

# Recipes Between Cultures: Muslim Women's Food, Memory, and Identity in Diana Abu-Jaber's *The Language of Baklava* and *Life Without a Recipe*

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received June 03, 2026

Revised June 25, 2026

Accepted June 29, 2026

Available online June 30, 2026

### Keywords:

Muslim Women's Literature; Diaspora;

Food Studies; Cultural Identity; Memoir.



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## ABSTRACT

This study explored how Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, *The Language of Baklava: A Memoir* and *Life Without a Recipe*, portrayed the journey of Muslim women through food. The research used the lenses of Muslimah narratives, literary devices, and intertextuality to analyze the profound connection between culinary experience and identity in a diasporic context. The paper argued that food is key to this journey in three main ways: (1) it acts as a medium for cultural preservation and identity affirmation; (2) it expresses personal agency, emotional healing, identity negotiation; and (3) it serves as a site for intergenerational storytelling and cultural continuity. The analysis found that food, particularly traditional dishes like baklava, served as a source of emotional comfort for the women, helping them maintain their heritage and define a new, hybrid Arab-American self. Furthermore, the kitchen provided an important space where women gained social authority and practiced self-determination to cope with cultural displacement. The study concluded that food in these memoirs is a dynamic tool actively used by Muslim women to assert their self-worth and ensure their cultural identity remains vibrant across geographical

boundaries.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Food is a profound and fundamental medium through which culture and memories are represented, preserved, and expressed. For many people who live in more than one culture, food becomes a powerful way to understand and express their identity. This idea is explored in Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, *The Language of Baklava: A Memoir* (2005) and *Life Without a Recipe* (2016), where food connects her Arab-American heritage with family, memories, and self-discovery. As a memoir, the genre grants the author a subjective, intimate, and often non-linear voice to explore her fragmented and hybrid identity. The form of the diasporic cookbook memoir is a critical site for mobilizing women's life narratives and documenting oral food histories to preserve distinct cultural identities (Sathananthar, 2025). These works suggest that food can act as a bridge between generations and cultures, making them a great resource for studying food culture and identity in literature. Food, as a shared experience, has the power to link past and present, helping people remember who they are and where they come from. This paper argues that Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, *The Language of Baklava* and *Life Without a Recipe*, portray Muslim women's journey through food as involving three main aspects: food as a medium of cultural preservation and Muslim women's identity affirmation; food as an expression of personal agency, emotional healing, and identity negotiation; and food as a site of intergenerational storytelling and cultural continuity.

Food studies as a field highlight how culinary practices are deeply tied to identity, memory, and cultural negotiation, especially for migrants and diasporic communities. Abu-Jaber's memoirs illustrate this by showing how food allows her to navigate between her Arab and American identities, creating a sense of belonging while challenging traditional cultural boundaries. This is consistent with analyses of her other works, such as *Crescent*, where culinary practice is identified as a key strategy to deconstruct Arab-American identity through various dimensions, including memory, nostalgia, hybridity, and essentialism (Berrebbah, 2020). In *The Language of Baklava*, Abu-Jaber talks about her experience growing up in a mixed family with a Jordanian father and an American mother. For her family, food is more than nourishment or something to eat—it carries deep cultural

meaning and tradition. She represents the emotional power of food by describing family gatherings where meals become metaphors for love, faith, and cultural difference. Furthermore, in *Life Without a Recipe*, she writes about cooking as a form of personal expression that goes beyond following old recipes, symbolizing the flexible and changing nature of cultural identity. In Abu-Jaber's writing, food expresses her deep questions about who she really is, with the dishes she eats and cooks symbolizing her ongoing journey to understand herself (Tabačková, 2018).

According to Demir (2025), in *Changing Food Habits and Cultural Identity in Migrant Populations*, food acts as a connection to home. Food habits are not fixed; they shift with time, place, and experience. For migrant populations, eating becomes a reflection of change, memory, adaptation, and pride. Although many studies talk about food and identity in Arab-American writings, not many of them focus on personal stories like Abu-Jaber's memoirs that explore Muslim women's journey through food and memory. This lack of focus points out the need to study memoirs more closely to understand how they tell stories about memory and identity differently.

Abu-Jaber's memoirs offer valuable insight because they show the experiences of groups that are often overlooked, especially Arab-American Muslim women. These stories tell us that food is more than just something to eat; it helps keep culture alive and helps people feel strong in their feelings and identity. By presenting personal experiences through culinary narratives, Abu-Jaber provides a nuanced portrayal of Muslim identities and highlights the complex relationship between food, memory, and diasporic life. Examining these memoirs contributes to broader discussions of cultural identity, women's narratives, and Arab-American literature, while offering readers a deeper understanding of how food can function as a site of cultural continuity and self-expression.

## 2. METHOD

The research uses a qualitative methodology to deeply explore the relationship between food, memory, and identity in Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, *The Language of Baklava* and *Life Without a Recipe*. This approach is necessary because the study focuses on understanding the complex meanings and cultural contexts embedded within literary texts, rather than measuring numerical data. The primary data source consists of the full texts of these two memoirs. The main analytical technique employed is close reading combined with thematic analysis. This means the research systematically examined the narratives, specific scenes, descriptions of food, and embedded recipes to identify recurring patterns, images, and key quotes related to the three main themes: cultural preservation, personal agency, and intergenerational storytelling. To guide this analysis, the study uses the principles of Food Studies and relevant cultural theories as its theoretical framework, providing a "culinary lens" to interpret how food functions symbolically and practically in the author's Arab-American experience, ultimately helping to answer the central research questions and support the paper's main argument.

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework

Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, *The Language of Baklava* and *Life Without a Recipe*, use food as a symbol to explore the identity and cultural memories of Muslim women. This chapter will engage with three theories—Muslimah Narratives, Literary Devices, and Intertextuality—to look further into Abu-Jaber's memoirs and their relevance. Muslimah Narratives focus on Muslim women's identities, Literary Devices illustrate how memory and identity are conveyed through language, and Intertextuality reveals connections to cultural traditions that enrich her stories. These theories highlight how Abu-Jaber's memoirs describe the complex process of negotiating identity, memory, and cultural belonging among Arab-American Muslim women.

- Muslimah Narratives

The first theory, Muslimah Narratives, emphasizes the representation of Muslim women's experiences and identities. Abu-Jaber's memoirs reveal the personal stories of women who deal with family, cultural, and religious expectations. In *The Language of Baklava*, Aunt Aya's invitation to share baklava is not just about offering food; it is a symbol of acceptance and the continuation of cultural traditions. As Abu-Jaber observes, "To my mind, this is the best way to show love—to offer food from your own hand" (Abu-Jaber, 2005, p. 17). This illustrates how food acts as a medium through which cultural identity and female solidarity are strengthened. Similarly, in *Life Without a Recipe*, the kitchen table serves as a healing and storytelling space: "I felt better at the table, which I thought of not just as a place to eat but also as a story-telling... reassuring" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 8). These moments challenge stereotypical portrayals of Muslim women by highlighting their active and central role in preserving cultural memory (Guebla & Maouie, 2020; Tabačková, 2018).

- Literary Devices

Literary devices, as the second theoretical lens, are useful for enriching Abu-Jaber's narrative, adding depth and emotional connection. The metaphorical and symbolic analysis of food in literary texts is a core component of Food Studies, which provides a crucial "culinary lens" for reading foodways in imaginative texts (Klitzing, 2023). The metaphor of baklava, which has many layers, symbolizes the layered nature of

identity and culture. For example, in *The Language of Baklava*, her aunt's advice when making strudel connects food with life choices: "Marry, don't marry... Ask yourself, Do I want a baby or do I want to make a cake? The answer will come to you like bells ringing" (Abu-Jaber, 2005, p. 175). This metaphor emphasizes the connection between culinary practice and womanhood. Additionally, in *Life Without a Recipe*, Abu-Jaber uses food as a symbol to express emotions and family connections. For example, sugar and baking represent comfort and help her cope with sadness: "I take out my soldiers—flour, brown sugar, vanilla, salt... The recipes soothe me with their calm voices, and the sugar brushes away sorrow" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 178). These devices help convey that identity is not fixed but an evolving and fluid narrative (Ledoux, 2021; Sayed, 2025).

- Intertextuality

Intertextuality is an important theory that connects Abu-Jaber's memoirs to bigger cultural traditions. In *The Language of Baklava*, she wonders, "... how people never seem to write about food in novels?" (Abu-Jaber, 2005, p. 195), showing how food connects stories and culture in a way that is often missing in literature. This focus on the recipe as a textual and cultural form aligns with contemporary Food Studies methodology, which views recipes not as rigid guidelines but as creative models for generating improvisations within the field (Chartrand et al., 2024). Also, in *Life Without a Recipe*, she explains that "You learn food by feel, not on a paper.... Why would you write down how to cook?... It's like learning to speak French. You don't do it in a classroom...." (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 195). This suggests that culinary knowledge and culture are lived experiences passed on through practice rather than fixed rules. These examples show that cultural stories are living and flexible, not fixed or simple, highlighting the rich, many-sided identities of Muslim women across generations (Djohar, 2020).

These three theoretical lenses—Muslimah Narratives, Literary Devices, and Intertextuality—show how Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs use food not just as something to eat but as a powerful way to tell stories about identity, memory, and cultural ties. Her way of telling stories reveals the many layers and changes in Muslim women's lives and challenges simple or one-sided views. By looking at these stories through personal experiences, symbolic language, and cultural conversations, readers can better understand how Muslim women literature shows complex identities in rich and meaningful ways.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Result

This section presents a detailed analysis of Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, focusing on how food functions as a central theme in Muslim women's journey of identity formation and cultural negotiation. The findings are organized into three key aspects that emerge directly from the texts: food as a medium of cultural preservation and Muslim women identity affirmation; food as an expression of personal agency, emotional healing, and identity negotiation; and food as a site for intergenerational storytelling and the continuation of cultural memory. These interconnected themes reveal the complexity and richness of Abu-Jaber's portrayal of Muslim women's lived experiences.

##### 3.1.1. Food as a Medium of Cultural Preservation and Muslim Women Identity Affirmation

In Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs, food emerges as much more than mere sustenance; it forms a pillar of cultural preservation and identity affirmation for Muslim women navigating diasporic spaces. In *The Language of Baklava*, her reflections on the rich sensory experiences attached to food highlight its role as a bearer of tradition. However, she also notes the challenge of true preservation in a new land, observing that her father "... thinks he cooks and eats Arabic food, but these walnuts weren't grown from Jordanian earth and this butter wasn't made from Jordanian lambs. He is eating the shadow of a memory" (Abu-Jaber, 2005, p. 178). This feeling of eating a 'shadow' highlights the emotional difficulty of being far from home and the challenge of truly recreating the original culture. This ritualized sharing of food becomes a way in which Muslim women maintain a tangible connection to their Arab heritage despite displacement. This challenge leads to creative adaptation, a core finding of the research. The persistence of the recipe and the ritual over the precise ingredient is a powerful act of cultural resilience. Similarly, in *Life Without a Recipe*, the kitchen table is portrayed as a sanctuary of healing and storytelling: "I felt better at the table, which I thought of not just as a place to eat but also as a story-telling... reassuring" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 8). Food here acts as a medium for transmitting family narratives and memories that sustain identity across generations. Through such spaces, Abu-Jaber portrays Muslim women engaging actively in cultural preservation, challenging notions that diasporic identities lead to cultural loss. The smell of spices and the taste of familiar dishes can immediately transport the author back to their homeland, acting like a private time machine for memory.

Abu-Jaber's description of the multi-layered baklava itself functions as a powerful metaphor for the layered identities of Muslim women trying to balance between tradition and contemporary life. The sheer number of layers

in the pastry (sometimes forty or more) mirrors the multiplicity of cultural influences, expectations, and personal histories that define the diasporic self. Her narratives demonstrate that food is simultaneously a symbol of cultural pride and a living practice subject to adaptation and personal interpretation. This duality reveals the constant negotiation Muslim women navigate between preserving cultural continuity and embracing individual evolution in diasporic contexts. Also, these food traditions are not about copying old ways blindly but about creatively keeping culture alive in new places. This way of cooking and sharing food lets Muslim women stay connected to their past while living their present realities, showing how important food is for their sense of self and belonging. In other words, food traditions are not just repeated but creatively reinterpreted by Muslim women, showing how they actively maintain their culture even as they adjust to life away from their homelands. This creative process highlights the way food becomes part of their identity journey, giving them a way to express who they are in changing social contexts.

### 3.1.2. *Food as an Expression of Personal Agency, Emotional Healing, and Identity Negotiation*

Abu-Jaber's memoirs also emphasize food as a dynamic medium for personal agency and emotional negotiation in Muslim women's lives. Cooking becomes both a refuge and an assertion of selfhood, reflecting complex emotional and cultural realities amidst diaspora. The careful, almost militant organization of ingredients is often described as a source of control. The phrase from *Life Without a Recipe*, "I take out my soldiers—flour, brown sugar, vanilla, salt... The recipes soothe me with their calm voices, and the sugar brushes away sorrow" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 178), encapsulates this intimate relationship between food and emotional solace. Baking, in this context, is transformed into a narrative of comfort, resilience, and identity renewal. The deliberate act of measuring, kneading, and transforming raw materials into a final product serves as a powerful antidote to the feeling of powerlessness often associated with navigating cultural displacement. This personal dimension is echoed in the literary device of layered baklava in *The Language of Baklava*, symbolizing the multifaceted and evolving nature of identity. More explicitly, Abu-Jaber links cooking and eating to self-definition in *Life Without a Recipe*, describing the act of tastes as "powerful, intimate, uniquely your own. ... the power to choose—to say, No, thank you, not this, ...— at the center of agency and pleasure. You are what you crave and fear and what you want" (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 190). This ability to choose what to eat or what to cook is presented as a fundamental human right and a core part of defining oneself as an individual. Here, food becomes metaphor and medium, connecting culinary practice to life decisions and self-definition, illustrating identity's fluidity rather than fixity. Also, the kitchen changes from being just a place for required work (which is often expected of women) into a place for self-discovery and working through feelings. By becoming skilled at cooking, Abu-Jaber's characters gain control over their minds and feelings about their culture, letting them define what it means to be a woman and feel good about themselves.

The focused, repetitive motions of cooking, like stirring or chopping, become a form of meditation that helps the women manage stress and sadness. The physical, sensory experience of cooking and eating offers a simple, reliable joy that acts as a powerful emotional support system for the author and her family. In a world where cultural rules and expectations constantly shift and sometimes clash, the taste of a beloved, familiar dish provides instant, trustworthy comfort. The warmth of a stew or the intense sweetness of a perfect dessert is a guaranteed source of happiness that contrasts sharply with the uncertainty of living between two cultures. This guaranteed pleasure helps them cope with feelings of being different or misunderstood in their American environment, turning the kitchen into a predictable, safe space for emotional refuge.

### 3.1.3. *Food as a Site of Intergenerational Storytelling and Cultural Continuity*

Finally, Abu-Jaber's memoirs powerfully demonstrate how food serves as a crucial site for intergenerational storytelling and cultural continuity. The kitchen and communal meals become spaces where histories, memories, and identities are actively transmitted, negotiated, and reinvented. Abu-Jaber's questioning in *The Language of Baklava*, "... how people never seem to write about food in novels?" (Abu-Jaber, 2005, p. 195), acknowledges this form of cultural storytelling's underrepresentation and importance. The stories told during meals are often incomplete, like the father's memories of Jordan blending with the author's American childhood, but having the actual food there gives a solid base to the talks and makes the past feel real and present. In *Life Without a Recipe*, she articulates the embodied, performative nature of culinary knowledge: "You learn food by feel, not on a paper.... Why would you write down how to cook?... It's like learning to speak French. You don't do it in a classroom...." (Abu-Jaber, 2016, p. 195). The idea of 'learn food by feel' emphasizes that cultural knowledge is passed down physically, through watching, touching, and tasting, much like a natural language. This metaphor demonstrates food as lived cultural experience, transmitted through sensory practice and familial engagement rather than written or fixed protocols.

The family kitchen functions as a critical, shared physical space where the author and her parents are forced to interact and communicate, even when their cultural views conflict. When verbal discussions about

identity or heritage become too difficult or lead to arguments, the common, necessary task of preparing a meal often acts as a non-verbal language that bridges the gap. The father and daughter may not agree on what it means to be Arab-American, but they must agree on how to chop the parsley or fold the kibbeh. This shared focus on the food creates temporary harmony and allows the cultural lessons to be passed down through the silent, physical motions of cooking, making the kitchen the central stage for intergenerational compromise and understanding.

### 3.2. Discussion

The discussion integrates the findings from Abu-Jaber's memoirs with existing scholarship to answer the research questions, interpret the significance of the findings, and position them within the broader field of Food Studies and diasporic literature.

#### 3.2.1. Discussion of Cultural Preservation and Muslim Women Identity

The idea that food is essential for cultural preservation and identity negotiation is a major point in the study of Arab-American literature. This resonance with Muslimah Narratives is underscored by Tabačková (2018), who argues that food narratives provide critical insight into Muslim women's negotiation of identity within intersecting cultural and religious contexts. Guebla and Maouie (2020) further emphasize that culinary memoirs like Abu-Jaber's function as acts of self-assertion and cultural reclamation within Arab-American diasporas. The political significance of food as a form of resistance and pride is also evident in Rodyna's (2023) examination of immigrant Muslim women's commitment to culinary tradition, which strengthens community cohesion and counters assimilationist pressures. By cooking traditional dishes, Muslim women publicly and privately resist the pressure to completely forget their original culture and fully blend into American life. Hamad (2016) and Hassiba (2017) similarly highlight how such preservation through food narrates complex hybrid identities affected by exile and migration. These perspectives offer essential context to Abu-Jaber's personal narratives, rooting her culinary memories within broader cultural and sociopolitical frameworks. Sutaguna et al. (2025), from an anthropological view, confirm food's role as a meaningful site where heritage is constantly negotiated, preserved, and adapted in diaspora, supporting the idea of food as a living cultural archive. Abu-Jaber's memoirs vividly illustrate this interplay, positioning food rituals as foundational to diasporic Muslim women's ongoing cultural resilience.

The analysis of food as a medium for memory and cultural preservation in Abu-Jaber's memoirs is further validated when integrated with the broader scholarship on diasporic Arab women's writing. The detailed descriptions of ancestral recipes, the emotional weight of certain ingredients, and the nostalgic atmosphere surrounding family meals serve to transform the culinary object into a memory and translation object (Alhussein, 2023). This is a crucial finding, as it shifts the reading of food from mere sensory detail to a dynamic mechanism for cultural transmission and self-identification. Alhussein (2023), in studying other Anglophone Arab women writers in the diaspora, confirms that these authors actively employ food and nostalgia not as a retreat from the present, but as a strategic tool to process dislocation and create an imaginative, negotiated sense of belonging. The feeling of 'nostalgia' for the taste of home is not a weakness, but a powerful motivator to keep the culture alive and build a new, blended identity. Therefore, Abu-Jaber's work participates in a significant literary tradition where the act of writing about food in a new land is an affirmative act of cultural and personal agency.

This argument shows that Muslim women's journey through food is deeply about sustaining cultural roots while negotiating the realities of a diasporic life. Food becomes both a reminder of the past and a flexible tool for identity preservation, revealing the resilience inherent in Muslim women's cultural experiences. Furthermore, the study of food in Abu-Jaber's memoirs helps us understand the concept of a hybrid identity. This means that people in the diaspora live connected to both their new home and their country of origin at the same time. The simple act of cooking a traditional dish is a way to practice this connection. It shows that identity is not lost when someone moves; instead, it becomes a new, blended thing. The kitchen, in this way, is like a small embassy for the home country inside the new one, offering a powerful, living connection to the Arab world. This continuous back-and-forth between places, done through food, proves that cultural roots can stay strong even across huge distances.

Food keeps culture alive for Muslim women, even far from home. The author uses simple meals like grilled lamb or stuffed vegetables to remind everyone of Jordan's tastes and smells. These dishes bring back old memories during family gatherings, no matter where they live now. Women lead by sharing food hand-to-hand, making sure kids feel the connection to their roots. Even when life changes, like moving to America, they mix new ingredients but keep the old ways strong. This shows how food helps Muslim women hold their identity tight, passing it down without losing any part.

This hybrid life shows up in daily choices, like mixing Arab spices with American fast-food habits. Muslim women lead this blend, teaching kids to love hummus next to burgers. Scholars like Sutaguna et al. (2025) call this a "living archive," where kitchens hold family history safe from fading. In communities, women share recipes at mosque events, building networks that fight isolation. This group effort turns personal cooking into public pride, helping girls see their moms as culture keepers. Over time, it counters media views of Muslim women as quiet;

instead, they stand tall through shared plates. Food markets become spots for bargaining in Arabic, keeping language and skills alive. Such small acts build big strength, proving preservation is active work, not just memory.

This entire discussion on preservation demonstrates how food actively affirms Muslim women identity and cultural belonging. The practice of preparing and sharing traditional dishes, even with adjusted ingredients, transforms the kitchen into a crucial, shared cultural space. This space acts as a living archive where Muslim women resist assimilation and actively pass on their heritage. This directly engages with Muslimah Narratives by highlighting the women's central and active role in upholding cultural memory and creating a sense of belonging in the diaspora. The cultural resilience shown through culinary rituals counters the idea of simple cultural loss, proving that the identity is not forgotten but is constantly preserved, negotiated, and sustained across generations through a deeply personal and political act. This affirms that food serves as a dynamic medium for cultural transmission and self-identification, ensuring that the Arab heritage remains a powerful part of the hybrid Arab-American self.

### 3.2.2. *Discussion of Personal Agency, Emotional Healing, and Identity Negotiation*

The way Abu-Jaber uses specific food descriptions as powerful symbols is a key narrative strategy throughout her writing. Scholars focusing on literary symbolism, such as Sayed (2025), argue that such narrative strategies reveal the emotional and cultural layers deeply embedded in food narratives. Ledoux (2021) highlights how food memoirs engage the senses to communicate cultural hybridism and personal identity. The agency expressed through food preparation and consumption also reflects larger gendered dynamics, where Muslim women claim space for autonomy in often restrictive cultural spheres (Guebla & Maouie, 2020). By mastering the kitchen, the women gain respect and authority within the family, which can translate into greater personal freedom outside the kitchen as well. Abu-Jaber's memoirs, through their vivid sensory and emotional detail, show how culinary acts become subtle resistance and affirmation, situating food at the heart of personal and collective identity journeys.

Such moments highlight how food and identity are intimately intertwined with resistance as well as belonging. Importantly, the personal agency reflected in food practices is not only about redefining tastes or rejecting norms, but also about embracing an intimate cultural dialogue that fosters healing and emotional balance within challenging diasporic settings. The focused, repetitive motions of cooking, like stirring or chopping, become a form of meditation that helps the women manage stress and sadness. This shows food as a vehicle for negotiating psychological belonging and identity empowerment. These moments of cooking and eating are more than just traditions; they let Muslim women speak their own stories and deal with conflicting feelings about their cultures. Food becomes a personal language where they express their independence and find healing, even when family expectations and social pressures are tough. This ongoing negotiation through food reflects the complexities Muslim women face when dealing with family expectations and their own desires. They use food as a form of storytelling that lets them communicate personal struggles and hopes in a way that is both healing and empowering. The choice of ingredients and the freedom to change a recipe become small, yet significant, acts of rebellion against rigid cultural rules.

Through this lens, Muslim women's journey is not simply about heritage but also about personal empowerment, where food enables emotional negotiation and self-assertion. This makes culinary practice a profound medium for articulating and shaping Muslim women's evolving identities in multicultural contexts. The focus on personal choice and skill in the kitchen also highlights the theme of self-determination, which is very important for understanding Muslim women's writing. When Abu-Jaber describes her own cooking process and her private feelings about different foods, she is taking charge of her own life story. She refuses to let traditions or other people tell her who she should be. By writing about her cooking with such detail and seriousness, she shows that the work done by women in the home is important and powerful. This act of describing and valuing her domestic world gives her a strong voice and allows her to claim intellectual space for her personal experiences and knowledge.

The use of cooking as a way to find control and emotional healing is central to this section, showing how food becomes a language for self-definition. By describing the careful, almost militant organization of ingredients as a source of control, Abu-Jaber uses Literary Devices, specifically the metaphor of the kitchen as a refuge, to convey resilience. Furthermore, the author links culinary choices to self-definition, showing how the power to choose what one eats or cooks is a core part of asserting individual agency. This fluid view of identity, symbolized by the many layers of baklava, shows that identity is not fixed but an evolving narrative shaped by personal choice. The memoirs use food symbolism to illustrate that culinary acts are subtle but significant forms of self-assertion, allowing Muslim women to negotiate conflicting family expectations and social pressures to define their own complex path toward empowerment and psychological belonging. Cooking gives Muslim women quiet power to heal and choose for themselves. In the kitchen, they control ingredients and steps, turning worry into calm with each stir or taste. This helps them balance family rules with their own dreams, like mixing Arab spices into American dishes. Small acts, such as kneading dough or sharing a sweet bite, build inner strength and fix emotional

hurts. Food becomes a safe space to feel free and whole, letting women shape their lives step by step amid tough choices.

### 3.2.3. *Discussion of Intergenerational Storytelling and Cultural Continuity*

The focus on how knowledge and history are passed down through the physical act of cooking is a perfect example of how cultural texts connect. Intertextuality theory clarifies how such embodied culinary knowledge supports fluid cultural continuity and identity negotiation across diasporic generations (Djohar, 2020). Abu-Jaber's memoirs provide vivid examples of this dynamic process, where cultural knowledge is actively reproduced and adapted. Mossner (2023) describes Abu-Jaber's food narratives as rich multisensory performances that engage both author and reader in cultural remembrance and identity formation across spatial and temporal divides. The descriptions of the textures and aromas of the food bring the reader into the memory, making the cultural lesson more powerful than if it were simply written down. Rodyna's (2023) findings reinforce that immigrant Muslim women utilize food preservation to maintain identity and community cohesion, successfully performing cultural resistance amid assimilation pressures. Together, these embodied, intergenerational food cultures portrayed in the memoirs provide nuanced insight into Muslim women's evolving identity journeys, revealing food as a vibrant medium for cultural survival and transformation within diaspora. The continued use of a shared family recipe connects the younger generation not only to their parents but also to a long line of ancestors they may never have met, reinforcing the strength of transgenerational identity.

These food-centered rituals connect personal memories with collective histories, enabling Muslim women to renegotiate identity through both adherence to and adaptation of culinary tradition. Abu-Jaber's memoirs encapsulate this ongoing cultural dialogue, underscoring the role of food as both heritage and living practice. Moreover, the process of sharing food stories across generations helps Muslim women in diaspora to navigate feelings of loss and displacement, creating a sense of home and belonging in places far removed from their origins. This reflects the dynamic and adaptive quality of identity formation through culinary culture. These food traditions aren't just about cooking; they are about passing down family stories, lessons, and memories that help keep Muslim women's identity alive. Through food, each generation talks to the next, sharing what it means to be Muslim women living between worlds.

Therefore, Muslim women's journey as depicted by Abu-Jaber reveals the importance of food as a living cultural dialogue across generations, serving to reforge communal ties and ensure that identity is perpetually recreated in harmony with changing social realities. This continuous cultural 'conversation' through food prevents identity from becoming a fixed, historical relic and instead keeps it vibrant and relevant. This process also supports the emotional wellbeing of diasporic Muslim women by offering a shared cultural space that eases the pain of loss and creates enduring bonds. Through food, these women maintain a continuous thread of identity that weaves through time and across geography. The way food is passed down in the family is an example of what scholars call oral history. This means that important knowledge is shared by speaking and doing, rather than by reading a book. Many of the old family recipes are not written down, which forces the younger generation to learn them by watching, listening, and practicing with their parents or grandparents. This creates a very strong, personal bond where memories are physically transferred through the shared work of cooking. Because food is prepared and eaten together, it naturally forces conversations where family stories, history, and life lessons are shared, making the dinner table a powerful, informal classroom for cultural learning and a central place for family history to be kept alive.

The discussion shows that cultural knowledge and family history are transmitted not through rigid, written rules but through an embodied, living dialogue. Abu-Jaber's narratives on learning food by feel directly engage with Intertextuality by viewing the recipe not as a fixed text but as a creative cultural model passed down through practice. This process of oral history creates strong, personal bonds where memories are physically transferred through shared work in the kitchen. The kitchen serves as a critical, shared physical space where cultural lessons and compromises are made through the silent, physical motions of preparing food, allowing the family to maintain a shared cultural foundation. Therefore, food acts as a vibrant medium for cultural survival and transformation within the diaspora, ensuring that identity is perpetually recreated in harmony with changing social realities across generations. Family meals spark stories that link old and young generations. While preparing food together, parents share tales from the past, and kids listen through the smells and tastes. This passes down culture naturally, from grandmas' recipes to moms' changes for new lives. Food gatherings turn into times for laughs, lessons, and bonds that last. Muslim women keep this chain going by adapting dishes, making sure their history lives on strong in every home and new country.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Diana Abu-Jaber's memoirs offer compelling and deeply personal narratives that explore the relationship between food, memory, and identity within Arab-American diasporic experiences. Through her reflections on

culinary practices, family relationships, and cultural memory, Abu-Jaber illustrates how food functions as a medium of cultural preservation, personal agency, and intergenerational continuity. The analysis demonstrates that food in these memoirs serves not merely as nourishment but also as a symbolic and practical means through which cultural belonging, emotional resilience, and family memory are expressed and sustained across generations.

This research makes an important contribution to both Food Studies and the study of Arab-American literature. First, by focusing on the Muslim women's point of view, it broadens how Food Studies can be used to understand a voice that is often overlooked, showing that cooking is a complex strategy for forming identity. Second, it emphasizes the political function of the memoir type as a deliberate act of saving culture, proving that the book form itself becomes a tool to resist the loss of culture. Finally, this study confirms that in the diaspora, food is not just a topic but an active, living record of culture that is constantly being changed, agreed upon, and strongly defended.

The insights from these memoirs, together with interdisciplinary theoretical approaches, highlight the critical role of food as a place where culture, emotion, and history come together. Abu-Jaber's work invites further exploration into culinary narratives as transformative literary and cultural frameworks, providing invaluable perspectives on diasporic identity formation and cultural resilience. As such, these memoirs contribute significantly to broader conversations on food memoirs, Muslimah Narratives, and the lived realities of diaspora. Future studies may extend this discussion by comparing Abu-Jaber's memoirs with other Arab-American, Muslim, or diasporic food memoirs to explore similarities and differences in the representation of food and identity across cultural contexts. Further research may also investigate how culinary narratives intersect with issues of gender, religion, migration, and intergenerational memory in contemporary life writing.

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