CHAPTER 4

Gastroethnicity

Reorienting Ethnic Studies

It is probably in tastes in food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it.

PIERRE BOURDIEU, *DISTINCTION* (1984: 79)

"Whatever is not Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Indian, American, French, Italian cooking, is ethnic," announces a Japanese informant (Ashkenazi and Jacob 2000: 46). He goes on to classify food into three categories: his "natural" Japanese food (*nihonjin*); familiar foods that are not his own (those listed earlier); and unfamiliar food (or "ethnic"). This is as good an illustration of what "ethnic" food means to people as any, although the details of the Japanese perspective are a little different from the American one.

A survey of ethnic restaurants conducted in 1999 by the U.S. National Restaurant Association identified twenty different cuisines that Americans consider ethnic. Pizza places were excluded from the survey for having lost their ethnic affiliation. The survey also noted that "some cuisines are becoming so in-grained in the mainstream of US culture that they are hardly considered ethnic any more. This applies especially to certain forms of Italian, Mexican, and Chinese (Cantonese) cuisine" (NRA 2000: 5). This echoes the sentiment of the Japanese respondent. Paraphrasing his words, one could say that for most bicoastal Americans there is American food, then there is Italian and Tex-Mex food, and the rest is ethnic. Of course, there are regional variations in this theater of consumption. In addition, there are changing temporal patterns. Maybe in a few decades we will be able to add

Chinese to the intermediate category—not completely of the self, but neither of the other. That is an optimistic view, because we might have trouble there both with race and ideas about essentially different cooking—think pasta and lo mein and their resonances.

Ethnic food is other peoples' food. That is congruent with the idea of "ethnicity"—derived from the Greek noun *ethnos,* meaning nation or people—which is used to refer both to people in general and "other" people in particular. English usage of the word continues to carry that same ambivalence. In American culture, "ethnic food" carries a range of meanings, from "different food" and "spicy food" to "food we do not regularly eat but love to try." Ethnic food is what half a century ago used to be characterized as foreign food—different food, but a little different still from "soul food," with its singular association with African American identity in the American imagination. All this, of course, is from the perspective of the Anglo-American resident. Everybody else since the Irish (1840s) carried first the taint of difference and now the romance of it. In spite of the recent popularity of ethnic food—maybe even because of it—ethnicity has largely been imagined from the outside in. What happens when we turn the concept inside out and let ethnics define the mainstream as an ethnicity, which it surely is?

Drawing the Gustatory Boundary

Probashi (expatriate) Bengalis in the United States define themselves in opposition to three other identities—Bengali in Bengal, Indian in the United States, and American. The first distinction—in opposition to Bengali food in West Bengal—is relatively muted in most cases and explained, usually with regret among the first generation, as the result of ecological constraints and the market context. Yet about 10 percent of my respondents asserted, with delight, that their food practices are more syncretic and adventuresome than Calcuttan practices. A few of the same respondents said that their food practices are healthier and more creative than those of Bengalis in Calcutta. Thus, at least one in ten *probashi* households seemed to relish the opportunity to break out of the straitjacket of Bengali culinary practices. Those households experimented with, combined, and ate out at many kinds of ethnic American restaurants that they might not have encountered in Bengal, such as Vietnamese, Japanese, or Thai.

Probashi Bengalis also define their gustatory identity in opposition to non-Bengali, Indian American food. I cannot fully elaborate on that opposition here because of the unavailability of any work on the food practices of other Indian ethnic communities in the United States. That has to await its own sociologist. Nevertheless, what can be asserted is that the main axis of that definition is not focused on breakfast, which appears to be cereal or toast for most Indian Americans (including Bengali Americans), nor can it be defined around lunch, which is a similar mix of American and Indian practices for all. It is dinner where Bengaliness is asserted against non-Bengali Indian Americans, especially in the inordinately frequent consumption of fish and rice by Bengalis in opposition to the vegetarian diet of many non-Bengali Indians.

Not surprisingly, given the context, most *probashi* respondents assert their culinary Bengaliness primarily in opposition to American food. Here we reach the meat of the matter, so to say. The quantity, quality, and nature of meat cookery appear to be the most important markers of American ethnicity for Bengalis. American food is imagined in astonishingly negative terms, perhaps echoing subconscious Hindu revulsion toward meat, especially red meat. Most of the negative stereotypes about American food centers not only on meat cookery but also on market versions of it, such as hamburgers and hot dogs. I heard numerous colorful stories about the "shocking appearance of 'uncooked' hamburger and its smell." One woman said, "Steak looks barbaric!" Another explained that "getting used to cold meat took me a long time, especially beef," and still another recoiled from "cold turkey sandwich" and "cold milk." One said, "I have never tried to eat hot dogs. The very sight and smell turns me off." Another exclaimed, "I was shocked by the appearance of a medium rare steak—to see how uncooked it was." To the (probably leading) question, "Do you think 'Cornflakes, beefsteak, and salad' would be the correct way to describe American food?" 65 percent answered in the affirmative, and only 30 percent disagreed. Among those who disagreed, some mentioned a whole range of domestic American foods, such as casseroles, stews, baked potatoes, baked beans, pies, soups, corn-on-the-cob, and so forth. But many who disagreed with the stereotypical characterization could not name any American foods other than the predictable hamburger, hot dog, and so on. I was told many an apocryphal story, one of which went this way: "When a Bengali came to America, he really wanted to try a typical American food to be able to talk about it when he returned to Bengal. A friend took him to

a hot-dog stand. This man had never seen a hot dog before. When he saw it, his appetite was gone. However, he still wanted to try, so he asked, 'Do you have any other parts of the dog?' " (Note how this story distances the Bengali American both from the American with his terrible foods and the provincial Bengali who knows no better.)

Another set of distinguishing American practices, according to Bengali Americans, centers on the fact that "they" do not serve proper meals at get-togethers—a conception obviously centered on ethnocentric notions of a "proper meal" and the "proper occasion" to serve such meals, of which I heard numerous versions:

> An American couple, a friend of my husband, invited us to a party. I thought we would have a full dinner, like our style of hospitality. I found quite a big crowd and they offered us some drinks, crackers, vegetables with dip and some cheese. That's it! My husband after coming home at 1 o'clock in the morning had fish and rice and then went to bed cursing Americans for their lack of hospitality.

Another respondent, Sharmista, wrote:

> We went to an American family's house for dinner one time. They had chips and drinks for appetizer. It was O.K. For dinner they had salad (basically lettuce), bread and spaghetti (no meat-sauce). They thought Indians don't eat meat. To this day, I don't like salads. To me it is what we call "cow's food." Anyway, I had a couple of bites for manners sake. Then comes the spaghetti and tomato sauce. I could only visualize how delicious our cooking of noodles is. I could not eat that spaghetti. All I had was a piece of bread.

These diatribes against others help construct generous narratives of their own past. In other words, American notions of hospitality are considered inadequate in comparison with an idealized vision of their own generosity and that of other Bengalis. Here Bengali Americans appear to reflect certain ambivalence toward "American culture," which Katone-Apte and Apte (1980: 343) characterize as the following:

> While it is conceded that opportunities for economic betterment are many and varied, it is also felt that the sociocultural environment is

somehow corrupting. Thus, there is reluctance to acquire typical American values and attitudes, and the dominant behavioral patterns that go with . . . middle class life [including notions of hospitality and proper meal].

is ambivalence is not exceptional to Bengali migrants but shared by ny migrants since the end of the nineteenth century, as made evident Louie's "Only stupid Americans eat turkey," quoted in Chapter 3. "Food hange," writes David Sutton (2001: 53), "provides a metonym for the mmunity values that many people feel are under threat from the forces modernization." Real or imagined stories about one's hospitality are thing more than what Sutton (2001: 54) aptly calls "narratives of *gemein-aft*." Such competitive evaluations in the case of my respondents are both gn of nostalgia for an imagined time of simple reciprocal exchange and epressed cry of anguish about the loss of that imagined community.

Continuing the discussion of Bengali-American perceptions of Amer-n food, one man said:

The main characteristic I noticed about American food was the serv-ing size. It was really big, and I would inevitably exclaim, "It's so much food!" . . . Initially, I tried to eat all the food because that is what I was told by my mother, but I ended up getting sick. Then I real-ized you could ask to take the leftovers home in a brown bag.

en we have the usual misunderstandings and miscommunications, some hem quite funny. One woman wrote:

I was surprised to see submarine sandwiches. . . . When I ordered a sandwich, the clerk asked me whether I would like it on a six-inch sub or a foot-long. I had never imagined sandwiches in inches or feet!

lhumita noted:

Within a week of my arrival I was at my husband's workplace—a hos-pital. In the evening a nurse offered me what she called "chili." She sked me, "Do you like chili?" I said yes, but that I did *not* want any. Yet, the bowl she held in her hand showed no evidence of chili pep-ers and she kept offering it to me. I was a trifle amused that she

would be offering me peppers and that there was no sign of them. And what the hell did she mean, anyway?

I heard a number of statements like the following: "Initially I thought th a hamburger is made of ground ham," or "I mistook lettuce for cabbage an cooked it like cabbage, but it shrank a lot." Another interviewee told me

> When I first came to this country, my cousin accompanied me to a Burger King. I felt intimidated by all the choices on the board, especially because they did not make any sense to me. So I waited until he ordered a Whopper, and I ordered the same. I quite liked the taste. So the next time we went to a McDonald's, and my cousin asked what I would want. I confidently stepped up to the cashier and ordered a Whopper!

There is a close parallel in another story:

> When I was here during the first months, I had no idea about salad dressing, so when we went to an Italian restaurant the waitress asked my choice of dressing—my mind went blank. I had no idea what kinds there were to begin with. So I asked her what she had. She rattled off the usual ones: Ranch, Blue Cheese, Thousand Island, house, etc. I didn't know what to say. Finally I chose French because it sounded familiar and was the easiest to remember.

Beyond the negative stereotypes and the miscommunications, many Bengali Americans acknowledged shuffling up to American food with trepidation but eventually coming to like it. Many explained how and why they came to like American food:

> First Thanksgiving dinner we saw the whole turkey and panicked. "'We are supposed to eat that?!" But with black pepper and a little curry powder that our host offered made it quite good.

Another noted:

> My first summer in Ohio in 1989—we were invited to a "Pig Roast" at a friend's place. Seeing the pig hanging upside down on an elec-

> tric rod, I was put off. My host informed me that for people like us they had potatoes and chicken. But I couldn't spot them. Then when the pig was taken off the spit—out came the potatoes and chicken from inside the pig—very well cooked in the pig's fat. To tell you the truth, they were the most delicious chicken and potatoes I've had till today.

Others described their transformation in less dramatic terms:

> Here breakfast and lunch are all ready-made; we have to cook only our family dinner. Cooking and cleaning is also very easily done because of conveniences such as dishwashers. So we have become accustomed to eating cereal and milk for breakfast, soup, salad and *chapati* [what Bengalis typically call *rooti*—flat bread] for lunch, and self-cooked food for dinner. Because of the environment and availability we have adjusted our food habits according to this country's style.

Some talked about how things have changed with the recent increase in Indian immigration into the United States. An older woman, responding to questions about changes in Bengali cooking in the United States, said:

> I think you should ask that question of the younger generation that has come recently. In our day there were very few Indians and so there was a constant interchange of ideas and food between the two cultures. My husband was a student then and we went to a lot of international functions. Further, the change in food habits came gradually without our being aware of it.

Along similar lines, another wrote:

> I learned cooking after coming to the U.S. by eating at friends' houses from all over India and also by following some Bengali recipe books. Twenty years ago, many things were not available; now almost everything, including fish from Bangladesh, is available in big cities. Also many Indian restaurants and catering services that are available now have changed my experience with food. . . . When I invited guests for dinner, I used to spend two to three days preparing various items for

> dinner and sweets. In India, we always bought sweets from outside. Now you can order many items by phone.

Another pointed to similar changes and to the reasons she has made the transition to American food:

> Twenty years ago when I came to the U.S., the non-American foods—Greek, Italian, Chinese, Thai, Middle Eastern or Indian, which are popular and common nowadays—were not available in all areas. The original American foods—hot dogs, burgers, soups, salad, sandwiches, etc.—appeared tasteless and bland to me at that time. But I did not have much time left in my hand after managing my job, a family of four with two kids, to prepare Indian food for all of us starting from breakfast to dinner. Therefore I realized that I had to choose at least a few of the American foods for our survival here. I desperately tried most of the common American foods and finally picked up a few of those that suit our taste.

The next commentator pointed to something a little different from the rest. She complicated the notion of American food by referring to her experience with sushi while talking about her food experiences in the United States. She said:

> I was very reluctant to try sushi. My daughter introduced me to that. First she learned how to make it and then tried to get me to eat it by using cooked curried tuna in the sushi rolls. She said they serve it in Japanese restaurants as spicy, curried tuna rolls. The thought of raw fish was initially atrocious to me, but now I enjoy it. It is quite delicious if it is fresh. However, I have not been able to convert my husband to a sushi eater.

This comment points to the complexity of what has been considered the unproblematic, "American" mainstream so far. As Yvonne and William Lockwood have pointed out, "The new cultural configuration of immigrants draws not only from 'mainstream' American culture, but from that of other immigrant groups as well. Groups previously arrived from other countries are emulated" (Lockwood and Lockwood 1991: 3). Newly arrived Eastern and Southern Europeans in Detroit "Americanized" their Serbian

names from Obradovic and Dragic to O'Bradovich and O'Dragich, emulating the Irish. Similarly, by the end of the nineteenth century Finns in Michigan's Upper Peninsula had appropriated the Cornish pasty, a turnover with a variety of fillings, as an authentic Finnish American dish (Lockwood and Lockwood 1991: 5ff). Hence, *probashi* Bengalis appropriately identify spaghetti and bagels as mainstream American food (given the primary areas of my research—the Northeast and the Midwest). Generally, that characterization does not extend to Chinese American and Japanese American foods.

Another *probashi* named Jhumpa provided an example of American children reaching toward Indian food:

> I teach elementary school children ages 6 to 9 years—most of them are fussy eaters. They like to stay with peanut butter sandwiches. We tried a special lunch for Thanksgiving with ham, turkey, cranberry relish, corn, potatoes, fruits, etc. I made a basmati rice pilaf and the children enjoyed it very much. I was surprised that it was their favorite and that they preferred it to every item, other than the corn!

As there are Bengali Americans who dislike "American" food, and those who don't particularly care for it at first but come to enjoy it eventually, there are equal numbers who outright love it. There is the *probashi* woman who responded to my questions cryptically: "Can't stand Indian cooking—too laborious. . . . Developed taste for other foods." Another wrote, "We were invited by an Indian husband and his American wife. She prepared marinated, breaded and roasted pork chops—that was the first time I tasted pork—and it was delicious. Since then I make similar pork chops at home." There were a variety of responses along the same lines:

> When for the first time I went to the grocery store in the U.S., I was elated to see so many foods and ingredients. Most of those things were unknown to me. Gradually, I learned to cook with these ingredients. From that time I am almost addicted to the grocery store. If I see any new item, I try to taste or cook it.

A Chilean woman married to a Bengali wrote: "My most favorite food upon arriving in the U.S. in 1965 were hamburgers with ketchup and milkshakes. I found them delicious. . . . I now find them fatty and tasteless." A man who arrived recently wrote:

> I never had any problems adjusting to American food. I was open to everything. I feel very fortunate to be here in a sense that I am able to taste food from so many countries around the world, which is not possible in India.

A number of respondents were delighted with pizza. As one of them said:

> Being vegetarian I thought pizza with cheese and vegetables looked good when I first came here. And I was right. A friend of mine took me to a pizza joint and ordered thin crust cheese pizza. I loved it and have enjoyed pizza thoroughly since.

Anamika wrote a paean to the hamburger:

> It was the day after I arrived to this country in the mid-seventies. My sister-in-law and her husband were visiting my home. I became quite attached to my brother-in-law who is a professor and a gentleman. My sister-in-law was visiting somebody else that day and my husband was at work. My brother-in-law said in a conspiratorial voice, "*Boudi* [respected sister-in-law], I am going to get a special treat for you." Within fifteen minutes he came back with a bag full of many Styrofoam boxes. He opened a box with huge buns layered with lettuce, tomato and a brown patty along with some fried potatoes. I ate the delicious sandwich with Coca-Cola. In the meantime my sister-in-law walked in and yelled at him, "You are feeding *Boudi* these unclean stuff?!" We exchanged conspiratorial looks. I knew I had been introduced to Americana by a friend for life and by Burger King!

Another woman wrote along similar lines:

> My first experience with American food was when I arrived in this country back in 1974. I remember going to a Ginos fast-food place in Langley Park, which is KFC now, and eating cheeseburger and french fries for the first time. I took a bite of that cheeseburger, and since that day I always look forward to taking the kids to KFC or a Burger King. I have a sudden urge for cheeseburger and fries and I am so grateful for experiencing one of America's most beloved

> foods. . . . I can eat any kind of food when I am outside of my house. But at night for dinner I want my Indian food—rice, dal, vegetables, and chicken or fish curry. One meal I must have my own food.

The lowly Jell-O seduced others:

> I was fascinated with Jell-O—its shimmering shape. I told everybody about it. When I was married in India, my friend sent me Jell-O packages—but I couldn't make it because I had no refrigerator!

Then there are views from the other side, especially from the twelve American women (among 126 respondents) who were married to Bengali men. Through these respondents we can again change the angle of vision and reorient the discussion by moving out of the insider group. A self-defined "former Episcopalian" American woman married to a Bengali man wrote:

> His mother knew British as well as Bengali cooking . . . was very smart and competent. Her meals were varied and kids never got fried food. We repeat too much, have fewer "courses," cut corners, do the easy and utilitarian thing. For example tonight. . . I filled this [survey] out, while my husband made *masur* dal with onion and cumin, *chochori* with cumin, black onion seed, turmeric, swiss chard, potato, spinach, yellow squash and broccoli and served it with *chapati* heated over the gas burner. (My son tried leftover chicken curry and rejected it, returning later for two scoops of . . . ice cream. My daughter is sleeping over at a friend's whose dad is Bengali and mom is American and vegetarian.) There was no *raita,* or fried eggplant (different texture to contrast with the rest) and no attention to the ayurvedic principles of bitter, pungent, salty, sweet, astringent, sour and the last one I forget—the seven tastes that should be present in a meal. . . .
>
> I had a shock going to India the first time. First, I was offered *sandesh* and *gulab jamun* [fried cheese balls in syrup] and *rosogolla*—never had I encountered so much sweetness. Then lunch was served—a huge mound of rice with a watery yellow dal. I bravely tackled it, not realizing that fish, meat, and vegetables were on the way. Chili would sometimes be intense. The combination of fenugreek and maybe *panch phoron* turned my stomach. I lost weight every time on

> my first three trips to India. By the fourth, I was used to the sweets and most foods. I can now handle food cooked with green chili much better and I like coriander leaf (I didn't at first).

A Jewish American woman married to a Bengali wrote: "In my experience, Indian cooks tend not to experiment with other cuisines. Also they prepare 3–6 dishes for each dinner, whereas American foods involve only 1–3 dishes per meal." She continued:

> My husband and sister-in-law, perhaps because they were 10 years and 9 years old, respectively, when they arrived in the U.S., have been very open-minded about trying different ethnic foods. Just a few weeks ago I visited a niece who recently (2 years ago) came to the U.S. Although she is considerably younger than my husband, I was a little surprised at how narrow-minded she was regarding trying non-Bengali food. Her main explanation for not liking a few of the dishes she has tried in the U.S. is that they "didn't taste like Bengali food."
>
> The fascinating part is that this prejudice extended to *non-Bengali* foods. For example, she stated that the European style cakes she ate from bakeries in the U.S. were not as good as the European-style cakes from Calcutta! I found this quite amusing since I've had tortes in Europe and America and the gritty sugar frostings I had in Calcutta were not anything like the originals that they were attempting to imitate.

Of course, what the niece is asserting is not so much the taste per se but its capacity to produce memories and hence identity. The past is recalled through food; and no matter how "gritty" that sugar frosting, it was more memorable than the best frosting one can have here and now.

A Lithuanian American woman married to a Bengali man responded to the question, "Why is your cooking different from your mother's?" by writing:

> I am trying to feed two kids who can't stand fish in any form other than fishsticks and a husband who would only eat fish if he could. In my mom's house we ate what she told me to make. Only my father could complain. That is, I cook what I learned to and compromise between kids and husband . . . all of whom have the right to and do

> complain. I cook vegetables and use more spices. We eat less meat and less casseroles and soups. . . . The children like to eat what their friends eat: white bread and hamburgers with ketchup. Their food tastes are simpler, no complicated spices.

She concluded:

> Luckily for my sake, I began this "cultural exchange" on a bout of vegetarianism. I was eating nothing familiar and trying to change my food habits drastically (nothing did taste like a chili dog!). So when I ran headlong into a man who didn't know how to cook anything but dal as vegetarian food, I was used to suffering. I ate it quietly, only spilling my guts later that dal was not my idea of a meal. We have since blended food habits and I eat all the meat he cooks and he suffers my noodles and potato binges.

Emily, a cultural anthropologist of India who is married to a Bengali, responded to the question, "Do you think, 'Cornflakes, beefsteak, and salad,' would be a correct way to describe typical American food?" with an angry "NO!" She continued: "American food is currently very eclectic, reflecting cuisines from around the world. Most people I know eat a wide variety of food and do not eat much beef, preferring chicken or fish or vegetables." Emily concluded:

> I am an American of Scotch-Irish heritage who is married to an Indian. I am also a cultural anthropologist (Ph.D., 1989) and have spent more than a year living (and eating) in India. In India, I ate almost all the food that was offered to me (provided it was clean and well cooked) and enjoyed it very much. Family members and friends in India had certain stereotypical notions of what kind of food I would like—they assumed, for example, that I would like large quantities of meat, but I don't. But on the whole they did not make a big issue (nor did I) about the spiciness or "hotness" of foods. On the contrary, in the U.S. I find many Indians to be very sensitive about the "hotness" of their food, probably because of the *occasional* American who reacts strongly against it. For example, I have enjoyed and cooked Indian food for over 15 years, never once complained about the spiciness or "hotness," and yet I am still routinely asked—even by close

> Indian friends—whether or not their food is too "hot" for me. While, as an anthropologist, I can understand their desire to define themselves as "Indian" and me as "American" by assuming (incorrectly) that all Americans cannot tolerate spicy foods, as an individual I find this *very, very* annoying.
>
> I've also come to realize that many Indians in the U.S. seem to believe that it is *impossible* for a non-Indian to cook Indian food that tastes reasonable. I will not pretend that my cooking is always good, but on occasion I have made certain dishes which, when tasted by Indian friends, produce a reaction of disbelief or outright denial that I could have made them. For example, some years back a friend insisted that my husband (who *never* cooks) must have made the chicken curry we were eating. At our Indian Society of New England meeting I am routinely asked to bring food "for the children"—assuming, again, that I am unable to make anything suitable for the adults.

She ended poignantly: "Sorry if I am complaining too much—food is *definitely* used as a marker of cultural identity by Indians living in the U.S., whose identity is likely to be more vulnerable owing to separation from India itself. Perhaps I resent efforts to exclude me from the enjoyment and preparation of Indian food, precisely because I myself feel very close to Indians and India."

In dramatic contrast to all the other American women married to Bengali men, Christina was in some ways the most devout Bengali. In the section on religion and prayer in the questionnaire, she gave a most detailed description of how she had built an alcove in the living room where, on a mat, are the *murtis* [idols] of Krishna and Radha, Buddha, Shiva, and Durga; next to them are a conch shell, an incense holder, and the Bhagavad Gita. She is also exceptional as a vegetarian among Bengalis in the United States, although she cooks meat dinners for her husband. She is exceptional because, contrary to stereotypical expectations about Hindus, none of the Bengali-American households in the survey were vegetarian. Only 6–9 percent (depending on the source) of West Bengalis in India are vegetarians. Ironically, Christina was the only American who agreed with the stereotype of American food as "Cornflakes, beefsteak, and salad." She, in fact, added: "Forget the salad and add a *can* of vegetables!" (Was she being ironic?) Then she responded to the question, "What do you think is more con-

venient—Indian food or American food?" with, "American—open a box, turn on the microwave, it is supper! Yuck!" She continued: "Americans don't cook—they prepare things from a box, while Indians cook from scratch." She was the only respondent who considered it inappropriate for Hindus in the United States to eat beef: "The cow is sacred—like *mataji* [mother goddess]—we must respect the cow, which gives us so much." She was also the only respondent who answered in the negative the question, "Can an Indian family be considered Indian if it does *not* eat Indian food regularly?" She wrote: "No—then it is an Indian family trying to be American and forgetting their culture; food is one of the things that define cultures." It is ironic indeed that it takes a non-Bengali by birth to become the purest of Bengali Hindus in the United States. Christina in some ways contradicts the fixity that I have given to ethnicity at other places in the book. Nevertheless, as an exception she also confirms the point.

Looking at a variety of ethnic constructions of Bengali and American gustatory identity as seen through the eyes of Bengali Americans—those who love American food; those who hate it; and those who have come to terms with it—as well as the more liminal and necessarily complicated views of American women married to Bengali men, I have sought to reorient the study of ethnic groups by looking at their food practices from the inside out and from the margins in. In the next sections, I compare the food practices of Bengali Americans with those of other "ethnic" Americans, then discuss the implications of the reorientation that I suggest here.

Comparing Bengali-American and Other "Ethnic" Foodways

I discovered Jitsuichi Masuoka's remarkable study "Changing Food Habits: The Japanese in Hawaii" (1945) after my own survey was sent out. Like mine, Masuoka's study draws chiefly from 100 household records, especially of food expenditures. Masuoka noted that the food of Japanese Americans in Hawaii had changed toward the consumption patterns of upper-class Japanese in Japan: "This fact maybe noted from such casual comments as: 'Our mouths are so sweet that we are not satisfied with coarse foods any more'; and, 'We are so accustomed to *zeitakuna seikatsu* [extravagant ways of living] that we are laboring daily just to eat well'" (Masuoka 1945: 761). On returning from Japan, a salesman noted: