

Challahpulla

Where two wor(l)ds meet

DÓRA PATARICZA



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ABSTRACT • The relationship between food and religion is a lived activity formed by the dynamics of both tradition and adaption. Religious commitments to food are influenced by various factors, ranging from personal spirituality and experiences to social patterns of belonging, ethical, political and doctrinal convictions. *Challah*, *gefilte fish*, *blintzes*¹ – these are just a few of the traditional Finnish Jewish meals that are still prepared by members of the community. The originally Eastern European dishes are one of the last living links that connect assimilated Finnish Jews with their Orthodox Jewish ancestors mainly from Russia, Poland, Belarus, and Lithuania. The current paper aims to present the conceptions and reflections relating to boundaries of identity connected with the multi-ethnic culinary traditions of Jews living in Finland as well as their ways of coping with the requirements of *kasbrut* (meaning fit, proper, correct; a set of dietary laws prescribed for Jews). The article is based on ethnographic data from interviews (2015–16) as well as personal encounters, informal conversations and home visits.

*We remember the fish,
which we did eat in Egypt freely;
the cucumbers, and the melons,
the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.*
Num. 11:5 KJV

This quotation takes us back to ancient times, when Jews escaping from Egypt still felt a strong nostalgia for food they had left behind. The current article is about the foodways of Jews living in Finland today.² Are there any

traditions and rules that are only valid in Finland? Are there typical eating patterns for different subgroups within the community?

How do Finnish Jews relate to traditional Ashkenazi Jewish dishes? Choosing one's food and everyday meals is a way of self-definition as well as a practice through which identity can be specified. *We are what we eat* is a well-known saying, which is a means of identification and includes existential dimensions as well as lived religion. Determining someone's foodways makes it possible to deduce their level of observance and integrity.

In Judaism, eating Jewish food is a way of identifying as a Jew in everyday life (Kraemer 2009: 2–3). Jewishness, however, is different from Judaism. Choosing food according to religious rules reminds someone of their religion at least five times a day, in every situation.

1 For the Yiddish names of traditional Jewish foods I have used the names commonly used among Finnish Jews. Otherwise I have relied on the YIVO standard for Yiddish spelling.

2 I wish to thank professor Elina Vuola for her insightful and knowledgeable comments on an earlier version of this article.



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Among the approximately 1300 Jews living in Finland today³, the number of converts and mixed marriages is exceptionally high but the community remains officially Orthodox and maintains a distinct Finnish Jewish identity. At the same time, owing to immigration and conversion, the ethnic and cultural diversity is rapidly increasing. Finland's Jewry is nowadays composed of Cantonists, converts and immigrants (mostly from Israel and Russia). Recently, the number of converts to Judaism without prior family connections to the religion has also started to rise. Thus, the once homogeneous Ashkenazi-Orthodox traditions have undergone enormous changes, including changes in foodways and food culture.

Judaism becomes pluralised when Jews from different backgrounds live together. There is interaction among the different branches of Judaism within the community and also among the non-Jewish surrounding Finnish culture and Judaism (Kantor *et al.* 2006: 137). The same applies to food culture. 1300 Jews living in Finland means 1300 different foodways. The Jewish people in Finland with different roots, backgrounds, level of observance, traditions and motivations brought their own food culture, thus resulting in different patterns in their foodways.

Research data about Finnish Jewish culinary customs

Being written by an insider researcher, this study is based mostly on personal encounters, conversations and home visits, including shared cooking (a research method often referred to as *co-cooking*). Having arrived in the country less than ten years ago, it is easier for me to spot Finnish Jewish particularities

3 Reference retrieved from the official website of the Jewish Community of Helsinki.

in customs, traditions and so forth. Being rooted in another country and a Jewish community of a different denomination, and at the same time being a member of the Jewish Community of Helsinki and having friends and casual acquaintances within the community, have ensured that I am up to date with the rules and traditions of both the community and its members.

There are several sources of recipes that can be used as sources when studying the food culture of Finnish Jews. The charity organisation Fruntta (an abbreviation of Judiska Fruntimmers Vålgörenhetsförening) of the Jewish Community of Helsinki publishes recipes in the periodical magazine of the community. The WIZO organisation (Women's International Zionist Organisation) always includes a recipe in their yearly *WIZO Magazine*. WIZO Göteborg (from Sweden) has published a recipe book and the Jewish community's yearly calendar sometimes contains recipes (e.g. 'Juutalainen vuosi keittiössä', *WIZO*, 5754/1993). I have also received two collections of family recipes from collectors, who do not wish to be disclosed.

There are a couple of recent cookbooks that are available for those interested in Finnish Jewish food culture (Ahonen 2000; Haras 2006). Cookbooks in Swedish are used by the Swedish-speaking community members; one example is *Judisk mat i svenskt kök. Mat, minnen och tradition* (2002), one of the authors of which was the *rebbeztzin* at that time of the Helsinki (and Stockholm) Jewish Community, Chaja Edelman (Fried *et al.* 2002). It is a complex cookbook, covering the background of *kasbrut* as well as containing almost 160 recipes.

Background literature or analyses of specifically the theoretical part of Finnish Jewish food culture, however, are scarce. Kirsi Asikainen's thesis (1994) focuses on kosher food consumption in Finland. Svante

Lundgren's study (2002) also contained basic questions about keeping kosher, which I shall discuss in detail in order to establish a basis of comparison with the current situation.

In his study Lundgren reports the results from questionnaires, filled in mostly by Finnish Jews, which, in this case, means primarily Jews born in Finland, as less than 10 per cent of them had been born abroad and most of the converts had a Jewish father (Lundgren 2002: 33). Of the respondents, 59 per cent did not keep kosher at home at all, 15 per cent did, and 26 per cent partly did. There were no significant differences among the generations. Those who consider themselves as 'traditional' have a slightly higher inclination to keep kosher (60 per cent). When eating out, 13 per cent of the respondents choose the vegetarian and/or fish option, 3 per cent eat only kosher meat, 37 per cent eat all kinds of meat, including pork, whereas 47 per cent do eat meat except for pork. Seafood was preferred by Finnish Jews already 16 years ago, 65 per cent answering yes to the question of whether they would consume it (independently of the fact that it is *treyf*, thus non-kosher). There was a huge difference in keeping kosher between those who live within a Jewish marriage (over 20 per cent keeping kosher) and those having an intermarriage (3 per cent keeping kosher). Already at this time, then, it seems as if only a minority of the respondents kept kosher. However, some basic elements of *kashrut* were kept by the majority, such as avoiding the consumption of pork and probably also of blood. Except for the strictly Orthodox, therefore, the respondents did not appear to keep kosher (Lundgren 2002: 64–5).

The situation has since changed significantly. In 2015–16 within a project funded by the Academy of Finland, 'Embodied Religion: Changing Meanings of Body and Gender in Contemporary Forms of Religious

Identity in Finland',⁴ led by Elina Vuola and in which the author participated as a research assistant, fifty Jewish women were interviewed in order to find out how they construct their identities in relation to the Jewish community and tradition, the family and the larger Finnish society. The women were interviewed using a qualitative method. They were born between 1928 and 1997, most of them between the 1940s and 1970s, so the sample focused on the middle-aged generation. Twenty per cent of the interviewees were immigrants and 28 per cent converted (Vuola's article in the current issue). Although the community is relatively small and only fifty interviews were made, a high proportion of the interviewees were women of Cantonist background (Vuola 2019).

In this article, I quote the interviews as a primary source for research on foodways. On the basis of the community membership lists of 2016, the Cantonists currently make up only an estimated 50 to 60 per cent of the Jewish Community of Helsinki. Nevertheless, this particular group is my focus.⁵ Some of these families have been

4 See the project's website.

5 This number is a rough estimation based on the membership list of 2016 and the archival material of the community that I have gone through in detail in 2018–19. The categorisation is made for purely statistic reasons and is by no means intended as a normative definition or a halachic judgement. Owing to the complex backgrounds of the members it is difficult, if not impossible, to unequivocally categorise all the members of the community as either Cantonists or not (e.g. children of a foreign-born Jew and a Cantonist). My own categorisation includes everyone who has at least one Cantonist grandparent. The question of how to define a Cantonist is ambiguous within the community, although a collective self-definition is often referred to according to which descendants

living uninterrupted in Finland for the past 150 years without interruption and there is a continuity of traditions, including foodways. I used the interviews with Finnish Jewish women as a primary source because currently, this is the latest and most extensive source of information available.

When asked about their childhood memories, not surprisingly most of the women (who were born Jewish) started to talk about their memories of food from childhood, often about meals that were prepared by the *bobe* (Yiddish 'grandmother'). Meals and recipes were mentioned in almost all of the interviews. These women prepare the dishes in most of the cases, especially when it comes to Jewish holidays, and thus have a direct knowledge of Finnish Jewish foodways. Yet it has to be pointed out that men too prepare traditional dishes and further interviews are called for, given the various backgrounds of the community members, which will be at least partly carried out in 2019 as part of the research project Boundaries of Jewish Identities in Contemporary Finland (see Illman in this issue).

Food-related challenges of Jewish everyday life in Finland

Accessibility of kosher ingredients

According to chief rabbi of Finland, Simon Livson (2017: 8), a wide range of basic food can be bought at regular shops that is considered kosher in Finland (such as bread, milk, milk products, even some sweets and

of soldiers from the Russian Empire, who arrived in the territory of Finland before 1917, are generally regarded as Cantonists. Nevertheless, opinions on this matter vary.

chocolate) yet keeping someone's household entirely kosher is rather difficult to accomplish, especially when it comes to kosher meat or when someone sticks to *Halav Yisrael* (rabbinically supervised milk and milk products) or *Pat Yisrael* (grain products prepared under the supervision of an observant Jew). The closure of the only kosher shop and deli Zaafran in Helsinki in November 2017 has left a need for kosher ingredients in Finland, and since then there have been only two online shops in Finland, so compromises have to be made by everyone due to the limited possibilities. With one of the Finnish kosher webshops, orders have to be made twice a year for six months' supplies, whereas the other webshop delivers orders within a couple of days, but, not surprisingly, prices are rather high and the stock is not always comprehensive.

A decline in Ashkenazi foodways and kosher observance

When the Cantonists settled in the cities of current Finland, they brought with them Ashkenazi style foodways. As time went by, Finnish Jews developed particular foodways drawing from the laws of *kasbrut*, and slowly adapting Finnish culinary traditions as well. However, the past fifty years brought significant changes. Since maintaining an entirely kosher household became increasingly difficult, in the countryside even impossible, Finnish Jews slowly modified their kosher laws and moved away from their Ashkenazi foodways, reserving them for the holidays alone. Nevertheless, Finnish Jews still try to 'eat Jewishly', and there is a nostalgia for kosher Ashkenazi traditions. Most of the Finnish Jews are aware of the fact that their



current way of keeping kosher cannot be regarded as 'officially' kosher. As a member of the community put it:

There are people in the community who eat *treyf* and there are others who eat less *treyf*.
(Man in his 70s)

However, the Cantonists of today share many traditional foods, which are mainly consumed during high holidays. At these occasions, traditional meals are prepared following recipes inherited from ancestors, who in many cases were related to each other. According to Simon Livson, an estimated 5–10 per cent of all community members keep kosher at home.⁶ Interest in the revival of Ashkenazi foods is growing in other parts of the world (e.g. Yoskowitz and Alpern 2016). However, in Finland the consumption of Ashkenazi meals is fairly stagnant or on the decrease, and the number of people observing the rules of *kashrut* is probably decreasing as well.

Community kitchen practices

The kosher rules are still strictly followed in the kitchen of the Jewish community of Helsinki, and after the community building of the Turku synagogue was sold and demolished, only a small kitchen in the building of the Jewish community of Turku remained.⁷ The community itself became a melting pot of different Jewish traditions. The head of the kitchen, also the owner of the only kosher catering company in Finland, is an Israeli man with Persian roots. The non-Jewish Finnish workers of the kitchen in Helsinki receive education in Israel on how to run a kosher household.

6 Simon Livson, personal communication, 22.10.2018.

7 Personal visit to the Jewish Community of Turku 28.10.2018.

The rule of *Bishul Yisrael* is adhered with, so both the oven and the stove at the community kitchen can only be turned on by a Jewish person.⁸ All kinds of kosher food are prepared at the community kitchen; during the weekdays the mainly Finnish meals follow the kosher rules, while on Shabbat and holidays there is a mixture of Ashkenazi and Israeli dishes. All the students of the Jewish school of Helsinki learn the kosher rules by doing a course on household studies at around age thirteen. They also study the subject in the religious education lessons and their textbook dedicates a chapter to the topic of kosher rules (Schwartz *et al.* 2008: 68–71).

The transformation from keeping kosher to 'eating Jewishly'

The boundaries of religious food practices have been relaxed in the past sixty to seventy years, as becomes clear from the accounts of the Finnish-born Jewish members of the community. This also means a repositioning of religious orthodoxy in one's set of discourses, where kosher has slowly turned into 'eating Jewishly' (Mulhern 2015: 326–7).

It seems that there was a change around the Second World War, and as a consequence, the parents of the Finnish Jews slowly loosened the kosher rules at home beginning from the 1960s and 1970s:

It was not really kosher, but it would be impossible to have milk and meat at the table simultaneously, never, never. So it was a kind of half [...] there is no such thing as half-kosher but I would say [the household] was indeed half-kosher. And during the holidays, my mum always did all the

8 Simon Livson, personal communication, 22.10.2018.

challabs, and we were always there when the dough of the *challah* started rising, there was a big heap and we always had to put a hole into it, always. We used to be naughty doing this. (Woman in her 60s)

Another woman recounts the following story:

We had quite a lot of meat dishes and fish dishes, but sometimes when we were kids, we happened to eat sausage or something like this and there were special plates for this. My grandfather was stricter about this. My mom lit candles on Fridays, and then, of course, we always had kosher food. The entire weekend was kosher, so on Wednesday and Thursday, processing of the fish started, there was always gefilte fish on Friday. There was also chicken, I still remember how salt was poured over the top [...] When I was old enough, I asked my mother, 'How is gefilte fish prepared?' So my mother showed, but I do not remember any longer how to prepare it [...] When my mom died, my father tried to keep Shabbat and kept it, but of course, there was not much food culture that was going to happen. My dad prepared what he was able to prepare, and I never learned to do any (Jewish) food. (Woman in her 70s)

Joseph, a man in his sixties, states that many of the old Finnish Jewish families nowadays keep kosher in a Scandinavian style. Even though Finland is technically not part of Scandinavia, 'Scandinavian style' refers to the similarities in foodways found across the Jewish populations of Finland and Scandinavia. These unwritten regulations include the following customs: milk and meat cannot be consumed at the same meal and chicken can be bought in regular shops. This is often called the K-shop rule among Finnish-speaking Jews (*K-kauppa-sääntö*)

referring to the biggest and most easily available food-store chain in Finland. According to this unspoken rule, chicken meat is acceptable from the convenience store. Beef for the meals prepared for the high holidays has to be slaughtered according to kosher regulations, and for regular days *halal* is acceptable as well. Milk products can be bought in normal shops. Previously any kind of cheese could also be purchased in non-kosher shops, but today the origin of the rennet has to be checked. The same pattern of rules can be observed among many Finnish and Swedish-speaking members of the community, even though many of them may not be aware of the fact that this is a local set of kosher rules, applied only in Finland. These rules are passed down even today from generation to generation:

Then, with my child, I do not eat, I do not combine meat and milk, so the basic kosher principles: I do not eat shrimp in front of him, and I do not put meat and milk together, and if he eats the meat and he wants to drink milk, I say, 'Sorry, you can't, because it's not kosher. Will you take some juice or water?' And it's completely clear to him: 'Ah, okay'. Totally obvious because we want to follow the same line that he has at the nursery during the day, so as not to confuse him. And it is so easy... just the basic, main principles [...] And yes, every time we have a Jewish celebration, we celebrate it according to what's customary to celebrate, [and] participate in events and talk about it at home. (Woman in her 40s)

So we do not eat pork or seafood but [we are] not kosher [...] Then the meat-milk combination [...] We eat everything at the same time. When I was younger, I did not eat meat and milk together. It has just come now with my husband, the combin-

ation of meat and milk [...] However, I do not want pork to be cooked in our frying pan. (Woman in her 40s)

Special rules apply as well when Jews of Finland, most typically the Finnish and Swedish speaking ones, take their summer holidays (in Finland there is typically a month of holiday in July). Many Finnish Jews own a cottage in the countryside which is often far from any other houses, let alone shops. Because of this forced situation, all kosher rules that would be applied at home are temporarily suspended for the short summer holiday as long as they are in their summer cottages. They eat what they can buy in the closest shop. Similarly it was mentioned by some community members who observe *kashrut* at least to a certain level that when it comes to visiting their non-kosher parents, the law of respecting one's parents comes before eating only kosher dishes, so in order to avoid conflicts within the family, many would choose to accept non-kosher meals (e.g. cooked in non-kosher pots) from their parents.

The majority of Finnish Jews still try to avoid eating pork in any way, even the younger generation, yet, *makkara* (the Finnish word for sausage) seems to be an exception.

We have never eaten pork in my childhood home, and I still do not eat it. If I get to choose, I never eat it. So now I sometimes eat sausages, but not really, no dairy-meat mixed or seafood, no way. Well, pork is actually the only thing to be [forbidden] and my *bobe* was the one keeping those [rules], but *bobe* is dead, so that's even more relaxed now [...] Since I do not eat [pork], I do not want to, I have never wanted to, nor does my husband. It would be foolish to buy different meats at home for different people. We both eat beef and it's OK for my husband, he has not missed it [pork].

Or at least he didn't admit it. (Woman in her 30s)

When eating out, more lenient rules apply. Most observant Jews are willing to consume cold vegetarian dishes when leaving home. Donin points out that 'keeping a kosher home' is no longer identical with 'observing *kashrut*'. Although sticking to keeping kosher at home despite eating out in a non-kosher restaurant can be regarded as an attempt to hold on to something, yet – as Donin states – none of reasons for observing *kashrut* are met by this double standard (Donin 1991: 103–4).

Reasons behind the weakening of keeping kosher in Finland

There have been a few turning points in Finnish history that also affected households keeping kosher. The Second World War resulted in a lack of food and the introduction of a rationing system; the following quotation from the interview material reflects this:

The war confused everything: before that, we had a kosher [household] [...] but after the war it was abandoned. There was so little food and there were so few opportunities. [...] When my mother was alone, we always had a housekeeper when I was small because we had to have someone [to help] at home. With a housekeeper, it's not a good thing to have the kosher thing, so it [keeping kosher] was all over. But during all the holidays my mum was absolutely hysterical when it came to Pesach: everything had to be changed, the whole household needed to be cleaned and the dishes changed, and everything had to be OK for one week. And when that week was over, they went back to the everyday routine. And all the other celebrations, New Year and other holidays, they were kept very

carefully. But then they abandoned this conservatism. (Woman in her 80s)

Another elderly woman with Finnish Jewish background grew up in a non-kosher household in the 1950s to 1960s:

Our family was not very religious. My brother was born in the '40s and by then they had stopped keeping kosher. And we never kept Shabbat at home but had a very strongly Jewish identity: we knew we were Jews, we were in the Jewish school and all our friends were Jews. And every weekend we visited the grandparents and had a meal together, and they still celebrated Shabbat [...] And we never ate pork. (Woman in her 70s)

One of the interviewees identified the termination of *kosher shehitah* (the Jewish religious method of slaughtering permitted animals and poultry for food) in Finland as a turning point (Animal Welfare Act from 1996), considering that since then people have had to plan meals according to what can be bought in the kosher shop and not what they would like to buy. Many members of the community recall the squalor of the kosher shop (called *yatke*) in their childhood (the 1960s to 1970s) as well as the bloodstained aprons of Jacko Weintraub, the butcher of the shop. One of the interviewees compared the kosher butcher shop to a Soviet-style store where only a very limited amount and kind of meat was available and where good connections with the seller were crucial. As a result, some of the families preferred buying non-kosher – but in their perception cleaner – meat from ordinary shops.

Levels of keeping kosher

The members of the community can be put into three major groups according to their kosherness: very few people stick to the food system of *kashrut* in a strict way so as to make no exceptions. There are people and families who can be defined as eating in a Jewish way. Then there is a majority who do not follow *kashrut* at all. Interpreting the foodway patterns of Jews of Finnish origin, it seems that the dichotomy of kosher (or at least kosher-style) at home, and non-kosher when going out, is valid, although it has to be added that there is an ongoing and visible change in the younger generations (new families with small children), who still struggle to find their way (Kraemer 2009: 143).

We have – at least compared with the rest of the Finnish Jewish community – maybe a tighter kosher home. And we have been keeping the rule of eating kosher at home and if we go elsewhere to eat, we eat what can be eaten there. In our family, it is the man of the house who prepares and cooks the chicken soup and all the others and makes it with a huge devotion [and] orders kosher meats from abroad, because the quality of kosher meat is better and so on [...] The number of Jewish cookbooks he owns that no one really needs. (Woman in her 40s)

Of course, everything is relative, so I guess our family was not kosher, for example, but in my opinion, however, the identity was still [Jewish] and we celebrated the holidays. Everything was about food, the celebration of the holidays [...] and my dad was active; he made the food after my mother died and he made a lot of food and really enjoyed it. (Woman in her 50s)

Finnish Jewish foodways

Can we find distinctively Jewish meals on the everyday table of Finnish Jews? Finland was the first country in the world to give women the right to vote and stand for election in 1906. Finland is advanced in equality, but also in other fields: housework is shared between the spouses and most Finns do not have paid help. Recipes offering a quick and healthy meal from a few ingredients are popular. It is not an organic part of the Finnish food culture to prepare complicated and time-consuming meals and this influence is clearly visible in Jewish households. Ashkenazi Jewish meals were developed at a time when women were housewives and resources were scarce. Nowadays, as women in Finland work as many hours as men, there is

less desire to prepare time-consuming meals. Consequently, they have become simplified, or else complicated Ashkenazi meals are prepared only for holidays. For a regular everyday dinner, most Jews in Finland will choose a quick and easy meal to prepare and Ashkenazi meals simply do not fit this trend.

Ashkenazi Jewish food culture was developed in Eastern Europe with slight regional variations. The descendants of the Cantonists share a similar food culture: independently of their land of origin, most of them follow the same traditionally Ashkenazi Jewish foodways. These long-established, customary recipes are the same in all families. Families have passed down their original home-country recipes from generation to generation. In a collection of recipes from Turku, we have access to the recipes of people who died long ago, where many dishes have their names in Yiddish. When it comes to *gefilte fish*, the use or the lack of sugar clearly indicates the origin of the family. Descendants of Polish Jewish families would add sugar to the dish, while families from more eastern parts would not (Roden 1996: 96). *Gefilte fish* is always eaten together with *chrein* – grated horseradish with a little beetroot to give it a nice pink colour. According to the traditional recipes of the Finnish Jewish families, *gefilte fish* is made from either bream or pike, but some recipes call for carp, haddock or whiting. Bream is not easily accessible any longer so nowadays pike or carp is most commonly used.

The list of Ashkenazi meals consumed in Finland has been more or less the same for the past 150 years, yet it has to be noted that they are not the same as in other parts of Europe. Dr Miksa Weisz of Hungarian Jewish origin, who served as a rabbi, and later as the chief rabbi of Finland between 1957–61 (under the name Mika Weiss), was surprised when offered Finnish Jewish dishes.

Dóra Pataiczka



Gefilte fish.

They [the members of the Jewish community of Helsinki] fed me *gefilte fish*, chopped liver, so many things. This might not sound special, but that was the first time I had ever had them. These were not traditional Hungarian Jewish foods. (Weiss 2008: 135)

For some reason, unlike in other Jewish communities of Eastern European origin, *cholent* (traditional Jewish stew eaten on Shabbat) is not an organic part of Finnish Jewish food culture. One of the reasons for this is that beans are not often eaten in Finland and for a long time no *kosher* oven was available. *Brust* or *briskett* is sometimes prepared for the holidays as a cold cut (Yid. *ufshnit*). It is made of beef and some people add saltpetre for conservation and to give it a nice colour (Turku recipe collection), but some do not (Haras 2006: 33). Beef tongue (often referred to by its Swedish name *tunga*) and *kisbke* (see later) are also served on the same plate of cold cuts.

Plum compote is a common Jewish dessert made of prunes (Wardi 1998: 54). Haras's recipe adds almonds (Haras 2006: 73), whereas Wardi's recipe lists port wine as an ingredient, but currently no kosher port can be bought in Finland. Buying any kind of alcoholic beverage is only possible in the government-owned enterprise in Finland, called Alko. Currently, it has seventeen different kinds of kosher drinks, four of which are vodka/spirit products and the others are red, white and sparkling wines.⁹

During Jewish holidays, and at every Shabbat, some of the families would have meat soup (made of chicken under the names *kanasoppa*, *kanakeitto*, *kycklingsoppa*, or sometimes made of beef) with vegetables on the table as a first course, then meat cooked in

the soup and fruit salad as dessert. At Pesach *matzoh balls*, that is, *kneidlachs* or *bombes* (Haras 2006: 25), are served too. Haras's version contains sugar and no fat at all, whereas another recipe from the Turku collection, quoting the WIZO cookbook *Det judiska köket* from Sweden, calls for animal fat (from beef or chicken).

In most cases *challah* (a plaited loaf of white leavened bread, traditionally eaten on Shabbat and certain Jewish holidays) is prepared by the woman of the household since there is nowhere that fresh and kosher *challah* can be purchased. Most people in the community use the same *challah* recipe – the one that is used in the community kitchen. Haras's *challah* recipe (Haras 2006: 79) contains cardamom but in most of the households it is prepared without it. There is a Finnish braid loaf resembling *challah*, called *pitko*, and it is only cardamom that distinguishes these two kinds of bread. A recipe from Turku suggests adding a pint of Koskenkorva (a strong vodka-like Finnish alcoholic drink), but this too is not a generally used recipe. This is one of the recipes from a collection of recipes from Turku of immense value, the owner of which does not want to be disclosed. By comparing these recipes from Turku with recipes from Helsinki (e.g. Haras 2006) it is clear that the culinary tradition is the same.

Regardless of what the Shabbat meal consists of, *challah* is always eaten by Finnish Jews who observe Shabbat. Thus we can say that *challah* is the last element of the original Eastern European food culture that the Cantonists inherited which still is an essential component of the Shabbat table:

We have a Shabbat dinner every Friday, we light the candles, we say the short prayers, not the whole thing, but just the basic ones. My child knows how to say it on the *challah*, we have fresh *challah* bread, my

9 For more information, see Alko's website.

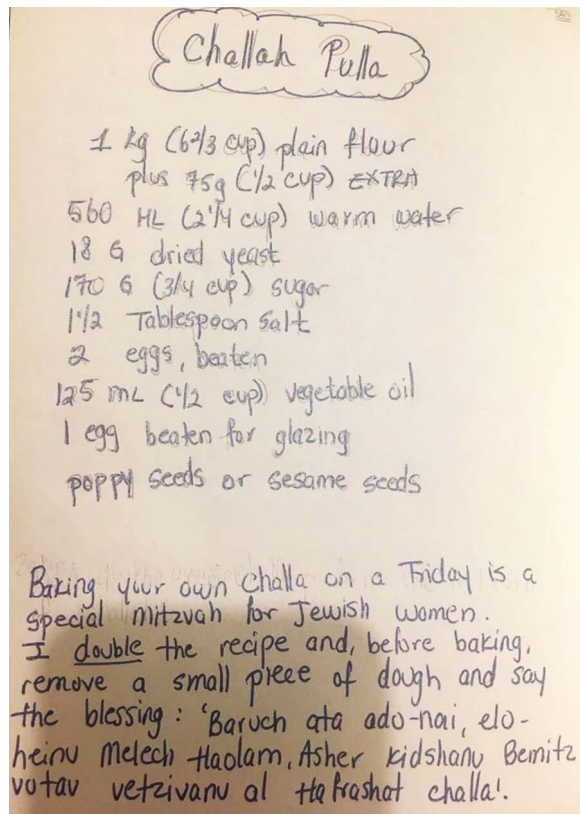
mother-in-law bakes them every Friday. So we keep that. (Woman in her 40s)

Challahpulla is a coined word of the Hebrew word *challah* and the Finnish word *pulla* for sweet roll. By adding the commonly used Finnish word *pulla* to the Hebrew word *challah*, even children as small as two years of age in the Jewish nursery in Helsinki can understand the meaning of the word. Finnish-speaking adults refer to it as either *challah/challeh*, or alternatively *challah-leipä* (meaning *challah* bread).

Gebackte herring (vorschmack) and *gebackte leber* are always present on the holiday table of Finnish Jews:

My dad and Sara have taught these children [how to cook], so they can already make *gefilte fish* and *leber* and everything because Sara decided five years ago or so to take on the role of teaching all the children to prepare this kind of food, to chop herring and liver and so on. I can now slip away because there are so many workers of the next generation. And the food is always the same. In a way, there is always the same list of the meals that we have. (Woman in her 40s)

Nowadays, *borscht* is only eaten by most Finnish Jews at the yearly WIZO bazaar, traditionally without meat, topped with smetana and dill. At Hanukkah, it seems that Jewish families living in Helsinki, but originating from Turku, have a special menu, the recipes of which I was able to get from them. However, I did not find them written down in any of the recipe books. The menu consists of *blintzes (blini)* consumed together with smoked salmon cream (prepared with cream cheese and smetana or soured whole milk (Finnish *viili*, obviously a Swedish gastro-nomic influence) and rainbow trout caviar which too is eaten with smetana or *viili*. Another popular Hanukkah dish is *latkes*, just like in most other Ashkenazi Jewish communities.



Challahpulla and its recipe made by rebetsin Wolff.



Gehackte leber.

There are also traditional Finnish Jewish meals that cannot be prepared any more because of lack of ingredients, such as *shmalts*. This basic component of Ashkenazi meals has not been available in Finland for over twenty years. Michael Wex dedicates a whole book to *shmalts* (Wex 2016), yet in Finland, only a few people use still kosher *shmalts* on some occasions. Some Cantonists collect chicken skin to produce their own *shmalts*, at least for the holidays. According to a Russian Jewish woman, Russians are used to cooking with (non-kosher) animal fat even after having moved to Finland, but the only easily accessible animal fat is lard, that can be bought in Russian and Estonian shops. *Gribenes* (crackling of chicken or goose skin with fried onions) has not been prepared since the time that fresh kosher meat ceased to be available. *Gehakte leber* (Yid. chopped liver) is nowadays made of chicken liver instead of the traditional way of preparing it from beef liver. *Kishke* too has ceased to exist except for a short revival.

In an experimental project, the production of *kishke* was restarted in 2018. *Kishke* means something different in Finland from in other parts of the world. *Kishke* is stuffed intestines

(this also applies to the Finnish *kishke*), but elsewhere it is filled with all-purpose flour, fried onions, goose or chicken fat spiced with salt and pepper (Modan 1994: 64; Marks 2010: 313–15), whereas the original Finnish recipe for *kishke* gives instructions for a kind of double smoked salami made of kosher beef, seasoned with plenty of garlic, and the recipe is kept safe as a secret in the Jewish Community of Helsinki. The recipe is vague – no exact quantities included in the recipe. It was written down by Jac Weintraub, who used to work at the so-called Jatke, the kosher meat shop.

Ever since the banning of *shechita* (kosher slaughter) in Finland, there has been no way to prepare the *kishke*, since it is only fresh meat that can be used for the production of this salami. In February 2018, the first portion of *kishke* was produced in Hungary in a kosher butchery, which was followed by a tasting event at the community. After feedback and some changes, a second and third order was made and it seems that now with the help of older community members we were able to establish the exact proportions of the ingredients needed. The existence of the recipe for the old, traditional *kishke* can be regarded as a possible thread that connects Finnish Jews to generations lost, but in this case, that thread is rather worn. Many members of the community remember the dish and its flavours, but they (and I) can only make guesses about how and when it became part of the food tradition, who started making it and what the precise quantities should be.

Trends have changed since the Finnish *kishke* was first produced. Fatty food has come to be considered unhealthy since *kishke* was eaten regularly and even though the recipe calls for a good portion of tallow, community members now prefer less. Also, beef contains less fat nowadays and since only the front quarter of the animals can be koshered



Kishke.

(Donin 1991: 106), kosher fat is more difficult to obtain.

All Finnish families probably have the same festive menu when it comes to holidays. Without certain iconic foods, there is no holiday at all. At earlier times holidays must have been associated with eating well and eating meat (Diner 2001: 147), nowadays it is rather ‘back to the roots’ and childhood food memories. The revived production of *kishke* offered an excellent addition to this trend.

Keeping kosher in Finland

Those Jewish people who are at any level observant in keeping kosher have to constantly negotiate when interacting with non-Jewish people (for example, at their workplace) (Kraemer 2009: 124). Even the younger generation of Finnish Jews have to cope with challenging situations when it comes to keeping kosher outside their homes. One of the interviewees in her twenties spoke about her experiences with a non-Jewish roommate:

I have a roommate who, however, eats pork and similar [non-kosher] meals. But I told her, ‘You can’t cook in my frying pans!’ And she understands it, although in her opinion it should be OK and my friends are like:

‘How comes you still don’t eat pork, even nowadays?’ And I feel like I’m not in the mood to, I don’t need it. (Woman in her 20s)

Other people cope with finding ways to justify their food choices at their workplaces:

So, with regard to food, I said I didn’t eat pork and seafood. Full stop. And well some might have asked, ‘Are you allergic?’ ‘Yeah.’ A surprising allergy combination it is... (Woman in her 40s)

If I were so religious, or for example if – now I am OK if I go somewhere to eat during work, I can always find something there. But if I were religious or very strictly kosher, it could be [a problem]. (Woman in her 40s)

Possibilities for those who would like to eat like a Jew while joining non-Jews when going out are limited in Finland. Choosing the vegetarian option – which is anyway popular thus common and easily accessible – when eating out is the most obvious solution. Currently, there are two kosher, vegan restaurants in Finland, a Vietnamese-style one called Emoi (ran by a Vietnamese woman) in Helsinki, near the synagogue, which is under the supervision of Chief Rabbi Simon Livson, and another one nearby, called Kippo at Forum Helsinki (*Hakehila* 4/2017: 8).

Another obviously Nordic influence on Finnish Jewish food culture is that some Finnish Jewish families have been celebrating the crayfish party (*Fi. rapujuhlat*), which takes place in August even though crayfish is not kosher. One of our interviewees said:

So I grew up in a somewhat secular family, so we had crayfish, and ham we did not eat, other than once at a Christmas party, then

we tasted some smoked meat. (Woman in her 70s).

I am aware that strictly speaking all these rules mean that in the end the majority of the foodways most Finnish Jews have cannot be viewed as kosher outside Finland, yet it has to be pointed out that eating kosher has more rigorous and less strict versions. The limited possibilities, and the scant availability of kosher ingredients, have produced this combination of unofficial and unspoken kosher rules in Finland. The most notable contradiction in Finnish Jewish foodways is between the Orthodox label and roots of the community and the locally developed set of rules regarding kosher that, in the end, result in 'kosher-like' foodways rather than an adherence to widely accepted notions of Orthodox *kasbrut* regulations.¹⁰ Representatives of the Chabad movement in Finland are probably members of the only family who strictly keep all kosher rules inside and outside their homes. I will not go into details concerning their food culture, partly to protect their privacy and because they do not have any followers in this aspect of life, so in the end it is only a single family.

Conclusions

Jews – as global people – have always adopted local foodways and adapted them to their own dietary laws. The Finnish Jewish cuisine too has blended *kasbrut* with local products and styles (Diner 2001: 148). The influence of Finnish culinary culture on Jewish food practices is visible in many ways: salmon has made its way to the festive tables of Finnish Jews and fresh green salad has also become a permanent dish. Coffee and tea have to be drunk

10 It has to be noted that I do not regard Orthodox Judaism as a unified movement.

Dóra Pataricza



Pesach table of a Finnish Jewish family.

after all meals – if there are meat courses, then with vegetable milk. Quickly and easily preparable Finnish recipes are sought even for a Shabbat dinner and Ashkenazi meals are only consumed on holidays. Israeli meals too have made their ways to the festive table of Finnish Jews. Hummus, *baba ganoush* and couscous are often eaten on holidays.

The community is often criticised for becoming more religious ('black' as Finnish Jews call it, referring to the clothes of Hasidic Jews), which can also be observed in the regulations around food in the community:

The congregation has forbidden any kind of food to be brought into the community that is not 100 per cent [kosher]. Well, if some biscuits or butter were brought there, it was not taken away for being *treyf* [non-kosher], no. After all, there has always been a kosher kitchen – it's not strange, but somehow it feels that the people who come in there get a taste of the rituals. It [the community] has become stricter now. (Woman in her 70s)

As Claudia Roden puts it:

Dishes are important because they are a link with the past, a celebration of roots,

a symbol of continuity. They are part of an immigrant culture which survives the longest, kept up even when clothing, music, language and religious observance have been abandoned. Although cooking is fragile because it lives in human activity, it isn't easily destroyed. It is transmitted in every family like genes, and it has the capacity for change and for passing on new experience from one generation to another. (Roden 1996: 11)

The Finnish Jewish food culture is undergoing a change, which has accelerated in the past twenty years since opportunities to obtain kosher ingredients have become more and more difficult in Finland. Adapting has turned into adopting: the Finnish food culture has now taken over the Ashkenazi Jewish food culture. Jewish meals are consumed only on holidays, except for *challah*, which is still eaten on Friday evenings by many Jews. Food is the strongest and often the only link to the Ashkenazi Jewish roots of the community members, and festive meals offer a possibility to preserve these roots.

Food, however, is also a way to innovate and to integrate the influences of the surrounding majority culture. Thus there is now a visible Finnish, and also Israeli, influence on the traditionally Ashkenazi Jewish food culture of the Finnish Jewish community. In parallel with the process of change in the composition of the community, with Finnish Jews becoming a minority and with a growing number of foreigners and converts, the foodways too are undergoing transformation. ■



Dóra Pataricza is currently working in a research project led by Ruth Illman, entitled 'Boundaries of Jewish Identities in Contemporary Finland', on a case study entitled 'Foodways'. Her project focuses primarily on how boundaries are drawn up and crossed in Jewish-

Finnish cuisines, where culinary traditions are shaped by influences from different times, cultures, geographical regions and traditions. Pataricza is a Doctor of Classical Philology from the University of Debrecen, Hungary.

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