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CHAPTER 12



SPICES AND FLAVOURS
LANGUAGES AND WORDS
DISHES AND CONTINENTS

COOKING AND PEELING
EATING AND BUYING
NAMING AND ORDERING

12 Cooking Class

Soup and Halva

Dinner is served immediately after leaving Wadi Halfa; and the sensation is certainly a strange one of feeling oneself carried along by a powerful locomotive across deserts which some eight years ago were virgin, whilst discussing a dinner which would do honour to one of the best modern hotels. As a matter of curiosity, I give the menu:

POTAGE JULIENNE.
POISSON BOUILLI, SAUCE HOLLANDAISE.
GROSSE PIÈCE DE BŒUF GARNI.
PETITS POIS À L'ANGLAISE.
POULET RÔTI.
SALADE DE LAITUE.
CRÈME RENVERSÉE.
DESSERT ET CAFÉ.

(de Guerville, 1906: 242)

The grandeur of the Ngorongoro Crater elevates every wedding to the sublime. The transcendent views, thick carpets of rose petals strewn as far as the eye can see, traditionally attired Maasai choirs, a personal butler for every wedding guest, wondrous bridal banquets ... a truly unforgettable start to a charmed honeymoon.

Halva Rosewater Ice-cream

5 eggs
125g caster sugar
750ml cream
250g halva – grated

Whisk the eggs, sugar and rosewater together until very thick and fluffy. In a separate bowl, whisk the cream until soft peaks are formed. Fold in the halva. Fold cream and halva mixture into eggs/sugar mixture. Freeze.

Serves 4

(Short, 2004: 154)

Wadi Halfa itself does not exist any longer. It now lies underneath the waters of Lake Nasser. The villages have been moved elsewhere, having had to make room for national parks, mining, roads and railways.

Everything else remains firmly in place: the opulent dinner, the relationship between technology and luxury, the exquisite remoteness of the dining room in the midst of grand nature. Talk about experiences of elegant ingestions, the culinary rhetoric of staged authenticity, the scribbled recipes from exotic cooking classes: these are the new-old linguistic practices of Orientalist tourism.

Culinary tourism, Melissa A. Baker and Kawon Kim (2019: 252f.) write, is based on notions such as authenticity and heritage. Food provided to clients in tourism settings is considered authentic if it possesses ‘the characteristics of a particular region or cultural traditions’ (Baker & Kim, 2019: 253), and dining experiences are authentic when they represent ‘national cultural characteristics’ (Baker & Kim, 2019: 253). Moreover, food tourism is often based on a set of practices that are characteristic of heritagizing, such as through highlighting differences and boundaries between social groups, the historicity of specific practices, objects and places, and the uniqueness of ‘tradition’ (Smith, 2006). Food here is not consumed, in other words, in order to savour well-composed ingredients or in order to be nourished, but in order to experience its context: decoration, architecture, environment and terrain, people, language and time. Therefore, the dining experience in a safari lodge near the Ngorongoro crater in contemporary Tanzania offers authenticity and heritage experiences in spite of its colonial ambience. The ‘personal butler’ and excess of luxury, such as the ‘thick carpets of rose petals’, strikingly resemble the luxury and amenities aboard the colonial trains on which elaborate dinners were served. Colonial practice and colonial constructions not only remain firmly in place, but are reinforced in these places and, more precisely, in food tourism practices at these places (Hall, 1994). The message is clear: Africa has only vaguely existed prior to its colonization, as the ‘Maasai choirs’ may suggest. The Africa that can truly be experienced, seen, travelled and consumed only becomes accessible through the construction of railway tracks and safari lodges. Before this, there was nothing but ‘virgin’ deserts and ‘grandeur’. And through colonialism, the narrative of the *Kitchen Safari* suggests, Africa emerges – out of an Empire whose militaristic costumes and game reserves now turn into the characteristic features of the postcolony (Mbembe, 2001). Heritage and authenticity are represented, or achieved, through colonial performance, gaze and discourse. Halva rosewater ice cream instead of *crème renversée*, and we don’t need to go back in order to have it once more: there is a recipe, which guarantees that the experience of the colonial sublime can be tasted, once more, at home somewhere in the refrigerated Global North.

Many sites of colonial heritage gastronomy remain elite tourist destinations, such as the Raffles Hotel in Singapore as the site of the ‘authentic’ *Singapore Sling*, while others are constructed in different, more ‘contemporary’ ways. Yet the story that is told at these sites remains closely

connected to colonial experiences and paradigms. For example, the Spice Tour on the island of Zanzibar is as deeply entrenched in colonial power relations that continue to be meaningful as the luxury safari in the national parks on the East African mainland. Yet the Spice Tour feels slightly different; it aims at displays of rawness and purity.

Spice Tours can be booked almost anywhere on the island. Unlike the exquisite lodge by the Ngorongoro Crater, spice plantations are easy to reach and not expensive to visit. Tourists can book guided tours at their hotels and guest houses, at bars and cafés, travel agencies and shops. Even though the dates for their visits are usually arranged according to their individual needs, the tours themselves take place along busy paths. Clients are taken to the various spice farms, which offer guided tours, cooking lessons and culinary experiences that are closely connected to the plantation: smelling, tasting and seeing the spices that form the basis of the curry as much as of the Sunday roast. The tone of the tour is personal and jovial; there is joking, a feeling of spontaneity, a seemingly uncomplicated encounter with the raw and uncooked. Clients are taken in minibuses to the plantations where they are greeted by a guide. The tour starts close to the small parking lot, where there are already some spices – hibiscus, frangipani or perhaps curry leaves. The guide asks about nationalities and cooking habits and takes the group from one plant to the next, peels a bit of bark from a cinnamon bush, puzzles his customers by explaining that pepper is a vine and not a tree, and continuously offers leaves and fruits to smell and taste. At the end, there is a small shop or a market with packets of spices, baskets full of colourful things, and food and drink.

The advertisements for Spice Tours often promise much more than this, such as culinary safaris, food tours and so on. Even though a Spice Tour never takes more than a few hours, including introductions, shopping and a meal, it is offered as a journey, like a safari, as on the website of the Australian agent *Urban Adventures*¹:

We begin our Zanzibar food tour at the source – a local spice farm. Here, you'll get a chance to taste seasonal samples and learn local farming techniques. Think Zanzibar only farms spices? Think again! On top of your spicy favourites like cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, nutmeg, chilli, vanilla, saffron, and curry, they also cultivate pineapples, jackfruits, lemons, limes, oranges, pomelos, durians, and coconuts which you may get to taste straight from the tree!

After snacking on a variety of fresh fruits, we'll head over to a nearby farming village. This is a rare opportunity to explore a local village off the tourist route and experience local life, work, and development just as it is.

From there, we'll visit a local farmer to see her small cassava farm. After trying our hand at African farming, she'll take us to her outdoor kitchen for a local cooking lesson. All the ingredients used for the vegetarian dish are fresh from the village and nearby farmland. Ever wanted to know how to make coconut milk from a fresh coconut? Now's your chance!

Our Zanzibar tour will end with a tasty Swahili lunch, including the dish we prepared as well as spiced rice, bananas, and local in-season produce. Feeling satisfied, we'll head back to Stone Town. On our way, make sure to ask your local guide about other off-the-beaten-path adventures in Zanzibar.

[...]

Inclusions: Local English-speaking guide, transportation, lunch, cooking lesson.

Exclusions: All spices and other products sold at the farm, tips and gratuities for the guide.

Dress standard: Modest dress and good walking shoes for the farm.

Off the beaten track, original, authentic, rare. The Spice Tour leads to a deep experience, just like the safari to the Ngorongoro Crater. And like the wildlife tour, it is tightly entangled with the metropole. The plantations have never been places of Indigenous sovereignty, or even remote. They were created, like those on other islands of the Indian Ocean, in order to sustain colonial trade networks. Clove trees, which were the most important plant of the Zanzibari plantation economy until the end of the 20th century, were introduced to the island only in 1818, when the government of Seyyid Said bin Sultan resulted in the incorporation of this part of the Omani empire into global trade networks. The ever-increasing need of emerging European bourgeoisies for spices, tea, coffee and so forth resulted in the drastic growth of plantation economies in the Global South, not only including the introduction of neophytes to islands such as Zanzibar, but also the growth of the slave trade and forced migrations. Right from its beginnings, the spice plantation economy was closely connected to slavery and colonialism, to the creation of the modern nation state and the colonial empire, to Europe's working class and urban poor, to capitalist markets and global exploitation. The plantations are therefore also closely connected with food such as cinnamon rolls, *Currywurst* and vanilla pudding, which have a 'traditional' Northern feel and yet were originally based on the availability of moderately priced spices from the South.

Since the decline of the spice export trade (and the rise of the artificial flavour industry), the plantations on Unguja, the largest island of the Zanzibar archipelago, increasingly depend on tourism. Mahenya and Aslam (2014: 99) give figures of up to 99% of the plantations operating as demonstration sites and not as working farms any longer. They remain lively places, where authenticity and heritage are explored in particular ways. Groups of tourists and their guides walk there, climb, peel, taste, try, cook. There is often a feeling of realness, of accomplished self-actualization, of authenticity. In her analysis of the Spice Tour as part of the growing global ecotourism industry, Honey (1999) describes the transformation of the plantations into places that offer precisely this.

Colonial erasure, feelgood epistemes. A young man climbs a coconut palm tree and demonstrates plantation work as plantation play. Sitting there on top, he sings *jambo / jambo Bwana / habari gani / hakuna matata*. A group of tourists take out their cameras and smartphones and video his performance. The guides have a break. Laughter. Comments and questions. Languages overlap, mix into one another, blend. Another young man introduces himself as 007, the *James Bond of Zanzibar* and walks away, shrugging his shoulders. Why do we know his name now that he has left? But then, why should we know all the things we now know, about how pepper is grown and cinnamon is harvested? Such authenticity will only remain meaningful as an anecdote, a story to tell at home, later. What if it is not simply plants and fruit that have been changed in their meaning, from trade goods into non-objects that have but one purpose, namely to amuse? What kind of thing is language turned into in the authenticity setting?

By the end of the Spice Tour, we know that cloves are called *karafuu* in Swahili and that pepper is *pilipili*. Nutmeg, *kungumanga*. Cinnamon, *dalasini*. Vanilla, *vanila*. Strawberry, *stroberi*. At the souvenir shop, there are little baskets filled with packed spices, which make authentic souvenirs. A bag made of palm tree leaves bears an inscription: *Jambo Zanzibar*. The guide who has explained all this to us, politely and patiently, says that he has learned something as well. A few words that might come in handy with the next group of tourists. *Erdbeere, Tasche, Andenken*. Strawberry, bag, souvenir.

Pepper Journey

The Spice Tour, like the botanical garden, is about essentializing space, associating plants with continents and vice versa – Zanzibar, this hybrid space, is Spice Island, a place where diversity is grown – and with food that is turned into national food. Communalities and encounters thus gain contradictory meanings as they are offered as concepts of homogeneous community, where the tourist may be present as a guest. That food and feast are occasions of inclusion, of hospitable encounters and togetherness is not at stake: this is about nations eating national food, made from national trees. Ethnic communities eating ethnic food, made from ethnic ingredients. Exotic locals, gazed at by their clients.

Language is conceptualized and distributed equally. The term ‘multilingual’ makes sense here, as we are constantly reminded of the presence of different languages. One is from Norway and speaks Norwegian, from Germany and speaks German, from Africa and speaks African. Swahili as the language of Africa, Tanzania and Zanzibar erases all other languages present, such as the many languages from the mainland that are also used there; it makes diversity easy to handle. *Hakuna matata, you already know some words*. Like the graffiti in Christiania, Swahili

represents a continent's hospitality, as a phantasy of managed hearts and tongues.

The compartmentalized performances of places, spices, heritage and history are multilingual performances by both guides and guests. Yet their fluid and creative language practices are usually not seen as artful and reflected, but as a necessity and as an aspect of commodification (Heller *et al.*, 2014b; Schneider, 2016, among others). The tourist guide Bwana A. describes his personal repertoire of languages needed for his work as follows:

I'm speaking almost six to seven languages. I speak Swedish, Norwegian, Dansk, Italian, French, a little bit – a little bit of Chinese und Deutsch a little bit. Chinese I learn from my brother who lived there for fourteen years; I learn from him. The other languages I learn mostly from the tourists during the spice tours. Maybe I'm a quick learner, I think.

Speaking and separating many languages here means being able to use many different and separate codes for a specific purpose, namely to work in a tourist setting. In terms of advertising his communicative skills as a guide, Bwana A. never mentions the other languages he speaks – Kiswahili, Arabic and English – nor the semiotically complex performance that is part of his work as a guide. The former he considers irrelevant for a description of his multilingual repertoire, because they are just there, as a result of one's socialization and education, and the latter because performance is not part of the hegemonic discourse: LANGUAGE is words and phrases, not gestures, song and movement. Languages are, in other words, named and counted and exhibited as commodities that are controlled by individual players when they are used in contexts where very particular language ideologies prevail: concepts introduced in colonial contexts, framing language as bounded object and tied to ethnicity or nationhood. Spices likewise are trees and shrubs; they can be combined in order to be sold as mixes, but under specific names: *butter chicken mix*, *biryani mix*, *masala spice*, *coconut curry mix*, *chai masala*.

This also applies to food itself. In a restaurant by the sea, just in front of a number of historical buildings in Stone Town, the menu provides us with the order of things. Before one gets to the dishes on offer, there is a chronological outline of Zanzibar's culinary history. Food as heritage and living history, as in the plantation. Pepper grows on trees, as a vine that climbs on them. Pepper is *pilipili*. Pepper is a motif, a trope. But how does it get here? Pepper is a journey.

The menu has a heading: 'Zanzibar rich cuisine influences'. White letters on turquoise-coloured wood (see Figure 12.1). In the land where pepper grows, the 'First Habitant of Zanzibar were Bantus from Tanganyika Fishermen.' We need to know this as much as we need to know everything else. 'Choose your starter from their history.' Everything is in place already. Explore. Find out. Yet what, precisely? Perhaps the many meanings of sadness.



Figure 12.1 Chronotopes on a menu

Isn't this, too, worth a closer look? 'Bantu' as an ethnic term is no older than colonialism; the word was coined by Wilhelm Bleek in 1862, when he wrote about typological differences between the languages of southern Africa. *Bantu*, *Bushman*, terms invented in order to make order. Back to the menu. Bantu fishermen came and created a starter. They came from *Tanganyika*, already a blend, a linguistic masala, consisting of *Nyika* and *Tanga*, which are not just any toponyms, but place names that are placed in a contested colonial space. Later, after the revolution, this toponym blend was to be mixed with another one, *Zanzibar*, in order to create *Tanzania*.

On the menu, history moves on, a linear process from starter to dessert. '9th Century Omani, Yemenis & Persians began their influence and brought along with them new dishes and ingredients.' No political economy of trade, no imperial formations of the Indian Ocean, no plantation and exploitation, but influence and ingredients. In case we are worried about too much pepper in their dishes, we can move on: 'In the 15th & 16th Centuries Portuguese began travelling to the African great lakes including Zanzibar.' Their culinary legacies are on offer. There is some deep logic in these geographies. Travelling to the 'great lakes including

Zanzibar’ in that past refers to travels to places connected through the slave trade; today they are connected through these historical experiences, as well as their erasure through tourism.

A nearby shop sells souvenir mugs, fridge magnets and other items with a Maasai warrior, Kilimanjaro and the inscription *Zanzibar the Land of Hakuna Matata* on them. Soaps and shower gels are on offer as well, and bear a more oriental design. The menu explains: ‘In the 17th Century, in 1651, the Omani sultanate influenced Zanzibar and brought stronger relationships between Indian & Zanzibar.’ Feelgood epistemes, *Khaleeji* influencers investing in relationships. From African beginnings to these ties to India, this gets more and more elaborate, and increasingly has a modern feel, of *chai masala* and batik shirts. Where will this end? ‘Around the 20th century, British, Germans & Europeans finalized the multicultural journey.’ As in any narrative that is based on thought that also informed earlier narratives, like the Hamite hypothesis of the 20th century, development ends in Europe, and the culmination of history is White. The colonialists of the last century have merely completed a ‘multicultural journey’. How nice! How sad.

‘Our Signature dishes were created around these rich multicultural fusions.’ Those who had to pay for the fusion do not appear in the picture. They have been named into complete invisibilities, Bantu. Someone says *Jambo, have you made your choice?*

Tourism is colonial practice and characterized by the continuity of imperial formations, Hall and Tucker (2004) have argued. This continuity is reflected in the presences of specific forms of language, discourse and representation. Tourist settings in the postcolony are represented in images, advertisements and tourists’ discourse as spaces where encounters with the Other-as-host can take place, and where cultural production and language practice are fundamentally *different*: not pure but mixed, not real but invented, not modern but traditional. Linguistic and cultural differences are exaggerated as part of a place’s authenticity and worthiness (e.g. as a heritage site, an allochronic site of Indigeneity, and so forth), as in this menu. The simplicity of the binary oppositions presented is self-explanatory; translators and interpreters will not be required unless the tourist decides to explore – for example on a spice safari – the ‘authentic’ realities of the hosts. Very much like expeditions during the colonial era, tourists will then enter a kind of *terra incognita*, where the ‘exotic’ prevails; in line with what Fabian (2000) has observed about the expeditions of the 19th century, which mostly used well-trodden paths, today’s touristic ventures out of hotel lobbies and secluded holiday resorts and into ‘otherness [which only] makes a destination worthy of consumption’ (Hall & Tucker, 2004: 8) take place mainly along pre-existing pathways and through commercialized activities. The menu puts them in order, across time and space, while we make our choices as we lounge by the beach.

The beach ceases to be particular precisely at this point. The same applies to anywhere else where a connection between food and hospitable encounters, language and shared environments, the colonial past and the concept of difference (or should we say diversity?) can be made. Cooking classes, guided tours to markets and visits to community museums all seem to be based on the idea that the postcolonial Other's food and ingredients are interesting to know not because they represent some kind of measured wealth (as in Europe's more distant past), but because they are a key to Otherness and to the spectacular.

Poisonous Stuff

Food tourism is about finding ways of including exotic, Oriental culinary experiences in tourism encounters. Spices transport sensual – and sometimes erotic – experiences, an experience that can always be exceeded. In this sense, the Tjapukai Cultural Park² in Cairns, Australia, displays plants, fruits and seeds that were used by Aboriginal people for both medicinal and culinary purposes. Here, the toxicity of the plants is constantly emphasized during the presentation, and the possibility of poisoning others or oneself either deliberately or accidentally is repeatedly mentioned. The toxicity of Aboriginal plant use corresponds strangely with the erotic sensuality of the Zanzibari spices, the intention being to highlight exactly the dangerous aspect even on the website:

Join the Tjapukai women for an insight into the ancient medicinal and culinary uses of native plants, fruits and seeds, which the Aboriginal people gathered. Learn how toxins are leached from poisonous rainforest plants and interesting facts like how flowers speak to you, telling you when the seasons will change and when it's time to move hunting grounds.³

As in every other section of the Cultural Centre, the names of the plants in the Tjapukai language are thrown in during the guides' explanations, leaving the visitor with zero remembrance of any of the terms, but with the sentiment that food preparation is highly dangerous and requires highly elaborated knowledge. It is also made more authentic for the tourists, as the guides at the museum are dressed in traditional costumes with their bodies painted in order to fulfil the promise of what the Cultural Centre stands for: 'The original authentic Australian indigenous cultural experience'.⁴ The exotic and mysterious Aborigine is kept alive in order to stimulate and produce the touristic melancholia after empire (see Gilroy, 2005).

The Other's culinary habits such as the sensual spices of Zanzibar or the extreme or toxic foods of Tjapukai are stirring and fascinating and inspire various forms of guided tours – not only through spice markets and cultural parks, but also to other people's own gardens and fields.

Since not all people have the same access to recording technology or the internet, the possibilities of profiting from culinary tourism vary immensely in terms of what can be offered. If the menu consists of, let's say, the five most common plants that are grown in the host's garden, the interest of the tourists can only be raised by the most minimal offer in order to convey the poverty and need of the society, which is as escapist as the toxic plants of the Aborigines. One of these minimalistic food tours was attended in Masindi, Uganda, offered by the Boomu Womens Group, situated at the Kichumbanyobo Gate to Murchison Falls National Park. As the sign (see Figure 12.2) shows, various offers invite tourists to join in. The cooking tour is a guided tour in the nearby banana plantation, where fresh plantains and banana tree leaves are cut and shaped in the presence of the visitor, and brought back to the hut, where the tourist learns to prepare them for cooking (Figure 12.3). The only necessary ingredients are the plantains, the leaves and water. The carefully peeled plantains are wrapped in the leaves and left to cook for the next two hours.

The Boomu women's camp has seized the opportunity of tourists' interest in Indigenous African food and offers the experience of extremes, which are created by the highly different lifestyles of guest and host. Food as the basis for life in any society raises special interest in the culinary touristic discourse, whereby not only the minimalistic ingredients and preparation play a role, but also the aspect of eating in what may be called an Oriental manner, i.e. eating with the hands. This localism in food is often opposed to the culinary cosmopolitanism of the tourist, whereby



Figure 12.2 Time eating away a signboard



Figure 12.3 a, b & c Cutting prior to cooking

cosmopolitanism is mainly used to describe places with a large assortment of ‘global foods’ (Molz, 2007: 79). Molz (2007: 79) further argues that culinary tourism ‘is not necessarily about knowing or experiencing another culture through food but rather about using food to perform a sense of adventure, curiosity, adaptability, and openness to any other culture’. This becomes particularly obvious in the cooking classes at Boomu Women’s Camp, as the tourists adapt and socialize, experiencing the life-style and the food in their own extreme ways.

Extremes, scary food, toxic food, localist food, erotic spices – these all belong inseparably to the tourist’s experience of Otherness in culinary tourism (Long, 2004; Mkono, 2011; Molz, 2007), presented in more or less complex guided tours. They all belong to the ultimate experience or, as Urry (1990) calls it, the tourist gaze.

Notes

- (1) See <https://plus.hertz.com/things-to-do/O3F8b8Hxx8-zesty-zanzibar> (accessed 12 August 2020).
- (2) The Tjapukai Cultural Park was closed down as a result of the Covid pandemic in 2020.
- (3) See <https://www.tjapukai.com.au/aboriginal-bush-foods-and-medicine> (accessed 12 August 2020).
- (4) See <https://www.tjapukai.com.au/> (accessed 12 August 2020).