

## RELIGION AND FOOD



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# Table of contents

<i>Ruth Illman and Björn Dahl</i> Religion and food	7
<i>Benjamin E. Zeller</i> Totem and taboo in the grocery store: quasi-religious foodways in North America	11
<i>Graham Harvey</i> Respectfully eating or not eating: putting food at the centre of Religious Studies	32
<i>Michel Desjardins</i> Imagining Jesus, with food	47
<i>Panu Pibkala</i> Ecotheology and the theology of eating: convergencies and controversies	64
<i>Natalia Moragas Segura and Elena Mazzetto</i> Contexts of offerings and ritual maize in the pictographic record in Central Mexico	82
<i>Gioia Filocamo</i> Hungry women: sin and rebellion through food and music in the early modern era	101
<i>Andrea Gutierrez</i> Modes of betel consumption in early India: <i>bhoga</i> and <i>abhoga</i>	114
<i>Bindu Malieckal</i> Early modern Goa: Indian trade, transcultural medicine, and the Inquisition	135

<i>Ulrica Söderlind</i>	
Religion and diet in a multi-religious city: a comprehensive study regarding interreligious relations in Tbilisi in everyday life and on feast days	158
<i>Miriam Abu Salem</i>	
Religious dietary rules and the protection of religious freedom: some evidence from practice in Italy	181
<i>Katarina Plank</i>	
The sacred foodscapes of Thai Buddhist temples in Sweden	201
<i>David S. Walsh</i>	
The nature of food: indigenous Dene foodways and ontologies in the era of climate change	225
<i>Joanna Jadwiga Zamorska</i>	
Prestige and alcohol in South Mexican <i>fiesta</i> : drinking with saint patrons in the central valleys of Oaxaca	250
<i>Patricia Rodrigues de Souza</i>	
Food in African Brazilian Candomblé	264
<i>Paulette Kershenovich Schuster</i>	
<i>Habaneros</i> and <i>shwarma</i> : Jewish Mexicans in Israel as a transnational community	281
<i>Adrienne Krone</i>	
'A Shmita Manifesto': a radical sabbatical approach to Jewish food reform in the United States	303
<i>Aldea Mulhern</i>	
What does it mean to 'eat Jewishly'? Authorizing discourse in the Jewish food movement in Toronto, Canada	326
<i>Ben Kasstan</i>	
The taste of trauma: reflections of ageing Shoah survivors on food and how they re(inscribe) it with meaning	349
<i>Elina Hankela</i>	
Elaborating on <i>ubuntu</i> in a Johannesburg inner-city church	366

# Religion and food

## EDITORIAL

The current 26<sup>th</sup> volume of *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* is based on a symposium arranged by the Donner Institute in June 2014, under the title: 'Religion and Food'. All the articles published in this volume were initially presented as papers or keynote addresses at this conference and have, through a double-blind peer-review process, been selected for this volume.

The relationship between food and religion is a lived activity formed by the dynamics of both tradition and adaptation. Religious commitments to food are influenced by several different factors, ranging from personal spirituality and experiences to social patterns of belonging as well as ethical, political and doctrinal convictions related to food and eating. Today, this topic is receiving increasing scholarly attention and has become a relevant focus to a broad spectrum of researchers working with different religious traditions and contemporary spiritualities. The conference aimed at addressing the questions of why and how persons of various religious and spiritual liaisons seem to engage in food and eating with a growing zeal today from a variety of different theoretical and methodological angles. Papers were presented on the interconnectedness of religion and food and themes such as: folkways/foodways and vernacular practices; tradition, memory, and nostalgia; boundaries, identity, and control; symbolism, authenticity, and fluidity; consumption and abstention; ethics and environmentalism; the global, local, and glocal. Teaching methods, fieldwork and methodology also received much attention.

As conference organisers, we were especially grateful for the lively and nuanced discussions that marked the event, as well as the excellent academic calibre of the contributions, some of which we are proud to publish in this issue. We were also pleased to see that another important tradition of the Donner Symposia was honoured: the speakers of the conference included researchers from all stages of the academic path: students, doctoral students, senior researchers, professors and emeriti. More than half a century separated the most junior and the most senior participants: a great span of experiences and perspectives. The conference papers also covered the whole span of human history, from antiquity and all the way up until today, from several different theoretical

and methodological points of view, exploring several different religious traditions. We hope that this discussion will continue through the personal contacts and networks created during the conference and through the publication of selected conference papers in this volume.

The volume opens with two theoretically-oriented papers. Benjamin E. Zeller analyses emerging 'quasi-religious foodways' in the USA and show how they offer individuals a way to engage in discourses of community, personal and group identity, and boundary-marking within the logics of the market. Graham Harvey introduces a theoretically innovative way of understanding the relationship between religion and eating by giving pre-eminence to the latter as a key to understanding the entire field of Religious Studies. Two papers with a theological focus follow. Michel Desjardin applies modern, cross-cultural, anthropologically-grounded food data to the historical Jesus in order to facilitate a more realistic and human image of him. Panu Pihkala, in his turn, deals with the research field of ecotheology and especially themes of food, eating, and Christian theology, which have gained ground during recent years.

Four articles dealing with historical perspectives on religion and food follow. Natalia Moragas and Elena Mazzetto analyse offerings of maize in Central Mexico from the Classic period to early colonial times on the basis of archaeological material. Gioia Filocamo discusses sin and rebellion through food and music in the lives of women in Early Modern Italy. The following article, written by Andrea Gutierrez, deals with the same time period but moves the geographical focus to India and the many modes of religious betel leaf consumption of that time. India is the context also of Bindu Malieckal's article, which demonstrates how food in terms of spices was the foundation of power for ethno-religious groups on the continent during the period of the spice trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The following six articles all have a more contemporary perspective and rely on ethnographical research conducted by the authors. Ulrica Söderlind explores the foodways of Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi while the laws guarding religious freedom in Italy and their application in relation to religious dietary restrictions is the topic of Miriam Abu Salem's article. Katarina Plank describes the 'foodscape' of the Thai Buddhist diaspora in Sweden, dealing especially with the strategies developed by the communities to facilitate supporting their temples. Moving geographically over the Atlantic to the Americas, David Walsh deals with the implications of climate change for the traditional foodways of the subarctic indigenous Dene people. Joanna Zamorska, for her part, analyses the role of food and alcohol in Mexican patronal feasts while Patricia Rodrigues de Souza presents the role of votive foods in African Brazilian Candomblé.



The final section of four articles all deal with Jewish perspectives on the conference theme. Paulette Kershenovich Schuster presents the foodways of Jews with a Mexican background living in Israel and how spiritual and cultural ties to the previous home country is preserved in food. A radical Sabbatical approach to Jewish food reform in the United States, combining the religious tradition of the Shmita Year with ecological concerns, is analysed by Adrienne Krone. A similar theme is dealt with by Aldea Mulhern, who discusses what ‘eating Jewishly’ means among participants of a Jewish environmental programme in Toronto, Canada. Finally, Ben Kasstan presents his ethnographic study of ageing Shoah survivors in the UK and how food for them awakens reflections and emotions tied to their childhood trauma.

The volume ends with an article by the winner of the Donner Prize for Outstanding Research into Religion 2014, Elina Hankela. The prize, which Hankela received during the conference, was awarded for her ethnographic study of an inner-city Methodist church in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the tensions between traditional hospitality (*ubuntu*) and exclusionary xenophobia arising as a result of massive immigration of refugees from neighbouring Zimbabwe.



Participants in the Donner Symposium ‘Religion and Food’ in June, 2014. Photograph by Björn Dahla.

This is the first volume of *Scripta* to be published solely as an electronic publication. During the past year, we have developed the entire series, inaugurated in 1967, into an open access e-publication, digitalising previous issues so that all volumes are now available online through the open access publishing platform OJS. In its new digital version, *Scripta* provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Open access publication is rapidly increasing in significance and is heavily promoted by most important research supporting agencies. By going online, thus, we strive to meet the requirements of the academic world of today. Nevertheless, for those who still wish for a printed book to keep in hand, print-on-demand arrangements can be made by contacting the Donner Institute.

Simultaneously, we have also strengthened the academic standard of *Scripta* by implementing a more formal peer-review process for the articles published in the series, which now undergo a double-blind peer-review evaluation before being accepted for publication. In order to facilitate this assessment and to secure the academic standard of our publication also in the future, we have appointed an editorial board consisting of prominent scholars of religion from around the world, representing a wide variety of subfields, theoretical and methodological approaches and cultural contexts within the study of religion.

This is also the first volume where Ruth Illman has had the privilege to act as editor. Luckily, she has had the opportunity to work together with her experienced colleague Björn Dahla, who has been involved in the work around *Scripta* for decades already! We hope that the current issue of *Scripta* will become an important resource for research and teaching in the field of food and religion and wish you inspiring and illuminating reading.

Turku/Åbo, 6 April 2015  
RUTH ILLMAN and BJÖRN DAHLA

# Totem and taboo in the grocery store

## Quasi-religious foodways in North America

BENJAMIN E. ZELLER

This article considers food proscriptions such as veganism and gluten-free eating, and prescriptions such as the Paleolithic diet, focusing on the North American context. These quasi-religious foodways serve as means for individuals to engage in discourses of community, personal and group identity, and boundary-marking. Through the daily practice of eating, those who follow quasi-religious foodways mark their identities, literally consuming who they are. These quasi-religious foodways therefore function to allow contemporary consumer-oriented individualistic Americans to engage in discourses of community, identity, and meaning in a highly vernacular manner, that of the marketplace. They also point to the manner in which identity and community have expanded well outside of religious categories.

A court case over whether veganism is a religion; a confectionary where the owner refers to wheat gluten as a taboo; a lifestyle modelling the imagined foodways and folkways of Paleolithic hominids. These intersections between *religion*, *food*, and *culture* demand attention, if only because they blur the borders between those three categories. As I will argue here, each of these 'quasi-religious' foodways represents a manner in which individuals living in consumer-oriented late modernity have crafted meaningful identities and social worlds with reference to absolute and transcendent meanings. These quasi-religious approaches to food function akin to traditional religions, mooring practitioners in identities and communities, and replicating the senses of comfort that religions traditionally provide.

There are many ways of studying religion and food. Every religious tradition involves rituals, ceremonies, or everyday practices involving food, eating, and drinking. Most religions offer guidelines on what sort of foods one ought or ought not to eat at particular times, amongst particular people, or in particular places. Further, practitioners of nearly every religion engage in lived practices involving food (Zeller 2012). Each of these represent important areas that we collectively as scholars ought to consider in our study of religion and food.

Much of the research on religion and food has focused on proscriptions and prescriptions of particular foods. The anthropologist Mary Douglas first raised the issue of food proscription or taboo as a fundamental concept in the analysis of culture in her *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), whilst the medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* (1987) was one of the first academic monograph-length treatments of food proscription in the most general sense, focusing on fasting and its complex relation to the Eucharist in the lives of religious women in the Middle Ages. Looking at books in the more popular vein and with a more explicit treatment of both proscription and prescription, the anthropologist Marvin Harris's *The Sacred Cow and the Abominable Pig* (1985) traced for a broader audience how and why specific religious groups avoided particular foods, or especially consumed other ones. In the decades that followed the publication of these books academics have looked to such themes in a multitude of religions. While certainly scholars have researched other areas in the intersection of religion and food, studies of proscriptions and prescriptions have become most common.

Looking at this topic alone, one finds that most of the research on religion and food has focused on practices within traditionally defined religious communities. David M. Freidenreich's recent *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (2011) provides an apt example of cutting-edge contemporary scholarship on this topic, since Freidenreich not only explores the various ways that Jewish, Christian, and Islamic food codes have developed, but how they have functioned within particular religious contexts to define and maintain religious boundaries. Most of the chapters in my own anthology, *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America*, look to such proscriptions and prescriptions within particular religious contexts, with contributors arguing that these food codes serve to help individuals negotiate identities and define communities of practice and belief (Zeller *et al.* 2014). These range from Santería practitioners in colonial Cuba, to Muslims concerned about the intersection of sustainability and *halal* in contemporary Chicago. Yet generally scholars have focused on proscriptions and prescriptions within well-delineated groups that one would traditionally define as traditional 'religions': Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and more recently new religious movements or sectarian groups branching off those traditions.

I want to broaden that focus quite explicitly, looking to religious or quasi-religious prescriptions and proscriptions outside the boundaries of traditional religions, linking them explicitly to the sort of religious food regulations and practices that we more traditionally study. This article focuses on food proscriptions such as veganism and gluten-free eating, and prescriptions such as

the Paleolithic diet, within the North American context. I call these quasi-religious foodways, and focus on them for two reasons. First, it challenges us to reconsider what we mean by ‘religion’, in a similar vein to the work of Russell McCutcheon, Craig Martin, and other theorists who insist that ‘religion’ is a constructed category rather than a *sui generis* one (McCutcheon 2003, Martin 2010). Second, particularly in North America, such quasi-religious relationships with food seem to be on the rise. These quasi-religious foodways include not only those already mentioned, but vegetarianism, locavorism, raw foodism, organic-only diets, and cleanse or detox food practices. All of these, in my reading, can represent quasi-religious relationships with food because they instil food and eating with transcendent qualities and meanings, foster personally meaningful worldviews for practitioners, develop ritualizations and other practices, and serve to develop communities of practice. Further, these quasi-religious foodways function as means for individuals to engage in discourses of community, personal and group identity, and boundary-marking. Through the daily practice of eating, those who follow quasi-religious as well as more traditionally-religious foodways mark their identities, literally consuming who they are.

### Foodways as religions

In 2002, the State of California Court of Appeals rendered a verdict in an unusual case, *Friedman v. Southern California Permanente Medical Group*. Jerold Friedman, an office worker, had been offered a job by a medical services company contingent on Mr Friedman’s having received routine childhood and adult vaccinations. This requirement is quite common in the medical field, given fears of infecting immune-compromised patients. Yet Mr Friedman refused to receive the mumps vaccine, citing his strict veganism and the fact that the vaccine is produced using embryonic chicken matter. The medical services company rescinded the job offer, and Mr Friedman sued, alleging religious discrimination.

Friedman argued that veganism was his religion. To support this claim, he insisted that veganism ‘guides the way that he lives his life’. He called veganism ‘spiritual in nature and set[ting] a course for his entire way of life’. Friedman argued that he would allow harm to come to himself rather than violate his vegan beliefs, that he upheld his veganism as strongly as did proponents of more traditional religions, and that his vegan beliefs were ‘sincere and meaningful’. He declared that veganism determined how he ate, dressed, with whom he spent time, and his political views. He noted that he had even been arrested for

civil disobedience in support of his veganism (*Friedman v. Southern California Permanente/Kaiser Foundation Hospitals* 2000).

All that being said, Friedman lost his initial case. He appealed to the state's high court, which after exhaustive study of federal and state decisions on religious freedom, sought to apply American jurisprudence to the question of whether veganism constitutes a religion. On behalf of the three-judge appeal panel, State Appellate Judge Paul Turner issued his judgment that veganism was not, in fact, a religion. Turner's logic was simple. Based on various other court cases, he defined religion as 'address[ing] fundamental and ultimate questions having to do with deep and imponderable matters, ... [being] comprehensive in nature, ... [and possessing] certain formal and external signs' (*Friedman v. Southern California Permanente Medical Group* 2002). Writing for the court, Turner reasoned:

There is no claim that veganism speaks to: the meaning of human existence; the purpose of life; theories of humankind's nature or its place in the universe; matters of human life and death; or the exercise of faith. ... Plaintiff does not assert that his belief system derives from a power or being or faith to which all else is subordinate or upon which all else depends ... there are no: teachers or leaders; services or ceremonies; structure or organization; orders of worship or articles of faith; or holidays. (*Friedman v. Southern California Permanente Medical Group* 2002)

Friedman failed because his veganism did not look similar enough to the normative Protestantism – or, charitably, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism, to borrow Will Herberg's formulation (1955) – that defines the American religious milieu. Veganism lacks clergy, churches, revealed texts, and an overarching or totalistic ideology. Given Protestantism as the basis of American religious norms, then if one defines religion as Turner did in his legal decision, veganism is no religion.

However, that is not the only way to define religion. Other legal thinkers and different judicial jurisdictions have come to the opposite conclusion, and have sometimes protected vegan practitioners on the basis of religious belief (Page 2005). Among scholars of religion, functionalists – and I count myself among them – focus on what religion does, how, and why, with an eye towards how people practice it and what it looks like when it is performed. Under these rubrics, veganism with its codes and communities of practice developed under a systematic set of beliefs about absolute values looks quite a bit like a religion. Recall that Friedman's veganism 'guid[ed] the way that he lives his life', which



meant in his case that he based decisions about health, political activities, and his social life on his veganism. His veganism forced him to take a conscientious position that resulted in his inability to assume a job on the terms he had been offered. He even called his veganism ‘spiritual in nature’, and if one follows the general logic of how Americans use the term, ‘spiritual’ simply means religious in an individualistic, non-institutional form (Fuller 2001). Veganism, in appealing to those who claim such a mantle, functions as an individualistic quasi-religion that nevertheless offers value and meaning to its practitioners, akin to how traditional religions do. Veganism merely does so for individualistic, secularized, this-worldly Americans.

Friedman was not alone in identifying his veganism as something akin to religion. In an oral history study of vegans that I produced, I found that the majority of practising vegans lived their foodways in a manner generally paralleling religion, and many like Friedman explicitly identified their veganism as a spirituality or individualized religion (Zeller 2014). My study indicated that the majority of vegans adopted their foodways after a process closely paralleling a religious conversion. Most had experienced conversions akin to the classic Christian case of the Apostle Paul wherein they felt an immediate impetus to convert after a radical experience of disjuncture, ranging from reading about the meat industry to visiting a commercial slaughter operation. A minority described a conversion process more akin to what one finds today in the New Age movement, involving intensive searching, exploration, and a more active experience of choosing veganism. Regardless, the individuals I studied reported that their veganism provided them with not only new practices related to eating, but also new codes of ethics and morality with reference to absolute good and evil, texts to study and with which to guide their lives, communities of fellow practitioners, and a new sense of identity. ‘This is me. It is about purity. ... It’s kind of a religion thing’, explained one of my subjects. (Zeller 2009)

Whether veganism is a ‘real’ religion is too broad a question to fully consider here. I use the term ‘quasi-religion’ as a compromise, since veganism at least shares some of the generally agreed-upon characteristics of religions. Vegans themselves seem quite aware of the correspondences and resonances between veganism and religion. Perhaps most notable is the use of Christian and at times Jewish imagery by the largest international vegan movement, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

PETA’s willingness to court controversy is well attested, and they embrace public disobedience and street protests not only to convey their argument against the consumption of animals, but also to gain attention. Religious spectacle is one of PETA’s common techniques, and while one might argue

that there is nothing intrinsically ‘religious’ about PETA, the group exploits the iconography of religion expertly. PETA activists have staged mock crucifixions, produced advertisements juxtaposing vegan placards with bibles, and issued calls for nuns to ‘convert’ to veganism: all indicating that indeed the line between veganism and religion is hazy, if present at all (WND 2006, PETA 2011, 2010). PETA’s spokesman Bruce Friedrich told one reporter, in response to criticisms of PETA’s mock crucifixions of animals held in Vienna and Berlin during the Christian Holy Week in 2006, that ‘[w]hat is offensive to God is the satanic treatment of God’s creatures by factory farms and slaughterhouses. ... We attempt to raise anyone’s awareness that eating meat is a violation of all religions, the spirit of compassion that infuses all religions. ... As a Roman Catholic myself, what I find offensive is that Christians would deny God’s creatures their every desire and need and cause them to suffer’ (WND 2006). Critics in turn assail PETA’s ‘gospel’, ‘evangelism’, and ‘religion’, indicating that at the very least this vegan movement has been successful in redefining itself as something akin to religion. Christian capitalist groups and Christian groups with ties to industrial farming explicitly engage PETA as a fellow religion, albeit one with which they disagree. ‘Marketplace Ministries’, a right-leaning Christian capitalist group, assailed ‘the gospel of PETA’ as ‘based on a set of beliefs which becomes a religion for those who are believers’ (Davis 2008). Similarly, the Center for Consumer Freedom, a Christian group associated with the gambling, tobacco, and fast food industries, have produced a booklet with faux-bible design accusing PETA of ‘twisting religion’ to support veganism (Martosko 2005). Certainly veganism looks ‘religious’ to at least some Christian opponents.

I would go further than this: vegans use ideas about the nature of evil, the world, and the human condition to craft a worldview that focuses on explicit practices about how to live one’s life on individual and social levels. This makes it a religion, if not a quasi-religion. The sociologist Malcom Hamilton writes that veganism and its related foodway vegetarianism possess ‘a number of “quasi-religious” themes, including taboo and avoidance behaviour, reverence for life, the denial of death, reincarnation, observance of disciplines and the rejection of domination and oppression’ (2000: 65). Such themes, he argues, represent the way in which vegans or vegetarians ‘seek to address those aspects of life ... which religion has traditionally addressed’ (*ibid.* 65). Hamilton is quite correct; veganism certainly functions in this way. Yet veganism functions as a religion or quasi-religion in a manner highly distinctive of capitalist late modernity: through consumption. Vegans obtain moral and spiritual certainty through what they eat and do not eat, marking veganism as a highly immanentist religion. Eschewing supernaturalism and transcendent notions of the divine – both



hallmarks of traditional religions – vegans root their practices in a this-worldly philosophy and set of practices. In this way, veganism fits well within the worldview of the secularized West, and it finds it appeals primarily among the most secular of North Americans. However, their this-worldliness leads vegans to sow the seeds of their own inability to convince the broader public of the religious nature of their practices. By seeming so unlike traditional religions on a theological level, observers and even legal decision-makers such as California's Justice Turner fail to recognize the intrinsically religious practices of vegans.

## Totem and taboo

All this may seem quite interesting, but beyond questions of jurisprudence and curiosity, so what? Why does it matter that veganism – or for that matter any other alternative foodway – seems akin to religion? As I read it, what a person chooses to eat or not eat in our contemporary culture acts as a powerful social and psychological signifier of identity, community, and worldview. Food and foodways become *totems* and *taboos*, to use Sigmund Freud's language, which individuals use to navigate the anxieties of modern life, and craft identities within it. Importantly, they do so in a manner uniting consumption, immanence, and a highly individualized and secularized notion of the self, spiritual practice, and community.

In his famous comparative study of mental health and pre-modern culture, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud (1913) developed a model of how the concepts of totem and taboo served as key models around which early religion developed. The totem, wrote Freud, 'stands in a special relation to the whole clan' (1913: 2, my translation). It binds the group together. The totem food represents and crystallizes the community of practitioners of the alternative foodways, whether they be vegans, gluten-free eaters, or Paleolithic eaters. While my usage of totem follows Freud here, I depart from him in an important regard. Freud wrote that groups do not consume the totem, given its degree of sacredness. I turn that on its head in my neo-Freudian interpretation: totem foods are defined by being eaten, and eaten with relish (so to speak!). Local food is totem for locavores; vegetables for vegans; gluten-free cookies for gluten-free lifestyle adherents; free-range meat for Paleolithic eaters. Freud's and my approach to the *totem* parallels that of Durkheim, though Freud proceeds from the level of the analysis of the individual rather than the collective. Yet for both Freud and Durkheim, and for me, the totem serves as central symbol of identity and community, and a special sort of symbol since it is invoked through religious practice.

Freud defined taboo as ‘possessing the meaning, on the one hand: holy [*heilig*], consecrated [*geweiht*]; on the other: eerie [*unheimlich*], dangerous [*gefährlich*], forbidden [*verboten*], impure [*unrein*] ... the taboo expressed itself importantly in prohibitions [*Verboten*] and restrictions [*Einschränkungen*]’ (1913: 25, my translation). The usefulness in Freud’s conceptualization is that the concept highlights both the forbidden nature of the taboo as well as the fact that it is somehow marked as special. The taboo is set apart as especially rejected and marked as uniquely wrong. Again, one might compare this to Durkheim’s idea of the sacred, though that is not really what either Freud or I have in mind. The taboo food is one that is forbidden in an especially significant way, one that leads practitioners to invest this avoidance with meaning and relevance, and to form a community of practice around it. Gluten obviously functions as a taboo for those attracted to the gluten-free lifestyle, just as animal products do for vegans, and the ‘foods of civilization’ for Paleolithic dieters. (Of note, I am omitting there those who avoid those foods for purely medical reasons, a matter to which I shall return.)

I do not mean to argue that people have never been gluten-intolerant or chosen to eat vegan diets, nor that everyone who avoids gluten or meat is engaged in a quasi-religious form of eating. Yet the creation of *veganism*, and a gluten-free *subculture* reflect the way in which these totem and taboo foodways function quite differently than purely nutrition- or health-based personal food choices either contemporary or historic. They become emblems of identity within broader cultural movements. They link a practitioner to practices, discourses, texts, and groups centred around avoiding or consuming the same foods. They provide meaning and certainty in a world of food choices. They resolve, in Michael Pollan’s (2006) words, the ‘omnivore’s dilemma’ so present in the global food economy dominated by apparent abundance and choice, but a reality of mass-produced synthetic food. These food taboos and totems serve to invest the quotidian act of eating with absolute significance.

As noted, they do this in a manner befitting early twenty-first century capitalist culture: through consumption. Practitioners of totemic quasi-religions mark identities through what they eat and do not eat. Here one can glimpse the manner in which identity and the spiritual practices constructing and supporting it have become both secularized and individualized. The sociologist Mark Chaves (2011: 41) explains that such growing individualism represents ‘one aspect of Americans’ overall softening involvement in traditional religion, and as part and parcel of a growing skepticism in American society about the value of organizations and institutions in many spheres of life, including religion.’ While individual, these alternative foodways are also secularized, for while

they may function akin to religion, they claim a this-worldly immanentism and eschew the sort of totalistic theology typical of most religions. Quasi-religious foodways exemplify this trend, revealing the way in which individualization, secularization, and consumption unite to create a context where what one eats or does not eat becomes a manner of emblemizing identity.

### The gluten-free foodway and totem

If one enters the terms ‘taboo+gluten’ into a web search engine (the ‘+’ means both terms must appear on the same webpage) one will find 11 million hits. Contrast that to about 1.7 million hits for ‘taboo+beef’ and 1 million hits for ‘taboo+pork’. If you follow a few hundred of these webpages discussing gluten as a taboo you will find that the vast majority use the term ‘taboo’ as a synonym for ‘forbidden’, ‘unacceptable’, or even ‘wrong’. Most such pages are produced by bloggers, journalists, nutritionists, and diet aid companies and offer proscriptive advice as to how to avoid gluten and gluten-related products, and conversely prescriptive advice for alternatives, ranging from quinoa cookies to rice meal bread. One does not want to build an academic analysis based solely on the terms used by practitioners, but it does seem that eleven million emic assessments ought to at least influence any etic one!

I encountered gluten as taboo when I wandered into a new confectionary near where I live in suburban Chicago in spring 2014. I was attracted by the beautifully formed and coloured macarons, *petits fours*, cannolis, and cookies lined up in the window. I chatted amicably with the owner briefly about my love of European pastries until he abruptly asked me if I knew what sort of confectionary I was in. The tone of the question implied sectarianism, esotericism, even transgression, as if I had wandered into a secret society, or perhaps a drag club. ‘This is a gluten-free bakery’, the owner revealed. He explained over the ensuing conversation how he was able to create gustatory delights without use of what he explicitly called a ‘taboo’, namely gluten, making special point to explain that customers who ate his products were assured of health and wellness. In the words emblazoned on the menu, the bakery offers ‘organic, preservative-free, GMO-free, trans-fat free, peanut-free, gluten-free and allergy-friendly products to help you live a healthy lifestyle’ (Rose’s Café and Bakery 2014). I was being sold, in essence, not only food but a lifestyle. It occurred to me as I walked away that in this confectionary, gluten was not only a taboo, but that gluten-free was a totem. The confectionary did not offer gluten-free food only to the minute number of Americans with serious medical conditions preventing them from being able to digest gluten, it offered gluten-free as a totem designed to provide health, holism, and satisfaction.

Gluten, a protein found in wheat and related grains that can transform a mushy mass of carbohydrates into stringy, cohesive bread, has become both totem and taboo within the realm of foodie discourse. Scientific studies estimate that one per cent of Americans suffer an allergic reaction to gluten, that is to say coeliac disease, yet recent surveys show that between 18 and 30 per cent of Americans have experimented with or adopted a gluten-free diet, with similar numbers in Canada (Fasano *et al.* 2003, NPD Group 2013, Market Research Group 2013). No data shows the exact number who follow a strict gluten-free diet, but for these individuals – a truly massive number of Americans – gluten has become a powerful taboo that they use to create meaning in their food and lifestyle choices, and even worldview. By contrast, other North American food aficionados and epicures have embraced fads such as artisanal cupcakes, hearth-baked bread, and donuts that emblemize gluten in its most obvious forms.

In a recent opinion piece the *New York Times* columnist Jessica Bruder reminisced about a dinner party where she had served a loaf of bread stuffed with savoury Italian cheeses. ‘The kitchen went quiet. You’d think I had offered up a bouquet of poison ivy’, she writes. Based on the behaviour of her guests and others like them who adopt restrictive diets ranging from gluten-free to vegan to macrobiotic to local, Bruder (2012) concludes that ‘many contemporary eating styles speak directly to values and virtues, aiming to affirm your ethos rather than nuking your love handles. ... Consumers seem to be building self through sustenance, ... control and identity were two common themes on everyone’s lips.’ Bruder is absolutely correct to note that these two themes, control and identity, categorize how individuals relate to totemic or taboo foods within quasi-religious foodways. They do so, as Bruder aptly notes, through consumption.

Evidence of how and why individuals craft their identities around such foodways as gluten-free eating is admittedly anecdotal, as no detailed social science survey or oral history study has yet been performed. Interviews with celebrities who have embraced such diets shed some light. Most emphasize that gluten-free eating leads to holistic well-being and a sense of authenticity. Lady Gaga, Miley Cyrus, and Gwyneth Paltrow all publicly made such claims, indicating that gluten-free was simply who they were (Piccalo 2010). Cyrus took to twitter to make her position clear: ‘For everyone calling me anorexic, I have a gluten and lactose allergy. It’s not about weight it’s about health. Gluten is cr\*pppp anyway! ... Everyone should try no gluten for a week. The change in your skin, physical and mental health is amazing’ (Eglash 2013). Elisabeth Hasselbeck, co-host of television’s *The View*, wrote a book-length memoir describing in explicitly salvific terms how gluten-free living saved her from a life of illness, depression, and potentially broken relationships (ABC News

2009). Substitute 'Jesus' for 'gluten-free' and Hasselbeck's book – along with the claims of numerous gluten-free celebrities – would sound identical to standard American evangelical discourse on the saving power of Christ.

As the gluten-free lifestyle became more popular and associated with the faddishness of celebrities, those with diagnosed medical allergies to gluten, that is coeliac sufferers, responded with their own declarations of identity. 'Gluten-Dude', one of the most popular coeliac disease bloggers, retorted with a parody of one of Lady Gaga's hit song titles in response to her self-proclaimed foodway choices, 'Lady Gaga May be Gluten-Free...But Baby I Was Born This Way' (Gluten Dude 2012). Another gluten-free blogger, a self-diagnosed coeliac, simply stated outright in response to the perceived faddishness of the foodway, that her eating choices were rooted in her basic embodied identity. 'I don't have a solid explanation for this, but I don't need to. All I know is I am aware how what I take into my body makes me feel, and the guidelines of a gluten-free diet make me feel better. End of story. Stop the sniveling' (Sarah B 2014). Both those with social as well as medical reasons for adopting gluten-free foodways have begun to use the same language of embodied identity to self-express their food practices. The transformation of a medical condition into a marker of identity has broader resonance in American culture. The medical sociologist Gayle Sulik has argued that the same shift has occurred among those diagnosed with and recovered from breast cancer, and Jo Nash has found the same process at work in 'Pro-Ana' or pro-anorexia subcultures that have transformed this disease into what Nash calls a 'mutant spirituality' (Sulik 2011, Nash 2006). In all such cases, practitioners create personally meaningful identities through highly individualized practices that they consider rooted in their 'authentic selves'. This represents a secularized, individualistic, quest for create a personally meaningful and authentic sense of self.

Yet for others, the gluten-free lifestyle both inculcates and requires a community. The blogger 'Gluten-Free-Girl', one of the most popular writers on gluten-free living, explains of her experience and advice on going gluten-free, 'You need even more community now. You need friends who understand this, families who support you, and good people who let you cry on their shoulder when your relative says, Oh come on, it's just a little flour. What harm could it do?' (Gluten-Free-Girl 2014). Here, Gluten-Free-Girl engages in the same sort of cultural construction of community that Anna Meigs (1997: 95) writes of in her study of food practices in the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea. Food inculcates 'bonds of social alliance and solidarity,' to borrow Meig's term, through shared norms of practice and belief. Leonard Norman Primiano (2014) argues the same in his consideration of how the International Peace Mission

Movement (Father Divine Movement) created a new community around a shared foodway. Gluten-free eaters form communities.

Still other anti-gluten activists invoked transcendental qualities to mark gluten as taboo. 'Good Living Doc' writes on his blog: 'Gluten is evil. There, I said it' (Good Living Doc 2013). Explaining his logic, the Good Living Doc indicates that 'Gluten doesn't want to be eaten. No, I'm not suggesting gluten has a conscious opinion about survival, but survival is an innate drive built into every living organism on a cellular level' (*ibid.*). Despite his caution to the contrary, the Doc clearly imbues gluten with a near-conscious ability to infiltrate and destroy the human body. It is 'evil', Good Living Doc repeats several times in his writing.

This talk of community, identity, salvation, and transcendent notions of evil all strike me as if not religious, at least quasi-religious. The vehemence with which gluten-free eaters defend their foodways, as well as with which critics assail gluten-free eating, show how important practitioners take this foodway to be. Michael Pollan, who in his *Omnivore's Dilemma* idolized wheat bread as a symbol of food tradition and stability, has attacked gluten-free living as 'a bit of a social contagion' (Pollan 2006, 2014). Such language of collective contamination is matched especially by the back-and-forth conversations in the comments sections of digital news articles or social network postings about gluten-free eating. On one cautionary article about gluten-free eating posted to *Scientific American's* website, one can find accusations against pro- and anti-gluten eaters as sick, brainwashed, duped, and stupid (Rettner 2013). Comments quickly spiral into attacks of, or defences of, a broad range of social forces, including medicine, science, technology, and religion. A recent post on *National Public Radio's* website found each side accusing the other of anti-intellectualism and collusion with unnamed nefarious corporate interests (Barclay 2014).

Perhaps most emblematic was a recent comedy sketch produced by the late-night television comedian Jimmy Kimmel, who recorded an assistant asking a number of Los Angelinos who claim to be gluten intolerant if they knew what gluten was. None did (Jimmy Kimmel Live 2014). Internet commentators disparaged these apparently ignorant individuals proclaiming intolerance, unwillingness, or an inability to eat gluten without knowing what it was or why they could not do so. The comments sections on Youtube, Huffington Post, and other sites where the clip was posted attacked these individuals as at best faddish and at worst ignorant. 'Here in L[os] A[ngeles] [gluten] is comparable to Satanism', summarized Kimmel (*ibid.*). Maybe. However, is the inability of gluten-free eaters to know what gluten is really that different from a Jew who does not know the details of *kasbrut*? Or a Muslim ignorant of the details of

how meat is made *hala?* Or an Irish-American Catholic explaining why, for some unknown reason, corned beef and cabbage is so important on St Patrick's Day? One does not need to explain religion for it to be real in the lives of individual practitioners.

### The Paleolithic Diet as epicurean ascetism and quasi-religion

A few weeks before I wrote the address that evolved into this article, I received in the mail my monthly copy of *Silent Sports*, a magazine for aficionados of Nordic skiing, bicycling, running, and other self-propelled sports in North America's Upper Midwestern region. I was not thinking about my research as I leafed through the magazine. Yet there, in the monthly magazine column about sports and nutrition, I saw the headline 'Would the Paleolithic Diet work for ultrarunners?' I am not an ultrarunner, but I read on. The columnist, a dietician and Nordic ski competitor, explained that she knew little about the Paleolithic Diet until several readers emailed her about it. So she researched it. 'A cursory search on the Web reveals a number of interpretations of their diet, some sounding more like a religious movement than a way to eat food', she summarized (Marlor 2014: 36). What did this columnist mean by this equation of the Paleolithic Diet and religion?

Numerous forms of the Paleolithic foodway exist. Some are more religious than others. All agree that one ought to eat how practitioners imagine our ancient Paleolithic ancestors did, under the premise that the human body evolved under those conditions and is attuned to that diet. This generally entails avoiding the 'foods of civilization' that humans developed after the advent of agriculture: grains, legumes, dairy, and any more recent refined or processed foods. Those are the taboos. Paleolithic eaters also have totemic foods, those associated with what they claim a caveman eats. This includes large quantities of meat and the plants for which one might conceivably forage, such as root vegetables and nuts. The most notable Paleolithic diet, the 'Paleo Diet', a registered trademark of Loren Cordain and his Sage Marketing Group, proclaims itself the 'world's healthiest diet', and promises everything from weight loss to longer life to improved libido (Sage Marketing 2014).

Though different Paleolithic adherents follow numerous and varied rules and codes as to what they may and may not eat, its totems and taboos do not vary from the general Paleolithic outline. That said, 'Paleo' and its foodway kin fetishizes the foods of the upper middle class, transforming them into icons of health, longevity, and prowess. Its cookbooks and website feature Copper River salmon, sushi, roast bison, and a variety of 'California cuisine' as featured Paleo



foods. Perusing Paleolithic cookbooks reveals that a form of epicurean asceticism characterizes this foodway. Adherents certainly eschew certain foodstuffs, but they embrace the sorts of foods that mark consumers as both high-class in taste as well as finances. More than just a general form of creating identity through consumption, Paleo represents a specialized form of consuming specialized foods that distinguish the consumer as a self-controlled yet refined gustatory savant.

Other Paleolithic options even more explicitly move from foodway to totalistic worldview. Mark Sisson's *The Primal Blueprint* (2013), relies upon what he calls the ten 'Primal Laws'. A latter-day Moses, Sisson's laws regulate how those living the Paleolithic lifestyle are to live, ranging from 'getting adequate sleep' (law 6) to 'play' (law 7) to 'using your brain' (law 10). Little of this relates to food. Rather, following Sisson's laws creates a new form of identity modelled on consuming and living in accordance with a high-class yet self-controlled lifestyle. Sisson's call for Paleolithic eaters to 'play' each day, and to sleep full eight-hour nights recalls Thorstein Veblen's note that a dedication to leisure marks the American upper classes, something that Sissons instills in his Paleolithic system (Veblen 1973 [1899]). Of course, those following the Sisson Primal Blueprint variant of Paleolithic eating also eat. For breakfast Sisson recommends one of his 'balanced meal replacement shakes' that he sells in his store, a salad with fresh vegetables and canned salmon, a snack of nuts such as macadamia or pinion, and a dinner of a 'a good cut of meat' (Sisson 2009). Sisson does not provide the average cost of this daily regiment, but it surely surpasses the income of an individual or family earning the American or even Canadian minimum wage.

For all of these diets, authors call for adherents to adopt a specific lifestyle similar to how they imagine ancient people lived. Some take explicitly anti-technological and anti-medical positions such as opposing vaccines, antibiotics, footwear, and dental care. Several years ago *The New York Times* featured extensive interviews with several proponents of Paleolithic eating who explicitly developed their foodways into what they called 'caveman lifestyles.' The *Times* described it as urban machismo, with its emphasis on consuming massive amounts of meat and engaging in exercise routines that proponents consider Paleolithic, such as playing catch with stones and scurrying on all fours beneath underbrush in New York City's Central Park. The article noted disagreements within the Paleolithic tribe, ranging from whether new world foods were acceptable to whether one was permitted to cook one's meat or had to eat it raw. (Goldstein 2010)

In her well-respected study of the development of *kashrut*, Jean Soler (1979: 126) argues that dietary habits define a society. 'Cooking is a language through



which a society expresses itself,' she writes. Soler's own research leads her to study how the laws of *kashrut* served ancient Jews to develop and form relationships between the foods they eat and their place in the world. *The New York Times* has found the same among the Paleolithic eaters of New York. Members of the 'Paleo tribe' have created personally meaningful worldviews that allow them to live in the world and respond to its various anxieties, especially those involving food and eating. They have created communities, codes of ethics, and even an alternative subculture around this quasi-religious foodway.

This appeal to lifestyle, rules, codes, led popular nutrition blogger 'SkepticRD' ('RD' stands for registered dietitian) to ask, 'Are you trying a new diet or a new religion?' (SkepticRD 2012). In providing a set of guidelines by which to live one's life, linking what one eats to what one does, how one lives, with whom one spends one's time, and beliefs about the nature of the human condition and human body, the Paleolithic foodway looks quite a bit like religion. The fact that Paleolithic assumptions are really based on faith and self-proclaimed experience, rather than scientific studies or anthropological research, only supports that contention. One forum for Paleolithic eaters I visited included a fierce defence by practitioners of why wine – which is by definition a product of agriculture – was not in fact a product of agriculture. Rather than dismiss Paleolithic eaters as irrational, I see this as simply a form of the religious non-rational. If wine can be the Blood of Christ, why can it not also be the drink of cavemen?

Numerous commentators, authors, bloggers, and dieters who participate in the Paleolithic subculture concur that something about their lifestyle and similar diets seems quite religious. Darren Beattie, writing for a fitness company marketing Paleolithic foodways as well as other forms of dieting, invokes the sectarian quality of religion in making the comparison between Paleo and religion. 'Diets, the New Religion?' he asks. 'People are generally intolerant of others' beliefs, which is exactly how I see very religious people, treating other religions. I couldn't help but notice that "diets" these days resemble that of a religious or cult following, at least for a little while' (Beattie 2010). One of the more reflective and popular activists for Paleolithic living, 'Caveman Greg', even penned an epistle of sorts linking the Paleolithic lifestyle to religion and calling for adherents of Paleolithic eating to explicitly integrate spiritual beliefs into their practices, so as to support a healthy and holistic lifestyle (Caveman Greg 2011). For this practitioner, and many others, Paleolithic eating takes on many of the forms of functions of religion, ranging from identity work and community building to ethics, morality, and a transcendent notion of what is correct and authentic.

## Some conclusions

David Sax, the *Los Angeles Times* journalist and author of *The Tastemakers: Why We're Crazy for Cupcakes but Fed Up with Fondue*, writes that ‘There are few cities that can compete with Los Angeles for the sheer energy its residents pour into health and diet trends. This town is the world leader in anxiety over what you should, and shouldn’t, be eating. . . . it’s become clear no food trend is more powerful, and potentially dangerous, than one that targets health and diet’ (Sax 2014). Whether Sax is correct about Los Angeles is immaterial. Yet he focuses on an important fact: the alternative foodways I have considered all help practitioners respond to profound senses of food anxiety that define modern North America. Concerns over processed foods, genetically-modified organisms, pesticides and other contaminants, big agriculture, environmental and social sustainability, and nutrition, have become rife. Scientific studies provide little certainty, and the sheer abundance of choice in a globalized world of food forces consumers to decide what they will and will not eat given a fundamental lack of knowledge about what is best for them, their society, and their environment. In a typical aisle of an American grocery store one must ask, Organic eggs? Cage-free eggs? Omega-three infused? Local? Vegetarian-fed? Brown? White? Or maybe one should skip the eggs and go vegan. Or buy some chickens and grow your own. (Or maybe ducks?) Quasi-religious foodways provide certainty, offering a system of totems and taboos that practitioners can accept and deploy to make sense of their foodway choices and assuage anxiety. As Freud described, this is one of the fundamental roles of religion in modern society, and while he dismissed religious solutions to anxiety as inferior to scientific psychoanalytic ones, they are surely as powerful if not more so.

Quasi-religious foodway practices allow individuals to not only assuage anxiety, but also mark their identity. The use of food to do so is of course not new. Even if we look only to religious codes of proscription in prescription, examples such as Jewish *kasbrut* and Islamic codes of *halal* indicate that food restrictions function to create and maintain social barriers and support religious identities. However, in such food traditions identity always falls within an inherited community ethos. Following *kasbrut* marks one as belonging to the Jewish community and possessing a Jewish identity. Following the laws of *halal* do the same for the Islamic community and Islamic identity. For those individuals who adopt gluten-free eating, veganism, Paleolithic eating, and other alternative foodways, the marking of identity occurs in different manner, one highly individualistic and driven by that most American of practices: consumption. While choosing to adopt these diets certainly embeds one within a broader

community of fellow eaters, it is ultimately a highly individualistic action rather than an acceptance of community norms. It is an individual rather than a religious tradition, a sacred text, one's parents, or a legal code that determines what one chooses to eat. Such individualism roots quasi-religious eating as embedded within contemporary individualistic Western culture. Further, these various food practices reveal a specific sort of identity work: identity through consumption. One literally purchases and consumes one's identity, investing a gluten-free brownie or Copper River salmon with broad social meaning.

These quasi-religious foodways therefore function to allow contemporary, consumer-oriented, individualistic North Americans to engage in discourses of community, identity, and meaning in a highly vernacular manner; that of the marketplace. They also point to the manner in which identity and community have expanded well outside of religious categories. A much trumpeted recent survey showed that a fifth of Americans have become religiously unaffiliated, though the majority of these still possessed some religious or spiritual practices and beliefs (Pew Forum 2012). Such identity now plays out within the realm of the quasi-religious. One finds religion not only in churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. One also finds it at the grocery store.

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# Respectfully eating or not eating

Putting food at the centre of Religious Studies

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With reference to data drawn from both ethnology and ethology, I argue that studying foodways does not merely add additional information about religions, but enables better understanding of religion. Rather than defining religion cognitively in relation to beliefs and believing (modernist tropes that have shaped the study of religion) I explore the effect of defining religion in relation to the questions, 'what do you eat?' and 'with whom do you eat?'

Food is more than a pinch of additional spice among the many topics available to scholars of religion. Researching foodways (everything related to the production and consumption of food) incites us to re-direct our attention to vital and generative matters among all religions. It reinforces the need for vernacular, material and performative issues to be placed firmly at the centre of our discipline.

If I were to push a claim to its extreme limits, I *could* assert that religion begins with eating. It certainly has much to do with what people eat or avoid eating, and with whom they eat or avoid eating. The intimate violence required in order to eat other living beings is at the heart of the relational engagement with the world that is life. Acts of consumption are allowed or constrained by religion as they are braided into both value systems and performative traditions. As such, food rules are among the quintessential forms of taboo that pervade and structure societies and cultures. Foodways are so frequently central to religious acts (even if they are insufficiently recognised as such) that they may define 'religion' as much as they differentiate between religions. Specific religions become identifiable, definable and observable when we attend to their meals (including their production and their aftermath) and also to feasting, fasting and other modes of celebration and abstinence. Perhaps religion (as a locus of scholarly attention) ought to be defined not as believing but as eating. In this article, I seek to explore and justify these assertions as a challenge to colleagues to make a feast out of the topic of religion and food by contemplating



'religion as food'. By way of an extended preface, the following section contextualises my main argument by pointing away from believing towards socialising.

### Religion is not entirely modernist

Bruno Latour is famous for asserting that 'we have never been modern' (1993). He means by this that the project of modernity has not succeeded in completely shaping the ways in which humans engage with or speak or think about the world. We do not entirely separate 'nature' from 'culture'. My assertion that 'religion has never been modern' is offered in that context. I do not mean that religion is primitive, a foolish irrationality left over from earlier epochs of human cultural evolution. Just as Latour's phrase can be expanded with the acknowledgement that some of us have tried hard to be modern and have even tried to impose modernity globally, so religions have tried to be modern. People have attempted to fit into the modern system by allowing the word 'religion' to label private beliefs about matters that are irrelevant to nation states. The United Nations declares that there is a universal freedom to believe anything. It allows, however, that there are apparently legitimate restrictions on acting on beliefs that might challenge the authority of political and public order. Displaying markers of religious affiliation too publically is likely to lead one to be identified as a 'fundamentalist' or 'extremist'. Early modernity's 'wars of state making' (which are often mis-identified as 'wars of religion') continue wherever people are vilified for becoming 'radical' or even 'militant' about religion (Cavanaugh 1995, King 2007). In short, when religion means more to people than 'odd ideas that hardly affect relationships with other people' they are demonstrating that religion is not, for them at least, entirely modern.

The study of religions has, however, far too often been almost completely modern. It has colluded with the notion that religion is believing. In research and teaching, it has emphasised odd ideas, cognitive process and unusual polemics rather than matters of relationship, materiality and performance. When these are engaged with, it has usually been as 'expressions' or 'representations' of properly religious believing. However, we are now well into an era that emphasises the study of religious performance and materiality. We are indebted to books with titles like *More than Belief* (Vásquez 2011) which point us away from privatised, individualised and interiorised acts of peculiar believing towards social acts of embodied, located, performative persons. Religion is no longer solely to be conceived of as a kind of mask worn by (Durkheimian) 'Society' but may be theorised as an aspect of the continuous relational interactions of social beings.

## Rejecting bland representations

Too often, textbooks about particular religions use dietary matters to give an introductory flavour of ways in which people live or practice their religions. Or they talk about festival foods or fasts to illustrate the living out of religious ideologies and systems. They use words like ‘represent’, ‘manifest’ and ‘express’ to indicate that foodways are among the practices which act as the public appearances of (allegedly more definitive) religious ‘beliefs’. While such approaches may offer an entrée to the study of lived religion, they remain bland and cannot nourish a full understanding. In both deliberate and subtle ways they reinforce the all too prevalent idea that religion exists before any actual performance, activity or living takes place. In some traditional scholarly approaches, religions can appear to be systems of teachings that may be expressed in ritual or daily life, represented in costume or art, and/or manifest in architecture, texts and/or symbols. Religions seem to exist independently of lived realities. Indeed, those ‘expressions’ may themselves be represented as only partially matching the supposedly normative form of a religion, that is ‘believing’ – as if ‘religion’ could exist independently of life. Until recently, considerable emphasis has been put on excavating these expressions, representations and symbols in order to uncover the underlying teachings, ideas or ideologies. It seems to have been more important to discover ‘what this religion teaches by encouraging or opposing this act’ than to understand what religion *is* if it is all about eating or not eating particular foods, wearing or not wearing particular costumes, talking or singing together at agreed times and venues, and so on.

The ‘turn’ towards vernacular and/or lived religion by scholars of religion (especially Leonard Primiano 1995, 2012; and Meredith McGuire 2008) resonates with wider scholarly turns towards performance, embodiment, materiality and, most recently, relationality (especially see Vásquez 2011, Harvey 2013). Together these emphases and approaches provide a resounding invitation to make far more of foodways than using them as mere data to flavour analysis or theorising. Rather, in studying ‘religion and food’ we are re-evaluating our discipline’s focus and approaches. We are attending to what people do in the real world. We are analysing and debating the lived realities of human behaviours in relation to the larger than human world and cosmos.

In the remainder of this chapter, I make use of a series of questions that have provoked me to think differently about the implications of researching religion and food. I begin by contesting existing approaches and move on to illustrating potentially more fruitful lines of enquiry. In the next two sections, questions about the Christian Eucharist initiate a rethinking of issues that have marked or moulded common ways of understanding and studying religion(s).

In the first of these sections, an over-emphasis on representation or symbolism is traced to Reformation-era disagreements over the Eucharist. Secondly, an emphasis on what religious elites do in the Eucharist has distracted us from studying the ways in which the majority of Christians perform their religion. We have, for example, been led to study interiority and transcendence as defined by authorities rather than relationships and interactions as performed by all religionists. Since the study of Protestant Christianity has played a definitive role in defining and studying all religions, these two issues – over-emphasising representation and belief and over-emphasising elites – have had a baleful effect on our discipline.

In seeking to provoke more exciting thinking about religion, as well as about relationships between religion and food, I then ask some unusual questions. Why do only some chimpanzees eat ants or termites? Is ‘doing violence with impunity’ the purpose of religious activity everywhere as Te Pakaka Tawhai (1988) claimed is true for his Maori community? Should researchers ask their hosts or informants, ‘who do you eat?’ rather than ‘what do you believe?’ The end result of discussing these questions may be a strengthening of a focus on topics that seem familiar (e.g. purity rules and taboo), and could also have been achieved by discussing *kasbrut*, *halal* or other foodways, or by renewing familiarity with Mary Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* (1992). The virtue of engaging with less familiar ways of achieving a similar result is that my aim is both to place food (its creation, consumption and consequences) at the absolute centre of our discipline and to provide better foundations for better scholarly approaches to lived religion. The resilience of what we have come to know as the ‘world religions paradigm’ demonstrates that it is all too easy to know we can do better but all but impossible to move on. Considering religion *as* foodways (rather than merely ‘religion and food’) places our subject matter firmly in the context of human interactions with the larger-than-human world. Food is not only ‘good to think’, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969: 62, 89) said of animals as totems, but vital to our living within the community of life, nowhere more intimately than in the food chain.

## Bread and body

The question of what Christians eat when participating in the Eucharist is not only of historical or theological interest. Neither should it interest those who research ‘religion and food’ only because of the surprising variety of ways in which Christians make and distribute ‘the host’ or dispose of whatever does not get consumed during the ritual. More than this, conflicts over the Eucharist were

foundational to the constitution and construction of early modernity. Since this evolving modernity has been exported globally to become the dominant world ideology, the results of those conflicts about bread and wine ought to interest everyone. The issue is not really ‘what do Christians eat when they participate in the Eucharist?’ That is a more theological and sectarian matter than is usefully addressed here. Rather, what interests me is the ramifications of those historic and continuing disputes in our wider culture, in the construction of ourselves as scholars, and in the study of religion(s).

In early modernity western European Christians structured their communities around competing understandings about the Eucharist and other ritual matters. One of these other matters was the ‘Communion of Saints’. Roman Catholics insisted that praying for and being prayed for by the deceased was effective and valuable (especially in the presence of relics). Protestants proclaimed that at death people either entered heaven or hell and played no role (other than as examples) in determining the eternal salvation of their still living kin. This was a necessary (to them) implication of the conflict initiated by the elevation of an individualised and interiorised notion of ‘faith’ to pre-eminence among Protestants. This shift from ‘faithfulness’ to ‘faith’ or from ‘trust’ to ‘believing’ (to encapsulate a complex phenomena briefly) and from ‘church’ to ‘believer’ also impacted Christian understandings of the Eucharist. Christian relationality was altered by a distancing of the Christian deity from what were asserted to be (material) signs, symbols and representations of his (spiritual) presence. The bread and wine which transubstantiated into divine body and blood as Catholic priests intoned the scriptural and liturgical phrases ‘this is my body’ and ‘this is my blood’ became transformative representations (without themselves being materially transformed) in Protestant rites. Christian material and performance culture changed dramatically and, sometimes, violently.

As Protestantism diversified so did the ways of explaining or expressing the relationship between bread and body. This is familiar territory to most scholars interested in religion or in European history. My purpose here is to indicate that something profound happened to European (and subsequent colonial and global) cultural discourses and performances under the influence of these early modern reformations. For one thing, the apparently simple word ‘is’ became loaded with increasingly complex freight. If ritualists could no longer say ‘this [bread] is my body’ without expecting to be understood to mean complicated things about signs, symbols and representations, more everyday uses of the word ‘is’ caught the same tendency towards convolution. A painting or photograph of a person or a scene cannot simply be explained with phrases like ‘this is my wife’ or ‘this is my garden’. There is no equivalence. The sign can only be something

other than that towards which it points. Much of modernity's understanding of 'art' begins here. But that is not all.

It is possible that matters were always more complex than I am suggesting here. I cannot be certain, for example, that ancient paintings or statues of Roman emperors were not understood by their first Roman viewers as *representations* of a distant ruler or as *signs* of his authority. Perhaps they were taken to be some kind of real presence of the emperor. However, my difficulty in knowing what 'is' does in those phrases is partly caused by the fact that centuries of European enculturation have made the notion of representation 'natural' to me. I hear the words 'this is my wife' or 'this is the emperor' but I hear 'this represents my wife' or 'this signifies the authority of the emperor'. At international borders things become a little more complicated because there is supposed to be an equivalence between a passport photograph and the person showing it to immigration officers. We prove our identities by showing something that is somehow understood to be identical to ourselves. An opposite trajectory to the reforming insertion of the idea of symbolism or representation into interpersonal relationships seems to be pursued here. Matters can be even more different elsewhere. For example, for (Native American) Zuni traditionalists, anyone who makes a *koko* mask is making a Zuni *koko* mask. As Pia Altieri demonstrates (2000: 139), it is simply not possible to make a copy, replica, model or representation of these masks. Since each *koko* mask is a personal and relational being, the act of making a mask is a relational act that employs Zuni sacred knowledge and establishes or enriches relations between the maker and the *koko*. The ethnicity or intention of the mask's maker is irrelevant: if museum curators or youth groups make *koko* masks they are making relations within the Zuni world. Any such mask *is* an authentic Zuni mask and never a mere replica or neutral representation.

Changes circulating around the Eucharistic bread and wine are among the roots of prevalent, taken-for-granted contemporary definitions of and approaches to religion because too many textbooks and introductory courses about religion indicate that food, costumes, buildings and ceremonies *represent* religion. They are not themselves 'religion' because that is all about the interior beliefs (or non-empirical postulations) rather than being actions in a material world. Happily, this inherited and misguided approach is being challenged. Thinking again about food and religion is pushing forward the project of thinking more carefully about lived religion.

## Wine and tea

In addition to the over-emphasis on interiority brought about by treating Eucharistic bread and wine as representations of more 'spiritual' realities, the study of religion has also colluded with religious elites in largely ignoring 'ordinary people'. Indeed, my use of a single name, 'the Eucharist', masks considerable variety and epic conflicts among Christians. It suggests a commonality belied by the diversity of Christian teaching, understanding, performance and debate. While it may be useful to treat these varied rites as the defining rituals of Christianity, what they define most clearly is the particular, local, and sometimes conflictual nature of plural Christianities in real life.

In addition, and far more interestingly, if we surrender to the normative call to direct our attention towards actions at the altar or table of churches we might fail to see the richness of what 'ordinary' Christians do as crucial aspects of lived Christianity. We might, for instance, mistakenly think that the drinking of tea or coffee is utterly separate from the 'real' ritual. We may not recognise that these seemingly more mundane acts of consumption are integral to establishing and reinforcing community and even *communitas*. They might not be symbolically rich. They might not represent anything. Few if any 'believers' say much to researchers about the religious meaning of tea drinking, flower arranging or many other putatively mundane acts undertaken in churches. However, scholars of religion need not follow this lead any more than we should allow our attention to be directed by the elite who manipulate bread and wine at the altar. Rather, if we consider that religion might have everything to do with communities eating together, we might place equal or even greater weight on the more frequent sharing of tea, coffee or fruit juice than on the less common ingestion of small bits of bread and small sips of wine. By all these acts of sharing together people become a congregation or community. They also become distinct from groups with whom they do not share. This, I believe, is religion and not merely a manifestation of religion. Perhaps a dramatically different culinary context will help me to develop that thought.

## Chimpanzee diets and religion

The primatologist Jane Goodall says that she is often asked 'if the chimpanzees show any signs of religious behavior' (2005: 1304). She and other researchers from various disciplines have debated evidence of religious behaviours or religious experiences among chimpanzees. Their approaches and evidence bases are admirably surveyed by James Harrod (2014) who advances an argument that

chimpanzees do indeed behave in ways that match his ‘non-anthropocentric, trans-species definition of religion’ (also see Harrod 2011). That is, chimpanzees engage in complex and deliberate behaviours which demonstrate prototypical characteristics of religion such as ‘reverence, careful observation, wonder, awe, and empathic intimacy’ (Harrod 2014: 9). He could have added evidence relating to the ‘culinary rites’ which he lists among other ‘possible categories of ritual’ but does not illustrate with reference to chimpanzees.

Evolutionary anthropologists and ‘panthropologists’ have greatly enriched understanding of chimpanzee tool use and dietary behaviours. For instance, in writing about the ‘Subsistence technology of Nigerian chimpanzees’, Andrew Fowler and Volker Sommer (2007) present evidence of complex choices and deliberate learning among chimpanzees. Specific tools are made, adapted and learnt within particular groups. These are used to obtain particular food sources. What interests me is that some chimpanzees use these tools to capture and eat ants while others use them to capture and eat termites. Ants and termites are available to most chimpanzees but particular communities select or reject them as food. Speculating about why this might be the case leads Fowler, Sommer and colleagues to write:

it is entirely possible that Gashaka chimpanzees do not consume termites, because ‘it is not something that is done here’ (McGrew 2004) – similarly to the situation at Mahale/Tanzania, where termites are consumed in one community, but not the neighbouring (Whiten *et al.* 2001). ... These patterns are perhaps related to what would be called a ‘*food taboo*’ in human societies. For example, humans in the Gashaka area will not consider eating dogs, while this is perfectly acceptable for the same or similar ethnic groups just 1 ½ days walk away, across the border in Cameroon (I. Faucher pers. comm.). The non-consumption of a perfectly edible food-item would thus serve as some sort of group-identifying trait. (Fowler *et al.* 2011: 482)

Sommer and colleagues are developing this argument about the ‘arbitrary/non-practical aspect of certain behaviours that assist to create some sort of random in-group/out-group identity’ (sometimes with violence) which would in human populations often be called ‘taboo’ (Sommer, personal communication; but also see Sommer and Parish 2010, and Sommer *et al.*, forthcoming). That eating particular foods, or wearing particular costumes, or acting in particular ways is ‘not something that is done here’ seems an excellent summary of the negative, boundary policing rules that could be taken to define religion in lived reality. The positive version is equally definitive: eating particular foods



and wearing particular costumes is exactly the kind of thing that ‘makes us who we are’. Indeed, they make otherwise unrelated individuals into a community, a ‘we’. Such an argument is familiar to those inspired by Douglas’ *Purity and Danger* (1992). While a remarkable array of explanations have been offered as to why some people do not eat some ‘perfectly edible food item’ (e.g. horses, pigs, dogs or any meat), Douglas’ argument may be perfectly summed up in McGrew’s words: ‘it is not something that is done here’. Those other communities who seem to make the eating of the same items central to their social relations or cultural actions act no less randomly or arbitrarily. No one is compelled to eat anything simply because it is edible. However, everyone (chimpanzees as much as humans) is born into a cultural context with expectations about what will be eaten or not eaten. What would otherwise be random becomes meaningful only when we understand that to be ‘us’ is to eat or not eat (to wear or not wear, to sing or not sing, to dance or not dance, to arrange flowers or not to arrange flowers) in given ways. Those who wish to act (eat, wear, sing, dance or arrange flowers) differently must take the consequences or find another community.

If chimpanzees have taboos (which presumably can be broken as well as maintained, perhaps at some cost), and if taboos are pervasive among religions, perhaps chimpanzees are religious. Perhaps taboo and religion are closely related terms or even synonyms. If so, to study foodways is to study religion.

### Violence with impunity

Jonathan Z. Smith has famously asserted that religion ‘can be defined, with greater or lesser success, more than fifty ways’ (1998: 281). The Maori scholar Te Pakaka Tawhai offers what may seem a surprising definition. In relation to his people’s traditional knowledge he wrote,

the purpose of religious activity here is to seek to enter the domain of the superbeing and do violence with impunity: to enter the forest and do some milling for building purposes, to husband the plant and then to dig up the tubers to feed one’s guests. Thus that activity neither reaches for redemption and salvation, nor conveys messages of praise and thanksgiving, but seeks permission and offers placation. (Tawhai 1988: 101)

My *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (2013) was initiated by reflection on whether Tawhai’s definition is applicable elsewhere. Does ‘doing violence with impunity’ successfully define ‘religion’ beyond



the borders of Tawhai's Ngati Uepohatu homeland at the East Cape of Aotearoa New Zealand? It certainly emphasises the links between ritual, food and community, but far more is involved here than merely adding some more (exotic) data.

Tawhai's explanation relies on a number of facts. In order to feed guests, one must have planted, tended and harvested *kumara*, sweet potatoes. The intimacy of this relationship reciprocates the care afforded to Maori when *kumara* migrated with them to what is now New Zealand. Understanding that plants are not inanimate objects or mere resources but personal beings may further our appreciation of the fact that digging up the tubers is an act of violence. Even if such violence is required by the cultural imperative to feed guests, it is not made automatically acceptable. There is nothing neutral about food and consumption: it is burdened with ethical and cultural weight. Over and above practical concerns about the conservation of plants for future planting, Tawhai's writing points to the structuring and maintenance of relations between humans and plants as much as between humans and other humans. Indeed, these sets of relationships are entwined. Guest-making rituals are among the most important Maori cultural activities. They involve the negotiation of taboo statuses and relationships. Someone new (like a host or a visitor) or something new (like a fresh meeting house) is deemed *tapu* (as Maori dialect renders 'taboo') until normalised by deliberate acts. These may include people eating together, as they do in the case of guest-making. Thus, social life and cultural interactions could not continue without the taking of life in order to produce food. But Tawhai describes a world in which 'social life' and 'culture' do not only include humans but embrace a larger-than-human community.

As Aua, an Iglulik Inuit shaman, told Rasmussen, a Danish explorer and ethnographer, in the 1920s:

The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls. All the creatures that we have to kill to eat, all those that we have to strike down and destroy to make clothes for ourselves, have souls, like we have, souls that do not perish with the body and which must therefore be propitiated lest they should avenge themselves on us for taking away their bodies. (Rasmussen 1929: 55–6)

Charles Darwin taught the same truth, albeit without recourse to the notion of 'souls'. The 'creatures that we have to kill' are our evolutionary and ecological relations, many with flesh, bones, families and activities that look quite like our own. Our relationships with other animals are fraught both because of their

similarities with and differences from us and also because we (and probably they) do not entirely approve of violence and life-taking. Nonetheless, killing is necessary. Local context underpins Aua's emphasis on human kinship with animals. Tawhai's evocation of the husbanding of sweet potatoes widens this concern with killing others to include plants. Inuit and Maori are far from alone in seeking ways to commit necessary, life-sustaining violence with impunity. We could examine a number of other cultural and/or religious lifeways, but questions about planting and eating invite thoughts about veganism. While some vegans justify their chosen diet by citing the sentience of animals or their ability to feel pain, others are not convinced that plants are insensate in relevant ways. If they are right, veganism may reduce the number of acts of consumption (i.e. eating plants directly rather than eating plants-transformed-into-flesh) without ending predatory acts. More to the point, diminishing one's impact within the food chain does not automatically bring about impunity for acts of killing. As Tawhai suggests of his Maori community, vegans too might need to 'seek permission and offer placation' to plants.

Killing, then, is a crucial element of everyday life in the real world, even for those of us who employ others to kill for us. We cannot, even if we wished, escape this cycle of violence by ending our own lives because our skin and guts are home to myriad lively bacteria (Wade 2008). As inherently symbiotic beings, neither our bodies nor our lives and deaths are entirely 'ours'. We live as communal beings even when we are without the company of other humans. When we die, many other beings die with (in and on) us. Acknowledging our involvement in food chains, and hearing the seemingly ubiquitous decree 'do not kill', may enable us to recognise the force of Tawhai's evocative and provocative proposal that 'the purpose of religious activity ... is doing violence with impunity'. If so, the study of foodways takes us to the heart and guts of understanding religion as a crucial aspect of human relations with the larger-than-human world and especially with those other-than-human beings consumed by humans.

### Eating with others

As a thought experiment, I wonder what the scholarly study of religion would have been like if it had emerged in a culture significantly moulded by any religion other than Protestant Christianity. If the dominant culture had been that of observant Jews would our textbooks invite students to reflect on food choices as their principle subject matter? Would researchers meeting new informants ask 'what do you eat?' and/or 'what do you not eat?' rather than worrying

about odd (i.e. non-secular, non-empirical) beliefs? If our habits of thought and behaviour had been shaped by animism (Harvey 2005) rather than modernism would we have phrased our questions more relationally, for example as ‘who do you eat?’, and attended more closely to inter-species interactions rather than to transcendence?

This is more than an idle speculation to while away some time between proper scholarly enquiries. It is part of an effort to contest the modernist assumptions and practices that inform and constrain us. It is a test of the taboo system of a discipline in which people can be marginalised for ‘believing’ what their host communities allegedly believe. A quite different relationship between scholars and practitioners could emerge if scholars were to be most interested in questions of performance. Our positions (in academia and in religious contexts) could be quite different if they were marked by degrees of observance (discerned, e.g., by answering ‘what do you eat?’) rather than being tangled up in worries about adherence to possible irrationalities. We would be researching and teaching about public, communal, performative, embodied and located matters rather than about putatively private and interior ones. We would have far easier access to those materialised realms than we do to imaginary worlds of imagined believers. I concur with Latour (2010) that we have become believers in belief and that, in doing so, we have misunderstood precisely that part of the world (a pervasively interactive community) which our discipline is supposed to study: religion.

When we think of religion and of our task as scholars of religion more relationally we find that asking ‘what do you eat?’, ‘what do you not eat?’, ‘with whom do you eat?’ and ‘with whom do you not eat?’ are vitally important questions. Foodways are at the heart of the many specific, local and generative taboo systems that are taught and, to one degree or another, adopted, adapted, negotiated or resisted by religious people. If we must seek systems, religion begins to look like a purity system rather than a belief one. We should not ask about cognition but consumption. What rules govern people’s choices of what to eat, when, where, how and with whom?

If we must seek the origins of religion, it seems to me entirely possible that religion did indeed begin with eating and not eating. Our first ancestors made choices about what to eat long before we were human, probably long before we were apes. Being embraided within the relational interactions of the whole community of life, religion may have begun when people sought permission from and expressed gratitude to those other-than-human persons who they wished to eat. But this is speculation and I might as easily assert that religion began when our first ancestors sought to communicate across species boundaries by

singing or otherwise sounding like other species. (If so, religion would fit better into Steven Mithen's [2005] views on the evolution of language and music than his brief allusion to cognitive scholarship allows.) I could as easily assert that religion began when those same early ancestors erected a pile of rocks or a cairn to mark a place of relationship establishing encounter with other-than-human persons. Interesting as these possibilities may or may not be, they are not my concern. Instead, I want to celebrate the fact that growing numbers of scholars are studying what people eat or avoid eating with other people.

However, I want to push this emergent project further. I want to insist that we do not only study 'religion and food' but 'religion as food'. Foodways are not just additional spice in our work. They get us to the heart of our subject matter. Whether or not you agree with Tawhai and me that religion is about the intimate and necessary violence of eating other living beings does not matter. If religions are (as some think) value systems and/or performative traditions, it is in the ways in which acts of consumption are allowed or constrained that we see them best. If foodways (what gets eaten or avoided with others) *is* definitive of religions, and religions are defined by meals (including their production and their aftermath) and by both feasting and fasting (and other modes of abstinence), they must also define 'religion'. If what people eat or avoid eating with other people defines the relational engagement with the world that we label 'religion', then our discipline should be evaluated according to its success or failure to analyse people's foodways.

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# Imagining Jesus, with food

MICHEL DESJARDINS

This article applies modern, cross-cultural, anthropologically-grounded food data to the historical Jesus. It explores five themes that have emerged from my research on the intersection of spirituality and food in contemporary life, across religions: food offerings, dietary restrictions, fasting, food prepared for special religious occasions, and charity. The analysis brings together previous historical-critical research on Christian origins and current research on food in order to shed new light on the role of food in a first century Jewish person's life. The result is a more human, possibly more historically-realistic, portrait of Jesus in keeping with broad sectors of religious life across traditions.

I imagine Jesus as an adult, early-first-century Jewish male, living in Palestine, of indeterminate sexual orientation, whose religious fervour attracted the attention of his fellow Jews and others in the region, eventually leading to his death at the hands of those who considered him a political threat, and to his deification by those who considered him their way to the divine. Trained as I have been as a scholar of early Christianity I know all too well that only a handful of other phrases, if any, could be safely added to this description of Jesus before scholars enter the realm of speculation. I also know how much academic speculation exists concerning 'the historical Jesus', all of it dependent to some extent on each scholar's worldview (Arnal and Desjardins 1997). There is no access to Jesus without interpretation, and imagination; as long as there are Christians, and scholars of early Christianity, there will be reconstructions of Jesus – to be sure, some more historically credible than others.

This article re-constructs Jesus through the lens of fieldwork I have done in comparative religions – much of it collaboratively with my wife.<sup>1</sup> Over the past decade, while conducting over 300 interviews with people in Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and Central and North America, we have explored how religious food customs and beliefs help to explain modern

1 Ellen Desjardins is a nutritionist and human geographer.

religious life. Every step in the research has uncovered complexities,<sup>2</sup> but we have gathered enough material with which to make some historically credible suggestions when looking back, in this case, at the earliest accounts of Jesus. I appreciate that Jesus is presented by the gospel writers as someone who challenged common religious and ritual practices and at times re-defined them in provocative ways, yet there is still much that one can say about him as a typical religious individual in the context of his contemporaries and ours.

Our research, I believe, has some transhistorical relevance. Much as I know how allergic scholars of early Christianity are to applying twenty-first-century data to first-century life, first-century Jews, including Jesus, would not have been radically different from other religious people in our world, or in theirs, when it comes to the religious role of food. That is to say, I am assuming that the information we have gathered from religious individuals has some explanatory power when applied to first-century documents. Here I would like to bring these two worlds together, juxtaposing the life of Jesus portrayed in the earliest Christian texts with the results of the research we have conducted in our own day.<sup>3</sup>

I have organized what follows around five themes that emerged in our cross-cultural research: food offerings to the deities; dietary restrictions; fasting; food prepared for special religious occasions; and charity. There are other themes, to be sure, but these five are relevant to most religious people and groups we have encountered and in the literature. Each theme reflects both commonalities and differences *between* traditions (e.g. Muslim and Jain fasting are more similar than one might imagine, but the specific differences are noteworthy), and *within* traditions (e.g. Passover typically brings Jews together once a year, but when it comes to food traditions some Jews have more in common with Buddhists than they do with other Jews). What follows is an exploration of early Christian sources on Jesus that fit these themes, in conversation with findings that have emerged from our research.

- 2 The complexities have made us resist the temptation to publish book-length studies, but together, separately and with others we have published some of our research: Desjardins and Desjardins 2009, 2012; Desjardins and Mulhern 2015; Desjardins forthcoming; Desjardins 2012.
- 3 Biblical scholarship itself over the last quarter century has increasingly paid attention to food. For pointers to this literature (including studies about early Christians), and to some of the discussions, see MacDonald 2008.



## Food offerings to the deities

Jesus would likely have believed in the existence of a single all-powerful deity, and also in a plethora of spirits that filled the particular construction of the world he inherited and created. Exactly how he navigated that complex world has been much studied, with varied and conflicting conclusions. Religious individuals commonly find ways to personalize the tradition in which they find themselves. I have met Muslims in south-central Java, for instance, who combine belief in Allah with worship of the Sea Goddess, and vegetarian Hindu priests in Bali who happily consume ducks. Jews in Jesus' day would have had their own ways of addressing their spirit world, and Jesus would have been no exception.

One thing is clear: the central Jewish cult of his day placed priority on animal and plant offerings at the Jerusalem Temple; that is to say, cultic officials solicited God's favour through blood, smoke, and other sacrificial substances. There is no reason to doubt that, growing up, Jesus would have taken all this for granted, just as a Roman Catholic today would be unlikely to question transubstantiation, or a Cuban santera the power of cigar smoke to draw the saints to her.

The gospel writers do not stress that aspect of Jesus' devotion, but there is the occasional reminder of its presence. In the Lukan account Jesus is first brought to the Temple by his parents shortly after his birth ('for their purification'), at which point his parents pay for food offerings to be made on his behalf (2:22–4). In a different narrative, when Jesus vents his anger at the commodification of sacrifice by driving some of the moneychangers and animal merchants out of their stalls in the Temple (John 2:13–16; Matt. 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–8), the context assumes that these business people were there to serve the sacrificial cult.

Another thing is equally clear: some of Jesus' colleagues tried to make sense of his death by conceiving of it as a grand blood sacrifice, even more pleasing to God than the other animal sacrifices (e.g. Heb. 9). God, in the case of both the traditional offerings and Jesus' death, was thought to be enticed by the death of human and non-human animals offered to him.<sup>4</sup> Underlying all these

4 This belief in Jesus as a replacement offering was reinforced by the use of Genesis 22 as a story to remind some Christians that the ultimate human sacrifice, anticipated by the Abraham and Isaac narrative, had been fulfilled by Jesus. For more discussion on the move from Jewish to Jewish-Christian interpretations of the *akedah*, or sacrifice, see Segal 1987a. For discussion of the modern Muslim adaptations of the *akedah* and



Food offerings to the rice goddess, Bali 2007. Photograph by Michel Desjardins.

statements and beliefs is a worldview that understands animal and vegetable products as key conduits between the spirit and human worlds.

Later discussions about food (1 Cor. 8, 10; Rom. 14–15; Acts 15), which show a division among Christians regarding the consumption of food that had first been offered to other deities ('idols'), suggest that at least some early Christians continued to conceive of deities as entering food. To eat 'food offered to idols' meant ingesting those deities, and that notion created problems for this new sect, living, as it were, between the times.<sup>5</sup>

That food offerings are religiously important is not surprising by modern, comparative standards. Contemporary religious individuals, across traditions and across the world, frequently and with a great deal of improvisation, reach out to the entire spirit world through food (and drink) offerings, sometimes with blood at the centre of the cult, sometimes with agricultural items. Three

of these modern practices help us appreciate Jesus' world differently.

First, it is striking how frequently food offerings are now made throughout the world, not only in and around communal places of worship, but also in and around the home. Food is prepared at home, and offerings typically begin there. There are no references to food offerings in Jesus' home (scarcely anything is said about his home, in any case) or in the homes he enters to dine. If there were such offerings, women would likely have been at the heart of that process, as they so often are today. The absence of women and most domestic activities from these (and many other) stories – Mark 1:31 is a conspicuous exception, perhaps Luke 8:2 as well – does not mean they were absent from Jesus' daily life.

theories of sacrifice through which those practices and narratives can be understood see Desjardins and Mulhern 2015.

- 5 For more detailed discussions see Segal 1987b, and Gooch 1993, who states in his conclusion: 'What was Paul's position concerning idol-food? He urged the Corinthian Christians to avoid it. While Paul abandoned the requirements of the law concerning circumcision and *kasbrut*, Paul did not abandon the covenantal demand for exclusive allegiance to Yahweh. ... Since idol-food was found in many contexts, and especially at events marking important social occasions, to avoid idol-food faithfully in the way Paul suggests would have carried significant social liabilities for Christians' (129).

Second, food offerings are sometimes given only to the good spirits, including the ancestors, enticing them to look more kindly on a particular person. That is certainly the New Testament paradigm: Temple offerings were made to God, not Satan. But across the world today offerings are often given to a wide range of spirits in order to attract some while warding off others. After all, spirits are all potentially dangerous: if food gets the attention of spirits from whom one hopes to benefit directly, why should it not have the same results with other spirits? Throughout Hindu Bali, for instance, we saw food offerings for evil spirits laid just outside the perimeter of the major temples, including the mother temple of Besakih, in order to keep those spirits away from the sacred spaces. Given the significant attention paid to evil spirits in the Mediterranean world in the time of Jesus (see for example Betz 1986, Meyer and Smith 1994), and in the New Testament gospels in particular, it is quite possible that some Palestinian Jewish families and individuals in Jesus' day would have sought to ward off evil by feeding these evil spirits – that is to say, by conducting food exorcisms – or by means of apotropaic rituals involving food.

Third, in some cases (e.g. Hinduism), but not all (e.g. most forms of Buddhism), at least a portion of the food that is offered to the spirits is returned to the donor, spirit-infused. Some food, in other words, ends up with the gods (burnt, eaten by animals, etc.), some is given as thanks/pay to the religious functionaries, occasionally some is given to the needy, and some comes back to the donor. In Jesus' day, donors consumed part of the sacrificial offerings they made at the Jerusalem Temple. The evidence is insufficient for us to know whether people considered that food God-infused, but the Eucharistic ritual that gets constructed following Jesus' death has the donors not only making an offering, but drawing the deity into the food in order to consume it/him. Accordingly, early Christians, in eating Jesus, would likely have been adapting a practice with which they were familiar since childhood. The gods are ingested everywhere in the world; it is the absence of this worldview, not its presence, that requires explanation and wonder.

## Dietary restrictions

So much is made of the Pauline turn away from kosher, and Jesus' occasional challenge to food practices, that it is often forgotten that Jesus himself (not to mention his close friends, including Peter) likely kept kosher.<sup>6</sup> The Acts 10

6 Notwithstanding the occasional saying that redirects the importance to other matters, for example the idea that it is 'Not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person,

account of Peter needing to be told three times by God that he could eat anything, and then having to plead the case to other Christian leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 11), gains force in the context where kosher was still the norm among Christians after the death of Jesus. Moreover, since Jesus lived in a land where not everyone was a Jew and (one always needs to remember) where not all Jews kept kosher, keeping kosher would have had implications for him.

Food restrictions matter. Our research has supported the well-known points that dietary restrictions inevitably reinforce in-group identity ('we' are not like 'them' in the food we eat), lead to in-group divisions ('we' insiders keep to the rules better than 'you' insiders), and help redirect attention repeatedly to the spirit world. One need only think of observant North African Muslim immigrants who now live in France – how their halal food practices divide them from some, and join them to others, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

One thing that I have come to appreciate more these last few years, particularly in conversations with Muslims and upper-caste Hindus, is how profoundly significant food restrictions can be for individuals. I have listened to devout Muslims, for example, tell me that if they eat food forbidden to them God will not hear their prayers because a barrier will develop between them and God. And I have listened to Brahmins tell me how, if they happen to eat food prepared by someone from a lower caste, they will be polluted/infected and will need to undergo a purification ritual to be made right again.<sup>7</sup>

Knowing what I know now – that religiously-imposed food restrictions often mark individuals in fundamental ways – allows me to appreciate more than I did previously, in my academic life as a scholar of early Christianity, the profound transformation that happened when some early Christians decided to abandon food restrictions. The debates in 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans and Acts suggest a break between Paul and Jesus' closest followers that arguably is more visceral than any theological disputes would ever have been. The signal meeting of Paul, his Jewish co-worker Barnabas and his Gentile co-worker Titus, with the observant Christian Jews James, Cephas, and John (Gal. 2:1–10), and its sequel (2:11–14) suggests as much.<sup>8</sup>

but what comes out of the mouth' (Mark 7:15; Matt. 15:11; GosThom 14; see also Acts 11:1–8); and the Lukan Jesus (10:8) encouraging his colleagues to eat what is set before them when they are spreading the message from place to place. For views of Jesus that do not assume a complete overturning of his culture's food laws see Bockmuehl 2000 and Sanders 1990.

- 7 On this topic in general, see also Dumont 1967: chapter 6, and Olivelle 1995.  
8 Paul's exclusionary statement in Gal. 2:15, 'We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners', might be grounded in Jewish food purity laws.

Bracketing the two millennia of Christian activities and thought that have been heavily influenced by Pauline thought, I now also imagine Jesus' itinerant lifestyle to have been more marked by concerns for food purity. In Samaria, in Galilee, and even in Judea, it is likely that Jesus would have been concerned about the food he ingested, and likely also about who prepared it, and he would have assumed that food would hinder or facilitate his access to his God. Statements attributed to Jesus such as that it is 'Not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth', need

not at all suggest that kosher was unimportant to him; they would have been meant, rather, to shock (his colleagues knew the importance of keeping kosher), and to signal the importance of proper behaviour (a person's words should matter even more than kosher).

Jesus might also have eaten vegetarian fare at times – not because he came from a vegetarian tradition, but because omnivorous individuals with meat restrictions who find themselves living in a culture where they cannot always be certain about the source of their food often choose vegetarian options outside the home. Christians, Jews and Muslims have rarely chosen an exclusive vegetarian diet for religious reasons (Seventh-Day Adventists are one notable exception), but the occasional comment about the vegetarian Ebionites<sup>9</sup> suggests that some early Christians at least were nudged in that direction by kosher concerns.<sup>10</sup> So it is not simply an argument from silence to imagine Jesus, when



Hindu offering at a temple in Bali, 2007.  
Photograph by Michel Desjardins.

9 E.g. Epiphanius, *Haer.* 30.22.4.

10 Note Rom. 14–15, which addresses a community controversy over some ('strong') Christians who ate meat and some who didn't (the 'weak'). Paul's view (14:13–16) is that Christians should refrain from eating meat on certain occasions so as not to alienate some in their community; a similar argument is made in 1 Cor. 8.





Seventh-Day Adventist grocery store, Chattanooga, USA, 2008. Photograph by Michel Desjardins.

travelling in parts of Galilee and Samaria at least, keeping to a vegetarian diet in order to ensure that he did not break kosher.<sup>11</sup> Even ‘good’ Samaritans might not always have had ‘safe’ *treyf*.<sup>12</sup>

## Fasting

Early Christian texts have much to say about fasting. Some of it is inconsistent. Yes, you should fast (Jesus fasts during his temptation; some of his closest friends appear to have fasted). No, you shouldn’t fast (at least when you have ‘the bridegroom’ with you, which explains why Jesus and his friends don’t fast like John and his group). Yes, you should fast but don’t publicize it (don’t be hypocrites). The common denominator in the gospels, if one seeks a cross-gospel viewpoint, is that Jesus fasted less than other religiously-minded Jews. Again, this concern for fasting is not surprising, given the near-universal presence of fasting among religious individuals in the world. Like prayer, fasting is a vital way for many religious individuals to reach out to the spirit world; once

- 11 To be sure, meat, because of its cost, would not have been eaten all that frequently, but it was available in Jesus’ day. If modern India can be used as an example, the special religious festivals often provide opportunities for even the poor to eat some meat. For information on diet in biblical times, see MacDonald 2008; for the argument that the ‘unmoneied’ of the Roman world did eat meat even beyond civic festivals see Meggitt 1994.
- 12 Gaye Tuchman and Harry Gene Levine (1993) popularized the expression ‘safe treyf’, that is, safe, ritually-impure food for Jews, in exploring the custom of New York Jews eating in Chinese restaurants at the beginning of the twentieth century.

learned, it is difficult to eliminate as a spiritual practice. Three modern practices shed additional light on Jesus' world.

First, 'fasting' means quite different things to different peoples, across traditions and for each person. It can mean temporary food constraints or no food at all for a certain time period of the day (no meat and animal products, no cooked food, no food and drink all day, etc.); moreover, religious individuals will typically alter the severity and frequency of their fasts to accord with what is happening in their lives.

Imagining Jesus' world to be similar to most situations today, I would expect fasting to accord with the first-century practice in Galilee (or Palestine more generally), whatever that was (we aren't sure),<sup>13</sup> while also varying quite dramatically from person to person and time to time. I would therefore not expect any saying by Jesus, or anyone else for that matter, to have universal application. By analogy, when Matthew's Jesus tells his group what to do and what to say when they pray (Matt. 6:5–15, the 'Lord's Prayer') one should not imagine people discarding their previous ways of praying.

Second, according to data we have gathered in our food research, women typically fast more than men: sometimes they fast for the health of their husband, or for their children, and sometimes they take on the fasting responsibilities for the family because they feel more capable of enduring the suffering.<sup>14</sup> The contrast drawn in the gospels between John the Baptist (who fasts) and Jesus (who doesn't... at least not quite as much) has gender implications: any advice to reduce fasting would have affected women's religious practices more than those of men.<sup>15</sup> Here is one instance where John the Baptist's practices, if we are to believe the NT accounts about John and Jesus on this issue, would have been more supportive of women's religiosity than Jesus' practices. Imagine that.

Third, we have found that the start of fasting in a person's life is often a significant rite of passage. Muslim boys and girls who are finally able to fast all the way through the month of Ramadan, for example, undergo a significant change

13 The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, is currently the main Jewish fast day. Religious Jews are encouraged to perform a complete fast (no food, no drink) for 25 hours. The biblical institution of the holiday, however (Lev. 23:26–32), does not mention fasting; it only encourages a complete absence of work and 'afflicting' oneself. Evidence is lacking to determine what fasting practices were current in first-century Palestine.

14 This practice is in tension with what the rabbinic sources tell us about women not having the same ability as men to restrain themselves. For a discussion of these gender stereotypes in early Jewish sources see Satlow 1996.

15 For the importance of fasting for European Christian women in the Middle Ages see Bynum 1987.

in group status. It is only natural to think that the same would occur for young Jewish girls and boys in Jesus' day. While much has been said in the past few centuries about Jesus caring for children, it is remarkable that gospel writers are almost entirely silent concerning food rituals such as fasting that would have significantly marked Jesus' life as a child and the lives of other children.

### Food prepared for special religious occasions

I imagine Jesus, like countless other religious individuals over time, to have associated religious festivals, and rites of passage, with tastes and smells, and with the cooking of mothers, sisters, and aunts at those events. Our research overwhelmingly shows that the central element of a religious festival is typically the food; it also shows that women almost always play the leading role in preparing that food. Special religious events in Jesus' life would have been linked to tastes, textures and women.

Currently, rapid cultural changes in every country are having an impact on the transmission of traditional food knowledge: younger generations are losing contact with their traditions, for a variety of reasons. But even now food traditions linked to women linger. I think of an occasion three years ago when my wife and I were invited by one of my students for Passover at her parents' home in Toronto. When we arrived at the home, we could not help noticing the frail appearance of the student's grandmother. My question to her ('Are you OK?') led to a confession that she had been in the hospital until that very morning, when her daughter had arrived to take her out on a day pass. Why? Because only the grandmother knew the recipe for one of the Passover dishes, and the meal had to be exactly 'so' for our presence that evening. The mother, for her part, knew how to make the other dishes, while the daughter could barely boil water.

I have also learned to appreciate the culturally-specific nature of foods served for special religious occasions. We have heard Sephardic Jews, for example, complain about the lack of sensitivity shown by their Ashkenazi brethren to their food customs ('You Sephardim serve *rice* for Passover?'). Indian Jews in Israel tell the same type of stories. And more generally we have heard religious individuals around the world distinguish themselves from others, even within their own tradition, based on the particular combination of spices used in foods served on special religious occasions. Growing up in a Western Canadian francophone Catholic home, I know how important each family's recipes were in marking Christmas and Easter (e.g. the *tourtières* or meat pies, the tender ham and spicy pickles). As children it was hard to even conceive of anglophone Catholics *having* Christmas since their kitchen tables lacked meat pies.



Three key issues, once again, stand out concerning special religious occasions when I apply our research in this area to the NT representations of Jesus. The first involves rites of passage. These events are universally linked to special food, and sometimes also to the absence of food. I think, for example, of an Indonesian Muslim hair-cutting ceremony which we witnessed, that was carried out in honour of an infant girl during which the hour-long reading from the Qur'an by women ritual experts, combined with the actual cutting of the hair, was followed by a two-hour feast containing foods made from recipes handed down for generations in that particular family.

One would expect the rites of passage linked to Jesus – for example his circumcision, the weddings of his siblings and the deaths of those close to him – to have been marked by food eaten (or not eaten), or offered, before, during, and after the events. The gospel writers, however, provide almost no information about these events. There is the family visit to the Temple to make an offering shortly after his birth. There is also the wedding at Cana, to be sure (John 2:1–11), but what we learn from that story is the unremarkable fact that people drank a lot of wine at weddings. And there is also Jesus' own baptism at the hands of John, followed in the Synoptic gospels with the temptation story and Jesus fasting for a lengthy period of time. The juxtaposition of baptism and temptation presents food as an obstacle to communion with the deity, not as a nourishing, natural completion to this baptismal rite of passage. Baptism is presented as a rite of passage for Jesus, and Christian baptisms in the immediate centuries also carried this force.<sup>16</sup> In short, the NT gospel evidence concerning rites of passage is slim, with references to food even less pronounced.

Second it is difficult to imagine a major meal, let alone a Passover, taking place in the absence of women. They alone, it is fair to deduce, would know what items to prepare, and how to cook them. How could Jesus and his male friends have had a 'last supper' Passover without women as cooks – and

16 We hear of Paul, for example, fasting for three days before his baptism (Acts 9:9, 19), and occasionally of a 'breaking of bread' that takes place sometime after baptism (e.g. Acts 2:42), but typically the NT gives the impression that baptism had nothing to do with food. The earliest extensive description of a Christian baptism is Hippolytus's *Apostolic Tradition* (chapters 15–21). As Hippolytus tells it, the initiation process was long and complicated. It began with the candidate's decision to become a Christian, and usually ended three years later with an elaborate baptism ceremony, immediately followed by a Eucharist and the convert's proclamation that he or she would go forth in the world to do good works. The baptism itself was preceded by a two-day fast.



A Jewish grandmother preparing a Passover dish, Toronto, 2007. Photograph by Michel Desjardins.

women as active participants, since the Passover ritual, at least as we now know it, demands it?<sup>17</sup> How could Jesus' male friends have 'prepared the Passover' (*hetoimasan to pascha*; Matt. 26:19, Mark 14:16, Luke 22:13) alone? Here too the women seem to have been written out of the scene.<sup>18</sup> Their absence is all the more significant given that this Last Supper scene has been commemorated for centuries as an all-male event. The imagery certainly works to reinforce male bonding,<sup>19</sup> but modern comparative data suggests that it is likely removed from reality.<sup>20</sup>

- 17 Jewish texts from the period tell us that Jews celebrated Passover (e.g. Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.144–75, who describes its domestic nature), but the earliest complete account of a typical Passover meal occurs in the Mishnah (Pesahim). For more information on this topic, see Feeley-Harnik 1981.
- 18 Women are not entirely absent from meals relating to Jesus; see, for example, the story of the woman anointing Jesus as he ate (Matt. 26:6–13, with the Markan, Lukan and Johannine parallels); and Simon's mother-in-law serving Jesus and his friends after she is healed by Jesus (Matt. 8:14–15, with Markan and Lukan parallels). There is also the Lukan 10 story of Martha busy with 'her many tasks' (*perispato peri pollen diakonian*), which, one assumes, would have included food preparation. And there is Luke 8:1–3, which notes that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and 'many others' supported Jesus; presumably this support would have included meal preparation.
- 19 Gillian Feeley-Harnik's thesis (1981: 166) acknowledges the curious omission of women and family in the Synoptic Last Supper scene, but, contrary to my position here, argues that Jesus, and the NT writers, deliberately chose a place on their own in order to stress other elements: 'The last supper, representing Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, was a reinterpretation of many different kinds of covenants in scripture, but it focused primarily on the Passover. By conforming closely to the overall pattern of the Passover, yet inverting every critical element, it transformed the meaning of the meal and the sacrifice on which it was based. Jesus' Passover ... was a rejection of familial and national separatism. His new covenant included all humanity.'
- 20 If the Last Supper imagery were filled with women, children, and succulent meals, and if the NT writers had paid more attention to Jesus' daily and special food practices, perhaps Christian images of heaven over the centuries would more often have included food, family, and other physical delights. For example, Alan Segal, in his magisterial survey of reflections about death and afterlife in the Abrahamic traditions (2004), reproduces Gallup Poll results of what American Christians actually think

Third, since it is not only food, but special food, that is linked to most religious occasions, it is also difficult to imagine early Christians gathering for banquets, weddings or Eucharistic services and not serving distinct, family-based dishes and treats.<sup>21</sup> It is not only the taste of *food* that would have mattered, but the taste of *distinct* food that would have sealed the memory of these events. Here again the gospels are silent.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, when Paul tells the Corinthians to avoid arriving early to eat all the Eucharistic food (1 Cor. 11:17–22), he does not remark on the nature of that food. Given the House Church model of gathering in those days, one would expect each family's Eucharist to taste different. I wonder now to what extent the specific food, and spices, served at what became 'the Last Supper' would have possibly served as models for Jesus' colleagues and friends afterwards.

## Charity

All religious traditions encourage food charity, though some now do so more (e.g. Hinduism, Islam) than others (e.g. Buddhism). Food charity has always been important in Judaism. One striking thing we have discovered in our research, though, is the vital connection between food charity and Christianity. When asked to start reflecting on the links between food and religion, Christians, far more than others, invariably start with 'charity', and food is primary.

In this context, what is surprising about the gospels is the relative *infrequency* of their comments about charity (e.g. Matt. 25:31–46; Luke 6:21, 25), striking though they are, and also the way some of those comments are concerned only in passing with charity. Yes, there is the famous Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–5; see also Mark 12:28–34; Matt. 22:34–40), but this parable's shock value lies not in the way it encourages charity but in the fact that it was a (despised) *Samaritan* who paid for food for a stranger. Yes, there is the encouragement to invite the poor to banquets (Luke 14:12–14), but

about heaven (11–12), and there are almost no physical aspects at all to their thoughts. People want to be rid of problems; what they yearn for is 'no more sickness or pain... peace... happiness and joy... love between people', and so forth. People 'will have responsibilities... and will minister to others', but food doesn't appear at all. How could Americans, I wonder, who love their food, imagine a heaven without it?

- 21 Three studies that examine early Christian banquets and other special meals, in the context of the broader Greco-Roman world, are Smith 2003, Klinghardt 1996, and Taussig 2009.
- 22 For example, parables that touch on special meals, such as Luke 14:7–11 (also Luke 14:15–24; Matt. 22:1–14; GosThom 64), while charged with layers of meaning, pay almost no attention to the interpretive possibilities of food.

the message here is to include outcasts in general, with a view to reaping even more rewards at the Day of Judgment. Yes, there is Luke's 'Blessed are you poor' (6:20; followed by the woes to the rich), but we know how Matthew has 'poor in spirit' in a parallel passage (5:3); in addition, Luke's emphasis in this section is not so much on charity as it is on critiquing the rich (note too that in 17:7–10 Luke's Jesus cares more about enforcing servitude than he does about helping the poor). Yes, Jesus is said to multiply food (in six parallel gospel stories) in order to feed the masses who are listening to him, but there are no similar miracles directed at the poor in general.

This is not to say that the message of feeding the poor is absent from the early Christian representations of Jesus. It is indeed woven through the stories. The point, rather, is that this message is not emphasized to the degree that one might expect, given current Christian practice, and also given the overwhelming connection between food charity and religion in almost all religious traditions. What is remarkable, in short, is this distance between the NT Jesus and what we have found in current religious practice, both Christian and non-Christian.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the later Christian focus on charity is out of keeping, at least in intensity, with Jesus' own practices – in the same way that the Christian avoidance of food restrictions does not accord with the kosher practices of Jesus and his closest followers. Given the widespread connections between food charity and religious life in the modern world, however, I suspect that the opposite position has more historical credibility: food charity was probably more significant to Jesus than the gospel narratives suggest.

## Conclusion

What I have presented by superimposing these five themes onto the composite early Christian representation of Jesus is a figure who is less supportive of food charity than one might think, and who shows almost no sensitivity to the value of special food in his religious life, or to fasting, or to kosher, or to reaching out to God through food. Viewed through the modern comparative religions lens this figure, sketched as he is by the gospel writers, is two-dimensional. One would expect Jesus to have reached out with food to God and possibly to other spirits, at the Temple and perhaps also at home. One would expect him to have taken care – at times great care – in determining what food went

23 The proto-communist manifesto in Acts (4:32–5:11) begins to move us in this direction, and much of the early Christian success in gathering new members becomes linked to charity, concern for widows, and other social matters.

into his body, and to have felt closer to God in those instances when he kept kosher strictly. Jesus would almost certainly have also carried with him the tastes and other memories connected to special religious events, including rites of passage; his thoughts of God would have likely evoked tastes and smells. And one would expect Jesus to have devoted more attention to feeding the poor, not only when they came to listen to him talk but

also in their everyday lives. A religious figure disconnected in this manner from food seems not fully religious, nor fully human.

Moreover, a fully-human, fully-religious Jesus would have been surrounded by women: preparing and serving his food, eating with him, teasing him to remember tastes and to choose his favourite recipes, preparing his offerings, helping him through fasts and fasting for him, ensuring that his food was acceptable to his religious sensibilities. The question worth asking, in this context, is not whether Jesus had sex with Mary Magdalene, but why the early Christian writers chose to reframe Jesus' religious life in ways that all but obliterated the important work of women, and the profound role of food.<sup>24</sup> The absence of women contributing to Jesus' religious life through food removes Jesus from this world, and helps me to appreciate the otherworldly nature of the gospel constructions of Jesus. Their imagined Jesus has little to do with everyday religious life.

Fortunately, modern anthropological studies can help bring Jesus back to life, as the human being that he was when integrating food into his religious



Parsi/Zoroastrian priests enticing angels to descend into the community, by offering them food Toronto, 2008. Photograph by Michel Desjardins.

24 The gospels contain numerous parables, aphorisms and stories that deal with farming in one form or another. This aspect of the food chain at least was certainly well known by the Jesus represented in early Christian texts, especially the Synoptic gospels and Thomas.

existence. In that regard, at least, this Jesus is both more mundane and more universally accessible. What he loses when we consider him less disruptive of normal religious life he gains by experiencing religious food rituals similar to a large numbers of religious individuals today. My Jesus now closely resembles a North American Muslim who struggles to eat halal, a Catholic volunteer for the St. Vincent de Paul Society who brings food to the poor, a Hindu woman who fasts to attract the goodwill of particular gods to ensure that her daughter marries well, a Parsi who draws the angels down into his community through food offerings, and a Buddhist who prepares special food for the dead. And like all others who have imagined Jesus to suit their time and disposition, I find my global Jesus compelling. Imagine that.

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# Ecotheology and the theology of eating

## Convergencies and controversies

PANU PIHKALA

Environmental theology (or, ecotheology) developed slowly during the first half of the twentieth century and has become a major field of study since the late 1960s. While many of the issues discussed in ecotheological works have included consequences for food production and eating habits, these themes were often not explicitly discussed. The reasons for this are interesting and complex. Issues related to food have been culturally very sensitive and have manifold connections to religiosity. In regard to the discussion about the rights and value of animals, controversies have been seen to arise between ecotheology and 'animal theology'. Recently, a new interest has arisen in the themes of food, eating, and Christian theology, which has resulted in a new field of literature which could be called the 'theology of eating'. This article gives an overview of the relations between these fields, with an emphasis on both early ecotheology and new literature about the theology of eating.

### Introduction

Most of us must live from the box and the bottle and the tin can . . . . The farmer now raises a few prime products to sell, and then he buys his foods in the markets under label and tag; and he knows not who produced the materials, and he soon comes not to care. No thought of the seasons, and of the men and women who labored, of the place, of the kind of soil, of the special contribution of the native earth, come with the trademark or the brand. And so we all live mechanically, from shop to table, without contact, and irreverently. (Bailey 1943 [1915]: 65)

The writer of this text, Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858–1954) was for decades one of the best-known natural scientists in North America. He published an enormous quantity of scientific writings and his influence also extended overseas. Bailey was a strong political player, and was especially active in the Country Life Commission which aimed at a reformation of the US countryside in the early twentieth century (for the Commission, see Minteer 2006: 20–6).



Bailey, a very liberal Christian with a Masonic background, was also one of the earliest pioneers of what is nowadays called ecotheology: religious thought and action concerning the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Bailey also wrote poetry and philosophical works, of which the most famous and significant piece is his 1915 treatise *The Holy Earth*. Here, Bailey argued poignantly for the adoption of a stewardship ethic in caring for the Earth. The book also included some arguments hinting at the intrinsic value of non-human creatures, which was very radical at the time (for Bailey, see Minter 2006: 17–50; Carlson 2000: 7–30).

A recent research project revealed that there were more proponents of ecotheology in the first half of the twentieth century than has previously been noted (Pihkala 2014). However, there still were not very many of them. Bailey was a rare case, and even rarer was his inclusion of concrete ethical and theological cogitations relating to food, eating and animals, which will be discussed at more length below.

Food and eating would also be rare themes in later works of ecotheology. As a field, ecotheology developed slowly during the first half of the twentieth century and has become a highly significant field only since the late 1960s (for an overview, see Conradie 2006). While many of the issues discussed in ecotheological works have included consequences for food production and eating habits, these themes were often not explicitly discussed before the turn of the century. The reasons for this are interesting and seem to be complex. Issues related to food have been culturally very sensitive and traditional eating habits have often been linked with religion. In regard to the discussion about the rights and value of animals, there has even been seen to be a controversy between ecotheology and ‘animal theology’ (Linzey 2006). Many proponents of ecotheology have not changed their eating habits or promoted animal rights.

Recently a new interest has appeared in discussions on the themes of food, eating and Christianity. This has resulted in a new field of literature, which could be called the ‘theology of eating’ or ‘theology of food’. Some of these works focus on vegetarianism, but the field extends also to even broader themes, such as the general function of food and eating for societies and Christianity. The works of broadest range approach Christian theology comprehensively from the viewpoint of food and eating.

Interestingly, these works on the theology of eating often have strong connections with ecotheology, but not always: sometimes the spiritual significance of eating is emphasized in a manner which does not include ethical reflections. However, usually the works on the theology of eating include discussions about sustainable food production and consumption. Their discussions about

gardening and farming often extend into the ecotheological theme of ‘tilling and keeping’ the planetary environment as a whole. Further joint themes are found in studies which emphasise connecting with nature and the spiritual significance of our relationship with the natural world. Thus, many works on the theology of eating also provide a fresh angle on ecotheology.

This article gives a brief overview of the relationships between these fields. A historical discussion is included: very little research has been conducted on early twentieth century ecotheology. Elements related to eating and food in early ecotheology are analysed and their relations to later developments are discussed. Important themes related to food and eating in ecotheological works of the later twentieth century are briefly discussed. Substantial attention is given to an overview of this new field of the ‘theology of eating’ and its connections with ecotheology. The focus is on food and eating, but in many cases drinking is also included in the reflections under study.

The selection of literature is limited to Anglo-American sources. English seems to be the main language used in the relevant works, but there may naturally be significant books in other languages which are not used here. Concerning different Christian denominations, Protestantism is prevalent in the sources. In the initial sections of the article, this emphasis has historical reasons: it seems that Protestants occupied a key position in early ecotheology. The reader will do well to note that since the 1970s, Orthodox and Roman Catholic voices have been highly influential in ecotheology as well.

The structure of the article is as follows. The first section focuses on early ecotheology and eating, in which an agrarian influence and the work of Liberty Hyde Bailey occupy a prominent position. Subsequent chapters discuss the themes of animal theology and sacramental eating in ecotheology. A following section discusses food-related themes in ecotheology of the late twentieth century up until the emergence of an interest in the theology of eating. The final section gives an overview of the new field of the theology of eating and its connections to ecotheology.

It is impossible to perform here a complete survey of themes related to food and eating in ecotheological works: the literature in the field is abundant and is increasing rapidly. However, while it is neither possible to discuss every book on the theology of eating, the field is still limited and a relatively wide overview is possible. The selection of books related to the theology of eating is mostly restricted to ones which have connections with ecotheology, but, as mentioned, most of the works in the field do have that connection. In addition, a few others are mentioned as examples of different kinds of works on the theology of eating, such as ones focusing solely on the spiritual experience of the person eating.

## Early ecotheology and eating: the agrarian influence

According to a recent study, the main forms of early twentieth-century ecotheology can be divided into three parts. The first of these comprises some of the American proponents of the Social Gospel, an influential Christian social movement, also engaged in what could be called the 'Soil Gospel', endeavouring to protect the soil. Bailey was a central figure in this group. Second, the British tradition of creation-oriented theology which gave rise to some of the first denominational statements to be delivered by Anglicans in the early 1940s. Concern for the countryside and the soil was one of the concerns underlying this strand of ecotheology. And third, a group of American theologians who influenced the first forms of a wider Christian environmentalism which emerged from the late 1940s onwards. Key figures were Paul Tillich (1886–1965), Daniel Day Williams (1910–73) and Joseph Sittler (1904–87). Earlier concern for the soil, especially following the environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, paved way for the reception of their message (Pihkala 2014).

These theologians and thinkers mostly approached the value of nature from a broad perspective, which is one of the reasons why they did not engage in much concrete ruminations about food and eating. They saw it as their task to provide wide-ranging statements, and evidently this was also expected of them. Theologians who have made practical ethical statements have often been accused of going beyond their remit in relation to society. Overall, the early ecotheologians had to navigate between what they wanted to say and what people were ready to hear. Even the general statements related to care of the Earth were radical at the time, as they were for decades to come (Pihkala 2014: 198–200).

The aforementioned Liberty Hyde Bailey was not a professional theologian, but rather an expert in the natural sciences, which gave him room and reason to comment on practical issues. Agrarian thinking, which forms Bailey's wider framework, was a highly influential strand in early ecotheology. Bailey championed a simple, rustic lifestyle, which included subsistence farming and an emphasis on eating simple, clean foods. The total lifestyle was seen to have a spiritual dimension, and thus Bailey also emphasized the spiritual elements of eating. He wrote in 1915: 'Yet it is not alone the simplicity of the daily fare that interests me here, but the necessity that it shall be as direct as possible from the ground or the sea, and that it shall be undisguised and shall have meaning beyond the satisfying of the appetite' (Bailey 1943 [1915]: 63).

Thus, Bailey championed fresh and local food: interestingly, he also included a discussion about the dangers of a growing tendency to add artificial ingredients

to food (Bailey 1943 [1915]: 70–9). Overall, Bailey emphasized a connection to a place, to the rhythms of nature and to the community. Common meals were crucially important. This included at the same time a connection to the previous generations: a person was to find his identity as a part of a story and a place. Mortality and the cycle of generations, and the deep fecundating matter of religions, were thus included. Persons were called to be faithful stewards of the land, a religious task which could be pursued in the contexts of a variety of actual religions. Bailey took his imagery from Christianity – *The Holy Earth* is full of implicit Bible quotes – but his Christianity is very liberal. The agrarian lifestyle associated with stewardship was the key; not doctrinal creeds or membership of institutions.

The similarities between Bailey's thought and that of later agrarian ecotheologists are manifold and obvious. There is actually a direct chain of influence from Bailey to Wendell Berry, the most famous American agrarian spiritual thinker for decades (on Berry, see Peters 2007), as well as onwards to current agrarian thinkers such as Norman Wirzba, who shall be discussed in more detail later.

Bailey was strongly influenced by Social Gospel-style optimism, although he was also keenly aware of the darker sides of human behaviour and became less optimistic in his later years (Carlson 2000: 26). Overall, both the Social Gospel and agrarianism have come under heavy criticism: are they viable in a world shaped by technology and urbanization, or are they actually merely characteristic of naïve optimism or romanticism? Ecotheologians, as well as proponents of different forms of ethical eating, have emphasized the elementary significance of hope. They have argued that even while the situation may look very difficult, only by believing in the possibilities of change can change actually be possible (for an example from theology, see Conradie 2006: 136). This hope-based activism has been the driving force behind agrarians, ecotheologians, and for example activists of fair trade foods and community-supported agriculture. It has also been the energy source for the proponents of animal rights, but the relationship between these groups and ecotheologians has been complex.

### Animal theology and ecotheology

The early ecotheologians were situated in such a way as to personally witness major changes in society. Most of them had spent their childhoods in the countryside or at least in semi-urban areas, and they lamented the loss of connection to nature and community that they observed around them. At the same time they were deeply immersed in traditional ways, including eating mores.

Vegetarianism and the promotion of animal rights took place mostly through the agency of other, even more counter-cultural people (Pihkala 2014: 200–4), including minority religious groups such as the Tolstoyans, whose relations with traditional forms of Christianity were often strained (see Preece 2008).

The famous British pioneer of animal theology, Andrew Linzey, has for a long time criticized a lack of thinking about animals in the mainstream of eco-theology, a lack which has led into a separation of animal theology and eco-theology (Linzey 2006). The results of recent research mostly confirm Linzey's views. However, the promotion of abstinence of animal eating was present also among theologians: the German winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) was a very famous figure at the time. He was also very widely known among theologians for his role in biblical studies (Barsam and Linzey 2000). Some theologians followed Schweitzer in his views about animals and vegetarianism, but in the works of the most prominent early eco-theologians Schweitzer is surprisingly little discussed: vegetarianism was a difficult topic for them.

Only since the 1980s has the field of animal theology started to develop. In addition to Linzey's works, the so-called 'process theologians' especially have been active writers on the theme, often combining wider ecotheological insights with animal theology. Drawing on the philosophical and theological adaptation of Alfred North Whitehead's and Charles Hartshorne's writings, authors such as John B. Cobb Jr, Charles Birch and Jay McDaniel have written about animals and ecotheology (Birch and Cobb 1981, McDaniel 1989).

Later in the 2000s a new wave of books on animal theology has emerged and recent ecotheological works often at least mention animals; but there is still a certain tendency for authors to focus only on single issues. An integration of the discourses concerning ecotheology, animal theology and theology of eating seems most necessary, since all three fields are in the end closely related. Celia Deane-Drummond is an example of a contemporary scholar who is skilled in both traditional ecotheology and animal theology, and she has co-edited important article collections on animal theology (Deane-Drummond and Clough 2009; Deane-Drummond *et al.* 2013). David Clough has emerged as a major representative of systematic theology about animals (Clough 2012).

### Sacramentality, eating, and ecotheology

The most common framework for addressing food and eating for early ecotheologians was the Eucharist and, more widely, thinking about the sacramental dimensions of food and drink. Two key pioneers in ecotheology, Paul

Tillich (1886–1965) and Joseph Sittler (1904–87), both included reflections on eating in this connection.

Tillich was one of the most famous and influential Protestant theologians of the twentieth century. His interests were wide and ranged from ethics to psychology, from arts to dogmatics. What is less known is that Tillich was also one of the first systematic theologians to give nature serious attention and his efforts influenced later ecotheologians (Drummy 2000; Pihkala 2014: 139–49).

Drawing from his own experiences of nature since childhood and his love of natural philosophy, especially that of Schelling, Tillich had argued in the late 1920s for the importance of nature and matter. In his essay ‘Nature and sacrament’, Tillich emphasizes the significance of the material elements in different religious – especially Christian – phenomena. He discusses both the traditional sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist, and other ‘sacramental’ instances. Tillich’s key argument is that the material element is never arbitrary: the whole sacrament or sacramentality is a product of the ‘intrinsic power’ of the material element and the acts of Divine will. He summarizes: ‘Sacraments originate when the intrinsic power of a natural object becomes for faith a bearer of sacramental power’ (Tillich 1948: 111).

On this basis, Tillich discusses an exceptionally wide range of phenomena, ranging from natural cycles to animals. Unfortunately, the discussion of any single subject is relatively brief, but nevertheless the text is fascinating and groundbreaking. Food and water are naturally included, although water is given more attention than eating, since in traditional Lutheran theology, which forms Tillich’s background, the sacramental role of water has been less valued than the role of bread and wine. In addition to reflection about the role of eating in the Eucharist, bread is used as a focal point in Tillich’s discussion of Protestantism and sacramentality, when the question of the relation between ‘special’ sacramental events and everyday life is discussed. Tillich links the separate sacred moments and acts with all life: ‘The bread of the sacrament stands for all bread and ultimately for all nature’ (Tillich 1948: 111). Thus, the everyday consumption of bread also acquires a certain sacred dimension, although Tillich does not venture into an extended reflection on this theme.

Tillich affirmed the value of nature in the aforementioned essay; but he was even more clear about the human need to treat nature responsibly in his later writings, such as his pioneering 1948 sermon ‘Nature, also, mourns for a lost good’ (for an overview, see Drummy 2000). Some years later, another progressive Lutheran theologian and Tillich’s acquaintance, Joseph Sittler began to publish influential writings on ecotheology. A Professor of Theology in the Chicago area and an active ecumenist, Sittler was a famous preacher and public

theologian (Bakken 2000). His earliest ecotheological writings from the early 1950s show some agrarian themes, but their emphasis is more on systematic theology than in the texts of Bailey and others.

In a 1953 essay 'Sacraments and mystery', Sittler focuses on the problems related to experiencing the sacred in the Eucharist in an urbanized and industrialized society. He thus emphasizes the significance of participating in the process of farming:

When bread is the end-product of planting and tilling and nurturing the fields of one's ancestral home, and when wine is the domestic product of vines pruned and cared for by our hands and by the hands of remembered fathers under the suns of home – then heavenly investiture of these common things with Divine meaning is a possibility. It comes very close to becoming an impossibility for a generation which buys its bread in shining wrappers in a super-market... (Sittler 1953: 13)

Later, Sittler's *A Theology for Earth* (1954) and *Called to Unity* (1961) became key texts for ecotheology. Sittler argued that Christianity will not make sense to contemporary people if it does not recover its mostly forgotten heritage as a nature-oriented faith. His theological framework emphasized the cosmic significance of Christ's work and the universal nature of God's grace, which led him to develop the ancient theological theme of 'nature and grace', especially in his main work, *Essays on Nature and Grace*, published in 1972 (see the collection of his writings, Sittler 2000). This approach led him to emphasize the significance of everyday life activities, but while his reflections include affirmations of the spiritual value of eating and drinking, he does not develop these themes very far.

However, despite not producing very extensive discussions about eating, Tillich and Sittler still discussed the actual eating more than most later ecotheological works did, until the later rise of interest in the theme. When later ecotheology did discuss the theme of eating, it usually did so by focusing strongly on the Eucharist. 'Sacramental ecotheology' has been a popular strand, especially in Orthodox and Roman Catholic ecotheology, although with variants: sometimes the generally sacred character of the universe has been emphasized, and sometimes the traditional sacraments (Conradie 2006: 118, 133–5). However, as David Grumett and Rachel Muers have noticed, metaphorical and symbolic interpretations of eating have tended to surpass the theme of actual eating in theology (Grumett and Muers 2008: 1), and this applies also to ecotheology. There are surprisingly few works dealing with food and eating in the



large bibliographical index about ecotheology (Conradie 2006: 379). On the whole, ecotheology has often focused on general-level statements, and their consequences for food practices have not been explicitly discussed. However, the ethical challenges related to agriculture, soil and food production have gained more attention, as shall be discussed next.

### **Ecotheology and ethical problems related to food**

In general, more people have become conscious of the various ethical problems included in the processes of global food production and consumption since the 1960s. These questions have also gradually gained more prominence in ecotheological works, and they were for a long time the main topic of food-related discussions in this field (see the literature listed in Conradie 2006: 162, 376).

The ecumenical movement and especially the World Council of Churches have been widely influential in promoting ecotheological notions, and one of the strengths of the movement has been the integration of social and environmental justice concerns. At the same time, the questions related to the economic order of the world have been very difficult and politically loaded, also causing controversies among Christians. On a general level, the problems related to food production and sharing have been recognized and also practical statements have been given, but many differences and problems remain. Also, there are different interpretations of whether the voice of the churches is ultimately being heard in decision-making contexts (for WCC and ecotheology, see Hadsell 2005).

Recently, some of the food-related themes which have received growing attention among ecotheologians include genetically modified crops (for an introduction, see Deane-Drummond 2008: 74–9) and the problems related to climate change and food production (for example Davis 2009, DeWitt 2009). However, the discussion has focused on justice issues, and actual eating has usually not been much discussed. An exception is Michael Northcott's *A Moral Climate* (2008a), which also includes reflections about the significance of congregational meals and the Eucharist. The work can be seen to be connected to the new interest in the theology of eating, in which Northcott has participated, as will be discussed below.



## The theology of eating and ecotheological themes in its different forms

In the 2000s, a new field in theology can be seen to have been established with the emergence of a wave of books dealing with theology of eating. As discussed above, the topic itself is not new in theology, but the emphasis it has now received is.

Below is given an overview of works which can be seen to belong to this new field in theology, as well as an analysis of their connections with ecotheology. Works on the field are introduced by categorizing them according to their main focus on the topic. Naturally, many works deal with several of these themes, and the categorization is partly heuristic.

### A focus on vegetarianism and its history in Christianity

In recent decades a growing number of theological works have appeared which are concerned with vegetarianism, even though it would still be an exaggeration to call ‘vegan theology’ a very popular field. Along with Andrew Linzey’s pioneering and widely known work books such as *Is God a Vegetarian? Christianity, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights* (Young 1998) and *Good News for All Creation: Vegetarianism as Christian Stewardship* (Kaufman and Braun 2002) have entered onto the scene.

These works on vegetarianism have an intrinsic connection to ecotheology. To use Christian concepts, these books deal with a fundamental aspect of the created world; the animals. Even when historically animal theology and ecotheology have usually been treated as separate enterprises, they are intrinsically connected. That said, the divide between ecotheology and animal theology, which Linzey has prominently criticized, works both ways. Ecotheologians have discussed animal theology only a little, but by the same token proponents of animal and vegan theology have not usually discussed general ecotheological themes very extensively. Exceptions include Linzey’s work, which operates from a wide theological framework concerning the value of creation.

The articles collected under the title *Eating and Believing* (Grumett and Muers 2008) focus mostly on the history of Christian attitudes to vegetarianism, but also include ecotheological discussions related to present-day ethical problems. The editors, David Grumett and Rachel Muers, have continued to explore the historical dimensions of the issue in their own book, *Theology on the Menu* (Grumett and Muers 2010). In *Eating and Believing*, however, two of the contributors, Michael Northcott and Christopher Southgate, extend the ecotheological content into a wider perspective. This is logical given their

backgrounds: Northcott is one of the most famous Christian environmental ethicists in Britain (see his earlier *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, Northcott 1996), and Southgate has specialized in matters related to religion, science, and nature (see especially Southgate 2008a). Northcott's article in *Eating and Believing* focuses on fish and includes reflections on the current global problems associated with overfishing (Northcott 2008b). Southgate's article deals with the relationship of eschatology and eating and extends the discussion also to climate change (Southgate 2008b).

The prominence of British writers and scholars in the area of animal theology is clearly seen in the aforementioned works, as well as in another collection of articles about animal theology as it is widely understood, entitled *Creaturely Theology* (Deane-Drummond and Clough 2009). In that collection also, the most wide-ranging ecological reflections are contributed by Northcott (2009) and Southgate (2009). However, Southgate's discussion of migration and extinction ventures quite far from the theme of eating, which is at hand in this article.

#### A focus on the wide-ranging theology of food and eating

Books which apply the theology of eating as a comprehensive viewpoint on Christianity are relatively recent and few. Angel F. Méndez-Montoya's *The Theology of Food: Eating and the Eucharist* (2009) has a strong Eucharistic emphasis and includes reflections on historical developments, as well as some discussion of other religions. Ecological themes are merely a side issue. Seemingly the most comprehensive book on the subject so far is Norman Wirzba's *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (2011), which also has a very strong ecotheological dimension.

Wirzba, an American Professor of Theology and Ecology at Duke University, has often written about ecotheology. He draws heavily on the agrarian tradition and has also promoted Bailey's thought (Wirzba 2009). *Food and Faith* is his effort at developing a comprehensive theological treatment of the subject. The total theological framework is based on a trinitarian and incarnational approach, establishing a view of the world which emphasizes interdependence, community and the value of the material reality. Wirzba discusses the activity of both growing and eating food, and his approach takes into account the wide-reaching ethical issues related to food production and distribution. As one of the very first monographs to discuss the subject, Wirzba's book has gained a good deal of attention, relatively speaking, among readers of theological works. The book is clearly a work which fits both into the fields of the theology of eating and ecotheology.

Another American writer, Gary W. Fick, has written a monograph entitled *Food, Farming, and Faith* (2008). As the title suggests, the book places a strong emphasis on farming; while both Wirzba's book and this one have an agrarian dimension, Fick's has the greater focus on the theme. The books have an eco-theological emphasis in common, but Wirzba is more concerned with the act of eating itself.

A comprehensive approach, and one with ecotheological dimensions, is also taken in the anthology *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*, edited by Michael Schut (2002). The background of the book is concerned with the Earth Ministry, a Christian environmental organization. The book has the clear intention of encouraging its readers to change their eating and consumption habits in the interests of promoting sustainability. Included are texts covering a variety of topics from ecotheology and spirituality to ethical questions such as genetic modification and the global food trade. In addition, Schut has written a study guide to be used in local groups.

#### A focus on gardening

Other volumes focus on small-scale farming, especially gardening. A major emphasis in works of this kind is on the spiritual benefits of growing food, but the dimension of justice and an ecotheological approach are also often included. The main ecotheological theme of responsible gardening, 'tilling and keeping' (cf. 1 Gen. 2:15), is extrapolated out from a specific garden to the whole environmental 'garden' of the Earth.

A relatively famous example of a recent work of this kind is Fred Bahnson's *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* (2013). As in many volumes of this genre, Bahnson's book has a strong emphasis on community. Forms of urban gardening, including community gardens, have increased in popularity in industrialized countries. The emphasis on the spiritual significance of food links the book with other volumes, which, even though they discuss eating more than growing, have a similar focus on spirituality.

#### A focus on the spiritual and sacramental dimensions of eating

Spirituality and sacramentality are an integral part of many works dealing with theology and eating, such as the aforementioned books by Wirzba and Méndez-Montoya. However, for some books these themes are the primary focus. A number of these works, which emphasize the spiritual dimensions of eating, focus on the subject so narrowly that an ethical or ecotheological discussion is

not included. A telling example is the anthology *Bread, Body, Spirit: Finding the Sacred in Food* (Peck 2008). It includes some texts by the same authors who are featured in books mentioned above, but the content is almost totally restricted to the spiritual significance of food for the persons eating it.

However, some significant works, which approach the theology of eating mainly from the viewpoint of spirituality or sacramentality, do have interesting connections to ecotheology, even when they do not focus on it. A fascinating example is the work of the British theologian David Brown, who also contributed to the volume *Eating and Believing*. Brown, a scholar with exceptionally wide interests, has written one of the most substantial theological treatments of the 2000s on the theme of sacramental theology. Brown has a broad view of sacramentality: he discusses the traditional sacraments and especially the Eucharist and baptism, but his purpose is to analyse all kinds of elements and encounters in which the sacred is mediated through material phenomena (see Brown 2013). Based on this approach, Brown includes a lengthy treatment of food and drink in the second volume of his trilogy on sacramentality, *God and the Grace of Body* (Brown 2007).

Brown's basic claim is that current Christianity has lost much of the understanding which earlier linked the sacred strongly with eating and drinking. All three of its central elements which are related to meals – the harvest, hospitality and gratitude – have diminished in value. Brown comes very close to touching on ecotheological themes when he discusses the potential of natural elements in encountering the sacred (Brown 2007: 120–84), but he does not venture into a discussion of the ethical challenges related to humans' relationship to nature; that theme is only briefly discussed in the first volume of his trilogy, which deals with places, architecture and the arts (Brown 2004). Thus, Brown's approach has strong similarities with Sittler's and Tillich's, including a prominent use of the term grace; Sittler and Tillich, however, have integrated ecotheology in their views more strongly than Brown.

A focus on ethical choices about eating in daily life

Finally, some volumes focus first and foremost on the ethical consequences of different food-related choices. This is also a strong theme in Wirzba's book, but other works focus mainly on this subject and do not venture into other wide-ranging theological considerations. A fine example is the very recent book *Faith in Food: Changing the World One Meal at a Time* (Campbell and Weldon 2014). The emphasis is on sustainability, which is understandable given the book's background in an inter-religious organization called the Alliance for Religions

and Conservation (ARC). Thus, the book is not limited to Christianity only, but includes reflections on many other religions also.

A specific theological field could be discerned through its focus on a theological treatment of daily life. This 'theology of daily life' is an ancient phenomenon, but seems to have become more popular again. A telling example is a whole series of brief books issued by the Fortress Press called 'Christian Explorations of Daily Living'. Topics include working, travelling, shopping – and eating. The volume *Eating and Drinking* (Groppe 2011) presents a brief but wide-ranging theology of eating, especially for American Christians. Ethical and ecotheological dimensions are integrated in the book, as well as in the purpose of the whole series (see the Series Foreword in Groppe 2011: xii). In the current age of environmental concerns, it has been realized that questions related to daily life are at the same time questions related to environmental sustainability.

To bring this brief overview into close, it may thus be stated that the theology of eating is currently both an emerging field of its own and also connected to other theological fields. It depends upon the reader and the reader's situation as to which conceptual framework is best used as a vantage point from which to view theological disciplines, but it seems that the use of a term such as the 'theology of eating' is necessary and fruitful. However, it is important to keep in mind the connections between the theology of eating and other fields. The theology of eating is linked with a wide range of questions, and its profound connections with ecotheology challenges scholars who are interested in it to familiarize themselves with both fields.

## Summary

The purpose of this article was to give an overview of the interesting relations between ecotheology and the theology of eating. At the same time, a brief introduction was given into the relatively new field of the theology of eating (or the 'theology of food').

A historical focus has been included, since there has so far been very little research on early ecotheology. It was found that early twentieth-century ecotheologians did not focus extensively on themes of food and eating, with the exception of Liberty Hyde Bailey, who championed local and organic (to use a current term) foods and emphasized the significance of eating together. Among the key founders of the later ecotheological movement, Paul Tillich and Joseph Sittler discussed the themes, mostly in relation to sacramentality. Tillich emphasized in the late 1920s that bread itself was elementary for

Christians, in contrast with such views of the Eucharist which emphasized only the role of the Word of God in the event. This was linked with Tillich's view of the significance of all material things, which Sittler also shared and developed into an even more explicitly ecotheological direction.

It was noted that the theme of animals, not to mention vegetarianism, was a challenging one for early ecotheologians and they mostly omitted engaging in discussions about it, even while Albert Schweitzer's works were available. Since the 1960s, the ethical problems linked with food production and sharing were increasingly being discussed among Christians, with important discussions taking place in ecumenical encounters, for example in the context of the World Council of Churches. Later, questions related to genetic modification and the effects of climate change on food issues were introduced as food-related topics in theological discussions.

Ecotheological themes in different forms of the theology of eating were then discussed. Works on the theology of eating were categorized according to the differences in their main focus. It was noted that books with a focus on vegetarianism have connections to ecotheology through their discussion of animals, but that they usually do not engage in wider ecotheological reflections. A few books discuss the history of vegetarianism or eating in general in Christianity, usually with minimal ecotheological content. The ecotheological discussions in British article collections about eating and animals were noted.

Works with a wide-ranging focus on the theology of food and eating were seen to be few and relatively recent. Norman Wirzba's 2011 *Food and Faith*, which also has a very strong ecotheological emphasis, was seen to be among the most comprehensive and significant of these. Thus, Wirzba's book brings the theology of eating and ecotheology into a closer relation.

Books with a focus on gardening were found to often have a significant ecotheological element through their emphasis on sustainability and the spiritual calling of the gardener. Other volumes focus on the spiritual and sacramental dimensions of eating. While these works often do not have explicit ecotheological content, their emphasis on the value of material things brings them quite close to ecotheology. David Brown's work on sacramentality was seen as especially noteworthy in relation to the theological fields under discussion. Finally, books with focus on ethical choices about eating in daily life were briefly introduced, and it was noted that these recent works often have an ecotheological element.

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# Contexts of offerings and ritual maize in the pictographic record in Central Mexico

NATALIA MORAGAS SEGURA and ELENA MAZZETTO

The objective of this article is an initial enquiry into the evidence and classification of the offerings of maize in Central Mexico from the Classic period to early colonial times. In order to achieve this goal, we will analyse the presence of maize in Central Mexico according to the evidence found in mural paintings and some pictographic codices. Two Mesoamerican cultures will be considered to achieve our analysis: the Teotihuacan and Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Maize was instrumental in the performance of daily rituals and in the diet of these ancient Mesoamerican cultures and the cereal also had sacred connotations in pre-Hispanic, colonial and contemporary narratives. We suggest this by reading the iconographic and symbolic representations of corn in the form of seeds and pods, or as an ingredient in cooked foods which are represented in the mural paintings of Teotihuacan as well as some codices of the post-Classic Nahua tradition. These methodological enquiries reveal evidence of a cultural continuity in Central Mexico as a contrasting perspective on the archaeological and ethno-historical period.

## Introductory remarks

In 1943, Paul Kirchhoff coined the term 'Mesoamerica' as a cultural concept to refer to the development of complex societies (Kirchhoff 1943, Flannery 1968) in the region. This concept defines a variable geographical area but also emphasizes the cultural traits that were shared by a number of different indigenous cultures. The geographical area covers Mexico to Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and northern Costa Rica. In this area different cultures had in common a basic point of view about how they understood their physical and supernatural world. This period started with the beginning of complex societies, and involved processes of social stratification but also the development of a very highly structured system of religious beliefs. The development of large ceremonial centres and cities marked the design of an intricate network of trade routes for the exchange of luxury goods, such as obsidian, greenstones, cacao, cinnabar, *Spondylus* shells, haematite, and ceramics. These goods were used by the elite to legitimate their power in various ways. For the

Mesoamerican cultures, offerings were one of the main systems of communication between men and gods. By means of offerings, the Mesoamericans gave to the gods their most prized possessions. In return, the gods granted their requests for rain, crops, or conquest of new lands, tributes and slaves and so on. Men and gods were bound by this exchange, and it was regulated by the priests.<sup>1</sup> This is why it is important to recognize the goods involved in the offerings because every offering had its own god and its own purpose.

Maize has been identified as a staple food for sustaining large populations. Archaeologists have made investigations into how and when maize was first domesticated (Staller *et al.* 2006). Archaeologists and historians are also interested in the use of maize in religious and ritual contexts. Maize always needs human intervention in order to reproduce itself. This results in an interesting relationship between men and maize from archaic times. We can consider that humankind and maize have been bound by magical ties from the beginning of its process of domestication. However, it is not an easy area to study. Studying past societies is complicated because the preservation of the remains is not homogeneous.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to determine the presence or absence of maize in ancient societies in archaeological and pictographic records.

In this article, we want to study the representations of maize as ritual food in two of the most representative cultures of the Valley of Mexico: the Teotihuacan (200 BC–650 AD) and the Mexicas (1325–1521). For this purpose, we will study the representations of maize as ritual food in mural paintings (of the Teotihuacans) and pictographic records (of the Mexicas).

### The archaeological/historical context: the classic culture of Teotihuacan (200 BC–650 AD) and the Post-Classic period in the Valley of Mexico (1325–1521 AD)

The Basin of Mexico is one of the key areas for understanding the development of Mesoamerican cultures in the past (fig. 1). This area has always concentrated a lot of population in geographical territory defined by William Sanders and others (1979) as symbiotic. The *Basin of Mexico Project*, led by William T. Sanders shows a settlement typology ranging from hamlets, villages, regional

- 1 For example, in Nahuatl *nextlahualtin* means 'the payment', which was the name given to future victims of sacrifice. These men were thought of as a subject to be commercially traded (López Austin 1997: 180).
- 2 Some aspects to consider are, for example, old archaeological excavations without a proper register, the characteristics of the soil (suitable or not to a better conservation of organic remains such as maize), the difficulty of identifying the uses and processes involved in the use of maize as a ritual food.

## The Valley of Mexico



Fig. 1. The Valley of Mexico, taken from Graulich 1994.

centres, provincial centres and super-regional centres and dating from pre-Classical to post-Classical times. These site categories are defined by the size of the population, ceremonial architecture and their position in the territory (*ibid.*). This also includes the control of land and crops. The Basin of Mexico provides the most important components for the development of complex agricultural systems such as *chinampas* or *albarradones* for the control of water. That means a high level of organization and specialization on the part of the people involved in the construction of these infrastructures for cultivation.

Teotihuacan was an essentially urban culture; a multiethnic society arranged according to a precise town-planning model and bonded by family relationships and lines of descent. This statement conceals a whole series of complex questions concerning sociopolitical organization within the same urban space during six centuries of cultural development. Teotihuacan gives us the chance to study a densely-populated, long-lasting city with inhabitants of various origins. This complex scenario leads us to a number of questions regarding the way the city was organized and governed and its expansion across Mesoamerica. Rather than a royal dynasty, in Teotihuacan we should imagine a tightly-knit elite group which superimposed a corporate model for exercising power, where the elite group was more important than the individual (Manzanilla 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Religion was part of this cultural and social process. The religion of Teotihuacan was a way to legitimate the elites of the city. We cannot consider that there was a pantheon of gods but rather that certain animals represented concepts related to the main axis of Teotihuacan religious thought – fertility. Around this concept we can identify animals such as the jaguar, owl and coyote, but also chimeric animals such as the feathered serpent (Quetzalcoatl) or quetzal (bird) butterfly (Quetzalpapalotl), related to power and fertility. The rulers, clothed in the attributes of these entities, acted as mediators between men and gods. Some important anthropomorphic representations were of Tlaloc (the god of rain) and Huehueteotl (the old god of fire).

After the collapse of Teotihuacan, the sociopolitical context changes dramatically. Teotihuacan's influence waned and it progressively fell under the control of the kingdom of Texcoco (Offner 1983). Gradually, political power in the Basin of Mexico moved from the north east to the south, with the rise of several city states including Azcapotzalco or Chalco which were in a continuous dynamic of conflict.

The origin of the Aztecs is well known from the chronicles that were written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Aztecs (1325–1521) believed that they came from a mythical place, Aztlan, and were sent by their god Huiztilopochtli to find a new place in which to build their holy city, Mexico-Tenochtitlan. As usual, archeological and historical sources do not always agree. Archaeologically, we have the presence of Aztec I–II ceramics existing before

3 '... Una estrategia "corporativa" en la que el poder se comparte entre diferentes grupos en una sociedad. Hay restricciones hacia el comportamiento político de aquellos que detentan el poder, existe interdependencia entre subgrupos, y un énfasis en las representaciones colectivas y en el ritual basado en la fertilidad y la renovación de la sociedad y el cosmos.' (Manzanilla 2006: 14)

the traditional dates of arrival of the Aztecs according to historical sources (Cowgill 1996, Crider 2011, Garraty 2000 and 2006, Parsons *et al.* 1996). Therefore, the official history of the Mexica is related to the idea of building a national history that serves the interests of their rulers in the process of territorial expansion. Mexico-Tenochtitlan was conceived of as a holy city that represents the *axis mundi* or the centre of the Mexica universe. In the Templo Mayor, were enshrined the two main gods of the Aztecs: Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. The first belonged to the patron god of the Mexicas, and the second was related to the rain god. This second included a more traditional god of the Valley of Mexico, perhaps as a way of incorporating elements of the common past under the new rulers (Matos Moctezuma 2006, López Austin and López Luján 2009).

The Aztecs believed that the world in which they lived had been created as a result of their gods' self-sacrifice. They also believed that they had been designated to sustain the earth. One of their most important legends was referred to as the Creation of the Sun and the Moon. The gods met at Teotihuacan and there gave their blood and lives to create the world. Their blood was the precious element that started the movement of the stars (Sahagún 1950–82, Book 7: 6–8; *Leyenda de los Soles* 2011: 181–5). The Mexica, as the people chosen by their god Huitzilopochtli, were obliged to maintain the movement of the sun and the moon by providing it with the necessary blood. As a consequence of his sacred mandate, sacrifice and self-sacrifice become a political concern rather than just a religious issue. More and more blood was required to sustain their world and religion was a key element in their political discourse. The Aztecs created a pantheon of gods who required very specific rituals and offerings. War, religion and trade were inextricably bound together in sustaining the social structure of the Aztecs and feeding their particular vision of the cosmos.

By the time of the arrival of the Spaniards on the coast of Veracruz in 1519, Mesoamerica was in an expansive military political process led by the Aztecs who were building a tributary empire covering most of central Mexico. For the Spaniards there was no other city in Europe that could compare with the power and size of Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

### The symbolism of maize in Mesoamerica

The cultivation of Maize represents the centrepiece of the food economy of the civilizations of ancient Mesoamerica. This cereal was not only the staple of the diet, but also a fundamental element in the indigenous worldview. Thereby a very strong link between the plant and humankind culminated in an

assimilation of the two life cycles (humankind and maize) so that we can find that the different stages of the development of cereal and the passage from one stage of human life to another; birth, youth, maturity, old age are cognate.

To understand the importance of maize in daily and religious lives of the Mesoamerican peoples we must consider first of all, its role in the mythical dimension. In the *Popol Vuh* of the Quiche Maya (c. 1550), the various acts of creation of mankind are described. Initial attempts were unsuccessful, but the subsequently the gods succeeded in creating humanity by mixing white and yellow corn (*Popol Vuh* 2013: 103). The grain then, became the flesh of humanity.

In the mythical narrative of central Mexico we do not find a similar myth. However, we can remember that *tonacayotl* ('our livelihood/comida') was the Nahuatl name used for maize. In a passage from the Book 11 of his *Florentine Codex*, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's indigenous informants' definition of this cereal as *tomiyo*, 'our bones' is given (Sahagún 1950–82, Book 11: 279). Furthermore, in each of the previous Suns, the associated imperfect humanity was also fed on imperfect forms of the cereal (*Histoire du Mexique* 2011: 145–7).

In the historical source called *Histoire du Mexique* the maize god Cinteotl was created out of an illicit union between Xochiquétzal and Tezcatlipoca/Piltzintecuhtli. This god was put under the earth, and from his body grew all the useful plants eaten by men (*Histoire du Mexique* 2011: 155).

In the *Legend of the Suns*, the discovery of cereal is explained. Quetzalcoatl, in the form of a black ant, found the maize saved inside the Tonacatepetl, our Mountain Livelihood. In Tamoanchan, the gods chewed the grain and put it in the mouths of humans, convinced that this would be good food for humankind. Then Nanahuatl and the tlaloque (aquatic gods) fulminated the mountain, stealing maize and all other foods and taking control of agriculture (*Leyenda de los Soles* 2011: 181).

The maize plant was closely related to the structure of the universe and the four colours of the cereal were associated with the four cosmic directions. As early as the Olmec era (1200–400 BC), maize was deified at the various stages of the civilization's development and it has become integral to the Mesoamerican supernatural world. Iconographically in Olmec art, the maize god is represented with a spigot projecting from a hole in his front. Among the Classic Maya (250–900 AD), the rulers emphasized their relationships with this cereal and its supernatural personification, wearing an extremely long head coming out of corn leaves, in a reference to the shape of the corncob. The glyph *kan*, or corn grain, was often integrated into the head (Taube 1985, 1996, 2000). Finally, among the Mexica there were three deities associated with the plant:

Xilonen (the goddess of sweetcorn), Cinteotl (the god of mature corn) and Chicomecóatl (Cinteotl's female counterpart), also linked to the last stage of the development of cereal, as well as all other human maintenance foods, for example, beans, peppers and squash.

### Mural painting and the representation of ritual maize in Teotihuacan

Teotihuacan being one of the first complex cities of Mesoamerican cultures, we can consider that the supply routes to the city were a central issue. Maize would be the basic food of the population of the city and their surroundings and its production, storage, processing and redistribution a matter of great importance. The city could not have reached its great size and political, religious and economic importance if it had not been able to feed those families who were not directly engaged in agriculture and hunting. On the contrary, a few years of poor maize harvests would require the city to stock up from beyond its boundaries and therefore enter into negotiations with other cities. Famine would imply a social and political instability, something that the elites would not want.

Surprisingly, representations of maize are scarce in Teotihuacan. The Teotihuacanos seem to have been more interested in representing the idea of fertility. In this case maize could be identified as a seed or tortilla and related to another seeds or flowers; never is it represented as an individual seed. Since maize has been identified as the staple food of Mesoamerican populations, capable of sustaining large populations, we could hypothesize that it might have been a more visible component in representations of the main deities of the city. In Teotihuacan it seems that maize can be related to two concepts: fertility as a generic concept and calendars.

As noted earlier, Teotihuacan society needed to mark the passage of time and control the water supply, as it was essential to know when and where the seeds needed to be planted and elites were responsible for knowing, deciding and instructing when the fields were to be prepared. Recognizing the arrival of the rainy and dry seasons was essential to ensure the proper development of the crops, accompanied by the appropriate rituals. In Teotihuacan there are some examples of these rituals as they are depicted in murals. In these, the Teotihuacan elite is represented as a collegial body, where the social group is more important than the individual as a member of a lineage. The elite is represented in different ways but always with common factors. Members are dressed in fine clothes with headdresses denoting their power and their hands are scattering seeds and precious things while they sing and pray. However, maize does not



seem to be represented in isolation but always part of the other precious things like *chia* seeds, shells, flowers and other 'precious things'. The concept of fertility seems to be more integral to Teotihuacan beliefs than the idea of a pantheon of gods, but this does not mean that we cannot identify some individual gods, such as Huehuetotl, the old fire god, or Tlaloc, the rain god. In the

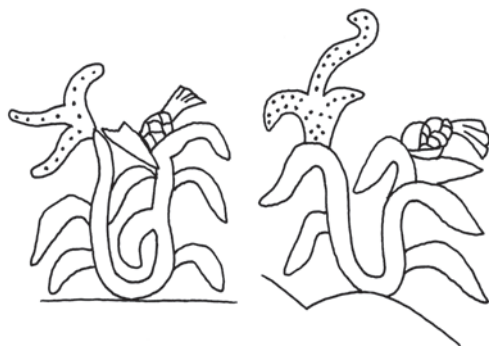


Fig. 2. Corn plants in the mural of Tlalocan - Teotihuacan. Drawing by E. Mazzetto 2014.

same way at Teotihuacan, we cannot find specifically a god dedicated to maize such as Cinteotl (the god of maize) or Chicomecoatl (the god of agriculture) will be for other cultures after the collapse of the city.

Some examples of those representations are the Tlalocan Mural in the departmental compound of Tepantitla. This place is situated about 500 metres east of the Pyramid of the Sun and is particularly remarkable for the presence of the mural of Tlalocan, which has been interpreted as representing the Teotihuacan concept of paradise. This mural painting represents a major figure, richly dressed, between two members of the elite, into whose hands precious things, including maize seeds, fall. Some researchers see her (or him) as a representation of the Great Mother Goddess, while others see a male figure (Caso 1942, López Austin 1994, Pasztory 1988). Beneath their feet, the mythical landscape of the paradise of Tlaloc (Tlalocan) is presented. Men dance, play and sing in an atmosphere of happiness. One of the representations show different plants, one of them identified as a maize plant (fig. 2).

Another representation of maize is provided by the so-called Mural of Agriculture. The Temple of Agriculture is located by near the Pyramid of the Moon and is so-called because of the themes of its paintings. It was considered that this structure is one of the earliest in Teotihuacan. This building was investigated by Leopoldo Batres in 1886 and subsequently by Antonio Peñafiel in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> It has been proposed that there had been a distinct ethno-linguistic group which had occupied the Temple of Agriculture's

4 It is difficult to assess the degree of intervention that wins this structure because of its early exploration, but has been able to identify various stages of construction ranging from Tzacualli Patlachique-to-Xolalpan Tlamimilolpa phase.



Fig. 3. The censer of Ostoyohualco. Drawing by E. Mazzetto 2014.

object. Jorge Angulo (1997: 202) suggests a Tlalancaleca connection to the Temple of Agriculture. This same round and yellowish form is also represented on the censer of Ostoyohualco (Manzanilla 1993). This censer carries an image which represents the same concept found in the mural painting: a member of the elite from whose hands precious things emerge (fig. 3). There is one aspect that must be stated. We have no evidence that the yellowish forms represented tortillas; it is just that we decided that they are tortillas because their form is the same as that of modern day tortillas.

The apartment compound of Zacuala is composed of four sets of rooms distributed around an axis in a very harmonious composition. It has been suggested that Zacuala ‘imposed its residential character’ from the beginning of the construction. Compared to

earliest structures. This theory is based on the differences in architectural design and the pictorial characteristics of the mural painting. Unfortunately, the original mural painting disappeared and all that exists now is the copy, made over a hundred years ago. In this mural several characters are represented making offerings to a mortuary bundle. We can also see depicted various rituals associated with activities involving food preparation. Some of the processed foods that are represented have been identified as ‘tortillas’. This assumption is based on the round, yellowish form of the



Fig. 4. The god Tlaloc, Zacuala, Teotihuacan. Drawing by E. Mazzetto 2014.

the other compounds excavated, the interior of Zacuala is of much higher quality and more noble than those in Atetelco or Tetitla (Sejourné 1959: 191–2). One of these mural paintings represents the god Tlaloc, or a man dressed like this god, carrying corncobs. It is not an unusual representation but this way of depicting the god is not the most common (fig. 4) to be found.

### The representation of maize in pre-Hispanic and early colonial codices

In this article we show two examples of the maize offerings in the *Codex Borgia* (16th century) and one more in the *Libro de los ritos* (1581). The first document is a key pre-Hispanic source, coming from the Valley of Puebla-Tlaxcala and dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. It is a religious codex. The members of the priestly class could read the influences of the days on the calendar and human lives (Seler 1963, Batalla Rosado 2008, *Codex Borgia* 1993). The second document is a colonial book focused on the religious Nahuatl world, written by the Dominican Fray Diego Durán in the second half of the sixteenth century. In this book there are illustrations copied from a pre-Hispanic codex, later adapted to the European style (Peperstraete 2007). Before proceeding to comment on these texts, we want to emphasize two key aspects: first, the metaphorical language used in the representation of maize offerings in the context of pre-Hispanic pictographical images but also their relationship with other oblations and gods. Second, the change in this illustrated language which can be detected after the conquest.

In Mexica images, maize is always represented as seeds and cobs. In the colonial era, seeds and cobs almost completely disappear and are replaced by the food in its processed forms, as *tortillas* and *tamales*.<sup>5</sup>

A very important point for Nahua people is that they consider maize to be a living being. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún describes the cooking process of maize using words such as the maize ‘has not to be frightened by heat’ (Sahagún 1950–82, Book 5: 184). If the maize feels mistreated by humans, ‘he’ could ask for famine or disasters to be visited on humankind. Sahagún (Book 6) says that maize sings in the pot because it is alive (Sahagún 1989: 454). In the *Primeros Memoriales* describing the rituals made in the feast of Atamalqualiztli it is written:

5 In the *Florentine Codex* there are some exceptions. In Book 2, in the description of the feast of Huey Tozoztli, corncobs are depicted as offerings to the gods of agriculture. Groups of seven cobs were wrapped in paper, sprinkled with rubber and taken to the temple of Chicomecoatl. (Sahagún 1950–82, Book 2: 63)

And for this reason was this done. It was said that thus the maize was made to rest in the eighth year, because it was said we torment it greatly in order to eat it, when we used chilli on it, when we salted it, when we treated it with pepper, when it was treated with lime. It was as if we had killed it; therefore we revived it. It was said that, thus the maize was made young (again). (Sahagún 1997: 69)

In the *Codex Borgia*, maize in the form of the cob is personified. Every representation has eyes, eyelids, a mouth and teeth. On pages 27 and 28, we have a picture of five lands of maize. In this representation, maize is attacked by rodents or is destroyed, deluged by heavy rain (Boone 2007: 145–51; Castillo Tejero 2009). In pictures 33 and 34 of the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer* (16th century), maize is seen as a person. During its growing process maize changes its sex from masculine to feminine (Boone 2007: 144–5). It is very common to find maize offerings represented in pre-Hispanic codices as a grain. It is represented in one, two or three rows in a yellowish colour, into their *xicalli* or containers for offerings. Eduard Selser (1963: 33, 39) identified these pots as *cuauhxicalli*, prepared to collect the hearts and blood of the sacrificial victims. He also identifies the falling flower as a metaphor for blood. However, Elodie Dupey García (in press) thinks of these falling flowers in a different way; as a metaphor the pleasant odour of the flowers is associated with the heated oblations of maize.<sup>6</sup> In the *Codex Borgia*, these pots are painted a green-blue colour. These colours are always associated with the ‘precious thing’ or the object itself (Mikulska Dąbrowska 2010: 134). They have circular decorations inside small boxes that evoke the *chalchibuitl* or greenstones, symbols of wealth and fertility.

By contrast, the representation of the cob is very rare and always refers directly to the plant itself. It seems to be related to an extensive iconographic convention, produced from pre-Classic times to post-Classic times. The two side blades which provide a wrapping for the corn can be easily recognized. The male part of the flower (in Nahuatl *quetzalmiyahuaio*) and the female part of the flower (in Nahuatl *xilotzontli*) are observed in detail.

The first image to be considered is number 72 (fig. 5). The sheet (*lamina*) is divided into four spaces, surrounded by four feathered serpents. Every space has one god and every god is oriented towards a cosmic course. We are interested in the representation of Quetzalcoatl, which is easily recognized by his black body

6 Selser (1963: 39) gave the same interpretation of other vessels filled with a frothy brown liquid which was interpreted as cocoa. Other elements that sometimes come out of the pots are necklaces of precious stones, pearls, greenstone, feathers and butterflies.

paint and his mouth-shaped beak. Set before this god is an incense burner with offerings. We can also identify a maguery thorn, yellow corn and a bone awl, used for self-sacrifice. Seler (1963: 246) believed that this corn was linked with the idea of Tamoanchan, the house of birth, and the Cincalco, the land of origin of maize. Ferdinand Anders and others suggest that as the Lord of Penance, Quetzalcoatl is linked with self-sacrifice (*Códice Borgia* 1993: 356). We have to remember that Quetzalcoatl is one of the pro-



Fig. 5. The god Quetzalcoatl with offerings of corncobs. Lamina 72 of the *Codex Borgia*. Drawing by E. Mazzetto 2014.

tagonists of the *Legend of the Suns* in which Quetzalcoatl sprinkles blood from his penis onto the bones of humankind so that they can be born. Also, Quetzalcoatl, transforms into an ant, steals the maize from the Tonacatepetl and gives it to humankind (*Leyenda de los Soles* 2011: 181). The song dedicated to Cihuacoatl, in Book 2 of the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1950–82, Book 2: 236), provides a further example of the relationship between the three elements grouped in the *lamina*. In fact, the maguery thorn is compared with the golden fields of corn – the corncob – and with the *chicahuaztli*<sup>7</sup>. These three elements express a single concept: fertility.

Another interesting sheet is number 75 (fig. 6). Tlaloc, seated on his throne, is being fed by a priest. In front of Tlaloc we can see two pots. The two pots have maize, represented in the form of cobs. A censer, with offerings and perfume, takes the form of scroll. We can distinguish a rubber ball, surmounted by a representation of her warm fragrance. The shape of this spiral was compared with

7 *Chicahuaztli* was a musical instrument consisting of a handle with a round part at the top. Inside, the seeds were placed to create a sound when the instrument was shaken. It was one of the main attributes of Xipe Totec ('Our Lord the Flayed'), a deity associated with ripe corn. Its symbolism clearly also draws on the ripe corn. The verb *chicabua* means precisely 'to become strong, mature' (Wimmer 2006: *chicabua*). In addition, the *chicahuaztli* was often painted red, the colour of the body painting of the solar gods and corn (Couvreur 2011: 242).



the tail of the quetzal (Seler 1963: 163; Dupey García, forthcoming). There are also yellow corns on the cob and a string of precious stones. The second vessel is adorned with the decorations typical of jewelry; turquoise or greenstones, and contains three cobs; yellow, red and blue. Tlaloc is one of the gods who gets more offerings of maize. A song dedicated to Tlaloc (Sahagún 1950–82, Book 2: 224) says: ‘You made our food’ (*motonacayoub tic chiuhqui*). The tlaoque (the assistants of Tlaloc) also steal maize. Men pray to the



Fig. 7. The god Quetzalcoatl with offerings of tamales. Foil 251v of the *Libro de los Ritos* of D. Durán. Drawing by E. Mazzetto 2014.

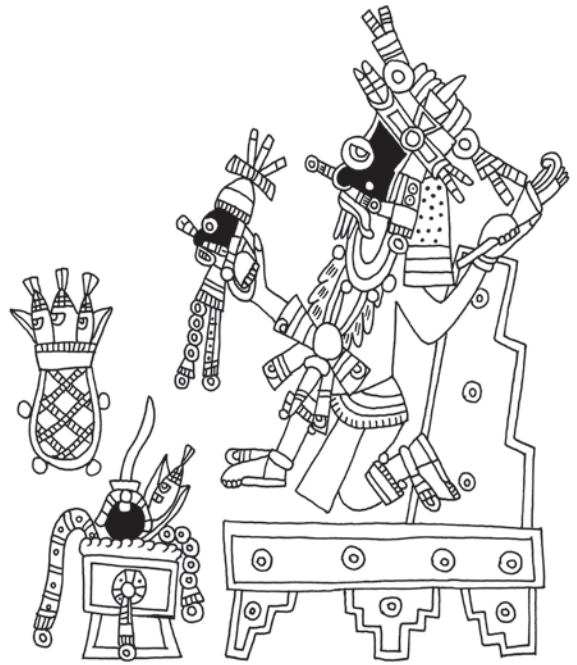


Fig. 6. The god Tlaloc with offerings of corncobs. Lamina 75 of the *Codex Borgia*. Drawing by E. Mazzetto 2014.

tlaoque for a good harvest. More interesting is the association between cobs, quetzal feathers and precious stones. Karl Taube (2000) analysed these relationships in the Olmec people. According to Taube, the iconography expresses an interchangeability between corncobs, precious stones – *chalchihuitl* – and quetzal feathers. The presence of the corn can be replaced by one of these symbols of fertility and wealth. An example is the male flower of corn, sometimes replaced by a quetzal feather in the Mexica iconography. This game of substitutions is shown in the myth of the end of the Toltec age. Huemac, the last king of Tula, plays with the Tlaloque and wins. The Tlaloque gives maize to him, ready to be planted, but Huemac

refuses the maize, preferring greenstone and feathers. The Tlaloque accept but leave the kingdom, taking with them the maize. So, Tula, the capital of the Toltec kingdom, falls (*Leyenda de los Soles* 2011: 193–7). Mercedes Montes de Oca Vega (1997) has studied the linguistic phenomenon known as *difrasismo* in the Nahuatl language. It is a grammatical construction in which two discrete words are coupled to form a metaphor. According to her, the myth of the defeat of Huemac can be interpreted as a misunderstanding of the *difrasismo* ‘in *chalchihuitl in quetzalli*’ (‘greenstone, quetzal feather’). This is the metaphor used to describe the precious things. For the tlaloque precious things were corn; for Huemac the *difrasismo* meant, literally, greenstones and quetzal feathers. Based on this mythical story, in this pictographic context, we propose that the simultaneous presence of corn, precious stones and quetzal feathers may represent an aquatic ensemble. A redundancy of elements having the same meaning expressed in different forms.<sup>8</sup>

The last example is taken from the *Libro de los Ritos* by Diego Durán (sheet 251 v). It is Quetzalcoatl again, but drawn in the European style (fig. 7). His attributes are the same: a black body, and a mouth in the shape of a beak. The offerings associated with this god are the same: maize, the decapitated heads of birds and some kind of bread. It would not be possible to understand the presence of these offerings without reading chapter 6. These pages describe precisely the oblations of food prepared in honour of the god:

... above these small plates, they put big *tamales*, big as melons – *tamales* is the bread they eat – on those *tamales*, large pieces of chicken were placed, which made great offerings before the altar of the idol. (Durán 1984, v. I: 66, our translation)

At this moment, the metaphorical signification of maize offerings disappears. The cereal is no longer present as a semantic unit of meaning in conjunction with other elements. The image depicts only the content of the text. The maize is interpreted as processed food in colonial texts. Despite some exceptions, the same logic is expressed in the majority of colonial pictographic documents. The symbolic content has disappeared and no longer makes sense.

8 The metaphorical reading of the pictographic documents has been studied by Jansen (*Códice Borgia* 1993) and Mikulska Dąbrowska (2010).

## Conclusions

This article presented a preliminary approach to a discussion of maize as a ritual food using two disciplines: archaeology and anthropology. Our goal was to understand the role of maize in two Mesoamerican cultures of the Valley of Mexico: the Teotihuacan and Mexico-Tenochtitlan. The first consideration was the difficulty of identifying maize in an archaeological context. We have considered the fact of a preservation of the archaeological record, but also the symbolic representation of maize in Teotihuacan art. It is not an easy thing to consider the archaeological indicators for the presence or absence of maize in Teotihuacan. Some of the problems are: 1) the existence of old excavations without a proper scientific register; 2) the soil in Teotihuacan has characteristics which render it unsuitable for a very good preservation of ancient maize; 3) it is difficult to identify the uses and processes involved in the deployment of maize as a ritual food; 4) the identification of the representation of maize in material culture as mural paintings, decoration of censers and so forth is also not straightforward. Other aspects to consider include not only the presence of maize, but also the presence of some elements of material culture as *metates* in ritual contexts. Ritual contexts were present at all locations in the city. We considered such places as ritual buildings, temples, altars and plazas, but also the tunnels and caves situated in the north to north-east of the city could be included. However, maize is not represented everywhere.

In Teotihuacan, maize seems not to have had a principal role, but it was associated with the function of fertility. It seems that it the function of the priest was more important than the maize itself. In the iconography of Teotihuacan, maize is under-represented. Maize is represented in mural paintings but always associated with another seed. One exception is the Mural of Agriculture but we have to consider that we don't have the real mural, only a copy from the beginning of the twentieth century and its representation seems not fit the convention. In conclusion, we have few examples to suggest a cultural pattern.

In Mexica society the presence of maize is more likely to be represented as a ritual food associated with the gods. The Mexican religion is more structured, with a real pantheon of gods. Rituals and ritual foods are therefore more related to a particular god. Maize was also conceived of as a living being. At this moment, we have the information provided by the codices and other pictographic texts to help us to study the maize as ritual food. Maize was associated with other precious things such as feathers and greenstones. Maize was also associated with the more traditional gods of the Valley of Mexico before the Mexican people: Tlaloc and Quetzacoatl. Tlaloc, the rain god was associated



with the good harvest and Quetzalcoatl was transformed into a cultural hero who gave maize to humankind.

In an ethno-historical approach, offerings of maize appear as grains and, very rarely, in the form of cobs, and they are always linked to mythical stories. The maize can be seen to be associated with precious things and fertility in a metaphorical way but also in very accurate histories of the gods and humankind. The conceptual notions of Teotihuacan times were replaced by a precise set of stories as written in the codices.

In colonial times, the symbolic content disappeared and no longer made sense. For the Spaniards maize had no significance because it was a new food. As a consequence maize was represented as a food without the religious connotations of pre-Hispanic times. For the colonial society, maize was merely a food and it was represented as such. The symbolism of maize as a ritual food progressively disappeared.

We still have many things to discuss about the role of maize as a ritual meal. We are surprised by the lack of iconographic information in Teotihuacan. Perhaps we overestimated the importance of maize as a ritual food, or perhaps there are problems with the archaeological record. For the Mexica period, however, we were surprised by the detail with which the food is represented as well as by the associated legends. Obviously, with the conquest and corn being a food which was unknown to the Spanish, it was not considered significant and was therefore under-represented in religious texts. The corn was just a food of the indigenous population and represented without any religious links for the new political powers.

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# Hungry women

Sin and rebellion through food and music in the early modern era

GIOIA FILOCAMO

Longing for food has always had different implications for men and women: associated with power and strength for men, it tends to have a worrying proximity to sexual pleasure for women. Showing an interesting parallelism throughout the Cinquecento, Italian humanists and teachers insisted on forbidding women music and gluttony. Food and music were both considered dangerous stimulants for the female senses, and every woman was encouraged to consider herself as a kind of food to be offered to the only human beings authorized to feel and satisfy desires: men and babies. Women could properly express themselves only inside monastic circles: the most prolific female composer of the seventeenth century was a nun, as was the first woman who wrote down recipes. Elaborate music and food became the means to maintain a lively relationship with the external world. Moreover, nuns also escaped male control by using the opposite system of affirming themselves through fasting and mortifying the flesh.

*In memory of Francesca,  
who enjoyed cooking  
and loved music*

The relationship between food and Christianity has always been problematic and ambivalent, given the complicated dynamics respecting intentionality and the remission of sins. From reading Penitentials – books circulating between the sixth and eleventh centuries where penances were mathematically calculated, which spread after the crisis of public penitence, but before the diffusion of manuals for confessors (Muzzarelli 1994; 2003: 10–11; 2006: 66–7) – we can see that the remission of sins followed simple rules managed by the priest,<sup>1</sup> who assigned a precise number of days of taking only ‘bread and water’ as a penance.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Previously, public penitence had instead been managed by the bishop. The new custom arrived on the Continent from Ireland.
- 2 Bishop Burchard of Worms wrote the last Penitential; the *Corrector sive medicus* (*Patrologia Latina* 140, cols. 949–1014), which was the nineteenth book of his *Decretum* (discussed in Vogel 1974).

After the eleventh century the deprivation of food is changed to personal repentance. The relationship between the individual and sin, which will result in personal repentance, is inevitably accompanied by a careful consideration of it, starting with Original Sin, the source of all human transgressions. In the common opinion the idea of Eve having the primary responsibility for Original Sin is perceived as an indelible stain on woman's honour. This is also shown in iconography: in some pictures the serpent speaking to Eve (Genesis 3:1–5) is dressed as a woman (Flores 1981).<sup>3</sup> Theological discussion in the Middle Ages was focused on the *quality* of the Original Sin: was it the consequence of *gluttony*, a view sustained by Ambrose, Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, or was it derived from *pride*, as was thought by Augustine and Pope Gregory I? The scholastics too considered gluttony not a fault in itself, but an accessory, because of the shift in the origin of the sin: the *intention* has modified the base of the sin, despite the pleasure derived. In fact, for Thomas Aquinas the deployment of *reason* and *measure* could govern the difficult relationship between human impulses and desires. But, despite the long-standing theological discussion, the most important doctrinal censorship crystallized around *gluttony*: this is a vice 'invented' by medieval monks, and women were made directly responsible for its origin, connected as it was to the famous apple (Casagrande and Vecchio 2000: XI–XVI, 124–48).

The idea that women were not able to control themselves because of their natural instincts had its origins in this basic concept. Women needed help to resist vices, starting with gluttony, which is the first corruption and generates all the others, especially the carnal ones. In medieval iconography respectable, slim women do not eat or drink in public. By contrast, men exhibit their power and superiority by their voracious appetite for food and drink.

This cultural attitude was to persist for centuries, despite the aesthetic shift in the perception of female beauty towards more generous physical shapes. The female sphere of activity was thoroughly delimited, and every woman had to act

3 The widespread tradition of the female-headed serpent has been investigated in Flores 1981 (my thanks to Sigrud Harris for directing my attention to this work). According to Flores, its earliest statement might be in Petrus Comestor's *Historia scholastica* (c. 1169–1173; *Patrologia Latina* 198, cols. 1053–1722), a very famous biblical paraphrase from the Creation to the Acts of the Apostles. The assumed similarity between devil and woman ('quia similia similibus applaudunt') has been the precondition for the incarnation in woman's clothing (Flores 1981: 4–5). On the same subject see also Bonnell 1917, Kelly 1971, and Crowther 2010: 28–9.

as a *social mirror of men*, with the function to affirm and confirm male identities.<sup>4</sup> This was the aim of preachers, humanists, and male tutors.

A couple of examples on the *necessary* limitation of food:

- (a) ‘With your food, do not decide by yourself, but listen to your husband and ask him for permission, with the understanding that he does not offend God by eating these foods’: these are sentences pronounced by the preacher Giovanni Dominici, a Florentine Dominican who wrote a *Regulation for Conducting Family Life* between 1401 and 1403 (Salvi 1860: 90),<sup>5</sup>
- (b) In 1581 the teacher Bernardino Carroli from Ravenna identified gluttony as one of the most baleful risks to female education: ‘Gluttony is very negative for everyone, but especially for a woman, because if a scoundrel knows that she can be easily tempted with a festive penny or some cherries or a melon, he will get from her whatever he wants’; moreover, she would be a bad example for all the other women (Carroli 2004: 181).<sup>6</sup>

In the modern era *music* too became a very suspect activity, and was considered, just as was food, to be a stimulant dangerous to the female senses. In the 1530s the humanist Pietro Aretino wrote: ‘Music and literature known by women are the keys which unlock their modesty’.<sup>7</sup> In the discussion on the

- 4 This is a reproposal of the current cultural model of ancient Greece, which considered women as means to affirm male identities, men being the only human beings who could be self-represented. This subject is discussed in Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant 1997.
- 5 ‘Così dico ne’ cibi tuoi, accordati con lui [il marito]; e senza sua licenzia non fare singularità. Intendendo in essi cibi egli non offenda Dio’. On the Dominican preacher see Debby 2001.
- 6 ‘Voglio ancora non sia golosa, perché questo vizio è pessimo in qual si voglia persona, ma più in donna perché essendo questa sua golosità da un tristo e ribaldo saputa, gli basterà l’animo con un soldo di festa o cerase o con un mellone che gli appresenti aver da lei tutto quello che vole. E quando anco ciò non ottenessi, non potrà lei senza biasimo praticar tra l’altre donne, poiché ha in sé questa cattiva parte’.
- 7 ‘I suoni, i canti e le lettere; che sanno le femine, sono le chiavi; che aprano le porte de la pudicizia loro’ (*De le lettere di m. Pietro Aretino. Libro primo*, Venice, Francesco Marcolini, January 1538 (*more veneto*), fol. 41v); my thanks to Dr Antonella Imolesi, responsible for the Fondi antichi della Biblioteca Comunale ‘A. Saffi’ of Forlì, who checked the correctness of the sentence in the print preserved in that library (Raccolte Piancastelli, Sala O, Stampatori, Marcolini 20). The sentence is in a letter written at Venice on 1 June 1537 to his pupil Ambrogio degli Eusebi, at fols. 41v–42r. There is at

conduct of women at court, the topic of the third book of the *Cortegiano*,<sup>8</sup> Baldassarre Castiglione strictly limited musical practice for women (§ 2: 52–4), never considering composition to be a possible activity (Newcomb 1987: 102, 114 fn. 46). Respectable women played music only within the courts.

The parallel situations are very interesting: if the public side of female active participation – in eating or playing music – was discouraged on account of its improper, ostentatious aspect, the creative side was discouraged in the same way. The intellectual activity of women needed to be limited in order to reproduce exactly the world defined for them by their male custodians. The noble female figures in Castiglione's *Cortegiano* conform to this strict cultural model: they 'nourish speech, but don't produce it' (Zancan 1983: 33), enacting with perfect *sprezzatura* (in this case *goodwill*) the male-centred, male-ordered vision of the world.

But some women did not agree with this restrictive and officialised vision of the world, and they invented some effective strategies as a response. Those female saints who were incorrectly defined as *anorexic*<sup>9</sup> actually affirmed themselves by using food as an alternative means to their prescribed destiny. These women took to the extreme the frugal attitude to food demanded by society, transforming it into a means of affirming their active presence: Rudolf Bell interprets their refusal as a way of challenging the patriarchal society of that time (Bell 1985), subverting the 'normal', intellectual male superiority. But the extreme rejection of food, as demonstrated by the example of Catherine of Siena (1347–80), could be deemed to be evidence of religious unbelief. Catherine fasted from the time she was very young, like the Desert Fathers; completely focused on the Eucharist as a food, she rejected the plans her family's had made for her, and did not marry. She only avoided the accusation of heresy because the Dominican Raymond of Capua became her confessor and biographer; he testified also that Catherine supported herself only by drinking water (Bynum 1987). Again, male authority is important to guarantee the adoption of a different life for a woman, who in this case firmly wanted to

least one other imprint of the same book also produced in Venice in the same year by Curzio Troiano Navò and brothers.

- 8 The treatise was written between 1513 and 1524, revised and definitively published in 1528.
- 9 On this questionable definition, originating at the end of the nineteenth century, and applied to a dietary behaviour derived from different preconditions see Vandereycken and van Deth 1994.



imitate Christ<sup>10</sup> although Jesus was incarnated as a man, not a woman; the *imitatio Christi* should *not* have been a model for women. In fact, women who used fasting and longing for the Eucharist as way of affirming their independence were suspected of heresy.<sup>11</sup>

The pre-eminent religious model for women was Mary, and her relationship with food implied that mothers were invited *to become food* for their babies. Breastfeeding was not customary, especially in the upper ranks of society, but the crusaders had brought back examples of eastern Christian iconography which depicted Mary sweetly feeding Jesus (Fortunati 2005: 58), a resonant example for every woman. The humanized image of the divine mother completely at the service of her son (Cassigoli 2009) began with Tuscan paintings of the fourteenth century (Giotto, Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti), encouraged by the theologically less conventional attitude of the mendicant orders. Breastfeeding was *the only leading role* allowed by the Church to women in the modern age, and medical science encouraged the appreciation of the mother as nurse, an activity normally precluded by the hiring of wet nurses.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, mercenary breastfeeding was an activity completely organized by men: the father of the baby got in touch with the wet nurse's husband, and the two men decided on the price of the service (Muzzarelli 2013: 5–19, 33).

Religious iconography connected to food records another symbolic tension: the image of knowledge being instilled into Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) through the milk falling from the Virgin's breast. The topic of the *Lactatio Bernardi* probably originated in Spain at the end of the thirteenth century: its earliest incarnation is in the first scene of the Palma de Mallorca Retablo with

- 10 The behaviour is based on an anonymous dialogue written in the fifteenth century, in four books, the last one devoted to the Eucharist. The aim was to reach perfection through the mystical practice achieved by individual meditation. On the *imitatio Christi* pursued by women in the Middle Ages through their bodies see Bynum 1991.
- 11 The accusation of sorcery did not exist during the Middle Ages; it began only in the fifteenth century (Gatti 1991). The most popular manual about witches of that time was the *Malleus maleficarum* ('The Hammer of Witches'), written by the two Dominicans Henricus Institoris (Kramer) and Jacobus Sprenger, printed in Venice in 1474 and considered valid at least up until the mid Seicento.
- 12 On the historical and social reasons for wet nursing see Fildes 1988. The most famous treatise on obstetrics and gynaecology during the modern age was written by Scipione Mercurio: *La comare o ricoglitrice* ('The Godmother or the Midwife'), Venice, Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1596, with many reprints. It was not the first work on this subject, discussed since the beginning of Cinquecento, but its approach is innovative: it directly speaks to the midwives who helped women in childbirth, and for this practical reason it is the first ever printed book in the vernacular language (Roscioni 2009: 627–8).

the lactation of St Bernard (Stoichita 1995). In all the images involving the *Lactatio Bernardi* the gush falling from the Madonna's breast – who never offers any real physical contact – transmits divine knowledge. In fact, it was normally held that breast milk could also instil into the child both emotional and cultural characteristics from the nurse, and for this reason milk coming from animals was discouraged (Muzzarelli 2003: 50–2): Mary personifies the Church, which feeds all humanity with its doctrine. It is very possible that this powerful image indicated a different route to be taken by those women who wished to be visible in the modern age. And I think that food and music can perhaps be considered quite similar in this respect. Let's see how.

There was only one place where female creativity flourished almost freely during the modern age: the *cloister*. Gabriella Zarri demonstrated a clear paradox (Zarri 1986, 1987): the nunnery allowed a real social and cultural alternative to those women who could not be wives or mothers. The monastery allowed the development of a female creative identity, affirmed in a muted way artistically and with food.

Aside from roasted food, which was traditionally managed by men (Montanari 2004: 35–40, 57–61), the practical management of food inside families has always been relegated to women, but this never implied any creative aspect to the activity: even in ancient Rome the professional *chefs* were men.<sup>13</sup> The earliest medieval recipe books date back to the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries,<sup>14</sup> but the first one definitely compiled by a woman comes from an Italian cloister: Maria Vittoria della Verde, a Dominican nun from Perugia, wrote down 170 recipes from 1583 to 1607.<sup>15</sup> These are recipes for the daily and festive uses of the nuns.<sup>16</sup> The compiler adopts a humble tone, minimizing the value of her contribution. But refined excellence has always been the main

13 *De re coquinaria* ('The Art of Cooking') by Marcus Gavius Apicius (25 BC–37 AD), known through a Latin revision perhaps written during the fourth century AD, is the most important source on Roman cooking.

14 The most important recipe book of that time is Maestro Martino's *Libro de arte coquinaria* (fifteenth century), reprinted many times until end of the Seicento (Capatti and Montanari 1999: 185–6).

15 Suor Maria Vittoria lived in the nunnery of St Thomas at Perugia. The years appear on the heading and at fol. 87r of her manuscript preserved in the Archivio del Monastero della Beata Colomba at Perugia (Casagrande, 'Introduzione', [Della Verde] 1989: 13). The modern edition has both the dialect and Italian texts.

16 As in the Middle Ages, many cooking times were defined by the corresponding spaces of common prayers: for example, the space of 5 Pater and 5 Ave Marias corresponded to c. 3 minutes; the space of 7 psalms corresponded to c. 10 minutes ([Della Verde] 1989: 103, 309).

feature of food coming from nunneries, signalling them as being unique places where female creativity and expertise were both recognized and encouraged.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, it is again a female cloister which produces the first instrumental music to be composed and printed by a woman,<sup>18</sup> who also was the most prolific woman composer of the seventeenth century: Isabella Leonarda (1620–1704) was an Ursuline nun from Novara (Grilli 2005, Carter 1982, Dahnk Baroffio 1983, Monticelli 1998, Schedensack 1998) who produced around twenty collections of musical pieces, mostly motets. This fact is also very interesting because instrumental music was not customary in nunneries.

It is clear that both food and music helped the nuns to maintain a lively relationship with the external world (Muzzarelli 2003: 49), all the more necessary after the Council of Trent (ended in 1563) decided on absolute seclusion for nuns, threatening excommunication if they even passed through the gates of their convent.<sup>19</sup> I think that nuns' professional production of food for body and mind could be interpreted as a substitution for the traditional female task inside the family – the *nutritional care* of the group. Since the customary beneficiaries of this care were lacking in nunneries, the work of the nuns was externally directed, and their products were perfected: it was imperative that they seemed celestial, like the wonderful interior gardens which reproduced heaven on earth, in order to limit the exacerbation of seclusion following the Council of Trent ruling (Zarri 1994: 208). The cloisters were clearly perceived as bridges between earth and heaven, essential in 'their intercessory function for towns and in their

17 The eighteenth-century MS B.3574 of the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio at Bologna preserves a very interesting collection of coloured images of nuns living in various convents of the town preparing their specialities – not only gastronomic – inside their nunneries (Fanti 1972).

18 It is the collection of *Sonate a 1, 2, 3 e 4 Istromenti d'Isabella Leonarda Madre Vicaria nel Nobilissimo Collegio di S. Orsola di Nouara. Opera Decima Sesta consagrata al Merito incomparabile di Monsignor Illustriss. e Reuerendiss. Federico Caccia Patrizio di Nouara Nontio Apostolico di Sua Maestà Cattolica, ed Arciuescouo di Milano* (Bologna, Pier Maria Monti, 1693), in four partbooks: Violino primo, Violino secondo, Violone and Organo. There is a copy in the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica at Bologna, AA.193.

19 Pope Boniface VIII had already required strict claustration for professed nuns with the decretal *Periculoso* (1298), later confirmed by the bull *Apostolicae sedis* (1309) (Sensi 1995: 82). But the discussion in the 25th Session (3–4 December 1563) of the Council of Trent opted for the strictest interpretation: *Decretum de Regularibus et Monialibus*, Chapter V (see *Il sacro concilio di Trento con le notizie più precise riguardanti la sua intimazione a ciascuna delle sessioni. Nuova traduzione italiana con testo latino a fronte*, Venice, Appresso gli eredi Baglioni 1822: 335–6).

close link with the good social practices organized by the nuns for the local communities' (Donadi 2009: 52–3).

But the keepers of the nuns' honour seemed more concerned with its potential compromise through music than through food. The Council of Trent also discussed music in nunneries, but the precise regulation was passed on to the local ecclesiastical authorities. Some bishops (such as Federico Borromeo at Milan), were indulgent or even enthusiastic about nuns' polyphony, but others set their minds against it (as was the case in Bologna). Musician nuns reacted against this and other restrictions on their freedom by often conforming only 'to the letter', eluding the substance of many prohibitions. Many typical examples of this come from the Camaldolese nunnery of Santa Cristina della Fondazza at Bologna, and were vividly reconstructed by Craig Monson (Monson 1995). Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana (1590–1662) lived in this nunnery, for example, and was the only nun from Bologna to have published music – the *Componimenti musicali de motteti concertati a una e più voci* (Venice, Bartolomeo Magni, 1623).<sup>20</sup> Although she had lived in the nunnery from childhood, her music surprisingly contains the most modern devices (Monson 1995: 61–5). Moreover, of the ten other women who published music before 1623, five of them were nuns: Vittoria Aleotti, Raffaella Aleotti, Caterina Assandra, Claudia Sessa, and Sulpitia Cesis (Bowers 1987: 162–4). This gives us extremely valuable information: that although without any openings,<sup>21</sup> the walls of nunneries, following the Council of Trent, were seeping like sponges (Filocamo 2012): the external world filtered inwards, and nuns succeeded in reaching out to the outside life.

I think that the active production of food and music in nunneries could also be interpreted as conscious or unconscious *seduction*. A seduction full of mystery, but even *sensual*, realized by invisible women. Taste and smell, sight, hearing and touch: preparing elaborate food and polyphonic music requires

20 There is a copy in the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica at Bologna, BB.63, in three partbooks (Canto primo, Canto secondo, and Basso continuo). The print preserves 20 motets, dedicated to Vizzana's religious sisters. On these pieces see Mitchell 2011.

21 'Nuns' post-Tridentine rites of passage – their prostration before the altar beneath a black pall, symbolizing their death to the world, and the cropping of their hair, for example – emphatically articulated their entry into this separate sphere and their rejection of all others. Once within the separate women's sphere created and enforced by the church hierarchy, nuns behind impenetrable walls were to interact with men hardly at all, and then only under strictest control, through veiled windows protected by double grates. Any unauthorized contacts were almost invariably described in overtly or implicitly sexual language. Thus, *clausura* seems to embody the worst, most oppressive aspects of the "women's sphere" (Monson 1995: 9).

active connections across all the five senses, creative cross-references where both *mouth* (connected to food or singing) and *hands* (to prepare food or write down and perform instrumental music) are essential. Even the lexicon can confirm this similarity: we speak of creative *good taste*, and in both cases the external world is delivered of a charming image of the nunnery: lively, colourful, well organized.

The Council of Trent was less strict with religious males: they were generally invited to respect the rule of their own order. But nuns were instead required to have exceptional strength. The oppressive prohibitions should have helped them in the fight against their own intellects, but many women reacted negatively to the imposed creative flattening. They protested by means of food, transforming its preparation into an art to be exported, and they also responded by performing challenging polyphonies, accepting external incentives. These enterprising women limited their creative acts on purpose so as not to alarm the men who believed they had to protect the assumed intellectual female frailty (Muzzarelli 2013: 145–50). This is a strategy still used by many women who want to be accepted beyond their traditional roles. Otherwise, female ambition is still perceived as socially aggressive and potentially destructive. Even five hundred years ago it was more prudent for women to use a humble tone, both in recipes<sup>22</sup> and in the prefaces of collections of musical compositions.<sup>23</sup> In fact,

22 In a little book with spiritual exercises which is considered to be the twin of her recipe book, Suor Maria Vittoria della Verde wrote (fol. 68r): ‘The profit for a perfect Christian and much more for a religious man lies in the loss, and his greatness consists in lowering himself, his glory is in infamy, freedom consists in denying himself, and ruling is in the cross, living is in dying’ (‘Il guadagno del perfetto christiano e molto più del religioso consiste nella perdita e la grandezza sua è lo abassarsi, la gloria è la ingnominia, la libertà è la negatione di se stesso e il regnare nella croce, il vivere è nel morire’) (Casagrande, ‘Introduzione’, [Della Verde] 1989: 19).

23 ‘Serene Highness, with these and other musical pieces I have always received much help from a scholar servant of Your Highness; for this reason it is my pleasure to dedicate with respect my first complete work, almost insolent for a woman, to the august name of Your Highness, so that under the golden Oak it will be protected from the lightning of malicious gossip’ (‘Serenissima, Ho riceuuto in ogni tempo tanti affettuosi aiuti dalla bontà d’vno studioso vasallo dell’Altezza vostra in condurmi all’impiego di questi, e d’altri molti armonici componimenti, che deuo di ragione la prima opera, che, come donna, troppo arditamente mando in luce, riuertemente consacrarla all’augustissimo Nome di Vostra Altezza, acciò sotto una Quercia d’oro resti sicura da i fulmini dell’apparecchiata maledicenza’): this is the beginning of the dedication to the Grand Duchess of Tuscany Vittoria della Rovere in the *Primo [libro] de’ madrigali* composed by Barbara Strozzi (Venice, Alessandro Vincenti, 1644). There is a copy in five partbooks (Soprano, Tenore, Contralto, Basso, and Basso continuo) in the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica at Bologna, BB.366.

even in the *Libro de cocina* ascribed to the Mexican nun Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–95) ‘the philosophy of the appreciation of the everyday life is surreptitiously affirmed, a kind of strategic minimalism ... which tended to enlarge the female protagonism ... without raising alarm’ (Muzzarelli 2013: 146).<sup>24</sup> Just as did Teresa of Ávila (1515–82), Sor Juana used modest images and culinary metaphors for her literary texts, but at the same time she was one of the first to fight for women’s rights in Latin America.<sup>25</sup>

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- 24 ‘... si affermava surrettiziamente la filosofia della valorizzazione del quotidiano, una sorta di minimalismo strategico ... finalizzato ad allargare il protagonismo femminile ... senza produrre allarme.’
- 25 On Sor Juana’s general intellectual attitude see Arias 2005. ‘Although Sor Juana is best known for her poetry, which has attracted the greatest critical attention, it was only a part of her intellectual interest. In fact, she used poetry to give voice to her views of science, music and philosophy’ (Arias 2005: 314).

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# Modes of betel consumption in early India

*Bhoga* and *abhoga*

ANDREA GUTIERREZ

In this article, I analyse some food practices surrounding betel in early Indian history. Betel consumption was not prescribed for everyone in Brahmanical society. Hence I examine texts referring to betel from the late pre-modern to early modern era (roughly 300–1800 CE) in order to explain proscriptions of betel in the legal discourse that discusses religious practice. The literature I consider in my analysis of betel consumption ranges from the *kāmasāstra* genre, influential works of tantra, texts detailing worship, and ascetic and renunciant guides. Material cultural studies aid my exploration of betel as a socio-religious identity marker and my development of three modes of betel consumption and one mode of non-consumption.

Betel ‘deserves its reputation ... it lightens up the countenance and excites an intoxication like that caused by wine. It relieves hunger, stimulates the organs of digestion, disinfects the breath, and strengthens the teeth. It is impossible to describe, and delicacy forbids me to expatiate on its invigorating and aphrodisiac qualities. (Abdur Razzāk of Herat, commenting upon his visit to the Vijāyanāgara court, 1443 CE, translated by Elliot 1966: 114)

Betel is pungent, bitter, heating, sweet, alkaline, astringent, a destroyer of wind, a destroyer of worms, a remover of phlegm, a kindler of the fire of desire – it adorns the speech of women, causes pleasure, and eliminates grief. These thirteen qualities of betel are known. Such qualities are rarely encountered, even in dreams! (First verse on betel from the *Bhojanakutūhala* [Curiosities about Food], seventeenth century CE, my translation, *Bhojanakutūhala* 1956: 219)

The food item today commonly called *pān* (or *tāmbūlam*, the betel leaf roll) is ubiquitous in India. The betel roll typically comprises one or more leaves of the betel vine with various ingredients wrapped inside, usually areca nut and slaked lime paste. Its consumption results in a stimulating, digestive, and purportedly aphrodisiacal effect; it is also a vasoconstrictor which the World

Health Organization has declared a carcinogen. People have consumed this foodstuff on the subcontinent from before the beginning of the Common Era, with attested references from at least the third century CE.

Betel chewing is still prevalent today across India and Southeast Asia. A recent study indicated that approximately 30 per cent of men and 7 per cent of women in India chew the areca nut, typically combined with other ingredients, and the figures are similar for Pakistan and Bangladesh (Betel quid and areca nut 2012: 336–7). People chew betel after a meal, give *pān* to guests or as a formal invitation to special functions, and share it at marriages, religious festivals (Gode 1961: 139), and other auspicious occasions.<sup>1</sup> Its popularity has reached such heights that the number of people chewing betel and spitting out the juice without spittoons has resulted in a ban on spitting in public places across much of India. This is due to the red staining that results from the chemical reaction of mixing lime powder (calcium hydroxide) with catechu, an extract obtained by boiling the heartwood of a particular species of acacia tree (*Acacia catechu*) (Zumbroich 2007–8: 94). When chewing betel, a consumer swallows some of the liquid resulting from the chewing, but typically spits out the indigestible bits, much as tobacco chewers do.

In this article, I analyse some food practices surrounding betel in early Indian history, focusing on their cultural and religious aspects.<sup>2</sup> Betel consumption was not prescribed for everyone in Brahmanical society (the orthopraxic followers of various Hindu religious texts).<sup>3</sup> Hence I examine texts referring to betel from the late pre-modern to early modern era (roughly 300–1800 CE) in order to explain proscriptions of betel in the discourse. As part of this exploration, I consider references to *pān* chewing in the later legal literature that discusses religious practices (from approximately the second half of the first millennium onwards). For example, some texts state that religious practitioners should offer betel to deities and priests. However, texts also resolutely proscribe betel consumption for ascetics, widows, those practising penance, and students

- 1 One Tamil tradition specifies offering a roll of betel leaves (*kaiccuru*) as a wedding rite itself and on other auspicious occasions. For example, wedding party members present their gift of money together with a roll of betel leaves (*Tamil Lexicon* 1924–36: 1103).
- 2 I use the term religion in a broad sense, meaning that I consider texts and practices involving or mentioning deities, such as the Brahmanical legal texts, to be religious texts and practices. Hence I describe practices stipulated for members of a Brahmanical group as religious.
- 3 For the sake of intelligibility and convenience, in this article I use the term ‘Hindu’ anachronistically to refer to the early Brahmanical traditions and texts that many Hindu practitioners of later times have largely adopted.

learning the *Veda*. Working from the assumption that texts reflect some level of historical food and religious practices,<sup>4</sup> I explore how betel consumption may have affected certain religious and societal roles in the past. Along the way, I offer an explanation for the great disparity between prohibitions of betel chewing for some people and the condoned use of betel (past and present) in temple worship, its prominence in religious texts such as the *Purāṇas*, and betel chewing as a prescribed practice for the religious elite and priests of India, the Brahmins.

I argue that betel chewing became important as a socio-religious identity marker via three modes of consumption involving *bhoga* – the enjoyment or experiencing of some worldly element. The modes of consumption I outline for betel *bhoga* are; 1) the royal mode, 2) the romantic mode, and 3) the householder mode. I posit that Brahmanical religious ideology reflects the bhogic associations surrounding these modes of betel consumption, resulting in discourses of *abhoga* (abstinence from a material thing) in legal and religious texts from approximately the seventh to the ninth centuries CE onwards, concerning people such as ascetics, widows, and the like. I suggest that the rise in the popularity of tantra as a religious alternative from the second half of the first millennium to some extent provoked this concurrent increased prohibition of betel. In tantra, *bhoga* was necessary for attaining the ideal goal of liberation (*mukti*) and was fundamentally involved in the soul's bound existence in the body. Hence I argue that the prominence of *bhoga* as foundational to tantric ideology partly explains the traditional orthodox *dharma* writers' prohibition of betel consumption, as Brahmanical followers desired to distance themselves from tantric practices.

Consideration of some recent theoretical approaches to material studies as developed by David Morgan, Karen Barad, and others furthers my argument of betel consumption (or abstinence) as an indicator of permitted participation in religious activities. These new theories, including new materialism (see below), illumine how this foodstuff could have caused such ideological concern and why food practices involving betel consumption or abstinence were important within the Brahmanical religious framework. Generalizing broadly, thinkers who embrace new materialism envision large composites of elements

4 While texts may offer imperfect representations of the past, the sources I use (the *Kāmasūtra*, the *Purāṇas*, and so on) are intellectual histories in their own right, which responded to other works in their milieu. These sources might not always indicate what people actually practised or ate. Nonetheless, it is the record left to us today and suggests certain practices and tropes surrounding betel consumption.

interacting in open systems in which human subjects are not the only agents.<sup>5</sup> Proponents of new materialism like Donna Haraway and Karen Barad endorse notions such as the entanglement of subject and object, ‘intra-acting’<sup>6</sup> elements, and the idea that nothing exists independently of other things. More importantly for discourses involving foodways, new materialists like Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012: Chapter 5) consider that ‘(a)n object is no longer passive matter that has to be re-presented; meaning-making takes place on a two-way track’. Thus, a foodstuff may create meaning, determine social identity, or differentiate, at the same time as humans attribute certain social significances to food practices of consuming or abstaining.

For the purposes of my discussion, this means that the betel roll and the human consumer both intra-act as part of a larger composite. The human affects the betel roll – biting, masticating, swallowing some of the betel juice, and spitting out the rest of the foodstuff, thus permanently affecting the betel roll’s form and content. Likewise, the object – the betel roll – has agency and creates effects on the human, including physiological ones; betel colours the lips, freshens the breath, aids digestion, and, significantly, stimulates the body, a topic that has relevance for my later discussion of tantra. Both the betel leaf and the areca nut are stimulants, accounting for textual proclamations of betel rolls’ properties of aiding digestion and stimulating passion (*rāga*).<sup>7</sup> I suggest that the betel roll’s physiological effects impart certain social meanings and religious identities on the human consumer and partly explain the concern that betel has occasioned for Brahmanical legal authorities and compilers.<sup>8</sup> Hence, the materiality of *bhoga*, observed in the foodstuff of betel, plays out in the theology of the subcontinent. My selection of betel as an object of study is not arbitrary;

5 For an overview of new materialism, as espoused by Bruno Latour, Manuel Delanda, and others, and a discussion of the agency of matter, see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 of Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012.

6 Karen Barad coined the term ‘intra-activity’ (Barad 2001: 98). The term describes the dynamics of changing material-discursive structures. Her quantum-physical vision of things proposes an ongoing machine-network of intra-actions ‘across an assemblage of humans and non-humans’ (Barad 2012).

7 ‘Betel is pungent, bitter, heating, sweet, alkaline, and astringent, a destroyer of wind, destroyer of worms, remover of phlegm, (and) a kindler of the fire of desire...’ (*Bhojanakutūhalam* 1956: 219).

8 This new materialist argument sounds like old materialism, but in fact, new materialism embraces past thought. ‘It is not necessarily different from any other materialist, pragmatic or monist tradition... since it carefully “works through” all these traditions... New materialism says “yes, and” to all of these intellectual traditions...’ (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, Part II: Introduction).

I choose it among many potential examples in order to test the possibility of using a material object such as food to determine if its materiality fits theoretically and theologically within a given system.

### *Bhoga and abhoga*

*Bhoga*, prescribed consumption

The *Pūjāprakāśa*, one of a number of books contained in the lengthy legal text called the *Vīramitrodaya*, which is part of the Hindu *dharmaśāstra* tradition, describes how to worship and revere deities by performing *pūjā*. The section on betel states, ‘A person intent upon devotion who offers Viṣṇu betel combined with fragrance and camphor is highly esteemed in Viṣṇu’s realm.’<sup>9</sup> Texts from the past like this one recommend ideal practices, and present-day worship corroborates that this ideal exists in modern practice: devotees today typically give betel among other offerings, especially in South Indian temples. Much earlier than the *Pūjāprakāśa*, at least four South Indian medieval inscriptions also offer historical evidence that this long-standing prescribed ideal had resonance in practice. They detail the quantities of betel leaves given to deities and land grants given for the agricultural production of betel intended for deities’ consumption. For example, an inscription from 1166 CE records a land grant for betel leaf production for the god Cenna Keśava (Inscription 13, lines 66–9, Kundangar 1939: 112). An inscription dated 1135 CE mentions a gift of 500 betel leaves for service to the god Jakkeśvara, gifted by some Setṭis (Inscription 232, Hultzsch 1939: 236–7). A further inscription dated 1292 CE states that certain merchants gifted a quantity of betel for service to a deity (Inscription 344, Hultzsch 1939: 366–8). Another inscription dated 1235 CE details that the Yādava King Singhaṇadeva gave a grant for the betel leaves of the god Bhāvaśuddhadeva (Inscription 18, line 64, Kundangar 1939: 153). While these inscriptions report the divine consumption of betel, one might speculate about the implied chain of consumption. Gifts of betel offered to gods in a temple might finally come into the possession of Brahmin priests working in those temples, or, equally likely, might find their way back into the hands of devotees as remnants of worship. While devotees do not typically chew the betel leaves returned to them after having wrapped temple offerings, I do suspect that such

9 *Gandhakarpūrasamyuktaṃ tāmbūlaṃ yo nivedayet | viṣṇave bhaktiyuktas tu viṣṇuloke mahiyate ||* (*Pūjāprakāśa* 1987: 86, my translation). This work dates to the first half of the seventeenth century CE per P. V. Kane (1930: xlvi).



vast quantities of leaves as are detailed in these inscriptions probably did serve for the most part as objects of human, in addition to divine, consumption.

P. V. Kane, renowned scholar of Indian legal texts, has suggested that such gifting in supplication to gods and their *mūrtis* (effigies) – especially using food items – developed naturally as an extension of earlier patterns of gifting to Brahmin priests.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, other legal sources, such as the *Yatidharmaprakāśa*, a guide for those who want to renounce and become ascetics, confirm that priests should receive gifts of betel. This text declares that a man planning to renounce offers reverence and gives ‘betel leaves and the sacrificial fee to the *Brāhmaṇas* (Brahmins)’.<sup>11</sup>

### *Abhoga*, abstinence

Yet other *dharmaśāstra* legal texts clearly specify that certain members of Brahmanical society – namely, ascetics, widows, and those performing penance or rites for their deceased ancestors – should *not* consume betel. The *Vṛddha-Hārīta* (dating from around the ninth century CE) prescribes that a widow should give up adorning her hair, chewing ‘betel’ nut, and taking two meals a day, and should rather wear a white garment, rein in her senses, and so on.<sup>12</sup> Another legal authority of roughly the same period or earlier, Pracetas, forbids ascetics, Vedic students, and widows from indulging in ‘betel leaves, oil baths, and eating out of brass vessels’.<sup>13</sup> The *Yatidharmaprakāśa* also quotes the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, which states, ‘(l)iquor and betel leaves are of equal potency. With all his effort, therefore, let a renouncer avoid betel leaves’.<sup>14</sup> These injunctions display contrasting attitudes toward betel in the discourse. I consider this indicative of a concern on the part of the legal authors toward to this foodstuff. Later in this article I elaborate why texts approve the use and gifting of betel for some people but recommend abstention from betel chewing for certain groups.

10 ‘When image-worship became general items offered to invited *brāhmaṇas* were also offered to the images of gods. It was a case of extension and not of borrowing from an alien cult’ (Kane 1941: 734). ‘After *naivedya* (an offering of food), *tāmbūla* (betel) is to be offered to the God worshipped’ (*ibid.* 730).

11 Section 21: Rite of Renunciation: An Outline, 21.34 (*Yatidharmaprakāśa* 1976: 104).

12 Verses XI.205–10 of *Vṛddha-Hārīta*, cited and translated by Kane (1941: 584).

13 My translation of Pracetas, quoted in the *Smyticandrika* I, 222, and *Śuddhitattva* I, 235, with *tāmbulābhyañjanaṃ caiva kāmśyapātre ca bhōjanam | yatiśca brahmacāri ca vidhāvā ca vivarjayet* ||. Compilers who cite Pracetas typically date from approximately 600–900 CE. Per Kane (1941: 584, footnote 1367).

14 *Vāyu Purāṇa* 68.17–18, trans. by Patrick Olivelle (*Yatidharmaprakāśa* 1976: 189).

Many other works also present an ideal of abstention from *pān*. Texts indicate that those fasting as a penance or as part of a regime of regular religious observances (for example, *ekādaśī*; fasting on the eleventh day after full and new moons) are not to eat betel.<sup>15</sup> According to one of the latest classical *dharma* texts, the *Dharmasindhu* (1790 CE), anyone observing eleventh-day rites (*ekādaśī*) and the restrictions leading to the fast 'should avoid taking food in a vessel of bell metal, ... over-eating, drinking too much water, (and) ... *tāmbūla* (betel leaves and nuts, etc.)'.<sup>16</sup> Another *dharma* text cites the *Matsya Purāṇa* and states, 'A fast is vitiated by drinking water often, by eating *tāmbūla*, by sleeping in (the) day time and by sexual intercourse'.<sup>17</sup> Further, a minor *Upaniṣad*, the *Itihāsoṣopaniṣad*, states that a person giving funeral oblations to his ancestors should not consume betel, although the deceased ancestor(s) may be offered betel.<sup>18</sup>

While rules about how one should practise religion may not necessarily have been followed, an Italian traveller to India in the early sixteenth century (1502–8 CE), Ludovico Verthema, comments in his travelogue that on the death of any of the King of Calicut's wives 'the King abstains from the company of women for the space of a year, when likewise he forbears to chew betel and areka, which are reckoned provocatives' (Verthema 2004). If one accepts foreign travellers' accounts at face value, abstention from betel-chewing had some degree of observance in practice.

- 15 An episode reflective of the complex injunctions involving betel consumption played out in the popular *bhakti* tradition: a medieval story retained in later literature recounts how guru Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Goswāmī rejected his disciple Hita Harivaṃśa for eating betel on *ekādaśī*. The *dharmaśāstra* forbade betel consumption on this day, but for Hita Harivaṃśa, what could be more holy than the remnants left after making an offering to his god (in this case, betel)? This episode is recorded in the Bengali *Bhaktamāla* of Lāldās Bābāji, per Tivārī (2006: 273). This sort of controversy reflects the opposing values of *bhoga* and abstinence for the orthodox tradition, which tantric traditions were able to resolve by melding *bhoga* into practices supportive of liberation, as I discuss in the section 'Points of concern: *kāma*, *bhoga*, and the rise of tantra'. I thank Rupert Snell for his assistance in locating this Vaiṣṇava story.
- 16 *Dharmasindhu*, 19 (Kane 1941: 107).
- 17 *Matsya Purāṇa* cited by Hemādri, a thirteenth-century *dharma* author, from his section on 'Vows' (*vrata*), vol. 1, 331 (Kane 1941: 116).
- 18 *Itihāsoṣopaniṣad* 40, *dantadbāvanatāmbūlaṃ kṣaurābhyañjanabhoganam | ratyauśadham parānnaṃ ca śrāddhakartā vivarjayet* (dating unknown). A later thirteenth-century source quotes this same passage (Gode 1961: 135).

## Modes of consumption

How and why have these ideas about chewing betel leaf developed? Some of the earliest attestations of betel may offer some clues.<sup>19</sup> The Buddhist Pāli *Jātaka* collection (c. first century BCE – fourth century CE; per Cousins 2013: 113–18) includes two stories involving episodes of betel consumption. The first details how to eat betel, in agreement with recommendations described in Hindu legal texts a millennium later.<sup>20</sup> The king in this first story has an abundant meal followed by a drink of water and finishes by chewing betel.<sup>21</sup> This tale exemplifies what I call the ‘royal mode’ of betel consumption.

### Mode one: the royal mode of consumption

As I define it, the royal mode typifies *bhoga*; the enjoyment of pleasurable things such as a nice meal, a relaxing bath, luxurious footwear, or sweet-smelling perfumes and incenses. The royal mode appears almost de-sexualized in many sources, although texts suggest that royalty’s *pān* consumption reached excessive quantities. An eleventh-century royal encyclopaedia commissioned by the Cālukya King Someśvara III indicates that the betel bundle for the king

- 19 Two other early betel references not discussed in any academic work appear in the Gāndhārī documents from Cadhota (third–fourth century CE). This collection of 760 fragmented documents records legal disputes and mercantile transactions. Two documents reference betel transported in bags (Cadhota was on the silk road into western China). See Niya Document #77 and #721 (Burrow 1940). These texts offer evidence of betel consumption as far north as central Asia by the third or fourth century CE. Various authors, including Gode and Kane, posit that betel was introduced to the sub-continent via South India from Southeast Asia by the Common Era or earlier. A recent article by the historico-linguist and archeo-botanist Thomas Zumbroich dates betel’s introduction to South Asia significantly farther into the past, as far back as 1500 BCE, asserting that *pān* chewing as a practice can be ‘dated to some time after 500 BCE’ (Zumbroich 2007–8: 119).
- 20 ‘After finishing one’s meals one is to ... drink some water ... then sip water again and take *tāmbūla*’ (Yājñavalkya 1.138, trans. by Kane 1941: 769). *ācamya ca tataḥ kāryaṃ dantakāśṭhasya bhakṣanam | bhojane dantalagnāmsca nirbr̥tyācamanaṃ caret | Dharmasāstra* compiler Marīci, as cited in *Smṛticandrikā* I, 225. *bhūyo ’pyācamya kartavyaṃ tatas tāmbūlabhakṣanam | Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna* 29.39 cited in *Smṛticandrikā* I, 225 (Kane 1941: 769).
- 21 *Mahāsīlavajātaka rājā nahānānūlitto maṇḍitapasādhito nānaggarasabhojanaṃ bhūñji... ath’ assa pāniyaṃ pivitvā mukhaṃ vikkhāletvā hatthe dho vitakāle corarañño sampāditaṃ pañcasugandhikaparivāraṃ tāmbūlaṃ āharitvā adamsu, taṃ khādītva...* (*The Jātaka* 1963: 266).

should contain fifty-two betel leaves.<sup>22</sup> If this seems too much to chew, another *dharmasāstra* text has a section on betel that stipulates that a betel roll with thirty-two leaves should be given to a king.<sup>23</sup> This suggested quantity might be ceremonial rather than practically intended for a single mastication. A Persian *farmān* of about the same period records regular gifting to a Brahmin of *birās* (betels) containing sixteen leaves and five areca nuts, and various other sources reference betel stacks with numerous leaves.<sup>24</sup> Even if not consumed in one bite, sources suggest that a high level of consumption of this stimulant continued over a period of at least half a millennium.

### Mode two: the romantic mode of consumption

A second Buddhist *Jātaka* story mentions how a vendor selling perfume and garlands gives countless flowers and betel rolls to a young man.<sup>25</sup> This story also describes using betel for *bhoga* (enjoyment). One finds a discourse surrounding betel much like the one in this *Jātaka* in another very early text containing references to *tāmbūla*; the *Kāmasūtra*, compiled by Vātsyāyana in the third century CE. The *Kāmasūtra* is a perfect example of the second mode of betel consumption as I classify it – the romantic mode.

One should recall that the *Kāmasūtra* is a guide to suggested activities. Following this text, there is a large, derivative body of *kāma* (romantic or erotic) literature spanning over a thousand years. The time span and number of works imitating the style, themes, and discourse of the *Kāmasūtra* suggest that it exerted a long-standing social and ideological influence, not merely projecting idealised recommendations. In the *Kāmasūtra*, one reads that a lover should use betel both as a precursor to sexual relations, at various points during the sexual act, and as a post-coital activity marking a ritualistic finish and freshening the breath. According to the text, a ‘man about town’ or urban man (*nāgaraka*) cleans his teeth and perfumes himself in the morning, uses mouthwash, and takes some betel, which the commentators suggest he reserves to use later, much as we might do with gum or breath-freshening mints today (1.4.5 of

22 *Pamāni prāntakṛttāni dvīpañcāsanmitāni ca*, verse 967 (*Mānasollāsa* 1939: 84).

23 Verse 9 of the section on *tāmbūla*, in Vaidya 1919: 235, cited by Gode 1961: 140. This text dates to no later than 1524 CE per Gode (*ibid.*).

24 *Farmān* dated Hijri 819 (*Śaka* 1228 [1416 CE]), transl. by S. A. F. Moulvi, Appendix Ū of the 1884 *History of Śukayajurvedīya Brāhmaṇas* (Gode 1961: 143).

25 *Aṇḍabbūtājātaka amma, kin te aññthagatena, ito paṭṭhāya mam’eva santikā harā”’i mūlam agabetvā va bahūni tāmbūlatakkolakādini c’eva nānāpupphāni ca adāsi* (*The Jātaka* 1963: 291).

the *Kāmasūtra* 2002: 18 and commentary, *ibid.*). The text also recommends that betel be given as a token of affection to one's beloved, possibly with bite marks in the betel roll to suggest sexual advances.<sup>26</sup>

Further examples from the *Kāmasūtra* are emblematic of the romantic mode of betel consumption. Two passages comment on betel's key placement near the bed and near the lover before, during, and after the sexual act (1.4.4 of *Kāmasūtra* 2002: 17 and 3.2.21; *ibid.* 80). A box called the *pāndān*, which keeps the pre-prepared betel rolls fresh and sometimes stores ingredients for making more *pān*, should also remain near the bed. If we accept Razzāk's statement, quoted at the beginning of this article, which claimed aphrodisiacal properties for betel rolls, the *Kāmasūtra*'s recommendations make perfect sense. The *sūtras* mention that '(w)hen the woman has accepted his [the man's] embrace, he gives her betel with his mouth' (3.2.11, *ibid.* 79). This transfer of betel from mouth to mouth reappears up to the present day in wedding rituals in Maharashtra, where marriage dinners typically conclude with the groom biting a betel held in the bride's mouth. The groom bites off a part to eat himself, and gives the closest thing to a kiss that can be done in public in India.<sup>27</sup>

It is not coincidental that this act of eating a betel roll taken from another's mouth also appears in various *Purāṇas*. The *Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa* (c. tenth century CE) recounts an episode in which Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā engage in a romantic encounter. Kṛṣṇa 'ate with pleasure the fragrant betel leaves offered to him by Radha. Radha the mistress of the *rasa* also merrily chewed the betel given to her by Krishna. When Hari (Kṛṣṇa) gave Radha the betel leaf chewed by him the passionate Radha smiled and cheerfully ate it up...' (Varma and Mulchandani 2004: 86). A similar episode appears in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* [c. ninth–tenth centuries CE] in a description of Kṛṣṇa's dalliance with the *gopīs* (cow protectresses), of which Rādhā was Kṛṣṇa's favourite: 'a slender maiden received with joined hands his (Kṛṣṇa's) chewed betel' (White 2003: 86). This trope of transferring betel from one lover's mouth to the other's is prevalent across textual genres and images and continues to be practised in a similar form today in Maharashtra, suggesting that this romantic mode of betel consumption has had significant impact on the Indian *imaginaire* of love.

A fifth-century Gupta era inscription from South India supports my claim that these proposed modes of betel consumption extended beyond restricted

26 *Kāmasūtra* 2.5.19 reads: 'When a man applies scratches, bites, and so forth to a forehead decoration, an earring, a bouquet of flowers, betel, or a sweet-smelling cinnamon bay-leaf used by the woman he wants, he is making advances' (*Kāmasūtra* 2002: 49).

27 This is called splitting the *viḍi* or cutting the betel-leaf roll (Gode 1961: 149).

time periods or specific genres of text. In this case, the inscription fits the romantic mode. The Mandasor silk weavers composed this inscription as an advertisement for their products: ‘Young and charming ladies, so adorned with beautiful necklaces, flowers, and betel, when approaching their beloved will not go so far as the meeting place until they have put on outfits made of silken cloth’.<sup>28</sup> Here, the mention of betel alongside lovers appears in a context that is neither literary in genre nor pertains to the *śāstra* of love, the *kāmasāstra*, although its discourse appears to be imitative of it.

### Mode three: the householder mode of consumption

My third category of betel consumption has links with the royal mode and explains the gifting of betel for Brahmin priests’ consumption, as well as the gifting of betel to gods; this is the householder mode of consumption.<sup>29</sup> The householder (*grhastha*) mode shares with the royal mode its relation to *bhoga* or enjoyment. In this usage, an individual enjoys *pān* after a large meal just as someone today might enjoy a cigarette or liqueur after eating; in order to savour the moment. The householder lifestyle, according to the Brahmanical social construct of the *varṇāśrama* system, is one of the four life stages in which a ‘twice-born’<sup>30</sup> man participates.<sup>31</sup> Firstly one dedicates one’s life to study of the *Veda* as a *brahmacārin*; typically abstaining from distractions such as women, sexual relations, and entertainment for the benefit of one’s studies. Secondly,

28 An inscription from 473 CE from Fleet 1963: No. 18, lines 11-12 (Gode 1961: 114). *tārūnyakāntīyupacito’pi suvarṇahāratāmbūlapuspavidhinā samalamkṛto’pi | nārījanahḥ priyamupaiti na tāvat āsrathām yāvanna paṭṭamayavastrayugāni dhatte ||* The correction of the text from footnote 3 of the same page reads: ‘*nārījanahḥ śriyam upaiti na tāvad āgrathyām*’.

29 There is also, of course, the almost ritualistic consumption of betel typically gifted to a person, in which the goal is not *bhoga*, as when accepting betel rolls while bidding farewell. This type of *tāmbūlam* might not necessarily contain the sweet or spiced ingredients that typically make chewing betel a bhogic activity. However, since this sort of betel consumption is still prohibited for renunciants, I designate it a form of *bhoga* contained within the householder classification.

30 Twice-born refers to a person who in childhood participates in an initiation rite (his second birth), from which point he wears a *sūtra* (thread) signifying his vows to observe Brahmanical religious practices and follow his *dharma* throughout life.

31 For a more precise and authoritative presentation of the *varṇāśrama* system than I can offer, consult Olivelle 1993. Early Brahmanical ideologies presented the four life paths as independent paths to be chosen, living out just one throughout one’s life. Later ideologies, already existing at the time of the texts I consider here, treated the *āśramas* as four stages, all to be completed in progression during one lifetime.

one follows the householder path, gets married, has a family, and enjoys the material delights of *kāma* (desire/sex) and *artha* (money/material concerns) as well as fulfilling ones *dharma* (duties). Later on, thirdly, one may elect to live as a forest hermit, or *vānaprastha*, renouncing the material comforts so valued by the ‘man-about-town’ of the *Kāmasūtra*, in order to abandon the trappings of urban living. Fourthly and finally one might renounce virtually everything pertaining to one’s material existence, withdraw from the world, and become a *saṃnyāsīn*.

The second *āśrama* (life stage) of the householder is the one that most embodies *bhoga* and allows full participation in a material existence. Thus logically, the householder is entitled to betel consumption. A king, of course, follows this *āśrama*, has wives, children, and so forth, and perfects the householder ideal, which explains commonalities between the royal and householder modes of betel use.

More importantly, Brahmin priests also follow this life path. For a priest to execute rites properly, he must be married and remain a householder. In fact, the presence and participation of his wife is necessary for the correct performance of many rites (Jamison 1996: 10 and 30–9). Therefore, one must not view betel consumption by priests as an irregularity, but rather as the correct fulfilment of *dharma* as delineated in the later legal texts. Following the same logic, offering betel to deities and to Viṣṇu in particular is a form of supplication to a god, using something that householders appreciate. Devotees conceive of Viṣṇu in particular with his consort(s); for Viṣṇu’s followers, he exemplifies a married god. Further, he conjures up associations with prosperity, abundance, and the like, and is particularly apt to receive offerings of betel as a sign of *bhoga*. Viewed in this way, inscriptions recording gifts of agricultural terrain for betel production intended for a god such as Cenna Keśava (Viṣṇu) fit into this model under both the householder mode of consumption (Viṣṇu as married god) and the royal mode of *bhoga*.<sup>32</sup>

By contrast, Kṛṣṇa’s frequent association with betel does not exemplify the householder mode, but does fit under the rubric of the romantic mode. After all, Kṛṣṇa with his *gopīs* was not a king or married, but rather came from a humble agricultural family. Using my categories of romantic, royal, and householder use, one can better understand why betel-chewing is permissible for priests, gods, and followers of the *varṇāśramadharmā* (Hindu) householder lifestyle, but not

32 Many present day temples similarly honour the householder aspect of such deities in yearly ceremonies celebrating and re-enacting the marriage of, for instance, Viṣṇu to Lakṣmī and Śiva to Pārvatī.



for ascetics, renunciants (*yatis*, *saṃnyāsins*), or forest hermits who have opted out of the pleasures of a life filled with *bhoga*.

### Points of concern: *kāma*, *bhoga*, and the rise of tantra

References to betel have appeared in literature since the beginning of the Common Era or earlier, with numerous mentions dating from the first millennium CE that I do not have space to discuss. I suspect that the genre of *kāma* literature attests to betel's actual presence in Indian life. Yet betel gets almost no mention in the legal literature until the latter part of the first millennium, after which time texts dictating practices increasingly mention betel. The increasing presence of betel in these legal *dharma* texts might indicate a corresponding growth in concern surrounding betel consumption, which I posit resulted from the popularity of *kāma* literature and the rise of tantra as a practice. A case in point which reveals this concern surrounding betel is the ascetic text the *Yatidharmaparakāśa*, which details the rites which need to be performed in order to renounce from the material world, one's family, estate, and so on. One section specifies that a person should give betel rolls to a Brahmin priest representing the gods the very night before permanently renouncing and yet later on, the compiler warns that one who gives betel leaves to Vedic students (*brahmacārins*) goes to hell.<sup>33</sup> Here one observes an intersection between betel and religious ideology in India, and that betel might make lifestyle differences apparent.

These socially important identity differences – choosing *bhoga* or *abhoga* – held greater significance in the second half of the first millennium and the first half of the second as tantra rose in religious and social significance on the subcontinent. The resonance of *bhoga* in tantra is evident in two of the principal tantric texts, the *Kiraṇa Tantra* and the *Kulārṇava Tantra*. The *Kiraṇa Tantra* (c. fifth–eighth centuries CE), while originating in Kashmir, attained prominence across the subcontinent and was influential for the broader tradition of Śaiva Siddhānta and its localized, later development in South India (Goodall 1996: xxxii–xxxiii). The *Kulārṇava Tantra*, another text of the early Kashmiri Shaivite school, is a primary text of the Kaula tradition, part of the *trika* system upon which later influential figures such as Abhinavagupta relied (Olson 1981: 382). Both the *Kiraṇa* and the *Kulārṇava Tantra* indicate that *bhukti* (bhogic consumption or enjoyment) and *mukti* (liberation) are compatible goals

33 Verse 21.34 (*Yatidharmaparakāśa* 1976: 104). Also, 'Vyāsa says, "By giving gold to renunciators, betel leaves to Vedic students and safety to thieves, the giver also goes to hell"' (*ibid.* 190).

in tantra and do not have to form two discrete paths, although one should exercise caution while participating in *bhukti*. The *Kulārṇava* doctrine pairs bhogic consumption and ultimate release outright by first describing other inferior forms of yoga which aim toward release through the practice of *abhoga*: 'One who is only a *yogin* indeed cannot be a *bhogin* (consumer of worldly things), and the knower of yoga indeed cannot consume. Kaula is of the nature of both *bhoga* and yoga, therefore it is of the utmost order [instigation], my dear.'<sup>34</sup> The following verse equates consuming in the material world with liberation: 'Consuming becomes yoga (devotion, contemplation, and so on), and any sin actually becomes a good deed; moving though the circular worldly existence (*saṃsāra*) becomes release, oh mistress of Kula, you whose *dharmā* is Kula!'<sup>35</sup>

While the *Kulārṇava Tantra* delineates the compatibility of the consumption of worldly items with the attainment of liberation, the *Kiraṇa Tantra* explains the necessity of a material body for processing karmic experiences via bhogic enjoyment and consumption in order to arrive eventually at liberation. 'The soul is bound for the sake of liberation; this [liberation] does not come about for him otherwise. Until he is linked to a body he cannot experience (*na bhogabhuk*, i.e., not be a consumer of *bhoga*). His body is derived from primal matter; if he has no body then he cannot be liberated' (Goodall 1996: 346).<sup>36</sup> This form of experiencing or consumption (*bhoga*) is not for the sake of pleasure, as one might envision the enjoyment of food or sex. However, the soul participates in this *bhoga* within a material body as a necessary process for the development (*paripāka*) or transformation of impurities and *karma*, explaining why the soul is bound to a physical form. The later commentary elaborates: 'As a rule, there is absence of liberation in the absence of maturation of impurities (the maturation of impurities occurs via the enjoyment or experiencing of

34 *yogī cennaiva bhogī syād bhogī cennaiva yogavit | bhogayogātmakam kaulam tasmāt savādhikam priye || 2.23 (Kulārṇava Tantra 1965: 146, my translation). Vocatives of 'dear' and 'mistress' appear because this tantra is a conversation between Śiva and his wife, Devī; Devī asks questions to which Śiva responds, elucidating the doctrine. The reading of *savādhikam*, which I have translated as 'of the utmost order [instigation]', is questionable. Two other manuscripts read *sarvātmakam* or *savādhikam*, per footnote 12 of *Kulārṇava Tantra (ibid.)*.*

35 *bhogo yogāyate sāksāt pātakam suktāyate | mokṣkāyate ca saṃsārah kuladharme kuleśvari || 2.24 (Kulārṇava Tantra 1965: 147, my translation). Kula refers directly to śakti, the divine female energy of transformation embodied in the goddess, hence the name for this tantra.*

36 *Kiraṇatantra 2.7-2.8ab. muktyartham sa paśurbaddho nānyathā sāsyā jāyate | yāvacccharīrasaṃśleṣo na sañjāto na bhogabhuk || 7 || māyeyam tadvapustasya tadabhāvānna nirvrtiḥ || 8ab || (Kiraṇatantra 1998).*

things in a body); the dependent soul is yoked to the bond that is the individual body of experiencing or enjoying (*bhoga*) solely for the sake of the maturation of impurities'.<sup>37</sup>

As these two tantras demonstrate, *bhoga* is a requisite component of tantra practice. Religious transformation cannot occur via something that is insentient; a material body that experiences or enjoys (*bhoktr*) is necessary to consume the results that have matured from past karmic actions. 'Thus Ananta created this means of bondage to a [gross] body (*dehanibandhanam*). Without a [gross] body there can be no liberation, consumption, knowledge, (or) action, and no teacher (*guruḥ*)' (*Kiraṇa Tantra* 4.27cd–4.28; Goodall 1996: 375). Ideally, a follower of tantra controls his or her desire expressed in the experiencing of various *bhogas* (Doniger 1969: 334) and can eventually detach from and sublimate those experiences in such a way that tantric practices do not oppose ascetic discipline (*ibid.* 332). Nonetheless, this increasingly popular doctrine challenged the orthodox Brahmanical theology that balanced *bhoga* within the householder mode and prohibited it in the ideal abstinent modes of asceticism. Therefore, I speculate that, in an effort to contain dalliances with tantric *bhoga* among members of Brahmanical societies and their increasing initiations into tantra, writers of *dharmasāstra* and ascetic literature became increasingly concerned with detailing prohibitions of consumption broadly speaking, and of betel more specifically.

### Materiality, identity, and objects of entanglement

Betel's myriad appearances in prescriptions and proscriptions of the past mark lifestyle differences for us today just as betel marks its consumer with red stains on the mouth. This, incidentally, might also have marked one's identity. The red colour resulting from mixing lime with catechu made a perfect ingredient for cosmetics in earlier times. In combination with adorning garlands and perfumes, it was suggestive of enjoyment, luxury, and even romance. Ascetics and renunciants would have wanted to avoid all that was encapsulated in its colour. A word for red in Sanskrit, *rāga*, also designates passion, desire, and love; the things that one renouncing worldly existence ought to avoid at all costs. The same would hold true for widows, who, since at least the ninth century if not earlier, were instructed not to eat betel and were mandated to dress in white

37 Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha's commentary (partial) of 2.7-8: *nyāyena kevalasya malasya paripākābhāvato muktyasambhavān malaparipākārtham eva bhogātmanā bandhena paśuryojitaḥ* | (*Kiraṇatantra* 1998, my translation).

clothing without colour or adornment.<sup>38</sup> A widow's *dharmā* was not supposed to allow for colour, passion, or *bhoga* in her existence.

The coloured staining aspect of betel consumption, then, might also have been an indicator of one's identity and status, especially significant for those who were prescribed not to wear colour on the body. The staining effect of betel might have made *pān*-chewing a praxis-based demarcation of one's religious or social identity as a householder, widow, renunciant, and so on. So, the discourse surrounding betel consumption in texts might reveal a concern to mark individuals within certain religious or societal groups which legal texts envisioned as fixed and defined groups, but which were not always so. For instance, having renounced his worldly existence, an ascetic was considered dead to his family in terms of religious ritual authority. Most texts suggest this status was permanent and irreversible, meaning one could not change one's mind and go back to being a householder after renouncing the worldly life (Freiberger 2005: 235, 245, and 250).

Ascetic texts, however, also suggest it was not so permanent or irreversible, as allowances were made for reincorporation into society, and re-renouncing later, if desired (*ibid.* 239–42 and 246–8). Thus, anxieties about unclear status and fluctuating groups might have led to the use of identity markers such as betel chewing. Legal injunctions concerning praxis-based identity markers – for example, carrying a staff and begging bowl for an ascetic, or using betel in the case of a householder, might reflect this anxiety to differentiate roles in Brahmanical society more clearly. I posit that anxieties about roles played at different times in one's life resulted in the creation of injunctions about what to hold and what to eat, or what to abstain from eating; this includes injunctions about betel chewing, which subsequently played a part in marking social identity.

Examining the evidence in these texts, betel consumption does not appear to have marked boundaries between individuals. If anything, betel consumption might dissolve boundaries, as is the case for the romantic mode of consumption. Passing *pān* from mouth to mouth, whether between the bride and groom or between deities like Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, suggests a merging of individuals via close contact involving the potential exchange of saliva and the sharing of food.

38 *Vṛddha-Hārīta* XI. 205–10, cited in Kane (1941: 584). The composition of the *Vṛddha-Hārīta* probably falls within the common *smṛti* dates of approximately 600–900 CE, per Kane (*ibid.*).

In exploring betel consumption, we may find that David Morgan's work on religious experience as sensation offers a useful approach. Morgan's material focus suggests that objects pass through the interface of the human body and that certain objects must be present or absent to facilitate a religious experience (Morgan 2010). Betel does not *per se* enact or cause a religious experience. However, I argue that betel is present for those individuals who participate in Brahmanical religious worship – for householders who perform rites and kindle household fires, for priests who enact sacrifices, and for gods who enjoy or consume offerings such as betel. Betel is absent for those who exist outside the mainstream of Brahmanical religious life – a Vedic student (*brahmacārin*) does not perform daily rites; a widow cannot participate in Vedic rites since her husband is deceased, and a renunciant gives up his involvement in religious rites and social life. In this way, it is not incongruous for someone participating in a *śrāddha* rite dedicated to deceased ancestors to refrain from consuming betel in observance of religious restrictions and at the same time offer betel to those deceased ancestors (see the section here headed 'Abhoga; abstinence'). In this case, the deceased ancestors are the revered religious participants, while others are not allowed this religious experience, as per Morgan's theory.

When considering the *dharma* restrictions on betel chewing in the light of Morgan's ideas about the experiencing of material objects, one observes that, within Brahmanical society, those permitted to participate in the experience of eating betel also participate in Brahmanical religious rites. Similarly, those proscribed the eating of betel – ascetics, widows, and Brahmanical students who practise the mode of non-consumption of betel – typically do not. Considering the counterpoint of tantra, those who participate in the consumption of betel and other material substances access their religious experience via *bhoga*, as the soul is bound to the material body as its way of experiencing and consuming in order to attain liberation. In tantra, the consumption of betel and other food items, along with countless other worldly phenomena, facilitates and leads one to the religious experience of sublimation and, ultimately, liberation. The effect of this materiality was that, because of *bhoga*'s role in mediating religious liberation within tantra, orthodox Brahmanical writers became more concerned with excluding bhogic experiences and verbalized their preference for abstinence within the mode of non-consumption. Hence, one form of religiosity in South Asia, expressed via the theology of *bhoga/abhoga*, crystallized in betel's materiality. Consequently, religious discourse expressed concerns about betel's materiality, which ultimately meant that the religiosity practised by an individual – tantric, orthodox, renunciant, and so on – determined the permissibility or prohibition of betel consumption.

## Conclusion

In this article I have forgone a comparative analysis of material from a focused time period, in part because dating is uncertain for some of the *smṛti* and *nibandha* legal texts I have cited. Scholars estimate a three-to-five-hundred-year period during which the compilers composed these works. My aim has instead been to investigate some tropes that became associated with betel and subsequently influenced its consumption and abstention. Using this longer view of history, one may gather a sense of the trend by which betel consumption increasingly came to be considered to be a sexualized activity. Likewise, there was a trend of greater and more specific limitations being placed on renunciants and practitioners of religious observances. This restrictive trend is certainly apparent upon examining the body of legal texts, which shows ever-increasing limitations on behaviour through the first and second millennia CE. Orthodox legal discourses responded to the rise in the *kāmaśāstra*'s prominence with heightened restrictions on modes of consumption. Concurrently, the increase in the popularity of tantric practices which applied *bhoga* as a means toward liberation certainly affected dharmashastric and ascetic restrictions on consumption as well.

Future research on the topic of betel would benefit from examining more narrowly defined time periods. In particular, the early period when betel references began to appear more frequently in textual sources (from the fourth to the fifth centuries CE) up through the Puranic references and early mentions of betel in legal *smṛti* texts (roughly the seventh to tenth centuries CE) would offer fruitful study. Similarly, the vastly larger body of material available both in travellers' accounts and visual works dating from the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries CE offers abundant resources from which to build future explorations on betel.

As the topic stands, it is possible to observe three dominant modes of betel consumption and one mode of non-consumption that had religious implications: 1) the royal mode of betel chewing, for which *bhoga* (enjoyment) is the foremost concern, 2) the romantic mode, which most strongly affected proscriptions for ascetics who were denied the pleasures of *bhoga*, 3) the householder mode, still concerned with *bhoga* allotted to royalty and the elite, but which also accounts for Brahmin priests and other participants in Brahmanical ritual life, and 4) the non-consumption of betel as practised by renunciants, widows, and the like. In particular, discourses of romance associated with betel chewing and tantric doctrine which endorsed the consumption of material items affected the meanings of betel consumption, resulting in proscriptions of the use of betel for widows, Vedic students, and renunciants.

My classification of betel chewing is not exhaustive. Other modes, often ritualistic in nature, include chewing betel to seal a deal, accepting a betel roll to show subservience to a higher authority, and gifting betel rolls to bid farewell or announce an auspicious occasion to the public. However, the modes I have detailed in this article engage the intersections between the topics of food and religion most directly. Certainly, the much denied aphrodisiacal effects of betel chewing had some social agency in the identity-marking of individuals, which resulted in the legal authors' concerns to dictate who could and could not chew betel. Similarly, tantra's emphasis on *bhoga* and experiential enjoyment within material realms affected the dharma authors' preoccupation with what to consume or not to consume. Legal guides, inscriptions, and religious texts such as the *Purānas* show numerous iterations of entanglement between the religious subject – be it a human, a deceased ancestor, or deity – and the material object being consumed or prohibited: the betel roll.

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# Early modern Goa

## Indian trade, transcultural medicine, and the Inquisition

BINDU MALIECKAL

Portugal's introduction of the Inquisition to India in 1560 placed the lives of Jews, New Christians, and selected others labelled 'heretics', in peril. Two such victims were Garcia da Orta, a Portuguese New Christian with a thriving medical practice in Goa, and Gabriel Dellon, a French merchant and physician. In scholarship, Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon's texts are often examined separately within the contexts of Portuguese and French literature respectively and in terms of medicine and religion in the early modern period. Despite the similarities of their training and experiences, da Orta and Dellon have not previously been studied jointly, as is attempted in this article, which expands upon da Orta and Dellon's roles in Portuguese India's international commerce, especially the trade in spices, and the collaborations between Indian and European physicians. Thus, the connection between religion and food is not limited to food's religious and religio-cultural roles. Food in terms of spices has been at the foundations of power for ethno-religious groups in India, and when agents became detached from the spice trade, their downfalls were imminent, as seen in the histories of Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon.

### Early modern Goa through the eyes of Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Indian textiles, wood, gems, and spices were exported to the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Mingling with merchants and doctors from across the Indian Ocean were Europeans who were merchants and doctors themselves. The Europeans were both transients and immigrants, and among them were Jews and New Christians who were refugees from the Inquisition. These Jews and New Christians found a hospitable home in India, even in the Portuguese colonies of Goa and Cochin, until the introduction of the Inquisition to India in 1560. One figure from the sixteenth century is Garcia da Orta, a Portuguese New Christian whose thriving medical practice at Goa collapsed after the Inquisition targeted him for investigation. Although da Orta died and was buried in 1568 before being charged, his body was later exhumed and burned at an *auto-da-fé* in 1580. One hundred years later, the Frenchman Gabriel Dellon, also a physician-merchant

but not a New Christian, was questioned by the Inquisition. Of Dellon's precise religious affiliation, sources vary. Abbé Barthélemy Carré visited Dellon at the Inquisition's Damão jail. When arguing with Inquisitors on Dellon's behalf, Carré insisted that Dellon 'was of an honorable and god-fearing family, good Roman Catholics' (Priolkar 1961: 47). Sanjay Subrahmanyam identifies Dellon as a 'French Huguenot' (2011: 171). By his own admission, Dellon owned a 'rosary', but unlike the Portuguese, he refused to wear it (1819: 53, 28). The Inquisition imprisoned Dellon for 'heresy' from 1673 to 1675. Upon release, Dellon was sent to the galleys. Unlike da Orta, however, Dellon obtained a reprieve, returned to France, and lived to write of his sufferings.

Da Orta and Dellon's lives share a number of similarities – which are unique to these two individuals in particular – despite the differences in their national origins, religious histories, and of course, the fact that they lived in different centuries. These parallels include their education and training in Europe, their interaction with Indian physicians, subsequent incorporation of Indian drugs and medical procedures into their practices, involvement in the India trade, and experience of oppression by the Inquisition. Da Orta and Dellon also share another important experience which distinguishes them from their peers but renders them doppelgangers in relation to each other: both wrote influential books about Indian trade and medicine, and in Dellon's case, the Frenchman offered a commentary on the evils of the Inquisition. The titles of these books are da Orta's *Conversations on the Simples, Drugs and Medicinal Substances of India* (*Colóquios dos simples e drogas he cousas medicinais da Índia*) (1563) and Dellon's *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies* (*Relation d'un Voyage fait aux Indes Orientales*) (1685) and *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa* (*Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*) (1687). In scholarship, da Orta and Dellon's texts are often examined separately as examples of Portuguese and French literature respectively, or as artifacts of pharmacology and autobiography (Priolkar 1961: 35; Boxer 1963: 12–13; D'Cruz 1991: 1593–4; Ames 2003: 163–80; Walker 2009: 247–70). These relevant views of the texts match their authors' intentions: an encyclopaedic account, aimed at Europeans, of otherwise little-known 'tropical plants' (da Orta) and an adventurer turned aggrieved victim's allegations against a powerful institution (Dellon).

While I do not dispute where previous approaches have located the *Conversations*, *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies*, and *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa*, this essay synthesizes the texts' combined offerings towards a characterization of the 'early modernity' of Goa. The commonalities between da Orta and Dellon and between their books show them to be products of the unifying moment that is early modern Goa, therefore permitting a combined

examination. The interdisciplinary methodology involves biographical and textual analysis within the framework of medical and religious histories keeping in mind the following thematic questions; what do we learn about medicine at Goa in terms of the transcultural conferencing between European, Indian, and Persian physicians? What role did the Indian Ocean trade, especially in so-called drugs and spices, play in treatments? How did the Inquisition single out the likes of da Orta and Dellon for their religious background and scientific worldview? Finally and most significantly, how can we explain the paradox of Goa as a place of progressive transculturalism with an oppressive ethos?

### Before the Inquisition: Goa and cosmopolitanism

Prior to 1498 – the year that Vasco da Gama arrived in India after having ‘discovered’ the sea route from Europe – Indian cities on the west coast of the subcontinent, including Cambay, Surat, Goa, Mangalore, Cannanore, Calicut, and Cochin, had been trading for centuries with other Indian Ocean and Red Sea ports, among them Mombasa, Malindi, Mogadishu, Aden, and Ormuz. Hence, as detailed in *The Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama* (*Roteiro de Primeira Viagem de Vasco da Gama*, 1497–9), when Vasco da Gama reached Mozambique *en route* to India, he met African merchants who were veterans of the Indian Ocean trade. Da Gama had a similar encounter with Indian traders near Malindi (Fontoura da Costa 1969, Ravenstein 1995). The frequent interactions and exchanges between Indian Ocean peoples created an atmosphere of cosmopolitanism which fostered the transcultural, multicultural, multi-religious nature of the region’s trade centres, such as Goa.

Goa is India’s smallest state and located on the west coast between Bombay and Cochin, somewhat equidistant from both cities, which are separated by about 1,300 kilometres. Goa is a lush Eden of rich soil and abundant fresh water, but the famed spices of India were more commonly harvested south of Goa, along the Canara and especially Malabar coasts. Black pepper (*Piper nigrum*), ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*), and turmeric (*Curcuma aromatica*) were available, as were spices transplanted from Sri Lanka (cinnamon or *Cinnamomum*, of several species) and the Moluccas (cloves or *Syzygium aromaticum* and nutmeg/mace or *Myristica fragrans*) (Pickersgill 2005: 153–72). Hence, since its earliest days, Goa has engaged in continuous international commerce. Economic histories date from the period of the Emperor Ashoka in the third century BCE (De Souza 1989: 118). In the fifteenth century and before Vasco da Gama’s entrance, Goa was ruled by successive empires (Vijayanagara, Bahamani, Bijapur) under whose aegis

international trade was particularly lucrative. Horses were imported to Goa from Arabia and distributed to other parts of India. Goa exported ships and textiles. As for spices, pepper and ginger were brought to Goa from Malabar and sold. Betel/areca and rice were also traded (*ibid.* 137–9).

Given the commercial vibrancy of Goa, naturally its population diversified as Indians from beyond Goa as well as foreign merchants settled in the city. In 1498, when Vasco da Gama landed on the shores of India, he was asked about the objectives of his mission. ‘Christians and spices’ was the admiral’s famous reply. Da Gama was not disappointed. He encountered plentiful amounts of spices of all kinds, and although he heard of Eastern Rite Christians, Roman Catholics were few if any. Hindus, Muslims, and Jews were more prevalent. Indeed, Jews appeared to be ubiquitous. They were immigrants, converts, travellers, merchants, and, most notably, given the exclusions they experienced in Europe, Jews worked as trusted government officers for local monarchs. Many of these Jews had resided in India for generations. Compared to Bombay and Cochin, the foci of the Bene Israel and Malabari Jews respectively, Goa’s Jewish community was smaller but significant. One such Jew was Gaspar da Gama, a Polish expatriate. Gaspar da Gama was the go-between for Yusuf Adil Khan (r. 1489–1510), the Muslim ruler of the Bijapur empire which, in 1498, controlled Goa.

Yusuf Adil Khan’s incorporation of Gaspar da Gama, a process similar to the inclusion of Jews in other areas of Asia – as for example Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent’s elevation of Joseph of Naxos thirty years later – exemplifies the religious tolerance of the Indian Ocean littoral and anticipates the Ottoman model. Cosmopolitanism, as expounded in various disciplines, implies the acceptance of difference and a perhaps nascent version of the constructive, versus imperialist, aspects of globalization. Of course, cosmopolitanism’s progressiveness has often experienced significant stresses such as conservatism, slavery, and genocide, but it has survived, if at times only in certain pockets of the world, among them Goa under the Bijapur kings Yusuf Adil Khan and Ismail Adil Shah (r. 1510–34); the latter until the Shah’s army was defeated in 1510 by the Portuguese naval general Affonso Albuquerque. Yusuf Adil Khan, the founder of the Bijapur dynasty, cultivated diplomatic relations with the Vijayanagara Empire and with Persia. He patronized artists and scholars from across India as well as Persia, the Ottoman Empire, the Arabian peninsula, and elsewhere. Ismail Adil Shah continued his father’s efforts, strengthening ties with Persia to the extent that he assumed the Safavid title of ‘Shah’ or ‘ruler’ (instead of the Ottoman ‘Sultan’ or the Hindu ‘Raja’) (Farooqui 2011: 174–5; Nayeem 1974: 21–2). Since creed was not a deterrent to professional

advancement under cosmopolitanism, Gaspar da Gama's and other expatriates' presence in Goa is a testament to the cosmopolitanism that existed before Portugal's official conquest of Goa in 1510. The tide had started to turn earlier, however, when Gaspar da Gama was abducted by Vasco da Gama in 1498, converted to Christianity, taken to Portugal, and then returned to India in 1500 with a fleet under Pedro Cabral's command. Gaspar da Gama was then put to work for the Portuguese (Malieckal 2012: 23–42). Although the Inquisition was yet to be established in Goa during Gaspar da Gama's lifetime, his fate foreshadows efforts to crush cosmopolitanism and transculturalism as well as the falls of Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon.

### Jews and New Christians, Portugal and Portuguese Goa: the early years

In an essay titled 'India nurtured Jewish heritage without prejudice', published in the February 1988 edition of the magazine *India Worldwide*, Renu Mehra quotes Elijah E. Jhirad, President of Congregation Bina, described as 'an organization of Jews from India living in the United States' (1988: 7). In a speech written for a Hanukkah Candle Lighting Ceremony in 1987, Mr Jhirad announced, 'One of the most fascinating aspects of the life of Jews in India is that they lived free from persecutions that have plagued them elsewhere in the world. ... In fact, we are the only Jewish community in the world which has not experienced anti-Semitism' (quoted in Mehra 1988: 8). This assessment may need to be nuanced, since Jews were persecuted in Goa under Portuguese rule. By and large, though, Jhirad is correct. Most Indians, irrespective of religion, did not oppress India's Jews; however, the experiences of Goa's Jews and New Christians are different from that of other Jews in India.

Before examining the trials of the Jews and New Christians in Portuguese Goa, a bit of history is in order. In 1510, Admiral Affonso Albuquerque and his forces defeated the army of Ismail Adil Shah to claim Goa for the Portuguese empire. The conquest resulted in a population shift within the principality. Most Muslim residents were ousted, many Hindus were advanced in their place, and mass conversions to Christianity of the remaining Muslims and Hindus occurred. A smattering of practising Hindus and Muslims remained as did small groups of Armenians and Chinese (Pinto 1994: 50–65). Portuguese immigrants settled in the city, most notably, Portuguese Jews and New Christians. As scholarly studies have pointed out, 1496 is an important year, distinguished by a royal decree making it illegal to be Jewish in Portugal, or as José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim puts it, 'Jews lost their right to exist in Portugal' (2008: 17). In the years following, a series of events prompted New Christians to leave, in



droves from 1530 to 1560, for India and the colonies; in 1519 Manuel I revoked his own 1507 law which stipulated that ‘Old Christians’ and ‘New Christians’ were one and the same, and in 1531, the Inquisition was introduced in Portugal (Wojciehowski 2011: 211). Even though the Inquisition became active only in 1540, Lisbon’s first *auto-da-fé* taking place in the same year, Papal approval of the Portuguese Inquisition had been obtained nine years earlier by João III. The status of New Christians was so precarious that many fled to Goa and Brazil, this despite edicts that outlawed their immigration (Boxer 1963: 8). Da Orta was in all likelihood a participant in the exodus.

In Goa, Sephardic Jews worked as translators, traders and pilots, as well as in other capacities, and according to Walter J. Fischel, ‘the Jews there were established as an independent group with their own synagogues and their own religious and cultural life’ (1956: 39). This, Fischel admits, was an unusual reality given Goa’s position as the Indian headquarters of the Jesuits and later of the Inquisition (*ibid.* 40). Goa even possessed a Jewish quarter and a ‘Jew Street’, both located close to eminent Catholic edifices (Rodrigues da Silva Tavim 2008: 27). Despite being in the employ of the Portuguese, the Jews of Goa were subject to discrimination. According to Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, they were forced to wear a ‘special symbol’ identifying them as Jews (*ibid.*). Jews laboured alongside New Christians (*ibid.*). In addition to working as physicians and government agents, records speak of New Christians’ connections to the diamond and cotton trades (Roitman 2011: 106–7). In other words, Goa’s New Christians were ensconced in the Indian Ocean trade (Boyajian 1992: 31).

### Enter Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon

Garcia da Orta was born some time between 1490 and 1502, in Portugal. His parents – da Orta’s father’s name was Fernão – were Spanish Jews who had become New Christians only a few years before da Orta’s birth. Educated at the universities of Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares in Spain, da Orta practised medicine in Portugal before travelling to Goa in 1534. At Goa, da Orta had a thriving medical practice and was one of the city’s respected physicians. He is known to have been called upon by a number of Portuguese viceroys and governors, of whom Martim Affonso de Sousa was da Orta’s initial patron. For a time, da Orta was also the personal physician of Burhan Nizam Shah I (r. 1510–53) of the Ahmadnagar Sultanate and at whose court da Orta was one of a consortium of Persian, Arab, and Hindu physicians who also served the Shah. In 1563, da Orta published his magnum opus, *Conversations on the Simples, Drugs and Medicinal Substances of India*. Written as a dialogue between

da Orta and an invented character, one Dr Ruano, *Conversations* reviews the medicinal uses of almost fifty spices and plants, many of which were the mainstay of India's international commerce. *Conversations* is constructed as a series of extended discussions; a section on a certain spice, for instance, will cover where it grows and where it can be purchased as well as its properties, uses, and variations.

Da Orta interacted with Jews and New Christians at Goa. Early in *Conversations*, da Orta informs Dr Ruano that aloe is unavailable in Jerusalem, a fact he learned from dialogues with Jews in India: 'I enquired respecting this of some Jews who came here and said they were inhabitants of Jerusalem. Some of them were sons of physicians, others of apothecaries' (Markham 1913: 16). Likewise, da Orta mentions talking with Jews (and Moors) who traded in benzoin, the tree resin used in making incense. These Jews carried benzoin to India from the Middle East and Africa and then returned with the Indian version (*ibid.* 60). In the chapter on mangoes, da Orta says that an acquaintance, a fellow New Christian and former (Sephardic) Jew, knows a great deal more about the foreigners (*Franguia*) of India than da Orta, perhaps due to a longer domicile in the country (*ibid.* 294). The above excerpts indicate da Orta's collaboration with Goa's Jews and New Christians who possessed similar interests in trade, botany, and India generally, not to mention da Orta's consultations with Goa's community of Jewish and New Christian doctors, one of whom may have been Jeronimo Dias. As we shall deal with later, both Dias and da Orta suffered under the Inquisition at Goa for being New Christians.

Although da Orta did not comment on the Inquisition, his fellow European, the French merchant and physician Dellon, published *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa* (1687). Like da Orta before him, Dellon mapped the plants of India (in particular those of Malabar) and remarked upon India generally in *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies* (1685). Gabriel Dellon was born in 1646 near Montpellier and followed in his father's footsteps by studying at Montpellier's famed medical school, the alma mater of François Rabelais. By 1668 Dellon had joined the French East India Company and shipped out to India, arriving in 1670. Dellon worked as a physician for the Company until 1673. He then practised medicine at Damão, a Portuguese colony north of Goa, and where he had great success. Dellon's patroness was a wealthy Portuguese woman named Donna Francisca Pereira.

Dellon admits in *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa* that had he not been seized by the Inquisition and expelled from India, he would gladly have stayed in the country forever (1819: 22). Dellon's proclamation is not surprising, considering India's many commodities and commerce, and French interests

in India were well-represented by Dellon's predecessors. François Pyrard de Laval (1578–1623) resided in Portuguese Goa from 1608 to 1610. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–89) was a jeweller and merchant credited with transporting the future 'Hope Diamond' from India to France. François Bernier (1625–88) was physician to the Mughal monarch Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) and Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb's rival and brother. Bernier's portrait of the Indian emperor formed the basis for John Dryden's play of the same name. Pyrard, Tavernier, and Bernier all wrote about their experiences in texts published in 1611, 1676, and 1670 respectively. Dellon possessed some affiliation with the French East India Company (*Compagnie Royale*), which was founded in 1664, as did Tavernier and Bernier. Since Tavernier and Bernier travelled and lived among the Mughals, they accumulated great wealth, either in goods or salaries. Pyrard had spent time in a Cochin gaol and as a captive of the Maldivians, but the Maldivians also paid Pyrard for certain services, and he grew rich. In Goa, he saw first-hand the benefits of trading with India and advocated greater French involvement. Dellon must have looked to his countrymen as models of success.

### Medicine in India: the lie of the land

Certainly, India's position as the epicentre of Indian Ocean trade and Goa's role as the Asian 'capital' of the Portuguese Empire are the reasons for da Orta and Dellon's emigrations. As physician-merchants, da Orta and Dellon chose a land where they could find spices and drugs in abundance and where they could practise: both qualifications would allow these men to exercise their expertise, partake in a vibrant economy, and gain wealth. The fact that India was not new to medicine was also likely to have been intriguing. Indeed, India's medical environment was as long-standing, sophisticated, and international as its trade history. Two approaches are of note here. Ayurveda is the ancient Hindu medicine based on the Vedas and followed by the Brahmins (or 'Pundits', as Gabriel Dellon calls them). Ayurveda emphasizes the relationship between the mind and body, between temperance and health, supports organic treatments, and makes recommendations concerning lifestyle. Ayurveda is still widespread in modern India. Another common form of treatment in India during the early modern period was the Unani approach of humoralism. Refined in Galenic Greece, 'Unani' (a corruption of 'Ionian' or 'Greek') underwent further development in medieval Egypt, Persia, and in India.

Although da Orta and Dellon did not receive their medical degrees in India or Persia, their training in Europe (at Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares in da Orta's case; Montpellier for Dellon) included references to Unani through

the study of the three great practitioners: Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abd Allah ibn Sina (980–1037), otherwise known as Avicenna; Averroes or Abu l-Walid Muhammad B. Ahmad B. Rashid (1126–98); and of course Maimonides. The treatises of Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides were exemplars in both the West and the East. Avicenna's successors emulated his methods; Zayn al-Din al-Jurjani (d. 1136), from Jurjan, Persia, was trained by Avicenna's student, Abi Sadiq, and among other books, al-Jurjani penned in Persian *The Thesaurus of the King of Kharazm*, as important as Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* (written in Arabic, completed in 1025) for its content which combined the theoretical with the practical. Hence, among the Persians and Arabs at Burhan Nizam Shah's court, Unani practices were somewhat familiar to da Orta. Dellon too recognized Unani in his interactions with Indian doctors. Returning to da Orta and his sojourn with Burhan Nizam Shah, the Shah patronized one of the foremost Persian physicians of the time: Rustam Jurjani, a Persian also from Jurjan, who was ensconced at Ahmadnagar by 1544 and was the author of, among other works, *Treasure of Nizam Shah (Zakbirah-i-Nizam Shahi, 1547)*, a text which was regarded in its time as 'a standard work on medicine' (Hadi 1995: 520). Jurjani, like other Persians and Arabs, followed the Unani approach according to Avicenna's model, which emphasizes imbalances of the bodily factors such as the humours as the cause of illness (Quaiser 2012: 115–36; Alavi 2009: 123–46). Even as Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* proposed selected absolutes in terms of diagnosis and drugs, inductive reasoning was not shunned (Gruner 1973). Likewise, Jurjani incorporates a clinical method in *Treasure of Nizam Shah* (Elgood 2010). Jurjani's methodology is the result of his credentials: Persia was at the forefront of the study of medicine in the early modern period, so much so that Indians travelled to Persia to study (Rezavi 2001: 40–65).

While Avicenna and his successors in the Arab world, Persia, Islamic India, and Europe were humanists and dynamic scholars, India's indigenous therapy was heuristic in the context of an ancient, Sanskrit-based epistemology. It is partly for this reason that even today Ayurveda continues to be regarded as 'alternative medicine' compared to the relatively proven effectiveness of allopathy, although acceptance of Ayurvedic techniques is on the rise (Wujastyk and Smith 2008). One proof of the dissimilarity between Avicenna and Ayurveda lies in the differences between European, Arabic-Persian, and Indian schools, hospitals, and practitioners. While colleges at Salamanca and Montpellier as well as hospitals at Baghdad and Jurjan were inclusive (depending on the institution, students and physicians included Jews, Muslims, and Christians) and strived for curricular consensus via empiricism, India had fewer faculties in comparison, and they were confined to certain castes. Exclusivity led

to limited options for treatment, so Indian kings sought Persian and European physicians to supplement the efforts of local doctors; hence, Burhan Nizam Shah's employment of Rustam Jurjani and Garcia da Orta (Meulenbeld and Wujastyk 2001).

### Transcultural medicine: West meets East

While da Orta and Dellon are only two of the many European physicians who operated in India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, what is unique and notable about these individuals is their collaboration with India's doctors, a collaboration that involved disagreement over what were acceptable practices – understandable since Europeans and Indians administered diagnoses and drugs differently – but more often than not the collaboration involved cooperation and partnership. The latter occurred in part because, to an extent, da Orta and Dellon's studies coincided with the application of Unani in India. Da Orta's alma mater, Salamanca, was founded in the early thirteenth century and not long after Bologna and Paris, and he also spent time at Alcalá de Henares, a newer institution built in 1508. Both universities taught humanism in line with Catholic tenets, but since Spanish scholars were in the process of translating Greek and Arab medical books into Latin for adoption, and since early modern medicine put great emphasis on empiricism in the study of anatomy, botany, and surgery, Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares offered a sophisticated curriculum (Earle 2012; Siraisi 2009, 2007; Ballester 2006: 37–64). Like Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares, Montpellier too emphasized Galen and Avicenna, and in fact some instructors hailed from Spain. Montpellier's prestige rivaled that of Paris, many court physicians being graduates of Montpellier (Williams 2010: 247–67; Prioreshi 2003). Understanding da Orta and Dellon's medical backgrounds explains the men's openness to Indian perspectives and their engagement in the exchange of knowledge, in spite of their rejection of some methods. It is important, however, to take into consideration that the availability of the potent items of the India trade – spices and drugs – contributed to the development of transcultural medicine in India. While Indians shared their treatments with da Orta and Dellon, the Europeans reciprocated.

Let us begin with Garcia da Orta. Da Orta's time with Burhan Nizam Shah and as part of the Shah's consortium of physicians exemplifies transculturalism on many levels. Like the Bahamani and Bijapur kings who ruled Goa, Burhan Nizam Shah I was a tolerant monarch and a supporter of literature, scholarship, and foreign trade, especially with Persia. One scholar claims that the Shah permitted da Orta to teach Portuguese to the crown prince (Pope 1989: 117). If

this is true, the Shah likely saw his son as a bridge between Europe and India, the foundations of which he was already building through his corps of doctors. As the Shah's personal physician, da Orta became part of an elite group – 'the physicians of Nizamaluco [Burhan Nizam Shah]' (Markham 1913: 151) notes da Orta – consisting of Indians and Persians, Brahmins and Muslims, who also served the Shah. As he writes in *Conversations*, Da Orta had full confidence in the abilities of his peers, observing that 'both Arabs and Gentios [Brahmins]' were 'great physicians' (*ibid.* 305). When he treated the Shah with Avicenna's methods, da Orta and the king – referred to as 'my friend' in *Conversations* – taught each other the Arabic and Latin terms for illnesses (*ibid.* 73). Others furthered da Orta's instruction: 'I was also taught by the Arabian and Khorasani physicians in his employment' (*ibid.* 306). Despite the variety of qualifications, given their common responsibility and cooperation, their treatments coincided.

Although Gabriel Dellon did not join an Indian king's court, he too learned from Indian physicians. For instance, in *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies*, Dellon praises the benefits of 'the Chaw [Chew]' or what Indians today call *paan*. Dellon explains that *paan*, which is usually chewed but not always swallowed, consists of areca, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, and other additives wrapped in betel leaves. 'The Chaw', writes Dellon, 'fortifies the Stomach, promotes Digestion, and leaves a good smell behind it' (1698: 68). Other advantages to health are noted: 'It is a great Specifick against the Stone, as I myself have Experience'd several times, when I prescribed it to some of my Acquaintance in that case. And what may serve as a confirmation of what I have asserted as to this particular, it is to be observed that in those places, where it is frequently used; I never met with any body that was Afflicted with this Distemper' (*ibid.* 68–9). Clearly Dellon sees the Indian habit of chewing *paan* as beneficial, even for Europeans.

In some cases however, da Orta and Dellon found Indian medicine to be questionable. The use of pepper to treat fevers was frowned upon. When Dellon was living in Damão under the patronage of Donna Francisca Pereira, Donna Francisca asked Dellon to treat her daughter and granddaughter after the failure of an Indian physician's remedies. In the case of the granddaughter, who had a fever, the 'Pundit, or Indian physician' had 'covered her head with pepper' (Dellon 1819: 35–6). Dellon removed the pepper and subjected the child to blood-letting. The girl recovered, as did her mother. Dellon was rewarded with lavish gifts and a house neighbouring Donna Francisca Pereira's residence. Garcia da Orta too prescribed blood-letting when Indian treatments were ineffective. In *Conversations*, da Orta recounts that despite the objections of the attending Indian doctors, he used blood-letting to relieve the fevers of

both Burhan Nizam Shah's heir-apparent and the son of a wealthy merchant from Tripoli. He also allowed the men to eat meat, whereas the 'Pundits' recommended starvation. Since the Pundits were Brahmins, they did not consider the consumption of flesh to have therapeutic properties. Da Orta disagreed with Indians in this respect because, as he explained to his omnivorous benefactors, 'a shoemaker did not fit every one with the same pair of shoes'; cures should match diets (Markham 1913: 310). Similar patient-specific medications were supported by Avicenna.

Attitudes toward blood-letting were a point of contention. In ancient Greek, Roman, Talmudic, medieval Arabic-Persian, and early modern European medicine, therapeutic and purgative blood-letting were recommended to balance the humours and alleviate fevers (among other 'inflammations'). Ayurveda allows blood-letting but not the repeated extraction of large quantities of blood, intended to drain an illness, as in the European procedure. Rather, somewhat similar to acupuncture, only small quantities of blood are shed at strategic locations or 'marma points' (Dash 2001: 605–6). Dellon writes in some detail about blood-letting. In *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies*, Dellon claims the pervasiveness of blood-letting in India, 'much beyond what is Practised in most Parts of Europe' (1698: 232). Patients are bled from their feet, he adds. In one sense, Dellon is correct: since Ayurveda regards the foot as possessing the marma points for internal organs (Tiwari 1995: 112), bleeding from the foot was necessary if organs were afflicted, but Ayurvedic blood-letting is both rare and appropriate only for selected patients. Hence, later in *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies*, Dellon's claim – 'These Pagan Physicians used to be [extremely] scandaliz'd when they saw us let blood' (1698: 244) – is accurate in that compared to Indians, Europeans were not restrained in their prescriptions of blood-letting.

Indians preferred to treat fevers with either starvation or the ingestion of spice-infused elixirs, notes da Orta in *Conversations* (Markham 1913: 310–11). Da Orta admits that he finds Indian pharmacology perplexing and Indians' ignorance of human anatomy troubling: 'These doctors are ... wrong in the classification of the medicines, for they call pepper and cardamom cold and opium hot. As for anatomy they do not know where the liver is, nor the spleen, nor anything else' (*ibid.* 308). Da Orta's classification of pepper as 'hot' explains Dellon's removal of the pepper poultice which had been placed on the granddaughter of Donna Francisca by an Indian doctor. In humoral theory, pungent spices like ginger, mustard, and black pepper were regarded as hot and dry and suitable for phlegmatics and melancholics, but pepper could exacerbate a fever; so in the *Canon of Medicine*, Avicenna warns that pepper 'warms' (Gruner



1973: 175). Indian doctors, in contrast, prescribed pepper to induce sweating and purge the body of toxins (Vijayan and Thampuran 2000: 463–75; Johari 2000: 40; Heyn 1990: 126). In *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies* Dellon describes how Indians mix pepper into rice soup (*cange*), feed it to the fevered, and smear the brew on the patient's head. But Dellon does not say that he prescribed pepper himself.

Despite the differences of opinion, Europeans and Indians came to see eye-to-eye with regard to certain treatments. Ayurvedic doctors observed the frequent use of blood-letting by the Portuguese and adopted the procedure, as Dellon himself testifies. During his incarceration by the Inquisition, Dellon feigned a fever. A 'Pundit, or Pagan physician' was called in. The doctor ordered that Dellon should be bled for five days (Dellon 1819: 97). In *Conversations*, da Orta acclaims pepper's many virtues. Additionally, he affirms Indian physicians' suggestion of turmeric (*açafrão da terre*), 'mixed with orange juice and cocoa-nut oil' (Markham 1913: 165) for ailments of the skin, eyes, and digestive system and praises the effectiveness of both the spice and the doctors: 'There is something to say of this medicine, as it is used by native physicians' (*ibid.* 163). Da Orta is so impressed with turmeric that he recommends its commercialization: 'You may, therefore, look upon it as a good medicine to take to Portugal' (*ibid.* 165). Turmeric was not unknown to da Orta and Avicenna, but its infrequent use in Europe led to confusion over its properties. Da Orta points out that Avicenna conflates turmeric (a yellow, fibrous root) with celandine (a plant with yellow flowers), and he blames Avicenna's limited experience with the spice: 'This Avicenna was a man who, when he did not know a thing well owing to its not belonging to his country, quoted the statements of others' (*ibid.* 164). Da Orta similarly corrects botanist and physician Matteo Silvatico (1285–1342), who, claims da Orta, inaccurately described cardamom as budding from 'great protuberances on trees' when in fact the plant 'only grows from seeds in the ground' (*ibid.* 111).

Da Orta's critique of his Western peers arose from first-hand experience with the spices and drugs in the land where they originated, were widely used, and catalogued completely. Hence, da Orta acknowledges that Indian doctors were better able to cure, with the help of spices, afflictions like diarrhoea that plagued both Europe and India. Da Orta confesses that he emulates Indians in this respect by administering to his patients, 'in secret', a cocktail of gambier, areca, betel, and cinnamon (Markham 1913: 196). Along the same lines, da Orta defers to Indians rather than Avicenna for other remedies. Da Orta learned about *Acorus calamus*, a plant of the myrtle variety and found only in India and Arabia, from inquiries among Khorasani and Arab traders as well as

‘the physicians of the Deccan kings’ (Markham 1913: 80). ‘Indian physicians’ are also mentioned in *Conversations* in relation to cardamom. ‘They say’, reports da Orta, that an elixir of cardamom mixed with the betel nut ‘draws out inflammations from the head or the stomach’, and as for the cardamom root, ‘They take it in fevers’ (*ibid.* 111).

While da Orta and Dellon received knowledge from their colleagues, the men actively and on their own reconnaissance pursued further investigations into Indian spices and drugs. After he arrived in India, da Orta never left its shores, but he travelled as far north as Cambay and as far south as Malabar, investigating and buying spices, drugs, jewels, plants, and seeds from Indians as well as Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian merchants. When mentioning these spices in *Conversations*, da Orta reports on the routes by which each spice was transferred from one region of the Indian Ocean to another, suggesting da Orta’s purchase and sale of the commodities. In fact, da Orta acquired seeds and plants, both domestic and foreign, from fruits to flowers, and grew them in his own gardens. Similarly, as an agent of the French East India Company and given his particular interest in medicine, Dellon makes specific reference to Indian plants in *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies*, from the spice market of Surat to Mangalore and its inhabitants who are ‘addicted to Commerce’ (1698: 154). What distinguishes da Orta and Dellon’s commentaries from other such narratives of India is that da Orta and Dellon’s perspectives on India’s commodities through the lens of medical usefulness, not just for sale and profit, obscure any goals they may have had as individuals harkening from a Europe awash with colonial politics. Whatever desire da Orta or Dellon may have had to conquer and dominate, all agency was dashed after their incarceration by the Inquisition, which, unquestionably, put theocratic ideologies at the forefront of its activities.

### The advent of the Inquisition and the fall of Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon

Although the Inquisition was established in Goa only in 1560, an *auto-da-fé* occurred as early as 1543. The accused was Jeronimo Dias, a New Christian and ‘bachelor of medicine’. Of Dias’s questioning and confession, a document records, ‘When arrested, together with certain other persons who had discoursed with him, he continued to uphold certain things of the old law against our holy faith, all of which showed clearly that he was a Jew, and the proceedings were concluded’ (quoted in Koschorke *et al.* 2007: 16). After his sentencing, Dias was pilloried, strangled, and his body was burned in public (Priolkar 1961: 22–3; Correa 1864: 292). Despite no mention being made of Jeronimo Dias in *Conversations*, da Orta had been living in Goa for ten years by 1543, so he could

have known Dias. If so, Dias' execution proved that despite the New Christians' many services to Goa, ultimately their religious heritage would become an issue. Late in his life da Orta too became a target of the Inquisition. The Inquisition was founded to eliminate perceived religious heretics, and while the repression of science might be seen as a repercussion, the stewardship of alternative medicine could be reason enough for condemnation. For Inquisitors, da Orta was an unreliable subaltern, and other Christians like Dellon were also accused of heresy and subversion. Before we examine da Orta and Dellon's cases, a review of the history of the Inquisition in Goa is necessary.

The Inquisition was first suggested for Portuguese Asia by the Jesuit missionary Saint Francis Xavier (1506–52). In a frequently quoted letter to João III, written from Amboyna on May 16, 1546, Saint Francis appraises the king on the state of Christians in the Indies and advises, 'Your Highness should establish here the holy Inquisition, because there are many who, without any fear of God or human respect, live according to the Mosaic law and the tenets of the Moors' (Costelloe and Joseph 1992: 149). Saint Francis was referring to Portuguese New Christians of Jewish and Muslim backgrounds, whom he suspected of being crypto-Jews and crypto-Muslims. The Inquisition was then launched in Goa in 1560. By all accounts, it was quite active. For the first thirty years of its existence, about one hundred people were burned at the stake either 'in person or in effigy' (Boyajian 1992: 72). While the majority of the Inquisition's victims were Hindu converts to Christianity and other Indian Christians, the Inquisition's original mission, to condemn New Christians of Jewish origin, remained a preoccupation (Wojciehowski 2011: 209–10; Oakley 2008). In *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa*, Dellon devotes an entire chapter to this subject, entitled 'The injustice committed in the Inquisition towards those accused of Judaism'. In the chapter, Dellon recounts the typical course of a New Christian's imprisonment and punishment by the Inquisition: the loss of all money and property, torture and the extraction of a confession, the false implication of others, and the New Christian's execution. Essentially, writes Dellon, the Inquisitorial system works in such a way that 'the poor *New Christian*' is doomed from the outset (Dellon 1819: 75).

And so Garcia da Orta was investigated, during which time his medical practice was suspended. Da Orta had three sisters, Violante, Catarina, and Isabel, two of whom had emigrated to Goa with their husbands and da Orta's mother after the sisters had spent some months in a Lisbon gaol (Boxer 1963: 7, 10). By 1541, da Orta had married Brianda de Solis. The couple had two daughters. The Goa Inquisition's probe of Garcia da Orta extended to his entire family. Da Orta died in 1568, before he was charged. A year later, his sister,

Caterina, and her husband, Lionel Perez, were accused of being Marranos (Isenberg 1988: 310). In documents from the time, da Orta's brother-in-law claims that da Orta confessed to him that 'Christ was not the son of God' (Boxer 1963: 10). Caterina was taken into custody and given a death sentence (Baron 1969: 84). She was burned at the stake on 25 October 1569 (Boxer 1963: 11). Eleven years later, Inquisitors 'posthumously condemned' da Orta and had his body exhumed and also burned at the stake at the *auto-da-fé* of December 4, 1580 (Saraiva 2001: 347; Baron 1969: 84).

While no record exists of da Orta's criticism of the religion in, or the state of Goa, Dellon publically condemned both even before he experienced his own troubles. In his earlier narrative, *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies*, Dellon writes, 'The severity of the Inquisition establish'd in all places under the obedience of the King of *Portugal*, Holy by its Name, but so terrible in its Consequences, serves for nothing else than to abalienate [?] the Infidels from the *Christian Church*' (1698: 43). *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa* is the more descriptive text of Dellon's experiences with the Inquisition. Here, Dellon asserts his firm devotion to Christ, as firm as that of his pious forebears, yet exposes the paranoia and tyranny that defined the Inquisition. Dellon relates that anyone under the Inquisition's jurisdiction was expected to be an informant, 'under pain of excommunication, but also under corporal and most cruel penalties, to denounce at once and without notice, those whom they may have seen commit, or have heard to say, any thing contrary, to its institutions' (1819: 148). This environment, Dellon points out, resulted in a society marked by mistrust and instability: 'The consequence of which is, that friends betray their friends, fathers their children, through zeal without discretion, forget the duty which God and nature impress upon them towards those from whom they derive existence' (1819: 28). During his residence at Damão, Dellon never abjured Christianity – he claims familiarity with the scriptures, was strict, and observant – but Portuguese acquaintances took friendly arguments to be indicative of apostasy. Dellon was reported to the Inquisition by a Dominican priest offended after a discussion about baptism and by a neighbour who asked Dellon to cover the crucifix in his room when Dellon's women visitors were present. (Dellon had declined, saying that God sees all.) Dellon's refusal to wear a rosary and to kiss images of Mary that were paraded in processions around the city did not help his case, nor did his dismissive comments about the Inquisitors as self-righteous and un-God-like. The Portuguese were displeased with Dellon's comment on France's good fortune not to possess an Inquisition. Dellon's remarks came to the attention of Manuel Furtado de Mendoza, the Governor of Damão. Dellon claims that the two men were in love with the

same woman, but more likely Dellon's outspokenness and absence of zeal precipitated his downfall.

Dellon was charged with 'heresy' and arrested. For five months he was imprisoned at Damão. The dungeon was overflowing with worms and human waste, which spilled down the walls from an upper cell. Fortunately for Dellon, his benefactress sent food daily. Others were not so fortunate. Starving prisoners ate their own excrement or committed suicide. From Damão, Dellon was transported to Bassein, which was 'less filthy' than Damão but where Dellon continued to encounter 'many companions in misery' (1819: 48). Upon reaching Goa and before being brought before Francisco Delgado de Matos, 'the Grand Inquisitor of the Indies', Dellon spent a night at the prison of the Archbishop of Goa (*ibid.* 52). This gaol, testifies Dellon, was 'more foul, dark, and horrible' than previous internments, yet he 'preferred it to the neat and light cells of the Holy Inquisition', known for solitary confinement and active torture (*ibid.* 49). Unfortunately, after a short and unproductive meeting with the Grand Inquisitor, Dellon was taken to a gaol cell of the Inquisition where was given three meals a day, and this cell had rudimentary toilet facilities. Nonetheless he heard the screams of the tortured and glimpsed 'crippled' men and women (*ibid.* 110). Since he was a Frenchman, Dellon was treated much better than Indians were. 'Europeans' were given sheets to protect themselves from the cold and mosquitoes, whereas others slept on mats (*ibid.* 60). While 'Blacks' were given rice and fish, 'Whites are treated more delicately', writes Dellon, and enjoyed a variety of foods, including rolls and sausage (*ibid.* 58). Indians were neglected. Dellon cites the tragic case of fifty 'Malabar pirates' imprisoned for their criminal activities (not for heresy). Forgotten and famished, forty of the pirates hung themselves (*ibid.* 42). Dellon spent two years of his captivity at Goa. After being censured at a 1676 *auto-da-fé*, he was sent to be a galley slave on the *São Pedro de Rates*. In 1677 a fellow physician, Sieur Fabre, made a successful appeal to Marie-Françoise, Princess Regent of Portugal, for Dellon's release. Dellon published *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies* and *An Account of the Inquisition at Goa* several years later.

### Conclusion: the paradox of Early modern Goa

Dellon's *An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies* and *An Account of the Inquisition* were so popular throughout Europe that they went through multiple editions. Da Orta's *Conversations* too experienced similar renown, more so than the work of the acclaimed Tomé Pires (d. 1540), apothecary, appointed 'factor of the drugs' for India, and the author of *An Account of the East* (*Suma*

*Oriental*), completed at Malacca in 1515. Pires spent a short period in India, arriving in 1511 and leaving in 1512, time enough, however, to commend Goa's ships, sailors, trade in spices, horses, rice, salt, betel, areca, and Goa's revenues of 'four hundred thousand *pardos* a year' from imports and exports (Pires 2005: 58–9). Pires's text, though, lacks, as per da Orta's *Conversations*, a discussion of Luso-Indian cooperation, both in terms of the exchange of wares and collaborative learning. Even though Avicenna and Silvatico before da Orta addressed aspects of Indian pharmacology, only da Orta witnessed the production and application of drugs, thereby making *Conversations* a model for future manuals, from Cristóvão da Costa's *Treatise of the Drugs and Medicines of the East Indies* (*Tractado de las drogas y medicinas de las Índias orientales*, 1578), written in Spanish and considered a revised edition of da Orta's *Conversations*, to Manuel Godinho de Erédia's *Summary of Trees and Plants of India* (*Suma de árvores e plantas da Índia*), published in Goa in 1612. Regardless of the medical advancements which occurred after his death, Garcia da Orta should be remembered as a pioneer who, by virtue of being *in situ* witnessed the vibrancy of the Indian Ocean trade, deployed a combination of both traditional and innovative treatments, benefitted beyond previous experts, and passed new technology back to Portugal, even though, ironically, da Orta himself could not return to his native land.

Da Orta's revelations, however, were suppressed or banned in Goa in the years immediately following publication. At the time the Inquisition scattered his ashes in 1580, the *Conversations* had also 'disappeared'. Very few copies of the first edition exist (a dozen, perhaps), in part because the Flemish botanist Charles de L'Écluse (1526–1609) translated *Conversations* into Latin, revised and abridged it, and published it in 1567 under a different title. De L'Écluse's version went through several editions and was popular in medical schools throughout Europe but was regarded as de L'Écluse's accomplishment, not da Orta's. Goan colonial authorities' and the Inquisition's steady erasure of indigenous and transcultural medicine was well underway. Indian kings like Burhan Nizam Shah employed European-trained physicians as well as Indians and Persians, but Portuguese viceroys accepted the services of non-Western physicians only to a degree. Official edicts in 1563 and 1567 expelled or restricted indigenous medicine in Goa, and Inquisition policy prohibited the use of some remedies under penalty of punishment because Ayurveda, for example, was perceived to be a form of sorcery and which warranted censorship. Further exchange between Indians and Europeans sharply declined after 1618. The authorities at Goa required all physicians to take a qualifying examination in order to practise, and decrees stipulated that the Indian doctors of Goa must not exceed thirty in

total. The examination was administered by the Chief Physician and Surgeon of the Royal Hospital, an institution established in the mid-sixteenth century and administered by Goa's Jesuits.

As for Dellon, even though he was not persecuted for being a New Christian as da Orta was, he nonetheless was a victim of the Inquisition for his worldview. Like *Conversations, An Account of a Voyage to the East-Indies* is not a testament of faith in the manner of fellow Goan transplant St Francis Xavier's missionary writings; rather, da Orta and Dellon's texts are keen observations of all things medical and experimental. Putting science before religion was the basis of the Inquisition's objections, since science was seen as distinct from God's work, unless the two were combined in the manner of Jesuit models for charity and evangelization, such as Goa's Hospital of the Poor Natives. Pedro Afonso (d. 1578), an Old Christian, was a physician and surgeon for the Hospital of the Poor Natives. Afonso had never been ordained due to his inability to acquire Latin (Županov 2005: 207–12). He was nonetheless a perfect lay father in the eyes of the Inquisition – he had an impeccable heritage, an approved affiliation (with the Jesuits), and he embraced medical science as a means of spreading Catholicism – all qualities absent in da Orta and more so Dellon. The early years of Portuguese colonialism in Goa saw the continuation of international commerce and cosmopolitanism, but in due course Portuguese monopolies regulated movement in the Indian Ocean. Despite being a prestigious Portuguese colony, hostilities towards some peoples, especially Jews, New Christians, and Muslims, had escalated; the Portuguese operated similarly in other cities of the Indian Ocean (Pearson 2002). Once the Inquisition stepped in, it added fuel to the fire by discriminating against the founders and titans of the region's trade, consisting of merchants of many creeds and including New Christians like da Orta and associates such as Dellon, both adherents to the Portuguese Empire even if they were not outright devotees. Additionally, the Inquisition interrupted and banned the dialogue that was developing between European and Indian physicians, thereby halting medical advances that would have benefitted everyone. The diminishment of da Orta and Dellon then appears to be due to the colonial project, which, during this time period, was still at the forefront and not yet affected by what Cristiana Bastos (2010) calls 'local initiatives' (versus 'colonial rules').

Da Orta and Dellon's lives and treatises indicate that the persecutions committed by the likes of the Inquisition affected all aspects of life, from religion and politics to society and science. India would never be the same, and ironically, by turning on their own, the Inquisition precipitated the end of Portuguese dominance in the region. By the mid-seventeenth century, the Portuguese



colonization of India had stalled as the Dutch and the English gained control of the Indian Ocean. As for the period prior to the arrival of the Inquisition in Goa, the observations of da Orta and Dellon mark a brief but productive moment in early modern Goa when the East and the West seemed to be moving towards consensus, a conclusion we may make from the review of da Orta and Dellon's easy interaction with the Jews, New Christians, and Indians of Goa as well as da Orta and Dellon's collaborations with Muslim and Hindu physicians. Although fleeting, this time should be regarded as significant. Indeed, when the Marquês de Pombal (1699–1782) reformed the Inquisition in the eighteenth century, he specifically criticized the Inquisition's injunctions against New Christians and its rejection of science (Smith 1843: 65). Pombal's critique may be seen as an implicit reinstatement of da Orta and Dellon's legacies as well as an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of Indian medicines. The removal of strictures between religion and food heralded a new era of modernity in terms of medicine because doctors no longer needed to observe boundaries which had been set by religious institutions. Although one must acknowledge that some aspects of medical practice might be described as inflexible in their own ways, medicine has evolved into an independent entity sustained by empiricism, not traditional religious ideology, and intimations of the current state of medicine were present in the practices of Garcia da Orta and Gabriel Dellon.

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# Religion and diet in a multi-religious city

A comprehensive study regarding interreligious relations in Tbilisi in everyday life and on feast days

ULRICA SÖDERLIND

This article deals with the importance of foodways among the believers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Georgian capital Tbilisi, both on feast days and in daily life. It takes the form of an interdisciplinary survey in which interviews and written sources are used as well as personal observations from people living within the city.

## Introduction

A person's relation to their own and others' dietary and drinking customs constitutes a very important part of that person's identity. Personal food and drinking patterns represent for an outsider an opportunity for self-expression, the assertion of one's individuality, but food and drink is also a primary and fundamentally important way in to others' cultures. To be able to take part in foreigners' food and drinking habits in order to engage with their culture is easier than, for example, breaking the foreign linguistic code (Montanari 2006: 133). The culture of food and drink becomes a language of its own on these occasions (Soler 1997: 35). All humans live with and by symbols that help us to create order and give meaning to our existence. Identities that are of a religious, national or ethnic kind are strongly linked with food and drink, since the various groups manifest their own affiliations and dissociations with respect to other groups through their own specific eating and drinking patterns and habits (Civitello 2007: xiv). Food reveals much about the complex interrelations between self and others, object and subject, appetite and digestion, aesthetics, politics, nature and culture, and creation and divinity (Méndez Montoya 2009: ix). An individual's or a group's food and drinking patterns are a very important aspect of being able to feel an affiliation with or of dissociating from other groups or individuals. The consumption of food and drink is seldom as complex as it is in the context of religious worship (Andersson 2005: 154).

This article focusses on the importance of bread/baked sweets and wine/grape juice for the believers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam within the city of Tbilisi.

### Georgia's history of religion in brief

Georgia has a long and complex religious history. The Jewish population came to the country after King Nebuchadnessar II conquered Jerusalem in the year 597 BC. The Jewish population and its descendents have since that time counted Georgia as a second homeland and they have always been free to practice their religion and customs there (Margvelashvili 2000: 46; Sukhitashvili 1999: 78).

Georgia was one of the first Christian countries: the country had representatives present at the First Council of Nicea in the year 325, while the official year for the country's baptism is 337, an event credited to Saint Nino and her work. The country was then a part of the Roman Empire under Constantine the Great (Lang 1956: 13; Machitadze 2006: 18; Silogava and Shengelia 2007: 43). During the latter part of the fourth century the Persians invaded Caucasus and the Christian population was faced with two choices; either to convert to Zoroastrianism or suffer the death of the martyrs. In the year 482 the Persians were defeated by the Georgian King Vakhtang Gorgasali, who allied himself with the Byzantines. In the year 645 the Arab-Muslims stood outside the city gates of Tbilisi and shortly after the whole country was under Arabian political rule (Machitadze 2006: 19–22).

During the reign of the King David the Builder (1089–1125) the Orthodox Church became very strong. During the fourteenth century the country was under constant attack from the Mongols. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 was followed by *c.* 300 years of very bloody battles and invasions. The Russian army freed Georgia from the Muslim incursions at the end of the eighteenth century, but in religious terms the country was ruled by the Georgian Orthodox Church even under Muslim rule. During the following 106 years the Georgian Orthodox Church was governed by a Russian synod. Services and masses in the Georgian language were forbidden, the frescoes were painted over and a large proportion of the country's icons were destroyed and sold. In the year 1917, in the aftermath of the Russian revolution, the country gained some independence. Independence was lost again in 1921, this time to Bolshevik Russia. During the era of Communist Party rule many of the churches were closed. Twenty five thousand churches were active in 1921, but in 1945 only 50 remained. During the 1970s the Orthodox Church started to recover again. Under the present

Patriarch over 600 churches have been restored, along with 70 monasteries, two theological academies, six seminars and the Academy of Sciences in Gelati. In 2004 one of the largest churches in the world was inaugurated. Jews, Christians and Muslims live side by side and have their sanctuaries very close to each other in the old part of Tbilisi (Machitadze 2006: 23–9).

Georgia's population is approximately 5.4 million and during the 1990s 65 per cent of the population confessed to the Georgian Orthodox Church, 10 per cent to the Russian Orthodox Church, 8 per cent to the Armenian Apostolic Church and 11 per cent to Islam. The remaining 6 per cent includes Jews, Catholics, Lutherans, Yazidi Kurds and atheists. Although the Jewish group is one of the minority populations, they do constitute the largest of them. The Jewish population decreased in number in the 1990s due to emigration to Israel. The Jews that still live in the country and in Tbilisi belong either to the Ashkenazi and Sephardim groups or to a third group which identifies itself as that of the Georgian Jews; they speak only Georgian in daily life, Hebrew at ecclesiastical occasions. The Muslim population is divided into the Shiites and the Sunnites; both groups pray in the same mosque in Tbilisi, separated by a wall. However, the feast days for the two groups are not the same.

### Dietary regulations

Even though the focus of this article is on bread/baked sweets and wine/grape juice it seems to be important to state the general dietary regulations for the various religions which coexist in Georgia.

The most extensive regulations regarding food and drink among the monotheistic religions can be found in Judaism. A common feature between Judaism and Islam regarding food regulations is that both religions have divided food and drink into two groups; clean and unclean. Both religions also have rituals for slaughter where the name of God must be pronounced when the animal's throat is cut. Which foodstuffs are considered to be clean or unclean differs between the two religions and also between different groups of worshippers within the same religion. As mentioned earlier the calendar and the feast days for the Shiites and Sunnites are not the same and the feast traditions for the Ashkenazi and Sephardim Jewish groups also differ from each other (Westblom 1999: 83–7, 102–4). There is a big difference regarding the regulation of beverages, since alcohol of any kind is forbidden in Islam, whilst wine is very important in Judaism: the wine has, however, to be of kosher origin (*ibid.* 83–7). The regulations of food and drink in Judaism and Islam are not just related to the body; they are also considered to be concerned with a diet



for the soul. A common feature for both Judaism and Islam is that pork meat and food made from pig's blood is strictly forbidden (*ibid.* 101–4; Hjärpe 1998: 178, 180). Neither Christianity nor Islam has any feast day/celebration that is similar to the Jewish Sabbath which is celebrated every week (Westblom 1999: 107–12).

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all use different kinds of calendars and this means that their feast days occur at different times of the year. Judaism and Christianity have in common that the celebration of Easter has a unique position among the feast days, even if it is seldom celebrated at the same time (an



A page from the so-called 'Lalashi Bible', written in Hebrew and dating back to the tenth century. National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi.



A so-called miniature depicting the Last Supper with Jesus and his disciples in a Gospel that dates back to the eleventh century. National archive of manuscripts, Tbilisi.

event which occurs once every seven years). Christianity and Islam on the other hand have in common the fact that fasting is very important at certain times of the year. The fasting periods are not fixed due to the use of different calendars and how time is measured. One example of this is that the major fasting period in Islam – Ramadan – can occur in any of the months of the year. For the Orthodox and Catholic churches Wednesdays and Fridays are the common fasting days. Apart from these there also exist some more extensive periods of fasting, the period before Easter being the most important one. Some of the fasting is ascetic and some not. Both Christianity and Islam have special regulations regarding diet during the fasting periods. Apart from the regulations for fasting periods the Catholic and Protestant churches do not have any other regulations concerning food or drink (Westblom 1997: 16–18, 107–12; Ware 2003: 303–7). For the Orthodox and Catholic churches the fasting days for different saints are very important, which is not the case in the Protestant Church (Machitadze 2006; Westblom Jonsson 1997: 60–3).

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is constituted of a combination of Mircea Eliade's *homo religiosus* (Eliade 1968) and my own theory about the 'gastronomic man' (Söderlind 2010: 6–30). In short it can be said that the *homo religiosus* strives to live as close as possible to the world's centre. One's home is therefore always holy since home is an image of the world and the world in itself is a divine creation, situated at the *axis mundi*. The city is its own cosmos and the religious buildings of a city, for a believer, are therefore of great importance, since they represent the threshold from which one can step out of the profane world into the sacred world. They are also a communicating doorway between these worlds (heaven and earth). This is the same for any religion. However large or small a cosmos might be – for example a country or nation, a city or a sanctuary – they are in the same way an image of the world, an *imago mundi* (Eliade 1968: 17, 29, 32, 35, 37, 43–4). Time is not homogeneous or continuous; there is an interval of holy or sacred time (such as one of the feast days) which is for the most part periodic, and there is also profane time; the 'normal' time span. Feast days always take place at the beginning of time, which means that the believer on these occasions behaves differently before and after feast days.

On the feast days the holy dimensions of life itself is reinstated to the full, and the holiness of human existence is experienced as a divine creation (Eliade 1968: 46–68). This means that on such days the believer eats and drinks, as it were, the very first meal which was the origin for every respective feast day and festival. To consume food and drink is not only a behaviour governed by physical necessity; it is also a very important religious activity since the believer eats and drinks what has been created by the Supreme Being and when the food and drink is consumed by the believer it is consumed in the same way as the mythological forefathers consumed it on feast days and festivals when the world was new (Eliade 1963: 59). For the profane human being the state of affairs mentioned above have been divested of any religious conditions or significance (Eliade 1968: 15).

In conformity with Eliade's theories regarding the existence of a *homo religiosus* I am of the opinion that a gastronomic man exists. The specific range of food and drink (the gastronomy) is established very early in the history of a nation (society) and its inhabitants. In short, factors such as necessity, eatability, availability, sensory experience, philosophical ideas, geographical and psychological limits, economic concerns, childhood memories, ideology, social structures, social class, gender, technology, experiences and sensations, all play a

vital part in human beings' choices concerning food and drink in daily life and on feast days.

A nation's gastronomy also consists of phenomena such as diet, provisions, culinary art, fare and nourishment. The choices are therefore very complex and never static. It gets even more complicated due to the fact that the factors mentioned above do not necessarily have the same meaning for all inhabitants within the same geographical borders. All these components constitute the gastronomical human being (Söderlind 2010: 6–30). These two theories combined create a complexity that holds important perspectives for believers in Tbilisi.

## Method

The method used in the study is interdisciplinary and consists of a combination of observations made on location in Tbilisi; interviews with believers from the different religions, religious documents and writings and artefacts. Some of the people that have agreed to be interviewed have done so on the condition that they are kept anonymous and I have agreed to that, so in some cases the references will state that the interview has been made with an anonymous person. The choice of method is based on interdisciplinary research which shows that it is important for a researcher to work with materials both from the past and the present in order to produce as broad a spectrum of response as possible to the questions asked in order to come to an adequate understanding of one's own present time (Andrén 1997, Söderlind 2006). This is particularly true for a region such as the Caucasus area with its very complex history (Bukhrasvili 2003: 226–7).

## Results

### Judaism

Italy, Spain and France are the three largest producers of kosher wines in the world, but for Jews in Georgia kosher wine is produced within the borders of the country. Both red and white grapes are used and the winemaking process follows the conventional pattern. However if a non-Jewish man is involved in the production, the wine is considered to be non-kosher. Although there are vineyards out in the countryside, many people make their own kosher wine at home in the basement, in so-called 'kvevris' (interview with Rabbi Meir Kozlovsky, Tbilisi, 20.2.2013 and the Rabbi, Synagogue, Tbilisi, 4.4.2013).



In order to care for the non-wealthy members of the community the larger synagogue in the city gives away the *maza* bread needed for the Passover celebration for free. The other more wealthy members pay a symbolic sum for the bread since it is imported from different countries such as Israel and Ukraine. Previously there was a Jewish bakery close to the larger synagogue in the city. However it is closed now due to the difficulty of the process of making *maza* bread (interview with the Rabbi, Synagogue, Tbilisi, 4.4.2013).

The word 'Sabbath' derives from the Hebrew word *shavat*, frequently translated as 'rest' or 'ceasing from work'. The Sabbath is a symbol of the connection between the Jews and God. Since the Sabbath is a day of rest it requires a lot of preparation. Traditionally the Jews prepare enough meals for the Friday evening dinner and for all of Saturday. The most important attributes of welcoming Sabbath are; tableware (preferably white), a candlestick with two lighted candles, two loaves of braided bread (*challah*), a *challah* cover, wine, a *kiddush* cup for wine and a prayer book. After lighting the candles, the wife waves her hand over the flames three times and covering her eyes with her hands says 'Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sanctifies us with his commandments and commanded us to light the Sabbath candles'. At this moment when the family is gathered the woman says a little blessing for her family and finishes the prayer with the words: '*Shabbat Shalom*' ('May your Sabbath be peaceful'). When the family is gathered at the Sabbath table, the father of the house fills up a glass with kosher wine or grape juice. He then places it on a palm leaf and recites a blessing, called a *kiddush*, over the wine. Every member of the meal remains standing to listen to the blessing standing up and when it is finished each and every one should reply with 'Amen'. When the blessing is done, everyone sits down. The person leading the blessing then drinks at least two ounces of wine or grape juice in one or two swallows. The remains of the *kiddush* wine or grape juice are then distributed in little glasses or cups to all those who were included in the *kiddush*. The head of the family picks up both the *challahs* with the bottom one slightly closer to him and pronounces the blessing. As, during the 40 years walk in the dessert, manna fell from the sky and a double portion of manna fell on Friday so that the Jews did not need to work to collect it on the



Maza bread for the Passover celebration, imported from Israel. Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2013.

Sabbath, so this miracle is commemorated by blessing the two loaves of *challah* at the Sabbath meal. After the blessing, the person who recited it should take a slice first, dip it in some salt, take a bite and then dip the other slices in salt and pass them around for others to follow. The salt is used in order to symbolize the sorrow of not having a temple. The Sabbath should be welcomed with the best of meals and it is customary to eat three festive meals; dinner on Sabbath eve (Friday night), lunch on Sabbath day (Saturday) and a third meal (*Seudah Shlishit*) in the late afternoon on the Sunday. Sabbath ends the following evening with a Havdalah blessing. This ritual involves lighting a special candle with several wicks, called a Havdalah, blessing a cup of wine and smelling sweet spices. (Iosebashvili and Mikadze 2012b: 1–3)

In Georgia during the celebration of Purim it is tradition to eat small biscuits (interview with the Rabbi, Synagogue, Tbilisi, 4.4.2013). The feast is called *seudah* and it is customary to drink wine and on this day. The Talmud allows people to drink until they no longer can distinguish between the phrases ‘*arur Man*’ (‘cursed is Haman’) and ‘*baruch Mordechai*’ (‘Blessed is Mordecai’). On Purim it is customary to make triangular pastries called *hamantaschen* (‘Haman’s pockets’) or *oznei Haman* (‘Haman’s ears’). A sweet pastry dough is rolled out, cut into circles and traditionally filled with a poppy seed filling. It is then folded into a triangular shape with the filling either hidden or in full sight. More recently prunes, dates, apricots and chocolate fillings have been introduced (Iosebashvili and Mikadze 2012a: 1–3).



An example of Sabbath bread.  
Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2008.

The celebration of Hanukka begins on the 25th day of the month of Kislev and lasts for eight days, and in Georgia it is customary to eat nuts and dishes made with plenty of oil (preferably olive oil) in order to commemorate the miracle of a small flask of oil keeping the flame in the Temple alight for eight days. Traditional foods include potato pancakes (known as *latkes*) with a thin, crisp crust and ball-shaped doughnuts with jam inside (interview with the Rabbi, Synagogue, Tbilisi, 4.4.2013; Iosebashvili and Mikadze 2010: 1–4).

The New Year (Rosh Hashanah) occurs at the end of September or in the beginning of October. As on every Sabbath and other holidays the celebration starts with a *kiddush*, pronouncing a special sanctity on the wine. The hands are washed

afterwards and the bread is blessed. On the Sabbath the bread is an ordinary white *challab*; during Rosh Hashanah however the bread is of a special round shape as a symbol for unity. After the bread is blessed it is put into honey in honour of a new sweet year (interview with the Rabbi, Synagogue, Tbilisi, 4.4.2013; Iosebashvili and Mikadze 2011: 1–2).

During Passover no leavened bread is eaten, only the *maza* bread, which is unleavened flatbread. Families gather at home under the auspices of the head of the family and a glass of wine is served (interview with the Rabbi, Synagogue, Tbilisi, 4.4.2013).

In May 2013 a new kosher restaurant was opened, located very close to one of the two synagogues in central Tbilisi. The bread for the restaurant was made in a bakery within the city walls and was *lavashi* bread (a thin, round flatbread) and in order to make it possible to serve at the restaurant Jewish men visited the bakery and started the fire for the baking (interview with three female cooks at the Jewish restaurant, Tbilisi, 16.5.2014).

In ordinary everyday life bread and baked sweets, as well as wine, play an important part in Jewish meals.

## Christianity

Within the frame of Christianity in Georgia there are several different branches; the Georgian Orthodox Church (the official church), the Armenian Catholic Parish of Holy Grigol Illuminatore, the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Holy Church, the Assyrian Chaldian Catholic Church of the East, the Baptist Church, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church, the Holy Trinity Church, the Lutheran Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Salvation Army, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, The New Church (Swedenborg), the Word of Life and the Molokans. The Russian Orthodox Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons are also represented in the country and in Tbilisi, however none of them agreed to meet or talk to me regarding my research so therefore I have no information about them in this matter.

Sacramental wine and the *kveveri* are regarded as being part of a special phenomenon. In Georgia a sacramental wine, or *zedashe* wine, is a wine used during religious ceremonies, for example the celebration of the Eucharist and weddings. Some claim that the best wine is the sacramental wine that is reserved for religious holidays and feast days. The sacramental *kveveris* and wine are most frequently encountered in eastern Georgia, especially in the region of Kakheti. In the past more or less every *marani* kept a sacramental *kveveri* for wine intended to be donated to churches and monasteries and for their



own consumption during secular or religious holidays. The sacramental *kvevri* served as a reference point and always occupied their own distinguished place in the *marani*. Other *kvevris* were placed in relation to the sacramental *kvevri*, depending on its location in the *marani*. The sacred *kvevri* did not necessarily occupy the central place among other *kvevris*, it was placed separately from other *kvevris* for quality storage in a cool, dark and somewhat secluded place (Ekana 2011: 30).

To the best of our knowledge today we are lacking information regarding the differences between the ordinary and sacramental *kvevri* making technologies; so far there have been no observations regarding differences in the liming and/or waxing of the *zedashe kvevris*. Having said this, it would seem that the sacramental *kvevris* undergo a more thorough washing than do the profane *kvevris* (Ekana 2011: 30). Making sacramental wine requires special attention and care, starting with the washing of the *kvevri* and *marani* hygiene and ending with the fermentation, ageing and storage of the wine. During the alcoholic fermentation the pomace needs to be regularly stirred inside the *kvevri*; this must be repeated at least five times a day. However it is advisable that the pomace be agitated in the *kvevri* at least once every two or three hours, especially during fermentation (Ekana 2011: 30). When the fermentation is over, the pomace and wine are separated and the latter is decanted into another



Making the holy bread for the Georgian Orthodox Church. Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2013.

*kvsvri*. Then the sacramental wine should be given a complete rest for a certain amount of time. The first drawing of the wine is dependent on the location, region, and vintage year. In making sacramental wine, only native red grape varieties are used. It is prohibited to use white grape varieties or to add white grape juice to the sacramental wine. Blending red and white wine is inadmissible even in the smallest of proportions. Additionally, the red sacred wine should not have any contact with water. Due to this all the washed wine vessels used for the sacred wine can only be used for the purpose when they are very well dried. (Ekana 2011: 31)



Stamps used for making the bread for the Georgian Orthodox Church. Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2013.

When the sacramental wine is made at home no treatment such as filtration, refining or chemical additives, or the use of a pure culture yeast during the fermentation is either required or recommended; the main idea is that the wine should go through all the necessary stages in a natural way. The only thing that may be added to the process of making homemade sacramental wine is the burning of sulphur in the *kvsvri* in order to disinfect it before use. (Ekana 2011: 31)

In the Georgian Orthodox Church wine is served every time the Eucharist has been celebrated (usually every Sunday). The holy bread that is used during the Eucharist is baked in a bakery close to the major Orthodox Church in Tbilisi and the bakers are all virgin young men. The bakery is open 24 hours a day and approximately 30,000 breads are baked a week. One batch of bread takes almost five hours, from preparing the dough until the loaves are baked, and for ordinary purposes two different kind of stamps are used; one of the Virgin Mary with the Baby Jesus and one in the shape of a cross. The first stamp is for the living and as yet unborn and the other one is for those that have passed away. For celebrations like Easter and Christmas other, special occasional stamps are used. The bread is sanctified following a blessing by the priest at the church (interview with bakers at the major church bakery, Tbilisi, 20.5.2013).

The service of the Eucharist is celebrated once a month (on the last Sunday) within the Word of Life and the wine that is used is homemade red wine, which it is permitted to dilute with water. Grape juice is also used for the purpose since there are members with drinking problems, and the breads that are in use



The Last Supper at the Assyrian Chaldeans Catholic Church as it is depicted on the altar icon. Assyrian Chaldeans Catholic Church.

are either baked by the members or shop bought (interview with anonymous member of Word of Life, Tbilisi, 20.3.2013). For the followers of the teachings of Swedenborg there is a Swedenborg Society and to this day there is no church in Tbilisi. Reverend Göran Appelgren from Sweden has visited the members annually, when the Eucharist is celebrated with wine and bread. The holy bread is made in and brought from Sweden by Rev. Appelgren and one per believer is distributed (interview with anonymous member of the Swedenborg Society, Tbilisi, 14.5.2013).

The Lord's Supper is celebrated once in three months for the believers in the Seventh-day's Adventist Church and the unleavened bread that is used in the service is made by the pastor's wife or the lay worker of the church. The bread is made out of flour, water and virgin olive oil and the bread is sacred from the beginning – if some is left over, it is buried in a place where no one can step on it. The bread is eaten at the same time by all the members during the celebration. The beverage that is used in the celebration is grape juice and it should be the juice of a dark red grape, such as the Saperavi grape, as a symbol for the blood of Christ. The juice is served in small cups (interview with Pastor Grigol Tsamalashvili, Seventh-day's Adventist Church, Tbilisi, 12.4.2013). Within the Salvation Army there are no sacraments (interview with the Salvation Army, Tbilisi, 26.3.2013).

The main service at the Pentecostal Church is held on Sundays; they celebrate the Eucharist once a month with undiluted red wine and members of the congregation make the wine at home. The bread is also made by the members and it is a flatbread made out of wheat flour and water; it is plain without any symbols. The bread is served first, in small pieces, then the wine in bowls; it becomes Corpus Christi during the service and they try not to have any leftovers (interview at the Pentecostal Church, Tbilisi, 27.3.2013). In the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia the Eucharist is celebrated on Fridays at a service that is given at 6 p.m. The wine is a homemade red wine from one of the brothers in the church; the bread is shop bought and is usually *lavashi* bread. The wine is served from a communal cup in order to commemorate Jesus' death and resurrection (interview with Bishop Rusudan Gotsiridze, Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, Tbilisi, 17.3.2013).

In Tbilisi there is one Armenian Apostolic Holy Church and one Armenian Catholic parish of Holy Grigol Illuminatore (for the latter there is a chapel). The holy bread for the Apostolic Church is made by the fathers themselves and is holy from the beginning. The bread is made during silent prayers. The bread for the Catholic parish is made in the Catholic church and is in the form of a round flatbread. The wine in the Apostolic Church is a pure, undiluted wine. The church has some vineyards, but members of the church also bring bottled wine for the services. In the Catholic parish church red wine is preferred for the service but white wine is not forbidden. It is only essential that the wine is pure and that the sacraments are given every day in the Armenian Catholic Parish Church (interview with priest Narek Kushyan, Armenian Apostolic Holy Church, Tbilisi 13.3.2013 and Father Miqael Khachkalian, Armenian Catholic Parish of Holy Grigol Illuminatore, Tbilisi, 22.5.2013).

Every Sunday the Eucharist is celebrated in the Assyrian Chaldeans Catholic Church of the East in Tbilisi, where Father Benjamin makes the holy bread himself, consisting of water, flour and salt. It is a flatbread and there is one for each member. Father Benjamin also makes the wine that is used in the



Making holy bread in the Armenian Apostolic Church, Tbilisi. Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2013.



An example of baked pastry with western European influences, Tbilisi. Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2013.

service and it is a pure red wine from the Saperavi grape (interview with Father [Monsignore] Benjamn Bethyadgar, Tbilisi 17.4.2013).

The wine that is used in the celebration of the Holy Supper in the Lutheran Church is red; the bread is an ordinary white bread. The transformation of the items into Christ's blood and flesh is believed to happen through one's own faith; there is no special treatment of them if there are any leftovers. The Holy supper takes place twice a month (interview with the Priest of the Lutheran Church, Tbilisi, 25.3.2013). The wine that is used in the service at the Holy Trinity Church is made by the pastor himself and it is a pure red wine. During the fermentation process the pips and skin sit together for 10 days in

wooden oak casks in the basement. After ten days the fermented juice is moved into larger glass vessels where it continues to ferment until it is ready. The wine is made in the autumn for the whole year and the wine is not holy until the Eucharist. Only one drinking vessel is used during the sermon and it is cleaned after each member has tasted the wine. The holy bread is made by the members and is made out of wheat flour, water and is unleavened, a large flatbread served when the Eucharist is celebrated on the first Sunday of the month (interview with Pastor Besarion Megrelisvili, Holy Trinity Church, Tbilisi, 11.4.2013). The members of the Protestant Evangelist Church make the high quality red wine for the service themselves and they use tiny cups, one for each member. The service takes place on Sundays since that day is God's day. The members also make the bread themselves; it is unleavened bread made out of no particular kind of flour. One first takes the bread and dips it into the wine before consuming it (interview with Tamar Khukhunaushvili, Protestant Evangelical Church, Tbilisi, 21.3.2013).

The Eucharist is celebrated every day in the Catholic Church. The wine that is used is homemade, both red and white, without sugar or water. The wine becomes sacred during the mass, if there is any wine left after the mass the priest drinks it so there are no leftovers. The bread is made locally in Tbilisi by



a single woman who bakes the bread for all the Catholic churches in Georgia. It is a bread made out of flour and water and it is a white unleavened flatbread marked with a cross. One bread is used per person and if there are any left over they are given to the birds (interview with priest student, Catholic Church, Tbilisi, 22.3.2013). Red wine is served on Saturday and Sunday during the Eucharist in the Saint Peter and Paul's Church and the wine is pure without sugar, water or chemical additives. On other days the wine is white and the bread is thin and flat; the bread tradition springs from the Jewish custom of Maza bread (interview with Father Maciej Mamaj, Saint Peter and Paul's Church, Tbilisi, 17.5.2013).

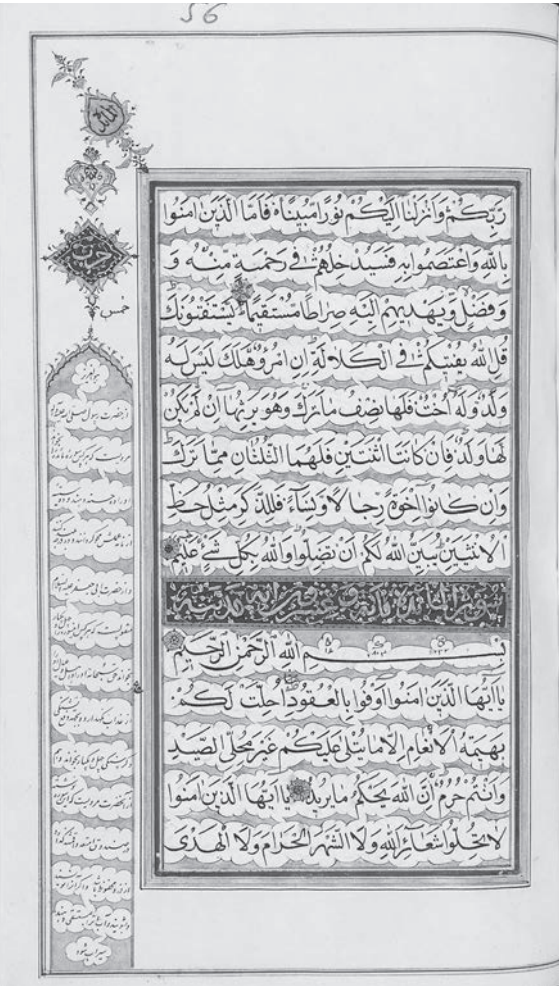
The Molokans celebrate a service every Sunday; however there is no wine or bread served during an ordinary service. Bread along with salt is only displayed at special celebratory services. The bread is either homemade or bought at a bakery. After the service the bread is cut into slices and served to the members during the meal that follows (interview with Pastor Fjodor of the Molokans, Tbilisi, 15.4.2013).

On Easter day everyone belonging to the Georgian Orthodox faith visits the graves of his or her relatives and wine is poured over the graves before what remains is drunk. Red eggs are rolled on the graves and Easter cake is left for the loved ones. Forty days after a passing it is believed that the soul leaves for heaven and this is celebrated with a large dinner (*supra*) where a lot of dishes are served, depending on the economic means of the family, along with a good quantity of good wine. For New Year a special pastry is made that looks like a half moon (interview with the secretary of Father Adam, Georgian Orthodox Church, Tbilisi 11.3.2013).

During the celebration of a wedding wine is served to the newlyweds in the Word of Life community as a symbol of their union (interview with anonymous member of the Word of Life, Tbilisi, 20.3.2013). After a wedding service at the Seventh-day Adventist Church it is traditional to eat large cakes, usually within



Making special cake for Easter; so called *paska*. Photograph by Ulrica Söderlind, 2013.



A page from the Qur'an containing the fifth sura. National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi.

environs of the church (interview with Grigol Tsamalashvili, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Tbilisi, 12.4.2013).

In the Pentecostal Church Easter is celebrated with eggs and cakes according to tradition (interview at the Pentecostal Church, Tbilisi, 27.3.2013). Wine is served during the blessing liturgy at a wedding in the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia (interview with Bishop Rusudan Gotsiridze, Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, Tbilisi, 17.3.2013). The breaking of Lent is celebrated by eating Easter cake (*paska*) in the Armenian Apostolic Church along with other food items. When Easter is celebrated Easter cake (*paska*) is put on the table in the Assyrian Church (interview with Father [Monsignore] Benjamn Bethyadgar, Tbilisi 17.4.2013). On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday one only consumes bread and water within the Catholic Church; Lent is broken with the consumption of Easter cake and red eggs (interview with priest student, Catholic Church, Tbilisi, 22.3.2013).

In the daily life of Georgians belonging to the Christian faith bread is a staple item and if there is not bread on the table, the meal is not considered to be complete. There are a lot of bakeries in Tbilisi, but many Georgians make their bread themselves. A very popular bread is the so called 'tone' bread, another one is *dedas puri* ('mother's bread'). Both those breads are made in a special tone oven. There are other breads that may be eaten with or without filling; but a day does not go by without eating bread in Georgia, regardless of shape and size. Regarding baked sweets and pastry the selection of available goods has increased rapidly over the last few years, thanks both to newly opened cafés, stores and bakeries that have a



Western European influence. Wine in ordinary life is equally important if one doesn't have problems with alcohol or is a non-drinker, and is consumed on a daily basis in great amounts.

## Islam

Although dietary regulations are stipulated for the believers of Islam in the fifth sura of the Holy Qur'an, it is nevertheless the religion that has the fewest dietary regulations amongst the three religions studied here. Alcohol is forbidden, therefore wine is never drunk by a Muslim, either in the daily life or on feast days. However non-alcoholic wines and grape juice are permitted and are held in high regard in Georgia (interview with the Imam of the Mosque, Tbilisi, 8.4.2013 and with two Muslim students, Tbilisi, 12.3.2013, 15.3.2013).

When the Prophet's birthday is celebrated it is traditional to eat sweets. The nature of the sweets depends on the family's origin; however the Turkish sweet-meat *baklava* is very popular. This meal is considered to consist of a mixture of religious observance and folk tradition amongst Muslims in Tbilisi. A bread, called 'mother's bread' is also served at the New Year's meal, and every family has its own tone oven to bake the bread in. Baked sweets are also served at the meal, depending on the origin of the family. During the night of forgiveness baked sweets are given to everyone. During the 10 day grieving period (Ashura) everyone is expected to wear black clothes and pray all night and one drinks sweet water and tea and eats *lavashi* bread with other food items (interview with two Muslim students, Tbilisi, 12.3.2013, 15.3.2013).

Bread and baked pastries also play an important role in the daily life of Muslims in Tbilisi. Students often bring with them homemade bread to school to eat during the day. The bread that is eaten at everyday domestic meals is also mainly homemade and the kind of bread it is is very much dependent upon the origins of the families; the same goes for the baked pastries. It is common to rejoice in and give thanks for the bread on the table during meals. (Interview with two Muslim students, Tbilisi, 12.3.2013, 15.3.2013)

## Closing words

This article has dealt with the role of bread/baked pastries and wine/grape juice in the lives of the believers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Georgian capital Tbilisi. The city was chosen for the study due to its geographical location at the crossroads between the East and the West and because the three mentioned religions have all been represented there since early in the history of

the country. The results that are presented in the text come from my fieldwork, carried out in Tbilisi during 2013. The role played by bread and baked pastries and wine and grape juice in the daily lives of believers are one aspect of a larger research project in which the entire range of foodways of believers are studied from the theoretical perspective of the religious and gastronomical man. The limited amount of space here means that it is impossible to present all of the results from my research work: this will be done at a later stage.

In Judaism wine, bread and baked sweets play a very important role, both on feast days and in daily life. When it comes to the making of both the wine and the baked items there are special rules to ensure that the final product is kosher according to the regulations stipulated in the scriptures. Great care is taken in the making of the products by Jewish members; this means that the items can only be made within the community of believers, apart from outsiders, and so in a way are very exclusive.

There are several branches of Christianity present in the country, comprising the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant faiths. Within the communities that use wine and bread these items are of great importance, since they are considered to be sacred for most of them. Just as great care is taken within the Jewish community when making wine, the same can be said about the holy wine within Christianity. It is very important it is made in the right way, either by fathers within the church vineyards or by members at home. In general wine is also of great importance in daily life; large volumes of wine are consumed on a daily basis in the country. If one has one's own vineyard, the cost is limited mainly to the labour. Others buy the wine directly from wine farmers (who usually have the best wines) or in bottles from stores; the latter at a much higher price and not of as good quality. Even a very young wine is a popular everyday drink mainly for younger people, since the grapes have not fully fermented yet and the beverage is somewhere between a grape juice and a wine – the alcohol level is low and the taste is very sweet.

For the communities that do not use alcohol, grape juice or 'flattened wine' plays the same sacred role as does wine for the other communities. The same can be said about the use of bread and baked pastry in the daily life of the Christians. For a native Georgian a meal without bread is not considered to be a proper meal. Lots of Georgians also consume a lot of sweet baked pastries both on feast days and on an everyday basis. Some of the pastries are costly, while others are very cheap so almost anyone can afford them.

The holy Qur'an stipulates food regulations for the Muslims and alcohol in every form is not allowed. However beverages such as grape juice are permitted and are held in high regard since they may be of a very high quality and very

sweet. They can be drunk on a daily basis as well as on certain feast days. Bread may be considered a staple food (as they are for the Jewish and Christian communities) and are mainly homemade. The bread is served on a daily basis and is often rejoiced in at the table where the meal is taking place.

One striking finding which emerges from the research is the fact that, regardless of faith, the origin of the family plays a great and important role in determining food and drink choices. It would appear that sometimes this is the crucial factor in determining what kinds of bread and pastries that are made within the religious communities or families, which means that links are maintained even to distant family histories. Provenance is therefore central and history is an important factor in the production or selection of bread and pastries. It seems that availability and edibility play a limited role here. Regardless of the origins of the families within the communities however, the economic means of the members always play a role. It is cheaper to make bread at home than buy it from shops or bakeries. However it is not necessarily the case that the bread and pastries are made at home only because of the cost. Flavour also plays a very important role here since it again has links with familial origins: one strives to have a taste of home. That taste cannot be bought in a store or a bakery.

Religious buildings, according to Eliade, are of great importance, because they represent a threshold between the profane and sacred worlds. One's home is important, functioning as a cultural carrier for believers, both in daily life and on feast days and festivals. The followers of Judaism make a journey between the two worlds at least once a week, as Sabbath is celebrated. The members of the Christian and Muslim communities make the same journey and back every time they enter a church or a mosque, both on feast days and in daily life.

Time is not homogeneous or continuous according to Eliade; there is the instance of the interval of holy or sacred time (the feast days), which is for the most part periodic; and there is also profane time, for example the normal time span. Feast days always take place in 'original time', which means that the believer on these occasions behaves differently before and after the feast days. During the feast days the holy dimensions of life itself are recovered to the full and the holiness of human existence is experienced as a divine creation. This means that on the feast days the believer eats and drinks the very first, the original meal of every respective and different feast day and festival. Thus, to consume food and drink is not only a physiological necessity; it is also a very important religious activity, since the believer eats and drinks what has been created by a Supreme Being. When the food and drink is consumed by the believer it is consumed in the same way as the mythological forefathers consumed it when the world was new, on the original feast days and festivals. This

means that the members of the Jewish community, at least once a week when the Sabbath takes place, eat the meal in the same way as their mythological forefathers did. It will be the same with the other annual feast days.

Christians eat the meal in the same way as their mythological forefathers every time they receive the Holy Communion at service – how many times a week or month this occurs depends on which community one is a member of, but the same is true every time a meal is eaten at home on a feast day. The members of the Muslim community also eat their meal the same way as their mythological forefathers every time a feast meal is served.

If one celebrated every feast day within the three religions in the year 2013 when this study took place the activity would cover 281 of the 365 days of the year. This indicates the importance of the feast days for the religious man. I do not mean that everyone in Tbilisi behaves in this way, but they have the opportunity to do so if they want to and they are welcome to do it if they have families and friends within the three religions. I know it is not very common within ecumenical work to work across the borders of the religions, however I think this can be done in a city like Tbilisi and that is a great step forward for the understanding of each other's thoughts and beliefs as they are expressed through foodways. It also illustrates the moments when the finest aspects of the religious and gastronomic man are combined!

Ulrica Söderlind has a very practical background in the restaurant business, having worked as a chief for several years before going to university. In 2006 she received her PhD in economic history with a dissertation, based on interdisciplinary research, entitled 'SKROVMÅL'. The dissertation deals with food and nutrition in the Swedish Navy during the period 1500-1800 and both historical and archaeological sources are the primary sources for the research. Apart from the doctoral dissertation, three other books and about 60 scientific articles have been published in the field of food and drink. Several of the books have been winners of Gourmand Cookbook awards in Sweden, even though the works are historical, scientific documents rather than cook-books *per se*. She has carried out several fieldwork sessions in Georgia and in October 2014 she was awarded the Georgian Embassy Medal for her work in strengthening relations between Sweden and Georgia.

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# Religious dietary rules and the protection of religious freedom

Some evidence from practice in Italy

MIRIAM ABU SALEM

In the Italian system freedom of worship provided by the Constitution is safeguarded by unilateral and contractual norms, sanctioned for minority confessions by an agreement, named *intesa*, that also concerns dietary issues. Muslim communities, however, as they have no *intesa* with the Italian state, are always compelled to negotiate in respect of their religious norms. Religious freedom concerns not only ritual acts, but also behaviours including dietary ones, which are based on religious beliefs. The aim of this paper is to critically reconstruct how Italy takes charge of religiously-motivated needs concerning food and beverages, both for those confessions holding an *intesa* (such as Hebraism) and for those not (Islam), in order to trace the real degree to which freedom of worship is guaranteed in Italy. The analysis will be focused on the bargaining for religious dietary rules in schools and in constraining institutes, as they are main social spaces of confrontation between believers and the state.

If we limit ourselves by considering food merely as a means of satisfying one's own physiological needs, we will not be able to understand why something that is good to eat for one person can be a repulsive object for another. Human beings were born omnivores; thus, apart from the times when they are forced to select their forms of nutrition on the basis of survival, we can state that an aversion or propensity to eat specific foods is related to the meaning that an individual's community gives them. According to Lucio Meglio (2012: 8) 'alimention translates from a biological process to a cultural fact of a society': everywhere cultures have always adopted somewhat explicit dietary behavioural codes, which, by distinguishing between permitted and forbidden foods and passing on their preparation processes, have changed perceptions of taking food from a mere physiological act into a means by which to frame social rules of mutual belonging and socio-cultural identification (Guigoni 2009: 13–14; Venzano 2010: 9–10). Food, as well as language, preserves culture and especially during periods of migration it becomes essential in providing and sustaining



self-representation in the public space (Saint-Blancat *et al.* 2008: 68) as well as maintaining firm roots in the motherland.

Furthermore, alimentation may also represent a relationship with God. Abstention from eating specific foods and observing cooking rituals are how religious people feed both body and soul, enabling them to feel part of a wider, but at the same time differentiated community.

This article will investigate the relationship between dietary laws and religious freedoms, as guaranteed by the Italian system. A brief discussion of the regulation regarding relations between the state and religious bodies will bring readers to the core of the matter; by which I refer to an understanding as to whether the presence of an agreement (*intesa*) may facilitate the compliance of religious dietary rules. The focus will be on Islam because it has a rich set of dietary precepts and because it has no *intesa* with the Italian state. Muslim religious dietary rules in school canteens and prisons will be analysed, since the impediments in the way of individuals independently being able to observe these laws involves the state protecting religious freedoms, thus accomplishing the constitutional principles.

Schools and prisons offer two very interesting case studies because they are the institutions which facilitate the transformation of society into a multicultural and multi-religious one. In each of these contexts the role played by religion is totally different: schools have the difficult duty of educating learners to accept diversity by respecting each others' cultural and religious identities, while prisons are the places in which religion becomes the instrument which supports the reintegration of the prisoners into society. The aim of this paper is to analyse the answers provided by those institutions to the citizens/believers and to elaborate on the ways in which the accommodation or rejection of dietary prescriptions is justified.

### Religious alimentary rules in Islam

The religious pluralism, which increasingly characterises Italian society has its origins – mainly but not exclusively – in the dynamics of migration which started in 1980s. In comparison with other European countries, Italy has experienced the phenomenon of migration relatively recently, transformed 'by the Great Mother of emigration to a new, powerful magnet for many people in search of a land in which to build, by means of their own efforts, a better future for themselves and for their children' (Bolaffi 2001: 4).

Unlike all the other industrialized countries, Italy has become a land of immigration without at the same time having realized the full employment of

Italians. While in other European countries foreign labour is required by, and managed and directed to, the areas most industrialized by the national governments, in Italy the immigrants have come spontaneously.

The influx into Italian territory has also come about due to the absence of legislation on immigration and effective border controls, while the northern European countries have enacted more restrictive rules. The 'wavering' attitude assumed by the Italian legislature, more oriented towards 'governing the tensions of the moment' than providing long-term legislation in response to the phenomenon, has become a powerful factor of attraction (Bonifazi 1998: 204). The increasing number of foreign people in the country is also fostered by the deployment of several amnesties in order to regularize 'illegal' immigrants, already embedded in the illegal labour market, as well as the geographical position of Italy which, thanks to the great ethno-national variety of the immigrants prevents the identification of Muslims with any one country of origin.

Italy has also undergone a transition from temporary immigration to immigration in which 'the immigrant ceases to exclusively consider himself as foreigner, a visitor, a worker' and define himself as a member of society (Mancini 2008: 93).

The cultural and religious pluralism that characterises Italian society has produced the revival of a number of issues which are generally considered to be outdated by the secularized western countries. Religions become (again) a key actor in the public space as they play a more important role than the one they held up until quite recently (Ferrari 2008: 9–11). In such a context western states – Italy among them – are called upon to find satisfactory solutions which allow individuals to feel themselves to be both citizens and believers.

Following the scheme outlined by Carlo De Angelo (2002: 34–5), it is possible summarize the requirements of Muslims as follows:

- requests that have an impact on the organization of urban public spaces such as the building of mosques, cemeteries and places suitable for the execution of ritual slaughter;
- requests related to the world of work for example, a flexibility of schedules and calendars in order to fulfil spiritual duties (Ramadan, for example);
- requests regarding the educational system (such as the opportunity to open private schools, wear the veil, and teach Islam in schools);
- requests concerning the application of the personal statute to family disputes involving Muslims regardless of their citizenship.

In order to better understand the requests concerning alimentation in public spaces it is necessary to analyse Muslim dietary rules.

Religious alimentary rules may be included in a general and an abstract pattern, applicable to each confession. Each alimentary provision contains:

- total bans (concerning the consumption of some specific foods);
- relative bans (prohibition on the consumption of food at certain times);
- cooking methods.

Alimentary prescriptions play an important role in Islamic religious practice. Most Muslims nowadays live a fully secularized existence, but they still maintain alimentary rules as a means of avoiding a ‘secularized behaviour drift’ (Rhazzali 2010: 92) and to express their religious affiliation.

The revised rules drastically reduce the amount of bans and days of fasting, and do not include impositions such as Lean Friday or *Shabbat*. One of the characteristics of Islamic alimentation is moderation: food is not only a source of nutrition; it also represents a vehicle through which to create wellness within the entire community.

According to the precepts of the Qur’an, Muslims can eat what is permitted, and what is good and tasty. All vegetables are allowed, while marine and land animals are treated differently. Marine animals are permissible in the case of natural death, except for those that are considered to be dirty or aggressive towards humans.

Things change with reference to land animals. Islam allows their consumption only if those animals were hunted and two conditions are implemented: the absence of a state of consecration and an invocation of God’s name before hunting (Ascanio 2010: 71). Animals that have died of natural causes, pork, and blood may not be consumed.<sup>1</sup>

Another known ban is the prohibition on drinking alcohol. The Qur’an has moved from a positive interpretation regarding the consumption of intoxicating beverages, specifically the *khamr*, to their ban (Chaumont 2007). Since the object of the prohibition was not clear, juridical schools have adopted a more or less radical interpretation of this rule. Apart from the *Hanafi School*, which

1 In the Qur’an, pork takes on a double meaning. It is considered an unclean food and the symbol of rejection. Compared to other animals it occupies a ‘special position’ because it is the only one to be explicitly mentioned, as opposed to the more general definition of livestock, and forbidden.

prohibits only the consumption of wine and allows a moderate use of other alcoholic drinks, other Sunni schools ban all alcoholic beverages.

Islam also prohibits its believers from eating specific foods at certain periods. During Ramadan, every Muslim must totally abstain from food, drink, smoking and sexual activity during the period from sunrise to sunset. Minors, critically ill patients, pregnant women or breastfeeding or menstruating women, the aged and all people doing heavy work are excluded from fasting. Members of all of these categories however, apart from sick, aged people and minors, have to make up for their fasting days, and if they are not able to accomplish this task, they will have to provide a certain amount of food to the poor in proportion to the number of days they did not comply with the fasting.

In order to produce meat which may be consumed, it has to be butchered following a precise ritual. This can take place in two ways: the *dabb*, originally intended for small-sized animals, dictates the slitting of the neck, trachea and jugular vein with one cut; and the *nahr* which applies to bigger animals and does not specify the cutting of the trachea and jugular (Ascanio 2010: 80). During the ritual slaughter, the animal has to be awake, conscious, positioned towards Mecca, and the cutting has to be followed by an abundant bleeding. A good, sane Muslim man, who must invoke the name of God before proceeding, should do butchering<sup>2</sup>. Animals can be sacrificed at the beginning of a new day, but not before the dawn prayer.

Sometimes some permissible foods may become prohibited. Having been in contact or even close to impure or dangerous substances for humans, will transform permitted foodstuffs into impure matter, a status that has to be dealt with by means of a purification act (Ascanio 2010: 74–5).

Lastly, it has to be cited that Muslims in a state of need are allowed to eat what would otherwise be forbidden foods. This provision is important for Muslims living in non-Muslim countries because it allows a reinterpretation of alimentary rules making lawful – in cases of crisis and within a limit that prevents death – behaviours that are actually prohibited (Abu-Sahlieh 2012: 263). This principle has been largely used during migration. In this way some Muslims have made a ‘sort of compromise with religious obligations’ (Rhazzali 2010: 185) deciding to adopt some religious obligations and avoiding others, since they believe God gives a man the chance to simplify his life (Abu-Sahlieh 2012: 284).

2 Also the ‘people of the Book’ can make the ritual sacrifice. This requirement is very important, especially in the context of migration in which Muslims have to deal with the native merchants.

## Religious freedom and the relationship between the state and religions in Italy

Religious freedom concerns not only ritual acts, but also behaviours religiously rooted, such as dietary ones. Obstructing the facilitation of religious dietary provision forces believers to go against their own religion or, to drastically reduce their quality of life (Botta 2008: 43; Roccella 2003: 2).

With that said, it should be appropriate to clarify what is the relationship between alimentary rules and religious freedom as it is guaranteed by Italian system.

Article no. 19 of the constitution – the *grundnorm*, which concerns religious freedoms – grants everybody the right to profess his or her own beliefs both privately and collectively, and to proselytize and worship within moral limitations. The full dimensions of this statement can be entirely understood only if considered in conjunction with other constitutional norms that uphold this freedom directly or indirectly. The first of those would be article no. 2, which grants man's inviolable rights, both as an individual and as part of a social group where he/she shows his/her personality. Among such rights – which cannot be changed by constitutional review law or constitutional law, since they existed before modern laws<sup>3</sup> – is religious freedom, considered as a 'vehicle for self-fulfilment, personal completion, self-promotion and meaning-making' (Loprieno 2009: 74).

Also closely connected with religious freedom is article 3, in both of its clauses. The formal one (article 3.1), which prevents lawmakers from discriminating against people on the basis of religious differences, and the substantial one (article 3.2), which compels the state to ensure the full development of human beings, promoting the satisfaction of the religious needs of everyone (Cardia 1996: 204), as well as legitimizing the application of different laws within diverse contexts.

This analysis cannot ignore the reference – although minimal – to the constitutional principle regarding state–religion relations. The constitution declares every religion to be equal before the law; it constitutionalizes the principles of church–state separation and confessional independence (articles 7.1 and 8.2), so both state and confessions in their respective matters exert an independent and sovereign power; it defines the treaty as a 'regulating tool' for state–church relations (Cardia 1996: 223). The *intesa* – this is the name of the agreement stipulated by the state and the confessions different from Catholic one – aims to determine specific needs concerning confessions, and, as soon as it is approved,

3 Constitutional Court, sentence no. 1146/1988.

it becomes the instrument by means of which the state and the country's cults and confessions regulate their mutual relationships. Those bodies which hold an *intesa* are no longer subject to the law of admitted worships (no. 1159/1929).

The innovative system set up by the constitution has been consistently rejected in practice. In fact, it produces a 'stratification in the legal status of cults and confessions' (Botta 2008: 126), with the Catholic Church standing in the first row, with those confessions which hold an *intesa* just behind, whilst an 'anonymous jumble of indistinct' (Peyrot 1978: 49), whose relations with the state are still regulated by the law of admitted worships, bodies take up the rear.

The framework outlined above is completed by the principle of *laicità*, inferred by Constitutional Court through the combined reading of articles 2, 3, 7, 8, 19 and 20 of the Constitution (decision 203/1989). Defined as one of the supreme principles of the Italian constitutional order, *laicità* does not imply an indifference on the part of the State before the confessions; but it requires the state to take action to promote religion in equivalent and impartial way, so that a different treatment that goes beyond the limits of reasonableness constitutes an 'inadmissible discrimination' (decision no. 329/1997).

For the purposes of this article, Judaism and Islam can be taken as prime examples respectively of a religious body on the one hand with and on the other without an *intesa*. The Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI) signed an *intesa* with the state on 27 of February 1987, which was implemented by Law 101/1989. The situation with Islam is different: the absence of both a hierarchical structure and a central authority has led to multiple interpretations of the religious message – all equally legitimate – and to the spread of various versions of Islam, thus making it impossible to define a single entity capable of representing all Muslims.<sup>4</sup> Several actors have tried to establish themselves as 'official' interlocutors of Muslim communities, presenting draft versions of an *intesa* in order to organize their relationships with the state, but without so far reaching an agreement.

It has been said that the signing of an *intesa* is the means by which a religious body can ensure the allocation of certain rights. We are attempting to understand whether the presence of an *intesa* may have produced consequences regarding religious alimentary rules. We already had a chance to observe that

4 For some authors this requirement does not seem to be necessary. Pierluigi Consorti (2010: 175) states that the absence of a unitary representation does not prevent the initiation of negotiations. In fact, it is not comprehensible why, if with non-Catholic Christian churches and Buddhists respectively the state has reached seven and two agreements, it is not possible to do the same with Islam.

the respect of religious dietary laws can be included – through a correct interpretation of the norm – in article 19 of the constitution. However, this consideration does not automatically render all dietary practices licit. If religious freedom collides with other constitutionally-protected rights, it is necessary to balance the interests. Following this line, some authors have begun to doubt the legitimacy of ritual slaughter, suggesting that it contravenes the animals' right to protection which – even though is not explicitly specified in the constitution – 'has acquired a growing importance in the consciousness of Italians' (National Bioethics Committee 2003: 12). This has not prevented the National Bioethics Committee from reaching a conclusion which renders ritual slaughtering licit, due to the special recognition in our constitution of the duty to protect religious freedoms and which recommends the use of tools which do not 'conflict with the ritual slaughtering ... and minimize animal suffering' (*ibid.* 12).

Regarding dietary laws, article 5.2 of the UCEI agreement states that 'slaughtering taking place according to the Jewish rite continues to be regulated by the Ministerial Decree June 11, 1980 ... in accordance with Jewish law and traditions'. The rule does not contain any innovation about animal slaughter, but gives coverage to the Ministerial Decree, binding the state not to change it, except after prior agreement with the UCEI.

Another provision dealing with dietary laws is article 6.2, which admits the right to respect the requirements concerning Jewish food without incurring costs to the local institutions in which they are located; this is applied to people in the military, hospitals, nursing homes, public assistance and institutions for prevention and punishment.

Similar provisions are contained in three draft proposals put forward by Muslim associations. Regarding ritual slaughter, as in the Jewish case, religious needs are fully met by the Ministerial Decree of 1980, thus Muslim organizations have adopted in their draft the Jewish norm with the addition of only subtle changes. However, the given provision and the subsequent amendments do not provide the absolute protection of Muslim needs, due to the lack of an agreement. This means that the state may change the law or even prohibit this type of butchering (Chizzoniti 2010: 37).

The drafts also give believers who are compulsorily placed in schools, prisons and hospitals the right to have access to an Islamic diet. We have to distinguish between associations intending to ensure this right without incurring costs to the institutions hosting the believers, such as the *Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia* (UCOII, 'Union of the Islamic Communities of Italy') and *Associazione Musulmani Italiani* (AMI, 'Italian Muslim Association'), from the *Comunità Religiosa Islamica* (CoReIs, 'Islamic Religious Community')



draft, in which the lack of reference to the charges suggests that they should be paid by the state.

Regarding dietary laws, the presence or absence of an agreement does not seem to produce any differences between Muslims and Jews. In the absence of a law concerning religious freedom – which shall be adopted to allow everyone to follow their religious dietary rules – believers' alimentary needs seem to be protected by law through a correct interpretation of Article 19 of the constitution (Castro 1996: 278; Chizzoniti 2010: 45; Mancuso 2012: 16). What is missing, in fact, is the political will to give satisfaction to those needs. Not long ago it was rare to run enterprise agreements or good practices, such as in school canteens, without generating complaints from the majority population. The arrival of the crisis – which is connected to the problem of economic sustainability of the interventions – and the fear of succumbing to a hypothetical clash of civilizations, has meant that the fulfilment of these requests occurs less often (D'Angelo and Fiorita 2009: 98).

### Respect for alimentary rules in schools and prisons

As Antonio Chizzoniti (2010: 39) reveals, the theme of religious alimentary prescriptions was not properly evaluated by Italian law, probably because the most part of the Italian population belongs to a confession, the Catholic one, which does not impose dietary rules on its believers. Changes in the religious framework, specifically that Islam is coming close to being the second largest religion in Italy, actually impose the need to pay attention to the needs of minorities, in order to ensure a full fruition of the constitutionally-recognized rights. Therefore, it is necessary to find the appropriate tools to satisfy specific alimentary demands – which today more than ever are relevant in all areas of human activity – by keeping the principles of equality, *laicità*, and churches–state separation as benchmarks.

The recent focus on religious dietary laws had as a first consequence the production of a set of rules at various levels which attempted to provide answers to those needs. Besides the unilateral legislation about the ritual butchering and the agreement – currently limited to the provisions of the Jewish *intesa* and the one concluded, but not yet approved by law, with Jehovah's Witnesses – there is a proliferation of circulars, opinions, and local-level agreements reached between public institutions and representatives of religious communities in the area.

The evolution of a multi-faith society has triggered the transformation of public spaces, among which school seems to be the 'perfect sounding board'

(Freni 2008: 797). School classrooms are the perfect places in which to find learners of different religions sitting together, and where access to religiously-based rights occur more firmly than in other contexts. Hence schools have the difficult duty of educating learners to accept diversity in order to become well-rounded members of society who will avoid the segregation and fragmentation of the social fabric, something which is not congruent with the principles of a democratic society (Briccola 2009: 50).

Alimentary prescriptions play a fundamental role within such a context, regarding both respect for religious freedom and the integration of minorities. The presence of multiple credos presupposes rearrangements of the school canteen system, in order to allow each student to get the proper nutrition without violating his/her traditions. The National Bioethics Committee, in its report on 'Differentiated and Intercultural Alimentation' (2003: 12), observes how 'the theme of food is used instrumentally, to sacrifice the concrete interests of people, with the intention of imposing one or another government strategy on immigration'. Moreover, the committee believes that – in order to protect religious freedom fully – students should have the opportunity to consume meals prepared according to the principles of their faith, through the preparation of different menus or by providing the opportunity for students to bring food from outside. In addressing the problem of the unsustainable costs of differentiated food catering, the Committee contends that it is possible to find ways of sustaining foreign alimentary traditions and enhancing those of local communities as well.

National school catering guidelines issued by the Italian Health Minister in 2010, specifying that the presence of foreign students is a structural feature of our school system, recognize the validity of maintaining a differentiated alimentary regime to safeguard cultural and religious traditions by replacing banned foods with licit ones according to the demands of parents and without a medical certificate (Italian Health Minister 2010: 16).

The regional strategic guidelines concerning school catering also accommodate the national ones in providing choices that adhere to philosophical and religious prescriptions. In Lombardy, for example, it is sufficient to present a formal request by the students' parents to the people in charge of services. The document also emphasizes the need to provide menus for bigger communities according to specific guidelines from the local health service, in order to avoid nutritional imbalances due to menu variations.

The guidelines in Emilia Romagna provide for, when possible, the replacement of banned foods with similar certified *kosher* or *halal* items, 'or foods nutritionally equivalent and appreciated by the student or his/her family, subject

to the satisfaction of the principles of taste, safety and nutrition provided for the normal menu' (Linee strategiche per la ristorazione scolastica in Emilia Romagna 2009: 65).

At the local level, many municipalities have created a Charter of School Service where they specify the services offered and the quali-quantitative standards they wish to maintain. These rules are based on a directive of the Prime Minister issued on 27 January 1994, which sets out the principles regarding the supply of public services. These services, even if carried out under concession, must be based on principles of efficiency and effectiveness, impartiality and equality, continuity, and with the participation of citizens in order to protect the right to have a proper service delivery and to foster collaboration with their providers. The Legislative Decree 286/1999, at article 11, outlines this principle thus: 'national and local public services are delivered in order to promote the improvement of quality and ensure the protection of citizens and users and their participation in the forms, also associative, recognized by law, to the assessment and definition of quality standards'. The important role that these documents could play in setting up targets that are immediately verifiable, leads the lawmaker to make this charter mandatory (Law 244/2007, article 2, paragraph 461).

The satisfaction of alimentary needs in school canteens is strictly related to the availability of economic resources – drastically reduced following the financial crisis – and the reassertion of a native's national identity, which often ends up coinciding with the rediscovery of his/her religious values.

Most of the Italian schools offer their students the chance to access different menus, by filling out a form to ensure the elimination of certain foods or substitution with others that are nutritionally equivalent. Some schools are completely opposed to these requests, as in the case of Adro, where in 2010, a municipal resolution has downgraded the principle of religious freedom to a health problem, allowing students access to different menus for religious reasons only after presentation of a medical certificate (Bossi *et al.* 2013: 36; Fiorita 2012: 152). Another example is Castel Mella where in 2007, a circular not to grant alterations to the menu based on religious reasons was approved except in the case of local traditions (Bossi *et al.* 2013: 37), thus introducing *de facto* unequal treatment on the basis of professed religion. Thus, while the administration of a 'catholic' menu is considered acceptable, since Catholicism is part of the local tradition, the requests of religious minorities of recent settlement cannot be accepted. Nevertheless, as Walter Citti notes (2007), 'in terms of the protection of religious freedom an *a priori* refusal to adapt public services to the religious needs of the users is not acceptable'. The risk that the satisfaction of

any demand for food produces excessive legal fragmentation (Chizzoniti 2010: 25) is not, in fact, a valid reason to prevent the public authority from managing both student needs and the proper functioning of public services (Citti 2007).

The satisfaction of religious alimentary needs is sometimes hampered by the reaffirmation of a national religious identity, triggered by the pluralism that increasingly characterizes Italy. For example, consider the circular promulgated by the municipality of Rome asserting the obligation to serve meat-free menus on Lent Fridays in primary and secondary schools, which fully violates the principles of equality and *laicità* (De Gregorio 2010: 61). To confirm that this provision reflects the desire for a reaffirmation of native inhabitants' identity rather than the implementation of religious freedom, it is sufficient to note that all the schools allow students to exclude certain foods from their menu, and that the canonical prescriptions require abstention from consumption of meat only from the age of fourteen (*ibid.* 61).

A significant issue for Muslim students concerns relative bans, as it is usual to encounter these periods during the scholastic year. Nevertheless, there is no single solution for this: in some schools, parents may decide to anticipate the exemption of their children by signing a permission form, while in other schools learners who are fasting are placed in empty classrooms during the break.<sup>5</sup> The obligation of fasting may be reconciled with some Qur'anic readings, according to which soul and body are intimately connected. This implies that only a healthy body and mind may fully serve God, thus a wide number of believers are free from these impositions, including minors until the age of puberty. Other factors, such as the impossibility of staying away from school for an entire month and the energy needed to cope with studies may be seen as important exemptions.

If the substitution of illicit food has never been a real problem, it is not the same regarding butchering rituals. It is unusual to find canteens which are able to offer meat butchered according to religious rituals, for this usually causes some controversy. This situation has met with many complaints from families and animalist associations, not agreeing with such a 'bloody tradition'. The municipality of Albenga tried to introduce *halal* meat to allow Muslim students to eat without violating the precepts of their faith. However, this proposal met

5 The school regulation of Voltri states: 'Muslim pupils who observe Ramadan, if they do not go home, will be placed temporarily in another class during lunch break and recalled during recreational activities with their schoolmates'. See the Voltri regulation 2014.

with a wall of criticism, headed by the National Society for the Protection of Animals (2011), which stated that ‘it cannot be accepted that a secular and civil country should admit a type of butchering that offends the majority of the Italians’. Nevertheless, they forget that the secularity they are talking about is meant not to be indifferent to other religions, but is the state’s guarantee for the protection of religious freedoms in the context of a regime of confessional and cultural pluralism (decision of the Constitutional Court no. 203/1989). The obligation of equidistance and impartiality towards religions does not prevent the state from realizing measures that fully guarantee religious freedoms, and these measures are definitely undeniably inside of prisons, schools and factory canteens, where individuals cannot satisfy religious needs on their own.

The polemical arguments discussed above did not prevent the municipality of Albenga from addressing the situation by arranging a form by which *halal* meat can be chosen.

The municipality of Ferrara moved in the same direction, by including the possibility of removing from the menu pork and beef and adding *halal* meat.

In addition, the municipality of Palermo also moved in the direction mentioned described above. For example, in the rules for kindergartens it states that ‘the school meals service must strike a balance with a menu that takes care of the requirements and prohibitions of the culture and religion of the children (for example requires compliance with the preparation food with *halal* meat for Muslim children)’.

The respect for these rules inside prisons is a good litmus test as to whether the penitentiary administration can support prisoners in meeting their religious needs, since they live in an area of limited movement, which precludes individual fulfilment (Fiorita 2010: 9). Inside prisons, religion takes on *other* meanings, due to the tripartite condition of being prisoner, foreigner and believer in a minority credo.

Religious freedom in prisons is regulated by Law 354/1975 and by the implementing regulation (Decree of the President of the Republic 431/1976), which marks a break with the previous norm. In fact, for the first time, prisoners have the freedom to profess their own religious (or otherwise) belief, receive instruction in it, practise their own form of worship and display their religious symbols. Concerning food, this law only says that ‘prisoners will be provided with a sufficient and healthy alimentation; adequate in terms of age, sex, health, job, season and climate’ (article 9). There are no references to religious needs, maybe because when the law was issued, the population was mainly Catholic, and that credo does not impose restrictive alimentary rules.

Renewed attention to prisoners' religious needs can be found in the Decree of the President of the Republic of 30 June 2000 (no. 230), whose provisions pay special attention to religion, since it is considered to be a key factor in achieving a complete rehabilitation of prisoners. The impact of the reform, however, is far from providing full protection – at least in the case here considered – of the religious freedom of prisoners (Fiorita 2010: 9). The awareness of religious pluralism that characterizes Italy and the consideration that prison reflects significantly the dynamics of the multicultural and multi-religious society (Fabretti and Rosati 2012: 3), leads us to think that the institutions are taking a greater account of the needs of prisoners and internees. But the innovation of article 11, paragraph 4 which says that different needs regarding alimentation have to be considered, is immediately reduced by the sentence 'when it is possible' (National Bioethics Committee 2006: 5).

The Decree of the President of the Republic of 13 May 2005, 'Approval of the Policy Document on Immigration and Foreigners Inside the National Territory, for the Period 2004–6', seems to be more accurate concerning alimentary religious needs. It allows Muslims to observe Ramadan and eat after sundown, and allows differentiated diets into juvenile prisons, to respond to the various needs of different religions. Nevertheless, the document has been criticized as it may produce collateral effects, since the legislation's explicit reference to Muslims may be considered a contrary form of discrimination (Chizzoniti 2010: 40).

The 'Charter of Rights and Duties of Prisoners' celebrates a new direction. It is delivered to each prisoner or internee, and contains extracts of Law 354/1975, from the Decree of the President of the Republic 230/2000, which contain the internal rules of the institute in which prisoner is located, and other dispositions (including supranational ones). It states the right to have an appropriate alimentation and to purchase food and comfort items without specifying religious motivations.<sup>6</sup>

A concerted effort was made by the protocols concluded between Minister of Justice and Calabria (2003), Apulia (2008) and Tuscany (2010), through which parties undertake to protect prisoners' religious freedoms, as well as food and prayers. These documents deserve particular attention because of the role regions may play in this matter. Even though the *intesa* is the basic means by

6 The same consideration can be made with reference to the 'Charter of the Rights and Duties of Minors who Encounter the Juvenile Justice Services', which recognizes the right to ask for a different diet without considering religious motivation, by choosing a more neutral reference to 'any reason'.

which to regulate the relationships between state and Church, the regions play a fundamental role in meeting the requirements of various religious communities.

We can pinpoint two pieces of evidence by bringing the practices implemented in prisons into the scheme outlined above. Firstly, all the prisons considered allow their convicts the opportunity to respect relative and absolute bans. The possibility of asking for different food for religious reasons is formally initiated at the moment of entering the prison or informally during the recognitions of food-carriers (Fabretti and Rosati 2012: 65). As opposed to what we noted regarding schools, religious freedom has not been downgraded to a health status; in fact, no medical certificate is required to get a different menu. Prisons respond to these needs, mainly coming from Muslims, by putting together alternative menus where pork can be substituted with other types of food according to the ministerial lists.

Every year when Ramadan begins the Department of Prisons Office for the treatment of prisoners issues a circular containing directions as to how to facilitate compliance with fasting and prayer (including the collective), with which prisons also conform by means of internal service orders.

In the prison of Imperia, to meet the needs of Muslims during the period of Ramadan, a Muslim who prepares the food to be distributed after sunset joins the cook. In other prisons, for those who request it, the meal is delivered baked in a one-day package<sup>7</sup> or raw, ready to be cooked in the cell<sup>8</sup> within the time scheduled for the end of the activities in sections. This last option actually may generate discriminatory situations to those who cannot afford a cooker or are isolated.

Cooking methods have to be considered in a different way, since the number of penitentiaries providing meat which has been butchered according to religious rituals is very limited.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the replacing of illicit food, most of

- 7 The delivery of baked food takes place in the Institute for Juvenile Criminal Florence and in the prisons of Enna, Reggio Emilia, Terni and Vicenza. In the latter case, to the Muslim prisoner observing Ramadan is given an extra litre of milk along with other foods after sunset and/or in the early hours of the morning.
- 8 Raw food is given to Muslim prisoners who request it in the prisons of Biella, Bolzano, Caltanissetta, Castrovillari, Cosenza, Enna, Gorizia, CC Pagliarelli of Palermo, Palmi, Perugia, Pesaro, Reggio Emilia, Trento, Treviso, and Udine. In Padua before the beginning of Ramadan, the people responsible of the kitchen agree with a representation of Muslim prisoners for the satisfaction of the alimentary religious needs.
- 9 The meat served is slaughtered according to Islamic requirements in Bolzano and Pesaro. In Imperia the meat slaughtered according to religious norms has a certification issued by the supplier, comes packaged separately and is prepared separately from ordinary food.



the time prisoners are allowed to buy *halal* or *kosher* food externally. Once again, the satisfaction of religious needs is closely related to the economic means of each individual. The solution adopted by some Muslims is considering their detention regime as a 'state of need': if there is some resistance against the consumption of pork, the consumption of meat not butchered in the ritual way seems not to be a problem.

*Halal* food may turn into *haram* if it comes into contact with something considered impure, and in jails, this problem arises in relation to the fridges. Only in a very few cases does the allocation of space take into consideration religious needs.<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, it should be appropriate to highlight a judgment that underlines how religious freedom is abundantly related to the discretion of the penitentiary administrations. In September 2013 a Buddhist prisoner, subjected to the principles from article 41b of the penal code,<sup>11</sup> appealed to the Supreme Court (Cassazione Penale no. 4147/2013) against the magistrate's decision regarding two claims concerning infringements of religious freedom. The prisoner was denied the opportunity to meet a Zen Buddhist teacher, as well as to have vegetarian food. The magistrate merely sent a communication to the prisoner claiming that the situation 'had to be faced following technical modes not depending on himself', while, with respect to the request for vegetarian food, he cited an older ordinance suggesting the adoption of 'measures to provide food in appropriate ways, even considering switching to other suppliers if necessary'.

Referring to the judgment no. 135/2013 of the Constitutional Court, according to which if the complaint 'refers to the alleged infringement of a right and not on organizational or functional aspects of the institute, the procedure takes on a jurisdictional nature', the Supreme Court considered that the behaviour of the prison administration is a violation of religious freedom and, therefore, annulled the contested decision since magistrate's communication was not considered 'appropriate for both procedure and content'.<sup>12</sup>

10 The division of fridges takes into consideration the religious needs of the prisoners in Padova and Palermo (Pagliarelli). In Alessandria the prisoners are used to organize themselves in an informal way.

11 41b is an article of the Italian penal code. It is referred to as the 'rigorous' imprisonment (*carcere duro*).

12 The European Court of Human Rights was appealed to concerning the administration of 'religious food' in prison two times. In the case of 'Jakobski vs. Poland', the appellant complained of a violation of freedom of worship on the basis that the prisons in which he was located had denied him the provision of a vegetarian menu, in accordance to his religion. In the first instance this request had been fulfilled on the basis of medical reasons. Once medical reasons were no longer presented, the diet was not assured.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to investigate the relationship between dietary laws and religious freedoms as guaranteed by the Italian system, and to analyse the answers provided by schools and prisons to the citizens/believers referring to accommodation or rejection of dietary prescriptions.

As stated previously, religious freedom concerns not only ritual acts, but also behaviours which are religiously-based, such as diet. Referring to alimentary rules, the presence or absence of an agreement with the state does not seem to produce any differences between Muslims and religions holding an *intesa*, since the believers' alimentary needs seem to be protected by law through the correct interpretation of article 19 of the constitution.

The problem is the different answer given by public institutions to these requests. Both institutions considered represent the evolution into a multi-faith society, although schools are the places where the access to religiously-based rights occur more firmly, maybe for fear that children can get away from their parents' religion. In schools food has been used as a tool to reaffirm the values of the majority, almost for fear of succumbing to that hypothetical 'clash of civilizations' suggested by Samuel P. Huntington (1996).

In the case of prisons we are dealing with institutions which are at the margins and where what happens is of little interest to the public. The research conducted shows that the alimentary religious needs are satisfied in a uniform way throughout the country, highlighting that there is only a problem of costs.

At any rate the most important issues are those regarding organization and costs, especially in this period of crisis in the welfare state. One solution in this sense is a shift of the costs of meals to the religious bodies, although the risk is to create differences between confessions.

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The Court, referring to what has already been stated in the ruling 'Cha'are Shalom ve Tsedek vs. France', decided that 'dietary rules can be considered a direct expression of beliefs in practice in the sense of article 9', thus the refusal of the prison authorities were in violation of articles 9 and 14 also because other prisoners have a menu compliant with religious norms. In the same sense the ruling 'Vartic vs. Romania' of 2013.

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# The sacred foodscapes of Thai Buddhist temples in Sweden

KATARINA PLANK

Thai Buddhist communities are by far the fastest-growing Buddhist establishments in Sweden, and - contrary to other Buddhist congregations that are mainly clustered in the cities - Thai Buddhist temples can be found in sparsely-populated areas and rural parts of Sweden. This article aims to document and analyse the 'foodscape' of diasporic Thai Buddhism in Sweden. In particular the article identifies and discusses five different strategies used by local communities in order to support their temples in urban as well as rural areas: 1) local support, 2) pre-cooking and freezing, 3) pre-organised almsgiving in nearby cities, 4) change of food gifts, 5) change of the *nikaya*. A temple's location in a rural area can drive forward a reinterpretation and adaptation of the monk's rules, and contribute to a changing composition of food gifts. Food performs several functions. In addition to the religious functions that are associated with almsgiving, food can also serve as a means of generating bonding and bridging civic social capital, and providing economic income to temples.

## Introduction

What to eat and with whom to eat are questions that shape everyday religious practices and are at the core of lived religions (Harvey 2013, McGuire 2008). Since religion is one of the main ways by which migrants build networks (Levitt 2007: 107), foodways become a prominent means of maintaining and negotiating that religion. The term 'foodways' here refers to 'a set of beliefs and practices that govern consumption', that is to say, how food is acquired, prepared, displayed and used, as well as how and where it is consumed (Zeller *et al.* 2014: xviii).

Early on Buddhism became a migratory religion, and thus the role of food in Buddhist traditions has a long tradition of continuity and change. Food norms and practices have been challenged and adjusted whenever Buddhist religious establishments have spread to new places. Not only have culturally-embedded food norms linked to ascetism been negotiated; new institutional developments and establishments have also contributed to the development

of new food norms. Today, with increased global flows of migration, religious foodways connected with Buddhist traditions encounter new challenges. In Sweden, Thai Buddhist communities are by far the fastest-growing Buddhist establishments, and – contrary to other Buddhist congregations that are mainly clustered in cities – Thai Buddhist temples can be found in sparsely-populated areas and in rural parts of Sweden. This article aims to document and analyse the ‘foodscape’ of diasporic Thai Buddhism in Sweden; the special landscape of social and economic relations in regard to food that moulds the diasporic space of Thai Buddhism in Sweden.

Following Kim Knott’s emphasis that religions need to be studied ‘in localities and particular places’ (2005: 3) this article aims to explore the ‘trajectories of adaptation’ (Ballard 1994) that religious foodways may undergo, and it does so by focussing on the ‘diaspora space’ (Brah 1996: 181) of Thai Buddhism in Sweden; that space in the temples and other religious sites where food is prepared, handled and offered.

How do the Thai Buddhist congregations support their monks? How is the religious giving of food organised in urban and rural areas? Who is being fed by the food that is being prepared and served in diasporic Thai Buddhist contexts? What functions may food have in diasporic Thai Buddhists contexts?

The article further aims to document the foodscape of Thai Buddhism as it is practised in Sweden, and in particular the strategies used by local communities to support their temples. For this analysis the article will make use of the locative, translocative and supralocative categories (Tweed 1997) in order to analyse how food operates at different levels in the ‘cosmization’ (Vásquez 2011) of Thai Buddhism in Sweden.

## Methods

During 2012 and 2013 multi-sited fieldwork was carried out, including participant observations, at nine Thai Buddhist temples in Sweden (at Fredrika, Åsele, Brunflo, Bispgården, Sundsvall, Borlänge, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Eslöv) spreading geographically from the north to the south of the country. Some of the observations have been made on the basis of just one or two visits; others on the basis of recurrent observations in the same temple. Observations have been made to cover weekdays, weekends and festival days, over a total time period of approximately one month. The fieldwork included the visual documentation of material manifestations of foodways (photographs) as well as notes, recordings and the tasting and eating of food. Interviews were conducted with food providers, as well as monks, to gain an understanding of how



the provision of food is organised and how the food is being prepared outside the temples. An additional study of literature was carried out in order to gain information on historical and contemporary food practices in India, China and Thailand. All of these data sources are instrumental in providing information for the present study.

### Thai Buddhism in Sweden

In Europe, Buddhists constitute the third largest religious migrant group – after Christians and Muslims – with about one million immigrant Buddhists. In recent decades the establishment of Asian Buddhist congregations has been motivated by different types of migration: refugee, work and marriage migrations. In total, Sweden has probably some 40,000 Asian Buddhists and some 5,000 converts (Fredriksson 2013: 115).<sup>1</sup>

Today the largest Buddhist migrant group in the country is the Thai Buddhists, who come primarily because of love relationships – i.e., marriage migration. However many do also come to work in Sweden, especially since Sweden's legislation concerning migrant workers has been liberalised.

Although Buddhists in Sweden still represent a minority of the population – probably around 0.4–0.5 per cent, Thai Buddhists have in recent years topped the statistics in terms of work migration and family reunification according to data from the Migration Board.<sup>2</sup> Unlike other Buddhist diasporic groups which are based on family immigration, the demographic profile in the Thai group is strongly gendered: 8 out of 10 Thais who come to Sweden are women. This individually-based migration means that they tend to settle with their partners in different areas all over Sweden, and the establishment of new Thai Buddhist temples reflects the features of this particular demographic group. In contrast to other Buddhist groups that are clustered around the major cities of Gothenburg, Stockholm and Malmö (Plank 2009), Thais are therefore one of the few immigrant groups that are distributed over the whole country including both rural and urban areas (Hübinette 2009). In addition to marriage migration, the Thais have in recent years (since 2006) constituted the largest group of labour migrants, the majority of which come for seasonal work in agriculture

1 The estimation is based on Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project 2014.

2 See *Migrationsverket* (the Migration Board) nd.a and nd.b.

and forestry. Especially in the northern areas of Sweden, Thais are engaged in berry-picking during the summer and autumn.<sup>3</sup>

Following the migration pattern, Thai Buddhist institutions have in the last couple of years expanded rapidly from north to south in both urban and rural areas. This development is largely initiated from the grassroots level, according to the religious needs of diasporic Thai Buddhists. The creation of new Buddhist temples and congregations, as well as the extension of invitations to religious specialists are therefore largely dependent on this development. The development in Sweden reflects a transnationalization of Thai Buddhism that has been taking place since the late twentieth century and has grown out of several global factors: growing numbers of Thai migrant communities outside the borders of Thailand; missionary activities supported by the Thai *sangha* and the Thai government; and a growing global interest in Buddhism that has led to the creation of various (transnational) international communities that include travel and exchanges for the purpose of taking part in Buddhist teachings and meditation (Kitiarsa 2010). Wendy Cadge and Sidhorn Sangdhanoo (2005: 15–16) have noted two founding patterns for Thai Buddhist temples in the USA: a grassroots demand based on collectively amassing resources, and as the consequence of a schism within an existing temple organisation, leading to dividing the temple into two. Divided Thai communities have also been noted by James Placzek and Ian Baird (2010) in British Columbia, Canada. In Sweden these patterns of establishment (grassroots demand and schisms) are also to be noted; however there are two additional patterns detectable, one exemplified by a vision-driven attempt to establish a temple at Fredrika, and an official representation of Thai Buddhism at Ragunda to complement the only royal pavilion that has been built outside Thailand. These religious sites, where the Thai state religion is maintained and supported, qualify as what Rogers Brubaker (2005: 1) defines as diasporic: that is to say, they are characterised by dispersion, having a homeland orientation and being boundary maintaining. As Steven Vertovec (2004: 282) has suggested the terms ‘diaspora’, ‘migration’ and ‘transnationalism’ are related, but not necessarily found together: ‘Diasporas

- 3 During 2013 Thais comprised the second largest group of partner/spouse migrants (with 1,665 individuals) in comparison with the year 1986 when Thais comprised the twelfth largest group with 200 individuals who came to live with a partner or spouse. From the year 2007, when the Swedish immigration laws were relaxed, Thais have been the largest group receiving work permits. In 2013 more than three times more Thais have come through work permits than living permits. A total of 6,509 work permits were given to Thais in 2013 according to statistics from the Swedish Migration Board: *Migrationsverket* nd.a, nd.b and nd.c.

arise from some form of migration, but not all migration involves diasporic consciousness; all transnational communities comprise diasporas, but not all diasporas develop transnationalism'. To what extent Thais in Sweden can be regarded as developing a diasporic consciousness and expressing diasporic identity is not under scrutiny in this article. Rather it is 'the production and reproduction of social and cultural phenomena' (Vertovec 1997: 289) which may be termed Thai Buddhism, and thus the diasporic space of the temples and other religious sites that is being looked at here.

Thai migrants tend to visit the temples in connection with major national festivals (New Year celebrations, Mothers' Day, Songkran, etc.), as well as personal events such as births and the anniversaries of the death of loved ones, and to a lesser extent in order to attend major Buddhist ceremonies. The temples serve as nodes for Thais living in Sweden, and the temples' catchment areas usually extend over several localities, sometimes involving two to three hours of travelling time. Visiting the temples – and inviting monks into private homes – enables Thais in various cities to come together. Meanwhile, the temples are also transnational arenas for Thai Buddhism where the monks' networks extend across national boundaries. The monks commonly travel between temples in the Nordic countries, as well as to temples in Thailand.

### The foodscape of diasporic Thai temples in Sweden

The notion of 'foodscape' has been developed using the concept of 'scape' as it is introduced by Arjun Appadurai in his work *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996). He identifies five different 'scapes': finascapes, ideoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes and ethnocapes, based on the idea that people live in constantly changing and shifting 'worlds' that are shaped and influenced by these 'scapes'. H. Brembeck and B. Johansson (2010) elaborate on Appadurai's work, adding 'foodscape' to the typology. A foodscape is 'centered around a food environment' (Mackendrick 2014: 16), and an institutional foodscape includes 'the physical, organizational and sociocultural space in which [one] encounters meals, food and food-related issues' (Mikkelsen 2011: 215). Gisèle Yasmeeen (2008) points out the importance and role of food as a medium in which social relationships are shaped. One interesting aspect of the concept of 'foodscape' is not to note *what kind* of food is eaten, but to understand *where* it is consumed and the social and economic circumstances surrounding its consumption. Yasmeeen thus emphasises 'the spatialization of foodways and the interconnections between people, food and places. [It] is a term used to describe a process of viewing place in which food is used as a lens to bring into focus selected human relations' (Yasmeeen 2008: 525).

When food is used as part of a religious world making activity, this needs to be understood in terms of the logic and history inherent in the religious tradition (Anderson 2005: 161). The role of food in Buddhist traditions rests both on historical continuity and changes that have taken place when the religious representatives and institutions have been established in new cultural milieus.

Thai Buddhism is part of what can be termed ‘a Pali imaginaire’ (Collins 1998: 1); a shared set of texts, doctrines, values, stories and images that are linked to practices and festivals in Theravadan Buddhism with all its local variations

throughout South and Southeast Asia. Theravadan Buddhist temples constitute – both socio-logically and geographically – the centre of most villages in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Sri Lanka (Bankston and Hidalgo 2008: 59). Theravadan Buddhist foodways has its roots in an ascetic Indian environment in which the early *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* (monks and nuns) lived eremitical lives and wandered around begging for alms. As the wandering life gave way to the establishment of monastic settlements, the Theravadan monks were still not allowed to work or marry and their daily activities remained dependent on interactions with the laity which provided them with food, medicines and clothing. The establishment of monasteries and more permanent living establishments also allowed for the storage of medicines and uncooked staple foods. When Buddhism met with East Asian culture the ideals of asceticism were difficult to accept in the context of the life-affirming Chinese culture, and therefore



Kitchen view at Wat Dalarnavanaram. The picture on the wall depicts Sujata's meritorious deed of giving milk pudding to the *bodhisattva* prior to the awakening. Photograph by Katarina Plank.

new approaches to food's religious role developed: work was permitted for the ordained, allowing monks and nuns to handle and cook food themselves, and vegetarianism was advocated (Mather 1981, Zysk 1991).

Buddhism can however be regarded as 'a double religion' which has two sets of rules for ordained and lay people respectively (Berglie 1996). The rules that govern monastic life – the *vinaya* – are thus not a requisite for the laity. The monks' rules permit them to accept cooked food and eat it between sunrise and midday; after this time of the day food is not permitted to be saved. Staple foods, however, such as uncooked rice, may be given to temples and stored.

One of the major dividing lines between the Mahayana and Theravada traditions is that monasteries are organised differently around food and diet, which also affects the ways in which new religious institutions are established when Asian Buddhists migrate outside their home countries. Within Mahayana traditions monks and nuns are allowed to cook their food, while the monks in Theravada traditions depend on the daily ritual giving of food. This ritualised giving of food is organised in different ways in Theravadan countries. In Thailand, the monks' eating habits are governed by the internal rules of the respective monastic Thammayut and Mahanikay orders (*nikayas*). The Thammayut, having emerged as a result of reforms initiated by King Mongkut in order to modernize the Buddhist tradition, has a close connection to the royal house.

The *nikayas* are not important in terms of lay devotion and the functions of merit-making (Taylor 1993: 296), however the *nikaya* affiliation of monks at a temple does have practical consequences in terms of the handling of food. Their disciplinary practices differ, as Mahanikay monks eat two meals a day while the Thammayut monks only eat one meal. Thammayut monks preach in the vernacular languages, while Mahanikay monks recite memorised texts in Pali. An overwhelming majority of temples in Thailand belong to the Mahanikay order (Swearer 1999: 217).

However the centralised *sangha* in Thailand has been fragmented 'into smaller communities of faiths and believers' (Whalen-Bridge and Kitiarsa 2013: 6), a diversity that is also detectable as Thais migrate and re-establish their religious practices and institutions outside their homeland.

Thai Buddhism in Sweden is a bricolage of local and global elements, where the diversity of Thai religion is reflected. The first Thai Buddhist temple in Sweden was established in the year 1985, and fifteen years later, in the year 2000, only two Thai temples were to be found. Fifteen years later again however, in 2015, there are now some 20 formal congregations (registered organisations) and approximately 14 temples in which one or more monks live. About

half of them belong to the Thammayut *nikaya* and half to the Mahanikay (a reverse proportion compared to Thailand), whilst two temples belong to the Dhammakaya movement.

In the following I will therefore discuss the *food transactions* taking place in the diasporic space which constitutes Thai Buddhism in Sweden, that is to say, those different Thai religious contexts which involve establishing food connections between lay people (mostly women) and human and non-human beings, some of which are visible and others are not. I will then turn to the *food logistics* involved in establishing and maintaining a Theravadin Buddhist temple in diaspora, and conclude with some remarks on the functions that food may have in Thai religious contexts in Sweden.

### Ritual boundaries and gender

Ritual boundaries in Thai temples are highly gendered, and made manifest by the cooking and consumption of food. As a social institution, Thai Buddhism has strictly defined gender roles (only men can become fully ordained monks, and they may not have any physical contact with women). Originally the Theravada *sangha*, or congregation, consisted of both male and female fully ordained monastics (*bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*). However, women have never been a part of the monastic Thai *sangha*, for two reasons: the *bhikkhuni* lineage, with its full ordination of women, died out sometime during the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE and had not spread to Thailand before then. Additionally, in 1928, the Thai Supreme Council enacted a law forbidding monks to give the higher ordination to women. Despite this, there is still room for women who want to live a religious life fully; they can either become vernacular ‘nuns’ referred to as *mae chii*, or as in a few cases, seek full ordination in another Theravadan country, mainly Sri Lanka, where the reintroduction of full ordination has enabled women to become female monastics. Women are therefore in a subordinate position in the religious field, where they are excluded from the Thai *sangha* (Lindberg Falk 2008: 96–7).

However, the most important boundary is not between men and women, but between two spheres: *lokiya*, the secular and worldly sphere, and *lokuttara*, the other-worldly. Through the centuries this division has also become highly gendered (Lindberg Falk 2008: 101). Amongst the Buddhist laity, made up of both men and women, practitioners follow the five or eight moral precepts that are associated with the worldly sphere. Their responsibility is to support people associated with the spiritual realm (the other-worldly sphere), who are following ten or more precepts (i.e. novice monks or fully ordained monks).



This division is reproduced in the Thai temples in Swedish diaspora, and is also reflected in the way in which food is provided.

Observations made at a majority of Thai temples in Sweden reveal a pattern of participation which is divided along lines of gender and ethnicity. Most of the visitors coming to the temples are women between the estimated ages of 25 to 60 years. Younger (childless) women tend to come to the temple in small groups of friends; mothers tend to be accompanied by their children until the children reach the age of ten; women over 45 can sometimes bring their small grandchildren (often children up to three or four years of age).

The temples serve to a large extent as ethnic, cultural and religious centres, however not only ethnic Thais come to the temples. Some of the immigrant women bring with them their Swedish partners/husbands, and other Asian nationals can also be noticed visiting the temples (including lay men and women from Singapore, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, India, Burma). On special occasions (i.e. for instance on birthdays, New Year and festival days), some of the women may want to intensify their religious practice by dressing in white, taking the eight precepts, and staying on for a couple of days as *chii phram* (temporary nuns, but without having undergone ordination ritual and without shaving their heads as do nuns, *mae chii*). When they live as temporary nuns in the temples, their religious position is incorporated into the ritual and gendered boundaries that are created the temple, and their special status is also observable in relation to food. The monks usually sit on a raised platform, where their individual positions also reflect seniority: the monk who has been ordained the longest sits closest to the altar and is given food first. The food is then passed on to the more junior monks. Below the platform, a clearly defined and separate space is created for the temporary nuns – often they sit on a mat on the floor. Members of the laity gather on the open floor before the altar, where they sit facing the monks and the temporary nuns. This is also where they partake in a communal meal in which the sacralised leftovers are shared. The boundaries between the otherworldly and worldly spheres are thus clearly separated, not only during rituals but also during the consumption of food. Another spatial boundary, based on gender and ethnicity, can sometimes also be noted when white, male non-Buddhists occupy chairs placed along the walls and remain in a passive role during ceremonies. They tend, however, to join in for the communal meal.

### Feeding and sacralised leftovers

The provision of food is the responsibility of both men and women, although women would normally take responsibility for the cooking and preparation



of food, both in the family and for monks (Trankell 1995, Van Esterik 1998, Wright-St Clair *et al.* 2004), and this is a responsibility they continue to maintain in Sweden. Thai women occupy a somewhat contradictory position in Thailand and Southeast Asia – they are often considered to be the main provider and bread winner, and as young adults girls are responsible for their parents and younger siblings – a responsibility that continues after marriage, and which is expected also amongst migrant communities. However the Southeast Asian gender system does not constrain women socially or physically to the same extent as it can do in other parts of the world. Women are expected to contribute financially to support their families, and Thai femininity is tied to being an economic provider (Yasmeen 2008: 526–7). Women’s economic activities are frequently linked to the food market: over 80 per cent of all small food stalls in Thailand are run by women. When Thai women migrate to Sweden they maintain this financial responsibility, and they regularly send money home to support their family members in Thailand. Thai women’s facility for entrepreneurship is also noticeable in Sweden, where many Thai migrants run restaurants and food stalls, or work in the cleaning sector. In urban areas Thai women often run massage and beauty parlours, or food stalls and restaurants. Thai women’s employment rate is high, 73 per cent, and they can thus be seen as having strongly integrated into Swedish society (Haandrikman and Webster 2013).

When Thai Buddhists visit the temples (or invite monks to their homes) the giving of food is the central ritual activity upon which all interactions between the laity and the order are based. The almsgiving ceremony, where the giving of food takes place in the temple, is generally carried out at around 11 o’clock in the morning. The act of giving is done in an impersonal, formal and distanced manner (Van Esterik 1998: 87), where eye-contact seldom occurs between donor and recipient. Monks do not ask for food – they are not beggars – but they make themselves available to the laity thus enabling the laity to present them with food gifts. In Sweden the offering of food to the Theravada Buddhist temples may be performed in different ways, depending on how the chief monk wants the almsgiving to be organised. This organisation often reflects the local or regional traditions of the area from which the monks come. The giving of food to the monks is subsequently followed by a communal meal, where the sacralised leftovers are shared.

The ostentatious display of food and cooking in Thai Buddhist temples is quickly noted by visitors such as this Swedish male partner who wrote the following in a commemorative publication for one of the temples:

So, when I came to the temple outside Eslöv I met – a kitchen! Where there are Thais, there are women who prepare and serve food, and it was the first thing I saw before I saw a single monk or Buddha statue. I do not know how different temples can be in Thailand, but I understand that they often function as gathering places for Buddhists as well as temples. In a foreign country like Sweden with few Buddhists the temples may also serve as the main gathering points – as I perceive it. Both religion and food are essential elements in the lives of Thais. This combination also makes *farang* [white, non-Thai people] curious in different ways. It also makes the Thais curious, those who come without having pondered much on their religion before, and in that way they can get a better foothold for their new life in the new foreign country. (5th Anniversary Watsanghabaramee, p. 44)

Food can either be prepared by the women in their homes and brought to the temples, or it can be freshly prepared in the kitchen of the temple. The kitchens and dining halls often serve as the main communal area in the temples, a place where people can chat, prepare flower decorations and eat or drink something together. The temples serve as community centres, which is a key feature in Thailand as well as Sweden. The food that is prepared and taken to the temple serves as one of the principal means of reciprocal exchange between the laity and the sangha, and it can also be an aspect of appropriation rituals. Reciprocal exchange and appropriation are the two main ways in which Buddhist rituals work in Southeast Asia today. In reciprocal rituals the concept of *karma* is at play, and by giving gifts to the *sangha* (representing the otherworldly sphere) religious merits (*thamboon*) are received in return. Appropriation rituals can be directed at suprahuman forces, such as the images of the Buddha that are worshipped and whose inherent power can be ‘tapped into’, or to deities that are pleased with gifts and in return are expected to provide protection (Swearer 1995: 19–22). Both types of ritual can be seen to be at play in relation to food in diasporic religious contexts. Of particular interest is the consumption of food and the sacralised leftovers. Food that is offered in the religious domain to monks, deities, Buddhas, may not be tasted or consumed by the lay people before the offering, and there are noticeable differences in how the sanctified leftovers (what remains of the meal once it is considered to have been consumed by the representatives of the holy) are handled and distributed.

At major festivals, which attract many visitors, the monks may perform a *pindipata* inside the shrine room, where they pass along a long line of kneeling lay Buddhists who then place a spoonful of rice into each monk’s alms bowl. Some of the temples have access to a temple courtyard which instead can be

Location for food transaction	Temple/altar	Dining hall
Receiver of food gift	<p><i>Other-wordly beings</i> Laity give a plate of food to a Buddha or monk image.</p> <p><i>Human beings</i> Laity give monks food, and, if present, also to <i>chii prahm</i>.</p>	<p><i>Human beings</i> Laity give food to monks.</p>
<p><b>Presenting a food gift</b> All food that is given to the Buddha, to monks or to deities, should ideally be prepared fresh and without being eaten of before it is presented as a gift. Giving of food is done once a day at the most.</p> <p>The gift can be presented to monks in different ways, however it is highly ritualised and characterised by an impersonal, formalised and detached giving, where eye contact is avoided.</p>	<p>1. During festivals a <i>pinidpata</i> can be carried out in the temple room (or in the courtyard) when monks walk past the laity who, while kneeling, give rice as a gift in their bowls. Monks then return to their seats, and:</p> <p>2. Dishes are given separately to the monks, who acknowledge receipt a) by physical hand contact with the plates (if presented by a male giver) or b) by receiving the plate while placed on a piece of cloth (if presented by a female giver).</p>	<p>3. Separate dishes are placed on a table, and then are given collectively by raising the table symbolically (many individuals cooperate by placing their hands under the table and jointly lifting the table).</p> <p>4. Every dish is given separately by (an) individual/s: every plate is lifted and then received by a monk with physical contact (see 2 a-b).</p>
Rituals in connection to the giving of food	<p>Food gifts to the Buddha also include candles, incense and flowers.</p> <p>When the monks have received the food, a recitation follows and a libation ritual, <i>kraut nam</i>, ends the ritual (merits are transferred to dead relatives by pouring water from a small container to another, or on to earth).</p>	<p>Recitations by monks.</p>
Consuming of food gifts	<p>Monks (and <i>chii prahm</i>) eat the given foods</p>	<p>Monks eat the given foods.</p>
Handling of sacralised leftovers	<p>When monks (and, if present, <i>chii prahm</i>) have taken foods from the plates, a 'food chain' is created where each individual dish is transported by the laity to a cloth, placed on the floor, around which the laity then gather and eat the leftovers.</p> <p>Rice left in the monks' bowls, and not consumed by them, may be shared by the laity.</p> <p>If there are plenty of leftovers after the laity has eaten, this can either a) be divided into separate portions to be brought home, or:</p> <p>b) be saved in the fridge or deep freezer for the monks to consume at a day when no lay person can be present to give food.</p> <p>c) the final leftovers can be given to birds or other animals living close to the temple.</p>	<p>The plates are transferred from the monks' table to tables where the laity gather afterwards for a communal meal.</p>

Table. Food transactions in Thai Buddhist contexts in Sweden.

	Public space	Private home	Spirit house
	<p><i>Human beings</i> Laity give food to monks.</p>	<p><i>Otherworldly beings</i> When a home has an altar, a food can be offererd to the Buddha.</p> <p><i>Human beings</i> Monks are invited and given food.</p>	<p><i>Non-human beings</i> Outside individual homes, temples or outside the royal pavilion in Ragunda, spirit houses have been erected, where local deities are presented with food.</p>
	<p>5. A <i>pindipata</i> can be carried out in different public places: a) on a pre-arranged street, outside a Thai shop or restaurant, or b) inside a shop or restaurant where women have gathered, or c) at a festival to which the monks have been invited. Rice and other dishes are given, and brought back to the temple.</p>	<p>Food is arranged on a plate and offered to the Buddha. The food may contain meet.</p> <p>Food given to monks, is given either collectively or individually (se 3-4).</p>	<p>Food is placed on a plate, and may not contain meat.</p>
	<p>Recitation by monks, followed by <i>kraut nam</i> (a libation ritual for transference of merits).</p>	<p>Recitation by monks, followed by <i>kraut nam</i> (a libation ritual for transference of merits).</p>	<p>Food gifts also include candles, incense and flowers, and an invitation to the deities to eat of the food, with requests for protection.</p>
	<p>Monks return to the temple, where they eat the food.</p>	<p>Monks eat the given foods.</p>	<p>Deities are invited to eat the food.</p>
		<p>The food/leftovers are cleaned away every day and placed outside in nature (it may not be consumed by humans).</p>	<p>The food/leftovers are cleaned away every day and placed outside in nature (it may not be consumed by humans).</p>



Pindipata at the Temple mountain, Fredrika. Summer festival 2014. Photograph by Marie Ericsson.

used for an outdoor *pindipata*. The increased presence of Thais in Sweden, even in smaller cities, has made it possible for the monks to carry out public *pindipata* in towns and cities – this is a noticeable change compared to the early 2000s when no public *pindipata* occurred in Swedish cities, but only took place in the temples (Plank 2004). These public *pindipatas* are usually pre-arranged, and their function will be discussed in the next section of the article.

The giving of food and other meritorious gifts to the *sangha* are usually public and social events, and their public manifestation is proof that the gift has been given freely. Van Esterik notes that ‘It is considered more likely that one has good intentions if the merit-making is public. In fact, if the act of giving is not public it may not be considered an act of merit but rather a personal relationship, a “deal” between the giver and receiver which may be suspect’ (Van Esterik 1977: 98, cited in Van Esterik 1998: 93). As noted, in Thai religious contexts in Sweden the giving of gifts usually takes place inside the temple, but the monks can also be invited into private homes.

It varies greatly how often the women come to the temple – some come with their partners during their first three-month visit to Sweden; some make their first visit only after living in Sweden for several years; others come regularly

every week or month; while still others visit the temple in connection with cyclic celebrations such as birthdays, New Year, or when a child is born or a loved one has died. The frequency of visits to the temples thus seems to depend on the location of the temples, but also on the women's migration histories.

Rice appears frequently as a gift, and especially the sticky rice that is popular in north and northeast Thailand. The Thai word for rice, *khá̄w*, is also a word used for food in general, thereby demonstrating the importance of rice as a staple in the Thai cuisine. Ing-Britt Trankell's (1995) fieldwork was carried out in northern Thailand, where the sharing of rice was seen as a way of creating and maintaining kinship and belonging. The rice was offered to the temple to transfer merit to deceased relatives (*ibid.* 133–4). Trankell notes that the cooking and giving of food becomes a means by which identity is created and executed (*ibid.* 103). The responsibility for providing food for family and monks is a practice which is maintained by Thai women in Sweden. (When they bring sticky rice to the temples, they refer, however, to culinary arguments: that the sticky rice goes better with certain dishes, like chicken, for example.) The remit is also extended beyond human beings which enables several different categories of beings to be fed. Thus the feeding may include not only people, such as family members, deceased kin (to whom the transfer of merit is usually done), monks,



Feeding animals (birds) with leftovers. Photograph by Katarina Plank.



the Buddha, guardian spirits and deities – but also animals. At several temples, the leftovers from the communal meal may be shared with wild animals, such as birds, foxes, and sometimes even domesticated animals such as cats. Meals and gifts of food are frequently used as a way of controlling other beings such as visitors, or guardian spirits, and are referred to by Trankell (1995) with the Thai key term *liang*, meaning ‘to domesticate or care for’. Van Esterik has made similar observations with regard to the spirits (1998: 85).

The food given to the Buddha, spirits or monks, should be freshly prepared and must not be consumed by the laity before it is offered. The food given to the spirits should not contain meat – suggesting the upholding of a *brahmin* tradition where Hindu deities have been incorporated into the Thai religious cosmos (Van Esterik 1998, Trankell 1995).

The remains of food given to the Buddha and to spirits must not be consumed by humans, instead they are (ideally) put out into nature. Only the remains of food given to monks may be ingested by humans. These ritual leftovers – or ‘sacralized leftovers’ (Trankell 1995: 134) – create a bond that links the laity not only to the monks and the otherworldly sphere, but also to other beings that inhabit the ‘samsaric’ world.

To sum up: the preparation, sharing and eating of food in the temple can be seen as an expression of belonging to a Buddhist community, and the Thai women living in the diaspora continue to uphold the main responsibility for preparing and distributing food to several different categories of beings: people (family members), the deceased, monks, the Buddha, protector spirits – and even animals.

## Food logistics

The logistics surrounding food is one of the key aspects in the economic maintenance of the temple buildings. A great deal of local support is required to maintain a temple and its resident monks in the context of a diaspora. The daily provision of food is thus not only a central question in terms of how the Theravada tradition will establish itself and survive in such a context; it is also a question of the monks’ physical survival.

Five identifiable strategies regarding food logistics can be observed among the Thai Buddhist temples in Sweden: 1) local support, 2) pre-cooking and freezing, 3) pre-organised *pindipatas* in nearby cities, 4) changes in food gifts, and 5) change of the *nikaya*.

*Local support.* The establishment of Thai Buddhist temples is usually demand-driven and local support is thus the most common way of providing



the monks with food. This support may be organised through the temple board, and/or carried out by means of individual support. Normally the lay people take it in turns to prepare food for the monks, as well as to receive and assist visitors. They also take care of the general chores around the temple such as laundry and cleaning, or to receive and assist when guests visit the temple. In addition, individual Thai visitors tend to bring fresh food and gifts to the temple and to the monks residing there. The number of visitors varies according to the location of the temple, and whether they come on weekdays or during the weekends.

Temples located in rural areas, for example in Fredrika, Lapland and Bispgården, Jämtland, where only a handful of Thais live, make long-distance travel necessary to support the temple (see Plank *et al.* forthcoming). These temples have large catchment areas, and travelling to the temple can be a demanding commitment. A woman who wants to visit the temple may need to be up by four o'clock in the morning to prepare food in her home and then (usually) drive a car for two to four hours to get to the temple in time for the almsgiving ceremony at eleven o'clock. This can hardly be combined with a working day, and this means that the women can visit the temples only at weekends. Many Thai women express their desire to have a monk available at close range, and that they would prefer to have a temple housed in a small apartment in their nearest city than having to go to a larger, remote temple which is difficult to travel to.

If the temple is located outside a town, or in an area where few Thais live, there is therefore a need for alternative ways of ensuring that the monks get the food they need. This includes other strategies such as:

*Pre-cooking and freezing.* Leftovers from festival meals can be frozen and saved for the monks (the food has thus already been given to them). Pre-cooking and freezing is another alternative that I have noted being used in rurally-situated temples.

*Pre-organised pindipatas in nearby cities.* If a temple is situated outside a town, and there is limited public transport to the temple, the temple board may pre-organise *pindipatas* in nearby cities during the weekends. The gifts of food are then brought back to the temple, stored or freezed, and used at times when no lay person is able to visit the temple in order to prepare food. The freezing of food has also contributed to a fifth observable strategy, described below.

*Changes in food gifts.* The food items given during pre-organised *pindipatas* or as offerings to rurally-situated temples tend to change. Rural challenges not only mean a forced reinterpretation and adaptation of tradition on the part of the monks (cooked food should not be saved according to monastic rules) – even the composition of the gift has changed. The monks are still given

freshly-cooked Thai food, but among the gifts one can also find processed food items, such as single portions of frozen ‘Sausage Stroganoff’ from Dafgårds, and ‘Falafel Marrakesh’ from Findus.

*Change of nikaya.* The Thai *sangha* consists of two *nikayas*, or orders of monks, the stricter Thammayut *nikaya* and the more liberal Mahanikaya. In the stricter and reformed Thammayut *nikaya* monks encourage the lay women to come to the temple with gifts of food every day, so that they do not compromise the *vinaya* rules (which the storing and reheating of food can imply). This has however put too much strain on the community at Bispgården. I was told by a woman visiting the temple, that they needed to invite monks from the Mahanikaya instead to stay at the temple, in order for the food logistics to work. The monks belonging to the Mahanikaya order have been more willing to compromise and be permissive in their interpretation of the monks’ rules. The women can therefore pre-cook and freeze foods.

The replacement of home-cooked meals with frozen food reveals changing food habits which are motivated mainly by the conditions which pertain in the depopulated rural areas of Sweden. These changes, along with the inclination towards the more liberal Mahanikaya that I have observed, involves making a compromise in regard to *vinaya* rules that enables the monks to continue living and supporting the local community. This can be seen as a deviation from food and eating patterns usually associated with migration. When people migrate to new countries they change their eating habits slowly, but some groups have proved to be more resistant to change than others. Ethnic groups whose kitchens are becoming popular even among the majority population have less reason to change their eating habits. Where the Thai kitchen is growing more popular among the majority, there is less reason to change food habits. If the migrant group is additionally reinforced with renewed immigration, and if they manage to maintain large and dynamic ethnic enclaves, this also reduces the inclination for change in relation to diet. E. N. Anderson (2005) has noted that there seems to be a universal pattern of eating in a migration context: the first foods that are adopted and exchanged from the new culture are sweets and snacks, followed by drinks. Breakfast habits are then adjusted accordingly to the new cultural environment, and subsequently the lunch diet changes. Dinner, and food for festivals or ceremonies, tend to be preserved the longest (*ibid.* 203–4). In the diasporic space of Thai Buddhism in Sweden, similar patterns can be noted: the sweets, beverages, and breakfasts that are served are usually based on commonly available domestic Swedish products that can be bought in supermarkets. Lunches, however, often contain ingredients and raw food imported from Thailand by ethnic stores specialising in food imports, and

lunches usually consist of various regional and traditional cooked dishes from Thailand. However, the composition of food gifts can be affected when a temple is located in remote areas where food cannot be provided every day, and other adjustments in regard to interpretation of monks' rules may be needed to maintain a temple located in rural areas.

### Food and civic social capital

The earlier quote, in which a Swedish male visitor reflects on the temple as a social arena where contacts are made between recent migrants and those migrants already living in the diaspora, shows how important transnational religious networks can be to both maintain and transmit ethnic and transnational identities. It also suggests how food relates to everyday and civic life, both in the old homeland and the new one. Food is thus instrumental in the creation of what A. Stepick and others (2009) term 'civic social capital'. Civic social capital is a concept which is used to describe how individuals create social ties outside the immediate network of family and friends, and specifically on how religious organizations can be of use to establish social relationships with the surrounding civil society. The communal meals in the temple can be understood to be creating a unifying bond between Thai migrants, that is they are a 'bonding' form of civil social capital that unites people with similar backgrounds. Food, however, can also contribute to creating a form of 'bridging' civil social capital by tying together people with different backgrounds. Bridging civil social capital is often created through a variety of services and volunteer activities. The exchange of food helps people from different backgrounds to connect at temple festivals and local markets. In this way food exchange serves as a bridge for social capital by linking people together. This happens when the temple compounds are used as festival arenas and food stalls where lay women from different regions or cities in Sweden can cook and sell Thai food to the festival participants (often also attracting non-Buddhists), and where the income is donated to the temple. Similar instances of bridging social capital can also be observed at various food markets, such as Åsele market and the Thai Festival in Sundsvall, in which the Buddharama temple in Fredrika participated in both 2012 and 2013.

Overall, food performs several functions in diasporic Thai Buddhism in Sweden. In addition to the religious functions that are associated with almsgiving (that is, a meritorious gift that augments an individual's *karma*) food can also serve as a means of generating bonding and bridging civic social capital. Temples in rural areas are faced with special challenges when the laity, due to

long distances cannot come to the temple every day so that the continuous giving of *dana* is difficult to secure. Food sold at festivals can thus have an important economic function for the congregations, as the selling of food at various festivals can help pay the rent, heating bills or clear debts for several months to come.

### Cosmization of life

The food that is cooked, donated and consumed in Thai Buddhist religious contexts in Sweden is also a medium through which religion is manifested; a medium that operates on several different levels. Thomas Tweed (1997) has noted that religion in a migration context can operate on locative, translocative and supralocative levels. Locative religion is where the sacred manifests itself in the local landscape and the material environment. The establishment of Thai temples in villas, or the building of a small spirit house outside a private house, are examples of how religion operates in a locative level. Religion can also be translocative as it links the diaspora to their homeland in different ways through time and space – often through symbolic links. In the Thai temples this is done in particular by various visual decorations: portraits of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit often hang in the temple room near the altar; curtains or other cloth items that are used as decoration are dyed in the royal blue and yellow colours; popular *Jataka* stories and the history of Thai Buddhism can be represented in images hanging on walls; as well as portraits of prominent Thai monks that hang on display in the shrine room. However, these visual representations are not the only aids to creating a translocative dimension – so does also taste and smell. Food that is cooked, served and consumed in temples plays an important role in creating a translocal religion: the food contains specially imported vegetables and spices grown in Thailand. The food is also based on different kinds of rice, where the sticky, steamed rice is central, and supplemented by various regional dishes from the places the women come from (especially from Isaan in north-eastern Thailand), thereby linking the eating and tasting of food to the home country.

In addition to this ‘horizontal’ linking, from local places in the Swedish diaspora to the Thai homeland, there is also the possibility of a vertical and cosmic link to a suprahuman dimension, which also finds expression in the giving of food. Food is not only given to humans representing the otherworldly sphere, but also to other beings in the ‘samsaric’ world: the Buddha, place-bound spirits or deities, and merits are transferred to dead relatives. Food given to the monks changes in character from having belonged to the secular and worldly (*lokiya*)

sphere to being received into the otherworldly (*lokuttara*) sphere. When the leftovers are consumed by the laity, they thereby also consume an otherworldly materiality. One could say, to adopt Manuel Vázquez' expression, that the food creates a 'cosmizing' dimension, since it allows the sacred and holy to penetrate time and space: 'Cosmization – the irruption of the absolute time and space of the sacred into history and geography – represents one of the most distinctive and significant contributions of religion to the diasporic experience' (Vázquez 2011: 131–2). Samsaric existence is cosmized and made present not only in the feeding of different beings, but also in the bodies of the lay men and women as the food is ingested.

The cosmizing dimension of food is intimately connected with the social relationships that are created and maintained by the feeding, and with the 'foodscape' that can be found in diasporic Thai temples in Sweden. By the giving of social and religious gifts obligations are created; food transactions can also be a way to control others – especially protective spirits.

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In addition to the religious purpose of almsgiving, food and food exchange serves the Buddhist congregation in several other ways. The feeding that takes place in the foodscape of the diasporic space of Thai Buddhism in Sweden does not only include human beings – even the Buddha and place-bound spirits and deities are given food, and the sacralised leftovers from the monks' meals are shared by the lay Buddhists in a communal meal. Even animals can come to partake of these sacralised leftovers. Through food the samsaric existence is reproduced, and the lives of Thai migrants are cosmized. Food and feeding link the various samsaric existences together, and food can also be used to control spirits, and to ensure the welfare of dead relatives.

The communal eating in the temple also helps to strengthen the bonds amongst Thais living in Sweden, and food also becomes a way of maintaining religious, national, regional and ethnic identities. In the diasporic space of Thai Buddhism in Sweden food can also be used in the marketing of the temples and as a source of income. Food may thus contribute to the creation of both bonding and bridging civic social capital.

A temple's location in a rural area can also drive forward a reinterpretation and adaptation of the monks' rules, and contribute to a changing composition of food gifts. The analysis of the foodscape also shows how intrinsic Buddhist structures are maintained by the practice of giving food. The globalisation of Thai Buddhism shows that local Asian traditions are transmitted into new

cultural contexts where food practices are negotiated, and how the handling of food can be understood as social and gendered patterns related to ethnicity.

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# The nature of food

## Indigenous Dene foodways and ontologies in the era of climate change

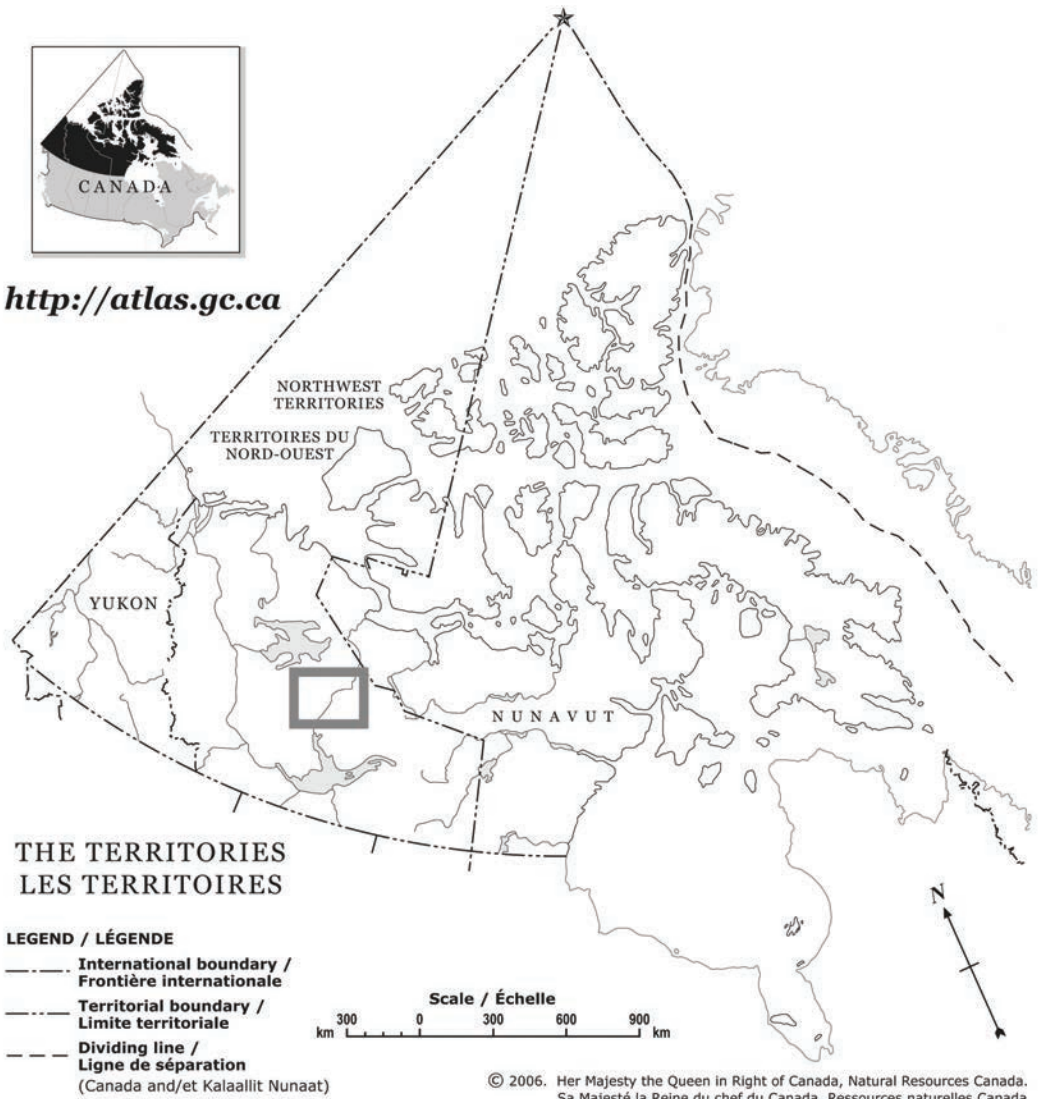
DAVID S. WALSH

Climate change leading to a drastic decline in caribou populations has prompted strict hunting regulations in Canada's Northwest Territories since 2010. The Dene, a subarctic indigenous people, have responded by turning to tradition and calling for more respectful hunting to demonstrate respectful reciprocity to the caribou, including a community-driven foodways project on caribou conservation and Dene caribou conservation which I co-facilitated in 2011. In these ways the caribou is approached as a person. Dene responses to caribou decline can best be understood by ontological theories of an expanded notion of indigenous personhood. However, I argue these theories are inadequate without an attention to foodways, specifically the getting, sharing, and returning of food to the land. The necessity of sustenance reveals a complicated relationship of give-and-take between humans and caribou, negotiated by tradition, yet complicated by the contemporary crisis.

The Tłı̄chho (pronounced clinchon) Dene, an indigenous people of subarctic Canada, rely on caribou for sustenance and identity as their ancestors did and caribou continue to provide their primary environmental relationship.<sup>1</sup> The reliance on caribou culminates in a complex relationship of give and take;

- 1 Dene gatherings begin and end with a saying of *masi*, or thank you. I begin this article by saying *masi* to my Tłı̄chho consultants, mentors, and friends who shared their food, homes, and lives with me, and to whom I am deeply indebted. I would like to thank the Tłı̄chho Nation for accommodating my research interests, and the Rae-Edzo Friendship Centre and Aalice Legat for inviting my participation in a number of community projects. The Canada Fulbright Program and Arizona State University Graduate College supplied funds to make my research possible, and this article has benefited from the guidance of Jenée Walsh, Miguel Astor-Aguilera, Beverly Lucas, Aldea Mulhern, and Eric Shuck. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Donner Institute for hosting the symposium on Religion and Food that would lead to this publication. As I reflect on relationships as paramount to my subject, it seems appropriate to maintain some of the original style of the talk, to honour the symposium and reflect the specific place and context that allowed my work to grow into this article.

the Dene must demonstrate respectful reciprocity so that the caribou will give their flesh to hunters. Climate change has caused a rapid decline in caribou populations since 2009 (Adamczewski *et al.* 2009), straining this relationship. Tłi cho Dene elders with whom I work draw from larger Dene ontologies in responding to the caribou decline with the imperative to respect the caribou, a perspective that conflicts with the Canadian ecological perspective. While the Canadian government and wildlife biologists have implemented strict hunting restrictions to protect caribou, Tłi cho Dene elders suggest respectful hunting



practices are necessary to convince the caribou they are still needed and will return to the people.

Indigenous peoples' relationships to their environment have preoccupied scholars since E. B. Tylor (1871: 427) introduced a theory of animism which displaced indigenous religions from the living environment to the realm of spirits. Tylor assumed a Cartesian dichotomy of nature and culture which contemporary scholarship (e.g. Descola 1996, Ingold 2000, Viveiros de Castro 1998) contends is not applicable to indigenous ontologies of the Americas and the Circumpolar North, instead positing relational ontologies wherein indigenous peoples engage directly with and within their environment. Scholarship (e.g. Astor-Aguilera 2010, Detwiler 1992, Harvey 2005, Morrison 2002, Shorter 2009) on indigenous North American religions corrects Tylor's (*ibid.*) abstractions by re-placing beings in the environment through an expanded notion of personhood; that indigenous persons can engage beings in the environment, such as animals, plants, rocks, wind, spirits, and ancestors, as non-human persons. Indigenous religious traditions of the Americas are defined by their relationships with social beings in the living environment.

I examine Dene environmental relationships through the lens of food, and specifically what I identify as three stages of Dene foodways: getting food, sharing food, and returning food and remains back to the land. Food is integral to many studies of indigenous religions and environmental relations (e.g. Gill 1982, Grim 2001, Holst 1997, Nabokov 2007). However, how a dependence on the environment for food affects social dynamics that include non-humans has not been addressed (with a few notable exceptions, including Crawford O'Brien 2014, Swanson 2009). Analysis through the foodways stages reveals complex social relationships between hunters, food-animals, and beings who aid in the exchange, such as ancestors and the land itself. These relationships complicate previous scholarship, including by revealing patriarchal biases in this scholarship. In this way, foodways as a component to theories of personhood explains Dene attitudes toward caribou, and offers insight into the relationships of other indigenous nations and their food sources. My aim is to demonstrate how foodways, as an analytical category, offers a glimpse within Dene paradigms to perceive non-human entities as something with which humans relate, while simultaneously demonstrating through foodways the limits of the relationships and complicating previous theories of indigenous religion and personhood. An attention to foodways reveals the necessity of sustenance as a primary motivation for indigenous relationships to other beings. Sustenance offers an entry point for understanding the relational ontologies of indigenous peoples, exemplified specifically by the Tłi cho Dene.

## Contemporary threats to the caribou

The Tłi cho Dene live in their ancestral homeland north of Yellowknife and Great Slave Lake, and south of Great Bear Lake, in the Northwest Territories, Canada. Hunter-gatherers, the the Dene emphasize hunting as wild crops are less abundant in the north: they hunt big game like caribou and moose; and small game that is trapped, including rabbit, muskrat, beaver; ducks and geese; and lots of fish. The Tłi cho were in an isolated pocket, without contact with Europeans, longer than any other indigenous people in North America (Helm 2000). They first met Catholic Oblate missionaries from France and Belgium in the 1860s. Even after contact, the Tłi cho maintained nomadic lifestyles of trapping, fishing, and following migrating game for another hundred years until the Canadian government established settled communities in the 1960s. Most Dene peoples still maintain hunting and fishing subsistence lifestyles. The Tłi cho in particular maintain diets high in traditional food, but this is changing between generations (Tłi cho 2012). I have sat at meals where elders in the house eat only caribou, moose, and fish, while the youth eat store-bought meats and processed foods.



An elder demonstrates how to check the fish net on Great Slave Lake, Northwest Territories, Canada. Photograph by David S. Walsh.

The Tłi cho belong to the Athapaskan linguistic family. Athapaskans spread across northwestern Canada into Alaska, with a few pockets in Oregon and northern California, and include the larger Navajo and Apache Nations in the south-western United States. Athapaskans of eastern Alaska, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, northern Alberta, and British Columbia, are commonly referred to as a whole as the Dene, of which the Tłi cho are one nation (Abel 2005).

The present day Tłi cho territory consists of 39,400 square kilometres of land, effective since their land claim with the Canadian government in 2005 (see Tłi cho 2005). Unlike reservations in the United States and southern Canada, they are a self-governed nation-within-a-nation. There are four Tłi cho communities. The three smaller and more remote are: Whatì in the west, Gamètì to the north, and Wekweètì to the far east; the fourth and largest community is Behchoko . The remote communities are only accessible by plane, by a gruelling boat trip with portages, or via ice roads open for a few months during winter, though Behchoko as the Tłi cho capital maintains year-round highway access. The population of the four communities is approximately 3,000 Tłi cho citizens (NWT 2013), leaving a vast open land on the edge of the taiga and the beginning of the arctic tundra, consisting of muskeg, permafrost, marsh, forest, and exposed Canadian Shield bedrock.

For the Tłi cho , caribou are of prime cultural significance. There are two caribou herds that routinely migrate to Tłi cho lands and are hunted during fall and late winter/early spring: the Bathurst and the Bluenose East. The Bathurst is the primary herd for Tłi cho hunters, while the Bluenose East generally travels north of Gamètì, around the Great Bear Lake. Caribou, and their domesticated cousins the reindeer, have cultural significance for indigenous peoples across the Circumpolar North. These and other similarities led Åke Hultkrantz (1994: 354) to define a 'circumpolar religion' as constituted by a 'relative lack of elaborate ceremonies and the intense concentration of religious activities on daily sustenance and protection from a harsh environment.' Yet he states that religion focused on sustenance 'should not be taken as indicative of a low level of spirituality' (*ibid.*). The Dene exemplify a practical, lived, embodied, but non-ceremonial spiritual life focused on survival. Maintaining proper relations with the caribou is paramount to this survival. Thus, studies of Dene religion must take into account the necessity of sustenance, or risk reifying Western categories of the religious.

In stark contrast to Dene worldviews, the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources for the Northwest Territories proposed a complete hunting ban on the Bathurst and Bluenose East herds, citing an accelerated



rate of decline for the Bathurst herd from 475,000 animals in the 1980s to just 32,000 in 2009; a 93 per cent decrease (Adamczewski *et al.* 2009). With a combined annual aboriginal, sport, and Northwest Territories non-aboriginal resident harvest of 7,000 caribou, the herd was estimated to become extinct in four years, by 2014. Environment and Natural Resources acknowledged the cultural importance of caribou for all northern residents, and worked with aboriginal governments to negotiate solutions. After much public debate the ban was negotiated to stay in effect for all non-aboriginal and sport hunters, but eased to a limited tag system for the Tłi cho and neighbouring Yellowknives Dene to 300 animals annually; not enough to maintain a traditional subsistence lifestyle for the Tłi cho and Yellowknives Dene populations. The more isolated Bluenose East herd would remain open for indigenous harvests, an option only for those who could afford the extra time and financial commitment needed for the trip.

Climate change is the predominant reason for the declining caribou populations: hotter-than-average summers and colder, drier winters led to an increase in forest fires and a decrease in lichen, the primary food source for caribou (Adamczewski *et al.* 2009: 3; Gunn 2007: 3–5). Additionally, there is a heated debate on the impact of over-hunting. In the two winters before the imposition of the 2010 hunting ban, caribou migrated directly onto the ice road near Behchoko and the highway to Yellowknife, allowing hunters from all over the territories and Alberta unprecedented access to the animals. Rather than needing to snowmobile to find the herd, camp, pack the meat and transport it back, hunters were simply hunting from their trucks and throwing the meat in the back. The influx of hunters and ease of access allowed some to take advantage; many took only choice cuts of meat and left unused carcasses, having a detrimental effect on an already declining caribou herd. While the Environment and Natural Resources Department determined that climate change was the main culprit against caribou viability, they suggested hunting must be curtailed to prevent extinction. This viewpoint reflects a Western ecological ontology wherein nature is either dominated or managed (Nadasdy 2011). In this case wildlife is managed through a stewardship model of protection that denies an agency to the caribou over its own viability and relationships with humans.

Similarly to the Environment and Natural Resources Department, the Tłi cho Dene addressed hunting practices as the solution to caribou decline. However, they arrived at an opposite conclusion. Dene elders spoke of the need for more respectful hunting practices in order to demonstrate their continued need and love for the caribou, who would respond in kind by returning to the Tłi cho (Drybones and Walsh 2011). Dene responses to climate change and how they fundamentally differ from those of the Canadian government and



scientists are understood through theories of indigenous ontologies and personhood. These theories are inadequate without an attention to the specific foodways contexts of a people. I turn now to the context of Dene foodways.

## Indigenous ontologies and personhood

Indigenous peoples of the Americas retain ontological similarities despite rich historical and cultural diversity (see Astor-Aguilera 2010: 197, 213; Crawford O'Brien 2014). A resurgence of scholarship addressing indigenous ontologies as distinct from Western ontologies is increasingly referred to as the 'ontological turn'. Scholars leading the ontological turn in anthropology (Descola 1996, Ingold 2000, Latour 1993, Viveiros de Castro 1998), and scholars of indigenous religious traditions (e.g. Astor-Aguilera 2010, Detwiler 1992, Harvey 2005, Morrison 2002, Shorter 2009) demonstrate that indigenous ontologies are relational.<sup>2</sup> Indigenous ontologies are predicated on a relatable world wherein indigenous peoples directly engage with the environment and living beings within the environment, thus avoiding the Cartesian dichotomy of nature and culture prevalent in modern Western worldviews. Kenneth M. Morrison (2002: 39) states that the parallel Cartesian dichotomy of natural and supernatural is also non-applicable to indigenous religious traditions. Henry S. Sharp (2001: 67) states, in regards to the Dene specifically, that what Westerners might consider supernatural exists in the natural realm as an integrated whole. I suggest that nature, culture, and the supernatural do not comprise a trichotomy in Dene ontologies, nor are they an integrated whole per Sharp, but that the categories of nature, culture, and the supernatural simply do not exist in Dene ontologies. Thus, the religious is of this world and can be held in social relationships: animals, ancestors, and spirits are social beings with whom the living engage for the benefit of humanity.

Many of the above scholars draw from A. Irving Hallowell (1967 [1955], 1975 [1960]) in referring to all beings in indigenous contexts as 'persons.' Hallowell states that the Ojibwa of Canada lack a nature/culture dichotomy, and that their behavioural environment is comprised of beings possessing agency, power, and the ability to communicate. Thus, these beings can have relationships with human beings. Hallowell (1975 [1960]: 144) states that 'persons as a class

2 I include Bruno Latour (1993) here, although he does not discuss indigenous ontologies, as his critique of Cartesian dualisms is informative to the emerging ontological turn.

include entities other than human beings', Beings such as animals, plants, rocks, land, bodies of water, and the elements, are not automatons nor abstract spirits; they are tangible beings with whom humans interact (see also Walsh 2011). Hallowell (*ibid.*) refers to non-human beings with whom human beings relate as 'other-than-human-beings' and 'other-than-human-persons' as they carry the same traits as persons and can be engaged as persons, yet are not human.

Morrison (2002: 40) builds on Hallowell's other-than-human-persons, stating that the Ojibwa live in a cosmos constituted by persons, and thus think in relational rather than objective terms. Animals are not beings to be studied and used indiscriminately, but are to be related to as persons, and in fact must be related to if one wishes to survive. Relation must become *relationship*. Humans and animals are not automatically connected, but must work at the connection as one would with a friend, relative, or partner. An expanded notion of personhood suggests that indigenous peoples of the Americas engage animals and other beings in the environment as persons with whom human persons can form reciprocal relationships.

Graham Harvey (2005, 2010), who delivered a keynote paper at the Donner Symposium on Religion and Food, derives from Hallowell's theory of other-than-human-persons, that all embodied beings, whether human, animal, rock, wind, spirits, etcetera, may carry the traits of personhood. Personhood does not rely solely on an embodied existence, but is relational and derives from the relationships between beings. The Dene are human persons who dine on caribou persons, as vegetarians dine on vegetable persons. The Dene also eat vegetables, but as imported foods these do not carry the same ontological significance as caribou. This is not to say that vegetable beings could not be persons, but that they do not share a personal history with the Dene, and as they are imported they do not require reciprocity to be harvested.

Harvey (2005, 2010) asserts that the personhood of beings is a defining feature of animism. He draws from Tylor's (1871: 427) definition of animism as a belief that souls and spirits exist, yet Harvey grounds the term in the notion that the environment is animate. Harvey (2005: 6) notes that Tylor derived his conception of animism from the specific context of indigenous peoples' relationship to the environment, erring when he universalized animism as the foundation of all religion. Tylor (1871: 445) stated that some animists did not make a distinction between nature and culture, a vastly important insight that became lost in the work of his successors. Harvey (2010) offers a new definition of animism that does not abstract to the realm of spirits, but places animism in the very being of animals, plants, etcetera, with whom animists have reciprocal relationships.

The manner in which some Dene approach the caribou would seem to exemplify Harvey's animism, yet further analysis reveals both a limit to personhood theory and fundamental differences between Dene persons and caribou persons. Harvey focuses on similarities between persons, such as what relates a human person to a caribou person. But this relation raises a fundamental question: if animists are persons and caribou are persons, how can the animist eat the caribou? Harvey (2005: 163) is one of the few scholars discussing personhood who raises the issue of food and the necessity of eating others. He asks whether a human person eating an animal person constitutes cannibalism. The Dene are decidedly not cannibals. Emile Petitot (2005: 197) related from his 1860s–80s missionary travels that the Dene regarded stories of Cree cannibalism with horror. Morrison (2002: 64) states that cannibalism is accounted for in indigenous Algonkian worldviews as inter-species but perhaps not inter-personal eating, stating that cannibals were antisocial beings incapable of a relationship with persons. Harvey concludes that eating non-human persons is not cannibalism by arguing that 'if everyone is a person, not everyone is kin, not everyone is enemy, and not everyone is food. But some are'. The connections between people are unique to each relationship and as per Harvey's example, some are based on the necessity of sustenance, yet the question remains, how can one person eat another person?<sup>3</sup>

I suggest to relate is to connect. While connection suggests the overcoming of difference, the difference itself is necessary, lest one become the other. Connecting is a negotiation of this line, of relying on others while maintaining difference, and that is apparent in the way the Dene discuss hunting restrictions. They recognize a deep historical and personal connection with the caribou, but they also recognize that the caribou are different from human persons. This is where I depart from Hallowell (1967 [1955], 1975 [1960]), Morrison (2002), and Harvey (2005, 2010). They, and most scholarship on indigenous personhood, focus on a shared personhood that does not adequately take into account difference, and interestingly does not pay attention to gender difference and gendering within the personhood of beings. An attention to the necessity of eating the other, however, reveals that a fundamental difference must be maintained in order to avoid cannibalism. You are *not* what you eat. The contradiction of needing to strengthen connections between species to attain

3 Ultimately terms such as animism, cannibalism, and personhood are derived from Western philosophical traditions and may aid etic scholarship but should be taken with caution of their ability to represent emic worldviews.

food, while maintaining difference in order to eat that food, demonstrates the nuances of Dene environmental relations between personhood and speciation. I turn now to examine Dene foodways as it relates to theories of ontology.

## Dene foodways

Dene foodways traditions necessitate relations with the environment to provide sustenance. Scholars of religious studies (e.g. Eden 2008, Finch 2010, Fuller 1996, Madden and Finch 2006, Sack 2000, Zeller *et al.* 2014), following predominantly from anthropologists (e.g. Douglas 1966, Harris *et al.* 2005, Long 2004), approach foodways as a universal social force that concretizes group identities and spiritualities. Lucy M. Long (2004) defines foodways as the ‘network of behaviors, traditions, and beliefs concerning food, and involves all the activities surrounding a food and its consumption, including the procurement, preservation, preparation, presentation, and performance of that food’. I add activities specific to Dene foodways to Long’s definition. Prior to procurement, Dene foodways include dreaming of the animal and its location (Helm 2000: 273; Legat 2012: 91) as well as visiting ancestors’ graves on the way to a hunt (Legat 2012: 92). The use of *ofjkk’o* or ‘medicine power’ may increase one’s luck in hunting (Helm 2000: 273). In addition to Long’s ‘presentation and performance’, I add sharing food within the community and food offerings made to ancestors. A final step is the proper disposal of remains in order to aid an animal’s rebirth and continue the reciprocal cycle of gifting sustenance.

I delineate three stages of Dene foodways: getting, sharing, and returning food. In practice these stages overlap. Fresh food offerings to the fire after hunting bind the first and final stages, and a successful hunt is dependent on properly sharing meat and disposing of waste from previous hunts. Dividing foodways into three stages aids academic analysis, yet the lack of codified stages is informative for understanding Dene worldviews. The first European explorers of the Canadian North remarked that the Dene lacked any codified systems, proclaiming the Dene to lack religion or ritual (see Mason 1914: 376). Analysis through the three foodways stages brings to light a distinct spirituality that informs contemporary Tłi cho Dene responses to the caribou decline.

### Getting food

Paul Nadasdy (2003: 124) states that hunting is more than the acts associated with killing an animal; that hunting is an entire complex of values, practices, and social relations that give meaning to indigenous relationships with

animals. A successful hunt is not one in which the hunter stalks and overpowers an animal, but success comes when the hunter finds the animal that has gifted itself as food (Legat 2012: 83). In Dene relationships with caribou, hunting is an exchange of respectful reciprocity between consenting beings: animals gift themselves to hunters; hunters reciprocate through proper treatment of the meat and remains, for which the animals are thankful and continue to give themselves. Reciprocation maintains balance within the relationship between hunter and hunted. Techniques of reciprocity are centred on the notion of offering respect. Specific animals are known to the Dene to find certain actions disrespectful. For instance, it is appropriate to kill many animals and fish by a quick hit over the head with a heavy stick, but one must not hit a caribou (Blondin 2006: 168) or rabbit (Helm 2000: 59) or the animal will stop giving itself. Other actions are offensive to all animals as they disrespect the sacrifice of the animal, such as boasting of one's hunting abilities (Nelson 1983: 23), stepping over spilt blood at a hunt site or home, women stepping over a hunter's rifle, especially when menstruating (Smith 1973: 13), and, as my consultants told me, bringing the meat or wearing the hide of another animal on a hunt.

Scholars (e.g. Helm 2000, Nelson 1983, Ryan 1995) discuss respectful actions in terms of mandated rules, laws, and taboos. However, I see interspecies social conventions as guiding personal relationships. Marie Francois Guédon (1994: 42) states that prohibitions, specifically as pertaining to menstruation and her role as a female researcher, are not rules to be obeyed but, 'the expression of my personal relationship with streams, paths, door-steps, men, food, and even myself as a woman'. Rather than institutionalized sexism, prohibitions pertaining to women, as with other actions of respect and disrespect discussed above, are displays of etiquette: social norms of how to treat one another that transcend the boundaries of species. Breaking prohibitions is impolite because it demonstrates a lack of need for the animal being pursued. Wearing the hide of another animal on a caribou hunt, for example, demonstrates to the caribou that its gift may not be appreciated as the hunter flaunts their relationship with the other. Hunters need not reciprocate in all manners possible, but the importance of reciprocity and displays of etiquette are paramount during times of crisis, such as when the caribou do not return for their bi-annual migration.

Robin Ridington (1990: 85) states that reciprocity and demonstrations of respect are 'food-getting techniques and technologies', suggesting that other technologies, such as dreaming of an animal before a hunt, are as practical as modern technologies such as traps and rifles. Historically, a hunter or leader of a hunting party would dream of the specific individual caribou (Helm 1994: 77), who would tell the hunter where to find them on their migration (Jacobsen



A caribou hunt. Photograph by David S. Walsh.

2011: 94). An elder told me that a hunter would tell the party not to shoot a specific animal for it was the one who had led the herd to meet them. *Nàte* is a Tłi cho word often glossed as dreaming and prophecy (e.g. Helm 1994: 20; Jacobsen 2011: 94). However, *prophecy* in the sense of divine revelation (Olson 2011) is not accurate. *Nàte* is a space wherein one converses with another being and negotiates plans for the future: asking caribou to give itself and the caribou suggesting a spot where they may be found. A conversation

in *nàte* between hunter and hunted is equivalent to discussion among human kin. *Nàte* are real experiences (Smith 1998) resulting in practical knowledge pertinent to the future (Goulet 1998: xxix). The caribou that is met in a dream and who leads the herd to the hunt is not a 'supernatural hunting divinity', as suggested by Hultkrantz (1994: 360), but a living, social other-than-human being, as discussed by Hallowell (1975 [1960]: 144). My consultants state that dreaming before a hunt rarely occurs today, although they do dream of deceased kin or an animal who offers medicine power or advice. As a technology dreaming has been replaced by snowmobiles, satellite imaging, and high-powered rifles.

The Dene request aid from deceased kin when met in *nàte*, or when visiting graves before a hunt in a practice called *do kw'o o wheto o*. With the advent of Catholicism, modern practice is to bury the dead with a cross marker in a picket 'crib' fence, often along traditional trails when not in community graveyards (Andrews *et al.* 1998). Hunters will fix and paint the crib, clear away brush, and make food offerings to graves by burning the food in a fire, or leaving a gift of food, tobacco, matches, or coins within or near the grave (Andrews 2011: 225). These acts are said to be appreciated by the deceased, who may reciprocate by aiding in the hunt. I will revisit the practice of leaving offerings for ancestors during the final foodways stage of returning food, as it brings the stages full circle. Dreaming, visiting grave sites, and making offerings are not sacred rituals to appease supernatural beings (see Bell 1992, Astor-Aguilera 2010), but are social acts of reciprocity and means of exchange between hunter and hunted.

## Commensality: sharing food

After the gift of an animal is received, preparing, cooking, and distributing food are also opportunities for demonstrating respect to the animal through sharing its meat. Ridington (1990: 88) states that meat is not the exclusive property of the hunter, but it is shared within the community out of an ethic of reciprocity that guides human relationships. There are no formal rules for sharing and distributing meat to family and to the community, nor do gifts demand a return. Rather, sharing is a social necessity (Nadasdy 2003: 73, see also Guédon 1974: 219; Simeone 1995: 153–9). Human reciprocity is an obligation, ‘that the animals insist on in order for them to continue to provide their gifts of life’ (Smith 2002: 61). Sharing between humans is necessary to ensure continued sharing with animals.

The influx of store-bought foods has changed subsistence lifestyles: community stores provide an ease to food acquisition, with detriments of economic dependence and negative health impacts associated with processed foods (Haman 2010). New food sources have not replaced traditional foods, as half of Tłi cho citizens’ diets still consist of traditional foods (Tłi cho 2012: 23). Through processes of naturalization new foods are integrated into Tłi cho palates. The meat of foreign animals, boiled or prepared over a fire with added salt, is consistent with older tastes, and goods such as canned meat and fruit, bannock bread, and tea were readily accepted into pre-settlement lifestyles. Dietary changes reflect historical changes. However, these changes are absorbed within a continuity of worldviews and social paradigms.

New foods are shared in traditional ways, though it is more respectable and appreciated to share traditional foods like caribou or fish. When visiting elders I would bring a bag of oranges, a treat that prompted stories of the first time they were given an orange after a trading party returned from the Hudson Bay store at Fort Rae, Northwest Territories. I seldom entered a home without being offered something to eat: caribou, fish, moose, and most always bannock bread with butter, jam, and tea. Although there is a constant attention to food, eating is often conducted without fanfare. Meals are prepared for oneself at any time, and consumed quickly and without comment. Extra is made for others to help themselves, and there is not an emphasis on communal meal times. Feasts, however, are a different case.

Feasts are special moments of food exchange. Sometimes they are family affairs, associated with Catholic and state holidays. Other times feasts involve the larger community, such as those hosted by the community government for special occasions: the opening of the school year, or the anniversary of



establishing self-government. While these are modern celebrations, they reflect traditions of feasts in the bush, and large gatherings at trading forts for treaty days (Helm 2000: 328). Historically there were great feasts, such as the several day celebration when Chief Edzo made peace with the Yellowknives Dene at *Gots'ò kati*, Mesa Lake, in the 1820s (Helm and Gillespie 1981: 16). Nearly 200 years later the circle worn into the ground from joyous dancing can still be seen by hunters venturing to *Gots'ò kati* and the tundra in the fall. A third type of feast are those hosted by families that involve the larger community. Most common are wedding and funeral feasts, wherein everyone is welcome to attend, even if only to get a plate of food and take it home.

Traditional foods are served at most weddings, funerals, and community feasts, such as caribou and fish, along with naturalized foods that still appeal to elders such as bannock, oranges, hot dogs, hard boiled eggs, noodle salad with canned meat, a rice pudding called *kwet'sa*, canned fruit sometimes poured over *kwet'sa*, and coffee and tea. Smaller family feasts may involve traditional and naturalized foods, and others more typical of southern Canadian tastes: baked ham or turkey, grilled hamburgers, mashed potatoes, beer, and if one is returning from the city of Yellowknife, Kentucky Fried Chicken. Andrews (2011: 222) states that traditionally men served food to family members sitting on the



Making dried fish. Photograph by David S. Walsh.

floor, a practice that has given way to the buffet, self-serve style. The funeral and wedding feasts I attended, however, were a mixture of served and self-serve styles. Men predominantly served, especially to important guests such as elders and Catholic priests. Larger community feasts begin with a prayer typically led by a male elder, although gender divisions are not strictly enforced and a female elder may lead the prayer.

Hunting is discussed in literature as a male activity pertaining solely to killing an animal. Barbara Bodenhorn (1990: 55) states that this imposes patriarchal norms of men as dominant, controlling the public sphere, and of male activities as work. In contrast, she argues that hunting ‘cannot be reduced to the catching and slaughtering of animals, but rather includes a whole set of activities ... in which the interdependence of men and women is fundamental’ (*ibid.*). A hunt, for the Dene, includes preparation, travel, field dressing animals, returning to the community, distributing meat to female heads of households, preparation of the meat by these women, and serving the food. Sharing food necessarily involves the expertise of both genders, and is itself an integral aspect of hunting. Dene women are powerful hunters.

Including eating practices in my study reveals a patriarchal bias in other studies that focus on men’s labour while ignoring that of women: the preparation, cooking, and distribution of the kill (see Pérez 2014). Hultkrantz (1994: 357), for instance, discusses ‘circumpolar animal ceremonialism’ as the ‘catching, killing, and burial of game’. While these are important parts of the Dene hunting paradigm, what happens to the animal in between killing and burial (returning remains to the land), notably the women’s labour of preparing, cooking, and distributing food, is absent.

Gendered labour is also fluid, allowing men and women to participate in each others’ activities. Some women told me with pride that their fathers or husbands taught them to hunt and fish. Additionally, Dene women have an integral relationship with the hunted beyond gendered labour: women’s actions at home or at a campsite are said to be taken into account by animals when deciding whether to give themselves (de Laguna and DeArmond 1995: 60). Although gender inequality exists in Dene sociality, Dene women have important duties before, during, and after the receiving of an animal, the appropriate execution of which ensure that the animals will continue to give themselves.

Hunting is not a strictly male activity that happens apart from communal life, creating divisions within the community and between hunter and hunted; rather, it is the opposite. The activities of hunting necessarily draw connections with a larger community of human and other-than-human beings. The hunting goal of communal sustenance necessarily draws connections within the human

community. Hunting, then, involves mutual sharing throughout in order for all to thrive. Thus, an appropriate response to a caribou decline within this social dynamic is better sharing.

### Returning food to the land

Food exchanges within the human community and offerings to the animals, ancestors, and land are acts of respectful reciprocity that bind relationships. Dene elders told me that animals are aware when their meat is shared and honoured that their sacrifice is appreciated. Animals are also aware of what happens to their remains, which brings us to the final foodways stage: returning food to the land. The gift of the animal is returned in two manners, the first of which is returning food by-products so the animal may be reborn more easily. Bones, unused hide, and other remains are placed on the land for caribou and other land animals (Helm 1951: 189), and in water for fish and other water animals (de Laguna and DeArmond 1995: 59–60), so that the animals may regenerate more easily when they are born again. Helping in this way is appreciated by the animal whose remains have been returned to the land. That gratitude is repaid



Individuals clearing grave sites for the ancestors, *dòkw'òò whetòò*, at a cemetery in the bush. Photograph by David S. Walsh.

to the hunter as the animal is more likely to give itself again. In non-dualistic Dene ontologies, the human, animal, and ancestor persons converse in the same social world; offerings are not metaphorical but are real exchanges between persons expressed through social conventions of etiquette and gratitude.

The second manner of returning food to the land is through food offerings in ceremonies and personal acts of reciprocity called *ghàts'èèdi*, 'to make an offering', or as my consultants state in English, to 'pay the land'. Dene tradition is to give *ti ghàts'èèdi* when approaching a body of water, or *de ghàts'èèdi* on an island or body of land they do not know (Zoe *et al.* 2009: 12; see also Sharp 2001: 57). Offerings are accompanied with propitiations for safe travels and other aid, and are made to the water, land, and ancestors who have travelled there before. Or, as an elder explained to me, offerings are made to whomever may be listening. Legat (2012: 83) states that paying the land maintains harmonious relations between the Dene and their environment. I witnessed the ill effects of not offering *ghàts'èèdi* when a Tłi cho guide fell through the ice into the river below on a snowmobile trip with a group of non-native schoolteachers. The guide was fine and his machine was recovered; he had simply ridden over a spot of thin ice. But a Dene consultant later explained to me that one of the teachers must not have paid the river when we arrived in the area and that was why the accident happened, implying that the river swallowed the snowmobile as revenge for the slight. *Ghàts'èèdi* are not selfless acts, but are communication with the environment in which humans negotiate for what they need: safe travels and aid in hunting or medicine. It is a negotiation between getting what one wants, sustenance, and not upsetting the giver.

The Dene offer *ghàts'èèdi* to ancestors through *ko ghàts'èèdi*, or 'feeding the fire' (see Legat 2012: 92–5). Ancestors are deceased kin who continue to live on in the social world and in the domestic domain, and whom Miguel Astor-Aguilera states (2010: 164), 'one should take care of... so they assist when needed and do not bother when not needed'. Not all the deceased are ancestors, but the ones who remain in



A Tłi cho individual performs *kò ghàts'èèdi* - feeding the fire. Photograph by David S. Walsh.



social relationships with the living, who can be engaged, ‘in order to cajole, persuade, or indirectly manipulate on an inter relational basis... (as) similar to what humans do with one another in our daily social dramas’ (*ibid.* 169) are the ancestors with whom the Dene may communicate.

While camping at an old settlement, an elder performed *ko ghàts’èèdi* at a cemetery located deep in the bush. The elder explained in English to myself and to the young people present that the ancestors buried there were very old, and we should each feed the fire with a small piece of traditional food that they miss in death and have been craving, such as caribou or fish. He added that there also might be children buried there who would appreciate a piece of candy. He then spoke words to the fire in Tłi cho , the language the ancestors would understand, thanked the ancestors and the Creator and asked that they hear our requests while we each approached the fire and gave our offerings. The fire and offerings were not symbolic: the fire burned the food, transferring it into an edible state for the deceased, who retain their individual tastes in death.

*Ko ghàts’èèdi* allows for reciprocal exchange between personable beings. The ancestors are disadvantaged as they do not have the modern conveniences available to the living, and they need the living to feed them. The ancestors have power to aid the living not because they have received supernatural powers upon death, but because of the power they acquired while alive. Consultants, including the elder who performed the *ko ghàts’èèdi* discussed above, stated that the Dene peoples had relied on relationships with other-than-human-beings to gain power in the world, before becoming dependent on modern conveniences. Recalling from the discussion above that Dene worldviews lack a Cartesian distinction between nature and culture, ancestors and other-than-human-beings are not separate from society, as may be articulated in a Western worldview: nature and the supernatural versus society. Instead, the living environment is where the Dene reside, but they have lost power in that environment while gaining the power of modern technologies. Modern Dene have an easier but less powerful life. Deceased kin maintain stronger connections with the environment than the living; yet it is the living who feed the ancestors.

The three foodways stages of getting, sharing, and giving back both allow for and are dependent on communication within a larger social body. Communication is possible because of a shared personhood between humans and non-human beings. Yet, while gifting draws humans and animals together, the reason for coming together is the desire for their difference. The purpose of respectful reciprocity is not to share in what hunter and hunted have in common, but to share in what they have independently that the other desires. The dynamic of give and take is a social one, mediated throughout the three



A woman pours bread and other foods into the fire at a *kò ghàts'eèdi* ceremony.  
 Photograph by David S. Walsh.

foodways stages. Reciprocity eases the tension of relying on the other for sustenance, and is refocused on in moments of crisis such as the current caribou population decline.

Conventions of etiquette toward animals, in modern contexts, operate predominantly at a discursive level for the Dene. Practices and proscriptions associated with animal regeneration, such as not giving caribou bones to dogs, or bringing the meat of another animal on a hunt, were discussed publicly by elders in response to the caribou hunting restrictions (Drybones and Walsh 2011). The discussions reflect a strong sense of tradition about how to treat animals that the Dene can turn to in moments of crisis, when the relationship between hunter and hunted is under strain. While discourse and tradition remain strong, hunting is a matter of practical utility for the Dene, therefore conventions of etiquette need not always be followed.

## Dene foodways in the era of climate change

The decline of caribou herd populations in northern Canada at the turn of the century, and subsequent hunting restrictions of the Bathurst herd (see Adamczewski *et al.* 2009), has changed the relationship between the Dene and the caribou, and the Dene now rely more heavily on imported foods (Haman 2010). Yet ontological assumptions about the nature of caribou have not changed, and they inform Dene responses to the current crises in relationship. Elders and other Dene with whom I have worked turn to tradition to offer solace and advice, and they express their tradition in innovative means through community workshops and public discussions (see Drybones and Walsh 2011). Dene foodways provide an arena for responses to climate change and caribou hunting restrictions. The foodways stages I delineate are best understood in the end, however, as an interrelated whole. As both the offering and the goal, food mediates exchanges between humans, ancestors, the land, and the animals. A successful hunt is an outcome of properly carrying out the latter stages. The hunt is dependent on properly sharing meat and on returning animal remains, and it may be aided by ancestors and the land.

Foodways, as a lens through which to examine indigenous relationships with the environment, reveal discourses used in order to receive what is needed. Moments of crisis reveal nuance to those discourses, strategies of survival that strike a balance between cajoling while not bothering the food animals. For instance, elders warned me not to speak too often of a caribou decline, for these words would upset the caribou whom were said to be listening (Drybones and Walsh 2011). Theories of personhood, coupled with an examination through foodways, adds a materiality to the abstractions of spirituality, grounding my study in the relationships between the Tłi cho , the caribou, and other beings. Yet more importantly, Tłi cho Dene responses to crisis shed new light on previous studies of indigenous relationships, demonstrating that animals and ancestors are social beings with whom the Dene engage for the survival of their society. The Dene are connected to their past and history when making *ghàts'èèdi* offerings to the ancestors, by asking the past to actively contribute to their sustenance today. To hunt caribou is to engage history and nourish a sense of self. Hunting restrictions cut the Tłi cho Dene off from their history, alienating them from a sense of Dene identity.

In contrast to Tylor's (1871: 427) conception of animism as belief in souls and spirits abstracted from the environment, the Dene do not relate with animating spirits as separate entities. They engage with the actual, living, embodied agents who inhabit the environment: animals, plants, bodies of land and water,



elements, rocks, and ancestors. June Helm (1994: 70) states that the Tłi cho Denes' dreams and visions are experiences with 'the actual animal-being that is there and is speaking'. The Denes' environmental relationships, wherein humans can communicate with animal-beings are not predicated on belief, the defining feature of Tylor's (1871) animism. Belief in beings in the environment is of little consequence to the Dene, as those beings may affect one's life whether or not one believes in them. Respectful reciprocity maintains balance with these beings, therefore reciprocity is social and political. Human and animal relationships are fraught with power dynamics and negotiation, wherein respect is not 'awe' (see Otto 1958 [1917]), but is tied to propriety and etiquette to get what one needs: their flesh for sustenance. Respectful actions draw together hunters and the caribou, but caribou are desired for their difference. Climate change has strained Dene relationships with the caribou, but unlike Canadian strategies of wildlife management, Tłi cho Dene elders have responded from the ontological assumption that the caribou must be approached respectfully, so the Tłi cho can dine and the caribou will continue to thrive.

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# Prestige and alcohol in South Mexican *fiesta*

Drinking with saint patrons in the central valleys of Oaxaca

JOANNA JADWIGA ZAMORSKA

Food and alcohol are the key elements of celebrating a Mexican *fiesta*. I show that drinking at patronal feasts can be the way of constructing a respectful position, as presented in the ethnographic material collected in the three suburban communities of the Central Valleys of Oaxaca (in the years 2012–13). I discuss the relation between drinking alcohol at fiestas, participation and collective identity. I analyse the issue of prestige in the context drinking at fiestas and its relation to gender. I also discuss the role of alcohol in ritual exchanging of gifts at the patronal feasts which were under study and its relation with prestige. Other questions being analysed include the problem of refusing drink and the Catholic and non-Catholic critiques of patronal feasts as based on perceptions of excessive drinking.

*Para todo mal, mezcal,  
para todo bien, también,  
para lo que no tiene remedio,  
un litro y medio.*<sup>1</sup>

When I brought a bottle of mescal as a ritual gift at the *fiesta* organised by the members of local authorities in San Bartolo Coyotepec, at the entrance I met one of the municipal councillors responsible for culture and education. She smiled and said it seemed that I had been learning the customs.

The *fiesta* is a spectacular way of being-together-in-community, considered by some authors as the quintessence of Mexican-ness, expressing as it does national and local identity. The organisation of *fiestas* is an interesting phenomenon, diverse and vivid, which still plays an important role in the life many local communities in Oaxaca and throughout Mexico (as well as in other Latin American countries).

1 A commonly known proverb used in Oaxaca: 'For everything good – mescal, for everything bad too, and for what has not its remedy, a litre and a half' (my translation). All translations from Spanish into English in this text are mine.

It is a phenomenon which is undergoing global influence and experiencing social changes which provoke the need to ask new questions. The festival days of the patron saints are usually the most important feasts in the calendar of local communities in Mexico. The organisation of a *fiesta patronal* will gain members of a local community in Mexico respect, and their prestige will also grow. The positional prestige, which is obtained by the organisers in exchange for their positions, can in the case of men be transformed into nominations to certain positions in local government. In the case of women, as Holly Mathews shows (1985), this relationship is more complicated, because, until now, there have been few women in local government, though despite this fact, many women have financed *fiestas*.

It is also possible to gain positions other than civil service posts which are not connected directly to political power, but are nevertheless prestigious and influential on the life of a community, in exchange for organising a *fiesta*.

As Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska (2008–9) suggested, the issue of prestige wasn't commonly used in anthropological writings as a research category, but mostly as an explanation, especially in the context of gift exchange systems. Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (1981) have analysed the issue of a 'prestige system' in the context of social structure: they have used 'prestige' as a synonym for status, and in similar fashion Jon Abbink (2002) discusses questions of prestige and power in relation to the consumption of alcohol in Maji (Africa). He focusses on the differing status of the various forms of alcohol such as wine in France (Bourdieu 1984). Jean G. Peristiany (1965) and Julian A. Pitt-Rivers (1965) discusses the relationship between prestige and honour, which is close to Marcel Mauss's (1922) understanding of prestige in his classic writings about gift exchange systems, which also treat the term prestige as something close to social status. The issue of individual prestige in the organisation of *fiestas* was recently discussed by Baraniecka-Olszewska (2008–9). She focused on the difference between positional and individual prestige and its attribution to gender.

My focus is on drinking at patronal feasts as a way of developing a good reputation, showing respect and maintaining prestige. I discuss the relation between collective drinking, prestige and participation, *inter alia*, in the context of gender. I understand prestige to be a dynamic phenomenon, not a stable value attributed to an individual, but arising from an exchange of meaningful gestures, their rating manifested in acts that attribute value, in exchange for certain practices (Domański 1999).

Food and alcohol are the key aspects of celebrating a Mexican *fiesta*. My interest in the subject of alcohol began from being surprised at how complex



the ritual of drinking alcohol at *fiestas* appeared to be, how broad its spiritual<sup>2</sup> background is, by contrast with drinking in the cultural context I come from, although it is considered to be, similarly, Catholic (and probably even more heavy-drinking). I was prepared for the fact that people drink a good deal of alcohol at *fiestas*, but at first I was not aware of how they do this. Alcohol was not the main subject of my research – it came out in the fieldwork as a ‘by-product’. This has happened to many anthropologists before, according to Mary Douglas (1988: 3).

This article is based on field research conducted by me from August 2012 to July 2013 and funded by the Mexican Government.<sup>3</sup> Its results were presented at the Donner Symposium on Religion and Food in Turku in June 2014.<sup>4</sup> My research focussed on power and prestige in *fiestas* ‘backstage’ – the questions of social changes, gender and agency.<sup>5</sup>

During the above-mentioned period I participated in more than 20 *fiestas* in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca (Mexico), mostly in San Bartolo Coyotepec, which was my main area of research fieldwork.<sup>6</sup> San Bartolo is world famous

2 I mean the spirit, not spirit as in distilled alcohol.

3 As part of its scholarship for foreigners programme.

4 My participation in the Donner Symposium was sponsored by the Foundation of the University of Warsaw, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Culture, PhD Students Council and the Council of the Students Scientific Movement at the University of Warsaw.

5 The research project title was ‘Fiesta in the communities of the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, State of Oaxaca, Mexico. Organization of patronal feasts as a way of gaining power and prestige’. Travelling costs were sponsored by: Rector of the UW, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Culture (UW) and PhD Students Council (UW).

6 The researched communities are suburban municipalities centres (with easy travelling to the capital of the state), with good access to education and a high level of literacy. They are relatively wealthy and non-marginalised, the main businesses being trade, crafts, tourism and services (old trade traditions). They are recognised nationally and internationally. San Bartolo Coyotepec is an artisan town in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, in the south and west it borders la Villa de Zaachila. The area of its municipality is 31 km<sup>2</sup>. The municipality has 8,015 inhabitants; 3,981 of them live in the centre of the municipality. Most of the inhabitants (45.31%) are dedicated to trade, tourism, and services, and 24.85% of them are craftspeople. Most of the inhabitants (87.54%) are Catholics. La Villa de Zaachila is a district with an archaeological site and an important traditional market (tianguis), in the Central Valleys district of Oaxaca, 12 km southwest of the capital of the state of Oaxaca. This ancient cultural and ceremonial centre of the Zapotecs occupies an area of 81 km<sup>2</sup>. In the municipality of Villa de Zaachila 28,003 people live, 13,959 of them residing in the centre of the municipality. It has the largest number of inhabitants and covers greatest area of all the studied communities. Most of the inhabitants (55.26%) are dedicated to trade, tourism

for its community of black pottery producers, living 11 km south of the city of Oaxaca. I have also collected additional comparative materials in Santa María Atzompa (a green pottery producers' community) and in la Villa de Zaachila (the neighbouring city of San Bartolo, a former ceremonial and political centre of the Central Valley's Zapotecs). My research was based on participant observation, individual in-depth interviews and audiovisual documentation, as well as bibliographical research. My interlocutors were mainly individual *fiesta* organisers called *mayordomos*, and other *cargo* holders<sup>7</sup>.

### Drinking alcohol as participation: collective identities

Many authors argue that drinking during celebrations and rituals is a common way of constructing a collective identity in many cultural contexts (Brandes 1988, Douglas 1988, Heath 1988, Mitchell 2004, Stepaniuk 2007). Why is the question 'to drink or not to drink' so important at *fiestas*? My interlocutors emphasized that drinking alcohol during a *fiesta* amounts to participation. Therefore avoiding alcohol can be taken as a refusal to participate; a rejection of being together in the community, and thus symptomatic of a lack of respect for the group. There is a word *convivir* (similar to 'conviviality') in Spanish which is close in meaning to the sense of the Turnerian term *communitas* (Turner 1969). It is used in the context of the *fiesta* by its participants.<sup>8</sup> It means to live together, to meet but also to have fun together, sometimes including drinking. Drinking at the *fiesta* helps individuals to socialise, to feel like they are in the right place, to take root in the community, which – in my opinion – is related to constructing a collective identity.

and services. 84.58% are Catholics. Santa María Atzompa is an artisan town in the Central Valleys district of Oaxaca, 5 km northwest of the capital of the state of Oaxaca. In the east it borders the City of Oaxaca and it is situated close to the most popular archaeological site in the State of Oaxaca, where the famous pyramid Monte Albán is located. It also possesses its own archaeological site, recently opened to visitors. The municipality occupies an area of 31 km<sup>2</sup>, and it is the smallest of the studied communities. The municipality estimates 27,465 inhabitants, 21,788 of them living in the centre of the municipality. Most of them (49.90%) are dedicated to trade, tourism and services; in the centre of the municipality 90% of inhabitants are artisans, pottery-makers of traditional ceramics, and 24.37% of all inhabitants of the Municipality are dedicated to craft-making. Majority of the inhabitants (83.70%) are Catholics. (Mexican Governmental statistics 1–2)

7 Here 'cargo holders' means position holders, mostly members of groups involved in *fiesta* throwing.

8 I noted it in interviews as well as during informal conversations.

As one of my interlocutors, a *fiesta* organiser said: ‘Tomar, si, licor, porque eso no puede faltar’ (‘to drink, yes, liquor, because that cannot be missing’). So I understand that strong alcohol is something which is obligatory at the *fiesta*. There is also an expression used by a former member of a religious committee: ‘tomadera como debe ser’ (‘binge-drinking as it should be’), referring to the *fiesta*. I interpret it that binge drinking is expected at *fiestas*, as a proper way of honouring, and showing respect to the patron saints. As one of the *fiesta* participants emphasised with pride: ‘en San Bartolo la gente es fiestera’ (‘in San Bartolo people like to feast’). I observed that people who drink at *fiestas* are popular and are considered sociable. I noticed also that drunk people at *fiestas* are usually treated with great respect; the same as in the sober state. They are not considered to be ‘pigs’, and clear signals of their inebriation are treated with understanding. It is parallel with the pre-colonial Aztec attitude to the drunkenness of elites and also equates with the biblical attitude to wine, as in the Old Testament’s tale of Noah’s inebriation. Sergio Navarrete Pellicer explains it as follows: ‘... there is something deeper in excessive drinking in the ritual context than the relation between living people: in drinking great amounts of alcohol, often to the point of unconsciousness, there is a declaration of trust in the communion of souls, the living and the dead’ (Navarrete Pellicer 2001: 69).

The mode of drinking and even drunken behaviour, although it seems hard to control, is culturally constructed, as anthropological literature shows (Heath 1988: 46). Some behaviours are accepted, and others prohibited, considered as a lack of respect to other participants. At *fiestas* in San Bartolo I observed cultural rules of drinking; getting drunk was not a pretext for showing aggression. It was allowed to dance vigorously, shout, display affection and joyfulness, but acting with hostility was not seen in a favourable light.<sup>9</sup> An aggressive person would be excluded from the party; nobody sat next to or talked to such a person, except in asking the aggressor to behave better (cf. Navarrete Pellicer 2001: 69–70). From my point of view, this was surprising as in the Polish context it is common to see drunk people (mostly men) acting violently and it is seen as an obvious hazard associated with drunkenness at parties (especially at weddings or dancing parties in rural communities). Ramona L. Pérez’s (2000, 1997) studies proved something similar – in contrast to my observations – an acceptance of violence (especially against women) as a rule, while men were getting drunk in Atzompa:

9 In Navarrete’s fieldwork (2001: 69, 70) conflicts and aggression were attributed to strangers, and only outsiders were blamed for it.

The movement of gendered psychical, emotional and mental abuse into a public space, such as the *fiesta*, is a clear indication that such behaviour is not only acceptable to the larger social unit, but sanctioned by it, albeit hidden behind notions of uncontrolled behaviour resulting from excessive drinking. (Pérez 2000: 367)

But if there are rules for getting drunk when participating in *fiesta*, which are about constructing collective identities, those rules are also about defining boundaries. Drinking or not drinking at fiestas expresses differences between groups. Firstly the attitudes expressed in participating in a *fiesta* reflects a space-community division along the lines of ‘the uptown *pachangueros*’ (‘party people’) and ‘the downtown *tacaños*’ (‘scrooges’).<sup>10</sup>

As the *padrino* or godfather of the opening parade of the Candlemass *fiesta* said:

In the same village, there is a line that divides us, I don’t know, it has certain traditions, certain customs, I don’t know what it is, but it is well defined. On this side of the highway, people don’t spend money on *fiestas* ... You cross the highway, and there *fiestas* are crucial... During the *fiesta* time, I don’t know from where they get it, but they throw a huge party. And this is a question of those from downtown and uptown. (Interview with the *padrino* of the opening parade of Candlemass Fiesta in San Bartolo Coyotepec, 2012)

Secondly, the decision to abstain can effect a rejection by community members. The same interlocutor told me that he had decided to organise his children’s baptism party to be alcohol-free. One of his relatives brought some beer, despite the fact he had been asked not to do so, and the *fiesta* participants were disappointed at such a small quantity of alcohol being available at the party.<sup>11</sup> His choice was commented upon as being not the proper way to organise a baptism feast (perhaps also as a lack of respect to the guests). He had broken a rule which was not negotiable; his resistance to ritual drinking was not accepted.

Of those who criticise *fiestas* there are two main groups, and their critiques are based on the concept of excessive drinking. Both seem to be inspired by new orthodox ascetic religious movements and rational neo-liberal ideas. Within

10 Both mentioned terms are commonly used as I noted during informal conversations.

11 It could be one crate of beer or more; one hundred people in rural Mexico is usually a modest party with only family members and closer friends.

the Catholic critique *fiestas* are in themselves binge-drinking and nothing else, and they are an offence to the patron saints and God. The fact that the patron saints' images are carried by drunk people signals a lack of respect, and risks damaging those images. The saints do not need such a celebration and can even use their power to take revenge if they feel offended. Other Catholic arguments against *fiestas* are based on expert discourse; alcohol is seen as evil because it damages the health of individuals and families as well as society as a whole.

According to non-Catholic, mostly Protestant (Evangelical) opinion, drinking, *fiesta* and Catholicism are synonymous with each other. Drinking is not acceptable to God, and drinking at a *fiesta* in the name of the saints is a form of idolatry. This evil tradition is also considered to be a waste of both money and time in the name of a God who does not approve. Some non-Catholic, mostly Protestant, churches offer a release from alcohol addiction by means of religious conversion. On their posters, displayed in public places, they invite people to join them if they have any problems with alcohol. It is a commonly-known fact in Oaxaca, and they are believed to be equally supportive of AA meetings, which are common in this area.

As anthropological literature shows, the AA movement can be interpreted as a quasi-religious organisation (Antze 1988, Brandes 2002 and others). In San Bartolo its members mostly avoid *fiestas* (and other non-AA events). They consider it to be a temptation to start drinking. If they participate, they refuse to drink, which in this case is accepted and understood by the community. As we can see, there are exceptions to the rules about drinking.

### Alcohol in ritual gift exchange and as a manifestation of prestige

Sergio Navarrete Pellicer (2001: 68, 69, 77) argues that drinking together in the context of the *fiesta* is considered to be a form of sharing; an exchange of gifts. Organising *fiestas* in the Valleys of Oaxaca is based on a ritual gift exchange called *guelaguetza* (a Zapotec term). According to classic texts, participation in a gift exchange is a way of showing respect and constructing prestige (Mauss 1922). One of the most common gifts in the *guelaguetza* ritual is alcohol: a bottle of tequila, mescal, or a crate of beer. In a situation of food offerings by women, men will give drinks, according to Stanley Brandes (1988: 174–5). It reminded me of the rules that I observed in a completely different (but also mainly Catholic and patriarchal) fieldwork project carried out in the Kurpie region of Poland, where men were always the ones who distilled alcohol and women were responsible for preparing food (Zamorska 2006). There is a tradition in Atzompa of giving alcohol as *guelaguetza* on the first day of the *fiesta*, and soft drinks the following day. It may be another remedy for a hangover.

In all of the communities mentioned, the people of high status (i.e. the authorities, or *fiesta* organisers) are in certain moments greeted with or brought music, alcohol and snacks by religious brotherhoods or committees. As I was informed by the president of a religious brotherhood, alcohol and snacks are called *carino* ('hospitality') or *regalo* ('gift', 'present'), as well as *presente* ('present') in this context. The *fiesta* organisers have to give presents in return, which usually means drinking together, initially with those who directly helped them to organise the *fiesta*. So the ritual of gift exchange remains, as Candlemass *fiesta* organisers from San Bartolo told me:

- They also come for us with a brass band, it is taken... what is this... the bottles.
- It's another present...
- Sometimes we are accompanied by relatives in receiving hospitality. Because it is the hospitality of the house. (Interview with the former *mayordomos* of the Candlemas *fiesta* in San Bartolo Coyotepec, 2013)

Alcohol in this way emphasises structure. It can be seen also in terms of the Turnerian sacred *anti-structure* (1969), where religious positions play a more important role than those of the civil authorities, in contrast with everyday life, and the organisation of the *fiesta* is the main theme. In one of the most important celebrations in San Bartolo – the Holy Week – the symbols of power are placed in the church, and the power of the police is symbolically passed to young men playing centurions (also called the Jews). They must catch criminals and to pass them on to the police station, where the police are still in charge.

According to literature, in pre-colonial Aztec ceremonial centres drinking was restricted, and only used by the elite, who were expected to drink excessively during celebrations (see De Sahagun 2012, as well as many other authors, e.g. Mitchell 2004: 15). This ritual lack of control over the body during celebrations, reverted to daily life, was attributed to prestigious people.

In San Bartolo Coyotepec, a less official form of showing esteem and cordiality to former and actual *cargo* holders (the *mayordomos*, authorities and the like) is giving them the task of pouring the alcohol. The *mayordomos*'s decision concerning who is going to play the role of alcohol 'pourer' is significant, as my interlocutors emphasised (mostly during informal conversations); it is not an obligation or a duty, but splendid. Alcohol pourers cannot refuse to drink, and it could be offensive to refuse the honour of pouring if he or she is not sick, and seen to be drinking. Distilled alcohol is served by a pair of people (often a man and a woman though it is not a rule); one of them pours alcohol (usually a man)

with the other holding cups and pouring some kind of soft drink as a chaser. Beer is given out in 0.33 litre bottles, the size small enough so that on a hot day its contents will not get warm before it is finished.

### Refusal, prestige and gender

In my opinion the drinking in Atzompa was the most ritualised and controlled of all – people took their drinks at almost the same time, with the words ‘voy a recibir’ (‘I’m going to receive’) in front of the eldest and most prestigious people, as observed at the *fiesta*. It is quite hard to refuse to drink alcohol in Atzompa; to do so is considered to be lacking in respect.<sup>12</sup> Especially those people (mostly men) who are sitting at the main table are expected to drink the minimum symbolic amounts of strong drink. There are places only for non-drinking women at the children’s table and to have a beer is not considered enough to be fully participating. Two of my interlocutors (a man and a woman) involved in the *fiesta* preparation in Atzompa were complaining that at every preparatory meeting, or before rituals they had to drink. For them it was not the amount that was hard to take, but the obligatory repetition of drinking was quite intrusive. This is also the case for *fiesta* organisers; I heard from the female member of municipal council about one of the *mayordomos* who died of alcoholic poisoning immediately following a *fiesta* he had been involved in.

For prestigious people in San Bartolo, it is hard to refuse drinking and maintain their status, while it is virtually impossible to do so in Atzompa, especially for women. Ramona Pérez (2000: 368) describes a case of the female president of the potters’ association in Atzompa, who could not refuse to participate in drinking at the *fiesta*. Although she was seriously sick, she was too afraid of losing her prestigious status to quit the *fiesta*. Two female members of the municipal council of Atzompa, as one of them told me, refused to drink distilled alcohol at *fiestas*, so they were strongly criticised for their perceived lack of respect for the tradition, even though one of them was diabetic. A third one drank ‘as it should be’ on every occasion and subsequently she was considered a drunkard. The husband of a female municipal council member in Atzompa also had a hard decision to make, according to his wife. As a non-authority member he could not join his wife at the main table. Although he did not like to drink, he would lose his prestige as a man and a former *cargo* holder if he sat with non-drinking women and children. So in the end he chose to abstain

12 There are also strict rules of receiving cigarettes – to show respect you have to light it, refusal is considered as offensive, as I unfortunately experienced myself.



from participating in the *fiesta* altogether, although it was hard for his wife to be there without him, and he risked being considered an unsociable person as a consequence.

In my opinion, the question of refusing to drink alcohol is as delicate as it is because of two factors: the importance of reciprocity, or gift exchange, that includes exchanging drinks, which is a mechanism for constructing collective identities; and the importance of alcohol itself, as a liminal, sacred substance. That is why refusal is seen not only as avoiding being together but also a lack of respect for that which is held to be sacred; close to blasphemy. It reminds me of the travesty of an old Polish proverb that I once heard from a drunkard 'Pijanego pan Bóg strzeże' ('God watches over the drunk', my translation).

A *fiesta* is thought of as a sacrifice in a religious sense at many levels. The *fiesta* organisers offer themselves to God, patron saints and to the community they represent. But also the pouring of alcohol and collective drinking could be interpreted as making an offering to a patron saint. In case of pouring, alcohol usually follows food or goes with it, so the combination of food and drink together is a complete offering, either at the *fiesta* or in other contexts. Here the nutritive value of alcohol is emphasised as having the effect of enhancing fertility; for example, when alcohol is poured onto the ground by the *mayordomos* of Saint Bartholomew, having placed food (raw chicken) there on the occasion of the spring blessing (1st May in San Bartolo). In the case of collective drinking as a form of making an offering, alcohol usually goes with music and dancing, and this triad is a gift for the saints. On such occasions its psychoactive potential is of greatest importance (it encourages participants to have fun, it makes them feel happy and allows them to experience an altered, sacred state), and it is closely connected to conviviality. In both cases it is a gift exchange not only between people, but first of all between them and the patron saint (who represents God and the collective self at the same time). The idea of sharing is also emphasised by the alcohol pourers using the same two cups for liquor and the chaser for all participants, in contrast to food dishes, or beer bottles which are individually distributed.

In all three communities there is a common tactic of drinking only symbolic amounts in order to avoid the effects of alcohol, but in San Bartolo there are also refusal tactics. As I heard during an informal conversation, when someone offers you a drink, you may say 'en buenas manos está' ('it is the right hands'), that means that it is the alcohol pourer's turn to have a drink. It does not refer to *fiesta* organisers who sometimes have to drink, for example three cups for every single one of the seven women working with *fiesta* preparation, as in the case of the Candlemass *fiesta* in San Bartolo. Fortunately, they may share it among



The author drinking mezcal in San Bartolo Coyotepec, 2007. Photograph by Joanna Dubrawska-Stepniowska.

family members, because the household as a whole is considered to be the *fiesta* organiser. The specific number of cups is suggestive of drinking's religious background, and reminds me the carnivalesque use of the eastern proverb 'Boh Trojcu lubit' ('God loves the Trinity', translation from Russian by the author) (Stepaniuk 2007: 30), often cited in the context of drinking alcohol by the Orthodox Church followers in Poland as well as in the former USSR. In San Bartolo gender is also an important factor in avoiding intoxication and maintaining participation. During any *fiesta* preparations a female who joins women preparing food can refuse to drink, by contrast with the men sitting at the table, discussing, drinking and waiting for something to develop.

In Zaachila, those who have prestige and do not want to drink can ask someone from amongst their relatives to drink instead of them at every turn (a stand-in drinker), as one of the past *mayordomos* told me. A hangover is expected in Zaachila, although not welcomed, so there is a special herb called *yerba de borracho* ('herb of the drunk') also called *té de poleo* and given out by the *mayordomos* after masses which open the main patronal *fiestas*. It can be used fresh or dry with hot water, like herbal tea.

In some cultural contexts, for example in Eastern Europe, interlocutors considered talking with an abstinent researcher to be a pointless exercise (see Śledziecki 2008: 20), so practically speaking the ethnographic research was impossible to carry out without full participation. I argue that co-consumption can be treated as phenomenological *destrangement*, as defined by Ilja Maso (2001: 139–40). As Navarrete Pellicer (2001: 78–9) assumes, getting drunk with members of an indigenous community in Latin America is considered a means of showing trust and confidence. It can be hard, especially for the researchers, to refuse and not to offend their interlocutors.

I consider the Polish perspective (which to a large extent is rooted in Catholicism) to be one of non-abstinence, arising from a familiarity with the

cultural intimacy which is constructed by means of drinking. I usually partake moderately of mildly alcoholic beverages, but I do like mescal and I did not want to feign abstinence, so I tried both tactics (*destrangement* and *estrangement*), depending on whether refusal was well received or not. *Fiesta* organisers invited me to play the role of an alcohol pourer several times, which I appreciated and understood to be a gesture of hospitality and trust. Alcohol pourers usually ultimately get drunk only at the end, though they cannot refuse drinks. In moments of *destrangement* I experienced a feeling of being-in-the-right-place, as well as of being-together-in-the-community (as a sort of 'adopted' and accepted stranger).

## Conclusion

I have aimed at arguing that drinking alcohol at south Mexican patronal feasts has many ritual, mostly religious and social meanings. It is a way of expressing participation, community and trust. It helps in constructing identities, and plays an important role in making contact with the past, ancestors, and higher spirits.

I argued that in the communities of the Central Valleys of Oaxaca mentioned here, practices connected with drinking alcohol are common ways of manifesting prestige. The important role of drinking alcohol in the outlined fieldwork, in my opinion, explains how the decision as to whether to drink or not impacts on the construction of prestige.

Cultural practices of drinking alcohol in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca vary depending on community, gender and religion, and they are also related to community divisions. Drinking alcohol at *fiestas* in the communities mentioned is the subject of critiques and arguments against *fiestas*, traditions and Catholicism. The drinking of alcohol at *fiestas* as researched here is assumed to be a culturally-constructed, meaningful practice.

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# Food in African Brazilian Candomblé

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The aim of this article is to highlight the importance of food in the rituals of African Brazilian Candomblé, as well as in its *cosmovision* (world view). A brief description of Candomblé's historical trajectory is provided in order to show how food offerings became part of its rituals and how specific ingredients became symbolically significant in this belief system. According to the theories applied, it is possible that food has at least two functions in Candomblé: to materialize principles and also to work as a ritual language. To show the role of food in Candomblé the state of Bahia was taken as a case study – firstly because Candomblé started there and secondly because, as this article shows, the sacred foods of Candomblé are also consumed in everyday life, outside of religious situations, but just as importantly constituting a part of Bahian cultural identity. The dishes that feature in the ritualised meals and at the same time in Bahians' everyday eating are described at the conclusion of the article, with a mention of their ingredients and to whom they are offered. The research sources included publications by Candomblé believers and scholars of religion, as well as cooks and journalists specialising in Bahian cuisine.

Most studies about food and religion are carried out by scholars of religion rather than of food or nutrition and it would seem that religious studies have been more concerned with understanding food practices in the religious field than food studies have been concerned with the impact of religion on food habits.

My perspective though, fits the second case. Since I come from the field of food research, my starting point is food culture up until the point where religion is encountered as a cultural element capable of determining or changing food habits. I seek to understand the range of foods and foodways in the religious context.

Almost all religiosities could be studied from the point of view of food as food whether it is encountered in or out of a religious context is often a vehicle for representation. In some belief systems food can be really one of the main ways of expressing the *cosmovision*. This is the case with Brazilian Candomblé, and this is the reason why I have chosen it. Candomblé possibly wouldn't exist

without its food practices. In this article I try to distinguish the different functions food can perform within this particular belief system.

The article begins with a little historical contextualization concerning the origins of Candomblé. The second section addresses the basic *cosmovision*, or worldview, that permeates Candomblé. I do not intend to explore very deeply any of these topics here. I shall simply mention enough for the reader to have an idea as to where food practices are situated within this context. The two following sections discuss the functions of food *per se*, the materialization of abstract ideas or pacts and language, as I try to show how food can be viewed as a religious language in Candomblé.

Finally, by showing that within the culture of Candomblé the food which features in its rituals is also a part of everyday life, I intend to demonstrate the power of food and religion combined; how one reinforces the other, even outside of the religious context.

Many different religions either use food in their ritual practices or have rules about food. Actually, almost all religions have something to say about food, using such terms as pure/impure foods, sacred foods, food taboos, feast and fast, dietetics associated with religious *cosmovisions*, food as symbols, sacrifices and offerings. Indigenous, tribal and orally-transmitted religions seem to have stronger relationships with food, apparently due to a proximity to agriculture; while official religions have veritable manuals on the proper ways of eating. In any case, the bond between religious practices and food can sometimes be truly unbreakable. One thing favours the other: in certain religions food practices may help believers to express their belief in the religion, while the religion may have the effect of preserving typical dishes which are specific to regions or cultures. And in many cases one can observe both of these effects.

## The origins of Candomblé

African Brazilian Candomblé is a Brazilian religion based on African religious cults brought to the continent by African slaves between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Some of the African deities and the forms of worshipping them had been transplanted to Brazil and after many adaptations, Candomblé came into being. One important thing to know in order to comprehend the nature of Candomblé is that Brazil received slaves from various regions of western Africa. Each group had its own culture, language, religion, and the like, and many of them became mixed up with each other in Brazil, forming new groups, and subsequently generating a culture which was characterised by hybrid forms of language and religion. In order to pre-empt a rebellion, slaves from different



cultures were very often intentionally mixed together by the Portuguese during their passage to Brazil. In the state of Bahia, however, a large number of slaves from closely related cultures (Jeje-Nago)<sup>1</sup> were brought together and as a consequence they were able to affirm each other in reproducing the greater portion of their belief system, which, with a few adaptations, formed the origins of Candomblé and which later diffused out to other Brazilian states. The African cults that arrived in Brazil had in common the usage of food in their rituals, in the form of offerings and sacrifices. Candomblé retained this custom, although adaptation was needed.

The food used in Candomblé rituals is called *comida de santo* (a Brazilian Portuguese expression, which literally means ‘saints’ food’) and it reflects the African cult’s history in Brazil. Some of the important ingredients used in the offerings associated with the *orisas*<sup>2</sup> cult, such as *dende*<sup>3</sup>, okra, yams, guinea fowl, *malagueta* pepper and others, travelled from Africa to Brazil with the slaves. Other ingredients which had been left behind had to be replaced by local ones such as corn, cassava root and alternative strains of chilli peppers. Just as did their beliefs, their foodways underwent adaptations in order to survive. The structure of their religion had been changed in order to preserve its organization. The ingredients may also have changed, but the custom of making food offerings to deities and ancestors was maintained. Eventually, such ingredients would figure not only on deities’ menus, but also on those of the colonialists’. Slaves would offer their gods the best of what they had; usually foods eaten by the colonialists, obtained at a high cost. By offering something so special and so valuable they expressed their belief in the divinity of the *orisas*.

From the foods served to the Gods, none takes ingredients served to slaves ... the daily foods served to slaves were based on beans, lard and pumpkin. In certain periods of the year, pumpkin was substituted by bananas and in some sugar cane mills there was a supplement of dried meat. (Radel 2006: 58, 59)

- 1 Terms in italics in this article are African expressions, mainly in Yoruba, the main language used by the Jeje-Nago group. I translate or explain them in footnotes. The terms in italics not translated in the footnotes are the names of dishes.
- 2 *Orisas* are African deities worshipped in Candomblé.
- 3 *Dende* is a palm oil.

Candomblé doesn't impose a fast or make pronouncements about pure/impure foods, regular diets or dietetics; but it wouldn't exist without its food practices. And although it is not a religion which is concerned about what a believer eats, nevertheless food plays a central role in Candomblé's rituals.

### A small window on the Jeje-Nago *cosmovision*; introducing the concept of ase

To understand the role of food in Candomblé it is necessary to understand the African cults' *cosmovision*. The *jeje-nago* system believes that:

There are two denominations which denote the places in which the process of existence is developed: the Aiye indicates the physical world, inhabited by all beings, humans generally called *ara aiye*; and the Orun, which is the supernatural world, inhabited by the deities. The *orisas*, ancestors and all forms of spirits are called *ara Orun*. They inhabit Orun's nine different spaces according to the power and category they have. It is in the Orun that the doubles of all living people from the Aiye, called *enikeji*, are installed and it is to here that all the offerings [food offerings] are sent. (Beniste 2002: 49)

Contrary to what many people think, Candomblé is a monotheistic religion and Olodumare is its supreme god. Mediating between God and humans are the *orisas*. According to Candomblé these are the great servants, and at the same time the great teachers, of humanity.

These divine beings have a very complex nature and should be considered as a group. Some of them would have lived with the Supreme Being at the beginning of time. Others are historical figures such as kings, queens, founders of cities who were deified as a result of certain acts or in recognition of their mythic bonds with natural elements – earth, wind, the spirit of hunting, rivers, tides, herbs and minerals ... they represent the personification of natural forces and natural phenomena: birth and death, rain and dew, trees and rivers; they also represent the three kingdoms: mineral, vegetable and animal, as well as the principles of masculinity and femininity. (Beniste 2002: 77)

According to Nago mythology, at the beginning of time Orun and Aiye used to be one world, uncompartmentalised. *Orisas* and humans would live together:

The myth reveals that in the distant past, the Aiye and the Orun were not separate. Existence unfolded itself on two levels and the beings of both spaces would go from one to another without hindrance; the *orisas* inhabited the Aiye and human beings could go to the Orun and come back. After the violation of an important interdiction the Orun and Aiye became separated and the existing world was set apart; human beings could no longer go to the Orun and come back alive from there. (Santos 1986: 54)

Although these worlds have become separate they are still dependent upon each other. In Candomblé they say that ‘life doesn’t end with death, just as sweetness doesn’t end with honey’ (Reis 2000: 295). When a person dies their life continues in a different way; they become what is called an *egun*,<sup>4</sup> now inhabiting the Orun. This fact is attested by a ritual called *asese*, which is at the same time a funeral ceremony and also considered a new beginning:

Without *asese* there is no beginning, there is no existence. The *asese* is the origin and, at the same time it is the dead realm, the passage from individual existence to the generic existence of the Orun. There is no confusion between the Aiye’s reality – the dead – and its symbol or its double in the Orun – the Egun. (Santos 1986: 235)

And that’s why ‘the cult of the ancestors is mandatory in Candomblé; it assures the initiated their immortality. Life always goes on, either on the physical level (Aiye) as a person, or on the spiritual level (Orun) as an ancestor’ (Reis 2000: 295). If death is the door for humans to the Orun, as they become *eguns*, possession is one important door for *orisas* and sometimes *eguns*, to come to the Aiye.

Nevertheless, there is a crucial principle that holds the worlds together, allowing an entire system of a flow of communication and energy between them. *Ase* is known as the principle of accomplishment that animates and drives everything. For didactic purposes one could to some extent compare *ase* to the concepts of *prana*, *ki* and similar ideas found in many other religions.

The presence of the supernatural entities, *orisa* and *egun*, can only be possible through ritual activity. The priestesses, the altars, the consecrated objects and the entire ritual system would cease if there was not a periodic transference and redistribution of *ase*. (Santos 1986: 51)

4 An *egun* is a spirit of the dead, an ancestor.

*Ase* is not endless and 'is not born spontaneously; it has to be transmitted' (Santos 1986: 36). So all the *ase* a person receives has to be re-established at specific moments, such as birth, several initiations, death or less predictable ones such as disease, starting a business, and so forth. Each person is related to a few *orisas* and is supposed to worship these *orisas* throughout his or her life. The relationship a person maintains with the *orisas* and *eguns* will directly impact on the balance of *ase* in this person's life. By worshipping the *orisas* *ase* can be assured. When a person dies, most of his or her *ase* is given back to the Orun, where it will be used by others.

A decrease in a person's *ase* can be caused by many factors, including improper behaviour (excesses), not fulfilling obligations to the *orisas*, curses, the action of evil spirits, *egun's* vengeance etc. Such an unbalance of *ase* is detected when a person gets sick, suffers injuries, goes through financial difficulties or any other problem that prevents them from achieving their destiny in the Aiye. Problems in life can really be an indication (in C. S. Peirce's [1967] sense) of a decrease in *ase*. In such cases rituals involving food offerings are performed in order to increase *ase* again. 'To acquire and accumulate *ase* is a process in which the horizon is the promise of permanence and the irreversibility of vital force' (Vogel 2001: 93).

'*Ase* is transmissible; is passed on by material and symbolic means and it is accumulative. It is a force that can be acquired by means of introjection or contact. It may be transmitted both to objects and human beings' (Santos 1986: 39). *Ase* always seems to need a material vehicle in order to be transmitted and food, in the form of food offerings, has presented itself as the main one. Minerals and ingredients from the vegetable kingdom, as well as animal sacrifice can be used individually or in combination as food offerings. These offerings are made to the *orisas*, *eguns* and sometimes the person's double. Once the food is offered, Esu<sup>5</sup> will take it to its addressee in the Orun. It is important to remember that Esu also 'eats' and he should be offered first, otherwise the offerings won't be delivered.

The food offered is not materially eaten by the deities, although it is believed that all energy (*ase*) from food offerings is transferred to the addressed entity in the sense of nurturing. Once the food has been left sitting for a sufficient period of time it can usually be consumed by the clergy and the initiated. The food offered is supposed to be steeped with *ase* which will pass into those who

5 Esu is an African male deity who is a messenger, a guardian and also the facilitator of creation. Represented by its phallus and the colours black and red he is very often confused with the devil.

are eating it. However in some cases food offerings cannot be eaten and must be delivered to specific places according to the *orisa* or other deity to which the food has been dedicated, and it might be left, for example, at the beach, river, forest, stone quarry, crossroads, or the cemetery.

### Food embodies principles

In Candomblé 'ritual activities engender a series of other activities: music, dance, singing, recitation, art, crafts, the culinary arts, etc., that integrate the system of values and the *cosmovision* of the *terreiro*' (Santos 1986: 38). But only something so basic and at the same time so essential to the maintenance of life, such as food, could embody so well the values of Candomblé. Candomblé believers also pray, play the drums and have a dress code in order to worship their *orisas*, but in this culture, food may seem to be the best means of encapsulating its values. The verb 'to eat' is a current word in Candomblé rituals because not only do living beings eat, but so also do invisible deities and objects 'eat'; the *buzios* (the oracle of cowrie shells) eat, statues of the *orisas* eat, masks and drums eat. Every thing and every being that receives the proper food offerings acquires *ase* and becomes alive. The act of making food offerings is called 'to plant *ase*' (Santos 1986: 43). Once *ase* is 'planted' the deity or object has to 'eat' periodically, according to a liturgical calendar. Thus nurturing entities and objects (that eventually become entities) is a way of establishing pacts and alliances between believers and supernatural forces; implicating rights and duties on both sides. As Candomblé uses food to transport *ase*, we can understand food as the factor that turns the abstract into the substantial. Even though human communication is based on verbal language, it still seems to require some sort of non-verbal, but physical demonstration.

It is more usual for the subject matter of messages to have weight and dimension, and for the signs representing them to be insubstantial: words, spoken or written. ... [W]hen that which is signified is incorporeal, like worthiness or influence, its representation may have to be material if it is to be taken seriously. ... [W]ords 'must be made heavy' if they are to be convincing. Corporeal representation gives weight to the incorporeal and gives visible substance to aspects of existence which are themselves impalpable, but of great importance in the ordering of social life. (Rappaport 1999: 141)

For example, sex is concrete, one can talk about it, but wedding proposals only seem real when followed by wedding rings. Especially when the social order is based on religious premises it is even more essential to convert its deities and principles into something concrete and mainly objective. Pacts and bonds between man and immaterial beings need to be made substantial, according to Roy Rappaport, discussing Marcel Mauss's concern 'with the moral obligation to return gifts':

Conventional bonds cannot be specified without words, but cannot always be established by words alone. ... Bonds among the living are not alone in requiring substantiation. The substantiation of the conventional by the material is also an aspect of sacrifice, whether the sacrificial act is understood to be an offering or a communion. If an offering, devotion is made substantial; if a communion, that which might otherwise remain an abstraction is first made substantial and then informs the performer as it is assimilated into his substance. (Rappaport 1999: 142)

According to Candomblé believers, deities also materialize their messages; nature can be 'read' through animal and plant behaviour and the weather also emits signals from the *orisas* to those who are capable of interpreting the signs. Many of us have lost the ability to read the signs in nature, but a experienced interpreter would still detect them. During the course of our evolution we've spent more time communicating in non-verbal than verbal ways. 'The message traffic in four out of the five kingdoms is exclusively non-verbal; verbal messages have been found only in animals and there surge solely in one extant subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens*' (Sebeok 1994: 7). And not only natural phenomena may communicate, but also objects. Graham Harvey, mentioning the Yorubas from Nigeria, conveniently says about the cowrie shells, kola nuts and other divinatory systems: 'Deities speak through objects. Meanings are recognized in what some others might interpret as random events (note that "randomness" is much an interpretation as "there is meaning here")' (Harvey 2013: 144). An initiate believer can glean information even from ordinary everyday objects.

The kitchen [where the *comida de santo* is prepared] is full of interdictions: not to talk more than necessary, not to speak loud, scream, sing or dance to music that is not related to the *orisas*, not to allow people who are not initiated. ... In this consecrated space everything gains meaning: a bowl that falls, the fork, the knife, the spoon, the oil that smokes too much when burning. In the kitchen one can learn beyond the right consistency of a

dish, learn not to turn the back to fire, not to throw salt on the floor, not to stir food with a spoon that is made out of wood, that food stirred by two people goes bad, not to put out a fire with water or that the presence of people related to certain *orisas* makes the food turn out bad, as in the example that when there are people related to Sango<sup>6</sup> in the kitchen, popcorn kernels will burn before they pop. (Junior 2009: 83)

Another great example of the deities speaking through objects is the *lubaça* game. *Lubaça* is a word for onion. In this case an onion cut in four equal pieces becomes an oracle. 'After votive food is prepared, right there, the *lubaça* is thrown in order to find out if the food has been accepted or not by the *orisa*. If the answer is negative, the food should be prepared again.' (Junior 2009: 75)

This non-verbal language is taken so seriously in Candomblé that they are really careful not to 'send messages by accident'. A person would never pass a knife directly to another; it could cause a fight. The knife should be placed on a surface by one person and then picked up by the other. Similarly certain foods are not offered to certain *orisas* or *eguns* because of the possibility of miscommunication with unfortunate consequences.

## Food as language

The so-called *comida de santo*, or ritual food practices in Candomblé can be understood as language in a sense that the offerings communicate something to supernatural beings and to the other participants. *Ase* is the message that is supposed to be transmitted between the two worlds, the Orun and the Aiye, and the believers' intentions are messages transmitted to other participants and deities. Whatever intentions are to be communicated, they can and ought to be converted into 'food language'; we can understand it as a transduction, as Rappaport suggests:

Transduction (the technical term for the transmission of information or energy from one form or system to another) is not always a matter of mere transmission. It is often necessary to translate information into terms which are meaningful to the receiving system or subsystem. Sometimes translation, if it should even be called so, is a simple matter of changing modality, for instance from the grooves of a phonograph record to the sounds emanating from a speaker. The 'languages' or metrics of the two subsystems, the

6 Sango is the *orisa* of justice, fire and thunder.



record's grooves and the vibrations of the speaker, are supposed to correspond to each other perfectly. (Rappaport 1999: 98)

Food in Candomblé can be understood as a language not only because it is able to transmit messages, but also because it follows a strict grammar. This grammar dictates which foods should be used, for what purposes, how, by whom and to whom. A change in one of these variables would produce an unexpected result: a miscommunication or a non-communication. In the same way that several languages use the same 26 letters of the alphabet to produce totally different languages, so different religions can use the same ingredients to produce totally different results.

As in other religions that also have food as a ritual element, there are two different sets of rules determining the ways of *comida de santo*: one is the religion, which will establish the reasons for and ways of making food offerings in Candomblé, as presented before. And the other is the food system itself. Every culture existing within a geographical area, at least in its beginning, is subject to its environment. The climate, the soil, the mountains or valleys, the rivers or deserts will design the products of the land; the abundance or scarcity of foods, as well as the possible techniques for obtaining, preserving and transforming them. Considering the symbolic capacity (language) of humans, everything acquires a meaning, including food:

In all societies the way of eating is ruled by conventions analogous to those that give meanings and stability to the verbal languages. This set of conventions, which we call grammar, configures the food system not only as the addition of products and foods, reunited in a more or less causal way, but as a structure in which each element defines its meaning. (Montanari 2008: 165)

The combination of geographical and physical conditions, plus cultural aspects would construct culinary systems with their own grammar:

The culinary systems of nations do not emerge only from mere survival instinct and necessity of nutrition. They are expressions of their histories, geographies, climate, social organization and religious beliefs. Because of that, the forces that condition a taste or revulsion for particular foods are different from one society to another. (Franco 2006: 25)

A culinary system will say which foods are proper; what is the correct 'grammatical' way of preparing and serving it and to whom. Even without religion, implied culinary systems impose rules and values onto food and foodways. Within a religious system this grammar can be amplified and justified. Religion will attribute meanings to foodways and food taboos. Even when they have been transported from one place to another, culinary systems tend to sustain their grammar, in the sense of proposition, as much as possible. In the same way, when a local culinary system is confronted by a new one it tends to preserve its values in response to the new grammar. 'Culinary practices are not so easily destroyed as are caliphates and theocracies' (Miller 2009: 159).

The highly structured nature of food systems is reflected in a tendency to reproduce models of reference ... even in a case of a forced detachment from customary practices, a system might persist in as close a proximity as possible to its own culture, to the 'language' that is well known ... inventions of all kinds are attested to adapt available resources to techniques and practices which are already well known. (Montanari 2008: 171)

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the food habits that came to South America with African slaves, informed by their *cosmovision*, underwent adaptations just as as much as the local food system was influenced by the African slaves' religious foodways.

This interplay of preservation and adaptation can be perfectly observed in Candomblé food practices. Back in Africa, the *Orisas* would already have had their proper votive foods, based on African local culinary systems. Subsequently Brazil would offer a whole different culinary system; a mixture of local indigenous and Portuguese factors. In the meeting of the three different culinary systems a new one emerged; the Brazilian. In Salvador, Bahia, due to a large number of slaves coming from similar cultures (and thus with similar culinary systems) it is possible to identify what is called in Brazil 'the African cuisine of Bahia': a system where, definitely, the African culinary system predominates. Some authors attribute this fact to the influence of religion on the African culinary system:

The orisas would have the favourite dishes, Sango, *caruru*, Osun<sup>7</sup>, chicken *xin-xin*, Osala<sup>8</sup>, *hausa* rice without salt. To a large extent, if African cuisine

7 Osun is a female *orisa* of love, fertility, waterfalls and rivers, gold and prosperity.

8 Osala is a male *orisa* of wisdom and peace. Superior to other *orisas*, he is referred to as the 'father of all'.

can hold its own in Bahia, against the Portuguese or indigenous systems based on cassava root, it has happened due to its relation to the cult of the gods, and the gods do not like changing their habits. (Bastide 1960: 464)

... [T]he slaves which were brought to Bahia, being a more homogenous population, practised almost the same religion; Jeje-Nago. The African-Bahian cuisine derives from the culinary practices performed in the *terreiros*<sup>9</sup>. *Orisas* would be worshiped at ritual banquets as demanded by the cult, and each *orisa* has its own votive food. The only ingredients in these votive foods were guinea fowl and the palm oil present in most of the offerings ... it should be mentioned that most white people accepted these votive foods and transferred them to the holy week, to the Cosme and Damion festival and to Saint Barbara's festival when *caruru*, *vatapas*, *efos*, *fradinho*<sup>10</sup> and black beans are prepared in palm oil, *xin-xin*, regular rice, *mungunza*, *abara*, *acaraje*, raw sugar, sugar cane and slices of dried coconut are served. (Radel 2006: 59)

A more homogenized concentration of black slaves could be verified to pertain in the city of Salvador, a more intimate one, and as such facilitating a defence of the old African foods more than in other places. It would be around the Candomblés, around the Jeje-Nago cults, that the African cuisine could sustain the primary elements of its survival. (Cascardo 2004: 824)

When it comes to what is considered votive and what is regular food in Bahia, it is very difficult to draw a line. They seem to be really blended. Many of the votive foods in Candomblé would have been in the first instance regular dishes which started to be used as votive dishes later, when Candomblé was more defined as a religion.

It is more logical that slaves, in the same way that they included *moqueca* and *caruru* in their *orisas'* diet, would have their specialties appreciated in noble houses, *vatapa*, *caruru*, *acaraje*, *acaça*, independently of the functions of these foods in candomblé. It would be food of the gods and also of the devotees from

9 A *terreiro* is a house or cottage where African Brazilian Candomblé is practiced.

10 *Fradinho* is a specific type of bean from Borneo, disseminated in Brazil and Africa by the Portuguese.

the *peji*<sup>11</sup> sanctuary. Before *Sango*, *amala* was a regular dish. (Casculo 1977: 837)

However, we should be reminded of the fact that these ‘first, regular dishes’ were an African legacy, and that means these regular dishes were permeated by their religious *cosmovision*. When Brazil was a Portuguese colony African slaves were always the only source of manpower. The kitchen was one of the main areas of activity which would require slaves: ‘In Brazil, the African presence in the kitchen was indispensable and regular. It was the most common, natural and proper of the occupations.’ (Casculo 2004: 836)

Africans tend always to have a religious attitude towards food. Their relationship with *orisas* would permeate their agricultural practices. ‘Those who give me what to eat also eat...’ (Junior 2009: 34), says an African song. One good example is celebration of the *orisa* called Osala, a ritual that commemorates the harvest of the new yams. This ritual is known as ‘Osala’s pestle’, with which in earlier times they would make yam flour. The idea of giving back to the gods was always present in the African culture, so it would be natural that such a belief passed into the dishes along with African ingredients.

We could say then that the division of foods into religious and non-religious categories doesn’t exist for the Africans, or that what really highlights the difference is the precepts (grammar) which apply when food is being prepared and which impact on to whom it will be served: *orisas* and *eguns*, versus the Aiyé people. At the *terreiros* food is offered to *orisas* and *eguns* on specific occasions following rigid and, most of the time, secret and ritual precepts. But in the houses, restaurants and streets of Salvador the same food is being consumed by everyone, including people who have no connection to Candomblé and even people who belong to other religions.

Here follows a list of dishes served as offerings which also figure at the same time on people’s tables every day or even are sold as street food. In order to make such list we have used as reference cookbooks on general Brazilian and Bahian cookery, as well as a Salvadorean restaurant guide (*Veja magazine* 2014), comparing them to texts from scholars speaking on votive foods of Candomblé:

*Abara* is a batter made out of *fradinho* beans, to which *dende*, *malagueta*, onions and salt are added and steam cooked. An African equivalent is found in Nigeria under the name of *moin-moin*. It is offered to the *orisa* Osun. (Radel 2006: 154)

11 *Peji* is a sacred room where private rituals take place.

*Acaraje* is the definitively iconic dish of Bahia and of the entire *comida de santo*. It consists of a fritter made out of *fradinho* beans fried in *dende* oil and served with dried shrimps. It is the most popular street food. It is sold by the famous *baianas do acaraje* (Bahian women dressed on African costumes). *Acaraje* is one of the offerings to Yansa<sup>12</sup>.

*Açaça* can be made with white or yellow corn and may be sweet or savoury. It is a batter made out of the crushed corn mixed with water and cooked until it thickens. It is wrapped in triangular shaped banana leaves. When it cools off it acquires a distinctive consistency. When made out of white corn with no sugar and no salt it is offered to Osala, though most *orisas* may eat it. When made with yellow corn it is offered to Osossi<sup>13</sup>.

*Amala* is a dish offered to Sango and Yansa. It consists of an okra stew. Okra is sautéed in *dende* oil; onion and dried shrimps are added.

*Caruru* is from Salvador. *Caruru* is the name by which a lot of people know *amala*. But in Salvador when one says *caruru* one is referring to a mixture of several *comida de santo* dishes. *Caruru* is the occasion where the saints Cosme and Damion (Ibeji<sup>14</sup>) are honoured. It is called *caruru dos meninos* ('*caruru* of the kids'). It's one of the most popular celebrations in which food and religion combine, and in which the 'profane and sacred' are found side by side.

Whether rich or poor, the head of household in which twins have been born invites friends and neighbours to partake of a *caruru* to honour the twins Cosme and Damion. The festival takes place during the month of September and very often the host is helped with the preparation of the party by his relatives and friends. (Andrade 1987: 54)

*Doburu* is regular, plain popcorn. When it is used as an offering it cannot take oil or salt. And it should never be microwaved popcorn. *Doburu* is offered to Omulu or Obaluae<sup>15</sup> every Monday and also on the feast day, August 16. A great procession is held on this day. Those who seek to be cured supplicate this *orisa*, the Lord of healing. Some people may even take 'baths' of *doburu* in order to be cured.

12 Yansa is a female *orisa* of wind, storm and fire, also called Oya.

13 Osossi is a male *orisa* dedicated to hunting and knowledge.

14 In Brazil there is a syncretism between Catholic and African saints. Cosme and Damion are Catholic saints, but their equivalent in Candomblé is the *orisa* Ibeji, which are also two boys.

15 Omulu and Obaluae would be the old and the young versions of the same *orisa*. He is the Lord of cure, known as the doctor of the poor.

*Efo*: in this dish a 'dough' of *taioba*<sup>16</sup> leaves is made by boiling and squeezing the leaves. The dough is seasoned with onions and dried shrimp and sautéed in *dende* oil. *Efo* would be offered to Nana, the oldest female *orisa* and mother of Omulu. She is the *orisa* of rain.

*Farofa* is a generic name for seasoned cassava root flour. The seasoning may be prepared in many different ways. When *dende* oil and onion are added, all the ingredients sautéed together may be called *farofa amarela* ('yellow *farofa*'). It may be served with any Bahian dish, and may be also offered to *Esu*. When *farofa* is offered to *Esu*, we call it *pade*, and it could also be prepared from a mixture of cassava root flour and *cachaça*<sup>17</sup>.

*Feijoada*, the most characteristic and well known Brazilian dish is a stew that combines black beans, sausages, beef and all pork cuts and is served with cassava root flour. This is the favourite food of Ogun, the 'way opener'. He is the *orisa* of all ways, material and spiritual. He is also the *orisa* of war.

*Fried fish* sometimes fried in *dende*, sometimes in olive oil is consumed everywhere and it is also a very important offering to *Yemanjá*<sup>18</sup>. It may include shrimps or shrimp sauce.

*Hausa rice* is a dish brought by the Hausas, Muslim Sudanese from Nigeria. It consists of rice with jerked beef. The rice must be cooked until very soft with dried shrimp and onion. The beef is cooked with onions and garlic. It is consumed with a lot of chilli pepper, though if it is to be used as an offering pepper and seasonings are not allowed. It is offered to *Osala* and *Yemanjá*.

*Manjar* is a very popular dessert in Brazil. It is a coconut pudding served with prune syrup. Though it is generically a Portuguese dish it is also an important offering to *Yemanjá* and *Ibeji*. When it is an offering it doesn't take prune syrup.

*Xin-Xin* or *oxin-xin* is chicken stew with *dende*, onions and dried shrimp. It is a very popular dish in Bahia, found in many restaurants, served with chilli peppers sauce and cassava root flour. It is offered to *Yansa*, *Ogum* and *Oxum*.

As in any area of human activity, this cuisine has gone through a number of changes due to technological, economic, social and many other developments. For example, people don't cook as much as they used to. Along with that, *Candomblé* has also changed, as would any other religion, for many reasons. It is not my intention to analyse such changes in this article. My aim has been to point out that these changes have been reflected in *Candomblé's* food practices.

16 *Taioba* is local leaf, similar to spinach.

17 *Cachaça* is Brazilian sugar cane brandy.

18 *Yemanjá* is the great mother and the *orisa* of the seas. *Yemanjá* is the most popular *orisa* in Brazil.

As the old priests and priestesses of Candomblé pass away, they take some of the traditions with them. Some of the dishes are no longer made and many recipes are starting to be forgotten, as has been mentioned by Guilherme Radel (2006: 233).

Although dishes are changing, a few ingredients, seasonings and techniques from *comida de santo* still pertain in both spheres (religious and secular): these include *dende* oil, dried shrimps, okra, beans, onions, cassava root flour, corns, and chilli peppers.

This cuisine is still available in Bahia and on the other hand there has been some governmental and popular effort aimed at preserving Bahian cuisine. The Instituto de Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, IPHAN (National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage) has encouraged people to write books on the subject; *acaraje* has been deemed to be an institution and is now protected by law as a cultural patrimony. Bahia hosts millions of tourists every year and they are enchanted by the religious festivals, costumes, churches and *terreiros*, as well as by the food, even when they don't know the relationship between food and Candomblé. Some ingredients, perhaps because of their exoticism, may be considered 'sacred' by tourists. 'You will see many a returning visitor from Bahia leaving the airport with a bottle of *dende* in tow, guarded with as much care as if it were an elixir of the Gods' (Andrade 1987: 51).

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# *Habaneros and shwarma*

Jewish Mexicans in Israel as a transnational community

PAULETTE KERSHENOVICH SCHUSTER

Food is the cultural expression of society as a marker of class, ethnic, and religious identity. What happens when the location changes? Does food continue to play such an important role or do other cultural nodes take over? Do layers of traditions, adaptation and cultural blends emerge? This seems to be the case with third and fourth generation Mexican Jews who have moved to Israel. Not only have they brought their spiritual and cultural connections from Mexico, their birth country; they have also brought the food experiences of their great-grandparents and grandparents who were themselves immigrants. Jewish Mexicans have transplanted their sense of community to Israel and in doing so they have also brought overlooked cultural interactions and unique food experiences. Are these simply by-products of religious and migration patterns? Or are there other elements that have affected this cultural hybridity?

## Introduction

Food is the cultural expression of society and a marker of class, ethnic, and religious identity.<sup>1</sup> What happens when the location changes? Does food continue to play such an important role or do other cultural nodes take over? Do layers of traditions, adaptation and cultural blends emerge? This seems to be the case with third and fourth generation Mexican Jews who have moved to Israel. Not only have they brought their spiritual and cultural connections from Mexico, their birth country; they have also brought the food experiences of their great-grandparents and grandparents who were themselves immigrants. Jewish Mexicans have transplanted their sense of community to Israel and in doing so they have also brought overlooked cultural interactions and unique food experiences. Are these simply by-products of religious and migration patterns? Or are there other elements that have affected this cultural hybridity?

1 On food and class see Bourdieu 1984: 169–225; Goody 1982: 97–154. On food and identity see Anderson 2005: 124–40, 154–62, 186–209; Fischler 1988: 275–93; Montanari 1999: 189–194.

Jews in Mexico infused the traditional Jewish dishes of their ancestors with typical Mexican ingredients such as: *chiles*, lime, banana and corn leaves, and local herbs and spices like *epazote*, *cilantro* and *achiote*. How do they recreate these flavours in Israel? Israeli cuisine encompasses dishes from a variety of Jewish ethnic cuisines such as North Africa, Spain and Syria (Sephardic tradition) and Eastern Europe (Ashkenazic tradition) reflecting patterns of immigration and acculturation (Rozin 2006: 52–80). The end result is *shwarma* (an Israeli/Middle Eastern shredded lamb meat dish) topped with spicy *habanero salsa* (a Mexican ingredient), *shakshuka* (Israeli poached eggs cooked in a spicy tomato and hot pepper sauce) with *jalapeños* (Mexican *chile*) and *matzo balls* (a traditional Ashkenazi Jewish food) in *pozole* (a spicy Mexican soup) eaten on Friday nights for *Shabbat* (the Jewish day of rest). These culinary concoctions and combinations are just some examples of the food fusion between Israeli local cuisine and the Mexican fare mixed in with Jewish religious traditions, or what I call the ‘Mexicanization of Israeli foodways’. In other instances the sacredness of food filters in with Jewish and Mexican folk remedies such as hot chicken soup (Jewish comfort food) with *cilantro* and lime (Mexican ingredients), washed down with a shot of *tequila* (Mexican hard liquor) and lemon as a cure for the common cold. This religious relationship functions both as an expression of belief and a religious value, forming a symbolic connection to the ancestral past and modern religious cooking and transnational practices. Graham Harvey (2013) contends that religion is not about belief but about practices, which I will discuss at more length later.

This article explores how Jewish Mexicans have recreated their sense of self in Israel by using food as a bastion of their religious, spiritual and cultural identity. Specifically, this article explores the cooking and consumption patterns of Mexican Jews prior to and post immigration to Israel; the shared food experiences of these immigrants; Mexican, Israeli and Jewish cuisines as separate gastronomic diets; the intersections of Mexican-Jewish and Israeli cuisines and traditions; and the nostalgia and memories evoked by these experiences. Lastly, Jewish Mexicans as a transnational community are briefly discussed in relation to food practices.

## Methodology

This article draws on qualitative and ethnographic research conducted inside Israel. It is based on participant observation, individual in-depth interviews, a review of the existing literature and field research using *charlas culinarias* (culinary chats).<sup>2</sup>

A total of fifty interviews have been conducted as part of a larger research project that was begun in December 2012. Interviews were conducted with Jewish Mexican women of different generations, religious and socio-economic backgrounds and in various cities throughout Israel. I have included myself in this study as a participant and as a participant observer. As a participant and as a fellow Jewish immigrant from Mexico, I have also shared some of the same life experiences. As a participant observer, I enjoy a vantage point from which I can gauge multiple cooking practices.

For this specific paper, follow-up interviews and casual conversations were conducted with both Israeli and Jewish Mexican men in order to evaluate other narratives of cooking and consumption patterns. Gauging these narratives from a time perspective (years in Israel), places of residency, ethnic/religious backgrounds (among other factors) provided a poignant insight into individual immigrant stories and a greater historical and contemporary understanding of food fusion and adaptation. Interviews conducted were semi-structured with open-ended questions in Spanish and/or Hebrew.

## Background of the Jewish Community in Mexico

As of 2015, the Mexican Jewish community numbered approximately 40,000 (out of a total Mexican population of 119 million) and thus represents a very small minority in the country (INEGI). The contemporary formation of the Mexican Jewish community began to coalesce in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, although its historical roots can be traced to the rediscovery of the Americas (Gojman de Backal 1987, Krause 1970, Sourasky 1965). Most Jews entered Mexico between the 1920s and 1950s, although immigration flows began earlier in the *Porfiriato*.<sup>3</sup> Three

- 2 I have borrowed the phrase *charlas culinarias*, coined by Meredith E. Abarca (2004: 1). Although Abarca's research centres on the life experiences and cooking practices of working-class Mexican women, I think these culinary chats are a useful tool for our own purposes.
- 3 The era of Porfirio Díaz's government from 1876–1911 is known as the *Porfiriato*. Aside from a brief interregnum from 1880 to 1884 when Díaz personally appointed

migratory periods with two major waves can be identified: 1876–1911, 1911–34, and 1934–50 (Kershenovich Schuster 2012).

In Mexico City, there are four main sub-groups (ethno-religious and cultural groups) in the Jewish community, divided according to their ancestral places of national origin: *Ashkenazim* (Eastern European Jews), *Sephardim* (from the Iberian Peninsula, Turkey and the Balkans), and two distinct Syrian Jewish sub-groups (one Damascene known as *Shamis* and the other Aleppan known as *Halebis*). These sub-groups are divided even further into ten community sectors to which the majority of the Judeo-Mexican population is affiliated.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish Mexican community is highly organized and centralized. Each community sector provides its members a whole array of services. Generally speaking, the Jewish community in Mexico City is considered traditional.<sup>5</sup>

### Israel and the Jewish community

Israel's current population stands at 8,309,400 (as of January 2015, Israel Central Bureau of Statistics). In 2013, Israel welcomed approximately 16,600 new immigrants. During the period 1948–2012, Israel absorbed 224,350 Latin American immigrants. The newcomers were largely from Argentina (68,545), Brazil (14,472), Uruguay (11,467), Chile (6,847) and Venezuela (2,597) (Israel Central Bureaus of Statistics).

Directly related to this case study, there were 5,067 immigrants from Mexico. Certainly, it is not a high number but it does offer a modest contribution to the overall picture of Latin American immigration. The migratory flows between

Manuel González as his temporary successor. Some scholars put the end of Díaz's regime in 1910 with the start of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20).

- 4 1) Beth Israel Community Center (an English speaking institution, which practices Conservative Judaism); 2) the CDI – Jewish Sport Center (sports, cultural, and social institution, which integrates members from all the other sectors); 3) Monterrey's Community Center (the representative institution of Monterrey's Jewish Community); (4) North Baja California's Community Center (the representative institution of Tijuana's Jewish Community); 5) Ashkenazi Community (formed by descendants of Eastern Europe immigrants.); 6) Bet El Community (an institution which practices Conservative Judaism); 7) Guadalajara's Community Center (the representative institution of Guadalajara's Jewish Community); 8) Maguén David Community (formed by descendants of immigrants from Aleppo); 9) Alianza Monte Sinaí (formed by descendants of immigrants from Damascus) and 10) Sephardic Community (formed by descendants of immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula, Turkey and the Balkans) (Seligson 1973: 203; Tribuna Israelita's website).
- 5 For more on the religious spectrum and divisions, see DellaPergola and Lerner 1995, Alduncin and Asociados 2000.

1948 and 1969 from Mexico were constantly maintained. The first major rise occurred in 1969. I have identified five important peaks: 1969–73, 1975–78, 1982–4, 1995–6, and 2009–10 (based on information tabulated from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics). Each of these groupings had different push and pull factors, but the majority were tied to patterns of socio-economic instability and general feelings of insecurity.

The 1980s ushered in a large influx of Jews from Mexico to Israel, due to economic changes known collectively as the *Tequila Crisis*. In the 1980s alone, 1,005 people entered the country; 929 immigrants arrived in the 1990s and between 2000 and 2010, 814 people immigrated. Since 2012, 258 Mexican immigrants have made Israel their home (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics).

## Discussion

What is Jewish cooking? Do we infuse it with certain Jewish elements such as *Kashrut*?<sup>6</sup> Is it the simple act of digesting traditional Jewish dishes?<sup>7</sup> Does it involve a spiritual connection or a greater Jewish nation/peoplehood?<sup>8</sup> What does it mean to eat Jewishly? Does what we eat make a difference?

Jewish cooking is a daily expression of religious beliefs, ethnic identification, cultural or family history, or a combination of these components (Kraut 1983: 71–83; Marks 2010; Spieler 2002; Roden 2001; Montanari and Sabban 2004).<sup>9</sup> Transcending social upheavals and countries, it nonetheless encompasses a plethora of ingredients and tastes that reflect the cultural forms and practices, ethnic markers, and religious elements of many Jewish communities worldwide. This combination of global and local is mirrored in the complex constructions of identity among Jews who embrace local cuisine while preserving traditional foods.

Eating Jewishly in this article is defined as consuming food that has been cultivated and harvested using Jewish ethical values. These values are not only tied to *Kashrut* but to other factors as well. In her presentation ‘There’s *Kashrut*, and then there’s “eating Jewishly”’ Alden Mulhern (2014) implies that eating

6 *Kashrut* is a term used to refer to the Jewish dietary laws.

7 The act of eating is defined here as the act of converting food into nutrients that supply the body’s organs and cells.

8 Jewish peoplehood was first termed in November 2006 (to my knowledge) by the Diaspora Museum when it established the International School for Jewish Peoplehood Studies.

9 On ethnic cuisines and foodways see Buckser 1999, Fischler 1988, Anderson 2005, Bahloul 1995.

Jewishly occupies a higher spiritual plane than *Kashrut*. By making this connection, Mulhern has brought to the fore an interesting conundrum: that of whether eating Jewishly is more important than *Kashrut*, and vice versa. She further explains that Jewish eating explores the intersection of Jewish trading and contemporary food issues as embodied in the organization Shoresh.<sup>10</sup> Many of the followers of this Jewish food movement, propose that having a vegetarian and vegan lifestyle is a good place to start. For most of my informants, eating *kosher* (or 'keeping *kosher*') was more important. However, many also stated that *kashrut* was not a factor in their diet. Although none of my informants followed the principles of eating Jewishly, some of the Israelis I spoke with did follow a vegetarian and vegan diet, reflecting a nationwide trend. For those of my informants that ate according to *kashrut*, *kashrut* was held in high spiritual/religious regard. They elevated their diet, cooking practices, lifestyles and beliefs to a level of sacredness (Sered 1988: 129–39). Thus, creating a religious relationship between their beliefs, cooking and eating practices. For example, by keeping *kosher*, everyday mundane food was elevated to something special. Moreover, when traditional holiday dishes were prepared, due to their laborious nature and higher spiritual/religious and symbolic connection to the ancestral past, women often cited feeling more attuned and aware of larger forces that united them to a greater Jewishness and Jewish nation/peoplehood.

In Mexico and Israel, the national diets have taken on a dominant role in the everyday food choices and cooking practices of my informants. The culinary influence of both countries is clear and is manifested in the combination of styles, practices and diets involved. Jewish cooking is well integrated into this scenario.

The traditional and modern Mexican diets are and were based on corn. Prehistoric Indians domesticated corn (Quintana 1993: 9) and used it as a component in ritual, as is evidenced in ancient archaeological and pictographic records (Mazzetto and Moragas Segura 2014). The emphasis on this invaluable foodstuff reflects the Mayan belief that humans were moulded and created from corn.<sup>11</sup> Corn is used as an ingredient in cooking savoury dishes as well as desserts and in a vast amount of products such as syrups, oil, grits, colourings, glucose, flour, animal feed, and starch.

10 As further elaborated in its food conference of 27 January 2012. Shoresh is a not-for-profit Jewish Environmental organization. Founded in Toronto in 2002. Among its programmes, it includes a food conference, the Kavanagh garden, Bela Farm, Kollels, CSA, kids', adults' and seniors' programmes and workshops. For more on Shoresh and its founding principles and programmes, see its website.

11 Prehistoric Indians called corn *toconayo* 'our meat' (Quintana 1993: 9).



The most important use of corn is in the form of *masa*, the dough for making *tortillas* and their variations, as well as for *tamales*.<sup>12</sup> According to ancient techniques, dried corn kernels are cooked with water and limestone or quicklime until the corn kernels are soft. After soaking for one day, the kernels are then skinned and ground (Quintana 1993: 9). This ancient cooking practice or process is known as *nixtamalización* or nixtamalization and is now mechanized, as is the production of *tortillas*,<sup>13</sup> except for in remote villages. It is a process that is almost unknown outside of Mesoamerica (Mexico Sabroso's website).

In addition to corn, other important staples include a variety of *chiles*, tomatoes (green and red), beans, squash and squash blossoms, and avocados, along with cacao and vanilla. *Chiles* are an integral part of everyday food and are eaten often in the form of salsas, or else sprinkled over fruit, popcorn, corn or popsicles in the form of a powder known as *chile piquin*; or they are eaten in the form of candy (or as candy) together with tamarind (sweet and spicy). Mexican cuisine is not uniform and varies according to each state and region.

The modern weekday Israeli diet is based largely on fresh vegetables, fruits, and dairy products (Gur 2008; Ziv 2013; Golden 2005: 181–99; Sirkis 2004). Israeli cuisine also incorporates many foods traditionally eaten in other Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisines, such as *falafel*, *hummus*, *shakshouka*, and *couscous* (steamed semolina served with cooked vegetables and broth) (Raviv 2003; Gvion 2006, 2009).<sup>14</sup> There is currently a debate on the appropriation over ownership of Israeli/Middle Eastern regional dishes, such as *hummus* and *falafel* and who has the right to claim them as their own (Broussard 2007: 691–728; Abu-Fadil 2011; Ariel 2012: 34–42; Ranta and Mendel 2014: 1–24). The main debaters in this contested culinary issue are Israelis, Lebanese, and Palestinians. All assert that the origins of these foodstuffs are rightfully theirs.

Food fusion, a process characteristic of the immigrant experience, refers to the trend of combining foods from more than one culture in the same dish. Some examples of food fusion in Mexico include stuffed zucchinis with tamarind sauce; stuffed vine leaves with lemon sauce; artichoke with *kipe* (a Syrian

12 A *tortilla* is a foodstuff generally made with dough from nixtamalized maize. It is flat and circular in shape. *Tortillas* vary in size and colour. They can also be made from white, yellow, blue or violet and/or red corn. They may be small (2 inches in diameter) or large (as wide as 10 inches). The former are more popular and are known as *tortillas taqueras* (for tacos). They can also be made with *nopales* (cacti), and avocados.

13 A mechanized *tortilla* factory is called a *tortillería*.

14 On food in the Middle East, see Heine 2004, Zubaida and Rapper 1994, Roden 1994. For general background on the Middle East and its Jews, see Cleveland 2004, Simon *et al.* 2003.

dish) and lamb, combined with various types of *chiles* and spices (such as cinnamon) and served with flour *tortillas*; meat rolls with *ancho chile* sauce; and *kipe* stuffed with beef, *serrano chiles* and *chile piquin*.

Israeli cuisine, like other Middle Eastern cuisines, is based on a few key ingredients such as lamb, chicken, dried beans, aubergine, rice and bulgur wheat, olives, yogurt and salty cheese (South and Jermyn 2006: 122). Thus, Jewish dishes, which largely follow the Middle Eastern cuisine except for the strict separation between dishes containing meat and those containing dairy ingredients (according to *kashrut*), are alive with flavour and healthful ingredients, emphasizing wholegrains, vegetables, legumes, and olive oil (Dweck and Cohen 2007). The Mizrahi cuisine in Israel reflects the convergence of Jews from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iran, Algeria, Morocco, Afghanistan, Bukhara (Uzbekistan), Egypt, the Berber communities, Kurdistan, Eastern Caucasus, and Georgia (Bahloul 1989: 85–95; Leichtman 2001: 247–72). It also shares a number of culinary practices with those of Palestinian Arabs (Shihab 1993; Dabbdoub Nasser 2001; Ranta and Mendel 2014: 1–24). Mizrahi food is often light and fresh, concentrating on salads, stuffed vegetables and vine leaves, olive oil, lentils, fresh and dried fruits, herbs and nuts, and chickpeas. Lamb or ground beef are widely used for *Shabbat*, holiday, and celebratory meals. Rice is a staple of the Mizrahi diet, as are many varieties of flatbread such as *lafah*, *pita* and *malawach*. There are many intra-group variations and modifications. In addition to the influence of Mizrahi and Middle Eastern cuisines, Israeli foodways also integrate the Ashkenazi Jewish diet largely based on potatoes, beets, brisket, chicken and cabbage in various formats (Bernstein and Carmeli 2004).

Initially, during the period of acculturation, Jewish immigrants continued to eat traditional Jewish food after their arrival in Mexico, but gradually Mexican dishes and foodstuffs entered their cuisine. Over time, members of the second and third generations adopted modern Mexican patterns of eating as well as Mexican foods. Jews now enjoy the culinary diversity of Mexican dishes, adapting them at home to meet the requirements of *kosher* cooking. Thus, for example, *chiles en nogada*,<sup>15</sup> traditionally made with *poblano chiles* filled with *picadillo* (a mixture usually containing fried ground beef, herbs, fruits and spices or diced potatoes and carrots) topped with a walnut-based cream sauce, called *nogada*, and pomegranate seeds, giving it the three colours of the Mexican flag: green from the *chile*, white from the nut sauce and red from the pomegranate.

15 The name comes from the Spanish word for the walnut tree, *nogal* (*Diccionario de la Lengua Española*). The walnut variety used to prepare *nogada* is called *nogal de Castilla* or Castilian walnut.

Jews adapt this dish by either substituting a cheese filling instead of the *pica-dillo*, by omitting the *nogada* white sauce or by preparing an alternative white sauce made with coconut cream/milk.

Another example includes *tostadas* (deep-fried *tortillas* topped with beans, shredded lettuce, some kind of meat, *salsa* and grated *cotija* cheese).<sup>16</sup> Due to *kasbrut*, Jews either omit the cheese or omit the meat and add the cheese. There are many other popular Mexican foods enjoyed by Jews which include *tacos*, *tamales*, *quesadillas*, *chilaquiles*, *enchiladas*, *enfrijoladas*, *entomatadas*, *sopa de tortilla*, *flautas* and corn-on-the cob with various toppings (Quintana 2003).

In Israel, Middle Eastern Jews continued to use food as a symbol of identity, at first signifying regional ethnicity such as Yemenite, Moroccan, Iraqi and later as part of the formation of Mizrahi identity. Middle Eastern Jews also contributed to the formation of a new national Israeli cuisine which incorporated European and Palestinian foods with the various dishes that non-European immigrants brought with them.

For many years, food preferences among Israelis mirrored political and ethnic separations by adopting the Mizrahi/Ashkenazi divide (Dahan Kalev 2001, Smooha 2008, Khazzoom 2008). However, today, the growing acceptance of culinary diversity means that Israeli Jews are more willing to embrace not only their ancestral ethnic cuisines of origin, but other, newer culinary traditions. In Mexico, eating patterns vary in each Jewish community. The community of Jews from Syria tends to consume its own ethnic cuisine. For example, it is rare that Syrian Jews will eat Ashkenazi food, citing that is disgusting and tasteless; conversely *comida árabe* (Arabic food, the food of the Syrian Jews) is often eaten by Ashkenazim or Sephardim. Adding this culinary value judgment is indicative not of the different palates, but of cultural distinctions and levels of religiosity. Israelis, by contrast, incorporate various forms of ethnic cuisines and make them their own. All of the Israeli informants described their diet as Israeli, although some of the women reported that they ate only traditional Jewish food on a daily basis.

Weekday food in Israel also consists of a mix of styles; mostly Israeli and traditional Jewish dishes mixed with some international dishes (for instance, *sushi*, *pizza*, or *dim sum*). As in Mexico, traditional family meals are eaten on *Shabbat*, and are often served in a special dining area used only for *Shabbat*, holidays, and other festive occasions. In Mexico, typically Jewish food is cooked

16 *Tostadas* are considered *antojitos mexicanos* (Mexican appetizers).

by the respondents with the aid of domestic help.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the situation in Mexico, food in the Israeli households was not normally prepared by domestic help. Instead, it was prepared by the female members of the household (mothers, mothers-in-law and daughters).

Food fusion does not occur in Israel as widely as it does in Mexico but this trend seems to be changing. Rather than combine various elements into a new dish, Jewish dishes are often served together with other Middle Eastern foods such as *szug* (a Yemenite chili pepper sauce or spread), which is often added to *falafel*, *tehina*, cut vegetable salad, or *hummus* and is also spread over fish and eggs or *chraime* (a spicy Moroccan fish with tomatoes). This type of what I call 'parallel' eating and/or cuisine is common and can be seen in other instances as well.<sup>18</sup>

### Boundaries, identity, and control: Mexicans in Israel as transnational community

Jewish Mexicans in Israel function as a transnational community. Transnationalism refers here to those multiple ties and the interactions linked to people or institutions through frontiers and nation-states (Vertovec 2009: 67–8). The wider meaning of transnationalism, within the rubric of globalization, includes certain actions or transnational or transcultural practices. Michael Kearney points out that 'transnationalism implies a diffusion or better said a reordering of distinction of binary cultural, social and epistemology of the modern period' (Kearney 1991: 55).

The transnationalism of Jewish Mexicans assumes diverse expressions. They participated actively in the construction of connections and transcultural practices in order to develop and re-create different ethnic, affective and transcultural ties within globalization.<sup>19</sup> Social networks on the internet play a fundamental role. This has created a virtual imagined community that has transplanted a little bit of Mexico into Israel. In a way, Mexican soil, plus Jewish roots and then in the new context Israeli soil, have combined to form

17 Although they reported receiving some help from their mothers or mothers-in-law on special occasions.

18 I define 'parallel eating' as eating types of foodstuffs in parallel form such as meat, *tortillas* and chicken, but not together on the same plate. I define 'parallel cuisine' as serving various types of national cuisines side-by-side but again not on the same plate. For example, serving an Asian noodle salad as an appetizer, Indian curried chicken with white rice, and *halva* (Israeli sesame seed candy) as dessert.

19 On globalization and food culture, see Watson and Caldwell 2005, Fischler 1999, and Chase 1994.

Jewish-Mexican roots.<sup>20</sup> On these online forums, Mexican Jews of various religious, socio-economic backgrounds and ages, share everything from political views, the best and worst Mexican restaurants in Israel, which stores are selling Mexican products or Israeli version of products, and who has the best recipe for *mole* (a thick sauce made with *cacao*, peanut butter and *chiles*, and other ingredients) among other things.<sup>21</sup> The fact that these spaces devote any time to food suggests that this online community serves as a strengthening element of memory, and identity and connection to transnational and transcultural practices.<sup>22</sup> Another transnational practice demonstrated by my interviewees were their trips to Mexico, typically, every two years. Each time they fly to Mexico, they do so with empty suitcases, which come back full of Mexican foods and sweets not available in Israel.

Another term that goes hand in hand with transnationalism is bifocality. Bifocality here refers to those dual practices in which immigrants constantly compare their places of origin with their adoptive homeland. Many immigrants are involved daily in activities and relations that tie them to the experiences of the nearby or the 'here' and to the distant or the 'there' (Geertz 1983: 55–72).

Examples of some cultural manifestations surrounding food that combine a diasporic identity and transculturalism include: monthly social meetings by Jewish Mexican women in the north and centre of the country; annual celebrations commemorating Mexican Independence, either at Mexican restaurants, barbecues in parks or at various residences of Mexicans and coffee and cake time in the homes of Jewish Mexican women on an *ad hoc* basis. Any excuse to eat and congregate is greatly valued. Food constitutes the bonding element in these gatherings surpassing differences in their generational, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. The sharing of food acts as a congruent element of personal and collective identity and as an expressive activity (Searles 2002). This network of exchange aids in the incorporation and assimilation of newcomers 'making kinship,' which is central to the social reproduction (Carsten 1995). Thus, food serves as an important vehicle in the production of meaning and identity (Searles 2002) and of making a home. As one Orthodox Jewish

20 It is a twist on Shores's Jewish environmental programme entitled 'Canadian soil, Jewish roots.' For more on this, see its website.

21 The word *mole* comes from the Nahuatl word *mulli*, which means 'sauce or stew' (*Diccionario de la Lengua Española*). The dish has its origins in the prehispanic period, when elaborate and various ground sauces that with the passage of time were modified and redefined into the modern version.

22 For more on food and memory, see Holtzman 2006: 361–78; Bardenstein 2002: 353–87; Naguib 2006: 35–53.

woman in her forties told me: 'food and the whole idea of making food together, not just eating it together, has been a tradition in my family and in many others, I believe food is about taking care, sharing and an important part of making a home'. Some of the younger women I interviewed generally share the view of food as an important aspect of family gatherings and festivities but do not necessarily welcome the idea of cooking with other female members, especially their mothers-in-law. Some expressed the bond that they share with their grandmothers and mothers in making traditional Jewish food for their own families, despite the fact that they are in different countries. However, there is sometimes discord in the types of food being served on these occasions and in everyday fare.

These acts transplant the Mexican context into an Israeli one, forming a conjuncture between Jewish identity and the Mexican one. This *Mexicanidad* or 'Mexican-ness' acts as an identitarian space that develops and acquires a new form that extends to a cultural Israeli framework.<sup>23</sup> In Mexico, the immigrants' hybrid identity as Jews was highlighted but in Israel their Mexican identity takes on a central role. In the end, a new hybrid identity of Mexican-Israeli-Jewish and/or Zionist or Mexican Israelis, Israeli Mexicans, Zionists or any combination thereof is created. On the one hand, participants confront the tripartite condition of having inherited their identity by being born in Mexico but lacking full ancestral *Mexicanidad* and at the same time, remaining Jewish and carrying on their parents' traditions. This group must constantly prove to outsiders that they are indeed worthy of their ethnic and nationalistic characterizations.

As Jorge Duany (2013) pointed out, the re-creation of companies/businesses is a transnational practice and also a form of cultural production. An important example of this is the opening of restaurants representing the owners' place of origin. In the last decade, there has been a proliferation of restaurants that claim to serve Mexican food. According to an internet-based Israeli restaurant guide (Zaprest), there are 36 Mexican restaurants, but a close examination reveals that the majority are not authentic Mexican venues and only offer a semblance of these flavours. The online restaurant list also included catering businesses or businesses offering prepared food for home delivery. Some were *kosher*, most were not.

23 *Mexicanidad* here is used to refer to a socially constructed term for describing not just an adherence to Mexico in national terms but a deep connection to and pride in the land as part of an identity and not as a proto-nationalistic 'indianist' movement as described by Susanna Rostas (1997).

On its window-front, one restaurant in English stated: 'Fresh Mexican food', while in Hebrew it read 'Mexican-American food'. To add insult to injury, inside the establishment there were posters advertising specials with misspelled words in Spanish, as well as American inspired themes and decorations.

The majority of these restaurants offer Tex-Mex food; they are followed by restaurants that serve Latin, South American fare or meat accompanied by *tortillas*. According to some of my Israeli participants, the fact that these restaurants serve *tortillas* or *tortiot* as they are known in Hebrew, magically converts them into Mexican. Even though the so-called 'Tortilla Bars' are popular in Israel, the concept does not exist in Mexico. These establishments typically offer a variety of toppings which are then spooned on top of *tortillas*. However, as one twenty-something Mexican woman told me: 'I went; it was good that you could build your plate of *tacos* for only 29 shekels, and get your choice of chicken, beef or vegetables. It wasn't bad in order to get rid of the craving a bit, but it is not authentic Mexican. The *tortilla* was cold and hard.' By contrast, in Mexico *tortillas* are soft and are served warm in a *tortillero*.<sup>24</sup> In Israel, imported wholewheat and plain flour *tortillas* can be readily found in local supermarkets and various healthfood stores. Corn *tortillas* can be purchased through catering services or in speciality stores. *Tortillas* and Mexican food in general are marketed as a healthy, exotic and vegan alternative.

In Israel, the greatest concentration of these restaurants is located in the centre of the country, reflecting settlement patterns of most of the Jewish Mexican immigrants. Currently there are approximately 1,000 registered Mexican families.<sup>25</sup> Even though there are clusters of Mexicans in various medium-sized cities throughout Israel such as Herzliyah, Tel Aviv, Karmiel, and Kfar Saba, they do not live in enclaves as they occur in Mexico as denominated by Alejandro Portes (1987). Moreover, the patterns of settlement are tied to economic activity.

On its website, one of these restaurants lists its purpose: 'to serve ethnic Mexican food in which you can taste a variety of dishes from an authentic Mexican kitchen'. In reality, this is not the case. Only a handful of places serve 'truly authentic' Mexican food. Claiming authenticity in food production is a tricky issue. As noted by Abarca, 'the concept of authenticity marks its presence

24 A *tortillero* can be a plain basket covered with a cloth, an insular pouch made from cloth or a type of basket manufactured from dried fibres from the maize plant known as *chiquihuite* which is covered with a small embroidered cloth. When not fried or cooked, *tortillas* are always served warm or hot.

25 According to information obtained from the Mexican Embassy in Israel.



in multiple settings: media, cookbooks, literature, classrooms discussion, and casual conversations with friends and colleagues.' (Abarca 2004: 1).

One restaurant stood out as the best among the restaurants according to the Jewish Mexicans I spoke with. This establishment was frequented by many of my respondents and used as a meeting place. However, people still complained that it was not too spicy (i.e. not hot enough), that it was expensive and that they do not serve the *tortillas* warm.

Other restaurants offered parallel cuisines in the same establishment for example: Italian, Spanish and Mexican food; Spanish, American, Mexican and Latin; Cuban, Argentinian, Spanish and Mexican; Italian, American, French and Mexican; Mexican, Japanese and Italian; and Italian, Mexican and Indonesian. These symbolize the many misconceptions Israelis have about what constitutes authentic Mexican food. What they know has been gathered from popular media, travels or from watching the local Israeli soap opera TV channel that features shows mostly from Latin America. As one second-generation Israeli told me: 'I know there are *tortiot* and that it is very hot street food.' The fact that she thought of it as only street food already points to misinformation and misconstrued perceptions. Israeli fusion culinary inventions include a fast-food place that features a *tortilla schnitzel*<sup>26</sup> bar, where chicken breast, entrecote, and homemade *kebabs* (skewers) are all served together with *tortillas*. Another offered parallel eating by serving meat, *tortillas* and 'indulgent' foods (dessert). A burger place served 'original *churros*' (a Mexican fried pastry dessert) filled with *Halva* (an Israeli sesame seed sweet paste/dessert), nougat and caramel. Again there is misleading information here, since *halva* and nougat are not used in Mexico. This can be classified as fusion but it is not presented that way.

One Mexican restaurant served 'Mexican brunch' from 10:00–13:00 every Friday and Saturday. This is an interesting occurrence, since the concept of brunch is not really practised in Mexico. What is practised in Mexico is an extended form of breakfast. In other words, people meet for a late breakfast which ends up carrying on into lunch. This is typical among men conducting business meetings or among female socialites gathering with their friends for their weekly meet-up. However, it is not called brunch and it is not an organized event or served in a buffet-style manner as proposed by the label 'brunch' or as practised in the United States.

Not all Mexican restaurants succeed in Israel. One Mexican restaurant in Rishon Lezion (a city in the centre of Israel) closed due to poor service

26 *Schnitzel* is breaded chicken, veal or fish eaten in Israel. It was brought over by Ashkenazi German immigrants.

and as one Jewish Mexican woman experienced, exceptionally bad food. Not only did the food lack authenticity, but it was also bland. In another instance a Jewish Mexican woman told me: 'There was one near where I lived in Rehovot (another city in central Israel). But I didn't go in. It was always empty. Not even flies would stand there, so it didn't appeal to me.'

In lieu of proper Mexican restaurants, many people have opted for growing their own crops (of various *chiles* such as *jalapeños*, *poblanos* and *habaneros*, green tomatoes or *tomatillos* and cacti or *nopales*), and/or cooking and adapting Mexican recipes to local ingredients. As one secular Jewish Mexican thirty-two-year-old woman, told me: 'I grow real *poblano chiles*. Made in Israel. I guarantee you that they are great. Not cloned.' This woman grew these *chiles* for commercial purposes. Over the last five years, many Mexican products have become available in speciality stores, such as *mole* (red and green), different types of *salsas* (ranging from mild Tex-Mex style, sweet-spicy mango to hot *chipotle salsas*), flour for making *tortillas*, hominy corn, dried *chiles* (*guajillo*, *cascabel*, *ancho* and *pasilla*), fresh *chiles* (*poblano*, *habanero*) and pickled *nopales* to name a few items. Mexican products can also be found in local supermarkets, although the variety is not extensive, such as Mexican-imported juices, *tortillas* and *salsas*. In these supermarkets, Israeli-made 'Mexican' products are also available. Such products include Mexican pastrami, organic spicy Mexican peanut butter, Mexican crushed *chile* and Mexican *shata* crushed *chile*, potato chips with 'Mexican' flavour and *pita* chips with 'spicy Mexican' flavouring. These products to most Mexicans are demeaning and offensive since they constitute stereotypes and misinformation as to what Mexican food is really all about. In the preceding lists there are two interesting examples: Mexican *shata* crushed *chile* and the *pita* chips. The Mexican *shata* in this case is a misnomer since the *shata* pepper is an Israeli indigenously-grown pepper unknown in Mexico and the *pita* chips offer a classic example of food fusion, where a local snack is combined with a foreign product. In this case, the *pita* snack is the local product and the spicy Mexican component is the foreign element. What is also interesting is the way the words are used: spicy Mexican as in a spicy Mexican person as opposed to using a more appropriate label or presenting them as a Mexican snack instead of fusion. When I asked what made a product 'Mexican', most Israeli people told me that it was 'Mexican' because it was spicy, even though this was not always the case. This lack of awareness leads to cultural and culinary misconceptions. Moreover, in a local supermarket, I found two types of fresh *chiles* that were labelled as being the same product. They were both labelled as being spicy *poblano* peppers. One was indeed *poblano chiles* which are mild to medium-hot, the other was *habanero chiles*, which are quite hot. This mislabelling shows a lack of knowledge of the product at hand.

Many Jewish Mexicans have fiddled with and honed their recipes. Some have turned out well, others not so well. For example, one person was able to re-create *pozole* perfectly by buying hominy corn and boiling it all night and then making the broth with a mixture of dried *chiles* purchased locally. She then added the accompaniments of shredded lettuce, radishes, diced onions, cubed avocados, wedges of lime and strips of fried *tortillas*. Traditionally the hominy is boiled with quicklime. Again due to a lack of Mexican products, ingredients or tools, people adapt the recipes and cooking methods. Others were not as successful, as was the case of a person who tried to make *barbacoa*. *Barbacoa* in Mexico City is traditionally made from goat meat (*cabrito*) and is often prepared with parts from the goat's head, such as the cheeks.<sup>27</sup> Due to *kasbrut* and the lack of available goat meat, this Jewish Ashkenazi male adapted the dish by cutting up beef thinly and frying it, then using store-bought barbecue sauce to simulate the richness of the *barbacoa* pit. Although quite tasty by his account, it was not authentic. *Barbacoa* is often served on the banana leaves in which it was cooked, often eaten with onions, diced *cilantro* and a squeeze of lime juice. Another element that was often substituted by my informants as a side dish was the *totopo*, which is made of deep-fried, cut up *tortillas*. The *totopos* are used as an accompaniment to many dishes or as a tool for dipping. Some informants tried to buy ready-made corn chips or attempted to fry locally bought *tortillas*. Again, the issue of authenticity came up.

Other informants tried to make *elote preparado* or prepared corn. The corn cobs are often spread with mayonnaise and sprinkled with lime juice, *cotija* cheese and *chile* powder. Off the cob the corn, known as *esquites*, is sometimes served plain but usually with the same toppings.<sup>28</sup> *Esquites* are generally made from fresh corn. They can also be fried and then seasoned with salt. Or they can be sautéed in butter with onions, sprinkled with *chile piquin*, *epazote* and salt. *Esquites* are served hot, in small cups. Since *cotija* cheese and white corn cannot be found in Israel, yellow sweet corn and parmesan cheese or another hard white cheese have been substituted. In one case, a secular, Jewish Mexican thirty-something man told me he made his own version and called it 'my Israeli corn in the purest Mexican style'. He used mayonnaise, local powdered red pepper flakes and grated *tzafit kasha* (a hard local Israeli cheese) in his creation. Again, this is an example of immigrants adapting the local ingredients to

27 In northern Mexico, it is sometimes made from the head of a cow and in central Mexico, it is also made with lamb.

28 The word *esquites* comes from the Nahuatl word *izquitl*, which means 'toasted corn' (*Diccionario de la Lengua Española*).

re-create a comfort food, which reminds them of home. Julie L. Locher *et al.* (2005) examines the social construction of some food objects as 'comfort foods', highlighting how cultural studies of food should take into account its social and physiological dimensions. Comfort foods are classified into four categories: nostalgic foods, indulgence foods, convenience foods, and physical comfort foods (*ibid.*). In our case, Jewish Mexicans use three categories of comfort foods: those consumed when feeling nostalgic; as a form of indulgence (when celebrating an event); or for physical reasons (for example when they are sick).

In recreating these dishes, they are trying to symbolize identity within food practices and through the act of consumption. By recreating dishes with local ingredients and within the constraints of *kashrut*, Jewish Mexicans are actively engaging in a reconstruction of an ideal and identity, a home in limbo. This home is transplanted into the Israeli context. The location and the relationship of foods become key. In doing so, Jewish Mexicans have created a new imagined community (Anderson 1991) and a community of practice (Wenger 1999) in Israel, one that is infused with the exquisite aromas, tastes, traditions, with nostalgia and memories of home. In her study of Ecuadorian migrants living in New York, Emma-Jayne Abbots (2011) contends that food from home tastes better than that which they purchase and prepare themselves. As such, the value judgments which are made through this statement, embed taste as culturally and socially influenced. Similarly, in Israel, the shared food experiences of Jewish Mexican immigrants are paramount and serve as catalysts of food practices and human relationships. This culinary exchange between immigrants allows them to proclaim and define their identity through the act of consumption of symbolic food items. As one Mexican Catholic man asked me: 'How do you do it? [How do you] find good Mexican food here?' I answered that I cooked it at home. The he asked me where I bought Mexican products. We discussed and compared opinions regarding the products being offered. And when all else fails in choosing symbolic foods, one can always forego those options as one of my informants eloquently stated: 'I can't stand *hummus* for lunch. Since I can't eat *frijoles* [beans] and *tortillas*, I go get a *schnitzel*'.

## Conclusion

This article presented an interesting case study of Jewish foodways and the significance of food for Jewish Mexican immigrants in Israel. Food plays a central part in their construction of religious, spiritual and cultural identity, which was constructed in a multiethnic and transnational context through everyday social interactions, cooking and eating practices. These immigrants shared

experiences and attributes that provided a meaningful social structure and relational narratives.

Specifically, this article explored the cooking and consumption patterns of Mexican Jews before and after immigration to Israel; the shared food experiences of these immigrants; Mexican, Israeli, and Jewish cuisines as separate gastronomic diets; the intersections of Mexican-Jewish and Israeli cuisines and traditions; and the nostalgia and memories they evoke.

It seems that religious, socio-economic backgrounds and generational differences did not affect which type of traditional Jewish food was served in Mexico or in Israel. However, the generation gap was evident in the quantity and frequency of when these dishes were prepared and the style of cooking implemented. The older generation preferred conventional ways of cooking, whereas the younger generation opted for food fusions and parallel eating. Lastly, the concept of Jewish Mexicans as a transnational community was also discussed as it relates to food practices.

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# 'A Shmita Manifesto'

A radical sabbatical approach to Jewish food reform in the United States

ADRIENNE KRONE

A revolutionary movement recently cropped up with a vision to revitalize American Jewish environmentalism through food reform. This movement implemented *shmita* (sabbatical) year practices, which Jewish law mandates only inside the land of Israel, in the United States during the *shmita* year that began in September 2014. This article offers a brief historical overview of *shmita* and then utilizes the main texts of the *shmita* movement to explore how the Shmita Project connects the diverse worlds of Judaism, environmentalism, ethics, and food reform. The Shmita Project encapsulates a multivalent environmentalist strain of American Judaism that is deeply concerned with climate change, industrial agriculture, and food injustice. The unprecedented observance of an American *shmita* year, focused on land stewardship and food security, is emblematic of this movement's efforts towards sustainable agriculture, animal welfare, and repairing the American food system through practices that are inspired by Jewish tradition and values.

## Introduction

A revolutionary movement recently cropped up with a vision to revitalize American Jewish environmentalism through food reform. This movement implemented *shmita*<sup>1</sup> year practices in the United States. *Shmita* is translated literally as 'release' but it is more popularly translated as 'sabbatical'. *Shmita* is a sabbath for the land. Similar to the weekly sabbath, a day of rest after six days of work, *shmita* is a year of rest for the land after it has been worked for six years. *Shmita* highlights both the importance and the sacred qualities attributed to land in Judaism. For these reasons *shmita* has garnered the attention of Jewish

1 As is the case with the transliteration of many Hebrew words, there are various options for transliterating the Hebrew word שְׁמִיטָה. I will use 'shmita' because this is the spelling that the majority of the American Shmita Movement texts utilize. Throughout this paper, when I am quoting other sources, I will maintain the transliteration used in the texts. Popular variations include *shemita* and *shemittah*. Similarly, capitalization will be maintained in citations and in the title of the movement, the Shmita Project, but I will otherwise avoid capitalization.

environmentalists, finding new life in the United States. On Rosh Hashanah in September 2014 the Jewish year 5775, a *shmita* year, began.<sup>2</sup> American Jewish environmentalists greeted the *shmita* year with a reimagined approach to sabbatical practices. This movement, called the Shmita Project, is the joint vision of a number of Jewish organizations focused on environmentalism. According to their website '[t]he Shmita Project is working to expand awareness about the biblical Sabbatical tradition, and to bring the values of this practice to life today to support healthier, more sustainable Jewish communities' (Hazon website 2014: 'The Shmita Project'). The leaders of the Shmita Project conceive of *shmita* as a node connecting a diverse and expansive network of Jewish organizations. The Shmita Project encapsulates a multivalent environmentalist strain of American Judaism that is deeply concerned with climate change, industrial agriculture and food insecurity and often expresses itself through food reform. The Shmita Project is inherently connected to a vast web of religious, environmental, and agricultural networks of the past and present in both the United States and Israel.

### Shmita through texts and time

The Shmita Project traversed temporal boundaries as it revived ancient religious practices and spatial boundaries and brought these practices to a continent outside its intended purview. In order to understand the revolutionary character of the Shmita Project, a discussion of the textual basis for *shmita* is required. The laws of *shmita* related to food and cultural systems are initially laid out in the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible.

Six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield; but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves. (*JPS Hebrew–English Tanakh*, Exodus 23:10–11)

These verses establish the agricultural practice of a sabbath for the land and fair distribution of harvested foods during the seventh year for the Israelites. These verses also lay out the basic parameters for a number of *shmita* year practices. First, land must 'rest and lie fallow'. This resulted in *shmita* year

2 For information on the calculation of the sabbatical (and jubilee) years, please see *A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee* (1866) by Dr B. Zuckermann.

prohibitions against seeding, planting, and ploughing land. The diet during *shmita* years was based on perennial crops and wild edibles because these plants did not need to be planted or cultivated. This text also lays out the basis of a cultural system that requires the fair distribution of food. The text reads 'Let the needy among your people eat of it' which is an important addendum in a culture where those without access to the land would otherwise fare poorly during the sabbatical years. Additionally, animals are considered in this holistic vision of the sabbatical cycle, as the text reads 'and what they leave let the wild beasts eat'.

This basic description is amended in the book of Leviticus with additional details regarding what is expressly forbidden during the sabbatical year as well as what the Israelites were meant to eat during that year.

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the Lord. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce – you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield. (*JPS Hebrew–English Tanakh*, Leviticus 25:1–7)

The text in Leviticus clarifies that Israelites may eat perennial produce during the sabbatical year: 'But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce'. It also specifies forbidden practices – sowing, pruning, and reaping. In Leviticus, the purpose of the sabbatical year is added: 'it shall be a year of complete rest for the land'. According to Louis Newman, author of *The Sanctity of the Seventh Year: A Study of Mishnah Tractate Shebiit*, 'implicit in this view is the notion that the Land of Israel has human qualities and needs' and it requires a sanctified day of rest (Newman 1983: 15). Later in the same chapter in Leviticus, more information regarding the source of the sabbatical year food is found.

You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. And should you ask, 'What are we

to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops? I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. When you show in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in. (*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, Leviticus 25:18–22)

These verses point to the key role of the land in the relationship between the Israelite people and their God. God commands them to let their land lie fallow, and in return promises to provide enough perennial crops to last three years (the sixth, seventh, and eighth years in the sabbatical cycle). The land is able to provide enough food for all of the people and beasts for three years because God has promised to bless it. Newman argues that this is the explanation for why the sabbatical year for the land applies only in the land of Israel: ‘The Land of Israel, unlike all other countries, is enchanted, for it enjoys a unique relationship to God and to the people of Israel’ (Newman 1983: 15). This unique relationship exists because the land of Israel was promised to Abraham and his descendants as part of his covenant with God.<sup>3</sup> Newman continues: ‘Israelites must observe the restrictions of the seventh year as an affirmation of the unique bond between God’s holy land and his chosen people’ (*ibid.* 16). So, the land is a vital actor in the covenant between the Israelites and their God and for this reason, the land too requires a sabbath.

Additional references to the *shmita* year, which also detail the economic and cultural practices associated with the *shmita* year are found throughout the Hebrew Bible in Deuteronomy, 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Nehemiah and 2 Chronicles.<sup>4</sup> These texts expand upon the agricultural restrictions of Exodus, establish a system of debt relief during the *shmita* year and prescribe a public Torah reading during Sukkot of the *shmita* year. These texts also describe the timing and requirements of the Jubilee year. The Jubilee year occurs after seven cycles of seven years, in the fiftieth year.<sup>5</sup> According to the text of Leviticus during the Jubilee year slaves and prisoners must be set free, land must be released from ownership and debts must be forgiven (Leviticus 25:13–18, 23–55).

3 Genesis 15:18–21.

4 Deuteronomy 15:1–11, 31:10–13, 2 Kings 19:20–30, Jeremiah 34:13–14, Nehemiah 10:32 and 2 Chronicles 36:20–1.

5 There is some disagreement over whether the Jubilee year occurs in year forty-nine or in year fifty of the cycle. For more information see Zuckermann 1984 [1866].

The rabbis interpreted the biblical texts on *shmita* but after the destruction of the Second Temple the sabbatical cycle was often discussed but rarely enforced. Gerald Blidstein, author of *Man and Nature in the Sabbatical Year*, asserts that *shmita* is representative of 'the commonplace struggle between a radical religious demand and an un-consenting world' (Blidstein 1966: 50). Blidstein suggests that the potency of *shmita* lies in its power:

[W]e have here an institution that in its essence contests the legitimacy of the world, and threatens to become not merely the symbolic repudiation of its normal social and economic patterns, but its real menace and ultimately its victor (Blidstein 1966: 50).

The disruptive potential of *shmita* posed a threat to the agricultural economy of the late ancient world and as time went on, the strength of *shmita* began to diminish.

Given these factors, it is rather extraordinary that *shmita* is the topic of the fifth tractate of Seder Zeraim ('Order of Seeds') entitled Shevi'it ('Seventh Year'). Louis Newman (1983: 20) argues that the decision to include an entire tractate on *shmita* was, in fact, surprising, given that none of the other surviving texts of late antiquity contain a discussion of the sabbatical year. Newman (1983: 117–20) proposes that *shmita* was highlighted in the Mishnah because it empowered ordinary Israelites. After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Israelites may have questioned their covenant with God and *shmita* enabled them to enact God's will. Newman stresses that the Mishnah's attention to *shmita* reflects an emphasis on the fact that the Israelite people were 'the sole surviving source of sanctification' (Newman 1983: 20). It was up to the Israelites to maintain the holiness of the Land of Israel by adhering to the requirements of *shmita* as a vital aspect of their relationship with God. It was the authorities of the Mishnah that determined the boundaries within which *shmita* would apply 'by delineating several distinct geographical regions of the Land within which the various restrictions of the Sabbatical year take effect' (Newman 1983: 19). The rabbis of the Mishnah discussed *shmita* at length and established its boundaries, but they were not necessarily in favour of continuing to abide by the *shmita* laws. Jeremy Benstein, author of *The Way Into Judaism and the Environment*, notes that 'Rabbi Judah the Prince, redactor of the Mishnah, called for the annulment of the *shmitah* year because its implementation was so arduous' (Benstein 2006: 190).

Once the majority of the Jewish people were exiled from the land of Israel after the destruction of the Second Temple, *shmita* was weakened. Blidstein



explains that the rabbis understood the exile 'as a disruption in the ideal state of Israel's relation to God through the land' (Blidstein 1966: 50). Blidstein continues, 'the Torah no longer expected the Jew to continue as if nothing had changed; God Himself had declared and decreed the change' (*ibid.* 50). The exile brought a reclassification for *shmita* from Torah law (*d'oraita*) to rabbinic law (*d'rabbanan*). Blidstein clarifies that as a rabbinic law 'shemittah can be narrowed, limited, and in effect abolished' (Blidstein 1966: 51). This shift is seen most clearly in the rabbinic texts that followed the Mishnah. *Shmita* is discussed in tractate Shevi'it in Seder Zeraim in the Palestinian Talmud, but this tractate was not included in the Babylonian Talmud. When *shmita* was mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, the discussion often related to the debt forgiveness aspects of *shmita*, since they were initially understood to apply outside the land of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

Rabbis continued to discuss *shmita* in their legal treatises, but these discussions were mainly theoretical because the majority of the Jewish people were living outside the land of Israel. In the twelfth century, Rabbi Moses Maimonides determined that there was a scientific explanation for *shmita*. According to Ronald Isaacs, author of *The Jewish Sourcebook on the Environment and Ecology*, Maimonides wrote that 'allowing the land to lie fallow gives it an opportunity to rejuvenate itself and yield more abundant crops in the years to come' (Isaacs 1998: 49). Maimonides also included detailed rulings about the *shmita* year in his major work, the *Mishneh Torah*. Although *shmita* continued to appear in major rabbinic works, *shmita* remained an ideal instead of a reality.

The absence of a practical history became a problem in the late nineteenth century when Jews began to emigrate to Ottoman-ruled Palestine in large numbers. The rabbinic leadership came up with a solution, the *heter mekhira* (sale permit), in anticipation of the *shmita* year 1888–9. The *heter mekhira* is a leniency that allows Jewish farmers to sell their land to non-Jews for the year thus exempting it from the *shmita* regulations. Julian Sinclair, who recently published a translation of Rabbi (Rav) Abraham Isaac Kook's influential *Shabbat Ha'aretz* ('Sabbath of the Land')<sup>7</sup> discusses the implementation of the *heter mekhira* in his introduction.

6 The Rabbis devised a system of transferring debts to the court during *shmita* years. This system, called the *prozbul*, ensured that lenders would not suffer when debts were cancelled during the sabbatical year, thus protecting the poor from lenders refusing to loan money during year six of the sabbatical cycle.

7 The new translation of *Shabbat Ha'aretz* was published by Hazon.

With the advent of the shmita of 1888–89, it was clear to the pioneers that observing the sabbatical year as commanded in the Bible would be economically ruinous and would likely lead to the extinction of the nascent agricultural settlements (Kook 2014: 35).

Sinclair stresses that the *heter mekhira* 'was seen as a temporary expedient' that 'was renewed for the *shmita* years of 1895–6 and 1902–3' amid much controversy (Kook 2014: 35). By the *shmita* year 1909–10, the agricultural settlements had grown but were still unable to withstand full *shmita* observance (*ibid.* 36). It was in anticipation of this *shmita* year that Rav Kook published *Shabbat Ha'aretz*. Sinclair argues that in the book, Kook endorsed the *heter mekhira* 'but throughout Shabbat Ha'aretz, and particularly its introduction, shines a vision of how *shmita* could be much more than it is today' (Kook 2014: 21). Blidstein also emphasizes the 'anguish' that plagued Rav Kook as he sanctioned the *heter mekhira* and his hopes for a future *shmita* observance: 'so the reality of *shevi'it* must be deferred, hints Rav Kook, until the Messianic age' (Blidstein 1966: 51). Rav Kook, who later became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandate Palestine, is still seen as authoritative on *shmita* by many Israelis, but controversy over the *heter mekhira* persists. The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Jews in Israel follow the position of Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, known as the Hazon Ish. According to Julian Sinclair 'The Hazon Ish believed that the Torah prohibition of selling land in Israel to non-Jews (Deuteronomy 7:1–2) was an insurmountable obstacle to the *heter mekhira*' (Kook 2014: 145). Sinclair explains that '[d]uring the *shmita*, his followers eat produce that is imported, grown by Arabs, or they rely on the *otzar beit din* method' (*ibid.* 145). The *otzar beit din* (the rabbinic court's storehouse) method refers to a system in which fields are handed over to the court for *shmita* and the court oversees the care of the fields, collection of produce and distribution of produce to the public. *Shmita* continues to be observed in Israel by Torah-observant Jews through these methods and its observation remains a point of contention between the Orthodox and Haredi Jews in Israel. Secular Jews engaged in agriculture in Israel do not observe *shmita*.

### Jewish environmentalism

As Israeli Jews argued over the legal implications of *shmita* and their practical application, American Jews began to discuss *shmita* for very different reasons. Torah-observant Jews in Israel debate the intricacies of *shmita* because they are bound by the law to acknowledge *shmita* and observe it in some way.

Conversely, Jews outside the land of Israel are exempt from the observance of *shmita* and rabbinic tradition suggests that observing *shmita* outside the land of Israel would be considered an additional and unnecessary obligation, which is usually forbidden. However, most of the Jews drawn to the practice of *shmita* in the Diaspora are not Orthodox Jews. They are Jews who seek to reinvigorate American Judaism through environmentalism. Jeremy Benstein elucidates this unique paradox of *shmita*:

As a problem, *shmitah* has become of interest to limited sectors of the Jewish people. As a solution, it can serve as a bridge to all those seeking answers to pressing social and environmental problems. (Benstein 1966: 192)

So, a century after the publication of his treatise on *shmita*, these American Jews also turned to Rav Kook because he ‘believed in the power of social and spiritual reawakening embodied in *shmita*’ (Kook 2014: 21). The reimaged *shmita* year is based on these biblical and rabbinic sources but it differs in its overall vision for the *shmita* year based on contemporary environmental concerns.

Julian Sinclair identifies four ideals of *shmita* in Rav Kook’s writings: ‘*shmita* is for the community what Sabbath is for the individual,’ ‘*shmita* is an expression of the interconnection between people and land,’ ‘in the *shmita*, treat food as food, not as commodity’, and ‘*shmita* as a year of human health’ (Kook 2014: 67–80).<sup>8</sup> These ideals identify many of the goals associated with the reinvention of *shmita* in America. Nati Passow, current Manager of the Shmita Project and Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Jewish Farm School, hints at these ideals in an article he published in 2008:

And while the agricultural laws apply only within the borders of biblical Israel, there is so much potential to use the *shemita* year as a foundation for renewed Jewish ecological education around the world, for *shemita* requires of us a humility and reverence for that which is greater than any one person (Passow 2008: 4).

8 Sinclair identified three additional ideals associated with the Jubilee year: ‘*shmita* and the Jubilee are interconnected rhythms and structures’, ‘Jubilee as a year of truth and reconciliation,’ and ‘Jubilee as a universal principle’ (Kook 2014: 67–80).

As Passow suggests, when American Jews began to discuss the possibility of bringing *shmita* to the United States it appealed to a growing Jewish environmentalism movement. Passow explains what he believed was an inherent connection between Judaism and environmentalism in the same article.

Judaism is a culture rooted in its connection to the land. ... Our major holidays are agricultural festivals, celebrations of harvest and the seasons. And what is becoming clear is that, for some people, being exposed to the agricultural and ecological roots of our tradition opens up new avenues for relating to God, our rituals, and our heritage. (Passow 2008: 1)

Although Passow notes that Judaism has 'ecological roots' others suggest that Jewish environmentalism is rather new. The editor of *Judaism and Ecology*, Hava Tirosh-Samuels, asserts that the 'Jewish voice has joined the environmental movement relatively recently' (Tirosh-Samuels 2002: xxxiii). She continues, 'Jews are not among the leaders of the environmental movement, and environmental activists who are Jews by birth have not developed their stance on the basis of Judaism' (*ibid.*). Tirosh-Samuels identifies the early 1970s as the beginning of 'the creative weaving of Judaism and ecology' and she noted that '[s]ince then, Jews from all branches of modern Judaism... have contributed to Jewish ecology thinking' (*ibid.* xxxvii). In his chapter in the same volume, Mark Jacobs, founding Executive Director of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL), identifies four stages of Contemporary Jewish Environmentalism beginning in the late 1960s. The first stage, 'defense and inquiry' came as a response to Lynn White Jr's assertion that the roots of the ecological crisis are religious.<sup>9</sup> The second and third stage, 'grassroots awakening and foundation building' and 'engaging leadership' brought Jewish environmentalism into the early 1990s. Jacobs calls the final stage 'movement building' (Jacobs 2002: 450–63). Jacobs continued by clarifying the purpose of these movements.

It is the goal of the Jewish environmental movement to engage all Jewish institutions and their members both in becoming environmentally responsible in their own practices and in using their political and financial power to further the cause of environmental protection (Jacobs 2002: 463).

9 See 'The historic roots of our ecologic crisis' (Science, 1967) by Lynn White Jr.

Jacobs also pointed out that Jewish environmentalism movements tended to concentrate their efforts in three areas: 'education, community building, and activism' (Jacobs 2002: 461).

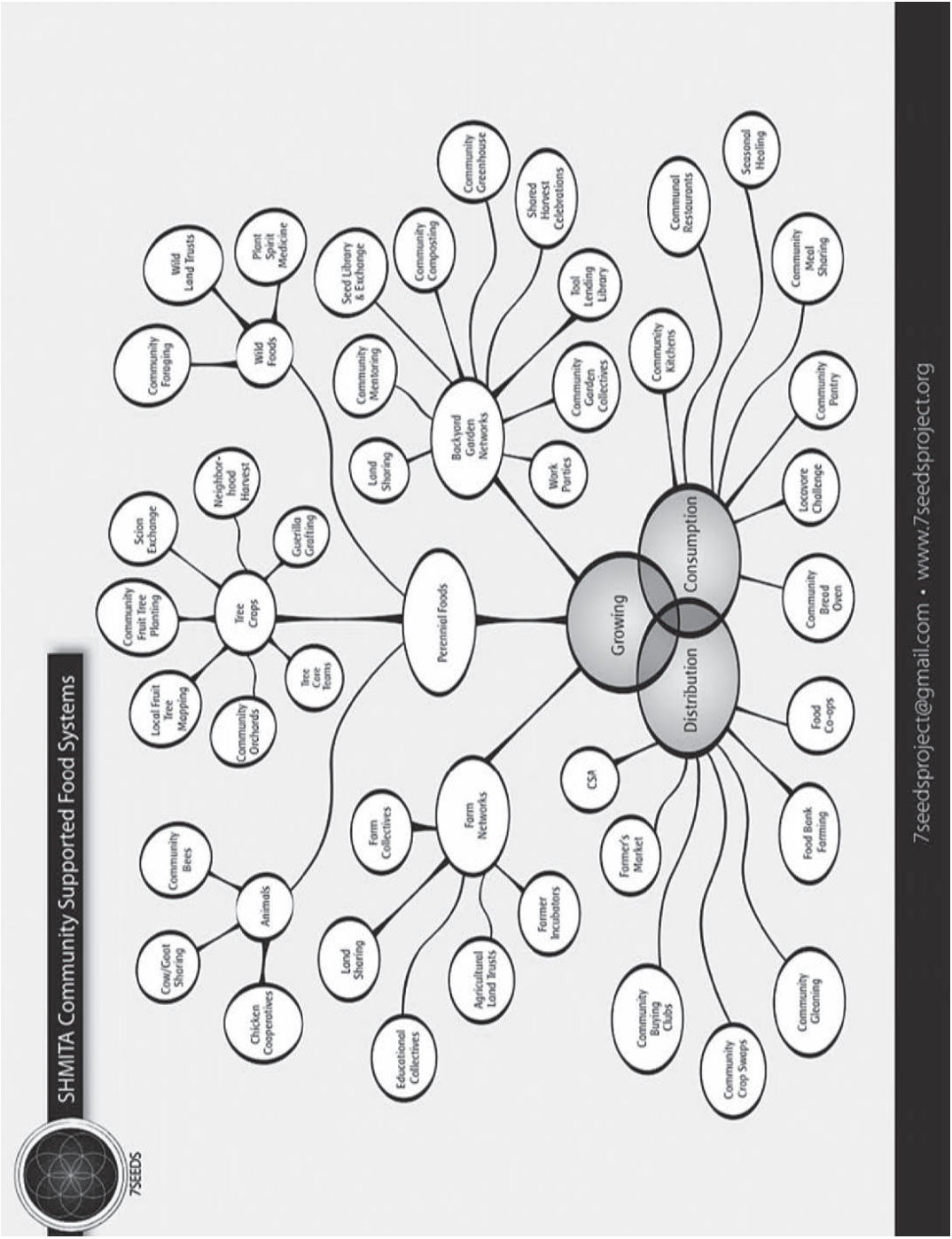
The Shmita Project exemplifies the goals and actions of the Jewish environmental movement identified by Jacobs. The Shmita Project is housed within the larger Jewish environmentalism movement under the ideological umbrella 'Jewish Outdoor, Food & Environmental Education' (JOFEE). The world of JOFEE comprises Jewish farms, Jewish retreat centres, and Jewish educational organizations and advocacy groups. At the centre of this sector of Jewish environmentalism is Hazon, an organization that seeks 'to build healthier and more sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond' (Hazon website 2014: 'Overview'). The Shmita Project has worked to revitalize *shmita* in the United States because they identified within it the potential for engaging Jewish individuals and organizations in environmental awareness, action, and activism.

### The Shmita Project

Even in the relatively new world of Jewish environmentalism, The Shmita Project is young. Nigel Savage, Executive Director of Hazon, writes in *Shabbat Ha'aretz* that 'at Hazon, we have been working on *shmita* fairly steadily since 2008' (Kook 2014: 15). This is the same year that the article by Nati Passow, cited above, appeared in *Jewish Education News*. Although the practical implementation of the Shmita Project is a recent development, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a leader in the Jewish Renewal Movement and Founding Director of The Shalom Center, suggested an adaptation of the sabbatical year in the 1990s 'as a way to enforce cessation of economic activity and promote reflection concerning the effects of our work and economy on the earth and each other' (Jacobs 2002: 451). This aspect of *shmita* appealed to Jeremy Benstein as well.

Indeed, the biblical *shmitah* is a stirring example of an entire society choosing to live at a significantly lower material standard for a year in order to devote itself to more spiritual pursuits than the daily grind (Benstein 2006: 189).

The spiritual appeal of *shmita* that entranced Waskow and Benstein remained a part of the Shmita Project as it grew. In its current form, the Shmita Project is a partnership between Hazon, 7Seeds, and the Jewish Farm School. The Shmita Project is small in numbers but its leaders are connected through Hazon and JOFEE to each other and to an expansive list of Jewish and



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non-Jewish environmental organizations and individuals. Together, they have reimagined *shmita* and worked to enact their vision in the 2014–15 *shmita* year.

The Shmita Project is not only located within an American context; it is enabled by that American context. The history of *shmita* reveals a resistance to observing the sabbatical year, within the Land of Israel for economic and social reasons and outside the Land of Israel for legal reasons. The United States in the early twenty-first century provided the perfect setting for the implementation of this environmentally-focused revitalization of an ancient religious practice. This backdrop combined a concern for the growing environmental crisis, increasingly industrialized food production, and an atmosphere that enables and even encourages religious cooperation and innovation.

As evidenced by the image above, published in *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture: A Shmita Manifesto*, the actors and actions embedded in the *shmita* network are often not exclusively Jewish. In fact, the chart above does not include a single food system that is identifiably Jewish. There are no synagogues, Jewish community centres, Jewish farms or Jewish camps listed on the chart. The actors listed on the chart also exemplify the connections between human and non-human actors within the network structure. The chart includes animals, land, foods and plants as vital actors in the Shmita Community Supported Food Systems (Deutscher 2013: 22). The Shmita Project is a network that exists in the very material world of food production. Blidstein highlights this central aspect of *shmita* in the Mishnah when he wrote ‘*shevi’it* demands the equalization of all who live off the soil’ (Blidstein 1966: 49). The Shmita Project is a network where humans, plants, and animals act upon each other.<sup>10</sup> *Shmita*, at its very heart, is focused on the needs of the land, not humans. The texts related to *shmita* identify the land as sacred and it is so valued in the Biblical text that it requires rest along with the Jewish people and their God. In this non-anthropocentric network, *shmita* is the soil it seeks to repair, the seeds that will be stored instead of planted, the wild edibles it promotes for consumption, and the animals it hopes to feed and protect. The Shmita Project comprises people, animals, things, ideas, and organizations. Each of these aspects of the Shmita Project is vital to its existence. As is the case with most complex networks, the Shmita Project is not a neatly closed system. The *shmita* network is enmeshed in a web of organizations and individuals focused on animal rights, environmental protection, food reform, agricultural industry, and Judaism in America,

10 I rely here on Jane Bennett’s discussion of vital material assemblages in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) and Tim Ingold’s discussion of Actor-Network Theory and distributed agency in ‘When ANT meets SPIDER: social theory for arthropods’ (2008).



Israel and beyond. Nigel Savage suggests that *shmita* might provide a locale for interfaith cooperation:

I hope that as this century unfolds, the Jewish tradition of *shmita* may become an opportunity to learn and share among religious traditions of all sorts. What would a Tibetan Buddhist make of *shmita*? How does a Native American read Rav Kook? ... We hope that, in due course, some of these conversations will unfold. (Kook 2014: 14)

Savage also aspired to a *shmita*-based connection between religious and non-religious people.

Those of you whose focus is not religion but, for instance, permaculture; land use; crop rotation; cohousing and intentional community; ecological restoration... if you are involved in any or all of these topics, or a hundred others, we hope that you will read this book, discuss it with your friends, teach it, critique it, and, most of all, engage deeply with it. (Kook 2014: 14–15)

The Shmita Project is a Jewish network but it actively works to participate in a larger conversation. The extent to which the Shmita Project is connected to other religious and non-religious movements is enabled by the religious diversity and tendency towards religious mixing and innovation present in the contemporary United States. The main texts of the Shmita Project, *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture: A Shmita Manifesto*, and *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* will be analysed closely below as evidence of the interconnected and diverse worlds of Judaism, environmentalism, ethics, and food in the proposed observance of the *shmita* year.

### Envisioning Sabbatical Culture: A Shmita Manifesto

In *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture: A Shmita Manifesto*, Yigal Deutscher (2013) lays out a broad vision for the American Jewish community with goals of healing the world. Deutscher was the founding manager of the Shmita Project and he directs 7Seeds, 'an educational platform weaving together Jewish wisdom traditions & Permaculture Design strategies' (Hazon website 2014: 'The Shmita Project'). In *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture* Deutscher highlights the aspects of the *shmita* culture that he hopes will inspire a new holistic sensibility in American Jewry:

Shmita is more than a calendar year; it is primarily a way of being, a blueprint for a sacred, whole-systems culture, one grounded in vibrant, healthy and diverse relations between self, community, ecology, economy & spirit (Deutscher 2013: ii).

In a slim book that brims with spiritual language, Kabbalistic diagrams, and artistic renditions of *shmita* concepts, Deutscher lays out the essential elements of a 'sabbatical food system'. The focus of the sabbatical food system is land stewardship. As mentioned earlier, the prohibition against seeding, planting and ploughing requires a reliance on perennial produce and wild edibles and Deutscher highlights the importance of these foods in his proposed sabbatical food system. He also stresses gathering the harvest at full ripeness, eating harvests in their natural growing season and eating harvests locally. Deutscher identifies the 'broken link' between food producers and consumers as a central problem in American society and he sees this problem as one that the *shmita* year can address head on. He argues that a connection to the land our food comes from is vital. He explains that the *shmita* year 'offers us a direct challenge to re-enter the sacred relationship with food production, distribution and consumption' (Deutscher 2013: 23). Toning down his language slightly, Deutscher then frames the sabbatical food system as an invitation:

This is an invitation to start reconnecting to perennial food systems: fruit trees, culinary herbs, healthy animal-based diets, and home drying, canning & fermentation. This is an invitation to cultivate awareness of wild edibles and medicinals, and to begin crafting intimate relationships with these plants and their gifts. This is an invitation to start the process of returning food production to our own backyards and neighborhoods, to take down fences and create networks of food producing commons. This is an invitation to join together to share in the sacred process of growing and harvesting food, to cook together and eat together in celebration of the seasonal abundance, which surrounds us. (Deutscher 2013: 23)

This invitation is offered beside the image included above that details the possible actors in a 'SHMITA Community Supported Food Systems' network (Deutscher 2013: 22). Deutscher is inviting his readers to explore the available resources in their local communities, Jewish or not, in order to embrace the spirit of the *shmita* year. This is reflective of Deutscher's focus on community building as an essential aspect of the *shmita* year, but it also points to a key reality of American Judaism. In the United States, many American Jews have the

option to make Jewish choices using non-Jewish resources. For example, sticking to food-based examples, there are hundreds of kosher products produced by non-Jewish companies. Deutscher taps into this tendency of American Jews to incorporate non-Jewish people, organizations, companies and products into their Jewish lives.

Deutscher offers his vision for a reconnection with the land and with food through indirect channels. Since most American Jews do not seed, plant or plough in order to eat, the Shmita Project is geared more towards the potential inspirational aspects of *shmita*. In keeping with these educational and inspirational aims, towards the end of his manifesto, Deutscher offers over one hundred ways to 'ReNew Shmita Culture'. Deutscher's suggestions are divided into three categories that reflect his *shmita* triad – community food systems, community economic systems and community design systems (Deutscher 2013: 35–9). In the section on food systems, Deutscher encourages establishing personal and communal perennial gardens, hosting harvest parties, composting, becoming familiar with wild edibles, buying local, organic and seasonal produce and storing the harvest by canning, preserving, fermenting and drying, as well as many additional suggestions (*ibid.* 35–6). Deutscher brought these ideas with him when he joined forces with Hazon as the founding manager of the Shmita Project.

### The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook

Many of the ideas laid out in *Envisioning Sabbatical Culture* were fleshed out in later Shmita Project resources. *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook*, authored by Yigal Deutscher along with Hazon staffer Anna Hanau and executive director Nigel Savage (2013), moves Deutscher's broad vision into a practical handbook meant for use in Jewish communities. *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* contains one hundred and twenty-five pages of biblical and rabbinic texts, resources, and suggestions so that American Jews can become educated about *shmita* and act in accordance with the essence of *shmita*. These texts are provided in order to inspire action among American Jews:

If Shmita was a radical, challenging proposition back in early Israelite culture, how much more so today, in an era of industrial agriculture and the global marketplace! After all this time of dormancy, the time has come to once again explore this question of Shmita. And in doing so, let us meet this ancient tradition anew, ripe and fresh, to harvest her lessons for us today, and begin a conversation which will ripple into years to come, many generations ahead. (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 65)

In accordance with their goal of resurrecting this ancient tradition for use in the modern world, *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* lays out the central *shmita* principles that they hope will inspire American Jews to adopt a sabbatical mindset. For each *shmita* principle, one or two environmental and/or cultural issues are highlighted and creative responses are offered with resources for further information. A total of sixteen *shmita* principles are listed and detailed in the sourcebook. These principles are divided into five categories: A Yearlong Shabbat, A Sabbatical Food System, Community & Food Security, Community & Economic Resiliency and Jubilee Release. The Sabbatical Food System principles listed in the sourcebook are Land Stewardship, Perennial/Wild Harvest, Eat Local, Seasonal Diet, and Animal Care. The Community & Food Security principles include Creating Commons, Shared Harvest, Fair Distribution and Waste Reduction, are listed under the heading Community & Food Security (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 70).

It is important to mention that the Sabbatical Food System is given much more attention in the sourcebook than it received in Deutscher's manifesto. Where it was included as one third of Deutscher's original tripartite vision for *shmita*, the authors of the sourcebook, a group that includes Deutscher, dedicate more than half of their Sabbatical Principles to foodways. The relevancy of these food-based principles to contemporary conversations about food production in the United States are likely the motivation behind this promotion of food reform as the primary aspect of *shmita* year action. The remaining principles are concerned with the economic aspects of the *shmita* year and the Jubilee year. Below, I discuss the principles associated with the Sabbatical Food System as they are described in the sourcebook and the religious and non-religious actions, or 'creative responses' that are provided as suggestions for embodying the spirit of the *shmita* year. The creative responses offered fall into one of two types: they are either intended for action at the individual level, or they are offered to a national or international organization working in the area that would benefit from monetary support and increased awareness and education. So, readers can either participate in direct action or they can act by learning more, spreading the word, or contributing money. It is clear through the presentation of these issues and the suggestions offered for action that the *shmita* movement is enabled by and embedded in wider networks in the United States that are similarly focused on environmentalism, food production reform, and animal rights.

## Land Stewardship

Land Stewardship is the central principle of the sabbatical system. It is based on the prohibition against the 'seeding or plowing of agricultural land during the Shmita year' (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 74). The following explanation is offered for this principle:

This fallow period provides an invitation to be in relationship with land as land itself: soil, minerals, rocks, communities of fungi, bacteria, earthworms, all nourishing the roots of plants, purifying the underground waters, generously supporting so many diverse forms of life (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 74).

This is an invitation to American Jews to stop taking the soil for granted, to enter into or deepen their relationship with the land their food comes from. The authors urge readers to consider the issue of land degradation in light of this principle. As is the case with almost all of the Sabbatical Principles they discuss, the authors turn to outside sources to explain the need for action in this area. Here, they provide brief statements from scientists at The Land Institute and the University of Connecticut that illuminate the economic and environmental costs of soil erosion and the over-tillage of soil (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 74). Creative responses to land degradation follow and include conservation tillage and no tillage systems as well as information related to soil fertility management. The responses here are directed at individual action in backyard gardens.

The loss of biodiversity and wildlife is also connected to the principle of land stewardship in the sourcebook. The authors explain, 'In the ideal sense, the Shmita year shaped the process of rejuvenating wild ecologies' (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 80). On the creative responses page for this issue information about wild land trusts and the wild farm alliance is offered. Both of the resources listed – The Wilderness Land Trust and Wild Farm Alliance – are non-religious non-profit organizations working to protect wild ecologies (*ibid.* 81). Here, the response requested of the readers comes in the form of furthering their knowledge on the subject and perhaps even supporting other organizations financially.

## Perennial/Wild Harvest

The *shmita* principle of the Perennial/Wild Harvest is linked to the impact of annual crop farming.

As fruit and nut trees do not need seasonal sowing or tilling, these plants still produce abundant harvests during the Shmita year. However, the conventional, large-scale mechanized and chemical monoculture farming systems in place today are best suited for the production of annual plants, which are primarily grown for processing and for animal feed. (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 78)

Educational information is delivered through excerpts from the Union of Concerned Scientists and The Land Institute. Deforestation and the high percentage of agricultural land dedicated to the production of annual crops are highlighted as issues that Jews should consider during the *shmita* year. The creative response section provides two resources: The Land Institute, a ‘non-profit farm research facility’ and community fruit tree projects (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 79). Interestingly, the two resources listed for information on community fruit tree projects are non-religious organizations in Portland (the Portland Fruit Tree Project) and Boston (the Boston Tree Party). These examples are interesting choices given that a frequent contributor to the Shmita Project, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, is Executive Director and Founder of a community fruit tree project, the Baltimore Orchard Project. Choices like this point to an intentional avoidance of Jewish and Jewish-led organizations in favour of non-religious non-profit organizations. In addition to these resources, Appendix A of *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* is dedicated to lists of perennial foods and wild edibles to assist people interested in amending their diet to align their eating habits with this particular *shmita* year principle. The appendix also includes additional suggestions for action in this arena including wild plant walks, perennial gardens and starting a local gleaning group. None of the authors appear to expect a complete adoption of a perennial and wild edibles diet, but they do ask readers to consider adding more of these foods to their diet in order to engage in the spirit of *shmita* and support healthier and more stable soil ecologies.

## Eat local

The *shmita* principle Eat Local is highlighted because of the texts that call for harvests to be eaten locally and prohibit exporting *shmita* year produce. This principle is used to highlight the difficulties associated with eating local today:

Today, our food system is complex and global. With a few exceptions, government support for local food economies and holistic, sustainable 'food sheds' tend to be bypassed in favor of subsidies given to large farms that grow food for global industry and export market. This has directly affected the security and strength of local food systems, both ecologically and socially. (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 84)

Besides the obvious prescription to eat local, the sourcebook uses this principle to call attention to some of the issues of the global food trade. Brief but educational pieces from *The Ecologist* and World Watch Institute consider the issue of monocultures and the homogenization of people's tastes as well as the extensive amounts of fuel used and the pollution created in the conventional food distribution system in America. Creative responses offered include accessible options for individuals looking to participate in *shmita* including shopping at local farmers markets and participating in a locavore challenge. These options provide familiar suggestions for American Jews interested in observing the unfamiliar *shmita* year.

## Seasonal Diet

The *shmita* prescriptions to gather harvests at full ripeness and eat produce during its natural growing season are the basis for the *shmita* principle dedicated to a Seasonal Diet. In a section dedicated to the principle of the Seasonal Diet, Eat Local is also included once more. Together, these principles are utilized to discuss unhealthy food choices.

Considering our modern food industry, this Shmita diet would limit the diversity of possibilities we have available in the selection of processed, non-local, and/or non-seasonal foods we can find in the common super-market. The Shmita year created an opportunity to explore the rich possibilities of a simple, natural diet. (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 88)

These principles offer the authors an opportunity to discuss the unhealthy food choices that have come to define the American diet. An excerpt from a *New York Times* article by Jo Robinson provides information about the reduced nutritional value of modern foods. The authors also include a paragraph from *In Defense of Food* by the popular American food activist Michael Pollan describing the rise of highly processed foods and refined grains which is provided to describe the dangers of unhealthy food. Creative responses to the prevalence



of unhealthy foods come in the form of the slow food movement and community supported agriculture (CSA). Here the authors do offer a Jewish initiative as a resource, because Hazon has been running its own CSA programme since 2004. Their programme now includes ‘over 65 sites in the US, Canada and Israel, and over 2,300 households’ (Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 89). Each site for the Hazon CSA programme represents a location where people can pick up locally grown produce on a regular basis. Even here, where Hazon itself is a resource for action, a non-Jewish resource (localharvest.org) is listed first. This reveals a dedication to broadening the reach of the *shmita* year beyond Jewish organizations and initiatives.

### Animal Care

The laws of *shmita* call for animals to have free access to both range and food. Animal Care is included as a central principle of *shmita* because of this requirement, and it is extended to include consideration of animal treatment:

The intention during the Shmita year was to unlock fences surrounding our agricultural fields so that anyone in need would have free access to come and harvest. This would have affected our relationship with animals, as much as with our human neighbors. Just as we unlocked fences for our human neighbors, would we unlock the fences keeping in our domesticated animals? ((Deutscher *et al.* 2013: 82)

The inclusion of Animal Care as a central principle speaks of the commitment of the authors to appeal to American Jews in the twenty-first century. It would be almost unthinkable to establish a movement related to food reform in the United States today without considering the treatment of animals as a central issue. The authors discuss the treatment of animals in agriculture in relation to this principle. Once more, information is provided through the words of Michael Pollan. The inclusion of his short but evocative piece from *The New York Times Magazine* calls attention to the ethical and health issues associated with American industrial animal farms. The suggested creative responses are the consumption of pasture-raised animals and community-supported meat. Again, these options will be familiar to many Americans. The authors also include a separate list of resources for readers interested in kosher free-range animal products. This points to the growing associated movement in eco-kashrut that calls for animals to be raised as ethically as they are slaughtered and the attention to animal husbandry on Jewish farms in the United

States. Once more, these Jewish options are offered as secondary to broader non-religious resources.

This pattern of highlighting secular voices of authority and both non-Jewish and Jewish resources persists throughout the sections detailing the food security, economic resiliency and Jubilee release principles. Many of these principles are coupled with issues that proliferate in the pages of newspapers in the United States today. Food insecurity, income inequality, slave labour, overconsumption and the student debt crisis are all mentioned as possible areas for action during the *shmita* year. The Shmita Project offers an opportunity for American Jews to educate themselves and take action on myriad issues affecting Americans today. The Shmita Project resources are a convincing reminder that *shmita* is a holistic vision meant to inspire American Jews, but it strives to repair the entire world.

## Conclusion

It is clear that many of the issues raised by the Shmita Project mirror those raised by secular environmental organizations and activists. Throughout the section of *The Hazon Shmita Sourcebook* that details the *shmita* principles and resources the authors utilized secular experts, institutions, organizations and initiatives as they called the American Jewish community to action. After a lengthy section of Jewish texts and rabbinic commentary encouraging American Jews to revive an ancient practice and bring it to a new land, readers are treated to thirty pages of education, discussion, and resources for the implementation of this Jewish practice through mainly non-Jewish means. This mixture of religious teaching spurring religiously intentioned action through non-religious methods exemplifies the ways that religion is lived out in the United States today. Outside the bounds of the synagogues lies a world of Jewish practices that are part of a vast and tangled web of other religious and non-religious practices. The Shmita Project offers a glimpse into the practices that are enabled by the inter-religious and extra-religious mixing that occurs in the American context.

The Shmita Project provided an opportunity for a number of Jewish organizations that work both separately and together on these issues to reclaim the sabbatical year in order to raise awareness among Jews of the environmental issues facing America. United in an effort to reimagine the *shmita* year, these organizations are encouraging American Jews to consider an environmentally sustainable permaculture model and a diet based on ethical food production, consumption and food security. The leadership of the Shmita Project worked

hard to ready the American Jewish community for participation in the unprecedented observance of the *shmita* year in the Diaspora. The movement remains small but many local *shmita* year events hint at the potential of this movement. A careful examination of the resources of this movement offers a clear picture of the vision for this revitalized practice, the level of innovation that is practical and possible in the American Jewish community and the extent to which this movement is a product of its location in the United States in the twenty-first century. However, since the true implementation of *shmita* requires attention to the entire seven-year cycle, only time will reveal the potential power of *shmita* in America.

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# What does it mean to 'eat Jewishly'?

Authorizing discourse in the Jewish food movement in Toronto, Canada

ALDEA MULHERN

This article examines the development of 'eating Jewishly' among participants at Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs in Toronto, Canada. Participants at Shoresh construct and draw upon Jewish tradition in order to resolve gaps between the *is* and the *ought* of the conventional food system, and to a lesser extent, the narrower food system of *kashrut*. 'Eating Jewishly' re-positions religious orthodoxy as one in a *set* of authorizing discourses, subsuming all Jewish eating acts under one rubric. 'Eating Jewishly' thus departs from standard narratives of Jewish eating as either eating kosher, or eating traditional Jewish foods. I use a theory of authorizing discourse to show the conditions of possibility through which Shoresh develops their intervention *as Jewish*. I conclude that such authorization practices are a key form of productive constraint in the formation of Shoresh's lived religion, and in the formation of religion as a framework for social good.

[A] great questioning [is] happening today within our community... a questioning that is not new... a questioning that has been happening for the last 5000 years... what does it mean to eat Jewishly?<sup>1</sup>

This article examines the development of 'eating Jewishly' at Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.<sup>2</sup> Both a practice and an idea, 'eating Jewishly' arises as a response to perceived problems in the conventional food system, and within the narrower food system of *kashrut*.<sup>3</sup> 'Eating Jewishly' allows Shoresh to gather together diverse food practices under the rubric of a specifically Jewish approach to food and eating. This rubric simul-

- 1 From the plenary address of Shoresh's Food Conference, January 2013. The ellipses are original.
- 2 This article has been much helped by Pamela Klassen and Anna Shternshis, who offered careful reading and generous feedback, and also by the insight of the Donner Institute's anonymous reviewers, to whom I am grateful. I am also indebted by David Walsh's keen editorial eye and constructive anthropological sensibility.
- 3 The system of Jewish law and practice governing which foods are fit or unfit for consumption by Jews.

taneously loosens and tightens the boundaries of religious food practice, by re-positioning religious orthodoxy as *one* in a *set* of authorizing discourses, and by unifying disparate dietary practices (and Judaisms) under a single distinction between eating 'Jewishly' and *not* eating 'Jewishly'. Thus, 'eating Jewishly', departs from standard narratives about Jewish food practice as either eating *kosher*<sup>4</sup>, or eating traditional Jewish foods. 'Eating Jewishly' opens a space for a Jewish food practice that includes both of those modes alongside others, such as food ethics.

In this article I analyse the discursive formation of 'eating Jewishly', a term which I encountered during ethnographic fieldwork with Shoresh between 2012 and 2014.<sup>5</sup> My fieldwork consisted of participant observation and in-depth interviewing for a comparative study of Jewish and Muslim participation in Toronto's food movement. Here, I focus on the orienting concepts offered during the plenary addresses at Shoresh's food conferences, as a window onto their development of 'eating Jewishly' and an opportunity to glimpse what it signifies, and why it arises.<sup>6</sup> My interlocutors at Shoresh draw upon Jewish tradition in order to confront and resolve gaps, problems, and contradictions they perceive between the *is* and the *ought* of the way their food comes to them. I use a theory of authorizing discourse to show the conditions of possibility through which Shoresh develops their intervention *as Jewish*. Authorizing discourse, for

4 Kosher meaning fit (for consumption).

5 I investigate the term as it is cultivated at Shoresh. The Union for Reform Judaism has also used the phrase, at least as early as 2009, to turn attention to food, to cultivate increased food-consciousness, and to encourage communal meals over just food, in solidarity with the American Conservative movement's release of a policy for ethical kashrut in 2008 (Union for Reform Judaism nd; Magen Tzedek nd). To my knowledge the term itself has not been an object of investigation in any of the scholarly literature on Jewish food. Alice Stone Nakhimovsky mentions 'eating Jewish' and 'Jewish eating patterns' in her article in the important reader on food and Judaism from the Fifteenth Annual Symposium of the Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization and its series 'Studies in Jewish Civilization' (Greenspoon *et al.* 2005), but neither phrase is the object of interrogation. 'Eating Jewish' appears only in the subtitle of Nakhimovsky's article, and in the rest of the article she uses the standard parlance of 'Jewish foods' and 'Jewish foodways'. 'Jewish eating patterns' also appears once, descriptively, to denote the historical eating patterns of Soviet Jews.

6 Shoresh, as an organization, develops and enacts 'eating Jewishly' in a wide set of programming contexts in addition to the food conferences considered here. These contexts include *kollels* (lit. 'gatherings' for the purpose of studying religious texts) at local synagogues and at Shoresh's new 100-acre Bela Farm, farm work retreats and work days at the Kavanah Garden, and various kinds of programming for children, families, young adults, adults and seniors. A fuller consideration of Shoresh's programming is beyond the scope of this article, but may be found in my dissertation.

my purposes, places its object in a narrative according to which the object may achieve coherence with that narrative. I conclude that such authorization is a form of productive constraint for the formation of Shoresh's lived religion, and in particular, in the formation of religious tradition as a source for social good.<sup>7</sup>

### Roots: introducing Shoresh

Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs is a not-for-profit Jewish organization based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Shoresh – Hebrew for 'root' – seeks to reinvigorate Toronto's Jewish community by applying 'Jewish values' to the challenges of contemporary Canadian life.<sup>8</sup> The organization is focused particularly on food and ecological concerns. Shoresh started in 2002 under the name *Torat HaTeva*, the Jewish Nature Centre of Canada (lit. 'Torah of Nature'), and was the brainchild of Alexandra Kuperman. Alexandra, who is now a board member of Shoresh, developed the idea for *Torat HaTeva* after her experience of teaching at the *Teva Learning Centre*, a Jewish environmental learning organization in the United States, when she was nineteen: *Teva* and other American organizations including *Adamah* ('Earth'), *Isabella Friedman Jewish Retreat Centre*, and *Hazon* ('Vision'), are the predecessors of Shoresh in the North American Jewish food movement.<sup>9</sup> Shoresh was later consolidated under its new name by Risa Alyson Cooper, who has been the organization's executive director since 2008. Before Shoresh, Risa spent three years learning Jewish farming in the US at *Teva*, *Adamah*, and *Isabella Friedman* and returned to Toronto with the goal of connecting Jewish roots and Canadian soil. That goal is now evinced in Shoresh's slogan, 'Canadian soil, Jewish roots'. Shoresh's approach, intentionally non-sectarian in nature, has become increasingly food- and agriculture-centric in recent years as food and agriculture have proved to be powerful ways to consolidate interest in Jewish environmentalism.

Shoresh's food and agriculture approach has been productive. In 2007 Risa and two Shoresh board members together launched a Jewish CSA (Community

7 Throughout the article, I refer to ethics, social goods, and problems which people want solved. In addressing these, my aim is not prescriptive, but rather descriptive.

8 Jewish values, as my analysis will show, are gleaned from both religious texts and major Jewish thinkers, and also, importantly, from other sources including daily life.

9 As of 2014, these organizations have since come under the institutional umbrella of *Hazon*, and now function as its subsidiaries. A history of the 'enlarged organization' can be found on *Hazon's* website. A number of the women with whom I spoke during my research at Shoresh have trained with or worked for *Hazon* or its current subsidiaries.



Supported Agriculture) network in Toronto, which is ongoing.<sup>10</sup> In 2009, a year after Risa took directorship, Shoresch opened the Kavanah Garden, which hosts over 1,400 program participants and produces over five hundred pounds of vegetables in a growing season.<sup>11</sup> In 2012, Shoresch launched an annual Food Conference, involving local Jewish academics, rabbis, and community members ranging from Orthodox Jews to Reconstructionists, members of independent *minyanim*, and secular Jews, and even some non-Jews, including Muslims from the Noor Cultural Centre in Toronto, who were invited to take part in a panel on the religious slaughter of food animals in Canada. Shoresch is currently cultivating the new 100-acre Bela Farm, which is already hosting programs and which is expected to be fully operational by 2016.

I first noticed the phrase 'eating Jewishly' in the context of Shoresch's food conferences. 'Eating Jewishly' is part of Shoresch's mandate to bring Toronto Jews together to deepen community and practice, while recognizing a diversity of Jewish perspectives. In order to meet this goal, 'eating Jewishly' must be capacious enough to accommodate all of the members of the Shoresch community, not just those who keep kosher: simultaneously, it has to be specific enough to answer the needs of the organization and the community, by fostering community relationships and advancing principles of social and ecological justice. It also has to be unassailably Jewish.

### The (Jewish) food movement

Shoresch derives some of its momentum from public interest in the food movement. In *The New York Review of Books* in 2010, Michael Pollan offers his take on the emergent (American) food movement. Pollan tells of a food movement that begins slowly in the 1970s with critiques of industrial agriculture like Wendell Berry's, and then flowers in the early 2000s 'in the wake of ... food safety scandals' in the US (Pollan 2010: np). Pollan, whose work is part of the canon of contemporary food movement literature, holds that the movement is characterized by its political nature (*ibid.*). Pollan's implicit criteria for the political features a range of advocacy issues central to the food movement, including

- 10 CSAs are one of the hallmarks of the Food Movement, and involve community members supporting a (usually local) farm by agreeing to pay a fixed amount for a box containing a quantity of that farm's produce, at fixed intervals over a harvesting season. The produce usually varies according to the harvest as different foods ripen over the season. This practice, or the box itself, is also referred to as a 'farm share', 'food share', 'vegetable box', etc.
- 11 From *kavana*, Heb. 'intention'.

school lunch reform; the campaign for animal rights and welfare; the campaign against genetically modified crops; the rise of organic and locally produced food; efforts to combat obesity and type 2 diabetes; 'food sovereignty' (the principle that nations should be allowed to decide their agricultural policies rather than submit to free trade regimes); farm bill reform; food safety regulation; farmland preservation; student organizing around food issues on campus; efforts to promote urban agriculture and ensure that communities have access to healthy food; initiatives to create gardens and cooking classes in schools; farm worker rights; nutrition labeling; feedlot pollution; and the various efforts to regulate food ingredients and marketing, especially to kids. (Pollan 2010)

In addition to environmental, health, and ethical concerns, Pollan gestures towards positive aesthetic experiences associated with eating in the food movement, and attends to the resistance to commodification, industrialization, and consumer capitalism that is another hallmark of the movement. Pollan's article reflects the food movement, and also partly constitutes it. He is frequently cited in the Jewish food movement literature, becoming iconic because he maintains the need to connect to and experience pleasure through food, alongside his keen interest in food's ethical dimensions. He is interested in knowing where food comes from, and also shows that it is possible to intervene in the food system in order to cultivate change.

Pollan, and his characterization of the food movement, sits easily alongside the other major writers of the movement: Mark Bittman, Sarah Elton, Jonathan Safran Foer, Barbara Kingsolver, Marion Nestle, Raj Patel, Carlo Petrini, Wayne Roberts, Eric Schlosser, Vandana Shiva, Peter Singer, Alisa Smith and J .B. MacKinnon, and Karl Weber. These authors, several of whom are Jewish, have different projects but share a commitment to the cultivation of what might simply be called alternative foodways.<sup>12</sup> Here, alternative foodways means alternatives to the now-dominant industrial model which functions as

12 The term 'foodways' has gained increased currency through the emergent field of food studies. In her introduction to a recent anthology on religion and food, Marie W. Dallam defines foodways, succinctly, twice: as arising from 'cultural communities and group behavior in relation to food and eating' and as 'a set of beliefs and practices that govern consumption' (Dallam 2014: xviii). Other definitions are possible, and those that specifically enumerate the stages through which food passes as it undergoes transformations from production to consumption are considerably longer. Dallam herself quickly traces the origin of the term with the New Deal writers of the 1930s and through religious studies and folklore scholars in the 60s and 70s (*ibid.* xxxn1).

the conventional food system in North America and elsewhere. Alternative foodways are conceived as improving the quality of life of human, and non-human, beings by refusing the excesses of industrialization. That this desire for improvement often involves notions of the past as the source of improvement, is both something to be expected, and also something worthy of attention, as we turn to religious participation in the movement.<sup>13</sup>

The Jewish food movement intersects with the wider food movement at a number of locations, and in complex ways. As Sue Fishkoff shows in a thorough, journalistic exploration of the kosher market, many Jewish and non-Jewish Americans have understood kashrut as an alternative to the conventional food system. Fishkoff refers to the iconic Hebrew National ad campaign which states that their kosher food products 'answer to a ... higher authority' (Fishkoff 2010: 3). She explains that Americans believe that kosher food is 'better ... cleaner [and] worth the money' when compared with conventional food (*ibid.* 4, see also pp. 275–6). She argues that '86 percent of the nation's 11.2 million kosher consumers are not religious Jews' due to the 'perception ... that kosher food is cleaner, safer, better ... of higher quality ... more healthy' (Fishkoff 2010: 6, 7; similar numbers are cited in Gross 2010). Increasingly, that attitude is shifting: many of the criticisms levelled at the conventional food system generally in terms of treatment of animals, treatment of workers, environmental impact, and healthfulness, are now also levelled at the kashrut industry (*ibid.* passim and inf.).

Jewish faith in kashrut has been shaken by several controversies during the history of kashrut in North America. Some of these controversies have functioned to reinforce the authority of kashrut, as with the history of kosher meat fraud in the US in the twentieth century (Fishkoff 2010, Gastwirt 1974, Lytton 2013, Sarna 2004). Controversies of this kind resulted in various kinds of tightening: the inflation to *glatt* kosher<sup>14</sup> as the standard for kashrut among certification agencies, an increase in oversight, the privatization of kashrut through

- 13 Invoking the past should be expected, because envisioning alternatives to a current system is easiest when there is an existing stock of history to draw upon. It is more difficult to imagine future alternatives. A teleology becomes more explicit when contemporaneous non-Western and non-First World societies are invoked as pre-industrial alternatives which are virtuously connected to practices constructed as 'traditional'. The tension between notions of progress and regress is useful in creating ideational space for producing alternatives, but meanwhile re-performs narratives which themselves remain problematic and pervasive cultural logics.
- 14 *Glatt*, from the Yiddish 'smooth', here refers to the smoothness of an animal's lungs, which must be examined and found to be lesion-free in order to meet this higher standard.

kosher certification bodies, and industrial kashrut. It should be noted that this tightening offered important protections against abuse for Jews who purchase kosher food, as well as for those embedded in the production and oversight processes, relative to the self-governance system (see Lytton 2014 on the benefits of regulatory bodies relative to self-governance; cf. Hyman 1980 on the political power of women in community regulation via boycott). Other controversies have thrown light on abuses that appear to have occurred within the bounds of, or at least were deemed by certain authorities not to contravene, standards of kashrut. The most notable of these is the controversy at AgriProcessors' *glatt* kosher slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) released a video in 2004 depicting what has been construed as inhumane slaughter at AgriProcessors, before the plant itself was the object of US government immigration raids over human rights abuses in 2008, and ultimately went bankrupt (for pre-event history see Bloom 2000; for the central narrative see Gross 2010).<sup>15</sup> These latter controversies have bolstered a larger questioning of kashrut, in both its orthodox interpretation and its industrial form, in relation to Jewish life. Such questioning has in some cases contributed to calls to abandon kashrut; in other cases, it has motivated calls for a revised, expanded, or renewed understanding of kashrut.

### Jewish food ethics

The Jewish food movement, in its basic form, is concerned with finding Jewish answers to problems in the conventional food system. Insofar as it is primarily about making food choices that ultimately result in a more ethical food system (see also 'Contemporary Jewish food movement' in Most and

- 15 These two sorts of controversy are really of a piece. Lytton argues: 'The Postville scandal ... arose out of allegations related to labor, environmental, and financial crimes, not—notably—problems with the operation's kosher standards. Thus, while the Postville scandal offers insights into the failures of industrial meat production generally, it does not support an indictment of kosher meat certification. Of course, retail scandals involving local butchers fraudulently selling *treyf* beef and poultry as kosher continue to occur, although there is no evidence to suggest that these incidents reflect a fraud rate comparable to the 40 to 65 percent estimated fraud rates in New York City in the early twentieth century' (Lytton 2014: 44n17). However, Lytton's estimation of the scope of Postville's challenge to kosher meat certification is unnecessarily narrow in two important ways: because it begs the question of what kashrut rules in or out, on which significant challenges to kosher certification rest, and because Orthodox authorities have indeed questioned whether the slaughter captured on film at AgriProcessors violated kashrut (Gross 2010: 80–6).

Mulhern 2014; Most, forthcoming), the Jewish food movement fits well within Pollan's characterization of the wider food movement as political.<sup>16</sup> The Jewish food movement claims key authors of the wider food movement mentioned above, especially Pollan and Safran Foer, who both allow their relationship with Judaism to emerge in their work (albeit differently, for example, with respect to pork). It also draws on Jewish theological texts, particularly those dealing with the environment, to develop its own literature. One key authorizing text of the Jewish food movement I describe is an edited volume that emerges from CCAR Press, *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic* (Zamore 2011). *Sacred Table* was prefigured by a sourcebook out of Hazon that outlines the basics of the movement and is descriptively subtitled 'Hazon's curriculum on Jews, food and contemporary life' (Savage and Hanau 2007). Nigel Savage, founder and president of Hazon and one of the authors of the sourcebook, also wrote the preface to *Sacred Table*. *Sacred Table*, coming out of the Reform movement, typifies the new Reform approach to food, cultivating personal spiritual experience while also deriving ethical principles from Jewish sources.<sup>17</sup> As we will see, Zamore's *Sacred Table* is instructive because it dwells on the key concepts the Jewish food movement pulls from American Jewish history and biblical Jewish tradition, and because these concepts also resonate with the wider food movement.

The food movement has critiqued the conventional food system for animal mistreatment, environmental degradation, and social injustice: its Reform iteration has moved from ambivalence about kashrut, to a desire to excavate a multivalent kashrut that addresses these concerns.<sup>18</sup> The Jewish food movement in general looks to Jewish sources for a Jewish food ethic that evades ethical problems. The Zamore text draws on biblical and rabbinic literature in order to explore and develop the key principles of a Jewish ethical tradition related to food. The key principles are *bal tashchit* (do not destroy), *tzaar baalei chayim* (the suffering of living beings- to be avoided), *oshek* ([financial] oppression [of a worker]- to be avoided), *tzedek* (justice), *sh'mirat haguf* (to guard one's

16 Additionally, the Jewish food movement is strongly aesthetic and can reveal frustration with industrial capitalism, although neither of these threads can be fully explored here.

17 To grasp the Reform movement's particular approach to kashrut and Jewish food, it is useful to begin with Gross in Zamore 2011 in particular, before the rest of the volume.

18 This is not to say that the Reform iteration of the food movement is identical with Reform Judaism. In 1885, the first of the Reform movement's Pittsburgh Platforms roundly rejected the relevance of kashrut to then-contemporary Jewish life. This position softened considerably by the time of the second Pittsburgh Platform in 1999. For more of the richness of American Reform Jewry's wrestling with kashrut see Joselit 2005, Gross 2011 (cited above), and Part One of Zamore 2011.

health), and *tikkun olam* (the repair of the world).<sup>19</sup> Many of the articles in the volume take up one or more of these terms in order to excavate its appearance in biblical and rabbinic literature, and then apply it to contemporary cases from the food system, from cruel animal farming practices to abusive conditions for farm workers.

The nature of the relationship between the dietary laws as they have been conventionally understood, and Jewish ethical principles from the rest of *halacha* and Jewish tradition, is open to debate, and in the process of being debated. Questions about whether kashrut should include ethical principles; whether it is these principles, and *not* kashrut, that are relevant to contemporary Jewish life; or whether kashrut is necessary but not sufficient for Jews who are concerned about food, all animate Shores's conversations around 'eating Jewishly'. This work is done in part by constructing the discursive object 'food', and then bringing 'Jewish tradition' to bear on it.

### Shores's Jewish food values

Following organizations like Hazon,<sup>20</sup> Shores takes both an intellectual and a practical approach to its work. Shores staff members have strong Jewish educational backgrounds, as well as practical farming experience from the contemporary Jewish food movement and the new stream of Jewish ecological learning initiatives that are now collated as 'Jewish Outdoor, Food and Environmental Education (JOFEE) experiences'. Hazon coined the term JOFEE, publicizing it with their report, 'Seeds of Opportunity: A national study of Immersive Jewish Outdoor, Food and Environmental Education (JOFEE)' (Informing Change, 2014). Shores is embracing the acronym, which fits well with the programming Risa wanted to bring to Canada in 2008. In Shores's programs, Jewish food is engaged in different ways, by growing and harvesting it, preparing it, reading about it, talking about it, and eating it. 'Eating Jewishly', however, is perhaps most visible when the phrase itself is used, as it has been in the plenary address at each of the Shores food conferences.

In her plenary address in 2012, Risa inaugurated the Shores Food Conference by welcoming a diverse group of participants and orienting them

19 Much the same principles are in evidence in the work of Jewish theologians from Jewish Renewal and EcoJudaism, such as Arthur Waskow and Jeremy Benstein. Because all these groups are at least semi-universalizing, and look to Jewish texts and traditions for ethical principles which bring together the environment, humans, and other living creatures, there is a good deal of overlap in the resources that they uncover.

20 The flagship organization of the American Jewish food movement discussed earlier.

toward a common field of vision. Risa situated the food conference within what she described as a '5000 year old conversation of what and how and when we eat'.<sup>21</sup> In so doing, she presented a concern with food to be utterly Jewish. The notion of 'eating Jewishly' was already on the table in 2012, and in 2013, that language became central: the 2013 plenary was much more explicit in its desire to simultaneously create and use the concept of 'eating Jewishly'. This article began with a quotation taken from that plenary: '[A] great questioning [is] happening today within our community... a questioning that is not new... a questioning that has been happening for the last 5000 years... what does it mean to eat Jewishly?'

With this phrasing, Risa and the organization she directs have placed the phrase 'eating Jewishly' at the heart of food and Judaism, using it to capture aspects of tradition and history which are left out by narrower categories of Jewish observance. Risa uses Hebrew terminology, mentions Shoresch's relationships with local and umbrella Jewish organizations, and speaks of 'Jewish traditions', 'Jewish values', and 'Jewish practices' that underpin Shoresch sites and activities. Shoresch events are presented as fundamentally Jewish and (yet) in principle open to all who wish to come. This presentation combines careful precision and careful generality. It is motivated by a principle of inclusion arising from Shoresch's mandate to deepen Jewish engagement across the various divides that fragment Jewish community. Developing 'eating Jewishly' is thus an exercise in developing 'Jewish'.

In the plenary, Risa asked a series of rhetorical questions that help elucidate the contours of 'eating Jewishly'. They correspond to many of the concerns of the Jewish food movement and the larger food movement generally, showing the locations of tension with conventional understandings of Jewish food practice. This portion of the plenary sheds light on the network of ideas that are involved in contextualizing food concerns as Jewish concerns. The questions occur in four clusters: eating Jewishly as eating Jewish food, eating Jewishly as keeping kosher, eating Jewishly as a practice of Jewish ethics, and eating Jewishly as engagement with the divine.

Risa begins, 'does eating Jewishly mean eating foods that are culturally Jewish?' She tells a brief story about United Bakers in Toronto, and how her Ashkenazi grandmother 'swears by' their bagels. Risa then asks, 'What if I am a vegan, gluten intolerant, Ashkenazi Jew ... can I still eat Jewishly if challah,

21 I take these quotations from Risa's plenaries at the Shoresch food conferences I attended during my fieldwork. Transcripts of the plenaries are available on the Shoresch Blog.



matza ball soup, mandel broit, brisket, bagels with lox and cream cheese ... are not a part of my diet?' Risa is speaking to an audience to whom her juxtaposition will be familiar: for a long time Ashkenazi Jewry made up the bulk of North American Jewish culinary culture and the dishes Risa has listed are both iconically Jewish, and manifestly wheat and/or animal products (eggs, milk, or meat). These foods are both vividly Jewish, and vividly at odds with other ethical or health-related dietary restrictions that are prevalent in the food movement.<sup>22</sup> Risa is touching on an important division occurring in the community. Not only do people who wish to eat their cultural foods find their choices radically restricted by their other dietary needs: they also may find that their ethics or their physical concerns create a separation between them and their own families at table. This is the very kind of separation which Jewish dietary law elsewhere erected between Jew and gentile.

The second cluster of questions is more complex even than the first, and is approximately twice as long. It begins, 'Does eating Jewishly mean eating foods prepared according to the traditional laws of kashrut? Who decides if something is kosher?' Risa here problematizes reliance on *hekhshers*, the industrial symbols of kosher oversight that appear on food labels, by invoking a past of Jewish food before industrial kashrut.

100 years ago, the women in our family, the keepers of the kitchen, they decided if something was kosher. They knew the butcher, the cheese monger, the baker... As our food system developed into a global food system, a system where our food is often grown/raised, packaged and prepared, out of sight, certifying agencies became important in helping consumers make informed food choices.

Having noted the benefits of access to industrial kosher certification, Risa now turns to some of the drawbacks that concern the people gathered at the conference: 'So what happens now that we are seeing a move back to smaller, locally-based food systems? For many, certified kosher has become the new standard of kosher. Can something be kosher without a hekhsher?' Not only is Risa connecting with the concerns of food movement participants who wish to eat local sustainable foods and support small local businesses; she is also giving voice to a struggle faced at Shores's Bela Farm: the farm will produce fresh foods that need to be prepared and preserved, like the cucumbers that will

22 For example veganism and being gluten-free.

be pickled there, but it may be prohibitively expensive to attain and maintain kosher certification.

The third cluster of questions is the longest, nearly four times the size of the cluster about God. It is the location of a significant thread in the logic of 'eating Jewishly'. The question that Risa historicizes is a flashpoint of debate in the Jewish food movement: 'Does eating Jewishly mean eating in a way that reflects Jewish ethics and values beyond kashrut?'

[O]ur food system has changed radically in the last 60–70 years. Food today is more complicated than ever. ... Some are arguing that we need to expand the definition of kosher – can we call something kosher, which literally means 'fit' to eat, if it has been grown in soil sprayed with known carcinogenic chemicals? ... [I]f we are packaging or serving it in Styrofoam? ... [I]f we know that those who helped grow or prepare our food were not paid fairly or given a safe working environment? ... [I]f the animals were raised in conditions resulting in incredible suffering?

Questioning the kosherness of carcinogens, Styrofoam, and abusive labour and animal husbandry practices is based on a fundamental inference about the relationship between kashrut and Jewish human, animal, and environmental ethics. The idea that food in particular ties together different dimensions of Jewish ethics, and indeed different kinds of Jewishness, is the heart and blood of the Jewish food intervention. That the most religiously orthodox Jewish diet today may be among the most processed, the least healthy, the most heavily packaged, and the most wasteful, is an intolerable contradiction for some in the audience, and evidence of the need for change for many others. Risa continues:

There are those who say kosher is kosher (we don't need to redefine kosher), AND that does not give us permission to willing[ly] overlook our tradition's ethical teachings when it comes to the food choices we make. Tzedek, tzedek tirdof... justice, justice you shall pursue. Justice for those by whose hands we are fed. Justice for the earth. Justice for the non-human animals in our food system. Justice for our own bodies. Justice for those who are hungry in our community. The Torah commands us to pursue justice. Eating has become a political act. So maybe eating Jewishly means embodying the fullness of Judaism's ethical principles as they apply to our current food system.

Risa, who keeps a kosher home and strives to eat ethically, voices the desire to hold kashrut in principle alongside Jewish ethics. Relying on the notion of *tzedek*, justice, Risa knits environmentalism, animal issues, and social justice issues together in the shape of food, and reveals food to be the material of politics and of ethics.

The fourth and last line of questioning is the briefest, and it is about God. God is spoken of obliquely, using language like ‘ultimate Creator’ and ‘the divine’ alongside ‘energy’ and ‘life’.

Does eating Jewishly mean creating space for the divine at our tables? Does it mean acknowledging the role of an ultimate Creator, a unifying energy or breath of life? Does it mean saying a blessing, expressions of gratitude? According to the Talmud, it is forbidden for a person to enjoy anything of this world without a blessing, and if anyone [does] s/he commits sacrilege. ... Does eating Jewishly mean eating with intention?

Here there are hints of an individualist model for religion. God is not invoked as an inscrutable lawmaker, but as the God with whom Jews are in relationship. Awareness of God allows ordinary experiences of food (or other enjoyment) to become elevated, or to be revealed as already elevated, rather than to become debased by lack of the proper orientation. ‘Eating Jewishly’ is connected with intention, and intention to eat Jewishly is a cultivated orientation toward a naturalized idea of sacredness.

These rhetorical questions soften the powerful challenge that may be seen to lie within the words: not only a challenge to the authority of kashrut, arising from the historicization of it and the critique of it, but also a challenge to Jews to eat Jewishly and to become politically involved in the food system in which they are implicated as consumers, as subjects. Health, tradition, ethics, politics, and God are all invoked here, in that order, and they are all placed on our plates, manifested as a function of our food choices. Risa has also offered a way into the movement for people who are otherwise marginalized by other discourses of Jewish food as accessible only through kosher brisket or *mandelbroit*. Ethics and politics have been placed alongside health, tradition, and orthodox religiosity. Importantly, the questions Risa asks thus function to create space for a multiplicity of participations and a range of responses to the call to eat Jewishly.

Risa has used questions to open up the rhetorical landscape and bring diverse participants to the same field of vision. Next, Risa integrates the possibilities by grounding them in firm orienting statements, planting seeds where she has tilled:

Jewish texts and teachings are clear – there are rules and traditions that govern our relationship with food – how we grow it, how we prepare it, how we eat it, how we share it with others. Our community has been exploring the nature of our relationship with food for over 5000 years and today is about moving that conversation forward. Which is why we have brought you all together – foodies, chefs, rabbis, farmers, students, teachers – we need everyone's voice at the table, we need to think holistically about what it means to eat Jewishly here, today.

By speaking about '5000 years' of 'rules and traditions that govern our relationship with food', Risa discursively makes food an object of Jewish tradition. In this way, kashrut is positioned beside a swathe of other, relatively less thought about, Jewish texts and traditions related to food, and these texts and traditions of the distant and recent past are constructed as related to food, from within a contemporary idiom.

### Authorizing 'eating Jewishly'

Authority is navigated at Shoresh by means of discursively linking ideas and activities at Shoresh to Judaism or Jewishness, which are themselves authenticated by means of Jewish religious texts, by a broader swathe of 'Jewish thought', and also by recourse to 'Jewish tradition' which includes and transcends sacred texts (and the contradictions therein) by the unifying emphasis on things done by Jews.<sup>23</sup> 'Eating Jewishly' means many things for those who are engaged in and by it, but it essentially designates a broadening of the field for thinking about what it means to be a Jew and to eat. It evinces a growing concern that kashrut may not be sufficient to designate even the diet of a 'good' Jew, since most Jews in North America do not 'keep kosher', but still place a great deal of importance on their identity as Jews (Lugo *et al.* 2013: Chapter 3). If food practice is important to identity, then it becomes of pressing concern to have food practices that enact Jewish identity. If kashrut now excludes not only most gentiles but also most Jews, then kashrut faces a problem. Shoresh's solution to such a problem must involve grounding their approach to food in narratives of Judaism, Jewishness, and Jews.

23 The recursion, turning on the question of what a Jew is, is both problematic and inevitable.

Understanding Shoresh's cultivation of 'eating Jewishly' as the development of a lived religious foodway involves attending to what is said and done around food, but not only that: it also involves attending to the means by which things are said and done, and the conditions under which such sayings and doings are made possible and legible. Put another way, noting the lines of authority according to which Shoresh's interventions are realized helps show how their intervention works, both in terms of what it means for them, and what it means for scholars of food and religion.

In *Genealogies of Religion*, Talal Asad makes a set of interlocking points around authorizing discourses that I find useful for thinking about Shoresh's activities (Asad 1993).<sup>24</sup> Asad is interested in the power relations that authorize particular practices and processes as legitimate, and I use his approach to shed light on the authorizing discourses present in our examples. While critiquing Geertz's theory of religion, Asad asks about 'the authorizing process by which "religion" is created', how 'authorizing processes represent practices, utterances, or dispositions so that they can be discursively related to general (cosmic) ideas of order' (*ibid.* 37). He says authorizing discourses have 'defined and created' religion *not* by 'establish[ing] absolute uniformity of practice' but rather by forming an overarching narrative against which behaviours and beliefs are to be measured (*ibid.* 37–8 and f.). Asad is not defining religion here. He is reflecting on how power works. He points to the social processes of knowing, which must construct their object, knowledge. Authoritative discourse produces a map of possibilities, and an implicit framework for evaluating those possibilities; as such, authoritative discourses warrant our attention. But where Asad says such a framework could tell truth from falsehood for medieval Christianity (*ibid.* 39), the framework I have discerned in 'eating Jewishly' offers a way to tell good from bad.

Asad sheds further light on authorizing discourse when speaking about Islam in the Middle East. Paying special attention to the role of orthodoxy as a gatekeeper of authorizing discourse precisely because it 'aspires to be authoritative' (Asad 1993: 211), he notes that:

Muslims in Saudi Arabia (as elsewhere) disagree profoundly over what orthodox Islam is, but *as Muslims* their differences are fought out on the ground of that concept. ... the process of determining orthodoxy in con-

24 Speaking about Christianity and Islam in order to problematize the translation of non-Western 'religions' into Western, implicitly Christian historical terms, Asad calls for an investigation of anthropology's complicity in colonial modernity.

ditions of change and contest includes attempts at achieving discursive coherence, at representing the present within an authoritative narrative that includes positive evaluations of past events and persons. Because such authority is a collaborative achievement between narrator and audience, the former cannot speak in total freedom; there are conceptual and institutional conditions that must be attended to if discourses are to be persuasive. (Asad 1993: 210, emphasis original)

Asad reveals that part of the power of authorizing discourse is that it is constructed 'on the ground of' orthodoxy<sup>25</sup>, that is, that for the religious subjects in question, coming out on top is necessarily a matter of being *right*. This helps us see that one who enters into such discourse with the goal of being right is constrained by a set of possibilities for rightness. Part of being right is 'achieving discursive coherence' where the object of coherence is relevant portions of 'past events and persons'; another way to say this is *tradition*. In fact this points up a part of tradition that it is important to acknowledge, which is that the claim to coherence with tradition necessarily situates oneself *within* that tradition, and thus tradition itself is, whatever else it is, a constant re-negotiation of the past in terms of the present and of the present in terms of the past. Furthermore, the tradition, insofar as it exists at Shoresh and elsewhere, is also a collaborative achievement of the kind Asad describes. Redescription and reconceptualization, furthermore, are part of right orientation. Orthodoxy, from a constructivist perspective, is less a fact than an achievement. Asad defines orthodoxy not by opposition to change, but by the 'aspiration to authority' even in change (1993: 211). He writes:

What is involved in such changes is not a simple ad hoc acceptance of new arrangements but the attempt to redescribe norms and concepts with the aid of tradition-guided reasoning. The authority of that redescription, among those familiar with and committed to that tradition, has depended historically on how successful the underlying reasoning was judged to be. (Asad 1993: 211)

and

[Religious] classification forces specific questions onto people who belong to that tradition: Into which category does a given behavior fall? Is it re-

25 Where orthodoxy literally signifies 'right belief'.

ally new, or is it an analogue of something whose classification is not in dispute? The application of these categories to behavior ... often involves an elaborate work of reconceptualizing the context itself in ways that aim to be plausible to [an audience of one's co-religionists]. (Asad 1993: 212)

Asad's claim resonates, in an explanatory register, with the patterns of authorization at Shoresh and in the Jewish food movement generally. Intensive industrial farming and animal husbandry as they appear today in North America are recent, and are radical departures from the reality of food production over most of the history of Jewish food law and tradition. Some of the differences are grand; some are troubling. The change and troubles together have been sufficient to prompt the redescription and reconceptualizing Asad describes. My interlocutors at Shoresh are troubled by a perceived disjuncture between contemporary food, ideal and practical kashrut, other parts of *halacha*, and their attempts to lead a Jewish life. The role of ethics in particular in Jewish law and practice has become a flashpoint in the proliferating conversation about Jews and food, presenting a problem for classification, descriptively and prescriptively, about what and how to eat. Tracing authority, here, is a matter of following which discursive threads achieve sufficient coherence across domains in order to be considered plausible, tenable, and, I would add, hopeful.<sup>26</sup> After all, religion here is being looked to to bear the weight of truth or rightness about what a food system *ought* to look like. This idea that religion is a source for a reparative critique of the current conventional food system has implications that transcend the bounds of Jewish consumption and sit squarely in the realms of the public and the political.

'Eating Jewishly' is cultivated by the community at Shoresh to bring together a set of diverse eating practices under a singular rubric. It is a means of authenticating eating practices as Jewish, and in order to do so it operates within particular constraints. In enlarging the scope of legible, Jewishly-oriented eating practices from kashrut observance to 'eating Jewishly', Shoresh must describe plausible boundaries of what is Jewish. These boundaries have been described along the following lines: culturally-Jewish foods, kashrut, Jewish ethics and values, consciousness of the divine, and a horizontal understanding of 'we'. By claiming the struggle to determine what is fit to eat as a Jewish struggle, Shoresh makes space for a diversity of practices to be authorized into the body of Jewish tradition. Shoresh has responded to crisis in the conventional food

26 Domains such as perceived religious tradition, perceived social ethics, and perceived economic possibility.



system by redescribing boundaries. Underlying this work is the assumption that religious tradition has answers to offer a problematic food system which, by being too (economically) value-driven, has emptied itself of value(s). Thus, while the Shoresch response includes culture, law, ethics, God-consciousness, and community, it becomes clear that there is a particular operating assumption about religion that creates the preconditions for this response. That assumption is that religion is the right place to look, that religion can offer an ethics, that is, a system for valuing, that is ultimately right in the sense of being both true and good. Religion, constructed as *tradition*, is made to offer rich resources from which religious subjects can derive an *ought* to ameliorate *is*.

## Conclusion

Contemporary and historical issues that could otherwise be thought separate from each other were brought together under the rubric of 'food' in Risa's plenary, in the rest of the Shoresch food conference, and in much other food-related programming I have participated in during my fieldwork. Seemingly disparate biblical and extra-biblical Jewish texts and traditions were connected with one another, and thereby unified, under a food lens.<sup>27</sup> Authorizing discourse is not limited to sacred texts, but can be derived from contemporary authors and organizations who write about Jewish life, and also, by the same logic, from the experiences and concerns of the people who are present. Seen in this way, Shoresch's work in the area of 'eating Jewishly' is a complex of discourses both verbal and practical, which seek and thereby construct a Jewish matrix from which to derive solutions to the new problem of eating.

Where kashrut has moved out of the centre of discourse about Jews and food, other kinds of eating become visible alongside kashrut. 'Eating Jewishly' is about conscious or mindful eating, understood and experienced as Jewish through the connection with 'Jewish' things like Jewish texts, Jewish tradition, or God, but also Jewish authors, Jewish institutions, Jewish camps and farms, and the experiences and concerns of ordinary Jews.<sup>28</sup> Shoresch's 'eating Jewishly'

27 These texts include dietary laws; agricultural, war, and hospitality narratives; economic, charity, and justice-related texts; medical advice; and myths about the origins and ends of human life.

28 Conscious or mindful eating may involve, for example, blessings or invocation of the divine, making ethical food choices, deliberately eating traditional or symbolic food, and so on. In practice, the presence of legibly Jewish reasons or narratives are fundamental. In my fieldwork I often heard the phrase 'eating with intention' in this connection.

is a grassroots initiative for the horizontal authorization of diversity in lived Judaism, or lived Jewishness.

Whereas industrial and orthodox logics have together authorized the complex of industrial kashrut, this authority has been called into question by the contemporary food movement's critique of the harms of the conventional food system, in which contemporary kashrut is implicated. In investigating what Jewish tradition offers in answer to these challenges, Shoresch draws on a Jewish tradition that decentralizes institutional rabbinic authority and also pulls from a network of sources for authorizing 'eating Jewishly' as Jewish practice. Looking to 'Jewish tradition', in part, involves the historicization of kashrut. In her plenary, Risa historicizes kashrut through a narrative tracing shifts from community-based decision-making to an industrialized system that, while offering important assurances, is costly enough to shut out small local businesses.<sup>29</sup> Looking to 'Jewish tradition' can also consolidate that tradition itself as an apparently single and unified body of authentic Jewishness rather than as a fragmented narrative of the accidents of history.

In describing the widest possible authorizing circle in which to situate its Jewish eating practice, Shoresch has constituted 'eating Jewishly' in largest part according to a notion of what is good to do. A vision of 'the good' can be excavated through attending to which authorizing discourses (appeals to Jewishness through religion, community, ethics, culture, and so on) function to consolidate power and cultivate a community's orientation, in this case toward 'eating Jewishly'. The idea of 'eating Jewishly' we have attended to here is a departure from two major ideas about Jews and food: the idea of kashrut as the *sine qua non* of Jews eating in a way that connects to their Jewishness, and the idea of Jewish foods as markers of Jewish identity by participation in an historical aesthetic. *Shoresch* makes room for both of those things within the wider frame of 'eating Jewishly', and a large part of its reasoning is ethical.

The notion of 'eating Jewishly' offers a structure for legibility, authoritativeness, and legitimacy for food practices that fall outside current systems

29 I distinguish the question of whether kashrut should (or does) include ethical assurances, from the move to historicize. They are different issues, although they bear a relationship to one another. Historicization has been pursued in the academic literature by investigating the diversity of authorized practices between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewry (cf. Cooper 1993, Kraemer 2007), by exploring the practice of kashrut before the rise of Jewish Orthodoxy (cf. Cooper 1993, Kraemer 2007, Rosenblum 2010), and by attending to the history of women's power in authorizing paths of kashrut observance (cf. Abusch Magder 2005, Joselit 1996 [1994], Sered 1992), as well as in the response of Reform Judaism and the industrialization of kashrut mentioned above.

for legible, authoritative, and legitimate Jewish eating. The usual approaches have been disturbed in recent years, in the larger social response to problems of industrial food production and consumption. As problems in factory farming, agribusiness, and the industrial food system have come more and more urgently into public view, there has been an attendant crisis of faith in the industrial systems which govern kashrut, which threatened to further fragment geographies of community practice in an already fragmented, denominationalized Jewry. A new configuration of the Jewish population has emerged: a segment that crosses denominational boundaries and is unified by the concern that the systems by which food comes to them now bears little resemblance to those systems by which food came to them in the past, and that this gap is problematic for them *as Jews*.

Shoresh consolidates multiple threads of authorization, including orthodoxy, women's authoritative knowledge, and horizontal knowledges in Jewish traditions, Jewish lives, and the Jewish food movement. These authoritative discourses help Shoresh to develop an approach to food that displaces kashrut from the centre of Jewish eating. Kashrut is thus retained (in multiple forms including industrial and historical), reimagined (through historicization), and repositioned alongside multiple kinds of authoritative Jewish practice. Room is made for multiple legitimate 'Jewish' approaches to food practice. Community is consolidated not around adherence or non-adherence to law but rather around authoritative Jewishness, and the lines of purity are redrawn around (explicitly) ethics and (implicitly) identity.

This article has been concerned with examining the meanings given to certain food choices, and the framework according to which those food choices are made and within which those meanings are embedded. By investigating the construction of 'eating Jewishly', I have shifted focus from the question of food and Jewish identity, preferring the question of the conditions of possibility for the construction of either identity or religion. Authorizing discourses, based on a variety of Jewish sources, help us trace the lines of power according to which particular instances of identity or religion become legible, particular ideas gain traction, and particular constellations of ideas achieve cohesion. If food is a window onto life, here, 'eating Jewishly' is a window onto the ongoing construction of tradition, which is the stuff of lived religion. Authorizing discourses offer productive constraint in the formation of Shoresh's lived religion, and in the formation of religious tradition as a source for ethics.

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# The taste of trauma

Reflections of ageing Shoah survivors on food and how they (re)inscribe it with meaning

BEN KASSTAN

Drawing on ethnographic research in the UK's only support facility for ageing Jewish Shoah survivors, this paper charts the 'foodways' in a Centre where satiety is experienced as an emotional as well as a physical need. How the experience of genocidal violence and displacement give rise to particular tastes of trauma is explored, firstly through the symbolism of bread which is metaphorically leavened with meanings and memories of survival – both in Judaism and for the survivors interviewed. Bread is positioned as a true reflection of lived experience for survivors of both ghettos and concentration camps, who construct a specific and salient relationship with food. This illustrates the perceived difference between them and members of the Centre who escaped the Nazi regime as refugees or by the *Kindertransport*. Foods associated with the concentration or extermination camps are (re)inscribed with new meanings, as a steaming bowl of Polish barley soup ultimately embodies the ingredients of memory but also the recipe of survival. It can also stew the nostalgia of pre-war lives for Eastern European Jews and their recollections of the *heyim* (Yiddish 'home'). Food is a conscious strategy of care in the Centre that mediates the embodied trauma of participants, and this article draws on comparative examples to argue that refugee and survivor communities more generally may possess culturally-significant relationships with food that remain poorly understood.

## Introduction

At the heart of a social and therapeutic Centre in London sits a busy and curious café, catering to a particular taste of trauma held by elderly Jewish Shoah survivors. As I am guided through the kitchen on the first day of my field-work in January 2013, it becomes obvious that the menu is a conscious strategy of care that is attentively crafted by the chef – who is himself a Jewish refugee of the 1992–5 Bosnian war.

From Monday through to Thursday he prepares fresh and familiar foods to offer the members both physical and emotional sustenance. The elders who



visit the Centre are typically Ashkenazi in origin and were violently uprooted from their lives in Poland, Germany and Hungary during the Nazi persecution of European Jewry. The menu is designed to reconnect them with their history and culture, but the camp and ghetto survivors are a particular clientele for whom 'tasteless food is an insult, but not enough food is traumatising'. (Support staff 2013)

Food in the kitchen must be kosher approved so that all Jews can eat in the café, but also because I am told the Centre's 'core members tend to come from religious or traditional families' (Support staff 2013). The meals served are *parve* (Yiddish, 'neutral'<sup>1</sup>) and dairy, the latter of which must be *Chalav Yisrael*.<sup>2</sup> Smells of the *beym* (Yiddish, 'home') infuse the room and offer a sense of comfort, and I'm told the look of love which some of the members have when they see a piece of *shmalts* (Yiddish, 'chicken fat') is a sight to behold.

The field-site is the only support facility for elderly-Jewish Shoah survivors in the UK, also the first of its kind in the world. In respect of the anonymity promised to the Centre, I have replaced its real name with the Hebrew<sup>3</sup> 'Bitachon', a term embodying a sense of security, trust or faith. Bitachon seeks to enable ageing members to feel secure in the space and service they use, and is widely regarded by members as a 'second home'. As a participant-observer in the Centre, I quickly became interested in understanding how an ethno-religious care organisation aims to meet the needs of an ageing and traumatised community of survivors through the study of foodways.

The *kehillah* (Hebrew, 'community') at the Centre is made up of camp and ghetto survivors, hidden children, and those who came to the United Kingdom by *Kindertransport* (which was the evacuation of Jewish children in Europe by rail) or as refugees from 1933 onwards, and membership is also extended to spouses. Although the different 'groups' of members are brought together under the shared title of 'survivor' by the organisation, there remains a

- 1 Not derived from meaty or dairy products, such as fish.
- 2 Dairy products that are produced under the supervision of an observant Jew. In compliance with the ritual separation of meat and dairy products, meat-derived meals are not available or permitted in the Centre's kitchen.
- 3 The therapeutic wing of the Centre has a Hebrew name which prompted me to use 'Bitachon' as an appropriate pseudonym.

‘hierarchy of suffering’<sup>4</sup> in the Centre, and food actually plays an implicit role in differentiating camp and ghetto survivors from refugees.

This article was informed by Barbara Myerhoff’s legendary ethnography, *Number Our Days* (1978), as an original example of conducting anthropological research ‘at home’, as well as being a study of ageing Jewish members of a day club, many of whom were refugees who left Eastern Europe prior to the Shoah. Similarly, Jillian Gould (2013) discussed the negotiations in ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces of a residential care home by Jewish elders in Canada, and touched upon the meaning of being an ‘immigrant’; which was a term perceived to be relative between ‘real’ immigrants from Eastern Europe and those who were second-generation. Gould (2013: 193) also remarked how the specific habit of taking tea with a sugar cube provoked memories of a pre-war childhood in Poland, whereas a cup of coffee evoked a taste of post-war life in Paris for one participant. However, this study is unique in understanding how food evokes particular memories of genocide, displacement and catastrophe for some ageing survivors of a religious community, within an ethnic sub-group, and particularly amongst a collective who consider themselves (and are considered) to have experienced the extremities of Nazi persecution.

## Research methods

The research was conducted over a six month period between January–August 2013 when travelling to London from Durham (UK), with data eventually drawn from ethnographic methods, incessant note-taking and semi-structured informal interviews. Approval was granted by the administering care organisation of Bitachon to conduct this project, with research and ethical consent provided by Durham University. Twenty-three interviews were conducted altogether; twelve with camp and ghetto survivors; five with *Kindertransport* or refugees; one with a member’s spouse; and five with associates of the Centre.

I initially visited the Centre to conduct participant observation and ‘hang out’, which, according to Russell Bernard ‘builds trust, or rapport, and trust results in ordinary conversation and ordinary behaviour in your presence’ (2011: 277). Being able to take part in activities at Bitachon meant that I could join structured sessions to observe the use of space and understand the ways in which the Shoah is sometimes discussed in everyday situations amongst survivors. I made sure to attend the same weekly activities so that my presence

4 See also Freedland 2011.

would become familiar and add a sense of continuity to the relationships that were gradually being forged.

In particular, playing Bridge on Mondays became an informal 'research method' which enabled me to recruit research participants and develop their trust, and in turn, their responses over multiple interviews, during the course of my research. During the recess between games they satisfied their own curiosity about why I was travelling from Durham to play Bridge, and interesting discussions were provoked once the members learnt about my research interests and how they themselves could contribute to the study. The term 'Bridge' proved to be a beautiful metaphor for the Centre and its members, as playing cards brought survivors together to share their experiences of the Shoah with myself, a young researcher.

I requested permission to record interviews with a Dictaphone upon gaining informed consent, but I soon had to reconcile an ethical and practical consideration regarding anonymity. It was initially my intention that all participants would remain anonymous and their names would be replaced with pseudonyms, with a view to maintaining the highest possible standards of research integrity outlined by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (see ASA 2011). However, as many participants have been interviewed extensively by media about their experience during of the Shoah, some are accomplished writers, feature in publications, national television, or are publically linked to the UK's Holocaust Educational Trust (HET nd), some preferred their real names to appear in the work produced. I am convinced that giving participants the choice to remain anonymous versus publishing their names in the original study was particularly pertinent to the context of research, as Nazi camps, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, were places where personal identities were excised and the status of prisoner was etched in. This realisation led me to be flexible with guidelines for best practice in anthropological research, and could be an ethical issue that needs greater discussion amongst ethnographers working with prominent participants in the context of surviving genocide or violence more broadly. However, as much as I wanted to respect the wishes of participants who requested to publish their names, I maintained the right to anonymise statements appearing in subsequent publications in case they may have caused issues between other members within Bitachon.

The strong relationships nurtured at Bitachon and the process of developing qualitative knowledge was greatly enriched by my personal connection to the research topic, as my paternal grandfather and his sister survived the Nazi occupation of France and French complicity in the Shoah that saw the deportation of their mother to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In April 2013 I accompanied a



Artefacts symbolising the journey of survival at Bitachon. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

number of the participants as they returned to Auschwitz on educational tours, which brought the research material considerably ‘close to home’, and was at times difficult to approach without feeling the weight of my familial connection. Moreover, I was able to quickly build rapport with elders by virtue of my Jewish heritage and knowledge of Jewish traditions and culture, and on one occasion arrived in fancy dress to the Centre’s Purim event. For these reasons I was undertaking anthropological work in the spiritual as well as the physical sense of the word ‘home’, and can be reflected in the rich interviews that took place (both at participant’s homes and at Bitachon), as well as the ethnographic notes drawn from my degree of involvement in the Centre’s activities.

To avoid the construction of qualitative knowledge being influenced by the extent of pre-exposure to the Shoah I had received prior to visiting Bitachon, I was careful to explore the effects of surviving genocide rather than focus solely on bearing witness. The extent to which some survivors have been approached for interviews or to recount their narratives raised an expectation that I was also pursuing Shoah testimonies, and instead my emphasis on understanding the challenges facing ageing victims occasionally took some members by surprise.

### Embodied trauma

Understanding how past trauma is marked through taste is greatly aided through the notion of embodiment, which is deeply rooted in the complex philosophical tradition of ‘phenomenology’. In one of its developments that impacted most on anthropology, the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty considered the body as a ‘disclosure’ of individual experience and the social world (2008 [1945]). The use of embodiment within anthropological

studies illustrates how the body is upheld as a true reflection of lived and social experience.

The phenomenology of embodiment described by Merleau-Ponty has since been developed to present human existence as temporally mediated, 'in such a way that our past experience is always retained in a present moment that is feeding forward to anticipate future horizons of experience' (Desjarlais and Throp 2011: 88). Embodiment is constantly in a state of flux and 'continually being constituted and reconstituted from one moment to the next' (Weiss 1999: 43), rather than being determined by a static or fixed experience.

The concept of the body as a disclosure therefore serves as a model to study the constant interplay between culture and the individual (Csordas 1999), and how these entities interact and are carried within the body over time. However, as much as embodiment is continuously determined by temporal events – memory and history are irreversibly inscribed on the body; as Didier Fassin notes, 'memory, buried deep, does not disappear. History relentlessly resurfaces' (2007: 28). The use of embodiment within anthropological studies of violence and suffering therefore illustrates how the body becomes a true reflection of lived experience when caught under siege, being shaped within – and by – particular social processes. It can be inferred that the embodiments of violence are context-specific, being 'shaped in important ways by the relations of power and domination in which the body is involved' (French 1999: 69).

Researching the tastes of trauma within a community of Shoah survivors is epitomised by Gail Weiss' (1999) notion of 'intercorporeality', which describes embodiment, not as a private or isolated entity, but moulded by everyday interactions with others. How 'intercorporeality' is envisaged through foodways at Bitachon is relatable to previous studies of embodiment in Judaism, as Jewish people are a religious and social collective known for being the 'people of the body' as well as of the book (see Eilberg-Schwartz 1992).

### Subjectivity and intersubjectivity

Subjectivity is a process that enriches anthropological conceptions of embodiment, as it offers a means of evaluating self-reflections and autobiographical experience. Subjectivity provides a basis for human beings 'to think through their circumstances and ... to inwardly endure experiences that would otherwise be outwardly unbearable' (Biehl *et al.* 2007: 14). Intersubjectivity describes how the individual relates to their collective and social worlds, and is exemplified in this article by a community of survivors who use a shared social and therapeutic centre. Engaging with subjectivity in the context of genocide and

embodied traumatic memory with age is essential, because ‘even when violence has lapsed, the memory of violence permeates the subjective experience of any number of people around the world’ (*ibid.* 11).

Anthropological work has become both theoretically and ethnographically drawn to the lingering and subjective effects of violence and war as of late. According to Didier Fassin and Estelle d’Halluin, the ‘body has become the place that displays the *evidence of truth*’ (2005: 598). Fassin claims that it is obviously the case that torture leaves a physical imprint on the body which testifies to lived experience of violence – but even in the absence of a physical trace of torture – ‘wounds of the soul’ can speak of exposure to suffering – now clinically recognised as ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (Fassin 2011: 287). Studies have also shown that the traumatic experience of violence can manifest at a collective and individual level for target groups who are alleged to constitute an ‘other’ during war and conflict. For example, Doug Henry (2006) found ‘heart problems’, especially a ‘spoiled heart’, in the Sierra Leone–Guinea border conflict to be a common emic category used to describe a heart that is torn apart by trauma and suffering. It has been noted by some anthropologists that the impact of suffering with age remains insufficiently understood (see Hinton 2002), and this article consequently offers an insight into the embodiment of violence seventy years after the liberation of Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

### ‘The bread of affliction’

Beside the kitchen in Bitachon sits a plate of bread which is freely available. It is not uncommon to see the slices wrapped into a handkerchief and slipped into a handbag, or to find rolls of bread bulging out of blazer pockets ‘just in case’. This is a learned survival strategy from a time when life and death were hinged on having bread in your hand, and resonates with many iconic testimonies – particularly the pioneering work of Primo Levi (1987 [1947]). However, the free bread in the Centre has its own vernacular, and is served in a range of flavourful and recognisable forms – including rye bread with caraway seeds or braided rolls (*challah*) at lunch, as well as sweet cakes and *rugelakh*; a pastry typical of Ashkenazi baking which is often rolled with a sweet filling such as chocolate.

Conversations with members who came to the UK by *Kindertransport* affirm the particular significance of food for camp survivors rather than refugees, illuminating the graded difference between the members of Bitachon. This can be attributed to the severe hunger enforced in the ghettos and camps, where those incarcerated received a ‘ration that wasn’t for living but for dying’

(Shoshannah 2013). The following reflections illustrate the fundamental role that, specifically, bread performs as a taste of trauma – as well as marking the threshold of life where Shoah survivors once stood. It also introduces the gradation of suffering that the camp and ghetto survivors feel towards the refugees who share the Centre.

For Rifkah, a Polish survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the meanings attached to bread are inextricable from the years spent in incarceration. She says:

[Here] they have a plate of bread for people to help themselves, it is a reminder that at one time we didn't see any bread and it was the difference between life and death.

I waste a lot of things in the kitchen, but when it comes to bread I do anything with it but I can't throw it away because people were dying for a *crust* of bread. (Rifkah 2013)

Drawing on her memories of working in the orphanage of the Lodz Ghetto, Chaya shared similar sentiments about bread. She recalled:

On *Shabbat* [the Sabbath] the children didn't work and I used to tell them the story of Hansel and Gretel. The only difference was that instead of these children finding a lovely house made of chocolates and sweets in the middle of a forest, the house was made of bread and they could just go in there and eat as much bread as they wanted.

We were always hungry, we were dreaming of bread, not luxurious food. I love bread now, I never waste bread because I still remember how important bread was during this very difficult time. (Chaya 2013)

As Chaya recalls, she was 'dreaming of bread' in the Lodz Ghetto because of the sustenance it offered during a time of enforced starvation. The extent of hunger in the Lodz Ghetto can be seen in the iconic tale of Hansel and Gretel – itself a story of hunger and survival – retold to orphans under her care – orphans who were all later sent to Chelmno extermination camp along with her father.

Chaya's further reflections then imply how bread can be considered a fundamental marker of difference in experience between ghetto survivors and those who escaped Nazi persecution before 1939. She said:



I could never speak to my husband [about the ghetto], he left Poland in 1939 but he could never understand it. As a student [in England] he had no money. He was telling me sometimes for lunch he had to have a bar of chocolate and that's where our differences started, when I was telling him about bread, and then he told me about chocolate! (Chaya 2013)

Bread was most extremely represented as a weapon of survival through Marah's quote, where access to bread saved her life at the expense of another's. She recalls:

I was sitting with the other crooked people who [Dr] Mengele had thrown out [during the *Selektion*]. Then suddenly I saw my sister was there with the bread that the other transport had had to leave behind. My sister was so insistent and she asked who wanted to change my place for bread. So we changed places and somebody instead of me went to the gas. (Marah 2013)

Not only is Marah's statement shocking to hear, but I was entirely unprepared for its impact during the interview. Imagining bread as a weapon of survival can be drawn from published and iconic testimonies, such as Primo Levi's, where he wrote that "The law of the Lager said: "eat our own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbour"" (1987 [1947]: 160) – to the less well known, such as, Sam Pivnik, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, who wrote:

The bread ration was supposed to be one loaf to every four prisoners, but ... At Auschwitz-Birkenau, we killed each other by percentages. (Pivnik 2012: 113)

Bread is then metaphorically leavened with meanings of trauma and survival for these elderly Jewish members who lived through the ghettos and camps yet remain affected by their lived experience of violence and harrowing reflections of hunger. Although metaphorical rather than etymological, the analogy of bread with life is made implicit within the *Tanakh*, also embodying an ancient Jewish journey of survival. The Hebrew terms bread (לחם *lechem*) and life (חיים *chaim*) are arguably interchangeable, for as much as *lechem* denotes bread, it holds a more general meaning of 'sustenance', which itself is used in conjunction with 'life' in the Book of Proverbs ([*Tanakh*] 27:27):

For thy food,  
 For the food of thy household,  
 And life for thy maids.<sup>5</sup>

By looking at meanings within the Jewish holiday of Pessa'h (Hebrew, 'Passover'), it is clear that from the time of the exodus to the extermination of the Jews – bread is the enduring 'taste of affliction' in Jewish history.

The ritual celebration of Pessa'h demands not only that unleavened bread – known as *matza* – is eaten, but also that traces or derivatives of grains such as wheat, barley, rye, oats or spelt are completely removed from the home prior to the Seder dinner which marks the beginning of the eight day event. Eating unleavened bread recalls the divine deliverance of the Israelites from enslavement by the Pharaoh King of Egypt, who took their dough before it had leavened in their haste to leave. It now relives the hardship and memory faced by the Israelite community as they wandered endlessly and despairingly out of Egypt, proclaiming to Moshe and Aaron: 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread' ([*Tanakh*] Exodus 16:2–3).

The meanings ascribed to bread by members of Bitachon, as well as its significance in Judaism, draws on signature studies of culinary narratives in anthropology. In her 'culinary ethnography' of a Buddhist population in Northern Thailand, the Tai Yong, Ing-Britt Trankell noted how rice cultivation has shaped feelings of locality and attachment to the land as being the 'basic ingredients of identity' (1995: 37). Not only is rice considered to be synonymous with food, but it is thought to be sacredly bestowed: it is imagined as a transformation of 'the self-sacrificing mother who dies in order to be able to feed her children' (Trankell 1995: 133). Rice therefore embodies the elements of being human and is thought to be the essence of life, the consumption of which becomes a connective ritual between family members and their ancestors, and also 'defines you as a human being' (*ibid.* 24).

Janet Carsten (1995) has argued that the mobility of some Malay communities on the island of Langkawi has given rise to fluid and mutable bonds of kinship and relatedness through the sharing of food, especially rice, rather than a sense of identity being bestowed through descent or birth. The importance of kinship is essentially placed on living and future relations rather than those of the past (*ibid.*). Commensality of rice acts as a process that redefines

5 Your own sustenance comes first, before the sustenance of your household, and life for your maidens (see Epstein 1948: 472).

newcomers to Langkawi as kin, which makes food and migration inextricable to understandings of social organisation for this particular community in Southeast Asia.

The way in which rice binds an individual to one's ancestry is deeply reminiscent of bread's symbolic value for survivors and its prominent role over Pessa'h. Moreover, it is obvious in Judaism that taking certain foods into the body is a physical act of remembrance, as the Hebrew term 'to remember' – *zakhar* – entails action rather than thought alone (Berlin and Brettler 2004: 315). This discussion indicates that the consumption of foods, staple grains in these instances, enable uprooted minority groups to connect or reconnect to a locality, community, or ancestry, evidently in the context of embodied trauma.

### Krupnik soup

Whilst the bread is free of charge, lunch at the Jewish Centre is prepared at a subsidised rate. Rifkah recommends that I try the *krupnik soup* – which is her own Polish barley recipe. She says:

They enjoy my homemade barley soup downstairs; it is thick and nourishing, and what did we get in the camp? Water with a piece of turnip swimming around – if we were lucky. (Rifkah 2013)

The soup is metaphorically ladled with the journey of survival. As Rifkah notes, the soup in the camps was weak and without nutrition, colour, or texture but now at the Centre, survivors can enjoy a rich, warm, and wholesome *krupnik* soup which represents where the members have come to. The Polish barley soup symbolises the *heym* beyond the physical sense of the term 'home' – and is also used as a metaphorical reference to place of origin, time and pre-war life for, by and large, Yiddish-speaking Jewish survivors of Ashkenazi origin.

It is therefore arguably the case that the soup epitomises a conscious strategy of care which is not only made culturally appropriate but in some way also produces a 'historical' counterbalance or re-inscription for this specific ethno-religious group. Through a taste that is recognised and relished, the soup becomes the antithesis of suffering experienced by members and embodies the ingredients of memory, but also the recipe of survival.

Although available with nuanced differences in composition, Rifkah shared her personal recipe for Polish barley soup. An interview conducted with a member of staff raised the importance of 'legacy' for survivors and how this is imagined through the above soup recipe for Rifkah. The energy that some

survivors invest in bearing witness to local, regional, and national audiences is a remarkable and clear example of how important preserving the memory of the Shoah is (see HET nd), and the Centre fully supports its members in doing this. I was also told that:

Legacy can be interpreted as anything; it could be, for example, the cookery and the recipes. The soup recipes come from Rifkah: the mushroom and barley is the most amazing soup! Now she would have got that recipe from her mum [who died in Bergen-Belsen] and therefore the continuity that her mum is never forgotten because there are 700 people eating the soup every month and that's really powerful. (Support staff 2013)

This illustrates how food is perceived as a culinary legacy amongst displaced communities and survivors of genocide, as the soup served in Bitachon is as much an act of 'continuity' as it is a sharing of experience and historical narrative. Rifkah's staple recipe at Bitachon indicates the role that gender and age play in preserving memories of the *heym*, as well as nourishing camp and ghetto survivors of Polish origin both physically and emotionally. As food is deeply rooted in topology and tradition, age-related care settings should thus be considered an environment that attempts to blend and reconcile these entities together.

Annemarie Mol's (2010) account of 'nourishing care' illustrates the importance of food preparation, distribution and consumption amongst the elderly and related care-settings. Here, she argues that the nutritional value and palatability of foods are 'in tension' as much as they are 'interdependent', also demonstrating that food is a critical factor of 'good' care in her ethnography of Dutch nursing homes (*ibid.*). It can therefore be inferred that food is central to discussions of ageing and embodiment, and is arguably a reflection of lived experience in that 'food ... can be viewed as the prism that refracts all-important cultural concerns into their elemental components' (Jochnowitz 2008: 305).

The potential for the *krupnik* soup at Bitachon to counterbalance feelings of displacement parallels broader studies which explore how the culinary traditions of minority-religious groups are marked by a taste of trauma following the experience of displacement and severance. Sidney Mintz has pioneered anthropological work into the political, economic and cultural forces that shape eating habits and the meanings held within foods (Mintz 2012; Mintz and Du Bois 2002). However there has been less focus on the foods which embody traumatic memories of displacement or genocide for marginalised or minority groups, despite the fact that foods are literally and metaphorically brought into

– and become – part of the body (Lien and Nerlich 2004: 6).

This notion is clearly found amongst studies of Palestinian refugee communities following the Nakba and Israel's 1948 declaration of independence. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev (2004) notes that the Nakba is likened to a natural 'disaster' by some Palestinians, to the extent that certain plants can evoke memories of a former homeland and are also perceived to nourish and symbolise the growth of a nation state.

Her study charts how Palestinian refugees make 'return visits' to their former villages and rural landscapes, or traditional Arab cities such as Akka and Yaffa, in order to collect organics such as wild herbs, mushrooms and fruits to prepare dishes that are shared with friends and family (Ben-Ze'ev 2011). For Muslim elders born before 1948, such visits to former Arab villages are likened to the Hajj – the Holy pilgrimage to Mecca that is viewed as an obligation in Islam (*ibid.* 108).

Ben-Ze'ev clearly illustrates the nostalgia that food can evoke and its importance within the present for people who remain painfully disconnected from their place of origin, as ingredients both reminisce and recreate an imagined Palestinian homeland after past catastrophe for Muslim refugees and their descendants. More specifically, comparing the aforementioned discussion of bread and soup for Shoah survivors with organic life and the Nakba exemplifies how food embodies a certain experience of calamity and can determine how past traumas are remembered and reflected upon.

We can see how bread is eminently divine in Judaism, with each crust serving as an ancient and salient reminder of Jewish suffering and survival from the time of the exodus to the Nazi extermination camps. Through Rifkah's recipe and culinary legacy,



Rifkah's Polish Barley soup. Photograph by Ben Kasstan.

#### Rifkah's recipe for Polish Barley soup

Glass of barley  
 1 onion  
 1 leek  
 1 carrot  
 2-3 celery sticks  
 ½ lb mushrooms  
 1 Chicken stock tube  
 Tbsp dill  
 Salt & pepper

Simmer for two hours (at least)

memories of the weak and watery soups of Auschwitz are stirred with renewed meanings of familiarity, sustenance and pre-war memories of the Ashkenazi heartlands of Eastern Europe. In a comparable way, the Palestinian ‘return visits’ epitomise their relationship with a sacred land perceived to have been lost through a catastrophe, and by consuming familiar herbs and plants, perhaps they physically ingest and internalise the memory, loss, and land of Palestine itself.

This trail of thought also leads to the ongoing inter-ethnic violence in the Central African Republic (CAR), where recent news reports imply that former Muslim Peul communities, which have either migrated or been razed to the ground, remain demarcated by the profusion of unpicked mango trees (Whewell 2014). Here it indicates that the scent of food could also perform a culinary role in igniting memories of dispossession, as blooming trees stand above a withered way of life, with the ground below marked by a ‘a rotting yellow squelch, the aroma more sickly than sweet’ (*ibid.*). How displaced Peul from towns such as Bozoum will come to recall their trauma and survival can only be understood through further scholarship into socio-religious conceptualisations of food and dispossession, for ‘survival comes in cultural inflections’ (Myerhoff 1978: 257).

In her analysis of French Jewish women’s writings of the Shoah, Lucille Cairns (2009: 8) pointed out the refusal or abstention from certain foods by individuals because of the ‘highly perverse identification’ with Jews who perished in the Nazi camps. In one example, Cairns sited the child character, Hannah, in Myriam Anisimov’s *La Soie et les cendres* (French ‘silk and ash’) who bore a hatred of milk, for its pale white tone brought memories of colourless Jewish corpses in Nazi extermination camps. The habit of ‘consuming guilt’ after surviving the Shoah, when so many perished from brutal starvation, was framed as a ‘human response to trauma’ (*ibid.* 11), but clearly attention should also be paid to the act of consuming – rather than avoiding – specific foods that become associated with a calamitous experience.

In contrast, at the Jewish Centre under study, bread is consumed as a shared and intersubjective token of trauma among the camp survivors, and when combined with a steaming bowl of *krupnik* soup, memory of the *heyim* is not only brought to life but is – in a sense – also recreated. The relationships that survivors forge with food are obviously a result of the barbaric starvation inflicted upon them, but the specific symbolism of bread and soup recounts a deeper story of an ancient – as well as lived – experience of exile.

Although the menu is imprinted with the taste of suffering and displacement and seeks to (re)inscribe foods with meanings of home, it does so explicitly

for Ashkenazi Jews in a way that might not be culturally appropriate for Shoah survivors of Sefardi origin. These are the Jewish communities whose origins lie in the Spanish expulsion of 1492 – Sefarad being the Hebrew word for Spain – and were later deported to concentration and extermination camps from Italy, Greece and the Balkans. For those Jewish survivors and refugees who spoke Ladino rather than Yiddish and enjoyed a diet influenced by the Mediterranean climate (see Roden 1996), Polish barley soup would arguably make little sense as a therapeutic intervention. Although the idea of the Jewish Diaspora imagines an ancient legacy of exile from the land of Israel, the Jewish Centre clearly understands that within the word ‘Diaspora’ lies a vast wealth of cultural and ritual difference that does not translate across divisions within the same religious group.

## Conclusion

Food in Jewish communities, Claudia Roden (1996: 8) notes, ‘is a nostalgic subject which has to do with recalling a world that has vanished’. The symbolic meaning of soup at Bitachon can be conceived as a clear example of the Welsh term *hiraeth*, for which there is no close English translation but is interpreted as a deep sense of longing or nostalgia for a lost place, person or way of life. As also illustrated by Ben Ze’ev (2011), consuming particular foods may be inextricable from experience for religious or ethnic minority groups more broadly who have become violently or emotionally severed from their origins. Based on this study it would seem that such a claim is indeed possible and worthy of further scholarship, as the Shoah is a truly embodied phenomenon for the community of ageing Ashkenazi Jews I worked with in 2013. As has been shown here, the words of my participants narrate a journey that is best shared in the form of *krupnik* soup and served alongside a soft roll of bread, nourishing the body with a lasting taste of memory, familiarity and all the ‘secrets of surviving’.

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# Elaborating on *ubuntu* in a Johannesburg inner-city church

ELINA HANKELA

The article was originally delivered as the speech of the winner of the 2014 Donner Institute Prize for Outstanding Research into Religion, and deals with some core findings of the research that won the prize, namely, the doctoral thesis *Challenging Ubuntu: Open Doors and Exclusionary Boundaries at the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg*. The author approaches the meanings of *ubuntu* (Nguni: humanity/humanness) in the context of a Methodist church that sheltered thousands of African migrants in its premises in the inner city of Johannesburg. Using ethnographic research methods, she analyses both the inclusionary message of humanity preached at the church and the exclusionary boundaries between the people who lived in the church and the local congregation that worshipped there. Based on the social dynamics of the church community, the author suggests the rules of reciprocity and survival as some of the socio-moral patterns that set the boundaries to the actualisation of the moral ideal of *ubuntu* in this context. Overall, the case of this particular church speaks to a broader discussion of the meaning of and limits to being human in one world.

‘Have you heard that there is xenophobia in Balfour in Mpumalanga?’ Freedom,<sup>1</sup> a Zimbabwean teenager, asked me in February 2010.<sup>2</sup> I had known Freedom for some months already, and thus I also knew that he was not only referring to xenophobic attitudes, but, rather, to violent attacks on black African migrants. I had met Freedom in inner-city Johannesburg, at the Central

1 The names of the informants, apart from Paul Verryn, have been changed.

2 Elina Hankela was awarded the 2014 Donner Institute Prize for Outstanding Research into Religion. This article is an edited version of her speech delivered at the prize ceremony, which took place during the Donner Institute Symposium ‘Religion and Food’ at Åbo Akademi University on 25 June 2014. It is based on the book *Ubuntu, Migration and Ministry: Being Human in a Johannesburg Church* (Brill 2014); some sections of this text have previously been published as part of the book. For the full manuscript of the book, see <<http://www.brill.com/products/book/ubuntu-migration-and-ministry>>. Moreover, some sections of this text have been previously published as part of the article ‘Rules of reciprocity and survival in negotiating Ubuntu at the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg’ (Hankela 2013).

Methodist Mission (CMM), where he used to stay like hundreds of his compatriots. At the time, however, Freedom was staying in Soweto, and so I asked him if he was afraid of 'it' also coming to Soweto. 'Not now', he responded, 'but after the FIFA World Cup'. Freedom seemed to think that the interest of the world in the 2010 host country of the soccer spectacle would protect him against xenophobic violence for the time being.

When I first met Freedom I was conducting fieldwork at the CMM for my doctoral thesis. In this article, I first introduce the CMM, that is, the context of the research project, and then briefly touch upon questions related to methodology and the *ubuntu* (Nguni: 'humanity, humanness') discourse that features as my theoretical framework. I end by making some remarks about *ubuntu* in the context of the CMM.

### Context: The Central Methodist Mission, Johannesburg

The CMM is established in a six-storey church building in inner-city Johannesburg. In 2009 it was both host to a large Methodist congregation and a shelter for a shifting population of two to three thousand international migrants and homeless South Africans.<sup>3</sup> I will call the first group members and the latter dwellers. Approximately 90 per cent of the dwellers, like Freedom, came from Zimbabwe. His story resonates with a collective narrative of his compatriots who due to the economic and political meltdown in their country have headed abroad; by far the largest percentage migrating to neighbouring South Africa, and in particular Johannesburg – the City of Gold, or the city of dreams of a better life; often a city of dreams deferred. Those who had ended up at the CMM lived in the church building; they slept in overcrowded rooms and foyers, on stairs and floors. Some parts of the church resembled a squatter camp; and some informants dubbed the building a refugee camp. The members of the congregation, on the other hand, were predominantly South African, the

3 According to an estimate made by the African Centre for Migration and Society, there were 1.7 million foreign-born residents in South Africa in 2009 (4% of the population) (cf. Landau *et al.* 2010). In 2008 1.25 million Zimbabweans 'legally' crossed the border to South Africa; in 2000 the figure was approximately half a million. In other words, migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa has increased in the 2000s (cf. Crush and Tevera 2010). Yet it is important to note that both officials and the media have exaggerated the number of undocumented migrants (and undocumented Zimbabweans) in South Africa (cf. Landau *et al.* 2010; on estimations by the public and the media of the number of Zimbabweans in South Africa, see Crush and Tevera 2010; Makina 2010).

majority of them Xhosas. However, there were foreign nationals among them, too. The members came to the CMM, as any local church community would, to worship.

While Freedom's comments on xenophobia are one window on the discussion of the issue in South Africa at large, there was also tension and separation between the members and the dwellers at the CMM. Unathi, a young member, for instance, said: 'There is a church where we worship; (and) there is a church that provides accommodation for refugees'.<sup>4</sup> The focus of my research project was on the dynamics of and the socio-moral meanings attached to the relationship between these 'two CMM's': the local members and the largely foreign dwellers. This is where I discuss the meaning of *ubuntu*.

By 2009, the CMM had changed tangibly as a church after having opened its doors some years earlier to asylum seekers and other homeless people under the aegis of the Ray of Hope Refugee Ministry. While this church has a history of social and political engagement, the recent spatial transformation can still be described as radical. A South African Methodist theologian, Neville Richardson (2007: 114) wrote of the CMM in a 2007 article as 'an almost unrecognizable church, a church that exists not for itself but for others, a witness to Christ the man for others, the crucified Christ'. The building had indeed been 'crucified'. For example, its glass door had been broken, toilets had been blocked and a journalist at some stage called the church 'a haven for criminals' (Moeng 2009). There is, however, another side to the coin: different skills training programmes continue to be run in the building; both a primary and a high school operate under the umbrella of the CMM and in 2009 there was still a Doctors without Borders clinic operating at the church – and so on.

Some aspects of the transformation of this once middle-class church into a 'refugee camp' resonate with the transformation of the surrounding city space. The inner city itself has changed from being the number one business centre in the area into what Martin Murray (2011: 149) describes as an outcast ghetto; that is, 'a territorially stigmatized place that operates as a site of spatial confinement and control over those with no place in the city'. Not unlike the CMM, the inner city has come to be known for its abandoned buildings inhabited by homeless squatters. The area seems to feature as one huge 'crime hotspot' in the imagination of those Jo'burgers who never venture to this part of the city. However, the inner city that I got to know in 2009 was not merely an outcast ghetto, but rather a domain of different and contrasting layers of reality. For instance, lawyers work in the high court right next to the CMM. They have

4 Interview conducted by the author in Johannesburg on 15.8.2009.

coffee in a cosy coffee shop catering for them in an area which is otherwise characterized by fast food outlets.<sup>5</sup> Overall, questions related to socio-economic inequality and poverty are topical in the inner city in general, and along with the Refugee Ministry these issues have become incarnate within the sacred space at the CMM.

### Methodology: ethics through ethnography

Initially I ended up in the inner city because of my interest in understanding the encounters between African migrants and churches in South Africa. I was a doctoral student in social ethics who found I could not take on the question by the means of the method of a close reading of texts which is characteristic of my discipline. Hence I signed up for methodology courses in the department of anthropology. Later, when reading Christian Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen's book *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (2011), I found a name for what I was doing: social ethics through ethnography; wanting to join in 'an attempt to give social ethics an empirical dimension' (Glover 1999: x).

I spent roughly a year doing fieldwork at the CMM conducting interviews, hanging out at the church, attending meetings and services, recording sermons, volunteering as a youth group facilitator and so on. I ended up with transcribed interviews, sermons and field notes as my primary data. The praxis cycle model served to structure the research project. The praxis cycle is influenced by liberation theologies and thus underlines a close connection between theory and practice, between social scientific tools and socio-ethical reflection, and between the agency of the researcher and that of the researched. The steps of the model that I paid the most attention to in my project are 'identification' (e.g. asking questions such as: Who am I? Who are the people I engage with?), 'social analysis' of the context and 'theological/ethical reflection'.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of my project, I fine-tuned the model by adding aspects of grounded theory and by applying insights gained during my background training as a systematic theologian.

It was missiologists from the University of South Africa who first introduced me to the praxis cycle which they commonly use at their department. I was thus provided with an avenue along which to pursue my research not only on South Africa, but also *in* South Africa – in dialogue with colleagues at the

5 On the city's attempts to 'regenerate' the inner city, see e.g. Winkler 2013.

6 On the praxis cycle, see e.g. Hankela 2014a, Wijzen *et al.* 2005, Kritzinger 2002, Holland and Henriot 1983.

University of South Africa, where I furthermore spent a year after the year of fieldwork, as a visiting researcher. With hindsight, I see the importance of this ‘being in South Africa’ aspect more clearly than what I understood to be the case at the time. Being together with South African scholars did not, of course, remove me from my social location – that of a white European researcher – but it gave me a chance to learn about my limits as well as my strengths, some of which are tangibly related to my social location.

### Theoretical framework: *ubuntu* discourse

During my fieldwork ‘humanity’ and ‘relationship’ emerged as being the recurrent core categories in understanding the encounter between this particular local church and migrants. The ‘grounded’ focus of the analysis then directed my choice of the academic *ubuntu* discourse as a theoretical framework.

The Nguni term *ubuntu* could be translated into English as ‘humanity’ or ‘humanness’. The academic discourse that scrutinizes this notion introduces an ethic of interdependence. Human beings are thought to exist only through other human beings. Virtues commonly attached to *ubuntu* include respect, hospitality and compassion, and are generally expected to actualize in concrete relationships.<sup>7</sup> Desmond Tutu, the world-renowned Anglican leader, writes:

A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able or good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated and diminished when others are tortured and oppressed. (Tutu 1999, quoted in Gathogo 2008: 48)

The academic contributions to an understanding of *ubuntu* vary significantly in scope and in how they approach the notion. Some discuss *ubuntu* primarily as a political idea, others concentrate on its cultural roots, yet others apply it in various academic fields. Michael Eze’s (2010) interpretation impacted on my work. Eze manages to bridge the gap between those who treat *ubuntu* as an ideal of the pre-colonial past, something that *de facto* structured social life in the African village of the past, and those who argue that it is merely a recent political construct created by an elite. Eze (2010: 161, 184–5) speaks of *ubuntu* as an

7 On a critical account on *ubuntu* and actual relationships, see Metz 2012.



open-ended ‘historical process’ and emphasizes its differing manifestations and modes in different times and contexts.

In my research I then observed *ubuntu* as a local process in the context of the CMM. For me, the dynamics in South Africa between frequent references to *ubuntu* by politicians, clergy and advertisers (cf. Shutte 2001: 14), on the one hand, and widespread xenophobic attitudes (cf. Hassim *et al.* 2008; Nyamnjoh 2006: 38–9), on the other, call for reflections on what it means to be human in contemporary communities. And so did the tense relationship between the members and the dwellers at the CMM. Ethnographic research on the grass-roots meanings and relevance of *ubuntu* has not played an important role in academic discourse; hence my attempt to make a contribution in that area.

### Ubuntu at the CMM 1: the theological vision

In thinking of *ubuntu* at the CMM, one place to begin is the leader of the church, the Superintendent Minister Paul Verryn, and his vision of humanity. In 2009 Verryn also still served as the district bishop. He was by far the most influential actor at the CMM as Andile, a long-term member, illustrated: ‘[What is] central at Central? The bishop. He is central at Central but ... I’m afraid ‘cause Central is him. If he goes, where do we stand as Central? ... The refugees, I would say he is the father to the refugees.’<sup>8</sup> As a bishop and superintendent minister, Verryn was in a position to create space for his vision at the CMM – by opening the doors of the church.

Sunday after Sunday he preached about an inclusionary humanity – much in line with Tutu’s words quoted above – to members in the morning and dwellers in the evening. Verryn would, for instance, talk about the barriers people build between themselves, and say: ‘God has no clue of who’s who in the zoo. He has no idea unfortunately about DRC people, Zimbabwean, South African. All God sees is humanity.’ Or he would remind the dwellers of their inherent dignity and potential: ‘We want everybody in this building to understand that they are made in the image of God – even if they are at the back of the queue.’<sup>9</sup>

Although Verryn barely used the Nguni term *ubuntu*, I called his vision a Christian contextual *ubuntu* vision in my study. The main reason for this is the strong resonance between various aspects of his thinking and the broader discourse – which I don’t have the space to discuss in more detail here. But also,

8 Interview conducted by the author in Johannesburg on 12.6.2009.

9 Sermons preached at the CMM by Verryn on 5.4.2009 and 14.6.2009 respectively. Recorded by the author.

when I asked Verryn what *ubuntu* is, his response was: humanity. It is clear that the term ‘humanity’ as Verryn used it is a broader concept than *ubuntu*, but what *ubuntu* as an ethical maxim stands for is key to understanding his thinking on humanity.

Moreover, Verryn’s interpretation of what it means to be human was influenced by a liberation-theological framework, or, by an engagement with the social context and with the liberating potential of humanity in that context.<sup>10</sup> As with Desmond Tutu’s ‘*ubuntu* theology’, in Verryn’s thinking and ministry, too, an ethic of *ubuntu* has been brought into dialogue with other thought systems. His preaching did not seek to capture an authentic essence of *ubuntu*, but rather sought to understand what *ubuntu* could do in people’s lives and in their relationships with each other in the context of socio-economic inequality and xenophobia.

Looking at the expression of Verryn’s thinking as one voice that participates in the discussion of *ubuntu* in the South African public sphere exposes the contextual and multifaceted nature of any moral discourse. In Johannesburg, *ubuntu* and the meanings attached to being human are being negotiated in a multilingual, multicultural, multi-social-class, post-apartheid context – and through his praxis, Verryn has participated in the discourse as a Methodist, English-speaking, white, South African male.

If we then think of the role and relevance of *ubuntu* in grassroots communities, Verryn’s preaching indicates that the notion has an important place, at least at the level of discourse. From this perspective, those scholars who imply that the contemporary emphasis on *ubuntu* is primarily due to a political nation-building agenda do not do justice to the ethos of grassroots communities such as the CMM.

## Ubuntu at the CMM 2: the relationship between the members and the dwellers

This ethos was the reason for the dwellers to be at the CMM and for the existence of the relationship between them and the members. Hardly anyone at the church would have disagreed with Verryn’s vision of humanity, but its material manifestation in the Refugee Ministry raised opposition among the members. It was the tension between Verryn’s tireless preaching on inclusive humanity and the exclusionary boundaries that characterized the encounters between members and dwellers that caught my attention time and again. In a

10 On my argumentation around Verryn’s theology see Hankela 2014a and 2014b; on liberation theology and Methodism in South Africa see e.g. Bailie 2009.

sense, *ubuntu* challenged the community at the CMM, but was also constantly being challenged by the community. As a researcher I then asked: What limits, and what enables, the actualization of *ubuntu* in the relationship between the members and the dwellers? And what do these dynamics expose about being human – or humane – and about *ubuntu*?

Three sets of issues emerged in the dwellers and members' narratives as causes for the exclusionary boundaries: first, dirt and disrespectful behaviour, second, experiences and narratives of xenophobia, and third, issues related to management and lack of agency. I will make a few references to people's experiences of these matters as a background to what I say about the negotiation of *ubuntu* in this location.

### Dirt and disrespectful behaviour

Many members were uncomfortable with the lack of cleanliness, especially when they saw it as a consequence of the dwellers' deliberate actions. Thobeka said:

[The relationship] is not good at all, I must not lie. Because the people of the church, they look at these people [the dwellers] as people who have vandalized their church, as people who are making their church filthy, as people who are doing all those bad thing, bad activities in the church which they respect.<sup>11</sup>

While the daily discomfort was definitely a factor in the unhappiness among the members, at a deeper level many felt that the dwellers affected the status of the CMM as a local church negatively.

### Experiences and narratives of xenophobia

In the dwellers' narrations, on the other hand, xenophobia was a common point of reference. Xenophobia was not only a name for their experiences in South Africa at large but also for the tense situation at the CMM. Prince, for instance, gave the following narrative account:

So now they [the members] are calling that church their church. But Church is for everybody, you know. So, if you find, if you find that xeno-

11 Interview conducted by author in Johannesburg on 3.6.2009.

phobia is starting in the Church, so who's going to like encourage people not to do such things? It's starting from the Christians.<sup>12</sup>

As much as the collective narrative was based on personal experiences, it also made individual dwellers withdraw from interacting with members – even if they had never had negative experiences themselves. In this way the narrative became a tool with which to negotiate the dwellers' position at the CMM – a church whose leader's ethos rendered the preferential option to the marginalised.

### Management and lack of agency

Lastly, a number of members expressed their discontent with the decision-making and the day-to-day management of the Refugee Ministry. According to Andile, the ministry had initially started on an *ad hoc* basis, by Verryn responding to people's need for accommodation. Andile said:

It started by a few people who needed accommodation. Then they came in numbers. Then it became out of control. And the bishop took it to the leaders meetings that we have these people and we are doing it temporarily. ... But they said it's his own baby.<sup>13</sup>

'Out of control' and 'his own baby' describe the sense many members had of the ministry.

An ethnographic analysis of the dynamics that I have briefly introduced here plays a big role in my dissertation: these narratives are the basis on which I build the socio-moral patterns which characterize the situation. In other words, my reflection on the moral universe is a result of my taking a step further away from the data, and from my ethnography and, as Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (2008: 56) would put it, 'hypothesizing about the relationships between concepts'.

### Ubuntu at the CMM 3: socio-moral patterns

On the basis of my ethnographic engagement with the CMM, both members and dwellers cherished relational virtues and had expectations towards

12 Interview conducted by author in Johannesburg on 20.11.2009.

13 Interview conducted by author in Johannesburg on 12.6.2009.

other people that were very similar to the ones Verryn preached about. In theory, both groups agreed on the ethical core of his vision. A set of relational virtues – such as recognition, respect, care and help – marked the direction of the communities' moral maps. But as has become clear by now, the actualization of the virtues in the interaction between the groups was constantly contested. Scholars have spoken of *ubuntu* as 'being-with-others' (Louw 2001: 15) and argued that 'a person's humanity' is 'discovered and recognized through good relations and interactions with others' (Munyaka and Motlhabi 2009: 74). At the CMM however the humanity of the two groups was hardly discovered in this given relationship.

The actualization of *ubuntu* was limited – but also enabled – by various socio-moral patterns. These include structural elements, some internal to the CMM, others characteristic of the inner city in general. Moreover, the patterns include what I called limiting rules. Here I concentrate on these rules of reciprocity and survival.

Notions such as a demand for reciprocity or self-survival have not been central in the academic discourse on *ubuntu*, but they appeared to be central to the grassroots dynamics of the CMM. This might be partly due to the fact that the patterns that emerged out of my fieldwork are based on a situation where the interaction between two large groups was already tense. The academic discourse on *ubuntu*, on the other hand, often concentrates on relationships between persons and a community, of which the person in question is, is not, or could be a part.

The rule of reciprocity points at a clear expectation that the other group should behave in a way that is worthy of our group's practise of *ubuntu*. If only they kept the building clean. ... If only they did not hate foreigners... . In this sense, humanness did not only appear to be characterized by interdependence, as often emphasized by *ubuntu* scholars, but humane conduct emerged as being somewhat dependent on the receiving end. The case of the CMM suggests that my embracing of the other is only required after they embrace me. It seems that the rule of reciprocity might have been a central undertone in the dynamic because the relationship was characteristically one between two relatively large groups; embracing a misbehaving group appears to be a much bigger challenge than embracing an ill-disciplined individual. From this perspective the CMM situation helps one to understand the friction between various social groups in contexts similar to that of inner-city Johannesburg and this church, despite the communal values that might be held by people in these contexts. On the other hand, however, the expectation of reciprocity actually acknowledges the other

as a human being who is capable of practising *ubuntu* and has the potential to participate in humane relationships.

The rule of reciprocity is closely linked to the rule of survival. Briefly put, this rule indicates that when one's own existence or group identity is at risk, one may compromise *ubuntu*, and maybe even should. The deteriorating state of the church building brought about anxiety among church members: was the sacred space turning into 'a social purgatory' or 'an urban hellhole', as Martin Murray (2011: 152) describes the perceptions that people have of the inner-city residential neighbourhoods of Johannesburg? I was told that a number of members had left the church because of the Refugee Ministry. The Ministry probably supported Verryn's liberation-theological identity, but it did not seem to support the religious identity of many members due to the attached sense of a threat to their existence as a (certain kind of a) Christian congregation. This rule, too, underlines interdependence: if the humanity of one party – here the human needs and the agency of the members – is not respected, that party is consequently released from the duty to practise *ubuntu*.

The case of the CMM exposes both the importance of the notion of *ubuntu* in people's thinking *and* the difficulties in embracing this, or any, moral ideal. While in the academic discourse having or expressing *ubuntu* is often presented as a prerequisite for being a person, at the CMM, by contrast, compromising *ubuntu* in this given relationship at times emerged as a means of defending one's own group's human dignity. Nevertheless, this moral compromise featured as a moral burden to many.

### (Not) final words

The former president of the Republic of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki (2005), proposed that a task team should 'elaborate on [*ubuntu*'s] value system and suggest the manner in which we can use it to define ourselves as South Africans'. If this proposal is to be pursued, not only the values ought to be elaborated on. In order to make a difference in society, we should also continue to elaborate on the ways in which the values are de- and reconstructed and contextualized in local communities, and on the socio-moral patterns that delineate the playing field of an *ubuntu* ethic.

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