Civilising through food

French fantasies about gastronomy and Muslim diet

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In January 2022, Fabien Roussel – a leader of the French Communist Party – urged the French public not to be ashamed of eating meat, drinking fine wine and eating good cheese because 'it's French gastronomy'.[1] The remark was made following a polemic around the introduction of a meat-free menu in school canteens during the pandemic.[2] There is nothing surprising about this attachment to a fetishised version of French gastronomy.[3] This discourse has been audible for several years across the political spectrum from the far Right to the institutional Left and in what is now called the New Right in France, which has recomposed itself through an ethnicisation of French identity, now constructed mainly as Christian, European, secular and anti-Muslim. Food tropes and a focus on food as an identity and racial marker are clearly visible in the media production of far-Right YouTubers and identity foodistas whose cooking blogs are suffused with colonial sentiments: 'It's not a steak that votes Green or La France Insoumise, it's a steak that votes Eternal France. If we send it to Indochina, it wins'.[4] All this is part of a desire to counter a so-called bourgeois bohemian culture in a language shot through with nostalgia and colonial racial melancholy. In addition, this discourse takes on a gendered logic in its stigmatisation of the eating habits of Muslims, with practices such as fasting during Ramadan or abstaining from eating pork or non-halal meat considered feminine ways of relating to food. We thus have a discourse which racialises through food in terms of its composition (especially in respect of animal and dairy products), preparation (in particular its method of cutting and cooking) and its ingestion and assimilation.

This poses philosophical and phenomenological questions about what it feels like to see those who do not belong to the community in the act of eating. Contemporary discourses, which are often premised on the idea that Islam is a foreign religion, are rooted in the colonial history of France and the colonisation of North Africa especially from the nineteenth century. In this article, I examine these sedimented layers to offer an archaeology of a white French gaze that is fixated on the mouths of Muslims in a manner that is deeply sexualised and that has its own economic and political rationality, never ceasing to produce deadly racialising effects. This gaze is constituted by fantasies of penetrating Muslim bodies to consume their difference, abuse their exceptionality and eventually either assimilate them into one's own corporeality/identity or reject them as waste. I do not address the question of the religious and anthropological status of the inedible in Islam[5] or analyse the historical or religious justification of food prohibitions. Rather, I offer a philosophical reflection on the political meaning of watching others eat and producing a discourse on this eating that is rooted in the materiality of social relations: in such a perspective, it is Islam that is considered inedible. I will demonstrate the 'racial indigestion' of Muslim populations in the French context.[6] Racial indigestion is understood here in a double sense: first, as the racialisation produced through the stomach, the palate and the sense of taste; and second, as the inassimilability and unmanageability of Muslims in the nation and in the space of gastronomy as it is constituted in the colonial nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Lauren Janes has shown, '[t]he anxiety about eating the food of others – of incorporating aspects of the colonized into one's body – stemmed, at least in some part, from the understanding of diet as a key marker of racial difference'.[7] This makes it possible to account for a disgust that is noted in

texts by observers, travellers and the nascent profession of food critics in the colonial period who construct the racial inedibility of Islam.

Embedded in this symbolic aspect of cultural depreciation is the economic and political profitability of gastronomic and/or dietetic racism. Civilisational discourses that focus centrally on food and the anxiety of ingestion are part of a racial capitalism premised on a denial of the politics of reproduction and subsistence in an international commodity market and an international division of labour that has tracked a global colour line since colonisation and slavery in overseas territories. This article begins with an analysis of the contemporary symptoms of racial indigestion vis-à-vis Muslims and concludes with a colonial archaeology of this phenomenon.

Masculinity, animal slaughter and the abstraction of violence in industrial food processing

The ideological focus on meat and dairy products (notably with an affective and semiotic overinvestment in pork) to signify an attachment to republican civility is particularly pronounced in France in the European context.[8] See *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 62–63. In contrast, in Germany, part of the far Right defends veganism.[9] Nonetheless, a masculinist attachment to meat and a concomitant association of culinary exoticism with effeminacy and 'sexual inversion' or 'perversion' seems to be fairly pervasive in Europe. This contemporary anti-Muslim discourse resonates with colonial representations. In the colonial era, Muslim men (typically ethnicised as Arabs) were constructed in the western imagination as sodomites imagined to feed on sperm and indulge in the pleasures of hashish and opium.[10] Muslim women were imagined as 'fricatrices' or rubbing addicts, practicing lesbianism as compensation for their lack of access to men;[11] sapphic consolation would also be expressed by the fact that these women are often represented as being in harems, and then able only to indulge in sex and gustatory enjoyment.[12] This demonstrates how racial difference is articulated in a fantasy of sexual inversion. The appetite for orality as a sexual practice is itself represented as a passive, feminine and oriental practice. Today these fantasies are expressed through a deployment of a homophobic masculinity that seeks to recuperate a martiality supposedly lost due to the feminist and queer ideologies which invaded France and engendered overly tolerant attitudes towards migrants, the putative invasion of Muslims and their 'great replacement' of the white population.[13]

In northern European societies, the sexualisation of food orality and the gendered moralisation of food habits focuses specifically on meat. This sexual politics of meat is based on a paradox.[14] First, the act of devouring meat is valued as an act of power and domination, a taming of the beast. In addition, the process of preparing meat is premised on a heterosexual order of the kitchen, a sexual division of labour in the preparation of food whereby the collective social cooking of meat is considered a male duty – recycling clichés about the mastery of fire and technique by men – while women, because they supposedly use their hands alone, are considered technologically under-equipped in culinary practices. Second, this paradox of the sexual politics of meat rests on a process of abstraction, of negation of living animality that is nonetheless put to death, cut up and prepared as edible matter. The idea of a modern, techno-industrial masculinity is attested to by converting the executed animal into an 'absent referent' – a process of abstraction necessary for the edibility of the animal, for its ingestion to defuse the triggers of disgust, in particular the conscious representation of having to ingest another bloody living being. [15] The disgust over slaughtering is indeed widely shared. These days, the death of animals, as Noélie Vialles notes in her survey of slaughterhouses, is euphemised. We do not kill: 'we slaughter … Slaughterhouses are also located outside cities, on the outskirts. In the organization of the work, a kind of dilution of responsibility is maintained which is based on a double requirement: all animals must be obligatorily desensitized before being bled. In France, currently, this desensitization is carried out by perforating the cranial box with a slaughter gun'.[16] Eating meat therefore entails quite considerable symbolic work to reconstruct the lethal act.

As far as Muslims are concerned, it is taken for granted that they subscribe to this negation/abstraction of lethal labour at the heart of the killing of meat.[17] In the banlieues – where (post-)migratory neighbourhoods are located and which are wrongly thought to be predominantly Muslim – the lethal act in ritual slaughter (above all the practice of butchering in the streets) is considered

too visible. Even the far Right in its anti-Islam rhetoric occasionally deploys the bourgeois ethos of the necessary abstraction of the lethal act in animal meat processing for it to be considered modern. What is reproached in Muslims then is their non-observance of this abstraction of blood and animality. They are considered unable to enter into food modernity, particularly where ritual slaughter according to the rules of halal are concerned: cutting an animal's throat and letting it bleed completely without stunning it is regularly described as a shameful disregard for animal welfare. Muslims are accused by the far Right, but also by the traditional Right and parts of the Left, to be incapable of this modernity which is performed through a defence of animal welfare considered solely from the angle of the minimisation of the suffering of the animal during its industrial slaughter. In fact, the noisy valorisation of both the imaginary evacuation of violent death and the devouring of bloody cooked or even raw meat as well as the consumption of dairy products and wine, is part of a fantasy of complete control in the formation of the perceived Self: we seek to control the conditions of its public appearance during shared or public meals. Roussel made no secret of this as he went to visit apprentice butchers on a slaughtering site, to reconnect with a fantasy of a popular Left whose virility is indexed by the meat that we chop and eat, underscored by the amnesic injunction to forget the ecological disaster of meat production. These discourses and communicative practices are thus part of the rituals of a patriarchal and ecocidal mandate.

Similarly, practices of food abstention are understood as existential threats to others. Not drinking alcohol, and even more, not eating during the month of Ramadan are considered a cultural and ideological aberration. Hence the fact that a good Muslim is one who disavows Islam by drinking alcohol and eating pork.[18] In contrast, Muslims who observe dietary restrictions prevent others from enjoying their food. They are the

opposite of the figure of *le bon vivant* (good living). Their abstemiousness effectively imposes their rules on everyone, disrupting the implicit rule of the universality of meals which presupposes, for instance, not taking religious beliefs into account in the planning of children's meals or collective catering arrangements in private or public settings. Meals based on 'republican' appetisers such as *saucisson* and *pinard* (sausages and wine) have become a way of excluding through food people considered to be *allophage*, that is to say whose diet is based on the fact of abstaining from prohibited foods for personal, philosophical or religious reasons, such as Muslims, but also Jews, vegetarians, vegans and teetotallers.

It is, then, worth adding to the analysis of patriarchy in food practices what Afro-veganism has clearly shown: the presence of a racial policy of meat, alcohol and dairy products that is attested to by the obsession with the food that Muslims do and do not eat.[19] By racialisation, we mean the description in moral and political terms of a Muslim population's food habits as intrinsically other and unable to comply both with the universality of Republican commensality and with the ethnic singularity of the national meal. Dietic discourse, and in particular xenophobic and Islamophobic assertions about 'good food', have thus been central to the recomposition of the far Right.

Studying food practices and their logics of racialisation makes it possible to understand the phenomenology of race in a different way by moving its display scenes beyond an 'epidermal ontology of race', often concerned only with the symbolic and material investments of the surface of bodies, in particular the skin.[20] Instead it allows us to look at the banal modalities by which the nation and its ethnicised and racialised identity are represented through metabolic devices internal to the body. But this metabolic materiality is also the object of denial. The nation's account of what it eats is premised on the denial of not only social reproduction and the sexual division of labour but also of the extractive and polluting methods through which food is produced. One pretends to see in Muslim eating an existential identity threat even as there is a very real threat to the means of subsistence and access to drinking water and edible, local food given the realities of climate change and the burning of fossil fuels in the Anthropocene. The ethnicisation of Land is also a way of denying the material reality of ecological devastation and energy depletion.[21] The indexing of the right to feed on the land to national attachment and the injunction to disavow one's religion is actually, and paradoxically, a way of denying one's earthly condition, because French national cuisine – the ethnicisation of French gastronomy inscribed in a policy of civility – is also a marketing emblem in the global techno-industrial circuits of large-scale food production.[22] To be exported, French cuisine must be ethnicised. Foreigners must be able to taste the 'real' French meal, rid of the influence of postcolonial cuisines but also of the migrant labour that produces it. Who will see, for example, who produces the strawberries from the fields that are the greenhouses of southern Europe?[23] North African women are asked to leave their children behind to come and work in precarious migratory conditions, to exhaust the land so that Europe has strawberries all year round at low prices. Their status as women identified as Muslim is seen as an advantage in the regulation of labour since it is the guarantee that they will return to their country of origin and to their duty as good Muslim mothers once their seasonal contract is over.[24] The ideological depreciation of Muslims' mouths in European countries is the counterpart of the functioning of racial capitalism, which consists in creating different racialised subjects endowed with differential values, whose hands and legs are exploitable and disposable in labour-intensive agricultural fields and fast food delivery. The question of who can eat with the national 'us' is therefore inseparable from the denial of the social reproduction of food workers, and the invitation to eat at the same table as this national 'us' is often accompanied by an injunction to renounce being Muslim in order to be able to have the right to food.[25]

The pig, the Muslim and the Jew: how to convert to food 'normalcy'

In 2015, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy claimed that eating pork was a value of the Republic that needed to be taught in French schools. Not eating pork is apparently to withdraw from the universal claim of the Republic emblematised in sharing the 'pig', which is elevated as a totem, a universal equivalent of all meals.[26] The reproduction of the nation requires an assimilation, understood literally as a common eating which is also an

identical eating, where the ingredients and preparation of food follow the same phagic scenario. It is worth noting that the remark was made in response to the demand for substitutions in school canteen menus. The idea that one could eat something else instead of meat, and in particular pork, was inconceivable. In the contemporary symbolic economy of food, substitutes become the subject of disproportionate emotional and regnal investment enabling an expulsion of Muslims from the bounds of acceptability, civility and nation. Outrage at gastronomic substitution expresses deeper anxieties harboured by the far Right and the new Right in France about the 'Great Replacement' of White Christian Europeans by Muslims. The deprivation of meat, and more specifically pork, is seen as a form of de-masculinisation associated with Muslims and Jews. The attachment to the pig in the reproduction of the nation is a fundamental factor in understanding this disqualification of Muslims. To refuse to eat pork would be to refuse to share: because flesh is first and foremost what we are made of and eating it involves resolving the question of the distinction between the same and the other. Flesh in the second place implies the sharing of remains: it brings into play cooperation and altruism and therefore raises fundamental questions for the social order. 'To eat meat, unlike many other types of food, you have to share. And the sharing of meat is a fundamental, if not founding, act of social life'.[27] We should add that sharing pig meat entails also sharing the responsibility for its killing, recycling it symbolically and transforming it into a social bond. What we would thus reproach Muslims for is a commensal secessionism and a refusal to be part of the social bond. In this sense, it is articulated with anti-Judaism.

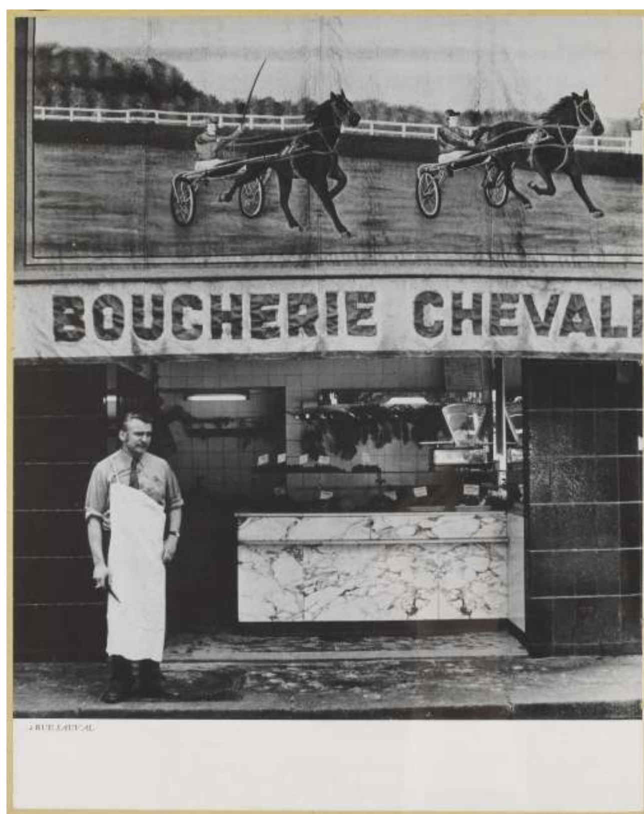
Pork has a fundamental place in the racial imagination because it has already played a major role in French and southern European anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.[28] Without conflating historical shifts and geocultural contexts too abruptly, we can nevertheless register this knot between anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism in the culinary field at the time of the so-called Spanish Reconquest which sought to inspect what went into mouths to identify the culinary and confessional disloyalty of lay-Jews and Moriscos: eating couscous and cooking with olive oil (rather than pork fat) opened oneself to the suspicion of crypto-Judaism or crypto-Islam. The purchase of certain ingredients such as eggplants and chickpeas or spices such as coriander and saffron, or the aroma of a dish cooked in olive oil, were enough to alert neighbours to possible heresy. This resonance between anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism allows us to see how disgust vis-à-vis Muslim and Jewish foods in particular has been permanently embedded in an imagination that makes these cuisines not only foreign but potentially dangerous because of their supposed power of identity conversion. Culinary anxiety around Jewish food is still palpable in contemporary antisemitism in Western societies to the extent that the Jewish diet is reduced to the 'abstinence of pork' as it is with Muslims.

Likewise, the proximity between 'Jewish food' and 'Muslim food' triggered a common repulsion from colonial travellers to North Africa in the nineteenth century. When François Bournand, a journalist and historian, described a feast in Tunisia in the late nineteenth century, he did so in terms that identified spicy cuisine as being both Muslim and Jewish, racialising what he saw as a dirty culinary otherness and demonstrating how antisemitism and Islamophobia were articulated through culinary xenophobia.

> The spicy dishes and the lack of cleanliness of the culinary preparations among the natives have always, despite the habit [i.e. his familiarity with life in Tunisia], inspired an invincible repugnance in me, which has never allowed me to eat much either among the Muslims or among the Israelites.[29]

There is indeed a form of antisemitism in contemporary Islamophobia in the sense that the same rhetorical repertoires of tracking down the enemy within are reactivated to try to ascertain who is Muslim from names and culinary practices at a time when Muslims are no longer migrants. Such measures are necessitated by the conundrum of needing to distinguish what has been partly assimilated – a conundrum that is addressed by identifying and differentiating the dietary processes that bear the residual mark of allophagy, of a different 'ethnic' communal eating, given that, as food and migration studies have shown, community food is often what remains of a culture of origin long after migration, conversion or assimilation.[30] Spurred by such intuitions, the far-Right Mayor of Béziers from the Rassemblement National party sought to identify Muslim children through their last names and dietary prescriptions registered in school canteens. The notion that names announce reli-

gious affiliation and diet drove Eric Zemmour, a far Right leader and current presidential candidate to call for a banning of names that do not sound Republican and French (read: African and Muslim-sounding names). At stake in this relationship between names and eating is nothing less than a disciplining of republican orality. We can now ask ourselves, how is it possible to be a Muslim in France in terms of food? Or in Montesquieu's formulation in the Persian letters, how can one wish to be a Muslim, that is to say not drink alcohol and, even worse, not drink wine or eat pork in a country devoted to good living and renowned for its sausages and wines?



Food disgust and the ambivalence of Republican appetite

What do we do when we worry about what Muslims eat? If food is an object of anxiety it is because eating is a process of incorporation, erasing the boundary between the world and our bodily interiority. It occurs through ingestion and metabolisation, a process that promises a regeneration of the body or threatens its disintegration depending on the quality of the food and its ability to correspond to our internal arrangement. The act of incorporation thus implicates issues that are both vital and symbolic, accounting for the deep anxieties associated with it. The life and health of the eater are at stake every time the decision to incorporate is made. As Claude Fischler puts it, borrowing a term from Kleinian psychoanalysis, the body fears 'incorporation of the bad object'. 'The incorporated object can contaminate it, transform it from within, possess it, and therefore dispossess it of itself'.[31]

Ironically, the anxiety about one's identity in discourses of civilisational decline in food habits relies on what was usually described as a primitive or primal fear. It recalls the belief reported by J. Frazer according to which 'the savage commonly believes that by eating the flesh of an animal or man, he acquires the qualities – not only the physical but even the moral and intellectual qualities – which were characteristic of that animal or that man'.[32] In fact it is almost always food of animal origin that arouses disgust, the affect of which seems to emanate from a shared carnal condition. Moreover, our relationship to animal flesh constantly references sexuality. Fantasies of the incorporation of the bad object also raise fears of desexualisation, that is to say the loss of markers of sexual difference, so that eating food from another culture that is considered not to conform to norms of gender difference would be to lose one's civilisational rank, gender and race.[33] At the level of the unconscious, there is a profound continuity between the table and the bed, between edible and desirable flesh. Lévi Strauss stressed the 'very profound analogy which people throughout the world seem to find between copulating and eating. In Yoruba, "to eat" and "to marry" are expressed by a single verb the general sense of which is "to win, to acquire", usage which has its French parallel where the verb "consommer" applies both to marriage and to meals.'[34] From this perspective, cannibalism, which consists of eating individuals of one's own human flesh, would be the hyperbolic form of sexual union; hence the prohibition on eating individuals of one's own family and sex.

By the same token, the taboo of culinary exogamy may carry the risk of organic and spiritual corruption and loss of identity, unless the class marker of an exotic cook or kitchen maid unlocks the taboo of 'Muslim' inedibility. Culinary miscegenation might revive nostalgia for a colonial bourgeois way of life: to have a 'dada' for instance (kitchen maid in Morocco) preparing briou-

ats, chicken pastilla or eggplant zaalouk can be a useful marker of social distinction among wealthy French elites. Similarly, the heterosexual order is also expressed by positions in the order of what is edible. 'The equivalence most familiar to us and undoubtedly also the most widespread in the world', says Lévi Strauss, 'poses the male as eater and the female as eaten'.[35] These structuralist pronouncements are problematic if we take them as normative assertions, but if they describe the logic of a gendered and racialised unconscious, they seem to correspond to familiar ways of naming foodways and our relation to food.[36] Nonetheless, this approach tends to stick to the level of description of the production of sexual difference without considering that the material historicity of the myth around this difference might offer a way to criticise the difference in itself, structured as it is around binaries such as cooked/raw, civilised/savage, masculine/feminine and anchored as it is in a social stratification in which the 'eaten' are in reality the ones who prepare, clean, cook and serve the food. The 'eaten' refers then to a subordinated group that is disadvantaged in the division of labour and capital.[37]

This is why we must also take into account other anthropologies and cosmogonic explanations that do not necessarily ratify sexual difference inscribed in a food order, but which on the contrary highlight food tropes that do not gender the social order, allowing us to see how the production of sexual difference through diet and the food order is also historical, contingent and rooted in social antagonisms. I would rather subscribe to the view of Mary Douglas, for whom the symbolic aspect of food is the expression of social relations. Then food or commensal prohibition are seen also as a social prophylaxis, a way of organising power and social relations by forming a community 'against': 'dirt offends against order'.[38] By eliminating it, gestures of purification are positive gestures of prophylaxis, which give unity and meaning to the experience and this gesture of purification is carried by the belief that 'it is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female' that one can reconstitute a sense of self immune to defilement.[39]

In this critical perspective where the symbolic is rooted in the materiality of power distribution in a given society, how can we explain what we do when we worry about what Muslims eat? Two things are striking. First, by expressing this anxiety, we worry about the nourishment of our food. Muslims eat but are also eaten symbolically. This is a position of inferiority from which we clearly want exemption. We refuse to eat with Muslims but also, occasionally, like them since they are a subordinated group endowed with the power of contamination. In 2012, far Right leader Marine Le Pen insinuated that all Parisian butchers were now halal and that people ate their products without knowing it. At work here is the idea that we ingest 'Muslim', and in doing so are ourselves converted and denationalised. For Muslim women, it is often their food hygiene and in particular the sugar that they incorporate that is often called into question, the fat produced by sugar threatening sexual dimorphism and the eroticisation of dominated bodies. Such representations can also lead to denial of care as evidenced by the persistent trope of the Fatma in the medical clinic, which we can observe for example through the blog of a doctor who fears the arrival in her office of the 50-year-old Arab woman, fat and diabetic, asking for clinical attention.[40] In these examples, the eater not only worries about the food that they incorporate but also about how the absorption of a food incorporates the eater into a culinary system and therefore into the group who practices it, unless they are explicitly excluded: 'The classifications, practices and representations that characterize a cuisine incorporate the individual into the group, situate the whole in relation to the universe and incorporate it in turn: they therefore have a fundamentally religious dimension in the etymological sense of the term, in the sense of re-ligare, to link.'[41]

Second, attention to what Muslims eat is also the vector and the product of the sexualisation of Muslim bodies, which are repelled and desired both by their putatively disordered use of phagic and sexual orality but also by their supposedly anti-erotic behaviour and their lack of taste in food (as apparently evidenced by their favoured halal junk food of kebabs). Thus, Muslims are also those who do not have or no longer have the ability to savour pleasure, to taste.[42] It should be noted that theoretically in the material act of eating, there is a prior desexualisation which makes animal meat suitable for consumption. We often eat young or castrated animals, that is to say animals excluded from reproductive activity on the principle that the flesh of an uncastrated animal tastes less good. Animal flesh is often either destined for reproduct-

ive or food purposes but not both at the same time. So we only consume 'desexualised' flesh, flesh whose use and nature is exclusively food.[43] Eating desexualised animals, then, is to desexualise the phagic act. But here, on the contrary, it would seem that the assimilation of Muslims, their consumption, digestion, and symbolic assimilation into the national republican order is subject to their prior sexualisation, possible eroticisation and waste transformation.[44]

Disgust is then related to eroticisation since it is strongly linked to the fact that it is the mouth which incorporates, tastes and mixes with itself, through sensorial acts such as chewing and smelling. This orality is profoundly sexual, or at least erotic in its symbolic and material dimension. It is not only a question of analogy with the fantasy of penetration, where the question of who has the right to penetrate – to cross the threshold of the body – is central, but rather of a mixed representation between race, gender and class insofar as the desire for devouring is a desire for the material appropriation of subordinated bodies.[45] It is symptomatic of this correlation between the eroticisation of otherness and disgust at the presence of Muslims on 'national' territory that Nadine Morano – a French politician – evoked a nostalgia for white gastronomy in her neighbourhood, where one could supposedly no longer find ham, while also affirming that she loved couscous and brik with egg. Disgust is not always expressed clearly in an attitude of rejection and is also palpable in practices of erotic predation. It participates in an affective economy that combines forms of ingestion, assimilation, devouring, appropriation. This is precisely the sense in which I suggest reading contemporary instances of 'republican' disgust towards Muslim diets as a symptom of a colonial remainder.

A colonial politics of digestion: gastric fatigue, civilisation and inedible Islam

We find the concern about food in Muslim countries in colonial medicine, which sought to understand both what was good to eat in the colonies and what ought to be 'rationalised'. Thus, Georges Treille's *Principes d'Hygiene Coloniale*, published in 1899, aims to 'outline the general rules which seem to me the most appropriate to facilitate their establishment for Europeans in hot countries', noting that 'the fundamental principle which Europeans in hot countries must observe is to spare all fatigue in the stomach'.[46] Digestibility, thought to be a function more of the method of preparation and cooking than of the foodstuffs themselves, is considered to be the priority: 'food must pass through without gastric fatigue … supplying the stomach with food that is both easily digestible and restorative'.[47] Gastric sensitivity is often racialised in this archive, which seeks to acclimatise European stomachs to the food available in 'hot' countries. We find this same concern at the beginning of the twentieth century in the first specialised gastronomic journals which are interested in the 'ethnic' or even racial conditions of digestion, not to prevent digestive diseases but to keep at bay the experience of bad taste. Thus, F. Barthelemy, instructor at the Cordon Bleu School and for a time editor in chief of *Le Cordon Bleu*, wrote about Morocco after the Treaty of Fez in 1912 and its 'repugnant foodways'. In his description of couscous, he describes the preserved butter that flavours Moroccan dishes as very often 'rancid'. Rottenness and evidence of decay is a central elicitor of disgust, especially when connected to food:

> We hope that French civilisation will bring to the Mo-

> roccans not only her benefits from economic and social point of view, but also from the culinary and alimentary points of view and that the modest couscous can soon be, transformed by the French culinary art, present on the table of our gourmets.[48]

Seen in this historical perspective, we can see how a dish like couscous occupies a special place in the racialisation of foodways since it was seen as Muslim and Arab for a time and, after decolonisation, as French because it was a favourite dish of the *pieds-noirs* – French settlers in North Africa, many of whom chose to depart for France alongside a Maghreb Jewish population who also left after Algeria gained its independence.[49] Considered a 'Muslim' dish to mark racial difference in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, couscous is today detached from its putative Muslimness. What is striking in the historical mutation of couscous representation is that racial difference is represented as not only cultural – as a difference of cuisine and foodways – but also as biological, with racial/religious belonging marked by different stomachs, metabolisms and palates.

Colonial observers were also disgusted by the fact of eating with the hands, which was seen as a sign of intellectual and civilisational backwardness. A 1905 article by the gastronomic critic Myrh in *Le Cordon Bleu* describes couscous as the dish of the Arabs, eaten with the hands in the same dish and on the floor (or almost), all elements that marked the ontological distance between the French and the Arabs. Difference thus passes through both the utensil and table manners. The civilisational imperative of eating at a table, distant from the floor, reflects the normative ideal contained in the distanciation between the hand and the mouth, the body and the floor. These distances from bodily markers partake in a broader narrative of civilisation and food progress. Erasmus's *On Civility in Children* had prepared the ground. Contrasting human habits to those of animals, he regarded eating with the fork, the maintenance of distance between the body and the ground and from food, and the consumption of food from a seated position at a table as marks of humanisation, access to adulthood and above all to civilisation. But how to elevate and civilise a Muslim population through food? Along with the incitation to eat 'properly' with forks, in separate dishes and at a high table, sitting on a proper chair, was the idea that food itself should be civilised. As Lauren Janes writes, the 1930s culinary critic Gauducheau asserted that 'eating more bread, meat, dairy, and wine would help French colonial subjects evolve to become more like Frenchmen.'[50] Indeed as Roland Barthes explains, abstaining from wine is not without consequences in France:

> The universality principle fully applies here, inasmuch as society calls anyone who does not believe in wine by *names* such as sick, disabled or depraved: it does not *comprehend* him (in both senses, intellectual and spatial, of the word). Conversely, an award of good integration is given to whoever is a practising wine-drinker: knowing how to drink is a national technique which serves to qualify the Frenchman, to demonstrate at once his performance, his control and his sociability. Wine gives thus a foundation for a collective morality, within which everything is redeemed: true, excesses, misfortunes and crimes are possible with wine, but never viciousness, treachery or baseness...[51]

Similarly, the relationship between the symbolisation of wine and the denial of its imperial capitalist production in 'Muslim' land in Algeria, raises the question of the obsessive reference to the mouths of Muslims which obscures the hands that cultivate their land and the depletion of that land by an aberrant monoculture:

> ... the mythology of wine can in fact help us to understand the usual ambiguity of our daily life. For it is true that wine is a good and fine substance, but it is no less true that its production is deeply involved in French capitalism, whether it is that of the private distillers or that of the big settlers in Algeria who impose on the Muslims, on the very land of which they have been dispossessed, a crop of which they have no need, while they lack even bread.[52]

The Islamisation of the dietary habits and foods of Arabs has not always been at the heart of colonial practices. On the contrary, agricultural policies during the colonial period attempted to de-Islamise representations of what came from Algeria to emphasise its assimilation into the French nation. For this it was necessary to represent it as a wine power. Thus in 1931 during the colonial exhibition in Paris, the Algerian pavilion presented a replica of the Sidi-Abderrahmane Mosque in Algiers, but it was the only reference to Muslim culture and Islam. Instead, Algeria was portrayed as a kingdom of wine and biblical food such as olives and dates in an exoticisation of the desert and 'wild' nature, but also as a cultivated, prolific, bucolic paradise of vineyards.

Night view of the Algerian Pavilion at the International Colonial Exhibition, Vincennes, 1931

As Janes explains, thanks to colonial development, Algeria had become a 'huge vineyard', with the pavilion considered a 'triumph of Bacchus' as a result of the considerable efforts of chambers of commerce and the Confederation of Wine Makers. There is a significant material dimension to the representations of food produced in 'Islamic' lands. Algeria became a significant locus of wine production following the phylloxera crisis of 1870 in France which ravaged metropolitan vineyards. This required breaking with the notion of 'terroir' – the idea that the taste of wine is a function of a unique combination of factors including soil, climate, topography and the 'soul' of the wine producer, which could not be reproduced elsewhere. The pavilion insisted on the possibility of the export and recomposition of terroir in a land as hostile and contradictory, on account of its Muslimness, as Algeria by underscoring the French character of Algeria and the familiarity of its soil and products. In contrast, the other North African pavilions were given over to an exoticisation of difference with their emphasis on souks, spices and snake charmers. The Moroccan restaurant in particular sought maximum authenticity with its Moroccan chef and alcohol-free menu.[53]

In our own time, 'foreign' food when eaten or cooked by groups external to this culture, becomes a gastronomic delight, a socially valued element on a gustatory journey, whereas when cooked by migrant minorities or people with a migratory past, is considered poor, low quality and cheap. Hence the injunction to minoritised groups to eat such food at home and to consume the 'national' food of the host country in public. This process of ethnicising the food of others, disqualifying others as competent to cook their own cuisine, or conversely the exotic idea of authenticity achieved through a chef belonging to the relevant 'culture', combined with the injunction to eat national food, is the expression in France of the coloniality of diet normativity in public space, which reproduces whiteness through food, excludes Islam from the regime of the edible and 'Muslims' from the regime of gastronomic desirability.[54]

Is it possible to decolonise food? Muslims, real or alleged, are not passive objects of racial discourses on food. It is important to note that it is precisely when they resist gastronomic disciplining that they are reduced to their religion through the medium of their food habits. Yet food is also a terrain of solidarity and insurgence. There is no shortage of examples to illustrate this. Through their conviviality around food in the so-called 'Jungle of Calais', where restaurants run by refugees offered spaces of survival and friendship, migrants reconstituted sociality in a place demonised and attacked by their opponents.[55] On the border with Italy, farmer and pro-migrant activist Cédric Herrou defies French authorities to assist migrants seeking to enter the country who – excluded from the labour market – work on his organic farm under the aegis of the international solidarity movement

Emmaus.[56] The Front de Mères (the Mothers' Front), a parents' union which fights against discrimination and violence suffered by children in working-class neighbourhoods, demands healthy food in school canteens.[57] Marginalised communities thus build their own commons by way of culinary disobedience and an eroticisation of food that resists gastronomic domination, thereby rediscovering a forbidden or devalued commensality and a popular gastronomic creativity, especially among recent migrants who are often prevented from eating at all. These ways of being, cooking and eating resist the reactionary performativity of public authorities who claim that there is a republican way of eating, but also struggle against food deprivation and towards a vision of food justice that entails an ecologically sensitive access to nutritious food for all.

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Notes

1. Fabien Roussel, 'Un bon vin, une bonne viande, un bon fromage, c'est la gastronomie française', *Franceinfo*, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x87beam. The following article was first presented as a lecture at the International Consortium of Critical Theory, University of California, Berkeley, where it benefited from feedback from Natalia Brizuela, Samira Esmeir, Lucie Mercier, Stefania Pandolfo, and Leti Volpp. It was also discussed as a work in progress at the seminar 'Food and Race: A Transatlantic Conversation', that I co-organised with Mathilde Cohen at the Institute of French Studies, New York University, where I had stimulating feedback from Sylvie Durmelat, Julie Kleinman, Tao Leigh, Ann Morning, Krishnendu Ray, Frédéric Viguier and Lionel Zevounou. I am also thankful to Lewis Gordon and Elena Comay del Junco, at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut, where I wrote the first version of this article as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar.
2. 'Menu sans viande dans les cantines scolaires: la polémique en cinq actes', *Franceinfo*, 22 February 2021, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/eelv/menu-sans-viande-dans-les-cantines-scolaires-la-polemique-entre-le-gouvernement-et-le-maire-de-lyon-en-quatre-actes_4306571.html.
3. Mathilde Cohen, 'The Whiteness of French Food: Law, Race, and Eating Culture in France', *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 39:2 (2021), 26–52.
4. 'Le steak qui vote France éternelle', https://www.tiktok.com/@leconservateur.tv/video/7217097126055103750. Both the Greens and La France Insoumise are leftwing political parties.
5. Mohamed Benkheira, *Islâm et interdits alimentaires – Juguler l'animalité* (Paris : PUF, 2000).
6. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
7. Lauren Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris: The Taste of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
8. As Roland Barthes notes in his essay 'Steak and Chips' the steak tartare conveys the mythology of a masculine primacy in sexual reproduction proper both to Frenchness and its universal claim to its own food: 'There are to be found, in this preparation, all the germinating states of matter: the blood mash and the glair of eggs, a whole harmony of soft and life-giving substances, a sort of meaningful compendium of the images of pre-parturition.'
9. Bernhard Forchtner and Ana Tominc, 'Kalashnikov and Cooking-spoon: Neo-Nazism, Veganism and a Lifestyle Cooking Show on YouTube', *Food, Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 20:3 (July 2017), 415–441.
10. Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007); Todd Shepard, *Sex, France, and Arab Men, 1962–1979* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018).
11. Jocelyne Dakhlia, 'Harem: ce que les femmes, recluses, font entre elles', *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire 26* (2007), 61–88.
12. Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 236–237.
13. Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar, 'Thinking Europe's "Muslim Question": On Trojan Horses and the Problematization of Muslims', *Critical Research on Religion* 10:2 (2022), 200–220; Sara R. Farris, 'From the Jewish Question to the Muslim Question: Republican Rigorism, Culturalist Differentialism and Antinom-

ies of Enforced Emancipation', *Constellations* 21:2 (2014), 296–307.
14. Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990).
15. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 66.
16. Noëlie Vialles, *Animal to Edible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
17. Nilüfer Göle, *The Daily Lives of Muslims: Islam and Public Confrontation in Contemporary Europe* (London: Zed Books, 2017), 215–242.
18. In the summer of 2009, Minister of the Interior Brice Hortefeux, while posing for a photograph with an Arab grassroots activist said 'It's ok when there is only one, it is when they are many that it becomes a problem.' In the amused audience, a woman yelled 'He's Catholic, he eats pork and drink alcohol', to which the minister replied 'Oh but this is not right, it does not correspond to the prototype'. 'Ce que Brice Hortefeux a vraiment dit', *Le Monde*, 11 September 2009, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2009/09/11/qu-a-vraiment-dit-brice-hortefeux_1238863_823448.html.
19. Afro or Black veganism argues that in a white supremacist political and cultural system, Black beings in slaveholding America were dehumanised just as animals were reduced to the rank of body-labour, made killable, edible and used as an instrument of terror against Blacks to control and hunt them down. During segregation, both people of colour and pets were prohibited from entering restaurants run by whites. Rather than an identity, Black veganism is an intellectual and philosophical posture which seeks to understand the human/animal dualism as a racial dualism which refers both to the racialisation of animals and the animalisation (which is in fact the dehumanisation) of humans. Therefore the process of animalisation at the heart of racialisation must be investigated in critical studies of race, especially when considering food; and the notion of humanity itself must be understood in its historical context as an oppressive category. See Tier-Autonomie, 'An interview with Syl Ko', *Jahrgang* 6:1 (2019), 1–22; A. Breeze Harper, ed., *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* (Brooklyn: Lantern Publishing and Media, 2020). The dynamics of racialisation have largely been studied in Anglophone literature. See Hanna Garth and Ashanté M. Reese, eds., *Black Food Matters: Racial Justice in the Wake of Food Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020); Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Rachel Slocum, 'Race in the Study of Food', *Progress in Human Geography* 35:3 (2011), 303–327. In general in France, food has not been considered much in critical race and gender studies despite an important article on the question: see Tristan Fournier, Julie Jarty, Nathalie Lapeyre, Priscille Touraille, 'L'alimentation, arme du genre', *Journal des anthropologues* 140-141:1-2 (2015), 19–49.
20. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
21. Stéphane François, 'L'extrême droite française et l'écologie. Retour sur une polémique', *Revue Française d'Histoire des Idées Politiques* 44:2 (2016), 187–208.
22. Rick Fantasia, *French Gastronomy and the Magic of Americanism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018).
23. Arab Chadia, *Dames de fraises, doigts de fée, les invisibles de la migration saisonnière marocaine en Espagne* (Casablanca: En toutes Lettres, 2018).
24. Emmanuelle Hellio, 'Importing Women to Export Strawberries (Huelva, Spain)', *Etudes Rurales* 182: 2 (2008), 185–200.
25. Sara Farris, 'Social Reproduction and Racialized Surplus Populations', in Peter Osborne, Eric Alliez, and Eric-John Russell, eds., *Capitalism: Concept, Idea, Image: Aspects of Marx's* Capital *Today* (Kingston Upon Thames: CRMEP Books, 2019), 121–134.
26. Both the far Right and the New Right converge in the totemisation of pig meat. Sarkozy's comment was prefigured by The Identity Bloc, a far Right collective which regularly tried to distribute its 'pig soup' to homeless people in Paris, reaffirming the virilist 'gaulois' spirit. In order to be served, visitors to their mobile soup kitchen were required to eat the pork soup. In 2007, their website proclaimed 'cheese, dessert, coffee, clothing and candy go with the pork soup. No soup, no dessert' (Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris*, 165). More recently, as Judith Butler was receiving a doctorate honoris causa from the University of Bordeaux, some far Right 'pro-family' demonstrators distributed an invitation to share 'pig soup'. The obsession with the preservation of the putative naturalness of sexuality and gender and with food as a national marker are thoroughly entangled.
27. Claude Fischler, *L'Homnivore: Le Goût, la Cuisine et le Corps* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001), 138.
28. Claudine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, & the Pig* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
29. François Bournand, *Tunisie et Tunisiens* (Paris: J. Lefort, 1893), 325. See also Nina S. Studer, 'Too Spicy for the French: Medical Descriptions of Sexuality, Masculinity and Spices in the Colonial Maghreb', *Anthropology of Food* 16 (2022), doi.org/10.4000/aof.13668. More generally, on the intertwining of Jewish and Muslim racial categorisations in the understanding of *limpieza de san-*

gre (blood purity), see Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *Antisémitisme et islamophobie. Une histoire croisée* (Paris: Amsterdam, 2021).

30. Krishnendu Ray, *The Ethnic Restaurateur* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

31. Fischler, *L'Homnivore*, 69.

32. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, vol. 8 (Frankfurt: Outlook VerlagsGmbH, 1890), 100.

33. After recalling the idea formulated by Clastres of a correspondence between the prohibition of incest, the production of social bonds and food restrictions in the Guayaki population in Brazil, Fischler brings together the 'modern' fear of chickens injected with hormones with the fear that hormonal transformation induced by the pill would erase sexual dimorphism.

34. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), 105.

35. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 136.

36. See Françoise Héritier-Augé, 'Semen and Blood: Some Ancient Theories Concerning their Genesis and Relationship', in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone, 1989), 159–175, who considers the difference between the feminine and the masculine, female and male, through the ontological difference between the raw and the cooked.

37. Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

38. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1966]), 2.

39. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 4.

40. 'Chauderie hémicorporelle gauche', 29 April 2008, http://www.jaddo.fr/2008/04/29/chauderie-hemicorporelle-gauche/.

41. Fischler, *L'Homnivore*, 69.

42. For a story of two veiled Muslim women who were chased out of a gourmet restaurant, see 'Deux femmes musulmanes voiles chassées d'un restaurant de Seine-Saint-Denis', *La Croix*, 29 August 2016, https://www.la-croix.com/France/Justice/Deux-femmes-musulmanes-voilees-chassees-restaurant-Seine-Saint-Denis-2016-08-29-1200785134

43. Vialles, *Animal to Edible*.

44. See the veiled Muslim woman as sexual prey in my article on eroticisation and the prohibition of the veil: Bentouhami, 'The Veil, Race and Appearance. A Political Phenomenology', in Emily Lee, ed., *Race as Phenomena: Between Phenomenology and Philosophy of Race* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019) 55–68.

45. As Nassima Mekaoui has shown, there was a passion for the appropriation of the bodies of cooks in the colonial era in overseas France and in Algeria with the production of a generic body (that of Fatma), a surplus body also subjected to rape as were many working class maids and domestic servants. Nassima Mekaoui, 'Les domestiques dans l'Algérie coloniale à l'épreuve des relations de classe, d'altérité et de domination (1830-1962), unpublished PhD Thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 27 November 2014.

46. Georges Treille, *Principes D'Hygiene Coloniale* (Paris: Georges Carré et C. Naud, 1899), foreword.

47. Treille, *Principes*, 184–185.

48. Cited in Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris*, 112.

49. Sylvie Durmelat, 'Making Couscous French? Digesting the Loss of Empire', *Contemporary French Civilisation* 42:3-4 (2017), 391–407.

50. Cited in Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris*, 165.

51. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 59.

52. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 61. It is worth noting that *Mythologies* was published in 1957, during the Algerian War of Independence.

53. Janes, *Colonial Food in Interwar Paris*, 145.

54. Cohen, 'The Whiteness of French Food'.

55. Myrtille Plotain, 'In the Restaurants of the Calais Jungle', *Vice*, 13 March 2016, https://www.vice.com/en/article/8qe79k/dans-les-restaurants-de-la-jungle.

56. Charlotte Oberti, "'Rebel valley" farmer starts France's first Emmaus-backed farming community for refugees and homeless people', *Info Migrants*, 19 July 2019, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/18262/rebel-valley-farmer-starts-frances-first-emmausbacked-/-farming-community-for-refugees-and-homeless-people.

57. See their intersectional manifesto for a vegetarian alternative in school canteens: Front de Mères, 'Manifeste pour une alternative végétarienne à la cantine', 30 November 2017, https://www.front2meres.org/manifeste-pour-une-alternative-vegetarienne-a-la-cantine/.