

Stomach-Thought: Popular Portuguese Imageries of Ethnic Food, Indirect Group Representations, and the Sociocultural Condition of Afrodescendants of Cabo Verdean Origin

ABSTRACT: This study is inspired by an ongoing associational project to discuss issues of intercultural communication and to raise our awareness of existing cultural representations and possible discriminatory practices in Portuguese society. It focuses on representations in popular Portuguese imageries of ethnic food, i.e., “African” food versus “Asian” food. The Asian comparison is mainly used to illustrate, highlight, and make sense of the African case. The objective is to use food as a lens of analysis to present a dynamic picture of contemporary Afro-experiences in the West and more specifically in Portugal. The materials discussed were collected over four years of residence and fieldwork in Portugal and abroad using anthropologically-based methods. The present study politicizes our “stomach-thought,” proposing a creative way to understand the challenges and opportunities for Afrodescendants and especially Afrodescendants of Cabo Verdean origin in Portugal, whose experiences form the basis of this article.

KEYWORDS: Cabo Verde, Cultural representations, Food, Ethnic, Fieldwork, Afrodescendants of Cabo Verdean origin

RESUMO: O presente estudo inspira-se num projeto associativo que aborda problemáticas de comunicação intercultural e que nos consciencializa das representações culturais correntes e das possíveis práticas discriminatórias na sociedade portuguesa. O estudo foca as representações no mundo imaginário português acerca da alimentação étnica, ou seja, “africana” versus “asiática”. O caso asiático serve sobretudo para ilustrar, frisar e reforçar o caso africano. O objetivo deste estudo é usar a alimentação como uma lente de análise para apresentar um quadro dinâmico das experiências africanas no Ocidente e especialmente em Portugal. Os materiais foram recolhidos durante quatro anos de residência e de trabalho de campo em Portugal e no estrangeiro com métodos de matriz antropológica. Trata-se de uma proposta de politização do “pensamento-estômago” e

compreensão criativa dos desafios e oportunidades para os afrodescendentes, sobretudo afrodescendentes de origem cabo-verdiana em Portugal, cujas experiências constituem a base do presente artigo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cabo Verde, Representações culturais, Alimentação, Étnico, Trabalho de campo, Afrodescendentes de origem cabo-verdiana

Introduction

This study is inspired by an ongoing inter-associational project to discuss issues of intercultural communication and to raise our awareness of differential cultural representations and possible discriminatory practices in Portuguese society. It is a joint project proposed by Associação para a Mudança e Representação Transcultural¹ and O Graal². Since 2018, these associations have worked to engage people from all walks of life, including activists and academics, to discuss issues of immigration, racism, communication, and social and cultural representations. The project is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. From the beginning, even when many of the organizers and participants were African immigrants or Afrodescendants, they displayed a strong willingness to discuss issues beyond color or racism based on appearances. Past discussions were highly inclusive, and the implications are applicable to all (see figures 1 and 2). Importantly, this project does not encourage Black self-victimization but promotes mutual understanding. The organizers and participants try to compare openly the experiences of ethnic Portuguese, Cabo Verdeans, Guineans, Angolans, Brazilians, Indians, Chinese, Romani people, etc. In the initial explorative process, we reminded ourselves how certain greetings, stereotypes, and reactions had taken root in Portuguese society and how we had struggled to understand ourselves and understand others at different stages of our lives, and we dared to imagine living in a global society wherein differences are assets, not liabilities.

Taking inspiration from this project, the present study creates parameters for a transcontinental triangulation. It investigates popular Portuguese imageries of food and the indirect representations of certain social groups. For instance, African feasts are commonly imagined to be musical, festive, celebratory, and abundant (Murray 2015; Beyala 2000), while Asian food is often associated with secretive Chinese-run restaurants that evade taxes and charge “laughably low”

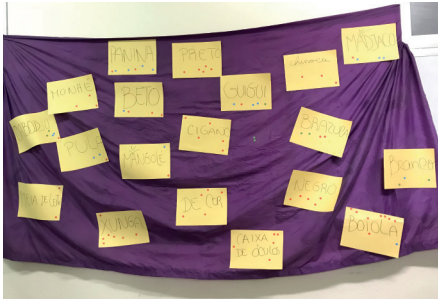


Figure 1. Calling people names. Unhos, Loures, January 20, 2018 (Photo by the author)



Figure 2. "Preto." Unhos, Loures, January 20, 2018 (Photo by the author)

prices (Bedell 2018; Liu 2016). Most people take these imageries light-heartedly and do not problematize them.

The title of the present article is borrowed from an artistic project called "Stomach-Thought. Musa Paradisiaca" or "Pensamento-Estômago. Musa Paradisiaca" in Portuguese, curated by David Santos in March 2015. An introduction to the exhibition at the National Museum of Contemporary Art—Museu do Chiado states:

Departing from the idea of a stomach-thought, as the core of the plot, the project presented in the context of the RAUM platform introduces a new dimension in this conversational and experimental process, brought by the opening, through the anonymity of its participants, to the discourse of the unknown narrator. Within the system of a non a priori controllable network of participants, dependent as it is on the natural and concrete temporality of the web reality, another stage of collaboration is opened, challenging RAUM's visitors to discuss a "thought" that will not only literally, but also in analogy, pass through the "stomach" and the "digestion" process. These "thoughts" accomplish a sort of dissection, revealed in the truth of those "guts," simultaneously obscure and transparent, especially when observed in the raw analysis of the sediment of a conversation sustained by the statement "if all may be eaten, all may be thought through the stomach." (Santos 2015a)

Then, on the RAUM interactive platform, there were the following open dialogues: "When you say that a stomach thinks, what are you talking about?" "I am

talking about a relationship with the world, more sensible, extensible and formless.” (Santos 2015b).

Using a body part to think critically about something is not new. This article also draws on the seminal book *Politics of the Womb* in regard to the contestation of power:

Through the politics of the womb, competing reproductive concerns and domains of power intersected and, eventually, became entangled. People, things, and ideas moved back and forth, between households and hospitals in rural areas; government offices and medical training centers in Nairobi; the Colonial Office and the House of Commons in London; and, later, between international aid offices and conferences in New York and Beijing. (Thomas 2003: 6)

The womb is not devoid of politics, and we have to attend to matters of the womb (Dossa 2011). We also need to politicize the stomach-thought leading to popular Portuguese imageries of ethnic food, knowing that the ethnic quality of food is relative:

In America (unlike in some cultural/historical contexts), for instance, what one eats at home is relatively unmarked—even valorized, as an enduring symbol of the melting pot—whereas in the public sphere ethnic food is a particularly palatable form of multiculturalism, in contrast with the conformity expected, demanded, or even legislated in areas such as language and clothing. One might, then, consider what the ubiquity of food in maintaining historically constituted identities owes not only to the properties of food itself, but also to the social and cultural conditions that allow or encourage this to be a space for resilient identities where other arenas are far more stigmatized (Holtzman 2006: 373).

This article serves, therefore, to present a food-centered perspective on contemporary migrant experiences. It explores the ways in which Portugal is stigmatizing or liberating as a space, and how this relates to the social, cultural and political situations of the people involved. While some of the following observations are critical, they are strictly designed to encourage collective reflections and not intended to offend any community or individual. And yet, to address the unspoken, the silenced, and the ambiguous (Furtado 2012), it is important that we discuss what is not to be discussed, that we reveal what is not to be revealed, prior to properly suturing the open veins of the postcolonial (Galeano 1997).

Concepts and Methods

The study of food can be found in all academic disciplines. To start, we know that the history of mankind is also the history of man's food (Chastanet, Chouin, and Lima 2014). Then, anthropology explores food and social change, food insecurity, eating and ritual, eating and identities (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Moreover, economists and development theorists have come to understand food not as a mere economic question but as a total social fact (Briand 2007). Widely accepted concepts have been used in the studies of food. Classically, foodways are understood as comprising the common ways in which people belonging to the same cultural group feel, think, and behave about food (Simoons 1994); we can also explore the linkages and mutual influences of the city and the country today, namely the global foodscapes (Domingos, Sobral, and West 2014). Food as a lens of analysis is particularly versatile and is adopted innovatively. There are interdisciplinary studies of food conducted around the world. For a Caribbean example, Wilk (1999) described how Belizean food is positioned between Belize and the developed world; the flow of migrants, imported food, media, tourists, and colonial history make their mark on Belizean food and identity. Meneses (2009) gauged people's memories of food and of curries, the relations between the Portuguese, Goans, and Mozambicans, and the exchanges of food products in the Indian Ocean. Reviewing Chinese history, food was of the utmost importance; for this reason, food was incorporated into the Chinese understanding of governance and livelihoods—this noble political attitude supposedly distinguished China from all others (Zhao 2014). In a study of Nauru Island, McLennan (2017) integrated the discussion of obesity and land disputes in the analysis of changing local foodways and accounted for the failure of internationally driven community gardening initiatives to promote food security.

Ethnic food studies have matured in the United States, and they have often approached the food question not only gastronomically but also socially, so that an ethnic food study is also a modern social survey of relationships and power (Liu 2016; Modan 2008). By contrast, in Portugal, research on food traditions and nostalgia maintains a strong influence (Oliveira 2013).

The present study politicizes our “stomach-thought,” especially in relation to Africans and African cultures, with special implications for their descendants, acknowledging that what is seemingly harmless, recreational, and ubiquitous among them today can be traced back to a complex European imperial history of rule and control (Akyeampong and Ambler 2002).

The materials used in this study were collected by me over four years (2015–2019) of residence and fieldwork—applying anthropologically-based techniques—in the Lisbon metropolitan area, which involved constant interaction with Cabo Verdeans, Guineans, Saotomeans, Angolans, and their families, African university students and researchers, Africanists, Afro-activists, and associational leaders in diverse settings, including home gatherings, immigrant festivals, conferences, and other academic meetings in several European countries. I also participated and volunteered in some civic associations in order to better understand their work and contribute in small ways. As the ongoing research is focused on the food, culture, and politics of Cabo Verde, I draw heavily on my on-the-ground experiences and self-reflections on the Atlantic islands. Due to my limited exposure to the realities of all African Lusophone countries, the following account may be skewed toward the areas with which I am most familiarized.

The experiences of Afrodescendants of Cabo Verdean origin form the basis of this article. Gibau (2005) presented one of the most elucidating works on the onerous maneuvering of Cabo Verdean identity in the United States, the implications of which are highly relevant for Portugal as well:

Since Cape Verdeans are of African and Portuguese descent, their experiences have been one of constant negotiation of identity along racially ascribed and culturally defined lines. Other Black immigrants, from the Caribbean and Africa, have undergone similar experiences once confronted with the United States system of racial classification based on physical appearance and the demarcation of identity “boxes.” However, Cape Verdeans who are comfortable with asserting multiple identities actively challenge ideas of racial categorization. The Cape Verdean diaspora community of Boston can be accurately described as being in a constant state of transformation, where identities are contingent upon the community’s task of defining and redefining itself internally and to outgroup members. The individual and collective identities proffered by Cape Verdeans can be interpreted as identities of resistance in relation to the United States system of racial classification and its attendant ideology of racial hierarchy. (p. 433)

Other authors have also contributed to our understanding of the subtleties of navigating a treacherous sea of possible and plausible identities in the Cabo Verdean case (Challinor 2012).

By presenting this study, I put myself in the position of Afrodescendants of Cabo Verdean origin and become immersed in their struggles as they navigate a bewilderingly diverse global African diaspora with “complex threads of connections, convergences, and commonalities,” knowing that the colored, Black and white “American-style regimes of racialization” may not apply to the majority of Africans on the move in contemporary history (Zezeza 2010: 2, 9).

Of the Asian examples, Chinese ones dominate not only because I am Chinese, but also because most Asian-styled eating outlets in Portugal are Chinese or Chinese-run.

Besides information collected first-hand in the form of recordings, photos, and field notes, I also draw on second-hand materials, such as printed cookbooks and old records, internet pages, online sites, and other public information. The analytical process revolved around three elements: food, people, and environment. For coherence, they are presented here in an integrated manner.

Tradition

Asian and African cuisines are generally appreciated for being traditional in Portugal and remain largely unaffected by what may be called fusion food, a seemingly recent concept. However, Macanese food, a unique fusion between Portuguese and Chinese food, which has been recognized by UNESCO as the world’s first fusion food with a history that covers more than 450 years, is little known outside the city of Macau, China (Keegan 2019). In Portugal, for the general market, successful cooks tend to be the ones who best preserve traditional cooking. To understand the above, we can think of the cooks as culture-makers, who are involved in a culture-making process to mass-produce food traditions for others in foreign lands (Renne 2007).

This contradicts what we know about Cabo Verdean cuisine, which is a creole cuisine of a creole people whose past and present histories have been a constant struggle to negotiate their social and cultural identity (Rodrigues 2003; Henriques 2016). Creole means mixture. A study of Africa’s Gold Coast in the Atlantic Era, for instance, showed how creativity and innovation, integral to fusion foodways, are old and originate in Africa (La Fleur 2012). Cabo Verdeans invented their “national dish” (Cusack 2000) in order to survive in exceedingly harsh conditions, explaining why there are differences and adaptations in dietary habits in Cabo Verde in pre-colonial history as early as the fifteenth century (Torrão 1995). *Cachupa* is the quintessential creole stew of edible, nutritious, locally sourced

ingredients. Seen from this perspective, Cabo Verdean food is creativity; it is human ingenuity. In Portugal, on the contrary, in a culture-making process that is market-driven, Cabo Verdeans are encouraged to maintain and re-produce tradition to suit foreign tastes, denying the essence of that very tradition.

From fieldwork, I have observed that the *cachupa* that is consumed on the Cabo Verde islands is often more modern than the *cachupa* that is eaten in Portugal. Cabo Verdeans have explained and demonstrated to me what preparing this stew—the most recognizable dish of the country—means to them in their cultural context. Gathering ingredients, or *juntar ingredientes*, is an active experience that is at once practical and emotional. It is practical because there is no definitive list of ingredients and what goes into the stew depends on the day, season, personal taste and, certainly, purchasing power. It is emotional because foreign ingredients are often used, not only because people can easily buy canned, semi-prepared ingredients in Chinese shops, but also because they often use what others send or bring. The emotional aspect is all the more important as cooking enables an intimate connection to loved ones who pick the ingredients.

For instance, a family preparation of *cachupa* that I enjoyed on a weekend in Tarrafal (northernmost city of Santiago, Cabo Verde) included imported European carrots, deep-frozen Dutch meat, and Brazilian maize that the hosts had bought in Praia (the capital of Cabo Verde and the southernmost city of Santiago), cabbage bought in the small municipal market in front of the house, beans and sweet potatoes that had arrived in a boat and were sent by relatives living and farming on the island of Fogo, and *Chouriço Alentejano* that I had brought with me from Portugal as an *encomenda* (a gift). This rich combination is due to the fact that a *cachupa leva tudo*, meaning everything goes into its making.

Similarly, to most Portuguese, Chinese cuisine means *arroz chau chau* (an old, bizarre name for Yangzhou fried rice) and *massa chinesa* (a monotonous selection of stir-fried noodles, often cooked with pork, shrimp, and other seafood ingredients). Other well-known Chinese pastries in Portugal are also deep-fried. They appeared frequently in imperial-era-styled cookbooks, such as *A Cozinha Descoberta pelos Portuguesas* (Valente 1989), which illustrate Portuguese influences and contacts on different continents. They are so ingrained in Portuguese culture that, being Chinese, when I am in Portugal I am frequently asked if I know how to cook and if I would be so kind as to cook these “typical” Chinese dishes for my friends. In reality, they are not part of my regular diet, and I only eat them if I am in a restaurant, partly because, according to popular Chinese medicinal

knowledge, consuming too much stir-fried food will cause “hot air” to rise in the body and make one ill.

The implications of this Portuguese mentality are relevant for Afrodescendants who were born in Portugal or assume a clear Afro-identity as adults and who are constantly compared with first generation immigrants. The latter group tends to be docile, hard-working, and poorly educated. First generation immigrants rarely fight for their rights (for a study of early arriving Cabo Verdeans, the most numerous non-white immigrant community besides Brazilians, see Batalha 2004). Importantly, they are traditional, conservative, family-oriented, and present a resigned attitude. Afrodescendants are burdened with the social expectation that they should preserve the qualities of first-generation immigrants, just as the Portuguese wish to enjoy traditional African food as they first knew it. This can be unsettling and difficult to digest for some.

Post-Colonial Rediscoveries

In Portuguese society, middle-class, white consumers can afford to be omnivorous and enjoy a broad range of food options (Johnston and Baumann 2007). This means that they can choose to eat expensively like the rich and vary their diets with occasional meals for the poor, and they can afford to go to high-end restaurants and visit street stalls once in a while. Ethnic specialties are good for gatherings and for weekend socialization. In the academic circle, conferences and seminars may end gastronomically and at an elegant price, with guest speakers and distinguished participants gathering for quality African cuisines.

Sometimes, these dietary alternatives are dubbed “green,” “pure,” “natural,” or “healthy,” not unrelated to the transnational pursuit of exotic African superfood (Said-Moorhouse 2016), which are common African food or drink ingredients rediscovered by Western scientists and health specialists because of their abilities to remove toxins from the body. This may be understandable if we recognize that, per fixed quantity of calorie consumption, West Africa has some of the healthiest diets in the world because of the high intake of lean meats, vegetables, legumes, and staple starches, outperforming the diets of many Western, developed countries (Kuo 2015).

Asian cuisines, meanwhile, have long been viewed by the West as healthy. In fact, to take one example, the Chinese diet has been modernized and drastically Westernized, and China, with rising rates of obesity, now has the largest number of obese children in the world (Zhuang 2017). In another example, I once

heard a university professor assure his students during a class that Chinese do not use salt, the excessive use of which is a major health concern in Portugal, because they use soy sauce. This is not possible. Salt is needed to manufacture soy sauce, and humans cannot remain healthy without salt. Moreover, in Chinese history, salt was a major currency of trade as well as an asset.

The above shows that there are many contradictions in our understanding of what comprises good food. The “positive” qualities projected on African food may be said of any other diet.

African cuisines are to no small extent promoted by cookbooks, a major means of promoting a culinary culture (Appadurai 1988). When traveling to African countries, Portuguese tourists like to purchase cookbooks. These recipes are often sold in touristic areas and are in great demand in high seasons. From my experience, however, when visiting the homes of local people, it is rare to find the same cookbooks on their shelves. They almost always have only Portuguese recipes, especially healthy Portuguese recipes, neglected or for mere decoration. When I asked for an explanation as to why local people do not buy their own cookbooks, it was explained to me that Cabo Verdean, Angolan, Mozambican recipes, etc., are very difficult to cook; the ingredients are not readily available, there are too many steps, most recipes are desserts. They suggested to me that there are many simpler, practical Brazilian recipes online for reference, which require only minor adaptation.

Catholicism, the most important religion in Portugal, may account for the insistence on purity, as it is important to stay away from sins. From a cultural anthropological perspective, what is not pure is dangerous and from a young age people learn to rid themselves of impurity and dirt, both personally and socially (Douglas 2003), justifying why food consumption is regulated by taboos in all cultures. Nevertheless, in the Portuguese case, I suggest that Africa is still thought to be closer to Nature, more ecologically friendly, a place where people are more likely to cultivate plants, raise animals, and produce their own food, and that African diets are perceived as less industrialized and as containing fewer chemicals.

Interestingly, a similar mentality was also registered among busy, transnationally-styled migrants who live on a different continent and idealize the mass-produced and mass-packaged food from their land of origin (Renne 2007). This begs the question of what tradition has become in modern times as far as food is concerned:

The raw materials used to produce the canned or packaged item may also be illustrated, as in can labels of Ruker Cream of Palm Fruits, which depict the palm nut fruits themselves (from which palm oil is made) and a large cook pot overflowing with palm nut soup. Yet despite the authenticating imagery of traditional technologies and labor-intensive production process used in the packaging of foodstuffs sold in West African grocery stores, their preparation represents new concerns about time and health. (p. 619)

Accordingly, whether it is to appeal to Westerners or emigrants, tradition is merely exploitative, sentimental marketing that has more to do with industries and commerce, and less to do with culture.

Knowing that about half of the world's population is urbanized, including in Africa, living and feeding have become increasingly challenging, if not dangerous, on the peripheries, i.e., in between the city and the country (Rodrigues 2008). There is little opportunity to go foraging in the open, little space and soil to grow food, and there is the tendency to feed rations to chickens and pigs. In metropolitan cities in Europe, such as Lisbon, Paris, and London, the livelihood of Africans is equally worrying.

With knowledge of the above, an implication for Afrodescendants in Portugal is the perceived difference. As Portuguese food is marked as different from African food, the people are also seen differently. By assuming that African food is more authentic and closer to the source, there is also the sentiment that African people are the guardians of something from the past.

When it comes to food in Portugal, Asian food is much more affordable than African food, even when there are many more people of African origin than of Asian origin in this southern European country.

This is curious if we agree that Western appreciation of African "cuisines" — not just food customs and diets—is rather new. It may be described as a post-colonial rediscovery of the food and culture of the former colonial subjects. The long-time association of Africa with hunger is still strong, due to the quintessential images of starving Ethiopian children transmitted by English-language media (Ramos 2018). As a result, African food is still in the process of gaining recognition from a wider public.

By comparison, there is always a small selection of Asian food in major supermarket chains operating in Portugal. A good example is Koka "Chinese" instant noodles which are in fact Singaporean. In large Pingo Doce or Continente

supermarkets, there is ready-to-eat Japanese sushi. It is rare to find African food items on the shelves, except during the celebration of African Week in supermarkets like Lidl. I once bought two bottles of spicy sauce, one labelled “Angolan” and the other “Cabo Verdean,” and was disappointed to find out later that they had been produced by a Portuguese company for the Portuguese market. To add to my dismay, I was told by my Cabo Verdean home-cooking friends that these products were made specifically for African Week and were not regular products.

A Portuguese couple who travelled to China once shared their experience with me, confessing that they had not known before the trip that there are so many varieties of Chinese food. Throughout their adult lives, they had eaten Chinese food thinking that it was “mild” in taste and easily suited all people, hence the general popularity of Chinese food in Portugal. Then, during their first trip to China, they visited several cities and provinces and realized that Chinese food can be quite spicy and that people there do not eat the same mild food.

African food undergoes changes abroad much more rapidly than in their respective countries. There are three instances of changes in *cachupa*, the typical Cabo Verdean dish, that deserve our attention. First, the meaty version of *cachupa*, or *cachupa rica*, is said to be a copy of *cozido à portuguesa*. When Cabo Verdeans arrived en masse in Portugal in the last century, they were urged by the Portuguese to prepare typical food from their land. The Cabo Verdeans began to worry that their food was too “poor” and not presentable. So, they enriched the *cachupa*, borrowing ingredients from a popular Portuguese dish, i.e., *cozido à portuguesa*, and the Portuguese were satisfied. This is how *cachupa rica* came about, according to anecdotes. Presently, the *cachupa* eaten in Lisbon is almost always the rich, high animal protein, elaborate version, and so is the *cachupa* eaten on especial occasions and in restaurants on the Cabo Verde islands due to external influences.

Another instance of change is *cachupa* with rice (figure 3) served in Portuguese restaurants. This is becoming more and more frequent in some “traditional” Cabo Verdean cafés and restaurants in Amadora, Portugal. On the islands, this serving style is unknown. Combining *cachupa*, a maize-based stew, with rice is an obvious redundancy. *Cachupa* is a stew complete in itself, a common feature of African food traditions (McCann 2009). A third, curious development is preparing “Muslim” *cachupa* for children whose parents converted to Islam and “vegetarian” *cachupa* for young European tourists who visit Cabo Verdean neighborhoods.

Once, when dining at *Cantinho do Aziz* in Mouraria, part of the Lisbon historical center, and reading the menu with fellow colleagues, among them Mozambicans and Angolans, I understood what a marketable Mozambican, or “African,” menu is expected to look like in Portugal. It is structured like any other European menu, with many options, allowing people to order their preferred portion.

A seminal work about India discusses the menu (“the invoking of the menu idea”) in these terms:

Many recent cookbooks have suggested menus, based on a series of slots . . . which are then filled with items from different regional or ethnic traditions. The interesting thing about this process is that while, in European and some other cuisines, the idea of a menu is associated with a succession of courses, Indian meals do not normally have a significant sequential dimension. Everything arrives more or less at once in most everyday contexts. . . The idea of a menu is clearly a way to organize the proliferation of specialized regional and ethnic traditions and to subordinate them to the counterweight of an Indian culinary idiom. (Appadurai 1988: 20)

In relation to its other restaurant in Leeds, England, *Cantinho do Aziz* is said to offer “a Portuguese menu with some Mozambican influences” (*Cantinho do Aziz* 2016). This is exemplary of the success of African cuisine in Europe but also of the necessary compromises.

I have known Angolan mothers who declare that they only prepare Angolan food and Saotomenean women who are adamant that they would never be tempted to eat like the Portuguese. This closure from others explains why immigrants tend to stick to their respective communities and why their food is not sufficiently promoted and commercialized in Portugal. For Afrodescendants, this is not realistic because they necessarily incorporate more than one culture; they eat African, they eat Portuguese, and they eat Chinese as well.

Afrodescendants struggle daily to maintain the right balance between two forces. In Portugal, through education and other institutions of socialization, certain ways of approaching, understanding, experiencing, and preserving the exotic are fossilized. The creation and promotion of categories for the other is not an innocent act. As Edward Said has eloquently explained, it is part of a Western power game with the ultimate goal of fixing positional superiority and championing Western hegemony (Said 1978).

Go Down the Alley and Up the Hill

Portugal has more than 7,000 Chinese commercial establishments (Barra 2017), which is a significant number considering the size of the country. These shops are most common in the historic center and in neighborhoods where there is a high concentration of elderly residents and other ethnic businesses.

It may be difficult to determine the door number for a Chinese restaurant, especially when it is located in a neighborhood that was built haphazardly a long time ago. The restaurant is often where the owners and workers live and sleep, so the bathroom for guests is also residential. It may be in a building waiting to be renovated or to be sold by the Portuguese owner. In fact, many such restaurants operate clandestinely to evade taxes. As a result, the Portuguese clients have learned to be cooperative. They bring friends along, go down the alley, up the noisy wooden stairs, and knock on the door. Even if the employees have a limited Portuguese vocabulary, communication with Portuguese clients is seldom a problem.

The situation is surprisingly similar for African eatery outlets. The locations of African restaurants may be historical. Some have established themselves at a certain location, almost always at the highest elevation of a given locality. Reaching the place is a form of ritual and requires not only willingness but physical aptitude.

The Cabo Verdean case is, again, a good example. Cova da Moura is the best-known, independently formed Cabo Verdean immigrant neighborhood in Portugal, where there are several well-established traditional restaurants. In a highly ritualized act, Portuguese clients have to go up a hill and pass by the many houses and spontaneous barbecue stalls that border the curves leading to their destination. Not rarely, the residents inspect the Portuguese visitors with inquisitive expressions. The journey is often lively because of the creole conversations of neighbors and the popular African music heard along the way.

Whether Chinese or Indian, Asian people have a reputation in Portugal for being hard-working, serious, and frugal. They have earned this by keeping their businesses open for the most hours possible and suppressing their operational costs. These qualities are reflected in the above description of clandestine Chinese restaurants. In comparison, Africans are thought to be group-oriented, laid-back, free-spirited, expressive, and festive. They populate certain parts of the city, color them in their distinct styles.

In either case, eating Asian or eating African food is a ritualized encounter that is inherently imbalanced. Chinese restaurant owners run the risk of paying

finer to the Portuguese authorities if denounced by an unsatisfied Portuguese client. They are often not fluent in the Portuguese language and some of the workers may even be undocumented. In the Cabo Verdean example, if serious crimes occur in the neighborhood and the local council imposes restrictions in the name of maintaining law and order, restaurants will lose Portuguese clients who are concerned for their own safety. They may eventually have to close if they lose their spaces to the rightful Portuguese heirs wanting to reclaim their lands in Cova da Moura.

Generally speaking, the Portuguese language is not a problem for Afrodescendants, and they are unlikely to face disadvantage because of an inability to defend themselves verbally, when renewing their residency permits or applying for Portuguese nationality at the Portuguese Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF), being subject to document checks on the street or responding to interrogations in a police station, challenging a schoolteacher's recommendation to choose technical training and not university, etc. All of these encounters are ritualized in the sense that both sides know roughly the socially sanctioned behaviors and probable outcomes. In all of these, the prejudice against Afrodescendants is rampant and well-documented (for experiences of working-class Cabo Verdeans and their families in postcolonial Portugal, see Batalha 2004).

Cooks, not Chefs

The cooking process is gendered in many cultures (Counihan and Kaplan 2005). The cook in a Chinese restaurant is almost always a man, partly because throwing the heavy metal *wok* requires physical force and because cooking for other people has long been established as a business for men. By contrast, in African cultures, "eating out" is not yet widespread, especially beyond the major cities; cooks are women, at home and on the street. Similarly, in Portugal, the simpler the Cabo Verdean restaurant is, the more likely the cook will be a woman. They are cooks, not chefs. Imagine a woman in her fifties or sixties in an apron quietly laboring away in a clean, well-kept kitchen, helped sometimes by an adult daughter or son. Her clients congratulate her on her cooking skills, and she comes out, thanks them humbly in simple but cordial Portuguese, and returns promptly to mind her stoves.

Throughout history, cooking has been classified as a female performance, and anthropologists continue to analyze how it affects women's lives and how gendered notions of household responsibilities persist through generations (Perez 2012). For many women in African countries, cooking is not only a domestic

task; it is also their livelihood. They sell home-cooked food on the street in order to feed their children and sometimes even their husbands. Therefore, cooking is also their profession, be it in the formal or informal economies. This may explain why African food is largely prepared by women. When these women emigrate, they continue cooking and, in the case of cafés or restaurants, cooking for non-family members. We know that “women always work. They are not in and out of economic activity, but at various stages of their life cycle they are either paid for their work or not and their work is either recognized as economic activity or not” (Morokvasic 1984, 888). The food prepared has a motherly touch to it; the clients are like the “sons and daughters” of the cook in what feels like a heart-warming moment of food appreciation and enjoyment. There are many life histories of women who proudly claim to be African and who demonstrate a unique relationship with cooking. In the process of my research, I was encouraged to talk to the small but important group of female African chefs who have fought for their place in a white and masculine culinary world. Gender has major implications beyond cooking. In reality, female Afrodescendants are often the most vocal in defending collective interests, which explains why I have constantly seen more female than male participants in workshops and academic meetings that discuss racism, minority rights, and social problems. Female Afrodescendants are highly participative and gather broad support, and their organizations are more democratically run. They act as channels of intercultural communication and of social consensus. Figuratively, their singing makes up the chorus of their shared cultural experience. A self-sacrificing attitude, unfortunately prevalent among first-generation immigrant families, has the potential to be dangerous; mothers constantly deny their rights to rest, to share family and work responsibilities with their husbands, and to receive care from grown children. In these cases, to be a mother is to be the cook for life, the substitute husband, the devoted wife, the unpaid nanny, and the exploited worker. Female Afrodescendants have unique problems that need different solutions.

Conclusions

It is not easy to approach possible instances of discrimination because doing so may offend others. It is doubly difficult to discuss the situation of Afrodescendants because it is an open and flexible category. We take this as encouragement for us to seize present and future opportunities to study generalized categories like “African” and “Afrodescendants” in greater detail.

Mobility is a constant characteristic of human society, and we are plural, hybrid beings. Stuart Hall (1996) and others with multicultural backgrounds who live transnationally would agree that people have bits and pieces of various cultures in them but sometimes do not realize it, and often deny it. Scholars would agree that identity is almost always constructed across differences, and we do not maintain a single, stable identity throughout our lives.

The Afrodescendant consciousness symbolizes a sense of unity and common destiny. This sociocultural study of popular Portuguese imageries of ethnic food and indirect group representations adopted the same spirit. The African-Asian comparisons added perspective to our discussion, showing that there is a unique case to be made for Afrodescendants in Portugal, for its members accumulate personal qualities, familial connections, and social engagements that set their experiences apart.

Afrodescendants may find themselves living in the shadow of first-generation immigrants, feeling the burden to preserve the positive qualities of the latter group. This limits the social, cultural, and political participation of Afrodescendants who desire to form their own groupings, make themselves heard, and manifest their diverse interests in distinctive ways.

African food is perceived to be closer to the source than Portuguese food; there is also the sensation that the people are the guardians of a tradition, of something historical. This lineal, progressive imagination of social relationships is likely to limit Afrodescendants' visions for the future. While the Portuguese can easily access African cultures for all types of experiences, Africans rarely enjoy the same privilege when trying to be part of the Portuguese world.

A barrier to overcome is the shame that some Afrodescendants feel about their food and, more generally, about the culture in which they grew up and know is part of their heritage. In Portuguese society, people have internalized a certain way of appreciating African cultural manifestations. Through education and other forms of socialization, the Portuguese promote their ways of approaching, understanding, experiencing, and preserving the exotic.

Afrodescendants often find themselves in positions with less power, in what can be described as ritualized, inherently unequal encounters. Many battle daily against prejudice. Additionally, even while accepting the common objectives of Afrodescendants, we admit that male and female Afrodescendants do not have completely identical experiences. Female Afrodescendants participate actively in social movements, and they facilitate intercultural communication and social consensus.

We hope this discussion has provided some food for thought on the subject of Afrodescendants and their struggles in postcolonial societies. We should continue to problematize such categories as “Asian” or “African” and unravel the entanglements caused by previous racialization and ethnicization processes.

NOTES

1. Associação para a Mudança e Representação Transcultural is the new name of Associação de Melhoramentos e Recreativo do Talude, or in short, AMRT (<https://www.amrtranscultural.org/>). It was first created in 1993 to defend the rights of Cape Verdean immigrants who had settled and built houses in the peripheral and administratively challenging neighborhood of Talude in Catujal, Loures. While the Association continues to promote the welfare of grassroots Cape Verdean migrants, it has made increasing efforts to reach out to other communities and interest groups.

2. Graal – Associação de Caráter Social e Cultural characterizes itself as a Christian movement, an international community of women from different backgrounds (<http://www.graal.org.pt/>). In practice, the association organizes a wide range of activities and serves less privileged social groups, including immigrants and their descendants, on a regular basis.

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KAIAN LAM is Research Fellow at the Center for International Studies of ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon. She holds a Ph.D. in African Studies. From May to July 2021, she was Visiting Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Macau. Her recent articles include "Island-raised but foreign-made: Lived experiences, transnational relationships, and expressions of womanhood among Cape Verdean migrant women in Greater Lisbon," *Island Studies Journal* 16 (2021), 101–114; "In poverty we will always stay: History of famine and contemporary politics of social in-distinction in Cape Verde," *Food, Culture & Society*, forthcoming.