The Tastes of Home:
Cooking the Lost Heimat
in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s

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The intense interest in cooking and eating that helped to define the first two postwar decades of the Federal Republic were not, as has often been claimed, a move away from the political sphere. Instead, this culinary discourse directly engaged with some of the most controversial issues of the day: the relationship between the German past and the German present, the validity of the Oder-Neisse border, the cultural definition of the German nation, and the integration of ethnic German expellees from Eastern Europe into West Germany.

In 1954, one of the early Federal Republic’s most beloved celebrities, TV chef Clemens Wilmenrod, released what was to be the first of several bestselling cookbooks: *Es liegt mir auf der Zunge.*1 True to the pattern of his remarkably successful television show, the cookbook was an entertaining mixture of paeans to the pleasures of food, lighthearted repartee, and recipes requiring little culinary skill and a willingness to embrace novelty—traits exemplified in his most famous creation: Toast Hawaii, a combination of pre-sliced white bread, ham, cheese, and that most infamous of postwar foods, canned pineapple. Wilmenrod provides his readers, however, with more than just tips on how to whip up tasty hors d’oeuvres or guarantee a deflation-proof soufflé; he also instructs his readership on the significance of personal cooking and eating habits within the context of a new Federal Republic. He casts his own autobiographical transformation from an impoverished young man during the war into a prosperous and happy chef as a metaphor for the (re)birth of West Germany after the horrors of war and the ignominy of Allied occupation. In accordance with popular memory, Wilmenrod claims not the founding of the FRG itself but rather the 1948 currency reform as the beginning of a new and delicious life for his beloved nation:

> As the new money suddenly appeared, I shoved my young wife into her chair to listen to me. As of now, I cried, a new era is beginning in our kitchen. You are about to experience miraculous things.2

In a particularly visceral rendition of the *Stunde Null*, Wilmenrod casts the currency reform, metonym for the entrance of the FRG into the West and thus of the beginning of “miraculous” prosperity, as an absolute break with the past—and crucially this “new era” begins in the kitchen.
Cultural and economic historians of the Federal Republic have long explored the significance of the transition from the scarcity of the Occupation Years to the abundance of the economic miracle of the 1950s and 1960s. Such scholarship has highlighted the ways in which the consumer culture that emerged in the early FRG was tied to specific raced, classed, and gendered categories of society. As icons of individual prosperity like laundry machines, refrigerators, and international vacations—and of course the imported delicacies and savory treats that Wilmenrod prepared for his wife—gradually became common-place, they were interpreted as representative of the country’s increasing distance from the hardships of its recent past.

Food and gustatory discourses were central to this transition. While the end of the war brought the complete breakdown of the economy, ushering in a time of grim shortages and widespread hunger, the early FRG focused an inordinate amount of attention on increasing rates of individual and collective consumption. The infamous *Fresswelle* of the early 1950s represented the decisive break with a hungry past and the ushering in of a new era of abundance. The large-scale consumption of food was celebrated in public eating contests, popular songs, and private social gatherings—and the foods that were to be consumed in such quantities were generally sweet and fatty; the postwar years saw dramatic increases in the consumption of ham, tropical fruits, and chocolate. The doubling in per capita calorie intake during the early years of the FRG (from 1400 in 1946 to 2800 in 1952) was passionately celebrated in the media. A 1957 advertisement gleefully proclaimed: “we have become regular sweet-tooths (*Leckermäuler*). In the last four years, consumption of whipping cream has increased by 40 percent, baked goods by 90 percent and luxury foodstuffs by 77 percent—at the same time that this new diet was medically pathologized. As dietary specialist Dr. K. Voit noted in 1950, “since the general dietary adjustment (i.e. the currency reform), in a surprisingly short span of time cases of obesity are again emerging.” Within five years of the Federal Republic’s founding, 40 percent of West German adults were clinically overweight.

Even once the initial excesses of the *Fresswelle* were over, the West German kitchen remained central to conceptions of modernity and consumer culture, as most of the first major purchases made by households were dedicated to the kitchen. This was in and of itself not specific to the FRG. The modern kitchen was at the heart of the remaking of the West after the war and the spread of an idealized model of American consumer culture through Europe. In the public sphere “politicians strategically used kitchens to constitute, embody and enact their political goals,” ensuring that they became key metaphors for the international tensions of the Cold War. At the same time, though, in the FRG the kitchen was insistently defined as a feminine, private and, most importantly, apolitical sphere of daily life. As the 1954 West German book on “Masters of the Culinary Arts from Around the World” explained, “chefs are little interested
in politics, that is the concern of our guests.”

A specifically West German desire for food and fixation on the kitchen has been generally explained by the food shortages of the hunger years immediately preceding it. However, the postwar Fresswelle and West German culinary discourse in general was about much more than simply filling long-empty bellies. As I show in this essay, postwar food discourse directly addressed questions of national politics, becoming an important site for the negotiation of a West German identity. An analysis of cookbooks from the 1950s and 1960s reveals that the question of the literal and metaphoric borders of the German nation were being negotiated and contested in a realm far from the government halls of Bonn or the rallies and speeches of city plazas, moved instead into the most primal space of daily life: the kitchen.

There are two historically specific reasons for this development. First was the West German insistence that the private kitchen represented a crucial link to the past, a way of preserving what was long-gone and (re)presenting it in the present. Secondly, the lost territories of the German east were constructed as a food-based space, the vital breadbasket of the German nation, a space of lost-but-not-forgotten foods and flavors. Culinary discourse of the 1950s and 1960s expressed the Federal Republic’s attempt to create a palatable national identity that would allow fantasies of the longed-for Greater Germany to be nourished at the same time that the contemporary FRG pursued an agenda of integration into (western) Europe through increased dining out in ethnic restaurants and the embrace of modern technologies and tastes. Since the formation of the Federal Republic in 1949, the West German state had refused to recognize the new borders of the shrunken FRG. Federal policy like the Hallstein Doctrine and influential activist groups like the Bund der Vertriebenen ensured that the West German public sphere was saturated with reminders that the eastern lands were still German. However, the relationship between everyday life and this public discourse has been little considered.

In particular in the fields of anthropology and cultural studies there has been a sustained interest in the study of the relationship between cuisine and national identity. Nation-making in its modern aspect has been tied to the establishment of specific preparation-styles for specific dishes. This literature has focused on early modern and industrializing Europe, or, more recently, on postcolonial societies. Scholars have explored the ways in which cultural elites constructed and disseminated specific models of what and how a nation should eat. In these cases, cuisine is important because of its relationship to class, taste, and physical bodies. In postcolonial or postsocialist societies, scholarship has also emphasized the fact that cuisine has been an important site for an emerging nation to collectively construct (and then individually consume) a specific relationship to the past, be it a mythic authentic cultural heritage, a colonial legacy, or a socialist tradition. A considerable amount of attention has also
been paid to the importance of regional and ethnic cookbooks in the United States. By incorporating cuisines originally conceptualized as ‘foreign’ into a fluid ‘American’ way of eating, cooks and consumers literally created a ‘cooking pot as melting pot’ model of the American nation.

In contrast to this wealth of theoretical scholarship on the relationship of cuisine to nation-making, historians of the Federal Republic have generally cast the nation’s dietary habits in a straight-forward teleology, following a steady and predictable path toward a more modern and international cuisine. West Germany’s culinary modernization is associated with the increased incorporation of kitchen appliances like refrigerators, hand mixers and blenders, the consumption of more processed foods, and an increase in dining out. The Federal Republic’s culinary internationalization, generally thought of as beginning a decade or so after the processes of modernization, was marked by a gradual embrace of exotic and imported foods at the expense of conceptually German ingredients and preparation styles. In particular, the slow but steady increase in the number of foreign restaurants in the FRG, which began to proliferate in the mid to late 1960s, is seen as a clear sign of West Germany’s shift toward a modern and globalized food culture. This trend is read as part of a larger movement away from an explicitly German national identity and toward a more globalized and diverse self-identification. This narrative credits increasing international travel, the presence of guest workers, and the 68ers, the left-leaning youth who rejected their parents’ traditional German cuisine in favor of conceptually lighter and left-leaning ethnic foods, as the driving forces behind these changes. There is much to be said for this narrative, and it certainly reflects the convictions of both the 68ers themselves and their disapproving parents, both of whom perceived traditional recipes (Hausmannskost) as symbols of the German past and of the maintenance of German traditions and conventions. These assumptions are, however, themselves cultural and historically produced. This essay aims to specify and historicize the real and imagined weight of German cuisine in the early postwar decades. The linkage of Hausmannskost with an authentic German nation, be it good or bad, was not self-evident, but in fact the result of the country’s territorial losses in the east and its Cold War division.

The Postwar Kitchen between Modernity and Tradition

During the 1950s and 1960s, a desire to maintain the German kitchen as a mainstay of tradition and a respite from modernization coexisted with the belief that the kitchen was the preeminent space of a private, consumer-oriented modernity. At the same time that the kitchen was obsessively modernized and filled with new technologies, it also became an important site of national memory and collective identity, providing a crucial link between the problematic Nazi past and the unknown and alienating future. Because of the kitchen’s association with food production and maternal care, it evoked a powerful sense of nostalgia; cuisine
was imagined as a vital and untainted cultural legacy, and methods of cooking were thought of as valuable legacies from past generations.

Preserving German culinary traditions and recipes was so important in the early FRG because of the special significance granted women, and women’s labor, in the postwar years. In the aftermath of a devastating war and an even more devastating defeat, women were seen as the primary placeholders of a German-ness that had been rendered largely untenable in the eyes of the world. Through her tireless struggles during the Hunger Years, the German woman came to embody the values that ostensibly defined authentic German culture: a strong work ethic, a sense of self-sacrifice, and an absolute commitment to a higher good (her family). In a time known as the “hour of the woman,” it was woman’s labor, and especially her work at feeding her families during these years of food shortages, that signaled Germany’s transition away from Nazism and toward a new capitalist modernity. At the same time, German women were celebrated for their ability to maintain traditions and older values—best expressed through cooking habits. In other words, their work ethic enabled Germans to move forward out of the rubble of war and defeat at the same time that their actual work (in the kitchen) ensured that the German past was preserved and revitalized. In the words of Lilo Aureden’s best-selling 1953 cookbook *Was Männern so gut schmeckt*, German housewives needed to “nourish anew the good, the proven old traditions and recipes; only by doing this will we be able to regain a certain quality of life through our work.”

Given this importance, it is unsurprising that West Germans worried that the social and physical trauma of the war had severed the traditional passing on of cookery skills from generation to generation: “When the times of emergency were finally over, millions of young women no longer knew the recipes that had been the pride of the household stove.” Younger West German housewives lacked the ability to evaluate and plan healthy meals and were unable to learn from absent or overburdened mothers. Inadequate foodstuffs and increased labor demands meant that, as a concerned 1949 report from the Berlin Committee for Food Issues explained, “housewives can seldom prepare meals in the manner to which they were accustomed, and a great many have forgotten how to cook.”

In response to the perceived dire state of housewives and of general dietary and familial health in the aftermath of the war, the German Nutrition Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ernährung, DGE) was founded in 1953. Created as a “wide-reaching scientific society for nutrition that engages with the question: how can a well-rounded diet be made and how can it be realized in our land,” from its inception the DGE emphasized its conservative values while celebrating the expansion of a modern consumer economy and the distribution of the newest nutritional knowledge and technologies. In 1958 the institute assured the population of West Germany that:
it has not been and will not be attempted to try to use words or thoughts to suppress handed-down tastes or eating habits in order to revolutionize or reform diet. In a so history-conscious and tradition-bound country as Germany this would not be the proper way. We have chosen the quieter and more intensive method of personal conviction, which encourages the transition to more practical dietary forms in accordance with our development, with a gentle touch and based on previously existing customs.\(^\text{27}\)

These nutritionists explicitly associated modernization with a worsening of nutritional health; “industrial society” was the “internal and external social root of Germans’ poor diet.”\(^\text{28}\)

Thus, throughout the early postwar years publishers generally preferred to republish older, “traditional” cookbooks, particularly those written during the late nineteenth century, but also many from the 1920s and 1930s; even some popular Third Reich cookbooks were re-released with success. In the realm of the kitchen, oldness was seen as a sign of quality. With a focus on “much beloved,” “traditional,” and “familiar” recipes, these re-edited cookbooks allowed German cuisine to be an important site of continuity with the German past and an expression of positive, traditional German values. One of the most popular of these cookbooks was Mary Hahn’s *Praktisches Kochbuch für die bürgerliche Küche*, a book that had won prizes at international cooking conventions during the interwar years, and which was awarded the silver medal at the 1956 International Kitchen Exhibition (IKA) in Frankfurt am Main.\(^\text{29}\) Originally published in 1894, the cookbook focused on practical suggestions for how to prepare filling and reasonably priced meals for a middle-class family. While the first postwar reprint began by pointing out that “so much has changed since the first publication of Mary Hahn’s cookbook; opinions regarding the appropriate preparation of dishes are quite different today,” the cookbook immediately reassured its readers that the “well-known and tried and true Mary Hahn cookbook”\(^\text{30}\) had not been drastically changed. New nutritional knowledge affected many of the recommended cooking techniques (steaming rather than boiling, sautéing rather than deep-frying), but the dishes themselves remained the same. Indeed, the explicit goal of the 1956 edition was to ensure that “you did not need to abandon the dishes that your mother and grandmother prepared according to Mary Hahn’s recipes.”\(^\text{31}\) While it was in particular the kitchen of the late nineteenth century that evoked the most pleasant and tasty memories in postwar cookbooks, the much more recent past, the years of the Third Reich, shaped these cookbooks as much as did Mary Hahn’s original recipes. The most obvious sign of the ability of cookbooks to preserve this recent past is the continued inclusion of a complete chapter of *Eintopf* or casserole recipes, which were first added to the Mary Hahn cookbook in 1934.\(^\text{32}\)

Until the rise to power of the NSDAP, the term *Eintopf* had not been a standard part of the German culinary repertoire; the dish itself, usually an
assortment of vegetables and cheap cuts of meat cooked together in a single pot, was associated with poverty and found primarily in North Germany. While stews and casseroles were common throughout central Europe, they were not known as Eintöpfe. The Nazi appropriation of this culinary genre was rooted in both ideology and practicality. The dish could be based on indigenous German food products, primarily root vegetables, dried fruits, beans and pork products. These ‘native’ foods were cooked together, without hierarchy or individual preparation, in a single pot. Practically, the dish promised to eliminate Germany’s enervating dependency on imported foods, creating a healthier and more vital population while strengthening the domestic economy. After the fall of the Third Reich and the occupation and division of Germany, the Eintopf as well as many other Nazi nutritional innovations, including the promotion of Quark and wholegrain bread, continued to influence private cooking and eating; these dishes represented continuity and tradition, falsely standing in for the recipes of mothers and grandmothers who had by no means prepared such ‘traditional’ foods.

**Culinary Constructions of the Lost German Lands**

At the same time that the kitchen was associated with the past, and recipes were transformed into an aspect of the German past to be celebrated and preserved, specific geographic spaces became associated with particular foods, flavors, and recipes as well. Most importantly for this article, the former regions of Germany since ceded to Poland, Czechoslovakia and the USSR became the prototypical German Heimat—one conceptualized in gustatory terms. This discursive development was the result of the devastating Hunger Years immediately after the war, as well as the Third Reich’s rhetoric of Blut und Boden, which had cast the eastern regions as the vital breadbasket of the nation. Against legacies of remembered hunger and a longed-for lost abundance, specific food products, and ultimately simply food itself, served as a constant reminder of a greater Germany that had disappeared with the defeat of the Reich. Postwar Germans found it difficult to forget the culinary landscape of these regions, which represented both a material provider of craved food stuffs and an imagined site of an uncontaminated German culture. The Federal Republic refused to recognize the new international borders of its territory as it continually evoked the “48 percent of the German soil [that] lies behind the iron curtain,” using memory and fantasy to assert the integrity and permanence of the German nation as a food-based entity, an “organic, prosperous unit that is so much spoken of still today.”

During the years immediately following the war, Germans blamed their devastating hunger on the loss of these lands to the Soviets and Poles. Long after basic nutrition ceased to be a problem for the majority of West Germans, these regions of supposedly uncontaminated German-ness continued to be the sites of cultural, and especially culinary, memory. In 1953, West German food
economist Fritz Alten reminded his readers of the “immeasurable blow our food economy has suffered through the severing of the provinces of the German east.” The early postwar *Grüne Woche*, the main German agricultural and food exhibit, organized frequent exhibitions about the nutritional production of the German east. The 1952 exhibit, for example, was “dedicated to the agriculture of the German regions on the other side of the Oder-Neiße line.” Such exhibits were accompanied by sorrowful reminders that “despite the excellent productivity of West German agriculture during the past years, the absence of the eastern German agricultural regions is strongly felt in German food supplies […] the loss of the regions across from the Oder and Neiße weakens the German food situation inordinately […] 5.5 million people in Germany were fed from the products of the eastern lands.”

The gustatory pains of the loss of the East had a long legacy. In 1956, the beekeeper Walter Ahrens wrote to the West German Ministry of the Interior requesting the right to sell honey imported from the eastern German regions “currently under Polish administration” as “German honey,” pleading the continued validity of the borders of the long-defunct German Reich for determining the origins of this food product. Although the federal government agreed that this honey was “in a legal sense not ‘foreign honey,’” there were concerns over labeling the product “German.” The Minister of German Affairs worried about the possibility of Polish honey being mixed into this German honey, or of honey from the “authentically Polish regions on the other side of the borders from 1937” also being imported as “German.” The Ministry of the Interior feared that the honey might not be processed “according to the methods otherwise typical of German honey.” And the Ministry of Justice doubted that “the average consumer, when purchasing a product labeled ‘German honey,’ [thinks that it] could come from a region that, although legally belonging to the German Reich, currently stands under foreign administration and is almost entirely inhabited by people of a foreign ethnicity/nationality (Menschen fremder Volkszugehörigkeit).”

The solution offered by the Ministry was the label “eastern German honey,” which would ensure “no confusing of this honey with honey from the Federal Republic or from central Germany [the GDR].”

The issue was to reemerge less than 10 years later in the form of an appeal from the ethnic Germans expelled from this region two decades earlier. In October of 1965, in response to a recent Federal decision to label honey produced in these regions as Polish, Hermann Janssen, a local representative of the Bund der Vertriebenen, penned a heartfelt appeal for the maintenance of a nominal claim on an ethnic German food heritage. Janssen asserted both the traditional and biological German-ness of the honey produced in these contested regions. For him, not simply the land itself, but the local bees and blossoming trees were bearers of a German identity. In the lost eastern lands, honey was “produced by German bees who have remained there [in the east] from purely German
flowering linden trees (dort verbliebenen deutschen Bienen aus urdeutschen blühenden Lindenbäumen), which have always and will always continue to grow in purely German mother soil.” Pointing out that a West German apiary that employed Dutch or Polish workers did not label his product “Dutch” or “Polish,” Janssen insisted that “neither German nor Polish beekeepers can ever produce Polish honey in the German eastern regions currently under Polish administration, from German linden trees growing in German soil.” He and the large community of expellees that he represented not only vowed never to purchase such honey, but they threatened to appeal to the European commission on human rights in Strasburg were the renaming to take place.

While such aggressively nationalist claims to the foods of the lost territories were unusual, they reflected a much more widely maintained hunger for the grains, fruits, and meats of the German east. It was because these stretches of lands were symbolically represented by their food products that domestic cooking practices within the shrunken borders of the FRG were instrumentalized in a project of culinary historical revisionism, offering imagined access to a no longer extant German nation.

A New German Cuisine for an Old German Nation

In 1960 the West German periodical Magnum framed the postwar development of the country’s culinary culture in terms of its international political standing. After the war, the magazine explained,

Germans longed to be part of the family of nations. They were tired of standing apart […] the desire to assimilate to international standards of taste, wishes and desires engulfed architecture as well as menus […] no more would a restaurant forego serving Steak Hawaii or Nasi Goreng.

During the postwar decades, the dramatic increase in tourism meant that many West Germans for the first time had the opportunity to enjoy pasta in Italy or Sangria in Spain; the postwar explosion of recipes calling for exotic ingredients—epitomized in Wilmenrod’s Toast Hawaii—reflected a new valuing of foreign foods and flavors. However, these same cookbooks that newly included recipes if not for Nasi Goreng then for spaghetti and American cupcakes simultaneously expressed not only a strong pride in a (culinary) national past but a distinct suspicion of the very international trends that they were advocating. Lilo Aureden, whose cookbook was explicitly devoted to internationalizing German housewives’ cooking repertoire, insisted that she would “never trade [the good German plum] for pineapples and dates.” And the first postwar edition of Mary Hahn’s cookbook reminded its readers that:

more than any other sort of fruit, it is the apple that is the strongest and most solid […] with the apple we can be sure that it is native to us (bei uns bodenständig), that it is, in the truest sense of the word, born of our soil. Many
sorts of fruits have been transplanted here during the past centuries; many [...] have retained to this day a subtle foreignness (eine leichte Fremdartigkeit) [...] but the apple has belonged to us since the beginning.\footnote{48}

Clemens von Wilmenrod is by far the most recognizable embodiment of West German postwar culinary trends; his embrace of processed and convenience foods made him an icon of an internationalized and modern postwar German palate. However, while Wilmenrod included a considerable number of French and Italian dishes in his cookbooks, he also reassured his readers that this was not because

the German cuisine is a step-child, a poor relative of fine cookery. The utter opposite! The primary feature of the German cuisine—in its praise—is its richness of diversity. The Italian cuisine, for example, rapidly exhausts its repertoire; while they have 50 sorts of noodles, each with a different name, they are still all just noodles.\footnote{49}

Thus the West German cookbooks that promoted a diversification of the German palate and the modernization of German cooking simultaneously used foreign foods and flavors as a way to confirm the distinctiveness, excellence, and significance of German cuisine. A new culinary discourse took shape which inverted assumptions of diversity and homogeneity—‘German’ cuisine, newly defined as wildly diverse and regionally differentiated, was contrasted to a monotonous ‘international’ cuisine: “even on your international trips you must as well have realized: the universal dishes of the ‘international cuisine’ taste the same, no matter where you eat them.”\footnote{50}

The culinary travel guide Rast auf Reisen complained that the menus at German restaurants were “following current trends [toward internationalism], so that despite their abundance of offerings, they are becoming ever more homogenous; as a result, one must search for regional or local specialties, or explicitly request them.”\footnote{51}

Indeed, by the late 1960s cookbooks and women’s magazines were increasingly moving away from promoting imported foods and exotic recipes, and instead encouraging a return to the German and the domestic. The National Minister of Nutrition Hermann Höcherl wrote in a 1969 introduction to Essen und Trinken in deutschen Landen that “during the last few years, after a detour through the long-favored international cuisine, we can observe a clear return in the Federal Republic to a trend of natural, rustic eating habits rooted in the soil.”\footnote{52}

In fact, the late sixties and early seventies, the moment generally cast as West Germany’s decisive embrace of international eating and turning away from nationalism was also marked by the reassertion of a German cuisine—crucially, this was not a national but a regional discourse.

This shift to the regional has been represented, even by current scholarship, as a form of resistance “against the plurality of current cooking styles and modes, but especially against the ‘making everything the same’ international cuisine,
against a Heimat-less cuisine.” Such narratives, however, ignore the fact that regional foods had been heavily promoted since the end of the war and indeed, during the war itself. The 1960s and 1970s did not witness a rediscovery but a re-marketing of these recipes, which were assigned a particular postwar meaning.

Uwe Spiekermann has pointed out that culinary habits within the borders of Germany have long been shaped by regional rather than national patterns; cookbooks traditionally defined the foods of Germany in terms of diverse and disparate regions, showing, Spiekermann claims, that “German cuisine” is “a fiction.” It was not until the 1930s that culinary regionalism became a form of German nationalism though; Peter Lesniczak, in his study of regional cookbooks, claims that 1930 saw the birth of national cookbooks that were regionally organized. This trend shaped Nazi food discourse; during the Third Reich, Nazi propaganda insisted that distinct German regional foodways needed to be nourished for the strength of the national collective. Bemoaning the “bland (verwaschenen), generic meals” that result in the “lack of character” (Allerweltscharakter) of home-cooked meals. Nazi discourse heavily promoted regional cuisine. Such recipes were seen as possessing substantial ethnic value, as well as improving biological and economic health by relying on local and therefore easily accessible ingredients: “every [Germanic] tribe uses their local natural products in different ways, unique to them.” Flourishing regional cuisines both represented and created a vital, united, and well-nourished Greater Germany.

The meaning of this fetishization of the regional changed dramatically after the war. During the Third Reich, women were told to cook their own regional dishes, which were thought to best match local food availability as well as serve the biological needs of the local population. In the FRG, in contrast, housewives were encouraged to prepare the dishes not of their own regional background but of the many, diverse and never-visited regions of the vast German lands. Cooking was a way of connecting to different parts of the country, rather than a way to affirm one’s roots in the local soil. This difference is based in a crucial shift in the role of the regional after 1945. Alon Confino has argued that, after the Third Reich, the concept of Heimat shifted from a national to a local concept, a move that “made it possible for West Germans to feel the pride of being Germans without associating it with the militarist, state-led nationalism of the Third Reich.” Regionalism no longer was linked with expansionism, aggression and potency, instead evoking victimization, anti-modernism, and an apolitical connection to the land. Thus regional cooking offered West Germans a means of accessing a national past to which they otherwise had little legitimate claim. The emphasis on regional cooking in postwar West Germany was not only an alternative to internationalization; it was also a strategy of renegotiating the geographic and cultural borders of the nation.
Over the course of the 1960s, culinary discourse ceased mourning the loss of the east, and instead seemed to deny it altogether. West German cookbooks described traditional regional recipes in terms of their ability to “turn back the clock” and recreate a lost time and place imagined as free of the legacy of militarism, Nazism, and of the disturbing forces of modernity. In 1968, the popular women’s magazine Für Sie began a lengthy series, “The Colorful Book of Favorite Dishes,” (Leibgerichte) that introduced its readers to “more than 300 recipes of typical specialties from our multifaceted native cuisine” in an attempt to make up for the fact that:

even our home-cooked meals have lost much of their earlier unique local flavor (bodenständigen Eigenart) [...] [this collection] will help to ensure that our indigenous specialties are not forgotten, that the traditional diversity of our domestic cooking is preserved for the future.

That same year, Constanze began its own series, “The New Cookbook of Traditional Dishes (Hausmannskost).” This series promised that, by introducing herself and her family to the dishes of the many regions of Germany, the housewife could instill in them a sense of the richness and diversity of her native land: “your own family will be tremendously excited when you announce: next Saturday I will cook Swabian, on Sunday is something Silesian, and for afternoon coffee an original Frisian Knüppeltorte.” Crucially, West German housewives were not to cook their own regional dishes, but those of the many foreign-yet-native regions of larger Germany.

German regional specialties offered both the producers and consumers of these meals a way of negotiating the harms and losses of the modern age. The “earlier era” to which German regional cuisines granted access was a time of childhood, an apolitical and sensual enjoyment of simple, appropriate foods. In the postwar FRG, however, this claim to apolitical innocence had specifically political connotations; as the past ceased to be associated with the war and Nazism, it became imbued with the smells and flavors of authentic home cooking, especially those of the ‘lost’ lands of the east. Thus, different from its Third Reich counterpart, West German regional cookbooks emphasized in particular the recipes of no-longer-German territories, relying upon their regionalism to assert a fictitious German nation.

Thus at the same time that West German cultural discourse encouraged an embrace of international dishes, ethnic German refugees’ cooking was assigned the role of maintaining traditional German cuisine. A 1960 survey of West German restaurants revealed disturbing trends toward internationalization and acknowledged that “it is eastern dishes, often with a panegyric acknowledgement of the place of origin, that [...] play the largest role” in maintaining truly German flavors in these menus. The linkage of the Vertriebene with authentic regional cooking ensured that the integration of the regional dishes of the Lost
East into German cuisine symbolically represented the successful integration of the expellees into the Federal Republic. Josef Hanika, a postwar ethnographer specializing in studies of the Vertrieben, determined that it was “in the field of popular foods (Volksnahrung), the meals and drinks,” that “the shift of the eastern German cultural heritage (Volksgut) into the West German space” was most evident. According to this narrative, shortages of food stuffs and housing had ensured that “housewives and the refugees often cooked together at the same stove [so that] the culinary-geographic (küchengeographische) contact was both very intimate and intensive.”

The particularly culinary significance assigned to ethnic German expellees in the postwar FRG meant that many West German cookbooks encouraged their readers to cook their way through the many regions of a Germany that was no longer in existence, indeed ones where no Germans remained, while insisting that these dishes were, like the regions themselves, “typically German.” German cookbooks from the 1960s and 1970s included sections on “specialties from the lands between Elbe and Oder” and “specialties from the German landscapes east of the Oder and Neiße,” casting the housewife’s daily cooking as part of an embodied process of nation-making. Such texts defined ‘German cuisine’ as stretching from Bavaria to Silesia to Königsberg. The frontispiece of the 1962 Rast auf Reisen depicted a map of Central Europe with the middle area labeled Deutschland, not only ignoring the border between East and West Germany but designed so that the letters extended over far reaches of what was in fact Poland. Inviting their readers to try out “traditional recipes from German lands” like East Prussia and Pomerania, such texts described the cuisines of multicultural metropoles like Königsberg as German, erasing the Polish, Russian, Jewish or other Eastern European peoples who had previously lived and ate with ethnic Germans.

Although the postwar displacement of the people who had prepared these dishes ensured that they were no longer being made ‘at home’ in the ‘traditional’ ways, cookbooks made no mention of this contextual difference between a Silesian potato stew and a Hanoverian cake. Both were represented as equally real, equally significant, and equally German. Indeed, the foods of the German east became a staple of West German cookbooks and recipe collections at the same time that the last generations of Germans to have actually eaten such dishes in the land of origin gradually died or, more disturbingly, began to cook with the ketchup, Maggi bullion cubes, and canned fruits and vegetables that dominated West German cuisine by mid-century.

By evoking the fertile soil of regions no longer their own, West German cookbooks belong, like the cookbooks of postcolonial India, “to the literature of exile, of nostalgia and loss.” After the war, in the face of the loss not only of the war but of large parts of the German nation, nostalgia for the German east motivated the propagation of the recipes and foods of these lands. The
daily activities of cooking and eating provided a method of domestically integrating the lost Heimat into the lives and bodies of West Germans who had themselves never seen these lost lands nor tasted their regional dishes. As one regional cookbook from 1969 explained, in rejecting the increasing availability of international dishes, “people are remembering in ever increasing numbers the diversity of dishes of our compatriots (*landsmannschaftlicher Gerichte*), including those of eastern and central Germany.”

Food, unlike other markers of identity like physical appearance, language or clothing, is both internal and external; it is not simply seen or performed, but ingested. Once ingested, in turn, it transforms the body of the eater, leaving its traces in both flesh and in memory. As Roland Barthes has argued, “food permits a person [...] to partake each day of the national past.” In this sense, a fixation with teaching West German housewives the dishes of the lost German east can be seen as a method of engaging the feminized private sphere in larger political negotiations over the meaning of the nation and the appropriate relationship between the German present and the German past.

The Other Side of the Curtain: Cooking in the GDR

There are many ways in which postwar West German cultural discourse employed gustatory metaphors and culinary discourses to suggest a certain sort of national past and identity. In this, the Federal Republic is by no means unique—cuisine is one of the most important and most popularly validated forms of cultural identification and self-expression. At the same time that the FRG’s use of food language to negotiate its sense of self is not unusual, however, the ways in which it did so are historically specific and contextually bound. The particularity of the FRG’s relationship with culinary regionalism and its (gustatory) past emerge with particular clarity through a brief comparison with culinary discourses in the GDR. In dramatic contrast to West Germany’s celebration of the past and its drive to preserve culinary traditions, East German cooks were encouraged to abandon a demonized German past and turn to a modern, internationalized culinary future.

In 1950, less than a year after the founding of the German Democratic Republic, nutritionist Richard Schielicke announced that “the movement away from the old traditions, which are found in abundance in our cuisine, is an absolute necessity.” East German cookbooks explicitly rejected any sort of romanticization of the German past; Grandma’s cookbook, in the West an icon of abundance, security and cherished traditions, was associated here with primitiveness, poor health, and bourgeois exploitation:

> From the yellowed, stained pages of old cookbooks suddenly emerges the unvarnished truth of the so-called good old days [...] and suddenly it is anything but good, cozy, or relaxing. Not only did young women have to... cook, fry and bake, they also churned butter and cheese, brewed beer,
sewed and bleached, made soap [...] even more disturbing for us today was
the humiliation and exploitation associated with kitchen work [...] yes, the
only good thing about these old days is that they are over!"75

Confident that “housewives and kitchen workers will not find it difficult to turn
away from the old, false culinary skills and embrace the new, correct ones,”76
the German cuisine as practiced in the socialist half of Germany was to be
something new and different. Not surprisingly, every cookbook published in
the GDR was a new text composed after the war, written not by housewives
but by socialist nutritional experts. Thus, although cookbooks here, as in the
West, were dominated by traditional German-style dishes focused on potatoes,
pork, and starchy vegetables, they were framed within a rhetoric of a socialist
and scientific modernity. If modernity in the West was associated with specific
(luxurious) food products, in the GDR modernity was assured by “unsentimen-
tally throwing overboard foolish [traditions]”77 and embracing a new socialist
approach to cuisine.78

Here, while collections of ‘German’ recipes routinely included dishes from
the FRG, recipes were associated with their then-current geographic location:
Czechoslovakian, Russian, or Polish. Similarly, Austrian or Swiss recipes were
not described as ‘German’ as they were in the West. While there was no overt
suppression of German regional food identities (it was even encouraged when
profitable, as with Thuringian Sausage or Dresden Stollen), it was not granted
any particular value or meaning; it did not evoke nostalgia, emotional connection
to a larger German whole, or the need to preserve an ‘endangered treasure’ of
regional recipes. Rather than using cookbooks and recipes as a way of recreating
a lost Greater Germany, East German food discourse worked to integrate the
GDR into an imagined community of “socialist friendship countries.” During
the early postwar years, this community emphasized neighboring Poland and
Czechoslovakia, as well as various Soviet republics. Unsurprisingly, Russia was a
particular culinary obsession: “this is because the Russian cuisine, long acknowl-
edged by gourmands as one of the most exquisite, has always offered the chefs
of Europe much inspiration.”79 As interest in and at least rhetorical support for
international travel grew, invitations to East German housewives to “discover
the culinary arts of our friendship-lands”80 became increasingly ambitious, as
the more familiar Central European nations were joined by a particular interest
in Hungary (described as the “gourmet capital” of central Europe) and socialist
nations in other parts of the world, particularly Cuba, but also parts of North
Africa, India, Vietnam and China. Despite an unchanging emphasis on using
domestically and even locally produced products, food discourse in the GDR
never embraced a model of regional cuisine. Instead, following the ideological
tradition of socialism, it asserted an international rather than regional-national
ideal.
Conclusion

In the aftermath of World War II and out of the chaos of defeat, occupation and division, the specific foods and dishes that West Germans ate became an important signifier of national identity, representing the cook’s and the consumer’s relationship to the German nation. By using cooking knowledge as a means of accessing and reviving a positive German past, by recasting the nation as a regional entity, and by using food to reclaim territories taken from German control after the war, culinary discourse allowed for the negotiation of a new collective identity that was by definition private, feminine, and apolitical. The ability of cooking to remake the borders of the German nation relied upon the Federal Republic’s continued construction of cooking and the private kitchen as spheres linked with the past and German tradition, as well as upon particularly gustatory elements of German ‘memories’ of the east. Preparing the dishes of the lost German east became a cultural responsibility of no small order, “to ensure that the well preserved traditions of the German cuisine remain intact and continue to develop.” While most scholarship on the Federal Republic’s culinary evolution has emphasized an embrace of modernization and a drive toward internationalization, I have argued that these trends were framed by a parallel culinary discourse that rejected modernity and laid claim to a fictitious yet authentic German-ness. In West Germany, food could be simultaneously international, regional, and national, and culinary discourse became a vital part of the postwar project of defining a new and digestible German nation.

1 Wilmenrod’s television career began in February 1953 with a live 15-minute television program Bitte in zehn Minuten zu Tisch. The program unexpectedly became Germany’s most watched TV show, with up to three million viewers tuning in weekly for his Friday evening program. For more on Wilmenrod, see Gudrun Rothaug, “Vom Toast Hawaii zum Döner” in: In aller Munde: Ernährung heute, Uwe Thimm, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: 2004).
2 Clemens Wilmenrod, Es liegt mir auf der Zunge (Hamburg: 1954), 9.
3 Hanna Schissler’s anthology The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968 (Princeton: 2001) gathers together many of the leading historians working on these themes.
4 Works that highlight the gendered nature of West German consumer culture include Erica Carter’s How German is She?: Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman (Ann Arbor: 1997), and Jennifer Ann Loehlin’s From Rugs to Riches: Housework, Consumption and Modernity in Germany (Oxford: 1999). For a fascinating recent study on Americanization as part of the emergence of postwar consumer cultures in Europe, see Victoria de Grazia’s Irresistible Empire: America’s advance through twentieth-century Europe (Cambridge: 2005).
6 Das Tor ist offen nach Deutschland, Bundesministerium für den Marshallplan, ed. (Bonn: 1952).
7 Rainer Horbelt and Sonja Spindler, Die deutsche Küche im 20. Jahrhundert: Von der
Mehlsuppe im Kaiserreich bis zum Designerjoghurt der Berliner Republik: Ereignisse, Geschichten, Rezepte (Frankfurt: 2000), 299.


11 De Grazia.


13 Werner Wymann, Meister der Kochkunst aus aller Welt sprechen; Ein Werk, verfasst nach Manuskripten, Briefen, Beiträgen und persönlichen Gesprächen mit mehr als 400 Fachleuten aus über 50 Ländern und von grossen See- und Luftfahrtslinien (Murten: 1954), 120.

14 As Maren Möhring explains: “in the postwar German context, eating out in ethnic restaurants might have been instilled by the desire to become cosmopolitan, to internationalize German identity after 1945.” Möhring, “Transnational Food Migration and the Internalization of Food Consumption: Ethnic Cuisine in West Germany” in: *Food and Globalization: Consumption, Markets and Politics in the Modern World*, Alexander Nützenadel and Frank Trentmann, eds. (Oxford: 2008), 141. The spread of ethnic restaurants during the 1950s and 1960s paralleled shifts in guestworker populations; initially, Spanish and especially Italian restaurants flourished, then ‘Balkan’ (Yugoslav) eateries became widespread, finally followed by an explosion of Turkish restaurants and snack-shops.


21 Möhring, 141. During this time, leftists and students explicitly connected eating habits
to political agendas. Vegetarianism, for example, flowered within this heavily politicized framework, as young West Germans openly expressed what had previously been implied, that certain dishes and ways of eating were implicated in specific attitudes toward the German past and the appropriate role of (West) Germany within the postwar world.

22 Elizabeth Heinemann, “The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany’s ‘Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity,” in: The Miracle Years.


24 Ibid., 40.

25 Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 012 # 131

26 Kraut and Wirths, Mehr Wissen um Ernährung. Berichte über Studienreisen im Rahmen der Auslandshilfe der USA (Frankfurt am Main: 1955), 110.


29 Mary Hahn, Praktisches Kochbuch für die bürgerliche Küche (Stuttgart: 1954).

30 Ibid., “Vorwort.”

31 Ibid., Dr. Oetker’s cookbooks, which made up the largest portion of West German cookbooks for the duration of division, similarly dated to the late 19th century and emphasized traditional recipes like ‘grandma used to make.’ This style of cookbook was generally organized thematically (by type of dish) rather than geographically, treating ‘German cuisine’ as a self-evident and frozen truth unchanged over the 19th and 20th centuries.

32 Restaurants were legally required to offer an Eintopf at a reduced rate every Sunday, and these cheap and filling meals were favorites in the menus of factory canteens. A new genre of Eintopf-cookbooks flourished, and newspapers and women’s magazines popularized a variety of regionally specific and economical recipes. See for example Eintopf-Gerichte: 70 Vorschläge u. Rezepte f. gute Eintopf-Gerichte von 10 bis 50 Pfennig mit genauer Preis-Angabe (Berlin: 1933); Erna Horn, Der Eintopf—Das deutsche Spargergesicht. (München: 1933).


34 On the relationship between Heimat and loss, see Alon Confino, Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History (Chapel Hill: 2006).

35 Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 012 # 132


37 Fritz Alten, Die westdeutsche Nahrungsmittelproduktion in Abhängigkeit von der Welternährungswirtschaft (Göttingen: 1953), 16.

38 Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 010 # 1329.

39 Landesarchiv Berlin B Rep 010 # 1329.

40 BArch B 116/4372.

41 BArch B 116/4372

42 Emphasis in the original. BArch B 116/4372.

43 BArch B 116/4372.

44 BArch B 116/4372.
It was not until January of 1970 that national legislation standardized the definition of *deutscher Honig*. Citing the difficulty of regulating production techniques, the legislation restricted the label “German honey” to products from the FRG and, despite clear differences in processing and packaging, the GDR. BArch B 116/4372


Hahn, 421.

Wilmenrod, 64.


*Rast auf Reisen* (Gütersloh: 1962), 181–82.


Peter Lesniczak, *Alte Landschaftsküchen im Sog der Modernisierung: Studien zu einer Ernährungsgeographie Deutschlands zwischen 1860 und 1930* (Stuttgart: 2003), 165. According to Lesniczak the actual distinctiveness of specific regional cuisines is minor; the primary difference between regional recipes is not specific ingredients, but slightly varying ratios of common ingredients. Actual distinctions were dishes’ names and geographic or historical associations.


Goetze, 1.


Confino, 64.

“In the Bavarian Franken region, you will seek in vain for an overwhelming modernity. The past and the present, tradition and progress, are bound together in a harmonious unity. This is particularly true in regards to the gastronomy.” Rühmland and Rühmland 47.

“Das bunte Buch der Leibgerichte,” 126.

“Das neue Kochbuch der Hausmannskost: Omas Küche bleibt modern.” *Constanze* 20 (1968). The fact that 1968 saw this surge of interest in regional recipes suggests that this paradigmatic moment of generational conflict had a culinary counterpart. For a discussion of food and generational conflict in postwar literature, particularly the rejection of paternal foods at the family dinner table, see Alois Wierlacher, *Vom Essen in der deutschen Literatur: Mahlzeiten in Erzählexten von Goethe bis Grass* (Stuttgart: 1987), 147–50.

“Das bunte Buch der Leibgerichte,” 126.


Cited in Ulrich Tolksdorf, “Essen und Trinken in alter und neuer Heimat. Zur Frage des Geschmackskonservatismus,” *Jahrbuch für ostdeutsche Völkstunde* 21 (1978), 345. Similarly, W. Leopold claimed that it was “only in terms of their foods and drinks that they [the refugees] made an impression” on West Germany (Leopold, 57). In fact, studies showed that the culinary exchange between West Germans and refugees was quite small. West
Germans initially showed distinct hostility toward this ‘foreign’ cuisine, certainly connected to the fact that initial contact with the refugees was framed by competition for inadequate food supplies. The only permanent changes in eating patterns in the FRG directly attributable to the expellees was an increase in the number of dishes using poppy seeds and wild mushrooms. Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (München: 2008), 320.


67 See e.g. Rühmland and Rühmland.

68 *Rast auf Reisen*, Frontispiece.


70 Ulrich Tolksdorf’s definitive 1978 study of West German foodways revealed that refugees, rather than absorbing local “traditional” German food habits, instead turned to international and new commercial trends, including cooking with frozen foods, store-purchased condiments, and spice mixtures. Tolksdorf, 345.

71 Arjun Appadurai, “How to make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30:1 (1988), 18. Similarly, Peter Fritzsche has recently argued that, in the wake of the French Revolution, modern Western society has cast the past as “an object of both mourning and desire, even as it remained broken and unfamiliar.” (Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* [Cambridge: 2004], 4). While Fritzsche argues that this trend is common to much of Europe and the United States, he notes as well a specifically German tendency to “see the nation in terms of loss rather than rediscovery,” an observation echoed in postwar discourse on the eastern territories. Ibid. 151.

72 Rühmland and Rühmland, 5.


74 DIFE 252 # 341.

75 Kurt Drummer, *Kochkunst aus dem Fernsehstudio: Rezepte, prakt. Winke, literar. Anm* (Leipzig: 1968), 144–45. TV chef Kurt Drummer was the GDR’s equivalent to Wilmersdorf; he focused less on exotic gimmicks and more on the practical preparation of easily available and politically approved ingredients.


77 Drummer, 5.

78 For more on the GDR’s understanding of modernity, see the anthology by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: 2008).

79 “Kulinarische Fahrt in die Sowjetunion.” *Frau von Heute* 45 (April 7, 1952).


81 Wymann, 83–84.