

James McCann, in this readable and enjoyable book, stresses the role of food as a marker of cultural identity and focuses on what African peoples have eaten over the centuries. The author is a great enthusiast for African cuisine, and Africa in general, and this passion permeates the book. After a brief introduction, the first two chapters describe the basic ingredients available to cooks, first those indigenous African staples such as millet, sorghum and *teff*, and then food items that came from outside Africa, notably from the Americas and Asia, such as maize, cassava, capsicums and bananas. The ‘Columbian exchange’ of food stuffs, or what McCann prefers to call the ‘Atlantic Circulation’, is a crucial development in the history of African cuisine and he stresses the African contributions to this interchange. These two chapters are then followed by a second section focused on Ethiopia, with a detailed look at Empress Taytu Bitul’s enormous feast in 1887, on the occasion of the consecration of the church of St. Mary at Entotto, and an exploration of Ethiopian ‘national’ cuisine from 1500 to 2000. Further chapters examine West African ‘culinary grammar’, and the ‘History and Cookery in the Maize Belt and Africa’s Maritime World’. Before a concluding ‘Epilogue’, which suggests some further reading, McCann writes on the cookery of the African Diaspora with a brief look at the African-influenced cuisine of the Americas.

The book is illustrated with some thirty-four, well-chosen black and white photographs, many taken by the author, showing, for example, cassava soaking in Southwest Sudan in 1981, cooking sadza (maize porridge) in Zimbabwe in 2006 (pp. 53, 138) and a newspaper advertisement for ‘Tasties’, a modern maize snack from Ethiopia (p.102).

Interspersed amongst the chapters are some twenty-seven simplified recipes for such dishes as *mutuku* (Venda sour porridge with bran, p. 144) from Southern Africa and *Açorda* (a version of Portuguese bread soup with prawns, p. 158) from Angola or *patten doya* (Nigerian yam pottage, p. 42). These examples show the wide range of culinary worlds encountered.

The author makes many important and insightful arguments about African food and cultural identity. Many of the historical sources used are excellent, but are quoted a little too extensively, sometimes over several pages, when a more detailed analysis of the arguments would have been welcome. For instance, in illustrating the great range of insects eaten in Central Africa, the author provides us with a three-page extract from the *Malawi Cookbook* prepared by a group of English housewives (pp. 147-150).¹ This



A Tour of African Culinary History

Igor Cusack

Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine

by James C. McCann

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list, and its details of preparation and cooking, is in itself of great interest and greatly enriches the text, yet it might perhaps have been accompanied by a paragraph or two of supporting material regarding the prevalence of insect consumption in Central Africa.

Any project that attempts to discuss the food culture of the innumerable different African societies and ethnic groups in over fifty nation states must necessarily leave aside many possible areas of study. McCann recognizes this when he begins the epilogue thus: ‘This book covers an impossibly broad landscape of food, cooking, and culinary culture found within the African continent’ (p. 180).

However, some of the arguments made might have benefited by a wider reading of the literature, especially some of the non-English language material. For example, one of the arguments made here is that Jollof rice and groundnut stew mark the ‘connections in West Africa’s culinary geography...’ (p. 133). This is no doubt true. However, included

amongst dishes similar to Jollof rice is the Senegalese *thiebou dienn*. In *L’Afrique, Côté Cuisines*, edited by Pierre Barrot, it is argued that today’s preferred essential ingredient for *thiebou dienn* is broken rice. This use of broken rice is a relic of colonial rule and the importation of large quantities of poor quality rice by the French from Indochina with the top quality grain having been sent on to metropolitan France.² The French also planted the majority of Senegalese agricultural land with groundnuts for colonial exploitation and this ‘legacy’ is crucial in understanding the history of present-day Senegalese cuisine. The other well-known Senegalese national dish, Chicken Yassa, has clear origins in the former Portuguese part of the country, Casamance. Cherie Y. Hamilton also shows, in her *Cuisines of Portuguese Encounters* (2008), the common colonial roots that can be found in the dishes of Portuguese Africa and other former Portuguese colonies.³ McCann’s Afro-centrism is admirable, if not essential, but the colonial impact on African food manners and the emerging African national cuisines is underestimated in *Stirring the Pot*.

In some chapters, such as those on Ethiopia, the history of the cuisine is explored in considerable detail, but elsewhere such as the chapter on African-influenced cuisines in the New World, only brief surveys are made, with much interesting literature inevitably excluded from the discussion. Thus, the complex interplay of Native American, Spanish and African cuisines in Venezuela or the reintroduction of ‘New World’ foods to Brazil by African slaves is not discussed.⁴

McCann might perhaps have explored further the notion of ‘national cuisine’ and ventured into the prolific literature on nations, nationalism and

national identity. He maintains that an Ethiopian national cuisine has emerged but that such national cuisines are not obvious elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa (p. 107). Adrian Hastings argues in his book *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (1997) that the growth of a sense of nationhood was closely associated with the Christian Bible and the associated idea of a chosen people.⁵ This therefore might explain the early development of nationhood and a *national* culture in Christian Ethiopia, compared with other states in Africa. If this were to be the case, then McCann's assertion of the emergence of a national cuisine in Ethiopia, but not elsewhere, might lend some support to Hastings's argument. However, several African countries, such as Senegal, Angola or Cape Verde, do have well-developed national cuisines and national 'signature' dishes are emerging in many others.⁶ The notion of a 'national cuisine' has been challenged by Sidney Mintz who declares that '[a] "national cuisine" is a contradiction in terms: there can be regional cuisines but not national cuisines.'⁷ Certainly, what is termed a 'national cuisine' in Africa can vary greatly from one extreme of being just a concoction of the national elite proclaimed on a government website, to an authentic collection of dishes reflecting what most people in the 'nation' eat, such as might be found, say, in Cape Verde or in Ghana.

It is not obvious what the expected audience for this book might be, although a statement on the back cover claims the book is an '[i]ndispensable reading for anyone interested in African history, the African diaspora, food studies, and women's contributions to culinary history'. It is certainly a valuable addition to the literature on African food studies. However, for a university course on African history or food culture, it has a number of shortcomings, in particular, a tendency to make assertions, which although very likely to be correct, need more supporting evidence and argument. For instance, McCann states that in Africa cooking

has been consistently 'a woman's daily domain' (p. 3). Elsewhere, we are told that 'the varied tastes of African cuisine comprise a body of historically gendered knowledge' (back cover), yet no coherent argument is made to develop this argument, except to repeat that women are always involved in the cooking. The reader might want to know the evidence, for example, supporting the claim that it was only women who exchanged seeds in West African village compounds that were carried on in trans-Saharan caravans (p. 111). The involvement of men in cooking may be more widespread than suggested. For example, men cook in some Muslim societies and in parts of Cameroon, it is only men who cook dog.⁸

It would be interesting to know of other examples of men's involvement in the cooking of food in Africa and, perhaps, more research is needed here. McCann acknowledges men's involvement when he notes that women were not always the cooks in all African societies but provides no details (p. 48). However, he has traveled widely in Africa and the reader is left in no doubt of his considerable first-hand experience of partaking in many African meals – meals prepared by women.

The text also would have benefited from tighter editorial scrutiny, as there are too many sentences that are not quite clearly expressed. To take one example, the sentence 'the history of food as cooking and sensual experience overall is a new subfield that is growing rapidly' (p. 181) is somewhat obscure. Is it the 'the history of food as cooking' (should it have been 'and' not 'as'?) as well as the history of food as 'sensual experience overall' (what is this exactly and how might one study it?), that is, to make the new subfield? Another example: the statement 'the consideration of taste, color, and texture – what scholars call hermeneutics – has mattered a great deal in this story' appears to misapply or, at least, not to properly explain the use of the term hermeneutics (p. 7). Elsewhere, if for instance, we check the note attached to a substantial abstract from a Portuguese account of a late

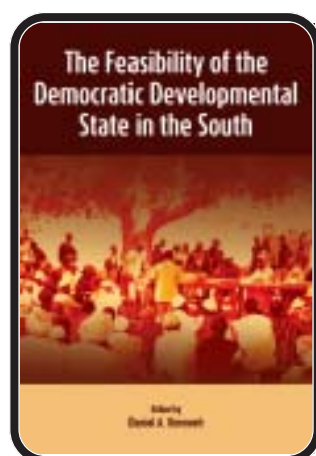
1600s Ethiopian feast, we are told that 'all the spices listed here derive from areas outside Ethiopia (in fact, outside of Africa)' (p. 192). This is a most interesting point, but it is confusing to the reader who, in checking the passage in the chapter, notes that there are no spices mentioned – although lentils, chickpeas and linseed are listed – and the note is probably referring to information to be found elsewhere in the Portuguese account. Sometimes, the argument that is implied in a sub-title, such as 'Culinary Consequences of the Mali Empire, 1250-1500' (p. 111), is not borne out in the section that follows. How, for instance, did the Mali Empire impinge on West African cuisine and what is the evidence of this? In many ways, these are just minor quibbles and perhaps an inevitable accompaniment to a book undertaking such a wide-ranging and complex field of study; but

there is the need to make the text readable for the general reader, yet useful for the student and specialist.

Nonetheless, despite the concerns cited above, this is a book very much worth reading for anyone interested in the history of African cuisine; it is lively and engaging. The two chapters on food and national identity in Ethiopia are a valuable contribution to the study of the emergence of African national cuisines. Some of the broad classifications of African cuisines suggested here, that is 'West African' and 'the Maize Belt and Africa's Maritime World', would seem to be very useful organizing principles to use in trying to compare and discuss a continent with such complex pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial culinary histories. McCann's focus on African contributions to culinary culture is welcome but it perhaps underestimates the impact of the colonial period.

Notes

1. 1979 retitled edition of Annabel Shaxson, Pat Dixon and June Walker, 1974, *The Cook Book*, Zomba: Government Printer, pp. 21-23.
2. Cherif Seye, Vincent Leclercq, Abdallah Faye, Mamadou Amath and Madieng Seck, 'Riz contre mil' in Pierre Barrot (ed.), 1994, *L'Afrique, Côté Cuisine. Regards Africains sur L'alimentation*, Paris: Syros, pp. 93-97.
3. Cherie Y. Hamilton, 2008, *Cuisines of Portuguese Encounters*, expanded edition, New York: Hippocrene Books.
4. José Rafael Lovera, 1998, *Historia de la Alimentación en Venezuela*, Caracas: Centro de Estudios Gastronómicos; Warren R. Fish, 1978, 'Changing Food Use Patterns in Brazil', *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 15/1, pp. 68-98.
5. Adrian Hastings, 1997, *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Igor Cusack, 2000, 'African Cuisines: Recipes for Nation-building?', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13/2, pp. 207-225; *idem.*, 2010, 'From peixefritismo to yellow-bean stew: Angolan national cuisine in the pot and in the novel', in a special edition, Phillip Rothwell (ed.), 'Remembering Angola', *Portuguese Literary and Cultural Studies*, 15/16, pp. 215-230. For a new national dish from Cameroon, *le Poulet DG*, see Joëlle Cuvilliez, Alexandre Bella Ola and Jean-Luc Tabuteau, 2003, *Cuisine Actuelle de L'Afrique Noire*, Paris : Générales First, pp. 74-79.
7. Sidney W. Mintz, 1996, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom. Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past*, Boston: Beacon Press, p. 104.
8. Jean Grimaldi and Alexandrine Bikia, 1985, *Le Grand Livre de La Cuisine Camerounaise*, Yaoundé: Sopecam, p. 125.



The Feasibility of the Democratic Developmental State in the South

Daniel A. Omoweh

The book examines the prospects of a democratic developmental state in Latin American, African and Asian countries, collectively referred to in this work as the global South. Practically, the state refers to the political leadership. Within this context, it interrogates the politics of the state and the unresolved critical issues it has engendered in the state-development discourse such as the need to re-conceptualize the developmental state, democratization, elections, inclusion, indigenous entrepreneurial and business class, political parties and cooperation among the countries of the South. It looks into the need to re-centre the sought state in the development process of the Southern countries after over two and a half decades of embracing neo-liberal policies and economic reforms that, rather than transform, sank the adjusted economies into deeper political, social and economic crises. It contends that the capacity of the state to overcome the market and democratic deficits resides with its democratic credentials. Finally, it suggests strategies that could lead to the rise of a democratic developmental state in the South.

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