

Research Article

Couscous as Golden Food: Colonial Circulation, Cultural Recoding, and Asymmetric Recognition in France

Altın Gıda Olarak Kuskus: Fransa'da Sömürgeyel Dolaşım, Kültürel Yeniden Kodlama ve Asimetrik Tanınma

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Makale Geliş Tarihi	Makale Kabul Tarihi
02.05.2026	05.09.2026

Abstract

This study examines the historical transformation of couscous in French colonial and postcolonial contexts to develop the "Golden Food" framework. This theoretical framework explains the paradoxical disparity between the gastronomic valorization of a food and the social recognition accorded to its associated communities. Using a qualitative, theory-developing historical single-case design based on document analysis, the research traces the dish's culinary trajectory. Findings reveal that the incorporation of couscous into French food culture occurred through overlapping mechanisms: colonial exoticization, military-administrative political commensality, industrial standardization, and postcolonial migration. Crucially, this culinary mainstreaming coexisted with measurable structural inequalities affecting Maghrebi-origin populations. The study defines "Golden Food" through four criteria: power-asymmetric circulation, expanded valorization, selective cultural recoding, and asymmetric recognition. The framework demonstrates that the cultural incorporation of a food does not guarantee the equivalent social incorporation of its associated people. Finally, the 2020 UNESCO inscription illustrates the postcolonial rearticulation of couscous as shared, living Maghrebi heritage.

Keywords: Couscous, Golden Food, Food Imperialism, Colonialism, Asymmetric Recognition.

Öz

Bu çalışma, kuskusun Fransız sömürgeciliği ve sömürgecilik sonrası bağlamlardaki tarihsel dönüşümünü inceleyerek "Altın Gıda" çerçevesini geliştirmektedir. Bu kuramsal yapı, bir gıdanın gastronomik olarak değer kazanması ile o gıdayla ilişkili toplulukların gördüğü toplumsal tanınma arasındaki paradoksal eşitsizliği açıklamaktadır. Nitel doküman analizine dayanan teori geliştirici tek-vaka çalışması, kuskusun çok katmanlı mutfaksal yolculuğunu izlemektedir. Bulgular, kuskusun Fransız yemek kültürüne kolonyal egzotikleştirme, askerî-idari politik kommensallik, endüstriyel standartlaştırma ve postkolonyal göç gibi kesişen mekanizmalar aracılığıyla dâhil olduğunu göstermektedir. Ancak bu mutfaksal ana akımlaşma, Fransa'daki Mağrip kökenli toplulukların maruz kaldığı yapısal eşitsizliklerle bir arada var olmuştur. Çalışmada "Altın Gıda"; güç-asimetrik dolaşım, genişleyen değerlenme, seçici kültürel yeniden kodlama ve asimetrik tanınma olmak üzere dört ölçütü tanımlanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak araştırma, yemeğin anlamsal ve kültürel olarak benimsenmesinin, onu üreten

Önerilen Atıf /Suggested Citation

Keskin, H., 2026, Couscous as Golden Food: Colonial Circulation, Cultural Recoding, and Asymmetric Recognition in France, Üçüncü Sektör Sosyal Ekonomi Dergisi, 61(3), 3726-3753.

toplulukların eşit toplumsal kabul görmesini sağlamadığını kanıtlamaktadır. Kuskusun 2020 yılındaki UNESCO tescili ise yemeğin yaşayan, müşterek bir Mağrip mirası olarak sömürgecilik sonrası yeniden eklemlesmesini temsil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuskus, Altın Gıda, Gıda Emperyalizmi, Sömürgecilik, Asimetrik Tanınma.

1. Introduction

Couscous occupies a paradoxical position in contemporary France. It is widely available in restaurants, supermarkets, canteens, domestic kitchens, and prepared-food markets and regularly appears in discussions of French consumer preferences. At the same time, it remains strongly associated with the Maghreb and with populations whose belonging within French society has often been contested. The dish has therefore acquired a degree of culinary familiarity and legitimacy that has not necessarily been matched by the social recognition accorded to many of the people historically associated with its production and transmission.

This divergence between culinary acceptance and social recognition constitutes the central problem of the study. The popularity of a dish may reflect genuine appreciation, adaptation, cultural exchange, and hybridity. It may also develop within unequal historical and institutional conditions. A society can incorporate a cultural object into everyday consumption without extending equivalent equality, authority, or belonging to the communities associated with it.

The French trajectory of couscous provides a particularly revealing case. French encounters with the dish developed through the conquest and colonization of Algeria, settler colonialism, the Algerian War, decolonization, migration, industrial food production, and postcolonial cultural negotiation. Its circulation was shaped by soldiers, settlers, colonial officials, travellers, Maghrebi workers and families, North African Jewish communities, pied-noir repatriates, cooks, restaurateurs, manufacturers, advertisers, journalists, and consumers.

Consequently, the history of couscous cannot be reduced either to a deliberate state project of assimilation or to an uncomplicated narrative of reciprocal exchange. Colonial institutions shaped the unequal political and representational conditions within which the dish became visible. Migrant and diasporic actors, however, actively preserved, adapted, commercialized, and reinterpreted it. Industrial production increased its reproducibility and geographic reach, while restaurants, retail markets, advertising, television, and institutional catering contributed to its incorporation into everyday French consumption.

Existing scholarship explains important dimensions of these processes. Global-commodity research demonstrates how foods acquire value through colonial production, labour, trade, and capitalist consumption (Mintz, 1985). Studies of food imperialism and culinary colonialism examine unequal control over food systems, culinary knowledge, representation, and gastronomic capital (Koçtürk, 1966; Heldke, 2003; Grey & Newman, 2018). Research on national cuisine, cultural displacement, and hybridity emphasizes that foods are reconstructed through migration, classification, adaptation, and negotiation rather than transferred unchanged between bounded cultures (Appadurai, 1988; Bhabha, 1994; Cook & Crang, 1996).

These approaches nevertheless leave a specific relationship insufficiently integrated: the relationship between the increasing value and legitimacy of a food and the continuing marginalization of associated populations. Commodity studies primarily foreground production, labour, trade, and consumption; appropriation research emphasizes decontextualization and unequal representational authority; and hybridity approaches illuminate cultural creativity and negotiation. Less attention has been given to how culinary incorporation may advance further than social incorporation.

The present study addresses this problem through the Golden Food framework. The framework does not claim that the relationship between food, colonialism, and power has previously remained unexplored. It brings established approaches together around four constitutive criteria: power-asymmetric circulation, expanded valorization, selective cultural recoding, and asymmetric recognition. Its central proposition is that a food may acquire economic value, cultural legitimacy, familiarity, or partial national inclusion while associated communities do not obtain proportionate economic benefit, cultural authority, equality, or social acceptance.

Couscous is treated as a critical case rather than presumed in advance to be Golden Food. Its French circulation is historically embedded in an identifiable colonial and postcolonial relationship. It is also not merely a raw commodity but a culturally encoded prepared dish involving grain processing, embodied techniques, recipes, tools, domestic knowledge, communal consumption, industrial production, and heritage practices. Its trajectory encompasses colonial representation, military-administrative use, commercial standardization, migration, restaurant entrepreneurship, media visibility, and popular acceptance. The case therefore permits the cultural position of the dish to be compared with independent evidence concerning the social and institutional experiences of Maghrebi-origin populations.

The study addresses three research questions:

1. Through which historical mechanisms did couscous circulate, acquire value, and become culturally redefined in colonial and postcolonial France?
2. To what extent does the historical trajectory of couscous satisfy the constitutive criteria of the Golden Food framework?
3. How do colonial domination, commercial transformation, cultural hybridity, and migrant agency interact in explaining the incorporation of couscous into French culinary culture?

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, theory-developing historical single-case design based on document analysis and within-case temporal comparison. It draws on colonial exhibition publications, cookbooks, military audiovisual records, industrial and corporate materials, newspapers, consumer research, official statistics, and UNESCO heritage documents. The analysis distinguishes direct documentary evidence from convergent contextual patterns and theoretically informed inference, thereby limiting claims of institutional intention to those supported by identifiable documentary evidence.

The historical analysis follows the changing mechanisms through which couscous acquired visibility and value: colonial exhibition and culinary representation; political commensality during the Algerian War; industrial standardization and commercial circulation; postcolonial migration and mainstreaming; asymmetric social recognition; and the 2020 UNESCO inscription as a form of shared Maghrebi heritage articulation.

The study makes three contributions. Empirically, it replaces generalized claims of culinary assimilation with a periodized analysis based on identifiable documents. Conceptually, it develops Golden Food as a bounded and testable framework rather than as a general label for valuable or colonially circulated foods. Theoretically, it demonstrates that unequal power may coexist with cultural hybridity, migrant agency, entrepreneurship, adaptation, and genuine culinary appreciation.

The argument is not that the popularity of couscous caused, concealed, or intensified discrimination against Maghrebi-origin populations. Nor does the study attribute a uniform attitude to French consumers or treat Maghrebi communities as homogeneous. Its narrower claim is that the culinary trajectory of a dish and the social trajectory of associated populations can diverge. This divergence provides the basis for examining how cultural incorporation may proceed without equivalent social incorporation.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Case Selection

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-developing historical single-case design based on document analysis and within-case temporal comparison. It is not a systematic literature review or a critical discourse analysis in the strict methodological sense. Secondary scholarship is used to establish historical and theoretical context and to identify relevant materials, whereas the empirical claims are grounded primarily in dated and provenance-identifiable documents.

Couscous is treated as a critical case because its circulation in France is historically connected with the colonization of Algeria, decolonization, and postcolonial migration. It is also a culturally encoded prepared dish whose transformation involves domestic knowledge, industrial production, restaurant

practices, commercial representation, and heritage politics. The case therefore enables the relationship between culinary valorization and the social recognition of associated communities to be examined across different historical periods.

The analysis does not presume that the French state adopted a continuous or centrally coordinated policy of using couscous as an instrument of assimilation. Instead, it investigates the institutional, commercial, cultural, and migratory mechanisms through which the dish circulated, acquired value, and was redefined. Claims concerning deliberate governmental strategy are made only when supported by direct institutional evidence.

2.2. Documentary Corpus and Source Selection

The study employs qualitative document analysis, understood as the systematic examination and interpretation of documentary materials for the production of historically and theoretically meaningful findings (Bowen, 2009). The corpus was constructed through criterion-based purposive sampling rather than through an attempt to collect every available reference to couscous.

Primary materials were retrieved from official and digitized repositories, including ECPAD/ImagesDéfense, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and Gallica, UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage records, historical newspapers, cookbooks, advertisements, institutional publications, official statistics, and corporate records. Secondary historical and theoretical studies were used for contextualization and source discovery but were not treated as substitutes for primary documents when claims concerned specific events, institutions, representations, or commercial processes.

Documents were included when they:

1. explicitly concerned the production, consumption, representation, commercialization, or heritage status of couscous;
2. were connected with France, French Algeria, the Maghreb–France relationship, or Maghrebi migration;
3. possessed identifiable dates, authorship, institutional origins, publication contexts, or archival provenance; and
4. contributed evidence relevant to at least one Golden Food criterion.

Undated reproductions, decontextualized images, tertiary webpages without identifiable provenance, and unsupported anecdotal accounts were excluded. Journalistic and corporate sources were included only when analyzed as evidence of contemporary representation, commercialization, institutional discourse, or public recognition.

A source inventory was maintained throughout the analysis, recording the date, institution or author, document type, provenance, geographic context, explicit content, evidentiary status, and analytical relevance of each item.

2.3. Historical Periodization

The case was examined through an overlapping historical periodization intended to identify changes in the principal mechanisms through which couscous circulated and acquired meaning. The periods are not treated as rigid or mutually exclusive stages.

The analysis distinguishes:

1. colonial encounter and representation, 1830–1954, covering exhibitions, colonial publications, cookbooks, and public classifications;
2. war, ralliement, and political commensality, 1954–1962, examining military-administrative ceremonies during the Algerian War;
3. industrial standardization and commercial circulation, extending from the early twentieth century into the post-independence period;
4. postcolonial migration, mainstreaming, and asymmetric recognition, 1962–2020; and

5. heritage recognition and reappropriation from 2020 onwards, centred on the multinational UNESCO inscription.

Industrial and commercial transformation overlaps chronologically with the other periods because mechanization, migration, and market expansion did not develop as separate consecutive stages.

2.4. Analytical Procedure and Evidentiary Standards

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the documents were subjected to historical source criticism. Following Scott (1990), each source was assessed in terms of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Attention was given to the document's producer, institutional setting, intended audience, purpose, date, preservation context, and possible omissions or biases.

Military, administrative, commercial, and heritage records were not treated as neutral descriptions of historical reality. They were read both for the events or processes they documented and for the institutional vocabulary and representational purposes through which those events were presented. Archival terms such as *ralliement*, "Franco-Muslim manifestation," and *action psychologique* were therefore treated as historically situated categories belonging to the institutions that produced the records.

Second, the documents were coded through an analytical matrix derived from the Golden Food framework. The main codes concerned:

- power-asymmetric circulation;
- expanded economic or symbolic valorization;
- industrial and commercial transformation;
- selective cultural recoding;
- institutional or political incorporation;
- asymmetric recognition or value capture;
- cultural hybridity and reciprocal exchange;
- migrant and diasporic agency; and
- heritage-based reappropriation.

The same questions and codes were applied across the historical periods, enabling structured within-case comparison of changes and continuities.

Three levels of empirical support were distinguished. Direct documentary evidence refers to dated and identifiable materials explicitly recording an event, institution, representation, commercial process, or policy. Convergent contextual evidence refers to patterns supported by several documents of different genres or institutional origins. Interpretive inference refers to theoretically informed conclusions not stated directly by the sources.

Interpretive claims were formulated cautiously and were not presented as evidence of institutional intention. For example, the appearance of couscous at a military-administrative ceremony was not treated by itself as proof of a centralized policy of culinary assimilation. Such a claim would require documents connecting the use of the dish with an articulated policy, directive, or recurring administrative objective.

Alternative explanations were also considered. Culinary circulation was not interpreted exclusively through colonial domination. Migration, adaptation, entrepreneurship, industrial production, consumer preference, hybridization, and the agency of Maghrebi communities were examined as interacting mechanisms operating within historically unequal relations.

2.5. Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The documentary corpus reflects processes of historical survival, institutional preservation, selection, and digitization and cannot be considered a complete record. Military and administrative materials may

reproduce the perspectives and justificatory language of their producers. Corporate sources may emphasize continuity and commercial success, while cookbooks, advertisements, and newspapers may represent prescriptive or symbolic discourse rather than ordinary consumption.

The absence of documentary evidence was not interpreted as proof that a practice did not occur, and isolated examples were not generalized to the entirety of French colonial rule without corroboration. The study therefore aims for analytical rather than statistical generalization: the couscous case is used to develop and assess the Golden Food framework, not to claim that all colonial food transformations followed an identical trajectory.

The study relies exclusively on publicly accessible documentary and archival materials and does not involve human participants, personal data, animal subjects, or interventions. Ethical approval was therefore not required.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1. Colonialism, Food Imperialism, and Gastronomic Power

Colonialism operated not only through territorial occupation and political administration but also through the reorganization of land, labour, production, trade, knowledge, consumption, and cultural representation. Food occupied a distinctive position within these processes because it was both material and symbolic. Colonial systems could alter what was cultivated, who controlled production and distribution, and how culinary knowledge and practices were classified. Foods and cuisines could consequently be exploited, devalued, exoticized, selectively adopted, industrialized, or commercially celebrated.

Mintz's (1985) analysis of sugar provides a foundational account of the relationship between colonial production and metropolitan transformation. Sugar's movement from elite luxury to everyday necessity was inseparable from plantation slavery, imperial commerce, capitalism, class formation, and changing practices of consumption. His work demonstrates that the meanings and values attached to food cannot be separated from the political and economic relations through which they are produced.

Koçtürk's (1966) concept of food imperialism similarly emphasizes the capacity of dominant powers to create dependency through the control of food production, distribution, trade, aid, and consumption. However, the concept should not be applied to every instance of cross-cultural food circulation. Ingredients, techniques, and dishes have always travelled through trade, migration, intermarriage, religious contact, entrepreneurship, and everyday exchange. The popularity of a food outside its historically associated community does not by itself demonstrate imperialism or appropriation.

In this study, food imperialism refers more specifically to situations in which identifiable power asymmetries shape access to food-related resources, markets, knowledge, representation, or economic and symbolic value. Such asymmetry may operate at several interconnected levels. Materially, it may involve control over agriculture, labour, industrial processing, supply chains, or distribution. Institutionally, foods may be incorporated into military, administrative, educational, medical, or ceremonial settings. Representationally, cuisines may be classified through concepts such as exoticism, primitiveness, authenticity, hygiene, or modernization. Economically and symbolically, culinary products and knowledge may generate profit, prestige, or cultural capital for actors possessing greater authority over their circulation than the communities historically associated with them.

Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism is particularly relevant to the representational dimension. Applied to food, it draws attention to the ways cuisines may be made culturally consumable through images of sensuality, mystery, timelessness, primitiveness, or excessive authenticity. Such representations do not simply describe culinary difference; they may organize it hierarchically by positioning the Western consumer as modern, knowledgeable, and authoritative.

Orientalism is used here as an interpretive framework rather than as a predetermined explanation for every French representation of couscous. Whether a particular cookbook, exhibition, advertisement, newspaper article, menu, or institutional record exoticized, domesticated, normalized, or marginalized the dish must be established through document-specific evidence.

Heldke's (2003) critique of "food adventuring" extends this problem into practices of consumption. The desire to discover foods represented as ethnic or exotic may express genuine curiosity and appreciation while simultaneously positioning another culture as an object available for exploration. Culinary appreciation is therefore not automatically equivalent to cultural equality.

Grey and Newman's (2018) concept of culinary colonialism further demonstrates that the public inclusion of a cuisine may coexist with unequal control over gastronomic capital. Foods can be welcomed into restaurants, markets, festivals, tourism, and multicultural narratives while associated communities retain limited authority over how their knowledge is represented, commodified, reproduced, or withheld. The distinction between the inclusion of a cuisine and control over its value is central to the present study.

Food imperialism is therefore understood as a configuration of potentially interacting mechanisms rather than as a single event. These mechanisms may include unequal control over production and circulation, institutional incorporation, hierarchical cultural representation, commercial extraction of culinary value, and the unequal distribution of economic benefit or representational authority. The presence of one mechanism does not automatically prove the existence of the others.

For example, the appearance of couscous at a military-administrative ceremony may demonstrate institutional incorporation within that setting, but it does not by itself establish a centralized French policy of culinary assimilation. Similarly, industrial production and commercial distribution may demonstrate expanded valorization without proving that the state deliberately designed the process. The analysis therefore evaluates the documentary evidence associated with each mechanism separately.

Gastronomic power is consequently treated as relational rather than absolute. Colonial institutions, corporations, and cultural intermediaries may possess greater control over markets, archives, public classifications, and national narratives, but they do not fully determine the meanings of food. Producers, cooks, migrants, households, restaurateurs, consumers, and heritage communities may preserve, adapt, commercialize, contest, or redefine culinary practices.

Couscous is examined within this relational field. Its French trajectory is not presumed in advance to constitute food imperialism. Instead, the analysis assesses the extent to which unequal power, commercial transformation, cultural representation, migration, and community agency interacted during different historical periods. Food imperialism identifies the unequal conditions surrounding this circulation, whereas the Golden Food framework examines the more specific relationship between the value acquired by the food and the recognition or benefit extended to associated communities.

3.2. Beyond One-Way Domination: Culinary Hybridity, Circulation, and Agency

The circulation of food between societies cannot be explained solely as a unidirectional transfer from a dominated culture to a dominant one. Foods move through overlapping processes of conquest, trade, migration, displacement, domestic transmission, adaptation, entrepreneurship, and consumer preference. Their meanings are therefore produced by multiple actors and cannot be treated as culturally fixed.

Cook and Crang (1996) describe foods as simultaneously placed and displaced cultural materials whose identities are reconstructed across geographical and symbolic contexts. A dish does not simply leave one bounded culture and enter another unchanged; its meanings are reshaped through changing relationships among ingredients, techniques, markets, memories, consumers, and representations. Appadurai's (1988) analysis of cookbooks and national cuisine similarly demonstrates that culinary traditions and national classifications are actively constructed. Diverse regional practices may be organized into apparently coherent cuisines through recipes, institutions, and cultural intermediaries.

Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity further emphasizes the production of new meanings through encounter, translation, and ambivalence. Culinary forms may be modified in response to ingredient availability, religious practices, domestic routines, commercial conditions, intergenerational change, or new consumer preferences. Such transformations cannot always be classified either as faithful reproductions of an original cuisine or as products imposed entirely by a dominant society.

Hybridity, however, should not be equated with the disappearance of power inequalities. Cultural interaction may be reciprocal while remaining structurally unequal. Migrant households, restaurateurs, cookbook authors, manufacturers, and consumers may actively shape the development of a dish while possessing unequal access to capital, media representation, institutional authority, and cultural legitimacy.

The French circulation of couscous must therefore be interpreted through the interaction of domination and agency. Colonial institutions shaped the political and representational conditions within which the dish circulated, but Maghrebi families, North African Jewish communities, pied-noir repatriates, cooks, restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, and consumers also participated in its preservation, adaptation, commercialization, and reinterpretation.

The study consequently does not treat food imperialism and hybridity as mutually exclusive explanations. Culinary circulation may involve genuine appreciation, adaptation, and reciprocal exchange while also producing decontextualization, commercial simplification, unequal value capture, or selective recognition. The analytical task is not to determine whether the trajectory of couscous represents either domination or hybridity in absolute terms, but to identify how cultural agency and unequal power operated together in the production, circulation, and contestation of its value.

3.3. The Golden Food Framework

3.3.1. Definition and Constitutive Criteria

The Golden Food framework is an integrative analytical category for examining the unequal relationship between the valorization of a food and the recognition accorded to the communities historically associated with its production, preparation, preservation, or transmission. It builds on scholarship concerning global commodities, food imperialism, culinary colonialism, gastronomic capital, national cuisine, and cultural hybridity rather than claiming to identify the relationship between food and colonial power for the first time (Mintz, 1985; Appadurai, 1988; Heldke, 2003; Grey & Newman, 2018).

The framework addresses a specific problem: a food may acquire economic value, cultural legitimacy, popularity, or partial national inclusion within a dominant society while associated communities do not receive proportionate economic benefits, representational authority, equality, or social recognition.

Golden Food refers to a food product, ingredient, or prepared dish that circulates through historically identifiable relations of unequal power, acquires expanded economic, gastronomic, or symbolic value, undergoes selective cultural recoding within a dominant social field, and produces forms of value or recognition that are not extended proportionately to its associated communities.

The term *golden* does not refer to colour, scarcity, luxury, nutritional superiority, or price. It denotes the intensified value acquired through incorporation into new economic and cultural systems. The distinguishing characteristic is therefore not popularity alone, but the divergence between the successful incorporation of a food and the incomplete recognition of the people and knowledge associated with it.

A food can be classified as Golden Food only when four constitutive criteria are supported. These criteria are analytical dimensions rather than fixed chronological stages and may emerge through different historical mechanisms.

1. Power-asymmetric circulation: The movement of the food beyond its historically established context must be connected to an identifiable structure of unequal power. This may involve colonial conquest, imperial trade, settler colonialism, coerced labour, unequal commercial relations, or migration shaped by colonial history. Cross-cultural circulation is insufficient by itself; the analysis must show how political, economic, or representational authority was distributed unequally.

2. Expanded valorization: The food must acquire additional economic, gastronomic, social, or symbolic value. Valorization may occur through industrial production, standardization, branding, restaurant circulation, media visibility, convenience-food manufacturing, tourism, or incorporation into popular and national food cultures. Prepared dishes need not become globally traded raw commodities to satisfy this criterion, but the actors and mechanisms producing the increase in value must be identifiable.

3. Selective cultural recoding: The food must undergo a demonstrable change in meaning, representation, preparation, classification, or presentation. Recoding may include exoticization, domestication, simplification, aestheticization, standardization, renaming, nationalization, or the selective obscuring of historical contexts. It may be produced by migrants, settlers, household cooks, restaurateurs, manufacturers, advertisers, journalists, consumers, and institutions rather than by a single central authority. Cultural recoding must therefore be distinguished from an unverified claim of deliberate state instrumentalization.

4. Asymmetric recognition or value capture: The value and legitimacy acquired by the food must not be extended proportionately to its associated communities. A dish may become profitable, widely consumed, or represented as part of a national culinary landscape while the people connected with it continue to experience restricted belonging, racialization, economic exclusion, or limited authority over the representation of their knowledge. Evidence may concern social recognition, cultural authority, ownership, labour, market participation, or economic benefit. The existence of a colonial relationship alone is insufficient to demonstrate this asymmetry.

The fourth criterion differentiates Golden Food from more general accounts of diffusion or commodity circulation. The framework asks not only how a food travels and acquires value, but also who can define it, whose contribution remains visible, whose knowledge is treated as authoritative, and whether acceptance of the food corresponds to recognition of associated populations.

3.3.2. Contingent Mechanisms and Outcomes

Political instrumentalization, institutional incorporation, and cultural reappropriation are treated as contingent mechanisms or outcomes rather than universal criteria. A food may be incorporated into military ceremonies, schools, hospitals, public events, exhibitions, or state-supported heritage narratives. Such uses strengthen the analysis only when documented in their specific institutional contexts and do not automatically establish a continuous state policy.

Communities may also preserve, reinterpret, contest, and reclaim culinary practices as vehicles of memory, identity, heritage, or transnational solidarity. Reappropriation demonstrates that associated populations are not passive objects of colonial or commercial transformation. Cultural agency may coexist with appropriation, commercialization, and asymmetric recognition.

The framework consequently distinguishes among:

1. **institutional or commercial incorporation**, through which a food enters new systems of production, consumption, and representation;
2. **asymmetric valorization**, through which it gains value without equivalent recognition or benefit for associated communities; and
3. **cultural reappropriation**, through which those communities renegotiate authority over its meaning and heritage.

3.3.3. Distinction from Related Concepts

Table 1. Distinction from Related Concepts

Concept	Primary analytical focus	Distinction of Golden Food
Cash crop	Agricultural production for sale and export	Adds cultural incorporation and community recognition
Global commodity	Production networks, trade, and mass consumption	Examines representational authority and the distribution of recognition
Food imperialism	Political and economic domination through food systems	Explains the paradoxical valorization and acceptance of the circulating food
Culinary appropriation	Adoption of another community's culinary practices	Requires expanded value and demonstrable asymmetry
Gastronomic capital	Control over culinary knowledge, prestige, markets, and representation	Places control within a historical trajectory of unequal circulation and recoding

Cultural hybridity	Negotiation and creation of new cultural forms	Retains attention to structural inequality and uneven authority
Golden Food	Unequal circulation, valorization, cultural recoding, and asymmetric recognition	Integrates historical, economic, cultural, and recognition-based dimensions

Golden Food is not proposed as a replacement for these concepts. It is a relational framework that draws on them to determine whether several forms of inequality and cultural transformation converge within a particular food trajectory.

3.3.4. Relationship with Mintz and the Global Commodity Literature

Mintz's (1985) analysis of sugar is a central intellectual foundation of the framework. His work demonstrates how colonial production, plantation labour, slavery, capitalism, industrialization, and changing consumption practices transformed sugar from an elite luxury into an everyday necessity.

Golden Food extends this analysis in two limited respects. First, it makes asymmetric recognition a constitutive analytical requirement rather than treating it as a possible consequence of commodity circulation. Second, it accommodates culturally encoded prepared dishes whose transformation involves not only production and trade but also recipes, embodied techniques, domestic knowledge, restaurant practices, media representation, and heritage politics.

In a raw commodity case such as sugar, the central asymmetry may concern the growing value of the commodity alongside the exploitation or invisibility of its producers. In a prepared-dish case such as couscous, the asymmetry may also concern the acceptance of the dish within a dominant national culture alongside the incomplete social recognition of populations associated with it.

Raw commodities are not automatically excluded from the Golden Food category. Sugar, coffee, tea, or spices may qualify when all four criteria are demonstrated. Couscous is selected because its history makes it possible to examine these criteria through a prepared dish shaped by colonial encounter, industrial production, migration, cultural adaptation, and contested belonging.

4.1. Colonial Encounter and Early Representation, 1830–1954

The French conquest of Algeria beginning in 1830 created the unequal political and social conditions through which soldiers, settlers, administrators, travellers, writers, and consumers encountered North African culinary practices. Colonial contact, however, should not be equated automatically with culinary incorporation. The surviving documents, concentrated primarily from the late nineteenth century onwards, indicate that couscous initially entered French visibility through spectacle, classification, culinary curiosity, and mediated cultural translation rather than as an ordinary element of metropolitan domestic cuisine.

One of the clearest early metropolitan representations appeared at the Paris Universal Exposition of 1889. An illustrated report entitled “Les cuisines exotiques,” published in the *Revue de l'Exposition universelle de 1889*, included an image captioned “Préparation du couscous” (Arène, 1889, p. 213). Its inclusion within a section devoted to “exotic cuisines” made the dish visible while positioning it within an exhibitionary system that presented cultural difference as spectacle.

Couscous was not displayed simply as transferable culinary knowledge. Its preparation formed part of a wider colonial environment in which foods, bodies, material practices, and colonized populations were arranged for metropolitan observation. The exposition brought the dish physically and visually into Paris while continuing to mark it as belonging to a culturally distant and hierarchically classified world.

Paul Bluysen's account of the same exposition illustrates the racialized character of this framing. In *Paris en 1889: Souvenirs et croquis de l'Exposition*, he informed visitors that couscous could be found in the cafés of the Esplanade but described it as being prepared by hands that were “not necessarily very white” (Bluysen, 1890, pp. 117–118). Culinary curiosity was therefore connected explicitly with bodily and racial difference.

This evidence does not establish that all French encounters with couscous reproduced an identical attitude. It does, however, demonstrate a mechanism of selective cultural recoding. The food became

available to metropolitan consumers through a language of exoticism and colonial otherness. Visitors could experience the colony through taste without the dish being separated from the racial hierarchies structuring the exhibition.

The interwar period expanded this mediated visibility. The Paris Colonial Exposition of 1931 stimulated public interest in colonial products, peoples, architecture, performances, and food. Several publications appearing around the exposition presented culinary knowledge from the colonies to metropolitan readers, including Anne Quérillac's *Cuisine coloniale: Les bonnes recettes de Chloé Mondésir*, Charlotte Rabette's *La Cuisine exotique chez soi*, Raphaël de Noter's *La Bonne Cuisine aux colonies*, and Léon Isnard's *La Gastronomie africaine*.

The clustering of these works indicates a growing market for colonial culinary knowledge, but their classifications remained significant. Recipes circulated as "colonial," "African," or "exotic" cuisine rather than as unmarked components of established French cooking. Their publication therefore demonstrates increasing accessibility and interest, not the complete integration of couscous into ordinary metropolitan food practices.

Quérillac's treatment of couscous is particularly revealing. The text transmitted a recipe while also interpreting preparation, bodily techniques, modes of eating, and service through a distinction between indigenous custom and what it presented as a properly arranged or "civilized" table (Quérillac, 1931). A culturally situated culinary practice was thus translated into metropolitan standards of presentation, conduct, and correctness.

This translation represents domestication as a form of selective cultural recoding. Couscous could be prepared by French readers, but the colonial authorial voice retained the authority to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable ways of serving and consuming it. Culinary knowledge was transferred while the hierarchy governing its interpretation remained intact.

Professional culinary publications provide further evidence of this process. Early twentieth-century articles commonly classified couscous under foreign, Arab, or Moroccan cuisine. In 1937, *Le Cordon bleu* published a "ratatouille marocaine" combining the Provençal dish with couscous and mutton. The recipe demonstrates culinary hybridization rather than the simple reproduction of a fixed North African original. Yet couscous continued to operate as a marker of foreignness: its presence was sufficient to recategorize a regional French preparation as "Moroccan."

Hybridity therefore did not eliminate asymmetry. Metropolitan culinary actors could modify, combine, name, and classify new dishes, but the authority to determine their legitimate form and public category remained unevenly distributed.

Couscous also entered colonial agricultural and institutional discourse. Proceedings associated with the 1931 Colonial Exposition identified sorghum as a cereal used in couscous production and discussed colonial agriculture in relation to imperial supply and "the needs of France" (Exposition coloniale internationale, 1931, p. 97). This does not demonstrate the existence of a specific state policy concerning couscous. It shows that the dish and the cereals used to produce it were incorporated into an imperial system of technical classification and economic evaluation.

A different form of visibility appeared in colonial Algeria. On 14 January 1939, *Alger républicain* reported that a New Year couscous had been offered to the "meskines," or poor residents, of Algiers. The brief notice does not identify the full institutional organization or political meaning of the event. It nevertheless shows that couscous could function as a public and charitable meal rather than exclusively as a private domestic practice. In such a setting, meanings of hospitality and solidarity could coexist with hierarchical relations between organizers and recipients.

Taken together, the documents identify three principal mechanisms of early transformation. First, exhibitions presented couscous to metropolitan audiences as an experience of colonial difference. Second, cookbooks and culinary publications translated selected practices into metropolitan categories of service, bodily conduct, and culinary correctness. Third, agronomic and public institutions incorporated the dish into technical, economic, and charitable discourses.

The available evidence does not establish that the French state operated a coherent or continuous strategy of culinary assimilation during this period. Nor does it demonstrate that couscous had become fully integrated into metropolitan French cuisine before decolonization. It shows a more limited but historically significant development: couscous became increasingly visible, interpretable, reproducible, and consumable within French colonial culture while remaining marked as exotic, indigenous, African, Arab, or Moroccan.

These early representations established the colonial and cultural conditions through which later forms of institutional, commercial, and popular incorporation became possible.

4.2. War, Ralliement, and Political Commensality, 1954–1962

The Algerian War created new institutional settings in which food could acquire political meaning. French military and administrative authorities sought not only to defeat the National Liberation Front but also to display authority, communicate allegiance, and represent proximity to civilian populations. Within this context, communal meals could be incorporated into ceremonies combining military display, public speech, local intermediaries, and symbolic representations of Franco-Algerian affiliation.

Two photographic reports produced by the French military audiovisual service provide direct evidence of this practice. The first documents a ceremony held in Boghni, Kabylia, on 29 August 1956. The second records an event organized by the Section administrative spécialisée (SAS) of Loudalouze on 2 September 1957. In both cases, couscous was served after formal proceedings involving French military authority, political communication, and assembled civilian populations (ECPAD, 1956, 1957).

These records must be interpreted as institutional representations rather than neutral descriptions. Terms such as *ralliement*, “Franco-Muslim manifestation,” and “French Muslims” belonged to the political vocabulary of the French military apparatus and do not provide transparent evidence of the identities, motivations, or political convictions of the participants. The photographs establish how the events were organized and represented by French authorities, but they do not reveal whether attendance was voluntary or how the ceremonies were experienced by local populations.

The Boghni report, preserved under the archival reference ALG 56-223, documents a ceremony attended by General Jean Olié, other military and administrative officials, local representatives, veterans, and inhabitants of surrounding douars. The event included speeches, a flag-raising ceremony, veterans’ colours, and banners bearing declarations such as “La Kabylie c’est la France.” The assembled population subsequently moved to the Boghni market for a couscous meal. Individual photographs were captioned as showing couscous being served to the inhabitants of the “rallied douars” (ECPAD, 1956).

The documentary sequence is significant because the meal followed public displays of French authority and attachment to France. Couscous was therefore not recorded as an isolated act of hospitality but as part of a ceremony officially classified as a *ralliement*. The document does not show that the dish was intended to transform everyday dietary practices. Rather, a locally familiar form of communal eating was incorporated into a French-controlled representation of political affiliation.

The Loudalouze report, preserved under the reference ALG 57-409, documents an event attended by approximately 2,500 people and organized by the local SAS. The proceedings included the review of a harki company and the 1/22nd Infantry Regiment, speeches by military and local authorities, and communication support from a loudspeaker and leaflet company. The event concluded with what the archival description called a copious couscous served to the crowd (ECPAD, 1957).

Loudalouze provides a more explicit connection between communal eating and the French military communication apparatus. ECPAD classified images of the SAS chief addressing the crowd under *action psychologique*. Nevertheless, the record does not state that couscous itself was selected under a formal psychological-warfare directive. It supports the narrower conclusion that an SAS-organized event involving military display, speeches, propaganda infrastructure, and a large civilian audience ended with a collective couscous meal.

The similarities and differences between the two cases can be summarized as follows:

Table 2. The Similarities and Differences Between the Two Cases

Analytical dimension	Boghni, 1956	Loudalouze, 1957
Archival classification	<i>Ralliement</i> ceremony	“Franco-Muslim manifestation”
Principal authorities	Senior military and administrative officials	SAS and senior military officials
Political elements	Loyalty banners, speeches, flags, veterans	Military review, speeches, loudspeaker and leaflet company
Position of couscous	Meal following the ceremony	Meal concluding the event
Directly supported conclusion	Couscous formed part of a ceremony staging attachment to France	Couscous formed part of an SAS-organized event connected to psychological-action infrastructure
Unsupported conclusion	Participants genuinely supported French rule	Couscous was governed by a central assimilation directive

The recurrence of couscous in both ceremonies suggests that its use was not necessarily unique to a single isolated event. However, two cases cannot establish a universally applied or centrally coordinated policy. The scale, frequency, geographic distribution, and administrative planning of this practice would require additional archival evidence.

The two cases are more accurately interpreted through the concept of political commensality than through gastronomic assimilation. Political commensality refers here to the incorporation of collective eating into an event intended to communicate political proximity, legitimacy, affiliation, or unity. It concerns the symbolic use of a familiar meal rather than an attempt to replace or systematically reform the diet of a population.

In Boghni and Loudalouze, the political significance of couscous derived from its position within a broader ceremonial sequence. Speeches, military display, banners, and administrative categories articulated authority verbally and visually; collective eating extended the performance into an embodied social experience. The meal could conclude the proceedings through hospitality, attract or retain participants, and create a temporary representation of shared community.

Commensality should not, however, be equated with equality. Eating within the same ceremonial setting did not remove the asymmetry between military organizers, armed forces, local intermediaries, and civilian populations. The meaning of the occasion remained structured by institutions that controlled the organization and representation of the event.

Nor should couscous be understood as a cultural instrument created by the colonial administration. Its capacity to function as a recognizable communal meal derived from Maghrebi culinary knowledge, labour, hospitality practices, and social meanings. Colonial institutions temporarily incorporated this existing cultural intelligibility into their own political ceremonies.

The wartime records therefore indicate a shift from the earlier exhibitionary representation of couscous as an object of colonial difference. During the Algerian War, a locally embedded culinary practice appeared within ceremonies through which colonial authorities attempted to stage political proximity and inclusion. This shift was neither complete nor linear: exotic representation and institutional incorporation could coexist. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates bounded instances in which couscous acquired a political and ceremonial use beyond spectacle or gastronomic curiosity.

4.3. Industrial Standardization and Commercial Circulation

The industrial transformation of couscous should not be described as a linear movement from an isolated local food to a global commodity. Couscous had long circulated across the Maghreb and was produced through diverse household, communal, and artisanal practices. The historically significant development

examined here is more specific: the translation of embodied preparation techniques into mechanized, standardized, packaged, and commercially transportable form.

4.3.1. Mechanization and Market Circulation

Two records produced by the French military audiovisual service in December 1961 document the Ferrero factory in Algiers during the final months of French colonial rule. The photographic report *Visite de l'usine de pâtes alimentaires Ferrero à Alger* is preserved under ALG 61-375, while the film *Usine de pâtes Ferrero à Alger* is catalogued as ACT 6201 (ECPAD, 1961a, 1961b).

The records describe a factory occupying approximately 9,000 square metres, employing around 200 workers, and operating automated production lines twenty-four hours a day. Semolina was transferred into mixing equipment, mechanically processed, and dried under controlled temperature and humidity conditions. Couscous production involved rotating machines that formed moistened semolina into granules, mechanical sieving to standardize their size, controlled drying, and automated packaging.

Mechanization did more than increase production volume. It transferred processes historically dependent on hand-rolling, tactile judgement, sieving, and environmental drying into repeatable industrial operations. Couscous remained materially recognizable, but its grain size, moisture, stability, and packaging increasingly became subject to corporate and technical standards.

Industrialization did not eliminate Maghrebi culinary knowledge. The machinery reproduced characteristics established through existing preparation techniques. It nevertheless reorganized the relationship among knowledge, labour, scale, and authority by relocating substantial stages of production from households and artisanal settings to the factory.

The ECPAD records report an annual combined production of approximately 10,000 tonnes of pasta and couscous. Because the sources do not separate the two categories, this figure cannot be interpreted as couscous output alone. They further state that approximately three-quarters of total production was consumed in Algeria, while the remainder was distributed to metropolitan France and other markets.

These records therefore demonstrate that Ferrero participated in a commercial network extending beyond Algeria. An industrial trans-Mediterranean route existed before the full postcolonial mainstreaming of couscous in France. Packaged circulation did not depend exclusively on later migration, restaurants, or household preparation in metropolitan France.

The evidence does not, however, establish that the French state created or directed this commercial network as part of a culinary policy. Ferrero was a commercial enterprise operating within the legal, infrastructural, and economic conditions of colonial Algeria. Its transformation involved the Ferrero family, managers, workers, technicians, suppliers, transport networks, retailers, and consumers. Industrialization is therefore treated as a multi-actor commercial process shaped by colonial conditions rather than as the outcome of a centrally coordinated state strategy.

4.3.2. Industrial Modernity and Evidentiary Limits

The ECPAD materials are both documentary evidence and institutional representations. Their descriptions emphasize the factory's scale, automation, continuous operation, productive capacity, employment, and access to Algerian, metropolitan, and international markets. This vocabulary presented the factory as an image of technological order, productivity, and economic modernity during the Algerian War.

The records nevertheless provide limited information about ownership relations, wages, workplace hierarchy, labour conditions, or the distribution of economic benefits. They document machinery, workers, production, and market circulation but do not establish who occupied managerial and technical positions or whether Algerian workers and communities benefited proportionately from the value produced.

The Ferrero evidence consequently supports expanded valorization more strongly than asymmetric economic value capture. It demonstrates industrial scale, standardization, and commercial reach, but not how the resulting profits and authority were distributed.

4.3.3. From Algiers to Vitrolles

The foundation date of the Ferrero enterprise differs between the available sources. The 1961 ECPAD production report gives 1908, whereas the Panzani Group's corporate history dates the beginning of Ferrero couscous production in Algiers to 1907. In the absence of independent verification, the enterprise can be described more cautiously as having emerged during the first decade of the twentieth century.

According to the Panzani corporate account, Anaïs and Jean-Baptiste Ferrero transferred their knowledge and business to their sons Francis and Gilbert, who left Algeria for France in 1964 and established a factory in Vitrolles (Groupe Panzani, n.d.). As a retrospective brand history, this source emphasizes family continuity, authenticity, expertise, and entrepreneurial success and may omit conflict, ownership changes, labour relations, or political ruptures.

Used cautiously alongside the 1961 records, however, the corporate chronology identifies continuity between an industrial enterprise operating in colonial Algiers and later production in metropolitan France. The relocation involved not merely the transfer of a recipe but also industrial expertise, production practices, brand identity, and commercial experience.

The move also altered the geography of value production. Before independence, couscous was manufactured in Algiers and partly distributed to metropolitan markets. After relocation, production for French consumers could take place within metropolitan France while the brand retained an association with North African culinary knowledge.

Industrial standardization also changed the conditions of consumption. Packaged couscous transferred moistening, rolling, sieving, and drying from the consumer or household to the factory. A calibrated and shelf-stable grain could be transported, stored, and prepared by consumers without access to the complete body of knowledge historically required for its production.

This transformation constitutes selective material and cultural recoding rather than complete cultural erasure. The product retained the name and recognizable form of couscous while reorganizing the labour, time, skills, and social relationships embedded in its production. It could subsequently circulate through supermarkets, restaurants, cookbooks, canteens, and domestic kitchens and be marketed as traditional, exotic, practical, inexpensive, or modern.

Industrial couscous therefore provided material infrastructure for later mainstreaming. It did not determine how the dish would be culturally interpreted in postcolonial France, but it made large-scale circulation and repeated consumption increasingly possible.

4.4. Postcolonial Migration, Mainstreaming, and Asymmetric Recognition, 1962–2020

The postcolonial incorporation of couscous into French food culture cannot be attributed to a single population or institution. Its circulation was shaped by Maghrebi migrants and families, North African Jewish communities, pied-noir repatriates, cooks, restaurateurs, manufacturers, advertisers, retailers, journalists, and consumers. Mainstreaming was therefore neither a unilateral French appropriation of an external dish nor an uncomplicated process of egalitarian cultural exchange. Community agency, adaptation, entrepreneurship, commercial expansion, and unequal social recognition developed simultaneously.

4.4.1. Migration, Restaurants, and Negotiated Domestication

Couscous was present in metropolitan France before Algerian independence, particularly in North African migrant, religious, and communal settings. A retrospective examination of *Le Monde* archives identifies an August 1947 report on Eid al-Fitr in Paris describing restaurants serving couscous to guests and strangers. A December 1948 report stated that couscous grain, previously distributed to consumers administratively classified as North African, would become available to other consumers (Gautheron, 2020).

These examples indicate an early metropolitan presence that remained closely connected with North African populations. Wagda (1997b) similarly describes Maghrebi workers preparing food individually or collectively in workers' residences, male living quarters, and informal settlements. Couscous was

particularly associated with festive and communal occasions and was sustained through migrant knowledge and trans-Mediterranean social ties.

The social geography of the dish changed after decolonization. Pied-noir repatriates brought culinary memories, hospitality practices, and restaurant traditions from Algeria, while continuing migration and family settlement from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia expanded the communities for whom couscous remained a domestic, religious, festive, and commercial practice. North African Jewish migrants also transmitted distinct Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian preparations through households, cookbooks, restaurants, and food businesses.

These trajectories demonstrate that neither Maghrebi cuisine nor the communities transmitting couscous formed a homogeneous category. The dish circulated through overlapping Amazigh, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, pied-noir, national, regional, class, and family traditions. Attributing its French success exclusively to one group would obscure this multi-actor history.

Wagda (1997b) identifies three intersecting forces behind the integration of couscous into ordinary French consumption: the culinary practices of repatriates, the growth and settlement of Maghrebi-origin populations, and the expansion of industrial food markets. Mainstreaming emerged through the convergence of migration, memory, entrepreneurship, and commercialization.

Restaurants formed an important interface between community reproduction and wider public consumption. Restaurateurs and cooks adapted preparation, meat selection, portioning, service, price, and naming in response to neighbourhoods, available ingredients, labour conditions, customer expectations, and commercial constraints. They should therefore be treated as active producers of the French trajectory of couscous rather than as passive representatives of a fixed tradition.

Adaptation could nevertheless produce simplification. Diverse preparations associated with different grains, regions, seasons, religious communities, vegetables, and ritual settings were increasingly condensed into commercially legible metropolitan forms. The category *couscous* frequently came to denote standardized semolina, vegetables, broth, meat, merguez, and sometimes several meats combined as *couscous royal*.

Such forms should not be dismissed merely as inauthentic copies. They were new culinary products shaped by migrant entrepreneurship, pied-noir memory, customer demand, and commercial convenience. Their visibility, however, could obscure the diversity of Maghrebi practices and establish a standardized restaurant form as the version most familiar to French consumers.

This process can be described as negotiated domestication: the dish became practical, purchasable, intelligible, and repeatable within French routines without being absorbed into an unchanged national cuisine. Migrants and restaurateurs participated actively in this transformation, although their agency did not remove unequal access to capital, industrial production, media visibility, or authority over national culinary representation.

4.4.2. Media, Retail, and Culinary Mainstreaming

Industrial expansion was accompanied by new forms of media and retail circulation. By the 1970s, couscous appeared in branded convenience foods, television advertising, supermarket categories, and recipe programmes. A 1979 Antenne 2 programme presented a couscous recipe within an episode devoted to Morocco, illustrating its incorporation into national audiovisual food culture.

Advertising combined domestication with cultural difference. Some advertisements emphasized convenience, affordability, reliability, and the ability to prepare couscous without extensive culinary expertise. Others retained or intensified exotic imagery. Colvin's (2026) study of French advertising between 1970 and 2000 identifies representations involving pied-noir authenticity, domestic convenience, Orientalist spectacle, racialized difference, gendered fantasy, and eventual incorporation into recognizably French household settings.

Commercial normalization therefore did not require the disappearance of origin. Couscous could be presented simultaneously as an ordinary prepared meal and as an experience of cultural difference. Selected Maghrebi signs were retained for authenticity or exotic appeal, while histories of conquest, migration, labour, and community knowledge were less visible.

The claim that couscous became mainstream rests on convergent rather than singular evidence. Newspaper commentary, restaurant expansion, industrial production, supermarkets, canteens, television, advertising, and consumer surveys all reveal different aspects of its incorporation.

In 1975, *Le Monde* described couscous as having been relatively exotic and poorly known approximately two decades earlier but noted the rapid expansion of restaurants after the repatriation of French settlers from Algeria (Gautheron, 2020). By 1995, the newspaper referred to couscous as a popular “national” dish with an established position in canteens and consumer surveys, while continuing to distinguish between Maghrebi regional forms and commercially modified restaurant versions (Ribaut, 1995).

A 1997 article in *Hommes & Migrations* reported that consumer research placed couscous among increasingly preferred foods and identified it as an established category within the industrial prepared-meal market (Wagda, 1997a). In 2001, a CRÉDOC survey reported by *Le Monde* placed couscous third among preferred dishes, while later reports continued to rank it highly and noted its presence in school canteens and national food markets.

These rankings varied by date, wording, and sample and should not be interpreted as a fixed hierarchy. Their significance lies in the recurring inclusion of couscous in discussions of the preferences of the French population rather than exclusively in accounts of ethnic or migrant consumption.

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the dish was visible across domestic meals, restaurants, industrial foods, supermarkets, television, advertising, canteens, newspapers, and consumer-preference surveys. This evidence supports the conclusion that couscous had become an ordinary and widely intelligible component of French popular food culture.

Mainstreaming nevertheless did not eliminate its association with origin. Couscous became familiar to consumers without direct ties to North Africa while continuing to be represented through Maghrebi, Oriental, immigrant, Mediterranean, pied-noir, and exotic references. It became mainstream without becoming culturally unmarked.

4.4.3. Asymmetric Recognition and Its Limits

The mainstreaming of couscous raises a question not answered by consumption data: did the culinary value acquired by the dish correspond to proportionate recognition for the populations associated with it? Food preferences cannot be used as a direct measure of attitudes toward people. Evidence concerning social recognition must therefore be drawn from independent data on employment, discrimination, housing, institutional treatment, and belonging.

An INSEE study combining large-scale employment testing, the 2019–2020 Labour Force Surveys, and the Trajectories and Origins survey documented substantial disadvantages affecting immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb (Arnoult, 2023). Applications bearing names perceived as Maghrebi received 32 per cent fewer callbacks than otherwise comparable applications. The test involved 9,600 applications to 2,400 vacancies with equivalent educational and employment profiles.

Among people aged 18–59 who had completed their education in France, unemployment was approximately 16 per cent among immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb, compared with 6 per cent among people without a direct migration background. Approximately two-thirds of this difference was not explained by observed variations in qualifications, experience, age, family situation, sex, or residence (Arnoult, 2023).

Between 30 and 37 per cent of the Maghrebi-origin groups examined also reported having experienced unjust employment refusal, compared with approximately 15–16 per cent of the reference groups. Origin was the most frequently identified reason among those reporting discrimination. Other studies have documented perceived housing discrimination and concentration in disadvantaged residential areas, while the Defender of Rights has described origin-based discrimination across employment, housing, policing, education, health, and public services (Pan Ké Shon & Scodellaro, 2011; Défenseur des droits, 2020).

These data do not demonstrate that the popularity of couscous caused, concealed, or intensified discrimination. Nor do they imply that consumers who enjoy the dish necessarily hold prejudicial

attitudes. Culinary incorporation and social inequality are measured through separate sources and operate at different analytical levels.

Their comparison identifies a divergence. By the time couscous had become a familiar commercial product, canteen meal, restaurant dish, and recurring consumer preference, people perceived as Maghrebi continued to experience measurable disadvantages in employment, housing, and institutional treatment. This divergence constitutes asymmetric recognition: the cultural object achieved a degree of legitimacy and inclusion not matched by equivalent equality or uncontested belonging for associated populations.

The asymmetry is relational rather than absolute. Maghrebi households and entrepreneurs actively shaped the circulation of couscous, while Maghrebi references remained commercially valuable as signs of authenticity or exoticism. At the same time, people perceived as Maghrebi could continue to encounter structural disadvantages. The food and the associated populations were therefore neither accepted nor rejected in identical ways.

The evidence supports asymmetric social recognition more strongly than unequal economic value capture. Economic value accrued to Maghrebi-origin restaurateurs, cooks, retailers, writers, employees, and entrepreneurs as well as to industrial manufacturers, supermarkets, advertisers, and media organizations. The corpus does not contain sufficient ownership, wage, revenue, market-share, supply-chain, or intellectual-property data to determine how profits were distributed.

The analysis must also avoid treating “the Maghrebi community” as homogeneous. Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritania contain diverse regional, linguistic, ethnic, religious, national, class, and gendered traditions. Pied-noir involvement creates a further complication: repatriated settlers contributed substantially to metropolitan popularization, but their culinary claims developed within a settler-colonial society marked by unequal political and material relations.

The Golden Food framework does not require a culturally pure origin followed by a single act of theft. It examines how culinary value and representational authority are negotiated among differently positioned actors within historically unequal relations.

The available evidence supports a bounded conclusion. Couscous became widely incorporated into French popular food culture through migration, domestic transmission, restaurant entrepreneurship, industrial production, advertising, retail, and consumer adoption. This process involved agency, exchange, adaptation, and hybridization. Nevertheless, the cultural legitimacy achieved by the dish was not accompanied by the elimination of systemic disadvantages affecting people of Maghrebi origin.

4.5. Heritage Recognition and Reappropriation: The 2020 UNESCO Inscription

A new phase in the cultural trajectory of couscous began with its inscription on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020. Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia jointly submitted the nomination under the title *Knowledge, know-how and practices pertaining to the production and consumption of couscous* (UNESCO, 2020a).

The inscribed element was not couscous as a standardized recipe or commercially exchangeable product. It encompassed cereal cultivation, grinding, hand-rolling, steaming, cooking, utensils, transmission, communal consumption, and regionally diverse accompaniments. UNESCO also emphasized solidarity, conviviality, sharing, and togetherness as social meanings associated with the practice (UNESCO, 2020b).

This framing contrasts with industrial standardization. Whereas commercial production transforms couscous into a stable, reproducible, and transportable product, the heritage framework foregrounds the knowledge, labour, relationships, tools, and cultural settings involved in its preparation and consumption.

The joint nomination was equally significant. Rather than assigning couscous to a single national cuisine, it represented the dish as a shared and internally diverse Maghrebi practice. Regional, seasonal, communal, and technical variations were recognized, challenging attempts to reduce couscous to one homogeneous recipe, origin, or national ownership claim.

The nomination process involved communities, associations, experts, researchers, and heritage institutions, although UNESCO identified differences in the breadth of participation across the submitting states. The Committee also requested greater attention to the role of women, women's associations, cooperatives, and local organizations in safeguarding the practice (UNESCO, 2020b).

These qualifications prevent the inscription from being interpreted as a neutral restoration of cultural ownership. UNESCO recognition operates through states, inventories, nomination files, experts, and internationally standardized heritage categories. It may increase the visibility of community knowledge while simultaneously translating diverse and changing practices into an institutionally legible form.

Within this study, the inscription is therefore interpreted as postcolonial rearticulation rather than complete cultural reappropriation. Maghrebi states and participating communities repositioned couscous as a shared body of living knowledge after a historical trajectory shaped by colonization, migration, industrialization, and commercial incorporation into France. This is an analytical interpretation; UNESCO itself did not define the nomination as postcolonial or decolonial.

The inscription also reconnects the commercially circulating product with forms of knowledge that industrialization can render less visible, including grain selection, rolling, sieving, steaming, domestic labour, tools, and intergenerational transmission.

Symbolic recognition, however, should not be equated with economic redistribution. The UNESCO inscription does not establish who controls international markets, who benefits from industrial production and branding, or whether farmers, artisans, women, workers, and community bearers receive material advantages from increased visibility. It supports cultural recognition and representational agency more strongly than the resolution of unequal economic value capture.

The nomination consequently demonstrates that the meaning of couscous remains contested and negotiable. Communities and states can redefine the dish through shared heritage and living knowledge, although this process is itself mediated by national and international institutions. The inscription does not reverse every historical asymmetry, but it shows that authority over the public meaning of couscous can be challenged, renegotiated, and partially reclaimed.

5. Applying the Golden Food Framework to Couscous

The historical evidence enables the Golden Food framework to be applied systematically to the couscous case. The classification does not depend on a single instance of cultural appropriation or on the assumption that culinary circulation was controlled entirely by the French state. It requires the combined presence of power-asymmetric circulation, expanded valorization, selective cultural recoding, and asymmetric recognition.

Table 3. Evidence from the Couscous Case

Constitutive criterion	Evidence from the couscous case	Assessment
Power-asymmetric circulation	The French circulation and representation of couscous developed within a history shaped by the conquest and colonization of Algeria, settler colonialism, the Algerian War, decolonization, and postcolonial migration. Colonial exhibitions and military-administrative ceremonies placed the dish within institutions possessing unequal political and representational authority.	Supported
Expanded valorization	By 1961, couscous was being mechanically granulated, standardized, packaged, and commercially circulated between Algeria, metropolitan France, and other markets. Postcolonial migration, restaurants, industrial production, supermarkets, canteens, advertising, television, and prepared-food markets subsequently expanded its economic and cultural visibility.	Supported
Selective cultural recoding	Couscous was represented as exotic colonial food, incorporated into political ceremonies, transformed into a standardized industrial product, adapted through restaurants, and marketed as both convenient and	Supported

	culturally distinctive. Its Maghrebi associations were retained, simplified, commercialized, or reinterpreted according to context.	
Asymmetric recognition	The growing familiarity, legitimacy, and commercial visibility of couscous coexisted with measurable inequalities affecting immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb. The evidence supports asymmetric social recognition more strongly than a claim concerning the complete distribution of economic profits.	Supported with limitations

The first criterion is satisfied because the circulation of couscous occurred within historically identifiable colonial and postcolonial relations. This does not mean that every movement of the dish resulted from coercion or institutional planning. Maghrebi families, North African Jewish communities, pied-noir repatriates, restaurateurs, businesses, and consumers actively shaped its circulation. Their agency, however, operated within political, commercial, and representational fields whose conditions were historically unequal.

Expanded valorization is demonstrated by the mechanization, standardization, packaging, and widening commercial distribution of couscous, followed by its increasing presence in restaurants, supermarkets, canteens, advertising, television, and consumer-preference discourse. This transformation should not be described as a movement from an isolated local food to a global commodity. Couscous already possessed extensive regional circulation and cultural significance. The relevant change was the addition of industrial, commercial, media, and gastronomic forms of value.

The evidence also demonstrates selective cultural recoding. Couscous moved through changing classifications that included exotic, colonial, African, Arab, Moroccan, industrial, convenient, popular, and partially national food. These transformations did not completely erase its Maghrebi origins, nor were they produced exclusively by dominant French institutions. Migrant households, cooks, restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, and heritage actors participated actively in the adaptation and transmission of the dish. Recoding refers therefore to the selective reorganization of its meanings, practices, and material form rather than to the disappearance of its cultural origins.

The fourth criterion concerns the divergence between culinary acceptance and community recognition. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, couscous had acquired broad familiarity and institutional availability in France, while official data continued to identify unequal employment outcomes and higher reported experiences of discrimination among immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb (Arnoult, 2023). This comparison does not imply that couscous consumption causes, conceals, or directly reproduces discrimination. It demonstrates that the social trajectory of a cultural object may differ from that of the populations associated with it.

The evidence consequently supports asymmetric social recognition more strongly than asymmetric economic value capture. The available corpus does not permit a systematic assessment of how profits were distributed among industrial producers, retailers, restaurateurs, workers, and Maghrebi-origin entrepreneurs. Such an assessment would require evidence concerning ownership, market shares, wages, revenues, intellectual property, and supply chains.

Within these limits, the four criteria are sufficiently supported to classify couscous as Golden Food. This classification is relational rather than inherent: couscous acquired this analytical status through a historical trajectory connecting colonial power, industrial transformation, cultural incorporation, migration, and unequal recognition. The classification does not reduce its history to appropriation or victimization. Hybridization, entrepreneurship, domestic transmission, cultural exchange, and genuine culinary appreciation formed part of the same process.

The 2020 UNESCO inscription further demonstrates that authority over the meaning of couscous remains negotiable. Its recognition as shared Maghrebi knowledge and practice does not eliminate commercial or social asymmetries, but it shows that associated communities and states can contest and redefine the dish's public representation.

The couscous case therefore illustrates the central proposition of the Golden Food framework: cultural incorporation does not necessarily produce equivalent social incorporation. A food may become

familiar, commercially valuable, and partially incorporated into a national culinary landscape while the people, knowledge, and histories associated with it remain selectively recognized.

6. Discussion

The historical transformation of couscous in France cannot be explained adequately through either a conventional global-commodity model or a one-directional account of cultural appropriation. Its trajectory combined colonial power, institutional incorporation, industrial standardization, migration, entrepreneurship, domestic transmission, commercial adaptation, and heritage-based rearticulation. The Golden Food framework connects these processes through a specific analytical problem: the divergence between the value acquired by a food and the recognition extended to associated communities.

6.1. Beyond the Global Commodity Model

Mintz's (1985) analysis of sugar provides an essential foundation for understanding how colonial production, labour, capitalism, and mass consumption transform the value and social meaning of food. The couscous case extends this perspective in two respects.

First, couscous is not only an agricultural product. It is simultaneously a processed cereal, preparation technique, prepared meal, body of domestic knowledge, commercial product, and social practice. Its transformation therefore involved production and trade as well as the mechanization of embodied skills, restaurant adaptation, media representation, communal consumption, and heritage classification.

Second, the central asymmetry in this case cannot be reduced to the contrast between commodity value and exploited labour. It also concerns the successful incorporation of a dish into French popular food culture alongside the incomplete social recognition of populations associated with it.

Golden Food should therefore be understood as a mid-range framework that extends rather than rejects global-commodity analysis. Its distinctive contribution is to make the relationship between culinary valorization and community recognition an explicit analytical requirement and to accommodate culturally encoded prepared dishes alongside raw commodities.

6.2. Domination, Hybridity, and Culinary Agency

The evidence does not support an interpretation in which the French state designed and controlled the entire transformation of couscous. Colonial institutions established unequal political and representational conditions and incorporated the dish into particular ceremonies of *ralliement*. Its industrial and postcolonial circulation, however, involved a much wider range of actors.

Maghrebi migrants and families transmitted culinary knowledge; North African Jewish communities and pied-noir repatriates carried distinct memories and practices; restaurateurs adapted the dish to new commercial environments; manufacturers standardized its material form; advertisers constructed changing representations of authenticity and convenience; and consumers integrated it into everyday eating.

These actors were not equally positioned, but neither were migrant and diasporic communities passive sources from whom a dominant society simply extracted a food. The couscous case demonstrates how culinary circulation may involve adaptation, entrepreneurship, reciprocal exchange, and cultural creativity.

Hybridity nevertheless does not eliminate structural inequality. Foods may be reconstructed across households, restaurants, factories, markets, and media while authority over manufacturing, classification, advertising, and national representation remains unevenly distributed (Cook & Crang, 1996). The French trajectory of couscous is therefore better understood as an interaction between cultural agency and unequal power than as either unilateral appropriation or egalitarian exchange.

6.3. Culinary Inclusion and Asymmetric Recognition

Grey and Newman's (2018) distinction between culinary inclusion and control over gastronomic capital is particularly relevant to the findings. The presence of a cuisine in restaurants, markets, canteens, supermarkets, and multicultural narratives does not necessarily provide associated communities with proportionate authority over its representation or benefit from its value.

Couscous acquired broad familiarity, institutional availability, and cultural legitimacy in France, while independent official evidence continued to identify measurable inequalities affecting people of Maghrebi origin. This coexistence demonstrates that culinary and social incorporation are analytically distinct processes.

The finding does not imply that couscous consumption caused, concealed, or reproduced discrimination. Nor does it attribute a uniform attitude to French consumers. It shows that genuine appreciation and everyday familiarity with a cultural object may coexist with unequal employment opportunities, racialization, restricted belonging, and limited representational authority.

The evidence supports asymmetric social recognition more strongly than asymmetric economic value capture. The study documents the commercial expansion of couscous and persistent inequalities affecting Maghrebi-origin populations, but it does not contain sufficient evidence to determine how profits were distributed among manufacturers, retailers, restaurateurs, workers, and entrepreneurs. Market ownership, wages, revenues, supply chains, and intellectual property consequently remain areas for further research.

A bounded comparison with the Dutch–Indonesian case reinforces this distinction. Protschky (2008) demonstrates that Dutch colonists could consume Indonesian foods while maintaining European eating practices as markers of racial and cultural status. Both cases show that culinary appreciation need not dissolve social hierarchy. They nevertheless involve different mechanisms: the Dutch case concerns colonial identity in the colony, whereas the couscous case extends through decolonization, migration, metropolitan mainstreaming, and heritage recognition. The comparison therefore identifies a shared analytical possibility rather than a universal colonial pattern.

6.4. Theoretical Contribution and Scope Conditions

The Golden Food framework is relational rather than essential. No food is inherently Golden Food, and popularity, foreign origin, hybridity, or commercial success is insufficient for classification. Its application requires the combined demonstration of:

1. a historically identifiable structure of unequal circulation;
2. expanded economic, gastronomic, or symbolic value;
3. selective transformation of cultural meaning or representation; and
4. unequal recognition, authority, participation, or benefit affecting associated populations.

The framework is therefore most useful for foods whose historical circulation can be connected with a colonial, imperial, or centre–periphery relationship and whose value and cultural transformation can be compared with independent evidence concerning associated communities.

It should not be applied indiscriminately to every globally circulating or hybrid dish. Nor should it assume the existence of a culturally homogeneous source community or a single uncontested claim to ownership. Couscous itself involves overlapping Amazigh, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, national, regional, migrant, and pied-noir histories.

The 2020 UNESCO inscription also demonstrates that Golden Food trajectories are neither final nor irreversible. Communities and states may renegotiate the meaning of a food, restore visibility to embodied knowledge, and construct new forms of shared heritage. Such rearticulation can alter representational authority without necessarily resolving economic inequality or social exclusion.

Golden Food consequently describes neither a completed transfer between two bounded cultures nor a permanent condition of victimization. It identifies an ongoing field in which culinary value, historical memory, cultural authority, and social recognition are negotiated by actors occupying unequal but changing positions.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the historical transformation of couscous in French colonial and postcolonial contexts through a qualitative, theory-developing single-case design based on document analysis and within-case temporal comparison. Rather than presuming the existence of a continuous French policy

of culinary assimilation, it distinguished direct documentary evidence from convergent historical patterns and theoretically informed interpretation. This approach revealed a set of overlapping institutional, commercial, representational, and migratory mechanisms rather than a single linear process.

The historical evidence shows that couscous first acquired metropolitan visibility through colonial exhibitions, culinary publications, and classifications that presented it as exotic, African, Arab, or colonial food. During the Algerian War, French military records documented its incorporation into two ceremonies associated with *ralliement*, political communication, and the staging of Franco-Algerian affiliation. These cases demonstrate bounded forms of ceremonial instrumentalization but do not establish a centralized or continuous state policy.

Industrialization constituted a separate but interconnected mechanism. By 1961, the Ferrero factory in Algiers had mechanized and standardized granulation, sieving, drying, packaging, and commercial circulation. Following decolonization, migration, restaurant entrepreneurship, industrial production, retail markets, institutional catering, advertising, television, and consumer familiarity further expanded the position of couscous in French popular food culture. This transformation was shaped not only by institutions and companies but also by Maghrebi families, North African Jewish communities, pied-noir repatriates, cooks, restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, and consumers.

Within the historical scope of the study, the evidence supports the classification of couscous as Golden Food. Its trajectory involved power-asymmetric circulation, expanded economic and symbolic valorization, selective cultural recoding, and asymmetric recognition. The dish circulated through relations shaped by conquest, settler colonialism, decolonization, and migration; acquired new forms of value through industrialization and cultural mainstreaming; and was repeatedly reclassified, standardized, adapted, exoticized, and domesticated.

The principal theoretical contribution lies in the fourth criterion. The culinary incorporation of couscous developed more extensively than the institutional and social recognition accorded to populations associated with it. Official evidence of persistent origin-based inequalities affecting immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb indicates that culinary and social incorporation followed different trajectories. This comparison does not imply that couscous consumption caused, concealed, or intensified discrimination. It demonstrates that a society may value and normalize a cultural object without extending equivalent equality, belonging, or representational authority to associated communities.

Golden Food therefore extends rather than replaces scholarship on global commodities, food imperialism, culinary appropriation, gastronomic capital, and cultural hybridity. Its contribution lies in examining the production of value and the distribution of recognition within the same analytical framework. It also accommodates culturally encoded prepared dishes whose transformation involves domestic knowledge, embodied techniques, restaurant practices, industrial production, migration, media representation, and heritage politics. The couscous case further shows that cultural agency and unequal power are not mutually exclusive. Hybridization, adaptation, entrepreneurship, community transmission, and genuine culinary appreciation may coexist with unequal access to economic, institutional, and representational authority.

The 2020 UNESCO inscription demonstrates that these trajectories remain open to negotiation. By recognizing the knowledge, techniques, tools, social practices, and circumstances associated with couscous as shared Maghrebi intangible heritage, Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia repositioned the dish beyond its status as a commercially circulating product. This development can be interpreted as postcolonial rearticulation, although symbolic recognition does not itself resolve questions of market ownership, economic benefit, or social inequality.

The study is limited by the selective survival and digitization of historical records and by the institutional perspectives embedded in military, commercial, culinary, and heritage documents. The corpus does not permit a complete reconstruction of ordinary consumption, participant interpretations of colonial ceremonies, labour relations, or the distribution of profits across the couscous market. It supports asymmetric social recognition more strongly than asymmetric economic value capture and cannot

reduce the diverse Amazigh, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, national, regional, migrant, and pied-noir relationships with couscous to a single source community.

Future research should test the Golden Food framework through comparative and multi-method studies of other colonial and postcolonial food trajectories. Research on couscous would particularly benefit from company archives, trade and ownership data, labour and supply-chain analysis, and oral histories involving cooks, artisans, families, restaurateurs, and migrant communities.

The couscous case ultimately demonstrates that food circulation is neither an innocent movement of taste nor a process reducible entirely to domination. It is a field in which power, memory, labour, adaptation, value, identity, and belonging are continually negotiated. A dish may become familiar, profitable, and partially incorporated into a national culinary landscape while the people and knowledge associated with it remain selectively recognized. Golden Food provides a framework for identifying and comparing this asymmetry.

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Araştırma Makalesi

Couscous as Golden Food: Colonial Circulation, Cultural Recoding, and Asymmetric Recognition in France

Altın Gıda Olarak Kuskus: Fransa'da Sömürgeyel Dolaşım, Kültürel Yeniden Kodlama ve Asimetrik Tanınma

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Araştırmanın Konusu ve Problemi

Kuskus, çağdaş Fransa'da paradoksal bir konumda bulunmaktadır. Restoranlarda, süpermarketlerde, okul ve kurum kantinlerinde, ev mutfaklarında ve hazır yemek pazarlarında yaygın biçimde yer almakta; Fransız tüketici tercihlerine ilişkin araştırmalarda düzenli olarak üst sıralarda anılmaktadır. Buna karşın yemek, Mağrip coğrafyasıyla ve Fransız toplumu içindeki aidiyeti sürekli tartışma konusu edilen nüfuslarla güçlü biçimde ilişkilendirilmeye devam etmektedir. Böylece kuskus, üretimi ve aktarımıyla tarihsel olarak ilişkilendirilen topluluklara tanınan toplumsal kabulle örtüşmeyen bir mutfaksal aşinalık ve meşruiyet kazanmıştır. Çalışmanın merkezi problemi tam olarak bu ayrışmadır: bir toplum, kültürel bir nesneyi gündelik tüketimine dâhil ederken, o nesneyle ilişkili topluluklara eşdeğer eşitlik, otorite veya aidiyet tanımayabilir. Fransız örneği, fetih, yerleşimci sömürgecilik, Cezayir Savaşı, dekolonizasyon, göç, endüstriyel gıda üretimi ve sömürgecilik sonrası kültürel müzakerenin iç içe geçmesi nedeniyle bu ayrışmayı incelemek için özellikle elverişli bir zemin sunmaktadır.

Kuramsal Çerçeve ve Literatürdeki Boşluk

Çalışma, üç ana literatür kümesiyle diyalog kurmaktadır. Mintz'in (1985) şeker çözümlemesi, sömürge üretimi, plantasyon emeği, kapitalizm ve tüketim pratiklerinin gıdanın değerini ve anlamını nasıl dönüştürdüğünü göstermiştir. Koçtürk'ün (1966) gıda emperyalizmi kavramı, üretim, dağıtım, ticaret ve tüketim üzerindeki denetim yoluyla kurulan bağımlılığa; Said'in (1978) Oryantalizmi, mutfakların egzotiklik, ilkelik veya aşırı otantiklik imgeleriyle hiyerarşik biçimde düzenlenmesine; Heldke'nin (2003) "gıda maceracılığı" eleştirisi ile Grey ve Newman'ın (2018) mutfaksal kolonyalizm kavramı ise gastronomik sermaye üzerindeki eşitsiz denetime dikkat çekmektedir. Appadurai (1988), Bhabha (1994) ile Cook ve Crang (1996) ise yemeklerin kültürler arasında değişmeden aktarılmadığını, göç, sınıflandırma, uyarılma ve melezlenme yoluyla yeniden kurulduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ancak bu yaklaşımlar, bir gıdanın artan değeri ve meşruiyeti ile ilişkili nüfusların süregelen marjinalleşmesi arasındaki ilişkiyi tek bir çerçevede birleştirmemektedir.

Altın Gıda Çerçevesi

Çalışma bu boşluğu "Altın Gıda" çerçevesiyle doldurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Buradaki "altın" nitelemesi renge, nadirliğe, lükse, besinsel üstünlüğe veya fiyata değil; yeni ekonomik ve kültürel sistemlere dâhil olma yoluyla kazanılan yoğunlaşmış değere işaret etmektedir. Bir gıdanın Altın Gıda olarak

sınıflandırılabilmesi için dört kurucu ölçütün birlikte karşılanması gerekir: (1) *güç-asimetrik dolaşım*, yani gıdanın kendi tarihsel bağlamı dışına çıkışının tanımlanabilir bir eşitsiz güç yapısıyla bağlantılı olması; (2) *genişleyen değerlenme*, yani endüstrileşme, standartlaştırma, markalaşma, restoran dolaşımı, medya görünürlüğü veya ulusal mutfaka dâhil olma yoluyla ek ekonomik, gastronomik ve simgesel değer kazanılması; (3) *seçici kültürel yeniden kodlama*, yani anlam, temsil, hazırlanış veya sunumda gösterilebilir bir değişimin yaşanması; (4) *asimetrik tanınma veya değer temellükü*, yani kazanılan değer ilişkili topluluklara orantılı biçimde yansımaması. Dördüncü ölçüt, çerçeveyi yayılma ve meta dolaşımına ilişkin genel açıklamalardan ayıran belirleyici unsurdur.

Yöntem

Araştırma, doküman analizine ve vaka içi zamansal karşılaştırmaya dayanan nitel, teori geliştirici tarihsel tek-vaka tasarımı benimsemektedir. Kuskus, kritik vaka olarak seçilmiştir. Korpus, ölçüt temelli amaçlı örnekleme ile oluşturulmuş; ECPAD/ImagesDéfense, BnF/Gallica, UNESCO Somut Olmayan Kültürel Miras kayıtları, tarihsel gazeteler, yemek kitapları, reklamlar, kurumsal belgeler ve resmî istatistikler taranmıştır. Belgeler Scott'un (1990) özgünlük, güvenilirlik, temsil edicilik ve anlam ölçütlerine göre kaynak eleştirisine tabi tutulmuş; askerî ve idari kayıtlar tarafsız betimlemeler olarak değil, kurumsal temsiller olarak okunmuştur. *Ralliement*, "Fransız-Müslüman gösterisi" ve *action psychologique* gibi arşiv terimleri, bu kayıtları üreten kurumlara ait tarihsel kategoriler olarak ele alınmıştır. Analizde doğrudan belgesel kanıt, yakınsayan bağlamsal kanıt ve yorumsal çıkarım birbirinden ayrılmış; kurumsal niyete ilişkin iddialar yalnızca doğrudan belgeyle desteklendiğinde ileri sürülmüştür. Dönemselleştirme beş kesişen evre üzerinden kurgulanmıştır.

Bulgular

Sömürge karşılaşması ve erken temsil (1830–1954). Kuskus, metropole öncelikle gösteri, sınıflandırma ve aracılı kültürel çeviri yoluyla girmiştir. 1889 Paris Evrensel Sergisi'nde "egzotik mutfaklar" bölümünde yayımlanan "Préparation du couscous" görseli (Arène, 1889) ile Bluysen'in (1890) yemeği "pek de beyaz olmayan" ellerle ilişkilendiren anlatımı, mutfaksal merakın bedensel ve ırksal farkla açıkça eklemlendiğini göstermektedir. 1931 Sömürge Sergisi çevresinde yoğunlaşan sömürge yemek kitapları (Quérillac, Rabette, de Noter, Isnard) tarifleri aktarırken, sunum ve sofr düzenini "medenileşmiş" ölçütlere göre yeniden yorumlamıştır. 1937'de *Le Cordon bleu*'nın "ratatouille marocaine" tarifi ise melezlenmenin asimetriyi ortadan kaldırmadığını göstermektedir: kuskusun varlığı, Provans kökenli bir yemeği "Fas yemeği" olarak yeniden sınıflandırmaya yetmiştir.

Savaş, ralliement ve politik kommensallik (1954–1962). ECPAD'ın Boghni (29 Ağustos 1956, ALG 56-223) ve Loudalouze (2 Eylül 1957, ALG 57-409) fotoğraf raporları, kuskusun askerî geçit törenleri, konuşmalar, bayrak törenleri, sadakat pankartları ve psikolojik harekât altyapısını içeren törenlerin ardından topluca sunulduğunu belgelemektedir. Bu iki vaka, gastronomik asimilasyondan çok *politik kommensallik* kavramıyla açıklanmaktadır: yerel olarak tanıdık bir ortak yeme biçimi, Fransız denetimindeki bir siyasetal yakınlık temsiline eklemlenmiştir. Ancak iki vaka, merkezî ve süreklilik arz eden bir devlet politikasını kanıtlamaya yetmez.

Endüstriyel standartlaştırma. 1961 tarihli ECPAD kayıtları (ALG 61-375; ACT 6201), Cezayir'deki Ferrero fabrikasını yaklaşık 9.000 m², 200 çalışan ve kesintisiz üretim hatlarıyla belgelemektedir. Mekanizasyon, elle yuvarlama, dokunsal yargı, eleme ve ortam koşullarında kurutmaya dayalı bedenlenmiş bilgiyi tekrarlanabilir sınıai işlemlere aktarmıştır. Yıllık yaklaşık 10.000 tonluk üretimin dörtte üçü Cezayir'de tüketilmiş, kalanı metropole ve diğer pazarlara gönderilmiştir; bu da postkolonyal ana akımlaşmadan önce bir Akdeniz-aşırı ticari ağın varlığını göstermektedir. Ailenin 1964'te Vitrolles'e taşınması, yalnızca bir tarifi değil sınıai uzmanlığın, marka kimliğinin ve ticari deneyimin de aktarımı anlamına gelmiştir.

Postkolonyal göç, ana akımlaşma ve asimetrik tanınma (1962–2020). Kuskusun yaygınlaşması tek bir aktöre atfedilemez: Mağrip kökenli aileler, Kuzey Afrikalı Yahudi topluluklar, *pied-noir* geri dönenler, aşçılar, restoran işletmecileri, üreticiler, reklamcılar ve tüketiciler bu süreçte etkin rol oynamıştır. Restoranlar, topluluk içi yeniden üretim ile kamusal tüketim arasında arayüz işlevi görmüş; süreç, çeşitliliği "kuskus royal" gibi ticari olarak okunabilir standart biçimlere yoğunlaştıran bir *müzakere edilmiş evcilleştirme* üretmiştir. 1970 sonrasında reklam, televizyon ve süpermarket dolaşımı bu süreci hızlandırmış; Colvin'in (2026) çalışması, pratiklik vurgusuyla Oryantalist gösterinin bir arada

var olabildiğini göstermektedir. Buna karşın INSEE verileri (Arnoult, 2023), Mağrip kökenli adlarla yapılan başvuruların %32 daha az geri dönüş aldığını, işsizliğin %16'ya karşı %6 düzeyinde seyrettiğini ve bu farkın yaklaşık üçte ikisinin gözlemlenen niteliklerle açıklanamadığını ortaya koymaktadır.

2020 UNESCO tescili. Cezayir, Moritanya, Fas ve Tunus'un ortak dosyası, kuskusu standart bir tarif olarak değil; tahıl yetiştiriciliğinden öğütmeye, elle yuvarlamadan buharda pişirmeye, araç gereçten aktarıma ve ortak tüketime uzanan bir bilgi ve pratik bütünü olarak tescillemiştir. Çalışma bunu tam bir kültürel geri-temellük değil, *postkolonyal yeniden eklemlenme* olarak yorumlamaktadır.

Sonuç ve Katkı

Dört ölçütün de karşılanması nedeniyle kuskus, tarihsel kapsam içinde Altın Gıda olarak sınıflandırılmaktadır; ancak bu sınıflandırma ilişkiseldir, özsel değildir. Kanıtlar asimetrik *toplumsal tanınmayı*, asimetrik *ekonomik değer temellükünden* daha güçlü biçimde desteklemektedir; mülkiyet, ücret, pazar payı ve tedarik zinciri verilerinin yokluğu bu konuda temkinli olmayı gerektirir. Çalışma, kuskusun popülerliğinin ayrımcılığa neden olduğunu, onu gizlediğini veya yoğunlaştırdığını ileri sürmemekte; yalnızca bir yemeğin kültürel yörüngesi ile ilişkili nüfusların toplumsal yörüngesinin ayrışabileceğini göstermektedir. Böylece Altın Gıda, küresel meta, gıda emperyalizmi, mutfaksal temellük ve kültürel melezlik literatürlerini reddetmeyip genişleten; değer üretimi ile tanınmanın dağılımını aynı analitik çerçevede inceleyen orta-menzilli bir kuramsal katkı sunmaktadır.