



Featured in  
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## Artist Michael Rakowitz Pays Tribute to His Mother's Baghdadi Recipes

'*Enemy Kitchen* makes Iraqi culture visible in the US beyond war, producing an alternative discourse and social space.'

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BY MICHAEL RAKOWITZ IN FAN LETTER | 12 FEB 19

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The staff of *Enemy Kitchen*. Courtesy: Michael Rakowitz

My homage is in tribute to my mother, who in 1991 began teaching me recipes from my Iraqi grandparents to undo the dehumanization caused by the Gulf War that year. She has been, and continues to be, the most profound influence on my practice. In January 1991, I witnessed Iraq in real time for the first time, via CNN's green-tinted images – night-vision. Buildings I would never get to visit were being blown up by American bombs. Suddenly, as I watched all of this unfold at the dinner table, I realized that the place my Iraqi Jewish grandparents fled to was destroying the place they fled from. I felt bifurcated, shattered. My mother saw how this was affecting me, and got my brothers' and my attention. 'Do you know there are no Iraqi restaurants in New York?' she said. Later, I understood what she meant: that Iraq was not visible in this country beyond oil and war. That moment would serve as a primal scene that inspired my work *Enemy Kitchen* (2006–ongoing), as the drum once again began to beat toward war with Iraq in 2003. Together with my mother, I teach Baghdadi recipes to audiences, many of whom have relatives serving in Iraq, but few outlets to discuss the war. Since 2012, this has included a food truck that serves Baghdadi cuisine. *Enemy Kitchen* makes Iraqi culture visible in the US beyond war, producing an alternative discourse and social space.



# Kubba Bamia

*Kubba* or *kibbeh*, is a dish found throughout the Middle East and North Africa, most commonly cooked as a spiced meat mixed with pine nuts and onions stuffed inside a bulghur wheat shell. It is usually fried and served with sesame paste.

*Kubba Bamia* is a traditional dish, particularly popular in the departed Iraqi Jewish community, in which the *kubba* is also made of spiced meat, but stuffed inside a rice flour-based dough, giving it a soft, chewy texture like a dumpling. It is cooked in a stew of tomato stock with plenty of fresh okra, called *bamia* in Arabic

## Dough

2 cups brown rice flour  
1 tsp salt  
1/2 lbs. ground lamb  
1 cup water

Put rice flour and salt in a bowl. Add water. Mix and knead into a dough. When everything is mixed well, add lamb and knead until evenly distributed. If dough is dry, additional water should be added gradually to keep the dough smooth. Keep a saucer of water nearby to keep your palms wet. Break off small pieces of the dough and roll them into spheres smaller than a golf ball. Set *kubba* dough aside.

## Filling (Hashwa)

1 lbs. ground lamb  
2 large onions  
1/2 cup minced parsley leaves  
1 tablespoon sesame oil  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon pepper  
1 tablespoon Iraqi *bharat* spice mix (cumin, dried limes, turmeric, ginger, chili, curry, cloves, cardamom, dried rose petals, allspice)

Put lamb in a bowl. Use a food processor to chop onions finely, almost creating a paste. Add parsley, oil, salt, pepper, *bharat*, and knead together well until all ingredients are distributed evenly.

To make the *kubba*, flatten each piece of dough on the palm of your hand making a thin, flat disk. Take approximately one teaspoon of the meat filling (*hashwa*) and place in the center of the disk. Next, work the sides of the disk up around the *hashwa*, as if forming a bowl. Pinch the dough closed around the *hashwa*, enveloping it to ensure a good seal. With your wet palms roll the *kubba* and shape into a ball. Place all the *kubba* in refrigerator when done.

## Stew

1 box (10 ounces) frozen whole baby okra, or 1 pound fresh okra  
2 lbs. crushed tomatoes  
1 small onion, chopped fine  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon ground turmeric  
2 tablespoons sesame oil  
1/2 teaspoon pepper  
4 tablespoons sugar (or Iraqi date syrup)  
3/4 lemon juice

Finely chop one small onion. In a large, deep pot, sauté chopped onion in 2 tablespoons of sesame oil, until soft and transparent, adding 1/2 teaspoon of pepper, 1 teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon of tumeric. Next, add the crushed tomatoes and 4 cups of water. Bring to a boil and let cook for 15 minutes. Reduce heat, simmer for about 7 minutes, and then add the okra (*bamia*) along with a teaspoon of salt. Introduce the *kubba* into the simmering mixture by dropping them in carefully, one at a time. Distribute evenly around the pot, but do not layer one atop the other. Once cooked, the *kubba* will float to the surface. Carefully remove cooked *kubba* with a ladle and set aside in a bowl. Repeat until all *kubba* are fully cooked.

Add sugar or Iraqi date syrup to the broth and let simmer for 10 more minutes. Let cool for 3 minutes, then add lemon juice.

Pour stew and *bamia* into the bowl of cooked *kubba* and let sit for 10 minutes, so that any *kubba* that has cooled warms up again. Serve with plain basmati rice.

Makes 6-8 servings.