

The Hummus Wars

GOOGLE “HUMMUS, ISRAEL, LEBANON” and your search returns an array of bizarre articles and blogs referring to Middle Eastern foods as “the Middle East’s new weapons of mass consumption” and “the latest conflict cooking between Lebanon and Israel.”¹ One particularly tongue-in-cheek blog entry states: “Lebanon has denied smoothing the passage of hummus throughout the country, and says there is no discernible build up of the chickpea-derived substance on its southern border with Israel.”² Humor aside, Lebanon and Israel are currently engaged in a two-pronged battle over the national identity of hummus. The first involves the ongoing competition to produce the world’s largest serving; the second, an attempt by the Association of Lebanese Industrialists (ALI) to prevent Israel from marketing hummus in Europe and the United States.

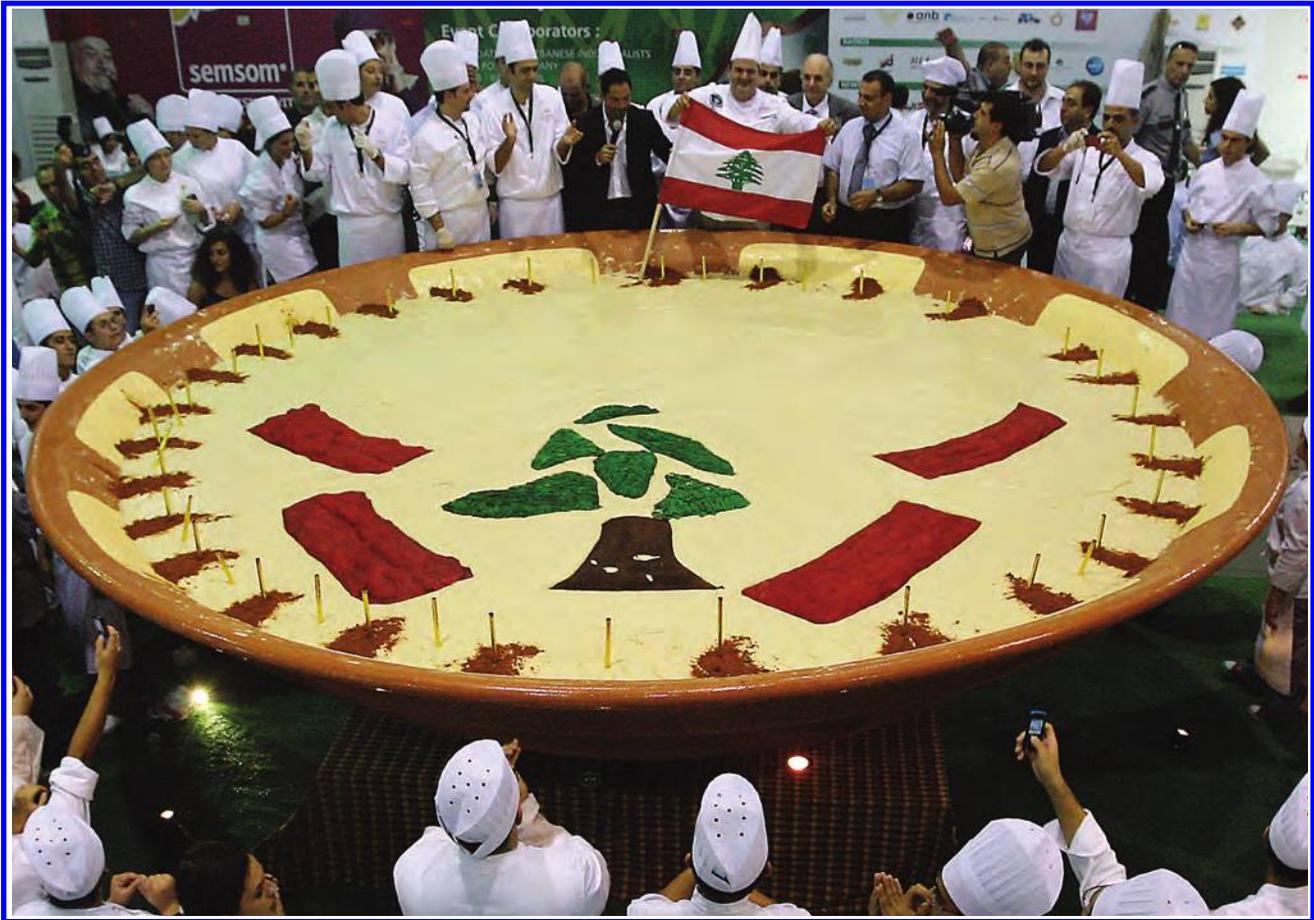
The two fronts of the “hummus wars” shed light on the complicated relationships among food, nationalism, authenticity, and globalization. As foods become increasingly global and foodways are gradually homogenized, national groups affirm their distinctiveness through assertions of food authenticity. Vying for the Guinness World Record for the largest dish of any food is a form of claim-making intended to declare ownership. Trademarking the term “hummus” would take this claim a step or two further by attaching economic importance to gastronomic distinction and legalizing the very concept of authenticity.

The contestation over hummus is part of the larger, often armed, conflict between Israel and Lebanon. Thus, the participants in both countries—those preparing and selling hummus—depict themselves and/or are depicted by others as representatives of their national communities; the terminology used is often military. If food and national identity are universally linked, here political dispute and warfare produce a rhetoric of violence that transforms cooks into combatants. At the same time, however, national boundaries in the Middle East are notably ambiguous. The Lebanese claim to ownership of hummus highlights a residual tension between *wataniyya* and *qawmiyya*, that is

between state (Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian, etc.) and Arab nationalisms. ALI’s representatives, while asserting a national and legal right to be the sole producers of hummus, themselves acknowledge that the dish is Levantine, and thus part of the national cuisines of Syria and Palestine. Even if ALI presents its claim as pan-Arab, the potential benefit of trademarking hummus will accrue to Lebanon alone. Likewise, ALI regards Israel as essentially European and posits “Arab” and “Israeli” as dichotomous, despite the large number of Palestinian Arabs and Middle Eastern Jews who inhabit that state. Even while noting that these Jews eat hummus, it claims the dish as Arab and/or Lebanese and, therefore, by definition not Israeli.

On the Israeli side, national identity is equally problematic. The major Israeli protagonist in the hummus competition is not an Israeli Jew, but rather an Arab citizen of the state. Commenting on the competition, Israeli celebrity chef Haim Cohen has noted with irony that “Now there is a fight, there is a huge fight between Lebanon and Israel for the hummus, you know, and it’s funny because it’s not the Israelis in Israel that are doing the hummus, it’s the Arabs, the Israeli Arabs that are doing the hummus.”³ Chef Cohen’s slippage here recalls the frequent debate about the fundamental nature of Israel and Israeli-ness; is the nation to be defined by ethno-religious identity or by citizenship? His phrasing suggests that only a Jew can be a “real” Israeli; he places Arabs in a different national group. If Arabs are not fully Israeli, can hummus, an Arab food, be Israeli? And what does it mean for a food to be “authentically” Israeli or Arab?

In the age of globalization and international, migration foodways have become increasingly hybrid. Dishes travel and are adopted and indigenized by groups of people outside of their “original” homes. This produces anxiety in those who once considered these foods “theirs.” The trademarking of foods is a reaction to this process. Of course, the demand for the exclusive right to produce and sell a dish stems partially from economic interest. More than this, however, it is part of a larger effort at preserving the imagined



uniqueness of ethnic and national groups in the face of the perceived threat of others, and an attempt to concretize and legalize the amorphous concept of authenticity.

Before discussing both the competition for the Guinness record for the largest dish of hummus and the Lebanese attempt to prevent Israeli companies from marketing the dish internationally, I will briefly survey the history of the dish.

The History of Hummus

The chickpea was probably first domesticated in Western Asia about 7,000 years ago. From there it spread throughout Asia and the Mediterranean, and eventually to the new world. According to the *Cambridge World History of Food*, today chickpeas are “practically universal.”⁴ *Ḥummuṣ* is the Arabic word for chickpea, and it does not imply a particular preparation. However, in common English parlance *hummus* refers to a Levantine dish of pureed chickpeas, more properly called *ḥummuṣ bi-ṭ-ṭaḥīna* (chickpeas with sesame paste); I will simply use *hummus* throughout this article to refer to this dish.

It is unclear when the first puree of chickpeas was served. Of course, mashing or pureeing has long been

Above: The largest batch of hummus ever made weighed 4,532 pounds. It was created by the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, the Kafaat Catering School, and Chef Ramzi Choueiry in Beirut, Lebanon, on October 24, 2009.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMZI HAIDAR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES © 2009

a common culinary practice, and some historians have speculated that the ancient Egyptians prepared chickpeas mashed with vinegar, but there is little evidence to attest to this. By medieval Islamic times, however, this preparation was common in both Egypt and Syria.⁵ The earliest recipe similar to modern-day hummus with tahina comes from the thirteenth-century *kitāb waṣf al-aṭ'ima al-mu'tāda* (*The Description of Familiar Foods*), which includes a recipe for *ḥummuṣ kasā*:

Take chickpeas and pound them fine after boiling them. Then take vinegar, oil, tahineh, pepper, *aṭṛāf ṭīb*, mint, parsley, the refuse of dry thyme, walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, pistachios, Ceylon cinnamon, toasted caraway, dry coriander, salt, salted lemons and olives. Stir it and roll it out flat and leave it overnight and take it up.⁶

Unfortunately, we have no Arabic cookbooks from the period between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries

and, therefore, we know precious little about how common foods were prepared and eaten. As a result, exactly how and when these older recipes transitioned into the modern *hummus bi-ṭ ṭahīna* is a matter of conjecture. Despite this, national claims are being made, particularly in Lebanon, regarding the pedigree of this dish. This is hardly surprising in the context of competing nationalisms, each attempting to allege a distinct cuisine. Food, however, is not easily confined by borders, especially those that are less than a century old, and hummus today is pervasive. For that reason, Lebanon's attempt to assert national ownership of this dish is being carried out in the unusual venues of culinary competition and legal proceedings.

The Largest Serving of Hummus in the World

In May 2008 a group of chefs in Jerusalem sponsored by the Israeli food company Tzabar prepared an 882-pound dish of hummus, which Guinness World Records recognized as the largest in the world. That Israel held this record agitated a group of Lebanese chefs, who decided to take the title, preparing a 4,532-pound dish of hummus a year later. Soon thereafter, fifty chefs in the "Arab-Israeli" village of Abu Ghosh, led by Jawadat Ibrahim of Abu Ghosh Restaurant, made an 8,992.5-pound dish. Finally, on May 8, 2010, chef Ramzi Choueiri and 300 student chefs from Al-Kafaat University in Lebanon prepared the currently standing largest serving of hummus, on the largest ceramic plate in the world. The hummus itself weighed an astonishing 23,042 pounds and 12 ounces.⁷

That food plays a role in the formation of both individual and communal identity is by now well established. Eating is an act pregnant with implications for group identity at any level, from family or social group to the nation. What and with whom one eats, or doesn't eat, conveys an array of messages about class, ethnicity, lifestyle, and religion. Likewise, recipes and/or food preparation are fundamental markers of identity. Moreover, the function of food as an indicator of "us" and "them" appears to be almost universal and eternal. Throughout his journeys, Odysseus searches for eaters of bread, a clear indication of civilization. Writing about early rabbinic Judaism, Rosenblum has noted the formation of an "edible identity," referring to the system of culinary practices through which diners perform identity.⁸ Of course, modern examples abound.

The competition over the world record for the largest serving of hummus is clearly a national matter and has been understood as an extension of political conflict by participants and observers. One of the organizers of the 2009

Lebanese record attempt, for example, described the situation as follows: "Lebanon is trying to win a battle against Israel by registering this new Guinness World Record and telling the whole world that hummus is a Lebanese product, its [sic] part of our traditions."⁹ Another organizer noted that Lebanon was set to "mark a new victory on Israel," and depicted the competition as "a patriotic event of national scale."¹⁰ On the Israeli side, an IDF radio broadcaster dubbed the "hummus clash...the third Lebanon war."¹¹

However, as a shared food item, hummus has also been represented as a symbol of coexistence, even in the context of this competition. Jawadat Ibrahim dedicated his temporary victory to "the whole village, the whole country, the whole people. People love hummus. They love to live side by side."¹² He also appealed to the Arab world: "I am saying to people in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt: I know the situation is complicated because there is no peace, but I would love it to happen one day, that we can cook one plate of hummus—about 10,000 tons—to share with the whole Middle East."¹³

The idea of hummus as a bridge to peace is problematic. Jamil Jadallah, the founder and director of Palestine Agency and Palestine Documentation Center, has written a blog entry entitled *Matzah balls, chopped liver, but not humus, falafel and baba ghanough* which addresses both the politics of food and the issue of Jewish settlers in the territories. He concludes:

I wish we had more to share than just humus, falafel and baba ghanough. I wish we can share a life, hopes and dreams, a country together; perhaps we can share water, perhaps the same roads, where we can look forward to the olive harvests as a time of celebration not time of fear, without these criminals and misfits from the American Jewish Ghettos of Brooklyn descending on our villages and towns uprooting and burning olive trees.¹⁴

Obviously there is a fundamental disagreement between Ibrahim and Jadallah about what it's like to live side by side. Given Abu Ghosh's history of working with the Israeli government and Jadallah's role as a Palestinian political activist and organizer this is not surprising.¹⁵ More germane to this article, however, is that all the previous examples posit cooks as representative of their nations, and culinary rivalry as a vehicle for political struggle or reconciliation. As competitive spaces, the Guinness World Record events naturally amplify conflicting national claims. They are replete with flags and other national symbols, what Hobsbawm might call "holy icons."¹⁶ Culinary competitions exist outside of the frameworks we usually associate with cooking and

eating (homes and restaurants) and are in fact strikingly similar to sporting events.¹⁷ On an international level, the Olympics seem an obvious analogy. It is well worth noting that analysts of international sporting events, like the Olympics and the Football World Cup, understand them as an extension of politics and have discounted the idea that they are a safety valve through which individuals and groups can release communal tensions and, therefore, mitigate violence. Ethno-national conflict has persisted and, in fact, increased with the growth of these sporting events.¹⁸ On the other hand, scholars have noted that these events are public spectacles that may be imbued with diverse political meanings.¹⁹ Perhaps culinary competitions, like other forms of spectacle, are empty forms to be filled ideologically by organizers and participants in specific contexts. For Ibrahim, the hummus competition may be a vehicle through which to appeal for coexistence and stake his claim to Israeli-ness, even to demand a redefinition of the Israeli nation to include Arab citizens.²⁰ For the Lebanese it may be a forum in which to make claims about authenticity and to express grievances with an enemy.

Like the Olympic Games, international culinary events are highly productive sites for the creation and expression of nationalism. Both the Internationale Kochkunst Ausstellung, popularly referred to as the Culinary Olympics, and the biannual Bocuse d'Or pit teams of chefs from various nation-states against one another. The Bocuse d'Or rules stipulate that teams must showcase their national cuisines, and Paul Bocuse himself has described the participating chefs as "passports for their nation."²¹ *Time* magazine noted that the Bocuse d'Or "brings fanatical nationalism into the mix."²² The Guinness Record hummus competition is different from these, and the sporting events previously described, both in that it includes a limited number of potential participants and in that it is taking place within the context of a political, often military, conflict between states that border one another. Proximity and conflict affect cuisine in contradictory ways: on one hand, neighboring countries have a hard time creating and maintaining distinctive cuisines, particularly in an area like the Levant with historically fluid national borders. On the other hand, increased contact often creates the desire to mark difference, particularly with the growth of nationalism and the apparent significance of identifying a distinct national cuisine.²³ The Lebanese claim against Israel, then, is both an assertion of the Lebanese identity of hummus and a declaration that Israel is not of the region. The Guinness victory is a symbolic step in grounding these two claims. The image of the world's largest plate of hummus, topped with the likeness

of a cedar, a Lebanese national symbol, and flags waving in the air, sends the unequivocal message that hummus is an essential part of Lebanon. "Authentic" hummus, therefore, cannot come from elsewhere, and particularly not from Israel. Authenticity, as both a product and producer of national pride, is a particularly significant claim given the diffusion of hummus throughout the region and its increasing commonness globally. Perceived threats to national distinctiveness give authenticity even greater currency. Moreover, with the rise of global hummus consumption, authenticity takes on an economic value. Consumers around the world now regularly purchase manufactured hummus, and Lebanese producers are not well represented in international sales. Therefore, they have attempted to trademark hummus, both to legislate and profit from the construction of authenticity.

Trademarking Hummus

In October 2008, the Association of Lebanese Industrialists announced a campaign, dubbed "Hands Off Our Dishes," intended to stop Israel from marketing hummus and other dishes as Israeli. To do so ALI intended to register the names of Middle Eastern dishes, like hummus and baba ghanush, with a European Union commission as Lebanese, and to, therefore, gain the exclusive right to use those terms on food packages. If successful, any other country wishing to sell these dishes as packaged foods in the European Union (EU) would have to do so under different names. Although it is clear that Israel is ALI's main target, this ruling would apply equally to potential Arab producers in places such as Jordan, Palestine, and Syria, where hummus is commonly eaten. Two aspects of this case are plain. The first is that like the rivalry over the largest dish of hummus, this litigation is intertwined in national conflict. Fadi Abboud, the head of ALI, who was later appointed Lebanon's minister of tourism, said:

Of course, the danger is not restricted to the issue of stealing the names and recipes of dishes but the danger is in the organized theft carried out by Israel, not just of land, but history, traditions, architecture, poetry, singing, music, and everything that is Arab in this region. In the imagination of the world everything bad that originates from the Arab countries is Arab, and everything that is pleasant and good in this region originates from Israel.²⁴

An ambivalence in ALI's position emerges from this quote. On one hand ALI is claiming that these dishes are Lebanese. The Facebook page devoted to the campaign is



entitled “Fight to Keep Hummus and Tabouli LEBANESE No one else’s.”²⁵ Abboud has described the foods involved as “traditional Lebanese delicacies,” and has complained that “If we eat Sabra hummus, the very popular hummus available in U.K. supermarkets, there is no mention of Lebanon anywhere on the package.”²⁶ On the other hand, ALI concedes that these dishes are prepared and eaten in other Arab countries:

We have a dialogue as to the subject of falafel, whether it is Lebanese, Syrian, or Palestinian, but the dispute is not between us, it’s clear that the dispute is not among the Arabs. I have no problem with falafel being Palestinian or Lebanese. I have a problem with it being Israeli.²⁷

Likewise, Abboud concedes that Arab Jews “eat the same food as other Arabs,” and that “there were Jews living in Palestine eating hummus,” adding “I am not arguing that. But with all due respect, I didn’t know German Jews or Polish Jews knew anything about hummus.”²⁸ Ironically, it appears that Abboud has accepted an old Zionist narrative of Israel as European, despite the fact that Jews of European descent account for a minority of the population of the country. It is, however, the slippage among Lebanese, Levantine, and Arab that exposes a major problem with the

Above: A serving of hummus in Abu Ghosh, Israel.

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legal merit of ALI’s case. The European Commission (EC) regulations require a protected food to belong exclusively to one state. In exceptional cases there may be a designation that crosses borders, but there is certainly no legal mechanism for excluding one particular state from producing a registered product.

ALI’s case does not seem to fit easily into the European regulations. Beginning in 1992 the EU instituted a program to register certain food and agricultural products as exceptions to the Union’s general practice of integrating agricultural and marketing practices throughout its member states. The objective was to protect traditional food products and to assuage fears of cultural loss in the face of foreboding European homogenization. Since then, products may be registered in one of three “EU quality schemes” or categories, intended to “encourage diverse agricultural production, protect product names from misuse and imitation and help consumers by giving them information concerning the specific character of the products.”²⁹

One of these schemes, Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG), indicates that traditional methods are

used in either the composition or means of production of a food item, but does not specify a geographic origin. The other two, more sought after, designations indicate a specific place of origin for the registered food product. Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) denotes that at least one stage of production, processing, or preparation is carried out in the specified area, while Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) indicates a food or agricultural item “produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognised know-how.”³⁰ The purpose of this legislation is to guarantee the quality and protect the authenticity of the registered products.³¹ Between 1992 and 1994, EU member states applied to the EC directly to obtain product designations. In 1994 an additional element was added to the registration process, requiring local producers to organize, create a designation for their product, and register it with a national agricultural office, which then forwards the application to the EC.³² After application other EU member states, third states, or individuals “having a legitimate interest” have six months to object to the designation on one of three grounds: that “the product specification fails to meet the required conditions, or that the name conflicts with a trade mark or agricultural product or that it has become a generic name.”³³ If the EC does not receive an admissible objection, the designation is registered. Some ambiguity existed in the EC regulations because of potential conflicts with the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). This led the United States to file complaints with the WTO in 1999 and 2003. Particularly at issue was the question of EU discrimination against foreign geographical indications. In 2005 the WTO ruled that the EU system was, in fact, inconsistent with TRIPS. As a result the EU revised its regulations, outlining more clearly the protection of foreign trademarks and establishing a system through which non-EU producers or groups could apply for a PDO or PGI.³⁴

Of particular interest here is the codification and legislation of authenticity, which perpetuates the myth of an original, while simultaneously permitting large-scale reproduction. Furthermore, the regulations not only control the method of production but sometimes extend to the use of the foodstuff. For example, in a judgment regarding Grano Padano and Prosciutto di Parma, the European Court of Justice ruled that companies outside of the restricted areas defined by their PDOS could not grate or slice and then package them with the PDO label because these “constitute important operations which may damage the quality and authenticity and consequently the reputation of the PDO...”³⁵ The Court, according to this ruling,

posits reputation as an economic value, while assuming the interconnectedness of quality and authenticity. That consumers are willing to pay more for “authentic” products is abundantly clear.³⁶ Thus, the legal authenticity embodied in the trademark of a foodstuff provides an economic advantage and promotes ethnic, national, or regional pride. ALI’s attempt to gain exclusive legal right to market hummus would benefit Lebanon in both these ways.

Abboud has said on numerous occasions that ALI’s case relies on the “feta” precedent. In 2005, ending over a decade of legal battle, Greece won the exclusive use of the term “feta” within the EU. Unlike Greece, however, ALI is not claiming that either local raw ingredients or the location of production give Lebanese hummus a “specific aroma and flavor.”³⁷ Nor does ALI assert any special quality of Lebanese hummus distinguishing it from that produced in Israel or elsewhere. In fact, Jawadat Ibrahim proudly stated that the Abu Ghosh hummus team used all local ingredients, and criticized the Lebanese Guinness participants for using chickpeas imported from Turkey.³⁸ While the EC regulators considered the high rate of production and consumption of “feta” within Greece, ALI cannot claim that the Lebanese consume or produce more hummus than their neighbors. Moreover, while the EC court judgment noted that non-Greek “feta” was marketed through reference to Greece, which had the potential to lead to consumer confusion, ALI is in fact complaining of the opposite—that no reference is made to Lebanon on the packages of hummus produced by Israeli companies. In addition, despite the numerous claims made that Israeli companies were selling their products as “Israeli” or that Israel was trying to register the names of these foods for exclusive use, none of the packaging I could find marketed in England or the United States makes such claims. The identification with Israel is more subtle. The Strauss brand that dominates the U.S. market, for example, is named Sabra, and was in fact originally founded as Sabra Blue & White Foods.³⁹ However, the company’s packaging and literature clearly refer to hummus and its other products as Mediterranean. Similarly, as an imported item, Osem’s packaging for Yarden Houmous in Great Britain clearly states “Product of Israel” but carries the message “saveurs méditerranéennes [sic].” While this reference to the Mediterranean may be partly attributable to the supposed health benefits of the Mediterranean diet, and maybe even to a desire to deemphasize the Arab-ness of hummus, it also indicates that the Israeli-owned companies seem not to be concerned with claiming an exclusive national ownership of hummus. Lastly, hummus seems to fit perfectly into the European

Commission's definition of a generic food label in that it does not have a link with a specific area of origin but instead is "descriptive of a type or kind of product." Even if Lebanon could prove its dubious claim that hummus was invented in Lebanon, or that the first packaged hummus was exported by Lebanon in the 1950s, the prevalence of the dish throughout the Levant, the greater Middle East, and even Europe and the United States, make it "part of the general cultural and gastronomic stock and may, in principle, be used by any producer."⁴⁰

It is clear that a primary motive of the "Hands Off Our Dishes" campaign is economic. In recent years the market for hummus in the United States and Europe has grown rapidly. The two Israeli companies previously mentioned, Osem and Strauss, dominate these markets. Strauss now accounts for 40 percent of the U.S. market and is the largest producer of hummus in the world.⁴¹ This is why Abboud decries Israel hummus production as culinary theft and aggression. He claims it has done "serious damage to the Lebanese economy and foreign trade" and that it has caused the loss of "tens of millions of dollars annually."⁴² Nationalism and economics converge here to aggravate the conflict over hummus. It is interesting to consider again Rosenblum's concept of "edible identity" as a set of practices relating to food preparation and ingestion that play an important role in identity formation and re-formation—that is, in establishing difference between "us" and "them." Culinary nationalism, as a form of identity politics, likewise seeks to differentiate and must, therefore, assert a distinctive gastronomic tradition. At the same time, food is a valuable commodity, entangled in global political and economic competition. Sociologist Michaela DeSoucey notes that the juxtaposition between food and globalization produces a fruitful framework through which to investigate national identity politics in an ever homogenizing world, and she terms this juxtaposition *gastronomicalism*.⁴³ It would seem, then, that within the contemporary political landscape, it is not only food preparation and ingestion, but also sales and assertions of authenticity, that form national edible identities.

Is Hummus Israeli?

If *hummus* is a generic term, can we nevertheless say that it is Israeli or Lebanese? Do the origins of a dish define its national identity? If hummus is originally Arab, can it become Israeli? There is little question that today hummus is consumed regularly by Israelis, but when and how did Jewish immigrants from outside of the hummus region begin eating this food? How, to flip Abboud's comment on

its head, did German or Polish Jews come to know anything about hummus?

Early European Jewish settlers in Palestine adopted local Arab food products. To some extent this was for practical reasons, but it was also part of an ambivalent and contradictory process of emulating Arab behaviors as exemplars for the new Jew, and as a mark of nativism. Food is obviously linked to cultivation and is, therefore, unusually well equipped to symbolically tie a group of immigrants to land—a matter of particular ideological importance in labor Zionism. Likewise, early studies of nutrition in Palestine recommended emulating Arab foodways as the most appropriate for the local climate and environment.⁴⁴ Gradually then, during the first half of the twentieth century, hummus entered the diet of Jewish immigrants in Palestine. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 amplified the process for two reasons. Firstly, Israelis began to travel frequently to Arab towns in an effort to circumvent the *tzena* rationing system implemented by the state. There they could more easily buy meat, but they also increasingly ate in Palestinian restaurants. Hummus, an ideal meat substitute, must have been particularly noteworthy. Perhaps more importantly, with the establishment of the state came a huge wave of immigration of Jews from the Arab world. At the same time, increased Arab-Jewish conflict meant that Israelis would increasingly reject all things "Arab." The presence of Jewish communities from the Arab world allowed Palestinian foods to be redefined as Middle Eastern in a more general sense, and therefore as the cultural inheritance of these Middle Eastern Jews. For their part, Middle Eastern Jews adopted these foods as part of their culinary repertoire, particularly on the menus of the "oriental" restaurants they were increasingly opening in the 1950s, despite the fact that these were not dishes native to their countries of origin.⁴⁵ Thereafter, hummus could be adopted as a Jewish "oriental" food, and eating it could function as an embodying practice which made the Jewish immigrants from Europe local. By the late fifties, even the Israeli army, which played such a key role in Ben Gurion's "melting pot" ideology, was serving hummus.⁴⁶ From then on hummus consumption proliferated.

Migration, of course, provokes changes in foodways. Krishnendu Ray, writing about Bengali immigrants to the United States, has noted the complex role of consumption in the seemingly contradictory processes of assimilation and ethnic preservation. Likewise, Uma Narayan has noted the complicated interchange that is involved in the notion of ethnic foods and "food colonialism" and has cautioned us against assuming a unidirectional flow of influence.

E.N. Anderson, describing the importance of immigration for American foodways, suggests that where groups of immigrants from various places come together, they create an entirely new cuisine. Israel may well be such a place. In the process of creating a new national cuisine, foods were adopted from a variety of Jewish ethnic cuisines. Likewise, local Palestinian foods were adopted, but because of the political conflict, they had to be stripped of their Arab identity. Therefore, the case of the Israeli adoption of hummus involved a process whereby immigrants assumed a local food practice, erased its potentially problematic national positioning, and then naturalized it.⁴⁷

Today, however, as a more confident and well-entrenched society than in the past, Israel is able to again acknowledge the Arab origin of hummus. Perhaps such recognition is only possible once the process of indigenization/naturalization is complete. Israeli foodies now search Arab villages for the most “authentic,” “artisanal” hummus.⁴⁸ At the same time mass-produced hummus is eaten in millions of Israeli households. It is among the most common foods in the country.

Writing in honor of the late Doreen Fernandez, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett noted that she contributed to our understanding of Filipino foodways precisely because she rejected any static concept of food as original or authentic. Rather, for Fernandez:

Filipino is as Filipino does. The question is not “What is Filipino food?” but “How does food become Filipino?”...The issue is less about indigenous cuisines and more about processes of indigenization.⁴⁹

Culinary culture, then, is not a question of heritage or tradition, but rather of performance and practice. Hummus is Israeli because Israelis eat hummus. Furthermore, Fernandez, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Raviv, and others have begun to theorize the processes by which a food begins as foreign, is then consciously adopted and adapted, detached from its association with the foodways of an “Other,” refigured as part of the “authentic” national cuisine, and finally widely disseminated throughout the nation.⁵⁰ This process seems clear in the case of hummus in Israel. It was first consciously adopted as a local Arab food and often eaten in Palestinian restaurants. It was then “estranged” from its Arab past and affixed to an imagined Middle Eastern Jewish cuisine, enabling it to be incorporated as an “authentic” Jewish-Israeli food and, therefore, to be popularized. Raviv has noted an identical process for falafel and astutely notes that: “Falafel became a particularly sensitive topic because of the tense political situation, and because Israelis made falafel into a symbol for the Israeli nation.”⁵¹

In other words, it is its ubiquity in Israel that makes falafel a contentious food item. Likewise, it is the Israeli-ness of hummus, along with its marketability, that has provoked ALI’s objection to the very idea of Israeli hummus.

I have seen little to suggest that Israelis have ever alleged exclusive national ownership of hummus. At present it is Israeli and Lebanese, Jordanian, Palestinian, and Syrian. It cannot be restricted by ethnic, national, or political boundaries. In fact, hummus is becoming increasingly global. I understand well the anxiety aroused by the adoption of this dish, but to deny its current Israeli-ness is to posit culture as essential and static. Foodways, like all aspects of culture, evolve. This is as true in Israel as everywhere else. ©

NOTES

1. Gideon Lichfield, “Food Fight,” *Foreign Policy* (15 January 2010), www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/01/15/food_fight; “Hummus War Looms Between Lebanon, Israel,” *USA Today*, 7 October 2008, www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-10-07-lebanon-israel_N.htm.
2. “Dangerous Build Up of Hummus in the Middle East—Telegraph Blogs,” 10 May 2010, <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/adrianmichaels/100038991/dangerous-build-up-of-hummus-in-the-middle-east/>.
3. “Haim Cohen on the New Israeli Cuisine,” interview by Joan Nathan, 24 March 2010. This video was part of an online seminar given by the New York Times Knowledge Network and the Israeli Consulate in New York entitled *The New Israel Cuisine*.
4. Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Cambridge World History of Food* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1752.
5. Cathy K. Kaufman, *Cooking in Ancient Civilizations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 68; Lilia Zaouali, *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 44; also on p.65 Zaouali includes the following recipe: “Cook the chickpeas in water, then mash them in a mortar to make a puree. Push the puree through a sieve for wheat, unless it is already fine enough, in which case this step is not necessary. Mix it then with wine vinegar, the pulp of pickled lemons, and cinnamon, pepper, ginger, parsley of the best quality, mint, and rue that have all been chopped and placed on the surface of the serving dish [*zudhiyya*]. Finally, pour over [this mixture] a generous amount of oil of good quality.”
6. Maxime Rodinson, A.J. Arberry, and Charles Perry, *Medieval Arab Cookery* (Devon, England: Prospect Books, 2001), 383.
7. “Rivalry over Hummus: An Emotive Issue,” *The Economist*, 12 November 2009, www.economist.com/node/14870126; Lichfield, “Food Fight”; “Abu Gosh Mashes Up World’s Largest Hummus,” *Ynet*, 8 January 2010, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3830318,00.html; “Largest Serving of Hummus + Largest Ceramic Plate—Beirut, Lebanon, Guinness World Records Blog post,” Guinness World Records, http://community.guinnessworldrecords.com/_Largest-serving-of-hummus-largest-ceramic-plate/blog/2343501/7691.html.
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37. "Joined Cases C-465/02 and C-466/02. Federal Republic of Germany and Kingdom of Denmark v. Commission of the European Communities. Summary of Judgment." Also see, "Commission Regulation (EC) No 1070/1999 of 25 May 1999."
38. Zoe Fox, "Lebanon Breaks Israel's Humous World Record," *Jerusalem Post Online Edition*, 9 May 2010, www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=175084.
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40. Ruiz-Jarabo, "Opinion of Advocate General Ruiz-Jarabo Colomer. Joined Cases C-465/02 and C-466/02. Federal Republic of Germany and Kingdom of Denmark v Commission of the European Communities." Here Ruiz-Jarabo is quoting the Opinion of Advocate General Saggio in Case C-448/98 *Guimont* (2000) ECR I-10663, point 11.
41. Nestle owns a majority of Osem. For more information, see "About OSEM UK Ltd," n.d., <http://osem.co.uk/about>. Strauss is allied with PepsiCo, and the two cooperate in "two central areas—Israel and the U.S. In Israel, Strauss is a partner in PepsiCo Frito-Lay's salty snacks activity. In the U.S. the two are partnered in Sabra—the Middle Eastern salad and dip company where both partners have an equal 50% stake in the company." See "Pepsico," at <http://www.strauss-group.com/AboutUs-PartnershipWithPepsiCo>. On market dominance see Aviv Levi, "Zinuk be-Mekhirot Hummus Strauss be-Artzot ha-Brit: Kavsha 40% me-ha-Shuk," *Globes*, 25 November 2009, www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000517051; Mishel Udi, "Osem Expanding Hummus Activity in U.K.—Israel Business," *Ynetnews*, 5 August 2009, www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3757522,00.html; "Rivalry over Hummus"; and Wheeler, "Hummus Food Fight Between Lebanon and Israel."
42. "Qarsana Israiliyya Munazzama ala Muntajatina al-Taqlidiyya" *Al-Mustaqbal*, 15 October 2008; "Lebanese Union to Sue Israel for 'Claiming Ownership' of Falafel."
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44. Yael Raviv, "Recipe for a Nation: Cuisine, Jewish Nationalism, and the Israeli State," Ph.D. dissertation (New York University, 2002); Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 185–201.
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51. Yael Raviv, "Falafel: A National Icon," *Gastronomica*, no.3 (Summer 2003).