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Flavors of Identity:
Jewish Cookbooks as Cultural Artifacts

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Introduction

Whenever I told someone I was writing a rabbinic thesis on Jewish cookbooks, they invited me into their kitchen. “Cookbooks!?” they said, “I have the most incredible one!” Sometimes centrally displayed, sometimes tucked away, more often than not stained, as people showed me their cookbooks, they also shared stories: stories about holidays celebrated, restaurants visited, vacations taken, ancestors deceased, countries escaped, and traditions maintained. These cookbooks spanned a massive variety: from old, tattered, and faded sisterhood cookbooks from obscure towns to innovative, contemporary, middle-eastern fusion cookbooks curated by famous James Beard Award-winning chefs. I was always most excited when someone pulled out a small box overflowing with handwritten index cards containing the most treasured and practiced recipes of a particular family.

Over the course of my research, I encountered family cookbooks, cookbooks representing synagogues, charities, and neighborhoods, and educational cookbooks geared towards home economics. These collections of recipes celebrated everything from religiosity to veganism, triumph to sorrow, traditionalism to innovation, diversity in the context of Jewish community to one specific and beloved bubbe. Every cookbook told a story of how culture, time, and place influenced a particular culinary point of view.

But what makes a cookbook Jewish? The literary critic Ilan Stavans asks a similar question about literature in general:

> Is there a fundamental difference between Jewish literature and other literary traditions? Is it religion? A national quest? Antisemitism? A shared sense of history? What brings together books as disparate as Luis de Carvajal’s Autobiography, Sholem Aleichem’s Tevye’s Daughters, Isaac Babel’s Odessa Tales, Arthur’s Miller’s Death of a Salesman, Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem, Clarice Lispector’s Hour of the Star, Art

> Spiegelman's Maus, and David Grossman's To the End of the Land? One explanation is that they come to us in translation. Another one is that what unites the authors is a shared sense of being outsiders—even when they are on the inside.[1]

With regard to our subject, we might ask: must a Jewish cookbook be written by a Jewish person? Must a Jewish cookbook tell of another country and the unique ingredients found there, long since forsaken? Should the recipes adhere to Jewish law and tradition through inherited culinary preferences? Or perhaps more simply, is a Jewish cookbook one with a Passover section?

One of the best-selling cookbooks of all time, *The Settlement Cook Book,* compiled by Lizzie Kander and first published in 1901, does not seem Jewish at first glance. Inspired by the "Settlement House" movement, establishments founded to help recent immigrants from Europe assimilate to American culture, the cookbook lacks any explicit holiday section, never once mentions words such as "Jewish" or "Hebrew," and encourages the consumption of blatantly non-kosher ingredients. Devoid of any explicit association with Judaism, according to the religion scholar Nora Rubel, what codes the text as Jewish "is what the cookbook includes, rather than what it omits."[2] Geared towards assimilation, yet discreetly containing recipes such as Creplich, Brisket with Sauerkraut, Matzos-Marrow Balls, *The Settlement Cookbook* paints a

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Ilan Stavans, *Jewish Literature a Very Short Introduction* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3.

[2] Nora Rubel, "A 'Jewish' Joy of Cooking? How a 20th Century Cookbook Containing Frog's Legs, Snails, and Ham Became a Beloved Jewish Icon," *The Value of the Particular: Lessons from Judaism and the Modern Jewish Experience*, April 14, 2015, pp. 268-297, 271.

picture of an assimilated Jewish identity of a specific time and place, that is, the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.[3]

The Israeli Folklore Cook Book, written by Molly Bar David, and the most popular cookbook published in Israel in the 1960s, represents a different Jewish community, identity, and place. Newly established as an independent state, with a rapidly increasing population made up of refugees from post-Holocaust Europe and the Arab and Muslim world, Israel found itself lacking in both food and foreign currency. The cookbook, which organizes recipes into categories including Israeli national holidays and Jewish festivals, illuminates the realities of this particular chapter of Israeli history. Quantities are specified according to the limitations imposed by the Israeli government's austerity policy. Recipes come from Jewish communities across the world, indicating the array of Jewish immigrant cultures interacting and negotiating in the newly established state.[4]

Cookbooks can be understood as vehicles of memory, preserving a particular moment of existence. Jewish cookbooks are cultural artifacts that tell the story of communities through textures and flavors, smells, and advice. The folklorist Janet Theophano has written, "Recipe books allude to meals and events, people and places, successes and failures, joys and sorrows, lives and deaths of those loved and known. In summary, they represent the life worlds-past

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[3] Simon Kander and Lizzie Kander, *The "Settlement" Cook Book: The Way to a Man's Heart* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).

[4] Molly Bar David , 1964 , *ספר בשול פולקלורי*.

present-of their creators."[5] Cookbooks thus stand at the juncture between past and present, absence and endurance, conjuring into existence people and events long gone.

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall has written, "Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."[6] Hall discusses the way that people with shared ancestry often produce the concept of collective culture by creating "stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history."[7] Indeed, over time, Jewish communities around the world have been faced with establishing identity despite their precarious position in relation to dominant colonial powers and removed from overarching systems of power. Internally resistant to different degrees but almost always restricted from assimilating completely into the mainstream, Jews have been archetypal outsiders, relying on transience for survival. That transience is also reflected in Jewish identity itself, as Hall writes, the formation of cultural identity as a process of not only "being" but also "becoming," affirming that identity is often much more than a fixed story, undergoing "constant transformation."[8]

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[5] Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 82.

[6] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora [1990]," *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, February 2021, pp. 257-271.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

The reality of displacement, readjustment, movement, and change, are expressed in many of Judaism's traditions. In each generation, new minds and scholars engage with Torah from their own cultural context, and rituals undergo processes of innovation to suit ever-shifting landscapes and climates. Cooking traditions were also influenced by realities of particular places and periods. Recipes developed depending on what was available, what was popular and esteemed, what was relevant in the context of greater cultural forces, and what was treasured and carried from a previous home verse what was left behind in haste.

While traditional Jewish texts convey the dynamic past of Judaism while speaking to the intellect of the present, cookbooks do the same, adding the additional aspect of physical gratification. Cookbooks tell a story of Judaism that is not only intellectual but embodied. Recipes for chicken soup, for example, appear in almost every Jewish cookbook I have studied, reflecting the diverse expressions of Jewish identity from region to region, but also, I suggest, the universal Jewish value of warmth, nurturing, and healing of body and soul.

Moreover, while classical Jewish religious literature (law, commentary, mystical texts) is often produced by and attributed to men, Jewish recipes represent the work of women, community members who are always present but rarely canonized. They speak, in particular, to how women experienced the passages of Jewish history, family to family, and how women communicated and conserved Jewish practices such as Shabbat or dietary law (kashrut).

This thesis explores the ways in which the complicated, diverse, and ever-evolving story of the Jewish people has been communicated through cookbooks. I embark on this exploration by studying two Jewish cookbooks that come from different historical periods and geographical locations. After providing a historical profile of each community, I analyze the recipes,

instructions, and descriptions present in each cookbook in addition to examining their paratexts, that is, the layout, accompanying stories, photographs, advertisements they include. Through considering factors that have impacted Jewish community and tradition over time such as migration, and colonization, I consider ways in which the cookbooks reflect cultural realities, from assimilation to nostalgia. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates how the Jewish cookbook has been a cultural artifact capable of defining and symbolizing the dynamism of the Jewish culture across time and geography.

Chapter 1: B’nai Zion Sisterhood, Shreveport, Louisiana

Cookbook: *The 1914 Cookbook*

Published in 1914 by the B’nai Zion Sisterhood, Shreveport, Louisiana

> *New Orleans Jewish life is defined by Creole and African American culture, the power of place, the overpowering desire to demonstrate allegiance to this distinctive region of the South, and the role of women who shape Jewish life in this city. Whether they were descendants of French and German cotton factors or eastern European merchants, New Orleans Jews all share something in common—a love for good food. Once Jews encountered the unique cuisine and culture of this region, there was no chance that Judaism practiced along the lower Mississippi could remain untouched by the flavors of this world.*[9]

—Marcie Cohen Ferris in Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South

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[9] Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), 252.

From Pedaling to Philanthropy

Located in the northwest corner of Louisiana, adjoining Texas and Arkansas, Shreveport's proximity to the Red River made it a major trading center. The region was the territory of indigenous peoples before coming under Spanish and French colonial rule. Although distant from New Orleans, Shreveport's Jewish community was an outgrowth of the Jewish community of New Orleans, to which it was connected through trade and social networks.

The first Jews in New Orleans were Portuguese and came directly from Curacao in 1757 seeking fresh beginnings and new opportunities on the North American mainland. In these early days, stability of Jewish comfort and inclusion remained precarious under colonial structures; as power passed between French and Spanish rule, and consequently Jews did not found a synagogue or actively express their identity. Under French rule, the Code Noire which "primarily regulated commercial and religious standards regarding the African slave trade" [10] also explicitly banned Jews from all of France's American colonies, including Louisiana. However, as was often the case with American colonies of European nations, colonists were more focused on developing trade in the region than following the strictures of royal courts thousands of miles away. From the French colonists' perspective, Jews had useful experience and connections in shipping and commerce.[11]

Jewish life in Shreveport began with the arrival of the first Jewish merchants in 1724. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 led to a gradual expansion of Jewish life as the protections of

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[10] Emily Ford and Barry Stiefel, *The Jews of New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta A History of Life & Community along the Bayou* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012), 18.

[11] "ISJL - Louisiana New Orleans Encyclopedia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, https://www.isjl.org/louisiana-new-orleans-encyclopedia.html.

the US Constitution were granted to the citizens of the newly acquired territory. Jews arrived from Central and Eastern European countries where “quotas were placed on the Jewish community regarding property, marriage and even the number of children a Jewish family could have.”[12] Therefore, the potential to relocate and start fresh was an appealing opportunity. At the same time, New Orleans expanded to accommodate a number of new cultures and languages. Migrants from Mexico and Cuba, British Canada, and British West Florida, led to new interactions among linguistic, racial, and ethnic groups.

By the 1830s, Alsatian Jews and German Jews began to settle in Louisiana, as the cost of ship passage to the United States declined. The Alsatian Jews settled in Louisiana because they could expect some comfort in the familiarity of the language. Jews from the Alsace’s neighboring German-speaking regions were also enticed to migrate to Louisiana. These Europeans, who were historically prevented from owning land, established dry-goods stores, clothing stores, grocery stores and other retail and wholesale businesses. Many of these Jewish migrants began as peddlers traveling across the countryside and among the towns along the Mississippi River. Peddling was a profession that Jews had adopted in Europe, a product of the precarious status of Jewishness in many cultural and societal contexts. According to the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, “Jewish peddlers and merchants from Germany and Alsace began to arrive [in Shreveport] soon after the town’s founding,”[13] and by 1848, twelve Jewish families lived in Shreveport.

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[12] Emily Ford and Barry Stiefel, *The Jews of New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta A History of Life & Community along the Bayou* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012), 28.

[13] “ISJL - Louisiana New Orleans Encyclopedia,” Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, https://www.isjl.org/louisiana-new-orleans-encyclopedia.html.

America explicitly and outwardly promised religious freedom, and race (as opposed to religion) divided society. Therefore, being White-passing in a region where skin color was more important than religious identity or cultural heritage promised an unfamiliar and unique opportunity for social acceptance. And unlike enslaved populations oppressed due to skin color, southern Jews were able to move up in American society, a position of equality historically denied to Jews in their European countries of origin. Because of their origins, religion, and ethnicity, Jews often remained outsiders. The fact that they could pass as White in the American South meant that they also had the option to assimilate and thereby shed their outsider status. The historian Abraham J. Peck has described that assimilation as the circumstance "Whereby a minority takes on many of the values and practices of the majority group" and has suggested that assimilation "was indeed possible for Southern Jewry, and may have been their only choice."[14]

Faced with the possibility of acceptance and security, conditions long denied to Jews in Europe, Southern Jews sought to show that they were as at home in the South as their Christian counterparts. In the years prior to and during the Civil War, this meant that Southern Jews expressed support of slavery and the Confederacy. The historian Henry Feingold has written, "For their own part, Jews were anxious not to be set apart from other Southerners, owning slaves, if not for labor, then for status. They imbibed generously of its pervasive racist sentiment and participated in the ritualized violence."[15] Or in the words of the historian Clive Webb, "Confronted with such a hostile political climate, Jews had little choice but to accept slavery.

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[14] Abraham J. Peck, "That Other 'Peculiar Institution': Jews and Judaism in the Nineteenth Century South," *Modern Judaism* 7, no. 1 (1987): pp. 99-114, 100

[15] Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America: The Jewish Experience from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: David & Charles, 2002), 61.

Those who did harbor doubts about the ethics of the slave system kept such thoughts to themselves for fear of provoking an anti-Semitic backlash."[16]

In other words, recent immigrants who did not want to relive the isolation and antisemitism they experienced in Europe took on the practices and values of the majority in order to construct a sense of belonging, protect themselves from appearing alien, and avoid attacks from their Christian neighbors. In this, they were largely successful. The historians Arthur W. Bergeron Jr. and Lawrence Lee Hewitt have observed, "Nowhere else in the United States had Jews been as fully accepted into the mainstream of society. Nowhere else in the United States had Jews become as fully integrated into the political and economic fabric of everyday life."[17] Similarly, Rabbi Bertram W. Korn, who wrote several works on the relationship between Northern and Southern Jews, posited that because of the existence of slavery and racially inspired hierarchy, Southern Jews were far more united behind the south during the Civil War than their Northern counterparts. The race-based social hierarchy meant that Jews could achieve a greater degree of acceptance there than in the North.[18]

In 1861, Rabbi Samuel M. Isaacs, a prominent leader in early the development of Ashkenazi Judaism New York, called on Shreveport's Jews to stand by the flag and maintain allegiance to the Union. The Shreveport communities rejected this suggestion outright and by professing loyalty to the Confederacy. The city's Jewish residents were therefore able to

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[16] Clive Webb, *Fight against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 7.

[17] Lawrence L. Hewitt and Arthur W. Bergeron, *Louisianians in the Civil War* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 73.

[18] Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001).

maintain amicable relations with their non-Jewish neighbors during the Civil War and in the years that followed. Along the same lines, According to the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, each year the Jewish community would host the annual Shreveport Purim Ball held from 1873 to 1882. This event "embodied and reinforced the spirit of religious harmony and communal good-will that pervade the town."[19] This ball, held at the Jewish festival, was attended by non-Jews and a "fixture of the Shreveport social calendar."[20]

As the Jewish population of New Orleans and Shreveport steadily increased during the 19th century, Jews began to build commercial and cultural foundations thanks to their growing wealth and success. However, like many of American Jews of this period, they were not known for their religious observance. Jacob Solis, a Jewish businessman from New York, visited New Orleans in 1828 and was shocked to discover that there was no matzah for Passover. In response, he decided to officially organize the growing Jewish community of New Orleans, establishing Shaarei Chesed, the first congregation in America outside of the original thirteen states. The congregation's bylaws are notable because they included nontraditional innovations such as allowing non-Jewish spouses of members to be buried in the Jewish cemetery.[21]

During the mid- and late-nineteenth century, women's roles in American Jewish society began to also shift. American Jews quickly rose to the middle class and took on the associated bourgeois gender norms. Jewish women now were "depicted and viewed themselves as having special 'Sensibilities,' and 'Noble Natures,' being powerless, and requiring male assistance and

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[19] "ISJL - Louisiana New Orleans Encyclopedia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, https://www.isjl.org/louisiana-new-orleans-encyclopedia.html.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

indulgence."[22] They were encouraged to avoid commerce and public life and relegated to the home. One public arena where they could play a role was the realm of social service. In the words of historian Mark Bauman "benevolence was an area that could be viewed as within the woman's purview," and women began to take on roles that enabled them to organize and work on behalf of "benevolent societies."[23]

Following the lead of their Protestant neighbors, they began to "understand philanthropic service as the natural religious expression of all women."[24] The work of Jewish women reached beyond projects in the Jewish community, providing support to non-Jews and the general community, contributing to patriotic causes particularly during times of unrest, and building synagogues, which "With such benevolence, these women clearly felt and acted on a sense of identity with fellow Jews that transcended divisive factors while, at the same time, maintaining a positive image of Jews for the Christian community."[25] Giving charity and supporting organizations created to help others was conveniently both in keeping with Jewish tradition as well as adopting the expectations of Southern nobility.

The acceptance of women's leadership in relation to benevolent societies, combined with the societal restructuring spurred by the Civil War, paved the way for women to assume new

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[22] Mark K. Bauman and Ronald H. Bayor, *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History: Studies in Institution Building, Leadership, Interaction, and Mobility* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2019), 78.

[23] Ibid., 79.

[24] June Sochen, *Consecrate Every Day the Public Lives of Jewish American Women, 1880-1980* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014), 46.

[25] Mark K. Bauman and Ronald H. Bayor, *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History: Studies in Institution Building, Leadership, Interaction, and Mobility* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2019), 40.

positions of power and influence. The 1914 Cookbook of the B’nai Zion Temple Guild of Shreveport was demonstrative of this new kind of leadership. And as the first Southern Jewish charity cookbook, it is an example of an evolution of women's influence. The journalist Roselyn Bell has noted:

> Cookbooks, particularly those of the fund-raising charitable variety, were instruments for building women’s sense of community.Through community cookbooks, women in the sisterhoods of synagogues as well as in other philanthropic groups could assert control over a portion of the budget of the synagogue or charitable institution. The cookbooks are a window into what those female-centric communities were about. Beyond sharing recipes, the contributors to the community cookbooks shared humor, cooperative leadership, and, usually, lack of rabbinical input.[26]

Because it allowed women to represent themselves outwardly, the cookbook is emblematic of a time period when Jewish women were finding their voice in the context of greater society and culture.

[26] Roselyn Bell, Becoming American in the Kitchen: Gender, Acculturation, and American Jewish Cookbooks: 1870s-1930s, February 2009, 3.

The Cookbook: “ Uncooked French Candies” and “Husbands”

The *1914 B’nai Zion Temple Guild Cookbook* begins and ends with pages of advertisements. These advertisements do not exist separately from the contents of the cookbook. In fact, cooking metaphors are used throughout, for example, the advertisement for “Continental Bank & Trust Co.” includes the advice, “Good cooking is essential to good health. Moral: Use the recipes contained in this book. Good banking is essential to good financial health. Moral: Do business with the Continental Bank & Trust Company.”

These advertisements paint a picture of the Shreveport Jewish community depicting commercial opportunities, scopes, and interests. While none of the companies or products advertised are explicitly Jewish, it can be assumed that these advertisements were affiliated to the Jews of Shreveport in some way; they were either owned by Jews or patronized by Jews. And Jews, as we noted, owned many prosperous businesses and storefronts in the center of town. These advertisements also signal the Jews of Shreveport’s ascent from immigrants and peddlers, to rootedness in the city’s middle class, possessing funds available to store in banks and the resources necessary to invest in luxury clothing items.

Some advertisements promote food products such as “Red Velva Syrup” to “Dr. Price's Delicious Flavoring Extract,” claiming to be “recommended by the authors of this Book whenever Extracts are called for in recipes.” Others advertise quintessential Southern Jewish businesses: dry good stores; “Hermon Loeb, Cotton Buyer;" Zodiag’s boutique where “The Woman Who Knows, When in need of ready to wear or millinery always shop at Zodiag’s;" and “The Youngest, But Growing the Fastest, Imperial Shoe Store,” managed by “Jno. H. Breiffeihl "

and “opposite the courthouse." At the end of the book, the advertisements highlight businesses whose products make statements about class and privilege. There are advertisements for jewelry stores; to “Excelsior Steam Laundry, where quality counts;” to “Berstein-Smith Automobile Co.;" and, “Mr. Levy’s Sons, the home of GOOD clothes.” The advertisements make clear that the community that produced the book had the financial means necessary to to afford these luxury goods. One page may even contain two competing businesses, such as “Hirsch & Lemon Stationers" positioned directly below “Cahn’s Book and Stationery Store."

In spite of the ideal of domesticity to which middle class Jew women were committed, the prominent businesses advertising in the cookbook points to women's ability to secure funds, network, lead, and leverage authority in this time period. Women were not only the authors of the cookbook but presumably the consumers of the recipes within, thus one can assume the target market of these advertisements were women. Not only do these advertisements prove women's ability to interact with outward facing commercial culture, but they also suggest that men accepted and adhered to the scope of influence that women's organizations had. The advertisements reinforce the idea that following greater societal shifts, this chapter in American Jewish assimilation marked a moment where the values of leadership within the private sphere began to be relevant, accepted, and encouraged in the public sphere. Moreover, unlike expressing values and leadership within the context of home-keeping, the creation of the cookbook as a recorded document meant to be shared and consumed by the public delineated a shift in the authority held by women.

Unexpectedly, the first recipe in the book does not instruct the reader in the cooking of a dish, but rather the cooking of husbands. This humorous preface, which appears before any other

more traditional recipes in the cookbook, is a statement about the evolving nature of women's roles in early-twentieth-century Shreveport while simultaneously shedding a light onto the multilayered identities, personalities, and values of the women writing. The recipe, entitled “An Old, But Good Recipe for Cooking Husbands” reads:

> A good many husbands are utterly spoiled by mismanagement. Some women go about it as if their husbands were bladders, and blow them up. Others keep them constantly in hot water. Others let them freeze by their carelessness and indifference. Some keep them ni [sic] a pickle all their lives. It cannot be supposed that any husband will be tender and good, managed in this way, but they are really delicious when properly treated. In selecting your husband you should not be guided by the silvery appearance, as in buying a mackerel, nor by the golden tint, as if you wanted a salmon. Be sure to select him yourself, as tastes differ. Do not go to market for him, as the best are always brought to your door. It is far better to have none, unless you will patiently learn how to cook him. A preserving kettle, of the finest porcelain is best, but if you have nothing but an earthenware pipkin, it will do, with care. See that the linen in which you wrap him is nicely washed and mended, with the required number of buttons, and strings tightly sewn on. Tie him in the kettle by a strong silk cord called Comfort, as the one called Duty is apt to be weak. Make a clear, steady fire out of Love, Neatness and Cheerfulness. Set him as near this as seems to agree with him. If he sputters and fizzes, do not be anxious—some husbands do this ’till they are quite done. Add a little sugar, in the form of what confectioners call kisses, but no vinegar or pepper, on any account. A little spice improves him, but it must be used with judgment. Do not stick any sharp instrument into him to see if he is becoming tender. Stir him gently, watching the while, lest he lie too flat and close to the kettle, and so become useless. You cannot fail to know when he is done. “If thus treated, you will find him very reliable, agreeing nicely with you and the children; and he will keep as long as you want, unless you become careless and set him in too cold a place.

The decision to begin the cookbook with this passage makes a striking statement about the women's position, values, and culture. First, it is made clear by the “husbands” section that the women writing felt a sense of autonomy over their work as well as ownership over the community that would consume it. The historians Debrah Dash Moore and Noa Gutterman have written, “The cookbook opens to public scrutiny aspects of their domestic realm reinforcing their

sense of agency over their Jewish lives."[27] The satirical recipe implies that the women writing are not only aware of the gendered dimensions of cooking, they are empowered to examine and critique it, even through the lens of humor. The political theorist Kennan Ferguson has written that, the presence of a recipe "implicitly rebukes a social order that devalues women's work, authorizes forms of communication and knowledge that have been ignored and suppressed, and brings into being collective forms of social, economic, and political identity."[28] Cooking was clearly a gendered role women were expected to adhere to. Yet while "cooking" men or securing men in their roles as providers and fathers through fulfilling domestic duties was expected, by including the husbands recipe, that women of Shreveport critiqued the social order where they were subject to husbands good and bad. In a society that presumed a gendered division of labor, they boldly claimed "no husband" is better than "a bad one."

After the "husbands" introduction, the book continues with a section of "appetizers." The section begins, "a daintily served appetizer not only decorates the table but is an incentive to the appetite," and thereby communicates the values of Southern hospitality and domesticity. The writers state that these appetizer dishes are meant to decorate the table–they serve an aesthetic function, not merely a nutritional one–and they imply that they are to be served for a special occasion, perhaps in an entertaining or hosting capacity, and likely for a group. These are dishes to be shared with people outside of the direct household, and serve as an opportunity to publicly display the family's disposable wealth and bourgeois sensibilities. The first two recipes, sardine

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[27] Deborah Dash Moore and Noa Gutterman, "Cooking Reform Judaism," *Sisterhood*, 2013, pp. 134-158, 135.

[28] Kennan Ferguson, "Intensifying Taste, Intensifying Identity: Collectivity through Community Cookbooks," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37, no. 3 (2012): pp. 695-717, 713.

relish and caviar relish, utilize costly ingredients, moreover, expressing the writer's socio-economic status.

Subsequent recipes for both crab and oyster cocktails address Jewish dietary law. Because these seafood ingredients lack scales, they are not considered kosher. The recipe for crab cocktail calls for “imported crabs" and suggests having as many cocktail glasses as there are guests further emphasizing that these dishes are to be served when publicly presenting the inner workings and values of the home through hosting. By conspicuously displaying the family’s lack of adherence to Jewish custom, serving these dishes at public events would have signaled the family’s adoption into the local culinary customs. Shreveport's Jews, in their cookbook and in their homes, thus presented themselves as at one with greater Christian society.

The section goes on to include recipes that showcase non-local, certainly imported fruits such as dates, prunes, and figs. The historian Carole Balin remarks that the imported fruits and crab as well as the caviar and salted almonds express an “ethos of civility and aesthetics,” connected with aspirations for social mobility.[29] From the ability to purchase expensive ingredients to a willingness and interest in serving quintessentially non-kosher delicacies, the appetizer section appears to be indistinguishable from any other cookbook created by non-Jewish women of the time. That being said, perhaps the emphatic extent to which imported, non-kosher foods were emphasized, is precisely what makes the appetizer section distinguishably Jewish too.

The “soup” section includes more distinguishably Jewish recipes. The centrality of soup as a staple dish is conveyed in the first recipe called “soup.” It reads, “boil soup meat in a closely

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[29] Carole B. Balin, Dana Herman, and Jonathan D. Sarna, *Sisterhood a Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013), 8

covered kettle used for no other purpose." We might imagine that this instruction, unparalleled elsewhere in the cookbook, is a relic of a time when the recipe's author's family observed dietary laws and reserved a special pot so as to ensure the meticulous separation of milk and meat. But our discussion above about crab and oyster cocktails, indicates that the community did not observe the norms of Jewish dietary law. They may not have been religiously compelled to separate a pot for only one type of cooking, but preserved the custom of a specific meat soup pot to retain a sense of Jewish distinctiveness in the thoroughly private realm of the kitchen.

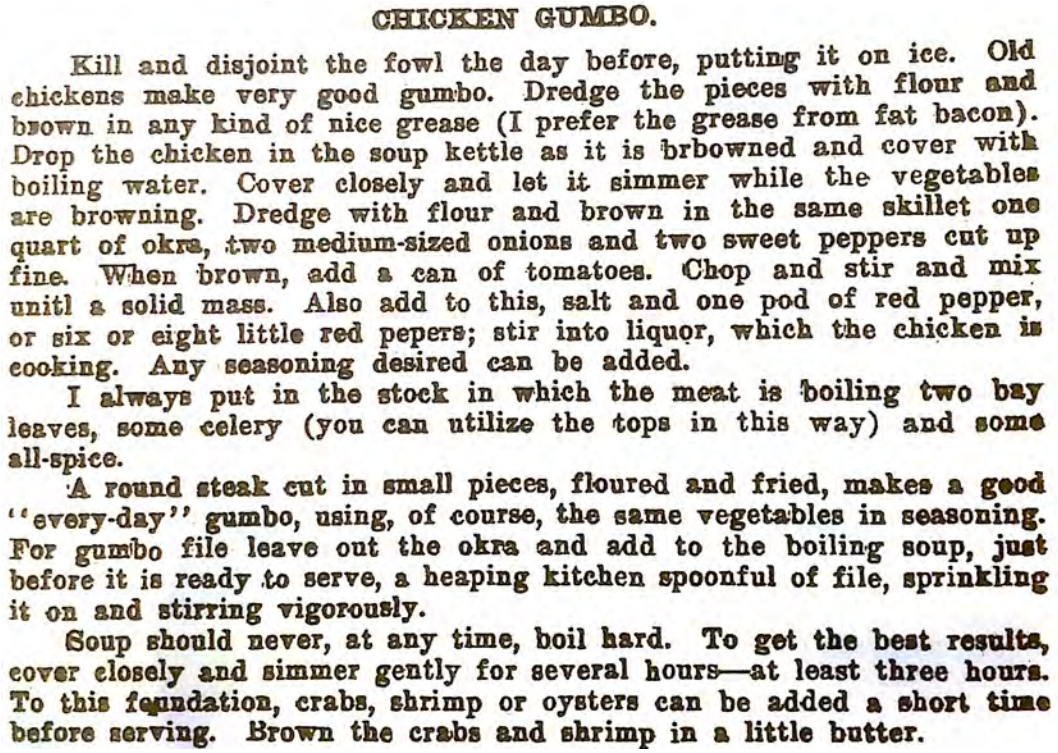
Next, across time and geographical location, almost every Jewish cookbook includes a recipe for chicken soup. The Shreveport cookbook is no exception, including a recipe for "Chicken Gumbo." Gumbo was a chicken preparation associated with Creole cooking traditions of Black Lousianans. The New Orleans chronicler Nikesha Williams has written, "Gumbo, in a sense, is the best part of the worst moments of our history. It is the legacy of both make-do cabin cooking in the slave quarters and the opulence of fine dining during parties at the plantation house. It is the syncretism of culture, race, and class, but most importantly, it is the lasting connection between kin."[30] According to the culinary historian Marcie Cohen Ferris, gumbo arrived in Jewish homes as result of the presence of Black cooks:

> Jews accepted African American women as their cooks, first as slaves and later as cooks and caterers, and their presence in homes and synagogue kitchens profoundly shaped Jewish life in communities along the lower Mississippi. Their creolized cuisine bears witness to slavery and to a long history of African American accommodation and cultural resistance. Recipes passed orally between Black cooks and White mistresses, between Jewish mothers and daughters, and between synagogue sisterhood presidents and

[30] Nikesha Williams, "It Starts with the Roux ," Eater (Eater, January 13, 2020), https://www.eater.com/2020/1/13/21056973/where-did-gumbo-originate-dish-history-new-orleans.

sisterhood members. Over time these instructions were published in congregational cookbooks and food journals.[31]

In appropriating this Creole dish, the author of this recipe showcased Jews' willingness to adopt the influences of the surrounding culture. The recipe abandons kashrut entirely, suggesting the cook use bacon fat for a "nice grease" and later the addition of shellfish.



CHICKEN GUMBO.

Kill and disjoint the fowl the day before, putting it on ice. Old chickens make very good gumbo. Dredge the pieces with flour and brown in any kind of nice grease (I prefer the grease from fat bacon). Drop the chicken in the soup kettle as it is brbowned and cover with boiling water. Cover closely and let it simmer while the vegetables are browning. Dredge with flour and brown in the same skillet one quart of okra, two medium-sized onions and two sweet peppers cut up fine. When brown, add a can of tomatoes. Chop and stir and mix unitl a solid mass. Also add to this, salt and one pod of red pepper, or six or eight little red pepers; stir into liquor, which the chicken is cooking. Any seasoning desired can be added.

I always put in the stock in which the meat is boiling two bay leaves, some celery (you can utilize the tops in this way) and some all-spice.

A round steak cut in small pieces, floured and fried, makes a good "every-day" gumbo, using, of course, the same vegetables in seasoning. For gumbo file leave out the okra and add to the boiling soup, just before it is ready to serve, a heaping kitchen spoonful of file, sprinkling it on and stirring vigorously.

Soup should never, at any time, boil hard. To get the best results, cover closely and simmer gently for several hours—at least three hours. To this foundation, crabs, shrimp or oysters can be added a short time before serving. Brown the crabs and shrimp in a little butter.

Figure 1. The 1914 Cookbook (Shreveport, LA: Temple B'nai Zion, 1914), 3.

Along with recipes that signal assimilation, several of the soup recipes indicate their authors' roots. Both "green kern soup" and "marrow balls for soup" are quintessentially German

[31] Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), 90.

dishes. According to the historian Steven M. Lowenstein, “grünkern” also sometimes called “dinkle” was a grain unique to Southern Germany and used in German Jewish cooking.[32] Grünkern was also used in *cholent,* Sabbath midday stews that are prepared on Friday and left to cook overnight by Jewish communities the world over. The recipe for “green kern soup” specifies to “soak a small teacup of green kern in a bowl of water overnight.” Next, “put soup meat on as early as nine o’clock” before describing a slow cooking process reminiscent of *cholent*. Yet, I maintain that the reason the recipe instructs to begin preparing the stew in the morning was to intentionally disassociate the recipe from its Shabbat context, and from any notions of adherence to Jewish law. Moreover, while the recipe for crab cocktail suggests preparing “as many cocktail glasses as there are guests,” implying that it was a dish intended for public consumption, the green kern soup specifically calls for small quantities. It was an old fashioned recipe reminiscent of Europe, meant for private consumption. The Jews of Shreveport did not completely leave behind the culinary customs of their Jewish roots, they only relegated them to the private realm.

The section where “fried matzo balls” appears is perhaps the most fascinating yet. So far, many recipes have alluded to the writer's enthusiasm around shedding “othering” aspects of identity. Yet thus far, this desire to assimilate has also come into conflict with the interest of preserving tradition. This tension, which is central to understanding the Jewish community of Shreveport in 1914, is perhaps the most prominent in the “Easter dishes” section of the cookbook where the first recipe is titled “matzo balls or shmaltz glaze." Ironically, unlike all other sections

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[32] Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Jewish Cultural Tapestry: International Jewish Folk Traditions* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2008), 135.

of the cookbook, which do not remotely adhere to kashrut, it is in the “Easter section” where Jewish laws of Passover are upheld. From “matzoth pancakes" to “lemon jelly cake” to “easter lep kuchen” (a kosher for Passover version of a traditional German cake), all recipes steer clear of flour, utilizing matzah, matzah meal, or potato flour instead. Self-conscious enough to associate traditional Passover techniques and dishes with a seasonal and non-Jewish holiday, the writers of the *1914 Cookbook* were still unwilling to discard the traditional Passover recipes, and, consequently, their methods of traditional religious observance. This section also showcases recipes that combine aspects of identity through cooking techniques. For example the recipe for “fried matzo balls” calls for the German tradition of using pieces of soaked matzo instead of matzo meal combined with Creole spices such as parsley, celery, and ginger.

The Passover/Easter section, not only sheds light upon the complex identities and values developing in the Jewish community, but lifts up the power that food has to preserve tradition beyond culinary. As Marcie Cohen Ferri writes in *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South,* “Women shaped the religious lives of their families in this Jewishly isolated world, while their husbands ran the plantations and stores that supported their families. Grandmothers, mothers, and aunts focused on the spiritual needs of their families in rural Louisiana, and such matters were negotiated at the dinner table.”[33] Despite the fact that Passover recipes were disguised as “Easter dishes,” by writing them down, women not only preserved a snapshot of a particular moment in their own cultural development, but also assumed the important role of communicating and safeguarding Jewish tradition. The Passover section teaches us, as Ruth

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[33] Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), 197.

Abusch Magder observed, that writing down recipes for a cookbook gave Jewish women an “opportunity to take the power ceded to them by rabbinic law far beyond."[34] The recipes in the *1914 Cookbook* illustrate a group of vibrant, educated, and opinionated women leaders, diverse in their personalities and beliefs, but committed to nurturing their families and communities. And yet, unlike the men in the advertisements, they remain unnamed.

The next several sections of the book present quintessentially American dishes with little to no clues of a specifically Jewish past. The “sandwich,” “egg and cheese dishes,” and “fish" sections include ham, mixtures of milk and meat. Several recipes gesture toward Spanish, French, and Black African and American cultures, such as “Spanish omelet,” “eggs a la Creole,” “courtbouillon fish” ('briefly boiled liquid' in French), and a variety of seafood croquettes, with techniques and flavor combinations Louisiana's Jews adopted from their neighbors. In the “salad,”“vegetables,” and “meat” sections, there are similar dishes such as “spaghetti a la Creole,” which melds an Italian noodle with ingredients favored by Black New Orleans cooks such as a thick tomato gravy made from browned onion, flour, canned tomatoes, parsley, and celery. Many recipes feature newly available processed products such as pre-made condiments such as mayonnaise and mustard. Other dishes, such as “tongue with aspic jelly” and “gelatin of chicken,” list specific brands such as“ Knox gelatin,” pointing to a moment in American history characterized by the industrialization of household goods including food products.

A subsection of recipes throughout the book betray the influence of Mexican cuisine, these include “Mexican chile con carne,” and “Mexican tamales." These recipes may have

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[34] Carole B. Balin, Dana Herman, and Jonathan D. Sarna, *Sisterhood a Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013), 136.

originated from the fact that Spanish rule between 1763 and 1803 had encouraged settlers from Mexico and Cuba to move to Louisiana. On one hand, Shreveport's Jews may have had relationships and connections with these immigrant communities. On the other hand, Shreveport's Jews were known to maintain commercial trade with Mexican border towns. The existence of these Mexican recipes amidst the German, French, and Black American culinary influences tells the story of a community whose members, after immigrating to Louisiana found themselves embedded in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural framework, while seeking to adopt the values and norms of White Christians.

The Cohen Levran Family, From Djerba, Tunisia to Lod, Israel

Cookbook: יא אמנה by שושנה כהן-לברו (*Ya Amna* by Shoshana Cohen Levran)

Published by first- and second-generation Tunisian immigrants in 2018, Israel

"The Nostalgic had an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed."[35]

— Svetlana Bayom in The Future of Nostalgia

[35] Svetlana Boym, The Future of Nostalgia (New York, NY: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2021), 4.

Ancient Roots and New Beginnings

Shoshana Cohen-Levran, the writer of *Ya Amna* (in Tunisian Arabic: "Our Mother") was born on the Tunisian Island of Djerba before migrating to Israel as a young child. Close to Europe, situated between Algeria and Libya, and bordering the Mediterranean Sea between the Atlantic Ocean and the Nile Delta, Tunisia has housed and nurtured Berber, Arab, Jewish, and African cultures for thousands of years. There has been a prominent Jewish community presence on the island for so long that their origin story is at least partially mythical, preceding conclusive history and tangible artifacts. Predating the destruction of the Second Temple and perhaps even that of the First Temple, many scholars and researchers refer to the Jewish community of Djerba as the original and first Jewish diaspora because the origin stories go far back.

One tale revolves around a group of priests escaping Jerusalem after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 and settling in Djerba. This account, which was likely orally transmitted for many centuries, describes these escapees carrying stones and a door from the original Temple all the way from Jerusalem to Tunisia. They allegedly incorporated these stones into the original synagogue of Djerba. This account not only positions the Jews of Djerba as indigenous to the island, inhabiting or existing from exceptionally early times and significantly predating colonization, but also simultaneously implies a direct connection to the original sacrificial cult and ancient Jewish dwelling in the land of Israel.[36]

Other orally maintained stories reach back even further into ancient history tying the Jews of Djerba to King David's army, in pursuit of the Philistines. This account also speaks of

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[36] Abraham L. Udovitch, *Last Arab Jews: The Communities of Jerba, Tunisia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 19.

stones commemorating the migration, including one inscribed with the name of the general who led the conquest. Other accounts trace the Jewish settlement in Djerba back to one of the original Israelite tribes of King Solomon's reign. Despite the fact that many of these oral traditions mention artifacts such as stone remnants and graves, there are no tangible vestiges of this time beyond the perseverance of stories and traditions. Nonetheless, the stories remain central to the construction of Jewish identity, impacting rituals, values, and priorities.[37]

Although the island's most prominent synagogue was renovated in the late 19th to early 20th century, the site is believed to have been used continuously for thousands of years, giving rise to an evolution of distinctive rituals. For example, Lag Ba'omer is usually celebrated with outdoor adventures, bonfires, and parades. But until today, the Djerban community facilitates a completely different Jewish experience. Attracting pilgrims from around the world, the ritual involves writing prayers and wishes on egg shells which are then placed upon the synagogue's candlelit stone floor. Although the symbolic reasoning has been lost over time, endurance of the ritual stands as testament to a Jewish identity which is uniquely Djerban.

In addition to cherished oral traditions, the first physical evidence of Jews inhabiting Djerba was found in the form of documents preserved in the Cairo Geniza. Dating back to the 11th century, these early documents contain Mediterranean business correspondence between Tunisia and Cairo and describe a bag of coins carried by a Jew from Djerba.[38] According to historian Abraham L. Udovitch:

> In the first half of the 11th century, the members of the Jewish settlement in Djerba were involved in what has been called the commercial revolution of the 11th century

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 24.

> Mediterranean world. Djerban Jews were actively engaged in a trade that extended from Spain through Tunisia and Sicily, to Egypt and beyond to South Arabia and India. They were part of an international commercial network which associated them not only with their co-religionists– Jewish merchants from Tunisia and Egypt– but also brought them into contact with Italian traders from Amalfi, Genoa and Venice, who were just beginning to venture across the Mediterranean in search of North African and eastern commodities.[39]

According to correspondents of the time, despite preserving a unique history and developing a culture reflecting a particular lineage, the Jews of Djerba were never cut off from the outside world.

In an atmosphere where Jews were met with general tolerance and afforded relative religious freedom, they were also involved in a wide variety of economic endeavors. Because of ongoing expulsions around the world, Jews scattered about North Africa were predisposed to multilingualism and Historian Fernand Braudel has painted a picture of them as "agents of cultural exchange."[40] Consequently, Jews were uniquely positioned to help connect business endeavors between Muslim and Christian communities. That being said, Jewish religious practices, traditions, and values were not removed from trading and business activities. Contrary to the general trend of division between commercial and religious adherents of the day, Jewish economic profit and material security became increasingly associated with religious observance.

In letters between the Franchettis, an 18th century Tunisian-Jewish merchant family with interests across the Mediterranean in the1700's, a recurring theme was the importance of young traders' commitment to Jewish learning, piety, and observance while engaging in business.

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[39] Ibid., 25.

[40] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée Et Le Monde Méditeranéen à L'époque De Philippe II* (Paris, France: A. Colin, 1966), 811.

Religious piety was seen as directly connected to reputation and a basis by which to vet business partners and collaborators within the Jewish merchant network. As Jessica Vance Roitman has written, “Although kinship and religion were key starting points, they were not enough on their own to ensure trust. Rather, these notions themselves needed to be painstakingly constructed, preserved, and managed in order to translate into creditworthiness, honor, and good reputation.”[41] In order to reap the benefits of identifying as Jewish in the context of a larger network, one had to actively express, establish, and publicly practice Judaism.

In a society that was trending toward secularization and universal morality systems, why did the Jewish population of Tunisia continue to rely on particularistic religious activity to communicate shared values? Although Jews were mostly received with tolerance and granted religious and social freedoms, their full assimilation was not necessarily welcomed. From the 16th to 18th century, as throughout other time periods and regions, Jews were subjected to restrictions and taxes in exchange for religious freedom. For example, “during the 18th century, the Jews appear in the fiscal registers of the Beylical government as payers of the jizya — the special poll-tax. The obligation to pay this tax flowed from their status as dhimmis, a condition they shared with all other Jews in Tunisia and, indeed, with all the “people of the Book” — mostly Christians and Jews — living under Muslim rule.”[42] Being a dhimmi referred to a status in society where non-Muslims were offered protection in exchange for a certain level of compliance to authority. Until the promulgation in 1857 of the Pacte Fondamental, this

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[41] Jessica V. Roitman, *The Same but Different?: Inter-Cultural Trade and the Sephardim* (Leiden, Netherlands : Brill, 2011), 17.

[42] Abraham L. Udovitch, *Last Arab Jews: The Communities of Jerba, Tunisia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 29.

compliance took form in varying degrees of restriction, from building codes and dress. Although Jews were prosperous and religiously free, they were consistently not allocated the same privileges as other members of society. The freedom to be Jewish paired with limitations in other realms likely contributed to their exceptional perseverance and prioritization of religious tradition.

Despite their precarious status, from the Aghlabid dynasty of the 11th century onward, Tunisia was a center for Jewish learning, producing a large number of prominent leaders and rabbis.[43] The North African Jewish tendency to maintain tradition, particularly prominent amongst Djerban Jews, was challenged by waves of Jewish immigration from other areas of the world. Centrally located in the Mediterranean and promising religious freedom and safety, Tunisia became a place of refuge for Jews escaping intolerance and oppressive regimes. For example, beginning in the 15th century, Jews arrived from Spain, driven by the Spanish Inquisition. In the seventeenth century, many Italian Jews arrived seeking economic prosperity. Eventually the Jewish population of Tunisia numbered over 100,000, with cultural elements from food to fashion imported from around the region, and intermingled with the existing North African Jewish culture.

On one hand, indigenous Jews in communities like Djerba, who relied heavily on stories connected to the ancient sacrificial cult, resisted the introduction of secular education and modern aesthetics. On the other hand, according to historians Mark Tessler and Linda Hawkins, the arrival of Jews from across the Mediterranean gradually "introduced a somewhat European character, at least in comparison with the dominant Muslim population, and introduced important

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[43] Ken Blady, *Jewish Communities in Exotic Places* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000), 335.

social and cultural cleavages into the ranks of the Jews themselves. These cleavages were a major element in Jewish life in many cities until the nineteenth century, producing much tension and dissipating energy that might otherwise have been directed toward communal development."[44] In other words, although the arrival of the Jewish immigrants did not substantially alter the tangible status of Jewish communities in the context of larger society, their presence did increase the social and cultural distance between Jews and Muslims.

Establishment of the French protectorate in the late 1800s further impacted the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Tunisia and the greater Maghreb region. Jews were generally eager to accept opportunities granted to them by the French because of their relatively marginal status in Islamic society and the oppressive conditions under which they sometimes lived. In Algeria, for example, most Jews were accorded French citizenship en masse in 1870. Elsewhere, Jews were given preferential access to coveted places in French schools. The result of such policies was the assimilation of many Jews into French culture.[45] Prior to French colonization, Jews and Muslims shared many of the same identity markers and lived in relative harmony. The presence of a colonial power amplified pre-existing rifts between Jewish and Muslim Tunisians, forever altering their relationship.

With the French protectorate also came new institutions with international connections and western interests. For example, the Alliance Israelite Universelle, an organization founded by French Jews in the 1860s for the purpose of providing assistance to Jews in need worldwide, became prevalent in North Africa under French colonial power. As a response to mostly western

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[44] Mark A. Tessler and Linda L. Hawkins, "The Political Culture of Jews in Tunisia and Morocco," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 1 (February 1980), 60.

[45] Ibid.

anti-semitism, this group had an eye toward safeguarding human rights for Jews and promoting Jewish self-defense, self-sufficiency, camaraderie, and cultural unity between Jews throughout the diaspora. Under French colonial power, the AIU established primary and secondary education institutions around North Africa, and implemented educational systems based on European values and curriculum. Many Jews welcomed the AIU and viewed it as an envoy of progress. The adoption of French language and European educational institutions "narrowed the cleavage between indigenous Jews and those of European origin and taught many Jews to accept France as their spiritual home. Thus, they greatly increased the cultural distance between Jews and Arabs."[46] Because of this, Jews slowly became perceived as complicit or supportive of a colonial power resented by the Arab population.

Prior to French immigration, Tunisian Jews were accepted yet ostracized. Alternatively, with the arrival of the French and as intermediaries by the colonial powers, Jews found themselves in a new precarious position. Historians Matthias Lehmann and Jessica Marglin have said, "The specific nature of Mediterranean exiles is linked to the end of the established colonial or imperial order, an event in which Jews could simultaneously be seen as victims but also as complicit or bystanders."[47] As French-Tunisian writer Guy Sitbon conveyed more personally in his Novel Gagou:

> LET'S BE CLEAR: Are you Jewish or Arab?
> Both.
> Half and half?
> No, both, fully.
> And when they fight each other, on which side are you?

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[46] Ibid., 61.

[47] Matthias B. Lehmann and Jessica M. Marglin, *Jews and the Mediterranean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 200.

On the wailing side. [48]

In an increasingly sensitive climate, the relationship between Jewish Tunisians and the French colonial power was further complicated during World War II when Jews were subjected discriminatory and highly restrictive legislation imposed by Vichy France. Eventually, Nazi German forces invaded Tunisia as well, confiscating property, enforcing antisemitic policies, and condemning Jews to forced labor camps. Between the impact the French colonial presence had on Jewish-Muslim relations, the trauma accumulated during the Holocaust, and the social political shifts brought on by Tunisia's independence from France in 1956, Tunisian Jews began to be impacted by the weight anti-Jewish events. In 1961 a number of violent anti-Semitic acts occurred following rumors that Tunisian Jews had helped the French army. During the Six Day War in1967, crowds stormed into the Grand Synagogue in Tunis, destroying hundreds of books and burning the Torah. Despite the fact that Tunisian leadership continued to be outwardly accepting of Jews, even going so far as to apologizing after the synagogue attack, the extent of anti-Jewish decrees and destructive events occurring caused a majority of Tunisia's Jewish population to leave the country before the 1970's, emigrating primarily to France or Israel.[49] Tunisian Jews left home to find security and equality. But in Israel, they faced discrimination when they found themselves amongst Europeans in Israel yet outside of the ideal narrative of European Zionism. Faced once again with the forces of colonialism, which "stressed the differences among groups of people living in the same, non-European, area and posited an

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[48] Guy Sitbon, *Gagou: Roman* (Paris: Grasset, 1980), 202.

[49] Mark A. Tessler and Linda L. Hawkins, "The Political Culture of Jews in Tunisia and Morocco," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 1 (February 1980), 62-63.

inflexible hierarchical order."[50] The first generations of North African immigrants in Israel were oftentimes pushed into the margins of society by bureaucratic systems outside of the official legislature as to not be officially discriminatory. According to historians Alex Weingrod and André Levy, African immigrants were "directed by Israeli government officials to new villages and development towns then being established in outlying regions" of Israeli territory, where "their housing was poor, [and] they earned relatively low incomes from unskilled and semi-skilled work,"[51] which perpetuated discriminatory assumptions and negative stereotypes already in place.

Prior to immigrating to Israel, despite having been indigenous to Tunisian, Jews of Djerba always existed somewhat outside of the dominant society. As rulers and regimes changed over time, so did the Jewish communities' access to power, privileges, and resources. Although immigrating to Israel marked a shift in autonomy as Tunisian Jews attempted to take control of their own circumstances, greeted with oppression embedded in Israeli attitudes and systems, many Tunisians faced an internal identity crisis as they struggled to fit into an Israeli society that pushed them to the periphery. In many ways, the new factors obstructing tangible self determination resembled the old.

Consequently, in the context of having little control over circumstances, Jews settled into alternative ways of sustaining a semblance of autonomy. Similar to the reliance on orally

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[50] Yaron Tsur, "The Brief Career of Prosper Cohen: A Sectorial Analysis of the North African Jewish Leadership in The Early Years of Israeli Statehood," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* XXII (2007): pp. 66-99, 72.

[51] Alex. Weingrod and André Levy, "Paradoxes of Homecoming: The Jews and Their Diasporas," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (2006): pp. 691-716, 695.

maintained memories of the First Temple, grounding a sense of identity despite shifting circumstances, in Israel, Djerban Jews also relied on storytelling, rituals, and traditions. Tunisian writer Colette Fellous has described seeing “how our life has been completely fabricated by political history, whereas we thought that it belonged to us.”[52] Similarly, referring specifically to the written stories created to bridge gaps between managing displacement and formulating identity, historians Matthias Lehmann and Jessica Marglin have said, “Written by those who left their country of birth, Jewish Mediterranean literature often presents an embellished account of lives before they got disrupted, the imperceptible cracks and the expulsion of individual lives dislodged by history; many accounts told from a child's perspective, epitomize guiltless memory.”[53] For people whose stories and structures of self determination have been disrupted over time, nostalgia can help provide a sense of ownership while simultaneously constructing a quality of consistency.

In many ways, these collections of memories from a chapter passed, which could seem to signal the end, served as the starting point for a new beginning. In post-colonial societies, the reestablishment or reclaiming of identity is what Frantz Fanon called a process “directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.”[54] Falling through the cracks of overarching interests,

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[52] Colette Fellous, *Pièces Détachées* (Paris, France: Gallimard, 2017), 77.

[53] Matthias B. Lehmann and Jessica M. Marglin, *Jews and the Mediterranean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 202.

[54] Frantz Fanon et al., The Wretched of the Earth (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2021), 38.

powers, and regimes, the process of looking back, reclaiming, and sifting through collective memories of the past was a central element to building identity in the present.

The Cookbook: "ספר האוכל הוא סיפור פרטי" (Food Stories are Personal Stories)

Unlike *The 1914 Cookbook*, which begins with impersonal advertisements, *Ya Amna* begins with a personal dedication. Furthermore, while the readers of T*he 1914 Cookbook* must read between the lines of advertisements and ingredients to understand the greater story of the community, in *Ya Amna*, the writers explicitly share their own narrative. Published first in Hebrew in 2018 and translated into English two years later, *Ya Amna* highlights recipes taught to Shoshana Cohen-Levran by previous generations of Tunisian women, and passed on to her six Israeli daughters. Although the cookbook is written in Hebrew letters, they spell out the traditional Tunisian Arabic names of recipes, expressing a unique iteration of North African, Israeli identity.

More than that, the book is guided by a self-told family narrative, with recipes serving as artifacts nestled between stories, photographs, dedications, and portraits painted with words. Before any recipes or even a Table of Contents, the first page reads:

> ספר האוכל הוא סיפור פרטי
> Food stories are personal stories. It is a link between the different words that created the aromas, the flavors, and the memories in our home. It is the meaning point between a little girl's religion in Djerba and her life in Israel, starting in the 1950's. For us, Mom is a strong and stable bridge between scarcity and plenty, between exile and renewal, between alienation and belonging. Mom's food is rooted in Tunisia and in tradition. But it is connected to the here and now of our lives in Israel. She never compromises on the precise ingredients for each dish, yet adds her own new, personal, Israeli flavor.

Unlike *The 1914 Cookbook*, which paints a picture of an overall community through a collection of personal yet anonymous recipes submitted by a variety of different women, *Ya Amna*, written by the 6 daughters of the author Shoshana Cohen-Levran, makes clear from the first page that the cookbook represents the story of a Jewish community as expressed through the personal

experiences and the specific journey of one family. The multiplicity of voices inside does not span an entire synagogue sisterhood, rather one biological ecosystem that identifies with several communities– from Tunisian to Israeli. *The 1914 Cookbook* requires reading between the terse lines as well as noticing what's absent to understanding cultural, religious, and social values defining the community at the time. In contrast, *Ya Amna* invites engaging with an explicit presentation of identity. Instead, the mystery exists in the book's nostalgic expressions.

Following the Preface, the Table of Contents helps to immediately convey the priorities of the book. Organized into seven categories: foreword, beginning, family, every day, shabbat, holidays, and cookies, unlike *The 1914 Cookbook*, Jewish customs, traditions, and laws are implicitly prioritized by the organization of the book. Upon first examination, I wondered why several recipes in the “beginning” section, which seem like they could be disturbed into one of the other categories, were set apart. I then realized that the cookbook was organized into seven sections, a lucky number in Judaism, often representing a full cycle, wholeness, or completion. Understanding that the women who wrote this book come from a community seeped in superstitious, often ancient traditional customs, I believe that the organization of the cookbook, which seems arbitrary at first, was an intentional choice. Organizing the cookbook into seven categories points to religious reasoning and spiritual priorities of the authors and the community they represent beyond what is explicitly communicated through words.

Upon first glance, while the cookbook itself as well as the authors who wrote it seem to have completely different priorities than the writers of *The 1914 Cookbook*, the foreword of *Ya Amna* proves to be surprisingly, strikingly, similar to *The 1914 Cookbook*. Shoshana begins by saying, “this is a tale that my mother used to tell me, and that she later told my daughters. And

when my daughters grew up, I told them to their daughters." She then proceeds to share a story called, "The Beetle Who Searched for a Husband."

In summary, the story follows a beetle who is looking for a husband. She meets several interested suitors ranging from a camel to a rooster before deciding that she would accept the mouse's proposal. After the wedding, the beetle was washing clothes in the river when she fell onto her back and couldn't turn over. She called for her husband and when he came to rescue her he said, "if I give you my hand, I might lose my bracelet. If you grab my head my hair might get ruined." Finally, the mouse turns around, and the beetle grabs his tail, ripping it from his body but managing to turn herself over. Everyone was very upset because the mouse had lost his tail. So the beetle invited all the mice to a party, hosting them decadently until they were full and drunk enough to fall asleep. Once they are asleep, she cooks a pot of glue made from flour and water, cuts off all the mice's tails, and glues them back on one by one. But she makes sure that the longest and prettiest tail goes to her husband. "What do we learn from this story? Woman might be small, but she has great power. She is resourceful, and she is the one who puts order in the world; that is her role."

Representing two vastly different geographical locations, time periods, level of religious observance, and cultures, both cookbooks do not begin with conventional recipes. Instead, they open with humorous tales of women taking power into their own hands through cooking. Both the "Recipe for Cooking Husbands" as well as "The Beetle who Searched for a Husband" depict women engaging in subservient tasks, cleaning and cooking for their male counterparts. But both of these stories also position women as the more capable and intelligent parties specifically within the context of these traditional roles. In fact, they yield their power, assert their control,

and exercise their discernment through cooking. The existence of these stories at the beginning of both cookbooks frames the recipes to come as more than methods of food preparation. Cooking is introduced as a way of nurturing and maintaining culture while also influencing and yielding power.

The foreword in *Ya Amna* goes on to describe the background of the book and the authors. Although it's officially written by Shoshana Cohen-Levran, she shares that the book is a collaboration. It began as a birthday present that she received from her six daughters in which they recreated the flavors of their childhood. She goes on to describe her background, explaining that she was born on the island of Djerba, but immigrated to Israel as a child. She admits that writing recipes down was a process she had no experience in because she learned Tunisian traditions through oral stories and knowledge of cooking through watching older female relatives. To elaborate she says, “the slow pace of my writing was so far removed from the quickness of my hand and thoughts while cooking.” The foreword teaches about the ways in which knowledge was passed down through times spent learning hands on.

After a few family photos, the introduction to the recipes continues, presenting a “cast of characters” list. This index introduces not only members of the family who tangibly contributed to the book, but profiles people from previous generations to illuminate the family's journey from Djerba to Israel. For example, the profile for Shoshana’s father, Nissim, contains information about German occupied Tunisia during World War II. It describes an unsettling and dangerous time of home invasions and forced labor, where Jews were required to hand over their possessions to avoid violence or murder. Although the following sentences acknowledge that Jews were treated generally well once power was restored to the French, in the same paragraph

the family is described as leaving behind their property and high social and economic status to move to the newly independent Israel in the 1950s. Though brief, the story includes the mention of public housing, physical labor, and “difficult times” in the newly established Israel. However, more focus is placed on beautiful, majestic descriptions of Tunisia, all posing a tangible quality of longing.

While the profiles of the previous generation mostly center on life in Djerba, the last section includes descriptions for each of Shoshana’s daughters. They are defined by parenthood, dietary restrictions, personality traits, higher education, cooking proclivities, as well as careers in science, technology, economics, and graphic design. Before engaging with cooking, *Ya Amna* explicitly places the recipes to come in the context of a nuanced, specific, multi-generational story. The introduction emphasizes the multigenerational process of maintaining tradition. This cross generation theme continues in the first formal section of the book titled “beginnings”. In the opening dedication, Michal addresses Shoshana as, “My Mother” (אמא שלי), notably using the Hebrew word for mother instead of the Tunisian word that used in the title. Although the cookbook centers Tunisian cuisine, the language choices present an intermingling between generations, cultures, and languages.

The “beginnings” section also paints a picture of Grandma and Grandpa's (Shoshana’s parents) house in Lod upon migrating to Israel. Their apartment is described as containing very few objects outside of cooking gear, a beloved sewing machine, “pungent books,” and a tzedakah box which held the quarter of Grandma and Grandpa's income would be designated for charity. The section ends with a word about legacy, stating, “when Grandma, and later Grandpa, passed away, they left behind a generation full of faith. Blind faith in the power of hope, and in the

existence of a single duty that one must fulfill: giving.” The delineation of their apartment in Lod as well as an emphasis on their fundamental values, helps to understand not only their socioeconomic status as new immigrants to a burgeoning county, but their religious priorities as well. That being said, in an effort to maintain a sense of ownership over identity, the tangible hardships experienced through the process of immigrating to Israel are secondary to the values expressed through idealized memories.

Only after several more stories as well as a tribute to Grandma Aziza does the very first recipe of the book emerge. The first 32 pages of the cookbook are designed to help the reader to understand the layers of nuanced identity, which will later be expressed as flavors and techniques, before even beginning to engage with the recipes inside. The first recipe in the book is for טילבינה (spicy savory porridge with garlic and caraway). The description of this recipe emphasizes that Grandma would make it when it was cold outside or when someone was sick. It reads “this porridge warms you through your soul.” The first recipe in the book, opening the section titled “beginnings” is one that is fundamentally cooked to be nurturing and healing. By noticing the placement of this recipe, one can understand the priorities of this family and community. Furthermore, beyond the traditional Tunisian flavors such as hot paprika, harissa, and caraway, right off the bat this recipe expresses an innovative take on a classic. While the traditional Tunisian savory porridge is made with semolina, Grandma's trademark porridge involves the same process but using flour. This adjustment points to resources available in this family's new Israeli chapter, and their willingness to adjust and innovate despite appreciating tradition.

The next recipe in this short “beginnings" section is for ספינג׳ (donuts). Although the cookbook calls ספינג׳ "Tunisian doughnuts", they are prepared across the Maghreb. Many countries, from Morocco to Algeria, claim these doughnuts despite the fact that they are prepared almost exactly the same from country to country. While טילבינה porridge is made to nurture and heal, ספינג is prepared to welcome and celebrate. The cookbook specifies that “Grandma used to make it, and to this day, on every holiday.” juxtaposed with טילבינה porridge which serves 8, the recipe for ספינג׳ doughnuts makes 25. ספינג׳, connected to the word for sponge in Arabic, are light and springy fried fitters that are said to have first appeared in kitchens around Moorish Spain in the middle ages. These doughnuts then slowly spread to places where Moorish traders traveled, from France where the beignet was born, to the Maghreb. These doughnuts being labeled as “Tunisian donuts” speak to the extent to which trade, cultural exchange, and immigration over time not only impacted culture in general, but Jewish culture, even in a place where Jews had been living in relative seclusion since ancient times.[55]

The last recipe in the short yet revelatory "beginnings" section is for בלקקוויה tea and the description says “when we wanted something tasty, Grandma would give us this tea.” The beloved recipes carefully selected for the "beginnings" section of the cookbook paints an expansive picture of what food means to this family, and by extension, the Tunisian Jewish community. From nurturing, to hosting and celebrating, to simply enjoying life on a day to day basis, the recipes in this section simultaneously communicate family values as well as cultural realities. And because recipes can morph, adapt, reflect, and change over time, food, flavors,

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[55] Joseph Chetrit, Jane S. Gerber, and Drora Arussy, *Jews and Muslims in Morocco Their Intersecting Worlds* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 382.

recipes, and cooking are uniquely positioned to tell the story of a nuanced, multilayered, deep human experience over time.

To introduce the next section of the book titled “family” a childhood of abundance and radical hospitality is recalled. Although it's unclear why these recipes are listed under the “family” category, the descriptions and quantities suggest that these recipes can be enjoyed and shared casually, routinely, and consequently, only with immediate family. In other words, as the description for קעבר בלביז׳ילוז׳ (meatballs with tomato sauce and peas) says “a special dish you can eat any day.” Although these recipes were seemingly not reserved for special occasions, they do not lack in complexity, from ingredients to procedures. The amount of time and labor needed to create these staple recipes points to the cultural centrality of food as well as reliance upon eating as the primary method of bringing family together and cultivating community, even on a daily basis.

The first recipe in this section is for ח׳ריימה (fish in spicy tomato sauce). The description of the recipe explains that the word “ח׳ריימה,” which refers specifically to the spicy sauce, comes from the Arabic word meaning “rascal” or “thief” because the dish will always steal the show. Other explanations say the dish's name is connected to thievery because the spice will sneak up on you. Although the development of the recipe remains unknown, the origins of this dish are from the Libyan Jewish community. The presence of the recipe in the book speaks not only to Tunisia as a culinary melting pot due to its central geographical location, with influences and ingredients arriving by sea, over land, and on caravans across the Sahara, but also to the extent to which Jewish food culture was impacted by the transient nature of Maghreb communities. Along the same lines, the presence of this recipe also points to the extent in which Jewish immigrant

communities culturally influenced each other upon moving to the state of Israel and interacting in developing neighborhoods.

While it comes as no surprise that this cookbook adheres to laws of kashrut, the recipe that opens the “family” section centers fish instead of meat. A fish dish allows for versatility in the other foods prepared, and speaks to ingredients that Tunisian Jews had experience cooking due to their coastal roots.The other recipes in this section include מארקה בלעדש (lentil soup), which Grandma said contained “70 medicines" despite only having nine ingredients, as well as recipes such as מעקוד (chicken and egg frittata). This section also contains several recipes for טביח׳ (stews) both בללוביא (with beans),בלקרעה (with zucchini), and בלברוקחו ובטטה (with cauliflower and potatoes). All of these chicken stews are made in under an hour and include variations, from different kinds of beans to spices. These stews show that although the recipes are based in traditional Tunisian cooking techniques, they are flexible, versatile, and able to reflect available ingredients and the cooks’ preferences.

The next section, “recipes for every day” contains a variety of recipes, from slightly less involved dishes, to condiments and preserves. Unlike the rest of the cookbook, where every component of the dish is made from scratch, this section utilizes dry goods and condiments. To explain, there are several passages from “the story of salted fish” to “the story of the flour” that speak to how the progressive industrialization of Israel changed resources available and consequently the make up of many quintessential dishes. For example, after the recipe for שקשוקה (tomato and pepper stew with eggs) we read:

> Grandma Aziza used to tell us that in Djerba they would dry halved tomatoes in the sun and then mash them with a mortar and pestle, and use the paste to make various dishes. In Israel, during the first years after my grandparents arrived, they always used fresh

> tomatoes– grated or chopped– and the food came out much less red. In Grandpa Susu's pots the liquid was almost clear, with a faint tint of paprika and turmeric. Then industrial tomato paste arrived on the market, and it made kitchen work much easier, and turned all the food red again.

Since then, tomato paste has become a staple of Tunisian Israeli cuisine, and the texture of שקשוקה stew sheds light upon a specific immigration story. Social, cultural, and economic adjustment to living in Israel are expressed through ingredients used and characteristics of dishes created. The passage goes on to say that it feels like they've come full circle because today, one of the daughters, Ilanit, makes her own tomato paste on the kibbutz she lives on. This section makes clear that the evolution of a dish can expose the progression of a community's identity, and flavors embody lived experiences over time.

After several versions of שקשוקה as well as other simple, homey dishes, we find a recipe for מקרוני בלסלסה (spaghetti in salsa). The presence of מקרוני בלסלסה (spaghetti in salsa) on this family's table simultaneously speaks to having access to dried pasta in an industrializing Israel, as well as their past, living in a country with close proximity to Italy. As briefly discussed in the previous section, Italy is 40 miles away from Tunisia promoting prominent trading routes. Furthermore hundreds of thousands of Italians settled in Tunisia, including a substantial population of Italian Jews. Italian and Tunisian cultures greatly influenced each other over time, and pasta became a large part of the Tunisian diet. Yet despite the fact that Tunisians took on the culinary tradition of eating pasta, the preparation took on a specifically North African quality. Upon first glance, this dish looks like a typical spaghetti with marinara but the ingredients are specifically Tunisian in that hot chili peppers, paprika, and tomato paste are used. Furthermore,

while Italians eat pasta al dente, Tunisians took to eating pasta softer, the recipe calls for a longer boil time.[56]

Lastly, this section for everyday food would not be complete without recipes for harissa, which is a required ingredient in many dishes throughout the book, as well as קרס משיר (Tunisian pickled lemons). The description situates harissa as categorically Tunisian, even stating "Tunisian women are judged according to the quality of their Harissa." Nonetheless, while maintaining a strong sense of individuality, the description also relates the tradition of adding spiciness in food to many Maghreb countries, asserting, "Tunisian harissa, Tripolitan felfel chuma, Moroccan sahku, and Yeminite skhug– all these are pastes made of hot peppers, which you should always have on hand to put in any dish." From this statement, it's clear that the writer is cooking from a cultural context in which all of these countries are represented. Her descriptions simultaneously express a unique Tunisian identity, while acknowledging and connecting to a greater Israeli immigrant narrative.

The Shabbat section of the book begins with a beautiful, wistful, evocative description of celebrating Shabbat. The introduction reads:

> Perfectly calmly, with impeccable neatness, and with the inner peace that comes with undertaking a task in which every step has been planned in advance and merges seamlessly into the next step, mom would fry, roast, peel, slice, chop, and mash. On Friday morning Mom would start preparing the dough for the bread. She would always say that your mood determines how the dough will rise. All the energy in the body goes into the dough. There was were very few times when Mom's dough didn't rise or come out as it should

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[56] Jeff Koehler, "Tunisia Eats a Lot of Pasta," TASTE, November 12, 2019, https://tastecooking.com/tunisias-pasta-obsession/.

Of course, the first official recipe for the Shabbat section is חבז׳ (house bread). The recipe specifies that “there was only one type of bread dough, but several different types of loaves” and one of them was a braided loaf for Shabbat. Despite the fact that there was originally only one dough recipe, in the book, there are several notes specifying different ways to alter the recipe– from veganizing it to using a stand-mixer. Similarly, although the Shabbat section is the chapter in the book that contains most traditional Jewish Tunisian recipes, it also presents the largest array of variations. For example, although the recipes suggest following a common Tunisian cooking method of frying first before simmering for כפתה (meat patties wrapped in strips of potato), it then proceeds to offer several ways to alter the dish in order to accommodate dietary restrictions, from vegan to gluten free. Along the same lines one of the most well-known and quintessential Tunisian dishes is קשיקשו (couscous), which is always served with מארקת קשיקשו (couscous soup), also has diverted from the traditional recipe. Couscous is usually made with chicken and is the centerpiece of any traditional Tunisian Shabbat table. In this rendition, chicken is offered as a suggestion while the base ingredients remain vegetarian.

Again, from 1914 Shreveport Louisiana to 2018 Tunisian Jews in Israel, every cookbook has a recipe for chicken soup at the center. While the chicken soup recipe in the Shreveport cookbook showcased a community open to assimilation and heavily influenced by surrounding culture, *Ya Amna’s c*hicken soup recipe also tells the story of a community constructing identity by taking ownership of a past narrative characterized by displacement while navigating change and re-evaluating cultural touch points. Although making a vegetarian recipe does not exactly constitute assimilation, it does mark a shift in values, emphasizing inclusivity over preservation. The fact that so many variations are present in the traditional Shabbat recipes tells the story of a

community that has been forced to change and adapt due to circumstance over time and have consequently developed a dynamic growth mentality accordingly.

That being said, the Shabbat section also has recipes that are geared towards maintaining tradition. For example, there are a variety of stews that fall under the דפינה category. In the introduction for עריסה (slow-cooked wheat berry stew), דפינה category stews are described as "the general name in Arabic for slow-cooked stew, from the word נקבר– meaning ‘buried’— because the pot is buried inside the baking oven that was in every neighborhood.” Although passage goes on to say that דפינה stews are consumed on Saturday afternoons after synagogue, it does not explain the ritualistic reasoning behind slow cooking. Of course, the reason is because fire cannot be lit on Shabbat, and warm foods must be set on a heat source the night before Shabbat. Although the explicit connection to maintaining Jewish law has been lost in the description, the recipes maintain this tradition, and tell the story of a Jewish community that continues to adhere to tradition despite taking on other contemporary mentalities and innovations. One of the other slow-cooked dishes included, פקילה (slow-cooked chard stew), is paired with the description of a nostalgic scene:

> The pot of stew would cook on the hot plate in our shed in the yard. On Saturday morning we could put on our coats and go out to bring in the pot, which was covered with wool blankets. Inside the pot were meat, beans, and warm, soft potatoes. When dad got back from the synagogue, Mom would serve us this stew in deep bowls with group black pepper. Mom still makes this dish for Shabbat in the winter, and one pot is enough for the entire family.

This description indirectly communicates not only shines a light upon the family's relationship with Jewish law and ritual, but the ways in which food grounds their collective observance and religious value system.

Furthermore, the vivid descriptions present in the Shabbat section indirectly communicate a vast range of information about this particular family as well as the community they represent, from circumstances to values. Between the lines of the stories that provide context and a sentimental texture to the recipes exists a larger picture of this family's life in Israel. For example, beyond providing information about religious observance, the passages about פקילה (slow-cooked chard stew) also sheds light upon the family's living situation. The fact that the Shabbat hot plate was kept in the yard implies that there was likely not enough room in the kitchen or home. Along the same lines, a previous passage about Shabbat paints a similar reality. Colored with emotions of joy, it reads:

> We wake up excitedly at 5 in the morning and go downstairs holding ropes and pieces of fabric. Grandma would fashion them into swings, which we played in and rolled in during those visits. We liked to do cartwheels together on the grass by the row of cinder blocks in the Sharet neighborhood of Lod.

Although difficult to discern from the tone, this passage describes a family creating meaning and fun despite limited resources. These small details embedded throughout the entire cookbook help the reader to understand not only the limitations and economic realities that Jewish North African immigrants and Sephardic immigrants faced upon moving to Israel and settling in developing cities like Lod, but also the cultural coping mechanisms. The rest of the Shabbat section highlights an extensive variety of salads and vegetable dishes that are to be served alongside the main course of a meal, many of which can be stored, pickled, and served over and over again if not eaten. These salads, which are meant to be displayed in small dishes covering the entire table for any large meal, expose an approach to celebration and abundance despite economic limitations and conditions. From uncertainty in Tunisia, to the precariousness of immigration, to

navigating lack of resources in marginal Israeli cities, these recipes and their attached stories illuminate the ways in which Sephardic immigrant communities maintained optimism and developed a new Israeli identity despite struggles.

The last two sections of the book, dedicated to “holidays” and “cookies” are perhaps the most nostalgic sections. The “holiday” section begins with descriptions of all of the important holiday traditions celebrated by the Tunisian community. Many of these holidays are celebrated differently or have unique components at the center as compared to other Jewish communities. For example, Rosh Chodesh Nisan is celebrated with a special ceremony called פשישה. This ritual that continues into modernity uplifts the flour offering that is said to have been made at the tabernacle. There is also a recipe for the grain used in this ceremony included later on in the section. Similarly, the cookbook teaches that during the nine days before Tisha B’Av, the day of mourning in Judaism on which a number of disasters in Jewish history occurred, the family only eats fish instead of meat. The description specifies that the days before Tisha B’Av are emotionally charged and during the same period they eat a special fish soup.

A connection to the original Temple cult as expressed by tradition has been a part of the Djerban Jewish community’s unique expression of identity for thousands of years. The continuation of this story into 21st century Israel speaks to the power of passing rituals and symbolic food recipes down generation after generation. Even though the Djerban Jewish community’s connection to the Temple is so ancient that it predates official history, the importance of constructing identity and asserting ownership over otherwise uncontrollable circumstances is made evident by the centrality of these roots in creating a cohesive identity.

And yet, despite the uniqueness of Jewish Tunisian history manifested into particular holiday themes conveyed through symbolic food, the holiday section in particular also contains recipes from other cultures. For example סלטת סלק (fried chard salad), is a recipe learned from Shoshana's Moroccan sister in-law. The holiday section contains both particular traditions as well as recipes that indicate camaraderie with other Maghreb communities in the context of creating new communities and roots in contemporary Israel.

The last section of the cookbook, "cookies" begins with a story that perhaps sums up the orientation of this family as expressed through the nostalgic presentation of recipes better than anywhere else in the book. It reads:

> Grandma wanted us to know that simmering beneath a simple life were forces that could burst out at any moment and change the order of things completely. In her stories about Elijah the Prophet, there is always a person whose own good qualities make him or her deserving of a life-changing miracle. The focus is not on Elijah's power; rather, the stories emphasize our ability to change our own fate.

Indeed, we see these Tunisian, Israeli Jews taking ownership over their own fate through the stories they tell, moments they recall, and recipes they preserve. Instead of focusing on what was lost over time, they use food and cooking as a way to communicate what they are able to own and what they continue to value. By means of recalling memories, telling stories, and preserving traditions, they assert ownership over their identity all while cultivating a sense of ongoing hope. And by innovating their own traditional recipes, they take part in carrying their identity to new places, figuratively and literally. Although *Ya Amna* is the story of a particular family, we can learn about the community's history and values, particularly the importance of maintaining and uplifting individual stories in the context of survival. Through recipes and food culture can we

begin to understand the process of organizing a precarious past into defining flavors, dishes, and stories in order to understand and claim the present.

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As a Tunisian/American/Israeli Jew myself, throughout the process of reading *Ya Amna*, I was often brought to tears. The foods, memories, and stories reminded me of my own upbringing. I loved looking at the photos of women's hands hard at work: kneading bread, stirring soups, and cutting vegetables. Their hands, big, strong, and adorned in gold jewelry reminded me of my own Tunisian hands and the hands of my grandmother. Hands that I have watched and admired my entire life. The nostalgic presentation of cooking processes took me back to the powerful moments of my own childhood, and helped me consider the ways that smells, flavors, and traditions ground my identity despite constant change and uncertainty in the context of understanding what it means to be a contemporary Jew.

When I read about חוט מקלי which is described as a "fried fish feast," characterized as "celebration on a regular weekday" and, "a sign of prosperity and peace" I realize the name, חוט מקלי (Hut Mukli) was familiar to me not from partaking in the feast, but from a lullaby. My grandmother and father used to sing to me:

> *…Ya lali ah nuf tu rek bil Hut Mukli…*
> whoever hits you will I will hit them back
> you're a pretty thing
> and you are dear to me.
> I'll feed you a fried fish feast

A song to send a child off to sleep was simultaneously about protection, strength, retribution, and feeding fried fish. Indeed, like the women in *Ya Amna*, my grandmother's strength and ability to protect were inextricably bound up in cooking and feeding.

Like many orthodox Sephardic and Mizrahi women, my Savta found power in the kitchen. The men in my family had voices elsewhere; they went to the synagogue on a regular basis, they studied, they influenced the organization of communal life, and unlike the women, scarce in number and whispering from the balcony, the men prayed loudly. Not separated from the Torah by a curtain, they prayed from the depths of their beings, witnessing, listening, and creating space for each other's voices. My Savta prayed through her cooking. Nurturing us with soup, she prayed for the health of her family. Protecting us from harm and evil, she'd infuse her recipes with peppers, garlic, and unusual herbs. Bringing us together, marking time and making meaning, she made special dishes for celebration as well as commemoration, profoundly understanding exactly how others needed to be fed. She cooked food that her mother cooked, food from her home, food that captured memory, tradition, longing and yearning for another place. Her food represented the collective pain of a people displaced, ingredients indigenous to one part of the world sometimes substituted by the next best thing from the Ramla shuk. My Savta had so much to express, so much to teach, so much to share, and so much to say. And instead of barely whispering behind a curtain in the Tunisian synagogue of Ramla, this was the voice she fixed for herself: the voice of grating, chopping, boiling and frying. Like the women in *Ya Amna*, my Savta found power in her recipes. She grounded our family's identity through food and created a sense of abundance and autonomy no matter what we had. Like *Ya Amna* teaches: "Those who are grateful to God and are happy with what they have will receive more."

Conclusion

Cookbooks have the capacity to preserve moments of Jewish history and assertions of nuanced Jewish identity. Seen in both *The 1914 Cookbook* and *Ya Amna*, the Jewish collective experience, often characterized by negotiating belonging within the context of greater society while maintaining a sense of individual identity and communal autonomy, manifests itself differently over time and in different geographical backdrops. From assimilation to nostalgia, these two cookbooks expose varied mechanisms for expressing, maintaining, and constructing Jewish identity amidst constantly shifting circumstances. Yet they both preserve the flavors of landscapes, journeys, and traditions over time, proving that recipes have the capacity to tell a story of a particular community while simultaneously connecting to a greater tradition and shared history.

In conclusion, I'll present a final recipe that highlights a specific iteration of Jewish identity that I am particularly familiar with. Like the recipes studied in *The 1914 Cookbook* and *Ya Amna*, impacted by factors such as assimilation, immigration, nostalgia, this recipe is born out of my Israeli and American, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish upbringing. It exposes layers of nuances that describe my Jewish identity, and like all recipes, shines a light on a particular moment of the Jewish story.

Crockpot T'fina Pkaila

Ingredients:
1 ½ cup cannellini beans
½ -1 cup dried porcini mushrooms
1 cup olive oil, divided
1 pound spinach
2 onions, diced
2 tbsp cumin

2 tbsp coriander
2 tsp paprika
1 tsp turmeric
½ heaping tsp cinnamon
4 garlic cloves
2 tbsp thyme
1 cup fresh Mint
1 ½ cup fresh cilantro
2-4 heaping tbsp harissa
4-5 Potatoes cut into large cubes
5 cups water and 3-4 tbsp consomme or other stock seasonings (or 5 cups vegetable stock)

Preparation:

- Place 1 ½ cup cannelloni beans in a large bowl. Completely submerge in water and leave to soak overnight or at least 5 hours
- Cover dried porcini mushrooms with boiling water and let soak for at least 20 minutes. Once rehydrated, remove porcini mushrooms from water, dry, chop, and set aside
- In a large pot, heat ½ cup of olive oil on a medium heat for several minutes until oil starts releasing smoke
- Add 1 pound of spinach and stir to coat with oil. Spinach will be overflowing from the pot but within minutes it will shrink down
- Let spinach simmer and fry in the oil for about 35 min. Add ¼ cup olive oil after 10 min and another ¼ cup olive oil after 20 min. Stir often, scraping any spinach from the bottom of the pan. As the spinach slowly blackens, the oil should become a dark green color. If after 35 min the spinach still has moisture and color, continue cooking until it is completely blackened, and the oil is dark green
- Continue heating the oil and remove blackened spinach from the pot. Set aside
- Add two diced onions to the green oil and sauté for several minutes until onions start becoming translucent
- Add cooked onions, green oil, and blackened spinach to an electric slow-cooker. Also add, cumin, coriander, paprika, turmeric cinnamon, garlic, thyme, mint, cilantro, harissa, soaked beans, potatoes, and rehydrated porcini mushrooms. Mixed until combined
- Add 5 cups of water and 3 tbsp consommé or other stock seasoning. Can also substitute with 5 cups of vegetable stock, or water flavored with salt and pepper to taste
- Cook on high in the slow-cooker for 5-8 hours. *Crockpot T'fina Pkaila* is a forgiving stew once it's slow-cooking. You can cook it at a lower temperature for longer or leave it in at a low temperature to keep warm after it is cooked through
- Serve with bread and more harissa

Similar to the family in Ya Amna, my fathers parents immigrated from Tunisia to a developing Israeli town, in the 1960s. They left home in Tunisia to be confronted by a wide range of hardships in Israel from social to economic. Although they had a difficult time adjusting to Israeli society, they maintained a sense of autonomy and identity through religious practice and food culture. Eating was always a number one topic of discussion when family would gather. Not only did holidays have special food traditions, but every day of the week. Recipes from my dads family are so complicated, extensive, and involved that he describes his grandmother and mother spending most of their time every day preparing food in the kitchen. He also recalls a significant emphasis on not wasting. Leaving food on the plate was forbidden, and if bread were to fall on the floor it must be picked up, kissed, and eaten.

My mothers grandparents immigrated from Russia and Romania to the Midwest (Indiana and Missouri) in the early 1900's looking for peace from the pogroms. They made a living in America as farmers, bootleggers, and store keepers. Coming from a landscape of scarcity, food was an integral part of family life and double chins were admired. They brought their fears of being stopped of freedom, safety and autonomy from antisemitic Europe, which manifested in survivalist mentality in America. Consequently, they grew most of their food.

This frame of mind was passed on to my grandmother's generation. She was also inspired by contemporary values. Involved in the women's movement of the 1960s and interested in challenging expected gender roles, she made a conscious decision to not cook. Her contemporary feminist values, which mingled with her inherited survivalist mentality, created a family food culture centered around efficiency. She vetoed Shabbat dinner famously repeating, "why keep Shabbat for a God that would let 6 million die?" Despite her nuanced relationship to cooking

and Jewish tradition, my Grandma could not let go of celebrating Jewish holidays. Hanukkah, Passover, Sukkoth, and Rosh Hashanah pulled her in. However, not a practiced in elaborate cooking, the aesthetics of the table were of most importance to her. Food-wise she would use eggs from the chickens she kept in the yard to make a quick and simple egg salad.

This stew, *Crockpot T'fina Pkaila c*ombines the efficiency and assimilation of my moms side with the traditionalism of my dads side. Also, customarily made with meat, my vegetarian version communicates an extra layer Jewish identity influenced by contemporary awarenesses such as animal cruelty and climate change. The ingredients and procedures reflect Jewish identities from two parts of the world, evolving overtime and coming together in the American diaspora. Enjoy and be full.

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