

CONGOLESE GASTRONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

by Louis-Marie Pandzou



Cultural Mediator and Researcher in Linguistic, Ethnology and Anthropology - Congo

Louis-Marie Pandzou completed an Professional Bachelor of Arts in Cultural and Artistic activities in Arts, Letter and Civilisations at the University of Provence in France. He has worked as Cultural mediator at the Mâ Loango de Diosso Museum in Pointe-Noire, as teacher and lecturer and as Researcher in linguistic, ethnology and anthropology. He has contributed in projects like "Place of communication in the creation of synergism between cultural actors" and Congolese gastronomy and sustainable development".

ABSTRACT

Congo, my Country, is a rich country not only for its subsoil, but also of its diverse and varied cultural heritage. This country has an ethnic multiplicity. It involves a cultural diversity which entails variability or a plurality of its culinary or gastronomical culture. This gastronomical plurality is an undeniable asset as well in touristic opportunities as in employment that it generates. In our communication, we propose to show the relation between gastronomy and sustainable development. For this purpose, our communication will be articulated around the following points: Short outline on Congo; Presentation of the Congolese cultural heritage; Role of women in Congolese cooking; Various dishes of Congo; Gastronomy, generator of employment and touristic opportunities.

SHORT OUTLINE ON CONGO

Geographical, administrative and linguistic situation

Located in the depths of Africa, Congo stretches over a surface of 342,000 km². It has common borders with Cameroon, the Central African Republic in north, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the south, Gabon in the east and the Atlantic Ocean in the west. Its capital is Brazzaville, bathed by the Congo River, the most powerful river in the world after the Amazonia. This river constitutes the natural border between Brazzaville and Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It makes these two capitals the closest capital cities of the world. Congo is divided into twelve (12) regions which are Kouilou, Pointe-Noire (which is also the economic capital of Congo), Niari, Lékoumou, Bouenza, Pool, Brazzaville (which is also the political capital of the country), Plateaux, Cuvette, western Cuvette, Sangha and Likouala. Congo is characterized by an ethnic and linguistic diversity. This country has nearly eighty (80) ethnic groups which can be gathered in eight (08) major ethnic groups, particularly Kongo, Téké, Mbochi (or Mbosi), Echira, Kota, Oubanguians, Sangha and Mekèè. The national languages of Congo are Kituba (much more spoken in the southern Congo) and the Lingala (more spoken in the north). The official language is French, the pedagogic language par excellence and the one used by the Congolese elite.

Congolese gastronomy

Congo is a country which is composed of a variety of characteristics, relating to its geographical, economic and sociocultural reality, different from one point to another one of its national territory, different from its culinary and gastronomic plurality. From the maritime and fish well-stocked coast of Pointe-Noire to the north of the country, while passing by the wet and game well-stocked Mayombe, the vast fertile-soiled territory of "Niboland", the majestic Congo River until the elevated landscape of the Nabemba Mount (in the extreme northern Congo), there are at any place "true cooking workshops" where women are good at the art of developing and creating typical and varied recipes.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONGOLESE COOKING

The Congolese people, be they patrilineal in the north of the country, or matrilineal in the south, is a society in which women play a major role in the family's feeding and nutrition. Even though the above truth can certainly be relativized in some extent because of economic situation, it indeed remains true that the more women a man is wedded to, the more well-fed he is. Cooking is thus the task devoted to women in the Congolese society. They are the queens of stoves, saucepans and plates. They have to be good at cooking and giving therefore culinary satisfaction to their spouses and children, at giving them "true gastronomical pleasures". In this initiatory and preparatory school of married life that is named "tchikumbi", cooking used to be the focal point of it. Amongst other aspects related to the life in wedlock, the young nubile girl learned how to cook. She was confined and trained during a period of four to six months by an experienced woman so as to become a "true housewife", a good woman who can make good dishes.

Today, a woman feels still flattered and honored when it is said about her that she "zebi lamba" (She knows or she is good at the art of cooking). And a woman who cannot cook is at risk of losing her husband or having some rivals (who know better cooking than herself). It is thus to say that women must master the traditional art of cooking. They do not need a calculator for the correct proportioning when they start preparing their recipes of which they are the only ones to hold secrecy. For them, beyond the common technique, they have the tact, the touch, the "feeling"; in short an exceptional sense that enables them to be good at cooking. It is a culinary art which has nothing to do with proportioning or measuring instruments, but which is a set of gestures acquired, practiced and developed by the old ones and that they transmit from generations to generations, to the descendants.

VARIOUS DISHES OF CONGO

IV.1- Feeding in Congo

a) - Components

Feeding in Congo is dependent on the diversification of the auto-subsistence activities such as fishing, individual or collective hunting, collecting caterpillars, breeding, and cultivation of domestic plants. The basic food varies in accordance with regions and ethnic groups. It includes:

- Meat: coming from hunting (game, wild birds...), breeding (bovines, sheep, porcine, goat, poultry), fishing (fish, tortoise, crocodile), collecting (winged insects, caterpillars.).
- Vegetables: beans, spinach, green vegetables, pea, sorrel, manioc leaves, sweet potato, yams...
- Cereals: corn, rice, manioc (manioc as tubers, manioc as flour or "fufu", manioc as paste or "kwanga"), banana, plantain...

b) - Meal schedules and parts

Meal schedules are not regular for many Congolese because of economic constraints. It most often happens that in an average household a consistent meal is taken only once a day, i.e. in the evening.

In the same time, some light meals can be taken from time to time along the day, such as nibbling to some peanuts, eating some banana or some fruit.

IV.2 - Congolese gastronomic recipes:

As said previously, Congolese gastronomic recipes are varied because of ethnic and cultural diversity, and the dishes are also varied according to whether they are related to such or such other cultural landscape. Some recipes are typical or proper to some given ethnic groups. It is hard to know which cultural places they are from, so much they no longer belong to a restricted circle of a given ethnic group in order to become national or international dishes.

If the Romans were fond of "bread and circus games" ("panem and circenses" as it was said by Latin speakers), the Congolese are crazy about exquisite meat and good wine, or delicious beer. At break time while still at work, during week-ends with friends, the Congolese gather around a table in order to taste dishes with local drinks (Ngok, Nzoko...).

1. Those who do not have money enough to afford such drinks, in accordance with their wallet, do not hesitate to buy for themselves a bottle of beer and some roasted meat brochettes.
2. It is for them the ideal opportunity to be divided certain information, to discuss problems related to the community life, to firm up or to strengthen the links of solidarity.
3. It is to say that if Romans said "**In vino veritas**" ("In the wine, there is the truth"), a proverb of my country says "**Mbuka nkungu, mbuka malamau na bindia**". It means that "the atmosphere is more convenient, more prone to dialogue between brothers or friends when they are gathered around some meal or drink.
4. Love of food and drinks is real; so it has turned this catering sector to be a flourishing one. Restaurants and bars are fast-growing all over the country. This trade seems to be easy to be exerted and it does not require initially large amounts of money for the same purpose: a little capital is enough to start a business.
5. The positive incidence in the economic life of the country where finding a job is a very tough enterprise, is that the said sector generates some subsistence employment which helps reducing the unemployment rates. In addition, what must be also promoted is the initiatives taken by some unemployed graduates and some housewives, all of whom are fathers and mothers to their

respective families, who gathered in some sorts of “mutual funds” so as to let the local good-meat lovers as well as the expatriate ones, taste the dishes, and, at the same time, to spare some money for the fulfilment of their family needs.

CONCLUSION

Congo is not only granted touristic sites, but it is endowed with a delicious cookery for the pleasure of the Congolese public and foreign tourists. The heritage sites, as well as the various meals of the Congolese cooking, deserve to be known all over the world, and they all have in possession that nice country which is fully blessed to be a true touristic destination.

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IGCAT’s mission is to empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

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