

7. Culinary Gentrification in the UAE: Authenticity, Commodification, and Hybridity in the Making of Emirati Cuisine

Amanual Ezra Sahledingle

Zayed University (United Arab Emirates)

amanual.ezrasd@gmail.com

Abstract

[EN] In the contemporary UAE, where transnational migrants make up 85% to 90% of the resident population, cuisine is increasingly becoming an important ideological battlefield for state-led nation-building, the post-oil economy, and global destination marketing. This literature review paper aims to present interdisciplinary knowledge on Emirati cuisine, with the specific objective of addressing the fragmentation of theoretical concepts of authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance. Specifically, it asks how these four concepts interact as co-constitutive processes within a single semiotic system of meaning and how their integration reveals culinary gentrification as an overlooked site of contestation between state heritage discourse and everyday lived practice.

This paper utilizes the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) framework from Laurajane Smith, along with postcolonial theories of hybridity and the *Third Space* of Homi Bhabha. To complement these approaches, this paper introduces a semiotic perspective drawing on Juri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere and Simona Stano's concept of the 'foodsphere' (cibosfera), framing Emirati cuisine as a dynamically contested and semiotically renegotiated system of being. The theoretical claim states that state-sponsored projects and high-class enterprises curate an idealized, simplified, national brand of cuisine, which is opposed to the real living cuisine maintained privately by the older Emirati women in their domestic kitchens and by the professional chefs cooking in luxurious hotel kitchens.

This is demonstrated through the history of chai karak, a sweet, milky tea beverage that was created and supported by the South Asian manual workers,

has been systematically exploited by high-class commercial coffee shops and renamed as a symbol of the luxury Arabic culture. The commercialized process of sanitizing such a drink denies the history of labor and culture of the subordinate South Asian migrant workers. Demonstrating a clear analogy to façadeism, as observed in the housing architecture of Emirati neighborhoods, we show how gentrified coffee shops use the aesthetics of tradition to conceal their hybrid migrant backgrounds. However, we argue that the process of spatial discipline is never complete. The roadside café is a contact zone where the consumption of chai karak becomes a third space for cultural translation that breaks state-imposed segregation.

This paper aims to overcome such conceptual and empirical biases by arguing for an interdisciplinary, ethnographic approach. The integration of the proposed theoretical synthesis represents a critical intervention to decolonize research on Gulf food and heritage. By shifting from an analysis of elite state representations to the sensory and lived experiences of subalterns, scholars can overcome static, objectivist approaches to heritage. Consequently, this paper suggests that national identity in super-diverse and post-oil societies is a dynamic, relational process of identity negotiation and co-production within the context of contemporary Gulf cosmopolitanism.

Keywords: *Emirati cuisine, Culinary gentrification, Authorized Heritage Discourse, Cultural hybridity, Food commodification*

1. Introduction

The economy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has rapidly changed over the past five decades from a subsistence economy dependent on pearling, oasis agriculture, and coastal trade to a post-oil, globalized economy driven by finance, tourism, and real estate (RANDEREE 2019; STEPHENSON & AL-HAMARNEH 2017). Emirati culinary heritage became an indispensable site in a changing and diverse society, catalyzing negotiations over globalization, consumer markets, and state-led nation-building (KHANSAHEB 2021; MARTÍN 2021). The preservation of traditional food practices in Emirati private homes diverges from the commercialized, standardized versions of heritage promoted in public spaces (KHANSAHEB 2021; MARTÍN 2021). The present discourse on culinary heritage studies treats authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance as discrete notions, without acknowledging the construction of Emirati food practices (SMITH 2006; WANG 1999). The use of semiotics to construct the notion of the *foodsphere* (cibosfera) allows for the consideration of these elements as a series of interrelated and co-constructive semiotic negotiations performed within a singular system of meaning-making (LOTMAN 2005; STANO 2015).

Authenticity is often perceived as a construct that is both enacted or experienced (MACCANNELL 1973; WANG 1999); commodification is a sanctioned story of the standardization of culinary heritage (SMITH 2006); hybridity is a product of intercultural communication and cultural translation (BHABHA 1994; COHEN & AVIELI 2004); and resistance is a defense of local agency from cultural homogenization and globalization (DERDERIAN 2017). As the literature indicates, these roles are intertwined, since the senior Emirati women practice authenticity at home in their kitchens (KHANSAHEB 2021). Professional cooks in public spaces become representatives of culinary heritage and serve *Emirati sushi*, as well as protect culinary heritage through recipe documentation (MARTÍN 2021).

This paper brings together the literature on authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance. By assessing the frameworks together, this study identifies culinary gentrification as a process overlooked in the existing literature. Culinary gentrification is understood as a day-to-day practice through which food becomes national heritage, thereby engendering transnational conflicts and struggles over history and ownership. This review demonstrates

a significant disparity in terms of the availability of literature on the issue. While authenticity and commodification are based on numerous empirical studies (ALKORANI 2026; MIELE et al. 2024), hybridity and resistance are mostly based on historical records and producers' views (COHEN & AVIELI 2004; MARTÍN 2021).

The research questions this literature review will address are as follows: How do notions of authenticity, commoditization, hybridity, and resistance engage in dynamic relationships with one another rather than being mutually exclusive concepts in the creation of Emirati culinary heritage? What insight can be gained about this dynamic process through the use of a semiotic approach based on the semiosphere by Lotman (2005) and the foodsphere by Stano (2015)? What light is shed on *culinary gentrification* as an under-theorized and yet crucial intersection between the state and neoliberal capitalism through the case of chai karak?

This paper uses a systematic literature review approach based solely on secondary sources; no primary empirical research was conducted, a known constraint of this type of analysis. The literature has been searched in two databases, namely Scopus and Google Scholar; searches have been conducted using keywords in the subject areas of social sciences, arts and humanities, and environmental science, and have covered peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and reviews published from 2000 to 2026. Searches have been organized using a Boolean search string based on context keywords (Emirati, UAE, Gulf, GCC) and thematic keywords (authenticity, commodification, culinary tourism, food branding, halal, hybridity), carried out in English. Peer-reviewed literature that was relevant to the topic of Emirati or Gulf food heritage, authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and/or resistance and dealt theoretically and/or empirically with the context of the UAE or GCC has been used; analogical contexts of multicultural tourism economies have been used as comparators in case there is no specific UAE-based literature on the topic. Non-academic literature, such as blogs, journalism, and grey literature, has been excluded, as have studies that focus solely on nutritional aspects and food safety without any reference to cultural or heritage aspects. Foundational theoretical literature (MACCANNELL 1973; WANG 1999; SMITH 2006; BHABHA 1994; COHEN & AVIELI 2004; LOTMAN 2005; STANO 2015) has been selected based on citations and relevance to the topic.

To develop an integrated perspective, this paper has five sections. Section

1 introduces the research context and identifies the paper's purpose and contribution. Section 2 brings the concepts of authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance. Section 3 examines each of the four concepts to indicate how they shape Emirati culinary heritage. Section 4 identifies key research gaps and introduces the concept of culinary gentrification. Section 5 concludes by explaining the theoretical and empirical contributions of these frameworks together.

2. Theoretical Framework

Traditional culinary practices survive, transform, and reflect cultural identity in a globalized society. Authenticity is used to judge genuineness, and commodification, on the other hand, is concerned with the transformation of traditional food products into commercialized products. Hybridity can be applied to study cultural interaction as the blending of different cultures, and resistance is how society guards its culture against outside influence. It was MacCannell (1973) who first proposed the theory of authenticity by structuring social space. In addition, Wang (1999) extended the theory by emphasizing the tourists' experience and existential authenticity. On the other hand, it is Bhabha (1994) who proposed the theory of cultural hybridity due to cultural interaction.

Authenticity does not have a single definition; rather, it is performed, perceived, and felt. According to MacCannell (1973), social spaces are divided into a front region, where culture is performed for visitors, hiding the backstage reality, and the backstage, where performers prepare for the performance. Wang (1999) expands this idea by introducing three types of authenticity. Objective authenticity refers to the measurement of the genuineness of original objects according to museum criteria. Constructive authenticity argues that authenticity is measured by people's perceptions, expectations, and cultural values. On the other hand, existential authenticity is emphasized based on activities that resonate with people's self-expression. Instead, a staged back region can be created by eating at a modern heritage restaurant, which facilitates a sense of constructive authenticity; also, existential authenticity

can be experienced through sharing communal traditional meals.

Smith's (2006) concept of the AHD is a dominant Western-based approach that emphasizes tangible heritage's physical, monumental, and visual attraction. In contrast, she argues for the intangible nature of heritage and the process shaped by people's experiences, practices, and engagements. Smith (2006) explains that to reduce social and cultural disagreement, governments and cultural institutions use heritage to present a simplified and widely accepted version of history. Under the influence of a discourse aimed at presenting a unified cultural identity, a state commercializes its national culinary heritage. By organizing festivals that highlight select Emirati cuisines, the state fosters a shared food culture that may end up neglecting the diversity of community food cultures.

The third space theory described by Bhabha (1994) is a middle space where different cultures meet and interact, leading to fusion. In this space, there is a constant negotiation of cultural differences. These identities reshape and reinterpret tradition. Cohen & Avieli's (2004) work reflected the process in the culinary field by arguing that tourist settings are often adapted to visitors' preferences. Within the diverse food culture of the UAE, the presence of varied ingredients, cooking techniques, and flavors results in the adaptation of traditional Emirati food, creating a space for cultural articulation rather than undermining Emirati food heritage. This hybrid food culture space is therefore a site of cultural reassertion.

In his semiotic interpretation of heritage, Lotman (2005) defines the semiosphere as the complete cultural universe in which all signs and meanings are created, stating that it is a system that works through structural antagonism between a strongly structured center, which is self-reflexive, and a periphery, which is more flexible and dynamic. Stano (2015) takes this idea a step further and applies it to food culture, introducing the idea of the *foodsphere* (cibosfera), the culinary semiosphere in which the systems of culinary signs are not eternal essences but are constantly renegotiated and translated from the innovations of the periphery into the dominant centers. Lotman & Uspensky (1978) add that culture acts as a non-hereditary memory of the community, transmitting its identity via sign and text systems. Boero & Greco (2019) apply the semiotic boundary concept to migrant identity, defining the person who moves between two cultures as having a *suspended identity*.

Lotman (2019) argues regarding the dual mechanisms of cultural dynamics.

Additionally, he asserts that culture preserves its identity through a continuous struggle against ‘automatization,’ the natural drift of sign systems toward routine, inertia, and semantic decay. To resist this, culinary systems utilize cyclical memory to stabilize communal identity, while simultaneously relying on directed, linear progress to deautomatize the food code and generate new cultural information (LOTMAN 2019). Performance and the experience of authenticity advanced by MacCannell (1973) and Wang (1999), with the critique of state-sponsored commodification provided by Smith (2006). Lotman (2005) and Stano (2015) further contribute a semiotic understanding of how these processes of authenticity, commodification, and hybridity are structurally organized as a continuous, dynamically contested negotiation of meaning across the highly organized core and flexible periphery of the culinary semiosphere.

3. Dimensions of Emirati Culinary Heritage

3.1. Authenticity

For the purpose of analysis of culinary authenticity, Wang’s (1999) approach of objective, constructive, and existential authenticity is applied with the sociological model of MacCannell (1973) with front, back, and staged back regions. MacCannell (1973) states that modern tourists seek entry into remote regions for an authentic cultural experience. Expanding on this, Wang (1999) provides an explanation of the emergence of constructive authenticity. Furthering the arguments, Alraouf (2010) shows how fast-growing cities create hyperreal environments. These sources demonstrate that culinary authenticity is a concept with multiple aspects rather than an innate property of food, which is concurrently perceived, performed, and experienced across diverse social spaces.

Authentic Emirati cuisine remains largely confined to private domestic space, even as the government pursues initiatives to standardize the image of national heritage (KHANSAHEB 2021; MARTÍN 2021). Hotels and restaurants

in the public sphere rarely offer traditional Emirati cuisines; instead, they adapt to visitor preferences (MARTÍN 2021). Conversely, the state tries to showcase the local food traditions in state-sponsored heritage festivals, yet these performances oversimplify the complex food practices into commercial spectacles, sometimes performed by non-Emiratis (KHANSAHEB 2021). This practice can be explained by Smith's (2006) concept of the AHD, which argues that state-level heritage policies are consensual and pay little attention to community-based heritage practices. Reframed through Lotman's (2005) semiosphere concept, this gap illustrates how officially curated public heritage performances attempt to stabilize and freeze authenticity at the highly organized 'core' as a static, exportable sign, whereas its organic, lived, and existentially authentic form operates within and persists at the flexible, dynamic 'periphery' of domestic practice.

Consumer-level engagement adds a further layer of complexity (MIELE et al. 2024; MIOČEVIĆ et al. 2021). The findings of Miočević et al. (2021) show that the highly developed retail context of Gulf cities may unexpectedly overshadow the authenticity of traditional food culture. For experienced cosmopolitans, a highly standardized supermarket setting diminishes the uniqueness of local food. In contrast, inexperienced cosmopolitans use the local dining context as a boundary-crossing strategy to affirm their multicultural identity. Empirical studies can be an example to show that UAE wealthy consumers increasingly associate halal certification more than religious conditions as an indication of health, safety, and environmental quality (MIELE et al. 2024). Therefore, the culinary authenticity in the UAE is dynamic, which is shaped by the combined influence of government narratives, commercial activities, and changing consumer identities and preferences, as observed at the intersection.

3.2. Commodification

Smith (2006), which helps to understand the commodification of Emirati cuisine, reflects the state's efforts to represent heritage in a selective manner through initiatives intended to manage cultural tensions and construct national identity. Within this framework, intangible practices such as culinary traditions are transformed into standardized and commercialized strategic resources to serve economic and political objectives. This process, initiated

by the government, became stronger due to broader economic factors, as advocated by Randeree (2019), supporting that globalization, international migration, and the emergence of the wealthy Muslim middle class expanded the global halal economy, leading to profitable markets and facilitating the commodification of local foods. Likewise, Stephenson & Al-Hamarneh (2017) explained that GCC tourism development has intensified heritage commodification as the government follows destination branding strategies to diversify the economy from oil dependence and develop the service sector. Together, state-led heritage policies and global market forces operate as mutually reinforcing drivers of culinary commodification in the UAE.

In the UAE, halal certification is used as a commodification mechanism to qualify, differentiate, and market consumer products in global markets, evolving from a religious assurance. As seen in Rajagopal et al. (2011), corporations are transforming halal certification as a unique selling proposition by leveraging its religious significance to develop lasting relationships with consumers and gain a competitive advantage. Along the same lines, Martín (2021) demonstrates how Emirati food is being codified into globally palatable forms by celebrity chefs and culinary media. Likewise, Michael & Fusté-Forné (2022) highlight the use of Instagram by luxury hotels to commodify Emirati gastronomy by crafting a narrative of luxury and sophistication around local cuisine. Finally, Alkorani's (2026) study aligns with these strategies, demonstrating that the UAE supports tourism and economic diversification by regulating its food practices, including public dining and alcohol consumption restrictions during Ramadan. The diverse applications of this concept reveal the dynamic commodification of cuisine at multiple levels across corporate, culinary, state-regulatory, and digital domains.

The widespread commodification in the Gulf has different consequences for the preservation and authenticity of Emirati heritage. Khansaheb (2021) advocates that state-sponsored heritage festivals reduce the complexity of culinary traditions and oversimplify the practical lived experiences of senior Emirati women. In a further critical analysis, Wippel (2023) shows how commodification can be fast-tracked through the practices of neoliberal urbanism and place marketing through the formation of hyper-real dreamscapes that promote global visibility and consumption. Likewise, Kashef & Balkhy (2025) argue that architecture and urban authenticity are undermined by centralized heritage management and planning that

marginalize local populations from strategic decision-making. Although the research of Kashef & Balkhy (2025) focuses geographically and structurally on the archaeological megaprojects of Saudi Arabia, it can be used as an excellent comparison to the culinary tradition in the UAE. In the same way that centralized spatial curatorial management in Al-Ula threatens to exclude locals from their heritage, the state-controlled AHD in the UAE turns the authentic and organic culinary tradition into a commodified global brand. Commodification, therefore, functions as a double-edged sword: it promotes Emirati culinary heritage on one hand, while distorting it on the other. In semiotic terms, this dynamic represents the process by which the foodsphere's highly organized 'core' standardizes and exports peripheral meanings as fixed, marketable signs, a process that remains inherently incomplete, as peripheral meanings and diasporic culinary practices continue to circulate and evolve outside of official institutional control (STANO 2015).

3.3. Hybridity

To analyze the culinary hybridity that occurs when local traditions and global influences intersect, Bhabha's (1994) third space serves as a theoretical foundation. Taking into account this demographic context, Cohen & Avieli (2004) claim that new cultural phenomena arise from cross-cultural interactions through food rather than from the mixing of culinary traditions. However, while Cohen & Avieli (2004) deal with the mixing of two cultures under the influence of tourism, Al Hameli & Arnucio (2023) discuss the negotiations that people with dual heritage, or *halfies*, must make and how hybridity functions as a shaping factor in their lives. Consequently, Bhabha's (1994) notion of translation becomes negotiation as a process of individual encounters due to multiple cultural affiliations both domestically and publicly. Through the deliberate adaptation of food traditions to promote national identity, culinary hybridity can manifest in the public sphere. Martín (2021) demonstrates the chef's efforts to create fusion dishes that align with global culinary trends, including traditional Emirati dishes such as pesto made with local rocca or *Emirati sushi*, made with ghee and local fish. However, it becomes clear from historical facts that hybridity occurred much earlier than today's globalization. According to Onley (2014), the Indo-Gulf trade

facilitated the exchange of culinary ingredients and practices across the Gulf region over the centuries of trade relations. Despite Martín's (2021) idea that culinary innovations were one of the reasons for the hybridization of cuisine, Moaswes (2023) asserts that the South Asian community's contribution to chai karak has been underestimated. However, it is noteworthy that this cultural exchange between India and the Gulf region in relation to cuisine does not happen in one direction; rather, it forms a multidirectional translocal loop. According to Trenka-Dalton (2023), years of worker migration have led to the creation of many cultural connections, whereby return migrant workers in the South Indian state of Kerala actualize their *Gulfi* experiences by creating thematic local eateries and business spaces.

According to Alraouf (2010), hyperreal environments are substituting for authentic cultural experiences. Abdellatif (2026) confirms that this view produces staged authenticity. On the contrary, El Amrousi et al. (2019) argue that creating traditional majlis and liwan in modern villas to achieve architectural hybridization preserves local identity rather than destroying it. Much in the way that the neo-vernacular facades of the Emirati residential cityscapes serve to impose a localized aesthetics over fast-paced modernization (EL AMROUSI et al. 2019), the physical and commercial spaces where chai karak is consumed also undergo 'façadism' (EL AMROUSI et al. 2019; MOASWES 2023). In the heavily gentrified cafes of Dubai, the drink's hybrid, working-class roots in South Asia are deliberately hidden behind traditionalizing aesthetics that cater to the tastes of the cosmopolitan clientele (MARTÍN 2021; MOASWES 2023). When these two cases are considered collectively, it is evident that they are both processes of hybridization that simultaneously act as a double performance of modern national identity, which hides the lived experience and labor of the subaltern migrant communities that built them. From a semiotic standpoint, this 'double performance' functions as a tactical act of boundary-crossing where subaltern migrant communities navigate a 'suspended identity' and actively generate new culinary meanings at the porous, contested edge between the foodsphere's core and periphery (BOERO & GRECO 2019). This dynamic is mirrored in Jeddah, where Greco (2021) shows how foreign street foods, like South Asian sambosa, are translated from 'alien' (chuzhoi) to 'own' (svoi); this naturalizes them into national heritage while erasing their migrant labor origins from collective memory.

3.4. Resistance

The theoretical understanding of cultural resistance begins by challenging heritage-defining and representing frameworks. Smith (2006) demonstrates this using the AHD concept by arguing that community-based practices get neglected when the state-approved history representation applies. In the process of this struggle, the notion of ‘mediation tension’ is brought to light as there is conflict between the state’s attempt to portray an immaculate picture of a united and ethnically homogeneous national identity and the transnational nature of this process. While Derderian (2017) reveals how official narratives constructed by the state are based on ethno-nationalism and focus on the Bedouin culture, dismissing the contributions of other cultures in the region, such as the Persian and South Asian diasporas. Abdellatif (2026) highlights the irony that this ‘authentic’ heritage is produced and performed with the help of a large number of non-national workers. The process of expatriate cultural labor disrupts conventional notions of cultural property rights.

According to Martín (2021), to maintain culinary authenticity, professional chefs codify and record traditional recipes, and Khansaheb (2021) mentions that senior Emirati women transfer them orally. In addition to state regulation of culture, Alhaddad & Galal Ahmed (2024) observe citizens’ use of informal urban agriculture to continue local food traditions. The diverse efforts to preserve local cultural agency cause broader political and commercial tensions when they interact. For instance, Khansaheb (2021) explains the oversimplification of the complex culinary traditions of Emirati women to symbolic representations in official heritage festivals.

Moving beyond cultural representation, Picton (2010) indicates that the state-led heritage revival serves the objectives of international tourism development and economic diversification, rather than merely responding to globalization. Also, Freer & Kherfi (2020) claim that the state incorporates grassroots regional heritage initiatives into nation-building projects. In essence, the perspectives indicate cultural resistance. Reframed semiotically, this disputed site becomes a zone where peripheral culinary practices resist total absorption into the authorized sign systems of the core, thereby sustaining alternative, non-hereditary channels of collective semiotic memory and transmission (LOTMAN & USPENSKY 1978).

4. Discussion and Gaps

When analyzing the common themes across the regional literature, the boundaries between authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance become unclear. Martín's (2021) work covers four different functions where the presence of the culinary heritage of Emirati confinement ration in private spaces within their houses as a representation of authenticity is codified by celebrity chefs and popularized by culinary media for commercial purposes, creating hybridity in forming new forms like *Emirati sushi*, and is recorded to preserve culture. On a similar note, the role played by the older Emirati women in the preservation of culinary traditions as well as the presentation of these traditions in simplified terms during state-sponsored heritage festivals was explained by Khansaheb (2021). From the similarities that exist in these literary works, it is clear that individual theoretical perspectives will not be helpful in comprehending the changes that are happening in the culinary landscape of the UAE. Instead, the AHD shapes traditions through negotiations amid the demands of globalization, commercialization, and cultural preservation (SMITH 2006). Consequently, the studies' convergences reveal that, through interactions among power, money, identity, and consumption, authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance are interconnected and can work together.

The structural analysis of the literature suggests that each theory leads to the conclusion that an issue remains open. Authenticity studies show that the conflict between state representation and everyday family traditions continually influences the values of Emirati cuisine (MARTÍN 2021; WANG 1999). Commodification studies demonstrate that cultural meaning is reduced and community control is limited as traditional foods are standardized for global consumption. Whereas Khansaheb (2021) highlights how the process occurs in the world of cooking, Kashef & Balkhy (2025) show how the same occurs in the built environment through centralized heritage management. In addition, hybridity research shows that different culinary traditions can contribute to the development of cultural identity, but small cultural communities are overlooked (EL AMROUSI et al. 2019; MOASWES 2023). Finally, research on resistance shows that the state's nation-building policy interferes with the presentation of the community's culinary heritage (FREER & KHERFI 2020; PICTON 2010). The recurring theme suggests that Emirati

cuisine has developed amid tensions that a single perspective cannot fully explain.

Despite the possible relevance of the literature in providing insight into the issue, an imbalance of emphasis and scale of research is visible when the frameworks are compared, since the issues related to authenticity and commodification were primarily analyzed using surveys and ethnographic studies of consumers' reactions to certification, retailing, and regulation of halal (ALKORANI 2026; MIELE et al. 2024; MIOČEVIĆ et al. 2021). At the same time, hybridity research paid little attention to consumer experience and perception of fusion dishes in favor of analysis of past trade and food production (COHEN & AVIELI 2004; MARTÍN 2021). The literature also reveals the mismatch between state-supported tourism and branding and personal food tradition preservation (EL AMROUSI et al. 2019; MARTÍN 2021; PICTON 2010). This paradox is illustrated by the gentrification of the drink chai karak, a traditional South Asian drink associated with the working class that has been deliberately reimagined as an exclusive Arabic cultural identity (MOASWES 2023; SMITH 2006). However, as Bhabha (1994) explains, this sort of process will never succeed in its entirety; the roadside café is always a third space where cultural production takes place organically despite efforts to the contrary. Read through Lotman's (2005) and Stano's (2015) core-periphery model, while official commodification attempts to fix and stabilize the meaning of chai karak at the dominant core of the foodsphere, everyday consumption at the street-level periphery continuously destabilizes these authorized representations and keeps the beverage's meaning in continuous, dynamic renegotiation. Providing a regional perspective, Greco (2021) confirms that these tensions are endemic to wider Gulf cosmopolitanism, where rapid modernization and 'culinary intrusions' turn the defense of local culinary authenticity into a highly contested regional negotiation.

These data, gaps, and conflicts suggest the need to go beyond investigating separate theories. The field of Emirati culinary heritage studies must become a space where diverse approaches are pursued simultaneously. The theories of authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance may all be reflected in a single culinary recipe or food practice. Further research needs to involve broader political and economic analysis of the global labor system and state branding, along with community-based ethnographic research using an

interdisciplinary approach. Researchers need to pay attention to senior Emirati women and migrant service workers who create and experience altered private homes, commercial public spaces, and altered relationships (ABDELLATIF 2026; KHANSAHEB 2021). Scholars have an opportunity to go beyond the idealized story and realize what the living tradition of Emirati cuisine actually means.

5. Conclusion

This review proves that analyzing Emirati culinary culture involves more than the isolated use of authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance; rather, these four elements must be understood as a co-constitutive and dynamic system operating within a single, unified culinary semiosphere. Not separate entities but mutually reinforcing components of a communal cultural grammar, the four concepts operate in tandem within the domestic, commercial, and institutional domains to continuously semiotically renegotiate and challenge a shared alimentary identity.

Through the development of an interdisciplinary framework, this paper shows how elite figures, including state-backed culinary experts, not only construct officially curated and idealized notions of authenticity at the foodsphere's core but also drive commercialization, while diasporic culinary practices on the periphery generate the hybridity that prevents system stagnation. Through the systemic analysis of cultural memory provided by this multidimensional approach, the focus shifts from a static preservation of the past to the active, present-day processes of selection, translation, and deautomatization, thereby demonstrating that the development of Gulf cuisine is a dynamically contested battlefield resisting static theoretical generalizations.

The combination of these categories helps uncover the relationships and lacunae within the Emirati food sphere. Synthesizing authenticity, commodification, hybridity, and resistance in this paper helps us recognize that culinary gentrification is an understudied intersection between officially curated state heritage policy and global economic forces. In this process, peripheral alimentary systems and hybrid culinary practices, such as the South Asian

roots of chai karak, are obscured by commercialization and the promotion of state-sanctioned national heritage. This review also indicates an imbalance in the literature between authenticity and commodification research, which uses consumer-focused studies of the core, and hybridity and resistance research, which focuses on subaltern culinary codes at the periphery.

These findings need to be taken into account in light of a few methodological limitations, such as the lack of primary data collection, which means the study is based solely on existing sources. Any future research on the culinary culture of the Gulf would need to be based on an interdisciplinary, ethnographic approach that shifts focus away from the institutionally authorized representations of the state and focuses instead on how collective semiotic memory is lived and practiced. Specifically, research should investigate the culinary lives of older Emirati women, as well as the suspended identities of South Asian labor migrants as they navigate the public and private spaces of cooking and semiotically renegotiate the contemporary culinary landscape.

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