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## PITAS AND PASSPORTS: ARAB FOODWAYS IN THE WINDSOR-DETROIT BORDERLANDS

### Abstract

Virtually all North American border foodways literature focuses on the US Southwest, where an international boundary runs through an ethnic foodway. This research is enormously valuable, but Mexican food in the Southwest does not tell us much about a diasporic border-food community. What do we learn when we study an international boundary running through an ethnic minority, such as the Arab community that exists on both sides of the Windsor/Detroit border? When a foodway already struggles to find its identity within a hegemonic culture, how does that food community negotiate an international state difference right in its midst? Before 9/11, a “soft” border allowed for the existence of a large, interactive, regional cross-border Arab foodway. Since then, the thickening of that border has rapidly accelerated the formation of an “Arab Canadian” foodway in Windsor.



In the fall of 2017, I went to lunch at Windsor’s most upscale Lebanese restaurant, Mazaar. As I laid eyes on the menu, one dish jumped out at me: *shawarma poutine*. Was this dish gutsy or heretical? Of all nations on Earth, Canada may well have the least defined national cuisine. If you ask Canadians to identify a national dish, they are likely to name only an ingredient: maple syrup. What is interesting, however, is the dish that has come out of the same region that produces that sweet nectar, *Quebecoise poutine*, which consists of french fries slathered in cheese curds and gravy. Today there is a poutine craze in Canada, where even fast-food joints are offering to upgrade that side of fries by dumping cheese and gravy on top. This meal ensures a slow afternoon following a fast-food lunch. But what was placed in front of me that afternoon at Mazaar, a plate of fries with beef gravy, cheese curds, shawarma chicken pieces, and a pretty pattern of squeeze-bottle shawarma sauce crosshatched over everything, was a fascinating twist on the story of Arab border foodways in Windsor/Detroit.<sup>1</sup> This is a regional food community that has traditionally seen the border as a

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nuisance but not a cultural divide, where differences in shawarma tend to be Beqaa versus Beirut. Shawarma poutine, were it to catch on, would put a profoundly Canadian stamp on Lebanese cuisine in the Windsor-Detroit borderlands. While this dish can now also be found in Dearborn, its Canadian heritage is openly referenced.<sup>2</sup>

Virtually all border foodways literature focuses on *l'autre frontière*, "the other border," in the US Southwest, as a French Canadian might redirect a more well-known Spanish turn of phrase. Fascinatingly, that southwestern research focus has travelled all the way north to the usual *otra frontera* with the analysis of Latinx food industry workers in upstate New York and Vermont, as they fall within the hundred-mile "border zone," and are therefore subject to incredible amounts of interference from immigration agents. Thus, even when the Canadian border is the "space" of border food studies, the subjects are nevertheless the peoples of the US Southwest border.<sup>3</sup> Studying the border food situation in the Southwest, where an international boundary runs through an ethnic foodway is enormously valuable, as are the other obvious comparative possibilities (two examples could be Alsace, and Hungarian foodways across Romanian borders, as in Transylvania). But Mexican food in the Southwest does not belong to a diasporic community, and although Anglo settlers sought to marginalize Mexicans and their foods, Mexican Americans have remained a significant presence in the region, far from being a small minority in the midst of a hegemonic culture.<sup>4</sup> What do we learn when we study an international boundary running through an ethnic minority?<sup>5</sup> In the Southwest, and in the comparable Transylvania region, on one side of the border, the foodway is in no way "ethnic," or minority. It is, in fact, "the" cuisine of the dominant culture. Yes, there are myriad Mexican foodways, from village to village, but the point is that, while differentiated, Mexican food is not "Other" in Mexico. The question highlighted by the Arab community split by the Windsor/Detroit border is: When a foodway already struggles to find its identity within a hegemonic culture, how does that food community negotiate an international state difference right in its midst? The thesis proffered here is this: a soft border allowed for the creation and existence of a large, interactive, regional cross-border Arab foodway, until 9/11. The thickening of that border has rapidly accelerated the formation of an "Arab Canadian" foodway in Windsor. After briefly laying out the history of the Windsor/Detroit borderland and then the arrival and steady evolution of Arab communities on both sides of the border, I will focus on the fracturing of the cross-border Arab

community caused by the aftershocks of 9/11 and how the smaller Windsor community has evolved to deal with this rupture.

I began living in Windsor in 2005, quite near the major east-west artery that is Wyandotte Street, with its specific built-up section called the Wyandotte Corridor, and immediately assumed it had long been a well-developed “Arab quarter.” I did not realize it had quite recently experienced a sudden explosion of new restaurants and storefronts. The purpose of this paper is to detail the history of the creation of this community mainly through a series of interviews with eyewitnesses. Because the history of crossing the border has largely been one of Canadians crossing to Detroit/Dearborn, my interview subjects, thus far, have been Windsor-based. A total of eleven interviews were conducted from September 2017 to May 2018. One subject was an indigenous Canadian; the rest were Arab Canadians. Two Arab Canadian students conducted three of the interviews, and I, a history professor of Northern European background, interviewed the remaining eight subjects. The subjects were chosen because (a) they were involved in the Arab food industry of the Wyandotte Corridor, (b) they were long-serving leaders in the Arab community of Windsor, (c) they were a significant voice in indigenous foodways of Ontario, and (d) they were long-term members of the Arab Canadian community and were acquaintances of the author. While the two students were able to represent themselves as insiders, and I presented myself as an outsider, and although all interviewees surely introduced their biases, there was no clear variation in the history of Arab foodways in the Windsor/Detroit borderlands presented in this paper.

#### “AUTRES FRONTERAS,” AND THE COMPARATIVE CASE THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

In a case similar to that of the US Southwest, a non-English empire ruled this region from Cadillac’s founding of Fort Detroit in 1701, until the British conquest in 1763—after which very few British settlers actually showed up. The Detroit River functioned as a highway ferrying goods and people in the midst of a stalwartly French farming settlement. The river became an international border only in 1796, following the Jay Treaty. British soldiers decamped from Fort Detroit to set up shop on what had become the Canadian, southern side of the river, while American troops moved in on the northern shore. But these Anglophones on both sides of the river were still a tiny community in an overwhelmingly cross-river francophone settlement. During the War of 1812, when British and American soldiers arrived in the area

and set about trying to raise local militias, both sides faced the same problem: French farmers were not about to sign up to go and shoot their cousins on the other side of the river, with whom they may well have been canoeing over to have dinner with that very evening.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the officially Spanish-speaking side of the border region that was created in the US Southwest in the 1840s, the French-speaking community on the Canadian side did not maintain its cultural hegemony against the eventual influx of Anglo interlopers. As late as the 1840s there was a discussion that what is today southwestern Ontario should become an official part of Lower Canada (Quebec), but increasing anglophone settlement in the area, along with fears of francophone independence near a still untrustworthy American neighbor, ended this trajectory.

Today in Windsor, in certain suburban areas where French families migrated, one can still occasionally hear the specific Franco-Ontarian-accented French of the region, but culturally, and especially for our purposes with regard to foodways, this language and culture has faded over time as people sought to blend in with the English.<sup>7</sup> But imagine if you will, French restaurants as the local cheap ethnic food. Alas, what you are likely conjuring is not quite what would have been the case had the French community in the Windsor/Detroit borderlands survived culturally. Canada's one truly thriving regional cuisine, Quebecoise, is nothing like the haute cuisine of Paris. Instead, it is very good peasant food. The heavy, simple tastes of poutine are a natural evolution of the hearty, rustic fare one finds in the best Montreal restaurants: meat-filled pies or *tourtières*, pea soup cooked with a ham hock, and of course *tarte au sucre*, often made with maple sugar.

These two frontier regions share another, earlier food history, for the Spanish and French Empires conquered and settled on the land of existing indigenous peoples. In the Southwest both the precontact ingredients and precontact recipes continue to be used to this day, most notably in the corn tortilla. In the Great Lakes region, only local ingredients are still sometimes used, while recipes have been lost. For example, two perennial dishes that appear at feasts on the Walpole Island First Nation Reserve (some 120 kilometers from Windsor/Detroit) are wild rice and "Indian tacos." The first has been consumed in the region for centuries (though today salt is added), but the latter involves fried bannock bread, a European food that has been assimilated into indigenous cuisine across North America. Fascinatingly, because we know that cornmeal was mixed with water

to make cornbread in the Great Lakes before the arrival of Europeans, were “Indian tacos” made with corn tortillas there would be more continuity with precontact indigenous cuisine. Thus, as with French cuisine, indigenous cuisine has largely been erased today in the Windsor/Detroit borderlands.<sup>8</sup>

There is one other border food culture that might have been: soul food. Windsor was a primary terminus of the Underground Railroad. This resulted in both a Black Canadian<sup>9</sup> community in Windsor, as well as Black Canadian farming settlements throughout southwestern Ontario. This vibrant local community thrived into the 1960s, with Windsor regularly holding the largest Emancipation Day celebration in the entire region, resulting in one of the most significant annual border crossings of African Americans to Windsor, and featuring such guests such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Supremes. This community slowly but surely assimilated into the greater Windsor region and today the only evidence of the Southern foodways so heavily practiced in Detroit can only be found in a few white-owned barbecue joints. The only overtly soul food restaurant in Windsor, Sweet T’s, replete with okra and green tomatoes, was a flop.

#### THE ARRIVAL OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN DIASPORA IN WINDSOR/DETROIT, TO 2001

Canada’s history of Arab migration is similar to the American experience and features the pre-Second World War story of usually solo Christian males, often from Mount Lebanon, migrating to work as peddlers and cheap migrant labor.<sup>10</sup> Both Windsor and Detroit had permanent Arab family- and community-based settlement at the *fin de siècle*, with the founding of churches in both cities. Immigration increased exponentially post-war with the booming automotive industry.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, southwestern Ontario is a Canadian breadbasket. The “tomato capital” of Leamington, some fifty kilometers outside of Windsor, welcomed generations of Lebanese and Italian agricultural workers. With the Lebanese civil war, the 1970s saw the arrival of both more skilled and educated Arab immigrants as well as an increasing number of Muslim Arabs.<sup>12</sup> The immigrant communities were, and remain, significant in number in both cities. In the last census, Arabic overtook French for the first time in Windsor as the second most spoken language. Echoing the overall demographic split between Canada and the United States, the Arab American community has always been much larger than its Canadian counterpart. This has led to different developments on each side of the

river and has always resulted in Windsor's subordinate relationship to the neighboring "big brother." One noticeable difference, most likely due to sheer numbers,<sup>13</sup> is that there is a geographic differentiation of ethnoreligious subgroups within greater Detroit that for the most part does not exist in Windsor. There are "borders" within Detroit.

Any study of Windsor/Detroit as a borderland will quickly run up against the stark conclusion which only feeds a Canadian inferiority complex: The Canada/US border is simply not the most important border in Detroit. In the daily life of greater Detroit, the city limit, Eight Mile Road, which classically demarcates the Black city from its white suburbs, is a vastly more consequential border than the Detroit River. Racialized divisions have a daily manifestation in Detroit, marking areas of identity, danger, safety, and so forth, that have to be negotiated, while the major, international border can be and largely is ignored by the vast majority of Detroiters, especially poorer African Americans who often do not have passports. Further, ethnoreligious borders exist throughout Arab Detroit: Maronites in the East, Chaldeans in Southfield, Muslims in Dearborn, Yemenis in Hamtramck. Again likely because of lower numbers, Windsor's Arab community tends to be divided socioeconomically, but not as clearly along ethnoreligious lines. Poorer Arabs live in the city while the richer live in the suburbs. The only recent shift in this story is that with the vast majority of more recent immigrants being Muslim, their settling near the largest mosque has created some spatial differentiation.<sup>14</sup>

The sheer size of the Arab population in Detroit has resulted in the creation of a cultural infrastructure that instead of being initially replicated by Windsor's Arab population, was patronized by it. One manifestation of this involved Windsorites travelling to Detroit for prayer. But this paper will focus on the infrastructure necessary for the maintenance of identity among all members of the diaspora, regardless of religious affiliation: foodways. This story begins, and is always most importantly centered upon, food markets necessary for the preparation of Arab food in the domestic sphere, or at community gatherings. Later in the story we see the rise of both restaurants and the shawarma shop. Detroit's still-vibrant Eastern Market was an early and important hub of Arab food shopping for the entire Windsor/Detroit borderlands. There, one could purchase imported olives, pomegranate molasses, find cheaper prices on key produce like lemons and parsley, and enjoy the handiwork of Arab butchers. Windsor's Arab community, from the 1960s to 1990s, had a much smaller version of this at the downtown market right on the river's edge where one could find a few local Arab

merchants with olives in bins, and good prices on those crucial produce items, but the pickings were rather slim on imported goods and there was no butcher.<sup>15</sup> Of course, Windsor's large Italian community had supermarkets that could always be counted on to provide certain eastern Mediterranean ingredients.<sup>16</sup> The area that is today the hub of Arab foodways in Windsor is Wyandotte Street, which was already in this period home to the majority of the Arab community; but the local food infrastructure was rather modest, with a few small shops carrying specialty items. Interestingly, in the classic pattern of one immigrant community replacing another, such as in Chicago's Czech neighborhood "Pilsen" (now Mexican American), the people slowly but surely moving out of the Wyandotte Corridor and into the suburbs were Jewish, and the last kosher butcher on the street closed in the late 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

In a development very similar to circumstances in the US Southwest, there was one foodstuff that could not simply be purchased on a weekly trip to the Eastern Market but instead had to be produced much closer to the purchasing population. Just as tortilla production marked the first phase of an established and demanding Mexican American population, so the need for fresh daily-baked pita began in 1970s Windsor with the establishment of Fred Francis's bakery. In the late 1990s, Francis's sons, including Eddie, who would become the mayor of the city in the 2000s, opened the Royal Pita Company on Wyandotte Street, and expanded beyond flatbread in what they were able to offer the local, growing Arab community. In 1994, an important bakery, New Yasmeen, had opened on Wyandotte Street. The original New Yasmeen bakery is in Dearborn, and every morning they bake the pita and transport it to New Yasmeen in Windsor, a truly border-food story that continues to today. The increasing demand for purchasing already-baked bread indicates households where there is no longer time to make one's own. Indeed, both the arrival of a more professional class of immigrant, and the increasing employment of women, led to that second development of food infrastructure: the restaurant.

Interviews with members of the older generation of immigrants make quite clear why so few Arab restaurants existed in the initial phase: (a) there was no tradition of going to restaurants among peasants in the Middle East, and (b) Why would Arab immigrants pay to eat the very food prepared so well within the home? With the arrival of a restaurant frequenting class of immigrants from the 1970s, this began to change, though very slowly. In the 1970s, Windsor's first Arab restaurant opened downtown, and sported a name that was surely

meant to attract a non-Arab clientele: The Sheikh.<sup>18</sup> For the most part, however, it served a largely solo male Arab clientele.<sup>19</sup> Beyond this, the development of a network of restaurants in greater Detroit once again stunted growth in neighboring Windsor. What is considered by most to be the first “proper” Arab restaurant in Windsor is the still vital El-Mayor, founded in 1997 on Wyandotte.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, with New Yasmeeen Bakery just a few blocks away, these two 1990s anchors would stimulate the steady evolution of this food corridor over the next twenty years. The earlier, longer, and larger development of restaurants in Detroit also includes examples of that fascinating and typical element of ethnic foodways already seen with Windsor’s first restaurant: self-Orientalism.<sup>21</sup> The first Arab food experience for many non-Arabs in the region was at another Sheikh restaurant, this one in downtown Detroit during the 1950s and 1960s. Today in nearby Canton there is a Sheikh restaurant whose website describes the term and its history. The only “Aladdin” I could find is a café in Hamtramck opened by Bangladeshis. Perhaps because of the late appearance of restaurants in Windsor, and the fact that until very recently they were intended for an Arab clientele, outside of that one 1970s example, self-Orientalism does not appear to have taken root in Windsor’s Arab foodways.<sup>22</sup>

#### 9/11 AND THE DIVISION OF A BORDERLAND

Older Windsorites speak of a youth during which, if one said, “Let’s go shopping downtown,” they meant Detroit. And although that phrase underwent a steady evolution to mean downtown Windsor, especially as Detroit became increasingly categorized as a racialized space of violence in the wake of the 1967 riots, the cataclysm of 9/11 ended any confusion as to what “downtown” might imply. A city that for two hundred years had been the Canadian side of an international region quite suddenly became the cul-de-sac at the bottom of Ontario, backed up against a fortress moat. After what had been a lifelong experience of having one’s driver’s license merely glanced at by a border guard pre-9/11, an experience reported by Arab Canadians as well,<sup>23</sup> the wait at the border grew to three hours. Although these wait times would come down, the Windsor/Detroit border has never returned to anything resembling the daily routine experienced on 9/10.<sup>24</sup> Very quickly it became apparent to many Arab Canadians in Windsor that trips to the Eastern Market were going to be fraught and not worth the trouble. This thickening of the border greatly accelerated the growth of Wyandotte Street with the expectation that all food products would



now have to be available to those who did not want to leave the country for an afternoon. Evidence of population growth patterns from Statistics Canada confirm that there was an interplay between sheer numbers and the thickened border. The biggest growth spike in Windsor's Arabic-speaking population occurred during the 1990s, when we see the first sprouts appear along the Wyandotte Corridor, setting up conditions for a blossoming. The 2001 to 2010 demographic information depicts a much slower increase in numbers, yet this was the period when the corridor exploded with growth. It is safe to say that the corridor would have continued to grow from 2000, but that the events of 9/11 greatly accelerated and perhaps exaggerated the Arab community that now exists.

Beyond this direct and concrete change in the heart of the borderlands, other effects of 9/11 contributed to the differentiation of the Arab communities on both sides of the border. Although post-9/11 America saw the continuation of a relatively steady level of "normal" Arab immigration, there was a steep decline in temporary worker visas and student visas.<sup>25</sup> This was not the case on the Canadian side. Further, the University of Windsor has steadily grown in influence in the city with the largest percentage of foreign students of any Ontario university, at 10 percent. Thus, something akin to the tomato pickers and cheap migrant labor of the 1960s has returned in that Windsor once again has a large population of unmarried Arabs in search of cheap Arab food. This may well be one of the drivers of the meteoric rise in popularity of the shawarma shops of Windsor, discussed below. The arrival of Chaldean Catholic refugees from Iraq in Windsor, initially after the First Gulf War, but especially in the wake of the second, was a significant driver in the founding of the first truly large Arab supermarkets on Wyandotte Street.<sup>26</sup> Although driven economically by the thickened border's pressure on Wyandotte Street, this was a profoundly "border story" from the start. For decades, Chaldeans have been synonymous with Detroit's grocery economy, including non-Arab food services.<sup>27</sup> Thus, through family and community connections, newly arrived Chaldeans in Windsor were able to tap into a larger, regional network of food distribution. In fact, this food network results in the products on the shelves of local Chaldean supermarkets in Windsor having travelled significantly less distance than the food in the nearby non-Arab supermarkets. Typically, food transport trucks bring Mexican, Californian, and Floridian produce up the "NAFTA highway" over the Ambassador Bridge and continue on past Windsor, four hours up the 401, to large redistribution centers

outside Toronto where food is sorted and then trucked back to Windsor's supermarkets. The food in the Chaldean shops, however, comes off those NAFTA trucks in Dearborn where it is placed on smaller trucks that transport directly to Windsor.<sup>28</sup> These new supermarkets, restaurants, and shawarma shops, along a bustling Wyandotte Street, run by an increasingly differentiated Arab population on the Canadian side of the river, have for the first time created a truly independent Arab food community in Windsor.

But crossing the border continues to be relevant, and in some interestingly new ways. On both sides of the border, Arab Americans and Arab Canadians participate in a global diasporic culture that both increases desires around choice in food products and restaurants, and affects assimilation and integration into North American hegemonic norms. Here, we may well see the newest driver of Arab Canadians crossing the border: Lebanese popular culture. Young Lebanese Canadians, many of whom have visited Beirut, describe their ability to completely immerse themselves in Dearborn to the degree that they are able to believe they are in Lebanon. This comes from first, the thriving hookah culture that has not yet caught on in Windsor, and second, the massive enclave's ability to attract Lebanese pop singers and other elements of culture that the Windsor population cannot yet support. Although Windsor's Arab community may have finally caught up to its neighbor in terms of places to worship and venues to shop for foodstuffs, smoking and music appear to be the latest points of lag.

There may well be another more abstract way in which the two communities have developed differently. Canada was not attacked on 9/11, and although it participated as a member of NATO in the war in Afghanistan, Canada did not take part in the war in Iraq. Canada never had freedom fries. In no way is it the case that Canada has been free of anti-Arab attitudes and actions, and it must be asserted, no matter how incongruously, that the worst anti-Arab terrorist massacre in North America occurred in Quebec City.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, despite the existence of an "authentic" Lebanese enclave in Dearborn, it may well be "easier" to be Arab and participate openly in Arab culture, in the officially multicultural space that is Windsor, than has been the case in non-Arab sections of Detroit.<sup>30</sup>

A final word on these more recent differences, and one that clearly demarcates the two communities and also fascinatingly ties into food culture: Syrian refugees. Canada has taken in more than 40,000 Syrian refugees during the recent conflict, as opposed to the United States' 15,000. Because of its Arab community, Windsor was quickly

named as one of the Resettlement Assistance Program sites, and indeed these Syrians have been welcomed into the community that had already, a century earlier, been called the “Syrians,” the Lebanese who had arrived from what the Ottomans had called Greater Syria. Thus, for the first time, an Arab community is being formed in Windsor that, for geopolitical reasons, is not forming on the American side of the river, or at least, it is growing at a radically slower pace stateside. A recent graduate of the University of Windsor doctoral program in sociology conducted a comparative study of “newcomer refugee and refugee youth,” interviewing African and Arab refugees. While the former experienced the generic racism associated with having Black skin, sometimes perpetrated by Arab Canadians, and had trouble finding work, newly arrived Arabs indicated the relative lack of racism in a city in which Arab-ness is an accepted part of the social fabric, and further, many of them reported having jobs the very next day after arrival . . . in shawarma shops.<sup>31</sup>

These newcomer Syrians will, for obvious reasons, experience Windsor as the cul-de-sac at the bottom of Ontario and not as a part of a borderland. The current political situation makes their travel over the Ambassador Bridge nigh impossible. But what of the experience of Windsor’s established Arab Canadian community in the era of Trump? The reality, as reported by my interview subjects, may be surprising to some. While a few Arab Windsorites reported that they simply choose not to cross anymore due to heightened fear for the first time since the early 2000s, those who must travel on a daily basis have noticed little to no change in how they are treated by border guards. Only the first forty-eight hours of the initial “travel ban” caused serious disruption and fear at the Windsor-Detroit border. After that and ever since, the daily transport of the food trucks and the back-and-forth of Arab Canadian taxi drivers from downtown Windsor to the only major airport in the region, Detroit Metro, continues. These are daily-reinforced human relationships. For the most part, every daily border crosser in Windsor knows every single American border agent. Yes, a federally controlled border agency is like an occupying army: the agents/soldiers tend not to come from the local area and thus do not have ties and relationships to the local population. But with both city centers directly adjacent, these people see a lot of each other, often several times in the same day.

FROM TERROR TO SHAWARMA PIZZA: ARAB EXPERIENCES  
FROM ASSIMILATION TO MULTICULTURAL FUSION

Brief tales from two of my interview subjects, each of whom represents a non-typical local Arab identity, help elaborate many of the themes discussed above, and highlight ways in which Windsor/Detroit is sometimes an Arab food region, but often also a divided space with individual food traditions. Sarah Ghabrial describes the strange and sometimes lonely youth she experienced as a member of an Egyptian Copt family in Windsor, with virtually no local co-religionists or conationalists. For Ghabrial during the 1990s, travel involved frequent trips to Coptic churches in Detroit, as well as food shopping journeys to Eastern Market. She describes a borderless region: "Before 9/11 it was just back and forth. The border didn't exist, like it was just a formality. . . . Yeah, all the time. All the time. My whole growing up – the border really had no meaning essentially in our lives at all."<sup>32</sup> Such a transregional life resulted in a fascinating understanding of "real," or "authentic" Arab food. Ghabrial's father turned his nose up at any locally, Windsor-produced Arab food. She tells the story of the one time, for a special occasion, she presented him with some Arab bread, something that he would normally enjoy. Initially, when he believed she had purchased the bread in Windsor, he refused to eat it. When she informed him that the local Windsor bakery had imported it that morning from Dearborn, he tucked in with gusto. In other words, the Arab foodways of the Windsor/Detroit borderlands have created actual "terroir" conditions: only flatbread made by Dearborn hands or machines, with (one imagines) Greater Detroit water, for some reason, passes muster for some.

The second story is of Windsor as cul-de-sac, a non-borderland, Canadian city. Libyan-born Taher Abumeeiz arrived in Windsor in 1982, at a time when Libyans were *persona non grata* in the United States.<sup>33</sup> He was a student at the University of Windsor. He could not enter the United States and thus was cut off from the major Arab community. His evolution with food followed the normal trajectory of male Arabs abroad, as detailed in a study by Helen Brittin and Bayan Obeidat:<sup>34</sup> he quickly adapted to non-Arab foods when he went out, an activity that was mostly focused on Windsor's all-time most-famous restaurant, Tunnel BBQ. But, after running out of money he needed to learn how to cook Arab food for himself and his roommates. He had not learned how to so much as boil an egg in Libya, but during his first year in Windsor he spent seven hundred dollars on long-distance calls to his mother trying to learn the recipes of his youth.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, he became a delivery driver for Domino's Pizza and worked his way up to manager, planting the seed for his own future pizza business.

From 1991 to 1995, he ran a generic grocery store on Wyandotte. From this vantage point he witnessed the beginning of the street's transformation into an Arab quarter. He then bought a pizzeria from a Greek family, who interestingly had not featured a "Greek Pizza." At first, when he took over, business dropped 20 percent and he knew he would have to "assimilate," as it were, and show the customers that he could make Italian pizza. Although he constantly toyed with new, fusion pizza designs, he was afraid of scaring off his non-Arab clientele, and only did this privately for friends. He in fact waited until 2014 to experiment openly, and what is both telling and fascinating, is the initial way in which he did so. A regular client had always ordered his pizza a particular way, so Abumeeiz started to market "Doc's Special." The "Lawyer's Special" soon followed. Ultimately, in 2016, Abumeeiz was confident enough to showcase his heritage and attempted a fusion pizza that quickly became legendary. Working with a local halal butcher, he began marinating chicken shawarma on a Wednesday, and on the Friday he put a sign out front advertising "Shawarma Pizza." He quickly sold out, weekend after weekend, and word spread far and wide. Soon enough, CBC food reporter Jonathan Pinto featured the recipe in his book of Windsor-specific recipes, *The Best of Windsor Cookbook*.<sup>36</sup>

#### CODA: NON-ARAB AMERICANS EAT ARAB WINDSOR

There have been other interesting ways in which the border has affected foodways in Windsor/Detroit. Mexicantown, right beside the Ambassador Bridge on the Detroit side of the river, was founded in the 1940s as yet another result of labor attracted to the booming automotive industry. "Mexican" is an ethnic foodway that in North America does not otherwise normally require a local ethnic population to support its existence, as is the case with Chinese restaurants not requiring Chinese patrons. Nonetheless, the position of this community, relatively accessible to Windsorites, has resulted in the strange dearth of Mexican restaurants in Windsor. The Mexican-born population of Windsor has measured only 300 to 600 over the last fifty years, within a Spanish-speaking population that today hovers around 3,000. One is almost as likely today to find an ethnically Salvadoran restaurant as a Mexican restaurant in the city of Windsor.<sup>37</sup> The vicissitudes of international currency fluctuations culminated in the curious situation in the 1980s and 1990s of a low Canadian dollar attracting upper-class Americans in search of fine dining. Indeed, Detroit's "best French restaurant" was often declared to be in Windsor. Another group of sit-down restaurants

in Windsor that attracts an American clientele is in Little Italy, sprinkled along Erie Street. But most interesting for our purposes, there is today a set of eating establishments that has proven to be very popular among American guests: the shawarma shops along Windsor's main street, Ouellette, serving throngs of drunk nineteen-year-olds every Friday and Saturday night. Since the raising of the drinking age to twenty-one, in 1978 for Michiganders, and 1988 for Ohioans, driving to the frontier town of Windsor on one's nineteenth birthday to legally drink copious amounts of alcohol has been a rite of passage in the American Midwest. Members of Windsor's Arab community saw a need, and today along the two main blocks of Ouellette, in the heart of the clubs and pubs district, there are four shawarma shops that stay open until the wee hours.

The Windsor/Detroit borderlands provide a laboratory to investigate what is, and what is not, important to the Arab diaspora. As a relatively undivided North American region during the twentieth century, this major Arab community developed in many ways as similar diasporas in say, Astoria, Queens. Only with the introduction of an obstacle in the midst of such a community, with the thickened post 9/11 border, do we see what a diasporic community finds to be immediately necessary, that is, specialized supermarkets, and what continues to be worth dealing with border agents once in a while to enjoy, a hookah lounge or a Lebanese pop singer. This paper has attempted to show the degree to which a food community will work "with" a border, until that border will no longer cooperate.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Geographical primer: The half-mile-wide Detroit River separates downtown Windsor (pop. 200,000; Greater Windsor, 350,000) from downtown Detroit (pop. 700,000; Greater Detroit, 4,000,000). The Ambassador Bridge, a fundamental link along the "NAFTA highway," crosses just west of downtown. The bridge's truck traffic represents 40 percent of the largest international trading partnership in the world. A tunnel from one downtown to the other thankfully is free of the eighteen-wheelers. When the five small Ontario border towns amalgamated into Windsor in 1935, one of the mooted names for the new city was "South Detroit." And yes: if you know the opening lines to *Journey's* "Don't Stop Believin'," being "born and raised in south Detroit" would actually mean growing up in Windsor. It's the only place that Canadians drive North to reach the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Curious readers: something about the gravy highlighted ingredients in the shawarma that was, shall we say, slightly unpleasant. This dish is not likely to catch on, at least without adjustments. Of course, *tacos al pastor* is perhaps the most famous shawarma fusion dish. Although an incredible example of diasporic food fusion, *al pastor* was not a Dearborn, or indeed an American borderlands, invention. I nevertheless want to pursue the place of *tacos al pastor* in Greater Detroit today and how they fit in modern Arab American foodways, where I imagine they are not made in the now typical Mexican manner, with pork. Gary Nabhan has discussed Arab influences on Mexican food, and has fascinatingly compared traces of Arab influences upon the Southwestern desert and the Middle East in *Arab/American: Landscape, Culture and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008). See below for another Windsor twist: shawarma pizza.

<sup>3</sup> See Teresa M. Mares, Naomi Wolcott-MacCausland, and Jessie Mazar, "Eating Far from Home: Latino/a Workers and Food Sovereignty in Rural Vermont," as well as Kathleen Sexsmith, "Milking Networks for All They're Worth: Precarious Migrant Life and the Process of Consent on New York Dairies," in *Food Across Borders*, eds. Matt Garcia, E. Melanie DuPuis, and Don Mitchell (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press: 2017), 181–218. To be fair, there is one chapter in this collection that actually has Canadians as border foodways subjects. See Mary Murphy, "Bittersweet: Food, Gender and the State in the US and Canadian Wests during World War I," 140–62. On Canadian/American border studies more generally, see Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, "Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," *Geopolitics* 10 (2005): 633–49; Viktor Konrad, "Toward a Theory of Borders in Motion," *Journal of Borderland Studies* 30 (2015): 1–17; Viktor Konrad and Heather Nicol, "Border Culture, the Boundary between Canada and the United States of America, and the Advancement of Borderlands Theory," *Geopolitics* 16 (2011): 70–90. On border cities, see Paul Nugent, "Border Towns and Cities in Comparative Perspective," in *A Companion to Border Studies*, eds. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 557–72. Finally, more generally see, David Newman, "On Borders and Power: A Theoretical Framework," *Journal of Borderland Studies* 18 (2003): 13–25.

<sup>4</sup> The work of Jeffrey Pilcher is key here. See his *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) and *Que vivan los tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, I have begun research on the Chinese foodways of Vancouver and Seattle. Another example might be the very large Arab community in South America's Triple Frontier.

<sup>6</sup> Guillaume Teasdale, *Fruits of Perseverance: The French Presence in the Detroit River Region, 1701–1815* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), chap. 7.

<sup>7</sup> This suppression has reached truly absurd degrees: Pierre Street is pronounced “peer-ee,” despite the fact that every Canadian knows how to speak aloud the name of their rather famous former prime minister, Justin Trudeau’s father, Pierre.

<sup>8</sup> In an interview with the well-known indigenous chef, Rich Francis, he told me that he refuses to serve bannock bread (“the food of the colonizer”), and he has stopped making precontact food because indigenous communities won’t eat it, especially because of the lack of salt and pepper. Rich Francis in conversation with the author, March 2018.

<sup>9</sup> African Canadian is a rarely used moniker. The local community prefers “Black,” as in the Black History Museum in nearby Amherstburg.

<sup>10</sup> Nadine Naber, *Arab America: Gender, Cultural Politics and Activism* (New York: New York University Press: 2012), 30–36.

<sup>11</sup> Windsor is a major automotive city in Canada because, to sell his cars within the British Empire, Henry Ford had to build those cars in the empire and thus crossed the river in the early 1900s to set up the Ford City sector of Windsor.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Eid, *Being Arab: Ethnic and Religious Identity Building among Second Generation Youth in Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 3–10.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, interview subjects claimed that in the 1960s, the Detroit community was more mixed, and that only as it grew in size did it begin to segregate. Tom Najem in discussion with the author, February 2018. Gordon Jasey in discussion with the author, March 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Jasey and Najem interviews.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Zakoor, interview by Salma Abumeeiz, July 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Fascinatingly, local Libyans having been colonized by Italians, felt a special affinity for these shops. Taher Abumeeiz in conversation with the author, April 2018. Abumeeiz also references the rise of certain cookbook authors (e.g., Claudia Roden), as being responsible for the appearance of more and more Arab foodstuffs in normal supermarkets, already in the late 1980s.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, although halal meat could have been purchased at this butcher, none of my subjects could recall if that was a local Arab Muslim practice. A further jarring effect of Arab Canadians referring to the area as “Wyandotte,” is that this is of course the name of an indigenous group that was ultimately displaced by incoming French settlers in the eighteenth century.

<sup>18</sup> Anan Ameri and Yvonne Lockwood, *Arab Americans in Metro Detroit: A Pictorial History* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2001), 58.

<sup>19</sup> Yehia Haider in discussion with the author, March 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Sadly, in January 2019, a fire shut down El-Mayor. Its future is unclear.



<sup>21</sup> Matthew Jaber Stiffler, "Consuming Orientalism: Public Foodways of Arab American Christians," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 2, no. 2 (2014): 119–49.

<sup>22</sup> Hamoudi's, in suburban South Windsor, does however use some Orientalist décor today, as many of their clientele are non-Arabs.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Ghabrial in conversation with the author, May 2018. Jasey and Yehia Haider interviews.

<sup>24</sup> See also Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds., *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Although there was a dip in the immigration of Muslim Americans, it was largely back to its normal rate by 2006. "More Muslims Arrive in US, after 9/11 Dip," *New York Times*, 10 September 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Imad Bazzi interviewed by Shaymaa Zantout, September 2017. Abumeeiz and Jasey interviews.

<sup>27</sup> Gary C. David, "Behind the Bulletproof Glass: Iraqi Chaldean Store Ownership in Metropolitan Detroit," in *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream*, eds. Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 151–78.

<sup>28</sup> One very interesting outlier here is the restaurant El-Mayor. They found that dealing with the border for their supplies was too much of a headache, and they now have their products shipped all the way from the large Arab community in Montreal. Lina Abbas, interviewed by Shaymaa Zantout, October 2017. See Jen Nelles and John B. Sutcliffe, "On the Boundary: Local Authorities, Intergovernmental Relations and the Governance of Border Infrastructure in the Detroit-Windsor Region," *Regional and Federal Studies* 23 (2013): 213–32.

<sup>29</sup> "Lingering Wounds and Fears of the Future," *Globe and Mail*, 25 January 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Ronnie Haider in conversation with the author, March 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Erwin Dimitri Selimos, "Young Immigrant Lives: A Study of the Migration and Settlement Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Youth in Windsor, Ontario," (PhD diss., University of Windsor, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Ghabrial interview.

<sup>33</sup> Abumeeiz interview.

<sup>34</sup> Helen C. Brittin and Bayan A. Obeidat, "Food Practices, Changes, Preferences and Acculturation of Arab Students in US Universities," *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 35 (2011): 552–59.

<sup>35</sup> These calls were replete with "exact" measurements, for example, a "handful." Because of his early realization that handful measures meant every house created every dish differently, Abumeeiz believes "authenticity" begins and ends within each family.

<sup>36</sup> (Windsor: Biblioasis, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Note, however, that today there is a large seasonal influx of Mexican labor to nearby Leamington (mentioned above) and supermarkets have much evidence of this group in their ingredient offerings.