

Leila Hudson

“THEY GAVE US CHEESE SANDWICHES”: FOODWAYS OF WAR AND FLIGHT

Abstract

As part of a larger ethnography of one family’s experience of the Syrian war and displacement, this paper considers the question of food and foodways. Based on extensive interviews and participant observation, this paper chronicles displacement through changing foodways. Following several families, the paper investigates how scarcity and price inflation punctuated the urgency of the conflict for a cluster of Damascus households. It illuminates critiques of how UN rationing and humanitarian food aid in Tripoli, Lebanon, and Amman, Jordan, aided but also betrayed newly disenfranchised populations. Interlocutors discuss how the introduction of almost-familiar new foods and eating styles in the nearby countries of refuge, Egypt and Turkey, exacerbated memories of home. In the desperate gambit for asylum in Europe, the families discovered how food lines and ration handouts in formal and informal camps from Greece to Germany emphasized the dehumanization and dependency of refugees. By the time many of the families reached their new lives in Germany and elsewhere, siege and famine had come to Syria, as food restriction was used as a weapon against remaining Syrian populations. For families settling into semipermanent exile, the ability to recreate Syrian cuisine and to return to comforting rituals of basic hospitality exchanges marked the beginning of postwar and post-refugee lives. In addressing the theme of how habits of cuisine, taste, and hospitality gave way to rations, dependency, charity, and mass feeding, the paper presents displacement, nostalgia, warfare, and humanitarian relief efforts in a new light.



INTRODUCTION

The ethnographic study of food and foodways is increasingly recognized as a critical analytical framework for human experience, including conflict. Food studies needs to be given its place in the fields of the humanities, as well as the applied and social sciences, as the gateway to nontextual expressive and rich symbolic systems,

Leila Hudson is Associate Professor of Modern Middle East Culture and Political Economy at The University of Arizona. Email: lhudson@email.arizona.edu

reservoirs, and practices of identity; an interface between culture and science; the primary product of human labor; an expression of social organization; and a mobilizer of growth, strength, and health. Is it neglected because of its banality or quotidianness, its rapid transformation into waste or hated fat, its gendered dismissal? The rise of foodie culture in all its mediated forms of celebrity and prestige helps us see immediately that it is a rich form of cultural capital that is embodied through consumption, objectified through connoisseurship, and institutionalized through capitalism, humanitarianism, the state, and its organs.

The ability of any particular social formation to feed itself is a sign that it is in some way working and sustainable. The assemblage¹ that bring people as consumers and producers of food together with the ecosystem of nature, agriculture, processing, distribution, and the cleaning that accompany it outline the contours of a social formation and define the degree of inequality and class and gender structures within it. As we follow the displaced from their home under attack to exile and flight and resettlement, the foodways they experience can tell us something about the structures they are moving through.² Most geographical approaches to migration and refuge or stable structures follow a flow of things. Here, by stopping at the stations of displacement, we see not only where refugees figure in the food production machinery, but more crucially, how they become refugees. As they move away from the predictable routines of shopping, cooking, and sharing food and hospitality, toward fumbling attempts to scratch out livings as novice food vendors and peddlers, to dependence on aid and tactical hand-to-mouth life on the road, their foodways tell the story of their displacement in material form. From neoliberalizing Syria, to new combinations of markets and humanitarian assistance in the nearby countries, to the precarity of life on the road, to the reestablishment of domestic sociability, this paper looks at how one group of middle-class refugees from Damascus shopped, cooked, ate, and fed.

THE CRISIS OF 2011: BAKING BREAD AND SIEGE RELIEF

There is a persistent theme in the analysis of the war in Syria that seeks to tie the war directly to drought and climate change.³ However, it is more complicated than that. Syria's plight, like that of all the countries that experienced Arab Spring uprisings, was related to poverty and inequality within an authoritarian system. The environmental effects

of climate change certainly exacerbated inequality, but they were filtered through a social and political system—Syria's Baathism and its socialist economy giving way, as per Hinnebusch, to one or both of neoliberalism or Islamism—namely exaggerated oligopolistic capitalism and sectarian divides.⁴ Rather than tracing a direct line between environmental factors and revolution, we need to explore the uneven terrain of neoliberal capitalism penetrating a formerly closed command economy. In short, it takes the form of parasitical oligopoly in which regime elites exploited the introduction of investment capital as partners in every enterprise, draining an already problematic form of global capitalism with the techniques of both socialist and Middle Eastern rentier-style corruption.⁵ Since the passing of Investment Law number 10 which opened Syria's economy to outside investment, the system preserved and combined the worst of capitalist, socialist, and third world political economies. Ultimately, agriculture would become another one of the victims of the ongoing conflict.⁶ The Eastern Ghouta region of Damascus, from where my interlocutors fled in 2012, the site of chemical weapon attacks in August 2013 and horrific bombing and starvation campaigns against the rebel stronghold by the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Russian allies that escalated into 2017 and 2018, is a site where we can investigate the complex of issues around the Assad regime's transition from Baathist socialism to Baathist oligopoly. Prior to the 1990s, Ghouta was the breadbasket of gardens and orchards around the Syrian capital; it became the default overflow zone of the city as it mushroomed during the Assad regime in the 1990s and early aughts. In a way, the belt of gardens-turned-suburbs was the coming together of Baathist socialism, neoliberalism, and Islamism. As described by Hanna Batatu, the agriculturalists of Ghouta were among the most conservative and pious, who distrusted the even legality of the socialist land redistribution of 1961 which worked in their favor.⁷ But by the 1990s, many had abandoned agriculture and their anti-socialist scruples to turn their farms into shoddily built residential properties. The housing crisis and patterns of the Ghouta in which agricultural land was nationalized and redistributed in the 1960s, then converted into badly needed but irregular and dangerous housing stock in the 1990s, set the tone for the politico-economic crisis that would erupt in 2011 as revolution.⁸ The people of the Eastern Ghouta were transferring old inherited wealth into an urban assemblage that functioned most of the time, but already manifested the contradictions of Baathism. Civil servants and supporters of the state and party, its large cadre of dependents and loyalists, had preferential treatment, but by the beginning of the revolution, food scarcity and distribution

patterns were beginning to change.⁹ Two of my interlocutors reflected on food security in the Ghouta suburbs at the beginning of the war. S, a public-school teacher who lived in the loyalist Assad Village suburb north of the Ghouta remembered that the first signs of an encroaching conflict were the result of the isolation by security forces of the surrounding rebel neighborhoods of the Ghouta and the government checkpoints that cropped up and made travel in and out of the city first inconvenient, then dangerous. The little suburban retail grocery shops that brought food from the city's main agricultural markets on a daily basis began to empty, and the delivery services that brought propane gas canisters were no longer reliable by 2011. S bought an electric cooker, since electricity was still reliable in these government-supported suburbs, and taught herself to bake the family's daily bread, something which neither she nor anyone she had known had ever done. For S as a member of the civil service, the Baathist professional class, the first disruptions were of the food processing urban and domestic economy.

Her sister B, in contrast, lived deep in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs. She too, first felt the war encroach on her as a matter of transport and navigating the city. She had gone into the main market of Damascus to buy items not generally available on the outskirts, leaving her three children at home in the suburb of Zamalka. The shared taxi "service" minivan was having an unusually hard time getting through the traffic on the way home due to road closures. It was apparent that some of the main thoroughfares from the city to the suburbs were blocked by security forces, and later she would feel that the plumes of smoke rising from the skyline—her first experience of what would become routine in the coming months—were targeting her children. Soon after, the neighboring town of Kafr Batna was sealed off from the outer urban fabric for harboring rebel Free Syrian Army forces. Distraught at the thought of a curfew and siege on a neighborhood of some twenty-five thousand fellow citizens, B and S hatched a plan to smuggle bread into the area. They decided that as two women, they could plausibly claim that fifteen one-kilogram bags of fresh bread, easily available in most areas of town, were for family use, and that they were just passing through the neighborhood by accident. Driving down a deserted street past the regime checkpoint, they were only able to find a single old man sitting on his stoop. They quickly gave him the bread and fled. B in particular remembered with a sinking feeling that the abandonment of neighbors by neighbors did not bode well for anyone in the country, and that next time it could be

her and her children isolated, hungry, and ignored in a cruel form of starvation counterinsurgency, since all of the Eastern Ghouta harbored rebel forces by 2013. From this point on, she could not rest until she got her children to safety in Lebanon, crossing the border in 2012, with her sister S following some months later. In the next two years, the exodus from Syria would number an estimated five million people.

The ability of working- and middle-class families to flee when they sensed that the access to food that they had always taken for granted was wavering foreshadowed the end of the rebellion in 2018. Out of harm's immediate way in Germany and Turkey after 2016, S and B and their families' realization that the Assad regime was defeating the rebel strongholds of Syria not just by chemical warfare and aerial bombardment, but also by deliberate starvation, torments the refugee families to this day.¹⁰

NEW FLAVORS OF NEOLIBERALISM

Refuge in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey is marked by an intensification of market factors—more expensive foodstuffs, more processed foods, and the turn to UNHCR and other international and local aid agencies and associations for food support. Labor in the commercial food sector reflects the scramble to find new livelihoods for people who had been family and household producers and consumers all their lives. New kinds of households emerge as people sometimes fail to pool their dwindling resources. The flight of people and capital from Syria into the surrounding countries and economies had a variety of effects depending on the particular case. In Lebanon the competition, coming on the heels of years of fractious labor migration by Syrians into a country their government had dominated for decades, created hostility and xenophobia. In Jordan and Egypt, there seems to have been more accommodation of Syrian capital and business entrepreneurship into the economy. And in Turkey, Syrians were absorbed as laborers into a larger wage-labor economy with demand for agricultural, food, and garment workers.

If Syria's trajectory of neoliberalization led to the harsh inequality that separated rebels from loyalists, what Syrian refugees found in the other flavors of neoliberalizing economies of the region was disorienting as well. In Tripoli, Lebanon, B and S and their sister D encountered a system that was familiar, but distorted by the different roles of the state, the market, and outside aid agencies from anything that they had inhabited before.¹¹ For my interlocutors the new spaces

in Tripoli were a complex of the familiar foodstuffs that was strangely distorted by the very different relationship of state, society, and market. The Tripoli mosque that B and her family turned to as a first resort for shelter turned them away, and the Lebanese state had no help to offer, strangely impotent to those fleeing a murderously strong state.¹² They found first refuge in a private school/daycare center, where they were allowed to sleep for weeks in return for cleaning and helping out with the children. With no income to speak of, B's family of five lived on "za'atar and cheap cooking oil" in place of the more customary but expensive olive oil. Every other day the father of the family would walk to a soup kitchen operated by a religious foundation several kilometers away for a free hot cooked meal they could prepare in the school kitchen after the pupils left for the day. UN and other NGO aid agencies temporarily and unsatisfactorily filled the gap with food rations. By registering with the UN (a process about which they would become very cynical) they were able for a time in 2012 to receive regular food aid consisting of flour, cooking oil, sugar, and tea, but this lasted only a month or two before the aid program stopped due to lack of funding. A round of registrations at other private charities began, and with it a sense of cynicism and despair. In S's words:

We started going for charity and quickly learned that it was a big fraud. Each assistance agency was just trying to sign up the greatest number of people to steal more and profit. We started to see the difficulties before us. Everyone takes our names so that they can steal charity meant for us. I can't find work not just because of the rising unemployment rate in Lebanon but also because of the campaign "Don't employ Syrians." So we discover that we are in a large open-air prison called Lebanon. We don't have what it takes to live, and we don't have what it takes to die. [Silence.]¹³

S's husband had owned a small bookstore in Damascus, and in contrast to his brother-in-law, a shoemaker, felt the lack of any marketable skills for the Lebanese labor market. Using the food rations that they received, S and her husband tried desperately to make a living.

M and I tried baking cakes and selling them to the kids near schools. It was humiliating and very difficult for him to do that, but at least we were trying to stand on our own. At least we were trying not to sit at home all day.¹⁴

Aside from the painful indignity of peddling homemade cookies to children for their paltry pocket money, the model was simply not sustainable. It was one of the first indications that no amount of sheer grit and determination could fill the gap between escalating rents and other expenses and the few dollars a day that a former business owner and breadwinner could bring home as a street vendor. S's two teenage sons had better luck working for a variety of businesses including a gas station and a nargileh delivery service on motorbike, and with help from relatives abroad they were able to survive in Tripoli for a year.

The family were touched by an act of traditional Eid al-Adha charity when they first arrived in the country. In contrast to overt hostility to Syrian refugees just about everywhere, when their older son was employed at a gas station, he was given a generous Eid gift of food staples by his new employer, even though he was on the staff for less than a day. "They treated him like all the employees that had been there for months and years, even though we just arrived. And he paid him full wages that a Lebanese would make," they noted admiringly. "Of course," they added, "this particular businessman had spent years and made his fortune in Australia, so he didn't act like everyone else in Lebanon."¹⁵

S and B's older sister H had a slightly easier situation as a refugee in Jordan where she had a married daughter. As a refugee, joining a household and extended family of in-laws with a preexisting sustainable lifestyle made all the difference in the world. By contrast, consider conditions in Za'atari Camp, a mushrooming world unto itself.¹⁶ It had been expensive, true, but at first there were food-aid coupons of twenty-four dinars per person per month which was plenty for the family of three, and all they had to worry about was rent for their apartment—two hundred dinars a month. With the basics taken care of, and a rich social life of visits exchanged with relatives and neighbors, H also had kept busy at the MH Society for Widows and Orphans, a charity for Jordanian needy. But when Syrian refugees began to arrive, Gulf donors would earmark donations to the charity for them, causing no small problem with the Amman society ladies

whose source of funding was now redirected. But donating labor was a veritable privilege and luxury compared to H's sisters' situation in Lebanon.

S ended up in Turkey, arriving in in 2014. For S's family it became clear that life for Syrian refugees in Lebanon was a dead end. When assistance from relatives in Saudi Arabia dried up after a couple of years, only Turkey offered an open border and the possibility of work and education. In another new neoliberal economy, things were different yet again from either Syria or Lebanon. If Lebanon was too small to accommodate the huge numbers of Syrians that swelled its population, the larger and far more productive Turkish economy swallowed them up. While language was a huge obstacle for older Syrians like S, finding wage labor and a sympathetic host society was not as challenging as in Lebanon. There was plenty of work in the food sector, not just for wage labor—one of S's sons worked twelve- to fourteen-hour days in a bakery and had plenty of opportunity to raise his salary by a third from eight hundred Turkish liras to twelve hundred Turkish liras a month—but also for investment in Syrian-style restaurants which now dominate certain areas around the Fatih Mosque area in Istanbul, providing a shawarma distinctly different from the Turkish *doner*, among other Syrian specialties.¹⁷ In addition to the food sector there was plenty of work—too much work in sweatshop conditions in the garment industry—and S was able to support her family working in a workshop sewing custom wedding dresses. Like her son, she was working well over eight-hour days, and felt she was losing her eyesight, embroidering white sequins on white dresses for hours and hours a day. As a professional and homemaker in Syria, she also felt like she was losing her family to wage labor.

I would look up from the white dresses and feel like I couldn't see at all. After five days or a week of this, I heard from another sister that she was coming from Lebanon. And I cooked some food at night so when she arrived we'd have some food. The kids brought her to the house from the bus station, but I couldn't get out of work. I didn't want to do anything to make the bosses angry even though I could barely work. And I only saw her when I got back that night.¹⁸

S and her newly arrived sister D eventually quarreled over domestic duties. For every case in which women's work and

contribution to household self-sufficiency is empowering, there may be many more in which friction overtakes the new arrangements.¹⁹ S was bitter that while she worked all day and left her young son in her sister's care, her sister was spoiling the children and not encouraging them to go to school or look for work. The challenges of blending households with differing philosophies were more complicated than dividing cooking and cleaning, and really got to the heart of the challenges of life in Turkey. The house was nothing like the household that the sisters had grown up in together with food, coffee, tea, and fruit shared in predictable routines of sociability. It was a small, crowded stopping place, where exhausted, angry strangers quibbled over minutiae.

Eventually D struck out on her own, but because she was a single mother with no outside help at all, she was reduced to living in a single room with her two children. From managing her sister's small household to living in angry isolation, one of the biggest differences was her inability to create friendships over hospitality. When I tracked her down in the migrant neighborhood of Aksaray in Istanbul to which she had retreated, she said that she saw other Syrians living on the same street in the market. One had even invited her over for coffee. But because she was living in a single room, she couldn't reciprocate and invite people over. D and her children were unable to hold up their end of the hospitality game, at least to the standards with which they were accustomed. This had been evident in our own visits, in which they would come to my hotel rather than receive me in their room, or we would meet in cafes over meals I invited them to, something that made them deeply uncomfortable. Thus, they found they were becoming more and more isolated. Regaining the habits of hospitality exchange-based sociability would become a key part of resettling.

THE AEGEAN CROSSING: CHARITY AND PRECARIETY

Before the journey to Europe from Turkey in 2015, S, B, D, and their families had experienced the breakdown of their lives and food security in Syria, and had weathered the disorientation and deprivation of trying to recreate household "business models" of food provisioning in the almost-familiar economies of nearby countries. But for most, that displacement was temporary, and it was legal. Making the treacherous journey across the Aegean Sea to Greece involved breaking laws and putting oneself in the care of smugglers.²⁰ A new set of risks replaced the old ones already encountered. For S's family, rent and basic food needs were easier to meet than for D's paralyzed

household, but the Turkish language divide and the impossibility of both work and expensive private-language-institute study and English-language college made a Turkish future look bleak for the family. A steady stream of friends of S's sons and husband used their tiny apartment, and hospitality, as a stepping stone as they arranged illegal passage to Greece, then called a week or two later, urging the family to join them. One by one, the family members began to imagine themselves in Europe.

The trip was expensive, with a large lump sum payable up front into an ad hoc escrow account for payment to smugglers. Resources that were previously hoarded and saved for sustainable future plans (tuition, business seed money, several months' rent, and expenses) were mobilized for a journey that took the refugees close to Agamben's state of bare life. S's family of five (herself, husband, young eight-year-old son, and two older eighteen- and nineteen-year-old sons) first had to break up to make the trip. Although the teenagers were the most anxious to take the trip, the family decided to use money borrowed from family members for the passage of the two parents and the youngest son. The older sons would stay in Turkey and work and save money to pay for their later individual journeys. S was surprised to find herself leaving her sons and all their accumulated household effects as she entrusted herself and her youngest child to a smuggler. Her older sons worked for a few weeks in Istanbul saving every lira that they didn't use late nights smoking hookah with friends, then sleeping until noon in young men's crash pads, and sustaining themselves on street food and snacks.

Packing for the risky journey to Europe began to highlight just how displaced—how removed from their comfortable previous home lives—Syrians had become. The families readied themselves for an unpredictable sequence of buses, boats, camps, and physical hardships by securing backpacks, cellophane wrap and tape for waterproofing, hidden pockets, cash, copies of ID papers, cell phones, medications, and only finally, food for the road. At the outset they wrapped packages of *za'atar* and *labneh* sandwiches rolled in flat bread and cellophane; and packages of dates, biscuits, lemons, and seasickness pills were secreted in backpacks.

Dealing with the unpredictable schedules of angry and secretive smugglers, and an exhausting sequence of waiting for and in rented buses, vans, and inflatable rafts meant that those carefully packed supplies would rarely last the uncomfortable hours of waiting, driving up and down the coast to shake police patrols, and often were

inaccessible when needed. Precious cash sewn into pockets and seams for use in Europe had to be spent on expensive junk food in Balkan convenience stores and Greek ferries

One of S's nephews attempting to make the longer Mediterranean trip from Egypt to Italy in 2014 had been weighed down with a twenty-kilogram suitcase that he let his doting mother pack for him. Full of warm clothes, containers of food, and bottles of water, it weighed him down as his smugglers had forced dozens of "clients" to sprint down the beach in total darkness to small skiffs waiting in the shallows of the coast of Damietta. Because of his heavy bag, he was among the slow passengers rounded up by police that night, and saved from death when the boat sank a few days later off the Italian coast.²¹

Another of S's nephews who made the Aegean trip in spring of 2015 described the overland travel through the Balkans when groups of refugees had to avoid cars and roads to escape arrest. He reported that since

cars were being stopped and drivers were being put in prison for months if they were found driving refugees through Macedonia. If you were found in a car you'd be put in prison for months, but if they caught you walking you'd just be dumped back in Greece. So we sat for a while in the forest and sent a couple of people to a nearby gas station. Police would come but not always. If we encountered a patrol, we'd pool our money and bribe them. We'd go buy food and water when no police were around. We would send those who could run fast to get the food. One time, my friend and I went to get food and the police came and caught us. So we ran. I was running and one came and put a gun to my back. I just ran. ²²

By the time S and her family made the trip in November of 2015, they knew a lot about what to expect. She had enough cash to buy snacks for her young son, but the logistics of eating and drinking were sketchy. As she crossed the Aegean at night in the middle of a rainstorm, she was packed in so tightly that even the supplies they had were unreachable.

When I was nauseous, I asked my husband for the seasick pills. He handed me the pill and of course I didn't have any water,

since all the bags were underneath people. My throat was bone dry from fright, but I managed to choke down the pill, only to throw it right back up.²³

S's first memory of coming ashore safely in Greece after the dreadful trip was embarrassing for her to relate, but was etched in her memory as a sign of her distress. She confessed that as soon as she was helped from the packed boat after five or six hours of terror, she (along with all the other passengers and despite her modesty and fastidiousness) released her bladder into the sea. This act, no matter how involuntary, was part and parcel of the movement away from all the comfortable certainties of domestic life. Along with insecurity about one's next meal came uncertainty about one's next bathroom, and the ad hoc diet of junk food made bodies weaker. Similarly, when B and her family prepared to board their raft to cross the Aegean a couple of months later, she was shocked to find herself and her children, like all the other normally modest Syrian middle-class people around them, squatting in broad daylight in full sight of all to evacuate their bowels as if by some silent prearranged biological impulse.

S's next European experience was also disorienting. Walking toward the main town of Mytilini on Lesbos, the family and their fellow travelers had their anxious and exhausting walk punctuated by random acts of charity, which were both welcome and unwelcome. S's husband recalled that a car stopped on the road and the people gave him a blanket and some apples. It was with a shock that he realized that he had never accepted personal charity before, something he prided himself on. He was in no position to refuse the kind help of strangers, but was struck by his predicament. This was different from the UN ration distribution in Lebanon, and people saw his need and responded with individualized handouts that would become ubiquitous symbols of the family's plight – sandwiches, pieces of fruit, and used clothing items²⁴

As we were walking we saw the UN on the way with two or three cars and again they gave us sandwiches, bananas, and water and they told us to wait for a bus that would take us to the camp. As we were walking near the airport we saw life vests and deflated rafts abandoned along the beach. It felt to me like ten hours. Then the second bus came and the driver was

wearing a face mask. It was as if we were insects or vermin. My god, that was insulting. He was afraid of us and shouting.²⁵

The rest of S and her family's long trip to southern Germany unfolded in similar episodes. Expensive cafe food on the overcrowded ferry to the Greek mainland with no functioning toilets. Camps and food queues with cheese and egg sandwiches and individual apples and bananas. Buses and trains and borders and cots, expensive seedy hotels when necessary. When S's sons made the journey later in the winter of 2016 accompanied by her sister B and B's three children, the situation was even worse. The party was trapped along with thousands of other migrants and refugees on the Greek side of the Macedonian border at Idomeni. For weeks, the family huddled in a donated camping tent in the pouring rain and cold and mud of the harsh Balkan winter, unable to move forward into Macedonia, unwilling to move backward into Greece. The day's work now consisted of queuing in endless lines for breakfast, lunch, and dinner – always a predictable cheese sandwich that they came to loathe, and that failed to satisfy their hunger. S's son wrote that he hoped he would never see another cheese sandwich in his life:

There is nothing worse or shittier than this camp. There are thousands of people, crowding for everything. In line for soup there are five hundred men. They are banging and making noise behind me because they want blankets, and the blanket distribution was delayed. There are five hundred guys in line here, and that's just the men. The women have their own line of five hundred. The situation – we are staying and sleeping with a group – we've put blankets on the ground in a garden and are sitting on them. The situation really cannot be described. In my life I've never seen anything like this.²⁶

His aunt B and her daughters spent their several weeks in the Idomeni camp huddled in the freezing, wet tent, while the boys lined up for food, joining the next line as soon as they had finished the previous meal distribution. The women lived in dread of using the stinking line of portable toilets, and positioned their tent as far away from them as possible. The young girls in particular avoided eating and drinking to the point where they were sick, just to avoid using the toilets which were foul and perceived to be dangerous. Eventually, after weeks in

the muddy camp at Idomeni, the travelers were transferred back to an indoor camp in Athens's Piraeus port area. There, S's son joined many others in the practice of photocopying the food ration authorization papers distributed by the Greek authorities. To get enough sandwiches to satisfy their hunger, the boys would quintuple the number of ration cards and make off with several times their allotted rations, having observed that names were never checked. In the confined quarters of the Piraeus camp, tempers flared and tensions grew between the Syrian refugees and the Afghan refugees who had good reason to believe that they were being treated even worse than the Syrians. Among the pitched battles S's son related, one involved a raid on the warehouse of the camp where some better quality donations of biscuits and crackers were being withheld from the camp's residents. Syrians and Afghans alike made off with armfuls of packaged treats. B and her daughters watched the frenzy with horror. This was indeed life reduced to its bare essentials in a way they could scarcely have imagined back in Ghouta when the war began.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION AROUND THE TABLE IN GERMANY

By 2016, families were being reunited in Germany. Home cooked foods, favorite Turkish or Moroccan groceries, new friends, and women's sociability, offering food, marked the beginning of a new life. The first sign of returning to normalcy was the ability to nourish one's own family; the sign of thriving was beginning to offer hospitality to others. After the camps and vehicles along the way, the cellophane-wrapped sandwiches and dates that people had packed for the water crossing fearing they might be their last meals, the snacks purchased at markups from gas stations and convenience stores throughout Eastern Europe, resettlement thousands of miles from home, all meant shopping with the cash assistance provided by the German state, choosing what to buy and cook, sitting around a table, inviting new arrivals like old friends, and winning over Europeans with the one thing they could do with confidence and aplomb in this confusing new environment—cook delicious food. The young men who separated from their families and made their way to Europe waited in dorms and barracks for their asylum hearings, but had cash stipends and no work permits so spent their days cooking together with their mother's WhatsApp guidance. B's husband, who had set out for Europe ahead of his wife and children, endured the agonizing wait while his family were held up at Idomeni by cooking for his fellow camp residents, then catering meals for the German language instructors and volunteers

who helped him process his reunification case, and he even began to make some extra money. When S and her family arrived and were housed in shared family asylum quarters, they had money for food, a vegetable garden and shared kitchen facilities (which led to the now-familiar strife with fellow asylum seekers) but at least there was family food again, *maqluba*, *kusa mahshi*, *ruz wa bazilla*. And when they finally got their own apartment, S celebrated by inviting all the local Turkish Muslim women she knew from the mosque for a Mawlid celebration with festive foods—puddings and sweets. B's husband maintained responsibility for cooking (and teaching his children to cook with him) once B arrived so that she could excel at her German language studies and work outside the home. Slowly, the families who were able to withstand the precarity of the migration began to reconfigure around food again, but in slightly altered ways from their customs back in Syria.

CONCLUSION

Tracking the foodways of the Syrian war and exodus gives insights not only into the challenges and resilience of refugees but also into the environments they traversed—shaped by market forces, states from the weak to the murderously strong, and even nonstate actors like NGOs, smuggling gangs, and bandits. The daily logistics of how and where to procure food, the appreciation of the privilege of shopping for and cooking what one likes, the necessary but distasteful acceptance of charity rations or processed snack foods, the bare-life indignities of elimination and hygiene on the road and in refugee camps mark the descent from precarious working- and middle-class stability into displacement in the various flavors of neoliberal capitalist encroachment. For S and B, their sisters H and D (who rejected the dangers of the water crossings and remained as "temporary guests" of Erdogan's Turkish state), their husbands and their children, the renewed ability to gather together for meals and the commensal sociability that went with them marked the gradual acceptance of new lives outside of Syria. The dishes and recipes were the same and will remain (and over the next generations take on a kind of gustatory spirituality) as sensory tokens of the life and land that was lost. The ingredients are often slightly different varieties that are available from the grocery stores of previous generations of immigrants to Europe. The children have grown and now speak in new languages about school and asylum hearings and job center internships. The husbands do a lot more of the household cooking, as the application of the

doctrine of comparative advantage at the family level means their younger, quicker wives can bring home the benefits of language classes and work outside the home more effectively than their menfolk can. Exchanging visits, enjoying picnics (trading the old fields of the Ghouta for new locales like German parks or even an Alpine lake), and welcoming guests around food knits diaspora communities together again in slightly different patterns and textures made of the same strands that had been unraveled and stretched beyond what they thought they could bear.

NOTES

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