

Symbolic cosmopolitanism, structural hedonism: Organic hummus and cultural glocalization in Israel

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ABSTRACT

Hummus, one of the most common foods in Israel, was appropriated several decades ago as an icon of Israeli culture and nationality. Organic hummus—a recent version of the dish—appeared due to global-cultural trends of ethical and reflexive food consumption. It is customary to see organic food as representing locality, health, ecology and social justice. But it also embodies representations of globalism and westernism, mainly because of its integration in the global industrial system and its origin among the post-materialistic social elite in Western countries. This article deals with the encounter of the global and local as embodied in organic hummus in Israel. This look at the production, distribution and consumption of organic hummus uncovers social and political layers embedded in the dish and sheds light on several paradoxical aspects. I argue that the global socioeconomic conditions and ideas embedded in the concept of organic attached to hummus allow the imagined re-localization of the dish. Hummus is a dish perceived as representing rootedness, earthiness and local simplicity, but nowadays, in its organic version, it wears an economic and symbolic framework of global values used by the Israeli westernizing elite to demonstrate a symbolic cosmopolitan identity.

Introduction

In September 2010, Guy Maroz, a journalist specializing in the “doco-activism” genre, made a sensational television investigative report, accompanied by an experiment: for a month he ate only organic food for the purpose of examining its effect on his health. “The idea was taken from Morgan Spurlock, the man from the movie *Super Size Me*, who ate only McDonalds’,” said the journalist. At the end of the experiment, Maroz claimed that a basket of organic food costs twice as much as a basket of the same foods that are not organic. In addition, Maroz, who ate organic food nonstop, complained that “organic food is not healthy at all like people think.” As evidence, he gained two and a half kilograms of body weight. In the television program which accompanied the investigative report, Maroz told a known joke:

“What’s the difference between organic food and regular food? Regular food is sprayed during the day and organic food is sprayed at night.” The report ended with the claim that the widening organic food industry in Israel deceives its consumers and alluded that whoever buys organic food is actually a *freier*¹: “The only difference between organic food and non-organic is the price. Whoever is willing to pay the price, that’s his business.” Afterwards, Maroz poured scorn on the “organic food trend that has conquered the Western world and Israel.”²

It may be an exaggeration to say that consuming organic food is a trend that “conquered” Israel, but it is definitely a growing culinary trend in recent decades. A consumer survey in 2005 indicated that the organic food market represents 0.35% of food consumption in Israel: 0.7% of the population consumes organic food on a regular basis, and another 1% consumes it occasionally (Mazori, 2005). A survey in July 2010 showed that the organic food market in Israel has been constantly increasing, reaching 1% of all food consumption in Israel. The increased sales rate of organic food in Israel stands at about 30% a year (Dovrat-Meseritz, 2010). It is customary to see the increase of supply and demand for “organic,” “ecological” and “fair trade” food products as an empirical expression of an ethical consumption culture (Bell and Valentine, 1997), the growth of a new moral economy of food (Morgan, Marsden and Murdoch, 2006) and a strengthening of worldwide environmental awareness.

Ethical eating is an ostensible contradiction to post-modern cultural trends that advance post-ideological thinking and the establishment, in recent decades, of a new narrative in the culture and identity in Israel. This narrative, anchored in individual hedonistic consumer identity, is expressed in everyday discourse in Israel with the frequently used term “not to be a *freier*.” The concept is used to describe an individual who refuses to be at other people’s disposal so as not to be taken advantage of by them. Israelis who refer to themselves as “not a *freier*” express a refusal to relinquish their independence, to be assimilated in the collective or make themselves available to it. Luis Roniger and Michael Feige explain that the new Israeli discourse which is engaged in not being a *freier* isolates individuals from the social, spatial and historical environment and places them in a reality lacking an ideological dimension. The researchers claim that the culture of “not a *freier*” became central in the cultural fabric of Israeli society at the end of the twentieth century (Roniger and Feige, 1992). The increased demand for foods whose (high) exchange value is based on ethical implications dealing with “change beyond the self” (Goodman, 2004; Hopper, 2007:170) seems to contradict the “not a *freier*” culture and the “hedonist individualism” which has spread in Israel.

Several scholars have critically examined the social construction of organic food as ethical food and indicated some paradoxes embodied in it. Pointing to the multiple values embodied in organic food, they clarified that it is not possible to relate to it as an expression of absolute ethicality (e.g., Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm, 2005:19; Buller, 2010; Goodman, Maye and Holloway, 2010; Guthman, 2003). Others have presented a series of paradoxes embodied in the structural

dimension of organic food, i.e., in the production process (Buck, Getz and Guthman, 1997; Fromartz, 2006; Guthman, 2004; Lockie and Halpin, 2005; Pollan, 2006:134–184). The current article takes a similar stance, perceiving organic food as a multi-dimensional cultural object saturated in symbolic meanings. I focus on the symbolic aspect of organic food and demonstrate how it carries a series of global and local meanings. I describe how organic food, in its Israeli version, serves as a symbolic representation of a “virtuous food” (Buller, 2010) and discuss the moral values embodied in it, as well as those that are absent.

My main claim is that more than advancing moral aspects, organic food in Israel serves to establish a cosmopolitan identity and provide Israeli consumers and producers with “the world on a plate” (Cook and Crang, 1996). This is revealed in the framework of a series of symbolic and structural encounters manifested in the appearance of the glocal culinary artifact: organic hummus.

Hummus, organic hummus and cosmopolitanism in Israel

Organic hummus is a recent culinary version of the ancient Middle Eastern dish, hummus in tahini. It is one of the most popular foods among the consumers of organic food in Israel. Thus, for example, at the First International Conference on Food and Sustainability held in 2009 by The Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership,³ the main course of the lunch served to participants was organic hummus with wholewheat pita bread.

While hummus is perceived as representing rootedness, earthiness and local simplicity, organic hummus is perceived as an artifact representing global values. It is possible to define the interweaving of organic into hummus as a hybrid between cosmopolitanism and localism. Ulrich Beck defined the term “cosmopolitanism” as “a state in which the otherness of the other is included in one’s own self-identity and self-definition” (2003:17).

In light of Beck’s definition, the development of an “ethical eating culture” in Israel can be seen as an expression of the change taking place in the Jewish-Israeli culinary culture, characterized by a transition from ethnocentric-national closure to global-culture openness. This new Israeli culinary culture includes a growing interest in ethnic foods, exotic flavors, local food, seasonal gourmet healthy food, ethical food and organic food. Thus, organic food (and the other culinary trends) constitutes a materialistic expression of cosmopolitanism in Israel and the rise of global neo-liberal discourse in Israeli society. Jonathan Friedman explains it as a discourse ascribed to the new trans-national elite, based on metaphors of consumption and appropriation and often combined with a desire for connoisseurship concerning the vast array of world objects accessible to them (Friedman, 2000:143). The Israeli version of this discourse is associated with “yuppie post-Zionist” culture, promoting familiarity with global customs and culinary manners (Almog, 2004:36; Regev, 2000, 2007).

A number of researchers point to cosmopolitanism as a promise for a positive future: the formation of a global citizenship and a worldwide community of human beings (Nussbaum, 1996) and the development of a global civil society and trans-national social spaces (Beck, 2000). Anthropologist Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni (2003) emphasizes the cosmopolitan perspective as an existence that includes the “other” in mundane cultural practices and thus widens knowledge of the “other.” John Tomlinson (1999:198) is of the opinion that ideal cosmopolitanism expresses a worldwide moral concept integrated in everyday life. Within the context of the world climate crisis and the post-modern environmental discourse, the concept of “sustainability” relates to cosmopolitan culture and represents “globalization with a human face” (Morgan, 2010). In this article I examine the unique characteristics of a cosmopolitan identity in Israeli society as manifested in the context of the use of everyday goods—namely, food. My main claim is that cosmopolitan identity in Israel serves only as a symbolic cover under which worldwide concern or essential connection to the “other” is basically absent.

Seeing hummus as a representative of an encounter of cultures does not arise for the first time in the framework of global culture in Israel. Previous studies have already pointed to hummus as a cultural object that reflects assimilation of otherness and culinary appropriation. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, hummus was considered an Arab food (Litani and Ariedi, 2000). Later, after the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and because of the frequent visits of Israeli Jews to Eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank, the prevalence of hummus flowered. Since then, hummus has become an iconic Israeli-national food and was adopted into the Israeli culinary repertoire as part of the cultural colonialism process representing selective appropriation of Arab cuisine (Gvion, 2006).⁴

Nir Avieli (2005:168) claims that iconic dishes are a particularly suitable means for negotiating and expressing complex and contradictory ideas concerning national identity. To that I add that the changes taking place in national-iconic dishes are used to express the fragmentation of the national-identity form that characterizes the “glocal” post-modern situation and an inclusion of additional updated Western representations of “otherness” to the dish. Therefore, organic hummus constitutes—to paraphrase the words of Douglas and Isherwood (1996)—concretization of the cosmopolitan culture in Israel.

Culinary changes in appropriated dishes that became local-national signifiers expose the extent to which global culture is intertwined in the local culture and the different ways in which collective individuals shape the historical forces of globalization and localization and assimilate them in everyday activities such as eating.⁵ I argue that processes occurring on the global macro-social level, i.e., in the materialistic and symbolic production process, are experienced, paradoxically at times, as the opposite on the micro level, i.e., feelings, sensations and tastes produced by an individual’s action of eating. The case of organic hummus demonstrates the conditions and limitations of producing organic food in Israel, as

well as the lack of congruence between the production process of organic food and the merits and symbols attached to it in distribution and consumption processes.

I will demonstrate this argument by analyzing the three main stages in the process that turns food products such as chickpeas, sesame seeds, wheat and olives into hummus: production, distribution and consumption. In discussing the production processes, I present the way that the “organic” nature of hummus is designed under structural conditions of integration in global trade. The discussion dealing with distribution modes will demonstrate how it leans on symbolic representations of re-localization, and the discussion on consumption will emphasize this practice as more a part of nutritional-health discourse and less motivated by environmental concern or social justice.

Organic food and identity in Israel

For many people, organic food symbolizes the spearhead of the struggle against the consequences of globalization. Growing, labeling, distributing and consuming organic food is conceived as an expression of an alternative narrative and as a reaction to the alleged harmful influence of conventional agriculture and food production (Belasco, 1993; Knight, 2010:203–204; Lang and Heasman, 2004; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). But, at the same time, organic food symbolizes progress, economic wellbeing and cultural elitism. The global organic food market has changed from a network of local producers and consumers to a global institutionalized and industrialized system and became the food of the social elite (Buck et al., 1997; Guthman, 1998, 2004). In the United States, for example, organic food has attained the scornful moniker “yuppie chow” (Guthman, 2003).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, and in tandem with cultural and economic neo-liberalization, Israel has seen the rise of a new middle class (Ram, 2008). The lifestyle of this category might be characterized by consumption patterns encompassing leisure activities (Kaplan, 2010) and professions involves designing, processing and producing knowledge and symbols (Ram, 2008). The widespread perception in Israel is that organic food is the food of these privileged social groups. An additional cultural-social category ascribed in the public discourse to eating organic food includes participants of the “new age” culture,⁶ who include in their private and public lives alternative activities to the mainstream and hold onto the perception of mutual ecology, which sees the world as an integral holistic entity (Ruah-Midbar, 2006).

Thus, it seems that organic food in Israel expresses the two main axes of glocalization: it is a product of popular culture, driven by the force of the accelerated post-Fordist production system, but also an outcome of the longing to go back to a local experience and the resistance to the cultural homogenization of industrial modernization.

The formal definition of organic food presented by IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) includes four main principles that are the basis for defining such food: *health*, protecting the health of the earth, plants, animals and humans; *ecology*, protecting ecological cycles and their continuing existence; *fairness* between farmers, workers, distributors, merchants and consumers; and *care*, taking responsibility for and protecting the public and the environment.⁷ This definition was formally adopted by companies supervising organic products in Israel and has been used since 2000.

How do these principles come to be realized in the contradictory meanings embedded in organic food in Israel? What are the ways in which the producers and consumers of organic food in Israel organize their affinity to the tension-saturated symbolism of the idea organic? What are the ways in which organic is “translated” to the Israeli cultural context? The process of turning hummus into a carrier of the organic idea sheds light on these questions.

Production: Organic commodity fetishism

Hummus is a dish that enchants its fans. The fondness for it is great in the Middle East, so much so that the well-known cookbook author, Claudia Roden, named the dish “the flagship of the Arabic kitchen” (Litani and Ariedi, 2000:24). Actually, hummus is quite a simple food. It is just a puree of dried chickpeas that were soaked in water and cooked until they were soft, pulverized and mixed with a paste of sesame seeds called tahini, and served topped with olive oil.⁸ The production of organic hummus includes the same ingredients, but the raw materials originate in organically grown crops.

Several rural sociologists define organic food as demystifying the social relations embedded in the food we eat (e.g., Raynolds, 2000). Patricia Allen and Martin Kovach (2000) claim that organic food is intended to undermine the “commodity fetishism” of the industrial-agricultural process, and is perceived as an object that demystifies the hidden layers of food production conditions. Contrary to this, organic hummus in Israel reveals the fetishism of organic food in and of itself. I demonstrate this argument by focusing on the main ingredients of hummus.

Chickpeas

Organic chickpeas are grown mostly in Israel, dried and packaged by one of the big organic food distributors (Adama, Harduf and Nitzat Haduvdevan) and distributed to supermarkets, stores and restaurants. A large proportion of Israeli organic chickpeas are exported. Mostly, the chickpeas constitute the local ingredient in Israeli hummus (organic and non-organic). A local supply of chickpeas is made possible by Israel's

climate, as well as the development and improvement of agricultural processes in the country. In addition, the global demand for Israeli chickpeas and the integration of Israeli agriculture in the global market brought about an increase in the local supply (Retig, 1998).

One of the reasons that local organic chickpeas are used is their low price, as one of the organic hummus producers explained:

I buy organic chickpeas from Adama. They provide inexpensive organic chickpeas on a regular basis, and all I care is that they are organic-certified. As long as the price is reasonable and steady, it doesn't matter to me if the chickpeas are local or imported. In any case, most of the legumes we all use—organic and non-organic eaters—are imported (interview, Tel Aviv, September 7, 2009).

Nevertheless, organic hummus producers claim that when locally grown chickpeas were not available, they did not hesitate to use organic chickpeas imported from other places in the world, or as one of the hummus producers phrased it: "My customers are a lot more interested if the hummus is made from organic chickpeas, those that are free of pesticides or genetic modification. The question of their origin doesn't really bother them" (interview, Tel Aviv, September 9, 2009).

Organic tahini

The second main ingredient of hummus is sesame paste called tahini. Many in Israel see tahini as a local product. One of the reasons for the Israelization of tahini is its integration in the falafel dish, another food fixated as a symbol of Israeli nationality. Indeed, in the past, sesame seeds were grown in Israel. But since the growing process requires manual labor, wide open spaces and coping with a low profit margin, its production in Israel has ceased almost completely. Most of the sesame seeds used to produce tahini are imported to Israel from countries along the equator—Guatemala, Uganda, Eritrea and mainly Ethiopia.

One of the largest tahini production plants in Israel is the Achva-Achdut factory. The factory, which specializes in producing tahini and halva, allocates about 5% of its capacity to producing organic tahini and is the main supplier to the local market. All restaurants in which organic hummus is served use tahini produced by the Achva-Achdut factory. The factory owner testifies about his product: "Our organic tahini is devoid of preservatives, stabilizers and additives, is grown from environmentally friendly crops, and even the salary we pay our workers is good" (interview, October 7, 2009).

The factory seems to meet most of the principles for growing organic food: health, ecology and care. But what about the principle of fairness? Well, the Achva-

Achdut tahini factory is situated in the Barkan industrial area (Ariel), east of the green line, i.e., in the Palestinian territory under Israeli military control for 43 years. When I asked the factory owner if any boycott was directed to Achva-Achdut's products, he answered:

We have many consumers and no one complains. We export organic tahini and halva to consumers from Europe and America. You can find our organic tahini at Galeries Lafayette in Paris or at Harrods in London. We provide organic tahini to the most important companies in Israel: El Al, Israil, catering companies, private food-distribution companies—such as Liv, Adama and Harduf, which sell our organic tahini under their brand name—and more. No one ever complains and no one ever told us anything related to the plant's location. Why would they? We have a good reputation, high quality products and a reasonable price. What's politics got to do with it? (interview, October 7, 2009).

Moreover, the location of the plant in an occupied territory—a clear contradiction to the principle of fairness—does not prevent the supervising company, Agrior (which is responsible for giving permits for marketing organic produce in Israel) to mark the tahini manufactured in the factory as “organic.” The main questions consumers ask the producers are questions that deal with its “organicness,” healthfulness and the quality of the tahini. Most of them are troubled whether “the tahini is produced from whole sesame seeds [which are considered healthier] or perhaps the organic tahini is based on sesame seeds which aren't whole” (interview, organic hummus producer, Tel Aviv, September 7, 2009). And so, even though fairness is neglected, both producers and consumers of organic hummus in Israel are not aware of it and do not see this as a problem.

Organic wholewheat pita bread

Hummus is usually served accompanied by pita bread. The pita is torn and dipped in the hummus. This form of eating is called “wiping.” In most Israeli restaurants, it is customary to serve hummus accompanied by pitas made from white flour. In serving organic hummus, it is customary to serve pita made from wholewheat flour, which is perceived by many consumers as complimenting the organicness of the hummus and its high quality.

The wholewheat pita symbolizes opposition to industrialization and the nutritional inferiority symbolized by pita made from white flour. Ironically, those pitas, produced in factories in which non-organic pitas are produced, are the reason that some of the restaurants serving organic hummus are not awarded official organic certification from local supervising companies. In any case, wholewheat

pitass can be easily recognized by their taste, texture and unique color, and they are perceived as organic and healthy even without formal endorsement. Some of the restaurants in which organic hummus is served hold workshops for preparing wholewheat pitass. Omer, a 28-year-old male organic hummus consumer, told me:

I love hummus, organic and non-organic. But when I eat non-organic hummus, I eat it with wholewheat pita. I don't touch any white wheat bread. It seems to me like poison. When I see people eat white wheat bread I imagine how it stretches and is glued in their stomach. Besides, wholewheat pita is much closer to the original taste and texture of real pita. My grandmother was born in Yemen and she told me that all of the Yemenite dishes were made of wholewheat flour. I think that in this restaurant they make the pitass themselves, so it is much better than the industrial white pitass for our health and for the environment (interview, February 4, 2010).

In other words, these kinds of pitass are perceived as a product that is not industrialized, produced by hand and therefore a symbol of environmental care. But in the Israeli case, the symbolic rootedness of wholewheat flour does not have structural validity, as most of the wheat used to produce flour in Israel (including wholewheat organic flour) is imported.⁹

Olive oil

It is customary to serve hummus seasoned with large amounts of olive oil. In the last few years, olive oil attained a double revival in Israel. First, the health properties and virtues attributed to it accelerated its consumption. Second, its supply and demand were increased by "gourmetization" and the creation of a refined eating culture, influenced by global culinary trends which crown Mediterranean cuisines and the prevalent use of olive oil (Meneley, 2007).

Organic olive oil is derived from olives grown without the use of fertilizers or pesticides. Most of the organic olive oil consumed in Israel, and used to prepare organic hummus, is from local producers. In the Aba Gil organic restaurant (detailed later), organic olive oil is an important ingredient proudly exhibited and offered for sale. The restaurant owner buys the oil from a non-governmental organization called Green Action. The goal of this organization is to encourage consumption of fair trade products in Israel under the brand name Saha.

The International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) focuses on reducing inequality and exploitation experienced by growers in the Third World, and is not involved in creating fair trade processes between producers and local consumers in developed countries. In Israel, the Green Action NGO made modifications to these global fair trade principles. Their website states: "In Israel, as a multi-cultural state comprising

many different populations and classes, there is a need to apply the fair trade principles locally.”¹⁰ Accordingly, the movement began to apply such principles to protect Palestinian food producers. The organization supplies Palestinian olive oil, which its producers testify is pesticide-free and organic for all intents and purposes. But, in fact, the olive oil distributed by Green Action is not branded as organic and does not carry the label of the Israeli organic supervising companies, as the producers do not have the economic or cultural capital necessary to apply to a supervising company and attain the organic label. And so, in fact, the oil, which seems to meet all four principles defining organic food is, in fact, not considered (institutionally) “organic.”

“As far as I’m concerned, what is important in olive oil is the quality and that it doesn’t have remnants of pesticides,” claims one organic hummus producer (interview, Tel Aviv, September 7, 2009). When I asked a 30-year-old organic hummus consumer if he knows anything about the origins of the olive oil or about any other component of dish, he answered:

I must admit I never thought about it at all. I know that it is very important to use high quality olive oil and in here [the organic restaurant where the interview took place] they use a very tasty olive oil. It improves the taste of the dish a lot. I assumed it is an extra virgin olive oil, but I never thought of asking where it comes from. So what you are saying is that by eating this hummus, I also help some poor farmers? Cool! Good to know (interview, February 4, 2010).

These statements illustrate that the main exchange value of Green Action-Saha olive oil is quality and health, but not necessarily fairness or decreased social inequality in Israel.

To conclude, exploring organic hummus production processes reveals aspects of integration in the global commodity flows, appropriation and colonization, but also aspects of anti-globalization and political opposition. However, many of these aspects are not realized and do not manifest themselves at the symbolic level of organic hummus and the values attributed to it in the framework of distribution and consumption.

Distribution: Organic *hummusia* and organic “fast hummus”

Organic hummus is sold in Israel in two ways: the first is through Aba-Gil restaurant.¹¹ This restaurant adopted the distribution concept characterizing restaurants called *hummusiot*—small daytime restaurants, most of which are managed and run by members of one family. Hummus is the main dish served, and it is customary to prepare it early in the morning in huge pots. These restaurants are

usually open from morning until noon. During this time, all the hummus prepared that morning is sold. These restaurants became widespread in Israel in the 1970s and most are run by Palestinians who are Israeli citizens. Some of the *hummusiot* that became known for their quality and popularity with the Israeli Jewish population carry the name of the Arab restaurant owner: Abu Hassan, Abu Adham, Abu Taher, Abu Maher, Abu Shukri and others.

Gil Maoz, a young Jewish entrepreneur from Tel Aviv, began running a *hummusia* four years ago. Before that, Gil spent a long period of time in Europe and India, where he studied Tibetan medicine. Gil manages his restaurant in the same format as the *hummusiot*. That is the reason he called his restaurant Aba Gil—as a parody and Hebrewization of the Arabic “Abu” attached to the popular Arab *hummusiot* (both Abu and Aba mean father). But Aba Gil’s hummus is presented as organic. The restaurant has achieved relative success and wide media exposure. It was named “the first Zionist organic restaurant” (Lavi, 2009) and even tour guides such as *Wallpaper City Guide*¹² and *El Al* (Israeli airline) magazine recommend trying the “national” dish not in its “regular” or “industrialized” version, but in the “organic, more authentic version”—their claim.¹³

Alongside hummus, the restaurant serves a taste of new age culture in Israel. This is expressed by the influence of Far Eastern culture (or at least representation of the East by the West) demonstrated by the color orange (identified with Eastern cultures) that dominates the décor of the restaurant, futon sofas, low tables and the creation of a serene ambience. In addition, the customers are invited to take part in “rituals” of preparing compost (organic fertilizer), experience making organic pitas from wholewheat flour, and be updated on spiritual activities and self-healing treatments advertised on the restaurant bulletin board.

Gil serves foods, in addition to hummus, that he defines as vegetarian, healthy, dietetic and environmentally friendly. Out of all the foods, why was hummus chosen to be the central food of this organic restaurant? Gil explains:

First of all, I had and still have, a great love for hummus. Second, when I learned about nutrition, I understood that it isn’t by coincidence that certain foods developed in certain places... the spices used, the plants and vegetables have a deep connection to the place. It is not a coincidence that hummus developed here in the Middle East. It has qualities that are essential here. Hummus speaks for itself, it exists. It is *the* food here (interview, September 9, 2009).

The second way to sell organic hummus is through restaurants situated inside the supermarket chain Eden Teva Market, which specializes in natural, healthy and organic food products. Eden Teva Market is designed to be similar to the American supermarket chain Whole Foods. The hummus counter in the supermarket operates according to the McDonaldization principles, which George Ritzer (1995) stressed in his *McDonaldization of Society*: efficiency, calculability, predictability and

control. These restaurants sell organic hummus, wholewheat pitas, organic whole tahini, organic falafel and organic chopped vegetable salad. These are produced and served utilizing production and marketing methods that allow for serving the portion quickly, as a part of a “business meal,” with a fixed menu displayed on large lit posters and employment of temporary workers wearing uniform clothing (in the color green, which symbolizes environmentalism).

Eating organic hummus in Eden Teva Market thoroughly represents the cultural omnivore characterizing our era (Peterson and Kern, 1996; Warde, 2000). On the counter on which the diners eat are placemats depicting a reference to hummus from the Bible. From the performance aspect, the placemat expresses the assertion that “hummus is ours, the Israeli Jews.” But this local-symbolic representation is realistically interwoven in other expressions of the global: the hummus served on the counter is given a hybrid expression—Eden Hummus Bar (like Burger Bar or Sushi Bar). Furthermore, the diner who chooses to eat organic hummus in the supermarket Eden Teva Market gets to literally encounter a global-cultural supermarket: the way to the hummus stand entails an encounter with a department in which there are hundreds of spices from all over the world; a stand offering over 100 imported tea infusions; a stand in which more than 60 types of legumes imported from Egypt, Mexico, the United States, China, Guatemala and many other places are displayed; a variety of dried fruits imported from China, North and South America, Canada, Russia and Central Asia; departments specializing in food products from the Far East; a coffee shop offering different mixtures of imported gourmet coffee; and even a sushi bar. And so, the Israeli symbolic representation of hummus is integrated in “a taste of the world” and in assimilation of varied “other” cultural representations.

The common denominator of the *hummusia* version and the supermarket version is the prevailing socioeconomic conditions and the global ideals that allow tying the concept “organic” with hummus. These global conditions are those that create the imagined re-localization of hummus. The Americanization of Israeli society, expressed in the way the supermarket chain Eden Teva Market is run and designed, is renewing the symbolic representation of hummus as a neo-national commodity that signifies a particular past and imagined cultural continuation between Zionism and the ancient Israeli sovereignty. The new age culture represented by the Aba Gil *hummusia* symbolizes ancient continuity that preceded Israeli sovereignty and expresses ancient merging in the regions’ cultures and the sanctity of nature and place, implemented in the post-modern, multi-cultural Israeli context. In the area of distribution, just as in the area of production, I find a discrepancy between the post-modern—not to say post-Fordistic—structural conditions and the symbolic representations of locality and continuity.

Consumption: “Health is first (and also taste)!”

Organic food is perceived both in popular discourse and in marketing practices as a niche product. The relatively high price of organic food in Israel¹⁴ is the main reason that organic food is consumed mainly by the economic elite, who are capable of paying these premium prices. Yet, the preference for organic food requires not only economic capital, but also suitable cultural capital, in order to realize practices of reflexive consumerism. A survey conducted in Israel in July 2010 shows that people with a high level of education are more likely to buy food products that are labeled as natural, healthy and organic.¹⁵

American publicist David Brooks claims that the word “organic” (like words such as rustic, authentic, natural, simple) became one of the adjectives most commonly used by the “new middle class” in the United States whom he calls “Bobos”—bourgeois bohemians (2000:83). In Israel, organic food is consumed by a similar social category that shows a preference for foods classified as “simple,” “delicate,” “authentic” and “unprocessed.” And so, together with other organic foods, organic hummus was integrated mainly in the culinary repertoire of these privileged social groups.

Indicative interviews conducted with organic hummus consumers in Israel revealed that most of them do not give much thought to the production process of hummus, to the carbon footprint of the foods they consume or the rest of the production conditions described above.¹⁶ The main reasons for the preference for organic hummus over non-organic comes from the hummus being “clean, healthy, lower in calories, and devoid of harmful substances” (interview, 23-year-old female, November 18, 2009). Another main motive is taste. Many consumers attribute culinary quality to organic hummus: “This hummus is served hot and fresh. It doesn’t cause a feeling of heaviness and is free of the aftertaste of preservatives” (interview, 30-year-old male, February 4, 2010).

In his seminal book *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu presented the nuanced connection between taste and social class, and pointed out that upper classes prefer tasty, health-giving, light and non-fattening foods (1984:190). It seems that organic hummus integrated in the Israeli elites’ culinary repertoire in the same way and is perceived as one of the tasty-healthy commodities used to demonstrate their refined taste. A 24-year-old waitress from Aba Gil restaurant told me:

I speak a lot with consumers. I like to talk to them and ask them what they think about our restaurant, about the food, how they heard about the restaurant and what they think about our special organic hummus. I can tell you, without a doubt, that we have few consumers that started to eat organic food only for ecological reasons. I would say that 99% of our customers eat organic food for health reasons. This is by far their most important motivation to try our organic hummus for the first time. Many of them find it tasty and special, so they return also because of the taste. Of course all of

the organic eaters know a thing or two about ecological aspects, but if you ask me—it's not the most important thing for them (interview, November 18, 2009).

When I asked organic hummus consumers the reason they prefer organic hummus over non-organic, environmentalism and social justice were expressed only as a marginal motivation. Sustainability, for instance, is a term customarily used by consumers, but it seems that the main object they wanted to sustain was their bodies and health. For example, a 38-year-old accountant from Tel Aviv who eats organic hummus for lunch on a regular basis explained his eating preference:

I came here [to an organic restaurant in Tel Aviv] because I was looking for healthy food. I've been a vegetarian for many years and I'm strict about yoga and a healthy diet [...]. For work I travel a lot overseas. In Europe and America there is no problem finding healthy restaurants, organic restaurants [...]. I started eating here regularly because of the hummus, which is very tasty and has a good texture. I also persuaded some friends from the office to try the hummus and we come here two or three times a week. We all love hummus, so why should we compromise on industrial or unhealthy hummus? In order to save a few shekels? [...] As far as I'm concerned, the main thing is the quality of the hummus and the taste. Regarding organic and the whole thing with environmental quality, I recognize the importance of these subjects, but to tell the truth, it's just a bonus (interview, November 6, 2009).

Moreover, it seems that the previous symbolism of hummus is irrelevant to the consumer when it comes to the organic version. A clinical dietician in her early forties argued:

What does it matter if the hummus is Israeli or Arabic? The thing that should bother hummus consumers is the fact that industrial hummus isn't even real hummus. Real hummus is a dish made out of chickpeas without artificial additives and preservatives as in industrial hummus. I love hummus very much, but not the industrial kind. The healthiest hummus is made of organic chickpeas and whole tahini (interview, January 8, 2010).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated the centralism of the global socioeconomic conditions in the changes taking place in the symbolic and materialistic production processes of hummus in Israel. These enable the creation and flourishing of organic hummus,

which has become integrated within the Jewish-Israeli culinary repertoire, as part of the creation of a local variation of cosmopolitan habitus. This habitus is based on accessibility to the “global buffet” and the symbolic expressions which arise out of it.

In the framework of the Israeli cosmopolitan habitus, organic hummus serves as a flag of rootedness and belonging to the Israeli collective. It allows for the symbolic interweaving of trans-national and post-national values of environmentalism, sustainability and cosmopolitan moral orientation. But realistically, the wind in this flag is that of capitalization and commodification of social relations in Israel, including the colonial relations between Jews and Arabs. Connecting “organic” to “hummus” enables redesigning the dish, while shedding some of its particular representations (Arabic; a reflection of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict) and changing it to a post-particularistic cultural object, devoid of political-historical context.

Organic hummus weaves the previous representations of the dish hummus (national and Middle Eastern food) and makes it into a means for demonstrating accessibility to networks of knowledge, information and global similes; a cultural-consumer post-modern being; and an indicator of cultural cosmopolitanization. In this way, despite the comparative decline of the modern national identity (Zionism) (Ram, 1999:135) and the (relative and limited) founding of a civil society and liberalization in Israel (Ben Eliezer, 1999), hummus continues to be expropriated from the Arab or Middle Eastern identity and continues to be appropriated to the Jewish-Israeli culture. But with the change of hummus to organic hummus, the appropriation becomes an arbitrator through gentrification of the food in Israel, characterized by the symbolic presentation of lifestyle, health and, to a lesser extent, global environmentalism.

To be sure, the appearance of a multi-dimensional food such as organic hummus testifies to significant cultural changes taking place in Israeli society, including cultural openness and the formation of cosmopolitan identity. But exploration of the symbolic representations and the structural processes related to Israeli cultural artifacts teach us something about the nature of this cosmopolitan identity: that the ideals of health and quality constitute the main component in the Israeli organic model. These values faithfully express the new “Israeliness” that began developing in the 1970s—a culture based on individualism, ambition and a hedonistic narrative, contrary to the collective unification that characterized an earlier Israeliness (Ram, 2008).

But does being a cosmopolitan in Israel mean “adopting an identity free from national borders,” like the dictionary definition of the term “cosmopolitanism”?¹⁷ Not necessarily. The phrase “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Beck, 2003; Cohen, 1992) is an expression of simultaneous involvement in the local and the global. Sociologist Sydney Tarrow claims that, whereas cosmopolitans move physically and cognitively outside their origins, they continue to be linked to place, to the social networks that inhabit that space, and to the resources, experiences and opportunities that place

provides them with (Tarrow, 2005:42). Thus, in the case before us, the appearance and absorption of ideological aspects such as “green thinking” and “global environmental perception” into the Israeli bourgeois repertoire expresses cosmopolitanism and a longing for “global.” However, the concentration on the self demonstrates the anchoring of the rootedness of cosmopolitanism in its Israeli version. Health and quality, which arise from my research as the main values in Israeli organics, might be related to the local Israeli culture of “not being a *freier*,” which emphasizes the unwillingness to contribute without compensation.

The Israeli cosmopolitan repertoire is focused on lifestyle and Western fashionable trends characterized by commodification of health, gourmetization and caring for oneself, without fundamental involvement with the other. Therefore, I would like to propose the concept of “symbolic cosmopolitanism” to describe this cultural repertoire.

Analysis of organic hummus ingredients, in addition to the modes of distribution and consumption, demonstrates that the fetishism of organic food in Israel is designed according to discrepancies between structural conditions and symbolic representations. Production of organic food in Israel is mostly based on global procedures; its distribution is based on symbolic patterns of re-localization, but is actually imagined by virtue of global structural processes; and in the consumption processes symbolic post-material patterns of fairness and environmentalism are interwoven, but they are fundamentally tied to the self. The realm of organic food in Israel ties producers, distributors and consumers in a limited discursive field, concentrated mainly on the individual, and does not pretend to turn the act of cooking and eating into a social critique or political-consumer praxis.

Organic hummus is a commodity saturated in paradoxical aspects, characterized by culinary-ideological dissonance. Materialistically, its ingredients are organic chickpeas, organic tahini, organic wholewheat pita bread and organic olive oil. But symbolically, it is composed of imaginary re-localization and global ingredients, used by the westernized elite in Israel to represent a cosmopolitan whole-environmental identity.

NOTES

¹ The Hebrew word *freier* (to be a *freier*) might be translated as being gullible or being easily tricked. Respectively, “not to be a *freier*” could be translated as being no one’s fool. For extensive discussion of the source of the concept, see Roniger and Feige (1992).

² <http://ong.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=679743>.

³ The Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership is a non-profit organization. Its declared mission is “Building a sustainable future for Israeli

society—environmentally, socially and economically—through education and reflective activism.” See <http://heschel.org.il/eng/about/mission>.

⁴ Culture researchers Dafna Hirsch and Ofra Tene (2010) argue that, as a result of industrial manufacture and commercial distribution, hummus was already an established “national dish” in 1967.

⁵ For example, see the encounter between McDonald’s, as the epitome of global fast food, and the Israeli local version of fast food, namely, the falafel (Ram, 2004).

⁶ A category constituting in itself part of the new middle class in Israel (Tavory, 2007:114).

⁷ See http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/principles/index.html.

⁸ Of course there are many ways to season hummus. Most common is lemon and garlic, but the chickpeas, tahini and olive oil are mandatory ingredients.

⁹ The wheat grown in Israel—organic and non-organic—constitutes 5%–25% of the yearly quantity used for grinding flour. The rest of the flour produced in Israel is ground from imported wheat (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998).

¹⁰ See <http://www.greenaction.org.il/fair.php>.

¹¹ Recently, the name of this restaurant was changed to Aba Gil—Organic Food House.

¹² See <http://www.abagil.com/wp-content/gallery/press-e/press-7.jpg>.

¹³ See <http://www.abagil.com/wp-content/gallery/press-e/press-8.jpg>.

¹⁴ In Israel, organic food products are 20%–25% more expensive than parallel non-organic products. This data is taken from a survey conducted by Panels Institute for *The Marker* newspaper (Hebrew) published July 8, 2010. See <http://shivuk.themarker.com/news/index.dot?id=49889>.

¹⁵ See <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3215322,00.html>.

¹⁶ This finding arises from interviews conducted with 17 diners in the following restaurants: Aba Gil, Eden Teva Market and Yevulim in Tel Aviv; Eden Teva Market in Kfar Saba; and consumers of organic hummus in the Tel Aviv harbor farmers’ market. The diners were chosen randomly during a visit to these restaurants. All the interviews were conducted in the restaurants themselves. In addition, two interviews were conducted with a waiter and waitress from Aba Gil restaurant. All interviews were conducted between September 2009 and March 2010.

¹⁷ *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 4th ed., 1989:267, Oxford University Press.

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