Prescribed Moroccan Authenticity And The Quest For 'Real' Food

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Introduction & Methodology

What is Authenticity in Moroccan food?

A combination of ethnographic methods, including in-person interviews, restaurants visits, and speaking to chefs both in Morocco and the US, intertwined with theoretical and textual research, this project seeks to:

- Investigate the relationship between food and authenticity, seeking to understand ties to cultural sovereignty.
- Broadly, questions were asked surrounding the importance of authenticity in cultural cooking, notions of identity as connection to foodways and access to regional resources, and the creation of cuisine for community versus for a general palette and audience.
- Seeks to further understand the inherent relationship that food and cooking have on perceptions of self and others, manifested differently in the public vs private space.

This research looks at the intersection between neoliberalism and culture in the form of authenticity discourse participating in contemporary scholarly debates regarding homo touristicus and the Coloniality of Power.

Thesis

Morrocan foodways provide a view into the ways that food and identity interact, showcasing the agency over one’s cultural identity, or lack there of, for the people who make it. Understandings of self are inherently impacted by projected notions of cultural identity placed upon communities. Authenticity discourse subjects understandings of cultures to the liminal space between barbarism and modernity. Through colonial ideas of linear time, these notions freeze cultures in time, forcing ideas of stagnant identity on a peoples.

Types of Restaurants

While not limited to these definitions, these 6 styles of ‘authentic’ Moroccan food represent the confluence of ideas that prescribe authenticity onto Moroccan restaurant food and the plurality that authenticity truly represents.

**National Specialty**

Represented by an attachment to the entire nation state, this restaurant creates a menu centered around dishes palatable to a tourist. Forging regional specialties, it ties nationhood to a dish and further, its people.

**Fusion**

Represented by its distinctly different representation in the public vs private space, this type of restaurant leans on the idea of fusion to explain away any differences the perceived clientele might see on the menu as different than ‘authentic’. By highlighting a merger of culture or cuisine these restaurants put the identity of both the chefs and patrons on the forefront. Fusion restaurants simultaneously work to reconceptualize notions of authenticity while perpetuating ideas of linear time marked by definable fusions of culture and self.

**Fine Dining**

Represented by its clientele, this restaurant can skate outside many of the ‘rules’ other restaurants must play by. They are frequented by the ultra wealthy both from Morocco and abroad.

**Regionalism in Cuisine**

Food is inherently influenced by the land it is created on and the practices that the people who occupy that land partake in. Trade, climate, political conflicts, and religion all impact the who, what, when, where, and why of a dish.

**Ras El Hanout**

A case study in regionalism, this spice blend varies drastically based on where in Morocco it is made. A source of pride, each region creates the blend with anywhere from 25-40 spices.