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Paradoxes of Jews and Their Foods

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My father, Max Wilk, was an observant Jew, going to synagogue at least a few times a year, overseeing family celebrations of Jewish holidays, and making sure his sons had some religious training. But his real temple was Gold's delicatessen in Westport, Connecticut, where he was a regular denizen for more than 40 years. He went to sit and have some soup and gossip, and also to purchase ingredients for the ritual Sunday brunch at home: bagels, cream cheese, whole smoked whitefish, and sliced smoked salmon. Since we lived in the suburbs far from New York City, it was a treat when something special appeared from the high temples of delicatessen in the big city, perhaps some smoked sturgeon or crusty bialys.

We did not eat much that would be identifiable as "Jewish food" in our house; my parents were passionate and cosmopolitan eaters who visited many countries and always "traveled on their stomachs." My mother, Barbara, trained at Cordon Bleu in Paris after the Second World War when she was a correspondent for United Press International and was just as likely to cook cassoulet or coq au vin as she was to serve her brisket, blintzes, or some of the Hungarian specialties she had learned from her grandmother, a famously good cook. She was emphatically not a baker—her mother-in-law had that role in the family, and it says something about their relationship that my father's mother went to the grave without passing along her recipes, including the one for her glorious schnecken, one of the highlights of my childhood.

But from early in my life I also learned that my family's passionate love of food was unusual. The mostly Protestant and Catholic children with whom I went to elementary school seemed happy to eat bland and stereotypical diets, and when I stayed over at friends' houses I ate strange things such as canned spaghetti and fried spam. As an adolescent, I just accepted that this culinary gulf of difference was part of what made me Jewish. After our family had moved around to different places I could see that in general Jews enjoyed their food, were engaged with eating, cared about family food traditions, and connected with one another through sharing lore, knowledge, recipes, and meals, more than most of the Gentiles I met.

These opinions, and many other assumptions about Jews, were significantly shaken during an extended stay in Israel, working on archaeological projects, when I was an undergraduate in 1971. As many of the essays in this symposium document, Israeli cuisine at the time was often basic and functional: lunches at one kibbutz where we

stayed consisted of a boiled egg, a cucumber, a tomato, and a piece of white bread. The kibbutzniks seemed to be conceding to the overdetermined cultural meaning of food by their diligent efforts to deny its importance.

In the academic world as well, the topic of food seems to have an unusual attraction for Jews (perhaps more so in the United States than in Europe). At a recent American research symposium on food, an informal survey over coffee revealed that almost three quarters of the participating professors identified themselves as Jewish. Compared to the general student body at my university, I see more Jewish students in my food studies classes, and friends report a similar phenomenon at other universities. And there is certainly a superabundance of books about Jewish food, scholarly and popular, religious and secular. So what *is* it about Jews and food? What do the essays in this volume reveal?

Food, Remembering, and Forgetting

Judaism as a faith is more concerned with prescribing what people should *not* eat than in telling people what they should. Jewish people have found many ways to build cuisines within these rules. Food, if anything, expressed the incredibly diverse historical experience of Jews—both their adaptability and their resistance to change. In this, Jews and their food turn out to be quite typical of what food historians are finding about many other cultures. That is: sometimes food customs appear to be like a rock, an immovable source of continuity and strength that people cling to as a font of memory and meaning, the steel cables that hold together families and communities. Yet at other times, foodways change in the blink of an eye; old traditions are dropped and forgotten overnight. Periods of great stability seem to alternate with episodes in which food habits, tastes, and beliefs change very quickly, as new staple foods, modes of eating, and spices replace old ones—the Mintz Paradox, as it might be called.[1]

Not all dietary change is episodic. There are also gradual processes of merging and blending through which new elements—ingredients, cooking implements, dishes, spices, and condiments—are added to the old, sometimes replacing, and in other cases creating new combinations. In my book *Home Cooking in the Global Village* (2006), I provide labels such as “substitution,” “submersion,” and “wrapping” for some of these forms of gradual change in cuisine.[2] In contrast, the essays in this symposium, many of which focus on the role of memory, present a form of change that is more complex than a gradual shift from one state to another—more recursive, self-conscious, and self-referential. The change here is more cyclic, or perhaps “rhythmic” would be a better description, because while food in the present may be *evocative* of the past, it can never be a perfect replication, as it is always being produced and consumed in a new social context. No meal can be an exact repeat of the ones before it, because of the irreversibility of time; the diners will get older, the tablecloth accumulates stains, the vegetables you buy this year are subtly different from the ones you cooked last year. You simply cannot eat the same food twice.

Nevertheless, memory constantly juxtaposes the food we are eating in the present with foods we have eaten in the past. While many authors have discussed the way this can evoke happy memories of childhood, as with Proust’s famous petit madeleine, fewer have

taken on the issue of the more complex process through which food memory can be used to transcend painful memories, to resolve the violence of oppression and bondage through a process of deliberation, choice, and pleasure. Let me give some examples.

In the United States, many have written about "soul food" as representing a survival of the kinds of cooking that were imposed on slaves by the strictures of plantation labor, where they often had to make do with low-quality and cheap ingredients. More recently, however, writers such as Doris Witt and Psyche Williams-Forson have shown how Afro-American food traditions can be seen not as mere carryovers or survivals, but as a form of resistance and reappropriation, as the descendants of slaves use their culinary traditions as a basis for careers as cooks, restaurateurs, and food vendors—thus turning the emblems of poverty into symbols of pride.[3] This process of reinvention is never complete, and it reflects political, geographic and class differences. Another historical example of people who transformed foods of bondage into pleasure were the 18th- and 19th-century merchant seamen about whom I have written elsewhere.[4] In the Age of Sail, the crews of ships often had to subsist for months at a time on tough and greasy salted meat or fish, accompanied by weevil-ridden hard biscuits, prepared in the most rudimentary ways. On long voyages their health suffered, and many thousands died of scurvy and other nutritional diseases. Contemporary narratives are full of bitter complaints about the terrible quality of rations, which prompted more mutinies and rebellions than any other cause. But it was also noted that retired sailors, late in life, often missed their "salt horse" and "hard tack" and cherished the memories of youth and adventure that the flavors and textures brought back.[5] This example hints at some of the ways that the bodily experience of food can be transformed through memory, finding sweetness even from times of trial and suffering.

Loyalty to the foods of poverty can also be a way of reminding both the self and the next generation of sacrifices and hardships, and the impermanence of wealth. My mother's father, though a prosperous surgeon, ate a plain salt herring for breakfast every morning. Like many of the Jewish immigrants who achieved wealth after growing up in poverty, he enjoyed his success, but he also missed the sense of community and closeness with relatives, the busy kitchen full of simple but sustaining foods—all of which were part of his youth in a New York tenement.[6] These complex motives often transform the poverty foods of one era into the beloved national dishes of another. What Irish-Americans, Newfoundlanders, and Jewish Americans today cherish as "corned beef" is no more than the bulk salted beef that was the cheapest preserved animal protein of the 16th-19th centuries. The wretched, low-quality salted cod that was once fed to slaves is now the basis for the Jamaican national dish of "ackee and salt fish."[7] Is this a victory over humiliation, a message that has crossed generations?

Hagit Lavsky's essay on feeding Jews in postwar Germany describes a very similar process: people can form close personal and cultural attachments to the foods that remind them of pain and suffering, as well as to those that have pleasant or happy associations. There are many good reasons why people want to remind themselves of a painful past, to learn to live with it rather than try to deny it or escape from it. Rescuing pleasures from painful and traumatic experience can be a necessary and noble process, though one that mostly seems unconscious and subliminal. Esther Meir-Glitzenstein's essay, in contrast, gives the example of an Iraqi immigrant who at first refused to eat herring, then decided to try it, and eventually grew to love it.

This example emphasizes a key point: making connections, and developing or losing the tastes for particular foods, can be overt, conscious, and political acts. People may choose to develop tastes for particular things, to change their diet through perseverance and willful development of habits. One of the most fascinating and important aspects of food preference and taste is that it so often crosses the boundary between conscious and unconscious, decisive and habitual, intentional and incidental.[8] Many of the cuisines discussed by the authors in this symposium have this recursive quality to them, where the memory of food is playing an active role in the present, and represents in some way the process through which people born and raised in one culture are dealing with dislocations that involved complex mixtures of choice and compulsion.

While the acts of remembrance are often visible, easy to discuss and study, acts of forgetting are much more subtle, as Ofra Tene's essay makes abundantly clear. For some immigrant groups, it makes sense to give in to the pressure of the majority, to abandon, forget, and even suppress heritage, and to integrate rather than resist.[9] But people rarely mark the process or moment of forgetting, the passing of a taste, the demotion of a favorite food, the loss of the memory of a favorite smell or evocative sound from the kitchen. These things slip away, as if forgetting was a natural process. And rather than being opposites, remembering and forgetting are often partners, working together in subtle ways at both individual and social levels. In this, Jews are similar to other peoples caught up in the massive global dislocations of the 20th century.

Some Interesting Parallels

I am not a scholar of Judaism. Instead the major topic of my studies of food has been the process of globalization, as seen through the lens of a small and peripheral country, Belize (formerly British Honduras), on the margins of the Caribbean and Latin America. My goal has been to show how a small place can be both completely unique and at the same time absolutely typical of the kinds of problems that all peoples face in their dealings with globalization, whether in the form of colonialism, imperialism, or consumer capitalism.[10]

This background leads me to read the essays in this symposium with a generalizing and comparative question in mind. Perhaps there is something about being a small multicultural nation in a thoroughly globalized and cosmopolitan world that gives food a special position as a mediator between the local and the global? I have suggested as much in my own work. Belize is about the same size and shape as Israel, except that it faces East on a sheltered sea rather than West, and it has a comparatively miniscule population of about 350,000 people. There are other parallels—its colonial master was Britain, and its independence was long delayed due to the hostility of a neighboring country (Guatemala), which continues to press territorial claims to this day. The national culture is patched together from nine different ethnic groups who came mostly as refugees or, in the case of Africans, as slaves.

Yucatec Maya arrived in the 1840s and 1850s, fleeing the Caste War in neighboring Yucatan. Mennonites from Mexico and Canada (via Ukraine) began to settle

Belize in the 1950s, following a long historical sequence of schisms and dislocations, always in an attempt to keep their culture and religious practices pure. All the eclectic strands of Belizean immigrants—returning indigenous Mayas, Chinese economic migrants, Garifuna Afro-Antilleans, East Indian plantation laborers, refugees from recent civil wars in nearby Hispanic Republics, and lately a flood of North American entrepreneurs and retirees—have, almost without noticing, forged a common "creole" culture with its own language (Kriol) and cuisine.

At the same time, all the immigrant groups maintain a sentimental and sometimes vociferous attachment to their separate historical roots and present themselves as having distinct foods, music, dress, and dance, all of which are put on proud display at every national festival and carnival. In the meantime, their children have become Belizeans, an identity they often discover only when they migrate to the United States and find themselves lumped together with Jamaicans or Mexicans. The official narrative of the state is multiculturalism, a unified Belize forged together from diversity—in reality, a defanged form of cultural diversity that is distinctly ornamental and domesticated. When ethnic groups demand rights to land, oil, or other valuable resources, government cooperation and munificence comes to an abrupt halt.[11]

As displaced persons, almost every group in Belize shares a common story of having an original "home," a voyage, dislocation, trial, or passage, followed by a period of resettlement, reintegration, and adaptation. Anthropologists should recognize in this the dramatic form of a classic *rite of passage,* though there is also an uncanny parallel with the "hero" myth that weaves universally through world mythology and folklore, according to Joseph Campbell.[12] In either situation there is an initial state of stability, a dislocation or transformation, and then a new state marked by new strengths and weaknesses. The hero that emerges (whether an individual or a group) is more powerful but also has deep flaws, and there may be many cycles of trials and rebirths. The power of this kind of narrative—repeated endlessly in popular entertainment and drama—is so great that it becomes a *schema*, a template for understanding real events, and a guide to making decisions.[13]

If there is a reason why this story seems so universal and fundamental, I doubt that it can be found in the universal properties of the human psyche (as sought by Levi-Strauss) or through neuroscience (which seems to be continually finding a new bundle of neurons responsible for any given thought or emotion). Instead, dislocating and moving people from place to place has been absolutely essential to meeting the labor needs of global capitalism as it has expanded and changed over the last five hundred years. Mercantile capitalism required mobile armies and navies, traders, factors, diplomats, and bankers. Plantation capitalism and colonialism drove millions off their land and repopulated it with imported slaves, and the commercialization of agriculture and growth of industrialism displaced hundreds of millions more. Sidney Mintz has been the scholar who, more than any other, has reminded us that food has been an intimate part of the transformations wrought by global capitalism, finding important connections between the stories of people who are culturally distinct and otherwise quite distant from one another. Food can be an instrument of power and control as well as a form of resistance and a means of seeking justice.

The essays in this symposium tell parts of the same global story, from different points of view. The oppression and genocide visited on the Jewish people can be seen

as the product of fascistic nationalism in a single country and era, but it can also be compared with other historical patterns. Indeed, scientific and vernacular racism seems to have been the ideological partner of brutal forms of colonialism in many parts of the world, from King Leopold's Congo to Japanese-occupied Manchuria. The global expansion of European capitalism began with the violent expulsion of Moors and Jews from the Iberian peninsula in the 15th century, and was extended overseas in the murderous regime of slavery that destroyed the indigenous cultures of the Caribbean archipelago within a century of Columbus' blundering arrival. The saga of misery and pain that accompanied the African slave trade continued for almost three centuries. Systematic starvation and the genocide of subject peoples were practiced extensively in the British Empire, beginning in Ireland during the potato famines, continuing in the Bengal famines of the 1880s, and culminating in the invention of concentration camps during the Boer Wars and the Bengal famine of 1943.[14]

Hundreds of millions of people, including Jews, were driven into motion and suffering by these global political-economic events. Unlike many others, Jews kept alive a religious tradition that retained the memory of past repression, bondage, and diaspora. But Jews were not unique in using food as a central symbol and substance in rituals that maintained social memory of past oppression, forging a close connection between the general social memory of the group and the experiences of individuals and families. In many cultures, food has been the vital link that connects people across time and among one another in social groups at the levels of the household, regions, ethnic groups, and the nation.

The Narrative of Loss and Reconstruction

It is important to remember that, while global processes of dislocation and transformation are all real and are connected in very specific historically verifiable ways, the specific histories people tell to account for their own roles are *narratives,* crafted from memories through collective and individual efforts, but always in a particular moment. Their goal is to communicate a moral lesson and express complex emotions, not to record events for historians. The stories are informative, but they are not in themselves history, because their narrative structures leave out so much. Let me give an example.

The Kekchi Maya people of Belize (I did my dissertation fieldwork among them in 1979 and 1980) were identified closely with a variety of the *modernization* narrative. According to this story, they had once been peaceful and independent subsistence farmers living in the rainforest. In the 1950s, the government built roads and encouraged them to grow cash crops; missionaries arrived; schools were built. In consequence, they became modern, English-speaking Belizeans with electricity and running water. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I accepted this story, but my historical research quickly revealed that the past was far more complex: the imagined primordial state of peace and independence had never existed, at least not since the Spanish conquest. In the 19th century, the Kekchi had been driven off their land and farms, becoming peasants, almost slaves, on German-owned and operated coffee plantations.[15]

In a similar way, the narratives that appear in this symposium tend to portray the process of dislocation and relocation as a kind of rite of passage, where people start in one state, go through a dramatic transition, and end up in another relatively stable condition. The Ethiopian Jews discussed by Hagar Salamon remember the Ethiopia they left in a particular way, namely, as a place where they slaughtered cattle communally and distributed meat through lottery. But did they ever buy meat in a market? Did all members of the community participate in the lottery? Did this customary practice itself have a complex and perhaps disputed history? These details are lost to the narrative structure of the rite of passage. The Iraqi Jewish migrants in Meir-Glitzenstein's essay remember the date palms and the delicious smells coming from the kitchen at home, the wonderful fried crisp fish from the river—not the clouds of flies that swarmed the spot where the fish were cleaned, or the prolonged haggling with the vendors, or the rancid smell when the oil was too old.

The shape of narrative tends to flatten out the details of the pre-transformative period. The key elements of reconstruction, the period in which new cuisines are reassembled after dislocation and migration, are shaped by the complex diversity of concrete memory, on the one hand, and the creativity of fusion and adaptation, on the other. The symposium is exceptionally rich in examples that show us how religion provides a central cultural backbone for the construction of meaningful connections with the past through food. While there are definitely commonalities, each of the migrant groups discussed here faced different problems of memory and adaptation, depending on where they were coming from, what resources they brought with them, and what kind of country they were migrating into. Migrating to a nascent Palestine under British rule in the 1930s presented a different set of problems and opportunities from those faced by European Ashkenazim arriving in the immediate postwar period, or those of Ethiopian Jews who confronted a fully formed national culture in the 1990s.

The essays portray the process of reconstruction in two distinct ways. In the first, Jews must continue to negotiate their insider/outsider status as minority "ethnic" members of a larger national culture, in Mexico (Paulette Kershenovich Schuster), the Soviet Union (Anna Shternshis), and the United States (Sander Gilman, Shaul Stampfer). There is a relevant comparative literature on other migrant communities, including the Chinese diaspora, overseas Greeks, and Bengali communities in the United States and the UK.[16] This could be profitably used to compare the experiences of Jews with other migrants, looking for similarities and differences. The second direction is the complex process of nation-building, and again there is a good deal of comparative material to work with, including my own on the incomplete genesis of Belizean food.[17]

As Liora Gvion's essay shows, building a national cuisine is inherently problematic in a culturally diverse and divided setting in which the past is contested. Typically the state normalizes and supports some cultural traditions and suppresses or marginalizes others, which can lead to open discussion and public debate about cultural policy, in which food is a powerful symbol that has a weight and importance in itself, beyond the things it stands for. It is equally possible that debate over national dishes can become anachronistic in an era in which post-Fordist production, micromarketing, and internet sales make it possible to be *ethnic* and *global* as a viable and

cosmopolitan alternative to being *national*. Transnational capitalism of the kind envisioned by Thomas L. Friedman in *The World is Flat* (2005) requires a mobile cosmopolitan class that can adapt to any setting while keeping one foot in a "home base."

There is always conflict involved in constructing local, ethnic, and national cuisines, particularly between those who seek a return to the past by purification and eliminating the alien, and others who want to adapt, innovate, and create new hybrids. In this struggle, *authenticity* and *tradition* become important tools in a cultural politics about compromise and resistance, often involving complex differences between generations, classes, and genders. The essays in this volume include many convincing examples of how food is both the medium and the symbol of conflicts over heritage and identity.

Nevertheless, given this richness and the abundance of comparative material, it is curiously difficult to arrive at more precise generalizations about how food plays a role in cultural change, as both symbol and substance. In the next section, I suggest that this is a product of a failure of analytical language. To put it briefly and baldly, we are not specific about what we are comparing when we speak of food, so it is very difficult to draw useful comparisons between cases.

A More Precise Language

Scholars once tried to draw a division between the physical substance of food and its cultural content and context, imagining a primordial state in which humans simply put edible substances in their mouth without thinking about them, literally "hand to mouth." In practice, everything about our interactions with food is culturally coded, with the marginally possible exception of the initial breast-feeding of human milk.

Another fundamental distinction is that between cooking as a lived practice, and food as a discursive and rhetorical object. This is the distinction Jack Goody makes between *cooking* and *cuisine*.[18] Cooking is customary and unself-conscious: people eat what is normative, and make distinctions more about quantity than quality. Cuisine, in contrast, is an object of public debate and distinction in the sense of the word as used by Bourdieu; it requires the development and use of new forms of cultural capital, and according to Goody it is a characteristic of class-based societies with highly productive agriculture. Cooking is deeply embedded in the daily life of any given culture. Cuisine, however, is a matter of public display, discussion, and performance.

The idea that some kinds of society have cooking whereas others have cuisine does not seem to stand up well to comparative ethnography.[19] In every culture, some kinds of food preparation and consumption are routine and relatively thoughtless, while others are elaborate, complex, and require expertise beyond the ordinary. Psychologists have discovered that a good deal of food consumption in class-based industrialized societies is "mindless" and unreflective, so this is hardly a quality of hoe-cultivating Africans.[20] Sociologists also produce strong evidence that daily diets in developed countries are the product of norms and constraints, rather than individual choices or decisions.[21] The kinds of choices offered on a daily basis in routine situations are extremely limited; just as an example, as my daughter was growing up in the 1990s,

I surveyed hundreds of "children's menus" in American restaurants, which mostly repeat five basic, safe dishes (fried chicken "fingers," macaroni and cheese, hot dogs, hamburgers, and grilled cheese sandwiches).

The fact that so much cooking and eating is routine and unreflective, unremarkable and rarely discussed, does not mean that people do not think and talk about food. But it is clear that there is a world of difference between the daily bowl of porridge with honey and a feast for a visiting relative where no expense is spared. In thinking about Jewish food as a whole, it would seem worthwhile to maintain this distinction, and it would help us a great deal in thinking about the relationship between restaurant meals and the food people eat at home. With regard to Nir Avieli's essay, for instance, perhaps the taste for size and abundance only applies to the special setting of the cuisine of restaurant food? Eating out and eating at home do not necessarily follow the same rules; I suspect that in many ways they are opposites.

A closely related distinction is that between food practices that are embodied, directly experienced with the senses, and those that are expressed in discourse, visual display, and the kinds of sensory stimulation we often cultivate in connoisseurship. Food scientists have long known that in each culture people have completely unconscious predispositions for foods with a particular texture and "mouth-feel," culturally conditioned palates that interpret some combinations as harmonious and others as jarring and unpleasant, or even disgusting. Just the act of watching someone eat something unusual or culturally "inedible," such as insects or jellyfish, can make people physically ill. Without being aware of it, we have completely absorbed a cultural sensorium.

This argument has been extended into the social world in practice-theory approaches that concentrate on the ways that the separate activities of shopping, preparation, consumption, and disposal are bound together into patterned "practices." These practices are embodied through ritualized activities such as brushing teeth, walking the dog, or drinking a cup of tea—a collection of tasks and projects held together by unvoiced understandings. Going out for a Chinese dinner on the weekend or participating in a Sunday morning brunch, for example, may be defined as patterned practices.[22] As opposed to these examples, there may be few rules for the conduct of lunch in a faculty lounge, and eating there may not even be recognized as a specific meal; consequently, it may not qualify as a patterned practice.

In contrast to the notion that food practices are mostly habits and routines, a number of scholars and popular media focus on the constant quest for novelty and fashion in food consumption. In many countries the rising middle class is engaged in a seemingly endless search for the newest food trends and fads, getting to know the farmer whose olives were crushed for your oil, talking at parties about chefs and restaurants, reading cookbooks and food writing, and watching televised food programs.

We still lack sustained ethnographic work on such "foodies," but there is no reason why the quest for novelty cannot exist alongside heavily routinized practices and culturally embedded bodily routines.[23] In reality, the discursive and embodied qualities of food often have a close relationship with each other. The Jewish food activists described by Andrea Most, for example, first discuss and debate food as part of a political and philosophical effort to think about how they want to build a lifestyle in relationship to work and consumption. They screen different foods for their political

and environmental meaning before actually trying them out with their mouths, noses, and bellies. Foods that may be discursively "hot" may end up gradually becoming more familiar and routinized; we may even *teach ourselves* to like certain foods, or learn to feel disgusted by foods that might otherwise taste good, on ethical or aesthetic grounds. Foodies in the United States are currently learning to like new kinds of fermented foods such as kombucha, and Sandor Katz reports on others who are experimenting with fermented meat.[24] Food engages both our conscious mind and our culturally patterned senses, and indeed we respond to food with our whole bodies, so that our response to food includes how we digest it, and how it affects or even causes medical symptoms.[25]

It may seem that "food" is itself a self-evident and objective category, certainly capable of supporting comparison across cultures and over time. Yet the boundaries are consistently problematic; shading into medicine and tonic along one dimension, and dissolving through stews into soups and beverages to water in another. When archaeologists write about food, they often mean the sources of staples, plants, animals, and raw ingredients: how many mammoths a year? A food sociologist, in contrast, can study food by observing hundreds of meals, watching carefully who serves whom and how dishes are passed from hand to hand, while monitoring conversations and paying absolutely no attention to what is actually eaten or how it tastes. Both are studies of "food," yet they have as little in common as a butcher and a worker in a sewage treatment plant.

Part of the problem I am presenting here is historical, exposing the arbitrariness of the way academic disciplinary cultures have claimed portions of the world as their territory. Another aspect of the problem is metaphysical and philosophical, dealing with essences and the question of whether humans make order in the world, or discover and order what already exists. But a large part is simply a lack of definition and a kind of lexical sloppiness that has produced a flowering of creative scholarship that fails to build any larger structure of knowledge, find any regularities or structural similarities, or even note contradictions and totally opposed findings.

In reading this symposium, I found that the topics and arguments were much easier to compare and connect with one another when I used a more precise lexicon for what the authors meant when they referred to food, foodstuffs, diet, cooking, and a number of other food-related terms. It was also important to distinguish between references to food as a physical substance as opposed to social and cultural acts and meanings that surround and involve food, such as dining out, cooking, and remembering.

For the sake of clarity I present a basic set of terms below, elaborating on suggestions that appear in an article I co-authored:[26]

1. *Foodstuffs* are raw or processed ingredients, some of which can be eaten directly without preparation (for instance, fresh fruit). Foodstuffs become *ingredients* when they are prepared, processed, manipulated and/or combined with other substances, through *cooking*.
2. *Dishes* are foodstuffs or ingredients transformed through specific procedures, usually named. Some are common and widely recognized, others unique; they may be formalized through recipes.

3. *Meals* are specific culturally recognized eating events, often combining particular dishes with social rules and a "grammar" that prescribes an order of presentation and various rules of combination and separation.[27]
4. *Cuisine* is a combination of foodstuffs, dishes, and meals that characterize a particular group of people, location, period, or corporate entity. A cuisine may be named and recognized, or it may be deeply embedded in daily routines and practices while at the same time unrecognized and inchoate. There may be justification for using the analytical term *foodway* when the distinction of a cuisine is apparent to the social scientist, but not to those who are embedded in the culture. "Cuisine" would then be reserved only for cases in which the foodway has been recognized and named, becoming a discursive object as well as something that can be observed.
5. *Diet* is an abstraction for the total of what an individual or group of consumers eat over a specified period. It is most often applied to a total of ingredients and foodstuffs, rather than to modes of preparation or serving. Diet relates to meals in the same way that climate relates to specific weather events. (Thus, we may regard the terminology found in items 1–4 above as levels of analysis of the diet as a whole.)

The elements in this hierarchy are not tied together in the same ways at each level. Foodstuffs become dishes through processing, preparation, and cooking. Other ingredients may be required—equipment, fuel, and non-food ingredients such as minerals (salt) and water—and preparation usually requires labor, knowledge, and skills. But meals are made through the application of other kinds of knowledge and labor, and tend to be more socially prescribed. Their key qualities are the participants (a daily "family meal" is actually quite rare among human cultures), timing during the day and in the calendar, and the order and sequence of dishes. A cuisine, for its part, can have both emic and etic manifestations; it may be recognized only by outsiders through contrast with other groups, or it can become widely recognized and appreciated by the members of a society, or some sub-group or class within that society as a representation of a particular place, group, or time. Some societies recognize several cuisines, characteristic of particular regions, ethnic groups, religions, seasons, occupations, or class fragments. A *national* or *ethnic* cuisine is a further abstraction that bears an even more tenuous relationship to the actual diet. As Livia Barbosa and I found when collecting recipes for rice-and-beans dishes from around the Americas, in some countries the national dish is actually eaten by the majority of the population for two or even three meals a day, while in other countries, equally passionate about their national dish, it is actually eaten by a minority perhaps once a week.[28]

Advancing the Analysis of Jewish Food

If we begin to separate the levels within the concept of "Jewish food," we can speak more accurately about the ways in which an ethnic or national cuisine is shaped by different, and sometimes contradictory, processes. Several of the essays here, for example, those of Orit Rozin and Hagit Lavsky, discuss the tensions that occur when

the foodstuffs and ingredients essential to a cuisine are no longer available, or have become prohibitively expensive. In these situations, people have to learn to develop new dishes that incorporate unaccustomed ingredients, using an existing grammar of flavor and texture combinations and familiar cooking techniques to produce dishes that fit into acceptable meals. Other essays are concerned instead with a full-fledged collision between two different cuisines, each with its own foodstuffs, dishes, and modes of serving. In these instances, older people prove much less flexible than youth. A lifelong habituation to cold borscht with sour cream before the main course leaves the diner feeling unfilled and unhappy when confronted with a plate of hummus and olives. Young people, in contrast, are more apt to experiment with new combinations of ingredients and dishes and are willing to try meals that seem disordered, "ungrammatical," or even disgusting to their elders. Notwithstanding, young people can find it difficult to combat the conditioning effects of childhood food routines, even those they have learned to hate.

Another point that emerges when we use a common lexicon is that nostalgia and memories are not usually attached to an entire cuisine, but rather to emblematic and meaningful dishes or particular ingredients. A good example is the way that corned beef, bagels, and smoked fish (the latter two discussed by Shaul Stampfer) have come to substitute for the entire cuisine developed by European Jewish immigrants in New York and other major cities. Many of the dishes that were quite essential to that cuisine—salted herring, heavy dumplings, knishes, kasha, stuffed cabbage, and thick soups—were deeply associated with poverty, and as individuals and families found their ways into the middle class they stopped eating many of them, or relegated them to special occasions. Part of the problem of what Andrew Heinze calls "adapting to abundance" was coping with the ambiguity of a culture both deeply loved and at the same time identified with poverty and oppression.[29] Keeping the structure of meals while making use of innovative dishes, substituting expensive ingredients for cheap ones, and promoting special holiday dishes to the status of daily fare: all are common strategies for upwardly mobile people who want to sanitize their cultural connections with the past.

Substituting dishes for a cuisine is very much like the literary trope of synecdoche, where one small part stands for the whole. It is very common for food to be used as a way to stereotype a nation or ethnic group, as when the English call the French "Frogs," and the French call the English "Les Rosbifs."[30] In a similar way, Proust's famous madeleines were the dish that unlocked an entire world of memories and connections with people and places. Subtle color, small changes in light, or the smell of particular ingredients may become the focus of nostalgia for an entire era or place; C. Nadia Seremetakis has a wonderfully evocative essay about the role that *horta* (wild greens) play in Greek cuisine, and how gathering, sorting, washing, and cooking the plants activated all the senses, not just vision and taste, to produce an ineffable experience connecting people and cuisine.[31] Here, rather than merely standing for the whole, the small part is the very connection that binds people and cuisine into one cultural entity.

Another advantage of separating out meals from other levels of analysis is clearly exposed in Lavsky's essay on the diets of Jews living in DP camps in the aftermath of the Second World War. The lack of adequate quantities of food was one issue,

closely connected to the mostly unfamiliar, non-kosher, or unsavory ingredients provided. Yet eating meals cooked by others in a large anonymous room was an equally important issue. Cooking and serving your own food creates a circle of domesticity, and sharing meals is a kind of commensality that may be more important in reconstructing a shattered culture than the actual dishes served at the table. Clever cooks can turn unfamiliar ingredients into dishes that evoke memory—which can serve as adequate impostors given adverse circumstance—but no amount of culinary artifice can change the atmosphere of a mass food service.

Taking away the commensality of a shared meal by feeding people a uniform ration in a large noisy room has subtle effects. These apply not only to oppressive situations such as meals in prisons and detention camps, but also to ceremonial dinners, meals in military mess halls, school cafeterias, kibbutz dining rooms, factory canteens, and feasts at weddings, funerals, and other life-cycle events. Archaeologists have recently begun to trace the history and prehistory of feasting and communal dining, which goes back at least to the Middle Bronze Age in the Eastern Mediterranean, and which may actually be an older and more primordial form of gathering, given the role that fire and cooking may have played in the early evolution of our species.[32] Israel itself is therefore close to the historic hearth of human commensality. The palaces and temples of early states were often used for storing equipment and ingredients for massive public feasts and sacrifices that may have involved the entire populace, demonstrating as well as symbolizing the material and spiritual connections between people, leaders, and supernatural powers.[33]

If large feasts and institutional meals can make even the most familiar foods seem anonymous or alienating, the essays in this symposium implicitly and explicitly show that the reverse situation is also common. A familiar and comforting setting for a meal, the rituals of the table, the rules of precedence, the order of dishes, and even the right tableware, bowls, plates, forks, and other implements—having all of these can make it almost irrelevant whether the food itself is unpalatable, inadequate, or alien. Observing the familiar order of the laws of kashrut, the ritual of the Sabbath dinner, the seder and other shared festive meals, maintains a clear sense of continuity whatever the location and the ingredients. Creative cooks substitute ingredients in ways that create dishes that can imitate or stand in for those specified by religious tradition. These examples show how the *meal* specifically as a social event, rather than food itself, is a complex institution worthy of more study, particularly in regard to its crucial role in maintaining the domestic as opposed to written traditions of Judaism.

If we keep better track of the different levels of analysis, we can also gain insight into the puzzle that I posed at the beginning of this essay, namely, how is it that cuisines sometimes seem so resistant to change, and at other times seem so malleable and fickle? Nir Avieli's discussion of the fate of Spanish tapas in Israel provides a fascinating case study in resistance and change. As I read his argument, it was not the ingredients, the flavors, or the content of the dishes themselves that proved an obstacle to Israeli acceptance of tapas. Instead, diners objected to the more fundamental disruption of the order and definition of the meal. They did not want a dinner composed of many small individual dishes. They might have been happy with a kind of sampler plate with a little bit of everything—a familiar "mezze" style of antipasto

quite common in Mediterranean cuisines. But the mezze is followed by a substantial main course, which was not forthcoming in the tapas bar. We may abstract from this case study a more general proposition, anticipated by Mary Douglas in her essay on "deciphering a meal," that—other things being equal—*meal structure is one of the most conservative and resistant parts of a cuisine*.[34]

We might even tentatively advance a broader proposition for the way in which diets and foodways change over time. *Rapid change at one level of the foodway (foodstuffs, dishes, meals) is always accompanied by rigid stability at another level*. By this I mean, for example, that North Americans are willing to accept a new category of dish such as sushi and new ingredients such as sea urchin roe into their diet, but these must be made to fit into the fixed grammar of a North American restaurant meal: that is, one starts off with a drink order, followed by an order of soup, salad, or appetizer, then a main course (a platter with the sushi or sashimi selections, in this case) followed by some sort of sweet, if only a piece of candy with the bill. This is far from the way in which sushi is eaten in Japan, where it originally developed as a casual snack for gamblers.

Using the same proposition that stability at one level may compensate for fluidity at another, I would argue that when we see a major change in the structure of *meals,* their order, structure, and timing, we should expect that people will work very hard to stabilize *ingredients* and *dishes*. In the case of Brazilian immigrants to the United States, for example, the work schedule may necessitate doing without a large family lunch in the middle of the day, a cherished meal. At the same time, Brazilian immigrants are noteworthy for their determination to maintain a basic Brazilian cuisine. Whereas in Brazil the cuisine is regionally divided, rich, and extremely eclectic, in the United States, migrants tend toward a more rigid definition of the national cuisine, one that is heavily weighted toward common-denominator staple foods such as cassava flour (farina), black beans, and rice. Wherever Brazilians congregate in the United States, they find ways to import their favorite staples in order to maintain the cuisine, despite forced changes in the structure of meals. While this seems to be a common pattern in migrant communities, there is also enough variation to suggest that there are more dynamics to be discovered.[35]

Cuisines themselves are representational, discursive constructs, based on generalizations over varying periods of times. In this they are like the abstraction of "climate," which is a statistical construction based on the actual phenomenon of weather over a specified area and timespan. Because of this abstraction, cuisine is always in play, subject to debate and dispute. People are constantly advancing their own agendas in defining cuisine, often as a way of creating and maintaining social boundaries: defining a people or a nation in space and history. Culinary nationalisms and localisms are continually contending with cosmopolitism and the allure of the exotic, in a field of dispute that seems permanently unstable.[36] Where dishes are physical objects with sensory qualities, meals are social events, and cuisines are cultural constructs. Why should we lump them all together as part of the same analysis?

Distinguishing between levels of analysis can help us understand how national, ethnic, or regional cuisines can appear to be constant while they continually absorb new ingredients and dishes. Elsewhere I have suggested that new foodstuffs and dishes can enter a community through a variety of pathways, generally starting at the

top of the class hierarchy and moving downwards (as with Mintz's example of sugar in Britain) or entering through youth or street cultures and then becoming more broadly popular, the general path of fast food.[37] In contemporary North American food culture, the educated middle class seems to have become the major innovators.[38] Media personalities, chefs, and even politicians may endorse a given item or reject it; magazines, popular dieticians, and the wellness industry take positions on its positive or negative effects on health or appearance. Small businesses thrive on new tastes but then stumble as they try to expand, and the really successful businesses are eventually bought up by major food processing multinationals. Food becomes part of broader fashion cycles, and manufacturers present an endless number of new options on the shelves of ever-larger supermarkets and hypermarkets. Restaurants and food fashions come and go, so that in the long run, the food marketplace acts as a kind of selective arena in a Darwinian struggle for continuing culinary survival.

These highly visible, public, and even political aspects of cuisine can easily distract us from the fact that everything ultimately depends on those who produce foodstuffs. The contributions by Shternshis, Lavsky, and Rozin remind us of times when food supplies were limited, whereas the essays by Meir-Glitzenstein, Schuster, and Salamon take us into the settings in which cooks struggle with unfamiliar foodstuffs and engage in the kind of improvisational dance that always characterizes the kitchen. Northern Europeans knew about edible roots such as turnips and rutabagas, so that when the potato came along—once they were convinced it was not poisonous—they knew what to do with it. Tomatoes were a much greater problem, and it should be no surprise that they were incorporated through the process I have called "submersion" in which they were used in sauces and gravies; chopped up and cooked, they could appear at first as a seasoning, and only later as a dominant flavor in themselves. New ingredients can also be incorporated into old established dishes through wrapping and folding, by which means they are hidden out of sight, covered in crust, rolled in sheets of dough, pushed into an edible leaf, or stuffed into the interior of an animal.

Reaching for Some Conclusions

In March 2012, Pope Benedict XVI visited the Communist island nation of Cuba and had an extended meeting with Fidel Castro that was widely reported to be friendly and cordial. The two octogenarians were apparently able to converse in such broad terms, using such disparate language and examples, that they never actually had to argue. I believe that contemporary studies of food are in a similar situation, as illustrated by the studies in this symposium and equally well by other recent anthologies on food.

The essays here are kaleidoscopic rather than comprehensive, in that they show us parts of the intricate and fascinating stories of how Jewish lives have intersected with their experiences of food and eating. The diversity and historical scope of this group of essays serves to provide a clear sense of the central topic of the symposium as I frame it above—*what is special about the relationship between Jews and food?* The answers are particular, various, deeply historical, and intimately connected to the

processes of settlement, diaspora, and resettlement that have been part of the Jewish experience. As I suggest, while Jewish history has been unique, especially when it comes to understanding foodways and cuisine, we could benefit from careful comparisons with the experiences of other peoples who have been driven into diaspora and resettlement—sometimes many times—under economic pressure, political oppression, and religious persecution.

Because food studies are in such a pre-paradigmatic state, the authors of these essays lack a common lexicon, a corpus of established comparative examples, and basic theoretical propositions. They do not agree on what they mean when they discuss so basic a concept as "food." Each author approaches the given topic from a particular disciplinary tradition, making use of diverse methodologies, modes of analysis, and standards for evaluating evidence. This makes it very hard for the authors to engage with one another even at the level attained by Benedict XVI and Castro. This is hardly a failure of scholarship, and is no reflection on the authors' high level of skill in their areas of research and writing. Instead it mirrors the way in which the topic of food has been neglected, marginalized, and butchered into little pieces, most bits claimed unsystematically by different academic fields.[39]

The contributions to this symposium nevertheless present fertile ground for the next stage in the development of food studies. At this point, rather than more examples and case studies, we need to build mid-range interpretive theoretical tools on the order of the terminology and propositions I have developed above. Certainly this rich and complex imagined object, Jewish food, has the potential to energize a continuing conversation among scholars and diners for many years to come.

Notes

1. Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Power, and the Past* (Boston: 1997).
2. These terms will later be discussed.
3. Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: 2006); Doris Witt, *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (New York: 1999). See also Robert Dirks ("What Early Dietary Studies of African Americans Tell Us about Soul Foods," *Repast* 26, no. 2 [2010], 8–18), who shows how recent an invention "soul food" traditions really are.
4. Richard Wilk, "Poverty and Excess in Binge Economies," *Economic Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (January 2014), 66–79.
5. Margaret S. Creighton, *Dogwatch and Liberty Days: Seafaring Life in the Nineteenth Century* (Salem: 1982).
6. Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: 1990).
7. Ackee (*Blighia sapida*) is a tree fruit from West Africa that, when ripe and cooked, has the consistency of scrambled egg.
8. Richard Wilk, "The Edge of Agency: Routines, Habits and Volition," in *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Shove, Frank Trentmann, and Richard Wilk (Oxford: 2009), 143–156.
9. This was certainly the fate of many 19th-century immigrant groups (and their cuisines) in the United States, particularly in the face of strong pressure from the state and educational systems, not to mention the popular panic aroused by the immigrants and the consequent waves of violence against them, especially before and after the First World War. See Harvey

Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (Oakland: 2003). Also see Galia Sabar and Rachel Posner, "Remembering the Past and Constructing the Future over a Communal Plate," *Food, Culture and Society* 16, no. 2 (June 2013), 197–222.

10. My approach divides globalization into phases; a finer set of divisions is used by Rafi Grosglik and Uri Ram to describe the history of the globalization of Chinese food in Israel; see their "Authentic, Speedy and Hybrid," *Food, Culture and Society* 16, no. 2 (June 2013), 223–243.

11. For a general history of Belize, see Ann Sutherland, *The Making of Belize: Globalization in the Margins* (Westport: 1998); on its ethnicity, see Laurie Kroshus Medina, *Negotiating Economic Development: Identity Formation and Collective Action in Belize* (Tucson: 2004); Mark Moberg, *Myths of Ethnicity & Nation: Immigration, Work and Identity in the Belize Banana Industry* (Knoxville: 1997).

12. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: 1949).

13. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn (eds.), *Cultural Models in Language and Thought* (Cambridge: 1987).

14. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: 2001).

15. Richard Wilk, "The Search for Tradition in Southern Belize: A Personal Narrative," *America Indigena* 47, no. 2 (January-March 1987), 77–95; idem, *Household Ecology: Economic Change and Domestic Life among the Kekchi Maya of Belize* (DeKalb: 1997).

16. See David Y.H. Wu and Sidney C.H. Cheung (eds.), *The Globalization of Chinese Food* (Honolulu: 2002); Manpreet Janeja, *Transactions in Taste: The Collaborative Lives of Everyday Bengali Food* (New Delhi: 2009); Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas (eds.) *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia* (Berkeley: 2012); David E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford: 2001).

17. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (eds.), *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* (New York: 2001).

18. Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: 1982).

19. See, for example, Steven Sangren, "Dialectics in Comparative Sociology: Reflections on Jack Goody's *Cooking, Cuisine, and Class*," *Food and Foodways* 3, no. 3 (1989), 197–202; also see Joachim Theis, "Changing Patterns of Food Consumption in Central Kordofan, Sudan," in *Changing Food Habits: Case Studies from Africa, South America and Europe*, ed. Carola Lentz (Abingdon: 1999), 91–110; Gerd Spittler, "In Praise of the Simple Meal: African and European Food Culture Compared," in ibid., 27–42.

20. Brian Wansink, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (New York: 2010).

21. Alan Warde and Lydia Martens, "A Sociological Approach to Food Choice: The Case of Eating Out," in *"The Nation's Diet": The Social Science of Food Choice*, ed. Anne Murcott (London: 1998).

22. Bente Halkier, *Consumption Challenged: Food in Medialised Everyday Lives* (Burlington: 2010); Elizabeth Shove, Mika Pantzar, and Matt Watson, *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes* (London: 2012); see also a special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Culture* on practice theory (vol. 11, no. 1), ed. Alan Warde and Bente Halkier (March 2011).

23. Fabio Parasecoli, *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture* (Oxford: 2008); Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape* (New York: 2009).

24. Sandor Ellix Katz, *The Revolution Will Not be Microwaved: Inside America's Underground Food Movements* (White River Junction, Vt.: 2006).

25. The intersection of food and digestion has recently been discussed by several historians, and it would appear to be a subject worth pursuing ethnographically.

26. Leigh Bush, Adrianne Bryant, and Richard Wilk, "The History of Globalization and the Food Supply," in *The Handbook of Food Research*, ed. Anne Murcott, Peter Jackson, and Warren Belasco (London: 2013). We do not explicitly use Mary Douglas' or Michael Halliday's terminologies, which had a much more restricted purpose of defining the structured substitutability

of the components of meals—in other words, which dishes can stand in for others in the same category. So we can think, for example, of a snack as having two alternate menus, either sweet plus hot drink or salty plus beer. The menu tells us that the salty category for American college students can include pretzels, potato chips, or nuts, but excludes anything wet or any animal products such as dried shrimp. See Michael Halliday, "Categories of the Theory of Grammar," *World, Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York* 17 (1963), 241–291.

27. Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," in *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: 1971), 61–82.

28. Richard Wilk and Livia Barbosa (eds.), *Rice and Beans: A Unique Dish in a Hundred Places* (London: 2012).

29. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance.*

30. Ben Rogers, *Beef and Liberty: Roast Beef, John Bull and the English Patriots* (New York: 2004).

31. C. Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses (part 1): Marks of the Transitory," in *The Senses Still*, ed. by C. Nadia Seremetakis (Boulder: 1994), 1–19.

32. Richard Wrangham, *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* (New York: 2010).

33. Martin Jones, *Feast: Why Humans Share Food* (Oxford: 2008); Julie Hruby, "Feasting and Ceramics: A View From the Palace of Nestor at Pylos" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2006), online at etd.ohiolink.edu/ap/6?102216003166067:P0_SEARCH:NO: (accessed 1 July 2014).

34. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal."

35. See, in particular, Janeja, *Transactions in Taste;* Krishnendu Ray, *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households* (Philadelphia: 2004).

36. The literature on these issues is discussed in Richard Wilk, "Completely Unique but Appealing to Everyone: Managing Difference on the Globalized Menu of National and Ethnic Foods," in *The Globalization of Food*, ed. David Inglis and Debra Gimlin (Oxford: 2009), 185–196.

37. Richard Wilk, "Loving People, Hating What They Eat: Marginal Foods and Social Boundaries," in *Reimagining Marginalized Foods: Global Processes, Local Places*, ed. Elizabeth Finnis (Tuscon: 2012), 15–33.

38. Johnston and Baumann, *Foodies*.

39. I discuss topical butchery at greater length in "The Limits of Discipline: Towards Interdisciplinary Food Studies," *Physiology and Behavior* 107, no. 4 (November 2012), online at sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0031938412001825 (accessed 1 July 2014). Others have recently addressed the lack of core concepts in food studies—see, for example, Warren Belasco, *Food: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: 2008); Andy Smith, Jeffrey M. Pilcher, and Darra Goldstein, "Food Scholarship and Food Writing," *Food, Culture and Society* 13, no. 3 (September 2010), 319–329.

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