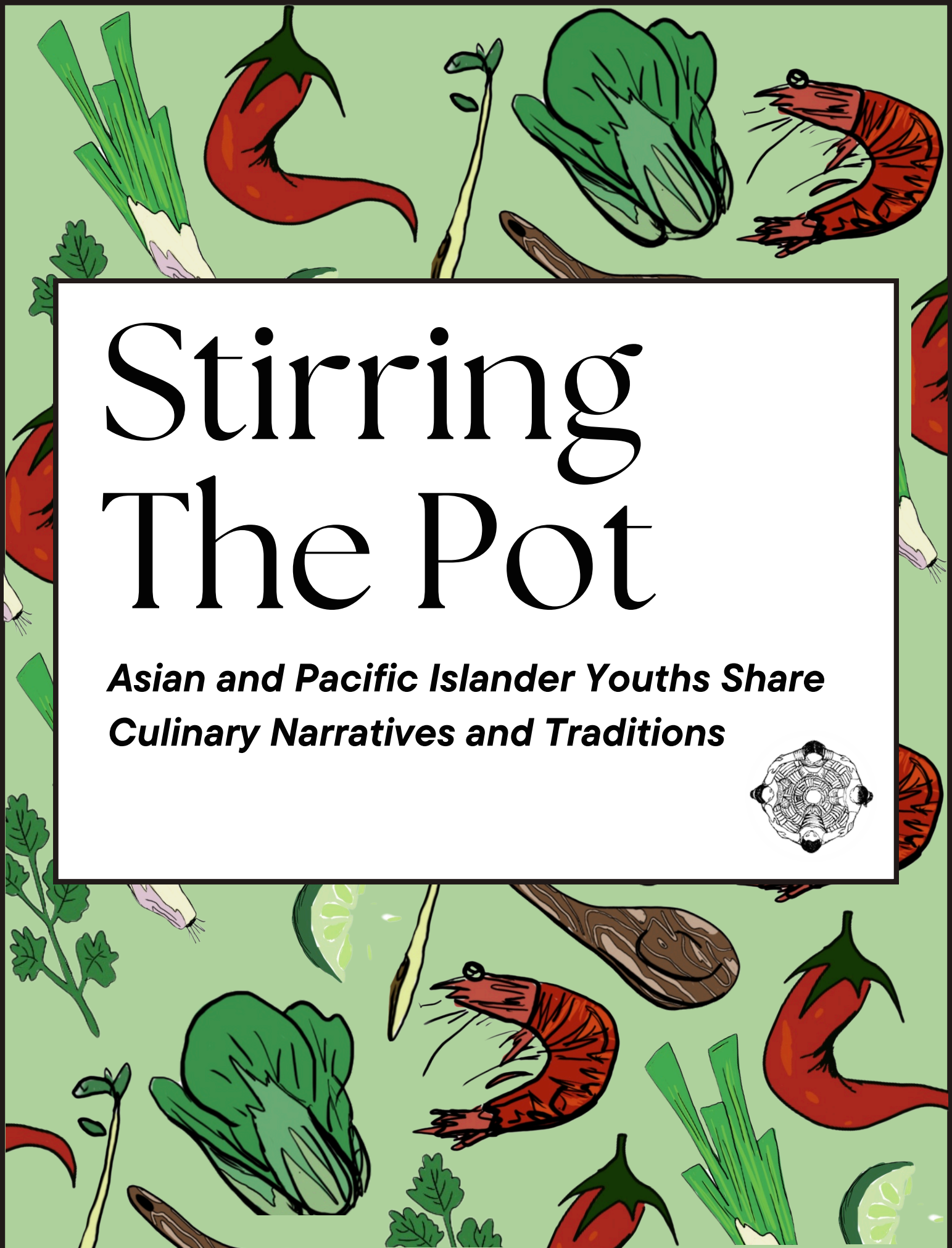


Stirring The Pot

*Asian and Pacific Islander Youths Share
Culinary Narratives and Traditions*



MONSOON ASIANS & PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN SOLIDARITY

Stirring The Pot



***Asian and Pacific Islander Youths Share
Culinary Narratives and Traditions***

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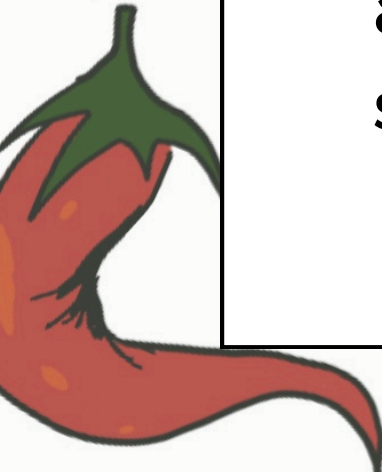


Maggie Sibok

Danya Albert





Introduction



This cookbook explores how foods and recipes connect with cultures and religions around the world. You'll find a mix of facts, recipes, stories, and personal experiences that show the unique role food plays in people's lives. In the pages that follow we will discover dishes and the diverse ways food shapes our shared human experience.

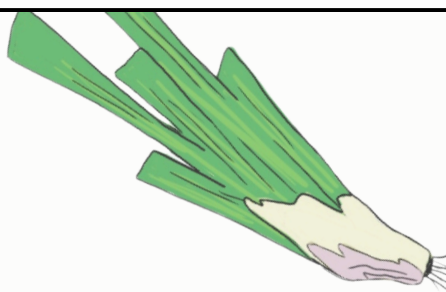
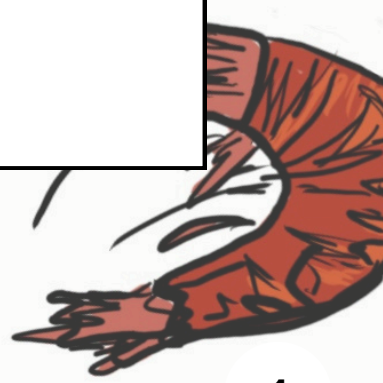



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What's Going On In Gaza? Food as a Tool for Genocide

While many of us can get out of bed, make breakfast, go through our day until lunch, and end the night with dinner, Palestinians in Gaza cannot do the same. They are awakened by the sounds of bombs, drones, and terror, and try to survive on grass soup just to make it through the night without any humanitarian aid reaching them.

In this section, understand the challenges faced by Palestinians through highlights of their enduring efforts to preserve traditions and heritage in the face of adversity.

What's Going On In Gaza?



Monsoon youth interns interviewed Rima Afifi, Professor and Director, Prevention Research Center for Rural Health, in the Department of Community and Behavioral Health, College of Public Health, University of Iowa, to gain insights into the relationship between Palestinians and food, examining how it is influenced by or separated from the context of war.

Afifi was born in Beirut, Lebanon, to a Palestinian father, who migrated to Lebanon because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and an American mother. She grew up in Lebanon and moved to the United States in 2017 to pursue further education.

Her father's family originates from what is considered historic Palestine, specifically from the city of Akka in the northern region. Akka is currently under Israeli control.

When asked about what food means to her and its significance in Palestinian culture, Afifi described food using words like collectivism and resistance. She further elaborated by connecting these concepts to Ramadan and Iftar, emphasizing that 'food is life' and signifies more than just physical nourishment.

"Food brings people together, it's a symbol of unity and community."

Afifi also revealed to us her favorite comfort foods like Dolmas (stuffed grape leaves) and Tabbouleh while also expressing concern about the appropriation of cultural dishes, such as hummus. Palestinian cuisine faces threats not only from the erasure of native crops, but also from the gentrification of traditional recipes in the West.

"Appropriation is dangerous in terms to identity"



How does this impact food?

In terms of the Israel-Hamas war, food has been used to oppress Palestinians not only in the form of famine through hunger and malnutrition, but also through cultural erasure.



Thyme

Afifi mentioned how in the past, the Israeli occupation in Palestinian territories resulted in prohibition of the cultivation of different herbs and crops that were significant in Palestinian cuisine, such as thyme. While Afifi noted that those herbs were not necessarily essential for survival, they were crucial to preserving Palestinian heritage.

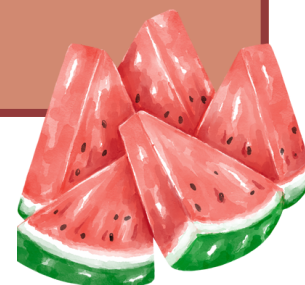


Sage

Another significance that food holds to Palestinians beyond nutrition is its connection to struggle.

Watermelons & Liberation

The watermelon graphics in articles pertaining to Palestine stem from Israeli prohibition of displaying the Palestinian flag. In response to this ban, and in a show of cultural determination despite the risk of persecution, Palestinians used watermelons as a subversive move: The colors red, black and green of the fruit appear in the flag as a symbol of resistance and identity.



Symbolism & Significance of Olive Trees in Palestinian Culture

Another key moment of oppression through food is the destruction of olive trees.

Olive trees hold deep meaning for West Asian (Levantine) cultures, especially Palestinian. The trees take many years to grow strong, healthy and hardy. Their symbolism of persistence and peace makes them even more precious to families.



“They [olive trees] are like babies to them. ... (removal of these trees is akin to) taking away Palestine from the people.”

The controversial JNF (Jewish National Fund), which owns large swathes of land in Israel and develops land for Jewish settlement, has been criticized for decades of planting non-native pine and cypress trees, which are not well suited to the climate, instead of local species, such as olive trees.

Peace activists view the JNFs afforestation project as a ploy to displace Palestinian agrarians from their homes and lands.



“Oftentimes the olive tree will grow back, split the pine tree, and take its rightful place on the land. And I really believe that this is symbolic for the Palestinian people.”

Preserving Culture

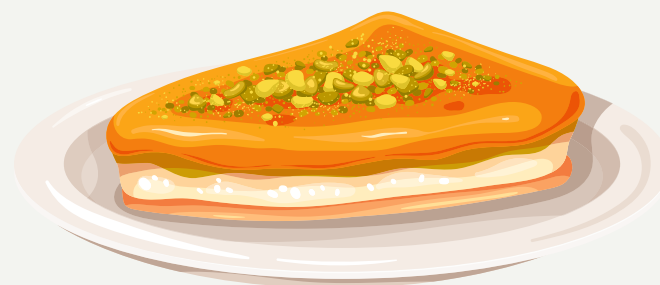
In response to the destruction and erasure of Palestinian cuisine and traditions, there have been significant efforts to preserve and document Palestinian cultural heritage, such as with food. This is reflected in the prevalence of shared recipes across West Asia, often adapted with regionally specific twists, especially due to migration from Palestinians. When addressing the olive trees project, Afifi highlighted efforts to save native Palestinian crops, including initiatives to germinate seeds and cultivate them until they can be reintroduced into the soil of an independent Palestine



However, all is not lost, as neighboring countries in the region often share the same dishes that evoke a sense of 'home.' Afifi highlighted how many dishes across West Asia share common roots in their recipes. Exploring the concept of authenticity, she noted that such favorites as tabbouleh (salad of bulgur wheat and herbs) or knafeh (a cheese pastry) can vary widely in preparation, even when claimed by specific countries as their own. She recounted her grandmother's cooking as a true representation of Palestinian flavors, adding that it exemplified the rich and diverse culinary heritage of her culture.

“Food makes me feel like home”

Knafeh, A warm Arab dessert made with shredded filo dough, cheese, and syrup, topped with pistachio.



Palestinian Cuisine Highlight

Mussakhan: Roast Chicken With Sumac and Red Onions



Image credit: "Zaitoun: Recipes from the Palestinian Kitchen"

When asked about some of her favorite Palestinian dishes, **Dr. Afifi** shared a recipe from Yasmin Khan's cookbook, *Zaitoun: Recipes from the Palestinian Kitchen*. She accredited the cookbook as a main resource when it came to remaking her favorite comfort foods.

She noted that dishes within the Middle East are typically shared across borders, but differ by a country's unique twist.

When explaining her choice to highlight Mussakhan, Dr. Afifi recognized it as

"...one of the most famous Palestinian dishes".

Ingredients

2 lb./1kg chicken thighs and drumsticks, skin on
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus more to serve
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 1/2 tablespoons sumac, plus more to dust
juice of 1 lemon
4 garlic cloves, crushed

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 large red onions (about 1 lb./500g), finely sliced into half-moons
2 tablespoons pine nuts
1 tablespoon olive oil or any neutral oil
naan or Arabic taboon bread, to serve
chopped parsley leaves

Directions

Slash the flesh of each piece of chicken diagonally a few times, around 3/4 inch/2cm apart, and then place the meat in a large bowl or plastic container.

Pour over the extra virgin olive oil, spices, lemon juice, garlic, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and rub this into the meat. Add the red onions and toss everything together well. Cover and leave to marinate in the fridge for 1-3 hours.

When you are ready to cook the chicken, preheat the oven to 375°F/190°C.

Transfer the meat to a baking pan and roast for about 35 minutes, or until the chicken juices run clear when pierced at their thickest part. Once the chicken is cooked, cover in foil and leave to rest while you prepare the toppings.

Fry the pine nuts in the cooking oil for a minute or so until they turn golden brown, then tip onto a paper towel to drain.

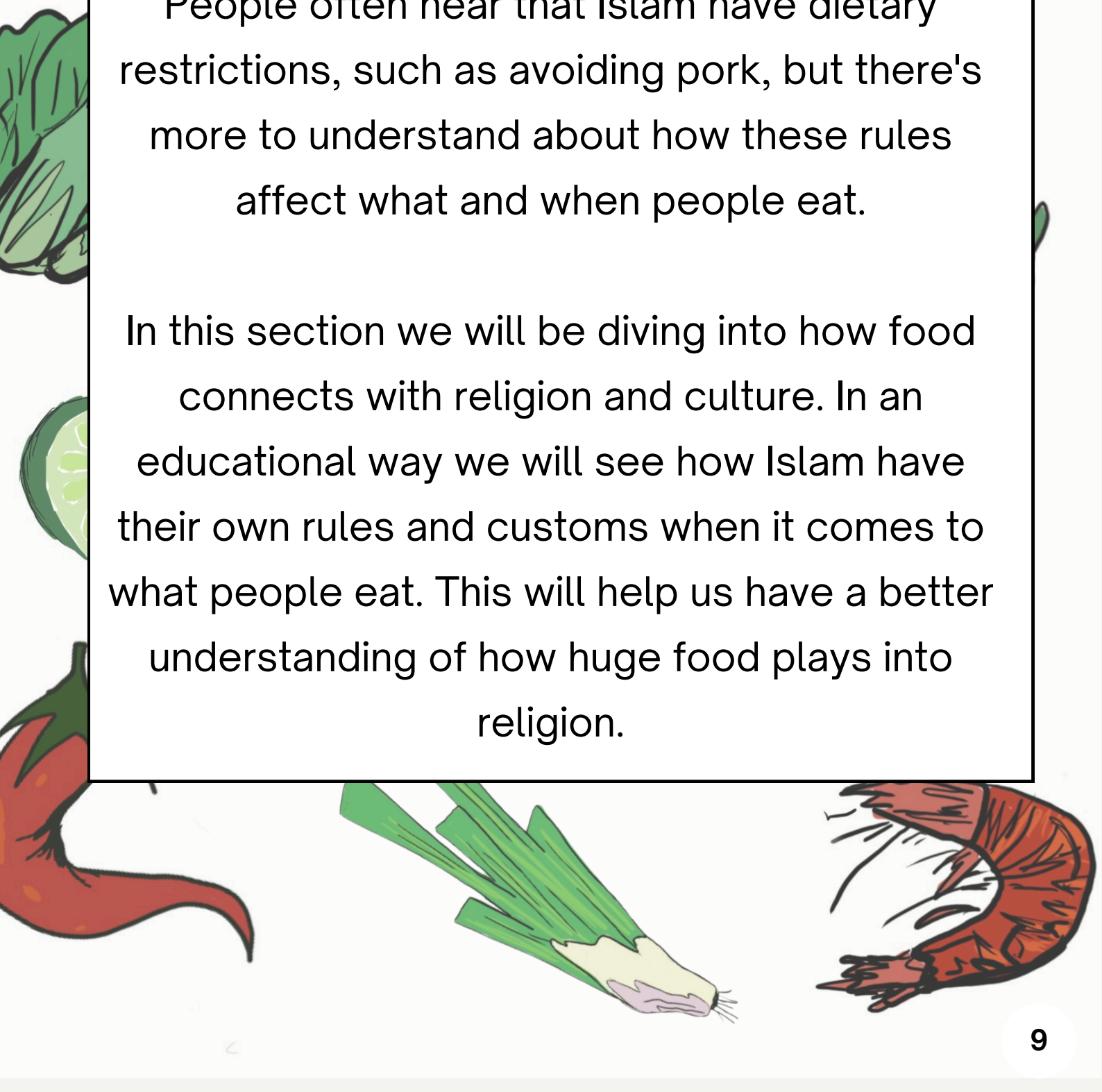
To serve, toast the naan or Taboon bread and then place the chicken and red onion on top. Finish with a smattering of pine nuts, sumac and chopped parsley. Drizzle over any remaining roasting juices so they soak into the bread, then sprinkle over a little more extra virgin olive oil.



Is It Halal?

People often hear that Islam have dietary restrictions, such as avoiding pork, but there's more to understand about how these rules affect what and when people eat.

In this section we will be diving into how food connects with religion and culture. In an educational way we will see how Islam have their own rules and customs when it comes to what people eat. This will help us have a better understanding of how huge food plays into religion.



Is It Halal?



By: Janna Noori, Monsoon High School Intern

Tuesday, June 25th, 2024

Wondering whether a certain dish is religiously forbidden can be challenging for Muslims who may have different rules of consuming food items and who also may follow the rules differently.

In this section, we will delve into the meaning of Halal, its religious significance, and reflecting on the role it plays with those who follow the laws of Islam.

“What does Halal and Haram mean?”

The laws of halal and haram are vital in Islam and come from the Muslim holy book, the Quran. They are meant to help Muslims understand what is and is not sinful under Islam.

HALAL

Halal, an Arabic word meaning permissible, applies not only to food but also extends to things such as clothing, relationships and the way you carry yourself as a person. Following ‘Halal’ results in good deeds’.

HARAM

Haram, an Arabic word meaning non-permissible or forbidden, applies to the same areas as Halal. Actions categorized as ‘Haram’ lead to negative consequences.

What makes food Halal?



The animal that will be slaughtered needs to be healthy and alive, while being hung upside down it needs to be cut from the neck while saying God's name to make it Halal to eat. The animal needs to be kept upside down for the blood to drip out. This is a practice that many Muslims follow in order to eat meat.

What makes food Haram?



Any food that contains pig meat and enzymes is Haram. If the meat was cut in an unclean environment or God's name wasn't mentioned while cutting the animal. If the animal was unwell when cutting it plays a part too. An unwell animal is said to carry its diseases to people when eating it.

Did you know?

These foods are *Halal*



- Seafood
- Horse Meat
- Sour Patch Kids
- Twizlers
- Swedish fish

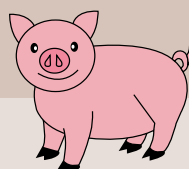
and these are *Haram*



- Frog Legs (& all other amphibians!)
- Lard
- Meat of carnivores
- The blood of any animal
- Skittles
- Rice Crispy Treats

Why is pork Haram?

Pork is religiously forbidden for Muslims because pigs like to roll around in mud and their own filth. They also consume their own cud which the Quran says runs in their veins. It is said that they have many harmful bacteria.



How to know a product is certified Halal?

Look for this label!



Ramadan: Food & Fasting

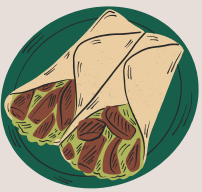
Ramadan is a major period of fasting for Muslims, and is a time marked also by prayer, good deeds and reflection. Food plays a big role during Ramadan, which lasts for 29-30 days depending on the lunar calendar, and deepens connections with family and friends.



During Ramadan before sunrise, they take part in suhoor, a meal to prepare for the day, and after sunset, they break their fast with iftar with family and friends. This lasts for 29-30 days depending on the lunar calendar.



Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset, meaning abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking, swearing, and sex during daylight hours. Fasting aims also at fostering spiritual growth and empathy for those with limited access to food.



When it comes to food, Ramadan is a special time for friends and family to come together and connect while eating. Everyone comes together to prepare the meal making it perfect. The end of Ramadan is celebrated with Eid Al-Fitr, a three day holiday celebrating a successful fasting year.

Fun Fact!



Did you know that it's best to break your fast with a date and Greek yogurt? These foods are beneficial for your immune system and are commonly used because they are mentioned in the Quran.



My Halal Eating Experiences In Iowa

YOUR EXPERIENCES EATING HALAL IN IOWA

INTERVIEW BY: ANGELINA DANG AND JANNA NOORI



At school

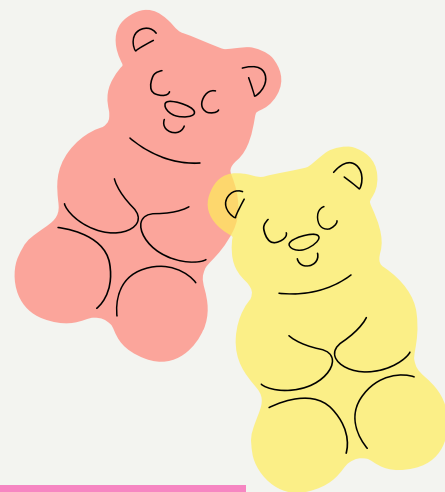
Growing up as a Muslim in Iowa can be tough because schools typically don't serve Halal meals. Instead they often serve pork, which puts Muslims in a difficult spot. They are left with the choice of skipping meals or going against their beliefs and eating pork, affecting their health and religion.

In an interview with Maaza Giraqandi, an Iowa-born Muslim teenager, we asked her to recount her experiences regarding whether schools adequately provide halal food for Muslim students.



"I remember in elementary school, there was only pepperoni pizza and I got it and I took the pepperoni off and ate it".

This not only occurs in the cafeteria, it also happens in classrooms. Teachers often give out candy as rewards, but they usually have gelatin, which Muslims can't have. There's rarely any consideration for offering non-gelatin options for Muslim students and when they do, it's usually an afterthought.



"All my classmates would be eating it [candy] but I'm sitting here when I did the work but I'm not getting rewarded because the teachers did not consider people who are Muslim."



How would someone check that something is Halal?



Figuring out if something is Halal is time consuming. Most people look at the ingredients, but many foods don't specify if the enzymes used are from beef or pork. So you end up having to search online, but sometimes it's not always clear. Sometimes you just have to skip it and pick something else.



“How I check is basically if I'm in this store checking the ingredients on the back, a lot of candy has gelatin so I have to research it to see if it's beef gelatin or not. Others don't specify so I avoid them.”

How accessible and accurate are Halal restaurants?

In restaurants, Muslims often have to ask for no pork in their food. Sometimes, waiters forget or don't tell the cooks. It's a hassle to make sure they get the right meal. Finding Halal restaurants in Iowa is tough because there are only a few around.



“I don't think there's a lot. With more cities and bigger populations, they sell halal food. Smaller populations like Des Moines, I don't see much halal restaurants just stores.”



Halal Recipes Highlight

CHICKEN SHAWARMA



Shawarma is a special to many Muslim families because it is created everywhere in the Middle East. Its made in many ways and with different proteins such as beef and lamb. It's loved everywhere and is a popular street food.

Directions

Prepare the Marinade:

In a bowl, mix together the minced garlic, lemon juice, yogurt, olive oil, cumin, paprika, coriander, turmeric, salt, and pepper. Add the thinly sliced meat to the marinade, ensuring it's well coated. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, preferably longer (up to overnight) to allow the flavors to develop.

Cooking the Meat:

Preheat your oven to a high broil setting or prepare a vertical rotisserie.

If using an oven, you can thread the marinated meat onto skewers and place them on a baking sheet lined with foil. Broil for about 10-15 minutes, turning occasionally, until the meat is cooked through and slightly charred.

If using a vertical rotisserie, stack the marinated meat slices onto the spit and cook according to the rotisserie's instructions until the meat is cooked and has a nice char on the outside.

Assembling the Shawarma:

Once cooked, let the meat rest for a few minutes before slicing it thinly.

Warm the pita or flatbread briefly in the oven or on a grill.

Spread some hummus and/or tahini sauce on the bread.

Place a generous amount of sliced meat on the bread.

Top with sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, and pickles if desired.

Roll up the bread tightly around the filling to form a wrap.

Serving:

Serve the shawarma wraps immediately while warm.

Ingredients

For the marinade:

- 500g of chicken or lamb, thinly sliced
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 tablespoons of plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1 teaspoon of ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon of ground paprika
- 1 teaspoon of ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon of ground turmeric
- Salt and pepper to taste

For serving:

- Pita bread or flatbread
- Hummus
- Tahini sauce or garlic sauce
- Sliced tomatoes
- Sliced cucumbers
- Chopped lettuce
- Pickles (optional)

Halal Recipes Highlight

DOLMA



Ingredients

- 1 jar of grape leaves in brine (about 60-70 leaves), or fresh grape leaves blanched and prepared
- 1 cup long-grain white rice, rinsed
- 250g ground lamb or beef (optional)
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2-3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint (or 1 tablespoon dried mint)
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Water or broth, as needed
- Plain yogurt (for serving, optional)

Dolma is very popular in the middle east but it originated from Turkey which lead to it expanding to other countries. Dolma is called many things such as Sarma and Warak Enab.

Directions

Prepare the Grape Leaves:

If using jarred grape leaves, rinse them thoroughly under cold water to remove excess salt. If using fresh grape leaves, blanch them in boiling water for 2-3 minutes, then drain and rinse under cold water.

Prepare the Filling:

In a large bowl, combine the rinsed rice, ground meat (if using), chopped onion, olive oil, parsley, mint, lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Mix well to combine.

Assemble the Dolma:

Lay a grape leaf flat on a cutting board or work surface, shiny side down.

Place a small spoonful (about 1 tablespoon) of the rice mixture near the stem end of the leaf.

Fold the stem end over the filling, then fold the sides toward the center, and roll tightly to form a compact roll.

Repeat with the remaining grape leaves and filling mixture, placing the stuffed grape leaves snugly in a large pot or deep pan, seam side down, in a single layer.

Cook the Dolma:

Once all the dolmas are assembled in the pot, pour enough water or broth over them to just cover.

Place a heat-proof plate or lid directly on top of the dolmas to keep them from floating.

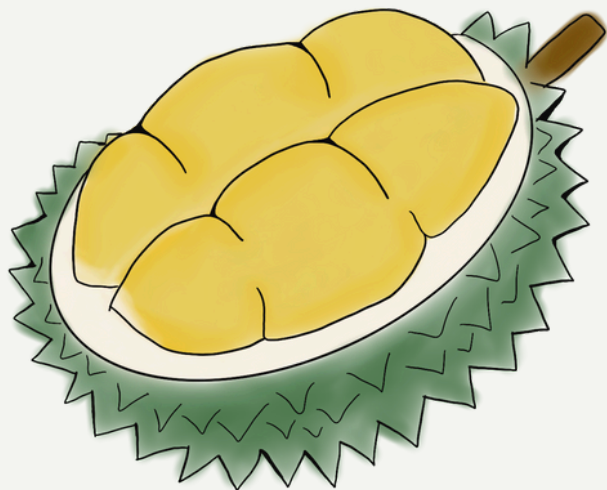
Bring the liquid to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and simmer gently for 45-60 minutes, or until the rice is fully cooked and tender.

Serve:

Remove the dolmas from the pot using a slotted spoon and arrange them on a serving platter.

Serve warm or at room temperature, with a dollop of plain yogurt on the side.

What's That Smell?



When I first arrived in the United States, in 2012 I had about a million dentist appointments because we never went to the dentist in Vietnam. As a 6 year-old, I had more than 6 teeth pulled and a handful of cavities. Due to my inability to chew, I relied on food cooked from home to bring to school.

Durian, the national fruit of Indonesia, has a reputation for being the stinkiest fruit however, it is a beloved delicacy in Southeast Asia.

Source: Angelina Dang

One day I brought Vietnamese porridge and packets of soy sauce to eat for lunch. When I opened my soy sauce packet to put in my porridge, I did not expect the reaction from everyone around me, including my new friends. There were scrunched noses and loud voices of **“What’s that smell?!”**



I asked my mom to stop packing me lunch. That day changed my life, and it was not for the better. It started with changing the food I ate, to not wearing my cultural clothing, and refusing to speak Vietnamese, all because I could not handle the voices of judgment around me.

Rice Porridge, made with rice and water and can be eaten with a variety of toppings.

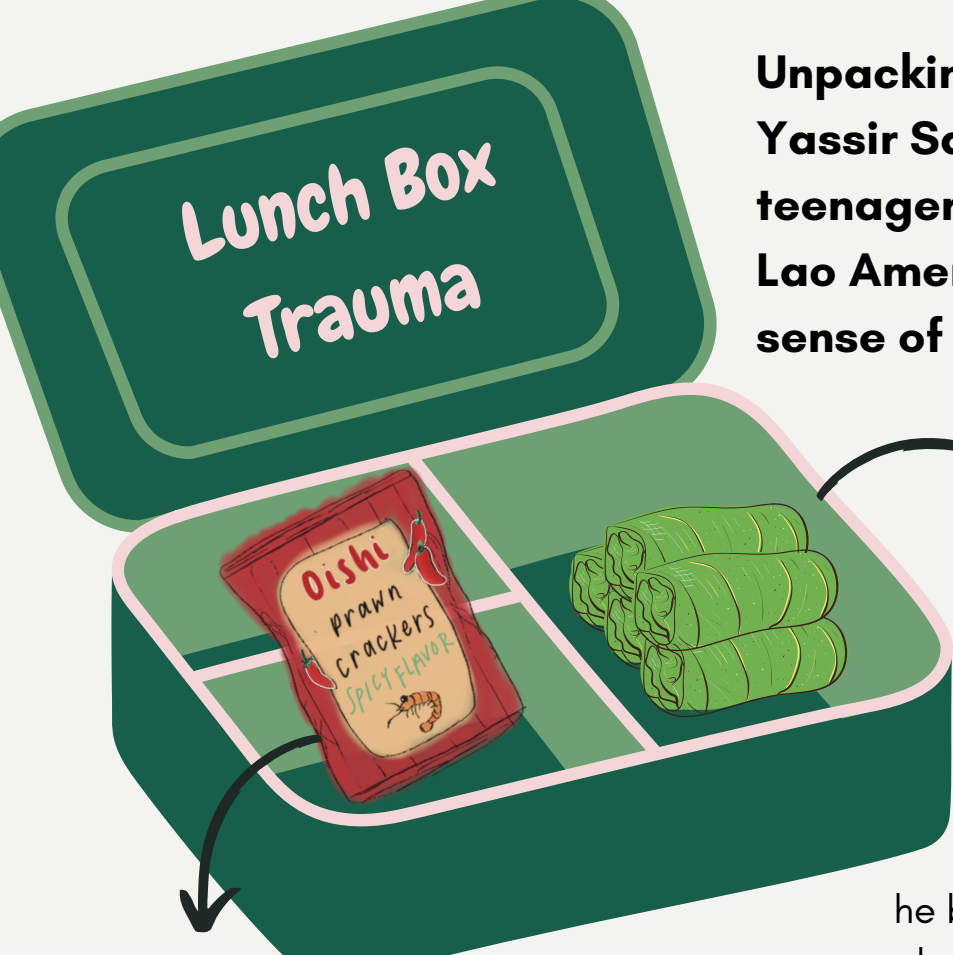
Food Therapy

Made by: Angelina Dang



But time has changed. While now it's popular to eat food (Pho, ramen, kimchi, etc) people made fun of me for, I'll always get the privilege to find comfort in foods that has been passed down for generations.





Unpacking shared experiences with Yassir Samir, an Iraqi American teenager and Briana Khounkhong, a Lao American teenager, I felt a sense of belonging.

Dolmas

As **Yassir** remembered his own struggles with peers, he mentioned how Americans are accustomed to the smell of Western food, which meant when

he bought Dolmas (meat dumpling in a leaf wrap) to school, their reaction was less than polite

Prawn Crackers:

Deep fried crackers made with starch and prawns.



When asked about what it was like bringing Asian food to school, **Briana** recalled an experience from kindergarten.

“When they smelled Dolma, they said ‘Eww it smells bad’ or they would see the leaves and say ‘Are you a giraffe or something?’.”

“I had brought these prawn crackers and these kids were like ‘What’s that?’ I didn’t understand that they were making fun of me, so I told them ‘It’s good, you should try some’ but they said no”.

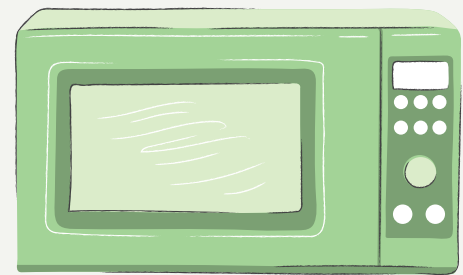
While the bullying is already hurtful enough, these moments cause greater harm than just insecurities about what we bring to school. For many Asian American and Pacific Islander teens and adults, these sly comments result in cultural rejection. The shame people carry about their heritage leads to the erasure of such cultural identities as language and tradition in the search for acceptance by Western society.

From school to office: Battling smells across generations

The struggle with accepting our identities is not something that is left behind in childhood. The ignorance we faced from classmates often extends into the workplace. While it may appear that adults have resolved these issues and can fully embrace their cultures, isolation from coworkers can create another layer of identity crises.

Smell in Shared Spaces

The communal microwave might just be the biggest enemy. There is already self-consciousness around the smell of our foods, and reheating seems to intensify it, making it open for everyone to judge.



Clinging to Culture


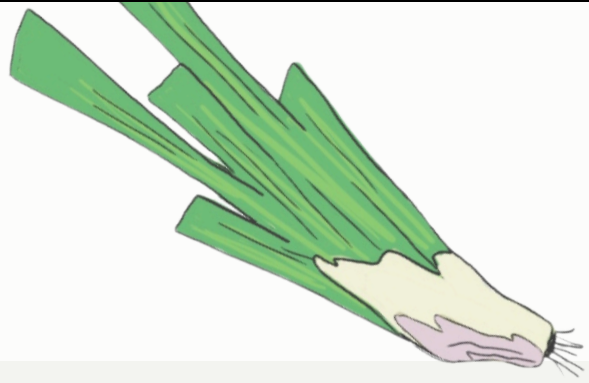


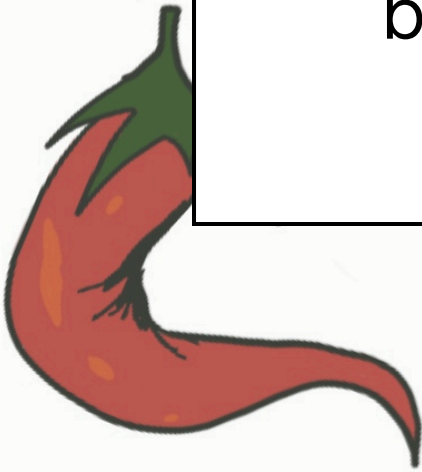

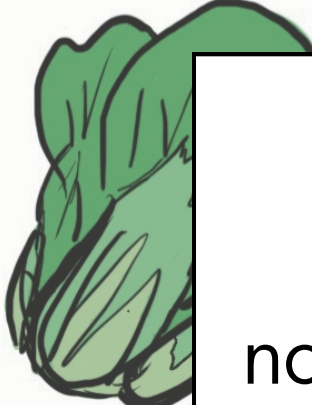
The discussion around our food extends beyond what's packed in our lunchboxes. Whether prepared in a family-owned restaurant or at home, the lingering aromas of our comfort foods can cling to our clothing and belongings, often getting comments such as, **"What's that smell?"**

THE REALITY IS THAT ASIAN FOODS USUALLY CONTAIN A LOT OF INGREDIENTS, ESPECIALLY OILS AND SPICES, SO IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL TO EXPLORE THESE INGREDIENTS AS A GREAT WAY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FOOD AND CULTURES.





How Has Migration Impacted Food?



Food is not just a form of nourishment. Food tell stories of life whether that's joy, pain, or anger. In the following pages, you will read stories about opening restaurants, the impact of imperialism, and how food brings people together.

Immigration & Assimilation

Not Like Your Other Restaurants

Opening any kind of restaurant takes time, money, effort, and failures. It is no easy task. However opening an Asian restaurant as an Asian owner comes with its own set of challenges. When interviewing Justina Luangdetmalay from JJJasmine, she brought up how her parents were profiled as uneducated or able to communicate properly. Tony Chandavong, Blu Thai Sushi Owner, also brought up how he wasn't extremely confident and at times didn't see eye to eye with his parents, but as he started asserting ideas and trusted his aunts recipes that all changed.



Front Counter of JJJasmine where orders can be taken. *Photo Credit: Justina Luangdetmalay*

Staying True

Adapting dishes to different taste palettes while still embracing that authenticity can be hard. This was the case for Restaurants, JJJasmine, and Blu Thai. While JJJasmine chooses to create the dishes to be basic so the customers can add their own flavoring, Blu Thai has gone from accommodating things like spice to using more traditional spices. One common thread between these restaurants is the importance of family. At JJJasmine, Justina collaborates closely with her father, to maintain traditional flavors and an authentic feel in their dishes. Their bond goes beyond the kitchen, reflecting their shared passion for food and commitment to preserving their culture. Similarly, at Blu Thai, Tony works with his aunt to blend their cultural influences, highlighting the family's important role in their culinary approach.



Front entrance to BluThai located on 13th st. *Photo Credit: Hlaw Meh*

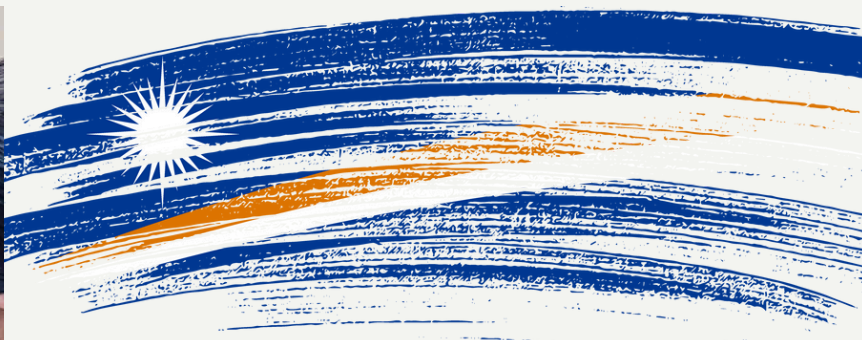
Migration for Pacific Islanders in Iowa

Most of Iowa's Pacific Islander population resides in Dubuque. The three main demographics are Marshallese, Chuukese, and Pohnpeian.

The primary reasons for migration within the PI population include accessing healthcare, employment opportunities, education, and to be closer to family.



Pacific Islander youths at Monsoon's monthly gathering and guided discussions on educational resources in Dubuque, Iowa, in 2022. | Photo credits: Maggie Sibok



Pacific Islander communities in Dubuque, Iowa at a monthly gathering in 2023. While quilt making, they discussed healthy family relationships and how to navigate hurdles Pacific Islanders are currently facing in Iowa. | Photo credit: Danya Albert

During WWII, the United States conducted several nuclear tests on the Marshall Islands, displacing the native population from their land. The testing destroyed their crops and access to clean water, resulting in severe health consequences. The loss of local food sources forced Marshallese people to rely on imported processed foods, significantly altering their diet and health.

Food is not just a form of nourishment; food is a tool for imperialism/colonialism.

Food & Family

The heart of Culinary Traditions

Family is an important part in all Asian and Pacific Islander's cultures and in their food culture. This is shown through how recipes aren't verbally taught and written down but by being and cooking together. Family is also what keeps the traditions and culture alive.



What comes to mind when you think of family?
Here's what Youth had to say when asked that question





Plants being sold at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers market Saturday Morning for those who want to start their own garden.
Photo Credit: Hlaw Meh



Local and fresh ingredients being bought by many at the Des Moines Downtown Farmers Market Saturday Morning. Photo Credit: Hlaw Meh

Sourcing Ingredients

While the ingredients may come from different places, whether it's sourced locally or globally, the one thing they all have in common is the want and need for the freshest and best quality ingredients for their customers.



Local Asian owned booth at the Des Moines Downtown Farmer's Market selling fresh produce on a Saturday Morning
Photo Credit: Hlaw Meh



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