trade routes; and in more modern times, as a holding place for massive numbers of Palestinian refugees from its surroundings, incorporating not only elements of the Mediterranean, such as dill and seafood, but also of the Bedouin tradition of Bir al-Saba and nearby Sinai, the flavors of the fellahen of its eastern villages, the sophisticated and urbane tastes of Yaffa, and the much-loved piquancy and spice-heavy foods of Gaza City itself.

When we think of Gaza, we don’t tend to think of food – except, of course, in the context of its absence or else unaffordability due to the effect of a persistent and deliberate blockade intended to deprive people of their ability to prosper, develop, and live free, ordinary lives.

Gaza and its people have the misfortune of being viewed as a caricature of sorts, whether by supporters or adversaries or brethren. We are brute, resilient, and steadfast; we are brutal, aggressive, and violent; we are wretched, dejected, and downtrodden.

But in the end, we are human beings who are more concerned with the immediate and pressing issue of our daily struggle to survive rather than how we are viewed by others.

In 2010, my co-author Maggie Schmitt and I went to Gaza and spent many weeks poking around in people’s kitchens, joining their families for lavish meals often prepared on nothing more than a butane burner, massaging the warm, fertile composted soil with farmers, and listening as they all shared their collective hopes and fears and laughter and histories – all the rich details that get lost between the dichotomous and convenient media sound bytes and snapshots that allow us, the readers and viewers, to dismiss or pity Gaza.

Of course, the historical Gaza region occupies (as it were) a unique culinary position in its own right, a function of its position along a crossroads between continents and along ancient

In 2013, I had the chance to return once more while filming an episode with acclaimed food critic and television personality Anthony Bourdain, before travel through Rafah Crossing was nearly halted. I revisited many of the same families, acquired a few new recipes, and received firsthand updates on the situation. Thus the second and updated edition of The Gaza Kitchen was born.

We have always thought of The Gaza Kitchen as a storybook of sorts, a window to understanding Gaza that turns the conventional camera-eye view of this troubled part of Palestine on its head, and in so doing, helps the reader understand the Palestinian experience in Gaza, as well as its inhabitants, their history, and their present.

More than just pretty pictures or trendy recipes, or even “folklorized” ethnography, it is an ode to the ordinary, a guide to understanding a place and a people and their dogged persistence to keep cooking, living, retaining their dignity, and staying human, as well as their ability to keep alive the traditions and tastes of parts of historical Palestine of which no other trace exists, aside from its aromas and flavors and memories. And given the constant threat of the appropriation and “invisibilization” of Palestinian history, we like to think that such a compilation is more important than ever.

Read it, cook from it, eat, contemplate, and then converse, act, and repeat. And above all, enjoy its recipes, much as Gazans would.

Laila El-Haddad
Having the opportunity to visit and perform umra in al-Haram Al-Sharif/the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa is one few Palestinians (including those on the outside) are afforded due to an overarching Israeli matrix of control over their movement and access between and beyond their own cities and towns. Even though the mosques are as close as 15 minutes away from some Palestinians, a special, difficult to obtain permit is required to go. I thank the Almighty for blessing me with this visit, and ask that He frees and opens our beautiful occupied sanctuary to all who wish to pray there.
Laila El-Haddad is co-editor of Gaza Unsilenced (2015), co-author of The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey (2013), and the author of Gaza Mom (2010). She is a talented writer, analyst, and social activist, and a policy advisor for Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network. Born in Gaza, El-Haddad currently lives in Columbia, Maryland. Her co-author on The Gaza Kitchen, Maggie Schmitt, is a writer, researcher, translator, educator, and social activist. She holds a B.A. from Harvard in Literature and has conducted advanced graduate studies at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Schmitt Author and journalist, Laila El-Haddad takes us into the hidden world of Gaza through the kitchen. Interweaving history, personal experiences and stories of food, family and recipes, El Haddad paints a vivid picture stories of food, family and daily life and some of the issues facing people living in Gaza and the Middle East. Comments. Post comment. electroradio.fm. 39,941 views. Tune in. Dance UK Radio. El-Haddad is a blogger, political analyst and social activist who recently published a cookbook, “The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey” (Just World Books, 2012), with co-author and Madrid-based researcher Maggie Schmitt. The workbook-size paperback has earned praise from food luminaries including Claudia Roden, Nancy Harmon Jenkins and Anthony Bourdain. “Gaza Kitchen” makes the distinction between street and home foods in the Palestinian world. Most Westerners are familiar with the restaurant fare traditionally prepared by male chefs—shawarma, kebab—but not many know the complexity and creativity of the home cuisine prepared by female cooks.