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Exploring Moroccan Identities: The Tension between Traditional and Modern Cuisine in an Urban Context

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Chancellor Honors Program

Exploring Moroccan Identities: The Tension between Traditional and Modern Cuisine in an
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ABSTRACT: This paper will analyze Moroccan foodways, which over the last century have become increasingly influenced by the Western world, largely due to forces of colonialism, globalization, and neo-colonialism. I examine how rich and poor, young and old, male and female view Moroccan cuisine, dine at home, in the streets or in restaurants, interpret shifting gender roles, shop for food, and understand changing trends in food. The conclusions and observations made are based on a small ethnographic study, which interviewed 25 urban Moroccans across different ages, genders, and social classes during the spring of 2011 and a review of the literature.

KEYWORDS: Moroccan cuisine, globalization, gender roles, foodways, colonialism, Morocco, France

1. Introduction

This section introduces the reader to Morocco with a brief history and a small geography lesson with a map. I discuss Hassan II and Mohammad VI's ruling style, the context of the Arab Spring and why Morocco did not revolt. A brief explanation of how most informants described Moroccan cuisine is also given to provide an introduction to Moroccan cuisine. The study is justified within the context of food anthropology.

2. Literature Review

This section explains the way in which food anthropologists typically gather information about a certain population and foodways. It explores the literature pertaining to food and anthropology in Morocco already in existence and shows the need for contemporary research on identity shaping relationships with food and vice versa.

3. Methods

I conducted an ethnographic survey over the course of four months in Rabat, Morocco, interviewing 25 informants of varying social class, gender, and age. I briefly describe the make-up of my informants compared to the larger class, gender, and age structure of Morocco. While Morocco does have some ethnic diversity based on indigenous populations and Arabs, almost everyone in the country (99%) identifies as Arab-Berber, and very few "pure" Arab's or Berbers exist. The fact that the vast majority of my informants identified themselves as middle class should be taken into consideration and the possible implications on the research. A brief description of the Moroccan middle class is also discussed.

4. Social Class & its Implications

Differences in social class explain the majority of the differences in opinions expressed by informants, especially in regards to the urban rich and rural poor going out to eat, where one shops for food, breakfast, lunch, teatime, and dinner. One can generally separate Morocco into the urban rich and rural poor, with a few exceptions. The urban rich are able to experience more varieties of food because of the

availability of varying restaurants in cities and their ability to afford such luxuries. The rural poor have far less options but they generally have fresher produce. However, exceptions exist, like poor urban Moroccans who cannot afford to try different types of restaurants or rich Moroccans living in the countryside. Instead of going to a more expensive restaurant, poor urban Moroccans often eat street food as a quick and convenient meal but upper class Moroccans would never consider buying unhygienic street food. Social class and proximity to a store also largely account for the differences in where Moroccans shop for food, generally with lower class individuals shopping in open-air markets while upper-class individuals mainly enjoy the convenience and overpriced produce of a super market. Conversely, one may consider themselves to be acting of a higher social class simply because they are shopping at a grocery store instead of an open-air market. All social classes use the convenience of the *Hanoot* but the rich may send a servant to fetch the item. The general Moroccan way to eat a communal meal is described to understand how people of a different social class experience food differently. A brief description of a typical Moroccan breakfast and lunch is given. Generally, the more well-off a family is, the more side and dessert dishes the family has in addition to the main course. Next, a brief description of a typical Moroccan teatime meal and dinner is explored. A family's social class and occupation also most likely determines whether or not a dinner is served after teatime. A brief overview of street food, how Moroccans view it, and its popularity among the lower classes is discussed.

5. Gender Identity

This section explores how gender affects the way Moroccans view food, exploring the epitome of female beauty, women in the work force, and learning how to cook. The ideal of female Moroccan beauty has changed over the last fifty years to include a skinny, Western, appealing woman instead of the traditionally more plump beauty model. Traditionally, Moroccan women are expected to stay home and cook during the day but an increasing number of women in the work force means that dinner is replacing lunch as the biggest family meal of the day for some individuals. Learning how to cook is also an interesting issue reflecting gender roles and class structure. Upper class women do not feel the need to learn how to cook while middle and lower class men are learning for their student bachelor years and just in case their wife is a "bad" cook

6. Age Differences

An informant's relationship with food is also influenced by his/her age. I briefly discuss the younger generation going out to eat, how the older generation views this, and the common ground. There is a section on the motivations of the relatively new phenomenon of younger Moroccans going out to eat with friends, without their family members. Going out to eat has become popular and socially acceptable for the new generation but not for everyone in the older generation. On the flip side, this section also examines how the older generation informants feel about the youth today. I conclude this section with the percentage of informant's who said a traditional Moroccan dish is their overall favorite dish, showing some agreement between ages in the enjoyment of Moroccan cuisine.

7. Conclusions

Social class, gender roles, and age differences shape Moroccans' relationship to food and vice versa. Social class effects a variety of ways that Moroccans interact with food including eating food outside the home in a restaurant or in the street, shopping for food, the number of dishes presented at meal time, and the number of meals per day. Gender also has a huge role in Moroccan's relationship to food including the new female beauty ideal, issues regarding lunchtime and women in the workplace, and learning how to cook. Younger and older generation Moroccans have different ideas about what is socially acceptable and desirable regarding going out to eat with friends but generally agree that Moroccan cuisine is delicious. Moroccan's identities as high or low class, male or female, older or younger all have a huge bearing on an individual's relationship with food.

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