other in lived experience, let us separate and isolate them for a moment in order to consider the ways that food and meaning relate to each.

The relationship between food and gender has been the subject of ethnographic description since the formative years of anthropological practice, primarily as manifested in the gendered division of labor as it relates to food procurement and food production. These topics remain relevant and of interest to contemporary anthropologists, even as we have largely moved beyond the project of mere description. In most cultures, there exists a strong association between womanhood, cooking, and the space of the domestic kitchen. As such, the kitchen space and the acts of cooking and feeding others are understood to historically have played a significant role in determining the influence women wield(ed) in the unit of the home, as well as their larger immediate communities. As Carole Counihan writes, "the predominant role of women in feeding is a cultural universal, a major component of female identity, and an important source of female connections to and influence over others. Hence, […] the power of women has often derived from the power of food" (Counihan 1999: 46). Returning briefly to Gvion's work

in Israel, we see that the Palestinian kitchen acts as a cultural reservoir for a Palestinian-Arab identity. Considering that the domestic kitchen is largely the domain of the Palestinian woman, she holds considerable power over the production and reproduction of Palestinian identity via food. Gvion writes that women are powerfully socially positioned to "translate into practical knowledge not only the theoretical knowledge of cooking but also the semiotic system and cultural beliefs in which food is enmeshed" (Gvion 2012: 173.n).

On the other hand, the kitchen can also be understood, depending on the context, as a site of women's oppression rather than a source of power. Oftentimes this is related to imposed expectations of domestic kitchen labor. In an article centered on Indian grocery stores, transnational subjectivities, and the relationship between commodities, sensory experience, and nostalgia, Purnima Mankekar recounts a conversation she has with a middle-aged South Asian American couple living in the Bay Area (Mankekar 2005). In this trialogue, the husband fondly recalls the mountains of food that marked the celebrations of the Hindu festival, Diwali. While he nostalgically longs for these mountains of celebratory feasting foods, his wife remarks that such mountains of food were produced only because all of the women of the family would be "stuck" (implying at least some degree of unwillingness) in the kitchen, laboring for hours on end to cook the Diwali meal (Mankekar 2005: 206). This particular example highlights the fact that the same food item(s) can hold different, sometimes oppositional, meanings for different people based on the specifics of their multiple intersecting identities within the same social structure (men vs. women in patriarchal family structures in this case). It also brings us to ask who carries the burden of doing the labor that enables certain kinds of identity performances. The first-generation and second-generation Bengali Americans in Ray's *The Migrant's Table* negotiate their identity as transnational subjects through, among other things, the food they

consume. Much of the food consumed in the public, domestic sphere is cooked by the Bengali immigrant mother. As such, their food-related identity work is enabled largely because the Bengali immigrant mother labors in order to make it so. Now, whether or not the mother views this labor as being linked to patriarchal oppression as opposed to her cooking being a source of empowerment and pleasure depends on the specific mother in question, as well as the context in which the cooking is being done. It can, of course, also be both at once.

These works demonstrate, among other things, how the meanings ascribed to food can differ or be read differently between members of a group on the basis of gender. They also ask us to question how the dynamics of power and labor related to food work, both material and symbolic, are shaped and experienced by gendered identities. Transitioning towards a consideration of the relationship between food, meaning, and class while still considering the relationship between food, meaning, and gender, I want to note how food (and drink) items themselves can take on explicitly gendered meanings. In *Semiotics of Drink and Drinking* (2012), linguistic anthropologist Paul Manning remarks that "drinks, as a phenomenon of material culture, are both ordered by people into cultural systems ('ordering things') and reciprocally act indexically to order people into those systems ('ordered by things')" (Manning 2010: 4). To illustrate his point, he uses the example of cocktails commonly categorized as "girl drinks," which stand in opposition to the normative category, "drinks" (which, presumably, can also be explicitly understood as "boy drinks" depending on the situation, but are generally unmarked as a category). Paul Manning's work in this book is informed largely by theories of Peircean semiotics, in which meaningful potential qualities (aka qualisigns) are important in determining the semiotic nature of a sign in question. When it comes to drinks (and foods), many of these qualisigns can be perceived and experienced sensorially. A typical *Sex on the Beach*

cocktail, for instance, is often sweet, brightly colored, has decorative elements and garnishes, has a funny or provocative name, and is a mixed drink (Manning 2010: 5). Even beyond the realm of drinks, a number of these qualisigns are often used to gender all sorts of cultural objects. As it pertains to cocktails, all of the aforementioned qualisigns are typical of "girl drinks," so the *Sex on the Beach* becomes "ordered" within our cultural system as a "girl drink," thus taking on an explicitly gendered identity and dimension. Through this process of being ordered, the *Sex on the Beach* (and other "girl drinks" like it) simultaneously takes on the power to order us as cultural subjects. When consumed, the cocktail, as a material package of specific gendered qualisigns, some degree of femininity, which then becomes associated with the drinker of the cocktail.

Food's (and drink's) dual characteristics of being-ordered and being-able-to-order are critical for the relationship between food, meaning, and class. Some of those earlier anthropological works mentioned previously, such as *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* and *Sweetness and Power*, demonstrate how specific foods and cuisines can be associated with class identities in many hierarchically structured societies. Class identities are, of course, marked by more than just accumulated economic capital. Also important to class identity and identification, especially nowadays, are the (re)production and display of aesthetic taste (which I distinguish from embodied, sensuous taste), cultural capital, and claims to social distinction. Much of the recent anthropological and sociological work on food examines acts of public consumption (as well as adjacent acts such as that of generating discourse around said consumption) and their symbolic utility as a means of indexing social distinction. More often than not, Pierre Bourdieu's seminal *Distinction* serves as the foundational text upon which these analyses are grounded. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that "good taste," as a set of standardized cultural preferences, reflects the ability of those in the upper classes to frame their tastes as being the pinnacle of

aesthetic appreciation (Bourdieu 1984). Importantly, the material goods which comprise the objects of their taste are generally inaccessible to those in lower socioeconomic classes. Individuals who exist outside of the upper socioeconomic class lack both the financial capital to access these cultural materials that index social distinction, as well as the cultural capital necessary to appreciate them in the first place.

Bourdieu's *Distinction* has traditionally been invoked in discussions of the arts and their associated cultural forms (e.g., music and visual arts), but Bourdieu himself stressed the importance of studying how more quotidian cultural forms, such as food, contributed to the creation and maintenance of claims to social distinction (Bourdieu 1984). One of the ways food is taken up in these projects is as an object of consumption. I offer a simple example: consuming a tasting-menu meal at a fine dining restaurant that costs each diner four hundred US dollars certainly suggests that the diners have access to enough financial capital to be able to afford a meal that is, arguably, meant to sate aesthetic desire rather than physiological hunger.[5] It also suggests that the diners have enough cultural capital to know how to appreciate a three-hour multi-course meal, prepared using rarefied ingredients, razor-sharp technique, and artistic sensibilities. In addition to indexing social distinction, taste, and other aspects of identity as an object of consumption, food and drink can also index these attributes as an object of discourse. Michael Silverstein's work on oinoglossia (aka "wine talk") shows how language and drink can share a semiotic relationship, which reinforces ideologies of social distinction (Silverstein 2003, 2006). Silverstein writes that the oinoglossia employed by wine connoisseurs traces its roots to the register used by gentlemanly English horticulturalists, thus indexing prestige and high class.

[5] Food, in this case, is largely seen through the lens of what Bourdieu termed "aesthetic disposition," which emphasizes cultural knowledge and appreciation rather than the more utilitarian functions of food as physiological sustenance.

By being able to recognize and convincingly employ esoteric denotational terms specific to wine connoisseurship, speakers take on the identity of a socially distinguished, well-bred individual who possesses the cultural know-how to sensorially experience wine in its elusive fullness (and the money to afford fine wines).

In *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape* (2009), sociologists Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann similarly look at food as an object of discourse to explore the construction of social distinction through food. For them, a critically oriented analysis of foodie discourse allows them to explore not only "how social reality is discursively constituted, but [also] how discursive activities create, sustain, and legitimate relationships of power and privilege". They find that contemporary foodie discourse operates around a dialectical tension between ideals of social democratism and the drive to create, maintain, and claim social distinction and prestige. In terms of diet (and its related discourse), this manifests in what Johnston and Baumann term "omnivorousness," which describes a model of consumption that integrates both lowbrow and highbrow foods. The lowbrow foods suggest a move away from the explicit snobbish gourmandism that may have been more typical of, say, Bourdieu's own mid-twentieth-century France. The highbrow foods, meanwhile, imply the continued importance placed on boundary-making and claims to exclusionary prestige, even if those claims are generally more covert in the contemporary American foodie landscape. Claims to having "good taste" are rooted in the ability to enjoy foods from across a wide range of the class spectrum and, importantly, being able to discern which of these foods index good taste. This marks foodies from non-foodies.

Also, as far as class in its more traditional conceptualization as an economic condition is concerned, the authors find that issues of wealth, poverty, and general income inequality seldom

appear in foodie discourse. When they do appear, they are framed in such a way that "encourage[s] an understanding of the foodscape as a classless terrain" in which "inequality is insignificant, unimportant, and even irrelevant" (Johnston and Baumann 2009: 158). In addition to indexing class through more direct semiotic relationships, food and consumption, as objects of discourse, are then also integrated in larger sociopolitical fields that produce and reproduce class inequalities. The dominant voice in contemporary foodie discourse is that of the upper-middle class individual. Even if that voice celebrates some lowbrow foods and cuisines (the selective process of which also implies upper-class privilege) and seeks to obfuscate the valorization of inaccessible highbrow foods, the contemporary foodie identity is one rooted in upper-class culture. It should also be noted that this upper-class culture is rooted in privileged whiteness. The authors acknowledge two central frames that orient foodie discourse, the search for "authenticity" and the hunt for "exoticism". The latter frame in particular adopts the vantage point of the white, Euro-Western adventurer that sees the exoticized, ethnic Other as an exotic commodity ripe for consumption. By adopting this frame of discourse (and the consumption of the "exotic" that acts as the subject of said discourse), diners perform what philosopher Lisa Heldke has termed "culinary colonialism" (Heldke 2003). To engage in popular foodie discourse and perform a foodie identity through meditated consumption is to also claim belonging (or, in some cases, the desire to belong) in the white, privileged class.

Food, The Senses, Memory

Thus far, I have considered the symbolic dimension of food as both object of consumption and object of discourse. At this point, I would like to divert my attention towards the materiality of food, namely its sensuousness, and the way that it becomes taken up in memories. The ways in which (a) food is ultimately constituted and experienced as a symbol has

to do, in large part, with the ways in which it is experienced sensuously and, later, remembered. Nancy Seremetakis, in a number of her works, engages with the entanglement between material objects, sensory perception, acts of remembering, and the narratives that emerge from these entanglements. She begins *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* with a narrativization of her own childhood memories surrounding a unique cultivar of peach (colloquially called "Aphrodite's peach") that purportedly no longer exists in her Greek hometown. She writes that this peach, despite no longer being materially present in the village of her youth, continues to exist in the village as contained within sensory memories and as mediated through narratives of the past. For Seremetakis, the "disappearance of Aphrodite's peach is a double absence [which] reveals the extent to which the senses are entangled with history, memory, forgetfulness, narrative and silence" (Seremetakis 1994: 2). Two important aspects of memories and remembering are implied here: 1) memories are created in a process of selective remembering and forgetting, narrativizing and silencing, and 2) there is a temporality to memories, which not only locates them in the past, but also connects the past to the present moment and, less immediately, to future ones. This is particularly true for sensuous memories, which are attached to particular sensory stimuli that are embedded in specific cultural artifacts, such as Aphrodite's peach. When consumed, these sensory stimuli (as embedded in an object) become sedimented in an individual's history, which makes them available for later memory recall throughout the course of everyday life. This gives them the power to shape future perceptions and re-perceptions. As Seremetakis understands it, "memory is the horizon of sensory experiences, storing and restoring the experience of each sensory dimension in another, as well as dispersing and finding sensory records outside the body in a surround of entangling objects and places" (Seremetakis 1994: 9).

Oftentimes, these sensory experiences and their sedimentation as sensuous memories become emotionally and affectively charged. Through this process, foods (as well as other cultural artifacts) can come to be imbued with powerful meanings, particularly in the context of transnational migration and migrant subjectivities. In *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*, David Sutton provides an example which illustrates the specific meanings that come to be embodied within food for migrants, paying particular attention to the role of everyday sensory experience and memory. He describes an exchange between a former London-based PhD student of his who received a visit from a then-recent Greek migrant. During the encounter, the Greek migrant noticed a pot of basil on the windowsill, took a deep whiff, and longingly described it as "*really* smell[ing] like Greece" (Sutton 2001: 74). Sutton notes that basil, even outside strictly culinary contexts, is ubiquitous in Greek daily life, thus suffusing everyday memories with its scent. Now being largely removed from that cultural context and everyday scent environment, the smell of basil triggers a nostalgic longing for home in the Greek migrant and gains a symbolic association with the homeland that has since been departed.

This is not an uncommon occurrence among Greek migrants (nor amongst transnational migrants, in general). Sutton cites previous scholarly accounts of Greek immigrants in early twentieth-century America who would "br[eak] off springs [of basil] and from time to time br[ing] them to their noses and [breathe] in the piquant scent," saying "Ach, patridha, patridha" – aka "homeland, homeland" (Sutton 2001: 74). These scent-based experiences of nostalgia for home as mediated through a food item suggest that: 1) sensory experiences and sensuous memories play an important role in reconnecting transnational migrants to the places they have left behind, 2) that cultural artifacts can have different meanings in different cultural and

geographical contexts (e.g. basil symbolizes life in Greece for the Greek subject once both are located outside of Greece), and 3) food can create a feeling of being reconnected to physically distant communities by virtue of a shared set of culturally situated sensory experiences. Migrants, particularly those who relocate to areas where the diasporic community of their homeland is relatively small or virtually nonexistent, often feel a sense of fragmentation in addition to feelings of displacement. Food, which, over the course of a life, is so often sensuously experienced in the company of family, friends, ethnic and national community members, etc., has the power to recreate a sense of (re)connectedness and "wholeness" when sensuously (re-)experienced in the context of transnational migration (Sutton 2001:75-76).

Purnima Mankekar's article on Indian grocery stores in the Bay Area of California similarly engages with the relationships between transnational subjectivities and identities, sensuous experiences of everyday spaces and cultural objects (including food), and memory and nostalgia. The space contained within the Indian grocery store is full of sights, sounds, and (notably) smells, which enact what Mankekar calls the "semiotics of the familiar" for diasporic Indians (Mankekar 2005: 208). There are also potentialities of taste embedded in food commodities, which can have potent mnemonic effects. One of Mankekar's interlocuters describes how the taste of Glucose biscuits evoke powerful memories of childhood mornings spent with her parents, reconnecting her to a spatial and historical environment in which she is no longer situated. While this specific set of memories is more individualistically specific than the general longing for a homeland inspired in Greek migrants by the scent of basil, the two share a similarity in the affective resonance that foods can evoke in diasporic subjects, especially as this resonance relates to notions of home, family, and belonging. In fact, that this set of memories is more individualistically specific is an important point. A central point of

Mankekar's article is that cultural artifacts and spaces do not evoke uniform memories and nostalgic sentiments across all members of a certain diasporic community. While the commodities and sensory stimuli found in Indian grocery stores might certainly reconnect diasporic individuals to the same national and cultural contexts, the emotions evoked and experienced as a result of this reconnection vary depending on each individual's specific set of memories associated with said national and cultural environs. For some of her interlocuters, the space of the Indian grocery store – and all the auditory, visual, tactile, and olfactory stimuli that they contained – triggered feelings of anxiety and fear. For women, in particular, and the connection to the larger diasporic community enabled by the Indian grocery store sometimes engendered feelings of being surveilled by other community members. Again, we must recognize that the meanings ascribed to and inhered within food can change across contexts, not just in terms of the geographic and cultural contexts in which they are situated but also across personal historical contexts (even though the latter is shaped by the former, and oftentimes in similar ways across members within the same diasporic communities).

Anthropology of Restaurants

The works considered thus far demonstrate the ways that food functions as a symbol for various dimensions of identity, acts as a tool through which to negotiate and make claims to agency and belonging, and creates and evokes memories through their sensuous qualities. To do so, food-as-object (of consumption and production, of discourse, of aesthetics and performance, etc.) is often taken as the lens through which these aspects are explored. Just as important as any particular food item, dish, or national cuisine (however imagined and contested that national cuisine is) are the various social contexts and environments in which food is produced and consumed, bought and sold. Ray looks at the Bengali-American household table, Gvion

considers the domestic kitchen spaces of Palestinian-Arab women living under Israeli occupation, and Mankekar examines Indian grocery stores in the Bay Area of California, all of which provide crucial definition to the respective symbolic dimensions of food that these scholars are interested in.

Since the 1980s, restaurants have also become increasingly important social sites in (and through) which the symbolic capacities of food become subsumed, shaped, and intensified. In fact, restaurant spaces are fertile grounds for explorations of a number of concepts that have historically captured the interest of anthropologists, as well as those that have constituted more recent academic trends. The interactions that take place in (and thereby define) what we understand as restaurant spaces have the potential to yield rich insights regarding modes of exchange, social networks and labor hierarchies, processes of racialization, gendered and classed dimensions of social interaction, the body, political life, transnational movement, etc.

When questions surrounding accelerated globalization became *en vogue* within the discipline, for example, restaurants became a lens through which to complicate understandings of the dynamics between the global and the local. After all, in our contemporary moment, restaurants are a global phenomenon. This is visible in the diffusion and presence of recognizably restaurant-type establishments across vast swaths of the globe, as well as the diffusion and presence of specific corporate restaurant chains across the world – the most iconic of which may very well be McDonalds. As recounted by Alison Leitch, the Slow Food Movement was purportedly born out of fears and anxieties surrounding the encroaching hegemony of corporate global fast-food chains (specifically McDonalds) and the threat of erasure of local traditions, demonstrating the tension that exists between what is popularly understood as the global and the local (Leitch 2003). Certainly, this popular understanding of the

relationship between the global and local is not entirely unfounded, but *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* offers a more nuanced take on this relationship. In this volume, James Watson and the other contributing authors explore the ways in which McDonalds – a corporate restaurant entity that seems to encapsulate globalization's purported threat of cultural homogenization – has actually been "localized" (i.e., tailored, adapted, or otherwise altered to fit local social contexts) in a number of East Asian countries (Watson, ed. 1997), demonstrating that the global and local are actually, as contributor Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney describes it, "mutually constituent forces" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999). In doing so, the contributing authors to Watson's edited volume demonstrate the value that anthropological considerations of restaurants might yield for the discipline writ large. In our current moment, theorizing globalization may be less of a disciplinary preoccupation and the insight that the global and local are mutually constituent and constitutive may be less novel. That said, the construction of the local, local-ness, locale, and locality – as informed by heightened global, transnational flows of people, materials, media, and ideas – continues to be of enduring interest. Restaurants, many of which are in the business of commodifying locality and selling it through the vehicle of local foods, offers anthropologists an opportunity to explore the complex constructions (and, at times, fabrications) of the local (Nir 2016).

The vastness of the scholarship on restaurants mirrors that of the scholarship on food more broadly, so I choose hereafter to limit this section of my review to works that connect restaurants to the themes explored earlier in this paper, which themselves ground my exploratory observations of the current state of restaurants during this time of crisis. Namely, I seek to consider scholarly works on restaurants that engage with the symbolic capacity of food, the construction and negotiation of personal and group identities, taste and social distinction as they

relate to production and consumption, the senses and memory, and the multiple interconnections between these themes. By virtue of the fact that restaurants have typically been understood and imagined as discrete, bounded spaces, I also consider on what the literature reveals about the restaurant as a space of social encounter and as a physical space situated within larger urban topographies and social geographies prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has radically transformed restaurants' capacities to act as spaces of encounter, at least in the context of Los Angeles, in which both indoor and outdoor dining were banned, on and off, until recently. It also threatens their presence and existence throughout urban topographies as well, specifically in terms of the degree to which restaurants are able to stay open and thus materially constitute cityscapes.

Again, Leitch's work on *lardo* and the Slow Food movement shows how certain corporate restaurant chains with global reach might be popularly imagined to represent a threat to local identity, as well as how food becomes a means of resisting perceived cultural homogenization and erasure. The politics of Slow Food is ultimately rooted in a politics of *terroir*, a French term which denotes a powerful, essential connection that exists between food and land, product and place. The amalgamation of geology and climate, flora and fauna, human culture and craft, and the sensuous qualities of specific foods and drinks are naturalized and presented as indelible characteristics of a particular discrete, isolable region. Furthermore, *terroir* implies a certain timelessness to this web of connections, which ultimately belies histories of movement (of people, flora and fauna, techniques for the processing of food and drink, ideas, etc.) and generally takes for granted the fixity of "cultures" and entities like the nation. Anthropologists have long since challenged these understandings of space and cultural isomorphism (Gupta and Ferguson 1992), but they persist and remain relevant in the popular

imaginary. *Terroir*, then, becomes a part of place-making projects that seek to construct and assert a local identity through "local" foods.

In many cases, restaurants become conduits through which this sort of identity work is carried out (Beriss 2007). Amy Trubek details a chef's efforts to construct a regional *cuisine du terroir* of Wisconsin through her fine dining restaurant (Trubek 2007). Locally-specific food products that are produced and foraged in the region become critical components of this mission. Trubek's interlocuter makes claims to culinary heritage through the use of endemic foodstuffs such as the shagbark hickory nut, but the Wisconsin *terroir* she purports to represent through her cooking ultimately differs from the *terroir* associated with French *Beaujolais* wines or Italian *Fiore Sardo* cheese. While *terroir* is similarly a social construction in both of these Old-World contexts, the marked foodstuffs in question have longstanding (sometimes centuries-long) histories of being produced and consumed in some variation throughout their respective regions, oftentimes forming the foundation of local diets. The United States of America largely lacks similar storied culinary products by virtue of being such a young nation. Furthermore, the *cuisine du terroir* of Wisconsin that forms the core of Trubek's chef interlocuter's cooking does not represent the typical diets of modern Wisconsinites, who generally lack the sort of mythologized agrarian, pre-industrial connection to land, place, food, and craft that *terroir* implies and encapsulates. As Trubek writes, her interlocuter is "creating a Wisconsin *cuisine du terroir* from scratch," forcefully and with intention, chiseling out a local Wisconsin identity that can be perceived through one's senses (Trubek 2007: 40).

As it stands, the food of this Wisconsin *cuisine du terroir* might not reflect the everyday diet of most Wisconsinites, but Trubek notes that her interlocuter's cooking has gradually influenced the food products that locals seek out in farmers' markets, restaurants, and

conventional grocery stores. These institutions have seen a steady rise in demand for the regional ingredients that are used to make claims to a distinct Wisconsin culinary (and thereby "cultural") identity. To be sure, there are issues of unequal financial and cultural accessibility that mark the local food products she works with, but the fact that the chef interlocuter's culinary output has transformed the diets of some local domestic cooks and eaters speaks to the increasingly potent social capital and power wielded by chefs (particularly chef-restaurateurs). Sociologist Sharon Zukin notes that the 1980s saw increasing importance accorded to spaces of visible cultural consumption (e.g., restaurants) in urban social contexts (Zukin 1995). The advent of television networks dedicated to food-centric programming in the early 2000's accelerated the rise of the figure of the celebrity-chef that accompanied the growing cultural importance placed on restaurants (Johnston and Baumann 2009). As of the early 2020s, restaurants and the chefs that helm them have the potential to enjoy privileged positions as sites of taste-making and arbiters of taste. The degree to which individuals have access to these privileged positions is, of course, unevenly distributed along the axes of race, gender, etc. Overall however, chef-restaurateurs are, more than ever, powerfully positioned to influence how and what diners eat, as well as how diners should be, in both the public and private spheres.

It goes without saying, of course, that restaurants are not uniform in the food they produce, the general clientele they attract and regularly serve, or the financial and cultural accessibility of their fare. While restaurants might be categorized on the basis of a number of different dimensions, one of the most salient categories, particularly in a world marked by histories of transnational migration, is that of the "ethnic restaurant". This is particularly true in the context of the United States, a nation which is often framed internally as a paragon of liberal multiculturalism. As mentioned earlier, "ethnic," as a term, is subjective, slippery, and relational.

When applied broadly within the United States, as it so often is, it flattens all non-Anglophone – notably *non-white* non-Anglophone – others into a singular category of people. While this is, in itself, problematic, "ethnic" can nonetheless be a useful category of analysis precisely because it reflects the "unequal relationship between the self-proclaimed normative center of the Euro-American imagination […] and numerous categories of others, such as the foreigner, […] the stranger, the immigrant, etc." (Ray 2016: 4). These unequal relationships are often informed by histories of imperialism and (neo)colonialism. Immigrants who become coded as "ethnic" are generally involved in migration from the Global South to the Global North and common migration routes are often framed (if not directly, then indirectly) by the aforementioned histories of colonialism and imperialism. While migration from these nations might be spurred on by any number of reasons (e.g., violent religious and ethnic persecution, gang violence, etc.), the motivations are often based on economic need. The economic migration of "ethnic" individuals to the United States in particular continues to be shaped by the persisting mythology of the American Dream.

There is a rich body of social science scholarship on ethnic entrepreneurship (of which restaurants form a major category) that focuses on the political-economic dimensions of the lives of economic migrant entrepreneurs (see Song 1999; Ray 2016; Curtis 2013 for examples of migrant restaurant entrepreneurship). Examples of such studies might highlight the aspects of restaurant ownership that make it a relatively more viable option – if not in practice, then certainly in theory – for gaining an economic foothold in the new nation that transnational migrants find themselves in. Erin Curtis's work on Cambodian donut shops in Los Angeles, for example, speaks to how businesses that deal in the sale of prepared foods are understood by new migrants to be economically viable on the basis of having relatively low startup, ownership, and

operating costs. Hopeful Cambodian entrepreneurs typically meet the initial startup costs via a combination of working grueling hours in other low wage jobs and tapping into an informal, decentralized credit lending circles called *tong tine* (Curtis 2013). Accessing these informal credit lending circles can oftentimes be critical economic strategies that restaurateurs pursue dreams of financial security and success. Strategies of maintaining lower operating costs after the initial startup phase include tapping into kin and fictive kin networks for sources of labor. In many cases, Curtis's interlocuters depended on the labor of their children, extended family members, and friends from within the broader LA Cambodian American community in order to cut costs and maintain the viability of their businesses, a dynamic which is mirrored in the family dynamics of Chinese takeout restaurateurs in Britain (Song 1999).

Also worth noting are the ways that ethnic restaurants (or, more generally, businesses owned by "ethnic" transnational migrants) might directly inform waves and patterns of migration for diasporic communities. Ted Ngoy, largely credited as the progenitor of the entire Cambodian donut shop niche in America, is said to have personally sponsored the visas of over one hundred Cambodian families to enable them to come work in his then-burgeoning empire of donut shops, many of whom would eventually settle permanently in the United States (Curtis 2013). A significant proportion of contemporary American Chinese takeout restaurant workers, particularly in the Northeastern United States, trace their origins to the Fujian province of China, with most coming from Fuzhou (Lee 2008; Guest 2011). The labor supplied by rural Fujianese economic migrants is highly transient and mobile, and this movement is facilitated in-country by a sprawling network of Chinese-run bus services that connect major metropolitan areas of the United States, as well as internationally via underground smuggling rings managed by crime syndicates. While the work of Curtis, Lee, and Guest point to the ways in which co-ethnicity

becomes the basis of labor networks that drive (and are driven by) ethnic restaurants, restaurant kitchens also serve as common workplaces for ethnic economic migrants regardless of whether or not their ethnic identity aligns with that of the genre of restaurant they find employment in (Wilson 2020).

These studies, and others like them, point to the value restaurants have had as social environments through which anthropologists and other social scientists have explored the political-economic dimensions of the lives of economic migrants who are deemed "ethnic" in their host country, including kinship and fictive kinship networks, economic strategies and exchange systems, patterns of migration, co-ethnic labor recruitment, inter-ethnic labor exploitation and labor relations, etc. That said, anthropologists have also productively explored the poetic and symbolic dimensions of ethnic restaurant spaces. This is of course not to suggest that the poetic, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions of restaurants (ethnic or otherwise), are somehow separate from the political and economic. As public spaces in which food is consumed in the company of others, restaurants ("ethnic" or otherwise) are sites where performances of social distinction and taste are particularly concentrated (Zukin 1995; Zukin 1998). In addition to implicating a logic of hierarchical differentiation in itself, performances of social distinction and the restaurants they often take place in are, to varying degrees of transparency/obfuscation, undergirded by systems of labor and global commodity supply chains that reproduce political and economic inequality (Roseberry 1996). Ethnic restaurants, however, are also a useful context in which one might explore the processes of cultural production and the development of new identities and the ways in which these identities are performed. In his most recent book, *The Ethnic Restaurateur* (2016), Krishnendu Ray remarks that studies on ethnic entrepreneurship often construct the poor ethnicized subject as an individual who can only teach us about

suffering and domination, "as if immigrants are creatures only of political economy who never think about taste, beauty, and how such things might intersect with their practical-moral universe" (Ray 2016: 16). His work reorients us towards a theorization of taste that recognizes the substantial (albeit unequal) influence that ethnic restaurateurs wield over the production of palatal and aesthetic taste in the context of America. He also asserts that taste is not something that is marginal to the lives of marginalized peoples, but rather something of great emotional, psychological, affective, and also practical importance in their everyday lives.

Such epistemological choices are ethically important and intellectually generative. In addition to attending to the processes of oppression that define the lives of racialized ethnic entrepreneurs, we might then also pay attention to processes of cultural production that reveal how said subjects actively navigate the structural conditions they find themselves attenuated by. So, while we might recognize ethnic restaurants as spaces of racialized and racializing encounters (Padoongpatt 2011; Wu 2019), we might also understand them as spaces of agentive racemaking and production of subversive forms of identity (Siu 2008). Sylvia Ferrero's work in Mexican restaurants in Los Angeles, for example, shows us how Mexican restaurants are sites of innovation for new forms of identity (Ferrero 2002)[6]. For her interlocuters, Mexican restaurant spaces act as sites in which diasporic Mexican restaurateurs exert agency over the representation of their "culture." While the way they are racialized inside and out of the restaurant is still informed by hegemonic ideations of what constitutes and characterizes a Mexican individual, restaurant owners possess at least some degree of control over the way Mexican-ness is presented and understood (see also Vasquez-Medina 2017). Ferrero finds that Mexican

[6] For an interesting counterexample to the restaurant as a space of belonging, see also Rusty Barrett's (2006) piece on language ideologies in an Anglo-owned Mexican restaurant in Texas.

restaurateurs employ strategies of presentation (of people, food, etc.) that undermine dominant stereotypes about Mexican people, as well as strategies that help "foster a Mestizo way of being in the world" (Ferrero 2002: 205). Furthermore, these restaurants act not only as sites of racialized encounters (or resistant encounters against normative racialization) with non-Mexican others, but also act as spaces of encounters for members of the broader diasporic Mexican community. They function as "living rooms for the homesick" (ibid.) that catalyze the formation of social networks amongst Mexican immigrants and facilitate solidaristic relations (see also Johnson 2016 for similar findings with Guinean immigrant communities in Lisbon, Portugal).

Preliminary Observations of Restaurant-Industry Changes in Los Angeles

At this point, I shift my attention towards the ways in which conventional characteristics of 'the restaurant,' as a social institution, has been challenged and transformed by COVID-19. I limit these observations to restaurants in Los Angeles proper since that is the locational context within which I plan to conduct future fieldwork. In this section, I offer a number of open-ended questions which might prove to be fruitful lines of inquiry that I will take up in (or otherwise use to guide) future research projects.

Again, scholars of urban life have noted the significance restaurants hold as spaces situated in the symbolic economy and cultural geography of (and between) cities, noting that restaurant spaces have increasingly reflected, shaped, and defined the character of individual neighborhoods and/or entire cities since the late 1980s (Beriss and Sutton 2007). Restaurants act as crucial nodes in the formation of distinct "local" urban identities, which hold increasing importance in a global cultural arena where cities have unevenly distributed access to flows of transnational economic and social capital (Farrer 2010). Los Angeles is one of a handful of cities that possess a disproportionately high amount of cultural capital within the national and global

arena. As such, innovations made within LA's restaurant industry have further reach and oftentimes spread outwards through the rest of the country, informing what and how the rest of the country eats.

In addition to the cultural capital and influence that Los Angeles wields as a city, Los Angeles is also an interesting context in which to think about the transformation of the restaurant due to the various, often unpredictable city-level lockdown mandates issued in response to the pandemic. The city government first ordered restaurants, bars, etc. to immediately shut down indoor dining on March 15, 2020, which would be the first of a confusing array of orders that would alternate between allowing and preventing indoor dining, outdoor dining, and any combination thereof over the following year (Addison 2021). Furthermore, federal and state economic support for the restaurant industry has largely been inadequate, particularly for self-employed BIPOC small-scale restaurateurs (Center for Responsible Lending 2020). In light of the numerous lockdown mandates and the lack of economic support from the government, restaurateurs have had to transform the way their restaurants operate in order keep their businesses afloat, their employees paid, and their diners fed. While a bustling dining room might suggest otherwise, small-scale (i.e., non-corporate) restaurants generally exist in a more or less state of financial precarity due to extremely thin profit margins. That is, most independent restaurateurs lack any significant amount of savings through which the weather the effects of the lockdown mandates on their revenue. The pivots, then, come out of an immediate need for adaptation and survivability engendered by a hitherto unseen moment of industry-wide uncertainty. Located within them, however, is the potential to reimagine and redefine 'the restaurant' as a social and physical space in Los Angeles, as well as the ways in which restaurants fit into the larger social fabric of the city.

Many of the pivots were directly connected to the foreclosure of indoor dining. The most common response to the lockdown mandate was the shift towards offering takeout and, in many cases, creating jerry-rigged outdoor dining spaces on the sidewalk or in a parking lot space. The move towards outdoor dining, and the issue of whether or not eating at a restaurant (indoor OR outdoor) was safe, became an ideologically charged and contested issue, both privately and publicly. How safe was outdoor dining really? Who was it more safe and/or less safe for (e.g., diners vs kitchen staff)? These are common questions that circulated amongst the public, which also lead me to ask: Why was there such a strong contingent of people (in LA, but also broadly throughout The United States) invested in having access to indoor or outdoor dining, despite the fact that it might endanger restaurant staff on a daily basis? I imagine the reasons are complicated and also mixed. Perhaps, in some cases, there was a genuine concern for contributing the economic livelihood of the restaurateur and their staff (Although one might also ask questions about how the state offloaded the burden of "saving" restaurants onto the individual consumer). That said, I anticipate that the affectively charged debate over indoor and outdoor dining points to how restaurant spaces are themselves affectively charged spaces that contribute to a sense of normalcy in the public sphere. Restaurants are spaces of connection and encounter, of conviviality, of anticipation, of bodily and emotional pleasure and satisfaction. There are questions then about the ways in which these positive feelings, as channeled by and through commensality within restaurant spaces (Chee-Beng 2015), become political and politicized. To what degree did diners become attuned to their connections with restaurant staff and the ways in which they are a part of a political economy of affect and feelings (albeit perhaps not in those words)? What effect does the vision of a server donning a face shield, a mask, and gloves have on diners and their experiences of indoor and outdoor dining events? What does the

protective gear reveal about the ways in which the affective labor of restaurateurs and their staff are physiologically fraught? Along the division of race, gender, class, etc., who is it that bears the burden of maintaining a sense of normalcy for the broader public? How do restaurant workers interpret the continuing and evolving demands placed on them?

On a separate note, one might also ask about the ways in which outdoor dining has transformed the physical and sensory terrain of Los Angeles. I anticipate that outdoor dining may be one of the widespread pivots that endures even as the city gradually shifts towards a proverbial "return to normal." In what ways has outdoor dining shifted what we understand to constitute a proper or ideal restaurant space? In what ways does dining conspicuously outdoors engender a feeling of connection and attunement with a larger public that exceeds the enclosure of restaurant walls? At the same time, a number of restaurants have pitched tents or erected makeshift walls around their outdoor dining setups. What might these constructions reveal about the valuation of public versus private (versus semi-private) spaces of intimacy (see Samells 2016)?

The widespread shift towards a takeout model has also challenged the ways restaurants fit within a public/private distinction. Takeout and delivery are, of course, not new models in and of themselves, but the degree to which the industry writ large became dependent on them for survival has transformed the idea of what takeout is and what it can be. Whereas food ordered for takeout and delivery might have been understood as being impersonal and even unremarkable prior to the pandemic, a number of restaurateurs have transformed takeout into an exceptional meal format in itself. This is due in large part to the fact that ordering takeout was, at various points over the past year, the only way to procure and eat food produced outside one's own domestic kitchen. However, it should also be recognized that restaurants have taken great care to

replicate the sensory feelings of anticipation and satisfaction associated with dining out and package them up for the home. The intention was, in many cases, to bring that *je ne sais quois* of dining at a restaurant – a public space – to the dining room table at home – a private space. A fairly common takeout-specific pivot restaurants made was offering large format meals meant to be shared amongst multiple guests, oftentimes four or more. For example, during Summer 2020, Sawtelle's Kato (a fine-dining restaurant that normally offers a strict multi-course tasting menu) offered what it called its "Family Meal Menu" and "Kato at Home" (Kato 2020). The Family Meal Menu was designed to evoke past and invoke future moments of commensality experienced with loved ones. The name also points to the tradition of 'family meals' in the restaurant industry wherein restaurant employees will share a pre-service or post-service meal together, strengthening everyday relational ties in their fictive kin networks through moments of commensality. We see then, the ways in which the restaurant enters the private space of the home, both materially in the form of food (which is represented quite literally in the case of Kato's "Kato at Home" offering) and indexically through the evocation of the restaurant 'family meal'. What insights regarding public life might we glean from this movement of the public into the private?

That said, one might also ask how the movement of the public into the private might also be bidirectional or even recursively bidirectional. Instead of focusing solely on the ways restaurants have entered the home, one might also ask how the idea of home, the family, kinship and care, etc. has trickled into the restaurant. How might the format of restaurant takeout offerings and the aesthetic presentation of said offerings reflect the movement of the private into the public? Chefs Niki Nakayama and Carole Iida-Nakayama of n/naka and n/soto made a shift towards offering a series of takeout *bento* boxes during the pandemic. While the *bento* meal has

been taken up productively by scholars as a means to study such things as state control (Allison 1991), I want to foreground the connection bentos share specifically with motherhood – not so much in terms of the interpolation of mothers into state projects of ideological reproduction, but rather the fact that motherhood and notions of family, care, and the home manifest materially in the cultural production of restaurants. The most recent *ekiben bento* series was thematically titled, "A Taste of Home" (n/soto 2021). With the bento, we see the home enter the restaurant, which then re-enters the home as a restaurant *bento.* We might see a similar form of movement in novel takeout businesses, such as Chef Jihee Kim's Perilla, a takeout-exclusive operation that was born during the pandemic when Kim lost her restaurant kitchen job. Perilla focuses exclusively on making *banchan,* the side-dishes which accompany any standard Korean meal. In effect, her meal subverts the typical format of a meal ordered at a Korean restaurant, in which patrons typically order main dishes alongside which *banchan* is provided. Instead, she makes *banchan* the focus, approximating what Koreans refer to as *jipbap* – which translates to "home food." Again, we see the home enter the restaurant. In addition to thinking about the ways the public has moved into the private, what insight might we be able to glean from restaurants regarding the movement of the private into the public? What might the implications be for the ways in which the home, family, nostalgia, and connection are subsumed into projects of relation-building through and in the public? Perilla's *banchan* and n/soto's *bento* might show the ways in which the home, family, and nostalgia enter into the aesthetic form and presentation of restaurant offerings, but how do these themes manifest discursively? What might be gleaned about the ways in which food becomes increasingly used as a means of emotional regulation through looking at trends towards "comfort food" that restaurateurs are increasingly leaning into? How are nostalgic memories of home and comfort and ideas of nourishment indexed or

otherwise evoked through appeals made to the senses (see Yano 2007)? What is the affective potential imbued within "the taste of love" or "the taste of home"?

Chef Kim's Perilla also points to the ways in which digital technology has transformed the restaurant. Perilla has no brick-and-mortar location, nor does it operate out of a food truck. Instead, Chef Kim advertises all of her current menu offerings on Instagram and asks customers to place orders in advance of specified regular pickup days and hours through digital connective technologies. How have the affordances of digital technologies changed the social experience of eating restaurant food and the way we engage with those who make our food? While Perilla has received national press coverage, her operation is hardly the only one in which diners drive to the makeshift kitchens – oftentimes personal homes – of restaurateurs or cooks who started running digital-takeout operations during the pandemic. How have logics of Big Technology infiltrated the restaurant, if at all? Terminology such as the "cloud kitchen" and "ghost kitchen" have emerged to describe emerging commissary-like kitchen spaces that function as the guerilla kitchens for those running digitally-mediated takeout pop-ups. Do these offer any potential for restructuring of restaurant labor that affords historically marginalized communities more opportunity within urban culinary landscapes? Roy Choi of Kogi fame, for example, has collaborated on a new delivery app called Chewbox which funnels money into South LA's Watts neighborhood via a network of ghost kitchens and Watts home cooks. On the other hand, how might some of these "ghost kitchen" spaces serve to further obfuscate labor and exploitation within the restaurant industry?

Chewbox is one manifestation of a larger move towards the incorporation of restaurants into projects of caregiving and community aid that has been engendered by COVID-19. In the early months of the pandemic, noted LA restaurateurs like Josef Centeno teamed up with

nonprofits like Dine 11 to cook massive meal orders designated for delivery to frontline healthcare workers. These orders were also crucial for the survival of the restaurants, which were, as of then, still blindsided by the unprecedented ban on indoor and outdoor dining. Another organization birthed during COVID-19 is No Us Without You, a nonprofit that distributes food to Los Angeles's undocumented restaurant industry workers, who have historically formed the backbone of the industry, particularly in kitchen spaces. Undocumented kitchen staff were unable to receive state aid in the form of unemployment pay, so their state of financial precarity was particularly dire while restaurants were unable to continue indoor and outdoor dining. In what ways did restaurant pivots take into consideration the inequities that already defined the industry prior to COVID-19? How else might notions of care and community support have transformed the ways restaurants operate and are understood? Are there emergent trends in the restructuring of labor and compensation that attend to the most vulnerable members in the restaurant ecology?

What novel networks of social relations have emerged during a time of industry-wide precarity? A new collective of women restaurateurs in LA, RE:Her, recently hosted their inaugural ten-day festival, designed to "illuminate, celebrate and uplift the sisterhood of restaurateurs in LA" – to literally "save her restaurants" (RE:Her 2021). A notable feature of the festival was the prolific number of cross-restaurant collaboration pop-up events. What might this suggest about new strategies of survivability within capitalist structures that subvert the individualizing tendencies of neoliberal logics of competition? What sorts of networks of solidarity and aid are forming between restaurateurs and those in adjacent industries? Somekind Press, self-described as a "crowdfunded [and] community-focused micropublisher," (Somekind Press 2020) collaborated with local Los Angeles cookbook store, Now Serving, to create a series

of artistic cookbooks highlighting a selection of modest restaurants that are fixtures within the Los Angeles community. The series, “Takeaway LA,” features the likes Sonoratown and Hop Woo (an institution in Los Angeles’s Chinatown for twenty-five years), among others, and essentially functions as a crowdsourcing operation for each restaurant. All proceeds go directly to the restaurants featured in the series. How important has graphic design, visual aesthetics, and media become to the survivability of restaurants as restaurants have increasingly become a fixture of the digital media world and digital media has increasingly become a fixture of the restaurant world?

The upheaval of the restaurant industry engendered by COVID-19 coincides with a resurgent moment of a nationwide reckoning with systemic racism, particularly police brutality that disproportionately affects Black communities and xenophobic violence against Asian American communities. In what ways do these dual crises intersect? Restaurants donating a percentage of their proceeds to organizations devoted to effecting change that counteracts racialized structural violence has become a more common occurrence in Los Angeles. All Day Baby, for example, donated all profits from their Sidewalk Bake Sale last June to Black Lives Matter Los Angeles (All Day Baby 2020). This past March, Shiku donated twenty percent of their gross sales over two weekends to Advancing Justice LA, the local chapter of a legal aid and civil rights organization that service Asian American and Pacific Islander communities (Shiku 2021). These are two examples of many. Aside from donations, however, how have restaurateurs responded to structural inequalities in their capacity as business owners? In what ways has structural racism contributed the experiences of BIPOC restaurateurs in particular during this time of precarity and in what ways have they imaginatively met the confluence of industry-wide precarity and heightened racial tension? Has food been intentionally wielded as a medium for the

assertion of racial and ethnic identity or belonging during this moment of heightened racial consciousness among the larger national public?

CONCLUSION

The questions posed in the previous section are offered to tease out potential lines of inquiry to pursue through future research projects. Although certainly not exhaustive, they collectively offer up ways to start thinking through the ongoing transformation of the restaurant as a genre of public institution in Los Angeles.

Previous scholarly work within the anthropology of food, and food studies more broadly, provide a theoretical foundation upon which one might build an understanding of the ongoing transformation of the restaurant. In particular, attending to the rich body of work on the various symbolic and affective dimensions of food – which include dimensions of identity such as race, ethnicity, regional identity, gender, and class – might allow one to think through the social functions that restaurants have typically fulfilled for different communities, as well as the ways in which these functions have imploded and transformed during a time of upheaval and uncertainty.

Over the past year, the broader public has had to grapple with questions about what a restaurant is, as well as what a restaurant can and will be in the future. As I contend with that set of questions alongside the broader public, I aim to also interrogate what restaurants *do* for various actors of the restaurant ecology, as well as the ways in which food is integral to the dynamic processes of social life that take place in and through restaurants. In doing so, I follow a rich tradition of anthropologists who have recognized the value of food as an analytic object through which to make sense of social experience. My goal is to build upon this body of work through future dissertation work by attending to the ways in which the transformed restaurant

and the symbolic and material capacities of food yield powerful insights regarding the contours of contemporary urban life.

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