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## FOOD AND FOODWAYS OF THE MAGHREBIAN DIASPORA IN TURKEY: IDENTITY, BELONGING, AND INTEGRATION

Asma HEDİ NAİRİ<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey is a significant and understudied population. This research investigates the role of food and foodways in expressing cultural identity, belonging, and integration for Maghrebian migrants residing in Turkey for more than a decade. Using a qualitative research methodology and semi-structured interviews with Tunisian, Algerian, Moroccan, and Libyan migrants, the study examines how food practices shape their sense of belonging and identity in Turkish society. The study finds that food serves as a tool for coping with homesickness, connecting with cultural heritage, and preserving memories of the past. It also reveals the importance of food practices in maintaining a sense of belonging to the broader society, including the family back home and the diasporic community in Turkey, and promoting

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cultural exchange between the Maghrebian community and Turkish society, thus facilitating the integration process. This study provides important insights into the ways in which food and foodways play a significant role in diaspora community formation and integration.

**Keywords:** food, foodways, diaspora, Maghrebian diaspora, Turkey

# TÜRKİYE'DEKİ MAĞRİP DİASPORASININ YEMEK VE YEMEK YOLLARI: KİMLİK, AİDİYET VE BÜTÜNLEŞME

## Öz

Türkiye'deki Mağrip diasporası önemli ve az çalışılmış bir nüfustur. Bu araştırma, on yıldan fazla bir süredir Türkiye'de ikamet eden Mağripli göçmenler için kültürel kimliği, aidiyeti ve entegrasyonu ifade etmede yemek ve yemek yollarının rolünü araştırıyor. Nitel bir araştırma metodolojisi ve Tunuslu, Cezayirli, Faslı ve Libyalı göçmenlerle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler kullanan bu çalışma, Türk toplumunda gıda uygulamalarının aidiyet ve kimlik duygularını nasıl şekillendirdiğini inceliyor. Çalışma, yemeğin vatan hasretiyle başa çıkmak, kültürel mirasla bağlantı kurmak ve geçmişin hatıralarını korumak için bir araç olarak hizmet ettiğini ortaya koyuyor. Ayrıca, Türkiye'deki aile ve diasporik topluluk da dahil olmak üzere daha geniş bir topluma ait olma duygusunu sürdürmede ve Mağrip topluluğu ile Türk toplumu arasındaki kültürel alışverişi teşvik etmede ve böylece entegrasyon sürecini kolaylaştırmada yemek uygulamalarının önemini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, gıda ve yemek yollarının diaspora topluluğu oluşumu ve entegrasyonunda nasıl önemli bir rol oynadığına dair önemli bilgiler sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** yemek, yemek kültürleri, diaspora, Mağrip diaspora, Türkiye

# Introduction

The prevalence of an African diaspora in Turkey has witnessed a notable surge in recent decades, owing to the transformative interplay of socio-economic and political forces, along with Turkey's astute foreign policy and diplomatic involvement in the Middle East, Africa, and North Africa. Particularly following the Arab spring, Turkey assumed a proactive stance in the region, cultivating a compelling reputation that exerted a magnetic pull on the migration patterns from North Africa towards its shores.

Indeed, while comprehensive official data remains elusive, estimates suggest that approximately 100,000 North African nationals currently reside legally in Turkey. According to formal indicators from the Turkish government, Libyan nationals account for 24,296 individuals, supplemented by a further estimated 6,796 Moroccans who reside in Turkey via family residency permits due to marriages with Turkish citizens. In addition, there are 19,365 Egyptian citizens who have established their presence in the country under the short-term residency permit category, providing further evidence of the substantial North African community in Turkey (Directorate of Immigration Management, 2023). Considering the significant presence of North African and Maghrebian communities in Turkey, a thorough exploration and analysis of their cultural and social dynamics is essential. This is particularly important due to the shared historical and cultural connections between North Africa and Turkey that trace back to the Ottoman period. The existing bond, further reinforced by shared religious identities, necessitates a focused examination of the Maghrebian community, which is the primary subject of interest in this context. The richness of their experiences and their integration into Turkish society present invaluable opportunities for academic inquiry, particularly with regards to the preservation and adaptation of their cultural heritage and identity.

The significance of this community notwithstanding, comprehensive research probing the culinary practices and foodways of the Maghrebian diaspora within a Turkish context remains markedly scant. This academic lacuna can be partially attributed to the prevalence of various other diasporic groups, along with the substantial presence of Syrian refugee community in the country. This dynamic has inclined researchers to concentrate primarily on the exploration of Syrian culinary traditions and practices in Turkey (Hudson, 2019, Karyelioğlu, 2021; Şahin & Elbeyli, 2022).

With the aim of addressing this scholarly gap, our research endeavor sets out to enrich both the discourse on African studies within Turkey and the inquiry of the migratory narratives of the Maghrebian community. As part of this pursuit, our study underscores the pivotal role that food and foodways play in shaping the narratives of integration and identity within the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey.

While there is a dearth of existing research on the experiences of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey, a substantial body of scholarship has examined the significance and role of food and food practices among this community settled in Europe, particularly in France and in Italy. The Maghrebian diaspora in France has been a subject of scholarly inquiry for decades, with research covering a range of topics, including the role of food in cultural integration and heritage maintenance. In particular, Wagda Marin's anthropological work explores the significance of couscous in the lives of Maghrebian migrants in France, revealing its historical roots and symbolic importance as a bridge between Maghrebian migrants and their cultural heritage (Wagda, 1997). Other scholars, such as Sylvie Durmelat and Krista M. Guy, have also explored the role of Maghrebian food in expressing belonging, heritage, and identity highlighting the crucial role of food in the lives of Maghrebian migrants in France (Durmelat, 2015. Guy, 2010). Academic research in Italy has also focused on changes in the food and foodways of the Maghrebian diaspora over the decades, exploring intergenerational aspects and the impact of assimilation (Sercia & Girard, 2010).

These existing studies fundamentally illustrate how food emerges as a significant arena for cultural negotiation and identity formation among Maghrebian diasporic communities in Europe and elsewhere. A striking aspect of this body of scholarship is the emphasis it places on the influence of the colonial past and the enduring memory of colonization in shaping food and food practices as a means of preserving cultural identity. Each of these studies accentuates the colonial history and the conspicuous cultural divergences between Maghrebian and European societies as influential elements in the experiences of the Maghrebian diaspora, which prominently include their food customs and rituals. This compelling insight subsequently provokes inquiries about the experiences of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey, particularly considering the mutual religious identity and socio-cultural affinities between Turkish and Maghrebian societies, coupled with the absence of a colonial past.

Hence, in this work, we aim to investigate the role of food and foodways for the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey using a qualitative research methodology and based on semi-structured interviews conducted with Tunisian, Algerian, Moroccan and Libyan migrants residing in Turkey for more than a decade. Referencing the studies on migrant food and foodways, this work aims to understand how do Maghrebian migrants in Turkey use food and foodways to express their cultural identity, sense of belonging, and to assist their integration in the host society.

While shedding the light on the significant presence of the African and Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey, we aim first to explain the specificity and sorts of the Maghrebian food and foodways in diaspora and secondly, we delve into the significance of food as a diasporic object for the Maghrebian community in Turkey. For this purpose, we investigate the connection between diaspora and food focusing on how food practices play

a role in shaping the sense of belonging, the expression of identity, and the diasporic experience of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey.

This study is novel as it addresses a gap in current research by examining Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey, an understudied population. Specifically, it offers a qualitative preliminary analysis of the ways in which foodways are maintained and transformed in this diasporic context, expanding our theoretical understanding of how food can function as a symbolic expression of belonging and identity as well as a reflection of the integration as a diasporic experience.

## Theoretical Background: Migration, Food and Foodways in The Diaspora

Migration is a complex human experience that necessitates a multidisciplinary approach for studying and researching the diverse facets of human behavior and practices in its frame. The process of migration and resettling in new environments within the diaspora can result in changes and developments in different aspects of groups and individuals' lives, such as identity, language, social relationships, and culture. As a result, food, being an essential element of human culture and civilization, has become a focal point for academic considerations in this context and has been a subject of research to study the migration and diasporic experiences (Mintz, 2008).

Food as an exclusive human behavior (Lévi-Strauss, 1978) is of a certain significance and provides rich insights on human and social experiences. The way that people from different cultural groups eat and prepare food can reflect their diversity, social hierarchy, and organization, while simultaneously emphasizing their similarities and differences. According to Fischler (1988), we learn the cultural rules of food and eating from an early age, before we acquire language and without even being aware of it, until we encounter other cultures. Abrahams (1984: 20) explains that we unconsciously act out ethnic or regional identity in our homes by eating certain foods prepared in specific ways, and only become aware of the process when we are exposed to alternative foodways and have to make a conscious choice.

Migration is a transformative experience that expands individuals' awareness and imbues food and food practices with new dimensions, transcending their nutritional aspects. Instead, food becomes a powerful medium for expressing identity and carrying profound cultural meanings. The way food and food practices travel, change, and evolve along the pathway of migration and as a result to the diasporic experience have been widely discussed. Investigating this, the scholarly discourse employs the terms "foodways" and "food habits" to encapsulate a wide spectrum of activities, rituals, and beliefs associated with the production, distribution, procurement, preparation, and consumption of food. These concepts establish an

anthropological foundation for interpreting food as a cultural practice, functioning at both community and domestic scales (Counihan, 1999; Germov & Williams, 1999).

In the realm of classifying migrant food, the field of food studies encompasses several conceptual frameworks, including ethnic food (Verbeke & Poquiqui López, 2005), comfort food (Abdullah, 2016), and food of home. However, the selection of these conceptual frameworks may vary based on the research objectives and the specific migrant groups under investigation. In light of the characteristics of the sample studied in this research, we choose to designate the culinary creations of Maghrebians migrants as 'food of home', given that the food and foodways of the Maghrebians diaspora in Turkey do not necessarily align with a distinct ethnic identity, and that participants in this study did not describe it as comfort food, but instead it is consistently associated with the notion of home. Therefore, framing the food and foodways of the Maghrebians diaspora in Turkey under the concept of 'food of home' is more fitting. This terminology reflects the deep-seated connection between the cuisine of the Maghrebians diaspora and their sense of belonging, nostalgia, and familiarity with their places of origin. By employing the concept of 'food of home,' we acknowledge the significance of these culinary practices as symbolic markers of cultural heritage, ancestral traditions, and a means of preserving a sense of identity and rootedness within a transnational context.

Previous research, conducted with diverse diasporic groups worldwide, has shown the crucial significance of food and foodways for individuals and groups, particularly in relation to identity, belonging, and integration (Petridou, 2001). In fact, food as a cultural phenomenon (Parasecoli, 2014) plays a significant role in the formation and maintenance of identity, both at the individual and group level, particularly for communities in the diaspora.

Starting with the individual level, food and foodways related experiences are 'the most immediate and idiosyncratic' (Parasecoli, 2014). Each migrant would have a different perception and practice of food resulted of his or her personal experience back home, gender, believes, lifestyle and economic conditions, and in his or her new environment. According to Charon Cardona (2004), preserving previous food habits and customs is a crucial element in the formation and reconstruction of an ethnic identity for migrants. In addition, cooking and eating traditional foods from their homeland serves as a symbolic and cultural link to their country of origin. Feelings of sadness or homesickness that may accompany cooking and eating can be identified as a nostalgic experience which "is always already predetermined in scripting migrant attachment to the past" (Mannur, 2011, p.12). Further, Hage (1997) suggests that migrants use nostalgic feelings that arise during food production and consumption as a means of constructing a sense of home. This is not because migrants are constantly longing for their homeland and neglecting their new surroundings, but rather as a way of creating a stable foundation for dealing with the challenges of their

new environment. Hence, food and foodways may be a sort of coping with nostalgic feelings for some individuals.

In addition to these feelings, migrants in new environment may encounter fears and anxieties as a result of the constant exposure to the otherness. As a response, "While easing the anxieties (...) communal practices such as food preparation, shopping, and celebratory meals simultaneously strengthen a sense of belonging through specific ingredients, dishes, and practices from the migrants' place of origin"(Parasecoli, 2014, p.420).

In fact, as suggested by Fischler "Food and cuisine are a quite central component of the sense of collective belonging" (Fischler, 1988), establishing the symbolic value of food as central to this sense of identity and belonging. From a collective stand, and in the context of the diaspora, food is used as a tool to gather and to celebrate the groups' heritage, culture, and identity among diasporic community members (Vallianatos & Raine 2008; Sutton 2001). Same-group migrants organize food-centered gatherings helping to build a community, establish belonging in the diaspora, and maintain cultural practices and traditions. Food in this context serves as "a placeholder for marking cultural distinctiveness and as a palliative for dislocation" (Mannur, 2014, p.14) and a marker of community affiliation (Vallianatos & Raine. 2008). Thus, both from an individual and a collective stance, food and foodways seem to have a symbolic yet critical power as "They connect those who share them, confirm the eaters' identities as individuals or as part of a collective"(Parasecoli, 2014, p.420).

The way food is included in the migrants' lives and relations, reflects not only the personal feelings and the groups' dynamics, but also talk about the diasporic experience. As migrants navigate the challenges of adapting to new environments and cultural contexts, food and foodways may play a significant role in their integration process while making sense of the new environment and building along social relationships. This assumption is strongly supported by the fact that food serves as a medium of communication (Stajcic, 2013) allowing migrants to connect with the host community and facilitate the exchange of cultural traditions. In previous research conducted by Duan Ying about the Chinese foodways in Mandalay, he explained how sharing ethnic Chinese food in rituals and ceremonies with the host community, considering specific cultural norms such as not offering roasted pig as it was in conflict to the beliefs of the Cantonese people in Mandalay (Ying, 2011). Therefore, food and foodways not only facilitate integration by creating opportunities for social interactions while sharing and offering food, but they may also undergo specific modifications in the diaspora due to new social norms and traditions of the hosting communities. This would be particularly relevant in situations where migrants have social, religious, and cultural attributes that differ from those of the host community. Although, in this case study, there are several religious, social, and cultural similarities between the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey- notably exemplified by their shared Islamic

religious identity and the historical interconnectedness during the Ottoman period- it is still worthwhile to explore how Maghrebian food and foodways may evolve through interaction with Turkish culture.

## Methodology Of the Research and Data Analysis

Qualitative narrative analysis is a method focused on interpreting and analyzing the stories and personal experiences shared by study participants (Polkinghorne, 1995). This approach enables researchers to delve into complex phenomena through the perspectives of the individuals directly involved. The emphasis on personal stories and lived experiences offers rich, detailed insights that enrich our understanding of real-life experiences and the meanings ascribed to them. This methodology has been of particular interest in the field of migration, refugee, and diaspora studies, where personal narratives often reveal the nuanced interplay of individual, cultural, and societal factors (Christou, 2011).

In this context, this article employs a qualitative narrative research approach to scrutinize the role and function of food and foodways within the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey. While the North African region typically includes six countries (Egypt and Sudan included), this study focuses on individuals from four specific nationalities: Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. This group of participants presents a preliminary exploration of the broader Maghrebian diaspora, and henceforth in this article, the term "Maghrebian diaspora" will refer to individuals from these four countries residing in Turkey.

A criterion sampling was implemented to select the participants to this research (Byrne, 2011). Participants were selected based on two main criteria: being a Maghrebian citizen first, and secondly, residing in Turkey for more than a decade. The participants in this research were reached by means of the researcher's personal network being a member of the Maghrebian migrant in Turkey. In this frame, the researcher has conducted different home-based visits to the participants and took part in three different Maghrebian diaspora gatherings in Turkey which, besides of the authors' own experiences as a member of this diaspora, have helped in establishing an understanding of the utility of food and foodways in the Maghrebian diasporic experience in Turkey.

Following this, the qualitative research and principal data and testimonies analyzed in this work was collected through conducting nine semi-structured interviews online between May 2022 and October 2022. Five participants are female, and the rest are male. The interviewees are from four Maghrebian countries: four from Tunisia, two from Algeria, two from Morocco, and one from Libya. While some of them came for educative purpose, others came to Turkey as workers or to join a significant other and start a family. In fact, four of the participants are married to Turkish nationals, which was a chance to receive insights in relation

to the role of food in their intercultural marriages and within their closer and frequent interactions with the Turkish society. (Annex 1)

During the interviews, a variety of topics were discussed due to the nature of the subject matter, and a substantial portion of the conversation was not directly related to food or food practices. For instance, participants shared personal memories about their migration experience or life in the diaspora, which, while important, were not directly related to the topic of investigation. Hence, in order to focus on the segments that were most relevant to the research question, thematic transcription methodology was employed in the data analysis phase.

This research employs a thematic narrative analysis to explore the significance and use of food and foodways among the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey. The findings highlight the important role of food practices in individual experiences, collective diasporic dynamics, and inter-community interactions. Specifically, the study demonstrates that food serves as a tool for coping with homesickness, connecting with cultural heritage, and preserving memories of the past. It also reveals the importance of food practices in maintaining a sense of belonging to the broader society, including the family back home and the diasporic community in Turkey. Additionally, the results indicate the crucial role of food in promoting cultural exchange between the Maghrebian community and Turkish society, thus facilitating the integration process. To start with, we begin by analyzing the role of food and foodways in the Maghrebian migrants' lived experiences in and within the diaspora.

## Food's Role in Maghrebian Migrants' Lives and Experiences:

Food is a vital aspect of our daily lives, going beyond mere nutrition and fulfilling individual needs. In the context of the diaspora, it takes on an even greater significance. In this chapter, we explore the role of food in the personal lives and experiences of Maghrebian individuals living in Turkey and gather their accounts on what the food of home means to them.

To begin with, all the participants in this study, assured that they had in the moment, foods, food objects, ingredients, and even pre-cooked dishes they brought from home to Turkey, or they received as a gift from a friend or a family member coming to visit. After visiting their home country, Maghrebian migrants often return laden with food:

*In my first years in Turkey, my mother and aunts used to prepare Algerian food especially the traditional dishes that I couldn't be able to prepare in the dormitory, they put it in conserves, force me to take it on the plane or send it with whoever comes to Turkey (...) My mother would prepare kilos of Zrir and made me promise that I would eat from it each morning, she wanted to make sure that I get nutrition and I don't skip breakfast, so she selected what she thought was the most nutritional and rich food in the Algerian kitchen (...)(Ameera, July 2022)*

Ameera told us how her mother and family back home prepared food to ensure that their daughter gets nutrition. Her mother would prepare Zrir and make her promise to eat it each morning. In fact, Zrir is a paste commonly found in Maghrebian countries that contains a mixture of nuts, honey, and butter. It is highly nutritious and traditionally prepared and served to women during the postpartum period to aid in their recovery after childbirth and it is as well an expensive food. Ameera's mother tried to ensure taking care of her daughter even when she is faraway. Hence, Preparing and sending food to family members in the diaspora is an act of care and love, expressing affection and ensuring good nutrition, as noted by Coe (2011).

Similar to Ameera, other participants also reported bringing food from home and incorporating their traditional cuisine into their diet while living in Turkey. When asked if they consistently consume food from their home country, the participants answered by referring to the necessity of specific food or food objects as an identity marker. For instance, Khaled said that "you can't be a Tunisian if you don't have Harissa home" and Sihem told us joking: "if a Moroccan woman doesn't have a Tajin pot in her house, means one of two things, either she is not a Moroccan, or she is not woman".

These quotes show how Maghrebian migrants in Turkey see the presence and consumption of certain foods, and the use of specific food and kitchen items, is a part of their identity. They reflect how food can serve as a tangible representation of one's cultural heritage and a means of expressing that identity. For Khaled, Harissa -a very famous traditional Tunisian sauce- is a condition of being a Tunisian. By suggesting that a Moroccan woman who does not have a Tajin pot in her house is not truly Moroccan, Sihem highlights the importance of a specific authentic food objects in defining not only one's national and cultural identity but also the gender identity as perceived back home in relation to specific socio-cultural norms and gendered roles. This point pertains to the role of women in preserving food, food-related culture, and practices in the diaspora as "Women are likely to be in charge of cultural reproduction through food, trying to meet expectations that certain dishes and meals maintain similarities with preexisting customs" (Parasecoli, 2014).

Although, while all the participants shared that they had frequent access to food of home, living in a new country still can present a number of challenges for migrants, including difficulties in accessing specific

types of food including perishable foods. For example, even in countries like Turkey, which boasts a rich variety of dairy products, it can be challenging for Maghrebians migrants to find specific items that are important to their cultural traditions. For example, as one Tunisian migrant explains:

*I can't find Rayeb, which is a very specific Tunisian fermented milk, different than other products available in Turkey like Kefir or Ayran. For me it is a challenging situation, and it is even harder in Ramadan, because drinking Rayeb for Iftar is one of the Tunisian habits and without it Ramadan misses something, a very important taste and tradition. (Khaled, June 2022)*

As Khaled's experience with the Tunisian fermented milk Rayeb illustrates, the absence of certain foods can be felt particularly keenly during important cultural and religious events such as Ramadan. These challenges can lead to feelings of disconnection from one's cultural traditions and can make it difficult to maintain one's dietary habits. However, many migrants have developed creative strategies for accessing the foods and ingredients that are important to them. Khaled for instance explained how he started searching on internet and learned to prepare Rayeb alone in his home especially in Ramadan. Another Tunisian participant, Rahma mentioned that -when out of Harissa- she would use the Turkish Çemen and pepper paste, add to them some Tunisian ingredients and try to make it taste like Harissa. Hence these challenges become rather an opportunity for creativity and resourcefulness, as well as a means of preserving and celebrating cultural heritage.

Building on Khaled's expression, certain foods can take on added religious significance, serving as markers of the religious identity and a reminder of an authentic ambience related to the migrants' previous life back home. In this case, we observed that Maghrebians migrants give more importance to preparing these foods:

*Tunisian food is generally very hard to prepare and takes hours of time, but I still find myself spending hours in the kitchen to prepare 'Djerbian rice' or 'couscous'(...) I feel like being home while preparing our food, and whenever I miss my mother, I would go and prepare one of her favorite dishes (..) In Ramadan I will for sure prepare Tunisian food every day, it is Ramadan you know!*

- So it is more important for you to prepare Tunisian food during Ramadan?

- Not only Ramadan but also other different religious events, like I usually prepare Assidat Zgougou in the Mouled (...) I remember home, my childhood, my mother and I just cry... not because I am sad, but because I miss my home and my family and while I make our food, I have pictures from home running in my mind, it is like daydreaming (...) few times my husband caught me crying and I would just tell him that it is because of onions. (Wiem, June 2022.)

This quote reveals key insights. First, it highlights the shared experience among all participants in putting significant time and effort into preparing their traditional Maghrebian foods, despite the fact that it can be a challenging and time-consuming process (Giovin, 2014). Second, it offers a specific example of the importance of specific foods and foodways who are related to specific religious events. While acknowledging the practical challenges of preparing Maghrebian cuisine, Wiem continues to prioritize it, particularly during religious and festive occasions such as Ramadan and Mouled (the celebration of the prophet's birthday). Through the act of preparing food, migrants are able to maintain a connection to their cultural and religious identity. Further, for some of them preparing specific dishes is a part of the religious practice.

Another important insight revealed by Wiem's expression is in relation to the emotional connection that individuals can have with the food of home and how related practices can be used as a coping mechanism dealing with homesickness and nostalgia. Wiem's response reveals that preparing Tunisian food is not just a task or a hobby, but a powerful trigger of memories and emotions associated with home and family. The act of cooking and the sensory experience of the food may transport individuals back to their childhood and homeland, providing them with a sense of comfort and connection. However, this emotional connection can also lead to feelings of sadness and longing for the familiar surroundings of home. As the participant's response suggests, the act of crying while cooking can be a way of releasing pent-up emotions and memories associated with home, a behavior that was investigated in the food studies literature (Sutton, 2001; Wansink, 2003).

It's worth noting that every individual may have unique behaviors and coping mechanisms when it comes to using their cultural foods to deal with homesickness and nostalgia while living in the diaspora. For instance, while Wiem may choose to reveal her feelings crying while preparing Tunisian foods as a way of connecting with her homeland, Sihem takes a different approach by sharing her food and cultural traditions with others in her new environment:

*(...) One of the things I love doing, is preparing Moroccan traditional sweets for Bayram and sending a plate to all my neighbors.*

*- This is very kind, why do you do this? Is it a tradition? (Researcher)*

*- Yes, it is a very old tradition, and it makes me feel like I was in Morocco, it helps me feel less sad for being away of my family and home during Bayram. When I prepare the Moroccan sweets, the same we prepared back in Marrakesh, and share them with my neighbors like we do in Morocco, it helps me go through this nostalgia and instead of crying alone I have beautiful moments of sharing with my neighbors (...). (Sihem, May 2022)*

Sihem's practice of preparing Moroccan traditional sweets for Bayram and sharing them with her neighbors is a way to connect with her homeland and culture. By preparing the sweets in the same way they were made back in Marrakesh and sharing them with her neighbors as she would in Morocco, Sihem is able to recreate a sense of community and belonging in her new environment. This practice allows her to replace feelings of sadness and potential tears with moments of joy and cultural exchange. This highlights the importance of food and foodways as a tool to cope with homesickness and connect with her cultural roots. Additionally, it reveals that food practices can be a way to adapt and navigate the challenges of living in a new country while still maintaining connections to one's homeland and culture. Often, this connection can be built over remembering a place, a moment and also a special family member:

*(...) I kept my promise and eating Zrir was like saying good morning to Mama and now, after we lost her, I still bring it from home (referring to Algeria) and eat Zrir every morning... (Ameera, July 2022)*

Another insight from Ameera's story is related to how food and eating becomes more significant throughout the migration experience. After the death of her mother, purchasing Zrir, bringing it from Algeria, and keeping the habit of eating it every morning is representative of how food and foodways have additional symbolic meanings for the migrants in the diaspora. Life events happening and affecting individuals when they are away from home, adds significance to specific rituals, objects, traditions... and in this case losing her mother added a deep meaning to what may look like a normal dish. Hence, food is a way for migrants to maintain a connection to their past, families, and the memory of special ones and to have a taste of home (Raman, 2011).

While individual practices and uses of food may vary, preparing food from one's homeland in the diaspora is first an identity marker and also a coping mechanism for migrants to deal with complex emotions related to the migration experience. It allows individuals to engage in a practice of remembering, as it provides a tangible connection to their cultural heritage and serves as a way of preserving traditional practices and protecting their sense of belonging.

Although, the role of traditional food extends beyond individual emotional coping mechanisms, reaching out to the broader diasporic community gatherings, thereby strengthening collective identity, and fostering a shared sense of belonging. Transitioning from the personal experiences and individual practices

surrounding food, in the next chapter we venture into its communal implications, examining how culinary traditions serve as a collective identity marker and symbol of belonging within the diaspora.

## A Diasporic Community Practice and A Proof of Belonging:

Food of home is an essential element in the community gatherings in the diaspora, as it helps to evoke memories that may otherwise be disconnected from current experiences and social relations, food facilitates cultural preservation and the continuation of traditions (Lambek, 1998). Like different other communities, Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey establishes diasporic social networks fostering a sense of belonging that is expressed in different modalities and through different tools including food and foodways.

In this sense, one of our participants described the gatherings of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey describing how food is an important element reminding them of home:

*We try to gather as much as possible, I organized two gatherings in my home. Tunisians, Algerians, Libyans... all the Maghrebian friends in our school are invited, I try to prepare enough food but also everyone brings something and prepare a traditional dish or bring sweets from home, (...) we always have these debates about the best couscous in the region (...) we open our music, we talk in our dialect, if it is Bayram we wear our traditional clothes (..) I love these gatherings it makes me feel like a child in his safe home. (Abdullah, July 2022)*

The participant describes organizing gatherings with other Maghrebian friends, where everyone brings food, and they share their own traditional dishes. This illustrates how food can serve as a way of connecting with others who share a similar cultural background, even when living in a different country. This quote highlights the important role that food and foodways play in maintaining connections and fostering a sense of community for Maghrebian diaspora from one side, The quote also emphasizes the social aspect of food, as these gatherings provide an opportunity for the participants to come together, talk, and share their experiences in their own dialects.

Also food and foodways for the Maghrebian diaspora are among the tools used in maintaining connections with cultural heritage and the role it plays in bridging the gap between the diaspora and their home countries. Bringing food of home to these gatherings, is an expression of belonging both to the diasporic community and to the left home.

In our research it was clear that preparing the food of home is additionally an affirmative practice of belonging:

*(...) It would be a shame if I don't prepare a traditional authentic Moroccan dish for my family when they come to visit. Of course, we prepare Turkish food, and we take them out to eat traditional Turkish food, but it is a rule to prepare a Moroccan dish in the first day of having the guest.*

*- Why is it a rule? What happens if you don't prepare a Moroccan dish and prepare something else instead?  
(Researcher)*

*- Let me explain this with a story, my sister lives in France for more than 15 years now, I was still a student in Morocco during that time, and we went with my mother to visit her. She prepared a spaghetti that day, because she was working and did not have time to prepare real food, my mother was shocked, she was sad, and she felt that my sister did forget about her origins and her culture and became 'Gawria' (...) (Sihem, May 2022)*

This quote suggests that traditional Moroccan food and foodways play an important role in maintaining cultural identity and heritage, particularly when it comes to hosting guests or welcoming family members. The participant notes that it is customary to prepare a Moroccan dish for the first day of having a guest, even if Turkish food is also being prepared and served. This illustrates the importance of food in Maghrebian culture as a way of showcasing hospitality and expressing cultural identity.

The quote also provides insight into why it is considered a "rule" to prepare a Moroccan dish when hosting guests. The participant shares a personal story about their mother's reaction when their sister prepared spaghetti instead of a traditional Moroccan dish during a visit. The mother was disappointed and felt that her daughter had forgotten her origins and cultural heritage and had become "Gawria" (a term that means "foreigner", "Western" or "outsider" in Moroccan and Maghrebian Arabic). Preparing food of home becomes a proof that the migrant is still faithful to his origins and was not assimilated. Hence, food is used for the Maghrebian diaspora to "mark their membership of a culture or a group by asserting the specificity of what they eat" (Fischler, 1988).

Secondly, the participant's use of the term "real food" to refer to Moroccan cuisine further emphasizes the importance of traditional food in Maghrebian culture. The term suggests that traditional Moroccan dishes are considered more authentic or genuine than other types of food, and reinforces the idea that food is an essential aspect of cultural identity.

What Sihem shared highlights the cultural significance of food and the role it plays in expressing and showcasing one's belonging. Forgetting about home food, and related traditions was described to be seen unfavourable by the community and would be judged. Therefore, preparing food in the diaspora is often a communal practice that serves as a way for migrants to proof their belonging and attachment to their

traditions and heritage rehearsal, not only to their families back home, but also to their peers and the Maghrebian community in the diaspora:

*in our gatherings everyone eats traditional dishes, we can say that it is the real reason why we gather, our single friends and those living in the dormitory who can't cook Maghrebian food they mainly come to eat "our food" (referring to Maghrebian food) (...) it is not an obligation of course, but it is strange if you don't want to eat the food of your home, especially in these gatherings or in religious celebrations, first it is disrespectful to those of us who spent hours preparing these dishes and secondly it is considered to be a sort of a betrayal to our traditions and forgetting about our origins. (Abdullah, July 2022)*

The quote suggests that food and foodways play a crucial role in maintaining cultural identity and traditions within the diaspora community. The statement emphasizes that it is seen as strange or even a betrayal of one's culture and heritage if one does not consume this food and take part in the related rituals. This sentiment is particularly strong during cultural or religious celebrations, where food is often a centerpiece of the festivities. Therefore, the quote underscores the significance of food and foodways as a means of preserving and celebrating cultural identity and heritage, especially in diaspora communities where individuals may be geographically distant from their homeland. Secondly, it also underlines the significance of food as a practice of belonging, particularly as a proof of non-assimilation.

Within the Maghrebian diaspora, community gatherings frequently revolve around food and foodways, becoming powerful instruments for fostering community formation and expressions of belonging. As established in this previous chapter, these culinary practices serve as essential markers of cultural identity and communal belonging, particularly highlighted during cultural or religious celebrations. Furthermore, the adherence to these food practices underscores a profound affirmation of diasporic identities, acting as a testament to non-assimilation. Building upon this understanding of food as a conduit for intra-community connection and self-expression, we now venture into examining the role of food and foodways as a bridge for inter-community engagement within the diasporic context.

## Maghrebian Food and Foodways as Cultural Bridges:

In addition to its intra-community functions within diasporic contexts, food of home also serves an inter-community role. As stated by Stajcic "what we eat and with whom we eat can inspire and strengthen the bonds between individuals, communities, and even countries." (Stajcic, 2013, p. 6) This bridging role that food can play between different groups and communities, could be even stronger if we are talking about two groups who share different socio-cultural, religious, and historical elements.

In fact, while previously investigating the role of food and foodways in the Maghrebian migrants' diasporic experiences, one of the participants -Sihem- explained how through sharing food of home she was recreating habits and memories of her origins in the diaspora. In this sense, sharing food is a longstanding tradition in Middle Eastern societies that Maghrebian migrants were comfortable in practicing in Turkey, a country that shares this same tradition:

*- (...) Every one of my neighbors comes during the next hours or days, brings me the plate back, with sweets or food from their region or their city, we have coffee and we talk... they ask me about the sweets and how to prepare them, and about Morocco and our traditions... they usually tell me that the traditions sound very similar to the Turkish culture, and honestly, it is the best way to tell them about my home and my culture. I think that the plate of sweets makes us closer and make them think of me as a person rather than being a 'Yabancı'(..) (Sihem, May 2022)*

This expression offers valuable insights into the use of food as a representation of identity and its role in facilitating positive intercommunity relations. Through the act of sharing sweets and food from her region with her Turkish neighbors, Sihem is using food as a tool of communication to convey her identity and cultural background.

Hence, sharing food serves as a powerful medium of building connections and facilitating dialogue between the Maghrebian migrant and the host community, which highlights the communicative role of food and foodways as identity expressions. In fact, as noted by Stajcic (2013), identity cannot be performed in isolation, and our relationships, communicative practices, and interactions with others are essential in shaping our sense of self. In Sihem's case, sharing plates of sweets with her neighbors not only provides an opportunity to share her culture and traditions but also helps to establish closer relationships with her Turkish neighbors. As they gather over coffee and food, they exchange stories and learn more about each other's cultures, building mutual understanding and respect. Furthermore, the act of sharing food of home also allows Sihem to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about her identity as a "Yabancı" (foreigner). By sharing her culture and traditions through food, she is able to present herself as a person rather than just a label, helping her neighbors to see her beyond her migrant status.

Other participants in the research have shared similar experiences on how food was a cultural bridge and an opportunity of mutual exchange within the Turkish society. Some have mentioned student events and cultural fairs where they presented and offered the food of home and during which they had a remarkable attention from Turkish peers in relation to the food of home. They found that these events served as invaluable platforms for fostering cultural understanding and promoting intercultural exchange. Presenting

their traditional dishes allowed them to showcase their heritage, and through sharing their culinary traditions, they were able to engage in rich conversations about their respective cultures.

In these settings, food acted as a conversation starter, inviting queries about ingredients, cooking techniques, and the cultural significance of the dishes. It opened avenues for the participants to share stories from their home countries, bringing their culture to life in a relatable and accessible way. This, in turn, sparked curiosity and interest among their Turkish peers, often leading to a deeper appreciation and understanding of their cultural heritage.

Consequently, it is possible to conclude that food fosters mutual understanding between diaspora and host community, through enabling individuals to communicate identity, build relationships, and challenge stereotypes. Which as a result would play a potential role in facilitating the integration of the Maghrebien diaspora within the Turkish society.

While food plays a crucial role in inter-community interactions, it is the practice of sharing food between neighbors that significantly contributes to establishing similarities between Maghrebien and Turkish cultures. Sharing food is a common tradition in Middle Eastern and Muslim societies, and it holds even more importance during religious festive days. At the same time, through re-visiting their neighbor and bringing themselves Turkish food, the Turkish neighbors are following a well-known Turkish socio-cultural practice. Hence, this commonly shared traditions between Turkish and Maghrebien society makes the act of sharing food a socially accepted behavior that strengthen the feeling of similarity. This tradition of foodways has significant value in building relationships and promoting mutual understanding between members of the Maghrebien Diaspora and their new social networks in Turkey. Sihem also shared that she would bring Tajin pots and give them as a gift to her Turkish friends and colleagues, a behavior that was also mentioned by other participants:

*(...) do you think that now after a decade in Turkey they stopped it? No! they still send food, and I still bring a lot of Algerian ingredients every time I visit. Now, my family and especially my mother, they even have special dishes prepared for my husband and for my in-laws, dishes that they are not too spicy for the Turkish in-laws... (Ameera, July 2022)*

The quote above illustrates the role of food as an integration tool for migrants, showcasing how it can reflect good intentions, care, and social interaction. By adapting their cooking to accommodate the cultural and taste preferences of their Turkish in-laws, Ameera's family demonstrates the power of food to create connections and foster a sense of belonging in a new community. Additionally, the exchange of food gifts between migrants and their loved ones back home helps to maintain cultural connections and preserve traditional practices and values. Thus, the use of food as an integration tool highlights the power of shared

experiences and cultural practices in building connections and fostering a sense of belonging between the North African and the Turkish societies. It may vary if they are married or not...

Additionally, we observed during the interviews that sharing food and the practices of foodways of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey, became of an inter-cultural value as the migrants communicate and exchange with their new communities, which would as well add new food related practices of the new home:

*I usually love having the mangal parties in Turkey as they are very similar to the Michoui in Tunisia. My wife prepares the side diches like Harissa and Salade Mechouia and we take them when invited by Turkish friends, and they really think that it is tasty and goes with the Turkish mangal tradition... (Bahri, October 2022)*

Bahri's statement underscores the commonalities between Tunisian and Turkish culinary traditions and the ways in which these traditions can be seamlessly intertwined. Bahri speaks of his enjoyment in hosting "mangal" festivities in Turkey, a tradition akin to "Michoui" in Tunisia. "Mangal" denotes a conventional Turkish barbecue, while "Michoui" refers to a cherished slow-roasted lamb dish prevalent in Tunisia. Through the dissemination of their cultural customs and traditions, Bahri and his wife are successful in introducing Tunisian cuisine to their Turkish friends, thereby augmenting both the understanding and appreciation of their shared cultural legacy. The amalgamation of food traditions from their homeland and their host country serves as further evidence of the integral role food and foodways play in the integration of the Maghrebian diaspora. Additionally, it highlights the function of food and foodways as a conduit for generating meaning within the continually evolving diasporic community. As this community navigates the culture of their host society, merging the food and foodways of the home with those of the Turkish society additional significance is conferring on its new meanings while interacting with the other as "meaning is never finalized or complete, but is incessantly in motion, expanding to include other, ancillary, or supplementary meanings" (Hall, 2015).

Following the same context, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, four of the participants in this research are married to Turkish partners. They provided different insights into how food plays a significant role in creating joyful and meaningful experiences in their relationships:

*(...) My husband loves to tease me, saying that Baklawa is actually Turkish and that we should find another name for the Libyan Baklawa. It's all in good fun, and we both know that our sweets are equally delicious, he specially loves the Baklawa Bil Jibna, which is a special Libyan Baklawa with cheese (...) When I'm with my mother-in-law, we often talk about Libyan and Turkish food traditions and how they are very similar and may have encountered each other, especially during the Ottoman period. It's fascinating to think about the ways in which our cultures have influenced each other over time. (Hajer, September 2022)*

Additionally, to this story of Hajer showing the role of food as an encounter in her relationships, in the interview with Rahma she described how she was competing with her husband concerning which of the sauces was the pickiest: the Tunisian Harissa or the Turkish Çemen. It was also possible to observe how Turkish and Maghrebian dishes co-exist in the dual-heritage households. Rahma mentioned that using Çemen in Tunisian dishes makes them even more delicious and she explained that while discovering Turkish cuisine she adds to her Tunisian recipes creating different new and delicious tastes.

However, all the participants married to Turkish nationals clearly mentioned that Turkish cuisine is dominant in their households especially that it is easier to cook. Food of home becomes rather a food of celebration prepared in important occasions and when receiving family members and Turkish guests.

Overall, these testimonies suggest that the exchange of food traditions within intercultural marriages is an opportunity of exchange and may function as a form of cultural hybridization, in which new food practices are created through the blending of different culinary traditions. To conclude, food can serve as a marker of social and cultural differences and a symbol of shared heritage. Sharing food can create social bonds and a sense of belonging, as well as facilitate intercultural exchange in diasporic communities. Incorporating traditional cuisine into local food culture can transform food or products from representing loss to symbols of renewal, demonstrating the dynamic nature of cultural identity and the capacity of food to create new cultural connections within diasporic communities.

## Conclusion:

This study utilized semi-structured interviews with members of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey to explore the role of food and foodways in the diaspora. The research revealed the significance of food practices for the migrants, their identity, memory, and individual experiences. Maghrebians in Turkey use food as a means of communication with their families, to revive cultural traditions and rituals, and to express different feelings related to their migratory experience. The research also established the importance of food and foodways as a practice of belonging to the diasporic community in Turkey, functioning as a tool for diaspora community formation and a demonstration of commitment to one's origins and heritage. Finally, the analysis demonstrated how food and foodways of the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey were utilized as a tool of communication with others, fostering social connection and exchange. Through sharing food and considering the cultural and social aspects of specific food practices, Maghrebian diaspora members were able to facilitate their integration into Turkish society.

By examining the experiences of Maghrebian migrants in Turkey, this study contributes to the broader conversation on transnationalism, cultural hybridity, and the ways in which migrants navigate new cultural

and social environments. Although it was also possible to highlight the importance of cultural and social similarities between the diasporic heritage and the one of the host communities in this context. In fact, while conducting this research, we were able to observe additional divergences comparing to the literature that studied Maghrebian diaspora in the West. First, different articles have underlined the importance of finding and consuming Halal food for the Maghrebian and the Muslim diaspora in the European countries. In this research, such result wouldn't be valid due to the shared religious identity and cultural food practices among Maghrebian and Turkish societies. This suggests that the Maghrebian Diaspora in Turkey have rather an easier experience with food in the diaspora comparing to the Maghrebian communities in the Western countries.

Additionally, many of the investigation on Maghrebian diaspora food in Europe have related to the colonial history and colonization in their analysis to the food and food practices significance of the Maghrebian diaspora in Europe. Obviously, due to colonial history and the still ongoing racism towards Muslim and Africans in specific contexts, Maghrebian food and foodways in these articles were described to have a resistance role and a tool to protect the authenticity of the related to the memory of colonization.

In the case of the Maghrebian food in Turkey, much positive accounts have been clearly stated by the participants in this research. While the Ottoman Empire has been described as an imperialist power in some academic accounts, this research did not find any negative perceptions of Turkish society or Ottoman heritage regarding this matter. Instead, the shared food practices and rituals between Maghrebian and Turkish societies were highlighted as a positive account of cultural unity and brotherhood.

Despite the contributions of this study, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was relatively small, and the participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other diaspora communities or locations. Future research could address this limitation by conducting larger-scale studies that use a more diverse sample selection method, such as snowball sampling.

Secondly, the researcher's own background and experiences may have influenced the data collection and interpretation of the findings. To mitigate this limitation, future research could incorporate multiple researchers with different backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the data.

In addition, this research focused specifically on the experiences of Maghrebian migrants in Turkey and may not be generalizable to other diaspora communities or contexts. Future research could explore the role of food practices in other diaspora communities and compare the similarities and differences across contexts, especially given the presence of other Arab and Muslim diasporic communities in Turkey that have increased in the last decade due to the refugee crisis, as well as the significant Russian and Ukrainian

community that has become visible in Turkey as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian War. It is worth noting that Turkey is a central country with unique historical connections and exchanges with the Middle East, the Balkans, and Russia and Ukraine, which could bring specific insights to the field of food studies. The examination of different diaspora communities' experiences and practices related to food and foodways in Turkey could offer a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which cultural, historical, and political factors intersect to shape food practices and experiences in diaspora communities.

Overall, this study provides important insights into the role of food and foodways in the Maghrebian diaspora in Turkey and their significance for diaspora community formation and integration. By acknowledging the limitations of this study and suggesting areas for future research, we can build on this research and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersection of food, culture, and identity in diaspora communities.

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