

Arab-Hebrew bread: The story of the Hubeza and the split local heritage

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Introduction

The *hubeza*,¹ a local wild plant that in the winter months grows everywhere in Israel, is absent from supermarket shelves and popular market stalls in Tel Aviv. Despite being so common in fields and wildlands, and though it is a tasty edible plant, easy to prepare, healthy and full of vitamins – qualities that make it what is called today “superfood” – the *hubeza* can be found almost exclusively in Arab markets, which are culturally and geographically removed from Israel’s culinary center. This research seeks to examine why and how the *hubeza* has been pushed to the margins of the Israeli cuisine, by analyzing its appearances in the printed Hebrew press from the foundation of the state up to this day. The study highlights three major themes that are associated with the *hubeza* in the Israeli society: one theme, prevalent mainly in the first decade of the state, was an attempt to mythologize the *hubeza* in the spirit of the Zionist narrative as having played a major role in saving the Jewish community during the siege of Jerusalem. The other two themes show that nowadays, the *hubeza* is perceived in Israel on the one hand as local and available, and on the other as exotic, distant, and belonging to the Other.

How can one edible plant be perceived as both distant and near at one and the same time? How can one plant become part of the heritage of two opposing ethnic-national groups? And what role does this plant play in the Israeli cultural heritages?

Through analyzing the allusions to the *hubeza* in the Hebrew press, the research questions the underlying idea of the *Slow Food* movement, and especially the assumption that promoting local food necessarily promotes ideas of justice and equality and contributes to the challenge of creating of a more inclusive Arab-Jewish shared heritage. Through analyzing the allusions to the *hubeza* in the Hebrew press, the research questions the underlying idea of the *Slow Food* movement, and especially the assumption that promoting local food necessarily promotes ideas of

1 The Arabic name of Mallow.

justice and equality and contributes to the challenge of creating of a more inclusive Arab-Jewish shared heritage.

In the last two decades, movements that call for local food consumption have gone beyond the confines of activism to become a central component of the global foodie discourse. Food stores boasting “zero kilometers” and restaurants proclaiming “from farm to table” are opening regularly, and in 2007 the word “locavore” (a person who bases their nutrition on local food) was Oxford University’s word of the year. There are many motivations behind the idea of promoting local food consumption, among them ecological motivations such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, social motivations such as supporting the local farmers, and cultural motivations such as preserving traditions. In his book *Loving the Earth* the founder of the international *Slow Food* movement,² Carlo Petrini, documents a conversation with one of the prominent voices preaching local consumption – Wendell Berry, an American writer, intellectual, and farmer. Berry suggests that a deep and continuous cultural connection to a piece of land is the key to developing stable and incontestable culture and agriculture (Heldke 2012; Petrini and Irving 2014).³

Although (and maybe because) the subject of promoting local food is close to my heart, and although the ideas expounded by Berry in particular and locavores in general sound beautiful and romantic, I would like to challenge them by trying to understand the ramifications that promoting local food consumption might have in a place like Israel. Israel is a relatively young state, whose founding was a realization of Zionism, an ideology associated, among other things, with an Ashkenazi (Jews from European origin) elite that had no knowledge of the local flora, and based on the myth of “a land without a people [and therefore without a culture, traditions or a local cuisine] for a people without a land” (Zangwill 1901, p. 615).

In order to challenge the ideas of local food promotion in Israel, I chose to focus on one local wild plant that has a symbolic status in the local culture – the hubeza. Through analyzing the representations of the hubeza in the Israeli press from the foundation of the state up to this day, and through reading contemporary menus in restaurants across the country, I will examine the ways local wild food deals with the

2 The *Slow Food* organization promotes local food consumption, the preservation of culinary traditions and biodiversity, and agriculture and food sustainability – in the belief that each human being has the right to good, clean, and fair food. The organization was founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, and today operates in around 160 countries around the world through hundreds of thousands of activists engaged in advocating the organization’s ideas through diverse actions.

3 For Berry (and other locavores), there is a close connection between the physical plot of land and culture and agriculture. He claims that work on the land can begin only after it has been home to at least three generations of the same culture, otherwise the land will pay for the mistakes with every change of ownership.

challenge of fostering and creating a culinary heritage of both Arabs and Jews, while at the same time imposing segregation, appropriation, and oppression.

Food as cultural language and heritage

In the last decades many theoreticians have discussed the inherent qualities of food as language,⁴ making varied arguments about food carrying symbolic meanings and often serving as a signifier. Philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, or communications experts have used food and its representations to read society's structures and analyze it.⁵ One of the cornerstones of gastronomic studies is the assumption that we are not only what we eat,⁶ but also how, when, and where we eat, and why we choose to eat in that particular way.

When Roland Barthes (1972) wrote about *Wine and Milk* or *Steak and Chips*, he examined the values and ideologies of the society that glorifies these products by looking at the myth created around them, their representations, and the ways they are customarily consumed.

In other words, a society's conception of the food it consumes shapes in numerous ways not only the nutritional agenda of its members, including the food's production, supply, storage, sale, and availability, but also their cultural agenda. The various contexts that link food, culture and tradition contribute to shaping the identity of the modern state. The culinary heritage creates foci for collective identification by shaping a variety of ethical-cultural conceptions, including: the types of food that are allowed (or prohibited), the ways food is grown/manufactured, how food is consumed in normal and in festive times, and so on. The social, economic, and religious contexts of food are present in the cultural heritage in diverse ways and

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- 4 For example: Massimo Montanari (2006) describes the disconnection between the stimulating caffeine in coffee and the idea of the "coffee break" as a practice of relaxation between two work periods. He suggests that unlike verbal language, food language cannot be detached from the concreteness of the object or from the predetermined semantic value, but it is the context that defines itself autonomously to the point of contradicting the nutritional value of the food it is attributed to, as in the case of coffee. Warren Belasco claims that "what we think about food may have little to do with the actual material properties of the food itself" (in: Johnston and Baumann 2010, p.31).
 - 5 Many scholars agree that the connection between identity and consumption gives food a major role in community building, and that we use our nutrition to convey images of public identity.
 - 6 To paraphrase the famous saying by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, one of the forefathers of gastronomy: "Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es" (tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are), as well as the famous observation by the Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach: "Der Mensch ist, was er ißt" (man is what he eats).

through various mediums. These include the rituals connected to how food is represented and consumed, canonical recipe books, the preservation of cooking practices, museums, and the legal protection of specific products/dishes (Luigi and Albinetti 2016). Furthermore, the ways food is featured in the cultural heritage influence the relations between different classes in a specific society, as well the relations between different ethnic and religious groups that comprise the modern national society. Hence the shared culinary heritage strives to regulate relations within the national group, while reinforcing its uniqueness against and in relation to secondary groups and the invasion of global flavors and food products. In this sense the culinary heritage offers a means and an arena for creating an ethnic-national hegemony that tends to reproduce the center-periphery relations that exist in other social arenas. In immigration states the culinary cultural heritage represents an actual arena of struggle where processes of integration and assimilation simultaneously exist side by side with appropriation, marginalization, and exclusion. The latter produce dichotomous categorizations such as “haute cuisines” and “popular cuisines”, “quality food” and “fast food”, “authenticity” and “junk” (Johnston and Baumann 2010). The agents in the culinary arena – chefs, cooks, restaurant critics, talk-show hosts, and judges in cooking contests – play in this field and take part in formulating the cultural narrative it is centered around. As a result, the shared culinary heritage is trapped between the wish to consolidate and preserve a unique cultural-geographic space, and responding to market forces, industrialization processes, the mobility of goods, and waves of immigration.

The local Israeli cuisine similarly represents an arena of struggle over the character and face of the shared Israeli cultural heritage. In this arena, fight against each other, the Ashkenazi cuisine and the Mizrahi cuisine, the secular cuisine and the kosher cuisine, the omnivorous meat-based cuisine and the vegan cuisine, the Jewish cuisine and the Palestinian cuisine. They all oscillate between the wish to formulate the cultural heritage as unique, authentic, and original, and the wish to create hybrids of flavors, dishes, and traditions with a more pluralistic and cosmopolitan character (Raviv 2015), which is present not only on the private plate, but also in the collective field of representations.

Why not the hubeza?

The scientific name of the mallow common in the Middle East is *malva sylvestris*, and it is known to most Israelis by its Arab name hubeza.⁷

7 I will use the name hubeza to describe this edible plant.

Fig. 1: Hubeza Lasagna by Chef Asaf Doktor (Photo: Asaf Doktor)



Fig. 2: Hubeza Soup with cured egg yolk by Chef Raz Rahav (Photo: Raz Rahav)



Both the Hebrew and the Arab names are derived from the word for bread, attesting to this edible plant's great importance in the history of the Mediterranean diet in general and the local one in particular.⁸ But it's not just the name: Horace (in Conington 1882) mentioned it in his writings in the 1st century BC, when referring to his own diet: "me pascunt olivae, / me cichorea levesque malvae" (as for me, olives, endives and smooth mallows provide sustenance). Pythagoras forbade his pupils to consume it, because he believed the consumption of mallow encouraged brain activity and symbolized the attraction between the heavenly and the earthly (Flaccus and Conington 2017). One of the interpretations of the sentence from the Book of Job translated in the King James Version as "can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" suggests that the original's *riv halamut* is not egg white but a flavorless secretion discharged from a plant named *halamut*, probably from the *malvaceae* family, and in the Mishna a plant named *helmit* appears in the Kil'ayim tractate (1, 8).

In addition to its great importance in the local culinary traditions, the hubeza is also attributed with medicinal qualities, and is considered healthy and nutritious, as can be gleaned from numerous sources in the local folklore (Azaria 1978; Zohari 1978).⁹ Current studies prove that the hubeza contains active elements that can relieve mucous irritations, as well as anti-inflammatory elements and antioxidants (Barros et al. 2010; Benso et al. 2015). Despite that, the hubeza not been accepted as a full member in the Israeli-Jewish cuisine and has never been grown as part of commercial agriculture in Israel.

Even though the hubeza remained on the margins of the Israeli-Jewish culinary heritage it has gained a symbolic status in the Israeli society. The hubeza is local not only because it grows on Israel's land. In fact, it also grows in the wild across Europe and Africa (ibid). The hubeza is local because it has played a major part in the culture and history of the local cuisine. It has long been well-known to the country's inhabitants, and to this day is part of the foraging and cooking traditions among Jewish and Muslim families whose roots are in the Middle East. The hubeza is a wild plant not only because it grows in the wild all over the country, in fields, in courtyards, in traffic islands and in landfills; it is wild because it has been marked as such. Should an Israeli want to buy hubeza, they would have trouble finding it outside of the Arab markets, which are both geographically and culturally remote from the urban food markets in central Israel. Conversations with Israeli farmers and distributors and with Nativ Dudai, head of the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants unit at the

8 The hubeza is considered one of the most important edible plants in the Middle Eastern foraging tradition (Zohara and Dudai 2014).

9 In popular medicine, mallow was considered a laxative. Mallow was used as cough medicine and for stomach problems (Ben Shabat 1944). Mallow leaves were also used as bandage (Buchman and Amar 2007).

Volcani Center's Agricultural Research Organization, suggest that it's not because of its natural traits that farmers in Israel don't grow the hubeza commercially. According to Dudai, and as will be demonstrated below, the reasons are purely cultural and consumerist ones.

The authentic and the exotic: The contemporary foodie discourse

It is important to understand that the foodie¹⁰ discourse is based on knowledge and takes place within frameworks of thinking that are influenced by the power relations in society and influence them back in return. Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann (2010) describe the contemporary foodie discourse in their book *Foodies: Democracy and distinction in the gourmet foodscape*, showing how food acts as a status symbol that positions the economic and cultural elites and distinguishes them. This book laid the foundations for thinking about foodies as cultural consumers who in the sphere of food negotiate the tension between democratic tolerance on the one hand, and exclusive distinction on the other. The authors claim that this tension is governed by the frameworks of "authentication" and "exoticization" (Johnston and Baumann 2010). These two frameworks had been examined seven years earlier by Lisa Heldke (2003) that deconstructs the fashionable desire that inspires the foodie pursuit of ethnic food. Heldke (ibid) exposes and critiques the orientalist approach underlying Euro-American foodies' adventurous motivations, as she calls them, to consume exotic and authentic food.

Methods

Drawing inspiration from Barthes (1972), the study is based on analyzing around one hundred scanned passages from the printed Israeli press, which mention the word hubeza or helmit (the plant's Hebrew name), the earliest from 1948 and the latest from 2018. The analysis focused on the dichotomy local/global, while bringing to light the traps inherent in promoting local food consumption in Israel and ways such promotion fosters segregation, appropriation, and oppression.

Three periods, three themes

The analysis of the hubeza's representations in the printed press points to three central themes characterizing three different periods (see graphic): in the first period –

10 *Foodies* [informal] is a slang nickname for those interested in preparing and eating fine food.

the first decade of the independent state – the hubeza is mentioned almost exclusively in the context of its role during the siege of Jerusalem; in the second period – from the beginning of the 1960s to the beginning of the 2000s – the hubeza is by contrast absent from the Israeli Hebrew press; the third period – between 2000 and 2018 – raises questions about how the local wild is perceived and promoted in Israel. These two decades have seen a sharp rise in mentions of the hubeza in two opposing contexts: on the one hand, it is linked to terms such as local and *baladi*,¹¹ seasonal and foraging, while on the other hand it is associated with terms that denote a nostalgic distance, expressed in longing for what is no longer there, or a material distance and an imagined rarity, expressed in words such as rare, oriental and treasures. As if the hubeza, a food with deep and strong roots in the local culture, was an exotic food found far away from here. How can the hubeza be perceived in Israel as both near and far at the same time?

Following the analysis, I will show the current representations of the hubeza as they appear in menus of celebrity chef restaurants across the country, and on the process of the hubeza's aestheticization. Through these representations I will raise questions about the promotion of local food consumption and about shared Jewish-Arab heritage in Israel today.

The fifties: The siege of Jerusalem narrative

As mentioned above, the hubeza's fifteen minutes of fame in the Israeli society came in the decade after the 1948 War and revolved around its role as the heroine of the siege of Jerusalem. This is what Dr. Dov Yosef, Jerusalem's military governor in 1948, wrote in his memoirs:

At the beginning of March, the food supply situation became grave. We were completely out of animal proteins, and apart from flour we had vital foods for only four to fifteen days – each product and its amount [...] We sent children to the fields to gather mallow leaves,¹² a wild plant that grows after the rainy days and tastes like spinach and sold it to the public to cook soup. We had to stop for fear of landmines and because of the Arab snipers. [...] As hunger in the besieged city increased, the gathering of mallow, or hubeza, was renewed. The picked leaves were transported to Tnuva,¹³ which was located at the time on Yechezkel Street near the Shabbat Square, where they were packed and marketed in the city as 'New Zealand spinach' (Genachowski 1988, p. 10).

11 The Arab word *baladi* means "from the country".

12 Dr. Dov Yosef chooses to use the Hebrew word *helmit*.

13 *Tnuva* was established in 1926. Today it is the largest food manufacturer in Israel.

In the years after the founding of the state of Israel, the hubeza became a national heroine. The *Yediot Ahronoth* newspaper wrote in 1950: “He [Man] tends to forget the little stories of the war; he remembers the hubeza he ate during the siege, but has already forgotten its taste, unless he’s made it his habit to put a plate of hubeza on his table once a year as a souvenir” (Genachowski 1950, p. 1). This glorification had a goal and was instigated by the government and supported by propaganda in the press. In the early fifties a proposal was made by the department of nutrition at the Ministry of Education and Culture to name the hubeza as the official food of the Independence Day celebration:

Ahead of the festive family meal on Independence Day eve, the department of nutrition at the Ministry of Education and Culture is suggesting two menus for the meal, connected with the memories of the War of Liberation,¹⁴ with the founding of the state and with the Ingathering of the Exiles. The menu can be adapted to the tastes of the family members, while keeping the fundamentals that are listed in the explanation for the menu [...] The first course consists of mallow (hubeza) in memory of the siege of Jerusalem: this wild plant, which grows in every courtyard and garden in Jerusalem, was almost the only vegetable on our diet during the siege of Jerusalem. The mallow can be served in various ways, such as: as a sautéed patty in tomato sauce, or salad with tahini, or in any other form, like you would usually cook spinach (no author 1956).

The Israeli government’s effort to mythicize the hubeza was so great, that in 1952 the then Minister of Education Ben-Zion Dinur came up with the idea of an “Independence Day Seder”, which included a revised version of the Passover Seder telling the story of the War of Independence. In 1955 the proposal was publicized in the *Maariv* newspaper:

The dictionary writer Even-Shoshan and the poet Yitzhak Shalev have prepared a tastefully written and edited modern Haggadah,¹⁵ which is going to turn the festive meal into an experience worthy of a tradition. To complete the celebratory setting, we are instructed at the beginning of the Haggadah to decorate the walls of our house with the national flags, the state’s emblem, and pictures of its personages [...]. And then – the Seder¹⁶ will begin! [...] One by one the members of the household and their guests will read the festive stories [...]. It also tells in a flowery haggadic style about ‘the rulers of the country who joined our enemies and appointed over us commissioners and policemen and oppressors’ and about the UN resolution that said Amen to our heart’s wishes. Here begins the story of the heroic struggle, and the Arab’s plots to ‘beat us and defeat us before

14 This is another name for the 1948 War.

15 The *Haggadah* is a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder.

16 The Passover *Seder* is a ritual feast that at the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover.

we become a state' [...]. The meal – a masterwork of the government's nutrition department [...]. But in stark contrast to the idea of the Merging of the Exiles, separate menus have been prepared for those with eastern and western tastes, and while those of Ashkenazi¹⁷ origin are instructed to have a first course of 'mallow patties in tomato sauce', those of Mizrahi¹⁸ descent will get 'mallow salad with tahini' (Bitzur 1955, p. 2).

Six years earlier, in 1949, the *Hed Hamizrach* newspaper had published a version of the Passover Haggadah for the Independence Day meal, with a different take on the song *Ma Nishtana* (Hebrew for "The Four Questions"):

Why is this Passover different from last year's Passover/ In 1948 we were under siege without leavened products and matzah – and this year we have both leavened products and matzah. / In 1948 we ate mallow [...] without all the other vegetables – and this year we have all kinds of vegetables and fruit (no author 1949).

By creating a symbolic connection between the hubeza and the powerful myth of the matzah that saved the Israelites in their Exodus from Egypt, the Zionist leaders in Israel hoped to create a national heroine, a local wild ingredient in the evolving Israeli cuisine. But they failed. In 1965 the *Haboker* newspaper published an article about the Independence Day meal, which described how a decade earlier, the forgotten idea of the Independence Day Haggadah and of eating hubeza in the festive meal was proposed:

In April 10 years ago the college for nutrition and home economy at the Ministry of Education and Culture made a proposal for the Independence Day meal. The proposal is reprinted here, but in the meantime the Independence Day Haggadah, as well as the Independence Day meal, has been forgotten by many and even the Education Ministry spokesperson didn't know it existed. We obtained it from the college for nutrition and home economy, and here it is in full (no author 1965, p. 6).

In the early sixties, when the Israeli culture started to cast its gaze outward and tend towards capitalist consumer culture, food became a leisure and luxury product (Raviv 2015). Moreover, when the years of austerity ended, the Israeli society was presumably no longer interested in a food like the hubeza, so closely linked with the poor nutrition that prevailed during the siege of Jerusalem.¹⁹ Therefore, between

17 Ashkenazim are Jews that emigrated to Israel from European countries.

18 Mizrahim are Jews that emigrated to Israel from Arab or Muslim countries.

19 In a text thus titled *We are looking for a national dish* (no author), the writer wishes to find the common language for East and West in Israel, and the suitable dish "to symbolize the Independence celebration, the Gathering of the Exiles and the Merging of the Exiles." She remem-

1960 and 2000 there were considerably fewer mentions of the hubeza in the printed Israeli press, and when mentioned at all, it was almost exclusively in the context of its role during the siege.²⁰ It seems that the hubeza was pushed out of the Israeli-Jewish heritage. However, a fascinating semiotic process took place at the turn of the millennium, between 2000 and 2018, in which a food having symbolic meaning in the local culture became both near and distant at one and the same time.

2000–2018: Baladi-Local is great, Arabic even better

The global trend for local food consumption has not skipped the Hebrew food press, and the last two decades have seen a sharp rise in representations of the hubeza as a food connected to local food, foraging and seasonality. In these years many articles have encouraged their readers to get out of the city into the fields and gather hubeza or buy it at the Arab markets or even order a hubeza dish in restaurants.

Unsurprisingly, as the hubeza is increasingly mentioned in the context of local food, it is also increasingly mentioned as part of the Arab cuisine. This trend can also be linked to the hubeza being more frequently mentioned alongside the Arab word *baladi*, which means “from the city” or “from my home country”. Over the years, in different countries in the Middle East, the word has acquired meanings linked to the terms “rural” and “local”, and therefore many markets have started to sell local produce under the *baladi* moniker.

In an article from 2001, that discusses the market in Wadi Nisnas in Haifa, the vegetable store *Bshara* was described in the following way:

In the winter he has wild herbs. All the stuff they have in the nearby market, but more expensive, packed, and convenient. Hubeza and wild chicory and sorrel and sage leaves for filling and wild fennel. Everything. In the summer he has *baladi*. I know that it's already becoming a cliché, but I don't mind being a bit of an evangelist, a bit of a crusader. This food, which didn't pass through the Volcani Institute, didn't grow in hothouses, and has no brain, is a lot tastier than the perfect fruit and vegetables at the supermarket (Farber 2002, p. 8).

bers the menu published by the Ministry of Education, which included hubeza in memory of the siege, and writes: “In truth, I don't believe that this synthetic menu will take root” (1962 p. 8).

- 20 It is interesting to examine the rise and fall of the hubeza as the national hero in comparison to the way the early settlers in Palestine perceived the fellahin and the Bedouins: “In the early days of Jewish settlement, the figure of the Arab worker, and especially the Bedouin and the fellah, gained a mythological status not only for being considered a relic of the Biblical past, but also for their association with desired masculine qualities like physical power, endurance, abstemiousness, and attachment to the land” (Hirsch 2016, p. 351).

Tsaban (2016) argues that by eating hummus in as distinctly Arab style as possible, Jewish Israelis acquire cultural status, preserve the power relations, and reconnect to the land. We may consider the word *baladi* in a similar way to the way Zaban considers hummus. Farber, and likely also many of the readers of his column, are interested in reconnecting to the land by consuming authentic Arab food. Using the Arabic word *baladi* to describe local food earns the writer and his readers a cultural trait that connects them to the region and makes them feel more authentic. By contrast, defining *baladi* as “food with no brain” marks it as a food that belongs to the inferior Other and distinguishes them from the relatively superior writer and readers.

In another article from 2000 the writer encourages his readers to go out and forage for herbs:

If you haven't yet met your salad when it was still alive, this is the time. Go out to the field, to the nearest *baladi* market, or to a restaurant that hasn't yet assimilated the secrets of commercialization. [...] It starts in the autumn, with the small leaves of the *hubeza*, that human-loving plant (what it really loves is nitrogen, and we and our rubbish provide it with plenty of that) which the kids used to call ‘Arab bread’ and ate its fruit, and even before that, during the siege of Jerusalem, its leaves were used to make soup and patties and salad. Even if some of us think that before we came to this land there was nothing here – well there was, or more correctly there were Arabs, and the *hubeza* leaves are an important part of their diet (Farber 2000, p. 4).

By using the term “Arab bread”, the Israeli society's common nickname for the *hubeza*, the Hebrew language has pushed this wild plant to its seemingly natural place – to “their” diet (and whom is the writer addressing in this text?). In fact, this is how the local-Other food – Arabic food – becomes reinforced in the Israeli food discourse.

In time the food manufacturers and the restaurants realized the status symbol inherent in the word *baladi*.²¹ Different food businesses slowly started using it to promote their products, and thus, with no basis in law or precise definition in Hebrew, the word was “becoming a cliché” (Farber 2002, p. 8). In fact, it is already such a cliché that it has changed its meaning.

On the *Milog* Hebrew dictionary website, which is the first result in a google search for the word *baladi* in Hebrew, the meaning is given as: “1. fine agricultural produce. ‘*baladi* eggplant tastes perfect’; 2. original.”²² Both suggestions are a dis-

21 In the contemporary foodie discourse about quality, locality, organic, handmade, creativity, and simplicity, everyone strives to mark foods as a source of distinction for those with the cultural and economic capital (Johnston and Baumann 2010).

22 See: <http://bit.ly/3G7HiSH>

tortion of the word *baladi* in Arabic. As we shall see below, the semiotic change undergone by the hubeza as it takes on characteristics that lend its users a different status also leads to changes in the modes of its consumption and in the meanings it bestows on those who consume it.

When the local becomes exotic: The creation of local-Other food

As defined by Johnston and Baumann, “exotic” is not only the geographically and socially remote; it can also be a “norm-breaking” object: “[...] foods that present difference as radically different, exciting, and desirable. These foods are not simply rare, or unusual, but they violate norms of the culinary and cultural mainstream” (2010, p. 108–109). Moreover, Johnston and Baumann (*ibid*) suggest that in the contemporary foodie discourse, the discovery of new exotic foods, restaurants, and cuisines grants the foodie a social status that was not of importance in the past, but whose value today, with the rise of globalization and the spread of different food cultures, has risen considerably.

Before we turn to the contemporary representations of the hubeza’s exoticization, let us look back and try to trace its positioning as the food of the exotic Other. Exoticization is created by a perspective that defines the Other as different, but – different from whom? What are the standards of normality, and who is the Other? A good example of the standards being positioned within the hegemony is the education system’s theme concerned with respecting the Other and the different.

In 1960, the children’s writer and educator Miriam Rot published an article titled *He’s so different from me – and yet so similar...* in which she sought to educate children to accept the different. The article was accompanied by an illustration showing a white girl facing a black girl:

The children of the kibbutz kindergarten regularly meet with Arab children from the neighboring village. The children know the pasture used by the little Arab shepherd. They like to make exchanges with him: Ahmed brings ‘pita bread’ in his rucksack and the children give him bread. The shepherd plays his whining flute and the children applaud. ‘Too bad we don’t understand Arabic [...]’ – they say – ‘He’s also sorry he doesn’t speak Hebrew, isn’t he?’ – ‘Ahmed is our friend – he’s nice, he’s a good Arab! Isn’t he?’ The children like Ahmed despite his dark skin, despite his tatty clothes, despite his scruffy hair and his incomprehensible words. [...] The children learned to appreciate him as a child and struck a pact of friendship with him. Ahmed taught them how to toast wheat in the field, Ahmed taught them how to eat hubeza, Ahmed knows which wild plants are edible and good for making salad. [...] Ahmed carves branches and makes beautifully decorated sticks. Ahmed is smart and quick [...]. He’s so different from the children and yet so similar [...] (1960, p. 4).

The presentation of the hubeza as a popular food that belongs to the Other, as part of a wider and less sophisticated knowledge, recurs in texts from the last two decades, as in this text from 2000 that was published in *Yediot Ahronoth*:

There are great experts, Bedouins who know every leaf and herb and know how to produce water by chewing small wild fruit, but even if you can't find yourselves an expert you can get by [...]. Many also know the hubeza (mallow). Round leaves, in dark green, on the sides of the roads. Here too preparation is nothing: you fry chopped onion in olive oil until golden (with a bit of garlic or without), add the roughly chopped leaves, some pepper and salt, and fry it for a few minutes until the leaves wilt but don't lose their firmness completely [...] (Farber 2000, p. 4).

By creating distance between the subject who holds knowledge and the readers that seek it, the writers preserve the local wild food as belonging to the exotic Other. This distance is well demonstrated by the three following examples.

Local and exotic wild food: Meet Nadima from the market in Wadi Nisnas

The key word – hubeza – came up in three different texts discussing Nadima Sabiti, a veteran restaurateur who ran a restaurant in Wadi Nisnas in Haifa. In a piece from 2014 Sabiti is presented by the journalist and writer Miriam Kutz:

It's pretty amusing to hear Nadima, 71 years old, for 53 of which she's been cooking, talking about Aharoni and Gidi Gov²³ as if they were friends from the hood. This is maybe the most informal cook you're likely to find. A small alcove in the Wadi [Wadi Nisnas], maybe 20 pots on the go, and she's sitting and sorting leaves for rolling or black-eyed peas for cooking as if she was standing in her private kitchen rather than in the middle of the neighborhood. This is a cute homey little eatery, mainly due to the personality of the cook and the homeliness that sizzles in the pots: stuffed eggplants and zucchini, rice with meat, vine leaves, black-eyed peas, green beans in okra sauce, Mujaddara, and lots of dishes with spinach, beetroot, hubeza and more. Nadima learned how to cook from her mom. She has two children and seven grandchildren, but they're not into cooking (2014, p. 12).

23 Israel Aharoni is an Israeli celebrity chef, and together with Gidi Gov, a famous Israeli actor and singer, they are *Aharoni & Gidi* – the hosts of an Israeli TV show that follows them through various countries as they study the respective culture while travelling in different sites and enjoying the local food. The show's first season aired in 2011, and only in 2017, after three seasons where they went to places like Sian, Bucharra, Vietnam, China, Morocco, and more – they finally had a season about the local Israeli cuisine.

In 2006 the chef and restaurateur Pini Levi wrote about the market in Wadi Nisnas:

[...] In the middle of the market I stop in the tiny restaurant run by Nadima, who cooks Arab food on kerosene burners. I can always open the pots here and have a peek at the food, see what tickles my fancy most and ask for a plate. For 18 shekels you can get spinach, endive or hubeza, stuffed vegetables, okra or eggplants in tomato sauce. Nadima serves everything with a smile and is happy to tell you each time all over again what's going on in her pots (2006, p. 16).

In a piece from 2013 titled *The Hubeza Craze*, David Bender describes in his column *From the diary of a hedonist* the ways to eat hubeza:

You can eat the leaves chopped and cooked like at Nadima's in Wadi Nisnas, and at a lengthening list of other Arab restaurants, and not only there. The hubeza has made a grand entrance this winter also at Alma, Yonatan Roshfeld's new restaurant. He has chosen to serve it with fresh ricotta, and it's worked brilliantly (2013, p. 11).

These texts raise two central points:

(1) The local-Other food is transmitted to the readers as a silenced object by the food writers – agents of the Jewish hegemony, who come to visit and poke around in its pots. In the three examples, Nadima Sabiti's last name is never mentioned. It might be down to the fact that she is a woman, or an Arab, or both identities at once – an Arab woman. Either way, these texts frame Sabiti as inferior or less important. Certainly not as important as Israel Aharoni and Gidi Gov or chef Yonatan Roshfeld,²⁴ who has chosen to put ricotta on his hubeza, as opposed to Sabiti's simple cooking, which is based on a traditional recipe that she didn't choose but was passed on to her by her mother. The recurring opposition between “there” (the tiny restaurant, the cute homey little neighborhood eatery) and “here” (Yonatan Roshfeld's Tel Aviv restaurant; the cultural knowledge of Gidi Gov and Israel Aharoni) not only shows how food writers often address a Tel Aviv audience who is from a defined and known socio-cultural background, but also reveals the gap between the simply-cut green leaves and the innovative way of serving them in a more aesthetic, more European way (and combined with ricotta).

Thus, Nadima is a home cook, and entering her kitchen is like entering a private kitchen. In this case, the Arabic cuisine is kept within the feminine, domestic private sphere. But with the “help” of Israeli-Jewish chefs, the hubeza gets to enter a different sphere – more public, more sophisticated, more Western.

24 A highly appreciated Israeli celebrity chef, who was a judge on *Master Chef* T.V. show.

(2) By using belittling words such as amusing, cute, and tiny, the writers perpetuate the social distance that stems from the power relations. This distance between the professional men (Gidi Gov, Israel Aharoni, Yonatan Roshfeld) and Nadima's little eatery paints Sabiti's hubeza as lowly, and she herself as uneducated, with an inferior unprofessional culinary knowledge, knowledge that passes from mother to daughter (which is probably why it was also important to note the number of her children and grandchildren), and as having norms of behavior that are different from the mainstream, which allow snooping around in her pots. Notwithstanding, however, Sabiti's culinary knowledge and eating norms are presented within the frameworks of the "authentic" and the "exotic". The true adventurers, those who have made it to Wadi Nisnas and were able to find the treasure – Nadima's tiny little eatery – have earned the cultural status which only true food adventurers earn.

At the center of the arguments expounded by locavores in general and by Berrylies the idea that connection to place and land promotes justice and trust in democracy in a way that can only happen if people buy directly from the person producing their food (Heldke 2003). It is important to understand that the direct consumption of local wild herbs, and in particular the hubeza – Arab bread – directly from the Arab vendors in the sphere of the Arab markets, is a kind of performance, in which the two sides fill their expected role, which is usually based on a shallow knowledge of the culinary culture of the exotic Other. For example, intentionally or unintentionally, Sabiti continued to cook the same dishes. After all, if she had decided one day to garnish one of her dishes with hubeza fries or labneh mousse (as did recently a few young Arab chefs in Israel, on which I shall expand later), the Jewish customers who make pilgrimages to her small restaurant would have probably raised an eyebrow and tell themselves that Nadima is no longer as authentic as she used to be.²⁵ And if so, does this direct encounter really promote trust, or does it merely perpetuate the existing power relations by stabilizing the hubeza as the cultural heritage of the inferior Other?

Nostalgia and childhood: The imagined distance

The social distance is demonstrated not only through the opposition between "us" and "them", but also through the opposition between "today" and "then" – an imagined distance created, among other things, by correlating representations of the

25 As Johnston and Baumann define it, "culinary exoticism can work to essentialize and stereotype ethnic cultures (e.g., Mexican-American) that are expected to present and preserve their cultural heritage for consumption by the dominant culture, often in a context of social and economic inequality where an ethnic community's exotic food is more welcome than members of that ethnic community" (2010, p. 102).

hubeza with notions of nostalgia and childhood. Nostalgia is a highly influential marketing tool often used by many tourism and food writers; it is also extensively used with regards to local wild plants.

In the hubeza's case, however, we seem to be dealing not only with a marketing strategy. This edible plant is not rarer today than it used to be in the past, yet still many writers seem to treat the hubeza as if it was a childhood memory of a food that has disappeared, that can no longer be found in these parts. For example, this is what food writer Nira Russo writes in a nostalgic collection published in 2013, in which "the best writers, personalities and stars return to their yearbook photos from kindergarten, the army and school":

I didn't know yet the Hebrew word: Wallah!²⁶ Nor was I able back then to put all this into words, but I started to breathe. Our classroom was, hooray, inside the water tower: round, many-windowed, with a stone courtyard from whose cracks sprouted wood sorrel and hubeza, and with the rusty stepladder to the forbidden water worlds above. There, on the warm stone, with the Tel Aviv blend mixed with tinges of hubeza and fragrant lantana on the fence, I relaxed in order to breathe, restfully, as a child can only breathe in their own home. Since then, well, 'years have passed, the gold has dimmed, hills have become plains. But I still remember a mountain echo, clear and vivid, then as now'. Not that there were hills at our high school, and in any case the poet put it better. But I remember every sunny and poetic and grassy and clear and vivid detail. And even without citing Rachel's poem, I'm crying as I write this (2013, p. 22).

In David Bender's piece *The Hubeza Craze* from the same year, the writer describes his childhood:

On muddy winter days we had roundabout ways to go back home from school. We preferred the wadis and the fields, which tripled the distance, but it was such fun. We walked through rocks, trees and tall grass that reached as high as our shoulders. Among those there was one kind with small pink flowers, which towards spring developed into round and squashed fruits. One of the gangs showed us one day how to pick the strange fruit, remove its green wrapping, and chew. It was a bit tasteless. These were fruits of the hubeza, a common wild plant, which drew our attention mainly when it dared to grow in a carefully groomed flowerbed and was immediately uprooted. If someone had told us then that in days of need its leaves were used as spinach substitute, we would have found

26 Walla is an Arabic word which means: "I promise by Allah (God)." Nowadays it is used in spoken Hebrew and has two meanings: The first is to ask someone to approve what they say (it is really so?), for example: "Yesterday I had a great dinner – Walla? Yes." The second is to highlight the truth of a sentence (it is really so), for example: "Walla, I had a great dinner last night."

it hard to believe, because we knew that only animals feed on wild herbs. It's surprising to see how the hubeza has made its way from poor people's food to a trendy vegetable, as before did its lentils, Israeli couscous, and cornmeal porridge (2013).

Frequently, we can also find representations of the hubeza that feature a non-nostalgic connection with childhood, as in a text from 2004 published in *Yediot Acharonot* newspaper: "The mallow [...] is a common wild plant in Israel. [...] Many kindergarten children strolling in the countryside collect the leaves and later practice making mallow patties in class [...]" (no author 2004, p. 22).

Why does the exoticization of the hubeza go hand in hand with its representation as a nostalgic object consumed during childhood? It may be merely a marketing writing style, but this connection can also be explained through the dichotomy between the wild (in the sense of a natural wild plant) and the cultivated, and its correlation with the dichotomy between childhood and adulthood. Just as the adult is a cultivated child, so in many ways the wild Other is perceived as belonging to childhood or even as childhood itself. This distance between the adult and the child creates an additional way to turn the local into an exotic Other and to distance it from the mainstream's norms. The texts cited above use the hubeza to paint a nostalgic picture and a fantastical past. Even if the nostalgia illustrated in these texts can be related to the spirit of Berry's nostalgic locality,²⁷ it paradoxically also operates as a promoter of social, cultural, and economic distance and cultural gap between the Jews' cultural heritage and the Arabs' one.

The knowledge gap, imagined rarity and changing identity

A 2016 satirical illustration by Daniela London Dekel shows a woman (Jewish, probably urban), standing in front of a market stall owned by a couple – a mustachioed man and a woman wearing a headscarf (signs suggesting that they are probably Arabs). The illustration's protagonist is holding a bunch of green leaves and asking

27 As suggested by an interview with Petrini: "The present situation is by no means ideal. We are experiencing the failure of a model that has caused many losses, some of them irreparable. For the next few years we need to be guided by different principles. More practically, we have to start adopting an approach of the kind I call 'local adaptation'. It's a principle that every living species on earth has always followed and it's hard to see why human species shouldn't follow it too. In the past we did so because we had no choice. Agriculture was adapted to each local area because there was no alternative" (Petrini and Irving 2014, p. 63). Heldke defines the past that Berry talks about as "the gatekeeper for truly tasting terroir [the overall environmental conditions for agricultural cultivation]" (2012, p. 37).

the vendors if this is curly kale or hubeza. Under the illustration, London Dekel describes her own experience at the market:

The vegetable and fruit selection is simply staggering. Everything is so sensual. All kinds of these seasonal things that have come totally fresh and shiny straight from the earth's womb. Suddenly asparagus. Suddenly artichokes. Suddenly something kind of green that looks like lettuce, but is probably not lettuce [...]. And the prices! Say, a bunch of hubeza leaves at the supermarket would cost. [...] Well, I don't really know, because when did I last buy hubeza leaves at the supermarket, and what do you even do with them, but even if it's the same price? It's only because there is no comparison. Because when the vegetable is really *baladi baladi*, that is, smaller, uglier, and dirtier, you can feel it. It tastes totally different. *Baladi baladi* has a kind of concentrated taste of a Palestinian fellah who has smuggled his produce in at five o'clock in the morning (London Dekel 2016, p. 16).

London Dekel's satirical illustration and text convey the message with unerring precision. The creation of an imagined distance between the food section's readers and the local wild plants has also opened an essential knowledge gap, which draws the hubeza even further away from the readers and the markets' consumers. In fact, in this way it becomes seemingly rare and desirable. The food writers (and the curious readers) embark on journeys of explorations in pursuit of the exotic Other so it can be used later, thus fulfilling their desire for contact with the Other, and in line with Heldke's insights, also using it to become more interesting people.²⁸

And if the local in Israel can turn into the exotic, and the exotic can turn into a resource – then even a common food that until recently was considered a poor people's food can be seen as a food that carries connotations of wealth. For instance, as suggested by a Sarit Sardas Trotino piece from 2011, in which she describes the menu in the Haj Kahil restaurant in Jaffa:

In the generous meze plate offered to each diner (20 NIS per person) you will find treasures such as hubeza, wild spinach and wild endive, which are in season and brought especially from the north, along with roasted eggplants, cauliflower in tahini, a wonderful avocado salad and more. [...] If you have guests from abroad whom you'd like to show the magic of the east, this is the place you should bring them to (2011, p. 2).

28 According to Heldke, "in the contemporary foodie discourse, foodies are motivated by a deep desire to have contact with, and to somehow own an experience of, an exotic Other, as a way of making [themselves] more interesting" (2003, p. xvi).

The Merriam-Webster dictionary explains the word “treasure” as “wealth (such as money, jewels, or precious metals) stored up or hoarded; wealth of any kind or in any form; a store of money in reserve; something of great worth or value; a person esteemed as rare or precious; a collection of precious things” (Merriam-Webster 2003, p. 439). Do hubeza, wild spinach or endive meet any of these definitions?

It seems that the text’s writer has gained, earned, or simply acquired the knowledge about the place that serves such treasures, and is now able to tell her readers how they can impress their friends from abroad (which abroad? Presumably not the Arab countries). Thus, in practice, a common wild plant like the hubeza becomes a social status promoter for the readers who are “adventurous foodies” and is therefore perceived as rare.

Said (1979) claimed that by setting itself off against the Orient, the European culture gained in strength and identity and in fact used it as a surrogate for its own self, and sometimes even as an underground self. Hirsch (2016) notes that food consumption is not only an expression of our social identity, but can also be part of our identity-construction by allowing us to pretend that we are someone else. Heldke (2003) similarly suggests that in modern Western culture we abandon the familiar in order to encounter the unusual, the unfamiliar, the Other, the exotic, the strange, and to reflect how this Other changes our identity.

This change of identity can be demonstrated through the following text, written in 2008 as part of a piece titled “50 tips from the 50 people who have made our year”, and containing a recommendation by Lior Tsionov, a 33-year-old architect: “I recommend *Ezba*, a local-Lebanese-Arab restaurant in Kfar Rama in the Galilea. You arrive there mainly by recommendation. Since I heard about it, I have looked for excuses to pass by on my way north. The food is excellent and made of local and seasonal ingredients. At *Ezba* I had my first taste of endive, hubeza, mulukhiyah, akkoub and other plants and thorns” (2008, p. 40). Tsionov acquired new knowledge about the local food, and now he not only uses it to mark himself as having a higher cultural status, but is also interested in going back there himself, that is, from now on he possesses a different, more local identity, connected to the land and to its native elements. Thus, by adopting the local wild food and turning it into a status symbol, many Jewish Israelis attach an additional characteristic to their identity and widen the heritage of their status group.

The taming of the shrew: The aestheticization of the exotic as it is displayed in Israeli restaurants today

The romantic gaze turned on the exotic Other has made it rare and valuable. Now, with the fetishization of local products and the cultural status associated with

them,²⁹ the hubeza has started to enter the menus of Israel's leading restaurants. In recent years the hubeza has been undergoing a process of aestheticization,³⁰ in which many chefs combine in its preparation European techniques and ingredients with complex aesthetics on the plate. This, of course, is in contrast with the simplicity and "preparation [which] is nothing,"³¹ characterizing the local wild food of the exotic Other. For example, chef Yonatan Roshfeld used ricotta as mentioned above; chef Asaf Doktor in his restaurant *Dok* served hubeza lasagna; chef Amos Sion served hubeza tortellini, and chef Raz Rahav served a carefully-arranged dish of asparagus and hubeza.³² The hubeza's aestheticization is part of the domestication of the exotic, or as Heldke puts it: "We need to whittle the exotic down to size, so it isn't too odd for us; we like our exoticism somewhat familiar, recognizable, controllable" (2003 p. 19).

It is important to note that this process is not happening only among Jewish chefs in Israel. Arab chefs too, especially the younger ones, are changing the classical way of serving the hubeza and making it more Western. For instance, in winter 2018 chef Omar Elwan served hubeza pizza in his restaurant. The same year *Arutz 10* broadcast a television report by Amit Aharonson titled *Why do I need politics now: The Arab cuisine revolution in Israel*, in which chefs Hmodi Okala, Nof Atamna Ismaeel, and Alaa Musa presented dishes they prepared for a special dinner at Okala's restaurant *Eataliano dalla Costa*. One of the dishes made by Atamna Ismaeel was kibbeh nayyeh stuffed with wild mustard, on a bed of garlic and lemon vinaigrette and topped with hubeza chips.³³ After presenting the dish, the chef looked at the camera and said: "Just like it seems natural to you and you don't raise an eyebrow and chuckle when

29 The fetishization of local products and the cultural status associated with them come up time and again in Johnston and Baumann's (2010) study.

30 It is impossible to talk about aestheticization in such a political context without mentioning Walter Benjamin ([1935] 1992). When Benjamin talks about the aestheticization of the political, he claims that the aestheticization and spectacularization of the political, including political protest, are problematic because they divert the attention from the aims of the protest towards the aesthetic form. Benjamin argued that art cannot be a medium of authentic political protest, since using art to promote a political agenda necessarily involves the aestheticization of the protest act, turning it into a spectacle and thus in fact neutralizing the act's effect. For more on this, see: Jay (1992).

31 "Western aesthetics" here means adopting the characteristics of European cuisines, in particular the Italian one.

32 The information is taken from social networks, the press, television, and restaurant menus in the years 2013–2018.

33 Atamna Ismaeel (2017) herself wrote an article on the culinary revolution in the Arab cuisine and the hubeza in particular.

they make you basil chips at an Italian restaurant, why do you raise an eyebrow when I make hubeza chips? It angers me, and that's why I make hubeza chips."³⁴

Pierre Bourdieu (in: Johnston and Baumann 2010, p. 194–195) described our relationship with everyday objects like food in a way that puts less emphasis on their functional value, and instead sees them through an aesthetic lens of cultural appreciation and potential for acquiring knowledge, as “aesthetic disposition”. The aestheticization of the hubeza, which until recently was considered a poor people's food, foraged outdoors and cooked in the kitchen of the Other, together with its representations in the Hebrew press, as can be seen in the above examples, which present a knowledge gap, a geographical distance and an imagined distance – all these have led to the hubeza turning in recent years from “a taste of necessity” to “a taste of luxury” – another term coined by Bourdieu (2017). This evolution of the hubeza raises important questions regarding the ways local wild food is being promoted in Israel and the way it is being positioned within the culinary heritage of the dominant group.

Promoting local food in Israel

The “local trap” is a relatively new term in gastronomy, used to critique the way in which many scholars and activists tend to connect the “local” category with values of social justice and ecological sustainability. The critics maintain that the “local” scale, like other scales created in society, is the product of social and political power struggles and political agendas that serve the dominant powers in the society or market. They argue that resources and decisions that are based on the “local” value don't really promote justice and sustainability (Heldke 2012). Indeed, as the present research suggests, promoting local food consumption in the Israeli context contains many traps and raises many questions that need to be addressed.

The reality in which most (if not all) the food writers in the Hebrew press are Jews, addressing their texts especially (if not only) to an urban Jewish audience, has

34 The piece was broadcast as part of celebrating the twenty years anniversary of “the Arab cuisine revolution in Israel” (the count started in 1998, with the opening of the *El-Babor* restaurant). In the piece, the senior chef Husam Abas compares his cooking techniques with those of the three young chefs. At the start of the program, Aharonson stands and looks at Abas as he forages, with an Oud playing in the background, and mentions the names of the herbs: “endive, hubeza. If you didn't grow up on this land, if you didn't grow up here, there's no getting around it, you won't know these ingredients” (in Central News Broadcast 10 2018). These examples raise the question of whether the modernization and Westernization of the ways of preparing traditional Arab dishes by Arab chefs is an act of taking the reins or not – in itself, an important question that merits a separate discussion.

created a gap between, on the one hand, the local traditions and the people practicing them, who are the objects of the texts, and on the other, the readers, who wish to get to know the local customs and study them. It is no wonder, therefore, that the hubeza has remained limited to the Arab markets. But the gap between the knowledge about the local wild plants and those who wish to consume them has become so wide, that it has reached a point where these common plants are perceived as treasures. And treasures, as we know, are something that people want to take and appropriate.

When Heldke (*ibid*) talks about exoticization, she devotes a chapter to food colonialism. First, she defines the term in its economic sense, as a practice that disrupts the local and independent food systems through international companies engaging in growing and production in poor countries, in order to exploit cheap workforce and land. According to Heldke, culinary colonialism of this kind creates real poverty, undernourishment, and hunger in the dominated economies, due, among other things, to producing cheap food and selling it expensively to the members of those dominated populations. Heldke goes on to show how the economic aspect also leads to cultural food colonialism, that is, to the appropriation of cultural customs by political and economic forces.

If promoting local food consumption in Israel is able to create a knowledge gap, an imagined rarity and a cultural appropriation, then it also might lead to food gentrification, to a rise in the prices of a basic consumer product that had been produced for the disadvantaged population, and to its marketing as an upscale superfood for the privileged populations.³⁵ That is, culinary colonialism in Israel manages to disrupt the local systems while simultaneously attempting to promote local food consumption (although this attempt apparently genuinely originates in good intentions) (Agbariya 2017).

To conclude, by analyzing the hubeza's representations in the Israeli Hebrew press, we can see how the way it is represented – distant, wild, connected to childhood, uneducated, exotic, unprofessional, oriental – contrasts with the way in which those writing about it perceive the normal – Jewish, urban, close, cultivated, adult, educated, familiar, professional, Western.

Thus, the hubeza was assimilated into the Israeli Jewish culinary heritage by Westernizing and Orientalizing the plant at the same time. In the name of promoting the idea of local food consumption, we see the use of exoticization, which not

35 This happened for instance in the United States to Collard Greens, which until recently were a staple "soul" food for poor families in the South. With the increasing demand for local superfoods the prices went up, until the extreme case in which in November 2016, in the upscale online store Neiman Marcus, a frozen dish containing a few leaves with bacon sold for \$66, with the delivery price, around \$15, not included. Promoting the hubeza as a superfood (for being nutritious and easy to grow) might lead to a similar result (Ross 2016).

only presents the Other in a way that reflects the fantasies of the West, but also perpetuates the myth that the cultural center and the superiority belong to those who are looking on, the readers. By creating an imagined distance between the mainstream and the common wild plant, the value of the plant increases and accordingly so does its price, and therefore also its social and economic segregation.

The hubeza is a wild plant that for four decades was ignored by the culinary mainstream in Israel, or alternatively was considered a poor people's food associated with the Arab cuisine. The aestheticization of the hubeza, in the sense of making it more Western and more digestible by the Jewish consumers, is a process that, intentionally or not, is part of a mechanism that is associated with political conflicts in the Israeli society, that often creates segregation, appropriation, and oppression and that doesn't necessarily promote ideas of justice and equality.

Perhaps it is precisely the politicization of the local wild food that may offer a solution; that is, in order to foster a responsible promotion of local food in Israel, editors, journalists, chefs, and food people in general must operate with the understanding that food is a political issue. Such an understanding will bring about political culinary actions that might promote a shared cultural heritage between Jews and Arabs on a more equal basis. A wonderful example of such an action can be found not far from Israel, in Lebanon. A project named *Souk el Tayeb* (Arabic for market of good food) founded a farmers' market in Beirut that over the years has morphed into an activist culinary organization responsible for some wide-ranging and influential activities in Lebanon and abroad. Kamal Mouzawak, a *Slow Food* advocate in Lebanon, founded the market in 2004, where today organic produce is sold by around one hundred Christian, Muslim, Shiite, Sunni, Druze, Armenian, Kurdish, Palestinian and other farmers.³⁶ This has created a situation in which the power relations between the different ethnic groups and sectors are becoming blurred, creating an opening for real equality along with promoting local food.

In the food press as well, the way to promote local food consumption passes through equality. If the restaurant critics, food columnists, and guest chefs represent the different sections in a more egalitarian way, the knowledge gap will be able to narrow, and the readers will get the diverse culinary knowledge without mediators, just like the advocates of locality wish us to consume our food. We can avoid these traps if we manage to create shared spaces and thus heritage for buying,

36 In 2008 the market's success attracted the interest of the business consultant Christine Codsi, who has since become Mouzawak's partner. Together they founded "Tawlet" (table) – a chain of small restaurants offering only buffet lunches. The restaurants, located in six cities and towns in Lebanon, each employ around 15 women who cook in rotation, along with a regular chef. In the last two years the many tawlets, which are run for profit at lunchtime, have operated in the evenings as "soup kitchens" designed to feed diners in need. For more on this, I would recommend watching Kamal Mouzawak's TED lecture (2019).

preparing, and consuming food, along with a shared media platform where we can discuss food together. It is impossible to promote local food in Israel without aspiring for equality. After all, you can't have your hubeza and eat it too.

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