

# **Escargot and the Francophone cuisine: A tool for cultural transformation**

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## **Abstract**

Snail production has gained prominence in recent years. Researchers' evidence shows snail as an emerging domestic micro-livestock of importance in developing countries. 'Escargot', as commonly called by the French and Francophones is seen by various researchers not only as an Agricultural farm product for food, but also considered a useful pharmaceutical, industrial and economic product which contributes to the growth and transformation of the nation. This study is carried out to reveal other relevance of snail in creativity, identity and cultural transformation in Francophone Africa

Keywords : Escargot, Giant African land Snail(GALS), Identity transformation, Creativity, Cultural independence.

## **Introduction**

Escargot is a French word that stands for snail (*cornu aspersum*), specifically edible land snail. It comes in different shapes, sizes and colours and has about five (5) species that can be used for food. These include the Roman snail (*Helix Pomatia*), abalone (*Haliotidae*) queen conch (*hebatus cugas*) periwinkle snails (*Littorinna Littorea*) and the Giant African Black snail (*Achatina Fulicia*), (Olaleye, 2013). Escargot or edible land snail comes in different sizes, shapes, and colours (shells). The Giant African black snail (GALS) can grow up to 30cm in length (11.83inches) with a diameter of up to 9cm (3.55inches) and is accounted for as the largest land snail species. GALS are predominantly hermaphrodites ie possessing both male and female sex organs and have the potency for laying up to 1200 eggs each year. As a rich source of protein, minerals and other curative substances, coupled with its large size vis-à-vis rapid growth potency, thus, its usage in exotic delicacies, especially in francophone cuisines. Specifically, preparing snails for use in French meals involves processes starting from purging ie removal of waste from the snails either through starving them for two or more weeks, killing them, separation from their shells, pre-cooked with garlic, butter, wine etc and then placed back into their shells, then serving it. However, additional spices may be added or other methods of serving them without placing them back into their shells (Adeyemi, Shobanke & Omotoso, 2013). These processes engaged in snail preparation and its rearing is known as "helliculture" or heliculture". It is the artificial breeding of land snail for consumption, sales and for cosmetic and/or medical uses.

However, French cuisines prepared with snail include among others, easy garlic Escargots, Escargot a la bourguignonne, Escargot vol-Au vent, Ants on a log, cabbage stuffed with snails, garlic parmesan Escargot etc. They are quite expensive meals, because they are considered delicacies and sometimes served before and/or after meals (ie petti-griss). In a typical escargot meal, specifically in a French restaurant, provisions of snail tongs and snail forks are made for holding the snail shell and extracting the meat respectively. A typical escargot cuisine in France e.g emblem of French gastronomy is prepared with garlic, parsley, softened butter salt, pepper and snail meat (Moniq, 2017). The significant ingredient that is common among francophone cuisine that contains snails is garlic and butter. These ingredients are imperative for removing the slime

from snails and adding extra taste to snail meat after preparation. Although, escargot cuisines are predominantly engaged by French people in terms of the creative uses of edible land snail in preparing varieties of exotic meals and delicacies, the extension of this dimension of cuisine to French colonies in Africa or African francophone countries presents avenues for cultural transformation. Cultural transformation in terms of gradual and/or swift modification in the indigenous values, tradition, lifestyle, beliefs, perspective, leadership style etc among the general or average persons in African countries where French is the official language.

Relatively, the giant African black snail is predominately perceived as a pest in agriculture and also used as a pet in developed western countries. It equally provides sources of protein and curative opportunities. Furthermore, it has been proven to present avenues for income generation through heliculture (Agbogidi & Okonta, 2011). Besides, these implications of escargot consumption, usage as well as economic and/or industrial benefits, yet its cultural transformation dimension and other relevant areas like creativity and identity among African francophone countries have relatively been ignored by past empirical studies. Thus, this paper attempts to explore escargot francophone cuisine – cultural transformation linkage with specific reference to francophone African political systems.

### **Problem statement**

Past studies that relate directly to edible land snail or giant African land snail (i.e. escargot) have on the average focused on the economic, nutritional and curative benefits associated with heliculture or factors (eg socio-economic variables or farm resources input use etc.) affecting heliculture. Furthermore, on the average, the study observes that past studies on (GALS), have specifically been carried out in the Anglophone countries. These gaps so far identified stimulated this paper into exploring other relevant areas consequent to heliculture in terms of creativity, identity and cultural transformation in francophone Africa.

Moreover, the study upon completion provides measurable dimensions of heliculture as a broad independent variable and its relationship with cultural transformation (broad dependent variable). Thus, testable hypothesis will be developed and the variables identified notwithstanding. In this regard the objectives of this study are provided below.

### **Study objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to explore escargot and the francophone cuisine as a tool for cultural transformation in francophone Africa. The specific objectives are to;

- find out the relationship between escargot cuisines and the creative uses of giant African snail.
- investigate the influence of escargot cuisines on cultural independence.
- determine the effect of escargot cuisines on identity transformation.

### **Literature review**

This section focuses on presenting a conceptual as well as empirical baseline review on the subject matter. Specifically, the conceptual review attempts to provide a constellation on escargot,

giant African snail, francophone Africa, francophone cuisines, identity transformation, creativity and cultural independence. The empirical review is focused on the specific objective of the study in terms of escargot cuisines and its relationship with the creative uses of Giant African land snail on the one hand, and on the other its influence on cultural independence and consecutively identity transformation.

### **Conceptualizing escargot**

The French term escargot can be traced back to as early as 1982 and emanated from the ancient Greek word “Konchylion” meaning “edible shell fish oyster”. However, this word is perceived to have been developed or transited over time from “conchylium” classical Latin, “coculium” vulgar Latin and from the old French “escargot” (Harper, 2016). It generally refers to any edible land snail that may be served as an appetizer or as a full course meal. Evidence from archeological sites proves that humans over time have enjoyed escargot (Bowman, 2017). Furthermore, evidence records that there were specific festive periods in which the ancient Romans and other European celebrated ‘escargot’ meals. Currently, the Spanish, Portuguese and the French people are the sets of individuals that have variety of exotic delicacies prepared with escargot (Alastair, Michael, Monckton, Reese & Robert, 2002). Escargot cuisines are quite expensive meals and were considered by the Ancient Romans as an elite delicacy (Hogan, 2017).

However, the edible land snail species used in preparing escargot delicacies include *Helix Pomata*, *Helix Lucorum*, *Achatina achatina*, *Cornu aspersa*, *Archachatina marginata* among others. *Archachatina marginata* (GALS) is the specie that is commonly used in francophone cuisines, specifically because of its large size, flesh palatability, nutritional and curative value. It holds and can weigh up to 500mg at full maturity (Amusan & Omidiji, 1999).

Escargot is also widely used as a protein input in meals, however, its nutritional value is low in carbohydrate, ash and fat i.e. 2.93, 1.49 and 1.21 respectively and high in protein and water i.e. 20.7 and 73.7 respectively (Wosu, 2003). It has 10.0mg calcium, 3.5mg iron, 2.5mg magnesium, 272.0mg phosphorus, 70.0mg sodium, 1.0mg zinc, 0.4mg copper, 382.0mg potassium, and 27.4mg selenium per 100 gram in terms of minerals. The vitamin contents include thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B6, folate, vitamin B12, vitamin A, vitamin E, and vitamin K (USDA, 2006). It is worthy to note here that, there are at least three (3) species of escargot widely consumed in Africa to include *Achatina fulica*, *achatina achatina* and *archachatina marginata*.

The (GALS) can grow up to eight (8) inches if adequately reared in environments with temperature between the ranges of 25 to 30°C with a relative humidity between 75 to 95% annually. Typically, there are few snail growers in the African continent that engage in large-scale commercial farming. Most are either engaged in backyard snail farms or small-scale heliculture (Goodman, 2008). Despite the low cost implications associated with snail growing, very few individuals in modern francophone Africa attempt engaging in this lucrative business (ie heliculture).

It is observed that Snail consumption is not largely patronized in Africa unlike other sources of meat irrespective of its nutritional, curative and economic value (Adeyemi, Shobanke & Omotoso, 2013). Snails offer curative value due to the presence of medicinal nutrients that can counteract hypertension, anemia, hemorrhoid as well as male infertility (Odunanya, 1991). Snails could be roasted, cooked or fried depending on the nature of its demand in time and space. Most

time demand for snail come in the form of fried snack rather than direct utilization in cuisines. However, there is largely little creativity or novelty in snail consumption, rearing and curative/industrial usage among African francophone countries. The orthodox approaches are still prevalent among francophone countries in Africa. Rearing is still small-scaled on the average. Also, consumption pattern has been relatively unchanged across local and urban communities. Cuisine creativity using escargot is not adequately manifested.

### **Giant African Land Snail (GALS)**

GALS are giant land snails which belong to the family Achatinidae. They can live up to ten (10) years and engage in a “reciprocal copulation” where sperm in one snail fertilizes eggs in another which is usually laid between 8 and 20 days after (Raut & Barket, 2002). GALS can effectively survive in an atmosphere that ranges between 20 to 25°C and can feed on virtually any decomposed plant or animal. But to keep their shell strong, they need to feed on calcium either from bones of decayed fish or animals. GALS produce hyaluronidase substance that are relevant to wound healing, and is composed of proteoglycans, glycosaminoglycan, glycoprotein enzymes, hyaluronic acid, copper peptides etc (Smith, Robinson, Salt, Hamitton, Silvia & Blasiak, 2009), these substances helps to strengthen tissues in the body.

### **French cuisine**

Francophone cuisines are typically the most highly recognized delicacies across the globe. Evidence from western cookery school systems as well as formal education in culinary have integrated the processes and styles associated in preparing French cuisines. In 2010, UNESCO added French gastronomy to its “intangible cultural heritage” list (UNESCO, 2010). Basically, a typical French cuisine consist of a three course meal to include, hors d’oeuvre or entrée (introductory course, sometimes soup), plat principal (main course), fromage (cheese course) or desert. But, the style and/or preparation of French cuisines may comprehensively differ across the French regions (Hewitt, 2003).

Among the notable French chefs that have contributed significantly to contemporary French cuisines over the years include; Gui laume tirel (14<sup>th</sup> century middle age) Cathrine de Medici (17<sup>th</sup> century), Francois Massailot in 1960 who sampled the first alphabetically listed recipe book, used in the French royal courts, Queen Marie Leszczyńska, Marie-Antoine Carene (late 18<sup>th</sup> century – early 19<sup>th</sup> century), Georges Auguste Escoffier (late 19<sup>th</sup> centry – early 20<sup>th</sup> centry), Paul Bocuse (Mid 20<sup>th</sup> to late 20<sup>th</sup> century) etc (meimell, 1996 and Escoffier, 2002). Consequently, modern day restaurant operations and management have been influenced by French culture (Spang, 2001).

### **Francophone cuisines**

owever, the use of escargot in francophone cuisines not differ insignificantly from how it is used in France. Specifically, escargot is basically served as status or appetizers before the main course meal. Most times, it is taken as a snack or used as an after meal/dessert function. They are usually served in garlic and parsley butter (Appleby 2017), like goat meat pepper soup served as appetizers in the Nigerian context, or in some cases integrated into social gatherings having huge consumption of alcoholic beverages. Although escargot is considered a delicacy among the French people, it is yet to attain such phenomenal cultural appraisal in francophone Africa.

## **Francophone Africa**

The countries whose official language that predominates every aspect of formal, semi-formal and informal interactions in Africa are regarded as francophone Africans. These countries hold their current administrative, economic, political, social status to France (their colonial masters). The African countries that fall into this category include; Algeria, benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Brazzaille, Congo Kinshasa, Cote d' Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea (Konakry), Madagascar, Mali, Mouritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo and Tunisia. About ten (10) of these countries mentioned above have at least 60% of its population speaking French e.g Gabon 80%, Mauritius 72.7%, Cote D'ivoire 70%, Senegal 70%, Sao Tome and Principe 65%, Tunisia 63%, Guinea 63.2%, Seychelles 60%, Republic of Congo 60% and Equatorial Guinea 60% (Chigozie, 2017).

Most of these francophone African countries exhibit their indigenous cultures, beliefs, religion etc but a vast majority of the urban dwellers explicitly portray lifestyle similar to the European people. Specifically, the management and operations of hospitality, leisure, entertainment, agriculture, restaurants among others rely heavily or are a fusion of France and their respective modus operandi.

Currently, there are over 120 Million francophone Africans spread across 24 French speaking countries in Africa. This makes Africa the largest French speaking continent in the world. There are at least four (4) categories of French language spoken in Africa, which include; Meghreb French (north west African French), Djibouti French, Indian Ocean French and the French spoken in the West and Central Africa (Tabatabaian, 2017).

## **Identity transformation**

The concept of identity transformation in relation to escargot cuisine in francophone Africa, describes situation or conditions under which indigenous factors that characterize francophone African traditions, beliefs, culture, personality etc are expressly modified over time, resulting from global trends to include; fashion, music/entertainment, technology, economic conditions, leisure & recreation and so on. Shaheem (2015) is of the view that identity transformation involves processes where individuals or groups directly or by implication update their knowledge and perceptions either through formal education, traveling, attempting new ideas etc that are not in sync with their original or orthodox beliefs. It is more or less a transmission or movement of individuals or society's unique socio-cultural characteristics towards a novel and more satisfactory awareness that suits universal acceptability reasonably.

Identity transformation may mean debunking orthodox beliefs, tradition, religious inclinations, research findings and so on. On the basis of personal or collective evidence of new ideas that pragmatically foster effective and efficient well-being, identity transformation prevails virtually in every society, this is largely due to increasing pace of information transfer via ICT. However, in the context of identity transformation induced by escargot consumption and helliculture among francophone Africa, the question of measurement comes into mind i.e. assigning adequate numerical value to identity transformation vis-à-vis escargot cuisine. Although there is evidence of French-African fused cuisines for example "salt cod beignets", "chicken tagine with olives and preserved lemons", "exotic marinated vegetable salad", "orange almond cake"

(Calder, 2017). There is however, an absence of data and identity transformation regarding these fusion.

### **Cultural independence**

The concept of cultural independence describes the ability of a specific group of people to break free from colonial heritage, influence, models, standards, systems, orthodoxies etc and thus utilize that which is suitable for their collective existence (Robert, 1983). Most African countries still rely heavily on the structures laid down by their colonial masters, with little or insignificant changes in their political, economic, technological and social dimensions. Cultural independence can be achieved comprehensively if there is adequate human capital development through craftsmanship or vocational skill development, especially in African countries. This is still farfetched since most African countries depend on western technology for economic survival.

Thus a need for inward preaching regarding technology advancement is the bed rock for attaining true cultural independence. Furthermore, the need to formulate and implement a formal learning structure where indigenous languages are used for teaching engineering and other science related courses in tertiary institutions of learning as done in China, where the Chinese language is also the official language of instruction in schools. Thus, francophone African states, should adopt indigenous languages as its language of instruction in order to attain true cultural independence.

However, cultural independence is merely a concept which has not been colossally entrenched in black Africa. Both Anglophone and francophone African countries still rely heavily on colonial systems, models and methods of technology. Thus, to attain cultural independence through escargot cuisines, it is imperative for francophone African countries to go back to the drawing board and engage in strategies similar to that of the Chinese and other Asian countries that have manifested true cultural independence.

### **Creativity**

Creativity refers to the emergence of innovative dimensions of old ideas, ways of doing things, life style, cuisines etc. The outcome of creativity may be an objective or subjective format i.e. quantifiable or non-quantifiable or respectively qualitative. Minford (2003) defines it as the bringing into existence of novel products/services needed by society. Thus, product development strategy in business is a measure of creativity. Sternberg (2011) posit that it is the manufacturing of an origin and worldwide phenomenon. It is a rational process under which deficiencies are identified in a society or flaws in systems within a society and the further engagement in systematic research towards filling identified gaps and or system flaws.

Creativity entails at least five (5) processes to include, preparation, incubation, initiation, illumination and verification (Wallas, 1926). These processes gave rise to various theories and models that tend to explain creativity in terms of what induces it. These baseline models include among others; the explicit-implicit interaction theory by Helle & Sum (2010), Honing theory by Gabora & Saab (2011), convergent and divergent theory by Gullford (1967) etc. However, these models attempt to explain how individuals/groups bring into existence novel ideas or tangible phenomenon resulting from rational thinking vis-à-vis identification of needs in their society and then systematically engage in activities to produce value added and utility satisfying phenomenon for economic gain.

Moreover, creativity in the context of escargot cuisines among francophone African entities describes the dimension under which colonies bring about novel uses of the giant African land snail, resulting from integrated ideas in helliculture that offers conditions for Malacologist expertise. Over times novel ideas with respect to helliculture has been static, given that much research or scientific research into the economic, curative and industrial imports of escargot have been relatively low among francophone Africans.

## **Empirical review**

Creative uses of GALS resulting from helliculture or escargot cuisines go beyond economic benefits in terms of export opportunities and nutritional accrued dimensions from its consumption. Other dimensions of creativity in GALS was scientifically investigated by Thomas (2013) in a study on the medical uses of terrestrial mollusks (Slugs and snails) in the treatment of wounds and skin lesions. Observing that slime produced by slugs and snails contain curative components for treating wounds and skin disorders. The study adopted the pure experimental research design where slime from a terrestrial mollusk is used to cure warts skins disorder. The experiment lasted for eight (8) weeks. The results showed that the use of slime from snails and slugs had curative value for wounds and skin disorders such as warts. Supporting this claim, Quave, Fieroni & Bennette (2008) posit that slugs and snails can be used as treatment for stomach ulcers when swallowed. Similarly, research further reveals that, when snail slime is mixed with sugar in alcohol and kept for some days, the mixture becomes syrup for curing stomach ulcer. Furthermore, snail mucus secretions can be used to reduce pigmentation, scarring, and wrinkles thus reducing aging (Lucy Lui et al (2017). Also, evidence from US pharmaceutical industry offered that 70% snail extracts soothes regiments and heals skins and have proven to be the novel face-fixer for treating acne, pigmentation, reduction and combating minerals (Reporter, 2012).

However, based on the analysis of these past studies discussed above, it is evident that Escargot presents other benefits to mankind beyond its conventional nutritional and economic benefits. The curative benefits and other potential derivatives positive to mankind are yet to be sufficiently explored. Scientific investigations into its uses have mostly prevailed in developed economies relative to francophone Africa where there is lack of requisite funding for research uptake. Irrespective of the abundance of Escargot and its subsequent consumption in francophone Africa, there is still inadequate empirical investigation into its curative dimensions.

Regarding cultural independence induced by escargot cuisine consumption, Olaleye (2013) investigated consumers performance for snail meat in African community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, using the survey research design on a sample of one hundred and seven (107) respondents. A sixteen (16) item structured and semi-structured questionnaire was administered. The specific objectives of the study include; (1) identify elicit African snail consumers demographic data living in Pittsburgh, (2) identify the snail preference of Africans in Pittsburg, (3) determine snail consumption constraints in the study area, (4) increase awareness of snail meat nutritional value in Pittsburg and (5) assess the level of awareness of helliculture practitioners in the study area. The study used descriptive statistics in analyzing the data collected and was presented using Microsoft Excel (SAS version 9.3). the chi-square test and fisher's extract test were used in validating the hypotheses developed for the study. The findings showed that all the variables used were not statistically significant in relationship. Specifically, income, gender, education, farm experience and accommodation topology were not statistically significant in relationship with snail consumption.



Agbagidi & Okonta (2011) in an exploratory study titled reducing poverty through snail farming in Nigeria. Observed that the cost of helliculture was minimal and its risks were relatively. The study reported that snail rearing and consumption among African are not generally accepted. Some tribes view it as taboo, while others view it as normal, hence the relative low investment in helliculture among Africans whether francophone or Anglophone entities. The study found that GALS had medicinal value in terms of arteriosclerosis and other heart-related infections. The study concluded that helliculture is a veritable means for income generation among African communities, given the vegetative dimension suitable for rearing snail. Furthermore GALS is the largest specie among all edible land snails and is highly in demand across the globe. Therefore, the need for increasing its supply becomes imperative.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts the exploratory approach on the grounds that the components of cultural transformation used (ie identity transformation, creativity and cultural independence) have not been empirically determined in a snail consumption – cultural transformation linkage beforehand. It further relied greatly on secondary data and focused primarily on francophone Africa countries. The outcome of the study provides or induces the need for empirical investigation using the variables developed in the study. However, the specific objectives of the study are research areas that beg for statistically quantifiable verification on the subject matter.

### **Conclusion**

The Literature review point that demand and curative use of GALS across the globe is virtually on the rise and offers vast economic and curative benefits for both malacologists and helliculture practitioners, specifically francophone African nations. GALS is the largest amongst all species of edible land snails and is yet to attract sufficient usage in terms of creativity, cultural identity and independence among the francophone Africans. This is largely due to the cultural and religious diversity in Africa for which some tribes view it as a taboo if consumed. Furthermore, little awareness concerning its importance for nutritional and curative value have not been evenly spread across African cultures, hence the limitation notwithstanding.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends the following:

- Adequate orientation of helliculture practice by government agencies as well private organizations on the importance of Escargot in Francophone Africa.
- Integration of French African fused escargot into local dishes for the purpose of inducing improvement in tourism activities within francophone African countries.
- Adequate research into the dimensions of cultural transformation of escargot cuisine consumption as it affects creativity in GALS, cultural identity and identity transformation.

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