Chapter Nine

Food as Charity, Community-Building, and Cosmopolitanism on a Budget

Critics of mainstream multiculturalism such as urban geographers Kanishka Goonewardena and Stefan Kipfer rightly criticize what they call the "food and festivals" brand of "aestheticized difference." Driven by corporate interests, public-private city-branding efforts, "creative class" chatter, and tourism strategies, such marketing, they note, seeks to sell diversity through superficial or reductionist notions of difference based on the "exotic" pleasures of "visible" and "edible" ethnicity.[1] However, we should not categorically dismiss every form of culinary pluralism as suspect or exploitative as there are community and collaborative contexts in which the consumption of "ethnic" foods can have a more positive impact on those involved.

The International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto used food as a way of promoting immigrant integration and liberal cosmopolitanism in three major ways. One was in social welfare practice aimed at supporting struggling families and avoiding mass maladjustment. Another strategy entailed the group dinners and collaboratively organized banquets meant to foster community through cross-cultural sharing and exchange in festive contexts. As a third strategy, the cookbook projects, like the banquets, bore elements of popular and tourism-oriented spectacle (see chapter 10), as evidenced by the many references to colourfully decorated tables and enticing ethnic dishes. Each type of activity differed in terms of its potential for fostering a cultural pluralism rooted in meaningful cross-cultural interactions and social relationships.

This chapter highlights the role of food in promoting Institute-style pluralism. The discussion of the mix of Anglo, ethno-Canadian, and immigrant women most directly involved in these activities is informed by the literature that explores the multifaceted character of food as material resource, political tool, social practice, cultural marker, and site of contest and negotiation between dominant and less powerful groups.[2] The women in question included the Institute's female group workers and counsellors, and the volunteers recruited through the Catholic Women's League, IODE, Toronto Junior League,

and the women's branches of various ethnic organizations. In scrutinizing the character and impact of this female-led reform activism on both the Institute women themselves and the membership and wider public, I draw as well on the literature on im/migrant and hybridized food cultures, national and transnational foodways, and food-as-spectacle.[3] Of particular importance is the multidisciplinary feminist scholarship that has explored women's agency and empowerment within this traditionally female-gendered activity and examined culinary books as literary texts that, like journals or diaries, can reveal much about contemporary social values, economic conditions, and women's engagement with the wider world.[4]

I consider the possibilities and limits of the culinary pluralism enacted by the Institute's differently located women through an engagement with feminist analyses of women as food providers, cookbook writers, and community fundraisers.[5] In carrying out the Institute's various food campaigns, I argue, the participating women, most of whom were of middle-class origins, forged cross-cultural if not cross-class bonds of respect. A related argument concerns the paradoxes and tensions revealed by generally well-intentioned actions that, alongside other efforts and developments, contributed towards a greater public exposure to and acceptance of varied ethnic cuisines, at least among liberal Torontonians, but hardly erased class, gender, and racial-ethnic hierarchies. Finally, I highlight the critical labour performed by women even when male restaurateurs or chefs were involved and draw a few comparisons between the Institute's support for ethnic entrepreneurialism and more recent public/private efforts in food tourism.

Food Charity

As countless studies have detailed, immigrant women have heroically sacrificed their own health and endured multiple indignities to feed their families in challenging Old and New World contexts, and their success or failure has deeply informed their personal identities and affected their status within their family and community.[6] Charity among poor women has a long and enduring history and, as the US Institutes told American audiences in the 1930s, underprivileged immigrant women knew how to make do through preserving and other means.[7] Then, too, food has been a major charitable or welfare item and middle-class women, whether religious or secular, professional or volunteer, have played key roles in distributing food to struggling women and their families.[8] As a social agency serving non-English-speaking immigrants, the Toronto Institute's organized charitable food-related projects both reflected and reinforced class and ethnic hierarchies.

In carrying out their welfare activities, Institute staff prescribed to the professional and bourgeois codes of a mainstream social service agency surveying

resources and selecting suitable recipients. They solicited food vouchers from ethnic stores (such as Johnny Lombardi's nearby grocery store), supermarkets (Dominion Stores), and bakeries (Silverstein's), and funds for vouchers from various sources (including Allstate Insurance and the Junior Red Cross), each time thanking the donor for contributing towards "the newcomers' integration into Canadian life."[9] A preference for food vouchers, which, depending on the number of children, ranged from about $8 to $30, over money vouchers or cash reflected a familiar social welfare ethos, namely that they prevented mothers from potentially "squandering" cash on something else, even a cheap trinket meant to cheer up a gloomy flat. The intrusive methods involved in the selection of families was partly tempered by the sympathy shown the mainly European clients, and by the parties organized for Institute members and for the children of struggling clients.

Such dynamics were much in evidence during the Christmas season, a time of heightened charity-giving, when the Institute distributed as many as 100 baskets to poor and struggling immigrant families in the neighbourhood. As supervisor of the Institute reception centre during the early 1960s, the Czech-born counsellor Margarete Streeruwitz assembled and prioritized the lists of potential recipients identified by the counsellors and reception centre volunteers. The mainly female donors recruited through the Christmas Bureau of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto (SPC) were primarily Anglo-Canadians, though a few women of European origins also show up. According to Streeruwitz, the Christmas Bureau donors directed to the Institute usually knew nothing about the agency, but once apprised of its goals, most offered "generous" donations of food parcels, hampers, and toys. The few who refused the referral usually said they preferred to help an English-speaking Canadian family.[10]

The Bureau lists indicate that the Institute's individual donors were mostly women, with married women outnumbering single women, and the group donors mainly guide groups (Brownies, Girl Guides), the Junior Red Cross, and local schools. Some Boy Scout troops also appear. As do individual men: a 1961 list included a Mennonite minister, the head of a YMCA group, and a stockbroker. The staff of local government offices such as the Workmen's Compensation Board also appear on the lists. With the usual caveat about the risk of reading ethnicity from names, the preponderance of names such as Harris, Payton, Boland, Smith, Bailey, and Broadhurst suggests a mainly Anglo-Canadian group of donors.[11]

Most donors were located in the west end, but others came from elsewhere in the city and a few from the suburbs. Showing concern for the immigrant recipients of their charity, several donors wanted assurances that adequate refrigeration facilities existed for the turkeys and chickens being purchased. An imbalance in gifts for women and girls meant specific requests for donations

for boys or men. Companies such as Bell Telephone donated puppets, dolls, and other toys. On occasion, the Christmas Bureau passed on specific requests, like the one from a "gentleman from India who wanted to be invited by a Canadian family for Christmas." It likely resulted in an invitation to an Institute Christmas dinner.[12]

As truck drivers, troop leaders, teachers, and other donors dropped off items, Institute staff and volunteers filled the baskets with a Christmas turkey or chicken dinner, food vouchers, and toys. Institute staff preferred that families pick up their basket, but when that proved difficult, they delivered them. Senior female administrators such as Nell West and, later, Tine Stewart, who became director in 1968, sometimes participated in these dropoffs. But the task usually went to seasoned workers such as Streeruwitz and Irene Szebeny (the multilingual bookkeeper/home visitor), who checked in on the family and sometimes recorded their conversation with the mother. The work was sufficiently labour-intensive that it interrupted normal duties and programs for several weeks.[13]

Institute staff, like its SPC counterparts, tried to protect the harried women of these "needy families" from intrusive donors, usually Anglo-Canadian women who wished to accompany a delivery and see what an appreciative immigrant family looked like. To discourage them, workers said the children might be confused and disappointed to see strangers rather than their parents bring home Christmas food and gifts, but they also clearly wished to spare mothers and fathers from potentially embarrassing encounters with their donors. One insistent donor, Mrs Payton of Russell Hill Road in the "Anglo" enclave of wealthy Forest Hill, wanted to hand deliver her parcel to an immigrant family with three children who were similar in age to her own. When the Bureau staffer noted that the family members "speak just Italian," Payne said she spoke Italian "fluently," though it is unclear whether it was an educated or tourist Italian. At any rate, she evidently got her way, as did a few others.[14]

The ethnic profile of the family recipients followed the shifting composition of those living in the heavily immigrant west end where the Institute was located for much of its history. The earlier lists of recipients selected for baskets – and in many cases, additional items such as toys, (used) clothing, and, on occasion, (used) furniture – reflected the European arrivals of the late 1940s and the 1950s, namely Eastern European refugees (the largest group of which was the Hungarians of 1956) and some Germans and Southern Europeans.[15] More than half of a list of 23 families selected in 1958 were of Czech, German, Yugoslav, Russian, Ukrainian, and Hungarian origin whereas Italians (41) topped the list of 66 recipients in December 1961. The remainder included a mix of German, Eastern European, and Portuguese families. The donors for that year included Carol Purche and her Girl Guide troop, whose contribution supported several families, including a financially strapped Polish family.[16]

The growing concentration of Italians in the Institute's west end neighbourhood was reflected in the sixties-era lists. It explains the significant presence of Italian Canadian volunteer home visitors from the Italian Immigrant Aid Society (IIAS), the charitable arm of the Canadian Italian Businessmen and Professional Men's Association. Each year, the IIAS selected between 30 and 45 Italian families from the Institute's list, most of whom lived near the Institute.[17] On occasion, the donor was an immigrant who, having achieved some financial stability, showed compassion towards others. In 1961, Streeruwitz praised a Northern European woman now living in the suburb of Weston for her "very very generous donations" for "one large Italian family" and "a German lady who suffers from diabetes."[18]

Staff and home-visit notes on the recipient families show how separation, desertion, or divorce could push struggling mothers to the brink of disaster. A number of the Eastern European families who received Christmas baskets in 1958, for example, were female-headed households where the presence of a young child or children kept a mother without family child-minders from entering the paid workforce. They included a Czech mother of a 13-year-old boy whose husband was still in Czechoslovakia, a Hungarian nurse and mother of a 4-year-old boy who was separated from her husband, and an unmarried Hungarian mother of an 11-month-old baby. Male unemployment explained why other families, including a German mother of three boys under the age of 6, were on the list.[19] The twenty-eight families on a 1960 list included, unusually, a destitute single Hungarian man whose family was still abroad and a childless Italian couple. There were also several large families, including a Serbian family with five children between the ages of 4 and 14, and a Maltese family with ten children between the ages of 1 and 19.[20] The Italian and Portuguese recipients who increasingly dominated the lists usually had large families.[21]

A home visitor's notes on two Portuguese families on a 1964 Christmas list sheds further light on the challenges plaguing large families. One newly arrived family of four children (ages 5 to 15) was described as completely ill-prepared "for the oncoming winter." The couple was renting two sparsely furnished rooms and a kitchen for a monthly rental fee ($60) that swallowed up too much of the husband's weekly wage ($45) and the children had no winter clothing or other items. A "very large family" of eight young children were crammed into "a very modest home" whose monthly rent ($70) could not be met by the construction worker husband come the winter slack period. In both cases, the "X-mas present" would have included a donation of clothing from the supplies provided by local IODE branches. .[22]

The home visitors' reports reveal as well the detrimental impact that illness or injury of a parent, and on occasion both parents, created for financially precarious families, and how an unexpected crisis compounded matters. Examples from 1963 include a Croatian mother with five children whose husband "was

ill for years" and whose family was on welfare, and an Italian family with a diabetic father whose hospitalization with a lung infection left them dependent upon the wife's low weekly income ($35).[23] A majority of the families on the 1964 lists were large young families newly arrived from Portugal that were headed by an unemployed father and in debt to sponsors who had paid their voyage. There were also a number of female-headed households, including a few deserted wives and single mothers and a woman with a husband in jail. Another struggling family included parents trying to support a disabled child.[24]

Late-twentieth-century professional social welfare work was no longer steeped in a Victorian language of "deserving" and "undeserving" poor and the Institute records contain statements of principles regarding "Holiday Living" that emphasize the need to give in a manner that "enhanced" the recipient's "independence and self-respect."[25] But like other twentieth-century social workers, Institute staff passed judgments that reflected age-old expectations about the charity recipients being of solid moral character. The mothers were expected to use the modest food vouchers appropriately, and those who made what staff considered impulse or unnecessary purchases came under criticism. This happened to an Italian mother of seven young children deemed irresponsible for using part of her food voucher to buy chestnuts and other unnecessary "merchandise." The criticism ignored the cultural and emotional significance of this holiday treat for Italians. Further, the woman's effort to rekindle nostalgic memories of roasted chestnuts at Christmastime hurt her chances of getting similar help the following year.[26] In addition, the Institute worked with the Christmas Bureau to ensure that families did not double-dip and receive baskets from more than one agency.[27]

Overall, however, the reports reveal plenty of sympathy for struggling newcomer women, albeit sympathy that frequently bordered on class pity. An Anglo-Canadian home visitor was so moved by the plight of a mother of six young children burdened with hospital and mortgage costs that she recommended additional financial support. The parent's work ethic along with their efforts "to keep the children in school" influenced her recommendation for food and clothing. Her Italian immigrant counterpart described a struggling but deserving Italian couple as "proud people" with "good manners"; the sick and "very depressed" wife had recently undergone a very expensive spine operation. She showed sympathy towards non-Italians, too, including a Portuguese mother of five whose husband had recently died in a car accident.[28] When their resources ran out, Institute staff directed "last minute" requests for help to charities such as the Scott Mission, the Fred Victor Mission, and the Salvation Army.[29]

The Institute served primarily recent arrivals, but the wretched situation in which an Italian family found themselves in 1961, a decade after arriving in Toronto, moved the home visitor to recommend support. The husband had developed an incurable illness, was on welfare, and could not afford the expensive

medicine that had to be purchased abroad, and the wife was recovering from an operation and could not pay the current medical bills. The recommendation in the file of a Portuguese woman in hospital with a kidney infection conveyed plenty in few words: "she just had her ninth child and is in a state of depression."[30] So, too, did the home visitor's report on a Portuguese mother of seven children all under the age of 12 who had just given birth to a "mongoloid" son. She noted that the children "needed winter clothing" and "one or two beds for the little ones." In this case, the woman had reportedly initiated the visit so that the worker could witness their poverty. The sympathy expressed for an injured Hungarian woman with an unemployed husband and four children may have been enhanced by the political circumstances surrounding her migration: she had "been shot in the hip during the Hungarian Revolution."[31]

The home visitors did recommend support for mothers whom they considered immoral or irresponsible on the grounds that the children truly needed help. This happened to a racialized woman in these records, an unmarried Jamaican mother of four receiving modest unemployment insurance payments. Three of her children, the youngest of whom was 4 months, were living with her, while a daughter, age 7, was in England (presumably with relatives). The Institute's commitment to a pluralist ethos that claimed respect for "other" cultural norms, and its acknowledgment that female-headed households within Caribbean communities faced a lesser degree of disapproval than in the "Canadian community," did not preclude the home visitor from conveying her disapproval of the fact that the children were fathered by different men. But the "desperate" financial situation led to a recommendation for support.[32] Deprecating comments about European mothers also surface, though again need triumphed, as exemplified by an IODE visitor who chastised a Portuguese mother of seven "very poorly dressed children" for not heeding earlier advice to turn to "the Church for help," but recommended support because her family was "certainly one of the most needy."[33]

Home visitors were disposed to help women with unreliable husbands. The brief notes on an Italian mother of five children, two of them teenagers, is typical of these cases. It reads: "Destitute case. Husband lost job through gambling. He gives her no support whatever. She is expecting again – and very hard of hearing."[34] On occasion, visitors recommended particularly desperate cases to the IODE's adopt-a-family program. The paternalistic language notwithstanding, the program provided additional material support to the family through local IODE chapters. One of the three families taken on during Christmas in 1961 had eleven children; the sponsoring chapter provided extra vouchers for food and shoes and, because the mother was expecting her twelfth child, baby layettes. In other cases, the house bills were also covered for a period of time. In 1966, the Charles of Edinburgh Chapter provided a Polish mother on her own with $25 worth of Christmas presents for her children.[35]

Significantly, the Institute women showed considerable cultural sensitivity towards the food preferences of their mostly European recipients. When donors asked which food items to give, they usually said "southern European" foods because they were easily obtained in Toronto's ethnic shops and would appeal to the largest number of families, even non-Southerners. One suggested list included cod, turkey, chicken, a cooked ham, sardines, macaroni, rice, tinned tomatoes and tomato paste, beans, dried peas, fruit, and olive oil.[36] They also lobbied the Visiting Homemaker's Association, whose nutritionists drew up model baskets, to incorporate ethnic items. The suggested list for "Italians, Greeks, Slavic, and Others" included brand names of Italian foods such as Unico or Bravo canned tomatoes and Lancia "macaroni" as well as "Italian Coffee [espresso]." A "Portuguese and Spanish" list added corn flour for making bread.[37] As these examples suggest, the cultural gap between the "Canadian" foods recommended in the Canada Food Guide and "southern European" foods was fairly easy to close, especially in a multi-ethnic city like sixties-era Toronto.[38]

As their correspondence suggests, the Institute's staff and volunteers drew satisfaction from their charity work and also exhibited a mutual respect for each other. Even allowing for an expected degree of politeness, even effusiveness, the letters and messages that refer to helpful, reliable, and even charming colleagues hint at a few budding friendships. Together, they articulate the women's growing sense of themselves as a community, or collective, of women involved in worthy projects, a theme to which I return below.[39] By contrast, their interactions with the overburdened mothers they met were overlaid with a paternalism that reinforced the class and cultural (if not ethnic)[40] divide between them. But while accepting charity likely proved embarrassing for some mothers, no one rejected a basket, a finding that no doubt reflects the Institute's selection process as well as the depth of need.

Charity work made gift-givers of the Institute women and their social welfare colleagues, but the gift came with strings attached. Having met some bar of need, the recipient of charity also becomes in some way beholden to the giver while the giver, feeling virtuous, might yet expect something in return.[41] Institute staff did encourage the mothers to take out memberships and to enrol in their English classes, mother's clubs, and other programs, but did not limit donations to Institute members. However complicated their response to charity, the recipients of the food baskets and vouchers, many of whom already had been forced by war, displacement, and poverty to rely on aid, expressed their appreciation in letters written on cheap cards or scraps of paper, either in their own language or in rudimentary English.

A typical batch of thank-you messages that arrived at the Institute at Christmastime in 1962 came from Italian, Polish, Yugoslav, and Croatian mothers, or their daughters, and most of the writers struggled to say thanks in English. The English letters were brief and riddled with grammatical and spelling errors (as in "takeyou"

for thank you), but heartfelt. A Polish girl thanked the Institute women for the "wonderful" and "adorable" doll she received on Christmas Eve," adding that "I put her on the top of the bookshelf so that I can look at her." In one of the longest letters, an Italian mother thanked the Institute for providing her children with such "a memorable day" and "unforgeble [unforgettable] … great avent [event]," adding: "I will prey the God to give you better living and value future together."[42]

For the Institute women, who worked long hours to bring some sustenance and joy into the homes of newcomer mothers struggling during the stressful holiday season, such displays of appreciation affirmed the value of their actions, and the viability of the Institute's dual-pronged commitment to immigrant adjustment and pluralism. Some self-interest operated, too, in that well-adjusted newcomers would more willingly embrace the Institute's philosophy and join its programs. Overall, though, this labour, like all charity work, reinforced rather than bridged class divisions between givers and recipients.

Children's Parties and Adult Meals

Some Institute food-related charitable activities took place within a more festive context and involved a greater degree of cross-ethnic interaction; these were the luncheons, dinners, parties, and dances held to celebrate mainly Christian holidays. By far the busiest holiday was Christmas, when a children's party, afternoon teas, buffet luncheons and dinners, a formal turkey dinner, and dances were organized. With invitations generated by the counselling staff and volunteers, the size of the events ranged from between 60 and 125 people for the adult meals to between 100 and 320 for the children's party.[43] The principle of breaking bread and, in the children's case, enjoying treats, informed these festive events, as did the "wider universality of the Christmas message" of unity, harmony, and good will.[44] That message was also captured in the Christmas cards designed by Hungarian artist Dora de Pédery-Hunt, one of which featured an abstract tree and another a stylized star surrounded by greetings in multiple languages.[45]

The boys and girls who attended the children's Christmas party feasted on cake, ice cream, and milk or chocolate milkshakes in a holiday atmosphere created by colourful balloons, streamers, bells, a decorated tree (or two), and clowns, and took home a gift from a jolly Santa Claus. The entertainment, which was provided free by newcomer or Canadian performers, might include a puppet or variety show. The 1964 variety show featured a folk-dance troupe and was hosted by Bruno Gerussi, the Italian Canadian stage and television actor who became best known for the long-running CBC-TV show *The Beachcombers* (1972–90).[46] As West put it, the parties were meant to bring some "happiness into the lives of little children" of struggling immigrant families "and indeed of their parents."[47] By 1970, organizers noted the importance of welcoming children who, as Streeruwtiz opined, "did not celebrate Xmas" but

"have other customs as interesting," though the party remained overwhelmingly European and Christian.[48]

IODE chapters headed by women such as Mrs A. Stermac (Polish Canadian) and Mrs E.H. Hugenholtz (Dutch Canadian) organized the children's Christmas party. Parents could also accompany a child to the party. With an eye to creating fun and a sense of wonder on a budget, the women tapped donors for the ice cream and milk, and for the eggs and butter to bake large, colourful cakes. Companies such as Acme Farmer's Dairy Ltd and Cira Brothers responded to the call to help bring some joy into the lives of deprived children, most of whom were also celebrating their first Christmas in Canada by providing Dixie cups of vanilla ice cream, half-pints of milk, and cake-baking ingredients. The Ideal Toy Company, International Games of Canada, and other companies donated the Santa gifts. The donated trees were decorated with Institute ornaments and were later reused for the adult tree-trimming party.[49]

By the women's own account, organizing the Saturday party was hugely time-consuming. The tasks included collecting and coordinating the information needed to ensure that each child received an appropriate toy for their age and gender (such as dolls for girls and puppets for boys). As a goodwill gesture, the Santa invitation was translated into different European languages, a job that often went to Szebeny, though the absence of the appropriate alphabet on the typewriter meant invitations to Russian and Ukrainian families were issued in English. The Institute provided the Santa suit and recruited the volunteer Santa, usually from among its male members. The Institute and IODE also supplied the music (on vinyl records or tape) for the carolling session. The young hostesses dressed in colourful ethnic costumes reinforced the event's multi-ethnic character, though an IODE suggestion that the children come similarly attired went nowhere, in part, no doubt, because their parents could hardly afford such outfits.[50] National Film Board (NFB) animated cartoons and holiday films were another party staple.

The changing age and ethnic composition of the children largely parallels the immigration shifts. Thus, a more ethnically diverse European group, albeit one with plenty of Hungarian "1956ers," gave way to parties increasingly dominated by Italians and Portuguese though a few Czech, Yugoslavian, and German children attended into the mid-1960s.[51] The decision in 1961 to reduce the maximum age of the partygoers from 14 to 10 likely reflected the presence of large Italian and Portuguese families. The only non-Europeans to attend the 1963 party of 293 children were two "Japanese" children, probably born to Canadian parents.[52] The Portuguese- and Italian-dominated party of 235 children in 1964 included a few children from previously unrepresented groups: thirteen Spanish and three Moroccan children, and one Afrikaans child (white South African). A few Black children appear in the early 1970s (see image 9.1 below). Again, many of the children lived in the vicinity of the Institute nearby, though a few had suburban addresses.[53] The gender was not always specified,

but organizers aimed for a roughly equal number of boys and girls, and for more younger (age 10 and under) than older children or young teenagers.[54]

Here, too, we find some evidence of a shared sense of camaraderie and mutual trust and respect among the organizing women, who clearly derived satisfaction, even pleasure, from bringing a little joy into the children's lives. In 1960, Streeruwitiz complimented Tine Stewart, then an IODE volunteer, for once again "work[ing] so hard to make this party possible for our little ones from all over the world." A 1967 report said "the important contributions" made by "Mrs. E.H. Hugenholtz and her team of IODE volunteers" (Alton chapter), and by "Mrs. Kaye, our regular volunteer," had ensured a highly successful party.[55] Such commentary revealed a patronizing attitude towards the parents who were incapable of giving their children a proper Christmas, but also a shared sense of female accomplishment among the mix of Anglo and ethnic organizers. Even allowing for a tendency to gush in thank-you letters sent to donors and volunteers, West and Streeruwitiz' appreciation for the work done by the IODE, and by the Italian Canadian volunteers who helped with translation and home visits, speaks to the presence of cross-ethnic bonds among a mixed group of middle-class women. The Christmas context, with its emphasis on giving and good cheer, likely reinforced such bonds, if only temporarily.[56]

Certainly, the parties reflected Institute paternalism, but the children surely enjoyed them, and delighted in taking a toy home to their sparsely furnished flat or multiple-family household. For a few hours, children who were baffled by their English-speaking teachers, or embarrassed about being sent back a grade or two because of their poor English, or confused by their parents' constant worries stepped into a "make-believe" world of colourful streamers, carol singalongs, dancers, a decorated tree, and a Santa Claus bearing gifts. For those who lived along its downtown route, only that "mile of make-believe" that was the annual Santa Claus parade rivalled it.[57]

The organizers stressed the children's joy. The report on the 1973 party hosted by the IODE Immouna Ephrem chapter described the "spirit of excitement and glee" that filled the "well decorated Recreation Room" of the Davenport Road building as the children met and played with new friends. The folk-dance teachers and the youth volunteers (who were dressed up as clowns) entertained them. They watched three NFB cartoons: "Christmas Cracker," about a young "heroine" who decorates a tree, the "Great Toy Robbery," a western about Santa retrieving the toys stolen by some cowboys, and a third about the "exciting new theme of space travel." Their enthusiastic greeting of Santa Claus, all "waving little hands and little bodies pushing their way to get a closer look at him," was followed by the "peak excitement" of opening their gift, showing it to parents and friends, and seeing what their friends received. The report ended by thanking the student volunteers, who came from Woodbine High School, George S. Henry High School, Oriole Yorkmills United Church, Kawartha Lakes School, and a senior Sunday school class.[58]

Santa's arrival at an Institute Christmas party delights the children, c. 1972. Archives of Ontario, F884-2-9, B427166.

The photos of the parties, which attracted some media attention, confirm the positive IODE reports, showing us mostly (but not exclusively) white immigrant children eating cake, clapping, and singing. Or surrounding Santa Claus (usually an Institute member) when he arrived to hand out the gifts.[59] Other children's parties were also held at the Institute, including a 1961 spring party hosted by Havergal College, an elite private girls' school, which treated 40 children to a supper (probably hot dogs) and ice cream, and a gift of little baskets with candy and games.[60] But it was the Christmas parties that stood out.

The Christmas lunch buffets and the dinners held for adults were more collaborative efforts involving Institute members, both newcomer and Canadian, and the staff and volunteers. The size varied according to the venue and resources but, following Institute practice, the mixed-gender groups, who might consume ham (or ham and cheese croissants), Greek pies, and Portuguese wine,[61] were ethnically diverse but overwhelmingly European. Special invitations to Anglo-Torontonians, from reporters to dignitaries,

Nell West hosts a sit-down Christmas dinner with Institute staff and invited members and guests, 25 December 1958. Archives of Ontario, F884-2-9, B427166.

were issued with the hope that the event would also get some wider public attention. The Christmas dinners to which single adults and childless couples were invited – Streerurwitz called them the "lonely ones"[62] – attracted 60 or more people. The Christmas open house buffet drew closer to 100 people and the tree-trimming party about half that number. On occasion the food ran out, suggesting that numbers exceeded expectations. Given the value placed on such feasts as a community-building act, running out of food caused embarrassment.[63]

West and staff also held more intimate sit-down affairs with a "traditional Canadian dinner with turkey and all the trimmings." The photographs of these dinners feature a smiling West, formally attired in dress, pearls, and hat, and the guests, also dressed up but donning more serious expressions, seated at the table. One cannot easily read emotions from such photos, especially since some would have adopted a formal (unsmiling) pose for the camera even if they were enjoying themselves.[64] Writing about the Christmas dinner she attended

A multiracial line-up of performers sing carols during an International Institute Christmas show, c. 1973. Archives of Ontario, F884-2-9, B427166.

in 1969, Elizabeth Dingman of the *Toronto Telegram*'s women's page remarked with approval on the diversity of the guests. She commented on the general "stiffness" of the atmosphere, but added that the mood was lightened by a gregarious Viennese woman who displayed a fondness for the American "Wild West."[65] A degree of awkwardness would be expected of any gathering where most people do not know each other, and Dingman's own anecdote indicated how a shared meal can break the ice among strangers, leading to conversation, lighthearted or otherwise. Even the not entirely comfortable immigrant guests would have registered the importance of the invitation. The Christmas (and other) parties held for the volunteer English teachers at the Institute, and those the teachers held, often in their own homes, for the graduates of their adult English classes, were more relaxed affairs.[66]

The Christmas and New Year's dances drew the largest crowds. The *Intercom* reported on people enjoying themselves at the 1965 Christmas dance, which also featured a "lively and colourful vaudeville of Canada's past and present," a "magnificent" performance by the Hungarian Kodály Choir of Toronto, and

Santa Claus (member Wolfgang Moritz). The New Year's Eve dance for that year was "a complete sell-out." In 1970, though, it drew a "disappointing" crowd, a harbinger of the difficulties that led to the Institute's demise in 1974.[67]

Eating among Equals

The Institute events that held far greater potential for encouraging cross-cultural exchange and a sense of community, albeit on a small scale, were the member-organized dinners. Even with the annoying interference of the supervisory staff (see chapter 7), these intercultural dinners encouraged collaborative organizing and cross-ethnic sociability. An early success was the mixed-gender supper club, whose members met on two Sundays of each month to make and share a meal and enjoy a movie, music, or a lecture, and conversation.[68] Drawing on their own food customs rather than staff menus, the mostly European members of the Supper Club sat down to a meal that was punctuated with storytelling, debate, and entertainment. In short, they clearly understood that sociability could facilitate and reinforce social bonds, and that, to cite food theorists Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eating is "an evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships."[69] Significantly, both women and men organized the suppers, with the "ethnic" cuisine of choice, be it a Portuguese fish dinner or Italian pasta dinner, determining who might "supervise" the meal-making. There were rosters to ensure that everyone did their share of the preparation, cooking, and cleaning up.

The affiliated ethnic groups also held banquets at the Institute. Although mainly single-ethnic group events, the hosts often invited the director or a few board members and a few Canadian members to help create a more diverse gathering. By the mid-1960s, newer groups were also hosting dinners, which in certain cases, including those involving South Asian groups, prompted vegetarian menus. Institute staff showed an open-mindedness towards the "new" post-1967 immigrants by educating themselves about the differing food rules and preferences of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other non-Christian newcomers. They also made plans to develop non-Western cookbooks, though only an Asian one materialized (see below).

Banquets and Ethnic Entrepreneurs

The Institute's Ethnic Weeks, which showcased an immigrant group's folk and artistic cultures in order to raise public awareness of Toronto's rich ethnic heritage, included a festive banquet, or "nationality dinner." (The Ethnic Nights and Ethnic Sundays also featured a banquet.) These events reflected the Institute's immigrant-gifts form of cultural pluralism – which asserted that immigrant

customs enriched the society that embraced them – and its promotion and popularization of the concept through public spectacle (see chapter 10). The description that director West gave of an upcoming banquet for a Latvian Week, where she promised a table set "with the Easter motif used by Latvians in their homeland, fresh birch branches, green stalks of corn and multicoloured Easter eggs," offered an apt "plentiful table" symbol of culinary pluralism. She promised, too, that young Latvian women dressed in their "varied and colourful" ethnic costumes would serve the dishes, and that guests could try "the national bread in which the centre is filled with the whole kernel of wheat."[70]

Such publicity offered an illustration of how Institute-style cultural pluralism simultaneously celebrated and appropriated ethnic customs for larger objectives, in this case, offering Torontonians an opportunity to consume "other" foods in a festive context. Insofar as the Ethnic Weeks were intended to strip the immigrants of any threatening elements, the banquets were a critical ingredient in promoting a therapeutic pluralism. The cooks and chefs filled their role as makers of food that was exotic enough to make people feel adventurous in their own city but not so exotic as to scare them off.[71]

Insofar as they involved the marketing and commodification of Toronto's growing cultural diversity, these banquets prefigured current city-branding strategies that "present multiculturalism as a product for spectacle and consumption."[72] The Toronto à la Cart program launched in 2009, which ignored the needs of immigrant and ethnic food providers, serves as a caution against accepting feel-good analyses of multicultural banquets as necessarily progressive celebrations of urban cosmopolitanism. An entrepreneurial as well as neo-liberal pilot program to use "ethnic" food (here largely understood as the food of racialized immigrants) to attract tourists and investors, it failed to provide the immigrant vendors who competed for and invested in the carts that would prepare the Korean, Thai, Middle Eastern, Caribbean Fusion, and Indian foods with a viable business. Straitjacketed by rigid regulations regarding location, rent, health and safety inspections (for example, they could not cook in their carts), and the types of foods they could sell, vendors faced disappointing sales and accrued major debts.[73]

But, like the concerts and arts and crafts exhibits that were also part of the Institute's Ethnic Weeks, the banquets were not simply top-down events. They involved the active support of ethnic organizations, many of which invited Institute leaders to their own commemorative and holiday banquets, and immigrant and ethno-Canadian chefs, cooks, and restaurateurs. Whether out of mainly business or political interests or ethnocultural pride, or a mix of all three, the ethnic food entrepreneurs clearly saw the banquets as an opportunity to promote their food specialties as well as a more pluralistic Canada.[74]

As advocates of immigrant entrepreneurialism, the Institute women were pleased to assist ethnic bakery owners, chef-restaurateurs, and caterers in

establishing or expanding their clientele. The dinner menu for Latvian week in spring 1957, for example, offered a valuable plug for Little Riga Restaurant, which prepared a buffet that included a starter of head cheese with horseradish and rye bread and three entrees: roast ham baked in dough, roast veal, and roast chicken.[75]

The importance of ethnic food purveyors is similarly illustrated by a German Week. As the Canadian sponsors recruited for the event, a Local Council of Women and the Parkdale Travel Club, a group of travel enthusiasts, were instructed to provide (Canadian) "fruitbread or sandwiches" for the opening afternoon tea because their ethnic counterparts, which included the German-Canadian Business and Professional Association (GCBPA) and Club Harmonie, would provide "the nationality cakes and pastries."[76] But the latter did far more than that. Three local German bakeries – Freimann's Pastry, Hilda's Fancy Cake Bar, and Rudolph's Pastry, who probably belonged to the GCBPA – supplied ethnic pastries throughout the week. Presumably, so, too, did the (unnamed) chef or restaurant owner who supplied the banquet menu of "traditional" German fare: consommé with liver dumplings, smoked pork chops, and Swabian veal steak with noodles. The dessert was apple strudel. These small businesses undoubtedly considered their donations and discounts money well spent for the positive exposure and goodwill it created.[77]

There were also some disappointments. The inaugural Polish dinner held in honour of the Institute's first ethnic week in February 1957 was arranged and catered by W. Szymczak, owner of the Parkside Grill, a modest restaurant located at 695 Queen Street West, not far from the Institute. When only 49 of the 60 people who reserved spots showed up for the ($2) dinner, Institute staff resolved to collect the money when reservations were made in order to avoid debts, though it is not clear that they did so. In 1962, the Institute lost one of its most "generous" chefs, Dutch restaurant owner Kees Vandergraaf, who had catered several receptions and dinners, when he left Toronto to run a tourist lodge he bought on the Trent River near Campbellford, Ontario. We do not know how much his subsidized meals for Institute events helped to attract new diners to his restaurant, but this ethnic entrepreneur's move to rural Ontario meant shifting from an ethnic-niche strategy of serving members of one's urban ethnic community and, one hoped, some other Torontonians and tourists, to a more specifically tourist-oriented one.[78]

The gendered dynamics that characterized many of the Ethnic Weeks, where male elites enjoyed pride of place while female members tended to the preparations, applied to the banquets, though the shared labour encouraged some positive bonds between the women. At the Polish Ethnic Week banquet in February 1957, for example, the male president and vice-president of the co-sponsoring Canadian Polish Congress sat with their wives at the head table along with Rev. Claude Mulvihill, current chair of the Institute board. The women directly

involved in the preparations received no fanfare, though they did acknowledge each other's contributions. Director West praised Irene Ungar, a member of the Canadian Polish Women's Federation who sat on the Institute board, for being an effective liaison to the various sponsors. Ungar sent a congratulatory box of chocolates to the Institute "Ladies" for pulling off the event. As coordinator of a later Croatian banquet, Mira Ashby, president of the Croatian Women's Organization, received a similarly effusive thank you.[79]

In the 1960s, the Institute featured some "Eastern" events, including an Indonesian exhibit and dinner. For the Japanese Week held in 1969, the flyer, whose cover featured a drawing of wooden female dolls dressed in kimonos, promised a "Buffet of Japanese Delicacies," but no menu is available. Nor is there one for a Canadiana Week that included "Eastern" food.[80]

The banquets involved some cross-gender collaboration. The Institute women worked with both male and female caterers, bakers, and cooks. They took care of logistical details, including seating plans that ensured mixing and ordering tablecloths and napkins. If they used a commercial laundry, they saved themselves hours of washing up.[81] The Institute's pluralist mandate could serve to disguise women's labours as contributions to a greater goal, especially for festive events, but the women's correspondence suggests that they also expected some recognition for all the work.

The Institute's support for small ethnic businesses would not have precluded support for the corporate-friendly and public-private campaigns in culinary tourism that have come under critique in recent years. It was, after all, involved in organizing the 1969 launch of Metro International Caravan, the folk and trade show festival that helped to define Toronto multiculturalism, both in the city and beyond, for more than three decades (see chapter 10). Food and business, and the business of food, were key elements of Metro Caravan. The press releases for the inaugural festival promoted Toronto as a world trade centre and industrial capital with international port facilities, and as home to many rich "international heritages," including culinary ones. Small ethnic shops and large supermarket chains participated in what became a major tourist attraction by setting up displays of their "international foods" and a wide array of ethnic restaurants advertised their "international specials." The organizers even produced a resident celebrity chef, Stephen Vojtech, long-time chef of the posh King Edward Hotel. He was billed as a world-class chef much beloved among Europe's royal families. Vojtech reportedly supervised all the "gourmet menus" on offer "in consultation" with each participating group, though, in truth, Toronto then had few upscale restaurants, and the pavilions, which were ethnic clubs, church basements, community centres, and pubs dressed up as major cities, offered relatively simple (if labour-intensive) specialties, such as perogies (variously named), cabbage rolls, and pizza.[82]

The excitement of playing the culinary tourist in the safety of one's city emerged as a major theme of the media coverage of Metro Caravan '69. Playing

A Croatian dinner at the Institute in February 1964. Archives of Ontario, F884-2-9, B427166.

up this theme, *Toronto Telegram* writer Colin Murray told readers that, at the Budapest pavilion in the city's west end, people could enjoy "gulyas [goulash] and cabbage rolls the Hungarian way" and purchase "wines like Bull's Blood." (The wine's name, Egri Bikavér, referred to a legend about a band of men who defended their town of Eger against an invading Turkish army in the sixteenth-century.)[83] His description of the Rome pavilion located in Toronto's new Little Italy on St Clair Avenue West captured the festival's eclecticism. Visitors could participate in an ancient Roman festival set against a replica of the Forum by shopping in the surrounding boutiques, dancing on the terrace, and consuming "ravioli, lasagna, wine, wine, wine."[84] The Institute's own contribution to Caravan was a Swiss café (Maison Française) that served cheese and beef fondue on tables with checkered tablecloths, an Alps corner where women, dressed in the peasant-inspired *dirndl* consisting of a full skirt and apron and a blouse with short puffy sleeves, sold cheese-and-onion meat pies, and a Scandinavian smorgasbord buffet. At the outdoor dance, they ate

In a scene reminiscent of an Institute food festival, two fashionably dressed women take in an array of Greek sweets during a Community Folk Art Council bake sale at the Blue Flame Room, Consumers' Gas Company, 21–23 Toronto Street, January 1967. York University Libraries, Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, Toronto Telegram fonds, ASC08808.

"Canadian" hot dogs, maple-syrup sundaes, and apple pie, and drank beer. In the Institute's most noteworthy attraction, a Caribbean festival located in the auditorium with Calypso music, the bar served rum drinks and the kitchen a curried chicken and rice dinner.[85]

Serious reflection of the wide-ranging, but hardly omnipotent, power of food, might well lead us to ask the following question. Have the critics who reject food-and-festival multiculturalism as entirely illusory, and even dangerous, ignored or underestimated the capacity of food, both as a thing imbued with cultural meaning and as a site of consumption, to expose people to new cultures, and even to express defiance? After all, plenty of middle-class Anglo–North American youth in sixties- and seventies-era heterogeneous cities like Toronto expressed their discomfort with bourgeois conformity in part by experimenting with "ethnic" foods.[86] Furthermore, as Warren Belasco and others note, food battles have often accompanied grassroots political struggles, and the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which included civil

Stephen Vojtech, master chef of Metro Caravan. The original caption for this publicity shot read in part: "Gourmet fare – at a gourmand's fair – may consist of suckling pig … or stewed squid, marinated herring or kapustnik [Russian cabbage pie]." York University Libraries, Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, Toronto Telegram fonds, ASC60823 (photographer Jac Holland, 13 June 1970).

rights, Black power, feminist, hippie, and back-to-the-land groups, used food as a form of political expression.[87]

Community Cookbook Projects

As Donna Gabaccia notes, the interwar US Institutes helped to popularize the idea that food and sociability go together, both at home and in the wider community, and that immigrant foods brought the spice of variety to American society. A popular strategy for promoting such ideas was the production of

multicultural cookbooks, examples of which included the International Institute of St Louis' *Menus and Recipes* (1927) and Lowell's *As the World Cooks: Recipes from Many Lands* (1938).[88] While West herself participated in US and Canadian-based conversations about creating multi-ethnic cookbooks,[89] the Toronto Institute's first foray into this activity was creating a column in the *Intercom* called "Let's Exchange Recipes" featuring (mainly simple) ethnic recipes.[90] A more substantial project was the Christmas cookbook, *Season's Greetings in Food – Christmas 1962*. The collaboration encouraged cross-cultural bonds among the female participants, though the final product was hardly free of contradiction.

The Christmas cookbook reflected a general strategy of promoting the Christian season as a time for "re-dedication" to such "higher principles" as "goodwill to men."[91] Ecumenicalism also informed the efforts to diversify the annual International Festival of Carols. This was billed as an evening of carols and stories that represented "the universality of the Christmas message" and "the spirit" of a city "where immigrants from many lands have come together to create a truly Canadian life," by recruiting "clergy and laymen" from a wider array of denominations and ethnic origins.[92] By 1970, the still heavily European performances for this free event included a Korean ensemble, Japanese choir, and the predominantly Black British Methodist Episcopal Church Choir. Organizers were disappointed by turnouts below 100 people – though no one could do much about the flu outbreak that reduced numbers in 1969 – and occasionally complained about an "obstinate" choir, but thought it a worthwhile event. The music writer for the Toronto *Globe and Mail* described the 1970 festival held at the St Lawrence Town Hall thus: "As a musical event, it left much to be desired. As a simple retelling of a familiar tale [the birth of Jesus told in five languages] it was effective and sometimes moving." He also thought "the most exotic performance" was that of the Armenian choir "with its fascinating Mid-Eastern minor key melodies."[93]

Special articles in the *Intercom* similarly used the multiplicity of long-standing Christmas celebrations as proof of the value of practising a modern-day form of pluralism. Oddly, perhaps, the best example is the publication in 1962 of "American Christmas," a feature from a US magazine supplied by Institute headquarters in New York City, though the Toronto staff clearly thought the message travelled easily across the border. Its main point was to lay out the multicultural origins of Christmas, beginning with the first colonials. (No mention is made of Indigenous peoples.) The article praises the immigrants for bringing harmonizing cultures that were "to change and blend during a century and a half of the Republic," citing the Germans for having introduced two now widely popular customs, the first (of Italian origin), setting up a crèche that represented the birth of Christ, and the second, lighting the Christmas tree. The English and other Europeans, it adds, brought the tradition of singing carols in public.[94]

Similarly, the Christmas message in the 1965 *Intercom* asks readers to practise the "understanding, compassion and goodwill that prevails within the family circle at Christmas" throughout the year, and to extend this compassion for others to Toronto's community of diverse religious and ethnic groups, and also to the province, nation, and the international arena. Through its staff, members, and volunteers "of many races, religions, colours and creeds," it adds, the Institute was doing its utmost "to broaden our horizons still more and to extend the spirit of Christmas in time as well.[95]

At times, Toronto Institute personnel used the Christmas season to recognize the city and nation's non-Christians, and to argue that the positive ideals being celebrated were "not the sole prerogative" of Christians.[96] In the early 1960s, the *Intercom* declared that the Institute's members comprised "peoples of almost all lands and of all races and … religions." The list of 65 countries that appeared in the holiday message included, besides the European ones that dominated it, nations that included significant numbers of Hindus and Sikhs (India), Muslims (India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt), and Buddhists (India and Japan). The list also included officially atheist Cuba, though the Institute would not have sanctioned Communism.[97]

The Institute's 1962 multi-ethnic Christmas cookbook project was, however, mainly European, and, like the interwar US Institute cookbooks cited above, Christian – there were no Jewish recipes. The aim, however, was not simply to entertain, but to promote a pluralist message, and the process of producing it involved intercultural collaboration. In both respects, it mirrored the 1956 cookbook of recipes of "new and old Americans" compiled by the staff of the Institute's central body in New York City. That book declared, "when we prepare and eat the food of a foreign country we are not only exploring unique gustatory delights but bridging a gap in international understanding."[98] The Toronto cookbook was also an Institute fundraiser that helped to cover the costs of the Christmas baskets and parties. A few men contributed a recipe, including one for Greek turkey stuffing.[99] Donald Bellamy, a professor of social work at the University of Toronto, sold copies to colleagues who "recognize a good thing and a good cause when they see it."[100] But it was the Institute women and their colleagues who were most directly involved in creating and selling the slim and inexpensive ($1) book. The women who peddled it included nuns, social work instructors, and SPC volunteers.[101]

Cookbooks are more than "just recipes" in part because the recipes, even if single-authored, are so often the product of women's personal and community relationships. Cookbooks offer an entry into the worldview or standpoint of the individual or collective cookbook makers, whether related to advancing a particular type of cuisine over another or projecting a particular cultural or ethics-based lifestyle.[102] In addition to the project's obvious pluralist message, the documents generated by the Institute's 1962 project again offer evidence

of cross-cultural bonds of community forming among the women involved. For one thing, a number of women, including immigrant members, responded with enthusiasm to West's call for recipes. A Danish immigrant, Mrs R. Jensen, sent in her favourite recipes for Danish Christmas "Goodies" and was delighted that West included them.[103] The friendly note of a contributor of a recipe for Ukrainian cabbage rolls said she hoped "it helps you in your booklet idea." The inclusion of personal references suggest that she and West were on friendly terms.[104] Czech Canadian writer Marie Dymes sent West recipes for Czech fish dishes and yule loaf (vanocka), adding, "I only hope you will be able to decipher them." Although asked to provide personal favourites, Dymes took the project so seriously that she copied the recipes out of an old cookery book "to make them more reliable," but added, wistfully, that "they certainly evoked some old memories."[105]

West is equally friendly in her replies to the contributors, which included Hungarian Canadian staffers Elizabeth Szalowski and Szebeny. Szalowski wanted her borscht and beef stroganoff listed as "everyday recipes" representing "a mixture of old country and Canadian foods, adapted to the needs of a busy Canadian housekeeper, who still loves to cook and serve interesting meals." In both cases, ketchup and a package of dried onion soup mix appeared as the convenient "Canadian" (North American) processed ingredients. The borscht recipe also added wieners to the hamburger, (canned) consommé, diced beets (also tinned), celery, and potatoes. In addition to the familiar emphasis on quick and inexpensive meals is their flexibility: the meal could be prepared in advance and reheated and refrigerated leftovers used for another meal, thereby aiding "the Hostesses' disposition and appearance." Referring to her borscht recipe ("very nice to serve this stew-type soup on cold winter nights"), Szalowksi offered a familiar encouragement to women to be playful with meals and vary the recipe to keep family members from becoming bored eaters. One could use a ham base for borscht or add lima beans, cabbage, or tomatoes. Even more fun, she exclaimed, "for the ones who do not count calories!" was her "quick tasty potato pancakes": "this is excellent for a kitchen party – everybody ready with a plate waiting for the pancakes to be served right off the skillet (or skillets)."[106] Szebeny's recipe for a chicken and rice dish that included convenience items of cream of mushroom soup and condensed milk indicates that busy ethno-Canadian women had adopted quicker versions of Old World dishes. She, too, stressed ease and flexibility. The dish was "excellent" to prepare in advance for "a nice relaxed Sunday – dinner ready – just heat it and serve it," and leftover soup could be made by adding dumplings or fresh vegetables.[107]

A cookbook like *Season's Greetings in Food – Christmas 1962* is a multi-layered cultural, political, and gendered text. Written in the cheery style of the era's food writers, the book was clearly targeted mainly at Canadian and ethno-Canadian women operating in both an English and an ethnically Euro-Canadian milieu.

Institute staff also hoped to sell copies of the book – an English text that promoted culinary pluralism – to immigrant women like those enrolled in Institute classes or programs.

The cookbook offered brief descriptions of the varied European Christmas customs transplanted to Canada, including the Czechs' St Nicholas, who descends "from the heavens accompanied by an angel carrying a bag of gifts for good children and leading the devil who has switches for the bad ones." It noted the more intimate, familial, and less commercial nature of Christmas in Europe, where people enjoy a quiet family meal on Christmas Eve, attend mass, and perhaps exchange a few gifts. The emphasis, however, is on Christmas as a magical time, where children are delighted by golden or flying pigs or talking animals and people tell each other's fortunes. The playful take on pagan rituals continues into the section on New Year's Superstitions: the Irish must have "their lucky Irish bread" and the English believe that "for every mince pie you eat you will have a wish come true." The only reference to non-Europeans is an entry on the Japanese who "drink the first pail of water drawn from a well on New Year's morning" in the belief that it "drives evil spirits from their body."[108] Despite the inclusion of a few quaint "Anglo" customs, the overall emphasis on European villagers' fantastical beliefs veers into a primitive world of simple folk figures and quaint traditions.[109]

All but eight of the book's thirty-six recipes are depicted as popular Christmastime foods. Most are assigned a nationality or ethnic-group label, though some items easily crossed (European) borders. Paradoxically, given the Institute's interest in encouraging Anglo-Torontonians to experiment with "other" food customs, the single largest number of recipes were identified as British (for Christmas cake, pudding, and sauces), followed by four Czech, Italian, Portuguese, and Hungarian recipes, and two each of Lithuanian, Danish, Yugoslavian, and Ukrainian ones. Only two of the eight "year-around recipes" were ethnically marked, namely Finger Frets (Austrian pastry) and German Cake. The remaining "Canadian" recipes would have been familiar to Anglo-Torontonians: pumpkin pie, tuna casserole, and chicken and rice dishes. As Szalowski hoped, the borscht and the beef stroganoff, though European in origin, were also presented as Canadian recipes for the busy mother. (Her cute asides for the borscht and pancake recipes were also included.) Again, the selection of recipes both reflected and reinforced the mainstreaming of economical and nutritious European-origin foods, with commercially prepared ketchup and tinned or packaged soups acting as means of homogenization.

Nevertheless, the recipes were presented as cultural gifts transplanted to Toronto by the latest waves of European immigrants. The book featured "typical" Christmas meals of recent immigrants, including the Portuguese, who reportedly ate cod for Christmas Eve and a turkey dinner for Christmas with turkey soup, stuffed turkey, fish fillets, pumpkin croquettes, flan pudding, salad, jams,

oranges and dried fruits. It noted, through a silly joke, that many Toronto Portuguese bought live turkeys (presumably from Kensington Market or neighbouring farms). "Before killing the turkey," the recipe advises the wife to give her husband "a drink of brandy so he gets drunk, then let him rest without food for 24 hours."[110]

Like other multi-ethnic Canadian and US cookbooks, the Institute's Christmas cookbook helped to create a safe cultural terrain on which the dominant "hosts" could be encouraged to accept "difference." Such cultural politics inevitably involved a process of mainstreaming the foreign food until it was no longer considered dangerously foreign yet still retained enough of the exotic to make experimentation worthwhile. Enticed by the fun prospect of experimenting with ethnic foods that, as a bonus, were generally cheap, it was argued, women across class and cultures could engage in mutual cultural exchange and share a healthy respect for culinary diversity. In short, these foods were cultural gifts that could be used to enrich the smorgasbord of Canadian national unity. A few immigrant and working-class women did participate in the project, but West held the reins of cultural power, and she and her middle-class friends decided what made it into the book.

Asian Cookbooks

The Institute's plans for other cookbooks suggest some effort to redress its Eurocentrism, but with a view to modifying ethnic cuisines for Anglo-Canadian palates. One such plan was for a series of "Eastern" cookbooks to be produced in cooperation with Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and other Canadian and immigrant Asian groups. However, the sole Asian cookbook in the Toronto Institute archive is a thin 1961 pamphlet called *Cooking in the Chinese Manner* that says nothing about having consulted anyone. The cover features a drawing of a young attractive Chinese woman in flowing Japanese kimono winking as she blasts off from a cloud, but the contents consist of Chinese recipes "adapted" to Canadian conditions and made easy for the Canadian housewife, who could now conveniently buy such items as bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, and crunchy noodles in her local supermarket. The featured dishes included Cantonese chow mein, egg foo young, barbequed spareribs, and boiled and fried rice.[111]

Another project that did not materialize was one initiated by Stewart, now Institute director, in 1968. The plan was to publish "a truly International Cookbook" that would celebrate the immigrants' culinary gifts to Canadian culture. It would also reflect, she added, the transformation in "Toronto's eating habits" resulting from "the enormous increase of travel" that had acquainted "native-born Canadians with the pleasing variety of European and Eastern dishes at home." Furthermore, it would "enable a hostess to entertain with a variety of foreign dishes" or serve "a whole meal from one country." Despite initial enthusiasm, the idea was dropped amid staff cuts due to declining funds.[112]

Conclusion

The Toronto Institute's record on promoting culinary pluralism was mixed, but, on balance, the women's food activism represented a collective if not fully coordinated effort to modestly shift the dominant Anglo-Canadian food culture of 1940s Toronto to that of a more outwardly pluralist society. In that regard, the Christmas cookbook, though slim, cheap, and even amateurish, and the banquets, though limited to about sixty people, were not only vehicles for the exchange of ideas among middle-class liberal women. To borrow from scholars who explore the relationship between gender, food culture, and nationalism, these texts and venues also constituted sites of a gender-influenced production of nationalist ideology that linked culinary experimentation and celebrations of multi-ethnic diets to participation in the new national culture of a more cosmopolitan society.[113]

The strategies or approaches also differed significantly with respect to the potential they held for promoting cultural diversity through culinary experimentation and facilitating a sense of cross-cultural community. The best example of cross-cultural bonds being forged was largely confined to the middle-class Institute female staff, members, and volunteers who worked collaboratively on both charitable and more community-affirming projects. Lofty ideas about food-and-festival pluralism could also serve to obscure the female labour so critical to getting these projects off the ground. In the end, and notwithstanding their celebration of the immigrants' supposed Christmas beliefs, the Institute women never took a leap towards a more radical reimagining of the city (and nation), one in which progressive immigrants reshape everyday life and revitalize politics in big cities.[114] While it contained some positive features, their food reformism instead remained largely within the realm of charity aimed at immigrant adaptation, the promotion of liberal cosmopolitanism on a budget, and the encouragement of ethnic entrepreneurialism. The latter was helped by the fact that a newcomer could enter the restaurant business with a small investment of capital, no professional training, and little knowledge of the host-land language, though one also needed to be able to draw on the labour of family or kin and work extremely long hours. An array of ethnic entrepreneurs (both pre- and post-1945 immigrants) who began initially by catering to their compatriots and local patrons contributed significantly to the proliferation of ethnic restaurants in 1960s Toronto. By the time of the Institute's demise in 1974, the greater willingness on the part of Anglo-Torontonians and others to experiment with eating "ethnic" was internationalizing Toronto's once dominant meat-and-potatoes and fish-and-chips food culture.[115]