



## Cultura kosher y judía estadounidense en “Indignación” de Philip Roth

### Kosher and American-Jewish Culture in Philip Roth’s Indignation

### Cultura kosher e judaica americana em “Indignação” de Philip Roth

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**Abstract:** Objective: Abstract: “Kosher” is a word used to illustrate the food laws of Jewish people. It’s a traditional Jewish law for food. For Jews, it’s more than food consumption with safety. It’s regarding religious beliefs and traditions. Jews follow proper guidelines of Kosher and give the compulsion to food to be reckoned Kosher. The English word “Kosher” is derived from the Hebrew root “Kasher”, which means to be pure, proper, or suitable for consumption. Kashrut is a charter that renders the foundation for kosher dietetic rule and is established inside ‘Torah’ which is a Jewish sacred book. Kosher dietetic rules are including all and produce a strict structure of rules and regulations which gives a sketch of foods allowed or prohibited. It also determines how foods allowed should be made, refined, and fixed before eating. The paper illustrates kosher law and food among American-Jewish people and their determination towards their religious beliefs in American land, which is not their motherland, with analysis from Philip Roth’s novel Indignation. This paper also ascertains Jewish culture into the outlook of American culture which ends with a cultural clash referring to historical consequences.

**Keywords:** Kosher; jewish; culture; america; law; religion



**Resumen:** "Kosher" es una palabra que se usa para ilustrar las leyes alimentarias del pueblo judío. Es una ley judía tradicional para la alimentación. Para los judíos, es más que consumir alimentos con seguridad. Se trata de creencias y tradiciones religiosas. Los judíos siguen las pautas adecuadas de Kosher y dan la compulsión a la comida para ser considerada Kosher. La palabra inglesa "Kosher" se deriva de la raíz hebrea "Kasher", que significa puro, apropiado o apto para el consumo. Kashrut es una carta que constituye la base de la regla dietética kosher y se establece dentro de la 'Torá', que es un libro sagrado judío. Las reglas dietéticas kosher incluyen a todos y producen una estructura estricta de reglas y regulaciones que dan un bosquejo de los alimentos permitidos o prohibidos. También determina cómo se deben preparar, refinar y arreglar los alimentos permitidos antes de comerlos. El documento ilustra la ley kosher y la comida entre los judíos estadounidenses y su determinación hacia sus creencias religiosas en la tierra estadounidense, que no es su patria, con un análisis de la novela Indignación de Philip Roth. Este artículo también inscribe la cultura judía en la perspectiva de la cultura estadounidense que termina con un choque cultural que se refiere a las consecuencias históricas.

**Palabras clave:** Kosher; judío; cultura; américa; derecho; religion

**Resumo:** "Kosher" é uma palavra usada para ilustrar as leis alimentares do povo judeu. É uma lei judaica tradicional para comida. Para os judeus, é mais do que consumir alimentos com segurança. É sobre crenças e tradições religiosas. Os judeus seguem as diretrizes adequadas de Kosher e dão a compulsão à comida de ser considerada Kosher. A palavra inglesa "Kosher" é derivada da raiz hebraica "Kasher", que significa ser puro, adequado ou adequado para consumo. Kashrut é uma carta que torna a base para a regra dietética kosher e é estabelecida dentro da 'Torá', que é um livro sagrado judaico. As regras dietéticas Kosher incluem tudo e produzem uma estrutura estrita de regras e regulamentos que dão um esboço dos alimentos permitidos ou proibidos. Também determina como os alimentos permitidos devem ser preparados, refinados e fixados antes de serem consumidos. O artigo ilustra a lei e a comida kosher entre os judeus americanos e sua determinação em relação às suas crenças religiosas na terra americana, que não é sua pátria, com análise do romance Indignation, de Philip Roth. Este artigo também averigua a cultura judaica na perspectiva da cultura americana que termina com um choque cultural referente às consequências históricas.

**Palavras-chave:** Kosher; judaico; cultura; américa; direito; religião



## INTRODUCTION

Following their culture has always been the priority for Jews, it's connected to their identity and religion. Jewish law should be pursued rigorously and it's pure by origin because it has been derived from 'Torah' which is their holy book. Judaism is old more than 3000 years. Its root has made structure in the Middle East during Bronze Age. Judaism depicts the religion, outlook, practice, and means of livelihood of Jewish people. It gives light on the history and development of religion and how they must adapt everything according to religious faith and practice it. Judaism culturally traces no differentiation in its laws between religious and non-religious life. Jews do not separate religious, national, ethnological, or traditional identities. 'Halakha' is the joint figure of Jewish religious statutes borrowed from the Written and Oral Torah. Halakha supervises not only traditional practices and faiths but various conditions of everyday life. 'Halakha' is usually transcribed as "Jewish Law", transcribes might be "the way to behave" or "the way of walking". The word originates from the root that means "to behave". With respect to history, halakha served various Jewish communities thoroughly in both religious and non-religious approaches and it is a medium for sages to come onwards with their view. Sages point out the social system of holy Israel. Halakha represents Jewish mythic culture in the setting of the number of laws. It's a manifestation of unending trueness, equally developed by altering the ethnic realism or incomprehensibly because both are unchangeable and commutable (Neusner, 2002). Kosher butchering law is portrayed in the novel which is one of the important rules of Judaism, through the Messner family, Marcus Messner describes his family's kosher butchering history in American-Jewish background and; quotes, "My father's father, dead before I was born, had been a kosher butcher, as were my father's three brothers, Uncle Muzzy, Uncle Shecky, and Uncle Artie, each of whom had a shop like ours in different part of Newark" (Roth, 2010, p. 36).

## RESULTS

### **Settlement of jews in america**



Jews fled to the United States of America centuries back because of discrimination in their own land and for the opportunity of religious freedom. Immigration of Jewish-Americans is divided into three waves by historians: Spanish-Portuguese Jews, German Jews, and Russian Jews – based on which part of Europe they belong. Jews of Portuguese and Spanish roots are called the “Sephardic Jews”, who reached the United States in the mid-seventeenth century. The first-ever group of Sephardic settlers came to New Amsterdam in 1654 from Brazil. Later, audacious Sephardic and Ashkenazi merchants made a home in American colonies which includes Newport, New Amsterdam, Philadelphia, S.C., Charleston, and Ga (Zollman, 2011). Jews imagined the land of their dream and of desire and they migrated to a foreign land, and that was America, and established a community of Jews. After the establishment of Jews in America, the subject of Jewish-American culture came into existence. Jews occupied unique status in American society. In the history of America, Jews have always made a special position in all ways of society. The American society gave multicultural thought to the world by giving space to the immigrant of the entire corner. America is considered a multicultural society (Fludernik, 2003).

Colonial Synagogues of America followed Sephardic rites and directed each condition of Jewish religious life. Synagogue didn't attempt economic action. It diverged from the old world where all things were commercialized; Synagogues in Amsterdam, London, and in other places governed Jewish publications and penalized members for mistakes. Colonial synagogues divided Jewish and outside fields in American Jewish life. Colonial American Sephardic synagogues merged modern opinion of beauty with traditional Judaism by making congregations that were pure and wise. Synagogues made some rules for services and prayers to complete it with some decorousness. Colonial synagogue arranged places to sit for male and female members in the congregation. Well-known families were prioritized because they have paid money and as a result, they were getting good seats. The amalgamation of modern thought with Jewish tradition in American land made space for Jewish immigrants to make a new identity. Synagogue was the best place for Jewish people in America to know each other and to



get to know a new place where they were going to start a new life with their old tradition with the new aspect of society for their religious faith, which they wanted to carry in new land too (Zollman, 2011).

German Jews started settling in America in large numbers in the 1840s. Jews saw American land as their medicine which will cure the suffering of restrictions, economic struggle, oppression, etc which they were having in Germany; America became a land of economic strength and social equality for Jews. Around 250,000 German-speaking Jews arrived in America by the eruption of World War I. This large immigrant group spread out American Jewish places on the map by making themselves in smaller parts of cities and towns.

Eastern European Jews started coming to America in ample numbers after 1880. Forced to come out of Europe by too much population, oppressive rules, and poorness, they were forced towards America by the chance of money and social up-gradation. Between 1880 and 1924, more than two million Jews from different parts of the world migrated to America. They started engaging themselves in various fields to make their place in a new society and for earning money, as the Eastern Europeans were in bulk, the characteristic of American Jews changed.

Jews started settling in the wretched locality of main cities. Cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and Chicago turned into Jewish people's locality by the twentieth century. The immigrants started working in factories of garments, cigars, food production, and building. Jewish workers made their union and started working together and made a voice of their own for their rights in the working place. As they started working in the garment factory in New York, it became the capital of fashion and Jewish food also became popular. They started contributing to American culture. Marcus Messner's mother says once to him, "we're not starting now. We are Americans" (Roth, 2010, p. 172). It depicts the contribution of a person to his/her society and the adoption of societal rules. American Jewish started flourishing in every field such as in drama, media, prose writing, etc. in the shape of Yiddish culture. Marcus Messner is willing to



change his profession unlike his kosher butcher father and wants to become a lawyer. He is one of the best examples of a contributor to American-Jewish society according to the demand of the society. He even quotes, “As a pre-law student majoring in political science, I was taking The Principles of American Government and American History to 1865” (Roth, 2010. p. 30).

The Eastern European Jews got with them positive mythos rules that will determine American Jewry. Most workers braced socialism or communism for assuring equality in society. So, in such a way, they made a bond between American Jews and society for their settlement. They infused Orthodox Judaism with new thought and joy in a modern concept for maintaining their tradition and culture. In this era one more concept came into existence is cultural pluralism in America from minorities of Europe. Cultural Pluralism is a concept in which one ethnic group has an ethical right to live on their own condition between the larger societies by continuing their specific cultural inheritance (Haas, 2015). Cultural pluralists say that various ethnic groups have impoverished the American style of living as immigrants and natives of America have learned from other ethnic groups and have expanded their ideas on food, art, education, dress, music, and another prospect of life too. The protagonist of the novel, Marcus Messner, who is studying law is once told by his Dean, “On the basis of this interview, I think you are destined to be an outstanding lawyer.” (Roth, 2010, p. 105). He discards being a kosher butcher and adopts the profession of being a lawyer in the American society which is an outcome of being in a society of America (Cultural Pluralism).

### **Kosher butchering laws**

The Kosher condition is a processing and investigation of the role of the specific kind of animal and its slaughtering method, and after slaughtering. The Torah (religious book of Jews in Hebrew) permits Jewish people to eat solely terrene mammals that have cloven hooves and chew their rechewed food, for example- cow, goats, sheep, etc (Hill, 2019). There are twenty-four species that are not allowed to eat particularly except that all poultries are allowed to eat by the Torah. Torah allows consumption of kosher meat and



fowl particularly if it's rightly slaughtered. The explanation of kosher slaughtering- shechitah (it's the practice of slaughtering animals permitted in the Jewish religion) is developed by rabbis' comments and conventional laws. Jewish traditional law prohibits consuming whatever animal is suffering from illness and disease even if it is slaughtered properly. After slaughtering inspector does an inspection for approving kosher and illness-free meat according to the rabbinical instructions given. In the novel also it is mentioned, "to buy kosher meat and chickens from a rabbinically certified shop whose owner was a member of the Federation of Kosher Butchers of New Jersey" (Roth, 2010, p. 03). According to Jewish law, two kosher butchers are supposed to perform slaughtering in presence of each other at a time so that they can check each other's knives and cattle's lungs. By doing this failure in kosher butchering becomes low. A Jew person must pass three-level examinations to be a kosher butcher. By slaughtering fowl, cattle, etc, they can pass the examination and get the license to be a professional butcher.

The removal of whole blood is called kashering, and should be completed within seventy-two hours of slaughter. In time the blood becomes excessively solidified to take out. In case kashering is not accomplished within seventy-two hours, the meat should be water-washed to prolong the time period for one more seventy-two hours; this procedure possibly can be reiterated one extra time if required. By salting leftover blood should be removed. Egg with any spot of blood is prohibited from consumption and is considered non-kosher. One more thing in the history of kosher meat is the cost of production, which is higher than non-kosher meat. In a long history, kosher fraud in the market is also highly recorded. To solve the problem of fraud Jewish institutions made some laws following their tradition. It helped the institution somehow to handle the fraud (Stern, 1990).

Utensils are also important to be in a kosher category, for also some rules are there. Utensils that are picked to eat food or cook food should come under kosher status. If meat is cooked in a utensil, the utensil becomes of meat. After this process, if the utensil is used for boiling the milk, then the status of the utensil becomes of forbidden concoction (Masoudi, 1993).





In ancient days rabbis were having the right to check the knife of tabach for its imperfectness before slaughtering the animal, which can fix whether it was kosher or not. Rabbis are allowed to give serious permission to butchers if they are refusing for inspection. It includes banning selling meat. Rabbis always want to make sure that butchers should be professional kosher butchers and Jew by religion. Same way, Marcus Messner's family's background is of a kosher butcher, his father is a kosher butcher, not a butcher because they are Jews; even in the college of his, dean mentions his profession and says, "It says here your father is a kosher butcher." (Roth, 2010, p. 91). Jewish people are the only ones whom rabbis can believe for being kosher butchers because they follow all the rules of the Torah. Torah is a religious book of Jews and according to it Jews follow entire activities of life and fulfill their livelihood (Lytton, 2013). Its significance in Jew's life is very important and it gives basic knowledge of communal life. One more point, it gives space in the Jewish community wherever Jews are settled in the world after settling in a heterogeneous society among mixed-race people. Being in mixed-race community Jews can follow their religion and this Torah is a basic Jewish background knowledge giver.

Marcus Messner, the protagonist of the novel discusses the scene of his father's kosher butcher shop and at the same, his role also in the shop, saying, "I'd scrape out the blood to keep the place kosher" (Roth, 2010, p. 07).

### **Novel's plot and analysis**

Indignation is a story of Marcus Messner, is the son of a kosher butcher and is a college-going boy, who wants to break the chain of restraint of family. The story revolves around the father-son relationship, Marcus says, "And I loved my father, and he me, more than ever before in our lives." (Roth, 2010, p. 07). Marcus' father's over possessiveness towards Marcus has become suffocative for him, he says; "my father's surveillance had become insufferable." (Roth, 2010, p. 09). His father is always being afraid that his son will be killed in the war and he wanted that his son should also become a kosher butcher. Marcus left Newark after finishing his first year of college and took a transfer to Winesburg College a fictional liberal arts





school in Ohio. Marcus took this step because he realized pastoral life is less to be liberated in life. At the time of attending chapel sitting, Marcus being an atheist finds comfort in singing the Chinese anthem, learned in his school time, and the title of the novel comes from this song: “China’s masses have met the day of danger. “Indignation fills the hearts of all our countrymen, Arise! Arise! Arise!” (Roth, 2010, p. 82). Philip Roth has shown creativity in the novel and it’s his twenty-seventh masterpiece of fiction which is having a fully Jewish background, Marcus Messner’s Jewish descent comes into notice as mentioned by his dean, “I notice, though you are of Jewish extraction” (Roth, 2010, p. 92). The novel is set at the time of the Korean War of 1950-53 and its fear among people. It takes us to fear the past of war among people. Fear has doomed an individual’s life and his family. On the ground level novel takes a firm stand on past events’ chaoticness and harmful current existence bringing out the mode in which the past event of the post-war U.S.A. has been whatever though an unavoidable event. Marcus Messner is unable to fight the scary history of war and violence and the reality of life. As he is born and brought up in a kosher butcher’s family has seen blood spots everywhere and, on the battlefield, too where he has died. The storyline also reveals the restraints of social and cultural American society of the controlled middle century by portraying the historical spread out. Roth has attempted to show the consequences of war in American culture and through his characters in the novel alienation of contemporary American life after war. He has tried to depict the chain of past and present in a series of tales that exemplify the horrible history’s effect on an individual’s life, “but history will catch you in the end. Because history is not the background- history is the stage!” (Roth, 2010, p. 222). In the story, father-mother-son’s relation to each other is served to the readers and their inheritance of tradition and culture. Marcus’s father inherited Jewish culture and followed it fully being a kosher butcher and his mother followed American and Jewish tradition both, though Marcus wished for American equalitarianism and to be free. Family longed for the American dream. Marcus is a living example of the American Dream, his mother talks to him concerning upliftment of his position in society by means of knowledge, and says to him; “Markie, you are here to be a student and to study the Supreme Court



and to study Thomas Jefferson and to prepare to go to law school.” (Roth, 2010, p. 171). Marcus tried to break the chain of restrictions of his father and lost his life on the war field. This father-mother-son chain broke after Marcus’ death and with their chain of relationship, their American dream also broke.

Marcus Messner’s story of life in the novel revolves around history’s progression and restores the Chinese national anthem in every single narrative structure in the story, and the words of the anthem express combativeness.

Marcus shares a feeling of kinship with the Chinese national anthem, and he understood it at the time when Dean Caudwell called him to his office regarding the change of roommate request twice. On the other point, Marcus is too young to understand the consequences of his action and its end. He was transported to Korea on account of his wrong actions to die. He is intelligent but at last, loses his insight of action of incentive. After his arrival in Winesburg, he alienated himself from everyone even didn’t join the Jewish fraternity. Refused to be part of the baseball team thinking extracurricular activity will destroy his studies. His coordination with roommates is not so good; he fought with them because they were disturbing him at the time of his studies. One of his roommates (Flusser) Beethoven record he broke and after this incident, Marcus told Flusser that he will buy him a new one.

Flusser then mockingly told Marcus “Thank you so much. You really are a nice boy, Marcus. Irreproachable. Marcus the well-washed, neatly dressed boy. You do the right thing in the end, just like Mama Aurelius taught you” (Roth, 2010, p. 25). All the way through Marcus loses his calmness. With the next roommate, he fought and ended up in Dean Caudwell’s office with vomit during an argument being an atheist. Even he badmouthed Dean Caudwell. Roth provides a clear and distinct view at every bit that Marcus has an insufficiency of resources to be free from the restriction enforced on him historically and socially. As we can see clearly that



religious beliefs and cultures were imposed on him by his father and society, he tried to remove them but becomes unsuccessful. As in college also during his conversation with the dean, the dean keeps on focusing on his religious background; says, "I'd be curious to know why you didn't write down 'kosher,' Marcus." (Roth, 2010, p. 92).

### **Kosher butcher's life in america**

Marcus' father's profession is as a kosher butcher, and he also use to work in his father's butcher shop. Post-war downfall in the number of families disturbed the economy and as a result, maintaining kosher food and eating kosher meat from the rabbis proved shop became difficult for people. Marcus' father's rabbinically certified shop is in trouble, World War Two disturbed his kosher butcher business. Jewish people started buying non-kosher meat after World War Two because of the low price. Being a kosher butcher in American society become trouble for Messner, following Jewish kosher culture became the reason for his downfall in business. In another land following Jewish culture became expensive for Messner. Even though, he wanted his son to be a kosher butcher in American society.

Marcus's involvement in the kosher butcher's profession became a nightmare being killed in Korean War and it made an image virtually of his childhood remembrance. Because of images of blood Marcus wants to fly to Ohio from New Jersey to pursue law at a college (Mckinley, 2014). He is longing to be an educated boy instead of a kosher butcher. Without knowing his future, he went to college out of his place and got killed on the battlefield, not listening to his father became expensive for Marcus. Father is always worried about his son's life, knowing the outside situation. He would have been always happy if his son would have chosen the family business because for him son's life is more important than being educated, says, "You are a boy with a magnificent future before you- how do I know you're not going to places where you can get yourself killed?". (Roth, 2010, p.03). Messner's father was also a kosher butcher, but Marcus never liked to be a kosher butcher. Marcus doesn't like the smell of blood, especially the smell of carcass subsequently it's slaughtered and before preparing it.



He is surrounded by too much blood since his childhood at the slaughterhouse, seeing the ritualized killing of animals according to kosher law. He doesn't long to fulfill his life by wearing an apron full of blood and passing over hands on it, even doesn't like to see father and mother full of blood after an hour opening of the shop, "a fresh apron always smeared with blood within an hour after the store opened." (Roth, 2010, p.35). His father never taught him to like the blood, taught him only about butchering. He has changed his clothes in college to begin a new life, brought new clothes to remove the image of a kosher butcher's son. Tried to make a new existence but in vain because on the same cloth, he vomited during the meeting with Dean Caudwell. In those clothes, while wearing his roommate punched him and his girlfriend Olivia blew him. It suggests changing clothes too didn't help to change the life which he has imagined. He went to college to become a student and study Supreme Court and compete in law school. To make a good reputation in society than other people of the family, never willing to be like his grandfather and father and cousins and part of a butcher shop for his entire life.

## CONCLUSION

Roth has subtly represented everything in the novel and rather than that Marcus' failure in life is tragic. The failure of Marcus to hold his emotions time and again makes him defenceless to his historic minute. This is the point Marcus' father shared in between their fight which drove Marcus to leave the house. It is a warning of his father of the coming future, which is waiting for his son outside, an ill-fated future. Indignation is a book of "alternative history" of American-Jewish cultural conflict. Being a Jewish boy Marcus has failed to know and comprehend the nature of every side belonging to him. He is portrayed as a sufferer and merchandise both of his time because of his indignation. Indignation is a critic of American society of the late 1950s and religious conflict.

If Marcus would have attended the chapel forty times, he would have been alive. He didn't attend the prayer, so, is sent to war and killed over there. The novel revolves around the superpower of religion. Basically,

<https://culturacuidados.ua.es>



Marcus Messner strangled between Jewish culture (Kosher butcher) and American culture (Law student), and within it died searching for identity as a lawyer by discarding being a kosher butcher. Marcus' story depicts the American-Jewish culture and struggle of life in an American land of the character. American society gives hope of social upliftment, but the reality is something else as we can see the identity problem in American society in both phases of Marcus' life, the life of a kosher butcher and law student. The identity of a kosher butcher was unacceptable for Marcus Messner, and the identity of a lawyer which he tries to make for himself is unacceptable for the society of America. The role of history never leaves the person as the novel suggests an existence of a person is a recollection of the past. Indignation rightfully depicts the American culture and the consequences of post-war.

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