Wilk (1999) Belizean Food and Culture

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Yay Good work

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Sachelle should have told you to add the page numbers as well

This article is about the role of food preferences in Belizean history and how it is directly correlated with the creation of a Belizean identity. The changes in social class and food choices throughout history demonstrate the progression of a Belize where outside influence was preferred to the current Belize where local culture is embraced.

When Belize was under control of the British government, there was a very clear hierarchy in terms of access to food. Because they could not afford expensive imports, the lower class only had access to local food, such as lobster and root vegetables (Wilk, 1999:6). Therefore, local food was undesirable to the upper class, which preferred imports from other countries for a majority of their diet. Wilk argues that this made it difficult for Belize to have its own distinctive culture, since the social stratification caused such significant differences in cuisine (Wilk, 1999:7). The fact that the social structure was built around an inherent resistance to local food made it difficult for Belizeans to have a real sense of identity.

Even after Belize was freed from British rule, locals of the high and middle classes did not support the new ideas of limited imports and increasing dependence on local food. The opposition to change showed that imports were still highly valued in society (Wilk, 1999:8). However, in modern day Belize, this is no longer the case. Food preferences are no longer determined by social class, with a majority of Belizeans preferring local foods (Wilk, 1999:9). Wilk describes an anecdote that demonstrates how Belizeans now embrace their culture by comparing two meals offered by locals in different time periods. The first was in 1973, before local culture reached the pinnacle of importance. The native people served Wilk classic American food, making it obvious that they believed someone of his stature would have no interest in consuming local food. In contrast, the second meal in 1990 had the people serving Wilk classic Belizean food in an effort to show their pride in local culture (Wilk, 1999:2). The progression of outright resistance to gradual acceptance of Belizean culture is illustrated in their food choices, both locally and in what is offered to foreigners.

Although I agree with the idea that Belize has had problems finding its own identity, I disagree with Wilk’s point that prior to the British leaving there was no national culture of Belize. Every country has its own culture, with many having outside influences due to increasing globalization. Colonialism does not deprive a country of a culture; rather, it provides outside characteristics that become blended into local culture. The idea that Belize had to wait many years to establish a culture seems implausible and even insulting. Wilk also makes the assumption that food is the most definitive aspect in classifying culture. While food is obviously important in defining a culture, there are other aspects of Belizean culture that may have been around before the end of colonialism that would give them a national identity.

Overall, this article provides a thorough account of the progression of Belizean culture and its relation to food preferences throughout history.