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“KITCHEN HISTORIES” AND THE TASTE OF MOBILITY IN MOROCCO¹

Abstract

Scholars have long recognized the importance of everyday life to understanding the formation of modern nation-states and national cultures. Culinary culture offers especially rich insights into these processes, but the nature of culinary practice poses a challenge to researchers: namely, much of it exists not in conventional archives or written texts, but in embodied knowledge, learned gestures, and oral tradition. This article outlines a method for conducting “kitchen histories,” an ethnographically oriented oral history methodology focused on memories of kitchens and cooking. It describes the narratives of three Moroccan women in which migration and mobility are significant factors in the formation of both national and class identities. These histories highlight a tension between consolidating national cultural styles and tastes within a bounded geographical unit and the centrality of migration and middle-class mobility, both of which frequently cross national borders, to that process.



In an essay on cookbooks and the making of a “national cuisine” in India, Arjun Appadurai discusses the practices of women from India’s urban, “spatially mobile” middle classes—in particular, the exchange of recipes among women hailing from different regions.² Highlighting the relationship between textual and oral forms of culinary knowledge, he argues that these kinds of verbal exchanges were foundational to the creation of a new genre of cookbooks, a genre that is part of a process of “constructing a new middle-class ideology and consumption style for India.”³ Appadurai’s insights speak to the importance of verbal, interpersonal interactions to the codification of a cuisine intended to reflect national tastes. They also point to a central challenge facing scholars working at the intersection of nationalism and popular culture: much of everyday cultural and social practice is intangible, existing in memories, learned gestures, and oral traditions. Even once recipes are written down, they remain intertwined with the layers of

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nontextual historical material that coproduced them—and which inform their use or evolution.

Scholars have long recognized the importance of everyday life to understanding the formation of modern nation-states and national cultures. Following the work of Eric Hobsbawm and others, Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss call “for examining the actual practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the contexts of their everyday lives” by studying what they term “everyday nationhood.”⁴ They outline a number of modalities of everyday nationhood, from the performance of symbolic rituals to forms of consumption by which individuals enact “national distinction” through “mundane tastes and preferences.”⁵ This article draws on examples from culinary culture in Morocco to explore the latter modality, tracing the formation of a Moroccan national cuisine within the home kitchens of the mobile middle classes, along similar lines as the context Appadurai describes. It is based on material collected through an interview-based methodological approach I refer to as “kitchen history,” which is designed to focus attention on the oral as well as gestural and sensory aspects of culinary practice and history.⁶ The methodology, which will be explained in further detail below, builds on an oral history interview. Women are asked to narrate their memories of kitchens, cooking, and eating, prompted not only by verbal questions but material objects, foods, and spaces.

“Kitchen histories” conducted with Moroccan women reveal a tension at the heart of the formation of national culinary tastes: namely, although the making of a national cuisine reflects a process of standardization identified with a discrete, bounded geographic unit, migration and mobility are nevertheless central to that process. The dynamics of both migration and middle-class mobility, including movement within and beyond national borders, were and remain foundational to the way that certain foods were invented, reproduced, and consumed as Moroccan. For scholars of the Middle East and North Africa, this approach to the history of everyday life and nationhood offers a salient means to counter misperceptions of the region’s societies as fundamentally unchanging or “traditional,” especially when it comes to gendered spheres like the home.

THE MAKING OF NATIONAL CULTURE IN MOROCCO

This article contributes to existing scholarship addressing the

formation of modern Morocco through the lenses of mobility, social class, and gender. By focusing on the specifics of ordinary social practices like cooking, I aim to extend these lines of scholarly inquiry into the realm of everyday nationhood. Doing so demonstrates how embodied and haptic practices relate to formal or discursive ones in explaining nationalism as “a mass phenomenon.”⁷

One key framework for studying the formation of Moroccan national culture is the relationship between modern Moroccan identity and the heritage of al-Andalus—that is, the Islamicate culture that flourished on the Iberian Peninsula between the eighth and fifteenth centuries. This idea is itself predicated in part on a history of migration, stemming from the fact that significant numbers of Muslim and Jewish Andalusians moved to Morocco following a series of expulsions ordered by Iberia’s Christian rulers beginning in the late fifteenth century. Eric Calderwood’s work details the origins and influence of the notion that “modern Moroccan culture descends directly from al-Andalus,” explaining how this idea became a part of contemporary Morocco’s “national doctrine” by tracing its emergence during the colonial period (1912–1956) and its resonance in both Spanish colonial and Moroccan nationalist intellectual traditions.⁸ Kitchen histories reveal that it was not only nationalist figures and Moroccan intellectuals that engaged and identified with the idea that Andalusian heritage is fundamental to Moroccan national culture. Ordinary women also did so by cooking foods specifically associated with Andalusian cuisine—whether or not those foods were a part of their mothers’ or grandmothers’ culinary repertoires.

Because they trace the life trajectories of women and their families over multiple generations and thus multiple locations within Morocco, kitchen histories also offer a contribution to recent interventions in Moroccan historiography that counter a scholarly tendency to focus on the French colonial zone (which covered the majority of present-day Morocco) at the expense of Spanish colonialism in Morocco, which was restricted to the north of the country. Calderwood points out that “Spanish colonialism in Morocco, when it is considered at all, is often treated as a sideshow to French colonialism; by extension, Moroccan nationalist culture under Spanish colonial rule is seen as an appendix to the nationalist movement that developed in the French zone.”⁹ He and others have highlighted the significance of peripheral or marginal actors and regions to the articulation of modern Moroccan nationalism and nationhood. Historian David Stenner counters this trend by arguing that histories of the Moroccan

nationalist movement must take not only the history of the Spanish zone capital of Tetouan, but its rich transnational dimensions into account.¹⁰ The mobility of actors, ideas, and resources across colonial borders within and outside of Morocco, he argues, was essential to the building of the nationalist movement. Kitchen histories use the narratives of women rather than public figures to demonstrate that accounting for mobility in the domestic sphere is just as crucial for understanding the emergence of modern Moroccan nationalism on the level of the everyday.

This article also contributes to feminist scholarship that highlights Moroccan women not merely as passive objects of nationalist or colonial discourse but historical actors in their own right in both the colonial and post-independence periods. Significant examples of this scholarship include the work of sociologist Fatima Mernissi and linguist Fatima Sadiqi, both of whom foreground the voices of ordinary women, including oral narratives and culture, in their research on gender in Morocco.¹¹ Jonathan Wyrzten has also drawn on oral Amazigh poetry composed by rural Moroccan women to demonstrate the ways that Moroccan women “actively contributed to discursive struggles over collective identity.”¹² Kitchen histories build on this attention to orality and women’s voices, expanding it through lines of inquiry that pursue additional sensory and material dimensions beyond the oral and aural.

Finally, the kitchen histories of Moroccan women discussed below speak to the intersection of Moroccan nationalism and the Moroccan middle classes. Shana Cohen traces the roots of what she calls Morocco’s “global middle class” in the colonial period but highlights the significance of new forms of social mobility that emerged in Moroccan society following political independence in 1956.¹³ Much of this social and geographical mobility was fueled by the expansion of the state educational system and the public sector, which prompted significant rural-to-urban migration over the course of the twentieth century. Whereas in 1920 one in ten Moroccans lived in cities, by 1982, 42.8 percent of the Moroccan population was urban.¹⁴ Cohen also links the Moroccan state’s efforts to develop a middle class of professionals with modern educations to “the ideology of an essential, unified Moroccan society.”¹⁵ Focusing on how the women of these newly educated classes learned to cook new foods from their friends and neighbors in urban neighborhoods and apartment buildings illuminates the ways in which members of the middle classes came to

identify with and produce Moroccan nationhood in material, concrete ways.

METHODOLOGY: KITCHEN HISTORIES

In designing and conducting kitchen histories, I combine an interview-based oral history technique with elements of ethnography, drawing from the anthropology of the senses in particular. Since the 1990s, scholars of the modern Middle East have turned to oral history as an important alternative to document-based historical studies, especially in the study of groups marginalized in more conventional practices of record keeping, including peasants and women.¹⁶ An important contribution in the case of Morocco is Alison Baker's collection of oral histories of Moroccan women active in the nationalist movement and in armed resistance.¹⁷ The focus on oral history in the Arabic-speaking world is not limited to the work of Western scholars: for example, the Women and Memory Forum was founded in Cairo in 1995 by women academics and activists seeking to challenge and expand the representation of Arab women in a range of historical periods.¹⁸ Their work includes the creation of an extensive library of oral histories documenting the experiences of Egyptian women.

Discussing the significance of oral history in the context of her work on mandate-era Palestine, Ellen Fleischmann notes that not only are women less represented in written sources and records, but that the marginalization of women and non-elites in this sense partly feeds into the vibrancy and potential of nontextual sources speaking to their experiences: "oral tradition tends to be most tenacious among non-elites—of whom women constitute a majority," she points out.¹⁹ Oral narratives do not simply complement written sources or fill a lacuna in the historical record; they provide a qualitatively different perspective on history and society. Alessandro Portelli argues that while multiple subfields of history have developed techniques for writing the histories of marginalized groups, there is something different and unique about oral history in terms of form: "There is a particular quality to oral histories," he writes. "The tone and volume range and the rhythm of popular speech carry implicit meaning and social connotations which are not reproducible in writing. . . . The same statement may have quite contradictory meanings, according to the speaker's intonation . . . but only approximately described in the transcriber's own words."²⁰ Stemming from this formal distinction between oral and written narratives is the power of oral history to reflect not only events but

perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about those events—complex and personal dimensions of those events’ social meanings.²¹

In the case of the kitchen and culinary culture, these valences of historical memory—perception, emotion, and sensation—are especially rich, extending beyond questions of orality to encompass taste, smell, touch, sound, and sight. My method for conducting kitchen histories therefore builds on the insights of oral history theory to access aspects of historical memory and experience that cannot be captured in writing or, in some cases, any linguistic form at all.

COMPLICATING ORALITY

Kitchen histories draw on ethnographic research methods that attend to sensory, material, and spatial elements of the research field. One example is the “guided tour” research technique, a model that is often interview-based but “hybridizes visual and aural methods.”²² In this approach the researcher engages subjects as “co-researchers,” asking them to explain certain aspects of a given space, like an office or a kitchen.²³ Kitchen history builds on this hybridized approach by introducing kitchen spaces and objects, whether utensils, ingredients, or actual prepared foods, to engage additional sensory dimensions.

This synthesis is intended in part to access historical material that resides beyond the realm of language, transcending the problematic divide between orality and literacy by contextualizing this material within a broader framework that takes embodiment and the senses into account.²⁴ An approach that moves beyond orality and textuality has the added advantage of transcending Western attitudes towards the senses that have privileged hearing and sight over other sensory faculties.²⁵ But this is also made necessary by the nature of food as subject matter: frequently traditional or family recipes are discussed as a matter of “oral tradition.” But in fact the transmission of culinary knowledge is a much more bodily engaged and haptic process than the term “oral” suggests, and often entails the use of written recipes as well. Claudia Roden, describing how she collected recipes for her iconic volume *The Book of Middle Eastern Food*, discusses the challenges she faced when translating both verbal and written recipes into actionable, replicable, written directions: “I learned that to some ‘leave it a little’ meant an hour,” Roden writes, and “that ‘five spoonfuls’ was in order to make a round figure or because five was for them a lucky number, and that a pinch could be anything from an eighth of a teaspoon to a heaped tablespoon.”²⁶ Studying culinary knowledge entails a

consideration of embodied gestures that mediate between material objects, like stoves, pots, and ingredients, kitchen spaces, and linguistic cues, whether verbal or written. The kitchen history methodology proposed here can be thought of as situating cultural and historical information about food within a Geertzian conception of culture as “webs of significance” of our own making, in a way that extends beyond the semiotic to encompass objects, space, flesh, and memory. Geertzian “thick description” in this sense offers a means to move beyond “oral history” to engage a wider sensory range in the narration of history.²⁷

In practice I draw on the growing literature on the anthropology of the senses, which not coincidentally includes many scholars who have engaged specifically with food.²⁸ C. Nadia Seremetakis draws our attention to the interconnectedness of all the senses and their relationship to memory and the body. She points out the “tactility of smells” and argues that “no smell is encountered alone,” implying that in order to study taste, we would do well to consider how it is connected to other modes of bodily experience.²⁹ Her point invites us to consider the way that kitchens are uniquely poised as spaces saturated with intersections of all of the senses in ways that many other spaces are not, such that asking questions about the physical space of the kitchen can prompt a range of sensory memories. She also notes that the senses, and sensory memories, are encoded not only in bodies and in memories, but in objects and spaces – including, I suggest, food, kitchens, kitchen tools, and ingredients. Bundles of meaning associated with the kitchen provide ideal vehicles for combining Geertzian thick description with new ways of doing and writing history: juxtaposed with our experience of the present, Seremetakis explains, “things, spaces, gestures, and tales” from the past stand still, and “drag the aftereffects” of experiences that might otherwise be consigned to silence into view.³⁰ We can take sensory memories, in other words, to prompt a creative engagement with aspects of the past that may have been omitted from “public culture, official memory and formal economies.”³¹ It follows that memories of food and kitchens represent a way to create a new kinds of historical narratives that connect material factors to cultural meaning – the kinds of narratives that speak to everyday nationhood.

Anthropologists Kathryn Geurts, Paul Stoller, and Jon Holtzman have elaborated specific methodologies and approaches to ethnographic work that take the senses into account. Geurts suggests that each culture has its own “sensorium,” which “reflects some of [its]

most fundamental values.”³² In an essay co-authored with Cheryl Olkes, Stoller advocates for what he calls “tasteful fieldwork,” which has the potential to “take us beyond the mind’s eye and into the domain of the senses of smell and taste” through immersion and experience.³³ Holtzman argues that “a more sensuous” ethnography can help us to move beyond assumptions we may hold about what makes food “good” or “bad” to begin with, and seek instead to understand the particular “taste lexicon” of the context we study, acknowledging it may require us to experience new ways of tasting and eating.³⁴ The approaches these scholars detail offer some starting points for an approach to oral histories that centers the textures and tastes of everyday life.

CONDUCTING KITCHEN HISTORIES

I developed and implemented the kitchen history methodology while conducting research for a dissertation project about the history of the middle-class kitchen in twentieth-century North Africa. During periods of fieldwork in Egypt and Morocco between 2016 and 2019, I conducted twenty-two kitchen histories with women from a range of middle-class backgrounds—defined as broadly as possible—born between 1940 and 1970.³⁵ In addition to conducting my own interviews, I also consulted existing collections of oral histories, which were particularly useful for capturing perspectives of women from older generations, often narrated in colloquial Arabic.³⁶ While these published oral histories proved useful, they often focused on women’s experience of public events rather than recollections of the rhythms and sensations of everyday life.

Where it was possible and appropriate, I conducted interviews over a meal. In many cases, this was volunteered before I could request it, as soon as women heard that I was studying food.³⁷ If the interview involved food, I also requested to be present for the actual cooking process. When conducting the interview over food was not practical or possible I asked to conduct the interview in the subject’s home, which allowed me to record a written description of their kitchen, view and discuss certain kitchen objects, and prompt memories of other kitchens using the subject’s kitchen as a source of visual cues (e.g., “Did your grandmother have cabinets like these?” rather than “How did your grandmother store her food?”). The deliberate choice of setting and space reflects an ethnographic emphasis on social context, while the inclusion of objects reflects what Micaela di Leonardo identifies as a feature more closely associated with oral history methods (in contrast

to ethnography, which she describes as more concerned with observable behavior and narrative).³⁸

I typically brought gifts of sweets, fruit, or fresh juice. Following preliminary questions about the subject's personal and family background I moved to a discussion of kitchen-related memories, prompting them first to narrate sensory memories of their grandmother's and mother's kitchens and thereby describe change over time and generation. In a sense this was an attempt to reverse engineer Seremetakis's point that "no smell is encountered alone": by asking subjects to recall memories of a space typically saturated with tastes and smells, I aimed to prompt sensory memories as they described it.³⁹ Asking about histories of smells, tastes, and textures helped to expand my subjects' narrations beyond the oral and the visual to focus on other sensory dimensions.

Framing my queries in terms of change over time provided a framework for asking open-ended questions focused on difference (e.g., "How was your mother's copper cookware different from your aluminum pots and pans?"). This was helpful in a practical sense because more often than not my interview subjects, deservedly proud of their family's culinary traditions, would insist that they cooked in a manner identical to their mothers and grandmothers. Beginning with discussions of how the physical spaces of home kitchens had changed, and the different places they had been located geographically (as they corresponded to a family's migration from the countryside to the city, for example, or from an older part of town to a new development), offered a way to draw out the differences that had emerged over changes in time and space. This open-ended approach also generated "taste lexicons" of terms generated by my subjects, rather than by me. These lexicons included, for example, a set of terms in Moroccan Arabic that refer to various forms and uses of cooking fats and oils as well insights about the simultaneous conceptual and culinary applications of words like "preserve" and "spoil," which subjects used to refer to family and society on one hand and foodstuffs on the other.

When the interview involved cooking or eating, I asked specific questions about the food, ingredients, and processes in front of us, and then resumed the final questions on my list after the meal. If specialized culinary techniques were used, I asked permission to create short video clips of the cook's hands as they demonstrated particular gestures or tools. Even when recording audio, I took detailed fieldnotes notes throughout the interview, particularly about smells, tastes, and textures, and typed them up shortly after. In addition to asking detailed

questions about sensory memories, I sought to gather information that was generated through an ethnographic encounter in terms of smells, tastes, sounds, and touch. Introducing even simple objects like copper pots or cookbooks frequently prompted memories that would have been more difficult to recall without these prompts, from brief remarks about how heavy copper cookware had been to extended stories otherwise forgotten.

Crucially, the commensal nature of cooking and eating meant that many of these interviews were conducted with one or more of the subject's family members in the room for part or all of the conversation. In some cases, the interview evolved organically into a lively multigenerational discussion. This added to the ethnographic nature of these encounters, breaking down the researcher-subject dyad and drawing out points of intergenerational difference. The presence of family members nearly always enriched the interview: they might prompt one another's memory or debate or clarify a key point or date with one another. Debates arose about culinary memories, practices, preferences, and meaning. Discussions between mothers and daughters about how one had passed culinary knowledge to another were also enlightening. On occasion a family member (usually a man) might dominate the narrative, but more often than not the family cooperated to highlight their matriarch's voice as the authority on the matter at hand. The overall aim was to generate a narrative about culinary knowledge and changes in kitchens over time that included the senses as both objects and tools of analysis—and thereby capture aspects of everyday life not captured in archives or even necessarily in conventional oral history narratives.

THE TASTE OF MIDDLE-CLASS MOBILITIES IN MOROCCO

In both colonial and postcolonial Morocco few cooking lessons or domestic science classes were designed or taught in state schools. Printed cookbooks of Moroccan food were also few and late to appear compared to other societies in the region like Egypt and Lebanon. As a result, for women growing up in the 1960s and '70s in post-independence Morocco, most culinary learning and the formation of culinary tastes took place within the home kitchen. Home kitchens were therefore the primary settings through which the tastes and techniques of certain foods came to be experienced as national. Below I discuss in detail the narratives of three Moroccan women belonging to the urban professional middle classes. These narratives speak to the emergence and standardization of a national, middle-class cuisine—

and the way that it was shaped just as much by international migration, domestic movement between rural and urban settings, and the mobility of people, objects, and recipes as it was by local factors and context.

Aida was born in 1964 and lives in Rabat, but spent her early childhood in Nador, a provincial city on Morocco's north coast in the former Spanish colonial zone.⁴⁰ Her family's history reflects two different patterns of migration. The first, on her father's side, unfolded through a series of internal movements within Morocco, from a village in the northern Rif Mountains to the provincial capital, where her father moved in 1940. When Aida was a teenager in the 1970s, her family moved to the national capital, Rabat—motivated in part by her mother's desire that the children receive a French-style education there. This pattern, by which a family moves from a village to a provincial capital to the national capital over the course of two or three generations, was a common one in the interviews I conducted. This complicates the commonly rehearsed historical narrative of rural-to-urban migration, which tends to describe individuals or families moving directly from "country to city," from a rural village to the capital or another major city. In fact, most families I met made that journey in stages, sometimes spread over several generations, with stops in large towns and provincial capitals along the way.

On Aida's mother's side, the migration pattern was transnational—between Algeria and Morocco. Aida's mother and grandmother had both grown up in colonial Algeria, but the family maintained ties to their native Morocco, in part through marriages to families from their home region. Aida's parents were distant cousins, and upon marriage her mother moved back to Morocco to set up her marital home in Nador, where Aida's father lived. At the time, Aida explained, living in Algeria "was like living in France," which had factored into her mother's motivation that her own children should have French educations in Morocco. It also meant that the women on her mother's side were what Aida described as being more "modern" in outlook, because of the entrenched influence of French culture in Algeria.⁴¹ Her mother made salads and quiches in addition to typical Rifi regional foods and was swift to adopt new kitchen appliances like the *cocotte* (pressure cooker) and electric mixer, which were advertised in the French magazines that she read. Aida also pointed out that when her mother was young, it had been far easier to acquire new kitchen appliances in the Rif, in the north of Morocco, than in Morocco's commercial, political, and cultural capitals to the south, because these

appliances were available in the nearby Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which remained Spanish territories even after Morocco gained independence in 1956.

Aida's mother's approach to cooking contrasted starkly with her father's side of the family: even after moving to the provincial capital and acquiring a gas stove her paternal grandmother continued to cook over charcoal and in an earthen bread oven. Aida's description of her grandmother's cooking habits invoked a sense of how her entire kitchen and house smelled as a result: "She would get up early to cook, and even though there was a gas stove there in the kitchen she preferred to cook over gas . . . she would set her food on the coals, then leave it to go do laundry and come back to check it from time to time," she explained. Even in an enclosed kitchen in a modern urban apartment building, her grandmother insisted on slow-cooking tajines over burning coals over the course of many hours.

As for Aida's own culinary practices, she learned very little about cooking from her own mother. Most of her culinary education took place among friends and neighbors in Rabat, after she had finished her university degree and married. As part of a highly educated, mobile middle class, her own rural culinary heritage was supplemented, though not entirely supplanted, by recipes reflecting the regional cuisines of Fes, Rabat, and Tetouan, which are popularly associated with those cities' Andalusí cultural heritage. Although the tagines she had grown up eating reflected ingredients typical of the north coastal region, with more fish than meat and the use of oil, cumin, and black and red pepper, Aida befriended numerous women in Rabat who taught her how to make the dishes of Morocco's urban cuisines. "You can add other things to tagines," she explained, "like cinnamon and prunes" – naming two ingredients typical to Fasi⁴² and Rabati cuisines, which frequently mix cinnamon and dried fruit into savory meat dishes. "I have friends who did learn with their mothers, Moroccan recipes like the foods from Rabat and Fes and Casablanca," Aida explained – "the Moroccan cooking of their grandmothers (*tabkh maghribi dyal jdathum*). For example, there was a friend I always spent Eid with. I would help her cook, but the cuisine we made was her family's."

Aida's kitchen history is typical of modern Moroccan middle-class cooking on a number of fronts. First, it illustrates the way that certain traditional recipes, in this case the tagines of Fes and Rabat, become authenticated as national traditions through maternal lines of transmission but popularized in the social context of mobile, educated,

middle-class women. Second, it points to a cornerstone of modern Moroccan middle-class cuisine: the adaptation of older local recipes and cooking vessels to modern kitchen equipment like gas stoves and ovens. In part because of the scholarly emphasis on Morocco's French zone and its cities as key incubators of colonial modernity, I had myself assumed that I should look to the markets and advertisements reflecting French-zone cities like Casablanca and Rabat for evidence of Moroccans' first introductions to pressure cookers, gas stoves, and electric kitchen appliances.⁴³ Aida's kitchen history alerted me to my own bias, reminding me to look beyond colonial and national borders. Her family history of migration between Algeria and Morocco, the proximity of Spanish enclaves to cities and towns in the north of Morocco, and her own traversing of the border between the French and Spanish zones all factored into the emergence of a new kind of modern Moroccan cooking in her home kitchen.

Fatima's kitchen history was markedly different. Whereas Aida described her family's kitchens as spaces that were changed due to the influences of migrations, Fatima emphasized her family's cooking style as both authentically Moroccan and resolutely resistant to change in the face of migration. Fatima was born in 1961 in Fes to a family with longstanding roots in the city. Within Morocco Fes is generally renowned for its cuisine, and Fasis are fiercely proud of it, citing its sophistication and Andalusi cultural roots. Fatima narrated significant changes in her family's *physical* kitchens over time—from her grandmother's traditional *riyad* in the old city of Fes, to a modern apartment in the *ville nouvelle* where her family moved when she was ten, to her kitchen in Rabat where she cooks now. But she emphasized that when it came to the cooking techniques and recipes, she makes food exactly the same way as her mother does, and that her mother's cooking was exactly the same as her grandmother's (*tiyyab wahd, bhal bhal*: "one cuisine, exactly alike"). When pressed for details about differences and change over time, however, she clarified what she meant by continuity in cuisine in subtler terms. It was permissible to swap out pigeon for chicken in a given dish, for example, if it was the right sort of chicken. The proper combination of spices and flavors was more important than the particular cooking vessel used. And some traditions, like those connected to pungent clarified butter, were preserved as cultural knowledge to be narrated and passed on to the next generation, but not necessarily put into practice in more material ways.

Fatima's sense of culinary heritage was informed by her membership in a community of other Fasis in Rabat and closely tied to Fes as a place, even long after she had left the city to live abroad and later in Morocco's capital city of Rabat. For example, she explained that she never cooked with fenugreek because "It isn't ours. There is never fenugreek in a Fasi kitchen." A "Fasi kitchen" in her understanding was not simply a kitchen physically located in Fes; it existed anywhere that members of a certain group of Fasis cooked with their characteristic spices—cinnamon, saffron, and ginger—and distinctive dishes. A Fasi kitchen, in other words, could be brought into being practically anywhere in the world with the proper combination of learned culinary techniques and instincts, spices, and recipes.

Essential to Fatima's cultural and culinary identity was the experience of growing up in a "Fasi kitchen." When I asked if her mother taught her to cook, she answered in the negative. "She didn't *teach* me. I just started going into the kitchen; I saw what she did. Then I tried it myself." Learning her family's culinary traditions was a matter of immersion: simply being in the right place to observe and absorb as a child; she deliberately eschewed describing this process using the verbs in Moroccan Arabic used to describe formal teaching and learning. This underscores the significance of cooking as a means by which national tastes were created entirely separately from formal structures or patterns of education or public institutions.

Shortly after she married, Fatima's husband got a job in Senegal and they lived there for a number of years. Once she had left Morocco, "cooking Moroccan" became something to be deliberately sought out and reinforced. From Senegal she would call her mother on the phone for instructions about cooking something properly to maintain the authenticity of her kitchen. In contrast to Aida's experiences, in which movement was a means to narrate expansion or changes in the family culinary repertoire (which included Moroccan food but was not limited to it), Fatima's narrative was about maintaining continuity and tradition in spite of patterns of mobility and migration. She described hers as a culinary tradition able to withstand any geographic displacement because of its commitment to sensory and embodied practices, and the inculcation of those practices at a young age in the proper Moroccan context. In a paradoxical way, Fatima's middle-class mobility—her moves away from the conventionally "traditional" old city of Fes to the more "modern" *ville nouvelle*, and then to Senegal and back to Rabat—strengthened her own sense of Moroccan culinary identity and clarified how she understood it, because it forced her to

define and maintain that identity against outside influences. The kitchen history brought to the surface stories of migration that were fundamental to Fatima's identity as a middle-class Moroccan woman, but which were totally elided in her initial explanation of the unchanging Fasi kitchen.

The final case is that of Zohour (born in 1965), a Moroccan woman currently living in the southeastern United States whose life has been defined by international migration. Before moving to the United States she lived in Qatar with her husband and children. Because of her experiences as a Moroccan in the Gulf, Zohour's sense of her Moroccan culinary and national identity was formed initially largely in relation to other Arabs: in Doha and in the United States, she recounted, she cooked with Egyptians, Syrians, Palestinians, Lebanese, and Qataris. Particularly formative experiences in this regard included holidays, when various members of the Arab community would gather and share dishes from their respective backgrounds. In these contexts, just as important to Zohour as her mother's recipes were a specific set of Moroccan cooking utensils. "Coming from Qatar [to the United States] I brought a couscous pan, even though I had to pay twenty-five dollars to carry it on [the plane]," she explained. "But I needed it! I could never make couscous by boiling it the way the Lebanese do."

Zohour made similar assertions about culinary authenticity as Fatima had, explaining at first that "we altered nothing from my grandmother to my mother . . . nothing was changed." As the kitchen history interview parsed how certain dishes were passed down from her maternal and others from her paternal grandmother, however, a more complex pattern was revealed about which of her grandmothers' recipes were more likely to survive generational change and migration. This process is most clearly illustrated by her family's relationship to a dish called *bastila*, a sweet-and-savory chicken pastry made with eggs, saffron, almonds, cinnamon, and sugar. Associated with the Andalusian-influenced cuisines of Fes, Rabat, and Tetouan, *bastila* transformed from a delicacy of the bourgeois elites of those cities to a standard national celebratory dish over the course of the twentieth century, particularly among the urban middle classes throughout Morocco. The history of *bastila* within Zohour's family demonstrates how this happened, highlighting the relevance of migration to the formation of national cuisines and tastes.

Zohour's family history includes numerous internal migrations within Morocco. Her maternal grandparents were from a Rabati family, while her paternal grandparents lived in Oujda, on Morocco's

eastern border. Her parents met and lived in Rabat, where Zohour was born and raised. Her maternal side of the family had a deep attachment to making *bastila* in a specific way, presumably passed down for generations; but the dish was absent from the culinary repertoire of her paternal grandmother in Oujda. And yet because her father migrated from Oujda to Rabat and married into a Rabati family, that side of the family effectively gained descendants for whom *bastila* was a staple. Zohour recalls that *bastila* was the first course at her wedding, where her mother personally oversaw the preparation of thirty of the pastries, refusing to delegate their preparation to anyone else. Zohour's attachment to the dish was strengthened in Qatar, where the only other Moroccan in her social circle was a Fasi woman who also made *bastila*. Her family background demonstrates how, over the course of generations and migrations, Moroccan families that may only have partial connections to Andalusí heritage came to prepare dominant foods like *bastila* to express and experience a certain form of Moroccan national identity. As the consolidation and expansion of the middle classes in urban settings transformed *bastila* from a regional specialty to a national one, the particulars of its history were replaced by the assertion of its place within a Moroccan national culinary heritage.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of Moroccan nationhood over the course of the twentieth century as not only a political movement but a popular experience depended upon the invention of certain "national traditions," to use Hobsbawm's phrase.⁴⁴ This process of "invention" included the rewriting of cultural and culinary histories within the bounds of discrete national political borders and uniform national categories. In many cases this obscured the complex and far-flung influences, including narratives of mobility and migration, that underpinned the origins and emergence of national traditions and tastes. By focusing on the actual practices of the women who adopted, enacted, and reproduced those tastes, however, kitchen histories can shed light on how nationhood came to resonate with Moroccans in the context of the everyday. They also point to the importance of migration and movement in shaping and reinforcing identities, even when those identities are asserted as linked to a geographically bounded space, and reveal the dynamics through which certain traditions are experienced as "national" while others fade or remain regional or local. In the context of the Middle East and North Africa in particular, kitchen histories offer a research method attuned to the ways that women both

make and un-make national histories and cultural traditions, countering stereotypes of the region as a place defined by static and “traditional” gender norms. For scholars of nationalism more generally, they underscore the power of the ordinary and the everyday to unravel national narratives of permanence, uniformity, and cohesion.

NOTES

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² Arjun Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (1988): 6.

³ Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine,” 6.

⁴ Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (2008): 537; for an account of everyday nationhood among Palestinian refugees in Jordan, see Michael Vicente Pérez, “Materializing the Nation in Everyday Life: On Symbols and Objects in the Palestinian Refugee Diaspora,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 42, no. 4 (2018): 409–27.

⁵ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” 538.

⁶ The term “kitchen history” is also intended to evoke the term “kitchen Arabic,” which is used to refer to colloquial varieties of Arabic that are primarily oral, contrasted with standard forms of Arabic, and associated largely with women.

⁷ Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” 537.

⁸ Eric Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus: Spain and the Making of Modern Moroccan Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 8.

⁹ Calderwood, *Colonial al-Andalus*, 18.

¹⁰ David Stenner, "Centring the Periphery: Northern Morocco as a Hub of Transnational Anti-Colonial Activism, 1930–43," *Journal of Global History* 11, no. 3 (2016): 430–50; David Stenner, "Networking for Independence: The Moroccan Nationalist Movement and Its Global Campaign against French Colonialism," *Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 4 (2012): 573–94.

¹¹ See Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Fatima Mernissi, *Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes* (Rabat: Société Marocaine des Editeurs Réunis, 1984); Fatima Sadiqi, *Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Fatima Sadiqi, ed., *Women Writing Africa: The Northern Region* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2009); Fatima Sadiqi, ed., *Women and Knowledge in the Mediterranean* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹² Jonathan Wyrzten, *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 241–42.

¹³ Shana Cohen, *Searching for a Different Future: The Rise of a Global Middle Class in Morocco* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 13.

¹⁴ Cohen, *Searching for a Different Future*, 43, 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37; For an overview of the emergence of "middling cuisines" and their relationship to both the expansion of the middle classes and the emergence of nationalism globally, see Rachel Laudan, *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chaps. 7, 8.

¹⁶ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Ellen L. Fleischmann, "Crossing the Boundaries of History: Exploring Oral History in Researching Palestinian Women in the Mandate Period," *Women's History Review* 5, no. 3 (1996): 351–71; Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870–1920*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Alison Baker, *Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

¹⁸ "About Us," *The Women and Memory Forum*, accessed 26 March 2019, <http://www.wmf.org.eg/en/about-us/>

¹⁹ Fleischmann, "Crossing the Boundaries of History," 352–53.

²⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 47.

²¹ Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 50.

²² Leslie Thomson, "The Guided Tour Technique in Information Science: Explained and Illustrated," *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 52, no. 1 (2015): 1.

²³ Thomson, "The Guided Tour Technique," 3.

²⁴ Johannes Fabian, "Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 4 (1990): 753–72; Jonathan Sterne, "The Theology of Sound: A Critique of Orality," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 36, no. 2 (2011): 207–25.

²⁵ Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 24–25.

²⁶ Claudia Roden, *A Book of Middle Eastern Food* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 5.

²⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

²⁸ Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*; Kathryn Linn Geurts, *Culture and the Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2005); Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015). For scholars that address food specifically, see C. Nadia Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994); Jon Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes: Memory, Ambivalence, and the Politics of Eating in Samburu, Northern Kenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); David E. Sutton, "Food and the Senses," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010): 209–23.

²⁹ Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Geurts, *Culture and the Senses*, 101.

³³ Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes, "The Taste of Ethnographic Things," in *The Taste of Ethnographic Things*, 29.

³⁴ Holtzman, *Uncertain Tastes*, 61.

³⁵ These dates were based on the parameters of my study. In defining "middle class" I looked for any one of a number of factors, including family history (e.g., women whose mothers or grandmothers were born in a provincial village and moved to the city for their education or because they married a man in the new professional classes), level of education, and the neighborhood in which they lived. In this sense I did not approach the middle class in empirically bounded terms, but, following Lucie Ryzova's work on the Egyptian *efendiyya*, as an amalgamation of social groups distinguished by a common set of lived experiences, cultural outlooks, and, crucially, self-conscious identifications with or aspirations to modernity. Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8–9.

³⁶ Two examples of published interview collections I consulted are Mernissi, *Le Maroc raconte*; and Amal Abu al-Fadil, ed., *Aswat wa-Asda'* (Cairo: Women and Memory Forum, 2007).

³⁷ Ellen Fleischmann discusses the challenges entailed in conducting oral history interviews in homes in cultures where hospitality is a significant cultural value, as it introduces considerable social expectations of the interviewer and narrator to also embody the roles of guest and hostess. She points out that interviewing in a domestic setting also means that multiple people beyond the researcher and her subject are introduced to the research field and conversation. Fleischmann, "Crossing the Boundaries of History," 361–62.

³⁸ Micaela di Leonardo, "Oral History as Ethnographic Encounter," *Oral History Review* 15, no. 1 (1987): 4–5.

³⁹ Seremetakis, *The Senses Still*, 29.

⁴⁰ All names have been changed.

⁴¹ French colonial policies towards Moroccan culture contrasted significantly with their policies in Algeria. While in Algeria the French pursued assimilation, encouraging Algerians to adopt the French language and other customs, French colonial policy in Morocco placed an emphasis on defining and maintaining cultural differences between French and Moroccan society. Both were designed to support and legitimate colonial rule, but it meant that a Moroccan woman growing up in Algeria was more likely to experience more direct exposure to French culture than if she had grown up in Morocco.

⁴² "Fasi" refers to someone or something from the city of Fes (sometimes written as Fez).

⁴³ David Stenner gives an extensive overview of histories of Morocco that have scarcely mentioned Tetouan, the capital of the Spanish colonial protectorate that governed the Rif during the colonial period, as well as an overview of books specifically on the nationalist movement that treat activity in the northern part of the country as peripheral; David Stenner, "Centering the Periphery," 4. For notable scholarship on colonial modernity in French-ruled Morocco, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).