

Colonial Food in Interwar Paris

The Taste of Empire

Lauren Janes



BLOOMSBURY

Colonial Food in Interwar Paris

Colonial Food in Interwar Paris

The Taste of Empire

Lauren Janes

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

BLOOMSBURY and the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2016

Paperback edition first published 2017

© Lauren Janes, 2016

Lauren Janes has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4725-9282-8

PB: 978-1-3500-4568-2

ePDF: 978-1-4725-9283-5

ePub: 978-1-4725-9284-2

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Janes, Lauren, author.

Colonial food in interwar Paris: the taste of empire / Lauren Janes.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4725-9282-8 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-4725-9283-5 (ePDF) –

ISBN 978-1-4725-9284-2 (ePub) 1. Food–France–History–20th century. 2. Ethnic food industry–France–Paris–History–20th century.

3. Food habits–France–Paris–History–20th century.

4. France–Colonies. I. Title.

TX637.J36 2016

394.1'209440904–dc23

2015030743

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

For Mom, Dad, Dustin, Daphne, and Teddy

Contents

List of Tables	viii
List of Images	ix
List of Abbreviations	x
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
1 Colonial Food in the First World War	19
2 The Exotic Luncheons of the <i>Société d'acclimatation</i>	45
3 Selling Rice to Wheat Eaters	69
4 Colonial Cuisine in Culinary Literature	103
5 Food and Taste at the Colonial Exposition of 1931	127
Conclusion	161
Notes	167
Bibliography	201
Index	217

List of Tables

Table 1	French consumption of sugar, 1911–32	24
Table 2	French sugar imports, 1922–32	25
Table 3	Rice consumption in France in thousands of metric quintals, 1911–22	36

List of Images

Image 1	“Famille française/Famille hindoue”	92
Image 2	“La cuisine nègre”	125
Image 3	“La cuisine bourgeoise de saison: Le moussaka à la turque”	126
Image 4	Gabon section of the façade	131
Image 5	Cacao, detail of the façade	133
Image 6	Indochinese fishing, façade	134
Image 7	Michel Géo, “Principal Export Items of Plant-based Products, panel 3”	135
Image 8	Michel Géo, “Principal Export Items of Plant-based Products: oranges, tobacco, peanuts, henna, carob, dates, olives, cocoa, cork”	136
Image 9	Postcard, Algerian pavilion	137
Image 10	Henri Dormoy, “1830–1930, Algeria, a country of great agricultural production”	141
Image 11	Tunisian restaurant	144
Image 12	French West African restaurant	151
Image 13	“Un déjeuner au restaurant nègre”	152

List of Abbreviations

Affeco	Affaires économiques
AEF	Afrique équatoriale française (French Equatorial Africa)
AOF	Afrique occidentale française (French West Africa)
APOM	Archives du comité central français pour l'outre-mer
AN	Archives nationales
ANOM	Archives nationales d'outre-mer
ECI	Exposition coloniale internationale (1931 Colonial Exposition)
F10	Série F Agriculture
F12	Série F Commerce et Industrie
FM	Fonds ministériel
FP	Fonds privé
GERI	Groupement des exportateurs de riz d'Indochine
MNHN	Muséum national d'histoire naturelle
SSHA	Société scientifique d'hygiène alimentaire
UCF	Union coloniale française

Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to the many professors, family members, friends, colleagues, and institutions that have supported this project, which began as a dissertation project at the University of California, Los Angeles. I am especially grateful for the supportive faculty of the UCLA department of history and for the financial support I received there. Caroline Ford's deep understanding of French social, cultural, and imperial history gave my work its foundation, but she also gave me the intellectual freedom to wander into food studies. She offered sound advice, insightful comments, and constructive critiques. Andrew Apter encouraged me to find deeper meanings in the story I was telling, often clearly articulating the ideas I was struggling to convey. Andrew's enthusiasm for this project renewed my confidence at key stages of the process. Akhil Gupta gave me a compelling introduction to food studies. Teo Ruiz has been my advocate and mentor, and I am grateful to him. Many generous colleagues have commented on various stages of this project, but I especially want to thank Elizabeth Everton, who has read and insightfully critiqued early stages of nearly every chapter of this book. Liz also first found the image that is on the cover. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, Erica Peters, Sylvie Durmelat, and Kyri Claflin have been helpful by reading sections or sharing ideas at key moments. For two years I found an intellectual home and kind friends at the University of California Washington Center (UCDC). Thank you for the hospitality, encouragement, and useful feedback. I especially wish to thank my colleagues in the history department at Hope College. Their kindness and generosity make Hope a great place to work.

This research relies on the skillful help of archivists and librarians at the *Archives nationales*, the *Archives nationales d'outre-mer*, the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*, the Library of Congress, the Getty Research Institute, the Charles E. Young Research Library at UCLA, and the Van Wylen Library at Hope College. Michelle Yost, the Interlibrary Loan Associate at Hope, made the final stages of this project possible by finding everything I needed.

I am thankful to the following sources of funding for this project: the UCLA Department of History, the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*, the UCLA

Graduate Division, the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies, and the Arts and Humanities Division at Hope College.

Thank you to my parents Don and Mary Beth Hinkle. For my whole life you have encouraged every passion and talent I had and worked to make everything I wished to pursue possible. Thank you to Dustin. You are the love of my life, my best friend, my partner in everything, my fiercest advocate, and my best editor.

Sections of this book have been published in earlier forms in various articles. This book has benefitted from the editorial support of reviewers and editors from the following publications: A small portion of Chapter 5 appears in “Writing about Cannibals and Consuming Black Africans in twentieth-century France,” *French Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2015), 176–85. An early version of Chapter 4 is published as “Curiosité gastronomique et cuisine exotique,” *Vingtième siècle: Revue d’histoire*, no. 123 (2014), 69–84. A section of Chapter 3 appears in “Selling rice to wheat eaters: the colonial lobby and the promotion of Pain de riz during and after the First World War,” *Contemporary French Civilization* 38, no. 2 (2013), 179–200. Small sections of Chapters 2, 3, and 5 are a part of “Exotic Eating in Interwar Paris: Dealing with Disgust,” *Food and History* 8, no. 1 (2010), 237–56. Finally, an early version of Chapter 2 is included as “Python, sauce de poisson et vin: Produits des colonies et exotisme culinaire aux déjeuners amicaux de la Société d’acclimatation, 1905-1939” in Eva Barlösius, Martin Bruegel, and Marilyn Nicoud (eds.) *Le choix des aliments: Informations et pratiques alimentaires* (Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais and Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 139–57.

Introduction

From 1914 through the 1930s, the Parisian culinary world changed. Provoked by dire necessity, intriguing new availabilities, and cautious curiosity, Parisians experimented with a cornucopia of new foods and tastes from France's colonies. Bourgeois cooking magazines published recipes for curry and various dishes "à la créole" while the Chamber of Deputies debated the appropriateness of adding rice flour to French bread. Home cooks used tropical fruits in their desserts and added pinches of curry powder to their sauces. The Cordon Bleu cooking school included in its curriculum dishes like sauté of veal in curry and fillet of sole à l'algérienne. A hygienic eating society and the National Association of French Colonialists published cookbooks and held cooking demonstrations to try to convince housewives to buy more Indochinese rice. The Acclimatization Society held annual banquets highlighting dishes with diverse ingredients such as peanuts, couscous, and fish sauce. In 1931 Parisians and visitors to the city tasted food and drink from all over the globe at the International Colonial Exposition in tasting rooms, restaurants, and concession stands. In short, interwar Parisians confronted new foods from the French colonies in both quotidian and spectacular settings.

In the interwar period, food became central to the political imagination of what France's global empire meant to the French nation. The loss of French agricultural self-sufficiency during the war, and the failure of the French empire to efficiently meet all of France's immediate food needs, convinced many in the colonial lobby—those actively pursuing pro-imperial policies—that the organized expansion of colonial agriculture and the orderly and profitable export of colonial foodstuffs to France were the most critical aspects of colonial development. At the same time, the colonial lobby seized upon the example of those colonial foodstuffs that did reach France during the war as powerful symbols of the importance of the colonial project to the life of the French nation. The role of the empire in feeding France became a key aspect of a new narrative of Greater France, one which portrayed the colonies as necessary to sustaining life in the metropole. This narrative is illustrated in the image on

the cover of this book. In this poster advertising the 1922 Colonial Exposition in Marseille, representative subjects of the French empire offer up agricultural goods including wheat, rice, fruit, and an olive branch to France, represented by a gracious laurel-crowned Marianne draped in the colors of the French flag. As Marianne rises above her subjects, she appears to be supported by colonial agricultural abundance.

There were serious limitations, however, to the popular consumption of this narrative. The wider French public lacked the enthusiasm for colonial foods shown by the colonial lobby. Many colonial foods were met with trepidation or disinterest by French consumers and with downright hostility by competing French producers. While French consumers embraced a few new colonial foods, many were never accepted. In recipes and restaurants, the inclusion of even those colonial foods that were embraced—such as tropical fruits and curry—was enough to set apart a dish or a meal as exotic. The cultural limitations on the use of colonial foods demonstrate resistance in France to the notion that the development of the colonies was essential to improving life in the metropole. Whether French cuisine and the French body could incorporate these new foods, and the anxiety over these questions, reflected a broader national discomfort with the incorporation of the French colonies into Greater France.

Food and identity

By examining the trajectories of colonial food—how it moved through the empire, how it was promoted, and what place it occupied in French culture and cuisine—this book takes into account both discourse and practice in the center and at the margins of empire. My main focus, however, is on what Kyla Wazana Tompkins calls “eating culture”: looking “beyond food itself to consider the practices and representations of ingestion and edibility.”¹ Eating may be quotidian, but what and how we eat is steeped in meaning. Food is complex and meaningful precisely because it is such a central part of our embodied lives, of the ways we “live inside, understand, and act through our own flesh.”² While visual and auditory exchanges allow the observer to maintain a certain amount of distance from the object of observation, to taste something requires actually placing an object in one’s mouth, experiencing its smell and taste as well as the sensation of its movement down one’s throat. The food is then digested, nourishing or potentially poisoning the eater. The risk involved in eating is both a biological reality and a sociological construction. As nutritional

sociologist Claude Fischler has argued, eating is dangerous because it “implies *incorporation*, i.e., taking the food in, across the body’s boundaries, and letting it become an integral part of the self.”³ As Carolyn Korsmeyer remarks, “This makes it, I believe, a profoundly *intimate* sense. Its mode of operation requires that its objects become part of oneself. Its exercise involves risk and trust.”⁴

This incorporation is more than just the material question of nutrition. Many human societies hold to some form of the “you are what you eat” principle—“the mental representation by which the food eaten transforms the person, who takes on the food’s real or imagined characteristics.”⁵ On some level, what we eat defines who we are, including what groups we are a part of. The English word “companion” comes from the Old French *compaignon*, meaning one “with whom one shares bread,” from the Latin roots for “together” and “bread.”⁶ If eating culture is a space for defining group identity, then it can also delineate difference. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson explains, “The array of food choices open to each of us supplies a cultural space in which we see ourselves and our difference from others. Every mouthful constructs as it performs culinary identity.”⁷ In some contexts, this performance of a culinary identity also makes eating a “racially performative act” where whiteness is constructed through the embodied practice of eating. As Tompkins describes, eating culture serves as a nexus “through which the white relationship to otherness is often negotiated.”⁸ This othering often happens through disgust reactions. Disgust protects the body by “rejecting distasteful and noxious foods,” but it has also evolved into a “uniquely human mechanism for internalizing cultural rules.”⁹ Disgust is an embodied reaction that can define insider and outsider status by categorizing outsiders as disgusting.¹⁰ In interwar Paris, diverse opportunities to eat (or to reject) colonial foods gave Parisians new spaces to identify themselves in relation to the colonies through their food choices. The ways in which colonial foods were promoted, mediated, described, and consumed show how the boundaries of French culinary identity clearly excluded the colonized as other and outsider.

Foodways continue to play a large role in the debate about French national identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The media discussions of halal burgers at Quick restaurants and halal slaughter practices at Parisian slaughter houses from 2009 through 2012 have many parallels to the racialized discourse of French versus colonized diets in the interwar period discussed in this book. Halal meat is meat that is permissible in Islam. The animal is slaughtered according to Islamic Law, which includes slitting its throat and fully draining its blood. In 2009, Quick, the second largest fast food chain in France, began selling halal hamburgers in eight restaurants. Quick had commercial

success with the halal menu and began selling only halal hamburgers in twenty-two of its French restaurants.¹¹ France has Europe's largest Muslim population, with about six million Muslims. Even though the French market for halal foods had grown to an estimated 5.7 billion by 2010, the halal menu at Quick, and especially the fact that these restaurants sold only halal meat, caused a firestorm of criticism in French media.¹² Many commentators argued that halal burgers were either discriminatory to non-Muslims or not reflective of the values of republicanism. Wynne Wright and Alexis Annes analyzed the discourse on Quick in three leading French dailies and determined that "in their efforts to construct meaning around halal hamburgers, the media constructed a defensive gastronomicalism which served as a political tool to reinforce French identity within national borders, using everyday foods, and, in this way, drew boundaries around who was French."¹³ Commentators and politicians complained that Quick's new menus excluded non-Muslims from eating there, but, of course, non-Muslims can eat halal meat. The idea that Muslim meat is somehow inappropriate for non-Muslim eaters was a powerful one. In something as simple as the burger—certainly not a central dish of traditional French cuisine—the incursion of Muslim practices into the diets of French citizens caused a reaction that defined Frenchness in a way that excluded Muslims.

In the 2012 presidential campaign, the issue of halal meat dominated discussion on the political right for a few weeks in February and March. President Nicolas Sarkozy even claimed that halal "was the issue that most preoccupied France."¹⁴ The controversy over halal meat in Paris began with a TV documentary that revealed that nearly all of the abattoirs in Paris followed halal slaughter methods, and that not all of this meat was sold under a halal label. Parisians, therefore, could be eating halal meat and not know it. Presidential candidate for the far right wing Front National party, Marine Le Pen, seized on to the issue, declaring that she was "disgusted" that "all of the abattoirs of the Paris region have succumbed to the rules of a minority."¹⁵ Although it was soon clarified that only a small percentage of the meat eaten in Paris is processed in abattoirs in the region around the city, the fear that non-Muslims were eating halal meat without knowing it had taken hold. Down in the polls and attempting to attract voters from the far right, Sarkozy joined in the outrage by calling for regulations requiring the labeling of all halal and kosher meat and promising to ban halal meat from state-school canteens.¹⁶ While both Sarkozy and Le Pen claimed to be concerned about animal cruelty—as halal rules do not allow for the animal to be stunned before slaughter—the rhetoric of disgust and anger at the idea of unknowingly eating halal meat was most powerful because it raised

the fear of the “Islamization” of France.¹⁷ Here, eating was indeed revealed to be a performative act of French identity, as the unintentional ingestion of halal meat by the Parisian public seemed for some to threaten the continuation of Frenchness itself. While the context of the present fear of the “Islamization” of France is a recent development, the role of diet in defining insiders and outsiders of the French nation has its roots in debates about colonial food imports in the first half of the twentieth century.

Cooking in France at the start of the twentieth century

At the start of the twentieth century, French cuisine was divided into distinct categories based on class. *Haute cuisine* or *grande cuisine* was the cuisine of the great restaurants and the work of chefs serving elite clientele. It was, still in the early twentieth century, the creation nearly exclusively of male chefs, whether employed in restaurants or in the homes of the very wealthy. At the turn of the twentieth century, Georges Auguste Escoffier, “the king of chefs,” codified his modernized and simplified *haute cuisine* in *Le Guide culinaire*, a remarkably influential text on the art of French cooking. Contrasted with *grande cuisine* was *petite cuisine* or domestic cookery. *Petite cuisine* was also known as *cuisine bourgeoise*. This was the urban home cooking of both the upper bourgeoisie who employed cooks and of lower middle-class homes in which housewives did their own cooking. The food of the urban working classes, often eaten outside of the home, formed a third category of French cuisine. Finally, French regional cuisines and the cuisines of the countryside formed another distinct category and were sometimes lumped together in Parisian descriptions as *cuisine de la grand-mère*. These four categories of French cuisine were quite separate and recognized as such by contemporaries. Cookbook authors, magazine columnists, and gastronomes spoke of these different types of cuisine by name.

Despite these class divisions, however, there were some important elements of consistency across most French cooking, and these different levels of cuisine had a lot of influence on one another. By 1900, a pattern of three daily meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) had become the norm across classes, and the “French dietary model” of a lunch and dinner each featuring at least an appetizer, entrée, and dessert was standard. Even at elite restaurants and upper-class households, service had transitioned from “French service,” where elaborate dishes were all served simultaneously, to the sequential presentation of courses known as “Russian service.”¹⁸ *Haute cuisine* meals had additional courses, as

did most *cuisine bourgeoise* meals, but the three-course minimum served as the base. For example, a typical bourgeois menu as published in the home cooking magazine, *Le Pot-au-Feu*, in October of 1911 called for the following five courses for lunch:

fresh herring with mustard sauce
 beef *à la mode ancienne*
 terrine of partridge
 salad of lettuces and eggs
 pear gratin

and the following six-course dinner:

soup solférino (a vegetable and potato soup)
 fillet of sole
 calf's liver braised with fresh cepes
 sirloin roast
 lettuces
 apples *à la ninette*¹⁹

These menus show the centrality of meat to the French meal and the marginal role of vegetables. Most bourgeois menus included a soup course with dinner. Both desserts, as was also quite typical, contain seasonal fruits. Bread and wine would have accompanied the meal, but their inclusion was assumed and did not need to be specified in the menu suggestion. Even among the working classes, by 1900, a "proper meal" consisted of three courses and wine. Nearly all restaurants, even those with a working-class clientele, proposed menus "couched in the categories of appetizer, meat dish with vegetables, and dessert. Bread and wine were almost incontrovertible accompaniments to the meal."²⁰ This sit-down lunch, however, was not affordable to all workers, and by 1900, Paris had "a whole street-food sector" featuring such quick eats as oysters, fried tripe, soup, and fried potatoes.²¹ Even though a "proper meal" was not attainable to everyone, it remained an organizing concept of what it meant to eat well.

Across classes and regions, the French believed that France produced great food. Brillat-Savarin wrote in the 1890s:

French soil is privileged [and capable of] naturally producing in great abundance the best vegetables, the best fruits and the best wines of the world. France also possesses the finest chickens, the most tender meats, and the most delicate and varied poultry. Its maritime situation gives it the most beautiful fish and crustaceans. It is, therefore, natural that the French become both good cooks and good eaters.²²

Tied to this respect for the products of French soil was an interest in traditional regional French cuisines within *cuisine bourgeoise* and to a lesser extent within *haute cuisine*. The popularity of regional cuisines in Paris increased in the interwar period with the growth in automobile tourism and the restaurant reviews of the Michelin Guide, but regional cuisine was also especially valued during the First World War as a source for practical and inexpensive cooking. Although *cuisine bourgeoise* celebrated a certain level of conspicuous consumption, thrift was also an important value and the unfussy dishes of *cuisine de la grand-mère* were celebrated for their inexpensive ingredients.²³

Cuisine bourgeoise was also shaped by the rise of nutritional science, domestic education, and print media in the late nineteenth century. The educational reforms of the Third Republic included domestic education for girls, intended to prepare them to become skilled housewives and raise the children of the Republic. By the end of the nineteenth century, this domestic education focused on the “science of domesticity,” teaching girls that one of their primary functions as wife and mother was to serve simple and well-prepared meals to meet the nutritional needs of each member of their household. Spurred in part by concerns about the declining birth rate, a 1909 law mandated that upper primary school girls spend one-quarter to one-half of the day on domestic education.²⁴ Gender differences in primary and secondary education were lessened in the interwar period, but by that point domestic educators outside of the school system were writing home management guides, cookbooks, and magazine columns, and teaching courses at institutions like the *Société scientifique d’hygiène alimentaire* and the Cordon Bleu. Sometimes these educators were chefs who had made careers in *haute cuisine*. In the 1920s, Escoffier wrote cookbooks highlighting affordable ingredients, including rice, and Henri-Paul Pellaprat became the head of the Cordon Bleu school in 1902, which at the time taught housewives and domestic cooks. Through domestic and culinary education and publications, some practitioners of *haute cuisine* had a hand in shaping *cuisine bourgeoise*, and in this way, men continued to have a role in shaping and critiquing the domestic realm.²⁵

Colonial foods in France

The availability of many colonial food products was not entirely new in the 1920s, but interest in them grew significantly during and after the First World War, and the volume of many colonial foods imported into France increased

in the 1920s and 1930s. For some older colonial products, with which French consumers were very familiar, increased colonial production aligned with protectionist trade policies to increase the amount of these imports from the French colonies. For example, French imports of colonial sugar increased from 57,070 metric tons in 1922 to 123,650 metric tons in 1932, despite the recovery of domestic French sugar production during the same period.²⁶ The French colonies went from supplying less than 3 percent of France's chocolate in 1913 to supplying 90 percent of it in 1938.²⁷ Coffee gained popularity in France in the late seventeenth century as a luxury good coming only from Yemen in the Ottoman Empire. In the eighteenth century, the French developed coffee production in Saint-Domingue, and coffee became a colonial commodity and a "staple drink of most urbanites in France, whatever their social status or income level."²⁸ After the Haitian revolution, the French colonies produced very little coffee until after the First World War. Coffee, formerly exotic, became a normalized part of French culinary life before it again became a colonial product. French colonial coffee production met 11 percent of French demand in 1934.²⁹ Although these older colonial goods—sugar, chocolate, and coffee—were already fully integrated into French cuisine by the beginning of the twentieth century, the role of the French colonies in bolstering the supply of these now indispensable elements of French culinary life during the war and the Great Depression illustrated the colonial lobby's message that the colonies were essential contributors to Greater France.

The First World War and the interwar period also brought new colonial goods to France and increased the availability of some lesser-known and unusual colonial foods. These new colonial foods had an impact on French cuisine and eating habits, and some of them faced significant resistance. Rice, which had been an uncommon ingredient in French cooking before the war, was heavily promoted during and after the war. French imports of Indochinese rice did dramatically increase in the 1930s, though most of this rice was used for animal feed. The loss of livestock during the war forced the French to eat frozen and canned meat from the colonies—the products of technologies that Parisians had previously resisted. France imported only 2,204 metric tons of colonial meat in 1913, but this amount increased to 19,395 metric tons in 1920.³⁰

Tropical fruits had a significant impact on twentieth-century French cuisine and were potent symbols of colonial bounty. At the start of the twentieth century, bananas were available throughout French urban centers, but they were expensive due to high transit costs.³¹ In 1932, France imported 185,000 metric tons of bananas, of which the French colonies provided about

50,000 metric tons.³² This reflected a dramatic increase in the availability of bananas, prompting one recipe author to say in 1935: “In the past they [bananas] were regarded as rarities, the same as pineapples and all colonial fruits, which we look upon now with the same indifference as apples and pears.”³³ Quotas on foreign bananas along with production incentives increased French colonial banana production fivefold between 1932 and 1937, and by 1939, the French empire was “self-sufficient in the production of bananas.”³⁴ Pineapples, both fresh and canned, also became more widely available and frequently eaten in France in the interwar period. Since the nineteenth century, pineapples had been a symbol of imperial dominance for European nations and of privilege for wealthy Europeans.³⁵ In the interwar period, both fresh and canned pineapple were more widely available, and the pineapple became a symbol of colonial abundance despite the fact that the French colonies did not produce enough pineapple to supply the metropolitan demand.³⁶ These new colonial foods—along with others that never gained much traction in France—were key elements of the public discourse about the role of the colonies in feeding France and the place of colonial foods within French cuisine.

The increase in French colonial food imports in the interwar period was part of the increased interdependence between France and the colonies during the Great Depression. As economic protectionism caused overall French imports and exports to decrease, the percentage of colonial goods in French imports increased from 9.8 percent in 1913 to 12.4 percent in 1929, 23.7 percent in 1933, and 28.5 percent in 1936.³⁷ The actual amount (by weight) of colonial goods imported into France increased to 3 times prewar levels in 1934 and 3.5 times prewar levels in 1937. Food played an absolutely central role in this dramatic increase in French colonial imports. In the late 1930s, the Ministry of Colonies estimated that 85 percent of colonial exports to the metropole were foodstuffs.³⁸ Not only were foodstuffs the majority of French colonial imports, but colonial foods also made up the majority of all foods imported into France in the 1930s. According to the French Ministry of Finance, 70 percent of foodstuffs (*objets d'alimentation*) by weight imported into France in 1936 came from French colonies.³⁹ This increased to 74 percent in 1938.⁴⁰

The colonial lobby

The increase in French-colonial commerce was in part due to the efforts of the colonial lobby, which pushed for tariffs protecting colonial goods as well as

investment in colonial production. The French colonial lobby began to take shape in the 1880s as loosely organized groups with business and scientific interests in the colonies.⁴¹ In the 1890s, these various groups organized more formally with the founding of independent entities like the Committee for French Africa (1890), the Committee for Madagascar (1895), and the Committee for French Asia (1901). These groups sponsored research and exhibitions and lobbied ministers about colonial concerns. Two developments in the 1890s led to a great expansion of the influence of the colonial lobby. First, in 1892—at the height of the Anglo-French colonial rivalry—Eugène Etienne, the deputy representing the Oran district of Algeria, founded the *groupe colonial*, “a caucus of pro-colonial members of the lower house of parliament.” The senate version formed in 1898. The *groupe colonial* grew rapidly, reaching two hundred members—about a third of the Chamber of Deputies—in 1902. Second, business interests from across the empire came together in the *Union coloniale française* (UCF) in 1893. The UCF became a leading organization in the French colonial lobby in the twentieth century, seeking both to pressure government for policies favorable to colonial business interests and to promote colonial products and the benefits of imperial expansion directly to metropolitan consumers.⁴²

French historians have articulated a few different names to describe the community of individuals and interest groups committed to the French colonial project. C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner identified the development of the “colonial party,” revealing the many connections between the parliamentarians of the *groupe colonial* and the business interests of the colonial party. The “*parti colonial*” label has been the most favored among most Francophone historians.⁴³ English language historians however, have come to favor “colonial lobby,” which is the nomenclature that I embrace in this work. “Colonial lobby” accurately describes the actions taken by this group in the interwar period—lobbying both government and public opinion in favor of colonial development. As opposed to broader terms such as Martin Thomas’s “imperial community,” “colonial lobby” helps to distinguish those groups and individuals who actively promoted colonial development from those who were drawn into the discourse on empire through other interests such as nutrition.⁴⁴

The experience of the First World War spurred the colonial lobby to push for changes in the way the French nation defined itself in relation to the colonies. These shifts were articulated in the phrases “*mise en valeur*” (value creation) and “*plus grande France*” (Greater France). *Mise en valeur* was, in its most simple form, the argument that investment in organized colonial development