INTRODUCTION

Anthropological literature has looked in various ways at ethnic food in multicultural, transnational contexts, largely emphasizing discourses of cultural symbolism and self-identification. In this literature, ethnic food is often regarded as a system of communication that discloses the daily practices and the habits that people enact when they purchase, cook, and eat their ethnic food. In transnational contexts, ethnic food is also seen as a vehicle for understanding the practices of "home cooking," where food practices represent a symbolic and cultural connection with the homeland. In this respect, ethnic food is considered as a "symbolic marker of identity," where the boundaries of ethnicity and regionalism are often transcended in new forms of sociality.

The anthropological and sociological literature on consumption of ethnic food at restaurants in transnational contexts also reveals the same tendency to deal with ethnic food in abstract terms, in other words, in ways that extol exotic experiences and solicit pleasure and desire. Ethnic restaurants are regarded as "traveling spaces" where diners take in foreign cultures and, contradictorily, are faced with forms of "staged authenticity." Ethnic restaurants are also seen as "arenas" for the transcendence of ethnic differences and the exploration of the culinary "other." At the same time, the process of consumption of ethnic food in itself is conceived as a device to reconstitute identity and enact strategies where subordinated people engage in critical thinking and change the conditions of their own existence.

However, if one looks closer into the culinary practices of people in transnational consumer societies, one realizes that some paradoxical tensions emerge. Mintz, for instance, draws attention to the relations of political and economic power in which food and eating are often enmeshed. He claims that we often deal with food in terms of pleasure, disregarding or forgetting about the conditions of starvation and embargo under which entire populations are constrained by international political decisions. Such political decisions, Mintz argues, show how food at an international level has become an important source of political power. In the same vein, Donna Gabaccia highlights the tensions emerging in transnational and multiethnic contexts related to ethnic food practices. She claims that food fights occur particularly in times of increasing immigration, food conservatism, and harsh competition between corporate food business and enclave entrepreneurs, in other words, between mass production and anticorporative behaviors of people who claim authenticity of their food.

In this chapter I argue that there is more to be considered about ethnic food consumption than the aspects that semiotic and symbolic anthropological approaches highlight. For among the strategies enacted by ethnic groups through food consumption, there are cultural and social dynamics that are difficult to grasp in their intricacy and with the full complexity of their widespread global movements, particularly in contexts of transnational consumerism. Yet, we must not forget that in transnational consumer societies, the interactions between individuals and consumer objects become increasingly fleeting, intense, and diverse. In this respect, any form of consumption in transnational consumer societies gives way to new forms of negotiation and new cultural contexts where both the cultural traits of individuals and the intrinsic peculiarity of the objects become "disembedded" from their home categories. In other words, in transnational consumer societies consumerism plays an important role in creating new forms of power relations that are established upon and submit to the influence of consumerism itself. Indeed, the tensions between increasing forms of cultural homogenization and new emerging forms of cultural heterogenization, enacted through consumption, bring about different processes of appropriation, resistance, and commodification. In such societies, the process of globalization blurs the center-periphery distinction upon which previous models of global interaction have been based. Its categories of power blur and create new spaces of action where the relations between the dominant and the subordinated, the self and the other, must be reconfigured.

Yet we must take into account also that in transnational consumer societies the market becomes the mirror of what consumers are, what they want to be, and what they can become. The market becomes the arena where individuals build up new social spaces for themselves. In transnational consumer societies ethnic minorities can insinuate themselves into the rules of the dominant system and make up their own rules of action. Marketable objects become, in this respect, the devices to change and perform such new tactics. In this } objects
considered to be ethnic, usually regarded in the anthropological tradition as forms of self-identification and as a means of understanding people's intimate worlds, turn out to be useful and powerful enough to change people's social conditions. By gaining economic and social relevance, ethnic objects enable those who are involved in the economic transactions of these objects to state a position in a dominant social and economic environment.

Ethnic food is invested with such power. I argue, in fact, that it can be used to twist relations of power and knowledge in food markets. Indeed, the strategies and the transactions enacted through ethnic food consumption are enmeshed with daily cultural and social dynamics that cannot be separated one from the other. The daily lives of thousands of immigrants, who are spread all over the world, intermingle and intertwine with the transnational consumer and productive practices of their ethnic communities, their neighbors, their relatives, and their family members. How is it then possible to point out the nature and the consequences of such dynamics in daily practices and at the level of everyday and ordinary life? It is in this respect, and to work out a methodological tool of analysis, that I have extended Appadurai's notion of "scapes" to include one of "foodscapes."

The notion of "foodscapes" will allow an analysis that deals with transnational food practices and their dynamics that usually characterize, and potentially subvert, consumer societies. Appadurai defined the overall dynamics characterizing global cultural movements and transnational consumer societies with five different dimensions. They are: ethnoscapes—the changing landscape of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and so on; technoscapes—the movements of technologies across any kinds of boundaries, for example, mechanical and information technologies; mediascapes—the diffusion of electronic technologies that communicate images, news, and information of any kind; ideoscapes—the widespread electronic distribution of images and information throughout the world that are often linked to the ideologies of a state, a political movement, or a movement of opposition; finally, finanscapes—in other words, the endless and quick movements of money and financial transactions across nations, financial corporations, currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculation. Any of these "scapes" is able to mobilize cultural paradigms, political movements, market economies, and financial systems and provide an analytical framework for characterizing the complex interrelations between the different forces. The dimension of "scapes" challenges the notion of cultural center and subordinate periphery. It offers the building blocks for individuals and groups who create their "imagined multiple worlds" spread all over the globe. Thus, these five dimensions are powerful enough to subvert a dominant order dependent upon the notion of the nation-state.

In the case of ethnic food, a notion of foodscapes highlights the trajectories of specific ethnic food items across the globe. Hence it discloses the different configurations that ethnic food entails and builds up with the other "scapes" around the world. For instance, a notion of foodscape shows how movements of ethnic food are deeply interrelated with ethnoscapes and how the economies developed around ethnic food, for example in the case of multinational corporations, are also linked to configurations of finanscapes. A notion of foodscape traces the emergence of enclave economies and ethnic niches in marketing, agriculture, and labor recruitment. It detects movements of ethnic groups and the immigration flow of such ethnic groups. Hence, it discloses the establishment of new ethnic communities that increase and broaden their social networks and their links between the homeland and the hosting nations.

When we go to a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown in New York, Montreal, or London, we enjoy the flavor and taste of Chinese food but do not think of the intricate social connections that are behind Chinese restaurants in any Chinatown around the world. For instance, we do not think that the renown of Chinese food in transnational contexts can be reason enough for Chinese of diverse origins in Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, and South East Asia to try to settle down with a Chinese restaurant business overseas. We do not imagine also that the variety of Vietnamese, Japanese, and Thai restaurants is often the tip of an iceberg that is the widespread business world of Chinese people in transnational contexts. As Watson argues, it is very difficult to gain a clear picture of immigration processes in transnational contexts if we do not take into account both ends of the migration process. Ethnic food is a very important element of such a process. Chinese food, Watson maintains, has enabled Chinese people to settle down and establish a solid food industry in many parts of the world. Issues of authenticity of Chinese food in the Chinese communities abroad have educated non-Chinese diners to request specialties and, at the same time, have enabled the expansion and empowerment of Chinese immigrants into the takeout trade and the business of Chinese restaurants. Thus, in some communities, the Chinese food industry has consolidated Chinese ethnic enclaves and enabled Chinese people not to assimilate and to perpetuate their forms of sociality and traditional life both at home and in a foreign context.

The same counts for the variety of restaurants and food markets that we happen to come across in Indian, Palestinian, Lebanese, Arab, Iranian, Turkish, Greek, Senegalese, Ethiopian, and many other ethnic areas of many towns and cities all over the world. In those areas we enjoy the colorful sights of outdoor food markets and the aroma of ethnic food coming from nearby ethnic restaurants. However, we do not think of the political and economic links and the financial connections that support that niche of ethnic restaurants and markets. When we go shopping, we a
by the variety of new ethnic foods that we find on the shelves of our supermarkets. However, we do not think that new ethnic groups might have settled down and flourished enough to influence the marketing policy of our supermarkets. To live in London, for instance, with its myriad outdoor food markets and small shops, it becomes even easier to understand how the metropolis is divided and inhabited by the different ethnic groups and enclaves. All sorts of vegetables, spices of any kind, in different colors and with different aromas are daily displayed on the stalls of landed immigrants, political refugees, and first and second generations of ethnic groups who inhabit the city. Thus ethnic food can be a survival strategy where old forms of antagonism and ethnic hatred are forgotten or silenced in a common need for integration. For example, food is a survival strategy for the Mediterranean community in North London. Turkish, Kurdish, Greeks, and Cypriots live together and share their food business in their common attempt to settle down. Their restaurants and food markets are the business enterprise of people who came to London with the intention of starting a new life, having a family, or helping with remittances to their relatives left in the home country.

In this article I focus on consumption of Mexican food in the transnational society of Los Angeles. I look at consumption of Mexican food in Mexican restaurants and Mexican food markets in the areas of East and downtown Los Angeles. I argue that an analysis of these different spaces and food practices, so closely intertwined with one another, allows a comprehensive understanding of the various facets involved in the concept of foodscape. I also conduct a brief analysis of Mexican cookbooks and claim that cookbooks must also be taken into consideration if we want to understand better the tensions crossing over the ethnic world of a foodscape.

First, a closer analysis of consumption of Mexican food and some culinary practices in the Mexican restaurants of different areas of Los Angeles presents us with a remarkable arena in which to observe how human beings invest eating, food exchange, and their culinary practices with social meanings, issues of power and class discrimination. It also helps us understand how discourses on ethnicity and authenticity of ethnic food can participate in or challenge the dominant system and its discourses of class and ethnic discrimination. Second, a consideration of Mexican food markets and mass food production in Los Angeles shows that Mexican food, as a foodscape, can become a forceful device to twist power relations in the ethnic food industry and corporate business. It shows how Mexican business people claim authority and cultural capital over the authenticity of Mexican food items and culinary practices. It also reveals how Mexican food becomes a means to break into the American economic and cultural system, a way of legitimizing social networks and establishing new ethnic roots. The steady presence of Mexican food in American food markets in Los Angeles allows the ethnic "I" to build up social networks and new social spaces, and to improve his or her position within a dominant system. Finally, a brief introduction to Mexican cookbooks suggests that they turn out to be the semiotic vehicle of communication of a foodscape. For they describe, support, and challenge the social and cultural practices linked to the consumption of Mexican food at Mexican restaurants in a dominant American system. It is by taking into consideration these three aspects and their various facets that I highlight the importance of a full and holistic analysis of Mexican food in terms of foodscape.

**EXPLORING MEXICAN RESTAURANTS IN LOS ANGELES**

To give an ethnographic account of consumption of Mexican food at Mexican restaurants in Los Angeles, and to understand Mexican food as a foodscape, one has to identify different "spaces" of the city, namely different areas where different food practices prevail. One has also to take into consideration that each area exhibits different social alliances and perceptions of identity and class. Thus an analysis of the consumption of Mexican food at Mexican restaurants located in the different areas of Los Angeles unveils the discursive practices of power and knowledge linked to Mexican food. These practices are found at Mexican restaurants according to the social spaces in which Mexican food is served and in respect of the expectations of different diners concerning the experience of eating Mexican food.

For instance, in the case of Los Angeles, downtown and East Los Angeles are the areas mostly characterized as Mexican-American and Mexican environments. Here restaurants are reminders of social and communal solidarities within the community of Mexican immigrants. They represent forms of culinary pride that express their "Mexicanness" or *Hispanidad* versus the main ruling system. For Anglos, eating and purchasing Mexican food in downtown and certain areas of East Los Angeles often means having to overcome negative conceptions of class and ethnic discrimination. On the contrary, in more affluent areas of Los Angeles, Mexican food can become a device to express forms of culinary resistance versus the Anglo-American society and non-Mexican diners. It is in the location of the different areas and in the distinction between the different culinary practices enacted at different Mexican restaurants that Mexican food discloses a new dimension. Mexican food becomes a device to voice issues of power, class, and ethnicity. Mexican food reveals a sort of "dual life," dependent upon the different areas of Los Angeles where it was found, and distinguished by class and ethnicity.

The "dual life" of Mexican food can be seen in the distinction between the food for non-Mexican diners, adapted according to their expectations and their experience of eating ethnic food, on the one hand, and Mexican food for Mexican diners, on the other. In the first case, Mexican restaurateurs adjust their culinary practices and the image of themselves.
ing to the expectations of non-Mexican diners. They adopt different attitudes toward their Mexicananness, play with the images imposed by the American society on their culture, and perform specific cultural traits to satisfy their customers' expectations. Following Rodriguez, Mexican restaurateurs in these areas enact a process of "commodification of the self" through which they convey the dominant system's consent. So while the outsider expects to encounter certain behavioral attitudes, the persons who are the objects of such expectation display a "pseudoethnicity" that enables them to mask and at the same time adapt their cultural and ethnic identity.

Mexican restaurants participate in the construction of the mythology of Spanish missions, the Mexican revolution, or the rural ancestry of Mexican culture and invent a tradition that becomes a symbol of cultural voyeurism. Photos of Spanish senoritas, of dome-shaped ovens next to mestiza and Indian maids, of Spanish soldiers or Californian cowboys, or of the Mexican hero Emiliano Zapata are elements that enhance such imagined tradition and the associated sense of exotic appropriation. Some restaurants have big sombrero hats and Mexican flags hanging from the ceiling, and pictures of relatives and family ancestors stating their family status and extolling a specific class or cultural heritage. Some other restaurants offer plays, music, and different kinds of performance drawn from the Mexican folklorist tradition. In many affluent restaurants one might find in a corner or in the middle of the restaurant a group of Mexican musicians. They all wear the typical mariachi suits and play romantic and melancholic Mexican music for non-Mexican diners who are willing to experience the romanticism of imagined Mexican beaches. Other affluent restaurants adopt a different strategy. They entrust their reputation and credibility to their cookbooks, written by their cooks or the owners of the restaurant and wisely displayed for sale at the entrance to the restaurant. In this case, one can understand the "positionality" of the restaurateurs, both with regard to the social environment and in relation to the dominant American system, from their marketing strategy that targets and also considers some restaurants one might be taken by surprise by waiters who seem to be wearing a pair of ammunition belts crossed over their chests and with two holsters hanging on their hips. There is nothing to be worried about since it is only an illusion; only when these waiters come closer to one's table will one realize that instead of bullets they have in their ammunition belts only small tequila glasses, and instead of guns they keep in their two holsters two bottles of tequila. What a surprise when these waiters perform a gunslinging routine like those in the Hollywood movies of the Far West. Then they will slowly blow on their hands and bend their arms over each holster. They will ask "Are you ready?" And when one replies "yes" they will shout something incomprehensible and literally shoot some tequila into the small glasses. Everything will occur in the span of a couple of seconds. The sudden and abrupt noise of the glasses filled with tequila being banged against the table will conclude their performance.

Another recent trend has developed especially at Mexican restaurants that want to come to terms with "modern" times. Some Mexican restaurants display in the middle of the restaurant, in sight of their diners, a huge electric machine that makes tortillas. The menu, brought by gentle waiters dressed in Mexican farmers' costumes, offers an immense variety of Mexican foods that have to be rolled in freshly made tortillas. The message is clear: "In our modern times we must be realistic and keep up with technological development in spite of the glorious tradition of our Mexican ancestors." Freshly made tortillas seem to be what really matters for the success of a Mexican restaurant.

Indeed, the concern for healthy and fresh food is something that worries many Americans. In the land that bore the first drive-ins, Mexican food, together with many other ethnic foods, impinges on the daily concern of millions of Americans about slimness, healthy eating, and levels of chemicals and preservatives in their processed foods. There is, in fact, an emphasis on the importance of dieting for health that bears the motto "eat what is good for your health not what you like." Paradoxically, however, an overwhelming number of Mexican fast-food chains and restaurants contradict Americans' concern for dieting and health. In Los Angeles, for instance, the presence of numerous Mexican fast-food chains such as Taco Bell, El Pollo Loco, Baja Fresh, El Gallo Grito, El Torrito, La Salsa—to mention but a few—is evidence of the popularity of particular Mexican food. However, the leaflets distributed to their customers by Mexican fast-food chains and restaurants show that there is an awareness of health issues that makes an explicit response, as well as being a marketing device, to these voiced public concerns. For instance, one Mexican fast-food chain started in 1990 with a brand-new image promoting its cover leaflets by a long list of no's: "No freezers," "No lard," "No can openers," "No styrofoam," "No MSG," "No microwaves."
However, in spite of the main concerns for healthy and low-fat food, in the affluent areas of Los Angeles, cooks at Mexican restaurants are expected to fulfill the expectations of non-Mexican diners eager to have exotic experiences and explore the culinary Other. In these areas, Mexican restaurants become as if they were the "front stages" of exotic tourist sites that hosts prepare for their tourists' curiosity. Hence the presentation of colorful Mexican recipes and food items participates, together with the performances of Mexican waiters and restaurateurs, in the construction of the Mexican imagery. Cooks at these restaurants are expected to prepare Mexican food which their customers will find palatable. Thus their menus open up different worlds. Followed by rather un-Spanish-sounding lists of dishes where a French and German flavor is often added, the repetition of entrees such as enchildas, chile con carne, tamales, fajita naxos, quesadillas, and so forth, signals the appearance of a standardized cuisine. Yet in some circumstances, the issue of good, fresh, and healthy food is left aside. I remember a few times taking my Mexican friend Elia, who migrated to Los Angeles with her family when she was ten, to one of these restaurants. I wanted to understand from her personal experience how she perceived those Mexican restaurants. I wanted to know how she judged the food that we were served. By the time we had visited a few restaurants, Elia became eager to ask the cook or the waiters for "more original Mexican food" and quite often she also managed to upset the personnel. Of course she was aware that those restaurants were not for "real Mexican people" and that the food was either "Americanized," as she kept saying, or "standardized" and "with always the same ingredients, something that non-Mexican diners could not understand." My friend's opinion was further confirmed by other Mexican women whom I met in downtown Los Angeles:

The food that you generally find at Mexican restaurants in many areas of Los Angeles, as a matter of fact, is not the food that we usually eat at home. That one is too rich and fat and we usually eat it only during our festivities. If we are all that kind of food everyday we would be absolutely fat by now!"

Thus the menus of many Mexican restaurants in different areas of Los Angeles demonstrate that their customers are considered as tourist diners who lack the knowledge to demand authenticity of Mexican food. In such circumstances, Mexican food becomes a device to transform Anglos' experiences of going to Mexican restaurants into a "foreign" experience. These Mexican restaurants become "communities" where non-Mexican diners are regarded as tourists who go through the same sense of estrangement that in general any tourists experience when they are in a foreign land. Hence it is through a reverse process that Mexican food inverts the social relation seen the "ruled" and the "ruler," though still following to the expectations of the ruled ones. In other words, the knowledge of Mexican food that cooks and owners of the restaurants are expected to have empowers them to take in their non-Mexican diners and guide them into the pretended "traditional" culinary practices. In this case, Anglos and non-Mexican diners in general, being treated as tourists, have to fulfill their role and accept being guided by their host Mexican knowledge-givers. Yet the game becomes evident when the acclaimed authenticity of the Mexican food that is served at these restaurants is questioned by diners who, unexpectedly, know the culinary practices of a particular Mexican cuisine.

Interestingly, however, the search for authenticity leads non-Mexican diners to challenge the stereotypical discrimination based on class and ethnicity that stigmatize Mexican-Americans. Donna Gabaccia maintains that "the pursuit of pleasure with minimal obligation encourages Americans to cross cultural boundaries... But it also exposes us regularly to the fears that cultural differences generate." I argue that the search for authenticity of Mexican food also leads to a reconsideration of issues of class and ethnic discrimination. In a society where class and ethnicity are still high on the list of discriminatory parameters, it is to taste real, authentic, Mexican food that non-Mexicans dare to enter the Mexican communities in East and downtown Los Angeles. For instance, one can go to a Mexican restaurant downtown that is well known by middle-class Mexican-Americans, Anglos, and non-Mexicans as a luxury restaurant with real, authentic, Mexican food and be amazed by the sight of Mercedes, BMWs, and Cherokees parked in the backyard, contrasting sharply with the shabby houses of the shanty area of downtown. In such cases, the search for authenticity and a taste of real Mexican food is powerful enough to overcome the stigma associated with Mexicans and Mexican food. It is through food consumption at these kinds of Mexican restaurants that class distinction is reconfigured. Another aspect of the Mexican foodscape is revealed. Non-Mexican diners enter the social space of Mexicans in order to have a "real" experience of Mexican food. Yet it fosters their awareness that Mexican restaurants in affluent, safe areas are mainly "staged" places where non-Mexican diners are obviously treated as "foreigners." In this respect, Mexican food becomes the catalyst of a behavior that challenges stereotypical concepts about the ethnic Other and class and social status. Thus, seen as a foodscape, Mexican food questions the cultural assumption of a society that still highly discriminates against Mexican immigrants and Mexican culture.

In East Los Angeles and certain areas of downtown, Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants generally run Mexican restaurants for customers who are mainly Mexicans and Latinos. It is in these areas that a new sense of Mexicanness and new forms of social solidarities emerge. It is in these ethnic niches that ethnic food as a foodscape demonstrates its consolidating power. Anglos enjoy Mexican food that...
areas only when their workplace is nearby. Such is the case, for instance, of a Mexican restaurant on North Broadway of Los Angeles. The restaurant is located near a police station, and Anglos queue almost every day to have good Mexican food, in spite of the presence of a large number of Mexican fast-food chains and other restaurants in the nearby areas. Indeed, in downtown and East Los Angeles, ethnic and regional restaurants flourish. In these areas Mexican-Americans and Mexicans name their restaurants by the name of the region they come from. Thus names such as Zacatecas, Michoacan, Vera Cruz, Puebla, Oaxaca, Colima, and Chihuaha are reminders of a more-or-less recent process of cultural and social displacement.

In these restaurants getting together to eat or to talk about food can be a confusing but laughter-filled event. Although some standardization and processes of pan-ethnicity are occurring among Mexican and Latino food items, there is a variety of food and so many different ways to name it that often the same item can have various names. Discussing food names can be also a great icebreaker, especially when all discover that there is no "right" word and find out one was talking about the same thing all along. However, the terminology, the use of particular words, and the question of nontranslatability of certain Spanish and Mexican words also entails another issue. It is, in fact, another device to claim a certain authenticity for Mexican food items and to a certain extent, it represents a form of resistance against the Anglos' claim to knowledge of, and appropriation or assimilation of, the cultural practices of other ethnic groups. Yet to talk about names of food items and the history of recipes can also become also an occasion for resentful historical remembrance, since it is through words and the names of Mexican food that the Latino cultural ancestry is openly revealed and proudly declared.

During my research I discovered that some Spanish words are also used to describe the colonial past of Mexico and to trace in the memories of Mexican immigrants the routes and histories of migration. These words become strong devices to preserve tradition, to mark historical transitions, or to symbolize cultural events. For example, many Mexican restaurateurs argue about the origin of the word "chile." Some are convinced that it is a Spanish word, coming therefore from Spanish conquerors. Others claim that the word "chili," on the contrary, is used as a symbol of mestizaje, or as a way of explaining the link to a past of colonial submission. The same happens with regard to the recipe used to prepare mole poblano. Some Mexican restaurateurs claim that mole poblano was invented by the sisters of the convent of Santa Rosa in Puebla, who wanted to prepare something special to celebrate the arrival of an important Spanish bishop. However, many others argue that all the important ingredients for this recipe—turkey, chile, tortillas, chocolate, and squash seeds—were being used by the Aztecs long before the Spanish arrived.

In East Los Angeles and downtown, Mexican restaurants become ethnic communities and social environments where new forms of sociality and new alliances between Mexican immigrants of different backgrounds are consolidated. In these restaurants, Mexican immigrants foster a mestizo way of being in the world, and yet they voice their concerns and complaints against the dominant American system. Distant from standardizing food corporations, Mexican food becomes in these restaurants the purveyor of the culture of mestizaje. In other words, it is a culture that stands as a sort of transgression. It insists upon violating culinary boundaries and becoming—not ideologically but pragmatically and culturally—a survival strategy whereby, however contradictorily, boundaries are set against the "ruling" society. In many of these restaurants Mexican people claim authenticity for their food and culinary practices and warn against the Mexican restaurants in other areas of Los Angeles. Some restaurateurs vehemently argue that "to taste the real flavor of Mexican food one must buy Mexican ingredients, pans, and crockery at Mexican markets in downtown and East Los Angeles":

"Anglos will never know the real taste of Mexican food because they do not dare to come here downtown and buy our food. Yet the food of Mexican restaurants in fancy areas is not real Mexican food and it is not even a fresh one."

Other restaurateurs display astonishment at the idea that some Mexican restaurants serve "freshly made" tortillas by means of big electric machines and state proudly their faithfulness to their old molcajetes, the ancient tools made out of a porous dark gray stone used to pound corn for their tortillas.

However, the contradictions and the conflicts of self-perception within the Mexican community also emerge strikingly when issues of class and ethnicity are brought up. A diet based on coffee and tortillas can be referred to as cheap food or as food for Mexican farmers, while the middle-class Mexican people can afford to eat meat and eggs. In the same vein, to call a restaurant tortilleria and to call someone a tortiller is to accuse the restaurant of occupying the bottom social rungs, and the person of passivity, Indian backwardness, and poverty. A conversation on Mexican food and restaurants in East and downtown Los Angeles can also turn out to reveal intraethic antagonisms within the Mexican and Latino society. For example, the term mestizo entails ambiguous implications that are very situational and changing, especially in response to the American environment. The word mestizo is associated with class and status, hence with ethnic connotations. For example, to refer to maids as mostly mestizo is common amongst those who want to distinguish their social status. However, in response to the discriminating attitude of the dominant society, Indian and mestizo can become devices to express an underlying cultural resistance and voice a political position.

Nevertheless, and in spite of resentments voiced within the
community, Mexican restaurants in East Los Angeles and downtown represent amazing arenas of socialization where the boundaries between private and public spaces are blurred. These restaurants serve as living rooms for the homesick. They are great archives of culinary memories. They constitute cozy places for Mexican and Latino businesspeople to arrange their affairs. It is in such areas that Mexican foods manage to survive the melting pot. Nowhere else but in East Los Angeles can one find, in a hot Californian summer, a refreshing Mexican drink based on water and flowers of hibiscus with no preservatives and the guarantee that it is a safe drink. That is a real Mexican summer drink that one can find only at stalls spread throughout the backstreets of Mexican neighborhoods in East Los Angeles. At these stalls, one encounters only customers who are Mexican immigrants.

In conclusion, with a notion of foodscapes in mind, an analysis of consumption of Mexican food at Mexican restaurants in different areas of Los Angeles highlights the tensions arising between the dominant system and the Mexican community as related to issues of class and ethnic discrimination. Mexican restaurants disclose discursive practices of power and knowledge relating to food items and culinary practices as well as to issues of identity and ethnicity. At the same time, Mexican restaurants have a major economic and demographic significance. It has to be taken into account that Mexican restaurants are a powerful source of employment for Mexican immigrants and first- and second-generation Mexican-Americans. Here the economy of the Mexican foodscapes gives Mexican people a legitimate way to break into the American economic system and establish social networks. In the next section I argue that the steady presence of Mexican food in American food markets in Los Angeles allows Mexican people to build up social networks and improve their social position in American society.

**FOODSCAPES IN A PROCESSED-FOOD WORLD**

Donna Gabaccia claims that America is not a "multi-ethnic nation, but a "nation of multi-ethnics." In the nation of "multi-ethnics," she argues, multiethnic eating stands as a constant reminder of how widespread and enjoyable ethnic interactions have sometimes been in the United States. I argue that ethnic food, particularly in transnational consumer societies, often turns out to be a social and political symbol that is disputed in forms of negotiation and cultural appropriation. Numerous food items and culinary practices as well as to issues of identity and ethnicity. At the same time, Mexican restaurants have a major economic and demographic significance. It has to be taken into account that Mexican restaurants are a powerful source of employment for Mexican immigrants and first- and second-generation Mexican-Americans. Here the economy of the Mexican foodscapes gives Mexican people a legitimate way to break into the American economic system and establish social networks. In the next section I argue that the steady presence of Mexican food in American food markets in Los Angeles allows Mexican people to build up social networks and improve their social position in American society.

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There is, in fact, a far more economic reason for such an overwhelming presence of Mexican snacks in American food markets. Mexican snacks seem to be successful because they lend themselves to experimentation in the American food industry, where spicy ethnic food can be combined with processed food to fit well the structures of fast food and snack markets. However, there is also another explanation that goes back to the social realities of ethnic food markets. American food corporations are constantly faced with the reality of food markets where immigration flows are endless, and repeatedly introduce new sources of culinary diversity, new tastes, new expectations of authenticity, and new attitudes related to authenticity and its meaning. Thus the notion that Mexican food has bad connotations of low status and low class distinctions may demote it to the rank of snack. But we must not forget that Americans continue to increase the frequency with which they eat at fast-food restaurants, and their tendency to snack remains highly important in their eating habits.

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American food corporations, in other words, cannot compete with a food market that is always flexible in its demand for food items and where consumers are also always rigorously in search of authenticity in relation to their ethnic foods. Indeed, big American corporations recognize the existence of enclave markets, as demonstrated by their franchising and marketing to specific ethnic groups with precise consumer tastes. However, although they try to penetrate these markets of ethnic food, they are nevertheless faced with enclave businesses who
have the cultural capital to compete, knowing their consumers better and being able, in spite of their strong anticorporative behavior, to create quasi-monopoly markets.

Indeed, the Mexican food industry and markets have become a center of activity for many Mexican-American and Mexican manufacturers and marketers in Los Angeles. Growing small-business enterprises of Mexican food, outdoor markets, Mexican food stores, and chains of Mexican restaurants bear witness to the potential of the economic value of Mexican food in the food industry. Market analyses now estimate that Mexican food markets are worth billions of dollars, and corporate analysts see Mexican food as increasing its market share with the increasing immigration of Hispanics. As purveyors of their own foods, Mexican-Americans and Mexicans demonstrate entrepreneurial skills. They take advantage of their cultural capital and knowledge of their home regions to supply specific commodities required by new immigrants, Mexicans, and first-generation Mexican-Americans.

All this has to be considered in light of the demographic statistics that relate to the near future of California and which suggest a continuing increase in the Latin American population. Latinos are projected to constitute 35.5 percent of the Californian population by the year 2030, while the growth level for African American and Asians will remain more or less unchanged. Another significant point is the striking disparity in age bands of Latin Americans and Anglo-Americans. In the not-too-distant future, Hayes Bautista argues, California will be inhabited by old Anglo-Americans and young Latin Americans. It is expected that by the year 2030, 60 percent of senior citizens will be Anglo-Americans while 50 percent of the young population will be Latin American. Of this, 45 percent will be under the age of 15, and 38 percent will be between 16 and 64 years of age. This age group is considered by Anglo-American workers to be the most "intrusive" since it will consist mainly of the working classes. The expectations of a demographic explosion will mean also that the Anglo-American society will soon no longer be the majority in the Southwestern States. Hence, in terms of business and market forecasts, in the year 2030, 48.2 percent of American total consumer growth will be in the Hispanic population. In the same year, only 9.1 percent of American consumer growth will be attributable to the non-Hispanic white consumers.

In times of ethnic tensions and increasing migration, powerful American corporations are suddenly realizing that the Hispanic community, on a national scale, represents more than $100 billion in spendable income but that their market share is still very low. To capitalize on these expanding market opportunities, American corporations have been compelled to invest in costly research into the history and culture of Mexican food. The _Panic Market Handbook: The Definite Source for Reaching This Lucrative Segment of American Consumers_ gives an idea of how market research on Latino markets can become an anthropological and sociological treatise on Mexican-Americans and Latinos in general! Hence, to be effective, marketing campaigns that target Mexican consumers must be in tune with Mexican culture at all levels: symbolic, explicit, visual, and subliminal. However, despite these great efforts, Latino and Mexican food markets are very complex, still underrepresented, and very much an enigma to the vast majority of Anglo marketing professionals.

The contrasts between the homogeneity of American, processed, mass-produced, food markets and the extraordinary diversity of Mexican food markets are, in fact, striking. Colorful _mercados_ and _mercaditos_ are found throughout downtown and East Los Angeles. They are overcrowded at any time of the day with Latinos, Mexican-Americans, and Mexicans. Only a few Anglos dare to adventure into those areas since they are the domains of ethnic gangs and have high levels of street and juvenile criminality. From the smallest to the largest—including chains such as Tijuans and Viva that are found throughout Southern California—it is common to find in these markets indigenous vegetables and fruits that have been consumed since pre-Columbian times. Following the traditional custom of _tangüis_ (the name given to the markets at the time of the Aztecs), most large Mexican markets in downtown and East Los Angeles have a special section in which ready-to-eat traditional Mexican dishes, from _tamales_ to less common dishes, are available. One can also find in these _mercados_ and _mercaditos_ small Mexican restaurants and stalls where tacos are served hot and ready-made with a wide variety of fillings. The preservation of traditional food patterns is made all the easier by the geographical closeness to Mexico that allows many Mexican-Americans and Mexicans to visit their relatives and maintain close contacts with their cultural heritage.

Indeed, the search for a real Mexican food and the claims for authenticity by immigrants transform Mexican food into a device that shifts power relations in the American ethnic food industry. By being involved in economic transactions of Mexican food, Mexican-Americans and Mexicans are also able to play a position game since they are strongly advantaged by their closeness to immigrant consumers. It is in this ability to affect economic business relations that Mexican food shows its dimension as a foodscape. It is in the claim for authenticity by immigrants—whether based on food habits, nostalgia for the homeland, or pride in one's dietary tradition—that Mexican food shows its potential as a foodscape. It is due to the attachment of Mexican food to Mexican culture and to its pervasiveness in the American food markets that Mexican food is effective as a foodscape. Thus Mexican food not only acquires an economic relevance in the American food industry but it also allows the social and cultural empowerment of new immigrants, Mexicans, and first- and second-generation Mexican-Americans. Mexican food fosters traditional social links with the homeland. It opens up economic routes for immig
favors the establishment of social and ethnic networks. It becomes also a means of social "deterritorialization" since it opens economic routes for immigrant Mexican labor to come and consolidate in American society. Enhancing flows of immigrants as labor force, Mexican food provides food entrepreneurs privileged access to sources of low-wage labor and new consumer markets. Thus it allows entrepreneurial activity to flourish and thrive. In the next section, I point out that Mexican cookbooks reveal other narratives that play within a foodscape. As nonofficial channels of communication, Mexican cookbooks turn out to be an important bridgehead between the different practices developed around Mexican food consumption in the different areas of Los Angeles.

**Mexican Cookbooks as a Meaningful Practice**

Anthropologists have widely considered cookbooks as the expression of a particular cultural environment, the potentially surest sign of the emergence of a national cuisine, the representations of structures of production and distribution, or the growing body of a food-based characterization of the ethnic Other. I conceive Mexican cookbooks as a sort of ethnography that discloses, in conjunction with an analysis of Mexican restaurants and food markets, the contradictions between groups and subcultures and the ethnic tensions within the Mexican community and the dominant system. Carefully exposed on the shelves of fancy restaurants in Los Angeles, sold at the stalls of small Mexican food markets, or neatly displayed in the Spanish/Mexican cuisine sections of bookstores, Mexican cookbooks reveal the social reality that pertains to the daily life of Mexican-Americans and Mexicans in American society.

Mexican cookbooks are atypical books in which each section of the book is intertwined with chapters on personal and family histories, historical accounts, political statements, and cultural reclamation or resentment of the injustice of the American society. In American society, Mexican cookbooks represent alternative channels of communication where Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans voice their concerns, wishes, and political standpoints in accordance with their social situation. Mexican cookbooks sold at expensive restaurants will try to persuade the reader that the recipes are the outcome of long-term, elaborate research, the heritage of family traditions, and the careful devotion of the author to Mexican tradition and authenticity. By contrast, Mexican cookbooks sold at the stalls of downtown mercados and mercaditos will express resentment against American society, disclose personal histories, challenge the American history of colonization, and claim a social role within society. Hence Mexican cookbooks have also to be seen in their diversity and in relation to the particular social practices of their immediate contexts. In this section, I highlight only a few aspects of the social and political engagements that emerge vividly from the variety of issues intermingled with recipes, descriptions of food items, and hints on how to perform certain culinary practices.

As we have seen earlier in relation to restaurants, the issues of class and social status are often contradictorily intermingled with ethnicity. Terms such as *mestizo* and *mestizaje* are ambiguously used either to refer to pride in Mexican ethnicity or to distinguish oneself and one's Spanish heritage from the other Mexicans and the low connotation of their Mexicanness. One can understand such tensions when in Mexican cookbooks writers express their negative considerations toward the word *mestizo* either as an "indeterminate and ambiguous" aspect of Mexican culture or as an assumed hybrid characteristic of Mexican people. In this respect, it is interesting to notice also how the ambiguities of *mestizaje* are juxtaposed and elaborated upon through claims of authenticity of Mexican food and stand in contrast with the negative connotation of *mestizo* relating to class, as illustrated in the earlier section on Mexican restaurants:

By now I arrived at a cuisine representing, I felt, not just the *mestizo* character of Mexican food generally but my own personal process of *mestizaje*, synthesis. I was making dishes true to their origins . . . but I was also experimenting by juxtaposing different elements.

In such cases, the pride in *mestizaje* represents an instance of "reversed normality" and Mexican cookbooks become a tool of political significance. In other words, the concept of *mestizaje* is used by Mexican writers as a response to the imposition of a stigmatic identity by the dominant society. Hence, in this way, those who are stigmatized assert certain characteristics that reinforce their identity rather than mask them. Through the concept of *mestizaje* Mexican writers invite the readers to get rid of conceptions of purity or wholeness. In this sense, they attempt to forge a new conception, in terms not only of race but also of culture, speech, and lifestyle:

. . . most norteamericanos are, or will become, mestizos and border crossers. The real question is whether we will acknowledge our literal and imaginary border crossing. *Mestizo* cultures and cuisines remind us that all cultures drift beyond the boundaries of the familiar. Some are just more honest about it. But the fears provoked by *mestizo* ways of becoming are understandable. Almost always, the hybridizing style, because it transcends or ignores the boundaries of the "official" or "traditional" national culture, threatens sacred categories of gender, language, social class, or race. Here in the Southwest, the culture of *mestizaje* expresses a refusal to prefer one language, or one culture, at the expense of the other.

Furthermore, writers express their pride in *mestizaje* to show their pride in the syncretism that enriches and, at the same time, obscures Mexican culture to others. In this respect, we find that *mestizaje* becomes also an underlying form of cultural resistance toward the dominant society:
Consciousness in mind, for this book I selected typical home-style dishes whose fat content could be reduced to a more acceptable level without seriously under-

To conclude, an analysis of Mexican cookbooks proves useful for a full understanding of the aspects that characterize Mexican food in terms of a foodscape. Mexican food as described in Mexican cookbooks is, in this respect, the means that enables writers to extol a historical heritage, to elaborate class distinctions and ethnicity, to hinder forms of cultural resistance toward the dominant society, or to denounce prejudices against or within the Mexican community. Mexican food items, along with the success of Mexican cuisine in American society, become, therefore, the means to affirm a range of social and cultural positions in the dominant system. Yet Mexican cookbooks function also as a "bridgehead" to link the dominant society with the authenticity of Mexican culinary practices and Mexican culture. In such a process, however, the claim for authenticity of Mexican food and the question of authority granted to Mexican purveyors stand in great contradiction to the ambiguity expressed in relation to questions of class, ethnic origins, and historical heritage. It is in Mexican cookbooks, in fact, that the tensions characterizing the relations between the dominant system and the Mexican community are strikingly revealed. At the same time tensions also emerge within the Mexican community itself. To limit an analysis of consumption of Mexican food to Mexican markets and Mexican restaurants in Los Angeles would therefore miss important insights into the dynamic nature of Mexican food practices seen in terms of a foodscape.

**Conclusion**

Ethnic food is widely regarded in anthropology as an arena whereby eth-

Hence ethnic food must be regarded under a different light. It must be considered as a means of empowerment. It must be seen also as a device to establish close ties within a community: ties that blur ethnic and social boundaries and conceptions of space. Ethnic food, to this extent, must be regarded as a foodscape. A notion of foodscape reveals how movements of ethnic food are intertwined with the different movements of ethnic groups, financial capital, and business, hence with different configurations of power. In this respect, the implications entailed in the use of a notion of foodscape are many. For instance, it enables one to focus on ethnic food at an ethnographic level. Furthermore, in transnational consumer soci-

It is thanks to Mexican food and Mexican food markets that Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and new immigrants have the opportunity to consolidate Mexican communities and to gain better positions within the dominant system. Mexican food becomes an agent of change that reconstitutes the possibility for the ethnic "I" of gaining a social position within American society.

Yet to carry out an ethnographic account of consumption of Mexican food in Los Angeles and to understand the impact of Mexican food as a foodscape on American society, one has to take into consideration the aspects that concern American food practices, such as the procedural production, food processing, and homogenization that mostly charac-

It enables dislocated, contingent identities to establish social alliances and links of solidarity. It opens paths for immigrant labor and becomes an opportunity for the ethnic "I" to acquire status and social position within a dominant, hostile environment.
American food industry. One has to identify different "spaces" within the different areas of Los Angeles in which different food practices are enacted. Each area implies different social alliances and different perceptions of identity and class. For instance, in downtown and East Los Angeles, Mexican markets and restaurants represent arenas of social solidarity as much as Mexican restaurants in more affluent areas of Los Angeles, by contrast, foster forms of culinary resistance against American society.

I have therefore shown how the consumption of Mexican food in Mexican restaurants unveils a "dual life" of Mexican food: standardized food for Anglos, and specialties for Mexican-Americans and Mexicans. In this respect, I point out a disparity between food practices in themselves and food practices for themselves enacted by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. The former are enacted for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in homely environments and ethnic communities, and the latter are performed for Anglos in restaurants located in affluent areas of Los Angeles. Within such a "dual life," Mexican food becomes a means to enhance forms of solidarity and culinary and cultural resistance toward the dominant system. At the same time, it becomes a positive mestizo way of being in the world, since it enables Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to foster discourses of pan-ethnicity and to challenge the forms of discrimination by American society.

Mexican cookbooks prove to be one important semiotic vehicle of communication of such a foodscape. They describe and challenge the social and cultural practices linked to the consumption of Mexican food in a dominant American system. They become educational devices to allow American readers into the homely, "authentic" practices of Mexican cuisine. In this respect, they become a "bridgehead" between Mexican culinary practices, otherwise unknown, and Anglos' stereotypical concepts of Mexican food. However, Mexican cookbooks reveal other narratives hidden behind Mexican food items, culinary practices, and recipes. They disclose the ambiguity with which issues of ethnicity, class, and gender are dealt within the Mexican community and the contradictions in which the Mexican community is enmeshed. In this respect, I highlighted the ways in which issues of class and ethnicity are contradictorily linked with concepts of mestizaje either to express a belonging to a social status and class or to claim a pride in the multicultural dimension of Mexican culture, challenging American discriminatory stereotypes. In the same vein, questions of authenticity of Mexican food items may become a means to voice forms of cultural resistance toward the dominant system or to declare a willingness to "acculturate" non-Mexican readers and enable them better to know Mexican culture. To conclude, I argued that the real stakes of Mexican cookbooks lie behind what has been explicitly stated and said, between the lines of recipes and culinary descriptions. In other words, they voice social and cultural discrimination and the ambiguous positionalities of the ethnic "I" with regard to gender, class, and ethnicity within both the dominant system and the Mexican community itself.

NOTES

17. Ibid., p. 191.
21. One of the problems in introducing an article on Mexican-Americans and Mexicans in the United States is that of overgeneralizing the characteristics of one subgroup to the others. In particular, there is the problem of deciding what overarching term to use to refer to all persons who are of partial or whole Hispanic descent [e.g., Amado Padilla and Susan Keefe, Chicano Ethnicity (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); L. Estrada, The Changing Profile of Mexican-Americans (Claremont: Thomas Rivera Center, 1985)]. There is, besides, the subtle risk that the terminology which might be adopted to define a group can often be embedded with, and interpreted in, ethnic, racist, and elitist terms. Yet in the case of American society, it is class distinction that becomes a function of ethnicity and race. These multiple class distinctions are made according to an ideology that states that social classes are "open," meaning that the movement between classes is a consequence of personal merit. As a consequence of the relationship between class
and 'Hispanic' ethnicity, many Mexican-Americans and Mexicans refuse to recognize their Mexican identity and heritage. Chicano literature is suffused with issues of exploitation by the Anglo society as well as by issues of intraethnic antagonisms based on generational and class differences. See Ernesto Galarza, Barrio Boy (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1971); Richard Rodriguez, Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father (New York: Viking Press, 1992); Rodolfo Anaya, Bless Me Ultima (Berkeley: TQ's Publications, 1972). In the present article I have adopted the terms 'Mexican-American' and "Mexican." With regard to American society in general, I have preferred to refer to it as 'Anglo,' since in the interviews held during my fieldwork, 'Anglos' and "Anglo-Americans" were the terms most commonly used. To refer to the American society as Anglo and to social interactions as only occurring between Mexican-Americans/Mexicans and Anglos does not imply a disregard for the importance and the role of other ethnic social groups. Indeed, the definition itself of 'Anglo' is wrong since it does not indicate the diverse mix of peoples that it encompasses.


25. Personal communication with Olga, Dolores, and my friend Elia interviewed at the Gate Street Children's Center in East Los Angeles during my research in 1996.

26. Forms of regionalism and pan-ethnicity linked to food consumption as a phenomenon among Mexican-Americans, Mexicans, and Latinos need to be further investigated.


28. Personal communication with a Mexican restaurateur of a small Mexican restaurant in East Los Angeles.