

## Hybridization in the Eating Habits of International Students in Türkiye

Mehmet Sali<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>(PhD candidate), Istanbul University, Istanbul, Türkiye

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to reveal the changes in the eating habits of international students who've interacted with Turkish cuisine. Accordingly, data were collected between June and August 2021. The analysis results of the data obtained from 443 participants in the study revealed changes to have occurred in the eating habits of international students after their interaction with Turkish culinary culture. These changes were found to have been shaped around gastro-anomie and to have manifested as irregularity, anxiety, and uncertainty in eating habits, as well as hybridization through interactions between their own food culture and Turkish culinary culture. Some important points of emphasis in the study are that hybrid eating habits are not limited to Türkiye and that these students had continued their contact with Turkish cuisine upon returning to their home countries; thus, hybridization lasted longer than expected. In addition, the study also obtained findings within its scope regarding international students' perceptions toward Turkish cuisine and which foods appeal to their tastes.

**Keywords:** International Students, Turkish Cuisine, Hybridity, Hybridization, Eating Habits, Food Culture

The world had 800,000 international students in 1975, a number that has reached 6.4 million today (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2015, p. 360, 2021, p. 216; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). Türkiye has more than 300,000 international students (Council of Higher Education [YOK], n.d.) who experience both their own culture and the dominant culture side by side in the cities where they stay. Revealing how international students, whose numbers are expected to increase in Türkiye and the world in the coming years, view their own culture and Turkish culture, as well as the intercultural interaction between them is important for both international students and Turkish culture. This study focuses on the changes that occur in the eating habits of international students who are exposed to Turkish cuisine as a cultural element, with the questions "Does Turkish cuisine affect international students' eating habits?" and "If so, what kind of changes have occurred?" constituting the main axis of the study.

### Hybridity as a Possibility

Cultural globalization tends to produce differentiation, assimilation, and hybridity (Smith, 2008, p. 3), and each of these three outcomes are ways in which marginal cultures seek to establish themselves within a dominant culture. In differentiation, marginal cultures continue to exist within the dominant culture with their own cultural values. In assimilation, the dominant culture transforms marginal cultures by melting them into itself, while hybridity is the conceptualization of a new process that includes the characteristics of both cultures and forms through the encounters and interactions of the different cultures. The concept of hybridity is the most prominent concept in postcolonial theorist Bhabha's theory,<sup>1</sup> who uses hybridity to offer a framework that allows different cultures to live together and interact.

In intercultural encounters where different cultures<sup>2</sup> interact with each other, their original forms should be noted to disappear, with a new hybrid structure emerging. In this regard, apart from Bhabha's emphasis on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, to look at hybridity not only from the perspective of colonialism but from a broader perspective should be noted as perhaps being appropriate. Such a perspective obviously arises from the interaction of two or more cultures, whether or not they are opposed to each other. Although hybridity may at first glance seem like cultures losing their own identities (Gürlüyer, 2019,

<sup>1</sup> The concepts Bhabha proposes as a form of resistance of the colonized against the colonizers are hybridity, imitation, difference, and ambiguity (Huddart, 2006, p. 1).

<sup>2</sup> In Bhabha's theory, the interaction between the colonizer and the colonized is at the forefront, and these are usually meant to be from different cultures.

**Corresponding Author:** Mehmet Sali E-mail: mhmts1@hotmail.com

Submitted: 10.12.2022 • Revision Requested: 27.02.2023 • Last Revision Received: 19.05.2023 • Accepted: 18.06.2023



This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

p. 46), it is actually an opportunity. This opportunity can emerge as a congestion and in-betweenness in the interactions of two or more cultures, one that will lay the groundwork for a new hybrid positioning that is more productive and that transcends the previous cultures (Papastergiadis & Trimboli, 2017, pp. 1–2).

In this case, the reflexive relationship between colonizer and colonized, or from a broader perspective between local and global which Bhabha takes as a basis, produces hybridity. As Papastergiadis and Trimboli (2017, p. 2) stated, “Hybridity creates a friction, but it is a productive, two-way friction.” In such a formation, identities do not undergo assimilation or change because no dominant culture can be mentioned. Instead, elements of the different cultures interact to create a new hybrid culture. This is because the formation of a hybrid identity is made possible through the intertwining of the local and the universal. The local and the global interact to create a new identity that is different in every context, with the local constructing the global and the global constructing the local. The result is a hybrid structure that allows the local to be sustained in a global context by selectively using the global while maintaining the essential elements of the local. Indeed, the global and the local are two contradictory processes that work together. As a global culture, economic and social structure try to spread to other cultures, with local cultures and communities striving to maintain their own cultural, economic, and social existence (Smith, 2008, p. 5).

Meanwhile, although hybridity includes both local and global elements, it is unique in that those who occupy hybrid spaces have both local knowledge and a global understanding of cosmopolitanism (Smith, 2008, p. 4). Individuals with hybridity simultaneously experience a doubleness and cultural intermixture (Gilroy, 1993, p. 4) that has become advantageous today. Hybrid units contain both the local and the universal and have a blessed difference. As Hoogvelt (2001, p. 158) highlighted, hybridity is “celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures, and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference.” Thus, the individual who embraces a hybrid space occupies space within both cultures by straddling between two cultural groups, and this space has challenges and privileges. In this regard, the importance of hybridity is not about traces of the two original cultures existing within a hybrid culture but about a “third space” emerging from the other two that transcends them, becomes different from them, and enables their positions to emerge (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). Bhabha’s concept of the third space concerns the space where hybrid identities and hybridization are formed, spaces that allow for borders to be crossed and for social change, dialogue, and creativity (Brunsmas & Delgado, 2008, p. 339). “Hall’s representation of hybrid identities as always incomplete does not imply that they aspire to a sense of wholeness and that they invariably fall short of becoming a finished product, but rather that their energy for being is directed by the flows of an ongoing process” (Papastergiadis, 1999, p. 190). In the third space, hybridity becomes cultural difference itself (Young, 2005, p. 22), one that takes the form of challenging the dominant discourse, resisting the colonizer, and identifying within the global.

The interaction of different cultures and the location of culture that results from this interaction is important to Bhabha. During the interaction of cultures, a new location of the colonized becomes possible with the advantage and productivity that will occur, especially on the side of the colonized, because “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211).

### **Different Cultures Next to Us: International Students**

Admittedly, marginality, otherness, foreignness, being different, and hybridity (which Bhabha proposes for overcoming otherness and marginalization) within the dominant culture also apply to international students as actors of international education.<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, international students are others in the countries and cities where they study and are subjected to various forms of discrimination and marginalization (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011, p. 323; Lausch et al., 2017, p. 910; Mitchell et al., 2017, p. 20); they also face the existing distant attitudes toward strangers. Despite all the negative experiences and impressions, one should keep in mind that the other will evolve into a “celebrated and privileged” (Hoogvelt, 2001, p. 158) location by creating a hybrid identity and culture that will then create productive opportunities. Although international students come from many different countries, during their interaction with Turkish culture as the dominant culture, changes may also occur in their own cultural patterns and thus result in hybrid cultural patterns. Therefore, international students are becoming more and more visible as both a hybrid culture as well as a subculture (Keskin, 2020; Li, 2016) that is shaped under the influence of the dominant culture in the countries where they live.

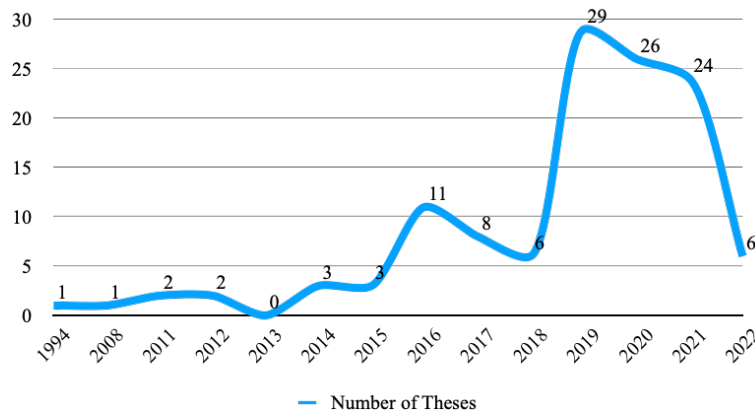
While international students, who are defined as people “who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purposes of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin” (UNESCO, 2009, p. 250), is commonly used as a term for members

<sup>3</sup> While these definitions guide the understanding of who international student are, they are embodied as the other in the societies in which they live. The fact that the location of the other is constructed in comparison to the self is either explicit or implicit. Put more precisely, the other is the stranger. Strangers, whom Bauman defines as the social other (as cited in Marotta, 2002, p. 42) are “those who obscure and overshadow the boundary lines that should be clearly visible” (Oğuz, 2013, p. 42). Such ambiguity of borders is undesirable, and as a synthesis of attachment to a place and distance from it (Simmel, 2009, p. 149), foreignness is positioned somewhere in between. Bauman describes this in-betweenness as “there are friends and enemies. And there are strangers.” (2003, p. 74). As a result, there is still ambiguity as to who international students are, and their position remains undecided. At this point, both Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and the third spaces where hybridity is embodied appear as possibilities.

of this privileged subculture, other terms such as foreign student, foreign national student, overseas student, and guest student are also preferred by various countries. Türkiye uses foreign student/foreign national student in its legal legislation. International students have also been defined as “long-term tourists” and tend to study abroad for reasons such as “to access high-quality education, acquire skills that may not be taught at home and get closer to labour markets that offer higher returns on education” (OECD, 2021, p. 213). In previous years, international students had mainly chosen according to the perceived value of education and universities (Abbott & Silles, 2016, p. 622) and mostly preferred Western countries. However, international students have started to turn to new educational destinations for reasons such as “the characteristics of educational centers in the West have changed over the years due to the effects of globalization, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Asia ceased to be a source region” (OECD, 2020, as cited in Yalçinkaya & Beşirli, 2022, p. 364), with the number of international students in non-Western regions having increased rapidly, especially in the last 20 years.

As of 2020, close to 6.4 million international students were found in the world (UNESCO, n.d.), with more than 300,000 international students in Türkiye in 2022 (YOK n.d.). According to UNESCO data for 2019, Türkiye ranked 11<sup>th</sup> with the highest number of international students, a number that had been around 15,000 in the 2000s (UNESCO, n.d.). These increases in numbers show that Türkiye is an important educational destination for countries in its sphere of influence<sup>4</sup> and will continue to attract international students in the coming years. For example, the *US News* website ranked Türkiye first in its The Best Countries to Study Abroad 2021 list.<sup>5</sup> An international survey of 6,500 people under the age of 35 was conducted based on the following criteria: “culturally accessible, fun, has many cultural attractions, would consider attending university there, and a country that provides top quality education” (US News, 2021).

Increasing numbers of students and research indicate that Türkiye’s international student numbers will continue to rise in the coming years. In addition, an increase in research on international students should also be noted to have occurred. As of 2019, an increase had occurred in both the articles and graduate theses<sup>6</sup> on international students as a subculture that attracts attention within Turkish society. The subjects of the studies are concentrated on topics such as social adaptation, foreign language education, problems international students face in the countries they live in, intercultural communication, reasons for choosing Türkiye, and public diplomacy. Regarding the nutrition of international students, many studies that have examined the problems these students experience in Türkiye have concluded that they experience nutritional problems but get used to Turkish food in the process (Çetin et al., 2012, p. 478; Eynullayeva et al., 2021, p. 165; Gebru & Yüksel Kaptanoğlu, 2020; Yardımcioglu et al., 2017, p. 246). Although few studies are found in which Turkish cuisine/meals are a direct focus of research, Özgen and Yaman’s study (2014, p. 1094) on international students’ perceptions on Turkish cuisine examined the sub-dimensions of international students’ openness to new tastes and curiosity about new tastes. Başpınar and Sali’s (2021) study also examined international students’ fear of new foods, and Kaya’s (2023) study focused on international students’ experience of Turkish food within the scope of Turkish Cuisine Week.

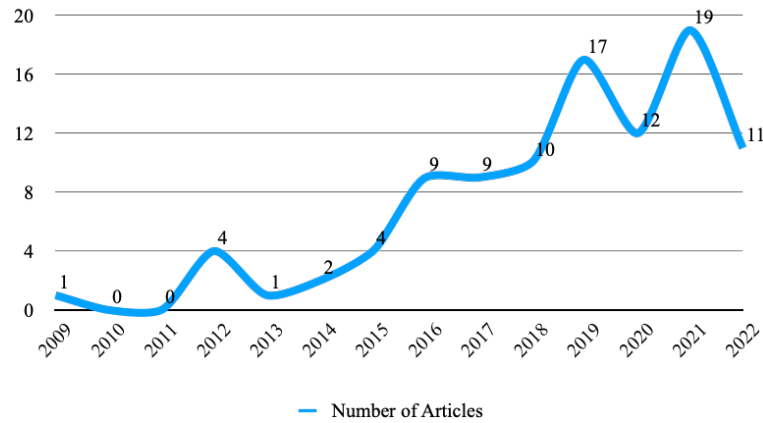


**Figure 1.** Number of articles on international students in Türkiye (Source: The data was collected from tez.yok.gov.tr by searching *uluslararası öğrenci* [international student] and *yabancı öğrenci* [foreign student]) (YOK n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> The countries with the highest number of students coming to Türkiye in the 2021/2022 academic year are listed as follows: Syria (20.4%), Azerbaijan (11.1%), Iraq (6.5%), Turkmenistan (6.0%), Iran (5.7%), Somalia (4.3%), Afghanistan (3.5%), Egypt (3.0%), Yemen (3.0%), Jordan (2.5%), Palestine (1.9%), Kazakhstan (1.9%), Germany (1.9%), Bulgaria (1.8%), and Pakistan (1.5%). These countries constitute 75% of the total number of international students in Türkiye, and their homelands are concentrated in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa (YOK n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> In the 2022 ranking, Türkiye ranked 14th. (*The Best Countries to Study Abroad 2022*, n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the progress of the research over the years.



**Figure 2.** Number of theses on international students in Türkiye (Source: The data were collected from [dergipark.gov.tr](http://dergipark.gov.tr) by searching *uluslararası öğrenci* [international student] and *yabancı öğrenci* [foreign student]) (Dergipark, n.d.).

### Turkish Cuisine at the Crossroads of Cultures

Turkish cuisine is regarded as one of the three richest cuisines in the world alongside French and Chinese cuisines (Baysal, 2020, p. 123; Girgin et al., 2017, p. 98; Tez, 2012; Wolf, 2010) and according to many food authorities has influenced the eating habits of many surrounding cultures, as well as contributed to itself by taking on the eating and drinking practices of many cultures. What is meant by Turkish cuisine, which has been filtered through Central Asia, the Seljuks, and the Ottomans, is the food and beverages necessary for the nutrition of the people living in Türkiye; the preparation, cooking, and preservation of these foods and beverages; the tools and techniques necessary for these processes and eating habits; all the practices that have been developed around the kitchen; and all related beliefs (Sürücüoğlu & Özçelik, 2008, p. 1291). Although the definition is based on Türkiye, traces of dishes belonging to Turkish cuisine can actually be traced over a wide geography, from Central Asia and the Mediterranean basin to Europe, the Balkans, and even the interior of Africa.

In this context, Turkish cuisine has a richness and history that reflects the history of Turkish society (Turkish Cuisine, n.d.). Being located at a crossroads between cultures has also increased the influence of Turkish cuisine on other cuisines, with Turkish cuisine having deeply influenced Western food cultures. For example, foods such as *pastırma*, *salep*, croissant, and *yufka* have become important in the national cuisines of some European countries. Similarly, the foreign equivalents of foods such as turkey (*hindi* in Turkish) and corn (*Turkish wheat – ble de Turquie – Türkishes Mais – granturco*) are evidence of how much Turkish food culture has influenced Western cuisine. On the other hand, the influence of Turkish cuisine, especially on the West, has reversed since the 18th century (Işın, n.d.), with Turkish cuisine becoming one that imitated Western-style foods and eating habits in some aspects. Since the 1840s, the Western influence on Turkish cuisine has become noticeable in the form of the transition from the floor spreads to the serving food on a table, the use of cutlery, and the introduction of French dishes to the table in particular. However, the impact of the global food industry on local cuisines has also had an impact on Turkish cuisine. Despite the differentiated tastes of local cuisines, the food industry has transformed many local cuisines due to reasons such as packaged foods; the similarity of food at airports, hotels, and chain stores; and the spread of fast food culture (Goody, 2013, p. 244), with Turkish cuisine having also been affected by this process. Many Turkish dishes are seen to have been affected by the fast-food culture offered to consumers in frozen, packaged, or canned form or by bringing meals to the table quickly in restaurants. Despite this negative outlook, Turkish cuisine is still one of the best cuisines in the world thanks to its deep roots and richness. The fact that traces of the same flavor can be found in the Aegean, the Balkans, and Central Asia<sup>7</sup> shows the prevalence and strength of Turkish cuisine. The fact that the same dish is prepared in different regions with different spices and seasonings, as well as in different ways and with different presentations with each region interpreting the dish in accordance with its own culture and lifestyle leads one to the conclusion that Turkish cuisine is rich.

### Method

This study conducts field research to examine the interaction of international students with Turkish cuisine/meals and the changes in their eating habits. Data were collected from 443 international students studying at Istanbul University through a questionnaire survey. The first part of the questionnaire includes demographic information, and the second part includes questions about nutrition

<sup>7</sup> For example, dolma are consumed and prepared over a very wide region, and many countries are in a race to claim this flavor as their own.

and Turkish cuisine. The research was conducted between June 15-August 15, 2021 using Google Forms. The research received permission from the Istanbul University ethics committee (Decision No. 2021/109). The study received no financial support from any institution.

Istanbul is the city in Türkiye with the highest number of international students, and Istanbul University is one of the universities with the highest number of international students; thus, this university is a location where international students will experience more interactions with both Turkish culture and other cultures. As the main claim of this study, the hybridization that will occur in the eating habits of international students with the influence of Turkish food can be predicted to be more visible in Istanbul. Therefore, Istanbul University was determined as the population of this study.

### Findings

Table 1 provides details regarding the demographic information of 443 international students studying at various levels and departments of Istanbul University.

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of International Students

Variables	Variable Levels	f	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	237	55.9
	Male	187	44.1
Age Group	17 and under	5	1.2
	18-20	68	16.0
	21-23	162	38.0
	24-26	77	18.1
	27-29	49	11.5
	30 and older	65	15.3
Marital Status	Single	366	86.5
	Married	57	13.5
Monthly Income (Turkish Liras)	500 and under	74	18.3
	501-1,000	54	13.3
	1,001-1,500	48	11.9
	1,501-2,000	61	15.1
	2,001-2,500	53	13.1
	2,501 or more	115	28.4
Place of Residence	With family	100	24.6
	State dormitory	12	3.0
	Rented	46	11.3
	Student house	139	34.2
	Private/Foundation dormitory	81	20.0
	Other	28	6.9
Education Level	Associate degree	10	2.4
	Undergraduate	169	39.8
	Master's degree	184	43.3
	PhD	62	14.6
Duration of Residence in Türkiye	Less than 6 months	127	29.8
	6-12 months	24	5.6
	1-2 years	64	15.0
	3-4 years	88	20.7
	5-6 years	59	13.8
	7 years and more	64	15.0

As seen in Table 1, 237 (55.9%) people in the sample group are female and 187 (44.1%) are male. When considering age groups, the largest group consists of students between the ages of 21-23 at 162 people (38.0%).

The majority (n = 366) of the participants (86.5%) are single, and 115 (28.4%) have a monthly income of 2,501 TL or higher.<sup>8</sup> Of the international students, 139 (34.2%) reside in student houses, 100 (24.6%) live with family, 184 (43.3%) are enrolled in graduate programs, and 127 (29.8%) have resided in Türkiye for less than six months.

Table 2 provides the distribution of the international students who participated in the study according to their countries of origin, while Table 3 presents the grouped distributions of countries.

Table 2 shows the countries of origin for the students in the sample group.<sup>9</sup> Azerbaijan with 168 students (37.9%), Iran with

<sup>8</sup> This income scale is valid for the period between June 15 – August 15, 2021 and is normally distributed.

<sup>9</sup> International students from 51 different countries participated in the study.

**Table 2.** *International Students' Countries of Origin*

Country	<i>f</i>	Percentage (%)
Azerbaijan	168	37.9
Iran	29	6.5
Indonesia	25	5.6
Turkmenistan	22	5.0
Syria	19	4.3
Afghanistan	12	2.7
Kazakhstan	11	2.5
Egypt	9	2.0
Mongolia	9	2.0
Algeria	8	1.8
Republic of China	8	1.8
Palestine	7	1.6
North Macedonia	7	1.6
Russia	7	1.6
No Answer	24	5.4
Other	78	17.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>100.0</b>

29 students (6.5%), and Indonesia with 25 students (5.6%) are the countries with the highest presence. The first of the findings related to the nutrition and Turkish cuisine/meals of the participating international students involves the scores the international students gave to Turkish cuisine/meals.

**Table 3.** *How International Students Rate Turkish Cuisine*

Points for Turkish Cuisine	<i>f</i>	Percentage (%)	Valid (%)	Stacked (%)
1	2	0.5	0.5	0.5
2	2	0.5	0.5	0.9
3	1	0.2	0.2	1.2
4	4	0.9	0.9	2.1
5	26	5.9	6.0	8.1
6	17	3.8	3.9	12.0
7	78	17.6	18.0	30.0
8	119	26.9	27.4	57.4
9	81	18.3	18.7	76.0
10	104	23.5	24.0	100.0
Total	434	98.0	100.0	
No Answer	9	2.0		
Overall Total	443	100.0		

**Table 4.** *International Students' Lowest, Highest and Average Ratings for Turkish Cuisine*

Points for Turkish Cuisine	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	Mean	<i>SD</i>
	434	1	10	8.12	1.615

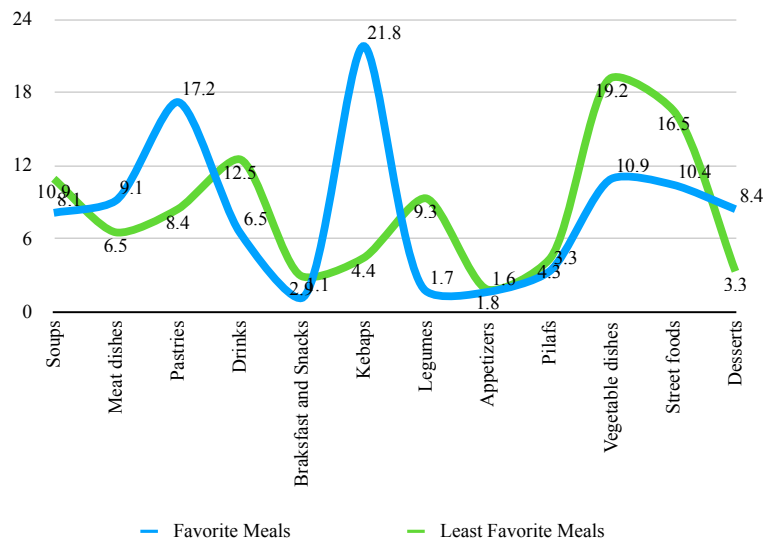
Tables 3 and 4 show the analyses regarding international students' ratings of Turkish cuisine out of scale from 1 to 10. According to the tables, 70% of the international students gave Turkish cuisine a score of 7 or higher. The question in which 119 participants (26.9%) gave a score of 8, the group's mean was 8.12. Table 5 presents the analysis of international students' favorite and least favorite Turkish meals.<sup>10</sup>

According to Table 5, the favorite Turkish meal among international students is kebabs at 21.8%. Kebabs are followed by pastries at 17.2%, vegetable dishes at 10.9%, and street food at 10.4%. As for the least favorite Turkish dishes of international students, vegetable dishes came first at 19.2%, followed by street food at 16.5%, drinks at 12.5%, and soups at 10.9%. Figure 3 shows a summary of the percentages of the favorite and least favorite Turkish meals.

<sup>10</sup> Participants were asked to write down their 3 favorite and 3 least favorite Turkish dishes. Due to blank or incomplete answers, 1,254 answers were obtained for the question of favorite meals and 787 for least favorite meals. In order to make a sounder analysis, the dishes were grouped under categories, as 137 different food names occurred for the favorite dishes and 156 different food names for the least favorite dishes.

**Table 5.** International Students' Favorite and Least Favorite Turkish Meals

Meal Groups	Favorite Meals		Least Favorite Meals	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Kebabs	273	21.8	35	4.4
Pastries	216	17.2	66	8.4
Vegetable dishes	137	10.9	151	19.2
Street foods	130	10.4	130	16.5
Meat dishes	114	9.1	51	6.5
Desserts	105	8.4	26	3.3
Soups	101	8.1	86	10.9
Drinks	81	6.5	98	12.5
Pilafs	42	3.3	34	4.3
Legumes	21	1.7	73	9.3
Appetizers	20	2.6	14	1.8
Breakfast and Snacks	14	1.1	23	2.9
Total	1,254	100.0	787	100.0



**Figure 3.** International students' favorite and least favorite Turkish meals.

Figure 3 indicates that the sharpest decrease in the transition from favorite to least favorite meals was observed with regard to kebabs and pastries, while the sharpest increase was observed for legumes and vegetable dishes. Table 6 presents the analyses of international students' preference for Turkish food at home and outside.

**Table 6.** International Students' Preference for Turkish Cuisine at Home and Outside

Frequency Levels	Turkish Cuisine Preference at Home		Turkish Cuisine Preference Outside	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Never	39	8.8	2	0.5
Almost never	41	9.3	6	1.4
Once every few months	49	11.1	25	5.7
Several times in a month	61	13.8	50	11.3
Once in a week	44	10.0	55	12.4
Several times in a week	136	30.8	166	37.6
Every day	72	16.3	138	31.2
Total	442	100.0	442	100.0

According to the table, more than half of the international students (57.1%) prepared a Turkish meal at home at least once a week. The majority of the participants (81.2%) prefer Turkish cuisine at least once a week. The “never” option was almost never chosen outside (0.5%) and infrequently (8.8%) at home. Table 7 presents analyses on whether international students would desire a Turkish meal when they return to their home countries.

According to Table 7, the majority of participants (77.1%) stated that they would desire Turkish food when they return to their

**Table 7.** *International Students' Desire for Turkish Cuisine in Their Home Countries*

<b>Desire for Turkish Cuisine in Home Country</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	337	77.1
No	32	7.3
I don't know / I'm unsure	68	15.6
Total	437	100.0

home country. Tables 8 and 9 present the analyses of the question regarding the international students' evaluation of the effect of Turkish cuisine on their interpersonal interactions.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 8.** *International Students' Opinions on the Effect of Turkish Meals on Interpersonal Interactions*

<b>Response</b>	<b>I would be happy to tell everyone about my experiences with Turkish cuisine.</b>		<b>Turkish cuisine brings friends and relatives together and enriches relationships.</b>		<b>I would like to give advice about Turkish cuisine to those who want to travel to Türkiye.</b>		<b>Having a Turkish meal with friends and/or family allows me to have a pleasant time.</b>	
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly agree	103	25.3	162	30.5	184	45.1	144	35.1
Agree	186	45.7	79	39.9	153	37.5	176	42.9
I don't know/ I'm not sure	73	17.9	25	19.5	41	10.0	45	11.0
Disagree	35	8.6	16	6.2	17	4.2	30	7.3
Strongly disagree	10	2.5	162	3.9	13	3.2	15	3.7
Total	407	100.0	406	100.0	408	100.0	410	100.0

**Table 9.** *International Students' Means Regarding the Effect of Turkish Meals on Interpersonal Interactions*

	<b>I would be happy to tell everyone about my experiences with Turkish cuisine.</b>	<b>Turkish cuisine brings friends and relatives together and enriches relationships.</b>	<b>I would like to give advice about Turkish cuisine to those who want to travel to Türkiye.</b>	<b>Having a Turkish meal with friends and/or family allows me to have a pleasant time.</b>
<b>Mean</b>	3.83	3.87	4.17	3.98

According to Table 8, 25.3% of international students strongly agree and 45.7% agree with the statement "I would be happy to tell everyone about my experiences with Turkish cuisine." 30.5% strongly agree and 39.9% agree with the statement "Turkish cuisine brings friends and relatives together and enriches relationships." 45.1% strongly agree and 37.5% agree with the statement "I would like to give advice about Turkish cuisine to those who want to travel to Türkiye." 35.1% strongly agree and 42.9% agree with the statement "Having a Turkish meal with friends and/or family allows me to have a pleasant time." Accordingly, more than 70% of international students agree or strongly agree with each statement. Table 9 provides the mean scores for the statements, which are 3.83, 3.87, 4.17, and 3.98, respectively. According to this, international students' scores for each variable are at an above-average level close to the top.

## Discussion

Firstly, international students should be noted to be strangers in the cities where they live. While being a stranger does not have a very negative meaning with a neutral approach, from the point of view of the citizens of that city and country (a subjective view), the stranger exists on a plane where one should be cautious. These foreigners do not match the definitions of a friend or enemy (Bauman, 2003, p. 74) and are constantly interacting both with the citizens of the state and among themselves in their social lives. Moreover, these interactions continue throughout their education, with intersections occurring in more areas and spaces due to the continuous increase in their numbers. As such, Türkiye is evolving into a multicultural and intercultural country where international students (i.e., strangers/foreigners) have intercultural interactions among themselves and with locals. This research saw the participation of 443 international students from 51 different countries (Table 2), which shows that both Türkiye and Istanbul, where the research was conducted, are grounds for intercultural encounters and that these spaces are intercultural spaces.

<sup>11</sup> This question was asked on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.



Meanwhile, although such interculturality carries rich connotations, international students are still strangers and are moreover labeled as the other (Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011, p. 323; Lausch et al., 2017, p. 910; Mitchell et al., 2017, p. 20). Therefore, international students are situated in society as a marginal subculture due to their distinctiveness within the dominant culture. Although such a position is seen as a deficiency, a new possibility emerges when considered within the framework of Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Having international students be stuck in between their own culture and the dominant culture will create a new and privileged hybrid culture. Hence, the position of international students in Türkiye in relation to Turkish culture will cause Türkiye to reconstruct itself as a third space, and a new and hybrid culture that transcends the previous two cultures will be created in this third space (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). In conclusion, to say that Türkiye's possibility of reaching this third space and that the construction of hybrid cultures will occur through international students (and other *others*) would not be wrong.

In terms of its impact on international students' eating habits, the average score of 8.12 for Turkish food (Tables 3 and 4) indicates that Turkish cuisine is an important part of their eating and drinking practices. In addition, Table 5 and Figure 3 show Turkish dishes to exist that qualify as international students' favorite and least favorite. As one can easily guess, kebabs are the most popular food category in this regard, with pastries, vegetable dishes, street food, meat dishes, and desserts also being among the dishes that international students like. In terms of least favorite Turkish flavors, vegetable dishes, street food, and beverages are the top three least favorite.<sup>12</sup> Although categorized for ease of analysis, participants named a total of 137 different favorite and 156 different least favorite meals. For example, dishes that are the hallmarks of Turkish cuisine such as *Adana kebab*, *yaprak sarma* (stuffed grape leaves), *baklava*, and *lahmacun* were mentioned, as well as peripheral dishes such as *kelle paça*, *büryan*, and *şırdan*. This diversity alone even shows the intensity of international students' interactions with Turkish food.

Based on the results of the research, international students' food cultures and eating habits can be said to have transformed and a hybridization to have occurred. A similar study conducted in Canada (Liu, 2019) examined the changes in the eating habits of Chinese international students and revealed hybridization to have occurred. In the current study, more than half of the international students preferred Turkish food at home, and the majority of them preferred Turkish food outside at least once a week (Table 6); this indicates changes to have occurred in their traditional eating habits. Hybridization can be appropriately pointed out as being more likely regarding meals prepared at home in particular, because not only recipes but also existing traditional and cultural habits have an impact on how a meal is prepared. When eating out, alternatives should be emphasized to also decrease, as Turkish food is more dominant and consuming what is put on the plate is almost obligatory; however, food preparation at home is heavily influenced by a person's cultural background. Therefore, considering that more than half of the international students (57.1%) prepared a Turkish meal at home at least once a week without any obligation can be said to show a hybridization to have occurred regarding food cultures. Although inferences cannot be made about the characteristics of this new food culture (e.g., form, recipe, ingredients, method, consumption, utensils) within the scope of this research, a hybrid culture should be said to have emerged through the interactions of the students' food culture with Turkish food culture. As "menus increasingly become monuments of cultural hybridity," (Warde et al., 2000, p. 303) the homes of international students<sup>13</sup> in particular emerge as "micro third spaces" where hybrid food cultures are formed.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the differences in the traditional eating habits of international students should be noted to indicate that they are faced with a *gastro-anomie*. The concept of gastro-anomie was introduced by Fischler (1979) while establishing a relationship between gastronomy and the concept of anomie. The concept of anomie, which is expressed as the incompatibility or difference between social rules and individual choices, becomes visible as gastro-anomie when it is extended to the eating habits of individuals and refers to the reflections and subversion of traditional rules, norms, and meanings related to human nutrition at the individual scale. The gastro-anomie caused by the pressure of actors and institutions such as the food industry, advertisements, and the state is reflected in individuals' dietary behaviors as uncertainty, anxiety, crisis, or discomfort. As a result, traditional eating habits under such pressure dissolve into normlessness or rule-lessness (Beardsworth & Keil, 2011, p. 115; Fischler, 1979, 1980, p. 948; Yetişkin, 2009, p. 254). In this framework, the intensity of international students' preference for Turkish cuisine more or less indicates the presence of gastro-anomie in their eating habits. The pressures that cause gastro-anomie in individuals are also valid for international students; however, the difficulty of accessing food from their own cuisines or the ingredients for preparing food, as well as the dominance of Turkish cuisine in Türkiye, are all additional factors that cause gastro-anomie for international students. In particular, the preference for Turkish food at least once a week, whether outside (81.2%) or at home (57.1%), is an indication of gastro-anomie and thus uncertainty and normlessness regarding the eating habits of international students.

The findings in Tables 8 and 9 also show that Turkish cuisine plays an important role in international students' interpersonal interactions with family, relatives, friends, and associates, both in Türkiye and in their home countries. International students recommend Turkish food as part of their socialization, think that it strengthens relationships, recommend Turkish food to those who

<sup>12</sup> Graph 3 shows a comparison of the percentages of favorite and least favorite meals. Accordingly, the sharpest decrease in the transition from favorite to least favorite meals was observed in kebabs and pastries, while the sharpest increase was observed in legumes and vegetable dishes.

<sup>13</sup> As shown in Table 1, at least 70% of them stay in houses

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that Türkiye's metropolitan cities in particular, and Istanbul in particular, are the third spaces where hybridity is produced.

are planning to travel to Türkiye, and think that they will have a pleasant time as a result of having Turkish dishes. These statements show how intertwined Turkish cuisine is with food and beverage patterns, which are important for socialization. Consequently, Turkish cuisine should be stated to have caused changes in the eating habits of international students, and re-emphasizing that these changes are gastro-anomie would also be appropriate.

Meanwhile, to just claim that hybridization and gastro-anomie processes only occur in Türkiye would be insufficient. As seen in Table 7, the fact that most of the international students (77.1%) stated that they would desire Turkish food if they could access it when they return to their home countries indicates that hybridization and irregularities in eating and drinking practices will continue when they return to their home countries. To argue that more than 75% of the participants will continue to interact with Turkish food when they return to their home countries, in particular preparing Turkish food at home, would not be wrong. An obligation for international students to eat Turkish food during their stay in Türkiye may be thought to occur due to its dominance; however, the fact that international students stated that they would desire Turkish food when they return to their home countries shows that the hybridization that occurs is not due to obligation but is rather based on preference. In this case, the changes in the eating habits of international students should be stated as having a deeper characteristic. The fact that they desire Turkish food even after the obligation to eat Turkish food is lifted indicates the presence of a longer-term hybridization in the eating habits of international students, one that last not just during their education but also afterward. Moreover, the findings in Table 8 also indicate that international students will continue to interact with Turkish food in their home countries. All these results are remarkable in that they emphasize that hybridization will continue after returning home.

## Conclusion

International students are perceived as strangers and as the other by the host society and are also actively involved in social life in the cities where they study. Being a stranger, other, or different is more than a deficiency, it is a privilege for international students as it paves the way for a wealth of intercultural interactions. In particular, this privilege is realized through the hybrid cultures they create thanks to their being positioned between their own culture and the dominant culture. In Türkiye, international students create privileged hybrid cultures between Turkish culture and their own.

As this study has revealed, irregularities and differences are found in the traditional eating habits of international students when encountering Turkish food culture, and hybrid food cultures are formed from this difference. The hybrid food cultures that are formed are privileged rich food cultures that both contain the characteristics of Turkish food culture as well as of other food cultures, sometimes even exceeding them as opposed to being incomplete, poor, or bad. In addition, hybridization can be easily predicted to occur during intercultural interactions. However, the determination of hybridization through research and the fact that the hybrid diet of international students is not only valid in Türkiye but will continue when they return to their home countries are important points emphasized by the study. Therefore, the inference that hybridization will only occur during the period of interaction between different cultures, or in the case of this study, different food cultures, is thus weakened. This study's findings are unable to determine how long the effect of hybridization will continue or whether it will even be maintained past the end of intercultural interactions; however, focusing on this issue in future studies may be useful.

This study has examined the changes in the eating habits of international students as a result of their interactions with Turkish cuisine. In summary, the study concludes that hybridization has occurred and that, contrary to expectations, the hybridization lasts beyond the interactions. The study's findings are important in terms of showing the changes in the eating habits of the increasing number of international students.

---

**Acknowledgement:** This study was derived from the doctoral dissertation titled “*Kültürlerarası İletişim ve Gastrodiplomasi: İstanbul'daki Uluslararası Öğrencilerin Türk Mutfağı Algısı.*” The completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without the support and nurturing of Abdullah Özkan, Adem Baspınar, Mustafa Otrar, and Nurullah Karaca.

**Peer Review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Grant Support:** The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

---

## REFERENCES / KAYNAKLAR

Abbott, A., & Silles, M. (2016). Determinants of international student migration. *The World Economy*, 39(5), 621–635. <https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.12319>

- Başpınar, A., & Sali, M. (2021). Uluslararası öğrencilerin “Gıda Neofobisi” ve yeme alışkanlıkları: Kırklareli örneği. In F. Yıldız (Ed.), *Kırklareli kent çalışmaları: Ekonomi, toplum, kültür* (pp. 91–112). Gazi Kitabevi.
- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Modernlik ve müphemlik*. Ayrıntı Yayınları.
- Baysal, A. (2020). Türk mutfağı, özellikleri, etkileşimleri. In T. Kutluay Merdol (Ed.), *Beslenme antropolojisi 1* (4th ed., pp. 123–150). Hatipoğlu Yayınları.
- Beardsworth, A., & Keil, T. (2011). *Yemek sosyolojisi: Yemek ve toplum çalışmasına bir davet*. Phoenix Yayınevi.
- Brunsma, D. L., & Delgado, D. J. (2008). Occupying third space: Hybridity and identity matrices in the multiracial experience. In K. E. Iyall Smith & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Hybrid identities: Theoretical and empirical examinations* (pp. 333–353). Brill.
- Çetin, T., Karakuş, U., & Aksoy, B. (2012). Yabancı uyruklu öğrencilerin turizm ve Türkiye'nin turizm değerlerine ilişkin algıları. *Uşak Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 5(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.12780/UUSBD132>
- Erichsen, E. A., & Bolliger, D. U. (2011). Towards understanding international graduate student isolation in traditional and online environments. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 59(3), 309–326.
- Eynullayeva, K., Gökalp, M., & Hatunoğlu, B. Y. (2021). Investigation of the Turkish cultural adaptation of International Students Living in Turkey. *The European Educational Researcher*, 4(2), 167–181. <https://doi.org/10.31757/euer.422>
- Fischler, C. (1979). Gastro-nomie et gastro-anomie. *Communications*, 31(1), 189–210.
- Fischler, C. (1980). Food habits, social change and the nature/culture dilemma. *Social Science Information*, 19(6), 937–953.
- Gebru, M. S., & Yüksel Kaptanoğlu, İ. (2020). Adaptation challenges for international students in Turkey. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(9), 262–278. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.89021>
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and double-consciousness*. Harvard University Press.
- Girgin, G. K., Oflaz, M., & Karaman, N. (2017). Türk Cumhuriyetlerinden gelen öğrencilerin türk mutfağı hakkındaki görüşlerinin belirlenmesi. *Manas Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 6(5), 97–111.
- Goody, J. (2013). *Yemek, mutfak, sınıf: Karşılaştırmalı sosyoloji çalışması* (M. G. Güran, Trans.). Pinhan Yayıncılık.
- Gürlüyer, A. (2019). Cherrie Moraga'nın The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea Adlı Oyununun Homi Bhabha'nın postkolonyal melezlik & üçüncü alan teorisi açısından incelenmesi. *Tiyatro Eleştirmenliği ve Dramaturji Bölümü Dergisi*, 29, 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.26650/jtcd.642087>
- Hoogvelt, A. (2001). *Globalization and the postcolonial world: The new political economy of development* (2nd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Huddart, D. (2006). *Homi K. Bhabha*. Routledge.
- şın, P. M. (n.d.). *A mirror of society: Cuisine. Turkish Cuisine*. Retrieved June 7, 2023, from <http://www.turkish-cuisine.org/culinary-culture-202/a-mirror-of-society-cuisine-237.html>
- Kaya, F. (2023). Yabancı öğrencilerin gastrodiploması aracı olarak Türk mutfağı haftasına ilişkin deneyimleri. *GSI Journals Serie A: Advancements in Tourism Recreation and Sports Sciences*, 6(1), 152–167.
- Keskin, U. (2020). Küreselleşmenin ortaya çıkardığı yeni bir alt kültür: uluslararası öğrenciler. *Safran Kültür ve Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3(2), 242–257.
- Lausch, D., Teman, E., & Perry, C. (2017). Scholastics, pabulum, clans, transformation: a journey into otherness. *Journal of International Students*, 7(3), 893–917.
- Li, J. (2016). A cultural hybridization perspective: emerging academic subculture among international students from East Asia in U.S. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(9), 2218–2228.
- Liu, S. (2019). *Festivals, festival foods, and dietary acculturation: a journey of hybridization and identity formation for Chinese international students in Ottawa* [Master of Arts]. Carleton University.
- Marotta, V. (2002). Zygmunt Bauman: Order, strangerhood and freedom. *Thesis Eleven*, 70(1), 36–54.
- Mitchell, C., Del Fabbro, L., & Shaw, J. (2017). The acculturation, language and learning experiences of international nursing students: Implications for nursing education. *Nurse Education Today*, 56, 16–22.
- OECD. (2015). *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*. Author.
- OECD. (2021). *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*. Author.
- Oğuz, H. Ş. (2013). *Kültürlerarası iletişim bağlamında sığınmacılık deneyimi: Gaziantep örneği* [PhD Thesis]. Ankara University.
- Özgen, L., & Yaman, M. (2014). Attitudes of international students towards Turkish foods. *Anthropologist*, 18, 1089–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2014.11891591>
- Papastergiadis, N. (1999). *The turbulence of migration: globalization, deterritorialization and hybridity*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Papastergiadis, N., & Trimboli, D. (2017). Hybridity and hybridization. In B. S. Turner (Ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of social theory* (pp. 1–4). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Rutherford, J. (1990). The third space: interview with Homi Bhabha. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Lawrence & Wishart.
- Simmel, G. (2009). *Bireysellik ve kültür* (T. Birkan, Trans.). Metis Yayınları.
- Smith, K. E. I. (2008). Hybrid identities: theoretical examinations. In K. E. I. Smith & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Hybrid identities: Theoretical and empirical examinations*. Brill.
- Sürücüoğlu, M. S., & Özçelik, A. Ö. (2008). Türk mutfak ve beslenme kültürünün tarihsel gelişimi. *Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Yayınları*, 3(4), 1289–1310.

- Tez, Z. (2012). *Lezzetin tarihi*. Hayy Kitap.
- The Best Countries to Study Abroad 2022*. (n.d.). USC News. Retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/best-countries-to-study-abroad>
- Turkish Cuisine. (n.d.). *Historical development of Turkish cuisine*. *Turkish Cuisine*. Retrieved June 7, 2023, from <http://www.turkish-cuisine.org/historical-development-1/introduction-historical-development-213.html>
- UNESCO. (n.d.). *Inbound Internationally Mobile Students*. UNESCO. Retrieved February 20, 2023, from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3804>
- UNESCO. (2009). *Global Education Digest 2009: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
- US News. (2021). *The Best Countries to Study Abroad 2021*. US News. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/best-countries-to-study-abroad>
- Warde, A., Kalb, D., Land, M. van der, Staring, R., Steenbergen, B., & Wilterdink, N. A. (2000). *Eating globally: Cultural flows and the spread of ethnic restaurants*.
- Wolf, B. (2010, August 1). Among the Greatest Cuisines, Turkish is a Delight. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128907103>
- Yalçınkaya, M., & Beşirli, H. (2022). Türk Cumhuriyetleri arasındaki uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği ve bu hareketliliğin yükseköğretimin uluslararasılaşma sürecindeki rolü. *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, 19(74), 363–382.
- Yardımcıoğlu, F., Beşel, F., & Savaşan, F. (2017). Uluslararası öğrencilerin sosyo-ekonomik problemleri ve çözüm önerileri (Sakarya Üniversitesi Örneği). *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi*, 12(1), 203–254.
- Yetişkin, E. (2009). Uluslararasılaşma ve mutfak. In İ. E. Işık & Y. Şentürk (Eds.), *Öznel, durumlar ve mekanlar—toplum ve mekan: mekanları kurgulamak* (pp. 245–264). Bağlam Yayınları.
- YÖK. (n.d.). *Yükseköğretim bilgi yönetim sistemi*. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr>
- YÖK. (n.d.). *Yükseköğretimde uluslararasılaşma ve Türkiye'deki Üniversitelerin Uluslararası Görünürlülüğü Çalıştayı düzenlendi*. Yükseköğretim Kurulu. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from <https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2022/yuksekogretimde-uluslararasılaşma-ve-türkiye-deki-universitelerin-uluslararası-gorunurlugunu-artirma-calistayi.aspx>
- Young, R. J. C. (2005). *Colonial desire: hybridity in theory, culture and race* (Published in Taylor et Francis e-library). Routledge.

### How cite this article

Sali, M. (2023). Hybridization in the eating habits of international students in Türkiye. *İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyoloji Dergisi*, 43, 132-143. <https://doi.org/10.26650/SJ.2023.43.1.0100>