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Consuming Cultures: The Culinary Poetics of Francophone Women's Literature

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Consuming Cultures: The Culinary Poetics of Francophone Women's Literature

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Dedication

For my boys, Peter and Joe

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Consuming Cultures: The Culinary Poetics of Francophone Women's Literature

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Anthropologists, sociologists and students of culture study food, eating and cuisine because they can provide insight into gender, power and even economic relations that structure a society. The way that people react to, think about and write about this most basic form of consumption can be very revealing. In a society where many different cultural traditions come together, one of the most basic ways that a group can identify and celebrate its own culture is through cooking and eating. In my dissertation, I extend this examination of food to the written word to show that a fictional character's relationship to food can reveal his or her hidden fears and desires, and that an author's description of food and eating can serve to express the values of a particular society.

Although the study of food as a cultural marker is not new, the relationship between food and specifically women has only recently

begun to be explored. This is surprising because, as Rosalind Coward says in her 1985 book *Female Desires: How they are Sold, Bought and Packaged*, "How food is consumed and prepared has crucial implications for women in this society, because it expresses deeply held ideologies of provision and dependency."(109) Specifically, women write about food because of their involvement in the acts of nurturing and the way that it is symbolic of their relationships with the people that they nurture. My dissertation explores the topics of food and eating in the novels written by Francophone women in the late 20th century. In limiting my scope to Francophone novels I have identified a common counter-current of struggle for a separate and valuable cultural identity from the dominant French national identity. I focus on the works of women living and writing in three distinct regions, multicultural Paris, West Africa, and the Caribbean. I examine the novels, *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* by Calixthe Beyala, *Ce Pays Dont Je Meurs* by Fawzia Zouari, *Une Chanson Ecarlate*, by Mariama Bâ, *Cendres et Braises* by Ken Bugul, *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* by Simone Schwarz-Bart's and *Papillon dans la cité* by Gisèle Pineau. My dissertation shows how food and cooking are used as cultural markers, and provide an activity that binds the characters together and separates them from the dominant French culture. In addition to being a cultural indicator in these novels, I assert that food is symbolic of social clout. Within a specific cultural group and even within a certain family, food and the preparation of food endow women with power and prestige.

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Introduction

I spend far less time in the kitchen than my grandmother did. I benefit from modern appliances and high-tech food processing that makes the way that I cook simpler and less time-consuming than it was in her day. Notwithstanding this 'progress' made to help the modern woman, women remain the people primarily responsible for meal planning, food shopping and meal preparation for their families. They are the ones who learn to juggle the myriad tasks required to provide their families and their guests with timely meals to fulfill them. And they are the ones who are the targets of huge marketing and publishing campaigns which all purport to help women to cook in a way that will benefit their families and reflect well upon themselves in society.

Eating is a mundane activity, and because it is biologically necessary for everyone everywhere it is often overlooked as a topic of study. However, anthropologists, sociologists and students of culture now recognize the subjects of food, eating and cuisine as important because they can provide insights into the gender, power and even economic relations that structure a society. The way that people react to, think about and write about this most basic form of consumption can be very revealing. In a society where many different cultural traditions come together, one of the most basic ways that groups can identify and celebrate their own culture is in the way that they cook and eat. However, the relationship between food and specifically women has only recently begun to be explored. As Rosalind Coward says in her 1985 book *Female Desires: How they are Sold, Bought and Packaged*, "How food is consumed and prepared has crucial implications for women in this society, because it expresses deeply held ideologies of provision and dependency. Where eating is no longer a matter of absolute survival, the preparation and contexts of food are laced with social symbolism."[1] Many of the roles that women perform in society center on their involvement with food, therefore foodways can serve as clues about women's experience within a society.

The primary focus of this study is the representation of food in Francophone women's novels, and thus an interdisciplinary approach to fully explore and understand how and what food connotes in the contexts is appropriate. Since these works specifically address what happens when two different cultures come into contact with each other, we see that the meaning assigned to different foods and eating cultures is negotiated on both sides. Accordingly, cultural information regarding the subject of food in both Western and diasporic society is central to my analysis of the meaning of the situations and symbols that appear in the novels.

Food, cooking and eating are subjects that figure ever more prominently in every form of media. Though the importance of the availability of food and its influence on political reality is nothing new, it is now an issue that is played out on a global scale. The reasons for this are myriad. A crop failure in one country affects the profit margins of grocery stores in another. The control of food resources is wide reaching and is dependent on environmental and governmental policy. Cooking practices and eating habits are also ever changing because of technological advances that change where we live and how we live. It is ever more common for people of differing ethnicities to live in proximity to each other. If diverse people must shop at the same stores and markets (at least for some things) then the sellers must respond to client demand with more food choices. All of these factors contribute to the increasing global circulation of food products and the people who consume them. It is a trend seen in the Francophone novels discussed here and will continue to gain influence with continued globalization.

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[1] Rosalind Coward, *Female Desires: How they are Sought, Bought and Packaged* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1985) 109.

In this study, I seek to provide a basis for deciphering the cultural implications of food, cooking, and eating in six novels written by Francophone women during the last thirty years of the twentieth century. It is in these novels that I believe the reader can discern the personal and private struggle experienced by the female characters through the themes of food, cooking and eating. Writers from Africa and the Caribbean, and some who have immigrated to France all write in French about non-French experience. Their use of the dominant culture's language is emblematic of their position between cultures. They introduce ethnographic information and include non-French vocabulary, introducing new terms to the language itself.

In chapter one, historical, anthropological and sociological studies provide a background for understanding the role of food within a society and especially how this relates to women. This subject encompasses the conditions of ideology, identity, subjectivity, religion, memory, professionalism, maternity and romance. Chapter two, examines two novels written by Francophone women living in Paris. *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* by Calixthe Beyala (2000) and is a novel annotated with recipes and Fawzia Zouari's novel, *Ce pays dont je meurs* (1999) and is about a young woman who makes the choice to not eat. The authors and their respective heroines come from two distinct cultural traditions, but in these novels they are both subject to dominant French culture. Chapter three, proposes two novels written by Senegalese women, *Une Chanson Ecarlate*, (1981) by Mariama Bâ and *Cendres et Braises* (1994) by Ken Bugul. These two novels feature characters who travel between Senegal and France but find the gap that separates the two cultures much too difficult to traverse. In effect, the Senegalese novels present failed attempts at cultural integration. Two novels by two women from Guadalupe, *Pluie et Vent sur Telumée Miracle* (1972) by Simone Schwarz-Bart and *Un papillon dans la cité* (1992) by Gisèle Pineau are the subject of chapter four. These two novels show two different approaches to 'Créolité.' Schwartz-Bart was one of the first writers to give a voice to people from the Caribbean in the first ‘créolité’ movement, and Pineau engages in a new process of ‘creolization.’ These novels, document how these writers from diverse countries and backgrounds explore the ideas of cultural difference and conflict and how food, a powerful cultural signifier, can serve as an emblem of personal and ethnic pride.

Chapter One-
Defining the Ingredients: A Recipe for Understanding the Meaning of Food

> People ask me: Why do you write about food, and eating and drinking? Why don't you write about the struggle for power and security, and about love, the way others do?
>
> They ask it accusingly, as if I were somehow gross, unfaithful to the honor of my craft.
>
> The easiest answer is to say that, like most other humans, I am hungry. But there is more than that. It seems to me that our three basic needs, for food and security and love, are so mixed and mingled and entwined that we cannot straightly think of one without the others. So it happens that when I write of hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth and the love of it, and the hunger for it… and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied… and it is all one.
>
> --M.F.K. Fisher[2]

When I was in my senior year of college in Madison, Wisconsin, a friend's parents were visiting from out of town and wanted to take their son and his friends out for dinner, so my friend made reservations at a restaurant called "The Horn of Africa," which specialized in Ethiopian food. My roommate and I hadn't the slightest idea of what to expect at dinner. Despite the fact that we had traveled and lived overseas and therefore prided ourselves on our knowledge of foreign culture, we grew up during the severe famine that gripped Ethiopia, so our only images of that part of the world were colored by TV reports of starving children. All we had ever learned about Ethiopia was that there was no food there, so how could we now have reservations to experience Ethiopian cuisine in the middle of Wisconsin?

---

[2] M..F.K. Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me* (1943. New York: North Point Press, 1988) ix.

At the restaurant that night, I realized that our friend had chosen this restaurant because he used to be a tenant in the basement apartment of the proprietor's house. She was thrilled to have her former tenant's parents in her establishment and went out of her way to make a fuss over us. As we finished our dinner, a savory stew served from a common dish lined with *injera*[3] bread, she came to check on our table again. She leaned over the table and proclaimed that we hadn't eaten the best part of the meal, the *injera* left in the bottom of the dish that had soaked up all of the sauce. With that, she scooped up a piece of the bread, and proceeded to feed it to me, placing the hand-held morsel directly into my mouth. I was caught completely off guard and wasn't sure how to react to the proffered bit of bread; should I open my mouth, or decline politely? Most confusingly, I was seized with the sudden impulse to bite her fingers, which I thankfully managed to control.

The proprietor then hand fed both my roommate and my friend's mother, we later whispered about the experience while the restaurateur went to prepare a special carafe of traditional *jebenna* coffee[4] for our table. My roommate admitted that she, too, suppressed a sudden impulse to literally bite the hand that had fed her. I was struck by the fact that we had both felt this strange impulse. Though I had always considered myself to be an adventurous eater, and was always interested in having new gastronomic experiences, this dinner brought into focus the idea of cultural limits. I had enjoyed the new flavors in the meal, but the prospect of eating with fingers rather than cutlery – and someone else's fingers at that – was more than I was prepared for. This kind of 'culinary impasse' is bound to become more common in our lives as we have more frequent contact with 'foreign' foods, in restaurants, in the frozen food aisle and during travel abroad.

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[3] A thin, flat bread made with a fermented batter.

[4] A fresh roasted, spiced coffee made in a specialized earthenware pot with a long neck and handle.

When I look back on my dinner at the Horn of Africa, it is not the spice mixture in our stew or any other flavor that stands out in my memory, but the woman's powerful gesture to literally feed her clients and my momentary inability to cope with it that I will always remember. My curiosity and desire to become familiar with and maybe even appropriate another region's foodways was limited by my own conception of eating culture. This introduction to African food became emblematic of the way that people worldwide experience, react to and adapt (or do not adapt) a foreign culture's foodways. It also brought into focus the growing accessibility of foreign foods throughout the world. In the same way that diners in Madison, Wisconsin can eat Ethiopian foods, American, Asian and European foods are becoming more prevalent in Africa. This kind of cultural exchange and circulation is becoming more global in nature, but it became ingrained through the systems of colonialism that linked East and West and North and South.

These links have irrevocably changed both places. It is impossible to discount the legacy of European colonialism from West Africa and it just as impossible to consider French literature and culture without examining the influence of the exchange of products and people that come from former colonies. Therefore, when studying the subject of French cuisine, we must also look at how it is impacted by outside forces and how it is regarded by France's most recent citizens. France has long been considered a culinary Mecca, a place with a great tradition of high quality agricultural products, highly trained professional chefs and respected gastronomic conventions. But in this study we will see how France's culinary reputation is not respected by all of her inhabitants. Francophone women's novels present an alternative to the typical French gastronomic culture thereby privileging the traditions of diasporic people.

There are three basic realms of food study which all are linked and intertwined. To fully apprehend the relevance of food to society, one must examine anthropological studies that address questions of ethnicity and gender, sociological studies about class and culture, and literary accounts associated with memory and personal identity. To that end, I have used texts from these three fields to try to recognize issues pertaining to all of the above that are imbedded in the way that people grow, sell, buy, prepare, cook, serve, eat, feed, talk about and remember food. The earliest studies of food within a culture were done as ethnographic initiatives by anthropologists. Through their work it has been demonstrated that "food is about identity creation and maintenance, whether that identity be national, ethnic, class or gender-based."[5] To this, I would add that a person's ideas about food contribute to identity formation by addressing questions of religion, memory, socio-economic position, and professionalism. Moreover, in multi-cultural societies, like the US and France, food is also about cultural assimilation and for the majority, a limited and sometimes deformed knowledge of the minority community.

Whenever multiple cultural traditions come together, food's connotations can change according to the perspective of a different gender, ethnicity, or class. This means that in order to make sense of the way food is represented in literature, the reader must come to the text with ideas about how food 'means' in his or her own culture and the culture that produced the text. This study focuses on novels that rely on a representation of reality and therefore necessarily includes the representation of food, food preparation, hunger, public and private meals revealing the cultural values of the society depicted in the novel. We can also see food and the word as being linked when we recognize them as "two oralities,[6]" the acts of speaking and eating both being operations located in the mouth.

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[5] David E Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 5.

The practice of cooking is heavily codified – often with a different code for each group that practices it. For example, a professional restaurant chef in Paris has a dramatically different idea of "how" to cook (to chop, stir, serve) than an African grandmother, but both are equally devoted to their specific code. The novel's description of food piggybacks on this already established code and relies on the reader's understanding of "how to cook." The reader's knowledge accounts for a certain amount of appreciation; for in the culinary arts, as in literature, gastronomic value is accorded to dishes that demonstrate a tension between tradition and innovation. In literature we might see this as the line between conservatism and avant-gardism and in the food world this can be expressed as the opposition between fusion and comfort.

In novels, food has a distinct role in characterization. Certain characters must eat certain foods to demonstrate their socio-economic class, or their gender, etc. The author can deviate from the expected to criticize or propose an alternative. The description of food in novels can also provide a sort of narrative shorthand. In this way, it is not necessary to describe an entire feast if certain elements are mentioned. For instance, if readers know that the Thanksgiving turkey is on the table, then the presence of the rest, the sweet potatoes, the pumpkin pie, etc., can be inferred. In an African novel, a writer might simply say that couscous was served, and readers would know that in addition to the couscous grain, the meal also includes a well-seasoned sauce of vegetables and perhaps a bit of meat that was poured over the couscous itself. However, if readers tackle a foreign text without enough knowledge of the culture that produced it, they might be tempted to believe that the bowl of red jelly on the Thanksgiving table were strawberry preserves or that the couscous were some kind of grain. Fortunately, the Francophone novels considered are very accessible because they have been doubly mediated. First, they are the product of authors who have themselves had extensive contact with France and they depict the lives of characters that travel between France and the former colonies. Second, they are written in French, with the inclusion of just a few expressions in the characters' first language which are mostly explained in the footnotes. In this way, the reader of *Une Chanson Ecarlate* is not confused when Mireille learns to make the 'national' dish of Senegal, because Mariama Bâ chooses to call it *riz avec du poisson*, rather than *Ceebu Jën*.[7]

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[6] Gian-Paolo Biasin, *The Flavors of Modernity: Food and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993)

Food also provides "cognitive" and "tropological" content to novels. In *The Flavors of Modernity*, Biasin writes:

> As a cognitive pretext, food is used to stage the search for meaning that is carried out every time one reflects on the

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[7] This prized dish is referred to and written in many different ways: *riz Senégalais, Thiboudienne, Ceebu Jën, Cebbu Jën*. The variance in spelling (and language) can be attributed to the relatively recent written standardization of Wolof. A recipe for *Ceebu Jën* appears in chapter three.

> relationship among the self, the world, and others—or among the subject, nature, and history – and such a reflection is made somewhat easier by the fact that precisely in food, ... nature and history tend to be conjoined.[8]

This process of self-reflection is depicted famously in Proust. It is the “la petite Madeleine” that sets in motion a journey within the self that travels through memory, to generate a depiction of a certain time and place which later became symbolic of a particular cultural heritage.

Food in the novel is also tropological or figurative, so that a culinary sign can be laden with other rhetorical significance. It is the fact that Proust’s petite madeleine also reminds the reader, among other things, of the figure of Mary Magdalene, who guards pilgrims on their way to Saint-Jacques which is perhaps the reason for the shape of the cake.[9] If the ‘cognitive’ function of food is primarily a personal exploration, then the ‘tropological’ operates on a larger scale. It relies on cultural references beyond the scope of the individual yet understandable by a particular group. The readers/eaters have a body of experience that allows them to recognize the metaphorical status of certain foods. Though it seems contrary to the sensual nature of the subject, talking and writing about food does not usually address how it tastes, rather it is inscribed into personal experience and cultural context through its cognitive and tropological function.

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[8] Biasin 17.

[9] See Fig. 1 for recipe.

Even though writing about food doesn't focus on the sense of taste, which is where one would expect to generate the notion of pleasure, we are reminded by Biasin that, "The discourse on food inevitably becomes a discourse on pleasure and on power, on the most secret individual as well as on the most visible classes; in short, it becomes a discourse on the world."[10] This is definitely the case in the Francophone novels discussed here. In them, the discourse on food is so far-reaching because it is a cultural activity that produces meaning for the individual about identity, ethnicity, religion, class and gender. This is the crux of the intersection of food and the novel – it is art and it is life, it is formed by depictions of reality that are revelatory and crafted pieces fraught with multiple meanings, ready to be consumed.

FOOD AS A MEASURE OF IDENTITY

To begin any study of how identity is reflected by food, it is hard to find a better starting place than with eighteenth century magistrate and writer, Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's famous aphorism, "Dis-moi ce que tu manges et je te dirais ce que tu es," ("Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.") Clearly, people are known by what they speak, wear, and eat, and Brillat-Savarin's idea relies on the understanding of food choices as important markers of class, wealth, and ethnicity.

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[10] Ibid 27.

Food is integral to cultural behavior and thus often serves as identifiers for a group of people. For example, in English, we identify nationalities as Krauts (German), Frogs (French), and Limeys (British), and in French, the British are *les Rosbifs.* We will probably all agree that the above terms are not very politically correct, but we may not realize how derogatory other common names for ethnic groups and nationalities can be. For example, the Inuit people, meaning 'real people' in their own language, were formerly known as the Eskimo, which means 'raw flesh eaters' in an Algonquin language.[11] Another Arctic people used to be known as the Samoyed, which means 'cannibal' in Russian, but they are now known as the Nenets, (or Nietsi by the Russians), which means 'human being' in their language.[12] All of the above are examples of a metonymic process, with a single (supposed) consumable standing in for all of the foods eaten by that group. Furthermore, they are all examples of outsiders positioning themselves in opposition to that group because they do not share the same conception of what constitutes an acceptable food. This question of what is an acceptable or appropriate food or way to eat really only surfaces when two different eating cultures come into contact and an alternative to one's own culinary *gestalt* is presented. Groups may share geographic location, climate and history yet still have a different tradition. For example, in West Africa, certain ethnic groups see the leaves and the roots of the Baobab tree as possible additions to a stew, while other groups, located in proximity, see only the fruit of the Baobab tree as food.

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[11] Paul Fieldhouse, *Food and Nutrition: Customs and Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) 41.

[12] Sidney Mintz, "Eating Communities: The Mixed Appeals of Sodality." *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food*. (Eds. Tobias Döring, Markus Heide and Susanne Mühleisen. American Studies A Monograph Ser. 106. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003) 24.

In a way, this naming process is Brillat-Savarin's quote but in reverse. We hear "the Frogs" (*ce que tu es*) and we assume food choice (*ce que tu manges*). But there are other examples from history, which truly demonstrate Brillat-Savarin's truism as stated. During the Spanish Inquisition, 111 women from Toledo were informed on by their neighbors and servants. They were reported to salt their meat, to cook on Friday for Saturday and to not eat pork or shellfish (*ce que tu manges*). What they ate identified them as Jewish even though they had converted to Catholicism. Ultimately, of the 111 *conversas*, 71 were condemned and 56 were burned at the stake. Given their fate, it seems clear that keeping Kosher was enough to place one's life at risk, and therefore, the dietary restrictions could be suspended, so why did the *conversas* still eat and cook like Jews? Were they still Jews, or did they simply maintain the style of cooking that they always had? In a similar story about religious dietary restriction being of primal importance, Muslim and Brahmin soldiers of the British Army revolted when they discovered their rifles had been greased with cow fat. This was later referred to as the Indian revolt of 1857 and is thought to be the beginning of a struggle for independence in India.[13] Again, the soldiers had enlisted in the Queen's Army, effectively changing their identities, but were unable to change their eating habits enough to maintain these identities. Both of these examples point to some interesting epistemological questions. If you change what you eat, does that change who you are? If you don't change what you eat, did you really change who you are? Most importantly, why should a person attempt to change who they are by changing what they eat? These questions are integral to the two novels examined in chapter two. Both Calixthe Beyala's and Fawzia Zaouri's characters, who are immigrant women living in the French capital, radically change what they eat in an attempt to integrate into French society. This proves to be actually dangerous to the women, who both eventually reject Western foodways altogether.

Without a doubt, food is both a reflection and a result of shared experience. It is a biological reality, heavily mediated by socio-cultural pressures. And, as Mary Luknauski states:

> How food is consumed is a powerful method of further defining a community. A group who follows proscriptions forbidding certain foods, and or combinations of foods, immediately separate themselves. A sense of order, place, and discipline is created: the tacit understanding being, beside any divine command, is that without such regulations the community would fall victim to its individual appetites. Once members of the community were pursuing their own desires, the community would disintegrate.[14]

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[13] Part of using the rifles required the soldier to bite down on the spent cartridge, therefore a soldier could ostensibly ingest a bit of the fat. Ibid 25.

[14] Mary Luknauski, "A place at the Counter: The Onus of Oneness" *Eating Culture* (Eds. Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz. Albany: SUNYP, 1998) 113.

In short, a community's food choices are a conservative attempt to keep its members in the fold. However, this denies the primacy of the modern individual's sense of self, or subjectivity. The post-modern individual must continuously create his or her own identity and making choices about consumption are a way to communicate this. Thus, the individual is constantly torn between the longing to be part of an established group and the wish to separate from that group.

In *Food, the Body and the Self*, Deborah Lupton cautions against essentialism in the understanding of food and eating within a society. Her poststructuralist approach allows for a fragmented, contingent self, which I find helpful in this context. She writes:

> Subjectivity is a less rigid term than identity, as it incorporates the understanding that the self, or more accurately, selves, are highly changeable and contextual, albeit within certain limits imposed by the culture in which an individual lives, including power relations, social institutions and hegemonic discourses.[15]

She also reminds us that power cannot be taken out of the equation or re-assigned at will. Power is always present in the construction of the sense of self.

Nevertheless, people perceive that there are ways that they can differentiate themselves from their own group and possibly align themselves with another by changing aspects of their life and lifestyle including how they cook and eat. Scapp calls the resultant discussion about food “a hyperaesthetics of eating,”[16] because eating is often no longer restricted by agricultural or transportation constraints. Unbounded by the traditional food choice limits of season and region, desire is more powerful than any practical concern. The individual is free to eat and cook in whatever manner he or she prefers.

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[15] Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage Publications, 1996) 13.

In Western societies, some people, including immigrant populations are influenced by the explosion of ‘lifestyle’ media which provides the individual with endless possibilities to both bind oneself closer to one’s own group and separate oneself by learning about new and often exotic ways to eat and cook. Cooking and the appreciation of ‘fine’ food are presented as markers of ethnicity, style and class that can be taught and mastered. The rise of the didactic cooking newspaper column or television show gives evidence of two directions that tempt the modern eating citizen. On one side, there is an ever increasing trend towards the individualization and informalization of food choices where one can have truly “anything you want” at any time of the day and if you don’t want to cook, there is an already prepared option available. Though this is a development that is fully visible in Western societies, the concept holds true across the globe, and can be seen in West Africa where more people are eating meals and especially snacks outside the home and processed and prepared foods are more readily available and acceptable. This tendency is tied to the continued urbanization of populations. In this model, personal freedom of choice is an esteemed value.

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[16] Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz, eds. “Introduction.” *Eating Culture* (Albany: SUNYP, 1998)

Conversely, we can see a counter-trend in the likes of lifestyle gurus like Martha Stewart and B. Smith who purport to create a sense of belonging and community despite a trend toward the contrary found in modern societies. Granted, we cannot completely separate Martha Stewart from the idea of social mobility, but it is clear that she, like others, preserves a conservative attitude towards food and eating by meting out information about the rules and conventions surrounding food that have seemingly been lost in the race to modernity. The growing importance of national identity or ethnic or regional identity as expressed through food also point to a desire to preserve cultural values that seem threatened. Other matters like food safety and concern for its industrial production, health questions, and political issues like vegetarianism contribute to a proscriptive attitude towards what to cook and eat as well.

This same tension is present in Francophone women's novels as well. Characters in Calixthe Beyala's, Ken Bugul's and Gisèle Pineau's novels immigrate to France and adopt French eating and lifestyle habits, but in the end this proves to be impossible and dangerous to achieve. This is the 'crisis' that Claude Fischler sees in food choice, which is due to the collapse of external rules, and leads to anguish, obsession and anxiety. In the case of these Francophone novels, this collapse refers mainly to the loss of the characters' cultural heritage which is abandoned in France. In Fischler's view, modern culture increases this anxiety instead of regulating it, which causes many to seek substitutes for traditional gastronomy like food fads, diets, and an interest in cooking that arise from a desire for norms.[17] In the Francophone novels, a return to one's roots is the celebrated end, which can only be attained with the advice and help of one's own people and family, and not with the 'professional' opinions of lifestyle mavens or pressure from other media sources.

These contrary drives, one leading towards individual freedom of food choice and the other the conservative approach on the suitability of food choice are explained by what Fischler calls the "omnivore's paradox." Fischler points out that human beings are omnivores and are continually torn between the need for both variety and diversity and a wariness of the unknown, since a new food may potentially be poisonous. He sees this paradox as being at the root of the human being's anxiety towards food. As we have said, in modern society, attitudes and preferences related to food are shaped less by the community and more by the individual's "taste" which is a fundamental part of self-formation. People now don't self-identify as being part of a group as readily as they did in the past (at least to outsiders). Instead, they prefer to focus on their own subjectivity. For the characters in these Francophone novels, navigating the array of possibilities in France, choices must be made between the prevalent French foods and their own heritage of African and Caribbean foods, or even the foods of North Africa or Asia, brought to the capital by other immigrants from the former colonies.

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[17] Claude Fischler, *Food Habits, Social Change and the Nature/Culture Dilemma* Social Science Information, 19 (6), 1980. 93.

This being the case, it is easy to understand why there is generally an expanding range of accepted practices when it comes to eating and food. Clearly there is not a *single* attitude towards food, even within the same group. Rather, attitude toward food choice seems lie along a continuum, with one extreme being a completely socially unconstrained attitude and the other being wholly subject to a global culture, which can be seen in the case of multi-national restaurants like McDonalds. To understand the basis for the global versus local dialectic and the role of culture in food choice we must then attempt to define culture especially as it relates to food and eating. We must also recognize how we are acculturated, that is, how our families and especially our mothers instill culture in us for it is the mothers or in some cases the grandmothers that rescue the characters in our novels from the potentially treacherous task of 'eating French.'

Attitudes toward food lie at the intersection of public and private ideology. These feelings are inextricably linked with feelings of desire, need, love, and identity. An individual's conception of what and how to eat is shaped from his or her earliest infancy by his or her mother and family. It continues as that person grows and develops, later taking into account the larger expectations of a society. Eventually, an individual, fully versed in the symbolic language of food, can strengthen or reject his or her society's norms by adhering to or expanding the accepted ideas about food and food choices. Though these attitudes seem to be firmly rooted in the quotidian and biological, we cannot ignore the fact that they are cultural markers, for if food choice were merely based on biological need, then children, men and women would choose only that which was available and nutritious, and we wouldn't need our parents and legions of diet gurus, doctors and scientists who are determined to adjust cultural leanings to be more in line with biological reality. In addition, we must also consider the fact that cooking is more than a mundane skill practiced primarily by women across the globe. Indeed, like any craft, it can be elevated to an art form, and celebrated in the destination restaurant where the chef has become a star.

Our feelings towards food are integral to our conceptions of our public and private selves; it plays a role in our development within the family and our insertion into society. Though it is easy to see the predominant role that women play in the education of children about food within the private realm, it is more difficult to see their influence in the public sphere, for many of the aforementioned "taste-making" star chefs are, and have always been, men. But women are increasingly present in the lists of high-profile chefs, and more importantly, women are the chief preparers of food in this world, despite their relative absence in the man's world of the restaurant kitchen. Because women are the chief procurers and preparers of food in the home, they forge the food ideology of the family on an individual level, and they reinforce cultural food ideology that is shaped on a societal level.

The reasons for the division between male chef and the female cook are the result of the historical division of the public and the private. Domestic cooking was seen as the realm of women, while men usually held the role of professional chef. Not surprisingly, there are no female restaurant chefs in the novels that we are examining, but there are plenty of references to women who excel at cooking and are feted both in Paris and in their own communities for their prowess. There is also a professional cook, the title character in *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, who goes to work as a servant for a wealthy white family at a very young age. Despite the family's belief that she is bettering herself by serving them French food, Télumée finds nothing but derision for their lifestyle and food choices. Télumée's employment in the French household reminds the reader to call into question just who is doing the cooking in every home and even in restaurants. The person doing the cooking may not be from the region or culture from which their recipes or methods come. They are responding to the demands of their employers and their own economic limitations.

A person's beliefs and preferences about food are chiefly shaped during early childhood within the family. The family is also the primary focus of emotional support. Familial love (encompassing maternal, romantic and concern) is often expressed through the medium of food; and marketers are keenly aware of this, mounting vast campaigns that play on these feelings. However, this is a modern development; the privileging of affective relationships within the family helped give rise to the image of the ideal mother as the emotional center of the family, at least in Western societies. With the split of the public and private spheres in the 19th century, women were increasingly relegated to the home, so they focused more and more on increasing these familial emotional bonds. It is at this point in time that it began to be important for families to eat together, thereby acculturating children into their societal roles. In the past (albeit in certain classes) children would never eat with their parents. Deborah Lupton characterizes the social aspect of a woman cooking in the home thusly:

> The 'work' that is performed in the context of the family is rarely viewed as 'real' work in terms of attracting payment, but as a labour of love and commitment which tend to be taken for granted by those for whom it is performed. Femininity is idealized as being caring and working for others with little thought of oneself. Cooking for women is thus an intensely social undertaking, performed for others.[18]

Not surprisingly then, women are caught up in an opposition between their emotional satisfaction and the limits that family life places on them, and this is the case with women throughout the world.

This process begins even before the arrival of children in the family, but it is at this point that she is expected to become essentially selfless. A woman's sense of responsibility with regards to feeding her children is shaped by society even before the baby is born. Wives-tales, medical pronouncements and government charts abound featuring list of foods to eat and foods to avoid for the pregnant woman. Women in Western society are assailed by heavy-handed books like, the popular *What to expect when you're expecting* which admonishes women to self-surveil when it comes to their future child's nutrition, advising mothers-to-be in a draconian way that, "before you bring a bit of food to your mouth, ask yourself: is this the best bite I can give my baby? If it isn't, find a better one."[19] When the baby is born, a woman is advised to breast-feed, thus becoming the sole source of nutrition and often comfort. After weaning, it is usually the mother who is chiefly responsible for the child's developing tastes, introducing new foods at precise intervals and in a specific order, so that the child will not reject green beans later in life and so that any problems like food allergies can be identified.

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[18] Lupton 40.

In addition to societal pressures, which can cause anxiety, the first thing that a newborn does – eat – can increase stress on both mother and child. A child's first food is usually mother's milk, and is the product of the relationship of two bodies, the mother and the child. The mother is the source of the milk, but she creates the milk solely because of and for the child. In this way, it is the embodiment of the relationship between mother and child. Though this feeding is the source of food and love, it also causes anxiety because it can be taken away. These stresses are not restricted to Western women and Western society. In Tsitsi Dangaremba's novel, *Nervous Conditions*, the anxiety and depression that can occur during a woman's earliest attempts to feed her child are explored. In this novel, Tambu's mother suffers from depression and stops feeding her new baby; it is only with the help of a relative and friend that she eventually reclaims her role as a nourishing figure both for her infant and in a larger sense, for the rest of her family.

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[19] Murkhoff, Heidi, *What to expect when you're expecting* (Workman Publishing Company, 3rd ed. 2002)

Throughout infancy and beyond a child learns that eating assuages emotional, psychological and physiological needs. Thus, hunger and appetite are linked to emotion, and this is learned at the breast. Eventually, as the child grows into adolescence and adulthood, he or she will express many different emotions in his or her attitude towards food including boredom, loneliness, anxiety, guilt and rebellion. The link between food and the maternal, then, is a high-stakes relationship. Women are responsible for providing food for their families beginning with pregnancy and are then largely responsible for the child's food acculturation into society. In this way women pass on the traditions and set the family examples, which develop the tastes of generations.

In this context, it would seem that there is little to be gained by women in the home kitchen save anxiety and stress, but an explanation comes from an unlikely source. In *The Second Sex* chapter "The Married Woman," Simone de Beauvoir explains why she regards cooking as more "positive" than cleaning:

> With her fire going, woman becomes a sorceress; by a simple movement, as in beating eggs, or through the magic of fire, she effects the transmutation of substances; matter becomes food. There is enchantment in these alchemies, there is poetry in making preserves; the housewife has caught duration in the snare of sugar, she has enclosed life in jars. Cooking is revelation and creation; and a woman can find special satisfaction in a successful cake or flaky pastry, for not everyone can do it; one must have the gift.[20]

The alchemy that De Beauvoir references is practiced by many of the characters in the Francophone novels examined here. Calixthe Beyala's heroine definitely becomes a sort of sorceress, achieving her desires by cooking up provocative and evocative meals that play on her dinner guests' desires and memories. Ken Bugul's heroine talks about her mother's cooking skills in the same way, suggesting that she also "miraculously" was able to preserve foods and water even through the dry season so that she could always be ready to prepare just what everyone wanted. De Beauvoir recognizes the fulfillment that can come through the successful practice of this skill, but she feels that against the monotonous backdrop of the housewife's daily chores, her efforts to put a personal stamp on her food, "to make it seem essential….is but a vague and meaningless rearrangement of disorder."[21] I contend that the 'magic' of the kitchen is not the transformation of elements that occurs in the oven or bowl, but rather, the transformation of relationships that can occur as a result of the "alchemy." For de Beauvoir, the value of domestic labor like cooking is diminished because it is ephemeral and continually consumed, though it is in this 'constancy' that women draw power. For her, only the lasting had true value, but we must remember how memories of foods, and of women cooking, are powerful, lasting impressions.

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[20] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York : Vintage-Random House, 1974) Ed. and Trans. H.M. Parshley 506.

[21] Ibid 507.

CULTURAL FLAVOR

Just as images of food can reflect the attitudes towards subjectivity, love, desire, gender roles, and their transgression that are held by a culture, food can have an effect on a culture's view of all of the above and more. To understand how this process takes place, it is necessary to gain a clear view of the "nature" of culture. "Culture" is often used interchangeably with "society" and sometimes, "ethnicity." It is a marker for difference and inclusion, a way to describe what we share and how we separate ourselves from others. Fieldhouse considers "culture" the characteristics of a society or group that are not inscribed in a person at birth; in short, it is the non-genetic component of ethnicity.

Culture is also subject to two constant trends. It changes; both generationally and individually, and externally and internally according to the influences of media, policy, technology, ideology, education and family. In Africa, these changes are occurring at rapid rate because they are magnified by the rapid rate of urbanization seen across the continent. As the population shifts toward the cities, food culture is especially impacted, as methods of food production, economic situations and access to products change. This trend is especially evident in Francophone novels because they are also the result of two divergent cultures coming together. These changes accelerate due to the proximity of French and diasporic culture especially in an urban environment and the increasing importance of technology and media on food availability. On the contrary, it resists change, because it is routine, because we are largely unaware of it and because it has a value system inherent in it.

That value system is discernible through a culture's food ideology. It is largely ethnocentric with an idea that "mine is good and theirs is bad," which was evident in the aforementioned clashing nomenclature of the Inuit/Eskimo people. Food ideology is the belief of the group of what constitutes a food and what its appropriate preparation and consumption is. At the core of the formation of this category is the ontological question, "Would I eat it?" which is again based on the fact that unknown food is a potential danger. We all categorize foods. We see them as nutritious (which may or may not be accurate) or not, prestigious or not, hot or cold, meal or snack, masculine or feminine, sinful or virtuous, comfort or punishment, sophisticated or trashy.

These categories beg certain questions. What does this (ethnocentric) truth express and /or represent about its specific community? Can they be expanded or modified to discuss other groups? Can we detect a universal truth played out differently in distinct groups? These classifications are reminiscent of the structuralist ideals of Claude Levi-Strauss,[22] but these binary oppositions are not absolute. It is dangerous to over-generalize, for although anthropology is good for describing static patterns, it doesn't take into account the small-scale interpersonal relationships and interactions that shape the importance of food within a culture.

Nevertheless, we understand Levi-Strauss' view of cooking as a civilizing process. Cooking is a science and an art; it is a transformation from Nature – constituted by raw animal and vegetable products to Culture – denoted by the cooked and therefore 'civilized' dish. Levi-Strauss actually breaks down food into three categories: raw, cooked and rotten. He sees these types as falling along a continuum that runs from nature to culture and unprepared to prepared. And indeed, the reader can often see the organic nature of food can be played out in literature. Writing about food frequently focuses on its being either raw or cooked or rotten and therefore desired or refused. According to Levi Strauss, these categories can reveal societal structures and status through the prestige or derision that people assign to different kinds of food based on where they fall in his structure. Traditionally, the highest status foods are the most

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[22] Levi-Strauss, Claude, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London: Jonathan Cape. 1970) 70.

‘civilized,’ that is, they are the ones that are cooked (but not rotten) and require the most amount of skilled preparation.

Those who believe African food to be less civilized than European or North American food because it is simpler to prepare don’t realize the amount of work required to make even the most common high-status dish. For example, to make couscous in West Africa, millet is ground by hand into a fine flour. Later, the couscous is sometimes combined with ground leaves (which helps the flour stick together) and water, and is then hand rolled into individual grains. After the couscous grains are formed, the actual cooking process begins.[23] Now in Africa, one can find pre-made couscous, and the couscous found in Europe and North America, is both preformed and parboiled. Everywhere in the world, processed food became high status food because it cuts down on labor and preserved food (i.e. kept it from becoming rotten) and was therefore costly. But now, it would seem that the Levi-Straussian ideal is turned on its head. Whereas processing once equated civilizing, now there is a fear of artificiality. Western society, where abundance is the rule, no longer fears the rotten but rather the chemical and synthetic. It will be interesting to see how these questions will play out in the developing world as well.

Eating is a social occasion where relationships are built and maintained. A perfect example of the kind of social occasion surrounding food, and in this case, drink, is the Senegalese tea ceremony called *Attaya*. It is an elaborate way of preparing and serving tea that can last up to three hours, giving people the chance to catch up with one's friends, preferably by drinking tea with them outside under the trees. The tea is usually prepared on a small charcoal burner and served in small tea glasses, rather than ceramic cups. The tea is typically green tea, as in North Africa, but can also be black tea. As a rule, in *attaya*, the tea-drinkers drink three glasses of tea with each serving's preparation varying slightly. The first cup is prepared with boiling water and tea leaves and only a little sugar, if any. When serving the tea, the person who makes the tea, pours the tea back and forth between the glasses from a height, so that foam will develop on the tea. The second glass of tea is prepared with the same tea leaves, water, mint leaves and more sugar. Sometimes *des pastilles de menthe*, mint candies similar to gumdrops, are added in addition to, or when mint leaves are unavailable. Often during the second and third round, the tea will be poured back into the pot to warm up after it is mixed to develop the foam and then poured out again for service. The third glass of tea has even more mint and sugar so that it is extremely sweet.

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[23] See recipe for couscous at the end of Chapter Two.

Drinking three glasses of tea in a similar progression is very common throughout North and West Africa, but there are slightly different explanations for the practice in different countries. In The Gambia, they say that the first cup represents the love of your mother, the second is the love of your friends and the third is the love of your love. In Senegal, it is said that the first cup is "Amer comme la mort," the second is "Doux comme la vie," and the third is "Doux comme l'amour." The progression from the first serving in which the bitter flavor of the tea dominates, to the last serving in which the bitter tea flavor is now weak and the mint flavor and sweetness dominate is seen to be symbolic of friendship, that grows sweeter over time. Eating and drinking thus becomes the background against which the social bonds are reaffirmed. Throughout the world and between individuals or groups of people, food can be an expression of status, social distance, political clout, family bond, friendship, and respect. It can also be a manipulative tool with which to exert influence, bargain or humiliate.

Sharing and eating food with one's family and larger social group is an expectation throughout one's lifetime. While today feasts usually celebrate life's big moments, traditionally they also correspond to seasonal concerns. Whether it's a feast to celebrate the harvest of a specific grape, grain, salmon run, or even our own Thanksgiving turkey, sometimes the food IS the event. But more often than not, it is transitional life events that involve ritual or ceremonial sharing of food because it symbolizes the social relationship. Occasions like a marriage or christening are also moments of change in socioeconomic status, so the requisite ritual exchange of food is hoped to strengthen bonds between new family, friends and business partners. Ultimately, feasts are redistributive of wealth; an occasion where the hosting individual or group hopes to obtain through the distribution of food and hospitality a measure of gratitude, respect, acclaim and in some cases, forgiveness from the larger group.

On a smaller scale, the way that individuals exchange gifts of food and the choice of food that is given speaks to the relationship of the giver and the recipient. Sometimes, the food item is a purchased commodity gift; it is often impersonal and designed to emphasize generosity and continued relationship. In France, this might be a box of fine chocolates brought to a hostess, while in Senegal, gifts of bottled soft drinks or purchased sweets are appreciated when one is an invited guest. Food can also be much more personal, prepared with an individual's tastes in mind and without expectation of reciprocation. Food can function as both gift and offering; in the case of the former, it brings prestige to the giver whereas the latter indicates the prestige of the recipient. There are several examples of the latter kind of food gifts in the Francophone novel. For example, in *Comment cusiner son mari à l'africaine*, Aïssatou brings Bolobolo's mother bean fritters to establish contact between her and her neighbor and his family.

THE DISTINCTIONS OF FOOD CHOICE

The idea that food can convey prestige to a person hints at the fact that food choice is a demonstration of a person's socioeconomic class. Food is deceptively obvious, though, and class issues can be masked by the idea that food choice is a "matter of taste." But "taste" is a means of distinction between the classes. Pierre

Bourdieu discusses taste in order to show how people read class. What Bourdieu refers to as 'habitus' is the way that taste is expressed and embodied.[24] It is physical rather than symbolic and it is acquired through acculturation rather than education. This means that taste is so deeply ingrained, that one is often not aware of why one holds certain expectations. People use systematic judgment and classification to understand and participate in this demonstration of class. Bourdieu's 1960's study of class in French society focuses heavily on the food choices of different classes and shows how a person's preference for food is an example of a demonstration of cultural capital.

The relationship of class and food seems somewhat intuitive, as we all have notions that certain people eat certain things, but why and how this is the case and whether or not it holds true across different cultures bears examining. When one considers the primacy of production and consumption, especially as relates to food, socioeconomic divisions become clearly visible. However, in the Francophone novels class distinction is marked by forces that are more divisive than Bourdieu's notions of performed 'habitus.' For these characters, the economic and cultural factors that separate them from the French majority carry more weight than class in and of itself.

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[24] Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social* Critique *of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984) 84.

Nonetheless, it is easy to discern that prestige arises from the possibility of choosing what to eat. It is important that in these novels the characters are not locked into eating what is available to them, especially in the novels set in Africa, where the availability of food is uncertain. Rather, they exercise choice and eat according to their own culture's demands.

The possibility of making these kinds of food choices is based on technological developments and the rise of the middle classes. Stephen Mennell describes this process as being marked by "increasing variety and "diminishing contrasts."[25] Modern technology has made the world smaller so increasing numbers of people have the opportunity to choose from a diverse assortment of foods. Therefore the differences between what people eat are evening out. This development began long ago, before the modern era, when people other than the most privileged class had very little food choice for reasons of seasonality, scarcity, ease of production and ease of storage. With the emergence of the bourgeoisie, a middle class could now emulate the practices of the nobility, including their ability to choose what they would eat.

Soon, the bourgeoisie's lifestyle could in some cases rival that of the nobility and so there was a backlash against them. The Catholic Church began to enforce fasting among its parishioners, proscribing what and how much could be eaten throughout the week and the church calendar. In addition, laws were enacted that limited the number of dishes that the bourgeoisie could enjoy per course, and how many courses they were entitled to. The same sort of restrictions can be seen in the Islamic tradition of fasting and charity that spread quickly outside of Europe. Islamic dietary restrictions are also in part intended to maintain and reinforce social relations through provision and dependence.

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[25] Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 30.

But as time went on, sumptuary laws couldn't hold down the rising middle class whose purchasing power assures them the right to eat like the nobility, especially since technological improvements have made food available to all. There is now more than enough food produced in the world to feed all of its inhabitants, even during a famine in a particular region. Food is available; it's just that people lack the 'right' to it. This can be seen in the chronic malnutrition of the 19th Century working poor in Europe and in the hijacking of food aid by warlords in Somalia or other drought starved regions in Africa. The right to food is a socioeconomic issue related to questions of power. The conception of class is a part of that socioeconomic reality even today. It is true that there is a tendency to deny the existence of class with the myth of social mobility, and this is especially true with food choice.

So far we have touched on the effects of subjectivity, culture, gender and class on ideas and feelings about food and eating and the only thing that seems constant is the mutability of these feelings. In all cases, there is a desire to "define" and at the same time a desire to transgress these limitations. The eater's ambivalent notions of self-identification and self-representation cause him or her to seek out foods and eating patterns that may be foreign to the dominant culture.

This exploration of how women negotiate the often conflicting cultures of France and their home countries is based on how the subject of food, cooking and eating are treated in the novels of Francophone women. We must take into account the fact that writing about food is often an act of memory, though it would be short-sighted to say that it is only a nostalgic reflection on one's childhood. There is a process that causes food to inhabit a location of memory. The quotidian necessity of cooking and eating provides a continuum of experience where children are provided for and women display their mastery of cooking technique.

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE: RECOGNIZING THE AFRICAN ALTERNATIVE

It is essential to understand both French and African gastronomic traditions so that one can recognize where authors are making an assertion about the differences between French and diasporic customs. There are many distinctions between the French and West African way of cooking and eating. The norm, which of course varies in both traditions, is vastly divergent. Most people are familiar with French gastronomic tradition given its influence on *haute* or 'restaurant' cuisine, but have very little knowledge of African food and its traditions. The two differ greatly in the types of products used, the methods of cooking, the structure and frequency of meals or 'food events.' In contemporary France and the rest of Western Europe, people generally have three meals. A typical meal includes three courses, a small appetizer which can be soup or crudités, a main course which usually is meat or fish accompanied by a starch and a dessert which can be a fruit, dairy product like a yogurt or cheese, or perhaps a piece of cake. African traditions maintain different ways of eating. While the effects of urbanization and technological advances are causing shifts in the eating practices of West Africans, the greatest dietary change comes, of course, with immigration. Nevertheless, in West Africa and especially in the rural areas and during the dry season, there is often only one meal per day.

The culinary traditions of Sub-Saharan Africa can be divided into two main systems, based on the climate of the region. A meal in both areas will be composed of a stew-like dish of vegetables, leaves, groundnuts (like peanuts), palm oil, spices and sometimes meat or fish. This is served alongside the staple of the diet, a cereal which is usually a grain like rice, millet, sorghum or corn in the Sahel, or a starchy vegetable like manioc, yams or plantains in the forested parts or West Africa.[26] This cereal base is the 'cultural superfood' of Africa in the same way that bread is in Western Europe.

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[26] "L'alimentation des Africains vivant en France: des repères culturels à la cuisine familiale." *Alimentation et Précarité* 24: Jan. 2004. Cerin.org. Centre de Recherche et d'Information Nutritionnelles. 2004. <http://www.cerin.org/periodiques/AlimPreca/AlimPreca2424.asp>

Special or festive occasions are commonly marked by an adjustment in the cooking and eating choices made. Preparations are usually more costly and time-consuming and therefore create an expectation of greater diversity of dishes and abundance. For example, desserts are usually part of feasts and are not common at the end of daily meals. Eggs and dairy products are also very rare in the West African diet. In fact, there is a common belief that pregnant women must not eat eggs. Of course, every culture maintains its own beliefs and superstitions about food and food preparation, West African and Western European alike.

At mealtimes in Senegal, it is vitally important to have a good understanding of *fayda*, which can mean class, esteem, dignity, personality, and advantage. *Fayda*, especially as it is experienced during meals is the ability to share and at the same time obtain what one wants and needs. The meal is a communal event and is usually served in one large common dish or bowl, which is placed on the floor. The family and guests also sit on the floor and gather around the bowl. The bowl is placed on the ground so that the family can also symbolically share the meal with their ancestors, who support the bowl on the floor. It is for this reason that it is considered bad luck to jostle the bowl as it rests on the floor, because this could knock the bowl from the ancestors' hands.

The basin is full of the rice or couscous or *foufou*[27] that is the staple food and the mistress of the house ladles the sauce and vegetables into the center of the dish over the cereal base. Everyone eats with his or her right hand, forming a small dimpled ball of the grain or porridge that will carry a bit of the sauce to the mouth. There are no other condiments to be added to the dish. In fact, it is rude to add condiments to a dish after it is served because doing so would be an insult to the woman who prepared it. A dish is considered done and perfectly seasoned before it is served, the eater's only responsibility is to enjoy it.

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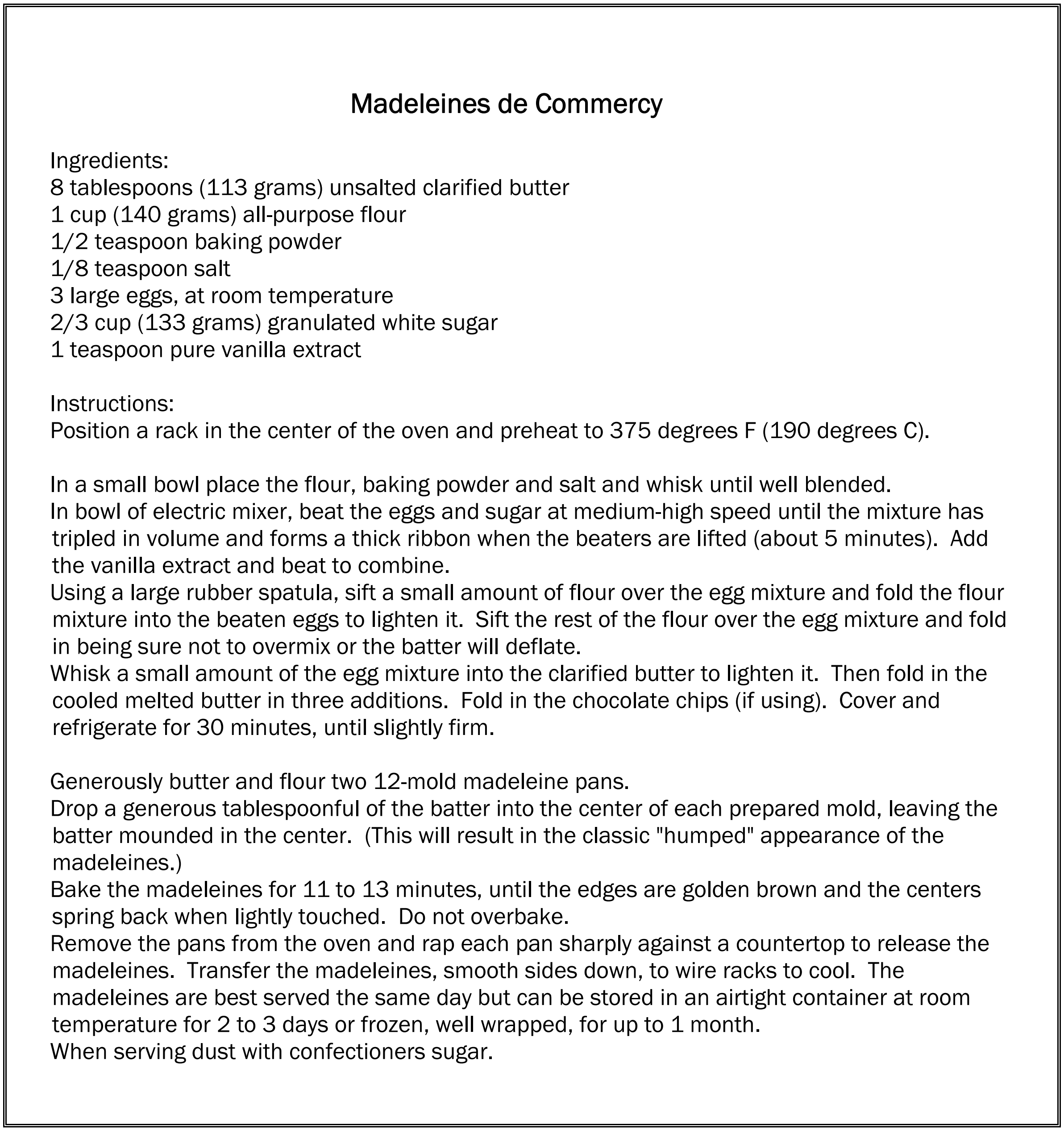
[27] A thick paste of plantain or manioc which has been pounded in a mortar.

Each person gathered around the dish eats from the part of the dish that is directly in front of him or her, as if the dish were a piece of pie; the vegetables and rare bits of meat that fall squarely into one's 'pie' wedge are fair game, but when the choice pieces fall between two diners, then *fayda* comes into play. These fairness questions also come into play as the mistress of the house knocks food from the center of the dish in the direction of certain diners; distributing the most sought after pieces to the most esteemed diners. After the meal, guests are usually given the opportunity to rinse their hands in a bowl of water and maybe even perfume them with a few drops of *Eau de Cologne*.

In both traditions, oft-eaten dishes and everyday meals form a background comprised of habitual actions and relationships. It is understood that "regular" meals are appropriate because they are composed of certain elements. We can compare their structure to other food events that lodge in our memory and accompany different circumstances. To understand the structure of a meal is to understand the structure of meals past, its likeness and difference to those meals and the knowledge of where it falls in a week or a lifetime. In this way, food inhabits a *lieu de mémoire* because of its self-referentiality. Decoding and designating a type of food event requires one to remember how it fits into an overarching sequence of food events. This is quite different from the experience felt by Proust's hero when he tastes the *petite Madeleine*; it is not a taste that suddenly unlocks a memory. Focusing on the syntagmatic nature of food exposes how food is essential to ritual, memory, exchange, event, and nostalgic practice. Effectively, cooking performs cultural memory and recipes are the links to the past and the roots which bind people together.

Food, eating and cooking can have multiple meanings across societies. When we allow for the possibility that the culinary sign can be ambivalent, we are better able to decipher its meaning, especially in novels where diverse ethnicities, genders, and classes come into contact in our post-colonial, global world. The following chapters will reveal how food can, for different individuals, bring comfort and express generosity and passion. They will also highlight issues of parental control and rebellion and flesh out moments of celebration and even spirituality. They will document how the representation of food in novels written by Francophone women provides depth of character, fullness of description and a rich set of cultural interactions.



Madeleines de Commercy

Ingredients:
8 tablespoons (113 grams) unsalted clarified butter
1 cup (140 grams) all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/8 teaspoon salt
3 large eggs, at room temperature
2/3 cup (133 grams) granulated white sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Instructions:
Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).

In a small bowl place the flour, baking powder and salt and whisk until well blended.
In bowl of electric mixer, beat the eggs and sugar at medium-high speed until the mixture has tripled in volume and forms a thick ribbon when the beaters are lifted (about 5 minutes). Add the vanilla extract and beat to combine.
Using a large rubber spatula, sift a small amount of flour over the egg mixture and fold the flour mixture into the beaten eggs to lighten it. Sift the rest of the flour over the egg mixture and fold in being sure not to overmix or the batter will deflate.
Whisk a small amount of the egg mixture into the clarified butter to lighten it. Then fold in the cooled melted butter in three additions. Fold in the chocolate chips (if using). Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes, until slightly firm.

Generously butter and flour two 12-mold madeleine pans.
Drop a generous tablespoonful of the batter into the center of each prepared mold, leaving the batter mounded in the center. (This will result in the classic "humped" appearance of the madeleines.)
Bake the madeleines for 11 to 13 minutes, until the edges are golden brown and the centers spring back when lightly touched. Do not overbake.
Remove the pans from the oven and rap each pan sharply against a countertop to release the madeleines. Transfer the madeleines, smooth sides down, to wire racks to cool. The madeleines are best served the same day but can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for 2 to 3 days or frozen, well wrapped, for up to 1 month.
When serving dust with confectioners sugar.

-- Adapted from The Joyofbaking.com

Fig. 1 - Recipe for Petite Madeleine

Chapter Two-
Cooking in the ‘contact zone’: African Women’s Creation and Refusal in their Paris Kitchens

INTRODUCTION

The writings of two African women living in Paris constitute a counter-current to "kitchen culture" that defines a dominant French identity. Recent novels by Calixthe Beyala (*Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine*) and Fawzia Zouari (*Ce pays dont je meurs*) reject a traditional view of French cuisine, and by extension French society. Rather, they deal with the tensions between the French and the immigrant population living in France using the subject of food and eating to demonstrate the differences between the two cultures. These novels reveal how food and cooking are used as a cultural marker, and provide an activity that binds the characters together and separates them from the dominant French culture.

Beyala and Zouari write about women who have immigrated to France, and are immigrants themselves, though they have lived for a long time in France. Their stories are set Paris, in neighborhoods of the city where immigrants dominate the scene. Though neither are explicitly named, we can identify Beyala’s book as being set in Belleville and Zouari’s in the southern part of the city, because of the passing mention of certain streets and/or metro stations. By locating the action in the peripheral areas of the city, the authors ensure that Metropolitan French culture is held slightly in check by the presence of the many immigrants in these neighborhoods. Though of course traditional French culture is prominent in the stories, by keeping the action in the HLM's of Paris, it removes French culture from inscrutable icons like the palaces and museums of central Paris. Instead, an alternative culture is created in Paris, where African women re-create mini versions of Algeria and Cameroon by entertaining and cooking as if they had never left home.

At the outset, it seems that these two novels are thematically very different. One is part of a growing trend that binds a narrative to a set of recipes that are used by the characters in the story. Like many of these novels, *Comment Cuisiner son Mari à l'Africaine* is a kind of love story, and cooking is the mode of seduction used by the main character. In Zouari's story, there is also a character who expresses her love through her cooking, but in this case, it is not enough to satisfy all of the characters. In *Ce pays dont je meurs*, a character feels unable to become a part of French society, and literally refuses to consume any of it, ultimately dying of anorexia. In both books, the authors write about food because it is emblematic of their involvement in the acts of nurturing and the way that it is symbolic of their relationships with the people that they nurture. However, in the end, but in different ways, this attempt to nurture the characters through cooking fails.

COMMENT CUISINER SON MARI A L'AFRICAINE: HOW-TO MANUAL OR CAUTIONARY TALE ?

> De tous les arts, l'art culinaire est celui qui nourrit le mieux son homme.
> - Pierre Dac

Calixthe Beyala was born in Cameroon in 1961. She was very disturbed by the extreme poverty of her surroundings. She went to school in Douala, and she excelled in Mathematics. Calixthe Beyala traveled widely in Africa and Europe before settling in Paris, where she now lives with her daughter. Beyala has published prolifically, and her most recent novel, which came out earlier this year, is called *La Plantation.*

Beyala's novel *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* appeared in the year 2000, published by Albin Michel. It is similar in structure to Laura Esquivel'*s Like Water for Chocolate*, where the narrative is interrupted by the recipes which figure in the plot line. In her book, Beyala includes twenty-four of the recipes which her heroine Aïssatou prepares to attract her neighbor and compatriot, Souleymane Bolobolo. In this way the book serves as a how-to manual, as its title suggests, on how to seduce, marry and keep a husband by cooking for him.

The book begins with a prologue in the form of a legend where a woman arrives at the remote home of the recluse, Biloa. She announces that she has dreamed of him since she was a little girl, and that she has always known that they would marry. Biloa protests that he isn't the one she is seeking, repeating "Ce n'est pas moi", but the woman tempts him with food so Biloa admits his identity, "C'est peut-être moi," and takes the woman and the basket of food into his house. This, according to the legend, is how Biloa came to be a member of the society of men. This prologue does, indeed, prefigure the struggles of Aïssatou, our novel's heroine, who is a *une dame-pipi*[28] caught between her identity as a Parisian and as an African. Fed up with romantic disappointments, she has chosen her neighbor Bolobolo to be her husband, though she hasn't really even met him.

Aïssatou, who habitually eats only three grated carrots for her dinner, and always takes her tea without sugar in order to maintain her slim figure goes to a marabout for advice on how to seduce Bolobolo, and is provoked by the other women that are also waiting there for advice. According to them, Aïssatou's problem is that she is too skinny, and they lament the fact that "ces filles d'aujourd'hui ne savent même pas cuisiner..... et ça se veut des femmes."[29]

Aïssatou takes this all to heart and armed with the recipes she learned from her mother and grandmother, she attacks her neighbor on the culinary front. She begins by bringing "beignets aux haricots rouges" to Bolobolo's elderly mother who is suffering from a mental illness, and then continues tempting her neighbor with other exotic and spicy dishes. Aïssatou is not unopposed, however, and deals with her rival, Bijou, by again eclipsing her performance in the kitchen. Eventually, Aïssatou does seduce Bolobolo, and after his mother's death, they do marry.

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[28] An attendant in a public restroom

[29] Calixthe Beyala, *Comment Cuisiner Son Mari à l'Africaine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000) 54.

But the story doesn't end here. In an epilogue, the reader gets a glimpse of Aïssatou and Bolobolo's marriage twenty years later. Aïssatou admits that she cooks to save her marriage, which is constantly imperiled by her husband's infidelity. But, as her mother had told her, "There comes a time when one must prefer one's marriage to one's husband," and so Aïssatou sacrifices her pride and tends her relationship in the kitchen even though she realizes that her husband is an adulterous coward. The epilogue leaves a bitter taste at the end of such a delicious novel, but it keeps it honest, and doesn't allow it to seem like the simple re-telling of the legend of Biloa.

Whereas the themes of food and cooking often serve as expressions of nostalgia in other novels, in Beyala's book, food is a language spoken by the different characters. Aïssatou hears her mother's voice prescribing certain dishes to mend a broken heart and other dishes to soothe herself and her family, for as she says, "Ventre plein n'a point de conscience."[30] Her daughter, however, doesn't initially have the same reaction when feeling low and instead she makes herself a bowl of 'véritable soupe chinoise en sachet.' This means that prior to her decision to seduce Bolobolo by cooking for him, the only cooking that Aïssatou undertakes is nothing more than adding water to a dried powder and heating it up. The fact that the dried powder is identified as ‘real’ and ‘Chinese’ point to the fact that it is really neither. Aïssatou is not concerned with her food’s quality or ethnicity, and cares only about its convenience and calorie count. In the course of the novel, Aïssatou will give up her proclivity for these ‘inauthentic’ foods and begin to enjoy the foods of West Africa prescribed by her mother and other African characters.

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[30] Ibid 38.

In Beyala’s book, African food is imbued with nearly magical qualities. Yes, it does put meat on the bones of those who enjoy it, but it also excites the senses, and inflames the passions of those who eat it. Moreover, the true connoisseurs and sages of African food are all women. Even when Aïssatou goes to consult a marabout about her love life, it is the women who actually reveal her ‘diagnosis.’ Maïmouna, who is known as ‘la cheftaine-reine des cuisines” amongst the women at the marabout’s apartment says that Aïssatou’s problem is that she is too thin, and that a certain spicy shrimp dish will always attract a man.

Once Aïssatou decides to begin cooking African food in order to achieve her goal of seducing Bolobolo, she is also able to influence other situations through her cooking. She decides to provoke a macho response in her passive male best friend and prepares a *jus de gingembre*, a drink formulated to send him into a frenzy of desire, just to see what will happen. When confronted by her angry rival, mademoiselle Bijou, she cooks a *bouillie de mil* for her to show that she is civilized and in control of the situation. Later, angered by

Bijou's assessment of her relationship with Bolobolo, she also takes revenge on him by putting a laxative in a favorite dish of his. And of course, Aïssatou's prime objective, clinched by her *pépé-soupe aux poissons*, is to arouse an appetite for passion within Bolobolo. Aïssatou is speaking through her cooking, revealing her desires and fears, using food to express those things which she cannot explicitly state.

In addition to its function as a way to provoke a physical response in the eater, food acts as an important cultural identifier in this novel. Through it we see the transformation of Aïssatou from Parisian, back to African and from white, back to black. In other words, she effectuates a reverse migration, and food and cooking are the vehicle that she uses to bring herself back to her roots. Though this migration is easy to track, as she embraces her mother's attitudes toward food, cooking and even marriage, it is more difficult to find Aïssatou's point of departure. In the beginning, Aïssatou's very racial and ethnic identity is called into question by Beyala's own publisher's blurb on the back of the novel itself. It describes her as « une Parisienne pure black en proie au tourments de l'amour. »[31] But Aïssatou claims that her self-imposed exile in France has made her forget the fact that she is black and that she doesn't know when she became white. She admits that she has become white by imitating the thin, white Parisian women who are, as she is, completely caught up in the constant pursuit of beauty that is calculated to please men.

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[31] Ibid back cover.

She realizes that she has adopted a foreign mentality when it comes to her own body image and describes herself thus: "Moi, je suis une négresse blanche et la nourriture est un poison mortel pour la séduction. Je fais chanter mon corps en épluchant mes fesses, en râpant mes seins, convaincue qu'en martyrisant mon estomac, les divinités de la sensualité s'échapperont de mes pores."[32] It is interesting to note the use of the kitchen techniques, which indicate how previously her only cooking projects served to keep her thin. She combines these techniques where she literally scrapes her body until it is thin with words like martyr and divinity, playing into the idea that the denial of food in order to remain thin is a somehow sacred task. This is a long-standing dialectic, where women align divinity and asceticism when that same asceticism really represents a societal imperative to conform to ideals of beauty. This statement is a declaration of success; she has martyred her body in order to be desirable, and therefore white.

Though Aïssatou admits that she diets constantly and obsessively, like other Parisian women, she also lies about what she eats, just for the sake of being cruel. When asked about her diet by an apparently jealous overweight woman, Aïssatou joyfully tells her that she has, since her birth, eaten, “le coq au vin, arrosé d’un bon beaujolais nouveau; les épaules d’agneau aux champignon noirs, le ris de veau à la crème fraîche et le couscous mouton à la tunisienne."[33] Of course, it is completely untrue that she ever indulges in such rich food, and certainly doubtful that she ate these traditional French dishes as a child in Cameroon. It is worth noting the inclusion of Tunisian couscous with the list of very traditional French food. Couscous has entered the repertory of French foods and is a common dish, despite its colonial origins. Though one may argue about the 'authenticity' of a Parisian "couscous à la Tunisienne" and how it plays on French ideas of exoticism, it is undeniably a part of French cuisine.

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[32] Ibid 24.

This is in contrast to sub-Saharan African cuisine, which is much more difficult to find in the capital. Though you can eat couscous in every arrondissement, you would be hard pressed to find many restaurants that serve food from West Africa or the provisions necessary to make them at home. With this book, Beyala presents a fictionalized cookbook, and if the intrepid home cook should retrace the steps of the heroine, it could even serve as a guide for shopping for the ingredients in the recipes. As mentioned previously, this book's structure is similar to other popular novels where recipes for the dishes prepared by characters are included, like Frances Mayes', *Under the Tuscan Sun*, and Laura Esquivel's, *Like Water for Chocolate*. But in these novels, the recipes are most often a part of the narration itself and sometimes are even recounted by one character to another, mimicking the traditional way that cooking recipes are transmitted, orally, from one cook to another, most often mother to daughter.

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[33] Ibid 21-2.

In Beyala's book, which features African characters who themselves benefited from the oral tradition of passing down culinary knowledge, Beyala's chooses to completely disconnect the recipes from the text, placing them on a separate page at the end of the chapter, and printing them like a traditional recipe that could be found in any cookbook or magazine article. Also, Beyala's book differs from Mayes' and Esquivel's because their novels are both set in a time or place that is foreign to the reader. Esquivel's novel is set during the Mexican revolution, and Mayes' is set in Italy, and their settings automatically place them in a foreign and/or exotic locale. Despite this fact, the reader can easily recreate the recipes that their characters make, thereby exoticising themselves by their appropriation of the foreign meal. In contrast, Beyala's book is both more accessible in its setting, and less accessible to the home cook. *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* is set in the present-day French capital and is completely recognizable in terms of its location and lifestyle. But re-creating the recipes that Aïssatou makes is nearly impossible, because many of the ingredients listed in these recipes are not translated or even described. Though it would seem that this cookbook is intended for other immigrant women to use in re-creating dishes from West Africa, the lack of information about ingredients or possible substitutions runs counter to other cookbooks with similar propositions. Therefore, the status of the book as a manual is questionable, since it is not clear that one can even follow the recipes. Beyala's book may just be using the recipes as other novels use illustrations. They are glimpses of a foreign culture provided by the author in order to pique the interest of the reader, just as an illustration does.

Beyala's location of the text in Paris is key in the novel, because it allows her to set up a cultural dialectic between France and Cameroon. Her heroine must navigate the multicultural space of the post-colonial capital to assess the compromises and concessions that white and black women make. Aïssatou is caught between her Parisian reality where sexual value is based on how thin a woman is, and her memories of her mother's advice which promoted the importance of domesticity and especially culinary satisfaction in the life of a couple. "Un homme qui vous fait ressentir de telles émotions….. mérite le paradis,"[34] she would say as she seasoned a dish to please her man. Aïssatou imagines the questions that her mother would have asked her if her daughter had come to her after a failed love affair. Her mother would have asked if first, she had satisfied him sexually, second, if she had kept the house well, and third if she had prepared nice dishes for him. As Aïssatou begins cooking savory dishes for herself her thin figure fills in with more womanly curves, eliciting pitying looks from some who think that she has let herself go, and approval from others. Race, beauty, food and sex are all locked into an uneasy correlation that she cannot accept. She gives up on the idea of maintaining a French, *i.e.* thin, ideal of beauty and trades it for the African ideal of sensual pleasure of food as a means to attract men. Interestingly, she does not trade her French beauty regimen for an African one. She even cites the methods that she is unwilling to follow and decides that braiding her hair, massaging herself with shea butter and pretending to be fragile is not for her: “Rien qu’à y penser, je m’épuise comme si c’était déja à l’ouvrage.”[35]

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[34] Ibid 31.

This return to her roots is unquestionably problematical for Aïssatou. She is torn between the two worlds constantly. For example, when she sees Bolobolo leaving the apartment building, she is struck by her sudden ‘African’ reaction: "Si j'étais sa femme, je serais restée à la maison à l'attendre." But just as quickly she asks herself, "Mais pourquoi dans le partage des rôles les femmes doivent-elles garder le foyer, cuisiner, allumer les lampes.... jusqu'à ce que mort s'ensuive?”[36] This is the same reaction that she has when she asks herself if she is capable of using African methods of seduction. Aïssatou’s onerous task is to reconcile her African mother’s advice on how to seduce and hold on to a man with her French post-feminist questions about that role.

She knows that her mother is right, and that she will be able to seduce this African man by appealing to his sensual desires and African identity. So, she picks at Bolobolo's sensibilities as an

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[35] Ibid 59.
[36] Ibid 39.

African man and critiques him for doing the marketing himself, saying: "Vous vous êtes finalement bien adapté a l'Occident qui voudrait que l'homme soit une femme et l'inverse."[37] In this way, she calls attention to the cultural difference in the French and African views on the traditional division of labor and highlights the fact that she and Bolobolo share a common culture, though they may be forced to adapt to French practices. Aïssatou also seeks to call attention to their shared culture when she uses Bolobolo's mother's condition as an excuse to get involved, which she does with ulterior motives: "J'ai l'impression que mon discours est en décalage, espace et temps. Je sais que j'ai eu une réaction africaine ou tout le monde se mêle des casseroles étrangères."[38] This statement is telling because it shows that Aissatou knows that she is acting in bad faith. She knows that she has rejected certain aspects of African seduction and that she is not being honest about her intentions, but she nevertheless goes forward with her culinary seduction of Bolobolo and his mother.

When Aïssatou brings the beignets to Bolobolo's mother he mentions that she mustn't have anything better to do if she is cooking for others, but Aïssatou reminds him: "Oui, parce que dans ce pays il faut être vieux ou au chômage pour se rendre compte qu'il est important que l'on s'occupe des autres," again setting herself apart from the French and reminding him that they are compatriots.

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[37] Ibid 44.

[38] Ibid 35.

She finally gains access to his house with this plate of food. Once inside, she professes that she loves to cook and he answers that he loves to do dishes, seeming indicating that they are ideally suited for each other, but also indicating that he may be an African man, but he has adapted to a non-African setting.

And this is the prime reason that Aïssatou cooks, and especially why she cooks African food, to spark Bolobolo's passion for her. Aïssatou cooks constantly, and she cooks the most exotic dishes and uses ingredients that she must search for in all the African boutiques of the capital. Her apartment building is infused with the heady aromas of African cuisine, which causes different reactions among her French neighbors. The concierge battles the smells of cooking with the Airwick spray, but the old lady who lives on the first floor creeps up the steps to hover on the landing while Aïssatou is cooking. Aïssatou's cooking, because it is foreign and strange smelling, makes her black in the eyes of the racist concierge and Bolobolo's métisse girlfriend, Bijou.

Aïssatou decides to invite Bolobolo and his mother to dinner at her apartment, where she intends to win him over with her prowess in the kitchen, but when she goes downstairs to invite him, another woman is in the apartment with him. Unfazed, she announces that she would be happy to bring dinner down to them to enjoy together. The dinner is a success with Bolobolo but his girlfriend, a lovely métissse named Bijou, doesn't enjoy herself at all: "Je n'ai jamais aimé la cuisine africaine…… Paraît qu'ils mangent des singes, ces

Nègres!" To which Aïssatou responds: "Du serpent boa également.......C'est excellent, n'est-ce pas"[39] Again, the food has served to bring together the Africans and place them in opposition to a separate group because they share a taste for a dish that others find objectionable. Aïssatou even goes further in invoking their taste for boa constrictor, because she knows that Bijou will be disgusted by this prospect. Since Bijou is mulatto and not just French, Aïssatou and Bolobolo's shared food preference places emphasis on the fact that they are from the same country in Africa and therefore share a distinct culture, and should not be lumped in with other 'people of color.'

But Aïssatou's main goal for her fabulous dinner is achieved after Bijou's departure when Bolobolo starts kissing and caressing Aïssatou while she is cleaning up the kitchen. This woman, who previously denied herself any sensual pleasure at all from food, is altered by her dinner with Bolobolo. With her seduction of Bolobolo she acquires a new language, where food metaphors dominate the description of sex and the body. Nicki Hitchcott sees the narrator's almost over the top references to food to be a demonstration of clichés on which Western advertising depends.[40] But at the same time, this dinner is evocative of the traditional polygamous African family dynamic, where the wife who cooks for the husband is the one who sleeps with him that night. Although Aïssatou must still deal with her more powerful rival, Bolobolo's mother, she is eventually successful in seducing and keeping him with her culinary talents.

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[39] Ibid 108.

[40] Nicki Hitchcott, "*Comment cuisiner son mari a l'africaine*: Calixthe Beyala's Recipes for Migrant Identity." French Cultural Studies 14/2 (2003) 215.

By the end of the novel, Aïssatou's transformation is complete. She does experience uneasiness when it comes to her own motives and doubts regarding her role in what Hitchcott calls ‘postnational’ France, but Aïssatou settles on using cooking in order to maintain her relationships. She has gone from being a self-described white woman who viewed food as a 'fatal poison' in the matter of seduction, to using food as a tool to accomplish her goal of seducing Bolobolo. She now sees food as a positive, unifying force: "La nourriture est synonyme de la vie. Aujourd'hui elle constitue une unité plus homogène que la justice. Elle est peut-être l'unique source de paix et de réconciliation entre les hommes. »[41] And in this novel, cooking can also reflect passion, love, comfort, anger and civility. Food and Aïssatou's deft manipulation of people through her cooking give her power that she doesn't have otherwise in French society.

As Bolobolo’s mother says in the novel, cooking is indeed becoming a rare skill especially in large capital cities like Paris because women are increasingly working outside the home, and don’t have the time or even talent to cook, since they never really learned the skills from their mothers. Even though France may be a center for haute cuisine technique, it suffers the same problems of all modern countries where there has been a redistribution of domestic tasks from inside to outside the home. Women don’t cook as much as they used to, and more and more people eat outside the home. Therefore, we must ask ourselves for whom the didactic element of this book is intended. As stated above, it is not descriptive enough to satisfy a food adventurer in search of the exotic and by virtue of the fact that it is written and published in France, it is clearly not intended to be used by African women. Perhaps the reader who would find Beyala's recipes to be the most accessible are women like herself, immigrant women who might need to be tempted back to the kitchen.

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[41] Beyala 146.

When this is considered along with Beyala's problematical portrayal of marriage, the book appears as an invitation to take up cooking, not as a way to experience the exotic, but as a way to reject the Western ideal of beauty and to appropriate some power within the community. Aïssatou returned to this aspect of her African heritage, because she had a specific goal in mind and felt that this would allow her to achieve it. She questions herself, her methods and her motives all along the way, and ultimately accepts the limitations of "un bon pépé-soupe" and her husband's monogamy. Just as she advises her neighbor whose husband has begun to stray from the conjugal bed, she doesn't reproach Bolobolo and accepts his infidelity, knowing that eventually, he will return to her. She rejected the literal and figurative hunger that she experienced as a 'nègresse blanche" and chose the culinary tools that allow her to make her husband happy, even though she knows that he will sometimes hurt her. Beyala's heroine fully understands the limitations that she faces in a Paris, and negotiates an identity through her cooking that she can live with.

Jus de Gingembre

Ingrédients :
1 kilo de gingembre
1 litre de lait
1 kilo de sucre
250 g de citrons verts

Préparation :
Laver le gingembre. Gratter pour ôter la peau.
Mixer par petites quantités jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne pâteux.
Mettre le gingembre dans une grande casserole.
Ajouter 4 litres d'eau.
Laisser reposer si possible une nuit entière.
Le lendemain, mélanger soigneusement en tournant avec une grande cuillère en bois de façon à ce que le gingembre se fonde complètement dans l'eau.
A l'aide d'une passoire, séparer le jus de gingembre de ses débris filandreux.
Presser les citrons.
Ajouter le jus de citrons et le lait. Mélanger de nouveau. Selon votre goût, ajouter du sucre.
Le jus de gingembre et prêt, Mettre dans des bouteilles. Garder au frais.
Le jus de gingembre se sert en apéritif, très frais, accompagné de bananes plantains vertes frites.

This recipe figures prominently in the plot of *Comment cuisiner son mari à l'africaine* and is provided in the text on the last page.

Fig. 2 - Recipe for Jus de Gingembre

CE PAYS DONT JE MEURS: A 'NERVOUS' CONDITION OF IMMIGRATION

C'est aux portes du palais que le couscous devient royal.
- French Proverb

Fawzia Zouari was born in Kef, Tunisia, and came to Paris in 1979. She holds a doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of Paris IV – Sorbonne. She worked for 10 years in many different positions at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris. At the Institut she also served as editor of the magazine Quantara . For the last five years, she has worked as a journaliste for Jeune Afrique and has published many articles about the wearing of the *hidjab* or *le voile*. Her most recent novel, *La retournée,* was published in 2002 by Editions Ramsay

Fawzia Zouari's novel, *Ce pays dont je meurs*, was published by Editions Ramsay in 1999, and is the fictional back-story of a real-life tragedy. In late 1998, a young North African woman starved to death in the Parisian apartment that she shared with her sister. Zouari was so touched by this story that she was compelled to write their story, imagining the events that could have led to such a dramatic end. The novel, then, is a family history told by the surviving sister to explain their inescapable spiral towards poverty and death.

The structure of the novel is not linear; instead the reader slips back and forth in time, in the same way that the characters travel between France and Algeria. This transitory feeling reinforces the hardship that the characters face in finding their places in French society when they are really living between the two cultures. The female characters' relationship toward food, again, is emblematic of their cultural identities. The mother, Djamila, sees food as a sign of abundance and comfort since she was brought up in Algeria, where her family had tried to fatten her up so that she would be more pleasing to her husband. The narrator, and eldest daughter, Nacéra shares this happy association even when overwhelmed by the grim reality that she faces. Early in the text, the narrator asks her sister as she lies dying if she can remember the sound of happiness, which was heard in the tinkling of the gold bangles her mother wore while she was cooking, the sound of the radio mixed with the smell of cilantro and dried mint. Her younger sister, Amira, was born in France and thus comes from a mixed cultural background, reflected in her extreme relationship with food and eating, anorexia. This is diametrically opposed to the reaction of Aïssatou in *Comment cuisiner son mari a l'aficaine*, who turns away from her 'lactified' and restricted relationship with food and towards the generous abundance recommended by her mother. Though Aïssatou may have once been anorexic, she is able to re-create a body image for herself that Amira cannot.

Djamila, the mother, comes from a noble family in Algeria, and is the descendant of a famous and respected marabout. To the great consternation and dismay of her family, she decides that she will have no other husband but Ahmed, the only son of a poor family.

Like so many Algerian men during the 1970's, Ahmed goes to France to work in a factory and make some money so that Djamila's family will accept his proposal of marriage. After five years, Ahmed returns and marries Djamila, but he leaves her with her family and returns to his job in France, coming home once a year to spend his vacation with her. Left behind, Djamila sits dreaming in Alouane, furnishing her future home in France in her imagination. She imagines beds and chairs and "surtout, surtout.... des casseroles en cuivre dont l'éclat résumait à ses yeux le confort douillet du foyer et l'alignement, le cours tranquille d'une vie ideale"[42]. Before she even has a family of her own, her idea of nurturing them is equated with cooking for them. This is entirely understandable since the extent of Djamila's education was to train her to make a home and to cook for her family, and of course, to keep her mouth closed.

After six years, Ahmed brings Djamila and their daughter, Nacéra, to France where they move into an HLM on the *péripherique* of Paris. He tells Djamila that she should be happy that she is living in Paris proper, in an apartment building over a supermarket that he calls "une vraie caverne d'Ali Baba." He expects that Djamila will fulfill herself by cooking, as in Alouane and will enjoy and be impressed by the 'modern' convenience of the supermarket. Even though Ahmed calls the supermarket Ali Baba's cave, Djamila will come to be overwhelmed, not by the diversity of products in the store, but by the people that she must come into contact with there.

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[42] Fawzia Zouari, *Ce pays dont je meurs* (Paris: Ramsay, 1999) 67.

Ahmed’s statement may be intended as tempting to his wife, but it highlights the fact that Djamila has never been to any kind of market, even in Alouane. In her respected and relatively well-off family, the women didn't go out, and others performed tasks like marketing for her. Djamila's life is about to change radically. In France, Djamila is no longer the daughter of a noble family, but just another North African immigrant woman.

Despite her attempts to make her home a miniature version of an Algerian home, she is pressured to act more French. Even her husband tells her that she should give up wearing the veil. Djamila acquiesces, but she first has her hair cut short, because she reasons that if she is going to show her hair, then there should be less of it. When Ahmed sees Djamila’s boyish haircut, he reacts violently, and beats his wife and then his daughters. The next day, they must explain the disturbance to the police. This episode demonstrates clearly to the girls the shame and difficulty of their situation. They must live with the double-edged sword of not being French enough and not being Algerian enough. First Ahmed wants a ‘modern,’ i.e. French wife, but not too French. He punishes her and the girls for daring to make this change on her own terms. And then, to literally add insult to injury, she must suffer the shame of being called before the police, when her desire for discretion was at the very core of this whole problem. The fact that all of this is played out for the girls to see shows that they are taught early how treacherous their paths will be.

For the girls, the symbol of a woman's hair, already laden with meaning in their own culture, is put into question because of the violent episode that their mother provokes. Later in the text, Amira shows that she has adjusted her view of a woman's hair, and feels only shame for her condition when she considers her sister's dark curls. She describes them thus, "Ce sont les signes du sous-développement et de la barbarie. Le contraire du raffinement et de la modernité." Amira isn't expressing a French view of her sister's hairstyle, but a condemnation of themselves as barbaric. Aghast at her daughter's critical assessment, her mother tells her to be quiet, because: "En d'autres lieux, cette crinière de lionne aurait porté Nacéra sur un trône."[43] The difference between Djamila and her daughter is that Djamila, for however despised she is in France, has a clear idea of who she is, even if it doesn't do her any good in France. On the contrary, her daughter is not able to find an identity for herself at all.

Djamila and her family's condition worsens when Ahmed is the victim of an accident at work and is incapacitated. Ahmed dies shortly thereafter, and with his death, the family loses his pension, their only source of revenue. Djamila is forced to look for work as a maid and becomes a housekeeper for Mme Sentini. Though her employer's last name exposes her as perhaps a recent immigrant herself, the fact that she is looking for a maid shows that being an immigrant in France is not necessarily a problem, but being an immigrant from Algeria is. Djamila's interview was quite perfunctory, Mme Sentini asks :

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[43] Ibid 126.

> Vous savez repasser?
> - Oui
> - Cuisiner?
> - Oui
> - Mais pas que du couscous. Du rôti de porc, de la tête de veau.
> - J'apprendrai.[44]

This statement shows how, Djamila, 'une bonne musulmane' and descendant of a holy man, is even ready to do something culturally abhorrent by cooking pork roast in order to support her family.

Despite the hardship they face, Djamila is unwilling to return to Algeria or to ask her family for help because she doesn't want them to discover their economic or social status in France. She hides their poverty and tries to maintain her place in Algerian society under false pretenses, always returning with a car full of presents, even if it ruins them financially to do it. Later on a trip home to Alouane, she turns her misfortune to her advantage and puts on airs as she teaches the other women in her family to make French dishes that she actually learned as a domestic employee at Mme. Sentini's home. Djamila prefers to lie to her family and friends than to be reduced to asking for help. When things start to fall apart in Algeria in the early 1990's Djamila is crushed to realize that her image of Algeria is slipping away, and decides to let herself slip away too. Her daughters, left alone in Paris, are incapable of overcoming the barriers to French and Algerian society and follow the lead of their parents -- quietly starving to death in their apartment.

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[44] Ibid 107.

The two sisters' desperate end is due to two things, Nacéra's unwillingness to betray the fact that their mother has endured a complete failure in France, and Amira's willful refusal to fit into French society as her family had tried to do. Amira was born in France and with her pale skin and straight hair, looked more French than her sister. She wanted desperately to be French, especially since no one seemed capable of explaining to her what it meant to be Algerian. Amira can't find a place within French society because she doesn't want the one that French society is willing to grant her. Even her attempt to escape into a relationship fails. She has an affair with a Frenchman and goes to live with him, but it ends quickly because he expected her to be an obedient servant, the stereotypical Arab woman who would fulfill all his desires, in the kitchen and in the bedroom. Her boyfriend’s sudden demands that she prepare couscous for him frightened her and made her even more anxious about food and cooking. She can't relate to other immigrants either. She is severely beaten by a young black woman on the Metro, after antagonizing her about being "plus française que toi."

Since no one would grant her this French identity either, she began to literally reject life in France by not eating. The first signs of her anorexia came early in her life, but her family was ill-prepared to deal with it, "C'est peut-être par goût de la provocation que ma soeur demeura fragile et menue et qu'elle manifesta, à l'âge de douze ans, ses premiers refus de s'alimenter."[45] Nacéra was right to call this a 'provocation' because this was Amira's way of combating those who would force her to assume a particular identity.

Anorexia Nervosa is a complicated disease that medical and mental health professionals struggle to treat all over the world. While *Anorexia* means 'lack of appetite' and can be a symptom of a diverse range of illnesses, Anorexia Nervosa is a refusal of food, even when there is no loss of appetite. William W. Gull, a London physician, first diagnosed Anorexia Nervosa in 1868. He found the malady to be wholly mental and recommended that the patient be removed from the home to effect a cure or at the very least be put into the care of a strong-minded nurse.[46] Obviously, the doctor had an inkling that a power struggle within the family was often at the root of this disorder. Though this struggle is often played out at the family dinner table, in this text we can see that the character, Amira, is resisting the pressures and expectations of the larger French culture through the rejection of food. Furst explains this situation well in her collection of articles about what she calls "Disorderly Eaters." She asserts that:

> The situations uncovered in the texts discussed in this volume suggest, however, that the conflict and need for self-assertion are equally pronounced beyond the confines of the family circle and may amount to a much larger and more significant stand against an entire social system, whose victims find their

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[45] Ibid 86.

[46] Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 111-125.

> desperate outlet in a silent opposition to the normative customs of sustenance.[47]

This is the case with Amira in *Ce pays dont je meurs*. She is in conflict with the entire socio-economic system of France on many levels. Though she used to do well in school, she drops out. She can't hold a job, even where she is only expected to do light office work. She mutters insults to people as she passes and gets in fights. Her anti-social behavior is an attempt at resistance, but one that is destined to merely reinforce the stereotypes that others hold about her. Her anorexia is a refusal of symbolic interaction.

Another late nineteenth century doctor, Charles Lasègue diagnosed a young woman with what he called *anorexie hystérique* in 1873. He postulated that one of the causes of this illness was the bourgeois practice of keeping young girls at home rather than having them become wives and mothers themselves. For him, this was a partial explanation of why it occurs predominately in bourgeois families. Of course, Amira's family is not bourgeois, but the reasoning behind the doctor's opinion holds true for her as well. Lasègue saw the problem as one of a lack of agency. Since his patients were young women that had not yet come into their own as wives and mothers, they were being unnaturally held in the social roles that they had outgrown. Furst illustrates the process by which these girls then searched for agency by focusing on their intake of food:

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[47] Lilian R. Furst, and Peter W. Graham, eds. *Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) 6.

> Middle-class girls….turned to food as a symbolic language, because the culture made an important connection between food and femininity and because girls' options for self-expression outside the family were limited by parental concern and social convention….. Young women searching for an idiom in which to say things about themselves focused on food and the body.[48]

Amira too, is limited by her family's and her Algerian culture's concerns for her. She is also limited by French society's fears and prejudices against her. Though she seeks answers and a measure of self-determination, she is repeatedly rebuffed and responds by applying her will in the one area that she can, by metaphorically trying to erase her body completely.

And Nacéra realizes this; "Elle ne pouvait avoir un autre corps, ni changer de destin. …. De ce mal venait probablement sa maladie. Ses crises de larmes, son refus de la nourriture, ces jeûnes prolongés qui, paradoxalement, cessaient lorsque s'annonçait le mois de ramadan."[49] So that none would confuse her actions of those of religious asceticism, Amira eats during Ramadan, when all Muslims are supposed to fast. Ultimately, Amira's refusal of French society, of even 'ingesting' French culture, is a European and not Algerian act. Amira's family doesn't understand anorexia because it doesn't exist in their culture, "Elle ne frappe que les gens d'ici, parce qu'ils sont sans foi, ni coeur." Djamila believes that anorexia was "un mal de romantiques, d'athées, de suicidaires. Un mal français."[50]

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[48] Ibid 188.
[49] Zouari 126.
[50] Ibid 95.

This is very much like the situation faced by the character Nyasha who suffers with anorexia in Tsitsi Dangaremba's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988) which is set in colonial Rhodesia of the 1960's. In Dangaremba's novel, the doctor who is consulted about Nyasha's condition does not diagnose her with anorexia, because she "could not be ill… . Africans did not suffer in [that] way" even when it is clear that she does.[51] The doctor accuses her of "making a scene" which ignores the validity of her suffering. Nyasha is denied a diagnosis, but is hospitalized for an indeterminate 'nervous condition.' In contrast, Amira is diagnosed, but refuses to be treated. Her mother's attitude towards her illness makes it clear that she doesn't understand nor fully believe that Amira is truly ill. Djamila even goes so far as to summon a family friend to threaten Amira with being sent to Algeria if she continued to be "malade sans raison." Amira is not impressed with this threat and declares that she won't go to Algeria because, "Une vie de chien ici vaut mieux que vos vies d'humains là-bas."[52] Amira is fully aware that she is sick, is also clearly aware that being sent to a country that she only knows through the racist prejudices that she has been exposed to in France will not help her to get better. In both cases, "The primary need of these women is to find a space in which a new historical and social identity can be created," as Wright argues in his essay on Dangaremba's novel.[53]

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[51] Tsitsi Dangaremba, *Nervous Conditions* (London: Women's Press, 1988) 201.
[52] Zouari 123.

In her article about *Nervous Conditions*, Heidi Creamer warns against accepting the novel as no more than the story of an anorexic girl, and we must do the same for *Ce pays dont je meurs*. According to Creamer, food in Dangaremba's novel becomes a symbol of feminine oppression and the oppression of Africans as a whole. In Africa, and in Dangaremba's novel, women are responsible for growing cash crops and food for their families, for buying and selling that food in the marketplace and then preparing it at home. Also in the novel, there is a distinction between English and African food, cooking and service, with of course, the English ways being privileged over the African ones. It is important to realize that women's difficult relationship with food in *Nervous Conditions* has as much to do with the fact that they are poor and come from a county subject to the colonial system as is does with the fact that women bear the brunt of food production in Africa.

Similarly, Amira is reacting against this oppression she feels as a woman and the greater oppression that she feels from French society. Like Nyasha, Amira cannot reconcile the facts about her own culture that she finds in school books, or are told to her by teachers with the realities she confronts in the streets. Derek Wright explains how this process works in *Nervous Conditions*:

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[53] Derek Wright, "'More than just a plateful of food': Regurgitating Colonialism in Tsitsi Dangaremba's Nervous Conditions." Commonwealth: essays and studies: an index to Commonwealth… and Echos du Commonwealth, 17.2, 8-18. (1995) 15.

> [T]he body steps in and acts on the mind's behalf, voicing its protest in physical terms, when the mind is unable to speak for itself for the reason that the only language available to it, the language in which its educational diet is encoded, is the patriarchal discourse of the colonial oppressor and his indigenous puppets – a language in which she cannot express what has to be expressed[54].

This holds true in Zouari's novel as well. Even though the colonial era is over, the power structure between France and Algeria remains the same, and therefore the Algerian remains the subaltern, either despised or completely absent from the discourse. The novel's narrator, Nacéra, describes how this absence was felt, especially at school, where they learned about everything, except themselves. They learned about the glory of France, and how it didn't seem to belong to them, explaining, "Nous égrenions les prouesses technologiques de la France, ses grands progrès industriels et son économie florissant d'après guerre, sans mentionner l'immigration massive qui en assurait la prospérité."[55]

Nacéra, as the narrator, is able to name the problem explicitly, but in looking back at her own faults, she admits that, "Je refusais de savoir, comme Amira refusait souvent de se nourrir."[56]

But this European malady remains a mystery even to many Europeans. It is caused by a person's desire to control oneself and a distorted body image, exacerbated by the dominant images of female beauty. When Djamila discusses the matter with Mme Sentini, Mme Sentini assures her that Amira simply wants to look like the models in women's magazines, so Djamila buys a Marie Claire to inform herself. She doesn't understand how these women could possibly be desirable. "Elle pensait probablement à son village où l'on jugeait de la valeur d'une femme à l'abondance de ses formes."[57] She overlooks the fact that her daughter's illness is not caused by the images in women's magazines but rather by her daughter's need to control her own life in a situation where she is out of control. As Furst writes, "All reveal in one way or another the individual's lust for self-empowerment through choices consciously or unconsciously made in determining patterns of eating. The eating disorder thus becomes a vehicle for self-assertion as a rebellion against a dominant ethos unacceptable to the persona."[58] She elects to starve herself to death because she feels like it is the only thing she *can* do. In this way, anorexia must be recognized as a protest and refusal to be dominated.

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[54] Ibid 12.

[55] Zouari 85.

[56] Ibid 89.

In her definitive book on anorexia, *Fasting Girls*, Brumberg argues that anorexia cannot be considered completely a bio-medical or psychological disease because neither model can account for all causes and reasons for the disease. She asserts that it is an over-arching cultural phenomenon caused by cultural expectations on the predominantly female sufferers. She does not, however, see all cases of anorexia as a form of political protest because this would ignore the fact that it becomes increasingly hard to pull oneself out of the disease as it becomes a full-blown case. The outcome of *Ce pays dont je meurs* is an example of how the victim of disease can be irretrievably ill and how the members of the family can be dragged along with the victim. In Zouari's novel, anorexia begins as a symptom of a larger cultural malaise, but almost claims two victims as it becomes a serious disease in its own right.

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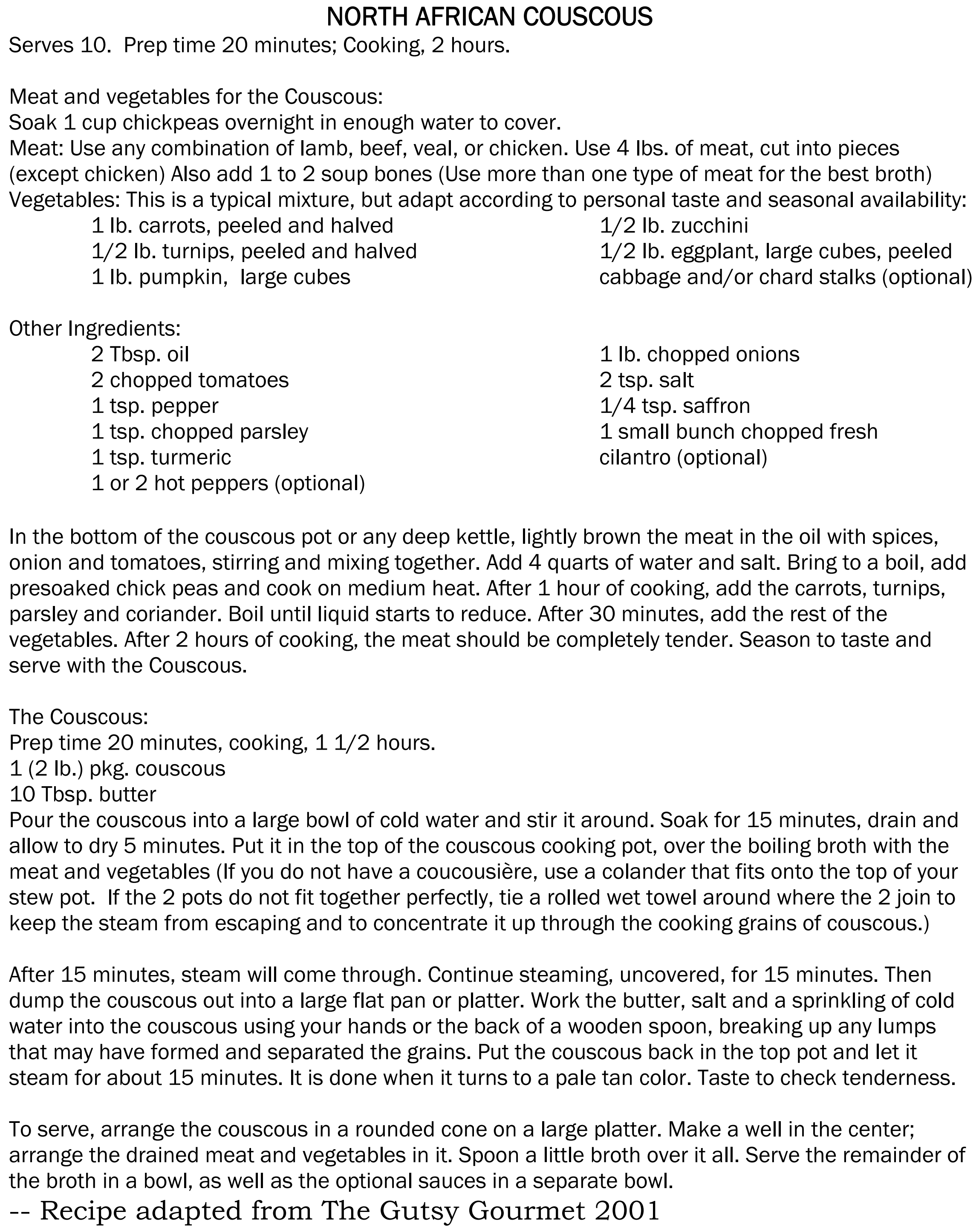
[57] Ibid 91.
[58] Furst 5.

Near the beginning of the novel, the omniscient narrator describes the native village of Djamila and Ahmed. Alouane is a paradise on earth; the fields are cultivated and the gardens are full of fruit. Ahmed sees Djamila for the first time at a *zarda*, or feast when of course everyone was dressed in his or her best clothes and everyone was eating marvelous things to go along with the steer that had just been butchered. It is a communal event where the entire village partakes together. This lovely but transitory description of a village festival that Amira has no knowledge of and therefore cannot relate to appears in stark contrast to the scene at the end of the book, which takes place during another feast. The emergency medical personnel are finally summoned to the girls' apartment on Christmas Eve. Nacéra has opened the window and can see their neighbor's family eating their holiday meal as her sister finally succumbs to anorexia. The two scenes put the two cultures at odds with each other in the text. To be sure, eating is 'conditioned' by the culture in which it is sited, but here, only the discrepancy between the two matters. The inclusion of the two feasts bookends the impression that in Algeria, all were invited to share food is contrasted with the fact that in France many people are left looking in from the outside, quietly starving to death in an empty HLM.

So how can we reconcile these two books, with such divergent moods and outcomes? They share location, situation, and strong-willed female characters who suffer from body-image issues. In Beyala's novel, Aïssatou is more mature, and willing to make concessions to arrive at her desired end. She also is an immigrant herself, and was able to form an opinion of herself before she came to Paris. Amira is *beur,* and is never presented with a clear idea of who she is. In both cases, though, they use their relationship to food to gain power within their cultures – whichever culture they decide to adopt.



NORTH AFRICAN COUSCOUS

Serves 10. Prep time 20 minutes; Cooking, 2 hours.

Meat and vegetables for the Couscous:
Soak 1 cup chickpeas overnight in enough water to cover.
Meat: Use any combination of lamb, beef, veal, or chicken. Use 4 lbs. of meat, cut into pieces (except chicken) Also add 1 to 2 soup bones (Use more than one type of meat for the best broth)
Vegetables: This is a typical mixture, but adapt according to personal taste and seasonal availability:

- 1 lb. carrots, peeled and halved
- 1/2 lb. turnips, peeled and halved
- 1 lb. pumpkin, large cubes
- 1/2 lb. zucchini
- 1/2 lb. eggplant, large cubes, peeled
- cabbage and/or chard stalks (optional)

Other Ingredients:

- 2 Tbsp. oil
- 2 chopped tomatoes
- 1 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. chopped parsley
- 1 tsp. turmeric
- 1 or 2 hot peppers (optional)
- 1 lb. chopped onions
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. saffron
- 1 small bunch chopped fresh cilantro (optional)

In the bottom of the couscous pot or any deep kettle, lightly brown the meat in the oil with spices, onion and tomatoes, stirring and mixing together. Add 4 quarts of water and salt. Bring to a boil, add presoaked chick peas and cook on medium heat. After 1 hour of cooking, add the carrots, turnips, parsley and coriander. Boil until liquid starts to reduce. After 30 minutes, add the rest of the vegetables. After 2 hours of cooking, the meat should be completely tender. Season to taste and serve with the Couscous.

The Couscous:
Prep time 20 minutes, cooking, 1 1/2 hours.
1 (2 lb.) pkg. couscous
10 Tbsp. butter
Pour the couscous into a large bowl of cold water and stir it around. Soak for 15 minutes, drain and allow to dry 5 minutes. Put it in the top of the couscous cooking pot, over the boiling broth with the meat and vegetables (If you do not have a coucousière, use a colander that fits onto the top of your stew pot. If the 2 pots do not fit together perfectly, tie a rolled wet towel around where the 2 join to keep the steam from escaping and to concentrate it up through the cooking grains of couscous.)

After 15 minutes, steam will come through. Continue steaming, uncovered, for 15 minutes. Then dump the couscous out into a large flat pan or platter. Work the butter, salt and a sprinkling of cold water into the couscous using your hands or the back of a wooden spoon, breaking up any lumps that may have formed and separated the grains. Put the couscous back in the top pot and let it steam for about 15 minutes. It is done when it turns to a pale tan color. Taste to check tenderness.

To serve, arrange the couscous in a rounded cone on a large platter. Make a well in the center; arrange the drained meat and vegetables in it. Spoon a little broth over it all. Serve the remainder of the broth in a bowl, as well as the optional sauces in a separate bowl.

-- Recipe adapted from The Gutsy Gourmet 2001

Fig. 3 – Recipe for Couscous

Chapter Three-
Tastes like home: How Senegalese women write about food, lovers and rivals

INTRODUCTION

Anthropological and sociological studies of culture use the ethnographic information encoded in the daily acts of cooking and eating to examine deeply rooted values and beliefs of a people. In literature, too, cooking and eating can reveal truths about the characters and situations inscribed in the text. This study explores issues faced by the heroines of Mariama Ba's *Un Chant Ecarlate* and Ken Bugul's *Cendres et Braises* who live in hybrid situations where two distinct cultures come into contact. The novels were both written by Senegalese women and feature characters that travel between Senegal and Paris. Even though the characters can physically circulate between the two countries, the path to cultural acceptance for the foreigner proves more treacherous.

The novels share similar themes of love, betrayal, racism and even mental illness. In *Cendres et Braises*, a young Senegalese woman becomes involved with a Parisian man, and returns to Paris to continue their affair, and in *Un Chant Ecarlate*, a young Frenchwoman falls in love with a Senegalese fellow student and returns to live with him in Senegal. Though both relationships are bi-racial, neither seems particularly affected by this in the beginning. Eventually, the women realize that they have rivals, and that their lovers are chauvinists and racists. The revelation of their lovers' true natures and what that means for women's social status becomes too much to handle and they react violently; one becoming murderous and the other, suicidal. Obviously, the novels are both dark and lack the qualified *joie de vivre* of Beyala's tale of cultural conviviality, but, the books still include many descriptions of cooking and food that color and give depth to the reader's understanding of the dissimilarity between French and Senegalese life and especially the distinction between men and women.

The two Senegalese novels analyzed in this chapter present scenes where their characters eat meals either in the French or Senegalese tradition. These traditions and the characters' reactions to them is an example of how food and cooking can be used to show how people can and cannot adapt to new cultural situations. It also shows how people are chauvinistic about their own ways of eating and equate them with a more generalized sense of cultural superiority.

‘FOOD IS LOVE’ AND OTHER LIES:
STIRRING UP THE SAUCE IN MARIAMA BÂ’S *UN CHANT ECARLATE*

L'amitié faible est rompue par le partage de la viande.
- African Proverb

The *New York Times* Wednesday “Dining In/Dining Out” section is my favorite section of the week. In it one can find recipes and articles about food from around the world and across the country with special attention paid to the cosmopolitan capital, New York. In spring of 2004, the headline article from the “Dining Out” section highlighted a new chef from Africa who is enjoying success in our nation’s capital. Joan Nathan’s article, titled, “A Chef’s Greatest Influence Comes From Africa: Mom,” introduces this young DC chef, Mourou Ouattara, who is not permitted to cook at home, at least not when his mother is visiting him from the Ivory Coast. His mother, Constance Hallange Ouattara explains that she takes over her son’s kitchen, because, “It is a question of tradition. If a man knows how to cook, it is a sign that a woman is not doing her job. There is no respect.” It seems that Mr. Ouattara’s mother is reminding the reader that food, even when we are talking about how food functions in the relationship between a mother and her child, can express things other than love. Though I am not suggesting that Mrs. Ouattara does not love her son, her own words reveal that there are issues of “respect” and “tradition” in play as well when she cooks for her son. Mariama Bâ can see the same in the novel that we are considering here, *Un Chant Ecarlate*.

Mariama Bâ was born in 1929 in Senegal into an influential Dakar family; her father became the first Senegalese Minister of Health in 1956. Though she was raised by her grandparents in a traditional Moslem environment, she was educated even though her grandparents did not approve. She attended the École Normale (Teacher's College) and received the highest exam score in 1943 for all of colonial French West Africa. She obtained her teaching diploma in 1947, and taught for twelve years. Then, for health reasons, she asked to take up an appointment at the Senegalese Regional Inspectorate of Teaching. She was married to a Member of Parliament, Obèye Diop, and had nine children but eventually divorced. She wrote many essays and articles long before she wrote her novels that probed political and societal issues and influenced Francophone African society. In 1980 she obtained the Noma Prize for Publishing in Africa for her first novel *Une Si Longue Lettre*. She died the following year, just before the publication of her second, *Un Chant Ecarlate*, in 1981. Both of her novels deal primarily with the fate of women in a society that permits polygamous marriage. While the first novel takes the form of a letter written by one woman to her lifelong friend, the second's form is that of a traditional novel. While the narration of *Une Si Longue Lettre* gives women a voice directly, the narrator of *Un Chant Ecarlate* is omniscient, and follows Ousmane, a young Senegalese man, who affects the lives of three different women profoundly.

In Mariama Bâ's second novel, she charts the relationship of two star-crossed lovers, Mireille, the privileged daughter of white French diplomats, and Ousmane, the favored son of a poor yet respectable family in Dakar. Bâ's depiction of their secret love affair, clandestine marriage and unhappy end relies on the voiced experiences of the many women involved in the story to add depth of emotion and social context. Most of the women, Mireille's mother, Mathilde de la Vallée, Ousmane's mother, Yaye Khady, and Ousmane's lover and eventual second wife, Ouleymatou all seem to recognize the social position that they inhabit within their own communities, and work within the confines of their roles to secure as much respect, dignity and power as is possible, yet fully recognize the limitations of their actions. Only Mireille bucks tradition. She abandons her life and family in France in order to spend her life with her long-time love, Ousmane. When she arrives in Dakar, she finds that her own family's opposition to her marriage was easy to deal with compared to the obstacles that she now faces with her in-laws. Mireille finds virtually no support in Dakar, and will not conform to the ideals expected in a Senegalese daughter-in law. She is met with resentment from her husband's family, friends, and eventually, Ousmane himself. Suffice it to say that this story does not end well. Mireille is left a modern-day Medea, crazed by neglect and contempt.

Bâ's narrative highlights the feminine condition as it is shared by all women, young, old, black and white, hemmed in by tradition, bracketed by longing and pain. One thematic technique that Bâ employs to demonstrate the shared experience of her female characters is her repeated description of their cooking. Not surprisingly, all of the women cook for their families, but they all cook different foods, in different ways, and to different ends. Bâ's depiction of food in this novel thus provides insight into the cultural differences between women of different ethnicities, castes, generations, classes, and economic levels. Though often in literature and in memorable filmic instances, food can serve as an expression of love, but in this novel, food is almost everything but love. Even in the early happy stages of Mireille and Ousmane's love affair, the lovers don't share a single meal where food serves as the somewhat clichéd metaphor for sensual pleasure. Instead, food is linked to issues of identity and community, reinforced through a process of sharing that underscores relationships of provision and dependence.

Mireille's early cooking practice came in making her parents breakfast in bed. Though the more substantive and difficult meals were prepared by servants, she prepared coffee and croissants with jam for her father and tea "without bread or butter" for her mother every day. The reader recognizes the relative lightness of the task, in comparison with the meal preparation of the African woman, but also recognizes Mireille's participation in her mother's diet restriction which is prompted by her need to conform to the aesthetic ideal of beauty required by her husband's job. This model of denial and limitation runs contrary to the ideal of abundance that she confronts later in her Senegalese marriage.

Surprisingly, Ousmane also had early practice in cooking. Since his mother was the only adult woman in his family's compound and he had no older sisters, he was often called to help his mother perform domestic tasks, including cooking. Ousmane was glad to help his mother, but he knew that performing these tasks went against tradition, and so he often hid the fact that he helped his mother. He was stung when his first real crush, Ouleymatou, who in fact later becomes his lover, spurns him because, "he did the sweeping and went to buy dried fish." Perhaps this was Ousmane's first evidence that those who transgressed traditional gender roles would meet with opposition, but in any case, this is when he retreated fully into his studies that took place in the more European sphere of the University. Though Ousmane was brought up in a household where he was encouraged to help his mother and then was educated in the French system, which promoted humanistic ideals of equality, he eventually rejects the values learned from his mother and his academic system, partly because his mother rejects them as well.

Clearly, the real cooks in this novel are the African women, and the chief cook of them all was Yaye Khady, who had managed her household, unchallenged by any co-wives, and respected by all the neighbors throughout her marriage. The fact that Ousmane's father had only one wife, Yaye Khady is important to our story, because it shows that it is possible in Senegal to be in a monogamous marriage and still be respected by the community.

Ousmane often comments on the relative peace that reigned in his family's compound, spared by any squabbles between co-wives. From his childhood, Ousmane had a clear idea of how polygamy negatively affected a family, since many of his friends came from families with multiple wives.

This is illustrated by Ousmane's friend Ousseynou, who here describes how much of the stress in a polygamous household begins with difficulty of feeding the extended family:

> Every wife has charge of the "budget" for the whole compound, every second day. That wife is overwhelmed by the task of making this sum stretch to several meals. Often she has to cadge and scrounge for the wherewithal to flatter the Master of the House's gastronomic tastes. Then, to safeguard her reputation, she sees to it that the best of his leavings go into the dish reserved for the other adults. The children get the worst of this share-out of the contents of the cooking-pot, and as their fingers pick through the couscous or the rice, they find nothing but bones.[59]

The description of the family meal encapsulates one of the major problems in a polygamous marriage. The co-wife must constantly vie for the favor of the husband, and prove herself beyond reproach in the eyes of the other co-wives, so the children often suffer from a lack of attention and food. When Ousseynou visits Ousmane's house, he is surprised to find that everyone ate slowly at mealtimes. At his home, the children always ate as fast as possible so that they would be able to keep up with the adults and, "No-one protested lest he be called a meanie who begrudges sharing his food."[60] In this way, the children are taught that food, like their father's attention, was a limited commodity, and must be seized as quickly as possible in order to get one's share. At the same time, one must not give the appearance of being greedy or stingy. The unequal relationship between the man and wife sets off a cascading effect that extends to the entire family and causes an imbalance even amongst the children. The children are struggling to get enough to eat and are at the same time worried about the appearance that they are ungenerous. This tension between the needs of the individual and the needs of the community is a recurring theme in the novel.

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[59] Mariama Bâ, *Scarlet Song* (White Plains, NY: Longman African Writers, 1993)
[60] Ibid 7.

In Susan Stringer's article about *Un Chant Ecarlate*, she discusses the dichotomy set up between the individual and the community. In Bâ's novel, the individual experiences difficulty in trying to live between two worlds. To truly be a part of the community, one must accept its norms without question, and Mireille cannot do this because she has nothing to gain by giving in to all the demands of Senegalese customs. Stringer shows how this dichotomy is present in all of Bâ's novels, with the modern Dakar representing the responsibilities and values of the individual while the rural village serves as the locus of the community. In Bâ's novels, the characters physically circulate between the village, site of African tradition and community spirit, and the modern city of Dakar. In *Un Chant Ecarlate*, the poor part of Dakar, where Ousmane grew up, replaces the village as the site of the community. Ousmane's 'village,' then, is the place where he feels comfortable and surrounded by people who share his values. The apartment he shares with Mireille, which in fact was granted to her because of her teaching post, is the place where he is standing outside of tradition, acting in response to the attraction that he feels for a woman because of her character and intellect.

Edriss Markward's essay on Mariama Bâ discusses another major current running though her novels that suggests she believed that happiness, for all individuals, must be based on a monogamous marriage. For Bâ, marriage should be the partnership of two equals who can therefore share in the joys and troubles encountered in family life. She further believed that the fate of the nation was bound up in the happiness of its citizen couples and that the couples would be stronger if they had come together of their own choice, as equals. Ousmane and Mirelle are equals; they were initially attracted to the intelligence and intellect of the other, and their courtship is based on their mutual respect for one another. The questions of race and culture do not figure greatly into their love story, and the young lovers are independent of, yet committed to each other. Later though, their relationship falls apart because of racial and cultural differences that separate them, but mostly because of Ousmane's sexual and romantic fantasies. However, the presence of Pierrette and Lamine, Ousmane's cousin who is also married to a French woman, shows that these differences can be overcome though compromise and adjustment. The problem is, as Lamine says, that Ousmane “ne veut rien ceder.”[61]

Bâ’s presentation of an idealized relationship that goes terribly wrong when a husband selfishly exercises his ‘right’ to polygamy might cause one to believe that Ba is a feminist, even though she herself wouldn’t call herself a feminist. Feminism in post-colonial Africa was considered by some to be an importation from the west and therefore contrary to African ideals. I would argue that really, it wasn’t and maybe still isn’t even a completely accepted part of Western society until relatively recently. Even if Bâ would never have called herself a feminist, she may have admitted to being a bit of a political actor. Her strong convictions about marriage were most likely brought into focus because of a storm brewing about the rights of women in Senegal. A major piece of legislation called the Family Code became law during the Senghor era in Senegal. It was a law that gave equal rights to women and protected them from arbitrary repudiation.[62] Islamic leaders who were becoming more vocal and more powerful in the 70’s opposed it. Bâ’s novel, in its portrayal of the tragic effects of actions supported by Islamic law, is an indictment of the leaders who didn’t want the Family code to supercede Islamic laws.

However, the problems posed by Islamic interpretations of marriage are not the first ones to arise in the novel. First, Ousmane must break the news of his plan to marry his white girlfriend. In the following passage, Ousmane is looking for an opportunity to tell his parents that he is going to go to France, still concealing of course his intentions. He waits for the moment when his family would be at its most receptive, gathered around one of Yaye Khady's specialties:

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[61] Ibid 151.
[62] Edson 15

> Yaye Khady was serving M'Boum, her husband's favourite dish, a couscous with cabbage leaves and ground-nut sauce. Hands dipped into the common dish. From time to time Yaye Khady added another ladleful of sauce to the couscous. The flavor of the M'Boum, cooked to perfection by Yaye Khady, loosened their tongues. [63]

This is the moment in the novel when food *does* appear to be purely an expression of love, but I submit that Ousmane's actions undermine the effect of his mother's meal, especially since the reader is well aware of Ousmane's real reasons for traveling. While Yaye Khady's skill creates and controls the atmosphere, Ousmane takes advantage of the moment to make his difficult announcement though she presciently warns against bringing a white woman home with him. For this novel catches Yaye Khady at a time in her life when she is seeking to divest herself of the day-to-day management of the compound, achieved when a daughter-in-law takes over the bulk of the responsibilities of the household.

In fact, when Khady *does* learn of Ousmane's marriage, her opposition is first based on her disappointment that she will not be relieved her of duties and cosseted by her son's wife, because she believes that a white woman would never behave in this expected manner. Yaye Khady believes that "A white woman does not enrich a family."[64] In Yaye Khady's eyes, a white woman divides the community, she 'exploits' others to do drudge work, and she doesn't turn a large portion of her husband's earnings to her husband's family.

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[63] Bâ 59.

Khady also worries about how the marriage will be received in the community:

> The "matter" would be blown up, distorted, dissected, so that it could be spread more easily and nourish hatred and envy…It would accompany the choice of fish and vegetables at the market, squat round the public water taps, beguile a couple of women traveling by bus. And she, Yaye Khady, she who had been the soul of dignity and honor since her earliest childhood, she who had lived in perfect harmony with her conscience, would, all because of her son, become food for all these tongues well versed in slander. ….She grew thinner by the day….How was it possible to not lose weight? The lump in her throat made her choke on solid food and for some time now, she had been living on milk and broth.[65]

The author's choice of words here is interesting for several reasons. First the matter of her son's marriage is likened to a comestible item, something to be bought at the marketplace, and then, Yaye Khady herself is transformed into a foodstuff. She is horrified and literally consumed by the thought of becoming fodder for gossip. These food metaphors effectively replace Yaye Khady and her typical day's work of marketing and cooking with her son's shameful choice of wife. While Yaye Khady had hoped to be 'retired' from this work by a daughter-in-law of her choosing, she is denied this and starts to waste away.

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[64] Ibid 72.

[65] Ibid 69.

As feared, things do not go well for Mireille when she arrives in Dakar. She is hampered by her lack of progress in Wolof, making her even more of an outsider, and she has trouble even taking meals with her new family:

> She made an effort to get used for the time being to the community life, which upset her. The meals were always served in a large aluminum dish from which everyone helped themselves. After every meal the tablecloth was folded up and pushed into a corner of doubtful cleanliness. The water which everyone used to wash their hands was dirty after the first person. That did not prevent the others from dipping their hands in and Mireille did not dare to be the exception. Yaye Khady, out of spite or habit, prepared extremely hot, peppery dishes which were torture to Mireille. They made her nose run, prevented her from swallowing and for days on end she had to live on fruit.[66]

When Mireille is granted an apartment as part of her new job, she sets up a European-style home for herself and Ousmane, but feels invaded whenever her in-laws or her husband's friends visit them. She was especially vexed by the way Ousmane's friends would hang around the house until dinnertime. As we see in this passage, this would cause Mireille to feel taken advantage of:

> Mireille, waiting in the kitchen to serve, was getting to the end of her patience. Ousmane would come through, demanding more places to be laid and enough food to be provided for the unexpected guests. In spite of Mireille's protest the contents of the fridge were depleted: fish, meat, yoghurts, everything disappeared.[67]

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[66] Ibid 81.

[67] Ibid 85.

Though Mireille had furnished the apartment with care, her belongings and customs are not respected, especially at dinnertime, "Knives and forks were pushed aside. They joked about the tiny plates, which couldn't hold enough to satisfy a man's appetite. Table napkins were grey after they had used them. The basin in the bathroom was like a kitchen sink, stained with grease after they had washed their hands."[68] Ousmane wants to live in his comfortable Western apartment, but with all of his family and friends around him.

Not everyone is as adversarial towards Mireille as Yaye Khady, and some women that she meets try to help her fit in, in Senegal, and in her new family. The wife of one of Ousmane's friends tries to explain the expectations held for Senegalese daughters-in law. She suggests that Mireille adopt certain Senegalese customs, especially the customs of giving, which reinforce the patterns of respect and dependency in a community. She also suggests that she prepare and send special dishes to her father-in-law, quoting a common proverb, "The mouth that chews is always grateful to the hand that provides."[69] Unfortunately, Yaye Khady considers Mireille's efforts as insufficient, and greets them with overt derision:

> "One chicken in a soup-tureen for your husband's father! What can you be thinking of? For the father-in-law one cooks at least five chickens." How could she invite her women friends to show off Mireille's generosity? Her friends would be

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[68] Ibid 86.
[69] Ibid 96.

> flabbergasted at the sight of one miserable chicken swimming in a lake of sauce.[70]

Mireille's gesture of love and appreciation, albeit prompted, is rejected because it doesn't support the desired image of a wealthy son who values his parents. Mireille doesn't understand the mutually beneficial system of giving in receiving. She considers these overblown gifts attempts to create false appearances and doesn't realize that this exchange brings honor to both parties. Mireille rejects this practice as a system of empty ostentation.[71] Mireille cannot countenance the position that she feels forced into by her new family as is illustrated in these passages about sharing food. More and more, Ousmane feels that Mireille is intransigent and self-centered. When during their school days they considered themselves to be equals, Mireille is now relegated to the lesser role of 'wife.' These glimpses into the kitchen show the weight of a woman's culinary skill. Though these instances are limited in scope, the women are thus capable of making their will felt.

But Bâ does more than just evoke the difficult feminine condition in the developing world. Several scenes in the novel seem to have less to do with interpersonal relationships than with a post-colonial struggle to maintain African traditions. In Bâ's novel, the two questions are connected. Bâ's heroine, and hero, for that matter, were educated in a modern school, but expected to return to a ‘traditional’ family structure. According to Adele King, Bâ’s novels caution against this strict adherence to ‘tradition’ because this leads to the subjugation of women and a corrupt, conservative state.[72] Though certainly Mariama Bâ addresses issues of class and race relations in her novels, and especially in *Un Chant Ecarlate*, she seems to suggest that the unequal relationship between men and women is a more essential problem in society. In this novel, she shows this imbalance in Mireille and Ousmane’s marriage.

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[70] Ibid 97.

[71] Susan Stringer, "Cultural Conflict in the Novels of Two African Writers, Mariama Bâ and Aminata Sow Fall." *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* Student Supplement (1988) 38.

Though originally based on the ideals of equality and respect between people, the disintegration of Mireille and Ousmane’s marriage is caused by a perversion of the ideals of Négritude into a black racism.[73] Ousmane claims to espouse Senghor’s tenets of “négritude” but in the end, his version of Négritude ruins his marriage. At first Ousmane sees Négritude as both a look back at a proud history, and as a way to embrace openness to others. But later, he forgets this second trait of the Senghorian movement and indulges in a corrupted form of Négritude that allows him to cling to the traditions that serve him and reject all others.

This is a central problem in *Un Chant Ecarlate*; traditions are invoked only selectively and are used to advance one’s own cause through the domination of another. This manipulation is present in both black and white families and also between women. The real problem that Yaye Khady has with Mireille is that she will not be able to dominate her. This is why she says, "A *Toubab* can't be a proper daughter-in-law."[74] Ousmane admires his own father and home because his father had only taken one wife, but still invokes his right to polygamy because it allows him to indulge his sensual fantasies with Ouleymatou and leave his wife behind. The image of African women in 'traditional' roles, that is, in a polygamous marriage is unstintingly negative in *Un Chant Ecarlate*. In many instances, they are reduced to mere merchandise, as evidenced in the scene where Yaye Khady presides over the gathering of women who offer her money in congratulations for her new daughter-in-law.[75] This novel is an appeal for the kind of universal humanism that Mireille, and at one time Ousmane, espouses.[76] Sadly, most of the other characters in the novel have nothing but prejudice and loathing for other races, white and black, women and men, equally.

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[72] Adele King, “The Personal and the Political in the Work of Mariama Bâ.” *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* 18.2 (1994) 177.

[73] Ibid 177.

Through the course of the novel, Ousmane and Mireille's relationship becomes more and more embattled. They seem irrevocably divided by cultural demands – illustrated by their differing views on music, religion, economic dependence and yes, especially food and eating. When Mireille proposes that she take over Ousmane's convalescence after a long bout with the flu, Yaye Khady scoffs at this notion:

> You think you can build up a man's strength with your bits of beefsteak, an apple and a yoghurt? Ousmane needs building up. He needs to train his stomach and intestines to digest

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[74] Bâ 66.
[75] King 185-6.
[76] Ibid 185.

> food again with a dish of foufou. And an ox-foot soup to give him back his strength. I shall come every day to bring him what he must have. If you've no objection![77]

While before, Ousmane's mother would merely try to deny her daughter-in-law access to her family through cooking, here she manages to dismiss the nutritive value of Western food, and Mireille's ability to care for him at the same time.

When Ouleymatou, Ousmane's first crush from so many years ago, sets out to seduce Ousmane, she decides to play on his sense of personal and cultural memory. She entices Ousmane into inviting himself to her house for dinner, and giving her plenty of money to pay for the feast. He even makes particular requests for the menu and meal preparations, saying that he likes his couscous spicy and with not too much tomato.[78] The rather proprietary way that Ousmane speaks to Ouleymatou reminds the reader that in many African countries, a woman who cooks for a man is the woman who is sleeping with that man. Ouleymatou is thus setting herself up as a potential co-wife, which is completely normal in Senegalese families (but not Ousmane's). Again, reinforcing the link between the dinner and the possibility of their marriage, the reader learns that Ouleymatou is free to entertain in her mother's room because her mother will be having her 'turn' that night. Ouleymatou invites her brother and the neighborhood girls because she is maximizing the appeal of the invitation to a purely ‘African’ meal and to force Ousmane into being very clear about his intentions.

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[77] Bâ 94.

[78] Ibid 112.

Ouleymatou’s seduction of Ousmane is the chapter-long description of a meal, from its preparation, till just after the guests disperse. It *is* the easily-identifiable sensual experience that I mentioned earlier, but with one important difference. She prepares her room, herself, the food and even the entertainment and guest list with only one goal in mind – to make Ousmane remember his African heritage and to see her as the embodiment of that heritage. He enjoys the meal completely, eating with his hands, having the other women literally pick the best morsels out of the common dish for him, and is urged by Ouleymatou’s use of his childhood nickname to eat, because it is “all for him.” Later, a *griot* seals the deal, specifically calling him to have an affair with Ouleymatou. Although she is definitely in love with Ousmane, the food that they share is symbolic of an entire way of life and not an intimate moment between lovers (although admittedly, that does happen after dinner). Ousmane is consumed with passion for his culture and for Ouleymatou whom he sees as his true wife, which assuages any guilt he feels in deceiving and abandoning Mireille and his young son. He believes that he is completely within his rights in leaving his wife and marrying Ouleymatou even though he does not treat the two women equally, which is against Islamic law. Mireille becomes desperate because she is the only one who has sacrificed for her marriage.

But not everyone approves of Ousmane's treatment of Mireille. Ousmane's youngest sister befriends Mireille, teaching her how to cook Senegalese specialties and helping her with her young son. It pains her that Mirelle is being mis-treated and she is sickened that Mireille has no idea that she has a co-wife, but she is forbidden by her mother to tell Mireille about her co-wife. Yaye Khady sees the material benefits of having a Senegalese wife represented by the value of her labor as enough reason to remain quiet about Ousmane's infidelity. But even before Ousmane marries Ouleymatou, his cousin Lamine reproaches Ousmane. He finds Ousmane much too demanding of Mireille, while Ousmane finds any compromise in his behavior to be a betrayal of his true self. Lamine counters, "How can it change a person to sit at a table and eat steak instead of rice? ….[I]f to respect my wife and let her live happily in the way she chooses means that I've been colonized, well then, I've been colonized…. That doesn't mean I'm a traitor to myself."[79] Ousmane argues that these 'trivial' aspects of his behavior still hold sway over his thinking and that he is in danger of losing his "essence as an African."

The exchange in the novel between Ousmane and Lamine reminds me of Lisa Heldke's excellent philosophical treatise, *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer*, published in 2003. In it, she puts eating habits into a global context fleshing out notions of novelty, authenticity and colonialism. She self-identifies and might identify many of us as ‘food adventurers,’ eaters who unwittingly participate in a cultural colonialism through our pursuit of exotic experiences in ethnicity. She describes the ways a colonized people resist colonialism by refusing to provide access to their culture and specifically their cuisine. She also talks about the ways that “attitude” and “action” are inextricably connected. And therein lies Ousmane’s and indeed *our* problem as exposed in Heldke’s book. Can Ousmane compromise aspects of his culture for his marriage’s sake? We need to fully explore and understand the systems that bring us to the table in order to partake with impunity.

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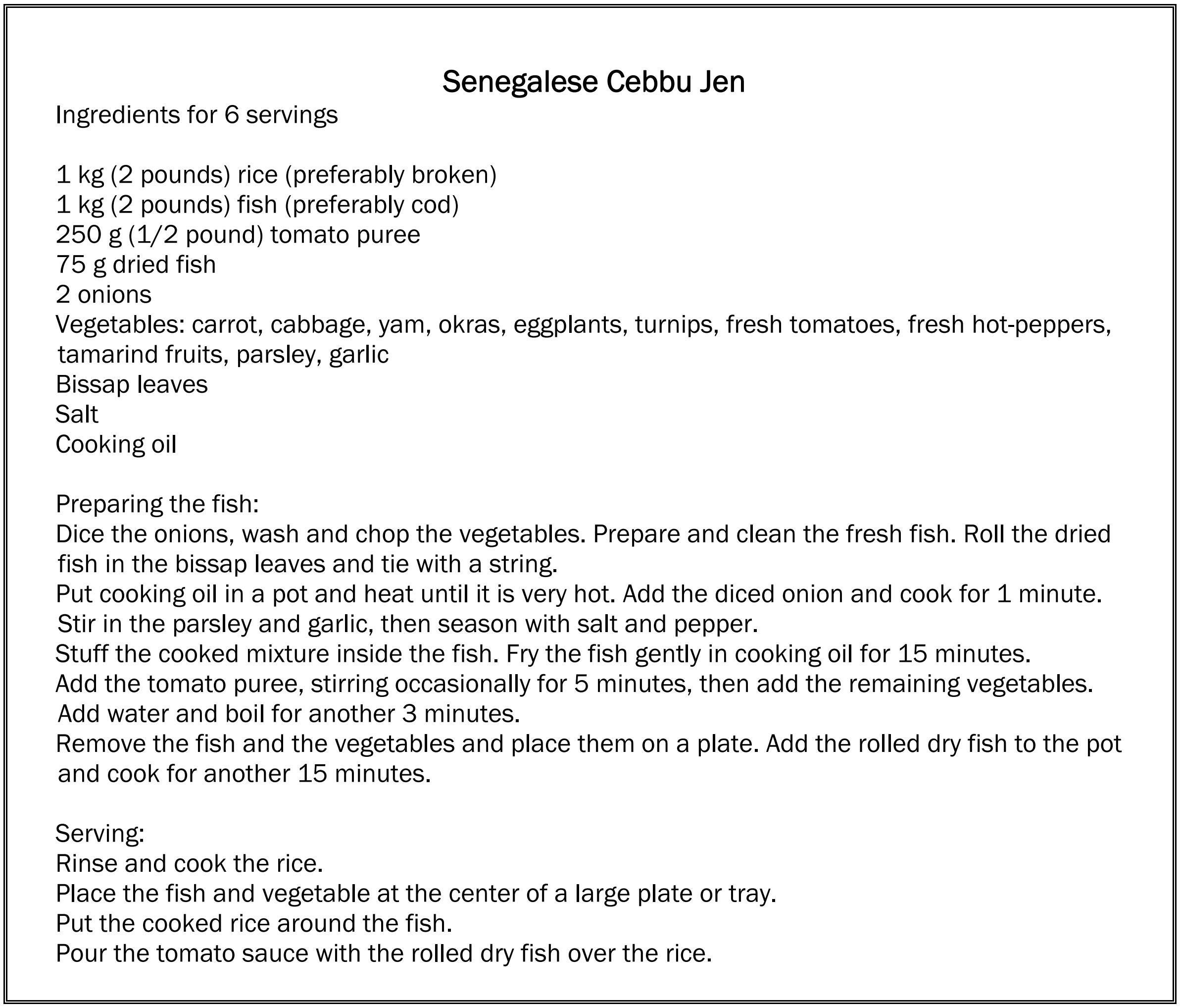
[79] Ibid 100.



Senegalese Cebbu Jen

Ingredients for 6 servings

1 kg (2 pounds) rice (preferably broken)
1 kg (2 pounds) fish (preferably cod)
250 g (1/2 pound) tomato puree
75 g dried fish
2 onions
Vegetables: carrot, cabbage, yam, okras, eggplants, turnips, fresh tomatoes, fresh hot-peppers, tamarind fruits, parsley, garlic
Bissap leaves
Salt
Cooking oil

Preparing the fish:
Dice the onions, wash and chop the vegetables. Prepare and clean the fresh fish. Roll the dried fish in the bissap leaves and tie with a string.
Put cooking oil in a pot and heat until it is very hot. Add the diced onion and cook for 1 minute. Stir in the parsley and garlic, then season with salt and pepper.
Stuff the cooked mixture inside the fish. Fry the fish gently in cooking oil for 15 minutes.
Add the tomato puree, stirring occasionally for 5 minutes, then add the remaining vegetables. Add water and boil for another 3 minutes.
Remove the fish and the vegetables and place them on a plate. Add the rolled dry fish to the pot and cook for another 15 minutes.

Serving:
Rinse and cook the rice.
Place the fish and vegetable at the center of a large plate or tray.
Put the cooked rice around the fish.
Pour the tomato sauce with the rolled dry fish over the rice.

This recipe adapted from The Congo Cookbook is for one of Senegal's most famous dishes. Ousmane's youngest sister teaches Mireille how to make it.

Fig. 4 – Recipe for Cebbu Jën

CENDRES ET BRAISES OR FINDING THE INGREDIENTS FOR HAPPINESS

> Lekkal lu la neex, waaye solal lu neex nit na.
> (Eat what you want, but dress according to what society wants.)
> - Wolof Proverb

Mariètou Mbaye Bileoma, was born in 1948 in Louga, Senegal. She took the name Ken Bugul, meaning "nobody wants it" in Wolof, as her pen name. She studied at the University of Dakar and received a scholarship from the Centre National du Livre in 1995 for her study of languages. Ken Bugul now lives in Benin.

Ken Bugul is the first Senegalese woman to have denounced how young African women struggle with the realities of their own identities especially when they come into contact with Europeans who reduce them to being sexual objects. Bugul's own experience of a life shared between Africa and Europe allow her to engage in this critical view of Europe. Thus, even though she deals with the image and role of African women within family and social groups and condemns women's debasement in her novels, she does not offer a caricatured view of them. While her books are often autobiographical, readers can consider Ken Bugul's texts as a mirror of the relations of African and European cultures towards women and African women in particular. She was awarded the Grand Prix de l'Afrique Noire in 1999 and, ever since has been a rising African literary figure.

Cendres et Braises is the second volume of a semi-autobiographical trilogy of novels by Ken Bugul. In her essay on this trilogy, Jeanne Garane highlights a single image found initially in *Le Baobab Fou*, in which "l'harmonie était brisée."[80] Garane exposes this 'shattered harmony' as the absence of the mother. Certainly in *Le Baobab Fou,* and especially in the 'prehistory' part of the novel, the protagonist is traumatized by being abandoned by her mother. In *Cendres et Braises*, however, the narrator undertakes to begin to know and appreciate her mother once she finally realizes that she has lost herself. It is only with her return to her mother, both literally and figuratively, that she can find peace.

Other themes that run throughout this trilogy are the clash of European and African cultures and the subaltern position of women. She sees the clash of cultures that she is a party to as being just one more burden in the life of a woman. The difficulty of being black and a woman that is first exposed in *Le Baobab Fou* continues in *Cendres et Braises,* a novel with an equally cruel story as is found in her first story. At a particularly low point in the novel, when the protagonist of *Cendres et Braises* seriously contemplates suicide, and even makes a failed attempt, she says bitterly, "[J']en voulus à la mort qui elle non plus ne voulait pas de moi."[81]

The practice of polygamy is another important theme in this novel, whether it be the adulterous affairs of European men with

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[80] Ken Bugul, *Le Baobab Fou* (Dakar : Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983) 31.
[81] Ken Bugul, *Cendres et Braises* (Paris: Encres Noires – l'Harmattan, 1994) 134.

African women, or the polygamic family structures so common in rural Senegal. Ken Bugul herself has a complex opinion of and part in polygamy because it is one of the most physical manifestations of the inequality between men and women, especially because it is not a reciprocal system at all. As she says in an interview, "la pratique actuelle, par contre, surtout dans le milieu urbain, s'éloigne de celle des ancêtres." [82] But the reader can't ignore the fact that at the end of *Cendres et Braises*, the narrator Marie, goes home to her village and enters the harem of the *Serigne*. And this is a point that is auto-biographical, because Ken Bugul herself lived in the harem of her village's *Serigne*. It is there where she and her protagonist are both able to heal, because the *Serigne's* home, where she is surrounded by other women, is a place of community and gratitude.

This novel, as the middle part of the trilogy, is neither located entirely in France, nor entirely in Senegal. *Le Baobab Fou* begins in Senegal and takes the heroine to Europe for the first time. *Cendres et Braises* decribes a period when the heroine makes several journeys back and forth. *Riwan ou le Chemin de Sable* is set almost entirely in the rural village.

The beginning of *Cendres et Braises* is the arrival of the protagonist in her rural village at the home of her mother. It is, in effect, the end of the story, so the following narrative is a sort of memoir. When Marie finally decides to tell a friend about what happened to her in France, she is sometimes interrupted, so the text moves back and forth in time with very little to reference the rupture.

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[82] Jeanne Garane, "'La Femme moderne c'est moi; la femme traditionnelle, c'est aussi moi': Entretien avec Ken Bugul." *Women in French Studies* 11 (2003) 128.

In the first pages of the novel, the protagonist, Marie, comes back to her mother's village, and the first view that she has of the village is her neighbor's wife, cooking. When she finally catches a glimpse of her mother, she too is bent over the fire, but Marie understands right away that her mother is ill, because of the way that she moves, and because of what she is cooking, "des écorces, des feuilles, dans un liquide brun, confirma mes soupçons: à cette heure de l'après-midi," some sort of medicinal *tisane* at a time of day when other women are preparing dinner.[83] When she arrives, she is psychologically broken; having just extricated herself from what became an abusive relationship with a French man that had taken her far away from her home. She returns, looking for solace in her mother's house. Her mother's first reaction is to try and feed her. "'Attends, qu'est-ce que tu veux manger?' Ce sentiment qui aurait empêché toute famine et toute misère, il n'y avait que la Mère qui assumait entièrement jusqu'au bout de ses forces."[84] Marie tries to restrain her mother from going to too much trouble, and slaughtering two of the roosters in the courtyard, so Marie lies, telling her mother that she has just eaten in the train, that her fellow travelers had shared their food with her.

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[83] Bugul, *Cendres et Braises* 7.
[84] Ibid 9.

To further spare her mother, when she sees a young calf picketed in the yard she professes a desire for some *lait caillé*, curdled milk. She asks for this because she knows that her mother already has some, because the presence of the calf indicates that there is a cow who is giving milk. When she enters her mother's pantry, she says, "Tout ce lieu me touchait profondément. J'en respirait l'odeur."[85] Her mother fusses over her and tries to get her to take the biggest container of milk. Her mother is very concerned with providing for her child, who has returned to the fold in such a bad state.

Her mother and her mother's pantry are depicted as full of life-saving gestures. She is able to keep rainwater pure throughout the dry season in the large clay jars inside the house. She has the reputation of being a good cook who served a 'thousand' different dishes at a meal so that everyone would be satisfied. She was able to predict what everyone and especially Marie would enjoy without even asking. Marie feels like these attentions are what will allow her to heal herself, "J'étais revenue chez moi, j'étais revenue me réadapter, j'étais revenue me désaliéner. J'étais revenue me purifier."[86]

Marie's healing process can only be achieved at home, where serenity and health and a good-home cooked meal can be had. It is impossible for Marie's mother to not feed her, and she refuses to take any shortcuts when it comes to the cooking. Marie finally agrees to let her mother cook something, but tries to limit the work involved:

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[85] Ibid 11.
[86] Ibid 109.

> "Bon, Djimé va aller chercher de la viande, nous ferons un couscous à la viande, sans huile, sans tomate, juste tout faire bouillir jusqu'à la cuisson; ici la viande est fraîche, c'est bon, nous mettrons seulement de l'oignon et du laurier", proposai-je pour éviter toute peine a la Mère.
>
> Mais elle, elle aimait les choses bien faites, si possibles, et pour la Mère tout était possible. "Non, nous allons faire un bon couscous, un *céré talalé*[87], c'est meilleur."[88]

In her mother's house, she will begin to live again, and that means that she will begin to eat again.

In Senegal, as opposed to Marie's life in Paris, food is a part of life. It is an activity which draws women together while cooking, keeps people close during mealtimes and expresses a mother's love. It is also a subject for jokes, even during the dry season, when food is less plentiful. Here, her neighbor jokes with her about her name:

> Ton nom ? Mbaye, ce n'est pas un nom, cela n'existe pas; Mbaye ? Comment pouvait-on avoir un tel nom ? C'est gourmand, ça ne fait que manger; je me demande comment celle qui est ta mère peut te nourrir; quelqu'un qui a nom Mbaye n'est jamais rassasié.[89]

This wordplay probably stems from the fact that the name Mbeye sounds like *mbey* which means harvest in Wolof.

After some time back in the village, Marie starts to think about her own life and about the first time that she went to live with her mother. At a young age, she became the victim of sexual violence committed by a half brother, after which she is sent to live with her mother, in her grandmother's village. She didn't really know her mother well, and felt out of place in this new home, a feeling which would become the rule in her life. But it was in her mother's village that she became aware of the importance of food in the community and the defining role that it played in the lives of the village women, "C'était avec les femmes de Saer Mboup que j'avais appris à connaître le mil. Reconnaître la nourriture de la base, le support essentiel de la cuisine ; en discerner les diverses substances."[90] With these women, Marie would practice grinding the millet and the sound of pounding of the pestle became the rhythm of life in the village.

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[87] a couscous served with sauce

[88] Bugul, *Cendres et Braises* 14-5.

[89] Ibid 18.

As an adult, once Marie reaches her mother's home again, she finally begins to tell her story to Anta Sèye, a neighbor's wife. Her narrative explains how she had left the country and become the mistress of a married man in Paris. Their affair continued despite the fact that he had become violent and even had her turned out of the house by the police and institutionalized. Marie's self-esteem and confidence is destroyed and she comes home to her own country and family to try to heal. Her narrative becomes the way that she begins her healing process, both telling the story to Anta Sèye and to the marabout of the village.

Her recuperation is achieved as she finally admits the truth of what she had allowed herself to become involved in. In doing so, she rediscovers her own identity and that of her mother as her mother and her neighbors try to build her back up by letting her tell her story and feeding her the simple foods that she knew in her childhood and adolescence. At the home of the marabout, she begins her talking cure when she has dinner in his home, "C'était un bol de couscous frais avec une sauce d'arachide aux haricots. 'Les toubabs connaissent-ils le couscous?' demanda le Marabout. 'Non, ils ne connaissent que le blé.' 'Ils ont tort; quand ils découvriront le couscous, le vrai mil, ils découvriront la vérité.'"[91]

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[90] Ibid

While Marie was involved with 'Y.' she is always looking for a way out of the relationship, especially when she accompanies him on business trips back to Senegal where she feels a strong pull to remain with her people rather than continue to live the way she does in Paris. She realizes that she is an object for her lover, Y. and tells him this at a dinner at the famous restaurant *La Tour d'Argent*. Significantly, there is an almost complete absence of food and eating in Paris, though Marie describes everything else. She catalogs her surroundings, where she walks, shops and gets her hair done, but only very rarely mentions cooking or eating. Even when they visit *La Tour d'Argent*, this symbol of French haute cuisine, she says merely that the champagne, and the *crêpes suzette* did not impress her.

Marie's opinion of French food and French eating culture are acidly described in the most telling episode about food in the novel. Marie's lover Y. spends Christmas with his family, so, like "all the mistresses in the world," Marie fishes for an invitation amongst her friends. She goes to celebrate Christmas at the home of a young French acquaintance. She describes the family as being one where everybody played his or her role, and that the wife was principally engaged with keeping up her apartment, even though her apartment was in a housing project and was exactly the same as all of the rest in the project. She finds the mother's efforts to decorate the apartment lacking, presaging her opinion of the dinner which follows, "Ici, tout était en série; on changeait les couleurs pour préserver une personnalité. Les gens avaient peur de faire ce qu'ils ressentaient; l'originalité les faisait émerger de la masse."[92] Marie's criticism of her host's apartment is that her hostess, like all of her neighbors is engaged in a futile search for originality in an area and economic situation where all goods and services (and resultant decorating choices) come from the same shops and manufacturers.

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[91] Ibid 56.

Her criticism of the Christmas dinner that she shares with this family is similar:

> La mère de famille avait préparé ce que toutes la familles moyennes, la majorité alors, préparaient ce jour-là. Les bouchers ne vendaient que de la dinde car chacun viendrait chercher sa dinde. Les pâtissiers faisaient tous des bûches, car chacun viendrait chercher sa bûche.[93]

In France, as in many Western societies, Christmas dinner functions as the archetypal 'family meal,' where families and close friends gather together to reinforce the close bonds that they share. It is a

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[92] Ibid 82.
[93] Ibid 81-2.

‘serial’ celebration where each family unit celebrates separately, but in a very similar way. As such, each family sits down together at a similar time and shares a similar menu. It is a ritual that emphasizes the stability, contentment and togetherness of a family at the Christmas dinner, even if, as Marie sees it, it is a somewhat manufactured representation.

The image of family togetherness and economic stability indicated in the Christmas feast is a goal to be achieved at all cost and made possible by the market economy. This over-zealous performance of family togetherness on this one day is often a reaction against the feeling of fragmentation that most modern families are faced with in the age of urbanization, dual-incomes and divorce. And yet, Marie cannot abide what she sees as the wasteful machinations of an uninspired and uninspiring tradition. She cannot reconcile these excesses with the reality of life in her own village where food is never taken for granted, “Tous les démunis du monde entièr, tous les abandonnés, tous ceux qui mouraient de faim et de soif, ne pouvait pas se rendre compte à quel point ces sociétés-là gaspillaient et de l’énergie et de la nourriture pour faire semblant d’être ensemble un seul soir. ”[94]

In fact, Marie’s view of the way that working class French people eat in general is very negative:

> Toute l’année, ces gens là mangeaient des tranches de jambon avec des petits oignons au vinaigre et des cornichons en conserve, du camembert, fromage de convenance.

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[94] Ibid 81.

> Quand ils mangeaient du chaud, c'était l'éternel steak sans goût, sans forme, enduit de moutarde et de poivre traité et du pain français.
>
> Toute l'année, c'était pratiquement ainsi, à Noël, avec les primes de fin d'année de Renault-Billancourt, ils sautaient sur les huîtres, le saumon, le champagne, la dinde, le vin sans tin, se gavaient comme des oies du Périgord.[95]

French food in Bugul's novel, whether it be a meal in a destination restaurant like *La Tour d'Argent*, a celebratory Christmas dinner or a typical meal of the French proletariat is not imbued with much cultural capital at all. It is nearly devoid of the human touch that colors the preparation of African food and so lacks the contact with both cook and eater. The perceived hegemony of French cuisine is conspicuously absent.

Marie's disastrous experience of a French Christmas dinner is quite believable since most people have memories of traumatic holiday meals with their families. Not surprisingly, the forced and idealized performance required by most family members at a Christmas dinner is too much to swallow. Christmas dinners are ultimately characterized by disappointment and filled with family conflict. One is expected to maintain a mien of good humor while being required to interact with family members with whom one has little in common. Also, the stresses on women of holiday feast making are increased by the importance of the occasion and the increased size of the family, therefore they have a greater chance of being disappointed if the dinner doesn't go as they plan or isn't received well. It is an emotional test for all involved because it can concentrate the feelings that already color the family dynamic under normal circumstances. In the case of *Cendres et Braises*, the host tries to play footsie with Marie under the table as the other guests all talk about how Africans are so lucky to have been colonized by the French. Marie manages to not lose her cool over the 'footsie' but cannot abide the ignorant description of the colonial system.

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[95] Ibid 84.

Marie decides to stick with the oyster and salmon appetizers rather than eat the turkey, which her dining partners find 'original.' In French, being called 'original' really means 'strange' or 'bizarre.' Then, for an unknown reason, she begins to tell them about how they eat in Senegal:

> Dans les grandes familles, comme c'était toujours le cas, chez nous, les homes et les femmes mangeaient séparément.... En mangeant, les enfants n'avaient pas le droit de parler et tenaient le bord du bol pour qu'il ne bouge pas. Nous mangions par terre dans le même récipient..... Le repas était une cérémonie durant tout le temps qu'on mangeait avec les parents. La fête commençait pour les enfants dès que les grandes personnes se levaient; ils faisaient le 'djiro' et le bol en était pratiquement nettoyé.[96]

Again, the narration explains Marie's view of the French celebration as inherently wasteful with the description of the Senegalese child's quick cleaning out of the common dish. Though the meals may be simpler, more labor-intensive, and not as copious as the French Christmas feast, a Senegalese meal is portrayed as being more convivial, and certainly more appreciated.

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[96] Ibid 85.

At the end of the novel, Marie has a completely different attitude towards food than the one that she expresses at the Christmas dinner in Paris. She is beginning to feel the effects of the healing presence and nourishing meals of her mother and the calming discussions with the marabout. In the last few sentences of the novel, Bugul's heroine describes a plant that is beginning to grow in the spring, "Le *ndour* était partout. Nous en faisions de la sauce pour le couscous de mil. Le Marabout en raffolait, moi aussi. Je découvris les délices des mets simples et l'instant merveilleux avant la pluie….Je sentais en moi une nouvelle fraîcheur des sens et des sensations."[97] Marie feels surrounded by simplicity and plenty even though in Senegal she is subject to the difficult climate, extreme poverty and extremely labor-intensive way of cooking. She is on her way to being healed from her French 'consumption disorder.'

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[97] Ibid 190.

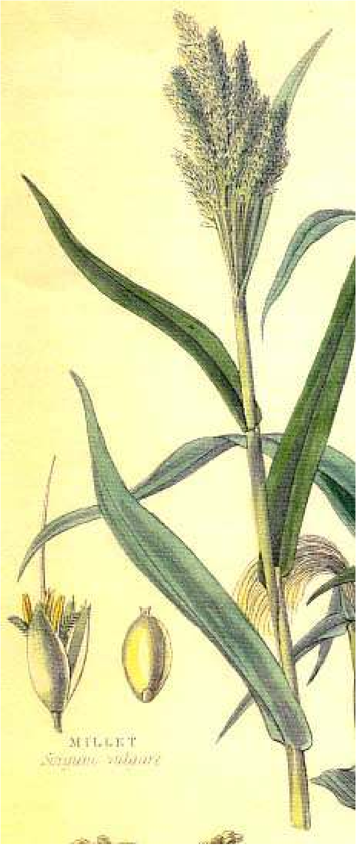


Illustration 1: Millet plant and seed

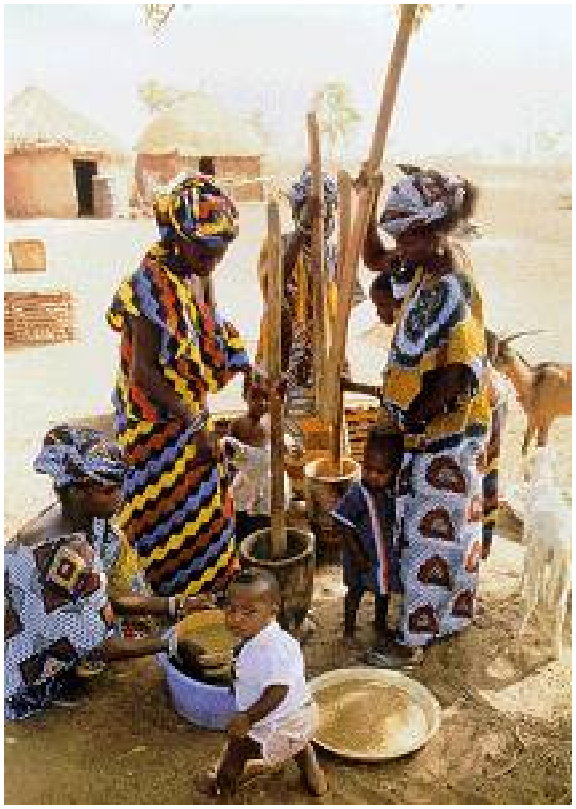
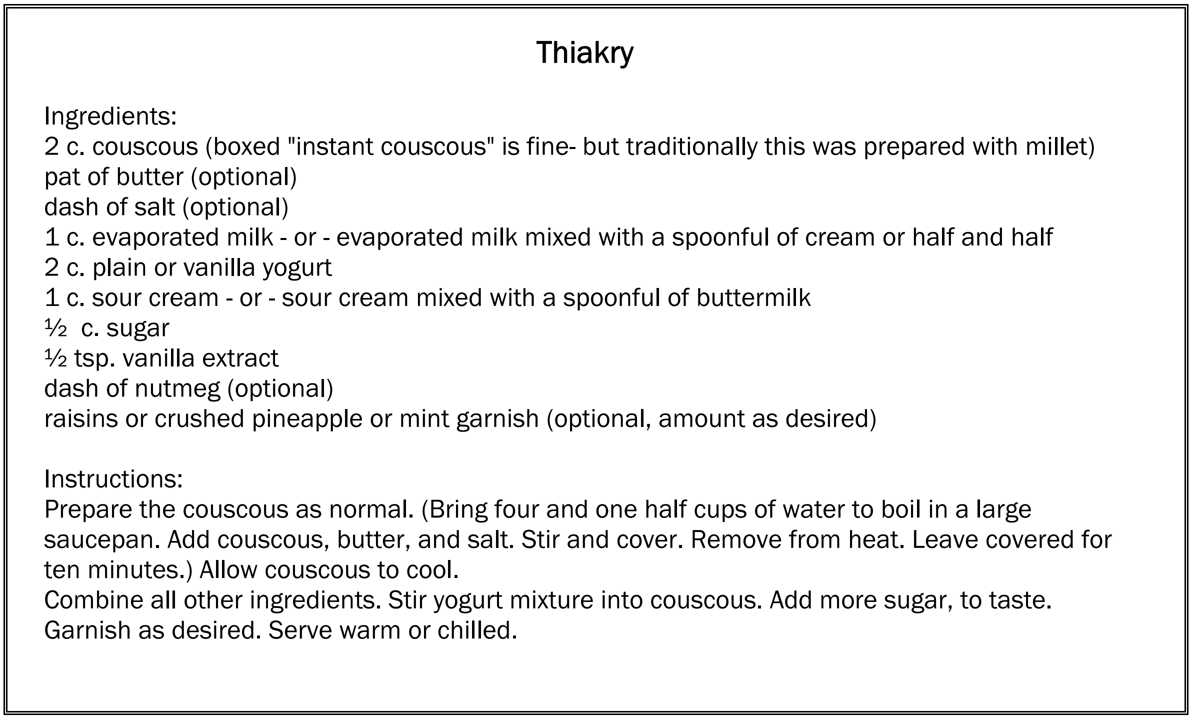


Illustration 2: Photo of Women Pounding Millet in Senegal

Millet is ground into flour used to make couscous or porridge.



Thiakry

Ingredients:
2 c. couscous (boxed "instant couscous" is fine- but traditionally this was prepared with millet)
pat of butter (optional)
dash of salt (optional)
1 c. evaporated milk - or - evaporated milk mixed with a spoonful of cream or half and half
2 c. plain or vanilla yogurt
1 c. sour cream - or - sour cream mixed with a spoonful of buttermilk
½ c. sugar
½ tsp. vanilla extract
dash of nutmeg (optional)
raisins or crushed pineapple or mint garnish (optional, amount as desired)

Instructions:
Prepare the couscous as normal. (Bring four and one half cups of water to boil in a large saucepan. Add couscous, butter, and salt. Stir and cover. Remove from heat. Leave covered for ten minutes.) Allow couscous to cool.
Combine all other ingredients. Stir yogurt mixture into couscous. Add more sugar, to taste.
Garnish as desired. Serve warm or chilled.

This recipe for sweet porridge is similar to rice pudding and is from The Congo Cookbook.

Fig. 5 – Recipe for Thiakry

Chapter Four-
Callalloo on the page: Food and Eating in the Writing of women in Guadeloupe

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the work of two women from the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. Though their novels are very different, we can use the authors' inclusion of detailed descriptions of food to present underlying feelings of tension; tension between cultures, and tension between family members. Caribbean culture is often referred to as *callaloo* culture; *Callaloo* is also the name of a literary journal featuring the works and study of the works of authors of the African Diaspora. Callaloo is actually a diasporic dish, often called Creole soup, and it features ingredients that originate in all parts of the globe, and come together in this soup made up of dasheen or taro root and leaves, crab, coconut milk, salt beef, green pepper and thyme.

Food is an important medium in the Caribbean whereby people of color can connect with each other. Since they came to the region as part of a brutal policy of forced migration and slave labor, they could not bring anything with them that would unify and identify them as a people. They couldn't even really communicate with each other since they were often from different regions in Africa and they were not allowed to speak in their own languages on the plantations. Their connection with their past and their origins, then, could not immediately be made through oral or written means, but through other practices, like cooking, that could signal a common heritage without overt display.[98] Valerie Loichot likens this signifying process to the very act of cooking itself, where a skillful cook combines different ingredients, different memories and fragments of stories and simmers them together to create a history.

Simone Schwartz-Bart and Gisèle Pineau are contemporary authors who in their novels explore the lives of generations of women living in the Antilles and in France. Like the authors themselves, the characters in their novels live in the "in-between" space of the Caribbean, a place marked by the tensions of two cultures coming together. *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* was published in 1973 and tells the story of Télumée's ancestors and her own story, as they all suffer in their condition of black women subject to exploitation by the *béké*. *Un Papillon dans la Cité* was published in 1992 as a novel for young people that chronicles the life of Félicie, her last few days in Guadeloupe with her grandmother and her new life in France with a mother that she doesn't remember. In this chapter we will see how the women in these novels think about, talk about and make food that helps them remember who they are and where they are from.

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[98] Valérie Loichot, "Reconstruire dans l'exil: la nourriture créatrice chez Gisèle Pineau." *Etudes Francophones* 17.2 (2002) 25.

‘MANGER L’AUTRE’: COOKING FOR THE OTHER IN *TÉLUMÉE MIRACLE*

> If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay home.
> - James Michener

In 1990, Jacques Derrida gave a lecture course in Paris titled “Manger l’Autre.” In the course, he explored the idea that that which one eats is ‘other’ and that it is a nourishing ‘other.’ One ingests all that is beneficial and then one eliminates the rest. If we combine this basic precept with the Bahktinian idea of the dialogic, we can start to identify the different positions of the self and the other. Bahktin’s model of the dialogic provides for a consciousness based on otherness, in which one is engaged in dialogue between the self and the other. In an analogous way, food addresses different identity positions – eaters, makers, and speakers. In Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel, *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, (Translated as *The Bridge of Beyond*) we also see these different identity positions depicted. For this novel, we should also add the role of ‘grower’ since Schwarz-Bart’s characters are involved in all of these different activities that relate to food.

Simone Schwarz-Bart was born in 1938 in Guadeloupe; her father was a teacher and military man. Schwarz-Bart studied in Pointe-à-Pitre, Paris and Dakar. When she was eighteen and a student in Paris, Simone met writer André Schwarz-Bart. They married in 1961 and, two years later, he won the Prix Goncourt for

Le Dernier Des Justes (*The Last of the Just*). A Polish Jew, André Schwarz-Bart lost both of his parents during the Holocaust. Simone Schwarz-Bart has written four novels and helped her husband by either researching or co-writing two more. They have all achieved laudatory reviews both in the United States and abroad. Her collective works lucidly narrates the harsh realities Caribbean women endure in the clutches of slavery and colonization. In 1989, publication of her six-volume work, *Homage à la Femme Noire* (*In Praise of Women of Color*), testifies to her lifelong commitment to unearthing the unknown history and culture of black women of the diaspora. In her lifetime, Schwarz-Bart has lived in France, Africa and Switzerland. She currently resides in Lausanne, Switzerland and Guadeloupe.

In *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle*, the author traces the heroine Télumée's family matrilineally through four generations. The women each endure countless hardships, including the loss of husbands and children, yet maintain their independence and dignity throughout. The novel is a work of magical realism which seems like a style particularly well-suited for the novel's setting in Guadeloupe at the beginning of the twentieth century. Schwarz-Bart pays particular attention to detail in her descriptions of the everyday realities and hardship faced by these generations of women, and also accentuates the fantastical moments in the text, like the continued 'presence' of Télumée's ancestors and the magical knowledge and ways of Man Cia. Even the names of Télumée's ancestors seem magical, like her great-grandmother Minerve, a freed slave who has a baby with Xango. Their child, Toussine later becomes known as Reine Sans Nom.

The first part of the novel is called the 'présentation des miens,' where Télumée's remarkable lineage of strong women is introduced. The second part is Télumée's own story of love and loss. She grows up and falls in love with a boy from her village, Elie, who eventually turns to drinking and becomes violent. Télumée is eventually turned out of her home by another woman who has taken up with her husband and Télumée is almost driven mad. Fortunately she meets the gentle Amboise, with whom she lives and starts to build a life until he is brutally killed during a labor action at the sugar refinery. Télumée meets this new challenge with the adoption of a little girl, Sonore, whom she will also lose. Télumée, whose life was punctuated by tragedy and pain, resolves to die, "là comme je suis, debout, dans mon petit jardin, quelle joie…."[99]

As in many Caribbean novels, the heroine Télumée is raised by her grandmother, Toussine, away from her own mother. The young girl grows up deep in the countryside of Guadeloupe where her Grandmother ekes out a meager existence making sweets to be sold in the local shop. However, when Télumée reaches age sixteen, her grandmother becomes ill and requires medications bought in a pharmacy. In order to care for her grandmother Télumée goes to work as a servant for a white family in a nearby town. There aren't as many instances of food metaphors in *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* as in the other novels that we have examined, but when Télumée feels forced to begin working as a servant, Schwartz-Bart includes several episodes in the book that center on food preparation and food choice. Here, the author demonstrates the cultural and racial tensions between the white/French, and the black/African inhabitants of Guadeloupe by showing the differences in the way that the two groups cook.

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[99] Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 254.

Télumée goes to look for work for the family of 'le Blanc des Blancs,' the owner of the sugar plantation and factory. When Télumée arrives at the family's villa, the mistress of the house interviews her coldly, asking "Qu'est-ce que vous savez faire, par exemple?", and "Vous connaissez cuisiner?"[100] Mme. Desaragne uses the word *connaissez* and not *savez,* which would be grammatical in the phrase. This indicates her immediate low opinion of Télumée by using *p'tit nègre*, which is an offensive pidgin French.

When Télumée assures her that she can, in fact, cook, the mistress of the house insists "Je veux dire cuisiner, pas lâcher un morceau de fruit à pain dans une chaudière d'eau salée." The breadfruit is the non-French Caribbean food par excellence. It was imported specifically from Polynesia in order to provide a cheap source of starch for the slave population of the Antilles. The importation of the breadfruit has a storied history in and of itself, as the effort was taken up by the notorious Captian Bligh of HMS Bounty. Mme. Desaragne's contempt for the breadfruit shows that it is still not regarded as a suitable food for a French family.

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[100] Ibid 93.

Télumée again assures her that she can cook, but her prospective employer is not persuaded, saying "C'est bien, mais qui vous a appris?" Télumée answers, "La mère de ma grand-mère s'était louée, dans le temps, chez les Labardine."[101] Finally satisfied, Télumée is engaged. The exchange between Télumée and the white employer about Télumée's cooking credentials reveals the white woman's immediate mistrust of black servants and her derision for regional Caribbean cooking even though Télumée is adamant that her skills are sufficient. It is only when Télumée associates herself (very loosely, since there are separated by four generations) with the supposedly acclaimed servant of another white family that her prospective employer is convinced. In taking this job with the Desaragne family, Télumée is put in the position that many young black women were during slavery; she is forced to protect herself from the sexual advances of M. Desaragne and listen to Mme. Desaragne, who is utterly convinced that without having been saved by being brought to Guadeloupe as slaves, Télumée and her people would still be "sauvages et barbares ..... à courir dans la brousse, à danser nus et à déguster les individus en potée."[102]

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[101] Ibid

[102] Ibid 97.

Despite commentary like this, Télumée works hard in the family's home, determined to make her stay away from her grandmother as tranquil as possible. The white family even finds Télumée's béchamel sauce to be wonderful, but they are warned by the mother not to compliment Télumée too much or "elle s'appliqera moins la prochaine fois, tu verras."[103] Télumée glides though her life in the villa, "comme un caillou dans une rivière,"[104] trying not to hear and be touched by the insensitive and stupid remarks of her employers and their guests.

On Sundays, Télumée is only allowed a day off if her employers are not receiving. She quickly realizes that the guests in the house are ultra-focused on the gentility of the service and proper table etiquette, because it reminds them of the good old days when the Negro 'à son rang.' They seem ruffled if a dish is put down too heavily or if a glass or plate is served from the wrong side. Patronizingly and yet at the same time pleased that they have found some "confirmation of their view on the Negro," they reassure Télumée if they perceive a slight error, speaking to her in *p'tit nègre*:

> [P]as pleurer ma fille, pas pleurer… ce n'est rien, rien que tout ça, et regarde seulement que tu es en train de t'élever,tu vois les belles choses du monde, tu sers à table, tu apprends torchons et serviettes et comment pourrais-tu le savoir, hélas, comment pourrais-tu, hein?[105]

Télumée steps around these words as she steps around the many guests in the house, seeking only to "preserve herself" and continuing to make the guests crêpes with jam and eight different kinds of sorbet. Télumée's experience with the guests characterizes them as frivolous, given the vast assortment of sweets that she prepares for them and their penchant for refined manners and their willingness to chide her for an imagined slight. Télumée's description of these Sunday receptions shows the reader that she is not duped by their ostentatious displays of gentility.

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[103] Ibid 95.
[104] Ibid
[105] Ibid 99.

When Télumée is finally allowed to go home to her grandmother's house one Sunday, all of the neighbors crowd around her asking her to tell them something about "those white folks in Galba"; what they ate and drank, what their house looked like and whether they were happy. Télumée tells them everything that has been pent up inside of her during her stay at the villa, ending with the story of the béchamel sauce. One of her neighbors says, "Si c'est tellement bon, explique-nous comment ça se prépare, pour nos propres entrailles…" Reine Sans Nom interrupts him saying, "Je te le dis, ami, il n'y a rien de bon dans la béchamel. J'en ai goûté autrefois et je peux te rassurer : il n'y a rien de bon dans la béchamel."[106] Reine Sans Nom's comment provides a counterpoint to the white family's appreciation for the white sauce. The family likes béchamel because it is a typical metropolitan French way to prepare meats and vegetables and is a measure of a cook's skill, but Reine Sans Nom's reaction to the sauce shows that the béchamel is foreign, bland, and unfulfilling to the native of Guadeloupe.

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[106] Ibid 107.

Reine Sans Nom then counsels Télumée on what to do when her heart is heavy, "Quand ton coeur te le réclame, tu n'as qu'à faire cuire deux tranches de fruit à pain au gros sel, sur du bois, au fond de la cour, et ne va pas t'occuper ce jour-là s'ils on fait de la béchamel."[107] She is urging her granddaughter to use cooking and food to comfort herself. Interestingly, the food that Reine Sans Nom suggests as a cure for the blues is the same food for which Télumée's employer expressed so much dislike in their first meeting. The mutual disdain for each other's foodways signals the division between the white and the black inhabitants of Guadeloupe and the French and the Caribbean ways of eating. Télumée eventually leaves the villa and returns to her grandmother's and to the life that is waiting for her there.

When David Sutton says that, "Food, then, can carry hegemonic identities through its very ability to connect the mundane with the pleasurable and the necessary," he is primarily talking about the way that religious dietary guidelines are able to establish hegemonic identities by using the seemingly simple relationship that people have with food.[108] I would like to expand this idea of the 'hegemonic identity' that Sutton talks about beyond that of religious adherence. It is obvious that in books like *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle,* an author is able to use the symbolism of foods like the breadfruit and béchamel sauce to signify continued power imbalance in Guadeloupe.

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[107] Ibid 104-5.

[108] David E. Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 4.

Mme. Desaragne does not consider the breadfruit fit to eat by white people, even though it is a comfort food for la Reine. In reality, it was Mme. Desaragne's ancestors that commissioned the arrival of the breadfruit on the island for the express purpose of feeding their slave labor force, and Télumée's ancestors who were forced to develop a taste for the only starchy food that was available. Even two generations after the end of slavery, these food choices persist. In the lowly breadfruit, Simone Schwartz-Bart alludes to the enduring racism, poverty and power structure that her characters must struggle against. At the end of the novel, Télumée tries to understand how slavery is, in a sense, still a fact of life in Guadeloupe:

> J'essaye, j'essaye toutes les nuits, et je n'arrive pas à comprendre comment tout cela a pu commencer, comment cela a pu continuer, comment cela peut durer encore, dans notre âme tourmentée, indécise, en lambeaux et qui sera notre dernière prison. Parfois mon cœur se fêle et je me demande si nous sommes des hommes, parce que, si nous étions des hommes, on ne nous aurait pas traités ainsi, peut-être.[109]

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[109] Schwarz-Bart 250.

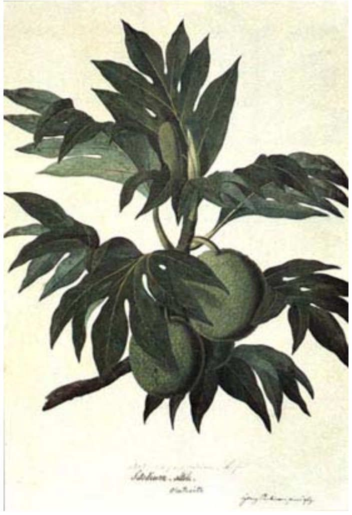

Illustration 3: Engravings of Breadfruit Tree

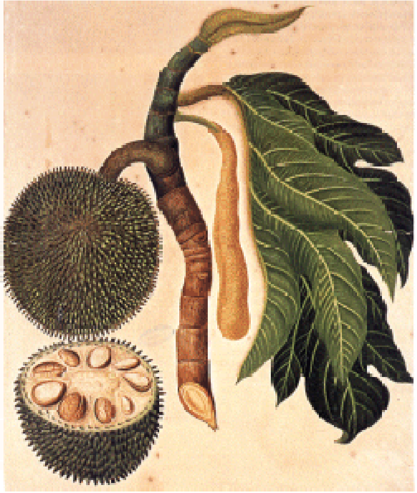

Illustration 4: Engraving of Young and Mature Breadfruit

Roasted Breadfruit

INGREDIENTS :
Whole Breadfruit

METHOD:
Put whole breadfruit on grill.
Cook on all sides till brownish black.
Use skewer to check if cooked.
Take breadfruit off grill and use a pot holder to hold and peel off skin.
Cut in half.
Cut out the 'heart'(uneatable portion in the middle with seed).
Cut breadfruit into large sticks.

Fig. 6 - Recipe for Roasted Breadfruit

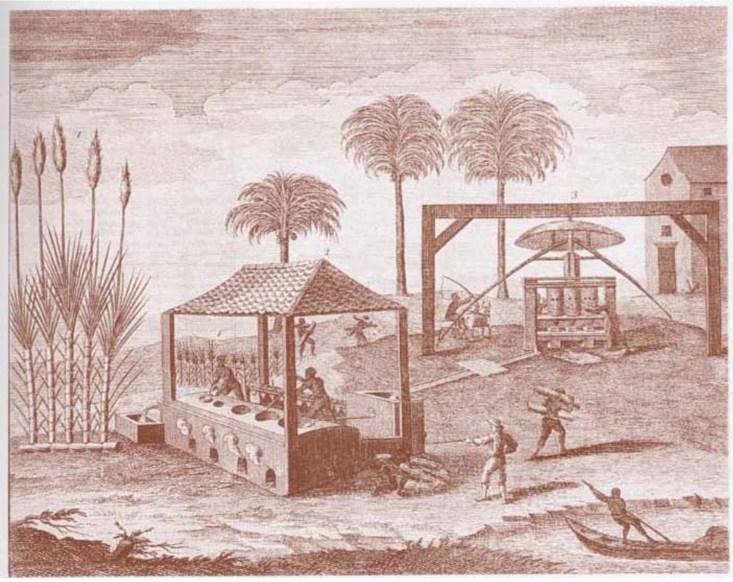

Illustration 5: Engraving of Sugar Manufacture
Copper engraving from *The Universal Magazine* c. 1750

Illustration 6: Author’s photo of Chateau Dubuc, Martinique

UN PAPILLON DANS LA CITÉ: OR CREOLIZATION IN THE PLATE

> Cooking is at once child's play and adult joy. And, cooking done with care is an act of love
> \- Craig Clairborne

Gisèle Pineau was born in Paris in 1956 to Guadeloupian parents, and grew up far from her parents' home in the Antilles. For Pineau, France is a land of exile, and the racism and intolerance she endured there daily later became themes for her books. In 1975 she enrolled at the University of Paris - Nanterre to study Modern Literature, but discontinued these studies in order to become a psychiatric nurse. After she married, she went back to Guadeloupe, where she worked in the Saint Claude Hospital for nearly 20 years. She began writing in Guadeloupe and in 1993 her second novel *La grande drive des esprits* was published. Almost immediately, she won international recognition for her many published novels and essays. Gisèle Pineau recently returned to Paris where she continues to practice nursing and her writing career, the occupation that she says gives balance to her life. In 2002 she won the Prix des Hémisphères - Chantal Lapicque award for her most recent novel *Chair Piment*.

Pineau combines two literary traditions, the Caribbean oral tradition and French literature. In her novels, Cartesian thought converges with Creole story-tellers so that her writing draws simultaneously on the mythical and the sociological, the real and the magical. Her descriptions of the Caribbean and France can be alternately violent, poetic, sensual and universal. Her description of women, men and their differences, testify to the appeasing power of words, the suggestive power of literature and its ability to lessen prejudice.

Pineau's first novel, *Un Papillon dans la Cité* (A Butterfly in the City, or 'projects'), is a work of children's literature published in 1992. Perhaps because it was intended originally for children, Pineau does use a linear style in her narrative, which is quite different from most of her other novels, where time, place and narrative voice are all fluid. In this novel, as in Schwartz-Bart's novel, the heroine is a young girl raised by her grandmother. At the beginning of Pineau's novel, Félicie receives a letter from her mother Aurélie, in France, telling her that a friend of hers will soon come to bring her to France, where she is now married and has a second child.

Man Ya works in the banana fields; it is hard work that provides for her and Félicie's meager existence: "les bananas partiront sur l'ocean comme sa fille Aurélie."[110] Guadeloupe is a source of raw materials; as foods, goods, and people all seem to leave the island for France or perhaps another country with a large market for consumable goods. France, then, is the locus of economic and social mobility. Aurélie, Félicie and other Guadeloupians immigrate to the metropole because they hope for better lives. They are told constantly that their lives are better in France, since the children go to ‘good’ schools where they learn *le francais de France* rather than *créole*. But we must consider the real experience that the Guadeloupians encounter in France. Papa Jo is an automobile worker and Aurélie is a garment worker. Both find themselves in jobs where they perform repetitive tasks, separated from the final product, which is an experience not so different from work in the cane field, albeit less physical. They live in an outlying area of Paris in a large dingy apartment building that Félicie describes as “kalòj à poules”[111] which is a Creole word for a chicken coop, where they are crowded together like beasts. By comparison, Guadeloupe appears as a real home, rooted by family, community and a welcoming climate and environment.

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[110] Gisèle Pineau, *Un Papillon Dans la Cité* (Saint Maur: Sepia, 1992) 6.

In the Caribbean and in Caribbean literature, the bond between grandmothers and their grandchildren is traditionally very strong. It was very common for the grandchildren to be raised and educated by their grandparents as is the case in *Pluie et Vent sur Télumée Miracle* and *Un Papillon dans la Cité*. But this relationship is beginning to be imperiled even when extended families live together, because often the grandchildren, especially if they live or have lived in France, don’t speak Creole. Since the figure of the grandmother is often evocative of nature, history and traditional knowledge, this threatened relationship speaks to the nascent inability of younger generations of Guadeloupians to connect with their own past. This is compounded by the often strained or even inexistent relationship between the mother and daughter, which can also be seen in *Papillon*, at least for the first part of the text. It is only with the return to Guadeloupe that Félicie, and Pineau's other heroines for that matter, are able to reflect upon their past and put into words their experience. Their creative processes are dependent on the re-appropriation of their familial and cultural past. This is much like the experience that Pineau herself experienced; she was able to write only with the reintegration of her missing Guadeloupian heritage. Even though Pineau wasn't born in the Antilles, it is here that she reaches the equilibrium between her professional and artistic lives that she begins to create. Pineau's own experience in traveling back and forth between Guadeloupe and France was necessary for her to reclaim her identity and reflect upon it. As in her own life, Pineau's works are often structured by the causes, effects and reasons for the characters' circulation between France and Guadeloupe.

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[111] Ibid 32.

The relationship between Félicie's grandmother, Man Ya or Julia, and Félicie is certainly threatened by Aurélie's demands. But Félicie will continue to write to, think about, talk about and dream about her grandmother while she is in France. Man Ya is devastated by her granddaughter's departure but prepares the best she can, sewing her some new clothes and packing her suitcase with all her belongings and even some food:

> Ta valise est trop lourde, Félicie. Qu'est-ce qu'elle a mis là-dedans ta grandmère ?
> - Mon linge, madame et aussi mes cahiers, et puis des ignames

> et des patates douces, et un p'tit fruit à pain, je crois.
> - Ta grandmère est une vielle folle. Tu seras obligé d'abandonner tout ça chez ma mère.[112]

Here, when Marie-Claire, Aurélie's envoy, comes to pick up Félicie, she mockingly unpacks Man Ya's contribution for Félicie's journey. Marie-Claire, and by extension Aurélie, can not understand Man Ya's maternal desire to provide for Félicie, and are frankly embarrassed by Man Ya's belief that one would take produce, and especially produce as lowly as a yam, back to France. Yet this is a very common and universal desire as evidenced by the mountains of food confiscated at international airports everyday, where travelers and immigrants try to bring this most elemental symbol of their journey and immigration home. This small, food-related detail indicates to the reader that according to the French and even Guadeloupeans who are trying to be *more* French, like Aurélie and Marie-Claire, the Caribbean way of eating and thus, way of life are backwards and therefore to be forgotten.

However backwards Guadeloupe is in Aurélie's memory and opinion, for Man Ya and Félicie it is a place of abundance, despite their poverty. The island is overflowing with nourishment, literally, as when Man Ya tries to send Félicie on her way with a suitcase full of yams and breadfruit. The island's bounty is a demonstration of the way Guadeloupe is associated with corporeal presence. It is teeming with life which allows for a symbiotic relationship between the earth and women and between women themselves. The island of

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[112] Ibid 20.

Guadeloupe, the earth, provides healing plants and nourishing plants for the women in these novels and they possess the traditional knowledge to take advantage of them. Overwhelmingly, the physical is seen as profoundly positive, as in this passage, "Je me retrouvais, coincée, le nez niché dans son aisselle odorante….Sa respiration résonnait en moi ainsi que chacun des remous de son gros ventre agité de gaz sonores."[113] Here, the body that toils and sweats and digests is a comforting presence.

In comparison, Félicie's mother's house in Paris is cold, quiet and sterile, and Félicie learns quickly that she must take off her shoes in the apartment so that the tiles aren't dirtied. In Paris, Félicie is a stranger in her own home. Her mother and stepfather live in a housing project in the suburbs of Paris, and everything and everyone is completely new to her. Although she quickly becomes part of the neighborhood, her integration into her new home is not as rapid. Aurélie has difficulty relating to her daughter, and their difficult and painful relationship is reflected in the way that Aurélie cares for, and cooks for her family. As Sarah Sceats points out, "the connection of food with love centres on the mother, as a rule the most important figure in an infant's world, able to give or withhold everything that sustains, nourishes, fulfils, completes. It is this person who shapes or socialises a child's appetite and expectations of the world."[114] Since Félicie's first maternal influence was her grandmother, and not her mother, she has enough distance from her mother's actions to provide an indirect criticism of them. Félicie comments that every night, when her mother is preparing dinner, she is always sent on an errand to the mini-market to get whatever ingredient her mother has forgotten for the evening meal. If we liken Aurélie's preparedness in the kitchen to her preparedness for motherhood, the reader learns that Aurélie is an impulsive person who does not think ahead; not about dinner nor about bringing her daughter to Paris.

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[113] Ibid 12.

[114] Sarah Sceats, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 11.

Whereas in France, food comes from the grocery store, in Guadeloupe, it comes from the earth. Food and food preparation also seems to highlight many other differences between France and Guadeloupe. It is consumed inside individual apartments rather than in community, even on holidays. In Paris, Aurélie brings out her best dishes and buys oysters and a big turkey to celebrate Christmas Eve because "c'était la tradition ici et … il fallait s'adapter aux coutumes de la France."[115] Aurélie serves only French food, ignoring the traditions of her own culture and trying to fit in with the image of a typical French feast in much the same way that she turned her back on her mother and daughter for almost twelve years.

Valerie Loichot explains that this impression of the 'customs' of France is really a statement about the market economy in France, in which consumers have little choice about what they are able to purchase. Aurélie prepares for the meal by bringing out symbols of their supposed economic success, her ‘best’ dishes, and shops for the rest of the dinner. She buys the oysters and turkey because they are available in the market at holiday time, not because they live near the sea or have been raising the bird. The ‘custom’ is predetermined by the production and distribution decisions of corporate entities.

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[115] Pineau 46.

Félicie is impressed with the meal because she has never seen a whole turkey before. In Guadeloupe, the only turkey she had ever seen were the frozen turkey wings that even the poorest families could afford. Thus, the descriptions of the two ways of serving turkey contrast the economic realities of life in the two places. Nonetheless, Félicie thinks back fondly to the Christmas celebrations that she had with her grandmother. In Guadeloupe the community celebrated the holiday together, eating a pig that a neighbor had been raising all year, cooking together all day, listening to the drums. It was, Félicie tellingly says "better than a real family."[116] Their celebration was in a sense prepared for throughout the year, and is therefore looked forward to throughout the year. It is linked to the earth because they would eat “des pois de bois frais, [et] des ignames tendres,” foods which were growing at the moment.

The fact that they are eating yams and listening to the drums being played by the ‘descendants of the marrons,’ shows that the tradition is linked to their African past and not just the Christian calendar. Man Ya explains “La nuit de Noel est faite pour chanter la venue du Christ, me disait Man Ya. Mais aussi pour profiter, manger plein son ventre, boire, rire et oublier les mauvais jours."[117] In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha warns how imitation of the coloniser by the colonised is dangerous.[118] By simply imitating the French Christmas 'customs' Aurélie is allowing a continuation of the storied history of the colonial and post-colonial system which brought her to France in the first place. Though Félicie truly enjoys eating the turkey and the chocolate Yule log cake, she can't manage to swallow the raw oysters and thinks of her grandmother and Christmas in Guadeloupe. The celebration of Christmas in Paris and in Guadeloupe differ in the choice of menu, but the real difference, and the difference that causes Félicie pain, is the difference in the guest list. Félicie, however, with her critique of the Christmas dinner is attempting to transform French custom, mix it with other cultures and create a new tradition.

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[116] Ibid 51.

This same disconnect between the French and Caribbean holiday is felt for Easter. Félicie talks about how everyone in France was buying decorated eggs and therefore eating hard-boiled eggs. In Guadeloupe, everyone was having crab, but prepared in lots of different ways, "en kalalou, d'autres en matété, ou en Colombo, avec des dombré, du fruit à pain, du riz…Mais tout le monde en mangeait."[119] In Guadeloupe, there is variety in what is cooked and eaten, even if they all start with the same featured ingredient. The prefabricated nature of foods and other products like the Barbie doll that Félicie receives as a Christmas gift are constantly contrasted with the organic nature of food and even gifts from Guadeloupe. Man Ya sends Félicie a package with among other things a lace petticoat that is handmade by Man Ya and a vanilla bean, cinnamon stick and three nutmegs. Félicie gives the spices to her mother, perhaps hoping that Aurélie will incorporate them into their meals, but never sees, smells or tastes them again.

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[117] Ibid 50.
[118] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 88.
[119] Pineau 119.

We often speak of the creolization of language, the process of language creation that brings together disparate elements of different languages and standardizes communication within a population, but we can certainly also see a creolization in the foods of the Caribbean. Creole cooking, the cuisine of the Caribbean is a blend of Indian, European, African and Chinese cuisines. We see the effects of this creolization in Félicie's description of the range of Easter dishes featuring crab. The roots of different traditions are seen in these diverse ways of preparing crab; *kalalou* comes from an African tradition, *Colombo* comes out of the traditions of the Indian subcontinent and *matété* is Caribbean. Félicie is engaging in a process of creolization herself. In Pineau's novels the characters experience a kind of creolization that occurs in France. In the city's working class neighborhoods, French, North African and Caribbean cultures all come together to create a new experience. Félicie describes her neighbors as all being in the same situation as she, "Ils sont français, mahgrébins, antillais, africains. Les accents se mélangent, les couleurs aussi."[120] Everything is mixing, people, accents, and foods.

Metaphors of ingestion and digestion abound in Caribbean literature to invoke the colonial and post-colonial policies which treat people and elements as resources to be gobbled up. But in Pineau's work, these food metaphors create a new sort of action, where the Caribbean person is not assimilated by France, but brings a new experience to the Metropole. Pineau's characters transform the 'foreign' French foods and experiences before they incorporate them into their own experiences. Their activity of creolization gives them agency rather than remaining objects in the colonial paradigm. Félicie is therefore more successful than her mother, because her mother is still caught up in a mimetic relationship with French culture, which Fanon warns against in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*.

Her mother's rejection of Caribbean custom is contrasted with the approach taken by another family who lives in the same housing project. When Aurélie starts working again, Félicie begins to go to her friend Mohammed's house after school. Félicie first accepts Mohammed's invitation to his family's apartment when he tells her that his grandmother has made some *loukoum*. This reminds Félicie of a sweet that Man Ya would make called *doukoun* and she accepts. Félicie imagines them as being similar, but in actuality, they are quite different; *loukoum* is a jellied treat, and is often called, Turkish delight, *doukoun* is a pastry, a small cake made with coconut.

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[120] Ibid 38.

Notwithstanding, Félicie finds this element of her friend Mohammed’s culture as sharing elements of her own, and brings them together, ”Loukoum et doukoun, ça se joue sur la même musique, ça rime, c’est parent.”[121]

Félicie loves the sweets that Mohamed's grandmother makes and the homey smells that emanate from the big pot of couscous on the stove. Again, Félicie encounters the nurturing maternal figure in someone other than her own mother, who interestingly, here, is another grandmother. Mohamed is glad that his friend appreciates his grandmother's cooking saying, "J’en mange tous les jours. Ma grand-mère est une passionnée de pâtisserie..... Elle dit tout le temps que c’est la dernière chose qui la rattache à son pays et que l’heure où elle oubliera une recette sera l’heure de sa mort -- vrai!"[122] Mohammed's apartment is a haven of companionship for Félicie; it is filled with plenty of furniture and objects from North Africa and always smells of spicy meats in sauce.

Félicie is engaged in an attempt to compare and bring together metropolitan France and Guadeloupe, whether it be though language, food, comparisons of celebrations like Christmas and Easter or by physically moving between the two. However, it is in France where Caribbean culture becomes creolized, not just with metropolitan French culture, but with the North African culture of her neighbors. Félicie exchanges grandmothers, food and even names with her Moroccan classmate Mohamed. She changes her name from Félicie Benjamin to Félicie Ben Jamin, "J'ai fait exprès d'écrire Ben Jamin, Mo dit que ça nous rapprochait….(Mo prononce Bène Jamine)"[123] This shows how in Pineau's novel, old categories like race and nationality are becoming obsolete. In effect creole culture is being re-creolized through the circulation of its inhabitants to a now multi-cultural France and back.

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[121] Ibid 56.
[122] Ibid 59.

She and Mo also bring their cultures together along with American culture when they play at being the characters from the TV show *Dallas*; "'J'ai preparé ce couscous spécialement pour toi, Bobby.' 'Merci Pam chérie, tu es une excellente cuisinière.'"[124] Unlike her mother, who is content to imitate French customs, Félicie engages in a playful transformation of the foods and cultures that she comes in contact with in her working-class Paris neighborhood. Félicie then takes all of these experiences with her back to Guadeloupe, creating a circular relationship between the ex-colonial power and the colonized people. Once only 'primary resource,' these people, like Félicie, and Pineau herself, are imbued with power in their own right, creating a new paradigm for the inhabitants of the island.

Mohamed's grandmother is also a foreigner in France, but instead of adopting French traditions, and especially traditions of eating and furnishing a home, she imports her own to her place in

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[123] Ibid 105.

[124] Ibid 69.

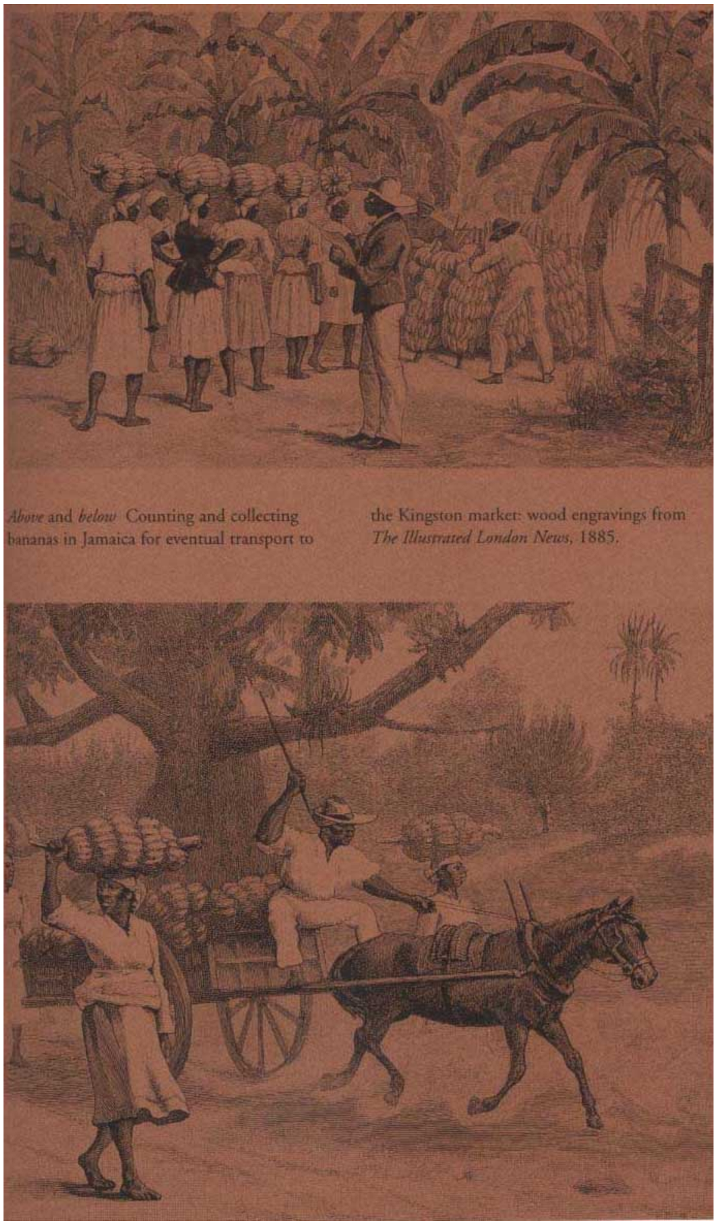
Paris. This is the same reaction that Man Ya had, when she sends Félicie off to Paris with a suitcase full of yams.

On a visit back in Guadeloupe, Félicie and Mohammed spend a week with Man Ya in Haute-Terre, where Mohammed spends his time swimming and fishing for crabs. It is a literal deliverance from the jail for which Félicie fears her friend Mo is headed. Once more, in order to highlight the differences between a French holiday feast and a Guadeloupean one, on Easter Sunday, Félicie's grandmother and neighbors all gather on the beach for a huge feast of crabs in a curry sauce. For dessert, Man Ya makes *doukoun* or coconut cakes for the children. Félicie is happy to be home with her grandmother, celebrating the way that she remembers, but now, she wishes that her mother and her baby brother and stepfather were on the beach eating and enjoying the festive occasion with them.

Pineau's novels focus only on the experience of Carribbean people of color, in France and in the islands. Besides the appearance of the French teacher who comes searching for Félicie and Mo there are no tourists or *petits blancs* or *békés*.

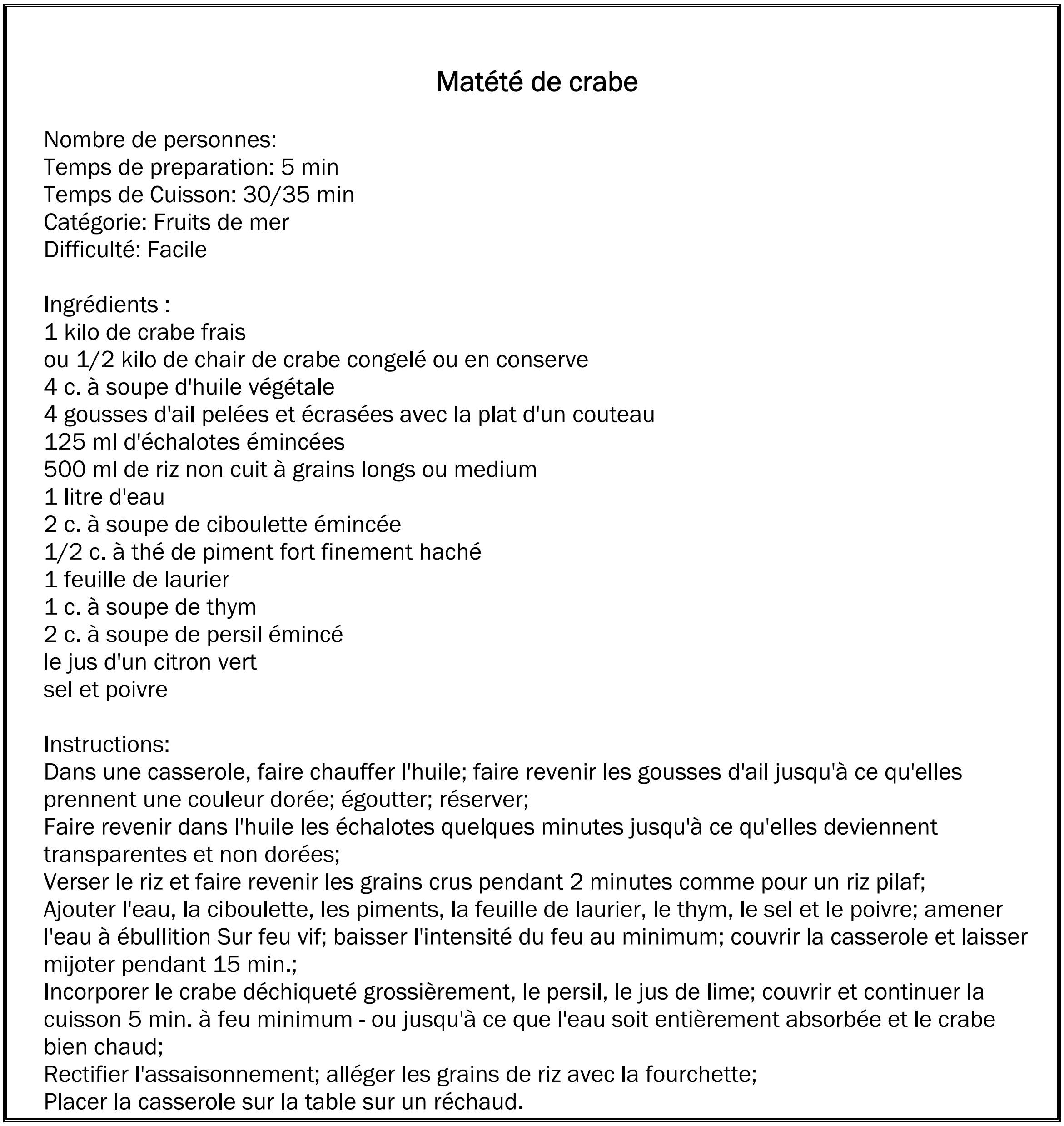
A tradition of cooking and eating brings the past forward into the present. It also provides an opportunity to go beyond the colonial relationship between the Antilles and France by mixing with other immigrant populations who they themselves are involved in a transforming relationship with France. Pineau brings cooking into her writing because writing used to be the only way that Caribbean women could express themselves and communicate and commune with each other.

Certainly eating serves a biological function, but clearly it serves a social one as well. When we eat together, we create relationships between family and friends. Sharing a meal can be pleasant or unpleasant depending less on the food itself and more on the people who share the meal. A large celebration serves to both mark a festive event and to enlarge a social group, including new people and codifying behaviors at the same time. Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gisèle Pineau use food and eating to comment on the social realities faced by their characters. These are not overt messages, the reader never gets to hear Télumée speak directly about her condition as a black woman in Guadeloupe, and Félicie never comes out and says that she misses Man Ya and Guadeloupe and that she has difficulty connecting with her mother and France, but the inference is clear. Like Pineau and Schwarz-Bart, women writing about food and eating are women writing about their lives and their place in society.



Above and *below* Counting and collecting bananas in Jamaica for eventual transport to the Kingston market: wood engravings from *The Illustrated London News*, 1885.

Illustration 7: Banana plantation – Nineteenth Century Wood Engravings



Matété de crabe

Nombre de personnes:
Temps de preparation: 5 min
Temps de Cuisson: 30/35 min
Catégorie: Fruits de mer
Difficulté: Facile

Ingrédients :
1 kilo de crabe frais
ou 1/2 kilo de chair de crabe congelé ou en conserve
4 c. à soupe d'huile végétale
4 gousses d'ail pelées et écrasées avec la plat d'un couteau
125 ml d'échalotes émincées
500 ml de riz non cuit à grains longs ou medium
1 litre d'eau
2 c. à soupe de ciboulette émincée
1/2 c. à thé de piment fort finement haché
1 feuille de laurier
1 c. à soupe de thym
2 c. à soupe de persil émincé
le jus d'un citron vert
sel et poivre

Instructions:
Dans une casserole, faire chauffer l'huile; faire revenir les gousses d'ail jusqu'à ce qu'elles prennent une couleur dorée; égoutter; réserver;
Faire revenir dans l'huile les échalotes quelques minutes jusqu'à ce qu'elles deviennent transparentes et non dorées;
Verser le riz et faire revenir les grains crus pendant 2 minutes comme pour un riz pilaf;
Ajouter l'eau, la ciboulette, les piments, la feuille de laurier, le thym, le sel et le poivre; amener l'eau à ébullition Sur feu vif; baisser l'intensité du feu au minimum; couvrir la casserole et laisser mijoter pendant 15 min.;
Incorporer le crabe déchiqueté grossièrement, le persil, le jus de lime; couvrir et continuer la cuisson 5 min. à feu minimum - ou jusqu'à ce que l'eau soit entièrement absorbée et le crabe bien chaud;
Rectifier l'assaisonnement; alléger les grains de riz avec la fourchette;
Placer la casserole sur la table sur un réchaud.

Fig. 7 - Recipe for Matété de Crabe

Conclusion

This study of Francophone women's novels has focused on the cultural differences between metropolitan France and the former colonies and overseas departments. To be sure, the world is increasingly 'global' but not necessarily homogenous, so in order to examine the differences and identify similarities in cultures affected by the heritage of French Colonialism, the role that food plays in the diaspora must be taken into account. The differences between the French and African or Caribbean traditions underscore the stereotypes, actions and feelings of the characters in the novels analyzed here. Another view of French cuisine, French society and the status of the immigrant woman within French society emerges from this study.

Much has been said and written about the relationship of French culture with French cuisine. In fact, the first gastronomes were French and developed an aesthetic by which to judge food's merits. Its renown causes many French individuals to regard French cuisine as a marker of cultural superiority. French farming methods are fiercely protected, French lands are controlled and officially demarcated, French cooking techniques are taught world-wide and French tastes are celebrated. Nonetheless, post-colonial France has changed dramatically, and food in France has changed dramatically, too. Today you are just as likely to be served a couscous in a French university cafeteria as you are a *rôti de porc*. France is now a multicultural society where people of different ethnicities, gender, and class must shop, cook and eat the foods that remind them who they are and where they have come from.

A thorough look at all of the different forces at work in analyzing the role of food and eating in society and in these novels, and an exploration them in three specific contexts – multicultural France, West Africa and the Antilles – was very important. These regions are all places where cultures collide and often conflict is played out through the food choices represented by the author.

This question is the most interesting part of how people develop their ideas about food because it most exemplifies the ability of an individual to inhabit two distinct and sometimes blending positions at the same time. The novels feature characters that travel globally between the countries of their birth and metropolitan France, which is a demonstration of the legacy of the colonial system. Their environments are split either because they live or were brought up in overseas departments, former colonies or immigrant neighborhoods of France. As a consequence, their own culture is set up as an exotic alternative to the dominant French culture. In all of the novels but one, the main characters circulate, taking their own ideas, tastes and expectations about food with them. Abroad, they taste new foods and accept or reject aspects of the new culture by adapting parts of it and transforming their diets. In this way, cooking chronicles change, cultural circulation, and creation. We can see that global exchange is a high-stakes activity; it ensures the survival of some countries, the wealth of others and contact with the exotic, read foreign, to many. Again, this impression is not a new one and we return to another of Brillat-Savarin's aphorisms for an illustration, "La destinée des nations dépend de la manière dont elles se nourrissent."[125]

The fate of nations, therefore, is changing. The kitchen, emblem of the home and self-definition, is changing because the way people move and live is changing. Food defines 'us' and 'them;' but also 'here' and 'there.' Though food choice used to be determined by local availability, now in the post-colonial, global economy, food choice signifies both an originating place and its displacement, and contact with a diverse world. In effect, food circulates and so do immigrants, and no matter how much ink is spilled on the subject, you can't go home again. Again, if we consider the nature of representation, we see that the importance of food in immigrant culture is a sign that something else, namely the home country, is absent. This is continually played out in the lives of people who must mediate two different cultures. Döring elaborates on this idea,

> Meals and foodways typically mark the material basis for the displacement as well as the translatability of culture….(I)n the complexity and plight of diasporic situations, cooking performs cultural memory: food and recipes are links to cultural 'roots' and are, at the same time, testifying on the contact zones and 'routes' which their producers and consumers have gone through.[126]

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[125] Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût* (Paris: Charpentier, 1839) 11.

[126] Tobias Döring,, Markus Heide and Susanne Mühleisen, ed. "Introduction." *Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food* (American Studies A Monograph Ser. 106. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003) 7.

Food is the cultural praxis of representation for the displaced in a diasporic community. It is a way to explore a lost or diminishing relationship with home even though this is not always successful since 'home' is no longer what it was.

Frequently, when food is represented in literature, difficulty arises and is present in the text because of problems related to the circulating cultural signs and cultural translations expressed through the relationship with food. Sometimes, as in these novels, within a specific culture there are subversive figures that are performing an alternative cultural identity. They may also display food practices that transgress cultural norms in order to differentiate themselves from the group. Often in literature and other media, mixed or multicultural eating habits are used as a metaphor of social change. An emphasis on multicultural meals, especially in literature, serves to erase difference. It is a way to internalize and effectively "consume" the other.

As previously mentioned, and maintained by Stephen Mennell, there is at the same time less contrast between what different groups eat and more variety to what they eat. This is a trend which will continue because of the realities of production and transportation technologies. Since there is less difference between what socio-economic classes eat, there is an increased marketing of the exotic. This is the new sought after commodity. As bell hooks writes, "Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture."[127] This idea is explored at length by Lisa Heldke who explains what she terms cultural "food colonialism." For Heldke, eating a different culture's food in an effort to have contact with the Exotic Other is in some ways an attempt to make oneself more interesting. It also supports economic colonialism. Food colonialism can be understood as the flip side of cultural imperialism whereby a dominant culture will suppress indigenous culture in order to control the indigenous people. Heldke explains, "Cultural imperialism refers to the imposition of cultural practices by an economic or political power; cultural colonialism.... refers to the appropriation of such practices by such a power."[128] According to Heldke, it is virtually impossible to have a completely uncolonized cuisine because food and cooking methods have been circulating for centuries and perhaps even longer. The globalization of food began with the circulation of plants during the age of discovery. Virtually all of the tropical crops and foods that Western society considers to typify the Caribbean were brought to the islands. Bananas, sugar, breadfruit, mangos, coconuts and salted fish, they are all exogenous rather than indigenous. The same holds true for African crops. Even though they are a staple crop and the largest cash crop in Senegal, peanuts were originally grown in North America. People have brought about the circulation of foods around the world for profit and for sustenance and this circulation has also caused the global movement of large numbers of people especially when it is the result of crop failure and famine. Ultimately, to be free of contact with other cultures is not the goal; the goal is for the ex-colonies and third world countries to have some agency in the power relationships between cultures that influence each other.

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[127] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance." *Eating Culture* Eds. Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz. (Albany: SUNYP, 1998) 181.

[128] Lisa M. Heldke, *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* (New York: Routledge, 2003) xviii.

The importance of food and cooking to immigrant populations are evident. Often, the last vestige of a person's cultural identity is culinary. Long after clothes are abandoned, the history is forgotten and a language becomes extinct, the foods remain important to immigrant populations. They are a most basic way that people have of remembering their heritage. As Marcuse states:

> Smell and taste … relate (and separate) individuals immediately, without the generalized and conventionalized forms of consciousness, morality aesthetics. Such immediacy is incompatible with the effectiveness of organized domination, with a society which tends to isolate people, to put distance between them, and to prevent relationships.[129]

Food is a sensual experience and discourse around food interprets and conveys that sensual experience. As such, food is a locus for community and at the same time, resistance. In every novel that we have considered here, food and eating are vehicles for resistance against the cultural domination that the characters face.

Inscribed in this discussion are questions of global systems of production, transportation and distribution of food with all of the issues of rights and responsibilities that go along with that kind of process. Today, consumers with means are able to recognize these systems and make choices according to their personal beliefs about their health and tastes and subjectivity. The characters in these novels recognize the underlying pressures which stem from France's colonial history on their own food and eating habits, and in every novel they reject French food and cooking in favor of their own culinary heritage.

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[129] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon, 1966) 39.

Beyond this, and for future generations of immigrants in a multicultural France, the nature of French food itself will change. Whereas previously culinary 'technique' always meant French culinary technique, now other culinary traditions are being recognized and technology permits completely new techniques to emerge. The second and third generation of immigrants will develop still another relationship with both French food and their own culture's foods. They will occupy the third space, as Homi Bhabha calls it, where one is able to determine if a food is 'authentic,' but talking about it makes you other. [130] Future generations will be the same because of their intimate knowledge of the culture, but other because they are on the outside critiquing it instead of producing it themselves.

These novels share deceptively simple plot lines and a richness that comes from the inscription of diasporic cultural heritage within them. They showcase the feminine experience by describing the entire practice of cooking and eating - active processes that women participate in daily. In so doing, these authors expand the transfer of information that is literally expressed in Beyala's inclusion of actual recipes in her book. Beyala provides a tangible manual of how to cook "à l'africaine," but the other authors transmit this knowledge in a more figurative way. They describe marketing, food prep, cooking, serving, preserving of food and how it fits into the lives of their families. The characters convey this knowledge to their daughters and in this way, the authors valorize the disaporic heritage that is contrasted in their novels with French culinary tradition.

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[130] Bhabha 211.

Global perspectives and global identities will become ever more important in future studies of food and culture, but the actions of the individual will also remain paramount. Though locked into a global system, the individual must make choices about what to eat many times a day, every day of his or her life. The individual will choose to identify with the dominant culture by eating 'standard' fare, or will reinforce a cultural heritage by eating foods prized by his or her own culture. Cooking and eating can be a daily act of resistance, assimilation or transformation. New ways of eating will emerge as global eaters' tastes change. It will depend what we are hungry for.

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