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Formal reception by the President of Mali, Modibo Keita, arranged for President Tito, Bamako, 25/03/1961. / Thanks to the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

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BROTHERHOOD AND UNITY AT THE KITCHEN TABLE

Food in Socialist Yugoslavia



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(DIS)UNITY IN EATING, BROTHERHOOD IN DRINKING?
AMERICAN TRAVEL WRITERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
YUGOSLAV SOCIALIST CUISINE

In 1979, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Roy Andries de Groot shared an interesting anecdote with his readers. The story began with Yugoslavia's President for Life Josip Broz Tito suddenly arriving at a small restaurant in a village in the South of France in the summer of 1979. The chef was the famous Michel Guérard, the founder of *cuisine minceur*.¹ He was just about to prepare dinner for the Yugoslav head of state when the cooks from Tito's delegation stormed the kitchen. De Groot vividly described the scene: "Soon there appeared in one of the most advanced kitchens in France – gleaming with pots and stainless steel – a motley crew." They started making dinner using methods that were "[...] unorthodox by the French standards, but the Yugoslav efficiency in preparing multicourse meals and getting them to the president in time was extraordinary."² The dish they were making was called *bosanski lonac* (Bosnian Pot), De Groot pointed out.

The *Tribune's* journalist seems to have been obsessed with this dish, which apparently represented a delicious delicacy from the East: "[...] the more I thought of that scene in Gerard's kitchen the more I pictured those earthy Yugoslav cooks weaving their magic in that elegant French kitchen, that gleaming, refined temple of modern cuisine – the more I wanted to taste *bosanski lonac!*"³

De Groot then called the Yugoslav Embassy's Office for Cultural Affairs in the United States and tried to reconstruct the Bosnian Pot recipe. Further into his anecdote, which holds more importance for this subject matter, an image of Yugoslavia emerged; the image that was supposed to, ideally, be projected to the world. Gerard managed to talk Tito into trying his specialty *foie gras*.⁴ Then, something unexpected happened: "Apparently, Tito liked it. An order came for more. Then, four more orders for four ministers. Next six orders for the six advisers. An order for the ambassador,

1 *Cuisine minceur* literally translates as "slimming cooking". It is a special method of food preparation which Guérard founded. Low in calories and yet delicious food was Guérard's successful attempt to revitalise the spa tourism of his home town, which was 500 kilometres (310 miles) away from Paris and which wealthy Parisians started to visit, due to his invention.

2 Roy Andries De Groot, "Yugoslavia's Bosanski Lonac," *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 1979, N 29.

3 Ibid.

4 An exclusive dish made from the liver of specially fattened geese.