

Today, I tried the pancakes.

They are called Moroccan pancakes
and it is a Sunday market tradition to
eat them.

People had told me about them
several times.

People I got to know while cooking
and exchanging flavours. Friends who
brought me new tastes and made my
tongue tickle.

The air is full of smells and my eyes
can't get enough of the large, wide
goods whilst queuing.

Eager for a taste, I wonder what their
names might be.

These “pancakes” are more than the dish of the same name I was raised with*

* The **Pfannkuchen** (Pfanne = pan, Kuchen = cakes) I’ve known since childhood are made of milk, flour, eggs, salt and a hint of sparkling water.

The runny dough is poured into a hot pan and fried from both sides. Sometimes, apples, cheese, ham and/or mushrooms are added while the top side of the dough is still runny.

My sisters loved them but I had never been a huge fan, to be honest. I never liked having to eat one after the other, as they really had to be eaten as soon as they left the pan. My mother would be in the kitchen most of the lunch period while we were swallowing as much as we could. Usually, it was two and a half. There was something I enjoyed about them though. I loved to spread the toppings and watch them melt and soak into the surface.

Their shape is rectangular.

Their colour, light yellow to crispy brown-yellowish. The dough seems to have multiple layers.

Just as one colour floats into the other, the texture morphs from soft to crunchy, turning each bite into an excitement.

Still trying to figure out the name of this Arabic dish, my mind wanders off to a time I was looking through images in a recipe book called “Arabesque — a taste of Morocco, Turkey & Lebanon”, in the company of a friend. He asked: ‘hey, what’s that Turkish yoghurt doing in there’? I closed the book with my finger stuck between the pages I was looking at to show him the cover, to which he responded: ‘we are not Arabs’! I looked at the book, lost for words, thinking: ‘of course you are not, why the hell did I not realise’? All this happened in the space of a minute but it hit me as a strong wake-up call. My mind further travels to a Turkish dish whose name I have only learned in the past year. I had had it several times but never came to ask for its name. I assumed people would simply call it Turkish pancake, to make it easy to pronounce and remember. If so, it would make it easier to order... also, dissolving its story of origin.

ignoring the tale that lies in the name
ignoring stories told through the dish
blind to spoken pictures
blind to stories and images unknown
because we only eat and taste in the
moment but not feed ourselves with
the back story

But this Turkish dish is called **Gözleme** and the name is revealed by its shape: Göz = eye, -le / -me = relates to the root, Gözleme = made from / with / of the eye / eye shape* .

* **Gözleme** is made of dough baked on a convex pan. As the circular mixture of flour, water and salt bakes on the one side, the other side is filled with stuffing like spinach, cheese, potatoes or meat. Other ingredients like onion and parsley are added very often. It is then folded in half and the outer corners are put together to form a semi-circular shape like an eye or a half moon. It needs to bake further until it reaches the right shade of golden-brown colour. At the end, the upper side receives a treatment with butter. By the time it reaches your hands, it is very hot and smells delicious. Usually, I burn my tongue with the first bite. I can't help but live through that burn every time I eat it. It's too enticing to resist.

Maybe the Moroccan pancakes are literally called pancakes. A thing baked in a pan. But then, their name should be French at least. But actually, I'm pretty sure they were a delicacy before the French language was forced upon Moroccan culture. Looking it up, the Internet (Wikipedia to be more precise) tells me their name is **Msemmen**. It means 'well baked' or 'well kneaded'. But I have a feeling there are many more ways to call them, many more stories to be told about them. *

* **Msemmen** is made from flour, semolina, dry yeast, salt, water and butter. First, the dough needs to be kneaded, divided into little balls and left to rest. On an oiled surface, each dough-ball is flattened to such thinness that one would be forgiven to think it would disappear, if flattened further. Then, butter and a mixture of semolina and baking soda are sprinkled on the round and fragile dough before one side is folded towards the middle. A bit more of the semolina and baking

soda mixture is sprinkled on the part which has been folded in, before the other side is laid over it. The dough now has a shape of a long rectangle with two round corners. Sprinkling and folding the round corners towards the middle is repeated until the dough acquires a square shape. The combination of folding and sprinkling cause a separation of the layers during the baking. When the square shaped dough arrives in an oiled frying pan it rises, looking like an inviting soft pillow. It can be served with sweet or savoury toppings. Since the preparation of **Msemmen** requires a lot of time and work, it's not very common to make them on a daily basis. It's a dish made in big quantities for special occasions such as family gatherings where everyone can get involved. It is eaten (just as the **Gözleme**) with hands, allowing the meal to appeal to all senses. The same ingredients and procedure can also lead to other dishes by turning the dough into different shapes. Each shape has its own name.

Inside the rectangular shape of a flat, distinctly yellow shaded and layered, crispy Msemmen, a variety of ingredients are wrapped:

- fresh cheese
- sun dried tomatoes
- baked and marinated eggplants
- pickled red bell peppers
- pickled, small onions
- marinated artichokes
- spicy olives
- dried figs
- stuffed grape leaves
- honey

Perfectly accompanies by very sweet mint tea

Sitting in the sun,
enjoying each bite,
watching umbrellas
dance in the wind.

They are meant to protect
treats and humans

but the wind has a different plan.

The troublemaker steals the scene
from the food/plants/
clothes merchants.

Umbrellas that are
sizes of small houses,
are lifted into the sky,
moving up and down
like they are ready to leave.

***Can I fly away with them,
I wonder?***

In my view are clouds and
the bright blue sky.
The kind of blue allowing you
to see things clear.
It's only there at certain times.
It's the hour of clarity.
To me, it gets more intense
the further south I go.
Looking at it at the Mediterranean,
I see blue pass from one element
in through to the other.
My eyes are incapable of
seeing any borders.

The clouds float through the air
as if the wind were a flowing river.
Stratifying stuffing/cushions/clouds.
Some closer.
Some further.
Like a dough with multiple layers.
The sun is reflected on some
of the drifting, undefined objects.
They keep changing
the luminous shape.
What they bounce off is light.
So bright that one may question
the concept of colour.

Sometimes,
when the dough
like layered air cushions
have gone
there is only
blue.

Suddenly,
the eye catches the light
shape
almost invisible.

Steady,
unimpressed by all he hustle
imperceptibly moving
Moon.

p.s.

Much later, I ask a friend about Msemmen. He tells me that indeed, the name Msemmen is only used in the region around Casablanca and that he and his family who come from Rabat call them **Rghayef**.

And that name actually has a meaning: *something buttery*.

The Moroccan pancakes we'll be eating today are called **Baghrir** = *the thousand holes pancake* and they are made of flour, semolina, yeast, salt and water.

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