

“What shall I cook?”

Erna Meyer’s WIZO-Cookbook in the field of tension between Nation building and shared cultural heritage¹

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Introduction

French food culture, Spanish flamenco, and the Mongolian *Naadam festival* are all part of the heritage of humanity. This was decided by the UNESCO Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage at its conference in Nairobi, Kenya, on November 16 and 17, 2010. A total of 51 traditions and customs from 29 countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin America were newly included in the lists of intangible cultural heritage at this conference (UNESCO 2003). In order to keep this heritage alive, active transmission is just as necessary as storage media that contain information and directives on the practice and maintenance of this cultural heritage (Assmann 2018).

Such storage media include cookbooks and household guides. They contain knowledge about food culture(s) and recipes, providing information about food and tips on how to use it. Cookbooks also implicitly communicate norms, for example in the form of information about ingredients, preparation, and other recommendations for action in the kitchen. In this way, they depict and at the same time establish social models of their time. As the content of cookbooks is handed down and received, a heritage is created that increasingly appears to be worth protecting. However, this heritage, which usually offers a high degree of identification, does not always remain at the place of its origin. Through migration, the knowledge associated with cooking and household management is transferred from one social context to another and undergoes adaptations there. As it is practiced under different conditions and shared with other cultures, it undergoes modifications. In the case of cooking, such transcultural influences are reflected in visible adaptations.

1 This text emerged from the artistic research project *What shall we eat this time?* that Julia Schäfer and I founded in 2019. I thank Julia for the joint viewing of the archival material in Jerusalem and for the intensive exchange.

Cookbooks alone, however, provide only limited information on how the knowledge they contain can be related to collective identification processes. Therefore, the contribution of individual cookbooks to the intangible heritage of cuisine can only be assessed in connection with other sources (Thoms 1993). By examining how Dr. Erna Meyer, the author of the cookbook *Wie kocht man in Erez-Israel* (How to cook in Palestine), Tel Aviv 1936, transferred her knowledge as a national economist and household expert from Germany to the social and geographical conditions of Palestine, sheds light on the making of fruitful political Zionism. Meyer had emigrated to mandatory Palestine (in Hebrew Palestine/Eretz-Israel) in 1933 after the National Socialists came to power, in order to do reconstruction work, there. In mandatory Palestine she benefited from her familiarity with the architecture of the *Neues Bauen* movement and its kitchens, which also shaped the young Tel Aviv (see: Elfi Carle in this volume). In order to answer the question of whether Meyer's cookbook is an intangible cultural heritage that connects Germany/Europe and Israel, the historical background of the cookbook will be outlined and the question will be asked to what extent the food culture was to contribute to the new (Jewish) cultural identity in Palestine and, from 1948, in Israel. To this end, attention is also drawn to the author of the cookbook and to the image of women that modernity produced in Europe around 1920. The analysis of the cookbook will show to what extent the cultural heritage of food can be considered a connecting link for migrated Jews from Germany and Europe, and where Erna Meyer's efforts found their limits. Finally, I will ask to what extent cookbooks contribute to a pragmatic or normative approach to cultural heritage.

Components of a new Jewish identity: The Zionist image of women

The concept of cultural identity reflects social and material contexts, but also political ideas. The political movements of the 19th century largely define cultural identities as national: the nation is metaphorically thought of as a family, an imagined community based on a common language and history. In the modern nation-state, the functional level of the state as an organization that “claims the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a given territory [...]”² (Weber 1919, p. 4), becomes largely identical with this imagined community. The European national

2 For better readability, quotations from German literature have been translated into English. German sources and literature are marked as such in the bibliography. This applies also to Erna Meyers cookbook although it contains an English (How to cook in Palestine) and a Hebrew (איך לבשל בארץ-ישראל) translation. Since the English translation of 1936 differs in parts considerably from the original German manuscript, it was necessary to work with a literal English translation.

movements of the 19th century are preceded by events that are subsumed under the term "modernity". The Enlightenment of the 18th century, the major event French Revolution, and industrialization artificially establish a break between an "old" and a "new" time in order to radically open up to the future and, as a consequence, produce a permanent present (Habermas 1988).

As a political movement, Zionism emerges in the context of European modernity and its national movements. It has a vision of the future and a goal: the creation of a public law [Jewish] home, as stated in the *Basel Program* of the first World Zionist Congress in 1897. In Herzl's reading, the Jewish community constitutes itself as a political one. In the Zionist reading, the Jewish community in Palestine represents a new beginning in the "old-new homeland". The name of the Jaffa suburb founded in 1909, Tel Aviv (Hebrew for Spring Hill), also reflects political Zionism's narrative of rebirth, new beginnings, and departure. The *Yishuv* (Hebrew for Jewish settlement in mandatory Palestine) had been steadily expanding through *aliyah* (Hebrew for immigration) since the late 19th century in response to pogroms and anti-Semitism in Europe. In the 1930s alone, the Jewish population had grown from 160,000 to 400,000 people, and thus from about 18 to about 30 percent of the total population of Palestine (Schoeps 1998, p. 40). Women's organizations and their institutions, such as the *Women's International Zionist Organization* (WIZO) founded in England in 1920 and its Palestine Federation, contributed to the integration of immigrants in the "old-new homeland":

About sixteen years ago, a group of leading Zionist women in England concerned with the pioneer woman in Palestine set out to help her become rooted in the land. [...] WIZO ramifies into every phase of life, educational, social and cultural; its program is elastic and it has adapted it to suit every mode of immigration: it fed *Chaluzim* during the *Aliyah* of the first post-war years, in 1927 it planned its program to teach new immigrants vegetable growing and rational housekeeping; to teach those persecuted by Hitler gave great impetus to its agricultural institutions, to absorb girls from Germany. Its growth is intimately connected with the growth of Palestine [...] (WIZO n.d., CZA F49-2185).

The paragraph, written in the mid-1930s, not only provides an overview of the development and scope of WIZO's activities in Palestine, but also illustrates the extent to which the establishment of the Jewish polity was imagined through the land and linked to it with household, food, and agriculture. The progress of cultivation, the reclamation of the land, indicated in this logic the degree of prosperity and growth of the Jewish polity. This polity, despite the prospect of "equality" (Herzl 1902, p. 83) of female Jewish pioneers with their male comrades, was established via a bourgeois binary gender order centered on the preservation of male labor through care work

performed by women. This order can be seen, among others, in Nadia Stein's³ text *Mütter füreinander!* (Mothers for each other) about WIZO:

Poor nutrition reduced the efficiency of the pioneer settlers and undermined their health. Unkempt domesticity with all its bad consequences in the warm climate had a depressing effect on the high-spirited mood; ignorance not only made the kitchen list monotonous and irrational, but prevented the girls from doing productive work. Here the mother felt the giant burden of responsibility. Throughout the centuries, she had bequeathed to her daughters the knowledge of home and kitchen management. Now that mastery of these matters had gained national importance, she had to take the difficult and complicated detour of organizing the women (Stein n.d., CZA A217-15).

The importance of Zionist women's organizations in the incorporation of Jewish women into the Yishuv cannot be underestimated. The quotation makes clear that political Zionism made use of a bourgeois family metaphor and declared the woman to be the guardian and mediator of (Zionist) norms and values – the private was also political in political Zionism and placed cooking and household management in the service of the collective. Against this background, the question of the value of cooking arises anew; food and drink are among the basic needs of human beings. Food and the nutrients it contains sustain the human body and renew it again and again:

The living (animate) thus consumes itself, it uses up its own body mass. In order to replace what has been consumed and to continue, it takes from its surroundings, the environment, substances which allow it to secure its existence. Thereby it is remarkable that the substances serving the nutrition, which are taken from the environment, are substances foreign to the body [...]. The organism must first transform them. Thereby they become endogenous substances (assimilated) (Balzli 1928, p. 32).

This is what the physician Hans Balzli writes in the first volume of his reference work *Kunst und Wissenschaft des Essens – Gesundheit und Volkswohlfahrt durch basische Ernährung* (Art and Science of Eating – Health and Public Welfare through Alkaline Nutrition) (Balzli 1928). The aphorism of Ludwig Feuerbach taken up by Balzli: “Man ist, was man ißt” (man is what he eats), which goes back to Paracelsus, can be understood against the background of his intention to show the “great connections be-

3 After her emigration to Palestine, Nadia Stein (1891–1961) headed the WIZO Propaganda and Public Relations department in Tel Aviv. In this function, she was also the editor of the *WIZO Journal* and worked for about fifty WIZO associations (Fortus 2014) She was also privately connected with Erna Meyer (Stein n.d., CZA 217–15).

tween nutrition and health or disease, national economy, politics, etc." (1928, p. 23), and can thus be interpreted politically. It is through the transposition of food and dishes received in a specific context that the human being is first produced as a political and cultural subject. This subject acts back on their environment and shapes it in certain ways.

According to Aleida Assmann, the stomach, that is, the place where food is processed, is "the counterpart of the thesaurus: a place of passage, not of permanence, a place of processing and transposition, not of preservation" (2018, p. 166). Accordingly, in the reading of political Zionism prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, cooking and eating do not have a conserving, preserving function, but rather a primarily transformative one that is meant to contribute to the creation of a new Jewish identity. Here, the normative nature of cookbooks plays a crucial role. As guidebooks containing instructions, and recommendations for behavior, they depict the "as-is" state of the cooking subject and at the same time have an effect on the future by influencing (as mass media) individual as well as collective behavior and consumption decisions (Thoms 1993).

The household as a "business": Erna Meyer's understanding of the New woman

The Zionist idea of a new Jewish identity also falls on fertile ground in Erna Meyer. Erna Konstanze Fanny Karoline Pollack was born in Berlin on February 13, 1890, studied national economics and completed her studies in 1913 with a doctoral thesis on *Der Haushalt eines höheren Beamten in den Jahren 1880–1906* (The household of a higher civil servant in the years 1880–1906) (Maasberg and Prinz 2004). During World War I, she moved to Vienna with her husband Arnold Meyer, where, according to her own account, she worked in one of the largest war kitchens (Meyer n.d.). After the war, the couple settled first in Nuremberg, then in Munich, before moving in 1927 to Unterzeismering on Lake Starnberg to live in a wooden house they had planned themselves, from which Erna Meyer continued to pursue her career. In 1929, the couple founded the magazine *Neue Hauswirtschaft* (New home economics), of which Erna Meyer served as editor until she was dismissed in 1933, after the National Socialists came to power.⁴ She emigrated to Palestine in the same year.

In Germany between the wars, Meyer, who holds a doctorate in national economics, is a sought-after author, publicist, and expert – also for many architects of

4 The newspaper article *Dr. Erna Meyer – 70 years* in the German-language daily *Yedioth Hayom* (Hebrew for News of the Day) states that Meyer was summarily dismissed by her publisher in 1933. Arnold Meyer had already died in 1932 (Stein n.d., CZA A217-200).

the *Neues Bauen* (New Building). In 1927, Meyer is involved in the Werkbund exhibition *Die Wohnung* (The Dwelling) in Stuttgart, in which architects of the *Neues Bauen* movement such as Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and J. J. P. Oud take part under the artistic direction of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. As an expert in practical household matters, she not only draws up guidelines on kitchens and kitchen furniture, but is also responsible for the kitchen section of the indoor exhibition⁵ at Gewerbehallen-Platz. Four so-called Stuttgart kitchens are presented here, intended to help demonstrate so-called “rational housekeeping”. Three of the four kitchens were designed by Erna Meyer herself together with Hilde Zimmermann: the Stuttgart small kitchen, the Stuttgart kitchen, and the Stuttgart teaching kitchen (Much 1998).

The Stuttgart kitchen is a kitchen with a small number of movable elementary pieces of furniture, from which different variations of kitchen cabinets can be built, which can be put together in the store according to the individual needs of the buyer⁶ (Meyer 1928; Much 1998). In this way, the Stuttgart kitchen differs fundamentally from the so-called Frankfurt kitchen, which Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky had developed for the Frankfurt housing program (see: Elfi Carle in this volume). It was precisely the kitchen's adaptability to its context of use that was typical of Meyer's empirical-methodological approach. As a supporter of the household rationalization movement, she called for a planned, systematic organization of the household and methodically drew on the reform pedagogical approaches of Pestalozzi and Montessori for this purpose. She saw the rationalization of household management as a task that affected all areas of life and was also intended to transform society. She introduced this approach to her audience in her guidebook *Der neue Haushalt – Ein Wegweiser zu wirtschaftlicher Hausführung* (The new household – A guide to economical housekeeping) (Meyer 1931b). With over 40 editions, it became one of the most successful household guides of the interwar period, far beyond the borders of the Weimar Republic.

In her book, Meyer makes a direct address to her readers, whose destiny she sees primarily in the household, in care and reproduction work. She does not question the division of labor between the sexes in society, although she herself sets other

5 The Werkbund exhibition *Die Wohnung* (The Dwelling) took place in Stuttgart from July to October 1927. In addition to the model housing development on the Killesberg, which featured 17 architects, there were three other parts of the exhibition that were intended to convey the intentions of the Deutscher Werkbund: the Experimental Site, also located on the Killesberg, which explored technical issues related to the construction of the dwelling, the International Plan and Model Exhibition of New Architecture at the Interim Theatre Square near the New Palace, and the Hall Exhibition, which was devoted to the furnishing of the house (Much 1998).

6 Parts of the Stuttgart kitchen are now in the collection of the *Stuttgart City Museum*, having been salvaged in 2016 before the demolition of the *Cugel House* in Stuttgart (Gaukel and Lange 2016).

priorities in her marriage. The aim of her book is to contribute to the recognition of housewifery as "the most serious professional work" (Meyer 1926, p. 3), in other words, to the professionalization of the housewife. The housewife should learn to enable herself to organize her household according to economic principles, as a business.⁷ The focus of the book is therefore the "realization of the economic principle in the household," modeled on the "household of nature" (Meyer 1926, p. 5). In nature itself, Meyer sees the ideal model for an all-encompassing social rationalization and reorganization:

[...] that which has formed the core of our technical-industrial production for half a century now, that which has left its mark on our entire culture, the striving for economic success, i.e. such work that achieves the greatest success with the least effort, with the smallest exertion – that has long since been realized in Mother Nature to an extent never attainable by ourselves (1926, p. 6).

Following the model of "natural rationality", Erna Meyer thinks of the household as a suborganism in a system of branched organisms. As the smallest economic unit, it forms this system's essential pillar and contributes to the continued existence of society as a whole. According to Meyer, the household can thus be understood as the genuine "nucleus" of the demanded comprehensive social modernization and progress.

For if the principle of 'struggle of all against all' stood invisibly over the last millennia of human history, the coming time will in any case endeavor to prepare the ground for 'mutual help'. But where should we be better able to develop the forces for such a community which lie dormant in each of us than in our homes, in our own families? (Meyer 1926, p. 161)

The quotation illustrates the normative charge of the woman and the family in Meyer's imagination around 1925. Looking into the future, the housewife embodies the "new", to which she turns "with head, heart and hand". "Self-study, self-judgment, self-decision, inner further development of one's own personality" (Meyer 1928, p. 6), promote the "inner mobility that forms the contrast to today's general rigidity." Accordingly, the modern housewife is not only at the service of her family, but of the whole collective, in whose daily renewal she is to actively participate. Equipped with such an ideological "superstructure" in the Germany of the Weimar Republic, Meyer actively applies these ideas in the construction of a Jewish community after her emigration to Palestine – home economics becomes for her an

7 In addition to appropriate professional clothing, this also included bookkeeping and the domestic office (Meyer 1928, p. 96).

elementary building block of Jewish nation building. This will now be shown by means of an initial analysis of her cookbook.

How to cook in Palestine: Erna Meyer's WIZO cookbook

Already three years after her arrival in Palestine, in 1936, Erna Meyer, together with the cooking teacher Milka Saphir,⁸ publishes her cookbook *Wie kocht man in Erez Israel?* (How to cook in Palestine) on behalf of *Histadruth Nashim Zionioth*, the Palestine federation of the WIZO. Exact edition and sales figures of the book are not available. At the price of 10 piasters⁹ it can be bought in all WIZO offices, in bookstores, at kiosks and presumably also during the *Levant Fair* – at least this is suggested by a photograph showing an automobile decorated with books and a poster in front of the Italian pavilion (Zlocisti 1936; Meyer 1936/ n.d.; Meyer n.d.).

The physician Theodor Zlocisti, who reviewed the cookbook in the *Newsletter of Hitachduth Olej Germania*, attests not only to its tasty dishes, but also to its tendency toward Jewish nation-building. He sees cooking and eating here as a contribution to an all-encompassing political and social transformation, which is why he recognizes a closeness between the vocabulary used and the narrative of the “revolution”. The Jewish “revolution”, like the French Revolution, is connected to all areas of life:

It is a social and at the same time a national one. And it is also a revolution in Jewish cuisine! Not only because the ‘Schickse’ has disappeared. But because the new climate, the new employment opportunities, the new dwellings, the inner relationship of even the city dweller to the village, actually restructures even the non-restructured – from the soul to the throat (Zlocisti 1936, p. 10).

For him, the disappearance of the “Schickse”, as Zlocisti puts it, and the influence of the new environment are equally basic prerequisites for the formation of a new Jewish (female) identity. By addressing the immigrant woman and appealing to her influence on Jewish cuisine, he makes clear how intertwined food and cuisine are with the national context, and how mutually dependent the two are.

8 Milka Saphir was a teacher of nutrition and cooking at the WIZO Home economics school in Nachlath Yitzhak, Tel Aviv. Before her *aliyah*, she had attended a seminar for home economics teachers, so she knew Erna Meyer's household guidebook (Stein n.d., CZA A217-200).

9 One British pound was equivalent to about 100 piasters at that time (Stein n.d., CZA A217-15).

Fig. 1: Erna Meyer: *Wie kocht man in Erez-Israel* (How to cook in Palestine). Book cover (detail), Tel Aviv, ca. 1936 (Source: Ann-Kathrin Müller)



However, the design of the cover¹⁰ leaves no doubt as to who this “revolutionary” cookbook is ultimately aimed at: the European immigrant. (Fig. 1) A woman is shown, dressed according to the fashionable conventions of interwar Europe, standing behind a table in front of an outdoor brick wall. She is engrossed in a book, which she holds in her left hand, while with her right she is stirring a dish in a cooking pot heated by a kerosene stove. To her right is a tray, with vegetables and fruits of the Levant – grapes, oranges, *kussa* (Arabic for zucchini) and *chatzilim* (Hebrew for eggplants) – and to the left, a prepared dish attractively decorated on a tray. In the background, on a terrace or balcony, the family sits at the set table under a striped awning – a man and two children. Nanny Margulies-Auerbach writes about this in her review of the cookbook in the *Jüdische Rundschau*: “All these little things, however, conceal a deep seriousness: the preservation of the family and the community through healthy, stimulating food appropriate to the climate and the purse” (1936, p. 16).

The cookbook appears during a high point of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the *fifth aliyah*. In addition to 208 recipes printed in German, English and Hebrew, it contains advice on cooking and household management in general, illustrations for replication, an extensive section on weights and measures, a glossary of herbs, and a dictionary intended to teach the newcomers Hebrew kitchen vocabulary. As in Germany, Erna Meyer propagates a determined will for reform in Palestine. It is no coincidence that the book the woman is holding in her left hand is precisely that cookbook. Designed as a *mise-en-abyme*, the scene is repeated and continued indefinitely as a “picture within a picture”. Together with the composition of the image, which conveys through the sharp cut-outs that the scenery is taken directly from life, which continues beyond the frame, Meyer’s intention is already formulated on the pictorial level. With her cookbook she promises to introduce a community-building, uniform “Palestinian cuisine”, which is to be based on the agricultural products of the country. She underlines this intention in her introduction:

What should I cook? This anxious, thoroughly international housewife’s question gains a special topicality in our country. For the difference of the climate and some related side circumstances force the European woman to a reorganization of the whole life and not least of the cooking, which is not at all so easy to cope with as it would seem at first sight (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 7).

The text excerpt shows that Meyer tries to use the rupture in her readers’ lives caused by migration for her purposes. Food preparation becomes a crystallization point that marks the transition from the old to the new life and calls into question habits that

10 The illustrator of the cover, the painter and graphic artist Rico Blass, had emigrated to Palestine in 1934 and lived in Tel Aviv before settling back in Frankfurt/Main in 1952 (Blass 1982).

are hardly possible anyway given the lack of resources in the new country. (Fig. 2) In contrast, new, healthier foods are available for the new beginning:

Yes, it must be noted that among the mass of the population, the eating and cooking customs of the previous countries of residence are held on to with tenacious conservatism for several generations. It is now high time that we housewives try with more energy than before to free our kitchen from the *Galuth* [Hebrew for exile, diaspora] traditions clinging to it, as far as these are not appropriate in our country; that we consciously change to healthy Palestine cuisine [author's note: parts blocked in original] (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 7).

Erna Meyer thus launches her call for renewal through the medium of food. With its help, the habitual of the countries of origin is to be discarded, a new Jewish identity is to be internalized and strengthened. The cookbook is thus not only about the integration of tens of thousands of newly immigrated Jews into a Mediterranean cuisine, but also about the political process of nation-building and the development of a (necessary) Jewish national economy. For this purpose, Erna Meyer links her approach, which she had already developed in Germany, with the concept of the "self-thinking woman", by defining women as the bearers and mediators of this new Jewish identity, and addressing them directly and emphatically:

[...] We are not to carry out this changeover grouchily, [...] but in the affirmative, in the knowledge that this is one of the most important means for our own rootedness in our old-new homeland [author's note: parts blocked in original] (1936/n.d., p. 7).

So, what characterizes this "healthy Palestine cuisine" proclaimed by Meyer? She predominantly favors vegetarian food, freshly cooked from local agricultural products and, wherever necessary and possible, supplemented by industrially manufactured *Totzeret Ha'arets* products (Hebrew for products of the land). She not only calls for their consumption in her recipes, but also has producers and traders advertise themselves in the cookbook (Reuveni 2010). In accordance with the formula "five olives equal one egg" (Schlör 2010, p. 168), she cautiously introduces the new and unfamiliar, sometimes frowned upon, from the local cuisine.¹¹

11 Eyewitness Gad Granach recalls his difficulties with the new ingredients used in cooking on the kibbutz: "When the food was already distributed on your plate and you asked yourself, 'What is this?' it was usually chatzolim – eggplant, eggfruit, eggplant. That was the most horrible thing you could imagine, and THAT tasted even more horrible!" (Hoba 2017, p. 192, emphasis in original).

Fig. 2: Ladies in Tel Aviv, reading in *Wie kocht man in Erez Israel*. With Erna Meyer, second from left (Copyright: German Exile Archive Frankfurt on the Main)



Fig. 3: "Dinner Performance Telawif", Liebling Haus, November 2022 (Photography: Goni Riskin, Copyright: Ann-Kathrin Müller, Julia Schäfer/VG Bild-Kunst Bonn 2024)



On page 60, for example, there is a recipe for raw sauerkraut garnished with olives that can be recognized as a variation of the recipe *Junger Sauerkrautsalat mit Tomaten* (Young Sauerkraut Salad with Tomatoes) from her cookbook *Koch schnell und frisch für den Sommertisch!* (Cook fast and fresh for the summer table!) written with Maria Kirchgessner in 1931 (Meyer 1931a). The *Sauerkraut* familiar from Germany is combined in Palestine with the unfamiliar olives, and fresh tomatoes are replaced by Assis brand ketchup. While Meyer does not mention any spices for the recipe in 1931, she lists cumin, pepper, and paprika as ingredients in 1936. She now devotes a separate chapter to seasoning, which goes beyond the usual salting and peppering. In addition to enriching the taste of vegetarian cuisine, seasoning is also intended to bring about a turn toward a balanced, healthy diet adapted to the climatic conditions and culinary traditions of the Levant. She therefore advises immigrants to plant a herb garden. In the *vegetables* chapter, 14 out of 24 recipes are devoted to the "native specialty fruits" *chatzilim* (eggplant) and zucchini – Meyer consistently uses their Arabic names, *kussa*. As a new immigrant herself, she draws on the expertise of her co-author Milka Saphir, who already has many years of experience in preparing the native "specialty fruits" through her work at the WIZO Home economics school. One of the recipes suggested by Milka Saphir is as follows:

Chatzilim meatballs

2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of chatzilim, 1 small onion fried in *mege*d [oil], 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ spoons of flour, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ grated bread, salt, pepper, 1–2 eggs, oil. Peel the chatzilim, cut them into cubes, stew them in a minimum of oil until soft, put them through the meat machine at the same time as the fried onion, add bread crumbs, egg, salt and pepper, form patties and fry them (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 56).

The main ingredient of meatballs, minced meat, is replaced by eggplants steamed and minced in a meat grinder. Erna Meyer is convinced that a cuisine adapted to the climatic conditions of the Levant should largely dispense with meat and consist essentially of vegetables, salad, and fruit. She is still skeptical about regional legumes, fearing digestive problems. Alternatively, she advises rice, semolina, oatmeal, bulgur, and potatoes (Meyer 1936). With appropriate ingredients and an adapted cooking method, excessive heating of the body in the hot summer months should be avoided, which is why she recommends never preparing vegetables other than steamed and using fat sparingly (*ibid*). With the recommendation to turn away from northern European butter and toward mediterranean oil, Meyer not only credits the cuisine of the Levant, but also transfers her call for healthy nutrition to the new regional context:¹²

12 Theodor Zlocisti writes in his review that only with the use of oil would the transition to "oriental cuisine" (1936, p. 10) be completed.

The ‘food reformers’ of the Central European countries have for many years been very concerned about oil and have tried with all their energy to introduce it into the kitchen, although it is much more difficult to get it over there and has to be bought quite expensively. Here, where we have it well and cheaply at hand, we should be grateful and use it eagerly in our own interest, instead of resigning ourselves with a sour face to cooking with oil and possibly buying foreign butter (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 25 et seq.).

Wherever possible, Meyer calls on housewives to be frugal and encourages them to consume local products. Therefore, in her cookbook *Küchenzettel in Krisenzeiten* (Kitchen notes in times of crisis), published in 1940, she proposes a “national dish” based on the Italian model: “macaroni with tomato sauce and parmesan” would find its equivalent in “bulgur stewed with tomato sauce and white cheese.” In line with the demand for a healthy nutritious dish made from ingredients of regional or “own production”, it should be eaten in variations, by all social classes, several times a week (Meyer 1940). In this point, too, she seamlessly continues the concepts she had developed in the interwar period. The consumption behavior of each individual, she concludes, sustains the Jewish community as a whole. In addition, economic, i.e. rational housekeeping should help the housewife to adapt optimally to the respective conditions of her housekeeping. The structure of the cookbook also follows this: concisely formulated basic recipes leave the “independently thinking” and “not copying” housewife enough room for variations and experiments. Illustrations, which are placed as marginalia in the outer right margin, are intended to support this thinking and acting by conveying at a glance hand movements, work techniques, or the preparation of dishes. In similar pragmatic vein, the author advises avoiding dishes that require long-cooking, keeping the “noise production” of the widely used *Primus* stove¹³ to a minimum in order to reduce the heat effect to a minimum, or using a homemade cooking box (Meyer 1936/n.d). For Meyer, it can be concluded, these principles of household rationalization are universal. That is also why they can be transferred effortlessly from one context to another. They are important in order to be able to act optimally according to external circumstances.

In view of this universalism, her attempt to transfer the principles she had gained in Europe to Palestine and to adapt them to the countercultural conditions there can only be called transcultural to a limited extent. Even if Meyer refers to the cuisine of the Arab population in *Wie kocht man in Erez-Israel?* (How to cook in Palestine) and even if she refers to the cuisine of Sephardic Jews in her cookbook *Küchenzettel in Krisenzeiten* (Kitchen notes in times of crisis), the central European

13 The term *Primus* is used by Erna Meyer as an appellative for a kerosene or petroleum stove. Accordingly, the cover of the book does not show a stove from the Swedish manufacturer *Primus*, but a *Totzeret Ha'aretz* product of the *Tooval* brand.

cooking tradition is still in the foreground for her. She argues for "native special fruits" for economic reasons, emphasizing their health aspects, or taking up the ideas of a "good" life developed in connection with the *Essreform* (Food reform). Where it becomes (trans-cultural), on the other hand, she remains reserved. The inhabitants of Palestine, who were already present before the emergence of the Yishuv, she refers to rather distantly as "Arabs" (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 30) and as the "native population" (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 33); at the same time, she points out the limits of the Europeans' adaptation to the "spicy food" of the native population (Meyer 1936/n.d., p. 33).

Thus, Erna Meyer's cookbook proves to be a work on the threshold: on the one hand, it wants to accompany its readers as a forward-looking tool and breviary on the way to the New (Jewish) man. On the other hand, it remains faithful to European modernity and sees its ideals realized only in essence against the backdrop of the factual new beginning in Palestine.

Nation-building through cooking? Acculturation versus transculturation

With regard to the performing subject, the New woman, Erna Meyer was already convinced in the mid-1920s that the changes in the external world could only be met with a lifestyle aimed at an inner mobility (Wimmer 2011).

The ancient tradition, which has been the almost exclusive teacher in the household, arose from completely different circumstances than today's [...]. Therefore, it no longer makes sense today to still refer to the 'traditions', to hold on with timidity to the 'traditional' and to believe that especially in the home, a greater conservatism is necessary, the more mercilessly time makes it impossible in all other areas of life to hold on to what has been (Meyer 1926, p. 24).

At the same time, such self-techniques were to enable the subject to become "creatively" active, i.e., to participate actively in the shaping of a new society: "With the spirit of the new household", according to Meyer, the housewife attains "the key to mastering her life in general, because through it she advances to the essential in herself" (Meyer 1926, p. 163). The purpose of her WIZO cookbook can be interpreted doubly against the background of this statement. In the healthy, agile and increasingly Hebrew-language-mastering New person she saw a successful return to the "Jewish" self. While in Germany she links her argumentation to the demands for a comprehensive social modernization of the Weimar Republic – not coincidentally, the New woman of the Weimar Republic and the one in Palestine resemble each other – after her immigration to Palestine she uses the household system to propagate the construction of a Jewish nation-state. At the center of this is a new Jewish identity,

which she defines negatively, as a departure from that of the *Galuth*. Here, as there, the small family of European character is the supporting pillar for these ideas – it is also the heart of European national thought, which invokes a “new” bourgeoisie.

Johann Gottfried Herder, going back to Samuel von Pufendorf, had already linked his concept of culture to that of the nation. According to him, every nation has “its *center of happiness within itself*, like every sphere” (in: Welsch 2017, p. 10, emphasis in original). At the same time, it manifests its distinctiveness outwardly in this way “and generates the urge to keep the supposedly foreign ‘outside’” (ibid). Homogenization and external demarcation also characterize the national movements of the 19th century and the meaning of culture as a specific national culture. In this context, and against the background of the centuries-old experience of anti-Semitic exclusion in Europe, the idea of a Jewish state emerges, bringing (Jewish) nation and (Jewish) culture into alignment. Culture, as an expression of the totality of practices, actions, and making, is equated with progress in the reading of future-oriented and present-focused modernity. In this reading, culture becomes for Herzl the normative basis of a new Jewish state, wherever it will be established:

For this, first of all, a *tabula rasa* must be made in the souls, erasing many old, outdated, confused, limited ideas. Thus, dull brains will think at first that the migration from culture must go out into the desert. Not true! The migration takes place in the middle of culture. One does not return to a lower level, but climbs a higher one. One does not move into mud huts, but into more beautiful, more modern houses, which one builds anew and is allowed to possess without danger (Herzl 2011, p. 47, emphasis in original).

The idea that one could found a nation-state – Herzl even speaks of a “model state” (2011, p. 60) – on any piece of “earth’s surface” refers not least to the self-image of modernity, which thinks of its values – detached from tradition and history – universally (2011, p. 61). Ultimately, Erna Meyer also follows this logic when she urges her readers to use their “knowledge of European cuisine to bring a pleasing variety into the local one” (1936/n.d., p. 8). In the sense of household rationalization, to cook Zionist means neither to adapt completely to the “local cuisine” nor to develop a common diet, but, in the context of nation-building, to contribute to the physical constitution of the New Jewish community. Such an understanding of culture also implies minimizing influences from outside (Welsch 2017) in order to preserve one’s own culture from within.

“But we want to give the Jews a homeland. Not by forcibly uprooting them from their soil. No, by carefully digging them out with all their root system and transferring them to a better soil” (Herzl 2011, p. 103). This metaphor could also describe Erna Meyer’s biography: as a mature tree, she was dug up and had to grow back elsewhere; however, the root system remains intact. Such a tree makes contact with the ground,

but no longer forms a completely new root system. Meyer's call for a "rooting in [the] old-new homeland" (the original English translation finds a different metaphor: "becoming acclimatized to our old-new homeland") (1936/n.d., p. 7) can accordingly be understood more as acculturation with varieties of segregation than as a genuine attempt at transculturation. Where it becomes transcultural, where a transition of cultures takes place, Erna Meyer with her cookbook remains reserved and rooted in Europe. Her "healthy Palestine cuisine", despite its demanded liberation towards something new, is thought of as European.

Conclusion: Cookbooks, migration, and shared cultural heritage

In the context of migration, cookbooks have an important commemorative value, since they preserve native recipes and transmit cultural preferences that are revitalized in cooking. In this way, they point in two directions on the timeline: into the past and into the future. At the same time, they have a normative and preserving character, since the challenge of preserving one's own culture despite adaptation and transformation processes is immediately encountered.

What influence does the host country have in this context? Anat Helman (2003) has referred to Erna Meyer's distanced attitude toward Arab cuisine. The deterioration of relations with the Arab population in the 1930s certainly contributed to it. While there was a romantic fascination with the Arab population until the 1920s, this changed with the increasing tensions between the non-Jewish population and the expanding Yishuv (Helman 2003). Helman assumes that the increasing political tensions and riots, especially in the years 1936 to 1939, also had their effects on everyday culture: "Turning 'exotic' into 'primitive'. Imitating Arab habits, climatically suited as they might be, was not in vogue" (2003, p. 80). Against this background, Meyer's cookbook reflects not only the ideas of political Zionism, but also the impossibility of an absolute new beginning in the face of political and geographical conditions. The supposed blank slate, the image of the uncultivated desert of Palestine, covers a moment of greatest individual and collective insecurity and vulnerability – through migration. If one relates this observation to Erna Meyer, one can ask to what extent she, as a new immigrant from Europe, could have had the expertise and knowledge to convey the subtleties of the regional cuisine in the first place.

For all the politically intended demarcation, Meyer's distance can also be interpreted as uncertainty and her cookbook as a cautious in-between, as a first step towards rapprochement and change (Rautenberg 2013). Palestinian society has been in a constant state of change since the publication of *Wie kocht man in Erez-Israel?* (How to cook in Palestine) and especially since the founding of the state of Israel. Between 1948 and 1968, approximately 700,000 Jews immigrated from various Arab countries such as Yemen or Iraq (Schoeps 1998). In order to understand the (cultural)

impact on society at that time, it is helpful to compare it with the number of Jewish immigrants, most of whom came from Europe, who arrived between 1919 and 1948: 483,000 (ibid).

Using the example of falafel, which originated in Arab cuisine, Yael Raviv (2015) has shown how it was gradually naturalized against the backdrop of a (culturally) changing Israeli society. Today, it connects an entire geographical region. Moreover, it symbolically stands for a worldwide social denationalization (Zürn 1997) and the hybridity of its cultures. Erna Meyer's cookbook, on the other hand, the knowledge it contains about her "healthy" Palestinian cuisine, hardly plays a role in today's Israeli society. In terms of content, it has neither consistently handed down the old and familiar – in the sense of a cuisine of memory – nor fully admitted the unknown, new Other of regional cuisine. The model of the New Zionist woman drawn in it remains, for all the heart and soul required, mechanically pale, and in retrospect, the underlying a-historically conceived, supposedly a-cultural image of man in the modern age remains imposed and artificial.

Instead of filling the kitchen shelves of Israeli households or becoming a must-have for a younger European and North American generation like Yotam Ottolenghi's and Sami Tamimi's cookbook *Jerusalem* (2012), Erna Meyer's WIZO cookbook is known today more in professional circles or as an object for passionate collectors. Does it nevertheless represent a heritage shared between Germany, Europe, and Israel – and if so, who shares it?

Meyer's cookbook and her recipes can be seen first and foremost as a common heritage of Ashkenazi Israelis with Germany and Europe. With historical distance and despite the lack of practice in recipe preparation, the recipes are increasingly attracting interest. Against the background of the transnationalization of communication and culture, it is a matter of searching for the context of one's own cultural heritage in the context of an increasing social sensitivity to diversity. Such an interest can be detected in Germany as well as in Israel, as shown by the great interest in the *Community kitchens* of the exhibition *What shall we eat this time?* in the fall of 2020 in the Stuttgart Weissenhof Estate, and in the dinner performance *Telawif* in November 2022 on the roof terrace of the Liebling House in Tel Aviv. (Fig. 3) Precisely because food and drink affect the body and every human being enters into relationship with the world in this way, the intangible heritage of food culture holds the possibility of reflecting on the complexity of individual and collective identities. Erna Meyer seems to have been right in her perception of the kitchen as a site of transformation: the kitchen subversively transcends boundaries. The rest – whether it is perceived as a shared or a separate heritage – remains to be seen.

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