



# Sharing/Not-Sharing

Élodie Razy and Mélanie Vivier

## PREFACE

*To share or not to share lunch and snacks with peers at school? We decided to explore this existential issue for children in the form of a story divided into three episodes around a central character: “Little Cake”, leaving the bibliographical references until the end of the chapter. Little Cake comes from a reception centre for asylum-seekers, like some of the children in the story, whose concerns and questions it shares. Nothing has really been explained to it since it left its place of origin. There is little room for individualisation, and a kind of collective identity prevails that makes one anonymous, especially outside the centre and at school. The so-called “children of the centre” have almost the same snacks and meals every day. These snacks and meals are purchased in large quantities. As such, Little Cake is a cake among other various industrial and home-made foodstuffs. The initial “non-human perspective” featuring a “more-than-human” Little Cake as the main character allows us to show what sharing/not-sharing among children is, without specifically focusing on asylum-seekers’ children at school. Doing so during the Food2Gather project aimed to avoid*

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pointing out these children while telling their own story of sharing/not-sharing-a part of the co-written Encyclopaedia with the children entitled “*L’alimenpédie enfantine*” (<https://dox.uliege.be/index.php/s/g0plGI7runGLaAU>).

*Little Cake’s encounters with the other foods in the lunchboxes are a metaphor for the encounters of “the children from the centre” with their new peers. Moreover, if the main characters are the children who develop complex social relationships outside of adult prescriptions by deciding whether or not to share their food, the food they eat plays a central role. Placing foodstuffs at the centre allows for a better understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of school meals and snacks in French-speaking Belgium when children’s encounters with food take place.*

### **Creative Intervention #6**

*Creative interventions – should not be read as academic constitutions.*

*They explore the creative routes of thinking about food, migration, and belonging differently.*

## **LITTLE CAKE**

It is night. I have travelled a lot since I was born, but I was asleep when I arrived in this new place, and I don’t really remember the journey. I feel that everything around me is moving again and that I am moving too.

Suddenly I find myself trapped in a box with a larger cake. It is almost dark in the room where I am and I did not notice it right away. Everything happened so fast! The big cake says hello and asks me what my name is:

- My name is “Little Cake”, what’s yours?
- Guess what?
- Your name is “Big Cake”!
- No, I’m made of bread and chocolate. I’m “Chocolate Toast,” but you can call me “Toast”!

It laughs because I mistook it for a cake! I am a little bit offended and feel very small, even though I am quite long and pleasantly black. How could I have known? I thought the world was full of cakes, just like me, but of different sizes, and that they also lived in small, medium or large boxes.

Here they put a nice transparent coat on me! No time to ask why! Toast speaks to me again: “So ... we’re both in the same mess. Don’t worry, kid, it’s going to be okay.”

I don't understand it very well; Toast is trying to speak my language, but I think that it sounds strange. Toast explains that it was born in the canteen and comforts me because it is really dark in this box! I don't dare to ask it what a "canteen" is ... It continues to explain: "We are in a kind of big box which is called a house. It is there that human beings, a kind of toasts and cakes, live", Toast clarifies.

I believe that it is laughing at me again because I can hear voices that are neither the voices of cakes nor the voices of toasts. Toast sums it up:

- These human beings come from even further away than you and they have had a lot of trouble before they got here. Their home here is called an "asylum-seekers' reception centre". Here, there are rooms, toilets, bathrooms, offices, a big kitchen, a small kitchen, stairs, empty rooms, and a dining hall where everyone comes together to eat and get food, like slices of bread and chocolate spread, which are used to make chocolate toasts like me. This is the canteen, a kind of dining hall.
- But why are all these human beings here?
- They live in this house while they wait to see if they can stay in an even bigger house called a country, Belgium: they are "asylum-seekers". Asylum seeking is to ask to be protected by being housed somewhere, to be allowed to start a new life when it's impossible to stay in one's own country -or rather one's own big house (See entry "Migrer/Migrate" in *L'alimenpédie enfantine*: <https://dox.uliege.be/index.php/s/g0plGl7runGLaAU>).
- And where are we right now?
- We are in a small house within a house: the room of a family of human beings, a very small room actually, where one sleeps, drinks, plays, gets dressed, chats, and sometimes eats. This is the Alnamaher family. As with the cakes, there are single human beings, but there are also families. The smallest of the human beings are children, little cakes like you, who go to another house during the day. This other house is a school, and they learn to grow up there. In order to learn, they need to gain strength, so they bring food in a box. This is the box that you and I are in now. Its name is "Lunchbox" (See entry "Boîte à tartine/Lunchbox" in *L'alimenpédie enfantine*: <https://dox.uliege.be/index.php/s/g0plGl7runGLaAU>).

Another journey is about to begin as well as new experiences that I hardly dare to imagine because, all of a sudden, Toast and I are shaken up in the lunchbox of Tamaly, the smallest child of the family: up, down, left, right! How funny! We bump into each other, and I feel chocolate on my lips: I had to get very close to Toast. We have no choice but to share the space in this box, which I think is pretty cool! I am so tired that I fall asleep.

### FIRST EPISODE: A CLASSROOM, DISCOVERIES, AND SECRETS

A loud voice, a human being's voice, wakes me up with a jump. Toast tries to calm me down. The voice is telling the children to be quiet and to sit down. Her name is "Miss Patricia" (Toast reads me the sign on her desk because I cannot read), and she speaks strangely too: "We are in school now!", she says. Toast explains that Miss Patricia looks after the children who come here to grow up. There are many different noises that I don't recognise. Toast tells me how we got here:

- Lunchbox was put in a bag and the bag was put on a child's back and the child was put in a big box on wheels, called a van, with other children. The van went and dropped everyone off at school, the kids, the bags, and the lunchboxes, but not the parents. Parents are big human beings, adults. They stay at the centre while the children are at school. They are the ones who prepared the lunchboxes for the kids in their little house, their room.

Why are we in boxes? What is the purpose? Oh, I remember! We are the children's food that Toast was talking about! We give strength to the children who eat us when they are at school. I start to feel a little scared, but Toast calmly tells me:

- Everything is fine. We were born to be eaten by the children at snack time or at lunch, it is not something bad, it is the meaning of our lives. In the meantime, we're going to have fun!

I don't even have time to ask what the words "snack" and "lunch" mean because I'm trying to figure out what is going on. I hear low voices coming from other half-opened lunchboxes. I want to know more, I'm curious to see what's going on. The children secretly open their lunchboxes and we witness a real show. Toast knows everyone's names: Cashew

Nuts, Cherry Tomato, Sausage, Chocolate Toast, Apple, Cucumber, Salad ... We are meeting each other for the first time but I feel like we are part of the same family:

- We are the family of those who will be crunched!
- Some of us will not be crunched, they will be abandoned, Toast says.

Here, I feel fear again: to be crunched at all costs rather than to be abandoned! Anyway, I quickly forget my fear. As in a game, as not to be spotted too quickly, we all speak as quietly as possible so that no one can hear us. We all find that we speak strangely even if we understand each other more or less.

Suddenly, the children want to eat. Are they hungry? They look at each other and discreetly show the contents of their lunchboxes to their neighbours under their desks. Some make faces because they are not happy with what they have been given to eat. New, unfamiliar voices begin to call out at the children: the lunchboxes! I didn't know they could speak! They tell the children: "Wait, it's not time to eat", but some of them cannot wait. A little girl called Samara opens her box and takes out a wrapped cookie. She makes a face of disgust; she doesn't like it. She wants to trade her cookie with her friend Fiona for a carrot cake because she knows that Fiona hates carrot cake! What a disaster! Miss Patricia has seen their little trick. Samara's cookie has been taken away until playtime because it is forbidden to take food out of your lunchbox without Miss Patricia's permission. I hope that Cookie will be out of Miss Patricia's drawer soon!

After this event, everyone is quiet, including us, because we are afraid of being taken away and some, like me, are afraid of being abandoned. I listen to the lesson, and I discover that there are two other adult human beings in the class named Élodie and Mélanie. They are not teachers. They are anthropologists, and they are proposing to the children a workshop on sharing food. We all wonder what these strange words mean. Fortunately, Banana, that had been forgotten in the drawer of one of the children's desk, quickly explains:

Anthropologists seek to understand everything about more-than-human and human beings, for example, what they eat, how and where, what they feel, what their habits are... by living with them, in their village or neighbourhood, in Belgium, Mali, or many other countries (See entry: "Anthropologie/Anthropology" in *L'alimentpédie enfantine*: <https://dox.uliege.be/index.php/s/g0plGl7runGLaU>).

Banana knows this because it has listened to all of Élodie and Mélanie's workshops. On this day, they ask the children if they know the word "share" and what they think of when they hear it. The children begin to talk about what they like to share, with whom and why (Take a look at entry "Partager/Sharing" in *L'alimentpédie enfantine*: <https://dox.uliege.be/index.php/s/g0plGl7runGLaAU>).

Some explain that they don't like to share!

Suddenly, a cheerful melody can be heard in Lunchbox. Toast, who had fallen asleep, wakes up: "It's a nursery rhyme, a song for children!" It starts humming:

I like the *galette* (cake)  
 Do you know how?  
 When it is well made  
 With butter in it  
 Tra la la la lalalalère  
 Tra la la la lalalalala  
 Traa la la lalalalère  
 Tra la la lalalalala

The children discuss about the "Kings' cake" of the Epiphany, a Catholic celebration, and sing with Mélanie, Élodie, and Miss Patricia. They also talk about another story about a *galette*, "*Roule galette*", which can be heard or read in different languages: Arabic, French, Italian, Turkish, and Bulgarian! The children talk about the celebrations where human beings eat special things, such as Christmas or Eid al-Fitr, an important day in the Muslim religion where food is shared, they say. Then they tell a funny story, the one about the "*petit bonhomme de pain d'épices*", "little gingerbread man". Mélanie and Élodie invite the children: "Let's listen to it together in French".

It is a little cake, just like me! I am having fun, even if I don't understand everything, and I ask myself a lot of questions while Élodie and Mélanie invite the children to imagine how children eat in other schools around the world. In a video, Méliissa, an anthropologist, tries to understand how children in Peru eat lunch. In some parts of this country, mothers cook a meal at school and the children share it (Watch Méliissa's video about her research in Peru in *L'alimentpédie enfantine*: <https://dox.uliege.be/index.php/s/g0plGl7runGLaAU>).

Mélanie explains:

- In France, all the children who stay at school at lunchtime share the same meal prepared in a large kitchen, sitting at tables with their own plates, in a room called a dining hall, like at the reception centre: we say “eating at the canteen”.

Élodie adds:

- In some schools in India, the children cook their own food. They all eat with their hand from the same big plate.

Hmm, I think I’d like to do that if I were a human child.

Mélanie asks:

- Do you think it’s dirty to eat with your hand?
- Yessss, the children reply.

Élodie then explains:

- There are plenty of ways to eat: with your hand, with cutlery, with chopsticks, on your own plate or sharing the same plate. We often think it’s dirty to eat with our hand because we use forks, knives, spoons to eat.
- Mélanie: Do you know any food that you eat with your hand?
- Walla: Yes! chips!
- Fatimara: Toasts and almost everything else we have in our lunchbox.
- Mélanie: You’re totally right!

Élodie then tells the children that in Mali, a country in Africa where she did her work as an anthropologist, she had to learn lots of rules about eating with her hand in a proper way from a large, shared plate on the floor:

- I had to be with the mothers, young girls, and children. Before, I had to wash my right hand carefully, wait for the oldest mother to start eating, take the food from the big plate in front of me, not look at the others while eating, avoid burning my fingers by mixing a bit

of the hot sauce in the middle of the plate with the couscous flour, make a kind of small ball with this mixture, avoid dropping half of it on the floor and put the ball properly in my mouth, wash my hands and mouth at the end of the meal.

Manal, who lives in the center for asylum-seekers, then explains:

- In the room, sometimes we all eat together from the same plate with our hand, the meal that mum has cooked.

Little Cake is lost in thought: Why do we share the same plate? Why do children like to trade and share their snacks or meals? What do they say to each other when they share? Do we have to be friends to share? Or do we become friends when we share?

Little Cake saw that there were some lunchboxes that were not very full. Are there any children who get less food than others? Why is it forbidden to trade meals at lunchtime but accepted for snacks? It understands that there are a thousand ways of sharing, although the children respect certain rules among themselves, in addition to those of the adults. Little Cake begins to ask itself anthropological questions but is a little worried ... What if Tamaly wanted to trade me, or worse, divide me into pieces? My half would end up with a child I don't know. Cut in two, or more, I would be separated from myself forever. Two different mouths, different teeth, two different stomachs! Toast explained to me what it meant to be "crunched" and I think I got it. I've grown attached to Tamaly and I don't want to go with another child now. Ouch, it's getting really hot, I'm sweating, quick, "It is playtime", says Miss Patricia, another new word. It is 10:10 am. Toast tells me: "The ringing bell means 'everybody out!'"

## SECOND EPISODE: A PLAYGROUND, A "SNACK MISSION" AND TRADING

The children are on a "snack mission". Élodie and Mélanie suggested that they look at what happens in the playground during snack time, when the children feel less supervised by adults. They observe what the children do while they are eating; they discuss and explain that they are training to be anthropologists and that they are learning a lot about sharing between children: sharing a favourite snack with your best friend, sharing a



“homemade snack” that appeals to many children, sometimes even those who are not necessarily your best friends, sharing your sweets in the hope of getting one later.

Little Cake knows that children often proudly give something away without receiving anything in return. It understands that some of them hope to get something later, one day when their friend has a snack they like. Then there are the kids who don’t share: “Mum doesn’t want me to share my snack”, says Vanerie.

Little Cake gets hotter and hotter and wonders what is going to happen, but it sees that there are lots of cakes, like it or different ones, fruit too, and waffles passing from hand to hand or waiting to be eaten.

Sitting, standing, running, almost all the children are eating something. Many of them discuss their snack. The coats of the cakes, which the children call “packaging”, ends up in pockets, in bins or ... on the floor.

Little Cake was sure that it would be eaten during playtime, but in the end, it is just being traded for another snack because of the friendship between Tamaly and another child called Liana. Liana gave his friend a really nice gift: a home-made pancake! Tamaly usually has the same snacks that come from the centre. He promises that one day he will bring his friend a special biscuit that his mum buys from time to time in a store where she shops like in the country that she left and that Tamaly doesn’t remember very well.

Little Cake is thoughtful:

- I thought I was unique ... in fact, I am the twin of yesterday’s snack, the day before yesterday’s snack and the day before yesterday’s snack... the twin of Manal’s, Houamed’s, Jafroi’s, Sanah’s snack, of the children of the centre...

Little Cake finds itself in Liana’s hand: “That’s it, I’ve been traded”, and no longer understands what is going on. It witnesses a strange scene: “But why are these children fighting to get a piece of Tamaly’s pancake? Oh... because it’s very special”.

Children rarely eat such pancakes, they say, and Tamaly ends up sharing the pancake with his sister, Famala, and another child who lives at the centre, Moumed. Tamaly remembers what it was like last year when all the children in the centre were in the same classroom because they had just arrived and did not speak French. They played and ate together and

sometimes they were allowed to share their lunchbox in the classroom, but they never played with the other kids. Now it's better, they are in the classrooms with the other kids and have made new friends there. They all play together without finding that their neighbours are strange because they have all got to know each other.

Little Cake finds its new place in another lunchbox. It is not being eaten because Liana wants to keep it: But until when?

Little Cake listens to the children's discussion with Ryan and Vlad, who are learning how to become anthropologists. They don't all agree on whether it's fine to share or not: Some say it's not because of the covid 19, others because they don't have the right according to the adults' rules; some say that everyone should share because it's kind and parents as well as teachers always say that children should be nice to each other, they should share what they have... except food, the adults often say, because of allergies or because some parents are afraid that children will eat pork, which is forbidden for them, or because some parents want their children to eat what they have cooked for them, or because they think that sharing causes problems. A girl says: "Those who don't want to share are selfish". The discussion is not settled. Little Cake thinks that quarrels about food could be a good subject for anthropologists.

Playtime is over. The bell rings.

- Little Cake discovers the contents of its new lunchbox: "Hmm, it smells different and there are other ingredients than in Tamaly's lunchbox and that I don't know: it's soft, I like this new smell and this green colour! Oh, there's red too .... but what's their name?"

It has left his friend and bodyguard, Toast, and is introduced to "Cherry Tomato" and "Little Toast", in the shape of a triangle. It is covered by "Salad Leaf", "Cheese Slice", and "Meat Slice". Little Cake has trouble figuring out what they say because they all speak in different ways. It manages to understand that this lunchbox is not from the same house and that this child is not a child from the centre: "I am in the lunchbox of a child who lives in its own house, not with other families. Luckily, Cherry Tomato and Little Toast explained everything to me!"

They take turns in asking questions about the centre while speaking at the same time:

- What is Tamaly’s room like? Does he have his own room, like Liana? Liana has a chest where she keeps all her toys and sometimes she hides snacks in there! Her mum often makes cookies or pancakes for her to take to school, but she always keeps some secretly in her room, like cherry tomatoes. She loves us! Does this happen to Tamaly too? Is Tamaly’s mum always in the room with him? Is she also the one who makes his lunches and snacks?
- Toast told me that in Tamaly’s room there is his mummy’s bed, that Tamaly sleeps with his little brother in the same bed and that his sister sleeps with their other big sister. This leaves more room to play or to prepare food! Toast also told me that Tamaly hides snacks but not in the room; he leaves them in his pencil case, so that his sister cannot steal them! But he’s not allowed to eat snacks like sweets: if his mum finds them, she gets very angry, Little Cake says with a teasing face.
- And what does he do when he gets sweets?
- Toast explained to me that Tamaly often trades sweets or toys with Houamed who lives in the room right next to him. Sometimes Tamaly goes to his room, sometimes he comes to his or they play football outside, and when it’s cold, they play in the lobby. Toast also told me that Tamaly’s mum is not always in the room: she often cooks in the small kitchen, or she goes shopping, or she goes to work, or she is in Tamaly’s room with him, because his mum is his “best friend”, or sometimes she has an appointment in Brussels.

### THIRD EPISODE: SAYING GOODBYE TO LITTLE CAKE!

The bell rings for the second playtime of the day. It’s 2:10 p.m. “Am I going to be crunched”, Little Cake wonders, “or am I going to be dropped in a pocket?”

Cherry Tomato, Little Toast, and Toast left the lunchbox at noon: Liana was very hungry! Little Cake was a little sad to be alone, but its new friends were happy to get crunched and it is starting to live new experiences.

Liana played a football game that made everyone hungry: 3-1. No one has any snacks left and Liana only wants to share Little Cake with Tamaly. An argument starts between them:

- If it was still my cake, I would share it with my whole team because everyone played well, even though we lost!

- Yeah, but they're not all my friends!
- Yeah, that's true ... but they are our football friends. We can share with them anyway!
- Well, ok, but I'm the one who gets to cut the cake.
- It's up to you.

Everyone gets a small piece, but Tamaly is proud that his cake is appreciated, even though it was no longer his. Little Cake is happy too, because now it feels unique and useful. Its fear of being abandoned or separated into a thousand pieces is gone. After all, when you are a little cake, do you have any other reason to live than to end up crunched and to please so many children at the same time?

*As the three episodes of Little Cake's story show, through the narration of its experiences, discoveries, feelings, and social interactions, the food journey of asylum-seekers' children at school is not an easy task. However, it is a way for children to position themselves at the intersection of the rules established by adults and carried out by the children on the one hand, and the spaces of expression of a kind of agency, on the other. In this way, asylum-seekers' children navigate by contributing to the construction of a children's foodscape with their new classmates.*

### *Connected Concepts*

Children's Agency, Conviviality, Ecology, Forced Migration, Gift, Material Culture, Neighbourhood, Public Spaces/Public Foodscapes, Sense of Home & Vulnerabilisation, Taste.

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