

Consuming Palestine: Palestine and Palestinians in Israeli food culture

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Abstract

This article sets out to study the role that Palestine and the Arab-Palestinians have had on Israeli national identity through the examination of Israeli food culture. Food culture played an important part not only in the emancipation of European Zionist-Jews who immigrated to Palestine before 1948 but also in the creation of the Israeli national identity, including its collective memory, national psyche and desired political aspirations. However, it is impossible to understand Israeli food culture, and Israeli identity and popular culture, without taking into account the environment in which and the people among whom it developed. In that respect, and as argued hereafter, for political and ideological reasons the Palestinian direct contribution to Israeli food culture, and by extension national identity, has been expunged or overlooked. Early Zionist encounter with the Arab-Palestinian people and their culture contained a mixture of romanticisation, admiration and imitation. However, with the Zionist aim of substituting the Arab-Palestinian people by creating a separate political and economic society, the process of encounter changed to replacement, appropriation and deliberate forgetting and rewriting of the past. In relation to Israeli food culture, the Arab-Palestinian food element was marginalised, blurred and reinterpreted as belonging to the Zionist settlers, or as being brought to Israel by the Mizrahi-Jews. In other words, Israeli food culture 'needed' the Arab-Palestinian culture as a source of imitation and localisation, but at the same time desired its de-Palestinianisation, together with the general idea of a separate Jewish state.

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Every country in the world
has a national dish that is known to everyone,
and every child in kindergarten knows that
the Italian meal is made of macaroni.

The Austrians have tasty schnitzel
and that the French eat frogs,
that the Chinese eat fine rice,
and that the cannibals eat one another.

Chorus

And we have falafel,
falafel, falafel,
a present for my dad
even mom buys it here
for my old grandma, we will buy half a portion
and even the mother-in-law will get one today:
falafel, falafel...¹

Appetisers: On food culture²

This article sets out to study the role that historical Palestine (the place) and the Arab-Palestinians (the people) have had on Israeli national identity through the examination of a specific element of this identity: Israeli food culture. This will be done by examining the ways through which Israeli food culture was constructed, including the dialectic relationship it had with the grander process in which it developed, that of the discursive construction of Israeli national identity. This article argues that the concept of Israeli food culture (and the creation of this culture), in similar way to the concept of the 'new Jew', has left on a journey whose point of departure included the adaptation of Arab-Palestinian elements, but whose final destination was de-Arabisation and more particularly: a total de-Palestinianisation.

In order to begin our study it is important to first explain our approach to the idea of the nation and the relationship between national identity and food. Anderson's (1983) concept of an 'imagined community' with regards to the modern nation-state is indeed helpful, but one should wonder from what other sources do individuals get the notion of them being part of a community, even if imagined, in a given homeland. One important process which actively installs and propagates the notion of 'the nation', and so adds a further layer to Anderson's (1983) analysis, is the actions of elites and institutions responsible for, in the words

of Hobsbawm (1993), the writing of history and the invention of traditions. Another layer, which is in a way complementary to this process, is the idea that individuals in a given territory are constantly reminded of 'their nation' and its values through the use of 'banal nationalism'. That is to say that the idea of the nation is continuously constructed, reproduced and reinforced through symbols, spaces and discourses, which range from coins and buildings to monuments and everyday use of language (Billig, 1995). All in all, this means that in trivial, natural, everyday situations and practices, individuals negotiate and engage with the notion of the imagined community (Edensor, 2002), a discursive construction in its nature in which 'the nation... is a way of seeing, doing, talking and being' (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 540). These processes take part in constructing and reproducing the idea of an imagined community and its qualitative differences and significance.

An illuminating and telling method of examining and exploring issues concerning national identity is through *food culture*, which we believe adds a crucial layer to our understanding of the subject. Examining eating – perhaps the most instinctive and basic human act – can point out social and political processes, watersheds and beliefs, and that food itself, including the alleged 'quiet' and 'sidelined' practices relating to the food culture created, can serve as a historical 'recorder' of much louder events, developments and decision-making. In that respect, *food culture* is an important part of who we are and how we imagine ourselves and the nation.

By using *food culture* we do not simply mean a particular diet, but rather we include the manners and methods in which food is grown, produced, prepared, commodified, consumed and perceived by a particular society. This might appear an unusual choice of medium to study national identity in general and Israeli national identity in particular; yet again eating and purchasing food, and talking about it, are some of the most basic activities shared by every member of the nation regardless of gender, class or ethnicity, and therefore can bring to the surface comprehensive and large-scale developments that were, and to some extent still are, largely ignored in the writing about national identity generally, and in our case study – a Jewish national identity in Israel/Palestine. Additionally, our choice of focusing on food culture and national identity stems from an anthropological truism that how we eat, what we eat and what we choose not to eat, communicates who we are to ourselves and others (Mintz, 1986: 13).

In this article, we use theoretical literature about *food culture*, as well as specific examples highlighting the relationship between food and identity, and apply them to our case study, vis-à-vis the history of Zionism, the Zionist-Palestinian encounter, the Israeli-Arab conflict, and the creation of a 'local', 'rooted', 'modern' Jewish identity in historical Palestine, and from 1948 – in Israel. Avieli (2005) makes an important anchor for this research as he provides examples of, and analyses how, particular food items (in his study of Vietnamese society) serve as mediums through which the idea of an imagined community is negotiated, practiced and solidified. This is not to say that our analysis takes food items as authentic to the culture that celebrates them. For example, food items adapted from other food cultures can

become representative of the nation, for example, Sukiyaki and Tempura in Japan (Hiroko, 2008). In that respect, we acknowledge Narayan's argument that food items can be manipulated and 'fabricated' in order to create new national sensibilities that explain the 'interesting and problematic understandings of our relationship to social others' (1995: 64). Based on this (and following Palmer, 1998) we argue that the negotiation and maintenance of the imagined community is based on a national food culture and is not limited to particular food items.

According to Edensor (2002) one of the key elements in the construction of the imagined community is the incorporation of regional, religious and ethnic differences into the greater national identity. We argue (in a similar fashion to Pilcher, 1998) that the construction of a national food culture mirrors that of the nation. This process is evident, surprisingly or not, in food literature. Appadurai's (1988) research into the creation of the Indian nation-state explains how Indian – but also Colonial – cookbooks helped create a unique Indian national identity through the incorporation of regional and ethnic cuisines into a national one. Montanari (2004) provides similar examples of how cookbooks helped to *culinarily unite* Italy by disseminating local and regional food knowledge nationally. Additionally, and in relation to nation building projects, Cusack (2000) provides examples of how elites in post-colonial African states 'created' national cuisines by assembling ethnic, colonial, expatriate and other recipes into cookbooks.

In our case study, the triangular connection between Zionism, the construction of Jewish national identity and food culture, might not appear strong at first. However, examining some of the symbols of Jewish identity in Israel/Palestine, from the Sabra (prickly pear, the name given to an Israeli-born-Jew) to Jaffa oranges (probably the most famous symbol of production in Palestine, which after the creation of Israel, was adopted by the state and became one of its primary exports) – both of them are also symbols of Palestinian production, life, society and natural component of their existence and environment³ – it becomes clear that food has played an important part in the emancipation of the 'new Jew' and in the historical and political Zionist 'return' to biblical *Eretz Yisrael*. As we argue hereafter, food culture not only played a role in the emancipation of European Zionist-Jews who immigrated to Palestine before 1948 but actually played a pivotal role in the creation of the Israeli identity, including its collective memory, national psyche and political aspirations.

An example of this can be seen in one of Israel's most recognised postcards, sent by thousands of tourists every year to their friends and family back home (Semmerling, 2004). The postcard depicts a portion of pita bread with falafel with an Israeli flag stuck on the peak of the pita, titled 'Falafel: Israel's national snack' (see Figure 1). The flag on the 'mountain' of falafel looks almost as one put on a concurred destination, be it the US flag on the moon or another on the peak of the Everest. The national importance of this dish and its connection to Israeli identity is clear in this postcard, and what is so striking here is the fact that the falafel is a traditional Arab sandwich, whose name originates from the 4th century in the Coptic community in Egypt (Albala, 2011: 54) which has been popular all



Figure 1. Falafel: Israel's national snack.

over the Arab world, and which, after 1948, was re-branded and appropriated by Jewish-Israelis as 'Israeli' (Suleiman, 2004: 204).

According to Raviv (2002a, 2002b, 2003) food was an important symbol utilised by Zionist leaders in the construction of national feelings from an early stage. It was a process which was driven by the political elites generally, and in relation to food was led by cultural-political agents, such as Womens' International Zionist Organisation (WIZO). At the heart of this process was the growing tendency to shift the focus from the romanticisation and imitation stage, in which the first Zionists settlers wanted to resemble the local Arab-Palestinian peasants, including drinking and eating like them (see Figure 2) (Benvenisti, 2002) to replacing the Arab-Palestinians through the appropriation of their local customs. Strikingly, these acts were justified on many occasions as another 'return': this time not only to the land but to the historical/biblical Jewish customs that the Arabs have 'preserved'.⁴

We argue that the idea that food items adopted from Arab-Palestinians were 'preserved' is rather farfetched. For example, several Israeli-Jewish authors have claimed that hummus is a biblical-Jewish dish (Shalev, 2001) to which the Zionist immigrants 'returned' and which was 'preserved' by Arab-Palestinians. We do not deny the fact that the biblical *hamits* or *himtsa* meant chickpeas (Felix, 2000: 143). However, we doubt that the passage in Isaiah 30:24 that 'The Oxen likewise and the young donkeys that work the ground shall eat salted provender [lit. 'blil hamits']' meant the animals got a portion of chickpea paste made with tahini, garlic, cumin, lemon juice and olive oil. The passage most likely refers to a blend of raw or fermented chickpeas used as animal fodder.



Figure 2. Second aliya settlers in Migdal 1912.

This 'return', however imagined, was characterised in its next stage by a shift towards an autonomist Jewish polity (Gorny, 1968). Regarding food, this meant an emphasis – beginning from the second or third decade of the previous century – on separatist Jewish products and Jewish-grown only, known in Hebrew as *Totzeret Haaretz* (Bernstein, 2012). This policy corresponds well with later, post-1948, nationalistic and patriotic initiatives to buy only local, Israeli-made, 'blue and white', products.

These initiatives linked local food products and production to Zionist and Israeli-Jewish identity. They were undoubtedly part of a grander food-culture discourse and corresponded with pre- and post-state concepts, such as the statement attributed to Haim Arlosoroff, the head of the Jewish agency's political department, that in Palestine 'the Jewish milkman thinks about Zionism when he milks cows' (Megged, 1965: 87), or to current symbols of the State of Israel, such as the logo of the Ministry of Tourism: an image of two of the twelve Jewish spies that were sent by Joshua to tour the Land of Israel, and the cluster of grapes they picked from the Eshkol River area which was so heavy that it took two men to carry it (see Figure 3).

Strikingly, in recent years we have also witnessed how food serves as an important medium through which Israelis express their national identity, sometimes at the expense of the *other*. These incidents include the Israeli boycotting of Turkish products, such as dried figs and ketchup, after the Mavi Marmara incident (Kristal, 2012) through the passionate 'hummus war' Israel has had with Lebanon (Yahav, 2009),⁵ and up to the straw which broke the camel's back in the 2011 'social justice campaign' in Israel: the rise of the price of Israeli *cottage cheese*, a product short-listed as one of the national symbols of Israel (NRG, 2012). Adding to this that a large part of Judaism's regulations and prohibitions – followed by a majority of the



Figure 3. Israel's Ministry of Tourism logo.

Israeli-Jewish population – are related to food we can conclude that food (Friedman, 1997: 138) is indeed an important, integral and even a central part of Israeli-Jewish national identity and everyday practice.

Having this in mind, we also need to acknowledge that the construction and reproduction of national identity through food involves a wide range of components and influences. Therefore, we choose to use the term *food culture* rather than *cuisine* because it is not clear whether Israel has a clear and identifiable national cuisine, and even if it does – we are not sure this concept can solely include the complex relations between identity and national feelings. By *cuisine* we mean an extensive literary body of national culinary information, which codifies practices and traditions (Ferguson, 2006). *Food culture*, on the other hand, provides additional avenues for examining national identity because it includes aspects which are normally neglected or marginalised, for example, the place and role of ‘everyday practices’.

By looking at *food culture*, we believe that we can better understand a hidden angle in the relationship and consequences of the encounter between Zionist-Jews and local Arab-Palestinians. Furthermore, while there is an extensive body of literature devoted to Zionism’s effects and influence on the region, especially vis-à-vis the Zionist–Palestinian conflict and the Jewish and Palestinian national identities, there is relatively little research devoted to the way in which and extent to which Zionism and Israeli national identity have been influenced – perhaps consciously at the time and unconsciously today – by the local Arab-Palestinian people and culture, and this article sets to contribute new insights that will help bridge this lacuna.

When writing about Arab-Palestinian ‘people’, ‘culture’, as well as ‘food culture’, we mean neither to essentialise nor to simplify these concepts. Much has been written about the construction of identities, as well as the construction of ideas, collective memories and ‘national culture’. Therefore, regarding Palestine and Palestinians, and following the Khalidian approach (Khalidi, 2010) we do not treat Arab-Palestinian food culture as static, unchanging, primordial or homogeneous. Furthermore, when combining these insights with the general idea of ‘food as a cultural construction’ (Meigs, 1997) we take it for granted that Arab-Palestinian food culture was not created in a vacuum, but was constructed through

a dialectic process influenced by the Middle East region, its people, visitors and rulers.

When looking specifically at the Israeli food discourse, one can see this pattern as there appears to be little literature on Palestinian contributions to the Zionist collective food culture. A handful of writers (Gvion, 2012; Hirsh, 2011; Raviv, 2002a, 2002b, 2003) all of them Jewish-Israelis have promoted the analysis of this subject over the past decade, and have mentioned the appropriation and transformation of specific dishes, in particular hummus and falafel, by and within Israeli-Jewish society. However, they have stopped short of focusing specifically on the contribution that Palestinian food culture has had on the Israeli one.

Refraining from explicitly mentioning the *Arab-Palestinian* contribution appears prominent also in non-academic accounts of Israeli food culture, in particular Israeli cookbooks. Whether written for Israeli or non-Israeli audiences, these cookbooks provide an indication of the dominant discourse used by the Jewish community in Israel (cf. Magee, 2005: 4). Interestingly, in the early Israeli cookbooks, written in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, Arab-Palestinian dishes and food items such as hummus, falafel and tahini, as well as many others, were either presented as 'Israeli' or referenced as Jewish *Mizrahi* or *Sephardic* food and so corresponded with the dominant approach of Israeli sociology regarding integration and cohesion around the Zionist principles of the 'melting pot' and the 'ingathering of the Diasporas' (Ram, 2010: 4).

These early cookbooks were part of the Zionist hegemonic-cultural effort to construct a 'new Jew', a new nation and a new national identity. As explained by Rozin (2006), Zionism was challenged not only by the Arab *other*, but also by the *other-self*, the pre-Zionist Jew of the Diaspora. Therefore, on the one hand, these books, which in many cases speak directly to women, provided the necessary culinary knowledge on how to be good (Jewish) housewives as well as educating new immigrants on using local cooking traditions and ingredients without mentioning the Arab-Palestinian origins of many of them. On the other hand, these cookbooks attempted to construct an expected national-social *ideal* by addressing the role of women, Jewish produce, food and table manners and etiquette, as well as issues of hygiene and health. This dual approach is seen in the introduction to *How to Cook in Palestine* (Meyer), a 1937 cookbook published in Tel Aviv by WIZO of which at least six editions were published over the years 1937–1960:

It is time that we, the women, try with greater vigour than before to free our kitchen from the Diaspora tradition that has clung to it, and consciously replace the European cuisine with a healthy Israeli one . . . This is one of the most important mechanisms for growing roots in our old-new homeland . . . We have placed two principles in the book: First, to adapt our cooking to the agricultural produce of the Hebrew economy for all tracts of the Yishuv, the majority of whom brought poor nutritional habits from the Diaspora. Second, to establish in the land, proper, and where possible, standard nutritional habits.

The failure, either by design or by default, to mention Arab-Palestinian people and their contribution to the 'new' Israeli food culture is prevalent in most Israeli cookbooks, even where there has been less of an emphasis on national and social construction. There are different layers to these omissions, the most glaring of which is the presentation of Arab-Palestinian food culture and food items as part of the *Mizrahi* Jewish culture and so as part of Jewish tradition.⁶

In the rare occasions that Israeli cookbooks discuss Arab-Palestinian food, the term 'Palestinian' is almost always omitted, and is provided in isolation from Israeli-Jewish food culture, as if it was a foreign food culture such as French or Italian.⁷ Strikingly, this is also the case of cookbooks that were written in Hebrew, for an Israeli-Jewish audience, by Arab-Palestinian citizens of the State. On these occasions (Abbas and Rouso, 2006; Abu-Ghosh, 1996; Hinnawi, 2006) the terminology reflects Israeli-Jewish hegemonic culture, omitting the words 'Palestine' and 'Palestinians', and more interestingly, at times replacing the term 'Palestinian food' with the ideologically loaded 'Eretz Yisraeli Arab food' (Abu-Ghosh, 1996: Hebrew book title) or 'Eretz Yisraeli culture' (Hinnawi, 2006: 11). The point of importance here is the recognition of Arabs as a minority group in Israel with a distinct culture but not of an Arab-Palestinian people with their own political aspirations.

These omissions appear odd when one looks at the importance of Arab and Palestinian influence on Israeli food culture, and one example is the disconnection of hummus from its Arab origins and its depiction as Israel's 'national dish' (Hirsh, 2011), of Israel as 'the land of hummus' and hummus consumption as the embodiment of the nation (Galili, 2007). Another example is that, for Israelis, buying Arab food items such as pita bread, hummus, tahini, majadra and labaneh at their local supermarkets is seen as an integral part of the Israeli culture, taste and daily lives. Strikingly, even eating out in Arab-Palestinian restaurants (such as shawarma at Hazen's in Haifa, Falafel at Mishel's in Wadi Nisnas, pastry products at the legendary Abulafia bakery in Jaffa established in 1879, hummus in Abu Gush village and lamb's throat stuffed with minced meat and pinenuts in Al-Babour restaurant in Umm al-Fahm) has been appropriated into, and contextualised as part of, the Israeli food culture. This phenomenon can be demonstrated in the following example: when asked in a survey by 'Akhbar Ha-'Ir magazine (Golan, 2008) to identify '*what is Israel's national dish in your eyes?*', 30 out of 60 leading Israeli-Jewish chefs mentioned food items that are part and parcel of the Arab or Palestinian food culture and kitchen. These include falafel, kebab, hummus, musabaha (hot chickpeas with tahini and lemon), and aubergine with tahini (also known in Arabic as babba ghanoush or mutabbal).

In other words, this odd situation either implies that Israeli food culture had been only marginally influenced by Palestinian culinary traditions and that these dishes were by and large introduced by *Mizrahi* Jews, or – as argued hereafter – that for political and ideological reasons the Palestinian direct contribution to Israeli national identity and pride has been expunged or overlooked.

As this article understands the evolution of Zionist, and then Israeli, food culture in light and in the shape of the food culture of the Arab-Palestinian people, it, therefore, strives to explain the gap between the Arab-Palestinian influence on Israeli food culture, and the almost total ignoring of this culture in the Israeli 'national collective memory'. By doing so, it corresponds with the dual process of imitation and de-Arabisation that took place within the Zionist discourse in general.⁸

First course: Constructing the 'new Jew'

We came to Palestine not only to grow plants and raise cattle but also human beings (Gordon, 1916).

The first Zionist settlers to Palestine did not immigrate solely to establish a Jewish state or escape anti-Semitism and the failing policies of emancipation. They also came to construct a 'new Jew' (Almog, 2000: 76). This new identity, according to the emerging Zionist ideology, could only be attained by rejecting Jewish life and culture in the *Galut* (exile/Diaspora), a discourse that, in many ways, continues to define the self-consciousness of Jews in Israel to date (Raz-Krakovitz, 1993).

Following the need to negate the Diaspora, the new desired identity necessitated emigrating to Palestine – the biblical land of *Eretz Yisrael* – adopting the 'revived' Hebrew language and committing to the establishment of a new settler-pioneer nation based on socialism, agriculture and manual labour. Klatzkin (in Laqueur, 2003: 171) and other Zionist writers envisioned the emergence of a Hebrew nation in Palestine, revitalised, reborn, growing and prospering, in parallel to a degenerate Jewish nation in the *Galut*. As Almog demonstrates, this 'new Jew' in Palestine was portrayed as the antithesis of the 'Jewboy of the Diaspora'; the former was raised in a 'rural environment', had an 'active lifestyle' and was 'physically uninhibited'; he was strong in body and in spirit; and regarding food: he rejected and substituted the meat, fish and boiled vegetable rich diet of Eastern and Central Europe for a 'healthier diet' rich in fruits, fresh vegetables and dairy products (2000: 78–80).

The idea of creating the 'new Jew' was also connected to the early Zionist settlers' encounter with an indigenous population in Palestine. The 'new Jew' attitudes were framed, therefore, not only towards Arab-Palestinians but also towards the local Jewish population. Zionist historiography referred to the Jewish population living in Palestine before Zionism as the 'Old Yishuv' (settlement) while claiming the title of the 'New Yishuv' for itself. The Jews of the 'New Yishuv' perceived the pre-Zionist Jews in Palestine in an equivocal way: on the one hand, as another 'proof' of the continuous Jewish existence in *Eretz Yisrael*, but on the other hand as a degenerate, lazy and dependent community. The Jews of the 'Old Yishuv', however, viewed themselves as part of the Ottoman order in which they lived, and part of the Arab-dominated space they inhabited. They lived in mixed cities, spoke either fluent or basic Arabic (Kosover, 1966; Spolsky and Shohamy, 1999: 139) and adopted some of the local Arab customs.

With regard to *food culture*, and according to the Jewish food encyclopaedia (Marks, 2010), diffusion of food knowledge, traditions and practices was common between Jewish and neighbouring communities in the Middle East as well as in Europe. Jewish communities, as part of the countries they lived in, adopted, modified and reinterpreted local and existing bodies of culinary knowledge in line with Jewish dietary rules and customs. In addition, migrating Jewish groups brought with them and disseminated their culinary knowledge in their new environments.⁹

This close resemblance between what was considered 'local' and 'Jewish' food, which many times was the same thing or at least influenced dialectically, was also present in Palestine among the 'Old Yishuv' prior to the Zionist emigration and colonisation. Ben-Naeh (2005) provides examples of customs common to middle- and upper-class Jews and Muslims in the 19th century, which include, among other things, the drinking of a specific kind of black coffee, eating similar sweetmeats and smoking shisha (waterpipe). The influence of Arab-Palestinian food culture on the Jewish community is evident among the *Sephardic* and *Ashkenazi* (European) communities alike, the latter even adopted to its Yiddish language in Palestine Arab food-related words, such as *kusalakh* (from Arabic *kusa*, meaning courgette), *keftalakh* (from Arabic *kufta*, meaning meatballs), and *zeytunes* (from Arabic *zaytun*, meaning olives) (Kosover, 1966: 245–58).

Discussing the Castel family (a Sephardic family of Spanish descent) in the early 20th century in the Bukharan neighbourhood in Jerusalem, Sachar (1961: 23) describes the diffusion of local Arab customs into the Jewish home. He depicts how the family adopted:

Arab, Turkish and Bukharan dress, Arab food and Arab furnishing... The family chairs were Arab wickerwork, and their tables were inlaid with Damascene carvings... the coffee they drank was Turkish; their vegetables were Arab eggplant, or churned humus and techina... and their meat was grilled in oil, Arab fashion.

The following account of the Shlush family's food traditions, towards the end of the 19th century, illustrates the central place of Arab-Palestinian food in the pre-Zionist Jewish community.¹⁰ The Sephardic family, who arrived to Palestine from Morocco in the mid-19th century, lived in the city of Jaffa. According to the family memoirs, their house contained a large central courtyard where the main oven (taboon) for baking pita bread stood. Dinner, which was the main meal of the day, was served in a large clay dish and diners, sitting on the floor, would serve themselves using pita breads. Small dipping plates with olive oil, olives and labaneh (yoghurt) would also be provided. After dinner, sweet delicacies, such as dried dates and figs, baklawas (according to the same memoirs, the Damascene sweets were especially praised), rahat lokum (Turkish delight) and tamar-hindi (tamar-ind), would be served alongside strong Arabic coffee. Breakfast and lunch would normally be lighter and consist mainly of pita breads with za'atar (a herb with similar taste to thyme), olive oil, labaneh, hard-boiled eggs and olives. The family diet consisted of little meat or fish, but on special occasions they would also serve

stuffed vegetables, in particular courgette (kusa mahshi) and vine leaves (waraq al-'anab). In addition, the family also preserved the tradition of eating couscous, which Muslim and Jewish immigrants brought with them from North Africa, as well as eating hamin (a traditional Jewish stew) on Saturdays (Shlush, 1991).

The stories of the Castel and Shlush families are but two examples of the Jewish food-culture reality in Palestine at this crucial moment in history, on the eve and in the first few decades of the Zionist immigration to the country. In many ways, the story of Jewish families who lived in Palestine during that period, who adopted or modified local-indigenous food traditions and items either because of necessity or taste, is similar to other historical case studies involving settler, colonial or immigrant communities. For example, according to Pilcher (1996), Spanish colonialists incorporated and adopted Mesoamerican food traditions and items, such as corn, turkey, chocolate and chilli peppers, initially not by choice, into their own food culture. Narayan (1995) provides a similar account of how British colonialist modified, adopted and incorporated Indian food, 'inventing' new dishes, such as curry and mulligatawny. The issue of adoption and appropriation is also evident in Canadian cuisine which incorporates a broad variety of identifiable indigenous ingredients (Jacobs, 2009).

The Zionist newcomers to Palestine, however, were different from the Jewish *Sephardic* and *Ashkenazi* communities in Palestine as well as from typical colonial settlers by their rejection of their previous culture, their desire to construct a new identity, their desire not to integrate with the indigenous groups and the fact they did not represent one country, or one empire, that used the colony for its own economic or political benefits. This brought about a dual process where, on the one hand, and definitely in the first stage, Zionist settlers incorporated and imitated local food items and practices, while on the other hand, and as the conflict heated, they tried to maintain a clearer separation, which was seen on all fronts: settlements, language, economy and also – food. Zerubavel (in Kantor, 2002) analyses this duality as a differentiation made between the cultural and the political: 'Politically, the Zionists ignored the Arabs, but culturally, they romanticized and tried to imitate them'.

For early Zionist settlers, the Bedouins and the Arab-Palestinian fallah (farmer/peasant) resembled and represented the Jews of antiquity. Therefore, by adopting Arab-Palestinian and Bedouin traditions, such as dress, including the kufiyyah (traditional Arab headdress), agricultural practices and food, they sought to reconnect with their perceived ancient Hebrew forefathers, homeland and heritage (Ram, 2010: 103). In relation to food, these 'new Jews' expressed their joy and fascination of baking 'our own pita bread' and eating it in the fields with olive oil and labaneh. They described the (somewhat) exotic experience of eating in Bedouin tents akin to rediscovering the *Bible* (Raviv, 2002b). The adoption of these food items and practices was further enabled by the Zionists' emphasis on socialism, connection to the land, the rejection of European lifestyle and culture, and as mentioned before – a general attitude of negation of the Diaspora. According to Roden (in Kantor, 2002), many groups within the Zionist movement, therefore, showed little interest

in the 'jewels' of Palestinian cooking, but were attracted to the Arabic 'humble street food' that probably represented for them the roughness and connection to their new habitat. Raviv (2003: 20) illustrates this anti-bourgeois trend in the adoption of falafel as 'a quick, no frills, affordable, and satisfying food'.

The mixture of romanticisation, admiration and imitation of the local Arab-Palestinian, together with a desire (overt or covert) to become a political *replacement* to this people, were evident processes throughout the Zionist immigrations to Palestine. One can argue that only the scale of each process changed with time: that, as the conflict became more heated, the percentage of Jews in Palestine grew larger, and the idea of creating a Jewish national home in Palestine became more practical, the 'volume' of admiration decreased and that of replacement increased. This duality can clearly be seen when comparing the first and second 'aliyahs' (immigration waves). First 'aliyah' (1882–1903) members operated in a similar fashion to traditional colonial-plantation owners. They employed a mostly Arab-Palestinian and Bedouin workforce, including women as maids and nannies, and traded and bought local food and building materials as a way of acclimatising, connecting to the land and with their neighbours (Bartal, 1976). However, they rarely emphasised or discussed that their acts may impose a political threat to the Arab-Palestinian majority. Second 'aliyah' immigrants (1904–1914) continued to romanticise the local Arab-Palestinians while working to establish a Jewish-only economy, in so trying, to become a perfect *substitute* for the local Arab-Palestinian.

Having said this, it is clear that the socio-political phenomenon of a mixture of admiration and antagonism did not disappear after the second 'aliyah'. Ben-Yehuda's account of the 1940s experience in the Palmach is an example of the on-going Zionist admiration of the local Arab-Palestinian population, which remained dominant even in times of heightened conflict (1981: 176):

The Arab inhabitants (of Palestine) were from the very beginning, in the view of the youth of the Palmach frightening, intimidating, courageous heroes... [The Zionists] envied them... These Jewish youngsters imitated the Arabs in everything... Even the 'chizbats'¹¹ and the 'finjan'¹² they took from the Arabs... The Arabs represented the role model for the people of the land, and while we were not well defined, we definitely weren't 'Diasporic Jews'... Anyone who could say a few words in Arabic had more prestige, and if he had Arab friends – he was a real king. Even one Bedouin friend... or a porter in the Jaffa port was enough... whoever knew more Arab customs, and knew how to behave among them, and how to create a common language with them – was for us more than God.

It is interesting to analyse this quote and to keep in mind that the Palmach was not a cultural organisation, but a paramilitary force that was created in order to protect, enable and maintain the Zionist national project in Palestine. It is, therefore, insightful instance to see how the contradicting views about the Arab-Palestinians remained, and how only the 'volume' changed. In this light, the 1947 Partition

Plan, and the war that followed it dramatically changed the balance between the Zionist desire to imitate and replace the Arab-Palestinians.

Main course: 'Israeli food'

One can argue that the processes of romanticisation and imitation, leading to appropriation, antagonism and deliberately forgetting the past, were rather comprehensive and could be used to analyse many of the sociological and political phenomena in the interactions between Zionists and Arab-Palestinians from the 19th century to the present day. For example, the Arabic language was perceived by the first Zionists as the desired language which would make them 'more local' in Palestine. However, at the turn of the century, Arabic was seen as a reservoir of words for the revival of Hebrew language. According to lexicographer Ben-Yehuda (1912):

We are allowed to rule that most of the words found in the Arabic vocabulary also existed in the Hebrew vocabulary, and that therefore these are not foreign roots. They are even not Arabic roots. They are our roots. They are the roots that we lost, and that now we are coming back to find them.

Interestingly, following the revitalisation of Hebrew, and about the 1947–1948 watershed, there was a gradual neglect of the Arabic language within the Zionist community. As time passed Arabic was less and less considered by Jewish-Israelis to be a sister of the Hebrew language and was more associated with Military Intelligence needs and with security-oriented themes more generally (Kraemer, 1993).

Another example is the Zionist 'hora' dance, which is perceived by Jewish-Israeli society as a symbol of Israeliness and localness. One can argue that, in the Israeli collective memory, there is a deliberate forgetting (or disregarding) of the past, especially as the origins of this dance go back to the beginning of the 20th century in Palestine. It was then when Zionist-European immigrants became fascinated by, and imitated, local Arab-Palestinian 'dabke' dancers, creating what later became known as the Israeli folklore 'hora' dance (Rowe, 2010: 82). The 'dabke', though, especially after 1948, was downgraded in Zionist collective memory to a warmon-gering, powerful and almost violent, dance (Mikhaeli, 1994: 95).

Food culture, in this regard, is no different. We therefore tie together the food that Jewish-Israelis eat today and the way they perceive their food with the origins of the Zionist interaction with Palestinian food culture, while trying to understand the process that fills the gap between these two experiences. There is absolutely no doubt that there has been a dramatic shift from the initial Zionist fascination with Arab-Palestinian food through to its conscious adaption (Nocke, 2006: 126) to what today is considered – sometimes unconsciously – in Israel as local, Israeli and national food, with or without the inverted commas. The added value that was attached to Palestinian food and food culture was its Israelisation and

de-politicisation, two processes that exist on different levels and that helped distance the food and its culture from Palestine and Palestinians thus making it a 'natural' part of the Israeli experience. This, for example, is a phenomenon we found interesting when analysing Israeli 'street food' culture.

Apparently, as the Israeli adage says, 'life is in a pita bread' (lit. *ha-hayim be-pita*). 'Israeli food', or what many Israelis considered as Israeli, often comes in pita bread, the round bread which Zionist immigrants probably tasted for the first time when they encountered a Palestinian kitchen. There is an almost ironic meaning in the fact that most of what Israelis consider as 'Israeli food' comes inside a Palestinian cultural artefact. Paradoxically, the act of Israelising food, therefore, comes through its Palestinianisation, and in this method – every food that needs to be nationalised as 'Israeli' has to come into the pita. From the famous Israeli *schnitzel be-pita* (chicken escalope in a pita), through *shakshouka be-pita* (egg poached in spicy tomato sauce in a pita) everything that needs to be considered as 'kosher' from the Israeli *national* point of view of street food has to go into the pita. Perhaps the most extreme version of this phenomenon can be found in one of Tel Aviv's most successful delis ('Ha-Miznon' – the 'Kiosk') where a famous Israeli chef, Eyal Shani, sells fancy food in pita. There, you can have for main course 'pink shrimps in a pita' and for dessert 'bananas and chocolate spread in a pita'.

One can argue that there is a lot of the 'new Jew' spirit in the place of Shani, as well as in the pita-oriented street food culture of Israel. The eating of food with no cutlery, the baldness of eating in the street, and in a local, Middle-Eastern bread, all involve the desired negation of the Diaspora and its lifestyle. This 'pita-culture', in one way or another, also corresponds with the elevated character of *chutzpah* which seems to represent Israeli 'rough', 'impolite', 'straightforward' spirit (Gitelman, 1977: 82). One can argue that the simple act of eating in the street, standing and perhaps more graphically – with tahini dripping from one's mouth – is almost a replica of the image of 'Srulik', the personification of the 'native' Israeli-Jew as drawn by caricaturist Kariel Gardosh (*Dosh*) (see Figure 4).¹³ All in all, and perhaps in an unconscious revolt against the home slow, cooked-food of Eastern Europe, Israeli culture identified as 'most local' those food items that are eaten outside in the street, that has a Middle Eastern 'envelope' and an 'Israeli' content. This new creation, we argue, captures the Israeli 'formula' that makes food 'local' and 'Israeli' and that brings about the desired 'new Jew' through an unconscious de-Palestinianisation of these very food items.

An example of this de-Palestinianisation can also be seen through one of the meals Israelis are most proud of: 'the Israeli breakfast'. On many occasions, one can experience the Israeli pride of the local breakfast, and the food it contains. The following is a description of the 'Israeli breakfast' as advertised in an Israeli leading tourist website (Go-Jerusalem, 2010):

There is a reason why the hotels in Jerusalem go all the way with their Israeli breakfast in the menu. The Israelis know how to make the best continental breakfast in the



Figure 4. Srulik.

world... If you visited any place in Europe, you already know that their breakfasts might contain only a poached egg and some chopped vegetables. But with us you will get a buffet of respect: from salads, spreads, green omelette (lit. *havitat yerek*: a fresh herb omelette), other kinds of eggs, yoghurts, labaneh, smoked fish, seasonal fruits, hard and soft cheeses, croissants, breads, bagels, coffee, freshly squeezed juice and even shakshouka if you like hot dishes in the morning. Yes, there is a reason why it is called an Israeli breakfast.

The Israeli spirit that blows through the text is almost obvious. The Israeli breakfast is 'the best in the world'; it has lots of 'respect'; the Europeans have only 'a poached egg and some chopped vegetables' and only in Israel one can find this combination of 'modernity' in the Middle East, fresh and simple food with a sophisticated twist of variety. The 'Israeli breakfast' as a gastronomic representation of Zionism's founding father Theodor Herzl's idea of, Israel as 'a wall against Oriental barbarianism', or of Israel's former Prime Minister Ehud Barak's statement of Israel as a 'villa in the jungle'.

Deconstructing the notion of 'Israeli breakfast' further, though, can uncover the process of Israelising a Palestinian concept. Firstly, the 'Israeliness' of Israeli breakfast comes from its pre-state Zionist origins – in the kibbutzim. There, the combination of socialism, agriculture and patriotism, was the epitome of the 'new Jew' and it is not a coincidence that the symbol of Israel's 'national cheese', the cottage cheese, resembles a kibbutz house. The kibbutz connection to the concept of 'Israeli breakfast' was highlighted by many, among them Torstrick (2004: 110):

The typical Israeli breakfast owes its origins to kibbutz life. Kibbutz members needed a hearty meal to carry them through the day's work. A kibbutz breakfast buffet might consist of sliced fresh fruit (melons, oranges, apples, pears), sliced vegetables (cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers), olives, a variety of breads, yoghurts, numerous cheeses or cheese spreads such as labaneh, other kinds of eggs (hard-boiled, soft-boiled, scrambled, or poached), juice, and coffee.

One might wonder by whom were the kibbutzim inspired when coming up with their 'hearty meal' that later became one of the symbols of the Israeli identity. The answer, like many other cases, is found in the local Arab-Palestinian community, which unsurprisingly has a very similar breakfast. Among the similarities are the lack of meat, the emphasis on fresh fruits and vegetables, hard boiled eggs and herb omelettes (known in Arabic as *'ijja*), as well as olives, pita bread and labaneh.

A third example of the process of de-Palestinianisation can be seen in the concept of the 'Israeli salad'. In a similar way, this salad also made its way into the Israeli culinary scene through the kibbutz mess halls (Marks, 2010: 278) and is sometimes presented as part of the celebrated Israeli breakfast. The salad is included in most Israeli cookbooks.¹⁴ According to the Israeli food writer Faye Levy, an Israeli menu is not complete without an 'Israeli salad' (*Jerusalem Post*, 2005). The salad, based on diced vegetables, fresh herbs and olive oil was described by three leading Israeli chefs as 'Israel's national dish' (Golan, 2008), and it seems that no Israeli family, meal or restaurant that wishes to serve local food will dare to have a menu without it. So heavy is the social capital of the 'Israeli salad' that the blog *How to be Israeli* states that 'if you want to be Israeli, you must master the art of the basic Israeli salad' (HowtobeIsraeli, 2009). Even on Israel's Independence Day this salad is celebrated. Israeli chef Sherry Ansky (2009) gave a recipe to the 'perfect Israeli salad' (the secret, according to her, is the addition of parsley, mint

and sumac). The striking fact behind this salad, however, is that it is called in Arabic *salatah 'Arabiyyah* ('an Arab salad') and that it was not 'invented' in Israel.

It is not to say that the origins of the 'Israeli salad' are totally denied in Israel. In recent years, several Israeli writers have acknowledged the salad's 'Arabness'. In an interview with BBC, Israeli chef Gil Hovav addressed the origins of the 'Israeli salad' and 'admitted' that 'this salad that we call an Israeli salad is actually an Arab salad, a Palestinian salad' (BBC, 2008). Also restaurants, especially *Mizrahi* ones, tend to use term 'Arab salad' (sometimes also 'chopped salad' – lit. *salat katsuts*) to describe in their menus the finely diced tomato–cucumber–onion salad with lemon juice, salt and olive oil. Others, like the Israeli restaurateur Shaked (*Fresh*, 2003) choose to admit, on Israel's Independence Day, tongue in cheek, that 'in truth, there is no such thing as Israeli salad – there is an Arab vegetable salad, but in the name of our independence – why should we really care?'

The case studies of the Israeli salad and the Israeli breakfast are just two examples of a broad phenomenon in Israeli society, and in Israeli food culture. Due to the scope of this article, we cannot delve into other examples that could clarify even further the relationship between Israeli food – including food items that have national significance – to the Palestinian food culture. Briefly, though, we can mention a few of them, including the Israeli most popular food activity on Independence Day which is a family gathering for a barbecue in the park that includes grilling of chicken wings, kebabs and shisliks (shish-kebabs) on the 'Israeli' mangal (a word originates from the Arabic *manqal* which points out the mobility of the outdoor brazier).

Another example is the Israeli desire to buy vegetables which are *baladi*. This word, meaning in Arabic 'my village' or 'my land', and colloquially meaning a *local* product indicates the vegetables were naturally grown and not imported or 'invented' by modern agricultural methods. Israeli shoppers in the past who liked to buy fresh vegetables, which are not industrially grown, were looking for small Arab shops and asked for *baladi*. Today, however, in a paradoxical shift, the *baladi* has almost replaced the word 'Israeli', and one can find in all Israeli supermarkets products of the leading Israeli trademarks such as *Osem's* (one of Israel's largest food manufacturers) 'baladi aubergine salad with mayonnaise' or *Shamir Salads'* 'hummus baladi'. Through these examples, one can see how the original *baladi* meaning has ceased to represent the connection to Palestinian-Arabs and shifted to represent just fresh, local, *Israeli* products.

Other examples include the 'Israeli herbs', including *sumac* (in Arabic: *summaq*), *marva* (sage, in Arabic: *maramiyyah*) or '*olesh* (common chicory, in Arabic: '*illeth*); the concepts of 'Mizrahi restaurants' which are actually Arab restaurants that only in the Israeli context had to go through the same de-Arabisation process that the Zionist movement had forced the Arab-Jewish community to go through, in which they had to strengthen their Jewishness – hence the Mizrahi and the Sephardic definitions – over their Arabness (Shenhav, 2006). All of these examples, which could be analysed further, can enrich our understanding regarding the depth of the Israeli phenomena of Israelisation through de-Arabisation.

For dessert: Consuming Palestine

As we have argued, food culture, because of its 'quiet' and alleged 'non-threatening' nature, can act as a reliable 'recorder' of and mechanism for uncovering large-scale historical and social developments. Zionist immigrants came to Palestine to establish a new 'national home' and a new Jewish identity. In terms of food, they proceeded to gradually reject and substitute their predominantly European food culture. The 'new' constructed food culture was a by-product of several influences, importantly a local Arab-Palestinian food culture. However, in light of the Zionist separatist policies, the new Jewish identity could not have assimilated into or admit that it included in itself the Arab-Palestinian *other*. On the other hand, the very same process of localisation required also grounding oneself to the local and indigenous people.

This dissonance resulted in an initial romanticisation and imitation of Arab-Palestinians, including their food culture, which at the time was not considered a political problem. However, with the Zionist aim of substituting the Arab-Palestinian people by creating a separate political and economic society, the mood changed to replacement, appropriation and deliberate – or at least desired – forgetting and rewriting of the past. In other words, and in a similar fashion, Israeli food culture 'needed' Arab-Palestinian culture, but at the same time desired its de-Palestinianisation. The general idea of Jewish separation, of a 'Jewish state', of purifying the 'hyphenated' Arab-Jews and the creation of the Mizrahi-Jews, and other processes can all be regarded as the Israeli denial of the Palestinian connection to the place ('Land without a people for people without a land') and a denial of their influence on what is currently celebrated as 'Israeli culture'. In relation to food, we can see how the Arab-Palestinian food culture was marginalised, blurred and reinterpreted as belonging to the Zionist settlers (e.g. in the case of the Kibbutzim – the Israeli salad and Israeli breakfast), or as being brought to Israel by the Mizrahi-Jews.

What does the story of Israeli food culture tell us? We believe that it uncovers that beneath the veneer of animosity and indifference shown by many Jewish-Israelis towards Arab-Palestinians, there is also a constant diffusion and flow of cultural exchanges, which for socio-political reasons have been denied in Israel, and with which Jewish-Israelis would also not like to be associated. As we have demonstrated, it is impossible to understand Israeli food culture, and we would extend that to Israeli identity and popular culture, without taking into account the environment in which and the people among whom it developed. These cultural exchanges are not limited to food, though they are sometimes easier to notice and uncover in food, but which extend to many other fields, such as language and dance, as we mentioned before. In other words, it might be an uncomfortable truth for many Israelis to admit or face, but they are as much a product of 'their' history as they are of their cultural encounter with the Arab-Palestinian people.

The late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish once said that in the future, in a time of reconciliation between the Jews and the Arabs, 'the Jew will not be

ashamed to find an Arab element in himself, and the Arab will not be ashamed to declare that he incorporates Jewish elements' (Behar, 2011: 93). Darwish knew well that political animosity, together with the dispossession of the Palestinian people from their homeland, today's Israel, resulted in the inability of the two people to admit the existence of the 'other' in the 'self'. As we have shown here, with relation to Israeli food culture, one should only shake off the dust to reveal the Palestinian roots that hide – or that were hidden – at the other end of each of Israel's national dishes.

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Notes

1. Part of the Falafel Song (lit. *Shir Ha-Falafel*), an Israeli hit from the 1950s. Translation ours.
2. We would like to dedicate this article to Theodore Nicholas Tomlinson Ranta, may he have a long and tasty life.
3. See, for example, the classic short story of Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani on the Palestinian Nakba following the 1948 calamity. It is titled *The Land of Sad Oranges*. For further reading, see: Bardesntein (2007).
4. See, for example, the same shift in the making of a 'Jewish watchman' and a 'Jewish shepherd' in Palestine, as seen in the context and the essence of two Zionist organisations, Ha-Shomer and Ha-Ro'eh (Mendel, 2014). According to Eyal (2006) Jewish-Arab symbiosis was replaced in the Zionist thinking with replacement, control and the creation of boundaries between Jews and Arabs and between Jewish and Palestinian lives. In relation to the issue of 'return', he addresses the point that some Zionist immigrants actually regarded the Palestinian fallahs as Jews who had remained in the land after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, and who later converted to Islam (Eyal, 2006: 53).
5. The idea of food as a source of national tension is not unique to our case; see, for example, the argument between Greece and Turkey regarding the origins of Baklava (Perry, 2010).
6. See, for example Bar-David (1963), Cornfeld (1949), Meir (1937), Peretz-Rubin (1987) and Sirkis (1975).
7. See, for example: Valero (2002).
8. Compare with: Mendel (2013) 'Re-Arabising the De-Arabised: The Mista'aravim Unit of the Palmach', in: David Attwell, Anna Bernard and Ziad Elmarsafy (eds) *Debating Orientalism* (Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan).
9. See, for example, the case study of the Jewish community in Britain (Panayi, 2008: 46–55).
10. For an account of Arab-Palestinian food traditions in the late 19th century, see: Grant (1907), Masterman (1901) and Rogers (1865).
11. Chizbat, a word adopted from Arabic to Hebrew, is a narrative that brings together myth and reality. It comes from the Arabic word lie, 'kidhb'.
12. Arab small cups of coffee.

13. In his caricatures, the Israeli-Jewish person, with sandals, t-shirt, shorts and round brimless hat (lit. kova' tembel) represents the naïve and curious Israeli, the pioneer, who is full of energy, liveliness and also chutzpah.
14. For example, see Friesem and Hornreich (1977), Gur (2008), Sirkis (1975) and Peretz-Rubin (1987).

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