

**“The Aroma produced this time is inviting”: gustatory enthusiasm in the African cookery book.**

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**Introduction.**

This paper will explore the extent of gustatory enthusiasm conveyed and generated by African cookery books, both those published in Africa and elsewhere. It will ask which books written by ethnographers, ‘housewives’, gastronomic journalists, colonial ‘ladies’ or celebrity chefs might generate a salivating performance from the reader and an urge to consume the presented dish. The extent of any such response will largely depend on the cultural milieu of author and reader and their own personal tastes. The writer will have had an imagined narratee in mind which might, for example, be a cook in the ‘Western’ kitchen (in the West or in Africa), or one in an African village, or maybe both.

Some recipe collections from the former British colonies in Africa, provided by the colonial ‘ladies’ themselves, and later books written by those Africans who had been trained in a tradition of post-war British domestic science, bring a rather clinical approach to their recipes, aiming for a nutritious assemblage, which might satisfy the stomach, but maybe not enthuse the palate. In a continent where many go hungry, perhaps simple recipes for producing a nutritious meal from any available food should be the priority. More recently some African chefs emerging from hotels and restaurants may be more focussed on their skilled and self-important work of presenting the dishes, rather than selling their deliciousness, whilst others proclaim their gustatory enthusiasm for every recipe.

Photographs and illustrations of prepared food may be an important means of enticing the reader to prepare and/or enjoy the meal. The paper will explore to what extent such illustrations in African cookery books succeed in conveying gustatory enthusiasm. Sometimes, where the photographs themselves are the central feature of the book, the illustrations may curiously suppress any urge to consume the food.

### **African Cookery Books.**

There is a great range of African cookery books that have been published both in and outside of Africa. I have discussed the emergence of African ‘national’ cuisines elsewhere and the role of cookery books in this process (Cusack 2000, 2014). The first significant books were published in British colonies from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. After African states got independence, cookery books appeared in a number of countries, in particular in Ghana and the former British East Africa. By the 1990s books began to be published quite widely both in Africa and the West setting out recipes from many African countries. Some countries, such as Angola or Cameroon have well-recognised national cuisines while others are still not sufficiently defined. In 2013 a book giving recipes for the national dishes of 54 African countries was published in France on the basis that every nation has a national cuisine (Parmenthier 2013). In this paper I will focus on three types of African cookery books: those published the British colonies prior to independence; cookery books published soon after independence where the influence of British domestic science was still strong, and finally those books, mainly emerging from the African diaspora where hotel and celebrity cooks present their skills.

### **Colonial and Post-colonial Cookery Books: serious work in the kitchen.**

One of the first African cookery books was Mrs A.R. Barnes’s *The Colonial Household Guide*, first published in Cape Town in 1890 and then reissued as *Where the Lion Roars*, with minor corrections, by the Jeppestown press in 2006. Whilst the change in title might have been made with an eye to sales, the original book does contain a section on “how to destroy Tigers” (with the requisite quantity of strychnine – the use of gloves is advised) (2006, p.220). The range of offerings included is illustrated by the two sections following the above alarming advice: ‘Raisins and other dried fruit’ and ‘Drink for a Tired Horse’ (pp. 220-221). The purpose of the book is set out in the 1890 preface: “the chief object of this book is to assist in their duties the housewives and mothers of the colony.” The numerous recipes include all the standard British dishes of the time, such as bubble-and-squeak, Irish stew, Welsh rare-bits, toad-in-the hole and numerous sweet puddings, pies, tarts, cakes and buns, jellies and sweetmeats. In the 2006 preface to the new edition, David Saffery points out that “Mrs Barnes revels in the use of local ingredients and unfamiliar techniques: her Plum Pudding No. 3 recipe casually suggests substituting an ostrich egg for the 12

hen's eggs otherwise required!" (p. 5). The recipes are simple and presented without any evident enthusiasm. For example, Wild Buck, after having been hung on the branches of a shady tree is roasted, and then we are told "serve with a rich gravy, and place on the table black currant jelly or jam, a great improvement to its flavour" (p. 71). Similarly, adding a squeeze of lemon to Jugged Pigeons "improves the flavour" (p. 76). However, Almond Sponge Cakes are "very superior", while after the recipe for Strawberry Sweet Cake we are told "these are delicious little cakes" and that Fruit Blanc Mange – "eaten with cream and sugar, makes a delightful dessert" (pp. 160, 161, 169). Perhaps Mrs Barnes's own gustatory enthusiasms are showing her, whilst the meat that needed improving in taste was for the men for whom they were cooking. Some of the recipes, such as curried tinned sardines, might not appeal to many people nowadays.

Mrs N. Chataway's *The Bulawayo Cookery Book and Household Guide* was published in Bulawayo in 1909 in aid of the Building Fund for the Anglican Church of St. John the Baptist. Mrs Chataway had been born in Dublin in 1865, married Norman Chataway whilst working in London and then spent the rest her life in Africa (Chataway 2006, pp. 7-8). The book contains a preponderance of mainly English middle class dishes typical of Edwardian times. The difficulty in obtaining fresh fish is reflected in the use of tinned fish, for example, in making lobster rissoles, whilst eggs were expensive so are used sparingly. Puddings, sweets, bread, cakes and biscuits form the bulk of the recipes. The back cover of the book which declares that it contains over 230 recipes for 'African' delicacies seems out of place. The tone of the book can be gained from the Hydropathic Pudding, the recipe provided by Miss Henderson: "Remove the crust from a rather stale loaf and cut very thin slices from it", or from 'Rusk Pudding' whose ingredients consist of 2 or 3 finger rusks, one gill of warm milk and one egg all steamed for 20 minutes (pp. 139, 141). This is a book clearly aimed at the colonial housewife managing the home with certain restrictions in the availability of standard English fare. A section on household management, following Mrs Beeton's example, with recipes for furniture polish and "Preserving Colours in Washing", flows seamlessly from the previous recipes in a far from appetising approach (pp. 149-155). There is a marked absence of vegetables or fruit throughout. A short section on 'Veldt Cookery' includes Ducks á la Polynesia provided by Major R. Gordon, D.S.O, probably the same person as Colonel Robert

‘Boomerang’ Gordon, DSO, OBE described elsewhere (p. 7) where you are told to “put a very hot stone inside the bird; then wrap all up in banana leaves and bury in a wood fire for 20 minutes or so. Feathers need not be removed till after cooking ...” (p. 145).

Another book in similar vein, although published much later, is *Recipes from Bechuanaland* by the Women’s Institute in Francistown, where cakes, scones, breads, pastry, biscuits and cookies, tarts and tartlets, puddings and sweet dishes take up the first fifty pages. There are a few indigenous dishes but we are told by Joy Wray, Patroness of the Institute “there is everything here from ‘madila’ of the Kalahari to the most civilised of dishes” (**Women’s Institute c1950, Foreword, unpaginated**). The assemblage of many standard British mid-century dishes is interrupted however by a section headed “Menus with a Difference” where most of the recipes’ titles are given in French, such as *Choux de Bruxelles au gratin* (p. 118). Another part is labelled “On Safari” and includes “Fried Buck Liver: as soon as the buck is killed, the liver should be taken out and cut into thin slices. These must be floured, peppered and salted to taste and cooked almost in their own blood” (p.123). Clearly the gustatory enthusiasm of any reader will depend on their carnivorous propensities. This is again an instruction manual for the colonial housewife – and perhaps the servants. Following “Invalid Cookery”, which includes the far from mouth-watering recipes for “milk soup” and “albumenised water” (pp. 127, 129) there are the usual household hints such as “meat in Bechuanaland is often tough – soaking for 12 hours in oil and vinegar tenderises well”(p. 133). There are no photographs or pictures of the food to entice the reader but a few notes appended, probably by the editor, underneath the recipe-titles suggests an occasional restrained enthusiasm. Thus “Christmas Cake” is labelled “Very Good”, Orangeade is “Very Nice”, “Russian Toffee” is “Good” and “to Cook an Old Fowl” is “Very Good” (pp. 10, 53, 68, 79). Presumably, the other hundreds of recipes do not reach these standards of excellence.

*The Gold Coast Cookery Book* was published by the British Red Cross Society in 1933 and contains recipes contributed by numerous colonial Mrs and Misses, a couple of sisters from the ‘Our Lady of the Apostles’ and including the wife of the governor of the Gold Coast, Lady Thomas. This has been reprinted recently as *The Ghana Cookbook*. Here again we have the multiplicity of cakes and puddings so

characteristic of British colonial cooking although here there seems to be a greater use of local produce so that there are, for example, four versions of stuffed pawpaw, and a palm nut hash and okra stew (2007, pp. 104-106). Dishes from other parts of the Empire are included. Thus ‘Dublin Lawyer’, we are told is a favourite bachelor dish in Ceylon and consists of “a tin of lobster, two tablespoons of butter, five tablespoons of sherry, red pepper and salt to taste and a squeeze of lemon, cook if possible at table on a small spirit lamp or stove” (p. 63). Recipes are presented in a stolid instructional way but as with *Recipes from Bechuanaland* there are occasional restrained enthusiasms. Burton Sausage for example, “if served cold ... makes a capital Sunday breakfast ...” (p. 85). This restrained and begrudging enthusiasm for a dish is typical of these colonial cookery books.

### **Post-Colonial domestic science.**

In an introduction to the *The Cook Book*, published in Malawi in 1974 (facsimile edition, 2011) thanks is given to the Council of Women for permission to use material from the *Nyasaland Cookery Book and Household Guide* (1947). The latter was very much in the mould of the other colonial books discussed above and includes advice for settlers arriving in Nyasaland including hiring a servant and the wages that might be paid (2011, p. 1). The narratee is clearly the Nyasaland housewife who, we are told, “finds a few simple tools very useful, such as a light hammer, a small screwdriver, a pair of pincers, a saw, and an axe” (p. 152) and who is encouraged to make some homemade ‘Flit’: “½ wine bottle of petrol, 1 oz. wintergreen and ½ wine bottle paraffin: shake well to mix and it is ready to use. ...” (p. 155) – which as Arne Schaefer remarks, is ‘downright lethal’ if sprayed near a candle or lamp. (unpaginated, Introduction, 2011). To the present day European reader the tone is generally worrying: all water and milk need boiling, strawberries and lettuce need immersing in permanganate of potash (pp. 1-5), fish “is unwholesome and unpalatable if underdone” (p. 20). However, Tiger fish is excellent if over 6lbs – otherwise it is too bony whilst a “Nyasaland chicken bought from a native is always rather small and tough” (pp, 22, 29).

The 1974 book does contain various recipes for scones and flapjacks but also far more recipes using local ingredients and given local names. There are seven insects whose preparation for consumption is described including grasshoppers, ants and sand

crickets and many recipes for fish from Malawi's lakes. There is no attempt at all to describe the deliciousness or not of the food, so this again could be seen as a cooking and household manual for the 'housewife'. In the foreword, Dr S M Cole-King, formerly Medical Officer, Maternal and Child Health of the Ministry of Health spells out the purpose of the book: "A good fire must have good firewood if it is to burn well, So must a person be stoked with good food if he is to be healthy and strong and happy. This book ... is designed to give the housewife some ideas to improve her "firewood". It is hoped that the recipes given in this book will enable her to add variety to the diet and thereby improve the family nutrition as well as earn her a good reputation amongst her neighbours" (1974, p. xi). Nutrition not taste is what matters here.

Adele Faye Njie's in *A Taste of the Gambia: Local and International Recipes* writes that she provides "easy, speedy and efficient ways of preparing, cooking and serving delicious and nutritious meals" (1994, p. 8). She was a teacher in home economics and "presented the first Gambian students for the GCE O-level exams" (p. 7). The recipes included are a good mixture of Gambian and Western, from Smoked Fish Benachin to Spaghetti Bolognaise and Sponge Fruit Flan (pp. 30, 53, 69). There are also notes for 'Home Economic Students' on the reheating of food: "it is sometimes necessary to reheat leftover food, but great care is needed to prevent the food from becoming: (a) indigestible due to further cooking of the protein: (b) lacking in flavour; (c) less nourishing due to the loss of nutrients in the cooking; (d) contaminated with bacteria which can cause food poisoning" (p. 85). The general pedagogic tone is sustained throughout the book, for example, "the daily consumption of fruit should be encouraged, particularly in the morning as this stimulates the bowels, prevents constipation and headaches" (p. 8). Despite this, the enthusiasm of the writer for her recipes seems to infiltrate the rather dry and scientific presentation.

*Tanzania Cookbook* is in the same mould – written for the "general public and domestic science students. The author writes "The recipes I have collected in *Tanzania Cookbook* strike a balance between good nutrition and good taste ... I believe the general public will find this book a treasure as much as secondary school domestic science students" (1978, p. vi). This book and *The Taste of Gambia* are

typical of early postcolonial cookery books and in many ways reflect their colonial predecessors.

More recently, Mac Oma Eyeoyibo's *Cook Book in Itsekiri (Warri Kingdom)* is a curious book by a male author that gives some twenty-six recipes using local ingredients in English and in the Itsekiri language. To the Western reader there is little to encourage the palette: Igbagba –Isibe is, we are told "... also medicinal. It is for the treatment of yellow fever and jaundice" (1994, p.9). This is clearly a worthy cause but not a recipe that might provoke hunger in many readers. Other recipes are presented in a similar way: Ukuōka (p.25), when fully cooked and solidified they are ready for consumption or Ogolo-Ekpo, "(t)he Aroma produced this time is inviting" (p. 19). We are not told about the other times. Perhaps the Itsekiri men and women, for whom this book is aimed, may be so familiar with the dishes that their mouths water at the very mention of the dish.

Therefore there are a considerable range of African colonial and post-colonial cookery books where the focus on the systematic production of the meal is not necessarily accompanied by the author indicating her or his enthusiasm for the food. The reader will react in different ways as usual.

### **Illustrations and the desirability of a dish.**

Few of the African colonial, and early post-colonial cookery books have illustrations while many of the more recent ones include glossy photographs of the food. Some have line drawings of the ingredients, sometimes with a mixture of these ingredients and the final product, while others show a fully prepared dish set out on a laid table, as if ready to be consumed by the reader.

The very complexity of examining a cookery book and trying to decide the extent of gustatory enthusiasm engendered, and who is the supposed to be the narratee and what are the underlying purposes of the book, is well illustrated by Coumba Diop's book *La Cuisine du Sénégal*. It is a book published in France by the Senegalese writer Coumba Doup described as a 'gastronomic journalist'. As with many African cookery books written by women she dedicates the book to her mother who transmitted the passion for cooking. Her imagined reader may be Africans living in

Europe, others living in the West and also, as the book is for sale in Senegal, the Senegalese cook at home. The illustrations consist of two kinds of glossy photographs: first some general touristy pictures of town and country showing various people in Senegal and secondly full page pictures of the dishes whose preparation is described on the opposite page. These show the dish set out on a plate on tables and tablecloths or mats of various kinds. Most of the dishes show a fork, spoon or knife as if the reader is just about to help her or himself. Thus one of the *Chaussons au thon, sardines, tomates et poivrons* is shown neatly half eaten as if the reader has just consumed a mouthful (**Diop 2010, p.13**). This picture might be aimed at the prospective cook who would wish to produce such an apparently delicious meal for the family or guests or perhaps it is aimed at the general reader who will demand these mouth-watering pasties for dinner that night. In a similar way, a *Crème renversé caramel coco* is shown with a spoon full of the recently scooped out mouthful of the delicious dessert, with the spoon just ready to be guided into the reader's mouth (**p.112**). The description of the preparation of the dishes is precise and simple: times for preparation and cooking; a list of ingredients and a description of the method of preparation and cooking: here there is no particular enthusiasm for the meal which hopefully is being prepared. However, alongside, as if hand written, there is a brief section entitled notes. Here the author often reverts to the first person and, for example, tells of her experience of eating a particular dish – *Brochettes d'agneau, sauce moutardée* - with her father. She adds here 'Un régal' - a feast, a delight (**p. 32**).

Another book with similar pictures of the food is Paola Rolletta's *Cozinha Traditional de Moçambique*. Thus the spotless plate and fork and the fish and prawns meal next to some clean bright red tomatoes and pimentos, which would have been used in the recipe for the *Paixe à lumbo*, might enthuse some readers. Others might be put off by the clutter and the way part of the photograph showing a blue plate is cut-off (**facing p.64**).

In contrast, some photographs of food can fail to engender a desire to consume the dish at all. Thus in *Afrikanische Küche* the large glossy photographs, glistening with moisture and juice, are strangely off-putting, maybe because the viewer could not face consuming such a gigantic avocado (**Liadé 1999, pp. 16-17**) or rather raw looking and brightly coloured vegetables (**pp. 44-45**) or perhaps he or she would not be sure



as to what exactly is to be eaten, for example, some indistinct and rather abstract picture which, on examination, we can read is *Yams frites mit relish* (pp. 38-39).

Sometimes simple drawings accompany recipes – showing the ingredients that are needed. Thus, for example, in *Recettes Africaines et leurs valeurs nutritives* opposite the recipe for Mouloukhiye (Gombo) from Chad is a drawing, including a fine-looking cow, some ladies' fingers, some onions, a large pepper, a tin of tomatoes (Université Senghor 2009, p.18-19). There is no attempt to sell the deliciousness of the recipes but just to illustrate the live – and raw ingredients.

Another example of photographs which 'misfire' in the author's attempts to illustrate the food are those shown in Maria de Lourdes Chantre's, *III Recetas de Cozinha Africana*. The cover shows a strange assemblage of objects set on some cane matting: a dish of meat stew in a red earthenware dish placed inside a decorated brass pot, a wooden spoon over-filled with some of the stew worryingly about to contaminate the matting, a decorated gourd or calabash of rice, another full of an unknown grey glutinous substance, a bowl of fruit, a dark African mask and another statue of a sitting person. The overall effect is rather off-putting - to this reader at least. Another photograph showing *Galinha com mancarra* [Chicken with Peanuts] (Chantre 1981, facing p. 33) is an over-crowded table-setting with a plate of half-eaten chicken along with a knife and fork apparently ready to be picked up by the reader, all surrounded by numerous side dishes and a large platter of fruit, a large serving bowl of the main dish, with its lid askew in a rather precarious position, some shiny glasses and – steeped in gloom – another African statuette surveying the scene. It is not clear whether all of red blotches on the dinner plate are part of its design or bits of the three large tomatoes included in the recipe (p.57). Quixotically, despite this off-putting assemblage – to this reader at least, and having noted the simple ingredients used in preparing the dish – the food looks most delicious! Other pictures are in the same vein with one of *Guisado* shown in a large pot ready to be served is accompanied on the table by a steel crocodile who seems to be leaving the scene (opposite p. 97).

### **The African Celebrity Chef.**

*L'Art Culinaire Camerounais* is a typical celebrity chef's book. We are told that Pierre Nya Njike, shown in a white chef's hat on the back cover, has a diploma from

the Paris Hotel School and has worked in a number of grand restaurants there. In the introduction he says that he wants to share with the young girls and women - from his country and the world – his professional experience and his adapted, delicious recipes from Cameroon (1997, p. 7). In a preface he claims that the reader will marvel at the description of these amazing meals – and wishes the reader, “Bon Appetit”. The rest of the book, however, is a simple series of recipes presented in a simple straight-forward scientific way. There are no illustrations to tempt the reader.

Alexandre Bella Ola is an enthusiastic celebrity chef, very different from Pierre Nya Njike. In his *La Cuisine de Moussa* we are told straight away, on the title page, that it contains, “80 recettes Africaines irrésistibles”. The book is full of happy smiling faces and well-judged colour photographs of each dish. ‘Alexandre’ writes in the introduction “I invite you on a great gastronomic journey between the desert and the tropical jungle ... I will show you many unusual and delicious flavours ...” (2010, p. 13). For every recipe, the great chef addresses the reader personally giving some a bit of advice. For example, for “Flan au citron vert” [Lime flan] we are asked “how do you choose a good lime? The fruit should be firm, its skin smooth, of a beautiful unvarnished green, without any black marks.” The glossy photograph opposite shows two flat yellow ramekins one with a spoon full of the pure yellow flan – the reader’s first mouthful – all on some spotless rush mat and some clean slices of lime would certainly be enticing to someone who fancied a dessert (pp. 56-57). In terms of engendering gustatory enthusiasm *La Cuisine de Moussa* would win here and is far from Mrs Barnes or *La Cuisine Congolaise*, discussed below, you can get.

Charles A. Cann’s *Tropical Ghana Delights* is another example of a book where the chef presents his recipes with great enthusiasm: “my inclusion of ‘delights’ in the title is a way of saying the recipes are original, exquisite, fruit infused and satisfying” (2007, 1). Here, as with Jamie Oliver, the cook is having fun in the kitchen, an example, of what has been called the “New Lad” version of masculinity? (Hollows pp. 229-247). The author has fun on most pages so that, for example, for Plantain Boats we are told “I love plantains, and I love them grilled ... Just remember not to miss the delightful unique taste as it melts in your mouth!” (p. 14).

*La Cuisine Congolaise* (2001), jointly written by a scientist, a nutritionist and an anthropologist is a complete contrast to these celebrity chef books. After a general introduction about the Congo (Brazzaville) there is a long section of the food stuffs including a list of wild animals which are eaten there, including antelopes and gazelles, pangolins, monkeys, crocodiles and elephants. The second part of the book is a series of recipes typical of the country with many recipes for smoked, salted and fresh fish and others for various insects. This is not for the cook in the Western kitchen but an ethnographic description of the food of the country. I have discussed such books elsewhere and there are a number of other books with this ethnographic approach including *la Grand Livre de La Cuisine Camerounaise* (1985) and *Alimentação Regional Angolana* (1965) (Cusack 2014). No attempt is made to get the reader to crave the meals. *La Cuisine Congolaise* has a number of poor quality black and white photographs, one of which shows a dead fruit bat alongside some fruit - *nguembo à mangue verte*. This would not appeal to many in the West, but presumably might enthuse the palate of a Congolese aficionado of this particular dish.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has examined a few cookery books written over the last 120 years from different countries in sub-Saharan Africa, published both in Africa and in the West. An examination of these books, with a focus on whether the text, and any pictures, might activate in the reader a desire to consume a dish, illustrates the complexity of looking at any cookery books with such an aim in mind. Cultural differences may be important although cuisine from different parts of the world is now known by many in the developed nations of the 'West'. For the individual, personal preferences of taste, texture and smell probably dominate a reaction to a recipe. The various authors however show different approaches to how the recipes are presented: a dry scientific approach is characteristic of many colonial, ethnographic and other post-colonial authors of cookery books – with little or no reference to the deliciousness of the food. This contrasts with some authors who are active in trying to titillate the reader's taste buds. As we have seen, illustrations of food may or may not encourage the reader's gustatory desires.

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