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Abstract

Consuming Colonisation, the working title of my current research project which is based on interviews with my family, investigates the relationship between food, culture, memory and the negotiation of physical and metaphorical borders central to the African diaspora experience. Just as its spoken and written word is creole in character, Jamaican cuisine is an amalgam of African, Arawak Indian, Spanish and English colonial inspirations.

CHRISTINE CHECINSKA

Consuming Colonisation: *Excavatin' Escoveitched Fish*

Escabéche (pickled) is a spicy marinade of Spanish origin, used to season and preserve fried (occasionally poached) fish and sometimes poultry. *Eskoveitch* is the Jamaican name for this dish.

Eskoveitch/*'Skoveitch* a Jamaican dish of fried fish that is then pickled in vinegar, spices, hot pepper and oil.

Consuming Colonisation, the working title of my current research project which is based on interviews with my family, investigates the relationship between food, culture, memory and the negotiation of physical and metaphorical borders central to the African diaspora experience. Just as its spoken and written word is creole in character, Jamaican cuisine is an amalgam of African, Arawak Indian, Spanish and English colonial inspirations. In this context, this essay argues that the consumption of creolised dishes, such as eskoveitched/'skoveitch fish, in the postcolonial moment, reveals not only personal memories of real and imagined homelands, but also the interrelated histories of the coloniser and the colonised. Food is seen as more than sustenance; the preparation and consumption of food is regarded both as a means of communing with and reconstructing the past, and as an expression or materialisation of interwoven cultures.

The initial concept for this essay came from a meal that was recently shared with friends in a small, back street, late-night café in Barcelona, where I randomly ordered 'fish' with no real idea of what I was about to be served. When my order finally arrived, I was somewhat disturbed to find that I had inadvertently ordered a spicy mixture of fried fish and onions that looked, smelt and tasted like the fried fish that my mother routinely made for me during my childhood, and frequently still makes for me on my visits home or as a gift, carefully packaged in greaseproof paper, when she comes to stay with me in London. I closed my eyes and was immediately transported back in time and to a different location; I could have been in my mother's kitchen.

Through charting the changing eskoveitched/'skoveitch fish recipes across three generations of Lawson¹ women, *Consuming Colonisation* considers the ongoing process of creolisation, as the original family recipe, rooted in the Spanish and African traditions, mutates as sisters migrate from colony to metropolis —

that is, from Jamaica, to England, to Canada and the USA — and as re-configured recipes are then passed on to daughters and grand daughters; the circulation of recipes mirrors the circulation of people criss-crossing the Atlantic. The ceremony surrounding the preparation of the dish is also considered: the futile search for snapper fish in 1950s England; the tying of one's head with a headtie before descaling and frying; the slow steeping over night; and the telling and retelling of stories in the kitchen. In this instance, the alchemical powers of the recipe at the hands of such skilled cooks is a reminder of Olive Senior's 'Yemoja: Mother of Waters', African 'mother of origins, guardian of passages' and 'generator of new life':

Always something
cooking in your pot
Always something
blueing in your vat
Always something
growing in your belly
Always something
moving on the waters
(Senior 131)

The cultural theorist, Homi Bhabha, and the anthropologists, Marcel Mauss, David E. Sutton and Richard Wilk, inform my theoretical approach. I take up some of their key concepts, namely: the physical and metaphorical border as a site of innovation and transformation; the notion of gift, reciprocity and exchange as central to human solidarity; the place of food within the formation of cultural identities and historical consciousness; and the concept of home cooking as food for the soul, to narrate and examine my case studies.

I begin my reflection by briefly outlining the historical milieu out of which the dish emerged. As my chance encounter with *escabèche* fish in Barcelona revealed, and as the definitions in my subheading indicate, the spicy marinade is thought to have a Spanish ancestry, revealing, through its ingredients and method, the identity of Jamaica's earliest colonisers. Remember that Christopher Columbus 'discovered' the island in 1494, having set sail on a second voyage from Paolos de la Frontera, under the commission of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, via Hispaniola and Cuba. Jamaica was under Spanish rule for little more than 160 years, when British forces then captured it. It was the Spanish who first brought African slaves to the island as early as 1517, beginning the process of creolisation long before the arrival of the British.²

The Spanish occupation began in 1509. However there is a lack of detailed information readily available about this period, possibly as a result of poor record keeping since, as Sidney Mintz points out, 'between its conquest by the Spaniards and its seizure by the British ... Jamaica remained a Spanish imperial backwater' (35). Indeed, the historian, Clinton Black, in describing Jamaica as 'more of a burden than a benefit to Spain', highlights the fact that few details about this

period are included in transcriptions of Spanish history, while English records are equally as scant and there are apparently no surviving records in Jamaica itself (25). The first settlement, founded in 1510, was located at New Seville, (La Sevilla Nueva). Sevilla was abandoned in 1534, the settlers relocating to Spanish Town, (Villa de la Vega), which was then established as the capital (Black 18–34).

The Spanish introduced various fruit trees including orange, lemon, and lime, and other edible plants to the island. (Lime, as you will see from the recipe I have included, is one of the ingredients in the 'skoveitch pickle.) In fact, Jamaica is indebted to the Spaniards for the introduction of such staples as plantains and bananas. (Black 28) Just as its other cultural expressions, such as its spoken and written word, are creole in character, Jamaican cuisine is an amalgam of African, Arawak Indian, English and Spanish colonial influences. Or as Myrtle, one of the respondents to my questionnaire, puts it: '(Escovietched) 'escabeche' is of Spanish origin which is made by pouring a tangy marinade of oil, vinegar, pimento over fried fish to *Jamaicanise* this dish. Scotch bonnet pepper was added to the fish which was eaten hot or cold' (emphasis added). The Scotch bonnet pepper is a characteristic ingredient of Jamaican cooking; its fiery flavour gives a distinctive kick to many local dishes such as jerk chicken and rice and peas. Hot peppers and hot pepper sauces are a favourite seasoning in many African-Caribbean kitchens and on many Caribbean diaspora tables. It is interesting to note that the Amerindians who populated the Caribbean before the arrival of the Europeans used hot peppers in their cooking (Parkinson 286). So my pensive savouring of familiar scents and flavours in a late night Spanish café, in hindsight, transported me back on a metaphorical journey through time and space, that stretched way beyond my childhood home in England's Gloucestershire.

This brings me to my main body of research: a series of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires conducted amongst the female members of my family located in Orange Hill; Jamaica; Toronto; Canada; and the UK. (Questionnaires were forwarded to relatives in Washington and New York, but responses had not been received by the time of writing). The aim of these investigations was to assess the extent to which the preparation, serving and eating of 'skoveitch fish in the post-colonial moment reveals individual and collective memories of homelands, the interrelated histories of the colonised and the coloniser, and the ongoing cultural exchanges that occur as we engage with each other and with our environments.

My investigation started by asking what, if anything, was known about the origin of the term eskoveich or 'skoveitch. Myrtle, based in Orange Hill, gave the most comprehensive answer, stating clearly the dish's Spanish heritage that then became 'Jamaicanised' over time.³ In contrast, Hyacinth's initial response was 'I couldn't tell you', but when questioned further she explained that 'fried fish' was 'always called that'. She had grown up with it being called 'skoveitch': 'we get it from our gran'parents ... so we don't really know where it comes from. I expect

it's from their parents and their parents' parents'. Whilst Jackie, my older sister's response, though very carefully considered, reads as less experiential:

My understanding, from reading is it's Latin, it's Spanish or Portuguese. So brought to Jamaica as a way of cooking fish, it describes a way of cooking fish that was brought to the Islands by lots of different people who were there, were colonised and may have also integrated with people that were already there.

Yovanka, my cousin, born in Jamaica but now based in Toronto, and the youngest respondent, had no ideas about the origin of the terms or the dish. Similarly when it came to the details of the recipe itself, she was unable to answer, saying instead: 'I know it is fry-fish'. Perhaps unsurprisingly the most informed recipes were those of the two older women, Hyacinth and Myrtle, both in their mid to late seventies. (Hyacinth's recipe has been transcribed in full at the end of my essay.) The ingredients suggested in their recipes are very similar; for example, both recommend the use of snapper fish and ground black pepper. However, Myrtle is much more specific about the quantities of each item; for example, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of flour and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of black pepper.

Although Jackie had never cooked the dish herself, she did have a clear opinion about what the ingredients were and what the method entailed:

Jackie: Well I think, then, it's a mixture of reading, going to meals, or lunches provided at work for occasions for people from different islands foods, and I would say that the fish is fried first and then vinegar, onions, peppers and, I've forgotten the name of the vegetable, but it's a green vegetable ...

Christine: Cho-chos?

Jackie: Cho-chos or St Christophene is put on as well and then it's steamed the next day or you can have it cold with bread.

Christine: So it's like a marinade thing?

Jackie: Yes, it's like a marinade, two processes.

The level of detail and accuracy in Jackie's reply, in spite of never having cooked it, is intriguing. As will be seen from the recipes that I include and as I will discuss, there are indeed two processes. Her knowledge is gleaned primarily from reading, consuming and 'absorbing':

It is kind of something that was always around that you have sort of absorbed, so I don't actually remember watching it or learning. I remember smells but I don't remember the process of putting it together although if somebody asked me how to do it, even though I haven't done it myself, I could describe a process.

This notion of absorption relates back to Hyacinth's comments about origin: 'I expect it's from their parents and their parents' parents ... your older parents, your old grandparents, they make it up as they go'. Myrtle also talks about her recipe being passed on from the older generations: 'this recipe was handed down by my grandmother, not written'. She then goes on to explain: 'As Caribbean people, recipes pass down from generation to generation. I was taught to cook this dish

by my grandmother then mother with slight variations as we went from wood fire with freshly caught fish to using gas or electric with frozen fish’.

Although for each of the women there was a reluctance to veer away from their adopted recipes, unless there was a very good reason for doing so — for instance, the unavailability of key ingredients — recipes do change over time, as Myrtle suggests. Innovations in terms of cooking utensils and kitchen equipment, migration and limited access to ingredients, differing lifestyles and tastes, and the means by which the recipe is learnt, all add to the reconfiguration of the dish.

Speaking about her arrival in England in the late 1950s, Hyacinth recalls the difficulties experienced in trying to locate fundamentals like black pepper: ‘for a start you couldn’t get black pepper, it was white pepper’. She had to make do with white pepper. She was also forced to improvise when unable to find her preferred red mullet or snapper fish:

Those two we used to use do that ... but when we first come here you couldn’t, you didn’t get it, a long afterward now West Indian people go into the fish mongers an’ ask for that type of fish. So they begin to get it an’ you could get it afterward too... Instead we have to use cod or whitin’ or hake... a fillet.

In contrast, later in the interview, Hyacinth reminisces, through ripples of laughter, about my grandmother, Granny Drina, buying fish from either the local market in Jamaica or else from Uncle James, the fish-man:

Hyacinth: We don’t live near the coast, but a bloke used to come in the village, Green Hill, where we live. When he go down, he go to either Runaway Bay or St Anne’s Bay, that’s where they get the fish, at the sea side. Him bring it roun’ an’ sell it to the people ... in the village like. ... Sometimes he, you know, would bring for Mamma; bring fish for Mamma...

Christine: Can you remember what his name was?

Hyacinth: Uncle James. (laughter)

Christine: Ahh! Did he have a trolley or something?

Hyacinth: Him ride his bike.

Christine: Oh right!

Hyacinth: Yeah! An’ then he have like the basket at the front. Because his parents land and Grandpa Tommy’s land join. You see.

Judging by the excitement surrounding these particular memories, Uncle James was clearly the best person to buy fresh snapper and red mullet from!

Sometimes ingredients were difficult to obtain even on the island as Myrtle points out: ‘Over time recipes have changed as a result of availability of ingredients. The authentic Scotch bonnet pepper, pimento and allspice may be difficult to obtain. Use can be made of cho-cho, tamarind to substitute for vinegar, which is quite interesting’. So changes occurred not only as a result of migration and cultural exchange. Making a comparison between Myrtle’s observation above and Jackie’s recipe, it is interesting to note that in the recipe that has been handed

down via the oral tradition — Myrtle's recipe — the use of cho-cho is not seen as part of the authentic 'scoveitch fish recipe. Yet for Jackie, whose recipe is an amalgam of what she has read and what she has absorbed, cho-cho is an integral part of the dish. Similarly, Myrtle, who was kind enough to send me a copy of the recipe as the home economics department of her local school teaches it, notes that their recipe, written down like those that Jackie is more familiar with, includes carrots. The recipe, or the perception of what is considered to be the 'authentic' recipe, appears to mutate even as it is fixed by the written word. The formal teaching of the dish in the local school also leads me to question whether the passing on of the recipe verbally from mother to daughter has ceased to occur. For this reason, I have chosen to include transcriptions of two recipes. The first, Hyacinth's, has been passed down by word of mouth, generation after generation. The second is taken from a recipe book, (a gift received from my sister some ten years ago), produced in the UK and written by Jamaican, Norma Benghiat.

The rise in tourism has also shaped current recipes:

Myrtle: This Escoveitched fish is now served in hotels with adaptation of use of spices and use of fillet and fish steaks (NO BONES)

It is implied that the absence of bones and the re-configuration of the spices used, (I assume they are toned down), makes the dish more suitable for the palettes of foreign tourists.

I turn now to the issue of food and memory, reminiscences of childhood and of real and imagined homelands. Regardless of age, location, and background knowledge about the dish, the women unanimously agreed that the experience of preparing, sharing and eating the fish, the materiality of the experience — the texture of the fish, the smell and taste of the oil, even the scraping sound as the fish is de-scaled — conjured up images of their individual family homes and of Jamaica:

Hyacinth: Yeah. When me come here [England] an' could get it ['scoveitch fish], it bring back memory of home. It bring back the memory of home; what your mom used to cook give you an' what an' what she used to do.

Myrtle: Escoveitched fish reminds me of my food heritage brought by the different people who came to the Caribbean. The social and nutritional significance it has even today in the mainstream meal preparation in Jamaica cultural food habits and cuisine.

Jackie: I suppose as a snack it's having a traditional snack, that's an association.

Yovanka: I would associate feelings of being back home, of my mother, of warm island breezes, a nice Red Stripe Light and laughing with my sister.

A corresponding recurring theme was the association of the dish with social gatherings such as on public holidays, weddings, and work or family outings, where it is often served with hard dough bread, rice and peas, plain rice or fried dumplings:

- Yovanka:* I would most likely eat it on holidays – especially if the holiday is taking place IN Jamaica as fish is always best eaten back home!
- Myrtle:* This dish can be served at family gatherings, weddings, graduation.
- Jackie:* (elaborating on an earlier comment about eating the dish in adult life primarily on special occasions) I suppose when I say celebrations ... it's sort of initially holidays, so like Easter or something like that.

I would like to sift out this connection between 'scoveitch fish, Easter and specifically Good Friday, as a means of ruminating on the alchemical nature of certain dishes, home cooking as food for the soul, hospitality and, drawing on Marcel Mauss, food as gift.

During my interview with Hyacinth she not only talked about the tradition of eating fish on Fridays but also discussed the integral part that 'skoveitch fish played in Good Friday preparations. This tradition was seen as stemming from Christian teaching: 'yes, the festival. They have fish. We don't have meat Good Friday.... We were brought up where they cook fish on Good Friday'. Recalling the anticipation of Easter, Hyacinth spoke about Mamma preparing the fish the night before and remembered waiting expectantly to eat it:

- Christine:* But I seem to remember a while ago when we spoke you mentioned that on Good Friday, was it Good Friday, that you didn't used to shop or you didn't used to cook until a certain time?
- Hyacinth:* No. You don't cook until after 3. That's just the tradition there. They say that at that time the crucifixion finish. So after you get up on Friday morning, Good Friday morning, and you have breakfast, make fire and have breakfast, no fire no make up after that.
- Christine:* So if you were having fish after 3 on Good Friday, did you used to, did Granny Drina make it on Thursday night?
- Hyacinth:* Yes, you do it on the Thursday.
- Christine:* and leave it to one side and after 3 that was when you heated it up?
- Hyacinth:* Mm. Heat it up and eat it.
- Christine:* So if I asked you, if we sat down and ate a plate of 'scoveitch fish now, what kind of memories spring to mind when you smell the fish, what would you say?
- Hyacinth:* It come in like, you know, it bring in mind like when you young girl growing up, isn't it.
- Christine:* A fun time?
- Hyacinth:* It remind you of that. And then Good Friday, when especially you looking forward to the fish with bread.

It would be true to say that spirituality, Christian or otherwise, is an integral part of everyday life in the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora; there does not

appear to be the separation between the spiritual and the secular that we find in the West. The fish has been a universally recognisable symbol of Christianity since it began and the eating of 'scoveitch fish with hard dough bread has obvious resonance's with Jesus' feeding of the 5000. Perhaps more pertinent to my study, since it leads me into the notion of home cooking as food for the soul, is the event surrounding His post resurrection appearance to His disciples, who, perhaps naturally, thought that they had seen a ghost. In an effort to dispel their fears, Jesus asked: "'Do you have anything here to eat?'" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ... and ate it ...' (Luke 24: 36–4), thus proving that he was indeed flesh and blood, he was indeed alive and, from a Christian perspective, wholly human and wholly God.

Whether one believes this to be an historical truth or whether one believes it to be a myth is not my concern here. What does concern me is the association of food with wholeness, with what it is to feel human, with personhood. The African-Caribbean in exile could be seen as occupying a position of absent presence within the West; a somewhat ghostly existence whereby the visibility of the individual is all too often masked by the fact of blackness and an ambivalent colonial gaze.

It is in these moments of 'fixity', (Bhabha 75), that one needs to regain a sense of connectedness. I would argue that one way of achieving this is through food. Marvelene Hughes, writing on African-American soul food, equates the cooking and eating of culturally rooted foods with the reclaiming of women's identities. This speaks directly to my observation. Hughes stresses that food preparation is at the hub of African-American oral history; the cultural heritage that shapes African-American identity is kept alive through the process of cooking and sharing food. To that end, soul food, to the black woman, is an expression of nurturance, creativity and survival; 'the very core of her African heritage are embodied in her meal preparation' (Hughes 274). She goes on to describe an intimacy and spiritual connectedness that takes place through sharing food that is reminiscent of Mauss' study of gift. Hughes' examination of the place of soul food in African-American communities parallels Richard Wilks' work on home cooking in Belise. According to Wilks home cooking is equally as concerned with well-being and wholeness as it is with nutrition. This type of cuisine, he explains, is grounded in shared histories and the common knowledge of places and people. He also draws out the relationship between home cooking and 'slow food'; 'scoveitch fish, with its two-part cooking process, certainly falls into this category. In my opinion, the serving of slow food in this moment, when time as a commodity is at such a premium, says something about caring for the self and for others. It is about nurturing in a holistic sense.

Furthermore, viewing the 'scoveitch fish served on Good Friday through Mauss' eyes, where food is part of the gift economy, to receive the dish, to consume it, is also to receive part of the giver or the cook's 'spiritual essence'. According to Mauss, the gift economy is that which involves the circulation of

material objects and the circulation of selves. Similarly, reflecting on the culinary gifts from my mother, carefully packaged in greaseproof paper, I recall feeling almost as though she were still with me whilst tucking into my 'presents' long after she and my father had driven back to Gloucestershire.

Likewise, Jackie's observations about eating 'scoveitch' fish at special occasion dinners, particularly when the dish has been made by the guests themselves as opposed to outside caterers, highlights Hughes', Wilk's and Mauss' analysis of the role of food beyond sustenance:

Jackie: If you were to make it yourself or even if you have some that somebody else has cooked, it's not an easy snack, because usually when you think about snacks now it's something that's really quick to do. Because it has got that two part process so it feels like something that somebody's spent some time over, even though it's something that you might pick at as a snack, it is something that somebody's spent time over; at least a couple of days.

Christine: So does it make it feel ... you know, does it feel more valuable, for example, I don't want to lead you, but does it feel ...

Jackie: Um ... not valuable ... it just feels as though you've been thought about; that somebody thought it was worthwhile making that dish for people rather than just steaming some fish or something like that. It's an effort.

Mm ... and I suppose as well it links back, because I don't, even though I know how to do it in theory, I don't do it myself. I choose not to because I can't be bothered (laughter) But ...

Christine: Is that because of the long process?

Jackie: Yes! And life isn't like that; my life isn't like that. And so it does take it back to somebody who can be bothered, so back to ... I then sometimes will think about when I had it first, when it was eaten when I was younger; because I am always surprised that if you do go to somewhere that there's loads of it that hasn't been done by a caterer but has been done by the people that are attending there, I think: 'God! You must have taken ages and been really motivated to do this!' (laughter)

Christine: So would you say that it is almost like a gift?

Jackie: Mm. Because you have to be bothered to do it.

By commenting on the motivation for cooking such a time consuming dish, Jackie draws attention to both the notion of food as gift and the determination and commitment to preserve and pass on, what Hughes describes as the 'soul in food preparation'.

I would also like to suggest, in light of my findings, that the definition of the 'giver' could be seen in metaphorical terms, for example, as Jamaica itself, or indeed as Senior's 'Yemoja'. Expanding the definition further still, in the case of home cooking 'soul' food for oneself, as implied above, particularly in Hyacinth's comments about finally being able to find the right ingredients to cook 'scoveitch

successfully during the 1950s, the alchemical process of preparation and consumption could be viewed as a giving back to oneself — a way of regaining a connectivity with and a rooted-ness in the self. By this I mean that the preparation and consumption of such foods is tied to recapturing and experiencing a sense of belonging at a personal level that contests the colonial gaze.

In conclusion, having explored the themes of food and historical and cultural consciousness, food and wholeness, food as gift and food and memory, it is possible to deduce that eating creolised dishes such as 'scoveitch fish in the postcolonial moment, reveals not only personal memories of real and imagined homelands, but also the interrelated histories of the coloniser and the colonised. Home cooking clearly is so much more than sustenance. Through the preparation, sharing and consumption of 'soul' food, interwoven histories and cultures materialise, communal solidarity is created and maintained, and a sense of individual wholeness or rooted-ness can be regained.

It would also appear that food culture has the ability to transcend geographical borders, blurring the boundaries of what we define as local and global. Certainly recipes do mutate at the point of culture clash and exchange, but the essence of the dish — the frying of the fish and the slow steeping of it in the oil and vinegar based marinade — has remained. This demonstrates connection. The sharing and eating of 'soul' food connects us both to ourselves and to others. In this schema, I would suggest that there is a correlation between one's inner essence and one's 'lost' cultural heritage.

Correspondingly, the importance of the recurring theme of memories from childhood that is present in the interviews lies in the fact that culture is socially learned. As we see from the brief extracts referred to in this essay, the migrant home forms a focal point from which cultural expressions, in this case culinary cultural expressions, are produced, consumed, re-configured and reintegrated. The kitchen is but one of the spaces within the home that allows this cycle of cultural production to be enacted and embodied.

Finally, since this essay has been about my personal impressions of and my family's reflections on *excavatin' 'escoveitched fish*, it seems only right to let my mother have the last word. My effort to close the interview by expressing my hope that one day she would teach me her recipe, carrying on the oral tradition, was met with:

And you don't even want the fish eye look 'pon you! ... An' Christine never want to look on the fish eye! (laughter)

NOTES

- ¹ Lawson was my mother, Hyacinth's, family name. She and her three sisters, Gem, Dor, and Miss G, grew up in 1930s/40s rural Jamaica, together with one brother, Frankie. While she emigrated to England during the late 1950s, her sisters and her brother migrated to Canada and the USA. She has one half sister, Myrtle, who remained in Jamaica.

- ² My use of the term 'creolisation' draws on Brathwaite's *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*, and C. Allen's, 'Creole The Problem of Definition'.
- ³ Myrtle's opinion that the Spanish recipe was 'Jamaicanised' by the addition of hot peppers reminds me of a recent article in *The Gleaner* where Rosemary Parkinson was forced to defend a vociferous email from an angry reader who made the mistake of challenging her on a previous article about the history of certain common ingredients in Jamaican cuisine. The reader, a university lecturer 'originally from an African village on the Guyana coastland', having challenged the origins of hot pepper, claiming them to be African, was met by the response: 'I cannot get my knickers in a twist over semantics but, I will over peppers! Sorry doctor, dem definitely ours!' (Parkinson 2006 E5.)

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Hyacinth Shaw's Eskoveitch/'Skoveitch Fish

(Extract from an interview with Hyacinth Shaw, 29th May 2006)

INGREDIENTS

2 fish cut into 4 slices — jack fish, snapper or red mullet recommended

plain flour

onion or shallots — sliced

salt

black pepper

chilli pepper or Scotch bonnet pepper — 2 small strips

malt vinegar

fat for frying

METHOD

- 1. De-scale, clean and wash the fish. Dry it off thoroughly and slice.*
- 2. Heat the fat in a frying pan. Make sure it is well hot.*
- 3. Put the flour and black pepper onto a dish, and roll the fish in it until it is covered, but pat off any excess with a kitchen towel.*
- 4. Fry in the hot oil. When one side is fried, turn it over and do the other side. Take the fish out and put it into a dish.*
- 5. Fry the onions or shallots with the chilli or Scotch bonnet peppers. (Don't let the onion burn)*
- 6. Spread the fried onions and peppers on top of the fish. Pour a bit of the fat on it, with a little vinegar. Then cover it up for it to settle.*

Use the following day. (Serves 4)

Norma Benghiat's Eskoveitch/Skoveitch Fish

Snapper, jack, sprats, parrot, grunt and kingfish are best for this dish, but any fish will do. The secret of success lies in the freshness of the fish. When you are buying fish make sure that the eyes are bright and shiny and the gills red (Benghiat, 1985, p.81).

INGREDIENTS

2 lb (1 kg) fresh fish

juice of 2 limes

salt

black pepper

oil

pickle:

1–2 cho chos or cucumbers

2 onions — sliced

2 hot peppers, Scotch bonnet if possible — sliced

2 tablespoons pimento berries

1 cup (8 fl oz, 250ml) vinegar

salt

METHOD

Clean and wash the fish, rub them with the limejuice, and dry them with a kitchen cloth or paper.

Sprinkle them on both sides and inside with salt and pepper.

Heat plenty of oil in a frying pan until it is very hot and begins to smoke very slightly.

Place the fish in the hot oil one at a time, taking care that they do not overlap.

Reduce the heat a little and fry the fish on both sides. If they are difficult to turn, then the oil is not hot enough. Leave them for a further couple of minutes to allow the underside to brown, then turn.

When the fish are done, drain them and arrange them on a larger platter or in a deep bowl.

In the meantime, peel the cho chos and cut them into halves and then into long strips.

Put them in a saucepan with the onions, hot peppers, pimento, vinegar and a little salt to taste.

Bring the mixture to the boil, simmer for 2 minutes or so, then remove from the heat.

Pour this hot pickle over the fish. The fish is often left to marinate in the pickle for a while (it will keep for up to 3 days), but I prefer to serve the dish while the pickle ingredients are still crisp.

Serve it hot or cold. (Enough for 4 – 5)

(Benghiat, 1985, pp. 81–82)