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“Nothing is sweet in my mouth”: Food, identity, and religion in African Lisbon

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ABSTRACT
Here I explore food and eating and their connection to identity and religion among immigrants and refugees from Guinea-Bissau living in and around Lisbon, Portugal. I first demonstrate the importance of food to fieldwork in transnational settings, as well as to the understanding of the experience of migration. I show how different foods and eating styles mark boundaries and distinctions between homeland and host country, Africans and Europeans, and Muslim and “Christian” (non-Muslim) Guineans, and allow people to play with these boundaries while making powerful statements about identity and religion in African Lisbon. I argue that during the War of June 7th, the inability to taste food—captured by the expression “nothing is sweet in my mouth”—transcended ethnic and religious distinctions and united the Guinean immigrant community by providing a common way of reconciling memories of their war-torn homeland and their ongoing struggle for belonging in Europe.

One evening in 1999, while conducting fieldwork with immigrants and refugees from Guinea-Bissau living in and around Lisbon, I stepped into Morabeza restaurant for dinner. The 11-month civil war—known today as “the War of June 7th” (1998)—was well underway, and the fighting at the time was intense. Established Guinean immigrants and newly arrived refugees gathered at Morabeza to watch RTP’s (Rádio e Televisão de Portugal) evening Africa news report. Muna, the restaurant’s owner, dimmed the lights and told everyone to quiet down. As the report began, people looked up from heaping plates of rice and sauce, their favorite kumida di terra (“food from the homeland”), to watch the disturbing images unfold before their eyes. People sitting beside me moaned or mumbled insults at “Nino,” Guinea-Bissau’s ousted president, and his supporters. Others wept as they watched bodies being lifted from the streets and loaded onto trucks in Bissau.

A Portuguese journalist interviewed a local woman about the conditions in the capital city. “We have no food; we have no water; we have nothing,” she said as she held out her hands in front of her, palms up. The woman’s familiar gesture and
heavily accented Portuguese sparked chuckles from the crowd at Morabeza. It was, after all, much easier to be amused by this woman’s struggle to speak a colonial language than to actually listen to what her words described: the death, pain, and suffering of a war-torn homeland.

Despite occasional moments of levity and Muna’s booming business, the war was taking a toll on peoples’ appetites. Overwhelmed with worry and guilt, people claimed to have had difficulty eating since the start of the war. “I eat only because I have to, but I never feel hungry,” one man told me. A woman exclaimed, “No matter how much I eat, I never feel full, and I just get thinner.” During the war many people complained of the inability to taste food, even their favorite Guinean dishes, exclaiming: *Nada ka sabi na boka* (“Nothing is sweet in my mouth”).

In this article, I explore the connections between food, eating, identity, and religion among Guinean immigrants in Lisbon. My goals are threefold. First, I examine the centrality of food and eating to fieldwork in transnational settings and to the anthropological understanding of migration. I demonstrate how different foods and eating styles, both during and after the war, marked distinctions and boundaries between homeland and host country, Africans and Europeans, and “Christian” (non-Muslim) and Muslim Guineans, and allowed people to play with these boundaries while making powerful statements about identity, religion, and belonging. I show how this complexity plays out in restaurants and “culture clubs” (Gable) in African Lisbon. Finally, I argue that during the time of my fieldwork in Lisbon, the inability to taste food became a central metaphor through which displaced Guineans, divided by ethnic and religious differences but united by the War of June 7, became united by their feelings of guilt and their desire to make a place for themselves in urban Europe.

This article is based on multi-sited fieldwork I began in Guinea-Bissau and Portugal in the late 1990s and continued in the early 2000s and, most recently, in 2011. As I researched the religious lives of Guinean immigrants, especially debates focused on the “proper” practice of Islam and life course rituals, food and eating played a central role in my experiences in both field sites. This article represents my first attempt to interpret the ethnographic data I have collected on food, identity, and religion through fieldwork over a period of 15 years. I draw inspiration from the large body of anthropological literature on food and culture, including classical and contemporary works (e.g., Counihan and van Esterik, *Food and Culture*; Douglas; Firth), as well as recent literature addressing the role of food in transnational or diaspora settings (e.g., D’Alisera; Gasparetti; Mankekar; Rosales; Srinivas; Wilk). In exploring food and its connection to identity and religion among subjects who inhabit multiple diasporas, I focus on a variety of food practices—purchasing, preparing, and eating—and consider “the use of food narratives to speak about the self” (Counihan and van Esterik, “Why Food, Why Culture, Why Now?” 10). Crucial to this article is the importance of food as an anthropological window into understanding the often taken-for-granted dimensions of migration: the everyday, regular, ordinary practices that are central to the experience of displacement and the construction of identities in the diaspora.
The contemporary Guinean diaspora in Lisbon

Before exploring the connections between food, identity, and religion for my Guinean informants in Lisbon, I first provide some background to Guineans in Lisbon. In 2014, the total population of immigrants from Guinea-Bissau living in Portugal was 17,981 (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras 10). Although most live in Lisbon, there are smaller communities in Porto and in the Algarve (e.g., in the town of Faro). Considering how difficult it is to collect accurate census data, as well as the challenge of enumerating undocumented immigrants, however, the population is probably much larger. For their part, my informants rarely understood my own (or others’) desires to quantify their presence in Lisbon and would simply say, “There are so many of us that no one could ever count us all.” Carvalho (319–20) identifies three major waves or distinct groups of Guinean immigrants to Portugal. The first are the elites, who left the poor conditions in Guinea-Bissau to study abroad in Portugal or in Eastern Europe beginning in the 1950s. This “flight of senior officials,” as Carvalho (20) describes it, continues into the present and intensified following the War of June 7th. The second group comprises members of the former national elite who adopted Portuguese or dual citizenship when Guinea-Bissau gained its independence in 1975. Both of these groups consist of predominantly non-Muslims from privileged backgrounds who attended Portuguese schools in Guinea-Bissau. They had some advantages in adjusting to life in Portugal, and they maintain contact with elite Guineans back in Guinea-Bissau. The third and largest group of Guinean immigrants consists of unskilled workers who migrated to Lisbon in the last 20 years. My own research has focused primarily on members of this third group, most of which are Muslim.

Muslim Guineans began migrating to Lisbon in the 1990s (Machado 49) and thus belong to the third group of immigrants. The majority are ethnically Fula or Mandinga peoples. The Fula are nomadic or semi-nomadic cattle herders who live throughout West Africa. In Guinea-Bissau, they are the largest ethnic group and make up about 28.5% of the population (Mendy and Lobban 3). They live primarily in the northern and eastern savannah regions of the country, where they keep cattle and farm. They speak the Fula language, though those who live in urban areas also speak Kriolu. The Mandinga trace their heritage to the Mande heartland (in present-day Mali) and also live throughout West Africa. They are Guinea-Bissau’s third largest ethnic group, making up 14.7% of the population (Mendy and Lobban 3). They speak the Mandinga language, though many Mandinga also speak Kriolu. Although the largest populations of Fula and Mandinga people live in rural areas of Guinea-Bissau, many also live in towns and in the capital city of Bissau, where they make their living primarily as merchants or as Quranic scholars and healers. Islam is central to both groups: to be Fula or Mandinga is to be Muslim, and the practice of Islam unites these two groups, despite cultural and linguistic differences and a history of conflict. Both groups are also diasporic, a point that I will discuss at greater length later.
Machado (49) points out that unlike members of the other (non-Muslim) groups mentioned earlier who migrated to Lisbon from the capital city of Bissau, most Muslim Guineans migrated directly from Guinea-Bissau’s rural areas. This was true for the majority of my Muslim informants in Lisbon, most of whom were from villages and had little to no formal education apart from several years at a local Qur’anic school. Most of the Guineans I came to know in Lisbon worked as skilled or unskilled laborers in construction, as cooks, wait staff, and dishwashers in Guinean restaurants, or as Muslim healer-diviners. Others sold “things from the homeland” in front of Lisbon’s central mosque or at the city’s commercial plazas.

The Muslim Guineans with whom I worked related more strongly to their identity as Muslims than to their identity as Guineans. They formed their own immigrant associations and culture clubs such as the Associação dos Muçulmanos Naturais da Guiné-Bissau Residentes em Portugal (“The Association of Guinean Muslims in Portugal”) and the Badim Clubo (the “Maternal Kin Club”), the oldest and largest Mandinga women’s association in Lisbon. The clubs, which still operate today, hosted monthly meetings and Muslim holy day celebrations, such as the Prophet’s Birthday, Tabaski (The Festival of the Sacrifice), and life course rituals such as infant name-giving rituals, initiation “coming out” ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. The clubs also acted as rotating credit associations, providing members with emergency funds to travel back to Guinea-Bissau to attend a funeral or to make the Haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

My Guinean Muslim informants stressed their inclusion in the umma, the global community of Muslims, and living in Lisbon has intensified their contact with non-African Muslims.3 Integration into Lisbon’s transnational community of Muslims, however, has had its challenges. Women complained that they don’t fika avontadi (“feel at ease”) at the mosque, and most preferred the culture clubs, which offered them the freedom to construct and perform their own version of Islam through dress, food, and the celebration of life course rituals and Muslim holiday celebrations.

While some of my Guinean informants lived in apartments in central Lisbon, most lived in neighborhoods outside the city, many of which have been settled exclusively by African immigrants. There were some neighborhoods in which Muslims and non-Muslims lived side-by-side and others that had the reputation for being either “Muslim” or “Christian” (non-Muslim) neighborhoods. On one occasion during my fieldwork in Lisbon when I told a non-Muslim Guinean man that I was planning to nosti (“spend the day”) in the neighborhood of Santa Cruz Damaia, he bowed his head, imitating Muslim prayer. When I told a Muslim Guinean man that I was on my way to take the ferry across the Tejo River to Vale da Amoreira to attend a name-giving ritual for a Mandinga baby, he told me that I must be mistaken: “no Mandinga would live there; walking down the streets would spoil one’s prayer.”

Working with a single community over a long period allows the anthropologist to note consistency and change over time (see Ottenberg). In my own case, I have been working with Guineans in Lisbon for a period of 15 years, and during this time, there has been considerable change. Each time I go to Lisbon, for example,
people have different mobile phones with new numbers. Old restaurants have closed down or moved locations and new ones have opened. Several of my informants have returned to Guinea-Bissau or have died. Babies have been born and the children I met during my first stay in Lisbon in 1999 are now young adults and are forging their own identities different from those of their parents. In 2011, I learned that Guinean Muslims had created their own “mosque”—a rented room in a building in central Lisbon—and many of my informants who used to attend Friday prayer at Lisbon’s central mosque told me that they now prefer to pray in this new space.

But over the years, there has been considerable continuity, as well. The Badim Clubo—the Mandinga women’s culture club that I joined in 1999—is still active, though members complain that they don’t have the money for “parties” that they used to have. Life course rituals are still a major focus of immigrant community life in Lisbon, and music and religious-themed videos that were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s were still popular when I returned in 2011.

**Food and fieldwork in Lisbon**

I did not initially plan to conduct research in Lisbon. In 1998, I had intended to complete the second of two years of research on Islam and ritual practices among Mandinga people in northern Guinea-Bissau when the War of June 7th began. A military coup led by rebel leader Anumané Mané forced then-President João Bernardo “Nino” Vieira into exile, resulting in an 11-month conflict between pro-Vieira and anti-Vieira forces. Devastated by the news but determined to continue my research with Guineans, I relocated my project to Lisbon to study the established Guinean immigrant community and newly arrived refugees who escaped the war.

Although my intention was to study the religious lives of Guineans in Lisbon, food was central to my fieldwork from the very beginning. The parallel experience of displacement that I shared with Guinean immigrants and refugees found immediate expression in what and how we ate, and these experiences were key to helping me locate subjects for my research. Soon after arriving in Lisbon, I approached a large group of Africans who regularly congregated at Rossio, a plaza near the central train station. I had no idea where they were from, but I figured that even if they weren’t from Guinea-Bissau, they might be able to tell me where I could meet Guineans. When I approached the group, I heard them speaking Kriolu, Guinea-Bissau’s *lingua franca*, which I had learned during my time there. I introduced myself and asked if they knew where I could find some Guinean food. They were overjoyed by my familiarity with their home country and by my ability to speak Kriolu. Much to my surprise, they identified my husband and me as “Alhadj Fodimaye’s people.” Indeed, we had spent six months in the village of Bafata-Oio, whose spiritual leader, Alhadj Fodimaye Turé, was one of Guinea-Bissau’s most revered Muslim holy men.

To my delight, I learned that the men gathered at Rossio were Fula and Mandinga peoples from Guinea-Bissau. Many of them were veterans who fought with the Portuguese against the PAIGC, the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo*
Verde (the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde) during the war of liberation (1963–1974). These veterans were granted political asylum in Lisbon when Guinea-Bissau became independent. At Rossio, they sold kusa di terra (“things from the homeland”), such as kola nuts, sorrel leaves, okra, and native tobacco out of large, colorful bags identical to the ones I had seen in Bissau’s central Fera di Bandé (Bandim Market). As the kola sellers discreetly showed me their wares, they explained they had to be cautious as the police were beginning to crack down, imposing fines on them for selling without licenses. I learned that Rossio was a central meeting point for the Guinean community, where people could get the latest gossip, find people who had recently arrived or moved, or give someone planning to return to Guinea-Bissau money or letters to take to relatives back home. Before traveling to nosti (“spend the day”) with Guineans living in outlying suburbs, I would stop at Rossio to buy “things from the homeland” to take to them. This became a perfect way for me to compensate my informants for their time and friendship, as Rossio was “far away” from the perspective of most suburban-dwellers and items such as local food, kola nuts, and native tobacco were expensive in Lisbon when compared with prices in Guinea-Bissau.4

The men at Rossio responded to my query about Guinean food by directing me to Morabeza, a restaurant located in Mouraria, Lisbon’s “Moorish Quarter,” a neighborhood known for its roughness. Morabeza, which means “friendship” or “longing” in Cape Verdean Crioulo (Biasutti 158, my translation from the Portuguese), was housed in the basement of Mouraria’s Commercial Center, which was filled with stores owned and operated by immigrants from Portugal’s former colonies (see Figure 1). In the early months of fieldwork attempting to locate Guinean informants across the vast urban spaces of Lisbon, I frequented Morabeza and,
located just across the hallway, its rival restaurant, Tabanka, which means “village” in Guinean Kriolu. Although these restaurants were frequented primarily by non-Muslims (I wanted to work with Muslims), they were only a short distance from Rossio and both these restaurants’ names anchored my informants’ experiences of food and eating to the authentic spaces of home. Most of restaurant owner Muna’s clients were young men who had no one to cook for them: many were unmarried and/or living alone. This situation exemplifies a point made by Janowksi (180), that men in diaspora contexts are often rendered vulnerable and powerless in terms of food.

When Muna learned that I had lived in Guinea-Bissau, she allowed me to luga pratu (“rent a plate”), a privilege she extended to her most loyal (and vulnerable) customers. Instead of ordering off the menu and eating stilu Portugis (“Portuguese-style”) on a plate with a knife and fork, “renters” ate the daily special stilu Guineense (“Guinean style”) from a shared bowl with a spoon. Aside from being half of the price of a regular entrée, renting a plate earned me credibility in the eyes of my Guinean informants, giving me a kind of insider status. Not only had I lived in Guinea-Bissau and was able to speak two local languages, but I also knew how to “eat like a Guinean.” Furthermore, as I was living in a kitchen-less, single room apartment in central Lisbon, I was also reliant on others to prepare meals for me.

By frequenting Guinean restaurants I earned my informants’ trust and was eventually invited into their homes, many of which were located outside of the city. In conducting my fieldwork, I relied on participant-observation as my primary research method: I accompanied my Guinean informants, mobile phone in hand (Johnson, “Culture's Calling”) to homes, work places, restaurants, places of worship, and to cultural events such as “writing-on-the-hand” rituals (Johnson, “The Proof Is on My Palm”), initiation “coming out” ceremonies (Johnson, “Making Mandinga or Making Muslims?”), weddings, and funerals (Johnson, “Death and the Left Hand”). As the Guineans I met lived their daily lives in Lisbon and its surroundings, I conversed with them, joined their associations, recorded their stories, celebrated and mourned with them, and of course cooked and ate with them. I apprenticed with several of my female informants, learning how to prepare Guinean dishes, how to find the best ingredients at the most competitive prices, what changes to make to the traditional recipes to yield the best results, and which substitutions worked for ingredients that were impossible to obtain in Portugal.

Beyond participant-observation, I conducted 23 formal semi-structured interviews (and dozens more informal ones) on a variety of subjects. I also obtained a wealth of data from regular tea-drinking sessions with my informants (5–7 per session) that lasted for three hours several days a week. With my elder Mandinga informants (and even a few younger ones), I spoke the language of Mandinga. I had learned Mandinga, however, while living in a village in Guinea-Bissau, and my skills were (and still remain) limited in large part to life in rural Guinea-Bissau. When conversing about topics in Lisbon, I often switched to Kriolu. I conducted all my formal interviews in Kriolu unless someone didn’t speak it, in which case I conducted the
interview in Mandinga. As my Portuguese improved, I began speaking this language to my informants’ children. While most of them understood Mandinga or Kriolu, they preferred to speak Portuguese. Language for my informants was key to identity: parents would often invoke my own ability to speak Kriolu and Mandinga as a way of shaming their own children, who did not speak them and had little interest in learning: “This white person speaks Mandinga and you don’t even know what she’s saying,” they would exclaim. My Fula informants would often tease me when they heard me speak Mandinga, the language of their “rival” ethnic group: “Why don’t you learn Fula?” they would ask, “It’s a more beautiful language than Mandinga and ‘lighter’ on the tongue [easier to learn].”

Food, eating, and identity in Lisbon

In her work on food and culture, Mary Douglas (231) treated food as a “code” and “patterns of social relations” as the key to encoding its messages. For all of my informants, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, food and eating were central to being Guinean in Lisbon. What is eaten and how it is eaten highlighted boundaries and distinctions between Africans (Guineans) and Europeans (the Portuguese), homeland (Guinea-Bissau) and host-country (Portugal). My informants often contrasted, for example, *kumida di terra* (“food from the homeland”) and *kumida Portugis* (“Portuguese food”). Food from the homeland consists of a starch (rice or millet) accompanied by a sauce containing oil (palm or vegetable), vegetables, meat, or fish. My informants explained that food from the homeland is “natural” and “lacks chemicals,” while Portuguese food is “full of chemicals.” Both conditions were said to affect taste. In describing fish eaten in Guinea-Bissau, Juku, a middle-aged Mandinga woman in Lisbon, told me, “It doesn’t know ice,” meaning that it is always freshly caught and never frozen like it is in Portugal. To emphasize this point, Juku rolled her eyes and puckered her lips, imitating a fish emerging from water. Guineans in Lisbon linked the freshness of food and the absence of “chemicals” to bodily health and strength. Aminata, a Fula woman in her early 40s, even claimed that Portuguese women have more difficult births than Guinean women, which she attributed in large part to the “chemicals” contained in Portuguese food that weaken their bodies. In a similar vein, Searles differentiates “Inuit foods” and “Qallunaat,” or white people’s food, in the eastern Canadian Arctic. His Inuit informants maintain that Inuit foods that are obtained locally from the land promote warmth and generate “a strong flow of blood, a condition considered to be healthy and indicative of a strong body” (65).

My Guinean informants in Lisbon also distinguished “Guinean” and “Portuguese” styles of eating. At home and in restaurants, most people ate Guinean-style from a shared bowl with either their right hand or a spoon. If several people came together to Morabeza for a meal, Muna or one of her helpers would ask: *N’na junta-bos kumida?* (“Should I join your food?”), meaning to serve the meal all together in a single bowl as opposed to serving it in separate bowls or on separate plates. Although a few, mostly older, Guineans insisted on eating “traditionally” with their right hand
in restaurants, most preferred to eat with a spoon. Abdulai, a middle-aged Fula man who refused to eat with a spoon, offered a practical reason for eating with his hand as he shoved his right hand into his rice bowl: “Why waste money on a spoon when Allah gave us one built in?” Muna and her waitstaff explained that serving food to a group in a single bowl produces fewer dishes and thus makes lighter work, even if it doesn’t earn them as much money.

Practical explanations for eating a certain way, however, are always intertwined with symbolic ones as Firth (246) demonstrated in his classic work on food in Tikopia. While my Guinean informants may have chosen different eating styles based on their convenience or practicality, they were always statements about identity and sociability. My informants associated eating Guinean-style with community and equality, and emphasized the social, even spiritual, benefits of eating from a common bowl. As Abdulai insisted: “We eat from a shared bowl because God prefers it.” Eating Guinean-style also engaged religious and cultural beliefs that remain relevant when Guineans relocate to Portugal: eating from the same bowl is an intimate act that demands considerable trust, since the risk of a witch poisoning the food at any time is equally shared.7

Food and eating styles were thus central to being Guinean in the diaspora, and to establishing, regulating, and even playing with the boundaries around what was possible and acceptable in Lisbon. Beyond Morabeza’s regular clientele of working men with no one to cook for them, the restaurant was also popular among a small group of elite Guineans who would show up dressed in the latest clothing styles from Dakar or Paris, order expensive food and drinks from the menu, and eat Portuguese-style on separate plates with forks and knives. People sitting next to me would often comment that such Guineans had “forgotten where they came from” and that they came to Morabeza to “build their name in the immigrant community,” that is, to flaunt their wealth, status, and success in Lisbon. “They want to show people that they didn’t run from the war,” one woman put it.

To “run from the war” was an allusion to refugees who did not emigrate by choice but rather fled the war in Guinea-Bissau and were new to life in Lisbon. My informants often ridiculed and pitied refugees, calling them people who ka panya pe, literally, “didn’t grab a foot.” This common Kriolu phrase describes gullible, clueless, or socially unaware people who don’t understand a joke or don’t recognize when they’re being laughed at. One could tell by refugees’ appearance and behavior that they didn’t yet understand immigrant life: they were too Guinean to survive in Lisbon. For example, they might use their hand instead of a spoon while eating “food from the homeland” in a restaurant. Whereas this behavior would be expected of Guinean elders, who rarely ate out, people would laugh hysterically whenever (young) refugees did this. Even if my Guinean informants agreed that eating with one’s hand is virtuous, especially during life course rituals or Islamic holidays, in a Lisbon restaurant it crossed a line; it was “backward,” associated with “the bush” (village life) and thus antithetical to a cosmopolitan identity and lifestyle.

In both villages and towns (and even in the capital city) in Guinea-Bissau, it is customary to invite others, even unknown passersby, to bin no kume (“come and eat”)
before beginning a meal. This is for the most part a formality. Customary responses are *yoo* (“okay”) for non-Muslims and *Bsimilah* (“in the name of God”) for Muslims; both are appropriately polite ways of declining the invitation. On occasion, however, a person might accept an offer to “come and eat” either by taking one handful (or spoonful) of rice, which communicates trust (I trust that you haven’t poisoned my food and will prove it to you by eating some), or if one has not eaten, has nowhere to eat, and is hungry, by sitting down to join in the meal. My informants in both Guinea-Bissau and Portugal took pride in the Guinean ritual of inviting others to eat and often told me, “a person never goes hungry in Guinea-Bissau” in part because of it. They contrasted this with life in Europe, where a stranger would never be invited to eat and where poor people are forced to beg on the streets for food or simply suffer with hunger. My informants considered this as morally reprehensible as witchcraft.

The ritual of inviting others to “come and eat” takes on a different meaning in Lisbon, however, where food is abundant and people eat in their homes rather than outdoors in the public view of others. Furthermore, since the ability to feed oneself and one’s family in Lisbon becomes less of a matter of survival and more of a measure of one’s success in the immigrant community, actually accepting an offer to “come and eat” is shameful. Rarely did I see Guineans invite others to eat in Lisbon, even in restaurants. During my fieldwork, I often evoked this ritual, even in restaurants, as a way of demonstrating my knowledge of Guinea-Bissau and asserting my insider status in the Guinean immigrant community. Whenever I did this, people responded with a smile of approval, or even an enthusiastic *yoo*, almost as if to say, “Yes, I miss home, as well; life here is so different.” Indeed, the custom of inviting others to eat in Lisbon was linked to identity, to being Guinean in Lisbon and to evoking home in the diaspora. Refugees, however, often took peoples’ invitations to “come and eat” in Lisbon literally, and would join them at their tables at Morabeza as they might have done in Guinea-Bissau. On one occasion, when a refugee in Lisbon accepted my own invitation to “come and eat,” Muna reprimanded the man: “What, did you just get off the boat?” which sparked laughter from everyone present. 8

**Food, eating, and religion in Lisbon**

One day during my fieldwork, I stopped at Morabeza for lunch and joined Basiro, a Mandinga man in his early 20s who worked a construction job in central Lisbon. One of Morabeza’s regular customers, Basiro had just sat down to his own “rented plate” of the daily special, *cheben* (palm nut sauce) with rice, after completing a work shift. As Muna brought my food, Basiro teased: “Americans don’t eat rice; they eat hamburgers; that’s why they’re so big.” A Balanta man chimed in: “The Portuguese don’t eat rice because they know it’s unhealthy; they just eat meat, potatoes, and salad.” Taking full advantage of an ethnographic opportunity, I asked: “If rice is bad for you, why do you eat it?” Basiro looked up from his plate of rice and said, “I am a child of Muslims, and children of Muslims eat rice.”

If food and eating were central to being Guinean in Lisbon and marked boundaries and distinctions between homeland and host country, Africans and Europeans,
they also engaged religious boundaries, differentiating Muslim and “Christian” (non-Muslim) Guineans. As I have argued elsewhere (Johnson, “Becoming a Muslim”), being Muslim for Guineans is as much a statement about ethnicity as it is about religion. Muslim identity means first and foremost that one belongs to an Islamicized ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau: the Mandinga, Fula, or Beafada. Although members of these groups nowadays reside throughout Guinea-Bissau, they still constitute majority populations in the interior regions of the country where they form politically centralized communities. Fula and Mandinga are often referred to as “strangers” since they migrated to the area of present-day Guinea-Bissau (albeit centuries ago) from other regions of West Africa. They are contrasted with Guinea-Bissau’s autochthonous groups, who live on the coast, are organized into acephalous societies, and practice indigenous African religions (see Brooks; Lundy). While I was conducting fieldwork in both Guinea-Bissau and Portugal, non-Muslim Guineans often teased me when I told them that my research focused on the Mandinga people. “What do they know about Guinea-Bissau?” they would ask me, “They’re just strangers here.”

The division between “citizens who belong and others who belong less,” as Gescheire (100) refers to in a parallel situation in Cameroon, remains deeply entrenched in the contemporary Guinean diaspora. During my fieldwork in Lisbon, Muslim Guineans referred to non-Muslim Guineans as Kristons (“Christians”) in the Kriolu language whether they practiced Christianity or an African indigenous religion (or both). In fact, Muslim and Christian were considered distinct ethnic as well as religious identities. In both Guinea-Bissau and Portugal, common responses to my question, *Abo i di kal rasa*? (“What is your ethnicity?”), were either *Ami i Kriston* (“I am a Christian [non-Muslim]”) or *Ami i Musulmanu* (“I am a Muslim”), which underscores the point that ethnicity and religious identity for Guineans are often conflated.

Just as Muslims and non-Muslims inhabited different spaces in Lisbon, as I addressed earlier, they also patronized different restaurants. At the time of my fieldwork, Morabeza catered almost exclusively to non-Muslims. Its menu featured dishes from Guinea-Bissau’s non-Muslim ethnic groups, such as cafriela (grilled chicken with lemon, garlic, onions, and hot pepper), siga (oysters with palm oil and okra sauce), siti (smoked fish with palm oil), and cheben (palm nut sauce), all accompanied with rice. Morabeza also served alcohol, and many clients frequented the restaurant not to eat but to drink away the stresses of immigrant life. Muna, the restaurant’s owner, had the reputation of being a “hard” woman with a fierce temper who was not afraid to eject inebriated clients who started fights or refused to pay their bills. Morabeza was also a hang-out for some of the country’s most famous musicians, including Justino Delgado and Iva and Ichi from the group Netos D’Ngumbe, who enjoyed plates of their favorite “food from the homeland” while signing autographs or CDs for their fans. These musicians, who are still popular today, are all non-Muslims who play traditional or contemporary styles of music associated with indigenous ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau.
Muslim Guineans preferred to eat at Morabeza’s Muslim counterpart, Mansa Flema, located in the neighborhood of Santa Cruz Damaia, a short commuter train ride from central Lisbon (see Figure 2). Mansa Flema, which means “King Flame,” was named after one of Bissau’s most popular nightclubs. At the time of my research, the restaurant was owned and operated by Mariama, a Fula woman from the town of Bafata in northern Guinea-Bissau. She served Muslim dishes such as kaldu di mankara (chicken with peanut sauce), kabeza di karnel (sheep’s head), and kabra (grilled goat with vegetable oil and tomato sauce). Through food and eating practices, Muslim Guineans both distinguished themselves from Kristons (non-Muslim Guineans) in Lisbon, and expressed their aspirations for belonging to the umma, the global community of Muslims. My Muslim Guinean informants took pride in their efforts to buy “Muslim foods,” such as halal meat, spices, and rice from merchants near the mosque rather than at the grocery store. In their eyes, not only did this ensure the quality of these foods, but it also established their appropriateness for Muslim consumption. This is especially interesting, since at least in some cases
the products sold in grocery stores were identical to (even the same brand as) those sold near the mosque. The only difference was that the shops near the mosque were owned and run by fellow Muslims and thus had, in my informants’ eyes, God’s stamp of approval.

The Muslim Guineans with whom I worked also upheld, at least in public, the taboos on alcohol and pork, which they deemed essential for being “true Muslims.” Many people told me that they did not frequent Morabeza because Muna served pork and non-\textit{halal} meat, and the restaurant was often packed with \textit{Kirstons} (“non-Muslims”) who went there to get drunk. They also complained about Muna’s tendency to oversauce her meals. Guinean dishes consist of \textit{bianda}, cooked rice (or millet), and \textit{mafe}, an accompanying sauce containing protein (meat or fish) and/or vegetables, and the standard in Guinea-Bissau is a large portion of rice and a much smaller portion of accompanying sauce. Even some of my non-Muslim informants complained that Muna spoiled their favorite dishes with too much sauce.\footnote{Sauce wasn’t the only thing that could be too much of a good thing when prepared outside of the homeland. Muslim Guineans in both Guinea-Bissau and Portugal commonly drink \textit{ataya} (tea) in the late afternoon. They use Chinese green tea, which they brew in small pots, sweeten with refined white sugar, flavor with fresh mint leaves, and drink in three rounds (see Figure 3). Brewing tea is a learned art: it takes time (about three hours) and tastes differently depending on who brews it and the technique used—for example, how long a brewer “plays” with the tea, pouring it between cups and pot, before serving it. Since sugar in Guinea-Bissau is expensive and difficult to purchase in rural areas, it is used sparingly. This means that the first round of tea is the strongest and the most bitter. In fact, pregnant women are discouraged from drinking it, as it is thought to be “strong” enough to induce miscarriage. The second round is said to have the perfect blend of strength and sweetness, and the third round is too weak and sweet for some peoples’ taste. In Lisbon, sugar is readily available and relatively inexpensive, so immigrants often use it liberally when brewing tea. People often complained to me that just as too much sauce can spoil a meal, too much sugar can spoil tea, and they blamed these excesses for the health problems plaguing the Guinean immigrant community, such as obesity and diabetes.}

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But if some Guineans understood the problem of spoiling food and drink in terms of taste and health, others, especially pious Muslims, understood it primarily in theological terms: in their words, “God doesn’t like it.” Mariama, Mansa-Flema’s owner and chef, took pride in her ability to serve food with proportions of rice and sauce that both reminded nostalgic Muslim immigrants of home and was pleasing to God. She also did not serve alcohol and only served \textit{halal} meat purchased from stores adjacent to the mosque. As a result of her efforts, Mansa Flema was almost always packed with Muslim Guineans who felt more at home there than at Morabeza. Sammells (128) argues that, “ongoing cultural work must constantly recreate [the] equivalence between domestic/local cuisines and restaurant cuisines. The authentic must be made” (see also Mankekar; Gasparetti). Whereas “making the authentic” for restaurant workers in Bolivia entails attempting to meet tourists’
expectations by providing them “authentic” local food, Mariama struggled to meet her displaced Muslim Guinean clients’ expectations for an authentic experience of homeland by serving proportions of sauce that people could eat without spoiling their identity as Muslims.

If appropriate proportions of sauce to rice and sugar to tea engaged the ethnic dimension of being Muslim in Lisbon, then taboos on pork and alcohol served to connect Guinean Muslims to Muslims beyond West Africa: to what my informants termed Arabes (Middle Eastern and North African Muslims) and Indianus (South Asian Muslims). For my Muslim Guinean informants in Lisbon, upholding these taboos and publicly drawing attention to them were the ultimate expressions of Islamic identity and piety. I often encountered lively discourse in the Guinean Muslim community about the importance of avoiding pork for being a “true Muslim,” and the challenge of doing so in Portugal where, as Graham (14) puts it, “Since Paleolithic times, when stone statues of pigs dotted the countryside, pork has been the country’s culinary obsession.” Over the years, my Muslim informants have shared
with me what they deemed conspiratorial efforts by the Portuguese to make Muslims (unknowingly) eat pork. In their minds, such efforts were one response to the growing Muslim presence in Portugal. Several male informants told me that they avoided meals on airplanes because “they all contain pork.” When I asked these men if they knew that they could request specially made halal meals, they informed me that TAP, Portugal’s national airline, secretly put pork in these meals in an attempt to “ruin” Muslims.

During my 2003 fieldwork in Lisbon, several members of the Maternal Kin Club had just learned that gelatin, one of the ingredients in Danone yogurt, was made from pigs’ feet. The women were especially concerned, as Danone yogurt was one of their children’s favorite snacks and they feared that they had unknowingly “spoiled” their children’s Muslim identity by giving it to them to eat. Men understood this as yet another anti-Islamic act by the Portuguese. As one Mandinga man asserted: “The Portuguese have never wanted Muslims in their country, and now look at us; there are so many Muslims that they can’t count us all. They put pork in our food with the hope that we will give up and return to our home countries.”

Despite such expressions of Muslim piety through publically upholding the taboos on alcohol and pork, I met some Guinean Muslims in Lisbon who ate pork and drank alcohol, although they pleaded with me not to tell the elders. In the case of pork, they used the Kriolu expression, *djitu ka ten* (“it cannot be helped”): pork is readily available, filling, and inexpensive in Lisbon. “It’s delicious,” one young Mandinga man told me, as he rubbed his belly with subversive laughter. In the case of alcohol, many of my informants also claimed that the worry and stress of immigrant life was simply too much for them, and eventually drove them to drink. Some people described Muslims’ public observance of these taboos simply as attempts to *kumpu nomi* (to “build their name”), or show off, in the wider Muslim community. Many told me that the “real” reason why Mandinga don’t eat pork has nothing to do with Islam and everything to do with Mandinga “custom” (*ado*): “They respect the pig [as a totem],” they claimed. When I mentioned this to my Mandinga informants, no one could deny it. The story goes like this: In the old days when the first Mandinga people were searching for a home, there was a terrible drought and they nearly died of thirst. They encountered many animals on their way and they begged each animal to show them where they could find water. But the animals were selfish and wanted to keep the water for themselves. One by one, they told the people that they didn’t know where to find water. But the pig took pity on the people and led them to a water hole. The Mandinga vowed to never again eat the flesh of the pig out of respect for the animal that spared their lives. See Jackson (39–40) for a similar story explaining why members of the Kuyaté clan in Sierra Leone don’t eat the meat of the Monitor Lizard. In the same way that avoiding pork marks the ethnic distinction between non-Muslim Han and Muslim Hui in urban China (Gillette 114), many of my Guinean informants viewed the taboo on pork not as essentially Muslim but as essentially Mandinga. As such, it made little sense for non-Mandinga Muslims to uphold it.

My Guinean Muslim informants’ desire for inclusion in Islam beyond West Africa was also undermined by their constant concern with the omnipresent threat of
witchcraft transmitted through food. During my fieldwork, I was struck by how many of my Guinean Muslim informants politely declined, or avoided altogether, eating communally at public events (e.g., Muslim holiday celebrations or life course rituals), even when they deemed eating “Guinean-style” out of a shared bowl as central to both the event and to their identity as Guineans. On one occasion, I planned to accompany Bacar, a prominent Muslim healer-diviner in Lisbon, and his wife, Aminata, to the suburb of Bobadela for a funerary sacrifice for an influential Maternal Kin Club member's daughter, who had unexpectedly died back home in Guinea-Bissau. I arrived at Bacar’s house mid-morning and was surprised to find Aminata preparing lunch. As one of the key features of a funerary sacrifice is sharing a large meal, I asked: “Won't we eat at the funerary sacrifice?” Bacar told me that he refused to eat at community gatherings, and shared with me a childhood memory that shaped his current views on the perils of eating outside of one's own home:

When I was a boy in Guinea-Bissau, my brothers and I once travelled to a village near Bafata for a soccer game. A relative invited us to eat at her house, and we accepted the invitation. We were hungry after playing hard. As I reached into the bowl with my right hand, I saw some hairs and tiny pieces of glass. I told my brothers not to touch the food, and we went straight home. If a witch wants to harm someone, the easiest way is to put something in his or her food. From that day on, I have never eaten at the house of a person whom I do not know well and trust.

Like other Muslim healer-diviners in Lisbon, Bacar attempted to distance himself from African “custom” and become a cosmopolitan Muslim (see Werbner, Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism): to adopt a “purer” Saudi Arabian-version of Islam that privileges the power of God over the power of witches. He remained convinced, however, that his status and power as one of the most successful healer-diviners in Lisbon rendered him especially vulnerable to the omnipresent threat of witches who might harm him out of jealousy of his fame and material wealth.

Basiro’s statement from the opening vignette of this section, “I am a child of Muslims, and children of Muslims eat rice,” mirrors Bacar’s struggle and must also be understood at the intersection of Guinean Muslims’ desire for inclusion in the umma and the failure of this project for many of my informants in Lisbon. On one level, Basiro’s desire to eat rice says more about his identity as a Guinean (or even as an African) than as a Muslim. For all Guineans, both Muslims and non-Muslims in Guinea-Bissau or Portugal, rice is the most appropriate of foods: eating it even when others (e.g., Portuguese or Americans) don’t eat it or even consider it unhealthy is a way of expressing one’s identity as a “fidju di terra,” a son/daughter of Guinea-Bissau and is thus central to Guinean identity in the diaspora. In her own work on “sacred rice,” Davidson (18) establishes the centrality of rice to identity and social life among the Diola, a non-Muslim ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau:

[R]ice for Diola is a total social phenomenon in the classic Maussian sense. It mediates all social spheres and holds together the contradictions across them. It is the means through which people present themselves to themselves as others. (18)

Like Davidson's Diola informants who ask, “who are we without our rice?” (20), eating rice in Lisbon, especially when there are so many other options available,
reaffirmed one's identity as Guinean. At the time of my fieldwork, this was an issue with which many Guinean parents in Lisbon struggled. They often lamented to me that their children “had forgotten where they came from;” they had no taste for rice and preferred Portuguese foods. On one occasion, Aminata's daughter Maran told her that she didn't like rice and refused to eat it. Aminata responded: “Waaay! Ma abo i ka fidju di pretu? (“What! But are you not the child of blacks [Africans]?”) On another occasion when I was visiting Bacar (a Mandinga man), a Fula man declined his offer to “come and eat” the rice and peanut sauce Bacar's wife had just prepared. Bacar turned to me and said, “He’s Fula, and Fula are afraid of rice,” a comment that triggered roars of laughter from the Mandinga men gathered in Bacar’s sitting room. Indeed, accusing any Guinean of refusing to eat rice in Lisbon is the ultimate of insults: it implies that one is no longer African or Guinean. Taken together, these stories demonstrate the power of rice to collapse distinctions based on ethnicity, social class, and religion, and to unite Guinean immigrants together as *fidjus di terra*, as people from Guinea-Bissau.

At another level, however, Basiro’s assertion underscores Guinean Muslims’ desire for belonging to Lisbon's transnational community of Muslims and to the *umma*, the global community of Muslims, on the one hand, and to the loss of religious identity when living away from one’s family in a religiously plural setting, on the other. In self-identifying as a “child of Muslims” rather than simply as “a Muslim,” Basiro engaged the subtle distinction between a culturally Muslim identity and a religiously Islamic one. Although Basiro self-identified as ethnically Muslim, born of Mandinga parents, he confessed that in Lisbon he no longer practiced his religion. Immigrant life, he claimed, left him too busy to pray, attend Friday prayer at the mosque, and fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Most importantly, in calling himself a “child of Muslims,” Basiro made sense of his preference for Morabeza, a place over-run by “Christian” (non-Muslim) clients and deemed unfit for pious Muslims, who preferred to eat at Mansa Flema.

**Tasteless food: Abundance, guilt, and healing during the War of June 7th**

Scholars of Africa addressing food (e.g., Huhn; Weiss) have highlighted its relationship to emotional states. In her work on wellness and the vitality of food in Mozambique, Arianna Huhn demonstrates that positive emotional states such as happiness are thought to render food nutritious and energy-giving, while negative emotional states such as sadness do just the opposite. She argues (187): “The vitality enabled through consumption [is] thus a result not so much of specific quantities or qualities of foods but the context of experience and eating.” For Haya in Tanzania, as described by Brad Weiss, the effects of food on bodies say as much about wellness as they do about access to food or how much one has eaten. According to Weiss (143), becoming fat or thin for the Haya are “processes that index the quality of one’s relation to food …and constitute and demonstrate a general state of well-being.”

Similarly, food and eating indexed my Guinean informants’ emotional states in Lisbon as the War of June 7th raged in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau’s capital city. For the
majority of the conflict, flights from Lisbon to Bissau were halted and transnationalism ceased to be the relatively easy “physical, cultural and emotional movement back and forth between an African homeland and [a European] metropolitan center” (D’Alisera 3). Perhaps transnationalism has always been more complex than this ideal, but the war clearly made it more so for Guineans in Lisbon. Displacement and distance from their homeland suddenly became much harder to swallow. Many of my informants had not spoken to their relatives since the start of the war and did not know if they were alive or dead. Divided families felt the brokenness of ties in a more immediate, acute, way. I argue that the phrase “Nothing is sweet in my mouth,” which I heard almost daily during my 1999 fieldwork in Lisbon, transcended ethnic and religious distinctions and united members of the Guinean immigrant community. Specifically, it became the central metaphor through which Guineans in Portugal reconciled their shared experience of displacement with a shared nostalgia for their homeland, both of which were heightened during the war.

The meaning of the phrase “Nothing is sweet in my mouth” can be found in two interrelated structures of feeling in Lisbon: abundance and guilt. Although Guinean immigrants confronted these emotions prior to 1999, they were intensified as they followed the effects of the war back home. Guineans take considerable pride in their home country’s fertile soil, abundant rainfall, and bountiful harvests, and as I explained earlier, they often distinguish their home country from other African countries by the absence of hunger. But in Guinea-Bissau, most people spend the majority of their days acquiring and preparing food, and anxiety about a sufficient food supply for subsistence farmers and increasing food prices for city-dwellers is commonplace. For most Guineans, much like for the Tikopia as described by Firth (244), “getting a meal is the day’s work.”

When Guineans arrive in Portugal, however, they confront a very different reality. In Lisbon, as Firth puts it when describing food in industrial societies, “getting a meal is an interval or a conclusion to the day’s work” (244); food is abundant, readily available for purchase, and relatively inexpensive. Many Guineans experience for the first time an excess of kusa sabi (literally “sweet things”). These are coveted, luxury items, such as meat, vegetable oil, sugar, and soda, all of which are said to taste good and which are either expensive or scarce (or both) in Guinea-Bissau. Things that taste good are often described as “sweet” and this adjective extends to experiences unrelated to food; for example, when all is well, one may say that life is “sweet.” With medical conditions such as diabetes and obesity on the rise in the Guinean immigrant community in Lisbon, my informants struggled constantly to balance the necessity of restraint in regards to “sweet things” on the one hand with desire, sociality, and identity on the other. This is yet another aspect of why the invitation to “come and eat” had less force in Lisbon; the need to ensure against hunger has been replaced by the need to regulate what one eats in a given day. As one woman remarked to me as a way of justifying her polite refusal to “come and eat” at a funerary sacrifice: “If I ate at every ritual, Fatumata [my Mandinga name], I would surely develop diabetes.”11
But if before the war, abundance (often expressed as “too much sauce”) had the potential to spoil one's favorite dish, one's health, or one's identity as a Muslim, during the war, it created also a profound sense of guilt as all Guinean immigrants in Portugal—Muslim and Christian alike—worried about the survival of their relatives and friends back home. My informants would ask me as they sat in front of large plates of “food from the homeland” at Morabeza and Mansa Flema, “How can we enjoy food when we know that our people back home are suffering from hunger?” People claimed that preokupason (“worry” or “stress”) associated with the war was “spoiling” their appetites: many claimed that they rarely, if ever, felt hungry. At Morabeza, women would cry as they watched the nightly news updates on the war, unable to touch their plates of rice and sauce in front of them. People claimed that they ate only out of necessity, to give them the strength to manage their daily routines in Lisbon. When they did manage to eat, they claimed that the food was not “sweet” (i.e., it did not taste good) and many even claimed that they could not taste it at all. “Tasteless” food during the war also failed to provide them with the energy that it usually did, and even though they ate, they lost rather than gained weight. Their bodies, they exclaimed, were “wasting away,” just like their homeland.

I suggest that the inability to taste food became a primary way through which displaced, nostalgic Guineans—divided by ethnic and religious differences but united by the pain of loss—expressed the experiences of guilt and abundance during the war. Although the inability to eat or taste food was ultimately connected to negative emotions of sadness, worry, and guilt, the shared sense of pain that it expressed also rendered it a powerful source of healing. The inability to eat or taste “food from the homeland” united Guinean immigrants, despite internal differences, and provided a unified way of feeling the connection to a broken homeland and the desire for reconciliation within and beyond its borders.

**Conclusion**

This article makes several contributions to food and culture in the context of migration. First, it highlights the centrality of food to fieldwork in transnational settings. Food and eating highlighted the shared experience of displacement of my informants and me in Lisbon: beyond helping me find and meet the Guineans with whom I worked, they provided a window into both feeling and making sense from a distance of the pain of war.

Second, the experiences of food and eating reveal the complex processes of identity-making for migrants: how various identities and degrees of belonging are created, maintained, and undermined in the diaspora as migrants struggle to maintain a connection to homeland and make their way in a new locale. In Portugal, different kinds of food and contrasting eating styles marked boundaries and distinctions between homeland (Guinea-Bissau) and host-country (Portugal), Africans and Europeans, and, most importantly, between Muslim and non-Muslim Guineans. For Muslim Guineans, eating foods purchased near the mosque, regulating portions of rice and sauce that are pleasing to God, and refraining from drinking
alcohol and eating pork engaged their desire to distinguish themselves from “Christian” (non-Muslims) Guineans in Lisbon, and to make a place for themselves in the umma, the global community of Muslims. In short, contrasting food categories and eating styles highlighted boundaries between places, identities, and degrees of piety, and simultaneously allowed people to play with these boundaries while making powerful statements about displacement and belonging. The multiple identities that my informants embodied (African, Guinean, Muslim) were sometimes overlapping and at other times conflicting, and were mediated by the experience of food. Through food preferences, patterns of eating, sharing (or not sharing) meals, and food taboos, individuals and groups celebrated and solidified (or denounced and dissolved) identities and affiliations, and negotiated their place in a changing world.

Finally, this article demonstrates the importance of food in migration contexts during times of war and political conflict. The inability to taste food, captured so aptly by the expression “Nothing is sweet in my mouth,” united the Guinean immigrant community as members struggled to reconcile memories and images of a war-torn homeland with an ongoing struggle to belong in Europe. If different foods, eating styles, and taste preferences differentiated immigrant from refugee and Muslim from non-Muslim on a daily basis in Lisbon, the inability to eat and taste food during the War of June 7th provided a unified way of understanding displacement, feeling loss, and creating community in African Lisbon. I have shown here that food and eating in the context of migration are powerful indexes of both identity and emotional states, as well as the overlap and conflict between them.

Notes

1. My 1999 research in Lisbon was funded by Fulbright-Hays, the Social Science Research Council, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s Women’s Studies Department. I am grateful to Bucknell University for funding follow-up research in Lisbon in 2003 and 2011.

2. In 2013, I presented sections of this article at the Society for Applied Anthropology meetings, the American Anthropological Association meetings, and Bucknell University’s Department of Sociology and Anthropology Lunch Colloquium Series. I am indebted to my colleagues for their thoughtful comments on this article, and especially to Carole Counihan for encouraging me (for over a decade) to write this piece. Her thoughtful discussant remarks on our AAA session, “Public Practices, Private Selves: Food, Fieldwork, and Ethics on Five Continents,” improved the article considerably. I also thank Clare Sammells and Ned Searles for their comments on the first draft, as well as the three anonymous reviewers, all of whom helped me reorganize the article and clarify and sharpen the argument. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge Debra Cook-Balducci at Bucknell for expertly formatting the photographs that appear in this article, as well as Rob Sieczkiewicz at Susquehanna University for assisting me with a crucial last minute reference check.

3. Tiesler (1) notes that the total number of Muslims in Portugal is estimated from between 38,000 and 50,000. The largest groups are Fula and Mandinga people from Guinea-Bissau, people of South Asian descent from Mozambique, and smaller groups from Morocco, Senegal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

4. See Gottlieb (95) for a thoughtful discussion regarding the challenges of compensating her Cape Verdean informants in Lisbon.
5. Gasparetti argues that eating *tie bou jenn*, Senegal’s national dish, in Italy transcends ethnic differences and constructs a unified Senegalese national identity in the diaspora.

6. People in Guinea-Bissau often made this same gesture when describing to me the fish “pulled right from the ocean” that one finds in the Bijagos Islands, as contrasted with the fish that one finds in the markets of Bissau, which sits on ice for a period of time before it is sold.

7. In Gambian Mandinkan, society as described by Janson (144), eating from the same bowl is a powerful expression of kinship. Karp (111) described beer drinking for Iteso in Kenya as “a form of covert conflict disguised under the outward sign of sociability.” Like communal eating, beer drinking for Iteso, which involves sipping through individual straws from a common pot, also demands a sense of trust, as a witch might poison the beer at any time.

8. The phrase “he/she just got off the boat” is a reference to the Portuguese navy, which sent rescue boats to evacuate people from Bissau to Cape Verde and Lisbon during the War of June 7th. During my fieldwork in 1999, this phrase became a euphemism for “he/she is a refugee.” It also became a common insult for an immigrant who acted like a refugee.

9. See Stoller (Ch. 1) for Songhay reactions to “bad sauce” and a discussion of the importance of taste in anthropology.

10. Selby (92–95) describes the controversial “pork affair” in Paris. When in 2005 a kindergarten teacher allegedly made her students eat non-*halal* pork products for their snack, Muslim women formed an action group and protested. Unlike the North African immigrants with whom Selby worked in Paris, my Guinean informants’ complaints had not yet resulted in any activism in Lisbon.

11. See Werbner for a similar situation among British Pakistanis in Manchester, England. Muslims believe that they receive divine blessings when they give selflessly through offerings, yet this is “only fully possible through the mediation of the poor, a category that is said not to exist in Manchester” (154). Werbner argues that when ritual practices such as offerings are performed outside of their natural contexts, they must be reinvented: “The taken-for-granted features of rites become an object of conscious reflection, as migrants grapple to resolve emergent dilemmas around hitherto normal, expected or ‘natural’ aspects of the rituals they perform” (154).

**References**


