



Let them eat cake

In the first of a new column, mum-of-five **Gillian Harvey** reflects on the highs and lows of life with bilingual, cross-cultural children



“Mummy, don’t read it to me in French, I want you to read it in *anglais!*” whines my six-year-old daughter, Lily, as once again, we attempt to read her weekly library book.

She hates it when I speak French - partly because I don’t sound like ‘her mummy’ and partly because I don’t sound... well... particularly *French*.

As I struggle through the book, translating a French story about four rats into English (which is both as easy and fun as it sounds), I can’t help but reflect on the other moments when it’s been brought home to me that I’ll never be quite as ‘French’ as my children.

When it comes to food, for example, as much as I like to think I’ve adopted a more continental diet, quaffing coffee and a *pain au chocolat* for breakfast and lacing my *haricots verts* with vinaigrette, sometimes the pull of certain traditional British treats is just too strong.

This time of year, I tend to crave butter-drenched hot cross buns, and the kind of Easter treats my mum used to make:



chocolate cake garnished with Mini Eggs, or rich, golden fruit cake with marzipan and icing. And, although we enjoy a traditional French Easter lunch of roast lamb, I can’t resist adding the British favourite of mint sauce (a complete ‘*non-non!*’). Unfortunately, as even larger supermarkets in my area often only stock a minuscule (and often bizarre) selection of ‘British favourites’ in their ‘specially

Union Jack’ sections, the only option since our move has been to roll up my sleeves and bake.

Although I’m hardly France’s answer to Mary Berry, I’ve learned to make a mean Victoria sponge, have mastered the art of the chocolate fudge cake and - despite two soggy-bottomed, bin bag-splitting ‘fails,’ have even managed to somehow produce a half-decent carrot cake.

Sadly, even when my culinary attempts succeed, my *Franglais* little ones turn their noses up at many British favourites. I’ve lost count of the number of trifles, gingerbread



men and scones my long-suffering husband and I have had to wade through after the children have recoiled in horror at the dinner table.

So our Easter day feast will consist of a roast with all the (British) trimmings, a *gâteau de Pâques* from our local *pâtisserie*, a heavy doorstep of home-made fruit cake, and, of course the obligatory eggs (chocolate, I find, is something that transcends culture).

In short, we’ll have our cake, and eat some *gâteau*, too.

Having kids who are slightly culturally different to yourself is both a blessing and a curse. On good days, they’re your bridge between Blighty and your new French home; on bad ones they remind you that you’re dipping your toe into uncharted waters.

And, as for my accent, while Lily might sometimes comment, “That was really good mummy, but it wasn’t quite *français*,” on a bad day, she will simply roll her eyes with the kind of incredulous despair more befitting of a 15-year-old.

It’s enough to drive me straight to the cake tin. **LF**

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