Gvion (2009) Narrating Modernity and Tradition: The Case of Palestinian Food in Israel

This article stresses culinary issues Palestine faces such as trying to define the role of domestic and public cooking and the status of Palestinian food among Jews in Israel and its surrounding areas (Gvion, 2009:409). Thus, Palestinians are challenged with modernizing their food, while still maintaining their relationship with tradition.

The author does a good job interviewing her subjects. I appreciate that instead of filling (this is an odd word choice; reword) Palestinians with questions, she gives them space and time to discuss topics with her like any usual conversations. The first Palestinians that are mentioned are women who primarily dominate the cooking in the household. Men are unfavorable to their wives importance in the kitchen because it limits some of their power in the family (this is unclear, please reword). Men, on the other hand, look to run Palestinian restaurants in local villages. It is a custom that when eating out, you eat something you wouldn’t have at home. Public eating is seen as a time for the male of the household to take his family out to a leisurely evening, once again increasing his role in the family (Gvion 2009:405). Women’s recipes are often used in the restaurants, but it is unusual, to some point insulting, to have a women working in a restaurant because, as a Palestinian, Lubna said, “people would assume his wife neglects her domestic duties” (Gvion 2009:405). In other words, domestic dishes are seldom found in restaurants. However, women have the opportunity to narrate culinary history and share with their children new traditions as well as old ones (Gvion 2009).

The popularity of Palestinian restaurants is poor throughout Israel. Much was the same for Italian immigrants when first coming to America. When they were at the bottom of the food chain (this is too informal—reword) in American society, their food was seen as poor man’s food. Yet, as Italians climbed the social ladder and left the ghettos behind, the food began to be appreciated by most Americans. (Belasco 1987; Lind and Barham 2004; Ray 2007; Levenstein 1985). What does this mean for Palestinians? The Jewish society is as much of a roadblock as established Americans were for Italian immigrants. Even with basic dishes being served at Palestinians restaurants, Jews aren’t easily enticed. In fact, they seem to have little respect for the recognition of some Palestinian foods, like hummus, for example (Gvion 2009:408). Since the Palestinians were kicked out (too informal, reword) of their land there has always been some tension between the two cultures. Now with Palestinians being the minority, they are constantly trying to integrate themselves while still maintaining their distinct customs.

Some traditions will never change. For instance, dirty meat is seen as fresh meat to Palestinians, while clean meat is a non-living, or a “dead” sight. “Even young and very educated women,” a Palestinian man Manar explains, “wouldn’t dare to do it” (Gvion 2009:400) I’m not sure what “do it” refers to in the previous sentence. Cookbooks are also used as valuable tools for women to collect recipes and memories from their past mothers, and thus their past culture. One of the first women that Liora meets with, Abir, makes a mugrabilah. served with a couscous-like substance. She followed the traditional steps but at the same time used industrialized noodles instead of homemade ones. Abir, her name is, uses technologies to enhance her cooking, at the same time she moves more towards a modern housewife, allowing herself for other activities (Gvion 2009:399). Liora does a poor job here recognizing not just the positive side to moving more towards a more modern culture, but also the negative side. Little by little Palestinians are stripped of their food culture by replacing certain customs. The restaurants are another example of this. If their owners served more traditional and authentic foods, perhaps their dishes would grow in popularity simply due to its exotic nature or curiosity among Jews.. It may not be drastic or harmful to replace old customs, but it is another powerful reminder of globalization and the shrinking of unique and foreign tastes (a bit awkward, could be reworded).

References Cited

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Levenstein, Harvey


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