

## The History of Arab Cuisine and its Future

By: Karmah Tabbaa (started 2018) - on going

### Introduction

My research will explore the history of the cuisine of the Arab region in the pre-British and French Mandate era, and its development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will then present a proposal for the future evolution of its cuisine. The goal is to present an understanding of the region's cuisine beyond nationalistic labels, by focusing on the shared culinary similarities of the region. The recent popularity in "Middle Eastern" or in many cases (particularly in North America), "Israeli" cuisine requires a more nuanced explanation of the region's cuisine in the context of its history and geography.

This essay will attempt to answer the following questions, based on works by Arab cookery historians such as Nawal Nasrallah, Sami Zoubaida, Maxime Rodinson, Charles Perry, Tony Allen, Claudia Roden, Jean Bottero , Tom Verde among others:

- ***How was food writing in the Middle East tackled since the thirteenth century, and how it shaped twenty first century "Middle Eastern Food"?***
- ***How did rapid urbanization in the 1960s, and the agricultural shift change the Middle Eastern diet?***
- ***How does food create a national identity?***

Drawing from the New Nordic Kitchen Manifesto[1], this paper will conclude with a proposal for the creation of an Arab Kitchen Manifesto. The end goal is for the Arab Kitchen Manifesto to be implemented collectively throughout the region, to first restore pride in cooking Arab dishes and using ancient cooking methods that have been tested throughout the centuries. Second to adapt the Arab Kitchen Manifesto to the restaurant sector, not only when they are labelled as a Lebanese, a Jordanian or a Syrian restaurant. Lastly, to establish the Arab Kitchen Manifesto free from any political agendas and foreign intervention by

joining forces with like minded individuals all over the region and establish a practical evolution to the region's cuisine.

A focus on Jordan will be evident, since it is my home and being mostly familiar with the country and its existence within the complex world of Arab cuisine. The research also benefited from first-hand accounts of the cuisine of pre-independence Jordan by former Jordanian Prime Minister Abdelsalam AlMajali.

## **What is the Arab world and who are the Arabs?**

The Arab World encompasses Arabic speaking countries, which today covers a stretch of land that straddles two continents, West Asia and North Africa. About 385 million people live in this region, mostly Muslim Arabs, with religious and ethnic minorities of Christians, Jews, Kurds and Amazigh's among others. Arabs mainly lived in the Arabian Peninsula, but also in Iraq, when the Lakhmid tribe settled around the city of Hira in the late third century CE. Around the sixth century CE the Arab Ghassanid tribe settled in what is known as the Levant or Fertile Crescent. After the spread of Islam in the seventh century, flourishing Arab dynasties came to power dominating from north Africa, the Iberian Peninsula (Andalusia) to China. In the late fifteenth century, Arabs and Jews in Andalusia were forced to either convert to Christianity or be expelled from Spain. Many of those expelled migrated to South America while others returned to North Africa and West Asia. The Middle East was then ruled by the Turkish Ottomans for four centuries prior to their demise following World War I, after which the region was under the mandates of the British, French and Italians. Foreign rule in the Arab region continued up to the middle of the twentieth century, leading up to nationalistic uprisings in the 1950s that led to the independence of the region.[2] This rich history of multiculturalism and foreign influence has found its way in the food of the region, as this essay explores next.

## How was food writing in the Middle East tackled since the thirteenth century, and how it shaped twenty first century “Middle Eastern Food”?

Arab cookery research had a head start, beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with *Kitab al Tabikh*. This book was the only medieval Arab cookery book known to the English-speaking world, it mentions food poetry, food preparation and table etiquette. Authors like A J Arberry, Habib Zayaat and Maxime Rodinson all realize how rich and varied the food related genres mentioned in *Kitab al Tabikh* are and point to similarities between Western medieval and Arab dishes. The recipes written included sweet and sour stews, seasoning savory dishes with sugar, the liberal use of sugar in desserts, combination of spices such as cinnamon, ginger, cumin, cardamom and coriander, the techniques of coloring dishes with saffron, enriching sauces with almond milk and scenting foods with rose water. In the earliest medieval European cookbook (*liber de coquina*) in Latin, written in thirteenth century there are Arab recipes such as Romania (meat stew with soured eggplant), Somacchia (stew soured with sumac), Lomania (stew soured with lemon) and Mamonia (sweet rice porridge). Maxime Rodinson an French historian, Marxist, orientalist, anti-Zionist, anti-Islamist and co-author/ compiler of *Medieval Arab Cookery*. Rodinson expresses the following: “Just how this apparent fusion of cuisines came about is not clear, whether it’s through the crusaders contact with the Middle East or through the presence of the Arabs in Andalusia for eight hundred years.” And with that “one can realize how rich and varied these food related genres are,” but laments, “that only a few of these sources have been published while other works full of information have not been seriously studied.” His initial plan had been to publish a critical edition and translation of the entire work he had compiled, but he was prevented from doing so by WWII, which made important copies in Cairo and Damascus inaccessible to him. [3] The essay will explain the influence of the Abbasid caliphate (750 – 1258 CE) on the region’s food development. The Abbasid caliphate was the second of the four caliphates, succeeding the Umayyad caliphate (661 – 750CE). This was the focal point of Islamic political

and cultural life, shifting eastward from Syria to Iraq, making Baghdad, the City of Peace in 762CE, their capital. The traditional view attributes the Abbasid caliphate's brilliant achievements in food and dining to the Persians who occupied Iraq before the Arabs defeated them in 636 CE. Fortunately, archeological findings in the Iraqi region in the early twentieth century offered clues to the origin of the Abbasid cuisine, pointing to roots even more ancient than the Achaemenid (Persian dynasty pre-Islam) and Sassanian (last Persian dynasty pre-Islam), presence in the region. Three cuneiform tablets, dating from 1600 BCE, were deciphered by Assyriologist Jean Botttero in 1982, stating that these findings are "two thousand years before the only well-preserved collection of culinary advice and recipes in the west". [4] The cuneiform tablets were exhumed from the *Babylonian Collection* at Yale University. In 1911, the inaugural Laffan Professor of Assyriology, Albert T. Clay, founded the Yale Babylonian Collection, which today comprises over 45,000 items. It is the largest collection of seals and textual material from ancient Mesopotamia in North America and ranks among the leading collections in the world.[5]

One tablet includes 25 recipes, 21 kinds of meat broth and 4 kind of vegetable broth, common ingredients in most preparations include leek, onion, garlic, golden turnips, arugula and various types of meat such as venison, gazelle, kid, lamb, ram, mutton, francolin and pigeon. For more detail on recipes and tablet conditions see below.[6] Ancient varieties of flour are mentioned, sasku-flour, ziqqu-flour, tiktu-flour, or butumtu (an unidentifiable grain). Bottero expresses the following, "we possess no further documentation concerning the preparation and eating of any other food, that is, just about anything in that land and its surrounding areas that could be eaten: fruits, fungi, eggs, even ostrich eggs, certain seasonal game and insects, such as grasshoppers, and especially, the vast river and marine world of fish, shellfish, turtle, mollusks, cephalopods to which it would seem – a curious but unprovable exception - Mesopotamians were rather indifferent, at least at times, although we have evidence that they appreciated them and traded them in thousands. We don't really know, at least not explicitly, whether they had any true dietary taboos (perhaps only on certain dates); we do know, however, that there was never any question of eating horses or dogs, much less snakes! There is no ban on pork: it was raised and eaten. But it was considered dirty, according to a Babylonian maxim:

*The pig is not clean: it dirties everything behind it,*

*It dirties the streets, it fouls houses.*

perhaps that is what discouraged those rather fastidious people, if not from eating pork, then at least from flaunting their consumption of it”.[7]

Another even less acknowledged influence of the Abbasid culinary heritage is the role it had on the formation of Ottoman cooking which developed from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Arabs from the Arabia and desert regions of the area were commonly described as simple and austere people due to their harsh, dry physical environment. However, the ninth century Abbasid writer *al Jahiz* in his book *albukhala (of misers)*, asserts that: “they knew luxury in places where land was more productive and means more abundant such as oases and coastal stretches of the peninsula”[8]. Fine white flour, fruits, roasted meat, stew and different types of bread were all part of the Arab diet at the time. Contradicting the traditional belief that the Arab world under Ottoman rule was in a state of stagnation, new research in social sciences shows that major Arab cities remained vibrant trade centers, especially for spices and later for coffee. Food historian Marianna Yerasimo’s book *Five Hundred years of Ottoman Cuisine*, mentions that the oldest cookbook written in Ottoman Turkish was in fact a fifteenth century translation of *Kitab alTabeekh*. Translated and edited by Turkish physician Muhamad Shirvani who added seventy-seven recipes and health information to the translation[9]. It is also impossible to talk about Arab food influence without mention of Aleppo. Aleppo is the largest city in Syria and its economic capital, it is situated in the northwestern part of the country, about 30 miles (50 km) south of the Turkish border. Aleppo is located at the crossroads of great commercial routes and lies some 60 miles (100 km) from both the Mediterranean sea (west) and the [Euphrates](#) river (east).[10] Marlene Matar author of *The Aleppo Cookbook* presents the following description of Aleppo, “[YT1] Aleppo is a city steeped in tradition, history and culture. Aleppo (halab) in Arab is an ancient city, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. According to legend, Abraham stopped in Aleppo to milk his cows on citadel hill, hence the city's name (halab) which is the Arab verb (to milk). The uniqueness of Aleppo’s cuisine is not surprising, considering the fertility of the land and the distinct mix of influences, Arab, Turkish, Armenian, Greek, European, Persian and more. The iconic *kabab wa karaz* (kabab with sour cherry

sauce) was inspired by Chinese practice of adding sweet and sour on savory food. None of this would have been possible without imagining the spice trade route that passed through Aleppo and the infamous and unrivalled *Souk* (Arab for market). Until nearly 1,500 shops were damaged or destroyed in the Syrian conflict in 2012. Aleppo's historic *Souk al Madina* was the largest covered market in the Middle East and in the world[YT2] [kt3] [kt4] . About eight miles in length the souk for centuries has sold everything from essential supplies to provisions to specialty items, foodstuffs, herbs and spices, soaps, perfumes, jewelry, pure cotton and much more.”[11] According to Nawal Nasrallah who is an independent Iraqi scholar, and award-winning researcher and food writer, Claudia Roden was the first to introduce authentic Arab cuisine to mainstream Western readership. Roden in her own right was ‘not fond of Arab treatment of Arab Jews at the time (1948 and further on)’ (is my only explanation as to why she named a super normal salad of cucumber, tomato and onion chopped salad as an Israeli salad), she had written and published a few more biased remarks indicating her discontent as I mention below. Despite all the research presented in my paper, most of which was available to Roden when she published the first edition of *A Book of Middle Eastern Cooking* in 1972, she expresses the following: “Arab dishes today betray their origins by their Persian names” immediately dismissing the presence of any Arab influence in the area. Roden continues “the Arabs themselves, unsophisticated and primitive, possessed a very limited culinary tradition based on Bedouin and peasant food” and “it is this haute cuisine or rather various hautes cuisines (from Baghdad, Damascus and other centers), which was introduced by the conquerors who conducted the Muhammadan armies to the four corners of the earth. The Muslim invasion of the Middle East, north Africa, and parts of Asia, Sicily, Spain and Portugal introduced Arab dishes to all these countries. The peasant food brought by the soldiers, the court cuisine by their generals. It was probably then, too, that the couscous of the Maghreb was introduced to the Arab world, and that the Turkish burghul was adopted in most countries”.[12] One can comprehend how difficult it is for people faced with no choice but to flee their native homeland, to have bitter feelings. Nevertheless, being passive aggressive and expressing the most convenient truth is not progressive. It did not benefit the future generations, who relied on her cookbook, *A Book of Middle Eastern Cooking* for historical

information. The Jewish women's archive explains the importance of Roden's book below, "Roden's books are respected for their writing as much as for their recipes. Roden always includes ethnography and history of the kitchen and table, genealogy of recipes, dishes and ingredients. She traces the migration of each recipe and adds stories about the process of cooking, etiquette of serving and table manners, as well as the sequence and ritual of the meal. Roden is intensely interested in addressing the continuity of taste, techniques, and combination of ingredients. She often points out how modern cooking methods such as pounding, stuffing and shaping are surprisingly similar to the procedures of our ancestors." [13] This partial information on Arab or Middle Eastern food that has been preached since the 1960s will be explored in the last section of this essay.

### **How did rapid urbanization in the 1960s, and the agricultural shift change the Arab diet?**

Water has been the most important natural resource in the region due to its scarcity, as opposed to fossil fuel and its abundance, wars have been fought over water and continue to exist in the region until today. Tony Allen's chapter titled *Food Production in the Middle East* in *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East*, based on proceedings of a conference held in 1992, presents a strong argument on the influence of rapid urbanization and water. This chapter will be referenced several times in this paper, below is the first reference: "The water-management policies were devised during periods when there were no evident water shortages affecting agriculture. The importance of the agricultural sector in national water budgets was taken everywhere as an irreversible starting point. Another factor is the notion that food self-sufficiency is an essential national strategy. It is economically and ecologically unachievable for all countries of the Middle East except for Turkey, making the pursuit of food self-sufficiency a dangerous policy option" [14]. The Jordan river originates in the south-western Anti-Lebanon range, on the slopes of Mount Hermon (*Jabal al Sheikh*), which is covered with snow in winter. It then flows through Lebanon, Syria, Occupied Palestine and Jordan. Its principal tributary, the Yarmouk, forms the border between Syria and Jordan and divides Occupied Palestine from Jordan in the

Yarmouk triangle. Most of the Jordan valley is below sea level which gives it tropical weather year-round. The high temperatures which prevail in summer months mean that the annual field crops of the tropics can easily thrive. Staple tropical grains such as maize and rice may be cultivated, as well as essential food staples of wheat and barley in the cooler but more humid months. Wheat and barley can be raised on land which receives no rainfall, provided that the water can be brought to the crop from a surface of groundwater. The continuity of vegetables through the year is a feature of Middle Eastern domestic life not found in other latitudes, where temperatures rise too high or fall too low for crop production and divide the year into two wholly separate farming regimes. "The state of Israel currently uses as much as ninety percent or more of the stream water from the upper Jordan River"[15]. Jordan's water problems have undoubtedly been exacerbated by the state of Israel's actions to deny it the right to fully develop the water resources of the Jordan River within its borders. Allen explains that, "while agriculture is an important element in many national economies, it always forms a shrinking proportion of the national GDP and employs a decreasing share of the working population. In Jordan agriculture contributes about seven percent of GDP compared to thirty percent two decades ago, while the population employed in the industrial sector has risen to over thirty percent by 1990. Food production is an integral part of national history and culture and is easily established in such countries such as Egypt. Nevertheless, even in Israel food production has a vastly inflated significance in the national psyche because of the comparatively recent settlement experience of the early immigrants before the creation of the state in 1948. The governing elite of Israel has been dangerously identified with the importance of agriculture and the shift to high value products. National recognition that the significance of Israeli agriculture was emotional and symbolic, rather than economic, came in 1990 when the advice of the water technocrats was heeded publicly, and it was announced that Israel would cut its annual water allocation to agriculture by fifty percent. It was recognized that Israel could no longer export scarce water, which is what it was doing when it exported irrigated agricultural products such as citrus and avocados. "[16] The historically rapid increase in the population since the beginning of the twentieth century is one major reason for the Middle East becoming one of the major food importing regions of the world. The other



is the presence of oil-exporting countries which transformed their food consumption patterns especially in the 1960 and 70s. Rapid urbanization of the Gulf countries caused a rapid change in food consumption patterns of indigenous populations. The practice of livestock rearing, one deeply entrenched in nomadic culture, declined significantly in the past four decades: “In the twentieth century the proportion of nomads in the population approached thirty percent in some north African and Arabian Peninsula countries but by 1990 had fallen to five percent. Meanwhile in the past three decades livestock production has grown steadily in all countries of the Middle East driven partly by demand for food but especially by the increased purchasing power of the oil rich states since the mid 1960”[17]. Below is a summary taken from The Saudi Arabian Embassy website on water and agriculture since the 1970s: The 1970s marked the beginning of serious agricultural development in Saudi Arabia. The government launched an extensive program to promote modern farming technology; to establish rural roads, irrigation networks and storage and export facilities; and to encourage agricultural research and training institutions. The increased food production brought about a proportional decline in food imports; and in fact, Saudi Arabia now exports wheat, dates, dairy products, eggs, fish, poultry, vegetables and flowers to markets around the world. This agricultural transformation has altered the country's traditional diet, supplying a diversity of local foods unimaginable a few generations ago. Dates are no longer the vital staple for Saudi Arabians that they were in the past, although they still constitute an important supplementary food. The agriculture sector has also benefited from low-cost water, fuel and electricity, and duty-free imports of raw materials and machinery. Foreign joint-venture partners of Saudi individuals or companies are exempt from paying taxes for a period of up to 10 years, and the investment regulations in effect since April 2000 offer further incentives. The Kingdom's most dramatic agricultural accomplishment, noted worldwide, was its rapid transformation from importer to exporter of wheat. In 1978, the country built its first grain silos. By 1984, it had become self-sufficient in wheat. Shortly thereafter, Saudi Arabia began exporting wheat to some thirty countries, including China and the former Soviet Union. In addition, Saudi farmers grow substantial amounts of other grains such as barley, sorghum and millet. Today, in the interest of preserving precious water resources, production of wheat and

other grains has been considerably reduced.[18] Tony Allen argues that growth in production has been achieved by increasing livestock numbers in settled areas and in the best watered tracts to unsustainable levels. Fodder deficits have been filled by feed imports, which have become a very significant element in regional food imports especially to oil rich countries. In non-oil rich countries such as Jordan livestock played an integral part in the livelihoods of farming families. The animals were needed for drought purposes, as well as dairy production, which was the main source of animal protein. In this way livestock were integral to the Jordanian economy the goat or sheep was revered in the individual farm economy and given a privileged place in the household. But it was the non-flesh livestock products which comprised the integral part of the diet, such as yogurt, *jameed* (to be discussed further on) and ghee (*samneh*). [19] Below is a narrative by PM Abdelsalam AlMajali, who witnessed Jordan before and after its independence in 1946. He was asked if there was a noticeable change in the cuisine of Jordan after the influx of Palestinian refugees after the state of Israel was declared in 1948: In southern Jordan, where water is harder to come by, 'a typical diet did not even include vegetables, it was comprised of 'aish (unleavened bread) for breakfast, *fteer* (ground up wheat, drenched in *jameed* loosened with water, sautéed onions and ghee), and if guests show up meat is served for dinner, otherwise more 'aish would be eaten' explains PM Abdelsalam AlMajali. 'Coffee is consumed throughout the whole day, and it is freshly roasted and brewed when a guest arrives'. 'A typical breakfast dish could have shredded bread, topped with sugar and ghee'. Moreover, 'Many families who did not have the means would maybe have chicken once a week, and red meat once a month.' He goes on to explain, 'After WWII, there were many defeats and changes in the area, and it was around when we began to get imported products such as, steaks and shrimp but that was reserved for those who could afford it'.[20] Traditionally meat, especially lamb, is the focal point of many religious festivities, for example Eid al Adha or Eid al Qurban means (feast of the sacrifice) where its symbol is the sacrificial lamb. Lent is a season of forty days, which comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, which means "spring". During the forty days, practitioners fast on all animal and dairy products, and anything that has a soul. One interpretation is that springtime is when animals give birth, so it is a good time to give the nursing mothers time to rest, to

nurture their newborns. Lamb would be served to break the fast on Easter Sunday. Among Bedouins and nomads, it is customary to sacrifice a lamb or whichever animal is available when a guest passes by for a meal, this is Arabian hospitality at its most basic. Entire books have been written about Arabian hospitality and the treatment of a guest. Overall, meat is reserved for religious festivities and special occasions. It was not customary to consume meat as frequently as it is now.

## **How does food create a national identity?**

Since the twentieth century food in the Middle East, much like everything else, has become politicized. In the state of Israel, since the First Aliyah or migration of European Jews to what was then called Palestine (1882 – 1903), food played a significant role in promoting the land along its biblical description of “the land of milk and honey” Deuteronomy (31:21) from Old testament or Tanakh (Hebrew Name). Yael Raviv, an Israel food writer, explains how Zionist propaganda was used to create Israel’s brand in her book *Falafel Nation: Cuisine and the Making of a National Identity in Israel* published in 2015. Below is her description of the Zionist campaigns: “In biblical times the land of milk and honey was advertised with the aid of grapes, and ever since, food has continued to play a significant role in Zionist propaganda and Israeli tourism campaigns. These campaigns tend to use natural, whole foodstuffs such as grapes, olives, and oranges. These “fruits of the land” are perceived as direct links to the land itself and creating and enforcing these links has been the primary concern of the Zionist movement”.[21] Lebanon works very hard on counteracting the Zionist political food movement; however, they just attribute the food to Lebanon. They have a wider reach around the world due to various civil wars, which pushed many to leave the country in the 1800s. The Lebanese population has a wider reach within the foreign markets and more connections. Most Arab restaurants abroad will be called Lebanese, it is also much easier to describe Arab food to foreigners by saying its “Lebanese food”. It also became synonymous with mezze, mixed grill and shisha types of restaurants found all over the Levant, gulf region and the world. Through constant national identity branding, marketing and obviously in most cases nationality of the owner, Lebanese food

prevailed instead of Arab food. In the beginning of the twenty first century there was a Lebanese project of authenticating and protecting certain dishes and labelling them as Lebanese, however that was not executed. Lebanon has a well-researched and documented Slow food Ark of Taste inventory, that lists species of flora and traditional cooking techniques found in Lebanese mountain villages. They also have a good collection of cookbooks and documents that display all the research. There have been various Arab cookbook authors in the past two decades, who write about the region's food but some of their book titles emphasize their national food identity instead of naming a shared Pan-Arab cuisine. *The Arabian Cookbook* by Chef Ramzy Choueiry (probably one of the most iconic chefs of the region), mentions a variety of Lebanese dishes in the book. However, when talking about Mansaf he calls it "Jordanian Mansaf ", Machbous is "Emirati Machboos' ", Kabsah is "Saudi Kabsa' " and the list goes on. The motive behind this is not clear, however, especially within Lebanon, a country so proud of everything Lebanese, and very quick to stereotype and pass judgement – Jordan's cuisine for example became synonymous to Mansaf. The following section will further explain this stereotype. Mansaf consists of *jameed* (fermented dried yogurt), loosened with meat broth, served with slow cooked lamb or chicken and ghee flavored rice. Before the arrival of rice, this dish was eaten over dried wheat or bread. Mansaf is also enjoyed in Syria and Palestine and perhaps anywhere where *jameed* or some form of it was made. When yogurt substitutes *jameed*, the dish is called *shakriyeh* or *laban immo* (mother's milk. Milk by-products are a major preserved food in the Caucasian region, they are referred to by many names *kashk*, *kishk*, *keshk* (refer to a whole chapter in *Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* by Françoise Aubaile-Sallenave for more details). All variations mentioned from Iran, Pakistan, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, to Iraq, Syria, Armenia, Palestine, Lebanon and Turkey include some type of dried and soured (fermented) milk and grain, sun dried shaped into balls or flat cakes for winter season. Another variation came about with the addition of barley water influenced by Greek medicine which considered barley water a true panacea. Through the centuries each region developed their own form of *kishk* either incorporated with or without fermented grain. *Jameed* in Arab means hard, that could be why this type of *kishk* was given that name. Since food is perishable its history is hard to trace,

nevertheless techniques passed down through generations are a tangible reflection of the product's history. So, it is no coincidence that *jameed* and *kishk* share similar flavor profiles, given they share the similar basic ingredients (fermented dairy and grain by-products)[22]. So, calling Mansaf Jordan's national dish is incorrect, since it exists in various forms all over the region. Below is a quote by Leila elHaddad from *The Gaza Kitchen*, her view on how food became political regarding the Palestinian Israeli conflict: "Food is more than just nourishment; it is highly political, emotional and symbolic. How it is marketed and spoken about is a means of propagating stories and perpetuating history. In his *Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon argues that colonizers and occupiers make a determined effort to devalue or render invisible the histories of the native people they control, and thus those populations' future of a national culture"[23]. In this way, says Israeli writer Yahil Zaban "hummus, tahina, falafel was turned into symbols of Israeliness, while their Arab heritage was repressed and obliterated." Appropriation, "erases not only Palestinians, it also erases the bitter ways in which the state of Israel erased the Arabness of its Mizrahi Jews," argues Laleh Khalili, a scholar of Middle Eastern politics. Yael Zerubavel, a scholar on Israeli culture at Rutgers University, gives another explanation. "politically, the Zionists ignored the Arabs, but culturally, they romanticized and tried to imitate them. This imitation didn't seem like theft," she explains, "but localization, a process of putting roots in soil." Claudia Roden, not once mentions Mizrahi Jews and their cuisine in her book *A book of Middle Eastern Food*. She attributes all Mediterranean and Middle Eastern influence in Jewish cookery to Sephardic Jews who were spread out all over the Mediterranean coast. She mentions the differences between Ashkenazi cooking that had its roots in medieval Germany, with a heavy polish and Russian influence. Compared to the sophisticated Sephardic cuisine influenced by the long convivial symbiosis with Arabs, with no mention of Mizrahi Jews, who in other words were the Arab Jews. Arab is just being an adjective to describe the geographic land where they came from. Laila el Haddad continues to explain how 'new food' food could be cited without the need for rebranding: "The key here is context and intent. Everywhere the history of cuisine is one of borrowing, adapting, transforming: that is not the problem. It would be a far different script if Israeli chefs were to acknowledge the heritage of the 'new foods' they are just now discovering,

rather than quietly rebranding them as Israeli. But when so much of what was once Palestinian is now Israeli – the land, the water, the towns and houses and orchards – it stands to reason that Palestinians should resist the colonization of this last frontier of Palestinian identity”. [24] To that, one can add that Lebanese, other Arab and Israeli chefs can find better ways to describe the food they serve, one eaten by a whole region and showcase their pride in their national identity by treating their neighbors kindly. Leave politics out of the kitchen, it already involves other types of politics. Basic acknowledgement or citation of recipe and food origin is all it takes to maintain a civil atmosphere, as in the case of Slow food. But is that necessary? Having an organization whether it be Slow food, UNESCO cultural heritage or other organizations to be able to acknowledge origin, or can this be resolved with an open mind, respect and humanity. Despite the limitations of geography, and the tensions of regional politics, there is room for a more creative future of food in the Middle East. Tony Allen explores a sober look at the status quo of agriculture in the Arab region, he asks his readers to look at the long-term consequences of all the rapid urban advancement of the region, below is a quote from his section: “The last decade of the twentieth century will be one during which those who make policy based on symbolic significance of agriculture will have to yield to the arguments of those who argue for the unavoidable adoption of principles of economic returns to water within systems which are ecologically sustainable. In the way of politics, the struggle will not be one in which the misguided renounce the current economically and environmentally unsustainable policies; they will gradually adopt sustainable policies and make a virtue out of their adoption. In due course, principles relating to the equitable international use of water and the management of minimum standards of water quality will also appear on the international agenda and when implemented will enhance the stability of the region”. [25] This was published shortly after the first gulf war, perhaps optimism was in the air at the time, since 1994 was the year Jordan and Israel signed a peace deal and discussed shared water sources. Unfortunately, the stability of the region took a turn since 2003 and has been unsettled ever since. Price hikes in staple food crops mainly due to inadequate water supply was the main source of unrest in the Arab Spring in 2011. The ongoing war in Syria is mostly volatile near the Golan Heights near Mount Hermon, Wadi Barada which

is a river valley in Southwestern Syria, the Tabqa dam Raqqa which gets water from the Euphrates and the list continues. Water may have appeared on international agendas but surely not in the way Tony Allen mentioned. The proposed manifesto will shed light to water, and the importance of this scarce resource in the region. Few regions of the planet offer a more varied physiography or a richer mix of ethnicities, religions, languages, societies, cultures, and politics than the Middle East. At the same time, no segment of the globe presents its diverse aspects in such an amalgam of conflicts and complexities. Out of this compound, one issue emerges as the most conspicuous, cross-cutting, and problematic: water. Its scarcity and rapid diminution happen to occur in some of the driest sectors of an area where there are also some of the fiercest national animosities. River waters in the Middle East are thus a conflict-laden determinant of both the domestic and external policies of the region's principal actors. Equally, though, they could be a catalyst for lasting peace.[26] Since the water resources of the Middle East are insufficient to meet the needs of the region's rising population the kitchens of the region will have to accommodate the region's rising populations. Mainly temperate countries where water comes free or almost free to farmers and where exporting water in food products is a sound and economic proposition. The people of the Middle East are already at an advanced stage of accommodation to this situation in that the environmental resource endowment is such that food self-sufficiency is not a policy option. Jordan came to reality with this notion two years after it gained its independence from the British. In 1948 after the (Nakba – Palestinian Exodus), when 700,000 Palestinians became refugees after Israel declared its Independence, Jordan's population doubled making half its population Palestinian. Point being Jordan has struggled since 1948 with food staple shortages, the north of Jordan used to be able to plant enough wheat for the population at the time, but with the geopolitical manipulation of water supplies in the region that slowly diminished.[27] The Arab Kitchen Manifesto aims to tackle the main issues mentioned in my research Here they are summarized in thirteen points on purity, season, ethics, health, sustainability and quality. The Arab Kitchen manifesto has an innovative approach to traditional foods combined with a strong focus on sustainability and an ethical production philosophy. The time has come for us to create an Arab

Kitchen, free from politics and foreign intervention, which goes back to shared roots and history to showcase civility, compassion and an open mind with more emphasis on cooperation, transparency, traceability and a smarter way to continue living on a global planet that can be hit by global pandemics at any time.

The aims of the Arab Kitchen are the following:

- To acknowledge Arab foods' long and rich history, appreciate that it is shared by the whole region of multiple religions and cultures.
- To leave water out of politics, because it is a necessity for life. A unified water council free from internal and external politics and foreign agendas could be established to regulate water use and consumption. Fruits, vegetables and protein could have labels that show the source of water used and the quantity. A transparent monitoring system can assess if the water was used efficiently.
- To export surplus agricultural products only when it is truly surplus, starting with neighboring countries, because it is the cheapest shipping option.
- To decrease the amount of red meat in the Arab diet and the variety of complete plant proteins already available in our diet, since we have a heavily vegetarian and vegan diet. Reserve meat to its traditional time on occasions, such as having guests or festive occasions.
- To express the purity, freshness, simplicity and ethics we wish to associate to our region that is portrayed through the peace that Christianity and Islam are based upon.
- To reflect the changes of the seasons in the meals we make, by respecting what the land gives and the different religious rituals. Particularly regarding lent, which is in spring and when animals give birth so the newly born are fed by their mothers and mothers are not stressed to produce more milk for human consumption.
- To base our cooking on ingredients and produce that is characteristically native to our climates, landscapes and waters. With open and respectful attention to terroir, and shared terroir and territory that overcomes national borders where they come in the way of terroir.



- To combine the demand for good taste with modern knowledge of health and well-being and showcase the variety and medicinal benefit behind Arab food combinations, to instill pride in the history of the cuisine.
- To promote Arab products and the variety of Arab producers - and to spread the word about their underlying cultures. Have an Arab framework that can be used for honest promotion and work against culinary theft.
- To promote animal welfare and a sound production process in our seas, on our farmland and in the wild. Use halal and kosher laws in a scientific way as an extension more than based purely on their religious rituals, eliminate rules that are not reasonable. This could potentially build a bridge between the different religious cultures of the region.
- To develop potentially new applications of traditional Arab food products, to maintain continuity, innovation and long-standing cooking and preservation methods.
- 
- To combine local self-sufficiency with regional sharing of high-quality products.
- To join forces with consumer representatives, other cooking craftsmen, agriculture, fishing, food, retail and wholesale industries, researchers, teachers, politicians and authorities on this project for the benefit and advantage of everyone in the Middle East.

*I am revisiting this section of the Arab kitchen manifesto, because of the covid-19 pandemic. This pandemic has already changed the way people are eating, gathering food and storing. The first case was in Wuhan at the end of 2019 and it slowly spread to the east (near east Asia), Mediterranean and is in the Americas at the moment. Today is April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. My observations will be based on live counts/ stories from my family that lives in Jordan at the moment, and myself living in Washington DC for the time being. I decided to revise the rules and regulations, because Jordan has imposed one of the strictest protocols in the world to combat the pandemic and stop it from spreading. Naturally, food is a big part of strict lockdown and self isolation, and the rules imposed were very compelling for me to revisit this paper.*

*For example:*

*You cannot use a car to go grocery shopping.*

*Supermarkets are not allowed to open for self shopping, they can only accept orders and deliver to minimize human contact.*

*Mini markets and small grocery shops are allowed to open for a set time*

*Vegetable grocery and butcher shops are allowed to open for a set time*

*Farmers resume work and can supply the markets*

*Statistic for number of restaurants that serve animal protein*

*Statistic on number of restaurants that do not serve animal protein*

#### Appendix:

The Nordic Kitchen Manifesto was conceived and formulated in 2004 and summarized in ten points on purity, season, ethics, health, sustainability and quality.

The New Nordic Food manifesto has an innovative approach to traditional foods combined with a strong focus on health and an ethical production philosophy.

The Nordic cuisine should create and inspire the joy of food, taste and variety, nationally and internationally, according to the initial vision:

” As Nordic chefs we find that the time has now come for us to create a New Nordic Kitchen, which in virtue of its good taste and special character compares favorably with the standard of the greatest kitchens of the world”, the Manifesto state

The aims of the New Nordic Kitchen are:

- To express the purity, freshness, simplicity and ethics we wish to associate with our region.
- To reflect the changes of the seasons in the meal we make.
- To base our cooking on ingredients and produce whose characteristics are particularly in our climates, landscapes and waters.

- To combine the demand for good taste with modern knowledge of health and well-being.
- 
- To promote Nordic products and the variety of Nordic producers - and to spread the word about their underlying cultures.
- To promote animal welfare and a sound production process in our seas, on our farmland and in the wild.
- To develop potentially new applications of traditional Nordic food products.
- To combine the best in Nordic cookery and culinary traditions with impulses from abroad.
- To combine local self-sufficiency with regional sharing of high-quality products.
- To join forces with consumer representatives, other cooking craftsmen, agriculture, fishing, food, retail and wholesale industries, researchers, teachers, politicians and authorities on this project for the benefit and advantage of everyone in the Nordic countries.

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[1] See Appendix

[2] Nawal Nasrallah – *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective* (2012) p.140 - 152

[3] Clifford Wright/ Nawal Nasrallah – *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective* (2012) p.147 - 148

[4] Bottero Jean – *The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia* (2002) p. 3,4, 5

[5] <https://babylonian-collection.yale.edu>

[6] Bottero Jean – *The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia* (2002) p. 25 - 35

- [7] Bottero Jean – The Oldest Cuisine in the World: Cooking in Mesopotamia (2002) p. 25 - 35
- [8] Clifford Wright/ Nawal Nasrallah – Writing Food History: A Global Perspective (2012) p.151
- [9] Nawal Nasrallah – Writing Food History: A Global Perspective (2012) p.150
- [10] <https://britannica.com/place/Aleppo>
- [11] Marlene Matar – The Aleppo Book (2017) p.8, 11
- [12] Claudia Roden – A Book of Middle Eastern Food (1972) p.9, 12
- [13] <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/roden-claud>
- [14] Tony Allen – Culinary Cultures of the Middle East (1994) p.28
- [15] Masahiro Murakami - Managing Water for Peace in the Middle East: Alternative Strategies (1995) p.1.1
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[27] <https://fao.org/docrep/005/Y4473E/y4473e08.htm>

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[YT1].

[YT2] Are you sure? Where's your source?

[kt3] The market - Souk al-Madina - comprises a network of vaulted stone alleyways and carved wooden facades and was once a major tourist attraction and a busy cosmopolitan trading hub on the ancient Silk Road from China.

Its many narrow alleys have a combined length of 13 km (8 miles) making it the largest covered market in the world and it sells everything from soap to jewelry to clothing.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-idUSBRE88J0X720120930>

[kt4]