How Do Immigrants Use Restaurants for Integration in the Host Country

Tunisian Immigant Women in France as Case of Study

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Abstract—eating out is an activity that is still at an embryonic stage in immigrant consumer research. The purpose of this paper is to present an insight into the phenomenon of acculturation, in a consumer culture theory perspective, through restaurants attendance and dining out behavior using a qualitative data analysis approach.

Keywords—*food habits; eating out, restaurants frequentation; natives, compatriots, acculturation; integration; France, Tunisian immigrant women, consumer culture theory, theoretical coding, qualitative approach.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Experience of immigration is a source of personal, social and cultural changes for immigrants and their social and individual identities [1][2][3]. Changes also affect their behavior, especially their food habits [1][3]. They are already adopting new behaviors and giving up traditional ones. Their dietary patterns and their identities are transformed. Thus, food consumption is considered to be a key factor in the acculturative process of immigrants facing the influence of other food patterns, practical and cultural constraints [3][4]. One feeding landscape which is affected by immigration is the eating out phenomenon. In this spectrum, we believe that the eating out consumption in the French context of migration requires interest. We focus on two highlights: (1) the way immigrants use restaurants to acculturate and (2) the specificities of their integration process.

Our present paper's main objective is to explore, from the perspective of the Consumer Culture Theory [5], the practices of dining out consumption in the French context of migration in order to provide a different perspective for new food choices through interpreting the restaurants' attendance by Tunisian women immigrant in France.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Acculturation and Integration

Acculturation is a wide, multidimensional and multidisciplinary concept that Berry [6] defines as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members". Berry's work is subsequently a base study for postassimilationnist research in the field of immigrants' acculturation. In a migration context, Ward and Kagitcibasi [7] suggest that acculturation allows individuals to build and develop their personality and to strengthen the links among immigrant families. The acculturation of immigrants depends on their social, experience as well as its political and historical aspect and that of the host country.

1) Berry's acculturation strategies: Berry defines four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Assimilation supposes that immigrant radically refutes his cultural background and adopts the traits of culture of the host society. Integration is defined when immigrant is interested both by his culture of origin and the host culture. When immigrant's attachement to his traits of origin leads him to avoid contact with host culture, this is separation. Finally, when immigrant is not feeling interested neither by his culture of origin nor by the host one, this is marginalization.

2) Consumer's acculturation: Peñaloza [8][9] defines consumer's acculturation as "the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country". Researchers in the CCT field argue that immigrant consumer can adopt different ways to acculturate by the endorsement of different identity positions allowing him to balance between two cultures [8][10][11].

B. Food Acculturation

Immigrants' food acculturation is a very complex phenomenon. Cleveland et al. [12] argue that culture is the basis of any change in eating habits which they define as stable and predictable a priori, but paradoxically susceptible to constant changes. In this direction, Wandel et al. [13] explain that the immigrants' values and their food traditions are challenged by standards, accessibility and economic conditions of the new culture. Food acculturation can take various paths in the immigrant group. It can either lead to the maintenance of traditional culinary activities or the adoption of habits of the host country. Sercia and Girard [14] add that immigrants try to

preserve their pre-migration dietary habits in order to keep links with their culture of origin. However, to adapt to the new culture, they have to adopt a pendulist behavior [11].

III. PROPOSAL OF AN UNDERSTANDING OF RESTAURANT FREQUENTATION PHENOMENON IN A MIGRATORY CONTEXT

In a CCT perspective, we propose to study the restaurants frequentation phenomenon in the French migratory context in order to give a new insight on food acculturation and to go beyond stereotypes about the food consumption behavior of Muslim immigrants in an occidental host country.

A. Adoption of a Qualitative Approach

The choice of qualitative approach was carried out in reference to the work of Miles and Huberman [15], Poupart et al. [16], or even Paillé [17], because the main objective of this study is to understand the players in a situation or context [18].

B. A Sample of Female Immigrant Consumers

The sample of this study consisted of 22 women of the first generation of immigrants, having a high level of education and belonging to the middle and high social classes. The choice of these criteria is based on previous works considering that both factors facilitate the integration of immigrants into the host society [6][19][20]. We justify our choice of women as subjects for the study to answer the many calls for the introduction of a gender perspective in research in order to create a different vision, introducing a feminist breath in research conceptualizations [8][21][22][23]. For confidentiality and respect of anonymity of respondents, all of their names have been changed.

C. Theoretical Coding: Adopted Medthod for Qualitative Data Analysis

Our investigation is based on the understanding and interpretation of social phenomena and the actions of individuals, it draws its resources in empirical research whose purpose is to study the experience and consumer behavior through participant observation and through data collected from in-depth interviews [24][25]. Accordingly, we propose to use the grounded theory as data analysis method as a part of the analysis of the whole speech strategies [26]. This method of analysis, based initially by Glaser and Strauss [27], was taken up later by Strauss and Corbin [28]. In such an approach, the researcher goes beyond the simple description of the observed facts to claim responsibility for the interpretations of the social phenomenon under study [29]. This approach requires creativity to lead to the construction of a rigorous theory of science. This is an iterative method that focuses on in depth comprehension of a particular phenomenon [17][30].

Grounded theory as a method for analyzing qualitative data is more an act of conceptualization than a simple word counting occurrences or a logical application of thematic grid built beforehand or a correlation of exclusive categories [17].

It was, in fact, created to guide researchers in a conceptually strong theoretical production [31].

After interviews transcription, we carried out a theoretical coding [32] through computer-aided qualitative data analysis software Nvivo 8. Grounded theory was then our data analysis method. By time constraints, we were unable to perform a theoretical sample. We then opted for an intentional sampling with volunteers and for a snowball sample.

IV. RESULTS

The theoretical coding helped us interpreting and understanding the food acculturation phenomenon of the 22 immigrant participants in our study. In fact, we pointed out that the eating out concept is very important in the activities of Tunisian immigrant women in France [1][3]. In interviews, respondents talked about this activity with lot of enthusiasm. We were able to identify two important points at the achievement of the theoretical analysis: (1) the use of restaurants as mean of integration depends from the nationality of the companions and (2) the kind of the attended restaurant asks immigrants to adapt their identities in order live successfully their acculturation process.

A. Going to the Restaurant: Natives Versus Tunisian Companions

1) Eating out with compatriots: Going to the restaurant is the favorite pastime of our respondents. Being in group is more fun, they talk more and have a good time. This is an opportunity to live a good dining experience and make new cultural discoveries. Dining out allow consumers to relax after a hard day's work or over the weekend, after a week of stressful work. It offers them a moment of well-being with their compatriots in which they could identify with the culture of origin in an allochtone context.

Between Tunisians, the choice of restaurant is done according to what the group wants to eat, to the occasion for which the outing is organized and also to the meal time (lunch/ dinner/ brunch...). By combining these three criteria, consumers are faced with a wide range of alternatives related to:

- The place: they can choose to eat in a restaurant or in a fast food (a kebab, a sandwich shop, a pizzeria, a creperie, etc).
- The nature of meal: they have the choice between eating thick or thin, eat meat or fish dish or a sandwich, eat it raw or cooked, a kebab or a burger, pizza or pancakes, food very spicy or not spicy.

2) Eating out with natives: In this situation, we noted some sense related differences compared to the restaurants frequentation with tunisians. In that, during the interview and when we started to talk about going to restaurants with the natives, we had the idea to ask (an impromptu question) the interviewees: "who chooses the restaurant?" And to our surprise, the number of responses saying "it's them!" exceeded

the number of responses, "we choose together". We believe that this is an identity conflict where respondents show a submission to the natives. Indeed, in a belonging and integration aspirations, some respondents' speech took a different direction:

"We are going with them, anywhere and we adapt!"(Mariem, Lyon).

"If you want to know the world and have fun in France, you must still be open-minded". (Amina, Paris).

In this sense, adaptation is of great interest to the respondents for the purpose of socialization and integration. Thus, cultural openness helps build relationships with natives and facilitate, therefore, this adaptation. Some others claim to let their French companions choose the restaurant because they are more familiar with places. They are considered as trusted guides who can help them make new discoveries.

"Sometimes we go to a place that I would never know alone. My French friends have made me discover great places" (Sihem, Grenoble).

B. Relationship Between the Kind of Restaurant and Acculturation Process

1) With tunisians: The most frequented restaurants are European, Asian, Oriental and Latin:

For European restaurants, the Italian restaurant is best appreciated by interviewees. Italian food is preferred because it is quite familiar to consumers. This is a kitchen already adopted even before immigration. As for the French cuisine, is the cuisine of the host country and is chosen by curiosity, to discover the French culinary habits.

Asian restaurants, especially Japanese and Chinese, have garnered mixed reviews from the appreciation and disgust and, paradoxically, they are appreciated by some and disapproved by others for the same cause, namely, the smell of food. However, those who enjoy this kind of restaurants have become followers because they like the taste of Asian food (raw vegetables, salty-sweet taste...) and they have great pleasure and live a moment of escape.

Oriental and more specifically Lebanese restaurants, are appreciated for halal consumption and solicited to feel close to the original culture through the eastern part of the site and through the hospitality of the staff. However, many consumers do not like to attend the Arab restaurants every day because they prefer to discover other foreign cultures and let these restaurants for the month of Ramadan. The aversion to these restaurants is also due to a desire to demarcate his fellows and to assimilate into the host society.

"When I go to a restaurant... I want to avoid the Arab atmosphere as I am not in an Arab country I do not see the interest of going to the places frequented by the Arabs..." (Ilhem, Annecy).

In addition, we also noted that many respondents avoid going to the Tunisian restaurants in particular, because they believe that their food is mediocre and that *"the food served in*

Tunisian restaurants does not reflect the real picture of Tunisian good food"(Amina, Paris)".

The Latin restaurants (Argentinian, Mexican…) are cited by a few respondents (only two respondents) and are chosen for varying tastes and cultural discovery.

Finally, we noted that the choice of some women is essentially based on the "halal" criterion. They pointed out that they would like to go to places where halal food is available:

"You know? ... With Tunisian we choose in most cases the restaurants that serve halal meat ... now there are many halal restaurants ... not necessarily Arab ... now you have large alternatives... People no longer associate halal restaurants to Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian..." (Mariem, Lyon).

Halal restaurants are the generally the destination of practitioners for whom the halal consumption is of great importance in the selection of restaurants. Halal criterion can be a big problem for practitioners forbidding them discovering new tastes.

"Sometimes a dish on the menu attracts me but I cannot order it because of the halal constraint (...)" (Mayssa, Lyon).

The consumers then turn to the Eastern restaurants for the halal guarantee. However, some of the participants were lucky enough to experiment Asian, French or Italian halal restaurants where they are allowed to learn about other cultures while respecting their religion.

Halal is a factor that deters pendulist and assimilated Tunisian consumers to meet compatriots to the restaurant because they opt for culinary adventure and tastes change, putting aside the halal standard.

"I never go with my Tunisian friends in a restaurant because with them, you eat kebab or you stay at home" (Amel, Lille)

2) With natives: In this category, the most frequented restaurants are European ones (first, French bistros then Italian and Greek specialities). Far behind are placed Asian, Oriental and Latin restaurants. The fast food is also very little frequented by respondents when they are along with natives.

Regarding halal consumption (for consumers who do care), the results indicate that the interviewees show more flexibility since it is they who follow the movement, for a socialization purpose, they do not require that the restaurant must serve halal food. They tend to choose fish or vegetarian dishes. This is the situation where the interviewees showed a great ability to juggle between their original identity and the French identity in order to live properly their migration experience.

V. DISCUSSIONS

The dining out phenomenon is much neglected in the immigrant consumers' culture field. We call in this study to pay more interest to food acculturation through restaurants frequentation. We pointed out that, to integrate, immigrant women can adopt pendulist behaviors as Askegaard et al. suggested in previous research in order to culture swap and to successfully juggle between culture of origin and foreign one.

We have also stated that consumers' ethnic identity the ethnic identity of immigrants strengthens as long they are in a group, between compatriots. However, going to the restaurant may also signify aspiration to integrate the host society when we focus on the kind of frequented restaurant whether with compatriots or with natives. The more culturally opened consumer is and the more he seeks for diversity and tries new specialties while consumers who are more closely related to their original cultural values are more closely related to their original values, are more constrained and display a separatist attitude with a strengthening of their ethnic identity.

CONCLUSION

Consumer culture is a vast field of research. Very dynamic, it has attracted the attention of researchers in marketing through the cultural complexity studies. Multiculturalism facing companies today is due to the increasing number of immigrants in the world in general and across Europe in particular. In fact, immigration is transforming the world into a mosaic impregnated with difference and characterized by diversity.

Through this paper, we proposed in a CCT perspective, an insight into the phenomenon of immigrants' food acculturation through restaurants frequentation using a sample of 22 Tunisian women immigrants in France. We conclude that the dining-out phenomenon is rich and multidimensional depending especially on the nationality of the restaurant's companions (Tunisians vs. natives) and on the kind of the frequented restaurants.

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