Refusing to be fat llamas: Resisting violence through food in sozaboy and purple hibiscus

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Abstract
Food and foodways are among the most potent of cultural expressions. The food people eat and the way it is prepared speaks volumes about their relationship to their culture, their place in society, and their interaction with the environment. As with all artistic expressions of culture, cooking can be eminently practical or wondrously elaborate. On a most basic level, though, food has the ability to remember home, to reconstruct cultural memory from the integration of ingredients, seasonings, and preparations.

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Refusing to Be Fat Llamas: Resisting Violence through Food in *Sozaboy* and *Purple Hibiscus*

I took a bite, finding it as sweet and hot as any I’d ever had, and was overcome with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep my control. (Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 200)

Food and foodways are among the most potent of cultural expressions. The food people eat and the way it is prepared speaks volumes about their relationship to their culture, their place in society, and their interaction with the environment. As with all artistic expressions of culture, cooking can be eminently practical or wondrously elaborate. On a most basic level, though, food has the ability to remember home, to reconstruct cultural memory from the integration of ingredients, seasonings, and preparations. As John Egerton writes in the introduction to *Cornbread Nation I*: ‘At the very least, the foods of our formative years linger in the mind more tenaciously — and favourably — than almost anything else’ (5). The loss of those foods, or their prolonged absence, then, brings about a cultural displacement that emphasises the distance from home.

Two recent Nigerian novels use food to speak to the protagonists’ distance from their community and culture, and, through that distance, to look at the health of Nigerian society. In *Sozaboy* (1995) by Ken Saro-Wiwa, the decay of social norms is reflected by the changing eating patterns of the characters. The Biafran War alters what and how the title character eats, and his changing eating patterns become a metaphor for the cultural disintegration caused by the war. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimanda Ngozi Adichie, food clearly represents class, and the more privileged a class is, the further its food is removed from traditional consumption and production patterns of the majority of Nigerians, both rural and urban. The main character’s increasing comfort in her aunt’s kitchen, cooking traditional Igbo ingredients, echoes her growing strength and resistance to her father’s abuse of her.

*Sozaboy* begins with a description of the protagonist’s village on the eve of the Nigerian civil war:

Although, everybody in Dukana was happy at first.

All the nine villages were dancing and we were eating plenty maize with pear and knacking tory under the moon. Because the work on the farm have finished and the
yams were growing well well. And because the old, bad government have dead, and the new government of soza and police have come. (1)

The happiness and normality in the nine villages of Dukana is very clearly reflected in the food the people consume and the consumption of that food is connected to conversation and the cyclical nature of agriculture. That this contentment is connected with the harvest and planting offers a real sense of foreboding to the beginning of the novel, because ‘although, everybody in Dukana was happy at first’ the ‘new government of sozas and police’ brings starvation with it. By the end of the Biafran War between 500,000 and 2 million people will have died of starvation and related illnesses (Biafran War).

Near the close of the novel, the protagonist, Sozaboy, travels from refugee camp to refugee camp looking for the Dukana people and especially his mother and wife. The description of people’s ordinary lives again revolves around food, but the description is a horrific parody of the happy scene that opens the novel:

So I will leave that camp and go to another. And again na soso the same thing. Plenty people without no dress or little dress walking round with small small bowl begging for food to eat: small small picken with big belly, eyes like pit for dem head, mosquito legs and crying for food, and small yarse and waiting for death, long line of people standing, waiting for food. And still I do not see the Dukana people much less, or rather, much more my mama and my beautiful wife with J.J.C. Nevertheless you must remember that as I was going from one camp to another, I was passing the villages of the Nugwa people and I must say that what I saw in those villages can make porson cry. Because all these people cannot find food to chop. There is no fish so the people are beginning to kill and chop lizard. Oh, God no gree bad thing. To see all these men and women who are children of God killing and chopping lizard because of can’t help is something that I will be remembering all the days of my life for ever and ever, amen. (149)

The description of the ‘small small picken with big belly’ is a description of a child dying from kwashiorkor. This is a disease of malnutrition that affects young children. When it was first identified by the Western medical community in 1935, it had a mortality rate of 90%. A recent Bulletin of the World Health Organization article indicates that while the mortality rate has dropped slightly, it is still extremely high and that most children still die even after the onset of treatment (Kwawinkel 910). Kwashiorkor is often found following periods of civic unrest.

Kwashiorkor is the most extreme version of the way foodways have been changed by war. Before the protagonist has decided whether or not to enlist, he overhears a conversation in the Upwine Bar that will resonate throughout the novel:

The tall man was sitting down again and singing and dancing and he was talking again as he was eating okporoko and drinking tombo. ‘Everyday they hala about it. Many people have dead. Therefore some more people must to die again.’

‘And you think it is good thing?’ the short man was asking.
‘Well, I don’t think it is a good thing or bad thing. Even sef I don’t want to think. What they talk, we must do. Myself, if they say fight, I fight. If they say no fight, I cannot fight. Finish.’

‘But is it good thing to fight?’ the short man was asking as he chopped *ngwongwo* from the plate.

‘I like to fight. Yes. It is a good thing to fight. If somebody take your thing by force, if e want by force you to do something wey you no like to do, then you fit fight am.’

‘Well, as for myself, I like to chop *ngwongwo* and drink *tombo*. Anything that will disturb me and stop enjoyment, I cannot like it.’

That is what the short man said as he drank another glass of *tombo* and chopped *ngwongwo* and belched one big belch — etiee! I begin to think of what those two men were saying. I think I agree small with the short man. But I not too sure. I cannot too sure. (17)

The unnamed short man offers a vision of removal from the looming violence. Like most of the common people in the novel, he would rather eat goat soup than participate in war. His anonymity, however, signals that his desire for a simple life will soon vanish under the wave of violence and starvation the civil war will bring to Nigeria.

The other participant in the conversation, the tall man nicknamed Manmuswak, will appear to Sozaboy throughout the novel as a prescient figure representing the kind of person many surviving child soldiers will become. Though Manmuswak is a soldier and, as he states above, used to taking orders, he has no loyalty and switches sides seemingly at will. Unlike the people of Dukana at the book’s opening, he has no concern for anyone but himself. He is totally unsuited for life in a community. Unlike the short man, Manmuswak revels in both the order of the military and the chaos war will bring. He is perfectly adapted for life during wartime. He appears in the book as the ultimate survivor, and, unlike a contestant on Western reality shows, that designation does not make him worthy of admiration. Manmuswak survives by destroying others.

Through Sozaboy we see what may have driven Manmuswak to his individualist greed. Sozaboy’s description of the life of a common soldier shows the depravity the young men are subjected to:

And something was very bad for that place, you know. Water to drink no dey. Common well sef, you cannot get. So that all the time, it was the water in the swamp that we were drinking. And that is also the place that we are going to latrine. Na the same water that we are bathing and using to wash some of our clothes. And na the same water we were using for cooking. That is if we get something to cook like eba and soup. But as you know, not every time that we can cook soup and eba. Even when we cook, na sozaman cook we dey cook. Just throw water, salt, pepper and small fish for pot at the same time. Otherwise, always small biscuit and tea for inside mess pan without sugar or anything. Christ Jesus, man picken don suffer well well. (90–91)

This is before Sozaboy has seen the children dying of kwashiorkor, and he cannot imagine the starvation and disease the war will bring to his people. Prior to his enlistment, the older men of his village talk about the changes in food patterns the
war has already brought to Dukana, and those changes bring back memories of a
much-earlier conflict:

‘Bom, I think it is time for us to die,’ said Duzia.
‘Why?’ Bom asked.
‘Buy one cup of salt for one shilling? Whasmatter?’
‘It is very worse at all. How will porson begin to buy one cup of salt for one
shilling?’
‘Can porson marry or even chop if salt begin to cost money like that? … But why?
Eh? Kole. Have you seen anything like this before?’ Duzia was asking.
‘In all my life this is the second time that this thing have happened.’ Kole said. ‘The
first time na Hitla do am. Hitla very strong man, oh. If as he is fighting, they cut off
his arm today, he must return tomorrow with another hand complete and new. Very
tough man at all. He first hold up all ship bringing salt to Egwanga. No salt again.
Everywhere. Man picken begin to suffer. Even by that time you cannot find salt to buy
at all. Now again no salt for second time. Praps some strong men have hold up all the
ships again’. (24)

Kole’s connection of the Biafran War with the Second World War, where he was
sent by the British to fight ‘Hitla’ in New Guinea, emphasises the similar nature of
both conflicts: both wars were primarily about natural resources and in both it was
the common people who suffered the most, who were displaced from their homes,
deprived of everyday necessities, and killed in the millions. It is this desire to
become one of those strong men or at least to challenge them that leads Sozaboy
to leave Dukana and his ‘Agnes sweet like tomato’ (36) behind for the depravity
of a soldier’s life.

Sozaboy quickly learns, however, that wartime only makes the wealthy more
powerful. As he is reduced to eating uncooked snails and raw cassava root in the
forest and the rest of the Dukana people huddle in refugee camps starving, the
army officers, his village chief and pastor stockpile food and liquor and tobacco
becoming more sleek and rounded as everyone else’s bones push out from their
flesh. At the novel’s opening, Sozaboy comments upon the simplicity of the
Dukana people:

The people of Dukana are fishermen and farmers. They no know anything more than
fish and farm. Radio sef they no get. How can they know what is happening? Even
myself who travel every day to Pitakwa, township with plenty brick house and running
water and electric, I cannot understand what is happening well well, how much less
all these simple people tapping palm wine and making fishermen, planting yam and
cassava in Dukana? (5)

The one thing the people of Dukana have been able to count on is producing
enough food for themselves. Now that ability has been taken from them, and
they must rely on the Red Cross for their survival. As Sozaboy repeats, ‘Water
don pass gari’ (104), meaning that everything has reversed. Again, he uses a food
metaphor: gari, dried granulated cassava, usually eaten as thick porridge has been
made useless by the addition of too much water.
Similarly, food comes to have different meanings during wartime. Alcohol, once used for community celebrations and the praising of the gods and ancestors becomes a tool to subvert the enemy, as Manmuswak causes the humiliation of Sozaboy and his mentor and friend, Bullet. Because Bullet steals liquor and tobacco from the captain at Manmuswak’s urging, the captain deprives Bullet and his platoon of water and food, relenting only to make Bullet drink urine:

Then the soza captain opened one bottle and give i to Bullet to drink. So Bullet who have thirsty quench just took that bottle for him hand put the drink for him mouth. Look, I am telling you that what I see that day, I can never forget it until I die. Because I was looking at Bullet face as he drank that drink. And his face was the face of person who have already dead. And when he finished the bottle, the soza captain begin laugh and the san mazor laugh too. Then they asked us to get out. Bullet no fit walk by himself. Na we hold am. I think that he must die. God no gree bad thing. (102)

Waste products have become sustenance. By the end of the novel, Sozaboy will be afraid of being transformed into meat himself. He imagines Manmuswak, who has found him in the forest, fattening him up to be eaten:

‘All this one that I am giving you food and chooking you medicine you don’t know I am just making you to fat like llama so that we can shoot you and you can go and join your friend Bullet. Sozaboy, just wait for me. I will show you pepper. One day be one day. I am Manmuswak and you must fear me. As everybody who have hear my name in war front must fear me. Because I am soza and I am war. I have no friend and I can fight anybody whether whether.’ So I begin fear either for sleep oh or for morning or afternoon or evening. The fear no gree make I chop. I did not want to fat like llama. Some time if I am not fat, Manmuswak and his people will not think of killing me. (122)

Later Manmuswak threatens to cut out Sozaboy’s tongue, penis, and testicles and fry them up and force him to eat them. Cannibalism and forcing one to eat oneself echoes the destruction of Nigerian society. Not only are the Nigerians devouring the breakaway Biafrans, but both sides are also destroying themselves through treachery and betrayal. Describing the people on both sides who profit from the war, Kole says:

They see everything. They smell everything. And they hear everything. So they chop everything. Because they want to chop for today, tomorrow and even for many tomorrows to come, they even hear things which nobody have said, they see things which their belly told them to see and they smell things according to how their belly tell them to smell. So these bellyman are friends of the sozas and of the politicians and the traders. And they are all trading in the life of men and women and children. And their customer is death. (156)

The character that exemplifies these bellymen¹ in the novel is Manmuswak, but Kole’s comments emphasise that he is merely a tool of the true destroyers. The bellymen and their superiors have replaced the comfort and culture of food with that of death. At the end of the novel, Sozaboy rejects that culture of death and leaves Dukana, where the war has turned him into a ghost in the eyes of the
villages who survived the war. Even though he has no destination, he has refused to become a bellyman like Manmuswak, and though his future seems bleak, there is power in his resistance.

Food and resistance are central to Chimanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Purple Hibiscus* as well. The novel takes place during one of the military coups in Nigeria, probably the 1983 coup that ousted President Shehu Shagari. The narrator of the story, Kambili, is fifteen years old and the daughter of an important pro-democracy leader and Church elder. Kambili’s father, Eugene, has broken from his own father because he follows traditional African religious belief. Eugene also beats and tortures his wife and children, Kambili and Jaja, because they do not meet his standards of holiness:

‘Kambili, you are precious.’ His voice quavered now, like someone speaking at a funeral, choked with emotion. ‘You should strive for perfection. You should not see sin and walk right into it.’ He lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist steam before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed.

‘That is what you do to yourself when you walk into sin. You burn your feet,’ he said. (194)

The domestic violence Eugene unleashes on his family is part of his attempt to control everything within his domestic sphere, and that includes food consumed. Eugene is able to publish his pro-democracy newspaper and donate money to the Church because he has a very successful juice bottling business. The family is forced to test each new juice, and, like every ordinary experience in Kambili’s life, tasting the bottled juice becomes a source of terror as her father presides over the table:

I reached for my glass and stared at the juice, watery yellow, like urine. I poured all of it down my throat, in one gulp. I didn’t know what else to do. This had never happened before in my entire life, never. The compound walls would crumble, I was sure, and squash the frangipani trees. The sky would cave in. The Persian rugs on the stretches of gleaming marble floor would shrink. Something would happen. But the only thing that happened was my choking. My body shook from the coughing. Papa and Mama rushed over. Papa thumped my back while Mama rubbed my shoulders and said, ‘O zugo. Stop coughing’. (14)

Food is associated with restrictions and punishment for Kambili. A monthly menu is posted for each child’s lunch: half the month one meal, the other half another. Not only does Kambili associate meals with punishment, she also associates fear with food: ‘After every test, a tough lump like poorly made fufu formed in my throat and stayed there until our exercise books came back’ (52). She knows that if she does not get first place in her class she will be beaten. She will be beaten if she does not run to the car the moment class is dismissed. Socialising with any
other children will bring about a severe punishment. If as Egerton suggests, tastes associated with childhood have the most resonance in memory (5), then the food of Kambili’s childhood tastes like fear:

I started to wolf the cereal down, standing. Mama gave me the Panadol tablets, still in the silver-colored foil, which crinkled as I opened it. Jaja had not put much cereal in the bowl, and I was almost done eating it when the door opened and Papa came in.

Papa’s white shirt, with its perfectly tailored lines, did little to minimize the mound of flesh that was his stomach. While he stared at the glass bowl of corn flakes in my hand, I looked down at the few flaccid flakes floating among the clumps of milk and wondered how he had climbed the stairs so soundlessly.

‘What are you doing, Kambili?’

I swallowed hard. ‘I … I….’

‘You are eating ten minutes before Mass? Ten minutes before Mass?’

‘Her period started and she has cramps — ’ Mama said.

Jaja cut her short. ‘I told her to eat corn flakes before she took Panadol, Papa. I made it for her.’

‘Has the devil asked you all to go on errands for him?’ The Igbo words burst out of Papa’s mouth. ‘Has the devil built a tent in my house?’ He turned to Mama. ‘You sit there and watch her desecrate the Eucharistic fast, nwka nnidi?’

He unbuckled his belt slowly, It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back. (102)

The consumption of food in Kambili’s household is always a dangerous affair, even if there is no pleasure in eating. Eugene sees the cornflakes as an impediment to the grace brought by the consumption of the Eucharist sacrament. His worldview has no space for menstrual cramps, and the violence he unleashes on his family is designed to discipline them into obedience with his fundamentalist expectations.

Kambili’s association of food with fear only changes when Jaja and Kambili go to visit their Aunt Ifeoma in Nsukka. It is Ifeoma who shows the children ‘freedom to be, to do’ (16). She teaches them defiance, and as Jaja butchers his first chicken it is clear that he is also killing the fear of his father:

There was a precision in Jaja, a single mindedness that was cold, clinical. He started to pluck the feathers off quickly, and he did not speak until the chicken had been reduced to a slim form covered with white-yellow skin. I did not realise how long a chicken’s neck is until it was plucked.

‘If Aunty Ifeoma leaves, then I want to leave with them, too,’ he said. (235)

Ifeoma has taught Jaja that he does not have to take his father’s abuse. She tells him that ‘Being defiant can be a good thing sometimes’ (144), and while Jaja will not free his family from his father, he will defy his mother and accept responsibility for his father’s death.

Defiance is something Kambili must also learn, but she also must learn to enjoy life. Through her aunt and a priest, Father Amadi, she will learn that life can taste like more than fear. Food at Ifeoma’s in Nsukka is not bottled juices
and leftovers are not given away to the poor. Ifeoma is a university professor, but the government has frozen all university salaries. The class differences between Kambili and her aunt’s family are strikingly revealed when the power goes out on the university campus:

Aunty Ifeoma was cleaning out the freezer, which had started to smell because of the incessant power outages. She wiped up the puddle of wine-colored foul water that had leaked to the floor and then brought out the bags of meat and laid them in a bowl. The tiny beef pieces had turned a mottled brown. The pieces of chicken Jaja had killed had turned a deep yellow.

‘So much wasted meat,’ I said.

Aunty Ifeoma laughed. ‘Wasted, kwa? I will boil it well with spices and cook away the spoilage.’

‘Mom, she is talking like a Big Man’s daughter,’ Amaka said. (246)

Kambili is a Big Man’s daughter; though her father resists the despotism of the military governments, he rules his family as they do the country. It is impossible not to see the abuse Eugene inflicts on his family as echoes of the violence the authorities do to other characters in the novel. It is through Ifeoma that Kambili learns that she does not have to be imprisoned by the way she was raised. She learns to resist the badgering of her cousin about their class difference:

‘Why?’ Amaka burst out. ‘Because rich people do not prepare orah in their houses? Won’t she participate in eating the orah soup?’

Aunty Ifeoma’s eyes hardened — she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at me. ‘O ginidi, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her!’

I watched a wilted African lily fall from its stalk in the garden. The crotons rustled in the late morning breeze. ‘You don’t have to shout, Amaka,’ I said, finally. ‘I don’t know how to do the orah leaves, but you can show me.’ I did not know where the calm words had come from. I did not want to look at Amaka, did not want to see her scowl, did not want to prompt her to say something else to me, because I knew I could not keep up. I thought I was imagining it when I heard the cackling, but then I looked at Amaka — and sure enough, she was laughing.

‘So your voice can be this loud, Kambili,’ she said.

She showed me how to prepare the orah leaves. The slippery, light green leaves had fibrous stalks that did not become tender from cooking and so had to be carefully plucked out. I balanced the tray of vegetables on my lap and set to work, plucking the stalks and putting the leaves in a bowl at my feet. (170)

The simple act of preparing a meal with her cousin is Kambili’s first real moment of community. It gives her a sense of a possible life not lived in fear. Food, one of the trappings of oppression in her household, is revealed to be a source of strength in another. By embracing this communal preparation of food, by revelling in food her father considers too common to eat, Kambili is reconnecting with a culture from which Eugene has divorced himself. Also by disagreeing with her cousin, Kambili discovers her defiant voice which will give her the strength for the difficult times that lay ahead for her family.
When she watches her grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, pray for her father, Kambili completes her transformation. Though Eugene will severely scald her for eating in the same house as her grandfather and beat her nearly to death for bringing a painting of him home, Kambili will not forsake his memory.

Papa snatched the painting from Jaja. His hands moved swiftly, working together. The painting was gone. It already represented something lost, something I had never had, would never have. Now even that reminder was gone, and at Papa’s feet lay pieces of paper streaked with earth-tone colors. The pieces were very small, very precise. I suddenly and maniacally imagined Papa-Nnukwu’s body being cut in pieces that small and stored in a fridge. (210)

Kambili associates Papa-Nnukwu with the meat that earlier she would have discarded. Now, through her aunt and cousin she knows better. There may be things about traditionalism that she will need to discard — its sexism, for example, about which Ifeoma openly scoffs — but, like Ifeoma and her family, Kambili is hungry, and her grandfather offers one of the few sources she has to cultural nourishment. Though her father will beat her senseless, Kambili will stay and protect the torn pieces of the painting because they offer sustenance of a kind her father has always refused her.

At the end of the novel, Kambili travels to the jail where Jaja is imprisoned to bring him the news that he will be released. As she travels there she turns on the car’s stereo and puts in a Fela Kuti cassette. The choice of Fela, the Nigerian singer, songwriter, and advocate for democracy, is significant, for his lyrics resonate with the theme of the novel. Fela was a very vocal opponent of the military but equally critical of religion and the middle-class that embraced Western ideals at the expense of African values and heritage:

I no be gentleman like that
I be African man
Original (Fela 1973)

he sings on his 1973 song ‘Gentleman’. In evoking Fela, Kambili is keeping her father’s crusades for democracy separate from his religious intolerance with which he scarred his family. She has learned from her aunt to boil memories well with spices and cook away the spoilage.

Even more resonant considering the incident in the bath-tub is the Fela song, ‘Water No Get Enemy’ which insists upon the centrality of the common people’s experience to African society:

Nothing without water
Water, it get no enemy
Oh me a water-o
No go fight am, unless you wan die
I say water no get enemy (Fela 1975)

For Fela, resistance to oppression and insistence upon justice were a rising tide in Africa, borne upon the backs of the generations of those who suffered under
colonialism and neocolonialism. Similarly, both Sozaboy and Purple Hibiscus argue that the most important things in Nigeria’s transition to postcoloniality is a respect for the people’s experience. The inequity of foodways serve to highlight the continuing divisions in society, the scars left by the colonial era which must be healed in order for true freedom to come to Africa. By resisting both the cultural imperialism that threatens to erase the preparation of orah soup and the rise of the bellymen that threaten to devour everything of value in the region, the youth of Nigeria — and it is no coincidence that both books have youths as protagonists — can chart a new way for themselves, one that values the lessons of the past but cooks the past well with spices and cuts away the corruption.

‘But now if anybody say anything about war or even fight, I will just run and run and run and run. Believe me yours sincerely’ (181). The closing words of Saro-Wiwa’s novel indicate that the protagonist has grown amidst the horror and grief of the war; he is now firmly with the short man in the Upwine Bar who wanted to sit and eat goat and not fight. Adichie’s closing goes even farther, with Kambili imagining a garden with orange tree and ixora blossoms. By turning from destruction to cultivation, the novels suggest that there is culture that resists violence, but the imagined future can only be reached if people turn to the wealth of their culture, carve off the spoiled parts, and move forward with what remains, always refusing to be a victim.

NOTES

1 Saro-Wiwa uses this term in the singular form to indicate both singular and plural.

WORKS CITED


Groundnut Stew

**Ingredients**
1 whole chicken, cut up
3 large onions
4 cloves garlic
2 stalks celery
2 carrots
1 3-inch piece ginger
1 green bell pepper
1 hot chilli pepper
4 tomatoes, cut up, or 1 14 1/2 oz can tomatoes
1 cup chicken stock, or 1 chicken bouillon cube, dissolved in 1 cup water
2 cups natural peanut butter
1 tbsp fish sauce
2 tsps garam masala
salt, black pepper, and cayenne to taste
peanut oil for frying

**Method**
1. Salt and pepper the chicken pieces on both sides.
2. Place in the bottom of a steamer: 1/4 of one onion; 1 stalk celery, roughly; chopped; 1 carrot roughly chopped; and half the ginger, cut into coins.
3. Add water to right below steamer insert. Place chicken in steamer. Bring water to a boil, cover, and steam for 30 minutes.
4. While chicken is steaming, chop 1 onion, 1 stalk celery, 1 carrot, the bell pepper and the chilli pepper, and mince 4 cloves garlic and the remaining ginger. Sauté the vegetables in oil until tender.
5. Purée the remaining onion and the tomatoes, and add to the sautéed vegetables and purée them as well. Set aside.
6. Remove the chicken from the steamer. Heat oil in a large skillet. Fry chicken in batches until the outside is crispy. Drain any excess oil, and then add the puréed mixture and the chicken stock to the skillet. Fry, stirring continually, until it thickens and darkens slightly. Add the peanut butter, the fish sauce, and the garam masala. Stir until well blended. If the sauce is too thick, add extra stock or water to loosen.
7. Return the chicken to the skillet and add salt, black pepper, and cayenne to taste.

Serve over brown rice.