

# Anthropology of food

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People Moving with Food from and to Northern Europe

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## Street food as an ethnic border

Kebab as a symbol of home among young Swedish migrants in Oslo

*Le kebab comme symbole du chez-soi parmi les jeunes migrants suédois à Oslo*

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### **Abstracts**

EnglishFrançais

The background for this study is migrants' shared problems of finding familiar or culturally important foodstuffs, as well as the tendency for foodstuffs and cuisines to become emblematic symbols for minority groups. The case in question is young Swedish labour migrants living in Oslo in the first decades after 2000, and the article discusses how one specific dish – the German-Turkish döner kebab – is used as symbolic border-marker towards Norwegians by Oslo Swedes. My aim is to explain how an arguably originally Middle Eastern dish could take on such a surprising role among Nordic youth. The study is based on fieldwork on a large Facebook group for Swedes in Oslo, conducted from 2008 onwards. This is supplemented by a media study exploring the trajectory and perception of kebab in Scandinavia. The döner kebab, invented in Germany in the 1970s, has become a semi-international dish, changing according to local tastes in different countries. While it is strongly associated with postcolonial migration in Europe, I show that it has taken on somewhat differing symbolic values in different countries. In Scandinavia, among these specific migrants, at a certain point in time, knowing what a good, Swedish kebab should taste like has become an identity marker. The döner kebab has become important in establishing an 'us' and a 'them' for Swedes living among Norwegians. As such, it is a good example of the relative arbitrariness of banal nationalism, and of identity formation in urban, internationally-oriented but locally lived youth culture.

Cette étude repose d'une part sur les problèmes, partagés par de nombreux migrants, qui consistent à trouver des aliments familiers ou bien qui s'imposent pour des raisons culturelles, et d'autre part sur la tendance qui fait de la nourriture et des cuisines les symboles emblématiques de groupes minoritaires. L'étude de cas concerne les jeunes suédois qui ont immigré à Oslo pour y travailler au début des années 2000. Cet article

s'intéresse particulièrement à un plat spécifique - le «döner kebab» Germano-turc-utilisé comme repère identitaire symbolique vis-à-vis des Norvégiens par les suédois Osloviens. L'objectif de cette étude est d'expliquer comment un plat, a priori originaire du Moyen-Orient, a pu, de manière étonnante, prendre le rôle de repère identitaire entre différents groupes de jeunes nordiques. Cette étude est fondée sur les échanges au sein du groupe Facebook des Suédois à Oslo sur une dizaine d'années (depuis 2008) et complétée par une analyse du discours publique permettant de mieux comprendre la trajectoire et la perception du kebab en Scandinavie. Le döner kebab, inventé en Allemagne dans les années 70 est devenu un plat semi-international, dont le goût change localement en fonction des différents pays. Alors que le kebab est fortement associé à la migration postcoloniale en Europe, cet article montre qu'il a pris un autre tournant et acquis des valeurs symboliques différentes en fonction des pays. En Scandinavie -parmi les migrants étudiés et à l'époque donnée- être capable de déterminer le vrai goût d'un kebab suédois est devenu un repère, voire un marqueur, identitaire, ce qui est prépondérant dans l'établissement d'un « nous » et d'un « eux » pour les jeunes suédois qui vivent en Norvège. Ainsi le kebab s'avère un bon exemple de l'aspect relativement arbitraire de l'expression courante, ou banale, du nationalisme ainsi que de la formation de l'identité dans une culture jeune, urbaine et internationale mais dont les références sont locales.

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## ***Index terms***

**Mots-clés :** street food, ethnicité, migration, Scandinavie

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## ***Full text***

# **Introduction**

- 1 'Does all bloody kebab taste like poo smells here in Oslo??? !!'. In the autumn of 2012, the message in figure 1 was posted on the wall of the Facebook (FB) group 'Svenskar i Oslo' (Swedes in Oslo, abbreviated SiO). The post quickly received 26 likes and almost 50 comments, most discussing the quality of the Oslo kebab shops 'Balkan' and 'Happy Time'. Other comments included jokes about how nothing is as good as the kebab in the small Swedish town of Eskilstuna. This thread and its topic was not without precedence, and more posts of this kind would follow in the coming years.

**Figure 1: Screenshot from the Facebook group 'Svenskar i Oslo', 2012**



- 2 What led the kebab to be such an important topic for a social media group consisting of Swedes living in Oslo in the first decades of the 21st century?

- 3 Memories of cuisines and the search for familiar foodstuffs are important parts of what it means to be a migrant. Food has strong symbolic value (Holtzman 2006, Sutton 2001) and often triggers memories and feelings of nostalgia. Food metaphors play an important role in debates on identity, nationality and multiculturalism. A common example is the metaphor of the 'salad bowl', popularized in the United States, with a similar expression existing in many languages. Immigrants may be perceived as food-bringers, or in this case, metaphorically *as* food that needs to be blended in or even digested by the majority population (Edwards et al. 2000). Similarly, ethnic groups are often strongly associated with their most famous dishes, restaurants, or similar establishments, which are often the most visible manifestations of the new – or continued – presence of a minority group in a society. When Swedes in Norway claimed a German-Turkish dish as their own, this presented an interesting case for analysis, which is what I will be discussing in this study.
- 4 My aim is to explain the background to the passionate debates regarding kebab among a small group of intra-Nordic migrants. I start by explaining the very specific context of the social networking site where the above quote was found, and how the participants on the Swedes in Oslo Facebook group spoke of food. I will briefly describe the history of döner kebab as international street food, and point to the symbolic values ascribed to the kebab today. I will touch upon its status as a symbol of postcolonial migration, multiculturalism, and suggested notions of rurality. The article concludes with a discussion of how the kebab came to occupy the special place in the hearts of young Swedish migrants in Oslo at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and what it may mean when a young Swede ridicules Norwegian kebab as 'smelling of poo'. The discussion underlines several points, most importantly food as a symbol, and the nuances and intricacies of modern ethnic identity formation.

## Method

- 5 Media has played an important role for migrants and ethnic communities. Many are familiar with newspapers that were printed in Scandinavian languages in the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, keeping emigrants in touch with each other and the home country (see for instance Lovoll 2010). Today, Facebook and other social media serve some of the same purposes. There are websites serving whole dispersed diasporas, such as Eritreans in exile (Bernal 2005), as well as more specific sites such as Facebook pages serving a migrant group in a particular country or city. For instance, in 2010, there were several social media groups for Brazilians in various Belgian cities (Schrooten 2012:1799). The starting point for the present study is the interaction on one such transnational Facebook group, the 'Swedes in Oslo' group.
- 6 Run by and for young labour migrants, the topics discussed on the SiO community page revolve around typical migrant issues (Tolgensbakk 2015:144): how to find work, where to live, and how to navigate unfamiliar bureaucracy. In addition, the site is used as a marketplace where members can sell their furniture when they move, advertise services such as haircuts or dog walking to fellow Swedes, or offer to smuggle liquor and cigarettes for others when they return from visits home. I became a member of the SiO Facebook group while writing my dissertation on Swedish migrants in Oslo. My original

plan was to use the group wall to find interviewees for qualitative life story interviews. However, my informants urged me to take a closer look at the group itself. Hence, for three months during the spring of 2013, I followed the group closely through systematic fieldwork (Hine 2008:257). I was present at the group wall – lurking, not participating – sporadically all through this period. Every Thursday, I copied the top 30 posts (with comments) of the group wall for further analysis. Thursdays was chosen to capture both everyday communications and some of the partying atmosphere of the weekends. At the time, the group security setting was ‘open’, making it possible for everyone with a Facebook account to read the posts of the members. As far as non-commercial Facebook groups are concerned, SiO was unusually big. It had 13,000 members at the time of my fieldwork (at the time of writing the number has risen to more than 31,000), and its members were exceptionally active, with a core group of perhaps 50-100 members posting or commenting every week and sometimes every day.

7 At the time of my fieldwork, Swedes were the second largest migrant group in Norway (Tolgensbakk 2015:52). Although many decades of Nordic policies have made it easy to travel between, work in, and move within the Nordic countries, this was the first time in 100 years that the Swedish population in Norway was so numerous (Tolgensbakk 2015:54). High youth unemployment rates in Sweden and a very strong Norwegian labour market tempted large numbers of young Swedes to cross into Norway. They were generally very young and more than a third of them chose to move to the Norwegian capital, Oslo. As I have argued elsewhere, the Facebook page made an important contribution to creating a specifically Swedish community in Oslo (Tolgensbakk 2017:118). For young Swedes in Oslo in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, SiO was also a place for socialising and expressing their frustration with peers. Complicated tax rules, slow Norwegian colleagues, or strange Norwegian words were among the topics they could mock on the SiO page, often meeting recognition from other SiO members. Norwegian food was one of the favourite topics during the period that I observed the page.

8 For this analysis, my fieldwork on SiO has been combined with a cursory exploration of the trajectory of the kebab dish into Scandinavia. The history of the döner kebab, as a European street food, is an important aspect of that (Çaglar 1999, Möhring 2010). However, the main focus of this study will be on what values and associations are tied to the kebab, both culturally and symbolically, in present-day Scandinavia. I have done simple archival searches of Swedish and Norwegian newspapers’ mentions of kebab as a phenomenon. Specifically, I have searched the Swedish newspaper Expressen and Norwegian VG since 1970, in addition to Swedish-language Finnish and Danish online media. Internet searches on words such as ‘kebab’, ‘döner’ and similar has explored in what settings and with what connections döner kebab is spoken of among Scandinavians. In addition, I have photographed occasional kebab shops in Sweden and Norway (and further out in the world) since 2014, giving a rudimentary understanding of how döner kebab culture has spread. Although more thorough empirical work is definitely needed, this has given me an insight into the backdrop to which the kebab discourse of the young Swedes must be seen.

# Food for Swedes in Norway

9 Food, in all its aspects – how we procure it, what and when we eat, how we prepare it and with whom we share it – is an instrumental as well as expressive part of human life (Fischler 1988). Food habits are closely linked to local and national cultural identity and unfamiliar food is an important aspect of what is often termed ‘culture shock’ (Hagen 2017). For some, part of the experience of traveling abroad is to immerse oneself in the local cuisine. However, considering that most members of the SiO Facebook group were planning to stay in Norway for a short time, experiencing local culture, including food, may have been further down on their list of priorities. Stressful living- and working conditions may have made eating familiar foods even more important to them.

10 Food may be a problem as well as a comfort to all kinds of migrants. Cuisines and particular foodstuffs are important factors that affect how migrants adapt to new environments and how they create stories about themselves in the new country (Diner 2009:20). This is the case whether we are talking about forced migrants moving far away from home or temporary sojourners such as international students who spend a limited period of time abroad (for a useful overview of literature, see Brown et al. 2010:202). In the case of Swedes in Norway, one might imagine that Swedish and Norwegian food customs do not differ significantly from each other. They are both firmly rooted in the tradition of Scandinavian cuisine (Holm et al. 2015). Foodstuffs were nonetheless a recurring topic on the SiO page. Sometimes the issue was language (‘what do the Norwegians call *kvarg*?’ ‘Do they have white wine vinegar; the lady in the shop did not seem to understand what I asked for?’). At other times, discussions revolved around a specific Swedish food item that was difficult to find in Norway, for instance the soft drink *julmust*<sup>2</sup>, which was sorely missed in Christmas by the SiO members who could not travel home for the holiday season. There were both general lament over the poor selection in Oslo supermarkets and discussions of the quirks of Norwegian eating habits. For instance, while warm lunches, often served in substantial quantities, are common in Sweden, the norm in most Norwegian schools and workplaces is cold lunches consisting of a couple slices of bread with cheese or ham. This Norwegian peculiarity – each worker bringing a small packed lunch to work (Døving 2009) – was a reoccurring topic on both the FB page and in the life story interviews I conducted with young Swedes living in Oslo. Cold lunches are definitely one of the things Swedes tend to have trouble adjusting to in Norway. When you are used to having a full meal in the middle of the working day, two slices of bread simply will not do. In short, food was an important topic on the SiO page. However, the food item most often mentioned on SiO was, surprisingly, the kebab.

## The (döner) kebab as international street food

11 What most Scandinavians refer to as *kebab* is a street food version of skewer-grilled meat with salad and sauce, served in a pita bread. The dish, in this specific and modern form, is German in origin and was the invention of Turkish immigrants who arrived Berlin in 1975 (Çağlar 1999). There are several claims as to who invented the dish and both Mahmut Aygun and Kadir Nurman are credited with the invention of what was named a *döner kebab*. Both men were snack stall owners in Western Berlin in the early 1970s and both were of

Turkish origin. There may never be a consensus on who was first, but we do know that the döner kebab came to life in Germany in the mid-1970s. From those relatively humble beginnings, the dish spread to the rest of Northern Europe and out into the world. One might argue that the kebab is a Turkish or Middle Eastern dish, based on the men who are attributed with its development and the origins of its ingredients. The seasoned and grilled meat, the yogurt-based sauce, and the pita bread all have Middle Eastern origins or relatives. However, combining these ingredients to create a cheap, convenient snack first manifested itself in small German restaurants catering to tired workers and inebriated, late-night guests.

12 From its origins in 1970s Berlin, the döner kebab has become an international success story. In a similar vein to pizza, it has become a dish that you encounter all over the world. Like pizza, it has changed and adapted to the ingredients available, local tastes, and eating habits. Unlike pizza, the kebab has not become a dinner dish on Nordic tables (for analyses of the Norwegian relationship to pizza, see Lien 1989:96, Døving 2003:185). As in other European countries, it has instead become the new hot dog, at least for a certain segment of the population. The original Berlin döner kebab may have started out as an 'exotic' food, competing with Chinese or Indian restaurants. However, it appears to have quickly become what it is today, a street food that competes with traditional German sausages. The combination of spicy meat contained within a convenient pita bread makes it a perfect dish to hold in one hand while leaning on a buddy for support. The dish can be eaten on the bus on the way home from a rowdy night out. In this sense, the kebab is not Mediterranean or Middle Eastern cuisine, it is a bratwurst replacement. Like other dishes (see for instance Toumainen and Notaker in this issue), it has also conformed, to an extent, to local cuisines, dishes, and eating habits in complex ways.

13 Kebab, as street food, is not served in traditional dinner restaurants, but in snack bars and street stalls – the kind of shops that are open late at night. These are the kinds of places that came to replace hot dog stands, cheap pizza places, fish & chip shops, and kiosks in urban neighbourhoods in Europe during the last decades of the 20th century. They had, and still have, an often easy-to-recognise aesthetic. Kebabs are sold from small stalls or one-room restaurants where the food is served over the counter in plastic or paper containers. Their neon signs are often yellow and red, perhaps giving an 'oriental' impression, as used for instance in Chinatowns all over the world (Lou 2007). – Or it may rather be an act of copying the aesthetics of fast-food chains such as McDonalds and Pizza Hut. Copying elements from fast food giants based in the United States has been the strategy of several German kebab owners (Çağlar 1999), and can be seen today in the business model, aesthetic, and success of the Oslo kebab chain 'Bislett Kebab'. Even the names of the individual shops follow a similar pattern around the world: the restaurants are named either after the owner, the location, or after a Turkish town. In Northern Europe, there are restaurants named 'Istanbul Kebab' from Tallinn in the east to Limerick in the west. To summarize, individual kebab shop owners around the world conduct their business in a similar way with variations on the original Berlin concept.

**Figure 2: Brussels 2017, Ida Tolgensbakk**



Figure 3: Lund 2017, Ida Tolgensbakk



Figure 4: Copenhagen 2017, Loke Poipoi

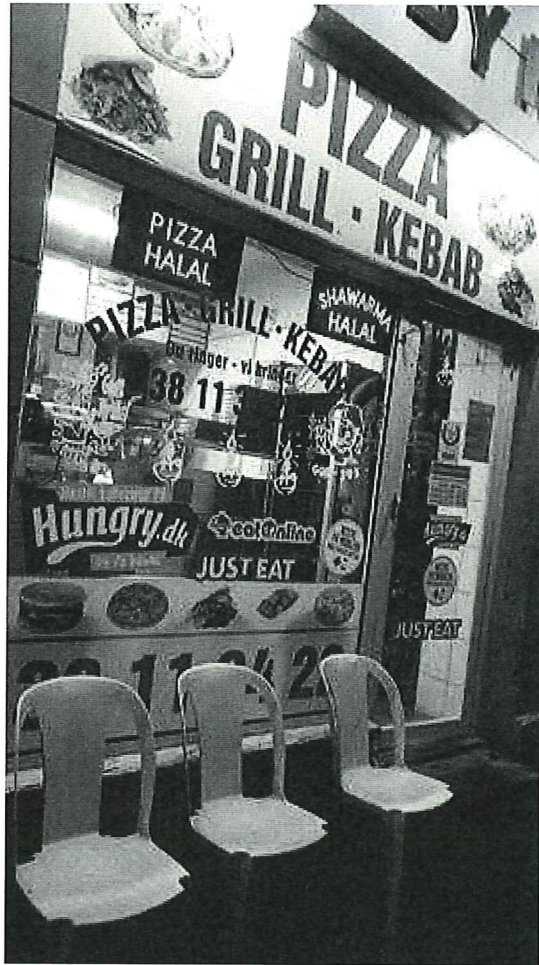
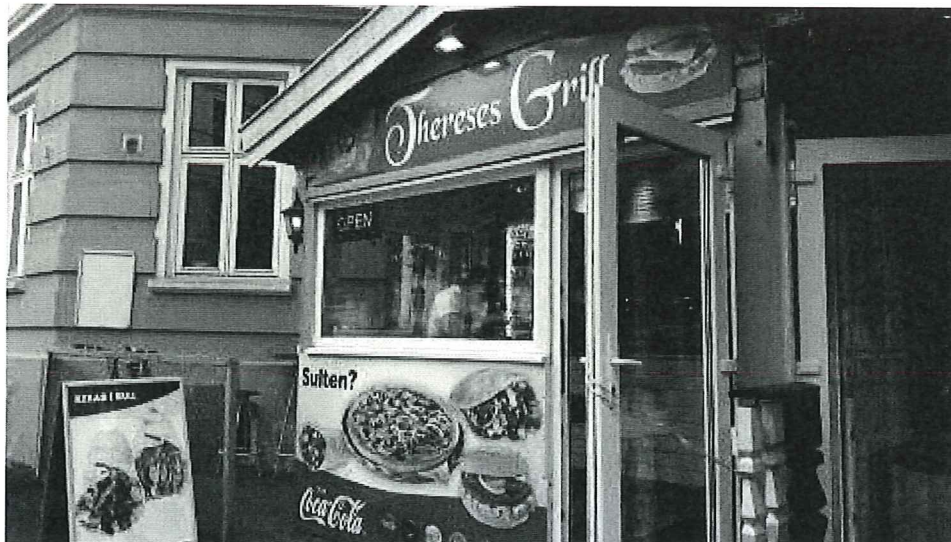


Figure 5: Oslo 2017, Ida Tolgensbakk



14 As these pictures (figures 2-5) show, not only did the kebab, as a dish, replace hot dogs and similar common cheap street foods in local cuisines, kebab shops also appear to have taken over the physical spaces of its street food predecessors. It remains to be seen what will inevitably, eventually, replace the kebab in these spaces. In Norway, it currently appears to be threatened by at least two cuisines, one from the east and one from the west. Asian cuisines are visible in the streets in the form of sushi kiosks and cheap Thai and Vietnamese restaurants. American cuisines are moving into more or less the same niche in



the form of, for instance, taco trucks. Some of these transformations take place because of shifts in the popularity of new tastes. Other changes may be attributed to changing migration populations, as street food establishments and small restaurants are often a typical entry point for new migration populations (Ram et al. 2001, Ray 2016).

15 In the following sections, I will discuss the symbolic values attributed to the kebab which are often interlinked with the history and idea of modern urbanity. However, kebab shops are no longer a uniquely urban phenomenon. This section will therefore close with images showing a kebab establishment in the small mountain village of Tynset, Norway (figure 5), and what may be the next generation of rural street food, a Thai restaurant in Fetsund, outside Oslo (figure 6).

**Figure 6: Tynset 2017, Ida Tolgensbakk**



**Figure 7: Fetsund 2017, Ida Tolgensbakk**



## A dish with conflicting symbolic values

- <sup>16</sup> Despite its German origin, the kebab, in Germany, has been strongly associated with Turks and with 'Turkishness'. As such, the döner kebab has conflicting symbolic values in Germany. In some contexts, it is touted as the pride of Berlin or as a symbol of positive multiculturalism (Çaglar 1999:263). Significantly, in other circumstances, people refer to the same döner kebab as a threat to 'Germanness'. The Neo-Nazi slogan, *Bockwurst statt Döner* (sausage instead of döner kebab), refers to the idea that one should support Germans before immigrants (Möhrling 2010:158). Similar symbolic values are ascribed to the kebab in Scandinavia but with slight variations.
- <sup>17</sup> For one thing, the kebab is not as specifically linked to Turks in Scandinavia as it is in Germany. It instead appears to be associated with a more general idea of non-European, postcolonial urban migrants. For instance, in Norway, the colloquial name for the multi-ethnic dialect spoken among urban youth is *kebabnorsk*, or kebab Norwegian (Nortier and Dorleijn 2013). This language variant is not only spoken by Norwegian-Turkish youth, but by young people with all kinds of migrant backgrounds. Like the kebab itself, this dialect may be seen as a positive addition to Norwegian culture or as a sign that immigrants are destroying old ways of life.
- <sup>18</sup> The history of the kebab in the Nordic countries has yet to be written and there are many uncertainties. For example, several individuals of different origin lay claim to being the first in Norway to serve döner kebab. One of them, 'Kebab King' Faraj Asmaro from Iraq, started out as a kebab shop owner in Oslo in the early 1980s and today runs a wholesale business (Haugdahl 2010). However, in Norwegian popular culture, somewhat surprisingly, it is the Pakistanis who are the main propagators of all things kebab-related. For instance, Pakistan is where the comedian 'ALiAs' claims to be from in his YouTube hit *Norges beste kebab* (Norway's best kebab). In the rather ridiculous (and quite racist) lyrics, the protagonist sings in a mock Norwegian-

Pakistani accent about his dad wanting him to become a doctor or engineer but all he wants to do in life is to sell kebab until he dies. Given its German-Turkish origin, it may seem rather strange that the kebab has become associated with Pakistani immigrants in the Norwegian imagination. However, the explanation is probably quite simple. As one of the first large groups of non-European immigrants who came to Norway in the early 1970s, Pakistanis were the stereotypical labour migrants in Norway. In the turbulent years leading up to the so-called 'Migration Stop' in 1975, the problem of migration was generally referred to simply as the 'Pakistani question' (Korbøl 2018).

19 In both Sweden and Denmark, the kebab seems to be more closely associated with Turks in popular understanding, but not as closely associated as in Germany. In Copenhagen, the name of the dish is often a *shawarma* and may be associated with the general Middle Eastern population including Lebanese and Syrian populations as well as the Turks who are the largest migrant group in Denmark. Finnish associations seem to have firmly placed the kebab as a Turkish phenomenon. Östen Wahlbeck has designated the structures leading up to Turkish immigrants working in Finnish fast-food stalls as the 'kebab economy' (Wahlbeck 2007): kebab restaurants being an important first-entry into the labour market but not necessarily a strong stepping stone for the participants. In Sweden, the story of the origin of the Swedish kebab often refers to a certain kebab restaurant in Bromma, Stockholm, which is still a popular restaurant today. The owner, Ilker Anadol, who is part of the large Turkish community in Sweden, claims that his preparation of the dish is inspired by his home country but modified to suit Swedish tastes (Nilsson 2016). In both Denmark and Sweden, the kebab is associated with Middle Eastern cuisines and minority groups. However, this is also a question of different generational perceptions. Older Scandinavians who remember the introduction of the kebab, may associate the dish more closely with the specific migrant group they believe brought the dish to Scandinavia. Ethnic foods are often an important point of contact between groups, and the entry point for the native population to get to know new arrivals, although the quality or progressive multiculturalism of such interactions is still debated (see for instance Buettner 2012). In writing about ethnic food tourism, Swan and Flowers discusses multiculturalism as a labour specific bodies has to do, and the vulnerabilities and othering processes involved when groups and individuals are racialized through food (Swan and Flowers 2018). It matters what groups are associated with which foods, and which groups feeds what foods to which others.

20 Both opponents and supporters of immigration to Scandinavian countries discuss the topic of food when weighing the pros and cons of a multi-ethnic society. While the supporters stress that without migrants, we would still be eating nothing but fish and rye, the opponents of migration contest this notion. Racist groups may claim to prefer Scandinavian food and encourage their followers to avoid foreign foods. This is an international phenomenon. The *Bockwurst statt Döner* slogan has already been mentioned, and another example that can be interpreted along the same lines is the attempts being made to ban ethnic food stalls from Italian cities. These attempts are justified by the claim that banning ethnic food stalls protects the country's heritage and offers tourists an authentic experience (Danovich 2017).

21 The strong correlations between food and migration occasionally put opponents of migration in a difficult spot, as may be evident from two recent Norwegian popular culture cases. In a meme circulating in early 2017, a picture

(figure 8) of a rather scary looking ninja-hooded kebab meat slicer was accompanied by inflammatory text.

Figure 8: Norwegian meme



'We never needed mass immigration to eat kebab in Norway. Leave the recipe and go home! It was not MASS IMMIGRATION by Italians in the 1970s that gave us pizza'.

22 Similarly, in 2016, Norwegian journalist Fouad Acharki tweeted a picture allegedly showing a screenshot of online discussions in a racist hate group known as Sons of Odin. The tweet showed group administrators introducing a ban on "Muslim food like kebab etc." One of the members replied "excuse me... but this is stupid. I'm a bit racist, but this is too much. Let people eat what they want...?" (cited in Morgenbladet 2016). The ridicule that followed after the viral tweet is interesting in that it both showed how racist groups struggle with daily life in a globalised world, while also indicating what the majority of the population finds humorous when dealing with such racist groups.

23 The kebab, perhaps considered a cool, urban phenomenon in the early days, has become a commonplace, vernacular dish in recent decades. Like most introduced cuisines, kebab has played a role in sensationalistic newspaper stories as well as in urban legends (Klintberg 1986). Immigrants, depicted as disease carriers, is a known trope and linking disease to foreign food is a permutation of the same underlying story. For instance, narratives about rats found in kebab meat serves to portray the storytellers as clean and healthy (Edwards et al. 2000:300). Today, however, the connection between

uncleanliness and kebab meat is perhaps changing from images of the immigrant Other to images of rural Folk as the kebab has become a staple of suburban and rural life rather than an urban, exotic speciality (Tolgensbakk and Woube 2016). Kebab used to be strongly associated with postcolonial immigration. But as hot dog stands were gradually replaced by pizzerias or kebab stands all over Scandinavia, younger generations of Scandinavians may have grown up with their local restaurant being a pizzeria or a kebab stand. These foods are now likely embedded in their childhood memories making the foods seem familiar rather than foreign. The symbolic value of a simple street dish changes with time, place, and individuals.

## Swedish kebab

24 I now return to the question of Norwegian kebabs ‘tasting like poo smells’. Despite the evidence that kebabs are originally non-European, the young Swedes of the ‘Svenskar i Oslo’ Facebook page have not been deterred from discussing the differences between the Swedish and the Norwegian versions. Most of them prefer the former. The young Swedes I followed were, to a certain degree, different from other migrant groups. While refugees, for instance, are often in a position where they feel they have to be polite and show some degree of gratitude to their host society, these Swedish migrants felt no need to apologise for their presence in Norway. As relatively privileged – and white – migrants, they have a certain degree of social freedom to criticise Norway and to mock Norwegians. One way of exercising this privilege is to mock Norwegian-style kebabs, at least among themselves.

25 Already from the start of my online fieldwork, I found examples of young Swedes asking the other group members of where to find good kebab (Tolgensbakk 2015:160), as can be illustrated by a short question posted on the group wall from November 2011, ‘svensk kebab, finns det i stan eller? [Swedish kebab, does it exist here in town or what?]. What is interesting about this simple question is the use of the term ‘Swedish kebab’, with no specification or explanation, showing that the original poster assumes his compatriots understand what he is asking for. However, among the 21 answers and comments to the post, several mocked the idea of a ‘Swedish’ kebab, suggesting meat balls as a definition of what a Swedish kebab would be, or going back to Sweden as an alternative for finding what the original poster was looking for. In addition to those mildly ridiculing the original posters, some commenters suggested specific places, such as Happy Time pizzeria, as good kebab restaurants. Happy Time soon became a pure kebab restaurant, and was popular for many years among Swedes as well as Norwegians in downtown Oslo. The owners, of Middle Eastern origin, chose to feature both the Swedish and the Norwegian flag on their menu. There were also other kebab places that chose to advertise specifically to the growing Swedish minority in Oslo. One example from my fieldwork is the small business Kebabtorget AS, which advertised at the group wall in November 2012:

Hej! Eftersom vi länge saknat riktig, "svensk", pizza och kebab i stan är vi på gång och ska öppna vår första svenska pizzeria i vinter. Vi kommer att ha samma klassiska svenska typer av kebab, såser, och pizzor som finns i varje svensk hemort.

Hi! Since we have missed real, “Swedish” pizza and kebab in town, we are on the move to open our first Swedish pizzeria this winter. We are

going to have the same classic types of kebab, sauce and pizza as you'll find in every Swedish home town.

26 Kebabtorget asked whether the group members had any particular menu items they would like to see, and received 122 comments. In a post summing up the input they had got, Kebabtorget promised to serve gyros as well as sliced kebab meat, pizza salad, chicken alternatives – and as many sauces as possible 'so that everyone will be happy, whether you come from Småland [a Swedish province] or not'.

27 The search from Swedish kebabs in Oslo and Norway did not end with the establishment of new snack bars catering more or less openly to the Swedish minority. On the contrary, over time discussing differences between Norwegian and Swedish kebabs became a staple of SiO life, and of the in-group humour (Tolgensbakk 2017). In June 2015, an almost identical question to the one from November 2011 was posted – 'Svensk kebab. Vart hittar jag det? [Swedish kebab. Where do I find it?]'. The question gathered 222 likes and a lively debate in 58 comments. The first comment stated categorically that you find Swedish kebabs 'In Sweden. I don't buy kebab on this side of the border, for that precise reason. This way I don't spoil my mood'. The following comments became an increasingly heated debate over the quality of kebab from Skåne, a Swedish province close to Denmark. One particularly helpful group member entered with a suggestion for definitions:

Det är klart att det finns många lokala variationer och varianter, så att fastslå exakt vad Svensk kebab innebär, kan vara knepigt. Dock är det våldans mycket lättare att fastslå vad det inte är. Och det är pepparkaksköttfärs som de hackar sönder till kattmat, napperar med spermasås, tillsätter kålsallad och en rejäl skopa majs, och sedan toppar med någon underlig kardemummaliknande krydda som de ibland strör på - Det är definitionen av Norsk kebab, och det kan du knappast bestrida är typiskt att stöta på här i Norge, likt det i Sverige är lika typiskt att stöta på kebab som faktiskt smakar gott!

There are of course many local varieties, so to say exactly what Swedish kebab means, may be difficult. However it is very much more easy to say what it is not. That's ginger bread minced meat chopped up as cat food, decorate with sperm sauce, add cabbage salad and a real chunk of corn and then topping it with some strange cardamom spice that they sometimes add – That's the definition of Norwegian kebab, and that you cannot contest is rather typical to find here in Norway, as in Sweden it is typical to find kebab that actually tastes good!

28 When cuisines or dishes are introduced in new settings, their composition naturally changes according to the available ingredients, the skills of their makers, and customer tastes. It should come as no surprise that the street corner kebabs of the different Scandinavian countries differ. Denmark, Sweden, and Norway may have similar national cuisines and food traditions (Bergflødt et al. 2012: 24), with similarities for instance in timing of the meals as well as some ingredients (bread, potatoes) and use of rather simple traditional dishes (Holm et al. 2015: 228). They also have some differences, with a divide between two different Nordic lunch cultures – one hot and one cold (Holm et al. 2015: 243). Differences in how common it is to eat out, that is outside the home, follows the same divide with Denmark and Norway on one side, Sweden and Finland on the other (Lund et al 2017: 29). The Scandinavian countries most definitively have different immigration histories, different restaurant regulations and different ethnic minority groups. As already

mentioned, the history of the kebab is unclear, but we may look to the history of the pizza for comparison. This Italian dish was introduced to Sweden and Norway more or less simultaneously in the late 1960s. The subsequent development of this dish, however, has distinct differences. The Swedish pizzerias quickly became small, informal establishments, and a domain for self-employed immigrant (generally non-Italian) owners (Hultman 2013:96). In Norway, the pizza restaurant market became the domain of large USA-style family restaurant chains, after the Norwegian-American couple Louis and Anne Jordan moved to Oslo and started the Peppes Pizza chain (Peppes pizza 2017). Swedes who arrived in the Norwegian capital around 2000 were surprised by the high price of takeaway pizza. However, Norwegian fast food restaurants that serve hamburgers or kebabs are similarly priced to what can be found in Sweden. Therefore, it was not the price, but the taste of the kebab that surprised the Swedish immigrants.

29 In Norway, kebab is generally served with canned corn and with different sauces than Swedes are used to. The biggest difference is that kebabs are often served with ground rather than sliced meat. For years, members of the SiO Facebook group have shared tips about where they could find 'real Swedish kebabs' in Oslo. Jokingly, but not without sincerity, the SiO members have discussed which Swedish regional variety of the kebab should be imported to Norway. In all the years I have spent observing the activities of the SiO group, I have only rarely seen anyone point out the non-Scandinavian origins of the kebab. By discussing the 'Norwegian' kebab, young Swedes in Norway, at a particular point in time, used the arguably Turkish, or at least German-Turkish, kebab to mark themselves as distinctly non-Norwegian. As white migrants, the Swedes were used to blending into Norwegian society. They may have felt the need from time to time to stand out, to differentiate themselves from a Norwegian majority population that they sometimes may have felt frustrated or even intimidated by.

## Concluding discussion

30 Missing home can be expressed in many ways. For the young Swedish adults who are part of the SiO group, the stereotypical Swedish Dala horse, red cottages by the water or the romantic Stockholm archipelago are perhaps not always the images they most eagerly envision when thinking of life in their home country. On the SiO site, the longing for Swedish kebab became the expression for many emotions ranging from frustration over annoying Norwegian habits to expressions of youthful homesickness. Being in a new country brings new impressions, a new language, lots of practical problems, and unfamiliar food. That is the reality, whether you move across the world or simply across a Nordic border. For young Swedes, adjusting to Norwegian prices, alcohol regulations, social habits, cold lunches, and the plethora of dialects were all frustrating aspects of their migration process. The pain of being away from home, relating to both minor and the major issues, were perhaps arbitrarily deflected to critiques of the Norwegian kebab. As such, the kebab discourse among Oslo Swedes can be interpreted as a form of banal nationalism (Billig 1995). For the young Swedes, kebab critiques were an expression of nostalgia, a way of looking back. It was also a way of creating and upholding internal Scandinavian national borders. Through the symbolic use of

an international street food, the young Swedes ascertained their self-identities as truly different – and of course better – than their Norwegian peers.

31 Food – in this case the kebab – is a good entry point into modern, postcolonial, migration history. When new migration groups arrive in a certain number, a common pattern emerges of grocery shops and small restaurants catering to the needs of fellow migrants (Ram et al. 2001:354ff). It may be due to their love of their home country's food or it may be due to the lack of opportunities in the host country's labour market. Or perhaps both. It is part of a pattern of middleman minorities and the development of ethnic economies (Bonacich 1972). If these ethnic entrepreneurs are successful, new foodstuffs and eating habits emerge in the host country. But that is not all that is happening. Opening an ethnic restaurant in a new country means sharing specific knowledge pertaining to food, the ingredients of a meal, its preparation and its marketing. It also means adapting to your environment and the tastes of your customers.

32 This means that the kebab, as a semi-international dish, served across the world in a globalised pattern of Middle Eastern exile, international trade, and a modern fondness for the exotic is different in different places. From the Istanbul restaurant of Valencia, Spain, serving *kebaps* as well as *hamburguesas*, to the Saray kebab shop of Tokyo, serving *kebab norimaki*, with rice or as a *bento*: kebab-makers adapt. A common denominator for the increased availability of kebabs around the world is that they were originally associated with urban, multicultural areas. Like the Chinese restaurants of Norway before them, and the Italian pizzerias in Sweden, the kebab has spread into rural areas, such as the aforementioned kebab shop in Tynset. The appearance of the kebab in such places, is a sign of two things: on the one hand, it means postcolonial migrants are settling in the countryside. On the other hand, it tells us kebab has been domesticated, no longer hip, urban and exotic.

33 The effort to find familiar or culturally important foods or ingredients is frequently an important issue in migrant communities. Sometimes, this may be a question of comfort and habit. At other times, it may be linked to religious or political values. Either way, what we eat is clearly essential to our identity and to the identity ascribed to us as individuals and as groups. It is part of how we present ourselves to others (Goffman 1959). As an ethnic community, Swedes in Oslo were no different in this regard. As already mentioned, Swedish migrants in Norway are generally young. Two-thirds of them are under forty, most are single and many work in the service sector. In the first decades of the 2000s in the Nordic countries, a part of 'youth lifestyle' meant eating kebab. As a street food, the kebab – served from small, very informal establishments open late at night– has been a mainstay of the post-party/bar scene in Oslo since, at least, the 1990s. When the Swedes arrived after the turn of the century, they did not like the local Norwegian kebab. A perfect logic of supply and demand led several establishments in Oslo to offer what they claim are 'Swedish' kebabs.

34 What we choose to use as boundary markers between 'our' ethnic group and that of the other may sometimes seem rather arbitrary. Among a possible plethora of cultural practices, we choose some clear and visible ones (Barth 1994:175). From these, and the collective work of making these symbols matter, imagined communities are made. For young Swedes in Norway, kebabs are not seen as exotic, Middle Eastern or foreign. On the contrary, kebab represents home, *is home*, or a substitute for home, while in a foreign land. To a certain



degree, kebab may become a way of connecting with a sense of belonging to Sweden, a vehicle of identity formation, showing your roots – as an Oslo Swede. Along the same symbolic lines, mocking Norwegian kebab as ‘smelling of poo’, that is, being disgusting, becomes a way of marking distance, and superiority, to Norway and Norwegians. Jokingly, but symbolically important.

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## Notes

1 The dairy product known in English as quark.

2 A Swedish soft drink sold almost exclusively around Christmas, with a taste somewhat similar to root beer.

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