

**Eating ourselves:
Marking identity and belonging
through food & sensorial recreations**

with accompanying film project: “*eating yabancı*”

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ABSTRACT

Food is closely intertwined with identity and belonging, and for many migrants, the tastes and smells of food can evoke connections to what they've left behind. While diaspora restaurants exist in cities and towns all over the world, *yabancı* restaurants in Istanbul are posts of place-making amidst a host country that is not interested in their offerings. The places that result provide comforting sensorial experiences and spaces of belonging for their communities. How do foreign restaurant owners in Istanbul create these spaces that capture the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of home?

INTRODUCTION

"Memory is stored in substances that are shared, just as substances are stored in social memory which is sensory." – C. Nadia Seremetakis, *Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (1994)

A few years ago, I attended a public conversation with Bilal Khalaf, owner of Saruja, a popular Syrian restaurant in Istanbul. He was working in the ICT sector in Dubai when the war started in Syria, and he was unable to return. Missing the foods from home, he opened a small restaurant, cooking his mother's recipes (with her advice over the phone). He realized that, away from their families, many immigrant men in Dubai went months or even years without tasting certain home-cooked dishes, which weren't available at the döner and kebab restaurants they frequented. Eventually, Bilal relocated to Istanbul and invested in a larger space. He recognized that this food provided sensory experiences synonymous with home, providing comfort now to not only male laborers but entire families displaced by the war.

Istanbul, Turkey is filled with establishments like Saruja. Some are well-known restaurants, attracting not only customers of that diaspora but also tourists and other ex-patriates. Others are more semi-official storefronts, known only by those in the diaspora community. The city, whose population ranges from 15.8 million (officially) to 20 million, draws people from other parts of the country and the world. Turkey hosts the largest refugee population in the world, at around 3.8 million, the majority being from Syria, followed by Afghanistan (as per UNHCR

statistics). That, however, does not include the vast number of unregistered refugees; undocumented workers; or other registered foreigners, like students, expatriate workers and long-term visitors. Istanbul is a center for transit, migration and rebirth – some are passing through to reside elsewhere, some specifically came to find opportunities, others found themselves here and just remained. Whatever their reason for being in Istanbul, a number of these migrants, like Bilal, opened restaurants or cafes to serve the food from their place of origin.

Turkey, however, is a country with a very dominant national culture¹, making all non-Turkish establishments by default “foreigner” restaurants. In many countries, especially in the West, they are referred to as ethnic restaurants, marking them as “other” in relation to the host culture², but also evoking an exoticism that encourages tasting and exploration. Other cosmopolitan centers, and even smaller cities, have embraced the ability to be adventurous and “eat the foreign” while staying home (Haldrup and Larsen 2010, 33). But despite the globalized nature of Istanbul, it remains quite local in many ways; most of the Turkish population lacks interest in outside experiences or influences. This would make sense in the context of place being a static concept, with strong “borders” against dynamism and movement (Cresswell 2004, 7). A modern metropolis like Istanbul, however, should reflect Appadurai’s *ethnoscape*, where the flow of people contribute to a shifting world with a shifting culture (Appadurai 1990, 297); the city is quite used to this movement and the routes of people in and out make it a more “global sense of place” (Cresswell 2004, Massey 1993). But as Featherstone notes, increased cultural flows will not “necessarily produce a greater tolerance and cosmopolitanism” (1993,174). Turkey truly sits on the border between the east and the west – more integrated into the west than most nations farther east but still their dominance is not accepted globally like other western nations. I believe this constant struggle as a third, middle position pushes Türks to preserve and protect their tastes. These restaurants are situated in a non-European country, but their foreign-ness and association with migration and difference pushes them even further from acceptance by the local population.

People in the food media industry have started referring to the “migrant kitchen” in reference to the cooking for and feeding a diaspora. While technically correct, its usage has taken on condescending undertones. Common stereotypes associate “migrant” as less-resourced and fleeing conflict or economic instability. The notion of the migrant kitchen has come to signify a

narrative of resilience, praising women and men for “recreating the taste of their homeland” as a tool to fight the trauma of displacement. This can simplify their struggles and journeys into a pleasing narrative: ‘Look at the joy a smell or taste can bring to unite people’. N.A. Mansour pushes back on against this in reference to what she terms the refugee cookbook: “there’s a formulaic wretchedness to the portrayal of the displaced individual: what someone fled, how they cook, their limited resources, how generous they are despite it all. These featured people only get a few lines...” (2021). She argues that the issue of food and identity is being simplified in a way that removes context and history, focusing only on resilience and evocation of charm. Foods can elicit transcultural memories in situations absent of political conflict; as part of regular processes of movement, relocation, and travel. While migration *is* the reason for these food spaces in Istanbul, the owners reflect a broader definition of the term; thus, I will use the term *yabancı* (foreigner) restaurants.

Food is a marker of identity, but also a signifier, a form of communication in itself. It naturally takes the form of visual communication – we see the food, we are inspired by the color, the texture, the smell and taste (Barthes 1961/2019, 14). These sensations do not solely evoke a level of personal pleasure and memory, but also serve to emplace and unite people within a societal context that is not traditionally theirs. When it comes to food, “the senses are not merely an intrinsic property of the body – they are a situated practice that connects the body to overlapping spaces of power in the cultural economy of labour migration” (Law 2001, 265). Whether stemming from exile or opportunity, the act of channeling these sensorial experiences can be a way to provide a “space” that is familiar within a foreign place, countering the hegemonic culture.

Can one create a place of home through the sensory experience of food? For many migrants, the tastes and smells of food can evoke connections to what they leave behind. Anthropologists have explored the intersection of migration, food and memories (Ayora-Diaz 2021, Hage 2010, Law 2005) and the sensorial memories of food (Howe 2004, Seremetakis 1994, Stoller 1989, Rodaway 1994), but less has been written about the physical places that reflect and deliver those memories. Why are foreigners in Istanbul driven to open food establishments that reflect their place of origin, how is that food linked with their identity and do those restaurants become spaces anchoring a migrant community in a foreign country? In this research, I look at the creation of spaces, how sensorially they try to provide a sense of home and what it means for

the people behind them. Some want to serve their community (who are in Istanbul from their place of origin), some are interested in sharing their culture and food with others, and some are fulfilling a personal need. In some restaurants, the customers are diverse internationally, where at others, it is a distinctly community affair. These spaces serve as a coping mechanism for the diaspora, but not one that is designed to isolate one from the dominant culture within which they are residing. As Hage writes, in the context of memory and home-building, “intimations of lost homelands, as well as, more obviously, intimations of ‘new homelands,’ should be seen as affective building blocks used by migrants to make themselves feel at home where they actually are. They are part of the migrant’s settlement strategies rather than an attempt to escape the realities of the host country” (2010, 419). It is natural to seek respite amongst that which is familiar to build strength for navigating a foreign culture. For most of the restaurants I have visited, the owners and many of the customers speak Turkish and have made a home for themselves in Turkey.

Food identity and how we classify it

How do we define a cuisine, what are its essential flavors and ingredients? For someone from within the place or culture of that cuisine, a taste of these flavors can immediately identify it and draw associations with home – whether as a physical space or a period of time. Taste is not subjective, but “shaped by everyday politics of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, regionalism, and other forms of cultural (self)representation” (Ayora-Diaz 2021, 9). Over time, those cultural representations shape a basic landscape of tastes and ingredients that form the backbone of the country or region’s general cuisine, i.e. Thai food or French food. Diversity and distinction within the cuisine, however, still exist, which raises the challenge of representing a foreign cuisine abroad. In addition, the unique food identity that arises from distinct and local ingredients can also cause challenges in its replication in a foreign place. During Bilal’s talk, he discussed the specific flavor profile of Syrian food, sometimes difficult to recreate in Istanbul. When asked what ingredient he missed the most, he immediately responded: black pepper, an essential ingredient of the food, but unreliable in Istanbul. Sometimes hot, sometimes mild, there was no consistency and thus his food often tasted off to him.

In Turkey, the word *mutfak* (kitchen) takes the place of *cuisine*. It makes sense, therefore, to ask “How do you define the Syrian *kitchen*?”, because it is the ingredients, the cooking techniques,

the things that are created in the kitchen space itself that form a cuisine. Where a restaurant procures the ingredients and how the food gets adapted in response play a role in authenticity and memory. A restaurant's interpretation or adaptation of its native cuisine could be based on personal preferences, location, the preference of eaters or the availability of ingredients.

Much of my research, therefore, was experiential; I cannot analyze the data as "true" or not, as it is their lived experience and how they embody their own culture. As Pink notes:

"the ways individuals use sensory knowledge and practice can be understood as a form of subjectivity - a way of understanding the world that is at once culturally specific and might also be influenced by experiences and ideologies originating beyond the local, from how an individual is positioned in relation to social institutions and other individuals, and that should be understood in connection with any number of other identity markers (such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and generation) and more." (2015, 62)

Sensory ethnography serves a fitting approach here, not only for the sensorial topic of food, but also as "an approach to ethnography that both seeks out knowledge about the senses and uses the senses as a route to knowledge" (ibid, 3) Learning about the restaurant owner's personal narratives and how food plays a role in their identity and emplacement in Istanbul provides a landscape of experiences across the city. This multi-sited approach enables comparisons across different restaurants and owners, covering various levels of class, culture and reasons for cooking. From the narrative testimonies, I draw comparisons about identity and space, framing that data within the contexts of migration, place-making, memories, identity and sensorial experience.

Ethnographic positionality

Turning a lens on a culture other than mine poses risks of exoticization. As hooks writes, "the commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks 1992, 366). Indeed, throughout my adult life, I have found the spice and

seasoning of other cuisines more exciting than my own. Growing up, though my mother and father cooked a variety of Italian and American dishes, my food preferences were limited in scope. When I attended university, I fell into a crowd of friends from the self-identified “multicultural” dorm, who took me to my first Indian restaurant. My taste buds were awakened to new flavors and from then on, I became interested in exploring new foods. A decade later, a job producing youth video workshops took me to over 25 countries; immersed in those places, I was able to taste and smell local foods – on the streets, in restaurants and, if I was lucky, in someone’s home. Curious to understand those diverse cuisines and their sensory experiences more deeply, I wrote about the tastes and smells and photographed the food and environments. Once I returned home to New York City, I searched neighborhoods for restaurants serving that food, or to find ingredients to recreate it in my own kitchen. It was a way of reconnecting with the experiences I had abroad. When I moved to Istanbul six years ago, I chose not to bring food items from home, wanting to immerse myself in Turkish cuisine. Slowly over the years, however, I have started to import things I cannot buy here that symbolize certain tastes of my culture and home.

Preparing for this research, I asked myself if I could answer the questions I would pose to my participants. Technically, I also am a migrant in a foreign country; what foods do I miss, that if eaten would make me feel at home? Just as I am asking restaurant owners how they would define their national cuisine, how would I define that of the United States? North American food is a mix of so many different influences; what I really miss “from home” actually, is the ability to eat foods of other countries. In a way, these restaurants that I frequented in Istanbul actually provided me with a connection to my old life, not as a culinary tourist but as one who regularly eats and cooks diverse international foods.

Like the restaurant owners, I am also trying to make my place in a country where I am always a *yabancı*. *Yabancı* is the common word for foreigners, but in breaking down the word – *yaban* + *çı* - I find an interesting connection to the early stages of anthropology. The *-çı/çı* suffix indicates a profession or occupation, as it denotes a person involved with what is named by the noun. As *yaban* translates to wild or savage, a *yabancı* can literally be defined as someone who performs the wild, who occupies the space as a savage. Am I embodying an early era of anthropology studying the “wild one”? While I am a westerner studying cultures not my own, in effect being an outsider that “stands in a definite relation to the Other” (Abu-Lughod 2008, 53), the context

differs because we are all in a second country. I am not a native studying the foreign or the foreigner studying the native; we are all strangers. In my film, I explore three restaurants I was drawn to precisely because of the feeling they capture of community, whether their own diasporic one or one they've created across ethnicities in Istanbul (and sometimes both). Even if it is not "my" place, I feel comfortable wrapped in the energy of this home-making for others.

In the next chapter I will review the research on anthropology of food and memory, especially as it relates to migration and place-making. I will also explore the different approaches of sensory ethnography and anthropology of the senses. This leads into an explanation of my research methodology, including the visual approach, and a reflection on issues of sensory subjectivity. The following chapter shares the research: data collected through my interviews and observations of the restaurants, exploring how the spaces and the food they serve provides a landing strip for their owners to maintain (and share) their identity within this foreign landscape. In the last chapter, I explore the role visual and aural anthropology played in capturing their sensory landscapes, including the sounds and smells of select restaurants featured in my film *eating yabancı*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three main anthropological threads that give insight into food's role in place-making and the social construction of belonging: anthropology of food; anthropology of migration, food and memories; and anthropology of the senses. I will note some the literature and modes of thought that informed my research in these three areas, the latter leading into approaches of sensory ethnography and visual anthropology and their role in my research methodology.

Anthropology of food

Food, essential to survival, is always going to be relevant. Barthes writes:

"No doubt, food is, anthropologically speaking (though very much in the abstract), the first need; but ever since man has ceased living off wild berries, this need has been highly structured. Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a

system of differences in signification, and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food.” (2019, 15)

From early anthropological studies (Levi-Strauss 1964, Douglas 1971) to contemporary television production and social media, food plays a significant role in culture and identity. It can be a signifier, however, of far more than just personal identity, reflecting wider societal issues related to politics, economies, symbols and value creation and collective memory (Mintz and Dubois 2002). Mintz and Dubois highlight studies of singular ingredients and food production, food as ritual, development issues such as food insecurity, and the influence that migration and availability of ingredients have on changing foodways and dietary styles (ibid).

In *Consuming Geographies* (1997), Bell and Valentine explore these intersections of food, identity and place across seven levels of geography: body-home-community-city-region-nation-global. They point out that while we are what we eat, food has always been on the move, that even what we think of as place-bound culinary identities “can be deconstructed as mere moments in ongoing processes of incorporation, reworking and redefinition” (ibid, 192). This can be seen in the context of colonialization, for example, where colonial powers introduce new products that become incorporated into the indigenous cuisine (ex. French rolls in Viet Nam, the base of the iconic banh mi) and food identities are appropriated by colonizing forces back into their own culture (ex. Indian curry in Britain). Cook and Crang agree this movement contributes to cultural formation in the context of food and identity formation, as people are “socially and culturally positioned, and socially and culturally position themselves, not so much through placed locations as in terms of their entanglements with these flows and representations” (1994, 138). This involves the food spaces themselves, both restaurant and the overall city landscape; the “spatial structures of systems of provisions” that account for ingredients, equipment necessary for proper preparation and the knowledge of how to use both; and the geographic knowledge allowing one to cook that food (ibid). Many of the restaurants in Istanbul, for example, are owned by people without previous experience of food, which means the process of displacement led to this connection with food and home that may or may not have existed in their place of origin.

As the field developed, Holtzman warned that western perceptions of food had thus far guided the production and consumption of most food studies (2006, 364). Notions of what a cuisine or food is supposed to be are drawn from a “long history of constructed associations between

foods, places and peoples, associations epitomized in conceptions of national, regional and local cuisines” (Cook and Crang 1994, 137).

In *Food and the Senses* (2010), Sutton illustrates, and encourages, the field’s turn to incorporate more sensory observations. He coins the term ‘gustemology’ to cover anthropological and sociological approaches that draw from “a wide spectrum of cultural issues around taste and other sensory aspects of food, opening up a new way of thinking about taste as an influencer of social formation and belonging” (215). Taste is never just a subjective and individual experience; the cultural relativism of food can never be fully removed from influences of gender, biology, religion, ethnicity and politics (Ayora-Diaz 2021, Counihan and Højlund 2018), and the sensory experience can mediate social relations, engendering belonging when the experience is familiar and marking otherness when it is unfamiliar (Walmsley 2005, 43). While tastes and smells of food are embodied markers of a cultural identity, their sensuous nature can also serve as an exchange point for collective, public sharing and understanding (Counihan and Højlund 2019, 1). Counihan and Højlund collect essays that shift the notion of senses from “passive receptors” to how and where tastes are made and socialized, where the spaces are of taste exchanges and clashes, and how values are attached to tastes.

Sensory anthropology or an anthropology of the senses

Anthropology of the senses did not emerge to capture the tastes and smells of food, but early pioneers of the movement recognized that observing and marking the *sensory* aspects of everyday life and rituals could reveal just as much about a culture as more traditional sight and sound gathering.

Stoller uses food, specifically the preparation of a certain sauce by the Songhay tribe he was researching, to argue the importance of sensory ethnography; that anthropologists who are lost in their theories miss the cues and nuances that impart knowledge (1989). The senses are a “way of seeing” (Howes 2004, 6), providing an approach that yields new perspectives on traditional subjects. Pink offers that sensory anthropology also brings in media practices and cross discipline approaches that incorporate different forms of embodied knowledge rather than solely the empirical data often focused on in earlier decades (2010, 331). In her domestic and community ethnographies, for example, Pink conducts field work focusing on the senses (including the smells and sounds of a place) that she and her study participants experience. In

interviews particularly, focusing on the sensory aspects allows the participants to feel freer and less scientific in their answers:

“A sensory ethnography invites new forms of ethnographic knowing and routes into other people's experiences. It provides us with ways of responding to research questions that involve focusing on forms of intimacy, sociality and emplacement which ethnographers who are not sensitive to the multi-sensoriality of our experiences and environments would not engage with. The results are inspiring new layers of knowing, which when interrogated theoretically can challenge, contribute to and shift understandings conventional to written scholarship.” (Pink 2010, 187)

Some scholars argue the sensory approach is too subjective and unscientific, fearing “an emphasis on sensation entails a loss of critical awareness and precipitates a slide into a morass of emotion and desire”, away from intellect and its rationality (Howes 2004, 6). Not everything, however, is reducible to language (Seremetakis 1994, 6), and sensory observations can contain meaning beyond consciousness, bringing to the fore inspirations and gut reactions over just words. As Marks notes in reference to sensory cinema, “What does not register in the orders of the seeable and sayable may resonate in the order of the sensible” (Marks 2000, 111). We can explain all we want, but being in a space and exploring the senses that are triggered can give us a hands-on or nose-on immersive impression. This knowledge is embodied knowledge. It is felt and expressed partly with our brain, also but evoked viscerally.

One note on sensory subjectivity, which, as noted earlier, cannot be removed from history, cultural practice, ethnicity or gender. That, however, does not have to cloud understanding. As I will explore in chapter three, for example, smell was a significant factor in the conversations with restaurant owners and the in-person observation. Sutton gives examples of studies linking smells with immigrant populations (2010), which triggered my own sensory memory. My mother picked up me and my friends from school, the air in the car smelling like body odor. I realized after a minute that it was actually left on her clothes from cooking Italian sausage, onions and peppers, but removed from the kitchen environment, the savory smell had flattened into one equated with *someone unclean*. I was embarrassed, wondering what my friends would think about my mother, and by default me. To one culture, a smell is a scent, to another it is an odor. While smells can immediately transport someone back to their home place or memories of their past, they can also serve as a marker of “otherness” in displaced contexts.

Migration and food memories

Migration has a distinct impact on the dynamic nature of food, as products and ways of cooking and eating move across borders, shifting national identities of food on both ends; but food and its cultural identification also has an effect on those who migrate.

As we ponder the notion of place-making, food and memory, we must consider briefly the concept of home and nostalgia, the diverse definitions of which help us understand these concepts as more fluid than more generally perceived. How people approach and absorb a place can be seen in the difference between travel and migration (Bell and Valentine 1997, Chambers 1993, Haldrup and Larsen 2010). Chambers classifies migrancy as a fluid movement, with neither the departure or arrival time, places or events are certain, and one's language, history and identity are similarly fluid and adapted (1993, 5). How then does the concept of home apply in the migration context? Hage defines home as a place imbued with feeling, and by extension "*the building of the feeling of being 'at home'*" (his italics) (2010, 417). This is a state of 'heimat', translated literally from German as "home or homeland" but actually describing more the place, culture and people that made you, a "sense of belonging" (Bittner 2018). Ahmed challenges the traditional concept of home, usually equated with being part of a family or friends, and thus the notion that leaving "home" automatically makes you a stranger (2000, 89). She reflects on Brah's notion that home is the "lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells" (1996, as cited in 2000, 89); that one can leave the physical space of home and still carry the sights, smells, feelings and memories inhabited *within* them to a new place (Ahmed 2000, 89).

The notion of home is closely intertwined with the feeling of nostalgia. For diasporas, "back home" is sometime equated with homesickness, debilitating and hindering a person from integrating themselves in a new environment (Hage 2010, 416). Seremetakis translates nostalgia from the Greek as literally meaning a 'pain in one's soul', linking it with a painful bodily and emotional journey, but situating it in the present with the possibility of "maturation and ripening", unlike a more American view that sees nostalgia as the loss of the past (1994, 4). Nostalgia is usually associated with the loss of a time or home to which one cannot return (and which may, actually, never really have existed in the first place) or it can be seen as "a longing for times and places that one has never experienced" (Holzman 2006, 367). For example, the restaurant Koali recreates an almost exotic notion of colonial Indonesia, which stems from the

owner's Dutch-Indonesian heritage; he does not claim to be creating "Indonesia", he is creating a *feeling* of Indonesia that his grandmother's house conveyed.

Positive nostalgia can be evoked by certain tastes, smells or encounters that trigger memories and conjure home even when it wasn't missed. Hage notes, "The person does not necessarily go around feeling that they lack something; rather, they encounter an object that creates both a yearning for a past homely experience associated with it and, in that very process, a feeling that the object was lacking" (2010, 421). The senses can be "meaning-generating apparatuses that operate beyond consciousness and intention" (Seremetakis 1994, 6). By extension, food-centered nostalgia is prominent in diasporic or expatriate populations, where it can be a reminder or displacement or contribute to the preservation and promotion of identity (Holzman 2010, 364). Nostalgia may be related to the loss of home in the physical sense, but that nostalgia is then sustained by collected memory both in the mind and embedded in the body (Featherstone 1993, 177). Eating, tasting, smelling and following cooking rituals can be a commemorative performance. Studies have looked at these connections with Lebanese in Australia (Hage 2010), Ghanian (Williams-Forsen 2019) and Belizean (Wilkes 2006) migrants in the United States, Sierra Leoneans in South Africa (Naidu and Nzuza 2014), Filipinos in Hong Kong (Law 2005), and Japanese eating rice (anywhere) (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993). Japanese abroad often complain that *manpukukan* (the full-stomach feeling) is not achieved without rice, no matter what else is eaten (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, as cited in Bell and Valentine 1997, 18). This concept can be applied in a larger sense to any diasporic community feeling satisfied and comforted by their "familiar" food, after yearning for something to quench a needed taste. This embodied knowing of food, the acknowledgement that it brings memories of home, may occur only through the process of migration. It is often only realized once the senses are stimulated by tastes and smells: "my body involuntarily knew what I consciously did not" (Seremetakis 1994, 16). It is in leaving behind that we recognize what we have left.

As migration carries cultures across the globe, issues of authenticity³, nostalgia and traditional tastes become more complicated (Ayora-Diaz 2021, 6), but the social relevance of food persists and can bring together communities. Sensorial memories can "constitute a temporary sense of common identity, or community, which separates them from the host community" (Holzman 2006, 176) or serve as "an active insertion of memory in the construction of the present and the future" Hage 2010, 417). Through food and diasporic restaurants, collective memories and sensory habits form a safe space to temporarily retreat from the host place, building strength

for integration. Food also brings people together, especially in collective eating in private or public (ibid 425). Law looks through this lens at how Filipino overseas workers use food as reason to gather in a downtown public space, sharing dishes and creating a safe environment away from their workplaces (2005). The cooking and eating of food is a ritual unto itself, an embodied performance with familiar sights and sounds that evokes a sense of home without being tied to more established rituals. The way we perceive and experience senses are linked with our histories, practiced in our movements. This is what makes the physical spaces that allow an immersion into a “taste of home” as important as the cuisine itself, as gathering points where the currency of taste and smell serve as cultural markers of belonging. Through sharing or rejecting a meal, “we are actively performing and representing our identity and rejecting that of the social and cultural ‘other’ (Ayora-Diaz 2021, 3). Taste is a marker of distinction, as Bourdieu notes in his cultural capital theory (1994, as quoted in Sutton 2010, 211). Preferences for different foods and restaurants communicate social distinctions, and choosing those restaurants and foods then mark them “as ‘belonging’ into their system of preference” (Ayora-Diaz 2021, 2). This includes not only tastes and ingredients but also cooking techniques, like the Pakistani way of releasing oil from the food in a way that differentiate it from similar south Asian cuisines.

Many studies looking at food and politics and identity don’t focus on taste or smell, which are significant components of food experience and memory, notes Ayora-Diaz, whose *Cultural Politics of Food, Taste, and Identity* (2021) brings to the fore the sensory aspects of food and consumption, arguing that focusing just on sight and sound cuts off a vast amount of knowledge we gain through exploring taste, touch and smell. Walmsley in her study of food as an embodied representation of localized black, indigenous and mestizo culture in Ecuador, argues that “by paying close attention to taste (and its interrelated senses) we can gain significant insights into the production of cultural identities (2005, 43). Just as sensory associations can be a reminder of displacement, understanding local tastes and smells can actually be an entry point for immigrants to emplace themselves in the host locality (ibid, 56). In my look at foreign restaurants in Istanbul, I explore the place-making of cuisines and cultural identities and their sensorial recreations, in both in how they are talked and how they are manifested in the physical spaces.

METHODOLOGY

Paul Rodaway offers two definitions of 'sense', noting that the term has an important duality or ambiguity:

1. Sense, as in '*making sense*', refers to order and understanding. This is sense as meaning.
2. Sense, or '*the senses*', can also refer to the specific sense modes—touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing and the sense of balance. This is sense as sensation or feeling (1994, 5).

My research incorporated both definitions, essentially "making sense of the senses". Oral interviews with restaurant owners explored their relationships with their businesses and their cuisine, exploring senses and memory. Participant observation, in the form of sensory ethnography, focused on the sights, sounds and smells of the restaurant spaces, food and ingredients. In looking at the role of food in place-making, I can also apply a parallel set of Rodaway's definitions to 'place':

1. Place, as in role or position, like the first above definition of sense. This is place as meaning.
2. Place, referring to a physical or emotional space. This is how one can recreate the place of their origin through the senses; after all, senses are intrinsic in our bodies, enplace us and make meaning.

As discussed earlier, the senses can awaken memories that are subconsciously embedded. Seremetakis equates memory with a form of storage that contains the embodiment of past experiences, people and places; thus, awakening the senses is awakening the capacity for tangible memory (1994, 28), To remember, then, is to make a place for those memories, as the restaurant owners do in both our conversations and the sensory experiences they offer to customers.

Much literature and theory on place-making and belonging through food and the senses prefaces my research, and I chose to set aside a more theoretical analysis in favor of a more evocative ethnography that prioritizes the experiential: "tasteful ethnographies [that] are descriptive, non-theoretical and memorable" (Stoller & Olkes 1989, as quoted in Sutton 2010, 211). Their idea that the "tasteful fieldworker" will eschew the search for "deep-seated hidden truths" and instead "describe with literary vividness the smells, tastes and textures of the land,

the people, and the food” (ibid) is reflected in my fieldwork approach, ethnographic descriptions (chapter four) and the accompanying film *eating yabancı*.

Research approach: walking and mapping

When I arrived in Istanbul in 2016, movement and walking were not only a place-making activity (Larsen 2014, 60), but enabled me to study my surroundings (Larsen ibid, 60; Haldrup and Larsen 2010, 4; Lee and Ingold 2006, 68). Howes writes about truly sensing a place: “We usually think of emplacement in terms of our visible and tangible surroundings but we relate to and create environments through all of our senses” (2004, 7). To embody this new space meant to not only take in the sights, but also its smell, taste and sounds. Lee and Ingold equate walking with literally being “on the ground”, akin to ethnographic fieldwork (2006, 68). This process of exploration on foot allowed me to find many restaurants. There were specific streets and general neighborhoods where yabancı restaurants were clustered – Kumpkapı for Pakistani and Bangladesh food, Akşemsettin and Fatih for Yemeni and Syrian food, Katip Kasım for Uzbek/Uighur food, Zeytinburnu for Afghan food, Aksaray for West Africa and Horn of Africa countries and Yusufpaşa for Syrian, Iraqi and other Middle East countries. More foreigner restaurants were scattered across other neighborhoods, sometimes in clusters and sometimes lone outliers amidst typical Turkish establishments. On the way to a museum, I passed a small Pakistan steam table restaurant hidden on the ground floor of an apartment building. I found a Jordanian restaurant nestled amidst Turkish tea houses, having a lovely conversation with the owners about off-menu dishes they were willing to cook for me, but returned after COVID lockdowns only to find it closed. A Tunisian restaurant I spotted one week had closed and turned into a generic hookah café before I had a chance to eat there. Turning a corner, I found dozens of young South Asian men drinking masala chai outside a small storefront Indian restaurant. Above an African restaurant, the faded sign for a Uighur restaurant still sits just above the new establishment’s prominent one. Many of these restaurants cannot be found on google maps; after all, the perceived clarity of what a map displays “erases the fluidity, mobility and embodied city,” and doesn’t come close to capturing the lived experience on the ground (Lee and Ingold 2006, 76).

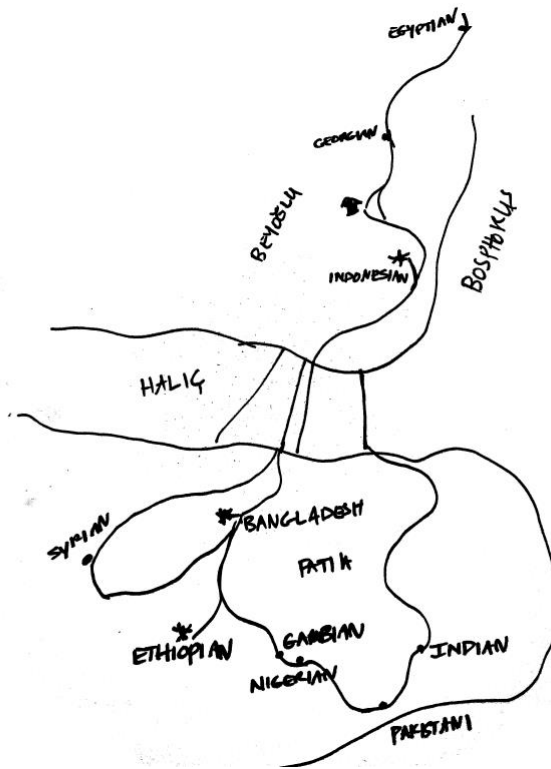


Figure 1: Walking map of the restaurants

If you search for “Nigerian restaurant”, you may get one or two but definitely not the full breadth of what exists in the city. Some restaurants are publicly advertised, with a strong social media presence that includes Facebook and Instagram reels and photo posts. These are usually the more outward-looking ones catering to a wider customer base along with their diasporic one. Others cannot be found online, known only to their customers in the know and word-of-mouth. For these restaurants, there is no need to be “placed” outside their community. Visiting these particular establishments felt like an invasion of their space. The recreated tastes and smells wouldn’t have any purpose for me, someone from the United States. Often, I perceived suspicion on my first visits, but managed to be accepted (at least on the surface) once I tried the food.

Through word-of-mouth, my own walking exploration, and online food blogs, I settled on a dozen establishments (some non-brick-and-mortar) that spanned a range of criteria – customer base, style of restaurant and cuisine representation. These included: Asia Lounge Café, Restaurant and Cultural Center, Buzzecedi, Cairo Restaurant, Fusion Indian Restaurant, Galaktion Georgian Restaurant, Hibret Breakfast and Coffee, Karista Foods (caterer), Koali Dine

and Lounge, Lahore Darbar, Moss Dooli, Favor's Nigerian restaurant, and White Rice Kitchen (caterer). While the research is based in one city, Istanbul, its multi-sited approach covers different countries of origin. This allows exploration, as Marcus poses, "what among locally probed subjects is iconic with or parallel to the identifiably similar or same phenomenon within the idioms and terms of another related or "worlds apart" site?" (Marcus 1995, 97). In this case "worlds apart" is in effect different foreign countries lying only kilometres apart in the same city. Laying stories side by side, focusing on the sensory aspect of environment and people's perceptions gleans more insight than just data. It reveals commonalities across a multi-sited study, where a shared experience emerges despite diverse locations.

Research stages – Interviews, observations and embodied eating

After eating and making myself familiar, the first research stage was conducting informational interviews with restaurant owners, recorded only by audio for data collection purposes. Semi-structured interviews covered on their experiences, restaurant origin stories the cuisine and ingredients. Focusing on the sensory aspects provided two opportunities. First, it showed the inadequacy of words only, revealing insights and meaning making that can arise when the senses are activated (Pink 2015, 74). Second, it opened up the conversation to be driven more by their voice than mine, to "allow the person to 'talk back'" (hooks 1989, quoted in Pink 2015, 76). This proved to be interesting, as I was asking questions few people ask but excited the participants. Often the encounters shifted towards more casual dialogues than official interviews. People commented "It's really nice talking to you – you understand this in a way no one else does" or "You are getting me to think about things I've never put into words." My previous travel to many of their origin countries contextualized the food and culture, providing reference points and the ability to ask more relevant questions. It also gave me a level of credibility that another researcher with the lack of that specific knowledge might not gain. Not all the interviews yielded rich conversation. I expected people to speak more romantically about place or cuisines or be very passionate about their food, but many were more technical and business-like about these topics. There were distinct instances where strong enthusiasm did come through, and I detected some form of passion for food from all the owners.

Observing the actions, environment, food and clientele of the restaurants, added visual layers to the narratives the owners shared. Each place had its own rhythm, its own essence; observing

that helped form an overall impression of the restaurants and their community. For the second stage, I selected several restaurants to study more in-depth, returning to observe and build a sensory narrative about the spaces: those who cook, those who eat and what they cook and eat. Part of that process involved consuming the food. Eating together allows us a full sensory experience that is more bonding than a casual encounter. As Walmsley notes, “the shared experience of tasting and smelling a dish are highly significant in binding them together physically and emotionally” (2005, 56). While she is speaking of the bonding within a community, food, as something everyone shares as a daily part of life, can also fuel bond across invisible boundary lines and the insider/outsider binary. As Pink acknowledges,

“Understood through a theory of place, the idea of ethnographer-participation implies that the ethnographer is co-participating in practices through which place is constituted with those who simultaneously participate in her or his research, and as such might become similarly emplaced. Indeed, she or he becomes at the same time a constituent of place (one of those things brought together through or entangled in a place-event) and an agent in its production.” (2008, 96)

Learning about and sharing those tastes helped ground me in the fabric of the spaces, making me complicit in the place-making.

Research approach - Visual anthropology

For the visual representation, I chose not to replicate modern food television tropes, but instead approach this subject with more observational and abstract video and audio sequences that would elicit the sensorial nature of the restaurants: sight, sound, texture of food. A typical food film or television show usually captures the cooking, food and back story in a superficial way, dropping into the restaurant to have a conversation with the chef, catch a few close ups of cooking and finish with a few bites of the food; everything is pre-planned and essentially pre-packaged, never really allowing the viewer the real feeling of the space or taste. Social media platforms go one step further, and often highlight only the final product.

Channeling the “real feeling” of such sensorial experiences through the digital medium was not easy. Marks poses, “How can the audiovisual media of film and video represent non-audiovisual experience? There are no technologies that reproduce the experiences of touch, smell, taste and movement?” (2000: 211). Howes bemoans the irony: “it would seem to be the fate of the

senses that their astonishing power to reveal and engage should forever be judged and 'sentenced' in the court of language" (2004, 5). Pink, in reporting her results, mostly uses the literary form and less often an audiovisual component. In chapters three and four, I do document via text some gathered sensations, but I also approach Marks's challenge by exploring the connections between aesthetics and sensory ethnography à la Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab. How do we visualize food? Of course, the textures, colors and sounds are important, but visualizing food culture is not these aspects alone; it also means capturing the preparation and serving of the food, how people come together over that food and the rhythm of the restaurants. A more experimental and experiential approach could draw the viewer into the sensory worlds of the places in a way that evokes the taste (both food and environment) of what's on screen.

Anderson sums up the field of visual anthropology with three definitions: anthropology of the visual, visual representation of culture, and visual representation of visual aspects of culture. To this I add a fourth – the visual representation of the sensory aspects of culture. While at its base my film serves as a visual representation of established knowledge, I also used the visual to provide a new, more sensory perspective to that understanding. The movements, expressions and non-linguistic signs can "transcend the cultural explanations evoked in written anthropology" (Suhr and Willeselev 2013, 291). For this, I drew from several different approaches to visual anthropology. Like Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, I recorded patterns of daily ritual, within the restaurants. Longer, more observational takes of actions and objects within the space, (a style originally identified with David MacDougall), allowed the rhythm of the places to bloom, creating meaning by presenting "one element next to another and asking us to see the connection between them" (Barbash and Taylor 1996, 374). I mix this observation with owners' perspectives on the restaurants' origin stories, customers and essential tastes and smells. The montage of fragments and styles push the sensory nature of the content: it is in the visceral, the haptic that we are able to draw out the senses. After all, "the use of montage here is not simply an aesthetic or arbitrary choice. Sensory and experiential fragmentation is the form in which this sensory history has been stored and this dictates the form of its reconstruction" (Seremetakis 1994, 23). Layered soundscapes reflect not necessarily the "realistic" truth of the scenes but instead a composed reality of what the spaces sound like, giving the listener "building blocks" to interpret the sonic space (Jones: 1993,241). This mixed approach intentionally lacks a narrative that tells the viewer what to feel but instead draws

them into the sensorial nature of the environments. Minh-ha quips that “a good serious film about the Other must show some kind of conflict, for this is how the West often defines identities and difference” (Minh-ha 1991, 134). I am not interested in identifying the difference, but rather allowing the viewer to feel something of the experience. Unfolding observation and haptic techniques can challenge the audience to feel and hopefully experience the places in a way that only visual anthropology can deliver.

Aesthetics aside, there were representational challenges in this visual anthropology approach. Practically, it is not easy to isolate sounds or certain visuals in the middle of a busy restaurant with image interruptions and competing sounds - air conditioners, exhaust fans, refrigerators - that you cannot turn off because of business. Piped music and the din of people’s voices is great for atmosphere but interfere with recording sounds of eating or cooking. Restaurants are a business and, even if open to talking about their places, owners were hesitant to give full reign for filming. Asia Lounge, one of my main subject restaurants, would not let me into the kitchen with a camera or audio recorder. At less outwardly professional places, I sensed embarrassment or worry over regulations, and I did not feel comfortable filming. I visualized many scenes that reflect the challenges highlighted in this thesis, like personal suitcases arriving with imported ingredients, but to protect them for legal reasons, I chose not to film them.

Before I started filming, I knew that there could be issues with the security and acceptance of the people I wished to interview and film. Not everyone may have had papers or even licenses for the food establishments they run (most of them did). My presence could compromise their businesses, making customers uncomfortable. In some cases, I blurred images to protect the identity of the people but still capture the vibe of the place. In all instances, I have respected the wishes of the owners and any customers, despite my aesthetic desire to film more.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION: THE RESTAURANTS

Food makes meaning and can be linked closely to identity, which makes these restaurants important in connecting foreigners to others from their diaspora and to who they are themselves. The very existence of these establishments makes them stakes in the ground of the

dominant culture, posts of place-making and belonging. How do foreign restaurant owners in Istanbul create spaces that capture the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of home?

First, I look at the origin stories of the restaurants and how they fit in the Turkish landscape. I explore the notion of a cuisine and how the owners represent or capture the authenticity of the food from their respective countries of origin, including the challenge of the ingredients. I touch on the smells and tastes of the food, the sights and sounds of the physical spaces themselves and the customers who frequent them. The quotations that follow in the text come from my unpublished interviews with the selected restaurant owner participants, who are referred to by their first names.

Origin stories

Since this project was inspired by Bilal's story, I started my research with a similar notion about restaurant owners and their passion for food. They would be driven by the desire to create a place of home for their diaspora. The question of "why open a restaurant?", however, revealed more practical reasons than I anticipated. All of the owners came to Istanbul for better prospects than in their home country, where options were hampered by politics, educational constraints or insecurity. The majority of owners just wanted to open a business. Some came to Istanbul specifically with that goal, although not necessarily a restaurant. Some came here for general opportunities and a restaurant seemed the best option, especially with the language challenge. Magdy, an engineer and owner of Cairo Restaurant, moved his family here so his teenagers could go to university and saw no Egyptian food, which is popular in the Arab world; the large tourism population from the Gulf States would make Istanbul a good market. Meriem, owner of Hibret, worked at her family's restaurant in Addis Ababa but as the political situation declined, she sought more stable work and a visa in Istanbul. She initially looked into other businesses but in the end, a café seemed easiest with her experience. Before even coming to Istanbul, Sradhya and Tarlochan, the owners of Fusion Indian, identified Turkey as having a good business environment and looked for different businesses options. When logistics for other industries became too complicated, they decided to try a restaurant. Wasaf, who runs Lahore Darbar, is the only one who came specifically for a restaurant. A chef in Pakistan, he worked in four-star hotels but knew he wouldn't be able to open his own place without international experience. His brother, who lived in Istanbul, invited him to partner in a small restaurant.

A number of owners came to study under Turkey's scholarship scheme, which offers tuition, housing and language instruction to foreign students. The scheme is especially attractive to students from other Muslim nations, providing good educational opportunities without the stigmatization, expenses and pressures of European or North American locations. Naeem, and the rest of the team behind the Asian Lounge, came from Bangladesh for university and stayed to continue their Masters or PhDs. Mamoud left Gambia to study anthropology in Istanbul, opened a small logistics business and is now pursuing his masters while running Moss Dooli. For both Naeem and Mamoud, the push to open a restaurant came from their own feeling of displacement and the recognition that other students similarly felt the need for tastes of home. This yearning for home-cooked food is especially pronounced by the lack of family presence around those like them, similar to Bilal's original clientele.

For most of the owners, the practicality of their origin stories were not mutually exclusive from the desire to create a welcoming food environment. Many had previous restaurant experience, as chefs or owners, or some passion for food. They would need at least the latter; the restaurant business is tough, and opening an establishment is difficult anywhere, let alone a place with a different language or not easily-accessible rules and regulations. Some owners started restaurants because their lack of Turkish language hindered them from getting good local jobs in their field; they then relied on partners or friends to help them with permits, negotiations and other logistics required to manage their business. Irakli, owner of Galaktion, found the paperwork and bureaucracy very hard to navigate; Wasaf had landlord troubles in his first restaurant location; Fadhil, owner of Koali, faced delays and corruption in trying to open a second location; and Favor, owner of the unnamed Nigerian restaurant, occupied five different spaces before the one where I visited her, each time moving because of difficulties with neighbors or authorities.

Cuisines and flavors

Origin stories and logistics aside, serving a foreign cuisine presents the question of what that cuisine is and how the restaurant represents it. The role of channeling a nation's cuisine can be daunting at best and impossible at worst. Geographical, tribal, historical and religious diversity impacts what people eat, even within the same country. While there are common national dishes, a food in one part of the country may never have been consumed in another; the

ingredients for it may not even be available. Opening a restaurant serving food from one's country of origin raises the question of whose or which country. This is a challenge faced by many restaurant owners in Istanbul. If they are cooking for their diaspora, they might need to satisfy different tastes and memories. If their mission is to introduce outsiders to their cuisine and culture, they might want a wide, diverse menu. Neither case is ideal for business, as Magdy explains:

"[Our cuisine] is very rich, we have a lot of variety...When you take just the items of the seafood [Egyptians] are making, it can be two or three menus of other countries... A big menu commercially is not good. But we took on our shoulders the mission to spread and make people aware of Egyptian food, so I have to take on a big menu...When [people] are in Egypt, there is a restaurant for koshari, there is a restaurant for ta'ameya, falafel, there is a restaurant for seafood...But here there's only one restaurant, so when they come, people have to find everything."

Asia Lounge also has a wide menu reflecting both common South Asian dishes (cooked Bengali style) and more Bangladeshi-forward dishes, including a wide seafood menu: *"Fish is one of our staple foods. If you go to other Indian restaurants you won't see many fish varieties, but we have"* (Naeem). Fusion Indian has a similarly deep menu covering Indian cuisine from mostly northern parts of the country, and even some Indo-Chinese dishes. The main flavor profile reflects the Delhi and Gujarati origins of the owners, but they are ready to adapt dishes to customers' taste preferences. *"If an Indian comes in, we ask them 'what part of India you're coming?' If he says South Indian, we put a little salt. If he says western Indian, we put a little sweet,"* Sradyha says. *"If north India,"* Tarlochan continues, *"no need to put anything – just spice, more chili!"*

Smaller restaurants, on the other hand, tend not to span an entire cuisine but focus on basic staple foods, which are prepared according to the owners' regional or local style. Buuzecedi focuses on only a few common Syrian foods prepared Damascus-style: hummus, fowl and fatteh, and their accompanying pickles and tandoor bread. The food is basic, yet so iconic that there are lines out the door, and Syrians who have left Istanbul for other places tweet about missing Buuzecedi's food. With so many other Syrian restaurants in the city, Buuzecedi does not need to serve as an ambassador; it can instead focus on this specific niche, which Nour dreamed of sharing with Istanbul long before he came to the city. As seen with their hummus and fatteh,

dishes can have local variations, which often reflect the owner's connection to a specific place within their country. Fadhil notes that many national dishes have regional representations and that Koali's menu features a specific version of those dishes. Favor serves several stews which reflect her tribe's culture. These dishes were uncommon for a Nigerian friend I took there, but he could identify what tribe she would be from based on them. Moss Dooli's menu features many dishes that, according to Mamoud, are enjoyed across West African countries, although people from those countries might not agree over how the dishes should taste. That same Nigerian friend identified their jollof rice as Gambian style, not Nigerian. In a second country place like Turkey, however, these differences don't seem to divide customers the way they might in their country or region of origin. Tastes are close enough, even if not fully satisfying.

Essential ingredients

Once restaurants identify their menu, they face the challenge of taste. Satisfaction for customers hinges on finding the right flavors in the food. Ingredients play a big role in how a diaspora experience its food in an "authentic" way. Authentic in this case would be matching the flavors of home, although this may never be possible even with the proper ingredients. Water, air, smells and décor all contribute to how we taste or experience food. Everyone cooks something differently, but capturing the taste of a dish at least requires certain flavors or scents; ingredients are the distinct building materials that can make or break a dish. These are the basic essentials that, regardless of preparation, are required to create the flavor profile. For instance, palm oil is an essential ingredient in Nigerian food, affecting both the color and flavor of certain dishes. A jollof rice can still taste delicious without it, but the oil will give it a flavor that is immediately reminiscent of home. While restaurant owners are not necessarily going for exact authenticity, they are often trying to get as close as possible. This could mean preservation or innovation, a combination of both or neither. Some preserve traditional tastes by importing the essential ingredients, while others adapt their foods to the local context—in instances where ingredients cannot always be found, it might be better to experiment in reflecting flavors a new way than relying on the wrong ingredients for traditional recipes, which only highlights the "wrong" taste. Fadhil says 30 percent are the really important ingredients, which he insists on importing, while the other 70 percent can either be found in Turkey he approximates with other local ingredients. To some owners, the lack of an important ingredient sometimes means not cooking it at all.

The availability of ingredients is crucial for authenticity, yet poses the biggest challenge to restaurant owners, all of whom raised this as their main difficulty. Often, the essential ingredients items not found on the Turkish market; even if they can be found, they often lack the proper taste. Procuring the correct ingredients can prove complicated. Georgian food, for example, requires unique ingredients ranging from “not common here” (tarragon) to “rare outside of Georgia” (marigold leaf powder). According to Irakli, it’s easier to operate a Georgian restaurant in Europe, the USA or Russia, where the markets have everything, but *“in Turkey this is not easy. I buy spices in Georgia, and everything else we make here, including cheese.”* For ingredients not available in Istanbul or Turkey, the only way to get them is importing, by the restaurant itself or through an import shop. Cairo Restaurant imports several impossible-to-find-locally ingredients: guava, mango, pigeons and rabbits. I have been in the restaurant when the latter two have come in, eating dinner as crates of animals are carried past. The inconsistent quality and availability and expensive prices of locally-purchased imported goods make them unsustainable for a regular supply. When they can’t import officially, many smaller restaurants rely on friends and colleagues to bring a needed item, or, more often, the “suitcase” method, carrying empty bags home to be filled up on return. The owners joke their bags still smell like spices, or that customs officials ask why they have so many bags of leaves (herbs in one instance, tea leaves in another). Some ingredients are available in Turkey, but don’t taste right according to the owners, who only use when they can’t import themselves. For those too difficult to import because of weight or risk of expiration, some owners substitute something available in Turkey. Certain restaurants choose not to make dishes without the proper ingredients: *“We try to resource [a needed ingredient] and if we can’t, we stop serving that dish. We don’t believe in making something using other things. If you cannot find the ingredients, and if you cannot find the thing which will make that dish perfect, we don’t make it.”* (Naeem)

Take the Indonesian triad of lemongrass, ginger and galangal, along with lime leaf. While lemongrass and ginger are available in Turkey, Fadhil claims the taste is not intense enough to match what they have back home: *“It just tastes like grass.”* A tiny amount of natively grown lemongrass and ginger goes a long way, so he can import small quantities at a time and extend their use. Galangal and lime leaf, also crucial for creating the right flavor, are not available at all and must be imported. The intensity of chilies is also incomparable in Turkey; when he cannot procure from home or is running low, he combines the deeper flavor of the local Urfa chilis with the punchier Indonesian ones to extend his stock.

Meriem serves only a few dishes in her café, so the ingredients she needs to find or bring from Ethiopia are limited. The main attraction of the café, however, is the Ethiopian style-coffee, made from raw coffee beans toasted daily over the fire in the traditional way. Ethiopian coffee beans are distinct and contribute to the proper taste of the cup that's offered here, so these must be imported. She also brings berbere, a spice blend that includes herbs and spices not commonly known or available outside the country. For Ethiopians, berbere is a family thing – each makes their own distinct blend or buys at a certain shop. While each mix imparts a slightly different flavor, it is essential for many dishes. Meriem only uses her family blend, which she must bring from home.

The issue of right flavor or strength of spices was expected, but the commitment to certain other ingredients was more surprising. More than one restaurant said they imported okra, despite it being a very common Turkish ingredient, because the texture and taste was not right. Turkey is a prominent producer of black tea (in the top five exporting countries), but the Asia Lounge brings in their own brands that have a significantly different taste and steeping process. Tarlochan finds it difficult to cook with Turkish onions, which contain more water than Indian ones. Rice's weight makes it complicated to import (officially or unofficially). The Gambian, Bangladeshi and Egyptian restaurant all bemoaned not being able to use their specific domestic rice varieties, and find the now-common basmati rice found in Istanbul not up to their standard. Even the right milk can be a challenge. Most Bangladeshi sweets are made from milk, which needs to be a full-fat raw milk so it can be cooked a long time to get the right flavor. For Asia Lounge to make their desserts, yogurt and paneer (cheese), they needed to find unpasteurized milk, which wasn't available in stores or restaurant supply businesses.

"We got a source that said if we go towards the new airport, there are a couple of dairy farms there. You can find raw milk from there directly from the farms. We figured, let's see. So we went there, and found it was the full-cream milk we were looking for, good quality. If we want to make the sweets which we have in the home, with the real original taste and quality, then we must have this milk. We would go every week to pick up 10 to 15 litres, because we couldn't find it in any store. And that was also an adventure."

(Naeem)

Some ingredients, such as this special milk, are not easily available on the surface, but research and creativity can yield good domestic options for sourcing. Fadhil found smoked fish and fresh tofu in Uzbek shops; the latter's texture is not as firm as Indonesian tofu but the taste passes. He has recruited some Indonesian families to make tempeh; what he doesn't buy, they can sell to the local Chinese store. Thu Do, who ran the Facebook-order Vietnamese catering company White Rice Kitchen until she left Istanbul, grew all the necessary herbs and vegetables in a small backyard garden. As populations expand and the market grows in Istanbul, opportunities arise for smart businesspeople to sell needed products. Favor reflects on the paradox and impact:

"What they hate is what they are selling. If we go to the underground big market...they don't like peppers, they don't like [smoked fish], but they are all selling that...Because we bring it. We have opened their eyes that this thing is money...Now they want to be doing the business. We have African cargoes, they know how our people are struggling. Now they want to close all the cargo."

Asia Lounge is now keeping that business in their own hands; they will begin importing their own spices and South Asian products as a business, opening a storefront next to their restaurant.

Ingredients are not just ingredients but allow for certain tastes and smells that evoke memories of home, nostalgia and pride. Several restaurant owners identified mangoes as one of the things they miss the most *and* are impossible to get in Istanbul. Magdy claims the Egyptian mangoes unique to Ismailia as superior: "This type of mango, it's a small one. You just eat it, you know like eating food. It's amazing. If you look to the Indian mango and the Pakistani mango – they have a good smell. And it's good. But that taste [of ours], when you eat it, is different." Naeem argues for the Bangladeshi mango, which is important not only for eating but also for pickles and vegetable dishes. "Mango is our national fruit. The mango we can find here, there are not that many first of all, and the mangoes, from Brazil or Thailand, they don't have that smell that we want to have." Smell plays an important role in both ingredients and the resulting taste of dishes, as well as defining the food itself.

Smellscapes

“As with all the senses, taste and smell must be understood as culturally defined experiences that are physical, embodied processes. A particular taste or smell may invoke revulsion in one person but bring enormous pleasure to another.” (Walmsley 2005, 44)

Cuisines can have distinct smells, and many restaurant owners have been told “your food smells bad” by neighbors or non-diaspora patrons. Bourdieu says that tastes “are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” (1984, as quoted in Sutton 2010, 211), but you have to actually *taste* the food to understand the markers. Smells, on the other hand, are more powerful signifiers precisely because they cannot be contained: “They do not stay put in kitchens...notions of distinction and cultural capital, which may be treated as metaphors for taste, are linked to the actual smells of food in the negotiations of everyday life.” (Sutton 2010, 214) Entering a place permeated with food odors can immediately place you in a certain mindset or evoke a cultural identity. Some restaurants want to convey a sense of cleanliness and thus erase the food smells that actually identify them. Entering these establishments, you might find them lacking the essence you expected to smell. While yabancı restaurant owners want to deliver these place-making sensations to their customers, they simultaneously must navigate the potentially contentious landscape of “air” rights in a landscape not familiar with their smells.

The first time I ate at Koali, before my research even started, I found myself coughing from a cooking smell that hung in the air. My friend remarked they needed to get better ventilation. Later, Fadhil noted this about his restaurant, when I asked him what Indonesian cuisine smell like:

“If you’re talking about Indonesian food, you’ll find something stinky. I mean if it’s not stinky, then it’s not authentic. I got some complaints from my customers: ‘I haven’t gotten my food and I already get that smell, it’s burning my nose and my eyes.’ Okay, that’s Indonesian food. But if you get the smell, oh that food is real food. It’s not about the spoonful of food that you eat. Even from the smell, you can understand that this is authentic.”

For him, it was the smell of shrimp paste and *wok hei*, the smell that is released in wok-cooking when the food reaches the right temperature and degree of doneness. He admitted it disturbs customers but sees it as a key to the taste and overall experience of the food. While he does have ventilation to partly diffuse the smell, he believes it can't be removed without losing the essence of consuming Indonesian food.

Naeem sees it the opposite, that you shouldn't smell the restaurant, only the food when it is put in front of you. He had many previous encounters with his neighbors, who, when he was cooking in his flat, would knock on his door or call across the way, asking him to shut his windows because the food smell was too strong: *"At first we were very surprised, like 'what's wrong with the smell?', but then we understood that, okay, this is not compatible with the culture so we must compromise."* When they were opening Asia Lounge, he knew this would be a significant issue for the neighboring business and residents. As a foreigner, he did not want to draw extra attention, so they had engineers design a high-tech ventilation system (which actually made the kitchen too hot, so they then installed even a high-tech cooling system). As a result, the smell of food rarely hits you when you enter the restaurant. Only once, when they closed the restaurant to the public so they could prepare a big catering order, did I smell the food like it was a home kitchen.

Favor also faces pressure from the smells of her restaurant. Nigerian food, as she freely offers, smells strong and distinct. It is a pungent dried fish and intestine smell that permeates out onto the street. *"That is Africa, they have many, many spices...They always complain about our food smells. Even my customers, my neighbors complain."* Now on her sixth physical space, one move was prompted by neighbors complaints and she is worried about her current ones. At the same time, however, she sees the smell almost as a calling card. Despite no sign or indication from the outside that this is a restaurant, *"because of the smell, when they are passing, they will ask 'where is an African restaurant?'"*. When you enter, the smell intensifies; when your food is served somehow the smell amplifies into taste.

It is not only specific smells that evoke home, but also the idea of the smell itself. While Fadhil's Dutch grandmother's house was very clean and "good smelling", his Indonesian grandmother's house was "so smelly" [note the difference in connotation and judgement on the word smell]. At the time he felt sad for her, but looking back now he associates the latter with hospitality.

“When she cooked something, the people in the area could understand...and everyone started to come and ask for the food,” he remembers. *“My grandmother would just give them the food. So even if only five or six people were inside the house, she always cooked for twenty because she says ‘that is part of our culture’.”* This embrace of sharing and embodying the food is something he works to create in his own restaurant.

Sounds and sights

Place-making not only happens with the smells and tastes of food, but all the senses can play a role. *“What I’m thinking is just to make people’s six senses working at the same time,”* Fadhil says. *“Because once you enter Koali, you get the smell. You see the atmosphere, you hear the songs, and the food of course.”* The design of the physical spaces — the sounds and sights — also incorporate signifiers of home, and many restaurant owners consciously build this familiar environment. Asia Lounge is decorated to resemble Bangladesh...greenery and lots of rivers. One wall is painted green, the other covered in plastic leaves and ivy, with a big circle of plastic red flowers in the middle to mimic the national flag. Wooden pillars symbolize the trees. A large fish tank anchors the center of the room, reflecting the importance of water and fish. Bookshelves hold Bangladeshi books, and Bangladeshi songs play over the speakers. Galaktion resembles a Georgian living room or literati café, channeling Irakli’s identity as a poet and author. The warm glow of green-glass library lamps on the tables, upholstered chairs, mismatched china and household furniture give the restaurant its bohemian feel.

Even the way the restaurants are set up to serve food can be a transporting experience. Lahore Darbar (a darbar is a gathering place, when friends and family get together) is a small storefront, some tables inside and outside, with a steam table at the entrance and a small kitchen in the back. Food is heated to order, not in a microwave but in small pans on the stove, exactly as it would be done in roadside restaurants across Pakistan. Just this familiar process of ordering and serving can be nostalgic for customers from the diaspora. The branch of Fusion Indian frequented mainly by South Asian workers has almost no atmosphere, just a few scattered tables on the sidewalk, which mirrors a typical Indian worker café.

Restaurants not catering specifically to diasporas tend to reflect more of a “construction” of the country of origin. At Koali, the television features archival Indo-Dutch films of a colonial time,

Indo-Dutch traditional songs play over the speakers and “exotic” masks and statues adorn the walls and tables. This is not a 21st century modern Indonesia but, as Fadhil says, “my grandmother’s house”, completed with a yellow neon sign in Bahasa that translates to her famous phrase, “Eat your food, honey.” Fusion Indian’s more upscale branch, which serves a mostly Turkish and tourist clientele, has statues of Indian gods like Ganesh and large pictures of traditional Indian dancers. Buuzecedi’s owner Nour put a lot of thought behind the design and concept, mimicking the style of 1900’s Damascus using traditional colors, stones, wood cuttings, “costumes” (of the workers), and cooking techniques using copper pots and pans.

Some restaurants spend less time on the décor and let the music and the soundtrack of the customers make the place. The Nigerian restaurant has little decoration aside from one large black and white painting of an African woman. Favor chooses to play a Christian radio station, songs in English, commercials in Turkish. Hibret doesn’t have piped-in music, only the occasional burst from someone’s phone. The melody instead is the *chop chop sizzle, shake shake* of the coffee and the “*Meriem*”, “*Meriem*”, “*Meriem*” greeting called out each time someone enters. Moss Dooli left up all the paintings of Turkish landmarks and Ottoman-wood-styled accents left from the previous Turkish restaurant, emplacing itself only through the West African music and the energy of the customers. Like many of the more diasporic-focused restaurants, this latter part of the soundscape is unintentional—the din of voices building on top of each other, a mix of national languages, local dialects and Turkish. It is another signifier of the “diasporic safe space”, where you don’t have to struggle expressing yourself in a new language.

Customers welcomed home

The clientele at yabancı restaurants span workers, students, businesspeople and tourists. Few of the restaurants have any expectation of getting many Turkish customers. Some restaurants have internationally diverse customers, while others host distinctly diasporic communities. There are migrants passing through and emigrants staying put. Migration to Istanbul has given most of these restaurant owners “two sets of ‘homes” (Haldrup and Larsen 2010, 29), which can keep them from feeling rooted in either place.

“I was in Gambia a few months ago. I tried to stay a long time. But the thing is, I found out that when you travel, you don't belong to anyplace again. When you

are here, you are called yabancı. When you go back home, after two, three weeks they will, your own people will ask you, 'when are you going back?' So you're like, okay where do I live? If these people are asking you when are going back and then in Istanbul, there you are a yabancı, then traveling makes you that person."

(Mamoud)

Feelings like this fueled many, including Mamoud, to make these restaurants a grounding place not only for the customers, but also for themselves. Naeem and his co-founders were part of a community of students and ex-pats that felt like they needed a place of their own, not only to eat Bangladeshi foods but to be able to share that food and culture with their non-Bangladeshi friends. For Tho Da, who has lived abroad for much of her life, cooking Vietnamese food (and sharing it) was a way to keep connected to her roots:

"Sometimes I feel like I'm just an earth citizen. I am not attached to anywhere, and food is the only way that I can actually connect myself to my homeland, where I was born. In the US, we have big Vietnamese community, so I have no problem eating Vietnamese food and feeling like I was back when I was a kid. But coming to Istanbul, or Turkey in general, it was such a culture shock, because it's very monoculture...There was not much that I can find here in terms of cuisines, it's mainly just Turkish cuisine...So at first initially, the push was mostly about you wanting to eat your own food, to satisfy yourself. And then from there, you kind of thought, well, I should bring this to everyone else."

Fadhil sees Koali as his platform for, as he puts it, gastrodiploacy, to make the cuisine more familiar to everyone. As he developed its menu and researched the stories behind the food, he actually grew closer to his Indonesian culture, helping him feel more connected to home.

From all the owners, I heard the same sentiment despite different customer bases: we just want people to feel at home. For Magdy, if he asks a customer how the food is, *"and they say 'Oh my god, I feel that I'm eating in my home', that for me is enough"*. Both Meriem and Favor have designed their spaces like casual living rooms, creating a family-like intimacy, and serve as matriarchs of their customer family. Hospitality, and food's role in it, is an important part in

many of the cultures behind these restaurants, and it extends to this new country of residence. For Naeem, this applies to everyone who enters:

“Students are staying here for a long time and they don't have the chance to eat Bangladeshi food regularly, so when they come here and when we can serve them the food with the original taste and essence, they feel like, ‘Oh, this is what I'm looking for.’ I feel happy because I can relate, and it makes all the customers happy. For others, no matter where they belong to, we just want them to feel like home, like, you don't have any pressure, you don't have anything to do, just be here, be comfortable, have a good time.”

Through their hospitality and sensorial recreations, the owners have created atmospheres where “subject and space leak into each other, *inhabit each other* (Ahmed, 2000, 89), providing a sense of belonging for themselves, their diaspora and beyond.

A SENSORY AND VISUAL APPROACH TO PLACE-MAKING

The previous chapter explored the ethnographic content of interviews with the restaurant owners. This chapter focuses on more sensorial data collection. This is not to say that the interviews were without sensory observations. For example, I wish I had been filming while interviewing Magdy. The look on his face when I asked, “Is food a big part of your culture?” There was silence, as he just looked at me, his eyes slowly twinkling, a smile turning into a silent laugh, as he turns his head and his shoulders shake from the laughter. *He looks back at me, asking “Do we like food?”* I can explain this scene, but it does not capture fully the essence and joy that is exuded in that moment.

While we can never remove our sensory subjectivity in observation or potential perceived power dynamics in entering and studying spaces that are not originally ours, using a sensory ethnography approach took me out of my head and into the space so that I was experiencing physical spaces more phenomenologically. The sensory experience “provides a visceral dimension to identity that impinges directly on our daily lives without necessarily entering into dialogue” (Walmsley 2005, 43), and it allowed me feel an intimacy and understanding that

transcended words, especially as the language spoken in the spaces often was not one I understood. Speaking became more about the rhythm and tone than the actual words. Smells became emplaced identifiers.

Slow cinema, observational filmmaking and sensory ethnography all fed into the approach for my visual and aural exploration of the restaurants. For my film, *eating yabancı*, I highlighted three restaurants, all owned and operated by young, Muslim migrants. The two main subject restaurants, whose owners came to Turkey on the scholarship scheme, reflect different purposes and audiences: one, to be a space for the diaspora of that country of origin and the other, to introduce the cuisine to other foreigners. The third subject restaurant also serves its diaspora, but as a smaller and not as public-facing space.

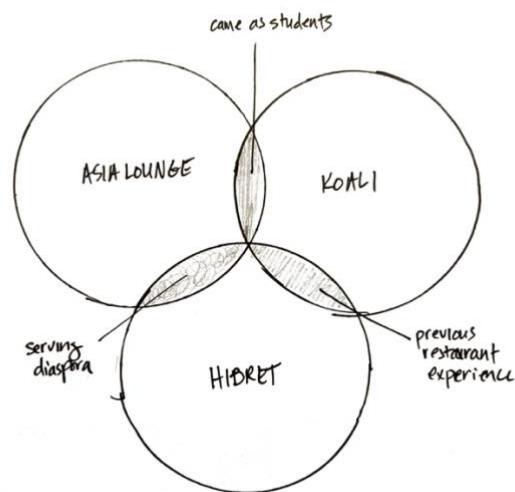


Figure 2: The three subject restaurants

Sensory ethnography: how to capture tastes, smells and feelings

Being in the spaces, letting the action unfold around me, my camera caught nuances and was able to convey feelings that would be hard to put into words. Looking out for the visual and audio cues to inspire shot choices pushed me to explore the space with a different perspective. It also, on the other hand, provided challenges for me due to people not wanting themselves or certain situations to be filmed. It was frustrating to see nuances that captured the essence of the restaurants but ethically I could not record without violating people's trust. It is here where the possible anonymity of text prevails over the visual.

How could I capture food visually without falling into the previously mentioned tropes of food media? While I did spend time in the kitchens, it was more important for me to focus only on specific images and sensations rather than following cooking processes as a narrative (with the exception of the opening scene). It became more about using those images to evoke a way of feeling rather than an explanation of foodways. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains: “From color, steam rising, gloss and texture, we infer taste smell and feel...Taste is something we anticipate and infer from how things look, feel to the hand, smell (outside the mouth), and sound...Our eyes let us ‘taste’ food at a distance by activating the sense memories of taste and smell” (1999, as quoted in Sutton 2010, 218).



Figure 3: Opening scene - making nasi koali at Koali Dine and Lounge

In filming and editing, I turned to this notion of synesthesia, which Sutton highlights as a key approach to capturing the evasive reality of taste and smell and which holds the potential to decenter western notions of taste and smell preferences (2010, 218). Zooming close on smoke, layering food and cooking imagery over restaurant scenes and combining sounds of food preparation, music and talking built layers of sensations that hopefully captures the essence of these food establishments and positions the viewer inside them. I want the audience to feel what it is like to enter that space, to evoke the taste and smell in the viewer’s mouth. I want them to feel hungry, and at the same time feel the “home” place-making. The impact of sound cannot be underestimated in visual anthropology, as it allows the audience to enter the space in a different way, where they can “have a very sensuous, affective, feeling relationship with voice and place by listening” (Feld, as quoted in Pink 2015, 468). For example, in the Ethiopian café,

listening to the sound of the space actually evokes something more intimate; the visuals alone cannot capture the warmth of Meriem's tone or laughter, or the energy fueled by the audible "action".

Ethnographic filmmakers approach their subjects trying to capture and convey a version of reality, but many visual anthropologists and critics disagree on exactly what method is appropriate. *Eating yabancı* incorporates several approaches – observational footage, stylized imagery and montage techniques – to expand the audience's perception. MacDougall points out that "film is cumulative", building understandings over the course of different scenes that often brings "a particular pattern to the surface retrospectively in a moment of crystallization" (1998, 81). In the observational style, which attempts to preserve the time and place of occurrences, long camera takes follow the action (or non-action) without overly stylized or creative camera techniques. Henley appeals that "the observational camera-person should take particular care that neither the distinctive temporal and spatial configurations of the events portrayed nor, more generally, the characteristic social and cultural aesthetics of their subjects' world are smothered by demonstrations of technical or aesthetic virtuosity" (2004, as cited in Suhr and Wallesley 2012, 284). Long camera takes reveal a wealth of visual detail that can emplace the viewer in the various restaurants. This approach, however, is limited in what it can actually capture and convey, and sometimes the essence lies just beyond what the camera sees. Excerpts of interviews provide a sparse narration that gives additional insights into the tastes and smells of the cuisines and the goals and feelings of the owners.

If the observational film allows that a visual approach "transcends 'culture'...by underscoring commonalities that cut across cultural boundaries" (MacDougall 1998, 252), then editing can build on those commonalities by making connections that assist in transcultural boundary-crossing. Suhr and Willerslev cite Taussing's idea of montage as interrupter, "a device for provoking: sudden and infinite connections between dissimilars in an endless or almost endless process of connection-making and connection-breaking" (1986, as cited in 2013, 16). Introducing unusual framing, focusing on objects (including food) and repeating visual techniques across the three sections of the film can reveal invisible connections within a space, as well as those across different locations in Istanbul. Montage, in this case, functions less as way to stimulate intellectual sense-making in pursuit of the essential truth a-la Dziga Vertov, but instead to provoke a narrative, sensual truth.

Including all the elements that construct place — smells, objects, sights, people, energies — should get all the senses working to absorb a composite picture of the restaurant experience. While I wanted to push the sensorial, it was important, however, not to descend too far down the experimental path. Too much disruption can make the viewer feeling lost and displaced, the opposite of the emplaced feeling I wanted. A filmmaker can enhance a viewer’s perception of reality, and reveal “the invisible aspects of social life” through a careful balance of disruption and composition (Suhr and Willerslev 2012, 284). This combination of observational takes, sensory haptic-ness and montage build towards a more “thick description”.

A “living room” cafe: Hibret Breakfast and Coffee

Shake, shake, shake. A woman sits on a low stool, toasting something in a small cast iron pan over a small propane-tank-fueled fire. The room becomes smoky with a strong smell of popcorn, except she is roasting coffee, the fresh green beans in the pan, shaken as they toast. She shakes, shakes, shakes, the sound of the beans rattling back and forth like a maraca. They sizzle with the heat. The smoke curls from the pan. The scent of the toasted coffee beans wafts into the room, filling every corner.



Figure 4: Smoke and scents curl from roasting coffee beans at Hibret Breakfast and Coffee.

Shake, shake, shake. The smell grows stronger as the coffee beans grow darker. Light brown to medium brown to dark brown glistening with oils. The fire sparks as it catches drops of oil, the flames snaking the outside of the pan, blue with intensity. The sound of *shaking* mixes with the *chop, chop, chop* of Meriem, the owner, chopping onions and peppers on a cutting board. One by one, customers come in, calling to her: “*Meriem...*” “*Salamalekum Meriem...*” “*Meriem...*” They chatter back and forth across the room, their voices rising, the patterns adding to the rhythmic beat of her chopping and the other woman shaking. The rhythm is interrupted by a radio talk show emitting from someone’s phone.

Sizzle. The sound of something in the frying pan builds in intensity as the food cooks, diminishing when another ingredient is added, only to build again.

The woman moves the pan to a small wooden table, where the smoke curls and rises. She brews and pours my coffee, lifting the pot high so the stream froths in the small ceramic cup. The scent of cardamom, cinnamon and ginger rises from the liquid, mixing with the same smells, and more, from the cooking.

A grandmother’s house: Koali Dine and Lounge

Clink, clink. Sizzle. There is a low din of talking, the clinking of forks on plates and the sizzle of woks on the fire. Old Indo-Dutch songs play languidly over the speakers, like a radio from the past. A television on the back wall plays a collection of Indo-Dutch archival footage. This feeling of another time, a nostalgia for an Indonesia that feels exotic and disappeared.

The restaurant is busy with people, their voices rising amidst bites and slurps. It has a smell: incense mixed with something flowery, mixed with shrimp paste, frying meat and “wok hei”. The smell gets in your nose and your eyes.



Figure 5: Smoke curls from incense in Koali Dine and Lounge

Scrape, scrape, scrape! The din of talking is no match for the open kitchen, which emits sizzles and clangs and the sounds of metal spoons scraping pans as batches of the namesake fried rice are tossed. *Chop, chop, chop.* A cleaver smacks the counter as it hacks off pieces from a large chunk of palm sugar. The whirl of the blender, spinning chiles, peanuts and garlic into sauce.

Bing! A busy night means regular orders, the bell dinging over and over as the dishes are ready.

House of biryani: Asia Lounge Cafe, Restaurant and Cultural Center

Swish, swish. In the morning, a young Bangladeshi man slowly makes his way around the room sweeping the green astro-turf covered floor, metre by metre, the sound of plastic brushing plastic. It's quiet, there's no music. *Sweep, sweep.*

Bright orange and pink fish swim back and forth in the fish tank as the water gurgles. The soothing sounds of running water is interrupted by the back and forth low fuzz of the oscillating fan. *Buzzzzzzzz.*



Figure 6: Kids watch the fish at Asia Lounge Cafe, Restaurant and Cultural Center

The staff speaks back and forth in Bengali, the words streaming quickly out of their mouths. There is no smell in the restaurant – no food smells or decorative smells, no scent of cooking spices that usually welcomes you in a South Asian restaurant.

Whirrr. The sound of a blender, a golden mango lassi whirring in its jar. There is smooth Asian rock on the speakers, but it's hardly heard above the excited murmur of people in the now full restaurant. Above the bar, a big television shows a cricket match, a barely audible commentary.

Four oversize wicker basket chairs hang in pairs, like giant eggs having a conversation, slow squeaks as the people in them move. *Squeak, squawk.* A man sits over a plate of their kacchi biryani, sounds of his chewing and biting somehow rising over the bustle. The steaming dome of orange, yellow and white rice smells of warm spices. The restaurant buzzes with energy.

Sensory preferences (taste and smell in particular) are indeed extensions of both personal preference and cultural imprints. Eating and filming at these restaurants allowed me to absorb that embodied knowledge in an experiential way. While on one level our sensory associations

and embodied responses remain, it does not exclude the possibility of experiencing new connections (Walmsley 2005, 44). Traditionally, as anthropologists doing field work, as Stoller says, “we tend to allow our senses to penetrate the other's world rather than letting our senses be penetrated by the world of the other. The result of this tendency is that we represent the other's world in a generally turgid discourse which often bears little resemblance to the world we are attempting to describe” (1989, 39). For me, experiencing third cultures through their food developed understandings mere conversation could not capture. Immersing in the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the places, and transferring those sensations on screen hopefully creates a visual space that both reflects the everyday life of the restaurants and invites the audience in a shared embodiment of that world. As Walmsley continues, “different environments and relationships engender new sensory knowledge and in so doing invest previously unfamiliar tastes and smells with social and emotional meaning” (2005, 44). Suddenly, I felt closer to the people in the restaurants, found myself craving certain dishes or having certain smells in the kitchen trigger hunger. This is the feeling I wanted to impart to audiences watching the film.

CONCLUSION

Food is closely intertwined with identity and belonging, its consumption an embodied experience. We see the food, feel the texture, experience the smells and tastes. These sensations do not solely evoke personal pleasure and memory, but also emplace and unite people within foreign societal contexts due to migration. This makes the physical spaces that offer an immersion into a “taste of home” as important as the cuisine itself, as they serve as gathering points where the currency of taste and smell serve as cultural markers of belonging.

While diaspora restaurants exist in cities and towns all over the world, yabancı restaurants in Istanbul have to work harder at constructing their spaces of authenticity amidst a host country that is not interested in their offerings. It is tough to find the right ingredients, difficult to navigate the system and challenging to serve a customer base that is in a large part transient. Many of the owners are new to the food industry and may never have cooked before. The process of displacement and a yearning to locate a place of home pushed them to investigate their cuisine and ingredients and be able to build the authentic flavor. The places they have

created provide comforting sensorial experiences for their communities and new ones for those outside them.

As sensory experiences are shared, so are meanings. A restaurant owner (and anthropologist) asked me how I could study other people's tastes. This was a difficult challenge, and I can never exactly convey the tastes and smells as perceived by someone else. Using sensory ethnography and audio-visual methods, however, allowed to me to open the conversations and observations up in a way that let the world of these restaurants, people and foods penetrate my own subjectivity and experience. Interviews that focused on the senses drew out perspectives that I wouldn't have understood just by discussing more theoretical ideas of home and place. Observational filmmaking, haptic cinema and montage all contributed to the visual and aural exploration of the restaurants, building a sensorial experience that emplaces the audience in the spaces.

Like the restaurant owners, I am also a foreign resident, trying to make my place in a country where I am always a *yabancı*. The embodied process of eating can provide something familiar and grounding. The sensorial connections I shared in these place-making spaces actually made *me* feel at home. Sharing food builds intimacy; sharing interest in and passion about food bonds people across cultures. *eating yabancı* explores three restaurants I was drawn to because they capture a feeling of community, whether their own diasporic one or one they've created across ethnicities in Istanbul (and sometimes both). Even if it is not "my" place, I feel comfortable wrapped in the energy of this home-making for others.

My research and the visual place-making of the film provide an opportunity to understand migration, memory and belonging in a different way. In the context of Istanbul, it is in our shared foreignness, and shared eating, that we can make a place of home.

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NOTES

1. My speculations is that it results from the historical nationalist dimension pushed by the government, the desire to consolidate against local differences and minority cultures, as well as the power dynamics between the country and Europe and Turkey's resistance to a global landscape that doesn't recognize its impact as a dominant culture.
2. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said births the concept of "the Other" and criticizes the West's view of the Orient as the ultimate "Other" in relation the ideal west.
3. Authenticity is defined as the quality of being genuine or real, but in the context of food, this notion is impacted by historical and cultural contexts, colonialism and power dynamics. The idea of authenticity has sparked recent debates in the food industry and media over what is the proper way to cook that food and who can cook what. The concept of authenticity is too big to unpack here, so for the purposes of this thesis, I will stick to the definition of being a genuine reflection of the source.

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