Ghanaian cuisine entering the cosmopolitan stage – the role of women, meal formats, and menu adaptations in the shaping of Ghanaian restaurants in London

La cuisine ghanéenne devient cosmopolite – le rôle des femmes et l’adaptation des menus dans la configuration des restaurants ghanéens à Londres

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Introduction

People migrating to a new country strive to maintain their food habits though change is usually inevitable. In the public sphere, the establishment of grocery shops and eating places is a natural development in the migration process and an important step in regenerating the migrant community (Diner 2001; Hage 1997). Ethnic restaurants, typically established by men, are significant means of cultural identification and an enactment of the past; places where they can “sense home, eat home and dream about home” (Sabar and Posner 2013: 198).

Ethnic restaurants founded by the first wave of migrants usually serve the immigrant population from that country (Ray 2016). To expand their business, migrant entrepreneurs need to capture the curiosity of the host population and secure a wider clientele. This can be done by adjusting the original recipes to make the dishes more palatable for the uninitiated (cf. Sammartino 2010), or by developing a “hybrid menu”, with a selection of ethnic and host population dishes (Ray 2016: 89). Ray (2016; 2017) describes how migrants became established in New York, creating a taste of home and influencing the American culinary landscape as a result of transactions between...
producers, consumers, and critics. One of his central arguments is that the changing emphasis of American cuisine can be explained by immigration patterns. He identifies three main waves of migrants – starting with Northern Europeans, followed by Italians and eastern Europeans, then Latinos and Asians – all of whom have left an imprint on the overall American cuisine (Ray 2016; Ray 2017).

Most of the major minority ethnic communities in the United Kingdom opened up “culinary safe havens” (Sabar and Posner 2013: 198) very early in the migration process, such as the Chinese and South Asians (Basu 2002; Chan 2002; Grove and Grove 2008). Interestingly, the Chinese, the smallest of the major colonial/post-colonial migrant groups, has had the greatest impact on the culinary landscape of Britain. In 2015, Mintel listed Chinese as the nation’s favourite foreign cuisine, followed closely by Indian (see Figure 1).

The successful expansion of Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern cuisine in Britain between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s has been attributed to patterns of migration, to the specific mixture of entrepreneurial aspiration among the migrants, as well as to the capacity of these cuisines for adaptation to the English palate (Driver 1983). Much of Chinese food’s current popularity is attributed to its perceived healthiness, like stir fry which is low in calories and high in vegetables, or small food parcels served in steamer baskets, as in Cantonese Dim Sum (Warwicker 2014). In comparison, African Caribbeans, who were, in the first instance, the largest group of colonial migrants, have had very little impact on British palates, and African restaurants have remained a curiosity despite the greatly increased number of migrants and imported foodstuffs from this part of the globe. Adonyoh contends, “African cuisine has been surprisingly marginalized, both in people’s consciousness and on the high street.” (2017: 6). She emphasizes the lack of African cookery shows or reviews of pan-African restaurants, and calls Africa the “last continent of relatively unexplored food” (2017: 6) (cf. Hassoun 2010). The very latest developments suggest, however, that a breakthrough for West African cuisine into the mainstream may be on the horizon, thanks partly to Adonyoh’s writing and efforts, which have been widely covered by the media (see e.g.
Henderson 2017). Cosmopolitan Londoners are starting to embrace the flavours and textures of African dishes, especially in venues closer to the city centre with contemporary interiors and varied menus where attention is paid to the presentation of dishes and portion sizes.

My focus on Ghanaians is linked with my prior interest in this West African nation and its food culture in the migration context (Tuomainen 2014; Tuomainen 1996; Tuomainen 2006; Tuomainen 2009). The reasons why Ghanaian, or more generally West African, cooking has failed to make the transition from ‘foreign food’ to ‘global cuisine’ in the UK (or elsewhere) is complex. Media articles have questioned whether the reasons might be linked to “old-fashioned cooking and preservation techniques”, limited marketing and customer-service practices, or discrimination among financial institutions (Gausi 2008). Previously, in an article examining ethnic identity in relation to the development of Ghanaian food culture in London, I have argued that (post)colonialism, among other reasons, has played a part, affecting Ghanaians’ mentality and attitudes about food and eating, especially in the early years of migration (Tuomainen 2009). They did not have the desire to express their traditional foodways in public as they lacked confidence in using their own cultural food as an expression of their ethnic identity, instead preferring to blend in with the mainstream society.

The aim of this paper is to explore the growth of Ghanaian food supply and food-related businesses in London over a period of approximately 50 years, and to address some of the reasons for this. The two key questions are: 1) Why did Ghanaian cuisine and restaurants in London remain out of the limelight in the first period of migration (1950s-80s); and 2) Why have they gradually become more successful on the London cosmopolitan stage, especially over the past few years? I focus on two explanations: a) the social organisation of food and cooking in the Ghanaian context, especially in relation to food-related businesses, and b) the basic characteristics of food and meals served in the Ghanaian/West African restaurants (i.e. meal formats). I embed this in the analysis of the migration pattern of Ghanaians to the UK. I start with this latter aspect before presenting my theoretical approach in the study of migrant food cultures. A methods section clarifies the empirical research I conducted at two time points, approximately 15 years apart (1999-2001 and 2016-17).

Migration pattern of Ghanaians: focus on gender and the development of food businesses

Ghanaians, like most other (West) Africans (Craven 1968), were not part of a mass chain migration to the UK, but entered initially to study. In the 1950s and 60s, most of the Ghanaian migrants were men who came from relatively privileged backgrounds and returned to a respectable occupation in Ghana, after achieving their academic goals. This encouraged others to follow suit. While studying in the UK, many worked to supplement their income but did not venture into business, as they had no intention of settling in the country. They lacked the propensity for any kind of entrepreneurship that characterised so many other migrant and ethnic minority groups (e.g. Jews and East African Asians) (Basu 2002: 151). As the political and economic situation degenerated in Ghana in the 1970s and employment opportunities worsened, many migrants’ stay was prolonged and eventually became permanent. Financial difficulties
compelled students to work, often full-time, even while they studied. Many had to send remittances to relatives; a great number also wanted to build a house in Ghana. Furthermore, it was no longer only the relatively wealthy Ghanaians who were migrating to this country. Increasing numbers were from less wealthy backgrounds and the main motive for migration was no longer solely for education. The upheavals in Ghana in the 1970s and early 1980s generated a fair number of political refugees, and more people were arriving to find work, with or without qualifications, and legally or illegally (Brydon 1992).

Table 1 shows the increase in numbers of the Ghanaian-born population in the UK between 1971 and 2001. It depicts the official figures and does not account for undocumented migrants or Ghanaians avoiding the census.

Table 1: Ghana-born population in the UK 1971-2001 (Daley 1996; Office for National Statistics).

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<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>6,385</td>
<td>8,918</td>
<td>16,805</td>
<td>26,691</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>4,835</td>
<td>7,969</td>
<td>15,867</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11,215</td>
<td>16,887</td>
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The number of female Ghanaian migrants in the UK soon became equal to that of males, a phenomenon unlike many other migrant groups (Asima 2010). Some joined their husbands but a significant proportion came independently to train and then married in the UK (Goody and Groothues 1977; Stapleton 1978). They had similar ambitions to men regarding further education and honing professional or technical qualifications, driven partly by the fact that economic independence is the norm (or aim) for Ghanaian women, especially for those from the matrilineal Akan group. If their husbands had not yet completed their studies, or worked part-time while studying, many wives had to make substantial contributions to the family income by finding work outside the home (Goody and Groothues 1977). Some of these women ventured into business, engaging in an activity they had already undertaken in Ghana or following in the footsteps of female relatives back home.

Not much academic research has been undertaken among African communities in the past to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind their low levels of engagement in the restaurant trade (Craven 1968; Driver 1983; Hassoun 2010; see also Ram et al. 2000). Some have seen it as merely a reflection of their remarkably low levels of engagement in business of any type. Ojo (2012) explored the environmental and cultural/personal constraints under which West African small businesses operate in London: lack of access to bank and mainstream institution loans and credits, little familiarity with official regulations or requirements regarding importation of certain categories of food stuffs from Africa, competitive pressure resulting in unwholesome practices to remain in business, large remittances to relatives in country of origin, a theocentric orientation (entrepreneurs having a high external locus of control, i.e. the belief that powerful others – God, fate or chance – principally determine events in their life), and transnational-linked pressures (through the engagement of a network of...
relatives and friends in their countries of origin) (Ojo 2012). Poor marketing practices have also been blamed for the “self-perpetuating marginalisation” of Nigerian cuisine in the UK (Madichie 2007: 268).

Most of the literature on immigrant or ethnic entrepreneurship fails to look at the gender dimension. Scholarly articles and books focus predominantly on males as entrepreneurs (Collins and Low 2010; Hassoun 2010) or, as in the food sector, on the experiences of male labourers recruited into the catering business (Watson 1975; Watson 1977). There are few studies on ethnic small businesses that have focused explicitly on the circumstances and contributions of women (Ip and Lever-Tracy 1999). Women are increasingly entrepreneurs in their own right, and not just unpaid and unacknowledged supporters of their husband’s businesses (Collins and Low 2010).

The eating system framework and the concept of meal format

In contrast to studies on migrants’ food habits that usually focus on (the frequency of) food items consumed (Ngo et al. 2009), ‘the eating system framework’ specifically concentrates on the structural, social and gendered aspects of food, cooking and eating (Figure 2). Essentially, information is also obtained from the actors, i.e. those involved in the food work and eating. Informed by research and writing on Western and African food, meals and eating (Dei 1991; Douglas and Nicod 1974; Goode et al. 1984b; Goody 1982; Mäkelä 1991; Murcott 1983; Spittler 1993), its aim is to capture the complexity of changes that occur in the context of immigrant food cultures. The presumption is that food and eating are products of culture and that a distinctive food culture reflects the surrounding culture in general (Douglas 1972; Mäkelä 2001).

Figure 2: The eating system framework (Tuomainen 2006)

The eating event in the centre – a meal or a snack – is defined by three different spheres: the meal format, the social context of eating (where, with whom, how) and the social organisation of food preparation or cooking (who, when, how). Meal format rules refer to the content and structure of the main course and to the sequence of the whole meal. The sensory characteristics of the various food items that constitute a meal, such as texture, colour and taste, are also important. When time is added to the system, two further spheres evolve: eating pattern (variation of eating over a course of a day) and meal cycle (variation of meal format and eating pattern over time, e.g. week-weekend and everyday-festive eating).
The ‘food availability, access and selection framework’ focuses on broader structural issues, such as areas linked with the food supply chain and related policies and practices (Tuomainen 2006). As the title suggest, the procurement of ethnic food by individuals or households and food related businesses is influenced by access to, and the availability of, these foods/imports.

**Methods**

The eating system framework guided most of my observations, discussions, and in-depth interviews in private and public settings during my original fieldwork in London (10 months during 1999-2001) and when revisiting the restaurant scene 15 years later (3 months during 2016-17). The food availability, access and selection framework directed my data collection in relation to the procurement of food in the various settings and material availability, such as cooking facilities and transport.

In 1999-2001, the settings included Ghanaian households and social functions, restaurants and food stores; a detailed description of this fieldwork has been provided elsewhere (Tuomainen 1999; Tuomainen 2014; Tuomainen 2006). I engaged 18 households (i.e. 18 women, 6 men, and 23 children/young people) in the intensive household research, which included repeated in-depth and more casual interviews, participant observation, cooking, and sharing meals. Twenty-four informants (15 women, 9 men) contributed further information. I involved five out of 18 restaurants in London listed by Ghana Review International (GRI) in May 2000 (Issue no 72). Interviews with the managers addressed menus, meals, chefs, and customers but also business development and problems. I conducted participant observation as a customer, but was also allowed behind the scene, in the kitchen, in two venues. In one of these instances, I helped with cooking and waitressing. In Ghanaian grocery stores, I was mainly interested in the foodstuffs purchased by Ghanaians and the origins or the supply chain of the foods, but also queried about business development.

Memories linked with food and eating prior to migration, and in the early years after migration, and the meagre literature on food and customs in Ghana and other West African nations, provided the backdrop against which I was able to compare the past with the present. I analysed the structure of food and eating as an integral part of everyday life, yet also contextualized it historically and situated it in a much broader societal, economic, and geographical context.

In the autumn of 2016, websites and social media used for marketing purposes were sources of information on Ghanaian/West African restaurants and menus. In the summer of 2017, I chose five venues in different parts of London, and one pan-African restaurant in Birmingham, to visit personally for observation and to conduct informal discussions with some of the chefs/managers.
Findings

Supply of Ghanaian food and the social organisation of food and cooking in the public sphere in London

Developments between 1950s and early 2000

19 Ghanaians who arrived in the UK in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, indicated that at that time Ghanaian foodstuffs were scarce in London and obtained only if one received a food parcel by post or knew of a ‘transnational link’, e.g. a business man or woman who travelled regularly to the country. Typical Ghanaian ingredients, or cooked food, generally prepared by women and often brought by them, created a connection between family members who were separated by thousands of miles:

“But then my sister used to work as a (...) Ghana Air hostess. ... So she used to bring me foodstuffs. Yes, so if I was short of palm oil my mother would send her with foodstuffs for me. (...) And funny enough sometimes she would prepare stew, maybe spinach or things like snails that is in the stew or something like that that I don’t get here - and she would bring it over you know.” Frances (hhK, Ga/Fanti, 50+, 1970)

20 Food obtained from Ghana was distributed further and acted as a means of connection, bringing friends together and reinforcing their identities as Ghanaians or Africans: “(...) most of my friends like to come round because they know ‘we’ll get some African food.’ And you know even if you give them a small slice of yam they appreciate it because they don’t get any to buy.” Frances (hhK, Ga/Fanti, 50+, 1970)

21 Other migration flows to the UK benefited Ghanaians in their quest for familiar foodstuffs (cf. Codesal 2010). The number of West Indian migrants in the UK exceeded that of West Africans significantly; Caribbean favourite foodstuffs had already found their way to London markets (Driver 1983), some of which were used by Ghanaians, but only to a limited extent. After the influx of South Asians from Uganda and Kenya in the early 1970s, the availability of other tropical produce improved further, for example chilli peppers, which Ghanaians readily accepted.

22 The demand for Ghanaian food in the UK grew with the rise in the number of Ghanaians in the country and with the realisation that the new home was indeed a permanent one for a large proportion of them. Rather than men, it was Ghanaian women who were the forerunners in establishing grocery stores and market stalls selling Ghanaian food in London, initially, in the early 1970s, in Kilburn (north London) and the Brixton market (south London). A greater number of stalls and stores, usually small in size and most with typically Ghanaian names, were not opened until the late 1980s and early 1990s in areas with a higher concentration of Ghanaians, further away from the city centre. In the year 2000, there were around 30 food retailers in London. Out of the seven outlets in my study, all but one was originally established by women, though sons had taken over the management in a few places.

23 Ghanaian women were also involved in formal and informal transnational trading, supplying shops and individuals with Ghanaian foodstuffs, and some trading from the homes of Ghanaians:

“What I do is, I don’t buy it from the Ghana shops. There is a lady who comes, she brings foodstuffs from Ghana, so what I do is that when she comes then she calls me. ... She brings about 50 boxes of yam, 50 boxes of kenkey, she brings bread,
spinach, smoked fish, salted beef, shrimps, pepper. (...) She brings it in a container and airfreights it. She’s got three shop keepers that she distributes them to. ... It’s a big business. ... She leaves some at home, at her daughter’s and you can go and buy it there. And she normally spends about five weeks here, when she comes. What she does is she buys old newspapers and airfreights it to Ghana as well. So it’s a buy and sell business. (...)” Lillian (hhA, Fanti, 30+, 1989)

Inside the four walls of Ghanaian homes, some women operated a dynamic cottage industry, producing basic Ghanaian foodstuffs to sell to shops and individuals. Staples such as kenkey, made from fermented corn dough and wrapped in corn husks (i.e. Ga kenkey), and shito, a spicy pepper sauce (with dried fish and shrimps) served as a cold condiment, were common items they made and sold. Fifteen years ago, I tried various avenues to gain access to observe a ‘kenkey-woman’ at work. But these efforts were in vain though many informants knew of someone in the business. Apparently, women in London made the ‘dumplings’ as a source of side income, unlike women in Ghana for whom it was a full-time occupation (Rocksloh-Papendieck, 1988). Despite the arduous work, it was profitable and worked well with family commitments. In 2017, the production of kenkey was still thriving and food stores supplied ready-made dumplings in thermos boxes. Williams-Forson’s (2010) account highlights that this kind of underground trade of ready-to-eat meals happens most likely everywhere in the diaspora and contributes to the well-being and gustatory needs of the customers.

Establishment of restaurants – early years

Women were also the driving force behind most of the Ghanaian restaurants in London. The first Ghanaian eating places were launched in the late 1980s, however, the real surge in business establishments did not occur until the mid-1990s and thereafter. This was evident in the increasing number of advertisements in Ghana Review International (GRI) after it was first published in 1994. Between 1995 and 2000, approximately 17 new eating-places were opened up (GRI May 2000, 33). Ghanaians were finally doing what many migrant groups had done before them.

Women’s enthusiasm for cooking and catering had been the impetus behind most of the six ventures I engaged in 2001. In three venues, women were the main chefs and their husbands were the (joint) managers, present in the evenings and weekends because they had other professions during the day. According to GRI, in two out of five venues there was either a mother or grandmother of the proprietor who had been in the catering business in Ghana (i.e. owned a ‘chop bar’ - a small traditional, often makeshift, eating-place). As is characteristic of ethnic restaurants (Basu 2002; Driver 1983), most were family businesses relying on the support of spouses, children and other relatives, in order to reduce labour costs. All the other kitchen staff was female as well. The only male I observed in one of the kitchens was a man employed to prepare kyinkyina (suya), grilled pieces of meat served on skewers. This corresponded with the situation in Ghana where the handling and preparation of meat for grilling has been seen as the domain of men. In both the restaurants where I gained access to the kitchen, the main chefs and kitchen assistants had arrived relatively recently from Ghana, one woman having very limited knowledge of English. Most likely they had never trained in catering but had learned cooking while growing up, as was expected of girls (cf. Hassoun 2010; Tuomainen 2014). “Anything to do with nurturing and nourishing is a woman’s job, basically. ... The man is to fend for the family, end of story. A woman cooks and takes care of the children.” Kwesi (Krobo, 50+, 1994).
The names of the restaurants were usually in one of the Ghanaian languages, the menus were simple with no descriptions of the various dishes. The venues played Ghanaian music, had modest décor, which included the omnipotent television. Considering the importance of the latter for the entertainment of guests in Ghanaian culture, its presence made the place a home away from home, where Ghanaians could eat cherished food in a homely manner. It was evident that the proprietors were trying to attract co-ethnic community members by creating a sense of the homeland (Basu 2002: 154) and were less interested in drawing in a wider customer base.

**Changing attitudes and gender roles**

None of these restaurants were in business fifteen years later. The five venues I visited in London in 2017 had been established six to ten years previously, some with names associated with Ghana and others with names that were more generic. While most of the places felt as if they were still part of an ethnic niche, two had a different aura and, according to staff, had a wider appeal by attracting a largely non-Ghanaian, even non-African, clientele. Both of these restaurants were in more central locations (Highbury Islington and Brixton) with very mixed ethnic populations. They had a contemporary décor albeit with an African theme, menus with descriptions of the dishes, and ‘Ghana’ or ‘Ghanaian’ in the actual name of the place or with the term prominently displayed under the main title. One of them was a ‘pop-up restaurant’, established in a popular ‘container park’, a community initiative using a disused plot of land, with various eating stalls and small independent retail units (www.popbrixton.org).

A change in attitudes regarding gender roles was apparent: two of the venues had been established by men who also acted as the main chefs or had employed other men to cook for them. However, women were in charge at the two establishments attracting other Londoners or customers. In the pop-up venue, non-Ghanaian male chefs (of south eastern European origin) were working when I visited the place. The proprietor had multiple responsibilities, most of which were linked with promoting Ghanaian food in the media, through a new cook book (Adjonyoh 2017), and through various supper clubs. Her chefs claimed that part of their success in attracting outsiders was linked to the reduction of portion sizes and more attention to the presentation of the food on the plate, the meal structure, and toning down the ‘spiciness’ of the food. I share the proprietor’s view that the structure of typical Ghanaian or West African dishes and meals is one of the contributing factors as to why food from the continent has not transformed into a global cuisine, or why the wider public has not taken a keener interest in it before. While the global trend has been towards an appreciation of healthier meals, usually associated with lighter and smaller dishes with fresh vegetables, typical Ghanaian meals can appear to be, especially to the uninitiated, in stark contrast to these.

**Ghanaian meal format and menus**

In year 2001, the menus of the restaurants prepared mainly southern Ghanaian dishes, including the favourite Ashanti, Ewe, Ga and Fanti dishes, with none providing typically English or European food. The main courses followed similar formats (Tuomainen 2009). A solid starchy staple, bland or sour in taste, accompanied by a highly seasoned (‘spicy’) soup or stew formed a typical two-part meal. The staple was often in the form
of a large dumpling (e.g. fufu, banku, kenkey), ‘dry’ chunks of boiled staples (e.g. ampesie), or in a granular form (e.g. rice or waakye, rice and beans), with rules linking certain staples with certain soups or stews. “Okay with fufu it’s soup, basically, yeah I mean that’s what you usually eat fufu with, and the soup can be peanut soup, palm soup, light soup, and with the rice it can go with spinach stew, garden egg stew, gravy.”

(Patrick, hhF, Ga, 35+, 1990) Three-part meals consisted of a bland or sour staple, a centrepiece (generally fish), and a spicy sauce: e.g. kenkey or banku, with grilled or fried fish and an accompanying sauce, favourites among coastal tribes. In one-part meals, such as Jollof rice, a popular dish throughout West Africa, the staple and the sauce were combined in the cooking process. Two and three-part meals containing a dumpling were normally eaten with fingers. Although menus presented a choice of starters and desserts, these were not favoured among Ghanaian customers.

Almost all staples in the restaurants were made with original ingredients. In the early years, many staples, such as fufu, banku and kenkey had been prepared from substitutes because of the poor availability of original African/Ghanaian foodstuffs. Due to convenience, many Ghanaians continued to use substitutes in their homes, especially for fufu and banku, although the original ingredients were now available. In the restaurants, fufu was the only staple still made with substitute flours, as pounding tubers in a large mortar with a long pestle was problematic indoors. The way in which substitute fufu was prepared in a saucepan resulted in a bland and pale dense dough, very much like the real fufu in Ghana, suitable for eating with fingers and swallowing without chewing, evoking the same sensation of eating and a similar feeling of fullness or satiety (Tuomainen 2009).

The selection of dishes served in the restaurants was limited, especially if compared to Chinese or Indian restaurants, or to the range of Ghanaian dishes and regional specialities I uncovered during my original fieldwork in London, some of which were prepared by women for special Ghanaian social functions (Tuomainen 2014; Tuomainen 2009). The dishes resembled those traditionally sold in the ‘chop bars’ and streets of Ghana. Rice was not as popular as in Ghana (Ayernor 1998), most likely because Ghanaians in London ate a lot of rice at home. Eating out, they preferred to choose something they normally did not cook themselves, such as banku made with real fermented corn dough. Not everyone knew how to prepare it from the substitutes, ground rice and/or semolina, and making real banku was a very laborious and lengthy job. What united all the best-loved dishes in Ghanaian restaurants, especially banku, fufu and waakye, was that they all formed heavy meals, a favoured property of food, especially by men, as it brought along total satiety, to the extent of causing sleepiness. The homely environment encouraged eating in a similar fashion to that at home where proper meals were usually associated with heavy, familiar, food. “The main course is already heavy so we don’t proceed with soup first, our soup goes with something heavy, that’s why we don’t eat like that. If it’s a light food like the white people they’ll eat potatoes and like I say very light food, our main food is too heavy when you finish you wouldn’t even want afters.”

(Caroline, hhJ, Ashanti/Fanti, 44, 1973)

Present-day developments

Fifteen years on, the menus of Ghanaian restaurants were lengthier – some illustrated with colourful pictures – and more wide-ranging. Most of the variation had been achieved by listing numerous combinations of stews or soups with staples. Thus,
nothing new had been invented or added, and the best-loved heavy staples, *banku*, *fufu* and *kenkey*, still formed the backbone of the assortment of dishes with large portion sizes. In one place, the menu was actually divided according to the staples (e.g. ‘*banku* dishes’, ‘*kenkey* dishes’, etc). Explanations were included in only a few menus. Starters featured more prominently than in the past, yet deserts were frequently omitted. Some menus listed a few Nigerian and/or Caribbean dishes; generally English food or dishes were not available.

The menus of the two restaurants attracting a non-Ghanaian/African clientele were, to some extent, different from the rest. One venue had a new sleek menu that had been recently “modernised” (term used by the chef). The main course dishes were organised under ‘meat dishes’, ‘fish dishes’, ‘vegan and vegetarian dishes’, and ‘soups’. A selection of staples was listed under the heading ‘sides’, from which patrons could choose one as “an accompaniment”. *Kenkey* and *banku* were not among them. The actual presentation of dishes was also more refined, achieved with the help of moulds and miniature dishes for relishes (Figure 3). The dishes were otherwise clearly identifiable as Ghanaian, and the portion-sizes were substantial, as in all the other traditional venues.

Figure 3: ‘Modern’ *waakye* and meat stew in London, 2017

The pop-up venue was in a league of its own. The “small plate menu” explained that the dishes were based on “traditional Ghanaian recipes re-mixed for the modern kitchen, serving fresh modern West African small plates”. They were organised under ‘bar snacks and appetisers’, ‘small plates & sides’, ‘main plates’, and ‘desserts’. The trend of small plates is a very new concept for Ghanaian or African food, yet matched the tiny venue. The main dishes in the menu did not feature any of the main staples, but focused on the meat or fish/seafood elements, with details about the special spices and herbs used to season the food. The absence of chili pepper was evident. The menu is comparable to that of a new Nigerian restaurant in central London (https://ikoyilondon.com/), which has also done away with traditional structures and embarked on a new style of cooking emphasising individual ingredients and aesthetics, rather than rich concoctions (cf. Hassoun 2010).
Discussion

36 The reasons why Ghanaian or (West) African cuisine and restaurants have only recently started attracting wider attention in London are complex, and explored here with research and observations over 15 years apart. Previously, I have argued that (post)colonialism played a part, affecting Ghanaians willingness to display their food culture and take pride in it. Here I have focused on two aspects of Ghanaian food culture, which help explain the phenomenon. The first is related to the social organisation of food and cooking, or the dominance of women in the food and catering trade. The second aspect is linked with the relatively stable Ghanaian or African meal formats, which only recently have undergone radical transformation by aspiring young chefs. An understanding of the migration history of Ghanaians to the UK is also essential in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the situation.

Gradual shifting of attitudes regarding social organisation of food and cooking

37 The situation regarding Ghanaian food-related businesses in London fifteen years ago and still today reflects the gendered division of labour in the Ghanaian society and economy: it is women who have been, almost exclusively, responsible for selling food in Ghana, which is similar to other parts of West Africa (Chamlee-Wright 1997; Clark 1994; Lewis 1976; Robertson 1976; Sabar and Posner 2013). Wealthy market women still wield power and are respected in society (Asima 2010). In London, women’s involvement in trading is a continuation of the role of women as traders in Ghana; what was once local and regional is now being done transnationally and is part of broader globalisation and the development of both economic and social transnational networks.

38 Women have also been responsible for preparing and providing cooked food for sale, whether hawking it in the streets (Mensah et al. 2002) or selling it in ‘chop-bars’. Cooking, like other housework, has been the women’s domain or duty (Asima 2010; Tuomainen 2014; Tuomainen 2009). In the past, cooking had strong sexual connotations in the Ghanaian context – suggesting marital obligations – and was synonymous with marriage in the Akan society and used to convey negative or positive sexual feelings (Clark 1994). According to Clark, this extended to chop-bars which served heavy meals similar to those at home. Most customers were single men and travellers, such as truck drivers. And although many of the women running the place were “perfectly respectable”, the suspicion was that they provided “sexual services along with the evening meal, as a wife does.” (Clark 1994: 348).

39 The slow rise in popularity for food or catering businesses in London can therefore be explained partly by the fact that in the early years of migration, the majority of Ghanaians who came to the UK were men with higher aspirations, aiming for a university degree. They probably had limited culinary skills and abilities. Establishing a grocery shop or a restaurant serving the favourite fare of time-intensive Ghanaian staples with stews or soups would not have been on their minds, nor their first choice of business. While migrant groups with higher educational levels and upward mobility are less likely to engage in restaurant business (Ray 2016), the added twist for Ghanaians was the gendered division of labour; a well-educated Ghanaian man would not have wanted to be seen as engaged in an activity which was so clearly feminised in
Ghana (Asima 2010). In contrast, male Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel started opening up Sudanese eating places in the country after gaining experience by working in Israeli restaurants (first as dishwashers, later as cooks and chefs) and obtaining skills that were a source of pride and status (Sabar and Posner 2013). However, the men did not like to prepare Sudanese foods that involved long labour, such as traditional bread, which remained a female task in both the domestic and professional spheres. This again resembles kenkey production, which is firmly within the domain of women (Obodai et al. 2014).

The sexual connotation of cooking further clarifies why setting up Ghanaian restaurants was such a slow process. Only women could prepare ‘chop-bar meals’, but they could not pursue the business on their own; they needed their husbands to manage the place to safeguard their reputation even though their husbands lacked the appropriate qualifications. As the catering trade was a feminised space, many of the men had other jobs or professions too. Some men with degrees took up the positions because of difficulties in finding suitable employment in their own field, frequently due to discrimination (Basu 2002). Black African men were affected by unemployment more than women (Barrett et al. 2001).

The propensity of men to become managers in the first instance, then fully-fledged entrepreneurs in spheres traditionally occupied by women indicates changing attitudes and circumstances in the Ghanaian community in Britain. In present day London, Ghanaian men are contenders as well, not only as managers or proprietors, but also as chefs. This is also happening in Nigerian restaurants, the owners of the latest popular venue being two men, only one of whom is Nigerian (http://jermynstreetjournal.com/st-jamess-restaurant-ikoyi-wins-newcomer-year-award-london-restaurant-festival-awards-2017/, accessed 01/04/2018).

Similar to Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel, migration is obliterating the gendered nature of food preparation and cooking for Ghanaians and other Africans in Europe (Sabar and Posner 2013). A contributing factor may be that over the last 15 years, men have featured strongly in various popular food-related TV shows, showing that it is socially acceptable for men to cook, and that those who do and win competitions, such as MasterChef in the UK, go on to become celebrities and make fortunes. Ghanaian and other African male contestants have helped promote the image and a change in attitudes. A simultaneous shift may have occurred in Ghana but this should be explored further. The (young) male restaurateurs I spoke to were quite amused when I explained that in the past, Ghanaian women were forerunners in the restaurant trade in London. They spoke about equal opportunities; the Nigerian proprietor felt strongly that men were at an advantage because work was relentless and they faced less trouble or sexual harassment from customers.

While this latter observation is anecdotal evidence, further in-depth research is needed to explore the conditions under which Ghanaian and other African restaurants operate. The places I had explored originally were no longer in business, suggesting that they had succumbed to the fate of so many other such ventures (Ray 2016: 108). All of the UK’s ethnic restaurant and takeaway markets suffered a massive decline in business because of the recession of 2009 (Kühn 2013) and some Ghanaian venues may have closed down then, if not prior to 2009.

The fact that Ghanaian women entrepreneurs are at the helm of two of the eating places that are attracting broader clientele demonstrates that ingenuity is required in
this very competitive field. The position of Ghanaian women is unlike that of many other migrant women. For example, large numbers of women from the Indian subcontinent (Gardner 2002; Werbner 1990) entered the country as spouses and their husbands have fulfilled the main economic role, often involved in a small family owned food or catering business (Bradby 1999). Ghanaian women have been a major force in the development of their cuisine in the diaspora: first by establishing the ethnic institutions considered vital for the wellbeing of migrants in the new host country, then by taking them to the next level to cater for the wider public by revamping the venues, workforce, menus and, most importantly, meals.

Modernising menus and meals in Ghanaian restaurants

Previously, I have concluded that in the early 2000s the whole set-up of Ghanaian eating places suggested that they were a mix of formal restaurants and a chop-bars. The former was characterized by male managers and specific interior design choices while the latter was characterized by heavy homemade one course meals prepared by female chefs (Tuomainen 2009). The venues were designed to provide a relatively small selection of regional dishes which seemed to have become nationwide favourites and represented a national Ghanaian cuisine. These venues focused on attracting co-ethnic community members. In a similar fashion, in Buenos Aires, all Peruvian restaurants have been offering a comparable selection of food, presented in a traditional way, reflecting the Peruvian customers’ need for “familiar foods that taste of home”, while other foreign restaurants in the city have attracted largely Argentinian customers (Sammartino 2010).

Many contemporary Ghanaian venues in London still seem to attract only members of Ghanaian or (West) African communities despite trying to attract a broader customer base. Menus have expanded but simply have a larger quantity of similar dishes revolving around the same staples. In contrast, one reason for the continued popularity of Chinese cuisine in the UK is that regional Chinese specialities have made their way on the menus (Warwicker 2014). This has not happened in Ghanaian restaurants even though special ethnic or regional dishes are being prepared by women for Ghanaian social functions (Tuomainen 2014; Tuomainen 2009). As part of my original fieldwork, I gathered information on a wide variety of regional or tribal dishes, giving me the impression that many Ghanaians in London, even those in the catering sector, were not actually aware of the rich food heritage of Ghana.

The basic two-part meal structure typical of Ghana (and Nigeria) is widespread in other parts of Africa as well, including the ‘taste balance’ of a bland starchy staple and pungent sauce (Ikpe 1994). This does not lend itself well to creating differentiated or more complex dishes, which would be potentially more palatable for the wider public. Traditional Ghanaian food and meals contrast with the trends for healthy eating, emphasising the freshness of ingredients and lightness, and aesthetic refinement. These trends have benefitted Japanese, Chinese and other such cuisines.

An understanding of meal format rules can help identify what kinds of foods can be introduced to the highly structured parts of the diet (e.g. introduction of substitutes) and which formats are more adaptable or have potential to become new innovative dishes. Goode et al. (1984a; 1984b) observed, in an Italian American community, that gravy meals and buffet-feast formats were highly content specific, yet platter and party
formats were more flexible, and new American food items entered the system mainly through these open formats. The two-part Ghanaian meal format consisting of a staple and a soup is more stable than two-part or three-part meal formats with stews. New food items – not substitutes – and elements can, and do, enter the food system mainly through these latter formats. Subtle transformations of traditional meals in this fashion is possible, as was demonstrated in the photo showing a plate of food from the restaurant that uses moulds to create more refined structures.

Then again, the more enterprising or adventurous Ghanaian and Nigerian venues that are breaking with tradition and old meal format rules are attracting cosmopolitan Londoners. The two-part meal of a starchy staple with soup does not feature on the menus and the three-part meal format is radically transformed. Portion sizes have shrunk drastically, staples have lost their dominant role, and starters and desserts are part of the game. Most of the deconstructed dishes are, in fact, no longer identifiable as Ghanaian or Nigerian. The chefs with “haute aspirations” (Ray 2016) are at the interface of two culinary systems, the African and the Western. They are imposing categories and structures of European cooking on deeply rooted African meal formats, which have evolved to what they are due to local ingredients, cooking techniques and, perhaps most significantly, cooking facilities. With modern kitchens and high-tech equipment in the west, the experimentation with traditional African ingredients is possible, and there is no limit to new kinds of concoctions, dishes, and meal formats. Hassoun (2010) describes similar, albeit less radical, developments in two African restaurants in New York.

Consequently, two strands of West African restaurants in London have emerged, one serving meals recognised by African immigrants as Ghanaian or Nigerian, enabling them to reminisce about home, and the other aiming to capture the attention of other cosmopolitan residents through new African fusion cooking (cf. Hassoun 2010). While the Indian and Chinese venues simply adjusted the seasoning and certain ingredients and elements of their dishes in the early years to attract a wider clientele in Britain, chefs of Ghanaian/Nigerian restaurants have had to make more fundamental alterations to the traditional meal structure to achieve the same effect. A basic ethnic element of the meal is lost, and with this, most likely the African customer base hankering for the satiety achieved through the ingestion of dishes like sour banku with okra soup, and the comfort from an eating experience in familiar surroundings. On the other hand, the new trendy venues may attract Ghanaians and Nigerians who are open to change and willing to embrace the new fusion food as part of their evolving culinary heritage. It is very likely that corresponding developments are occurring simultaneously in their countries of origin and elsewhere in the diaspora.

**Conclusion**

West African cuisines are among the last culinary cultures to enter the world stage, although Ghanaians and Nigerians have been migrating to the UK and other western nations in greater numbers over the past 60-70 years. In the early years, higher aspirations and short-term migration plans of male migrants deterred business development. The traditional social organisation of food and cooking was a contributing factor to the initial slow establishment of businesses in London because it was traditionally Ghanaian women who were at the forefront in the food and catering
sector in Ghana and the UK. The traditional format of typical (West) African meals, which emphasised heavy staples and large portions, was not conducive to attracting a wider clientele once eating-places were established in greater numbers in the 1990s. In more recent years, however, gender roles have transformed and Ghanaian and other West African men are competing in the food and catering sector. The most innovative chefs, both women and men, are creating new fusion cooking in trendier settings, combining elements of African and Western cuisines, and this is finally catching the attention of other Londoners. By abandoning traditional meal formats, restaurateurs will lose African customers who want familiar food from the past, but these venues may gain more inquisitive African customers who are willing to join the evolving ethnic foodways. As Ghanaian/West African cuisine has only just entered the cosmopolitan stage in London, it remains to be seen what mark it will leave on the culinary landscape of Britain.

The case study of Ghanaians in London has shown that the trajectories of migrants and migrant food cultures are diverse and intricate, as is the subsequent development of food businesses and cuisines in the host country. Not all foreign food cultures are received with great enthusiasm by the host nation. Meal formats are a significant aspect worth exploring in the study of migrant food cultures as changes happen not only at the food-item level but also in the patterning of food and meals. Gender roles in food and business development, and the role of African women in the food and catering sector in the diaspora, deserve greater research attention.


OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS. 2001 census of population for England and Wales specially commissioned table C0030.


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NOTES

1. Seven percent of the total population of London of over eight million is Black African, and West Africans - Nigerians and Ghanaians - are the largest sub-groups. The 2011 UK census
recorded 93,312 Ghanaian-born residents in the UK, although some estimate that the true figure is considerably higher.


3. All names are pseudonyms. The information in the brackets refer to household (HH), age, and year of migration.

4. During the colonial period, people of South Asian origin (largely from India) settled in British colonies in Africa, but after independence each African country adopted different policies towards South Asian residents, many restricting the livelihoods of non-citizens. In 1972, the President of Uganda, Idi Amin, ordered the expulsion of his country’s South Asian minority, and over 27,000 subsequently emigrated to the United Kingdom.

5. Grilling meat in the form of a ‘kebab’ was a relatively new tradition in Ghana, most likely brought to the country by the Hausa who had adopted the Arabic style of grilling meat (Ikpe 1994: 89).

6. It is considered polite to switch it on when receiving visitors, so that they won’t feel bored or uncomfortable should long silences in discussion occur.

7. Advertising through social media was, according to one of the restaurateurs, a key way for attracting customers. The impression I got from my visits was that more customers were females than had been the case in the past. There were also more families with children, especially during the weekend.

8. The substitutes were either a different foodstuff altogether or the same as in Ghana but in a modified, generally processed, form. For example, fufu was prepared in the early years in London from boiled potato passed through a sieve and mixed with potato starch, although in Ghana it was most commonly made from pounded plantain and cassava. Fifteen years ago, and in present day London, processed flour made from plantain and cassava, powdered yam or powdered coco yam produced in the USA was the basis of most fufu. A British produced variant is now available in well-stocked Ghanaian stores.

9. A recent study found that fufu made from substitute flour is one of the main staples of Ghanaians in London (Asante et al. 2015).

10. Proprietors of small ethnic restaurants frequently lack formal training and learn the trade after arrival in the country of destination (Warde 2000).

11. A Ghanaian male contestant in the latest series of Great British Bake Off (2016) became one of the favourites to win.

12. Goody’s (1982) seminal work on Cooking, cuisine and class addresses the lack of differentiation of cuisines in African societies. He compares them with “hierarchical cuisines” of societies on other continents, such as China, India and France.

ABSTRACTS

The establishment of food and catering businesses is a natural development in the migration process and an important step in regenerating the migrant community. It also enriches the culinary landscape and palates of the host population. African restaurants have remained a curiosity in the United Kingdom despite the large number of (West) African immigrants. The reasons are complex and examined here through the example of Ghanaians in London, answering the following questions: 1) Why did Ghanaian cuisine and restaurants in London remain out of the limelight in the first period of migration (1950s-80s); 2) why have they gradually become more successful on the London cosmopolitan stage? The crux of the article is twofold: an exploration of the social organisation of food and cooking followed by a discussion of meal formats. Ghanaian women have been key actors in the food/restaurant scene and traditional meal formats have hampered wider appreciation of the cuisine. However, new Ghanaian/African fusion cuisine seems more successful.

INDEX

Mots-clés: migrant, entreprise alimentaire, restaurant, genre, cuisine, repas, modèle de repas, Ghana, Afrique de l’ouest, Londres
Keywords: migrants, food businesses, restaurants, gender, cooking, meals, meal format, Ghana, West Africa, London

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