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978-1-107-14036-3 - Cooking Cultures: Convergent Histories of Food and Feeling

Edited by Ishita Banerjee-Dube

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Cooking Cultures

This volume offers a study of food, cooking and cuisine in different societies and cultures over different periods of time. It examines the intimate connections of food, identity, gender, power, personhood and 'national culture', and argues that cooking and cuisine are essentially results of combination, of ingredients, ideas, ideologies and imagination, inflected by relations of power and experiments with creativity.

The essays in the volume are wide-ranging and the common thread that holds them together is an exploration of how food and cuisine enable people to articulate not just who they are but what they want to be; a mix of love and conflict, power struggles and nostalgia that shape peoples as persons, and groups and communities as 'cultures'.

Tracking such blends in different societies and continents churned out of trans-cultural flows of goods and peoples, colonial encounters, adventure and adaptation, and change in attitude and taste, *Cooking Cultures* makes a novel argument about convergent histories of the globe kneaded by food and cooking.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers in the fields of food studies, culture studies, social anthropology, and sociology of food, as well as to general readers with an interest in the subject.

Ishita Banerjee-Dube is Professor of History at the Centre for Asian and African Studies, El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico City, and a member of the National System of Researchers (SNI), Mexico, where she holds the highest rank. Her authored books include *Divine Affairs* (2001), *Religion, Law, and Power* (2007), *Fronteras del Hinduismo* (2007) and *A History of Modern India* (2014). Among her eight edited volumes are *Unbecoming Modern* (2005), *Caste in History* (2008) and *Ancient to Modern* (2009).

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The preparation of *Cooking Cultures* has been a flavourful, pleasurable and tasting process. My initial interest in a food-centred language used by middle-class women in colonial Bengal to ridicule norms within the family and society has, through twists and turns, conversations and communion with ‘food studies’ enthusiasts, resulted in the confection of *Cooking Cultures*. Along the way, I have learnt, savoured and experimented with new platters to value the richness and essential presence of blends and combinations in the constitution of food and cuisine. Such mixes entail transcultural flows of species, people, ingredients, spices, cooking methods and process and are often poised on power plays and colonial encounters, ideologies and imagination, and taste and desire, affect and nostalgia, privation and abundance, hierarchy and intimacy. The realization that authenticity and identity in relation to food across the globe are premised on constitutive mixes has taught me to reflect critically on the authenticity of the ‘authentic’, the natural and the normal in different contexts. If the divergent tales of fights and fusion in food, cooking and cuisine in different parts of the globe narrated in the chapters enable us to simultaneously question inflexible identities and underscore convergent histories, the volume would have done a little more than contribute to ‘food studies’.

I am now left with the delectable job of thanking the people who have participated in the preparation and made the menu possible. The excitement and expertise of Debjani Mazumder and her team – Qudsiya Ahmed, Shikha Vats, Jayati Das, Suvadip Bhattacharjee and Anwasha Rana at Cambridge University Press – have added zest and taste and enriched the volume in countless ways. The thoughtful comments and insightful suggestions of the two anonymous readers, particularly reader two, have significantly aided the organization of the volume.

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Ishita Banerjee-Dube