“Food is something that we gather around”: Foodway Practices among Arab Americans in Columbus, Ohio

Thesis

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Abstract

This is an ethnographic project on foodway practices among Arab American women and men, who live in the greater Columbus, Ohio, region. These women and men primarily are students at The Ohio State University or are affiliated with the University, but some have no direct connection at all. Foodways are an important area of study with multiple facets to be attended to and I have chosen to focus my attention on four central suppositions regarding foodways. These suppositions are: foodways can oftentimes be seen as a point of and for social contact; one may use foodways as a vector for spreading cultural knowledges; one may use foodways as a possible way of expressing her or his identity; and a person may view foodways as providing a tangible (and tasty) way to remember the past and one’s ‘home.’ I suspected that these four outlooks regarding foodways would possibly be more prevalent and more crucial when looked at within an immigrant community compared to other types of communities residing in the United States. I collected this data by conducting semistructured interviews over an eight month period. I accumulated interviewees by utilizing the snowball technique and found a core group of about five women. The interviews regarded food choice, food preparation, social aspects of foodways, traditions, acculturation, but mostly the four abovementioned conjectures. The data collected from this project’s interviewees illustrates that the men and women interviewed do uphold the
four hypotheses of foodways put forth by myself but only to a certain extent. The data from my interviews with select members of the Arab American community in Columbus, Ohio suggests that foodways, for this group, can, at times, act as a space for and of sociality; the people involved with this project do use foodways, at times, as a means of spreading cultural knowledges and communicating values; foodways can provide the respondents of this project with a means of identity expression; and foodways can act as a holding area for their memories which get released whenever the interviewees taste, smell, or discuss foodways.
Dedication

Dedicated to my two great loves—Christopher and food.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract..................................................................................................................ii

Dedication................................................................................................................iv

Acknowledgments.......................................................................................................v

Vita..........................................................................................................................vi

Chapter 1: Whetting One’s Appetite........................................................................1
  Method of Data Collection..................................................................................6

Chapter 2: Foodways and the Ways of Food..........................................................10
  What are Foodways?.............................................................................................10
  The Many Roles of Food......................................................................................12
  Identity, Power, Sex, and Status...........................................................................15

Literature Review.......................................................................................................22
  Foodways through the lens of Cultural Studies and the Social Sciences..............22
  Gender and Food....................................................................................................28
  History, Geography, and the Middle East.............................................................32
  Folklore...................................................................................................................37

Theoretical Approaches to Food.............................................................................40
  Functionalism and Structuralism.........................................................................40
  Culturalism.............................................................................................................46
  Developmentalism.................................................................................................47
  Gramsci’s Hegemony............................................................................................49

Food as a Point of and for Social Contact.............................................................50
  Community, Commensality, and Crossing Boundaries.......................................50
  Contact Point for Women......................................................................................56

Food as a Transmitter of Cultural Knowledges.....................................................63
  Food as Complex Expressions of Complex Identities.........................................68

Chapter 3: Having your Kosharee and Eating it Too—Functions of the Egyptian
  Association and the Role of Food.........................................................................75
Chapter 1: Whetting one’s Appetite

What is food? This straightforward question does not come with a straightforward answer and can, instead, be responded to in countless fashions: “Food is good,” “Food is fattening,” “Food is a necessity,” or “Food is a friend and an enemy.” One could go on for days and days filling in the blank with a reply. For some, food is something which causes strife and stress because of abundance and overeating; while for others it causes strife and stress due to famine and lack. Food, in some cultural communities, is not as much a part of the cultural practices and traditions, while for others it is an extremely significant and major arena. How and why is something as seemingly simple as food so important to communities the world over? Anthropologist E.N. Anderson might reply to this query by saying that food “carries messages about status, gender, role, ethnicity, religion, identity, and other socially constructed regimes” and this is why it is so vital to a great number of people (6). Likewise, history and foodway scholar Hasia Diner would explain that “[f]oodways include food as material items and symbols of identity, and the history of a group’s ways with food goes far beyond an exploration of cooking and consumption. It amounts to a journey to the heart of its collective world” (9-10). Anything that is capable of taking someone on a journey to the heart of a collective world is worthy of study and deserves much attention.
While I have devoted the past two years to attending to foodways, it is only recently that I have come to pay closer attention to where my propensity for the study of foodways and folklore came from and how this affects the project at hand. While writing this thesis, I attended a lecture by a well-known folklorist, Carl Lindahl, and I found his talk to be very interesting and thought-provoking because he asked the audience why we all had decided to study folklore. He believes that there are two main reasons why people begin to study folklore: they either want to learn more about their past, where the “origin is the essence,” or they want to learn about people who are seemingly different than they are. I will admit that I began having an interest in the field of folklore due to the latter category, but I am slowly developing a greater interest in learning about my “heritage” and my “past”. Because I am one of the people who got their start in folklore through a desire to learn about people who are different, I would say that this project stems from that as well; I am not a member of the community which this study looks at and thus I am approaching the research from an outsider’s perspective.

This outside perspective is readily apparent to me because I can and will admit that I have caught myself wishing that I was more strongly “connected” to a “culture” outside the realm of “mainstream” America because I held romantic notions about the Other. It is likely that these romantic notions influenced my project because, as Edward Said says, “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. These continue to bear on what he does professionally” (10). Namely, a
scholar’s work—and I would argue especially work that is ethnographic such as this one—is influenced by her or his life experiences, biases, prejudices, and predilections. Some of my life experiences, biases, prejudices, and predilections include growing up in rural Pennsylvania, being surrounded by American media, and the effects of orientalism as described by Edward Said. Said’s *Orientalism* is germane to this project for multiple reasons. To begin with, Said tells readers that orientalism means several, interdependent things which include labeling anything or anyone dealing with the Orient in an academic manner as orientalism or orientalists; orientalism makes the distinction between “the Orient” and “the Occident”; and orientalism has the tendency to dominate, restructure, and have authority over the region and its peoples (Said). Additionally, Said contends that the West, due to its demarcation between West and East and because of its tendencies to restructure the Other, formulates a certain (often false) representation of the East which gets endorsed and engrained throughout Western society.

For me personally, I believe orientalism may have most affected me by creating an image of the Other as peoples having lifestyles and practices consisting of close-knit families living in multi-generational households where children learn from elders and women work together in the kitchen while cooking up foods and connections between each other. I, to a certain degree, hold these idealistic qualities as something that I hope for in my own life and I used to believe (for whatever reasons) that the Other was fortunate to have these attributes in their day-to-day lives. This research project has forced me to continually question these “positive stereotypes” and the project has also helped me to negotiate research on a community that is not one’s own. From this, I better
understand that outsider research has both limits and benefits (which may be affected by my own “positive stereotyping” and other influences); and in fact, any research—either done by an insider or an outsider—has limits and benefits that must be acknowledged.

Some of the limits that this work has are time; language barrier; methods employed; and rapport. Time was a limit because the project needed to be feasible for an M.A. thesis and thus extensive interviewing and fieldwork could not be done. Language may have been a barrier in that it is possible that some informants would have opened up more if I had spoken Arabic during the interviews. My methods may have confounded my results because I went into the research project with specific goals and conjectures and this can sometimes skew data. Lastly, rapport may have been a limit for my project. While I do truly believe that most of the women I spoke with were very comfortable with me, they may have been even more comfortable had I been a member of their cultural community. But, even with the limits that outsider research has, I believe that this project has compensated in ways which have resulted in the displaying of the significance foodways can possess for some immigrant communities. This project best highlights these significances by demonstrating the ways in which foodways can oftentimes be seen as a point of and for social contact, as a vector for spreading cultural knowledges, a possible way of expressing identity, and a tangible way to remember the past and one’s ‘home.’ These functions—foodways as a site of and for social contact; foodways as devices by which to spread knowledges; foodways as a means of expressing identity; and foodways as a memory warehouse—are all attended to throughout the present text, and
are inspected closely to see how they apply or do not apply to the Arab American community in Columbus, Ohio.

It is important to note that foodways—as Anderson and Diner suggest—have the capacity to express and perform multiple tasks for any one person such as answering questions of gender and status or taking someone on a “journey to the heart of…[a group’s] collective world.” Sometimes foodways reflect the four features that I am examining within this text, while at other times they also reflect simple needs for comfort, ease, and efficiency. It seems as though it is a combination or negotiation of desires and material realities—the foods one wants to eat combined with the foods one has available to them and can procure. Foodways are crucial sites with many factors providing influential forces. Material and specific conditions—like culture—determine, to some degree, what one can do in terms of foodways and what meanings can emerge, are available, or are created through said foodways. The people and groups utilizing particular foodways are the ones best able to articulate and posit emerging meanings with regard to those foodways. For this reason, my methodology sought to illuminate how the members of the Arab American community in Columbus discussed and treated their foodways. Acquiring the emic (insiders’) sentiments should be important for any project, but it is particularly important in the case of foodways because foodways are not always a matter for public observance; this is because foodways are both visible and invisible.

The (in)visibility of foodways can take many trajectories, including the following three: people can choose to make their foodways seen by the public; people can choose not to let foodways be seen by the public by performing the practices in private settings
only; or people may choose to simply change their foodways completely\(^1\). This is important to note because my project is deeply informed by and reflects issues of public and private space and the ways gender gets performed there. These aspects are important because foodways are, historically, linked with family and women and both of these items can be treated differently in the public and private spheres. The ethnographic and literature data which I collected for this project might be thought of as acting in both the public and private spheres because, even if private, the interviewees relayed the information to me and made it publically known.

**Method of Data Collection**

Collected data for this project is two-fold: Much of the data results from examining scholarly works in related areas of study so as to grasp what other scholars have done and said about the field of foodways; the other parts of the data are the products of ethnographic interviews conducted with informants over a period of eight months. As a main mode of gathering the ethnographic data, I utilized semistructured interviews. This is often the best method for gathering data when there may only be a few chances to meet with one’s informants, and I knew that this might factor into my work due to students’ busy and changing schedules (Bernard). Before each interview session I created an interview guide—a list of questions and topics to be covered throughout the interview—which allowed me to have a small amount of control regarding the themes and subject matter discussed at each interview (Bernard). However, I also

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\(^1\) This framework of visibility and invisibility is important but is not furthered in the present work. It is an area for future research.
always attempted to make the informants feel comfortable enough so that they could speak about what they wanted regardless of whether or not it was on the interview guide for that day’s interview.

I assembled my group of informants, who comprise an immense part of this project—and actually are the project because without them, it would not have taken shape—by way of the snowball technique. Once I had initial contact with the informants, we discussed a time, date, and place to meet that best suited their needs. All but one\(^2\) of the interviews within this project took place at cafes in the Columbus area or in buildings on The Ohio State University’s campus. The snowball technique is a chain referral method in which a key person locates one or two other people in the population to help with a project. Then those few people ask others to help, and this continues until the population becomes saturated with no new informants being mentioned (Bernard). My project, however, did not utilize the snowball method to this full extent due to time constraints and because the nature of the project does not require full population saturation in order for me to make conclusions and put forth findings. The purpose of the research is not to be exhaustive, but rather to look more closely into individual insights regarding Arab American foodways. For me, saturation did not mean talking with all or nearly all of the Arab American population; it meant that the women and men whom I was interviewing did not seem to be mentioning new data and were running out of stories and examples to tell me about.

\(^2\) One interview was conducted at the Columbus residence of husband and wife informants whose data is presented in chapter three.
The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours with a very informal atmosphere in place. The most predominant themes my respondents and I discussed throughout the interviewing period included, but are not limited to: general thoughts and feelings about food and foodways; the role of food within the Arab American community and the interviewee’s family; the role (or lack thereof) of food in identity expression; the relationship women have with food and the roles it plays in their lives; how food preparation is or is not learned within the family; family histories and narratives of the interviewee’s move to the United States; the role of food within immigrant communities; special foods prepared for the holidays; food recipes and methods of preparation; how foodways and other traditions have changed due to migration; the missing and craving of foods from ‘home’; and other items related to these mentioned. From these data sets I have created three chapters which comprise the body of this thesis as well as a concluding chapter to encapsulate my overall findings.

The chapters progress from more general information on foodways within the academy and narrow to the more specific examination of my ethnographic work. The next chapter, chapter two, considers how scholars have defined and used foodways in their own work and the many functions and roles which foodways can take. The chapter then moves on to review some of the literature which influences the present work and the theoretical approaches other scholars have applied to food studies. Chapter two ends by introducing the four main sectors of foodways which my research examines, and it demonstrates how the existing literature reflects these four areas. Narrowing, chapter three examines a small-scale, local example of how some members of the Egyptian
American community in Columbus, Ohio are utilizing foodways and social groups to surround themselves with compatriots and build networks while lessening the hardships that come with immigration. This chapter commences my ethnographic work with a small portion of the Arab American community in Columbus. Finally arriving at the bulk of the data attained through ethnographic means, chapter four includes an analysis of the other interviews conducted during the research period regarding Arab American foodways and illumines how the respondents speak about the four main conjectures I posited at the start of the project—foodways as a possible site of and for social contact; foodways acting as transmitters of cultural knowledges; foodways helping express one’s identity; and foodways storing a person’s memories.
Chapter 2: Foodways and the ways of Food

What are Foodways?

What have you eaten today, and why? With whom did you eat, and when? Do these types of questions accomplish any significant work? I, along with other scholars, argue that these sorts of questions do, in fact, accomplish critical work and are worthy of academic study. Food acts not only as sustenance for human bodies, but it can also act as a structure for humans’ lives. Days are constructed around the rhythms of meal times, and different rites of passage are marked by consumption—our first legal taste of alcohol, the first time we cook our spouse a meal, and even the ‘last supper’ (Bell & Valentine). Some go even further than this and look at “[f]ood as identity, as our physical selves, as a way of thought, as sex, as power, as friendship, as a medium for magic and witchcraft, as our time-controller” and suggest that “in all these different ways and more, food pervades our culture and gives meaning to our lives” (MacClancy 5).

Various theorists have described what constitutes foodways. Indeed there is no single, precise definition for the term. However, for the purposes of this project, foodways can be thought of as relating to the food traditions and customs of a people: what people eat, how they eat it, whom they eat it with, and the variant social aspects of eating (purchasing, preparing, consuming, cleaning, conversing, etc). Charles Camp attests that foodways emerge at “the intersection of food and culture” (24), and thus foodways look at the ways food and culture overlap; simply put, foodways recognize the
intimate relationship food and culture can have. In some instances it might seem that food and culture are inseparable because both food and culture make use of and require the other; food choice can be a product of cultural practices and one can observe certain cultural practices in another person by taking notice of what particular foods that person consumes. With this said, the significance in the study of food and foodways materializes with the added detail that culture plays a major part for both.

Culture receives much attention within the academy, and if Camp’s words are taken into account—that foodways are, in fact, “the intersection of food and culture”—then it is fitting that scholars devote equal attention to the food side of the equation as well. The folklorist, Charles Camp, states in his text *American Foodways: What, When, Why and How We Eat in America* that whenever studied, foodways—and food and culture separately—are often divided into “(1) production and gathering of foodstuffs, (2) distribution of foodstuffs, (3) cookery, (4) distribution of foods, [and the] (5) consumption of foods” (83). Cultural studies, when examining foodways, focuses on the areas of “production, regulation, representation, identity and consumption” (Ashley et al vii). As well as scholars studying foodways through the lenses of folklore and cultural studies, they also have studied foodways within other disciplines such as anthropology, geography, nutrition studies, semiotics, history, and sociology. Because each discipline employs a different lens to the study of foodways, varying theoretical approaches

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3 Examples of this could be kosher and halal dietary restrictions among practicing Jews and Muslims. A person might not consume pork or pork products due to her or his cultural and religious practices; thus cultural practices are influencing food choice. Similarly, if a person notices that a dinner guest opts for no meat instead of the pork chops being served, that person might wonder if the guest’s cultural or religious practices are a factor that they forgot to inquire about prior to designing the menu; thus food choice may reflect cultural or religious practices.
attending to them have arisen and these include, but are not limited to, functionalism, structuralism, culturalism, materialism or developmentalism, and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. These theories make explicit what many hold to be implicit, and this is one of the difficult tasks foodways scholars must face (Camp).

One of the food scholar’s goals is to show others that an everyday activity, such as eating or preparing a meal, reveals much about someone’s worldview, their religion, their group’s power dynamics, and much more. Allowing the implicit to be made explicit is tricky, especially because the study of foodways must be multi-faceted; scholars must consider both the nature and material aspects which constitute foodways as well as the beliefs, practices, and cultures out of which they emerge (Pilcher). The duality of foodways makes them unique in that nature (biology and environment) and culture (beliefs and practices) affect the way people express and perform foodways. So, when discussing foodways, one cannot make hard and fast differentiations between nature and culture. Furthermore, scholars acknowledge that foodways studies are critical not only for sustaining life, but because they also demonstrate and grapple with how we perceive ourselves and our social and natural environments. The preparation, serving, and the eating of foods oftentimes supplies a space for interaction or it opens up lines of communication and acts as symbolic structure within daily lives (Camp). Hence, it should be easy to see that foodways can partake in active and varied roles within the lives of humans.

**The Many Roles of Foodways**

The roles of food and foodways within humans’ daily existence are a foundational concept for this project. Aiding in the task of spotlighting some of the roles of foodways
are Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik’s opening lines to *Food and Culture: A Reader* which states, “Food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is a central pawn in political strategies of states and households. Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions. Eating is an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family, and community relationships” (1). Counihan and Van Esterik recognize the central role which food and foodways have in many humans’ everyday lives and culture, and they make evident that foodways do go “far beyond an exploration of cooking and consumption.” These authors highlight the weighty, and often hidden, functions of foodways, but they are not alone. Many others have echoed the words of Counihan and Van Esterik in regard to the utility of food studies.

Bob Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones, and Ben Taylor maintain that the analysis of food in the home can facilitate answering questions “about the role of food practices in producing and reproducing the home, the family, gendered identities and the relationship between public and private spheres” (123). Nancy and Richard Tapper concentrate on inspecting the domains of magic, religion, medicine, and politics with respect to food (Zubaida & Tapper). From just these few examples, it is clear that food can be full of meaning, and while simultaneously nourishing our bodies, it also has the capability of communicating cultural practices and other notions relating to humanity (Bell & Valentine and Counihan & Van Esterik). Much of the work which looks at food and foodways exemplifies the ways in which food does just this—communicates cultural and humanistic practices to others. Despite the fact that foodways may perform many

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4 For the purposes of this project, the terms ‘food’ and ‘foodways’ will be interchangeable unless specifically mentioned as meaning the material food or the cultural practices that go along with the material.
functions within any person’s life, this paper will specifically focus on four major roles in which foodways can play a part. These major roles of foodways are: 1) Food as a point of and for social contact. Evidence reveals that foodways can create bonds—especially amongst females—between family members and friends. They bring families together even when arguments arise because food oftentimes acts as a type of communication mechanism; it is a communicative device that, oftentimes, does not even need words; 2) Food as a transmitter of cultural knowledge. Along with secret family recipes and meal ideas being passed down from generation to generation, traditions and family histories can get transmitted as well; 3) Food should be seen as one of the many possible outlets for complex identity expression. A person might expresses a great deal about themselves through their food practices because food has the capability of ‘speaking’ in the sense that it can indicate and express a person’s or group’s class, worldview, and place of origin; 4) Food may act as a pantry where memories are held and kept for later remembering. This may be especially perceptible for immigrant populations as the present work demonstrates. This chapter illustrates these four functions and chapter four will further elaborate on them by using the data I obtained through interviews with a small number of Arab Americans in Columbus, Ohio. But first, attention must be paid to the expressiveness foodways may display by looking at the ways foodways are sometimes able to speak to notions of identity, power (or positioning), sex, and social status.

While I say that foodways can perform many functions within a person’s life, I realize that food’s utility changes according to context, situation, and person. I do not mean to suggest, for instance, that a bowl of couscous incurs the same meaning in every place all of the time. Each domain, or context, situates and helps determine how food could be used.
Identity, Power, Sex, and Status

Food can work as part of a symbolic system, and its value can go far beyond the actual foods that people consume. Tad Tuleja states in his introduction to the anthology *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America* that in order “[f]or symbols to serve simultaneously as community glue and boundary markers, they must be at once expressive, publicly expressible, and mnemonically markable” (8). Thus, in order for foodways to be considered a symbol, according to Tuleja, they must work to unite the community as well as set it apart from other communities. Additionally, foodways must signify and indicate to the public something memorable and unique about the community using those specific foodways. Consequently, the symbolic system which food is a part of may help some by symbolizing identity to the public.

Camp tells us that “[f]ood is one of the most, if not the single most, visible badges of identity” (29). Moreover, he explains that this type of identity—identity expressed through food—is “pushed to the fore by people who believe their culture to be on the wane” (29). I believe that these statements are very applicable to immigrant communities because immigration disrupts and dislocates community structure, thus making a once cohesive group become unraveled; much like when a culture is “on the wane.” For this reason, the role food can have within immigrant communities because of its expressive nature is critical for this project. Tuleja’s work discusses identity by differentiating between its “underdetermined” and “overdetermined” markers. “Underdetermined” markers of identity are those which a person or cultural community chooses to display and practice. “Overdetermined” markers of identity include things such as height and complexion; those physical features which are immutable and not chosen, but rather
inherited. I would claim that food choice does not fall completely into either of these two categories because it can act as both, chosen or not chosen, depending on the situation.

Some may view food, a cultural object which can at times express identity, as an underdetermined marker because it is an optional marker which people select to display whenever they see fit. But others might contend that economics, social norms, and other factors do not always permit a person or group to choose the types of foods and cuisines which they would wish to ‘display.’ For this reason, these critics would argue that food is not an underdetermined marker of identity because it is not always a choice. Instead they would view foodways as overdetermined markers. Tuleja furthers his thoughts on identity as either underdetermined or overdetermined by adding that “to a degree all identity is internal” (137) and that no matter what other people may label someone, it is up to that person to “make the conscious choice of assuming those identities, if they are to constitute a force in your social life” (137). Tuleja’s work makes many great points but I would argue against his notion that a person must consciously choose an identity in order for it to be a force in one’s life because many identities imposed onto people have influences within their lives whether they choose to identify with them or not. With this said, I must note that I do not expand on this topic of when and why someone chooses to perform certain foodway practices. The present study did not use methods to attain data demonstrating when and why the respondents make use of certain foodways at any given time. The topic of examining when, why, and how food choice is invisible, purposely kept hidden, modified, or unarticulated completely is an area for future projects to examine more thoroughly.
Along with identity possibly being symbolized through and because of food, power, sex, and class are a few of the other items which food may symbolize. In many instances, food gives power and position, and whoever regulates the food is then able to control others (MacClancy). This is especially applicable within the household structure. Scholars recognize that food and eating are related to the power structures of a family (Wood). Is it possible that in some cultural communities or individual families, women use food to their advantage by finding ways in which to control other family members? Furthermore, it has been my experience that power relations and family structures can be seen in the order of food service and type of foods served—who gets served first versus last? And, who gets the choicest pieces of meat versus the fattier piece? Also, power relations can be seen in the seating arrangement—who sits at the head of the table versus who sits in the other room at the ‘kiddy table’? Power relations, however, are not the only other thing that can be symbolized through foodways; sex is another. Although food may not symbolize or represent sex quite like it does power relations or identity, it can act as a stand in, and both food and sex are natural, human instincts.

Food and sex seem to have a covert affair with each other and that is why it may be less common to think of their relationship. But, if there was not a relationship between both sex and food, then why are there childish and immature references to breasts as melons, penises as weiners, and testicles as nuts? And, why is it that men and women fantasize about both food and sex? The two seem to go together like peas and carrots (or chocolate and peanut butter for those with a sweet tooth). Food and sex’s relationship has even seemed to turn into a source for capital consumption. Dating culture in the United States is an example of this in that it has enhanced the bond
between food and sexuality because a majority of dates take place at restaurants; and how much more (commodified and) romantic can it get than sharing a large bowl of pasta and meatballs on a candlelit table with someone you are attracted to? (Just think of Disney’s *The Lady and the Tramp*!). In addition to the captial consumption which Disney and others promote, food and sex are both about desire, the body, and social interactions regarding giving and receiving. Carole Counihan’s *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* illustrates these deeper relationships that can be found between food and sexuality.

Counihan’s text seems to convey that food and sexuality are not just appetites which humans must control. They are, in fact, systems which factor into the dynamics of intergroup relations because both food and sex fortify bonds between group members while raising barriers in order to impede outside interactions. Resulting from this, it is very likely that if cultural rules prohibit Person A from eating with Person B (or at least eating similar foods), then cultural rules will most likely prohibit Person A from having sexual relations with Person B as well (Diner). Mary Lukanuski agrees with this in her essay “A Place at the Counter: The Onus of Oneness” by saying that “[t]he proscriptions placed upon eating and sex were similar—what to eat, how to eat, and whom to eat with are parallel to customs on whom we can have sex with, how, and when we have sex” (114). The fact that societies place proscriptions onto whom one can and cannot eat with or have sex with says something about the relationship between food and sexuality; it demonstrates their correspondence with one another. This is relevant because sex shapes and creates families and communities which are the main component for the social
exchanges this project examines. In this manner, the relationship food has with sex as well as the ways it can affect and/or symbolize power dynamics becomes clearer.

Another layer which one can add to food’s many levels of complexity is that of performance⁶. It is possible to see identity as a performance, especially in regard to food, because of the fact that food can be so expressive and indicative. Food can permit a person to perform a specific identity simply by talking about, buying, preparing, cooking, or eating certain foodstuffs. Spectators may infer that a person is Muslim or Jewish simply based on whether that person purchases meat at halal or kosher butcher shops. This may not always be the case, but because food can be performative, this deduction may be made, and the act of buying halal or kosher meat indicates a religious prescription most of the time. In another way, food may be performative in the etiquettes of different cultural communities. How one eats foods and how one serves the meal can be viewed as actions—or routines—that someone is capable of performing, and persons must learn and transmit these routines to others; this is why foodways are capable of serving as a major site of cultural knowledge transmission. Within foodways, there are different parts or roles a person must ‘perform’ within each meal. One can act as host or guest; friend or family; or enemy or ally (Wood). Each performance role has its own script and set of rules which people teach others implicitly or overtly. Along with people performing host or guest roles at the dinner table, people can also perform social class status by way of food performances, and Pierre Bourdieu’s work concentrates on this concept.

⁶ The present work only briefly touches on the notion of food, performance, and identity. This can be an area of further study.
Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. And statistical analysis does indeed show that oppositions similar in structure to those found in cultural practices also appear in eating habits. (6)

Pierre Bourdieu writes these lines in his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* where he outlines his notion of habitus. Bourdieu describes habitus as a sort of orienting practice which embeds, what some people may erroneously refer to as, values into “the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body—ways of walking or blowing one’s nose, ways of eating or talking—and engage the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world…” (466). This means that different people place emphasis on “insignificant techniques of the body” due to their habitus, often regarding one technique as higher or lower than another; for example, whether one eats with one’s fingers, or not, or whether one eats with one’s mouth open, or not, and what each of these scenarios infers to spectators. Foodways are one of these “insignificant techniques of the body” and as such have the capacity to mark distinction between peoples and groups. This distinguishing mark can translate into social class which results in one being able to place (correctly or incorrectly) someone into a class simply by studying the foods they consume and the manners in which they consume them. Does the person eat escargot and
caviar or egg salad and tuna casserole? Does she or he purchase Brie and Camembert or Velveeta and Cheez Whiz?

Food may express identity; and identity is always performative; therefore, foodways can be performative. Because of this, in theory, purchasing different groceries might possibly place a person into a specific social class. Additionally, appropriation and reinterpretation of a group’s foodways by another group may result in foods transitioning, as Mario Montaño states in his essay “Appropriation and Counterhegemony in South Texas: Food Slurs, Offal Meats, and Blood”, from an offal meat to a cook-off food. Montaño looks at the ways South Texans have appropriated and reinterpreted foods that they once looked down upon and are now praising. Montaño states that “[i]n incorporating folk foods, the dominant culture can succeed in neutralizing, reinterpreting, and setting boundaries that separate “acceptable” foods from those perceived as disreputable or threatening” (62). That is, the Anglos in the area have taken foods which they once despised, modified them and turned them into a part of their own food traditions—new and created traditions—and now consider the foods chic, thus exemplifying that foods in various domains may take on various meanings.

Foodways can play a factor in identity, power, sex, and status along with countless others. This project focuses its main attention onto four specific functions which I feel can be particularly important for immigrant communities. In order to best examine these functions a review of some of the literature and theoretical approaches that

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7 However, the length of time someone could keep up this performance is a factor that must be taken into account. If one is considered to belong to the “lower” class, it is most likely that they will only be able to put on a “high” class performance for a relatively short amount of time due to economics. This can then be related to the previous thoughts on food and power and how commodification can oftentimes imply inequalities in class, gender, and race (Counihan & Van Esterik).
others have applied to foodways scholarship will help to better locate this work in relation to theirs.

**Literature Review**

After examining a small portion of the myriad roles which food can play within humans’ lives, readers may now understand better why Sherrie Inness writes that “eating is an activity that always has cultural reverberations. Food is never a simple matter of sustenance: How we eat, what we eat, and who prepares and serves our meals are all issues that shape society” (Inness 5). Inness examines foodways thoroughly and her work, along with many other scholars’ work, helps better inform and shape this project.

**Foodways through the lens of Cultural Studies and the Social Sciences**

Bob Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones, and Ben Taylor’s text *Food and Cultural Studies: Studies in Consumption and Markets* provides an excellent glimpse into some of the ways cultural studies attends to foodways. In the foreword to their text, they write that their work looks to explore the anxieties concerning food safety, distribution, and production. They accomplish this by applying a cultural studies lens while delving into “everyday food practices in relation to broader questions about national identity, globalization, consumption and ethics” (i). Ashley et al provide a history of, what they call, ‘food-cultural studies’ in their opening chapter and they offer readers “a modest and critical guide to structuralist, culturalist and Gramscian [hegemonic] approaches to the study of food culture, and also a history of food’s place in the evolution of cultural studies” (2). Ashley et al’s survey of said approaches most notably benefits my work because they provide well-documented reviews of major cultural studies approaches to food studies. Ashley et al’s ‘food-cultural studies’ looks closely at some of the more
prominent theoretical approaches used by cultural studies scholars who work with food. Although Ashley et al.’s work does affirm that it employs an historical analysis, it does not utilize this avenue as much as some would like. Historians attend to food studies a bit differently than cultural studies scholars. They study the evolution of foodways throughout history more meticulously while still touching on many of the topics depicted in cultural studies scholars’ work.

Jeffrey Pilcher’s *Food in World History* offers readers this more historical perspective that many historians felt was lacking in food studies research and he does this by “examining the globalization of food, illustrating how the diffusion of crops contributed to population growth and industrialization, and exploring the political, social, and environmental implications of our changing relation with food” (i). He divides the text into three sections: his first section delineates the origins of culinary modernity by honing in on the years from 1500 to 1800 CE in order to better grasp the beginning phases of food production and globalization; Pilcher’s second section continues on in history by examining the effects of industrialization on food which took place throughout the nineteenth century. Here he begins looking at the relationship of food, national cuisines, and nationalism, as well as food’s effect on class status (or class status’s effect on food); the final section launches readers into the twentieth century in order to investigate more modern outcomes of globalization and industrialization, especially in regard to food security and cultural imperialism. Along with these items, Pilcher explicates five themes which he deems as critical in shaping eating habits. His five themes are: 1) the distribution of foodstuffs; 2) the strain between pastoralism and agriculture; 3) class differentials and wealth; 4) social and ethnic identity and gender
roles; and 5) the nation-state. In similar fashion, Jeremy MacClancy’s *Consuming Culture: Why You Eat What You Eat* follows suit with Pilcher by inspecting why people eat the foods they do and what shapes these eating habits. While focusing mostly on European cuisines and diets, MacClancy touches on many areas shaping foodways such as sex, power, friendship, family, taboo, religion, and magic. For him, food is a mode of thought as well as nutrition.

MacClancy, Pilcher, and Ashley et al each provide excellent analyses and examples of how scholars may examine food within cultural studies and other social sciences. However useful their work might be, for the purposes of this project, their approaches will primarily be valuable only when broadly examining the range of theoretical methods brought to the food studies table. The methods and styles of obtaining and processing data utilized by Ashley et al, Pilcher, and MacClancy differ from those made use of in my work and these authors focus heavily on items relating to what shapes foodways, the alteration of foodways throughout time, and how the present state of the world—a highly connected world—reflects the world’s reaction to rapid globalization. Sociology, like cultural studies, wrestles with these same topics while additionally taking further actions to look more closely at the human component within food studies. Because sociology focuses more heavily on how foodways and food—or lack thereof—affects people, it steps a bit closer to relating with my work on Arab American foodways; although it still does not go quite far enough and remains a bit more abstract and quantitative than my approach.

In their work, *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture*, Stephen Mennell, Anne Murcott, and Anneke H. van Otterloo make it known that a majority of sociological
research pertaining to food examines public and social welfare as well as the uneven
distribution of food and nutrients the world over. The path followed by sociology’s
theoretical frameworks, Mennell et al note, is as such: functionalism, to structuralism, to
developmentalism. After first reviewing these major theoretical frameworks, Mennell
and his colleagues concentrate their energies on four broad topics within the realm of
sociology and food. First the authors look at culinary cultures’ development (much like
Pilcher’s first section). This section gives general reviews of varying disciplines’ areas of
specialty including anthropology, history, sociology, and socio-biology. They then move
on to health related topics including eating disorders and the relationship of food and
health and food and age, sex, and class. Next, Mennell et al (again similar to Pilcher)
widens the scope to look at food at a global level which entails looking at food security
and technology and the consequences of colonialism and migration on eating habits.
Before arriving at conclusions, the authors examine one more area of sociological
concern, the social institute. The authors scrutinize foods within varying institutions
ranging from the home, professional cookeries, as well as ‘total institutions.’ Because
Mennell et al examine different areas relating to the reciprocal relationships people have
with foodways, the authors move closer to exemplifying and informing how I attend to
foodways in the present work.

In continuing with the sociological perspective of food, Roy C. Wood offers
readers *The Sociology of the Meal*. He admits that the work “is a sociological study of
the role of meals in (predominately British) society” (1), and at the time of the book’s
publishing, 1995, sociology had just recently begun inquiring into the study of food.
Despite this fact, Wood writes, “for a relatively underdeveloped specialist research area
within the social sciences, a considerable degree of theoretical pluralism exists in approaches to the study of food and eating” (3). For this reason, Wood begins The Sociology of the Meal with an overview of the main theoretical stances and debates surrounding sociology and the study of food, with particular attention paid to structural and materialist (developmentalist) approaches. Wood mentions a few of the significant thinkers of structural theory: Claude Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Claude Fischler, and Mary Douglas. He also mentions significant theorists working with materialist approaches and this includes Jack Goody, Marvin Harris, Sidney Mintz, and Stephen Mennell.

Wood’s first chapter opens by noting the symbolic powers of foodways, and recognizing that foods alone do not have meaning attached to them, but rather it is the “preparation of food and the uses to which it is put that create meaning” (15). In stating this, Wood gives power and acknowledgement to foodways as opposed to the actual foodstuffs which especially informs my work because I am not closely examining the components of the foods eaten by Arab Americans, but rather I am concentrating on the way the women attach meanings to the foods and the practices surrounding them, i.e. their foodways. As the chapter goes on, Wood surveys the works of major actors in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and food studies because he sees these scholars as contributing to the sociological perspective of food, despite the fact that not all of them are sociologists. The remaining chapters of Wood’s text look more closely at materialist and structuralist approaches and offer critiques of both. Much like Ashley et al and their survey of theoretical approaches utilized by cultural studies scholars studying food, Wood provides additional theoretical styles of attending to food as used by sociologists.
For this reason *The Sociology of the Meal* is most helpful in setting a theoretical foundation and base to start from. While not explicitly essential to the study at hand, it is important to know how others are playing with their food so as to join in and expand.

Other major figures playing with food include Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. Their text *Food and Culture: A Reader*\(^8\) utilizes mainly anthropological methods to highlight that “food is life, and life can be studied and understood through food” (1). The reader, like many other texts described, first looks at how food studies uses theoretical approaches and acts as a communicative device. Furthermore, the authors discuss food and political economies in regard to food distribution, commodification, and the power resulting from possessing foodstuffs. Counihan and Van Esterik also offer readers fresh ideas relating to gender and commensality, which is the eating of meals with other people. The authors investigate commensality along with the implications of “giving, receiving, and refusing food” (2). In conjunction with this, Counihan and Van Esterik introduce ideas concerning the female perspective which help to discuss thoughts on food, body, culture, and gender\(^9\). Gender is an important factor for my study because I had initially set out to exclusively look at Arab American women’s treatment and sentiments about their foodways\(^10\). *Food and Culture* briefly touches on gender and

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\(^8\) Counihan also writes, *Food in the USA: A Reader*, which examines the cuisines of the United States and how they have been created due to migration and amalgamation. Her work highlights food as identity, food as power and resistance, food and advertising, along with the effects of the narration of food.

\(^9\) For a more in-depth study of items related to food, body, gender, and culture, see also Carole Counihan’s, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*.

\(^10\) All interviewees except one were women. The interview introduced and discussed in the next chapter involves a husband and wife talking about the Egyptian Association of Columbus. This was the only man I spoke with concerning Arab American foodways.
food, but because this component is so indispensable for the project at hand, I had to
examine and make use of other texts in this specialty field of study.

_gender and food_

Critical gender studies\(^{11}\) add significant value to food studies for the simple fact
that women still prepare a majority of the world’s foods, and it is obvious and possible to
study food and gender from a multitude of angles. For example, one may offer a critique
of patriarchy by underlining the fact that there are societal norms, in some places, which
expect women to work outside of the home as well as inside while not being
acknowledged for both tasks. Assessments similar to this are useful and worthy of note,
but they over-simplify the situation. They do not account for the many affirmative
effects which may result from women’s time spent with food such as those put forth in
this work like bonding, socializing, transmitting knowledges, and creating and recreating
memories because they only focus on the negative. For the purposes of the present work,
gender and food studies will look more closely at the affirmative influences foodways
can have; it will utilize studies accenting the positive correlation between foods and
women. Sherrie Inness edits the collection titled _Kitchen Culture in America: Popular
Representations of Food, Gender, and Race_ with the goal of “explor[ing] a few of the
ways that food and cooking culture have shaped women’s gender roles over the past
century” (3). By way of humorous yet informative essays, Inness’s anthology looks at
gender construction through items related, but not limited, to consumer culture and
candy; the introduction of processed foods and its effects on women in households; and

\(^{11}\) Nearly all of the ‘gender studies’ literature examined by the researcher focused on women and food. Men were rarely mentioned and so ‘gender studies’ seems to connote ‘women’s studies’. However, in the general folklore literature, men and food were mentioned.
women’s culinary autobiographies—cookbooks—and their roles in promoting female heritages and lineages. By virtue of the text scrutinizing how cookery and foodways have helped construct gender norms in the United States, the work is useful because it adds more depth to the knowledge base of scholars working with food and women. While Inness provides an excellent survey of varying issues relating to gender formation and foodways, other scholars have chosen to look more closely at single items within the realm of foodways and inspect how everyday items, like cookbooks, play a part in women’s home lives and their methods of resisting the silencing which may occur within that home setting.

Janet Theophano’s *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* details this aspect of feminine food studies. Her work mainly seeks to highlight the words women write in their cookbooks and demonstrate how cookbooks are important artifacts by which we can learn about marginalized, voiceless women. Many of her chapters reflect the community bonds made by women because of the identity that transpires due to food. Women use cookbooks, Theophano argues, as communities, collective memories and identities, autobiographies, lineage and legacy markers, influential factors in literacy and domesticity, and they contain social and political commentaries. Theophano also makes known the relationships that women have through cookbooks which can act as ties between generations. Miriam Meyers’s work prolongs and thickens this work on food, bonding, and women.

Meyers’s *A Bite off Mama’s Plate: Mothers’ and Daughters’ Connections through Food* brings a considerable amount to the table with regard to women’s bonds through and because of food. Meyers’s main goal is to delve into the bonds which North
American daughters and mothers form because of food; but, the author believes, one can apply much of her work to different geographies and communities around the world. Her work is unique in that she claims that because of North Americans’ “national obsession with dieting, and the mother’s implication in those problems…one is hard pressed to find serious discussion of the role—especially any positive role—food plays in the mother-daughter relationship” (3). She notices some preoccupations North American women seem to have with keeping food out of their bodies while viewing food as a negative. Meyers sets out to amend this oddity and fill the void in the literature regarding food, women, and positive correlations. That is why Meyers wants to bring to readers’ attention food’s positive effects and implications. Meyers’s chapters look at items such as food and the role family plays in the bonds formed; how food allows communication between women, particularly mothers, daughters, and grandmothers; the learning that takes place during food related activities; the advice given and learned through food activities; how food acts as a connection between multiple generations; and what mothers give their daughters through food. For these reasons, Meyers’s work is extremely useful as a lens for this project and acts as a template.

Inness, Theophano, and Meyers relate closely to the heart of this project. Foodways are crucial to my research, and I am particularly interested in how the women interviewed throughout the research period attend to their foodways, and for this reason literature on women and foodways is fundamental. Although not entirely related and useful, Inness lays a base for discussing topics of food, race, and gender in a general sense and makes numerous points about the ways in which foods can mold women’s roles inside and outside the home. She briefly mentions cookbooks and the notion that
women use these texts for things other than making tasty beef stews or scrumptious corn bread muffins; she recognizes their utility in creating and retaining women’s lineages. Theophano’s work continues with these thoughts and further elaborates on how women speak through cookery items and keep hold of ancestries and identities. This correlates with my research in allowing me to see that foodways can be a site of and for knowledge transmission. Following suit, Meyers’s work is perhaps the most useful because of her content and methodology. Her work so clearly and overtly scrutinizes the connections women create through food while employing methods which suggest she merely took time to sit and talk with women about their foodways and experiences—this corresponds to the work I set out to accomplish with this thesis. While not explicitly mentioned in her text, it seems likely that Meyers was not focusing on newly arrived immigrant communities in the United States and this is where my current project fits in. Meyers does an excellent job of articulating the bonds women form because of food, and my work expands on hers by looking most closely at Arab American women’s experiences with food. Despite the fact that the types of texts authored by scholars like Inness, Theophano, and Meyers are perhaps the most useful, other works offer further insight as well.

The disciplines already examined—cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and gender studies—are very useful and constructive when looking to add breadth to a study, but it is also necessary to add depth, and this can be done through adding historical and geographical contexts to any piece of research. Historical contexts can help researchers position their work better so as to create a mode of comparison and a time line of how item ‘X’ evolves and modifies over time. Geography facilitates researchers by literally
locating research within the specific region, thus paving the way for excellent analysis by adding multiple contexts and cultural peculiarities. For these reasons, history and geography literature is useful for this undertaking.

**History, Geography, and the Middle East**

We have already seen, by way of Jeffrey Pilcher’s work, that historians have stuck their hand into the proverbial cookie jar that is food studies. However, scholars need not research the historical aspects of food studies by only studying the development and evolution of foodways in the strictest sense; they can use less direct approaches for examining food as well. Researching immigration is one of these less overt modes of attending to food studies and it is a very relevant method for this project for the obvious reason that I am working with an immigrant community. Two historians, Hasia Diner and Donna Gabaccia, provide useful commentaries for this project seeing as both scholars work with history, foodways, and immigrant studies. Hasia Diner’s *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* insightfully scrutinizes—as is obvious from the title—Italian, Irish, and Jewish foodways from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and their evolution and adaptation resulting from migration. Diner details the modifications of each of the said foodways as they travelled from the kitchens and hearths abroad to the shores and tables of the United States. She deftly illustrates the important link between food and immigrants and the implications migration had on ethnic business, class status, and immigrant food dishes. In much the same way, Donna Gabaccia’s *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* also considers the effects immigration had on American foodways. As an historian, Gabaccia first examines Creole foods during the colonial period of American
history before moving on to later waves of migration. Gabaccia’s remaining chapters focus on areas like the rise of ethnic business; how food triggers people to cross (food and social) boundaries; the food businesses which emerge due to the rise of capitalism; the fighting that occurs when groups hold their foodways (and beliefs) to be more superior and civilized than others; and she additionally examines cookbooks and culinary roots. These two works—Diner’s and Gabaccia’s—provide this project with a better sense of the historical aspects of foodways and immigrant communities in the United States while also offering unique and useful commentaries on immigrant foodways in general.

Along with historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, geographers also take a turn thinking and theorizing through and about food. Geographers Barbara and James Shortridge edit the text *The Taste of American Place: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Foods* which claims food habits are as much based on locale and region as they are on ethnic background and race. They argue that place matters just as much as, if not more than, race, gender, and class in the ways of understanding the world. The editors hold food as being a good approach to dealing with ethnic differentiation because it is a cultural identity item that is easily retained or altered. The first section of essays in the reader focuses on regional foods and the ways in which regions have come to be known for certain foodways. However, the essays show that this is not always agreed upon by the people in that area, and contestations about the origins of foods often arise. More suited to the type of work this project is accomplishing, the second half of the collection looks at ethnic foodways and the ways they are frequently a “complex transformation of identity” (119). The authors tell their readers that no ethnic food exists in a vacuum, “nor
are they preserved in a pristine state, uninfluenced by their surrounding…Recipes are modified to accommodate changing time commitments, technology, and ingredients” (122; 123). Immigrants and ethnics adapt their foodways, like anyone else, to suit their surroundings, and this notion is echoed in the interviews conducted for this research project. For these reasons the Shortridges’ collection is useful.

Similar to the Shortridges’ work, David Bell and Gill Valentine also explore the novel connection between food, place, and identity. Their work, *Consuming Geographies: We are where we eat*, employs spatial scales—body, home, community, city, region, nation, globe—to look at the role food has in creating place identities. The community scale is most useful for the current project due to the fact that Bell and Valentine see it as two-pronged; ‘community’ refers to both those created through migration as well as place-bounded ones, and it is clear that the former prong—communities created through migration—is most helpful for this project. ‘Community’ in the migration sense indicates that foodways may act as ethnic community identities which help when vast distances separate people from their place-bounded community. The authors stress the fact that a community is not always place-bounded; it can be more of a mindset and way of thinking which is how immigrant communities may employ it and why it is useful for this project. ‘Community’ in the place-bounded sense refers to the way people living near one another use food as social glue for block parties, barbecues, and other types of social actions. Both *The Taste of American Place* and *Consuming Geographies* examine large bounded communities of the United States and the United Kingdom respectively. Because my work examines Arab Americans it is important to not only look at the U.S. and the U.K. but also the Middle East. By
scrutinizing texts which focus on the Middle East, this work gains useful knowledge concerning specific cultural contexts which many of the interviewees may have been exposed to while growing up.

Sami Zubaida, Richard Tapper, and Peter Heine help with this task as they focus their attentions on and look at Middle Eastern communities outside of the United States. Zubaida and Tapper’s *A Taste of Thyme: Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* gathers multiple scholars’ research in three broad arenas: the first arena analyzes the basics—the ingredients, dishes, and cuisines found throughout the Middle East; next, emphasis is placed on the function of food within the social order—here Zubaida and Tapper mention class and cultural boundaries as well as gender and the utility of cookery books; lastly, Zubaida and Tapper’s collection acknowledges that food is communicative and it is a language device with food acting as a symbol for various other items. Because Zubaida and Tapper discuss the communicative and expressive ability which food can have, the anthology supports some of the main goals of this work. Peter Heine’s work is also useful for reasons similar to those found in Zubaida and Tapper’s text.

Heine’s text, *Food Culture in the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa*, is part of a series of texts which look at foods from every corner of the world. Some of the subjects he touches on include ingredients; geographical, historical, and cultural overviews of the region; kitchens and cooking; dining in and dining out; holidays and special occasions; and health. Heine’s chapter titled “Cooking and the Kitchen” is the most beneficial for this project as it deals with hospitality’s crucial role in Middle Eastern, Near Eastern, and North African cultures as well as the status and role of women in the kitchen. Heine states that women’s “status in the family depends not least on their
ability to make good bread, roast a tasty lamb, or prepare a special dessert,” and thus foodways are seen as one of the many important cultural practices for these groups (72). Heine also discusses the changing makeup of the households within Middle Eastern, Near Eastern, and North African homes. He declares that it is more common now to see a “nuclear” family living situation as opposed to multiple generations living under one roof. Another change he notices in households is the fact that young women are not learning to cook as much from elders as they once used to do and the “chain of tradition is in danger” (72). These types of changes echo words uttered by some of my respondents, and for this reason Heine’s work can relate to the project at hand. The changes he takes notice of may serve as a sort of comparison to the changes experienced and mentioned by the women I interviewed.

The next framework or field of discipline which is extremely important to this project is that of folklore. I went into this research project with the notion that I would be studying foodways using folkloristics. After examining other disciplines’ methods and outlooks on food studies research, I still hold that my work falls under folklore’s umbrella. The gender literature reviewed in this chapter are perhaps some of the most informative literature for this project, but much of this work dealing with foodways would fall under the larger domain of folklore; and for this reason I consider my work to be a folkloric project which looks at foodways through that lens. For me, folklore’s perspective on foodways utilizes the theories advocated by other disciplines, such as cultural studies and sociology, but at the same time works on the ground with the people who are purchasing the foods, preparing the foods, consuming the foods, and passing on the recipes over stove burners. While other social science disciplines deal with people, I
believe that folklore fully attempts to express and communicate the thoughts and opinions of the people being ‘studied,’ and this is what I hope my project does. For this reason, I find folklore literature very useful.

_Folklore_

With social science’s perceptions of how to scholarly attend to food already stated, we can now turn to folklore’s perception of the matter so as to witness the benefits it provides to the current research. When studying foodways, folklore pays particular attention to traditions and events, such as clambakes in the Northeastern United States\(^{12}\) or Shandong banquets in northern China\(^{13}\). Charles Camp’s _American Foodways: What, When, Why and How We Eat in America_ embodies this notion of the folkloric study of foodways which looks at food events by declaring that when studying food, scholars should look at the entire event as opposed to merely the food item. Food events—any event which has food present—are Camp’s primary concerns throughout the text which makes it useful for chapter three of this work. _American Foodways_ directly relates to the next chapter of this text which examines an Egyptian food gathering hosted by the Egyptian Association of Columbus. Camp deems foodways as the intersectional meeting point of food and culture, and he posits that ordinary and transparent items—foodstuffs—actually help to inform our daily decisions about our identity, how that identity is different than others’, and why these differences are important. Other folklore scholars recognize and appreciate the powers foods may have within community events.

\(^{12}\) Kathy Neustadt’s _Clambake_ provides an excellent ethnographic example of a study of a food event tradition like the clambake.

\(^{13}\) See Eric Shepherd’s _Eat Shandong_.

37
Lin Humphrey is one of these scholars and she expands and amends Camp’s work on the ‘food event’ by modifying the name to ‘small group festive gatherings.’ Lin and Theodore Humphrey both elaborate on the concept of small group festive gatherings (SGFG’s) in the collection titled “We Gather Together”: Food and Festival in American Life. Works gathered by the editors—Humphrey and Humphrey—celebrate the roles food has in festivities such as birthday parties, Halloween parties, Seders, clambakes, etcetera. The text focuses on food within festive events because it is understood that “traditional foods, events, and contexts encode more meaning than the single food or event” which is why the work so closely relates to Camp’s American Foodways (10) and why it relates to the work at hand; the current project does not focus specifically on the Arab American foods consumed by my interviewees, but rather attitudes and contexts surrounding the consumption of said foods. Furthermore, the Humphreys’ text examines “the relationship between community and food and the level of the event” (10) which are closely tied to the goals of this research because I point out the connection food makes between people, specifically the connection between women. The editors divide the collection’s essays into three separate sections. The first section centers on small—and occasionally seemingly meaningless—traditional events which help stimulate community building. Next, the Humphreys organize essays around the notion that hard work, homecoming events, and foods create a sense of social meaning. Although tasks may be tedious and time-consuming, people, nonetheless, perform them because of the social meanings embedded within them. This helps substantiate the notion that food may be able to bring people—and in this project’s case, Arab Americans—together. Although the foods cooked by the families of the women I interviewed may be tedious and time-
consuming, they are, nevertheless, prepared; perhaps because the preparation unites the community. The editors’ last section addresses the ways in which food expresses identity of both peoples and places. While Humphrey and Humphrey’s compilation briefly investigates the association between food and identity, other texts solely concentrate on this facet and for that reason are useful for my research which examines the ways foodways may act as complex entities which are capable of expressing complex identities.

Scholars Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell’s *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity* acts as one of the texts which does specifically set out to unpack food’s expressiveness. The editors note that “foodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a context for performance of group rituals” (5). These lines show the articulacy food can have and some of the many things which it can convey and portray. Brown and Mussell set out to go beyond the usual modes of interpreting foodways and communities so as to set in motion new thoughts on the matter. To do this, the editors assemble multi-disciplinary works dealing with the performance of ethnic identity through the use of theoretical and field study cases, essays on regionalism, as well as works on forming new identities and food studies’ implications on public policy. Brown and Mussell gather in one place varying disciplines’ and scholars’ modes of working with identity and food and have allowed my work to benefit by providing examples of field research and theoretical studies on the performance of group identity through food. While Brown and Mussell do put forth
essays which advance the theoretical stances of food studies within folklore, it is important to also note the theoretical stances endorsed and most employed by social science scholars.

**Theoretical Approaches to Food**

Reviewing foodways literature reveals the many perspectives and methods applied to food studies. Notable scholars employ these methods, particularly cultural studies and sociology scholars, and facilitate in peeling back the layers and theoretical strands surrounding foodways. The following discussion expands on the theoretical approaches put forth in the reviewed literature section and allows readers to see the thinking that can be done through food from a theory-based perspective.

**Functionalism and Structuralism**

Functionalism, in the sociological tradition, attends to foodways by taking notice of the ways in which food can represent or express social relation patterns (Mennell et al). It sees societies as structured with various inter-dependent parts which work together to fulfill their functions. Audrey Richards, a protégé of Bronislaw Malinowski and a renowned scholar of functional anthropology, paired functionalism with foodways so as to “set the production, preparation and consumption of food in their social and psychological context,” thus allowing food’s relationship with “the life-cycle, interpersonal relationships and the structure of social groups” to be witnessed (Mennell et al 7). In short, she looked to show how foodways are inter-dependent structures which work together with other structures such as social or life-cycle rituals. Functionalist approaches focus on the functions foodways have within recurrent and substantial life events. Because functionalism does strive to reconcile foodways with life events and
rituals, I could apply it to the present research in order to see how, for example, foodways work during Ramadan or Eid events within the families of the women interviewed or the role food plays during births, funerals, and other special occasions. Although this sociological approach seems to concern itself commonly with larger and more general ideas of life-cycle events and rituals than the project at hand, one could make the argument that the sentiments shared by the interviewees depict instances of foodways playing parts in their life events, thus making some functionalist insights applicable here.

While it is useful to understand the social workings and functions of food and how food occupies places within the cyclical structures of societies, it is also important to consider that people’s actual uses of food do not conform to such rigid categories. Further, food works differently in different domains of social life, and some early research on food privileged high ritual events as the more “authentic” events while others placed the privilege of “authenticity” onto food experiences acted out within the home. Instead of only emphasizing one domain as the more “authentic” and more privileged, more recent work by folklorists, including the work at hand, attempts to explore multiple domains of cultural food practices whether public celebrations, home events, or marketplace food exchanges among people who do not share food and culture traditions.

Much like functionalism, structuralism, as used in sociology, also sees society as structured and claims “that societies, social institutions and social action can be analysed

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14 See Lin and Theodore Humphrey’s “We Gather Together”: Food and Festival in American Life

15 See Humphrey & Humphrey; Charles Camp’s American Foodways; Meyers’s A Bit off Mama’s Plate;

16 See Donna Gabaccia’s We Are What We Eat
[sic] in a manner analogous with language, as structures of often unobservable meaning that can nevertheless be detected in the relationships that exist between elements in the ‘language’” (Wood 4). In other words, structuralists break down whatever system they are studying and examine how the parts of the system interact with one another to contribute to a set of broader meanings while looking for overarching patterns within the system. Structuralists believe that the significance of the structures (natural and social structures) found within societies emerges from the relationships they have with one another, and social action is what establishes these relationships by causing structures to come into contact with one another (Wood).

Applying structuralism to foodways presupposes that foodways and cookery are cultural systems, akin to the ways language is a cultural system (Ashley et al). This means that just as the study of language is best done by breaking it down into its smallest units and then comparing the units with other language systems, so too must one do with foodways under a structuralist analysis. For this reason, scholars applying structuralism to foodways only pay attention to cuisines and not individual foodstuffs; cuisines, unlike foods, consist of rules and patterns as do other cultural systems such as poetry, dance, and languages. In much the same way, structuralists recognize that ‘taste’ is a social construct (Mennel et al). Pierre Bourdieu, a Marxist structuralist whose work *Distinction* elaborates on this notion, argues that social class is a determining factor in taste preferences (Wood). Other structuralists include Claude Fischler, Roland Barthes who sees food as a communicative system, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Mary Douglas (Wood). Structuralism purports that people make and remake deep meanings through their cultural practices and these practices signify the meaning. Thus, structuralists may view the
foodways practiced by the Arab American women interviewed in this research as being signifiers for deeper meanings and patterns which the culture produces and reproduces through said foodways.

Claude Levi-Strauss’s work with structuralism attempts to unearth universal human characteristics while at the same time illustrating that humans act as they do because of nature and culture (Wood). Humans, Levi-Strauss proposes, are products of their environments—both culture (social) and nature (biological). Levi-Strauss’s work with food emerges from his belief that the nature/culture opposition comes to fruition in a variety of ways in relation to the varying foodstuffs and food practices in differing cultures (Ashley et al). Each community of humans, Levi-Strauss believes, creates cultural objects and concepts in response to how they view nature (Wood). Thus, Levi-Strauss posits, each group will possess different cultural objects—like foodways and cookery methods—that differ from community to community, but the underlying structures at work will be similar and comparable to one another (Ashley et al). Perhaps Levi-Strauss’s most well-known approach to analyzing foodways by way of structuralism is his culinary triangle, which has at its three points, ‘Raw,’ ‘Cooked,’ and ‘Rotten.’ The triangle has opposing binaries of ‘raw’ and ‘cooked,’ as well as ‘nature’ and ‘culture.’ The ‘rotten’ side of the triangle, Levi-Strauss puts forward, is the natural transformation of the ‘raw’ while the ‘cooked’ side is the cultural transformation of the ‘raw’ (Ashely et al). He feels that his culinary triangle can analyze social behaviors in countless cultural communities because, as Roy Wood’s assessment states, cooking (a cultural object/action with binaries) has “intimations of universally shared mentalistic structures” (11). In effect, cooking, on the surface, is a unique social action within any given society, but its
deeper structures are common and widespread. While Levi-Strauss’s structuralism and theory of the culinary triangle have been used by many scholars, my work will not employ the notions surrounding cooking as a mediator for nature and culture. These types of thinking do not concern the objectives strived for within this work, but it is important to be aware of them nonetheless. For example, one focus of my research is to highlight how the specific women interviewed view their family’s foodways. My work does not attempt to search for large patterns that one could apply to the Arab American community at large—although this could be the case for some of the data discovered, it is not the intent of the current project.

Naturally, scholars and disciplines have made several critiques of structuralism, and particularly Levi-Strauss’s work with the approach. Some of the criticisms of Levi-Strauss’s work stress that the work is too simplistic; or that the theory is problematic because it is looking only for similarities in cultures and not differences—cultural studies scholars especially find the search for universals troublesome; and the employment of binary oppositions can be disputable for scholars like Derrida (Ashley et al). Mary Douglas concurs with these sentiments and disputes Levi-Strauss’s use of universals. Douglas, unlike Levi-Strauss, exercises bottom-up approaches and locates theories of food in local social groups instead of universals (Wood). In addition to this, Douglas makes the distinction between drinks and meals by claiming drinks as more democratic while people reserve meals for only a special few (Wood). She is interested in how food can be useful for understanding significant differences in social interactions.

Critics of the general approach of structuralism see it as being weak due to its main goal of finding large, structured patterns. With this position of placing strict
boundaries across cultural communities, critics say, it is then difficult to explain varying diets with relation to their use or function because structuralism aims to unearth overarching structures that can be found in every society (Mennell et al). The difficulty of explaining varying diets arises because structuralism does not account for dynamic processes—such as those found within immigrant communities—and suggests that structures of social life, family, society, etcetera will map on to other structures related to food choice, food preparation, and the like. So, for instance, if we attempt to understand universal principles of the distribution of food or access to land or the divisions between excess and enough, we might overlook the more significant differences among groups of people. It is not just that the details and nuances are richer, but that the over-generalizations are not even valid in many cases. The over-generalizations fail to explain some of the more complex uses of food. For example, in Janet Theophano’s essay “I Gave Him a Cake: An Interpretation of Two Italian-American Weddings” she examines the way an Italian-American mother uses specific foodways at her two daughters’ weddings in order to serve symbolic functions at these ceremonial events. While one daughter’s wedding consisted of rituals and foods that one might label as ‘Italian,’ the other daughter’s wedding had no sign of Italian-ness (at least in terms of foods present).

By using this example we can see that if one was to apply structuralism to the weddings described by Theophano, the researcher would most likely focus on the foods which promote a specific, sort of, high profile cultural identity within the event, i.e. the wedding which served Italian food. Thus one would miss the whole point of how the mother used food to strategically create status. By using foods at the wedding that would not be labeled as ‘Italian,’ the mother was attempting to perform as though she was of a
higher position—a societal position which did not need to eat every day Italian fare. In other words, the large structural generalizations are fascinating and insightful, but sometimes can misrepresent a situation. For this reason and others, reviewers such as Jack Goody, see the productive aspects of structuralism but are, nevertheless, critical and believe that it does not provide as much of an in-depth analysis in terms of paying close attention to cultural contexts. These critics suggest that researchers use structuralism alongside additional modes of analysis, especially ones which pay closer attention to historical aspects and patterns of consumption (Wood).

**Culturalism**

Cultural studies scholars utilize culturalism most frequently, and they view it as nearly incompatible with structuralism because, as Ashley et al note, structuralism assumes preexisting structures—both mental and social—as organizing humans’ thoughts and lifestyles so as to allow the society to function (albeit in an unequal manner). For this reason, structuralism, in some ways, depicts humans as possessing a lesser amount of agency than some would prefer. Culturalism, on the other hand, gives agency back to the people and has subjectivities determining their own actions as opposed to preexisting structures doing that work for them (Ashley et al). In spite of this, both structuralism and culturalism are based on the idea of a dominant force or ideology of some kind “which is imposed from above and resisted from below” (Ashley et al 16-7) but this power force is constantly changing its distribution and repositions itself in relation with the ruled and the ruling forces (Ashley et al). Culturalism is immensely interested in bounded spaces—bounded in the sense of homogeneity as well as spatial geography, and when applied to food studies it pays heavy attention to the “meaningful mundanity of [these] bounded
populations” (Ashley et al 16). Culturalism is the most humanistic theoretical approach looked at in the present work because it focuses on the everyday members of populations within certain areas and gives them the most agency and subjectivity. Given this fact, this theoretical approach, when applied to the present research, would focus on seeing the interviewees as having control and agency regarding their food choice or at least it would highlight that the population of study negotiates the choices more than what other theoretical approaches would make known.

**Developmentalism**

Along with structuralism, materialism—also known as developmentalism—is the other major theoretical branch which cultural studies scholars and other social science scholars seem to work under. While structuralism relies heavily on the notions of signs, signifiers, and symbolisms, developmentalism only half-heartedly supports these ideas and instead prefers to utilize historical trends and data to understand contemporary food habits (Wood). Put simply, developmentalism examines food to see how it has developed throughout history especially in terms of biological development. Developmentalism looks at the “historical evolution of food practices and preferences” and it employs a biological imperative as opposed to structuralism which uses a cultural imperative (Wood 6). Using the nature/culture binary, developmentalism highlights the nature side of foodways—how foodways have naturally transformed over time—while structuralism highlights the culture side of foodways—how preexistent social structures modify foodways. What is more, developmentalists, unlike structuralists, do not believe that meanings should simply be ‘read.’ Developmentalists conjecture that theorists and researchers need to examine meanings in light of cultural applications because the
“meaning [of cultural practices] is the consequence of activity” (Mennell et al 17).

Mennell and his colleagues seem to suggest that developmentalists place meanings into more specific contexts, unlike structuralists. Another important critique which the developmentalists have of structuralists is that they believe structuralism does not pay enough attention to economics or biology when explaining the origin or perpetuation of food habits (Wood). This project, if analyzed using developmentalism, would more closely examine the changes occurring within Arab American foodways since first immigrating and even the changes that began to take place in their homelands. Instead of simply breaking the Arab American foodways down into smaller units so as to ‘read’ them and compare them with other foodways like structuralism would do, developmentalism would take the deconstructed practice and place it in context within the actions it occurs. Developmentalism, structuralism, and culturalism may all seem to be approaches which are incompatible and conflicting, but scholars are trying to amend this

For example, scholars using developmentalism, like Jack Goody, Stephen Mennell, and Sidney Mintz, are not completely satisfied with structuralism. However, they do not entirely disagree with it because they recognize the utility in “the power of the symbolic meanings of food in shaping and controlling social behavior” (Mennell et al 14). Scholars are searching for a middle ground which would link these approaches because there is interdependency between the biological (developmentalism) and cultural (structuralism) imperatives; our need to eat—our biology—influences the type and value of our food symbols which, consequently, affects the form and nature of the biological requirement (Wood). The relationship is reciprocal, prompting researchers to realize that
each has something to offer and should not be discounted entirely. And, still other scholars apply additional ideologies and theories to grapple with the complexity that is food studies.

**Gramsci’s Hegemony**

Antonio Gramsci is best known for his political theory and approach of cultural hegemony. While primarily applied to political topics, questions of imperialism, and the “relationship of domination and subordination” within ‘civil society’—family life, media, and religion—some cultural studies scholars use hegemony theory as a lens through which to study food and drink (Ashley et al 17). Applying hegemony to the study of food entails the examination of two questions: How did the hegemonic system (the current cuisine) successfully become internalized within the populace of a certain community or region so that they feel it is part of their identity? And, how have these notions become rooted and spread throughout civil society? (Ashley et al). A common example of hegemony being applicable to foodways might be the case of the McDonald’s corporation and the reason and rationale for its global ‘success.’ Some may see McDonald’s as employing cultural hegemony or cultural imperialism when it opens its doors outside of the United States and roots itself deeply into a foreign civil society and changes the way (and what) people eat. Or, another example more related to Arab American foodways is that many Arab countries have an extended lunch break to allow employees to return home to eat a large lunch with their families. The United States has no such policy and thus some immigrants are forced to modify their eating habits and eat smaller, quicker, and perhaps colder meals for lunch. To apply hegemony to this research project, I could develop questionnaires and surveys inquiring into how the
respondents decide what to consume, why they consume said items, and whether or not they consider those foodstuffs to be a part of their community. Or, I could have asked the informants their thoughts on adapting to or feeling compelled to adapt to American mainstream ways of eating. This, however, is not a set goal for the current project, and thus I did not ask questions or use questionnaires to obtain information of this sort. Accordingly, I did not employ a hegemonic approach when analyzing the collected data.

**Food as a Point of and for Social Contact**

With several of the texts and theoretical approaches to foodways outlined, it is fitting to move forward so as to see how the literature provides evidence and support for three of the four main functions of food on which this project focuses its attention. Foodways literature provides substantial evidence and examples of food having importance far beyond simply providing sustenance for the body. Indeed, its work as a point of social contact can be extremely important for building community, and this is especially true, I will argue, for immigrant communities.

**Community, Commensality, and Crossing Boundaries**

The concept of ‘community’ was not something that I immediately imagined as playing a role within my project. But, I soon realized through my research that community is and always was a factor influencing my interests. This is because I (quixotically) envision foodways as being practices which somehow tie people together, and for this reason, it is important to pay sufficient attention to the attributes and elements which the idea of community offers my project. Bell and Valentine’s *Consuming Geographies* discusses foodways from a geographical perspective, and they focus on food, place, and identity especially in relation to varying spatial scales—body; home;
community; city; region; nation; and globe. Their chapter on the spatial scale of community examines community in a distinct fashion as well as the link communities have with foodways. This chapter is unique and informative for this project because Bell and Valentine recognize that a community does not have to encompass a single, bounded geographic area. Communities can oftentimes transcend geographic boundaries, and this is why I see it as very applicable to immigrant communities. That is, because communities can transcend a specific bounded area, immigrants separated from their homelands and people of similar ancestry and heritage may still be able to connect through new or hybrid communities which are not bounded and which might be purely imagined and felt by the immigrants themselves.

Benedict Anderson uses this notion of imagined communities when looking at the origins and emergence of nationalism as we know it today. Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). He goes on to note that one can think of nations as imagined communities “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). One might transfer this to immigrant communities because there will be many members of the community who do not remember family, friends, and places from their home communities and some members may not have even been born in those communities but are still a part of the imagined community. In these imagined communities I believe it is possible that food may help to anchor the members to their roots which stretch across oceans and vast distances, and that is why many migrants might try and hold on to their foodways for as long as they are able.
Bell and Valentine acknowledge that “migrant groups [are] often bearers of ethnic or religious identities [and as such] commonly take their [relevant] food habits with them, altering the culinary culture of host nations along the way” (113). That is, Bell and Valentine consider migrant groups—the Arab American community of Columbus, Ohio in this project—to be a type of ambassador to host nations with regard to foodways and other cultural practices. And furthermore, these ambassadors may not only change their own food and cultural practices due to immigration, but may in turn modify the host nations’. Bell and Valentine also remark that foods can often be tools of inclusion as well as exclusion. For the purposes of this project, I place more emphasis on the inclusionary aspect of foods as opposed to food as an exclusionary device. However, the data which demonstrates food as an inclusionary tool will, by default, exemplify its exclusionary tendencies as well.17

Once the implicit is made explicit, or, once time is taken to think about who one eats with and why, it is apparent to see that food does bring certain people together (or separate them). This is because whoever one eats with can often link them with a specific group membership (Wood). High school—and prison—cafeterias exemplify this because where one sits can determines one’s “social status,” and it can indicate the group one is a part of. Dining out patterns also illustrate another way in which food can link people to one another. For instance, does it not signify different and separate things if we take our dates out for coffee versus a quick lunch or a late dinner? This is because the

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17 For a closer examination of exclusionary, inclusionary, and assimilatory tools, see Jennifer Michael’s article “(Ad)Dressing Shibboleths: Costume and Community in the South of France”.

52
kinds of foods eaten with certain people specify details about that relationship (Wood). This carries over into home and family life as well.

One of the quintessential—or hoped for—moments within family life, for many families, is eating meals together at home (or more recent trends would have this meal taking place outside the home at a restaurant). In Europe, research suggests, commensality—sharing a meal together—bonds family members (MacClancy). Commensality somehow generates a feeling of cohesion and enables the incorporation of new family members and guests (Bell & Valentine). Counihan and Van Esterik’s, *Food and Culture*, devotes an entire section entitled “Commensality and Fasting” to examining the “practices and meanings of giving, receiving, and refusing food” (2). Thus, one may view the time spent at the table together as precious and treasured. In fact, several scholars\(^\text{18}\) see these instances as so crucial that they believe that if, and when, family meals stop, then community will stop as well (Ashley et al).

Commensality bonds and connects people while also possessing cultural and social meanings (Pilcher; Zubaida & Tapper). Commensality illustrates social unitedness and can display moral implications towards one another (Zubaida & Tapper). This may be the case because of foodways link with sex and social exchange which was discussed earlier while surveying the many functions food can serve. If sharing food connotes the possibility of sexual exchange, and sexual exchange may connote marriage—or the sharing of family—then it is fitting that commensality implies social exchange and unity. Moreover, people do not only display this unity and togetherness as a physical state of

\(^{18}\) See Rowe (1999), C. Jennings (1999), and N. Lawson (1999)
being together, but the togetherness can also be a mental state when distances do not permit people to be near one another.

One of the more apparent times when this mental state of unity and connectedness with people far away occurs is during holidays and festivals. Zubaida and Tapper posit that commensality is especially vital and awash with the capability of bonding people during religious feasts and festivals. While I hold this statement as valid, I would go one step further by adding that the importance that some people pair with commensality when thinking about community and bonding is especially true for and can be extremely central to immigrant communities. This is because, as Bell and Valentine noted, ‘communities’ do not have to be in the same geographic locale. Because immigrant communities are not in a single bounded area and are not always surrounded by people who share similar beliefs and practices, foodways, especially those people practice during holidays and feasts, may provide a channel for plugging into this unbounded community network. Immigration separates people from their homelands and it is possible that food provides a link back to where their roots are and enables them to unite with family and friends back home. This sharing of food can suggest and reify a person’s connection to others in varying places.

What is more, sharing food may also imply a shared understanding of culture (Zubaida & Tapper). The wonderful thing about food is that it allows a person to take simple and easy steps to crossing cultural barriers. Food, foodways, and cuisines actually seem to encourage the crossing of cultural boundaries, and this is especially true for the American palate. Donna Gabaccia remarks that the fundamental aspect of American identity and culture is the friction generated from people’s passion for the familiar and
their yearning for crafting and experiencing the novel and innovative. This is evident even now when one scans the menu of nearly any restaurant because one is sure to find foods that originated in different parts of the world or were created by fusing together different cuisines. Thus, food enables people to experiment and taste foods of others which may facilitate in them understanding, if ever so slightly, those cultures. However, while food and the eating of others’ cuisines can start the process of becoming more aware of other cultures and more understanding of other people’s ways of life, it is not a cure-all.

Food is one of the least controversial items of cultural difference (Gabaccia), and because of this it gets the ball rolling when broaching a foreign culture. But, it seems that Americans are and were less tolerant of their actual neighbors or colleagues than they are or were of that person’s cuisine: they will eat the food but not want anything to do with the people. What is more, people are willing to eat other cultures’ food or do business with them because people can detach food and business from a specific country or society of origin. In short, people realize/d that eating hummus or couscous does not make them Middle Eastern, and eating lox and bagels does not mean that they are Jewish (Gabaccia). “Americans,” Gabaccia states, “have been far more willing to celebrate multi-ethnic eating than the pleasure of cross-cultural sex and marriage” (231). Crossing cultural barriers through the use of food only works to an extent, as Gabaccia evidences, because in addition to acting as a unifier, it simultaneously stratifies cultures and creates hierarchies.

Many people consider their national or regional cuisines to be superior to others when it comes to taste, healthiness, cleanliness, and the like (Xu). Thus, foods can also
act as negative cultural stereotypes which can be offensive and hurtful. Roger Abrahams classifies food stereotypes as being a type of “deep stereotype.” In his essay “Equal Opportunity Eating: A Structural Excursus on Things of the Mouth” he says that this style of stereotyping refers to the “very general characteristics by which peoples throughout the world talk about strangers and enemies” (22). Speech and sexual proclivities are also among the category of stereotypes that Abrahams refers to as “deep stereotypes,” and this is because of the link between food and sexuality. Thus, Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell should amend their proclamation that “[f]oodways bind individuals together, define the limits of the group’s outreach and identity, distinguish in-group from out-group, serve as a medium of inter-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a context for performance of group rituals” (5) so as to note that foodways can also create tensions and harbor negativity. Despite the fact that it is very evident that foodways can produce negative sentiments between groups, I would like to remain optimistic—and always hungry for others’ food—and move forward with the more positive side of food and the manners in which it can bring people together. I especially see it necessary to communicate the constructive means by which foodways can unify women.

Contact Point for Women

In her text, *Stories from the Motherline*, Naomi Lowinsky uses the word *Motherline* to describe the continuity many women experience when examining their own lives and the lives of their predecessors. This continuity, some argue, is especially seen in women’s cookbooks. Janet Theophano’s *Eat my Words*, remarks that “…women formally constructed their matrilineal genealogies and their relationships to one another
in their cookbooks, binding together the different generations” (86). Furthermore, “women adopted and adapted printed cookbooks as handmade and handheld objects; they became personal legacies passed on from mother to daughter, who reckoned their ancestry through the female line and noted the line of descent in their cookbooks” (108). Theophano’s work elucidates the connections some women develop with one another due to foodways, and it becomes clearer to see that foodways, and in this case cookbooks, may provide a means for women to unite and create legacies and traditions.

In Memory’s Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezín describes a unique example of cookbooks providing links from woman to woman because it supplies readers with a collection of recipes written by one woman, Wilhelmina (Mina) Pächter, who was a prisoner at the Terezín concentration camp near Prague during World War II. Amazingly, Mina wrote down many of her recipes and entrusted the collection to reliable persons, and years later the book of recipes arrived at her daughter’s doorstep in Manhattan’s East Side. Cara De Silva, the editor of In Memory’s Kitchen, writes that “[f]ood is who we are in the deepest sense…[and] to recall them [traditional foodways] in desperate circumstances is to reinforce a sense of self and to assist us in our struggle to preserve it” (xxvi). In effect, De Silva suggests that saving foodway practices also helps to save one’s own being. Mina’s daughter, Anny, tells De Silva these words as she discusses the power of her mother’s cookbook: “‘[H]ere is the story of how the inmates of the camp, living on bread and watery soup and dreaming of the cooking habits of the past, found some consolation in the hope that they might be able to use them again in the future. By sharing these recipes, I am honoring the thoughts of my mother and the others that somewhere and somehow, there must be a better world to live in’” (xliii). For Anny
and her family, Mina’s cookbook offers a source of pride, memory, and honor. One might believe that through the recreation of the recipes within Mina’s cookbook, family members are recreating or re-remembering family members who are no longer around. Food and practices surrounding food can give the impression of cooking up attachments and relationships between generations living and deceased.

Cooking dishes commonly prepared by loved ones who have passed away can be an evocative method of memorializing those who are no longer around physically, as In Memory’s Kitchen demonstrates. Another example resides in Meyers’s A Bite off Mama’s Plate where an interviewee speaks the following words in reference to her mother: “When I cook one of her dishes for others, I feel as though she is smiling down on me from heaven. I am extremely proud that I can cook like she did” (108). Clearly, recipes and food dishes can be indispensable assets for some women. As a result, women may preserve handed-down recipes in numerous ways: they keep them with other recipes; get help concerning cookery methods from other living relatives; give recipe collections as wedding gifts; put oral recipes into writing; or by making family cookbooks.

This idea of keeping traditions alive may be particularly important for traditional ethnic foods and especially true for immigrant communities because immigration separates migrants from their homes and compatriots by physical space. But, it is possible that foods may have the ability, for some, to build bridges between where an immigrant currently resides and their original home. By passing along certain recipes for ethnic foods, the tradition is kept alive for future generations (Meyers), and furthermore, individuals separated from their home communities are capable of continuing the
practices. Women, it might seem, have an exceptional linkage with the maintenance of traditions because they are commonly the one’s attending to food, and accordingly women can be especially vital to the transmission of cultural knowledges. Traci Marie Kelly’s essay, “‘If I Were a Voodoo Princess’: Women’s Culinary Autobiographies,” explicates that despite women in families having various last names (due to marriage) they are in fact the keepers of the family traditions and they are the ones that keep people coming back to the table. For Kelly, women are the paramount reason traditions stay alive from generation to generation and Miriam Meyers focuses on this chain of tradition and bond created in kitchens and homes through women as well. Meyers’s *A Bite off Mama’s Plate* offers great examples of food as glue for the generations through her exploration of “a range of connections women in families have through food” (3).

Throughout the book, Meyers provides readers with responses concerning feelings about food elicited from women throughout North America as well as her own life experiences. The responses are oftentimes anecdotal memories of women with their mothers or grandmothers. One response in the book states that one woman’s best memories of special events and holidays is of doing the dishes after the meal, because it was when all of the women were “…in the kitchen talking, laughing, and telling stories” (22). Another woman mentions dish duty as well: “After dinner, I dried the dishes while she [her mother] washed, and we talked some more. It was during those times that she gave me encouragement to do my best…After finishing the dishes, we moved onto our individual concerns…” (37). Foodways and processes like cleaning up after a meal acted as ways for this mother and daughter to connect. I can attest to this same notion, except I associate doing the dishes with socializing with my father. My mother’s house rule is
that if she cooks, then my father cleans. Consequently, whenever I am at my parents’ house, I help my father in cleaning up after meals because it provides a space for us to talk before going our own ways. Other times during the day we are both doing our separate activities but washing the dishes opens up our line of communication. Meyers goes on to demonstrate that this connection continues even when the mother (or father) and daughter are not under the same roof.

“When my mother and I did talk, usually by phone…food was often a topic of conversation. I always listened with interest to what Mama had for dinner, since, when I lived alone, my miserable cooking skills did not make for memorable meals” (Meyers 35). As a graduate student who lives away from my family, I can identify with this statement because I always ask my mother when I call her at night, “What did you have for supper?” She’ll tell me what they ate even though she knows that I am going to say, “Aww, I want that!”—whatever, that, might be. I have also noticed that when I make my weekly phone call to my eighty-six year old nonna¹⁹, we inevitably talk about the food she has made—all homemade of course. Meyers claims that food serves as a common ground for mothers and daughters who have grown apart, but one can also see it as a bridge over generation gaps. For instance, my nonna may not understand the type of class that I teach (or even what my Master’s degree will be in), but she can understand and give advice on how to make great pasta sauce or Italian wedding cookies. Food seems to act as stable ground where both of us can connect. Sociologist, Lucy Rose Fischer, found that women continue to call mothers and grandmothers even after they are

¹⁹ Italian for ‘Grandmother’.
married with families in order to ask advice about food and cooking (Meyers) and in this type of manner, food can help connect the women within a family.

Preparing meals, eating meals, and then cleaning up after them can engender special bonds between whoever partakes in these activities. Mothers and daughters may create a special bond and “kitchen talk” through these actions which can continue even after the daughter leaves the house (Meyers). This bond reaches past mother and daughter relationships though, and female friends also share this similar feeling of food bringing them together into a group.

Women were, and still are, the primary cooks in a majority of cultures, thus much of their time is devoted to cookery activities which makes it a leading feature of “female cultural heritage” (McDougall 107). Thus it might seem comprehensible that women would foster relationships through food and because of food due to the amount of time spent attending to it. Jane Dusselier’s essay, “Bonbons, Lemon Drops, and Oh Henry! Bars: Candy, Consumer Culture, and the Construction of Gender, 1895-1920,” features an advertisement from a 1908 edition of *Ladies Home Journal* which depicts five college women gathering around a double boiler, singing songs, and carrying on while making fudge. The ad is called “A Fudge Party” and at the top of it, it says: “Harrison Fisher’s College Girls”. The ad’s caption reads, “This is the last of a series of studies of the American College Girl at Her Sports and Pastimes, in Her Leisure, and at Her Work” (26). While the advertisement is clearly archaic and many might view it as unfortunately highlighting women’s ‘innate’ ability in the kitchen by illustrating to readers that this is what college women do—in between studying, they group together to bond, relax, and eat—it is in fact true that there exist many women who transform—intentionally or not—
the kitchen into a space where “oral storytelling has brewed while dinners have simmered” (Kelly 252).

Congregating at the kitchen table or sitting on kitchen counters while preparing a meal and unwinding from a long day may contribute to the womanly bond which women can create because of food. Food has a unique “double-edged sword” quality because it is capable of releasing stress and acting as a comfort while on the other hand it also possesses the ability to foster and engender tensions and strains related to the energy and finances necessary to prepare and serve meals. However, it might be said that the stress produced while preparing the food does not outweigh the delight found around the table once it is finally served; and this is most aptly seen during holidays and celebrations of other sorts.

Very commonly, extended families get together during holidays and other special occasions, even when it is inconvenient and untimely. But, it is possible that the meal and foods served at these events are what keeps families coming together—along with gifts, television, and sports (Meyers). Meyers explains that families assemble even when fighting with one another because food is the one thing that fighting families can come together for. One food writer wittily avows to Meyers that “A baked ham inspires truce. A turkey levels dissent. The emblem of harmony and goodwill is manifested in a leg of roast lamb” (18). Likewise, Meyers further illustrates this point with an example from her own life experiences as an early professional living with roommates by explaining that “dinner required the four of us [her roommates] to let our individual worries and struggles drop away so that we could be fit company, engaging in pleasant conversation. It took us…out of our separate worlds and into community” (12). Meyers is thus
demonstrating that food brought her and her roommates together whether they were in the mood or not. Meals can be a social time for bonding with family and friends and this came up over and over again in Meyers’s book. In fact, she suggests in her research that families interact predominately at the supper table and this is because everyday basic meals as well as lavish festival meals all play an important role in joining people together (Janowski). If, as Meyers suggests, the kitchen table is where family members most often interact, what occurs during these times and what, if any, important work is being done? I would argue that worthy of note work is, in fact, being done within the kitchen’s walls, especially because food may act as a mode of transmitting cultural knowledges from one family member to another.

**Food as a Transmitter of Cultural Knowledges**

Foodways can be special in the sense that they can generate an atmosphere which somehow brings people together. This can happen at the kitchen table for nuclear families on a Wednesday evening, extended families during holiday dinners, or neighbors from differing backgrounds having a potluck in order to meet each other on a Saturday night. Food and commensality assist in the construction and maintenance of relationships. One of the ways foodways may maintain and prolong relationships is by creating a space where children and adults can hear and pass down stories and traditions from person to person so as to give food the ability to act as a mode of cultural transmission. At the kitchen table during mealtimes, children can learn, for instance, reading skills, good nutrition, and vocabulary. “Moreover, children learn family stories, manners, and consideration for others among other things” (Meyers 14). Consequently,
when, and if, families integrate stories into mealtime, the transfer of knowledge can be between not only one generation, but many.

This may be especially evident in the case of immigrant communities whose children may be growing up in a society vastly different from where their parents grew up. The “kitchen talk” and meal time stories may provide the younger generations with much needed cultural knowledge that is no longer pervasive outside of the home. The collected data from interviews with the Arab American women of this study will further elaborate this notion but for now, it is enough to recognize, as Charles Camp does, that the knowledge transferred in the stories during mealtime inculcates younger family members with “family, ethnic, religious, and social values” (51). Camp continues by explaining that “the teaching process [of foodways] has an informal character; it transmits not only practical, hands-on skills but also social values that are regarded as related and inseparable elements of the same enterprise” (51). Thus, it seems, foodways and mealtimes may assist in the socialization of youth while teaching them culturally specific etiquette as well (Wood; Bell & Valentine). Likewise, the importance of mealtimes for socialization and the instillation of social and cultural values can be immeasurable but, nevertheless, foodways are still capable of transmitting much more. Along with the possible diffusion of social etiquettes and wisdoms from parent to child taking place in the kitchen, younger generations also, as would seem obvious, learn how to prepare foods their families value and eat regularly.

Foodways can function as a space for multiple generations to gather and spread knowledges concerning foods and cooking practices. Meyers provides an eloquent example of this type of transmission in her book, *A Bite off Mama’s Plate*:
My mother made beautiful Southern biscuits regularly. I sat in the kitchen talking with her as she spooned what seemed to be a random amount of self-rising flour into a special bowl, scooped a piece of fat from a can and placed it in the center of the flour, poured in buttermilk, and worked the mass with her fingers. When the dough was “right,” I watched her shape the biscuits, then place them on a greased baking sheet…I could make those biscuits today easily, though Mama never taught me formally.

Being in the presence of my mother, talking with her as she made biscuits, “taught” me. (56)

Here Meyers explains how her mother imparted the knowledge for making beautiful Southern biscuits. None of the learning was formal, but her mother was still able to transfer the information. This is because it is often the case that women and children learn simply “by being in the kitchen” and observing.

Meyers’s research leads to her understanding that many American women learn informally about food and preparation, and these types of knowledges are not explicitly taught like other skill sets. By being in the kitchen, children become “apprentices” to their mothers, and when children help their mothers or other caretakers in the kitchen they unknowingly receive knowledge and wisdom (Meyers). Nadya, one of the Arab American women who helped me with this project, became a sort of “apprentice” in the kitchen without even really trying. Nadya explained that when she was growing up in Egypt her mother worked outside the home and because of this their family employed a caretaker. Through the years of watching over the shoulders of her caretaker, Nadya learned how to make a dish which requires one to stuff rice into another food in a specific
way. Nadya’s mother, to this day, cannot prepare the dish properly and when making the
dish, she asks Nadya to help. Thus, food preparation is one of the ways in which it is
possible for mothers (or other senior generation women) to pass on cultural and family
customs to youth. Besides food preparation techniques, young women may learn other
skills from spending time with elders in the kitchen as well.

From the title of Meyers’s text, it is obvious that her work focuses on mothers and
daughters and she lists an array of ‘kitchen-knowledges’ taught and learned by them.
Meyers relays that daughters learn things such as how not to waste; how to make do with
what one has; the concepts of sharing, hospitality, and offering abundance; the fact that
family is special; and that presentation is everything. Kitchen chores, like setting the
table, also help children, particularly female children, to learn these skills (Meyers).

Women, it might seem, learn life skills and foodways, whether explicitly or implicitly,
from each other. Thus, along with life and socialization skills, women diffuse cooking
skills in the kitchen as well, as Meyers depicts through her anecdote about southern
biscuits. Bell and Valentine agree and add that “[p]assing on recipes and particular
cooking techniques from one generation to another (usually from mother to daughter) is
one way in which some households have traditionally reproduced their ‘identities’ over
time” (66). If this is the case, what happens to the identities of families and cultural
communities when, or if, this “chain of tradition is in danger”? (Heine 72-3).

More and more it seems that families are spending less and less time together in
the kitchen due to busy schedules and active lifestyles which results in children learning
cooking skills outside the home—if anywhere at all (Heine). Some even fear that when
the older generations pass on, so too will their recipes for foods and the ethnic identity
which can be connected to the food (Bell & Valentine). Peter Heine’s *Food Culture in the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa* conjectures that nuclear families are becoming the norm (as opposed to extended family members living under one roof) and one of the consequences of this occurrence is that the passing on of cooking traditions is changing. This may be particularly significant for some immigrant communities if those communities use foodways, among other practices, to constitute its identity. How are these types of communities negotiating the challenges facing the transmission of their cultural knowledges? If there is a break in the line of transmission, how are their traditions dealing? These questions are critical and one can apply them to other communities, not just immigrant ones, because changing lifestyles are affecting many groups.

In *Sociology of the Meal*, Roy C. Wood cites Nicholas Coleridge who wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* on March, 28th, 1993, that “‘traditional roles played by the adults of the house have been forgotten. Most modern women have not a clue how long it takes to roast different meats’” (64). Although one might read Coleridge’s statement as predicting some unforeseen chaos that will occur if women leave the kitchen, the point I want readers to take from it is that changing lifestyles the world over can influence and modify—whether for the good or the bad—gender roles and foodways’ relevance. And, one of these changes that people may see (as positive or negative) in varying places is that lives might be becoming more individualized and less focused on the family.

Jeffrey Pilcher believes that “individual choice multiplies at the expense of family unity,” and he asks whether or not mass-produced products eaten at mealtimes engender the same feelings as homemade dishes (7). Are people more likely to consider meals less
important now because they come from a box, or will people adapt and transfer their feelings about homemade foods onto mass-produced foods? In short, are people now bonding over take-out Chinese and delivery pizza the same way they once did while eating homemade pasta and sauce? While that may be extreme, one might notice that “recipes are modified to accommodate changing time commitments, technology, and ingredients” because changing lifestyles may lead to changing foodways (Kaplan, Hoover, & Moore 123). As this section demonstrates, mealtimes and foodways can be very significant arenas of study because of the fact that they might act as points of social contact as well as modes of cultural transmission. Nevertheless, there is still another major function of foods yet to describe and it deals with identity expression.

Foodways as Complex Expressions of Complex Identities

Ken Albala writes in the series foreword of Food Culture in the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa that “there is perhaps no better way to understand a culture, its values, preoccupations and fears, than by examining its attitudes toward food” (vii). This is because food may play the part of a signifier, and if looked at in the right light, it can be seen as a means to an end—the end being status, identity, and community (Humphrey & Humphrey). The earlier reference to Pierre Bourdieu’s Distinction demonstrates Bourdieu’s argument that food sometimes possesses the capacity for distinguishing and demarcating people. To reiterate, Bourdieu writes, “Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (6). Bourdieu applies these thoughts to foodways and insists that
foodways make and remake class identities and do not simply express them (Ashley et al). Furthermore, “tastes are not simply a reflection of our identity but work to construct our culture identity…what we eat also produces who we are” (Ashley et al 59). That is, the identity of one’s food may reveal or hint at one’s identity as a member of a certain group or social status. Does this not ring true at the grocery store?

Imagine standing in line at the checkout counter at the local grocery store and peering into the shopping carts in front and behind you. If, in the cart ahead of you, you see wine, veal cutlets, filet mignon, fresh asparagus, and garlic, would you assume that this person has a four year old child at home and is ‘working’ class? And, if the cart behind you contains frozen chicken nuggets, Fruit Loops cereal, bologna, and top round steak, would you assume that this person is ‘upper-middle’ class with grown children? The answer to both of these questions would probably be a resounding ‘no’ and this is because food choice can, to a certain extent, be affected by class and act as a marker of it (Wood).

One could easily counter argue that this is only the case because of pure economics and that there is nothing else to it. The counterargument made would claim that one can only purchase filet mignon if she or he is of a certain social status and that as soon as that status changes, so too would her or his foodways; but what if we ignore the cost of the groceries and focus on the actual food product? Would a person formulate a certain assumption and response when the woman in front of she or he at the deli counter asks for sheep’s eyes—a Saudi delicacy—or other unique foodstuffs not normally eaten by the dominant society? Or, how about when a person realizes that the cultural community of her or his neighbor enjoys eating dog or cat meat? What kind of response
does this engender? The mere fact that these queries engender any response at all might seem to prove the point that food can express and locate a person along various cultural axes. Hence it seems that food may be expressive and performative, and people may draw certain assumptions and stereotypes simply by looking at what others consume; this is because of the expressive and performative faculty foods can possess.

“[F]ood is a powerful and effective device for expressing (along with music and dance) key elements in the identity of…groups precisely because they can be performed, displayed, and consumed” (Humphrey & Humphrey 194). Others would agree and reaffirm this assertion because, for many, food communicates information about heritage, identity, and internal conflicts alongside one’s basic outlooks on life and one’s worldviews20 (Stern & Cicala; MacClancy; Humphrey & Humphrey). The foods one eats or does not eat and the time, place, and way one eats all are capable of indicating certain items about a person and her or his cultural community. Likewise, foodways may not simply express generic and vague characteristics about a person such as, ‘She likes French foods,’ or ‘He likes healthy organic foods.’ Foodways might express larger items. For instance, “food preferences [may] exhibit a person’s membership of a particular group, rather than making strong statements about either individuality (personal taste) or social superiority (inter-group distinction)” (qt. in Ashley et al 70). Namely, foodways might be capable of expressing larger social grouping identities and belongingness as opposed to individual attributes. For this reason, foodways can be a large and essential aspect of immigrant communities.

20 See also Janet Theophano’s “I Gave Him a Cake’: An Interpretation of Two Italian-American Weddings.”
Immigrant Foodways

Food and foodway practices can be central when thinking about immigrants, identity, and social construction. Gabaccia’s *We Are What We Eat* remarks that “immigrants sought to maintain their familiar foodways because food initiated and maintained traditional relationships, expressed the extent of social distance between people, demonstrated status and prestige, rewarded and punished children’s behavior, and treated illness” (51). Gabaccia’s work concerns itself with the early waves of immigrants arriving in the U.S. around the turn of the 20th century—mostly Italian, Jewish, and Irish—but one can apply her sentiments avowing that immigrants maintain their foodways because of the many reasons she lists—they mark social boundaries, reward and punish behavior, show prestige, and so on—to immigrants arriving in more recent times. Food rituals, according to some, have the ability to allow people, especially immigrants, to stay in touch with their roots and “in some families, food serves as the primary conduit for learning ethnic traditions” (Meyers 110). While food may be the “primary conduit for learning ethnic traditions,” people can only hope that this method does not fade with the changing times of a society. Change is an understatement for the events many immigrants undergo while moving across lands and oceans. Immigration might better be stated as a life-altering experience as opposed to a mere change, and throughout this tumultuous period, some immigrants may use the kitchen table as an anchor and remnant of what their lives were before immigration.

For immigrants especially, food may act as a way to keep an identity and a piece of their past alive in a new setting. For instance, Margaret and Farah, two of my interviewees, both spoke to this notion during our interview sessions. During my
conversation with Margaret, she described how her grandmother taught her to cut kibbeh a certain, peculiar way. Margaret’s grandmother did not have an explanation as to why the kibbeh should be cut in this fashion and simply stressed that that was the way to cut it. Margaret, while recognizing that cutting the kibbeh this certain way is unnecessary, continues to slice the dish as her grandmother instructed because she cannot bring herself to stray from her past and how she was taught. Margaret’s example exhibits an instance where the preparation of a food may link a woman with her deceased relative while providing a link to her heritage. Farah offers another illustration of how food may act as a form of identity and link with one’s family and heritage. During an interview, Farah told the story of how she took the time to photocopy an entire cookbook belonging to her deceased grandmother because she enjoyed the very old recipes that it held. She expressed to me that these recipes and dishes—along with traditions—will disappear unless people continue to prepare, eat, and talk about them and for this reason she made the effort to get a hold of the recipes inside the cookbook.

A majority of my interviews with the women who assisted me in creating this project focused on unearthing thoughts and opinions dealing with their foodways. I placed much emphasis on obtaining information regarding items related to, but not limited to, the three main roles of food which I have outlined in the present chapter: food as a point of social contact; food as a cultural transmitter; and food as a complex form of complex identity expression. In addition to these three items, another important component seemed to emerge from my research; that is, that food may act as a memory storehouse—or cultural memory pantry as I refer to it—within immigrant communities.
What is meant by food acting as a memory pantry is that foods can hold and store memories for later use, much like a pantry holds and stores foods for later use. Food may well enable immigrants—or anyone for that matter—to bite into a food and travel back in time to their childhoods or to their favorite memories related to holidays and family functions. Certain smells and tastes facilitate in bringing ‘home’ closer because, as Diana Abu-Jaber remarks in her memoir, *The Language of Baklava*, whenever someone “comes over” they are hungry “for home, for family, for the old smells and touches and tastes” (6). Many American travelers and tourists will divulge about the comfort found when spotting the Golden Arches while abroad and tasting McDonald’s hamburgers and fries or a Snickers bar after weeks of tasting foods which may be appetizing but are just not reminiscent of home.

An excerpt from Lawrence Joseph’s, “Sand Nigger,” poignantly, and more seriously, exhibits this affective connection between food, memory, home, and immigrants:

*Lebanon is everywhere*

*in the house: in the kitchen*

*of steaming pots, leg of lamb*

*in the oven, plates of kousa,*

*hushwee rolled in cabbage,*

*dishes of olives, tomatoes, onions,*

*roasted chicken and sweets...* (243-4).

Joseph’s excerpt expressively describes the ways in which his Lebanese heritage is all around him and one of the ways he does this is by mentioning food; for Joseph and
others, food seems to offer a direct link back to their homes or their parents’ homes which they’ve heard much about. Additionally, Joseph chooses not to deliver the poem in long, connected sentences which possibly reflects his sense of fracture and detachment with Lebanon and his Lebanese heritage.

Food, I hope, can now be better seen as having the capability to perform multiple functions within humans’ lives. While crucial for all groups, immigrant communities might hold these functions to a higher esteem and use them in different ways compared to more mainstream populations.

In this chapter, I have offered details about what foodways mean to this project and the many roles which they can play in different people’s lives while predominantly concentrating on four large spheres where foodways might be most important. Additionally, a review of the literature and theoretical approaches to food allows for the work within this project to be better located within previous scholarship. Now I will turn the attention to the ethnographic data collected by way of interviews so as to see how it speaks to those four main functions outlined above.
Chapter 3: Having Your Kosharee and Eating it Too--

Functions of the Egyptian Association and the Role of Food

Foodways are critical for all groups of people because of the nourishment they provide human bodies. While for some, foodways may appear to be only a means for obtaining the necessary nutrients, others may see foodways as symbols for numerous items and acting as sites of identity activity. This symbolic nature and identity activity can be particularly vital for immigrant groups. In his book *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature*, Wenying Xu articulates to readers that “[f]oodways nevertheless continue to be the bloodline that keeps alive ethnic identity and the bittersweet longing for home” (101). More simply, foodways for many immigrants can be paramount to their well-being and happiness in their new homes, and this is why “immigrants sought [and still seek] to maintain their familiar foodways” (Gabaccia 51). It seems astonishing that over time staple foods like pastas, rice, and meats have come to symbolize and epitomize such profound parts of humans’ lives. Why is this?

A plethora of texts make mention of the value and importance of foodways, yet the present endeavor still offers readers a unique look into how a few members of a local immigrant community utilize their foodways to most benefit them. The pages within this chapter will first describe a food gathering event hosted by the Egyptian Association

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21 Kosharee is a national dish of Egypt.
in Columbus, Ohio. The event will be set in context by identifying the actors involved in this particular event—those being myself, young adult women, and elder adults. Next, I will present the data I harvested from the follow-up interviews with respondents which will allow the thoughts and opinions of said groups to be seen in terms of what they articulated concerning foodways and the stated objectives of the Egyptian Association. Following this, I will reconcile the two levels of data, the actual event I witnessed and the commentaries contained in the interviews, in order to see if what the respondents say about the Association actually occurs at their events; to, in fact, see if their thoughts and goals are blossoming and coming into fruition.

**The Food Gathering**

Because of my interest in foodways and the nature of this research project, a friend and informant, Nadya\(^{22}\), asked me to attend an event being held by the Egyptian Association of Columbus which became an official organization in 2007 under the leadership of her father. The event I attended was a food gathering held in a Columbus, Ohio club house on Saturday, January 17\(^{th}\), 2009. The Egyptian Association attempts to hold events like the one I attended about once a month. I met Nadya and her sister, Amina, at their family’s Columbus residence, and after being joined by another young woman, Nora\(^{23}\), we made our way to the event. Nadya and Nora are both in their early twenties and are current and graduated students of The Ohio State University respectively and Nadya’s sister, Amina, is a high school sophomore. After arriving at the club house

\(^{22}\) All names in this text have been changed to pseudonyms.

\(^{23}\) Nora is an Iranian-American who attended high school with Nadya and is a recent graduate of The Ohio State University.
for the event, Saha, a friend of Nadya and Nora and who is also a twenty-something Ohio State student, met us at the entrance. Saha arrived with her mother, a member of the Egyptian Association, previous to us.

When the young women and I first arrived at the club house, we walked in, hung up our coats, and greeted the elder adult women in attendance. I hesitated to greet the women because I knew none of them, and was not outright introduced. I also hesitated because the young women I arrived with greeted the elder women in Arabic. However, I did end up greeting one woman, Saha’s mother. This was not the first time that the young women had used Arabic to communicate. While getting ready at their house, Nadya and her sister used Arabic here and there to communicate with each other and often times it would be an Arabic word mixed in with other English words or vice versa. Additionally, after leaving the food gathering and going to Nadya’s house with the other young women, they often spoke using Arabic because we were talking about music videos and other contemporary items. At a point during the evening, one of the young women said something similar to this, “Okay, no more Arabeeya. Only English”—most likely because this person realized that Nora and I did not fully understand the conversations being had. These observations show that Arabic still acts as a main mode of communication for the young women in question; or more correctly, it is at least a

24 Women in this community usually—almost always—greet each other with a hug and cheek kisses—from my observations, three, alternating right and left cheeks, is the protocol. At a later interview with Nadya’s mother, she told me as soon as she greeted me at the door that this was their way of greeting each other.

25 Although Nora is Iranian-American and Arabic is not an official language of Iran, Nora knows common greetings and phrases in Arabic such as ‘salaam alaikum’ and ‘wa alaikum as-salaam’.

26 When speaking Arabic, the word ‘Arabic’ is pronounced ‘Arabeeya’.
main mode when they are conversing with other Arabic speakers. Furthermore, a majority of the older attendees at the food gathering spoke Arabic as well. Thus it seems that the Arabic language is still used by some members of the Egyptian community in Columbus, Ohio, particularly when the community gathers together.

The young women, upon entering the club house, made an obvious entrance and noticeably greeted the elder women. However, the young women I arrived with did not greet the men present in the hall. The men stayed in their seats where they had been seated prior to our arrival, unlike most of the women who got out of their seats to greet us. As I walked diffidently into the club house, I noticed that the women and men sat on different sides of the room. The men sat in chairs near a chimney at the far side of the hall while the women sat around a table nearer the entrance. Small children—boys and girls—ran around going from the men’s to women’s sides while playing together. There were about two dozen people in attendance—including six small children and the young adults I arrived with and Saha. Men and women ranging from ages of about mid thirties to about late fifties or early sixties comprised the rest of the attendees. The ratio of men and women was nearly equal.

Nadya, Amina, Saha, Nora, and I all sat at the same table. Our table was on the women’s side of the room but was not neighboring the women’s table per se; it was set off on its own. In addition to the five of us, our table also sat three small children—Nadya’s six year old brother, Ali, being one of them. Because of comments made

27 In her follow up interview, Nadya’s mother, Samar, commented about the seating arrangements. She stated that some of the members of the Association are very conservative and prefer it this way. Thus, when I asked Samar what the women and men talk about at the gatherings, she was only able to account for what the women discuss because she never sits in on the men’s conversations. I had to personally ask Ahmed, Nadya’s father, what the men converse about.
throughout my time with the young women, I believe that the spatial isolation between us and the elder women resulted from the generation gap between our groups as opposed to our arriving late. The young women often referred to the event as an event for “adults” and for “parents” and so it makes sense that they would want to separate themselves from “the old people.” While room could have been made at the table where the other women sat—or at least chairs could have been pulled up close to the vicinity—the young adult women chose to sit off on their own. Due to the young women referring to the event in phrases which suggest that they viewed it as boring and for “old people” and because they left the gathering as soon as they finished eating, I believe that the young women chose to sit in such a fashion because this seemingly was not the type of event that they enjoyed participating in.

After a few minutes of sitting and chatting, we realized that it was time for prayer\textsuperscript{28}. All of the men got out of their seats and made their way to the entrance of the club house to pray while only a few of the women stood to find a spot elsewhere\textsuperscript{29}. Once the praying was over, the elder women informed us (the young women) that the women were to eat first, along with the young children. We all made our way to the buffet table where specific attendees had laid out about eight to ten different homemade dishes for all to enjoy. We ate off of paper plates and plastic utensils and drank from Styrofoam cups. There was pop to drink and someone brewed black tea after we all had made our rounds at the buffet table because it is an Egyptian practice. However, the young women and I

\textsuperscript{28} Practicing Muslims are to pray five times a day: pre-dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, evening.

\textsuperscript{29} During follow-up interviews, I did not inquire more about this fact and so I am unsure as to why this was or if there is even a reason.
drank tea once we arrived back at Nadya’s house. Nadya explained that she loves and needs tea after her meals but did not want to sit and drink it at the gathering because she prefers a more comfortable setting. The older women finished their food more slowly than the younger women I was with even though we had both served ourselves at the buffet table at the same time. The young women and I finished our plates, looked around, and realized that no one else had finished yet. Because of this, we ate the desserts (store-bought sugar cookies and store-bought cake) prior to the others finishing their main courses. Nadya’s mother, at a later interview, informed me that it is often the case that she only gets to visit and talk with the women at the gathering during the few hours spent there; outside of the gatherings, busy lives thwart communication and visiting between the elder adult women. In contrast, the young women I sat with attend school together and talk on a more regular basis. Thus, it is likely that the elder women had more to catch up on and talked more with each other while eating—as well as caring for young children—compared to the younger women.

The Association serves their food buffet-style with each person serving her or his own food. Attendees at the gathering prepare the foods in a potluck manner with each bringing different dishes. Nadya’s parents, previous to the gathering, phone specific families to ask if they will bring certain dishes, and these specified people placed their prepared dishes on the buffet table upon arriving at the club house. The two follow-up interviews with Nadya and her parents revealed that Samar and Ahmed, Nadya’s parents, contact families prior to the date of the gathering in order to see what foods families are
planning to bring so that desserts, for instance, are not the only thing present\textsuperscript{30}. Nadya’s mother is usually the one who contacts the families to see what type of dish they will bring and the quantity they are planning on preparing. Nadya’s parents reported that the foods served at the gatherings are almost always Egyptian dishes.\textsuperscript{31} During a follow up interview, Nadya’s parents told me that all of the foods present at the food gathering I had attended were Egyptian except for the desserts, which were store-bought cake and store-bought sugar cookies. The homemade dishes at the January 17\textsuperscript{th} event included two or three variations of rice; two types of, what I would call, meatballs; a dish with ground meat (beef or lamb) and mashed potatoes in a white sauce; an Egyptian national dish called kosharee\textsuperscript{32} which can contain various amounts and combinations of lentils, rice, chickpeas, and macaroni, among other ingredients; and a dish called “macaroné béchamel” (macaroni with a béchamel sauce)\textsuperscript{33}. Nadya’s mother is known for her macaroné béchamel and everyone at the gatherings expects her to bring this dish. Neither Nadya nor her parents had more specific names for most of the dishes served except for the kosharee and the macaroné béchamel.

While making observations at the gathering, I first assumed that the foods served were perhaps ones considered “special” and “elaborate” and that the women prepared

\textsuperscript{30} Ahmed and Samar relayed that this did happen at a previous gathering but Samar had luckily prepared a large enough quantity of a covered dish that it turned out alright in the end.

\textsuperscript{31} However, I was told that that the group has served pizza and other ‘junk foods’ before so as to cater to the small children in attendance who are the future of the group.

\textsuperscript{32} Or spelled, ‘koushari’.

\textsuperscript{33} The interview with Nadya’s parents, Ahmed and Samar, revealed that the time of year often dictates what dishes are prepared. This is especially true for the gatherings taking place near Eid and Ramadan because traditional holiday foods are prepared during these times.
these dishes specifically for the gathering to underline and emphasize Egyptian cuisine and identity. I imagined that most of the women did not prepare these dishes regularly at home, possibly because they were more complicated than other meals and convenience foods, or because the women cooked many American foods in their homes. I formulated this assumption because of experiences I have had with special occasions and gatherings within my own family. There are certain foods which my mother makes which are usually accurate in indicating that a special event is occurring. For instance, if I see her making dessert pizza or this great apple-cashew salad, then I usually ask, “What’s that for?” because within our family those foods denote an event that is more than just our evening meal. In this manner, I imagined that the food gathering hosted by the Egyptian Association would signify a time for women to prepare “special” foods which are more laborious or significant than “everyday” foods. However, the follow-up interviews with Nadya and her parents proved this assumption wrong. Samar, Nadya’s mother, let me know just the opposite. She divulged that the food gatherings, while still offering Egyptian foods, allow the women to get rest from everyday cooking and, oftentimes, the women bring easy to prepare dishes instead of more complicated ones such as grape leaves\(^{34}\). Samar mentioned this as one of the reasons why she has to phone each family; because if she does not phone members of the Association, then each family would bring the easiest dish possible. Nonetheless, Nadya’s parents made it clear that the dishes eaten at the gatherings are foods which they recognize as Egyptian and eat on a regular basis.

Of course there are variations within families about how to prepare certain dishes and

\(^{34}\) However, I was fortunate enough to taste Samar’s delicious grape leaves, among other foods, when she generously prepared a meal for me when I visited her house for the interview.
what goes in them, just as in any homemade dish. But, the foods are still familiar and identifiable, even if prepared slightly differently.

After finishing our desserts, the young women and I spent a few more minutes chatting and then decided to leave and return to Nadya’s house to relax, drink tea, and converse in a more comfortable setting. In full, the young women and I probably spent roughly forty-five minutes at the club house for the gathering. Although I spent a short amount of time at the actual food gathering, I learned a great deal about the Egyptian Association, its purposes, and opinions about it by way of two separate follow-up interviews; after the food gathering I met once with Nadya by herself and once with Nadya’s parents who are active members in the Association. Both interviews—Nadya’s and her parents’—facilitated in setting the event into better context within Nadya’s family’s immigrant experience, thus allowing for a better understanding of the group.

**The Event in Context**

The food gathering which I attended can be seen as having three sets of actors or participants. These actors include: 1) The young adult women (Nadya, more specifically) whom I attended the event with and who, from speaking with them, may not be very interested in the Association or the food gatherings; 2) The elder adults (Nadya’s parents, more specifically) whom one might describe as being very invested and interested in the food gatherings and the Association itself; and 3) Myself, an outside observer who is new

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For example, at the food gathering, Saha made the comment that the kosharee had onions in it and she does not like onions in her kosharee; while eating the kosharee, she picked out the onions as best she could. In addition, Nadya informed me during our follow-up interview that her family usually arranges the kosharee’s ingredients slightly differently so as to best suit their tastes.
to the group and the setting and is not a member of the Egyptian American—or even Arab American—community.

The main social events hosted by the Egyptian Association of Columbus are the food gatherings just described which have multiple families bringing in various homemade dishes for everyone to eat and enjoy while socializing and catching up with one another. The Association’s events center on families bringing in food, and if the gatherings are main events for the Association, then foodways would seem to designate or act as an important social role. But, what do the actors in the event see as the food’s function?

Food’s Role

Briefly above I listed the foods present at the gathering and one must ask what role these foods hold for the three sets of actors involved in the event. First, I will examine the value and function of the foods from the young adult point of view, followed by the elder adults’ point of view. I will intersperse the outsider perspective—my perspective—throughout the chapter and summarize it in the conclusion as a type of comparative analysis between the commentaries by the interviewees and the actions I witnessed at the food gathering.

Embracing Food, Embracing Culture: Nadya’s Interview

What do the foods present at the gatherings mean to Nadya? When asked what the foods and the gatherings mean to her and her family, Nadya remarked that:
It’s a way to not necessarily remember the culture, but embrace it more because either way, we’ve grown up here. As second generation, my sister and I and my brother have grown up in the American sense. You know we—there are things that when we, especially when I study poli-sci or—and I’m like, “Oh my god, that’s such an American mindset!” But you’re like, “Oh, I kinda have the same thing. It’s kinda me too.” It’s a way not to forget. Like, we don’t eat the traditional American food as much unless we go out. We went out for my mom’s birthday and then we went to “The Olive Garden” and whatever. That’s kind of more the dinner, but when we cook in the Egyptian sense, it’s kinda like, like you remember your culture. And even like my dad brought something from the Arab store yesterday that I tried and I was like, “Oh my god, it tastes so much better in Egypt.” Like, “No, I don’t wanna eat it here!” You know what I mean? But you remember how it was and how it tasted and where you were, and you know what I mean? [You remember] what you said about it the first time. Like everything you remember in Egypt just from tasting it here.

NR: Even though it tastes a little different?

Nadya: Yeah… when you taste things here, it reminds you of the stuff back home even though it tastes a bit different.

Nadya’s sentiments suggest that she recognizes that the foods eaten at the gatherings allow her to embrace her culture, and they mean more to her and her family than mere sustenance. Nadya realizes that she and her siblings are not growing up in

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36 Nadya immigrated to the United States when she was around 10 years old and began the fourth grade in Kentucky, near the Cincinnati, Ohio border.

37 For the purpose of this essay, ellipses denote an intentional omission of words or phrases by the author. They do not indicate hesitations or pauses in speech.
Egypt as their mother and father did, and they oftentimes find themselves engendering an *American mind set*\(^{38}\). As a result, Nadya may have begun to view foodways as a link between herself and her heritage. However, while Nadya might view foodways as a pipeline to her heritage, she may not always be fully satiated by the foods cooked in the U.S. Her interview reveals that the foods prepared in America may not always quench the cultural hunger she has—because some foods taste differently than they did in Egypt—and thus she says *I don’t wanna eat it here!* In spite of this, Nadya still remarks that foods continue to remind a person of their home even if they taste a bit differently. One might conjecture that if still in Egypt, Nadya’s family’s foodways may not seem as salient to her because they would be ever-present and ubiquitous. But, because immigration separated Nadya and her siblings from Egypt, their birthplace and the place where their parents grew up, they may eventually learn to cling to the foodways even stronger than if still there so as to stay better connected while apart.

An essay by Yvonne and William Lockwood entitled “Continuity and Adaptation in Arab American Foodways” from the anthology *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* echoes this sentiment: “‘We eat these old dishes more in America than we did at home—lentils, bulghur, wheat berries, barley. [They] bring memories. When you are poor, you want what you can’t afford. When you can afford [what you had wanted], you want those dishes you ate when you were poor’” (535). These lines help to demonstrate that it is often the case that reflection, awareness, and appreciation of cultural traditions and practices—including foodways—may occur more readily once

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\(^{38}\) Words italicized such as these indicate that they are part of an interview transcript from an interview conducted by me. Quotation marks are not used so as to better integrate the text with the words of the interviewees.
removed from these environments or when that environment is in crisis. In short, you do not realize just how much you love the street vendor on the corner or the homemade dish your grandmother makes for you until you move across an ocean and cannot get those tastes anymore.

This short section of the interview also suggests that food may be a sort of cultural repository which can help evoke memories of people, places, and foods from before emigration because it stores these memories in the mind’s pantry for later use. In an earlier part of the conversation, Nadya explains that most of the foods at the gatherings are Middle Eastern cuisines and especially Egyptian dishes. She says this is because many of the members who attend the gatherings are single people conducting research and gaining an education at OSU and are therefore cooking for themselves. They want to see the Egyptian foods which they consumed at home. These remarks illustrate the sensory link that food creates between people and memory. The essay by Jeffrey Ghannam, “Hope, Figs, and a Place Called Home,” eloquently demonstrates this sensory link. The essay explains that year after year Ghannam’s mother and father plant fig and lemon trees in their Michigan yard even though year after year the “…trees…ultimately succumb to the northern climate” (463). He says that this persistence is because his family is determined to evoke the parts of their lives that they left in Ramallah and Palestine. Stories like this may remind readers that food can be a way for immigrants to bring ‘home’ closer to their physical bodies when distance is between the two. Even though immigrants are not physically ‘home’, food might provide a way for them to mentally return to the places they grew up in and still love. Essays such as Ghannam’s help inform this project because they illustrate that food, for some people, is not only a
means of sustenance, but it is also, among other things, a reminder of their childhoods, and their homes, and their past identities.

This morsel from Nadya’s conversation also helps disprove my first conjecture of thinking that it might be plausible that the foods present at the buffet are ones prepared specifically for the gathering because they are Egyptian dishes. I believed that it might be assumed that the families at the gatherings make these specific dishes because at home they are usually making more “American” style cuisines. Nadya blatantly overturns this assumption in saying that her family does not eat the traditional American food as much unless they are dining out for special occasions, like birthdays. Therefore, the women may not only showcase their prepared dishes at the gathering so as to stress an ancestral link to Egypt and the Middle East, as some might think, but the foods may also reflect day-to-day fare for many of the people present; these Egyptian dishes may, in fact, be mainstays of their daily diets.

For Nadya, the food is a way not to forget one’s heritage and memories of past lives, and it is also a way to bring family together in the present:

NR: Does the food still have the same meaning here as it did there [Egypt]? Is it still just as important?

Nadya: No, I really think it does [stay the same]. Like…not every single day but it’s kinda like a way a family gets together in a sense. Like, I lived at my aunt’s house for a majority of my time over there, and her son’s married and blah, blah, blah. They have kids…But when we’re invited for dinner or something, he was there with his wife and kids and it’s kinda like a way to get us all together. But, once we ate, this person wants to
sleep, this person wants to watch TV, this person is on the computer...And then
sometimes when the tea is ready, we get all back together with the tea and the dessert.

NR:  Is it the same here?

Nadya:  Yeah, I mean here it’s more difficult [to get family together] especially me, you
know? I’ve been on campus all day and night classes. But it’s interesting because now
it’s kinda like a breakfast thing with us. Like, with my family at least. I mean we
sometimes do dinner, but sometimes I don’t get home till nine [p.m.]. Like, I have work
and this. My dad goes to work out. It’s kinda like, in that sense, that Saturdays become
the breakfasts.

Nadya indicates that for her and her family the food is one way to bring them all together
despite their hectic schedules. In this way, the food gathering, like family dinners (or
breakfasts), can bring friends and family together. Although Nadya’s family cannot
always enjoy an evening meal together, they have adapted to their new schedules in order
to create a time for a family meal; this time happens to be on Saturday mornings instead
of weekday evenings. Some families, Nadya’s included, have changed meal patterns to
better suit children and teenagers’ busy schedules and food may have a unique
relationship with these age groups.

For the youth, tasty food would seem to be a major incentive to attend the food
gatherings hosted by the Egyptian Association. When interviewing Nadya’s parents at
their home in Columbus, Amina, Nadya’s sister, poked her head into the living room
where we were conversing. When asked why she attends the gatherings on occasion, she
immediately responded, For the food! It is well known that organizations and events
commonly use food as an enticement for adolescents and young adults to attend extra-
curricular functions, and it seems to be the case for the Egyptian Association events as well. Why does the food induce the young adults to attend these events, and why is it so crucial? Is it simply because it tastes delicious and their growing bodies need extra nourishment, or is there something more to it?

Nadya contends that food is a huge aspect of culture. *I think it’s—you can’t study culture without, you know, studying some part of the food. It’s a huge part….I think you can’t miss culture without the food. If you’ve noticed “Taste of OSU”*, most organizations, if not all, have something that relates to food to represent their country, represent their mission… [I]t’s a type of, I guess, [way of] differentiating your culture from others. Nadya bolsters this idea of using food to differentiate cultures when she discussed with me the ways in which eating is a bit different in Egypt compared to eating in the United States. She mentioned that, in Egypt, the culture seems to prompt people to eat more frequently than in the United States. Nadya describes multiple meals which Egyptians often partake in, such as mid-morning breakfasts, long lunches, and late night meals. In the United States however, some of the population finds that this is changing and Nadya states, *I eat breakfast and I could go on the entire day and eat at nine [pm].* This demonstrates a slight difference between the Egyptian society she grew up with and the American one she lives in now. Also, Egyptians, unlike many other Arabs, prefer to drink black tea as opposed to the strong coffees well liked throughout the Arab world.

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39 “Taste of OSU” is an event held annually at The Ohio State University. The Office of International Affairs at OSU describes “Taste of OSU” as “An evening of international food, desserts and cultural performances for the campus community.” (http://oia.osu.edu).

40 This may also relate to the discussion on cultural hegemony that was mentioned in chapter two.
Thus, food is a way of differentiating your culture from others, just as Nadya suggests during the interview.

While Nadya’s sentiments and attitudes toward her family’s foodways may not be true for all of the young adult women who attended the food gathering, it is nonetheless likely that they share some of her perspectives. It would then seem that food’s role, for this group of participants, might permit young adults, who are growing up in the United States but have strong ties to other places, to embrace and remember where they and their families came from. These one-and-a-half and second generation immigrants can evoke their childhood memories or their parents’ homelands by tasting particular foods at the gatherings held by the Egyptian Association and other similar groups or by purchasing certain products from the ethnic grocery stores in their places of residence. Nadya also intimates that foods may act as a channel for bringing family members together under one roof, even if just for fifteen minutes to eat a meal. Additionally, it can be incentive for young people to attend events like the food gathering and interact with elders of their community. On top of this, Nadya’s remarks indicate that she views foodways as a marker of distinction for cultural communities. With all of this said, how do the outlooks and opinions Nadya expresses about food compare with her parents’ who have a different stake in the Egyptian Association as well as in keeping cultural practices alive?

Embracing Food, Embracing Culture?: Samar and Ahmed’s Interview

Members of the Association voted to have Nadya’s father, Ahmed, become the new president for their group in 2007, and subsequent to this, they formalized the

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41 The term was coined by Ruben Rumbaut to describe children who were not born in the United States but immigrated there before reaching adulthood—those who immigrated between the ages of 6 to 13 constitute this group and Nadya and her sister can be considered a part of this cohort. See Zhou 1997.
Association by creating a bank account and registering with the city council. My original project planned to focus only on the young adult perspective in regard to foodways, but the words and actions of this younger age group as compared to the elder adults modified this. Following my meeting with Nadya to discuss the Egyptian Association and the food gathering that we attended, it seemed useful to also meet with her parents who are active members in the Association. As president of the newly established group, I believed that Ahmed would hold the group in high esteem and therefore would offer great insight into the role of food for the group. Hence, I sought to elicit both he and his wife’s thoughts on the matter.

The interview with Nadya highlights food and its function within the group; while on the other hand, her parents’ interview did not mention food as explicitly or as often. Rather, their conversation tended to concentrate on the larger purposes of the Association with food being a mere product and part of the events. This could be the result of Ahmed and Samar having different investments in our interview; perhaps they saw the interview as an opportunity to discuss the Association’s purposes and goals. While I did seek to uncover the purposes and goals of the group during our interview, I also wanted to hear Samar and Ahmed’s thoughts on the function of food within the gatherings hosted by the group. Despite the fact that much of the interview with Samar and Ahmed discussed the purposes of the Egyptian Association—which is important in itself—I did glean some details concerning food’s function nonetheless:

NR: Do you think the food at the gatherings is important to have? Does it make you remember Egypt…or memories?

Ahmed: Um, not really. But I do think the food attracts people to come.
NR: *Amina, for example?*(Laughing)

Ahmed: *You see what the first reaction was, “Food!” And at the same time, when we get people [who] didn’t have family anymore that helps them—I lived here for one year—for one year without family. I had been invited by several Egyptian families just to remind me that I came out of Egyptian blood. It helps, but it’s not necessary. But it definitely helps.*

These statements exemplify Samar and Ahmed’s most direct thoughts concerning the function of food within the Association; those thoughts being that food attracts participants. The other moments when they mentioned food throughout our discussion was during these times: in their explanation of how the members come to know which dishes to bring to the events; when describing the dishes actually present at the time of my attending the gathering; when describing what special foods community members prepare during holidays such as Eid and Ramadan; and the ways in which Samar learned to cook over the years. In effect, Samar and Ahmed’s interview centers on the functions of the Association as opposed to the food. Thus, it is fitting to inspect and contemplate the Association’s purposes according to the first two sets of actors—Nadya (young adults) and Ahmed and Samar (elder adults).

**The Egyptian Association’s Purpose**

According to Ahmed, an idea for the creation of a group like the Egyptian Association in Columbus first materialized around 2002 among Egyptians affiliated with The Ohio State University. The group became an official organization in 2007. The idea

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42 She and Ahmed informed me, by way of a funny family anecdote, that her cooking did not originally taste as delicious as it does at this time. It took Samar many years to become the cook she is today.
for the Association emerged when the attendees of a community meeting between members of the Egyptian community already here in Columbus realized that they would like to formalize their social activities and begin doing more things together, as a whole. To start, the group limited membership to Ohio State University’s students, faculty, and staff only. A large majority of these original members attended Ohio State in order to conduct research, complete post-doctorate fellowships, and earn degrees. While the Egyptian government had been paying for many of these members’ research, most of the scholarships, fellowships, and grants provided to them only lasted limited amounts of time—usually two to four years. In conjunction with this and the fact that the Association was growing and planning more activities, these members were unable to manage it on their own. Due to this, they widened their doors and extended membership to Egyptians not affiliated with The Ohio State University in hopes of bringing in members who could stay with the group for longer than two to four years. This is how Ahmed and Samar became members. Neither Ahmed nor Samar is affiliated with The Ohio State University—except that their daughter, Nadya, is a registered student—but, while attending the local mosque, initial members in the group asked Samar and Ahmed to join.

According to Ahmed, the Association has about forty to fifty families listed as members. However, during the winter months it is common to only see about ten families participating in the gatherings. The members consist of entire families who have migrated to the United States for education or other purposes as well as many single

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43 Exact numbers were not given in regard to membership. Ahmed and Samar did make it clear that member activity is much higher during the spring and summer months as opposed to winter months when the weather is colder and not as nice to go out in.
people who are living in the U.S. without other family members. Participants in the Association represent all areas of Egypt and one locale is not represented more than another. The forty or so families involved with the Egyptian Association try to schedule events, such as the food gathering I attended, about once a month. However, this does not always occur, but it is the goal. What does the Association hope to accomplish through these monthly events, and why have as many as forty families taken part in these group activities? What do the people involved see as the purpose and goal of the group, and how do they beget these goals? How is the group perceived in the eyes of Nadya and other young adults as compared to Ahmed and Samar? I addressed these types of questions throughout the two follow-up interviews: one interview with Nadya and one interview with Samar and Ahmed.

New Immigrants, Old People: Nadya’s Interview

NR: What would you say the group’s purpose is?

Nadya: I guess it’s a way to, um, not necessarily have an in-group, but, you know…The Egyptian culture, it’s very different from the Arab culture. I mean some people—to the point—I mean I still argue with one of my friends that they don’t even consider it in a sense, Arab…They think of Arab countries more of the Gulf and Jordan and they don’t think of Egypt as one of them. And even—and culture wise it’s different and like dialect is absolutely different, you know? So, and the media, the TV shows and the series [are different]. The movies especially—a majority of them are Egyptian…So, it’s kind of a way to, I guess, collect us together at certain points where…it could be a religious holiday, could be a soccer game, the African cup that we won. Anything like that.

NR: So does that kind of differentiate you from other Arab immigrants?
Nadya: I guess...Sometimes when new immigrants come they are kind of like, in a sense, homesick, and they want to meet someone who’s closer to their culture and understands—the TV shows, “Hey, did you watch this?” type thing. In a sense, other nationalities would know about it and hear about it, but not necessarily follow up with it.

NR: So it kind of helps someone new coming in because they know that you guys know the same cities or the same restaurants?

Nadya: Yeah

NR: Do you think they use the group for that purpose a lot?

Nadya: I’m pretty sure that happened even before the organization actually was formalized because I know awhile back there was an Egyptian family that came over here and my dad kind of took charge of it. And, “Here’s what you do.” “Where to get a car,” you know, kind of like showed them around in a sense. But that was before the organization was planned. It was just kind of there. And it’s interesting to see that, I don’t know why, but it’s kinda my family—whether the women or men—it’s kinda like, “Here, go to Samar, go to Ahmed!” “They’re the people that’ll show you around,” type thing. I’ve noticed that I’ve officially gotten the trait too because most of the people that my friends know, they know through me.

NR: Do you think that helps new immigrants coming?

Nadya: I think it does. My dad was absolutely—he still laughs at little things he did that he had no idea what was going on when he first came here. So, it helps to find where the best places are. “Where are the mosques?” “Where are the schools?” Especially when you’re coming with a family—or even if you’re single. “Where do I get an apartment?” “Where do I look for a job?” Anything like that, it’s kind of crucial in a sense. You try
and make it as easy as possible. My dad remembers how it was for him and it wasn’t up until he met that Cincinnati group[^44]—we still meet up with them….I think it helps. That should be one of the—I’m pretty sure it is one of the main goals [of the Association].

Nadya provides insight into her opinions on the functions and purposes of the Egyptian Association. Her interview suggests that the Association has two main roles: It creates a space where Egyptians can surround themselves with others like them, especially because Egyptians, for some, are different than most Arabs—they drink tea instead of coffee, they have their own dialect and media, and they reside on the African continent; And, the group also works to ease and remedy the difficulties a newly arrived Egyptian might face by helping her or him find amenities which they will need, as well as providing food that is reminiscent of home. Nadya goes on to describe the Association as such:

It’s an organization, as you can tell when you went, that’s more for an adult, type thing. Like usually I don’t even go because I’m like, “Who am I gonna hang out with?” There’s like, you know, old people talking with old people.

NR: Do people your parents’ age attend or do young people your age?

Nadya: I would say, “Not really.” It’s a majority of like single individuals that are trying to finally get a taste of home through food, type thing and they go. Or, married and they take their kids…I’m not sure why we [young adults] don’t [go]. I guess it’s fine

[^44]: After first arriving in the Cincinnati, Ohio area, Ahmed eventually found a group similar to the Egyptian Association of Columbus which he became a member of. Nadya informed me that, even today, her parents still visit the friends they made from that group and travel to Cincinnati on breaks, like Thanksgiving break, to visit with them.
for—for me and my friends it’s like, “They’re doing their thing, so why don’t you guys come to my house?”... It gets kind of boring when we sit there and talk about—I don’t know what they talk about. You know, “Kids” and “How they are,” and “Blah, blah, blah.” And I’m like, “Alright, I don’t need to listen to this.” That’s why I’m like, “Hey, we’ll go eat and come over to my house. We’ll watch a movie or something.”—Something more than talking about children and what their husbands did and blah, blah, blah. Like, I don’t know, “I’m just gonna go home and study.”

Nadya goes on to say that most people her age, especially males, are more apt to attend events, meetings, and gatherings hosted by student groups such as the Muslim Student Association (MSA) because this, and other associations, cater specifically to college-aged students. Ahmed and Samar recognized this fact in their interview and assert that as long as their children involve themselves in some social activity with other Egyptians or Arabs, they will be pleased because the traditions and cultural practices are still being evoked. Nadya’s parents also acknowledge that their children and other youth do not have much interest in attending the Egyptian Association’s gatherings because they are only listening to moms talking to each other. However, Ahmed and Samar do not see this as problematic because of groups like the MSA. Despite this fact, Ahmed still adds: Personally, I think the only way to keep the Egyptian culture around is to keep the young kids joining the parents when we have these kinds of gatherings because there’s some culture behavior you’ll never see in the families. So, you can see the reaction between the two different families and the other family as well. So, we [the varying generations] can learn the culture and grow up in the same culture.
New Immigrants, New Networks: Samar and Ahmed’s Interview

With Nadya’s opinions on the Egyptian Association drawn out, I will now return to Samar and Ahmed’s interview to elucidate their thoughts on what they see as the purpose and function of the group. Egyptian students initiated the Egyptian Association as a student organization to help them formalize their social activities and members still seem to emphasize this social aspect today.

Ahmed: I get tons of phone calls “When you going to have the next gathering?” “What do you want me to do or bring” “Shall I cook this, shall I do that?” The most important thing is to show up and be active and do whatever needs to be done. That’s what I think. This is why we need the Association to be active because there’s a need to gather all these people for the social activities...because there is a gap in the social... In America here, business is number one in life. People do business twenty hours a day—Even if they are working eight hours, but they are [still] thinking about work. The problem with this is that they forget their social life and we forget a lot of things. Here, I think, we [should] work to live not live to work!...That’s important. The social activities is very important. It’s a very strong—powerful part of our lives we should not forget.

While it is obvious that the social aspect of the group acted as the original reason for its formation, and still persists today, other functions and purposes have likely arisen as well over the years. What other work is the Egyptian Association doing, or what would its members like for it to accomplish? Put simply, Ahmed states the answer to this inquiry as:

Basically, the goal for the association is social. The most important thing is to introduce each other and widen the network together. Knowing who’s working where and what he
does. So, with that little community you network and get wider and wider. Definitely there’s a few of them getting some support somehow. There’s a lot of things happening in this kind of way… I would like for networking.

NR: For jobs?

Ahmed: For everything. We live in a very limited community. When you have your own family—I would like to see us [the Egyptian community] form a big family. That’s the big target. It’s great to have a cousin in a bank, and you have a cousin in a court, and you have a cousin doctor…that’s great.

Ahmed seems to chiefly want the Association to supply Egyptians with a space for meeting other Egyptians within Columbus and for forming a community network. This is in concert with Nadya’s thoughts on the Association. She expressed that one of the uses of the group is to allow Egyptians to be surrounded by—or at least come in contact with—other Egyptians who have similar backgrounds and experiences. While this may be one of Ahmed’s goals which are visible from the younger adult perspective, he and his wife both see a major hurdle in this plan and they would like to remedy it. In speaking about the Egyptian community in Columbus, Samar and Ahmed had this to say:

Samar: They are big but they are not regularly going to the mosque [to be in contact with each other]. We don’t know how to be connected unless we meet them [other Egyptians] in the mall or at OSU.

NR: But they don’t look to meet each other outside of the Association?

Samar: Yes, well that’s maybe one good thing it’s doing…They are not eager to meet with other Egyptians because they [Graduate students and post-doctorates] came [for a] very limited time. They came only for two years. They came for something focused.
They want to get the PhD. They are not missing that much of their country so that’s why they aren’t looking for that [camaraderie of the Association].

Ahmed: There’s no strong communication…between them. It’s very common that you go into the grocery store and you start hearing a few Egyptian words and you don’t know who that is. It’s very common.

NR: So is that something the Association would like to try and do?

Ahmed: Exactly! The goal is to get them together. We haven’t done enough to get all this community together yet. We are trying. It’s not that easy of a task.

Samar: They feel [that] they lived here long enough to feel that they don’t need an Egyptian Association to share with. “We’re fine here.”

Ahmed: They get Americanized! (Laughs)

Samar: Some of them get married to Americans so they already have been settled, but it depends on the style of lifestyle. If you are living the social life, you want to meet people, you want to have communication with them—you will have plenty. If you don’t, you don’t want this [the Association].

Ahmed: Through the Association, I met a person who hadn’t met any Egyptian for the last eighteen years. And the first time he met [an] Egyptian in Ohio it was at the Association….He was extremely happy.

Ahmed and Samar believe that members of the Egyptian community do not communicate well enough with each other and they see this as unfavorable. For Samar and Ahmed, an ideal situation would be one in which the Egyptian community in Columbus institutes a community-wide network where people know each other better and can assist each other in a multitude of ways by utilizing the individual assets that each
Egyptian has to offer. This, they feel, is one of the items that the Egyptian Association tries to accomplish. Ahmed also has high hopes of one day extending the network created in Columbus to include all of Ohio. This may be an ambitious goal for the future, but for the present, Ahmed and Samar appreciate the fact that the Association offers a familiar face, language, religion, customs, and foods to the established population as well as to recently arrived Egyptians.

Just as Nadya mentioned, so too do her parents state that the Egyptian Association assists recently arrived Egyptians in their transition into living in the United States.

Ahmed: The Egyptian culture is very family oriented. There is people in Egypt who have been born and died in the same street. They are not going out because most of their family are in the same street. So, basically when the people in Egypt have some link to another country and being in [that] country and [saying] “I’ve never been in this country before. I have no cousin, I have no relative. Nobody knows me.”—They feel shy and this is what my feelings [were] the first few weeks of being in America. [It is good] [w]hen they feel there is some support somehow—There’s people from the same culture and religion and background [who] are available in the same town here in America. That’s definitely giving some support, some comfort—that they would still feel around.

As an aside, Samar made a remark relating to Ahmed’s thoughts on the Association helping newcomers to the U.S. which perhaps shows slight gender differences in the way some men and women receive neophytes. Speaking about women, Samar comments that the old one’s always help the new ones because she has more experience and we women talk easily to each other without any friction. But men, no.

45 At the time of the interview, all of the members of the Egyptian Association of Columbus were Muslim.
You have to wait for one to come and talk to you. But we didn’t think, we just saw someone new and talk to them directly. For her, women communicate more readily and effortlessly than do men. Regardless of which gender helps transition the newly arrived immigrants more readily, the Association is still a promising channel for this work to happen.

For Ahmed and Samar, the Association is also a means of transmitting cultural knowledges and practices, and this may be vital for one-and-a-half and second generation youth who are not growing up in the same contexts as their parents but are still being raised as if living in their homelands. Essentially, parents may expect children to know and appreciate certain customs and practices which they themselves are aware of due to being socialized in a specific society; and this society may not be the one which their children are living in anymore. Without an entire community which shares similar customs, youth may grow up not knowing the proper cultural procedures or practices that their parents know unconsciously. Samar tells a well-known family story which illustrates this notion:

My son did a mistake once. (Turns to Ahmed and says) Remember? And I never forget it. We were in the park once and he [Ali] was playing with an American boy with his dad. And they were playing and we had fun and everyone eat food. And I was thinking his dad is still sitting and it is dinner time, we all eat. So I make a plate for him and I give it to him—to his dad and for the boy and he said, “Thank you very much.” After awhile I was asking [Ali]—he didn’t understand—my son didn’t understand that this food is for everybody. He thought that this is for only us, for the [Egyptian] community. So he didn’t—he focused on the—even the food for the Egyptians. He had seen the Americans
and they are eating, so, he asked me, “Is he okay to eat?” And I say, “Yeah, why not? He’s your friend?” So this is the way we can educate each other, the younger age that they have to have friends from everywhere and we can even invite them.

Although this incident did not occur at a food gathering hosted by the Egyptian Association, it still demonstrates the fact that commensality and social community activities might aid in passing along cultural norms which youth cannot always see within a single family home. Consequently, food gatherings, like those the Association hosts, can help generate these types of settings where certain cultural practices can be performed.

When asked specifically if the Association and its gatherings help promote and sustain Egyptian practices, Ahmed replies:

*It’s good; it’s great to keep the Egyptian culture valid. But personally, what I’m trying to do in my family is to get the best of the Egyptian culture and the best of the American culture and mix these together so we can have better people. My kids are learning much more American culture in school and they are dealing with American culture every day. They are learning a little bit of the Egyptian culture because their time in the house is much less than their time in the school. So, I would like to add Egyptian culture to that.*

*It’s very important that you don’t forget your roots. It’s very important.*

Thus, Ahmed and Samar both wish to utilize the Association and other forums for passing on knowledges about their home country, while simultaneously raising their children to make the most of the setting they are in and adapt to it. For both parties, Ahmed and Samar and Nadya, the Egyptian Association’s purposes seem remarkably clear. The Egyptian Association, for Nadya and her family, lists three main items on its
agenda: create a space in which the Egyptian community of Columbus (and beyond) can socialize, network, and enjoy their compatriots; assist recently arrived Egyptians in adjusting to life in the United States by providing resources and comfort; and act as a conduit of Egyptian traditions which parents can pass on to children during the social activities it hosts.

**Researcher’s Analysis**

With the food gathering event described and the commentaries from Nadya and her parents presented, it is valuable to also look at how these two levels of data speak to each other. I base the first level of data, the description of the event, on my observations of the actions I witnessed while attending one of the Egyptian Association’s food gatherings. The second level of data, the follow-up interviews with two different sets of actors involved in the event, presents more of the emic, or insiders’, view of the event.

**Interview Recaps**

In summary, Nadya’s sentiments toward food and foodways suggest that she might see it as a way for second generation immigrants to embrace their heritage and find an appreciation for it. Being surrounded by a culture that is different than the one a person’s parents grew up in possibly engenders feelings of yearning or lack for that cultural community, and Nadya sees food as one possible way to satisfy this hunger. Nadya also implies that food may act as a memory storehouse to help her and others remember past memories. This is because food and culture, for Nadya, are linked.

Nadya states, you *can’t study culture without, you know, studying some part of the food.* It’s a huge part…I think you can’t miss culture without the food. In addition to these two major functions, Nadya acknowledges that food may work as a means of bringing family
and friends together. This is seen in the case of some of the young adults at the food gathering because their thoughts on the event told of their not enjoying the *old gatherings* because it is not what their generation does. Their only motivation for going is *For the food!* Thus, in this instance, food brought them together with their families and compatriots.

Samar and Ahmed’s interview speak about foodways primarily by reiterating the fact that food is an incentive for attendance. Ahmed replied to the question of whether or not food was important at the gatherings for remembering Egypt and memories from his time spent there with, *Um, not really. But I do think the food attracts people to come.* He recants this initial statement when he says, *And at the same time, when we get people [who] didn’t have family anymore that helps them—I lived here for one year—for one year without family. I had been invited by several Egyptian families just to remind me that I came out of Egyptian blood. It helps, but it’s not necessary. But it definitely helps.* From these statements, I would contend that food for Ahmed and Samar’s generation may not seem vital at first in terms of how they utilize it, but after more careful thought, they realize that food does in fact have some essential part in the gatherings and in the immigrant experience. Ahmed and Samar’s interview briefly touched upon food’s role and function. The other references to food’s role and functions were anecdotes about Samar learning to become a good cook over the years, the different foods prepared by families for holidays, and the ways in which the members of the Association come to bring food to the gatherings. Whereas Nadya talked more about food creating a connection between people and their past, her parents discussed more of the social aspects and purposes of the Association.
This disparity might result from the fact that Nadya’s parents spent much of their lifetimes in Egypt and are not a part of this one-and-a-half or second generation who are becoming adults while residing in the United States. Perhaps because Ahmed and Samar grew up in Egypt, unlike Nadya, they do not, as self consciously, see foodways as primarily important for being a vector for cultural transmission; perhaps Ahmed and Samar do not intentionally use foodways as a way to satiate their cultural hunger as Nadya does. Instead of focusing on food acting as a connector between immigrant and home country, Nadya’s parents focus on other agendas they see taking place by way of the Association: They concentrate on its abilities to generate sociality among Egyptians; how it can create networks and social groups amongst the community members; and the way it allows members to disseminate cultural knowledges to Arabs and non-Arabs alike. Perhaps, and very likely, food possesses multiple functions with each function working towards different investments. I must admit that my methodologies may have confounded my findings because, due to time constraints, I only interviewed each person—Nadya and her parents—once, and for each interview I came prepared with certain open-ended questions which I wished to have answered. As a result, it is possible that I focused more on food or more on the purpose of the group in the respective interviews. Or, as cited above, Ahmed and Samar may have thought that I specifically wanted to talk about the Association and they were just trying to satisfy my requests.

With a summary of the main thoughts and opinions stressed by Nadya and her parents regarding food’s role in the Association, I can now move on to recapitulate Nadya and her parents’, sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent, attitudes and thoughts on the overall purposes and goals of the Egyptian Association. Both Nadya and
her parents view the Association as a space where Egyptians can come and surround themselves with people, language, religion, and foods which they recognize and call their own. The Association’s events offer a time to be with others who have had similar experiences and share a collective memory of home. After solving the internal communication problem which Nadya’s parents spoke of, Ahmed hopes the Association will create a large community network between Egyptians in Columbus and throughout Ohio so as to prompt feelings of security, familiarity, and home. Furthermore, both parties affirmed and agreed that the Association is a mechanism for improving the transition process involved in leaving one’s home in order to live in a foreign place. Nadya and her parents remarked on the way the group utilizes its resources (the members) to assist in finding recently arrived Egyptians employment, housing, and everything else needed when making such a large move. These examples illustrate the overlaps found in Nadya and her parents’ outlook on the purposes of the Egyptian Association but these sets of actors had more to add as well.

The Association began as a student group looking to formalize their social activities and Ahmed, the current president, still sees this as one of the main purposes of his group. Nadya, on the other hand, did not seem to mention this detail throughout her interview—possibly because for her, the group is not a mode of sociality. Ahmed believes strongly that life cannot and should not be all about work. For him, life necessitates social activities involving family and friends and he hopes to provide this through the Egyptian Association. Ahmed and Samar also made it clear that the group acts as a mode of cultural diffusion and a way for the younger generations—who are maturing and living in a different country and culture than their parents did as they grew
up—to hold on to the traditions and practices of the older generations who spent more time in Egypt. Ahmed adds to this notion by pointing out that he wants his family and children to have the best of both worlds: the Egyptian world and the American world. Because, Ahmed states, his children attend American schools and universities and live in the United States they are already immersed in the American world and thus need to have equal exposure to the Egyptian one. The Association provides a means for gaining this exposure and that is what he hopes it imparts.

Comparisons

How do these thoughts and statements speak to the actual event that occurred on January 17th? Although I only attended one of the Egyptian Association’s events, I can still make deductions and conclusions by comparing and scrutinizing how the commentaries about food and the Association align with and speak to the actual event I witnessed. However, difficulty arises when doing this exercise because many of the viewpoints and remarks elicited from Nadya, Samar, and Ahmed are visceral and emotive, making it harder for an outsider who has only recently begun researching the topic to make concrete and sound findings. The affective opinions regarding foodways which I am referring to are the ways Nadya seemed to suggest that foodways are possibly carving a path towards embracing her Egyptian heritage and generating an appreciation for her family’s culture. Additional hard-to-get-at feelings, as stated by Nadya, are the feelings that foods help recall—because food is a pantry and stores memories for later use—such as past places, people, and times and allow memories to return to the person so that they can experience delicious recollections of her or his past. Although I view these
notions as important yet hard to obtain, I can still develop informed reflections and impressions regarding them and other related items.

I did not utilize a quantitative method for measuring these intuitive feelings evoked through food, but from my observations and interviews I get the impression that by eating certain foods, a person from any generation can not only embrace her or his heritage, but actually embody it. The actual consumption of the food at events like the Egyptian Association’s food gatherings allows a person to hear, see, touch, smell, and taste the foods that her or his family has eaten throughout many generations. By doing so, older generations can tell and teach memories and family stories to the future generations. In this manner, people embrace the culture by marinating themselves in Egyptian stories, language, and culture and they embody the food of their ancestors by actually consuming it; and both of these feats can be crucial to immigrant communities for keeping alive traditions and practices. These are the types of responses elicited from the interviews which are less easy to witness and describe simply by attending one event and conducting one set of follow-up interviews.

One commentary and response that is more easily identifiable than the previous examples is Nadya’s remark that, for her, food is closely linked with culture and should not be separated. Attendees at the event demonstrated this through simple signs of recognition and familiarity. The young women I attended the event with knew how to greet elders as we walked into the club house; they knew how to act as the other men and women prayed; they were familiar with the foods served on the buffet table and the tea served afterwards; and they knew how to eat the foods prepared. While these are small details and actions which many Egyptians accept and perform unconsciously on a day-to-
day basis, an outsider may not be aware of them at all; accordingly, food may be a large, but often too casually acknowledged, part of the cultural community.

The event also substantiated both Nadya and her parents’ claims that food brings together family and friends and acts as an incentive for youth to join their parents at certain events. The young women, even those not interviewed, made it clear that these food gatherings are not something that they attend all of the time because of the nature of the event. In spite of this, they still attended the event and previous others because of the foods being served. Although the young women attended the event, their actions made obvious their uncertainty towards it: These actions were the spatial isolation of seating arrangements that the young women chose as well as their consumption rate and actual time spent at the event itself. The young women and I, as noted in the gathering’s description, sat at our own table with small children. They did not attempt to sit at the table of adult women already present at the gathering. This may demonstrate standoffishness and a slight aversion towards the event on the part of the young women. Their rate of consumption can highlight the same idea. The young women finished their plates of food long before the others in attendance did. Once the young women consumed the main course food they immediately wanted to open the boxes of cookies and cake present at the buffet so as to complete the meal cycle. With this action complete, the women did not even wait for the necessary after-meal tea to be served. Instead, they opted to return to Nadya’s house and brew their own tea so as to spend as little time at the gathering as possible. In total, our time spent at the gathering was no

46 I realize that it is possible and likely that the young women only attended this food gathering because of Nadya’s awareness of my research interests.
more than forty-five minutes. All told, these actions maintain both Nadya and her parents’ thoughts on food at the event being capable of bringing people together—even if only for a short time. It also supports their claim in noting that, for young people, the event is only a time to consume Egyptian foods and not to socialize with other elders in the community.

Most of the responses relating to the purpose and utility of the organization which I obtained from the two follow-up interviews do, in fact, coincide with actions seen at the event. Both Nadya and her parents indicate that the Association serves—or hopes to serve—the Egyptian community by providing it with the opportunity to surround themselves with other Egyptians in a social setting. In this setting, networks and connections can be created, and recently arrived—or already established—Egyptians can get a taste of home by enjoying the homemade dishes prepared by the families in attendance. Moreover, young adults and children can see and hear how their parents interact with other Egyptians in order to learn minute cultural idiosyncrasies.

While in attendance at the food gathering I cannot claim to have seen a newly arrived immigrant learning where to find the best deals on used cars from other Egyptians. Nor can I claim to have heard the words, “Ahhh, that tastes just like my mom’s macaroni béchamel!” come from the mouth of a post-doctorate Egyptian taking a bite into the dish brought by Samar. What I can say is that if these actions are to happen anywhere, the Egyptian Association’s gatherings are where this type of work will most likely be done. On the whole, from my outsider’s standpoint, it would seem that the members of the Egyptian Association are realizing their sentiments and objectives for the group during their food gatherings like the one I attended on January 17th, 2009. While
more ambitious goals are in the minds of some members, I would say that the Egyptian
Association is accomplishing what it sets out to achieve and are thus, having their
kosharee and eating it too!47

47 I want to thank Nadya, Amina, Nora, Saha, Ahmed, and Samar for taking so much time out of their
schedules to help me with this project. Without them, it clearly could not have been accomplished.
Thank you!
CHAPTER 4: FOODWAY PRACTICES AMONG ARAB AMERICAN WOMEN

The introductory chapter to this thesis introduced four broad ideas concerning the potential utility of foodways, and I maintain that these four areas can be especially central to immigrant communities. By way of semistructured interviews I worked with a select few members of the Arab American community in Columbus, Ohio to discuss foodways and what foodways mean to them. The data following from these interviews is displayed in the subsequent sections so as to draw attention to how the interview data speaks to the four arenas of food being examined in this project. Again, those points are: food as a point of and for social contact; food as a transmitter of cultural knowledges; food as a complex mode of complex identity expression; as well as the way food can act as a memory pantry.

**Food as a Point of and for Social Contact**

Food as a point of and for social contact references my conjecture that food represents a cultural item whose main ingredient is sociality. Food and sociality coupled together compose a perfect pair, and when and where one of them is found, so too is the other. Socializing regularly occurs around foods and tables, thus demonstrating that food is a site of social contact. In much the same way, foods and meals prompt the bonding and socializing of persons involved, thus making food a site for social contact. For reasons that some may hold as flawed and erroneous I like to believe that foodways act as
a site for and of social contact between human beings. I also feel that the social contact brought about by foodways can be, much of the time, stronger amongst women. While I am well aware that these statements are not always the case and do not apply to every group of people or family, I will still readily put forth this argument owing to my own life experiences, evidence in the foodway literature reviewed for the project, and the data collected during my research period.

I have always loved food and eating, and for me there is nothing better than getting together with friends and eating great food and enjoying one another’s company. Food as always been a way for my friends and I to interact, and many of my memories from high school and living with my parents take place in the kitchen. Whenever my friends would stop at my house to visit, we would always find our way to the refrigerator and “junk food” cupboard where we were sure to find leftovers or other goodies to eat. Without even thinking about it, my friends and I would immediately head to the kitchen to sit down, eat, and talk about the things high school girls talk about and in this one simple way, I can see food as a site where my friends and I connected. The kitchen also acted (and still acts) as a room where not only my friends and I bond and gather, but it is the same for my family. When I lived with my parents, my mom would arrive home from work and begin making supper. I would soon venture in to the kitchen and help her by doing things like paring the potatoes, browning the venison, or setting the table. She never asked me to assist, but it somehow felt right. The same can be said about both of my grandmothers; I have memories of helping each prepare bread dough or gingerbread cookie dough while wearing their old aprons. In short, foodways has always been—without me fully realizing—a site where I bonded with family and friends. In addition to
my life experiences helping to bolster the hypothesis of food acting as a site of and for social contact, scholars of foodways also state similar claims which lead me to deem it as an acceptable supposition.

Many of the texts cited in the literature review section of this thesis help to demonstrate this point but Janet Theophano, Lin and Theodore Humphrey, and Miriam Meyers especially highlight and support this position. Above all, Meyers’s *A Bite off Mama’s Plate* fully backs my position in that she has dedicated an entire text to communicating the connections mothers and daughters have because of food. I read Meyers’s text before fully realizing what my own thesis project would look like and I remember thinking to myself as I read her book that it was exactly what I would love to study because she demonstrates the exact feelings which I have for foodways. Due to this I set out to uncover the relationships women create through foodways in a community within a community—the Arab American community of Columbus. The following is what I found in relation to my hypothesis that food can be a site of and for social contact:

As Meyers, Theophano, Humphrey and Humphrey, and other scholars mentioned in chapter two, food is something that can draw out the social aspects of people and Farah bolsters this by saying that food is central. *It’s not just something you munch on…I think it’s-it’s. I don’t know; it’s important, very important. I don’t know how to explain, but it’s something you’re supposed to sit down and enjoy with people you like, you know? It’s not just, ‘Oh, I’m hungry; I wanna grab something [to eat]!’* Farah also

48 Farah is a first generation Egyptian immigrant who arrived in the United States around the age of 14. She is a recent graduate of The Ohio State University and at the time of writing is still living in Columbus, Ohio with her family.
adds that food is something that we gather around. It’s something that we think about—a lot. It takes a lot of time. Like usually the men come in and they’re like, “Where’s the food?” and they’re not saying it ((makes stern face and voice gets deeper)) “Where’s the food?” Like, ya know? ((Whinier, soft, child-like voice)) “Where is it? It’s important.” Like “What do you mean you didn’t cook today?” but not like in a demanding way. But it’s something that’s really important. They want it, you know? It’s important…The lifestyle is a little bit different back home. Times have changed a little bit but here because everything’s so fast and quick you don’t have time. So, people don’t tend to care about food as much as they [Egyptians in Egypt] do. Our families still do, but it’s not like back home. Back home, I don’t think my mom would just leave us one day without food (grimaces at the thought of it). These few phrases highlight a tie between food and sociality and the importance food can play within Farah’s family on a day-to-day basis and it is interesting to take note of the ways families attend to food during the different holidays of the year.

Throughout the interview period, discussions often turned to holiday food and especially the rituals of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. Interviewees spoke about holidays in an energetic and animated manner and often relayed to me the importance of food, family, and commensality during these times:

NR: Do you do anything special on holidays or is eating together important?

Farah: Yeah, yeah…Ramadan is coming up…Usually you’re supposed to eat with—we end up eating with family, and if you don’t have family [you eat] with friends…because you all are eating at the same time when the sun sets.
NR: So during Ramadan you wouldn’t just—once the sun sets—eat a plain old meal in your house?

Farah: No. you have to be together. It’s cute, you know.

NR: And it’s every night for a month?

Farah: Yeah. And usually a lot of people invite other people because they wanna get good deeds...So usually you’re with your family and your family’s with their family and another family...and we go to a relative’s in Michigan too. Yeah, it’s very family oriented. You won’t find someone being a foreigner being by themselves, that’s just sad, unless you have midterms and you’re stuck on stupid campus. Yeah, it used to be a really, really sad Ramadan when you’d find someone just sitting like that [alone] and you’d be like, “Ok, we’re all gonna go eat!” Ya know? (Whining) “I have an exam in an hour!” It’s sad. We all eat together...it’s like we’re celebrating food or something. It’s like a food celebration and that’s not how it’s supposed to be. But, we pig out...We all go all out...You eat to the point that you can’t even get up and do prayer.

While other interviews echoed the thoughts on overeating as if one would never eat again, the women divulged that family meal times are slowly becoming more of just a holiday attribute as opposed to an everyday occurrence. For example, during a different interview with Farah, I asked if it was important to eat with one’s family and she responded:

Yeah but it doesn’t happen anymore. Just in [the past] five years like it won’t happen...Some people work ‘til nine [pm], some people work ‘til later. I only sit around the dinner table when it’s Ramadan or it’s Eid or we have people coming over or we’re making a really special dish. Like something we’re all just waiting for.
NR: Was that different in Egypt?

Farah: Egypt is very um—routine is a very important thing in our lives. So we just end up—it’s not like people eat with each other all the time. I don’t know...You get used to it...Sometimes when we all sit together [in the U.S.] and they’re [the older generations] like, “Aww, we should do this every day!” And you’re like, “Mmmhmm. Ok, I’m leaving now.”

Farah seems to recognize that immigration has had an effect on family meal structures, but immigration is not the only thing which can have an effect; changing times and ways of life within the U.S. are also in the mix when speaking of the diminishing time spent at the kitchen table together as a family. One interviewee, Margaret, refers to this occurrence.

Margaret, a 56 year old women of mixed heritage—Lebanese, Scotch, German, Welsh, and Dutch—remembers when her grandmother was still alive and the Lebanese side of her family would get together for large family gatherings during holidays and other special occasions. Margaret’s grandmother was born in 1899 in Lebanon and moved to the United States in 1908. While her grandmother was still alive, Margaret fondly remembers twenty or more people crowding into her grandmother’s tiny house after pushing all of the furniture up against the walls so as to make more room. Margaret also recalls the way the women would gather in the kitchen after the meal in order to clean up and would commence animated and boisterous conversations about neighbors, mutual friends, family members, and other items that one might consider “kitchen talk.” Margaret is aware and cognizant of the fact that once her grandmother—the matriarch of the family—passed away, so too did these family gatherings, large family meals, and
“kitchen talk.” Ruefully, Margaret admits that these types of gatherings and forms of female sociality are foreign to her twenty-something daughter who will never know of these times. Although large and lively gatherings and conversations are no longer occurring within Margaret’s family—a family that is a bit more removed from their Middle Eastern homeland roots—other interviewees expressed that these sorts of events do still take place in their families, but to a lesser degree than in the past.

During a conversation with four respondents, one woman explained how her family interacts with each other through food. Rashida, a 23 year old Palestinian and Ohio State alumna living with her parents in the Columbus area, explained that her three older sisters come over often with their husbands and children to eat a meal cooked by Rashida’s mother. At these family dinners, Rashida’s mother prepares more elaborate dishes as opposed to the more everyday ones which Rashida usually consumes. Additionally, the four interviewees joined in when talking about past times in their homelands—Palestine and Egypt—when families would purchase whole lambs to prepare and would then invite extended family members over so as to not waste the prepared and prized meat. They explained that these happenings took place in their homelands and still occur, to some degree, here in the U.S. as well.

Diana, a Christian Arab who was born in Jordan but whose family moved to the United States when she was two years old, says that her mother, who was born and raised in Syria, still possesses the hospitality that many Arabs are famous for with regard to food and social gatherings.

Diana: Whenever anyone comes over like they’ll be like, “Oh, this person’s coming to visit.” “Oh, we’ll invite everyone that we know who is Arab in Columbus.” “I’ll just cook
for everyone.” That’s the holiday; whenever someone comes to visit…It’s definitely not just holidays [when many family members gather around food]. It’s whenever any occasion once a month when someone is at our house.

NR: Is it hospitality?

Diana: Definitely hospitality, but it’s also a very natural response with my mom. Like, clearly people are over, “Oh, I have to cook for them. I have to cook a meat—a chicken, meat, and fish and something else.” Like everything…It’s her way of honoring them, I guess, and she says, “Oh, no. It’s my pleasure. I enjoy this.” Even though it will consume her time and stress her out absolutely. It’s her natural way of honoring.

Despite the fact that practices like this may be becoming less common within some families, some women who spoke with me are devising their own ways of compensating for the lost social practices. Rashida and the three other women revealed that, amongst themselves, they have “cooking parties” at each other’s homes. Interestingly, the women do not always prepare and consume Middle Eastern fare at these cooking parties. Eggrolls, the women explained, are an all-time favorite and a staple at the parties. The women cook foods based on what they are in the mood for and based on what ingredients are available to them. There are even times when the women phone each other because they pine for foods from their homes and hope that the person on the other end of the phone line will commiserate and join in reminiscing about the foods once had. For example, Farah divulged to me that Saha had phoned her one night because she was craving kosharee like they both were able to eat from street vendors in Egypt; and so, one can say that the kosharee, or any food, acted as an agent which connected Farah and
Saha and gave them a reason to come together (or at least talk on the phone with one
another).

My first hypothesis stated that food is a space for and of social contact and this
hypothesis seems to be upheld by way of the instances cited. Food, either within family
dinners or friendly cooking parties, can at times act as a site of and for social contact for
the women interviewed; when socializing occurs, food is often present and when food is
present, socializing often occurs. However, I think it necessary to amend my initial
conjecture so to account for changing practices which are occurring within every
community including the Arab American community in Columbus, Ohio. While my
collected data upholds my idyllic view to a certain extent, I must realize that it is also
impractical for many families to retain such practices and thus, changes are occurring
with regard to families and their foodways. Thanks to the ever changing world in which
one lives in, the strength and continuity of cultural traditions, practices, and knowledges
are repeatedly challenged. However, these traditions and knowledges repeatedly find a
way to persist, and I believe that foodways can act as a helping hand in this feat because
they are so dynamic.

**Food as a Transmitter of Cultural Knowledges**

Foodways held an important spot in my interests outside of academia long before
I began scanning foodways literature and conducting interviews for this project. I had
already deemed it a space where much work was being done, such as the learning of
cuisines specific to one’s cultural community or family. Because of this, my mind
renders food as one of the many methods for transmitting cultural knowledges. Through
cooking and baking with my mother and grandmothers I have learned short cuts and
preparatory methods which they have used throughout the years as well as special recipes that my entire family enjoys. It is safe to assume that I am not the only person for whom this is the case and some of the interviewees for this project as well as the literature reviewed relayed similar instances.

As chapter two noted, food not only creates an aura of sociality, but it also helps related women (and men) of different generations to form a more cohesive entity and feeling of oneness. By learning how to knead bread dough or poke holes in a pizza shell like my grandmother does, I feel a stronger connection with her because I am embodying actions that she has done for years. Because food acts as a vehicle for exchanging family traditions such as these, and many others, it is unmistakably a passage by which cultural and family knowledges travel from family member to family member and from generation to generation.

An unforgettable—and slightly absurd—family knowledge that my mother has passed on to me is to never fry bacon in the nude. I realize that this example is laughable and does not exemplify an “important” piece of cultural knowledge, but it does demonstrate—in a semi-ridiculous manner—the hypothesis that I have concerning foodways; and that is the notion that foodways can facilitate in younger generations learning important (or not so important in my case) cultural values and traditions. Janet Theophano and Miriam Meyers also help to reinforce my conjecture. Theophano’s *Eat My Words* looks deeply into the ways in which foodways have been able to build passable bridges between multiple generations of women which allow them to feel connected despite the separation created by time and death. Meyers, because of the nature of her book, inevitably mentions women’s stories which depict the traversable
bridges foodways can produce. The interviews I conducted for this project also exhibit signs of these generation bridges, and accordingly they underline the capacity foodways has for acting as a tool for transmitting cultural knowledges.

Margaret’s interview touched upon this arena of foodways when she mentioned her grandmother teaching her to make kibbeh:

*When we make kibbeh, we didn’t make it in balls, we made it in a big 13 [in] x 9 [in] pan and you’d divide—after you’d make the mixture—you’d press it down. You’d pre-cut it before you bake it. And we would cut it in half; one side would be cut into diamond shape and the other side would be cut into long strips, parallel with the 13 inch side of the pan. And I would ask her [her grandmother], “Why do you cut it like that? Why don’t you make the whole thing lines or the whole thing diamonds?” She’d say, “No, no, no. This is the way we make it.”... And I could never get from her, was that a family thing, was that a village thing, was that just one person taught you to do it that way? She almost had a superstition about it—as if something horrible would happen if you didn’t cut it exactly this pattern—which makes me think she must have learned it as a very young person and didn’t really know the reason why she did [it]—but knew she had to do it that way. So, I still make it that way to this day. One time, I wanted to cut it in a different way and I realized—I went to do it—“I’m just gonna do this on purpose.” You know, all long-wise. I just couldn’t bring myself to do it. It was just so ingrained so I laughed because I thought, “I’m just like her. I don’t know the reason and still I can’t bring myself to do it.” So someday I hope some Lebanese person from Tripoli will say, “Oh, yes. This is the reason you cut it this way.”....But these traditions were that way. You didn’t know where they came from. They could be five minutes old or 5,000 years*
old. You wouldn’t know. All you knew was that that was the way you did it and you didn’t do it any other way.

Is it possible that the women (and possibly the men) in Margaret’s family have been teaching their children to cut the kibbeh in diamonds and strips for many generations without reason being given? It is very likely that one of Margaret’s ancestors began cutting the kibbeh this way—for some reason that may never be known—and her daughter saw her cut it like this throughout the years and when this daughter had her own home, she did the same thing. Margaret probably cuts her kibbeh the way she does because of the same reason that I keep my crushed red pepper in the refrigerator; I do it because my mother does it; and my mother does it because her mother does it. Unlike Margaret, I have never asked my mother or grandmother why they keep the crushed red pepper in the refrigerator but I repeatedly place it there. Likewise, it is probably the case that other women, whether knowingly or unknowingly, convey to their lineages unique family or cultural knowledges and idiosyncrasies such as cutting the kibbeh into diamonds and strips, or keeping the crushed red pepper on the refrigerator door, or even the directive to never fry bacon in the nude. Families continue these peculiarities because foodways are capable of performing as mechanisms for cultural knowledge transmission. But, foodways cannot always act in this manner, especially when women and men are spending less time in the kitchens away from the area where special knowledges can be learned.

I relish and appreciate when family customs and peculiarities are passed down from mother to daughter or grandmother to granddaughter even though I realize that this may be a very archaic and idealistic vision. At the start of this project, I thought that the
women I would be interviewing—mostly first and second generation Arab Americans—would possibly conform to my romanticized vision of daughters learning to cook from their mothers and grandmothers because they were members of an immigrant community. As stated in the introduction, orientalism has possibly aided in creating this false and romantic image of Arab Americans in my mind and for this reason—among others—I had the preconceived notion that the women I would interview would convey the ways in which they help their families prepare meals. However, while the respondents did express the importance and value of foodways, the women also stated that they may not always be found in the kitchen with their mothers and grandmothers. When I asked Farah if there is usually more than one person in the kitchen when the cooking is being done (thus I was hinting at multiple generations being present) she replied:

*Most families, um, yes. I won’t say most families. A lot of families have that, but in my family, no. I actually, I learned how to cook when I lived by myself because my mom is very dominating how you make it [the food].*

NR: Right.

Farah: *And I’m not like that but when I’m in the kitchen, I ask my mom to leave because I’m like—*

NR: *--because she makes you nervous?—*

Farah: *--because she looks in and she’s like, “That’s not how you do it! My mom said—,” talking about her mom. “But this is how—.” I’m like, “Mom, mom, mom. Stop. Stop. Get out of my kitchen.”*

Farah’s narration illustrates an instance which might suggest that cooking is not being taught from mother to daughter. However, with this Farah is not suggesting that
foodways and cooking are becoming any less important for women to know and learn. In relation to the importance of cookery knowledge and women, Farah articulates that:

...[I]t’s considered a shame um, not a shame but—it’s considered not very good for a girl to get married and she doesn’t know how to cook. She gets made fun of a lot.

NR: How does she learn?

Farah:…Um well typically you pick it up from your mom but most of us don’t; um, unless you help your mom. You just, trial and error, or your friends.

NR: Like the cooking parties you were talking about?

Farah: Yeah your friends come or you go to the house and you eat something and you’re like, “I need to have the recipe,” or they come over and teach you.

A conversation with Diana reaffirms Farah’s words on women not necessarily learning how to cook from their mothers; this can be due to a mother who is a great cook but a bad teacher, or simply because a woman has just not found the time to listen to her elders’ wisdoms. Diana conveys how her learning of cooking skills has progressed thus far, and one might notice that she acts as an example of the women who have not found the right time to learn through the informal apprenticeships which kitchens and mothers often offer:

Me specifically, I’ve always kinda just avoided the subject [of cooking], you know because my life has been a little crazy. My dad jokes with me all the time about that...He’s always like, “When you gonna learn to cook?!” or whatever. And I’m like, (laughing) “Dad, I’m not gonna learn to cook. You’ll marry me off to some Arab guy!”…But she’s [her mother] definitely made efforts to [teach me to] cook or hints at like, “Why don’t you know how to [cook] right now?”...It’s been the natural progression
of life except me...But, there are things that she would love to teach me. There are things she’s like, “Oh, well you need to know how to make this.” And I’m like, “At some point I will, but right now, what’s the point?”

I understand where Diana is coming from when she expresses the idea of being too busy to learn to cook from one’s mother or grandmothers. However, I am now realizing—that I live four hours away from my family and will soon be moving even further away—that I have learned too few recipes and skills from my grandmothers and mother due to “busy” schedules and other activities, and so it should not come as a surprise to me that other women—immigrant and long time citizen—have the same impasse.

Even though the previous statements indicate changing patterns in how families pass down preparation techniques and recipes, the women seem to still suggest that this space—the kitchen and foodways—can be vital, even if they do not always treat it as such. For instance, Farah told me the story of how her aunt was given a very old cookbook that belonged to Farah’s grandmother and Farah really wanted to have the cookbook. Because Farah’s aunt did not want to part with the cookbook, Farah took the time to photograph each page of the cookbook and then upload the pictures onto her computer and put them on a computer file. I asked Farah why this specific cookbook was so important to her and she responded:

Because it was my grandma’s, because it had stuff that people don’t make anymore.
Serious stuff from scratch. It was awesome. I love stuff that people don’t make anymore.
Like, stuff they don’t, like as my dad says, it’s stuff that even he faintly had when he was a little kid.

NR: Like older food.
Farah: *Like some desserts. I was asking my dad a few days ago about a few desserts and I was like, “I heard it on TV, what is it?” And he’s like, “Oh, god! I had that when I was a kid. That’s extinct, they don’t make it anymore.” And that stuff was in there [in the cookbook], and I wanted to make it because I wanted to be cool.*

These lines underscore the fact that Farah still holds foodway traditions dearly and views them as cultural capital. Farah understands that if not attended to properly, these valuable practices can disappear.

Farah sustains her zest for the old recipes as she emphasized that traditions need to be kept alive. *Keep ‘em going! These traditions die out! I mean we have some dishes that have stories. Umm Ali*[^49] for example—the literal translation, “The Mother of Ali.” Farah goes on to explain the story that comes with this traditional Egyptian dish and how it is served everywhere in Egypt with everyone knowing the story. For Farah, food seems to have a past history and it possesses the ability to link her to her grandmother, and others before her, who have eaten the foods within the old cookbook. Taking into account the words of Farah, Diana, Margaret, and the others, one might gather that food not only acts as a site for sociality but as a place of knowledge transmission. Moreover, the women’s words help articulate the relationship food can form with identity expression.

**Food as an Expression of Identity**

In chapter two, I asked readers to imagine that they were standing in a grocery line while peering into the carts of the persons in front and behind of them. By doing this, I hoped to show that there are occasions when one can form an opinion of others

[^49]: Umm Ali is a traditional Egyptian dish that can be compared to bread pudding.
based on the foods they eat. Another example would be in my asking this: if one person is buying fast-food at a drive-thru window and another is buying organic whole grains at a locally owned market, what thoughts, if any, does each foodstuff evoke when considering the character of the persons purchasing said items? My hopes are not to sustain whatever attitudes arise when thinking about such scenarios but to merely show that foods can factor into the identity—whether self-proclaimed or imposed by others—of persons the world over. Hasia Diner’s *Hungering for America* illustrates a noteworthy example of the way in which food might act as a mechanism for identity expression.

Diner’s text explains that America’s food abundance allowed Italian immigrants to design and carry out “…an Italian American cultural system heavily centered on food” (53). This new Italian American cultural system created a unique way of life because it mixed American foods that were not eaten by the Italians on a normal basis, like meat, with staple Italian foods like sauce, olive oil, and pasta. “Italians had come to America in part to eat more and better” because once in America they could eat familiar foods that before were only eaten by the elite (57-8).

Class differences partition any society’s foodways, but because the Italian immigrants found abundance on America’s soils, the *contadini*—land tillers who owned no land in Italy—were basically given a whole new identity after emigrating to the U.S. simply because they were eating foods once only eaten by the privileged few, and because they could now own land (Diner). Resulting from the fact that the new Italian immigrants were now “[f]easting upon dishes once the sole preserve of their social and economic superiors…” they were able “…to mold an Italian identity in America around food” (Diner 54). The *contadini* were now able to eat like *Italians* because eating foods
that only the Italian elite ate gave the immigrants a sense of well-being due to the fact that food was “…connected…to the essence of being Italian…” (Diner 49-50). Thus, Diner provides an historic example of the ways in which foodways, immigrants, and identity can all work together. With Diner’s example to corroborate and validate my conjecture that food has some sort of relationship with identity expression, I can now offer some of the examples I found within my interviews which may suggest a similar link.

Before launching into the interview data, chew on this: If a person is eating spaghetti topped with chili while another person is eating chicken fried steak and drinking sweet tea, how would someone identify each of them? Can one assume that they are both eating in a restaurant in Maine? Or, would it be more likely that the first person is eating the chili topped spaghetti in Cincinnati, Ohio while the second person is sitting somewhere in the deep South? The reason that a person can make such assumptions is because towns, regions, countries, and peoples all have foods which may be unique to only them and thus can be seen as serving as one type of identity marker. This type of identity marker—a marker through food—might also work to bond people together because some may see it as a unifying force.

Maha, a twenty-something Afghan American woman who is a student at The Ohio State University, gave me an example during one of our interviews which helps to

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50 Maha stressed to me that Afghans do not consider themselves to be Arab, and I recognize the value and importance of the noted differences between Arab and Afghan cultures. I do not mean to imply that they are one in the same. However, Maha did disclose that she feels more connected with Arab culture—compared to how other Afghans may feel—because of her family’s history. Additionally, Maha divulged that although Afghan and Arab cultures do have dissimilar practices, links and associations can be drawn, especially with regard to immigrant communities, due to them both facing similar circumstances.
demonstrate the way certain foods, like chili-topped spaghetti, can act as identifying markers:

*I know like with us, like yogurt it’s a biiig thing, yogurt. Like you’re not a real Afghan unless you eat yogurt with your food…My parents are always telling—my parents and my aunts and uncles are like, “This girl’s a real Afghan”—because I like to eat yogurt with my food.* Maha’s words shine light onto how a food can help identify a person as being a member of a certain cultural community or nationality. Maha also stated that food is a way for people to connect…It helps you form your identity. It passes on traditions. Food is really, really essential to identity—in a sense that I’ve never considered before. It’s like when you have something every single day, you don’t value it, you don’t understand. But, I think food, in terms of women being in the kitchen and working, yes, it’s a way for them to bond. Maha’s words help to draw attention to the ways food can connect women as well as the way it can operate as a channel for expressing one’s identity. Farah’s words also convey a similar link food may have with identity expression.

During one of our discussions, Farah mentioned the possible link that food and identity can be seen as having and the way a person can use foods to distinguish and identify others:

*Farah: …*\[W]\*e used to make fun of my baby brother when he wouldn’t appreciate things that we ate like [names a food but it is inaudible]…Like if he doesn’t eat that, we’re like, “What’s wrong with you? Are you not Egyptian? What’s wrong with you? You’re not an Egyptian man!” You know, things like that.*

*NR: What else is like that? [What are other] foods or qualities that make you “an Egyptian”?”*
Farah: ...Usually it’s the gross stuff—like the brains, the liver, the tongue, the—you know what I mean? Stuff like that...What else? Eggplant. We make this, Egyptians make this dish. It’s eggplant, it’s like a casserole...I don’t like it and I get made fun of. They’re like, “You’re not Egyptian!” And I’m like, “I just don’t like it!” But um there’s just some stuff. Like if you say you don’t like grape leaves, if you say you don’t eat liver... [then some might not consider you to be an Egyptian].

Farah’s words give examples of foods which Egyptians have assigned as being of a particular importance and having a certain amount of cultural capital. Grape leaves and liver, for Farah, characterize an important aspect of Egyptian identity. She gives another example of a grocer who also recognizes certain foods which may mark Egyptian identity.

Farah described to me an occasion when she was at a grocery store and was asking a clerk if they had a certain type of dried meat. He replied, “Yeah, we have it for Egyptians. They’re the only ones that ask for it.” And actually that dried meat, we had been to another store on Morse Road and we were asking for it and then the guy was like, “You know what, no, we don’t have it anymore because not enough Egyptians come into the store so we had it and no one kept returning.”...We’re the only ones that ask for it...

NR: So if you saw a stranger and they were eating that, you would assume that they were—

Farah: I’d be like, “Hold on a second.”

NR: Would you assume that they were maybe—

Farah: --that they’re Arab or that they’re Egyptian...I’d be very curious to ask...
With these lines, Farah again adds to the supposition that food can help express complex identities. For her and the grocer, the dried meat serves as an indicator in helping distinguish Egyptians from other Arabs or other communities.

Farah also relayed another anecdote which illustrates the way food might, for some people, double as sustenance and identity marker:

*My parents one time were in the airport and they were eating falafel and bean sandwiches and I was so embarrassed. You don’t eat that in Western lands! It’s smelly and it’s good, but it’s disgusting to eat, you know what I mean. You eat it at home! But, yeah if I find someone eating like a bean sandwich, just a bean sandwich, they have to be Arab. There’s no other choice. Falafel, it’s not, everyone eats it. But actual bean sandwich [implies they’re Arab]…Grape leaves not so much.*

Farah’s narration further shores up the notion that food may be used as a mode of identity expression; or rather, her story reveals how food can be used by onlookers to identify others.

Why is it that a group can use food to mark in-group characteristics or people can use it as a tool for which they might identify others by? What qualities does it possess which give it the ability to possibly be a forum for identity expression and recognition? Farah does not offer answers for these questions but still hints at a capacity food might have for acting as a teaching tool which allows outsiders to learn about various groups. In relation to food’s potential for teaching someone about a group outside their own Farah says:
I totally agree. Like if I wanted to know more about Indian culture…I mean the easiest thing to do instead of just like picking up a history book and maybe I’d read about it [is to learn about and eat the food]…

NR: …And I guess around a meal you’re gonna hear who’s talking about what and you can see what the family does.

Farah: Yeah, how women and men and children and I don’t know what.

NR: You can see if the women eat together or if the men—

Farah: --it tells you a lot because people are in their natural habitat…

NR: It’s where they feel most comfortable…

Farah: You’re hungry, you eat. And you act like how you’re supposed to eat. Excuse me, how you’d normally act, sorry.

In these lines Farah intimates that a person may be able to learn about others while reading books but also while eating at those others’ tables.

Foodways can offer spectators and participants certain knowledges about a cultural community and Farah maintains this idea by stating the following:

Like for example, when I look at Indian food and how they prepare their food, I notice that they do lots of things from scratch. And if you do that, that probably means that the women are very, they’re good homemakers. They have to spend a lot of time at home to make the stuff….You just have to spend more time at home then maybe someone that is in maybe Germany, I don’t know. So it does tell you that. And at the same time, you can probably figure out their eating habits, not the foods they eat but, do they like to sit around and relax and gather around food? Like if it’s food that’s like soup and stuff like
that, you need time to sit, eat, digest. You know what I mean? And of course there’s like quick food. So I guess it tells you about their social habits too.

NR: Like if there’s talking at the meal…

Farah: We talk, but if the food’s really good no one’s gonna talk back to you because…they’re hungry and they don’t care about you right now. You’re not a priority. They will [talk to you] when they take a break for a drink of water…It tells you something about them. Yeah, it does.

Again one might see that Farah’s dialogue hints at the notion of food perhaps relating to someone’s identity and being a method of learning about another’s way of living.

Although Farah’s conversation indirectly signaled that food and identity can have an association of sort, Maha suggests more directly this possible connection. When I asked Maha what would make someone an Afghan, she responded with:

Food would be on that list. That’s like the really essential. Honestly, if you’ve never had Afghani food in your life, then I don’t think you can say you’re an Afghan. I wasn’t born there or lived there but I’m very similar [to Afghans born in Afghanistan] in a sense because I eat the same foods they eat. Maybe I have more meat than they do…Maybe we make it simpler; but it’s the same thing…And the same meaning to it, the same idea, the same concept…But I know for sure I can go over to Afghanistan and be like, “Do you want to have korma chalow?” And they can come here and be like, “Do you have korma chalow?” and I know what they’re talking about because I’m Afghan and it’s a part of my identity and it’s a part of their identity. Like if someone’s never had Afghani food in their life and they say their Afghan, they can’t come up to me and have that same conversation, “I have korma chalow at my house, or I have bolani at my house. You
wanna come have some?” In that sense, yeah, food is definitely a big part of identity and a part that I don’t think I’ve ever actually considered....You can’t not have the food in your life and be Afghan, but that’s just for me...Yeah especially in terms of people from there coming here. It’s the biggest thing because that’s how people get to know each other. “Come over to my house for dinner.” You don’t say, “Come over to my house so we can talk.” It’s, “Come over to my house, we’ll have dinner and then we’ll talk.”...It’s actually even bigger than I thought...It’s really, really the dominating factor. It’s not, “Come over to my house and see what kind of Afghani clothes I have.” It’s not—I don’t walk across the street and see someone wearing Afghani clothes. Maybe I’ll see them at an Afghani restaurant or at an Afghani event where there’s always food. Yeah, that definitely—probably the most important, now that I think about it, because the music and the poetry, and any kind of books, those are hobbies and those are things that you do at your leisure time, but food is a necessity. And food is something that you have to at least have three times a day. So, food is definitely the biggest part.

From the words spoken here by Maha, food does seem to be an item that makes up a part of an identity for some. Maha even goes as far as saying that food is really essential for her identity as an Afghani American woman. Maha uses her foodways as a way to connect to other members of the larger Afghan community and even sees it as a way for her to attach herself with a country she has never travelled to; food allows her to relate with peoples and places that she has never met or visited, but in spite of this she still feels united with them. For Maha, food represents an important site of identity and yet, she states, she did not appreciate or recognize this site until discussing the matter with me, probably because it is such an inherent object.
Diana similarly says that *If you asked me to name something [that defines someone as being Arab], I probably wouldn’t say ‘food’ off the top of my head. But, if you asked me if it was part of my identity, I’d be like, “Yeah, of course.” But it’s almost something that you take for granted...If you were like, “Hey, name some things that define you as an Arab or Middle Eastern girl,” I probably would name food.* Like Maha, Diana views foodways as a concealed avenue for identity expression but does acknowledge its abilities for such tasks. While Maha and Diana seem to eventually realize the full capacity of food in relation to identity expression only after speaking about it out loud, some of the other women communicated that, for them, food has been a recognizable site of identity and pride especially since immigrating to the United States.

In an interview with Saha and Farah, I asked them to talk about how immigration affects or can affect one’s feelings towards foodways and this is what they had to say:

NR: *Once you get here, do you kind of get more proud of your food?*

Farah: *Yeah you get more proud.*

Saha: *Like all of a sudden you are proud you’re eating your food. I mean back home it’s known as good food, like things like old school culture food they know it’s what we eat but it’s kind of like chic or like classy to eat Western food once in a while.*

Farah: *Not all the time.*

Saha: *Maybe not...all the time. It would be absurd to go out and eat Egyptian food. Like usually if you’re going out to eat, you’re going to get like—we have our own fast food which is either the beans or it’s subs that have like liver and—*

Farah: *—and brain. [turns to Saha] Brain! Don’t be embarrassed!*

Saha: *I don’t like brain but it kinda tastes like chicken.*
Farah: *It’s very tasty.*

In the same discussion, Farah mentions how her family members who are still in Egypt will often bake her brownies or buy pizza whenever she arrives because they see it as a delicacy and a sign of sophistication. Farah, on the other hand, sees brownies and pizza as foods that she can easily obtain anytime and instead wants to eat foods that are more rare in the United States such as brains and liver. Farah even mentioned at a later time that a person only switches to *memory mode* once she or he is away from a place.

Saha and Farah’s attitude is similar to that of the one put forth in the previously mentioned essay by Yvonne and William Lockwood where they quote someone who says, “‘We eat these old dishes more in America than we did at home—lentils, bulghur, wheat berries, barley. [They] bring memories. When you are poor, you want what you can’t afford. When you can afford [what you had wanted], you want those dishes you ate when you were poor’” (535). While Saha and Farah do not explicate on the number of times one craves or consumes Egyptian fast food (brains, liver, or beans), they do indicate that upon arriving back in Egypt they want foods that are not Western and these Western foods were probably the ones the women yearned for while they lived in Egypt.

Thus, similar to the Lockwoods’ quote, whatever foods the women are more able to attain, the less the women desire those foods, and accordingly, while the grass is always greener on the other side, so too are the brownies and the brains tastier. Despite the fact that some people may crave foods or realize their importance more often once they are away from them, Diana, nonetheless, views her family’s foodways as essential.
Diana, who was born in Jordan but grew up in the United States, sees food as meaning much more than nutrition, and she remarks that it brings pride and identity for her and her family:

NR: What do you think food means to you? Does it mean anything special?

Diana: It means everything. For me, I guess the big thing is that I love food that is specifically Middle Eastern. I’ve grown up on it. I love it. I’m very, it’s almost like a sense of pride like with my mom still; like even though both my parents are fully integrated into like Western culture or whatever. I consider myself to be very White, you know. But still we love, love Arabic food. It’s part of everything. Like, I brag about it. Like especially…things like hummus which is everywhere now. My friends all know that my mom makes better hummus than they could ever have anywhere and…I don’t know, it’s a sense of cultural identity, I guess. Even in a little way.

Here Diana speaks of the value of foodways for her identity. Although Diana considers herself White and mentioned the fact that she loves that she can fit into both the American and Arab worlds, she seems to use food to create a connection between herself and her other Arab compatriots in both the U.S. and abroad. Foodways, for Diana, act as a source of bragging rights and linkage with a larger community, both living and deceased. Foodways can create a link with one’s ancestry; and people of every nationality and ethnicity—in regard to community traditions—seem to most readily pass on their foodways.

Margaret brought up this facet of foodways during our conversation as she discussed the ways in which foodways become so embedded into one’s life that they are often the hardest cultural practice to lose:
NR: Do you think the food culture or something with the food or the women has stuck more than other things [in relation to one’s cultural practices] maybe, or no?

Margaret: I think food is the thing that has stuck the most. I think food is the thing that is most integral to any culture. I think it’s the last thing that you give up as you integrate into another culture. And I think at some point you don’t even realize you haven’t given it up. It is just so normal.

NR: I wonder why that is? Why food is the last to be given up?

Margaret: Food is such a practical thing. You have to eat. When you’re speaking in the host culture, yeah it’s convenient to speak—you have to make an effort to speak two languages and retain both languages that you grew up with. But you have to eat anyway, and people tend to learn cooking and recipes and what’s normal from their parents so what you eat as a little teeny kid you just grow up thinking tastes normal. And so I think the food is the last to go. And it’s associated with life passages and holidays. Wedding food. Jordan almonds to me means wedding. Whenever I see a Jordan almond in a little net bag, that’s a wedding! Because, would you consider getting married without a wedding cake?

NR: No.

Margaret: I wouldn’t either, but why? That particular food, cake, is so tied to a wedding you can’t even—what happens [if you didn’t have cake]?….You’d think something was wrong—that it was incomplete. “We didn’t do it right.” “Well, we had a wedding but we didn’t have a cake.” I mean you just have such a fixated idea of what it means to do this. Just like, if you graduated from high school and they didn’t give you a diploma, “Did I really [graduate]?” “Is it real?”…There are some things that have become so
ingrained that you honestly can’t feel that you actually did it unless that piece is included. Food becomes one of those pieces that you can’t think something’s really done unless you do it. And again, because of smell memories are the earliest things you have before you even can speak, some part of your brain thinks “Christmas”… “ham”… Those foods become so associated with cultural events. When people die, certain groups have wakes and food, and other groups bring over Jell-O salads, and other groups have a sit-down meal at the church afterwards, and other groups don’t eat at all, and it doesn’t feel like it was a complete event unless you go through all of the motions that you learned were the correct motions to go through when you were small. Otherwise, you feel like, “Well, we didn’t really do it right.”

In these lines Margaret discusses her theory on why foodways and food culture are often so rooted in people’s lives. She believes that it is because food is something that most people embody and consume every single day (or strive to embody and consume every day). Parents pass on the recipes and preparatory methods to children at a young age and thus the parents socialize the children into their familial foodways and tastes. Furthermore, foodstuffs and foodways, according to Margaret, strongly influence cultural events including holidays, festivals, feasts, and rites of passages. Because of this, some people may view many events as not complete or unsatisfactory unless participants consume and embody specific foods and practices. Consequently, foods can begin to serve as identifying markers of events, seasons, and even people. The interviews conducted for this project reveal to me that certain foods may act as specific national identities for some people—bean sandwiches and a certain dried meat for Egyptians or yogurt eaten at all meals for Afghans—while also possibly creating a more general sense
of identity within the Arab, Middle Eastern, or Muslim communities at large. As Bell and Valentine note, ‘communities’ do not have to be bounded spaces located in a single locale. For this reason, immigrants living outside a bounded nation or region may utilize community in this sense. For immigrants that choose to see themselves as united with others in distant lands which were once the immigrants’ homes or their families’ homes, food may provide a link by way of memory—in the form of a taste, a smell, a touch, or a sight—back to these places.

**Food as a Cultural Memory Pantry**

I am not an immigrant and have never lived outside of my homeland, the United States, for extended periods of time. Because of this, I cannot speak from experience as an immigrant and state that food is a way to remember where I came from. However, during my undergraduate education, I travelled outside the country for a few months at a time and during these periods there were many occasions when certain foods—or even the mention of foods—brought back scrumptious memories for me from my home. I even, near the end of my trips, wrote lists of foods that I needed to eat within the first week of arriving back home because I missed those foods so dearly. I did not think twice about this aspect of my travels until researching for this project. Therefore, my claim that foodways and foodstuffs may act as cultural memory pantries which one may use to recall memories of times past did not arise prior to starting research for this project. Rather, it is a result of the data I saw emerging from the texts which I was reading in preparation for my interviews with Arab American women and the actual writing of this thesis. I assembled the information I found within foodways literature and formed the supposition that foodways can be especially important to Arab American immigrants—
and immigrants in general—because foodways may act as sites where peoples who are separated from their homes can remember past places, events, and peoples.

Poetry and fiction, like that found in texts such as *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab-American Poetry* and *Dinarzad’s Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction*, lends a hand to this thesis by emphasizing the possible link between memories, childhoods, homes, and foods. Many of the poems and short stories scattered throughout these two works describe the ways in which the tastes and thoughts of certain foods call to mind homes that are too dangerous to return to and thus promote the potential usefulness and benefits of foodways. A section of Fawaz Turki’s poem “Being a Good American” in *Grape Leaves* exemplifies this by declaring:

*I wake up in the middle of the night,*
*or maybe somewhere when the night*
*is just fading into day,*
*when the moment*
*is neither here nor there,*
*which is a safe time to think*
*about Palestine and olive trees,*
*and the place I came from…* (199)

Turki’s poem speaks of the dreaming state which occurs in between night and day and allows the protagonist of the poem to remember her or his Palestinian home. The character realizes that the safest way to see Palestine may not be to actually visit but to instead dream of it. In dreaming and thinking about Palestine the person in the poem not only thinks about the physical land of Palestine but also something she or he holds dear
and related to a Palestinian way of life—olives. In view of this, readers may not only see that the character in the poem is longing for her or his homeland, but that that person also thinks of foodstuffs when thinking of home. This poem then gives the impression that foodways can be closely connected to memories of home for some groups of peoples. For this reason, poems and stories similar to Turki’s help me to realize that home and memories of home can be vital to immigrant communities, particularly Arab Americans.

*Dinarzad’s Children* also provides examples of this connection between home, family, food, and memories. In the short fictional story “Manar of Hama” by Mohja Kahf, Manar, a Syrian woman, follows an unknown American woman in her car for miles simply because this unfamiliar woman smells of allspice which stirs up Manar’s senses and thoughts of Syria. Manar says in disgust:

> In this country there is no squash, no eggplant. What they call squash is long and skinny. What they call eggplant is gigantic and seedy. They have skimpy orange carrots, not the fat purple kind you can hollow out and stuff. Most repulsive of all is the enormous slimy thing they call cucumber. Waxy outside, watery and seedy and tasteless inside...I can’t find fresh mint. Mint! Let alone coriander. I looked up the English name for it in the *Mawrid*, but when I asked the girl at the grocery store she looked at me as if I had asked for something from the Land of Waq-Waq. There is no allspice, no sumac, no cardamom. So I cannot even make the food smell like food. (131-2)

This and many other simple examples from these two collections testify to the fact that food may be essential to immigrant communities and their well being because foodways
can be so closely linked to immigrants’ childhood memories and memories of home. The example of Manar also shows the specific foods that the main character is wanting and craving—“real” squash and eggplant along with various aromatic spices which are a bit difficult to find in the United States. Manar, like some of the women I interviewed, simply wants to recreate the foods and smells that she loves and became used to but, as may be the case for other immigrants, it is all too often that the foods one pines for are either non-existent in the host country, difficult to attain, or looked down upon as an edible food by the majority society.

Farah’s statement of, I like the really gross, ethnic [foods] summarizes what many of the women discussed when on the subject of what foods they crave the most. The women mentioned different types of meats which they often consumed in Egypt including dove and pigeon meat and liver and brain from street vendors. Now that the women live in the U.S., they must resign themselves to merely yearning for these foods and talking about them more than actually consuming them because of the lack of availability and cultural norms found in the United States. The interviewees also mentioned that despite street foods making them sick now that they no longer eat them regularly, they still crave these foods and consume them despite an ensuing stomach ache.

Farah: When I got back home, I made a big fuss about it. I wanted hawaushi. It’s almost like…a pastry but huuuge sandwich/pastry. They think it’s ground meat but it’s not. It’s all the leftover parts of the animal just ground up. With lots of mmm good stuff…I was like, “Mom, I want it.” She’s like, “You’re gonna be sick.” “I don’t care!” So she ordered it for me...It came delivery because everything comes delivery.
Stomach ache or not, interview transcripts repeated the sentiments mentioned above which testify that people miss foods more and appreciate them more once they are away from them. Again, Farah demonstrates this in her remark during an interview session: 

*I would never think to eat liver off the street when I lived there. What the hell would be wrong with me? But now, it’s what we crave. Personally, I hated kosharee when I was in Egypt; now me and my friends crave it on the phone.*

Farah and the other women uphold the long-standing expressions of “The grass is always greener on the other side” and “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.” I can personally attest to this and my anecdote at the start of this chapter demonstrates this.

Again as mentioned earlier, while travelling abroad I created a list of certain foods that I wanted to eat once I returned home from my travels, and this supports the statements regarding missing foods when you are away from them. Thankfully, an interview with Farah assured me that I am not the only food-crazed person who would do such a thing; Farah’s father also created such a “to-eat” list:

*My dad, before we went to Egypt…I found…his “to-do-it” list. And he had a list of foods…And I was like, “Is my dad gonna cook? What the heck’s that?” So I looked at it and it was all stuff that we eat that you can’t find here that we get back home. And I talked to him about it. I was like, “I’m a little concerned. Not that I’m spying on you or anything, but what the heck is that?” And he’s like, “What? I’m making a list of the stuff I want to eat when I go back home.”*

These words show that creating a “to-eat” list may not be as rare or odd as I once thought. Why would people, including me, prepare lists of foods to eat or resolve to eat foods that may taste good but will eventually cause sickness? What kind of special force
does food offer people to trigger them to do such things? Once more, my earlier conjecture of foodways having the capability of assisting in people remembering times gone by and places far away surfaces, yet again; foodways may act, for some, as a storehouse for memories which a person recalls, for instance, by smelling cinnamon buns in the morning or eating peas and white bread at midnight in a dark kitchen. The interviewees did not mention cinnamon buns or white bread but did, however, make mention of foods acting as a key into their memory pantry.

Farah, when speaking about her family and why they eat mostly Middle Eastern fare at a majority of their meals stated:

_We just, I don’t know if we, if they hold onto it so much because they miss it and they don’t get it all the time. Or, they do get it all the time but they’re not in Egypt, they’re not at home. So maybe it’s something that reminds you of back home. Like, it’s silly but sometimes we’d be eating—my dad made this kind of fish that we only get back home or the way they cook it. It was awesome._

NR: _He cooked it here?_

Farah: _Yeah, he made it. And it was very similar to what we had at home. And at the dinner table all we could talk about for like an hour and a half was like, “Oh my god. This is great. Remember we were eating this when, at I don’t know whose house, and da-da-da-da.” And it was, yeah. It brings up memories._

Farah continued speaking about foods which have provoked memories for her and her family when she told me about a rice dish that mainly villagers know about and prepare:

_Mostly people from the villages are really good with it. My mom made it one day at a gathering and people were like, “Oh my god! Oh my god! We haven’t had that since we_
were,” you know, “kids,” or “back in Egypt,” or—especially the older people who were very amazed to be fed that dish again.

Additionally she adds, When we would eat something here that would remind us of back home, like lemon ice cream [then we remember home]…If we eat something that’s similar to that flavor or taste back home we tend to—memories come in automatically.

“Remember that day when were at the beach and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.”

In these examples, Farah, who left Egypt as a young teenager, repeats her outlook and experiences with food becoming a site of memory recollection. The fact that Farah, who is directly connected to an Arab country through birth place, recognizes foodways as memory pantries may seem reasonable. But it is also the case that others, who are further removed from an Arab identity (or any other regional or national identity for that matter), might view foodways as capable of the same feats. Margaret, a 56 year old woman whose grandmother was born in Lebanon, also spoke with me about foodways and their possible linkage with memories when she discussed an experience she had in Dearborn, Michigan, a city with one of the densest populations of Arabs outside of the Middle East:

Ahh I went to this bakery once in Detroit, up in Dearborn where there’s so many Arab bakeries and cool things. And they had—not pita-type bread but the thicker loaves covered with zatar and sesame seed. Straight out of the oven. And I ate one of these things and I got a flashback. It’s like, “Oh my gosh that’s the way my grandmother used to pull them out of her oven.” And I went and I bought this huge jar of this zatar…[which] has such a particular taste and it just smells and tastes—smells are supposedly our earliest memory and the last thing to go as your senses are leaving you.

And certainly they’re the earliest thing tied to memory and obviously food gives off
smells. So, some of those smell-memories are so ingrained in us we don’t even realize
they’re there until you smell something and suddenly you’re like four years old again and
you’re just taken back to pre-verbal time and you just go, “Ahh, good. Warm.
Steaming!” Sometimes I even forget that she [her grandmother] made something, and
then I’ll smell it and realize, “Oh my gosh!” Follow my nose! And realize, “yes, that’s
part of my memory bank,” and I don’t know where or how but it is. And it’s just hidden
in there someplace in a pre-verbal time.

Through these words, Margaret relays to me an occasion when foods—and the
smells of foods—brought back her childhood memories which may have been forgotten
otherwise. She theorizes that this may occur due to the fact that humans oftentimes
develop smell-memories and the sense of smell before we are able to verbally
communicate and form memories. For Margaret, foods like warm breads straight out of
the oven with spices uncover concealed memories from her early years with family
members in the United States. For others, like Farah, food can be a site for memories
relating not to childhood memories in the U.S. with elder family members but rather
memories which help a person to recall where they came from and their heritage. For
example, Ahmed’s statements from the previous chapter allude to this notion of food as a
memory pantry:

NR: Do you think the food at the gatherings is important to have? Does it make you
remember Egypt…or memories?

Ahmed: Um, not really. But I do think the food attracts people to come.

NR: Amina, for example? (Laughing)
Ahmed: *You see what the first reaction was, “Food!” And at the same time, when we get people who didn’t have family anymore that helps them—I lived here for one year—for one year without family. I had been invited by several Egyptian families just to remind me that I came out of Egyptian blood. It helps, but it’s not necessary. But it definitely helps.*

Ahmed’s word, like Margaret’s, suggest that, for him, foodways may be a memory pantry but one with different types of memories stored inside. For Margaret and others, foodways may be a site where one can connect with elder generations and recall childhood memories of that time; while on the other hand, Ahmed may be employing (possibly unknowingly) foodways as a way to remember his country and its traditions because he is currently residing in another location. Either way, both examples illustrate that it is conceivable for foodways to act as a memory pantry and location for some people to store recollections for later use so as to recall memories of the past, and I pointed out earlier that this was my hypothesis for this portion of the data. However, I do not feel that the data from this project fully supports this conjecture in the ways which I had originally imagined.

Once acknowledging the fact that for some, food does work as a cultural memory pantry, I went into all of my interviews imagining the respondents to tell me things such as, “I prepare food ‘X’ so as to remember my time spent in Damascus.” Or, “Whenever I smell my mother making food ‘X’ and I take a bite into it, I feel like I am more of a Jordanian and all of my time spent in Amman comes rushing back to me.” These phrases are obviously exaggerations and I did not expect for such blatant remarks to emerge from the interviews, but I did expect the data from the interviews to fall a bit closer to those
types of responses than what they actually did. The data relating to this aspect of foodways predominantly discussed the women and men craving certain foods as opposed to the foods bringing back their memories of certain places. However, as one can see from the interview transcripts presented above, the respondents did touch on foods’ ability to recall memories, just not to the extent that I had first imagined. Nonetheless, I still believe that the data gathered throughout the research and interview periods advocated my original feelings and that it is true, for some immigrants, that foodways might be tools by which one can reach back into the past.

The data gathered throughout the interviews with my respondents centered on four broad areas regarding foodways and immigrants—food as a site for and of sociality; food as a vector for cultural knowledge transmission; food as a mode of complex identity expression; and food as a memory pantry or repository. Other data genres naturally emerged but I chose to pay particular attention to (and concentrate my questions on) these four arenas because each represents a hypothesis which I formulated by way of literature read, events experienced, or items stated in preliminary interviews. While the data did not buttress these conjectures as well as I had originally imagined, the data still shows that, to a certain extent, each of them can be seen as true for the population interviewed in this project. I would also venture to hypothesize that one could extrapolate the data collected in this project to discover patterns within the Arab American community at large or even within other immigrant communities residing in the U.S. and find similar results.
CHAPTER 5: PLAYING WITH FOOD

For me, in a simple and non-academic way, food always connoted energetic conversations between family and friends and a time to be with others. This viewpoint, food providing a space for peoples to come together, was—and still is—the primary manner in which I approached foodways in my daily life. I did not think of foodways in terms of structuralism or developmentalism before undertaking this project. But, after researching this topic in-depth I now realize that my emphasis on foodways can go much deeper to include things such as the way in which it stores memories for people to use later, or how families pass down knowledges and traditions from generation to generation; foodways encompasses more items than I had ever imagined before, and this might be especially true for immigrant communities because of the dynamism and transformation which communities undergo before, during, and after migration.

It is my hope that this thesis project allows readers to now recognize and acknowledge the powers foodways can have within people’s lives. I also hope that it highlights the roles foodways might be playing for the members of the Arab American community in Columbus, Ohio who helped me in my research. Foodways are everyday items which can still be very influential throughout many facets of a person’s life, and this thesis project—especially chapter two—points out several of these functions and roles which they can take.
Chapter two of this text demonstrates a sampling of these facets by accentuating the ways in which foodways can impact some of the following: one’s identity; power and positioning structures within societies and families; sexuality and sexual politics; and class or social status. While these items are important for foodways scholarship, this thesis chooses to focus its attention on four other areas of concentration: foodways as points of and for social contact; foodways as transmitters of cultural knowledges; foodways as complex expressions of complex identities; and foodways as repositories for memories. Chapter two presents readers with the ways in which foodways literature speaks to these four themes. By using concepts of community as thought of by Benedict Anderson, David Bell, and Gill Valentine chapter two contends that immigrants, and others, may not just view community as the surrounding geographic location in which they reside. Community, for some, can be an imaginary structure in the sense that it stretches beyond national and regional borders and land masses, and many of the “community” members will be strangers that one will never meet or even see. I argue that people may use and regard foodways as a means of uniting others of that group who are not physically near or within strict boundaries, and this is because commensality—taking meals together—is an action that unites people in a manner which does not necessitate strict bounded areas; foodways’ ability to unite can go beyond borders and land boundaries. Moreover, foodways’ importance and magnitude may be especially evident in the lives of women because it is oftentimes women who prepare meals for the population of this world. Thus, women must pass on their vital knowledges of foodways to others.
Foodways literature reveals that this transmission of knowledges does not only occur between people from differing communities but it also occurs between peoples in the same community who are in different age sets. Foodways can create a space where grandmothers teach granddaughters how to prepare the secret family recipe for barbeque sauce or other wisdoms the family treasures. This transmission process, literature suggests, happens informally and is usually not taught but is instead learned. In opposition to other types of knowledges which one might learn by sitting in a classroom, many aspects of family foodway knowledges spread by means of informal apprenticeships—daughters asked to knead dough or set the table witness over and over again caretakers elegantly forming biscuits, stuffing shells, and other tasks which outsiders may not know how to perform. Mothers prepare foods that the family and community desire and as a result mothers pass down to daughters and granddaughters a repertoire of cultural and familial recipes, and consequently these foods might act as an identifying aspect of the particular family or community.

Varying foodstuffs may connote to others what religion a person adheres to, what region they grew up in or currently reside in, what their socioeconomic status is, and other identifiable characteristics because foodways can be very expressive. I propose in chapter two that foodways’ expressiveness and other unique attributes are possibly very important for immigrants. The literature reviewed in chapter two supports this proposal by providing works of fiction and non-fiction which illustrate immigrant communities tightly holding on to their foodways because of their expressiveness and because the foods offer a link back to the homes they left. The foodways can be seen as a pantry for
storing memories of homes before immigration and whenever families consume foods and prepare meals in certain manners, memories of the past can surface once again.

Chapter three illustrates this concept of immigrants using foodways within their host countries through a case study of the Egyptian Association of Columbus, Ohio. The Association is a relatively new group but members and leaders have high expectations for it. The current president of the Association hopes his group will one day link Egyptians in Columbus with those in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and all over Ohio. He wants the group to provide a state-wide network where Egyptians can not only assist one another in transitioning from life in North Africa to life in North America, but he also wants it to provide social activities so that Egyptians can enjoy life to its fullest. For now, a state-wide Egyptian Association is only a dream for Ahmed, the Association’s president, but, as it stands, the group is aiding those Egyptians who partake in its activities. By talking with Ahmed and his wife, I found that they believe the Association does help newcomers to Columbus and the home-cooked meals and social gatherings offered by the Association provide a space for Egyptians to gather. However, all generations do not view the group similarly. Nadya, Ahmed’s daughter, views the group’s events as dull gatherings which are only for old people and parents. She prefers other outlets for socializing. Nonetheless, Nadya does recognize and articulate that the group is useful and she expresses that one day—maybe—she’ll attend the events with less dissatisfaction and actually enjoy them. The Egyptian Association helps me to see that foodways can be an important part of an immigrant community because each event held by the group is centered on the serving of Egyptian foods. Through interviewing Ahmed, the president of the Association, his wife, Samar, and their daughter, Nadya, I collected the data
expressed in chapter three and, as one can see, the Egyptian Association seems to be, for
the most part, reaching its current goals and thus having its kosharee and eating it too.
While chapter three supplies a case study of three people’s opinions on an event and
immigrant group, other interviews collected looked at a broader spectrum concerning
Arab American foodways in Columbus, Ohio.

Chapter four details the interviews I collected throughout my research period and
categorizes the data so as to highlight the four areas of foodways which I am most
concerned with. Prior to commencing interviews for this project, I had already
formulated three of the four themes emphasized in chapter four—food as a social tool;
food as a transmitter; food as a form of identity—because of my long-held romantic
notions and yearnings concerning immigrant communities, families, and foodways. The
fourth theme, food as a memory pantry, was vaguely present in my thinking but came to
full realization after conducting initial interviews and scanning foodways literature during
the beginning of my research period. After completing my research, it is clear to me that
my findings do not fully support my initial conjectures.

Idyllically, I imagined foodways being a space which brought Arab American
women together on a regular basis to prepare foods for special occasions, friendly visits,
and everyday meals, and some of the literature regarding foodways backed this view.
Although my interviewees did report these types of activities within their families and
circles of friends, they also reported that these types of actions occur to a lesser degree
now as compared to the past. As families migrate out of the Middle East, as social lives
and obligations change, and as generations get distanced from their ancestors because of
time, social gatherings and communal cooking occur less frequently. Although these
occasions may not occur as frequently as I had imagined, the interviewees still spoke of foodways as a source of sociality and sense of community. Interviewees still attend gatherings where generations of women help prepare foods and still partake in cooking meals with friends while gossiping about daily happenings.

My second conjecture stated that foodways not only provide a space to socialize but act as vectors for the spread of cultural knowledges. Foodways, I posited, help transmit recipes, histories, and other valuable items over time from generation to generation and woman to woman. From my experiences cooking with my mother and grandmothers I was aware that a great cook often learns the most simply by being in the kitchen watching and practicing with elders and peers. I found this to be the case for some of the women interviewed. They knew specific methods of preparation from years of helping mothers and caretakers prepare family meals. However, some of the women I interviewed spoke of changing habits which seem to result in a smaller amount of young women who are eager to learn from their elders the preparatory methods for traditional foods and family favorites. Despite this fact, the women who mentioned that they have not taken to cooking like their mothers have, or those that did not learn to cook from watching elders, state that this is not because of lack of interest but more because of lack of time. Busier schedules for both mothers and daughters results in less time spent in the kitchen for both parties; but the women interviewed are not mourning lost traditions and foodways because they still employ them when they can and still have the desire to do so. This desire to cook foods that one’s mother or grandmother did may result from the fact that a person sees food as a part of their familial and individual identity. I held this position—that food helps one express an identity—because it seems that people
attribute certain foods to certain groups of peoples or regions of the world, and these foodways may be a source of pride. The interview data contained in chapter four does illustrate some of the interviewees expressing how they see foods as being a component of their identity and in this sense my conjecture is upheld. Still, after hours of interviews I realized that these women were not always eating particular foodways so as to set themselves off from the dominant society; they were eating these foods because it is what they were used to. None said to me, “Yes, I eat kosharee because I want others to know that I am an Egyptian!” Instead, they remarked that certain foods, when eaten, may indicate that someone is from Egypt or Jordan or other Arab countries because they are foods eaten most often in those regions. The women I interviewed no longer live in regions where it is common to see people eating falafel and bean sandwiches in public or hear vendors selling liver on the streets. Instead, they now reside in the U.S. where some may view these foodway practices as crass and unpleasant. How do they compensate for this and remember foods of their childhoods and experiences had in their homes of origin?

Interview data and literature on foodways and immigrants suggests that recreating foods while in a host country allows immigrants to relive experiences and remember foods of their pasts even if the foods taste a bit—or a lot—differently. Interviewees revealed to me that many recipes and dishes have changed since immigrating. But, when families prepare dishes that slightly resemble foods from home, memories flood their thoughts. In addition to this data emerging from the interview transcripts, it is also apparent that many of the interviewees crave foods that they cannot find here in the U.S. and foods which taste extremely better when prepared in their homes of origin. Foods
most often missed, the interviewees explained, are often ones which they described as gross and ethnic. It is interesting to note that they themselves termed the foods which they craved as gross, and I would speculate that they employed this term due to my being an outsider to the Arab American community. Because the women I spoke with have resided in the U.S. for a reasonable amount of time, they have come to recognize which foods Westerners might view as inedible and gross and they projected these thoughts into their interviews with me. I would assume that amongst themselves they would not consider these foods gross because if they were gross for themselves, they would not crave them!

The above paragraphs summarize the conclusions made in each chapter of this thesis. This project, as is obvious, is by no means exhaustive or comprehensive and much work could be done if I were to continue. While I do not think that it would be absolutely necessary to add more members to my sample size, additional opinions and experiences from Arab Americans would add an interesting aspect. With the sample group that I have or with a larger group, I would be interested in looking at the idea of public and private space and how this plays out in terms of foodways. Do the young women eat different foods when on Ohio State’s campus versus when they are at home with their families? What types of foods do they eat when they are with friends that are not Arab American versus what foods do they eat when they are with others of the same cultural community? When is it necessary, beneficial, or desired to downplay one’s heritage, by way of foodways, or when are those same foodways put on display? While these questions relate to notions of public and private space, one might also look at these questions in terms of identity and performance: when is Arab American identity—as
expressed through food—performed or suppressed? These are just a few of the directions future work could go in to compliment what I have already established within this project.


Appendix A: Interview Citations

Ahmed. Personal interview. 26 February 2009.

Amina. Personal interview. 22 January and 26 February 2009.

Diana. Personal interview. 22 October 2008.


Margaret. Personal interview. 8 October 2008.

Nadya. Personal interview. 22 January 2009.


Samar. Personal interview. 26 February 2009.

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51 All interviewees’ names have been changed to pseudonyms.
Appendix B: Consent Form

The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Foodway Practices Among Arab American Women
Researcher: Nicole Rearick
Sponsor: The Ohio State University’s Comparative Studies Department

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
This is an ethnographic/oral history project on foodway practices among Arab American women, who live in the greater Columbus, Ohio, region. For the purposes of this research, foodways can be thought of as relating to the food traditions and customs of a people: what people eat, how they eat it, who prepares the food and with whom, and specifically referring to the social aspects of eating. Examples of this could include things like: the funny anecdotes that get told when families are preparing meals together; the special foods/food preparation that takes place during holidays; what/when friends get together to cook and eat, etc. Interviews and participant observation will allow the research to gain insight regarding how foodways change and are adapted from one generation to the next in a population of women who have immigrated to the U.S. In addition, acting as a participant observer, the researcher for this project may share a meal and meal preparation with the participants in order to experience food choice, preparation, customs, and social behavior.

Procedures/Tasks:
Interviews regarding food choice, food preparation, social aspects of foodways, tradition, and acculturation will take place between participants and the researcher using audio/video-recording devices if permitted by the participant so that the responses can be
evaluated later so as to gain insight. The interview process will most likely consist of two to three individual interview sessions and a final group session (if possible). Additional sessions/impromptu meetings may be added according to participants’ willingness and desire. A General Well Being questionnaire will be administered which deals with the moods, behaviors, and feelings of participants. The survey asks questions similar to the following: Have you felt blue and down—hearted lately? How happy are you with your life? The sharing of meals and joint meal preparation will take place if allowed and desired by the participants. Free-listing exercises and pile-sorting exercises may also occur during the research period. The majority of the types of interactions between researcher and participants will involve sitting together for a period of time and discussing Arab American foodways and related topics. The joint preparation of a meal activity would involve the participants and the researcher meeting at a said location in order to make a meal together. This will allow for the researcher to actually experience the social aspect of food with her participants. Video and audio recording of this activity will be utilized if permitted by participants. The participants will be permitted to take home the consent forms and General Well Being questionnaires so as to go over them at their own free will and respond as they see fit.

Duration:
You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Interview sessions can range from 15 minutes to two hours, depending on the participants’ willingness and ability. The researcher wants the interviews to be very convenient for the participants and therefore it will be up to them and their schedules to determine the length of the interviews. The interview process will begin fall quarter and last until the first half of winter quarter (depending on the participants’ willingness and ability of course).

Risks and Benefits:
There are no risks or anticipated benefits to the participants in this project; however the researcher expects to gain a greater understanding of how the social aspects of foodways—choice, preparation, eating, etc.—are influenced by culture and change.

Confidentiality:
Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
• The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
• The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

--Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research project unless otherwise stated by the participants.
--The researcher will retain the data collected throughout the research period indefinitely but confidentiality will continue to be kept and identities will still be protected.
--The researcher may employ an outside transcriber to create transcriptions of the interviews conducted during the research process. This transcriber will also maintain confidentiality and is aware of the ways to keep confidentiality.

**Incentives:**
Participants will not be given incentives to participate in the research project.

**Participant Rights:**

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

**Contacts and Questions:**
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact __
**Nicole Rearick** – rearick.13@osu.edu,
**Maurice Stevens** – stevens.368@osu.edu

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact rearick.13@osu.edu or stevens.368@osu.edu
Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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Please mark an ‘X’ on the line if videotaping is permitted—video taping would occur during the interactive meal preparation activity, if permitted.

Please mark an ‘X’ on the life if the transcription of interviews is permitted by someone other than the researcher. She or he will keep your identity confidential.