Gastronomic cosmopolitanism: Supermarket products in France and the United Kingdom

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

In this article, we explore whether contemporary European cosmopolitanism is a deep or superficial trend. We do so by examining prepared meals in mainstream French and United Kingdom (UK) supermarket chains. First, we ask to what extent are foreign cultural influences present in these grocery outlets? Then, we explore which foreign cultural influences are present and, finally, how they are presented in this mainstream market setting. Our results are mixed. We find evidence of significant cultural diversity in the offerings of both French and UK supermarket chains. Supermarkets in both countries offer sizeable percentages of products from foreign countries in and outside of Europe. In addition, most of these products are presented without exoticization, suggesting a level of comfort and familiarity with the foreign gastronomic products among consumers, and a promising indicator of robust cosmopolitanism. However, the range of foreign gastronomic influences, in both countries, is both limited and stratified. We argue that this partially reflects standardizing logics and trends of globalizing consumer markets. This suggests that everyday cosmopolitanism may continue to develop in Western Europe, but will likely involve an uneven set of cultural influences.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary West European societies are considered more cosmopolitan than ever. The European Union’s decades-long project of market and political integration has transformed how people of different nations interact (Fligstein, 2008). Growing percentages of their inhabitants have origins external to their country of residence and to Europe (Alba & Foner, 2015). Europeans are also more mobile within and outside of Europe and are increasingly likely to identify as ‘Europeans’ as opposed to citizens of their nation-state (Stoeckel, Forthcoming). Popular culture and consumer products produced in Europe have increasingly diverse influences, and foreign cultures are increasingly likely to add novel twists to otherwise commonplace products and experiences (Janssen & Peterson, 2005; Miller, 2008; Rudolph & Hillmann, 1998; Wise & Velayutham, 2009). Additionally, the circulation of the products of different cultural and consumer industries is increasingly accepted as global (Featherstone, 1990). Together, these developments have led some scholars to argue that new cosmopolitan societies are emerging, where Europeans primarily look beyond their nation-state borders and embrace broader values and norms (Beck & Grande, 2007; Fligstein, 2008).

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Despite these indicators of growing cosmopolitanism, there is also significant evidence of countervailing trends. Ideally, cosmopolitanism offers a life ethic that balances commitment to universal human values, an aptitude for worldliness, and respect for, if not embracement of, cultural differences (Appiah, 2006; Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, & Chakrabarty, 2000). The cosmopolitan individual is a citizen of the world (Skrbis & Woodward, 2007). Yet in Europe, there are many signs that these philosophical ideals are not being met. For starters, some argue that cosmopolitanism values and practices are mainly concentrated among the highly-educated European elite in large urban centers or those who work for multi-national businesses (Favell, 2008; Fligstein, 2008; Mau, 2010). In addition, even if a wide range of Europeans acknowledges the importance of cosmopolitan values, their actual behaviors are more parochial and nationalistic (Calhoun, 2007; Pichler, 2008). Moreover, the global financial crisis and its aftermath, as well as recent terror events, have exacerbated backlash among both the extreme left and right toward institutions that otherwise promote cosmopolitanism (Berezin, 2015).

One of the most dramatic examples of the limits of European cosmopolitanism is the continued reluctance to accept non-European-origin immigrant groups as full and legitimate community members (Bail, 2008; Joppe, 2004; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Many Western Europeans fear that immigrants from outside of Europe have attitudes towards mainstream norms that are unacceptably conservative, even a threat (Sniderman & Hagedoorn, 2007). Many want to prevent non-European immigrants from physically displaying their cultural differences (for example via traditional clothing or religious architecture) or distorting the character of European public spaces (Carol, Helbling, & Michalowski, 2015). Concerns about immigrants from outside of Europe have even bolstered recent support for far-right political parties with extreme nationalist platforms (Berezin, 2009; Givens, 2005), which have become increasingly polarized toward anti-immigrant sentiments (Holmes, 2011).

We address two questions that arise from these simultaneous trends of European cosmopolitanism and provincialism. First, is European cosmopolitanism a deep or superficial trend? Second, to the extent that cosmopolitanism does exist, how does it structure everyday culture and practices? We respond to these questions by exploring the reach and shape of cosmopolitanism in contemporary European consumer markets. Consumer markets are often used to study cosmopolitanism, because as sites and vehicles of the fabric of everyday life, they comprise the ‘stuff’ of cultural consumption, giving symbolic value to objects of material culture (Crane & Bovone, 2006; Miller, 2012; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Prieur, Rosenlund, & Skjott-Larsen, 2008). Much of this research focuses on which people are more likely to express cosmopolitan identities (Meuleman & Savage, 2013; Rössel, 2015; Warde & Gayo-Cal, 2009). We take a different tack and examine products offered by large, mainstream retail chains as a way of charting the cosmopolitan European consumer market landscape. Our approach is based on two assumptions: first, that large retail chains’ product offerings are evidence of mainstream cultural consumption and, second, that consumers do not take up cosmopolitan attitudes in a straightforward or non-reflexive manner. While we extend research that uses retailing as a lens for understanding mass cultural trends (Cochoy, 2007), we do not wish to suggest that all consumers experience or respond to products similarly. People develop their own reasons for consuming products with diverse cultural origins that do not necessarily reflect openness to cosmopolitan values (Bookman, 2013; Cappeliez & Johnston, 2013). Nonetheless, our focus on the availability and promotion of mass consumer products indicates general trends and allows us to avoid the trap of only examining elite cultural spaces for evidence of cosmopolitanism, such as cutting-edge restaurants (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Young, Diep, & Drabble, 2006).

Our empirical focus is prepared meal products in mainstream French and United Kingdom (UK) supermarket chains, guided by the following research questions. First, we ask to what extent are foreign cultural influences present in mainstream European grocery outlets? Broadly speaking, more products with foreign cultural influences may be more evidence for cosmopolitanism. Here we focus Beck’s concept of “banal cosmopolitanism” (2006) applied to mainstream food culture. While scholars posit that ‘exotic,’ ‘adventurous,’ or otherwise ‘omnivorous’ eating is an important 21st century means of accruing cultural capital (Johnston & Baumann, 2010; Warde & Gayo-Cal, 2009), it may also undergird the creation of cosmopolitan identities. As Beck (2003, p. 37) argues, everyday food practices can precipitate cosmopolitan consciousness among people. Second, we explore which foreign cultural influences are present. While recognizing that globalization practices are necessarily shaped by historical patterns and events, we posit that influences coming primarily from neighboring European countries would offer only moderate evidence of cosmopolitanism. If more global influences are present, that may be evidence of more robust cosmopolitanism. Finally, we ask how foreign cultures are promoted in European consumer markets. Presentations of products’ ordinariness and familiarity would be evidence of successful cosmopolitanism. Conversely, if foreign cultural influences are labeled as exotic and unfamiliar, that could indicate a lack of cosmopolitanism.

Together, these empirical questions permit us to examine how the cultural diversity of supermarket products relates to the shape and depth of European gastronomic cosmopolitanism and cultural change as it manifests in consumer markets. Scholars increasingly identify foods, cuisines, and gastronomies as rich and cognitively-accessible sources of cultural and political meaning in globalizing markets (DeSoucey, 2010; Inglis & Gimlin, 2009; Ray & Srinivas, 2012) and as aspects of cultural production that are relevant to everyday life (Inglis, 2005; Watson & Caldwell, 2005). For our purposes, mainstream food practices – supported by institutions like supermarkets – help to create and reproduce symbols and behaviors suggestive of cosmopolitan attitudes.

Scholars who have examined multicultural culinary changes in France and the UK typically focus on trends in restaurants, from high cuisine (Lane, 2014; Warde, 2009) to ethnic establishments (Cwiertka, 2005; Jamal, 1996; Pottier, 2014) to fast food (Fantasia, 1995; Wright & Annes, 2013). We focus on supermarkets as a socio-material and institutional setting where cultural assumptions translate into a different type of offering (Newman, 2013). Supermarkets are a key element of mass consumer culture in advanced industrial societies (Burch & Lawrence, 2007; Deutsch, 2010). As opposed to specialty food stores that concentrate on specific niche demographics (e.g. vegetarians, ethnic enclaves, or high-end ‘foodies’),
supermarkets attempt to appeal broadly to a large range of customers and are thus indicative of banal shopping and consumption habits (Deutsch, 2010; Falk & Campbell, 1997; Featherstone, 1997). Moreover, the supermarket industry has recently undergone a sea change toward greater control over global supply chains, as well as concentrated growth by larger retail chains and ‘hypermarkets’ (Ferni, Sparks, & McKinnon, 2010). The increasing standardization of supermarket products reinforces their value for our analysis as indicators of mainstream, and mainstreaming, cultural consumption.

Our results are mixed. We find evidence of significant cultural diversity in the offerings of both French and UK supermarket chains. Supermarkets in both countries offer sizeable percentages of prepared meal products from foreign countries and from countries outside of Europe. In addition, most of these products are presented in a straightforward manner without exoticization, suggesting a level of familiarity with foreign gastronomic products. These findings are promising signs of robust gastronomic cosmopolitanism. However, there is a fairly limited range of foreign gastronomic influences in both countries. This suggests that gastronomic cosmopolitanism involves an uneven set of cultural influences and reflects, we argue, standardizing logics of global consumer markets.

2. Case selection

France and the UK are useful cases for examining gastronomic cosmopolitanism for two reasons. First, both are among the most politically, socially, and economically global countries in the world (Beck & Grande, 2007). Both are populous countries with demographically diverse populations due to long histories of immigration from multiple European and non-European locales (Messina, 2007). Both are thus countries where we would expect relatively high levels of cosmopolitanism in general, making them useful indicators of levels of gastronomic cosmopolitanism in Western Europe.

France and the UK also have crucial differences that allow us to explore how gastronomic cosmopolitanism may manifest differently across national contexts. We expect greater evidence of cosmopolitanism in UK supermarket product offerings. In part, this is because UK food culture has tended to be relatively open to outside influences and not as reliant on domestic cuisine as a source of national pride as in some other European countries (Collingham, 2006; Mennell, 1996). In addition, the broad UK policy approach towards immigrant integration legitimizes racial, ethnic, and religious diversity and encourages immigrants to express their homeland cultures while joining mainstream society (Bleich, 2003; Favell, 1998; Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, if we do not find evidence of cosmopolitanism in UK supermarket products, such influence most likely does not exist in Western Europe. Moreover, to the extent that gastronomic cosmopolitanism is limited in the UK it is likely to be even more limited in other European countries that are less open to immigrant and global cultural influences.

France also possesses relatively high levels of demographic diversity as well as openness to global capitalism and political integration. Yet, France also has one of the strongest traditions of national culinary pride in the world (Ferguson, 2004; Mennell, 1996). In addition, the French policy approach towards integrating immigrants requires that immigrants reject their homeland values and adopt French cultural norms (Noiriel, 1988; Weil, 2005). These two dynamics should lead to less cosmopolitanism in French as opposed to UK supermarket products. As such, France may be an especially instructive case because of the competing forces that predict both openness and limitations on gastronomic cosmopolitanism.
3. Data

The data in this article come from the largest supermarket chains in France and the UK – the only chains with more than 10 percent (each) of domestic grocery markets. In France that is Carrefour, Leclerc, Intermarché, Système U and Auchan. In the UK that is Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury’s and Morrisons. In each country, these chains together make up 70–75 percent of domestic grocery markets.1

Within each chain, we collected and analyzed data on the ‘prepared meals’ (traiteur in French) sections. We chose these items because prepared meals offer better indicators of contemporary demand for certain cultural food practices than individual grocery products.2 Additionally, single ingredients are often used in multiple cultural or national food traditions depending on how the customer prepares (and cognizes) the product (e.g. cornmeal can be used to make American grits, Italian polenta, or African fufu) (Belasco & Scranton, 2002). In comparison, prepared meals are complete, finished dishes that clearly demarcate available choices for supermarket customers. The precise categories of prepared meal products vary across supermarkets, but each offers a combination of appetizers, main courses, side dishes, and desserts.

Our data on prepared meal products comes from the websites of each supermarket chain (see Table 1 for an overview).3 Collecting data from supermarket websites is particularly useful for our purposes because it provides one selection of products that is available to the whole country and therefore represents a national cultural expression, as opposed to the variable product selections potentially available in individual stores.4 We define a ‘product’ as the individual unit of food available for purchase on the prepared meals section of the website. This includes a diverse array of items ranging from side dishes of sliced breads to main course dishes of meat with vegetables to party platters with assorted snacks.

Prepared meals are attractive for their convenience, and industry trends show that their modal consumer is young, urban, and single (Datamonitor, 2003; Harris & Shiptsova, 2007). These are some of the population subgroups that are also most likely to self-identify as cosmopolitan (Hill, 2011), so in some respects our analysis could be seen as biased towards finding evidence of cosmopolitanism. However, the archetypical consumer of mass supermarket chains is not defined by high socio-economic status or high cultural capital, which helps mitigate against the common bias of over generalizing cosmopolitanism from evidence among elite subpopulations (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Young et al., 2006). In addition, recent trends in European prepared meals include a greater diversity of product ranges, with more emphasis on lower cost, healthy, as well as higher-quality offerings (Scott-Thomas, 2014). This expands the market for prepared meals to a wider range of consumers – including families and the working class – and further supports our usage of these products as a measure of gastronomic cosmopolitanism in everyday life.

4. Analytical strategy

We began by coding the main national reference for all prepared meal products in these supermarkets to examine the prevalence of foreign cultural influence. To code the main cultural reference, we focused on the central item in each ‘product,’ and not the spices or the additional ingredients. For example, pasta and pizza are always coded as Italian, couscous and tajines as North African, quiche as French, cottage pie as British and sushi as Japanese. This choice was based upon the historical cultural origins of dishes and was designed to be as objective as possible.

When coding these dishes, we used a combination of country and broader regional categories because not all products can be clearly associated with one specific country or cultural influence. For example, couscous is historically identified with multiple North African countries. East Asia is another common regional coding, as many supermarkets offer spring rolls or various noodle or rice dishes flavored with soy sauce and/or ‘chilli’, none of which can be attributed to a specific country. Intermarché and Leclerc include a Mixed category because each store offers a product that is a platter of various smaller dishes from multiple regions around the world.

Our coding approach was chosen for simplicity, but numerous complications arise when prepared meal products combine multiple cultural influences.5 This was primarily an issue for the pizza and pasta dishes, because the global popularity of Italian ingredients and cuisine has generated more extensive local variants of pizza and pasta than have other foreign cuisines. Nonetheless, we opted to code all pizza and pasta as Italian to avoid inconsistencies about which dishes retain their Italian origins and which do not. Later in the article, we return to the issue of how to interpret the extensive Italian influences on French and UK supermarket products, and in doing so we also highlight the relationship and fusion

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1 More details on supermarket chains in each country are in the methodological Appendix.
2 For example, Sainsbury’s stocked Indian spice mixtures as early as the 1920s in recognition of the consumer market for those products. However, Sainsbury’s did not expand those offerings into more comprehensive meal products until the 1990s (Hamlett, Bailey, Alexander, & Shaw, 2008).
3 The data were collected between November and January when five of the nine supermarkets offer special holiday products. The online methodological Appendix examines the concern that this may bias our findings.
4 For more on the distinction between website and in-store selections see the online methodological Appendix.
5 One could argue that almost all dishes are cultural fusion because so many ingredients have traveled from their indigenous homes to mix with ingredients from elsewhere (e.g. ‘Italian’ tomato sauce with tomatoes from the Americas). However, we focus on the culture where the dish initially emerged, even if ingredients or techniques within the dish originated elsewhere.
6 The concept of baking pasta with a creamy sauce has existed in Italy for centuries, but Americans began developing their own version in the 18th century. In the 1930s, the American food company Kraft began selling boxed elbow macaroni with powdered cheese, which helped institutionalize the dish as a mainstream American one (Spieler, 2013).
between Italian and American food cultures (Gabaccia, 1998). For example, we coded macaroni and cheese as Italian though many would argue that the dish is culturally American.\(^6\) In addition, over the last half-century Italian-American cuisine has become globally significant (Capatti et al., 2003; Helstosky, 2008). Therefore, some pasta and pizza products (e.g. macaroni and cheese or pepperoni pizza) that we code as Italian because of their deeper origins are likely to have entered French and UK supermarkets due to American popular influence.

In short, we acknowledge the complexities of assigning singular cultural origins to food products and do not claim that our coding captures all aspects of a product’s origins. Regardless, re-coding the ambiguous cases does not change the overall analysis. Therefore, our coding scheme provides a general overview of which foreign cultural influences are most prevalent in these supermarket chains. Later in the article, we offer more detail on the various and overlapping ways in which different cultural influences are used in the prepared meals. Full details on each product and its coding can be found in the Appendix.

5. How prevalent are foreign cultural influences?

Tables 2 and 3 present the results of our coding. At the top of each table is a summary of the percentage of prepared meal products with domestic origins. Table 2 indicates that those with foreign cultural origins are a minority of the products in each of the five French chains (ranging from 9 to 50 percent, with an average of 26.3 percent). Table 3 shows prepared meals with foreign cultural influences are a majority of the products offered in each UK chain (ranging from 63 to 67 percent, with an average of 65.3 percent).\(^7\)

These initial results are consistent with some of our expectations. Given the different histories of domestic culinary pride and the different political approaches to integrating members of immigrant groups, we expected to find more openness to foreign gastronomical influences in the UK than in France. However, even in France a non-trivial percentage (roughly one-quarter) of prepared meal products have foreign cultural origins. This suggests encouraging – if preliminary – evidence of gastronomical cosmopolitanism in both countries. In the following sections we examine which foreign cultures are most prevalent and how those foreign cultures are represented in each country. The results suggest similarities, albeit with a few key differences, between France and the UK in which and how foreign cultural influences are present among prepared meal supermarket products.

6. Which foreign cultures are most prevalent?

Our next step in evaluating gastronomic cosmopolitanism was to examine which foreign cultures are present in French and UK supermarket chains. This yielded two key findings. First, French and UK supermarkets all have significant percentages of products with non-European cultural origins. However, supermarkets in both countries also have very limited

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\(^6\) The percentage difference between foreign and domestic cultural influences is statistically significant (at \(p < 0.001\)) in eight of the nine supermarkets. Système U is the one exception, where foreign cultural influences account for 49.6 percent of the prepared meal products and the difference between foreign and domestic cultural influence percentages is not statistically significant (at \(p < 0.05\)). (This is based on a series of one-sided binomial probability tests where the null hypothesis is that foreign and domestic cultural influences are equal.)
range of foreign cultural influence. This suggests a more cautious and nuanced assessment of cosmopolitanism and intercultural gastronomic encounters.

### 6.1. Influence from non-European foreign cultures

One crude distinction is between the presence of European and non-European foreign cultural influences. Tables 2 and 3 indicate a tilt in this balance toward non-European cultural influences. In France, non-European influences account for an average of 53.8 percent of all foreign cultural influences across the five supermarket chains (and are as high as 77 percent of the foreign cultural influences in Carrefour). In the UK, non-European influences account for an average of 69.6 of all foreign cultural influences across the four chains.8

Further evidence of gastronomic cosmopolitanism is the extent of cultural influences from non-European immigrant communities that are usually considered the most challenging to integrate (Brouard & Tiberj, 2005; Maxwell, 2012). In France, North Africa is always in the top four regions of foreign influence and accounts for an average of 10.8 percent of the total products with foreign influences. In the UK, India is always the primary region of foreign influence and, among the products with foreign influences, accounts for an average of 25.7 percent.

In many respects, the presence of North African products in France and Indian products in the UK is an expected result of historical, and post-colonial, ties. Yet, the fairly high levels of influence in mainstream market venues are nonetheless remarkable because North Africans in France and Indians in the UK have historically been stereotyped as culturally inferior (Collingham, 2006; Durmelat, 2015; Guy, 2010). In addition, in both countries, these non-native communities face discrimination and stigmatization from those who do not welcome their presence and consider their foreign religions and

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8 In France, one-sided binomial probability tests (where the null hypothesis is that European and non-European cultural influences are equal among products with foreign cultural influences) indicate that the larger percentage of non-European influences is statistically significant (at p < 0.01) in Auchan, Carrefour and Système U and the larger percentage of European influence is statistically significant (at p < 0.01) in Intermarché. There is no statistically significant difference (at p < 0.05) in Leclerc. In the UK, the larger percentage of non-European influences is statistically significant (at p < 0.001) in all four supermarkets.
cultural norms threats to French or UK society (Maxwell, 2012). Therefore, the fact that North Africa and India are among the most prominent culinary influences on prepared meal supermarket products is evidence of how facets of non-European immigrant communities have become a de facto part of cosmopolitan French and UK consumer culture, despite serious integration challenges (Alba & Foner, 2015).9

East Asia is another prominent source of non-European cultural influences in both French and UK supermarkets. This can signal cosmopolitanism because it encompasses several different nations that are all geographically and culturally distant from Europe. In part, this reflects the fact that East Asian cultures have longstanding immigrant communities in France and the UK resulting from colonization and empire (Laudan, 2013; Messina, 2007). Additionally, the late–20th century emergence of a number of East Asian nations and cities as centers of transnational capital accumulation has likely influenced the global cultural valuation of those locales’ consumer and culinary products. This relationship between economic capital and cultural capital could explain why East Asian ingredients and flavors have resonated more soundly in mainstream food media than, for example, those from the Caribbean. Indeed, in both countries, East Asian ingredients and dishes have become familiar and popular at home and in food and cooking magazines, television programming, and at a broader range of restaurants (Hill, 2012). These developments have occurred alongside greater rates of distribution of East Asian food products to French and UK supermarket chains such as those examined in this article (Roberts, 2002).

However, many East Asian-influenced products cannot be traced to colonial histories or purely economic ties; we also note clear evidence of growing interest among French and UK consumers for stylistically new and interesting tastes writ large (Warde & Gayo-Cal, 2009). Creative trendsetters in elite gastronomic settings often borrow extensively from other culinary styles, yet they do so in ways that are patterned and derive from the hierarchical status of those who serve as early adopters (Leschziner, 2015), and in time such trends often extend well beyond niche gastronomic cultures. For example, French chefs in the emergent nouvelle cuisine movement of 1960s and 70s adopted both ingredients and cooking techniques from Japan (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2005), making it easier for those flavors to be considered broadly complementary to French dishes today. Further, a recent New York Times magazine article reported on the prevalence of pluraliste culinary trends in the contemporary high-end Parisian food scene (Gollner, 2016). In short, the qualitative and quantitative array of which national influences are prominent in both countries denotes further evidence of status and cultural hierarchies within gastronomic cosmopolitanism, as well as the simultaneous symbolic and material entwining of global taste preferences through media and networks of capital accumulation.

6.2. A limited range of foreign cultural influences

The presence of foreign (and more specifically non-European) cultural influences may suggest cosmopolitanism, but in examining the countries and regions represented among these products, we have a more cautious assessment. Tables 2 and 3 indicate that for each chain, over 80 percent of the prepared meal products with foreign origins come from four sources: Italy, the United States, East Asia, and the region that is each respective country’s main source of post-colonial migration (North Africa for France and India for the UK). In both countries, there are very few prepared meal products with origins in Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or Central or Southern America. This uneven distribution of foreign influences is evidence of the limits of cosmopolitanism in Western Europe, showing how gastronomic cosmopolitanism is a product of historically-embedded markets and their unequally distributed cultural and economic resources.

Perhaps the best example of how globalized markets and firms promote a narrow range of particular cultural influences is the prominence of Italian and US influences among these offerings in both France and the UK. Together, these two countries account for an average of 50.3 percent of foreign-influenced products in France and an average of 36.4 percent of foreign-influenced products in the UK. This indicates both the independent influence of each country’s food on global market trends, as well as the strong assimilation of Italian cuisine into American culinary repertoires (Capatti et al., 2003). While the category of ‘Italian food’ itself comprises a wide variety of specialized and regional culinary practices (Parasecoli, 2014), for much of the 20th century it was a low-status ethnic cuisine in France and the UK (and much of Western Europe). As its status grew in those countries, it entered most, if not every, main street, shopping mall, airport, train station, and supermarket (Mariani, 2011). However, Italian cuisine’s global popularity has also benefited from its earlier deep assimilation into 20th century American food culture (Gabaccia, 1998; Helstosky, 2008). Dishes like pastas and pizzas have been re-introduced to the world via American global prowess, helping to explain, for instance, why the French supermarket chain Intermarché offers five versions of baked pasta in different cheese sauces under the menu category ‘Les Box.’

This strong US presence links to broader trends in which America has served as a dominating force in global consumer culture and cultural flows (Appadurai, 1990; Tomlinson, 1999). Gastronomically, and to the dismay of those promoting ‘traditional’ food cultures, the US has been particularly successful at exporting its fast food and snack culture and brands

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9 Another possibility is that North African and Indian products are offered on the supermarket websites primarily to appeal to members of those specific communities, while being ignored by the rest of the population. This would suggest that non-European immigrant communities have not become part of mainstream French and UK consumer culture. However, this dynamic is unlikely because the websites are standardized for the entire country and these immigrant communities are only roughly 6 percent of the population in their respective countries (more details on immigrant demographics are below).
The cultures in Southern, Southwestern and Tex-Mex inspired dishes like pulled pork, barbecue ribs, and many variations on chili. Global markets may generate opportunities for new foreign cultural influences to enter a country, but for large retail chains that serve broad consumer bases they also involve rationalized supply chains and product standardization. Food retailers in France and the UK are among the most sophisticated in the world, using increasingly complex financial and operations techniques within their supply chain and distribution logistics and consumer tracking programs. This helps explain why a fairly narrow set of global ‘cosmopolitan’ influences dominates the prepared meal offerings in French and UK supermarket chains.

Another example of how global markets limit cultural diversity is the narrow range of non-European immigrant cultures that are represented in these supermarkets. In France, the largest non-European origin immigrant communities are North Africans (roughly 6 percent of the population), followed by Caribbeans, Turks, and Sub-Saharan Africans, who are each roughly 1.5 percent of the population. All of these groups are conspicuous in French cities and as subjects of public and political debates about immigrants, signaling potential status differentiations by race, ethnicity, and social class that could affect gastronomic offerings. While each supermarket offers a selection of North African-inspired couscous, tajines, and tabbouleh dishes, influences from the other groups are barely present. Sub-Saharan Africa is never the primary cultural source of a single prepared meal in any of the five supermarkets. In three of them, there is exactly one Caribbean-influenced dish (cod fritters/accras de morue), and in two supermarkets there are zero. Finally, while Turkish donner kebab takeaway restaurants have proven extremely popular and numerous throughout Western European cities thus far in the 21st century, there is only one Turkish kebab dish in Système U and a mere three Turkish-influenced dishes in Intermarché.

In the UK, India is the largest source of non-European immigration with 2.5 percent of the population, followed by Pakistanis (2 percent), black Africans (1.8 percent), Caribbeans (1.1 percent) and Bangladeshis (0.8 percent). All of these groups are prominent in British public life, but India is overwhelmingly the most prominent influence on supermarket prepared meals. In some respects, the prominence of Indian influences as opposed to Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, despite only being a slightly larger percentage of the UK population, reflects India’s historical dominance as the name utilized to signify the South Asian subcontinent. Yet, the dramatic drop-off in influence for Sub-Saharan African or Caribbean gastronomic cultures in the UK is noteworthy. The only African dish that appears in the UK supermarket product lists we analyzed is piri piri chicken, and even that was a European-African fusion dish from its inception. Asda, Morrisons and Sainsbury’s each only offer one Caribbean-influenced prepared meal product. While Tesco offers a slightly more extensive selection, with ten different Caribbean-influenced items (mainly different Jamaican curries and patties), even that is less than 2 percent of their overall prepared meal products.

The fact that cultural influences from non-European immigrant communities are mainly from North Africa in France and India in the UK reveals tentativeness toward cosmopolitanism in everyday food practices. East Asia is a prominent non-European culinary influence in both countries, but East Asians are less than three percent of each country’s population, and thus unlikely to be reflecting demand from demographic presence. Instead, these influences are more likely a reflection of the economic, political, and cultural prominence of East Asia globally. In short, the fact that almost all products with foreign influences come from the same four sources (Italy, the United States, East Asia and the main source of post-colonial migration) indicates similarly imbalanced consumer market logics.

7. How are foreign cultural influences portrayed?

Our final question, following the above evidence of foreign cultural influence on France and UK prepared meal supermarket products – which is an encouraging sign of cosmopolitanism – concerns the ways in which foreign cultural influences are presented and promoted by these chains, and how these products are described and promoted differently.
across the two countries. As a relevant note, the term ‘authentic’ appears sparsely in our data. This finding is somewhat counterintuitive, as a number of sociological and marketing studies predict a purposive quest for authentic products by consumers seeking cultural and culinary capital, and gastronomic institutions responding accordingly (see among others: Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Johnston & Baumann, 2010; Warde, 1997). We conjecture that large mainstream supermarket chains, which reinterpret and market products for mass audiences, may know they are not where consumers seek out ‘authentic’ culinary products. Moreover, the few times we do find authenticity referenced, it is done so quite differently across the two countries. In French supermarkets, the language of ‘authentic’ dishes is reserved only for French products (i.e. an authentic cheese platter, or a description of an authentic Breton cake recipe for Far Breton aux pruneaux), never for foreign-origin products. In UK supermarkets, on the other hand, the language of authenticity is occasionally used to describe foreign-origin ingredients or dishes (i.e. ‘authentic tasting lasagne’ or an ‘authentic Middle Eastern recipe’), but not for British-origin dishes.

7.1. Post colonial immigrant influences

Given a long and politically fraught history of cultural marginalization, one might expect North African culinary influences in France and Indian influences in the UK to be exoticized or ‘Other’-ized (Johnston & Baumann, 2010). However, North African-influenced meal items in France and Indian-influenced meal items in the UK are all presented as familiar, relatively ordinary products that will meet consumer expectations. As a caveat for what follows, we acknowledge that incorporating ‘ethnic’ dishes into ‘mainstream’ diets, historically, often requires their physical conversion into forms considered more acceptable and appealing to consumers (Lu & Fine, 1995), and the search for ‘exotic’ tastes perpetuates other status-seeking processes tied to food consumption, namely cultural omnivorous (Johnston & Baumann, 2010).

The closest French supermarkets come to exoticizing North African items is Intermarché, which has three couscous dishes under the menu sub-heading ‘Exotic Dishes.’ However, while this category is mostly comprised of non-European dishes from around the world, it also includes Greek moussaka and three Spanish paella dishes. This suggests that to the extent these products are seen as exotic, it is because they are not of French origin. Moreover, North African dishes are not confined to this ‘Exotic dishes’ sub-heading. There are tabbouleh dishes in the general ‘Salad’ menu sub-heading and one couscous dish in the Weight Watchers sub-heading. In Auchan and Carrefour, the closest acknowledgement of the foreignness of North African dishes is reference to them as ‘Oriental’ or ‘traditional,’ but with no additional adjectives or descriptors. In Leclerc and Système U, North African-inspired dishes are presented without any such descriptors.

In the UK, each supermarket includes a wide range of Indian-inspired prepared meal dishes. These include multiple tandoori and curry dishes (various kormas, jalfreizis, and vindaloos, as well as more generic ‘curries’), biryanis, and various snacks (e.g. samosas, bhajis, pakoras). There are also several long-established British-Indian fusion dishes (e.g. balti, mulligatawny, phal, and chicken tikka masala, which was declared Britain’s national dish by foreign secretary Robin Cook in 2001 (Cook, 2001)). Each UK supermarket has a menu category for Indian dishes, which could potentially reflect segregation or stigmatization of Indian cultural influences. Yet, the presentation of Indian dishes uses no exoticizing or otherwise-detached language of symbolic boundaries. Instead, the websites described these dishes only using adjectives like ‘rich,’ ‘creamy,’ ‘aromatic,’ or ‘hot.’

A further example of Indian cuisine’s integration into UK gastronomy is the occasional use of Indian spices in what would otherwise be called ‘British’ dishes. This was not a common occurrence, perhaps in part because there are already extensive product offerings for Indian dishes. Yet, Asda sells chicken breasts flavored with lime and coriander as well as baked potatoes seasoned with chilis. Sainsbury’s sells lamb patties flavored with ginger and cumin, and Tesco sells potato wedges flavored with cumin, curry powder, and fenugreek. These findings are consistent with research on general trends in contemporary British cuisine over the last half-century, which finds growing popular acceptance of Indian-origin flavors and ingredients (Collingham, 2006; Hall, Hayes, & Pratt, 2003; Panayi 2008).

7.2. East Asian exoticization

The presence of East Asian communities in France and the UK has several notable historical and cultural differences from the North African and Indian communities there. First, the populations of East Asian immigrants in France and the UK are much smaller in number. In addition, East Asian immigrants have remained more geographically segregated and culturally distant from mainstream French and UK society, with less civic, political, and cultural integration than other non-European groups (Chen, Cole, & Bowpitt, 2007; Hassoun, 1997; Tribalat, 1995). This can help explain why East Asian influences on supermarket prepared meal products are more likely to be presented as exotic and foreign.

French supermarkets are more explicit in this regard and, for the most part, such language is solely used for East Asian dishes. Carrefour has a menu category that translates as ‘Voyage to Asia’ and Système U has the category of ‘Exotic Asian.’ Intermarché has a category named ‘Exotic Dishes,’ which includes dishes from all over the world outside of France, but of the

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17 In France, Vietnamese minorities are roughly 0.5 percent of the population and the combined total of other East Asian minorities (Cambodians, Laotians, Chinese) is even smaller (Tribalat, 2004, 2009). In the UK, the Chinese are only 0.7 percent of the England and Wales population and the combined Chinese and other Asian population (excluding South Asians) is 2.2 percent. Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics.
26 products in this category, twelve are from Vietnam, China, or generically East Asia. Auchan pitches their Vietnamese spring rolls as ‘ideal for your exotic aperitifs.’ Intermarché calls a platter with assorted Vietnamese and generically Asian starters ‘The Discovery Platter.’ In each case, the phrases describing these products evokes literal and cultural distance from French society.

Menu categories in the UK similarly use language of exoticism and adventuring in marketing their East Asian dishes. For example, Asda describes a Chicken Thai Red Curry with ‘Discover exotic spices and coconut, with a zesty lime squeeze . . . ’ and a King Prawn Thai Red Curry with ‘Savour exotic spiciness, with chilli and zingy lime . . . ’ There is also a UK-brand of tofu sold at Asda and Tesco that depicts its product as ‘perfect for adventurous cooks who love to try different recipes and flavours from the Far East.’ As in France, these phrases indicate geographic and cultural distance from the mainstream and suggest that East Asian food occupies a qualitatively different position in UK society than South Asian or American influenced products. Therefore, while the presence of East Asian influences may indicate a cosmopolitan opening to the world, the purposeful ways in which the dishes are depicted also indicates ongoing French and UK gastronomic parochialism with regard to East Asia and, for some scholars, is representative of elitist tendencies in such systems of cultural valuation or colonization (Bell & Valentine, 1997).

7.3. Italian and US gastronomic integration

Italian and US influences on prepared meal supermarket products tend to be presented straightforwardly without exoticizing or stigmatizing language. What is most distinctive about these influences is that they are the most likely to go beyond their own cultural-origin dishes and appear in otherwise-traditionally French or British dishes.

In both countries, Italian cheeses (e.g. mozzarella, parmesan, ricotta, grana padano, and mascarpone) are common additions to salads, sandwiches, and meat dishes that are categorized as French or British. Similarly, Italian ingredients like pesto, pancetta, and balsamic vinegar, and a wide-range of Italian-inspired tomato and basil flavorings, are used for various meat and vegetable dishes. American ingredients like butternut squash and cranberries are included in several appetizer and main course dishes that are otherwise traditionally French in the French supermarket chains. Stereotypical American desserts like brownies and cupcakes are transformed into modern versions of French petit fours. Additionally, French supermarket chains have adopted the recent French invention of savory ‘cakes.’ These cakes are based on the American muffin recipe, and are named with an English word, but are a French version of savory bread loaves with added ingredients (Sigal, 2010). In UK supermarket chains, American ingredients like barbeque sauce and Monterey Jack cheese are added to otherwise-British sandwiches and meat dishes.

The incorporation of Italian and American ingredients into traditional French and UK dishes is cultural fusion that could be considered evidence of gastronomic cosmopolitanism. However, this same fusion is much more likely than with Asian or African culinary influences. Admittedly, it may be easier to combine culinary influences from Italian and American gastronomic repertoires for their baseline similarities in ingredients, flavor profiles, and cooking styles. Yet, Asian and African influences have been embraced by numerous high-level restaurant chefs (Lane, 2014). Our supermarket product data indicate a broader mass market that may be less cosmopolitan and more parochial than the more creative, cutting-edge restaurants.

8. Discussion

Over the past few decades, the dual projects of European integration and of internationalizing consumer markets have followed complex cosmopolitan agendas. Global culture is assumed to be a mechanism for articulating and developing cosmopolitan, as oppositional to national, mindsets. This is especially pertinent for modes of everyday consumption – cosmopolitanism entails literal and symbolic engagement with cultural differences at the level of the mundane, where consumption is essentially framed as a civic act (which indubitably comes with its own ideological tensions) (Beck, 2006; García Canclini, 2001). This article adds a comparative perspective to the study of cosmopolitan tastes as expanding beyond the social world of urban elites. We focused on prepared meal products in large supermarket chains in France and the UK to examine forms of banal cosmopolitan in mainstream gastronomic practices. Our results are mixed and suggest that gastronomic cosmopolitanism is both filtered through market mechanisms and irreducible to ‘global cultural diffusion’ as a conceptual construct. While the unevenness in culinary origins that we find denotes historically embedded, and often disenfranchising relationships between nations, we also suggest that real culinary interactions potentially have the capacity to facilitate other forms of interethic belonging and trust.

On the positive side, we find significant percentages of foreign cultural influences in both French and UK supermarkets. These foreign influences are not limited to neighboring European countries and, in many cases, are more likely to be non-European. Many of these products are presented straightforwardly and without exoticizing language, which suggests customers are familiar with the dishes and have achieved a certain level of gastronomic cosmopolitanism. This lack of exoticization is especially notable for North African influences in France and Indian influences in the UK, two of the most prominent – and at times controversial – immigrant groups.

Yet, there is also strong evidence of parochialism and unevenness parsed from the gastronomic patterns that we identify. Although North African and Indian influences are well-represented, there are very few prepared-meal products with cultural influences from the many other immigrant groups in both countries. In addition, foreign influences in both French and UK
supermarkets are overwhelmingly dominated by the same four sources: Italy, the US, East Asia and each country’s main non-European immigrant community. This limited range is evidence of consumer markets’ political economic underpinnings and commodifying logics. Moreover, it suggests that even as cosmopolitan ideals becomes more developed and robust, they are very likely to be distributed unevenly and in ways that reproduce categorically-derived inequalities, reifying stereotypical tropes of distance between groups, especially those struggling with integration into host communities.

As we posited earlier, the UK is one of the most likely West European countries to develop robust gastronomic cosmopolitanism. As such, the limits on cosmopolitanism that we observe in the UK cases are likely to be even more pronounced elsewhere. We expected more limitations on gastronomic cosmopolitanism in France, and indeed we observe fewer products with foreign cultural influences than in the UK. However, the evidence of North African-influenced products being presented as commonplace and ordinary in France are suggestive of the possibilities for a more cosmopolitan and inclusive future.

As Western Europe becomes increasingly pluralistic and flirts with emergent cosmopolitan ideals, food will likely be an important vehicle and metric of those cultural exchanges (Cappeliez & Johnston, 2013). Such patterns relate to ongoing trends in social boundary maintenance – how people re-define cultural membership and worth – and are particularly pressing in our current neoliberal era, where social identity processes derive many of their resources and status distinctions from consumer-oriented marketplaces (Parker, 2013). Here, we do not claim to analyze the totality of gastronomic cosmopolitanism in either country. Rather, we use supermarket prepared meal food products as an indicator of cultural influence on mainstream retail and consumer practices, as opposed to various specialized niche cultures where non-European influences may be more prevalent. Charting the interactions, and especially the contestation, between mainstream and niche gastronomic subcultures is yet another direction for future research on how foreign culinary cultures are diffusing within and among contemporary European nations.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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