

# Food Identities at Home and on the Move

## Reimagined Community in London

### 2

## Reimagined community in London

### The transmission of food as heritage in the Afghan diaspora

Rebecca Haboucha

#### **Introduction: Transmitting heritage in forced displacement – the Afghan case**

Using the example of the Afghan diaspora in London, this chapter examines how populations resulting from forced displacement use the cultural practices of food to reconcile the memory of home with their lived experiences in a new place through the transmission of food as heritage among women.

Because of sociopolitical circumstances in their homeland, refugees are often unable to return or maintain any personal connections with their countries of origin. Furthermore, they are rarely able to take any tangible objects with them upon fleeing. Nostalgic memories of a past place come to serve as the primary means through which they can maintain their cultural identity (Creet 2011). Food and foodways – defined as the cultural, social and economic processes involved in the production and consumption of food – commonly serve as the primary markers used in the formation of group identity because of their practical and cultural roles in everyday life (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014). Further, taste, defined as both an individual and a social experience that binds groups together through space and time, is an invaluable concept to study food as heritage; it has under-explored potential from which to study the formation of cultural and national identities in diasporic groups resulting from forced displacement (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014; Sutton 2008).

In 2017, the number of forcibly displaced people around the world reached an unprecedented high of 65.6 million, of whom a third were refugees (UNHCR 2017). The ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan have resulted in three discreet waves of Afghan migration worldwide, including to the UK. The Soviet Invasion in 1979 produced the first major wave throughout the 1980s; Mujahideen wars in the early 1990s led to the second wave between 1992 and 1996; and the third wave of migration came with the rise of the Taliban in 1996. Afghan migration to the UK increased exponentially at this point, peaking with the invasion of international forces in Afghanistan in 2001 (Barfield 2010: 6–7). The 2011 Census for England and Wales estimated 63,000 Afghan-born individuals living in the UK, the majority of whom lived in London followed by Birmingham (ONS 2013: 11). Since issues of cultural identity and illegal immigration are not taken into consideration, this figure is substantially higher in reality (DCLG 2009). To this day, 10 per cent of the world’s refugees are from Afghanistan (UNHCR 2017).

To understand the manifestation of cultural practices and identity in the Afghan diaspora, one must first have a broader sociocultural and geographical understanding of Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s modern-day geography was constituted exogenously. Although never directly ruled by colonial forces, the territory was nonetheless impacted by the neighbouring British and Russian Empires in the nineteenth century (Marsden and Hopkins 2011: 24). The formation of an Afghan state, however, preceded the forging of an Afghan nation. Although Islam is the official religion of the state (US Department of State 2012: 2), Afghanistan is extremely ethnically diverse to this day. It has approximately twenty main ethnic groups. The most populous and politically dominant are the Pashtuns (42 per cent), followed by the Tajiks (27 per cent), Hazaras and Uzbeks (9 per cent each) (Library of Congress 2008: 6). The term ‘Afghan’ has historically been synonymous with a Pashtun identity, since it is the largest and most politically advocate group in the country. The national character of ‘Afghan’ was

therefore imposed contemporaneously with the formation of the state and still serves as a contentious issue of identity within Afghanistan. That said, a religious affiliation with Islam seems to largely override ethnic differences (Ewans 2002: 3). Notions of ethnic identity are, in short, historically, politically and situationally contingent. While the interviewed individuals, affiliated with two London-based refugee community organizations, came from various ethnicities, their very participation in and membership with these organizations are testaments to the fact that ethnicity should not, and therefore did not, define how I interpreted their interviews.

Afghanistan's cultural diversity is reflected in the diversity of its food. Afghan cuisine is mainly non-vegetarian and includes tomato paste, aromatic spices – such as turmeric, cinnamon and cardamom – and onions among its staple ingredients. Just as religion forged a concept of the nation, the urbanization of Kabul has created a more cohesive form of Afghan cuisine that overcomes regional differences. Moreover, the origins of traditional dishes are resonant of the intersections between regionalism and transnational influences in Afghanistan. For example, the north is heavily dependent on animal husbandry and rice cultivation (Barfield 2010: 36–8). Their best-known dishes *Qabili Palaw* – the national rice dish – and the dumpling *Mantu* both feature meat as a main ingredient. Conversely, the geographical conditions of the East have made it an agrarian region and it therefore consists of a largely vegetarian diet, where the vegetarian dumpling, *Ashak*, may have originated. Regionally specific dishes can now be found throughout Afghanistan but are still most prevalent in their regions of origin (Pers. comm., G. Farooq, 19 July 2015). Afghan women are the research subjects of this chapter since they continue to be the main practitioners of domestic chores, including culinary practices (Lockett 2010: 50; Saberi 2000: 31). They therefore arguably serve as the primary progenitors of Afghan cultural identity to this day. Moreover, the fact that the Afghan diaspora is a contemporary,

first-generation and continually growing population provides the unparalleled means to examine how identities are forged in a new place.

This chapter is divided into methods, followed by three sections that present and discuss the results, and a conclusion. The sections are based on an applied thematic analysis of the continuity and change of foodstuffs and food practices, their transmission within and beyond the domestic unit, and their role in the formation of identity within the Afghan diaspora. These themes capture how Afghan food in London represents true diasporic memory.

### **Methods**

Data was primarily collected through seventeen semi-structured interviews, as well as one group interview, with first- and second-generation women from the latter two waves of Afghan migration. The interviews were conducted between April and June 2015. Thirteen of the interviewees were in their mid- to late thirties, while four were twenty-five years old and under. In addition, fifteen of the seventeen interviewees were of first generation, while two of them described themselves as second-generation migrants.

All the participants were affiliated with one of the two London-based refugee community organizations (RCOs) that collaborated in the research. Although a few interviewees were identified through snowballing – that is, trying to find contacts within the London Afghan community through my established Afghan contacts in other cities, this approach proved unsuccessful. The five major Afghan RCOs in London were then contacted, and two agreed to participate: the Paiwand Afghan Association (PAA) and the Afghan and Central Asian Association (ACAA). The fieldwork comprised of three visits to the PAA and two to the ACAA. The PAA had an official women's group that met every Saturday at the Whitefield School in Brent. The same women met weekly to casually converse and eat home-cooked Afghan food, while their children learnt Dari at the Saturday School. In contrast, the ACAA did not have a formal women's group. Instead, women and/or their children participated in

various language and social welfare workshops at the Albany Centre in Deptford. Staff at the organization identified potential interviewees. Eleven of the interviews were conducted with women involved at the PAA and six at the ACAA.

Semi-structured interviews proved beneficial for conducting research with Afghan refugees in three regards. First, they minimized the language barrier between the interviewer and the interviewees. The mother tongue of all the interviewees was either Pashto or Dari/Farsi. While most of the individuals were proficient in English, some had more difficulty understanding the questions than others. However, an interpreter was only required for one of the interviews. The contingent nature of the questions proved useful insofar as I was able to modify the complexity of language based on the interviewee's English proficiency. Second, semi-structured interviews were chosen over other data-gathering methods to maximize the breadth of data obtained within the time constraints of the research project. A method such as the written questionnaire was considered sub-optimal because of the aforementioned language barriers. If misunderstood, questionnaires may have gone unanswered or led to irrelevant responses. Third, this form of interview was best suited to conducting ethical fieldwork in an ethnically and religiously diverse refugee community. The questions' open-endedness permitted sensitivity around contentious issues of identity within the Afghan community or the women's traumatic memories of leaving Afghanistan.

The one group interview was conducted at PAA. This conversation aimed to extract more information on the specificities of Afghan dishes and cuisine based on the answers derived from the individual interviews. Women were able to engage with one another and collectively discuss the ways in which they perceived Afghan cuisine within larger world-systems (Fontana and Frey 1998). This interview enriched my understanding of historical Afghan cooking traditions. In addition to the formal group interview, I was occasionally invited for lunch when

visiting the women's group, where I engaged in participant observation and informal conversation.

Contentious issues of identity such as ethnicity and political affiliation could not be precisely discerned for individual interviewees. Nonetheless, the history of Afghanistan and migration to the UK are testimonies to the varied lived experiences of refugees in London. Refugees displaced at distinct moments have different memories of home, different levels of engagement with the Afghan community in London and thus different norms and values that influence their life in the UK (Schlenkhoff 2010: 21). In this case, eleven of the participants originated in Kabul and one each from Herat, Balkh, Logar and Laghman Province. There is therefore no one 'Afghan' identity either within the host nation or within the home country.

All these interviews and interactions were then qualitatively analysed using an applied thematic analysis (Guest, Macqueen and Namey 2012: 23). The areas of analysis were divided into three themes, which were subdivided into further areas of analysis based on what emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The three themes are as follows: the food and foodways that have been maintained since displacement, how and to whom they are transmitted, and the role that they play in the construction of identity within the London diaspora.

### **Memory, nostalgia and food practices in diaspora**

The term 'diaspora' has become an all-encompassing term for broad categories of exiled and refugee communities, due to the ubiquity of human displacement in recent years (Tölölyan 1991). The current chapter postulates that diasporas can constitute refugee and exilic groups, but the converse is not true; refugees and exilic groups do not necessarily have the transnational network definitive of a diaspora. While there are many interpretations of a diaspora, this chapter uses William Safran's (1991: 83–4) six features of an ideal diaspora: first, that they have dispersed from their place of origin to at least two new destinations; second, they maintain memory or myths of the original home; third, they do not believe they are, or can be, fully

accepted by the host state; fourth, they see the 'homeland' as the ideal place of return; fifth, they are dedicated to maintaining their homeland; and sixth, their group consciousness is dependent on their ongoing relationship with their place of origin.

Theories on collective and social memory, nostalgia and how they come to be imbued in food practices in the process of constructing identities in places of settlement prove to be essential analytical devices in this case. While the association between food and memory has long been recognized, the explicit study of the relationship between the two only began about a decade ago (for example, Counihan 2004; Holtzman 2006; Sutton 2001) and, further still, the relationship has been sparsely explored in circumstances of forced displacement.

For Maurice Halbwachs (1992), social memory is only possible through individuals' constant reference to, and sustainability of, the social environment. Pierre Nora (1989) links 'true' and 'artificial' memory to place by arguing that *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, are the media through which modern society collectively remembers. Nora defines three types of *lieux* – material, symbolic and functional (Nora 1989: 19). Food fits all three definitions: it is a portable, material 'site' insofar that it is tangible; symbolic due to its sociocultural attributions; and functional since it satisfies the necessity to eat. Nora argues that these sites exist because societies can no longer spontaneously remember. They act as markers to remember a place that has been inevitably warped by time (Nora 1989). Benedict Anderson's (2006) notion of imagined community can also serve as a useful concept to understand the formation of collective identity in diaspora, despite its initial use to describe identities within the nation-state. While he originally deemed the nation to have finite boundaries, here the concept of imagined community is used to emphasize the ability of diasporic nations to transcend physical boundaries in order to maintain transnational networks and multiculturalism. It has been argued that the fixity on place in these concepts fall short in explaining the composition of memory in a contemporary society of mass migration (Creet

2011). In the same vein, I argue that the re-imagining of an ‘Afghan’ collective memory and community in diaspora can only be understood if place is taken to be in flux: the process of migration itself. In this chapter, place in flux is the notion that memory is dependent on the transition of place, rather than a binary opposition between the place of origin and the destination (Ang 2011; Creet 2011).

The complex intersections between time and place in moments of migration from an original home have been problematized in studies of nostalgia, the ‘longing for home’. Svetlana Boym (2001: xvii) suggests two typologies of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia focuses on the restoration of home and solely concerns itself with the replication of place in its pristine form. Reflective nostalgia concerns the longing and is more multitudinous in nature. This form concerns itself with the many places that come to be simultaneously occupied when one is separated in both place and time from their original home (Boym 2001: xviii). She suggests that this distinction allows one to separate memory associated with the single goal of national identity from social memory in Halbwachs’s (1992) sense of the term – memory derived from constant reference to a common social environment. Further, nostalgia depends on material place, senses, tastes and sounds (Boym 2001: 256), of which food is an unparalleled means for exploring how theories of collective or social memory are created in diaspora. David Sutton (2008: 16) used the term ‘prospective memory’ to account for the nostalgic role of food. Prospective memory deeply resonates with Boym’s (2001) theory of nostalgia insofar as it connects the sensuous, embodied memory of tastes in the past with the present generation that wishes to revive these experiences to create a memorable future. Further, unlike established definitions of social and collective memory that deem shared memory as a precondition for social cohesion (for example, Connerton 1989; Halbwachs 1992; Nora 1989), he maintains that the exchange between varied individual memories of social landscapes and similar foods can be a social act without necessarily being derived from shared



memories (Sutton 2008: 164, 178). I have modified Sutton's understanding of social memory to take 'site' as a place in flux, to allow for the conceptualization of the reimagined Afghan community in the London diaspora as a new creolized social memory formed through individual memories of multiple regional and ethnic social landscapes in the homeland.

Finally, collective groups use the cultivation, preparation and consumption of food as mediums through which to claim their identity and cultural heritage (Anderson 2005). This work therefore follows Di Giovine and Brulotte's (2014) approach and steers away from a commoditized understanding of food in order to gauge how food and foodways act as mediums of social interaction. While their volume focuses on how heritage claims on food as markers of ethnic identity are conceptualized in official heritage discourse, such claims have historical affiliation to place and the socio-biological concept of *terroir* at their crux, the antithesis to the practice of food and foodways in diaspora. *Terroir* links heritage claims to sociocultural and biological characteristics that are unique and 'authentic'<sup>1</sup> to a given geographical environment and therefore neglects any concept of place in flux.

### **Continuity and change of food and foodways in the Afghan diaspora**

The first theme of the applied thematic analysis pertains to the food and foodways that have been maintained since leaving Afghanistan. The interviewees' responses in this research demonstrated that place as a cognitive or physical site could not be taken as static (Nora 1989: 22; Creet 2011: 9). Afghanistan has come to be a place in flux in the minds of the interviewed individuals. This is made evident through the analysis of the food and foodways women have continued in the diaspora. Overall, it appeared food traditions superseded regional differences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Where authenticity follows Russell Cobb's (2014: 6) notion that it can never be set in stone by a community or group, because 'the construction of the artifice of authenticity depends on the context'. This definition therefore considers time and place in flux and accounts for the fluidity of intangible cultural traditions in diaspora and more generally.

This trend is particularly transparent through the centrality of rice as both an ingredient and a dish in the Afghan diet. All seventeen women mentioned the national dish, *Qabili Palaw*, regardless of their origins. In the same vein, rice was explicitly stated as being the most special ingredient to Afghan cuisine in many cases; however, only two individuals alluded to the many rice dishes that Afghans ate besides *Qabili Palaw*. With regard to traditional food processes and techniques, one had even brought a special thick-bottomed rice pan, or *dayg*, from Afghanistan during a visit to her country of origin after migration. Other frequently mentioned dishes included the dumplings *Mantu* and *Ashak* as well as *Boulanee*, a fried, leek-stuffed pastry. The women also unanimously find it easier to locate spices used in Afghan cuisine within London in the ‘Asian’ shops.

For a couple, the question of ingredients brought back negative memories of their first moments in the UK. Both stated that at first, they were unable to locate the necessary ingredients needed to cook Afghan food. Initially void of an Afghan network in London, they only came to locate ingredients once they had familiarized themselves with their environment. Further, enquiring into the continuity of foodstuffs also highlighted ingredients and food practices that had been discontinued in the diaspora. Unlike spices, many everyday Afghan ingredients are more difficult to come by in London. *Gandanak*, a wild-grown leek, is one example. This allium, the main ingredient found in *Ashak* and *Boulanee* is substituted with leek in London, since the city’s environmental conditions made its cultivation impossible.

At first, the lack of access to familiar ingredients made it impossible to fall back on ‘social environment’ in Halbwachs’s (1992) sense of the term. The social environment therefore could not serve as a point of reference on which to base individual memory in the diaspora; the example of food shows that the hybridization of individual memories eventually resulted in a reimagined Afghan community abroad. The continuation of Afghan food practices has only become possible through a creolization of traditional foodstuffs that are available in London

and substitutes for those that are not. Forging the capacity for an Afghan cuisine abroad is contingent upon re-imagining Afghanistan in the minds of individuals based on a compromise between homeland and host nation. 'Afghan' cuisine, as practised by the women now living in London, had to rupture with a pure understanding of food ingredients and practices in the homeland. Ingredients as physical sites of memory have been reinvigorated to account for the change of place, thus contradicting any notion of place as a cognitive or physical 'site' as being static (Nora 1989: 12).

### **Intracultural transmission, gender and the domestic unit**

Examining the transmission of Afghan food practices is crucial for ascertaining how the means of transmission and its recipients have changed over time to create a creolized, reimagined Afghan cuisine in diaspora. This line of enquiry, the second theme of analysis, includes how recipes were originally transmitted to and recalled by the women, how they subsequently passed the recipes onto others and to whom they were transmitted.

All the first-generation women had the recipes passed down to them by their mothers from a young age in Afghanistan. Many claimed to know their recipes from memory, although some do now use cookbooks and other sources as a memory aid. The majority had used primarily Farsi websites and YouTube videos to remember ingredient measurements and techniques (for example, *Mantu recipe – Afghan Dumpling* 'Afghan Cuisine' 2015). One woman had been able to take Farsi-language cookbooks from Afghanistan, while others used Indian-English, not Afghan, cookbooks written in the UK. This finding is significant not only for the transmission of recipes in diaspora, but also for the international presence of Afghan cuisine, which will be elaborated upon below.

As one might expect, the first-generation participants, all mothers, intended to transmit their recipes to their daughters. There were mixed replies when asked if the recipes were transmitted orally, as the first-generation interviewees' mothers had taught them, or through writing. Four

of the women used a hybrid of the two: they would have their daughters watch them prepare a dish while writing the recipes down themselves. Another four women had already begun to start writing down their recipes for future generations. Being in their mid-thirties, many of the women had not yet had the chance to teach their daughters to cook. The latter were under twelve years old and too young to learn; however, those who had daughters old enough had already taught them. The main issues brought up by the women were the time constraints with their children's studies, as well as the safety hazards of cooking. Some, for example, claimed that their children's education was their highest priority and that they would therefore learn to cook at an older age. One of the second-generation interviewees under twenty-five years old had never learnt to cook, despite her mother's insistence, because of her coursework and job. Aside from her, all the other interviewees from the younger generation had learnt to cook from their mothers. Returning to Sutton (2008: 159), his example of brick ovens on Kalymnos Island constitutes prospective memory as only being dependent on modernization, and thus time. However, the current case demonstrates that temporal change is inextricable from a change of place. The sensuous memories of taste in traditional dishes from the Afghan homeland are used by the present generation to actively plan for future memories. The mixed method of observation and writing that the daughters have been taught to perform demonstrate how the mothers anticipate them practising foodways as emotional and physical bodily memories (Connerton 1989).

Writing the recipes down was intended for each other in addition to younger generations. The regional differences between women were not only overcome by the commonality of certain dishes, as mentioned above, but through additionally sharing those that are regionally distinct. Some of the women at the PAA indicated that the women's group often shared recipes. One stated that everyone had a notebook at home designated for all the recipes she got from friends, while another claimed to enjoy sharing recipes because some women were better at

cooking certain dishes more than others. Therefore, sharing similar food dishes has brought a multi-ethnic Afghan diasporic identity to the fore, and the subsequent sharing of unique specialities has arguably reinforced this identity. Slowly, individuals have come to form a new social environment, which can be shared through Afghan networks established by living near one another or through organizations such as the PAA and the ACAA.

It is already evident that the women had the prospect of passing recipes onto their daughters. Gender norms in the diaspora exemplify further divergence from the regular transmission of food and foodways in Afghanistan. It is traditionally not common for men to cook in Afghanistan, but the participants in the research agreed that they would pass it onto their sons now. The mothers had perceived cooking as a necessary skill to have, rather than a cultural legacy for them to transmit, which is how they saw it with respect to their daughters. The impetus to teach their sons, one could argue, is borne out of their spouses' circumstances as refugees upon arrival in the UK. In some cases, the men had travelled to the country alone, ahead of their spouses and the rest of their family; they had learnt to cook out of necessity. Void of the prerequisite language and certification requirements for jobs in the UK, some of the men first worked in restaurants of Western cuisine. For example, the husband of one of the women had cooked in an Italian restaurant, while another had perfected cooking burgers in an American-style restaurant. Another had called his wife still living in Afghanistan to learn how to cook Afghan rice.

First-generation men must learn to cook due to the processes of dislocation and isolation caused by their situation as refugees. This rupture from tradition has, by extension, enabled sons to have the recipes transmitted to them, since their mothers now recognize that their sons can live alone before marriage, a previously unfathomable thought. In addition to the previously described ingredients, or physical sites, mental sites of memory have had to be reframed in order to accept men as culinary practitioners in London. In his example of the first-

generation Bengali–American cuisine, Krishnendu Ray (2004) sets ‘authentic’ Bengali food among first-generation migrants in strict opposition to American food. He suggests that ‘authentic’ heritage strictly implies no divergence from past practices; in order to maintain ‘Bengali-ness’, gender roles must be maintained, and women must continue to cook the same foods as they did in India. The Afghan case is contradictory to this notion of authenticity, and it cannot be represented by a simple dichotomy between old ‘Afghan’ and new ‘British’ identity; instead, accepted English male roles have been appropriated and accepted into an understanding of Afghan identity in London.

This phenomenon of hybridization is true as well for the English food dishes appropriated into the everyday cooking repertoire among the domestic units of the interviewed women. Mothers broadly felt that they wanted their children to thrive in both Afghan and British cultures in different spaces: Afghan while at home and British when at school. They did not see their Afghan culture as an impediment to their participation in everyday life but instead as a means to participate in the multiculturalism inherent to London as a British Afghan. The women did not perceive the same endangerment to their Afghan identity when practising Western foodways in their home. The main reason seems to be that women still ruled the domain of the kitchen, since most were stay-at-home mothers.

Most of the women related that they still cook Afghan food on an almost-daily basis. That said, most had also come to incorporate new food into their diet. Despite some of the men being able to cook Western food, they rarely did so. The physical act of cooking has therefore been passed onto both genders, but it can be argued that the emotional memory imbued through foodways still seems to be constricted to the role of women. Italian cuisine has been the most commonly adopted new food, initially due to their children’s inclination for it, although they now enjoy it as well. A couple of individuals even compared Western dishes to Afghan counterparts, such as Italian ravioli and Afghan *Mantu*. One woman had even syncretized

British and Afghan cuisine by cooking a turkey with curry spice. There has been a conscious attempt by women to both help integrate their families into British society and develop an acquired taste for new cuisines with more time spent in London.

The example of the Afghan diaspora in London therefore concurs with Fabio Parasecoli's (2014: 419) suggestion that women are the main actors who decide on the traditional foods that are kept and the newly available foods that are adopted into their household. Being the primary cooks therefore empowers women as the primary progenitors of Afghan culture, and Afghan cuisine is not perceived as endangered due to the fusion with other cuisines. The mental reconceptualization of place forges a reimagined community where women can actively choose to incorporate new dishes into their repertoire without undermining their Afghan identity. The evolution from 'participative negotiation' to 'enthusiastic embrace' (Parasecoli 2014: 418) of sharing food with the host culture is possible due to the aforementioned creolization of foodstuffs that first enabled the continuation of Afghan food practices in diaspora.

### **Out of Marginality: Afghan cuisine in the public sphere**

This chapter has so far focused on the practices of Afghan cuisine in and between the domestic unit, but what role does food play in the construction of identity in the public sphere? The final theme in this chapter analyses the role of food and foodways in the formation of identity within the Afghan diaspora.

All the women in the PAA group interview agreed that Indian and Pakistani cuisines had traditionally appropriated Afghan dishes and had consequently subordinated the latter as a national cuisine. The inability to take any tangible objects upon fleeing has made Afghans dependent on Indian and Pakistani food stores and the historic world system that influenced their cuisine in the homeland. Here, Pakistan and India can be attributed the role of the political 'core', while Afghanistan fits the description of a 'peripheral', subordinate state (Anderson 2005: 235). Women consequently do not perceive authentic Afghan food heritage in the

diaspora as a dichotomy between homeland and host nation (Ang 2011: 92); they perceive the authenticity of Afghan cuisine in opposition to larger minorities in the UK. It is only in the past decade, according to the group at the PAA, that Afghan restaurants have begun to emerge in London.

That said, Afghan food as heritage is still lacking a crucial catalyst for its successful establishment outside the domestic unit: the widespread circulation of Afghan cookbooks meant for popular consumption (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014). As previously noted, the informants in this case have primarily come to rely on YouTube videos made by Afghan women in the diaspora or Farsi cookbooks from Afghanistan. The main purpose of these resources is to act as memory aids in order to try to replicate the spice blends and food processes the women have forgotten since initially learning them. The media mentioned in this case serve to transmit personal experiences from one Afghan to the next. These primarily Farsi YouTube videos and books are 'sites' necessitated by movement and are used to supplement the continuation of Afghan practices within the home, rather than as a means to connect to cultural 'outsiders' in the UK (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014: 3).

Furthermore, women preferred eating hamburgers, pizza and Chinese food when they dined out, rather than Afghan food. In the same vein as the fusion of food practices within the household, the willingness to embrace foreign cuisines outside their own homes reinforces the power of Afghan women as progenitors of culture. It is the ability to perform Afghan foodways within their household that allows women to still feel 'Afghan' and perform 'Britishness' in public. Food is one of the most salient forms of heritage from which to study women as agents of memory, and it exposes the gendered nature innate to experiences of diaspora that have been covert up until recently (Clifford 1997: 258; Holtzman 2006: 370). Women are usually the primary cooks of the family, as is the case in Afghanistan, and therefore try to replicate dishes that are characteristic of traditional customs (Parasecoli 2014; Saberi 2000). Moreover, women



choose which aspects of cuisine they wish to adopt from their host nation since they do most of the household shopping (Parasecoli 2014: 419). This phenomenon exhibits the relationship between two senses of 'home': that within the city or country and that within the physical confines of the familial dwelling. As the results suggest, 'home' in diaspora at the interfamilial level first became possible because of the availability of ingredients definitive of Afghan cuisine in the food stores of 'Others'. It then further materialized when men working in the restaurant industry introduced 'Western' food into the household, concretizing culinary practices as well as gender roles for cooking in the British Afghan household. Afghan restaurants as a growing feature in the public London food scene can, in turn, be argued to represent the city and the people who go to Afghan restaurants as an embracing 'home' that goes beyond the familial dwelling (Boccagni 2017).

### **Nostalgia for Afghanistan**

The other area of analysis in this theme examined the relationship between food and the romanticization of Afghanistan. I asked each individual if they had returned to Afghanistan and if so, whether they brought back anything they originally could not take when fleeing. The only individuals who had been able to return to Afghanistan were those who still had family living there because the travelling circumstances were too unsafe for a leisurely visit. The majority of individuals listed material items they had brought back upon revisiting. It is particularly interesting that two of the women had brought special Farsi-language cookbooks and rice pans, respectively, to continue cooking 'pure' Afghan food in London. In addition, three of the women stated that they had brought back nuts and dried fruits for their family only because they were fresher in Afghanistan. Other noteworthy foodstuffs were *qurut* and fruits, which were longed for by all women in the group interview. The woman from Herat at the PAA even mentioned that she occasionally brought it back from her visits to share with everyone in the group.

When interviewed together, the group from the PAA spoke of Afghanistan as being a vacation destination that had been ravaged by war. Although many of the first-generation women in their thirties stated that they felt quite at home in the UK, they wished that their children and foreigners could one day visit Afghanistan and see it the way it had been. They dreamed of an Afghanistan that had not been stigmatized in the media and could return to the former pristine, calm state of their memories.

The strong upkeep of performing Afghan traditions at home is a necessary component to constructing and maintaining a new form of Afghan identity that thrives on participation within the multicultural social sphere of London. Both first- and second-generation women endorsed that their desire to adhere to Afghan food practices at home was not because of any hostility they felt from or towards London as their home. Nonetheless, there is undeniably a longing for Afghanistan, which concedes to Boym's (2001: xvii) reflective nostalgia; it is not matched by the need for an eventual permanent return to Afghanistan. The women's collective identity as Afghans in London still relies on a transnational connection with the homeland. These individuals, however, have redefined Afghanistan as a geographical 'site' that has been romanticized and frozen in time. Many of the women feel at home in London, and the return to Afghanistan as 'home' can never come to fruition; the 'site' of Afghanistan has been irrevocably replaced by a creolized sense of what it means to be Afghan.

The Afghan refugee diaspora in London therefore rejects Safran's (1991: 83) third and fourth criteria as outlined above: the belief that they will never be accepted by the host nation and that the homeland is the ideal place of return. I propose that a new diasporic element arises out of a non-commoditized approach to the study of food as a heritage site in circumstances of forced displacement. This feature shifts the perspective that dictates the third criteria in order to understand how the diasporic group accepts the host state and is inspired by the need to account for a hybridized diasporic identity (Ang 2011). Based on these women's accounts, I

propose that the Afghan diaspora's ability to not only accept but embrace a new host nation without compromising the concept of their group's authenticity is one feature of a diaspora. As mentioned in the previous section, the sense of home in the UK in terms of culinary practices has become externalized from the dwelling as a physical infrastructure. It follows that the environment linked to the interviewees' attachment to place in the host nation has and will continue to grow (Boccagni 2017). This, in turn, can lead to a stronger sense of Afghan identity in relation to other minorities and 'Britishness' within the UK, since Afghan food has become dependent on how it relates to other cultural groups present in the location of the diaspora rather than how culinary practices were traditionally defined in the homeland, Afghanistan.

Ien Ang (2011: 86) has argued that it is impossible to distinctively 'heritagize' this true reality of diasporic memory and displacement. Instead, officially recognized diaspora heritage within the Western world, such as the migration museum, is still fixated on nationally defined discourse of heritage. The national discourse of diaspora heritage simplifies the complex relations to place to a simple dual territoriality of 'homeland' and 'host nation' (Ang 2011: 89). Here I argue, however, that it is because the Afghan diaspora has arisen from forced migration and is not yet fully consolidated that Afghan food as heritage in diaspora can embody the intricate relationships between homeland and host country.

### **Conclusion: Conceptualizing the Afghan diaspora**

This study of women Afghan refugees, as opposed to Western national migration narratives, is exemplary of how diaspora heritage can be asserted without positioning the migrant as having lost their authentic cultural identity (Ang 2011: 92). Not only are the women's only means of maintaining an Afghan cultural identity upon displacement entirely dependent on reviving the intangible memories from home; they also must account for how these intangible practices can be sustainable, given that they may never have any personal contact with Afghanistan again. The forced aspect of their migration has therefore made the modification of the tangible

components, including the ingredients and gender roles, more permissible, while traditional intangible foodways have become more salient. That said, women currently still serve as the main cultural progenitors in the household, since they are stay-at-home mothers.

By extension, the fact that authenticity depends on the forced movement from place in flux challenges the official discourse to heritage claims on food. This work therefore provides a new avenue for recognizing food as heritage, which strays away from notions of *terroir* and tangible historical connections to place (Di Giovine and Brulotte 2014: 5–6). While true diasporic memory can be asserted through food as heritage, official heritage discourse must be re-evaluated to account for both time and place in flux.

The current research would benefit from a wider multi-site ethnography that encompasses the larger transnational networks of Afghan diaspora communities elsewhere in Europe and North America. It also serves to see how Afghan cuisine will be practised among the younger first- and second-generation refugees once they are in their prime, since education has become a more dominant priority for girls in London today. It follows that the burden of cooking may become more central to men as the next generation of women enters the workforce or that traditional foodways get abandoned for mainly restaurant and processed food, if both genders have less expendable time (Counihan 2004: 154).

In short, this recent and ongoing diaspora serves as a foundation for studies on past, present and future refugee communities worldwide. The dual intimate and social roles of food as heritage are unparalleled for understanding the complex relationship between memory and identity formation upon the transition of place.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank the Afghan and Central Asian Association and Paiwand Afghan Association, and especially the seventeen women who shared their stories and traditions, Dr Nooralhaq Nasimi, Dr Ghulan Farooq and Tyler Fox. Final thanks to Dr Liliana Janik and Dr

Dacia Viejo-Rose for their feedback and guidance on my MPhil thesis, of which this chapter is a product.

## References

1. Anderson, B. (2006), *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. London: Verso.
2. Anderson, E. (2005), *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
3. Ang, I. (2011), 'Unsettling the National: Heritage and Diaspora', in H. Anheier, Y. Raj Isar and D. Viejo-Rose (eds), *Heritage, Memory & Identity: The Culture and Globalization Series 4*, 82–105, London: Sage.
4. Barfield, T. (2010), *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
5. Boccagni P. (2017), *Migration and the Search for Home. Mobility & Politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
6. Boym, S. (2001), *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books.
7. Cobb, R. (2014), 'Introduction: The Artifice of Authenticity in the Age of Digital Reproduction', in R. Cobb (ed.), *The Paradox of Authenticity in a Globalized World*, 1–9, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
8. Clifford, J. (1997), *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
8. Connerton, P. (1989), *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Counihan, C. M. (2004), *Around the Tuscan Table: Food, Family and Gender in Twentieth Century Florence*, London: Routledge.
10. Creet, J. (2011), 'Introduction', in J. Creet and A. Kitzmann (eds), *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, 3–26, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
11. Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2009), *The Afghan Muslim Community in England: Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities*, London: The Crown.
12. Di Giovine, M. A., and R. L. Brulotte (2014), 'Introduction: Food and Foodways as Cultural Heritage', in R. L. Brulotte and M. A. Di Giovine (eds), *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*, 1–27, Farnham: Ashgate.
13. Ewans, M. (2002), *Afghanistan: A New History*, London: Routledge.
14. Fontana, A. and J. H. Frey (1998), 'Interviewing: The Art of Science', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 47–78, London: Sage Publications.

15. Guest, G., K. Macqueen and E. Namey (2012), *Applied Thematic Analysis*, Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
16. Halbwachs, M. (1992), *On Collective Memory*, trans. L. A. Coser, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
17. Holtzman, J. (2006), 'Food and Memory', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35: 361–78.
18. Library of Congress. (2008), *Country Profile: Afghanistan*, Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
19. Lockett, K. (2010), 'The Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan', in C. Oeppen and A. Schlenkhoff (eds), *Beyond the 'Wild Tribes': Understanding Modern Afghanistan and Its Diaspora*, 45–56. London: C. Hurst & Company.
20. *Mantu Recipe - Afghan Dumpling 'Afghan Cuisine'* (2015), [Online video] Afghan Cuisine, Youtube, 18 May. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WHFc0Wp8O4> (accessed 7 January 2018).
21. Marsden, M. and B. D. Hopkins (2011), *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, London: Hurst & Company.
22. Nora, P. (1989), 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26: 7–24.
23. Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2013), *Detailed Country of Birth and Nationality Analysis from the 2011 Census of England and Wales*, London: Office for National Statistics.
24. Parasecoli, F. (2014), 'Food Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities', *Social Research*, 81 (2): 415–39.
25. Ray, K. (2004), *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
26. Saberi, H. (2000), *Noshe Djan: Afghan Food and Cookery*, 2nd edn, Totnes: Prospect Books.
27. Safran, W. (1991), 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1 (1): 83–99.
28. Schlenkhoff, A. (2010), 'Challenges to Research in Afghanistan and Its Diaspora', in C. Oeppen and A. Schlenkhoff (eds), *Beyond the 'Wild Tribes': Understanding Modern Afghanistan and its Diaspora*, 9–25, London: C. Hurst & Company.
29. Sutton, D. E. (2001), *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*, Oxford: Berg.
30. Sutton, D. E. (2008), 'A Tale of Easter Ovens: Food and Collective Memory', *Social Research*, 75 (1): 157–80.
31. Tölölyan, K. (1991), 'The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1 (1): 3–7.
32. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2017), 'Figures at a Glance', *UNHCR*, n.d. Available online: <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> (accessed 7 January 2018).
33. United States Department of State. (2012), *Afghanistan 2012 International Religious Freedom Report*, Washington, DC: Department of State.