


2022

The Bittersweet Tooth: Understanding French Identity Through the Colonial Empire, Commodity Fetishism, and Pâtisserie

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**The Bittersweet Tooth:
Understanding French Identity Through the Colonial Empire, Commodity Fetishism, and
Pâtisserie**

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May 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At first, whenever people asked me about my thesis, the first thing out of my mouth would be, “Bear with me, this is a little niche...” Part of me regrets that now. My thesis is uniquely me, tying together my academic interests, French identity, and love of food. It may be an untraditional topic, but it allowed me to tackle an unasked question. And I am so lucky to have had people react curiously, asking questions and expressing interest. I have loved every step of this project and remain so excited that I even asked a question about the importance of dessert. I want to thank everyone that greeted my hesitant introduction with enthusiasm and intrigue.

I would first like to thank the Colby History Department. For believing in my ideas, for the KIND bars and tea, for listening to me chatter and waving back at me as I essentially moved into your department. Specifically, I would like to extend heartfelt appreciation to the Sarah Janney Research Fund for sending me to Paris during my Jan Plan. It was an unforgettable experience.

I feel incredibly fortunate that I have gotten to know almost every member of the incredible history faculty during my time at Colby. Professors Weisbrot, Scheck, Deidrich, and Turner, I would like to thank you for your critical curiosity and insightful analysis of my work. Our Friday meetings kept me consistent and questioning. Professors Taylor and Jacobson, even though we did not overlap much with thesis work, your history courses further inspired me to pursue tough questions and pushed me to be a better writer. I will miss our chats. And to Professor Brignac, I extend much gratitude to you for your help with this project. Your insights deepened this work. Colby College is lucky to have a department with such knowledgeable, genuine, and dedicated faculty. I am lucky to have learned so much from them.

Without Arnout, this project would not exist. Over the last three years, his guidance, kindness, and a shared love of coffee and baked goods have been an absolute gift. I want to thank him for believing in me and supporting me through everything. This year has not been without challenges, and neither has been navigating courses, research, and a thesis through a pandemic, but his hard work and constant enthusiasm paved the way. I could not have asked for a better advisor. I scarcely think words will do justice to the gratitude and admiration I have for Professor van der Meer. In graduating, there are few things I will miss as much as his company.

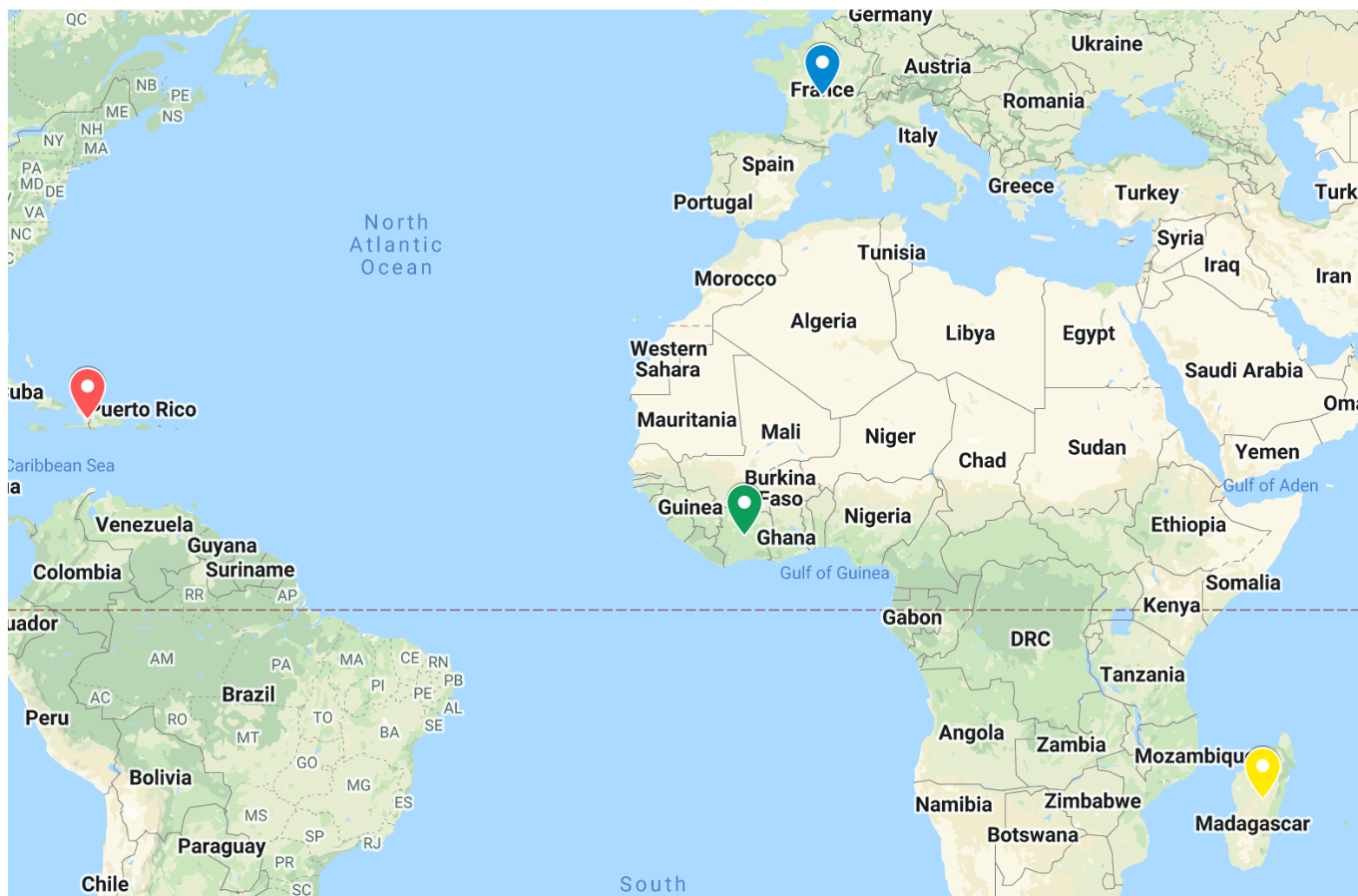
Lastly, a thank you to the people in my life who have listened to me ramble on about this topic and never doubted my abilities. To the wonderful women of 110, to my incredible friends, and to Joey, thank you for eating my baked goods and encouraging me always. We got through college in a pandemic and managed to have the time of our lives. I feel forever lucky. To my family, thank you for the indescribable opportunities you have provided me with and your endless support for academic pursuits. Thank you for France and countless tarts au citron. I am so lucky to have a family that lets me dream big and finds shared joy in learning.

I started this project with curiosity and end it even more inspired. This work allowed me to connect the joy I find in research and writing with something I care deeply about. I hope I can forever continue to learn like I have during my years at Colby, and hope to continue loving and learning from food. To everyone above, this work is for you. I am so proud and so excited to share it.

GEOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW & MAP

Use this map to contextualize the spread of the French empire and as reference for the various locations discussed:

Blue - France
 Red - Haiti
 Yellow - Madagascar
 Green - Cote d'Ivoire



INTRODUCTION

“No one does dessert quite like the French”

Paul Hollywood, Great British Bake Off ¹

The Bittersweet Tooth

The quoted statement from Paul Hollywood, famed baker, and judge on the beloved British baking competition seems to aptly sum up the way French dessert and patisserie are perceived globally. Each year, the show dedicates an episode to the difficulties of French pastry, where the home bakers agonize over the complexity and difficulty in perfecting choux pastry, meringues, and tarte aux fruits. For the bakers, this is one of the most distinctive moments within the competition, separating the exceptional bakers from the rest. French patisserie sits on a pedestal within dessert culture, with pastries that look like art and taste even better.

The depiction of patisserie in Bake Off is not unlike how patisserie is understood by the rest of the world. With an acknowledgment that Marx would probe this statement for its flawed attribution of value, French cuisine is perceived as exceptional. To this day, pastry chefs and general chefs regard French cuisine as the benchmark in culinary education, with many of the revered institutions still in France. French gastronomy is even a UNESCO World Heritage site. The French sweet tooth created a culinary world of dessert and validated its distinction from other types of gastronomy. In France, dessert is a way of life. As a child, I spent summers in France visiting my extended family. I also have a late summer birthday, so during the years that we remained in France through my birthday, my cake looked quite different from the (still absolutely delicious) buttercream frosted traditionally American cake my mother normally made. Instead, elaborate layers of tempered chocolate, pastry cream, and delicate genoise sponge were the norm from the local pâtissier. In Paris, when you look carefully, you will see pâtissier

¹ “Patisserie Week,” The Great British Baking Show (Channel 4, November 16, 2021).

storefronts frequently dotting small shops and street corners. A patisserie is an edible art form, something niche and ornate. And yet, these storefronts survive as independent businesses throughout France. All these shops dedicated to tiny cakes with elaborate decoration and powerful flavor have loyal consumers and remain an important part of the French diet and culture. The consumption frequency of pastries among French consumers in a survey from 2018 showed that 30 percent of the respondents declared eating pastries once to twice a week, while 48 percent tended to consume pastries on occasions only.² Pastry is a part of the diet in a way that is distinctly French. The thought of Paris conjures up visions of perfect pâtisserie windows filled with glistening tarts, colorful macarons, and ornate cakes. But every shop and restaurant in Paris has its specialty and its pastry chef who likely attended a school for masters and strives to obtain the national distinction of Meilleur Ouvrier. With all this reverence for their gastronomic prowess, the patisserie is a point of French pride and identity. In deciding to pursue a thesis, I knew I wanted to explore my long-held fascination with this national dedication to exceptional desserts.

In the spring of 2021, I enrolled in Professor Arnout van der Meer's course Global Commodities. I had toyed with the French relationship with food for some time as a possible research idea, and when presented with the commodity scholarship at the beginning of class, this national relationship with sweetness emerged as a line of inquiry. When you consider patisserie as described above, the relationship with value feels poignant. The French value something that is a uniquely luxurious good; while delicious, dessert is not a need. Despite this, patisserie has a culture of its own, supported by nationalism and history. Applying Marx's questions on value and commodity fetishism then engages the narrative behind an object, of patisserie composed of

² "Pastries Consumption Frequency France 2018," Statista, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/941111/pastries-consumption-frequency-france/>.

sweet ingredients, connecting it to the French colonial empire that pursued sweet ingredients specifically. Several initial articles I read described a gastronomic civilizing mission in French history. As Sylvie Durmelat puts it in her work on culinary imperialism, “In a time when the trade of information and goods is blurring national borders, the French, who see their cooking as a defining trait of their national identity, use French cuisine as a tool to fight the encroachment”.³ Gastronomy was a tool used by the French to propel their superiority and use their empire to further nationalistic endeavors. The value of sweetness allowed the French to rewrite the meaning of goods to fit within the pristine image of the perfect delicacy. A history emerges, one that pieces together questions of identity, power, and value – all bound together by a national sweet tooth.

Approaching the Question

Within this paper, I argue that patisserie and the French relationship with dessert are engrained in national identity. The historical context of patisserie runs parallel to the growth and power of the French colonial empire. The way sweetness and empire weave throughout French history in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries illustrate how these seemingly unconnected industries can speak to national identity. Patisserie feels removed from the empire, and yet the two show how gastronomy, luxury, and exploitative power in the form of empire are components of French history and identity. Marx’s theory on commodity fetishism serves as the backbone for this argument. This theoretical idea supposes that value is an objective concept and that power decides what is important and what is perceived meaning.⁴ Patisserie exemplifies commodity

³ Sylvie Durmelat, “Introduction: Colonial Culinary Encounters and Imperial Leftovers,” *French Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 115–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957155815572572>.

⁴ Karl Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism,” 1867, <https://web.stanford.edu/~davies/Symbsys100-Spring0708/Marx-Commodity-Fetishism.pdf>.

fetishism as a good which has high social value and receives reverence without question, despite the exploitation needed to create it, as represented by the history of the French sugar industry. French society has attributed the power to sweetness, in the form of colonial exports and in dessert itself. This value enhances French reliance on empire, reinforces the importance of gastronomy in culture, and reveals the relationship between value and luxury. Elitism permeates French national identity as hierarchical power has long existed within the culture. Creating an industry in patisserie of the ultimate dessert explains the quest for sweetness beyond borders. In this project, I argue the role of sweetness within French identity and how it can explain the power of patisserie and gastronomy, the exploitative pursuit of empire, and the significant national value of luxury.

An honest struggle of this thesis is that I approached an unexplored question. This work does not rely on singular historical works which serve as a reference to similar questions or lines of inquiry. Instead, I sought to weave together various histories and come to a concluding interpretation of French identity. With this comes an acknowledgment that, at times, these chapters can feel unconnected. The first chapters are focused depictions of the singular histories. The final two chapters, *Empire & Identity*, seek to connect and bring together how the history of theory, patisserie, and sweet colonies helps us understand identity. I am proud that I approached a complex and new question but understand how this limits my work. The work I approached was unconnected because this work is the first of its kind. In saying this, I am left with many unanswered questions and am excited to further my studies of how the intersection between colonialism, culinary culture, and national identity manifests itself beyond the borders of France. I hope this work does justice to commodity histories and provokes new questions. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the limitations of this project. I was restricted to particular sources

due to the timeline of this project and the lack of indigenous perspectives accessible in academic references. My writing implicitly centers on a Western narrative and, in some ways, preserves the colonial mindset of national exceptionalism I seek to shed light on. I sought to explain the exploitative and damaging nature of colonialism and the disregard for the human cost. I wish I could have done greater justice to the lived experiences and erasure of indigenous identity in these scenarios. I do my best to critique national identity and explain the lack of reflection on France's relationship with identity. In saying this, I fall victim to commodity fetishism myself in placing so much value on French perspectives and *pâtisserie* as the central commodity.

I structure this study of identity into five parts. Beginning with Marx's theory and scholars' interpretations grounds my argument about luxury, the relationship between value and choice, and the anointment of different cultural demarcations as national identity. Following this section is a historicization of *pâtisserie* intended to affirm the importance of the commodity within French culture and how gastronomy is one manifestation of nationalism. The colonial commodities section focuses on the story of sugar in Haiti, vanilla in Madagascar, and cacao in Cote d'Ivoire. This chapter intends to demonstrate the lengths to which the French went to pursue sweetness and justified exploitation in doing so. It also seeks to illustrate how the empire defined an era of French statehood in a way that permeates into dessert's history. The last two chapters then connect the theory and the history to illustrate how luxury, gastronomy, and empire tie together as inherent components of French identity, as defined by the continuous pursuit of sweetness, domestically and colonially.

This project is the product of my own identity, passions, and curiosity. I hope to raise critical questions on how we understand nationalism concerning food. This is not to say that people should not eat their dessert without investigating the devastating colonial origins of the

ingredients, rather that we should all think critically about the power food has and how this power can erase history. This work, I hope, will allow scholars and interested parties to question what society places value on and what they put on their plates.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Overview of Literature

The literature discussed in this section provides a look into the histories told overtime of the broad concept and individual narratives brought together in this work. As previously mentioned, this work is the first of its kind. Due to this, I brought together and relied on a very broad scholarship. The study of patisserie required me to look widely. The approach to my argument was determined by considering what my work brings together, establishing what has been written, and where information is lacking. In Chapter 1, there is an overview of academic writing concerning commodity studies, and in Chapters 4 and 5, the concluding claims about identity examine various academic works that have approached the role of these concepts within French history and culture. This literature supports the argument I claim about identity. Here, the literature described does not provide an overview to prove a thematic approach, instead, it considers what has come before this work and where this study intends to go. From this literature emerges an idea of the unexplored intersection of different histories.

The most similar academic writing to this project is Sydney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*, which greatly influenced this work. Mintz's book explores the relationship sugar has across the societies it interacts with and the grand thematic implications of this influence.⁵ Sugar, on a global scale, had an impact on economies and cultures as it became more widely accessible and harvested. The primary difference between Mintz's work and my own is the geographic focus of the book since it primarily considers the British sugar industry. *Sweetness and Power* also uses Marxist ideas and theoretical approaches to the study of goods, more so from an anthropological angle than a historical one albeit. Additionally, Mintz traces how sugar

⁵ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York, 1985.

transforms from a colonial commodity to a desired good within Britain. Mintz outlines how sugar exemplified royalty and how anything made of sugar was considered desirable and expensive purely because of its sugary nature. This work provides new perspectives by looking at France and expands beyond sugar to look at other colonial goods and the domestic pastry world of France. While not focused on French history, these excerpts provided insight into the identity given to sweetness and served as a model of commodity history.

Historicizing Studies of Nationalism & Empire

In compiling Chapter 3, I needed to utilize a breadth of sources to aptly do justice to the history of exploitation and degradation of French colonial commodities. In approaching this, my primary struggle was the amount I needed to historicize. From this came the help of several historical works, each highlighting components of the colonial narratives I compiled. Robert Stein's book, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*, highlights the brutality and intensity of the French sugar industry.⁶ Stein pairs his overview of how slavery increased the valuation of sugar as a commodity. He then translates this across the Atlantic and looks at how sugar was utilized within France, specifically by the government, and how it was used to proliferate distinctions of class. Laurent Dubois's work, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, illustrated the reality of sugar production as well as how the French administered the colony and maintained control within Haiti.⁷ Shifting to Madagascar, Ecott's book, *Vanilla: travels in search of the ice cream orchid*, as well as Andersen's work, *Creating French Settlements Overseas: Pronatalism and Colonial Medicine in Madagascar*, served as the

⁶ Robert Stein. 1988. *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. Louisiana State University Press. <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429957v>.

⁷ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

historical context for the French pursuit of vanilla. The first traces vanilla's journey globally, starting in Mexico, with insight into trade networks and the context of vanilla's botany.⁸ The second focuses primarily on slavery and exploitation in Madagascar, with a particular focus on the civilizing mission employed by the French.⁹ Corey Ross's, *The Plantation Paradigm: Colonial Agronomy, African Farmers, and the Global Cocoa Boom, the 1870s–1940s*, and Robert Earl Handloff's *Cote d'Ivoire: a country study* serve as useful histories for the subsection on Cote d'Ivoire and Cacao.¹⁰ These works contextualize French motivations, administration of the colony, and quantitative data about production.¹¹ Like the other literature described, these works touch aspects of a greater history pulled together to contextualize French colonial commodities. To understand the French desire and pursuit of a sweet empire, the stories of colonial commodities felt like an essential and insightful inclusion. Various scholarly works provided the essential context with which to compile the devastating reality of the French empire of sweetness.

Anthropological and historical inquiries into empire deepened my conceptual approach to empire and its tie to sweetness and identity. Peter Jackson, whose work I go more in-depth into during Chapter 1, applies a useful approach to commodity studies, putting into words the theoretical application I utilize. Jackson argues, like Whatmore, that to understand commodities, one must consider the journey of the parts in creating a whole.¹² Jackson distinguishes himself,

⁸ Tim Ecott, *Vanilla: travels in search of the ice cream orchid*. (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

⁹ Margaret Cook Andersen, "Creating French Settlements Overseas: Pronatalism and Colonial Medicine in Madagascar," *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 (August 1, 2010): 417–44, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00161071-2010-004>.

¹⁰ Corey Ross, "The Plantation Paradigm: Colonial Agronomy, African Farmers, and the Global Cocoa Boom, 1870s–1940s*," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 1 (March 2014): 49–71, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022813000491>.

¹¹ Robert Earl Handloff, and Thomas Duval Roberts. 1991. *Cote d'Ivoire: a country study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

¹² Peter Jackson, "Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 1 (1999): 95–108.

though, by focusing on imperialistic narratives. His writing approaches this genre of commodities by reconciling the journey of a commodity with a colonist's motivations and the impact this mentality has. Heath's work focused primarily on sugar, which deepened Chapter 3, Subsection A specifically, but her ideas informed my approach to perceptions of empire throughout. Heath considered the reflections of empire and sugar plantations within French culture, specifically looking at literature.¹³ Jackson and Heath's perspectives introduced nuance to my argument on the relationship between empire, commodities, and identity.

Historicizing Studies of Gastronomy & Patisserie

Most historical considerations of gastronomy, specifically patisserie, are historical chronologies of the commodities without a theoretical approach. In *La Grande Histoire de la Patisserie-Confiserie Francaise*, the influence of patisserie is traced through each century.¹⁴ Sender and Derrien trace how colonialism, the Renaissance and Italy, the nobility, and even the French Revolution influenced the patisserie industry and where it fits into French gastronomy. The authors' historical consideration makes a case for patisserie as high art and how it translated to high society. This historical argument illustrates how gastronomy can indicate class and its divides through accessibility and the symbolism of a commodity. This book's comprehensive overview of patisserie history illustrates the evolving understanding of the industry and its significant influence. Michael Kronl's book, *Sweet Invention*, looks at the history of dessert internationally.¹⁵ Both Kronl and Sender and Derrien's book are an example, though, of the fetishization of commodity, as they tie patisserie's influence deeply to historical development.

¹³ Elizabeth Heath, "Sugarcoated Slavery: Colonial Commodities and the Education of the Senses in Early Modern France," *Critical Historical Studies* 5, no. 2 (September 2018): 169–207, <https://doi.org/10.1086/699684>.

¹⁴ Sender, S. G., and Marcel Derrien. *La Grande Histoire De La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française*. Genève (Suisse): Minerva, 2003.

¹⁵ Michael Kronl, *Sweet Invention* (Chicago Review Press, 2016).

These works are also narrow at times, with limited critical considerations of gastronomy or patisserie. This literature serves this work as contextual background, without invoking the history of value or empire.

I include agricultural geography within the theoretical introduction to this work in Chapter 1 as a critical lens on food studies. Scholars like Sarah Whatmore consider the history behind food and the agricultural consideration of place and background.¹⁶ Whatmore's method is useful when approaching interconnected gastronomic histories that are still distinct in their timelines, focuses, and locations. The approach of agricultural geography provides legitimacy to my study of the ingredients within patisserie, without a direct source link between the two. Whatmore's work defends considerations of gastronomy as a web, which sees merit in tracing the piece-by-piece history of food.

The balance between a theoretical approach and a historical one is struck by Maryann Tebben and Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, whose works helped guide my approach to gastronomy. In Tebben's *Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy* she dives into the transformation of pastry through the centuries. In this article we see dessert go from a preliminary concept to art reflective of the wealth and luxury so associated with it.¹⁷ The article describes how this industry exploded in the 18th century, as dessert moved beyond cheese and fruit at the end of a meal. The author illustrates how elevated desserts were a luxury for the highest echelons of society until the 19th century. Tebben also argues how various pastries were "codified" to represent different social classes and reference different histories, figures, or

¹⁶ "Agricultural Geography - Sarah Whatmore, 1993," accessed December 7, 2021, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/030913259301700106>.

¹⁷ Maryann Tebben, 2015. "Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy." *Gastronomica* 15 (2): 10–25.

symbols. Ferguson's Culinary Nationalism considers how food informs identity.¹⁸ Ferguson uses France as a specific case study and explores culinary consciousness and how food is nationalized. The latter concept is useful when exploring why and how patisserie is distinctly French. Tebben and Ferguson are referenced in Chapter 2 when looking at patisserie conceptually, but their ideas inform the paragraphs within Chapter 3 which look at the translation of colonial commodities into a patisserie in France. The scholarship of Tebben and Ferguson reinforces the relationship between gastronomy and French identity, which I differentiate from my own by applying additional nuance through the study of Marxism and empire.

Historicizing Studies of Luxury & Value

At the outset of this project, I intended to examine how the attribution of value inspired the pursuit of sweetness, creating domestic dominance and inspiring the pursuit of a sweet empire. This intention remained among my chief objectives and constituted a central component of this research. However, I quickly realized that within the idea of value, the most important concept in its application to this project is the assigned label of luxury. This term is multi-faceted in meaning and situationally variable but for this project represents a typology of commodities determined to have an elite value, a superiority within its categorization. Luxury also represents the unnecessary, commodities within society that exist for pleasure or enjoyment. Analyzing the study of an opulent good that was wholly unnecessary beyond individualized desires revealed the importance of including luxury in this study. The implicit coercion of this desire for luxury leads society to invest and dedicate itself to its pursuit. In historicizing luxury, I struggled to find

¹⁸ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, "Culinary Nationalism," *Gastronomica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 102–9, <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2010.10.1.102>.

accessible and connected works and instead settled upon using the lens of commodity fetishism to approach the question of value, power, and the choices within society.

With this approach, Marx's work on commodities emerged as central to understanding fetishism and value. Marx's theory on commodity fetishism has inspired generations of commodity historians and a plethora of subfields, famous works, and lines of inquiry. With this, I used the works of Jeremy Jennings and Michael Kwass to connect these ideas back to sweetness, luxury, and France. Kwass' work focuses primarily on the terminology of luxury and the implication that language has had in developing a luxury culture within France.¹⁹ Jennings' approach is comparable to Kwass' but focuses less on linguistics and more so on the role of powerful and royal figures had in establishing the meaning of luxury in France.²⁰ This approach introduced a lens for considering how luxury manifested itself within French society, specifically allowing me to use an approach focused on the codification of commodities which qualify for this label. While neither Kwass nor Jennings directly interacts with the realm of sweetness within France, these approaches allow me to make claims about this intersection.

This historiography is an insight into the scholarship which predates this work. While comprehensive, a range of additional source material was used in creating my argument. My search for source material needed to be an organized effort, that carefully linked material which rarely addressed the intersection of *pâtisserie*, empire, and identity specifically. While it proved a challenge to amass this literature, these diverse perspectives allowed me to explore a new and original topic. The information within this historiography serves to introduce how my

¹⁹ Michael Kwass, "Between Words and Things: 'La Querelle Du Luxe' in the Eighteenth Century," *MLN* 130, no. 4 (2015): 771–82, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2015.0065>.

²⁰ Jeremy Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 1 (2007): 79–105.

intersectional claim about the connection between sweetness and French identity evolved from previous academic works.

CHAPTER ONE

The Question of Commodities

The Framework of Commodity Fetishism

At first glance, a commodity is a basic good. Commodities are objects, generally, and in the case of this project, foods. The idea of commodity studies seems too basic to develop into a major body of work. And yet, commodities hold mystery, secrecy, and depth. Commodities have interwoven histories and knowledge, with depth and unexpected complexities. Karl Marx's theory on commodity fetishism sheds light on the considerable role of patisserie in French cultural history and identity. In his book *Capital*, Marx explained the sociological concept underlying commodity fetishism:

“As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.”²¹

Marx's theory questions the social value we give to commodities and how it is not equitable to the labor value predetermined by production. To break down this theoretical excerpt, Marx argues that objects have a society-imposed value, as to say there is nothing natural in how we define the importance of commodities. Commodities are the physical relationship between physical things; they are defined by the community around them.²² The relationships between

²¹ Karl Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism,” 1867, <https://web.stanford.edu/~davies/Symbsys100-Spring0708/Marx-Commodity-Fetishism.pdf>.

²² Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism”.

individuals define what matters, and the subsequent social connotations or importance commodities possess. When several components come together to erase the history of production, Marx calls this valuation of objects fetishism.

Within this paper, this theory serves as a backbone for critical considerations of sweetness and power. This project examines the social relationship in French society between physical things, the desire for these objects, and the power in creating and securing them. The purpose of this theory is to examine the cultural value of sweetness in France, manifesting itself nationally with *pâtisserie* and through power exemplified by the colonial network. It connects this to the French empire and its desire to amass power, building a colonial network around valuable sweet goods. In applying Marxist theory, one can examine these commodities by their value and abstractly. When connecting the inherently French world of *pâtisserie* to the colonial commodities of sugar, cacao, and vanilla, Marxist theory upholds the idea that the French assign power to luxury and identity.

Commodities are transcendent. There is no one-dimensional explanation of the past when constructing a history of goods and objects. The variations of history derive themselves from the analysis of production. As Marx states, “It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him”.²³ Objects change their meaning based on their relationship with individuals and institutions. One determines the value of a commodity by the use subtracted from the value, isolating a commodity's importance in society. This idea of use does not wholly equal need, instead, it is an individual consideration of the frequency and significance of a commodity. Part of the evolving meaning of significance connects to the labor and means of production. This shift

²³ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism” .

does not translate literally to considerations like a factory or workshop. Marx refers to the chain of production and the collective variables involved.²⁴ Labor assumes a social identity, taking on societal meaning. Different forms of labor, from weaving to plantation work, are social functions. Marx defines the importance of this relationship with labor as such,

“A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor.”²⁵

The social valuation of labor is not objectively definable. Commodity studies provide a framework to consider the objects around us, but this framework hinges on the idea of subjectivity and mystery. This is not to say that there is a validity of conditions and relations, driven by definite and historical context. Rather, as Marx describes ambiguity in his writings, “Commodities, have already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life, before man seeks to decipher, not their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but their meaning”.²⁶ This search for meaning is what makes commodity studies applicable to this project. When considering the relationship between the French and sweetness and dessert, one can connect two seemingly unconnected aspects of French identity: colonialism and patisserie.

For this project, the relationship between value and commodities is Marx’s most important point. As objects, commodities have no attached value.²⁷ Analyzing them as discrete items can help us reflect upon their place in society. The French impose meaning and dramatize the importance of sweet goods, transforming sugar, cacao, and vanilla into a patisserie. Objects

²⁴ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism”.

²⁵ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism”.

²⁶ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism”.

²⁷ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism”.

own their value as dictated by man, and considering value assigned through relationships reveals the social processing of value. As Marx puts it in his *Commodity* work, “So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange value either in a pearl or a diamond”.²⁸ The objects in our world have no designed or inherent value. Marx’s theory seeks to understand where this value comes from, the relationship between labor and commodities, and how social value develops. This penultimate work provides a baseline reference for discussions on commodities and particularly this project which seeks to understand importance and identity.

Critical Considerations of Marx

Francis Mulhern’s work entitled *Critical Considerations on the Fetishism of Commodities* builds upon Marx’s theoretical ideas. Mulhern frames her critique around Marx’s condition of subjectivity in capitalist societies. Mulhern believes, “Commodity fetishism, by contrast, is strictly bounded in its historical incidence”, meaning that this theoretical concept only exists within a historical framework.²⁹ The meanings we attach to commodities are derived from the historical context within the framework of capitalism, specifically regularized commodity production. Sweetness within French culture is deeply intertwined with exploitation and capitalism. Mulhern would specifically apply this to the colonial aspect of this project, examining the magnitude of colonial commodities and the intentionality of their existence. Mulhern argues that fetishism will remain consistent, but its saturation is not an assumption one should make, especially as things immerse themselves within the supply chain.³⁰ Mulhern breaks down how to apply Marx’s theory in this regard but also shows its limitations, “Fetishism

²⁸ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism”.

²⁹ Francis Mulhern, “Critical Considerations on the Fetishism of Commodities,” *ELH* 74 (January 1, 2007): 479–92, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2007.0016>.

³⁰ Mulhern, “Critical Considerations on the Fetishism of Commodities”.

remains a structurally given potential, and, as commodities enter endlessly varied chains of exchange, the potential becomes mobile throughout the network. At this point we can imagine episodes or hotspots of fetishism but still not the saturated totality that Marx projected.”³¹

Mulhern agrees with Marx that commodities have value because of the amount of work they entail. This is precisely the way labor and detail are used to quantify commodity value. She also agrees that their exchange value is determined by the amount of socially necessary labor-power expended in their production. The aspect of Mulhern’s work most critical to this project are in dissecting fetishism. Mulhern believes that fetishism is a necessity, but that one should associate it with both the ideas of Marx and Freud. Mulhern writes, “Unlike Freud, who could discern a range of variation in the relative forces of acknowledgement and denial in disavowal, Marx was categorical in his judgment of the experience of commodity exchange. Mystery rules, in a process that inverts that of disavowal”.³² Freud presents a less black and white imagination of objects and their existence, arguing for relativity in relationships. When applying Mulhern’s work to my own topic, this argument allows me to consider the nuance of Marxist thought, broadening fetishism beyond an objective truth and into an informant on the relationships between objects, people, and institutions.

Peter Jackson’s *Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things* argues about the relationship between commodification and the erasure of colonial narratives. Jackson’s theory ties directly to the crux of this paper – applying commodity presumptions and associations to a colonial power network. As Jackson puts it, with colonialism there is an “inevitable process of cultural homogenization”.³³ This paper seeks to prove just that through commodity theory, that the

³¹ Mulhern, "Critical Considerations on the Fetishism of Commodities".

³² Mulhern, "Critical Considerations on the Fetishism of Commodities".

³³ Peter Jackson, “Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 1 (1999): 95–108.

French elite class attempted to coopt sweetness and create a luxury-based empire.

Anthropologies have shown how commodities that start as luxury items for the elite can trickle down to becoming a popular item of consumption, of which tea and coffee are examples.

Jackson's work can help illustrate the definitions set by empire grow and expand and affect the periphery. Jackson believes Marx also shows us how commodification involved the conversion of use-values into exchange values (often via monetary exchange), for example when goods are produced for sale rather than for purely personal use. Use value is the direct or tangible value of an object, its surface purpose, whereas exchange value is the definition set by society. This commodification comes when goods find a place within the market. In terms of colonial goods, this means the shift from regular organic growth to industrialized production and exportation. In considering western empires like France, this would require labor from the global south, cash crops and the plantation system are examples of this, and the then determined exchange value comes upon the commodities extraction in which it is processed in the metropole.

The scope and history of this project connect to Jackson's approach to commodification. Commodification is often connected to exploitation, as tied to the desire to establish the conversion of value.³⁴ This commodification seeks to erase the geographical origins and colonize it. As Jackson puts it, the ability to do this is only held by a few elites, "The ability to commodify other cultures is not evenly distributed in society or space. For those with the necessary economic and cultural capital, it is increasingly easy to enjoy 'a little taste of something more exotic'".³⁵ The French provide a case study to Jackson's interpretation of commodification, of an empire that desired a luxury and could impose themselves to do so. Jackson connects the rarity of this power to societal structure, arguing that this is related to the social system, the factors that

³⁴ Jackson, "Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things".

³⁵ Jackson, "Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things".

encourage or contain it, the long-term expansion or stabilization, and the culture and ideological premises of a country.³⁶ Jackson's analysis fits with the argument around timeline this paper seeks to make, of when the power around commodities in France rose and fell per the colonial empire. Applying Jackson's interpretation of Marx's theory to the French empire sheds light on power dynamics, specifically commodities.

Arjun Appadurai is the other foremost theorist on commodities aside from Marx. His essay, *The Social Life of Things*, provides another lens to consider commodities. Appadurai reframes commodities as something beyond objects with the consideration of meaning. Appadurai defines commodities as, "Things with a particular type of social potential, that they are distinguishable from "products," "objects," "goods," "artifacts," and other sorts of things - but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view."³⁷ Appadurai argues that commodities are something beyond everyday goods, they must be things that carry weight or potential. Instead of trying to commodify all goods, Appadurai argues that commodity studies should more closely consider the total trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption.³⁸ In considering a larger argument on the effect goods have had on a state and the choices made by that state, this trajectory-based approach fits this project well. Appadurai emphasizes the context of social arenas and cultural units. Commodities should exist within an intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors.³⁹ Within these factors to consider is also the relationship with exploitation. As Appadurai writes, "As rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies, they tend to become indigenized".⁴⁰ In considering the French, the

³⁶ Jackson, "Commodity Cultures: The Traffic in Things".

³⁷ Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819582>.

³⁸ Appadurai, "The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective".

³⁹ Appadurai, "The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective".

⁴⁰ Appadurai, "The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective".

relationship they had with their colonial holdings was to coopt and conquer, rather than accept mutual influence. This process of cultural appropriation can be considered southernization, where the power in a colonial relationship shifts the meaning of things. In the trajectory of commodities, the link between persons and things can cease existence to restrict or control identity. Within Appadurai's definition, since commodities are never singular things, they are the full life of a transcendent good, "The flow of commodities in any given situation is a shifting compromise between socially regulated paths and competitively inspired diversions".⁴¹ When considering commodities, it is essential to walk through both the natural path and the unexpected additions. Appadurai applies both a narrower and a more holistic look at commodity studies. When approaching this project, where one considers national goods and then the network of exploitation, Appadurai's approach is a fitting consideration of the transcendent nature of commodities.

The Colonial Commodity

The framework established by Marx and Jackson's interpretation of his theory demonstrates how commodities create colonial power and manifest themselves within empires. Using Sarah Whatmore and David Harvey's considerations of agricultural commodification can illustrate how food commodities and their production manifest these theories. Unpacking these articles will allow a direct application of commodity theory to France and the various case studies explored within this paper.

Agricultural geography is a way of approaching commodity studies, by considering goods through a network of production. Agriculture allows us to understand how food systems exist within large networks. These networks foster codependency and support a formulaic

⁴¹ Appadurai, "The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective".

approach to upholding an empire. Sarah Whatmore unpacks how agriculture exists beyond our traditional conceptions of farming and plant life. Nonfarm elements, like nation-states and new technologies, place commodities within the framework of conception and production.⁴² The structural links underlying varied experiences and varied players connect commodities. What Whatmore distills from this is, “That developments in the food manufacturing and retailing sectors are increasingly influential over the rest of the system.”⁴³ To understand the variety of commodities this paper seeks to discuss and connect, applying Whatmore’s line of thought serves as theoretical groundwork. Colonial commodities and luxury commodities exist as separate entities. A holistic understanding of French commodification relies on understanding how goods are created and marketed. Agricultural geography connects food products to cultural histories.⁴⁴ The importance of the state fits within the theoretical framework above, as geographers analyze the political economy within the context of state production. Whatmore applies this specifically to colonial and post-colonial relationships. When state intervention and policy intersect with agriculture, supply and production are direct products of consumption.⁴⁵ This paper seeks to apply this directly to the parallel relationship between sweetness and power, driving colonial relationships. When approaching this project, using agricultural geography to understand commodities adds nuance to the relationship of food products to power and systemic structures.

In David Harvey’s *Reflections on the Geographical Imagination*, the influence of power within geography is further explored. The baseline of agricultural geography works well to understand the relationship between empire and object. Whatmore’s article omits this nuance

⁴² Whatmore, “Agricultural Geography”.

⁴³ Whatmore, “Agricultural Geography”.

⁴⁴ Whatmore, “Agricultural Geography”.

⁴⁵ Whatmore, “Agricultural Geography”.

within the relationship between land, food, and colonialism. Harvey, conversely, establishes the social construction of geography and commodities lies within the mode of production and its characteristic social relations.⁴⁶ Assignments of place create distinctive roles and power within social orders. As we look at colonial networks, the relationship between place and power is even more prevalent. Harvey roots his argument in the desire for power, “The spread of capitalist social relations has often entailed a fierce battle to socialize different peoples into the common net of time discipline implicit in industrial organization and into a respect for partitions of territorial and land rights specified in mathematically rigorous terms”.⁴⁷ Geography can help us understand the importance of land and power, but contextualizing Marx’s theory on commodities and even Peter Jackson’s analysis of this idea underscores the importance of capitalism within this thesis. The idea upholding this theory is an empire, where the drive for goods fuels power, redefining geographical understandings of place. In Harvey’s article, he connects his theory to this Marxist idea directly,

“We cannot tell from looking at the commodity whether it has been produced by happy laborers working in a cooperative in Italy, grossly exploited laborers working under conditions of apartheid in South Africa, or wage laborers protected by adequate labor legislation and wage agreements in Sweden. The grapes that sit upon the supermarket shelves are mute; we cannot see the fingerprints of exploitation upon them or tell immediately what part of the world they are from. We can, by further enquiry, lift the veil on this geographical and social ignorance and make ourselves aware of these issues (as we do when we engage in a consumer boycott of nonunion or South African grapes). But in so doing we find we have to go behind and beyond what the market itself reveals in order to understand how society is working. This was precisely Marx's own agenda”⁴⁸

In Harvey’s article, he unpacks how power is connected to place, further developing our understanding of how commodities erase a narrative. All food has a geographical footprint, erased by power and exploitation. By looking beyond our fetishization, we reckon with a system

⁴⁶ David Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination on JSTOR,” accessed December 8, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2563621?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁴⁷ Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination on JSTOR.”

⁴⁸ Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination on JSTOR.”

of commodity production fueled by capitalism. Considering geography as a lens to approach commodity studies further reveals how fetishization creates a narrative decided by those in power.

Societal Value

This paper will introduce an overview of patisserie, explaining how it developed and became an essential part of French culinary culture, but the primary focus of this work will be beginning in the 18th and through the 19th centuries, specifically in the 2nd French Empire. Theoretical works on the changing conception of luxury and value can inform how commodity studies approach this specific case.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, France underwent a series of societal shifts that forced the country to reckon with luxury. In Jeremy Jennings's article focusing on how luxury shifted at this time, he writes, "According to Melon, if commerce could be defined as 'the exchange of the superfluous for what is necessary,'" then luxury was "an extraordinary sumptuousness which flows from wealth and the security provided by the government."⁴⁹ Jennings describes how luxury is inherently controlled and derived from the state. In the case of France, what was superfluous and sumptuous shifted at this time as the country reckoned with the monarchy, entering a new era for the state and shifting its identity towards an even more global empire. The revolution extinguished luxury in the sense of the regent and reformulated it into access and class, materializing in the form of a consumer revolution. In Michael Kwass' article on the change in consumer behavior at this time, he analyzes how prerevolutionary France existed around a set ideal and the survival of the rest, a wholly subversive act.⁵⁰ The new regime marked

⁴⁹ Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought."

⁵⁰ Michael Kwass, "Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France | Representations | University of California Press," accessed November 10, 2021,

a new category of the consumer, but also a restructuring of value for the French. Luxury and national identity became tied together, rather than luxury and monarch. The word "luxe" entered the French language in 1606 as the synonym for "superfluity." In 1694, the Dictionnaire de l'Academie Francaise tied its meaning to that of "excess," with an implied note of moral condemnation.⁵¹ The French experienced a shift in what "luxe" was at this point. Rather than rejecting its implied connotations of oppression and royalty, new classes of people had access to it. The French redefined what mattered to the country and could delegate value to new concepts, something they tapped into as they built their empire. The country considered luxe when formulating its new, post-revolution nationalism, assigning value to different things as intrinsically French, creating an elite nature to national citizenship as well. In considering Marx, fetishism, and the other theoretical approaches, understanding the shift in power the French underwent at this time adds important insight into how sweetness was redefined.

Patisserie, Empire, and Commodities – Applying this Theory

This project seeks to examine how commodities create identity and power. By utilizing these theoretical ideas as a framework to approach unpacking French history, the argument can find grounding in the base of Marx's idea. Commodity Fetishism helps us ask the essential questions tied to the thesis of this paper. Commodities play a role in the development of the French empire and identity. Considering agricultural and geographical aspects illuminate how the French built a colonial network around objects. Ideas around luxury illustrate the dichotomy of sweetness and how it grew to hold importance within French society. In asking a question of how sweetness holds power within French culture, using commodities is the essential approach. Looking at

<https://online.ucpress.edu/representations/article/82/1/87/81807/Ordering-the-World-of-Goods-Consumer-Revolution>.

⁵¹ Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought."

patisserie within the upper echelons and the colonial commodification of sweet goods illustrates how the French built an empire around sweet goods. Marx's ideas hold these ideas in place and help formulate an argument explaining the derivation of power.

With the theoretical framework of this paper established, it is important to note how fetishization plays its role in this study. Commodity fetishism is complex, convoluted, and can manifest in a multitude of ways. This theory describes society's role in deciding where power lies and what is valuable. I have played into this myself by choosing to write a paper on the power of sweetness and the manifestation of the French empire through their obsession with patisserie, empire, and luxury. With this in mind, it is impossible to erase fetishization wholly from conversations on commodities. The task this paper strives to tackle is the explicit conversation around value and the discussion of perspective to check giving anything too much power. Karl Marx and the work surrounding his theory give nuance to this thesis in unpacking a discussion on commodity fetishism while trying to avoid falling into the same traps of which he warns.

CHAPTER TWO

Pâtisserie: The French Inclination Towards Sweetness

Introducing Pâtisserie

A man's sobs can be heard echoing throughout the Lycée Hotelier du Touquet, one of France's most famous hospitality institutes. To the average individual, one must wonder what death or destruction this man must be mourning. Actually, the anguish heard is a pâtissier discovering that he was not named a Meilleur Ouvrier de France, the highest, most elite honor assigned to French pastry chefs.⁵² This competition can provide some insight into the heritage of dessert in France. The tension of the competition revolves around meticulousness, fragility, expertise, and pride. As Maryann Tebben puts it in her article, *Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy*, "The chefs who can survive such rigorous expectations are seen as warriors and national heroes, even if their battle involves displays of fanciful decorations, tacky color combinations, and profuse tears when the sculptures collapse into shards."⁵³ This competition is a matter of honor identity, sentiments connected to pâtisserie since its inception. For some within France, dessert is life or death, it is French culture, and it is an intrinsically important part of the diet. Pâtisserie remains a symbol of national culture even centuries after the collapse of the monarchy where its place in French culture originated. Pâtisserie embodies the decadence and luxury of French gastronomy. Haute Cuisine is a broad genre of French food, the distinctive nature of pâtisserie within this is the separate industry and value attributed. Pâtisserie

⁵² Soon Motoyama, "Inside the French Culinary Competition That Drives Chefs to Tears," *Eater* (*Eater*, November 30, 2018), <https://www.eater.com/2018/11/30/18118337/mof-meilleur-ouvrier-de-france-french-chef>.

⁵³ Maryann Tebben, 2015. "Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy." *Gastronomica* 15 (2): 10–25.

is considered high art in French culture, specifically culinary culture which is tied deeply to French identity.

To understand Pâtisserie, one must consider its value within society. Pâtisserie is a want and never a need, marking the distinction between food and haute cuisine. Despite the complex nature of production, demanding industry, and the lack of importance pertaining to health, pâtisserie maintains its essential place within French culinary culture. In his book, *Sweet Invention*, Michael Krondl describes the precise and intensive pâtisserie culture, tied to symbolism and historical value,

“In France they have their own way of dividing up the pastry repertoire. A pain au chocolat would never be categorized as dessert yet virtually these identical ingredients formed into a tarte au chocolat would. The first belongs to a category of dishes called the viennoiserie which are eaten for breakfast or as a snack while the latter is classified as pâtisserie and generally consumed at the end of a meal. The main distinction between the two seems to be that one may be eaten out of the hands or the other you need a plate and flatware. Only Barbarians (and Americans) would eat le dessert at any other way.”⁵⁴

The French take pâtisserie seriously, as it is an emblem of French culinary culture. It is an industry defined by history, prestige, and precision. For contextual purposes, pâtisseries are French pastries and the shops that sell them. Although the word is used liberally in English-speaking countries, in France, the law restricts its use to bakeries that employ licensed maître pâtissier (master pastry chefs).⁵⁵ Pâtisseries are traditionally light and delicate, as well as sweet and decadent. Creating pâtisserie requires training, specifically the study of classical techniques, to learn how to create such delicate items.⁵⁶ Since many of the pastries are intricate, only a well-trained hand can execute them flawlessly. The intense and rich world of pâtisserie gives it value, specifically as a luxury by the definitions in Jeremy Jennings's theory above where the state

⁵⁴ Krondl, *Sweet Invention*.

⁵⁵ “What Are Pâtisserie, Boulangerie and Viennoiserie?,” accessed November 2, 2021, <https://www.cordonbleu.edu/news/what-are-patisserie-boulangerie-viennoiserie/en>.

⁵⁶ “What Are Pâtisserie, Boulangerie and Viennoiserie?”

determines how it wants itself as an elite represented.⁵⁷ This classification explains its role in society and can help us grapple with the French's relationship with food and identity.

As a commodity, French society generally values patisserie above other sweets or desserts in France. There is a reverence for patisserie that supersedes candy, ice cream, or other sweet alternatives. Other desserts do not have the same luxury connotation. This designation has to do with the industry itself but also ties back to the general argument in question. The reverence around patisserie can explain itself when one considers how the French use food and the culinary world to develop their own identity, embedded in uniquely French cuisine. As an empire, France prioritized its individualized identity and built power around sweetness. At the crux of these colonial matters, which this paper seeks to explore, is the importance of luxury. As Jeremy Jennings and Michael Kwass illustrate, luxury goods, particularly in France, were manifestations of government power where elites set standards for commodities. Considering patisserie from a commodity standpoint can illustrate the cultural impact dessert has on France and explain choices throughout history. Patisserie provides a case study into sweet luxuries and its history can help demonstrate where power originates and how value is attributed.

16th Century Origins

The refinement of French elite cuisine culture during the 16th century brought patisserie and dessert to the forefront of French gastronomy. This development is in part due to the arrival of Catherine de Medici. Catherine was Queen of France from 1547 until 1559, and Queen Mother from 1559 to 1589. During the latter half of her tenure, she was quite influential. Catherine arrived at the French court from Italy to marry King Henry II of France. With her, she

⁵⁷ Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Crown Publisher, 1989).

brought her cooks, pastry cooks, chefs, confectioners, and distillers.⁵⁸ Before Catherine's arrival, the oldest French entries in cookbooks from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were not recognizable as desserts for two reasons: these preparations were sometimes savory, and they were not specific to the close of the meal.⁵⁹ It is important to not overstate the influence of Catherine De Medici on French cuisine during the 16th century, what her arrival signifies was a sharing of sweet culture. Specifically, the arrival of an Italian queen brought an Italian presence to the court. Notably, modern Italy had yet to be established but the series of city-states where modern-day Italy exists had extensive trade practices and across Europe, the culinary zeitgeist was decidedly Italian. Italian cookbooks had sections designated for desserts in the 16th century.⁶⁰ Conversely in France, the *Ménagier de Paris*, a volume of advice and recipes from the 14th century, long before the arrival of Catherine, provides insight into the impact of desserts growth could have. This book details the exorbitant cost of sugar in an era where the French had limited access or understanding of the commodity. The *Ménagier* describes how the price of a pound of sugar was more than cinnamon or ginger and could even buy you the equivalent of several pigs and horses.⁶¹ The *Ménagier* was a book addressed to the affluent of society, and even so, any sweet flavor was a rare addition to any menu. The extraordinary price of sweeteners and lack of access to other flavors limited the interest of French elites in or development of a dessert culture. The City-States throughout what today is modern Italy, though, developed their

⁵⁸ Michael Wintroub, "Civilizing the Savage and Making a King: The Royal Entry Festival of Henri II" (Rouen, 1550). *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 465-494

⁵⁹ Maryann Tebben, 2015. "Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy." *Gastronomica* 15 (2): 10–25.

⁶⁰ Michael Krondl, *Sweet Invention* (Chicago Review Press, 2016).

⁶¹ *The Good Wife's Guide (Le Ménagier de Paris): A Medieval Household Book, The Good Wife's Guide (Le Ménagier de Paris)* (Cornell University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801461965>.

own sweet culture. They became increasingly infatuated with dessert, via their ease of access to Sicilian sugar.

The Italians had a growing patisserie culture as they could cultivate sugar themselves in Sicily. The Mediterranean is the most northern location in the world to produce sugar cane, providing the Italians with a monopoly for continental cultivation over a widely desired good.⁶² The Italians became masters of sugar refining and developed both sweet goods and techniques under the encouragement of the Pope and elite Renaissance figures who were committed to the development of Italian culinary art.⁶³ Within the 16th century, France transitioned from traditional savory pies to more delicate recipes, such as meringues, macarons, and ice cream. Sugar became the favored vehicle for flaunting wealth and status. The British went through a similar culinary evolution to the French, allowing the boundaries of their gastronomy to expand and take on new meaning. Sugar became the new spice after centuries of culinary obsession with the pungent spice from the Orient. The French elite could capitalize on another good to display class and grandeur.

Catherine's arrival was a catalyst in revolutionizing dessert, but the development of the colonial empire in the aftermath of her life marked a shift in access to ingredients. Before the colonization of the French West Indies sugar was inaccessible and extremely expensive; it was not until the end of the 16th century that France had their own colonial holdings in places like Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. As sugar entered the market in the 15th century bringing with it the international influence of dessert culture, the French developed their enthusiasm,

⁶² J. H. Galloway, "The Mediterranean Sugar Industry," *Geographical Review* 67, no. 2 (1977): 177–94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/214019>.

⁶³ S. G. Sender and Marcel Derrien, *La Grande Histoire De La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française* (Genève (Suisse): Minerva, 2003).

capitalizing on developing a national flair.⁶⁴ The infatuation with sweetness is traceable because a set of related recipes under the title *Viandier* exists as early as 1300 and reappears through the 17th century. These early model cookbooks initially included no sweetness whatsoever, however towards the 16th century, there are sweet recipes in every course like flan, milk tart, and Norse pies.⁶⁵ Although *pâtisserie* is not an exclusively French concept, this era marked the development of distinct national interest. The initial access to the sweetness from Italy sparked a movement. As the French gained access to refined sugar through colonization, they began to codify their own *pâtisserie* culture.

The Era of Dominance

During the following century in France, French gastronomy and pastry began to be more refined and grandiose. After centuries where the distinction of wealth through food was pungent spices from the Far East, the 17th century marked a shift in which sugar became the favored vehicle for flaunting one's wealth and status.⁶⁶ This marked a crucial shift from reliance on trade routes outside of western control like the silk road to colonial extractions directly under western control. The 17th century was the era of Enlightenment thought and the development of French intellect and culture. During this time, *pâtisserie* took on a life of its own, becoming almost artistic and developing into a high-class, high culture world. The transformation of the word dessert from its origins in the verb “*desservir*” (meaning the opposite of to serve, or to clear the

⁶⁴ Krondl, *Sweet Invention*.

⁶⁵ *Le Viandier de Guillaume Tirel, Dit Taillevent, ... : Publié Sur Le Manuscrit de La Bibliothèque Nationale Avec Les Variantes Des Mss. de La Bibliothèque Mazarine et Des Archives de La Manche / Précédé d'une Introduction, [d'une Bibliographie Des Manuscrits et Des Éditions] et Accompagné de Notes Par Le Bon Jérôme Pichon et Georges Vicaire*, 1892, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k62367s>.

⁶⁶ Stéphane Henaut and Jeni Mitchell, *A Bite-Sized History of France: Gastronomic Tales of Revolution, War, and Enlightenment*. New York: The New Press, 2019. 121.

table) began in the 17th century.⁶⁷ Those with power in France sought to develop their luxury culture by determining what had consumer value and what distinguished various classes. After relying on foreign influences to create dessert and pastry, the powerful in France sought to create their distinct cuisine of pastry and manage the social meaning of *pâtisserie*.

There was an emergence of published works, such as *Le Pâtissier François* (The French Patisserie) in 1653 by François Pierre La Varenne, that exemplifies the modern and distinctly French cultural identity focused on gourmand and dessert. This era marked the emergence of French gastronomy.⁶⁸ La Varenne made the “frenchness” of his cooking explicit when he called his book “The French Cook” as if to distinguish it from all other foreign approaches. This national self-consciousness reflects the growing connection between *pâtisserie* and identity within France. Figure 1 depicts the cover of this book, which was the first to be devoted just to pastry. While much of it focuses on sweet pastries, it also illustrates the role they played in the ceremony of a meal.⁶⁹ The remarkably detailed work operates under step-by-step instructions and detailed measurements and



Figure 1: The Cover of *Le Pâtissier François*

⁶⁷ Maryann Tebben, “Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy,” *Gastronomica* 15, no. 2 (2015): 10–25, <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2015.15.2.10>.

⁶⁸ François Pierre de La Varenne, *Le Pâtissier François*. Amsterdam: Chez Louys et Daniel Elzevier, 1655.

⁶⁹ “Recipes for Domesticity,” *Cookery, Household Management, and the Notion of Expertise* (The University of Chicago Library, April 22, 2013), <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/collex/exhibits/recipes-domesticity/continental-cookery/>.

temperatures. The methods for making puff pastry and macarons are fairly identical to today's recipes. These cookbooks created a hierarchy of *pâtisserie*, or classifications that symbolized the growing importance of dessert. The classifications also indicated that some pastries were subordinate to others in technique and substance, defining what was the most inaccessible or reserved for the most elite in society.⁷⁰ Classification is an empirical concept, the distinctions of tiers within society were a fitting direction for pastry within a country that developed a notorious and oppressive empire. Additionally, dessert began to look more and more like art. Catherine de Medici brought to the French court *pâtisserie* and with it the idea that *pâtisserie* connotated high art, opulence, royalty, and wealth. During the 17th century in France, desserts began to look more intricate and even less edible.⁷¹ *Pâtisserie* took on its own identity and developed into a uniquely French commodity that embodied pleasure and luxury.

The 18th century was a complicated and transitory era for France, culminating in the French Revolution in 1789. As peasants suffered and food shortages swept the nation, the high art of *pâtisserie* became even further isolated to the upper echelons of society. The 18th century was an era of haute cuisine, sumptuous receptions, and ceremonial dinners, specifically for societal elites. During this era of King Louis XV and the Duke of Orleans, the progress of *pâtisserie* was a prerogative for royalty.⁷² Inventions such as mechanical kneaders and cocoa grinders began to appear in kitchens as experimentation to improve the creation of *pâtisserie*. This infatuation with *pâtisserie* by the nobility saw a large number of new recipes emerge with illustrious names that referenced royalty.⁷³ For context, according to Norbert Elias, the loss of

⁷⁰ Maryann Tebben, 2015. "Seeing and Tasting: The Evolution of Dessert in French Gastronomy." *Gastronomica* 15 (2): 10–25.

⁷¹ S. G. Sender and Marcel Derrien, *La Grande Histoire De La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française* (Genève (Suisse): Minerva, 2003).

⁷² Sender, "La Grande Histoire de La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française".

⁷³ Sender, "La Grande Histoire de La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française".

the weapons monopoly of the nobility pushed nobles to look for other ways of distinguishing themselves from other non-nobles. The nobility and courts played a crucial role in legitimizing the anointing certain goods as luxury, a classification patisserie earned.⁷⁴ Elaborate became the major theme in patisserie, exemplified by desserts like the croquembouche, which is a staggering tower of pastry puffs that is extremely difficult to execute.⁷⁵ In the pastry and confectionary sections of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedie*, published in 1751, the authors confirm the rising importance of visual appeal in patisserie, reaffirming the audience of these desserts were elites with the resources to entertain elaborate sugar sculptures. Diderot describes how taste and look have equal footing in patisserie since confectionary is an art that can "flatter le gout" (enhance the flavor) of even the most perfect fruit, but it can also "create out of sugar all kinds of drawings, designs, figures, and even remarkable pieces of architecture."⁷⁶ Desserts became increasingly large, almost taking the space of décor.

Additionally, the 18th century marked the first immediate and significant influence of French colonialism on patisserie. Access to sugar greatly evolved because of new cultivation in the Caribbean. Ingredients such as cocoa and vanilla became available in Europe. Not only did the French suddenly have access to their own sugar sources, but they also learned how to refine sugar, even from sugar beets grown within Europe, which allowed Europeans to import and use large quantities of sugar. Despite the domestic access, the quality of sugar cane was unmatched, pushing the French into their colonies. These developments increased the sophistication of

⁷⁴ R. J. Robinson, "'THE CIVILIZING PROCESS': SOME REMARKS ON ELIAS'S SOCIAL HISTORY," *Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1987): 1–17.

⁷⁵ The Chefs of Le Cordon Bleu, *Le Cordon Bleu Patisserie & Baking Foundations Classic Recipes* (New York: Delmar, 2012).

⁷⁶ Diderot, Denis, and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, eds. 1751–1772. *Encyclopedie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, etc. ed. Robert Morrissey. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopedie Project (Spring 2013 Edition).

baking and through and the development of new products such as puff pastries.⁷⁷ Pâtisserie became industrialized with the opening of the colonial market, further allowing the industry to grow in a distinct direction from the rest of Europe and take on a national significance. Industrialization took the form of access to ingredients, allowing for more development of recipes and the ability to produce greater quantities. The powerful in French could designate importance to pâtisserie, as a result of access to colonial markets and the growing pastry subculture with recipes that originated in France and connotated identity abroad. The 18th century marked the definition of pâtisserie as a class divider and the sudden growth of the industry due to a noble affinity for pâtisserie and the growing colonial empire.

The evolution of pâtisserie in this direction was a marked difference from the poverty and starvation endured by the rest of France during the 18th century. As peasants subsided off of oats, roots, and turnips, the growing opulence of pâtisserie exemplified the divide between royalty and people.⁷⁸ The 18th century was transformative for the French, as they entered a period of reconstruction and conflict in 1789 with the dawn of the French Revolution. The 18th century was both the peak of royalty and lavishness, as well as its reckoning.⁷⁹ Power in France within the class system evolved from the monarchy to a balance, between high governance and a class of elites. Even with this societal upheaval that saw the French revolutionize their way of life and destroy many traces and practices of the ancient royal family, pâtisserie persisted.

⁷⁷ Wayne Gisslen, *Professional Baking* (6th ed.: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), p. 5-7.

⁷⁸ S. G. Sender and Marcel Derrien, *La Grande Histoire De La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française* (Genève (Suisse): Minerva, 2003), 83.

⁷⁹ Tannahill, *Food in History*.

Revolution and Evolution

The 19th century was the climax of French pastry making, coinciding with what Michael Kwass described as a mass consumption consumer revolution. Even after the fall of the monarchy, pastry remained opulent and reflective of high status.⁸⁰ However, the early 19th century marked an era of change, under the influence of chefs who had fled from revolutionary France and returned under the direction of Napoleon. There suddenly was a French doctrine of *pâtisserie*, not just rationalized but codified into an elite industry. Several dishes became popular favorites, and while the classic understanding of dessert after dinner was not quite yet solidified, dishes began to appear in logical groups, each with a name.⁸¹ In post-revolution France, *pâtisserie* maintained its identity as a luxury and symbol of success, developing into an industry isolated from its royal roots. The idea that *pâtisserie* continued to flourish post-revolution meant that it symbolized power beyond Versailles. Even after the chaos of the revolution and its aftermath, power in France was still somewhat in the hands of elite and wealthy individuals. The revolution did not erase class. Rather, pastry became a symbol of individual wealth and *pâtisserie* became conspicuous or aspirational consumption, meaning that access to it or the idea of it still represented an idea of power to the French people.

The emergence of Marie-Antoine Carême as the first individual to be considered a “celebrity chef” exemplified how the symbolism of *pâtisserie* persisted beyond the revolution. The elaborate tradition of French *pâtisserie* reached its apotheosis in the hands of Carême. Carême was born in 1784, five years before the beginning of the French Revolution. When Carême was abandoned at the age of 10 by his low-class family, he was left to make his living. A

⁸⁰ S. G. Sender and Marcel Derrien, *La Grande Histoire De La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française* (Genève (Suisse): Minerva, 2003), 83.

⁸¹ Tannahill, *Food in History*.

chef took him in, where he served an apprenticeship for seven years before finding work as a confectioner in the fashionable pâtisserie of Bailly.⁸² Carême rose to fame and success in the transitory aftermath of the revolution. Eventually, Carême would be employed by a startling number of eminent international patrons. He was a celebrity for his work in pâtisserie, and much of his intellectual energy focused on the creation and recording of elaborate architectural confections (See Figures 2 & 3)⁸³. Carême is credited with saying, “I believe architecture to be the first among the arts and the principal branch of architecture is confectionery”.⁸⁴ Carême pioneered pâtisserie, developing a cuisine as “high art”, which was specifically favored by international royalty and the French nouveau riche. At this time, pastry and pâtisserie were still for the high elites in society and Carême created art that exemplified this.

In his book, *Cuisinier Parisien*, Carême continues to designate certain pastry recipes to different European royal houses, specifically mentioning Spain and Russia.⁸⁵ This spread of French culture across the elites of Europe further reinforced the codification of pâtisserie into

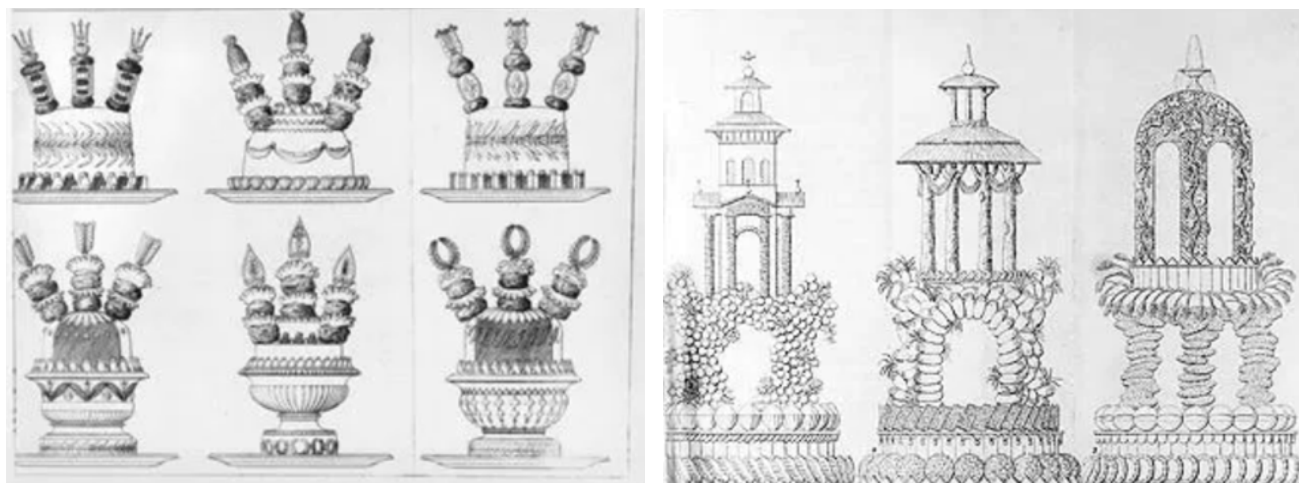


Figure 2 & 3. Scenes from Antoine Carême's Cookbook

⁸² Nicola Humble, *Cake* (Reaktion Books, 2013).

⁸³ Marie-Antoine (1784-1833) Auteur du texte Carême, *Le Cuisinier Parisien : Ou l'art de La Cuisine Française Au Dix-Neuvième Siècle,...* (Deuxième Édition, Revue, Corrigée et Augmentée) / Par M.A. Carême,... ; Ouvrage Orné de 25 Planches Dessinées Par l'auteur, et Gravées Au Trait Par MM. Normand Fils, Hibon et Thierry, 1828, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86172102>.

⁸⁴ Krontl, *Sweet Invention*.

⁸⁵ Carême, *Le Cuisinier Parisien*.

cookbooks exemplified how patisserie became viewed as a necessity for the wealthy table as a display of art. These works illustrate how an industry continually basked in opulence survived the Revolution's reckoning with class.

This era also marked a divergence, as those with the skills to continue making opulent patisseries became specialized and idolized while some patisseries became industrialized and accessible to the greater public. By the end of this century, the French culinary system engrained patisserie within its repertoire.⁹⁰ The gastronomic empire within France prizes tradition and exactitude over originality and change. It is worth noting how Carême worked with large, extravagant sugar sculptures reminiscent of the royal realm. Grimod de la Reyniere, a lawyer by qualification who acquired fame during the reign of Napoleon for his public gastronomic lifestyle, characterized pastry and confection as an art in his *Journal des Gourmands*.⁹¹ The French attribute cultural value to fine art and cultural extravagance. The patisserie is a gastronomic representation of this. During Carême's life and career, patisserie became essentially a professional matter.⁹² While there was a standardization of patisserie culture, specifically tying certain styles, techniques, and flavors to French identity, there was also a world of luxury within the profession itself. The job of pâtissier was separate from that of chef in the French culinary profession and became a specific trade requiring high technical skill. This job was held in high esteem, and documents show the sale of patisseries, the businesses themselves, as luxury goods with significant funds.⁹³ The defined title of pâtissier explains many of the differences between English and French cakes, this fundamental distinction in their baking

⁹⁰ S. G. Sender and Marcel Derrien, *La Grande Histoire De La Pâtisserie-Confiserie Française* (Genève (Suisse): Minerva, 2003), 83.

⁹¹ "Journal Des Gourmands et Des Belles, Ou l'Épicurien Français," Gallica, January 1806, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1423549k>.

⁹² Nicola Humble, *Cake*.

⁹³ "Minutes et Repertoires de Notaire Georges Emmanuel Ferdinand", Janvier 5 1862, Archives nationales (France) Pierrefitte-sur-Seine

practices. French cakes are the product of centuries of professional refinement and perfectionism, almost existing as little masterpieces.⁹⁴ Additionally, Patisserie continued in the 19th century to be extravagant and a reflection of opulence, because the French determined that this aspect of its culture still mattered even in a post-monarchial society.

There grew a culture in French society from the late 1800s on until today that interweaves societal influence with the ability to say that you have ordered your cake or Tarte au Fraise from this or that celebrated pâtissier.⁹⁵ Patisserie still carried the symbolic weight of status but began to be accessible. Local bakeries, known as boulangeries, carried patisseries because the state standardized bread prices post-revolution, and bakers needed to profit.⁹⁶ Those with disposable income could purchase a patisserie. What remained was the extravagance of this choice, the desire to simply treat oneself or demonstrate that one could. By the 19th century, the world of patisserie finished evolving from the symbol of royalty to something that still exemplified high status and art, even as it became an accessible mass commodity, a codification that persists through today.

The Social Meaning of Sweetness

Patisserie holds weight within French society. It has persisted throughout centuries as French society has seen shifts in culture, power, and government, through a series of periods where national identity was redefined. Connecting this to theory, Jeremy Jennings and Michael Kwass establish in their work on luxuries and commodities that the French developed an empire of consumption. Kwass and Jennings believe that the preservation of culturally significant luxuries, specifically throughout the Revolutionary era, can be explained by a French obsession

⁹⁴ Nicola Humble, *Cake*.

⁹⁵ Krondl, *Sweet Invention*.

⁹⁶ Krondl, *Sweet Invention*.

with consumption and its status alongside of it.⁹⁷ There is limited previous work on French dessert, as French food scholars only treat dessert tangentially. When one considers the history of patisserie as a reflection of French identity, a world of luxury theory emerges. The French Revolution, in part, was a war on anything labeled *luxe* in France.⁹⁸ And yet luxury did not cease to exist post the Revolution, rather it redefined what luxury was within French society. Anything that was attached to a political cause related to monarchy or the old regime was more often than not destroyed. As described above, patisserie survived this reckoning, even entering its most prolific era. Maryann Tebben describes in her work on French dessert this transitory phenomenon, “The desire for extravagant, if simplified, dishes (and dessert is by definition extravagantly inessential) remained in bourgeois cuisine of the eighteenth century and carried over into the following generation, when sugar creations were reinvested with symbolic meaning”.⁹⁹ This symbolic meaning ties back to the crux of this research paper, commodities. Within French society, extravagance and nonessential goods remain valuable. Even within a country that faced an intensive reckoning with wealth, the French viewed patisserie as an essential good, even though the world needs it in no major way beyond desire. Patisserie has power, attributed to it by a persistently luxurious culture and a national desire to display status, but also in that the French enjoy this intrinsically French delicacy.

The patisserie industry symbolizes elite French cuisine and has been through the centuries. From its inception, patisserie and royalty were linked. A hierarchy of patisseries, along with more and more ornate designs, grew out of this designation. Per Marxist theory, value is an

⁹⁷ “Ordering the World of Goods: Consumer Revolution and the Classification of Objects in Eighteenth-Century France | Representations | University of California Press.”

⁹⁸ “The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought on JSTOR,” accessed November 10, 2021, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30141868?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁹⁹ Tebben, “Seeing and Tasting.”

arbitrary concept in which some things are given value over others based on societal desires.¹⁰⁰

The case of patisserie can be explained by what society already places value on and attributes luxury to - the monarchy, deliciousness, and opulence. A patisserie is a commodity that exists for the pleasure of others, representing a class of individuals with an abundance of wealth and time. France is the country credited with “haute cuisine”, the elevated distinction between everyday food and an elite tier. Haute Cuisine is an example of the intertwined nature of cuisine and class in French culture. The boundaries of what food is accessible to what people within France create a system of gastronomic class. The taste itself functions as a marker of hierarchical social belonging.¹⁰¹ By attributing better taste to better value, patisserie exemplifies an extreme. Patisserie is a category of food with visual appeal and sweet taste, that has no necessity beyond pleasure. The ability to purchase and consume such a category, as defined by society, is a mark of high class: Haute cuisine for the Haute class. In a 1940 report on the importance of food in French culture, the essential nature of patisserie is attributed to the French desire to innovate and please.¹⁰² The explanation for why patisserie is attributed so much value and falls into the definition of commodity fetishism is what food means to France. The movement of goods and the blurring of borders notwithstanding, countries increasingly propose culinary distinction as a marker of identity.¹⁰³ The French use patisserie to do just this, as it characterizes an artistic and opulent national identity.

In the grand scheme of this project, patisserie serves as a benchmark for understanding where sweetness has power within France. Dessert and commodities which exist for the purpose

¹⁰⁰ Marx, “Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism.”

¹⁰¹ Robert Launay & Aurelien Mauxion (2018) Introduction: Eating French, Food and Foodways, 26:2, 87-91, DOI: 10.1080/07409710.2018.1454770

¹⁰² Louis Bourdeau, 1894. *Histoire de l'alimentation*. Paris: Alcan.

¹⁰³ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. "Culinary Nationalism." *Gastronomica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 102-09. Accessed May 1, 2021. doi:10.1525/gfc.2010.10.1.102.

of sweetness can tell us a lot about what France values. In the case of *pâtisserie*, the history and contextualization paint a picture of a nation basking in opulence and luxury, with an affinity for dessert that persists beyond taste and into identity. Jeremy Jennings's work on luxury theory articulates how luxury is defined and derived by the state. The history described above illustrates how the French state defined the boundaries of *pâtisserie* and its meaning in French society. Access to and the creation of *pâtisserie* has always symbolized success and access. The French chose to engrain *pâtisserie* within their national identity, building a culture around a sweet luxury, unneeded yet highly desired.

CHAPTER THREE

Sweetness Beyond Borders – The French Colonial Network

Introduction to Chapter 3

In concluding the historicization of patisserie, this next chapter approaches a different manifestation of sweetness within the French Empire. While domestically, during the 18th and 19th centuries, French patisserie became embedded in national identity, gastronomy expanded within society, and dessert was maintained throughout the Revolution, the French were colonizing new lands and growing their power. During this era, the French empire spanned almost every continent, and with this came profit, resources, and political strength. The three colonies within this section are three of the most dominant within French empirical history. They were each powerful and the French dedicated enormous time and resources to them; they also all produced sweet goods. These ingredients, cacao, sugar, and vanilla were the backbone of the growing patisserie industry and this colonization meant that the French could dictate meaning and distribution. The sections explore the development of the colonies, the system of labor and exploitation in place to produce commodities, the sources of power and trade networks, and the relationship with France domestically. While these ingredients are still just components, they continued the French fascination with sweetness and illustrated the lengths to which the French pursued it. Each section seeks to demonstrate how the French sought out colonial goods and why. In these three narratives, the exploitation, administration, and cost of colonization illustrate the lengths the French went to embed luxury and gastronomy in their national culture, just through different means than patisserie. Across Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, and Madagascar, luxuries came into the hands of the French, bringing them delicious power and the reinforcement of sweetness as French.

SUBSECTION 1

The French Colonial Empire & Sucre

France, Haiti, & Sugar

The colonization of Haiti begins the era of French domination in the pursuit of sweet luxuries. The French presence in the Caribbean that lasted for centuries began in the 1600s. The Compagnie des Îles de l'Amérique (Company of the American Islands) was a French chartered company that consolidated control over French regional and colonial interests beginning in 1635.¹⁰⁴ Within the next century Dominica, Grenada St. Croix, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Turks and Caicos, St. Martin, Saint Barthélemy, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and colonial Haiti each became French colonies, creating a vast and extensive empire in the Caribbean. When the Company went bankrupt, these holdings were transferred over to both private and state French governors and eventually the French West India Company, who transformed the colonial mission from primarily a religious mission to an economic enterprise.¹⁰⁵ In Guadeloupe, plantation agriculture began as early as the mid-1600s, with the first African slaves arriving in 1650. The French West India Company had a monopoly on the slave trade from Senegal, which since 1658 belonged to the Company of Cape Verde and Senegal.¹⁰⁶ This transition in leadership marked the beginning of the French sugar empire, in which French colonists established lucrative sugarcane plantations, worked by vast numbers of slaves brought from Africa. By the end of the 17th century, sugar had become one of the world's most lucrative

¹⁰⁴ Eric Roulet, *La Compagnie Des Îles De L'Amérique (1635-1651) Une Entreprise Coloniale Au XVIIe Siècle* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017).

¹⁰⁵ Elisabeth Heijmans. "Investing in French Overseas Companies: A Bad Deal? The Liquidation Processes of Companies Operating on the West Coast of Africa and in India (1664–1719)." *Itinerario* 43, no. 1 (2019): 107–21. doi:10.1017/S0165115319000081.

¹⁰⁶ Colin Armand. 1931. "L'INDUSTRIE SUCRIERE FRANÇAISE AU XVIII^e SIÈCLE : LA FABRICATION ET LES RIVALITÉS ENTRE LES RAFFINERIES" 19 (3): 316–46. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24066985>.

commodities, with French holdings, specifically Haiti, becoming some of the most profitable colonies in the world.

The spread of the French Empire into the Caribbean coincided with the 17th-century sugar revolution. The sugar revolution is a chain of events in the Caribbean during this time that had far-reaching ramifications for the Atlantic world.¹⁰⁷ The sugar revolution included massive shifts in production from subsistence agriculture to monoculture, free labor to slavery, and farm to plantation. The rapid evolution of sugar production shifted the demographics and density of sugar as an agricultural crop. This era in sugar production resulted in five major consequences, each of which illustrates the exceptional nature of these colonies and furthers our understanding of the French conquest. The five shifts are a massive boost to the Atlantic slave trade, the way sugar was the engine for a variety of cross Atlantic and interdependent trading, how sugar impacted European nutrition and consumption, increasing European interest in tropical colonies, and how sugar contributed vitally to the industrial revolution. The French saw the colonies as an opportunity to expand their empire further and satiate both their desire for power and sweetness. French political scientist Maurice Satineau referred to this era in French history as “une révolution économique et sociale” in which sugar was desired and prioritized, describing the transformation of Guadeloupe in 1665.¹⁰⁸ The sugar revolution helps explain the rapid consolidation of interest and resources into the Caribbean which created long colonial holdings for the French Empire. The eruption of value surrounding sugar was a highly desirable source of power, the French could capitalize and profit quickly – beginning an era of the French dominance of sweetness.

¹⁰⁷ B. W. Higman, “The Sugar Revolution,” *The Economic History Review* 53, no. 2 (2000): 213–36.

¹⁰⁸ Higman, “The Sugar Revolution”.

The Plantation System

The cultivation of sugar involved the introduction of plantations as a new means of production, creating a brutal system of labor deemed worth the human cost. As the profitability of sugar boomed, the French reorganized the entire colonial socioeconomic system to accommodate sugarcane. Saint-Domingue, Haiti's capital, received the necessary resources to build the infrastructure and property holdings of the plantation system, enabling a dominant economy for the time. In the year 1700, Saint-Domingue had only 18 sugar plantations. A year later, there were 35 sugar plantations, and by 1704, there were 120 plantations.¹⁰⁹ Since plantations functioned on the basis of efficiency and profitability, the powerful viewed the workers involved in terms of economic value. This dehumanizing effort is a commodity history in and of itself, illustrating the commodification of human lives through labor. The entire sugar industry fell on the shoulders of slaves, who made up the backbone of the plantation industry. Documents from the era indicate that the number of slaves on a plantation often determined its value, creating a perpetual need for labor for plantation owners.¹¹⁰ Slaves on sugar plantations did a variety of work based on abilities. On a plantation of roughly two hundred slaves, one report estimated they were split into seven groups, each with a different purpose. Slaves could be found in the master's hours, in the infirmary, in the plantation's food-growing areas, dealing with animals and grasslands, and some worked as artisans.¹¹¹ Not all slaves worked specifically with sugarcane, which exemplified how sugar as a commodity engulfed life for both the slaves and

¹⁰⁹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁰ Tableau des Finances et Commerce de la partie Française de St. Domingue, 1791. John Carter Brown Library.

¹¹¹ Guy, Josa, *Les Industries Du Sucre Et Du Rhum à La Martinique (1639-1931)*. (Paris: Université de Paris. Faculté de droit., 1931).

those running a plantation. The French were willing to create and maintain an extensive system to ensure peak production of sugar.

The production of sugar was not easy, requiring substantial human labor as the work itself was extremely intensive. Workers could plant sugarcane at any time, and it would grow at any time. However, after workers planted sugar, the crop required careful attention for the first few months. The harvest of sugar was an intolerable workload; the process was straightforward but extraordinarily physically difficult. After a year and a half, it would be cut, and a crop would immediately be planted in its place. After a slave cut the sugar, he had to immediately rush it to a mill to prevent the crop from fermenting into acid.¹¹² Slaves cut the cane down with machetes to treat it in a mill where they crushed it with an iron blade and removed the stalks by hand. Then sugar was transformed from a juice into muscovado in a process performed in a boiling house and by some plantations into clayed sugar.¹¹³ A mill crushed the harvested sugarcane to release its juice. Slaves had to manually feed the stalks into the mill without letting their arms get sucked into the crusher.¹¹⁴ Another slave then boiled the juice over a fire to produce the sugar. Some of the most skilled and most valuable slaves conducted this boiling process.¹¹⁵ During the harvest season, this process went on continuously during the night. The slaves had to be very careful to preserve the crop. They had to follow strict procedures to produce marketable goods. These demands necessitated their complete focus and the application of their entire skillset. The process was lengthy, complex, and physically taxing, further enforcing the need for the intricate

¹¹² James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. New York: Vintage, 1963. Print.

¹¹³ Colin Armand. 1931. "L'INDUSTRIE SUCRIERE FRANÇAISE AU XVIII^e SIÈCLE : LA FABRICATION ET LES RIVALITÉS ENTRE LES RAFFINERIES" 19 (3): 316–46. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24066985>.

¹¹⁴ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁵ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*.

plantation system. Scholars tend to assume that slaves were unskilled, uneducated laborers, but that was not the case. They were educated and skilled, albeit not in the traditional sense of education. The French needed to educate and maintain a massive operation of enslaved labor, the development of which they regarded as worth the substantive payoff.

The success of the sugar industry depended on the extensive slave trade and investment by the French. Sweetness would be in the hands of the French regardless of the extensive, demanding investment necessary. By the 18th century, which marked the peak of the sugar industry, the French settlers in colonial Haiti were outnumbered by slaves by almost 10 to 1.¹¹⁶ The French maintained such a tight hold on colonial holdings throughout these two centuries due to the passing of the Code Noir. The Code Noir was a decree passed by the French King Louis XIV in 1685 defining the conditions of slavery in the French colonial empire. The decree restricted the activities of free people of color, mandated the conversion of all enslaved people throughout the French empire to Roman Catholicism, defined the punishments meted out to slaves, and ordered the expulsion of all Jews from France's colonies.¹¹⁷ The Code allowed the French colonial governors a tight grip on the production of sugar, lengths explained because of the sugar industry's lucrative and profitable nature. France found its sugarcane islands so valuable that it effectively traded its portion of Canada, famously dubbed by Voltaire as "a few acres of snow", to Britain for their return of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and St. Lucia at the end of the Seven Years' War in the mid 18th century.¹¹⁸ To maintain profitability, the French needed to not only create a controlled and strict plantation system but also needed to import an

¹¹⁶ Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6.

¹¹⁷ Kelly Buchanan, "Slavery in the French Colonies: Le Code Noir (the Black Code) of 1685," Law Librarians of Congress, January 13, 2011, <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2011/01/slavery-in-the-french-colonies/>.

¹¹⁸ Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire, depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII*, 1753, Chapter 151.

astronomical number of enslaved people. Almost 3,950 expeditions are listed that altogether embarked from Africa estimated to roughly 1.25 million captives.¹¹⁹ Given assumptions about the volume of the Atlantic slave trade and a reasonable allowance for unrecorded voyages, French carriers must have been responsible for about one-eighth of the total Atlantic slave trade.¹²⁰ The profitability of sugar had a stark human cost and depended on degradation and exploitation.

In colonial times, the sugar industry thrived, in part because of a carefully balanced system of imports and exports. Sugar joined this system in addition to other New World raw materials, European manufactured goods, and African slaves.¹²¹ Sugar, often in the form of molasses, was shipped from the Caribbean to Europe. Within France, sugar arrived most often at the port city of Nantes, which became known as “the City of Slavers”.¹²² Slave traders used the profits from the sale of sugar to then purchase manufactured goods, after shipping these goods to West Africa, slave traders used them to barter for slaves. The Bight of Benin in French West Africa was the predominant port for the French slave trade. French colonial leaders in the Caribbean preferred slaves from the Bight of Benin specifically. For the demanding work of cultivating cane and making sugar, Caribbean stakeholders regarded slaves from this port as good agriculturalists and capable of taking charge of their provision grounds.¹²³ This desire, combined with the consistency of Nantes as the French port which received sugar, meaning that the sugar business was consistent in its trade network. To complete this network, slaves were

¹¹⁹ David Geggus. "The French Slave Trade: An Overview." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001): 119-38. Accessed May 6, 2021. doi:10.2307/2674421.

¹²⁰ Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: An Overview."

¹²¹ Geggus, "The French Slave Trade: An Overview."

¹²² Pierre H Boulle. 1972. "Slave Trade, Commercial Organization and Industrial Growth in Eighteenth-Century Nantes." *Revue Française d'histoire d'outre-Mer* 59 (214): 70–112. <https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1972.1577>.

¹²³ David Geggus. "The French Slave Trade: An Overview." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2001): 119-38. Accessed May 6, 2021. doi:10.2307/2674421.

then brought back to the Caribbean to be sold to sugar planters. The powerful used the profits from the sale of the slaves to buy more sugar, and ship it to Europe. Sugar was a commodity consciously acquired through exploitation by the French. In the 1785 edition of the journal *On Colonial Commerce, Its Principles and Its Laws*, there are reports of how the balanced system between the two colonial powers, Britain and France, and French ports is what led to the explosion of the French economy, “It was through interloping introductions of slaves and agricultural technology that these Colonies began to flourish”.¹²⁴ The offset cost of slavery was less valuable than the profitability of sugar.

The French implemented another policy to control sugar and Haiti in addition to the Code Noir, called the *Exclusif*. *Exclusif* translates to exclusive, meaning monopoly, and restricted trade within colonial Haiti. The *Exclusif* ensured that sugar could be distinctly French. Colonists had to get their imports from France and send their exports back to France.¹²⁵ A common thread throughout the French colonial system which distinguished it from Britain’s pursuit of colonialism, eventually driven by the “White Man’s Burden”, was a general disinterest in cultivating national culture within these colonies, rather treating it as a tool for profit than a subsidiary of France. In the case of Haiti, the French had a literal interest in fostering French nationalism, it used colonial Haiti for profit, as demonstrated by the *Exclusif*. The policy required that within trade, parties involved must use French ships. The policy also prevented planters from trading with other nations, ensuring sugar production was funded by the French and for the French only. Even when met with resistance, the French fixed the prices at which

¹²⁴ Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Du Commerce des Colonies, ses Principes et ses Lois. La Paix est le Temps de Régler & d'Agrandir le Commerce*. 1785.

¹²⁵ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

planters could trade, making them favorable to France and not to those residing in Haiti.¹²⁶ This allowed sugar to come into France at the desired price and be distributed at their chosen value, making colonial Haiti and the sugar industry tremendously profitable. France argued that colonies existed to benefit the home country, so France could do whatever in the name of helping the metropole.

Trade & The Power of Sugar

Within the 18th century, French sugar production and consumption exploded, and the national sweet tooth grew beyond palaces and royalty. Annual colonial production of sugar went from 50,000,000 pounds in 1713 to about 200,000,000 by 1789.¹²⁷ Sugar's value to France came both from its taste and the versatility it had within gastronomy. As sugar became an accessible luxury for the masses, its attraction hit its peak, as did importation. Within the eighteenth century, almost all sugar consumed by Europeans was cane sugar produced from the West Indies.¹²⁸ The sweetness of sugar was of high value to French Old Regime society and if affordable, was an addition wherever possible. A contemporary French writer described France's abundant and expansive infatuation with sugar in an essay, writing in 1755, "Today we put sugar into every sauce, to give food a more delicious taste."¹²⁹ Sugar was used in pharmaceuticals, as a sweetener in the changing beverage industry, and in the high art of patisserie.¹³⁰ The wealthier class of society used sugar as an ingredient in exotic and lucrative recipes. The rich clearly loved sugar, fueling the desire for imports, and even offered sugar as a gift to friends, or even servants

¹²⁶ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*.

¹²⁷ Robert Stein. 1988. *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. Louisiana State University Press. <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429957v>.

¹²⁸ W. R. Aykroyd, *Sweet Malefactor: Sugar, Slavery and Human Society* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

¹²⁹ Louis Lemery, *Traité des alimens* (3rd ed.; Paris, 1755), 523.

¹³⁰ Robert Stein. 1988. *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. Louisiana State University Press. <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429957v>.

and the poor if they felt generous.¹³¹ As a commodity, it existed both for the common person and as a signifier of wealth, manifesting itself in social circles differently. Sugar was an accessible good, with elite demand within French society, and a mark of class when considering its uses.

The use of sugar in France remained an elite marker or generally limited, a thriving market but an industry nonetheless with class connotations. This is partly because there was a substantial advantage of selling sugar rather than consuming it.¹³² The French could dictate the narrative of sugar domestically by controlling the sugar trade, placing themselves at the center of the commodity. The French fostered a sugar monoculture in which they maintained substantial control through an orbit model.¹³³ An orbit model is when a central power, in this case the French empire, establishes, controls, and maintains all relationships within the orbit, in this case life within Haiti. An analysis of Haitian foreign trade history shows this economic attachment to France, with an economy centered around the production of sugar and the complete regulation of imports and exports, the previously discussed Exclusif policy is an example of this.¹³⁴ During this time the division of labor between France and colonial Haiti as well as the nature and direction of commodity flows were defined through politically enforced monopolies, privileges, and restrictions determined by the French government, while slavery and the slave trade forcibly concentrated laborers and forced them to engage in commodity production. France reserved for itself the sugar produced in Haiti, monopolized colonial shipping and used colonial Haiti as a sheltered market for its industry.¹³⁵ French overseas commerce began its rapid growth, leading it

¹³¹ Stein, *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*.

¹³² Maryann Tebben, *Food Cultures of France: Recipes, Customs, and Issues* (ABC-CLIO, 2021).

¹³³ Giles A. Hubert, "War and the Trade Orientation of Haiti," *Southern Economic Journal* 13, no. 3 (1947): 276–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1053341>.

¹³⁴ Hubert, "War and the Trade Orientation of Haiti".

¹³⁵ Keith Mason, review of *Review of Slavery in the Circuit of Sugar: Martinique and the World Economy, 1830–1848*, by Dale W. Tomich, *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 1 (1991): 88–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3338570>.

to become a dominant colonial power. Sugar and its role in upholding French influence in the Caribbean was a turning point for the French empire, signifying the beginning of an era in which colonial production backed the wealth and power of France. The complete hold over the most profitable sugar colony in the world placed France at the forefront of trade.

The international success of the French sugar industry and its permanence within French cuisine can be in part attributed to the French National Minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. During the 18th century, Colbert and the Letters Patent of April 1717 reestablished French control over colonial trade, encouraged colonial production, French shipping, and French processing of sugar.¹³⁶ The French government barred foreigners from trading in the French West Indies to guarantee the highest possibility of profit. This was a successful initiative and French West Indian sugar dominated the market in Europe during the 18th century. The heart of the French sugar industry was in Nantes, which was also the capital of French slave trading. By the end of the old regime, more than 1/3 of all sugar arriving in Nantes was in payment for slaves sold by Nantes merchants, and most of the remaining sugar was simply sent to Nantes on consignment.¹³⁷ The sugar industry existed in localized pockets across France, with smaller-scale ports and refineries. The primary exportation of sugar within France beyond these destinations was across Europe, with a sizable chunk of the sugar being sent to Paris. The French efficiently controlled the importation and distribution of sugar so they could consume the popular commodity and distribute it for profit.

¹³⁶ Robert Stein. 1988. *The French Sugar Business in the Eighteenth Century*. Louisiana State University Press. <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/47429957v>.

¹³⁷ Pierre H Boule. 1972. "Slave Trade, Commercial Organization and Industrial Growth in Eighteenth-Century Nantes." *Revue Française d'histoire d'outre-Mer* 59 (214): 70–112. <https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1972.1577>.

Understanding the Power of Sugar & Its Place in France

It would be impossible to discuss the relationship between sugar and France without addressing the liberation of Haiti. At the height of Haiti's economic development, about 1789, there were 793 sugar plantations held as leases obtained from the French royal governors and the Intendants. The colonial trade with France brought in an average of 280,000,000 francs, occupied 750 ships, and employed 80,000 sailors. In 1788 over 163,405,221 pounds of sugar, 68,000,000 pounds of coffee, and lesser amounts of cotton and indigo were exported from Saint-Denis. As the French faced their reckoning with the start of the French Revolution, Haiti begins to undergo a thirteen-year struggle. This revolution destroyed much of the sugar industry and reduced the population by nearly one-half.¹³⁸ When Haiti began its quest for independence, the French backed off, and the planters could not muster enough capital while French investors had better opportunities for less risky financial ventures at their disposal, particularly in a moment of flux for the French economy. Even after the revolution, the cost of resurrecting the colony and preserving it for France was prohibitive. By 1806, cane sugar had virtually disappeared from the shelves of European shops.¹³⁹ Sugar did not reemerge immediately as a product of French control, but by the time Napoleon Bonaparte seized power, sugar reemerged. By the mid-nineteenth century, Napoleon flooded the European market with affordable sugar. Haiti sparked an addiction, a dependency within French culture on sugar that persisted through revolution and evolution. In 1811, French scientists presented Napoleon with two loaves of sugar made from sugar beet. Napoleon was so impressed he decreed that 32,000 hectares of beet should be planted

¹³⁸ Robert K. Lacerte, "The Evolution of Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1820," *The Americas* 34, no. 4 (1978): 449-59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/981159>.

¹³⁹ Smithsonian Magazine and Rachel Nuwer, "Blame Napoleon for Our Addiction to Sugar," *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed February 21, 2022, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/blame-napoleon-for-our-addiction-to-sugar-152096743/>.

and provided assistance to get the factories established.¹⁴⁰ France was able to domestically control and produce sugar again. French production increased access, and sugar was no longer a commodity from a colony, but it remained a colonial commodity in the theoretical sense as the elusive nature of sugar that signifies its value comes from the development of meaning. The history of French sugar in colonial Haiti gave sugar its meaning and equated sweetness with value.

French literature illustrates how the consumption and perception of sugar existed in France. Jumping backward to Voltaire's 1759 novel, *Candide* makes a brief mention of the human cost of sugar production, a reference which was relatively rare in prerevolutionary France. In *Candide*, Voltaire writes of the main character discovering the conditions under which those producing sugar work,

“When we're working in the sugar mills and the grinding wheel catches a finger, they cut off the hand. When we attempt to run away, they cut off the leg,” the slave told Candide. “This,” he concluded, “is what it costs, supplying you Europeans with sugar.” Duly shocked, Candide shed a tear and threatened to renounce “the madness of maintaining that everything is right when it is wrong.”¹⁴¹

This excerpt demonstrates that the French knew, that continental Europe was not oblivious to sugar's real cost. Before the collapse of sugar and the transition made by Napoleon to domestic production, the French began to see sugar as French. Colonial commodities produced by colonial labor exemplify the way capitalism and empire intersect. Within France, it was easy to see sugar as sugar, a vehicle for dessert and delicacy rather than a violent and harmful commodity produced through exploited labor. Depictions like that in *Candide*, though, were uncommon and disappeared during the 18th century. There is little trace of slave labor in French narratives on

¹⁴⁰ Magazine and Nuwer, “Blame Napoleon for Our Addiction to Sugar”.

¹⁴¹ Voltaire, 1694-1778. *Candide*. New York :Random House, 1975.

sugar and production is often an abstract idea.¹⁴² David Harvey wrote theoretically on the invisible history of goods and how easy it is to rewrite colonial narratives. As the French began their consumer revolution, it was easier for French citizens to see goods through their medium of exchange and view sugar as something French, which brought their country fortune and marked wealth within their circles of societies. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, sugar, now accompanied by other colonial goods, became a regular feature at the tables of the noble and wealthy, who increasingly regarded it as a necessity rather than a luxury.¹⁴³ Colonial commodities were both accessible due to the power of French influence in colonial Haiti and exclusive good due to French control. The status which came with sugar is reflected in Jean-François Melon's 1736 *L'Essai Politique sur le Commerce* which describes of sugar as a "nécessité du luxe" (necessity of luxury).¹⁴⁴ The wealthy needed access to sugar to engrain their access to high society. Commodities, specifically sugar, allowed colonialism and fetishism to become a mindset ingrained in the French people, by their ignorance dictated to them by institutions of power and empire.

There is a logical link between the commodity of sugar and *pâtisserie*. *Pâtisserie* is the penultimate example of the power and meaning of sweetness in France, and sugar is the primary ingredient. This paper does not seek to provide a direct, perfect link to the two. Instead, it seeks to demonstrate through this overview of sugar as a colonial commodity how the elites within France dictated what could be designated luxury. Furthermore, how dessert through this designation and access to the luxury of pleasure can be drawn from both the domestic realm of

¹⁴² Elizabeth Heath, "Sugarcoated Slavery: Colonial Commodities and the Education of the Senses in Early Modern France," *Critical Historical Studies* 5, no. 2 (September 2018): 169–207, <https://doi.org/10.1086/699684>.

¹⁴³ Heath, "Sugarcoated Slavery: Colonial Commodities and the Education of the Senses in Early Modern France".

¹⁴⁴ Jean-François Melon. *L'Essai Politique sur le Commerce*, 1736.

pâtisserie and the international narrative of sugar. At the height of pastry, as it became desired by royalty, the French became the gatekeepers to the world's sugar, defining its production and its use and allowing it to become a French commodity, erasing its roots in slavery, colonialism, and exploitation. Before addressing vanilla and cacao, the timing of the sugar industry is worth noting and separating. Sugar is a pre-revolution commodity. As pâtisserie sustained its value and meaning through this shifting era, Haiti gains independence and French access to sugar shifts, as noted above, but the patterns of designating commodity value to sweet flavors and pastry ingredients on a colonial scale continues.

SUBSECTION 2

The French Colonial Empire & Vanille

France, Madagascar, and Vanilla

The story of vanilla and the French began on the tiny island of Reunion, where the French discovered the possibility of profit and began a colonial conquest in search of production. The French took possession of Reunion in the 17th century, but it would not be until the 19th century that vanilla cultivation would be successful. The French pursuits within the Indian Ocean is not where vanilla originated. Until the mid-19th century, vanilla was almost exclusively produced in Mexico. In 1819, French entrepreneurs shipped vanilla fruits to Réunion, aspiring to produce vanilla due to the similar longitude. After years of attempted production, Edmond Albius discovered a more efficient method of pollination, and the French sent tropical orchids to its many colonial possessions in the Pacific with instructions for pollination. One of these locations was Madagascar, in which the French had claims dating back over a hundred years before the complete takeover. The French established administrative and exploitative power over time and when Madagascar was incorporated into the French empire in 1885 with a treaty naming Queen Ranavalona III the ruler of the entire island and establishing Madagascar as a French protectorate, the complete control over vanilla production began.¹⁴⁵ The French domination of vanilla did not truly begin, though, until September 1895. A French expeditionary force entered the capital of Madagascar and began a military takeover that led to the annexation of Madagascar in August 1896. A month later, the French abolished slavery and hundreds of thousands of slaves, as many as 500,000 according to some sources, were set free in a total

¹⁴⁵ Andersen, "Creating French Settlements Overseas."

population of about three million Malagasy.¹⁴⁶ The abolition of slavery was a surface level act, as the French now had a concrete labor force to subjugate and use. Reunion and other smaller French colonies were limited sources for vanilla, the success of this invasion lent the French an island perfect for growing wildly profitable vanilla. By 1898, French colonies produced 200 metric tons of vanilla beans, about 80% of world production, with Madagascar being the single largest producer.¹⁴⁷ The French, more than any other nation, developed the vanilla industry in their overseas colonies with unmatched success.

The French specifically sought out the cultivation and production of vanilla, despite the difficulty of its journey from plant to product. In considering the decision to attribute value to vanilla, it is worth noting the complexity of its growth. Growing vanilla is a real game of patience that can only be entrusted to expert hands. The vanilla tree flourishes in a perfect range of coordinates at only a certain degree above sea level. It likes humidity and a close range of temperatures. Vanilla takes three years from planting to flower.¹⁴⁸ The difficulty in achieving the conditions under which vanilla thrives circles the history back to Edmond Albius' discovery of pollination. Edmond Albius was an enslaved worker who, after close inspection of the vanilla orchid *Vanilla planifolia*, figured out how to hand-pollinate its flower to produce vanilla beans.¹⁴⁹ Albius used a stick to push up a flap in the orchid flower called the rostellum and press the pollen-coated anther against the female part, or stigma. Until Albius's discovery, vanilla had been successfully cultivated only in its native southeastern Mexico, home of its pollinator, the *Melipona* bee. Vanilla plants flower only briefly, for a few hours, and pollination must occur at

¹⁴⁶ Denis Regnier, "Clean People, Unclean People: The Essentialisation of 'slaves' among the Southern Betsileo of Madagascar," *Social Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2015): 152–68.

¹⁴⁷ Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁸ Tim Ecott, *Vanilla: travels in search of the ice cream orchid*. (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁹ Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets. 1900.

that time.¹⁵⁰ Outside of Albius' method, only a small, stingless Mexican bee has proved to be successful at pollinating, and possibly some hummingbirds. To this day, industrial vanilla pollination has yet to be achieved. From the moment the vanilla orchid is planted, it takes four years to harvest the first pods. Albius made a revolutionary discovery, and yet a French botanist named Jean Michel Claude Richard saw Albius' find as his opportunity for fame. Richard claimed that he had taught Edmond this technique.¹⁵¹ Credit eventually was properly attributed to Albius, and the French recognized his botanical technique in documents dating back to 1900.¹⁵² The discovery ultimately meant that humans could, albeit painstakingly, successfully grow vanilla outside of Madagascar. Albius' discovery was remarkable and revelatory in understanding the French pursuit of vanilla. Vanilla was not readily available or an easy agricultural crop, and yet the French pursued it for its luxury and value, putting time and effort into cultivating a plantation system surrounding an incredibly high maintenance commodity.

Indentured Servitude & Colonial Administration

Indentured servitude, an inescapable system of labor based on contractual work, upheld vanilla production in Madagascar. This system of labor supported a culture of dominance and exploitation. Before the abolition of slavery, the French stole at least 25,000 slaves between 1718 and 1810. This practice occurred through trade on the Northeastern coast of Madagascar to the French in the Pacific.¹⁵³ This created a workforce prime for use by the French colonial administrators. The population of Madagascar contained a group of laborers without historical ties or self-determination. As noted above, the French then abolished slavery upon assuming

¹⁵⁰ Delteil, Arthur. *Étude sur la vanille*. Paris: Challamel aîné. 1874.

¹⁵¹ Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar 1750-1895: The Rise and Fall of an Island Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁵² *Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets, Journaux officiels* (Paris), 1900-10-30

¹⁵³ Regnier, "Clean People, Unclean People: The Essentialisation of 'slaves' among the Southern Betsileo of Madagascar."

colonial administration in Madagascar. The French parliament in 1896 met to decide the fate of Madagascar, with concerns on one side over an anti-colonial revolution and social disorder.¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, the French made the controversial decision without significant ramifications. The state liberated the slaves but maintained proxy control through indentured servitude. Three years later, Jean Carol, a French official, wrote that the decision “hasn’t changed anything to the customs of the Malagasy so far”.¹⁵⁵ The French managed to assert dominance without the consequences they feared. This power can be partly credited to the man in charge of establishing colonial administration and the shift to indentured servitude, Joseph Gallieni.¹⁵⁶ Gallieni was notorious for expanding French influence in West Africa. In his leadership, Gallieni asserted that Madagascar faced a depopulation crisis stemming from a weak indigenous government, disease, and “savagery”. Gallieni used demographic arguments to justify French intervention and colonial rule. During his tenure, he established policies of pronatalism to continue the growth of the colony.¹⁵⁷ The decision to emancipate slaves had little effect on the freedoms and rights of the Malagasy people. The French managed to set up colonial power before their military intervention and maintained their labor force under the command of Gallieni’s policies, allowing the vanilla industry in Madagascar to continue its dominance.

While indentured servitude expanded across all of Malagasy society and vanilla’s worth grew, the French did their best to safeguard the secrets to vanilla for themselves. Women and children were used to pollinate the vanilla orchid. They used a thin strip to lift a small mobile separation between the male and female organs of the plant. When the pod has reached maturity,

¹⁵⁴ Regnier, “Clean People, Unclean People: The Essentialisation of ‘slaves’ among the Southern Betsileo of Madagascar.”

¹⁵⁵ Jean Carol. *Chez les Hova (au pays rouge)*. Paris: Ollendorff. 1898.

¹⁵⁶ Andersen, “Creating French Settlements Overseas.”

¹⁵⁷ Andersen, “Creating French Settlements Overseas.”

it was harvested before scalding, steaming, drying, and refining. Men were in charge of these other components as well as maintaining plantations. Vanilla was grown almost exclusively on the northeast coast of Madagascar in a tropical rainforest that extends around the northern tip of the island. The process itself was only possible in this specific climate and with the development of colonial knowledge, which developed over time and because of French control. A journal entry from a French official states, “Despite the spread of colonial knowledge, many people do not yet suspect the importance of the cultivation of vanilla in the French colonies, and the value of the trade to which this aromatic pod has given rise to”.¹⁵⁸ Keeping vanilla a secret was to the French advantage and sustained profit. The system of indentured servitude and the resources the French dedicated to vanilla allowed them to dominate and protect this commodity.

Trade, Success, & Power

Madagascar was a center of colonial power tensions, exemplifying the possibility and profit within the vanilla island. The British and the French struggled to conquer Madagascar, with the French finally seizing the island in 1896, marking the end of the conflict between the two colonial powers. As stated, the French established a stronghold on the island and abolished the Malagasy monarchy. But this did not stop the French from desiring an economic victory over the British.¹⁵⁹ Throughout the 18th and early 19 centuries, the French East India Company used the valuable, exotic goods from the Indian Ocean to amass financial riches. A large percentage of Madagascar vanilla was shipped to Bordeaux and Marseilles in France, for transshipment to the United States, and elsewhere. French traders of vanilla controlled the local market.¹⁶⁰ For

¹⁵⁸ Chow, “When Vanilla Was Brown And How We Came To See It As White.”

¹⁵⁹ Patricia Rain, *Vanilla: the cultural history of the world's most popular flavor and fragrance*. (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2004).

¹⁶⁰ Donovan S. Correll, “Vanilla: Its Botany, History, Cultivation and Economic Import,” *Economic Botany* 7, no. 4 (1953): 291–358.

planters in Madagascar and across the French Pacific, this growing trade network was to their advantage as exports in French colonies were less heavily taxed than the same goods originating elsewhere.¹⁶¹ This can be attributed to the physical effort and sheer production brought on by the import slave labor. It is also explained by the French desire to keep French colonial items “French”.¹⁶² If vanilla could continue its illusion as a French luxury good, this label could sell the idea under nationalistic pride. The French colonists in the Indian Ocean almost exclusively prioritized the commercially more interesting tropical agriculture like vanilla. Madagascar became a single industry nation with a voluminous labor reservoir.¹⁶³ Madagascar’s location and its nuanced focus made it a profitable colony protected by the French and strategically served their desire for trade domination as it already served African and Asian traders and quickly expanded with the increase of French resources.

Trade was not the only source of power for the French in Madagascar; the French imprinted upon Madagascar a set of nationalistic ideals and fulfilled colonial desires that they could flex to other competitors. To begin with, the French had an advantage in claiming the mass production of vanilla and cultivating individual colonies. In a journal entry from a French colonial official he writes, “Despite the spread of colonial knowledge, many people do not yet suspect the importance of the cultivation of vanilla in the French colonies, and the value of the trade to which this aromatic pod has given rise to”.¹⁶⁴ This author refers to people outside the circles privy to the profitability of vanilla; he writes of the ability of the French to capitalize on vanilla and this as a strategic victory. The French strategy with vanilla fits within a

¹⁶¹ Tim Ecott, *Vanilla: travels in search of the ice cream orchid*. (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

¹⁶² Tim Ecott, *Vanilla: travels in search of the ice cream orchid*. (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

¹⁶³ Rafaël Thiébaud, “Rituals and Coutumes in the European Slave Trade on Madagascar in the 17th and 18th Centuries,” *Afrika Focus* 29, no. 2 (August 14, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.21825/af.v29i2.4847>.

¹⁶⁴ Chow, “When Vanilla Was Brown And How We Came To See It As White.”

characterization of a period defined by accelerated colonial expansion and coincided with the formation of an influential lobby dedicated to securing governmental support for colonial endeavors and recruiting French emigrants for colonial settlement. Profit was not the sole purpose, rather, contrasting with Haiti, vanilla and the other case of cacao mark how colonies became desired. This desire was to expand an empire, spreading Frenchness and co-opting indigenous identity.¹⁶⁵ In Madagascar enslaved, freed, and free Malagasy speakers were classified among the *gens de couleur* and linked with France both linguistically and economically. Missionaries in Madagascar claimed Malagasy indigenous people received “a French education” and “always speak French,” with evidence of children more competent in the colonial language than in the Malagasy spoken by family.¹⁶⁶ The French created a society of totalitarian control, fulfilling their desire to profit and develop their nationalism overseas. Colonial administrator Gallieni fulfilled this goal in how Madagascar was set up, creating population policies to control indigenous populations and develop nationalism within local culture. In a colonial report before his send off, a French administrator states, “We must make Madagascar a colony in French Peuplement, a French land in a market reserve to Frenchman under our law”.¹⁶⁷ The French desired power; believing it to be in Madagascar, they sent Gallieni with the expectation of some such compound of extreme assimilation and small emigration. The goal of Madagascar was to profit off vanilla, but also to make Madagascar feel distinctly French. This drive to erase indigenous identity and further empire demonstrated French power internationally and fulfilled national desires to claim the value and identity of goods.

¹⁶⁵ Andersen, “Creating French Settlements Overseas.”

¹⁶⁶ Andersen, “Creating French Settlements Overseas.”

¹⁶⁷ Stephen H. Roberts, *The History of French Colonial Policy 1870–1925* (London: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429057502>.

Contextualizing Vanilla within France

The French incorporated vanilla domestically in major aspects of their culture, such as pastries and fragrances. Even before the colonization of Madagascar or the cultivation developments in Reunion, in the 17th century, the French more than any other monarchy in Europe became passionate about vanilla. King Louis XIV demanded vanilla within his chocolate beverages.¹⁶⁸ Europeans found many more uses for vanilla, most notably combining it with another colonial product, sugar. In France, they did so to make vanilla desserts that became popular among the elite class. This occurred around the time when the first recipes for vanilla ice cream, crème brûlée, and other vanilla-flavored dishes appeared.¹⁶⁹ Major pastry innovations were spurred in France by vanilla, notably the development of whipped cream. French chef François developed chantilly cream. Chefs made chantilly cream with whipped cream and vanilla that he named after the Château de Chantilly, the home of Vatel's employer, the Prince de Condé, and could be shared amongst the aristocratic class.¹⁷⁰ Vanilla found its place within the world of patisserie and existed for the elite classes investigation and enjoyment. In the *Physiology of Taste*, published by Brillat-Savarin in 1867, there is mention of vanilla both in the exotic colonial foods and in the necessities of dessert section.¹⁷¹ These types of official books, which outline French culinary customs, illustrate the importance of a commodity within their culinary culture. The French desire and use of vanilla fueled the dominance of colonial control, as to keep a hold of overproduction and control the identity associated with the commodity.

¹⁶⁸ Patricia Rain. 2004. *Vanilla: the cultural history of the world's most popular flavor and fragrance*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

¹⁶⁹ Patricia Rain. 2004. *Vanilla: the cultural history of the world's most popular flavor and fragrance*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher.

¹⁷⁰ La Pâtisserie française illustrée (Paris), 1937-06.

¹⁷¹ Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin. *Physiologie du goût, ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante*. 1867.

Vanilla fits neatly into the theoretical framework this project uses to approach commodities and the relationships between sweet goods. We can understand the way vanilla's history is erased and understood through this historicization by looking at colonial commoditization and agricultural geography. The role vanilla played in French society was as a luxury good: inaccessible and meant for decadence. Vanilla exemplifies the French obsession with sweetness in the search for colonial profit and the fixation the French elite had with sweetness. Looking at its history of exploitation, the difficulty with cultivation, the colonial administration of Madagascar, and uses of vanilla within French society illustrates the fetishism of sweetness. The lengths to which the French went to purvey a good that only had value for its taste and no naturally occurring benefit beyond pleasure characterizes the way commodity fetishism and empire link.

SUBSECTION 3

The French Colonial Empire & Cacao

France, West Africa, & Cacao

The French were not the first to bring cacao to West Africa, that credit is more often attributed to the Portuguese, but they were one of the first to create a colonial power around the commodity. As far back as 1822, under the colonial administration of Sao Tome, the Portuguese began to cultivate a cacao industry.¹⁷² It was not until about 1870, though, that the world became more and more interested in the lucrative cacao industry. By the end of the 1880s, the French had official control over the coast of Cote d'Ivoire, and in 1889 Britain recognized the French government's administration of the territory. In 1893 Cote d'Ivoire was recognized as a French colony, under the command of French Captain Binger.¹⁷³ The French control of Cote d'Ivoire was met with resistance and backlash from Ivorians, but as the cacao industry began its grip on the country, control only further intensified. The area around which Cote d'Ivoire is geographically located transformed into an international hub of cocoa production at an extraordinary pace. Cacao exports began in 1891 as the French gained their administrative footing, and within just two decades, they had reached 40,000 tons, making the colony the world's largest producer. The subsequent growth was historic: exports exceeded 200,000 tons in 1923 and 300,000 in the mid-1930s.¹⁷⁴ The Gold Coast's cacao industry was the envy of the colonial world. As a French commentator remarked in 1924, 'Forget the proverb that there is nothing new under the sun – or at least cite cocoa in the Gold Coast as an exception'.¹⁷⁵ French

¹⁷² F. N. HOWES, "The Early Introduction of Cocoa to West Africa," *African Affairs* 45, no. 180 (July 1, 1946): 152–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a093508>.

¹⁷³ "Ivory Coast | Countries | Collection of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum," accessed March 6, 2022, <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/countries/23424854/>.

¹⁷⁴ Ross, "The Plantation Paradigm."

¹⁷⁵ *Revue gé'ne'rale de botanique*, 36, 1924, p. 190, cited in Ruf, *Booms et crises*, p. 177

cacao, like sugar and vanilla, became dominant in the global commodity market. Cacao was valued by the French and the world, launching yet another exploitative colonial era in which sweetness dominates.

Cote d'Ivoire was the French center for its activities within French West Africa, grounding its political administration and creating a dominant agricultural hub. Cacao was the focal point, with the French creating a society surrounding the commodity. The French planted cacao in Cote d'Ivoire, importing the crop for its gain, hoping the longitudinal effects on climate within Cote d'Ivoire were similar enough to the Central and Southern Americas where cacao originated. French citizens owned more than one-third of the cocoa, coffee, and banana plantations and adopted a forced-labor system.¹⁷⁶ The cacao industry in Cote d'Ivoire was brutal and heavily state-controlled, dominating all aspects of life. The French used a set of laws and regulations called the Code de l'Indigénat, which assigned an inferior legal status to natives, detailed forced labor, and assigned requisitions and capitation.¹⁷⁷ Indigénat was used across French West Africa to ensure total control by colonial forces and maintain productivity. In a series of colonial reports on various West African nations, the Indigénat outlined powers of discipline, expanded the rights of colonial administrators, and determined police powers.¹⁷⁸ The Indigénat represented how the French established societal norms and dominated government life, but cacao's expansive nature stretches beyond its dominance over Cote d'Ivoire's society. Geographically, cacao was everywhere. Cacao growth in the Gold Coast was notably land-extensive; production increases came from expanding the scope of cultivation rather than by trying to extract more from remaining plantations. Given the abundance of land and the need to

¹⁷⁶ "Ivory Coast | Countries | Collection of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum."

¹⁷⁷ Jean-Pierre Chauveau, "Cocoa as Innovation: African Initiatives, Local Contexts and Agro-Ecological Conditions in the History of Cocoa Cultivation in West African Forest Lands (c. 1850-c. 1950)," *Paideuma* 43 (1997): 121–42.

¹⁷⁸ "Bulletin officiel de la Côte-d'Ivoire," 1903. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1262853t?rk=42918;4>

completely control labor, the French sought to maximize exploitation.¹⁷⁹ Cacao grew fantastically well in Cote d'Ivoire and so the French embraced it, creating a cacao country that they administered strategically and created labor for this good. Cacao came into Cote d'Ivoire with the French colonization, and it did not take long for the commodity to dominate life.

System of Slavery and Plantation

The plantation system originated from domestic farmers cultivating cacao within the Americas and was exported by the French to be used during colonization. French colonizers changed the Ivorian economy, which was initially based on subsistence, with each village being self-sufficient. Beginning in the early 19th century, many Europeans began encouraging African nations to plant crops like cacao in large quantities. This manipulation of local populations would eventually overrun Africa with monoculture economies.¹⁸⁰ When the French took control in 1893, cacao was already the focus of agriculture, allowing the centralization of control. This colonial strategy changed much of Africa into an external source of fertile land to feed Europe's growing economic and industrial needs. When it became profitable to switch to a style of agriculture that included exploitation and slavery, the French capitalized on these smaller farms. The French cacao economy revolved around the plantation. Plantations were much more than economic or commercial entities; they were also symbols of European power.¹⁸¹ As discussed above, the sheer size of plantations created power, but it was also the way plantation life was administered throughout Cote d'Ivoire for the benefit of an external colonizer. Plantations exemplified how cacao, despite being a luxury good, still justified large-scale investments by the

¹⁷⁹ Ross, "The Plantation Paradigm."

¹⁸⁰ Ryan Minor, "There Is No Bournville in Africa: Chocolate Capitalist, African Cocoa Workers, and International Labor Relationships from the 19th Century to the Present," n.d., 39.

¹⁸¹ Chauveau, "Cocoa as Innovation."

French into Cote d'Ivoire so that they could create an elaborate farming system all so that they could profit off cacao. Plantations are a case study in colonial control and illustrate the transformation of Cote d'Ivoire when manipulated by colonization.

The plantations and the monoculture in Cote d'Ivoire existed because of a dominant system of slavery. As recently as the early 20th century, the Portuguese were importing slaves into São Tomé and Príncipe to work on cocoa farms.¹⁸² Like in Madagascar, slavery was abolished in 1905 but was followed up by a system of indentured servitude with little distinction from actual slavery. The use of force and coercion created submission and efficiency in the plantation system. Each male adult Ivorian was required to work for ten days each year without compensation as part of his obligation to the state.¹⁸³ Additionally, cocoa producers in the southern part of Cote d'Ivoire collaborated with traditional rulers in the northern tribes living in areas still removed from cacao cultivation to encourage them to send prospective laborers to cocoa farms in the south.¹⁸⁴ There was a constant need for more labor as cacao expanded continuously. Southern cocoa planters also teamed up with neighboring countries to promote a system of migration to the Ivorian South to provide labor for their cocoa plantation. Because the population of the Ivory Coast was insufficient to meet the labor demand on French-held plantations and forests, which were among the greatest users of labor in French West Africa, the French recruited large numbers of workers from Upper Volta, today known as Burkina Faso, to work in Ivory Coast. Documents illustrate how taking advantage of the Upper Volta as a way to maximize colonial labor pushed the French to expand.¹⁸⁵ This source of labor was so important

¹⁸² Michael Odijie, "Cocoa and Child Slavery in West Africa," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History, August 27, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.816>.

¹⁸³ Wibarex Consulting and Jean-Claude Meledje, "Côte D'Ivoire: From Pre-Colonisation to Colonial Legacy," *Social Evolution & History* 17, no. 1 (March 2018): 16–33, <https://doi.org/10.30884/seh/2018.01.02>.

¹⁸⁴ Wibarex Consulting and Meledje. "Côte D'Ivoire: From Pre-Colonisation to Colonial Legacy"

¹⁸⁵ La Côte d'Ivoire, édité par "le Moniteur des colonies" (Paris), 1903. Bibliothèque nationale (France).

to the economic life of the Ivory Coast that in 1932 the French annexed a large part of Upper Volta to Ivory Coast and administered it as a single colony.¹⁸⁶ The system of indentured servitude sustained individually functioning plantations that sold to the state resulting in a massive export economy. The system of indentured servitude, which more closely resembled slavery, was endless and expansive, allowing the French enormous profit.

The French Desire for Cote d'Ivoire & Power

The origin of French power in Cote d'Ivoire is the Berlin Conference, a tension point in colonial dominance that exemplified the quest by the French and others to own luxuries and profitable goods at any cost. The Berlin Conference regulated the partitioning of Africa among fourteen European countries and the United States in 1885. This resulted in a period between 1885 and 1910, during which European countries were competing for control of Africa's territories, colloquially known as the 'Scramble for Africa'.¹⁸⁷ During the Berlin Conference, France was given colonial rule over Cote d'Ivoire, a move that reassured the French that other European powers would not seek to invade or usurp their colonial holdings. The decision to assign Cote d'Ivoire to France began the systematic destruction of the Ivorian way of life and total control. With this division of Africa into colonies and creating artificial boundaries throughout the country, the Berlin Conference "frequently divided members of the same ethnic group between two or more countries or brought ethnic groups that had been traditional enemies into the same country. When they redrew the map of Africa, the Europeans did not consider the needs or desires of the African people".¹⁸⁸ The French controlled Cote d'Ivoire for decades with

¹⁸⁶ Robert Earl Handloff, and Thomas Duval Roberts. 1991. *Cote d'Ivoire: a country study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Earl Handloff, and Thomas Duval Roberts. 1991. *Cote d'Ivoire: a country study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁸ Courtney P Conroy, "France as a Negative Influence on the Côte d'Ivoire: The Consequences of Foreign Interference," n.d., 56.

only national interest in mind, and no consciousness of the consequences of their actions. The colonization of Cote d'Ivoire via the Berlin Conference is significant in understanding the French and their relationship with commodities. Cote d'Ivoire became the stronghold of French cacao interests. As a colony, Cote d'Ivoire only held value for the possibility of profit, the French would colonize and destroy under the pretense of civilizing to attain what they saw as valuable and impose their commodity desires on foreign land.

Nationalist interest, cultural supremacy, and profitability under Cote d'Ivoire drove French colonization. With their European identity, the French could assume vast amounts of power in Cote d'Ivoire and gain power from their presence in Africa. The French imposed their culture on every aspect of Ivorian society. Under the pretense of the Berlin Conference, they claimed they were bringing 'civilization' to Africa. French colonial policy incorporated concepts of assimilation, which presupposed the inherent superiority of French culture over all others. In practice, the assimilation policy in the colonies meant an extension of the French language, institutions, laws, and customs.¹⁸⁹ National pride motivated much of the colonization of Cote d'Ivoire. Once the race to colonize began, the state that could obtain the most colonies, convert most people to its enlightened, cosmopolitan culture was seen as the best.¹⁹⁰ This innate desire for superiority is a thread throughout this study, with dessert and colonization coming to a head under a fundamental desire for national identity and pride to be reflective of opulence and status. In documents outlining French colonial policies, there are descriptions of Cote d'Ivoire which highlight its natural supremacy and the riches it brings nationally to France.¹⁹¹ Maintaining the

¹⁸⁹ Robert Earl Handloff, and Thomas Duval Roberts. 1991. *Cote d'Ivoire: a country study*. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁹⁰ Conroy, "France as a Negative Influence on the Côte d'Ivoire: The Consequences of Foreign Interference."

¹⁹¹ Joseph Chailley-Bert and Daniel Zolla. 1920. *Congrès d'agriculture coloniale, 21-25 mai 1918 T.III. fasc. 5, T.III. fasc. 5*. Paris: Challamel.

best and most successful colonies fueled French desire. Beyond nationalist intentions, from the French perspective, the potential profitability of the colony served as the main motivator, and profitability required the development of natural and human resources. Cote d'Ivoire facilitated just that and as a national desire for Ivorian products grew, so did the French presence.¹⁹² Cote d'Ivoire existed as a vessel for profitability and pride, two themes which have weaved themselves through these colonial histories. Sugar, vanilla, and cacao each symbolized the success of the French empire and represented the notion that the French could go to great lengths for luxury and wealth. Cote d'Ivoire is a case study of how the French went about colonial commoditization and used power for the benefit of France.

Cacao Becomes Chocolate

Cacao becomes chocolate as it lands in France, taking on a new form and shedding its colonial origins. From chocolate's initial introduction into European society until the mid-19th century, it was almost universally used in a powder form, mixed with water, to make drinks.¹⁹³ The only solid forms were very brittle, bitter, and rarely eaten. Chocolate drinks were served alongside coffee and tea in social houses and became a favorite among the elite classes of the time. Chocolate, in what would be considered the modern candy bar form, would not be introduced to the public until the later part of the 18th century. This development coincided with the beginning of the French presence in Africa. As the demand for chocolate grew throughout Europe and the rest of the world, so too did the fortunes of the Chocolate makers. Chocolate and patisserie were considered high class, and access to chocolate signified luxury. At Versailles, the delicacy became a customary delight. Louis XV was considered the greatest lover of the cocoa-

¹⁹² Wibarex Consulting and Meledje, "Côte D'Ivoire."

¹⁹³ "Europe's Colonial Craze for Chocolate," accessed March 6, 2022, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/history-magazine/article/chocolate-in-europe>.

based drink and would prepare his hot chocolate in the kitchens of his private apartments.¹⁹⁴

There would be an elaborate ceremony in the preparation, special pots to keep it warm, special cups to serve is made by the best manufacturers like Sèvres Porcelain, and he would sip it delicately for maximum enjoyment. Marie-Antoinette was also very fond of chocolate. When she arrived at Versailles in 1770 to start a new life with her husband King Louis XVI, she bought her chocolate maker with her. This chef took the recipes to a new level using orange blossoms and almonds to flavor the mix.¹⁹⁵ She started the day with a cup of thick creamy hot chocolate topped with more cream. Chocolate pervaded the livelihoods of the wealthy and took on royal connotations. With this enjoyment came demand, which the French capitalized on.

From the beginning of the 19th century, however, new industrial methods allowed for even higher consumption of chocolate at a much lower cost. Soon chocolate was replacing tea and coffee as the drink of choice. In Europe, at least, cocoa had become an everyday commodity, a world away from the holiness and mystery of its origins, taking on a distinctly European identity. The real breakthrough began around the 1880s as the expansion of global transport and rising purchasing power in Europe converted chocolate from a luxury article into an item of mass consumption.¹⁹⁶ As more people developed a taste for it, cocoa production rose rapidly to meet demand. World exports first surpassed 40,000 tons in 1885 and increased exponentially thereafter, reaching 95,000 tons in 1900, 280,000 in 1914, 500,000 in the 1920s, and surpassing 700,000 tons in the later 1930s. From 1900 to 1920 production increased roughly fourfold while prices sank by around two-thirds.¹⁹⁷ By far the largest import market was continental Europe,

¹⁹⁴ *Dinners of the Court or the Art of working with all sorts of foods for serving the best tables following the four seasons*, by Menon, 1755 (BnF, V.26995, volume IV, p.331)

¹⁹⁵ Minor, "There Is No Bournville in Africa: Chocolate Capitalist, African Cocoa Workers, and International Labor Relationships from the 19th Century to the Present."

¹⁹⁶ Ross, "The Plantation Paradigm."

¹⁹⁷ Ross, "The Plantation Paradigm."

which accounted for 58% of the cocoa trade from 1909 to 1913.¹⁹⁸ In the late 1930s, Europeans consumed an average of 331,000 tons of cocoa per year, over half of world production.¹⁹⁹

European's sweet tooth only grew with access to colonial goods. As cacao became chocolate, its colonial origins were left behind and it became a marker of status and enjoyment. Access to cacao fueled a taste for sweetness and pushed the French to seek outrageous profits at the expense of Cote d'Ivoire.

¹⁹⁸ Congrès d'agriculture coloniale 21-25 mai 1918.

¹⁹⁹ Ross, "The Plantation Paradigm."

CHAPTER FOUR

The French & Their Empire

Contextualizing Empire

Sugar, Vanilla, and Cacao are components of a greater history defined by empire. These snapshots provide insight into how the French pursued luxury commodities and goods without tangible resource benefits beyond taste and pleasure. This thesis does not seek to argue that the French specifically pursued colonialism for their pastry empire, rather that they pursued these goods and dedicated resources to them to profit off luxury and gastronomy. The French specifically fostered these commodities, and all three colonies became some of the most profitable within the European empire at their peak. As an initial example, none of the colonial commodities studied above are indigenous to their origins. Sugar cane is from the pacific, vanilla from Mexico, and cacao from the upper Amazon. The French used their power and exploitation to actively create an empire of sweet goods. The power of sweetness transcends French culture and permeates the pursuit of empire. To dive into how empire can help illustrate the connections between patisserie, colonial goods, and theory, this chapter will first outline the meaning of empire theoretically and how empire manifested in France. By considering these academic explanations and the case study of the French Colonial Exposition of 1931, this section will demonstrate how the empire is a part of French identity and one of the three components of this identity that sweetness can explain.

Empire theory has been largely explored by commodity scholars as an aspect of value and its relationship with nation-states. In the first part of this work, Marx's theory on commodities illustrated how value is an arbitrary concept and what matters is in the hands of the powerful, in concise terms, commodity fetishism. As Francis Mulhern writes, power within capitalism defines an empire's strength. Throughout the roughly 200-year span of French

dominance, France was a global leader in politics and power.²⁰⁰ The French defined trade networks, won conflicts, and dominated the earliest forms of geopolitics. The French ability to control so much trade and resources allowed them to designate the power within the empire. This ties to the theory established by Arjun Appadurai, who describes how the social regulation of commodities. Appadurai argues that those with power in society can designate value. Mulhern sees this power through economic wealth and capitalism, whereas Appadurai sees it through power structures and exploitation. Both are apt characterizations of the strengths of the French empire – the colonial commodities discussed above are characterized by the domination of land and the profit achieved by the French, and how those riches came to be where the French designated.²⁰¹ Sarah Whatmore adds depth to this attribution of power with the concept of agricultural geography. This theory emphasizes the consumption stage of goods and how it is essential to look at empirical commodities from start to finish.²⁰² The French also fit this characterization, defining production, and creating colonies around the goods themselves, while designating the meaning of commodities from the outset to fit their empirical narrative. These theories align with the final theoretical consideration, Jackson's work, which has been weaved throughout this paper.²⁰³ The act of commodity fetishization is most prominent in an empire with the ability to redefine a colonial narrative. These theories reinforce a central conclusion of this work, that the French empire is one of Marxist theory. Patisserie and sweetness are a story of the French, and a story of the power of empire.

The French Empire was expansive and dominant for centuries, and the different eras of empire have specific and different meanings. A distinction is generally made between the "First

²⁰⁰ Mulhern, "Critical Considerations on the Fetishism of Commodities."

²⁰¹ Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*.

²⁰² Whatmore, "Agricultural Geography - Sarah Whatmore, 1993."

²⁰³ Jackson, "Commodity Cultures."

French Colonial Empire", that existed until 1814, by which time most of it had been lost or sold, and the "Second French Colonial Empire", which began with the conquest of Algiers in 1830 and ended in the late 20th century.²⁰⁴ At its apex between the two world wars, the Second French colonial empire was one of the largest empires in history, with colonies, protectorates, and mandates outside of Europe. Particularly in terms of production, this industrial and war capitalism links the intentional pursuit of empirical strength with French national identity. During this era of global conflict, France used empire as a flex of strength. Additionally, The civilizing mission came to define the Second French Empire specifically.²⁰⁵ The Haiti case study explored above is an example of the First French Empire, a pre-revolution beginning of colonization not yet about imposing nationalism and more about the glory of conquest and profit. Cote d'Ivoire and Madagascar are examples of the Second French Empire, in which the civilizing mission is most evident, and the colonization of the nations contributed to a broader scope of French nationhood. These differences aside, both colonies manifested their commodity creation and exchange in similar ways. Production was only to be considered by the French and for the French, regardless of the cost imposed on these territories. While the two eras are distinct, considering them together illuminates a dominant and abusive story of empire, creating a generation of French history.

Elizabeth Heath's article, *Sugarcoated Slavery: Colonial Commodities and the Education of the Senses in Early Modern France*, looks specifically at sugar, as referenced above, but also provides insight into the nature of the French empire. Her argument is that colonial commodities played a central part in the expansion of this empire and the formation of a modern, self-defined

²⁰⁴ H. R. Tate, "The French Colonial Empire," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 39, no. 157 (1940): 322–30.

²⁰⁵ Tate, "The French Colonial Empire".

identity.²⁰⁶ As early modern French consumers arranged their days to purchase sugar or serve a proper cup of cacao beverage, colonial goods consolidated their expanding empire over French everyday life. As the colonial network expanded, so too did evidence of colonial wealth in metropolitan France. While this colonial wealth became more visible, references to the actual, concrete labor performed by colonial slaves who created the highly valued goods, especially refined sugar, receded and became more abstract. Heath writes of the way that textual and pictorial erasures of slave labor coincided with a significant rise in the consumption of slave-produced goods in 18th century France.²⁰⁷ In natural histories, literature, and other depictions of empire, the French witnessed a watered-down version of reality, one that perpetuated stereotypes and fantasy. The French domestically were encouraged to not consider their empire and rather enjoy the fruits of its labor, linking the notion of consumption with pride and joy. The European palate expanded as fortune grew from French international dominance and colonization, but the Europeans only saw the growth of France, not the destruction of any other.

Other scholars' discourse on the French Empire echoes Heath's idea of nationalism and ties deeper meaning to the importance of expansion for French national identity. In Krishan Kumar's work, he looks at the era after Heath's work and the distinct appearance of the civilizing mission. Nationalism, especially in its ethnic form, is in some ways a 19th-century invention, a child of the French Revolution, but there has existed a sense of the nation for a much longer time.²⁰⁸ The French could see themselves as the standard-bearers of modernity and progress. The French believed that it was their mission to bring reason and civilization to the

²⁰⁶ Heath, "Sugarcoated Slavery."

²⁰⁷ Heath, "Sugarcoated Slavery."

²⁰⁸ Krishan Kumar, "Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective," *Theory and Society* 29, no. 5 (2000): 575–608.

modern world, that "the destiny of France is to be the teacher of mankind".²⁰⁹ Another angle that reiterates Kumar's work considers a separate colony in this argument, Algeria. Mbembe argues that the French state has traditionally been the guardian of national memory, which it keeps alive through sustained action.²¹⁰ France's efforts to hide from itself its racial practices and glorify its discriminatory policies are best exemplified by its attitude toward the loss of Algeria. The willed forgetfulness of torture, brainwashing, and the destruction of entire villages during the invasion of Algeria in 1830 and during the war of decolonization is indicative of a deep-seated commitment to an unsavory past that is continuously whitewashed. The Code de l'Indigénat, which also existed in Cote d'Ivoire, subjected Algerians for more than a half-century to laws that criminalized the most mundane behavior in violation of the penal code used for citizens of French origin and of the principle of "liberty, equality, fraternity".²¹¹ Nationalism was weaponized to impose Frenchness. Kumar argues that a distinct desire to erase colonial narratives is a part of the French empire and that the ability to superimpose identity is the marker of empirical strength. Kumar does distinguish that state and nation exist in separate spheres, marking another distinction between nationalism and national identity.²¹² Nationalism makes claims to exclusivity and homogeneity. Nationalistic France is one which separates the pain of empire from the identity of the average French citizen.

Eric T. Jennings's work is similar to Heath's, but ties towards this next section on empire considering the 1931 Colonial Exposition. Jennings argues that most French experts have long held that empire mattered little to the "average" citizen.²¹³ The idea of whom the empire

²⁰⁹ Kumar, "Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective".

²¹⁰ Marnia Lazreg, "Mirror, Mirror, Tell Me Who I Am: Colonial Empire and French Identity," *Public Culture* 23 (April 6, 2011): 177–89, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2010-021>.

²¹¹ Lazreg, "Mirror, Mirror, Tell Me Who I Am: Colonial Empire and French Identity".

²¹² Kumar, "Nation and Empire."

²¹³ Eric T. Jennings, "Visions and Representations of French Empire," *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005): 701–21, <https://doi.org/10.1086/497721>.

mattered to fits within the framework of this essay. Concepts like patisserie and empire were exclusively for elite palates, and access to these worlds was a signifier of class. The 19th and 20th centuries, though, marked a shift in the way empire (and patisserie) were available across classes. Tastes of things like patisserie and empire allowed people to experience a world they were not privy to, reinforcing the connotations of this concept as luxurious. This phenomenon is what happened with the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition. As Jennings writes, “Even traditional French colonial historians, generally skeptical of the French public’s imperial ardor, have long recognized that the 1931 exhibit constituted the high-water mark of imperial awareness and enthusiasm in France”.²¹⁴ The Colonial Exposition affirmed the place of empire within a corner of French identity. Empire was something to absorb and understand as a part of what it meant to be French. Imperialism was an accepted aspect of nationhood. As Jennings writes, the empire was understood in the way the government designed it, “French colonial violence is utterly muted, while French colonial altruism is celebrated.”²¹⁵ The narratives written in Chapter 3 of this paper of the three colonies, their prosperity, and identity, reveal how this fair exemplifies the way the French internalized the cost of the colonies and the lack of reflection or awareness at hand. For the French, empire, not exploitation, was their pride and creed. Empire meant prosperity, luxury, and even sweet goods.

Experiencing the Colonial Exposition of 1931

In pursuit of this research, I traveled to Paris to visit the French Museum of the History of Immigration, located in the Palais de la Porte Dorée. I was in the process of researching and outlining the colonial commodities section and looking to connect the histories I was reading

²¹⁴ Jennings, "Visions and Representations of French Empire".

²¹⁵ Jennings, "Visions and Representations of French Empire".

about to a broader argument about French identity. This museum is at the site of the 1931 Colonial Exposition, a six-month colonial exhibition held in Paris, that attempted to display the regional differences and immense resources of France's colonial possessions. Before diving into this history and the way this glorification of empire can help us understand the relationship between sweetness, commodities, and nationalism, the context of my visit feels important to the relationship with colonization France has today. The museum is also an aquarium, a site that displayed exoticism and fetishized the French exploitation of colonies is a place where children can observe fish. In Figure 6, you can see how expansive the fair was with the map. In the upper left corner, there is the museum and the exposition expanded far beyond this location. Each colony had its own little display. The fair was an enormous glorification of the empire and a proud exaltation of the colonizing done by the French. And yet the museum's lobby and facade were decorated with art, in the form of carvings and paintings, of indigenous bodies laboring for the French state. In Figures 7 & 8, you can see the carvings for Vanilla and Cacao. The carvings are of mostly women, depicting the labor of commodities in an idealized form. The carvings reinforce the notion of the exotic other; primitive and thus nude. The audience intended for this display of power is the male colonial gaze. These depictions, a century after their creation, were not labeled with explanations or offering any context to the brutalization that coincided with colonial goods. The visit struck me, and I was left considering the lack of reflection on the way empire connected to pain, and how maybe even today the French accept empire as a part of their identity, without thinking beyond this surface.



Figure 6: Map of the Colonial Exposition



Figure 7 & 8: Exterior of the Colonial Exposition

What the Exposition Reveals

The Colonial Exposition of 1931 was a celebration and glorification of imperial France, meant to bring joy and intrigue to visitors and provoke little critical thought. On May 6, 1931, the first of 33,000,000 people walked through the gates of the Exposition Coloniale Internationale in the eastern suburbs of Paris. The majority of the expo's 500 acres of land was used to present the French colonies of the period.²¹⁶ Buildings were recreated, and native men and women were brought to Paris to perform their music and dance; demonstrate their crafts and foods; and present the customs of their daily life (See Figures 10 & 11). Haiti, no longer a colony, was not represented but Madagascar and Cote d'Ivoire had large pagodas, illustrating the gifts they brought to France, justifying their colonial administration. Posters, like the one depicted in Figure 9, advertised the fair with the bodies of the exploited as attractions.²¹⁷ Administrators sought to make the Colonial Exposition reflect the beneficial progress of the French "civilizing mission," the responsibility to bring civilization to the natives by means of scientific, authentic exhibitions

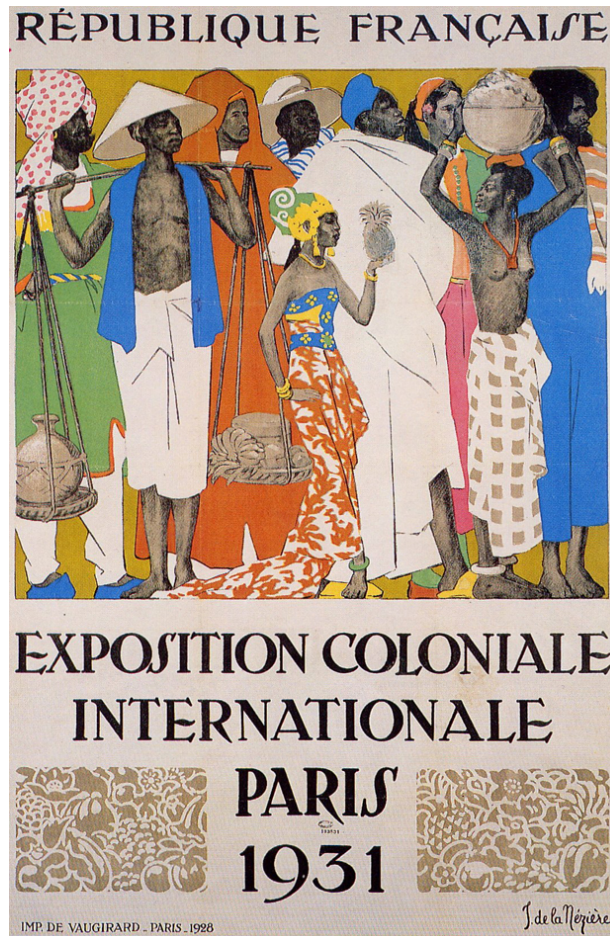


Figure 9: Advertisement for Colonial Exhibit

²¹⁶ Thomas August, "THE COLONIAL EXPOSITION IN FRANCE: EDUCATION OR REINFORCEMENT?," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 6/7 (1982): 147–54.

²¹⁷ *République Française. Exposition coloniale internationale Paris 1931*, lithographic poster printed in Paris, Imprimerie de Vaugirard 1928.

rather than vulgar, exotic entertainment.²¹⁸ The fair was designed above all to show the utility, the very necessity of the empire to the survival of France. The Musée des Colonies, as described in the exposition's General Report, was to "symbolize, in its structure, its decoration and its installations, the entire work realized in the colonies by the French genius, in the past and the present".²¹⁹ More than ever it was argued the colonies were necessary, an intrinsic part of French pride. Consequently, the Exposition of 1931 informed the public about the vital role the colonies had played and would have to continue to serve in the development of French nationhood.



²¹⁸ Patricia A. Morton, "National and Colonial: The Musée Des Colonies at the Colonial Exposition, Paris, 1931," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (1998): 357–77, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3051237>.

²¹⁹ Marcel Olivier, "Avant-Propos," *Le Livre d'Or de l'Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris, 1931* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931), vol. 5, pt. 1, 10..



Figures 10 & 11: Colonial Exhibits ²²⁰

Defining identity is an intrinsic thread throughout this essay, and an empire was a way to redefine commodities and their histories. Nationalism, in this case, meant the nationalism of “La Plus Grande France”, consisting of France and its colonial empire.²²¹ Questions of French national identity, including the integration of the French provinces and the colonies into a nation, the collective cultural expressions of the Republic, and the basis of national unity, were essential issues throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After the 1789 Revolution, efforts to define the French nation evolved as a reaction to the loss of collective identity that accompanied the monarchy's fall.²²² In the way patisserie sustained, the French colonial empire did as well, establishing the permanent idea of success, luxe, and wealth in French identity. The

²²⁰ *Les Etrangers au Temps de L'Exposition Colonial*. Paris: Gallimard: Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, 1931.

²²¹ Morton, “National and Colonial.”

²²² August, “THE COLONIAL EXPOSITION IN FRANCE.”

great mass of people who attended the 1931 Exposition discovered mostly the objectification of exotic myths and stereotypes. The reality of labor and hardship in colonies across Africa and the Caribbean as described, as well as in Asia, did not describe the empire that French officials wanted the citizenry to internalize.

The pursuit of empire by the French in addition to the desire to define empire as to best serve national interests is exemplified by the Colonial Exposition of 1931. The Exposition of 1931 could produce its own thesis on the relationship between national identity and empire. This project's breadth does not allow for the exposition to be completely dissected and understood, yet its place still holds in this work. Empire was not a foreign concept to the French people, as they consumed it and profited off it. This fair made empire an accessible good. Empire was an exhibit to visit and an entity that brought riches and glory to the nation. Madagascar and Cote d'Ivoire were foreign lands conquered by the French to export their luxuries and specialties. The empire was no critical concept, rather something for enjoyment and pride. The French replaced the histories of production with new meaning as colonies themselves were commodified for national consumption. Applying Marxist theory on commodities to empire illustrates how this pursuit is an example of fetishization. The history was erased by those in power, narratives redefined, and value attributed to what colonies could produce, not their culture or indigenous life. Sugar, vanilla, and cacao became sweetness and pastry, removed from the labor and exploitation at their origin. Empire was a tool for nationalistic gain, accrued through blatant oppression, defining French power. Domestically, the oppression scarcely ceased to exist, constituting one of the most successful forms of exploitation, one that caused pride, reverence, and fueled ignorance. The Colonial Exposition of 1931 demonstrates how the French reflected

and absorbed the empire as a part of their identity, and those who could construct that empire erased its history.

CHAPTER FIVE

Where Patisserie Meets Identity: Gastronomy, Empire, & Luxury

Unpacking Identity

Identity scholarship helps us understand how to claim an understanding of nationalism. In this case, scholarship explores how patisserie and the French infatuation with sweetness reveal aspects of French identity. Identity is a personal experience, and one's relationship with a nation can be highly individual. In saying this, discourse on national identity helps us to understand how a country presents itself, what it values, and adds nuance to interpretations or depictions of history. Esteemed nationalism scholar, Anthony D. Smith, described how "(nationalism) extends the scope of the ethnic community from purely cultural and social to economic and political spheres".²²³ Nationalism, in the case of this paper, will be interpreted as Smith asserts, as the reality and greater scope of national choice. This is not to say that national identity is not personal, but for the sake of academic consideration, there is room for objectivity in national identity when specifically looking at how a nation's priorities and interests intersect across cultural, social, economic, and political spheres.²²⁴ In the case of France, how sweetness manifested itself through social hierarchy and the culture around patisserie is a limited way to consider this aspect of identity. Considering how sweetness was also a part of political conquest and economic profitability in the form of imperial exploitation creates a holistic picture of the way patisserie meets identity.

²²³ Anthony Douglas Smith, *The Ethnic Revival: In the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²²⁴ Anthony Douglas Smith, *The Ethnic Revival: In the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

In approaching a consideration of French identity, it is worth adding some nuance to national cultural history. The aspects of identity described in this paper apply largely to pre-war era France. In the aftermath of World War II, France went through a series of identity crises, redefining nationalism and reckoning with globalism. While the importance of gastronomy, an infatuation with luxury, and the power of empire still permeate French identity in some facets today, these portions of identity were at their most powerful during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. France is a country, though, uniquely poised to have its national identity analyzed as it is a nation of “fraternité” or brotherhood in English. This concept’s creation in the aftermath of the French Revolution allowed France to create a universal ideology in terms of cultural and political issues; it established France's place in the community of nations as a country capable of realizing the legitimate representation of the “general will”.²²⁵ France intended to have and relished in the reality of the conformity associated with nationalism. What made a person French was a celebration of shared values, culture, and history. This desire to maintain a distinctly national idea of the country allowed something like patisserie to become a part of a national culture through every tier of society, whether among wealthy elites who ate it regularly or as a lower class treat meant to celebrate an occasion. The impact of sweetness permeated France across societal differences and being French meant some sort of a relationship with luxury, pride in gastronomy, and the profit of empire.

Empire as French Identity

The first pillar of identity this paper seeks to argue is the place of empire within French identity. Empire, as affirmed by the context of theory and historical events recounted above, is a

²²⁵ Mary Caputi, “National Identity in Contemporary Theory,” *Political Psychology* 17, no. 4 (1996): 683–94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3792133>.

part of the French mentality, a national culture that distinctly pursued power and wealth through dominance. Patisserie helps us see France was an empire of commodities. National gastronomy and the national palate included a taste for dishes like patisserie that represented power in their structure and symbolism. Patisserie also sheds light on this through its components, revealing a distinctly national taste for sweet goods, motivating their pursuit of colonial production. The theoretical evidence of empire's role within French nationalism is evident within commodity studies.²²⁶ Empire was a part of French identity, even when the French didn't want imperialism to be. The negative aspects of empire were intentionally ignored. Instead, the luxury, profit, and creations possible because of empire became national symbols and points of pride. The civilizing mission has its place within the French ideal, as the pursuit of exploitation for the purpose of nationalism is distinctly empirical. As a portion of identity, empire fulfills its need to impact France through various avenues of power, and the pursuit of a sweet empire upheld a national desire for sweetness. Empire was a political and economic pursuit but benefited French national culture and earned its place socially as something that brought in new commodities and reflected state power. The history of colonial commodities and the mentality used to validate these pursuits exemplifies how sweetness explains the place of empire within French identity.

Gastronomy as French Identity

The second pillar of French identity revealed by the intertwined histories of sweetness in French culture is the importance of gastronomy. The cultural construct of gastronomy and the way cuisine acts as a public good is distinctively French. Gastronomy and food are not the same things, within France and other cultures or countries there are unique gastronomies which

²²⁶ Please see pages 82 & 83 for a discussion on Marxist theory and Empire. The section on Empire within this conclusion on identity acts as a connection for the empire chapter above to these claims.

include foodstuffs, eating habits, and meal cultures, essentially a melding of the social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of food. This identity, particularly in France, is a distinct point of pride. France is a country that pioneered “haute cuisine”, the elevated distinction between everyday food and an elite tier.²²⁷ As the notion of haute cuisine makes very clear, the question of what French people do (or do not) eat cannot be divorced from questions of class. The taste itself functions as a marker of hierarchical social belonging.²²⁸ Applying this concept to the history of patisserie reveals notions about power and identity that intersect with the label of luxury and pursuit of empire. The histories throughout this essay are all components of a gastronomic narrative and reveal the importance of gastronomy in French identity. The pursuit of valuable ingredients in colonial exploration, the transformation of colonized goods into French ones, and the creation of a dessert empire are all components of gastronomic history.

To understand why gastronomy is a distinctive part of French national identity, rather than a component of nationalism that all countries have, one must engage with the exceptionalism of French cuisine. In Priscilla P. Clark’s article *Thoughts for Food, I: French Cuisine and French Culture*, she considers the origins and explanations of exceptionalism. Clark writes of gastronomic culture in France, “For cuisine [In France] is not food, it is food transcended, nature transformed into a social product, an aesthetic artifact, a linguistic creation, a cultural tradition. If food by itself approximates what economists term a pure “private good,” by its status as a cultural product cuisine is a “public good,” shared, though diversely, by many”.²²⁹ French history and the powerful figures throughout valued food. Gastronomy is a part of

²²⁷ Robert Launay & Aurelien Mauxion (2018) Introduction: Eating French, Food and Foodways, 26:2, 87-91, DOI: 10.1080/07409710.2018.1454770

²²⁸ Robert Launay & Aurelien Mauxion (2018) Introduction: Eating French, Food and Foodways, 26:2, 87-91, DOI: 10.1080/07409710.2018.1454770

²²⁹ Priscilla P. Clark, “Thoughts for Food, I: French Cuisine and French Culture,” *The French Review* 49, no. 1 (1975): 32–41.

everyday life, a part of a tradition, and affirmed as a part of what it means to be French. Clark reiterates this, writing, “For if every country has a culinary tradition, in France as nowhere else that tradition has become a national symbol of prestige, the incarnation of French civilization”.²³⁰ The distinction of French gastronomy is not that the food is superior or the traditions more important, rather, it is the emphasis placed on cuisine as identity. This is not to say that French cuisine is not exceptional in its variety, complexity, and the emphasis placed on refinement and tiers of expertise. French cuisine is vast, impressive, and historic, but so are many other traditional food cultures. What makes gastronomy a pillar of identity is the lengths to which the French pursued their gastronomic dominance, both through domestic and international avenues.

The scholarship of Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, first referenced in this thesis during Chapter 2, is worth highlighting for its understanding of the power French gastronomy has before addressing the role gastronomy plays within French identity. Parkhurst looks at culinary nationalism, while it does not focus specifically on sweetness, her work has served as a reference point in understanding the unique relationship France has with its culinary culture. Her work on how cuisine was embedded as a nationally endorsed component of French identity illustrates how the power of food was a choice made by the state.²³¹ Parkhurst describes this phenomenon as such, “The gastronomic field turned a culinary product into a cultural one. This cuisine became “French” as it had not been in the 17th and 18th centuries when the culinary arts were associated with the court and the aristocracy, not the nation. Culinary institutions and texts in the 19th century effectively transformed the patently class-based culinary product and practices of

²³⁰ Clark, “Thoughts for Food, I: French Cuisine and French Culture,”.

²³¹ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in 19th-Century France,” *American Journal of Sociology* 104, no. 3 (1998): 597–641, <https://doi.org/10.1086/210082>.

the ancien regime into a prime touchstone of national identity”.²³² Parkhurst’s argument that the creation of cookbooks, academies, and chefs allowed gastronomy to exist as a part of French culture rather than an elite exclusive good follows the timeline of this work, but I would add that the emergence of the Second French Empire additionally supported this, with the expansion of access to ingredients or wealth and the emergence of French power on a global scale. Parkhurst actually affirms this idea in her work on Culinary Nationalism, writing of the power French gastronomy had to define foods, “This finely tuned culinary consciousness turns food in France into French food, the expression and affirmation of a national identity that somehow exists outside of history”.²³³ The power gastronomy has within French culinary culture is the reality that French food is a national good, the concept of gastronomy is an example of conscious fetishization. French food is valued so highly that the labor and history behind it is irrelevant, as long as it fits within the ideal of gastronomy. This project has sought to show how sweetness motivated the pursuit of a domestic dessert empire, inspired colonial exploitation, and redefined histories. In relation to this study of sweetness, gastronomy’s place within French identity is how sweetness is embedded within French gastronomic culture, allocating with it power and influence.

Gastronomy is both a part of French national identity and a manifestation of nationalism. At the crossroads between the state, the market and civil society, the personal and the public spheres, the national and the local, gastronomy is one of the central features of contemporary French cultural identity. French scholar Vincent Martigny argues in his article on the intersection of gastronomy and nationalism, “Inside France, gastronomy "flags" the nation in

²³² Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “A Cultural Field in the Making: Gastronomy in 19th-Century France,” *American Journal of Sociology* 104, no. 3 (1998): 597–641, <https://doi.org/10.1086/210082>.

²³³ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, “Culinary Nationalism,” *Gastronomica* 10, no. 1 (2010): 102–9, <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2010.10.1.102>.

the daily lives of ordinary people. But in the global world, it also feeds a form of cultural nationalism based on the alleged virtues of French *savoir-vivre vis-à-vis* other nations”.²³⁴

French cuisine is meant to signal power and elite status to others. This persistent superiority throughout history stretching back centuries, has engrained gastronomy as a way for the French to feel culturally distinct. For the average French person, gastronomy is evident in access to foods and the consumption thereof, a subconscious prescription to the state. Internationally, it harkens back to this superiority. This attitude explains the relentless pursuit of colonial commodities that benefited gastronomic exceptionalism and the elite world of *pâtisserie* and cuisine aside from dessert as well as reinforced the denial of the circumstances under which commodities were acquired.

One way gastronomic nationalism presented itself was through codification, in this case, published works. In visiting archives in Paris, I came across cookbooks funded by the national government from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, entitled *L'Art du Bien Manger* (1906), *Bibliographie Gastronomique* (1890), and *L'Ecole des Cuisiniers* (1876).²³⁵ Within these books are various assertions about the cultural importance of French cuisine. Quotes describing the exceptional nature of French gastronomy, the French spirit of eating, and the way *pâtisserie* represented the “*vrais plaisirs de la vie*” (translation: the real pleasure of life), reinforced the internationalized national supremacy within which the French saw their own gastronomic culture. The chapters on dessert highlight how *pâtisserie* is related to royalty and aristocracy and a true soiree is incomplete without dessert. As well established, gastronomy was wholly a way to

²³⁴ Vincent Martigny, “Le goût des nôtres : gastronomie et sentiment national en France,” *Raisons politiques* 37, no. 1 (2010): 39–52, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.037.0039>.

²³⁵ These books were viewed at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The first is entitled *L'Art du Bien Manger*, was published in 1906, and was compiled by Gustave Geffroy. The second is the *Bibliographie Gastronomique*, published in 1890, and written by Georges Vicaire and *L'Ecole des Cuisiniers*, from 1876, and written by Auguste Escoffier.

demonstrate national superiority and pride. These books were only some of an entire collection of French cookbooks published during the peak of the French empire, the era in which nationalistic sentiments flourished and France saw itself as a global pioneer. The cookbooks reinforce the mission and organization of culinary superiority. Gastronomy was a form of government-organized nationalism and state-sanctioned identity.

Like empire, in addition to being a form of nationalism, gastronomy also served as a vehicle for oppression. The power food had domestically in France and comparatively to other cultures upheld their ability to dominate narratives and consolidate identity. In Mathilde Cohen's article entitled, *The Whiteness of French Food. Law, Race, and Eating Culture in France*, she outlines the French ability to whitewash their gastronomy. The article describes the supposedly neutral quality of whiteness that is particularly tangible in the context of food in a country where eating culture—understood as the norms around when, where, how, what, and why we eat—has been a central means of identity formation through slavery, colonialism, and exploitation.²³⁶ Gastronomy as a part of identity allowed France to dominate their narrative, which Cohen writes on, “The Whiteness of French food is all the more powerful in that it is unnamed, enabling the racial majority to benefit from food privileges without having to acknowledge their racial origin”.²³⁷ Cohen describes the way great powers can weaponize commodity fetishism to rewrite history and how this whiteness fetishizes the exploitation and struggle behind French gastronomy. Classic French cuisine was nationalized by chefs like Antione Carême in the early nineteenth century through codification in written recipes and published cookbooks.²³⁸ This haute cuisine was a manifestation of political power, a class-based cuisine rather than one rooted

²³⁶ Mathilde Cohen, “The Whiteness of French Food. Law, Race, and Eating Culture in France,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3819684>.

²³⁷ Cohen, “The Whiteness of French Food. Law, Race, and Eating Culture in France,”.

²³⁸ Cohen, “The Whiteness of French Food. Law, Race, and Eating Culture in France,”.

in a social community and representative of what people ate outside of a small elite. France was at its strongest in the nineteenth century, after enduring a revolution and growing an enormous empire. By defining French cuisine themselves, French elites could pursue exploitative avenues and profit off of their empire to further nationalize gastronomy without consequences. The idea that French gastronomy has always had class connotations is arguably oppressive to begin with, but when considering how France grew their wealth and status, where ingredients came from, and the constant drive to erase histories contrary to the stated idea of French food culture, the oppression within gastronomy is obvious. Gastronomy is an intrinsic part of the social and cultural fabric of French culture, and for good reason – it has a deep culture and results in beautiful cuisine, but a macro consideration of its political and economic relationship to society reinforces its place within French identity and yet reveals how it is used for control and justified whitewashing.

Luxury as French Identity

The final pillar of French identity fluid throughout the history of sweetness and its relationship with France is the presence of luxury. According to Marx, luxury is the penultimate example of fetishism. Prescribing an upper class label to commodities as designated by elites fits in the cycle Marx seeks to highlight. Patisserie is the ultimate luxury, as are its ingredients, delicious yet never a necessity. The French devoted cultural legitimacy, institutional investments, and enormous financial resources to building an empire of gastronomic luxuries. The value of these goods lies in their desire and this pursuit was distinctly prioritized by the French. Luxury, though, of these three identity-based conclusions, is the most elusive and complex. Where luxury appears throughout this paper requires more interpretation than the evident roles of empire and gastronomy. This section seeks to argue the place of luxury within French identity because of an

affinity for sweetness by providing broader historical context and tracing the overlap of luxury and power, nationalism, and oppression.

Luxury has a place as a distinctly French reality, particularly during the eras focused upon in this thesis. As the French empire of sweetness flourished, and *pâtisserie* became both professional and codified within national identity in the 18th century, so did the concept of luxury in France. In the decades after 1750 critics began to employ the term to refer to all uses of spectacular consumption for the purpose of social distinction regardless of the social position of the user, and the focus of criticism shifted from the lowborn to elites. Commodities were used to create a dazzling display of wealth and social distinction.²³⁹ George Butel Dumont's thesis on luxury served as a particularly effective way of understanding the rising importance of luxury during this era. Dumont was a member of the Gournay circle, a group of economists who admired commercial society but were not as rigidly free-trade as their better-known compatriots, the physiocrats. In his prize-winning 1771 treatise, *Théorie du Luxe*, Dumont formulated an entirely new taxonomy of the world of goods by playing with such categories as *la luxe*, *commodité*, and *la nécessité*.²⁴⁰ This distinction separated capitalist pursuits, distinguishing necessary goods, other commodities, and luxury goods. Dumont's definitions align with how displays of luxury presented themselves, with frequency and openness to effectively assert one's ability to do so. Luxury became an aspirational tier within French society, something regarded and studied by academics and something effective in distinguishing class. The ability to display personal luxury was not merely vanity and ostentation, it remained an effective practice of power in early modern European society at least until the French Revolution.

²³⁹ John Shovlin, "The Cultural Politics of Luxury in Eighteenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 4 (2000): 577–606.

²⁴⁰ Kwass, "Between Words and Things."

The use of luxury in French society shifted from a demarcation within domestic circles into an empirical pursuit, driving oppression. The post-revolution shift from the national dynamic between social classes to the international pursuit of wealth changed the meaning of luxury. This era assigned it new, dangerous, connotations. With this came dramatic changes in consumption patterns characterized by the passage from a "society of scarcity" to one of expenditure and accumulation. Luxury did not cease to exist with the downfall of the monarchy, it soon became a part of French society outside of Versailles. The court ceased to be the sole arbiters of taste, and, to that extent, this new material culture connected to the collapse of traditional forms of political and social authority.²⁴¹ With this shift came a new connotation for luxury, that of empire. The distinction of cultural superiority was no longer limited to elites, aligning with the emergence of a national identity. While France prided itself on elite culture, a culture that could seek out a patisserie on a Sunday, expanding access, in turn, reinforced the importance of luxury. This colonial empire's peak coincided with the reinvention of luxury culture. France could thrive internationally and rise to new global echelons of power. As Montesquieu once wrote, "For one man to live in luxury," he wrote, "a hand must work without respite".²⁴² Patisserie is an example of a nation living in luxury. The colonial empire which upheld the cultural superiority of France drove the desire for sweetness, and tangibly enhanced this dessert world became this support.

Luxury, conceptually, was both an unintentional direct reflection of French national culture. The French economically prioritized the pursuit of goods, whether domestic or colonial, creating a culture in which the superfluous things were labeled as French. Ancien Regime Paris became the epicenter of European style, for example, and as the Baroness d'Oberkirch concluded

²⁴¹ Jennings, "The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought."

²⁴² Montesquieu, 1721, *Persian Letters*, trans. C. J. Betts (Harmondsworth: Penguin 193-96).

– “demolish the Paris luxury industry, and French international supremacy would wither overnight”.²⁴³ France globally became the beacon of luxury, giving it purpose and power. This national pride in supremacy fueled a desire to further the luxury search, and the French did cultivate their domestic industries alongside. The common political enemy throughout French colonial history is Britain. While Britain won the imperial battle, creating the largest and most powerful empire, the French claimed a cultural superiority that allowed them to consider themselves equals; Britain as the political power and France as the cultural. And despite the British scope and scale of empire, they could not contain their desire for French silks, tapestry, porcelain, mirrors, clocks, and cabinetwork.²⁴⁴ This ability to capture the attention of competitors and stand out in their dedication to life’s luxuries set France apart. The idea that a country found purpose in dedicating time, energy, resources, and even colonial endeavors is unique in global history aside from this French mission. As Voltaire so aptly declared in 1735, “We are the whipped cream of Europe”.²⁴⁵ Being the beacon of wealth and opulence was the pride of France and a distinctly uniting sentiment amongst the elite in France. Luxury permeates the history so written here, *pâtisserie* and colonialism, gastronomy and empire, these themes find their intersection with this almost perfectly designed Marxist case study of fetishism and value.

The ability of the French to desire things of value and the way sweetness and luxury have always intersected in their history is a direct example of their intertwined power. Luxury was the pride of French culture, social life, politics, and economics. Evidence of power to this degree is less tangible than how gastronomy influenced French life or the scale of the French empire;

²⁴³ Amanda Vickery, “18th-Century Paris: The Capital of Luxury,” *The Guardian*, July 29, 2011, sec. Art and design, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jul/29/paris-life-luxury-getty-museum>.

²⁴⁴ Amanda Vickery, “18th-Century Paris: The Capital of Luxury,” *The Guardian*, July 29, 2011, sec. Art and design, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jul/29/paris-life-luxury-getty-museum>.

²⁴⁵ Jennings, “The Debate about Luxury in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought.”

rather, luxury manifested through its continuous and generational impact on France. As described, the superiority complex derived from a nation that embraced and flaunted luxury reinforced international power and gave people agency or confidence domestically. As French playwright, Pierre de Marivaux so declared in 1734, "Paris is the world, the rest of the earth is nothing but its suburbs".²⁴⁶ Social and cultural life in France, particularly during the centuries of focus within this paper, were divided by luxurious and peasant life. The wealthy lived in opulence, with grandeur and limitless symbols of status. Politically, luxury reinforced class dynamics. When tied with economics, luxury built an empire. The pursuit of excess drove French choices internationally and culture domestically in a way that validated the French value placed on sweetness.

Evaluating This French Identity

In establishing these three pillars of French identity, I acknowledge that this work falls inherently into the trap of commodity fetishism Marx sets out to address. This reiteration of a quote from Chapter 1 is Marx's assertion of commodity fetishism,

"As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Amanda Vickery, "18th-Century Paris: The Capital of Luxury," *The Guardian*, July 29, 2011, sec. Art and design, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jul/29/paris-life-luxury-getty-museum>.

²⁴⁷ Marx, "Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism."

Fetishism implies a personally or societally dictated attribution of value.²⁴⁸ In this work, I distinguish French pastry's superiority and assert that it has a distinct place within French culture. This is commodity fetishism, an inevitable reality in writing a thesis on an object and recounting its agency and importance. I acknowledge that dessert culture exists beyond France. For example, consider Austria and its history of cake. I acknowledge that French cuisine is much broader than *pâtisserie*, and much of the ingredients used and history surrounding it comes from French soil. I acknowledge that the French had other colonies beyond Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, and Madagascar. I explain that I focused on these not only because they produced sweet goods but because they produced at higher levels and received more national attention than most colonies within the French empire. I acknowledge that pastry is made up of more than chocolate, sugar, and vanilla. These acknowledgments are not meant to delegitimize this paper. They aspire to decentralize the commodities that I focus on. The histories told above have value. The concluding idea of identity in this paper is supported by the evidence above. What I seek to do here is engage with the nature of arbitrary value. Fetishization ignores the labor of a commodity and the background of its creation. In telling the history of *pâtisserie* as well the history of its components, I hope I have done Marx justice in telling a complete history.

In evaluating the claim that sweetness was powerful enough within French culture to specifically impact and enhance three aspects of national identity, it is worth considering renowned anthropologist and commodity historian Sidney Mintz's work as it disagrees. In his book, *Sweetness & Power*, Mintz looks critically at the history of sugar and its relationship with the United Kingdom. On page 189 of *Sweetness & Power* Mintz makes an argument converse to the thesis of this paper,

²⁴⁸Marx, "Capital Vol. 1: Commodity Fetishism".

“But the French sugar interests, no matter how zealous, were unable to push French consumption to the point where it would deeply affect the nature of French cuisine or the forms of French meal taking. To this day the average French person consumes less sucrose than the average Englishman... sweetness does not seem ever to have been enshrined as a taste to be contrasted with all others in the French taste spectrum – bitter, sour, salt, hot – as it has in England and America.”²⁴⁹

Mintz argues that sweetness was never an essential component of French gastronomy; that the French never latched onto it quite like the British or Americans I reference Mintz because scholars regard his study of sugar as essential literature on commodity studies. While Mintz’s take is incompatible with the premise of this paper, it misunderstands the French relationship with sugar. While the French may consume less per capita sugar a day, this is not for lack of desire but a different relationship with dessert. Patisserie and sweet goods intend to be luxuries; they have been since their inception in the 16th century. The French don’t consume as much sugar because sugar is supposed to be a treat, a special occasion, something delicious – which is often why French desserts are so ornate and meticulously made. After all, they are meant to be a celebration of sweetness. This paper would argue that sweetness is enshrined in the French taste. Sugar massively affected the nature of French cuisine because the French created a whole specialty industry out of it. The sugar the French extracted from Haiti, and the other sweet commodities as well did not appear on plates across France because it had a reserved luxury status. The premise of Mintz’s argument is that the relationship with sweetness can be quantified by the amount consumed, the number of dishes, and the amount within gastronomy. To better understand the relationship the French have with sweetness and dessert, consider the role it plays within French culture and how this luxury status permeated both the history of patisserie and colonial commodities.

²⁴⁹ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power* (New York, NY: Viking, 1985), 189.

An additional caveat in arguing a claim about national identity is to who this identity applies. This paper seeks to make a claim about national identity, an argument that this is how the state presented itself. The value placed on gastronomy, luxury, and empire were choices made by French elites. While the effects trickled down to impact everyday French society, they were not the livelihood of the average French man. Identity can be both a personal and national choice, and as Smith argues above, national identity persists throughout social, cultural, economic, and political life. The identity that related sweetness to Frenchness is a state-sanctioned one, derived from the powerful. This identity was certainly French, but not necessarily a part of every French person.

Using Sweetness to Understand Frenchness

One approach to applying this study of identity and the interweaving history of sweetness in French culture is the study of memory. Pierre Nora, an esteemed memory scholar, writes of the essential distinction between history and memory,

“Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer”.²⁵⁰

The history of sweetness is the separate one. The stories of patisseries are distant and disconnected from their origins. The intent of a project like this one is to illuminate and add depth to memory. To do justice to memory is to assign appropriate historical capital to the past.²⁵¹ In this chapter, I sought to illustrate how sweetness has power, the significance of this

²⁵⁰ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): pp. 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

²⁵¹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): pp. 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

history, and the worthy capital a thesis such as this one can have. Nora argues for the concept of a “lieu de mémoire” (a place of memory), meaning any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by the reality of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community, think a flag or a monument or even a collection of stories.²⁵² Patisserie can serve as lieu de mémoire. I believe this good is an example of French identity and national history, a symbol of France’s empire, its gastronomy, and its fixation on luxury. In applying this identity to patisserie, it is important to highlight the need to remember, about which Nora writes, “In the past, then, there was one national history and there were many particular memories. Today, there is one national memory, but its unity stems from a divided patrimonial demand that is constantly expanding and in search of coherence”.²⁵³ The national memory of France is one often forgetful of its colonial past. French patrimony is prideful and often non-critical. The national memory of France sees things like patisserie and empire as totally disconnected. This thesis, though, argues that an appropriate history of France is one that remembers the way nationalistic symbols intertwine with complicated pasts, that this is often the reality of French identity.

Sweetness provides us a lens with which to consider power, nationalism, oppression, and overall French history. When I began this project, I knew that there was a shared history between Marxist theory, patisserie, and the colonial network of sweetness the French sought out. As my research came together it became increasingly evident that the conclusion I would reach would not be a perfect connecting document linking a colonial administrator to the patisserie industry. Instead, fault lines would emerge amongst these histories tying together a cohesive way

²⁵² Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): pp. 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

²⁵³ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): pp. 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

sweetness is a part of what it means to be French, that the fetishization of sweetness created an addiction to luxury, empire, and sweetness. Sweetness reveals trends within identity and what mattered to the dictators of value in French history. Essential to this idea is the concept of choice. Commodity fetishism is only accessible to the powerful, whether that be a critical mass of people or a few with the power to dictate history. A natural conclusion to these interconnected narratives is their shared French identity and what they reveal about France itself. The memory of separate pasts can reveal a national history. These histories demonstrate that the French repeatedly chose to value sweetness, through the development of national gastronomic culture, the pursuit of empire, and a fascination with luxury.

EPILOGUE

The inspiration for this project came from Professor van der Meer of the Colby History Department's course on commodities. Reading Mintz, Kurlansky, Beckert, Norton, and other scholars transformed seemingly mundane commodities into an insightful lens to study world history. Approaching history through commodities reveals the interconnectedness of the human experience. By studying where commodities originated, how they moved around, and how their meanings changed over time, this exploration of culture and society draws attention to the larger historical patterns and processes. These histories demonstrate the constructed nature of identities—social, racial, gender, ethnic, and national—and how they transformed over time. Something that can seem small, trivial, or unessential can have a transformative or enlightening effect on how we look at the surrounding world. Approaching history through patisserie, sugar, vanilla, and chocolate may seem on the outside shallow or meaningless. I hope that this project has surprised you. This study has only further proven to me what was learned in *Global Commodities*, that every object has a story worth studying.

This study began a series of histories leading to a grand question: how do these stories connect to tell us about what it means to be French? And the answer we come to, of the overlapping ways gastronomy, empire, and luxury intersect to explain the multidimensional role of sweetness is a loaded one. It is crucial to acknowledge that assigning identity is an imperfect approach. The answer I come to is unique, tying together what I establish as common threads between different stories, but French identity is expansive, ancient, and fluid. It is first worth acknowledging that my conclusion about identity rests on Marxist theory. This approach to nationalism considered the role of value as not only an aspect of French identity through the concept of luxury, but served as a baseline to explain the importance of the power behind how

things mattered, why they did, and who decided they do. This research uses Marx's study of value because combining identity and commodities concerns this explanation of meaning. However, it would also be inappropriate to conclude that all French identity is summarized within the three concluding spheres of gastronomy, empire, and luxury. This approach serves to identify French values at a time in which these values intersected. While yes, the ramifications of these values transcend into today, they explain a part of national identity and not the complete picture of a socially, economically, and physically diverse nation. Identity should serve as a benchmark for understanding, a way to analyze the permanent aspect a history can have. Interpret this conclusion about French identity as the way commodity fetishism has transcendent power, how objects inspire empire and glory, and the lengths to which a nation will go to fulfill a purpose and keep up a persona.

In pursuing a paper like this, with disconnected ideas sharing common conclusions, I was often intimidated. I hoped to create a fluid argument that felt present behind the various lines of thought. The histories are separate, but each shows the way sweetness is valued and reveals secrets about French identity, power, oppression, and national pride. The luxurious patisserie world and the exploitative empire are separate histories, that jointly tell a story about how commodities interact with nations.

This project does not seek to ruin dessert for its reader. At times, I wondered why I chose to touch something that is so inherently meant for pleasure and enjoyment. This history does not argue that patisserie and French gastronomy is not divine or delicious. I am a "dessert person" myself, which is where this idea originated. In saying this, I have learned that we are quite literally what we eat and that food can tell powerful stories as well as share rich histories. And with this reveals the bittersweet truth, sweetness helped shape France into a nation that continues

to have an industry surrounding ornate, miniature pastries, a nation that faces the reality of its imperialism, and a nation that has a particular affinity for life's finer things. Our history has a meaning that can transcend a generation (or several), forever impacting what matters and what has value. There is merit in unpacking power and dissecting the meaning behind goods. On this note, I say let them eat cake and let them think about its history, too.

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