Fit for Food: "Eating Jewishly" and the "Islamic Paradigm" as Emergent Religious Foodways in Toronto

Title:
Fit for Food: "Eating Jewishly" and the "Islamic Paradigm" as Emergent Religious Foodways in Toronto

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Abstract (summary):
Abstract This project is about Jews and Muslims who participate in the food movement in Toronto, about how and why they do, and about what challenges and opportunities this presents to contemporary understandings of kashrut and halal as religious dietary laws. In early twenty-first century Canada, food is a site where consumer ethics and religious diversity intersect. The two groups I focus on are Shoresh Jewish Environmental Programs, a charitable organization running Jewish environmental practices at multiple satellite sites, and Noor Islamic Cultural Centre, a mosque where community members gather regularly for religious ritual and political and cultural events. Both are intentionally non-sectarian religious communities that invite pan-Jewish or pan-Muslim participation, have norms viewed as progressive by the wider religious community, and run considerable food-related programming that actively connects religion with alternative foodways. Both advocate for more “conscious” food practices, including local, organic, sustainable, humane, and social-justice-oriented food choices. They develop religious foodways that are, on the one hand, fundamentally connected to traditional religious food law, and on the other hand, significant departures from typical understandings of kashrut and halal. The foodways that emerge in this milieu are “eating Jewishly,” in relation to kashrut, and an “Islamic paradigm” for eating, in relation to halal. The aim of this comparative project is to show how religious communities do the work of constructing religion through material practices at once economic and symbolic. Drawing on anthropological fieldwork conducted with Noor and Shoresh from 2012 to 2015, I show how both organizations develop their religious foodways: as ethical interventions, as means of invigorating community, and as means for resisting industrialized orthodoxies. People at Noor and Shoresh bring religious life to bear on public lives, tying together social justice, environmentalism, and eating in a practice for recalibrating market values. Constructing religion as a domain of practical ethics, participants at Noor and Shoresh draw on religion for resources to develop emergent religious foodways that cut across and re-inscribe boundaries between insider and outsider, moral value and market value, and even Muslim and Jew.

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'Eating Jewishly' re-positions religious orthodoxy as one in a set of authorizing discourses, subsuming all Jewish eating acts under one rubric. 'Eating Jewishly' thus departs from standard narratives of Jewish eating as either eating kosher, or eating traditional Jewish foods. Through a comprehensive study of Gandhi's own words, select Indian religious texts and myths that he used, and the historical and cultural context of his activism, this research shows how Gandhi's ascetic disciplines helped him mobilize millions. It explores Gandhi's creative use of renunciation in challenging established paradigms of confrontational politics, passive asceticism, and oppressive social customs. In social science, foodways are the cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food. Foodways often refers to the intersection of food in culture, traditions, and history. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Foodways as "the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period". The term 'foodways' appears to have been coined in 1942 by three University of Chicago graduate students, John W. Bennett, Harvey L. Smith and Herbert. They eat both dairy products and eggs, but do not consume meat. It is fairly easy to get enough nutrients with a lacto-ovo diet. The second style of vegetarianism is very similar to the first. A lacto-vegetarian eats dairy but no meat or eggs. Very few people choose to be a lacto-vegetarian because most people think that eating eggs is very similar to eating dairy products because of the way that each is produced. The third and strictest form of being vegetarian is vegan. Vegans avoid all foods that come from animals in any way, including both dairy and eggs. Many vegans also to not use an