ABSTRACT

This article explores the meanings embedded in the production, consumption, and symbolic positioning of turkey and pumpkin pie, foods closely associated with the American ritual feast of Thanksgiving. An analysis of turkey and pumpkin pie recipes used and adapted by first- and second-generation immigrants in north America, and by north Americans living abroad, throws into relief complex relations between food production, food consumption and the complexities of lived and often multiple sociocultural identifications. Through sharing the experiences, memories and associations evoked by individuals in the production of holiday recipes, I argue that ideas about ‘tradition’ and a desire to celebrate family and community through the ritual of baking, serving and consuming a ‘standard’ Thanksgiving holiday meal allow one to feel part of an imagined global American community. At the same time these details demonstrate celebration of individual and familial distinctiveness that is traced to (sometimes contested) memories of childhood and/or ethnic background, as well as to exploration, innovation and experience in the world at large through travel, migration and imagination.
American of possible holiday meals. Add to this corn (on the cob or as corn bread), which is indigenous to North and South America, and you have a holiday meal that could not have been feasible in Europe prior to the colonization of America. In early America sugar was expensive, so the use of cranberries, corn and pumpkin, all of which have a natural sweetness when cooked, was a way to sweeten one’s meal at a lower cost.