**Amagwinya, vetkoek, or puff-puff?
Celebrating Heritage Day with South Africans’ favourite shared snack***By Thidziambi Abigail Sebola , a second year BConSci Hospitality Management student at the University of Pretoria. Heritage Day is celebrated annually on 24 September.*

On my way to school I would walk past at least three women selling amagwinya (vetkoek or magwinya) at a street corner. In winter my mother would wake up at 4 am to make amagwinya for us (which was exciting because of course our mothers are always the best cooks).

Amagwinya was and still is a quick breakfast for me and many other South Africans. It keeps your hands warm on cold mornings, and they are best enjoyed with savoury, breakfast-type fillings. But we also got to try a small, sweet type of fried bread dough – and I was amazed to discover amagwinya could be so sweet. Of course, I later found out this was called puff-puff, which is similar to amagwinya (but also quite different!).

Amagwinya is enjoyed daily by many. Although this tasty meal is similar to the Nigerian puff-puff, you may also know it as vetkoek, magwinya, bofort, mitake, beinye, kala or mandazi, depending on where you hail from.

Heritage Day on 24 September is the perfect occasion to take a closer look at the differences, origins and cultural significance of amagwinya, vetkoek and puff-puff, and to discuss the ingredients, preparation and consumption of these favourites of South African households across our diverse cultural groups.

Vetkoek, amagwinya or puff-puff?

Amagwinya is deep-fried dough bread, best enjoyed warm, and is loved by South Africans across cultures and using different names (‘amagwinya’ in Zulu, ‘vetkoek’ in Afrikaans, among others).

Vetkoek/ amagwinya was introduced to South Africa by Dutch settlers in the 1830s and is made with flour, sugar, oil, water, salt and yeast. It can be enjoyed as breakfast, a snack, a side dish, or even dessert. The savoury version is usually eaten with beef mince or polony (sliced processed meats), cheese and atchar (pickled mango or vegetable condiment), but it can be filled with many different meats and vegetables.

The sweet version is usually coated in sugar or filled with flavoured whipped cream, resembling a doughnut.

In cities across South Africa you will find people (usually women) at street corners or taxi ranks making amagwinya, usually in the morning, to sell to children headed to school and adults going to work. A mutually beneficial convenience for increasingly busy city lives, which often don’t allow time for families to make breakfast at home.

Puff-puff is also a deep-fried dough bread made in numerous African countries, including Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Nigeria, where it is a favourite snack and popular street food, as it originated there. It differs from amagwinya in the ingredients used: dough flour, yeast, sugar, butter, salt, water and eggs.

It is not only eaten as a snack, but at any time of the day. Puff-puff is often called “an African doughnut” and can be served in various ways: plain, coated in powdered sugar, or coated in coconut. It can also be rolled in any spice or flavouring such as cinnamon, vanilla and nutmeg, served with jam, or even paired with savoury side dishes.

And for those with a keen interest in history and heritage, and a love of travel, when you find yourself in New Orleans, Louisiana, in the United States, be sure to check out the puff-puff’s French cousin, the beignet. These tasty treats have become a staple of any visit to New Orleans, where African, French, and Creole culinary traditions merged to make them famous.

**Celebrating heritage through food**

Mention amagwinya, puff-puff or vetkoek, and Africans from various walks of life and across cultural groups will start telling similar stories about their experiences growing up. These quick, convenient and inexpensive delicacies can be prepared when feeling nostalgic and hungry for something hearty, with just a few ingredients. And even when one does not have flour in the kitchen, you can usually find it made fresh on a street corner nearby. The perfect way to celebrate our shared culinary journey every Heritage Day!

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