

Introduction

Organic Hummus

“Is there anything to say about hummus that has not been said so far?” was the title of a newspaper article by Ronit Vered, a food writer for *Haaretz* (an Israeli newspaper), which summarized a series of symposia on “hummus” held in Haifa and Jerusalem.¹ Indeed, in recent years it seems impossible to discuss anything about food in Israel without mentioning the Arabic word “hummus.” I have yet to meet one academic scholar, food writer, celebrity-chef, or restaurateur who did not mention hummus while discussing food in Israel.² I will not be the exception either, and therefore I must admit: hummus is an intriguing and polysemic food. Although it is a relatively simple and mundane dish, it is loaded with many social meanings. Hummus is now a key culinary symbol³ of the Middle East and of Mediterranean cuisines. It signifies rootedness, earthiness, local simplicity, authenticity, commensality, and *baladi* (an Arabic term often used by Jews and Arabs in Israel that means “rural,” “rustic,” or “folkish”). It is also a food that implies culinary cultural appropriation, culinary colonialism, and nationalism.

On January 8, 2010, I attended an event in the Arab-Palestinian village Abu-Ghosh in Israel: an attempt to break the Guinness record for the biggest plate of hummus in the world. The master of ceremonies and the honored speakers proclaimed, “Breaking the record is of national pride; the Lebanese claim that hummus is their invention, but hummus is ours, the Israelis.’” Hundreds of people cheered and gathered around a huge plate holding four tons of hummus that had been prepared by two local industrial food companies. The entire event, which was one battle in what was named “the hummus war”⁴ between Israel and

Lebanon, received impressive attention in the public sphere and even among scholars. It was interpreted as a case study of varying sociological and cultural processes termed gastro-politics, gastro-diplomacy, and gastro-nationalism.⁵

Surprisingly, it was precisely in such a local, politically loaded event that I discovered that hummus had also become imbued with environmental and health meanings. Esther, a clinical dietician whom I met at the event, disputed the excitement around us:

Does it matter if hummus is ours or belongs to the Lebanese? The hummus here isn't even real hummus; it is just an industrial product, a spread, just like a store-bought mayonnaise. Real hummus is made by hand, from real chickpeas without artificial additives and preservatives as in this stuff. I love hummus, but not the industrial kind. The healthiest and best hummus is made from *organic chickpeas* and from whole *organic tahini*. Besides, what will they do with all this hummus? It will be thrown out. As if our environment isn't polluted enough.

It was the first time I heard about organic tahini (sesame paste) and organic chickpeas. At that time, I had just completed a research project on processes of globalization, McDonaldization, and the social construction of authenticity as seen through the lens of food in Israel.⁶ When I was first introduced to the concept, and the dish, “organic hummus,” I was intrigued. How have progressive meanings related to organic food—such as sustainability, and resistance to global-industrialized food production—become tangled with local, political, and national symbols such as those embedded in hummus? Later, after tracing “the social life”⁷ of organic hummus, I realized that some of the mechanisms that allow the existence of such a dish underlie the questions addressed in this book: How, and to what extent, are global ideas associated with the notion “organic” and entwined with local culinary and agricultural contexts? How was organic agriculture integrated in Israel—a state in which agriculture was a key mechanism in promoting Jewish nationalism (Zionism) and in time, has been formulated into a highly mechanized and technologically sophisticated field? What are the social, environmental, and economic consequences of the development of organic agriculture in contested places such as Israel, the Gaza Strip, or the West Bank? In what ways is organic food recruited for the construction of social identities and how has it intersected with, or been impacted by, local foodways and

lifestyle practices? What practices do producers, consumers, distributors, and food purveyors in Israel use to create symbolic and economic values of the notion “organic”?

Before considering these questions in detail, it may be helpful to take a closer look at the case of organic hummus, which touches on the different conditions in which organic foods are produced, distributed, and consumed in Israel (and beyond), and exemplifies some of the main manifestations of the globalization of organic.

“There Is Nothing More Organic than Hummus”

The word *hummus* often serves, in Israel, as an abbreviation of the full Arabic name of the dish—*hummus bi tahini*: dried chickpeas soaked in water, boiled until softened, crushed, and mixed with tahini and often served with olive oil and fresh pita bread. Organic hummus consists of the same ingredients, of course, albeit ones that are labeled as organic. The main ingredient of the dish is chickpeas. Usually, the chickpeas used for making hummus in Israel are grown locally. In recent years, farmers began growing organic chickpeas in Israel. Nevertheless, a large part of the chickpeas grown in Israel, including organic chickpeas, are exported. One of the restaurateurs who serves organic hummus told me that when he cannot get locally grown organic chickpeas, he doesn’t hesitate to use imported chickpeas. “The question of the chickpeas’ origin doesn’t really bother my customers. As long as it’s labeled organic—they’re okay with it.”

Unlike chickpeas, tahini—the second most important ingredient in this dish—is definitely not made from local ingredients. Though in the past sesame seeds were grown within the geographic area known as “the Land of Israel”/Palestine, the cultivation of sesame ceased several decades ago. Nowadays, the vast majority of sesame seeds consumed in Israel are imported from countries along the equator—mainly from Ethiopia but also from Guatemala, Uganda, and Eritrea. However, tahini is symbolically considered a “local” product. Part of this symbolism emerges from the fact that the processing and grinding of sesame seeds are done in Israel/Palestine,⁸ but mainly because of the use of tahini with falafel (fried ground chickpea patties served in a pita bread pocket)—previously a national culinary symbol in and of itself.⁹

Almost all the venues that serve organic hummus use tahini produced by a factory situated beyond the Green Line¹⁰—a Palestinian territory

under Israeli military control. After talking to numerous organic hummus manufacturers and consumers, I realized that they do not see this as a problem. Their main consideration regarding organic tahini rests with the extent of its “organicness,” healthiness, and quality, while neglecting tenets of social justice and fairness that are often ascribed to the notion “organic.”¹¹ But the case of organic tahini in Israel raises an intriguing question: What allows the attachment of the label “organic” to a food item which is made of imported ingredients from a developing country and manufactured under controversial political circumstances?

Questions about the relation between organic food, import, and export are also raised from looking at the third main ingredient in any hummus meal: pita bread. The consumption of hummus in Israel/Palestine is mostly accompanied by pita bread made from refined or bleached flour. However, organic hummus is served with pita bread made from whole wheat flour. The inclusion of whole wheat pita bread seems to indicate the “organicness” of the dish. Whole wheat pitas can be easily recognized by their taste, texture, and brown color. They are perceived as healthy and as locally handmade. Thus, whole wheat pitas are culturally constructed as a local food. However, most of the wheat used to manufacture flour in Israel (including whole wheat organic flour) is imported.

When looking at the distribution of organic hummus, one can find that the marketing processes of this dish entail meanings of “Israeliness,” cultural appropriation, naturalness, healthiness, and cosmopolitanism. Take, for example, what seems to be the first restaurant to boast the title “organic” in Israel: Aba Gil (see Figure I.1). This restaurant (which operated in Tel Aviv between 2005 and 2015) was actually an organic hummus restaurant, or *hummusia*—an eatery where artisanal hummus is made and sold. This *hummusia* was described as “the first Zionist organic restaurant”¹² by the local Israeli media. *The Guardian* (a British daily newspaper) and tour guides of Israel mentioned it and recommended trying “the national dish”—not only in its “regular” or “industrialized” version but also the “organic, more authentic version.”¹³

The name of the restaurant, Aba Gil, is a “Hebrewization” of the Arabic word *abu* attached to popular Arab hummus joints in Israel (for example, Abu Hassan or Abu Shukri). Both *abu* and *aba* mean “father,” in Arabic and Hebrew respectively. Aba Gil served, in addition to organic hummus, foods that were defined by the owner as vegetarian, healthy, and environmentally friendly. But organic hummus was the most popular dish served at Aba Gil. The owner explained: “Hummus has qualities that are fundamental to the Middle East. Hummus speaks



Figure I.1. Aba Gil: Organic hummus. Photo by the author, September 2010.

for itself; it exists. It is *the* food here. There is nothing more organic to this place than hummus.” But contrary to the locality he ascribes to hummus, his restaurant had many global-cosmopolitan similes. For example, the decoration of the restaurant resembled tourist restaurants in India or Nepal: low tables and futon sofas, a serene ambience created by soft “world music” or meditation music, and a large bulletin board covered with countless flyers about yoga, holistic healing, and spiritual activities. Combined with organic hummus, the restaurant seemed to be an Israeli version of global New Age culture and the “Far Eastern” countercultural style.¹⁴

Organic hummus is also prevalent in retail chains that specialize in marketing organic, “green,” natural, and healthy food (*superim organim* as these Israeli venues of global ethical and “green” consumerism are called).¹⁵ Inside some of these organic supermarket chains, one can find organic hummus counters. These counters offer organic hummus, whole wheat pitas, organic whole tahini (tahini made from whole sesame seeds), organic falafel, and organic chopped vegetable salads. The counters operate according to organizational principles that sociologist George Ritzer

associated with McDonaldization—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.¹⁶ The organic hummus is ready-made, the menu is limited to a few items displayed on large backlit posters, and the employees, who wear green uniforms (that symbolize “green” environmentalism) are temporary workers. Furthermore, the organic hummus counters are named a hybrid *glocal*¹⁷ expression: *organic hummus bar*. This glocal name is similar to a burger bar or sushi bar, representing global-Western updated culinary trends (bar) and, allegedly, a local dish (hummus) (see Figure I.2).

At one hummus bar, on the counter where diners ate, there were placemats depicting a reference to hummus in the Bible (see Figure I.3): “Eden Hummus Bar: King David—was born thanks to . . . hummus!” These placemats include a biblical quote: “And at meal-time Boaz [King David’s great-grandfather] said unto Ruth [King David’s great-grandmother]: Come hither, and eat some of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the hometz” (Book of Ruth, 2–14).¹⁸ The text goes on to explain that the word *hometz*, which in Modern Hebrew refers to vinegar, actually refers to hummus. The word *hometz* not only sounds like *hummus* but also resembles the word *himtza*, which is the Hebrew botanical name for chickpeas.¹⁹ Clearly,



Figure I.2. Eden Hummus Bar in Tel-Aviv: Fast-food organic hummus. Photo by the author, June 2012.



Figure I.3. The placemat from Eden Teva Market. The title of the text says: "Eden Hummus Bar: King David was born—thanks to . . . hummus!!" Photo by the author, July 2014.

these placemats represent a symbolic connection between the "organicness" of the hummus in these hummus bars and the biblical Kingdom of Israel. Therefore, one can see them as a "gastro-political weapon"²⁰ in the above-mentioned "hummus war," and in the prolonged debate about "who invented (and owns) hummus?"

Organic for Change: Organic Food and the Sociology of Alternative Food Movements and Ethical Eating

The case of organic hummus shows how the notion “organic,” which seems to represent global eco-social ethics, is shaped by local cultural, political, and economic processes.²¹ It also mirrors how varied cultural and ideological tendencies, such as environmentalism, neoliberalism, and nationalism, enter the realm of mundane social activities, such as food production, consumption, and eating.²² Ultimately, the case of organic hummus illustrates how organic foods are essentially complex, polysemic culinary artifacts.

Rooted in the anti-industrial movements of the early twentieth century, organic agriculture and organic food movements are often described as the “remedy” to the hazards of market growth-driven food systems. Since its inception, proponents of organic farming in Europe and North America have advocated for an alternative to scientific (chemical) and industrial agriculture.²³ Agronomically, they were troubled by the depletion of the biological complexity of soils cultivated by modern scientific-chemical methods. Advocates of organic farming were also concerned with “severe consequences such as desertification and the toxicity of agricultural chemicals.”²⁴ They resonated with philosophical thinking about the interconnectedness of nature and the relations between environment and society, humans, and non-humans. Some of these advocates encouraged a romantic nostalgia for agrarianism and a longing for the communal conditions of a lost countryside.²⁵ From a political-economic perspective, they saw organic farming as a locus of environmental sustainability and as an effective expedient for balancing uncontrolled and unjust market growth. In the United States, for example, the organic discourse intensified throughout the countercultural era of the 1960s and the environmental movement of the 1970s. Organic farmers and consumers played a prominent role in developing and promoting a “counter-cuisine” that challenged conventional systems of food production and distribution.²⁶ Later, organic agriculture was developed from a fringe of countercultural farmers to an institutionalized niche within the food industry.²⁷ In France, organic farming has been practiced since the 1940s, but it was not until the 1970s that it flourished, mainly in resistance to the “productivist model” of conventional French agriculture.²⁸

Throughout the institutionalization and proliferation of organic farming, the adjective “organic,” which in its contemporary scientific meaning stands for a living organism or for a part of a living organism,

began to be ascribed to a product of a plant or an animal grown without synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics, or genetic modification, as well as high standards for the treatment of livestock. Nowadays, the term “organic” is widely seen as embodying meanings of naturalness, healthiness, and safety. But it is also often considered not only a food that is “good to eat” but also a virtuous food, a food that is “good to think with” (to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss²⁹) and engages with moral social and environmental issues. In fact, organic food is often considered the vanguard of foods labeled as ethically produced.³⁰ Therefore, organic farms have gradually become charged with meanings and images such as family-owned and local agricultural operations, small-scale and sustainable agrarianism, and spaces where human and environmental health are prioritized. Accordingly, a preference for organic foods by consumers is conceived as an ethical eco-social act, or, to put it differently, as a practice of citizenship and morality.³¹ These ethical meanings are manifested within “the principles of organic agriculture” as articulated by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM): health, ecology, care, and—as previously mentioned—fairness.³²

As the sales of organic food began to rise in the last two decades³³ (mostly in North America, Europe, and, to a lesser extent, Asia and Latin America), the notion “organic” featured in public and scholarly debates concerned its likelihood of making eco-social change. As part of this debate, an important sociological critique toward organic agriculture and organic food consumption has emerged. Critical geographer Julie Guthman, for example, argues that the production and sale of organic (and local) foods does not challenge the corporate food system but merely creates niche markets that function as an insignificant alternative to conventional agriculture.³⁴ Together, and in parallel, to other scholars, Guthman criticized the rise of “corporate organic” in the Global North and the transition of organic from a countercultural movement to a market-oriented sector.³⁵ “Big Organic,” “Organic Lite,” “Organic Industry,” and “Organic-Industrial Complex” are all critical notions associated with the processes of industrialization and conventionalization of organic that took place beginning in the early 1990s. Critical scholarly works on organic food in the United States argue that contemporary political and economic processes subverted the socio-ecological vision associated with the origin of organic agriculture.³⁶ Organic farmers in places such as California were driven to use intensive and industrial techniques, similar to those used by conventional growers.³⁷ Organic movements in places other than the United States and Western Europe have also

been described as co-opted by large-scale food conglomerates and retail chains. As such, the more radical goals of organic movements were put aside, and the ethical meanings ascribed to organic agriculture—those that made organic food an important emblem for resistance against the conventional food sector—were diluted by commercial interests.³⁸

Practices of organic food consumption have also been critically examined. It is indicated that practices of organic food consumption in the Global North are associated with collective environmental and social care combined with individualistic motivation such as healthy diets and good taste.³⁹ Accordingly, organic food consumers (as well as other ethical eaters) are often portrayed as “citizen-consumers,” or “reflexive consumers,” namely those who seem to think critically about the social and ecological problems of the industrialized food system, propose solutions, and even engage with food through more self-aware and democratic processes.⁴⁰ However, empirical studies that examined this hybrid conception of “citizen-consumer” revealed that consumers were attracted to organic products primarily because of the quality and palatability and were often motivated by care for their personal and family members’ health.⁴¹ Theoretical and publicly debated concepts, such as “the reflexive consumer” or “the ethical consumer,” have been fetishized as a major locus of social change.⁴² In this regard, the fact that eco-products are mostly accessible to privileged consumers has been addressed critically alongside the ways in which such accessibility might position organic consumers as thoughtful and sustainability-minded and thus may serve as a means to demonstrate high social status. Existing critiques of organic (and local) eating as “bourgeois piggery” or as “yuppie chow” point out that the ideology of consumerism often facilitates the link between political eating and status, thereby fostering troubling politics of gender, class, and race.⁴³

As part of broader accounts on current modes of alternative foods movements and alternative foods networks, both organic food production and consumption have been critiqued for embodying a neoliberal worldview and market-based logics.⁴⁴ The neoliberal-consumer-ethic frame suggests that individual entrepreneurialism can solve collective environmental and social problems, and that consumer choice is a primary pathway to social change. Accordingly, neoliberal political economies and subjectivities focus mainly on engagement with systems of voluntary regulation rather than on trying to leverage state and corporate power to pursue change.⁴⁵ Therefore, critical perspectives on the organic conceive it to be a liminal notion blurring the boundaries between (1) markets

and social movements, (2) lifestyles and activism, (3) agricultural development and romantic agrarianism, (4) commodities and ideologies, and (5) nature and culture. Thus, it has been claimed that there is some “gray area” between the “alternative” and the “conventional,” and that practices supposed to be counted as “resistance” and “oppositional” are, in many respects, “analog to the very things they are purported to resist.”⁴⁶

This book corroborates some of the accounts mentioned above. However, these claims draw mostly on case studies in the US, Canada, and Western Europe, whereas organic agriculture and organic food consumption outside the Global North is an understudied area of research.⁴⁷ Therefore, the analysis of the emergence and development of organic food in Israel presented here intends to expand this scholarship by emphasizing a somewhat overlooked aspect embedded in the alternative food movement: the tension between the global and the local. As discussed below, foods labeled as ethically produced, including organic products, are transformed into global culinary artifacts in and of themselves. While the existing literature mostly addresses how organic movements were transformed over *time*, this research looks at how the notion organic changed in relation to *space*. Put differently, the ways in which ideas about “organic” have been implemented as they moved from the Global North across societies, cultures, and political borders have been neglected.

Grounded in the studies of the globalization of food—which look at the ways in which cross-political and cross-cultural processes affect the realm of food, and how food-related processes affect the globalization of the social order⁴⁸—this book proposes a different view for understanding the social complexities of organic; focuses on the interactions, tensions, and limitations of the meeting points between global and local processes; and uncovers the ramifications of these processes in the field of alternative foods.

Organic (and Other Alternative) Foods as Global Cultural Artifacts

So far, I have discussed organic food (and other similar food-related categories such as slow food, local food, fair trade food) as an alternative to the destructive and exploitative consequences of the industrialization of food. Organic agriculture and organic movements are commonly conceived as a prominent trend that seeks to reverse the “gastro-anomie”⁴⁹

that, arguably, characterizes modern practices of food production and consumption and to challenge the profit-driven global agro-food system.⁵⁰

Symbolically, the proliferation of organic food (and local food, fair trade, slow food, and the like) seems to be antithetical to the McDonaldization of food systems, namely the incorporation, standardization, globalization, and degradation of agriculture as well as to the global homogenization of eating culture.⁵¹ Giovanni Orlando explains the emergence of organic farming and organic food consumption as a symbolic expression of reflexive modernization and an expression of the development of a “risk society,” namely recognition of the negative impacts on nature by society, of the difficulties of maintaining scientific dominance over nature, and of the consequential rise of risks due to human activities.⁵² According to Orlando’s account,⁵³ organic food (as a substance and as a symbol) is oppositional to the “icons of risk,”⁵⁴ such as genetic modification, chemical fertilizers, CO₂ emissions, and the loss of biodiversity, which are all closely related to the globalization and industrialization of food systems. Continuing this line of thought, and referring to the conceptualization of globalization as a process of “disembeddedness” or a change in the scale of human interconnectedness and a “lift out” of all social interactions from local contexts,⁵⁵ organic and local foods can be conceived as culinary artifacts that work toward re-embedding the relationships between society and technology, body and environment, nature and culture, and food and humanity. From a normative perspective, organic agriculture represents the creation of an “alternative food system” or even a realization of processes of “alter-globalization,” namely efforts intended to shift existing exploitative processes of globalization to alternative and virtuous processes of globalization.⁵⁶

Yet, despite the widespread discourse on the “localness” or the “alter-global” traits of organic, it is noteworthy that organic farming has been globalized structurally and institutionally. Historian Gregory Barton mentions that following the (relative) acceptance of the organic narrative in Britain and the United States after World War II, the organic movement made startling progress in terms of the influence and growth of consumer markets.⁵⁷ During the 1970s, organic farming was formed into an international movement. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) was founded in 1972 in Versailles, France, by a group of farmers from Britain, France, Sweden, South Africa, and the US engaged in organic and biodynamic agriculture. By 1975, IFOAM grew and had dozens of members representing 17 countries.⁵⁸ Since 1980, IFOAM has been working in partnership

with the European Community (EC) to establish organic farming certification and integrate organic farming practices into national and international government policies, certification standards, and legal definitions.⁵⁹ At that time, in the United States, states such as Oregon, Maine, and California adopted policies and legal definitions for the use of the term *organic*. In 1990, the National Organic Standards Program (NOSP) was established. The NOSP required the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement uniform national standards for organic goods (National Organic Standards [NOS]) as well as to guide and regulate organic farming. Concurrently in Europe, several countries institutionalized their own organic certification procedures. Later, IFOAM's standards for certification led the European Union to adopt an EU-wide organic certification program. In 1991, EC regulation 2092/91 on organic production of agricultural products was published by the European Commission; it was enforced as law in 1993. In other countries, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Japan, organic farming practices developed parallel to the development of organic farming in Europe and the United States.⁶⁰

The trade agreements on organic food at the international level that were signed in the 1990s and the 2000s created a new global robust circulation of organic foods.⁶¹ In 2016, organic products, with a total value of almost US\$90 billion, were sold globally.⁶² Between 2000 and 2010, the organic market more than tripled (2000: US\$17.9 billion; 2010: US\$59.1 billion).⁶³ Farmland for growing organic produce increased globally from 11 million hectares managed by 200,000 producers in 1999 to 57.8 million hectares managed by over 2.7 million producers in 2016.⁶⁴ Over the first decade of the twenty-first century, China, Korea, Africa, and Latin America became large producers of organic agricultural products due to the globalization of certification standards and export centered economies.⁶⁵ The increase in the volume of production and trade led to the expansion of the range of organic food products available to consumers around the world, mostly in the Global North.

Currently, about 90% of the sales of organic produce take place in North America and Europe. In 2016, for example, the countries with the largest organic markets were the United States, Germany, and France, and the highest per capita consumption was in Switzerland and Denmark.⁶⁶ The distribution and marketing of organic food also changed completely from its inception to the present with methods ranging from small stores in agricultural communities, farmers markets, community-supported agriculture ("box schemes" in the UK), and transnational

grocery chains labeled as “organic” to online organic food marketing (the latter will probably continue to rise, as one might assume from that fact that the online retailer Amazon purchased the organic supermarket chain Whole Foods Market in June 2017).

The globalization of organic food as this book intends to exemplify, however, is not only about the circulation of a set of farming techniques, commodities labeled organic, or certification and regulation standards across the globe. The ethics, aesthetics, and politics of organic food, as well as the global repertoires of ethical eating, do not operate solely according to technical-agricultural or organizational rules. Rather, the social meanings of organic food have been circulated, translated, and articulated differently—both across and within nation-states. They have been assimilated and implemented according to particular historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts. Furthermore, organic has not always served as a means of resistance to the global-industrial food system, and organic food consumption is not always a matter of ethical consumption.

As I will argue in this book, organic food has evolved as part of the globalization of agriculture and culinary culture, and it is a matter of broad processes of economic and ideological neoliberalization, localization, post-nationalization, and neo-nationalization, no less than a matter of resistance or “alternativization.”⁶⁷ Ideas related to organic may appear as part of the global diffusion of environmental ideas, along the lines of the proliferation of healthy-lifestyle movements, or as a cultural trend of “eating local,” and may be realized and loaded with meanings that do not necessarily undermine processes of globalization. They may also be interwoven with local foodways, with routine eating and cooking practices,⁶⁸ and with certain “histories”⁶⁹ of agricultural produce, foods, and dishes. Organic philosophy and practices can be intertwined with local similes attributed to agriculture and with the various local political meanings associated with agrarianism. They may also intersect with local theological cultures, with local political ideologies (such as nationalism in the case of organic hummus), with contested symbolic social relations, and with claims of power, control, or position in the sociocultural hierarchy (such as colonialism and cosmopolitanism in the aforementioned examples of organic hummus). As the case of the emergence of the organic agricultural sector and the development of a field of organic food in Israel/Palestine exemplifies, the virtuous meanings attributed to practices of organic food production and consumption are always in circulation, and these, once mobilized, are used by local

producers and consumers to negotiate particular issues of taste, morality, and identity. Apparently, there is no rigid organic philosophy or a set of organic procedures that can be applied straightforwardly without cultural, institutional, and technical translation, or without adaptations to local conditions.

Organic Food in Israel: Introduction

The Israeli field of organic food is an exemplary case of the globalization of alternative food movements in the twenty-first century. But it is also a significant case in and of itself, because of the centrality of agriculture in both the Israeli-Zionist and the native Palestinian ethos and practices. Since the first decades of the Zionist project, Jewish (conventional) agriculture in Israel was a key mechanism that promoted Jewish nationalism (Zionism).

The Israel Bio-Organic Agriculture Association (IBOAA) was established by a group of Jewish farmers at the beginning of the 1980s. They were the first to introduce organic agriculture to Israel. As I will show in Chapter 1, their rhetoric—which criticized the extensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in Israel's conventional agriculture—was entwined with national ideology, myths, and symbols. Similar to conventional Jewish agriculture in Israel, they combined these ideological meanings with pragmatic, rational-instrumental practices of efficiency, constant growth, and aspiration to become leading organic exporters in global agricultural markets. Currently, the IBOAA serves to unionize approximately 600 farmers and food producers. In 2017, 693 people, about a half of them farmers, were registered and worked in organic food production (compared to 640 in 2016).⁷⁰ From 2005 to the present, approximately 17,000 to 20,000 acres of land in Israel have been cultivated by organic farming methods. These areas constitute between 1.7% and 2.7% of the total area used for agriculture in Israel. In 2017, the total area of land that was cultivated by organic farming methods grew by 20% compared to 2016.⁷¹ Currently, crops cultivated by organic methods account for about 1.5% of all agricultural produce in Israel.⁷²

Organic agriculture and organic food production in Israel are export-oriented. Nowadays, about 92% of organic produce is exported, and the rest is traded within the local market. Organic agricultural products account for between 8% and 13% of the total export of fresh produce from Israel.⁷³ The rate of growth in Israeli organic agricultural produce is

reflected in export data. In 2006, Israeli organic food exports amounted to 45,000 tons of fresh agricultural produce. In 2008, export of organic agricultural produce from Israel almost doubled, amounting to 80,000 tons. Between 2011 to 2012, exports of organic agricultural produce to EU countries alone amounted to about 67,000 tons, and by 2013, nearly 90,000 tons of organic fruits and vegetables were exported to Europe. Organic produce, with a total value of ₪1 billion (1 billion new Israeli shekels), was sold between the years 2008 to 2012 (about US\$270.5 million). In recent years, there has been a growing demand for organic food products by the local Israeli market. While in the year 2000, total sales of the organic food market within Israel amounted to between ₪15 and ₪25 million, by 2010, total sales amounted to ₪300–400 million.⁷⁴

Moreover, the sale of organic food products in 2005 amounted to approximately 0.35% of the total food consumption, whereas in 2010 the total sale of organic food products in Israel increased to around 0.6% of the total food consumption.⁷⁵ In 2005, it was estimated that 0.7% of the population in Israel consumed organic food regularly, and another 1% consumed it once in a while.⁷⁶ According to a survey of sustainable consumption in Israel from 2010, 14.5% of households regularly (but not exclusively) consumed organic food, 13.5% frequently consumed organic food, and 23% rarely consumed organic food.⁷⁷

The increase in organic food sales can be understood as part of broad changes taking place in Israeli eating habits and food consumption. During the pre-State period (1882–1947), and for a decade after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the dominant public discourse among the Jews and the Arabs in Israel treated eating as an act of physical maintenance. Food and agriculture were used as a symbolic and discursive means of cultivating Zionist identity among Jews who immigrated to Palestine.⁷⁸ Palestinian agriculture was considered inferior,⁷⁹ and many of the eating habits of native Palestinians (whose political and cultural identity have been shaped—since 1948—by civil limitations and institutionalized discrimination) had been erased, overlooked, and in some cases, appropriated.⁸⁰

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the development of Israeli foodways and food production were subject to economic crises, high-intensity processes of migration, structural problems of distributive justice, and conflicts between ethnic and national groups, such as Jews of European origin (Ashkenazim); Jews from North Africa, Central Asia, and Arab countries (known as Mizrahim, Sephardim, or Oriental Jews); and Pal-

estinians. Thus, any attempt to usher in new eating styles or methods of food production (such as growing or consuming organic food) faced the barriers and limitations of complex social conditions.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Israeli society underwent an accelerated process of economic neoliberalization and the strengthening of a global consumer culture and lifestyle.⁸¹ Consequently, the status of food in Israel rose, and a new Israeli culinary discourse began to flourish. It was reflected in a significant process of the Americanization of food production and consumption as well as in the proliferation of foods representing “ethnic” and “exotic” images.⁸² During the first decade of the new millennium, Israeli society was already well embedded in the globalization processes, which paved the way to processes of deregulation and privatization of many sectors of agriculture and food production. Yet Israeli society labored (and still labors) under a volatile regional conflict with limited political and institutional resources devoted to solving environmental and global-ethical problems.⁸³

Recently, however, people living in Israel—as in other parts of the Western world⁸⁴—have become increasingly cognizant of the political and cultural implications of their food choices and practices. Several kinds of alternative culinary discourses, voluntary food justice movements, food-related lifestyle movements, and policies for sustainable food production have emerged in Israel. Among them are veganism, meatless Mondays, fair trade products, and the implementation of national policies for sustainable agriculture. Since the mid-2010s, the alternative culinary discourse obtained such a significant foothold among certain groups in Israeli society that Gary Yourofsky—a globally renowned American animal rights activist—declared that Israel had become the mecca of veganism and food activism.⁸⁵ Discursively and institutionally, organic food agriculture and culture in Israel was ahead of all of these movements and was formed as the first Israeli alternative foods movement.

Thus, one can ask how organic food, which signifies environmental protection and social equity, has been realized in Israel, a country in which environmental issues are perceived as less pressing than to inner political conflicts or the Israeli–Arab conflict and recurrent wars? Is growing organic vegetables in the Jerusalem area or in the West Bank different from growing organic vegetables in, for example, Northern California? Is consuming organic food in Tel Aviv similar to consuming organic food in Western European, American, or Canadian cities? In this book I attempt to expand the understanding of organic culture

and agriculture through focusing on the Israeli case, while at the same time looking through the lens of organic food in order to discuss Israeli cultural, political, and economic currents.

In the chapters that follow, I marshal the ethnography and qualitative data that I collected (see notes on methods, below) to engage with the questions mentioned above in a way that goes beyond focusing on farming practices, organization, or certification processes. I show that organic food production and consumption are not only informed by Western forms of environmental and sustainable agriculture but also shaped by local ideology and political economies. I address the intersections and discrepancies between structural and symbolic levels of organic, both from local and global perspectives, and show how they are realized according to local versions of global neoliberal consumerism, food politics, local foodways, and local media and popular culture.

As an extension of existing literature on the social aspects of organic agriculture and food movements—which tend to tackle the different levels of alternative foods separately (focusing on the level of either production, consumption, distribution, or mediation)—I will focus on organic agriculture and organic culture more broadly. The following chapters offer an integrative analysis of the levels of production, consumption, distribution, politics, media, and identity-making in relation to “organic” and explore the field of organic food as a whole. Thus, this book sheds light on the ways in which organic food is shaped and negotiated not only by organic farmers or organic food advocates but also by other social actors: entrepreneurs, consumers, journalists, dietitians, and legislators. It exposes the ways in which organic food shaped the subjectivities of these actors and also the ways in which the field of organic food was shaped by the *habitus*⁸⁶ these actors possess.

Organic as a Glocal-Cultural Field

My analysis, which is grounded in the sociology of culture, draws on the works of those who study meaning-making and framing in a variety of modes of cultural production, especially those who examine how the aggregate actions of actors in fields of cultural-culinary and agricultural production generate and substantiate social categories.⁸⁷ It describes societal processes of translation and negotiation in relation to the meanings of the notion “organic” and how it is connected—symbolically and materialistically—to places and identities.

In order to understand the locus of these translational processes, I employ sociological notions from field theory. This approach allows us to understand “organic” as not only a set of agricultural procedures stemming from environmental ideologies but also as a product of “spheres of values.”⁸⁸ In these social domains, the realizations of the notion “organic,” as well as its “values,” are constantly negotiated. I also draw on contemporary post-Bourdieuian accounts on fields of cultural production, which specify that social actors are always situated in more than one field and routinely transpose elements from one field of their actions and practices to another.⁸⁹ Thus, I designate how the meanings of organic food and its politics, aesthetics, and morality are all subject to tensions between actors whose work is structured by a cultural openness to global ideas and who are collectively striving to engage in global food-related trends and markets. Simultaneously, these actors use local interpretive frames⁹⁰ to position their own affiliation to local agricultural and culinary fields. In other words, I suggest seeing “organic” as organized around glocal fields of agricultural, culinary, and cultural production. These fields are contoured by growers, entrepreneurs, food manufacturers and grocers, global and local food distributors; local social movements and consumer associations; global and local creators of communication media, food literati, and cultural intermediaries intending to promote organic agriculture in the local sphere; global and local regulatory agencies, politicians, practitioners of “alternative” ways of living engaged with the global philosophical foundations of organic agriculture; and non-committed consumers who wish to use their “organic-reflective taste”⁹¹ as a symbolic means for identity-making and social currency.



In the following chapters, I demonstrate how the philosophical foundations of organic agriculture, as well as facets of the global organic culture, are entangled with salient, local Israeli aspects: the ethos of *halutzim* (“pioneers”—Zionist ideological farmers and workers) (Chapter 1), the utopian visions of the Israeli kibbutz (Chapters 1 and 4), indigeneity that is claimed by both Palestinians and Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Chapters 1 and 2), biblical meanings that have been ascribed to the (Western) “green” movement and counterculture ideas (Chapters 1, 2, and 3), and the Americanization of Israeli society and its neoliberalized economy (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). The chapters in this book are organized according to the analytic logic that directed

the research that this book is based on, a logic that is divided into two dimensions: synchronic and diachronic.

Regarding the synchronic dimension, the chapters intend to demonstrate the multiple actors and agencies that work simultaneously on the translation and assimilation of the global notion “organic” in the Israeli-local context. Thus each chapter is focused on a different level and different actors operating in the Israeli field of organic food, for example farmers’ movements and the “pioneers” of organic food in Israel as described in Chapters 1 and 2; food producers and consumers as described in Chapters 3 and 4; organic food distributors as presented in Chapter 4; and cultural intermediaries and regulatory agencies as discussed in Chapter 5. These chapters present a description of the field of organic food in Israel as a whole.

Regarding the diachronic dimension, the chapters are also arranged in a way that traces the development of the Israeli organic field over time. Thus, Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the birth of the field of organic food and its establishment in Israel through the 1980s and the 1990s; Chapters 3 and 4 describe the development and proliferation of organic food from the 2000s onward; and Chapter 5 indicates more recent developments, such as the discourse on organic food in popular media and the establishment of the organic law.

In Chapter 1, I argue that Zionist culture—idealized by the first farmers to start practicing organic farming in Israel—enabled the introduction of organic agriculture into Israel. I show how the Zionist (national) meanings attributed to agrarianism laid the foundations for the structural and symbolic restrictions of organic food within the cultural and political boundaries of Jewish-Israeli agriculture. This form of organic Zionism was expressed symbolically in the frequent use of biblical texts as narratives and justifications for the establishment of organic agriculture in Israel. From a structural perspective, this chapter shows that organic agriculture emerged as an agricultural niche designed as a means of strengthening the status of the Israeli agricultural sector in global agricultural markets and expanding its activities in them, and thus generally supporting Israeli conventional agriculture.

Chapter 2 explores the continuity of the nationalistic meanings attributed to organic food in Israel and demonstrates how global organic schemes can be implemented according to local ethno-national discriminative social logics. The chapter shows how the development of organic agriculture in the occupied territories (Judea, Samaria, the Jordan Valley, and the Gaza Strip) was rhetorically justified by agricultural-scientific