

Migration by smells: the impact of ethnic cuisines on gastronomy tourism

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this study is to examine the impact of ethnic cuisines on gastronomic tourism within the context of migration and to discuss the role of culinary culture in cultural identity and representation processes within a theoretical framework.

Design/methodology/approach – This study adopted a qualitative research method. A semi-structured interview technique was used as a data collection tool, aiming to obtain in-depth and detailed data from the participants. The data obtained through the interviews were systematically analyzed using content analysis. In this process, the data were coded, themes and sub-themes were created, and the findings were interpreted and presented in line with the research objective.

Findings – The study indicates that international students experience their own cuisines not only as a means of individual nutrition but also as a tool that shapes their cultural identity and social relationships. Eating practices strengthen the sense of belonging, connect with the past and keep cultural memory alive. Access to their own cuisine varies depending on city and environmental conditions; ease of access in large cities supports the sense of belonging, while limited access in smaller cities increases the feeling of cultural disconnection. Participants support intercultural interaction by sharing their dishes with their friends, but economic and material limitations restrict this process. Although eating habits become more individualized after arriving in Türkiye, ethnic cuisine continues to be an important reference point for identity and cultural transmission.

Originality/value – This study offers a unique contribution to the gastronomy tourism literature by examining ethnic cuisines as dynamic structures that shift with migration and reproduce cultural identity at the sensory level. Its distinctive aspect lies in revealing how ethnic cuisines, particularly through scent, strengthen the perception of authenticity, cultural memory and experience.

Keywords Culinary culture, Ethnic cuisine, Gastronomy tourism, Migration

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Tourism today is a multifaceted phenomenon that is evaluated not only for its economic outputs but also for its cultural, social, and educational dimensions (İlban, 2025). Tourism, while primarily an activity based on spatial mobility, has undergone a transformation, particularly in recent years, centering on experience, meaning, and cultural interaction. In this transformation, culture has become a differentiating factor in destinations, with intangible cultural heritage elements taking center stage in the tourist experience (UNESCO, 2003). Food is considered a multidimensional phenomenon that contributes to maintaining quality of life by providing pleasure and satisfaction, not only in terms of health and physical nutrition, but also closely related to an individual's personal characteristics, cultural identity, social practices, and religious beliefs (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2023). Food and beverage practices stand out as a critical area of study for understanding how cultural identity is produced (Fischler, 1988) and represented within a social context (Takenaka, 2017). In this context, gastronomy is considered both a reflection of cultural identity and a strategic tourism resource that enhances the competitiveness of destinations (Richards, 2012).

Gastronomy tourism is defined as niche tourism where local and authentic food and beverage experiences are a determining factor in tourists' travel motivations (Hall *et al.*, 2004).



Gastronomic tourism is contributing to the rapidly developing tourism sector, whose products are diversifying day by day, by creating a new image perception (İlban *et al.*, 2018). The literature increasingly shows that gastronomy tourism has significant effects on destination image, tourist satisfaction, experiential value, and revisit intention (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Hsu and Scott, 2020; Roustae and Jamshidi, 2020; Soltani *et al.*, 2021). Recently, gastronomic experiences have gained a central position in the processes by which tourists make sense of the destinations they visit and the encounters they have with the ethnic cultures represented in these destinations (Robinson and Clifford, 2011). Food consumption is not only a realm of sensory experience; it also offers a platform for interaction where cultural differences are recognized, negotiated, and symbolically validated (Beşirli, 2010). The literature emphasizes that culinary practices, particularly those shaped by the use of local and ethnic ingredients, serve to validate cultural authenticity and ethnic belonging in the tourist experience. In this context, food is not only a means for tourists to “taste the local” but also a significant point of reference in the construction of cultural capital, expressing the accumulation of knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, and symbolic status related to different cultures (Nandy, 2002; Mkono, 2012; Arvela, 2013). In this context, ethnic cuisines are emerging as a research area that is attracting increasing interest in the gastronomy tourism literature. Ethnic cuisines refer to the eating and drinking practices shaped by the historical experiences, beliefs, geographical conditions, and social structures of a particular ethnic group (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002). Especially with migration processes, ethnic cuisines not only serve as a means for migrating communities to preserve and reproduce their identities, but also become an important element of cultural interaction with host societies (Aral Uluk, 2023). In this respect, ethnic cuisines offer dynamic spaces where cultural boundaries are both preserved and negotiated.

At the intersection of migration and gastronomy, food is not only a form of cultural expression but also functions as a carrier of narratives of memory, belonging, and identity (Karyelioglu, 2021). The aromas, flavors, and cooking techniques of food carried by migrant communities contribute to the preservation of cultural continuity in new settings, while in a tourism context, these elements are reinterpreted through the discourse of “authentic experience” (Long, 2004). This situation necessitates examining ethnic cuisines within the scope of gastronomy tourism in terms of both cultural representation and commercialization processes.

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of ethnic cuisines on gastronomic tourism within the context of migration, and to discuss the role of culinary culture in cultural identity and representation processes within a theoretical framework. By considering ethnic cuisines not merely as a tourist product, but as a reflection of cultural meanings and sensory memory carried by migration, the study aims to make a holistic contribution to the gastronomic tourism literature.

Ethnic cuisine

The phenomenon of migration and culinary culture play a decisive role in the formation of a society's identity and the transmission of its cultural characteristics from generation to generation (Dursun and Güzeller, 2023). Cuisines, as one of the most concrete reflections of social memory, cultural continuity, and identity elements shaped over a long historical process, have the capacity to represent the culinary culture of societies (Oğan, 2025). Culinary culture is an important cultural indicator that distinguishes communities worldwide and plays a decisive role in the construction of group identity. Over time, it has become one of the fundamental components of the set of characteristics defined as ethnicity (Klopfer, 1993). Ethnic origin is considered both a fundamental element of belonging and a functional tool within social relations. In this context, ethnic cuisine can be viewed not merely as a response to pre-formed and culturally conditioned dietary preferences, but also as a symbolic expression of belonging based on shared origin, a practice maintained or reproduced to make social bonds

visible and strengthen them. Food offers a particularly favorable space for the revitalization and reconstruction of ethnic identity; because tastes and practices related to food are more easily learned, transmitted, and reproduced in daily life compared to other cultural elements such as language or belief systems (van den Berghe, 1984). Ethnic cuisine refers to the food and drink culture created by different ethnic communities by combining animal and plant resources specific to their geographical areas with preparation and cooking practices passed down through generations. In this context, ethnic groups produce and consume their traditional foods in order to maintain their cultural ties to their ethnic origins within their societies, to make these ties visible, and to introduce these culinary practices to other communities. Thus, ethnic cuisine transcends being merely a field of activity focused on nutrition and acquires the character of a symbolic tool serving the preservation and transmission of cultural identity (Kwon *et al.*, 2018).

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method. A semi-structured interview technique was used as a data collection tool. This technique allowed for the collection of in-depth and detailed data from participants, enabling a comprehensive understanding of students’ ethnic culinary experiences and cultural ties. Interviews were conducted using open-ended questions to allow participants to freely express their experiences; all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participants were selected from among international students studying at universities in Türkiye. Purposive sampling was used in the selection process; students from different countries were included to ensure diversity in ethnic culinary experiences. The obtained data were systematically analyzed using content analysis. First, all interviews were transcribed. The data were examined line by line to identify key concepts and recurring expressions, and the coding process was carried out accordingly. The codes were transformed into related themes and sub-themes and interpreted in line with the research objectives. MAXQDA 20 software was used in the coding process to ensure the systematic categorization of the data.

Findings

This section details the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by the themes and sub-themes identified based on the opinions gathered.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants. A total of 8 international students participated in the study. 5 of the participants were male and 3 were

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants

	Gender	Age	Duration of residence in Türkiye	University	Place of origin	Department
P1	Male	23	8 years	Kütahya Dumlupınar University	Syria	Gastronomy and Culinary Arts
P2	Male	22	6 years	Kütahya Dumlupınar University	Azerbaijan	Gastronomy and Culinary Arts
P3	Female	18	2 years	Balıkesir University	Afghanistan	Tourism Management
P4	Female	21	8 years	Balıkesir University	Azerbaijan	Tourism Management
P5	Female	22	5 years	Balıkesir University	Afghanistan	Tourism Management
P6	Male	23	6 years	Balıkesir University	Azerbaijan	Gastronomy and Culinary Arts
P7	Female	23	2.5 years	Balıkesir University	Kazakhstan	International Trade
P8	Male	24	4 years	Kütahya Dumlupınar University	Egypt	Tourism Management

female, and their ages ranged from 18 to 24. Their length of stay in Türkiye varied between 2 and 8 years. The participants were students from Kütahya Dumlupınar University and Balıkesir University. Their countries of origin were Syria, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Egypt, and their majors were primarily Gastronomy and Culinary Arts and Tourism Management. Additionally, one participant was studying International Trade.

When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that international students, while describing the culinary culture of their own countries, mainly developed narratives through special occasions, ritual meals, and communal eating practices. This shows that ethnic cuisine is positioned not only as a daily eating practice but also as a part of cultural memory and collective life. A large majority of participants associated their culinary cultures with important milestones in the life cycle such as religious holidays, births, weddings, and deaths/funerals. In particular, the themes of religious holidays and death/funerals were repeated in almost all participants, and it is understood that food took on the function of social solidarity and coming together in this context. It is noteworthy that food plays a central role in important moments of the life cycle, such as religious holidays, deaths/funerals, births, and weddings. Some participants expressed this situation as follows:

During holidays, weddings, and deaths, we always gather and eat together. During Ramadan, everyone gathers and makes meat pilaf (P1)

We also cook sacrificial meat during religious holidays. We set up big tables. We eat together. The elders start eating first. On our special days, we have Khabili pilaf, manti.(P5)

Figure 2 reveals that participants define ethnic cuisine not only as a nutritional element but also through longing, identity, and personal meanings. The fact that the sub-themes of “longing and emotional connection” and “personally special dishes” were mentioned by many participants reveals that ethnic cuisine establishes a strong connection with individuals’ past lives and cultural memories. Participants mostly associated dishes from their own cuisines with family environments, special occasions, and past experiences. One participant expressed this situation with the following words:

When I was little, we had a restaurant where my grandfather especially used to make piti. It was made with lamb meat. A little fatty. You know those small clay pots? It was cooked in one of them. It would

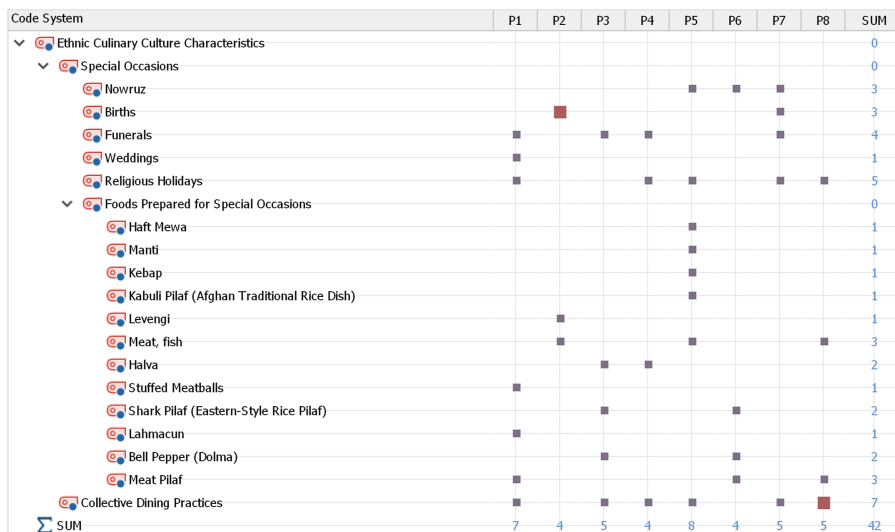


Figure 1. Ethnic culinary culture characteristics of participants

Code System	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	SUM
✓ The Cultural and Emotional Significance of Ethnic Cuisine									0
Nostalgia and Emotional Attachment	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	7
Identity and Sense of Belonging	■	■	■		■		■		5
Personally Meaningful Foods	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	7
Σ SUM	3	3	3	2	2	1	3	2	19

Figure 2. The cultural and emotional meaning of ethnic cuisine

cook for about 7–8 hours. It was served individually with chickpeas and spices. It was my favorite dish, it takes me back to the past. (P6)

What we call “five fingers” is a national dish of ours, or rather, a dish belonging to Central Asia. It’s a dough made by hand. It contains meat, onions, and potatoes. What we call “kuurdak” is mostly made after the sacrifice. We sacrifice a sheep, and we make kuurdak from that meat and distribute it to our neighbors. Its both distributed and made at home. Guests are invited. So it’s not just made after the sacrifice. It’s very laborious to make and not made very often. When I think of these dishes, my home always comes to mind. Because these dishes aren’t eaten outside, they’re eaten at home. As children, we first get that taste from our mothers. Even if a very good chef makes it, even if you eat it in a Michelin restaurant, it won’t be this good. Because when I think of that dish, my mother and grandmother come to mind, and it’s one of the first delicious dishes we ate as children. Our mothers know our regional cuisine. (P7)

Similarly, it is understood that the dishes are seen as part of cultural identity:

These dishes are not just food, they remind us of our culture. (P4)

The statements included in the sub-theme of identity and belonging show that ethnic cuisine is an element that reminds participants of their “self-identity.” In this context, ethnic cuisine plays an important role in maintaining both the individual and cultural identities of the participants.

The codes in Figure 3 reveal that access to ethnic cuisine varies depending on the city and spatial conditions in which the participants live. The sub-themes of “ease/difficulty of Access” and “spatial difference” show a significant difference, especially between large cities and smaller settlements. One participant expressed this situation as follows:

When I lived in Istanbul, I could easily go to restaurants serving my own cuisine, but I lost that when I came here. (P1)

It is observed that the participants’ sense of alienation increases when access to ethnic cuisine is limited, while their sense of belonging strengthens in environments where access is possible. One participant expressed the feeling of having spaces belonging to their own culture with these words:

I felt like I was at home . . . And when I don’t have access to them, I feel a slight sense of alienation. (P6)

Code System	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	SUM
✓ Access to Ethnic Cuisine and Spatial Experience									0
Ease and Difficulty of Urban Access	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	7
Urban Spatial Differences	■	■		■	■		■		5
Belonging and Alienation in Relation to Ethnic Food Access	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	8
Σ SUM	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	20

Figure 3. Access to ethnic cuisine and spatial experience

These findings show that access to ethnic cuisine is not only a physical possibility but also a determining factor in terms of emotional comfort and social cohesion. While spatial limitations make it difficult for participants to maintain their cultural practices, in environments where access is available, ethnic cuisine becomes an element that supports the sense of belonging.

The codes presented in Figure 4 indicate that participants positioned food at the center of daily life in their own cultures; however, this role transformed significantly after arriving in Türkiye. The vast majority of participants stated that while they associated food with family togetherness, spending time together, and social interaction in their own countries, in the context of their new lives, food became more of an individual and functional routine.

Several participants emphasized that communal meals at the family table were an indispensable part of daily life. One participant expressed this situation as follows:

This family meal is very important for us; everyone gathers, usually no one is missing, most of the time. We all gather for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. We eat the delicious meals my mother makes, and this was every day, especially on special occasions, for example, breakfast on the first day of a holiday, this is very important. (P6)

Most participants stated that this practice could not be continued after arriving in Türkiye. Participants stated that their eating habits changed due to reasons such as living alone, time constraints, and being away from family. This transformation is clearly seen in one participant's statement, "I often eat alone here, I don't attach as much importance to it as before." (P2).

Long meals, especially those associated with holidays and special occasions, have partially lost their meaning in the context of the new life. One participant expresses this difference with the words,

We used to sit at the table for hours during holidays, that atmosphere doesn't exist here. (P5)

These findings show that eating is a cultural practice whose meaning changes in the participants' daily lives along with the spatial and social context. It is seen that eating has evolved from a family-centered sharing practice to an individual and practical necessity; this transformation significantly affects the daily life experiences of international students.

According to the code distribution in Figure 5, it is seen that participants use their ethnic cuisines as a means of cultural representation and transmission in the country where they live. In particular, the practices of serving food in a home environment and explaining the cultural meaning of the food reveal that the participants consciously showcase their cuisines. One participant expressed this situation with the words,

In our country, hummus, bell pepper, and kebabs are made a lot, and I make them here for my friends, but some love them and some don't. I explain how we make them and what we do. (P8)

However, it is seen that structural barriers limit this process. Some participants stated that they could not always present their own cuisines due to reasons such as access to ingredients and cost:

Some of the products we use are expensive in Türkiye, so I can't buy them very often. (P1)

Code System	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	SUM
▼ The Role and Transformation of Food in Daily Life									0
Individualization and Loss of Meaning	■	■	■	■					4
Cultural Continuity	■	■					■		3
Shared Family Meals and Collective Consumption	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	8
Σ SUM	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	1	15

Figure 4. The role and transformation of food in daily life

Code System	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	SUM
▼ The Display of Ethnic Cuisine and Cultural Ambassadorship									0
Transmission of the Cultural Meaning of Food			■		■	■		■	4
Food Presentation in the Domestic Setting	■	■	■	■	■			■	6
Intercultural Reactions and Sense of Closeness	■		■	■	■		■	■	8
Structural Constraints (Ingredients, Cost)	■	■	■				■		4
▼ Socialization Through Food and Its Effects									0
Negative Judgments	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	9
The Role of Food as a Social Medium	■		■		■	■	■	■	6
Σ SUM	6	3	6	2	6	5	4	5	37

Figure 5. Cultural transmission and social interaction through food

Participant narratives also reveal that the reactions of individuals from different cultures to the food vary. While it is stated that individuals with similar cultural backgrounds have a more positive approach, this situation was expressed by one participant as follows:

Turkish students didn't really like these dishes, but for example, I have an Azerbaijani friend who really liked them. She even said they were very similar to dishes from their culture. She liked them, for instance. (P1)

The findings show that food is an important socialization tool for the participants. Participants stated that they were able to establish new relationships and reduce social distance through food. One participant expressed this situation as follows:

They come to our house. My roommate is Palestinian. But Turks come to our house a lot, and we go to theirs, and we cook a lot. We make *cig köfte* (raw meatballs), *kısır*, and sometimes bell pepper (*dolma*) a lot. (P8).

However, some food practices appear to be subject to misunderstandings and prejudices in cross-cultural interactions. In particular, the practice of eating with hands stands out as an example in the participant's narrative where a cultural difference is perceived negatively. The participant emphasizes that this practice is a form of eating based on partnership, sharing, and trust within their own cultural context, but the reactions they encountered were detached from this context and superficial:

For example, the culture of eating with hands. This is more common in Arabia. It's not very common in Syria. As soon as they learned I was from Arabia, they immediately said, "How can you eat with your hands?" They said it directly, even with disgust. I didn't like it. I explained that everyone knows each other, everyone eats from a large plate, everyone eats from their own plate. It changed the prejudice a little, but not much. Arabian cuisine is very rich. People don't know this, for example; they only believe what they see on social media. (P1)

Another participant similarly used the following statements:

So they think that in Türkiye we eat rice with our hands every day, as if we have no other food. However, our cuisine is rich and filled with a wide variety of dishes. In fact, even in Turkish cuisine, foods such as kebabs, syrup-based desserts, *lokma*, *kunefe* and *kadayıf* have already been passed from Arab cuisine into Ottoman cuisine. (P8)

Figure 6 indicates the themes and codes related to the participants' dining experience in Türkiye and the Turkish dishes they enjoyed making and eating the most. The participants' narratives show that the dining experience in Türkiye was evaluated not only in terms of taste or variety, but also in terms of the change in the meaning of food in daily life. While in their own cultures, food was a regular and sharing practice that brought family members together, it is seen that this meaning has weakened after migration. In particular, living alone and being separated from the family table has also transformed the perception of the quality of food:

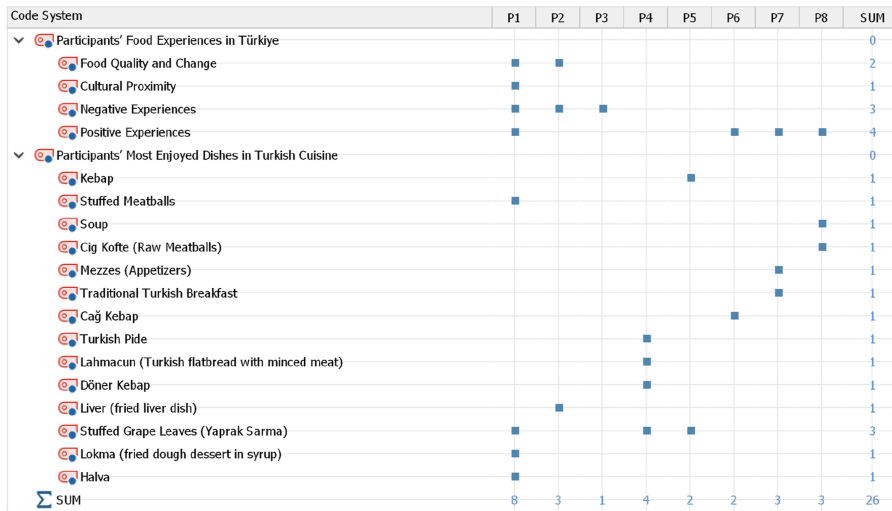


Figure 6. Participants' dining experience in Türkiye and their favorite dishes

This family table is very important for us . . . we all gather. We eat the delicious meals my mother makes . . . but when I came here, especially since I live alone, I couldn't do that anymore. I eat alone, I don't even care much about the food anymore, I just eat whatever it is. (P1)

However, some participants evaluated the taste and variety of food in Türkiye as a positive experience and this strengthened the feeling of cultural closeness. Among the dishes participants enjoyed most in Turkish cuisine, meat-based dishes and those associated with a culture of sharing, such as kebab, stuffed meatballs, soup, stuffed grape leaves, pide (flatbread), and stood out. These preferences indicate that Turkish cuisine offers flavors and cooking practices that intersect with the participants' own culinary cultures, and that this similarity facilitated acceptance.

According to Figure 7, participants' evaluations of Turkish cuisine focus more on the quality and naturalness of the ingredients used rather than the way the dishes are prepared. In

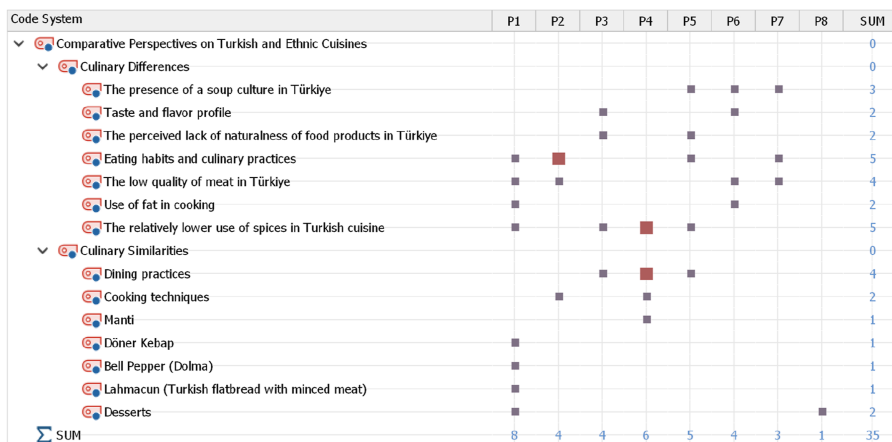


Figure 7. Comparison of Turkish cuisine with ethnic cuisines

particular, the quality of meat and vegetables was cited as a negative area of difference when compared to culinary practices in their own cultures. Participants stated that meats in Türkiye are inferior in terms of taste and quality, and vegetables are perceived as less natural due to the intensive use of pesticides. One participant expressed this situation as follows:

There is a clear difference in the quality of the meat. Because I bought fresh lamb and beef from good butchers. I applied the marination techniques I know from Azerbaijan to both. However, the lamb smells strongly of lamb. We don't have such a strong smell. Apart from that, our meats are a little fattier. (P6).

On the other hand, it was emphasized that there are significant similarities between Turkish cuisine and their own cuisines in terms of table culture and some types of dishes. Dishes such as mantı, bell pepper, lahmacun, and döner stood out as familiar and familiar examples for the participants. These similarities reveal that Turkish cuisine is not perceived as completely foreign by the participants; on the contrary, it offers an area where cultural affinity is established through certain dishes and table practices. Some participants expressed this situation as follows:

Dishes like mantı, bell pepper, and lahmacun are not very foreign to us. We also have dishes made in a similar way. (P3)

Large gatherings are important in our culture as well. Since there is a culture of eating together as a family in Türkiye, I did not feel like a stranger. (P7)

The findings of this study demonstrate that ethnic cuisines should be considered not merely as elements of tourist consumption within the context of gastronomy tourism, but as multifaceted structures related to cultural belonging and social interaction. The fact that international students define ethnic cuisines through special occasions and family meals points to the potential of these cuisines to generate cultural memory and a sense of community; while the varying accessibility to ethnic cuisine depending on spatial conditions highlights the importance of destinations developing gastronomic infrastructures that support multicultural structures. In this context, supporting ethnic restaurants and cultural culinary events can contribute to the development of inclusive and experience-oriented gastronomy tourism policies.

Conclusion

This study reveals that international students coming to Türkiye for university education experience ethnic cuisines not only as individual dietary practices but also as a tool that makes their cultural identities visible and shapes their social relationships. Smell and taste are considered chemical senses in the literature and work together in an integrated manner. A significant portion of the elements perceived as taste in the gastronomic experience are actually shaped through the olfactory system. Volatile components released in the mouth during food consumption are perceived through the nose, completing the sensory experience and playing a decisive role in interpreting the meal (Klosse, 2012). In this context, it can be said that this interaction between smell and taste in the perception of ethnic culinary experiences is an important element that deepens the cultural and experiential dimensions of gastronomic experience. The findings show that food practices are an important element for students, strengthening their sense of belonging, enabling them to connect with the past, and keeping cultural memory alive. The narratives of international students regarding ethnic culinary practices reveal that cuisine is not only an element that meets daily nutritional needs; it is also an important carrier of identity, belonging, and cultural transmission. When participants describe dishes specific to their own cultures, they emphasize that these dishes gain meaning especially through special occasions, rituals, and collective consumption practices. In this context, ethnic cuisine is positioned within collective memory and cultural continuity rather

than as an individual habit. When the cultural and emotional meanings that participants attribute to their ethnic cuisines are examined, it is seen that the dishes are mostly associated with family togetherness, childhood memories, and a sense of belonging. In particular, the fact that some dishes are described as “special” shows that these dishes stand out not only with their ingredients but also with the symbolic values they carry. This situation reveals that ethnic cuisine is an important point of reference in identity construction for the participants.

The experience of accessing ethnic cuisine in Türkiye varies depending on the city and environmental conditions in which the participants live. The easier access to ethnic products and restaurants in large cities shows that it reduces the participants’ feeling of alienation and strengthens their sense of belonging. In contrast, the limited access in smaller cities makes it difficult to maintain culinary practices and increases the feeling of cultural detachment. This situation reveals that ethnic cuisine is not only a cultural but also a spatial experience.

The participants’ practices of presenting their own culinary cultures to their social circles show that international students are positioned as active cultural agents. Although structural obstacles such as economic conditions and access to ingredients limit this process, participants prepare their ethnic dishes at home and share them with different cultures. It is noteworthy that the reactions to these sharings are related to cultural proximity; groups with similar culinary traditions react to the dishes more positively. Thus, ethnic cuisine becomes a daily and tangible tool of intercultural interaction. Finally, it is observed that the central role of food in daily life within the participants’ own cultures has significantly transformed after arriving in Türkiye. Collective eating practices centered around the family table have given way to more individual and functional forms of consumption, especially with the experience of living alone. This transformation does not eliminate the cultural importance of ethnic cuisine; on the contrary, it makes the participants’ culinary practices a remembered, longed-for, and meaningful cultural reference. This study provides in-depth findings on cultural identity, belonging, and social interaction dimensions by examining the ethnic culinary experiences of international students from a qualitative perspective. Future research, testing these findings on larger samples through quantitative or mixed-methods studies, could increase the generalizability of the results. In particular, examining the relationships between access to ethnic cuisine, sense of belonging, gastronomic experience, and social integration through scales will contribute to supporting the qualitative findings.

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