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Recipe of Me  
Senior Seminar Capstone Project  
Dr. Rebecca Wood & Dr. Tarah Robbins  
Olivia Azadmanesh

Welcome to *Recipe of Me*, a culinary journey through the anthropology of self. *Recipe of Me* is a visual collection of personal and family recipes, stories, and poetry that reflect my experience of personal evolution. Taking inspiration from the topics we have studied throughout this semester and the broader topics that have led me to this unique capstone project, *Recipe of Me* highlights different aspects of anthropology that are relevant to my story, which I depict through the universal language of food. Through the fusion of flavors and stories, I aim to not only tell the story of my culinary heritage but also to illuminate the connection between food, feeling, and identity. Each page of this book tells a personal story and what I consider to be crucial aspects of my upbringing and education. Join me as we journey through *Recipe of Me*, where this paper serves as a guide, enriching the narrative and deepening our exploration.

The first recipe in this book is called Khoresh-e Fesenjoon. This is a Persian dish that, in all honesty, isn't my favorite. However, I chose to include it in this book because it holds major cultural and symbolic significance. Fesenjoon (for short) is typically enjoyed on the Zoroastrian holiday Yalda, which is Winter Solstice on the Gregorian calendar. On Yalda night, Persian households are encouraged to enjoy fruits and nuts, and this recipe happens to be chopped full of both. The most integral part of this recipe is the use of pomegranates- which is arguably the most symbolic food in Iranian culture.

Since childhood, I have heard stories of Isfandiyar Khan, the legend and protagonist of Ferdowsi's epic, *Shahnameh*. Isfandiyar eats a pomegranate and becomes invincible. In addition to their illusive, protective powers, pomegranates also represent fertility and abundance in Persian culture, and the seeds can represent how many children a woman might bear. Pomegranates are a staple at all weddings and holidays in Iran, from Yalda to Nowrooz; this sweet fruit is adored by Persians far and wide. As an anthropologist, I'm interested in how something as simple as a piece of fruit can symbolize pride for an entire nation. According to anthropologist Mary Le Cron Foster, symbols result from a socially organized network (Le Cron Foster, 2002). In *Symbolism: The Foundation of Culture*, she quotes, "Because symbols form a web of meaning for members of any given culture, no symbol has a meaning apart from the context of its relations with other symbols. To study symbolism, it is necessary to examine and compare cultural contexts. This is the function of cultural anthropology. To

understand symbolism as the foundation of culture, it is also necessary to unravel the symbolic past.” ( Le Cron Foster, 2002). In unraveling the symbolic past of the pomegranate, we glimpse into the intricate layers of Iranian culture.

The next recipe in *Recipe of Me* darts from the other side of the globe back to my home state of Colorado to share the wonders of Colorado Green Chili. Before this project, the lore of green chili was unfamiliar to me. I wasn't aware of the tough competition between Colorado and our bordering state of New Mexico. While doing my research it became evident that the pomegranate to Iran is the green chili to New Mexico, and there's a strong sense of pride in this delicious nightshade. However, the Pueblo Green Chili of Colorado- which is a relative of the Hatch Green Chili of New Mexico, is still uniquely Colorado in its own ways. Competition aside, this Chili has a fascinating history in the state of Colorado. From its cultivation in Mexico to it's eventual migration to Colorado, at the aid of human labor, this chili has and continues to evolve, not only as a symbol but as a delicious Southwestern staple (Healy, 2023).



Codex Mendoza: Aztec Child Rearing and Chile Smoke. Image retrieved in the Public Domain from <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/codex-mendoza-1542/>

The next page is titled “You Are What You Eat.” Here, I explore the co-evolution of human diet and cultural behavior. This is a loaded topic and a vast interdisciplinary one. So, I will keep a broader scope in an attempt to provide an overview of this complex topic. While looking at these pages, you may notice several references to Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. In the case of homo sapiens, it's largely accepted that most Natural Selection plays an indirect role in human food evolution rather than a direct genetic impact. Marvin Harris and Eric B. Ross put it simply in their book *Food and Evolution*, stating, “..behavior associated with the procurement, distribution, and consumption of food came, like the rest of human behavior, to be propagated through learning rather than genetic replication. And although selection based on consequences for reproductive success continued to operate, it was increasingly supplemented, if not displaced by selection based on more immediate consequences for the satisfaction of biophysiological needs and drives.” (Harris & Ross, 1987) With the exception of rare instances involving fava beans and milk consumption, significant alterations in human dietary habits primarily stem from changes in modes of production. A

notable example is the transition from Upper Paleolithic to Neolithic methods, marked by the shift from a reliance on animal-based foods to the cultivation and consumption of grains. Later on, the shift to agro-managerial practices like domestication marked another socially evolved time in the history of homo-sapiens (Harris & Ross, 1987).

As we continue on, the next page is titled “A Love Letter to Chai”. On this page, I delve into the day-to-day ritual of tea. In my personal life, tea has been a constant source of connection and comfort. My Grandmother was constantly serving tea to the family. If there was ever a lull in conversation, an upset, a celebration, a mundane afternoon, she would serve tea, which is why I dedicated this page to my Grandmother. My Grandmother came to this country as a refugee and at an older age, never learned to speak the language, which left her, a social butterfly, isolated. Despite our challenges communicating, cooking and serving tea were ways to communicate non-verbally. Though she couldn’t easily communicate verbally, she always let me know I was loved through acts of kindness. As Jillian R. Cavanaugh and Kathleen C. Riley promptly state in *Language and Food*, “Food and language thus frequently constitute one another in multiple, often intimate ways” (Cavanaugh & Riley, 2023) and my relationship with Maman (my Grandmother) was a testament to that. I posed this page as a “Love Letter to Chai,” but, more importantly, it’s also indirectly related to my grandmother, who taught me everything I know about the ritual of Persian cooking. When you grow up with a language barrier, communication often becomes indirect, and our way of communicating is through the universal language of food.

This next page in the recipe of me was something I debated for a while. Not only because this recipe usually raises some eyebrows but also because I wasn’t sure how to relate it anthropologically. The recipe is called “Salsa Ramen”. This is a recipe I put together for my Sister as an after-school snack one day, and it stuck because it’s deliciously salty, satisfying, and extremely budget-friendly. The recipe is simple: a cooked & unseasoned packet of instant ramen with butter, salsa, and crushed-up tortilla chips. Trust me, it’s good in a bind. I’m glad that I ended up including this recipe because I actually found it to be a really good way for me to discuss two major topics we unpacked in class, Body Image, and Social Determinants of Health. We’ll begin with the latter. Being that this is the cheapest ingredients list you may ever find in a recipe book, means that it’s also likely full of highly processed ingredients. When looking at the endless ingredients on the back of an Instant Ramen packet, this becomes obvious. Personally, like any good American, I Love (capital L) junk food. It’s convenient, it’s delicious, and it’s as cheap as food can get. But of course, when not enjoyed in moderation it can have pretty bad health outcomes and for people who are less fortunate, this becomes one of the only options for them to feed themselves. Poverty

and health are highly racialized subjects at their core, and food is a relevant aspect of both. Not only is poor health a consequence of poor eating habits, but the way we feel about our bodies lends to the way we feel about ourselves or our self-esteem.

As most young women in the age of the internet, I'm no stranger to struggling with my body image. Thankfully, I have always had a pretty healthy relationship with food and eating; however, I have struggled with my appearance in many ways and for many women throughout history, I have been a victim to societal & self-objectification. According to the 2020 article by Elizabeth A. Daniels, over 13% of adolescent girls experience an eating disorder- and I'd be remiss to point out that that's the percentage on record. Personally, I have known more women than not who have struggled with chronic dieting, anorexia, and bulimia- and as Daniels points out, this can largely be pointed back to self-objectification. The focus on appearance can be detrimental in all aspects of life from physical detriment, to career focus (Daniels, 2020).

The final recipe in Recipe of Me is one that's extremely prevalent in my life, Lubia Polo as it's pretty much consistently in my refrigerator. I often batch this in large portions to eat throughout the week as it's nutritious, budget friendly, and never gets old. This is another Persian recipe that hails from my Father's hometown of Mashhad, Iran. Mashhad is a Northeastern city near the border of Turkmenistan, known for its iconic Goharshad Mosque, mountainous landscape, and notable dialect. The accents in this region are extremely distinct and can be related the way Coloradoans may think of Southern or New York accents. Sometimes jarring at first, and sometimes entertainingly unique. This accent is so unique that often one of the first reactions when I meet other Iranians is a note on the Mashhadi accent being "funny". The small amount of Farsi I know is passed down from my Dad, so unfortunately, I have the same accent that my Persian friends like to make fun of. Hooman Saeli of the English Department at Oklahoma State University devoted a study to different Persian dialects. Through a study that examines people of Tehran's attitude towards different dialects reflects that Mashhadi accents are significantly judged as being less educated and evaluated as "non-standard" Persian dialect speakers (Saeli H, 2018). Tehrani populations from the study have less positive attitudes towards Mashhadi dialect. However, if there was a poll on Lubia Polo, I'm sure Persians far and wide would share pretty positive attitudes, because it's delicious.

I hope you have enjoyed flipping through the pages of Recipe of Me, and I hope that I have given you a better understanding of who I am and how I relate to the vast and varied field of Anthropology. I am honored to have had the opportunity to share parts of my own identity with the fascinating realm of Anthropology. Through exploring food and its preparation, I've been able to delve into the depths of my personal history,

and also provide insights into the human experience as a whole. Just as each dish tells its own story, so too does each aspect of life. As I embark on new journeys beyond the classroom and beyond these pages, I will continue to carry the invaluable lessons I have learned through both the kitchen, and the field of Anthropology. Thank you for joining be on this journey. Bon appetite and Nūsh-e-jān!

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