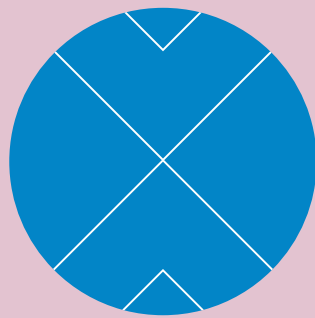
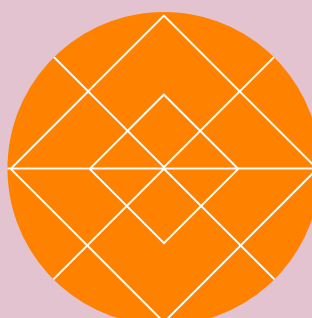
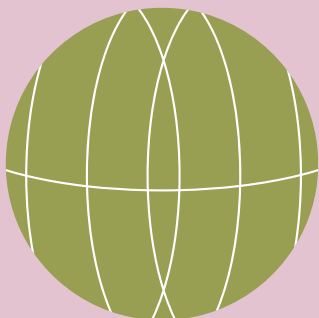
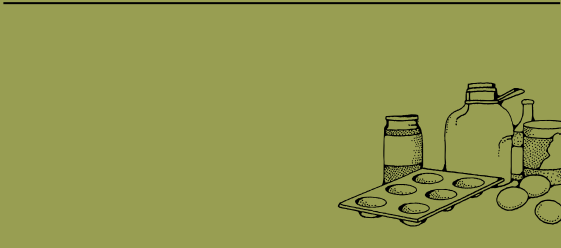


FASULE ME MISH: DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY





WHEN DID IT TRANSFORM FROM A NECESSARY MEAL FOR SURVIVAL UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP TO A SIMPLE WINTER DISH THAT BRINGS COMFORT TO MY FAMILY IN AMERICA?





MY GJYSHJA (GRANDMA) PREPARING THE DISH

THE DISH

- Fasule Me Mish is a hearty Albanian soup, traditionally served in the wintertime. The literal translation is “beans with meat”, but specifically, the dish contains white beans, lamb or pork, onions, and a tomato based sauce. It’s fairly inexpensive to make and many of the ingredients can be procured within the home, contributing to its longevity and relevance to Albanian culture.

“HOW CAN OUR FOOD SURVIVE IF NOBODY KNOWS HOW TO
ACTUALLY MAKE IT?”—NIKOLIN KOLA



THE HISTORY

“Albania’s loss of culinary traditions partially happened because of nearly half a century of communist rule. With government restrictions on consumption of dairy, meat and fat, Albanians often found themselves unable to replicate the dishes that had been passed down through generations”, (Rutherford). This quote showcases the harsh rationing that took place during Enver Hoxha’s regime (1941–1984). This ingredient-sparse reality was difficult for many Albanians to contend with, their main form of coping being inside the kitchen. Since there were no official cookbooks being manufactured during the dictatorship, my Gjyshja relied on the knowledge from her mother and grandmother. This emphasis on self-sufficiency, while originally well-intentioned, created a knowledge gap that allowed for some traditional foods to slip through the cracks, altered beyond recognition or altogether forgotten. Fasule Me Mish was one of those dishes that survived the knowledge gap.

PERSONAL CONNECTION



ME AS A BABY WITH MY GJYSHJA (LEFT) AND MY GJYSHJI (RIGHT)

I remember Fasule Me Mish very fondly in my childhood. My brothers and I would beg our parents to make it for us in the winter because the steam warmed the house and made everything smell like delicious broth. My mom would chop the vegetables and my dad would slow-cook the meat, bumping elbows and making remarks. Us kids would set the table, arguing while we did so and annoying my mom to no end. When my parents finished cooking, we'd sit down to eat together, all five of us. It would be dark outside but that didn't matter because the soup would keep us warm. We'd pass thick slices of bread around the table and finish our meal with a full glass of water, the Albanian way.

DISHES I GREW UP EATING



BYREK



BAKLAVA



TAVË KOSI

FAMILY STRUGGLES

I haven't had an Albanian meal in a while. My dad currently lives in Albania with my Gjyshja and my mom turns down any requests to make Fasule Me Mish. When my mom refuses to make the dish, there are multiple stances she could be taking. Perhaps it's out of respect for the culture she married into or maybe it's because she no longer has that personal connection. Whatever the reason, I hope to continue making Fasule Me Mish in my home with my spouse and sharing that cultural closeness.

The power struggles under the dictatorship that allowed me to have these fond memories, as well as the dynamics in my own family, have led me to cherish my mealtimes more. I seek out those moments of connection over food because it's impossible to know how your future will change. Who will you be crowded around the dinner table with in five years and what kind of dishes will be prepared?



INTERVIEWING MY DAD

Q: WHAT KIND OF RATIONS WERE GIVEN UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP?



(MY DAD AND I)

A: "Rations were based on family members and weren't guaranteed. You had to wake up early on a certain day of the month and wait in line until 8am when the store opened. Each town only had one store. When they were out, you had to go home empty handed. hopefully, You would be able to borrow the important things like sugar (for coffee for guests) or oil for cooking. other things we could grow ourselves in the summer months and have some canned. The rations were the staples to survive like rice, oil, sugar, flour, eggs, soap."

Q: WHAT KIND OF MEALS COULD YOU MAKE WITH THE RATIONS?



(DICTATOR, ENVER HOXHA)

A: "The meals were very basic for survival. Women would make a big pot to feed the whole family of 10+. The dictator loved big families: especially boys because of the 4 year mandatory military service to prepare for the 3rd World War. He gave money to families with 10+ kids but it wasn't much. My grandmother would get very creative on how to stretch those rations. She would add flour to the eggs and make slices of bread with egg and flour. Other dishes were rice soups watered down. We ate Fasule 3-4 times a week and mish (meat) was never part of the dish unless we would butcher a chicken or a neighbor's cow would die. The dictator wouldn't let you raise more than one cow per family or a few chickens because you would be able to sell the products and not rely on the system. Money was hardly necessary because there was nothing available to buy."

INTERVIEWING MY DAD (PT. 2)

Q: HOW MUCH OF THE FOOD DID YOU MAKE/GROW ON YOUR OWN?



Q: WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE ALBANIAN DISH?



A: We had very little land. We grew all the basic vegetables but there was no refrigeration so things wouldn't last. We dried figs and ate them in the winter. My uncle had one orange tree that was so special and I would get one orange a year if I was lucky. We lived with my grandparents for 7 years outside of town where roads were scarce. In the winter, we couldn't make it to town for days. the summer was better because we were able to enjoy the "farm life". When we moved to town so I could go to school I would still spend the days with my cousins at my grandparents farm house. Food was limited but hearts were full of love. Everyone was equal and there was no jealousy among people. I often reflect on the fact that didn't matter if my belly was empty because my heart was full.

A: My favorite albanian dish is: zog me leng.
Its a flour thickened type grits that has farm chicken in it the way my grandmother and my mother make it. It's so simple but so tasty. It only has flour, tomato paste and tasty chicken



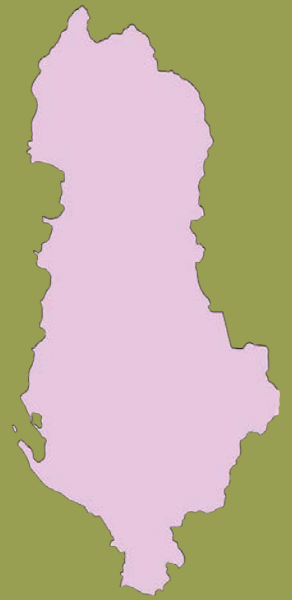
“I was a child when my
first teacher
mispronounced my last
name twice. That
pricked me

like a needle.

A small needle in the
earlobe. And suddenly,
my vision cleared—

I saw poetry,
the perfect disguise”
(‘Acupuncture’ by

Lleshanaku, an
Albanian poet)



LULJETA LLESHANAKU

THE IDEA OF LINEAGE (THROUGH POETRY)

I hadn’t heard of this poet before researching for my project but her work aligns with my experience on several levels. Despite not possessing any **Albanian features**, my last name singles me out and is often cause for misunderstanding. people either won’t listen when i correct them on the pronunciation or will refuse to try at all.

In light of this, I’ve thought of changing my last name to my mom’s easier one, ‘Brook’ because it can be pronounced on the first try. I think this relates to the power of cultures and the idea of the ‘other’. Since my name is uncommon in the west, it’s deferred in favor of my easier first name. In Albania, however, my name is one of the most common in the country, connecting families and villages. In recent years, my attitude has changed. My name is a direct result of my lineage and I don’t want to change it for the convenience of others.

ALBANIAN FEATURES



DAD: ALBANIAN ON BOTH SIDES, 1ST GEN IMMIGRANT



MOM: IRISH AND ENGLISH, FAMILY IMMIGRATED DECADES AGO

BOYS WITH DARK FEATURES, DARK EYES, TAN SKIN



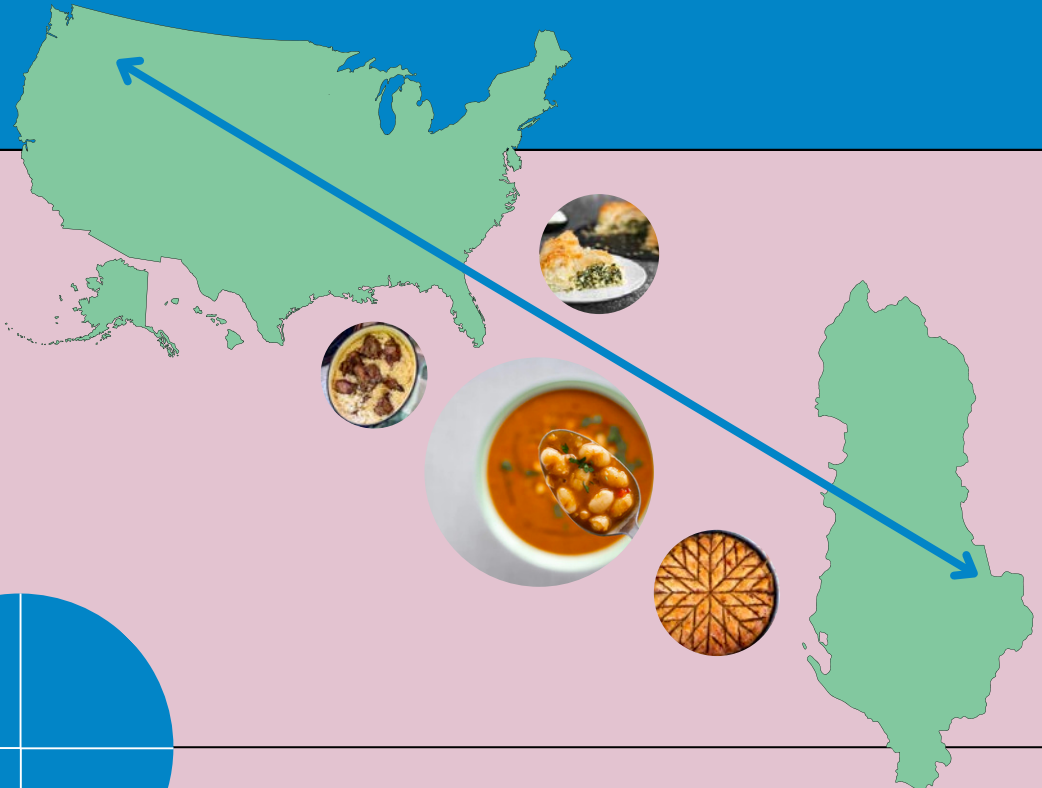
GIRL WITH LIGHT HAIR, BLUE EYES, AND PALE SKIN

Throughout my life, I've been questioned over and over about my relation to my siblings. people assume we can't possibly have the same parents, especially in the summers when my brothers tan and my skin burns. as explained on the last slide, my last name is the only trait that denotes my connection to anything Albanian. It's been difficult trying to connect with my dad's side of the family for this reason. There's never been, however, any confusion on my mom's side where all the women look exactly like me. This fact has led to some identity issues and feelings of not being able to claim any aspects of Albanian culture, such as fasule me mish.

CONCLUSION

Taking all of this into account, you'll understand that fasule me mish has a lot of context, historically and within my own family. It's a dish that has been central to the survival of Albanian culture, carrying poor farmers through the dictatorship and securing its place as one of Albania's most significant dishes.

In my family, it served as an introduction for my brothers and I to the heritage we hadn't been able to connect with previously. It brought my mom and dad's cooking expertise to a head and allowed them to share the tradition of home cooking with their kids. As a result, we've grown up to be more culturally sensitive as well as willing to carry on the tradition of making fasule me mish in our own families.



CITATIONS

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