

## Food Culture and Social Integration in Paris, France

Brooke Duplantier

Mentor: Dr. Michel, Political Science

### Abstract:

Paris is both a symbol of French tradition and multicultural influence within France. For the past several decades, minority and immigrants groups have possessed a firm presence in distinct regions of Paris. This proposal addresses this social integration of immigrant groups through the perspective of food culture and food establishments. It suggests and explores food as an avenue of engaging with the dominant French cuisine and culture, as well as granting immigrant groups with expression and retainment of their culture. Addressing recent events in France's political atmosphere and its pressing refugee situation, this research proposal attempts to provide an outlook and opportunity of integrating current refugees into French society through food.

Introduction:

Paris is a bustling city, hosting both monuments of French tradition and nooks of multicultural influence. Immigrants from North Africa to Asia have brought the “taste of a place” and the cultural heritage of their homelands to several regions within Paris (Brulotte and Giovine 6). Migrants and refugees have been recognized as “agents of dietary change” as they bring diverse food culture and practices with them (Mintz and Du Bois 105). The multicultural areas of Paris hold testament to the process of integration, as ethnic and minority groups establish restaurants to experience and share their own food cultures (Hargreaves 58). To engage with these ethnic identities, French citizens indulge in the diverse cuisines, experiencing the tastes and flavors that distinguish these minority cuisines from the dominant and historic French cuisine (Brulotte and Giovine 5). This experience of ethnic cuisines in Paris begs the question: what role does food play in social integration within Paris?

Background/Motivation:

With rising issues of immigration, food culture has recently been brought to the center of French politics, as French national parties and leaders discourage multicultural change (Binet 240). In particular, Muslim immigrants have often been the target of suspicions and discrimination, especially with the increase of Muslim refugees (Croucher 66). With this fear of Islam came an attack on Muslim food culture in the 2012 and 2014 electoral seasons (Binet 240). Right wing political parties such as the Identitaires, and the National Front, and the Union for the Popular Movement addressed the issue of food, at times specifically in relation to immigration and minority groups (Binet 240). In 2012, the National Front candidate for the 2012 and current 2017 Presidential election, Marine Le Pen, falsely claimed that all meat in Paris was halal, referring to meat killed in accordance with Muslim Shari’a law. She followed this claim with the

statement "all the abattoirs of the Paris region have succumbed to the rules of a minority. We have reason to be disgusted" (Irish). This past week in February, with the announcement of her 2017 campaign for Presidency, she swore to protect against "the twin evils of "Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism" (Bell). Like Le Pen, since the 2010s, French political dialogue has shifted to include food culture in immigration debates, highlighting a divide between traditional French cuisine as a representation of nationalism, and ethnic cuisines, as a sign of globalization (Binet 244).

The political backlash against multicultural cuisines echoes fear arising from rapid migration to Paris. Within the past few months, immigration and refugee settlement in Paris has drastically increased with the closing of "the Jungle," a migrant camp in Calais, a region North of Paris. An estimated 8,000 people lived within this "illegally" established migrant camp, and thousands were evacuated from the area upon its destruction (France 24). In November, the French President Francois Hollande claimed that 5,000 people were relocated to 450 reception centers throughout France (Davis). He stated that France would "no longer tolerate" migrant camps, stating there are "unbecoming of what a French welcome should be" (Davis). Yet, since the closing of the camp, aid groups estimate that 6,000 people have settled on the streets of Paris, and around 100 migrants are arriving daily, desperate for shelter and safety (Nossiter). Many migrants have settled camps near the working-class areas of the 10<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissements under Metro overpasses and on wide areas of pavement (Davis). With this increased migration, there has been resentment towards immigrants and minority ethnic groups.

To decrease the divide between refugees and French citizens and increase possibilities of integration into society, organization such as Food Sweet Food have allowed ways for refugees to share their food culture with French society. In June 2016, Food Sweet Food held a Refugee

Food Festival, in which 11 Parisian restaurants offered their kitchens to Syrian, Ivory Coast, Iranian, Sri Lankan, Indian and Chechen refugee chefs with the opportunity to cook and serve their culture's food to the French public (Food Sweet Food). Food Sweet Food operates under the belief that the discovery of other culinary cultures allows the acceptance of diversity and the humanization of migrants (Food Sweet Food). For their refugee chefs, Food Sweet Food believes that the kitchen is the best bet for successful "integration into French society...and integration into the professional market" (Food Sweet Food). This successful example of engagement through food provides hope for future integration of refugees through food culture.

Drawing from the established food cultures of settled immigrants within Paris, political tensions, the migration crisis, and the efforts of organizations like Food Sweet Food, my research seeks to explore the role food plays within France, focusing on immigrant and refugee experiences. Ultimately, my research hopes to provide observations to the questions: What role can food play in promoting social integration? What effect may French politics have on French and ethnic food culture? Do the multicultural cuisines and settled immigrant groups within Paris suggest potential avenues by which current refugees may become integrated into the food culture and greater French society?

Method:

I will approach this project qualitatively by conducting interviews with the owners, managers, and/or clientele of established immigrant communities' ethnic food establishments. I will explore the cuisines and food establishments in Paris' 10<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissements. The 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement is named "La Petite Turquie" for its large Turkish population, and bordering the southern part of the district is a predominantly Jewish community called Le Marais (Chideya). The 18<sup>th</sup> arrondissement is a multicultural area that houses immigrant communities of

Sri Lankan, Turkish, and Pakistani descent, as well as “Goutte d'Or” street named for North African immigrants (Chideya). The 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement is the main location where refugees have settled within Paris and is home to most of the city's working class (Nossiter). Observing these three different areas will allow me perspectives of different cultures while still allowing detailed analysis within the districts.

I am currently developing a plan for locating specific restaurants and supermarkets and am preparing a questionnaire for my interviews. While the questionnaire is still in flux, it will include questions aimed at gathering information on (1) the accessibility and difficulty of starting a business as an immigrant in Paris, (2) the ethnicities of clientele and employees, (3) narrative accounts of the importance of food before and after immigrating, and (4) opinions on the current refugee situation within Paris.

In addition to the information gained in these interviews, I hope to collect data from restaurant menus that will allow me to assess whether the ethnic cuisine appeals to or combines with the dominant French cuisine. More traditional French food on a menu would imply that this ethnic establishment is attempting to appeal to the French public, rather than solely minority groups, for better integration into French society. Less mention and engagement with French cuisine will suggest that the establishment was created mainly for the persistence of the culture or for the minority groups.

Finally, I hope to contact the newly opened refugee center in Paris, with the intention of volunteering or assisting the sponsoring organization Emmanus Solidarite. This center is still in the early phases of development, having opened in November. I plan to be in Paris for World Refugee Week, June 19-25, to experience any events or activities the city may plan for this week. Though I am not certain that events will be taking place, it is likely that there will be

positive activity for the refugee community at this time, given that this was the week Food Sweet Food organized their Refugee Food Festival last year and several organizations within France held community events (Food Sweet Food). In short, I will remain attentive to French news and aid organizations of Paris, in order to develop a finite plan for June.

In particular, this summer holds many advantages for this research. First, the French Presidential election will take place on April 23, meaning that France will have a new President by the time of my research in June. Not only will this affect the dialogue and policy surrounding food culture in the public sphere, but it will drastically affect the refugee situation in Paris, which is currently unfolding. In addition, Paris is in pursuit of new ways to respond to this situation, and it is predicted that more shelters and centers for refugees will be in development or fully established by the summer.

#### Expected Results:

After the research has been collected, I will publish a paper with the general findings, observations, and answers to the questionnaire. I will include personal narratives and accounts of owners, clients, and current refugees. Additionally, I will compile the information from the restaurant menus to confirm or deny the earlier assumption about the intention of immigrants' establishments to appeal to French citizens. Finally, I will create a theory based off the collected information on the likelihood and avenues for migrant and refugee groups to integrate into the French society through food culture and establishments.

#### Conclusion:

Though Paris is committed to traditional French culture, it has become a city of multiculturalism and diverse cuisines. Many ethnic groups and immigrants have established restaurants and supermarkets within distinct regions, as evidence of integrating their own culture

and cuisine into French society. My research seeks to explore the role that food culture plays in social integration of immigrant groups. Highlighting the current political discourse on food and the increase of refugees within Paris, I will use this information to explain and inform how current refugees can be more easily integrated into French society through the acceptance of ethnic food culture and establishments.

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