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# Intertwining Tradition with Modernity: The Case of Palestinian Restaurants in Israel

Liora Gvion

*Palestinian restaurants in Israel are settings that express modernity incorporating traditional practices. Their operation rests on social capital, taste and memories long coded in Arab culture and history. These codes construct the restaurant as an authentic space from a Palestinian point of view as their menus reveal the social relations embedded in the production and consumption of food, tastes and bodily practices characteristic of Palestinian society. Simultaneously, restaurateurs and diners introduce narratives of modernity that neither rule out food traditions nor jeopardise traditional social patriarchal hierarchies in Palestinian society. The narration of modernity enables restaurateurs and diners to deliberately construct the image of Palestinian food in Israel as traditional and limited that consists mostly of dishes such as hummus, tabouleh and grilled meats. They gain control over the commodification of Palestinian dishes, the dissemination of culinary knowledge beyond the Palestinian community and voice their protest against the position that Palestinians occupy in Israeli society.*

*Keywords: Palestinian Food; Ethnic Entrepreneurs; Culture; Consumption; Commodified Culture; Restaurants; Palestinians in Israel; Food; Authenticity; Tradition; Modernity; Gender*

I was sitting with Nazam in his restaurant in the heart of Nazareth when I realised that menus in Palestinian restaurants in Israel, regardless of their location and targeted clientele, were similar if not identical. How could I have missed this? Menus in ethnic restaurants reflect on the histories of the group they represent, the social positions they occupy in their destined country. They also reflect on the kind of

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clients they wish to attract (Harbottle 1997, Ferrero 2002, Barabas 2003, Girardelli 2004, Hsu 2005, Beriss and Sutton 2007, Lem 2007, Yano 2007, Gaytan 2008, Gvion and Trostler 2009, Highmore 2009, Karaosmanoglu 2009, Liu and Lin 2009, Buettner 2012, Ray and Srinivas 2012). In contrast, Palestinian restaurateurs in Israel seem to act as if the identity of the client has little to do with the choice of dishes or the staging of the restaurant. To a Jewish Israeli, these restaurants seem to fit the stereotypical image in which one lunches over a bowl of hummus and salad, followed by shishlik with French fries, and concluding with sweet black coffee. Why are the menus similar, and how does this similarity reflect on the position that Palestinians occupy in Israel?

Palestinian restaurants in Israel, I argue, are social settings that operate according to social capital, taste and memories long coded in Arab culture and history. These codes enable restaurateurs and diners to introduce narratives of modernity that do not rule out food traditions, but rather complement and restructure them. Moreover, the simultaneous existence of tradition and modernity constructs the local restaurant as an authentic Palestinian space as opposed to restaurants in the Jewish sections of Israel to which modern codes of behaviour apply. By refraining from serving dishes that are traditionally eaten at home, restaurateurs reinforce the social relations embedded in the production of food and expect the consumption of food restricted to traditional bodily practices characteristic of Palestinian society. For instance, women are expected to visit the restaurant only in company of men of their family, respect traditional dress codes and, in certain cases even let the men order for them. The Palestinian restaurants remain spaces in which modernities are expressed through the restaurateurs attempt to gain control over the commodification of Palestinian dishes in Israel. They become active social agents who are in-charge of the dissemination of culinary knowledge beyond the Palestinian community and use their access to food knowledge to express dissatisfaction with the position Palestinians occupy in Israel.

### **Modernisation, Authenticity and the Restaurant**

Modernisation is a historical process in which developing societies, whose members engage in intertwined spheres of activity and whose world view is primarily religious, gradually become knowledge societies, organised around professions and expert knowledge (Habermas 1986). By glorifying the new over the old, modernity transforms newness into a fundamental value that redefines other values (Vattimo 1988). Increased professionalism and secularism, as well as the elevation of the new to a sacred level, have led modernity to be identified with the capitalist economy (Simmel 1971), an increase in social mobility and a change in the organisation of relations between ethnic groups.

A broad line of research centres on how developing societies construct their own narratives of modernity. Chakrabarty's (2001) semiotic reading of the white *khadi* worn by public servants in India is an example of how non-Western societies instil

their own meanings of modernity informed by a notion of tradition. Originally, the white *khadi* stood for the politician's capacity to make sacrifices in the public/national interest. Today, white *khadi* represents either a thoughtless habit of the politician or his uncaring hypocrisy. Chakrabarty (2001) suggests seeing the *khadi* as an excuse for thinking about alternative constructions of the values of public life in Indian modernity, and in particular, about ways in which heterogeneous possibilities are both opened up and closed off in the modernity that colonial rule gave to India as a part of its legacy.

The popularity of Western fast food in China and Russia is another example of how locals assign their own meanings to modern icons. Russians and Chinese saw fast food chains as an opportunity to participate in modern and global culture. Yet while the Chinese interpreted their consumption as a way of preparing children for life in a Western world, the Russians looked at ways to incorporate the foods into their native culture (Caldwell 2004, Gillette 2005, Lozada 2005).

Modernity is a keyword for Palestinian citizens of Israel. During the final decades of the twentieth century, social stratification reshaped the face of Palestinian society in Israel. On the fringes of the Israeli bourgeoisie arose a Palestinian bourgeoisie, which aimed to exist within the Israeli economy. During the same period, the Palestinian intelligentsia, whose numbers had grown, began to organise. Exposure to democratic political apparatuses raised political awareness among Palestinians in Israel and stimulated organisation to achieve civil rights, raise the level of education and thus promote social mobility. For Palestinians, modernisation entails an adoption of life patterns perceived as more Western and more suited to the specific demands and needs of the Palestinian public. It brings about a rise in educational level, greater professional opportunity, gradual entry into the middle class, recognition of their equal rights in Israel and the consumption of new products (Bishara 1993, Pappé 1994, Al-Haj 1997, Yiftachel 1999, Rabinowitz and Abu-Baker 2002, Blumen and Halevi 2005, Levi 2005, Soen 2005, Jabareen 2006, Abu-Saad 2006, Gvion 2009).

Palestinians do not see the adaptation of a modern approach to cooking as antithetical to preserving the old; it is not an affront to a religious revival, nor a threat to male dominance in the household and community or to the nationalism stirring among parts of the Palestinian public in Israel. Modernity is in constant dialogue with tradition (Gvion 2009). Palestinian women in Israel, for example, narrate their versions of modernity to refashion the discourses that are central to Palestinian activism. Rising levels of female education, a decrease in fertility rates and the ongoing preoccupation with notions of modernity have all contributed to more autonomy for women. They face interrelated familial, national and ethnic forms of oppression and navigate between them. In their capacity as bearers simultaneously of modernity and tradition, women benefit from such opportunities and express their own positioning in domestic and political contexts. Simultaneously, they face a serious dilemma in their attempts to be modern in a society in which identity is marked by tradition. Their social activism requires them to confront constant

criticism from their own families and experience a certain sense of isolation (Fair 2002, Blumen and Halevi 2005, Sa'ar 2005, 2007).

Although Palestinians in Israel have become 'modern', the State of Israel has done little to provide them with institutional means to reinforce this self-representation. A study of rural ethnic tourism in the Palestinian sector in Israel shows that, while the Palestinian population aims to present itself to Jews as modern, state agencies have encouraged commodification of their traditional culture. They portray Palestinians as a group over which modernisation has skipped, with the aim of having Jews experience the Arab village as a tourist site (Stein 1998). A lack of necessary social capital, as in the case of Indian food entrepreneurs in the USA (Ray 2012), prevents Palestinian entrepreneurs from understanding what will appeal to a Jewish clientele. A similar construction of authenticity is apparent in Korpela's (2010) study of Western music students in India, who claim to appreciate an authentic India that actually refers to a romanticised perception of the country's ancient past rather than its modern present.

Individuals and groups construct and modify their particular versions of the modern, and the way in which modernity converses with tradition. This also raises questions about authenticity. Although a subjective and negotiated experience, authenticity, as experienced by individuals, reflects on relations of representations, which are connected to structural positions, social practices, cultural meanings and the complex constellation of power in which performances of authenticity take place (Wang 1999, Chhabra *et al.* 2003, Xie and Wall 2003, Gray 2004, Uriely 2005, Chhabra 2010).

Negotiated and constructed authenticity, for instance, promotes conservation efforts and sustainable developments of heritage in areas in Eastern Europe in which Jews once lived. Entrepreneurs use Jewish culture in these projects to create new 'Jewish spaces'. Comparing 'virtually Jewish spaces' with 'virtually wild western spaces', Gruber (2009) shows that, although imaginary spaces, both have to do with the ways people use other cultures to shape their own identities. They deal with social constructs, often stereotypes, in reference to what it means to be Jewish or a Native American, and are, therefore, creations of new authenticities; places that in themselves not only are real but are also altogether different from the reality on which they are modelled. 'Jewish' cafes, restaurants, bookshops and cultural centres have become part of the reality of Polish cities that represent something bygone but fondly remembered. They present a lost world playing on nostalgia and imagination, representing what people wish the Jewish world had really been, once upon a time. Similarly, in the historic centre of Damascus, many restaurants and cafes have come to create an atmosphere of an imagined past and to serve food that was once associated with the poor and now has come to symbolise authenticity and exoticism. Along the same lines, since the 1990s, Ottoman restaurants in Istanbul have used food to recapture a royal past (Salamandra 2004, Karaosmanoglu 2009).

Restaurants are not only representations of the bygone and the wish-to-be, but they are also social texts by which dominant and minority groups construct their

public images and participate in the commodification of their food. As texts, they illuminate the connection between culinary and political processes and provide a glimpse into the prevailing web of power relations by revealing relations of trust, suspicion and exchange between two cultures. By producing food for clients, ethnic and minority groups participate in the commercialisation, de-authentication and possible appropriation of their culinary assets, while still speaking in their own voice in the discourse of food. In this way, objects considered national or ethnic artefacts gain economic and social relevance; the unfamiliar becomes familiar, new culinary traditions emerge and the local goes global (Appandurai 1988, Stein 1998, Lu and Fine 1995, Zukin 1995, Ferrero 2002, Barabas 2003, Girardelli 2004, Beriss and Sutton 2007, Trostler and Gvion 2007, Gaytan 2008, Highmore 2009, Dewey 2012).

Social groups differ in the meanings they assign to eating out and in their ability to commodify their food and present it as 'authentic'. Americans, for instance, dismissed Italian food because Italians were poor rather than for any objective evaluation of their cuisine. The English rejected Iranian food because they were hostile towards Iran. Only in the 1980s did Mexican dishes begin to win partial acceptance in the USA, mostly due to fast food chains and the entrance of frozen Mexican foods into American supermarkets (Levenstein 1985, Belasco 1987, Harbottle 1997, Girardelli 2004, Ray 2007).

Despite their fabricated and socially constructed character, performances of authenticity influence how people identify with their native cultures and reveal the extent to which immigrant cultures have been assimilated into or excluded from the dominant culture (Ray and Srinivas 2012). In their decision whether to present their food as novel and exotic or as part of the mainstream culinary culture, immigrant and minority entrepreneurs are recapturing their past through commoditised forms of food and thus insinuating themselves into the rules of the host culture. Indian restaurants in England, for example, are established on sites where cheap food had previously been provided. They operate in rented settings that change hands frequently among a network of family and friends and are intercultural zones where different ethnicities meet. As they become part of the British urban landscape, they are appropriated by the host culture. The menu becomes standardised and expands to include dishes that are invented in Britain (Highmore 2009). The study of Indian restaurants in Manhattan shows that culinary performances of Indian immigrants are shaped not only by their material and social capital, but also by what they see as 'Indian' in America (Ray 2012).

Ethnic and minority groups also differ in their ability to authenticate and control the public image of their cuisine. Restaurateurs have difficulties disrupting mainstream ideas about what is and what is not authentic. Members of the dominant group often open restaurants, which offer their own version of ethnic food, claiming their customers are not ready for real ethnic food (Barabas 2003, Abarca 2004, Lou 2007, Gvion and Trostler 2009). Groups at the lower ends of society also use consumption to construct an identity that manages contests and extends common cultural categorisations that reproduce oppositional and conventional representations. Mexican restaurants in the

USA measure authenticity not only by the nature of the menu, but also by the restaurant's decorum, its Spanish-speaking staff, the ability for one to order in Spanish and by the number of Mexicans dining in the restaurant. With the aim of coming across as authentic, restaurateurs serve dishes that old Mexican women cook in their home kitchens or the food of their hometowns, which customers may eat when visiting Mexico (Gaytan 2008).

This article looks at Palestinian restaurants in Israel as spaces that reflect modernities. On the one hand, eating out is regarded as a modern practice, but on the other hand, the restaurant is seen as a setting in which tradition still plays a significant role. These restaurants, from a Palestinian point of view, are constructed as authentic. The space operates according to Palestinian cultural capital and traditional bodily practices, which restrict women's participation. Menus include dishes that are recognised as authentic restaurant foods and that are prepared by men. Simultaneously, eating out as a family or with friends is a modern phenomenon. Consequently, Palestinians distinguish, based on bodily and food practices, between traditional 'Palestinian spaces' where traditional behavioural practices apply, and 'non-Palestinian spaces' that they share with Jews, where modern modes of conduct apply. Through the idea of an alternatively constructed notion of modernity, I can argue that restaurateurs and diners speak for a national Palestinian narrative that enables them to protest their position in Israeli society. They present themselves as guardians of the Palestinian culinary culture who keep their culinary information within the bounds of the Palestinian community.

### **Methodology**

This article is part of a larger study on the social and political aspects of Palestinian food in Israel. Data were gathered through participant observation and detailed interviews of 100 men and women representative of the Palestinian community in Israel. All participants, with the exception of two women who were in their nineties, were fluent in Hebrew. Although not many of the men I interviewed were trained as professional cooks or chefs, about one-third of them made a living, at some point of their adult lives, by cooking in a restaurant, managing one or waiting tables. I spent one to three days with each of the participants. I visited them in their homes or restaurants and joined them in their activities. Frequently, a relative, friend or neighbour was present during the interview and joined in the conversation. Their contributions were integrated into the data.

Interviews were conducted in an informal way. They consisted mostly of conversations with the participants. Once the conversation started, I never interrupted their speech or stream of thought. At most, I asked clarifying questions regarding their statements. This method both established trust and was a sign of respect towards participants. It allowed them to share information that I could never have acquired through structured interviews. Data were coded according to major themes provided by the participants. The themes were compared to those mentioned

by peers. Unique comments made by participants were analysed in order to evaluate the extent to which they were consistent with the rest of the data.

Interviews focused on the circumstances under which men chose to make a living from food, their training and promotion as cooks, chefs or restaurant managers, the composition of the restaurant's menu, the nature of dishes served in restaurants and the social profile of their clientele. We also spoke about the circumstances under which both Palestinians and Jews ate in restaurants, the kinds of dishes they ordered, the prices they were willing to pay for Palestinian food and the role the restaurant played for each group. Most of the participants said cooking was one of the options for Palestinian men to make a living and lessen their dependence on Israeli employers. Additionally, Palestinians felt cooking enabled them to gain control over their lives, upholding Palestinian culture and resisting the appropriation of Palestinian dishes into the Israeli culinary repertoire.

### **The Construction of Traditional Palestinian Spaces**

Cafes and restaurants have always been major locations in Palestinian villages where men met and from which women were excluded. Conversely, going out as a family for a meal is part of a modern way of life, which Palestinians adopt in a selective manner. The meanings attached to eating out lie in the menu, which excludes domestic foods, regardless of whether the intended customers are Jewish or Palestinian. The menu shows that Palestinian restaurateurs expect their clients to eat out as a gesture to the woman of the house, with the aim of freeing her from her daily duties. Therefore, out of respect to the woman, diners order dishes they might prepare only rarely at home.

Gender dynamics in Palestinian society are, then, essential for understanding how Palestinian restaurants in Israel operate and why Palestinians see them as authentic. While in the restaurant, men and women join forces to stage a public image of Palestinian society as traditional in spite of its exposure to a modern lifestyle. Men use restaurants to practice masculinity and control women's bodily practices in 'Palestinian spaces'. Women, regardless of how independent they define themselves, respect tradition and eat out in 'Palestinian spaces' only in the company of the men from their families.

Leaving out dishes that women are expected to prepare at home is taken as an expression of respect for female culinary knowledge and the role women fulfil as homemakers and sustainers of Palestinian domestic cookery. Amin, a restaurateur from Um-El-Fahem, a major town in the Triangle, says:

My clients respect their wives and want to treat them by taking them out. I respect our women and therefore I never serve dishes that women prepare at home. I want them to feel like queens on their day off.

Azam, a restaurateur from Nazareth, who caters mostly to Palestinians, explains:



If I listed meluhiye or olesh on the menu, my clients would laugh at me. They eat it at home all the time. Why would they order it in a restaurant? At a restaurant people order shawarma, shishlik, kebobs and never dishes that our women prepare.

The story of a restaurateur from Arabe, a town in the southern Galilee, who caters to Jews and Palestinians and, therefore, included in the menu dishes such as maklubeh, megadra and akub, all of which are considered domestic dishes, exemplifies the strength of the distinction between home and restaurant food:

Palestinians do not want to eat in a restaurant what they eat at home. Jews are a little suspicious. They don't order dishes they're unfamiliar with.

The restaurateurs understand that, for them to win a devoted Palestinian clientele, it is essential they stage their place as a setting that respects tradition. Therefore, they refrain from serving foods whose serving might question women's fulfilment of their domestic duties. They stick to the distinction between home food and restaurant food based on the gender of the cook, the nature of the dish and the context in which the food is consumed.

The staging of the restaurant as homage to women's culinary knowledge and devotion to her household labour does not meet much objection from Palestinian women. Some, at least when talking to outsiders, share this mode of thought. Lila, who is engaged to be married, works for her brother, who manages a cafeteria at a major university. She says:

Women never order in a restaurant what they prepare at home. If they did, people would think they know nothing about cooking. If a man ordered such a dish in a restaurant, it would be like admitting his wife failed to perform her duties. It's humiliating. A man must know that his wife can cook.

For Lila, Palestinian restaurants are the arenas in which the positioning of women and the locations in which food knowledge are manifested and revalidated. Lila contextualises men's and women's orders in a restaurant in a traditional framework that distinguishes between male and female bodily practices as used in food-related activities. The restaurant, in that case, reaffirms gender hierarchies and the bodily practices that come with it and serves as a platform to demonstrate tradition. Thus, although eating out is a modern phenomenon in which women participate, their visits to restaurants must not jeopardise the traditional image of Palestinian society that the restaurant conveys.

The staging of the restaurant as 'Palestinian space' that operated according to traditional codes prevented dating couples from dining together in their home village. Although some of my interviewees were well-educated women, who thought of themselves as modern and independent in many aspects of their lives, they conformed to this expectation for fear the practice of modern bodily practices might offend their families or raise questions about their morals. Consequently, dating couples dined in restaurants that were not marked as 'Palestinian spaces', as mentioned by Miriam, a graduate student in sociology, from Arabe:

My fiancé and I go to Natanya or Hadera. I heard that in Jaffa and Haifa, women eat with their fiancés at local restaurants. They are more modern than we are.

Similarly, Muna, a tourist guide from the Galilee, states:

My father is very modern and trusts me. It is the second time that I am engaged to be married. When I told him my fiancé was taking me out for dinner, he said: 'Just don't eat here in the village because it humiliates me'. We went to Naharia, which is about 20 kilometres away.

Although Muna and Miriam were professional modern women, who have gained independence in other aspects of their lives, they refrained from challenging tradition in this context. The women I interviewed chose to cooperate for various reasons. Some felt that by avoiding being seen in restaurants on their own, they gained freedom in more important areas of their lives, such as becoming professionals and having a career. Others felt satisfied with the independence they had and were, therefore, willing to play a part in staging the restaurant as an icon of Palestinian tradition, over which Western modernity had skipped. Finally, some women compared their position to that of older women in the community and felt their lives were better.

Daily encounters with Jews (for example, in the workplace), marrying out of the community, travelling and exposure to the media have all opened up Palestinian society to novel influences which provide opportunities for its modernisation. However, attempts to modernise the local restaurant and make it accessible to women have been met with resistance. The reaction caused by daily visits of a Danish woman, married to a local Palestinian physician, to the village cafe exemplifies the potential complications that emerge from behaviour as such:

She used to go to the local café every morning, wearing shorts. She sat and joked with all the men. She didn't understand she was humiliating her husband.

Although she was an outsider to the community and married to a physician who had studied abroad and was familiar with her background, the villagers expected the woman to respect traditional bodily practices regarding participation in the public sphere. Her violation of these codes was taken as an insult to her husband and as a risk to his reputation, not hers. The villagers did not fear she might become a role model for other women, under the assumption that Palestinian women knew this mode of behaviour was unacceptable.

The number of professional Palestinian women who work out of the house has been growing. Many of them have Jewish colleagues and acquaintances, who go out on their own. Consequently, professional women, followed by others, have begun to go, with colleagues and friends, to cafes and restaurants in locations they do not see exclusively as 'Palestinian spaces'. Hishmi, a schoolteacher, claims she and her girlfriends have been going to cafes at the mall, a 20-minute drive from her house, after a class they all take:

The Jewish women always went after class and invited us to join them. It felt a little awkward at first, but not anymore. We even started going on our own. Not in the village, but in the mall, it's okay.

Hishmi and her friends have introduced a change in women's participation in the public sphere of dining without endangering the authenticity of the Palestinian restaurant. They gain access to public dining without being accompanied by men in spaces where the presence of men is neither necessary nor has the same social significance as in the village restaurant. Moreover, their visits to cafes, with or without their Jewish colleagues, do not challenge men's power or position in Palestinian society. Rather, Palestinian women are presented as accustomed to modern conventions outside of Palestinian spaces and, at the same time, as respectful of their tradition. They exemplify both the modern and the traditional and hence become the embodiment of modernity.

In conclusion, the Palestinian restaurant is an arena that differentiates between domestic cooking labour performed by women and restaurant food, which relies on men's kitchen work. By refraining from serving dishes associated with women's cooking, restaurateurs can stage the restaurant as an authentic setting that reinforces gender hierarchies and sustains Palestinian culinary tradition and the social relations it embeds. Women accept the limitations imposed on their participation in the public sphere in the Arab sector and use cafes to express their 'Western' modern selves in 'non-Palestinian' spaces. Palestinian women use of restaurants allows them to be 'modern' in 'non-Palestinian' sites without risking their freedom, position or being accused of offending tradition. They are simultaneously 'modern' and 'traditional'.

### **Negotiated Modernity: Food, Identity and Power**

Palestinians wish to eat out at restaurants outside the Palestinian village; they also refer to the experience as complicated and multilayered, with contradicting meanings. On the one hand, Palestinians believe dining out is essential for the modernisation and westernisation of the community, as it exposes them to different foods and eating conventions. On the other hand, eating out in 'non-Palestinian' restaurants brings feelings of estrangement to the surface, reveals their lack of appropriate social capital and emphasises their social marginality.

Excitement about broadening the culinary repertoire and modernising the Palestinian kitchen and society interweave with concerns about the possible outcomes of eating out – for instance, the modernisation of women. Young educated women report that their wish to reduce domestic duties by eating out regularly is often understood by Palestinian men – educated or not – as a threat to male domination in the home and community and to Palestinian culture in general.

Ibtisam grew up in Ramla (a mixed Jewish–Arab town on the outskirts of Tel Aviv). She is 23 years old and engaged to be married to a social worker from the Triangle. Upon graduation from the School of Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, she started working as a secretary for the Ministry of Education. Her Palestinian boss claims her attempts to be modern at all costs reflect disrespect to the Palestinian tradition in general, and a misunderstanding of the role women occupy in

Palestinian society in particular. Ibtisam, conversely, argues her wish to be modern is genuine:

Boss: She wants to eat out every day.

Ibtisam: That's true. I don't want to spend all day in the kitchen like my mom.

Boss: She wants her friends to think she's modern. She understands neither the roles Palestinian women have nor how much Palestinian men respect them. It is because of women like her that we are going to lose our cultural distinctions.

Ibtisam: I don't want to be respected for my cooking. I want to earn my own money, spend it, be pretty and take my children out to restaurants.

Boss: I know your in-laws and you do not see eye to eye with them.

Ibtisam: Men like you understand nothing.

Amir, a cook from Acre, is concerned about his 21-year-old daughter, who does not intend to get married before she graduated from nursing school. He believes her lifestyle prevents her from mastering the essential skills that Palestinian women are expected to possess prior to marriage:

She lives in the dorms, has no interest in cooking. She takes food from home but mostly eats in the cafeterias on campus. She is proud of leading a life similar to that of her Jewish roommates. She talks about taking her children to restaurants as often as possible. It worries me.

The different attitudes that Ibtisam, on the one hand, and Amir and the boss, on the other hand, express towards eating out reveal cultural and generational gaps in contemporary Palestinian society. The men stand for a generation that understands modernity as potentially changing long-time domestic arrangements and opening the possibility for educated women to deny their household obligations. Consequently, men fear modernity might jeopardise their position, challenge traditional gender hierarchies and lead to the obliteration of a patriarchal Palestinian culture. However, neither Ibtisam nor any other young women I met wanted access to the traditional village cafes or restaurants, which they viewed as exclusively traditional male spaces. They intended to use the restaurant out of the village as an institution through which they could introduce their own children to a modern lifestyle.

As concerned as some men are about the consequences of modernity on the Palestinian community, they also admit it opens up opportunities to become familiar with contemporary culinary trends and eases their mingling in 'non-Palestinian' spaces. Yet, familiarising oneself with modern foods exacts a price. Mustafa, a technician married to a dental assistant, complains about the new tastes that modernity introduces to Palestinian culture. For his 45th birthday, his wife prepared a dish she had eaten in a restaurant in Haifa, where she attended a birthday party for one of her Jewish colleagues:

She stuffed a chicken with cherries and pineapple and was proud of serving something different. It looked repulsive and tasted like chicken with jam. I felt sorry for her but insisted she never cook that modern stuff at home.

Conversely, Nur, a paediatrician at a major hospital, faces no resentment from her husband for her attempts to feed her family on dishes that she has eaten in restaurants. She attributes it to their middle-class professional lifestyle:

My husband is willing to try everything. We both studied in Italy, where we learned to prepare Italian food. I cook French and Italian dishes all the time. I even prepare paella but adjust the spices a little bit.

Ali, her husband, believes that eating out is essential for one's socialisation, as it exposes one to a modern lifestyle and prepares Palestinians for future meetings with non-Palestinians:

As a student in Italy, I often joined other students for a meal at a local restaurant. After the first time, when I had no idea what to order, I decided to eat out regularly and try new dishes. My wife and I take our children out at least once a month so they'll be prepared for adult life in a modern society. I make it a point to try something new whenever we eat out.

Ali's and Nur's restaurant experience is not typical of Palestinians in Israel, who prefer dining out in their own village or in a nearby town. When eating in 'non-Palestinian' spaces, they mostly visit fast food chains or restaurants owned by Mizrahi Jews that serve substantial and inexpensive meals. The majority avoids upscale dining for lack of social capital that brings feelings of estrangement and being out of place to the surface (Ray 2012). Subtle animosity on the part of the staff and their expressed concerns for the safety of other diners, especially during unstable times, make the restaurant visit unpleasant. Manar, a banker from Jaffa, tells me:

When my daughter and I went shopping, we chose one of the more expensive restaurants at a fancy shopping centre. The waiter turned pale when he heard us speak Arabic. It made us feel uncomfortable. We ate quickly and silently. The owner was happy when we left.

Bashir, a school principal, went through a similar experience:

I was sitting at a restaurant in Haifa two weeks after a terrorist bomber committed suicide in a place nearby that was owned by Palestinians. People were staring at us. I asked my children to speak Hebrew, which silenced us throughout the meal. That's why we rarely go.

Having felt uncomfortable in restaurants where one was waited upon at the table, Hasani decided to limit his visits to chain restaurants where diners are served over the counter. His experience at a coffee counter made him doubt his decision:

After taking my order, the cashier asked what my name was. I hesitated for a second and said 'Hanan' [a common Jewish-Israeli name]. 'Hasan' [a typically Arab name], she asked? 'No, I said, Hanan'. A few minutes later, I heard the speaker announcing 'Hasan'. I looked around and no one got up. A minute later, they called me again. I was furious and left.

Conversely, Aya, her fiancé and a few of their friends were determined to enjoy their visit to a trendy restaurant in Tel Aviv. While eating their first course, they heard one of the waiters saying she was afraid the presence of Palestinians would affect the popularity of the place. Aya's fiancé complained to the manager and after a long conversation, parts of which were loud, the waiter apologised and dessert was provided on the house. They left determined to repeat the experience in other places.

These examples show how the discourse on the modernisation of Palestinian society and the discourse on dining out intertwine with the political discourse, which expects Palestinians to make use of distinctive public spaces. From a Palestinian point of view, attempts to participate in 'non-Palestinian' spaces as part of a modern lifestyle are met by Jews with prejudice and hostility. Although entitled to participation in 'Jewish spaces', the humiliation embedded in the experience of dining out reduces the number of visits to non-Palestinian restaurants even at the price of giving up modernity, i.e. giving up eating out, which Palestinians associate with a modern lifestyle. But at the same time, Palestinians take their restaurant experience as an opportunity to voice their complaints for being taken first of all as Palestinians and only afterwards as clients and fellow citizens.

Whereas hostility and suspicion on behalf of fellow diners and the staff affect the frequency of eating out, the abstention from upscale restaurants is also connected to a lack of cultural capital. The serving of multiple courses, the small portions and the ingredients in use – all of which are foreign to Palestinian cooking tradition – complicate the experience. Nasser, a physician at a major hospital, was invited to celebrate the promotion of one of his colleagues:

They chose an expensive Chinese restaurant that looked very nice. Since I have never been to a Chinese restaurant, I let them order. I could tolerate the dumplings, although the spices were very different from those we use. The meat and fish felt raw, and the vegetables and the pineapple they were cooked with tasted strange. They all used chopsticks as if they had been using them since childhood. I was the only one who didn't enjoy the meal.

Mona and her husband, both pharmacists, who were celebrating their anniversary at a French restaurant, did not know how to interpret their waiter's behaviour:

He introduced himself by his first name and we didn't know whether we should have introduced ourselves too. He placed very small quantities on our plates and we did not know whether we should help ourselves to seconds from the general plate. He looked astonished when we told him we didn't drink alcohol and when we laughed at the idea of having cheese after the main course. We felt out of place.

As comfortable as Nasser and Mona feel among their colleagues, as professionals who are well adjusted to a modern lifestyle, their restaurant visit reminded them how culturally far apart they were from them and highlighted the complexities embedded in the Palestinian–Jewish relationship in Israel.

In short, attempts by Palestinians to capitalise on the communal public sphere were challenged from both a political and cultural standpoint, and their social marginality was reaffirmed. Moreover, feeling out of place and humiliated was taken

as an indication that their professional and modern identity still came second to their perceived traditional ethnic distinctiveness.

In conclusion, the experience of Palestinians in non-Palestinian restaurants highlights the complexities embedded in the Palestinian–Jewish relationship in Israel. The complicated meanings embedded in the Palestinians’ restaurant experience show how food, authenticity and power are interrelated and how the culinary scene is effected by social positioning. Encountering Jews in ‘non-Palestinian spaces’ also brings feelings of humiliation and misunderstandings to the surface. As modern as Palestinians may feel and as entitled they are to participate in the communal public sphere, their participation is constantly challenged and their social capital questioned (because they are constructed as traditional and regarded as hostile minority).

### **Narrating Ethnic Differentiation and Protest**

As much as eating out is a leisure activity that allows Palestinians to see themselves as modern, the restaurant is also a terrain in which connections between culinary practices and political processes are formed and the relationship between authenticity, food and power complicated. Jews express little curiosity about what Palestinians eat at home and interpret the predictable menu as an indication of the limitations of Palestinian cuisine. However, Palestinian restaurateurs, who cater mostly to Jews, and fail to introduce genuine domestic dishes, see themselves as active social agents engaged in controlling the commodification of Palestinian dishes. The restaurant becomes a major institution through which the appropriation of Palestinian food is controlled and the contribution to and participation of Palestinians in Israeli culinary culture regulated.

Unlike many ethnic entrepreneurs, who have to decide whether they cater to their own people or to members of the dominant culture (Lu and Fine 1995, Gvion and Trostler 2009, Highmore 2009, Liu and Lin 2009), the clientele in Palestinian restaurants mostly depend on their location. The proximity of the restaurant to Jewish towns brings in a Jewish clientele and vice versa. Suspicion towards Palestinians, together with the image of Palestinian food as simple and plain, prevents Palestinian chefs from opening upscale restaurants. Jews are not willing to pay much for Palestinian food and the Palestinian middle class is too small to sustain a restaurant as such. Restaurants that rely on Jewish customers are usually simple eateries that provide substantial lunches at low prices. Others attract weekend travellers who want to lunch over a bowl of hummus or families with young children. The clients usually order dishes that they are either familiar with or recognise in their commoditised and industrialised version. Walid, who lives in the Triangle and operates two restaurants in the Tel Aviv area, says:

Jews do not really want to get to know our food. I have regular clients who keep ordering the same food for years. When I suggest they try something new, they always refuse.

When I tell Walid that many Israelis go to certain restaurants for particular dishes they like the most, he replies that, when it comes to Palestinian food, suspicion and lack of curiosity dominate the restaurant experience.

Nadgi, the nephew of a famous Palestinian restaurateur, tells me about his family's failure to attract Jewish customers, who prefer to dine on similar food at a nearby restaurant owned by Jews:

A few years ago, my uncle rented a place in the centre of Tel Aviv. It used to be a popular Chinese restaurant. The location was great and yet very few people came. Now you tell me it has nothing to do with us being Arabs!

On another occasion, I had a conversation with a famous restaurateur, who runs a successful restaurant on a major highway:

Res: Frike or meluhiye look terrible. Do you really think I can serve it in a restaurant?

Me: Gefilte fish doesn't look great either, yet traditional Jewish restaurants serve it.

Res: Well, you Ashkenazi are now going through some kind of an ethnic revival, but 15 years ago, you wouldn't dare eat it in public.

Me: That's because we had grandmothers who prepared it at home. Maklube and shishbarak look aesthetic and yet you don't serve it.

Res: It's easier offering a dish that looks appetizing and, besides, no one will order them.

Interestingly, Nadgi attributes his failure to attract clients to his ethnicity, rather than to his misreading of the local culinary scene, ignoring the fact that Tel Aviv is a global city with sophisticated consumers and that the 'other restaurant' was a vegetarian restaurant that also served a number of Palestinian dishes. The second restaurateur, conversely, attributes his decision not to commodify traditional Palestinian dishes to their 'aesthetics', rather than to the position that Palestinians occupy in Israeli society.

Salim, an owner of a restaurant in an area of multinational high-tech corporations, talks about the role Israelis assign to Palestinian restaurateurs:

I get them for a quick and cheap lunch, never for dinner. I get mostly low ranking engineers and some of the secretaries. The executives come only when they have a visitor whom they want to think of Israel as multicultural and democratic. *Ya'ani* [slang for 'as if'], I am their local Indian.

Salim interconnects social marginality with limited structural opportunities to commodify his food. According to him, the social and political contexts in which commodities are marketed determine their exchange value. The low exchange value of Palestinian dishes makes it hard for restaurateurs to serve expensive and special dishes and reduces their chances of attracting sophisticated diners. In Salim's view, using a restaurant to feed low-ranking personnel and, when necessary, to stage a multicultural image of the State of Israel is part of the executives' habitus; they take his cooperation in playing the role of the 'native' Palestinian for granted.



Some restaurateurs, such as Mustafa, a chef from Nazareth, feel Jewish culinary agents have a better chance to commodify Palestinian food. Therefore, for an upscale Palestinian restaurant to succeed, it is necessary to join forces with a Jewish colleague:

I've been thinking about going to that chef – you know, the one who braids his hair – and saying 'Let's open a fancy restaurant. We'll charge the kind of prices you charge'. If I did it on my own, no one would come.

Adel from Jaffa, whose family owns a number of restaurants all over the country, states:

One day the owner of [he names an upscale restaurant] walks into my place and says: 'I need 200 portions of hummus for tonight. Can I count on you?' I tell her: 'It'll cost you 10 shekels a portion'. At that time, I charged 7 shekels for a combination of hummus, pita bread, a salad, pickles and five falafel patties. She didn't blink and paid for it. I have no idea how much she charged her clients for my hummus. No one would have paid me that much.

However, as Suhad, a social activist who works for a Palestinian–Jewish foundation, remarks, there are also negative consequences to the commodification of Palestinian food:

The whole world has come to think of hummus, falafel and tabule as Israeli foods. You do not respect the way we eat. We neither spread hummus over bread nor eat it as a first course. Falafel is not a sandwich filling. You have obliterated our culture, taken over our lands and now you ask me why our restaurants do not serve authentic Palestinian dishes?

The obstacles Palestinians face in their attempts to commodify and upgrade their food emerge from the position they occupy in Israeli society. The limited curiosity towards Palestinian food, together with their low exchange value, narrows restaurateurs' attempts to market their food and contributes to the image of Israel as a multicultural society. The fear of food appropriation, the weakening of Palestinian culture because of modernisation and the selective participation in 'non-Palestinian' spaces, all crystallise into an ethos of resistance to disseminate their culinary knowledge beyond the Palestinian community. This positions restaurateurs as active social agents in control of the propagation of culinary knowledge and as regulating the participation of Palestinians in Israeli society without jeopardising their distinctive identity.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the meaning that Palestinians in Israel ascribe to restaurants reveals an interesting interplay between tradition and modernity. Local restaurants are constructed as authentic Palestinian spaces that preserve the distinction between domestic dishes and restaurant foods and operate according to traditional bodily practices. Thus, they reinforce traditional relationships embedded in the production and consumption of food. Modern modes of conduct, conversely, are practised in

'non-Palestinian' spaces, such as restaurants and cafes located in Jewish area, where foods perceived as modern are consumed and women visit with their friends.

While eating out in Palestinian spaces portrays the Palestinian community as respective of its traditions and at the same time as adopting certain modern lifestyles, eating out, in non-Palestinian restaurants, makes it possible for Palestinians in Israel to imitate 'modern' Jewish modes of consumption. It also provides women with ways of gaining more independence without challenging men's domination in the home and community. At the same time, eating out in 'non-Palestinian' restaurants brings feelings of estrangement to the surface, reveals their lack of appropriate social capital and emphasises their social marginality.

The complicated meanings embedded in the Palestinians' restaurant experience in general show how food, authenticity and power are interrelated and how political processes and social positions shape the culinary scene. Palestinian restaurateurs and diners use the restaurant experience to introduce a national Palestinian narrative, which is part of the modern narrative because in their adoption of certain modern features, Palestinian citizens of Israel also frame claim for nationhood. Moreover, Palestinian restaurateurs also control the image of Palestinian foods in Israel, resist their commodification and the dissemination of culinary knowledge beyond the Palestinian community. Thus, by resisting commodification and protesting against appropriation, Palestinians combine modernity with a distinctive national identity and voice their protest against the position that Palestinians occupy in Israeli society and their dissatisfaction with the way in which their culinary culture is perceived.

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