

Joyce T. Mathangwane & Andy M. Chebanne, Kalanga Cuisine: Zwinojiwa Ne Zwinong'wiwa Zwe Chikalanga.

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This book aptly captures a 'neglected' topic from a historical and cultural perspective. The book starts by giving a historical background of the Bakalanga, and states that 'The art and culture of food is the art of life' (p.16). It situates the 'business of cooking' amongst the Bakalanga within a social relations context at individual, family and community level (p.16).

According to the authors, the Bakalanga adopted the culture of moraka from the Sotho-Tswana (p.13). Again the Bakalanga of the North East District (NED) adopted mold board ploughs and the use of oxen for ploughing from the Bakhurutshe. Historically, the Bakalanga used phangula (a hand hoe). In the NED, the 'moraka culture' is not common because of the acute shortage of land. Grain production is integral to the Bakalanga culture. Zembgwe (millet) is distinctly kalanga (p.17), and is a sought-after cuisine. The Bakalanga have a saying that 'Una dula una bupenyu' (he who has granary, has life) (p.16). No wonder historians write that the Bakalanga were the 'granary of the Matebele' in the 1840s to 1890s. The Bakalanga (used to) bury their loved ones, especially married women and the elderly, with grains in their folded palm (p.17), symbolising the importance of arable farming. To date, during some burials, elderly women scatter grain on top of the tomb. Maize was introduced by the settlers from South Africa. Interestingly, the Bakalanga have now a variety of cuisines made from maize more than zembgwe, their staple (pp.73-6). Maize has also become a staple food for Batswana generally.

Thopi (food prepared from melons and pounded grain flour) is originally Kalanga (p.80), but has been widely adopted by the Tswana-speaking groups. Awkwardly, thopi is eaten with beef stew, as relish, by some Tswana-speaking merafe. In Bukalanga, when thopi is prepared, sour milk is not added 'but is added as relish' (p.58). Those who add sour milk, whilst cooking, probably copied from the Tswana-speaking merafe. When eating thopi, the game of finding the pips (bana or 'children') was popular amongst the Bakalanga children (p.58). Any Kalanga child, who grew up in the village, would testify.

Delele (wild okra) is arguably the most popular Kalanga relish (pp.53, 67-8). The authors say that one can add tomato to make it delicious. But aromat makes it more delicious. As for makavu (nodous gourds) (p.56), the authors note that these can be served alone or with milk (sour/fresh). Interestingly, some in southern Botswana serve it with meat gravy. Dobi (ground biltong) (pp.62-4) is another popular Kalanga cuisine, and is delicious when cooked from hare meat and beef (p.62). However, the authors include 'donkey meat' as good in its preparation. This raises curiosity. Historically, 'donkey meat' was generally not eaten in the Bukalanga region, at least in many parts of the NED. However, in recent years, people have started eating it. In some parts of southern Botswana, 'donkey meat' has been a delicacy for years. There was a butchery along the Gaborone-Molepolole road which specialised in 'donkey meat'. Since dobi is originally Kalanga, it is hard to believe that 'historically' they used to prepare it with 'donkey meat' too as suggested in the book. However, the Bukalanga region is vast and diverse so there are some few cultural differences, which would certainly extend to cuisine.

Beer has a special significance in the Bakalanga culture (pp.15, 90-92) and Batswana in general. It is freely served during cultural ceremonies. No wonder the government's decision to regulate the sale and consumption of beer has been met with some hostility. But the opponents fail to historicise the importance of beer. Food and beer also play a critical role in the land cleansing ceremony (kupisa zwanwi) amongst the Bakalanga (p.45). The community would collect anything thought to be 'cursing' the land. These are burnt to please Mwali so that he could 'release' rain. Perhaps, this should be 'officially' adopted by the government as the country experiences shortage of rain. Some Bakalanga

jokingly say that the reason why there is poor rain, especially in the south, is because of zwanwi. But the government prefers church pastors.

Intriguingly, the Kalanga elderly women have a distinct method of finding out which type of mushroom is edible or poisonous. They also 'keep dates for their harvesting and claim territories for their anthills' (p.23). In my Bukalanga village of Masunga too, certain anthills belonged to some families. The elders would caution us from harvesting mushrooms from such anthills.

The book well captures Kalanga cuisine. But a Kalanga from the NED would easily note that some cuisines are uncommon or slightly different. Probably, some are known by different names. For example: chishabashaba (a drink prepared from peeled dried melon strips) (p.87), suswana (morula fruit porridge), shadza le nyii (berchemia discolour porridge) (p.84), bhizha (bean meal) (p.72), chitekete (meat gravy groundnut flour mixture) (p.71), chitapatapa (groundnut flour and oil relish) (p.71), nlibo we shachile (greens with fried cheese) (p.66), and bilamwaka (p.68) are generally uncommon or simply unknown by many in the NED. My 64-year-old mother could not clearly remember and explain some of them.

The authors left out some tubers and wild fruits (p.47) common in the NED. For example: ndori, nzeru, swibamlomo and nsekesi. As for wild vegetables, ntili is absent. Most importantly, they omitted Kalanga tea (nvavani). With good marketing, nvavani can compete with the famous Chinese tea in the Botswana market. There are also differences in the names and pronunciation of some cuisines and other things. For instance, in the NED most people call wild sour greens nyovi not nyevi (p.54). Moreover, many in the NED call a threshing enclosure, letombo not lubuwa (p.19). The authors call the black ground hornbill (huduntule) (p.27), but most people in the NED simply call it duntule.

This work ought to be replicated elsewhere in the country as this would contribute to the cultural and historical studies, the health sciences, and the indigenous knowledge systems. The book would appeal to many as reading it is like reading a recipe or a menu.

Reviewed by Boga T Manatsha