

Cuisine and its Formation of Personal Identity

Food is an integral part of personal identity and personal connection to a culture. For chef and author Fernando Saralegui, cultural cuisines play a central role in his connection to his Cuban, Basque, Asturian, and Galician roots.

Cuba's cuisine culture is growing rapidly. Contemporary eateries, street vendors, and traditional restaurants operate side-by-side to create a blend of options. Adjustments to the Cuban government's private-business policies have allowed for an increase in paladares – privately owned restaurants, as opposed to government-owned restaurants – which encourage the development of the authentic, personal and traditional foods that are giving Cuban cuisine global reverence.

The Basque Country, a region in northern Spain that also crosses the border into France, is widely considered to have some of the best cuisine in the world. The culinary influences from France, the non-industrialized manner in which food is grown and livestock is raised, as well as the focus on fruits, vegetables, seafood, and meat products within Basque recipes allows for a strong palate of options within the Basque Country as well as in the nearby Asturian and Galician regions of Northern Spain.

In the face of changing cultures, changing societies, and assimilation - the reshaping and formation of unique dishes and cuisines over time is a tenet of a strong cultural community on a local, regional, or national scale. Processes of food preparation, sharing, and eating contribute to an intimate connection with traditional cuisines. Research in numerous fields indicates a present qualitative and quantitative connection between cultural identity and food practices. Studies in the *International Journal of Psychology* express that people eat food connected to their cultures in order to foster a sense of belonging, indicating the significant importance that cuisine experiences have on the development of personal identity within a cultural group or community. Second generation Americans who lack access to traditional foods are at an increased risk of stress that can directly affect well-being and personal identity. Lack of cultural foodways can decrease feelings of nostalgia, belonging, and comfort in connection with cultural identity.

Food and culture are deeply intertwined. National histories, stories, and individual cultural experiences can be connected to each dish on a deeply personal level. The connection that humans have with their food is powerful and undeniable, and it is certainly integral to a deeper and more personal cultural experience.

Written by Natalia Fedorczak '24, Clarke Forum Student Project Manager

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