

## From “Mjaddarah” to “Fatti de Luxe” Food and Middle Eastern Diasporas

The *Moise A. Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies* (NC State University) and *Center for Regional Food Studies* (University of Arizona) will host an international conference—titled *From “Mjaddarah” to “Fatti de Luxe:” Food and Middle Eastern Diasporas*—at North Carolina State University (Raleigh, North Carolina, USA) on April 5-7, 2018.



Middle Eastern cuisines seem to have been suspended in time in popular imagination and culture. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. Since the arrival in North America between 1890 and 1920 of the first wave of Middle Eastern diasporas, cuisines that originated in the cities and villages of the Eastern Mediterranean have undergone spectacular transformations in their evolution both within the Middle East and beyond – in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Mexico and the U.S. At the same time, nostalgia, longing and post-traumatic stress have reshuffled the role of food in Middle Eastern identity(ies). The social contexts of these cuisines – in terms of their significance in memory, oral histories, intergenerational transmission of cultural identities and tourist promotion—have also shifted or diversified over the decades.

These issues are in ways similar for every refugee and immigrant group, but they are especially poignant during the centennial anniversary of Middle Eastern diasporas that affected the region itself and the world. And yet the way in which these issues have shaped the experience of Middle Eastern immigrants has still not been fully explored. Now, as popular interest in Middle Eastern food has increased to the point of rendering it into a globalized cuisine, and at a time when concomitant scholarly research is growing around this topic, there is a compelling need for delving deeper into the meanings and transformations of Middle Eastern food.

Narration is always mediated by power dynamics embedded in, and generated by, cultural and religious productions, economic relations and political negotiations. This is particularly evident in discourses about food and culinary culture. In this conference, we seek to unpack these elements in both scholarly dialogue and forays into popular culture. We also aim to investigate the ways that food and associated cultural expressions have morphed and diversified around Middle Eastern diaspora across time and space.

We invite proposals for papers from **across the academic disciplines** on topics relating to the following broad themes:

- The food and agriculture crises in Lebanon and Syria a century ago, and the debate on the degree to which they indirectly or directly affected the diaspora;

- Food practices among Middle Eastern diaspora communities, and how they diverged in the *Mahjar* including, but not only, the US, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, West Africa, etc.;
- How gender and class shape, and are formed, by food;
- Recipes, dishes and ingredients as cultural markers;
- How Levantine food was transformed to fit “mainstream” cultures, and adapt to the lack of typical ingredients not easily found beyond the Levant;
- Food memory, emotions and nostalgia in expressions of Middle Eastern identities;
- Poetry, stories and graphic narratives relating to changing intergenerational perceptions of food and drink as they are imbedded in cultural behavior;
- Ethnographies of traditional food custodians, innovators, chefs, celebrities and celebrated *Sittis* (grandmothers), in word, film, photo stills, theatre or dance;
- How Middle Eastern-American pioneers opened up cultural spaces through food businesses and distinguished their foods from other ethnic traditions.

Please send paper proposals in MS Word or PDF format via email to the organizers at the following address: [akhater@ncsu.edu](mailto:akhater@ncsu.edu). Proposals should have a title and abstract of no more than 300 words, and should include contact information and institutional affiliation. The deadline for receipt of paper proposals is Friday, November 3, 2017. Successful applicants will be informed by Friday, November 17, 2017.

We welcome proposals from graduate students, early-career researchers as well as established scholars.

The conference will be hosted by the *Khayrallah Center for Lebanese Diaspora Studies* at North Carolina State University and the *Center for Regional Food Studies* at the University of Arizona. It will take place on the campus of North Carolina State University. The organizers will cover all the costs of housing and meals for participants for the duration of the conference, and provide some support toward travel. Some papers will be selected for subsequent publication.

Dr. Akram Khater & Dr. Gary Nabhan