

Diet Models, Indigenous Gastronomic Knowledge, and a Colonial Legacy: From Food Heritage to a Healthy, Sustainable and Kenyan Diet



IT IS NOT POSSIBLE to discuss the present and future of the Kenyan diet without reconsidering the country's social and gastronomic history. Colonization not only affected the country's economic trajectory but also imposed new and foreign gastronomic models based on Franco-British cuisine. The few cookbooks published in the years following independence reflect a culinary hegemony of Western products, rooted in the use of non-indigenous plants and a higher quantity of meat. In the following decades, this gastronomic hegemony continued, leading to the introduction of new ultra-processed products as well as new urban foodways. In this context, traditional practices and products were marginalized and almost forgotten.

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However, in the past decade, a new attitude toward food has emerged—an understanding aimed at promoting a more sustainable, healthy, and resilient diet. This new understanding has sparked a silent revolution that reconsiders the potential of traditional products and foodways, relaunching them and opening new opportunities for the country's rural and dietary development. Drawing on the work conducted for the making of the Slow Food's Ark of Taste in Kenya (2018) and its anticipated second edition (2024), this paper will explore these trajectories and illustrate the emerging scenario regarding the Kenyan diet and the revival of traditional gastronomic products.

PROFILE

Prof. Michele Filippo Fontefrancesco is an Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Gastronomic Sciences. He is also a fellow of the Department of Anthropology at Durham University (UK) and an Associate Fellow of the City Diplomacy Lab at Columbia Global Centers in Paris (France). Prof. Fontefrancesco holds a Bachelor of Arts in History (2005) and a Master of Arts in Italian Language and Culture (2007) from the University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy. He continued his education in Poland, USA, and the UK. In 2013, he completed his doctoral thesis titled "Crisis in the city of gold: Emplacement, industry, and economic downturn in Valenza, Italy" at Durham University, UK. His PhD study focused on "The impact of the 2008 global economic crisis on the development of artisanship in Italy." Since the mid-2000s, Prof. Fontefrancesco's research has primarily focused on local development, with particular attention to entrepreneurship, sustainable development, and the construction of local know-how. In recent years, his active research in Southern Europe (Italy) and East Africa (Kenya) has centered around the role of food tourism in the development of rural areas and the processes related to the discovery and utilization of food heritage for tourism development. His research in Kenya has been published in international journals such as *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, the *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Sciences*, and the *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*.

