

**MANUEL VALQUEZ
MONTALBAN**

*Pierre Ebuka's Banquet or
Reflections on the Risks of
European Decadence*

Translated by Natalia Farr

Just as in any
trial of French-
speaking
criminals
implicated in
'gratuitous crimes'

in the forties or fifties, the prosecutor (probably a Vichy ex-collaborator) would have quoted the harmful influence on the accused of reading Andre Gide, so, in the horrific trial against the 'Strasbourg cannibal', the prosecutor mentioned the remote influence of Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* on the prisoner's cannibal practices. Pierre Ebuka, member of an obscure anthropophagous tribe in Central Africa, had graduated in epistemology at Heidelberg University, and was considered one of the main experts on the Pre-Raphaelites. This aestheticistic hobby almost made him a Renaissance man, or so his colleagues thought; they were all working, as he was, in the Strasbourg European Parliament complex.

Although the multi-murderer, confused and desperate, was obsessed with justifying a relationship between

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epistemology and cannibalism, basing his theory on the fact that epistemology is, essentially, a theory of scientific knowledge and that there is no formula in science superior to that of the metabolisation of the 'as yet unknown', the prosecutor managed to dismantle his trickery from the clues provided by his own peculiar ideological past.

The prosecutor had been a young revolutionary in May '68; whose ideas had evolved towards positions of moderate historical shared responsibility; he had worked from the knowledge gained by a critical education. With great brilliance he proved that Ebuka had devised a plan of the invasion of Europe which went beyond territorial annexation and the enslavement of its technicians perpetrated by various invasions of varied origins. Even though the accused steadfastly maintained that his proposal was cultural and his 'cannibalism' a simple metaphor, the prosecutor was out to prove that Ebuka (emboldened by the defeatist spirit of a European intellectuality obsessed with the decadence of the old continent, as it was once called) considered Europe the protein reserve of Africa. 'Even more dangerous than irrational defeatism, or the new right wing irrationalistic defeatism, there it is! , there we have it!' insisted the prosecutor: 'is a book like Edgar Morin's *Penser l'Europe* in which he upholds the vision of a multiracial Europe with open doors, fertilized by all kinds of peoples coming from the groins of the world. Provoking bad conscience – the European guilt complex – Morin recalls the xenophobia with which the European peoples have reacted amongst themselves, and how the French have both needed and hated the manual labourers who came to them from Europe itself: Belgians, Luxemburgers, Poles, Spaniards, Italians, and later North Africans, and who darkened Asterix's skin.

In statements made to *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Morin dares to propose a welcoming Europe, hospitable and open to immigrants; moreover, he offers it as a left wing idea, 'an idea which will deserve to be thought about and defended when Europe knows the beginning of political unity'. If Fanon, the prosecutor argued, had offered the cannibal the ethical

justification of the colonized, intellectuals like Morin gave him the guilty ethics of the colonizer. Dangerous ethics these, because they can feed the desire for revenge in undernourished peoples; in the recent past such peoples considered anthropophagy a sign of victory and a signal of deification, because human flesh was, and is, the favourite food of the Gods in any religion. Even in the Hebrew religion, men were forced to be vegetarians until the flood; Jehovah, however, was allowed to devour animals, and only in the times of scarcity and demographic increase subsequent to Noah's Ark was the human race permitted to eat animals. The taboo of the flesh marked the distance between God and Man, and when this taboo was overcome had not the gods reserved for themselves the supreme truculence of carnal or spiritual cannibalism? To kill the defeated in order to honour the gods of the victorious corresponds – to some extent – to the logic of cruelty; but to kill the conqueror and then eat him can only be a sign of subversion which, again, is always an unequivocal sign of weakness within the established order.

The prosecutor resorted to Lenin (for in his youth he had been a Marxist-Leninist before deciding he was a Popperian instead) in order to brandish his iron law over the objective possibilities of the revolution: it is essential that the adversary is defeated, and that he knows it. Extending this to include our case, the colonizer's awareness of defeat stimulates the cannibalism of the colonized. Based upon an observation of Farb and Armelagos in *The Anthropology of Eating*, the prosecutor adduced that the sensation sought by Ebuka was not dissimilar to that experienced by the Bantu tribe when they carried out human sacrifices: "The Bantu tribe clearly maintain that, to them, a sacrifice is not an expression of religious devotion, but rather a 'group emotion', as certain theologians have argued in an attempt to explain it." It is essential to differentiate between 'exocannibalism' and 'endocannibalism' and not only in the symbolic sense. Exocannibalism is practised by groups of humans emerging from a shared group conscience; to eat the stranger, the foreigner, is surely a symbol of coherent self-identification. In

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distinction, the groups that devour their very own members or who hand them over without qualms to foreign voracity, are going through a de-identification process.

A particularly tense moment of the trial took place when it was being discussed whether the cannibalism practised by Ebuka was to be considered 'ritualistic' or 'gastronomical', that is to say, whether it was motivated by by a spiritual impulse of homage to a superior idea (a god or a race) or by a simple nutritious impulse, more or less educated and corresponding to a wise palate. The prosecutor repeatedly maintained the idea that the menace of Ebuka was due to his unifying both types of cannibalism, and to his doing so through the filter of an exquisite culinary culture, thanks to which he was able to distinguish perfectly the different flavours of the human body and to know what particular dishes each is suited to – in the same way as it would be considered clumsy to use a piece of sirloin steak for the preparation of a *blanquette*.

Ebuka showed utter indifference to this argument, which he described as a discussion about the sex of angels, even though a renowned bunch of experts had been assembled by the defence and the prosecution. He seemed to be immersed in a private truth, of which he showed only the more conventional aspects, irritated by the very possibility of anyone discovering the secret of his behaviour. He allowed himself only one rather simple concession, and that was when, possibly moved by the cliché that the French justify everything in the name of love, he resorted to the case of the Japanese student who ate his Dutch girlfriend in Paris. The case left no room for a racist or equalitarian interpretation: he loved her, and so he ate her. Had these been more propitious times for lyricism, Ebuka might have inspired a hit song on the Rive Gauche, but these are indeed bad times for such sentiments, so he was unable to awaken any complicity whatsoever in the courtroom. On the contrary: if anything, his example turned against him, because Europe has never had an ingrained fear of Japanese danger, whereas it has had one of African invasions since the days of Charles Martel.

The public was growing a little restless, tired by the

abstract nature of the theories, when the prosecutor opened the section on proof and testimonials, which brought the court back to the concrete perception of cruelty. Not only were pre-cooked dishes presented to the jury (these had been kept in the criminal's freezer; he alleged that, during a period of excessive work as advisor for a 'Law of European Books', he had been forced to cook and freeze commissioned banquets). In his fridge there were also leftovers of revolting dishes, although cookery is able to metamorphose cruelty thanks to the use of sauces. On a purely anecdotal level, let us mention the fact that Ebuka alleged his preference for sauces related to the nationality of the devoured. This statement was sharply contested by one of the pontiffs of the nouvelle cuisine, who accused him of being something worse than a cannibal: a miserable scoffer completely beyond God's pardon.

"Sir, do you consider it impossible to use a *sauce regence* to accompany a *fricassé* made with Scottish tourist's back, for example?" Ebuka sprang this question at him with sarcasm. The cook repressing the nausea such blasphemy provoked in him replied heatedly:

"Mr Ebuka is obviously unaware that the *sauce regence* is appropriate for the fish, since it is prepared with Rhine wine and a fish base mixed with mushrooms and fresh truffles."

"And in the case of fish not being included in the diet?"

"In that case, never resort to a *sauce regence*."

"What sauce would you have used for a Scotsman's back-*fricassé*!"

"Are we talking about a tender back?"

"The Scotsman was in his forties."

"In that case, it would be risky to cook a *fricassé*."

However, if there was no alternative, you could have a *sauce venaison* or a *sauce salmis*, always bearing in mind the natural toughness of human flesh."

"My dish was delicious, I can assure you."

"Coming from you, I'll believe anything," concluded the cook, contemptuously.

This comment prompted the judge to intervene, asking him not to prejudge the accused. The prosecutor, fearing that

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the almost scientific neutrality reached by the debate could rid Ebuka of all guilt, proceeded to deal with circumstantial evidence, such as the menus handwritten by the accused. These complied past and future experiments, that is to say, cannibalistic acts both performed and to be performed. The reading of these documents provoked at first nausea, then indignation and finally tears when, with relentless asceticism, the prosecutor read the recipe for *lettaiolo*, an Italian dessert in which Ebuka had combined the most cold-blooded perversities.

The menu discovered by the police, among an assortment of varied and interesting notes belonging to Ebuka, was offensively nutritious, conditioned by his appreciation of Europe and illustrated by an almost diabolical knowledge of universal gastronomy. Furthermore, heading those macabre notes were comments by Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin himself about meats composed – to his certainty – of fibre which is the first element to appear after cooking. Brillat Savarin maintains that fibre is resistant to boiling water, preserving its shape, though it partially loses some of its outer layers. In order to cut the meat into slices, the gastronome sharply points out, attention should be paid to the angle formed by the fibre and the angle formed by the knife: it should be straight, or nearly so. Carved in this way, the meat offers a more pleasant aspect, it tastes better and can be chewed with greater ease.

Showing much the same curiosity and attention to detail as Savarin, Ebuka had noted that the bones are made up of gelatine and calcium phosphate, although the proportion of gelatine diminishes with the person's age, and the bones of, say, a seventy-year-old are nothing but "... imperfect marble", easily breakable which is why old people are so prudent when it comes to preventing possible falls. Ebuka, like Savarin, knew that the flesh contains albumin and that it coagulates at a temperature of 40 degrees; also, that it is the albumin that forms the froth in stews, and seems intent on ruining the most densely-populated *pots au feu*. One terrifying fact that emerged was that the gelatine can also be found in the bones and the cartilaginous and flaccid parts of the body, since Ebuka, on the

basis of these criteria, had cooked a stockbroker from Munich who, according to his widow, was particularly fat and flabby. This woman was a banal witness who digressed with vague reflections of this sort during her whole intervention before the jury.

I do not wish to carry on with this account of horrors in which the presumed scientific ascesis of a physiology of taste was put to the service of a diabolical cuisine carefully selected to represent the main European flavours. However, I do believe it necessary to draw your attention to the noxious effects of culture when this becomes an alibi for all sorts of behaviour, as if the desire for knowledge had no moral limitations and could always be used as a mask – even as a mask for a retaliating cannibal who is trying to avenge the cumulative effects of what was once called the international division of labour and uneven growth. Today this term is more appropriately clothed in words which are a far cry from the spirit of international class war wisely chosen by the language philosophy of UNESCO, the institution which has done the most to make political language become cultural and lose its historically dramatic quality.

Ebuka's obsession with European protein is reflected in this simple list of menus:

Starters

Spaniard's tripe (male and female, in equal amounts) – *Triana mondongo* style

British citizen's kidneys, preferably from the spouse of a urologist.

A small portion of *gense hutsepot*, Flemish casserole made with different meats, except for Walloon meat, sprinkled with cold *jeneber*

Main Dishes (optional or otherwise)

Sirloin of French customs officer cooked

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in the *foc-demi-cru* style of the Perigord Abbess.

Brochette of Greek stewardess, scented
with sage from the island of Skorpios.

White sausages made with ground meat of
Munich stockbroker, and potatoes grown in the
vicinity of ethnic minorities' cemeteries.

Frikadeller, meatballs made up of a
mixture of Danish and Norwegian citizens
(60 and 40%, respectively), fried in butter
manufactured with milk of Danish or Norwegian
women, without explicit preference.

Irish stew made with the neck of Irishman
and garnished with barley and vegetables (though
it is almost certain that this garnish was
incorporated by rich metropolitan Englishmen at
some undetermined date in history)

Portuguese liver seasoned with wine,
vinegar and spices, cooked with smoked bacon
obtained from the back of a Portuguese emigré.

As for the dessert, the audience was much impressed by
the morose explanation of how Ebuka had cooked the *lattaio*
with the milk of young Florentine mothers, lemon rind, two
whole eggs (hens' eggs of course), vanilla, half a dozen egg
yolks, two spoonfuls of flour, ground nutmeg, ground
cinnamon and icing sugar; the portions should be no greater
than 100 gm because this dish can be dangerous for diabetics.
Not only the Italians present in the courtroom – who were
logically and directly touched – but also the Spaniards reacted

with visible emotion to what they considered a violation of the most profound memory of their mothers; the horror, however, affected the public as a whole. If man – and some women – according to Saint Exupery belongs to ‘the country of his childhood’, his native palate has its origin in the taste of his mother’s milk or, failing that, in any vaguely similar Nestle’s substitute. But oh no, Ebuka had not made his lattaiolo with any old concentrated milk but had actually milked – goodness knows how – young Florentine mothers who were wandering around Strasbourg in search of its renowned delicatessens and, no subsequent utilization of the donors being known, had used the milk sacrilegiously.

“What right have you, synthetic milk-suckers, to demand explanations on the use of human milk for cultural purposes?” This was Ebuka’s arrogant answer which caused visible pain and outrage among the public; a Spanish communist congressman who loved his mother dearly very nearly attacked him in he midst of the ensuing general chaos and furious clanging of the judge’s bell, the judge obviously beside himself and unable to control that unleashing of emotions.

No comment on the trial would be complete if it omitted an anecdote which could well be raised to a category. Due to the understandable need of proving the cannibal’s savagery, the prosecutor produced as evidence a dozen enemas of varied origins, periods and sizes, which had been discovered in his home, and held them up as verification of Ebuka’s perverse inclinations. Faced with the scornful smile of the accused, the judge demanded an appropriate explanation for so scatological a find. And the perverse savage had the cynicism to make use of Grimod de La Reyniere’s exquisite culture in order to put forth the argument that every cook should be purged, according to a formula which the gastrosopher summed up thus: “When you feel that your cook becomes careless, that his dishes are overloaded with salt and spices and are too strongly flavoured, you can be sure that the time has come for you to seek advice from your pharmacist. Then prepare the individual as follows: give him two days of diet and enemas, administer a purgative concoction made with *manna* from Calabria, rhubarb, *cassia* and Sedlitz salt (dosage

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according to the degree of insensitivity of his palate). Then allow him to rest for one day, cease the purge in order to soothe the humours and, after a further two days of complete rest, you will be proud of having a completely new man."

Not fully contented with such a sinister usage of an eminent philosopher of the race he had devoured, he fixed his gaze on the judge and, acknowledging the handful of enemies, he finished his drivel by assuring that as a result of the frequent tasting of the dishes, the smell of ovens, the continuous drinking – and not always good wine – the vapours of coal, smoke and bile, the faculties of the best cooks became denaturalized and there follows a serious alteration in the tastebuds of the taste professionals. "The palate becomes brutalized, your lordship, one loses the capacity for appreciating texture, finesse, the sensitivity that gives the sense of taste its reason for existing. In the end, rubbish clogs up the sense of taste and it becomes as insensitive as the conscience of an old judge."

Not only because of the advanced age of the judge, but also due to all the evidence accumulated against him, Pierre Ebuka was sentenced for life as kitchen help in McDonalds, in the castle of If. All of us who were present at the act will never forget the final and useless defence that Ebuka made of his lost cause when he was given the right of speech.

"You have never put your ears to the ground at the moment when lettuces howl in pain as you cut them; you have never put your hand on a cow's heart when she foresees her own death, the moment she enters the Kafkaesque alley of a municipal slaughterhouse, legitimized by all the EC regulations. You only know the fear of dying, or of death, as experienced by men and women, and even then only by those who resemble you; they become mirrors of your own risk."

So barbarous a spectacle had dreadful sequels. About a month later, a high-ranking official of the EC was arrested, accused of having eaten a young woman who made a living in market research by contributing to the established statistics on the use of public transport among Eurocrats. It was a complete fiasco. He wanted to prepare a *salmis* and ended up with a *ragout* instead.