

National Braai Day: Cultural Coup d'état

Hysteria, Memory loss and YouTube: Braai Culture!

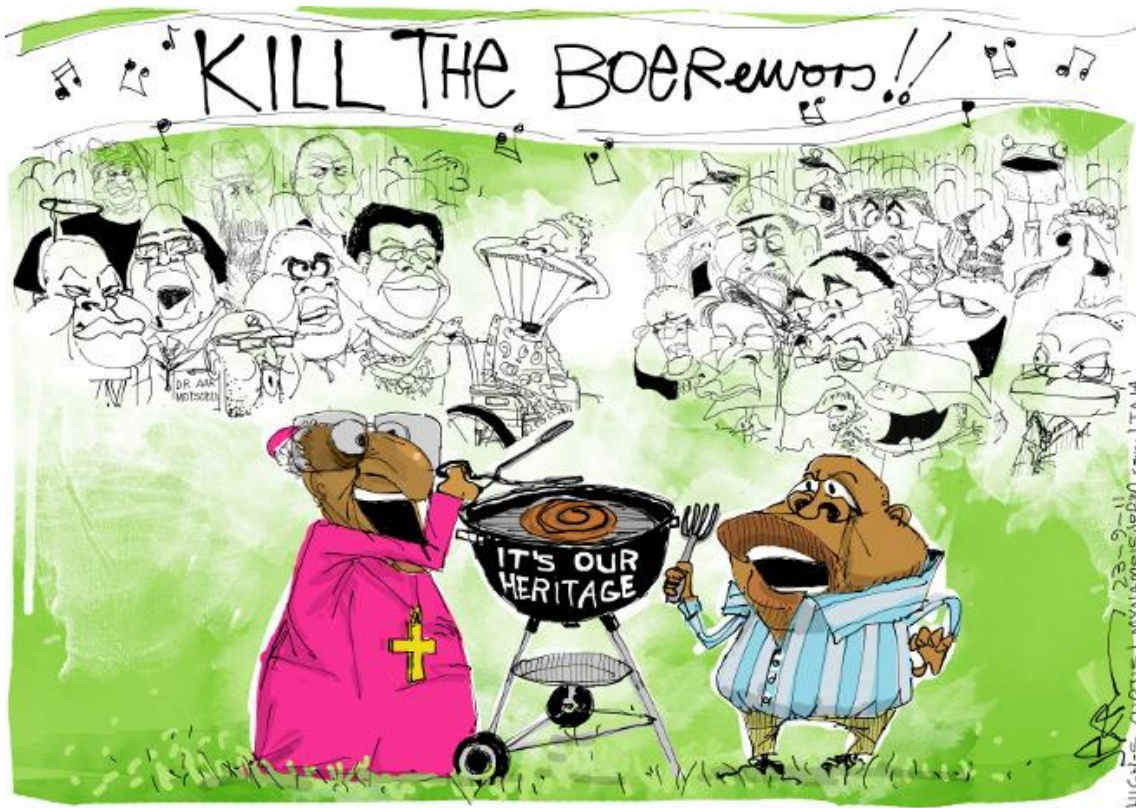


Figure 1: Cartoon by Jeremy Nell depicting National Braai Day 2011

September. The beginning of spring in South Africa: The air is warmer, somehow thicker. Fresh green leaves on the trees. The smell of Jasmin. And something else....the aroma makes your mouth water. Oh, that familiar smell. Someone is having a 'braai'! I am sure that smell cannot smell the same, anywhere else in the world. Because it is not only one smell, but the combination of smells. It can only smell like that here. In this country. At this time. Springtime!

September 24, National Heritage Day. People are dedicating songs to it... video satires have been made about it....competitions are held on National TV.... books are being published about it....everybody is preparing for the big event! Politicians are supporting it or condemning it. Columnists are writing about it. Even some funny cartoons... and yet some are getting very hot under the collar about it. Should we or shouldn't we 'braai' on this day? And whose idea was it, anyway?

Through the new Constitution, everyone has the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to enjoy their own culture. Heritage Day was declared as one of our new Public Holidays, to celebrate our traditions and our diverse cultures. In 2005, a bright 'spark', Jan Scannell, aka Jan Braai, wanted to unite the people of South Africa by finding one thing that he thought they all had in common: having a 'braai' around the fire. Jan actively marketed the idea,

and in 2007 convinced Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu to become the patron of National Braai Day. By having Tutu endorse the project, many people bought into the idea, and like many other public holidays, it has become a commercial event.

Unfortunately, instead of uniting the country, National 'Braai' Day, has in fact divided the country into three main sectors: those who support it, those who oppose it, and those who don't care either way. The main question that I have asked is whether the cultural significance of Heritage Day has been maintained by the introduction of National 'Braai' Day as a sub-theme or if the cultural value has been impacted negatively by focussing the attention on the 'braai'?

Some other questions that were also raised: Is the campaign '*Braai4Heritage*' appropriate in the post-apartheid democracy? As a divided country, can we find a common heritage that all people can relate to? Does 'Braai' Day contribute to nation building? Should we celebrate our differences or our unity on Heritage Day? How can we do both successfully? How does 'Braai' Day address gender equality and gender roles in terms of our new constitution? Do we fall back into old traditional patterns on 'Braai' Day, such as women-in-the-kitchen and men-next-to-the-fire? Where do the women of South Africa stand in all of this, or are they just happy that the men want to cook? Should we concentrate on our own heritage as members of a specific group on this day or learn about each other's heritages? Should 'Braai' Day rather be re-packaged with the participation of all people and all aspects of cultural significance, where co-existence of cultural values are recognized, respected and encouraged? If National 'Braai' Day is a unifying event, shouldn't it rather occur on the Day of Reconciliation?

Beginnings

The first smell of meat cooked over an open fire.... How exactly it came about is still unclear. Evidence was discovered at Swartkrans, a lower Paleolithic travertine cave site in the Cradle of Humankind¹, that it probably occurred over one million years ago.

Since 1954 Dr. C.K. Brain has worked at archaeological sites in the Cradle, and after three decades of work recovered the second largest sample of hominid remains at Swartkrans cave. A "*treasure trove of more than 250 ancient burnt animal bones*" was discovered at the site in 1984! (<http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2004/april/braai.htm>)

These fossilised remains of antelope, at least one million years old or more, were discovered in a section identified as Member 3. The antelope bones appeared to have been 'braaiied'. It is evident that the hominid bands sheltering in these caves seemed to have enjoyed regular antelope 'braais'. Since this is the oldest discovery of the controlled use of fire to burn or cook meat, and it was found in South Africa, we can claim that our early ancestors have indeed invented the 'braai'!
<http://www.scienceinafrica.co.za/2004/april/braai.htm>

¹ The Cradle of Humankind is one of the richest paleontological sites in the world.

By the manipulation of fire and the advent of cooking, it is further believed that the human digestive tract began to shrink and as a result, this allowed the brain to grow. This has led to the development of humans as we are known today.

The introduction of cooking may well have been the decisive factor in leading man from a primarily animal existence into one that was more fully human.

(Quote by Carleton S. Coon, *The History of Man*, in Wrangham 2009:83)

*According to the evidence carried in our bodies, it would take the invention of cooking to convert habilines² into *Homo erectus*, and launch the journey that has led without change to the anatomy of modern humans.* (Wrangham 2009:103)

Cooking further reduced the time that would be spent on chewing tough raw food, which could then be used more productively to hunt and to tend to the camp. Cooking consequently also became the basis for pair bonding and marriage. It created the household with its traditional sexual division in labour and social cooperation: “*if only to ensure that there would always be someone to look after the fire.*”

The idea that cooking led to our pair-bonding suggests a worldwide irony. Cooking brought huge nutritional benefits. But for women, the adoption of cooking has also led to a major increase in their vulnerability to male authority. Men were the real beneficiaries. Cooking freed women’s time and fed their children, but it also trapped women into newly subservient roles enforced by male-dominated culture. Cooking created and perpetuated a novel system of male cultural superiority. (Wrangham 2009:177)

Fire and meat - we could say, having a ‘braai’ - has therefore also shaped human behaviour. We have thus inherited a system of domesticity and cooperation and of fixed gender roles, where the male provides meat and the female cooks for the household.

‘Braai-ing’ has consequently made us human... Although, for some reason, the division of labour as instilled by our ancestors does not quite correspond with a typical South African ‘braai’ as we know it today... We will try to find some answers later in the paper.

September 24

The day itself was born out of compromise. When Shaka Day, celebrated by the Zulu nation, was not included as a public holiday in the proposed Public Holidays Bill, the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) objected.

The new democratically elected government realised that they had a problem. As a compromise to address complaints from the IFP, and to prevent other groups from feeling excluded, Heritage Day

² Term used to refer to *Australopithecus habilis* or *Homo habilis* species predating *Homo erectus*.

was declared on 24 September “to create a day where all South Africans could observe and celebrate their diverse cultural heritage.” (Soobrayan (ed) 2011:36)

We need to understand the significance of the original day of celebration. It was celebrated in honour of King Shaka, the great Zulu statesman who was commemorated for being a symbol of unity. During the darkest days of Apartheid, the year a partial state of emergency was declared, the message was as follows:

On 24 September 1985, in Stanger, Kwazulu, the then Chief Minister of Kwazulu, President of Inkatha, Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi, delivered the following speech:

My brothers and sisters, we are gathered again this year as we do every year to honour the memory of our great founding king, King Shaka. Each year when we gather to honour his memory we are made aware of our identity as South Africans who have deep roots which sink into history long past the beginnings of apartheid society which we are now struggling to change into the kind of society which the richness of our history demands. Above all other things, even above King Shaka’s military genius, he was a statesman who knew how to unify people. We who follow in his footsteps to unify South Africa will never cease our efforts until our country is one day a country with one people, one Government, in which there is but one destiny for everyone, regardless of race, sex or creed.

The story of the Zulu nation began beyond the recall of any memory and beyond the recall even of the stories which have been passed down from generation to generation. But the story of the Zulu Kingdom as a Kingdom began with our own great King Shaka who reigned as King between 1816 and 1828. It was he who brought together the people as one mighty sovereign nation who took on the clan name of King Shaka to give it a collective identity.

There are those who despise our treasured traditions and would want us to cast them aside to be trampled on by people with new ideas and new philosophies.

These were prophetic words, describing the people wanting to hi-jack Heritage Day! Exactly 27 years after this speech Mangosuthu Buthelezi said on Cape Talk³ that he is extremely disappointed that National ‘Braai’ Day is threatening to destroy the meaning of the original Heritage Day. In his original speech he continued by saying that:

*All life is continuous. When we sow our mealies, it is the seed of the previous crop which we sow. We would have no crops if we did not gather together the valuable seed to sow again. Our cattle come from generations of cattle before them. All of life demands continuity and life is enriched to the extent that we take the very best from the past and weave it into the present. **So my call on South Africans to work for unity is a call which respects the heritage of everybody.** (bold type added)*

Ours one day will be a society rich in its past with the best which each group reaps from its history, working in harmony with the best that other groups reap from their history.

³ Cape Talk is a radio station broadcasting in the Western Cape. Cape Talk spent most of their broadcast on Heritage Day 2012, interviewing people and obtaining their opinions on Heritage Day v National Braai Day.

It is quite amazing to think that this message was delivered eleven years before Heritage Day was declared as part of the new democratic South Africa. In 1996, former President Nelson Mandela addressed the nation as follows:

When our first democratically- elected government decided to make Heritage Day one of our national days, we did so because we know that our rich and varied cultural heritage has a profound power to help build our new nation.

We did so knowing that the struggles against the injustice and inequities of the past are part of our national identity: They are part of our culture.

It is therefore appropriate to look at all the aspects of the country's Heritages and combine it in a single celebration where we can be united - if not physically, at least spiritually. It is therefore appropriate to find a common act of celebration with which all of us can identify. Traditional Shaka Day celebrations would have typically included a big feast with meat being prepared over open fires.

Cattle are also seen as the intermediary between people and the spirit world. A beast is slaughtered at weddings, funerals and other significant events and this is said to bring the ancestral shades closer to the living. (http://zulucattle.com/cattle_and_culture.htm)

Therefore let us remember our ancestors and celebrate this day of Heritage. Let us prepare a feast. Let us enjoy 'chisa nyama'! Let us have a 'braai'...

What is this thing called Heritage?

Heritage / n. *Anything that is or may be inherited*⁴

Heritage / n. *Something passed down from preceding generations; tradition*⁵

In his chapter on Heritage, from the book *New South African Keynotes*, Nick Shepherd grapples eloquently with the notion of Heritage and comes to the conclusion that it is not a fixed concept and is at best paradoxical and contradictory. He refers to it in terms of a binary⁶ concept where the meaning cannot be given of 'this' as opposed to 'that', but rather that both meanings exist simultaneously. I will not attempt to rewrite or address all the various concepts, but will extract three notions of heritage most relevant to this paper, described as follows:

- The notion of heritage as it *"hovers uneasily between the individual consciousness and the collective, between the idiosyncratic and what is held in common."* (Shepherd 2008:117)

In South Africa, and especially applicable on Heritage Day, we are confronted with the fact that as a non-homogeneous society, there will always be issues of diversity, within the aim for unity. It is

⁴ The Concise Oxford Dictionary

⁵ The American Heritage Dictionary

⁶ Dual – something having two parts

therefore difficult to find something in common that can be all-inclusive. Our dilemma is therefore: *“While promoting a sense of community, tradition can at the same time also heighten division and difference.”* (Boonzaier and Spiegel, in Shepherd 2008:202)

- Heritage *“also sits uneasily between the past and the present.”* Heritage is about something of the past, experienced in the present, with the idea of projecting it into the future.

Because we look to the past, and all our experiences of the past in South Africa were so different and unequal, that our perceptions of the present are not even the same. We therefore have to make a concerted effort to find a common identity that we can all relate to in the present:

It is acknowledged that tradition is a resource drawn from the past; and thus its contemporary relevance is open to negotiation. (Shepherd 2008:200)

In a sense, Heritage for South Africans are still in the process of being shaped:

The past is being reinterpreted. New histories, from different perspectives, are being written, not only as antidote to previous histories produced by the powerful, but also in recognition that all history is interpretation – an imperfect reconstruction of what happened in the past. Just as history is best understood as interpretation rather than unmediated fact, tradition too, is less about a real or authentic past and more, indeed always, about interpretations and reconstructions. Recognising this raises an important question: How should we, as critical social scientists, understand and assess such reconstructions? (Boonzaier and Spiegel, in Shepherd 2008:197)

And then thirdly that:

- *“Heritage appears as a concept in two keys, as a simultaneity of deep cultural values and playfulness, irony and profundity.”* (Shepherd 2008:123)

While it is essential that we respect each others’ traditions, if not our own, and value and understand their origins, we have to remain open minded and see any potential values that are often hidden. When traditions are served up for the benefit of tourists, and the ‘acting-out’ is not degrading to the ‘actors’, we can all enjoy the act. South Africans have a good sense of humour and most do not mind to have a joke about themselves, as long as it is done in good spirit and with good taste. The idea being that we can be playful and respectful with Heritage simultaneously. The danger is that anybody can create and sell Heritage, for personal advancement or profit:

Heritage is virtually anything by which some kind of link, however tenuous or false, may be forged with the past. (P. Johnson & B. Thomas, 1995. *Heritage as Business.*)

Food as Heritage

Food is considered a “*hot new heritage topic*” (Deacon 2011), although food has been part of our histories and traditions for as long as we have had histories and traditions. The reason that it has become specifically interesting is because the history of food itself provides an alternative window on social, environmental, economic and political history. Migrations of people were mostly associated with the need to expand territories for more food. The major European Explorations from the 15th Century onwards, were also as a result of food: Access to sugar and spice and all things considered nice.

Even the history of the colonization of South Africa begins with food: The necessity for fresh food produce required by the sailors travelling around the tip of Africa led to the establishment of a garden by the Dutch East India Company. Jan van Riebeeck, Commander of the Cape from 1652 to 1662, was tasked with: “*building a fort, with improving the natural anchorage at Table Bay, planting cereals, fruit and vegetables and obtaining livestock from the indigenous Khoi people.*” (Available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_van_Riebeeck)

The Atlantic and Indian Ocean explorations also introduced new food stuffs to different parts of the world, and potatoes, rice, corn and sugar were distributed, grown and cultivated into new cultures. People started changing their diets to the effect that *Chicken with Rice*⁷ is now considered a national dish in Senegal! The colonial legacy has been a major contributor to contemporary African cuisines.

Culinary history is complex and evolving and it is likely that any contemporary African cuisines will have been built on pre-colonial, colonial and more recent globalising influences. (Cusack 2000:210)

In South Africa, where so many different cultures were brought together, traditional food is a mixture of food from all over the world, flavoured with various herbs and spices, brought from Europe and the East. Family histories can be told through recipes passed on from generation to generation. Communities can be identified by what and how they eat.

Food as Identity

The food body is the most tangible form connecting us to consciousness.

Maya Tiwari⁸

Looking at old cookbooks one can see how food has changed or remained the same. Certain recipes have gone out of fashion or use, while others have remained old standards or have even been adapted.

⁷ From about 1870, the French began growing ground nuts in Senegal and by 1930 covered half of the agricultural land in Senegal with nuts. Meanwhile in Indochina, the French were producing rice, so imported rice to Africa. As a result, Senegal was burdened with an enormous rice bill! With rice easy to cook, it has become a staple food. (Cusack 2000:210)

⁸ Maya Tiwari is a spiritual speaker, and author. Her quote was taken from the book *Conscious Cuisine* by Damyanti Gajjar

Most Africans have not learnt how to cook from written recipes but orally from mothers and grandmothers. Unfortunately, many older food traditions have subsequently been lost. Newer foodstuffs were introduced and have replaced other staple foods. *“In Sub-Saharan Africa there are no ancient cookbooks due to the fact that most African languages were never written until colonial times.”* (Available from http://www.congocookbook.com/rare_recipes/index.html)

However, during the past 30 years there has been a move to record typical African recipes. Traditional recipes are now being *“assembled, collated or adapted”* and offered as ‘National Cuisines’ to the world. (Cusack 2000) A ‘National Cuisine’ is a useful part of building a national culture, because it is an important element of a national cultural identity. Culturally defined food choices and patterns of eating can be seen as characteristics of a people and therefore of a country.

According to Igor Cusack, women are often seen as the guardians of tradition, and it is often women who are collecting and collating recipes into a national corpus. Women are also willing to assemble recipes from different ethnic groups and from different eras. Women therefore act alongside men to present the national cuisine alongside the flags and anthems. *“While women are looking to the past to collect recipes, men are appropriating the resulting national cuisine and looking to the future.”* (Cusack 2000:220)

This concept had already developed in South Africa during the Nationalist regime under the name of ‘Boerekos’. Looking at a doctoral thesis in Cultural History that was done at the University of Pretoria in 2003, it showed that most dishes in South Africa can be traced back to similar foods that developed in the Mediterranean area. It is mostly the unique naming (identity) that makes it a ‘typical’ and/or ‘national’ dish. In this instance I refer to ‘Bobotie’ which was always claimed as a typical South African dish and even labelled as ‘Boerekos’. Recipes for ‘Bobotie’ are recorded in C. Louis Leipoldt’s book: *Kos vir die Kenner [Food for the Expert]* dated 1933, and in *Kook en Geniet [Cook and Enjoy]* dated 1951. Today, with our history being re-written, and previously marginalised people being credited for their contribution, ‘Bobotie’ is now associated with the Malay cooking traditions and included in Malay recipe books.

One of the oldest South African cookbooks was written by Hildagonda Duckitt in 1891, and called *Hilda’s “where is it?” of recipes*. In the book, she refers to the following cooking method:

Broiling is the most primitive way of cooking, and it is best understood by our country folk. It is nevertheless, one of the most appetising ways of cooking a Mutton Chop; and anyone who has travelled in South Africa will remember how good was the “Sasatie” (Kabob) or tender “Carbonatje”(Mutton Chop), steaming hot from the gridiron on wood coals, or two-pronged fork held against the coals. Some kinds of fish broiled are very good, such as the Cape “Harder”, “Hottentot Fish” or “Snoek”. (Duckitt 1891:ix)

Doesn’t this sound very familiar? By this it is evident that the typical ‘braai’ was already performed more than 100 years ago and that ‘sosaties’ and ‘chops’ on the ‘braai’ is nothing new! There is also evidence of fish ‘braais’.

So, the South Africans have developed a specific word for preparing meat over an open fire: to 'braai', and South Africans have accepted that it is a uniquely South African experience to have a 'braai'. The word 'braai' can be used as a noun and as a verb.

Although we claim that 'braai' is unique to SA, it is only the specific word that is unique, and some specific associated dishes, but the method of cooking meat over an open fire is universal. Even 'braai-ing' wors (sausage) was already done by the Roman Apicius⁹! One can prepare meat over a fire anywhere else in the world, but it will not be a 'braai', if it is not prepared by a South African! As mentioned before: Communities can be identified by what and how they eat.

The development of a national cuisine will involve the summoning of a variety of dishes in the ambit of the discourse of the nation, and the very mention then of some national dishes will quietly flag the nation. (Cusack 2000:209)

The notion of National 'Braai' Day itself contains strong elements of nation building. Jan Braai, the promoter of National 'Braai' Day, claims that nation building was indeed the main reason behind the idea. According to him, the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup showed that South Africans can overcome their differences if they have a common interest. I believe that it is the reason why it is supported by the South African government and people like Desmond Tutu. *"The repertory of associations conveyed by food provides the people who share them with meaning and a strong sense of belonging."* (Paponnet-Cantat 2003:11)

*Food is used in every society on earth to communicate messages. Pre-eminent among these are messages of group **solidarity**: food sharing is literally sacred in almost all religions and takes on a near-sacred quality in many families around the world. It is also, very often, used in even more fine-tuned ways, to mark or indicate particular occasions.* (bold type added) (Anderson 2003:6)

In a booklet published in 2012, *"Commemoration of Significant Historical Anniversaries"* by the Department of Basic Education on the commemoration of historic days, school children are reminded that *"Celebrating and commemorating our past is one way of building collective memory and consciousness and thus build social cohesion."* (Soobrayan 2011:1)

The booklet sets out all the public holidays as per the Public Holidays Bill, with a short explanation of every holiday day and its significance as an event. Heritage day is promoted *"as a day in which all are encouraged to celebrate our cultural heritage in the wider context of the great diversity of cultures, beliefs and traditions that make up the nation of South Africa."* The booklet gives the background of King Shaka, South Africa's cultural heritage as a 'rainbow nation' and sets out broad objectives of heritage celebrations in schools. Finally, under the heading *"Classroom activities"*, school children are advised to celebrate Heritage Day by, guess what: *"Organising a 'Braai'!"* (Soobrayan (ed) 2011:39)

"As certain dishes become 'national dishes', the very mention of these will reinforce any sense of national identity." (Cusack 2000:216) This idea is supported by Christiane Paponnet-Cantat:

⁹ *The Roman Cookery Book*, by Barbara Flower and Elisabeth Rosenbaum, refers to the recipes of Apicius

“Culinary traditions translate a sense of national belonging, making food an active shaper as well as a marker of collective identity formation.” (Paponnet-Cantat 2003:11)

In Cuba food practices represent and reproduce a collective identity. Cubans admit that their enjoyment of eating has helped to shape their common identity. The sharing of a Cuban meal remains for the Islanders one of the greatest sources of pleasure, celebration and connection.

In her article Christiane Paponnet-Cantat examined the ways in which food practices *“can shape, represent and reproduce a particular collective identity.”* She refers in her writing to work by Mary Douglas¹⁰ who argues *“that food can act as a mental construct to bind people together creating a sense of collective self.”* (Paponnet-Cantat 2003:11)

Immanuel Kant¹¹ was one of the first philosophers to acknowledge the place of food in philosophy and its ability to create a sense of solidarity and humanity:

Human beings must embrace the drive towards maturity, must stand on their own two feet, even if they hesitate and stumble in the process. Taste plays a role here. It has, according to Kant, the extraordinary ability to stimulate solidarity through enjoyment.

Good meals engage reason, which acts on the emotion, which in turn stimulates solidarity and humanity. (Korthals 2008:67)

Apart from the fact that food can create a collective identity, there are also different cultural meanings in what we eat and how we eat it. The Chinese have a symbolic feast known as *“sikh puhn”* or *“eating from the common pot”*, that allows everybody to be equalised. *“All who eat from the common pot are equals. They are commensal with each other on a level not found in ordinary life.”* (Watson 1987:398) By sitting at the same table and eating from a common pot, participants accept each other as equals. In the ‘sikh-puhn’ all social barriers are breached. *“Just as the food is purposefully mixed together, so too are those who choose to eat it.”* (Watson 1987:398)

There are many Chisa Nyama (translated as “burnt meat”) eateries throughout South Africa where meat is selected, bought at a butchery and then taken to be ‘braai-ed’ over an open fire. Everybody then shares and eats from the ‘common pot’. This way of eating meat is traditional to the larger part of the population and should be further researched as an alternative to the ‘braai’.

Unfortunately in South Africa, the word ‘braai’ still has racist associations as it represents the white male version of preparing ‘Boerewors’ (and other meat) over an open fire. I have asked Namhla, a young Xhosa lady, what the difference was between a ‘tshisa nyama’¹² and a ‘braai’. She said that a ‘tshisa nyama’ was for meat, and a ‘braai’ *“for other stuff”*, such as *“boerewors”*. Although ABSA bank has also attempted to promote National ‘Braai’ Day and to equate ‘braai’ with a traditional Chisa Nyama eatery, the creators of National ‘Braai’ Day have not completely integrated it into their campaign.

¹⁰ This is a reference to an article by Douglas, Mary. 1972. ‘Deciphering a Meal’ *Daeadalus*, 101: 61-82

¹¹ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher and a central figure in modern philosophy.

¹² Chisa Nyama can also be spelt Shisa Nyama or Tshisa Nyama.

Food as Social Construct

Constructions of nationhood involve specific notions of both 'manhood' and 'womanhood.'
(Quote by Nira Yuval Davies, in Cusack 2000:219)

There are a number of ways in which nationalist projects can be gendered. Nation building based on emphasising a common cultural heritage may be differently gendered, for example, than a process built on ideas of shared citizenship. (Cusack 2000:219)

As mentioned earlier, fire and meat, i.e. the advent of cooking, has also shaped human interaction and behaviour. Through cooking, we have inherited a system of domesticity and cooperation and of fixed gender roles, where the male provides meat and the female cooks for the household. The hunting and subsequent slaughtering and butchering of especially larger animals were done by men. The meat was then given to the women to prepare meals. *"Men slaughter and slice and women stew and spice."* (Cusack 2003:3)

Although the kitchen is traditionally mainly the woman's domain (and in some places the woman also occupies a position of social inferiority), men do also play a number of roles in culinary culture. *"Men are the main slaughterers of large animals, they are hunters and fishermen, they are restaurant owners and professional chefs, ethnographic compilers, and they are the enforcers of ethnic or religious practices."* (Cusack 2003:1)

With the role that national cuisines play in nation building, men do therefore play an important part in culinary culture. *"In Africa men as consumers, and holders of power in most states, will tend to promote any element of national culture that will enhance a sense of national identity and will try to make a national cuisine part of that project."* (Cusack 2003:9)

It is therefore worth noting that the concept of National 'Braai' Day was in fact initially promoted by a man, Jan Braai, and subsequently supported by another man, Desmond Tutu. It has further been accepted by the government as part of a nation building project. It is also interesting that a 'braai' is predominantly about meat, because *"Meat, especially red meat, is an archetypical masculine food."* (Quote by Jeffery Sobal, in Cusack 2003:3)

It is however most interesting that during a 'braai', the male/female roles are switched to a certain degree as men usually do the 'braai-ing' of the meat, and the women prepare the side dishes. So, with a 'braai', there is a definite gender role change. Men are both the main promoters of nation building by supporting a national dish and they also perform the main part of the cooking. The 'braai-effect' has many men 'happily cooking' as active participants in the nation building project. Flying the flag. Having a 'braai'.

In many societies, it is only when cooking takes place in the public sphere, say in a restaurant or in the open air – whether at an Australian barbeque {or a South African 'braai'} that men 'man' the stoves. {added by writer} (Cusack 2000:222)

Obviously today men and women have shifted roles and there are many men who enjoy cooking. A large number of cookbooks have been written by men lately, such as Jamie Oliver, Justin Bonello, even Jan Braai! Joanne Hollows refers to this new version of masculinity as the 'new lad', in an article titled: *Oliver's Twist: Leisure, Labour and Domestic Masculinity in the Naked Chef*.

This is a cool masculine style of cooking, not 'slaving away at the stove', but more like having fun in the kitchen. (Cusack 2003:7)

As for the women, apart from women who are quite capable of doing a 'braai', most other women are quite happy to hand over the cooking to their men and having a good time catching up with the other women in the kitchen. No one seems to complain too much.

National 'Braai' Day as collective identity or just a Cultural Coup d'état?

The whole purpose of a feast is usually to bring people together and affirm their solidarity. (Anderson 2003:127)

What do the Soweto Gospel Choir, Heuwels Fantasties, Hip Hop Pantsula (HHP) and Tabure Thabo Bogopa Junior aka JR have in common? They have all combined their musical talents to produce the official South African 'Braai' Day Anthem. Another group has made a song called "*Chisa Nyama*", where they show a bunch of guys singing in the streets and ending up eating meat at a typical Chisa Nyama eatery. There is even a parody of a popular song called "*Friday*", by Rebecca Black, which has been changed into "*Braai-day*". Youtube¹³ is filled with skits about guys having 'braais'. In one of these videos, James Braai, 0027, is showing the "*Souties*"¹⁴ how to have a proper 'braai' in gloomy England.

'Braai'-culture is taking over the country! Heritage Day has been degraded to National 'Braai' Day and a new campaign, *Braai4Heritage*¹⁵, has been launched. The idea behind it was to give people with diverse backgrounds within South Africa, common ground for celebrating their different heritages. This idea has, however, caused another rift in the already divided SA. Some people, like Desmond Tutu, who has become the official patron of 'Braai Day', believe that it is a good idea and by 'braai-ing' together we can celebrate one unified SA.

Irrespective of your politics, of your culture, of your race, of your whatever, hierdie ding doen ons saam [this thing we do together]...just South Africans doing one thing together, and recognising that we are a fantastic nation. (Tutu in The Witness, 2008)

Others feel that it is a shallow effort at unification and just an economic ploy by a small group to exploit the public holiday. They believe that Heritage Day should be celebrated by remembering everybody's unique and different cultural backgrounds which enrich our nation's diversity.

¹³ Youtube is a video-sharing website on which users can upload, share, and view videos.

¹⁴ Nickname given to Englishmen by Afrikaans speaking South Africans

¹⁵ Campaign logo for National Braai Day

When National 'Braai' Day was officially launched in 2007, and people were not sure what to make of it, some people expressed their concern with it. In a speech made by Mr Ebrahim Rasool¹⁶ during Heritage Day celebrations, Gugulethu, on 24 September 2007:

I must say that I was very disappointed when I heard that there are people who have decided that they are going to turn Heritage Day into national Braai Day. I do not have anything against braais but when you take an important day such as Heritage Day and turn it into a national Braai Day and then there is something wrong. Then I think we are not using the opportunity to pay respect to those who have been the architects of this diversity that we have and the unity that we need to forge.

Mr Rasool's concern was obvious that by focussing our attention on meat and sausages, the important legacy of the struggle for a unified South Africa would be sidelined by the 'braai'. And yes, a major part of our common heritage is the struggle for freedom and equality. This is the aspect that the original campaigners for 'Braai' Day may have underestimated, since they were not the victims under the previous system. I think that if those South Africans, who were the beneficiaries of Apartheid, did spare a thought, and used *Braai4Heritage* to discover and imagine the heritage of their fellow citizens, it would be better received.

This is also the opinion of Pierre de Vos¹⁷, University of Cape Town, who wrote in 2011:

Maybe it is because South Africans often do not remember the same past and find it difficult to imagine a shared heritage. Maybe one day, when more white South Africans become capable of imagining the lives and histories of their fellow South Africans who happen not to be white, we will be able to begin to imagine a shared heritage. But this will only happen when more white South Africans realise that their assumption that the world they inhabit is the only legitimate world, that the world they take for granted is the norm to which others must adopt, and that their views and culture are normative and natural, are quite problematic.

When one looks on the internet, it is most interesting to see how many people have given their diverse opinions about Heritage Day being exploited and sold out as National 'Braai' Day.

Nondumiso Shabangu has written an article "*Our Heritage sidelined for a Braai!*" on a blogspot:

From what I understand September is a month to celebrate our history especially and rich backgrounds of slavery, colonisation and ethnic conflicts.

She further refers to the rich diversity of cultures and the fact that Shaka Day was originally celebrated on this day, as celebrated by the Zulu people. Then she laments that:

All that has been forgotten with young people going to concerts with braai stands and meat to have a good time and celebrate what they now call a heritage that includes all

¹⁶ Previous Premier of the Western Cape; 2004-2008

¹⁷ Pierre De Vos teaches Constitutional law at the University of Cape Town Law Faculty, where he serves as deputy dean and as the Claude Leon Foundation Chair in Constitutional Governance. He writes a regular blog.

South Africans. It's good to see that South Africans of all races and ethnicities are trying to forge a new identity that includes all of them but celebrating their history, culture and diversity is important too.

(journtau.blogspot.com/2011/09/our-heritage-sidelined-for-braai.html)

Lindokulhe Nkosi wrote an article titled '*Message in a Skottel*' and in the article refers to Desmond Tutu as St. Pap en Vleis [St. Porridge and Meat] and says that he has become Judas:

On the face of it, it seems like South Africans have finally found something we can all agree upon. Charred meat and potato salad. Booze, braai and beer. Polyfilla politeness that only serves to hide the brokenness, not mend it. We are desperate to attach ourselves to something that isn't divergent, violent and dehumanising. To fill the air with marinated smoke, to shield our eyes from who we are as people, to just get along; without the historical baggage. To be South African, and not white, black, Zulu, Jewish, Afrikaans: but how exactly do we do this, when we haven't even defined what being South African is?
(<http://www.mahala.co.za/culture/message-in-a-skottel/>)¹⁸

This is the essence of the dilemma. National 'Braai' Day has the potential to unite South Africans, but if we don't even know who we are, what is there to unite?

According to Mabine Seabe in an article "*Heritage Day goes up in Charcoal Smoke*", for the Daily Maverick¹⁹:

I feel that braai day has superseded Heritage Day and, like other public holidays such as Youth Day and Women's Day, is steeped in history, but dishonoured by the lack of understanding and respect. We should feel free to celebrate Heritage Day as we see fit, but we should not forget what the holiday is really about. Heritage Month should be about building bridges, understanding different cultures and learning about different South African traditions. If we're willing to let this holiday go up in flames, what else are we willing to compromise on? (Available from <http://dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2011-09-21-heritage-day-goes-up-in-charcoal-smoke>)

On a lighter note, no one even thought about the vegetarians and how they might feel:

Residents of Kommetjie, behind Cape Town's famous lentil curtain, have hit out at the organizers of National Braai Day, saying it has left them feeling both marginalised and horribly in denial about their appetite for steak.

Fruitarian Rainbow Tilapia, said she thought Heritage Day should be about unity and embracing a shared humanity. 'I understand that we have a proud culture of killing in South Africa, but I don't really think it is something we should be promoting.'
(Available from <http://www.hayibo.com/national-braai-day-upsets-cape-town-hippies/>)

¹⁸ Mahala is a free South African music, culture and reality magazine that '*strives to report and represent what's really happening along the fault line and in the trenches of South African culture*'.

¹⁹ The Daily Maverick is a digital website with a unique blend of news, information, analysis and opinions delivered from their newsroom in Johannesburg, South Africa. Available at: <http://dailymaverick.co.za/>

And on Heritage Day 2012;

Thousands of young South Africans say they will spend Heritage Day trying to erase their heritage out of shame over National Braai Day. "We could be sharing our cultures' music, art, poetry and stories, but instead we're huddled over meat," said one. "It's not crime that makes me want to emigrate. It's realizing that in South Africa, a chop is now a cultural icon."

(Available from www.hayibo.com/)

Tshepo Tsheole, news reporter for SABC News visited Maropeng, the official visitor's centre at the Cradle of Humankind, in search of knowing where we come from and where our roots lie. He was shown around by Erica Saunders, Maropeng's General Manager for Marketing.

Erica Saunders explained that most visitors to Maropeng felt very touched realising that we all originate in Africa, specifically from South Africa. This discovery has further helped people realise that our differences are actually very small irrespective of what backgrounds we have. She also stressed the fact that we should look after our heritage so that it is preserved for future generations to see. She reminded Tshepo of Nelson Mandela's words that *"a nation that turns its back on its heritage will eventually become a nation that turns its back on itself."* Tshepo Tsheole therefore felt that since humanity was our common heritage, we could celebrate Heritage Day by having a 'braai':

And as the nation hoists glasses into the air in celebration of Heritage Day, let us be reminded to preserve what mankind has built. Let us also think back that the last three generations of hominids that existed before mankind were purely carnivores, how befitting of National Braai Day.

(Available from <http://www.sabc.co.za/news>)

Many other articles of opinion have been written about the 'hi-jacking' of Heritage Day by the 'Braai' campaign. In spite of this, many people have accepted the idea and enjoy it. During a visit to Cuba, the MEC for Health made the following comments regarding SA students studying medicine in Cuba: *'I have never seen young adults so excited at the sight of maize meal.'* And further: *'One young girl from Ladysmith volunteered to go out to borrow a big pot, other students collected monies for two goats and a sheep which will be slaughtered on 23 September to commemorate the Heritage Day.'*

Sipho Hlongwane made the following comments in another article published in the Daily Maverick:

Guess what I did on Heritage Day? I went to Pick 'n Pay, bought some meat and had a braai with my friends at a house in The North. And saw that it was good.

He argues that the idea of National 'Braai' Day *"strikes the middle road between past and present"* by bringing people together to celebrate friendship and comradeship *"across the artificial divides that once defined the South African experience."* Sipho further believes that South Africans should forge a common heritage into the future, and if that is the purpose of National 'Braai' Day, we should support it. After all, we already know that the term 'Heritage' is about acknowledging the past, in the present, while transporting it into the future.

It is also interesting that 'Braai Day' has gone international. South Africans abroad get together and celebrate and jointly promote their country and their heritage. In this way South Africans can "encourage the gaze"²⁰ by being the "exotic others" by producing signs and images of their culture which can be revealed to their host countries.

From 12:00 on Saturday 24 September (2011) there will be a braai at Shaka Zulu restaurant in Camden. For 20 pounds you can eat as much braaivleis as you want. And they will have beers on special as well. There will also be a big screen showing how the Springboks "pleister die Wallabies". [In the words of Francois Hougaard]. If you are a South African, and you are in London, please come and join us. If you are not a South African, but always wished you were, come and join us as well, and pretend you are.²¹

I am, however, really concerned that in the affluent white community Heritage Day has officially become National 'Braai' Day with no reference to Heritage Day and the meaning behind it. Articles in a magazine produced exclusively for Woolworths, TASTE, only refer to National 'Braai' Day and focus the reader on all the delicious food and events associated with it: "South Africans are proclaiming a collective whoop of joy at the start of braai season – an occasion given official accreditation on 24 September when the country celebrates National Braai Day", and on a further page: "To Braai for: in anticipation of National Braai Day on the 24th, we round up eateries that are tops at chops." (TASTE p. 34)

Nowhere is there any mention of our Heritage. Has it already been overthrown? Or is it still possible that Heritage Day and National 'Braai' Day can "appear as a concept in two keys, as a simultaneity of deep cultural values and playfulness, irony and profundity."? (Shepherd 2008:123)

The Media as voice of the nation

We should also remind ourselves of the important part that the media have played in this whole process, for the media perform a crucial globalising role in making salient the diverse appeals to traditions that are used to mark differences.

(Boonzaier and Spiegel, in Shepherd 2008:203)

The media has been playing a very big role in this issue, and a complete dissertation can be written about it as a separate subject! Suffice to say that there are still various opinions out there and plenty of people willing to give their opinions. The matter has not been decided. The case is not closed.

As I was writing this, on Heritage Day 2012, radios were broadcasting the events on that day, newspaper articles were being read, V.I.P's were delivering speeches and citizens were blogging and tweeting about it:

²⁰ **The Gaze** is a psychoanalytical term brought into popular usage by Jacques Lacan.

²¹ Advertisement for a Braai Day Celebration that was to be held in London, 2011.

Head of the Heritage Council Advocate Sonwabile Mancotywa expressed distaste towards the masses who do not conform to celebrating Heritage Day with the nation's set theme. Advocate Mancotywa says that today should be celebrated as one nation and that it is truly "unfortunate" when people are driven by profit instead of honouring the essence of our Heritage.

(Available from [http:// www.sabc.co.za/news/a/a67bb5004cd589b795bf95b7ab2d4e24/Heritage-Day-vs-Braai-Day-20122409](http://www.sabc.co.za/news/a/a67bb5004cd589b795bf95b7ab2d4e24/Heritage-Day-vs-Braai-Day-20122409))

It is good that the media has engaged in the controversy and it is good that people have the opportunity to voice their different opinions.

Unfortunately the promotion of the big event by the media, by those in favour of the National 'Braai' Day option, has succeeded in exploiting the day for economic gain, and everybody out there is trying to sell a piece of 'boerewors', a chop, a Weber, 'braai' tongs, matches, books, recipes, bread, salads, beer, wine, and even mobile 'braai' kits.

This event has become an industry of its own, let alone the fact that the media is also very much part of the construction of National Braai day!

What does Mr Jan Braai say about the event? After all he promoted it...

When I first asked Jan Braai for an interview, he was very obliging and willing to meet. When we had to fix a date, he never returned my e-mails. What I didn't realise was that he had just released a book called "*Fireworks*" and he was busy jet setting all over South Africa to get the book launched appropriately just before the BIG event: National 'Braai' Day.

Since I did not have the privilege of meeting Jan Braai in person, I have had to rely on second hand information, and I am going to quote from an article that appeared in the *Cape Argus* on 22 September 2012, by Tony Jackman.

The man is clearly very clever, eminently sensible and straightforward, and has all sorts of commonsense ideas, all of which are fine qualities for a brief presidency.

If that doesn't sound like the stuff of a typical coup d'état, I don't know! Then he continues to say:

Now the man – who is the braai force behind National Braai Day, and seems to greet any controversy about the day with a smile, a shrug and a quick fling of another chop on the coals – has brought out a book which is undoubtedly the best braai book ever published.

Then he continues to say that Jan Braai claims that the book is NOT about National Braai Day (they say that it is all about timing), and that Jan Braai is of the opinion that: "*in National Braai Day we have a realistic opportunity to entrench and cement a national day of celebration for our country, within our lifetimes. I believe that having a national day of celebration could play a significant role in nation-building and social cohesion as the observance of our shared heritage can truly bind us together. In Africa, a fire is the traditional place of gathering.*"

If Jan Braai was serious about nation building, he would have solicited the opinions of a wider spectrum of South Africans to truly turn the event into a positive nation building experience:

National identity and national heritage are invented through common memory and common tradition – a careful filtering of historical events into an official narrative as a homogenising legacy of values and experiences. And further: It little matters that these entail false presuppositions, errors or inaccuracies. For ‘invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities come with each identity, each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative.’

(Appiah 1992 quoted in Bremner 2007 in Shepherd 2007:94)

Conclusion

How something as convivial as sharing food, drink, stories and friendship around the braai could be a source of controversy is just madness. Let’s just drop the attitude, light the fire, and eat and drink to life in the most beautiful land on Earth.

(Tony Jackman in the *Cape Argus*, 22 September 2012)

Unfortunately this sentiment, expressed by Tony Jackman who reviewed Jan Braai’s recently published book, is also shared by many people who are trying to simplify the complexities of our South African heritage. They are trying to re-invent a new layer of common identity to cover the sins of the past. Unfortunately things are not that simple, in a country with a long, dark and painful history. It is disrespectful to hi-jack a relatively new Public Holiday, with its already tender beginnings. The idea of finding a common identity that can be shared is fine, but unfortunately the focus has not only been on that. The day has become an event to promote personal and economic advancement and the idea of nation-building has become secondary. I cannot resist the feeling that this is a bit of a desperate attempt at restoring some power to the disempowered white male. Although, having said that, most white males are just having a good time ‘braai-ing’ and don’t mind joking about themselves in the process. This is evident from all the quirky skits on National ‘Braai’ day that have been placed on Youtube.

It is my opinion that the most important thing is to go back to the beginnings and remember what the significance of this day is for many Zulu people, and respecting that. Then one has to look at the day as a public holiday in the new democracy, and be respectful of other people’s traditions and how they may want to celebrate it. And finally, realising that this is a new democracy, where histories have been re-written and older traditions have gained new values, that there is space for new interpretations and new celebrations.

The preamble of the National Heritage Resources Act²² recognises, according to Prof Nick Shepherd, “*that it is here the nation remakes itself, that the new ceremonies of inclusion and exclusion are invented and enacted, that the sins of the past are symbolically expiated.*” (Shepherd

²² National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999

2003:126) We are therefore given the opportunity to participate *“in the public sphere in which to imagine new modes of being, new forms of identity, new conjunctions of place and person.”* (Ibid)

Therefore we can use this opportunity to find unity within our diversity. So, while finally licking my fingers after eating some deliciously ‘braaied’ South African Karoo Lamb “carbonatjes” (mutton chops), I do agree in principle that having a celebratory ‘braai’ on Heritage Day can be appropriate. We can look back and celebrate our common humanity by remembering our early ancestors in Africa who basically invented the ‘braai’, while simultaneously appreciating our extraordinary natural heritage and wonderful climate. Knowing that most South Africans do enjoy meat/food prepared over an open fire, having a ‘braai’ therefore provides an opportunity for all South Africans with diverse backgrounds to have a common, equalising feast to celebrate that heritage.

Nevertheless the re-invention of Heritage Day by having ‘braais’ in solidarity with our fellow South Africans wherever they are in and outside of the country, can only be successful where co-existence of cultural values are still recognized, respected and encouraged. National ‘Braai’ Day can only exist alongside Heritage Day, as a secondary event, a sub-theme, if all the citizens of South Africa have been consulted.

The best thing that has come out of the controversy and hype around National ‘Braai’ Day is that all the ‘steak’holders were given an opportunity to reflect on their heritage and voice it through the media. Cape Talk gave callers the opportunity to express their different views on the radio throughout Heritage Day. People from all different backgrounds and standing voiced their opinions, from leaders such as Mangosuthu Buthelezi to the ordinary man on the street.

According to Nick Shepherd this is where the discourse on heritage operates as the principal site *“for negotiating issues of culture, identity and citizenship in the post colony”*. Heritage does not only serve here as a *‘narrative of the nation’*. And finally: (Shepherd 2008:124)

It sees questions of heritage as standing at the point of negotiation of key social rights and entitlements. (Ibid)

Looking towards the future

Let us not forget, that we will leave a legacy of our own behind:

Our responsibility is not to try to relive, or redress, the past, other than to remember it in celebration and awe of, and gratitude for their (our forefathers’) achievements. Our responsibility is to create the heritage that we will be leaving for those who follow our footsteps so that they too can celebrate our achievements. Be aware that with every action you are creating the heritage that you will leave. How will those who inherit it feel? On future Heritage days, how will your contribution be remembered? Accept that while you cannot control your inheritance you can, and should, control your legacy. See yourself as the custodian of the future and rather than just taking the day off as another ‘national

braai day', use the time wisely to reflect on the importance of your role in the future of this nation. (Johan Campbell)²³

What would we like to leave in the ashes of the 'braai' for future generations to discover?

²³ Johan Campbell from The Corporate Healer

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