

Introduction

THE HUMMUS WARS

ON MARCH 14, 2006, New York-based Sabra Foods, partly owned by Strauss-Elite, Israel's leading food producer, set a Guinness World Record for the largest plate of hummus ever, 3.5 meters in diameter and 400 kilos (800 pounds) in weight. Sabra's American CEO, Yehudah Pearl, explained that this publicity stunt was aimed at expanding Sabra's market share and increasing the popularity of hummus in America.¹

The brand name Sabra (*tzabar* in Hebrew) evokes notions of national and ethnic identity. *Tzabar* (or, colloquially, *sabres*), means prickly pear, but it is used in modern Hebrew to denote a Jew born in Israel—that is, a native Israeli Jew. Israeli Jews often describe themselves as prickly on the outside but sweet within (Almog 2000, 4)—tough at first but sensitive and kind once you get to know them. Paradoxically, the cactus is a recent arrival from the New World, a diehard, drought-resistant plant used by Palestinian farmers under Ottoman rule to delineate their fields. As a consequence, *sabres* grow nowadays mainly on the ruins of Palestinian villages (Ben Ze'ev 2011). This culinary symbol is therefore multivocal and evokes both an endorsing self-perception of Israeli Jews *and* the memory of the displaced Palestinians and their 1948 ruin. In this sense, the brand name Sabra exposes the ambiguity embedded in the “Israelization” of hummus: both prickly pears and hummus are conceived by Israeli Jews as symbols of their own localness, but since both are actually pre-Zionist, they uncover a continued Palestinian presence.

Returning to the evolving Hummus Wars, the 2006 Guinness Record for the largest plate of hummus did not go unnoticed. In October 2008, Fadi Abboud, the president of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists and later the country's minister of tourism, announced that Lebanon would petition

the Lebanese Ministry of Economy and Trade to request protected status for hummus from the EU: “By marketing Lebanese national dishes such as hummus and tabbouleh² as its own, . . . Israel was costing Lebanon tens of millions of dollars per year.” Abboud explained that Lebanon’s case would rely on the “‘feta cheese precedent,’ whereby a European court granted Greece the sole right to use ‘feta’ in the name of the cheese it produced.”³ Abboud and the Lebanese government never did end up requesting such protected status for hummus, but the issue was important both economically and symbolically as it was deeply enmeshed in perceptions of Lebanese national identity and pride. The Lebanese therefore decided to respond to the challenge made by Sabra by setting their own Guinness World Record with a dish containing no less than 2,000 kilos of hummus in October 2009 (Ariel 2012). The response was swift: in November 2009, just a month after the Lebanese set the record, Israeli chefs prepared 80 kilos of meat and 12 kilos of fresh vegetable salad and stuffed it all into a giant pita, 3 meters in diameter, setting the record for the world’s largest *meorav Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem mix), a dish of chicken meat and internal organs grilled with onions and seasoned with turmeric, garlic, and cumin, and served in a pita with salad and tahini. This dish, reputedly invented during the 1970s in Jerusalem’s Mahane Yehuda municipal market, is a classic market “leftovers dish” and an iconic modern Jerusalem local specialty.

Mahane Yehuda market, where the record was set, is a well-known hub of vociferous Israeli right-wing nationalism and anti-Arab sentiments. The media often depicts the market’s traders and customers as supporters of right and extreme-right political parties and as verbally and physically violent, especially when it comes to Jewish-Arab relations. While this may not be the case for many of those who sell and buy there, the media depiction of Mahane Yehuda is so defined that the market has become a testing ground for politicians, especially for would-be prime ministers, who perceive their short visit to the market, usually in the presence of dozens of bodyguards and policemen, as a litmus test of their popularity among the “real population” (*am’ha*). It was therefore an obvious location for a reaction to the Lebanese challenge.

Though Jerusalem mix is not hummus, Israeli media reports made it clear that this was yet another maneuver in the ongoing Hummus Wars. Hadshot Arutz 2 (Channel 2 News), Israel’s leading news broadcaster at the time, began its report of the event by stating: “While the Lebanese ‘stole’ our Guinness record for the world’s largest hummus plate, Israel decided to fight back

[*lehashiv milhama*] with a feat that the northern neighbors can hardly duplicate: the world's largest Jerusalem mix."⁴ A headline on the popular *Walla News* website was even blunter: "Another Victory for Israel: Record in Jerusalem Mix."⁵ The futility of the ploy, however, was noticed by an *Al Arabia* (a Palestinian news website) reporter, who wrote: "They should have no trouble getting their concoction of 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of mostly chicken innards recognized by the *Guinness Book of Records*—no one has ever attempted it before."⁶

As such, the Guinness World Record for the largest Jerusalem mix could hardly count as an Israeli victory in the Hummus Wars. In a surprising twist, Jawadat Ibrahim, a Palestinian of Israeli citizenship from the village of Abu Gosh and the owner of the popular Hummus Abu Gosh restaurant, announced that by doubling the Lebanese record and preparing a plate containing no less than 4,000 kilos of hummus, he could "restore the state's honor"⁷ (see also Hirsch and Tene 2013, 39).

The Palestinian-Israeli village of Abu Gosh is an interesting place. Located some 15 kilometers to the west of Jerusalem on Highway 1, which links the capital to Tel Aviv and the densely populated central coast, it boasts dozens of restaurants specializing in hummus and other Palestinian/Arab/Middle Eastern foods such as falafel, tahini, and tabbouleh. These food venues cater mostly to an Israeli Jewish clientele, making Abu Gosh one of the Palestinian villages most frequented by Israeli Jews and, as a consequence, among the most prosperous. Though many Israeli-Palestinian villages feature similar restaurants, Abu Gosh is exceptionally popular among Israeli Jews because its dwellers are considered "good Arabs."⁸ The first reason for this is historical: in 1948, the village head (*mukhtar*) cut a deal with the Hagana (the prestate Jewish defense organization) leaders to keep his village neutral in the Jewish-Arab conflict in return for Jewish protection. Abu Gosh villagers maintained the agreement and even assisted the Jews, but, unbeknownst to most of the Israeli Jewish public, once the war was over, many villagers were deported, along with dwellers of neighboring Palestinian villages that had been conquered by the newly established State of Israel. The Abu Gosh deportees were allowed to return only because of a civil campaign headed by prominent Jewish figures. In her ethnography of Abu Gosh, Rebecca Stein (2003) quotes several villagers who recount bitter memories of their relations with the Jews and stress the fact that, despite their collaboration with the Jews during the war of 1948–49, most of the village lands were confiscated. Her informants made a point, however, of concealing these negative sentiments

from their Jewish customers to ensure the long-standing image of the village as welcoming and safe for Jewish customers.

The second reason for Abu Gosh's popularity among Israeli Jews is the widespread belief that Abu Gosh is a Christian village and as such is safe, or at least safer, for Jews than Muslim Arab villages. Abu Gosh's Christian image is constructed around its Notre Dame Church, large Benedictine monastery, and popular annual Abu Gosh Festival of Liturgical Music, which attracts thousands of upper-middle-class Israeli Jews. The Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel indicates, however, that 99.9 percent of the village residents are Muslim.⁹ Abu Gosh's popularity as a hummus hub is thus based on a set of incorrect assumptions made by Israeli Jews about the religion of the village dwellers and their relations with the Israeli state and its Jewish citizens.

Jawadat Ibrahim, the Israeli Palestinian who decided to challenge the Lebanese record and "restore the state's honor," is interesting, too. According to media reports, he left Israel as a young man, possibly because of financial debts, to join his brother in the United States. But after winning millions in the Illinois Lottery, he returned to Israel to establish his restaurant and became a successful businessman.¹⁰ Ibrahim is one of those Abu Gosh Palestinian Muslims that Israeli Jews incorrectly believe to be Christian, pro-Zionist, and "good." Naturally, I found the whole event extremely captivating and headed, along with my colleague, sociologist Rafi Groszlik, to Abu Gosh on January 8, 2010, to witness Ibrahim's attempt at setting a new Guinness World Record for the largest plate of hummus.

While the media rhetoric in the Israeli Hebrew broadcasting was statist (*mamlachti*) and even nationalistic, using terms such as "us," "the Lebanese," and "our national dish," the atmosphere in Abu Gosh had a local, not national, flair. The village was decorated with its own municipal flags rather than Israeli flags, and localness was the main theme in the day's speeches, a point to which I will return shortly.¹¹

We reached Abu Gosh early, just prior to the arrival of a large truck labeled "Salatey Miki" (Miki's Salads—Ibrahim's Jewish business partner). Boxes of prefabricated commercial hummus were unloaded from the truck, and their contents were poured into a huge satellite dish borrowed from the neighboring satellite farm of Neve Ilan. The dish was placed on a weight located on a high ramp above the parking lot of Ibrahim's restaurant. Standing next to the workers, we could not help but notice the acrid odor of the hummus, which smelled spoiled.

As the day progressed and the temperatures rose, the hummus in the satellite dish was exposed to the blazing sun and increasing heat. Coincidentally, January 8, 2010, was the warmest day ever recorded in an Israeli winter, with temperatures soaring to 30°C. Because January is usually cold and cloudy, the organizers had not devised a plan to deal with the heat with shade or refrigeration. Judging from the initial smell, it was clear to us that the hummus was rotting under the hot sun. In fact, although spectators had been promised free samples once the record had been set, the hummus was not apportioned, and no explanations were provided. Although no one admitted to me that the hummus had not been fresh to begin with or that it had spoiled due to exposure to the elements, it is quite clear that this was the case. The fact that, to my knowledge, none of the thousands of spectators made a fuss about the unfulfilled promise of free food suggests that I was not the only one aware of the state of the hummus.

Dozens of men clad in chefs' apparel moved busily among the crowds during the event. One of them told me that they were not chefs but waiters from the local restaurants and had been invited by the organizers to walk around wearing cooks' outfits. He admitted what we had already guessed, that they hadn't prepared the hummus. We even identified some of them as being the same men who took part in the construction of the stage earlier on.

An important and unusual feature of the event was the fact that it was trilingual. Although Hebrew, Arabic, and English are the official languages of the State of Israel, Arabic is often overlooked at events that are not explicitly Arab oriented. But here, the hosts made a point of using the three languages. The event was led by Zuhair Bahloul, a Palestinian sports broadcaster of Israeli citizenship who is often ridiculed by Israeli Jews because of his high-brow Hebrew and heavy Arab accent.¹² Bahloul, speaking in Hebrew, Arabic, and English, began by declaring, "Abu Gosh is on the map."¹³ He was followed by Miriam Toukan, the first Palestinian to make it to the finals of *Kohav Nolad*, the Israeli version of *American Idol*, in 2007. She sang Israel's Eurovision-winning song "Halleluiah" in Arabic and Hebrew.

Jawadat Ibrahim's trilingual speech further highlighted the "Abu Goshness" of the event. He repeatedly stressed that the event was taking place in Abu Gosh but did not mention the State of Israel as he had in interviews in the national Jewish-dominated media. He also pointed out that hummus was a traditional local specialty (that is, that hummus was a Palestinian or Arab dish, not an Israeli one). But his main argument was that "the dwellers of Abu Gosh [i.e., Palestinians of Israeli citizenship] were the bridge for peace in the

Middle East.” He recounted how Jewish, Arab, and other world leaders had met at Abu Gosh on several occasions and negotiated peace over plates of hummus, and he called for further meetings and peace talks between political leaders in Abu Gosh. In an interview conducted a couple of months after the event, Ibrahim commented further: “We at Abu Gosh know that we bridge all cultures. In my speech at the record-breaking ceremony, I even said that I was willing to make the next plate [i.e., set a new record] together with a Lebanese chef. Unfortunately, they said no, and we all know why.”¹⁴

Once the record was confirmed by Jack Brockbank, the Guinness representative, the song “Od Yavoh Shalom Aleynu (Salam)” (Peace shall be bestowed upon us [salam]), which includes the Arabic word *salam* (peace) and is thus bilingual to a certain extent, was played while blue and white balloons were released into the skies to the sound of cheering and clapping Jewish and Palestinian onlookers. Blue and white, the colors of the Israeli flag, had, until that moment, been absent from the event.

As the event concluded, we approached Brockbank to determine whether he knew that the hummus was industrial. He responded swiftly: “Of course I know, but it was the same in Lebanon. . . . No claims were made that the hummus was homemade.” He thus confirmed our observation that the claims for cultural authenticity were asserted while using mass-produced, globalized merchandise, adding yet another paradox to this incident.

Driving home, I couldn’t help but reflect on the irony of the event: A Palestinian of Israeli citizenship set out, in his own words (in Hebrew), “to save the nation’s honor” by preparing the largest plate ever of hummus, a dish of his own ethnic culinary heritage but one that is also a contested marker of identity and a desired economic asset claimed by the Lebanese, Palestinians, and Israeli Jews. He did it in a village whose Palestinian-Muslim identity is purposely blurred for political and commercial reasons, and he achieved his feat with industrial hummus produced by his Jewish business partners, beating Lebanese contesters, whose culinary heritage is similar, if not identical, to his own, and who also used industrial hummus for their feat.

Most disturbing, however, was the metaphor itself: Ibrahim suggested that peace in the Middle East was best negotiated over a dish of hummus in the liminal setting of a Palestinian-Israeli village, and he urged for further dialogue in the same location and over the same dish. The hummus he used, however, was smelly and rotten, thus reflecting accurately, although unintentionally, the state of peace in the region: foul, putrid, and unappetizing.



1. *Hummus for Peace*

FOOD AND POWER

The maneuvers in the Hummus Wars touch on many of the issues, relations, and dilemmas discussed in this book. While the strained relations between Israeli Jews, Palestinians, and Middle Eastern Arabs were the explicit motivation for the Hummus Wars, other issues, ideas, and social groups were involved in the events at Abu Gosh and are discussed throughout the book. Ownership and power, for example, were defined in the Hummus Wars in terms of quantity, an important topic discussed in this book. The Hummus Wars are also a great example of the kind of internal debates that pervade the

culinary sphere, where members of a given social group negotiate different aspects of their identity—such as ethnicity, religion, gender, and class—among themselves over the dining table, a process that is evident in each and every culinary setting explored in this book. The process of culinary globalization and attempts at transcending the local, which were evident at Abu Gosh, are also negotiated in various sections of the book. Yet the main theoretical thread that weaves the different cases, contexts, and processes into a coherent text is that of the interface of food and power.

“Power” means different things to different people, and its relationship with food and eating is complicated. In what follows, I present some of the seminal definitions of power by social scientists and then apply them to the culinary sphere. As very little has been written on the interface of food and power in Israel, much of the ethnographic examples I discuss are from elsewhere, especially the United States, mainly because much of the existing research focuses on American foodways.

Max Weber originally conceived of power as “the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (2009, 180). According to Weber, power is a probability of successful action—not a certainty—and, at least when it comes to states, is derived from their monopoly on the legitimate use of force (Uphoff 1989; Nash 2009).

Although Weber’s work focused on the power of nation-states, his theories apply more broadly to all relationships because power derives from imbalances in a variety of resources, including legitimacy, prestige, access to economic resources, and violence. These imbalances present themselves on interpersonal, national, and international scales. Importantly, Weber distinguishes these bases of power—traits affecting the probability of an individual’s successful action—from power, which is the action itself. As these resources fluctuate, so do the probabilities they affect. Thus, Weber saw power as a dynamic balance of one’s own means against those of others.

Although he agreed with Weber’s dynamic conception of power balances, James Scott expounded on the power those on the bottom exert on the social order, which he referred to as “resistance,” in his book *Weapons of the Weak*. He posited a Newtonian dimension to power—that is, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction—and argued that attempts to change power balances “operate against entropy,” creating friction (Wolf 1990, 590). Furthermore, he rejected the idea that “subordinate groups acquiesce to economic systems that are manifestly against their interests” because

they are persuaded by the ideas of the ruling elite unless they chose to revolt (Gal 1995, 407).

Instead, Scott documented the everyday forms of resistance employed by peasants to defend their interests against those who wish to extract resources from them, including sabotage and foot-dragging. These acts substantially yet nearly imperceptibly challenge the ability of the ruling class to exert control. Unlike Weber, Scott believed that power could be found both at the top and at the bottom of the social order because, except in a case of complete destruction, no person's agency can be completely dominated. Even prisoners in a prison (as we will see in chapter 5) and social groups located at the bottom of the social power structure, be it the poor, different kinds of minorities, or those subjugated, conquered or enslaved, can and do resist the power inflicted on them from above.

Scott was, in part, reacting to Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which introduced into the power discourse the idea that a state secures its power by securing superiority in the marketplace of ideas and culture. Hegemony is power derived from "cultural or spiritual supremacy," and it often works in tandem with a state's coercive power (Femia 2005, 342; H. Katz 2006). When a ruling class achieves hegemony, it rules with consent of the governed, which is "secured by the diffusion and popularization" of its worldview (Bates 1975, 352; Scott 2005).

Gramsci suggested that new elites take control over civil society with coercive power. Because they lack cultural domination, new elites, especially those who come to power by revolution, tend to resort to dictatorial methods of control until, once they have cemented their hegemony, they are able to rely on popular acceptance and identification. Although hegemony may extend beyond borders, especially from developed countries to developing countries, a "proper hegemonic culture" is most likely to occur in a specific and united national cultural context (Femia 2005). Hegemony, thus, can be defined as the acceptance by lower classes within a society of the opinions and beliefs produced at the center of society—that is, by the social elites. Hegemony's success is therefore based on the fact that it is taken for granted and perceived as natural.

In a series of essays on diverse topics such as the arts (Bourdieu 1996), the media (Bourdieu 1996), the economy (Bourdieu 2005), and gender (Bourdieu 2001), Pierre Bourdieu complicated Gramsci's understanding of hegemony and explored the processes that produce and maintain it. Bourdieu argued that different groups compete for hegemony in different *fields* of cultural

production, which are themselves set in a dynamic hierarchy. Social agents active in the fields produce and reproduce sets of bodily practices and dispositions that are internalized by members of different classes, forming what Bourdieu called the *habitus*. It is the embodied nature of these practices, rather than an intellectual or cognitive pursuit, that transforms hegemonic ideas from abstract notions into general beliefs that are perceived as natural and primordial. Bourdieu's emphasis on embodied practices is highly relevant to the sociological and anthropological analysis of foodways and their importance: the food people eat and the modes of food consumption are among the clearest expressions of the habitus.

In contrast with Gramsci, Scott, and Weber, who theorized about the power of people at the two extreme ends of the social ladder, Michel Foucault posited that power was a complex system of relationships touching all people and that it connected all members of society in a more diffuse web. Foucault's power "organizes and orchestrates" social settings by affecting the "distribution and direction of energy flows" (Wolf 1990, 586). According to Foucault, power is the ability to shape an environment so as to create the possibility or the impossibility of another's action. Power does not act *within* a system; it acts *on* the system. Unlike other theorists, Foucault considered power to be expansive and productive, not a zero-sum game (Nash 2001). Power is a renewable resource exerted and harnessed by all participants in a system and affects the way each of them views the system itself. Thus, despite accepting the dynamism of power suggested by other theorists, Foucault differentiated his theory by rejecting the ability of any single person to collect it. In her recent book *A Taste of Power*, Katharina Vester (2015) applied Foucault's theory to a critical rereading of American cookbooks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Vester showed how power in these texts works in different directions, at times reaffirming existing power structures and at other times subverting them.

In a similar line, Peter Farb and George Armelagos (1980, 4) suggested, "Once the anthropologist finds out where, when, and with whom the food is eaten, just about everything else can be inferred about the relations among society's members." Vester (2015, 196) noted that "food-expert discourses" affect how, why, where, when, and with whom we eat as well as the means of production for our food. Power relations are always fluid and being challenged, and food provides a key forum for that contest.

Scholars have theorized at length about the application of Gramsci's theory of hegemony to food discourses, surmising that societal elites use cuisine

as a manifestation of their elite tastes and attitudes and as a method of distributing values and ideas to the lower classes (De Vooght and Scholliers 2011; Gvion 2009). Cuisine is essential to nation-building, as it allows a people to define themselves by what they eat in contrast to what others eat, but it can also be a tool of nation-destroying when one culture seeks to impose its will on and eradicate another. Which foods people eat, and which other people eat those foods, defines a nation and a culture in contrast to its neighbors. Israeli cuisine intentionally straddles the Mediterranean and the Middle East, allowing Israelis to anchor themselves to modern, Western, “superior” Europe when convenient and to prove their connection to the soil they inhabit when necessary.

As an element of public art, food expresses the values of societal elites and connects citizens to the state. Usually, the richer, ruling class can afford to purchase more expensive foods and subsequently develop more sophisticated tastes. Through private chefs, cookbooks, television shows, and cooking demonstrations, the culinary tastes of these elites are then disseminated through society, reinforcing this class’s hegemonic control (Albala 2011; Vester 2015). Often, these culinary preferences reinterpret nostalgic pasts by modernizing traditional dishes and aligning them with current elite sociopolitical positions, which, after being polished, are disseminated to the masses.

Recent literature proposes that minority groups use cuisine to resist hegemony and to assert their own unique culture within a broader culture just as much as elites use cuisine to create the broader majority culture. Minorities see cuisine, essentially, as another one of Scott’s weapons of the weak. Just like elites, minority groups connect with their pasts through food, demonstrating their worthiness for rights in society based on the longevity and uniqueness of their culture (Barabas 2003; Gvion 2009).

Minorities also “stage authenticity” (McCannell 1976) in their restaurants, which helps them shape their public image, sometimes by challenging prevailing stereotypes, and allows them to survive economically. In Israel, Liora Gvion contends, Palestinians of Israeli citizenship use food to challenge their marginalization while also taking pride in the Arab and Palestinian identities that differentiate them from the hegemonic Israeli Jewish foodways (Gvion 2009). Similarly, Mizrahi Jews (originating from the Middle East and North Africa) have attempted to assert their right to political and social inclusion by emphasizing their Jewish identities while simultaneously capitalizing on their unique cultures and cuisines for economic survival, cornering much of the Israeli fast-food industry.

In the United States, too, food discourses have often been defined by their resistance. For example, Americans first distinguished their cuisine as American by using egalitarian terms that contrasted with aristocratic British tastes (Vester 2015). Women have used food throughout American history to assert power in a patriarchal culture, and recently food has become a medium for queer women to protest the hegemonic heteronormative culture (Vester 2015). The Nation of Islam, an African American emancipatory movement that sought empowerment in radical Islam, similarly grew as a movement by adopting Marcus Garvey's message of racial empowerment and reclaimed dignity, which specifically included the rejection Southern soul food as a legacy of slavery and white supremacy (Rouse and Hoskins 2004). Later, as the Nation of Islam adopted a more mainstream version of Sunni Islam, practitioners of the faith reappropriated soul food to connect to American identities and shift the religion from a racial and political movement to a more spiritual and religious one. Throughout American history, then, newly defined and growing interest groups have used food to challenge existing power balances and cultural norms.

Beyond preferences of taste though, power dynamics have also been contested through the supply of food, a necessity of life. In times of scarcity, the value of food increases to such an extent that it becomes the most valuable resource in a community (Phillips 2009). In rural and poor communities, villagers use food like currency to purchase both other material goods and immaterial political support. The ability to provide or deny food thus grants the Weberian state immense power over citizens.

In theorizing about revolutions, Anthony Oberschall and Michael Seidman (2005, 376) suggest that the principal means of competing factions to attract support is control over the food supply because "who will be fed and who will starve—the power of life and death—is the ultimate form of coercion in human affairs." In revolution and in civil war, the winner is more often the side that most effectively controls the food supply rather than the side with the largest arsenal or army. This "economy of predation" leads to decisions based on shortage and security, leading people to barter their support for resources, especially food.

Following the 1972 international food crisis and 1973 OPEC oil embargo, scholars sought to expand Weberian conceptions of power with respect to food to the international scene through discussions of American agripower as a diplomatic counterbalance to Middle Eastern petropower. Agripower is exercised through coercive control over the international food supply, though

it is much more difficult to deploy due to the difficulties in food storage and exportation (Paarlberg 1978; Rothschild 1976; Tuomi 1975). Somewhat sardonically, agripower is premised on exerting control over other nations through physical starvation, similar to the way that the deployment of petropower seeks to coerce other states by starving them energetically and, as a consequence, economically.

On a national scale, Weberian state power is most keenly discernible in confined institutions like prisons, where power hierarchies are extreme and policed and control over “personal experiences of consumption” is a weapon of dominance (Smith 2002; Godderis 2006). Prison guards can and do assert their power through arbitrary decisions, especially concerning the necessities of life. Providing or withholding food, especially for seemingly random reasons, reinforces the power imbalances inside the prison. Providing low-quality food—even, or perhaps especially, when prisoners serve as kitchen staff—demonstrates lack of concern for the prisoners’ health and well-being, a further sign of how little the guards value their wards as well as a show of the extent of their control over them. Rebecca Godderis concludes that surveillance and control of consumptive practices is one of the most noticeable and hated manifestations of power imbalances.

Hunger strikes, by contrast, allow citizens, and especially prisoners, to challenge their inferiority to the state by rejecting this reliance narrative (Anderson 2004). Hunger strikes, if they manage to receive sufficient media attention, draw awareness to the position of the disadvantaged by publicizing their lack of choice in their extreme circumstances. Furthermore, hunger strikes create martyrs, around whom coalitions of supporters rally (Passmore 2009). Even as I write this book, hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners in Israel protesting their indefinite detentions without indictment or trial have rallied a coalition of supporters against Israel’s security apparatus.¹⁵

While the state wields immense power over citizens in its ability to manipulate and disrupt the food supply, ordinary citizens still possess some power to resist the dominance of the state by rejecting their dependence. This form of resistance is necessarily self-destructive, but it can also be an effective way of proving the independent power of the weak to, at the very least, inspire dialogue about their plight.

Indeed, the powerful *and* the supposedly powerless can manipulate food supply, taste, and cuisine. The state seeks to maintain a Weberian control over the supply, and its elites assert their Gramscian hegemony over cuisine. Marginalized groups, however, resist both dominant cuisines and state

control over supply through both moderate means, such as capitalizing on their own unique culinary traditions, and more extreme measures, such as hunger strikes. The power over food thus belongs simultaneously to all in society and to no one in particular.

Following Foucault's theory, when it comes to food, power constantly ebbs and flows throughout society according to circumstance. Every application of food systems' power is met with resistance as some seek to define the food systems of all and others fight that definition. Food is a weapon and a blanket, a means of control and of protest. Most of all, food is power.

RESEARCHING ISRAELI FOODWAYS

This book is based on a long-term ethnographic project that has been conducted in various settings and contexts in Israel since the late 1990s. The project engages with the ways in which power is produced, reproduced, negotiated, and challenged in different culinary realms day-to-day in Israel. In some of the chapters, I deal with prominent culinary phenomena, such as Israeli Independence Day barbecues or the debates over the definition of Israeli cuisine. In others, I touch on subtler issues, such as why Italian food is so popular in Israel and the privatization of kibbutz dining rooms. At times, I discuss specific events, such as the Hummus Wars or a conflict that occurred over meat allocation during my own period of service in reserve duty in a military prison.

Food and Power is not a classic ethnographic study bound in space and time, conducted by an outsider, and based on temporary immersion in a local community. In order to discuss my methodological approach to this long-term project, a few words are due regarding its nonconventional qualities and the processes by which it was conceived and developed.

First, I am an Israeli citizen, born and raised in Israel, and certainly not a stranger to Israeli culture and society. And though "ethnographic homework"¹⁶ can be executed in cultural contexts that are as alien to the ethnographer as any site in a remote culture and society (and in a culturally varied country such as Israel—such settings are not hard to find), much of the research for this book was done in the spaces that form (or could form) my "natural habitat." This complicated the process of estrangement (Maso 2001) and required constant awareness to the "taken for granted" that constitutes my own experience and worldview.

Israel is a small country (roughly the size of Vermont or Slovenia), and though some research realms and issues were beyond my everyday territory, I rarely experienced the sense of awe and wonder I have felt so often in Hoi An, a small town in central Vietnam where I have been conducting ethnographic research since 1998. I also didn't experience the same kinds of misunderstandings and mistakes that, as I came to learn in Vietnam, signaled the gap between my own cultural perceptions and those of my Hoianese friends and meant that I was on the right ethnographic track (see also Avieli 2012, 249–268).

This is not to say that I was Mr. Know-It-All in Israel. Pursuing the interface of food and power in my home country had its surprises, discoveries, and insights, and every now and again, its mistakes, misunderstandings, and frustrations. My long-term engagement with Israeli language, culture, and history facilitated my awareness of minute details and intimate nuances that are well beyond my language capacity and cultural sensitivity when conducting research in Vietnam. So while I gave up what Michael Agar (1996) calls “the professional stranger’s perspective” when conducting “homework” in Israel, my native understanding and awareness facilitated the production of nuanced ethnographic knowledge.

What further removes this project from classic ethnographies is the width of its thematic and spatial scopes. The trajectory of multisited ethnography was defined by George Marcus (1995, 97) as pursuing the “circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space . . . that cannot be accounted for ethnographically by remaining focused on a single site.” However, as Ghassan Hage (2005, 464) notes, “It is not enough to be doing an ethnography that involves flying between two or three locations for people to call it multi-sited ethnography.” Hage points out that multisited ethnographies tend to focus on specific groups of people (e.g., immigrants from a single village or members of specific ethnic diaspora) that move to—or are scattered in—different locations but share cultural conventions and understandings and maintain social networks and relations. He therefore argues that with time and immersion, as research becomes “thicker and stickier,” his study was not multisited anymore but rather focused “on one site, occupied by transnational families and/or communities” (465).

My study was conceived and executed in a different way and is multisited in the sense that each chapter deals with a specific culinary site or phenomenon. Components of the Israeli culinary sphere, these sites and phenomena may interact with one another to a lesser or greater extent, but I approached

each of them as an independent case study that called for its own research questions, methodology, and theoretical background.

At this point, I must also state that *Food and Power* is not a coherent or holistic culinary ethnography of Israel, nor does it pretend to be one. Thinking about the process in which the research was conceived, I must admit that I never really chose the different research sites and themes—they very much chose themselves. When I returned home in 2000 after fourteen months of fieldwork in Vietnam, I started teaching a course at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the anthropology of food, and I have taught it ever since in a variety of formats. Teaching this course in Israel meant that I had to think of Israeli examples that would add a comparative dimension to class discussions and readings. A strong believer in field trips, I had to consider where to take my students and what to show them. I assigned them their own ethnographic projects, and they came up with many wonderful observations and insights. So while I was developing my ethnographic study on Vietnamese foodways, another ethnographic study was evolving, one that I never planned to execute.

It was only in 2010, when I convened a conference on “Food, Power and Meaning in the Middle East and Mediterranean” at Ben-Gurion University, that I realized that I was actually conducting some sort of multisited ethnographic study of Israeli foodways that was theoretically engaged with the ways in which power and power relations take part in culinary phenomena in Israel. Choosing research sites was therefore a gradual and, at times, unconscious process. News reports and articles that I observed, heard, or read; colleagues, students, and friends who came up with observations, suggestions, and questions; and everyday life events led me up and down the country. I was constantly facing intriguing phenomena and puzzling questions, and, being a food anthropologist, I felt I had no choice but to pursue them.

The field trips I took my students on turned out to be great successes, and all of a sudden I started to be contacted by people I didn't know. Some were students' parents; others had just heard of these trips somehow and asked me to take them on culinary tours. In 2011, I developed a set of tours that I titled *Comfort Food in Zones of Conflict*. This was a politically motivated project: observing my students, I realized that much of the violence and hatred in Israel is based on the fact that conflicting social groups (Jews versus Palestinians; secular citizens versus members of religious communities; citizens versus refugees and migrant workers; etc.), who are deeply scared of each other, hardly interact. And when they do, it is often in conflictual contexts. As always, anger and hatred are based mainly on ignorance and prejudice.

It turned out, however, that the food of “the others” was often perceived as an attraction, and food-focused tours allowed participants to shift their attention from the conflict to more pleasant aspects of the interaction. And just like in Vietnam, people failed to see the political edge of food and were therefore willing (and even eager) to explore the culinary realms of “the others,” feeling that this would be nonpolitical and therefore a safe zone of interaction.

But the culinary sphere is inherently political. I was deeply touched as I watched the interaction between retired Israeli Jews and retired Palestinians at a coffee house in the depths of Old Jerusalem’s Muslim quarter during January 2011. Members of both groups told me that this was the first time in their lives that they had interacted with people they would normally perceive as “the enemy” as equal human beings rather than enemies, conquerors, terrorists, or so forth. It was amazing to see how fear dissolved with the sweetness of tea and anger was forgotten when *knafe* (a Palestinian cheese pastry) melted on their tongues, and how “the others” became human when they shared their cooking secrets in the privacy of their kitchens. These tours were both products of my ethnographic project and sites where further research was conducted and data collected.

The elastic and evolving nature of this research called for the collection of data through additional methods that were beyond ethnographic participant observation and the incumbent interviews with interlocutors or informants. I relied on a wide network of relatives, friends, and friends of friends (interviewees located through the more professional-sounding process of “snowball sampling”). All ethnographers know that this is exactly how fieldwork is done, but my Israeli networks were much wider and intensive than those I had in Vietnam. As a native Israeli and a native Hebrew speaker, I was also able to make use of all kinds of media, including television and radio reports, news articles, and webpages. However, I did not consider such media reports to be ethnographic observations, which form the empirical backbone of anthropology. I approached these visual, oral, and written texts in a similar way to the interviews and conversations that I held, taking them not as forms of observed phenomena and certainly not as the objective truth, but rather as stories people tell themselves about themselves.

The study of the Hummus Wars is a good example of this methodological process. It began with a short news report that caught my attention, continued with me following the verbal and practical reactions of different participants as presented in the media, and culminated in my attending the event

in the village of Abu Gosh, where the bulk of my ethnographic material was collected. This event lasted for several hours, but as I always do with such culinary events, I arrived early in the morning to observe the preparations and talk to the people involved in the cooking before the crowds of spectators arrived. During the event, I took notes and photos, talked with participants, and recorded the speeches. I remained in Abu Gosh when the event was over to observe the dismantling of the installation and the cleanup. In Vietnam, I learned that this was an especially fruitful moment ethnographically because the hosts relaxed once the guests were gone and were often happy to discuss the events and comment on them. During the following days, I collected media reports of the event and followed the reactions that these reports elicited. Once I developed my own framework for the analysis of the Hummus Wars, I talked to various people in different contexts and asked them about their perception of the occurrences at Abu Gosh and of hummus in general. These people were not involved directly in the events at Abu Gosh but were Israelis who had their own opinions on hummus and on the Hummus Wars. Talking to them helped me fine-tune my understanding of the meanings of the Hummus Wars and the event at Abu Gosh.

Due to the multisited nature of this project and to the very different contexts in which it was conducted, I further elaborate in each chapter on the specific methodological approaches I employed for each case. Chapter 1 has an extended methodological section, which sets the ground for much of the research presented in the book. In other chapters, I address and explain specific methodological choices, implications, and dilemmas.

THE DRAWINGS

Another unconventional feature of *Food and Power* are the drawings by Heimo Wallner. When conducting ethnographic research in Vietnam (as well as in India, Thailand, and Singapore), I used a large reflex camera and collected thousands of images. Taking pictures was both exciting and easy: I was surrounded by scenery that was unfamiliar and exotic and by human practices that were new, intriguing, and, at times, strange and even bizarre.

Focusing on the salient, unique, and unfamiliar is an essential part of the ethnographic condition: ethnographers travel far and wide and conduct their research in cultures and settings that are significantly different from their own so as to bypass the constraints of the “taken for granted”—the familiar

daily practices that make up much of the human experience but are so hard to notice and analyze precisely because they are so familiar and taken for granted. We therefore study other cultures and focus on the practices that *they* take for granted, which for us are nothing but familiar and mundane. Taking pictures under such circumstances is easy: things are almost constantly new, strange, salient, and intriguing.

As mentioned earlier, this was not the case with the ethnographic projects presented in this book: I was conducting my research in my home country and culture, often in very familiar settings, and attending mundane and, indeed, taken-for-granted events and activities. I found taking “good pictures”—images that capture the mystery and perhaps revelation of the “ethnographic moment”—very hard as everything was so familiar. At the same time, everything in anyone’s home country is complex and multilayered, and thus an image with a clear message is hard to come by. Add to this the fact that I wasn’t even carrying a camera when I attended many of the events described in the book—either because I didn’t expect anything to happen or because I felt awkward carrying a camera into settings in which I was not “the anthropologist” but rather a relative, neighbor, or friend—and you’ll realize why, in stark opposition to my study in Vietnam, I didn’t have many good images for the book.

But when I saw Heimo’s work, first at an exhibition and then at a seminar at Middlebury College, I felt that his Zen-like line drawings managed to capture very complex ideas and present them in a very powerful way. I asked Heimo if he would create drawings for the book, and he liked the idea. The working process was such: I sent him the chapters, and he read them and then drew some images. I chose the images that I felt worked best—that is, those that captured the main ideas I was trying to convey—and these went into another round of fine-tuning (for instance, I asked Heimo to make the person roasting meat for chapter 2, dedicated to Israeli Independence Day barbecues, fatter and to add an Israeli flag over the hamburger for chapter 1, “Size Matters”).

It would also be possible to fine-tune a photograph in this way using sophisticated photo-processing software, but I suppose that most ethnographers would be reluctant to manipulate a photograph they took in the field to such an extent: this would equate to manipulating the data, something that is perhaps done, at least to a certain extent, by all scientists but is usually nonreflexive. When done intentionally, manipulating data is akin to cheating.

But in this case, I was not dealing with images from the field but with Heimo’s interpretations of my own interpretations. Furthermore, drawings,

unlike photos, are not ethnographic statements of being in a particular place, a quality that is often attributed to images presented in ethnographic monographs and articles (and crystallized in some of Bronislaw Malinowski's images of himself in the field). They are clearly the outcome of the artist's imagination and do not possess the scientific power of a picture, which is supposed to be an accurate representation of some aspect of the field.¹⁷

The reader is therefore invited to bear in mind that the drawings are not meant to be direct representations of some social reality. They are Heimo's readings of my text, shaped in his own artistic style and at times negotiated and reshaped following my comments. In a sense, the drawings are meant to do the work of a caricature: they capture the essence of a complex social event in an almost abstract form. Come to think of it, ethnographic writing as a genre is somewhat reminiscent of caricature: it is an attempt to extract an idea and present a clear argument out of the messy, noisy, and complex setting of everyday life.

CHAPTERS AND ARGUMENTS

My culinary ethnography of Hoi An (Avieli 2012) was concentric: I started with the analysis of daily, home-eaten meals and gradually expanded my attention to festive, public, and extraordinary meals, with the emphasis shifting from private events where food was shared by a small number of intimately connected people, to culinary events where increasing numbers of people shared their food, and finally to moments when the entire Vietnamese nation was eating the same foods at the very same moment.

Food and Power is a very different project, not only because of its multi-sited design but also because its scope is much wider. As stated earlier, this is not a comprehensive ethnographic study of Israeli foodways. However, each of the chapters is engaged with a question, an issue, or a dilemma that reflects on Israeli society as a whole. This book begins with chapters that deal with the widest and most inclusive topics and gradually moves into more peripheral and remote sociological and ethnographic zones.

Beyond the introduction, *Food and Power* is composed of six thematic chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, "Size Matters," deals with a question that haunts Israeli chefs, journalists, academics, and diners alike: How do we define Israeli cuisine? Based on interviews with dozens of chefs, restaurateurs, and food critics, and defying existing conventions of Israeli cuisine

as an amalgam of diasporic Jewish cuisines, local produce, and (according to some) local Palestinian cuisine, I argue that a defining element of Israeli food is large portions of “satisfying” dishes made from mediocre ingredients. Satiety is exposed in this chapter as a cultural rather than physiological trait. The implications of this tendency for excessive portions are discussed in personal, social, and national contexts.

The second chapter, “Roasting Meat,” deals with the meanings of what is clearly the most prominent and most “Israeli” food event on the Israeli calendar: Israel’s Independence Day barbecues. Based on ethnographic research conducted on Independence Days from 2002 to 2009 in Jerusalem’s Sacher Park, this chapter analyzes the two main practices in this salient food event: the roasting of meat and the managing of space. I show how these practices reflect age and gender hierarchies, express the masculine myth of Israeli independence, and reveal the Israeli mode of grasping space. These practices also expose the ambivalence characteristic of the sense of power Israeli Jews have when it comes to their strained relations with their Palestinian and Middle Eastern neighbors.

In the third chapter, “Why We Like Italian Food,” I try to understand the extreme popularity of Italian food in Israel, second only to Mizrahi food. My argument, based on observations from a study conducted in a dozen Italian restaurants, is that Italian food is so popular because the portions are very large, the food is dairy-based, and the restaurants are family-friendly, all of which correspond to specific sociological trends in contemporary Israel. The most intriguing finding, however, is that cooks and diners repeatedly asserted that the popularity of this cuisine stems from ecological and cultural affinities between Israel and Italy. I argue that Italian restaurants allow Israeli Jews, and especially members of the socioeconomic Ashkenazi middle class, to imagine themselves, even if only for the duration of a meal, as belonging to Mediterranean Europe rather than to the Middle East. I also show how pizza is “orientalized” in the Israeli periphery in a counterhegemonic culinary trend.

The fourth chapter, “The McDonaldization of the Kibbutz Dining Room,” deals with the unexpected consequences of the privatization of these iconic kibbutz institutions. The dining room was always the heart of the kibbutz, the main hub of social life, and the outmost expression of the communal ideology. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the dining rooms of three kibbutzim in different stages of privatization, or “McDonaldization,” this chapter follows the contested meanings of the dining room experience. The food and eating patterns that prevail in these dining rooms are presented as

expressions of hegemonic power structures, and their modifications reflect changing values within and beyond the kibbutz. My findings challenge the common understating of the “kibbutz crisis,” or the understating of failure in general as a consequence of the rise of individualism in contemporary Israel, and suggest that the main competitors over kibbutz members’ loyalty are primordial and nonegalitarian social institutions such as the family, ethnicity, class, religion, and gender, which socialist ideology wished to eradicate.

The fifth chapter is titled “Meat and Masculinity in an Israeli Military Prison.” Based on a study conducted in an Israeli military prison for Palestinian detainees, this chapter engages with what is probably the most complex, controversial, and problematic feature of contemporary Israel: the strained relations between Israeli Jews and the Palestinians living in the territories occupied by Israel during the 1967 war. The reserve soldiers charged with guarding the prison insisted that their poor military performance and their sense of weakness within the prison power structure were due to a lack of meat. A discourse of victimization evolved among the soldiers in which their apparent weakness—which they claimed to be a result of their meatless diet—became the justification for institutional and personal abuse inflicted on the Palestinian prisoners. This chapter sheds light on the intimate realities of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and exposes some of the implicit mechanisms that maintain a sense of victimization among Israeli Jews, which facilitates the maintenance of the occupation.

The sixth chapter, “Thai Migrant Workers and the Dog-Eating Myth,” deals with the prevailing total social fact that the Thai migrant workers who make for the bulk of the agricultural workforce in Israel systematically hunt and eat Israeli pet dogs. Despite extensive media accusations and widespread public consensus regarding the Thai penchant for Israeli dogs, my ethnographic research reveals that Thai migrant workers do not hunt or eat dogs in Israel or in Thailand. I follow the emergence of this culinary stereotype in the mid-1990s and decode its meanings. I argue that Israel’s constituting socialist ethos conflicts deeply with the notion of migrant labor, especially when it comes to agriculture in the “working settlements”—kibbutzim and moshavim—that are the iconic manifestations of socialist Zionism. Following the official Israeli policy of racial division of migrant labor, which allocates migrant workers from specific cultures into singular occupations, there emerged a culinary myth that has very little to do with the Thais and their culinary preferences but rather that evolved around the cultural meanings and social position attributed to dogs in Israeli Jewish society. This culinary myth

defines a particular kind of negative exoticism that facilitated the dehumanization of the Thai migrant workers and justified their ongoing exploitation.

In the conclusion, “Food and Power in Israel—Orientalization and Ambivalence,” I point to two culinary trends in contemporary Israel that emerge at the intersection of food and power. First, I argue that the Israeli culinary sphere has been very much “orientalized.” Earlier in the book, I point out that Mizrahi ethnicity is an Israeli creation, the outcome of the forceful fusion of members of diverse cultures and socioeconomic classes and their demotion to the Israeli socioeconomic and spatial periphery. In the conclusion, I argue that while the process of *mizruah* (orientalization) involves fierce conflicts in the political, socioeconomic, and cultural arenas, Mizrahi food is embraced by members of all the ethnic groups in Israel. In this sense, Israeli kitchens and food events celebrate *mizrahiyut*.

Second, I point out that power in the Israeli culinary sphere entails ambivalence and is treated with ambivalence. The meanings Israelis attribute to their food and foodways expose their take on their own power: they indulge in their power and celebrate their might but simultaneously perceive of themselves as the ultimate and eternal victims and as completely powerless. This ambivalence sheds light on many of the issues discussed in the book and is important when thinking theoretically about the work of power in the culinary sphere.

Food and Power is engaged with social processes that many commentators, both Israeli and foreign, perceive as radically departing from the original Zionist attempt at balancing between democratic governance and Jewish identity. Some argue that the Zionist project was colonial, brutal, and unjust to begin with and that the Holocaust was only a pretext for justifying the mistreatment of the Palestinians. Others contend that the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the aftermath of the 1967 war was the point at which the Zionist project took a right turn toward messianic ethno-religious nationalism and became a conquering and brutal Goliath rather than the slender and beautiful-eyed David it claimed to be.

The debate regarding the moment when Zionism went astray notwithstanding, there is no doubt in my mind that the Socialist-Zionist ideology that made my grandparents leave their homes and families in Bukovina in 1930 and immigrate (“ascended” is the term they used) to Israel to take part in the radical attempt to change the Jewish condition and fate, and the Religious Zionism that motivated my wife’s grandparents to leave Kurdistan and move to Jerusalem in 1921, have very little to do with the prevailing

ideologies in contemporary Israel. Let me be clear: I worry that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the deeply embedded cultural and cognitive militarism (Kimmerling 1993b) that affects all social realms and relations in Israel, and the way in which Israel treats its non-Jewish citizens and residents are all detrimental to its social fabric and democratic system. As an anthropologist, I study microprocesses and specific social relationships, but *Food and Power* exposes antidemocratic, xenophobic, and racist tendencies, as well as misuse and abuse of power, that plague modern-day Israel. In this sense, this book is a stern critique of contemporary Israeli society.

Food and Power, however, is not a post-Zionist critique of the State of Israel and certainly not a call for the country's demise. While the book is engaged with some of the negative features of Israeli society, such as greed, ethnocentrism, racism, patriarchal machismo, and other forms of abuse of power, which I find disturbing and harmful, I have dedicated this book to my children, hoping that the ethno-messianic ideology will eventually collapse due to its essential immorality, internal contradictions, and lack of practical solutions for the problems and difficulties Israel faces. Zionism has always been an unrealistically hopeful realistic project, and this book is my very humble contribution to the efforts to reorient Israeli society in a more democratic and humanistic direction and to make life in this country bearable, just, and perhaps even pleasant. The food, cooks, and diners I met while researching this book, some wonderful, other less so, are the strongest evidence for the potential of Israel to fulfill its original goal of redeeming the Jews from their diasporic condition and allowing them to live, for better and for worse, as a nation among nations.