

The Construction of Ethiopian National Cuisine

Abbebe Kifleyesus - University of Asmara

SOMMARIO

L'Etiopia ha sempre beneficiato di un'attenzione internazionale in quanto patria di un'eccellente tradizione gastronomica. Per quanto vi siano pietanze regionali diffuse in gran parte del Paese, vi è anche una cucina nazionale distinta. Ad elevare lo status di questa cucina nazionale ha contribuito la crescente popolarità di una sua pietanza particolarmente piccante conosciuta come *wät*, che ha ora notorietà internazionale grazie al turismo e ai ristoranti etiopici in Europa e Nord-America. Gli Etiopi non hanno mai dubitato dello status elevato della loro alimentazione, ma non c'è ancora un autentico e compiuto testo di ricette etiopiche che promuova le pietanze del Paese. Per quanto la loro cucina si diffonda in più continenti, lo studio dell'alimentazione etiopica è agli inizi senza che si registrino apporti significativi che contribuiscano a una migliore conoscenza scientifica.

Questo articolo esamina alcuni dei processi che sono implicati nell'alimentazione etiopica come cucina nazionale e internazionale, rievocando le radici storiche della sua tradizione gastronomica e i fattori che ne influenzano lo sviluppo come cucina trans-nazionale"

Introduction

Cuisine is central to people's sense of identity and hence there is a preoccupation with food as a marker of difference (Caplan 1997:8). It has become a prime element in the cluster of traits popularly understood as ethnicity, and thus the popular usage of the phrase *ethnic food*. Like the concept of ethnicity, however, cuisine, is easily reified or conceived in a falsely concrete way as given or natural (Douglas 1975:27). The reification of cuisine means that complicated social dynamics and processes associated with the emergence of a national culinary tradition is, in the case of Ethiopia, frozen into a simple trait such as *spicy food*. Indeed, cuisine, an essential part of culture, has not escaped the attempt to separate ethnic performance from cultural practice (Bourdieu 1984:63), or, as Appadurai (1988:5) argues, ethnic specialisation and an overarching national cuisine can emerge together.

Part of this same process might be expected to occur with increasing frequency in societies such as Ethiopia where complex regional cuisines are interpreted as a particular sort of national representation by middle class Ethiopians in places of emigration. Ethiopia in the diaspora would certainly fit Appadurai's characterisation because the Ethiopian diasporic population identifies itself less with regional food patterns and more with nationally recognised cuisines. Although Ethiopian restaurants abroad mostly maintain a distinct cuisine of the north-central highlands, they have avoided becoming regional or generic restaurants. Instead they have become stereotypes for national culture that has always existed. In order to understand this complexity of Ethiopian food, I, in what follows, examine its national origins and discuss its international development.¹

Scholarly interest in Ethiopian food became a great source of pleasure due to my involvement in the country for about three decades. Regardless of the focus of my field research among the Argobba of Ethiopia, I always found my journals filled with comments and anecdotes on food and meals, as if food were the means through which I came to make sense of Ethiopian national identity. In addition to observing the preparation and enjoyably participating in the consumption of Ethiopian meals — primarily in towns and cities of the north-central highlands — I have drawn evidence from a review of the various publications of the *Ethnological Society Bulletin* of the University College of Addis Ababa and from archival and library sources within and outside the country. Ethiopian students, scholars, and chefs whom I formally and informally interviewed confirmed and corrected impressions gained from the above sources.

My past work related to Ethiopian food concentrated on the social and symbolic meaning of foods among the Argobba of Ethiopia (Abbäbä Kəfläyäsus 2002). While this particular work raised questions about the meaning of food to Argobba identity, and the role of food sharing in maintaining social relations, it did not situate food in a broad or national historical and cultural context. A complete in-depth examination of the Ethiopian food system would include the analysis of food production, food processing, the social, symbolic, and metaphoric meaning of meals and manners of eating, and the nutritional consequences of food intake. This is clearly impossible to accomplish in a single article. The present article thus focuses on Ethiopian cuisine — the products of past and present kitchens of royalty and peasantry — and asks some preliminary questions about how Ethiopian cuisine has emerged out of the historical, hierarchical, seasonal, and regional variations in meals. The article begins with a historical overview of Ethiopian cuisine and examines the processes influencing the development of a national and international dish.

¹ This is a preliminary and by no means an exhaustive study of the development of Ethiopian national cuisine. I am most grateful for the research fellowship offered by the *Maison Des Sciences De L'Homme* in Paris where the article was first conceived and crafted in the summer of 2004 as an extension of a book project of a similar topic in Ethiopian Studies.

History of Hearth

Just as Ethiopian culture is often described as a blend of Amhara, Oromo, Təgräyan, Guragé, etc. influences, so, much of the Ethiopian food system is described in terms of Amhara chicken stew (*doro wät*), Oromo buttered flour (*čəkkko*) or buttered boiled barley (*qənčé*), Təgräyan baked bread (*həmbbašša*), which was and still is also predominant in the north-central highlands of the State of Eritrea, and Gurage butter sautéed raw or cooked ground beef (*kətfə*), with minimal attention paid to other indigenous Ethiopian cuisine and tastes.² While it is important to examine these other indigenous bases, the Ethiopians have always been extraordinarily loyal to the foods of the north-central highlands. It is easy to overlook the important evidence of historical and cultural relationships established through food and taste preferences of the various regions of Ethiopia, since there are very few historical documents relating to Ethiopian foods. Indeed, the clues are very few but they are provocative.

The development of national cuisines, as well as their representation internationally, is part of post colonial, post-industrial discourse that creates an overarching national culture from regional association and ethnic affiliation (Appadurai 1988:16). Although Ethiopia was never colonised, its rulers had to promote national identity and unity throughout the last three centuries (Rubenson 1976:48). It is possible that this unity in diversity included an appreciation of the unique qualities of Ethiopian cuisine. Certainly Ethiopians are aware of the importance of food to their identity. Their culinary art has for centuries been regarded as the quintessence of their cultural heritage. However, there hardly exists any recorded past recipes instead the complex culinary art was handed down like a family heirloom from mothers to daughters.³

Perhaps the earliest evidence on indigenous cuisine of the north-central highlands comes from missionary reports of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and travelers' accounts of the nineteenth century. In his missionary reports written in 1646, Almeida described a unique dish that may be one of the earliest Ethiopian specialties. "Men take the raw liver as soon as it is drawn out of the slaughtered animal, chop it into small pieces, and eat it immediately" (1954:138). The Ethiopian dish *dulät* which today is made from chopped liver, kidney, heart, gastro-intestinal parts mixed with bile (*hamot*), garlic, black pepper, celery, and sautéed in vegetable oil or butter is in many different ways mentioned in different missionary accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Alvarez 1961,II:121; Lobo 1735:85; Ludolph 1725:103). As a popular item on Ethiopian menus in many transformed states *dulät*, when cooked with or without bile, was and still is an important part of Amhara, Təgräyan and Oromo diets, and is found in a similar form among the Guragé. This combination of condiments and ground gastro-intestinal parts is perhaps another earliest manifestation of what has come to be known as the Ethiopian taste (Pankhurst 2002:71).

² This is prominently depicted in one of the well known song lyrics of Mahmud Ahmed about Ethiopian dishes. For details on how some of these foods are prepared, see Pankhurst (2002:68-72).

³ In the last three decades, the unique flavour of Ethiopian food, a harmonious blend of herbs and aromatic spices, has been gaining increasing popularity with dinners in Europe and North America and has firmly established itself alongside other world famous cuisines.

As the roving capitals of Šäwa and the Gondarine kingdoms set about distinguishing themselves from their predecessors in terms of elaborating their court and palace culture, the Ethiopian culinary base began the process of transformation so visible in the differentiation of palace and peasant food in the subsequent historical periods (Poncet 1793:43; Bruce 1790, III:123).⁴ For example, during and after the *zämänä mäsafənt*, local female cooks followed regional lords and kings in wars and battles (Abir 1968:137). These cooks may well have introduced regional recipes into the various royal courts at various times. This is perhaps also the reason why foods such as *bässo* and *čəkkö* are, for example, today considered as part of foods of military campaigns (*zämäčča*) and long distance travels.

Ethiopian food staples like *ənjära* and *wät* were already immortalised as a metaphor for prosperity and security in the various writings of nineteenth century travelers (Pearce 1831:93; Combes and Tamissier 1838,II:101; Graham 1843:627; Parkyns 1853:29; De Cosson 1877:35). When European travelers and envoys visited the court of Sahlä Səllasé (1813-1847) in Ankobär in the early 1800s, they described a whole range of food stuffs cooked for the royal court, and noted that people of different classes had different diets with *ənjäranna wät* at the core of everybody's daily dish (Rochet d'Héricourt 1841:133; Beke 1842:247). Some of these European travelers were less than enamoured with Ethiopian cuisine: "The food of the Abyssinians...in no way resembles normal, proper food and the natives are not familiar with intelligent methods of preparing meals. In fact, many Abyssinians do not really know how to cook and eat or even how to sit correctly at a table" (Salt 1814:71).

Such some nineteenth century visitors to Ethiopia failed to appreciate Ethiopian life because they measured it largely in terms of European civilisation. But the king, Sahlä Səllasé, managed to provide an Ethiopian banquet for his guests without acquiring a permanent taste for foreign foods (Harris 1844,II:109). After the founding of the Ankobär palace in northeastern Šäwa, foreign food items, spices and condiments continued to be adopted in the palace. This, however, did not alter indigenous meal formats. For example, Harris, visiting Ankobär in 1843 writes:

On arriving, we found the table spread in the accustomed and approved Abyssinian style, with an abundance of plates, glasses, local beverages, roasted and boiled meat with a variety of cooked vegetables and pancake breads. The king said he wished to gratify our curiosity, but that courtesy requires him to entertain us according to the usages of his country, not of Europe(1844, II:111).

⁴ In royal banquet halls of early and recent Ethiopian monarchies, there always has been social, spatial and dietary hierarchy where various classes are assigned specific dining areas and appropriate cuts of meat and other foods. For details on this subject, see Mahtämä Səllasé Wäldä Mäsqäl 1969:45)

Adopting the dishes of foreigners was not considered a polite and civilised thing to do in the Ethiopian courts. As Gäbrä Həywät Baykädaññ (1910:21) noted, civilisation was measured, not in broad, clean streets or impressive stone buildings, but in knowledge of etiquette embedded in Ethiopian culture. Ethiopia of this time frame was prosperous and well-fed. This is well elaborated by the royal banquet of emperor Mənəlik who invited people and made sure that all were well-fed:

His Majesty was always pleased to invite members of the royal family, the clergy, nobility and landed gentry to court banquets full of food, pomp and ceremony and involving court attendants at various levels (Gäbrä Səllasé Wäldä Arägay 1959:48).

Similarly, Hərüy Wäldä Səllasé (1915:19) and Mäkönnən Endalkaččäw (1957:33) write that the comforts of life, in Ethiopian terms, are to be found in being able to enjoy the rich cuisine and in the stimulus of drinking honey-wine. The abundance of food was indeed an important measure of a successful Ethiopian empire. In this context, the dissertation of Täkkaləññ Wäldä Maryam (1995:68) describes Addis Ababa of the 1920s as a city where people experienced pleasure and contentment, where food was abundant, and people lived free from anxiety about finding their next meal.

Features of palace pleasures were glorified and codified in written poems, traditional troubadour ballads, and *azmari* songs.⁵ The rituals elaborated around palace foods were clearly of indigenous origin and included practical precautions against possible poisoning. For example, no one could enter the palace kitchen when food was being prepared and meals were tasted by attendants before presentation to guests (Pankhurst 1990:128). These practical rules of regulating royal food consumption were not like the regulative eating rules established as the basis of the common people. Such rules could not take root in the traditional Ethiopian approach to pleasure in food preparation and consumption among the ordinary people and to the change in meal formats and taste preferences that come with the adoption of new cuisines and recipes from around commercial circles.

Market Meals

Palaces were not the only sources of inspiration for the nascence of Ethiopian national cuisine. Instead, the tradition of city or town market meals in which families specialise in one or two recipes is an important source of innovation in the development of Ethiopian national cuisine. The rise of small restaurants, food vendors at various corners of towns, push-cart food hawkers, sandwich and boiled egg sellers nearby

⁵ Works that followed up on these songs and poems by writing about Ethiopian culinary arts are almost non-existent.

entertainment pubs, and stalls selling spices and a variety of breads during market days have always been highly valued in urban Ethiopian society.

In these towns and cities it is also not uncommon to see dishes, snacks and other foods brought directly to markets by peddlers who sold their dishes up and down the lanes leading to and coming from these markets. Currently, the market tradition takes an even more significant place in the development of Ethiopian national cuisine through the incorporation and sale of partially processed foods in grocery stores and shopping malls. Even if these food preparations and distributions play little consideration to quality production and aesthetic composition, there is now public recognition of their importance in the construction of Ethiopian national cuisine.

Until about some four decades ago, the choice of restaurants in, for example, Addis Ababa included a few family owned restaurants serving national dishes (*yagär bahäl mägäb bét*). By the early 1970s Addis Ababa was, for example, sporting the sale of roasted beef (*təbs*) in and around the circle of the Soccer Stadium restaurants, boiled gastro-intestinal parts (*čägwarra* and *məlasənnä səmbbər*) in a special restaurant in Mäsfən Harär Street, ground meat (*kətfö*) in restaurants around Täklä Haymanot, and threaded roasted beef (*zəlzəl təbs*) and dry roasted beef mashed in *ənjära* (*yä qwanča fərfər*) in various Kaza Inčəs restaurants. These restaurants and their flavoured dishes are not also unknown to low-rank customers. In other words, *haute cuisine* in Ethiopia is not only the prerogative of the rich.

In time, small-scale family-owned businesses mushroomed and continued to prosper and flourish in Addis Ababa because of the loyalty of their Ethiopian middle class clientele and their new role as providers for employed male single adults who may dine in these places or pick up prepared dishes for consumption at home. By about this time, if not earlier, a limited number of restaurants including Etägé Hotel, Giyon Hotel, Ras Hotel, Gännät Hotel, Wabä Šäbällé Hotel, Ras Grill, Buffet de la Gare were serving some kind of European foods.⁶ The availability of European dishes in such restaurants offered different options for Ethiopian and foreign consumers. Appadurai argues that restaurants “reflect shifts in the boundaries of edibility, the properties of the culinary process, the logic of meals, the exigencies of the household budget, the vagaries of the market, and the structure of domestic ideologies” (1988:3). Amidst the burgeoning industry of national food restaurants, interest in foreign foods thus seemed by the 1970s, or perhaps much earlier, to have taken roots in the capital.

⁶ Nowadays Addis Ababa has fancy foreign and local Ethiopian restaurants like Hilton, Sheraton, Acropolis, Rainbow Seoul, Amsterdam, La Brasserie, The Olive, Serenade, The Village, Zebra Grill, Don Vito, Pizzeria Italia, Abäša, Agälgäl, Gurša, Baldäras, Elfəññ, Mä’ad and a number of exquisite cäfes and pastry shops which in the past included Säwa, Casalle, and Samson bakeries, as well as Gäbrä Tənsa’é, Cremerie, Bälay Täklü, Ras Mäkonñen, and Enrico pastries, and now consist of Café Dolce, London Café, Bole Mini, Il Pinguino Gelateria, Loza Maryam, La Parisienne, Le Notre, Roby’s, Saay, and Tomoka. Over the years, the availability of European dishes and pastries in Addis Ababa has increased dramatically, offering different options for Ethiopian and foreign consumers. Western chains and franchises such as McDonald, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Dunkin Donuts have not yet taken roots in Addis Ababa but Ethiopian versions of Western fast-food outlets abound in the capital catering to Ethiopian teenagers who make up the larger percent of the consumers. For many Ethiopian traditionalists, these are treated more like exotic oddities than as substitutes for indigenous meals and snacks.

The 1970s therefore saw the proliferation of such restaurants, bakeries and pastry shops. These eateries became important largely for unmarried male middle-class Ethiopians who lacked maids or servants, time, and expertise in Ethiopian cooking, having grown up in families where it is mothers and sisters who prepared dishes. Food vendors in neighbourhood markets and small *suqs* or shops who supply ready-made foods and other meal components also helped fill such gaps. In sum, in the last few decades, the number of standard restaurants serving traditional Ethiopian foods has increased dramatically. These restaurants grew out of the market tradition, with food hawkers and spice sellers engaging in the trade until they are able to open restaurants, which eventually gave rise to a number of family owned or big business-based restaurants serving national dishes and some foreign plates to middle class elites in the city.

The dominance of Addis Ababa and its restaurants is reflected in the structure of Ethiopian cuisine. Although there are distinct differences between the regional specialties of southern, eastern, and western Ethiopia and are highly regarded in their place of origin, they are mostly considered peasant foods and ignored or disparaged in this city's dining circles. Yet trips and travels to and from these regions brought back localised foods to the capital. Inevitably, therefore, modern communications and the temporary or permanent movement of peoples into Addis Ababa has meant a blurring of regional food differences and the building of national cuisine. The city thus also provided the opportunity to sample and savour the best of regional home cooking which in time was blended into a national cuisine.

Attempts to define regional or diverse ethnic cuisines as part of a single national cuisine are obvious in the various restaurants of Addis Ababa where eastern, western, northern and southern specialties are featured with and served by women wearing Ethiopia's national costume (*šamma*). As these regions were drawn more directly into the control of the central government, so, too, their food system—a key symbol of their distinct identity—was merged into the national cuisine and consumed at the centre of the kingdom. This, for example, was the case with Oromo *čäččäbsa* and *čəkko* and Guragé *kətfō*. Similarly, Ethiopian food has emerged as a significant international cuisine in the last two or three decades due to its construction from engagement in home-cooking, up-grading the market based food hawking, co-opting regional traditions, and popularising the national cuisine. The production of few texts in the form of cook books and the opening of some Home Economics (*baltanna*) schools have also encouraged this development.

These regional cuisines were subordinated to the central Ethiopian or Addis Ababa based cuisine until recently when migration and growth of international tourism encouraged the proliferation of places providing regional foods in the capital. Guragé *kətfō* and *qoččo* from southern Ethiopia is the best example of this process. In the 1970s and 1980s, raw and cooked *kətfō* and *qoččo* dishes were available in Addis Ababa mostly in restaurants around the Soccer Stadium where soccer fans gathered to eat and drink before and after soccer matches, in acclaimed hotels and restaurants like Addis Ababa (Däjjäč Wubé Säfär), Abənnät (Säbattäñña), Fasika (Ras Mäkönnən

Dəldəy), Fəlwəha (Fit Bär), and Ĥnsaro (Mulugéta Buli Säfär), and in petty family owned restaurants in and around Guragé populated communities and neighbourhoods like Märkato, Täklä Haymanot, Abba Koran Säfär, and Gojjam Bärända.

This period also witnessed the development of semi-modern and modern restaurants and hotels such as Abraha and Dähab, Pizzeria and Castelli, Oroscopo and Lombardia, Kokäb and Rendezvous, and China and Lalibäla in and around Piazza, Churchil Road, Sängatära, National Theatre, Soccer Stadium, and Abyot Addäbabay, selling national foods and a bastardised form of foreign foods. These restaurants and many others paved the way for the evolution and growth of more clean and pleasant places to sit and eat in the surrounding of Bolé Road, Mäsqäl Addäbabay,⁷ Mexico Addäbabay, Däbrä Zäyt Road, and led to the establishment of a number of family owned traditional restaurants that at various points popped up and dotted the Addis Ababa outskirts or suburb roads heading towards Gojjam, Käfa, Wällägga, and northern Šäwa.

It is in this spirit of running restaurants that the Bäqqälä Molla family franchises in southern Ethiopia and Täklä Haylä family restaurant enterprises in the Kombbolča-Bati-Asäb road started clean and air conditioned eating stops. These latter group of restaurants catered to and served single adults, lovers and married couples who drove by and visited them particularly during the weekends and holidays, track drivers and bus loads of countrymen traveling to and from Addis Ababa in different directions. The traveling of culinary ideas and the movement of people across regions, and the blending of various regional recipes and local foods and the modification of indigenous dishes and tastes eventually shaped the Ethiopian national cuisine.

At the turn of twentieth century, as in the past, palace cooks and royal retainers and nobilities who knew the art of cooking were still not willing to share their expertise with the large majority. After the end of the absolute monarchy in 1974, however, the financial bankruptcy of the aristocracy and loss of vast stretches of rural land and urban property by the nobility led to the merger of the royalty and nobility with that of the ranks of commoners, thus moving and marketing specialist knowledge a little more broadly into the rest of Ethiopian society by, for example, opening up restaurants in their own residential quarters within the city while others turned to the production of spices and condiments that are culinary.

These are then some of the mechanisms and routes through which recipes percolated from noble families and became widely known among the masses. This may only include a sample of the recipes rather than the total universe of Ethiopian cuisine. Within this sample, there are a substantial number of food combinations that reproduce the favourite recipes from a variety of cuisine sources. Although the recipes are mostly described as family recipes, they are also local and regional and hence also national recipes enjoyed by both the nobility and the peasantry.

⁷ Both Mäsqäl Addäbabay and Abyot Addäbabay refer to the same square around Ĥstifanos Church and Ras Bərru Wäldä Gäbrél Säfär.

High and Low Ethiopian Cuisine Categories

According to local exegesis, grains such as barley (*gäbs Hordeum vulgare*), wheat (*səndé Triticum aestivum*), *téff* (*Eragrostis abyssinica*), maize (*boqqolo—Zea mays*), and *zāngada* or *mašəlla* (*Sorghum bicolor*) are the mainstay of Ethiopian indigenous diet. Most of Ethiopian main meals thus consist of breads (*ənjära*, *qitṭa* and *dabbo* varieties) made of these grains, and the heavy carbohydrate content makes them very filling meals. Among them *ənjära* or pancake bread is the most widely consumed food because it accompanies almost all traditional dishes in Ethiopia. In rural Ethiopia, toasted or baked barley or wheat bread (*qitṭa*) is another important element of daily diet, something without which a meal would be incomplete. Because it is a pivotal product of the hearth and home, bread is the quintessential symbol of Ethiopian reciprocity and household hospitality some of which is always kept on hand to offer to guests. Indeed if market bakery (*dabbo*) is an object of desire, *qitṭa* is the locus of satisfaction that many Ethiopians aspire. Similar grains are also used for making porridge (*gānfō*) which is more commonly consumed during life crisis celebrations such as birth and weddings. It is usually prepared with a relish made up of glutinous ingredients like butter mixed with *bärbärré* and this combination provides the lubricant which allows the mouthfuls of thick porridge to slip down the throat. Sometimes *gānfō* is prepared with ingredient pulses such as *suf* (*Carthamus tinctorius*), *nug* (*Guizota abyssinica*), and *tälba* (*Linum usitatissimum*). Oat meal (*ajja—Avena sativa*) is consumed as the main ingredient of a beverage by the same name and consists of honey or sugar and butter as flavourings. It is a necessary diet of women during pregnancy and delivery and individuals recuperating from all kinds of illnesses.

Many meals are prepared around peas (*atär—Pisum sativum*), beans (*baqéla—Vicia faba*), and lentil (*məssər—Lens culinaris*) in order to make thin or thick stews called *šəro* or *kəkk* playing mostly the role of vegetable or foods. Some of these legumes are also eaten fresh (*əšät*) around September and October. In general, beef plays an important part of Ethiopian diet. A cow or an ox can be butchered for the sole purpose of selling the beef within the community. Even when an ox or a cow dies unexpectedly and is butchered by its owners, a great effort is frequently made to sell the meat rather than eat it. It is divided on the basis of equal portions (*qərčä*) comprising a package of every internal organ, muscle meat, and bone of the slaughtered animal. Size of the package is determined by the number of divisions (Pankhurst 1988). The greater the number of divisions the smaller the size of a package of meat. There are occasions in which meat plays pivotal and vital parts whose symbolic weight is markedly greater than that accorded to most other foods. These include holidays, initiation rites and visitations by important guests.

In Ethiopia, food is mostly served in a regular sequence of three main meals involving time telling: morning meal (*qurs*), mid-day meal (*məsa*), and evening meal (*ərat*). Not every food eaten in urban or rural Ethiopia is part of a main meal. There is *sənq*, food people carry with them to eat in the field, or during a trip, and there is *mäksäs*, food that by definition does not form part of a meal. It could be a ‘snack’ or ‘treat’ that as an important part of the diet supplies some nutritional elements not provided by proper

meals. *Mäksäs* foods can consist of either boiled, roasted or toasted cereals, peas or beans (*nəfro*, *qolo*, *aşuq*) or grain breads (*qiṭta*, *dabbo*).

In 1982, Goody explored the conditions for the emergence of cuisines in Europe, Asia, and Africa. His work raises questions about the development of a high cuisine (discussed here as food of the wealthy and the poor—*yä baläşägga mägəb*, *yä dəha mägəb* respectively), in Ethiopia. Although from the historical overview it is clear that Ethiopia meets Goody's conditions for societies with strongly differentiated cuisines such as grain agriculture and texts that elaborate ideas about food (1982:36-39), the country has a moderately differentiated cuisine, not an undifferentiated cuisine as Goody describes for Africa, nor a highly elaborated cuisine as he describes for Eurasian food systems.

The question of high and low Ethiopian cuisine or the differentiation between the food of the rich and that of the poor is maintained through unequal access to resources like food, exotic ingredients, and time and skills to produce certain dishes. But in Ethiopia, the differences are also emphasised by the use of serving dishes indicative of differences in rank, the number of different side dishes served, and the presentation of food in a transformed state, decorated to disguise its natural form. For example, *şəro* normally is ground peas or lentil cooked with a mix of vegetable oil and onions. The rich cook it with butter, onions, garlic, green peppers, and call it *bozāna şəro* by tossing into it meat cutlets. Individual differences in rank are therefore characteristic of Ethiopian society, and are marked by differential access to or allocation of specific foods.

Indeed lentil stew (*şəro*) and grain breads form the foundation on which both diet and cuisine rest among a large part of the Ethiopian population. While well-to-do Ethiopian families eat *şəro* cooked with butter and accompanied by *yä téff ənjāra* or pan cake bread, poor households sustain themselves with this dish using barley, sorghum, or maize breads. Similarly, for example, *dubba* (*Cucurbita pepo*) or squash which serves as a substitute staple for *dənnəč* (*Solanum tuberosum*) in the form of stews and soups is in poor family households cooked using only onions and vegetable oil while wealthy Ethiopian families prepare it by tossing pieces of flesh foods as principal ingredients. Inter-household variation is therefore reflected in diet and cuisine, and thus distinctions in economic status indeed affect diet.

Although in wealthy family households, lentil stew with sorghum or maize breads is a mark of hard times, there is a qualitative difference between the *ənjāra* and lentil stew consumed by poor peasant families and that eaten in well-to-do families. In the former households, the function of the stew is almost limited to moistening the *ənjāra* and hence Ethiopian others shout at children who consume too much stew by eating it with as little *ənjāra* as possible. In well-to-do families, on the other hand, the stew acquires a separate status, independent of *ənjāra*, whose function is no longer to moisten *ənjāra* but to accompany it as a better means of consuming stew. This means that in rich households the consumption of *ənjāra* decreases with increasing consumption of stew. Moreover, while in fortunate households the lentil stew potage may be flavoured with

chopped onions and a lump of butter, in less fortunate families such stews are cooked with vegetable oil and water.

Dishes prepared in well-to-do families are noted primarily by their elaborate decoration and attention to details of preparation. For example, effort is made to obtain the freshest foods, wash them repeatedly and thoroughly, cut them carefully into smaller and more regularly sized pieces so that the flavours would enter the food more easily, and remove all peel or seeds to make the dishes more convenient to eat. But the dishes themselves—the taste combinations—are standard Ethiopian recipes, available to the wealthy and to those who could afford and obtain the ingredients. Many Ethiopians mention that the rich differed from the poor by the richness of their table service and the variety of their dishes.

One striking feature of the food system of the wealthy is the transformation of food to make it look like something else. For example, bread is dipped into a sauce, molded and baked to look like a cake; spiced pieces of beef are barbecued on iron wires. Honey-wine (*täjj*), served mostly within well-to-do families (not to speak of the bastardised and deranged forms of it available in local drinking pubs), is so delicate, time consuming and difficult to make that few people have the skill or the patience to make it. Once served only to the royalty and nobility, it has in a lower quality recently appeared in public drinking parlors throughout the cities and towns of Ethiopia.

Amongst most wealthy Ethiopians food is consumed in both raw and cooked states, and preserved in a transformed state demonstrating human control. For example, it is common among Ethiopians to eat meat in its raw state (*tərə səga*) or preserve meat in a dried state (*qwanṭa*). Such a process of preservation partially desiccates flesh foods, inhibits rotting, and thus keeps them fresh and unspoiled for several days. This transformation is the creation of women and servants of wealthy Ethiopian households where food processing and preparing pays due attention to fine details of spicing and stewing with concentration on and control of hearth circles.⁸ Indeed food in wealthy families is not only aesthetically pleasing in its own right, but it is served on objects of value and beauty. Such objects used for serving sumptuary items marked differences in the rank of people who would consume the food. In other words, their value is as important a distinction as the food consumed. This however doesn't mean that poor families can never have the same type of meals or courses of meals of richer households. Rather, it means that there are differences in the ways of preparation and consumption.

In any event, meals of wealthy Ethiopian families were distinguished from peasant meals not by the composition of the dishes, but by the quality of the ingredients and the number of dishes served. Their food is more refined, harmonious in flavours, sweeter, and more elaborately decorated and served. Poor peasant family foods are more easily prepared and cooked, less carefully planned since each dish depended on current availability of consumable items and less refined in taste combinations. Dishes

⁸ In Ethiopian traditions, there is knowledge of reputation for men's involvement in domestic or public cooking. Instead men slaughter and slice while women stew and spice.

here are, for example, more likely to have more red peppers in order to stimulate the consumption of large amounts of *ənjäranna wät*. Wealthy family foods, on the other hand, are more likely to balance different flavours into a harmonious blend. What is characteristic of the Ethiopian food system is that the hierarchical cuisine has a great gulf between levels not simply differences in quantity and quality of food, and substantial differences in ingredients, recipes, meat format, methods of preparation, and flavour principles. But the differences are of scale and elaboration, not of structure.

Yet Ethiopian palate also acts as a protective mechanism against personal and cultural contamination (Braukämper 1984:431). Similarly, rules concerning commensality are important markers of status and purity that define hierarchy within Ethiopian society (Hamer 1994:130) For example, the Wäyṭo gobble animal flesh like hippo meat which other Ethiopians of the surrounding would consider too vile touch (Täklähaymanot Gäbrä Səllasé - 1984:19). Avoidance of food sharing is thus one indication of social distinction between the Wäyṭo and other Ethiopians of the north-central highlands. The ultimate sanction of rejection, represented by withdrawal of commensal privileges, is a form of ostracism. These arrangements are further complicated by the development of Ethiopian food taboos of various sorts following either religious rules or cultural values (Simoons 1967:23).

Noble and commoner, rich and poor, shared the essentials of Ethiopian cuisine. Here cuisine is defined as the individual style or expression of universal culinary activity. These culinary activities include selection of edible ingredients, manipulative techniques used to prepare the food, flavour principles, and cultural rules for consuming foods. Although Ethiopian cuisine constantly adjusts to new culinary conditions and reflects changes in society, its structure also shows substantial continuities through time and across income levels. Glutinous and non-glutinous cereals, fresh or dried meats, pulses and lentils, and locally available vegetables, condiments and spices are the most basic ingredients in Ethiopian meals in which garlic, onions, green and red peppers, and a wide variety of herbs, leaves, stems and flowers flavour daily dishes. Red pepper (*bärbärré*—*Capiscum frutescens* or *Capiscum annum*) for almost all kinds of sauces (*wät*) is a common ingredient and basic to all Ethiopian cooking in both rural and urban communities.

This prominent seasoning whose presence in cooking and cuisine is more frequent than its absence is prepared through the combination of all kinds of condiments such as *azmud* (*Nigella sativa*), *kororima* (*Afromomum angustifolium*), and *dəmbəlal* (*Coriandrum sativum*). It is not only exclusively culinary but, like paprika, also adds colour to the flavour of foods. Ethiopian men, women, and youth may grab raw green pepper (*qarəya*) at will and hack off a piece to eat along with meals. Moreover, red pepper predominates and is the most widespread hot ingredient in Ethiopian recipes because it stimulates the consumption of meat, lentil or vegetable sauces. Among greens, the onion (*qəy šənkurt*—*Alium cepa*, and *näč šənkurt*—*Alium ursinum*) is the single most important vegetable in Ethiopian diet. In almost every wealthy and poor Ethiopian household, onions are eaten daily, and the amount used in a meal is

controlled by a strong Ethiopian cultural preference for onions' presence. Stews, soups, sauces, or toppings are made up of finely chopped onions and other vegetable ingredients. While two onion stalks are normally thought to be an appropriate amount for a *šəro* stew that will feed a family of four, chicken stew, consumed mostly during ritual and ceremonial occasions, requires three to four onion stalks in both rich and poor family households. In these very same households, potatoes (*dənnəč*—*Solanum tuberosum*), and cabbages (*gommän*—*Brassica oleracea*) are used as thickening agents for stews (*wät*), broth and soups (*märäq*).

The basic taste contrasts of Ethiopian food include sweet, bitter, sour, salty, hot and fragrant. These taste contrasts guide the combination of ingredients for relishes, side dishes, and combination of dishes with various grain flours. They are derived from local herbs, spices, flowers, leaves, pulses, and roots whose aromatic properties are acknowledged to be important to the taste of foods. Many of these products are gathered wild in the forests along with wild greens which supplement the diets of the rural people. In spite of the regional variations in Ethiopian food, there is thus a recognizable Ethiopian taste resulting from a combination of meat, lentil or vegetable sauce, and such spices as coriander, ginger, garlic, and red peppers forming a harmonious blend.

Amongst spices, red and black pepper, ginger, garlic and coriander are probably among the most oldest flavour combinations as they are basic to Ethiopian culinary traditions. Ethiopian tastes favour the adoption of irritants such as red peppers and the inclusion of sour flavours like ginger. Although Ethiopian cuisine has gained the reputation of being chili-hot, traditional Ethiopian cuisine is characterised by a blending of flavours in order to produce a taste harmony of ingredients.⁹ Indeed it is the blending of herbs and spices that provides the essential Ethiopian taste. The taste of a dish therefore arises not only from the essential natural juices of beef, mutton, chicken, lentil or vegetable but also from the combination of herbs and spices flavouring the dish.

Ethiopian cooking requires very little special equipment; rather, there is great emphasis on careful preparation of ingredients before cooking. Basic equipment includes clay or metal cooking pots, frying pans, mortar and pestle, grinding stones, knives, and sifts. The most common forms of transforming food thus include boiling, broiling, roasting, and frying, with broiling being less common. Other special equipment involved in food preparation include all the new kitchen gadgetry imported from overseas. In this respect, there are a number of manipulative techniques and methods used in the preparation of Ethiopian foods. They consist of grinding, cutting, drying, pickling, fermenting, smoking, blending or mixing. Cooking is generally accomplished slowly and carefully, and preparation time may be substantial especially when using various imported ingredients and recipes emanating from oriental and European sources. What analytical questions does this overview of Ethiopian menus and meals within the country then raise in terms of the introduction and expansion of a national cuisine in foreign lands?

⁹ The ingredients selected for cooking different dishes sometimes have medicinal properties. For example, hot liquefied ginger *zənjəbəl*—*Zingiber officinale*) is consumed in order to treat common cold.

Foreign Food Exchanges

Beginning the 1970s, and perhaps earlier, tourism exposed thousands of visitors to Ethiopian food. This process spawned transformations that eventually reflected upon the structure of the Ethiopian food system. The first is the invention of an interesting hybrid or form of special Ethiopian food preparation meant for tourists which modified the taste of dishes like meat sauce (*yä səga qäy wät*) and lentil sauce (*yä šəro wät*) by reducing the amount of chili peppers (*bärbärré—Capiscum frutescens* or *Capiscum annum*) in the sauce in order to appeal to presumptions about Euro-American tastes. The second is the proliferation of Ethiopian and pseudo-Ethiopian restaurants in Europe, and North America.

The history of the expansion of Ethiopian restaurants overseas is unclear. Certainly Ethiopians have been emigrating to Europe, North America, and elsewhere especially after 1960s.¹⁰ Surely they brought their cuisine with them, but whether restaurants evolved from food stands or other restaurant-related trade undertakings is not known. The apparent proliferation of Ethiopian restaurants overseas is most likely but not exclusively due to the increase of long-term emigration of Ethiopians to Europe and North America, the increase of single men who regularly eat in non-Ethiopian food stands or restaurants, and probably also the emergence of a class of upwardly mobile Ethiopians who seek out restaurants as a form of conspicuous consumption.

In short, the outside world discovered Ethiopian cuisine through Ethiopian immigrants to Europe and North America and by way of European and North American tourists who visited Ethiopia. As more and more Westerners toured Ethiopia while Ethiopian immigrants traveled to and settled in Europe and North America, both groups had a need for restaurants. These restaurants reproduced authentic Ethiopian tastes based on a simplification of family recipes whose preparation better suits the time and skills most people bring to preparing meals and flavouring tastes. This is perhaps how North Americans and Europeans were first introduced to Ethiopian food. In it, many restaurants made initial as well as subsequent substitutions in order to accommodate the tastes of foreign guests that no one familiar with Ethiopian cuisine would permit today. A closer examination of these restaurants reveals the range of their extensive services and differences in culinary tastes.

At present, there are around fifty Ethiopian restaurants in Europe and some eighty in North America. Most of them frequently serve as the first nexus for newly arrived young men and women who go to Europe or North America to work or go to school. Some of these restaurants which began as sources of Ethiopian food for Ethiopian immigrants to the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Scandinavian countries including Sweden, Norway, and

¹⁰ Many Ethiopians overseas mention that the growth of an Ethiopian diasporic population in Europe and North America since the 1960s has led to the proliferation of Ethiopian foods and restaurant cuisines with traditional culinary conventions, serving style, and distinct dishes reifying national representations. At present there are around 70 Ethiopian restaurants in the United States, 10 in Canada, 8 in the United Kingdom, 5 in Sweden, 2 in Norway, 2 in Denmark, 4 in the Netherlands, 1 in Belgium, 1 in Luxemburg, 6 in France, 7 in Germany, 2 in Austria, 2 in Switzerland, 6 in Italy, 1 in Greece, and 2 in Australia.

Denmark, and the United States and Canada serve a very bland version of Ethiopian food and others make no lazy concessions to some mythical notion of Western taste. The Ethiopian restaurants therefore present an easily identifiable form of Ethiopian food for the cosmopolitan consumer. The tourist promotion of Ethiopia as a gourmet paradise and as one of the few places in the world where coffee is drunk ceremonially encouraged the marketing of Ethiopian coffee beans and processed foods in the form of spices and condiments for European and North American markets. For many Ethiopians living overseas packets of such ingredients enriched their evening meals modeled after traditional Ethiopian gourmet reminiscent of *yagär bét* or home town cooking.

Ethiopian food in Europe and North America is therefore best known through its restaurants. The restaurants' names in general refer to place names in the country, and from Ethiopian as well as foreigners' point of view, Ethiopian restaurants reflect Ethiopian culture through the offering of spicy sauces spread in pancake-like bread, *ənjäranna wät*, and by the touting of these special foods in tourist guide booklets and, now, in internet web pages as elements of national culture not to be missed by Europeans, North Americans, casual or seasoned travelers, and by Ethiopians in the diaspora themselves. Even if such Ethiopian dishes are served to several other African diaspora communities throughout Europe and North America, the plates and their unique spices and herbs are always presented in Ethiopian manners, and do not usually include alien cuisines but are instead exclusively Ethiopian. The success of this specialised cuisine and mode of service is said to be the result not only of Ethiopian meal manners but also of their hospitable national character.

Such Ethiopian foreign restaurant cuisine differs extensively from the home-made daily diet of Ethiopians, nonetheless, it is not only closely tied to Ethiopian culture and to a specific form of Ethiopian cooking, but it also experienced transformation when it moved meal messages and menus from its original homeland to foreign customers in foreign lands and to middle class restaurant-going Ethiopian diasporic community members. Indeed many Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians believe that Ethiopian restaurant food represents what most Ethiopians eat at home. In that respect, it is perceived by Ethiopians and foreigners alike as representing the Ethiopian domestic diet. Indeed such restaurants do have close cultural ties to Ethiopian ways of life, in a way imagined by most of their patrons and many of whom think that Ethiopian restaurants bring Ethiopian culture to these foreign lands by way of cooking and cuisine.

The serving style and use of the Amharic language as a medium of communication, the masculine ethos and female presence in the kitchen space encourages a familiar atmosphere which reflects Ethiopian cultural traditions. As more and more Ethiopians emigrate to Europe and North America, they become part of an amorphous urban lifestyle. In so doing, they accept restaurant food as equivalent to home-made food, and eat in Ethiopian restaurants where they believe the cuisine reflects nothing more than a chance specialisation in certain flavours, use of certain spices, and the baking of breads representing the national cuisine in the form of *ənjäranna wät*.

In such a context, Ethiopian regional differences are expressed as ethnic variations within a national theme. Young Ethiopian diasporic women experiment with Ethiopian national cuisine, rather than the regional cooking they learned in the hearth of their mothers; and the very few national cuisine publications that often come under the title *yä baltännä mäşəhaf* encourage or promote this interest. Local cooking and feast foods in the diaspora now thus appear in contexts so different as to transform the original meaning. This means that Ethiopian women in the diaspora serve meals containing foods from a variety of national traditions, thus divorcing the foods from their original regional cultural relevance. Once divorced in this way, national foods can easily be mixed and matched, or periodically indulged in by visiting not an ethnic but a national restaurant.

Foods consumed in this fashion are appropriated into national cuisine as markers of national identity in an alien locality. In any urban centres of Europe and North America, Ethiopian cuisine is therefore known through both indigenous recipes and by way of national restaurants. These days some Ethiopians are even opening convenience stores in these foreign lands selling freshly baked *ənjära*, and various spices and condiments. Unlike in magazines and cookbooks, Ethiopian restaurants do not mix genres. Their food and their method of serving it are unique. For diasporic Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians alike, these restaurants have thus come to stand for an Ethiopian culinary tradition and national identity construction embedded in native meal manners that matter.¹¹

These Ethiopian restaurants are owned or run by both Ethiopian men and women.¹² Their cuisine and, as noted earlier, their serving style distinguish them from other restaurants overseas. They range in size from one large room to elaborate multi-room houses. The number of employees ranges from one or two family members to some seven or eight workers. Larger and fancier restaurants may require employees to wear uniforms which during Ethiopian religious holidays may involve national costumes. Such restaurants emphasise the presence of female cooks and the ceremonial consumption of coffee beverages at the end of meals. They have a clear link to Ethiopian traditions through menu listings including beef, mutton, internal organ meats, chicken meat, and lentil sauces and a variety of side dishes of cooked or green vegetables.¹³

Ethiopian women in the diaspora already know how to prepare all these dishes and ritual drinks from their experience in Ethiopia, and suitably serve them to strangers and Ethiopians alike. In a way these foods symbolise the feminine experience of

¹¹ While these restaurants do serve Ethiopian food, they represent mostly the cuisine typical of the north-central highlands.

¹² It is a familiar pattern around the world that women cook at domestic hearths but then usurp prestigious, public, or money-making cuisines. Although the reasons for this pattern are less certain, Ethiopian restaurants serve a function for male emigrants, but women are not completely cut out of the restaurant business. Instead, many women are either owners or patrons, or still share holders or independent owners of small restaurants. Yet these restaurants employ mostly women who as cooks and chefs are found in the kitchen cooking, slicing and spicing, and act as waitresses, and only women are considered appropriate as cashiers.

¹³ Meat and vegetables are cooked with or without red peppers but always with different spices and condiments. By and large, Ethiopian restaurants are often cited as proof of their carnivorous diet.

migration, which makes them especially appropriate in expatriate restaurants. Customers of these restaurants are largely Ethiopian and predominantly male. Ethiopian women are rarely willing to go alone to such restaurants for reasons of modesty, but beyond that, many migrant women go overseas as wives or marry there with, almost by definition, access to a kitchen. Unmarried women who go abroad secure a job, which also ensures them a place to live and cook.

This falls squarely with the fact that single women conform to the cultural norm of cooking for themselves. Only where restaurant eating has become something of a social event, will Ethiopian women customers be seen in some numbers. Again Ethiopian women make up a significant proportion of take-out customers of these restaurants. Many Ethiopian restaurants also cater to customers who live too far away to go home for a mid-day meal. These customers sometimes send someone out to order single portions that are packaged to be taken to the work place. Since this form of eating out does not require a public appearance in a restaurant, it is especially popular with women Ethiopians. In contrast, most single men often end up eating in such restaurants because of 'inability' to cook or due to the cultural norm that excludes men from cooking.

When customers arrive in such Ethiopian restaurants, they are welcomed by the use of the well-known national greeting phrase, *ṭéna yəstəlləññ* (lit. may you have health) and made to sit in available spaces. The waiter or waitress then in a typical Ethiopian national and cultural tradition of humility and modesty either presents the customers with a menu or takes their orders by saying *mən ləttazāz* (lit. what shall I be ordered) or still orally shares with them information about what is available for the day. In all cases food, with the exception of *wāṭ*, is cooked to the order.¹⁴ Usually, a group of guests who come together will eat from a common plate following the national Ethiopian traditional cultural norms, otherwise customers are served with individual plates. In general, the success of Ethiopian restaurants is related to the ways in which they have been able to enlist the interests of the Ethiopian immigrant and non-Ethiopian tourist populations. Apart from the high quality of exotic food, the aspect most positively lauded for success is the degree of deference demonstrated towards customers by the caterers. These are then some of the interesting factors which led to the construction and consolidation of Ethiopian national cuisine.

Conclusions

This article has attempted to demonstrate some sources of stability and vitality in the Ethiopian culinary tradition. Most meals consist of glutinous grains in the form of breads and a combination of lentil, meat and vegetable sauces usually served in a

¹⁴ Unlike in other ethnic restaurants, Ethiopian restaurants do not usually use signs or chalkboards to list special foods or menu of the day inside or outside restaurant premises. Meal menus mostly include: mutton stew (*yä bāg wāṭ*), roasted mutton (*yä bāg ṭəbs*), beef stew (*yä səga wāṭ*), roasted threaded beef (*zəlzəl ṭəbs*), dried beef stew mashed in *ənjāra* (*yä qwanṭa fərfər*), ground beef stew (*mənččātabəš*), raw or roasted butter marinated or sautéed beef (*kəṭfo*), chicken stew (*yä doro wāṭ*), stew without red pepper (*yalləčča wāṭ*), combination (*bāyyaynātu*), Lent stew (*yä šom wāṭ*).

common bowl, with some dishes to go with the main courses. Food is eaten with the hands, and etiquette requires washing hands and mouth before and after the meal. A complete central Ethiopian meal consists of *ənjära* and *wät*, the hallmark of traditional cuisine and the bulwark of family interaction. Out of the extraordinary range of Ethiopian dishes certain ones are more likely to appear on the menu in Ethiopian restaurants within the country and overseas.

A hot stew (*qäy wät*) made from either beef, mutton or chicken is in meal menus often described as Ethiopia's national dish. *Šəro*, a rich stew made from beans or lentil, peas or beans, and various spices including green and red peppers and garlic is probably the commonest dish popular throughout Ethiopia. This dish is in well-to-do families elevated into a *haute cuisine* by dicing it with small beef cutlets (*bozäna šəro*). Ethiopia's fried meats (*təbs*) served with jellied red peppers (*awazé*) and mustard (*sänafäč*) have regional variants whereas the ubiquitous chicken stew (*yä doro wät*) which is served with *ənjära*, especially if not exclusively, during holidays or shared with dear and loved ones, has regional versions tasting almost alike.

In short, the hot meat stew demonstrates some of the principal components of Ethiopian cuisine, indicates the importation and subsequent integration of spices and condiments from the Arabian peninsula, and the Persian Gulf and India into the classical *wät* format, and exhibits the transformation of regional specialties and the elevation of certain popular recipes into Ethiopian national dishes. This is perhaps why today the structure of Ethiopian cuisine is rather stable in the ingredients used, cooking methods, and flavour principles. Although new ingredients may be added to dishes as they become available in Ethiopia and technological innovations such as cookers and blenders may simplify food preparation, the seasoned and hot *bärbärré* flavour carrying the identity of the national cuisine remains constant.

Indeed the flavour principle and taste judgments are what determine the success of dishes, meals, and restaurants for Ethiopian consumers and for converts to Ethiopian food preparations. If this continues, we can expect that Ethiopian restaurants will increasingly be related to Ethiopian culture, that food itself will probably nationalise dishes that are less or more heavily spiced—but from other Ethiopian regions—in order to attract customers looking for variety. Since such restaurant foods are related to practices and beliefs that originally made them significant among Ethiopians in the diaspora, the restaurants are expected to be increasingly self-conscious in their promotion of Ethiopian national identity by way of ethnic foods, sale of spices, condiments, pancake breads, ground Harar, Sidamo and Kafa coffee beans, native audio and video musical cassettes, and now CDs and DVDs, language usages, and display of ethnographic posters reminiscent of Ethiopian landscapes and food products.

Meals are entities and events that reflect some of these competing discourses, and are always rooted in practical knowledge of food praxis as well as in the historical and cultural meaning of their ingredients and recipes. For the Ethiopians, meals are one of the most significant arenas for negotiating identity. The current construction of their

national cuisine builds upon an ancient Ethiopian cultural base reflected in the regional culinary traditions and vibrant local market systems of the country, and in the muting of the distinctions between food of urbanites and food of rural people. Yet the democratisation of these food distinctions takes place with a justifiable pride in rediscovering or maintaining the flavour carry typical of Ethiopian cuisine and the skills necessary to produce food fit for the nobility and the peasantry.

If, then, we are to make sense of Ethiopian national cuisine, we need to understand not only a variety of social, cultural, and historical contexts but also the many layers of knowledge and meaning held by different Ethiopians in relation to food from different regions. Such knowledge is both socially and culturally constructed in terms of Ethiopian national identity expressed by meaningful meal messages. We need, then, to see consumers of Ethiopian national cuisine as agents actively engaged in constructing meaning around the food they eat.

The changes that have occurred in Ethiopian food habits over the years and the diversity of food preferences across social classes are therefore, I would suggest, tempered by some rather more subtle continuities which in *ənjäranna wät* carry the hallmark of Ethiopian national cuisine. It is my hope that this article goes some way towards understanding these food changes and continuities. Finally, there could be no other better way to conclude than by inviting the reader to consume an Ethiopian meal in order to recognise its national identity, palatability, and edibility.

References

- ABBÄBÄ KƏFLÄYÄSUS (2002) "Muslims and Meals: The Social and Symbolic Function of Foods in Changing Socio-Economic Environments", *Africa* 72, 2:245-276.
- ABIR, M. (1968) *Ethiopia. The Era of Princes, The Challenge of Islam and The Reunification of the Christian Empire 1769-1855*. London: Clarendon Press.
- ALMEIDA, M. de. (1954) "The History of High Ethiopia or Abassia." In *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646*. Trans. and eds. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford. London: Hakluyt Society.
- ALVAREZ, F. (1961) *The Prester John of The Indie* eds. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, Vol. II. Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society.
- APPADURAI, A. (1988) "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India", *Comparative Studies of Society and History* 13: 3-24.
- BEKE, C.T. (1842) "Route from Ankober to Dima", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 12: 245-258.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1986) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- BRAUKAMPER, U. (1984) "Food Avoidances in Southern Ethiopia. Religious Manifestation and Socio-economic Relevance". In RUBENSON, S. (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Pp. 429-466. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

- BRUCE, J. (1790) *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*. Edinburgh.
- CAPLAN, P. (1997) "Approaches to the Study of Food, Health and Identity." In CAPLAN, P. (ed.), *Food, Health and Identity*. Pp. 1-31. London: Routledge.
- COMBES, E., and M. TAMISSIER (1838) *Voyage en Abyssinie, dans le pays Gallas, de Choa et d'Ifat*. Vol. III. Paris.
- de COSSON, A.E. (1877) *The Cradle of The Blue Nile*. London.
- DOUGLAS, M. (1975) "Deciphering a Meal." In DOUGLAS M. (ed.), *Implicit Meanings, Essays on Anthropology*. Pp. 36-41. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- GÄBRÄ HƏYWÄT BAYKÄDÄÑÑ (1910) *The State and Economy of Early 20th Century Ethiopia. Prefiguring Political Economy c. 1910*. London: Karnak House.
- GÄBRÄ SƏLLASÉ WÄLDÄ ARÄGAY (1959) *Tarikä Zämän Zä Dagmawi Mənalik Nəgusä Näggäst Zä Itiyopiya*. Addis Ababa: Bərhanəna Sälām Printing Press.
- GOODY, J. (1982) *Cooking, Cuisine and Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GRAHAM, D.C. (1843) "Report on the Manners, Customs and Superstitions of the People of Shoa, and on the History of the Abyssinian Church", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 12: 625-728.
- HAMER, J. (1994) "Commensality, Process and the Moral Order. An Example from Southern Ethiopia", *Africa* 64, 1: 126-144.
- HARRIS, W.C. (1844) *The Highlands of Aethiopia*. Vol. II. London.
- HƏRUY WÄLDÄ SƏLLASÉ (1915) *Yä Həywät Tarik*. Addis Ababa: Kokäbä Şəbah Printing Press.
- LOBO, J. (1735) *Relation Historique d'Abissinie*. Trans. J. Le Grand. Paris.
- LUDOLPH, H. (1725) *Historia Aethiopia*. Trans. J. Phillips. Frankfurt.
- MÄHTÄMÄ SƏLLASÉ WÄLDÄ MÄSQÄL (1969) *Zəkrä Nägär*. Addis Ababa: Bərhanəna Sälām Printing Press.
- MÄKONNƏN, Endalkaçčäw (1957) *Mälkam Bətä Säboč*. Addis Ababa: Kokäbä Şəbah Printing Press.
- PANKHURST, A. (ed.) (2002) *Addis Ababa University College. Ethnological Society Bulletin*, vol. I, nos. 1-10 and vol. II, no. I. 1953-1961. Reprint.
- PANKHURST, R. (1988) "Hierarchy at the Feast: The partition of the ox in traditional Ethiopia." In GROMYKO, A. (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*. Pp.173-189. Moscow: USSR Academy of Sciences Africa Institute.
- PARKYNS, M. (1853) *Life in Abyssinia*. London.
- PEARCE, N. (1831) *The Life and Adventures of Nathaniel Pearce*. London.
- PONCET, J.C. (1793) *Voyage d'Éthiopie*. Paris.
- ROCHET D'HÉRICOURT, C.E.X. (1841) *Voyage sur la Côte Orientale de la Mer Rouge, dan le pays d'Adal et le royaume de Choa*. Paris
- RUBENSON, S. (1976) *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*. London: Heinemann.
- SALT, H. (1814) *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of that Country*. London.
- SIMOONS, F. J. (1967) *Eat Not This Flesh. Food Avoidances in the Old World*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

- TÄKKALƏÑÑ WÄLDÄ MARYAM (1995) “A City and its Hinterlands: The Political Economy of Land Tenure, Agriculture and Food Supply for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1887-1974)”. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Boston University.
- TƏKLƏHAYMANOT GÄBRÄ SƏLLASÉ (1984) “The Wayto of Lake Tana: An Ethnohistory”. MA Thesis, School of Graduate Studies, Addis Ababa University.