



## Introduction

Women of the Jewish community in Argentina play a key role in shaping personal and collective memory while setting boundaries through traditional cuisine. The Poster focuses on a culinary tradition, the "Gefilte fish" dish, prepared for festive meals and its symbolic meaning in contrast to the traditional Argentine meat grilling.

The community has its roots within the waves of immigration from Eastern Europe that took place from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A close look at culinary traditions of a minority group in the context of national culinary traditions, suggests that the minority domestic praxis, perceived as feminine holds a permanent dialogue with the meat grilling praxis, perceived as masculine in this culture.

## The Gefilte-Fish as symbol

The community usually celebrates Passover at a family meal. For them, the symbolic meal, unites flavors, times, and spaces. In personal stories, the reference to Gefilte-fish, stuffed fish in Yiddish, is particularly prominent. The preparation is usually up to the elder women.

The dish is made of ground fish and served as dumplings, a loaf baked in the oven or in the original way, fish skin stuffed with fish mixture, served with the head and tail, with the intention to satisfy more diners.

Today the dish symbolizes a mythical past composed of immigration stories and poverty. In contrast, in ancient Jewish culture, fish symbolizes luck, protection from the evil eye and fertility.



## The folktale

Fish and seafood are not central to Argentine cuisine, except during the Quaresma period, when Christians avoid red meat and settle for fish. The Jewish Passover period usually corresponds with this time, which greatly increases the price of fish.

Many personal stories and cookbooks mention the custom of mixing three types of fish to prepare gefilte fish. Often a folktale is told, explaining the origin of the custom in a variety of versions:

- ❖ The women would arrive late at the market and buy leftover fish cheaply.
- ❖ The women would go to the river and collect the fish that the fishermen had thrown away.
- ❖ The Jews in Eastern Europe would go to the shores and collect the fish remains left by the fishermen.
- ❖ In Eastern Europe, women went to the market at the time of closing and bought cheaply what they were about to throw away.

The story is told with reservations, related to the price of fish and the economic difficulties in Argentina today. By doing so, the women emphasize their responsibility for maintaining the home economy in difficult times, alongside their role as guardians of tradition and gatekeepers of Jewish identity.



## Fish and Meat, will they go together?

The dichotomy between the tradition to remember past poverty and the high cost of buying three types of fish today, created a new discourse that calls to brake the rules and change the tradition by buying only one type of economic fish. Anna Maria Shua humorlessly recommends this in her Jewish cookbook published in 1993:

"My recipe includes three times a pound of Merluza fish! I have not heard of anyone that complained about the lack of another fish! Cook for the younger generation, you are their grandmother, they have no memories to compare. The facts on the plate are what counts!, make Gefilte-Fish and be a legend!"

As the dish is present on a diachronic axis symbolizing poverty and femininity, the abundance encountered in Argentina constitutes a binary contrast present on a synchronous axis and is associated with meat as well as masculinity. The kosher restrictions on meat marked the image of the Jew as "other", by adapting the meat consumed to kosher restrictions, the Argentine "asado" viewed as masculine became part of Jewish-Argentine foodways symbolizing abundance. Thus, asserting their being part of the national culture. Recurrent praxis creates points of contact between the Jewish and the Argentinean identity elaborating a hybrid culture and accentuating gender roles.



## Conclusion

Examining foodways as cultural text often illuminates paradoxical aspects associated with creating and breaking cultural constructions.

Thus, the dialogue that a minority group holds with their traditional foodways and the foodways of the general culture, tells the story of the group past and present revealing aspects of power, participation and even transgression. A deeper meaning is seen when through foodways the group seeks to secure its present and future within a turbulent cultural and economic context.



## References

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