

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Food Television and Otherness in the Age of Globalization**

Casey Ryan Kelly. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017, 153p.

This book, published by Casey Ryan Kelly, comprises five chapters that examine the impact of food television on culture. Food television is no longer considered a source of food production and consumption, but a starting point for space, place, and identity. The author of the book attempts to provide a finite answer to the question of how media culture invites American audiences to think about the relationship between food, geography, travel, and cultural difference. The author exemplifies the local versus exotic foods based on *Bizarre Foods*, *Bizarre Foods America*, *No Reservations*, and “traditional” American comfort food in the light of *The Pioneer Woman and Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*, *Man v. Food*. In addition, taste is regarded as a feasible expression of judgment, preference, and hierarchy cultivated concerning historically and culturally specific food practices in American food culture and non-Western nations. The role of the “normal” food-place-identity is opposed to the role of the other. Three key propositions are regarded from the perspective of how food TV mediates an ongoing confrontation between cosmopolitan ideas and the dominance of Western power; how nostalgia and mythology of American exceptionalism give meaning to the food-place-identities; how entertaining formats use techniques of documentary and filmmaking to internalize the anthropological voice of food television.

Regarding the organization of the publication, the book contains a traditional introduction, several chapters, and a conclusion at the end. The chapters are based on programs that delve into exotic and multicultural cuisines and programs that feature American comfort food and mass consumer traditions.

In chapter 1, “The Neocolonial Plate,” the show “Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern” around Asia, Africa, and South America is analyzed. The show is a one-hour travel documentary with a former chef and food critic travelling and sampling the exotic and bizarre foods to reinforce the ideas of the superior white position regarding other cultures. The portrayals of cultural differences are entertaining and pleasurable for a simplified audience’s consumption. Not only are the portrayals simplified, but they are also distorted from the complex realities of the communities being featured. By presenting “the Orient” as mysterious and primitive, colonial histories are often neglected. The program generally allows viewers to “experience” distant cultures indirectly while ignoring global inequalities supporting Western globalization.

The author examines “*Bizarre Foods America*,” a spin-off program, in chapter 2, “Eroticizing Poverty.” Exotic foods are not typically exemplified in foreign countries, but rather in the USA, particularly in impoverished regions such as the rural South and Appalachia. The show portrays the food traditions formed by hardship and necessity, compared to the great exuberance of food for those looking for novelty. The author makes use of the term “culinary slumming,” explaining that it allows wealthier audiences to indulge in food practices of those who were born in conditions of inequality. Unreflexive enjoyment of American poverty cuisines marks the survival struggles of those who created them.

Ree Drummond’s “*The Pioneer Woman*” (Food Network), a cooking program set on a working-class ranch, is under analysis in chapter 3, “From the Plantation to the Prairie.” The show reimagines southern plantation iconography and ties it to the American tradition of slavery and colonial expansion. Food-place-identities are the key aspect of attention in this

chapter. The author showcases how the program was able to tie the mythic folklore of America's origin story with the wholesome, nostalgic vision of hard work and simple living, meanwhile criticizing this portrayal, stating that this appeal to frontier mythology obscures the violence and oppression that underpin American identity.

In chapter 4, "America, the Abundant," Guy Fieri's *"Diners, Dive-Ins and Dives"* (Food Network) and Adam Richman's *"Man v. Food"* (Travel Channel) are discussed as sources of excessive eating as a symbol of American prosperity. The author mentions that America is considered a land of abundance where overconsumption is a sign of upward mobility and the spoils of a mass consumer economy. They also position indulgence as a rebellious stand against authority, supporting the myth of prosperity of an upwardly mobile middle class. These shows highlight the American Dream of liberty, wealth, and demographic values on the grounds of overconsumption.

Chapter 5, "Going Native," explores the high-powers and downsides of culinary travel shows that prioritize curiosity over simple entertainment, concentrating on Anthony Bourdain's *"No Reservations"* (Travel Channel). The show offers detailed portrayals of food within its political, economic, and cultural settings. The key idea of the show is "going native" or living like locals, as it gives a more authentic experience. This concept relies on the simplistic, binary view of culture and marks the ways tourism often exploits and commodifies multicultural experiences. Yet, the show critiques the global tourist industry, providing a long-form argument against closed-minded ethnocentric forms of food tourism. While travel often struggles to break free from colonialist ideas of "self" and "Other," the show suggests it can transform cosmopolitanism as it is currently conceived by inviting audiences to reconsider their own assumptions and biases.

In the conclusion of the book, the author considers how food television relates to global structures of inequality and explores how it might help reimagine food-place identities. Even though the author criticizes food television's speculations of foreign Others, she ultimately argues that food's universal nature offers opportunities to bridge cultural divides and structural inequalities that are the main aspects of life under late capitalism.

*Viktoriia Linnikova*  
*Department of British and American Studies*  
*Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice*  
*Moyzesova 9, 04001 Košice*  
*Slovakia*  
*e-mail: viktoriia.linnikova@student.upjs.sk*

*Department of English*  
*Yurii Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University*  
*Sadova 2, 58012 Chernivtsi*  
*Ukraine*  
*e-mail: v.linnikova@chnu.edu.ua*

*In SKASE Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies [online]. 2025, vol. 7, no. 1 [cit. 2025-06-30]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JLCS14/09.pdf>. ISSN 2644-5506*