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Author(s): Claudia Raquel Prieto Piastro
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CLAUDIA RAQUEL PRIETO PIASTRO

Keeping Kosher in Tel Aviv: Jewish Secular and Religious Identity in Israel

abstract | *Two collective identities, both Jewish, confront each other in Israel: the first is an orthodox religious identity and the second is secular. Following kosher laws in Israel can demonstrate the commitment individuals have to their religion and be a clear identifier or sign of belonging to the nation. The manner in which kosher laws are followed also shows different ways of conceiving Judaism and Israeliness. How Israelis understand andollow kosher is a reflection of the collective identities that are present in the country. It also reveals political and social divisions and disagreements. In this paper, I examine how different people interpret and live kosher laws in Israel and the importance they give to them in their everyday lives.*

keywords | *Israel, Food Studies, Judaism, Identity, Kashrut, Secularism*

Kosher laws are a system of food practices followed by the Jewish people. They are based in the commandments God gave to Moses during the Exodus from Egypt. These laws forbid Jews to eat certain animals (most famously pork), prescribe distinct methods for the slaughter of animals that are not forbidden, and establish the strict separation of dairy products from meat.[1] Jewish communities and individuals from around the world have interpreted this set of dietary restrictions in different ways, depending on the time and place in which they live and their religious views. Although interpreted and practiced in different ways, kosher laws are a fundamental, familiar, and much-discussed part of Jewish daily life, identity, and community.[2]

The informants in my research understood kosher in many different ways. For some it was separating meat from dairy, for others it was not eating pork or seafood, and for others, it all depended on with whom they ate and where they were. The different ways and meanings of keeping kosher illustrate that Israeli society is not compromised of a single, monolithic identity, but rather a plurality of identities, which reflect different ways of understanding Jewishness and Israeliness. In this article, I argue that for secular Israelis, the choice to follow or not follow kosher laws is not a sign of religious observance but a reflection of political and cultural understandings of what it means to be Jewish in Israel. While the religious population follows kosher laws because they perceive them as a divine commandment, secular Jews in Israel might choose to follow them as a way to continue Jewish tradition, to highlight their origins in the diaspora, and to mark their identity, both cultural and national. While in the diaspora, Jewish secular populations have kept kosher as a way to avoid assimilation. In Israel, following kosher can be seen as a political position or a commitment to one's Jewish roots. On the other hand, not keeping kosher can be a way to resist the Rabbinical control over governmental institutions or as a way to break habits and social convention, what Michael E. Gardiner calls "redemptive moments." In the following sections, I analyze why secular Jews in Israel follow kosher laws and how this decision informs their national and religious identity.[3]

METHODOLOGY I conducted my fieldwork in Israel between 2015 and 2016. I worked with five families living in Central Israel, in Tel Aviv and Haifa. I also conducted twenty-five non-structured interviews with chefs, food writers, cookbook editors, and homemakers. All of my participants came from middle class, educated backgrounds, and most of them were born in Israel and considered Hebrew their mother tongue. Nonetheless, during my time in Israel I was also closely linked with the *olim hadashim*, or new immigrants, and participated in a few events organized by South African Jews in Israel. I was constantly perceived as a new immigrant and, because of my Jewish background, constantly reminded of the importance of immigrating to Israel.

I conducted my research in English and Hebrew. Some of my participants felt more comfortable speaking in English than in Hebrew or the language of their countries of origin. Although in the public sphere my participants spoke mainly Hebrew, in the privacy of their homes, with their family and friends, some of them spoke other more familiar languages. In some cases, my participants did not speak fluent English

or Hebrew, so a combination of both, as well as nonverbal communication, had to be used. Some of my participants also spoke French, Spanish, and Ladino.

LITERATURE REVIEW There is no single Israeli or Jewish identity in Israel. Drawing from Julia Bernstein and Yoram S. Carmeli's research, I understand identity as "a strategic presentation of self [that] can be considered to be dynamic and changeable," in which identity is a state of "doing," not "being."[4] Israelis are constantly reminded of the importance of "acting Jewish" through education, political discourses, and religious celebrations; and yet, they are expected to conform to a secular Israeli identity. In the last few years, the contradictions between secular and religious Jewishness in Israel have further deepened. Simply opening an Israeli newspaper is enough to observe debates about the religious establishment in Israeli public life, or whether Orthodox Jews should join the army, for example. A more nuanced assessment reveals that portraying Israel as a bipolar society is misleading—the spectrum of identities within Israel is far more diverse. The diversity of the Israeli population is mirrored in the food culture of the country and in the different understandings of what Israeli and Jewish food mean. During my fieldwork, I was baffled to discover that while many of my participants defined themselves as secular, most of them follow kosher laws to some degree and see this as a deeply political issue. Although keeping kosher is a key aspect of Israeli food culture, there is no ethnographic research available in English on this topic. Starting with the work of Mary Douglas in 1966, there is a vast expanse of research in religious dietary restrictions and in food practices in diasporic Jewish communities, but the relationship between kosher laws and the construction of Israel's national identity has received little scholarly attention.[5]

This oversight seems a consequence of scholars' unwillingness to recognize the preeminence of everyday life—especially of food—in the formation of national movements. However, in recent years some new works have appeared that relate national identity and the everyday. For example, focusing on how nationalism is reproduced and "flagged" in the everyday, Michael Billig coined the term "banal nationalism," referring to the reproduction of nationalism in small daily acts and how it is "flagged" in countries like the United States and Great Britain.[6] Through an analysis of different aspects of the everyday world like landscape and objects, Tim Edensor also gives a clear image of how quotidian and repetitive actions form and reinforce national identity. Edensor conceives the everyday as dynamic, consistent, and full of a multitude of potentialities.[7] Arjun Appadurai pioneered the subject of food and national identity and demonstrated the relationship between food and nationalism in India.[8] Richard Wilk also explores the relationship between food and nationalism in Belize and how it has changed since the independence of the country.[9]

However, a national diet is not the only influence that determines the way we feed ourselves and others. Memory is one fundamental element that influences what we choose to eat and cook.[10] Certain dishes can carry memories of lost homes, of communities erased by wars, of a Jewish past in Europe that is painful and that Israelis want to forget. Different generations in Israel have a different historical consciousness: Ashkenazi grandmothers that survived the Holocaust relate to food in ways that their granddaughters married to Mizrahi men cannot understand.[11] However, age is not the only division: what is traditional Jewish Moroccan food for Passover is completely unknown to Persian Jews, and the Gefilte fish loved by many Ashkenazi Jews is disgusting to the palate of many Mizrahi Jews.

In the case of Israel, some researchers have focused on the study of controversial items such as hummus or falafel. The existing literature has largely overlooked the European influences on Israeli food and has centered instead on the appropriation and consumption of Arab traditional dishes, such as Yael Raviv's historical study, *Falafel Nation.*[12] Although what is commonly known as Arab food does have a prominent place at the Israeli table, it is not the only culinary influence. After all, national cuisines everywhere are a blend of changes in identities, customs, and migrants, as Sami Zubaida's research has highlighted.[13] An Israeli homemade meal might include Middle Eastern food, as well as European schnitzel or chicken soup. Israeli tables reflect the result of political changes, migration patterns, wars, and governmental efforts to create and recreate an Israeli identity. Israeli cuisine is the heir of centuries of diaspora. While the Ashkenazi world developed a cuisine of poverty, scarcity, and persecutions, Sephardic dishes reflect their deep immersion in the cultures with which they lived.[14] These Jewish cuisines have only one common element among them: the adherence to kosher laws.

However, the study of kosher laws in Israel is not a popular topic among scholars. In recent years some Israeli scholars have started exploring the significance of national cuisine and food culture, but their research has overlooked the various interpretations of kosher laws in Israel and how this reflects a plurality of identities. The most renowned Israeli food anthropologist is Nir Avieli,

whose recent research has focused on Israeli food and the symbolism embedded in the food consumed during the commemoration of Israel's independence. More recently, Avieli has worked on portion sizes as a characteristic of Israeli cuisine.[15] Rafi Groslik also focuses on the consumption of organic food and the impact of globalization on the production of local foods in Israel.[16]

This article fills the gap in the existent Anglo literature about consumption of kosher food in Israel and contributes to the study of the role of the everyday in the construction of national identity.

RELIGION AND SECULARISM IN ISRAEL There is no single way to be Israeli or Jewish in Israel. There is no such thing as a permanent identity since, depending on the context, different characteristics of one's self become more important. As Tim Edensor discusses, identity is not an essence but a process, one that is reshaped continuously by our own ideas of the self and those imposed on us by others.[17] My participants have fluid identities: during religious holidays they emphasized their Jewishness; on other occasions, their main identities were housemakers, students, or academics. Their connection with their Jewish identity varies, depending on where and with whom they are—and based on the relationship they have with their past and their families.

All of my participants celebrated at least the main religious holidays, and most of them had a Shabbat dinner or lunch with their families and saw this as a special occasion. According to the latest survey conducted by the Israeli Democracy Institute in 2009, 90 percent of the Jewish citizens of Israel celebrate Passover, and two-thirds of Israeli Jews keep kosher, although only half of them use separate dishes for dairy and meat products. More than half of Israeli Jews define themselves primarily as Jews, and 80 percent think it is very important to be married by a Rabbi. Nonetheless, 46 percent considered themselves secular.[18]

So when my participants define themselves, they not only say they are *hiloni* (secular), they say Jewish secular. Being a secular Jew in Israel does not mean being anti-religious or unfamiliar with Jewish values and celebrations. Neither does it mean being indifferent to Jewish heritage. A secular Jew is then "one who, at least in some aspects of his life…makes decisions independently of *halakha* or rabbinic decisions."[19] In the words of my participants, it simply means not acting as Jewish Orthodox.

However, it is not only the state that imposes this identity dichotomy. All of my secular participants constantly moved between a religious and a secular world, distinguishing between them clearly in their speech, but not so much in their everyday lives. While some of them talked to me constantly about being secular, they simultaneously kept kosher kitchens, a marker of national and cultural identity, but not necessarily religious identity. The contradictions between their speech and their behavior mirror the contradictions of a state that emphasizes its Jewish religious character while simultaneously promoting a secular identity.

The case of Ruth best illustrates this point. In 1953, Ruth Friedman arrived in Israel with her Israeli husband. She had three daughters and a son and after a few years in Israel, she was able to bring her mother from the United States. All of her children except one live close to her, and she spends every Friday night with her family. Since Ruth lost her husband, these Friday dinners are always at the house of Rahel, her oldest daughter. Nonetheless, Ruth always brings at least one or two dishes. Her cooking is typically Ashkenazi, although she told me many times that her favorite food was in fact "Asian."[20] That particular Friday, she had prepared stuffed cabbage with ground beef, a dish from Eastern Europe, where she could trace the origins of her family.

During almost every Friday dinner, Ruth sat next to me. She was always willing to tell me stories of her youth, but one Friday she was not as happy as usual. She explained, "You know every Friday morning there is a food market in Dizengoff Center, right? Well, there is a stall that sells sushi, and you know I love Asian food, so every Friday I go there, and I eat something."[21] She then looked at me with a big smile and giggled. "Well, every Friday I have a shrimp, they are really good, I like them, but I only allow myself to have one, and today, they were really small. The boy that sells them told me to have another one, he knows me as I go every week, but I told him I could not have two, I only have one."

Ruth's daughter, Rahel, suddenly turned her attention to our conversation and asked her, "Do they sell shrimps in the mall? That is not right, the Minister of Health probably does not know about this." Ruth looked at me, searching for a partner in crime, and quietly said, "Oh who cares, they are really good. I am sure they are fresh and clean." Different from her mother, Rahel keeps kosher not for religious reasons but because she "dislikes the smell of pork" and is afraid of seafood being unhealthy. It is possible, then, that Rahel follows kosher laws for cultural reasons, not religious ones, as a way to mark her Jewish identity and separate herself.

The fact that Ruth broke kosher laws every Friday did not surprise me. She had fought with her mother all of her

adult life about how unpractical it was to keep Shabbat, and had never shown any interest in praying, going to the Synagogue, or any other religious ritual. What was baffling was that Ruth in her everyday life kept kosher, cooked traditional Ashkenazi food (although she loved other cuisines more), and believed eating seafood was wrong, so she only "allowed herself" a little treat. From a young age, Ruth was constantly trying to break with tradition. She had traveled alone with her babies around Israel in a pickup van, looking for a sense of modernity or anything new, arriving at the Port of Haifa or Tel Aviv. She also avoided visiting Jerusalem, as she felt suffocated by the Orthodox communities living in the Holy City. She had studied for a Masters degree, and had worked all her life. At the time that I met Ruth she was still driving, living alone, and unwilling to change any part of her life.

When Ruth eats a shrimp every Friday, she is not simply breaking kosher laws, she is consciously rebelling against her religious Eastern European past and highlighting the secular aspects of her Israeli identity, as well as the cultural ones of Judaism. She is also embracing the cosmopolitanism of life in Tel Aviv by choosing to eat Asian food in a shopping mall. Simultaneously, her unwillingness to let go of Ashkenazi food shows not only "nostalgia" for the times of the diaspora and the traditions developed in it but also the importance of transmitting cultural and national Jewish identity to her family through the privacy of her dinner table.

By consuming shrimp on Fridays, a few hours before Shabbat starts, Ruth might also be resisting a State imposition to her identity. More importantly, she is consistently vocal that she prefers Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. She eats shrimp to break social convention. Following Michael E. Gardiner's definition of "redemptive moments,"[22] I understand a redemptive moment as a transgressive action made consciously or unconsciously with the intention of creating a liberating space away from social conventions and restrictions.[23]This space is present in the framework of everyday life, and the redemptive moment does not necessarily break the behavioral codes imposed by the state. The possibility of breaking from the quotidian, not through extraordinary events but everyday actions, allows individuals to change their experiences and shape their routine. Breaking these habits might result in tensions between the individual and the "codes of conduct preferred by the state," or not.[24] Ruth eating shrimp resonates on these multiple registers.

RE-SIGNIFYING KOSHER Observing kosher is the most significant and important religious duty of Jewish women. While men are expected to go to synagogue and pray, women's religious obligations are focused in the household, which makes cooking and keeping kosher fundamentally female duties. As Susan Starr Sered points out, "*Kashrut* raises food preparation from a task that every woman in the world unthinkingly does to put food on her family's table to a religious ritual par excellence."[25]

Cooking is especially important and visible in the celebration of holidays, such as Passover. However, keeping kosher is a daily task and keeping a kosher house has the same relevance as any ritual performed by men in synagogues, though orthodox women are excluded from many such rituals. Most orthodox religious women learn from their mothers and grandmothers how to keep a Jewish household and how to cook both traditional and kosher dishes. However, most secular women in Israel, including my participants, are familiar with kosher laws, but will choose not to follow them or will accommodate them according to their religious views and their practicality. Some women have also substituted them with an "ethical way of eating." It was not uncommon for me to encounter vegetarian and vegan participants who felt that their diets were closer to the precepts encoded in the Torah than those followed by orthodox individuals. Yael, a woman in her thirties with two young daughters living in Tel Aviv, opted for a vegetarian diet, saying,

> *It is more important to buy free range eggs than kosher meat. The idea behind kosher laws was not only to guarantee the health of the people crossing the dessert, but to have an ethical approach to eating. Nowadays we can do much more than our ancestors; it is easier because we have more options. Instead of following kosher laws as literally, we need to interpret them as a health and ethical code. In a society as our [Israeli society] so violent [sic], it is also important to choose more peaceful ways to feed ourselves. Maybe that will help us to sleep a little bit better.*

Throughout my time in Israel, I was able to appreciate the immense culinary heritage brought by each wave of immigration. Although most communities have preserved their food traditions, most have also blended and mixed them with local ingredients, dishes, and techniques. However, for different reasons, some Israelis have completely changed their diet and adopted new foodways.

Noa, for example, an Ashkenazi woman from Jerusalem, has entirely erased European Jewish dishes from her diet. Noa got married more than two decades ago to a Jewish Tunisian man and lived with her family in Jerusalem. She invited me to cook with her and to spend a Shabbat dinner with her family. She wanted me to learn how to celebrate a religious Shabbat and to appreciate the differences between her celebration and secular ones. She also invited her sister, a secular woman, and her mother, who was also non-religious. She decided to cook Tunisian dishes, although she did point out that she sometimes cooks with an "Asian" twist.

When I arrived at Noa's house on Friday morning to cook with her, she had already started preparing the chickpeas for the stews and grilling some peppers. Noa does not cook Ashkenazi food as her husband does not like it, so she has adopted her mother-in-law's recipes. She also had to learn from her mother-in-law how to keep a kosher kitchen. Her sister was bothered by-our conversation, as she did not approve of Noa's lifestyle; not only her complete assimilation to Jewish Tunisian culture, but also Noa's observance of religious traditions. "Look," she told me, "Noa is only religious when her husband is around. When we go on holidays without him, she stops this nonsense and starts eating cheeseburgers again. The minute we return, she becomes religious again, it does not make any sense to me, but you know, Oriental Jews are like that, backward and sometimes macho."

Noa told me she did not see the importance of kosher laws, but following them kept her husband happy:

> *He comes from a religious family; he believes these things are important and I decided to follow them for him. However, sometimes it is really difficult, and men do not notice because they are not in charge of the house. For example, a few months ago we invited some friends for Friday dinner. Before Shabbat started, I prepared everything and put a chicken in the oven on a low heat. Less than an hour before the dinner I noticed that I had forgotten to turn on the oven. Shabbat had started, and it is forbidden to turn the oven on so I had to make a decision. When my husband went to pray I turned the oven on, so he never realized I had broken the rules. If I had not done it, we would not have been able to eat! He never found out the truth, and I am sure God does not care if I turn on the oven on a Friday afternoon.*

The taste and preferences of her husband and children determined Noa's cooking. Not only did she follow all the kosher laws even when she was unable to see the meaning or relevance of some of them, but she also decided to cook only dishes that pleased her family. Noa treats food preparation not only as her housewifely duty but also as her religious duty. While her husband prays in a synagogue, she cooks for Shabbat, cleans the house, and prepares everything for the rest day. In this sense, "the holy is totally embedded in the everyday,"[26] and through cooking Noa pleases her family and God. Simultaneously, she also separates herself from the secular Jewish world where she grew up.

Noa, Rahel, and Ruth understand and live kosher laws differently. Noa follows the laws strictly; even if she is not convinced of their relevance, she adheres to them, as they are fundamental for her husband. Ruth and Rahel also follow kosher rules to please their guests and avoid confrontation. Ruth will put special emphasis on them if she is cooking for a crowd of guests with different levels of observance. Noa, on the other hand, follows kosher laws not because she believes there are religious commandments, but because her husband and his family do. As a secular woman who decided to enter a religious word, she has had to modify her identity and her understanding of Judaism. The struggle to re-signify kosher laws in the modern world is a constant, especially in Israel where the risk of assimilation is erasure. David C. Kraemer affirms, "Jewish eating is…a 'negotiation,' a struggle on the part of individual Jews and the community over where the boundaries of Jewish identity should be laid."[27] This struggle continues to take place in the diaspora as well as in Israel, where the boundaries of identity are both religious and national.

NOT KEEPING KOSHER Ruth and her family were not the only participants in my research that had mixed views about being kosher. Most of my secular participants admitted they did not keep kosher. However, when I shared a meal with them in the privacy of their homes or a restaurant, most did follow kosher rules. Yonatan, a graphic designer in his thirties, kept a mainly kosher diet, especially since he moved in with his sister who is more religious than him. Although Yonatan will mix dairy products with meat when he is on holiday outside of Israel, in Tel Aviv he tends to follow all kosher rules, even if they are impractical, or nobody else at the table is doing so. He and a group of his friends, including his sister, invited me out one day while I was in Tel Aviv. They decided to go to an Irish pub, as they wanted to show me that it was possible to eat something other than kebabs in Israel. They had never been to that pub before, and they did not know that most of the dishes

on the menu included bacon or ham. After fifteen minutes of looking at the menu, they decided to go somewhere else. None of them pointed out that they had chosen to leave because the place was not kosher. They simply stated that there was nothing there they wanted to eat. A few days later I asked Yonatan about the incident. He responded,

> *Well yes, the place was not kosher, but that was not the problem. We just don't like pork, so the smell of the place was unpleasant for most of us. Kosher does not have to do with religion; it is cultural, and it has to do with who we are. I keep kosher because my grandparents did. It is part of being Israeli, and keeping kosher here is extremely easy.*

Yonatan feels that keeping kosher is a key marker of his identity, not necessarily religious but cultural. However, his attitude towards food can be ambivalent. While living outside of Israel, Yonatan became more religious. He went to services often and became closer to more orthodox communities. And yet, during that time of enhanced religiosity, he decided not to ask what kind of meat he was eating and shared a flat with a non-Jewish flatmate that did not keep a kosher kitchen. However, in Israel, although he never went to a synagogue, kept Shabbat, or participated in any event within the Orthodox community, he did follow a strictly kosher diet.

Yonatan's relationship with kosher food is part of a conflicting identity. On some occasions, he would define himself as secular, in others as a traditional (*Masorti)* Israeli. He has considered dating orthodox women, but does not consider himself to be religious. While living outside of Israel, Yonatan expressed his national identity by becoming closer to his Jewish religious identity. Nevertheless, he needed to integrate into a community where he was the only non-Christian, so he felt that keeping kosher might become an obstacle. Back in Israel, he returned to his old behavior and started to eat kosher again, while at the same time he stopped attending religious services and did not get closer to any orthodox group.

Yonatan's attitude towards kosher is again a nonreligious one. Following kosher laws is a matter of identity and of feeling connected with his ancestors. Like Rahel, his behavior towards kosher laws is ambivalent. Depending on the circumstances and the company, he will decide if he keeps kosher or not. However, like many secular Israelis, he will reject pork on any occasion but will be flexible with the other kosher laws.

IS ISRAELI FOOD KOSHER? Finding a non-kosher restaurant in secular Tel Aviv is not challenging, but finding one in Jerusalem requires a good knowledge of the city. One of my youngest informants suggested to me that while in Jerusalem, I should carry with me "butter and bacon, just to be sure you do not find yourself in the situation of having to eat bad, tasteless kosher food." All of my informants agreed that Israeli food was not necessarily kosher. Some of them even stated that "new Israeli cuisine" had to be non-kosher. Yariv, a culinary writer in his thirties, explained:

> *Pork and seafood—that is new Israeli cuisine! Kosher is not necessarily a characteristic of Israeli cuisine, but it is a style. However, I hate kosher; I have an allergy to it. [The Rabbis] rule over our private life for money. They decide how we get married and how and what we can eat. However, yes, the lack of pork is a characteristic of our cuisine. Thankfully, there are restaurants that don't cooperate with the rabbinate, so there is an initiative called "communal kosher" that tries to make people trust each other and give community kosher certificates. Even Jewish restaurants are leaving kosher behind. You have places like Rafael in Tel Aviv that serves Moroccan food that is not kosher. The chef there says his grandmother was his main influence. His food is the best simply because it is not kosher. Clearly, his grandmother would not be happy with his cooking.*

Yariv highlights his preference for non-kosher food, as well as the political problems it causes. Yariv is an Ashkenazi Jew and proud of European Jewish traditions, especially culinary ones. However, he feels that the official kosher certification and the religious institutions of the government do not have a legitimate place in a modern democratic state. He dislikes the idea of the Rabbinate determining what is fine for him to eat and what is not. Therefore, he supports a project managed by local restaurants that gives "community kosher certifications" and avoids the fees imposed by the Rabbinates to give this qualification. He also consumes pork regularly, not only because he likes it, but also because he believes it is a way to resist the regulations the Jewish character of the state imposes on him. Contrary to Yonatan, Yariv finds the fact that almost all Israeli food is kosher to be problematic. Although he enjoys Jewish cooking (by Jewish food he means European Ashkenazi food), he does not believe kosher should be a characteristic of Israeli culinary culture.

However, Yariv's secular identity does not mean he is less Jewish; as he keeps and transmits traditions, he identifies himself as a Jew and celebrates all the Jewish holidays.

CONCLUSIONS The history of food culture in Israel mimics the story of the country and the tensions within it. The first Jewish pioneers that arrived in Israel tried to erase any print left by the diaspora on the Hebrew identity. Zionists saw religion as the mechanism for Jewish communities in the diaspora to survive, but the foundation of a Jewish state erased the need to hold to religious Judaism. On the other hand, from the beginning of the history of Israel, religious institutions have had control over political and governmental institutions, making Jewishness necessarily attached to a religious upbringing.

The analysis presented in this paper focuses on the way Jewish identity in Israel can be interpreted and lived in different ways. Food choices reveal singular approaches to national and religious identity and the struggles to re-signify what it means to be a secular Jew in Israel. One of the clearer manifestations of this struggle is the way in which secular Jews relate to kosher laws. As I argued in this paper, secular Jews in Israel might choose to follow kosher laws as a way to identify with the Jewish collectivity and as a marker of belonging. Not following kosher laws can be seen as an act of political resistance or as a redemptive moment that allows the individual to break with the quotidian without trespassing any state boundary.

The importance of kosher laws for Israeli identity carries questions for the citizens of the country. While some of them, like Yonatan, believe following kosher is fundamental to the identity of the country, others, like Yariv, see kosher as a way for the state to intrude into the private matters of Israelis, as well as a form of corruption of the religious establishment and a sometimes unwanted limitation for chefs and diners. Noa, on the other hand, does not believe following kosher is important, but she does it to please her husband and her family. While in the privacy of her kitchen, she challenges kosher laws and resists their imposition.

Like Yonatan, Rahel sees kosher laws as a matter of national identity, primarily as a health issue, but not as a religious matter. Her mother Ruth follows kosher laws in order to transmit a Jewish identity to her family, but will resist them to demonstrate her food preferences and rebellious nature without breaking social conventions. As these case studies demonstrate, the questions of kosher also reflect some of the main issues of the country: the deep divisions between the secular and the religious, the problems and contradictions of a religious and democratic state, and the tensions between national and religious identity.

ENDNOTES

1. Andrew Buckser, "Keeping Kosher: Eating and Social Identity among the Jews of Denmark," Ethnology 38, no. 3 (1999): 194.

2. Ibid.

3. See Diana Mincyte, Food Culture, Globalization and Nationalism (The National Council for Euroasian and East European Research 2008).

4. Julia Bernstein and Yoram S. Carmeli, "Food for Thought: The Dining Table and Identity Construction among Jewish Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel" in Consumption and Market Society in Israel, ed. Carmeli Yoram S. and Applbaum Kalman (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 208.

5. Mary Douglas Op. cit. For examples of contemporary research in kosher laws, see Andrew Buckser, op. cit. and Anna Shternshis , "Salo on Challah: Soviet Jews Experiences of Food in the 1920-1950's" in Jews and Their Foodways, ed. Anat Helman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

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8. Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," Comparative Studies in Society and History 30, no. 1 (1988): 3-24.

9. Richard Wilk, "'Real Belizean Food': Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean," American Anthropologist 101, no. 2 (1999): 244-255.

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11. European Jews with roots specially in Germany, Poland, and East Europe are commonly known as Ashkenazi Jews, while the term Mizrahi is used for Middle Eastern Jews. It is believed that most Mizrahi Jews are Sephardic Jews, expelled from Spain by the Catholic Queen Elizabeth in 1492.

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13. Sami Zubaida and Richard Tapper, A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001).

14. See Claudia Roden, The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand and Vilna to the Present Day (London: Penguin, 1999).

15. Nir Avieli, "Size Matters: Israeli Chefs Cooking up a Nation" in Jews and Their Foodways, ed. Anat Helman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

16. Rafi Grosglik, "Organic Hummus in Israel: Global and Local Ingredients and Images," Sociological Research Online 16, no. 2 (2011).

17. See Tim Edensor, op. cit.

18. Loc. cit.

19. Loc. cit.

20. Ashkenazi culinary tradition is based in the food cooked by the European Jewish communities of Poland, Russian, Ukraine, Germany, etc. Ashkenazi is the Hebrew word for Germany. On the other hand, Mizrahi food is based in the traditions of Middle Eastern Jewish communities (also called Sephardic food, as most of the Jews in this region arrived after their expulsion from Spain in 1492).

21. A popular shopping mall in central Tel Aviv.

22. See Michael E. Gardiner, Critiques of Everyday Life: An Introduction (London: Routledge, 2000).

23. Edensor, 91.

24. Tim Edensor, 91.

25. Susan Starr Sered, Women As Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 88.

26. Loc. cit.

27. David C. Kremer, Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages (London-New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

biography | *Claudia Raquel Prieto Piastro is a PhD researcher at the Institute for Middle Eastern Studies at King's College London. Her research interests focus on the role of food in the construction of national identities as well as culinary transmission and Jewish identity.*