INFINITE CORRESPONDENCE

AN ORIGINAL 12-COURSE DINNER EXPLORING SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NORTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, FRANCE, AND THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN

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“…food and cookery are worthy of serious study because they represent one of the plot-lines that tell the story of the history and structure of human society.”

-Maxime Rodinson

Those who know me tend to identify me with food. And those who don't know what I study (how could they, with a major like ILVS?) often ask if my major at Tufts is "Culinary Arts." Of course, Tufts does not offer a Culinary Arts major, and I'm glad I didn't go to Culinary School. My life up to this point has given me more valuable knowledge about food than culinary school would have, though I admit to not being able to butcher whole animals or make the five master sauces from memory.

I grew up being exposed to good food, in a house where eating well was a priority. Like most people, I have emotional ties to the food I grew up eating, and my grandmother's cooking. My friends think I grew up eating the kind of involved, borderline pretentious food that I sometimes enjoy today—this isn't true. My parents made the kind of food that people interested in food in the 90's made: things like *salade niçoise* and, my personal favorite, pesto. When I was in elementary school, my mother took up food writing, and that's when my family's relationship with food became more serious. Suddenly she was interviewing chefs and testing recipes in our kitchen, after taking a food writing class at Radcliffe taught by John Willoughby, then an editor at *Gourmet*.

I had always enjoyed food, and especially watching it on TV (Julia Child, Jacques Pepin…), but everything changed for me when I was thirteen. It was that year that I began apprenticing at a highly regarded Italian restaurant in Boston, which I did for four years, starting in spring 2004 until spring 2008. Since then I've been involved in the food world in several other ways: In 2006 I began contributing food and travel articles to the *Boston Globe*, which I still do. In the summer of 2009 I spent time volunteering on an organic farm in Italy, after which I took my first job as a line cook. And in 2011 I returned to the original restaurant where I apprenticed to give the front of house a try—I was a host, and it was awful, but interesting.

My own development as a cook, food writer, and eater was 100% concurrent with the dramatic shift in food culture in the United States. I am absolutely a product of Generation Food Network, which started getting really popular just as I hit middle school. And though I recoil at the word "foodie," the fact that the word even exists is a testament to the incredible thing that has happened with food in the U.S. in the past decade. These days many people are interested in cooking, dining out, and the myriad cooking shows. Buzzwords like "organic" and "local" have penetrated even McDonald's commercials. It's a true revolution, and while I don't want say that I was interested in food "before it was cool," I feel like I have to mention that I was doing a Julia Child impression by the time I was five. And it was a damn good impression, too.

My first foray into food studies was actually in the ninth grade, when I wrote a major research paper for my history class comparing contemporary Italian cuisine to the traditions of ancient Rome. I consulted Waverly Root's *The Food of Italy*, lent to me by my mentor at the restaurant, as well as some Apicius. Since then, I've integrated food into my studies every opportunity I've had. For a project in tenth grade I made a cake shaped like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, festooned with pearl sugar to show the diamond-mining regions. I schmeared an eleventh grade English paper about Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* with baked yam, a reference to the protagonist's proclamation, "I yam what I yam." At Tufts I've done everything from a Peace and Justice Studies project on malnutrition in countries with popular restaurants around Tufts to an Arabic project where I used terrorism vocabulary in the context of a cooking show. And the first course I ever signed up for at Tufts was the anthropology course "Food, Nutrition, and Culture."

My senior year, I developed and co-taught a freshman film seminar entitled "Food in Film," in which we explored a selection of important movies related to food. And this final semester, I've had the pleasure of finally taking a straight-ahead food studies class, in the history department. Through this course, I was exposed to the Schlesinger library at Radcliffe/Harvard, where I did much of the research for this project. My first time at the library, I was able to meet the food historian Barbara Ketcham-Wheaton, whose book *Savoring the Past* is referenced many times in my brief history of French and Arab cookbooks. It was a rare opportunity to meet such a giant in this blossoming field, and spending time at the Schlesinger invigorated my passion for food studies. I found scholarly articles on cardamom and *pimentón*, a history of the Icelandic yogurt-like product *skyr*, and found myself getting distracted by texts unrelated to my thesis simply because I was so intrigued by them.

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An interest in foreign languages goes naturally with an interest in cooking—while interning in my first restaurant kitchen, I learned Spanish from the many Central American employees working there. The first language I ever studied was French, starting in sixth grade. My first trip to France was in 2005, and I actually participated in the Tufts in Talloires program for high school students in 2007, before I had any idea that I wanted to study at Tufts. This was my first experience living with a host family, and I formed friendships and connections that last through today. The food, needless to say, was outstanding. I came back with pounds and pounds of vacuum-sealed raw-milk cheese, successfully smuggled through customs.

My first semester at Tufts, I started studying Arabic, knowing that I would want to study abroad. Sure enough, going abroad to Morocco during the fall of my junior year had more of an impact on me than I realized at the time. Being from a predominantly affluent, Jewish suburb of Boston, I wanted to go somewhere vastly different. Morocco delivered. I drank in the culture, and while I enjoyed the food, I did become tired of it, yearning for the variety of restaurants and cuisines available in America. I did a research project there on European immigrants who came to Morocco to open restaurants, and met other people who agreed that the trio of *couscous, tagine,* and *brochette* needed to be shaken up. It wasn't until coming back home that I became truly enamored with Moroccan food—cooking it at home brought back the experience and the flavors took on a whole new meaning.

Of course I also actively seek out restaurants deploying Middle Eastern and North African flavors in an innovative way. One of my favorite restaurants in the Boston area is called Oleana, run by the chef Ana Sortun. At Oleana, cuisines from North Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean are given the *haute cuisine* treatment—something rarely done to food from Arabic-speaking countries. It's generally regarded as one of the best restaurants in Boston, and with good reason. The food there is creative, yet respectful to the traditions it references. I recently bought the cookbook of a San Francisco-via Casablanca chef named Mourad Lahlou, who has earned a Michelin star for his inventive nouvelle-Moroccan cooking at his restaurant Aziza. His fully contemporary book has chapter titles like "*Dude, Preserved Lemons*," and offers a creative take on the food of his homeland. Lahlou zeros in on my exact gripes with food culture in Morocco, complaining that in a land full of such amazing natural products, people rarely take any risks or step outside the box with their cooking. Using this palette of flavors in a creative way was an exciting challenge for me, and one I hope more people take on.

Early Cookbooks in the Arab World and France, and Arab Influences on French Cuisine

Though Spain and other countries are on the rise, France is still often thought of as the nucleus of the world of gastronomy. Culinary school students in the USA learn French cuisine, learn to respond to their superiors by saying "*Oui, chef*!" and read the works of Bocuse, Escoffier, and the great French chefs of the 19th and 20th centuries. Consequently, many of the "nice" restaurants around the world are French. There's no question that French chefs in the 18th and 19th centuries absolutely revolutionized gastronomy, but the first cookbook wasn't written in France until the 1300s.

The earliest cookbook we have from the Arab world is Al-Warraq's 10th century Abbasid cookbook, titled, "*The Book of Cookery Preparing Salubrious Foods and Delectable Dishes Extracted from Medical Books and Told by Proficient Cooks and the Wise*." It is a sprawling work of incredible detail, and it's a testament to the advanced nature of the cuisine that many of the dishes, or variants thereof, are still prepared today. The cookbook is broken down into 132 small "chapters" with equally convoluted (yet charming) titles like, "*Precautionary measures taken to ward off anticipated harm caused by some foods*," and "*Making dishes of 'vinegar and olive oil' using broken and crumbled bread*." The chapters are peppered with poems about food and drink, for which the Abbasids had a penchant[1], as well as anecdotes and personal advice. The recipes themselves are written in a style much akin to the contemporary recipes of Mark Bittman one sees in the *New York Times*—very no-nonsense, and assuming that the cook knows, for instance, what is meant by phrases like "cook until done."

As foreshadowed in the title, Al-Warraq puts a heavy emphasis on Galenic humoral theory—the basic idea that the human body contains four vital fluids (yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood) with myriad properties affected by everything from the weather to food intake. The theory professes that these so-called "humors" must always be kept in balance; consequently 18 of the 132 chapters in Al-Warraq's book contain the phrase "humoral properties of" or "humoral powers of." Properties are assigned even to utensils and materials ("copper is female and hot, iron is male and dry."[2]), and to people ("…children and young people are moderately hot, whereas old people are cold…[3])! Such emphasis was

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1 Nasrallah, Nawal, ed. 2010. *Annals of the Caliphs' Kitchens* [Kitab al-Tabikh]. Trans. Nawal Nasrallah., 30. Leiden, NL: Brill.

2 Nasrallah, 85.

3 Nasrallah, 58.

put on these theories, that cooking became more or less a formula for creating balance and harmony between the properties of the ingredients, the utensils and vessels used in their preparation, the people consuming them, the weather, and all manner of other variables.[4] Nawal Nasrallah writes that, "All the…chapters assume an educated lay knowledge on the part of the readers, regarding the contemporary pervading trends of the Galenic humoral theories…"[5] We can thus diagnose that the people in 10th century Abbasid Iraq were health-crazy. Contemporary Westerners are often criticized and mocked for the preponderance of diets and health-food trends that permeate our lifestyle, and with good reason. But it is at least comforting to know that prior civilizations were just as obsessive, if not more so. A chapter titled "*Making exquisite grain dishes for irritable vegan friends*" might be equally at home in Al-Warraq's cookbook as it would in any cookbook today!

Al-Warraq's book was an important work insofar as it documented the flourishing Abbasid cuisine of its time, but its Abbasid-style dishes popped up around the Arab world for centuries after, proving it to be a real influence.[6] Nasrallah gives a list of about 25 dishes that are still recognizable in contemporary Arab cuisine—this holds true for another often-cited Abbasid cookbook, usually referred to by A.J. Arberry's English translated title "A Baghdad Cookery Book," which dates from 1226 and was written by one Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn al-Karim al-Katib al-Baghdadi. The 1939 translation was significant, as it was the, "first translation of medieval Arabic recipes into a European language since the late middle ages."[7] The great food historian Barbara Ketcham-Wheaton writes in her landmark book *Savoring the Past* that, "The recipes [in al-Baghdadi's 13th c. cookbook] often sound far more appetizing than medieval French ones."[8] And Claudia Roden notes that, just like in Al-Warraq's book "Some of Al-Baghdadi's recipes for stews could be word for word instructions for an Iranian *khoresh* or a Moroccan *tagine* of today."[9] While I'm embarrassingly unfamiliar with Persian cooking, the *tagine* is an implement and dish with which I am intimately acquainted, and Roden is spot-on: a recipe for *tuffaHiya*, for example, is essentially still made today—a meat *tagine* with sour apples (or quinces; perhaps that is what is meant by "sour apples" anyway?), almonds, and onions flavored with cinnamon bark and other seasonings[10]. In fact,

4 Nasrallah, 55.

5 Nasrallah, 56.

6 Nasrallah, 26-27.

7 Ketcham-Wheaton, Barbara. 1983. *Savoring The Past.* First Touchstone Edition 1996 ed., 19. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

8 Wheaton, 20.

9 Roden, Claudia 2002. "Early Arab Cooking and Cookery Manuscripts." In *The Wilder Shores of Gastronomy.*, ed. Davidson, Alan and Saberi, Helen, 99. Berkeley,CA: Ten Speed Press.

10 *A Baghdad Cookery Book.* 2006. Medieval Arab Cookery. [Kitab al-Tabikh]. Trans. A. J. Arberry. 44. Devon, England:

the word *t'fayya* remains in current Moroccan Arabic, referring to caramelized onions with cinnamon. Perhaps over time the hard "H" was dropped, but the idea of cinnamony caramelized onions going well with apples remained. I'll leave that question to the linguist Charles Perry.

Al-Warraq's and Al-Baghdadi's notable medieval cookbooks are both meticulously organized and documented, and full of other sophisticated qualities—in the case of Al-Warraq, for an example, an obsession with kitchen hygiene and cleanliness, and a helpful proclivity towards exact measurements distinguish it as an advanced work. This is not so for all medieval Arab cookbooks, some of which "show lack of organization" or are "laconic and sketchy."[11]. A fascinating aspect of these books, though, is the demographic that they served. Though it may not be clear exactly who was consuming them, we can ascertain that the recipes, save, probably, the more outlandish ones, were consumed with equal fervor by people of the upper and lower classes. Al-Warraq quips, "Do you think that dishes cooked in the sultan's kitchen are any different from the familiar ones? The ingredients used there are none other than vinegar, greens, meat, eggplant, gourd, saffron, and the like. Indeed, meticulous cleanliness of the ingredients and the pots is all it takes."[12]

As noted before, the French came relatively late to the cookbook party, so to speak. The first recognizable French "cookbook" dates from 1306, and is known as "*The Little Treatise of 1306*," but, "*Le Viandier*," credited largely to the court chef Taillevant (Guillaume Tirel), and written around the same time, is perhaps more widely known. Both were abbreviated and barebones—they lack many vegetables and, in the case of the former, sugar and honey.[13] Later in the century, the famous "*Ménagier de Paris*" is what Wheaton calls, "the most entertaining and helpful to the modern reader."[14] Written by an older gentleman for his teenage bride, the aim of the book was to teach her relevant housekeeping knowledge (including cookery) so as not to sully his name when he died—it is notable partially because the author "takes care to explain processes,"[15] something not seen in the two earlier books, but reminiscent of Al-Warraq's.

By the time of the early 14th century cookbooks and "*Ménagier*," Arab books on dietetics were already being translated into Latin[16]. French scholar Maxime Rodinson writes that, "[European] commentaries on

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Prospect Books.

11 Nasrallah, 25.

12 Nasrallah, 81.

13 Wheaton, 34.

14 Wheaton, 21.

15 Wheaton, 22.

16 Rodinson, Maxime. 2006. "Venice, the Spice Trade and Eastern Influences on European Cooking." In *Medieval arab cookery.*, 205. Devon, England: Prospect Books

the classic texts of Muslim medicine, in particular on dietetics, were still being composed as late as the end of the 18th century. All these books, containing critical opinions on different dishes and spices, were brought into play whenever a new style of cookery was adopted."[17] Wheaton points specifically to Platina's 1450 "*De Honeste Voluptate*" as the progenitor of this trend—published in France in 1505, it "had been the first cookbook to be printed, in 1474."[18] The contents of the book are familiar after reading the work of Al-Warraq, as they rely heavily on Galenic humoral theory as practiced at the school at Salerno. In fact, it may be more a work of medicine than a work of cookery: Wheaton notes that Platina quotes Socrates in saying, "we should eat to live and not live to eat."[19] Platina's ideas can be traced back to Arabic writings from the likes of Avicenna (a Persian), says Wheaton, and had an influence on French cookery—Galenic humoral theory was the "Atkins diet" of early medieval France just as it was in 9th century Abbasid Baghdad. The Arab influence on French cuisine is thus exemplified at the level of medical thought, via the ancient Greeks. Insofar as actual cooking is concerned, there is another set of important influences.

An easily identifiable characteristic of Middle Eastern, and especially North African food is its remarkable blurring of the line between sweet and savory. Around the Mediterranean today, this idea manifests itself occasionally in some Spanish, Sicilian, and Tuscan dishes (I'm thinking specifically of raisins, pine nuts, and cinnamon turning up in preparations in the Maremma region of Tuscany), but is most alive and kicking in the cuisine of Morocco. Heavy reliance on cinnamon (and other spices), as well as a lack of distinction between sweet and savory also happen to dominate French cuisine in the Middle Ages—and this is a trend largely thought to have been brought to Europe in the 14th century by Crusaders enchanted with the so-called "Saracen" cuisine of the Middle East. British food historian C. Anne Wilson writes, "The experience of the Crusaders at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean was to have considerable impact on the diet of Western Europe. When they were not actually fighting over the holy places, the Franks lived on harmonious terms with the Saracens."[20] The food must have been a good measure better than the food back home, not only because of their skill in seasoning and preparing dishes, but because of a sheer abundance of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and spices that simply didn't exist yet in Europe. Things like almonds, pistachios, dates, citrus, eggplant, spinach, and, very notably, sugar, were encountered for the first time by Crusaders, and "incorporated into Western cooking before

17 Rodinson, 206.

18 Wheaton, 34.

19 Wheaton, 35.

20 C Wilson, Anne. 2002. "The Saracen Connection: Arab Cuisine and the Medieval West." In *The Wilder Shores of Gastronomy.*, 109. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press

the end of the middle ages."[21] The French enjoyed these new flavors so much that they may have perhaps gone overboard. The cuisine of France in the Middle Ages was so heavily spiced and perfumed that everything must have tasted like a child discovering his or her parents' spice cabinet and dumping everything in the pan to see what happens. One has to learn somehow!

Beginning in the 17th century, French cuisine started shedding spice and moving into modest modernity, notably with La Varenne's 1651 cookbook "*Le Cvisinier François.*" Wheaton notes that, "in the *Cvisinier François*, the old and new styles coexist."[22] She points specifically to the recipe for *blancmange*, a classic example of strongly-perfumed Middle Ages French cuisine, thought to have its roots in a Persian dish. In its older iteration, meat was stewed in milk with crushed almonds, sugar, spices, and rosewater, producing a sweet/savory mush. La Varenne's recipe has no mention of spices or rosewater, and is "based on a stock made from veal, chicken, and milk…it had become a true jelly."[23] *Le Cvisinier François* is notable also as one of the first examples of a cookbook author asserting personal style in recipes.[24] Things like "garnishes of cockscombs, artichokes, and truffles surround[ing] larger pieces of meat" can be seen as distinctly La Varenne, new flourishes not seen in any of the older books, and indicative of a newly developing cuisine.[25] Artichokes were, after all, introduced into France by Arab gardeners in Sicily and Al-Andalus. [26]

Three years later, in 1654, France took another step away from the highly-spiced cooking of the Middle Ages with Nicolas de Bonnefons' "*Les Delices de la campagne*," a work which celebrated the so-called "*goût naturel*." Evidently, the "natural flavor" of most foods did not implicate rosewater, and so many of the preparations in Bonnefons' book are more similar to what we recognize today as simple, rustic, French cooking. Pinkard concludes that, "French—or at least Parisian—cuisine in the first half of the seventeenth century was unique in not one but two respects; the decline of spices and the rise of vegetables."[27] Bonnefons' "*Les Delices de la campagne*" and earlier "*Le Jardinier Français*" can be seen as some of the first "farm-to-table" cookbooks in history! Bonnefons convinces the reader of the virtues of gardening, as, "it gives pleasure to a great variety of people…[and] your house will be furnished with its produce…"[28]

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21 Wilson, 110.
22 Wheaton, 117.
23 Ibid.
24 Wheaton, 114.
25 Wheaton, 117.
26 Pinkard, Susan. 2008. *A Revolution in Taste*., 18. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
27 Pinkard, 72.
28 Wheaton, 123.

In this 17th century rise of fresh produce, we see some of the ingredient-driven Arab contributions to French and European cuisine that remain today—fruits and vegetables brought to Europe by Crusaders via Venice[29], or via Jews fleeing (or being forced out of) Andalusia and bringing Arab-introduced foods north with them.[30] A lot of vegetables we associate more with Europe than the Arab world—cauliflower and beets, for example—were actually first successfully cultivated by Arabs.[31] And Interestingly enough, my Moroccan host mother favored preparing cauliflower in one way only: smothered in *béchamel.* The tables have turned; but I'll get to that shortly.

An important contemporaneous trend to touch on here is the gradual decline of the prevailing Galenic humoral theory, spurred by such medical progress as Harvey's discovery of blood circulation in 1628.[32] Pinkard references some debate on the subject, noting that the University of Paris medical school was "a bastion of Galenic orthodoxy for decades after Harvey's demonstration."[33] Nonetheless, it is significant to pick up on the correspondence between a decline in sugar and spice in the 17th century French cookbooks and a rise in skepticism towards Galenic theory.[34] Of course, all cultures have their food superstitions even today—my first time eating real *fondue* in the French Alps, I was told absolutely not to drink water while eating *fondue,* for fear that a giant ball of cheese would form in my stomach and impede digestion. I was only to drink white wine; this wasn't a hard concession. In Morocco, I was given thyme tea when I got an inevitable stomach bug—thyme is assigned major curative properties there, and many of my American friends had similar experiences with the tea. It didn't work, but tasted good.

It seems necessary to mention, as well, that one heretofore unmentioned, yet important, French institution has its roots in the Arab world: coffee drinking. Though coffee had its origins in Africa, its consumption was, in 17th century France, considered "oriental," and associated with a vague picture of the "Orient," including the Arab world. The idea of the café was popularized in Istanbul and Cairo, and the French thus associated coffee and the consumption thereof with these places. Though initially met with skepticism, the drink steadily rose to its current widely enjoyed status in France, its humoral properties no longer worried about or debated.[35]

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29 Rodinson, 201.

30 Roden, Claudia. 1997. "Food in the Sephardi Diaspora: From Spain to Istanbul." In *Food on the Move: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1996. 253.* Devon, EN: Prospect Books.

31 Pinkard, 18.

32 Pinkard, 65.

33 Pinkard, 67.

34 Pinkard, 66.

35 Baghdiantz-McCabe, Ina. 2008. "Coffee and Orientalism in France." In *Orientalism in early modern france.*, 163. Oxford, EN: Berg Publishers.

It seems unlikely that Arab and French cooking styles, medical theory, and ingredient lexicons would have crossed paths so long ago— in the 21st century, borders between so-called "national cuisines" are perhaps more porous than ever, and we tend to think of this as a *recent* phenomenon. But that's not really the case—the exchange of culinary ideas, especially within the dynamic Mediterranean space, has been going since before Whole Foods, Mario Batali, and food blogs. My own culinary interpretation of the historical and contemporary overlap of these cultures is just another small chapter in a much larger cookbook that continues to be written with each passing day, month, year, decade, and century.

A New Form of Influence: The Culinary Effects of French Colonialism in North Africa

French Influence in Morocco

French colonists arrived in Morocco in 1912, where they established a protectorate that would last 44 years, until Moroccan independence in 1956. This period of course had a huge affect on Moroccan culture—especially the linguistic *tagine* that is Moroccan Colloquial Arabic, and certainly on the culinary landscape of the country. Croissants now come out of communal ovens next to the traditional round loaves of bread, and line shelves of bakeries next to *cornes de gazelle* (*ka'ab al-ghazal*) and other typically Moroccan sweets. My host family most enjoyed croissants with their nightly 6-7pm mint tea snack time; my weight gain while living there can be partially attributed to this daily hour-long window. French fries (*les frites*) are commonly served in the middle of or atop a chicken *tagine* with preserved lemons and olives, one of the most classic Moroccan dishes. *Kasskrout* (*casse-croutes*) are commonly sold on the street; French-style omelettes are common in colonial-style cafes as well as in sandwiches on the street. A number of food words in Moroccan Arabic stem from French: *kouzina* (kitchen), *forchita* (fork; traditionally Moroccan food is eaten with the hands and pieces of bread), and *danun* (yogurt, from the company "Danon"), to name a few. The most popular cheese, more commonly consumed than Moroccan farmer's cheese (at least in cities) is, sadly, *La Vache qui rit*—I ate so much while I was there that the mere thought makes me queasy. Influences from other French colonies even made it into the Moroccan repertoire, like vermicelli from Vietnam, served in myriad ways—sweet like rice pudding with cinnamon and sugar, savory stuffed into triangular pastries called *briouats,* or steamed and topped with fragrant saffron chicken.[36]

Each Moroccan city has an old city (*medina q'dima*) as well as a "new city," or *ville nouvelle*—

36 Morse, Kitty. 1998. "Cooking in the Kasbah": In *Recipes From My Moroccan Kitchen.*, 79. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

designed by the French under colonialism. The *ville nouvelle* is where you'll find French restaurants catering to ex-pats and more well-off locals; the concept of dining out at Moroccan restaurants is absurd to most Moroccans, and so Moroccan restaurants exist pretty much only for travelers, many of them French but plenty from the rest of Europe and increasingly the U.S. In recent years, Marrakech in particular has exploded as a trendy destination for more "adventurous" travelers, and not surprisingly *haute cuisine* has arrived as well. Michelin-starred chefs from Europe like Richard Neat, who opened a *riad* offering Michelin-level cooking with his wife (he has since left), and Fabrice Vulin, who opened two concepts at a golf resort outside Marrakech, are mixing local products and flavors with French technique—and this has all been within the past decade. But in order to see the apex of this neo-colonial opulence, we must turn to the "*Grande Dame*" of hotels in Morocco—La Mamounia in Marrakech.

La Mamounia opened as a hotel in 1923, but more recently went through major renovations and re-opened in 2009. It has always been a destination for the global elite, a sprawling property of luxurious gardens, pools, fountains, and over-the-top Moorish décor. The hotel now boasts four restaurants, two of which (Italian and French) are headed by Michelin-starred chefs. There is also a Moroccan restaurant and a pool bar. While the menu at the French location is standard *haute-cuisine* fare, the Moroccan menu bills itself as "*cuisine marocaine contemporaine*." Eggplant and *tchkchouka* (roasted bell pepper salad) are layered in a *millefeuille* with charmoula-marinated sardines from the nearby coast at Essaouira. Scallops are served as a carpaccio with black olive tapenade and a coriander-infused preserved lemon emulsion. And of course, this kind of cuisine can come with a price tag, even in Morocco—the *millefeuille* is $23.00 and the scallop dish is $37.00. Both are appetizers.

But some daring foreign restaurateurs are opening more affordable Franco-Moroccan restaurants around the country, offering alternatives to the ubiquitous *tagines* and *brochettes* while still assimilating into their local neighborhoods. At Restaurant La Découverte in Essaouira, for example, the French co-owner works together with a Moroccan chef to produce a hybrid menu. There I enjoyed a lovely chilled lentil salad with nutty local argan oil for the equivalent of about $5.00. It was a perfect marriage of French sensibility with local ingredients. The restaurant offers the kind of food tourists have come to expect from Morocco, but sometimes adds French flourishes, like in a foie gras *b'stilla*—something I also saw at a restaurant in Tétouan. In this, the French delicacy takes the place of pigeon or chicken, filling paper-thin *warqa* pastry along with nuts and beaten egg, topped with cinnamon and powdered sugar. Delicious.

North African Influence in France

On the other side of the Mediterranean, the people of France (especially Marseille and Paris) can enjoy a multitude of authentic Moroccan dining options thanks to the giant wave of Moroccan emigration to France, both by Moroccans and *pieds-noirs*—Moroccan restaurants in Paris are "as abundant as pizza places in New York."[37] But many of the most popular serve what Mourad Lahlou refers to as "70's hotel [Moroccan] food"—including the popular and totally French-born *couscous royal*, topped with chicken, lamb, and merguez. In fact, topping couscous with merguez at all is a French habit, and especially bastardized when accompanied by other meats. At chef Fatéma Hal's highly esteemed Paris restaurant Le Mansouria, there is a dish called *Kascsou aux Quatre Viandes* which, despite its slightly classier name, seems to be the same as *couscous royal.* And even all of the dishes on the menu of swanky le 404 are pretty classic—*harira*, *tagine*, the same varieties of couscous. For some reason, more experimentation in joining French and Moroccan cuisine seems to be happening in Morocco than in France. But at the highest level, however, *grands chefs do* play with Moroccan ingredients. Preserved lemon, argan oil, and harissa, for example, are all on Alain Passard's current lunch menu at his 3 Michelin-stared L'Arpège.

Meanwhile, in the French home, items like couscous are relatively commonplace. For better or worse, couscous is probably Morocco's best-known culinary offering, and easy to find all around the West A recipe for couscous can be seen as early as in Ginette Mathiot's recently-reissued 1932 book "*La Cuisine Pour Tous*," sometimes referred to as France's "*Joy of Cooking*." This one is pretty traditional, but things are changing; a 2010 article in *Le Figaro* called "*Je Veux du Couscous*" suggests serving couscous as dainty individual *terrines* in glass jars with ribbons of cucumber and carrot, dressed with *vinaigrette*. This is the kind of repurposing couscous has seen as it integrates into the French culinary vernacular. Morocco's iconic conical clay cooking vessel, the *tagine*, is becoming increasingly ubiquitous in the West, too. My own *tagine* is made by the French ceramics company Emile Henry, though I could have gotten one by Le Creuset. In the U.S., these are easily purchase-able at stores like Sur-La-Table and Williams-Sonoma. Meanwhile, in Moroccan cities, more and more people have started using pressure cookers introduced from France (*cocotte-minutes*) instead of *tagines*. So goes globalization.

Couscous and *tagines* aren't only Moroccan, though—they are commonly eaten across the border in Algeria, a country with which France has a more complicated relationship. The French presence in Algeria

37 Sherwood, Seth. 2005. "In The Heart of Paris, An African Beat." *The New York Times*, December 18, 2005.

lasted much longer than in Morocco—over one hundred years, beginning in 1830 and ending with Algerian independence in 1962. The total mess of the aftermath of the war in Algeria (1954-1962) led to the idea of *harkis*, repatriated Algerian Muslims who had served in the French army. *Harki* is itself somewhat derogatory; it refers to the Arabic root H-R-K, which denotes movement: they are refugees, not citizens or repatriates.[38] In the fragile period following the massive repatriation of Algerian Muslims to France, the French government "did not treat them [the *harkis*] as French citizens with rights; the harkis were classed as outsiders…"[39] This mentality is absolutely still encountered today, as Algerians in France continue to face inequality and racism.

The Franco-Moroccan and Franco-Algerian relationships are therefore quite different, as one country gained independence rather peacefully, while the other gained independence after a horrendous war. Some right-wing French nationals who have not forgotten the conflict in Algeria remain touchy (to put it lightly) about Muslim culture in France, and are unlikely to be patronizing any of the many *Maghrébin* restaurants one finds in French cities, be they Algerian, Moroccan, or Tunisian. It is the unfortunate existence of this attitude which has likely prevented the fruition of a true "hybrid cuisine" as with the British in India where, for example, a tradition was being built as early as 1747 in the cookbooks of Hannah Glasse[40]. It seems that while there is occasional overlap and experimentation, as well as a well-documented abundance of couscous in the French diet, the Franco-Moroccan colonial relationship has not invented the next great *tikka masala*-style hybrid. Yet.

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38 Shepard, Todd. 2006. *The Invention of Decolonization*. 230-231. Ithaca, NY / London, EN: Cornell University Press.

39 Shepard, 234.

40 Collingham, Lizzie. 2006. *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*. In , 137. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

The other important element of the meal is, of course, visual. While I disagree with the stupid, hackneyed expression that we "eat with our eyes," the aesthetic aspect of this meal is undeniably important to the ideas it hopes to convey.

Food as a Visual Discipline

Every dish in this dinner has a visual reference point relating to something I've studied while at Tufts leading up to the major in "International Literary and Visual Studies." While the taste of each component of each dish is obviously important, the appearance is probably just as, if not more important. In the histories of both French and Arab cuisines, there is a rich tradition of aesthetic importance in food. Rose writes of a false "hedgehog" *(hérisson)*—a sort of haggis studded with cloves. Wheaton writes of such Middle Ages excesses as pies sneakily filled with live birds and peacocks elaborately skinned, cooked, and then re-feathered for presentation, beaks and claws adorned with silver and gold-leaf[41]. Though gold-leaf still appears from time to time, the French have decidedly scaled down such activities. But there is undoubtedly a certain stress still put on appearance at both ends of the French culinary spectrum, from the impeccably layered *galette des pommes* to any number of "classic" *haute-cuisine* dishes made "elegant" with the help of ring molds and the like.

Claudia Roden writes of visual trickery in medieval Arab court cookery as well, referencing "mock brains" and "an omelette in a bottle,"[42] though sadly not elaborating on either. But above all, color was valued, particularly gold—saffron and turmeric lending their shining color to dishes then as now. Gold, especially, was thought to be a "magic colour of alchemy,"[43] and the consumption thereof thought to increase human longevity. The affinity for golden foods persists today in Morocco, where fake saffron colorant reigns in the standard Moroccan kitchen, used in everything from chicken *tagines* to the broths for couscous: all the color of saffron and more, without the hefty price tag of the real thing.

Other visual habits are important in the Moroccan kitchen. The famed *couscous au sept legumes* always has a similarly constructed pile of vegetables relaxing in the center of the serving dish. And the decorative flourishes of cinnamon and powdered sugar that top *b'stilla* pies (*warqa* pastry filled with egg, chicken, and nuts) allude to older traditions—Perry writes that, "garnishes of sugar, spice, or nuts were

41 Wheaton, 16.
42 Roden, 104.
43 Wilson, 113.

arranged on the surfaces of dishes (and especially baked products) in lines, often explicitly compared to lines of poetry or calligraphy."[44] An appreciation of aesthetics is also recognizable in conical spice, olive, and preserved lemon displays in public *souqs*; something found in other parts of the Arab world as well. There is something undeniably inviting about a pyramid of spices and olives…

Perhaps no food culture pays more attention to aesthetics than that of Japan, a country that is seemingly irrelevant to the overarching cultural themes of this project. That might be true—but the one time Japanese culture has come up in my studies was during a freshman year in-class essay for Food, Nutrition, and Culture when I compared Japanese attitudes surrounding bento boxes to American attitudes towards Christmas presents. The Japanese obsession with how food looks is well documented, and fully relevant to my project insofar as visual theory is concerned. The British academic Richard Hosking observes that, "Such strong emphasis is placed on correct appearance of form that the substance normally takes second place…"[45], going on to describe in detail how a Japanese chef might think about a particular plate of food:

> "Let us say something roundish—a filet or teriyaki-style fish— is to be served. It will appear on a long, narrow, flat dish. Resting against the fish and extending the length of the dish will be a single stalk of pickled ginger. An asymmetrical balance has been created in which the negative space (the empty part of the dish) serves as a balance to the positive (fish-filled) and is accentuated by the single line (pickled ginger), which intensifies the emptiness, of course, and also intensifies the succulence of the fish."[46]

Whether or not the plating actually "intensifies the succulence of the fish" is up for debate, I think; to be sure, nothing quite so fanatical exists in the traditional French or Moroccan (or Arab) kitchen. But these principles are, increasingly, showing up in modern *haute cuisine* around the world. The most high-profile presentation practitioner is probably the Catalan food sorcerer Ferran Adrià, of the now-closed restaurant El Bulli. He is, among other things, the godfather of the "foam," and creator of such gastronomical wonders as "apple caviar"—apple flavor concentrated within a tiny gelatinous ball so as to resemble caviar. Both techniques have been mercilessly copied by chefs around the world with varying degrees of success and relevance. Another notable contributor to the global discourse on food aesthetics is Homaro Cantu, the chef and owner of Moto restaurant in Chicago, and of his own design firm. Cantu's most widely-publicized feat was making edible paper using an inkjet printer loaded with food-based inks…in his restaurant "even the

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44 Perry, Charles. 1994. "Arab Food in Poetry." In *Look and Feel: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1993.*, 142. Devon, EN: Prospect Books.

45 Hosking, Richard. 1994. "Too Pretty to Eat! Appearance and Texture in Japanese Food." In *Look and Feel:Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 1993.* 80. Devon, EN: Prospect Books

46 Hosking, 83.

menu is edible."[47] A further example is paper featuring pictures of maki rolls wrapped around sushi to create a meta-referential morsel. The paper is flavored with powdered soy and nori to create the flavor effect of traditional sushi.

And, of course, the current poster-boy for fine dining, Danish chef Rene Redzepi, has put his distinctive mark on food presentation with dishes like "snowman"—a construction of apple meringue and cloudberry sorbet balls with "snow" made of yogurt and a playful carrot arm—and baby root vegetables served in a terracotta pot with edible (and very realistic) malt and hazelnut flour "soil." Both recipes are available in his restaurant Noma's recently published and highly publicized cookbook, but are almost inconceivable undertakings to the ordinary home cook.

My interest in conceptual food can be (easily) traced back to a 90's Food Network personality—Bob Blumer—and his quirky show " The Surreal Gourmet." I can remember chef Blumer making recipes like "Green Eggs and Ham" using honeydew, cantaloupe, and prosciutto— a play on that popular late 90's/early 00's pairing. Circles of honeydew were cut out to resemble egg whites (or greens) and melon ballers were used to shape cantaloupe "yolks." They were served alongside strips of prosciutto, Italian ham. Blumer's clever way of professionally "playing with food" was one of the impetuses in my interest in cooking. My own punning in the kitchen started quite early when, faced with naming the stool I had to stand on to reach the stovetop, I decided on "Stoolia Child."

It is thus appropriate that the dishes in the dinner to follow are deeply conceptual and sometimes surrealist. An Arabic idiom becomes a sweet and savory dessert using honey and onions, a collection of 19th century French prose poetry is represented as an organ meat brochette, and I, appropriately, considering the former name of my major, tackle the oft-interpreted alphabet soup. What follows is a complete distillation of my academic experience at Tufts, and, honestly, life experiences, as experienced through a 12-course dinner. The project combines actual cooking, food studies, and a significant visual aspect. The idea had been marinating for a while, and, to be honest, I am shocked that I actually did it. The title— "infinite correspondence"— is the English translation of a term (*unendliche Rapport*) used by 19th century Austrian art historian Alois Riegl to describe the flowing forms of Arabic calligraphy in Islamic Art. To me, this beautiful phrase encapsulates the interdisciplinary spirit of the ILVS major, as well as the overarching idea of this project—everything is in infinite correspondence.

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47 Bernstein, David. 2005. "When The Sous Chef Is An Inkjet." *The New York Times*, February 3, 2005, sec Technology

FIRST COURSE

HARDBOILED EGG WITH FINGERPRINT
MOROCCAN CUMIN AND CAMARGUAIS FLEUR DE SEL

This dish is an homage to Italian artist Piero Manzoni (1933-1963), and a direct homage to, or even recreation of, his performance piece "*Consumazione dell'arte dinamica del pubblico, divorare l'arte,*" often just referred to as "*Divorare l'arte*," or "Devouring art." The meticulously documented event (for Manzoni, the documentation of ephemeral events was paramount) took place on July 21st 1960 at the Galeria Azimut in Milan.[48] The performance itself was relatively straightforward, if a little bizarre: Manzoni boiled a number of eggs and marked his thumbprint on each one with black ink. They were then distributed to the audience members to be consumed. Manzoni himself ate one too. Some eggs remain and continue to be exhibited today; a painstaking restoration (including the original dehydrated yolk) of one with a broken shell is detailed on the website of the Museo del Novecento in Milan. Whether or not this is in line with Manzoni's original intentions is up for debate: surely the eggs are no longer edible, so does the piece lose its meaning?

In the early 60's, Manzoni produced a number of highly thought-provoking works including "*Fiato d'artista*" ("Artist's breath," a series of balloons blown up by Manzoni) and the infamous "*Merda d'artista"* ("Artist's shit," a series of 99 cans supposedly filled with a quantity of Manzoni's excrement and sold to the public by weight at the equivalent price of gold). Manzoni sought to integrate the idea of the vitality of the artist with the art itself, and nowhere is this idea more poignant than in his eggs. Italian art critic and historian Germano Celant writes,

"Manzoni devoured the egg…he fed on himself and with a reversal of redoubling, ate his own body: the egg marked with his thumbprint. The consequence, shared by the audience, was an awareness of a mystical union with art, an elevation of the subject to artwork."[49]

Though Manzoni claims to reject symbolism, the egg as a symbol for Manzoni himself is somewhat inescapable. And while I initially felt some shame invoking Manzoni in this symbol-ridden dinner, it is this idea that has comforted me.

My goal in serving this dish is not, necessarily, as lofty as Manzoni's. I do not want the diner to feel as though he/she is consuming me, nor do I pretend that this dinner is anything more important than my senior thesis (i.e. I would not refer to it as "performance art"). That being said, this undertaking is an extremely personal one, and each dish was entirely conceived of by me, because of personal experience. Spring semester freshman year, I took a special topics course on Arte Povera, the Italian post-war art movement which was

48 Celant,Germano. "In the Territory of Piero Manzoni." In *Manzoni,* edited by Piero Manzoni, Germano Celant, and Museo d'arte contemporanea Donnaregina, eds. 2007. Milan: Electa.

49 Celant.

just hatching around the time Manzoni was working. It was my first art history course, and unequivocally the reason why I pursued art history further and became an ILVS major with a "visual studies" emphasis. Through this course, I was exposed to the work of Manzoni, and wrote a paper comparing and contrasting his "*Sculture Viventi*" (nude models whom he signed and exhibited as "living sculptures") to French artist Yves Klein's "*Anthropométries*," created with "living paintbrushes" (nude models covered in blue paint set loose on a canvas). To be sure, there is a French Dadaist influence in Manzoni's art—Duchamp and his "Readymades" inevitably come to mind when looking Manzoni's works and general attitude. And the connection between Manzoni and his contemporary, Klein, is easy to make given Klein's experiments with the color blue and Manzoni's fixation with the color white.

The same year I took that course, the Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea happened to have a retrospective of Manzoni's work, which I had the good fortune to attend. There I saw some of the eggs in person, and they had a huge impact on me. To put it colloquially, that somebody pulled off stamping his thumbprint on eggs and serving them to an audience completely blew my mind. I have no intention at all of comparing myself to Manzoni, but in some ways I feel like with this thesis, I'm "pulling something off" as well. Just as the Arte Povera artists did, I am hoping to use relatively cheap, everyday materials to produce something greater. It is in this spirit that I hope to channel Manzoni in my first course.

The eggs are boiled for 6 and a half minutes to keep a relatively soft yolk (personal preference, though the number 6 can be read as a reference to the 60's) and imprinted with my thumbprint. They are served simply with small mounds of Camarguais fleur de sel and Moroccan cumin. This is where the dish leaves Manzoni territory and enters into my personal realm.

I arrived in Morocco for my junior year semester abroad right in the middle of Ramadan. In my host family, each *iftar* (*f'tour* in Moroccan dialect; the meal eaten to break the fast at sundown during Ramadan) began with a hardboiled egg dipped in salt and cumin. The second the *muezzin's* call rang out, the eggshells started cracking; perhaps a date or two made it in before the egg, but the egg was always eaten at the beginning. Salt and cumin (which grows in Southern Morocco) are the traditional Moroccan table condiments, rather than the salt and pepper we are familiar with in Europe and the U.S. To this day, dipping a hardboiled egg in salt and cumin is my fastest route to a Proustian trip back to Morocco. I use Camarguais fleur de sel because of the Camargue's relative geographic proximity to Morocco, and because of a 2009 trip there, during which I drove past the sprawling salt-processing facilities in my friend's 1960's VW bus.

Though an egg dipped in salt and cumin can't transport someone to back to Morocco if they haven't been there before, it will introduce the flavors of that part of the world to the diners, along with ideological underpinnings (and salt) from Europe. This was the first dish I conceived for this thesis, and the best way I could think of to start this meal. Hopefully Manzoni will forgive me for the symbolic nature of the dish, realizing that the egg is one of the most symbolic objects on Earth.

SECOND COURSE

SALMOREJO AND AJOBLANCO ARCHES

RAW AND FRIED CAULIFLOWER
BEETS WITH ORANGE FLOWER WATER
EGGPLANT WITH POMEGRANATE MOLASSES
FRIED LEEKS

The alternating red and white-striped arches of the Great Mosque of Córdoba are among the most recognizable structures in the history of Islamic architecture. Completed in 987, the hypostyle prayer hall references the Umayyad-era Great Mosque of Damascus, completed two centuries earlier. By the 13th century, the Great Mosque had become a Great Cathedral during the *reconquista*, and today, though it remains a cathedral, is known colloquially as the *mezquita-catedral*, or mosque-cathedral. A similar religious repurposing can be seen with the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, though in reverse—the structure started off as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral in the 6th century and later became a mosque in the 15th century following the Islamic conquest of Constantinople. Now that two of the three Abrahamic religions have been referenced, I may as well bring in the third, which also happens to be, culturally, at least, my own: Judaism. Sephardic Jews lived relatively happily in al-Andalus until the Spanish Inquisition at the end of the 15th century. As I mentioned in the introduction, as the Jews fled North to comparatively more tolerant land, they brought vegetables and cooking styles with them. The vegetables and the cultivation thereof may well have been introduced by Arabs, and Roden writes that "It is sometimes difficult to disentangle what are Iberian from what are Turkish, Greek, Balkan, or Arab dishes, because Spanish cooking was influenced by Arab styles and Ottoman gastronomy was itself based mainly on the Arab, Persian, and Byzantine cooking."[50] Because it was the Jews who showed up in the North with these new foods and styles, they became "Jewish" by association. Frying meat with onions and garlic, for example, and the use of olive oil as a cooking medium (rather than pork fat) are both referenced as "Jewish manner[s] of cooking,"[51] though examples of the former can, for example, be found in the *Baghdad Cookery Book*. And the Spanish certainly rekindled their relationship with pork fat after the Jews left; that much is certain.

So, how does the socio-religious hodgepodge of Middle Ages Spain represent itself as a plate of food? I first turned to two distinct soups from Andalucía—*salmorejo* and *ajoblanco*. Both of these soups, served room temperature or chilled, rely on almonds as thickeners, a crystal clear Arab influence. One of the most often-cited Arab contributions on Western cuisine, in fact, is the almond, and particularly almond milk. Heavily perfumed gruels thickened with almonds (like the French *blancmange*, from the Persian *isfidhbaj*; egregiously well-documented) were enormously popular in Middle Ages Europe, and though dishes like that don't survive today, the use of almond as a thickening agent emphatically does. The two soups are quite similar, to the degree that, essentially, the only difference is that *salmorejo* has tomato and *ajoblanco* doesn't. It's no coincidence that one

50 Roden, 255.
51 Roden, 253

soup is red and the other white.

The relative viscosity of the soups makes it possible to alternate red and white stripes, a clear visual reference to the *mezquita-catedral*. Wilson writes that, "Westerners seem to have seen red as a typically Saracenic food color," adding also that, white foods were "a novelty to Western Europeans," and also associated with the Middle East for their use of chicken and almonds.[52] Thus, the red and white motif of the soups recall their Arab origins. Another important ingredient in the two soups is sherry vinegar. Though it would be wrong to classify them as "sweet and sour," there is definitely a push and pull going on with the brighter, more acidic notes of vinegar and the sweet undertones of olive oil, almonds, and garlic. Wilson notes that the concept of sweet and sour foods was known before the Arabs (via the Greeks), but that a reference to the Arabs is found in the name of a Middle Ages French recipe—"*bruet Sarassinois*"— a sort of sweet and sour sauce with made with wine or verjuice, the latter of which was extremely popular in the Middle Ages; one could characterize it as a predecessor to vinegar.

The bottom of the plate acknowledges some of the so-called "Jewish" vegetables introduced to the rest of Europe via Northern Spain via Southern Spain via the Arab world. Cauliflower is fried in olive oil (in the Arab or Jewish manner, depending on how you look at it… as if the two cultures need another thing to fight over) and rests atop some thinly sliced raw cauliflower—partially because I think raw cauliflower sliced on a mandoline is beautiful, and partially because the flavor of raw cauliflower differs from that of cooked cauliflower, and it is worth experiencing this vegetable in both forms. The raw and cooked versions are dusted with *pimentón de la Vera*—a smoked red pepper powder that might be the most popular seasoning in Spain; certainly the most popular spice on my spice rack at home. Because the pepper was introduced to Spain from the New World, I won't get into the history, but it is of note that the colors of raw cauliflower, fried cauliflower, and the *pimentón* are, respectively, white, gold, and red: the three magic colors of alchemy in Arab society, and the colors most associated with Arab food by Westerners.

Following the cauliflower are cubes of boiled and chilled red beets, seasoned simply with olive oil, salt, and orange blossom water; an unlikely combination, but a popular one in Morocco. The floral notes of orange blossom water and olive oil play off the relative sweetness of the beet. They are garnished with orange rind, another edible concept introduced by Arabs, though they were often candied.[53] I felt that would be overkill.

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52 Wilson, 112.

53 Wilson, 112.

Next is a simple eggplant puree with olive oil, salt, and pomegranate molasses. The eggplant is bruised over an open flame—the way it is prepared for spreads in Morocco and the rest of the Arab world—and blended with the other ingredients. Pomegranate molasses is just starting to be found in Western markets and discovered by Western food bloggers and chefs; the name in English is somewhat misleading: it's not molasses flavored with pomegranate, it's just pomegranate juice boiled down until it reaches syrup-consistency. The Arabic name (*dibs ar-rumman*) uses the same word as a date syrup (*dibs*) found in medieval Arab recipes.

Finally, a pile of thinly sliced fried leeks rounds out the dish. Not too much to delve into there—leeks were simply another one of the vegetables I found to have a similar Judeo-Arab pedigree, and a personal favorite. Al-Warraq cautions that leeks cause nightmares, but I wouldn't worry.[54]

54 Nasrallah 128.

THIRD COURSE

MERGUEZ PÂTÉ
CALLIGRAPHIC CABBAGE
PRESERVED LEMON HARISSA-MUSTARD

Of all the dishes in this meal, this is perhaps the most easily classified as a “stretch,” though the title

Of all the dishes in this meal, this is perhaps the most easily classified as a “stretch,” though the title of the thesis refers to an art historical term that I believe can be applied to purple cabbage. My love affair with cabbage began on a Spring 2011 trip to Denmark. I had encountered purple cabbage before this, but never had I seen the lowly vegetable treated with such respect or eaten with such gusto as in Denmark. There, it is most commonly consumed as a condiment; it is cooked down with vinegar and sugar, and then served room temperature alongside everything from open-faced sandwiches to hefty sausages. The flavor is sweet and sour (!); could Arab influence have made it as far north as Denmark? It’s possible. When I came home from that trip, my purple cabbage consumption skyrocketed, and as a result I found myself cutting up more purple cabbages than ever. One of these times is when, staring into the cabbage cross-section I had just produced, I started seeing Arabic calligraphy. It was, as Alois Riegl said, an infinite correspondence—the whites and purples danced and dove in and out of one another in a way surprisingly reminiscent of calligraphy. Once, I saw the word *allah* inside a cabbage. That’s right, I saw God inside a purple cabbage.

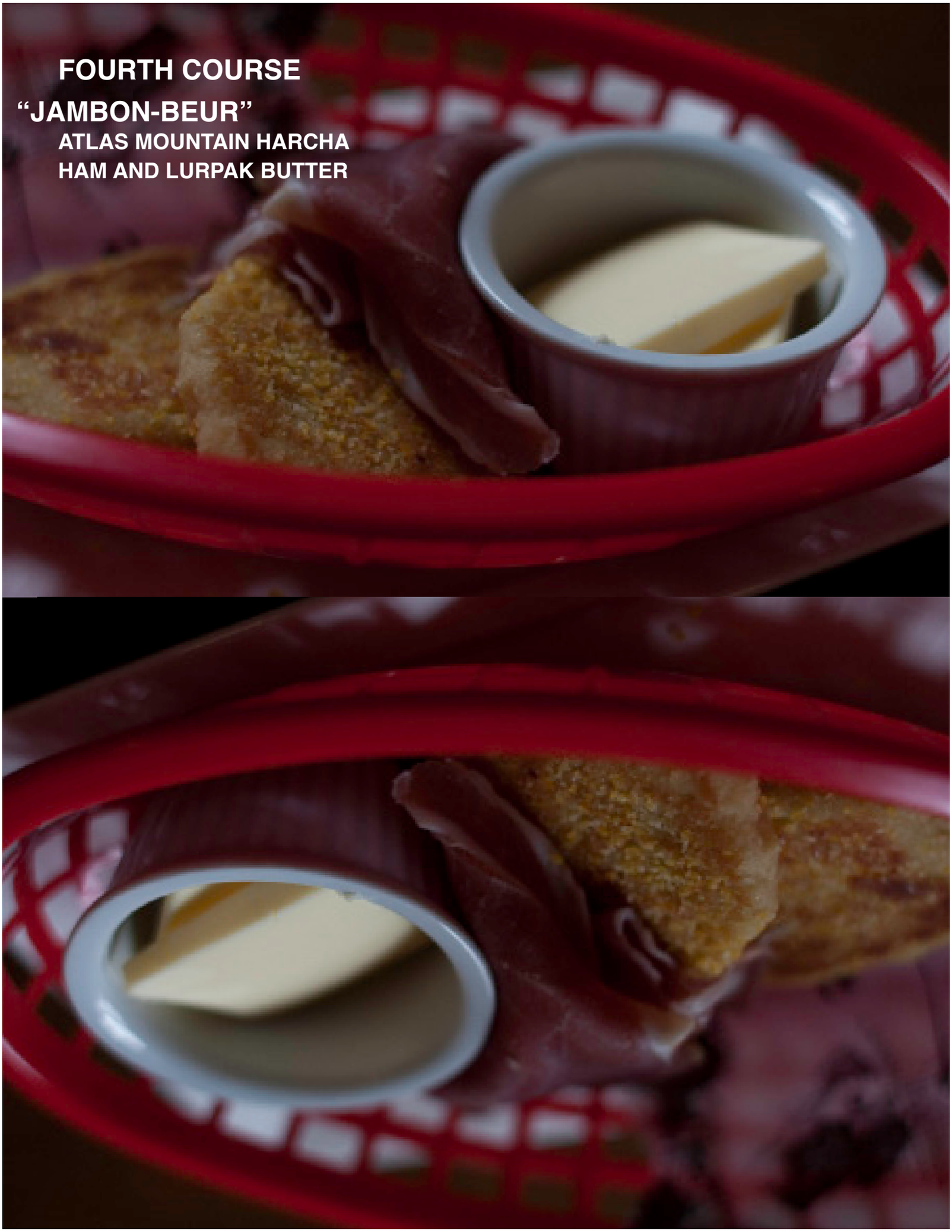
In working out a way to include this visual stimulant in my thesis, I turned to the Alsatian dish of sauerkraut with sausages, *choucroute garnie*. My mind naturally went to the delicious Moroccan sausage *merguez*, made with lamb and spiced with coriander, cumin, fennel seed, and *harissa*. But this is no good cold or room temperature, so my mind went back from the colonized to the colonizer and I decided to make a classic pâté. This, of course, is usually made with pork; having no dietary restrictions myself, I decided to mix lamb and pork, thus creating an edible representation of the tensions felt by Moroccan (and other Muslim) immigrants in France, surrounded by a nation of pork-lovers with a rich tradition of *charcuterie*. And indeed, meat has been the center of much political turmoil leading up to the 2012 French presidential elections.

Far-right Marine Le Pen made a comment—that non-Muslims in Paris were buying and consuming *halal* meat unawares—that set off a firestorm. European law states that animals must be stunned unconscious before killed, except in the case of religious slaughter. *Halal* slaughter can actually be quite gruesome: animals have their throats slit, and sometimes take a while to fully die. More and more French butchers are converting to *halal* to meet the needs of Paris’ ever-growing Muslim population, and because it can be impractical to slaughter animals with more than method. Le Pen has used this so-called “immoral” *halal* slaughtering practice and findings about the increase in *halal* butchers in Paris to feed her anti-immigrant narrative. Both Sarkozy and

his Prime Minister, François Fillon, have jumped in to the debate in an attempt to attract votes from the right.[55]

My discussion of the next course will delve into the situation of Muslim immigrants in France more, but this dish presents an introduction to the issue. By serving lamb and pork together, I'm not suggesting that Muslims in France give up their religious dietary habits and eat pork, but there is something significant about the two together in this pâté—these two meats are rarely mixed. I also mix a French condiment with a Moroccan one: Dijon mustard and preserved lemon-spiked *harissa*, a popular hot sauce of Tunisian origin (the lemons being a more Moroccan addition). The cabbage, upon which the pâté rests, ties the plate together: If eating *halal* meat without knowing is a problem, imagine what the French far-right would think if they knew Arabic calligraphy was lurking in their cabbage!

55 Beardsley, Eleanor. 2012. "In France, Politicians Make Halal Meat A Campaign Issue." *NPR*, March 15, 2012



FOURTH COURSE

“JAMBON-BEUR”

ATLAS MOUNTAIN HARCHA
HAM AND LURPAK BUTTER

This dish is a take on the classic Parisian ham-and-butter sandwich—the base is *harcha*, a common Moroccan semolina bread, often enjoyed at breakfast or as a snack, schmeared (sadly) with *Vache qui rit*. This version is prepared using Paula Wolfert's recipe for Atlas-mountain style *harcha*, with mint tea (made with a type of wild herb, *nepitella*, that grows in the region) in the batter. It is topped with a slice of ham and a schmear of Lurpak butter, one of the best commercially-available types of butter, imported from Denmark. Why would I use Danish butter when the French make perfectly delicious butter? It's relevant now to discuss the inendiary cartoons of the prophet Mohammed from the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten.

In 2004, the paper put out a contest for cartoonists to depict the prophet Mohammed, and printed the 12 best. This was, needless to say, very inflammatory. Though the total absence of figural imagery in Islamic art is a giant and unfortunate misconception, and the absence of depictions of Mohammad in Islamic art is also a myth, Muslims in Europe and the Arab world were sufficiently offended—the cartoons were not so flattering. The cartoonists received death threats, and the incident created a shockwave around the world, still on edge following the September 11th attacks. In this case, a comic couldn't hide behind its "humor," and there were repercussions—many Muslim countries boycotted Danish goods, and there were protests outside Danish embassies. The consensus is that Jyllands-Posten crossed a line[56].

That the Danish newspaper would print such provocative imagery is par for the course in Western Europe. Ultra-conservative, xenophobic politicians like Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France still have significant influence in their countries. A lot has changed in the past decade. For some, the scars of the Algerian War are perhaps slightly more buried, where the memory of September 11th and subsequent terror attacks in Europe are fresh. Yet no topic is off-limits for European cartoonists. They lament the relative lack of free speech that their Middle Eastern counterparts face because, offensive or not, Western Europe will not censor much. By contrast, a prominent Syrian cartoonist was recently tortured by government forces for drawing anti-government cartoons in a Damascus newspaper: he was found with his hands broken.[57]

Cartoons have never held the same sort of cultural weight in the United States as in Europe. When I travel to France, I'm often asked if I was named after the comic book character "Lucky Luke"—an American cowboy who roams across the West with his trusty horse getting into and out of various trouble(s). That, along

56 Klausen, Jytte. 2009. *The Cartoons That Shook the World.*, 1-10. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

57 "Syrian Cartoonist Has Hands Broken." 2011. *Telegraph UK*, August 26, 2011.

with comics like *Tintin* and *Astérix et Obelix* represent the sort of old guard of Franco-Belgian comics which are cute, action-packed, and often unintentionally racist. A newer generation of cartoonists have rebelled against this tradition, producing work that builds on the cultural relevance of the cartoon in that part of Europe, while using humor and irony to highlight and combat racism which, in the words of professor and cultural theorist Hédi Abdel-Jaouab, is caused "more by ignorance than hatred."[58]

The cartoonist Farid Boudjellal was born in 1953 to Algerian parents living in Brest, on the northwest tip of France. This makes him a *beur*, French double-inverted slang for "Arab" (*"Arabe"* becomes *"rebeu"* when inverted; *"rebeu"* inverted again becomes *"beur"*). The word *beur(re)* also means "butter," in French, thus it is ripe for further usages. Abdel-Jaouad mentions some I hadn't previously encountered—*beurgeoisie*, *beurre noire,* and *beur pourri*, to name a few.[59] And then there is *Jambon-Beur*, which, by way of a famous Parisian ham-and-butter sandwich, references children of mixed couples. Enter Boudjelall's incredible 1995 comic of the same name, and inspiration for this dish, *Jambon-Beur*.

Set on the backdrop of a classic tale of star-crossed lovers, *Jambon-Beur* explores race relations in mid-1990's France both through cartoons and a few interspersed pages of short interviews with children and teens, both "pure" French and immigrants. The story centers on Patricia and Mahmoud, a French woman and French-Algerian man, who fall in love and decide to get married, much to the chagrin of both families. Patricia's mother is a widow, having lost her husband in the Algerian War. Mahmoud's family has problems of their own—their oldest daughter committed suicide after falling for a Frenchman and fearing the reaction of her parents. They marry anyway, and have a daughter—this only creates more problems. Mahmoud's family wants to name her Badia, but Patricia's mother wants Charlotte. They settle on Charlotte-Badia, placing the more French and therefore socially acceptable name first.

The child's upbringing is, naturally, turbulent. She grows up never seeing her French and Algerian relatives at the same time, and poses herself questions like "Why are daddy's mom and mommy's mom so different?" and "Why do my friends define themselves as Algerian, Italian, Spanish, or Portugese? Why not French?"[60] The comic takes an interesting, and absurd, turn when she actually splits herself in two—one Algerian, Badia, and one French, Charlotte. This way, both sets of relatives are happy! The story ends with the

58 Abdel-Jaouab, Hédi. 2009. "Beur Hybrid Humor." In *Hybrid Humour: Comedy in Transcultural Perspectives.*, 119-120. Amsterdam, NL / New York, NY: Rodopi.

59 Abdel-Jaouab, 114.

60 Boudjellal, Farid. 1995. *Jambon-beur*. Soleil ed. 19. Toulon, FR: MC Productions/Boudjellal.

relatives finally reconciling at the girls' 10th birthday party, the two grandmothers realizing that the connection between their two countries have caused similar pain. Mahmoud's mother confesses to Patricia's mother, who had accused her of not understanding her feelings after losing a husband to the Algerian War. She addresses her former adversary emotionally:

"*Oh, si je comprends! L'Algérie elle t'a pris un mari, moi la France elle m'a pris une fille! Et moi aussi je peux pas l'oublier! J'ai toujours son visage dans la tête ! Un visage qu'il va jamais viellir, pas comme mes autres enfants…tout ça parce qu'elle a aimé un français! Aujourd'hui elle peut aimer un noir, un juif, un esquimo ou un martien je m'en fous!"*[61]

"But, I *do* understand! Algeria took a husband from you, and France took a daughter from me, and I can't forget her either! Her face is always in my mind—a face that will never grow up, not like my other children…and all because she fell in love with a Frenchman! Now she could fall in love with a black man, a Jew, an Eskimo or a Martian; I don't care!"

Boudjellal proposes an optimistic ending in which the families are able to transcend racial differences. He arrives at this ending through a consciously absurd and humorous storyline—that Charlotte-Badia splits herself in two is a relatively tame example. Patricia's sister is married to a Senegalese man and they have twins: one is black and one is white. In a moment of reflection while watching them play, she muses, "*Parfois je me demande qui est le noir et qui est le blanc."*[62] or "Sometimes I wonder who's the black one and who's the white one." Abdel-Jaouad writes that, "A cartoon is said to be worth a thousand books or treatises because both text and image are tinged with a dose of humor…Their [the cartoonists'] message is clear: expose and combat prejudice through humor, the most effective antidote to stereotyping."[63]

Naming the comic *Jambon-Beur* is as perfect as it gets—not only does it reference mixed couples, but *jambon* runs inherently counter to the Muslim belief system, being a pork product and therefore *haram*. Muslim immigrants in France, as I mentioned in the last dish, sometimes find it difficult being surrounded by such a pork-loving culture, and this is referenced humorously in the comic— the two girls are switched and end up at the wrong grandparents' house for dinner one night. Badia is served pork, which she refuses to eat on the basis that it is not *hallal*, much to the horror of her French grandmother.

So, this dish not only explores the issues confronted by North African immigrants in France, but also the importance of the cartoon as a visual medium in Europe. From a satirical yet culturally important comic

61 Boudjellal, 53.

62 Boudjellal, 17.

63 Abdel-Jaouab, 118.

book to a politically charged newspaper cartoon, there is a lot we in the United States can learn from immersing ourselves in this underappreciated art form.

FIFTH COURSE

ALPHABET HARIRA

DATE LEATHER AND HERB OIL

When I declared a major in "International Letters and Visual Studies," I didn't know what I was getting myself into. I mean that very literally—I very truly did not understand what the title of the major meant; I was seduced by the interdisciplinary focus and stress put on foreign languages. Students in other majors ridicule our humble program for being too scattered or too loose. It didn't help when the name was changed to "International Literary and Visual Studies" last year. Many Tufts websites still have the old name listed. This dish is an homage to the old name, which, despite not understanding, I liked more. Because either way it's impossible (or just frustrating) to explain the major to anyone outside Tufts.

Harira is probably described in tourist literature as being one of Morocco's "national dishes." I disagree with the concept of "national dishes," but fully acknowledge that harira is widely enjoyed around Morocco, and found in many different iterations from region to region. It is especially common during Ramadan, during which it is often eaten to break the fast. In my homestay, I would know the *f'tour* was coming the moment I started smelling onions and fresh cilantro leaves sautéing in oil and butter with a little flour. That is still one of those olfactory linchpins for a mental transport back to my host family's modest Rabat apartment. One aspect of harira that doesn't seem to change from region to region is the presence of thin noodles. Naturally, I got the idea to make alphabet soup.

Like any child in America, alphabet soup is something I grew up enjoying. Who knows, it may have even contributed to my mastery of the English language. Much to my surprise and delight, there is scholarly literature on the practice of consuming letters. So, I will turn to Gillian Riley, who says that, "Individual letters of the alphabet have been eaten for centuries. Beautiful, ornate, pastry letters in still-life paintings in the Netherlands suggest speculations about the significance of eating one's words."[64] She points also to a tradition of edible pastry-letters in England, and specifically to an 18th century poem by "a Bard at Bromsgrove" which goes like this:

"The bakers to increase their trade
Made alphabets of gingerbread,
That folks might swallow what they read
All the letters were digested,

64 Riley, Gillian. 2001. "Learning By Mouth: Edible Aids to Literacy." In *Food and the Memory: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2000.*, 197. Devon, EN: Prospect Books.

Hateful ignorance detested."[65]

It seems a similar attitude brought about the creation of alphabet soup in the United States. Sure, it's a gimmick, but it might be more effective than we give it credit for. Not content with the American alphabet, I wondered if perhaps foreign alphabets had noodle versions, too. Sure enough, I finally found what I was looking for—Arabic letter noodles! But the only evidence I had was a blog post from a food blogger (of course) in the Netherlands, who had found them at a Turkish market in the immigrant-heavy East Amsterdam neighborhood. I e-mailed a friend with relatives in the Netherlands and the hunt was on. Incorporating Arabic letter noodles in this dish was my ultimate dream, and though I wanted to make them myself, I finally realized that this would be effectively impossible. Miraculously, my friend's Dutch uncle came through.

But what if Arabic letter noodles were commercially available in the United States? What if Campbells made Arabic alphabet soup? And put a sprinkle of cumin in the broth. Would our nation's children become more open to Middle Eastern culture; would they actually learn Arabic? It's impossible to say. Arabic alphabet soup might do well at specialty shops in places like Park Slope, the South End, or Portland, Oregon. Certainly in Dearborn, Michigan there would be a captive audience. But it would be interesting to see. The pursuit of this idea is something I might actually continue after I graduate. We'll see.

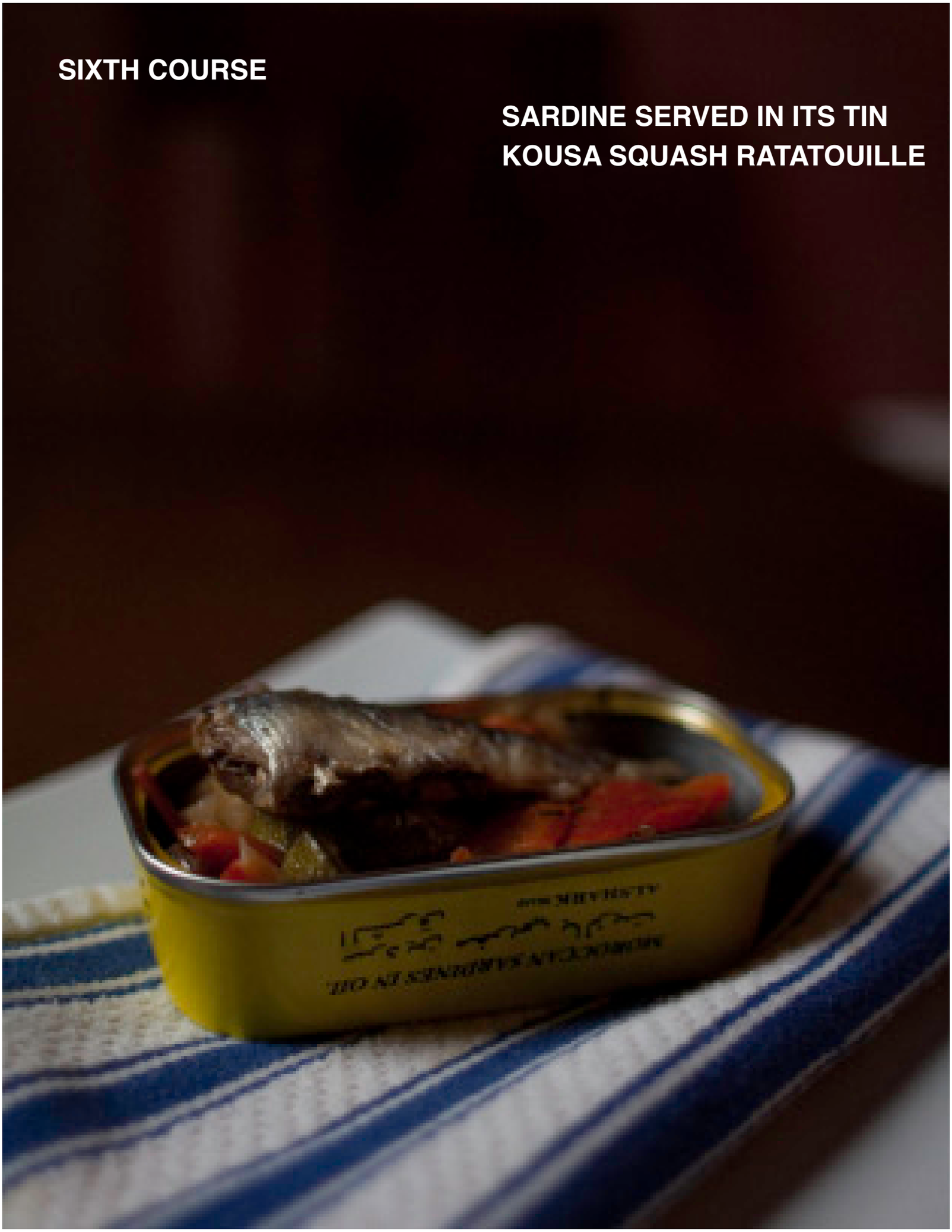
This iteration is "deconstructed," simply because I wanted to have fun with the plating, and make eating it a bit of an adventure, tapping into the childlike desire in each of us to experience things in a new way. I use San Francisco-via-Casablanca chef Mourad Lahlou's method for creating "date leather"—pounding dates between two layers of clear film to produce an effect not dissimilar from something I grew up eating—fruit by the foot. Dates are a common accompaniment to harira, especially during Ramadan, as they were a favorite food of the prophet. In fact, some of the first dates I had with my harira in Morocco were brought back from Mecca by my host father, who had just been performing *hajj*. The other elements of the plate—chickpeas, cilantro, and a lemon wedge—are also commonly enjoyed either *in* harira or with it. Many versions include a little bit of shredded beef or lamb, but I've chosen to forgo that. As you eat, think about this quotation from the children's book *The Phantom Tollbooth*, a personal favorite growing up:

"'Here, taste an A; they've very good ,' said the stall-holder. Milo nibbled carefully at the letter and discovered that it was quite sweet and delicious—just the way you'd expect an A to taste." [66]

65 Riley, 196.
66 Riley, 192.

SIXTH COURSE

SARDINE SERVED IN ITS TIN
KOUSA SQUASH RATATOUILLE



Does the "A" taste sweet like it did for Milo? And what about the "Alif;" is that sweet too? Here's to hoping that one day the children of America will be able to answer that question. Hopefully in the affirmative.

My Moroccan host mother Najat excelled at the art of sardine cookery, and I ate more sardines while I was living there than ever before in my life. These weren't canned; these were the genuine article—plump and fresh out of the Atlantic! Somehow, these same sardines end up packed in oil in cans all around the world; Morocco is the world's largest exporter of tinned sardines. They're not the same out of the tin, but they're still delicious, and for 99 cents a tin, who can resist? I like the tins of Al-Sharq brand sardines so much that last year, for the one SMFA studio art class I took during college, I made a piece of art based around these tins. I cleaned one out and shoved it into one end of a long canvas, where I had cut a hole the size of the tin. With the cut-out piece, I drew the tin design free-hand and put it in the middle of the canvas. And on the other side, I left an empty hole the size of a tin, and covered it with a red netting from an onion bag, but which looked like fish netting. To be honest, there was no deeper meaning to the piece—I just really like how the tins look.

One of the better sardine preparations I had in Morocco was in the home of an artist named Mohammed Jraïdi in Essaouira. Essaouira is on the Atlantic coast about two hours away from Marrkech; the town is home to some of the finest seafood and freshest sardines in the whole country. At the time I thought I was doing a cumulative research project on Moroccan artists who use Arabic calligraphy in their artwork, and I was introduced to Mr. Jraïdi by a friendly shop-owner in town. He came into the shop to meet me, and after talking with him for 15 minutes, he invited me and a friend over for dinner a few days later. These are not invitations that one should decline. My friend and I showed up at his house, covered floor-to-ceiling with stunning artwork, much of it adorned with Arabic calligraphy and quite a lot of it using collage from local newspapers. His wife brought out something I hadn't had or heard of before: a *tagine* of sardine *kefta*—basically little balls of sardine simmered in tomato sauce with onions and green bell pepper. It was fabulous, and the circumstances under which it was consumed only amplified the great taste.

In thinking about the flavor profile of that dish, I made a link to the southern French dish *ratatouille*, made also with long-simmered tomato, onions, and bell pepper, with the addition of eggplant and zucchini (and

no sardines). I wondered how *ratatouille* would taste topped with a sardine, and using Middle Eastern *kousa* squash instead of zucchini. I decided to test it. The natural serving vessel seemed to be the sardine tin, so I cleaned one out and plated. I took a bite, and, cliché as this sounds, I was back in Mohammed Jraïdi's sitting room, eating that sardine *kefta tagine* with him and my friend Ethan. I was having a true Proustian moment, alone in my kitchen.

There is, of course, a film called *Ratatouille* as well, and it's a film I taught in my Fall 2011 freshman "Food in Film." Sure, it was a Pixar movie, and might seem out of place in a classroom, but something very deep happens at the end of the movie. The harsh, crotchety Parisian restaurant critic, aptly named Antoine Égo, is served a nicely plated version of ratatouille and has a flashback to his childhood. He sees himself as a little boy and his mother serving him ratatouille in the countryside. He gets emotional and leaves the restaurant quietly, without the usual fuss he is notorious for making.

Food memory scenes like this abound in the arts, but the classic tea and *madeleine* scene in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* is the standard reference-point for all food-memory scenes that came after it, both in cinema and literature. Rose Arnold, in her essay "Food References in Proust's *Recherche,*" observes that, "Food and drink references…have been important ingredients in the miraculous spell by which Art can annihilate Time."[67] It's true. Arnold explains,

> "The early pages of *À la Recherche [du Temps Perdu]* imagine the people of the dead past as imprisoned in everyday things, impotent to communicate with us unless we summon them, but ready to spring back into being under the spell of our love, our attention, and the magical power of our—all too occasional—escapes from habit and boredom. The eating of the *madeleine* dipped in tea is just such a summoning, a 'recognition' which allows the past back to life."[68]

My experience in Essaouira is "imprisoned" in a sardine tin—and I've found out that all I need to do to summon it is fill the tin with *ratatouille* and top it with a sardine.

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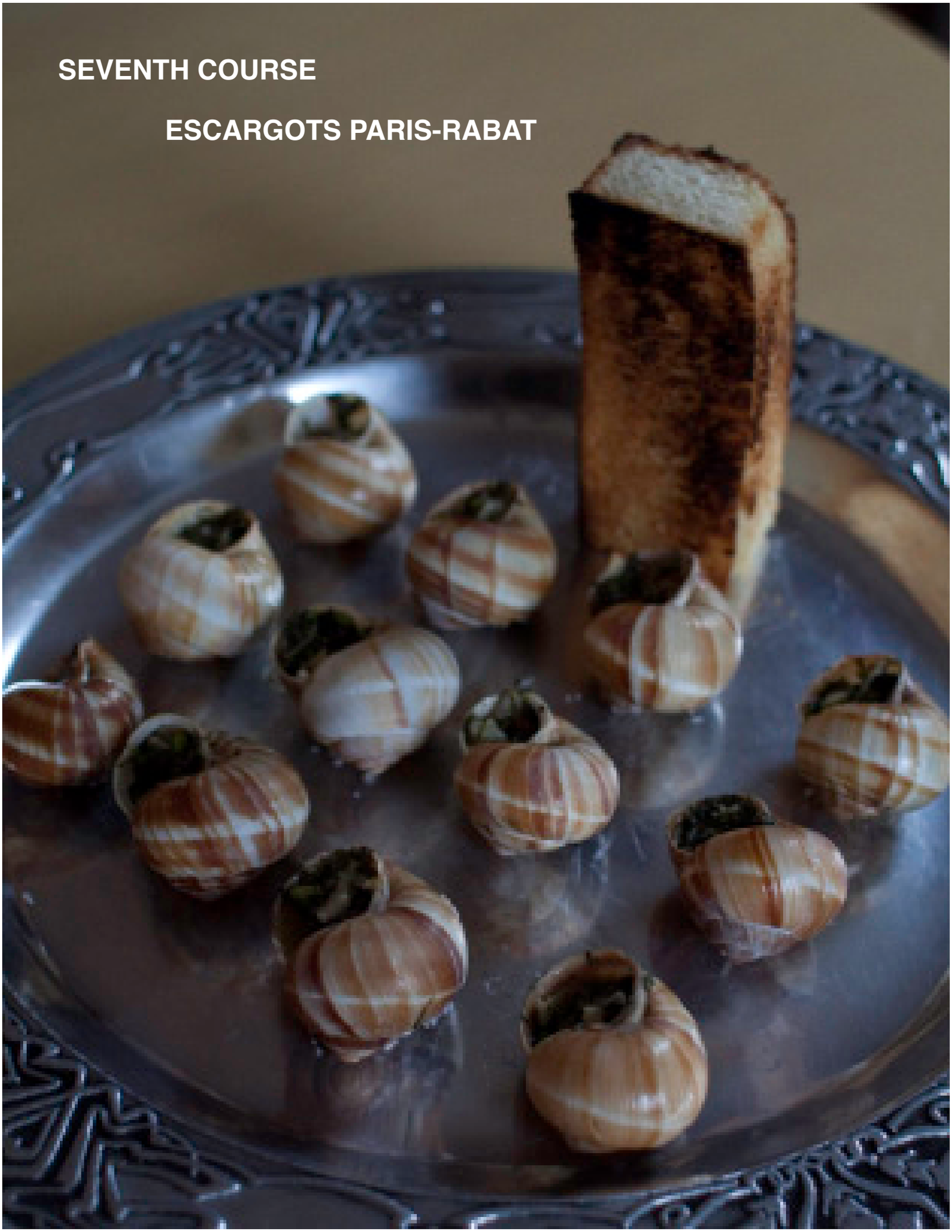
67 Arnold, Rose. 2001. "Madeleines and Other Aides-Mémoire: The Importance of Food References in Proust's *Recherche*." In *Food and the Memory: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2000.* 36. Devon, EN: Prospect Books.

68 Arnold, 34.

SEVENTH COURSE

ESCARGOTS PARIS-RABAT



It took me a day and a half of being in Morocco before I defied the suggestions of my parents, my doctor, and my program leaders by eating street food. How could I not? It was Ramadan, probably the best time of the year to eat street food in Morocco, and the masses were out and about at night, mingling, visiting, and stuffing their faces while the sun was still safely out of view. What food seduced me to commit this defiant act? A bowl of snails.

Snails are, surprisingly, one of the most common items on the streets of many Moroccan cities, and have their own section of the majestic street food paradise Djemaa el-Fna in Marrakech. We tend to associate snails more with France, though, and for good reason: the French consume about 20,000 tons of snails annually, making them the world leaders in snail consumption.[69] The first recipe for *escargots* appeared in *Le Ménagier de Paris* in the late 14th century, though this was among the first French cookbooks we know of—it's entire possible, and likely, even, that the French were enjoying snails before then. They did, however, experience a brief period of unpopularity between the 17th and mid 19th centuries. No recipes for escargots appeared, for example, in La Varenne's *Cuisinier François*, and though Bonnefons offered recipes in *Les Délices de la Campagne*, he makes sure to mention that he doesn't enjoy eating them at all.[70] Thanks to records from Les Halles, we know that snails started becoming popular again in the mid-late 19th century, and by 1902 a record-setting 675 tons were being enjoyed by the French[71].

Escargots à la Bourguignonne is probably the most well-known preparation of these gasteropods, served in their shells with bubbling garlic and herb butter. I was lucky enough to taste this for the first time at a French friend's house, where the snails had been raised by her uncle in the countryside. Her family was all surprised at how much I enjoyed them; I guess Americans have a reputation for being finicky eaters. Enough garlic and herb-butter, though, and anything will taste good. The first recipe for *escargots à la Bourguignonne* dates back to 1825, in Borel's "*Nouveau Dictionnaire de Cuisine*"[72]—it it any surprise that this work's publication coincides with the beginning of *escargot's* re-emergence as a popular food? I don't think so.

Across the Mediterranean, we have evidence (shells) of snail consumption in North Africa dating back to the Capsian civilization (6,000-10,000BCE) in Tunisia and eastern Algeria.[73] We also know that snails were

69 Samuel, Henry. 2007. "The French Shell Out For Organic Snails." *Telegraph UK*, August 7, 2007, sec World News.

70 Hyman, Philip. 2002. "Snail Trails." In *The Wilder Shores of Gastronomy.*, 198-199. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

71 Ibid.

72 Hyman, 202.

73 Lubell, David. 2004. "Prehistoric Land Snails in the Circum-Mediterranean: The Archaeological Evidence." In *Petits animaux et societes humaines du complément alimentaire aux ressources utilitaires.*, ed. Brugal, J-J. and Desse, J., 78. Antibes, FR: Editions APDCA.

popular in Roman times—parts of Morocco were under the Roman Empire, and it could have been during this period that snails gained popularity in Morocco, though it's possible they were enjoyed during the Capsian period as well. My first thought upon seeing snails for sale the streets of Rabat was "Ah, another effect of French colonization!" I was wrong.

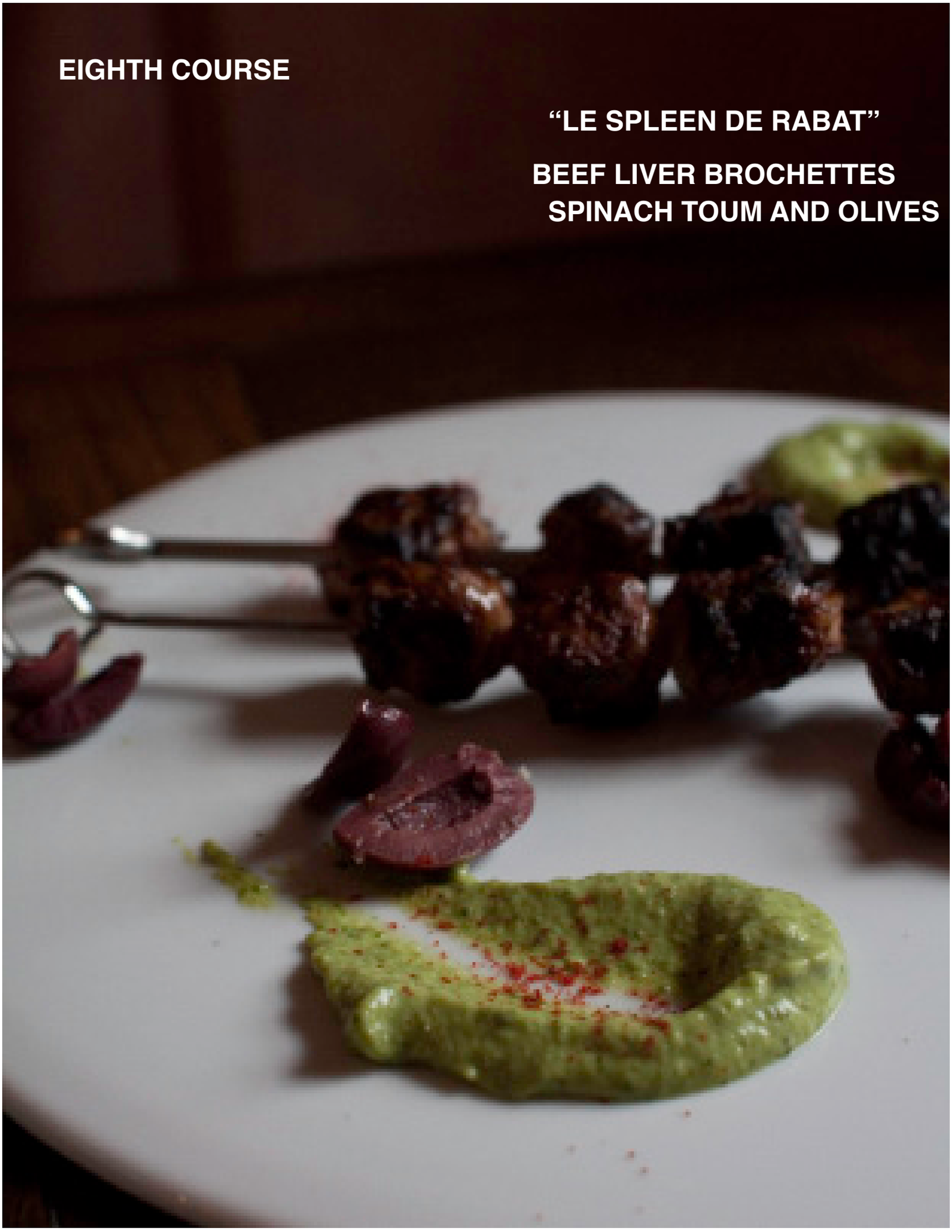
The snails commonly found on the streets of Moroccan cities are simmered in an intensely aromatic broth the likes of which even Paula Wolfert (America's leading authority on Moroccan cuisine) cannot properly reproduce. The seasonings include familiar names like thyme, wild mint, paprika, fennel seed and more unfamiliar things like licorice root and wormwood, better-known as the operative flavor (and hallucinogen) in Absinthe. In Morocco, where it's called *chiba*, it is popular as a tea, or mixed into the ubiquitous mint tea. Using that as a jumping-off point (given Absinthe's popularity in 19th century and early 20th century France), I decided to make a Moroccan-style compound butter that would fuse the best aspect of French *escargot* preparation with the more unique aspects of the Moroccan treatment. There is still plenty of garlic; the butter just has a few more flavorings, namely licorice root, thyme, and wormwood.

The presentation here is important, too. Snails have been a significant visual symbol in the cultures of everyone from the Druids to modern Italian farmer-activists who use it as the logo of their organization SlowFood. It is also a symbol for the layout of the city of Paris, whose *arrondisements* all spiral around in the shape of a giant snail shell. In trying to pull in Morocco's capital city, I thought of the Tour Hassan, minaret of an incompleted late 12th century mosque, and one of Rabat's only tourist attractions. Leading up to the lone minaret are the beginnings of the many columns that would support the prayer hall; I thought to represent these with the *escargots* leading up to a crouton minaret, thus representing both capital cities. And, of course, some bread is integral for soaking up the leftover melted butter left in the snail shells!

EIGHTH COURSE

“LE SPLEEN DE RABAT”

BEEF LIVER BROCHETTES
SPINACH TOUM AND OLIVES



One of the most memorable images from my semester in Morocco is sheet of fresh caul fat swaying gently in the wind on the clothesline on my host family's roof, surrounded by regular laundry. "One of these things is not like the other," I thought. But it was a special day. For *'Aid al-adHa*, we had sacrificed two rams on the roof (as is the custom), and a butcher fully took apart the animals for us to enjoy. And we enjoyed every part, starting with what I later identified as the spleen, served as barbecued *brochettes*, rubbed in salt, cumin, and paprika and wrapped in the caul fat before hitting the grill.

The brochettes were served with special fennel seed-flecked bread, sautéed mallow with purple olives, and some standard Moroccan beet, potato, and carrot salads. Of the whole spread, I honestly enjoyed the spleen the least, and it wasn't because I had just seen the rams from which it came being slaughtered. Muslim law prohibits the consumption of any blood, so meats in the Arab world tend to be quite well cooked as a result. Offal like spleen and liver are really best when they are medium-rare, or at least a little pink; otherwise they become tough to the point of inedibility. This is more or less what I was dealing with, but it was a holiday, so I ate many more *brochettes* than I wanted to and complimented my host mother.

My host family was lower middle-class by Moroccan standards, but lower class, I would say, by Western standards. That they were able to procure two rams for the holiday was a big deal—most families only get one, and some can't afford any at all. But our luck was mainly due to the presence of two males in our apartment—my host sister's husband Abd al-Razzaq (who lived with us) worked as a bodyguard at the Royal Palace, where the King gives every employee a ram for his family on the holiday. That was one; my host father procured the other, as it is tradition for the male head of the house to get the ram.

Needless to say, no part of the animal went to waste. This mentality is trendy in the U.S. right now; in Morocco it's just normal. We started with innards and worked our way out, with some of the meat being hung and air-dried to make *khliyaa'*, a sort of pungent Moroccan jerky commonly served with fried eggs. When people ask me what the "weirdest" thing I ate in Morocco was (and I get asked that a fair amount), I often just say that my family killed two rams and I ate all of them. That's not entirely true, but eating spleen was definitely new to me. Whether or not it was "weird," I can't really say.

In fact, the only time before then I had even considered the word "spleen" was in reading Baudelaire's collection of prose poetry, entitled *"Le Spleen de Paris*." In this seemingly bizarre title, Baudelaire is referencing his fascination with the inner-workings of Parisian life, the lives of the derelict, of the lower class.

I had never been a fan of dissecting French poems, but in my freshman year French class, I was happy to peer into the lives of 19th century Parisians whose stories were not usually told. Baudelaire also occasionally comments on the public's reception to his work, which was, at the time, not fabulous. In *"Le chien et le flacon,*" he writes of offering his dog a sniff of a fine perfume, and when the dog starts barking and backs away, addresses the poor creature,

> *"…indigne compagnon de ma triste vie, vous ressemblez au public, à qui il ne faut jamais présenter des parfums délicats qui l'exaspèrent, mais des ordures soigneusement choisies."*[74]
>
> "…undignified companion of my sad life, you resemble the public, to whom one must never present the delicate perfumes which exasperate them, but carefully chosen garbage."

Baudelaire's message is clear: the public wouldn't know good poetry if it hit them across the face. It's interesting to look at the status of offal through this lens, and it's especially interesting that the term *ordures*, translated here (by me) as "garbage," actually can mean "offal" in French as well. In a way, the current offal trend in the U.S. (which can be traced to the English chef Fergus Henderson), presents the public with "carefully chosen garbage." It's in the restaurant owner's best interest, from a financial perspective, to serve offal, so it becomes the chef's responsibility to make it seem cool. One hip Boston restaurant used to have sweetbread "McNuggets" on the menu, served with barbecue dipping sauce. And "sweetbread" is in and of itself a euphemism for the thyroid gland of a calf—stick "McNugget" on it and it reaches new heights of marketability.

Because the flavors of my host mother's spleen brochettes were so good, I decided to season these the same way, just cook them a little less and try to nail down the consistency. But, unfortunately, organ meats are not for everybody. This is where the sauce comes in. Much in the way that the compound butter in the last dish should be able to make even the soles of my clogs taste delicious, the spinach *toum* served with these brochettes should hopefully mask any sort of uncomfortable flavor or texture. This recalls a Middle Ages French custom of spicing meats heavily so as to not notice or to mask spoilage. *Toum* is a Lebanese whipped garlic sauce quite similar to French *aïoli* in flavor and texture, just without any eggs—the only ingredients are garlic, neutral oil, and salt. I add spinach for green color, and because at that holiday lunch, I wasn't yet familiar with mallow and my host mother could only describe them as the Moroccan word (*khobbiza*) or *"comme des épinards"* ("like spinach"). Mallow is available in the U.S., but frozen—I prefer fresh spinach as they really are quite similar.

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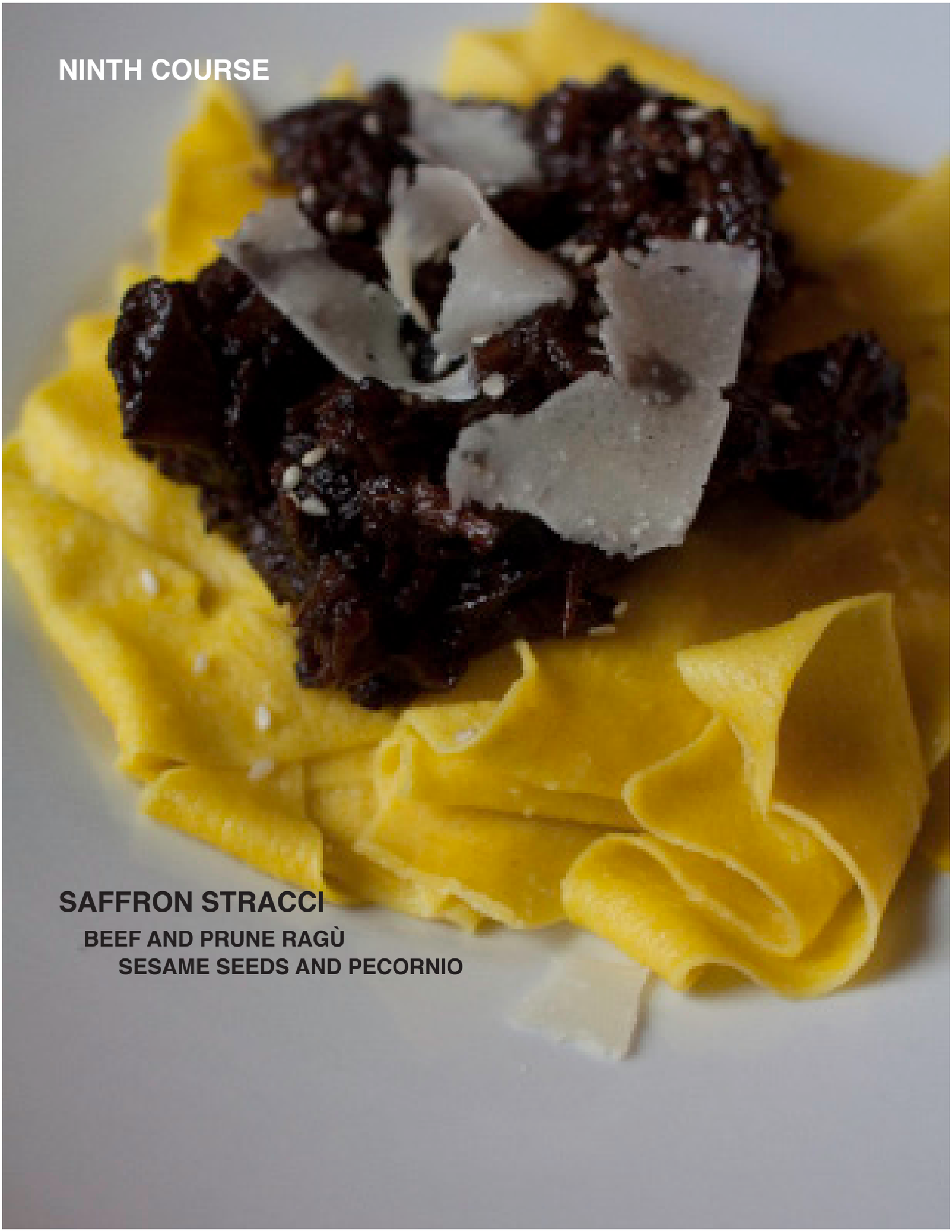
74 Baudelaire, Charles. 2003. Le chien et le flacon. In *Le spleen de paris.* Le Livre de Poche ed., 77. Paris, FR: Hachette.

Living with a lower class Moroccan Muslim family was the most enriching part of my experience in Morocco. Some other study abroad programs in Rabat placed their students with middle or upper class families in the suburbs; I lived in a small, four-room apartment in the old *medina*, above a café; it was the real deal. At times I saw myself as Said's maligned "Orientalist" figure, engaging in the deplorable act of "Orientalism—" alas, as an Arabic student, I had no choice. Briefly existing in the lives of these people with whom I would otherwise have had no contact, nor idea about, was experiencing *Le Spleen de Rabat*. By the end of the semester, I was friends with some of the colorful characters I would pass by every day. My parents will never forget when they came to visit at the end of my semester, as I tried to negotiate a proper taxi fare from a greedy driver in Moroccan Arabic, a toothless middle-aged parking attendant came to our rescue and told the driver, using my adopted Moroccan nickname "Za'alouk's my friend! He lives in that apartment right there! Don't cheat him; *he lives here*!"

NINTH COURSE



SAFFRON STRACCI

BEEF AND PRUNE RAGÙ
SESAME SEEDS AND PECORNIO

My sophomore year Italian film class couldn't have been at a worse time. Sunday afternoons from 5pm-7pm. That seems like a fine time to watch a movie, right? Go to the screening, maybe have a snack, and then go straight to the dining hall. Well, most of the films shown in this class fell into the Italian neorealist tradition—I usually showed up at the dining hall after class every Sunday without much of an appetite. World War Two was no picnic for the Italians, as evidenced in the heart-wrenching films produced during that period, like Rossellini's *Roma: Città Aperta* and *Paisà*. But one film in particular left me in such low spirits that I doubt I even went to the dining hall to meet my friends after the screening: Vittorio De Sica's 1960 film *La Ciociara*, or "Two Women" in English.

"Two Women" tells the story of a mother (played by Sophia Lauren) and daughter who flee their home in Rome to escape the Allied bombing and go to stay with relatives in the countryside south of the city. It's an emotionally fraught voyage, and life in the small rural community is highly stressful. But the situation eventually becomes safe enough for them to return to Rome, and they set off. The film is perhaps most notable for its depiction of what happens on their journey back. While resting in an abandoned building, the mother and daughter are brutally raped by a group of Moroccan *goumiers* (a Frenchified version of the Moroccan Arabic word "*goum*," meaning "people"), special soldiers in the French army. Being that Morocco was a French colony during World War Two, the French Army made use of Moroccan soldiers, mainly taken from Berber-speaking areas in the mountains.

The rape depicted in the film is actually based on a real historical event, the rape of Montecassino, during which groups of Moroccan *goumiers* are said to have raped thousands of women. The events have since been referred to as "*Le Marocchinate,*" or, very literally, "The things that the Moroccans did." They survive as some of the most atrocious war crimes ever committed, but many don't know it even happened. *La Ciociara* might be the best remaining testament to what happened there, and it's an extremely well-done, if challenging-to-watch film. Lauren won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance.

This is a rare convergence of Italian, French, and Moroccan cultures, and I thought it would be an interesting reference point for a dish, despite its heavy and unpleasant nature. The pasta dough is enriched with the Moroccan fake saffron powder I mentioned earlier, used for its intense yellow color. It's rolled out in long sheets and cut relatively haphazardly, making a shape called "*stracci*" in Italian; in English, "rags"—one of the most memorable movie posters for *Two Women* shows Loren crouched by the side of the road crying, her clothes torn.

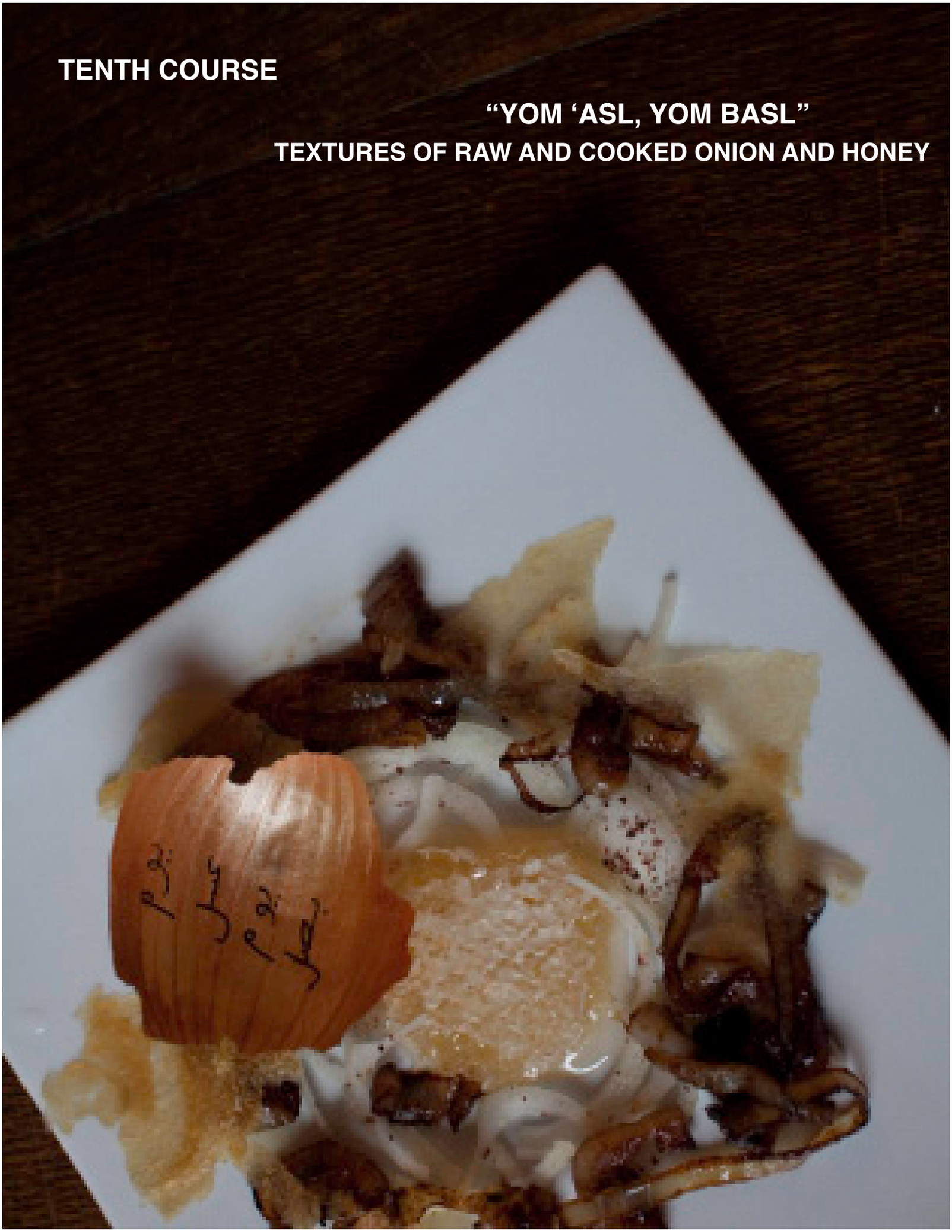
The Rags are covered in a *ragù* of beef and prunes—a common Moroccan *tagine* preparation. But there is an important difference in how the beef is cooked: it's been simmered in a *tagine* with Italian red wine from the region in which the film takes place. Of course, meat doesn't get cooked in alcohol in Morocco, though there is a bizarre little wine industry based in the city of Meknès, outside Fès. An Italian restaurant owner in Tangier told me that many of the Moroccans who patronize his restaurant drink red wine with abandon, and some knowingly eat *prosciutto* or *pancetta*. Surely, not every Moroccan is religious, and people in Tangier especially tend to lead a pretty secular lifestyle, but this restaurant owner seemed to think that some customers check their Islamic dietary restrictions at the door. It's just another confusing aspect of the cultural hodgepodge in Morocco.

The dish is finished with shavings of *Pecorino Romano*, a sheep's milk cheese from Lazio, again the region in which the film takes place. There is also a sprinkling of sesame seeds, which commonly adorn the traditional beef and prune *tagines* in Morocco. The assertive flavors of the *ragù* dominate the pasta rags, and represent a brief moment of Moroccan dominance over a population of helpless Italian women. It's a bizarre and horrible part of Mediterranean history, and we can't forget it.

TENTH COURSE

“YOM ‘ASL, YOM BASL”

TEXTURES OF RAW AND COOKED ONION AND HONEY



Being a student in the Arabic program at Tufts, one is expected to be either a Political Science or International Relations major. And if not, at least have a passing interest in politics. I am neither of those things, and though I occasionally enjoy discussing the Israel/Palestine issue with my friends and do keep up with the recent news from Egypt, Syria, and, of course, Morocco, I would not define myself as someone with any real interest in politics. This is too bad; politics are part of the equation that led to my studying Arabic in the first place.

My father, now a lawyer, got a master's in International Relations after college, and joined the Central Intelligence Agency. As a counterterrorism officer, he traveled around Europe and the Middle East for four years briefing foreign intelligence services on terrorism, and sometimes more mundane work like reading daily cable traffic. Growing up, he would always tell me stories of these travels, which painted a fascinating and alluring portrait of that part of the world. His missing suitcase containing valuable information recovered in Amman. Haggling for a gorgeous carpet in a market in Tunis. And, of course, the famous photograph in my mom's home office of him chugging a bottle of beer on a riverboat on the Nile in Cairo. When I got to college, I signed up for Arabic 1, imagining myself one day having these experiences, too.

It became clear that my interests did not lie so much in politics, and I opted for the ILVS major rather than I.R. My family now jokes that perhaps I'm more suited for one C.I.A. (Culinary Institute of America) over the other (Central Intelligence Agency). Regardless, my interest in the Arab world and the Arabic language can be traced to my father, who, at the time, spoke a little Arabic himself. The first thing I learned to say in Arabic, before arriving at Tufts, was *"Ana diblumasy fi' al-Hukuma al-Amrikiyya,"* or, "I'm a diplomat in the American government." I doubt I'll ever have to say that in the Arab world, but who's to say?

My own culinary interests collided with politics in a recent book that I read last year, called *Day of Honey*. It's a memoir of a freelance American war correspondent who spent time living in Beirut and Baghdad during the 2006 conflict with Israel and the American occupation of Iraq. It's quite possibly the only war memoir that focuses on food—the author, Annia Ciezadlo, sees food as the only way a culture tries to retain a sense of normalcy during wartime. Shops may close down, kids may stay home from school, but the bakery is always open, and people still have to cook. She talks about the culture of communal ovens in Beirut, as well as *manouche* shops which sell a particular kind of flatbread sandwich. In Baghdad, she discusses the tradition of carp grilled over an open fire on the banks of the Tigris; a practice which, sadly, dissipated during the worst years of the war, but has started to come back slowly. The book opens with an Arabic proverb, from which the

title is taken—*"Yom 'asl, yom basl,"* or, "Day of honey, day of onions."

This saying resonates particularly strongly during wartime, when one never really knows what each day will bring. One day might be sweet, like honey, and the next, bitter, like onions. As a course to bridge the gap between the more "dinner" courses and the more "dessert" courses, I saw this proverb as a way to further explore the sweet/savory overlaps in Moroccan food, while breaking down the sweet/savory binary that has existed in French food since around the beginning of the 18th century. In the center of the dish, both ingredients exist in a relatively pure state: a slab of honeycomb, and raw white onion, dressed simply with acidic sumac, a common additions to raw onion in the Levant. Encircling this is a ring of *t'fayya*, the Moroccan cinnamon-laced caramelized onion mixture that I referenced in the introduction. The onions are cooked down in a mixture of oil, butter, sugar, a little water, and raisins. In this iteration, I use honey instead of sugar. I often say that I didn't know how to properly caramelize an onion until living in Morocco, and it's true—if anyone knows how to caramelize an onion, it's the Moroccans. *T'fayya* is often served in a big clump atop couscous, under which one might find lamb meat and tail fat (also found in the Baghdad cookery book), or chicken and almonds. After the ram slaughter, my host family and I went to a relative's home to enjoy couscous topped with lamb shoulder and *t'fayya* so reduced it was nearly burnt and had the consistency of toffee. The final adornment to the dish is shards of onion "glass," a technique given in the book "*Ideas in Food*," written by the husband and wife food think tanks H. Alexander Talbot and Aki Kamozawa, who met in the kitchen of Clio, in Boston. Onion is pureed and mixed with glucose and then spread thin on a silpat and baked at a low temperature for two hours until it turns into "glass." The "broken" shards of onion glass around the dish remind us of the consequences of war.

Ideally, one will start in the middle with the raw ingredients, and move outward to experience the mixture of honey and onion. The idea is that onions are bitter and acidic when raw, but delightfully sweet when cooked, especially with honey. It's my nod to the political situation in the Middle East, which, I hope, seems to be transitioning from onion to honey as more and more people speak and act out against their oppressive governments. But, of course, like the proverb says, you have to take each day as it comes.


ELEVENTH COURSE
ABBASID EDIBLE INSCRIPTION
salted pistachio brittle
honey
black cocoa and black olive
orange
with orange flower water

This dish is part dessert, part art project. The inscription around the rim reads, “Knowledge: it is at first bitter to the taste, but in the end is sweeter than honey.” I couldn’t agree more. Middle and high school for me were fine, but sometimes the competitive suburban public school system in which I came up was toxic and occasionally quite bitter. I didn’t realize the academic hell of high school until I got to Tufts—here was a place where I could choose what I wanted to study (with the exception of the lamentable math requirement), and take courses based on pure interest. Not on AP credit, not on prestige, not on practicality. Studying the things I wanted to study was truly “sweeter than honey,” and it speaks to my experience in high school that two of the main components of my major—art history (visual studies) and Arabic—were not subjects available to me before getting to college.

It is in this mindset that I present an edible manifestation of this inscription, which has been dusted onto the rim of the plate using a specially made stencil. I traced the outline of the plate, and then drew the inscription myself using a thick sharpie to trace. I then cut out the forms with an X-acto knife, and positioned it back over the plate. The dusting is made with black cocoa powder (the same stuff they use for Oreos!) and frozen Moroccan-style oil cured black olives. A strange mixture, to be sure, but black olives pop up in unexpected places in Moroccan cuisine. An occasional foil to the black olive is orange, positioned here in the middle of the plate, dressed simply with a little orange blossom water, and drizzled with a little honey. Perfumed waters like this and rosewater became hugely popular in France during the Middle Ages, but have since waned in popularity there. They are still distilled and used frequently in Morocco, where they pop up in baked goods, and in my favorite preparation—a dash in a glass of sweet green tea. Around the oranges are pieces of pistachio *croquant*, made simply by making caramel and pouring pistachios into it. *Croquant* literally means “crunchy” in French, and it’s important to note that they learned this technique from Arab confectioners, who were far more advanced in the art of sugar manipulation than the Europeans. Pistachios are another one of the foods received enthusiastically by the Europeans upon their introduction there by way of the Arab world. The way to eat this is to start in the middle with an orange segment, and drag it through a little bit of the inscription. The flavor that will hit your tongue first is the bitter unsweetened cocoa and black olive. But then, the sweet orange, honey, and orange blossom water will come out, and the diner will experience the exact sensation referenced by the inscription. The *croquant* is there mostly for texture and added sweetness, but also a bridge between Arab and French cultures.

This plate is based on an actual plate, now in the Louvre, from the 10th century ‘Abbassid pottery

tradition (this particular plate is from Nishapur, in modern-day Iran). It is unclear whether plates like these were used more as ornament or as actual vehicles for serving food, but it's likely that the answer includes both. It's a shame to see orange dragged through the edible inscription, but the real plate is always there at the Louvre for anyone to go and see.

The question of the museum space comes up here, as artifacts from the Arab world tend to be displayed in Western museums like the Louvre more so than museums in their own countries. It is the classic Saidian model of the West representing the Orient, which "cannot represent itself." All of this is starting to change though. The Louvre recently sold its name (for 525 million dollars) (!) to be used for a new "Louvre" originally scheduled to open in Abu Dhabi in 2012.[75] And the Louvre isn't the only museum opening in Abu Dhabi—there's going to be a Guggenheim too, designed by Frank Gehry.[76] As the UAE gets more and more wealthy, they are pulling out all the stops in trying to catch up with the rest of the world's cultural offerings. Critics of the UAE complain that the country has no "culture," so the government is trying to create it.

But does this constitute creating culture? Officials in Abu Dhabi have stated that nothing will be vastly different about the artworks shown at these new museums, and will include contemporary European works from the collections of their Western counterparts, as well as other Western museums.[77] It's a tricky question. The cities of the Gulf States represent a new generation of "global" cities, offering transnational culture heretofore not available in that region, and there's no reason why they shouldn't build new, fancy, expensive museums. But there's still something fishy to me about the Louvre selling their name for $525 million dollars to the government of an Arab Emirate. How do they put a price tag on something like that? The news left a bitter taste in my mouth.

For my final course, I have chosen to pay homage to my favorite piece of visual art I've studied during

75 Riding, Alan. 2007. "The Louvre's Art: Priceless. The Louvre's Name: Expensive." *The New York Times*, March 7, 2007, sec Art & Design.

76 Bharadwaj, Vinita. 2012. "Cultural Jewels In The Gulf." *The New York Times*, March 20, 2012, sec Arts.

77 Riding.


TWELFTH COURSE
“EATING STRUCTURE”
preserved lemon pound cake
lettuce-wrapped
lettuce ice cream
crushed walnuts

my four years at Tufts: Giovanni Anselmo's "*Struttura che mangia*," or, "Eating Structure." It is by far the most architecturally ambitious course of the meal, and perhaps the most conceptual. Anselmo's work focuses on the concept of energy; in his statement "I, The World, Things, Life," he explains that, "…given that energy exists beneath the most varied of appearances and situations, I believe it is vital that there exist the most absolute freedom of choice or of use of materials…" The use of "everyday" materials to create pieces is one of the overarching characteristics of the Arte Povera movement. *Eating Structure* couldn't be a better example of this. In Anselmo's words:

"In *Struttura che mangia* there is a small granite block tied to a larger block (I've had both leveled so as to be perfectly smooth. The smaller block falls to the ground when all the vegetables that are pressed between the two blocks diminish in volume by dehydration. To allow the structure to stand, the vegetables have to be replaced frequently with fresh ones." [78]

A couple interesting questions are brought up with this work. The lettuce, for example, holds a degree of importance that one wouldn't automatically assign to lettuce, especially given the presence of granite blocks in the work. One would think that the structural integrity of the piece lies in the granite, but it's quite the opposite—once the lettuce inevitably starts wilting, the granite goes down with it. Everything, in fact depends on the lettuce. The other issue here is the role of the museum in exhibiting and preserving artwork. Any museum exhibiting *Eating Structure* has to be quite active in looking over the piece—the second that lettuce starts wilting, someone has to come replace it to keep the structure standing. One wonders (or at least I wonder) what happens to the slightly wilted lettuce. I can only hope that the museum workers enjoy a period of abundant salads while this is on view…

My version of *Eating Structure* uses lettuce-wrapped ice cream in the place of lettuce, and two bricks

78 Anselmo, Giovanni. 1999. Artist's Statement [1972]. In *Arte Povera.*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. 233-234. London, EN: Phaidon Press Limited.

of preserved lemon pound cake in place of granite. The ice cream is, of course, lettuce ice cream, and Boston lettuce, at that—a small nod to my own roots. The "soil" underneath is made from crushed walnuts, which grow in abundance in certain areas of the Middle Atlas Mountains. I ate the best walnuts of my life there. A similar energy-based process happens in this dessert—as the ice cream melts (which it inevitably will), it falls, taking the smaller piece of cake down with it into the soil. The difference here is that I will not appear with a fresh scoop—luckily for the diner, the ice cream, cake, and walnut "soil" all complement each other and will be pleasant taken together all at once after the melting process has run its course.

I wanted to end the dinner with this, given its doubly ephemeral nature. Because of the process inherent in the structure, it only exists in its original form briefly, until the ice cream melts, or the lettuce wilts. But I wanted to call into question whether or not meals are, by definition, ephemeral experiences. For me, they aren't at all. The memories, history, and vast web of interconnectedness present in all food remain long after the physical matter has been consumed. In fact, nothing is less ephemeral than a meal.

RECIPES

Hardboiled Egg with Fingerprint

Serves 6

Ingredients

6 Eggs

a pinch of fleur de sel for each egg

a pinch of cumin for each egg

black ink

Method

In a large pot, bring water to boil. Boil the eggs for 7 minutes, or 6 for a soft yolk. Cool. When cool, dip your thumb in black ink and imprint the eggshells. Serve each egg with a pinch of fleur de sel and cumin. To eat, peel the egg and dip in salt and cumin, in whatever order best suits your mood.

Salmorejo and Ajoblanco Arches with Cauliflower, Beets, Eggplant, and Leeks

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

For the ajoblanco

1 cup cubed day-old bread

¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted, if you want

¼ cup olive oil

1 clove garlic

dash of sherry vinegar

salt to taste

water to taste

For the salmorejo

The same as ajoblanco, but with 2 ripe roma tomatoes.

For the cauliflower

¼ head of cauliflower

½ cup water mixed with about half as much corn starch

salt to taste

pimentón de la vera to taste (or other smoked paprika)

neutral oil for deep frying

For the beets

2 red beets, peeled, boiled, chilled, and cubed

1 tablespoon olive oil

dash of orange flower water

orange zest to garnish

For the eggplant

2 small Italian eggplants, bruised and roasted over an open flame, with the flesh scooped out

~2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon pomegranate molasses

salt to taste

For the leeks

1 leek, thinly sliced

flour

neutral oil for deep frying

Method

For the soups

Make the ajoblanco first. Combine bread, almonds, garlic, and half of the olive oil in a blender and blend until combined. Add vinegar, salt, and blend more, adding the rest of the olive oil. Continue to blend and add water until the desired consistency is reached. It should be viscous enough to retain its shape on a plate, like a loose hummus.

Next, make the salmorejo following the same method, but adding tomatoes with the vinegar and salt. Put into separate bowls and into the fridge to chill.

For the cauliflower

Cut the cauliflower in half, and slice with a mandoline. Set aside. Pick small florets from the other half. Dredge in the water/corn starch mixture and deep fry until golden brown, about 5-7 minutes. Remove from oil onto paper towel and salt. Set aside.

For the beets

Combine with olive oil and orange flower water in a mixing bowl. Set aside.

For the eggplant

In a small food processor, combine the eggplant flesh, pomegranate molasses, salt and half the olive oil. Puree, while slowly adding the rest of the oil and salt. Put into bowl and set aside.

For the leeks

Dredge the sliced leeks in flour and deep fry until golden brown. It is OK to use the same oil as for the cauliflower. Set aside onto paper town and salt. Set aside.

To assemble the plate

On a flat plate, create an arch shape with alternating dabs of salmorejo and ajoblanco. Repeat this on another part of the plate. Below the arches, starting from the left: place a layer of sliced raw cauliflower down and top with a few fried florets. Dust with the pimentón. Next, put a spoonful of the beets, and top with orange zest. Next, spoon about a tablespoon of the eggplant, and drizzle with extra pomegranate molasses. Finally, place down a pile of fried leeks. To eat, try each of the vegetables separately. Then, drag a spoon through an arch and taste the soups. Finally, proceed in whatever way seems best for you. It is an attractive presentation, but nothing is "too pretty to eat."

Merguez Pâté with Calligraphic Cabbage and Preserved Lemon Harissa-Mustard

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

For the Pâté

¾ lb ground lamb

¾ lb ground pork

1 small onion, sliced and sautéed

3 cloves garlic, crushed

dash of heavy cream

1 beaten egg

1 teaspoon ground cumin

½ teaspoon fennel seeds

¼ teaspoon ground ginger

1 ½ teaspoons harissa paste

¼ teaspoon ground coriander

dash of ground cinnamon

salt to taste

For the Cabbage

2 small heads of purple cabbage

For the Preserved Lemon Harissa-Mustard

2 tablespoons preserved lemon harissa. Available at Moroccan groceries, and some pan-Arab groceries. Possible to make yourself—consult Mourad Lahlou's book *Mourad* or Paula Wolfert's *The Food of Morocco*. If you can't find Moroccan-style harissa, Tunisian is fine but you will have to combine it with preserved lemon zest in a food processor.

½ tablespoon (or a little more) Dijon mustard.

Lemon zest and fennel seeds for garnish.

Method

For the Pâté

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Boil a teapot's worth of water. Combine everything in a mixing bowl and mix well with your hands. Transfer to a buttered loaf pan and cover tightly with foil. Set in a large baking dish on the lowest oven rack and pour boiling water around it up until halfway. Bake for about an hour and a half, or until the internal temperature registers about 155 degrees. Cool and wrap in clingwrap. When sufficiently cool (or the day after, or two days after), slice in half lengthwise. Using a 3-4" biscuit cutter (or small ring-mold), cut out as many circles as you have guests. *Adapted from Maria Helm Sinskey in Bon Appétit, January 2009*

For the cabbage and condiment

Cut the cabbage in half horizontally, and then as thinly as you can, get as many horizontal slices out of each half as you can. It ends up being 3-4 on most cabbages. The idea is to capture the cross-section pattern. Using a slightly larger biscuit cutter or ring mold (if you don't have one, you can improvise), cut the same amount of circles as you did with the pâté. Combine the harissa and mustard in a small mixing bowl.

To assemble the plate

In a large, shallow bowl, paint a stripe of the harissa mustard across the plate (the rim too) using a pastry brush. Place a circle of cabbage down, and a circle of pâté overlapping slightly on top. Sprinkle the harissa mustard with lemon zest on one side of the pâté and cabbage, and fennel seeds on the other.

"Jambon-Beur"

Serves 6

Ingredients

1 1/3 cups semolina flour plus a little more coarse semolina for cooking the harcha

6 tablespoons softened unsalted butter

1 tablespoon olive oil

1 ½ teaspoons baking powder

1 ½ tablespoons honey

½ cup plus two tablespoons warm strained nepitella (or mint) tea

½ teaspoon salt

6 -12 slices prosciutto or other cured ham

6 pats of Lurpak butter for serving

Method

In a mixing bowl, add the flour, butter, and oil. Using your fingertips, incorporate the butter and oil into the flour. When everything is well combined, add the baking powder and salt and mix. Add the honey and tea and mix into a wet ball. Do not knead. Press down and flatten into the bottom of the bowl and let stand for 10-15 minutes. Meanwhile, dust a skillet with the extra semolina (preferably this is coarse) and set over low-medium heat. Shape the dough into small discs and cook slowly on the skillet, about 8 minutes a side, until golden brown. Serve in a red plastic fast food basket with a slice or two of ham and a pat of butter. Harcha are also delicious with apricot jam.

Recipe for the harcha taken from Paula Wolfert's "The Food of Morocco," p. 116. Full bibliographic citation at the end.

Alphabet Harira

Serves 6

Ingredients

Butter and olive oil to taste

1 onion, diced

1 bunch cilantro, torn

half a 24 oz. can of crushed tomato

1 cup low sodium vegetable stock (plus a little more)

the juice of one lemon

salt to taste

1 tablespoon ground cumin

dash of ground coriander

dash of fake saffron coloring (or turmeric)

6 medjool dates, cut in half lengthwise

Latin and Arabic (if possible) alphabet pasta.

Cilantro and cilantro-mint oil (a cup of warm canola oil plus ½ cup warm olive oil poured over a large handful of cilantro and mint each in a mason jar and steeped overnight) to garnish.

Method

Over medium-high heat, heat enough butter and oil to cover the bottom of a small pot. Use about half as much butter as olive oil. Sautee chopped onions until translucent and add cilantro. Add the tomato, vegetable stock, lemon juice, salt, and spices. Cover and reduce over medium-low heat until relatively thick, about 30-45 minutes.

Using Mourad Lahlou's method, lay out the date halves next to each other on an oiled sheet of clingwrap. Cover in another sheet of clingwrap and pound with a meat tenderizer until you have "date leather." It will be combined in a thin, continuous sheet. Carefully remove clingwrap and cut into small rectangles.

Boil a haldful each of Latin and Arabic alphabet noodles according to manufacturer's instructions.

To assemble the plate, fill a shotglass with warm harira. It should be warmer than lukewarm, but not so hot that it can't be sipped. Place at the far end of a long, rectangular plate. Place a rectangle of date leather leading up to the shotglass, and scatter alphabet noodles from both alphabets around the plate. Drizzle with herb oil and sprinkle with a few torn leaves of cilantro. To eat, take a bite of date with alphabet noodles and herb oil, then a sip of soup with it all still in your mouth, or immediately after. Take note of the letters you don't recognize, and learn them. If you already know them, teach those around you who don't.

Sardine with Ratatouille

Serves 6

Ingredients

6 cans al-sharq brand Moroccan sardines (Use another brand if you can't find al-sharq, but you're not gonna find a more attractive tin. Take out the 6 nicest sardines and reserve the rest to enjoy later on top of a Triscuit with some mustard.)

Enough olive oil to coat the bottom of a tagine or dutch oven

1 onion, sliced

2 small eggplants, diced

1-2 large kousa squashes, diced

1 red bell pepper, diced

4 roma tomatoes, diced

1 tablespoon. herbes de provence

1 teaspoon ground cumin

salt to taste

pepper to taste

Method

Empty and clean the sardine tins thoroughly, remembering again to save the remaining sardines to enjoy on a Triscuit cracker with some mustard. Wheat Thins are fine, but not always sturdy enough.

In a tagine or heavy-bottomed enamel pot, heat the olive oil. Add the eggplant and cover. Cook for 5-10 minutes, until the eggplant starts to soften. Add the onion, kousa squash, bell pepper, and tomato, combine, and cover again.* Cook for 10 more minutes. Add seasonings and cover again, stirring. Cook for another 15 minutes or so, until all the vegetables are cooked and the flavors have combined nicely. Allow to cool and put in the fridge.

To serve, fill a sardine tin with the ratatouille and top with a sardine. The ratatouille is good either chilled or at room temperature.

*In more traditional ratatouille, each vegetable is cooked separately. This is good, but for the purpose of this dish, it's not necessary or worth it.

Escargots Paris-Rabat

Makes roughly two dozen escargots

Ingredients

24 canned large snails (they often come in cans of 12)

24 empty snail shells

1 loaf day-old white bread

17 tablespoons (or about 1 cup) room temperature unsalted butter

1 shallot, thinly sliced

6 cloves garlic, minced

1 handful cilantro stems (not leaves!), chopped

1½ tablespoons dried wormwood

grated licorice root to taste

1 teaspoon absinthe (optional but recommended)

salt and pepper to taste

Method:

Set the oven to 400 degrees. Prepare a baking dish with a layer of salt on the bottom. Put a dab of butter in each shell, then the snail, then seal with a larger dab of butter. Place butter-side-up in the baking dish and bake until the butter is bubbling over, give or take 10 minutes. Meanwhile, cut long, thick, slices of white bread to resemble minarets and sautee them in olive oil and all sides until golden brown. Each guest should have one. To serve, arrange all the snails on a large platter in rows facing one of the crouton "minarets." The remaining minarets should be given to diners separately.

Le Spleen de Rabat

Serves 4

Ingredients

For the brochettes

2 pounds beef liver (or spleen, if you can get it!!)

1 pound caul fat (you might not need it all, but it's always good to have extra)

2 tablespoons ground cumin

1.5 tablespoons sweet paprika

salt to taste

a dash of olive oil

½ cup halved alfonso olives (or other purple olives)

For the toum (makes much more than you need, but it tastes good on everything so will be good to have around):

1 cup garlic

3 handfuls spinach

1 tablespoon salt

3 cups canola oil

the juice of one lemon

Method

For the brochettes

Fire up your grill or, if using a grill pan, take out your grill pan. Cut the liver into large cubes and place in mixing bowl. Add spices and salt and coat thoroughly. Add a little olive oil to help the spices out. The liver should be totally covered in cumin and paprika. Next, cut small squares of the caul fat and carefully wrap each cube of liver in the caul fat. Thread onto small skewers (about four per skewer) and set aside. Grill over high heat for about a minute to a minute and a half per side—the liver needs to be a little pink on the inside.

For the toum

In a food processor, pulse the garlic and salt until it is finely minced. Start the food processor and start slowly

adding the oil and lemon juice, alternating. The entire process should take 5-10 minutes so really go much slower than you feel like you have to or than you want to. When about halfway done, add the spinach, then continue pouring in the oil and lemon juice as it mixes. The mixture should be green and fluffy, the consistency of meringue before it's baked. The key to getting it right is patience.

To assemble the plate, make two swooshes of toum and lay down a brochette in between them. Scatter some olives on the plate and sprinkle a little paprika on the toum for color contrast.

Saffron Stracci with Beef and Prune Ragù

Serves 4

Ingredients

For the pasta

1 cup all purpose flour + a little more

2 eggs

pinch of salt

a little water

a small pinch of fake saffron colorant (turmeric is an OK substitute, but you will have to use more and it does not create the same bright yellow color)

a small pinch of real saffron threads

semolina for dusting

For the ragù

¾ tablespoon butter

¾ tablespoon olive oil

½ pound beef stew meat (shortrib would work, too)

2 large prunes, ripped in half

1 onion, roughly sliced

4 pieces cinnamon bark

¼ teaspoon coriander

½ teaspoon paprika

¼ teaspoon ground ginger

½ teaspoon ground cumin

1 ¾ cup red wine

salt and black pepper to taste

slices of Pecorino Romano cut with a vegetable peeler and sesame seeds for garnish

Method

For the pasta

On a flat work surface, make a well using the flour and drop the eggs and saffron into the well. Beat thoroughly and slowly start to incorporate the flour into the beaten egg with a fork. As the mixture starts to take shape, start using your hands and form into a ball of dough. Add more flour or water as needed to reach the desired consistency. Pass through a pasta machine, dusting with semolina, until you have long, thin sheets. Pasta machines have different settings, but this is usually until the number "7." Fold the dough over itself at number "3." Cut the sheets haphazardly with a pizza slicer and arrange on a plate with plenty of semolina to keep from sticking. Boil in salted water for about 3 minutes, until they float to the top.

For the ragù

Melt the butter and oil a tagine or heavy-bottomed enamel pot over medium-high heat. In a mixing bowl, combine the beef with the coriander, paprika, ginger, cumin, and salt. When the butter and oil are hot, add the beef and sear on all sides until browned. Halfway through, add the onions. When the beef is seared, add the wine and cinnamon bark and bring to a boil. If using a tagine, DO NOT COVER the mixture at this point, as the alcohol will burn off and start a fire under the lid of the tagine and it's a surprise you don't want when you open the lid again. Use caution anyway if covering and using a pot or Dutch oven. When boiling, set to low, cover, and cook for about an hour, turning intermittently. Add the prunes, then cook for an additional half hour to hour, turning the beef once or twice, until the meat is extremely tender and the wine is reduced. Transfer to a mixing bowl and pull the beef, mixing with the now-disintegrated prunes and onions, to form a ragù.

To serve, put a mount of pasta in the center of a bowl and top with ragù, a few shavings of Pecorino, a sprinkle of sesame seeds, and a drizzle of olive oil.

Yom 'Asl, Yom Basl

Serves 4

Ingredients

For the raw onion, honeycomb, and caramelized onion

2 yellow onions

1 ten ounce (.62 pound) brick of raw honeycomb

1 teaspoon butter

2 teaspoons sugar

2 teaspoons water

a handful of raisins

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon sumac

4 pieces of onion skin and a black sharpie

For "onion glass" (this will make more than you need, but it is fun to have around. halve if you don't want extra)

3 yellow onions

¼ cup plus 1 teaspoon liquid glucose (or about a third that amount of light karo syrup)

¼ cup water

3 tablespoons agave nectar

¾ teaspoon salt

Method

For "onion glass"

Set oven to the lowest possible temperature. Combine the onions, glucose, water, agave nectar, and salt in a pot and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer the mixture until almost dry, about 20 minutes. Transfer to a blender and puree until silky smooth. Strain into a metal bowl and cool. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Use an offset spatula to spread the onion mixture on a silpat set on a baking sheet. Bake for two hours. Cool and loosen from silpat. Break into shards and set aside.

For everything else

Slice the onions. Reserve half. In a small pot over medium-high heat, melt the butter and add the onions. Sweat for a minute, then add the cinnamon, sugar, water, and raisins and cook down on medium until caramelized, about 10-15 minutes. Take off heat and set aside to cool. Combine the rest of the sliced onion with sumac. Cut the honeycomb into small circles with biscuit cutters, ring molds, or other small circular objects. Write "yom 'asl, yom basl" in Arabic on a piece of onion skin (refer to photo) with black sharpie. To assemble the plate, place the honeycomb in the middle, then a ring of raw onion with sumac, then a ring of caramelized onion, and finally scattered shards of onion glass.

Edible Inscription

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

For the inscription and oranges

1 stick butter, for buttering

~2 cups (give or take) black cocoa powder

½ cup dehydrated or frozen Moroccan style oil-cured black olives

3 large navel oranges

½ teaspoon orange flower water

1 tablespoon honey

For the pistachio brittle

1 cup sugar

¼ cup water

½ cup pistachios

1 teaspoon heavy cream

pinch of coarse sea salt

Method

To make a stencil of the inscription:

On Photoshop, blow up the image of the original plate to be slightly smaller in diameter than the size of your plate. Isolate each half and print out separately. Tape the two pieces of paper together to create the whole plate , then over a lightbox, trace the inscription onto a large sheet of acetate with a thick sharpie. Using an x-acto knife, cut out the inscription. This is pretty involved, but for the motivated stencil-maker, it's actually not that difficult.

For the brittle

In a small pot over high heat, boil the sugar and water until it turns amber, about 10 minutes. Add the pistachios and stir. Add the cream and continue stirring. Pour onto a silpat set on a baking sheet and spread into a think layer as quickly as possible. Sprinkle with salt and leave to harden. When cooled (about an hour), remove from silpat and break into pieces in a variety of sizes.

For the oranges

Cut the oranges into suprèmes into a mixing bowl: with a pairing knife, cut off each end and then the peel. Carefully cut each section separately by slicing inwards towards the center on either side of each section until the whole orange is done, being wary of seeds. Mix with the orange flower water.

To assemble the plate

Butter the rim of the plate where the inscription will end up. Without this step, it won't stick. Set down the stencil and make sure it is flat. Put the black cocoa into a handheld sifter and, using a microplane, grate in some dehydrated or frozen black olive. Carefully sift the black cocoa/olive mixture over the stencil until every area is covered. VERY CAREFULLY remove the stencil—it will almost never come out absolutely perfect and that's okay. Place a small dot of black olive at the very center of the plate. Arrange 6-7 of the orange segments in a circle inside the inscription. Punctuate the orange segments with a few pieces of the brittle, some standing upright and some resting on the orange. Drizzle some of the honey over the oranges and brittle, taking care not to get any on the inscription. To eat, take an orange segment and dip it in the inscription so that the taste mirrors the wise words of the inscription: first bitter, then sweeter than honey.

Eating Structure

Makes 4-6 structures and about a pint of ice cream

Ingredients

For the preserved lemon pound cake:

2 cups sifted cake flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1 cup sugar

2 sticks softened unsalted butter

4 large eggs, at room temperature

½ teaspoon lemon juice

the zest of half a preserved lemon, chopped (or slightly more)

¼ cup chopped walnuts (for garnish at the end)

twine

For the lettuce ice cream

2 cups whole milk

5 egg yolks

1 cup heavy cream

¾ cup sugar

4-5 leafs boston lettuce, plus more for wrapping

salt to taste

Method

For the cake

Set oven to 325 degrees In a mixer, mix the sugar and preserved lemon zest on a low speed until the zest is well incorporated. Add butter and mix on a high speed until the mixture is fluffy. Set to medium speed and slowly add the eggs one by one, then the lemon juice. When combined, set to a low setting and add flour slowly until totally incporated into a dough. Pour into a 4.5 x 8.5" baking dish and bake until a stick comes out clean when inserted into the middle and the outside is a beautiful golden brown and your kitchen smells incredible, about 1 hour – 1 hour and 15 minutes. *Recipe adapted from Ruth Cousineau in Gourmet, January 2008.*

For the ice cream

In a medium pot over medium-high heat, heat the milk, cream, and sugar, being careful not to let it come close to a boil. You want it simply to be warmed up. Meanwhile, separate the egg yolks into a mixing bowl. When the milk and cream are warm, slowly whisk the mixture into the egg yolks. When incorporated, pour back into the original pot and set on low. Add the lettuce and simmer until the mixture coats the back of a spoon, about 15-20 minutes. Take off the heat and continue to steep the lettuce for an additional 10 or so minutes. Remove the lettuce, strain, and cool. Put into the fridge, and when cold, put through an ice cream machine following the manufacturer's instructions.

To assemble the structures:

Using a serrated knife, trim off the beautiful, delicious top of the pound cake and set aside or eat. Cut 4 roughly 3 x 1.5” rectangles and 4 1 x 1 x 1” cubes of cake. Lay one of the rectangles on its back. Scoop a tiny sphere of ice cream and wrap in excess lettuce. Carefully place near the top of the rectangle, and then top with one of the cubes. Using twine, secure the cube to the rectangle, and stand the structure up. If it does not stand up, either the scoop of ice cream is too large, the rectangle is too short, or the cube is too big. You may have to play around to get the ratios right, but it is not difficult. When your structure is standing, put a small handful of chopped walnuts under the ice cream, and allow the ice cream to melt, causing the smaller cube to fall into the walnuts, along with the ice cream. Then you may eat it. The length of this process will vary depending on how long your ice cream has been out.

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the original abbasid insciption plate:

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the last photo taken of my by a friend in morocco