

Slaughterers, Chefs, Writers and Consumers: Men's Contributions to African Culinary Culture

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In many African countries a recognised array of dishes and culinary practices have been assembled and mobilised to form a national cuisine. Cookery books, radio and television programmes, restaurants and websites all proclaim these cuisines. These may reflect that which is actually eaten by a large part of the population, as in Cape Verde or Ghana, but might also, in some other countries, be just an elite formulation contributing to the national project of construction of cultural identity. In most parts of Africa the kitchen is women's domain. For example, in one part of rural Tigray in Ethiopia, Diane Lyons has shown how "... only men plough and only women cook ... men who enter kitchens become 'like a woman.'" All over Africa women grow, cook and serve the food. They have also been the main compilers of African cookery books helping to define the national cuisine. This paper will therefore explore in what ways men may have contributed to this national project and their general role in culinary practices. Chefs emerging from Western-based hotels and restaurants such as Pierre Nya Njike from Cameroon, or Pierre Thiam from Senegal have gathered recipes together aimed at the cook in the Western kitchen and fellow nationals in the African diaspora. At the same time they are consolidating the national cuisine. As the main consumers of street food in Côte d'Ivoire or in Cameroon, men help reify certain dishes, prepared by women, transforming them into national dishes. Men play many other roles in food preparation and promotion: as the main slaughterers of animals, as hunters and fishermen, as restaurant owners, as ethnographic compilers, and as the enforcers of ethnic or religious practices. Muslim and other religious men empower themselves by enforcing traditional religious doctrines justifying the subordination of women in the culinary sphere. Novelists have incorporated national dishes into the novels which then form the national literature. For instance, the Angolan novelist Pepetela in his more recent works, such as *Jaime Bunda*, *Agente Secreto* has protagonists enjoying dishes such as *muamba de galinha*, one of the national dishes of Angola. Men therefore play a more extensive role in the construction of African national cuisines than might have been expected.