The Near East Restaurant: A Study of the Spatial Manifestation of the Folklore of Ethnicity

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Over the last twenty years, there has been an influx of Yemeni Muslims to the United States. These immigrants have found employment in the vineyards of California, the automobile factories of Detroit, and the steel mills of Buffalo. New York City is another major center of Yemeni immigration, and those immigrants who live there are scattered throughout the greater Metropolitan area. Many are employed in positions which require little job training or language skill, and others run small grocery stores or candy shops. Considering their pattern of dispersed residence and employment, the Yemeni presence is hardly noticed within the immensity and diversity of the New York City population; however, in one small area of Brooklyn a group of Yemenis has established a highly visible and successful presence in the form of numerous Yemeni/Middle Eastern restaurants.

These restaurants are located on Atlantic Avenue in “Arab New York,” a label more often used by outsiders and visitors to the area. Earlier in this century, Syrian and Lebanese Christian immigrants settled in this section of Brooklyn after they left their first residence in lower Manhattan, establishing their churches and specialty stores. Over the last generation, most of the Syrian and Lebanese Christian families have moved to other areas of New York City, but as the early residents moved out, other Arab immigrants moved in to take their place. The last twenty years have seen an increased presence of Yemenis and Palestinians among other Arab Muslim groups. The Syrian-owned spice shops, groceries, and bakeries remained even while the proprietors and their families moved their residence elsewhere. The shape of “Arab New York” from the perspective of Arab
residents in New York City would more likely be represented by small and dispersed pockets of residence linked by the locations of churches and mosques, shops which relate specifically to the needs of Arabs, and perhaps other places of employment. The Atlantic Avenue “Arab New York” may be an area of concentrated and visible Arab activity, but a good deal of this activity is directed outward, primarily for consumption by non-Arabs.

The Atlantic Avenue “Arab New York” lies at the convergence of three “Brownstone” neighborhoods, areas of gentrification in which 19th and 20th century brownstone houses are being renovated by an influx of new residents. If the various local neighborhood newspapers which are directed to the Brownstone residents can be regarded as a measure of the concerns of those residents, the consistent absence of mention of Arab Atlantic Avenue may indicate that although this is an area which the Brownstone residents may pass through, it is not the locus of significant interaction. On the rare occasion when Arab Atlantic Avenue is presented in these papers, the subject is often an exotic public display, as on the yearly street fair, The Atlantic Antic, when one block of the avenue is transformed into an outdoor Arab bazaar. The differential use of a common space at the level of neighborhoods and avenues provides a foreshadowing of the multiple definitions of space within one service establishment where the workers and customers are of different cultural backgrounds.

The study of ethnicity in an urban environment requires special attention with regard to the appropriate units of analysis. Neighborhoods, occupational groups, and ethnic groups are most often presented as major components of urban life, but these categories can be problematic if taken as the basic units of analysis. Such terms often lack clear boundaries: the definitions of the shape of a neighborhood or the identity of an individual will most likely differ depending on who is asked, when, where, and by whom. Rather than starting with these terms as units of analysis, they must be considered undetermined and investigable concepts.

The unit of analysis in urban ethnographic research must be smaller and better defined than the terms mentioned above. For this reason, a situational approach has been adopted in this study. Eames and Goode discuss situations in terms of “urban junctures” which “draw various segments of the urban population together in meaningful interaction.” Urban junctures such as markets, festivals, schools, eating and drinking establishments, and service institutions are socially and culturally recognized settings in which one can observe ongoing interaction. These sites are particularly useful in the study of ethnicity for their ability to draw together diverse elements of the population.

Before turning to the discussion of the particular site of investigation, I must clarify my use of the term “ethnicity.” The study of ethnicity and ethnic folklore is inextricably connected to a multicultural environment. Ethnicity can thus be understood as a statement of relations, the recognition and articulation of cultural similarities and differences in any culturally plural setting. Although immigration is not a prerequisite condition for ethnicity, it does create a multi-cultural situation which not only encourages, but also forces an awareness of sameness and difference which is at the root of ethnicity. As Ahner Cohen notes, “Ethnicity is essentially a form of interaction between culture groups operating within common social contexts.”

Ethnicity is therefore an identity which resides not within the individual person, or even the particular group, but between individuals and between groups engaged in social interaction. I call attention to Birdwhistell’s theory of social communication. Communication, according to Birdwhistell, is the dynamic aspect of social organization, not merely the exchange of information. Individuals do exchange information, and this is one important element of communication, but the term communication is reserved for a multi-level phenomenon which permits exchange of specific information at one level, but also facilitates societal integration and cultural transmission at other levels. Communication must not be seen as “the sum of bits of information which pass between two people in a given period of time.” Communication, and I might add ethnicity, is to be seen as “a process to which all participants in an interaction constantly contribute by messages of various overlapping lengths, along one or more channels (such as language, movement, and smell), whose elements are culturally patterned.”

Ethnicity is a situated statement of relationships, and ethnic categorizations are meaningful only in specific contexts. It is necessary to observe social interaction to discover how and when particular ethnic categorizations are appropriate and which cultural forms emerge as distinctive. Ethnicity as an identity situated in social relationships expresses itself in the social skills of foregrounding and masking various cultural characteristics. In this sense, and based on Goffman’s work on the performing self in everyday life, one can analyze ethnicity in terms of performance.
Goffman's study of symbolic interaction examines "the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the way in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them." Performance is defined by Goffman as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants." 13

Ethnicity, like performance in Goffman's sense, occurs in interaction located in specific spatio-temporal events and settings. The investigator's first task is to locate where and when ethnicity occurs. Secondly, observing the behavior in these events and settings to discover how this relationship is negotiated, the investigator focuses on the specific significant symbols of a particular event to explore the ways in which these symbolic activities encapsulate and express the ethnicity relationship. The subject of the investigation is the strategic manipulation of a cultural repertoire of symbolic activity whereby one group states the cultural similarities and differences between itself and other groups in the multi-cultural environment. This activity may be termed "the folklore of ethnicity." 14

Yemeni Muslim immigrants to the United States have a rich cultural repertoire of verbal folklore, music, dance, foodways, material culture, and styles of interaction; however, the folkloristic study of ethnicity is not simply the inventory of these diverse cultural expressions. As soon as one views these immigrants in the context of social interaction, one realizes that even the label "Yemeni Muslim" must be treated provisionally. To many, these people are Arabs. On occasion, they are identified as Puerto Ricans. In their relationship with Christians and Jews, they are Muslims, and among other Arabs, they may be identified as Yemenis. In their relationship to other Muslims, they may be distinguished as Zaydi or Shafi'i, two sects of Islam predominant in Yemen. Family and tribal affiliation as well as regional background are distinguishing identities within the Yemeni immigrant community itself. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, "We are all Yemenis; we are all brothers," and on another occasion that same person will tell a joke which highlights the regional differences between himself and another Yemeni immigrant. Immigration to New York City has renewed contact between Muslims and Jews from Yemen's Central and Southern Highland regions for the first time since 1949 when virtually all Jews from those areas emigrated to Israel. 15 In certain respects, Yemeni Muslims and Jews share more with each other than with their co-religionists from other culture areas. Their common dialects of Arabic, styles of music, dance, and their tastes in food are powerful factors which may evoke their common Yemeni-ness, and yet their religious identities as Muslims and Jews create social boundaries.

I have suggested that ethnicity can be studied by observing multicultural interaction in specific settings and events. The Yemeni-owned Middle Eastern restaurant presents itself as one such setting. As an urban juncture, the restaurant attracts a large and diverse clientele, while the Yemenis engage in a conscious presentation of self in creating the multi-sensory environment inside their ethnic restaurant. The remainder of this article addresses the nature of the created environment in one such Yemeni-owned restaurant and its relation to the folkloristic study of ethnicity.

The restaurant trade is often economically attractive to immigrants, and Yemenis follow the pattern of Chinese, Greek, and Italian immigrants to the United States. The Yemeni experience bears striking similarity to that of Chinese restaurant workers in England. J. L. Watson notes:

The economic niche that the Chinese control allows the migrants to live, work, and prosper without changing their way of life to suit British social expectations... The catering establishments are virtual islands of Chinese culture in the larger British society, isolated pockets where the immigrants can interact with the outside world on their own terms. Many cooks and kitchen workers do not learn more than a few words of English, even after years of residence abroad. The waiters have a better command of the host language but few are fluent enough to carry on extensive conversations with their customers. 16

Yemenis in the United States can be more accurately characterized as international migrant workers who maintain strong ties to their villages of origin, send money home, make periodic visits, and intend to return home permanently after earning sufficient money. During their sojourn in the United States, many Yemenis switch from job to job as opportunity arises, and transient residence is common. Since many Yemenis do not learn English they must rely on their personal network among other Yemeni workers to find jobs, housing, and for leisure activities. Commenting on the lives of Yemeni automobile
factory workers in Detroit, Nabeel Abraham notes, “The immigrant worker’s raison d’être in the U.S. is to earn a livelihood; everything else in his social existence (housing, food, social activities, etc.) is subordinate to his mesmerizing objective. Life itself is postponed to some future date after ‘the return.’”17 Faced with alternatives such as monotonous factory work or hours of isolation in a twenty-four-hour candy shop or grocery store, the opportunity to own, operate, or work in a restaurant surrounded by other Yemenis is particularly attractive. Currently, there are eight Yemeni-owned and operated restaurants within the area identified earlier as “Arab New York.”18

The restaurant trade allows the Yemenis to control and create their work environment, both for themselves and their customers. The feature which is most important from the perspective of the folklore of ethnicity is the ability to create one cultural environment for the clientele while preserving another for the Yemeni workers. This situation has been noted by Goffman with reference to the restaurant of the Shetland Hotel, where members of the local island crofter community serve middle-class British vacationers. Goffman identifies the front region—the dining area—where the British diners are served their familiar food in their accustomed manner. By contrast, in the back region—the kitchen—patterns of crofter social interaction replace the protocol of the dining area, food is prepared and eaten according to crofter custom, and local clothing and postural patterns replace the uniforms and etiquette with which the crofter employees serve the British vacationers.19 Following Goffman’s division of front and back region, I will now describe one Yemeni restaurant in terms of the social and cultural divisions of its space.20

Before the customer actually enters the front region of the restaurant, the restaurant begins its presentation to the potential customer through its advertising and business cards. The passerby is attracted by the name and the decorations on the facade. Names contribute prominently to the identity and character of the restaurant. A survey of names of Yemeni-owned restaurants introduces a theme that runs through the front region public display: each restaurant locates itself along a continuum from traditional or “authentic” Yemeni to a formulaic pan-Arab Middle Eastern to familiar and conventional American. Names include “Taiz Yemen,” “Mocha Middle East,” “Moroccan Star,” and “Atlantic House.”21 The name sign often includes additional information which qualifies and amplifies the name of the restaurant itself. The character of the “Atlantic House” is specified by the prominently displayed words

“Yemen Restaurant,” and further by the qualifiers “French, Continental, Oriental” which also appear on the name sign. In the case of the “Near East,” the name sign features a reference to the classic Middle Eastern food, “Shees Kbab” (sic). A second sign gives evidence of the owner’s attitude in business, advising passers-by, “It pays to eat well. -Prop.” The street windows of the Near East are filled with artifacts which demonstrate the attractiveness and character of the interior. Plants and Middle Eastern cut-brass lamps provide a backdrop for a picture calendar of Yemen issued by Yemen Airways as well as pictures of outfitted chefs serving their dishes. Restaurant reviews from New York City and Brooklyn publications are reprinted in the window. Customers read accounts such as the following:

When the Syrian mom-pop operation of the Near East came to its inevitable retirement end, two enterprising Yemenis, Mosad and Kaid Almontaser, took over the premises, retained the name, modernized the decor, and enlarged the menu. The new owners have not forsaken their predecessors’ guiding commonplace boldly inscribed over the entrance, to wit: IT PAYS TO EAT WELL. The two Almontaser cousins cooked and waited at Atlantic House around the corner, which is owned by their uncle Mohammed. They have adopted some of Mohammed’s free ranging bill of fare and his hospitable operating style.

This review continues to discuss specific dishes, their quality, and their price. The lunch and dinner menus are posted, so the customer has a good idea of the food available and its cost before entering.22

Upon entering the Near East, the customer views a small dining area with seating for approximately forty customers. One of the waiters, dressed in black pants, white shirt, dark tie, and red waiter jacket, motions the incoming customer to a free table. The customer is seated at a square or round table, covered with a white tablecloth and paper placemats, with standard setting and water glass. Shortly afterward, the waiter brings the menu, fills glasses of water, and calls into the kitchen in Arabic for a basket of fresh, hot pita bread, served with a dish of butter. The customer may take a few moments to note the sounds and sights.

Since most customers are not Middle Eastern, they cannot distinguish the regional styles of Middle Eastern music. Their impressions
of the sounds heard in the restaurant can only be in terms of the most general description: Arabic or Middle Eastern music. In fact, Yemenis play records and tapes of Egyptian and Lebanese vocal and instrumental music purchased at a local Arabic music shop on Atlantic Avenue owned by Syrian immigrants. The Yemeni workers do have tapes of Yemeni music, but these tapes are not played when customers are present. Yemeni restaurant workers state that though they prefer the Yemeni music, the diners are more accustomed and better served by the more familiar Levantine vocal and instrumental music. They say that Yemeni music would sound too plain, and it is not appropriate for those who do not understand the Yemeni dialect of Arabic.

The same principles which are operating with regard to the choice of the music are also present in the other features of the front region, which would include decoration, the menu, the food served, and customer-waiter interaction. The Yemenis are guided by their desire to attract and please customers, and to give them good food and service at low prices. Perhaps to the dismay of a folklorist or tourist, the Yemenis feel no obligation to be consistent or “authentic.” Even though Yemenis own and operate the restaurant, they are not putting their Yemeni-ness on display. Yemeni and Middle Eastern culture is a resource from which the Yemenis draw to construct their presentation and product, but these are not the only resource. Through a combination of Yemeni, Middle Eastern, continental European, conventional American, and local New York features, the Yemeni restaurateurs create an environment comfortable for customers, but which effectively shield their own cultural patterns from outside scrutiny.

Earlier I stated that the focus for the folkloristic study of ethnicity is that activity in which one social-cultural group states the similarities and differences between itself and other groups in the multi-cultural environment. The study of immigrant folklore has tended to note only those features which are distinctive while ignoring those forms which indicate the immigrant community’s integration with its new surroundings. Observation of the decor in the Yemeni restaurant has made it clear that distinctiveness and integration are both important features to be considered in the study of ethnicity.

For many years, the interior walls of the Near East were decorated with an assortment of Middle Eastern and Islamic images. A picture of the Yemeni countryside, a tapestry showing a desert scene of camels and nomads, and calligraphed Arabic inscriptions from the Quran provided a visual counterpart to the everpresent Arabic music. During the period of my fieldwork, a reorientation of the interior decor occurred. With the exception of three Middle Eastern/Islamic items no longer in prominent view, the entire wall space of the Near East is devoted to a rotating display of paintings from a local art gallery located just three doors away from the restaurant. The gallery owners have become steady customers in the Near East over the years, and they have begun sending their patrons to the restaurant. In return, the restaurant features the gallery paintings, giving greater exposure to this art among diners who may never have visited the gallery. In accepting the gallery exhibit in the restaurant, the Yemenis may violate the folklorist’s desire for “authenticity,” but they are following their pragmatic guidelines. We must remember that even while choosing to present painted still lifes and country scenes, the Yemenis are still engaged in the relationship of ethnicity. Currently, the wall display primarily indicates integration into the local entrepreneurial and artistic communities of Brownstone Brooklyn.

The music and decor of the restaurant may be considered components of a multi-channeled communication system. A feature of any such system is its ability to send messages which complement or contradict each other as well as frame and comment upon one another. In the case of the Yemeni restaurant, the music and decor of the front region present fundamental aspects of the restaurant’s ethnic presentation: its distinctiveness from, and integration with, local culture. This same effect is achieved through other channels as well, with the menu and the food itself playing principle roles.

Around the same time that the shift occurred in the decor, there was also a shift in menu design. Before the menu change, the Near East provided a mimeographed menu sheet placed in a protective folder. The sheet provided a list of items according to the following categories: appetizers, hors d’oeuvres, soups, salads, entrees—divided according to lamb, veal, beef, chicken, and seafood, desserts and beverages. On top of the left hand page was the following message:

MARHABA! (WELCOME!)

and the top of the right hand page read,

OUR FOOD IS SPECIALLY PREPARED WHILE YOU WAIT.

The new menu has the same information on the inside, but now the front and back covers also contain printed images. The front cover is dominated by a scene of a Yemeni town nestled at the foot of a rugged mountain. Above the picture are the words, “Welcome to
Near East Restaurant” with two words in Arabic meaning “Eastern Restaurant” below the English, and the word in Arabic for “Yemen” below that. Below the picture in bold print are the words “YEMEN & International CUISINE.” The back cover provides standard service establishment messages, such as “Thanks for coming” and “We are happy to have you as a customer, please call again.” Offset by these clichés, the back cover also features the unusual image of a bird holding a skewer of shish kabob in its beak. Without suggesting a causal relationship, it may be significant that the shift in menu design towards the Yemeni/Arabic occurred at around the same time that the decor shifted towards the conventional American. These shifts may indicate an ongoing balance between the strange and the familiar which underlies the presentation of self in the ethnic restaurant.

The food as presented on the menu provides a diverse array following the already familiar continuum: traditional Yemeni—familiar Middle Eastern—“Continental” restaurant fare. Out of a total of sixty dishes, only one is actually “Yemeni.” Excluding desserts and beverages, the Middle Eastern items named on the menu are in a 1:3 ratio with the continental items, but this ratio is true only at the level of lexical entries on paper. At the level of the food actually prepared the ratio reverses to 7:3. For example, a familiar “continental” dish such as “Chicken Coq Au Vin” is actually cooked in distinctively Yemeni spices. One may thus distinguish these categories in the food presented: Yemeni dishes in name and preparation, Levantine Arabic dishes in name but Yemeni in preparation, Continental dishes in name but Yemeni in preparation, and Continental dishes in name and preparation. This range of possible dishes allows the customer to construct a meal which is exotic, familiar yet exoticly flavored, or safely familiar. In choosing from the range of dishes offered, the customer experiences the tastes, smells, and textures of the food, these being additional components of the front region presentation. In the case of the ethnic restaurant, the physical environment provides the conditions for the experience, but the customer has a part in actually constructing its exotica or its familiarity.

The front region which has been described in terms of its presentation to outsiders is also a setting for Yemeni interaction. As Goffman notes, “By invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform any region into a backstage. Thus we find that in many social establishments the performers will appropriate a section of the front region and by acting there in a familiar fashion symbolically cut it off from the rest of the region.” In the Near East, the table closest to the kitchen is behaviorally marked off from the rest of the front region as a restricted area. Physically, the table is often covered with only a plastic tablecloth, whereas all the other tables are covered with cloth and placemats. This is the location where waiters sit between serving orders, and where cooks and dishwashers may congregate in their spare moments. One distinguishing feature of this space is that participation is related to the ability to speak and understand Arabic.

When Yemeni kin and co-villagers visit the restaurant, the back table is filled with men exchanging news, letters and pictures from home, and conversing about jobs and opportunities. On occasion, a folk performer of the emigre community, such as a singer, poet, or storyteller, will stop by to visit his friends and relatives. At such times, the men at the back table are animated in their lively interaction with the performer.

Moving further into the back region of the restaurant, into the kitchen, the basement, and the back courtyard, one notes an increased restriction of access to all but workers and a few kin and co-villagers. While the various communicational channels of the front region relate to the cultural presentation of self to outsiders, the communication in the back region is exclusively oriented to the Yemenis themselves, to their multiple concerns and identities. Snapshots of the home village, the family home, and relatives which are posted on the walls of the kitchen evoke family and village identities of the emigre Yemeni workers. A tape recorder plays tapes of Yemeni verbal dueling which make reference to Yemeni local governmental and tribal conflicts. Other tapes play nationally known Yemeni songs which can create feelings of national allegiance and identity. A short wave radio is used to receive Arabic news broadcasts from London. The daily gathering to listen to news of the Arab world broadcast in Arabic is a reminder of the Yemeni workers’ concern with pan-Arab issues and their self-identification as Arabs. Some of the workers use the basement to perform salat, the prayers which an observant Muslim recites at the five appointed times of the day.

Food also marks the back region as distinctively Yemeni. Every day one of the cooks prepares the traditional shurba, a thick meat soup made from the bones of the meat served to customers. Asin, a moist dough used for dipping in the soup, and kibbeh, a condiment with fenugreek and hot pepper, are prepared at the same time as the shurba. This food is served and consumed in a traditional manner. The workers squat around a central platter containing the shurba and asin. Taking the asin or pita bread in hand, the workers dip into the
soup and bring their hands to their mouths. When the entire platter of *shurba* and *asir* is finished, one of the workers brings a pot of soup bones and pours them onto the central platter. Again, the Yemenis take the bones in their hands to eat the remaining meat. Yemenis will point out that the use of a single communal dish does not reflect poverty or a lack of dishes for each person. Yemenis consider it an honor and a sign of respect to share food from the same plate. A Yemeni who sits down with a plate of food and does not offer his food to the other people present would be violating a basic principle of Yemeni social interaction. Yemenis recount stories of people who will not eat if they are alone. Instead, these people are said to go out to the street to find others to invite to partake of their meal.

In contrast to the private Yemeni character of the restricted back region, the publicly visible back table calls for a negotiation between front and back region behavior. When *shurba* and *asir* are eaten at the back table by the workers, individual portions on plates are used in place of the communal dish. On some occasions, the Yemenis eat with their hands, and yet there are times when a spoon is used for the traditional foods. As the owner commented to me on such an occasion, he prefers to use his hand as in Yemen and as he is accustomed to do in privacy, but in the restaurant he said it is appropriate to use the utensil. Even when eating the soup with a spoon, the meat bones are still eaten with the hands.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between front and back region behavior occurs around times of religious observance. At Christmas time, the dining area and the windows facing the street are filled with holiday tinsel and decoration. As Muslims, the Yemeni workers have no actual involvement in the observance of this holiday. On the other hand, during the month of Ramadan when many of the Yemeni workers fast from sunrise to sunset, cooking and serving goes on as usual with no indication that the workers are observing a religious occasion. At sunset, the men break their fast with a blessing recited over dates, followed by traditional Yemeni festive dishes prepared by the men in the restaurant kitchen or by one of the women in the apartment. After closing time at 11 P.M., Yemenis congregate in the restaurant for eating, conversation, and recitation from the Quran. Keeping their Ramadan fasting and feasting private and unknown to the public is consistent with the front region's shielding, protective character. Think of the alternative: a large sign in the restaurant window which reads, "Try Our Ramadan Specials."

In the contrast of the front and back region behavior one finds essential features of ethnicity, defined as a situational identity in which cultural similarities and differences are presented. The study of the folklore of ethnicity focuses on that behavior which articulates the relationship between a cultural "we" and "they." The public presentation of self in the front region of the restaurant is directly related to the ethnicity relationship in the multi-cultural immigrant setting. The private back region of the restaurant allows for a multiplicity of other identifications: as kin and villager, as affiliate of a particular region, as Yemeni, as Muslim, as Arab. Ethnicity is not simply what is presented in the front; the performance in this region may be dismissed by zealous folklorists as fakelore. Furthermore, ethnicity is not the behavior reserved for the privacy of the back region. One may describe this behavior in terms of Yemeni cultural patterns, referenced to life in Yemen. Ethnicity emerges when one observes the contrast between the front and back, between public and private. This contrast points to the negotiation of identity which occurs in the multi-cultural interaction.

As is true for many urban junctures in general and ethnic restaurants in particular, the Yemeni-owned Near East displays the ability to create contrasting cultural environments through the strategic manipulation of a broad range of communicational channels. Music, decor, and food are in constant interplay as the restauranteurs locate their performance on a continuum from the exotic to the familiar. One may find little consistency in the ethnic restaurant, for the various communicational channels may present different points on the cultural continuum. The cultural implications of the social division of space within the restaurant provide valuable insight into the workers' relationship to their new environment. The negotiation of space in the restaurant may be referenced to other settings of residence and leisure, and from individual settings to a more general investigation of perception of urban space. The similarities and contrasts from setting to setting together with an exploration of cognitive mapping of the urban landscape would reveal general patterns in the spatial manifestations of ethnicity.

NOTES

1 Research among the Yemeni Muslim immigrant community of New York City from June 1980 to November 1981 was supported in part by a U.S. Department of Education
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2 For a discussion of the economic impact of this migration on Yemen, see Jon C. Swanson, Emigration and Economic Development: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979).


5 Even on the occasion of the Atlantic Antic, the Arab section of the Avenue is rarely mentioned in article titles, though the erotic activities such as belly dancing, pastry displays, and camel rides dominate the pictorial coverage. The New York Times (September 17, 1976) provides a rare case in which the Avenue is highlighted in print: "Atlantic Avenue, A Bazaar of Middle East Delights, Holds an Antic."" Atlantic Avenue, A Bazaar of Middle East Delights, Holds an Antic."


10 Baron Jones, "Editor's Note" to Birdwhistell, Ibid, p. v.

11 This perspective on ethnicity is drawn from Michael Mooreman's "Accomplishing Ethnicity" in Studies in Ethnography, ed. R. Turner (Chichester: Penguin, 1974), pp. 54–68.


13 Ibid., p. 15.


17 Abraham, p. 9.

18 During the period of my fieldwork, two other Yemeni-owned restaurants opened— one in Jersey City and one in Manhattan.

19 Goffman defines back region as "a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fashioned by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course," op. cit., p. 112.

20 Ibid., pp. 116–117.

21 The Yemeni-owned restaurants are largely patterned after one another. Their structural similarities allow a description of one restaurant to represent a more general phenomenon. My use of the dramatic metaphor is intended as a heuristic device, not as an indication of a dramatic performance. Dean MacCannell deals with similar issues in "Staged Authenticity," in The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (N.Y.: Schocken, 1976), pp. 91–107.

22 Taiz is the name of a town in the Southern Highlands of Yemen.

Mocha is the name of a coastal town of Yemen, famous for its coffee.


24 Although the public front is designed for customers, the front sidewalk area is also used extensively by Yemenis. The owner's family lives above the restaurant, and the sidewalk area is a site for the owner's children to play. Workers load supplies into the basement entrance, and in their spare moments the Yemeni workers may stand outside visiting with other Yemenis who pass by.

25 On multi-channeled communication, see references to Birdwhistell listed above.


27 Other significant channels would include the waiter's clothing, the waiter's interaction with customers, the way the table is set, and what utensils are provided.

28 Goffman, pp. 128–129.