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THE INTERTWINING BETWEEN FOOD, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY: THE CASE OF THE IGBOS IN DIASPORA.

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SANTRAUKA

Maistas mums yra ne tik kasdienė reikmė, bet ir svarbi identiteto dalis. Šio tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti sąsajas tarp maisto, atminties ir tapatybės nigeriečių kilmės Igbo genties atstovų diasporoje. Vadovaujantis šia tema siekiama ištirti, kiek masto vartojimo įpročiai rodo pastangas išlaikyti tradicines kulinarines vertybes diasporoje.

Šio tyrimo teorinis pagrindas paremtas kultūriniu tapatumu, antropologiniu požiūriu į maistą, migracijos studijomis, globalizacija ir hibridiškumu; parodoma, kad kultūrinis tapatumas yra labiau kintantis nei statiškas. Kaip svetimoje šalyje gyvenantys Igbo bendruomenės nariai įtvirtina ir kuria savo tapatybę per savas kulinarines tradicijas globalizacijos akivaizdoje?

Remiantis ankstesne literatūra ir keturis mėnesius trukusiu etnografiniu lauko tyrimu, kurio metu naudotas dalyvaujantis stebėjimas, pusiau struktūruotais ir nestruktūruotais interviu, ir pasakojimais apie maistą, išryškėjo sunkumai su kuriais susiduria tyrimo dalyviai, ir jų atsparumas siekiant išlaikyti savo maisto kultūrą globalizacijos akivaizdoje. Per maisto gaminimo ir valgymo ritualus pastebėta, kad maistas sukelia prisiminimus ir formuoja kultūrinį tapatumą, yra svarbus elementas socialiniuose santykiuose su šeima, draugais ir bendruomene.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad, nepaisant iššūkių, susijusių su akultūracijos spaudimu ir ribota prieiga prie tradicinių ingredientų, Igbo bendruomenė išlaikė kultūrą valgyti ir valgyti be "skrupulų", sekant idėją „esi tai, ką valgai“. Maistas atlieka simbolinį vaidmenį išsaugant ir tęsiant Igbo bendruomenės istoriją ir yra labai svarbus kuriant asmeninę, socialinę ir kolektyvinę atmintį, įtvirtinant, kad maistas yra kultūrinės tapatybės simbolis. Apibendrinant galima daryti išvadą, kad maistas yra stiprus kultūrinės raiškos, socialinės vienybės ir kolektyvinės atminties bei tapatybės išsaugojimo įrankis Igbo migrantų bendruomenėse Atlantoje ir Europoje.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: maistas, diaspora, migrantai, maisto būdai, kulinarija, kultūra, tapatybė, tradiciniai, ritualai, praktika, išsaugojimas.

SUMMARY

Food is not merely for sustenance but deeply a part of who we are. The aim of this study is to gauge the association between food, memory, and identity among the Igbo tribe of Nigerian origin in diaspora. Guided by a central theme that seeks to determine the extent to which consumption patterns are indicative of an effort to maintain traditional culinary values in diaspora. The theoretical framework used in this study is based on cultural identity and from the perspectives from Anthropologists on food, migration studies, globalization, and hybridity it is illustrated that cultural identity is more fluid than static. How do Igbos in foreign land affirm their agency in promoting and constructing their identity through culinary traditions amidst the tenets of globalization?

Through a repertoire of previous literature on food and four months of ethnographic fieldwork using participant observation, semi structured/unstructured interviews, and food stories, the study brought to fore the difficulties and resiliency faced by participants in maintaining their food culture vis-à-vis globalization. Through the rituals of cooking and eating, the role of food is seen to evoke memories and shape cultural identity, negotiate social relationships with family, friends, and community.

The results indicated that, despite the challenge of acculturation pressure and limited access to traditional ingredients, the Igbo community upheld the culture to eat and eat without ‘qualms’, signifying the idea that "you are what you eat." Food plays a symbolic role in the preservation and continuity of the Igbos and is essential to the construction of the personal, social, and collective, memory affirming that food is a cultural badge of identity.

Conclusively, food serves as a potent conduit for the transmission of cultural expression, social cohesion, and the preservation of collective memory and identity amongst the Igbo migrant communities in Atlanta and Europe. The study concludes with recommendation to stakeholders for policies and activities that support the preservation of cultural heritage and intercultural communication aimed at fostering diversity.

Keywords: Food, Diaspora, migrants, foodways, culinary, culture, identity, traditional, rituals, practices, preservation.

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INTRODUCTION.

"Food looks like an object but is actually a relationship." Amideo, E. (2022, p. 63). It is the key to the very essence of life and is regarded as the highest on the scale of human wants and needs (Obayelu, 2010). Besides its fundamental role in influencing our ability to survive, flourish and learn (Morduch, 1995) it holds profound significance as a cultural artifact, serving as more than mere sustenance but as a cornerstone of identity, memory, and social cohesion within communities worldwide. humans are active in the process of food provisioning we decide which species to cultivate which animals to raise and kill how to prepare various ingredients and when and with whom we take them into our bodies but food is more than sustenance it's also deeply a part of who we are food is a part of many of our religious traditions like the Christian communion wafer or Buddhist food offerings or matzo ball soup on Jewish holidays food is tied to many of our secular traditions as well think for example of eating cake on birthdays or turkey on Thanksgiving food can play a symbolic role in many of our most important social movements both the Boston Tea Party and the Arab Spring were incited by conflicts

In the case of the diaspora, where individuals and groups navigate between homeland traditions and the influences of their new environments, food takes on added importance as a symbol of cultural heritage and a means of negotiating identity. This study attempts to examine the significance of food in the representation of culture, evoking memory and identity formation using the Igbo diaspora ethnic group traditions such as the yearly marking of their cultural rituals and seasonal calendric ceremonies which include the new yam festival, the breaking of kola nuts, etc.

By employing the qualitative research methodology of participant observation, semi structured/unstructured interviews, food stories and nostalgic memories, my goal is not only to ascertain the importance of food to identity formation and culture, but equally to unravel the meaning to some seemingly mundane rituals used by the Igbos in diaspora in reviving memories and construct home in diaspora. It seeks to glean from 'Ndi'igbo' migrants how one uses one meal past to recall another in the present?

Statement of Problem: People build their identity from the things they like and tend to make meaning of those things. Despite the bourgeoning scholarly literatures on food studies, there is a gap in the exploration of the unseen facets of the cultural import within some unassuming mundane substance involved in the preparation, presenting and consumption the Igbos attached to their eating culture thus, offering a new dimension on the relationship between food, memory and

identity. I will in this research endeavor to address the gap by investigating how the Igbo food and eating culture contribute to the construction of identity. Thus, in order, to investigate the problem, the following research questions below are raised:

Research Questions:

1. How does food act as a mnemonic in evoking things past to the present?

2. What are the strategies employed in the preservation and continuity of their cuisine amidst the influence of their host environment?
3. In what ways does food help as a tool for negotiating social relationships with family, friends, and community in the diaspora?

4. What is the impact of globalization to the food rituals of the Igbo.

Aim of the study: To elucidate the eating culture, preferences, and rituals using the framework of cultural identity as the migrants persevere to sustain their foodways and culture.

Goal and task: The goal is to understand how foodways contribute to the construction and negotiation of individual and collective identities within the diasporic context. To achieve this goal, the following tasks will be implemented:

1. To conduct ethnographic research to analyze the food practices and culinary traditions of the Igbo ethnic group in diaspora.

2. How individual or collective memories are stimulated through eating and its significance in identity formation of the Igbo migrants in diaspora.

3. To highlight the tactics used by the Igbo migrants to practice their foodways and preserve their cultural heritage.

4. To find out the social dynamics associated with the food practices in the study area.

5. To ascertain the degree of the effect of globalization on the food and eating culture of the Igbos in diaspora.

5. To provide insights and recommendations for cultural preservation efforts and community engagement initiatives aimed at fostering a sense of belonging and cultural pride among the Igbo diasporas.

Interest in research: My interest in researching on this topic was birthed on March 4th, 2023, in an African Restaurant called Tastee Afrikana in Georgia, USA. I went to this restaurant that evening to eat Nkwobi with a cousin of mine who is a frequent diner at Tastee. At this time, I was enrolled in a food class and had been introduced to the many attritions of food, thus the ethnographer in me was awakened. I began to view food in a whole new way. As I sat in the restaurant observing the activities, people kept trooping into place orders for eat in as well as to go. Seeing the visceral effect food has on the diners, the atmosphere in the restaurant being that of camaraderie got me interested. The act of commensality sparked off my interest in exploring the role of food in cultural preservation, social cohesion, identity formation amongst others**.** Another intriguing aspect was seeing four friends with good careers in healthcare and the likes, do take orders from not only bachelors or men whose wives are not living with them but from fellow women to prepare Nigeria dishes in their homes as a side hustle (job).

Structure: This academic paper will include five chapters. The first is the contextual background of our case study – the Igbo eating culture. Chapter two will delve into the literature and theoretical framework while chapter three is the methodology employed, the method of data sampling, collection, data gathering and description of analysis, the ethical principles and subjectivity of the study. Chapter four is the analysis of data, and presentation of the results of the research, thus answering the research questions. And lastly, the study concludes with discussions of the results, and recommendations to future researchers on food and diaspora.

Use of terms: In this research, the terms diaspora and migrations are used frequently and interchangeably most times denoting the same meaning so as to ease the flow of the prose and avoid the err on the side of too much repetition.

CHAPTER ONE.

BACKGROUND TO STUDY.

This background is essential for contextualizing the cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions of the foodways of the Igbos in diaspora and provides the framework to understanding the meaning of food to the Igbo culture. Amongst the 371 ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo tribe located in the Southeast of Nigeria, is one of the three major ethnic groups popularly known as WAZOBIA (Yoruba -Wa, Hausa- Zo and Igbo -Bia) literally meaning 'come'. With a population of about 40 million people out of Nigeria estimated population of 227,645,915 (world population review, 2024). The Igbo community collectively embraces a unique culture anchored in a shared language, shared institutions, and shared religion of Christianity. The Igbos are said to be home bound, tied to their traditions and heritage. Menkiti, I. (2018), portends that the phenomenal concept of 'Aku luo uno' meaning 'wealth reaches home' is sacrosanct to any Igbo person.

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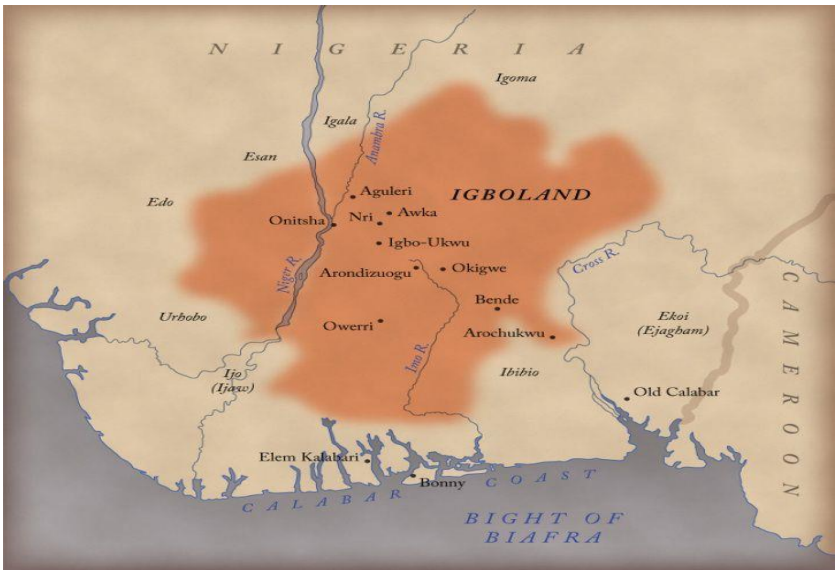


Figure 1: Map of Igbo region

1.1. Igbo food culture.

"*Ndi mba ozo na-azu na-anwu n'aguu." (People who depend on foreign food eventually die of hunger)*[1]*. Igbo popular saying*.

Another popular adage in Igbo tribe and generally in Africa, being one of the commandments laid down to every mother to their daughters is "the way to a man's heart and pockets is through his stomach" and this is true of most Igbos wives, mothers wherever they reside. To an average Igbo man food is not necessarily a means of living but encapsulate symbolic status like power, honor, solidarity, and prestige as well as the culinary the sensory aspects which seems to be quite significant to them. Taste is prioritized thus the reason why being a good cook is an important requirement for a 'wife material' in Igboland. It is said that it is a taboo for a girl child from Igbo tribe not to know how to cook from an early age of 12.

Their culture is ingrained in their beliefs, customs, and agricultural traditions. (Okoye, 2010). The Igbo region is richly endowed with good agriculture land which produces a lot of staple crops, such as yams, cassava, plantains, cocoyam's, vegetables and more. Staple foods such as yam, cassava, and plantain form the basis of many traditional dishes, which are often prepared communally and consumed during cultural celebrations and ceremonies (Onwuka, 2015). As portrayed in Chinua Achebe's (1958) yams hold particular significance in Igbo culture, symbolizing wealth, fertility, longevity, and social status. The yearly yam festival known as "Iwa ji ofuo," is celebrated every August all over the world serving as a unifying force, bringing families and communities together to celebrate their rich cultural heritage. Regarded as the paramount ceremony of the year for the Igbo community, the rituals are launched by the eldest man in the village, the reigning monarch, or a distinguished titleholder.

[1] https://www.fao.org/3/i0370e/i0370e13.pdf



Figure 2: Picture of a new yam festival

The ceremony involves the roasted yam before it is shared for everyone to eat. Picture supplied by Igbo Community Association (ICA)

1.2. Demography of Igbo and Geographical Distribution in Diaspora.

The Igbos who are referred to as 'Biafras' occupy five out of the thirty-six states in Nigeria namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Igbo diaspora communities are dispersed across the world, with United States having a higher percentage followed by Cameroon, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Canada, the United Kingdom etc. see Figure 3 below:

Regions with significant populations	
Nigeria	38,088,096 (18..2% of total population)[2]
United States	282,000[3][4]
Cameroon	114,000[5]
Ghana	72,000[3]

Equatorial Guinea	69,000[3][4] [2]
Canada	9,035 (2021)[6]
United Kingdom	8,000[3]
Gambia	7,700[3]
Estonia	152
Languages	
Igbo, Igboid, Nigerian Pidgin, Nigerian English	
Religion	
Christianity, Omenala/Odinala[7]	
Related ethnic groups	

1.2. Socio-economic characteristics: Igbos are well-known for their entrepreneurial endeavors, both within Nigeria and around the world. There is a saying that "If you go to any village or community without seeing an Igbo man there, then run as far as you can because the village cannot brew any profitable endeavor." [3]It means that, no matter how remote, poor, or unhabitable a place is, an Igbo man will feel at home there, establish businesses and fare well in it. "Where others might see chaos, Nigerians see opportunity" [4] . Many Igbo migrants are highly educated professionals working in fields such as medicine, engineering, academia, and entrepreneurship. However, there are also individuals engaged in manual labor, retail, and service industries.

Socially, the Igbos look for the slightest reason to celebrate or party in which they showcase a wide array of food, drinks, and fashionable attire and regalia. They often form cultural organizations, social clubs such as the renowned 'People's club of Nigeria' which is an elite club

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo_people
[3] Author unknow. State is used generally in by other tribes in Nigeria as well as in Cameroon to describe Igbos temerity and enterprising nature.
[4] https://www.ft.com/content/ca39b445-442a-4845-a07c-0f5dae5f3460

originating from the Eastern part of Nigeria and is now represented in all the states of the US with the headquarters being in Onitsha, Anambra State, of Nigeria. These organizations play a role in organizing events, gatherings, and initiatives related to food and cultural preservation.

In summary, the demography of Igbo diaspora communities is characterized by geographical dispersion, diverse socioeconomic profiles, multigenerational composition, cultural and religious diversity, and strong family ties. These demographic factors shape the ways in which food serves as a vehicle for culture representation, identity negotiation, and community building among diasporic Igbo populations.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIZING FOOD AND IDENTITY.

In this chapter I will highlight some scholarly perspectives and existing literature relevant to the study of food and culture. The review is structured to explore major themes such as the part memory plays in identity negotiation, the preservation of migrant's food culture while in a diaspora; food as a tool for negotiating social relationships amongst family, friends and community, and the impact of migration on food practices and sustainability.

2.1. Cultural identity framework.

I will start with the rhetorical question of "what is culture? Is culture monolithic or fluid? This question will be analyzed as I progress in this study. The science of culture is very broad and so is the definition. To proceed, I will draw some analogies from the works of some Anthropological perspective on cultural identity. Hall (2015), Brah's (1996), opines that identity is not fixed or essential but rather constructed through a continuous negotiation between different cultural influences such as one's upbringing, interactions with others, histories, and experiences. They emphasize the fluidity and hybridity of identity. This concept is also illustrated in Bhabha's (2012), "third space" which refers to the liminal space that develops from the interaction of subordinate and dominant cultures, where new subjectivities, identities, and cultural expressions are created.

Glick-Schiller (1995), Malkki's (1995) works also inspires contemplation on the complexities and fluidity of identity emphasizing that identities are constructed and negotiated. And according to Boas (1998) cultural identity places a strong emphasis on cultural relativism, this ideology recognizes that meanings and practices are culture specific depicting that the theory of diffusion makes it easier for culture of one region to be transferred and fused in another region far apart while, Mooney, Knox, and Schacht (1997) delineate culture to represent ways of life that symbolize a society. It highlights the symbolic and interpretive nature of Anthropology which is to analyze how people give meanings to their reality and how this reality is expressed by their cultural symbols.

2.2 Migration and Politics of Identity.

The cultural ties between migrant communities and their home countries origin have been studied lengthily as the subject of transnational kinship networks arose in the 90s (See Glick Schiller 1995), Safran (1991) studies of migration related communities argues on the multidimensional nature of diasporic identities and encounters of leaving their home country for another as a ‘linear’ process. This notion is in tandem with Baumann's (1997) viewpoint on transnationalism and migration emphasizing vibrant, diverse, and social configurations of diaspora communities. Baumann stresses the continuous processes of identity negotiation, cultural adaptation, and transnational contact that shape diasporic experiences rather than seeing migration as a one-time event. Hollinger (1995) theory of the ’hyphenated identity’ of immigrant, contends that some migrants may choose to assimilate into the dominant culture, while others may maintain a strong ethnic identity.

Vertovec (2009) pioneers the notion of "super-diversity," emphasizing the complex nature of modern-day migration and its effect on cultural associations. Migrants often develop hybrid identities, combining elements of their home and host cultures, leading to the emergence of new cultural expressions. Sidney Mintz and Arjun Appadurai study the global movements of food and the resulting transformations in food landscapes gives a subtle distinction on migration focusing on the encounters of diaspora populations. Similarly, Gabaccia (2000), Glick Schiller, (1995) & Salazar, (2013) scholarship gave insights on the ways immigrant communities modify and adapt their customs to new settings, illuminating the fluid nature of foodways in the context of diaspora and globalization.

The study will examine the ways in which globalization has affected local cuisines in the diaspora. Appadurai (1996), established the concept of "scapes," which provides a framework for understanding the ‘fluid’ and linked character of global cultural movements, including the movement of food. Through the lens of "scapes," Appadurai investigates how, in the age of globalization, food circulates as a component of larger cultural exchanges and encounters. He emphasizes how food shapes social norms, cultural identities, and economic relationships in a variety of settings, highlighting the fluid and contentious nature of international food movements.

The study of food and eating is an area that has been broadly studied in the field of anthropology with room for more exploration. Empirical data proposes to position “food as a powerful lens in which to question larger-scale sociocultural change over time and its significance as a symbol in evoking memories”. (Bestor 2004; Cinotto 2013; Ho 2018; Khan 2016; Leitch 2003; Paxson 2006; Pollock 1992; Sutton 2001; Sheng 2018, Trubek 2008, 2017; Van Esterik

2006; Whitelaw 2006). Anthropological studies have highlighted the ubiquitous nature of food, emphasizing its symbolic social, and economic dimensions (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). Food not only serves as sustenance but also as a means of communication, expressing cultural values, beliefs, and social hierarchies (Korsmeyer, 2005). Similarly, Murcott, (2005) posits that food is an expression of identity as she emphasizes the notion that the classifications of national character are couched in terms of typical national diets. Geertz (1973), explores the symbolic roles that rituals and symbols play in cultural identity formation stressing the social unity and togetherness of "we-ness" (us and them.) His analysis depicts how rituals and symbols within a community serve to express cultural values, uphold social order, and convey messages regarding the identity and perpetuity of the ethnic boundary and community.

2.3. Recalling the past through food.

I would like to start the romance between food and memory with this metaphorical question by Abarca, and Colby, (2016 p.1). Which I find intriguing "What is it about food memories that shape the narratives of our lives?" And "how do people use one meal to recall another." Sutton (2010, p 2). I find these questions thought-provoking as I seek to gauge the triangulate relationship of food, memory, and cultural identity. Austin Clarke, (1999) culinary memoir expresses a relational sense of cultural belonging by evoking a "taste of home" within the diaspora context as he narrates the Barbadian food of his heritage from the perspective of someone straddling both diasporic and cultural thresholds. Likewise, Gregory, in full accord to Mauss (1982) views in food as reciprocity supported this notion. Munn also theorizes food as a powerful medium of memory because it internalizes the debt to the other (Battaglia 1999)

Drawing on ethnographic examples from diverse cultural contexts, Sutton (2001), illustrated the ways food acts as a powerful mnemonic device, evoking memories of past experiences, people, and places. He contends that some foods become imbued with personal and collective memories, shaping individual and group identities and how a certain food prepared during festive seasons may evoke memories of family gatherings reinforcing a nostalgic emotion. He asserts that food does not only evoke individual or collective memory but also 'social' memory which some scholars opined that the topic of social memory faces challenges due to ambiguity in definition and theoretical development. (Climo and Cattell, 2002; Golden, 2005; Holtzman, 2006) cited in Sutton, (2008, pg. 157). Halbwachs (1992), Connerton, (1989) posits that the fundamental principle of the epistemological model of collective memory is that memory goes beyond the realm of the

individual’s mind and its personal recollections of the past and might be seen as a continuously developing collective social object.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, (2010) in the Settler’s Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration and food highlights the place of food as a form of anchor, establishing a link to one’s country of origin of rootedness in the land of residence as cuisine serves as a repository of collective memory, preserving cultural traditions and reinforcing a sense of ethnic pride. Machado. E, and Domitrovich, M. (2007) in his memoire in an ‘Exile’s Hunger for Home’, narrates how food became his solace transporting him back home. For many migrants, the smell of familiar foods encodes "an entire semiotic system of political, cultural, and social significations" (Mehta 2005:24)

2.4. Food delineated as a social marker.

In this sub chapter, the role of food as a social marker and class distinction is aptly captured by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital highlights that “taste shapes the class culture and shapes, but class culture turns into nature or naturalized” (1979 p 75 -76), positing that taste shapes perceptions of ‘self and otherness’. Lupton, (1996), sheds insights on how food intake intertwines with wider issues of hierarchy, prejudice, and social transformation in contemporary society. Additionally, food can be a medium of controversy as people navigate their identities in response to shifting social perspectives, Warde, (1997) equally posits that food performs the role of social construct binding people together fostering social relationships, as well as inequality in societies. Similarly, Smith, (2004) work gives an interesting scenario of the role of food as a determinant in class stratification, power dynamics, and identity formation amongst the Igbo people. Smith recounts that the variety and quantity of food provided in an Igbo party determines the social strata of the celebrant. He also posits that VIPs in Igbo ceremonies are served with the choicest meals with more meats than the people in the general group.

2.5. Commensality, Belonging and Cultural Sustainability.

Commensality is made up of co- which means sharing and “mensa” means a table, literally translated as ‘sharing a table’, is the act of dining together or sharing of meals. In line with the concept propounded by the theorists of cultural identity, people form a sense of belonging and identity from their correlation to a particular social or cultural group, shaped by shared experiences, traditions, and values. This can be referred to ‘mutuality of being’ creating a strong bond that binds them together. As posited by food anthropologists Sutton, ref in Grasseni, (2016, p. 207), “food constitutes a vital aspect of cultural continuity, serving as one of the numerous rites of passage that contribute significantly to reinforcing the societal norms we embody. Similarly, Appadurai, (1988) theorizes that by preserving and sharing traditional culinary practices, diasporans maintain a connection to their cultural roots and affirm their cultural identity.

Williams-Forson study on cultural preservation “I Haven't Eaten if I Don't Have My Soup and Fufu" (2010 p 1), postulates that cultural sustainability is a significant wheel of advancement, going beyond mere economic development to incorporate a more “fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual livelihood”. Williams-Forson (2010 p 3), The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity launched by UNESCO, outlined that “culture encompasses "modes of life," traditions, and beliefs, of which food and food habits are a part”. This reinforces the significance of food in cultural diversification which ‘is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature”. UNESCO, (2001), ct. in Williams-Forson (2010 p 3).

As seen from the above repertoire of literatures, food studies have garnered significant scholarly attention as numerous theorists depict that it is a powerful tool for the expression of cultural identity through culinary practices and dining rituals. With the enrichment of these well-wrought out and insightful scholarly works which invariably has armed me with the knowledge needed in retrospect, I will now enter the field. According to Mead, ethnographers should be cautious of the potential danger to “get stuck” and “attracted by the inexhaustibility of the task “(1970:258),

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this chapter I will present the research design and methodology chosen detailing where, how, and when. The methodology will describe the method used in data collection and presentation which is "the means and methods of doing something (Mouton 1996, p.35). It encompasses the theoretical framework used and the approach guiding my research process. While the method used here will include participant observation, interviews, focus groups, visual etc.

Scope and duration: Initially my intention was to carry out my field work in Atlanta Georgia but on a second thought, I decided to do a preliminary field work at an Afro shop in Basel with the aid of an Erasmus grant that afforded me the budget to travel to Switzerland. This decision, as I found out later paid off because my second fieldwork site in Atlanta Georgia presented the challenge of budget. I did not have the luxury of a grant and Atlanta's transport network leaves a lot to be desired for someone without a personal car. I had no choice but to engage in the use of 'Uber' taxis. However, having conducted the initial fieldwork at the Afro markt in Basel, Switzerland, it made it easier for me to focus on the cooking and eating culture having initially participated and explored the Igbo shopping experience on foodstuffs. It is worthy to note that some data were gotten from two students in Canada and a chef from Maryland.

The duration of my fieldwork in Basel was six weeks from July 2023 to August 2023 while my fieldwork in Atlanta was almost eleven weeks from the 20th of January to the 10th of April. Thus, the reason for the wide margin in my data presentation which seems to be a bit polemic as more of the voices of those in Atlanta Georgia were heard. Another reason for this gap is the fact that the Afro shop does deliver foodstuffs to their clients at home thus fewer walk-in customers. Though my main fieldwork was carried out between the time frame above, A few of my data dates to the first quarter of 2023 when I began to nurse the idea of investigating the immense attachment to food and culture by the Igbos.

3.1. Sampling of research participants.

Though I sought to use purposive **s**ampling as the source of my principal data whereby participants were chose based on the need of the study because their profile fit and were suitable to provide sufficient source of data related to the research (Grinnell, Jr, 1993), I also used opportunistic sampling with most of the participants coming in as walk in customers in both sites of my participant observation. The purposive participants included the director of Afro-Mark Bassel, two chefs from Tastee Afrikana, four Igbo women from the 1st generation, while the opportunistic sampling included fourteen diners from diverse African tribes, four young adults in their twenties from the 2nd generation (Three of which are international students) and three teens who migrated with their parents and have been in the US for seven years at the time of the interview. Participants agreed to take part with little persuasion but insisted against my taking their pictures.

3.1.1. Entering the field: Before entering the field sites, a pilot phase was booked so I can have some theoretical sensitivity that would aid me to understand the terrain, [Glaser 1978] and obtain contact information on potential respondents. While in the field, I was submerged, actively participating in the activities and interactions of the community while remaining an observer, striking a balance between involvement and detachment. My sensory senses were all engaged to pick even the minute detail and dynamics of my environment. The sights, smell, sounds of the gas stoves, fridges, coolers, ovens were all important in my quest. The body language and emotions of the shoppers, diners and staff were significant to me. Besides discussions about their businesses and everyday pleasantries, it included conversations of their days back in Enugu at some of their popular meeting joints where they eat ‘isi ewu’ (goat head) , ‘nkwobi’ (made from oxtail parts garnished with some Igbo ingredients like ‘ugba’ (no English name known). My priced possession in the field being my field note - field notes or memos are important tools for an ethnographer. “They are written data taken, often by multiple observers at a single event, capturing interactions of interest to the larger topic under study” (James et al., 2008:74). I made use of my phone cameras to capture some events and tape recorder to record. The interview took the mode of a story telling approach to fully grasp the emotions, preferences, and perspective of my participants. I had two focus group discussions with some members of the Igbo diaspora community in the two sites Atlanta and Basel. Language of communication is English with few instances in which the Igbo dialect pops in as it is imbibed and most of the food are in local Igbo dialect.

3.1.2. Interview: In conjunction with the participant observation and other material contents, I carried out 25 interviews with only 13 being recorded due to the nature of my subject and my main fieldwork locations being in an Afro markt and a restaurant thus it was inappropriate. The Out of the eleven 4 were in the personal houses I visited in Georgia, 7 in Tastee restaurant of which 3 were chefs and 4 were customers at Tastee. The remaining 2 recordings were carried out in Basel. The remaining were mental notes and (or) written notes. The duration of the interview differed greatly depending on the occasion and how hungry the participants were. It was between the range of 50 to 25 minutes. Most of my interview data was gotten from informal conversation.

The structure of the interview guideline was drafted in a semi-structured conversational style like. The questions are not cast in stone and can be adjusted depending on the direction of the interview. I had a list of main themes and questions to be asked. They were fashioned to be open-ended, and if an interviewee gives a monosyllabic answer, I try to probe gently to offer more information while ensuring I do not fill in the gap. As opined by Nlichael Agar (1996:119) the researcher should be in the position of a subordinate position. Agar calls it “one-down” position, where the fieldworker assumes a subordinate role as learner, as opposed to the “one-up” role assumed by the scientifically oriented hypotheses tester (1996:119. The first interviews allowed me to replicate and construct questions for further theoretical exploration. This informed me about the upcoming second round interviews in which I was able to relay informal feedback to participants about emerging themes.

3.2. Methods and description of process of data gathering.

As posited by Burns and Grove (1998: p.373), data collection is the systematic gathering of information relevant to research through interviews, participant observation, focus on the study of food, culture preservation and Identity, I entered the field with no prior knowledge of the subject at hand. As posited by Wolcott, "Skepticism is absolutely essential in all aspects of fieldwork, including any use of printed sources". Wolcott (2005, P 111) Please note that my stance in being skeptical is not to trivialize these prior efforts but to ensure I do not have any preconceived opinion to capture 1st hand and present to my readers. Also, as Wolcott rightly argued the data might no longer be correct, even if they were accurate then, Wolcott, H. (2005, P 111). Group discussion, narratives, and case histories. Notwithstanding the knowledge gained from the numerous literatures.

3.3. Fieldwork locations

My field work was conducted at multiple sites – A popular African restaurant called Tastee Afrikana at Duluth, GA; Four private homes in Georgia, USA, and Afromarkt Basel, Switzerland.

3.3.1 Afro Market cultural shop: The decision to conduct my field work research in multiple sites as previously stated, was first to understand the shopping habits of the Igbos in buying the condiments and raw produce used in preparing their traditional and local dishes. These Afro shops do not only stock food items such as fresh vegetables like 'Oha', 'onugbu' (bitterleaf), 'uziza' leaves, 'anyara' leaves, 'utazi' leaves, 'ugu' (pumpkin leaves), cocoyam's, Yams, plantains, garri[5], spices from Nigeria, beverages, African fruits such as 'udala', 'mbacheleko', African walnuts but also stock mortars, bathing sponge, chewing sticks etc. See figure 1 and 2 below:



Figure 4: Outer view of Afro Mark Basel.

[5] Garri is a popular West African food made from cassava, specifically from the tuberous roots of the cassava plant (Manihot esculenta).



Figure 5: Cross section of Afro Mark Basel.

Sub-section (foodstuffs) of Afro mark Basel: Researcher in the 1st Picture holding one of the most sought out item -Pounded yam fufu while in the 2nd Picture, researcher chatting with a customer.

3.3.2 Tastee Afrikana Georgia: My 2nd field site at an African restaurant in Atlanta, is to find out their eating habits and food choices. I chose Georgia because it is a hub to many Igbos who lived in Enugu, Owerri and Onitsha which are the most popular Igbo cities in Nigeria. The restaurant seamlessly offers me a distinctive and culturally vibrant environment suitable for my study on the food practices and identity of the Igbo ethnic group in the diaspora. Atlanta is renowned for its diverse populace and thriving immigrant communities, as well as numerous African restaurants that cater to diverse cultural backgrounds. The restaurant which is situated in the heart of Georgia close to the popular Pleasant Hill Road is neighbored by other eateries. By the right of Tastee is a Mexican restaurant and by the left a Deli fast food joint. This arrangement increases the footfall of Tastee as customers from the other restaurants do come in occasionally to check out their menu and some invariably end up ordering food.

Tastee Afrikana restaurant represents home not just to the Igbos but to the Yorubas, the South – South (Port Harcourt, Cross river states), Middle belts which make up Benue states, Plateau States. Also, Cameroonians, Sierria Leonians, Ghanaians and other African nations.



Figure 6: Outer view of Tastee Afrikana.

Below I will state the rationale behind my reasons for conducting my fieldwork in the Afro shop and the restaurant (Tastee Afrikana).

Cultural Hub: Afromakt Basel and Tastee Afrikana restaurant serve as a cultural hub where Africans especially the people from Igbo tribe meet not only to enjoy the Igbo delicacies but to 'jist' and catch up on the events happening in their homeland. According to Appadurai's (1996), concept of the imaginary space, these food sites or new local imaginaries represent modern settings of cultural landscapes where ideas of locality are reshaped by discussions influenced by global perspectives. This field work enlightened me on how culture is managed or represented by African diasporas as these Afro stores serve as 'culturescapes' to the Igbo community. The TV in both Afromakt food store and the Tastee restaurant mostly airs news from Nigeria which forms part of their discussion.



Sub-section of Afro mark Basel: Friends of the shop owner use shop as a connecting point.

Authentic and Originality: Afromakt Basel and Tastee Afrikana restaurant not only offer authentic and fresh foodstuffs to their teeming customers, but a wide array of items that makes the shoppers and diners feel they are in Nigeria.

The composition and offerings of an African store can vary, but generally, they consist of the following elements: Staple foods such as rice, maize flour, cassava flour, millet, sorghum, and various types of grains and legumes. Spices, herbs, and seasoning blends, canned and packaged goods: like tomato paste, peanut butter, and canned fish (sardines), which is one of the most sought out. Afro markt Basel also stock household items such as African local brooms for sweeping, hard toothbrushes as many Africans in diaspora claim they do not like the soft or medium brittle of the brushes found in Europe and the US. Cooking utensils: Traditional African cooking tools like mortar and pestles, clay pots, and woven baskets are often sold. Cosmetics and personal care products: The Afro markt Basel is just like most afro shops stock cosmetics brand that migrants are familiar with back in their homeland.



Fig 8: Picture of fresh vegetables called ‘utazi leaves) from Nigeria and sold in the Afro shop



Fig 9: Meal (Tastee restaurant) of goat head condiments with the fresh vegetable ‘utazi’ leaves toppings for flavor and dressing.

Comparative analysis of the two sites.

My ethnography field work in two separate sites Afro food markt Basel, Switzerland and Tastee restaurant, Georgia gave me an in-depth presentation to the shopping and meal preferences. Both spaces attract diverse customers, however, Tastee restaurant has more Afro-Caribbean. Both function as a pivotal point for social and cultural activities While Tastee Afrikana and the Afro food markt are significant locations in this study, they differ in the aspects below:

Population of Igbos in the United States and Switzerland: Ńdị́ Ígbò n'Emeríkà (The Ibgo’s people in America). While precise figures are challenging to ascertain due to the fluid nature of migration, diasporic community’s estimates suggest that millions of Igbos reside in diaspora settings. The Nigerian population in the United States is estimated to be about 712,294, While the Igbos are about 226,000[6] with significant communities in states such as Texas, Georgia, and Maryland. For the estimates of all Nigerians in Switzerland it is about 3000, a figure quite small in comparison with that of the USA.

Educational aspects: The Igbos in the United States are said to be more educated and gainfully employed in professional field such as Doctors, lawyers, accountants, nursing, and other skilled worker jobs occupations illustrating a wide degree of educational backgrounds with higher income unlike their European counterparts who are mostly non-skilled workers as drivers. In Switzerland and other parts of Europe, truck driving jobs are tagged as a very lucrative profession unlike in USA. The bulk of the Igbo population in Europe are not well educated thus are more

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo_Americans

engaged in factory work, Amazon, with very few women venture into nursing. An average Igbo family in the United States has a doctor, lawyer, nurse etc.

3.4 Data analysis of the study.

According to Holliday (2002, p. 99) it is the process of "making sense of, sifting, organizing, cataloguing, selecting, and determining themes for processing the data". The analysis is derived from my transcribed interviews after having validated my results through triangulation with multiple data sources and methods from participant observations, interviews, document analysis, to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research. The process I used in the analysis of this research study includes: The collection and gathering of data, classifying the data, and transcribing, after which a thematic content analysis carried out to organize and summarize the data collated into unique themes with references employed to design and direct the outstanding goal of the study (Boyatzis, 1998). The goal here is to make use of as much of the raw data as possible, naturally in text, and then reduce it while not losing insights of the meaning. As highlighted by Krysik & Finn, (2010), data analysis includes four steps: Organizing the data into concepts; developing the story; Maximizing rigor by authenticating conclusions and finally reporting the findings. And as Nilsen, (2005) opined, the process of analysis should be reflexive because it is not likely to come up with a neutral script. I read and edited the text without losing its originality. and I repeatedly listened to the recordings of the interview many times before transcribing the words. To indicate pauses, I used three dots (…)

3.5 Ethical and practical problems conducting ethnographic research in a food site.

I threaded with caution and made sure all the ethical concerns such as informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, trustworthiness, retrieval at will without reason, which are sacred in any research work were adhered to during.

Informed Consent: Before I embarked on the interviews, participating, and observing the meal preparation and serving, permission was gotten from the shop and restaurant owner and with all my respondents. Most were written while the walk-in participants were verbal approval. I clearly informed the respondents to notify me if they feel I am getting in their way or pressurized with my

line of questions**.** The consent should be given clearly in detail while informing the research use, aim, methods, topics including my identity and the intention of my research.

Privacy and Confidentiality: The researcher is required to seek permission before taking notes and pictures. Their names will be pseudo names and pictures will not identify the person except participant agrees. All data collected should be kept confidential and I promised my respondents I will not divulge our conversations to any other forum besides what it is intended for my research work.

Building Trust: Building rapport and trust with participants is pertinent in all qualitative research studies to facilitate open communication and access to information. Trustworthiness is an important aspect of a research study and encompasses credibility, transferability, auditability, and confirmability (Guba, Lincoln, 1989).

Reciprocity: There should not be any anticipation of reward for interacting with my participants, however, being in an environment of entertainment there is a need sometimes for refreshments (soft drinks, snacks, suya[7]), to break the ice and get a relaxed atmosphere.

Subjectivity and Positionality: The subjectivity of my research topic and positionality in Atlanta Georgia was a bit of concern to me and probably to some of my interlocutors. In as much as I am an Igbo in diaspora, it will not in any way impede the objectivity of my study. Rennie, (1994) portends that the "subjectivity in drawing on one's inner experience in order to better understand the subject of a study" gives the study an edge. Ethnographic research is focused on reliving people's lived stories by immersing oneself and my own experience might make it easier for me to deliver an unbiased and objective multifaceted experience.

Challenges in the field: The major limitations or 'biases' so to speak evident in the study is the limitations is in the sampling as the data is mainly the perspectives and narratives of first-generation migrants and staff and chefs, who may have vested interests in promoting their businesses. This might distort the overall representation of the and hinder the ability to draw definitive conclusions about specific situations, and only allow for general interpretations. I was faced with the challenge of having sizable number of participants from the 2ns and 3rd generation because they were in school.

[77] Suya is made of grilled beef spiced with spices. It is well sourced after and is usually served in

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.

In this chapter, I will present the recurring themes that emerged from the empirical data. Five major themes were identified from the thematic analysis gotten from the interview. The first emerging theme is nostalgia and connection to homeland, the second being cultural Identity and heritage preservation. The third theme is the social dynamism of food, cooking and eating while the fourth is globalization and migrants' food ways, and finally the fifth but not the least is diaspora as a cultural Space.

4.1. Memories of Home, Sweet Home.

For the Igbos who seem to be picky and prioritize tasty, spicy and flavored dishes as observed in my ethnographic journey with the community, it is no wonder they go to extra length to eat the food that reminds them of home. Nostalgia for home food can be a framework of memory as individuals seek to recreate the flavors and aromas of their childhood or homeland. Sutton (2010). My ethnographic exploration echoes this statement as we will see in the sub themes below:

4.1.1. The role of Rituals and Symbolism in Igbo food culture: The practice of rituals in Igbo food preparation, cooking and eating is profound. Further to the performative acts of the breaking of kolanuts in which libation are offered to the "Chi" (God), and the celebration of the 'JI ofuo' (new yam) festival highlighted by the Igbo communities, some seemingly mundane rituals like using particular cooking utensils, eating with their fingers, dipping bread in a cup of tea and following traditional cooking methods have important cultural and symbolic significance. These unassuming features of food culture act as sacred archives of shared memory, safeguarding ancestors' wisdom, and cultural legacy for future generations. The interlocutors I engaged with in the focused group discussion and interviews, narrate that it is common for Igbo gatherings to include extensive rituals and performances which focus on the preparation, presentation, and consumption of foodstuffs which is a reminder of their days back home. Most claimed that attending their communal celebrations such as the Igbo or states day, and the annual New Yam festival in the diaspora helps them feel closer to their roots.'

I was opportune to attend the Super Bowl 'come together party' in the house of 'Ide Chinyelugo, 65 years old Patron of the elite people's club of Nigeria and he narrated that:

> *In an oghe town in Enugu State, Nigeria, there is a local food festival in which some diasporan from the town can pay huge amount of money to ferry the food cooked during the festival". Each family prepares a delicacy of their choice and brings it to the village square. Every participant moves round and eats or takes a portion from each family's delicacy. This process starts by noon and ends by midnight. It is usually done during the dry season, and the moon serves as the light.* [Informal interview notes, February 11th, 2024, Kenesaw GA.]

Foods made and eaten during this festival ferried to diasporans from this town are priceless, he says. According to him:

> *Any person who gets such foods treasures it. The festival is called the Ibono festival.*

Likewise, remembrance of past things such as revisiting dishes from their childhood, sticking to cooking techniques from previous generations takes them closer home and serves to preserve their cultural identity. As posited by of the director of Tastee restaurant in Georgia who acknowledges making the best decision to quit her health career job to start an African eatery.

> *The Igbos are too attached to everything homeland and food is the highest on the scale. I did not bargain for the high demand I am getting. We open every day of the week from 11am to 12 midnight. My chefs and servers work in shift and we are always in need of more hands. (Tastee Director, 50)*

She went on to narrate they are always on edge as the orders keep pouring in.

> *The eat in diners do complain always that their meals take so long to be served, because we try to make it fresh. For example, okro soup, egusi and ogbono stocks are prepared earlier and we only add in the vegetables only when the diner orders.*

She attributed the feet traffic to the cultural inscriptions on each meal, ensuring attention to details in the preparation of their meals. As narrated by her:

> Our clients like the authenticity and identity of their culture which gives them a feel of their growing days. *For example, we use wooden mortars and native bowls to serve 'isi ewu' just as it is done back home. Picture below*.



'Isi ewu" (goat head) served in a native wooden bowl at Tastee

According to Nnenna the director of Tastee, the migrants relish the cultural artifacts and originality as they claim it takes them back memory lane.

> *Having been in this business for four years, I have come to realize that food is a representation of our cultural pride and perseverance, as well as being a means of nourishment. Each meal recounts a story of our past and present. (Tastee Director, 50)*

Africans especially the indigenes of the Igbo tribe gather to enjoy their traditional delicacies like 'isi ewu' (goat head), nkwobi (made in the form of porridge with the tendons from cow), 'abacha (African salad made from cassava) from their home countries. In this scenario, food is not only adapted to perform some cultural flavor, sensory preferences, but

it attains another meaning that is created through the processes of preparing, serving, and consuming it. The sight, sound and touch are all important to the diners as seen here. The act of eating the 'isi ewu' with their fingers as reported by my respondents gives it a whole new taste.

Speaking to one of Tastee's chef (Emeka), who has been working at Tastee for two years, I realized that the bulk of their business is not the diners who eats in, but the orders received from single men and families who either are too busy to cook or do not have some of the native ingredients to prepare the desired dishes. Chef Emeka said they receive a lot of orders for most of the soups such as 'Egusi, onugbu (bitterleaf), Oha, eforiro[8], jollof rice, fried and roasted chicken. He narrated that:

> Most orders are in large quantities and one of the soup packs costs about $200". Also, we receive bulk requests for African cuisines to cater for individual and community parties. I am *Happy working at Tastee but sometimes the orders especially the traditional soup which comes in frequent than other meals and ain't easy to prepare drains me out. Emeka (Chef, 44)*

Diasporans maintain their link to their homeland through their traditional practices and rituals of consumption. The findings from this study aligns to Roy's argument that "Expatriates are adamant, entirely passionate about such matters as the eating habits of the motherland." (2002:472). According to Emeka, the rituals of the preparation of using the local spices like 'udah' 'oziza' seeds, 'ogili', etc; these seemingly mundane things with the mode of presentation of the meals like using clay and wooden bowls are important to evoking migrants' memories. In a casual conversation with Benji a 30-year-old resident of Charlotte, North Carolina, who migrated from Onitsha, Nigeria says he is a regular to Tastee because:

> *The authentic home, like cooked meals and the servings instantly evoke emotions and longing for his mother's cooking.* (*Benji a 30)*
>
> *R. Do you normally eat here?*

[8] Yoruba vegetable soup made with spinach and fresh crushed paprika.

P. She's one of the best African restaurants here I know. It tastes almost like back home, I like it. It's delicious. She specializes on most Nigerian foods not just Igbo meals.

The rituals of finding dishes such as 'isi ewu', 'nkwobi', 'abacha' 'yam porridge with nchaawu' (saint leave), 'cassava', etc which are the main staples and diets are always available at Tastee restaurant and these cultural items helps in connecting people to place besides serving as powerful symbols of identity. When the question "If they find themself seeking out certain foods as a reminder to their cultural heritage. Nearly all participants responded in the affirmative. They all miss the communal settings, the locality, their mother's unique touch. According to two of the regular diners of Tastee Afrikana, they find out that they spent so much in Tastee just to have that feeling of home. Nnacheta and Chidi are immigrant that have been in the United States for about 9 and 7 years respectively narrates:

Sharing a meal of 'ofe onugbu' (bitterleaf soup) with my friends here is more than just eating; it binds us together. It's a way of connecting to my homeland. You know, it is far cheaper for me to eat the general food here like pasta or rice or the like, but I find myself yearning for my home food just to remind me of my homeland. (*Nnacheta, 48).*

Even though I'm thousands of miles away from Nigeria, whenever I eat pounded yam and ogbono soup, I feel a sense of belonging and connection to my roots. I feel as if I'm holding a part of my heritage with me. (Chidi, 40)

Conversely, a female participant Nkechi, a lawyer in her late early 40s whom I interviewed in her kitchen where she was cooking the famous 'oha' soup recalls her childhood. Recounting the smell of burning live goat during Christmas festive gatherings in their hometown, stirring up feelings of nostalgia and yearning for touch, sights, smell, sounds, and flavors of her homeland.

It is customary, a norm and tradition for Igbos and Christians at large to kill a life goat during Christmas then while I was growing up in Nigeria. Oh, the smell it evokes is one I can never forget. I wish I could do that here in the United States…My mother will share a bit to those who can't afford. Nkechi, informal interview, Norcross Georgia.

Food serves as a mnemonic for seasonal cycles by providing sensory experiences and memories linked with different seasons and in this scenario, the symbol for celebrating Christmas for the Igbos is to slaughter a goat. These seasonal foods are closely tied to the memories of celebrating the season with loved ones, and they serve as mnemonic markers for those occasions. She went on to recall the communal setting of celebrating Christmas in her village community:

> *The gathering of cousins, aunts and uncles from cities all make her nostalgic, let alone the taste and aroma of the goat meat in "ofe nsala" is unquantifiable. The shared task involving the men makes it more memorable as the men pound the yam in the local mortar while the women prepare the 'ofe nsala, rice and stew, which is sacrosanct in every home on Christmas day. (Nkechi, informal interview, Norcross Georgia).*

Nkechi's husband Chukwunonso a 45-year-old Engineer, coming in closer to the stove area:

> *Hmmmmmm, I am smelling something yummy; 'Oha' soup my best soup in the whole wide world.*

He sauntered in and gave the wife a bear hug and kissed her on the cheek and thanked her. He was able to tell the type of soup from upstairs by the aroma and flavor of the 'oha' soup and that motivated him to come to the kitchen. This soup made him join in our conversation after he learned that I was writing about the Igbo food and culture. He immediately became nostalgic from his body language and sighing. He went on to recount his childhood and their seasonal travel to their village[9] from the cities.

> *I always looked forward to our trip to the village because my grandmother's soups were always different. I don't know why so but maybe it is because she uses firewood[10] and not stove to cook.*
>
> *Every time I eat my wife's oha soup, I'm transported back to my grandmother's kitchen in Nigeria. Nkechi got me here using the same local*

[9] Village in Nigeria meaning is the actual ancestral place of origin the person. It might actually be a developed town, but it is being referred to as "my village".

[10] Firewood is. Used mostly when they are cooking for a communal food. The women gather at the back of the house where the fire is set.

ingredient's 'ogili and uziza spice.' [11] *It tastes just like that of home, connecting me to my roots that I cherish dearly.*

Here in attribution to the scholarly works of David Sutton we are brought to fore of the central role food plays in transporting the migrants to their homeland. We are presented with the fact that food and anything from home provides the frameworks of memory as it mediated between their present and their past. Similarly, my interlocutors from the Afro markt Basel, share the same opinion. Chewing stick and it is amazing to see local sponge for bathing.

4.2. Cultural Identity and heritage preservation

This section will present the sub themes the Igbos in diaspora employed in the preservation of their cultural heritage.

4.2.1. Cultural Expression: A sense of cultural pride and belonging was fostered among diaspora people through cooking traditional foods and sharing meals with families, community members, and other Africans, Caribbeans, Asians, Afro-Americans which turned into rituals of network of friendly relationships.

For the Igbos, culture is expressed fully in customs revolving around the kola nut, the New Yam Festival (Iri Ji Ofuo), 'Ofala chieftaincy celebrations, childbirth rituals etc. which are all unifying factors within various communities at home and abroad. The findings revealed that the ritual of breaking of Kolanuts is sacrosanct in every 'Umunna' (kinsmen) meeting, communal monthly meetings or any ceremonies, parties, weddings, burial wake keep in diaspora or home. Even the casual or monthly meetings the 'oji' (kolanut) and 'anyara' (garden egg) eating together with 'ose oji'.(Literally, Kolanut pepper) of my respondents from the first generations narrated that irrespective of where they are, tradition is tradition and is imbued in them. The participants revealed that the offering of kola nuts when one visits a fellow kinsman, meetings or ceremonial events symbolizes hospitality, respect, and goodwill. 'Ichie' (Chief) Agu, an elder affirmed that Kolanut is an important ritual in Igbo tradition:

[11] Ogili is a paste like spice that is black in color and has a very foul smell that lingers on for hours when used to cook. It is mostly used for all the Igbo soups and recently it's added in a pinch size for flavor and taste to 'isi ewu' and 'abacha'.

The fact that we are abroad in oyibo land does not mean we will forget our tradition. It's who we are. If we forget our 'ancestors' will not be happy with us. I always have kolanuts in my house oh. I always ask people to bring it when they travel home. (Ichie Agu, 55 Lawrenceville, GA).

Ethnic food in diasporic experience is often treated as the very epitome of cultural memory, with its material, symbolic, and functional aspects co-existing to create a memory site.

4.2.2. Full blooded Igbo: In this sub theme, the concept of 'I am who I am' and 'proud of who I am' is mirrored in their addiction to their foodways so to speak. Igbos are identified using ethnic categories in relation to their food preference such as 'fufu' or "swallow" as frequently used to describe them by other African nations even so by other tribes or ethnic group in Nigeria. Most of the Africans nations have' fufu' as one of their staples however, most of the participants revealed that other tribes in Nigeria always use the phrase "Igbo them too like to swallow" in a stigmatized way to describe the Igbos. This generalization or connotation in a way affects some few who tend to shy away from being categorized as a fufu lover and thus are proud to quickly say "I am Igbo, but I don't like swallow right from childhood". Notwithstanding, all my participants both the Igbos and other Africans interviewed except one middle aged female responded to loving to swallow.

Fufu is part of my life. That's what I grew up with. I love eating with my hands. Every day, you know, I came to the state only about eight years ago. (Ugonnaya, 35),

R: Oh, and you still love fufu that much to eat it every day in diaspora*?*

R. Of course, I can't do without fufu. That's, that's, that's what I was doing back home so if try to maintain it here in the State's. So, I, sorry, I'm probably not discrediting anybody's food, right? America has their food. We have African food. I'm used to it. Like I said, I don't want to discriminate. When I taste their chicken, they add sugar to it. And then, like, I can smell added sugar. I get discouraged. So, African food is spicy and tasty, bittersweet, and all that. (*Ugonnaya, 35. March 29th, 2024, Duluth, GA).*

Above excerpts replicate the main theme in the work of William-Forson (2010 p.1), on the foodways among Ghanaian Migrants in the United States titled "I Haven't Eaten if I don't have my soup and fufu". As gathered from some of my interlocutors from the first-generation Igbo's and other Africans, they do not consider meals like oats, cereals, salad as food at all which they refer to as snacks.

4.2.3. Intergenerational transmission of tradition: To stay connected to their heritage, participants from the older generations stressed the value of passing down traditional recipes to the younger generations to ensure continuity. As narrated by many participants and observed in Georgia and Basel, all ceremonies must showcase their traditional meals to make the occasion complete. An Igbo party in Atlanta or any part of the world must have 'ofe' 'onugbu' (bitterleaf soup) for the Anambra and Enugu states Igbos or 'ofe' Owerri (Owerri soup) for the Imo and Abia state Igbos. This food automatically reveals the identity of the celebrants to be Igbo, serving as an identity marker. It is unlikely to see this ofe Owerri, or ofe onugbu' in a Yoruba or Hausa party.

> *I can maintain a connection to my heritage and teach my kids about our food customs through cooking traditional Igbo meals because food represent who we are. It goes beyond eating. It is an avenue of reconnecting with our past generations.*

Besides the traditional cookbook bequeathed to the women by their grandmothers, mothers, aunts, the preservation of their heritage through food is made easier as narrated by Mrs. Emenike a middle-aged first-generation immigrant in Atlanta. With the emergence of social media and internet platforms, which has allowed diaspora people to digitally interact and exchange Igbo cuisine-related, cooking advice, and recipes anyone can cook now. This highlights one of the five cultural 'scapes' - Arjun's (1996) - mediascapes referred to as the movement of media and information. For instance, YouTube is full of the preparation of every single type of meal. This global media movement of food has aided a lot of students, families, marriages especially inter-racial marriages whereby the spouse of the African follows the guidelines from the media to prepare meals.

> *I am so grateful oh with these social media people. Any food I didn't know how to cook, I go to YouTube, type and voila I follow the tutorial. Life is easier now and interesting. No more looking forward to parties to get a piece of some of our traditional food. (Benji a 30)*

These virtual communities which function as virtual platforms has been a great source of help to diasporans especially the younger male students who didn't learn cooking at home, due to the characteristics of the Igbos gender biased norm requiring the girl child to be domesticated with cooking as the most important skill while the male child is not trained. These students once they

leave their homeland resorts to media and handouts to keep up with the eating culture which they cherish.

My visit to Canada in December 2023 to celebrate the end of year holidays with my children, gave me a bit of an insight on the cooking experience of Nigerian male students in diaspora. Their flat mates Obah, 18years Yoruba male and Chukwunonso, 20years Igbo male that recently moved to Canada for the January school session. They moved in with their two cousins Olutayo and Arinze to share their rooms. I was amazed to see the attachment they have to their traditional dishes. I thought they would stick to the easy way out such as cooking pasta, rice, French fries being teens but that was not the case. Obah was always cooking his native 'Yoruba ofada stew'[12], 'ogbono' soup[13] everyday other day, while Chukwunonso does more of the rice and tomato sauce stew with Goat meat and "shaki'[14]. As a matter of fact, I was concerned about an increase in energy consumption and bill due to their constant cooking and these meals take time to cook. The Stock fish, Shaki, canda[15] and cow leg cooked for an average of sixty minutes, also the new kids on the block always forget to turn off the smoke expeller after cooking. In one of our informal chats, I was curious to find out where they got the 'canda meat and Shaki'. I gathered that with the help of their social network, everything about food is gotten. The few shops that sell African raw foods, restaurant, and some students do mini trading or exchange of foodstuffs.

> *I don't know how I will survive in this Canada if I don't eat my native food always. I don't mind not buying clothes, but I must eat African food oh"*
> *Obah, informal interview, 10th January,2024.*

Reflecting on the bond that Obah and Chukwunonso from two different ethnic groups, I realized it was in their bid to navigate the scarcity of the ingredients, foodstuffs and the shared cooking that united them. Most times other students visit to cook and eat with them, forming a strong bond of friendship.

Despite the travel distance between homeland and their new cultural environment, Igbo as well as other African immigrants all over the world strive hard to prioritize the preservation of their traditional dishes. Staples like "ọha soup," "onugbu soup" "nkwobi," "Ukpa" "egusi soup"

[12] peppered palm oil stew used in eating ofada rice with a not so pleasant smelly spice called 'iru'.

[13] Ogbono is a seed that is grounded into powder. Cameroonians call it Mango seeds. This soup is eaten by most West African countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, etc. and is not particularly specific to any ethnic group or tribe.
[14] Shaki is a favorite to many Nigerians. It is the back of the Cow with towel like outer parts.
[15] Skin of Cow that is normally roasted, dried and later soaked in water for a day to soften it and later scraped, washed and cooked.

"ewedu" "amala" etc. etc. which are tasking, difficult and time consuming continue to be prepared in migrants' households, serving as a link to their cultural roots.

4.2.4. Generational shift and stigmatization: The study illustrated how the younger generations are shifting away from their traditional meals either due to acculturation or stigmatizations. These changes in generational identity affect the dietary habits of the older generations because in order not to prepare separate meals with their busy schedules, they end up eating their traditional meals fewer days than they would ordinarily. Nkoli, a 36-year-old mother of four children reported that it is only her 8-year-old that likes to eat fufu.

> *The teens who were even eating fufu in Nigeria before we migrated here six years ago have all stopped. They now stick to McDonalds and French fries. They love Chiphote and pasta. I wish I could get them to eat fufu so it can be easier for me. (Nkoli, 36-year)*

With a limited sample of teens and children, I was able to gauge their eating culture from their parents. I gathered that some children eat their traditional meals just to please their parents not because they like the food. The younger generation whom I interviewed said they find most of the food "yucky" (maybe disgusting) except for "jollof rice" or "rice and stew and dodo" (fried plantain). They narrated that their non-Nigerian friends mock them for swallowing fufu. Nneoma, a 16-year-old 11th grade was sitting at the far end of the sofa, fully engrossed on her phone obliged me few minutes of her time as I sought the approval of her mother to talk to her for 10 minutes. With the consent, I walk over to meet Nneoma and started with breaking the ice with some chit chat about her phone, friends, and school. Then to my question about her view on her traditional dishes:

> *I am not crazy about the food. I don't know why my parents want me to eat what I don't like. I do eat rice and stew and love jollof rice but the swallow that is the fufu, I don't like it. Besides most of the soups smell and linger on.*
>
> *R: Is it because of the smell or you do not enjoy the taste and flavor?*
>
> *P: Hmmmm (checking to see if her mom is close by) I think it is tasty, but anyways, I care less about the taste. I don't know the big deal about African soups, why the attachment. The most important is for me to eat well, right? Maybe later when I am older, I might get to like it but now, uhmmm… (Nneoma, 16.)*

The older generations expressed fear of the influence and negative health consequences of fast foods to their children thus they strive to incorporate their traditional dishes to the children as early as six months and toddler years. Besides the preservation of their cultural heritage, most of the women says it is less cumbersome for the children to eat what the parents eat to make their chores easier. This is to avoid preparing separate meals since the parents eat mostly Nigeria meals.

4.3. Social Dynamics of Food.

I will outline the social values that meals reflect, and the ambivalences they express. What way does food help as a tool for negotiating social relationships with family, friends, and community at large?

Eating in a restaurant, community gathering, or home is a holistic social activity, and the interactions, conversations, and shared experiences that occurred reveal valuable insights into how food contributes to community bonding, and building. This research illustrates that food is a conduit for social interaction, cohesion, bonding, rituals, cultural expression, networking, and conflicts. Mealtime functions as a central point for social gatherings, cultural events, and rites of passage, reinforcing the significance of family ties and community cohesion amongst Igbo migrants. In answer to my research question 3, my inquiry into the role of food, albeit its ubiquitous essence revealed that it encompasses some aspects of contradictions and conflicts within the community, which I will explain as I progress.

4.3.1. Commensality and Cross-cultural Exchange: My exploration in the Afro food market Basel and the Igbo community in Atlanta Georgia portrayed the interaction among members of the Igbo diaspora and with other cultural groups. From meeting to social connection and meal sharing participants shared insights on their friendship network and this bond has translated to getting others to eat Igbo dishes, which later culminated to creating a strong bond of genuine camaraderie and intimacy.

And now from the voices of my participants (Igbos and others) depicts that food is universal as it cuts across culture.

> *"You kid...g me! jollof rice is more than just a dish; it's a story, a journey through the flavors and spices of Africa. I love the spicy taste and the sight of it,*

and the (…) yes, the plantain with it makes it so yummy". [Roberto, 28, March 15, 2024, Tastee Afrikana]

"I come in here because I love eating with my friends. Especially Jollof rice because it is easier to eat, and my non-African friend love it. holds a special place in the hearts of the African diaspora, serving as a nostalgic reminder of home and family. It's unheard of not to find Jollof rice being served at gatherings and celebrations within diaspora communities where it serves as a symbol of cultural pride and connection to our roots". [Chukwudi, 32, semi structured interview, March 15, 2024]

As observed in Tastee restaurant's clientele which can be broken down below: Igbos 45%.

Other Nigerian tribes 25%.

Other Africans: 15%

Caribbeans: 10%

Latin Americans: 5%

The above indicates that culture can be fluid. As gathered from the other ethnic group customers, they love eating 'jollof[16]' rice which is becoming a universal meal. Jollof rice is a meal that has caused a lot of debate between many West African countries, especially between Ghana and Nigeria. The debate goes beyond social media rivalry to international cook-offs competition to my amazement is causing conflict and rife and has been on national news about which West African country cook the best jollof rice. It is a dish loved by many children and is generally prepared and reserved in parties as 'children's meal". Most times it is served with fried plantain commonly referred to as 'dodo' both in Cameroon and in Nigeria. According to one of African's professional chefs who has a hyphenated identity Nigerian-Cameroonian and lives in Maryland, United States, has this to say:

If there is no jollof rice, there is no party be it here in diaspora or in the homeland. It is a "must' in any party organized be it any ethic group of West Africans. It is becoming a staple meal for others like Asians, Caribbeans and Latin Americans. As a chef, Jollof rice holds a special spot in my heart and kitchen because it has won me many accolades here in the diaspora. I have a

[16] Jollof rice is a dish prepared with rice and tomatoes. It is prepared by frying some tomatoes, adding spices and later water, after bringing to a boiling point the washed rice is added to the sauce to cook on very slow heat to avoid burning. It seems easy to cook but is very difficult because it burns easily.

handful of 'oyibo'[17] *customers who loves eating jollof rice. (Dorothy Chef, Maryland, USA).*

Frau Daniella, a German married to a Ghanaian migrant in Essen, Germany says:

> Jollof rice *goes beyond borders, color, and language to bring people from different backgrounds. (Daniella, 30)*

In one of the Mexican restaurants "Papadeaux" 'jollof rice' though it is called "dirty rice" is serve in the restaurant. Here, I will give a personal experience of how a familiar food filled me happy memories. In 2017, I was travelling with a friend from Houston International Airport to Dallas and halfway on our journey I became hungry. I asked my friend who is a Cameroonian to stop by any fast food so I can grab a sandwich or chicken. And to my pleasant surprise he took me to a restaurant, and I was presented with "jollof rice'. I was agog with excitement to have eaten a meal that is infused with love and cultural heritage with the power to remind me of twenty years back in our home in Kumba, Cameroon as we gather to enjoy a meal of hot spicy jollof with banana. My mother always serves jollof rice with bananas if she was constrained to fry 'dodo' (ripe plantain). After devouring every single grain on my plate, I ordered two more portions to go. Papadeaux became my favorite restaurant whenever I travel to the USA.

4.3.2. Social cohesion and community building: Here the place of food as a platform for social interaction, dialogue and strengthening of community ties is brought to fore illuminating the communal aspects of food consumption and its role in creating a sense of belonging for Igbo diasporas living in Atlanta and beyond. The choice of dishes, ingredients, and cooking techniques often carries deep cultural meaning and reflects the values and beliefs of the community. My observations suggest that communing to celebrate their traditional annual Igbo Day, States Day, town Day[18] and other events, item 7 (food and refreshment time) is the highlight of the occasion.

> *Eating meals together with other members is just one aspect of the experience; it also fosters relationships and deepens our sense of*

[17] Oyibo is a slang Nigerians use to refer to the White race.

[18] The Igbos as I earlier stated look for any opportunity to gather to eat and merry. Each year in Atlanta, and other diasporan cities, the Igbos during summer celebrate their Day, then the individual states such as "Anambra union, or Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu, Abia" also pick a day. Then they also have towns from each state- For example Anambra state has about 20 towns and they each have their town union.

community. Nothing else compares to the way food brings people together. (Benji, 40).

I gathered that most of the diners at the afro restaurants enjoy dining there for the purpose of socializing and making new friend as illustrated below:

> *I will be saving money if I stick to buying rice, pasta or even okra from farmers market to cook myself but for me sharing a meal with fellow Igbos abroad reminds me that I am part of a larger community, no matter where I am. (Obiorah, 44).*

Also, D. Sutton in tandem with Fernandez's concept of the wholeness of food posited "the study of food evokes a "whole way of life not divided into pieces." Food bonds through solidarity, gifting, exchange, generosity, and hospitality etc. etc. This reminds me of Giorgos Serntedakis social kitchen enactment of 'The Other Human'. started by the Greek as an expression of love towards others. "We cook with love and solidarity... We do not separate people, we are not 'us 'and 'them', we are all together. Serntedakis, G. (2017).

From the findings, Afro makt Basel and Tastee Afrikana not only offer traditional local meals that enlivens the memories of their homeland but serve as a social network site where the Igbos and "others" in Basel and Georgia go to reconnect with long lost friends and relatives as well as to meet people, they seek to connect which as most narrated gave rise to business transactions and economic benefits. Tastee Afrikana is the hub or hang out so to speak for the 042s, 046s[19] migrants. In this section, I will describe one of the ways food acts as a tool for negotiating social relationships in the Igbo diaspora as this meeting point increases the social bonds while transporting them to their days in 'Enugu' 'Onitsha' and other cities. The ethnographic fieldwork in both Basel Switzerland and Georgia reveals that identity is more fluid reflecting the varied identities and experiences of people living in different parts of the world.

4.3.3. Power dynamics and social hierarchies: Food is used as an ego booster. As witnessed from the participant observation and reports from my interviewees all Igbo parties or ceremonies 'must' have the "high table' popularly referred to as VIPs (very important personality) section. Those at the high table are served with the choicest condiments and drinks reinforcing social hierarchies and kinship ties. For example, 'ukwa' (breadfruit) which is the most expensive food in Igbo land and revered by all older generations and many due to its high nutritional value and nourishing taste. According to one of my unstructured interview informants I met at a party in Georgia, portends that social status and prestige plays a significant role in every Igbo party or

[19] Telephone codes of the two Igbo popular cities/states) – Enugu and Anambra states

celebration. She attributed the main reason for such discrimination is because of the expected gains or gifts from the so-called VIPs.

> *My people too like shows and attention, especially the rich ones. If you don't give them special treatment at your party, they might not drop huge envelop hahahaha that is present. [Informal interview notes, April 06, 2024]*

As voiced by participants and by observing, it is argued that the type and quality of food one is presented to in a party is synonymous to the type and quality of gift mostly in form of cash the celebrant will receive from their invitees.

4.3.4 Conflicts and Animosity: Food is seen in this section as a facilitator of social relationships and community building fostering integration and cohesion within the community, creating a sense of shared identity and responsibility though not without its share of conflict. The Igbo community in diaspora is not monolithic, and conflicts and disagreement arise because of socioeconomic status, power dynamics and high expectations from some members. Geertz's insight that ritual must be understood not only as an integrative and cohesive force in social life but also as an arena in which conflict is expressed and exacerbated certainly is echoed here, (1973).

Chinenye, a 50-year-old caterer I had a semi-structured interview with on the 30th of March in her kitchen in Norcross, Georgia, says nothing breeds contempt in a party, ceremony, communal gathering or even in individual homes more than food. She narrates that it is always a site for quarrelling and sometimes escalated to enmity. One of the ways conflicts around food arises is because the party servers are partial to their friends and the others are served minimally or some tables seated by the host/hostess special friends are served with expensive drinks such as champaign, Jack Daniels, etc while others who are also friends or relatives to the celebrants are served differently. The caterer and other participants all confirmed the occurrence of animosity after every party because of the food. "It's amazing that food could evoke such emotions as if they don't eat in their homes" she countered.

> *Hmmmm (…) shaking her head. Some of these people clamoring and pulling waiters are well to do sef,[20] I just don't understand them. While some clamor, some keep their cool and respect themselves she says. Meanwhile these are the ones who will carry malice with the celebrants.*

[20] Nigerian slang for even.

Chinenye argues that most of these invitees are rich and can afford to eat whatever they like but wonders why they will resort to clamoring, begging or animosity because of party food. She goes on to say that:

> *Maybe party food tastes better, or it is the time to cook these traditional meals because some of them bring their takeaway bowls. Those without take away bowls ask the servers for 'to-go' disposables for the remains." Oh yes there is always leftover mostly jollof rice, fried rice and on some occasions, soup and fufu. The reason we have so much left is because it is customary for all the female friends of the celebrant to gift her with coolers of food while coming to the party. (Chinenye caterer, Georgia)*

As a caterer she witnesses a lot of issues with refreshment typically listed as "item 7" in the party agenda. It is said that some people attend occasions just because of "item 7". According to Mummy ND, a 70-year-old Grandmother who migrated about 15years ago to be with her children, recounts that 'Ukwa" (breadfruit) is the cause of many conflicts in most parties. She opines that:

> *People should stop serving it in parties because it can never be served to more tha 20% of the guests as it is very very expensive" she countered. She said she loves "ukwa", but the meal always sparks quarrels and conflicts. (Mummy ND, 70)*

Another participant I casually met at a 37-year-old birthday party in Alpharita, Georgia on the 6th of April 2024 narrates that all Nigerian parties in diaspora have fresh coolers of food left after all have eaten many rounds and that these leftovers are the main cause for consternation because the servers look at faces before dishing out. He lamented that:

> *Food sharing in parties should be without bias because it is a gesture of goodwill to all invitees, instead it is a tool for manipulation by the servers and organizers put in control of the food and the decide who gets what, and it's causing rifts. (Ifeanyi, 37, Georgia).*

Other factors leading to conflicts as narrated by some respondents are usually disagreements amongst the leaders over the appointment of the committee in charge of unions, communal monthly meetings, ceremonies such as the yearly celebration of 'Igbo Day', preservation of traditional practices and customs, decisions on the food type, quantity, and appointed members to cater for the food in any cultural events or individual event.

As Kanayo a resident in Basel, Switzerland, the financial secretary of Awkuzu in Diaspora (AID) reveals that:

> *Igbos are a very proud set of people and "difficult' to lead as they feel they find it difficult to be under someone.*
>
> *The struggle for power within our community here is intense. Everyone wants to be the leader, but no one wants to listen. How is that possible? In our zoom meeting, which is supposed to be 2 hours, we always spent 3+hours due to argument. (Kanayo, 41, Basel)*

4.3.5 Generosity and gifting: In this subsection, I will explore how friends and family fall apart due to the giving and non-giving of foodstuffs by a returnee from homeland. We are not only dealing with the non-receipt of foodstuffs but also the quantity and quality. The politics of exchange by the Igbos in diaspora and all over echoes Appadurai (1988) perspectives on the exchange versus gifting. My casual question if one is giving out of generosity and not due to obligations of reciprocity? Most confirmed it was out of reciprocity and moral obligations as implicitly expected by the custom. This custom confirms that some repetitive acts have become a norm and custom.

The participants in both areas of study wholly acknowledged the solidarity and generosity food offers. The gifting as informed can be intended for exchange in most cases. As Esther a female waiter at Tastee puts it: *"Eji mu ogwo"*[21] *or "keep it for me".* She says:

> *There is a very high expectation of being gifted or "paid" back so to speak. Reciprocity is sacrosanct amongst the Igbos. Notwithstanding, it is quite enriching to see the amount of food being given to the celebrant. Some come with two or even more coolers (food storages) with their names all written on them. It is a shame to attend a party without gifting or supporting the celebrant with food. Few who cannot bring food put money in an envelope and offer the celebrant. (Esther, 35)*

Food functioning as Gift item / exchange, brings people together in webs of gift-debt (Cited in Sutton Pg 46) as the actors involve are linked either in the giver expecting a return or the receiver conscious of a dept to be repaid, lending credence to the anthropological truism "that gift

[21] This saying is put in a form of an adage literally meaning "You are owing me for gifting you and I expect you pay me back in same or higher". It is an unspoken agreement between the giver and the receiver.

creates long term bond of reciprocity" (Sutton p 45) and remembrance for sure. Whichever way, the thoughts and memories linger. However, meals can also express ambivalence as seen above.

4.4 Globalization and migrants' food ways.

The empirical data portrays the huge effect of globalization on Igbo culinary ways. The findings showed how globalization has indeed contributed to diversification and hybridization of Igbo meals within the diaspora, with an emphasis on foreign ingredients introduced as well as cross-cultural exchange. Baumann's perspective on transnationalism, in which diaspora communities engage in transnational practices such as remittances, communication, and travel to maintain ties to their homeland while also participating in the social, economic, and cultural life of their host countries is related to the global travel of food as the concept of reciprocity and moral economy is enhanced. This section also highlights how migrants navigate the international laws on border crossing, tactics used in carrying forbidden ingredients and food produce to preserve their culture and maintain ties with their friends and families.

4.4.1 Border crossing and creativity: Food travels far and wide when it comes to Igbo diasporans. Food not only accompanies people in their travels across national borders acting as an instrument of globalization, but also as Arjun Appadurai (1996), metaphorically posits is an 'objects in this case food moving to deterritorialised people' as individuals send food as parcels to family and friends abroad which in most cases are craftly smuggled amidst the customs and border restriction to Europe and North America. Tope, a Yoruba lady who is a nurse chatted happily about being lucky as she has never been caught bringing in fresh vegetables, palmwine and indomie (Nigeria chicken noodles) She narrates that she travels every year. According to her:

> *Once I buy my ticket, I call my family back home to buy palm oil and put in small nylons and small plastic bottles. The nylons are better because, the Nigerian customs like to search and the Airlines forbids palm oil so if they see it, I normally tell them it's 'ukpa'*[22]*. Another method is to put the unfrozen palm more or submerging it in bag of garri to prevent it from being seen by the Nigerian custom officers. The reason for this is because the airlines all restrict the crossing of palmoil even as checked in article. For the fresh vegetables such*

[22] Ukpa is a snack like meal made from grounded peas. It's prepared with only salt and a lot of palm oil hence the color. It is wrapped in a plantain leaf or in a transparent plastic and steamed for an hour.

as "orah, and ugu' I wrap them in brown cement paper to keep them fresh and then wrap again with newspapers and line them in between my dresses. (Tope, 41)

These stories portray the attachment and cultural affinity they have for local foods and will go to any extent to preserve it.

4.4.2. Transnational Networks and Remittances: Globalization has made it easier for people to travel across national borders keeping diasporans connected to their home countries. Transnational networks are frequently formed via migration, facilitating the transfer of resources, foods, ideas, and goods. Fresh food produce and stuffs gifting from Nigeria to the diaspora are usually linked with remittance practices, such as sending goods or money back home to support their families for economic use and social use. According to most participants I spoke with, they all look forward to receiving foodstuffs from their friends and family:

I always send money to my family in Africa including American things for their upkeep and to build houses in our village. It is very important to our kinsmen to show that their son is not 'efulu' (useless). (Chike, 42 years old Surgeon, Emory, Peachtree, Georgia).

4.3.3 Traversing enmity and friendship: Through the act of giving and exchange of traditional ingredients, utensils and foodstuffs, migrants tend to please, establish, mend broken relationships, and reaffirm shared values and identities. However, the act of gifting and not gifting has marred a lot of relationships. Bourdieu (1977), argues on the motive of gifting being for economic reasons or for generosity? Many relationships have gone sour when a returnee from homeland does not gift some fresh vegetables like the well sought out 'Oha' leaves. Usually, diasporans request for local foods and while some appreciate the act, some respondents claimed others don't. Onyeka recounted one of the many experiences he had:

On several occasions, because of my frequent travelling to Nigeria, I have fallen off with friends through the gifting of "very small quantities" of local foods. Some of them don't appreciate it as if they are the ones that paid for my ticket. Some explicitly reveal they are not happy and sometimes you hear it as gossip 'that he brought some hungry looking dry fishes, this ungrateful attitude has made me not reveal to anyone when I am travelling. If you don't give it is wahala, if you give, they term it small. Onyeka, 44, Georgia.

R: Has the experience always been negative?

Not really, I have actually restored some sour friendships by offering them fresh vegetables, but that is for the ones who appreciate. Anyways, I think anyone you give fresh 'oha' vegetables will be ecstatic. Also, with fresh ukwa because they are contraband goods. If you are caught you will pay. Anyways, that was then. As I said before I don't inform anyone if I am travelling.

Notwithstanding, many family members in Nigeria uses this act of sending foodstuffs to reciprocate the remittances from diasporans.

4.5 Diaspora as a cultural Space.

This research brought to light the fluidity of identity negotiation in the setting of the diaspora, as identities shift through cultural influences of diffusion, hybridity, and transnationalism resonating (Counihan, 1999) arguments, that migration often disrupts established food practices and identities, making room to processes of adaptation, hybridization, and transformation.

4.5.1 Identification of third spaces: The fifth theme that emerged is participants talking about spaces that substantiate characteristics of Bhabha, (2012) "third space". For examples Igbo migrants in Basel and Atlanta engages in cultural practices and interactions that fused elements of Nigerian and Western cultures resulting in the creation of hybrid cultural expressions. Participants engage in code-switching to take on a hybrid linguistic form that combines aspects of both Igbo and English within the in between space. As narrated by Ichie Obieze on his fluid identity, he said he is in between the two worlds. That, no matter how he hoped he could replicate his food rituals the way it is at home, it is not possible.

"It seems I'm drifting back and forth between two worlds, even my accent is not American nor Nigerian, however, I can easily blend amongst my community because we share the same feelings. So here I can be both Nigerian-American with hyphenated identity at the same time.". (*Ichie Obieze, Informal discussion, 25th March 2024 Duluth, GA)*

The Igbo diasporic community studied creates a unique cultural space, blending elements from both Igbo and American cultures, with food practices acting as a principal object for negotiation and

adaptation. Another respondent in Basel, a female migrant who left Nigeria two years ago in a chit chat conversation reveal the same feelings as she said she is “between here and there”, She goes on to narrate the diversity and her multiple identity in Basel.

> *Here in Basel, we are like in a transit. I am trying to navigate between German, French and Naija stuffs. But at least I can find 90% of what I need from this Afro shop and the others I substitute from the local grocery shops here in Basel. I could not believe my eyes when I saw ‘chewing stick’ ‘agidi’ and ‘udala’ and many more items I did not imagine I would find here. No matter what life is good abroad as we can still enjoy most of the delicacies here. (Efosa, chitchat, Basel)*

4.5.2 Creation of hybrid cultural practices: The research findings incorporate insights like Avtar Brah's concept of cultural hybridization within diasporic communities. Participants portrayed hybrid cultural practices not only in their foodways but in other aspects one of which is the fusion of the languages ‘engli-igbo’ (English and Igbo) in their daily lives. This diffusion reveals how migrants actively shape their cultural identities in response to their experiences in the diaspora. Respondents demonstrated how they combined aspects of the host culture with Nigerian culinary traditions by modifying traditional dishes to inculcate local ingredients such as spinach, kale, oatmeal, oregano, Jamaican chilli spices. Ms. Dorothy, a chef in Maryland spoke on significance of the local ingredients used to substitute their cuisine:

> *We should indeed be grateful America has these items which equally help and besides the flavor it tastes almost the same. For example, we use spinach and kale to substitute for ‘ugu” (pumpkin leaves) to cook about 5 soups such as Egusi, ogbono, eforiro and okra.I prefer using spinach for efor riro than ewudu leaves. Also, oatmeal which is healthier than pounded yam or ‘amala’ is used. As a matter of fact, more people prefer oatmeal fufu than pondo fufu. (Dorothy, 50)*

4.5.3 Reconstructing Identity and fluidity: In this subcategory, I establish how individual and collective identity construction is not static, but fluid influenced by migrants’ interactions with both world through cross-cultural exchanges driven by transnationalism. Additionally, rituals practices and meetings of diasporan in a shared place such as Tastee restaurants, farmers markets where they frequently shop for Afro, Caribbean and Asian foodstuffs are drivers to identity formation as one habit or custom’s rub on the other.

The results of my ethnographic study revealed that the boundaries of the Igbo “ethnic community" are fluid and dynamic, continually evolving as they create new social connections and associations depicting that the diasporan community is not restricted to a specific geographic location or ethnic identity, but rather encompasses a diverse range of experiences and perspectives.

Food market or shops that stocks cross-cultural food items are agencies of cultural hybridity. Examples of such cultural scapes in the USA includes Farmers market where Africans, Asians, Caribbeans, and Latin Americans all shop here and they meet, greet, and share on the foodscape "reproducing and reconstructing forms of social relations from home." (Williams-Forson 2010 p 8). Thus “the inevitable dissolution of cultural distinctions takes place (Renne 2007:617). Participants are indeed happy that these markets have most of what they need – Tubers of yam, fio-fio, cocoa for equang, okra, kenkey, fufu, plantain and cassava flour, yam flour, cocoyam flour, etc. Also, large chain shops such as Walmart and Giants in Maryland sells local Igbo cocoa yams and palm oil used for Igbo soups. Quite amazing one of the participants said.

This variety reflects the spectrum of diasporic experiences and the numerous ways that food works as a platform for identity construction and cultural expression.

> *There is a saying that, if you go to Rome, do as the Romans do, thus I kind of blend and adapt wherever I go. I construct my identity to suit my environment. I try to speak supri- supri*[23] *…laughing. You are Nigerian right, oh yes you introduced yourself, so you know what supri-supri means…laughing again. I tend not to discriminate any cultural food once it is tasty. (Chukwudi, 34)*
>
> *R: What is supri-supri please. It sounds musical to my ears.*
>
> *P: Hahaha You are a nIgerian and you don’t know supri-supri? Ok make I tell you noh. Supri-supri means speaking through your nose like the Oyibo’s.That is trying to speak with their accent.*
>
> *R: That is really interesting. I like that very much.*

This excerpts aptly captures Glick-Schiller notion of the boundaries of "community" and the limitations of "methodological nationalism" in migration studies. Identity can be performative, expressed through actions, behaviours, and interactions with others, rather than solely inherent traits.

[23] Supri-supri he says is

While most of my respondents confirmed they will eat their traditional meals all things being equal, some were nonchalant. They said it is more expensive eating African food. And beside the nutritional value is questionable as it is mostly starchy food. The soups or sauce that is used to eat the fufu, rice or yam are overcooked and most of the veggies are dried. Chibuzor, a 50-year-old Medical Doctor claims he is not bothered. He does frequent Tastee restaurant to hang out with friends not necessarily because of the food.

> *P. I can't remember the last time I ate it with my hands…I'm living here in America and African food was rated very poor.*
>
> *R. Why so, could you share?*
>
> *P. Because they give you a lot of calories with no nutritional value. I prefer eating broccoli, and other high fibre foods. Semi structured interview, 2nd February 2024 at Tastee, Duluth.*

This diversity illustrates the different diasporic experiences and the various ways that food acts as a platform for identity building and cultural expression. Chibuzor and a few others have wholly acculturated. He says he eats more of American foods, though he does like their 'beef suyas' or 'jet chicken' and occasionally eat 'the delicacies like 'Nkwobi'[24] or 'isi ewu'[25] or 'abacha'[26].

[24] cow tendons prepared with ugba in a porridge style with spices and topped with utazi vegetable for flavor.
[25] Isi ewu is goat head using all the parts -ears, tongue, eyes etc prepared with a pinch of potash, palm oil, brain of the cow and little potash is used to get the sauce to mix the porridge with.
[26] Abacha is shredded dry cassava mixed with cow brain and little potash, crayfish, palmoil and topped with fried mackerel and fresh utazi vegetable. It is all fried together and mixed.

REFLEXIVITY.

Prior to enrolling for the food class in February of 2023, I was completely unaware of the different dimensions of food. I was struck by the manifold literature which all comes with novel and refreshing insights. With that I began my exploration with a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement of this necessity which is not merely an ‘Art’ but also a ‘Science’ in all ramifications. During my field work, I interacted with members of the Igbo diaspora community in Europe and in the United States and was awed by the power of a meal.

Food plays a fundamental role in reaffirming cultural identity, and I realized identity is more fluid than I thought as culinary practices underwent adaptation and hybridization in response to transnationalism and globalization. The eureka of this study was the ingenuity and creativity in the preservation of the perishable food items and the movement of the foodstuffs across borders. The tactics employed to beat the watchful eyes of the custom officers at the international borders. My engagement with the Igbo diaspora community prompted me to reflect critically on my own positionality as a researcher and the potential impact of my presence on the dynamics of fieldwork. As an Igbo though with limited proficiency in the Igbo language, I recognized the inherent limitations of my perspective and the need for humility and reflexivity in navigating the complications of "native anthropology”. I sought to mitigate the asymmetries of power by fostering reciprocal relationships built on trust, transparency, and mutual respect, thereby allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the live experiences of the participants.

Conclusively, my ethnographic voyage into the romance of food, memory, and identity among the Igbo diaspora has been a humbling and transformative experience, fraught with the challenges of too many interesting and educative literatures which in a way derail me a bit as I was carried away with the underpinnings and epiphanies of food. Through introspection and reflexivity, I have come to appreciate the intricate web of connections that bind individuals to their cultural heritage and the myriad ways in which food serves as a conduit for collective memory and identity formation.

DISCUSSIONS.

The findings of this research emphasize the profound significance of food in inducing nostalgia and strengthening connections to one's homeland among diasporic communities. Food is portrayed as a tangible expression of cultural identity and a means of heritage preservation in the diaspora. Participants emphasized the importance of preserving and passing on traditional Igbo food rituals to the growing generations as a way of keeping their cultural heritage and collective identity.

The social underpinning of food also emerged as a central theme in this study, as participants explained the role of food in framing social connections, ties, and community dynamics within the diaspora. By cooking together and sharing meals, diasporans enacted ‘scapes’ for cross-cultural exchange, and collective celebration, reinforcing social ties backed by generosity, solidarity, and kinship within the community.

The research illuminates the complex interplay between globalization and migrants' foodways, as diasporans navigate between traditional culinary practices and the influences of their new cultural contexts. Participants often showed a desire to preserve the authenticity and honour of their eating culture, with globalization facilitating transnational trade of food ingredients, and cooking skills through mediascapes.

CONCLUSION

"Every dish has a story, every ingredient has a journey, and every interaction has moments worth sharing". Dorothy Ngam, African Chef Maryland.

Eating is one thing we all have in common and as humans we are active agents in the type of food we need to prepare, how to prepare and when and with whom we consume the food with. The data analysis presented above from my ethnography inquiry into the relationship of food, memory, and identity in the Igbo diaspora in Atlanta and Switzerland has proven that food is more than sustenance. It is equally a channel used in framing the cultural identity of a community mnemonic, preservation of their heritage and traditions, a conduit for promoting social relationships with family, friends, and community How has globalization impacted the Igbo food ways.

This study on the Igbo foodways captured the diverse and vibrancy of food as a performative component used for rituals in religious, cultural, and social arena. The results depicted the significance of food in Identity formation as food is consistently identified as a powerful cultural symbol, with respondents emphasizing the symbolic meaning of specific ingredients, utensils such as wooden bowls, mortar and pestle, dishes in connecting them to their Igbo roots. It brought to fore the difficulties and resiliency faced by participants in maintaining their food culture vis-à-vis the challenges of globalization, time, and availability of traditional ingredients.

The Igbo community in Atlanta demonstrated a passion and commitment to safeguarding their culinary tradition, sometimes through the tactful ingenuity of escaping the watchful eyes of the border custom officers and or through innovative strategies. Intergenerational transmission through handouts, menus, cooking stories and skill dissemination emerges as a factor in the continuity of traditional food rituals emphasizing the import of encouraging discussion between the older and younger generations in the community. While the first- and second-generation migrants are immensely attached to their food and eating culture, the younger generations are aloof and occasionally do so to please their parents.

Captured in this research is the dynamic nature of food culture in building and fostering social relationships. While globalization provides modern ways, cross-cultural ingredients, and cooking techniques, it likewise presents a risk of homogenization and loss of ethnic distinctness.

RECCOMMENDATIONS.

The study concludes with recommendation to stakeholders for policies and activities that support the preservation of cultural heritage and cross-cultural relationships with the motive of promoting diversity.

To the Igbo community, it is suggested that while they continue to preserve their culinary heritage, they should be sensitized on alternative ingredients and efforts made to blend with the foodways and culture of their host country and avoid stoicism. This will reduce the conflicts, enmity and animosity arising from the expectation of their traditional foodstuffs. Additionally, it will reduce the 'unlawful' smuggling of food items through the international borders. It is recommended they focus on buying from the authorized Afro shops who bring in their stock through the legal way.

To the Anthropologists on food studies and future researchers, the insights gotten from this study should prompt a longitudinal study and carry out comparative analyses within the Igbo diasporic groups to investigate the impact of globalization on the sustainability of cultural values and diasporic foodscapes contributing to a more understanding of the dynamics at work.

While to the policymakers, community leaders, it is recommended that the should be culturally sensitive and foster cultural diversity while taking into cognizance of cultural relativism by understanding the challenges faced by the Igbo and other diaspora in Atlanta. Programs and policies such as a radical food empathy drive should be initiated.

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APPENDIX 1



Picture of woman cooking with firewood



The left is fresh ‘oha’ leaves while on the right is the dried ‘oha’.