Whole Foods: Revitalization through Everyday Synesthetic Experience

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SUMMARY  This article explores the role of food and eating as part of migrant responses to displacement and strategies for reconstituting community and re-creating cultural continuity. Drawing on Fernandez's concept of "the return to the whole," this paper considers the nature of the cultural revitalization achieved through food events, through particular food sent "from home." Attention is paid to processes of invocation, structural repetition, and synesthesia, concepts developed by Fernandez in his work on religious revitalization movements.

Every man carries within him a world which is composed of all that he has seen and loved, and to which he constantly returns, even when he is traveling through, and seems to be living in, some different world.

—René Chateaubriand, cited in Kahn 1994:xvii

A flower-pot of basil can symbolize the soul of a people better than a drama of Aeschylus.

—Ion Dragoumis, my translation (1976:90)

I begin with an anecdote—an event that Jim Fernandez would call a revelatory moment, though its insights were purely retrospective. It is the memory trace—with all the unreliability there implied—of a fragment of a conversation. The time was about 1989 when I was a graduate student under Jim's tutelage, the place the quadrangle behind the Reynolds Club at the University of Chicago. I remember Jim saying that what we need in anthropology are more ethnographies of smell and of taste. I did not really take in the significance of what Jim was saying, coming as it was several years before such concepts as "the anthropology of the senses," and steeped, as I was at the time, in a "Chicago School" that had branded the relationship between structure and event the topic on the theoretical horizons of the late 1980s. But more than the phrase, I remember the kinesethetics of Jim touching his index finger to his nose and his lips as he said this. It reminded me of what my father had once said in instructing me in the arts of cooking under the guise of my "helping him get dinner going," a repeated scenario during my teenage years. He recounted to me in Talmudic fashion how he had once heard a noted chef asking his student what was his most important cooking implement. After due consideration, the student replied, "the whisk." The chef shook his head, and eyes twinkling, said it was first, the nose, and then the tongue.

What follows is an effort to make good those two apprenticeships of mine, to bring together food, the senses, and memory in ethnographically productive ways. I argue in particular that Jim's concepts of "revitalization" and the "return to the whole" are useful in analyzing experiences of displacement in our transnational
world, and more specifically, the synesthetic experiences of food in the lives of migrant Greeks.

Traveling Smells

The reference to basil by Greek historian Ion Dragoumis provides a point of entry into my subject, the power of tangible everyday experiences to evoke the memories on which identities are formed. Dragoumis's aphorism was given substance by a comment passed on to me by Eleana Yalouri, a Ph.D. student in anthropology living in London, who was visited by a recent migrant from Greece. Smelling a pot of basil on her window sill, he told her with evident longing, "It really smells like Greece!" Although basil is not used in cooking in Greece to the same extent as in the United States, basil-dipped water is a component of the ubiquitous leavening (prozimi) used for bread-making in many parts of Greece, and the smell of basil a part of the general kitchen ambience in Greece (see Hart 1992). That this basil-inspired memory is not an uncommon experience is further confirmed by Papanikolas in her account of Greek immigrants in the American West in the early years of the 20th century: "Basil plants grew in dusty cans on the window ledges of the restaurants and coffeehouses; men broke off sprigs to put in their lapels and from time to time brought them to their noses and breathed in the piquant scent. 'Ach, patriđha, patriđha' [homeland, homeland] they said" (1987:156). Closer examination of Greek migrant experiences reveals that basil is merely the tip of the iceberg of a vast array of transnational odorific and gustatory traveling companions.

That the tastes and smells of homeland frequently accompany people in their travels across national borders may be obvious to customs officers worldwide, but the significance of this has only begun to be explored by anthropologists. While there has been some interest in the way migrant food has transformed eating in the United States and other migrant destinations (Raspa 1984), less attention is given to the implications for the identity of the migrants of the food they might bring with them, or have sent from home. Indeed the importance of this is explicitly dismissed by Hannerz in his theorizing concerning "cosmopolitans" and "locals" (1996:103). Yet Fog Olwig and Hastrup (1997) argue for the importance of "cultural sites," localized cultural wholes that become points of identification for people displaced by migrations caused by larger global processes. Here I suggest that food might be analyzed as just such a cultural site and is especially useful in understanding Greek experiences of displacement, fragmentation, and the reconstruction of wholeness.

In using the concept of "wholeness" I am drawing on Fernandez's ongoing work on the process of "returning to the whole," which he first discusses in the context of religious revitalization movements in West Africa. Bwiti, the revitalization movement among the Fang of Gabon where Fernandez worked, is seen as a response to the alienation and fragmentation brought on by "the agents of the colonial world and simply modern times" (1982:562). In the face of these radical changes in their society, Fang use Bwiti to reintegrate the past and the present, to "recapture the totality of the old way of life" (1982:9). Thus, contra the celebration of fragmentation in postmodern analysis, Fernandez provides an analysis of some of the ways that those whose worlds are being rent asunder attempt creatively to reconstruct them. Fernandez's approach is potentially applicable to many sorts of alienation, including that of victims of war, refugees, migrants, downsized workers, those caught in major political shifts such as the fall of Soviet socialism, and all those who in the midst of change "are looking for firm ground under their feet" (Thomassen 1996:44).
The originality in Fernandez's work arises from his focus on the symbolic processes by which the “return to the whole” is attempted. Fernandez describes the “whole” as a “state of relatedness—a kind of conviviality in experience” (1986:191). He suggests some of the difficulties of imagining or experiencing the whole, given the atomization and fragmentation of present-day Fang society. It is the sense that there is a “lack of fit” or coherence between different domains of experience that leads to attempts to return to the whole. Returning to the whole requires a “mutual tuning-in” based on shared sensory experiences that are explicitly synesthetic (crossing sensory domains), “hearing, seeing, touching, tasting—in primary groups, families, ethnic groups, fraternal or sororal associations, etc. If we don’t have these things to begin with we have to somehow recreate them by an argument of images of some kind in which primary perceptions are evoked” (Fernandez 1986:193). This is where revitalization comes in, the process by which a domain of experience that is experienced as fragmented or deprived is revalued by simply marking it for ritual participation: “The performance of a sequence of images revitalizes, in effect, and by simple iteration, a universe of domains, an acceptable cosmology of participation, a compelling whole” (Fernandez 1986:203). While Fernandez focuses on elaborated ritual revitalizations, he also suggests more mundane venues for such processes, even that the teaching of introductory anthropology itself is an attempt at revitalization through “taking the students’ too individuated awareness and . . . in some sense returning him or her to the whole” (1986:210). In this article I examine revitalization in a more everyday context, the effects of which may certainly be less durable than a full-scale revitalization movement but, nonetheless, are a key component for the construction of identity in exile.

Fernandez’s final image is one of “returning to the depths” (1986:211), an auspicious one for understanding the experience of Greeks from the island of Kalymnos, where I conducted my fieldwork. Kalymnos is an island in the Eastern Aegean that, until quite recently, relied on sponge diving for its livelihood. Sponge divers, prone to the crippling effects of the bends, can only temporarily regain use of their limbs and a sense of themselves as whole people by returning to the ocean depths where they contracted the disease. Fernandez’s notion that wholeness requires a coherence of domains, a “structural repetition,” also resonates with the words of a Kalymnian schoolteacher to whom I described my project of studying food and memory: noting that the study of food evokes a “whole way of life not divided into pieces,” he pointed to sea urchins as an example. When a Kalymnian desired them, he had to take the time to go and find them . . . one couldn’t buy them at the store. In diving for sea urchins “you became a sponge diver in miniature,” and in the process, you were enculturated into Kalymnian life. Here “wholes” already exist, but for migrants, I suggest, food is essential to counter tendencies toward fragmentation of experience, and we can use Fernandez’s terms to analyze this process of “conviviality” evoked through food in a way that brings out the aspect of memory that I believe is a key part of the experience of returning to the whole, an aspect left implicit by Fernandez in his use of the term iteration, that is, repetition.

The experience of absence from one’s home is culturally elaborated in Greece under the concept xenitia. Xenitia, or living away from home, has a long history of commentary in Greek oral tradition, as examined by Sultan (1999). Sultan examines xenitia in the context of heroic poetry, and notes that for men xenitia means absence from the physical comforts of home: “The woman will not be with her man in xenitia to cook his meals or serve his needs . . . [thus] he will experience hardship and isolation with his horse as his only companion. The analogy is to misery and death” (Sultan 1999:48). More generally, in the modern Greek context,
xenitia is described as a condition of estrangement, absence, death, the loss of social relatedness, or loss of the ethic of care seen to characterize relations at home (Danforth 1982; Seremetakis 1991:85, 175–176). It provokes a longing for home that is seen as a physical and spiritual pain, as Frantzis describes for the Dodecanese migrants to Tarpon Springs, Florida, “The sun-drenched shores of Florida are verdant with pine-trees, orange trees, palms, beautiful tropical trees, and multi-colored fragrant flowers. All of them resemble and remind them of their islands. Nevertheless, and in spite of it all, their heart withers and the longing for the wild beauty of these chunks of rocks where they were born is alive in them” (1962:105). Here the sensual landscape of Florida serves as a painful reminder of the home they have left.

3 Usually, however, migrants move to an urban environment where there is a more striking sense of disjunction—thus the need to carry with them from Greece some physical object that will become a tangible site for memory. This is expressed by the poet Drosinis, who invokes the earth of Greece that he will take with him on his travels:

“Greek Earth”

Now that I leave for foreign lands,
and we will be parted for months, for years,
let me take something also from you,
Earth scented by the summer seasons,
blessed earth, earth bearing fruit—
the muscat vine, the yellow grain,
the tender laurel, bitter olive. . . . [cited in Sederocanellis 1995:230]

Here it is agricultural soil (though elsewhere in the poem he speaks of “blood imbued” national soil) that can be seen as a link to home. But food itself is more commonly sent to migrants, whether they have left a home village for Athens, for a sponge-diving expedition, or for Europe, the United States, or Australia. Such packages of food sent abroad are given the local word pestellomata, and described by Kapella as a part that recalls the whole: “Pestellomata are a piece of homeland, carrying inside them (kleinoun mesa tous) its sun, its sea, its wonderful smells” (1981:35). Kapella stresses the symbolic nature of this transfer in recounting the bitterness of a Kalymnian mother whose son had married an Athenian and moved to Athens. She is told by her daughter-in-law not to send anything because “the refrigerator is full.” As Kapella notes, “In order to appreciate a pestelloma you need to have lived in a place (topos) and to love it” (1981:39). Such packages sent within Greece often include fish pickled in rosemary and vinegar (often red mullet, available in Athens but at much inflated prices), locally produced cheese (mizithra), locally grown tangerines, and a variety of homemade sweets. Those sent further abroad can include Kalymnian oregano, thyme, mountain tea, locally produced honey, figs, almonds, hard cheese, and dried dark bread rings (kouloures), all items that are particularly fragrant markers. The desire for such food is referred to by Kapella as a “burning of the lips” that comes from missing something deeply (1981:36). Similarly a Kalymnian woman describes her brother’s longing for a Kalymnian bivalve shell fish prepared in brine called spinialo, as his kaimo (the noun form of the Greek “to burn,” which translates as both “psychic pain” and “uncontrollable desire”), which led him on his return to consume an entire bottle and become sick. Another story that a man told me concerned his son’s time spent in the merchant marines, when during a long and unhappy stint in England in the late 1970s he bought a small vial of olive oil from a chemist’s shop (at the time olive oil was not generally available for cooking in England) to soothe his desire for the taste and smell of it. It seems surprising that
this tiny vial would be satisfying, but it relates to a local practice that if you smell a food cooking at someone’s house and strongly desire it, you must at least taste a small piece or lick the remains (e.g., of lobster shells). Otherwise the desire might cause men’s testicles to swell (na bouzefthoun) or pregnant women to lose their babies (perhaps a transfer of desire from one domain to another).

In some cases it is not specifically Kalymnian food that is sent abroad. A man in his thirties who had migrated back and forth to Italy for schooling mentioned that his mother sent him all kinds of things, feta cheese, grape leaves, even flour, “as if they wouldn’t have flour in Italy!” Another woman speaks of sending her daughter a sweet called foinikia,9 of which when I asked if it was Kalymnian she replied, “No, it’s Greek, but there are variations, whether you use oil or butter, almonds,” and in any case it reminds her of Kalymnos. In speaking with Greek students studying in Oxford, I found that the food they received from home (either through the mail or brought by friends or family members on visits) fell into three categories: (1) olives, olive oil, meat (in one case, two whole goats for Easter), eggs, and other products produced by family members on family land; (2) baked goods such as tsoureki and fiazmanio associated with Easter and other festive times, either prepared by family members or store bought; and (3) mass-produced Greek products such as feta cheese. The first type of item produced immediate local knowledge. One woman, who had lived in London for ten years working in various jobs while taking courses in art and design (with hopes of becoming an icon painter), told me about the olive oil that her father makes from family trees in Crete, and that the olive trees were especially good for oil because they weren’t watered, but raised only on rainwater. She said the oil had zero percent acidity, that it sometimes becomes more acidic if you let the olives fall off the tree, but her father used a stick to knock them off the tree, and you must knock in a certain direction, otherwise the olives won’t grow again. Aside from such local knowledge, sensory aspects of food sent from Greece are also stressed. Another woman, studying environmental planning, who had been in England for five years, spoke of the eggs sent from her father’s farm that she contrasted with “plastic” eggs in England that had a particularly unpleasant smell (mirizoun avgoulila), whereas eggs from Greece had a deep orange color to the yolks and an “intense” (entoni) flavor.10

The second category had an obvious connection to “Greek traditions” as well as to family, usually mothers, who had baked some of these items. But it is certainly not only mothers who put together such packages. Fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers may send separate packages of foodstuffs, items that they have actually produced or that they have shared in the past with the receiving child.

This direct connection with the family through food takes place in less tangible ways as well. Currently, with the availability of Greek products in the United Kingdom and the United States (even on the Internet!), one has the possibility of shopping and cooking many Greek dishes.11 If this makes packages of food from home somewhat less special, the contact through food remains. Elisabeth Kirtsgoglou, a doctoral student in anthropology in Wales, notes that her mother invariably asks her what she is making for Sunday dinner: “She’s satisfied when I tell her roast lamb, or other Sunday food. It symbolizes for her that I’m doing OK.”

The third category of mass-produced Greek products was less common in the late 1990s. One man noted that now (in 1998) it was possible to get these same products at British supermarkets, so the only connection with Greece these products had for him was the thought of his mother sending them. But others spoke of the importance of feta at earlier periods of migration, when Greek feta was not widely available. Dimitris Theodosopoulos, an anthropologist at the University of Lampeter in Wales, notes that new students who come from Greece
wouldn’t realize how much they were going to miss feta: “When they returned to Greece for Christmas, they’d really stock up, fill their suitcases and bags with feta in all different kinds of containers. On one trip, I came back from Greece with a ten-kilo tin of Feta cheese, which I preserved in brine... I’d cut a little piece with my meal every night. It was like ‘white gold’ to me [laughing].”

Eating the Past

What is the actual experience of such food events? As seen above, they are often experienced in terms of a “burning desire” that is satiated through a sensory experience evoking local knowledge, at the same time that a domain of experience that has fallen into disuse, in Fernandez’s terms, is revalued. They often explicitly evoke a wholeness, or fullness in experience, as in the following report by Kapella of a letter from a woman living in Germany, written in local Kalymnian dialect, on receiving a pestelloma from Kalymnos at the post office: “My joy was indescribable, I laughed and cried at the same time. I took the package, left the post-office, and in the street I felt like I was holding the whole world [in my arms]” (Kapella 1981:36). The woman notes that she used the honey to make doughnuts (loukoumadhes) and she “soothed her insides” (ivarsamothika ta mesa). She contrasts this feeling to her experience of the sensory deprivation of work in Germany in a few descriptive images: “We’ve made money, but we’ve moldered (iraxliasame) in the factories. We don’t see outside and we’re dying of cold.... Thank you for the pestelloma” (Kapella 1981:36).

This gives a clear sense of one strategy for returning to the whole: through what Fernandez calls the shock of “recognition of a wider integrity of things” captured in the metaphor of the “whole world,” but specifically triggered by memory of taste and smell. It is this memory that leads to the emotional affect described in the passage: simultaneous laughing and crying, and then a sense of soothing fullness, suggesting the evocation of other memories. The expression “laughing and crying” implies that such moments of wholeness are bittersweet and temporary, a reminder of homeland, the return to which is deferred. Yet the soothing fullness also suggests that such moments give the migrants the strength to carry on with their xenitia. This sense of emotional/embodied plenitude evoked above is echoed in the following passage from Papanikolas, describing several Greek immigrant men, cousins who were working in Idaho in an endless task of clearing sagebrush to homestead:

One night, working nervously, swearing obscenely, Louis made a pita. He could have waited for Sunday, gone the six miles to Pocatello [Idaho], and had one of the Greek women who ran boarding houses make it for him, but he wanted it right then. Louis rolled out the pastry leaves, layered each sheet with butter and eggs mixed with crumbled feta. The helper gazed with tearful eyes, Yoryis gazed avidly. That night they fell on their cots, satisfied. [1987:217]

Once again, the terrible emotional overload of xenitia—living in a foreign land—is temporarily relieved by the experience of eating food, an experience consisting of a demand and an immediate satisfaction. And once again it is through the iteration of a neglected domain metonymically described (“Louis rolled out the pastry leaves ... ”) that revitalizes and redefines the domain for the participants. Implicitly the revitalization of one domain brings others with it, a point made by recent theorists of refugee displacement. For example, Nordstrom (1995) describes the everyday and ritual practices of resistance to the destruction wrought on people’s lives by war in Mozambique. She concludes, “Worlds are destroyed in a war; they must be re-created. Not just worlds of home,
family, community, and economy but worlds of definition, both personal and cultural” (1995:147). Bahloul’s description of Jewish Algerian refugee memories also resonates in this context with Fernandez’s concept of the return to the whole: “The remembered house is a small scale cosmology symbolically restoring the integrity of a shattered geography” (1996:28, emphasis added). As Fernandez describes, integrity is restored through a remembered coherence, or structural repetition between domains. This occurs because the food event evokes a whole world of family, agricultural associations, place-names, and other “local knowledge.” Even memories of water have this characteristic, partly due to the fact that different qualities of water are said to produce different qualities of food (e.g., water used for olive trees or water used to soak beans before cooking them). Papanikolas recounts migrants’ memories of water sources from home, once again illustrating the almost sacred power of invocation:

The men talked constantly of the water in their part of Greece, which often had to be carried a long distance over rocky trails, how cold it was, of its special taste, its curative qualities, how its fame was known throughout the province and how people came from afar to drink it. They spoke the names of waters with reverence: Kefalovrissi—Head Springs, Palaios Platanos—Old Plane Tree, Mahi Topos—Slaughtering Place, Nifi Peplos—Bride’s Veil, Nerolithi—Water Rock. [1987:167]

Of course, the role of food in everyday acts of revitalization was famously elaborated by Proust in his madeline cake description. What is interesting to note is that Proust also very clearly invokes synecdoche, this same sense of the part which holds the key to revivifying a whole structure of associations:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection. [1982:50-51, emphasis added]

It is true that Proust was not speaking of migration, as I have been. But if the past “is a foreign country,” then similar processes can be at work in temporal as in spatial or spatiotemporal displacement. Indeed Proust directs us once again to the power possessed by a small sensed part to return us to the whole, the power of the unsubstantial fragment to reveal the vast structure. Like the memories discussed above, Proust also points us to the emotional charge of the moment of consumption for keying, involuntarily, these associative memories.

I would also suggest another reason for the sense of “fullness” stressed in these descriptions: that there is an imagined community implied in the act of eating food “from home” while in exile, in the embodied knowledge that others are eating the same food. This is not to deny that real communities are created as well: Dimitris Theodossopoulos notes how he would bring pieces of his 10-kilo Feta cheese to friends with whom he was sharing dinner, and the joy evoked in the shared consumption of this “most valuable object.” But even in Theodossopoulos’s case of shared consumption, a wider community of homeland is being referenced in the act of eating “food from home.”

Here I am drawing on Anderson’s notion of imagined communities, made famous in his primal scene of the “secular ritual” of the newspaper reader who, in the everyday act of reading “is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.
...What more vivid figure of the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?" (1991:35). What indeed? Anderson's image, despite its appeal, is perhaps far too cognitively oriented as a conceptualization of processes of identity formation and reproduction (see Wogan n.d. for a critique of Anderson's cognitive biases). It lacks Fernandez's sense of the importance of immediate, synesthetic experience as a primary strategy of dealing with the inchoate. As Palmer, drawing on Billig's concept of "banal nationalism," argues, food is one of the mundane reminders that keep national identity "near the surface of daily life" so that people do not forget their nationality (1998:192).

Here things become interesting, because the processes I have been describing work at multiple, sometimes contradictory, levels of identity—the family and personal or village history that only needs to be remembered, or reimagined, as well as at higher levels of imagining such as the nation. Just as people's identities shift levels in changing contexts such as migration, local products can take on shifting identifications as well. The basil sniffed in a pot in London reminds the new migrant of "Greece" in this instance rather than any more localized association. It is interesting to note, however, that the phrase cited by Papanikolas, "Ach, patria, patria" [Homeland, homeland], is inherently ambiguous in Greek, and can be used to refer to both local and national "homes." The power of scent is not fixed to specific references then, but can take on many levels of identity, which normally do not contradict one another. The same man who shared feta with other "Greeks" also had very localized memories of buying feta as a child from the small shop in his neighborhood: how it was kept in large cans of brine and how the shop owner had a "magical way of dipping his knife in the brine and simultaneously spearing and cutting the feta." However, local and national experience are not always congruent. A Greek couple living in England recount, half jokingly, their fights over bean soup (fassoladha), which the woman believes is "properly" made with tomatoes (kokkini), and the man equally vociferously insists cannot be made with them. As the woman put it, "Call it something else: call it some French recipe for making beans, and I'll eat it. Just don't call it authentic fassoladha, and don't call it Greek!" The man noted that they no longer made fassoladha, it was only when his partner was away, and perhaps his sister (also living in England) was over for dinner, that he enjoyed this dish. Here it is the fact that he comes from the Peloponnesse region and she from Thessaloniki that makes for the clash in attempting to make their local experience a metonym for national identity. And although local divergences in cooking, dress, and custom are part of discourse within Greece as well, I would suggest that they become more intensified in the migrant context, where cooking is not simply an everyday practice, but an attempt to synesthetically reconstruct and remember, to return to that whole world of home, which is subjectively experienced both locally and nationally, if not at other levels as well.

Soup provides an appropriate endpoint for my consideration of the usefulness of the concepts of "revitalization" and "returning to the whole" for interpreting responses to alienation in our current world. When commenting on an earlier version of this paper, Jim said, "Food, yes. The kitchen's the place in the house where, after being separated in our different rooms, we come for revitalization, a small return to the whole." Anyone who has had the good fortune to have enjoyed at the Fernandez table a bowl of garlic soup—either hot garlic soup with egg prepared by Jim, or cold garlic soup with almonds prepared by Renate Fernandez—can attest to the revitalizing power of food as one of many community-building measures undertaken by Jim and Renate to counter the powerful forces of fragmentation in our academic lives.
Notes

1. I am translating loosely the phrase po re gamoto as “really” since it is used as an intensifier and a phrase that frames the accompanying statement as particularly emotionally charged. A more literal translation might be “fuck it all” or “for fuck’s sake.”

2. Suggestive work has been done, however, by Knight (1998) and Narayan (1995). Knight considers how packages sent from rural villages to urban centers in Japan are imagined and commodified. Narayan focuses on the way that Indian food has been “incorporated” into British society, but also gives brief attention to the gendered meaning of Indian food for women migrants expected to be the upholders of tradition while men are given more leeway to break the rules, including dietary rules (1995:74-75). De Certeau and others recognize the significance of the topic in passing but do not discuss it beyond noting that “when political circumstances or the economic situation forces one into exile, what remains the longest as a reference to the culture of origin concerns food, if not for daily meals, at least for festive times—it is a way of inscribing in the withdrawal of the self a sense of belonging to a former land (terroir). . . . Food thus becomes a veritable discourse of the past and a nostalgic narrative about the country, the region, the city or the village where one was born” (1998:184).

3. And indeed, Tarpon Springs was chosen as a migration spot for Dodecanese islanders because of its similarities, because it allowed them to extend their seagoing profession to a new locale (see Buxbaum 1967; Frantzis 1962). As Georges notes,

Unlike their countrymen in other parts of the United States, the Greeks of Tarpon Springs had to make few immediate concessions to their new environment. The Florida climate was comparable to that in the Dodecanese islands. Households were re-established to emulate those in the mother country. . . . Dietary habits and modes of dress were retained. . . . Theirs was a life transplanted in the fullest sense of the word.

4. Gavrielides (1974:68) indeed notes the function of ceremonial feasting associated with name-day celebrations in providing a mechanism for maintaining ties between villages and their migrant populations.

5. This comes from the standard Greek apostelloma, a dispatch.

6. Buxbaum notes similar concern expressed among Dodecanese islanders in Tarpon Spring, Florida in cases of mixed marriages between Greek men and non-Greek women: “Greek-American mothers of sons who have married American girls frequently prepare Greek foods and bring them into the house of the married son as a means of making contact, often against the wishes of the wife” (Buxbaum 1967:232).

7. Food packages not only flow outward from Greece but also are reciprocated by migrants who send back or return with “exotic” food items from their travels. I analyze these inflows of food elsewhere (see Sutton n.d.).

8. Arnott notes that in Mani festive Easter kouloures have a mnemonic function for those abroad:

A kouloura is made for each member of the family who is away from home, and it is either sent to him or, if the distance is too great, it is hung on the wall and eaten “for his health” by other members of the family while they are gathered together. Then the family speaks of his absence, of the work he is doing, and of his childhood activities.

9. An Athenian friend tells me that the equivalent of foinikia are made in Athens. Called melomakarouna, they are typically available only at Christmas time.

10. This tendency toward hyperbole in describing Greek products is captured by Papanikolas (1987:10) in her account of her mother and other Greek women drinking coffee and eating Greek “honey and nut” sweets and pining “for sweet patriidha (home-land) where grapes were sweeter, lemons larger, water colder.”

11. There is an economic component involved in these transfers as well. Up until the early 1980s the Bank of Greece strictly limited the amount of money that could be transferred to relatives abroad, which posed a particular problem for parents of students studying abroad. Packages of food were one way of making up for the “poverty” that
children of middle-class parents were undergoing while studying abroad. Indeed, it was not unknown to smuggle cash inside various types of food packages.

12. See, for example, my discussion of perceived endo-Greek differences (Sutton 1998: ch. 2).

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