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Lauren Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris: The Taste of Empire*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. xii + 220 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$112.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4725-9282-8.

Review by Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College.

Colonial Food in Interwar Paris: The Taste of Empire is an excellent study of the relationship of food to images of identity in France and its empire during the years between the two world wars of the twentieth century. Writing in the context of an increased interest in both food history and postcolonial studies, Lauren Janes documents the real, but limited impact of colonial foods on the diet and identity of the metropolitan French population. Her book expands our knowledge of food as a vector of social and cultural identity in general and contributes to the recent focus in postcolonial studies on the culture of French colonialism.[1]

Colonial Food in Interwar Paris is based on extensive archival research, including the lobbying and related food business group publications in the Archives nationales in Paris and the Archives nationales d'outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence, and a wide range of secondary literature on French food history. It is structured with an introduction followed by six carefully crafted chapters that move progressively from an economic and political focus to the cultural dimensions of colonial foods in France. Janes begins with the First World War, which produced an increased need for colonial food to feed the mobilized soldiers and to compensate for the loss of both agricultural labor conscripted into the army and of productive farmland in France's northeast. As she shows, despite the war appearing to open vast possibilities to the colonial food lobbying interests, their success was limited by domestic French agricultural interests and, key to her argument, the identification by the French of many colonial foods as alien and, at times, disgusting. She concludes with a study of the mixed reception of colonial foods at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, in many ways symbolic of the apogee of the French empire. Popular interest in colonial foods peaked during the 1931 Colonial Exposition, but even then they were often perceived negatively as foods of the colonial and lesser "other."

The book opens with a brief discussion of the media controversy that erupted between 2009 and 2012 in France when the Quick restaurant chain began selling halal hamburgers. Some non-Muslims took offense, culminating with President Nicolas Sarkozy's call for halal and kosher meat to be labeled and also banned from state-supported school canteens, an example she uses to highlight the continuing importance of food as symbol in identity politics. Food as a representation of social identity is not new but, in her introduction, Janes emphasizes a takeoff during the interwar years in the import of a few colonial foods. Chocolate imported from the colonies, as an example, rose from 3 percent of France's total chocolate supply in 1913 to 90 percent in 1938. Chocolate and coffee, however, she adds, were longstanding accepted items in the French diet that had been imported since the seventeenth century.

Critical to Janes's argument is less the quantity of colonial foods imported than their symbolic meanings in the construction of French identity. She writes: "I argue that colonial foods were one way in which

the empire was present in everyday life, but this did not lead to a widespread enthusiasm for Greater France. Confronted by new foods from the French colonies, Parisians frequently rejected them” (p. 13).

Chapter one emphasizes that, although wartime necessity appeared to open the door to the import of foods such as colonial rice, in reality, the quantities of food imports were relatively small. Albert Sarraut, Governor-General of Indochina from 1911 to 1914, and again from 1917 through 1919, and the Union Coloniale Française (UCF) colonial lobbying group, were key leaders in a *mise en valeur* or “value creation” program, that pushed for, among other things, the importation of colonial rice to compete with wheat and locally grown rice in France. In a scenario repeated with other foods, their success was limited by political opposition from French farmers and the popular aversion to anything other than wheat bread. While the colonial lobby met with success in extending the import of tea, they were less successful with refrigerated or “*frigo*” meat among French urban residents who were accustomed to fresh meat bought daily in local shops. Limited shipping available to transport colonial foods to France also held back consumption and the acceptance of their foods.

Janes’s second chapter continues discussion of the colonial lobby, centering on the annual “exotic luncheons” held by the Société d’acclimatation, a group of prominent zoologists and botanists dating to the mid-nineteenth century, who, during the interwar years, mingled with colonial lobbyists while dining on colonial foods at elaborate luncheons (p. 45). She explains that even among more adventurous diners, colonial foods needed to pass through varying levels of mediation to be seen as acceptable. Members of the Société promoted the use of “exotic” foods such as tropical fruits in winter that would not only provide more food for people in France but also strengthen their bodies, especially in the face of a potential German enemy (p. 92). Her argument dovetails with others who have pointed to the ways in which physical culturists and naturists during the interwar years were eager to increase France’s population and toughen the French body, often with the Germans in mind.[2]

The sense of “exotic” dining, such as eating python from Africa or *nuoc-mam*, fish sauce from Vietnam, bestowed on the Société members a certain level of cultural capital, for their “brave and discerning palates,” and was in the spirit of their “teaching” the French to appreciate new foods (p. 59). Janes shows, however, that such avant-garde dining ran counter to the fears and stereotypes of many in France. Pierre Bourdieu, she writes, had described the art of eating and drinking as one of the few in which the working class, preferring “belly over palate,” resisted the refinements of the upper social strata (p. 59). In a Social Darwinist sense, speakers at the Société luncheons also praised the European diet, which, they claimed, had prepared the Europeans for world domination. Janes suggests that the popularity of Josephine Baker and her *Revue nègre* also contributed to the interest in “exotic” dishes manifested in the Société’s luncheons. She mentions luncheons where diners were taught how to use chopsticks by local Japanese and to taste stir-fried rice dishes from the Restaurant Shanghai in Paris, but maintains that colonial foods elicited greater interest at the luncheons. One wonders if there were local communities of colonial people in Paris, even if far smaller than the more recent groups, whose foods and dining may have influenced the luncheons or other elements of the Parisian dining scene at the time.

The third chapter addresses the Indochinese lobby’s promotion of their rice against the ingrained predilections of the French for wheat bread. Janes references the work of Steven Kaplan and others who trace the centrality of bread in France and the West and the Parisians’ preferences for white bread dating to pre-revolutionary times. Associating the color of bread with social status is of longer *durée* than Janes indicates. Juvenal complained in his *Satires* about social climbers in ancient Rome who did not know the color of their bread, meaning that at banquets they would try to inflate their status by partaking of bread whose color was too white for their real social status. The importation of rice from Indochina did increase during the interwar period, but it met stiff resistance from domestic lobbyists, who succeeded getting it reduced to help French farmers following the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s.

In chapter four, Janes moves to the cultural issues of food and identity and the resistance of many French to foods they associated with the colonized. Linked to lower status people, such foods were often regarded as disgusting. Because tracing what people actually ate in the past is so difficult, Janes, as other historians of food, turns to culinary discourse, in her case in *Le Pot-au-feu* and *Le Cordon bleu*, home cooking magazines, to track terms related to colonial-inspired recipes for dishes such as curry “à l’indienne” and eggplant “à l’algérienne” to cite only a few examples (p. 103). “I demonstrate,” she writes, “that from the late nineteenth century through the interwar period, culinary exoticism as presented in these magazines consisted not of exploration and discovery but of the repetition of stereotypes and disgust tropes” (p. 103).

Citing the work of Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, she explores the term “cuisine” as referencing a cultural code embracing the written discourse around food and eating. The word “cuisine” itself, it might be added, acquired an enhanced status only in the 1970s when it took on the connotation of a culinary esthetic or style, such as “French cuisine,” in contrast to its earlier use to refer to “kitchen,” with an implied a lower social status of cook or maid, by Balzac and other French writers in the nineteenth century.[3] Janes points out that, in the culinary hierarchy, male chefs were higher than women home cooks but that “French cuisine maintained a certain level of respect for women’s cooking” (p. 105). Increased literacy and the use of cookbooks by women in the home during the interwar years may have played a role as well. What was called “*cuisine coloniale*” during the 1931 Colonial Exposition referred mainly to tropical fruits and curry powder, both of which were considered as representative of a “disembodied generic colonial other” rather than recognized as distinct foods of specific peoples, and were often seen as disgusting (p. 107). In arguing for a type of writing she calls “gastronomic curiosity,” by which she means disgust, as in the French aversion to eating dogs, she places her analysis of colonial foods into the field of food taboos, with a history going back two to three million years at the least.[4] Her discussion of the “importance of disgust reactions” regarding the foods of different cultures (p. 110) suggests the possibility of future research addressing the different categories of age, gender, and social status as they affected French attitudes toward colonial foods. Janes notes that foods such as couscous became popular in France only with the post-World War II influx of larger numbers of people from North Africa, but her discussion of its appearance in “Le Cordon bleu” (p. 122) might be enriched with some comment about the presence of any North African or other colonial restaurants in Paris.[5]

Chapter five is devoted to the 1931 Colonial Exposition, where, as in her discussion of “exotic” foods in the previous chapter, Janes points to the difficulties in studying past attitudes and the need to rely on printed sources such as the press, menus, advertisements, and descriptions of restaurants to gain some insights regarding French views of colonial foods. This chapter is nicely illustrated with photos of frescos by Albert Janniot and paintings by Michel Géo in the Musée permanent des colonies at the Exposition showing the plentiful, if exotic, foods from the colonies now available to the Continental French.

An older colony with a larger number of European settlers, Algeria was depicted as less foreign at the Exposition than were Tunisia and Morocco. Algerian wine was discussed in terms of *terroir*, an idea that Kolleen Guy has also traced in her history of the Champagne wine industry (p. 139), and wine tasting in the Algerian pavilion made the region seem more French. In contrast, the otherness of Morocco and Tunisia was emphasized in gastronomic tourist guidebooks that encouraged the French to visit their souks and sample “exotic” Arab pastries. Janes’s discussion of Algerian foods as less “foreign” than those of Tunisia and Morocco implicitly raises the question of whether these differing food images might have played a role in helping to form political perspectives as well. Specifically, if Algerian foods were seen as more “French,” did this mean a more concerted struggle later to keep Algeria French in contrast to a greater willingness to let Tunisia and Morocco, seen as more foreign, become independent in the 1950s? Whereas selected foods from North Africa were depicted as possibilities for assimilation, Black African foodways were seen more negatively, with frequent allusions to cannibalism. Janes sums up: “The

broader rejection of truly dining together with colonial peoples--revealed in the recurring references to cannibalism--shows the limitations of the concept of Greater France" (p. 155).

Concluding in chapter six, Janes recapitulates her arguments. The needs of the First World War stimulated the colonial lobby to promote more exports to France. Resistance by local food producers, however, combined with a widespread suspicion of, and, on occasion, open disgust for colonial foods, limited the lobby's success to a handful of products such as curries and tropical fruits, the latter used for desserts. This sense of otherness was still evident in the France of 2015 when Nicolas Sarkozy argued in a television interview that schoolchildren in France should all eat the same lunches with no exceptions made for the anti-pork practices of Muslims and Jews. Despite the changed conditions of the postcolonial era, social status identification through food and the many forms that it takes are very much alive in France, as elsewhere.

In studying food as a vector of colonial attitudes in France, Janes has enriched both colonial and food history studies. Given that the book's title refers to Paris rather than France, more might have been said about the ways in which Parisians' colonial food adaptations and aversions were similar or different from those elsewhere in metropolitan France. A few minor grammatical *faux pas* include the use of "disinterested" where "uninterested" is meant, and a reference to "know" instead of "known" (p. 117). These do not detract, however, from a most valuable addition to our understanding of French colonial and food history.

NOTES

[1] See the discussion in Jennifer M. Dueck, "The Middle East and North Africa in the Imperial and Post-Colonial Historiography of France," *The Historical Journal* 50/4(December 2007), p. 938.

[2] For a parallel argument regarding French naturism, see Stephen L. Harp, *Naturism, Nudism, and Tourism in Twentieth-Century France* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), p. 8.

[3] For more on the changing meaning of "cuisine" in the 1970s, see Bertram M. Gordon, "Shifting Tastes and Terms: The Rise of California Cuisine," *Revue Française des Études Américaines* 11/27-28(February, 1986), pp. 109-126.

[4] Richard E. Leakey, *People of the Lake: Mankind and Its Beginnings* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1978), p. 105.

[5] Évelyne Cohen mentions Moroccan restaurants in interwar Paris in *Paris dans l'Imaginaire national de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999), p. 120.

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