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Mohr Siebeck

Eating Jerusalem: Politics, Food and Identity

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The *New York Times* reported:

The first symptoms of “Jerusalem” fever appeared on New Year’s Eve: a friend rushed over at a party, breathless, her eyes bright. “We have to do an all-‘Jerusalem’ dinner!” she panted, then immediately called dibs on making the chicken with clementines and arak.¹

The all-Jerusalem dinner party was a response to the cookbook *Jerusalem*,² by the London-based chefs Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi. *Publishers Weekly* described *Jerusalem* as “the future of cookbooks.”³ The *Boston Globe* reported how the cookbook has become “a craze,” with a ready-made audience of “cooks who talk about ‘worshiping’ one of the authors; and people interested in anything Jerusalem.”⁴ “It’s safe to say no cookbook has had as much cultural impact in recent years as *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*,” noted a reporter in *Tablet*.⁵

While the book’s authors live and work in London, they are from Jerusalem, and this best-selling James Beard award-winning book is an homage to the food of this city.⁶ If we are to believe the reports, *Jerusalem* has tapped into a *Zeitgeist*. Its success, along with the interest this cookbook has inspired in Jewish news sources from the UK, USA and

¹ Julia Moskin, “‘Jerusalem’ Has All the Right Ingredients,” *New York Times*, Jul 30, 2013.

² Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi, *Jerusalem* (London: Ebury Press, 2012).

³ Mark Rotella, “The Bestselling Cookbooks of 2012,” *Publishers Weekly*, Feb 8, 2013.

⁴ Beth Teitell, “How a Middle Eastern Cookbook Became a Craze,” *Boston Globe*, Sep 10, 2013.

⁵ Stephanie Butnick, “A ‘Jerusalem’ Cookbook Rosh Hashanah Meal,” *Tablet*, Aug 30, 2013.

⁶ *Jerusalem* has sold 170,000 in the UK alone (personal communication from Penguin Random House UK group). The *New York Times* reported in 2013 that in the United States there are 200,000 copies in print (Moskin, “‘Jerusalem’”); see also Teitell, “How a Middle Eastern Cookbook.” *Jerusalem* won the 2013 James Beard award for best International cookbook.

Israel,⁷ make *Jerusalem* an interesting site in which to explore the international cultural politics of Israel.

Jerusalem is not produced for local consumption in Israel. The book has not been translated into either Hebrew or Arabic.⁸ Thus it can be read as a commentary about Jerusalem, if not Israel more widely, for consumption as a cultural good outside of Israel.⁹ What *Jerusalem* offers is a political story about an idealized Middle East and the opportunity to connect vicariously to Israel and Palestine. This narrative is paradoxical, in the sense that the text is clearly political, but is also ostensibly apolitical. The introduction sets its political tone as one of hope for a peaceful future in Israel/Palestine, and the recipes provide a means by which to achieve such a future. However, the recipes, as foods to prepare at home, are apolitical, so the book can be framed (and thus consumed) as a book about food, not politics. Furthermore, *Jerusalem* presents a picture that blurs Palestinian and Israeli foods into a multicultural mix, which also makes it possible to ignore the political contexts that make such a representation highly contestable.

The following critique says nothing about whether this is a good or bad book. (Full disclosure: I not only own a copy, I use it and enjoy it.) My analysis is methodologically based in hermeneutics, “the philosophical enterprise for which the central question is, How is understanding possible?”¹⁰ While this intellectual foundation influences my analysis, I adhere more closely to Charles Taylor’s methodological description of interpretation and understanding in which the guiding methodological question is about reading a text so that it reveals something that is otherwise hidden.¹¹ Thus, what is of interest is not what so much what is explicitly stated in *Jerusalem*, but that which is not stated but contributes

⁷ For example, Jerusalem has had write-ups or articles about it in the *Forward* (A. Sussman, “Jerusalem, Revisited,” Sep10, 2012), *Jewish Chronicle* (V. Prever, “How Yotam Ottolenghi Is Inspired by Jerusalem’s Culinary Mish-Mash,” Sep 20, 2012), *Jerusalem Post* (G. Squires, “Come to the Table,” Nov 13, 2012) *Jewish Women’s Archive* (K. Romanow, “Review of Jerusalem,” Jan 13, 2013) and *Tablet* (e. g., among others, C. Ungar, “The Taste of Jerusalem,” Oct 15, 2012).

⁸ It is available in the Israeli bookstore chain Steimatzky’s, presumably for English-speaking tourists, and I have also found copies for sale in Jewish museums, including Berlin.

⁹ A classic treatment on the (international) politics of cultural identity is J. P. Singh, *Globalized Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ David Couzens Hoy, “Heidegger and the Hermeneutic Turn,” in *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 178.

¹¹ See Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971) 3–51.

to the meaning that the book produces.¹² Fortunately, the authors are clear about what they intend, and so what is required is not trying to decipher their intention, but rather to seek out what lies behind and provides conditions for understanding in which their intended meaning can be produced for consumption by others.

Politics of Food and Identity

From the role of pasta in Italy, the place of wine in French culture and the internationalization of the American hamburger, to the popularity of tea and curries in the United Kingdom, food plays a variety of roles within the cultural signifiers of nationalism and international politics. National food identities are often socially constructed in much the same way as the history of the nation. Jeffrey Pilcher notes:

Just as nations have been described as “imagined communities,” one could question whether national cuisines exist except as artificial collections of foods eaten by people within arbitrary political boundaries. Culinary practices invariably differ from one region to the next, so for national cuisines to exist at all, they must likewise be imagined from diverse local foods.¹³

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai¹⁴ has also highlighted the role of cookbooks in the construction of national identity, and in a related vein Liora Gvion writes, “Food is one of the means through which distinct national and ethnic identities are formed and practiced.”¹⁵ For humans, food is much more than biological fuel for our bodies. It can have social, cultural, political and historical meanings for understanding collective and individual identities.

Writing about the relationship between food and cultural identity, with a focus on the colonial and post-colonial relationship between India and Britain, the philosopher Uma Narayan highlights that

Thinking about food has much to reveal about how we understand our personal and collective identities. Seemingly simple acts of eating are flavoured

¹² Another way to frame this is Harold Garfinkel’s distinction in ethnomethodology between what is said and what is spoken about. See Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

¹³ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History* (London: Routledge, 2006) 65.

¹⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (1988) 3–24.

¹⁵ Liora Gvion, *Beyond Hummus and Falafel*, trans. David Wesley and Elana Wesley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 1.

with complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural meanings. Thinking about food can help reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self-understanding, as well as our interesting and problematic understandings of our relationship to social Others.¹⁶

The crossing of ethnic and geographical boundaries makes food both a compelling signifier for individual and collective identity, and an indicator of just how fluid identity constructions are. For example, the traditional Italian foods of pasta and tomatoes are not indigenous to Italy, and yet they are classical Italian foods. This kind of fluidity also applies to Jewish foods. They *become* Jewish because of cultural practices or through the application of Jewish dietary laws to local cuisines. For Jews, food has always been an important signifier of their identity, religiously, culturally and historically.

Trying to define Jewish food is difficult, as is demonstrated by Jewish food writer Claudia Roden¹⁷ and is evident in Judith Friedlander's examination of American Jewish food.¹⁸ Nevertheless, food has "always played an important role in Jewish history."¹⁹ Food was one way the early Israelites were able to differentiate themselves from others. Jewish food or dietary laws served as one of the "ritual practices [that] served to mark the implicit boundaries of cultural identity."²⁰ Food is a "daily reminder of cultural identity"²¹ and continues to serve this role among Jews and many other peoples. It plays an important part in Jewish culture and Jewish identity in large part because Jewish life has traditionally required a close relationship with food through the traditional Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*). Yet, as Friedlander argues, "Jews have been living in many different places, adapting local tastes to their dietary restrictions. While *kashrut* technically defines Jewish food, many [Jewish] Americans would contest such a view with descriptions of dishes from their non-kosher forebears who came to the United States at the turn of century."²² There is considerably more to the cultural and political relation-

¹⁶ Uma Narayan, "Eating Culture: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food," *Social Identities* 1 (1995) 64.

¹⁷ Claudia Roden, *Book of Jewish Food* (London: Viking, 1997).

¹⁸ Judith Friedlander, "Jewish Cooking in the American Melting Pot," *La Cuisine Américaine/The American Way of Cooking* 27/28 (1986).

¹⁹ Jonathan Deutsch and Rachel D. Sacks, *Jewish American Food Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) 2.

²⁰ Ronald S. Hendel, "Israel among the Nations: Biblical Culture in the Ancient Near East," in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002) 61.

²¹ Hendel, "Israel," 61.

²² Friedlander, "Jewish Cooking," 88.

ship that Jews have with food than whether or not they obey *kashrut*,²³ including the cultural politics of the Jewish deli and how food and identity are linked.

The traditional American Jewish deli²⁴ is not always kosher, and Diaspora Jews have found a variety of regional foods as appealing additions to their own. A wide range of culinary cuisines have contributed to Jewish food culture.²⁵ “New York Jews love Chinese restaurant food so much that they have made it a second cuisine,” note Gaye Tuchman and Harry Gene Levine.²⁶ Jennifer 8. Lee, producer of *The Search for General Tso*, a documentary about Chinese food in the United States, goes so far as to say, “I would argue that Chinese food is the ethnic cuisine of American Jews. That, in fact, they identify with it more than they do gefilte fish or all kinds of the Eastern Europe dishes of yore.”²⁷

Unsurprisingly, one of the more recent entries into Jewish Diaspora food is Israeli food. However, in addition to including Sephardic and Mizrahi foods, Israeli food is also often Palestinian or Arab food.²⁸ Just as defining Jewish food is a difficult task, defining Israeli food is additionally complicated. Thus, even though in the vernacular we tend to speak about foods as belonging to or referring to particular peoples or countries, it is hard to identify dividing lines between what foods can be said to belong to which peoples, nations or countries.

A “national” cuisine is a contradiction in terms; there can be regional cuisines, but not national cuisines [... National cuisines are] simply a holistic artifice based on the foods of people who live inside some political system, such as France or Spain. “Cuisine,” more exactly defined, has to do with the ongoing foodways of a region, within which active discourse about food sustains both common understandings and reliable production of the foods in question.²⁹

This argument by Sidney Mintz is easily confirmed by a simple thought experiment. Since a “national cuisine” would presumably correspond

²³ Gaye Tuchman and Harry Gene Levine, “New York Jews and Chinese Food: The Social Construction of an Ethnic Pattern,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (1993) 382–407. See also Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

²⁴ Ted Merwin, *Pastrami on Rye* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

²⁵ Deutsch and Sacks, *Jewish American Food Culture*.

²⁶ Tuchman and Levine, “New York Jews,” 383.

²⁷ Adam Chandler, “Why Do American Jews Eat Chinese Food,” *Atlantic*. Dec 23, 2014.

²⁸ Gvion, *Beyond Hummus and Falafel*.

²⁹ Sidney W. Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 104.

to the geo-political borders of a recognized nation-state, it would logically follow that, since there is no internationally recognized country called Palestine, there is no Palestinian cuisine. However, this statement is patently absurd: there are local Palestinian foods and thus Palestinian cuisines. Israeli and Palestinian cuisines are shaped both by the region and by the influences of their many different inhabitants. The idea of a national cuisine is effectively more about the political mythology of the nation-state than it is about food.

Yet, dismissing the significance of nationally-claimed foodways by specific identity-groups is not the point Mintz is making. Rather, his argument is that the idea of cuisine, as opposed to a cultural or national food culture, is difficult to sustain outside of the nationalist tropes that accompany statehood. Relatedly, Appadurai has commented on the nationalistic significance of cookbooks: cookbooks presuppose “not only some degree of literacy, but often an effort on the part of some variety of specialists to standardize the regime of the kitchen, to transmit culinary lore, and to publicize traditions guiding the journey from marketplace to kitchen table.”³⁰ The humble cookbook that seeks to educate the home cook is not so humble after all.

Indeed, food – cuisines or not – are often deeply connected to the nationalist politics of identity. Palestinian and wider Arab anger at Israeli appropriation of traditionally local foods helps make the point.³¹ As a major Israeli food, hummus has been understood as representing a significant appropriation of Palestinian and Arab food culture.³² In response to Israeli commercial success in marketing hummus internationally, Lebanon tried to gain protected status for hummus from the European Commission, like champagne and feta cheese.³³ There was public anger within the Palestinian community over a claim that the sweet cheese pastry *knafeh* was Israeli: “This is the latest example of blatant cultural appropriation of indigenous Palestinian and regional culture” wrote Ali

³⁰ Appadurai, “How to Make,” 3.

³¹ Which does not negate the Mizrahi culinary contributions. Part of the difficulty in framing Israeli food is precisely this complication. These and other related issues are addressed in Anat Helman, ed. *Jews and Their Foodways* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³² “Jewish appropriation of certain Arab dishes can be regarded as yet another instance of Israel swallowing Palestinian resources and claiming them as their own.” Dafna Hirsch, “‘Hummus Is Best When It Is Fresh and Made by Arabs’: The Gourmetization of Hummus in Israel and the Return of the Repressed Arab,” *American Ethnologist* 38 (2011) 618.

³³ Dafna Hirsch and Ofra Tene, “Hummus: The Making of an Israeli Culinary Cult,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 13 (2013) 25–45.

Abunimah in June 2014.³⁴ In her research on Palestinian food, Liora Gvion encountered significant resistance among Palestinians who were concerned that an Israeli Jew writing about Palestinian food could “folklorize” and possibly appropriate Palestinian food, as part of the hierarchical relations that exist between Jews and Arabs in Israel.³⁵ Food carries political and cultural meanings that go beyond nutrition: it can be politically loaded. “Everyone must eat, but the meanings of what, where, how, when, and with whom they eat are cultural inventions.”³⁶

The authors of *Jerusalem* are clearly aware of the politics of food. The *Jerusalem* cookbook provides a modification of the Israeli versus Palestinian nationalist narrative, in that both its Jewish and Palestinian authors are laying claim to a shared regional food culture, not an antagonistic one. Their hope is to bring together two different nations into one culinary narrative. Hummus in *Jerusalem* is not an example of Israeli appropriation of a Palestinian national dish, but a shared food experience with the power to unite, not divide. Or at least, that is part of the story its authors want to tell.

The Cookbook Jerusalem

Julia Moskin provides background information that helps contextualize interpretations of the *Jerusalem* cookbook:

The book does make Jerusalem look like a sun-soaked, harmonious haven of ancient foodways, although notes and essays convey the authors’ awareness that trying to contain both Arab and Jewish traditions in one book is inherently controversial. But the religious and geopolitical complications of the city’s past and present seem to have been trounced by the pull of the book.³⁷

In Ottolenghi and Tamimi’s book, Jerusalem is a city populated by a diverse, warm and generous people, and characterized by a rich food culture, a strong historical tradition and great spiritual energy. Even though the cookbook is, after all, a cookbook, it is also a political tract about what Jerusalem could be. As its authors write,

Alas, although Jerusalemites have so much in common, food, at the moment, seems to be the only unifying force in this highly fractured place.

³⁴ “Is Knafeh Israeli or Palestinian?” *HaAretz*, Jun, 2014.

³⁵ Gvion, *Beyond Hummus*.

³⁶ Tuchman and Levine, “New York Jews,” 385.

³⁷ Moskin, “Jerusalem.”

The dialogue between Jews and Arabs, and often between Jews themselves, is almost non-existent. It is sad to note how little daily interaction there is between communities, with people sticking together in closed homogeneous groups. Food, however, seems to break down those boundaries on occasion.... It takes a giant leap of faith, but we are happy to take it – what have we got to lose? – to imagine that hummus will eventually bring Jerusalem together, if nothing else will.³⁸

The idea that the book sells is the narrative that it seeks to create about Jerusalem, which reflects an idealized peaceful Middle East. As Adam Chandler put it, “In the months following the book’s publication, a cardamom-scented fog of love descended upon the masses, making *Jerusalem* not only the ‘it’ cookbook, but something of a roadmap for peace.”³⁹

The book speaks to several different social and political currents, as the authors are well aware. Indeed, the political currents that shape the multiple discourses of food and identity in Jerusalem were clearly articulated and acknowledged by Ottolenghi in an address he gave at the University of London, where he spoke on the themes of identity, tradition and ownership.⁴⁰

Cookbooks have often been part of larger political processes and social movements.⁴¹ Historically, cookbooks were repositories and educational sources of food and culinary knowledge. They played this role by contributing to the production and reproduction of gender roles and/or national cuisines, and in some cases have been important in the development of national identities, as Appadurai demonstrates in an examination of Indian cookbooks.⁴² Today, however, the political and social features in cookbooks are presented as part of a package commodified as entertainment. Whereas cookbooks used to be largely educational texts, they have changed either to address political and social concerns directly or to become social and political contributions toward the increasing commodification of life. *Jerusalem* does both.

Cookbooks have responded to the increasingly insatiable appetite among the public for food entertainment, and which is also fed by

³⁸ Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 12–13.

³⁹ Adam Chandler, “Can the ‘Jerusalem’ Cookbook Bring About Peace?” *Tablet*, Jul 10, 2013.

⁴⁰ Ottolenghi, “From Arak to Za’atar,” SDAS Food Studies Centre (Nov 12, 2014).

⁴¹ One of the more famous is Mollie Katzen, *New Moosewood Cookbook*, a James Beard Award Hall of Fame book originally published in 1974 that helped encourage greater plant-based cooking and diet.

⁴² Appadurai, “How to Make.”

cooking television, blogs and so on.⁴³ The ease with which recipes can be found online has required cookbooks to have an added value. There needs to be a story and an authority to ground the cookbook. Sometimes the story is historical, as in Claudia Roden's book on Jewish food that can be read as a history of the Jewish people through food.⁴⁴ At other times the story can be a personal journey in exploring a particular food-way; Grace Young's award-winning cookbook on Chinese food is one such example.⁴⁵ Cookbooks can also redefine what foods are considered authentic, like *Kosher Modern*, which provides recipes that maintain kosher credentials for foods that are not traditional, such as duck prosciutto (an alternative to conventional prosciutto).⁴⁶

Jerusalem is a successful example of how cookbooks have changed. It is entertaining in large part because the food and the city are interesting, the photographs really make you want to eat the food, and its authors can claim additional authenticity as Jerusalemites. The cookbook also tries to tell a story, in this case one of hope. *Jerusalem* provides a history of Jerusalem through food and through the cultures that brought this food to the city. In the process of searching for, finding and presenting the recipes of Jerusalem, it is also a book of discovery: Jews discovering foods that Palestinians eat, and Palestinians discovering foods that Jews eat, and perhaps both discovering that they eat a lot in common.

There is, however, another aspect of *Jerusalem*: the authors would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to write this cookbook had they remained in Jerusalem. Chances are, first of all, that they would never have met in a professional environment and become business partners; Jerusalem is very much a divided city, with economic resources apportioned unevenly between Jewish and Arab residents, and planning permission skewed toward increasing Jewish demographics in the city. Second, even if they had met, there are significant social obstacles for a Jew and an Arab to successfully develop a restaurant together. *Jerusalem* is a cookbook that could only have been written in the Diaspora. Just as the Oslo Accords were made possible by removing the negotiators physically from the area of conflict, a similar principle seems to have been at work here. *Jerusalem* was possible because the authors do not live in Jerusalem.

⁴³ Kathleen Collins, "Watching What We Eat: The Evolution of Cooking Television Shows" (New York: Continuum, 2009).

⁴⁴ Roden, *Book of Jewish Food*.

⁴⁵ Grace Young, *Breath of a Wok* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

⁴⁶ Geila Hocherman and Arthur Boehm, *Kosher Modern* (London: Kyle Books, 2011). *Kosher Modern* is published in North America as *Kosher Revolution*.

The fact that they wrote the book together is itself significant and important because it provides evidence for the political argument that food can bring Jerusalemites together. Their joint authorship, as well as their professional partnership, offers a model for those who want to discover a Middle East where Jews and Palestinians get along in peace.

The Production of Locality

The *Jerusalem* cookbook is a kind of ethnography. It purports to develop a first-hand narrative of the local foodways in Jerusalem, albeit very self-consciously. In so doing, it cannot avoid the methodological challenges involved in ethnography as identified by Appadurai:

If a large part of the ethnographic record can be re-read and rewritten as a record of the multifarious modes for the production of locality, it follows that ethnography has been unwittingly complicit in this activity. This is a point about knowledge and representation, rather than about guilt or violence. . . . Drawn into the very localization they seek to document, most ethnographic descriptions have taken locality as ground not figure, recognizing neither its fragility nor its ethos *as a property of social life*. This produces an unproblematic collaboration with the sense of inertia on which locality, as a “structure” and feeling, centrally relishes.⁴⁷

Defining locality as “relational and contextual rather than as scalar and spatial,” he wants to reframe the methodology of ethnography toward one that is aware of how ethnography contributes in the production of locality.⁴⁸

Methodology, however, is not the issue in *Jerusalem*; rather, it is how Ottolenghi and Tamimi’s way of producing locality functions as a political discourse, and does so precisely by addressing the temporal, relational and contextual categories that Appadurai highlights. It is not the recipes that speak to the production of locality so much as the story that the recipes collectively represent, which is emphasized by the photos and anthropological description that accompany them. The book is an attempt to locate Jerusalem within the current political traumas of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but it is written as if to transcend them, and to do so by engaging in local knowledge, local practice and local foodways.

⁴⁷ Appadurai, “How to Make,” 207.

⁴⁸ Appadurai, “How to Make,” 204.

The locality produced is an appealing one, as demonstrated by the book's commercial success and cultural impact, as reported internationally. However, in producing – or rather, in co-producing and re-producing – their locality of Jerusalem, Ottolenghi and Tamimi also contribute to a kind of reflexive distancing. They self-consciously locate themselves at the center of their narrative about Jerusalem, which is both nostalgic about the past and hopeful for the future, but they do so within a realm of political pessimism and geographical and temporal distance. They explore Jerusalem together and co-produce an ethnographic representation of Jerusalem's foodways in part because they do not live there anymore. Their journey is simultaneously one of exploration and personal reflection. They rediscover the foods they grew up with and discover the foods of the other. Moreover, the locality of Jerusalem they portray in the book is simultaneously based in their past, in their hope for a better future, and in the ambivalent present where the past is deeply problematic and the future uncertain.

A more explicit representation of this same ambivalence is evident in Ari Shavit's *My Promised Land*, where he highlights the morally dubious past of Israel's nation-building practices and acknowledges that the present would not have been possible without this discomfiting past, while trying to hold out hope for the future.⁴⁹ The *Jerusalem* cookbook provides a similar story, but told in such a way that the tragedy can be glossed over, courtesy of the food. The food produces the locality of Jerusalem in a way that makes the story enjoyable and tangible. This is significant because it reveals how the commodification of culture is part of a political process, and also because it helps us to understand how the authors' production of locality functions in transforming Jerusalem into a commodity to be consumed.

Jerusalem produces locality from a distance that contradicts the ethnographic story it seeks to tell. In this sense, it functions as an anthropology of Jerusalem, intermingling Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian foods that the authors see as representative of the traditional foods of Jerusalem that they remember. However, it presents a contradiction insofar as its production of locality functions not so much as an ethnography, but as wishful thinking of how the authors want to represent a city that they care for. The local knowledge they both reveal and produce in the cookbook is a re-visitation, a reproduction for consumption outside of Jerusalem, by Jerusalemites who have not lived there for many years. In this regard, the production of locality that takes place in the pages of

⁴⁹ Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land* (New York: Random House, 2013).

Jerusalem is about the imagined production of a locality that they wish could exist. *Jerusalem* is very much not about Jerusalem at all, but about telling and selling a story.

The cookbook's hopeful representation of peace through hummus offers an opportunity to escape from politics and delude oneself that through a kind of multicultural food-experience, one can overcome the divisions and conflict in the region. There is a risk that, in fostering this delusion, instead of bringing people together, the idealized world the cookbook allows its consumers to vicariously enjoy will supplant engagement with the local politics and contexts of Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whichever way we look at it, *Jerusalem* is suggestive of failure in the Middle East at this particular moment in time, and the need to find a positive story with meaning and authenticity that can overcome the ongoing tragedy of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Authenticity, Meaning and Eating the Other

A large part of what defines the *Jerusalem* is its combination of authenticity and authority. Its authors have both authenticity and authority in abundance; they are from Jerusalem, and they are professionals in the restaurant industry. The book's authority and claim to authenticity, however, play into an uncomfortable relationship that consumers of *Jerusalem* may have with Israel. The book enables and in a sense encourages what bell hooks has called "eating the Other."⁵⁰ This particular category of consumption is, in this case at least, tied to a combination of how authenticity and authority enable a particular type of meaning that is especially appealing in contemporary conditions of what Frederic Jameson has described as the culture of late-capitalism.⁵¹ *Jerusalem* ties into an inter-related set of themes addressed in post-colonial theory and cultural studies. What follows is an attempt to unpack these themes and explain their connection in regard to *Jerusalem*.

The consumption of Otherness is a theme that hooks writes about in regard to the consumption by White Americans of Black culture. In a chapter entitled, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," she writes, "the commodification of Otherness that has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal

⁵⁰ bell hooks, *Black Looks* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

⁵¹ hooks, *Black Looks*; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

ways of doing and feeling.”⁵² There is pleasure in the “fantasies and longings about contact with the Other embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy. In many ways it is a contemporary revival of interest in the ‘primitive,’ with a distinctly postmodern slant.”⁵³ She frames this as a postcolonial response in postmodernity: “the West’s fascination with the primitive has to do with its own crises in identity, with its own need to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe.”⁵⁴

A related dynamic and another way to think about consumption of Otherness is in the process by which, according to the late Edward Said, the West created a romantic image of the Orient as an Other to be discovered, studied from a position of privilege, enjoyed and controlled.⁵⁵ Uma Narayan’s work that links “the colonial British ‘fabrication’ of curry-powder to their ‘fabrication’ of India” and in so doing “explores the connections between colonial attitudes to Indian food and colonial attitudes to India” is another example.⁵⁶ In this example, curry-powder accompanies the colonially produced idea of India. This kind of colonial mentality functions through a process of self-privilege, which enables a hierarchy of relations.⁵⁷

In the context of *Jerusalem*, it is not a colonial hierarchy that is at play, and I am not suggesting that the cookbook is an example of what Maxime Rodinson has described as Zionist colonialism.⁵⁸ The hierarchical relations I highlight are not colonial, but they share in the colonial imagination of otherness as foreign, exotic and to be consumed. The narrative that the book provides is a commodity, and a narrative that carries multiple powerful meanings about authenticity, coexistence and peace. As a commodity and as part of the commodification of meaning, it can be treated as part of the postmodern condition where meaning is a commodity in low supply (but high demand).

Frederic Jameson provides the seminal explanation of this postmodern condition.⁵⁹ According to Jameson, within the postmodern cultural condition what passes for culture is often devoid of meaning, in the sense that culture becomes hollow or empty stylizations, a kind of

⁵² hooks, *Black Looks*, 21.

⁵³ hooks, *Black Looks*, 22.

⁵⁴ hooks, *Black Looks*, 22.

⁵⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁵⁶ Narayan, “Eating Culture,” 64.

⁵⁷ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁵⁸ Maxime Rodinson, *Israel* (New York: Monad/Pathfinder, 1973).

⁵⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*.

pastiche. Nothing is authentic, everything is constructed or fabricated, and this absence of authenticity accompanies an absence of meaning and increases desire to consume meaning. This consumption can never be satiated, because every time a new meaning is consumed, it is commodified and thus loses its authenticity, sparking the need for further consumption. This story of a world without meaning can be traced back to Nietzsche's foundation-breaking remark about the death of God. His argument served as an inspiration for 20th-century theorists who have described this condition as post-modern (as Jameson does) or liquid (as Zygmunt Bauman does).⁶⁰ Stefan Dufoix provides a further list of related nomenclature including "second modernity" (Ulrich Beck), "supermodernity" (Georges Balladeer and Marc Augé), "late modernity" (Anthony Giddens) and "hyper-modernity (Gilles Lipovesky).⁶¹ All of these refer to a period in which the 19th-century forms of communication were so drastically changed that the meanings of space and time changed as well.

For our purposes, what such descriptions share is a claim about a transformation of the social world into one in which "individuals are separated from a grounding in traditional narratives and value systems and must work to ground themselves."⁶² In this condition, the act of consumption comes to represent the only thing that is authentic. This encourages the consumption of cultural goods as commodities, because the process of consuming provides a substitute for authentic meaning.⁶³

At play here is a twist on the critique that Walter Benjamin advanced about the mechanical reproduction of art. He argued that when art becomes a mass product devoid of individual authenticity, it has an altered social meaning: "The 'one-of-a-kind' value of the 'genuine' work of art has its underpinnings in the ritual in which it had its original, initial value. ... Its being reproducible by technological means frees the work of art ... from

⁶⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

⁶¹ Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodarmor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 98.

⁶² Stephen Kern, *A Cultural History of Causality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 358.

⁶³ Such commodification is occasionally revealed, along with the hypocrisy and hierarchical relations that characterize it, but rarely. A not-too-distant example was the American fashion designer Donna Karen, who in 1999 created a collection based on the indigenous art of the Inuit peoples. For more on this and other related examples, see Samia Madwar, "Inappropriation," *Up Here*, Jun 1 2014. Ralph Lauren also provided an example when he tried to market knitted sweaters as Cowichan, referring to a traditional First Nations tribe from the West Coast of Canada; see CTVNews.ca Staff, "B. C. First Nation Takes on Ralph Lauren over Knockoff Sweaters" (www.ctvnews.ca/canada/b-c-first-nation-takes-on-ralph-lauren-over-knockoff-sweaters-1.2225767).

its existence as a parasite upon ritual.”⁶⁴ *Jerusalem* similarly involves removing and repackaging authenticity, but unlike Benjamin’s critique, in this case in the process it loses its explicit purpose (a political call to unite people through food) by becoming a consumer good that, through pastiche or reproduction, uses authenticity and tradition.

Cultures that can lay claim to traditional practices are especially appealing because they have a kind of authenticity that the postmodern world lacks. The *Jerusalem* cookbook offers a type of meaning that can be grounded in a place, and as such provides a kind of foundational meaning. It provides people with the opportunity to experience something authentic in a life otherwise marked by the inauthenticity of a postmodern society largely shaped by the values of contemporary capitalism. By introducing the flavors of Jerusalem as provided by two natives of Jerusalem, *Jerusalem* offers the opportunity to explore an authentic Middle Eastern diet at home, and seemingly escape the meaninglessness of a culture mired in capitalism and discover an ostensibly more authentic culture in the ancient foodways of this holy city.

I do not mean here that there is nothing with meaning in a modern (or post-modern) capitalist society, or that we ought to dismiss this cookbook. Rather, I am saying that the cookbook takes a political struggle and reframes it for consumption by treating Jerusalem as a commodity, so that it becomes possible to connect with Jerusalem (and Israel or Palestine) through a consumer lifestyle without having to think seriously about the political hierarchies and injustices that overshadow the commodification of enjoyment.

The home cook, or at least the purchaser of the book, does not need to question the assumptions they hold about Middle Eastern food, Israel, Palestine or the political hierarchies that underpin their enjoyment of another’s culture. In this context, the exploration of authenticity that *Jerusalem* enables – or rather, this consumption of an authentic culture – functions as a consumption of Otherness. As hooks writes:

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over intimate relations with the Other.

The consumption of the Other apropos *Jerusalem* functions as being able to indulge in an exotic culture, and also involves the appropriation of

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008) 11–12.

another's culture. *Jerusalem* can be treated as overcoming this kind of cultural theft because it is also authored by a Palestinian. However, the consumption of Otherness here is not necessarily about Zionists stealing Palestinian foods, but rather how the cookbook so clearly associates food to specific identity groups in a specific place.

While the discovery of the shared foodways of Jerusalem may contribute to learning more about the peoples of Jerusalem and yield a positive benefit by bringing people together, if the consumption reinforces a sense of hierarchical relations whereby consuming the Other helps reinforce the sense of superiority of the consumer who is able to take pleasure from another culture without recognizing the power relations that define this relationship, it may increase distance. In this sense, *Jerusalem* can play into existing narratives and identity-based power relations between peoples, even though the hierarchical relations involved in consuming the Other may or may not be present among all its buyers and users. In addition, the fact that both an Israeli and a Palestinian co-authored the book mitigates any hierarchy that it can be said to represent. Nevertheless, as a product for consumption, the book cannot escape the hierarchies that its authors want to break down.

Consuming the Other of *Jerusalem* is an act of consuming a product sold and defined by its claims to authenticity. Consumers of this book can find an authentic culture within its pages and vicariously live in this culture through its recipes. This taking of pleasure in another's culture serves the role of finding meaning that is otherwise absent. The absence of meaning could be a product of living in a postmodern world, but it could also be a reaction to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and to the increasing difficulty involved in trying to find a positive meaning from a city increasingly characterized by racism and violence. Alternatively, the consumption of *Jerusalem* could be used as a way to show the extent to which one is in touch with Jerusalem and Israeli/Palestinian issues, and thus elevate the consumer above the racism and conflict that exists in Jerusalem. In this case, the absence of meaning is a denial by the consumer of what the cookbook glosses over, and owning the cookbook can emphasize one's own sense of moral righteousness. Consuming the Other in this sense is about finding meaning by emphasizing an enlightened self without having to address the hierarchies of racism and violence that the book tries to overcome. The consequence for either of these is the risk of increased detachment from the politics of the region by seeking solace in a sunny and rosy Jerusalem that exists in the pages of the cookbook.

Highlighting this process of consuming the Other does not negate the value of the book. Moreover, the point is not to claim that there is

anything inauthentic about Israeli food, or that Palestinian food is more authentic than Israeli food. For many Diaspora Jews there is a need to find ways to connect to Israel,⁶⁵ and this cookbook provides one such opportunity, even if the opportunity is to connect to an imaginary Israel. That the authors both left Israel for London adds to the complex story of this cookbook. Perhaps it is only outside of Israel that is it possible to connect with what Israel could be. The violence in Jerusalem and the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians feeds into an ongoing crisis, not necessarily of meaning, but of hope. Yet Jerusalem remains a city of exceptional significance culturally, religiously and politically, for a great many people. The cookbook provides a story about Jerusalem packaged as a commodity that can be enjoyed without a conscious engagement with the politics of the city or the region.

Conclusion

Food is often political. ... The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve and consume foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own. Nor is the food ever simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning.⁶⁶

The *Jerusalem* cookbook navigates through the politics of Israeli food, of identity and of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict deftly by presenting a narrative that is seemingly only about food, but also offers the dream of transcending the conflict through food. Food is used to reduce the overt political argument their cookbook contains, but in so doing it also emphasizes the politics that frame Jerusalem.⁶⁷

Jerusalem is a rich book. Not only is it full of exciting recipes, it is also a cookbook that sells a powerful story of hope. In addition, it can serve as a heuristic device for exploring the cultural politics that shape

⁶⁵ Ilan Zvi Baron, *Obligation in Exile* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). See also Ofira Seliktar, *Divided We Stand* (Westport: Praeger, 2002); Keith Kahn-Harris, *Uncivil War* (London: David Paul Books, 2014); Pew Research Centre. "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," in *Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project* (Pew Research Centre, 2013); David Graham et al., "Jews in the United Kingdom in 2013: Preliminary Findings from the National Jewish Community Survey" (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2014).

⁶⁶ Mintz, *Tasting Food*, 7.

⁶⁷ See discussion with Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmitt in Sam Dean, "Yotam Ottolenghi and the Authors of 'the Gaza Kitchen' Discuss Food, Conflict, Culture," *Bon Appétit* (Mar 27, 2014) (www.bonappetit.com/people/chefs/article/ottolenghi-gaza-kitchen-conversation).

Diaspora consumption of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – or at least, consumption of this conflict by those who do not live there but feel a connection to the region. The book taps into existing cravings for authenticity and meaning, and in so doing enables its consumers to consume the Other. This particular type of consumption is a product of living in an age where traditional meanings are displaced through the cultures of contemporary capitalism.

In *Jerusalem* there certainly is a political element at stake that is both self-consciously admitted by its authors and also glossed over in its anthropological commentary and recipes. The narrative of locality that accompanies the food is designed to replace the political contexts in which the food is produced and consumed. At least two political stories are being produced in this cookbook: that of food being able to unite a fractured city immersed in an ongoing and destructive conflict, and that of being able to overcome and forget the conflict through food. The mass production of the book has made it possible for this story to travel across continents.

This book can be understood as offering an escape from the politics, violence and racism of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. As such, it can be read as constructing a narrative that builds on existing traits within the culture of late capitalism and, in particular, the postmodern and postcolonial discourse of consuming the Other. By enabling the consumption of the Other through its glossy pages and rosy stories about Jerusalem's foodways, the book helps to detach people from the locality in which the foodways are created and produced. The text thus produces a form of engagement with the people or cultures of Jerusalem in which such engagement is packaged as a commodity that enables detachment from the difficult politics that the book attempts to transcend.

This is not an indictment of the cookbook. It is, rather, an indictment of taking a political struggle and reframing it as a commodity, destined for consumers who find meaning through commodification and are more comfortable living a consumer lifestyle than addressing the injustices and political hierarchies that overshadow our commodified pleasures. *Jerusalem* is a thoroughly enjoyable book, but if the story of hope it offers is to have any chance of succeeding, it will be by not blindly accepting the book as a piece of consumerist entertainment, but by highlighting the contradictions contained in its political messages.

The politics in *Jerusalem* are not so much the politics of Jerusalem as they are the politics about Jerusalem. In other words, the politics are in the production of what Jerusalem means and how it is understood and represented, as opposed to the politics that accompany life in Jerusalem.

The politics of *Jerusalem* are thus open to the criticism that they encourage an attachment with a political debate that is of greater relevance to those outside of Jerusalem, Israel and Palestine than those who live there. This area of political debate reveals the different ways Diaspora and immigrant communities frame their relationship to the homeland. For the consumers of *Jerusalem*, the ideal of Jerusalem that the cookbook creates provides the book with meaning and a kind of vicarious enjoyment.

The problem with vicariously enjoying something is that the pleasure is made possible through a hierarchical relationship whereby consuming someone else's accomplishments provides for a sense of self-satisfaction. The consequences of doing this are that the consumer will become increasingly detached from the contexts of what is produced, and focus instead on the product. *Jerusalem* may yield a similar result, where its consumers, overcome by the fantasy Jerusalem they experience in the cookbook and may even try to find on visits to Jerusalem, blind themselves to the political contexts that the book tries to overcome.

The counter to this consequence is that the book offers a culinary space that can supplant the current political space in the region, and in Jerusalem in particular. In its place the book provides a space of coexistence, cooperation and professionalism regardless of ethnic, religious or political background. Using food, Ottolenghi and Tamimi provide legitimacy for breaking barriers and boundaries between Palestinians and Israel. This cookbook is one of a few culinary texts that confront the relationship between Palestinians and Jews in Israel, and however we choose to read these texts, it will ultimately be a positive development if they contribute to resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.