



Jewish Food in Mexico: Reflections of a Community's History, Culture, and Values

Comida Judaica no México: Reflexão sobre a história, cultura e valores de uma comunidade

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Abstract: Food is more than just sustenance. Culinary habits are an expression of a community's history and culture, an accumulation and expression of its environmental influences, experiences, conventions, beliefs, aspirations and behavior. Food is an enduring element of individual and collective memory¹. Food also defines a country and helps construct memories of home, real and imagined, longing and belonging, and survival. Ask almost anyone what they think of home and they will invariably answer something related to food. In this sense, food is a multi-faceted element that sways and adapts to the palate. Jewish food in Mexico reflects the places of origin, the recipes and memories that were transported with the immigrants, which were later infused, ladled and adapted with the local delicacies. The end result is nothing more than wonderful concoctions that continue to this day, transmitted lovingly to the newer generations. This article explores what constitutes Jewish food in general and how that has evolved in Mexico.

Key-words: Jewish food; religion and food; religion; Mexican and Jewish food; Judaism

Resumo: Comida é mais do que apenas sustância. Hábitos culinários são a expressão da história e cultura de uma comunidade e o acúmulo e a expressão das influências ambientais, experiências, convenções, crenças, aspirações e comportamento. Comida é um elemento duradouro de memória individual e coletiva. A comida também define um país e ajuda a construir memórias do lar, reais e imaginárias duradouras, de pertencimento e sobrevivência. Pergunte a qualquer um o que eles pensam sobre suas terras natais e eles invariavelmente vão responder alguma coisa relacionada a comida. Neste sentido, comida é um elemento multifacetado que influencia e se adapta ao paladar. Comida Judaica no México reflete locais de origem, receitas e memórias que foram transportadas por imigrantes, e que mais tarde foram infundidas, servidas e adaptadas com iguarias locais. O resultado final é nada mais que maravilhosas preparações que continuam até hoje transmitidas afetosamente às novas gerações. Este artigo explora o que constitui a Comida Judaica em geral e como tem evoluído no México.

Palavras-Chave: Comida Judaica, Religião e Comida, Religião, Comida Judaica e mexicana, Judaísmo.

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¹ G. MARKS, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*.

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.² 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 Americas³. Most Jews entered Mexico between the 1920s and 1950s, although immigration flows began earlier in the Porfiriato. Three migratory periods with two major waves can be identified: (1) 1876-1911; (2) 1911-1934; and (3) 1934-1950⁴.

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 affiliated⁵. The Jewish Mexican community is highly organized and centralized. Each community sector provides its members a whole array of services. As a whole, the Jewish community in Mexico City is considered traditional.⁶

Methodology

This article draws on qualitative and ethnographic research. It is based on participant observation, individual and groups conversations, and a review of the existing literature.

Participant observation took place in the author's home, participants' homes, parks, cafés and places of work. I casually held conversations with non-Jewish and Jewish men and women living in Israel and Mexico during the period between July and October 2014. As a result four sets of respondents were identified, each were asked specific questions with a different purpose in mind: (1) Non-Jews in Israel; (2) Jewish women in Israel; (3) Jewish Mexican women in Israel and (4) Jews in Mexico.

² INEGI, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía inegi.org.mx.

³ A.G. BACKAL, *Los conversos en el México Colonial*. A.C.KRAUSE. *The Jews in Mexico*. L.SOURASKY. *Historia de la comunidad israelita de México*.

⁴ P.SCHUSTER. *The Syrian Jewish Community in Mexico City in a Comparative Context*.

⁵ S. SELIGSON BERENFELD, *Los judíos en México*.

⁶ For more on the religious spectrum and divisions, see S.DELLAPERGOLA; S. LERNER, *La población judía de México*. ALDUNCIN and Asociados. *Sociodemographic Study of Jewish Community in Mexico*.

The conversations in Israel were held with both Jews and non-Jews in their homes, cafés or in parks and were in Hebrew, Spanish and English. The conversations with Jews living in Mexico were held via SKYPE, FaceTime or Facebook Messenger and all were in Spanish. Questions were asked about what constituted Jewish food, cooking and consuming Jewish food, preferences to food choices and styles of cuisines eaten at home, etc. The average time of the conversations was twenty minutes. All were contacted through personal ties. All were volunteers and were informed of the purpose of this study.

Non-Jews in Israel

This group included five individuals, a mix of non-Jewish men and women living in Israel. These participants were selected in order to answer queries about what constitutes Jewish food and cooking styles. Residency time in Israel varied from a couple of months to ten years. Their places of origin were one from Russia, one from Mexico, one from Australia, one from Holland and one from the United States. Three were women and two were men. They live in Rishon Lezion, Ashdod, and Ra'anana. Their age range varied from twenty-three to forty-two.

Additionally, these non-Jews were invited to the author's home in order to sample a selection of dishes that were mentioned by the participants themselves as being "Jewish food" which they had not tried before. After they had eaten these items, a lively discussion ensued about their experiences of tasting these dishes for the first time. If they had already eaten any of the dishes they mentioned, they were discussed at the outset. During these culinary events, the author jotted their physical reactions and noted their descriptions of the dishes served.

Jewish Women in Israel

Casual conversations with conducted with fifteen Jewish women living in Israel. Four were Orthodox, two were conservative and nine were secular. Their places of origin were six from the United States, one from South Africa, one from Germany, one from the United Kingdom, one from Finland, and five from Israel. Four were *Sephardi*, ten were *Ashkenazi* and one described herself as an *Ashkenazi-Sephardi*. They live in Yavne, Ashdod, Kfar Saba, Tel Aviv, Kiriyat Gat, Rehovot, Petach Tikvah, and Rishon Lezion. Their age ranged from thirty-four to fifty-six.

Jewish Mexican Women in Israel

Conversations were conducted with twelve Jewish Mexican women living in Israel. Two were Orthodox, eight were conservative and two were secular. All of the women in this group were from Mexico City. Residency time in Israel varied from a year to fifty-six years. Three were *Sephardi*, seven were *Ashkenazi*, one was *Sephardi-Ashkenazi* and one was *Halebi*. No *Shami* women were interviewed. They live in the Jerusalem, Ashdod, Kfar Saba, Tel Aviv Karmiel, Kiriyat Gat, Rehovot, Petach Tikvah, and Rishon Lezion. Their ages ranged from thirty to sixty-eight.

Jews in Mexico

This group included thirteen individuals, both Jewish men and women from Mexico City. All were conservative and were from Mexico City. Eleven were women and two were men. Three were *Sephardi*, seven were *Ashkenazi*, two were *Halebi* and one was *Shami*. They live in the neighborhoods of Tecamachalco, La Condesa, Bosques de las Lomas, La Herradura, Escandon and Polanco. Their ages ranged from forty-one to seventy.

Defining Jewish Food

Jews in the Diaspora have created rich culinary traditions. According to Toaff⁷, "Jewish food" assigns cultural meaning to cooking. Jewish food or rather Jewish cooking is based on religious laws, which dictates how certain foodstuffs may be eaten and prepared. As such, Jewish food encompasses a plethora of tastes, aromas and flavors reflecting the particular customs, forms, practices and ingredients of the many Jewish communities worldwide. "Jewish food" is sometimes understood as referring to only the cooking traditions and cuisine of *Ashkenazi* Jews. However, *Ashkenazi* food is only one of several of Jewish cooking styles. Food is a link with a Jewish past, a celebration of roots, and a symbol of continuity. The degree to which Jews embrace local cuisine while preserving traditional foods reflects their complex constructions of identity.

What is Jewish food? This simple and yet complex question was asked to the participants of this study. For one 42 year old Israeli, an *Ashkenazi* female nurse, Jewish food encompassed all food that is kosher. When I asked her to elaborate, she added that it reminds her of her grandmother's cooking, of soul food.

For a thirty-three year old marketing professional and a married mother of two, Jewish food goes beyond physical and religious borders and encompasses symbolic and traditional elements. As she stated: "We eat Jewish food as part of tradition, every holiday, the same special dishes, so we have these special Jewish dishes. It's part of who

⁷ A. TOAFF. *Culture Ebraiche Nel Mondo*.

I am." For someone else, Jewish food did not exist. She stated: "There is not such a thing! Jews took what they could find from all over the place." She explained that nothing is particularly Jewish but rather adapted to meet *Kashrut* (details below).

Not everyone associated Jewish food with something good or wholesome but rather with poverty, as I was told by a forty year old Russian non-Jewish English teacher. For him, Jewish food was mostly composed of cheap remains of food, which were overcooked and over salted, or over sweetened in order to conceal the bad taste until it became a mass. He explained that the purpose of Jewish food is to make as much as possible with as little as problem. He gave the example of a chicken. He said that you would strip the chicken of its meat, use that for two or three dishes, then take the skin and flour it and fry it as a side dish, then you would take the bones and make soup. Even the liver and other innards are eaten, either fried or as additions in soup. The liver can be chopped with onions into a pate, so nothing is wasted. Some of the older women concurred with his assessment, but added that they had no choice. Some of the younger women stated that now there is more diversity in Jewish food with the influence of other culinary traditions and diversity of ingredients. Jewish food, past and present, draws on the influence of regional flavors and available ingredients. This type of cooking style is called "Fusion Food", which refers to the trend of combining foods from more than one culture, a process characteristic of the immigrant experience.⁸

To others, all food in Israel is Jewish food, but as a twenty-three Israeli *Sephardi* woman told me *Hummus* is not Jewish food. For her *chraime* was the best example of Jewish food.⁹ There are many dishes, brought over from a vast array of lands which intermingled with local foodstuffs.

Kosher vs. Kosher-Style

To many, there is some confusion as to the difference between kosher and kosher-style prepared foods. This section briefly summarizes some of the issues involved.

Kashrut is the body of Jewish law dealing with what foods we can and cannot eat and how those foods must be prepared and eaten. "*Kashrut*" comes from the Hebrew root Kaf-Shin-Reish, meaning fit, proper or correct. It is the same root as the more commonly known word "kosher," which describes food or products that meets or conforms to the dietary requirements or standards of Jewish law. The word "kosher"

⁸ P.SCHUSTER, *The Syrian Jewish Community in Mexico City in a Comparative Context: Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

⁹ *Chraime* is a fish dish prepared in a sauce with tomatoes, hot peppers and other spices prepared traditionally by Jews of North African origin for the Friday night Shabbat meal and also for Rosh Hashanah and Passover.

can also be used to describe ritual objects that are made in accordance with Jewish law and are fit for this purpose. Food that is not kosher is commonly referred to as *treif* (Yiddish, lit. torn, from the commandment not to eat animals that have been torn by other animals).

From the Jewish point of view, kosher food is the optimal diet for spiritual health and well being. Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin¹⁰, suggests that the dietary laws are designed as a call to holiness. Although, kosher is not a style of cooking, it is a way life, it can be seen as a cohesive element that binds different dispersed communities together. Donin also points out that the laws of *Kashrut* elevate the simple act of eating into a religious ritual. The act of cooking can become holy and thus is bestowed with meaning and is not simply an action. In Mexico, Orthodox women, ascribes sacredness to food and its preparation. "While eating is a biological act, cooking is a cultural act"¹¹. Some women stipulated that while cooking and eating Jewish food, they felt closely connected to their ancestral homelands.

Chinese food can be *kosher* if it is prepared in accordance with Jewish law. On the other hand, traditional *Ashkenazic* Jewish foods like *knishes*, bagels, blintzes, and *matza* ball soup can all be non-kosher if not prepared in accordance with Jewish law. When a restaurant identifies itself "kosher-style," it usually means that the restaurant serves these traditional Jewish foods, and it almost invariably means that the food is not actually kosher.

Kosher dietary laws are observed all year round. There are additional dietary restrictions on *Pesach* (Passover) and many foods acceptable for year round use are excluded. These are all leavened grains, mixtures of grains or derivative products known as *chometz*, such as breads and pasta. Foods that are kosher for Passover, however, are always kosher for year round use. The food most identified with Passover is the brittle, unleavened cracker known as which is eaten in place of bread. Jews of European (Ashkenazic) ancestry customarily do not eat certain legumes on Passover.

Although the details governing *kashrut* are vast, intricate and complex, the laws all derive from a few general rules and can be broken down into the following categories: permitted and prohibited food sources; preparation of meat; separation of meat and dairy; kosher ingredients and utensils/equipment and kosher for Passover. These principles can be found in the Written Torah (the Bible) and the Oral Torah.¹² However, a brief overview suffices here.

Certain animals may not be eaten at all, such as camels, rock badgers, rabbits, and pigs. This restriction includes the flesh, organs, eggs, and milk of the forbidden animals.

¹⁰ H.H.DONIN. *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in a Contemporary Life*.

¹¹ J.F.ITURRIAGA. *Sabores de Tlaxcala*.

¹² The references to these sources are given throughout the text.

Rodents, reptiles, amphibians, and insects¹³ are all forbidden¹⁴. Any product derived from these forbidden animals, such as their milk, eggs, fat, or organs, also cannot be eaten.

Of the animals that may be eaten¹⁵, the birds and mammals must be ritually slaughtered in accordance with Jewish law.¹⁶ These include cattle, sheep, goats, deer and bison. Animals that died of natural causes that were killed by other animals or other means may not be eaten¹⁷. In addition, the animal must have no disease or flaws in the organs at the time of slaughter. These restrictions do not apply to fish; only to flocks and herds¹⁸. The Torah provides a list of forbidden birds¹⁹, but does not specify why these particular birds are forbidden. Chicken, geese, ducks, and turkeys are considered kosher sources of fowl meat. Once meat has been properly slaughtered, it must undergo a process known as *kashering* in order to drain it of blood, which the Torah prohibits for consumption²⁰. This entails soaking and salting or salting and broiling the meat. This applies only to the blood of birds and mammals, not to fish blood.

Certain parts of permitted animals may not be eaten. All unprocessed fruits and vegetables are permitted, but must be inspected for bugs (which cannot be eaten).

Of the things that are in the waters, you may eat anything that has fins and scales.²¹ Thus, shellfish such as lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams and crabs, as are eels, octopus, sharks, and whales are all forbidden. Fish such as tuna, carp, salmon and herring are all permitted.

The Torah prohibits eating meat (the flesh of birds and mammals) and dairy together²². Fish, eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains can be eaten with either meat or dairy. (According to some views, fish may not be eaten with meat). This separation includes not only the foods themselves, but also the cooking utensils, pots, pans, plates and flatware, dishwashers or dishpans, sponges, kitchen towels and other cooking

¹³ Except for the winged insects mentioned in Lev. 11:22

¹⁴ Lev. 11:29-30, 42-43.

¹⁵ Lev. 11:3; Deut. 14:6.

¹⁶ Deut. 12:21. The laws of ritual slaughtering are known as *shechitah*, and the person who performs the slaughter is called a *shochet*, both from the Hebrew root Shin-Cheit-Teit. The method of slaughter is a quick, deep stroke across the throat with a sharp blade. This method is painless, causes unconsciousness within two seconds, and is recognized as the most humane method of slaughter possible. *Shechitah* ensures rapid, complete draining of the blood, which is also necessary to classify the meat as kosher.

¹⁷ Deut. 14:21

¹⁸ Num. 11:22

¹⁹ Lev. 11:13-19; Deut. 14:11-18

²⁰ Lev. 7:26-27; Lev. 17:10-14

²¹ Lev. 11:9; Deut. 14:9

²² Ex. 23:19; Ex. 34:26; Deut. 14:21

surfaces that have come into contact with meat may not be used with dairy, and vice versa. Utensils that have come into contact with non-kosher food may not be used with kosher food. This applies only where the contact occurred while the food was hot. Therefore, a kosher household will have two sets of pots, pans and dishes – one for meat and one for dairy. Furthermore, there is a requisite waiting time between eating meat and dairy, to allow for fatty residues and clinging meat particles to decompose. Times vary according to levels of religiosity or customs.

Another major requirement for the *Kashrut* is qualified supervision. This means that every food product on the market must be checked to ascertain that it does not have any non-kosher additives or ingredients. This inspection is performed by properly trained individuals known as *mashgiach*, whose expertise is in identifying kosher and non-kosher foods. Supervision also exists in *kosher* restaurants to guarantee that everything on the menu is 100% kosher. Therefore, all *kosher* establishments and products must be labeled with an *hekhsher* (*kosher* rabbinical stamp or mark of approval) certifying that the food to be consumed is indeed *kosher*.²³

While kosher-style may look and even taste the same as *Kashrut* it does not have the same spiritual component. Kosher-style has to do with the physical aspects of a food—look, smell, texture, taste and is a much broader term. It can encompass any food that, in theory, could be kosher, whether that means chicken noodle soup or *pareve* meals such as fish or vegetarian dishes, even if not *kosher* by Jewish dietary standards. Diner points out that it merely creates the illusion of *kashrut*.²⁴ Kosher is not a style of cuisine but rather a way of life as one of my informants told me. Under Jewish law, corned beef can be as *kosher* as sushi or *foie gras* or not as Kosher-style, Kosher-style may follow the same restrictions in terms of what foods may be eaten, but does not go so far as to adhere to the rituals in terms of slaughter and separation. Kosher-style typically denotes a certain type of cooking or preparation of Jewish dishes but made without Kosher ingredients or the supervision process.

When it appeared in the 1920s, Kosher-style satisfied the need of assimilating American Jews to feel that they were eating in a Jewish style without necessarily following strict dietary restrictions. For them, it was “good enough that it was redolent of immigrant-era food.” It is a uniquely American innovation, although the idea has

²³ A *hekhsher* (from the same Hebrew root as the word “kosher”) identifies the rabbi or organization that certified the product or establishment. The process of certification involves examining the ingredients used to make the food, examining the process by which the food is prepared, and inspecting the processing facilities to make sure that kosher standards are maintained. These *hekhshers* are illustrated with different symbols, which are widely-accepted and indicate varying degrees of strictness and which category it is. The Yiddish words *fleishik* (meat), *milchik* (dairy) and *pareve* (neutral) are commonly used to describe food or utensils that fall into one of those categories.

²⁴ H. DINER. *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*.

roots in the 19th-century European term of *fressfroemigkeit* (eating religion) or “culinary Jew,” to describe assimilated Jews who expressed their “Jewishness” or religious affiliation through eating traditional Jewish food on holidays²⁵.

In post-World War II New York, Baltimore, Chicago and other cities with large Jewish populations, kosher-style was primarily used to describe restaurants that served salami, corned beef, pastrami—deli foods along with Swiss cheese. These establishments functioned as “safe places for Jews to bring their non-Jewish friends”²⁶. Weissman explains the changes in culinary habits as these new American Jews made around food and other domestic rituals: in their homes, Jewish mothers began to focus less on traditional Jewish recipes and the *Kashrut*, and more on their children’s adaptation and success in the United States.²⁷ Not all immigrant Jewish families exchanged Jewish cooking for American foodways, but in their struggle to integrate and thrive in local society, many of their traditional practices were negated or abandoned. Jews could eat food they enjoyed and share it with outsiders²⁸.

The concept of kosher-style food also made it easier for Jewish families to play with the strict rules of *Kashrut* at home, adapting them and thus freeing them to pick and choose. Households, for example, could forego expensive *Kosher* meat and avoid or partake in eating *treif* foods such as shrimp or pork chops.

In many delicatessens and restaurants worldwide, food is prepared in the Kosher-style but the place would not be considered kosher. Rather than strictly adhering to law, they opted for Jewish tastes and flavors, creating a food system which they called kosher-style²⁹. They offered familiar kosher meats with addition to *treif* combinations such as mixing meat and milk. These delis served as a haven that allowed Jews to experiment with forbidden foods and combinations. They divided the world in half: keeping a kosher home, but eating non-kosher food in restaurants³⁰. In time, kosher-Style delis added non-kosher foods and allowed patrons a wider choice, providing, as Diner notes, “the familiar with the new.”³¹ Jews who adhere strictly to *Kashrut* will not eat at kosher-style establishments. Some of these establishments are also open on the Jewish Shabbat for business when this is forbidden by Jewish law. Moreover, several Kosher-style restaurants serve pork products, such as bacon, ham, ribs, and sausage in order to serve a larger number of customers.

²⁵ C. RODEN. *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand to New York*.

²⁶ S. FISHKOFF. *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America's Food Answers to a Higher Authority*.

²⁷ J. J. WEISSMAN. *Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950*.

²⁸ S. FISHKOFF. *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America's Food Answers to a Higher Authority*.

²⁹ H. DINER. *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*, p. 185.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ J. E. PLAUT. *A Kosher Christmas: 'Tis the Season to Be Jewish*, p. 67; DINER, H. p.194

For some, kosher-style usually refers to food that is not kosher, but is a type of food that could be produced as kosher. Generally, kosher-style food does not include meat from forbidden animals, such as pigs or shellfish, and does not contain both meat and milk. For others Jews who do not keep kosher, but wish to restrict themselves to eating "traditional style" foods, usually not eating forbidden animals or mixing milk and meat, but not adhering to the dietary laws may consider themselves to keep kosher-style. For one person, kosher style is simply that you'll cook a meal that resembles a kosher meal (such as brisket, chicken soup, *matza* ball soup, or *tzimmes*) but does not conform to all the guidelines.³² For someone else I spoke with, Kosher-style just means no shellfish and no pork and no mixing of meat and dairy on the same plate. For one woman, a kosher-style meal can entail a vegetarian spread, a main course of salmon, or meat served without dairy products—depending on the venue. However, for Michal, it would be a meat meal that would not have any dairy served and no pork but would have a *treif* hamburger. Adding that the only difference, to me, between *kosher* and kosher-style is that, with kosher-style, the meat and other products used, and the preparation of them are not *kosher* (not prepared in a *kosher* kitchen).

Iconic Dishes

I asked several non-Jews if they had ever eaten Jewish food and if they had to tell me which dishes they had sampled. Most of my respondents had not in fact tried them. I also asked several of my Jewish friends which are the most popular typical Jewish dishes they cook and enjoy eating. I also asked them what made these dishes distinctly Jewish. The most common Jewish dishes that were mentioned by both sets of respondents were: *gefilte fish*, *kugel*, *matza balls*, and *chont*. The descriptions are detailed below.

Perhaps the most iconic Jewish dish, gefilte fish was mentioned by nearly all of the respondents. However, most non-Jews and *Sephardi* and *Mizrahi* Jews were not great fans of *gefilte fish*. It was described as "an acquired taste" by some and as "disgusting" by others. Most *Ashkenazis* either liked it or just tolerated eating this dish.

Gefilte fish comes from Yiddish words for "stuffed fish." It is an *Ashkenazi* Jewish dish made traditionally from a poached mixture of ground boned fish, such as carp, mullet, whitefish or pike, which is typically eaten as an appetizer or first course during the Shabbat and Holidays such as Passover, although they may be consumed throughout the year.³³ Although the dish historically consisted of a minced-fish stuffed inside the fish skin, as its name implies, since the 19th century the skin has been removed

³² *Tzimmes* are sweet carrots.

³³ Recently other fish with white flesh such as Nile perch has been substituted.

and the seasoned fish is formed into patties or fish balls. The fish is deboned and the flesh is minced and then mixed with ingredients, including bread crumbs or *matza meal* (flour made from *matza*), fried onions, carrots, eggs, salt and pepper. The fish balls are then boiled in a stock made up of the heads of the fish and seasonings such as celery, carrots, onions. It is served cold or at room temperature. Often, each slice is topped with a slice of boiled carrot, with a horseradish mixture called *khreyn* on the side. *Gefilte fish* may be slightly sweet or savory. Preparation of gefilte fish with sugar or black pepper is considered an indicator of the origin of the Jewish community. Gefilte fish was created so that Jews could cook without breaking the Talmudic law against removing bones on the Shabbat. *Gefilte fish* was described by the non-Jewish participants as either a cold sausage with a sour paste on the top, or as compressed tuna balls with a pickled flavor to it.

Kugel comes from the German word meaning "sphere, globe, ball"; the Yiddish name is derived from a reference to the round, puffed-up shape of the original dishes. Today, *kugel* is a casserole, similar to a pie, most commonly made from egg noodles (lokshen *kugel*) or potatoes baked in square pans. It is a traditional *Ashkenazi* Jewish dish, often served on Shabbat and High Holidays. The first *kugels* were made from bread and flour and were savory rather than sweet.

There are two types of *kugels*: savory and sweet with many variations. Savory *kugels* include potatoes, cabbage, carrots, zucchini, spinach or cheese. Sweet *kugels* typically have cottage cheese, milk and raisins. In Poland, raisins, cinnamon and sweet curd cheese were added to noodle *kugel* recipes. In Romania, this dish it is made with or without cheese, but it most always includes raisins. Some variations include: Cottage cheese noodle *kugel* (dairy); fruit noodle *kugel* (pareve); Jerusalem *kugel* (pareve) is a caramel-pepper noodle pudding that is traditionally during the Shabbat; broccoli *kugel* (pareve); vegetarian *kugel* (pareve); rice *kugel* (pareve) is made with cooked rice, eggs, cinnamon, raisins, and chopped nuts; carrot *kugel* (pareve) is honey-sweetened, with carrots and complemented by lemon rind alternatively made with sweet potatoes, apples, and carrots; and potato *kugel* (pareve). While these other variations are dishes served on Jewish holiday meals and the Shabbat, *matzo kugel* is a common alternative served at Passover. Some of the non-Jews described the sweet *kugel* sampled as delicious apple pie pasta or a cheesy macaroni cake. It was described as sweet noodle and cinnamon comfort food.

Matza balls (in Yiddish, *kneydlekh*) are an *Ashkenazi* Jewish soup dumpling made from a mixture of *matza meal*, eggs, water, and a fat, such as oil, margarine, or *Schmaltz* (chicken fat). *Matza* balls are traditionally served in chicken soup. The texture of *matza* balls may be light or dense, depending on the recipe. Unfamiliar with the concept of

matza, the non-Jewish participants described this dish as being composed of big potato balls, bread balls, eggy bread balls or condensed noodle balls with soup.

Jews only mentioned *chont* or *cholent* (the *Ashkenazi* version) and *hamin* (the *Sephardi* version). Recipes vary but both dishes essentially contain chunks of beef, different types of beans, potatoes, garlic, onions and barley. They may contain bones and other spices. All of the ingredients are cooked with plenty of water in a pot and simmered overnight. *hamin* uses rice instead of beans and barley, and chicken instead of beef. A traditional *Sephardi* addition is whole eggs in the shell (*huevos haminados*), which turn brown overnight. *Chont* often contains *kishke* (a stuffed tripe) or *helzel* (a chicken neck skin stuffed with a flour-based mixture). Usually eaten during the Shabbat day. Cooking begins on Friday before sunset in accordance to the observance of the Shabbat.

Most Jews associate *chont* with the Shabbat and as the ultimate Jewish comfort food. However, most non-Jews are repelled by this dish at the outset. As one person told me "the first time I saw *chont* I thought I was going to throw up. Meat, potatoes and unpeeled eggs thrown in there and full of oil but then I tried it and it was good."

Jewish Food in Mexico

Jewish food in Mexico can be considered as ethnic food fusion since it incorporates many of the culinary traditions of the Jewish immigrants mixed with local flavors and ingredients. The end result is a process of amalgamation, preservation, and innovation of distinctive Jewish and Mexican cuisines. These represent the old and the new, the acculturation and the adapted, the foreign and the local, blended together in a unique combination of flavors, memories and negotiated nuances.

Jewish cooking traditions in Mexico may be characterized as *Ashkenazi*, *Sephardi* and Syrian Jewish. These traditions have been altered and adapted by each influx of immigrants. The introduction of previously unknown foods, such as avocados, *chiles* (hot peppers), and local varieties of cheeses and corn, has resulted in new trends in Jewish cooking.³⁴ Jews of all backgrounds frequent the same stores and meet each other at the local *kosher* bakeries and butcher shops. They then go home to prepare their foods differently, according to their traditional cuisines.

Jewish immigrants continued to eat traditional Jewish food after their arrival, but Mexican dishes gradually entered their cuisine. Thus, initially there was still heavy emphasis on lamb and rice dishes, chicken and potatoes, cabbage, soups made from lentils, beans, lamb, beets; familiar vegetables and fruits, yogurt, and desserts made from pistachio nuts and honey, depending on their place of origin. But the immigrants also

³⁴ Many are fiery hot, while others are sweet, mild, or richly flavored.

began to consume *tortillas* (a type of Mexican flat bread), *pan dulce* (sweet bread), and local varieties of fruits and vegetables. Beef once played a very small part in the diet, but now it is widely consumed. Most former immigrants, regardless of economic status or religious observance, now regularly eat *chiles* and tamarind (a tart fruit), important staples of the Mexican diet. For the immigrants, eating traditional Jewish dishes was a way to safeguard their connection to their native lands, while eating Mexican dishes was a form of integration and acculturation.

For first generation immigrants, meals were a time for the family to gather together.

Everyone was expected to be present at the table at set times. The father might sometimes have been absent from this ritual due to his job obligations, but on weekends he was invariably present. The children and the mother always ate together, strengthening their familial bonds. Over time, second and third generations adopted modern Mexican patterns of eating as well as Mexican foods. Snacks began to play a far larger role in the diet, and television came into the dining area. Today, meals are taken at odd times during the week, and not all the family members eat together. However, dining together has not lost its importance. Family meals on the Shabbat remain traditional, while Sunday lunches, when Mexican families customarily gather, have become an institution as well. Typically, the venue for Sunday lunch is the home of grandparents or other older relatives, or a restaurant.

The Jewish community in Mexico as a whole is considered traditional, but the *Halebis* and the *Shamis* consider themselves quite observant and place great emphasis on traditional foods that are eaten on religious occasions. Nevertheless, they also enjoy the culinary diversity of Mexican dishes, adapting them at home to meet the requirements of *kashrut*. Thus, for example, *tacos al pastor*, traditionally made of spiced pork cooked on a rotisserie, are made instead with shredded beef or spiced fish and garlic, and a popular shrimp cocktail with ketchup and *chipotle chile salsa* is made from imitation crab meat. The dietary restrictions, strictly observed at home, function as a force for maintaining social and cultural unity and discouraging assimilation. Yet, when out on the town, many Jews will partake of local delicacies. Similar to the kosher-style delis popular in the United States, there are many local restaurants that will cater to the Jewish community, especially if they are situated in the vicinity of synagogues or Jewish residencies. Although these venues, will not be called kosher-style by the patrons or will not include this in the name of the restaurants, they will list on the menu different *Kosher* options, such as *kosher* salami, *kosher* imitation crab and will even serve, "kosher" cuts of meat alongside, pork, non-kosher meats or cheese platters. *Kashrut* is often practiced in the house rather than outside it, as Jews strike a balance between maintaining their separate identity and blending in with the general population. This balance is offset by food choices and is not about a rejection of religious beliefs. Many

Jews do not see a contradiction about keeping a kosher kitchen and eating non-kosher foods outside the home.

Chiles are an integral component of the sauces that both Mexicans and Jews like to pour over cooked food, and they are also often eaten as a side dish or condiment at meals. Powdered *chile piquin* is sprinkled over fruit, potato chips, and even lollipops or icicles. *Salsa* made of the *chiles* is eaten at every meal.

Mexican and Jewish dishes use many of the same ingredients, although they are combined differently. Both cuisines emphasize vegetables, used as an accompaniment to main dishes or cooked in different sauces. The most popular vegetables are eggplant, tomatoes, squash, cucumber, cabbage, and *verdolaga*, a Mexican leafy vegetable similar to spinach. A typical dish served by Syrian Jews contains okra and squash flavored with cinnamon, cloves, cumin, and coarse black pepper. *Sephardi* Jews serve chicken with tomatoes, while the *Ashkenazi* eat stuffed cabbage with a tomato and ground beef mixture.

In Mexico, where indigenous populations celebrated the planting and harvesting of corn with religious rites, corn is an important component of everyday food. *Nixtamal*, the basic dough for most corn products, is usually prepared commercially, as are corn *tortillas* in many variations. Cooked on a hot iron griddle called a *comal*, the *tortilla* is bread for a meal. Fried in oil and stuffed with shredded meat, it becomes a *taco*. Fried until crisp and used as a plate for other ingredients, it is a *tostada*. Unbaked *tortillas* become *quesadillas*, usually cheese-filled, or beans, or meat, that are folded in half and formed into turnovers and then deep-fried or eaten warm without frying. *Tortillas* serve as the cases of enchiladas, which are soaked in *salsas*, *adobo* (a ground *chile* and spice mixture), or *mole* (typically a spicy chocolate sauce with twenty-seven different ingredients) and stuffed with meat, chicken or cheese. *Flautas* are long tacos deep-fried and topped with lettuce, *salsa*, and white crumbled cheese³⁵.

Jews had no tradition of cooking with corn, but they now eat it regularly. Rice, viewed by Mexicans as benefiting the soul as well as the body, is central in both cuisines, while wheat is a less common staple, without important cultural associations for either group. Kidney beans (dry or fresh), lima beans, and broad beans, widely used in Jewish cuisine, are still consumed in this community, but so are Mexican pinto and *bayo* beans. For the Mexican, refried beans or whole black beans seasoned with hot spices are almost equal in importance to the *tortilla*. The Jews make refried beans, but without the pork lard or cheese sprinkled on top.

The tomato, integral too many Mexican dishes, is also widely used by Jews as a basis for sauces and stews; both groups enjoy the popular regional dish of *huachinango a la Veracruzana*, Veracruz-style red snapper. Mexicans use cilantro, both the leaf and

³⁵ S. VERTI, *Tradiciones Mexicanas*; M.CHAPA, (eds.). *La cocina mexicana y su arte*.

the seed of fresh coriander, in numerous dishes. The flavorful and highly aromatic seeds are also used whole or ground in a wide variety of Mexican meat stews and soups. Syrian Jews pound cumin and coriander seeds for use in several kinds of curries.

Mexicans and Jews share a liking for fish. Both groups use small fish preserved by salting and drying as a seasoning in other dishes, and both eat *ceviche*, a cocktail salad made of raw fish marinated in lime juice. Many Mexicans do not frequently consume fish for economic reasons, while Jews regularly eat several varieties of it – stewed, curried, fried, or roasted. The *Sephardi* eat the *chraime fish but use local chiles to add the spice*. Typical fish dishes for the *Halebis* include fish stew, cooked with *tahini* (Middle Eastern sesame spread), with saffron, paprika, and *tamarind*; with parsley; and/or with pistachios, mandarin, and lime juice. *Shamis* eat fish cooked with coarse salt. The *Ashkenazi* eat the *gefilte fish*, either in the traditional form known as white, or in the *Veracruzana* style, also known as red *gefilte fish*. All of these variants used some kind of Mexican ingredient, either *chiles*, *tamarind* or local spices showcasing these ingredients as prime examples of food fusion.

Mexicans often feel that they have not really eaten unless some kind of meat product has been consumed in the main mid-day meal. But, as is the case with fish, for much of the indigenous population such cultural perceptions are at odds with economic realities. Thus, steaks, roasts, and stews largely remain festive food, served at weddings and other occasional feasts. Small portions of shredded meat are included in *tacos*, *tostadas*, and *enchiladas*, which are regular fare, served with beans. Many cannot afford these typical foods, either, and they subsist on subsidized foods such as beans and *tortillas*. Daily fare also includes *tortas*, a sandwich made from bread similar to baguettes but wider, smeared with beans and sometimes meat, lettuce, raw onions, and avocado.

Upper-class Mexicans — including the Spanish, French, Japanese, Lebanese, and Syrian Jewish immigrant groups — on the other hand, consume meat daily. The main meal is often not served until late afternoon when children return from school. Many breadwinners who live near their places of employment and can go home for the main meal.

Jews also eat some kind of meat daily. For Jews, this heavy lunch includes several courses. Salad is followed by soup and then a main course of chicken, beef, or fish, as well as two and sometimes three side dishes and dessert. The Mexican staples of rice and beans are the usual side dishes, frequently appearing on Jewish lunch tables along with a vegetable dish prepared in a more typically Jewish style.

Weekday desserts in Mexico, including Jewish homes, usually consist of fruit or cakes or cookies made from wheat flour, rather than traditional treats. For example, they may use the apricots common in Syrian and *Sephardic* cuisine for gelatin molds, but they make peanut butter or coconut gelatin molds, more typically Mexican, as well.

Mexican *ate de membrillo* (quince) candy is adapted to fit the Syrian Jewish palate by adding one and a half kilos of sugar, lemon salt, and lemon juice! Typical Jewish confections are saved for ritual occasions, since their preparation is so time-consuming. The majority of desserts in Syrian Jewish households contain fresh ingredients in order to balance the acidity of the other components. Preserved fruit (particularly apricots) is a specialty of Damascus, while Aleppo is noted for its almond paste. Ashkenazi Jews serve traditional honey cakes or almond cookies, for example. The *Ashkenazi* Jews make *kompot* a non-alcoholic sweet fruit cocktail that uses the juice obtained by cooking fruit in a large volume of water, like apricots, peaches, apples, or sour cherries.

For snacking and desserts, Jews have followed Mexicans in favoring papaya, mango, and pineapple. They have adopted the Mexican custom of eating root vegetables such as *camote* (sweet potato) as snack foods or side dishes and of buying Mexican candy, made from sweet potatoes or bananas, from street vendors. *Piloncillo*, made from caramelized, solidified brown sugar, is another kind of Mexican candy, used to sweeten coffee and a variety of fruits. *Halebi* women use *piloncillo* to make *belta*, candy pieces; the recipe also includes cornstarch, nuts, cinnamon, starch, and twenty-four glasses of water. Mexican Jews even consume such special foods as Mexican bride's cookies and many of the treats of the Christmas season. They have their own parties on Christian holidays, though the gatherings have no religious significance.

Jews and Mexicans have in common several food-related customs that probably originated in similar ideologies. The sharing of food, especially at holiday times, is a social custom practiced by both groups. Adults take presents of food to elderly relatives and receive other foods in exchange. This custom assures that no person in the family or community goes hungry. As has been discussed, family meals are a shared custom, after which elderly relatives who were not present are visited, and some kind of sweet dish is taken to them.

At the *kosher* bakeries serving the community, Jews of all origins can buy each others' traditional breads and pastries: *rugelach* and other Ashkenazi pastries are available alongside pita bread and pre-made *kipe* (the traditional Syrian Jewish dishes involve mixing an emulsified paste of lamb and bulgur wheat, shaping it into small hollow balls) ready to be stuffed, as well as non-baked goods such as *kipe* fillings, *hummus* (Middle Eastern chickpea spread), and *tahini*. Younger women rely on these store-bought goods, while older women still tend to prepare everything at home.

Many foods embody potent Jewish symbols – sweets shaped like Torah scrolls, or holiday appetizers devised around Hebrew word plays or incorporating fruits mentioned in the Scriptures. The rituals of preparing and serving traditional foods imbue daily domestic work with sacredness, strengthening the family's ties to Judaism and ensuring that it remains part of a network that includes the entire Jewish people.

Each Jewish holiday and life-cycle event is replete with its own set of laws and customs. Tradition plays an important role in the selection of food for special occasions. A ceremonial meal marks important events, such as a *brit milah* (circumcision), a wedding, or a housewarming. After a funeral, a mourner's female relatives provide a meal, the *se'udat havra'ah* (meal of consolation), in accordance with the Talmudic injunction that "a mourner is forbidden to eat of his own bread on the first day of mourning." No food may be taken to a mourner's house by guests who are relatives of the deceased. Typical foods for the first day of the seven-day mourning period include hard-boiled eggs with pita or bread, rice and lentils, rice with almonds, and various salads. *Shamis* eat no food containing meat on that day, while *Halebis* do eat rice with chicken broth. During the mourning period the *Shamis* eat *Esfija*, closed triangular meat turnovers.

Ritual is action that speaks to the mind and heart, though it does not necessarily make sense in a literal context³⁶. From the perspective of the women of this study, the fact that they cook and prepare for holidays and special occasions means that it is they who are the ritual experts and the guardians of traditions.³⁷ Men may perform the public food rituals and dominate ceremonial food offerings (reciting Hebrew blessings, distributing *challah*, sitting at the head of the table), but women are the predominant agents of food provision. Holidays require a great deal of time in the kitchen.

The *Shabbat*, is a day of rest, prayer, and religious study for men. For women it means cooking (according to Jewish law, before the *Shabbat* actually begins) and serving food to others. Most of them stay at home to set the table and prepare salads for the large meal that they will serve when their husbands return from the synagogue. The quantity, variety, and complexity of the food are the women's way of honoring the *Shabbat*.

Typical *Ashkenazi Shabbat* meals may include, roasted chicken, *geharte liver* (chopped chicken liver pate), chicken soup with or without *matza balls*, *tzimmes* and *chont*. *Halebi Shabbat* meals may include white rice or *myedra* (rice with lentils and fried onions, known as *umyedra* by the *Shamis*); various dishes made with beef and chicken; chicken livers with onions; rice *kipe* with prunes and apricots; bullet-shaped pasta with chickpeas, bulgur wheat with beef; *halub* (made with veal and artichoke hearts); *chile relleno* (Mexican stuffed *poblano* pepper); stuffed eggplant with rice; orange sponge cake; *cocada de nuez* (a Mexican coconut and peanut candy); and sweet cakes made from figs and almonds and/or apricots. The *Shamis* eat rice *kipe* with artichoke hearts; chicken soup with *Hamud* (sour tomato soup with potatoes, chicken,

³⁶ C. BELL. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*.

³⁷ On the use of the term "ritual experts" in relation to women's domestic duties see S. STARR SERED. *Women As Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem*.

celery, parsley, and rice *kipe*); zucchini and radish salad; Mexican salad (diced tomatoes, onions, *cilantro*, avocado, olive oil, lime juice, and *Serrano chiles*); Arabic salad (which, unlike that of the *Halebis*, includes celery, spring onions, black olives, vinegar, cumin, and *Serrano chiles*), and stuffed zucchinis or vine leaves. During the *Shabbat* typically no dairy foods are consumed.

For Jews everywhere, sweet foods are traditionally eaten on *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year. Jews from Arab lands also eat symbolic foods. Beetroot and beet leaves symbolize the hope that the Jews' adversaries will be banished. White lima beans symbolize the purity of good deeds, while a calf's tongue signifies the hope of surging forward in all endeavors. A fish head or lamb's head, which according to the *Shulhan Arukh* symbolizes "being at the head rather than the tail," is served to the father as head of the household. Other foods served prior to the meal include *chilacayotes*, squash, chard pieces cooked with a bit of salt, *burghul* dip and crudités, *burekas* filled with spinach or mashed potatoes and onion, and *hummus*. The main course, including *kipe*, roast chicken, *loubia* (green beans), stuffed zucchini or *hoja yebra* (vine leaves), chicken and rice, or cod fish with mint sauce, may be followed by a gelatin mold with apricots and almonds, fresh fruit, orange sponge cake, or date cake.

On the eve of *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), meat is generally eaten before the fast. Some homes serve chicken soup made from the chicken used in the *kapparah*³⁸ ritual (in others, the chicken is given to the poor), while others have soup made with artichoke hearts, chicken or *kipe*, and rice. The next evening, Jews break the fast at the synagogue with honey cakes, orange juice, black tea, and a meal at home of chicken soup, potato dishes, okra in tomato sauce, and various salads, followed by Arabic coffee or almond *shrab* (the white color symbolizing purity), and often sesame cakelets. Family customs vary, and considerable cultural crossover is seen: For example, sponge cakes usually associated with *Ashkenazi* cuisine appear on tables in the vestibules of Syrian synagogues at the end of the fast. Traditional dishes for *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles) include *kipe*, sweet and sour stuffed cabbage, mashed potatoes with onions and garlic, stuffed zucchini, and vine leaves. For *Hoshanah Rabbah* (the seventh day of *Sukkot*), the *challah* is sometimes marked with a hand, symbolic of reaching for blessings, or it may be key-shaped, to open the door of heaven to prayers. At *Hanukkah* time, potato pancakes borrowed from *Ashkenazi* cuisine as well as donuts fried in oil recall the miracle of the oil that allowed the rededication of the Temple.

Tu bishvat, the traditional New Year for trees, is marked with fruits symbolic of spring and renewal. In many Syrian Jewish communities, blessings are pronounced at

³⁸ *Kapparah* (expiation) is a custom practiced in certain Orthodox circles, in which a person's sins are symbolically transferred to a fowl, usually on the day before the Day of Atonement, but in some communities also on the day before *Rosh Hashanah* or on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

the table over foods traditionally associated with the Land of Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and honey. Syrian Jews distribute *ma'ot perot* (fruit money), and each child is presented with a *bolsa de frutas* (bag of fruit).

All communities make cookies and pastries filled with poppy seeds for Purim, in the shape of Haman's hat, pockets, or ears. The Purim *challah* is giant-sized and braided, representing the long ropes used to hang Haman. Syrian Jews also fill triangular pastries with meat, vegetables, or fruit. For *mishloah manot* (the traditional distribution of treats to friends and neighbors), Syrian Jewish women make sugar-starch fingers in various colors, cakes filled with cardamom and almonds or other nuts, *diafe* (types of sweets made from chocolate, candied almonds, apricot, pistachios, or marzipan), cornstarch and coconut candies called *almasie*, and various kinds of pancakes. And of course they serve Arabic coffee to those who come to visit.

Passover means that cooking and cleaning – time-consuming, repetitive, physically demanding activities that women do all year – at least temporarily become honored and even sacred rites³⁹. Most women purchase *matza* (plain, egg, and chocolate-covered) from one of many *kosher* stores in Mexico (or one of the supermarkets that has a special *kosher* section), but a few still bake traditional Syrian round *matza* from scratch. Syrian Jews eat rice and legumes during Passover. To ensure that no forbidden grains were mixed in during harvesting or storage, the women sort the rice grain by grain, going through it seven times (a lucky number) in order to clean it properly.

The elimination of leaven from the home has resulted in a rich menu of *matza* meal and potato foods, such as dumplings and pancakes; as with other holidays, there is a crossover between *Ashkenazi*, *Sephardi* and Syrian Jewish cuisine. *Kneydlach*, *matza* or potato dumplings, which are typically *Ashkenazi* but are consumed by all sectors of the community, are popular at Passover, in soups or as side dishes or desserts. They may be filled with meat or liver, potatoes, or fruits. Other dishes adapted for Passover show a Mexican influence. Typical Passover foods include potato *kipe* (made of potatoes, *matza* flour instead of *burghul*, and eggs, and filled with meat, rice, eggplant, tuna, or a combination of three typical Mexican cheeses – *manchego*, *panela*, and *oaxaca*); *kipe nabulsie larga* (stuffed with veal, onions, pine nuts, mixed peppers, and cinnamon); spinach casserole; potato salad with eggs and parsley; steamed asparagus; and *kaftes* (beef patties). Noodles are made by rolling up and cutting *matza* meal pancakes into strips. *Haroset* – traditionally eaten at the *Seder* (special festive meal), in which it represents the mortar used by the Jewish slaves to assemble Pharaoh's bricks – is made from red wine, dates, raisins, nuts, and cinnamon, and is also served as a dessert and/or snack.

³⁹ N. FALK; R. GROSS (eds.). *Unspoken Words: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures*; S. STARR SERED. *Women As Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem*.

For *Shavuot*, the women bake cookies and sweets in the shape of mountains and Torah scrolls to commemorate the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Jews traditionally eat dairy foods on *Shavuot*; among Syrian Jews, cold cucumber soup and *riz b'halib* (rice pudding) are traditional, as is saffron bread. In Jewish communities everywhere, no meat or wine is consumed during the first nine days of the month of Av (except on the *Shabbat*), as a sign of mourning for the destruction of the Temple. Like the *Ashkenazi*, the Syrian Jews eat farinaceous and other pastry food, baked or boiled and accompanied with cheese. The fast of the Ninth of Av is preceded by a dairy meal that also includes an egg dipped in ashes.

Concluding Remarks

As it has been presented, food is an important element and the way it is experienced narrates the multiple traditions and identities (Jewish, Mexican, Israeli, etc.). Food is central and vital within the Jewish tradition. It serves as a vehicle for continuity, connection to memory, lineage, and cultural inheritance. Food choices – what we choose to eat (or not eat), what we share with friends, and what we feed to our families – are influenced by cultural considerations and surroundings. As is the case of Jews in Mexico, food is more than what is eaten. It is a shared vocabulary (e.g., recipes) that can serve as a link between traditionally observant or non-observant Jews. Jewish food in Mexico is an integral part of a collective voice, memories and adaptation.

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