Colonial Food in Interwar Paris: The Taste of Empire. Lauren Janes. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. ISBN: 9781472592828

We are what we eat. This popular saying lies behind our individual encounters with food, but also our collective encounters. Perhaps just as important as this saying, though, is its corollary: We are *not* what we *don't* eat. This is the essential argument of Lauren Janes's book on food and identity in Paris between the World Wars.

Janes looks at attempts to incorporate the foods of French colonies into French cuisine and uses the responses—generally lukewarm at best—of French peoples as a proxy for French national identity and as a barometer of the French public's view of the French empire. "In the interwar period," Janes put it, "food became central to the political imagination of what France's global empire meant to the French nation" (1). Consuming food is about incorporation, taking food into the body and internalizing it—becoming what you eat. Janes extrapolates this intimate encounter with food on the individual level to explain how national identity is shaped; just as the individual creates and asserts identity through eating some foods and rejecting others, nations of people eat or reject foods based on some notion of being "French" (or "American"). Janes's argument could be understood as a kind of phenomenology of national identity, the creation of a collective identity through the visceral politics of diet.

During and after WWI, France's ability to produce food—especially wheat and beet sugar—was severely compromised, forcing the country to import food (rice, ground nuts, tropical fruits, chilled meat) from its colonies of Indochina, French West Africa, French North Africa, and Madagascar in order to sustain itself. Although most of these attempts to import food during the war ended in disaster (Chapter 1), they nevertheless raised the possibility for foods from the colonies to support a Greater France. After WWI, further attempts to import food from the colonies came from a variety of interesting venues: the annual banquets of the *Société*

d'acclimation where scientists feasted on pink pythons from India (Chapter 2); the coalition of organizations Janes calls the "Indochinese lobby" that sought to introduce rice and *pain du riz* into the French diet (Chapter 3); the "colonial-inspired recipes" found in culinary literature that brought acceptable colonial foods—like "Langouste à l'orientale" made with curry powder—into the bourgeois home (Chapter 4); and the 1931 International Colonial Exposition where visitors could try foods from throughout the empire (Chapter 5).

Such dreams of a new, greater French cuisine, however, were repeatedly frustrated by the culinary conservatism of the French. Most colonial foods were outright rejected, and those accepted were generally diluted and homogenized, such as adding a pinch of curry powder to make sweetbreads "oriental" (118). It's a story of great expectations dashed by an increasingly trenchant national identity based on what foods constituted being "French."

Janes takes care to explain why this story matters just as much for today's France as it does for France one hundred years ago, namely, "the continued role of foodways in dividing 'us' and 'them' in contemporary France" (164-165). Within an anti-Muslim political climate in contemporary France, far-right nationalist groups, like "Identity Block," have continued to tie French identity to diet by making services for the homeless contingent upon consuming pork soup. And in 2015, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed eating pork was a value of the Republic and needed to be taught in schools. French citizens are pork eaters—the visceral politics of food and identity matter just as much now as they ever have.

This is a compelling book with a pressing argument and clear relevance to the present moment. Janes backs up anecdotal evidence with substantial quantitative evidence, detailing just how bad the food situation in interwar France was and how disastrous attempts at incorporating colonial foods were. The variety of sources—archival records from the comité central français

pour l'outre-mer, bulletins by the *Société d'acclimation*, articles and recipes in periodicals like *La Cuisinière Cordon Bleu* written by professional chefs, and photographs of the 1931 Colonial Exposition—reveals a complex discourse through which Janes effectively demonstrates the ambivalence the French public had for its empire, making the case that, above all, it was food, not empire, through which the French formed their identity.

I was, however, left with two reservations about this book. The first is that Janes purports to examine the reception of colonial food and the Greater France narrative among the "wider French public," (2) but focuses almost exclusively on elites, whether colonial lobby groups, business interests, professional chefs, or bourgeois homes. There is virtually no discussion of what non-elites thought of these foods, or even whether they encountered these foods during this period, other than a brief discussion the use of imported food in WWI military rations.

Second, Janes spends much of the Introduction laying out the corporeal relationship between food and identity, describing experiences of tasting and smelling and "the embodied practice of eating." (3) Yet, she largely discusses attempts to persuade the government to import colonial food, to introduce exotic recipes to the bourgeois public, and such rather than people's concrete encounters with these foods. In short, there's a lot of talking *about* food, but not a whole lot of eating, with the exception of the 1931 Colonial Exposition. It seems the food, as food, got lost in its symbolic meaning.

Neither of these shortcomings is fatal and perhaps each better represents an opportunity for more research. Readers would benefit from reading Yong Chen's *Chop Suey, USA* (also reviewed in this volume) alongside Janes's book, as the two books explore the relationship between food and empire in complementary ways. Chen engages with class throughout his story and incorporates embodied experience by providing recipes and describing the smells—and

reactions to those smells—in Chinese restaurants in America. And where Chen does not adequately interrogate the violence and exploitation of empire, Janes provides a great model of not losing sight of this violence even when it is not the central focus of the story. No book could singlehandedly capture the complexity of food's relationship to empire, and it is heartening to see a robust conversation emerge in recent scholarship. Regardless of any shortcomings, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris* is worth the read for anyone interested in food and identity broadly speaking.

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