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Friedberg Report
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After attending Mame-Fatou Niang's lecture watching her documentary, *Mariennes Noires*, on the black experience in France, I was left pondering the social determinants of present-day black and African communities in France. I wondered how the Ethiopian experience fit into the overall black community. What are the mechanisms through which such communities are cultivated and sustained? Being born and raised in Ethiopia, food has played an integral role in the formation and sustenance of communities. The intimacy of meals can be surprising for non-Ethiopians, as it is customary to share a platter of *injera be wot*, or even give each other *gursha* (we feed one another). I wondered whether the role of food as the pillar of the community was reflected abroad.

Through the Friedberg Memorial Travel Fellowship, I was able to probe the following questions regarding the role of food in Ethiopian communities in Paris: where are Ethiopian food vendors located and do they cater to communities outside of their own? What do they communicate through their decor, music and advertisements to those from their own community and to those outside the community? Are there other social determinants that play a part in Ethiopian communities?

I decided to study the two restaurants I chose because they received high reviews on websites, such as, Yelp and Tripadvisor and they were located in different regions of Paris. The first restaurant, Godjo, is situated in the 5th arrondissement. It was a small restaurant that could seat no more than 20 people. I was intrigued by the name of the restaurant as Godjo is a specific

kind of house, usually located in rural areas and constructed by hand from hay, mud, cattle manure and wood. Godjo is also metaphorically used to represent marriage and starting a life with another person. The restaurant was cosy, with dim lights and decorations covering the majority of the walls. The decorations ranged from paintings to masks and mirrors. I questioned whether all the decorations were Ethiopian and on closer inspection, I learned that the paintings were done by painters with traditionally Ethiopian names while some of the masks were clearly from other regions of Africa. I have found that to be a common trend amongst Ethiopian restaurants I have visited in the US as well. They played music from various regions of Ethiopia, mostly Tigrinya (belonging to the northern region, Tigray) songs. As I later found out from talking to the waitress, the restaurant has been in business for over 30 years and is owned by a man from Tigray, Ethiopia. Overall, the restaurant had a calm and cosy ambiance. As I sat there, none of the customers were Ethiopian. This was not the case with the second restaurant I visited.

The second restaurant, La Reine de Saba, was located in the 11th arrondissement, in a crowded neighborhood. This restaurant was more lively than the other restaurant: it was bright and had many Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian customers. The walls were decorated with fewer pieces of art than Godjo but the art that was on the walls was more informative. There were photographs of the owner and quick facts about the tourist sites in Ethiopia in addition to the paintings. The food was more authentic: it had the flavors that I am accustomed to eating whenever I am in Ethiopia and there was more variety in the items on the menu. I have the exact same plate in my house as it is traditionally found in most places. The customers in this restaurant were mostly Ethiopians who were introducing their companions to Ethiopian cuisine. I really liked this restaurant because it did a better job attracting Ethiopian customers by serving



authentic food, and using traditionally Ethiopian tableware. But it also caters to non-Ethiopians by providing forks to those who are not used to with eating with their hands and showcasing not only the cuisine, but

also attraction sites and interesting facts about Ethiopia. I later learned from a friend who lives in Paris that this restaurant is very old but has been changing throughout the years. The customer distribution has evolved from completely Ethiopian to a mix, most likely because they started catering towards non-Ethiopians while also allowing them to have an authentic taste of Ethiopian cuisine.

After visiting the two restaurants and seeing that there were not as many Ethiopians as I expected there, I wondered if there were other mechanisms through which communities were constructed. From my conversations with the waiters at the restaurants, I had learned that the demographic in Paris as well as France was mostly middle-aged people. The Ethiopians in Paris were refugees after Qey Shibir, a terrible war that took place in Ethiopia in the 1970s, or they immigrated in the 1970s and 1980s when there was political unrest in the country. Most of them currently reside between the 18th and the 19th arrondissement. After consulting my friend who

has been living in Paris for a while, I was informed that church played an integral role in the Ethiopian community. This is, of course, reflected in Ethiopia. My mother is a regular church attendant, going at least twice a week and so are her friends. In fact, majority of the middle-aged population goes to church at least once a week. Similarly, because people in Paris fit that age-group, it is not surprising that they are regular church-goers.

I learned that there are three Ethiopian orthodox churches in Paris: Giorgis (St George), Kidiste-Mariam (St. Mary), and Abo. People often pick and frequent one of the churches to strengthen their community. Church communities extend further than worshipping God. Members of the church take turns preparing lunch for everyone weekly. After the service, they all gather to eat, chat and support one another. If there is a new member, they would help them secure housing and employment; if there is someone getting married, people support by cooking food for the reception; if there is a death, they support by making funeral rearrangements. Overall, they care for one another.



I would like to again acknowledge the Friedberg Memorial Travel Fellowship for allowing me to travel to Paris to answer some of my questions and to explore Paris. I learned a lot about the not only the demographic of Ethiopians in Paris but also how they construct communities. Although food was my immediate answer, I now understand that church is the glue that holds the community together and food

is an added perk! It brings everyone together and further consolidates their sense of community.