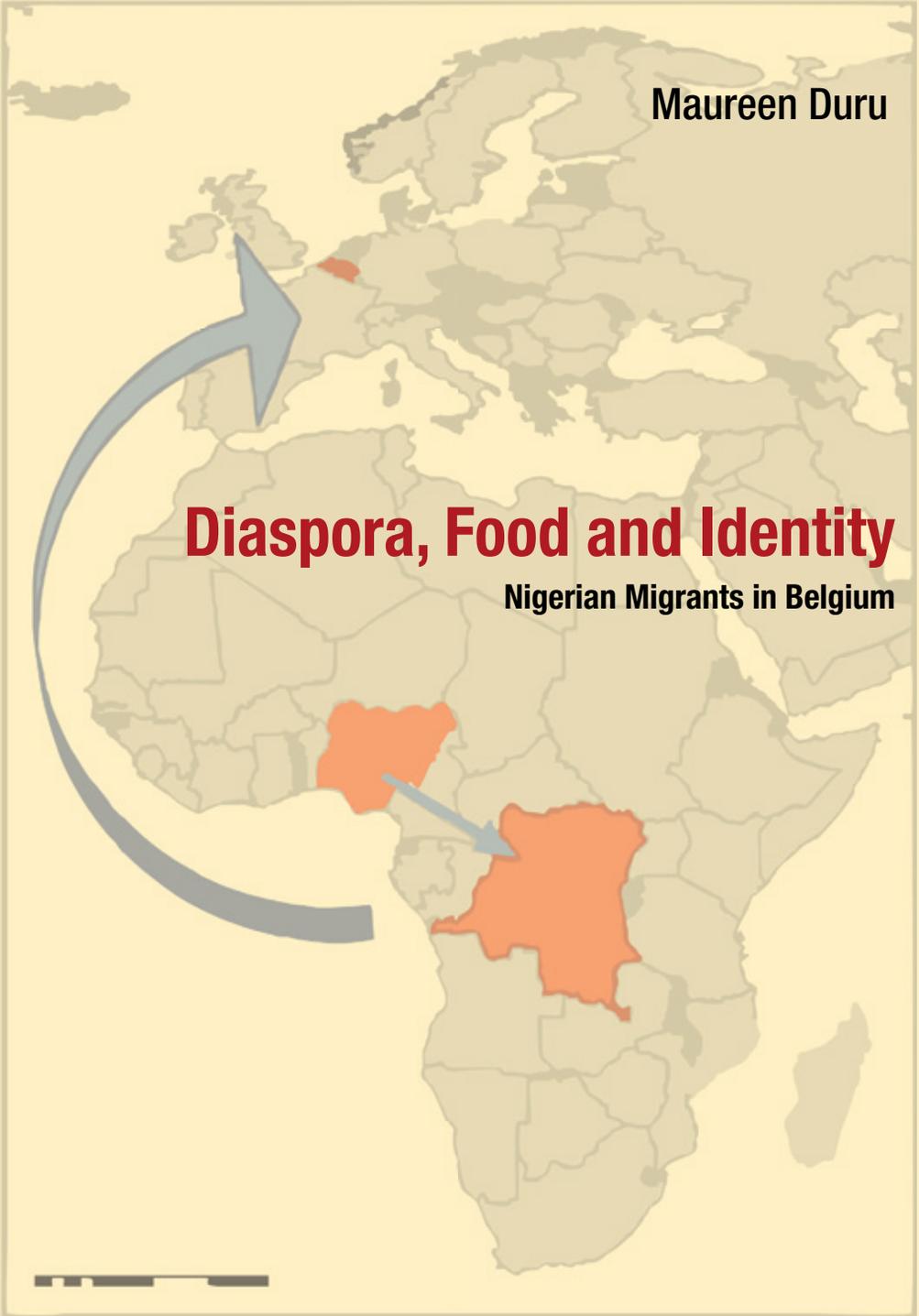


EUROPEAN FOOD ISSUES



Maureen Duru

Diaspora, Food and Identity

Nigerian Migrants in Belgium

This book examines the connection between food and identity in the Nigerian diaspora community in Belgium. Encounters between people from different cultures do not lead to a simple adaptation of the diet, but usually give rise to some kind of fusion of new and indigenous food habits.

The author questions the relationship between what Nigerian migrants in the diaspora eat, their self-perception and how they engage with outsiders. Starting with a historical introduction about the country, this study examines what aspects of the Nigerian food culture is retained and what has changed. This is reflected by the dynamics in the Nigerian homes, especially the gender roles.

The new generation of Nigerians, who see Belgium as home, also hang on to a Nigerian diet that remains not only an important part of who they are, but is also used in the creation of cultural boundaries and group identities. However, the influence of the new environment is very present because each diaspora community, wherever and whenever, must adapt. Skills such as language and social norms are indeed necessary to survive in the new environment. Yet, food plays a prominent role: on the one hand, it contributes to the affirmation of Nigerian feelings, and on the other hand, food serves as a means of communication with the host country.

EUROPEAN FOOD ISSUES

Maureen Duru obtained her doctorate degree in History from the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB), with a higher distinction. Her research interest focuses on Diaspora, migrants, food and identity. She is the founder of the non-profit organization The Food Bridge, which promotes food cultures as viable development tools and also supports indigenous food systems. She is a member of FOST, the Social and cultural food studies research group (VUB, Belgium) and is currently the Vice President of the Federation of Anglophone Africans Belgium. Born in Nigeria, Ms Duru now lives in Belgium with her family.

Diaspora, Food and Identity

Nigerian Migrants in Belgium



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Maureen DURU

Diaspora, Food and Identity

Nigerian Migrants in Belgium

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*This book is dedicated to the loving memory of my parents,
Gilbert Ifufejuorji Duru (Chinetugo) and Gertrude Chinyere Duru (Ochiora),
My daughters – Chioma, Obianuju, Chinenye and Chimezurum,
And
To God who is ever faithful.*

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Introduction

1. A journey of different routes

Writing this book started from an academic quest but writing the thesis it is based on, was not just an academic venture for me. It was a personal journey as well. In the year 2001, I enrolled for a master's degree at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels. The choice to study for a Masters in European Studies, focusing on European Integration and Development was not made out of any ambition for a lucrative career at the European Commission or affiliated bodies, but rather it was the choice of a migrant propelled by necessity. Having worked for years before joining my partner in Belgium, I found myself undocumented and unemployed which was hard to bear. With nothing to occupy my mind, the frustration was putting pressure on me and those around me. A way out was to occupy myself by studying. So, I chose a master's programme offered in English. Under no illusions about what I intended to do with the degree, most of the classes were just routine. Then I attended my first lecture for the course "European Cultures and Mentalities in Historical and Comparative Perspective" taught by Professor Peter Scholliers. Not only did I find it interesting, it was also academically stimulating for me. As a historian, who worked for years as the producer of a national television cuisine programme in Nigeria, the study of people, society and food from a historical perspective challenged me to look inward at the food and culture within my society.

Writing about Nigeria, the people and the culture, is so complicated that sometimes people write about one of the groups within the nation and present them as representative of the Nigerian nation. Nothing can be further from the truth. Homogeneity in all its ramifications is not a given in this diverse and complex nation. As an Igbo from the eastern part of the country, I spent years studying in Calabar, in Southern Nigeria. Upon graduation, I served for one year in Uyo (in the then newly created Akwa Ibom state in Southern Nigeria) as a corps member of the compulsory national youth service (NYSC)¹. Later, I moved to Lagos in the west, to

¹ NYSC is the acronym for the 'National Youth Service Corps', a compulsory one-year service to the fatherland which all Nigerian graduates from recognised academic institutions must perform. The scheme was established in 1973 by the then military

study and work, eventually living there for more than a decade. Work and friends (made at the university and the NYSC) provided me with opportunities to visit different parts of the western region. I have never lived in the north but I visited northern Nigeria for work and to spend time with friends and family.

I count myself as one of the lucky Nigerians, who have had the good fortune of experiencing the colourful tapestry of Nigerian culture and people. This experience has enabled me to have close contact with people from all over the country, both within their cultural domain and outside, thus giving me an insight into the socio-cultural attributes inherent in the different groups.

Having said this, I cannot claim to know any Nigerian group as well as I know the Igbo, which is my ethnic group and helped form my world view. Hence, in this book sometimes in drawing comparison with others, I may use aspects, references and frames of the Igbo culture more than the cultures of other Nigerian groups. However, the aim of this work is to explore and present Nigeria, its diverse people, food and culture within Nigeria and in the diasporas. I have arranged this book in such a way that it will convey an understanding of what it means to be Nigerian. Amidst our complex diversity, the difficult journey and detours in our history, there is a need to portray representations of our society, which can convey our world view and which enabled the emergence of new communities in different cultural milieus. Hence, certain aspects that are not so intrinsically linked to food are still relevant, because without them, this will be an incomplete history. Comprehending the Nigeria diaspora albeit in Belgium is helped with adequate knowledge of where we came from, who we encountered and how we got to this new place.

2. Migrant Communities: Food, Identity and Belonging

At a wedding between a Nigerian man and a Flemish woman in Genk, Belgium, a titled Igbo man performed the kolanut rites² thus highlighting the Igbo adage that the kola nut travels and talks too much. One wonders

government after the Nigerian civil war. The aim was to build national unity, thus graduates are posted to states different from their state of origin and which they are unfamiliar with, in the belief that exposing them to other cultures and their close interaction with people from different ethnic groups will build tolerance and lessen ethnic allegiances. However, achieving its set goals has been a challenge as shown by the number of corps members killed in the recent ethno-religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria. This has led to some parents and graduates refusing posting for service in some states (Marenin, 1989; *Thisday Newspaper*, April 23rd 2011).

² Among the different ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, the value of the kolanut varies, almost inversely, in symbolic and economic importance. In Nigeria especially

then what routes the kolanuts used for the rites may have travelled, what language(s) they speak and what tone was used. What does the kolanut say to the father of the bride? Does it speak the same way to the father of the bride as it does to the titled Igbo men, as each of them got a kolanut to take home? Moreover, for the Igbo men, is the kola nut really as important as it is in their homeland in Nigeria? The above illustrates the importance of culturally prescribed food norms, how people in diaspora use food to distinguish themselves from others or engage with others within their environment. In a previous work (Duru, 2005), I used the kola nut rites to highlight the changes Nigerians in Belgium undergo when they come into contact with other cultures. This showed that although migration affects the ritual in its form rather than its ritualistic content, it actually reinforces its traditional operation. One wonders if the same can be said of daily food habits, which have no ritualistic relevance in the lives of the people and if these food habits can also be powerful means of identification for the Nigerian diaspora community.

In this chapter my objective is to provide the framework, which will tackle the questions concerning migrants and the relevance of food in gauging the engagements and sense of belonging within diaspora communities. The combination of diaspora and food, in turn, brings to the fore the question of identity and how diaspora food habits are relevant or reflected in the identification process of the diaspora communities. Of relevance is an understanding of the composition and context of diasporas across the world. Diasporas as noted by Brah (1996), in the sense of historical experiences are composed of divergent groups made up of many journeys to different parts of the globe, each with its own history and particularities. These make each diaspora an interweaving of multiple travelling, “a text of many distinctive and perhaps even disparate narratives” (Brah, 1996, p. 183). This is also reflective of Agnew’s view (2005, p. 4), that the word diaspora can be used or defined in a number of different ways, which have more to do with the scholars’ discipline rather than with a substantive concern about the term. Hence, while using the term diaspora, one has to bear in

among the Igbo ethnic group, the kola nut is foremost an item which initiates, promotes and sustains social interaction. At any social occasion, whether a visit of friends, marriage, child dedication, burial even some business transactions, the kola nut is present. The presentation of the kola nut is a social and spiritual ritual. The kola nut communion is a very important item on the agenda of every gathering. Communion is not too strong a term: indeed, prayers invariably accompany the reception of the kola nut, indicating its spiritual status. Moreover stipulated formats and rules guide the presentation of the kola nut at all occasions. Thus in any gathering, drinking, eating and dancing are usually secondary and complementary to the kola nut rites. For the Igbos there are four main parts of the kola nut rites: the presentation (*iche oji*), the blessing (*igo oji*), the breaking (*iwa oji*) and the distribution (*ike oji*) (Duru, 2005).

mind its original definition as well as its subsequent broader use. The word “diaspora” has gained a wide audience in the social sciences, humanities and political sphere in the last 20 years, significantly increasing its scholarship. The Greek word was originally associated with dispersion of populations due to persecution or forced displacement, initially used to refer to the classic cases of Greek, Armenian and Jewish diasporas. In recent years the term “diaspora” has been used for migrants who, some argue, have not been forcefully dispersed (Agnew, 2005, p. 3; Munz and Ohliger, 2003; Cohen, 2008; Brubaker, 2005, p. 3). However, most of these migrants were forced to leave by a variety of negative circumstances in their homelands. Some economic migrants can argue that unequal opportunities and corruption, which limits their ability and access to a good quality of life, is a form of persecution (Nwolisa, 2004, p. 240; Ogan, 2001, p. 6).

There is, however, what one may refer to as the main context in which diasporas exist³. Firstly, diasporas are dispersed across different locations outside their homeland (real or imagined), of which the migrants all have a collective memory and some hope to return to once conditions are favourable. Secondly, there are links and exchanges between the various separated populations, which make up these diasporas and the homeland. These exchanges may be articulated through social, economic, political and cultural links, which give the diasporas continuous relevance in the homeland and to their existence in foreign lands. The level at which the diasporas acknowledge the homeland varies in its intensity as they invest in maintaining a link through language, religion, customs and traditions (Van Hear, 1998; Cohen, 2008; Amuwo, 2009). This link to the homeland can act as a constant reference, which helps reinforce traditional values, identity and loyalties, and can maintain a boundary between the diasporas and the host community. As a minority, this separate existence, even if only culturally, can provide the framework for group formation and claim making of migrants. This is sometimes necessitated by the continuous restrictions or challenges within the host communities, which raise barriers and impress on the migrants that they may not be fully accepted within the new cultural space and need to create their own space (Cohen, 2008; Brubaker, 2005; Amuwo, 2009). Yet, according to Manning (2010, pp. 10-11), diasporas can be big or small and may even lie within a larger diaspora, which is evident with the Nigerian case.

Whatever the frame of reference is, the existence of a Nigerian diaspora is not in doubt. Most diasporas with African origin tend to be classified as African diasporas and, within this context, people are further classified

³ As there is not just one diaspora community but many, composed of people of different races and origins, I will use “diasporas” in reference to multiple groups, but when indicating a particular group the term “diaspora” will be utilized.

by a nationality or ethnic group. When an African diaspora is discussed, the first reference is to the descendants of men and women forcefully dispersed all over the world as slaves – the old African diasporas. However, the replacement of the term Pan-Africanism in academic discourse with the term diaspora in the 1950s, allows more scope for one to recognise the different realities of being an African at home and away from Africa, whether in the old or new African diasporas (Okpewho, 2009; Zeleza, 2009; Osirim, 2010). The inhabitants of what is today Nigeria were major participants in the slave trade and many of the old African diasporas have ancestors who were originally from Nigeria. Some of these diasporas have maintained links with their origins through food, religion and politics (Adeyemo *et al.*, 2001; Apter, 1991; Chambers, 2009).

Among the new Nigerian diaspora are those who were dispersed by war, mainly those from the eastern region who left during or after the Biafra war (1967-1970). However, the majority of present-day Nigerian migrants are people who left due to bad governance and lack of opportunities, coupled with years of mismanagement by those in power (Falola and Heaton, 2008, pp. 255-256). Having migrated, they still maintain some economic, social, cultural and political links with home. These links between the Nigerian migrants and their country can be through economic investments at home, remitting money to family and friends, re-enacting cultural activities and traditional norms, and supporting political initiatives (Adepoju, 2006). Many Nigerians, like other Africans in the diaspora, strive to acquire a dual citizenship as it offers more mobility within the host country and also offers a guaranteed access (if they travel home) to the host country or other countries in the world, which can be challenging or even impossible with a Nigerian passport due to stringent visa requirements. These transnational movements have further strengthened the links between Nigeria and the country's diverse diaspora communities.

Diasporas cannot exist without migration, irrespective of the propelling factors. Hence, a study of diasporas is inevitably a study of migration and migrants. Thus, in referring to the people in the Nigerian diaspora, the term Nigerian migrants will also be used in this book.

2.1. *Eating from home away from home; the place of food and identity in the diaspora discourse*

People do not eat the same foods or the same ways. Cultures and societies attach much importance to food, which goes far beyond plain nutritional requirements (Lupton, 1998). Food is a very complex, paradoxical subject. In all communities, food choice and taste are socially and culturally constructed. These, in turn, are ingrained in the cuisines of

communities, which people accept and internalise as part of their cultural and even nutritional knowledge. This relationship between food, taste and cuisine tends to be symbiotic, as they influence each other in determining what is good to eat, how it should be cooked and what should be avoided (Civitello, 2011, p. viii).

Food traverse generations and communities. It is equipped with the ability to tell the story of a people, its history and its culture, together with what aspect has been sustained and what has changed. Due to food's ability to create links and bonds, focusing on any given food or food habits can be a means of understanding the configurations of a community and expose wider issues within any given society. Attention to historical change, as noted by Pilcher (2006), is essential to understanding how food has helped shape human societies. All foodstuffs have a history, which sometimes lies in a different locality from where it has the greatest impact. Historians and scholars of other disciplines have been able not just to study these origins, but can use food to elucidate societal changes within a given period (Mintz *et al.*, 1985; Mintz, 1996; Belasco, 2007; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Dinner, 2001). Food has been utilized as a symbolic tool for examining the cultural and social relations between and within societies. It can weave a link between people of the same group through rituals and rites. This helps one to recognize those who are within the group and those who live outside it (Douglas, 1984; Counihan, 1999; Holtzman, 2003; Gabaccia, 1998).

Although some scholars are of the opinion that people have an innate taste preference especially for sweet or sour, others maintain that taste is culturally dictated as it is the society in which one is socialised that will inform what taste category a food item is given. Not only that, even when people encounter new food, they value its taste based on their already acquired cultural yardstick for a negative or positive reaction (Rozin and Vollmecke, 1986; Meiselman *et al.*, 1996; Montanari, 2004; Anderson, 2005; Korsmeyer, 1999). As Macbeth (1997) argues regarding taste, there is "the essential interaction of the genetic and non-genetic", as gustatory sensations develop early while olfactory likes and dislikes seem to develop throughout life through experiences and associations. This is evident in people's food choice especially away from their initial cultural environment as they encounter new food and still maintain old eating habits.

Although eating habits as well as taste are culturally learned from an early age, these are continuously evolving to accommodate new food encounters (Macbeth, 1997). Devoid of war or famine, cultural influences define what is food within any given society and the attached symbolic relevance. The role of food as an identity marker, or means of identification, can be subtle or obvious in people's everyday lives. What and how people eat can tell us who they are, and about the culture within which

they live (Grew, 2000). As people move, they also carry their foodways along. Nowhere is this more evident than in the food practices of diasporas. The universal nature of food grants it an enormous potential as a means of mapping societal changes and values. This is possible because issues relating to food are linked to broader issues at the micro and macro levels of any given society. Thus, migrants proactively search for ways of using food to recreate their sense of self, taste and identity. Amidst various other food choices only that which they have learned to term as “food” is accepted and recreated even if not in its “true” form. This will be further highlighted as this study focuses more on diaspora identification processes.

Food can serve as a valid tool for mapping trends in migration, highlighting the link between food in the past and the present. It can portray the varied trajectories of different food items across the world (Bower, 2009; Ferrero, 2002). For migrants, maintaining their food habits may serve as a consistent means of alleviating the challenges of finding their place in a potentially threatening environment (Harbottle, 1995, pp. 27-29). The sentiment of belonging, which draws its relevance from food especially for migrants, is strongly built around memories and nostalgia, as food brings up memories of home, either in a positive or negative form. Food memories can be negative in the sense that, for example, due to economic limitations migrants may have experienced hunger back home. So, migration may be seen as a solution, to escape hunger. All through history many human migrations were triggered by the search for food or resources to acquire food. As people move to different localities, they carry their foodways along. People use food and remembered food practices as a coping mechanism in a new environment because familiar food or innovations from familiar food, remind them of home (Diner, 2001; Sutton, 2001; Belasco, 2010). The link between food and identity has been examined among many communities, particularly within “ethnic” and diaspora groups. These studies highlight food’s significance in the diaspora space and the different modes it utilizes in manifesting the diaspora practices within and outside the group (Ray, 2004; Goode *et al.*, 2003; Harbottle, 1995; 2004; Diner, 2001).

As the world’s largest industry, the food business is estimated at about 3-4 trillion dollars, having 10 per cent of the Global Gross Domestic product with millions of people working in the sector (Miller *et al.*, 2009, p. 6; Belasco, 2008, p. 8). Many of these workers in the food industry are migrants. Since food can also elucidate economic patterns within society, the diaspora communities’ entrepreneurial activities and how they reflect on the wider community can be viewed through food. The scope and context of these food entrepreneurial activities gauges the engagements within and between communities, how these mark their long-term food innovation, acceptance or tolerance of each other’s food. These economic

engagements show how various factors are interlinked to provide access to familiar food. This, in turn for the diaspora itself, helps in creating food networks across different foodscapes and hybrid foodways, which sometimes is only “authentic” within the diaspora, as many aspects within it are unknown in the homeland. Evidence of this is seen in migrant homes, ethnic food businesses such as restaurants, and food shops (Mohring, Harbottle, 2004, 1997; Deutsch, 2002; Lindgreen and Hingley, 2009; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Kersten, 2002).

The family is at the centre of most food-related activities in most cultural milieus. Thus the use of food in diaspora families can throw more light on the power play within; the economic status, gender relations and values, not just of the family, but of the wider society. The role of families is not only seen with regard to food production, provision and preparation, but also in the sustenance of culturally acceptable eating habits. This goes further into disclosing the connection between food, gender and power, thus bringing to the fore feminist perspectives, which view women’s housework, including cooking, as a form of subjugation (Avakian and Haber, 2005; Charles and Kerr, 1988; Inness, 2001; Counihan, 1998; Whitehead, 1994; Counihan and Kaplan, 1998; Murcott, 1983, 1997).

The relevance of identification in the diaspora experience, especially through food, is a very important aspect of this book. Identity is a complex term to define, but diaspora identity derives from a multiplicity of sources. According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, “Identity is who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which makes them different from others”. This defines identity in its most simplistic form. However, as Gilroy (1997) pointed out, identity offers much more than an obvious, commonsensical way of talking about individuality and community. People are fundamentally the products of history, culture and society (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 1). Human identity is thus socially, historically and culturally constructed. As all identities are constructed, the real issue is who constructs identity, how people do it, what do they use, and what are their reasons. Due to the constant self-dialogues about who we are, people tend to project an image, characteristics and values to those around them, and decide how their reaction to them should be valued. This, in turn, may influence their future actions or inactions, making individual and collective identity open to continuous assessment. Sometimes, the possibility of individual choice may be circumscribed by shared conventions, codes and values. This is what Castells (2004) refers to as the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute or set of related cultural attributes, pointing out that identities become identities if social actors internalize them and attach meaning to them. This construction of identities draws resources from history, geography, biology and a multiplicity of sources (Taylor and Spencer, 2004;

Castells, 2004). According to Woodward, identity gives us an idea of who we are, and of how we relate to others, and to the world in which we live; marking the ways we are the same as others, and the ways in which we are different: “it marks inclusion and exclusion, as insiders or outsiders – us and them”. Furthermore, “it is produced, consumed and regulated within culture” (Woodward, 1997, p. 2). Hence, cultural identities have an origin and history, which may entail constant changes in their construction. These different trajectories of cultural identity were well illustrated by definitions by Hall (1996). As he pointed out, on one hand cultural identity can be a sort of collective “one true self”, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves”, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us as “one people”, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and variations of our actual history. This is an underlying factor in the various efforts by Africans in positioning, creating and building an identity for African diasporas. Yet, Hall recognises that there are “deep and significant differences” in the identity of the members of the African diaspora, which reflects their varied experiences. Thus, cultural identity is also about belonging to the past, present and the future of multiple localities. Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being, not “who we are” or “where we come from” so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that influences how we might represent ourselves (Hall, 1996). Identity helps people to understand the interplay between their subjective experiences of the world, the cultural and historical setting in which subjectivity is formed (Gilroy, 1997, pp. 301-340). This way, their sense of belonging, or who they are, is continuously influenced or negotiated within their cultural environment, portraying the constant negotiations and reassessment inherent in identity formations.

Identity differentiated either as primary or secondary, is full of challenges. Moreover, people in diasporas have multiple allegiances and links from which they can draw meaning. Therefore, viewing identity as either collective shared history among individuals, affiliated by race or ethnicity which is considered as fixed (primary) can even be contradictory, marked with the multiplicity of the non-fixed (secondary) and its similarities as well as differences (Woodward, 2000 & 2003; Gilroy, 1997). Diaspora identities are strengthened from within as much as from outside the group, as identities marking difference are only obvious when contrasted by others. Some forms of identity are ascribed from the outside and might have a different connotation for those within the home community, but

assume a stronger meaning in the diaspora. A good example is the modern use of the term “African” in European societies in referring to Africans especially those of Sub-Saharan origin. In Africa, many Africans know about their origin, but that is not their first form of identification. It is only when they live outside the continent that “Africanness” surpasses all other sentiments of geographical belonging as a reference of identity. People call them “Africans”, a universal term which they in turn learn to use as it infers membership of a wider network than that which nationalities provide. African entities and governments in line with this trend now recognise an African diaspora and a national diaspora. A good example is the African Union’s reference to the African diasporas (old and new) as the 5th region after East, West, North and South Africa. The Nigerian government also makes efforts to engage with their diaspora through NIDO⁴ – Nigerians in Diaspora Organisation (Zeze, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2009).

In view of the fact that diasporas have multiple links and allegiances, and are continuously evolving, for some scholars the term identification seems a less ambiguous reference than identity. It connotes more than just sharing the common characteristics of a group or an ideal, but is a never-ending process of construction (Scholliers, 2001, p. 6). This is in line with MacClancy’s (2004, p. 64) preferred use of “modes of identification” as it “shifts attention from the static to the dynamic”, although Woodward (2003, p. 24) states that identification is just the process of taking up identities. In view of this, because diasporas exist in a fluid and flexible context, people may take up different identities as they go through identification processes. However, whether they have a uniform criterion, or attach the same importance and meaning to these processes, needs further investigation.

Diasporas do not exist in isolation, but rather have an intricate dynamic link to others with a close cultural identity. Food, as stated earlier, is a fundamental part of any group’s existence due to its varied importance. Clearly, the human relationship to food is a complex one, yet food patterns encompassing diets, habits, norms and taste are crucial to people’s sense of identity (Fischler, 1988). Although all humans have to eat to live, they do it in different ways. The variation in diet, cuisine and etiquette, when combined with cultural influences and traditions, assumes a unique

⁴ NIDO is the initiative of the former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. Established in 2001, its aim is to provide a forum through which the Nigerians in diasporas can contribute to the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Nigerian embassies and high commissions all over the world were mandated to enable the establishment of branches in different countries. As a result of the nature of its establishment and composition, many in the diasporas view it as another political agenda of self aggrandizement. In Europe, NIDO has branches in 17 countries including Belgium (www.nidoeurope.org accessed October 2012).

status, which helps define the people who live and operate within any given society. This is highlighted by Belasco, who states that “the people’s decision about their food is based on a rough negotiation between the dictates of identity and convenience, as identity involves considerations of personal preference, pleasure, creativity, the sense of who and where you are”. This is in addition to other issues such as taste, family, ethnic background and personal memories. Elucidating further, he notes that, in reference to identity, food choices are shown through rituals, etiquette, symbols and arts, so a study of identity and food has to look at what, where and how people eat or don’t eat (Belasco, 2008, pp. 1-10).

Expounding on food choice models and factors that influence what and how people eat, Fieldhouse (1986, pp. 23-36) also noted a food-selection paradigm based on availability, culture, economics, acceptability, religion, socio-psychological factors and individual choice. All these influence food choice, as no society classifies all available edible plants or animals as food. In essence, people eat what food they can conveniently access, influenced by their cultural and social orientation.

Beliefs and practices about food are circulated in cultures from one generation to another, linking food strongly with kinship and community membership, within which identity construction and sustenance is an important framework. Eating within a given society, like traditional dressing, a native language or festival, is a daily affirmation of cultural belonging. Generally, people as part of diverse cultures learn to adopt the norms and habits, as applied by their cultures. These are internalised and become part of the person. Thus, when they migrate, they take with them aspects of their culture. Food and food habits, being one of the earliest learned habits, tend to survive the longest. So, food has always played a major part in the migrant experience (Kershen, 2002; Kittler and Sucher, 2004).

In foreign countries migrants’ diets undergo some level of change, as familiar food may no longer be easily available or the dominant food cultures may gain more relevance. Yet, some familiar food habits remain resistant to change, as maintaining traditional tastes serve as a “cohesive and stabilising force in a strange environment” (Harbottle, 1997, p. 87). For migrants, not only does food portray individual identity, but its portrayal of group identity can also emphasise the ethnicity of its members. Food identifies ethnic difference, even for migrants who consume from their cuisine and that of others. The inherent differences are shown by the look, taste and smell of the food (Caplan *et al.*, 1997; James, 1997). Food, according to Kalcik (1997, p. 54), can be “manipulated consciously or unconsciously to make a statement about identity” not just self or group identity, but also how others perceive one. Migrants, when confronted by the pressure from their new environment, tend to adjust either by seeking familiar food or adopting the foodways of the host community. Yet, as Den Hartog *et al.*

(2006, pp. 36-38) pointed out, food diffusion and acceptance is complex as different factors come to bear on what food is; or practices accepted by migrants and how they influence the migrants' foodways. Its impact may depend on if the food is a staple, a condiment or a drink, as staples being the core food, may be less open to change.

To lay the right foundation for arguments on the main subject of this book, one has to first keep in perspective diasporas and the Nigerian diaspora in particular. Is food an identity marker in the migrant's experience? I assume it is, together with many other scholars based on the previous literature survey, but how evident is this connection between food and identity among Nigerian migrants in the diaspora? What factors support or challenge the use of food as a tool for identity formation and sustenance away from Nigeria? Since change and flexibility are inevitable in the lives of migrants, how does this affect their food choices and patterns? Is it possible to be open to change, while still upholding one's food culture or is it a matter of negotiation, flexibility and adaptation? Can there be a relationship between what Nigerian migrants in the diaspora eat, their self-perception, and how others perceive them? Is this relationship between food and identity for the Nigerian migrant stratified and transitory, or an unchangeable fundamental position? The following chapters will be elaborating more on these questions, and also contribute to burning issues about past, present and future migration flows.

Foodways, as used in this book, goes beyond cuisine and covers "the diverse range of uses and implications of food as a cultural/economic complex" (Hurst, 1981, p. 232). Just like Pauline Adema (2007, p. 232) pointed out, foodways denote general food habits of familial, regional, cultural or ethnic groups. This covers the way food appears in terms of meaning, procurement, preparation, presentation, and consumption. It refers to tangible, intangible and taken-for-granted factors, which influence how people prepare and serve food and especially attitudes, customs, traditions and ritualistic protocols.

The above overview of the diaspora, food and identity not only highlights the numerous perspectives of scholars, but also the diverse realities of diaspora communities in their new environment and relationship with home. The growing interest in diaspora food studies has gained more momentum in the academic world, providing more scope for further investigations.

2.2. *Situating the argument for a Nigerian diaspora and food studies*

A book such as this brings to light the similarities and differences in the diaspora adjustment modes, highlighting that even diasporas of the same origin are also moulded by where they are located. Although there are other groups from Sub-Saharan Africa living in Belgium, the Nigerian migrants have provided a privileged research field from which this book has emerged. The peculiarity of the Nigerians in Belgium showcases the divergent complexities of modern migration. The privileged research field of this study is particularly supported by the fact that Nigerians in Belgium lack significant means of integration. This could have been provided by a historic link to Belgium or the use of a common language with the host community. This lack of obvious links represents a major shift in modern migration (Bonifazi *et al.*, 2008, p. 9; Cohen, 1995, p. 8; Seweryn, 2007, p. 22).

The colonial and post-colonial migrations tend to be between the colonial countries and the colonies, and vice versa. Consequently, integration for Nigerians in Belgium is more difficult than for an African from the Congo, a former Belgian colony, or for migrants from other French-speaking African countries. Thus, considering Nigerians in Belgium adds a specific dimension to the study of migrants in relation to their host country. They, in fact, illustrate the present-day migrant who arrives in a country that offers no strings of whatever kind. Not only this, Nigerians in Belgium form a particular group: small, English-speaking, seemingly close on one hand but on the other hand, coming from a large, complex country with many ethnicities. This makes the study of the Nigerian diaspora in Belgium relevant, especially with regard to their modes of identification away from Nigeria.

Presently, the previous alleged homogeneity of nations – especially in Europe – is gradually being challenged by the increased multicultural outlook of many communities, which is a result of modern migration. The Nigerian diaspora is springing up in hitherto unimaginable regions (Bodomo, 2010; Bodomo and Enyu Ma, 2012). This work will provide a relevant platform for examining what historical trajectories brought Nigerians to their current position in Belgium and their daily experience of food in their host country. The importance of food grants it a pivotal position in people's lives including Nigerians, hence the daily private interactions, experiences and narratives of Nigerians, which otherwise will not be exposed, and their engagements with others is brought to light. This in turn, can initiate further academic research and arguments on migration, gender, interracial relations, economy, and diaspora cultures. The ability to confront and adapt to changes in their everyday lives, but be still able

to retain culturally ascribed food habits, is part of the enigma of food and migration. The new environment inadvertently positions the migrant as the “outsider”, which necessitates him to realign his position, to affiliate and consolidate within groups who share some common identifiable traits, no matter how small. As Carole Counihan noted,

food practises work as a conservative force, that prevents social change and obscures the political imperative to acknowledge difference, while on the other hand, it is precisely in the field of cross-cultural experience that it has worked most powerfully and helped materialize, if not to resolve conflicts in positioning (Counihan, 1999, p. 7).

In the past, a few anthropological works focusing on some Nigerian ethnic groups in Belgium, rather than Nigerians in Belgium, have been published. Nwolisa (2005) examined the Igbo migration to Belgium in recent years, and Onah (2007) examined the Igbo transnational migration to Belgium. Both studies recognise the relevance of Nigerian foodways to varying degrees. Nwolisa used restaurants and food to illustrate the mechanisms Nigerian migrants utilize in their daily struggle to settle down in Belgium. Onah used food festivals (new yam) to highlight the Nigerians’ transnational engagements. Food was not utilized as a historical material capable of elucidating the changes within the Nigerian diaspora community in Belgium. This may stem from the academic interest in Nigeria, which does not view food studies as a distinct academic discipline worthy of research. This notwithstanding, I (Duru, 2005) have examined food and the gender roles of Igbos in Belgium, to show how migrants can mitigate between known gender-specific food rituals and their place in the new diaspora community in Belgium.

There have also been some food-related researches carried out on the diverse migrant groups in Belgium, showcasing the ability of food to portray changes and innovations within or between groups. Briefly examining the main line of arguments of these authors will provide a comparable framework to the arguments of this book. The academic backgrounds of these researchers portray the diversity in food studies as their academic interest range from ethnobotany, anthropology and marketing to health studies. These researchers showed the divergent perspectives of food studies in relation to migrant communities in Belgium. None of these studies, though, has focused on the contribution of Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africans to the changing foodscape in Belgium. Nevertheless, these studies reveal some of the main issues in migrants’ food studies. Moreover, some of the authors also come from migrant communities and are in a unique position to access and present information from an insider’s viewpoint.

In Beyers' (2008) historical ethnography using life histories, she examined the Italian migrations to Belgium since 1946, highlighting the role food played in the Italian migrants' transition into their new community. Beyers exposed the tensions from within and outside the group that migrants had to contend with, as they negotiated between Italian and Belgian cuisines. This led to the eventual creation of hybrid foodways, unknown in the homeland but accepted as Italian cuisine in the new place, Belgium. As she pointed out, both cuisines had invariably influenced each other to a degree. This study also portrayed how the varied allegiance to Italian regions, Italy and Belgium is reflected on the cuisine. The changing styles of cooking and eating are viewed through the changing social relationships and identities of the Italian labour migrants in Belgium.

This historical study of Italians use of food is to some extent, similar to my work. Although the circumstances of the Italian and Nigerian migrants could not be more different, they share many similarities in their modes of adjustment to Belgium. The identity and affiliations within the Italian migrant community are shown as very strong, whereas their process of integration and relationship with Belgians was restricted and sometimes non-existent. The practical and symbolic attachment to Italian food habits is also portrayed as very important. Another commonality is the limitations posed by lack of suitable language skills, which were evident in the experience of these Italians. Like Nigerians, Italians speak a different language from the Belgian languages, which limited their integration and access to social networks in the host community. This meant that some of the first-generation Italian migrants never learnt to speak any of the Belgian national languages and looked inwards to build social networks. Beyers' study was able to highlight the modes of adjustment migrants utilize and how food can be a unifying factor for people from a culturally diverse nation when they migrate. As she showed, certain regional food from the diverse cuisines of the nation, in the diaspora, can gain more prominence than others, emerging as the identifiable "national cuisine". This does not in any way mean that regional or ethnic cuisines are no longer utilized, rather there tends to be increased diversity in styles of cooking and ingredients used to achieve an acceptable cuisine. On the surface it all seemed as if the migrants ate as they did at home, but a closer look at their diet and cuisine can reveal many innovations and influences in the migrants' foodways.

In her work Ching lin Pang (2002), used ethnography to investigate the migrant business and entrepreneurial trends within the Chinese food business in the city of Antwerp. Her studies mapped and analysed the development of the ethnic Chinese food business in Antwerp. As with many migrant communities, for the Chinese in Antwerp the food business provides an opportunity for economic advancement, which due to

some lacking skills, would have been impossible to achieve by working in the mainstream. Yet, despite their daily interactions with Belgians, the relationship is quite ambivalent as it does not provide for social interactions or relationships

Bonne, Vermeir and Verbeke (2008) in their publication on halal meat consumption in Belgium, focused on self-identity and acculturation of a Belgian Muslim migrant population. According to their findings, attitudes towards the consumption of halal food were influenced by the level of acculturation of the Muslim consumer in Belgium. In another study, Verbeke and Bonne (2008) conducted a cross-sectional survey in the summer of 2006, on Muslim consumer trust in the halal meat status and control in Belgium. It thus emerged that, from those who are indifferent to those who are Islamic idealists, attitudes and opinions vary with regard to halal meat monitoring and sales. Verbeke and Lopez's (2005) comparative work on the ethnic food attitudes of Belgians and Hispanics in Belgium, focused on the Belgian's stances towards Latin American ethnic food and on the Hispanics' viewpoints towards mainstream Belgian food, covering the attitude, perceptions and behaviour towards ethnic food and food consumption, among minorities in an increasingly globalised food market. Tabuna (1998) on the other hand, studied the market for plantains in France and Belgium. He used this popular tropical food item to reflect the changing trends in the exotic food market. The study offered a comparative analysis in both countries, looking at the development prospects of plantain consumption not just among a non-European consumer market, but also its steady inroad into the organic food market in both countries. Furthermore, in another work in 1999 he examined the African forest products sold in Belgium and France. Tracing the origin of this market, Tabuna provided an in-depth analysis of the African food market in Belgium/France and its impact on the producing countries.

Any study of Nigerian food and identity in Belgium has to be comparative – to some level – as there are always references to be drawn from other groups sharing the same environment and circumstances. Since food, eating and taste are shaped by culture, making cultural comparisons provides an important basis for understanding the determinants at work, in food choices and eating preferences among any migrant community (Frewer *et al.*, 2001). Food items were one of the earliest things to be globalized. Many of the food items termed as “Nigerian food” today, were unknown in the past to the people who lived in the area. So, a historical and comparative look at Nigeria is necessary especially its traditional foodways and the making of the modern Nigerian diet. This not only provides an insight into the origins and foundations of the Nigerian foodways, it also offers a base for drawing comparisons between the foodways of Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. The aim is not just to portray the

commonalities, but also to note the differences. It also helps to investigate what has changed, what is still the same or what is evolving among the Nigerian diaspora in Belgium. Attention is given to events and historical changes that impacted greatly or helped shape the Nigerian foodways and identity. This provides the necessary backdrop to the study of the food and identity of Nigerians in Belgium. In looking at the historical evolution of the Nigerian foodways, due to the continuous co-existence of the old and the new in the Nigerian milieu, care will be taken to avoid repetition of details.

Nigerian migrants on arrival in Belgium were of course confronted with already existing foodways, not just of Belgians but of other migrant groups too. How Nigerians perceived and reacted to these “alien” foodways is also of interest, as it will highlight any influence from these other foodways and show that the diet of Nigerians in Belgium does not operate as an isolated trend. There were diverse factors that provided an enabling environment for a Nigerian foodway to materialise and blossom in Belgium. A significant role was played by the emergence of African restaurants and shops in Belgium and also governmental agencies in Belgium and Nigeria. This not only maps the evolution of the Nigerian community in Belgium, but helps one to understand the resources available to Nigerians which enabled the foodways and identity sustenance in Belgium.

The findings of this work are made more relevant with the increased migration news since the beginning of 2015. We are daily presented with evidence of the south to north migration flow, thus with a continuous flow of migrants across nations; their daily cultural affirmations can no longer be ignored, since it will also impact on the host communities. What migrants eat is an important mark of identity, thus studies such as this will be a useful source of information for policy makers in the different nations with diaspora communities.

2.3. Sources, Methodology, and Approach

Since this book explores food as an identity marker among Nigerian migrants in the diaspora and its ability to build connections across cultural boundaries, it seeks to answer a range of questions that will help define the link between food and identity. The main research question propelling the discourse is: what influences the Nigerians’ food choice in the diaspora? Then, is it possible to be open to change, which is a necessity with migration, while still holding on to certain aspects of the home culture and traditions? Furthermore, with regard to the food culture, is there a connection between what Nigerian migrants in the diaspora eat, their self-perception, and how others perceive them? Is the connection between

food, identity and a sense of belonging for the Nigerian migrant, stratified and transitory or an unchangeable fundamental position? To answer these questions, I conducted 107 interviews in Belgium and Nigeria (see below for the methodology). Among those interviewed were 50 married Nigerians, 15 of whom are married to non-Nigerians. These data were further supported with relevant documents from other secondary sources such as literature, archival materials and media.

Coming from within the group brought its own challenges: potential sources are obvious but not necessarily accessible. One may encounter difficulties in gaining access to these sources due to one's affiliations within the community. Being friendly (or not) with certain individual(s) can deny one access to people. An individual in a position of influence due to his/her social or economic contacts can also portray the research in a negative light and make access to people difficult. The Nigerian community in Belgium is growing and is yet to reach its full potentials, but there are individuals who are striving to acquire positions of importance culturally, socially, economically or politically. Many of these people's emphasis is on having their position (real or imagined) within the community recognised and respected. However, as a member of the community one has the knowledge of who to appeal to or who can influence decisions within the community. This inside knowledge means that cultural etiquettes are observed and respect shown to people in positions of authority within the community. These challenges are not uncommon for researchers working within their communities (Marte, 2008; Abarca, 2006). Altogether, conducting a research like this would be very hard for someone who is totally outside the community.

Most of those interviewed at some point in their sojourn in Belgium were undocumented residents (some for more than ten years). Due to this, they have become weary if not defensive of any inquiry about anything relating to their private lives. After years of living as undocumented migrants and becoming used to divulging as little information as possible about themselves, the initial reaction to inquiries was suspicion and sometimes hostility, unlike those interviewed in Nigeria. In a general sense, people were willing to talk about every issue concerning their culture, however talking about their food in a personal way means opening up about their homes and lives, which are private. Not only this, some of the women arrived in Belgium trafficked (or willing) to work in the sex industry. Some have made money from this trade, and having married they have built a new respectable image for themselves. Thus questions about their migration to Belgium is glossed over, skipped or avoided.

As a community living in Europe, the reactions of these Nigerians may seem absurd, but as was explained earlier, many of these people have had to master the act of self-preservation in challenging circumstances and what

may seem absurd is a reality for them. It may also be a way of controlling certain aspects of their lives, in an environment which, most times, they cannot control. However, persistence and reference from other people and promises of anonymity paved the way for a better reception, if not complete understanding of my motive for the inquiries. A question about food, which to them is an everyday mundane issue, is initially reacted to with a lukewarm attitude or even disbelief but this is not uncommon, as other historians have experienced within their communities too (Diner, 2001). They could understand a study about their community but a study of their food seems like a cover for something else. This meant that the research had to be explained at every first contact, especially its relevance as a record of the social history of the community in Belgium. The informants known to the author were approached directly, while others were first spoken to on the phone, having gained an introduction through intermediaries. Further meetings were arranged during the initial calls. Nigerian families in Belgium played a pivotal role as an important source of evidence as to how food in the private and public domains reveal different dynamics of identity. Although there were limited historical records on Nigerians in Belgium for this study, there is an abundance of oral sources as is the case in most African communities. Children born to Nigerians in Belgium and non-Nigerian spouses were able to provide additional input in understanding the attachments and reactions to the Nigerian food and culture.

Different societies of the world including Nigeria arrogate different food-related roles based on gender, defining who does what in the food system and culture. Living in a different cultural environment that has different values and roles with regard to gender, the Nigerian migrants had to negotiate and sometimes reverse previously held views about gender roles. Insight into gender roles within families was necessary to understand the negotiation and sometimes the conflicts that can arise among men and women regarding traditionally held views about food especially food-related chores.

Food's cohesive cultural role in building and maintaining group identities through rituals is also examined, to see how representative they are and how these rituals have been utilized in creating boundaries. Moreover, food's social signification even amongst migrants can sometimes aim at creating social distinctions through prestige food. It was also important to examine how health issues have influenced the food choices of Nigerians in diaspora and its significance in their daily food habits. All these themes examined are geared towards answering the core question this book is focusing on, which is to highlight the importance Nigerian migrants attach to their food and how it reflects on their sense of identity within and outside their community at home and in the diaspora. To address

these themes, information was also gathered from documented sources and used in this book.

My first contacts became my main informants who in turn, referred me to other people who they felt may have had more information. All these core informants in Belgium, especially with regards to the history of Nigerians in Belgium, were university or college educated, and six of them worked for the Nigerian embassy in Belgium. Their level of education, although it gave them an understanding of the research topic, was not really a prerequisite. It was just coincidental that the Nigerians who have lived in Belgium the longest, were those who arrived to study decades ago. The main variables in selecting the core informants was firstly their ethnic group, their knowledge of the community, how long they have lived in Belgium, their marital status, and lastly, their position within the community. The embassy employees have privileged knowledge of the Nigerian community because of their professional positions, as they are constantly in contact with Nigerians living in Belgium. These were not diplomats but local staff of the embassy who have worked for the embassy for more than two decades. Thus, they were in a position to know about the Nigerian community and how it has evolved.

The first contacts were at public places or offices, and after the initial discussions, I requested to visit them at home. Some of these visits were also arranged to enable me to interview their spouses. However, it was imperative to insure that some spouses were interviewed separately, as I realised early that some of the respondents were restricted in their expressions in the presence of their spouses, or one of the spouses tried to control or dominate the discussion. This also brings the power dynamics in homes to the fore. This was not prevalent only amongst Nigerian couples but was also evident among interracial couples. Again, this separation was useful as confirmed by watching women, engaging with them either in the kitchen with other women during visits, and observing how different their language and expressions are. Although visiting for research purposes, food was always served in an informal way, as with family or friends, as the custom in Nigeria at such visits is.

Households were focused on as primary sources of information, to enable a clearer portrayal of the food-related behaviours and beliefs of the Nigerian diaspora community. As noted by Hubert (2004), food system is dynamic as food-related behaviour is never static. Hence, it was important to study the different generations of the Nigerian diaspora community, “to bring to light the various transmission processes on food and foodways” (Hubert, 2004). Over the years I have also attended formal events organised by many of the informants, children’s dedications, birthday parties, marriages, picnics, traditional events and even funerals, where food-related behaviours, etiquettes and rites were practised.

People in positions of authority in social or religious organisations were also approached, and, through them, members of their groups were met. This included organisations, which were established to enable non-Nigerian spouses to interact with Nigerians and be part of their cultural programs – i.e. dance, music, language, and festivals – in the community. For people contacted through organisations, the initial contact was at group interviews. This helps to break the ice and build trust (Achteberg and Arendt, 2008). Moreover, people were more forthcoming and gave their opinions freely although in a generalised manner, as the group dynamic provided a relaxed, familiar environment. Having spoken to them as a group, individuals were more approachable and one-to-one interviews were arranged.

All the data collection was arranged around the schedule or social plans of the respondents. For gathering information on migration and the place of food and identity in the diaspora space, open-ended questionnaires were utilised as a precursor to semi-structured interviews. To understand how the members of the Nigerian diaspora community use food as a conscious or unconscious identity marker, it was important to allow them the space to express their realities, how their journeys began, the routes they have taken, where they are and how they are. As Miller and Deutsch noted (2009, p. 158), narratives are compelling sources for food studies research because food is an important component of most cultures. Not only that, recounting narratives of their experiences has been the major way people throughout history have made sense of their experience (Seidman, 2006, pp. 8-10).

In using semi-structured interviews and oral testimonies, although people were allowed the leeway to express themselves and their views, effort was made to insure they did not drift from the topic. I utilised an interview guide based on the themes and key questions to be covered. This way the respondents could freely narrate their experiences, but enabled me to insure they were within the context of the subject matter and not drifting away from the research topic. The first set of interviews also helped fine-tune the questions as they showed how well – or not – the research questions addressed the issues and themes (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

The respondents interviewed in Nigeria lived in the southern part of the country. The respondents living in Nigeria were interviewed specifically to fill in some of the gaps that were caused by lack of adequate written material on the Nigerian food culture. Some of the respondents in this group were not literate. However, the interviews were based on their personal knowledge of the food in Nigeria, especially their locality. Although some of the older informants referred to information from their own parents – or older generations – to confirm some of the points they were making, this has been all part of historical narratives in non-literate

societies. These did not affect the content of the interviews, as oral history is an integral part of African historiography and documented sources were also used.

In Belgium the people from eastern, western and southern Nigeria account for 95 per cent of the data input, and the rest of the country 5 per cent. This is reflective of the Nigerian population in Belgium. All the respondents have experienced some level of internal migration in Nigeria before coming to Belgium. This is due to the increased rural-urban migration within the country since colonial times. As a result of the very recent Nigerian migration to Belgium, the majority of the data came from the first generation of Nigerian migrants. My aim is to understand how they built a community in their new milieu and especially how food was and is now used as part of their history (a link from home to this new place) and used for creating a new home away from Nigeria. I wish to portray what has been retained and what has changed, and how this occurred.

Although individuals were accessible, it was a herculean task to convince those, who are involved in large-scale African food importation to grant interviews. The two main importers at the wholesale market in Brussels always claimed to be too busy, and different staffs were asked to be contacted but all that came of it were e-mails containing little information. Nonetheless, retailers who buy from them were willing to provide information, and one could stay just to observe the transactions and also note the products that were available. Even though the retailers and smaller importers were willing to grant interviews, some were reluctant to provide any documented information that may have any link to their business, such as receipts or import documents. This is fairly understandable, because some people in this business try to maximise their profit, and in the process, may not adhere to all the official requirements. Others believe that what they do or how they run their business should remain private. The owner of one of the biggest African shops in Brussels, located in Anderlecht, was not forthcoming when first approached for information during the research. He stated that bringing his business to the position it was, had cost him three marriages and numerous friendships, so he would not be willing to give out any information.

Food diaries have also proved useful in determining which changes, if any, had been made in the Nigerian foodways in Belgium, especially in families, and if the changes were influenced from within the family, community or due to external factors. Not only was the composition of the family taken into account, composition of meals and the preparations helped to highlight the use of food in Nigerian homes, and what role education, gender, economic resources, and family background have played.

Although food diaries have always been in the domain of nutritional research where they are used with food frequency questionnaires to determine nutrient intake, during the research, informants were asked to keep a diary for one week at intervals, noting all the food consumed, and who cooked it. The emphasis here was not to measure nutritional contents of diets, but to investigate food use (and meaning) in families and food-related gender roles, for example what food is cooked and by whom. Despite the use of food diaries being a good method of self-observation, which provides the advantage of obtaining data on spontaneous eating, but it also has the disadvantage that the respondents may underreport or be biased (Meiselman and Blackie, 1996). Yet, as Krall and Dwyer (1987, pp. 1375-76) noted, this problem of validity of food diaries raised by some researchers can be circumvented if the foods are frequently consumed, because they are likely to be remembered than those eaten less frequently. The food diaries given to the Nigerian families would also pose less difficulties for them to remember, as they were recorded daily for a short period of time. Again some of the respondents already had family menus, which they used as a guide for meals. Bearing in mind that change in families at the time of keeping the diary may influence the data input, these diaries were further verified during discussions and interviews, by using them as a reference.

The questionnaires, as stated earlier, were utilized as a form of ground breaking mechanism for more exploration through other methods. This choice was in line with Beiske's (2002) view that research cannot rely on only questionnaires as questions may highlight trends or attitudes, but be unable from the response to explain the underlying reasons for the results. Due to the diversity of the group studied, questionnaires were developed differently to access and evaluate the different segments of the community. The first was for non-Nigerians married or co-habiting with Nigerians. The second was designed for Nigerians, and the third for children born to Nigerians in Belgium, or who came over to Belgium before the age of five. These questionnaires were reviewed twice. After the first sets were filled in by a sample of the respondents, the response showed that some line of questioning should be completely changed or better explored with interviews. Initially, one questionnaire was for women and another for men, irrespective of nationality. This showed the peculiarities within the Nigerian and non-Nigerian groups, and also that the line of questioning should be completely changed to reflect the difference in cultural background and origin. For example, in demographic questions, the Nigerian women tend to give information in reference to their husbands' origin, because married women are identified with their husbands' place rather than their natal origin. Again, that food decisions were not completely reliant on gender also became obvious.

Being part of the community meant that I had to attend numerous events organised by the members of the community. In some of them, I had roles to play other than that of a researcher. During most of these events food-related habits, customs and etiquettes were displayed and noted. This participant's observation meant that I could view the food and identity of Nigerians in Belgium in both private and public domains. At such moments, many of the abilities of food to label one as an "insider" or "outsider" became evident. Showing why a non-Nigerian sees nothing wrong in dishing out a traditional soup on her jollof rice, while some Nigerians point her out to others as an amusing sight. How food can tell a story of origins and places, like walking into a wedding reception of a Nigerian with other Nigerians and listening as they debated the origins of the spouse as boiled cabbages and tray loads of sautéed vegetables were not familiar sight in Nigerian wedding receptions. The participant's observations also can help one explore and understand the obvious gap between what people know, say and what they actually do (Achtenberg and Arendt, 2008).

Although much of the research, which this book is based upon, relies on primary oral sources, it was further supplemented with secondary information and data from a wide variety of sources, such as Belgian statistics and archival materials relating to pre and post-colonial African and Belgian history. This has helped elucidate the link between the increased migration and availability or emergence of more ethnic foodways in Belgium and have also been relevant in mapping the demographic projection of migrants in Belgium.

Food, migration and identity are experienced on a very personal level by people. Thus it was also crucial that individuals were allowed to express their own experiences and life histories, thus exposing their views and perception of their world. As noted by Donatella and Keating (2008), human beings are meaningful actors, so it is essential to discover the meanings that motivate their actions, rather than assume the experience of other migrants in one diaspora community is applicable to all. Since this is also about the history of the Nigerians in Belgium, it is also pivotal to understanding the historical events or social phenomena that have impacted on their lives.

Although there are written materials on some contemporary diaspora communities, oral testimonies and narratives from members of studied groups can help us understand and reveal undocumented habits and ways of life. It can also expose the characteristics of people, by revealing the images and symbols they use to order their experiences and give them some meaning. Many a time, these testimonies of individuals in turn may have references to the larger group and articulate shared realities (Raleigh Yow, 1994, pp. 12-17). Some from more literary societies may find it challenging to accept documented experiences that are not literary. Yet accepting

this as the norm means, many societies can only rely on others to tell their stories as they deem right, which may not be representative of the people and society studied. Oral testimonies and narratives have been used by other researchers in food studies, such as in Abarca's *Charlas Culinarias – culinary chats* (2006, pp. 7-9), Marté's foodmaps (2008, pp. 70-72) and the food-cantered life histories of Carole Counihan (2004), giving people the opportunity to convey their views in their own words. In each of the works mentioned, the oral testimonies and narratives enriched the arguments and contents.

My method in this book is necessarily diverse because food studies as a discipline straddle different study areas, enabling access to a multi-disciplined research methodology (Miller and Deutsch, 2009). Although some may struggle with this concept, I believe it removes some restrictions that might have hindered the presentation of the Nigerian culture and foodways in a manner truly reflective of the people. Despite Albert's stance (2005, p. 294), that a social historian is more interested in the fact of what happened than in formulating theories, elements of the different theoretical approaches prevalent in food studies are acknowledged. Although they may not necessarily be adhered to, yet some of their arguments and stances are also evident in this work.

From my point of view, the Nigerian foodways at home and in the diaspora, considering their multifaceted connections within and outside the country, attachment to food as a link for individual and group allegiance to the homeland; none of the theoretical approaches can be fully representative of the Nigerian situation. Focusing on one theory's approach, means denying other practices within the society as means of expression too. This is the challenge of working on a research field such as Nigeria with a conflagration of mini-nations and diverse people.

Having said this, it does not diminish or challenge the relevance of theoretical approaches in academic research in any way. In this work, influence has been drawn from different sources and some of the divergent approaches which have influenced this work reflect the different social science arguments and cover the different genres of food studies.

Firstly, food-related chores are viewed in many cultures as a woman's job, and as a result, the feminist voice has always been audible in food studies (Counihan, 1997, p. 2). Thus, the feminist approach to food studies is very relevant in understanding the social and cultural dynamics inherent in various foodways including Nigerian's. Influences were also drawn from economic approaches as they not only monitor the production and distribution of food, but also influence national policies on food (Ashley, 2004; McIntosh, 1996). Yet, food is both material and symbolic with a varied impact on people's lives, hence McIntosh's statement that

we must view food either as a material object or as a symbol but not both, although he was also quick to point out too that some human behaviour cannot be easily explained by relying entirely on culture, economics or personality (McIntosh, 1996, p. 3).

As the forte of food studies, scholars often draw influence from social science theories in formulating their arguments based upon many of the social and symbolic phenomena in foodways. However, three main theories have had great influence on food studies research. These three are briefly examined, noting how relevant they are to this book. The first of these three is functionalism, which presents society as having different organs, each playing a unique, irreplaceable role in the existence and maintenance of society. The functional signifier indicates the role of each aspect of society, including its food, and how it enables continuity and cohesion of the social order (Beardsworth *et al.*, 1997; Mennel *et al.*, 1992). However, some scholars argue that it does not take into consideration the history of the institutions and features within society. According to Beardsworth and Keil, "given that social systems are able to undergo far-reaching structural changes, the notion of a set of immutable and unavoidable functional needs is somewhat implausible" (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997, pp. 57-59).

Of great importance is also structuralism as it is embedded in many social research arguments including those on food studies. Although similar to functionalism, structuralism when focused on cuisine, taste and manners, elaborates the connection between the symbolic role of food and social relationships. Some of the main proponents of this theoretical approach in food studies include Claude Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas and Roland Barthes. The idea behind the use of this theoretical approach in food studies is that food has a "structure", a codified message or symbolic meaning, which is hidden within the foodways of various societies. Therefore, food portrays the order and social relations within societies, as "dictated" by culture, thus indicating what is termed as food and how it should be used. Analysing this inherent food code will then help decipher the underlying attitude of society, since these codes dictate how food is used in building boundaries between those who are in the group and those who are not (Brown and Mussell, 1984; Counihan and Van Esterick, 1997; Beardsworth, 1997; Harbottle, 2000; Ashley, 2004).

The developmental approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the relevance of history on societies and their food cultures and also recognizes the need for food, like other aspects of society, to be seen as ever evolving, reflecting internal changes. Therefore, in understanding the present foodways of a group, one needs to refer to one's history (Mennel, 1996, pp. 15-16). Its main proponents looking at food from a historical point of view noted how changes within society can impact on people's food choices, and how these choices are viable tools for examining micro and

macro historical trends. Some of its main arguments are seen in the social aspect of Norbert Elias's figuration theory. The theory postulates that people and society interconnect and develop, influenced by the complex sense of identity and broader social processes. In his work, Elias recognized the importance of shared symbols but not as a universal given (Elias, Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998; Kaspersen and Gabriel, 2008; Smith, 2001; Elwell, 2009). He further utilized his work "The Civilizing Process" to illustrate how Western society – and especially its eating habits – has evolved since the middle ages, leading to what is termed as acceptable table manners and use of food.

According to Sharma (2006), to explain information from different sources and resources from the viewpoint of individuals, groups or society, and be able to interpret the findings, history can always rely on other disciplines. This has undoubtedly widened the scope of historical research, as nowadays historians straddle the divide between the humanities and the social sciences (Bretel and Hollifield, 2000). As a result, the validity of this research takes from Saukko's (2003, p. 19) alternative validity, composed of dialogic, self-reflexivity and polyvocality. This demands that a research's truthful reliability should do justice to the perspectives of the people studied, so that they can in the main agree with its findings. Secondly, self-reflexivity helps one to reflect on the personal, social and typical dialogue that guides the way reality and other people are seen. Thirdly, polyvocality demands that one be aware of the divergent lives and realities being investigated. Consequently, attention is not to be focused only on the views and voices of prominent members of the community but on people from all strata of the society. This has been my guide in my approach and to the best of my ability, is portrayed in this work.

To further draw from a broader pool of knowledge, I have also examined the results of scientific research on the diet of the diaspora in other times and places, which has allowed me to contextualize the experience of Nigerians in Belgium. Throughout this book, attention is given to the history of food in Nigeria, the Nigerians' migration to Belgium and the recent history of Nigeria, establishing the link between "home" and the diaspora. Furthermore, the continuous encounters between people from different cultures as necessitated by migration, do not lead to a simple adaptation of the diet, but can give rise to some kind of fusion of the new and indigenous food habits, which also needs to be examined (Kalcik, 2001, p. 40; Kittler *et al.*, 2012, pp. 6-7). My research for this book has indeed shown that these encounters between cultures can lead to relatively new dishes that are unknown in the home country, but considered "authentic" in the host country. This necessitates a further examination of the concepts of tradition and innovation in relation to food, highlighting the interesting "confrontations" between the Nigerian food at "home" and in

the diaspora. To note what has evolved and what has remained the same, it was of importance to also examine the place of food in the Nigerian academia and what resources my research and others can utilize.

2.4. “Tradition” and “Innovation”

The exploration of how diaspora foodways are comparable to the home foodways can be a challenge to sustaining the notion of traditional food. Looking at any diaspora food, people tend to point out how it has changed from traditional food at home, yet on closer look at the origin of any given food, one may question and doubt the notion of “tradition” in relation to food and foodways. Thus, there is need to first examine the terms “tradition” and “innovation” in the context of foodways in the home country and in the diaspora including how both notions are reflected in the foodways.

“Tradition” is a common-sense word but with a scientific category (Handler and Linnekin, 1984). It refers to an inherited body of customs and beliefs, material objects, images, events, practices and institutions, which are handed down from generation to generation. These include all that a society at a given time has, and which already existed when its present possessors came upon it. Some scholars view tradition as a wholly symbolic construction, as some traditions that look or claim to be old, are often recent and invented (Hobsbawn *et al.*, 1983, p. 1; Handler and Linnekin, 1984, p. 280; Shils, 1983). Yet, according to Shils (1983), when a tradition is accepted, it is as important to those who accept it as any other part of their action or belief. Thus, tradition does not just belong to the past but to the present too, like any recent innovations. This is evident in food studies with reference to traditional food. As Scholliers pointed out, in food the content of what was tradition can be altered as is shown by the reintroduction of old cuisines, which is a reinvented tradition and becomes something new (Scholliers, 2007, p. 356). On the other hand, some of the food, which is viewed as part of the traditional foodways or cuisine, may have been introduced relatively recently. Thus, food tradition can rely on indigenous and introduced food items to convey the meanings and beliefs that are important to the community.

For scientific studies and other practices, different criteria apply to the definition and interpretation of what innovation is (Herzog, 2008, p. 9; Roth, 2009). According to the Oxford English dictionary, innovation is a noun derived from “innovate” which means “to make changes to something established by introducing new methods, ideas or products”. So innovation (which is the process of innovating) involves something new, a method or idea. For example Rogers (1995, p. 11) stated that, it does not matter so far

as human behaviour is concerned whether or not an idea is objectively new, if measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. Its perceived newness to an individual is determined by the individual's reaction to it. Thus, if it seems new to an individual, it is an innovation.

Furthermore, relating his definitions to food, Dando (2012, p. 181) stated that a food innovation consists of one or more additions made in an existing diet or the way food is prepared and presented. The way this food innovation is communicated among members of a social system and coupled with factors such as the need, ease of preparation, taste, nutritional value or cost, determines whether it will be accepted. Due to these factors, some food innovations diffuse slowly while others are more rapidly diffused.

Den Hartog *et al.* (2006, p. 40) clarified two categories of food innovation as "expensive innovation" and "emergency innovation". Expensive innovation involves food adopted by the upper classes of a society, which diffuses downwards. With time this type of food loses its exclusivity and becomes part of the general diet. Emergency innovation, on the other hand, is due to periods of lack, which may be precipitated by economic distress. Food innovation, whether as a result of food diffusion or absorption of new foods into a population's diet, is a continuous process, so this innovation must complement the existing values, past experiences and acquired taste to become widely accepted (Dando, 2012, p. 182).

Based on the above definitions, tradition as used in this book represents those aspects of the Nigerian customs and culture including food, which has been handed down and, one way or another, adapted through generations. These food items, diets, cuisines and culture, which were part of the people's past, are still relevant in the lives of Nigerians. Some of them may have evolved due to external stimuli from outside the Nigerian society.

The Nigerian foodways, as will be shown in subsequent pages, has experienced both expensive and emergency innovations at home and in the diaspora. How these innovations manifest within the foodways will be highlighted. Thus, in as much as some of the food innovations may be common or taken for granted in the host community, the way they are used by the Nigerian migrants differs and reflects the realities within the Nigerian diaspora community. Food traditions and culture in Nigeria will provide a comparative analysis for examining what has changed and what is still the same in the diaspora. Attention is also given to how the Nigerian diaspora foodways in Belgium adapted (or not) to its new milieu in an effort to be relevant to the Nigerian diaspora community and support some of the cultural affirmations of the people.

In the next pages, the food history of Nigeria especially the enabling environment that created the present Nigerian food culture and cuisine

will be examined. These will also reflect how the different ethnic groups use food to define who they are and those who are different from them.

2.5. The place of food studies in Nigerian historiography

As a historian, the examination of the origins of what is today the Nigerian foodways is of great interest to me and influenced my venturing into the field of food studies. McCann (2009, p. 2) rightly points out that, in studying food with regard to Africa (including Nigeria), a historian can either focus on the lack of food, which is already receiving attention as part of policy reports, as well as economic and agricultural studies, or one can focus on food as part of the cultural representation of the people. Thus using food as a window to examine the lives of the people on a micro and macro level, since food has the ability to permeate all aspects of life. Yet, African professional historians, when compared to their peers from the Western world, are yet to utilize fully the research opportunities in food studies.

Nigerian historiography is complex and challenging, to say the least. Its main thrust was initially political. It took years before Nigerian historiography became more diversified in terms of focusing on all aspects of the Nigerian society (Falola, 2002; Falola and Aderinto, 2010, p. 68). Despite this, food as a subject of study has often been the focus in agriculture, economics and health studies. For those aiming at using food to map the historical and cultural changes in Nigeria, the above-mentioned disciplines and other non-historical approaches have become vital.

The lack of written records on the people that inhabited Nigeria prior to the people's contact with outsiders – because theirs was a non-literate society – does not mean people did not preserve their history. Oral history and oral traditions (Vasina, 1985, p. 12) are an integral part of Nigerian societies and have been genuinely useful in historical researches. Grele (2007, p. 38) also noted that, oral history is important in uncovering the history of everyday life. However, some scholars advise caution in the use of oral history because it may not be fully representative and accurate (Vasina, 1985). Yet, Ritchie (2003, p. 26) points out that oral history is as reliable – or unreliable – as other research sources, because no single data of any sort should be trusted completely, and all sources need to be tested against other evidence. Irrespective of all this, Nigerian professional historians see oral historical narratives as crucial to Nigerian historical studies (Isichie, 1997, pp. 8, Falola *et al.*, 2010, pp. 5-6).

Historical narratives and traditions stating origins, customs, beliefs, rituals, many of which are food-related or food-based, abound in Nigerian societies. Some crops, such as yam, enjoy such cultural and economic status

that oral traditions about them provide useful indicators to the history of the people. Some good examples can be found among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria. According to Isichei (1970, pp. 7-8), a look at the mythology of human origin of the Igbo shows “the fundamental discovery that changed their society is yam cultivation” stating further that the discovery of yam cultivation formed the economic basis of Igbo civilization. This view is linked to the ancient *Nri* – town believed by some to be the original settlement of Igbos and their spiritual home – tradition, which states that:

Chukwu (God) gave *Eze Nri* (King of Nri) and *Ezedaru* (the wife of Eze Nri) each a piece of yam, yams were at that time unknown to man, for human beings walked in the bush like animals. After eating his portion, *Ezedaru* went to ask for more. *Chukwu* gave him another piece and instructed *Ezedaru* to tell *Eze Nri* to send his eldest son and daughter. The *Eze Nri* sent them and *Chukwu* told them to bring a big pot, which he sent back again. The *Eze Nri* was to plant this pot wherever he chose and no one was to look into the pot for twelve days; when they looked in and saw yams growing, they went to *Chukwu* and told him, and *Chukwu* said plant them, put sticks and lift up the runners (yam cultivation by divine intervention and instruction).

Yet another version of the Nri myth, Ukachuwkwu (2007, pp. 244-260) quoting Metuh, states that *Eri*, father of *Nri* and *Nnamaku* his wife were sent down from the sky by *Chukwu* (God). During his lifetime, *Eri* and his dependants were fed with fish from heaven by *Chukwu*. However, upon his death the food supply ceased. When *Nri* complained to *Chukwu*, he was told that in order to get food he would have to kill and bury his eldest son and daughter. Initially, he refused. However, when *Chukwu* promised to send someone to carve the scarification mark on the children’s foreheads, *Nri* accepted. After the promised man Dioka arrived and carved the scarification, *Nri* slit their throats and buried them in separate graves. Three native weeks or 12 days later, shoots appeared from the children’s graves. From the son’s grave, *Nri* dug up yam. He cooked the yam, ate it, and liked it so much he fell into a deep sleep. So deep did he sleep that his family thought he was dead. The next day he dug up the daughter’s grave and got cocoyam. There is still another yam myth from the northern Igboland, stating that the founder of the town of *Izzi* searched for food in the bush for his starving parents and sister. He found a number of specified wild yams, some of which have since been domesticated.

The above myths of origin show how intrinsic the yam is to the Igbos, so much so that it is linked to myths of origin of the group. Despite the variation in the versions of these myths of origin, its importance lies in its effort to link the cultivation and consumption of yam to divine intervention and instruction given to the revered priest king of the Igbos, *Eze Nri*. In essence, these beliefs initiated the high esteem yam enjoys all over

Igboland as it is deemed to have been there – by divine proclamation – since the origin of the Igbo people. This, in turn, has built the strong cultural attachment and identity surrounding yam cultivation and consumption in Igboland and in the diaspora.

It is from historical oral narratives, such as this Igbo yam myth, that communities transfer the knowledge and build support about what is accepted as edible. Hence, you have plants, animals and insects with differing acceptance in the food system. The case of totemic animals is a good example.

Despite the challenges oral traditions and sources may pose in the study of food in Nigeria, as an acceptable source for some scholars, archaeological evidence support some of the oral history of the people, especially regarding the origins of indigenous foods. Archaeological studies and excavations in the Nigerian areas have shown an early development of skills, like metalwork, which is needed for agriculture. This indicates an early crop and animal domestication (Okafor, 1993, p. 432; Ogundiran, 2005, pp. 137-140; Isichie, 1997, pp. 62-63; Klee and Zach, 1999, p. 81). As a result, archaeological studies have proved a useful resource in learning which food crops were available prior to external contacts (Shaw, 1976, p. 131; Klee & Zach, 1999, p. 81; Gordon, 2003, pp. 5-8; Bedigian, 2005, p. 152). Moreover, based on evidence from archaeological discoveries, it is safe to infer that, for the diverse Nigerian groups to have survived with some having – and controlling – great political areas, they had access to adequate food. Not only this, the development in agriculture invariably proves the existence of ancient crops with norms and traditions, which guided food production and consumption.

The first recorded contact with the outside world by the people who inhabit present-day Nigeria occurred in the northern section of the country, via the trans-Saharan trade routes, with the Arab world. Sources from this era provide useful resources for food studies, although some Nigerian historians advise caution in the use of these sources (Akin Alao and Gboyaga Ajayi, 1990). The Arab traveller Ibn Battuta's travel narratives were not just about the people or his experiences but also recorded which food was available in the areas he visited (Levtzion and Spaulding, 2003; Decorse, 2001; Bovil, 1958; Falola, 2000). The greatest impact of these trans-Saharan contacts was the introduction of Islam into Northern Nigeria. The indigenous food habits of the people were changed as they adopted food habits and practices prescribed by the Islamic faith.

More documented evidence of Nigerian foodways emerged as a result of contacts between Nigerians and Europeans along the Southern Nigerian coasts. Most of these early Europeans were mainly traders and explorers. In recording their daily experiences and encounters, they inadvertently

recorded some of the food history of what later became Nigeria. From these early documents one can draw an idea of which indigenous food was used in this area before colonialism and the means through which the people and foreigners acquired food. This is reflected also in the changing patterns of food trade, which assumed an “international” dimension. Writing about the earliest historical reference to trading in the Bight of Biafra, G.I. Jones noted the reference made in the *Esmeralda de situ orbis* of Pacheo Pereira regarding the trade in food. According to the record dating from the 1500s, people from what is now Southern Nigeria sold food to the early Europeans as shown by this quote, “they came from a hundred leagues or more up this river bringing yams in large quantity; they also bring many slaves, cows, goats and sheep” (Jones, 1958, p. 33).

These European traders had to rely on food supplied by the people living in the area, not just for their sustenance while in the area, but also to stock their ships for the trip back to Europe or the Americas. Hatch (1971) referred to the records from a ship worker about the 18th century, which detailed the negotiations and stocking up of supplies for a European ship in the pre-colonial era,

(...) the price of provisions and wood was also regulated: sixty king’s yams, one bar (a form of currency), one hundred and fifty slaves one bar; for fifty thousand yams to be delivered to us. A butt of water, two rings. For the length of wood seven bars which is dear; but they deliver it ready cut into our boat. For a goat, one bar, a cow ten or eight bars according to its bigness. A hog, two bars, a calf eight bars. A jar of palm oil one bar and a quarter (...).

Not only does this provide information about food during this period, it also shows the economic practices and the existence of a market economy. It also portrays the horrid trade in human beings, showing that some food costs more than human beings. Moreover, for the above quoted volume of food to be available for trade, one can infer that a vibrant agricultural system existed, able to sustain the people with enough surpluses for trade.

One of the negative aspects of this early contact between Europeans and West African regions, including present-day Nigeria, was the trade in slaves. However, this trade in humans, as unfortunate as it was, helped transfer different types of food crops and food culture around the world. Food crops came from different continents to Nigeria, but others were also shipped from Nigeria to the new world (Adeyemo *et al.*, 2001). Evidence of this is still seen in the Americas. Some of those sold into slavery later wrote about life in their countries of origin. The writing of the ex-slave Olauda Equiano (1837, pp. 13-14) contained information about the culture of his people (in what is believed to be present Eastern Nigeria), stating their foods and eating habits. Some historians argue that his recollections may not be accurate due to time lapse, and that some of his memories may have been romanticized (Isichie, 1970). Yet, some of the

foodways and habits he described are still evident in this Nigerian region, supporting the relevance of these sources in historical research.

Food crops can also provide links to wider historical developments in the country. For the Nigerians, palm oil was a substantial edible oil before it became a valued international trading commodity, at the end of the slave trade. The trade in palm oil that emerged later in the 19th century not only changed the social dynamics of the Nigerian communities, but it also impacted on the gender and economic roles. The trade enabled women to become part of the market economy and of the new economic status that it brings. Documents from this era have been used by Nigerian historians in the study of the palm oil trade and its impact on society. Many have used it as a window to view the economic and political changes that occurred in Nigeria in the 19th century (Dike, 1956; Alagoa, 1970; Jones, 1963). It must be mentioned that none of these historians set out to write the food history of Nigeria, but rather they were dealing with what was deemed of academic importance at the time, the rewriting of the political history of Nigeria by focusing on nationalistic, political and economic issues.

Furthermore, Christian missionary records are a valuable source of data for Nigerian historians, which if harnessed can portray the relevance of food studies in Nigerian historiography. Christianity challenged the indigenous beliefs and changed the cultural and traditional dynamics of Nigerian communities, including their food habits and practices. Disregarding the relevance of these records may mean losing information on the reaction of the indigenous people, their food and culture, to the Christian code of conduct and Western influence. For instance, Christian missionaries prohibited the use of traditional medicinal prescriptions, consumption of food presented before idols or used for cultural rituals (Aguwa, 2005, p. 20).

In adapting to the demands of the new religion, the people were sometimes able to negotiate this new religious terrain, sustaining some aspects of their food culture in the process, which ordinarily may have been lost. The close contact between the missionaries and the people put each side in a vantage position to observe the other's culture and norms. Some of these early missionaries did not just convert the people to Christianity, but interacted closely with them, even sharing meals (Isichie, 1970).

These early missionaries kept records of the cultures and beliefs they encountered, even though they may not have fully understood them. Not only are these records useful for the study of food in Nigeria, the most relevant contribution of the missionaries was in offering Western education to Nigerians, which equipped them to document their own history both in English and in their mother tongues. Many Nigerian historians studying other aspects of Nigerian history, including Isichie (1970, 1976,

1983, 1995, 1997), Falola *et al.* (2005, 2010), Ekundare (1973), Korieh *et al.* (2001), Aguwa (2005) and many more, have used data from missionaries in their works.

No work on the historiography of Nigeria would be complete without mentioning the impact of British colonial rule on Nigerian society. Some of the early colonial workers were anthropologists, ethnographers, or just individuals interested in recording the lives of the people. The information they recorded included details of the food culture and traditions of the people. In 1909, the colonial government of Nigeria appointed anthropologists to study the Nigerian societies (Falola, 2005). Although most of these works were intended for political and administrative purposes, they collated immense data about the people and their culture including food habits and traditions. Researchers included C.K. Meek (1946), M. Green (1947), G.I. Jones (1963), N.W. Thomas (1910 and 1914), C. Partridge (1905), P.A. Talbot (1926), J.R. Wilson-Haffenden (1927) and many more. However, some Nigerian historians, for example Falolu (2005), argue that these studies were insufficiently detailed. This may be so. Nevertheless, they provide an insight into the lives of the people as they are the earliest documented academic research into various groups that make present-day Nigeria. On these foundations Nigerian scholars have now been able to build an academic scholarship enabling a legacy for the future.

Some of the memoirs and autobiographies by Europeans are valuable means of acquiring information about historical events and changes. During the colonial era, various European men and women dedicated their writings, or parts of them, to documenting their daily encounters with the people of Nigeria. Not only did they provide information on indigenous foods, they also recorded the differences in the relationships between Nigerians and the colonialists, including the tensions and challenges as these two food cultures met. Most of these memoirs were written by European men. This is no surprise as they traversed the length and breadth of the country, working for the colonial enterprise. In these records of their encounters with the people, mundane activities such as getting a cook and having food that meets the desired taste were accorded a more significant meaning. This also reflected the role food played, either as a display of superiority by the Europeans or as a sign of passive resistance on the part of the Nigerians. Relevant details can be read in the memoirs of D.W. Carnegie (1902), G.D. Hazzeldine (1904), A.C.G. Hastings (1925), Mockler-Ferryman (1902), A.E. Kitson (1912), C. Partridge (1906), A.G. Leonard (1906).

The role of colonial spouses in Nigerian food historiography is significant. These women were not just reluctant participants in the colonial effort, but sought out ways to colonize the domestic front, especially food. Some of the colonial wives of note are Sylvia Leith Ross (1939) and

Constance Larrymore (1908), who concentrated on how to improve the indigenous food, which they viewed as inferior, in the absence of an adequate supply of European food. Some of their work was aimed at providing information for newly arrived colonialists on how to use indigenous food. Some, like Mrs Larrymore, made efforts to instruct the people about what she thought to be acceptable European culinary practices (Robins, 2010).

Although records provided an insight into the use of food during the colonial period as a mechanism of colonization, the voices of the people in Nigeria were not recorded in these documented encounters. So, we have little idea of what they initially made of this early European attempt at “civilizing” their food and habits. Robins (2010, pp. 6-7) noted in his research on food in colonial Northern Nigeria, comparing it to the political system of indirect rule, that “they would control it, change it, exploit it but claim to leave it very much Nigerian”. Taking into consideration the difference in the colonial administration of the north and the south, more research is still needed with regard to this area of Nigerian food history.

Some of the colonial women later recorded the lives and memoirs of indigenous women. Of great significance is Mary Smith’s *Baba of Karo: a woman of Muslim Hausa* (1954). By writing the memoirs of Baba, Smith presented the life and views of an indigenous woman in a fast-changing world. Of importance is her attempt to present only Baba’s narratives, without interfering is an exception of the period. In her narratives, Baba (believed to have been born between 1887 and 1890), mentioned the foods that were available during her childhood. According to her “(...) everyone grew guinea corn, millet, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, groundnuts, peppers, bitter tomatoes, sugar cane, rice, iburu, okras (...)”. Not only this, it showed the domestic and ritualistic use of food in Northern Nigeria, for example for weddings, child birth, formal friendships and maintaining kinships (Smith, 1954).

The efforts by the British colonial women to change the food habits of the people was further strengthened by the introduction of domestic science, which later became “home economics” in the school curriculum for girls. The impact of the study of home economics in colonial Nigeria has been examined by Joyce Amina Mangwat (1981). Although the ideal cuisines promoted in these classes were mainly Eurocentric as were the course materials, yet they bear witness to the transformation of Nigerian cuisine.

Moreover, British colonialism was not only political. The practice also impacted culturally and socially on the foodscape of the entire region, as it brought some level of uniformity to modern West African food, cuisine and etiquette. The British colonial food culture was transferred throughout all British colonies. Consequently, all the colonies, although having fairly diverse traditional food habits and cultures, had the same

influences regarding food and habits, leading to an almost identical urban food culture and diet. This change may not be so obvious at the rural or ethnic level, but is vivid in urban, national and transnational food habits and culture that emerged from these former colonised nations. This trend provides a meeting point in the study of food across the West African region, as the reactions to these new foods were similar across the borders (Goody, 1982; Tuomainen, 2009). As a result, any scholarship on food from these countries is relevant to the historiography of food studies of other countries in the region. The commonality in cuisines and food-related matters as a result of colonialism is evident in various publications (e.g. Osseo-Asare, 2005; McCann, 2009).

Having many foods items in common means that the West African diaspora foodways and food markets are provided with “home” food from divergent sources. On a closer examination, one soon realises the origin of this “home” food lies in some place far away from home. Moreover, while living in non-English speaking countries, Anglophone West African migrants tend to have a close affinity with other migrants from the same background. This also helps in sustaining the migrant communities. Therefore, written materials on food from these former British colonies, especially in West Africa, are of importance because of their shared origins and influences.

Towards the end of the colonial era, the first academically educated professional historians emerged in Nigeria, with many concentrated at the University of Ibadan. These historians initiated a conscious effort to rewrite the history of Nigeria from an Afro-centric viewpoint. The main objective of these first professional historians was to write a history of Nigeria by Nigerians for Nigerians, aimed at countering what they perceived as the misconception of the colonial historical records on Nigeria (Philips, 2005).

This nationalistic approach meant that most of the initial work concentrated on the political and economic history of Nigeria, neglecting its social history (Falola, 2010; Isichei, 1997; Osadolor, 2003). The post-colonial Nigerian historians paid scant attention to social history as such, thus food as a distinct area of study was non-existent. Despite this, some of these historical works covered aspects of the food history of the people, while recording the history of the various kingdoms, leaders, trade, religion and politics. Evidence of this can be seen in the works of K. Dike (1947) J.F. Ade Ajayi (1981), E.A. Ayandele (1966), E. Isichie (1983, 1973, 1979) and many more.

Noting Isaac Olawale Albert’s (2005) assertion that the lack of interest in social history by indigenous academic historians meant that most of the social history is by non-Nigerians or non-Africans, which is also prevalent

in Nigerian food history. With reference to the study of food in Nigeria, a lot of contributions have been made by non-Africans or non-Nigerians in this field, which also highlights some of the challenges inherent in relying on the “outsider” account. Africa and Nigeria are highly diverse with people from different ethnic backgrounds. In a number of studies on food however, the tendency is for scholars to group Africans into the same category. Many write about “African food” which is an anomaly because as large and diverse as Africa is, no regions or foodways are the same. African food and cuisine do not exist; similarly, there is no European cuisine, but a variety of national and regional foodways, which sometimes may have some commonalities.

A work on the food history of Africa may take years of research and cover volumes, but what is available in some publications can be referred to as mere footnotes. This is well highlighted in McCann’s (2014) publication on African food history and cuisine, which affirmed what is noted here, that writing about Africa as one culinary entity reinforces the tendencies for misrepresentations, as cuisines or food habits are generalized and granted as common all over a region or country. The tendency is to present an ethnic fare as a national dish. Sometimes it is completely inaccurate, as shown by Kittler and Sucher (2004). Writing about Nigeria in the section on West Africa, they stated

“(...) a mostly vegetarian fare has developed in this area (...)”, “(...) Gari foto is a popular Nigerian speciality eaten for breakfast; it combines gari (cassava meal) with scrambled eggs, onions, chillies and tomatoes and is sometimes served with beans (...)”, and (they go on to list other supposedly popular Nigerian dishes), “(...) curries are popular in Nigeria often served with dozens of condiments and garnishes such as coconut, raisins, chopped dates, peanuts, dried shrimps and diced fruits (...)” (Kittler and Sucher, 2004, p. 212).

For one unfamiliar with Nigerian cuisine, these details may be accepted as facts. Having said this, there are other non-Nigerian writers whose researches are worthy contributions to Nigerian food studies. Etkins *et al.* (1982) examined plant utilization in Northern Nigeria. Blench (1997) wrote a history of agriculture in Northern Nigeria, which not only examined edible crops, but also their origin and diffusion within Nigeria. Keay *et al.* (1964) provide detailed information on the tree species in Nigeria, including their indigenous and botanical names.

Nigerian historians began to pay some attention to social history from the 1980s (Falola *et al.*, 2010). Many were no longer focused on nationalistic history, as events since the independence has not really confirmed the Nigeria of their hopes. This may have necessitated historians’ attention shifting to other issues. Although books dedicated solely to food history

are rare, some historians, like Elizabeth Isichei, have chapters in books (1970, 1997, 1983), with food-related historical overviews covering agriculture, food habits and customs.

In recent years there has been an increase in food history research, although most of the publications are by historians based in universities in America and Europe, highlighting the limited input by home-based academic historians.

Eno Blankson Ikpe's book (1994), "Food and Society in Nigeria, A History of Food Customs, Food Economy and Cultural Change in Nigeria Between 1900 and 1989", has become the reference for academic research into food cultures and history in Nigeria. Mapping the changes that have occurred in the food habits of Nigerians, Blankson related this to historical changes within society. However, her assumption that the main changes in the food habits of the people happened after the civil war is flawed. According to her, the Biafrans by relying on foreign food aid developed a taste for imported food, which spread to other parts of the nation. This is not plausible as it does not explain why the main foods sent into Biafra, such as cornmeal, do not feature in the post-war cuisine of the Biafra region. Again, stating that the oil boom enabled this reliance on imported food is not an accurate analysis, as urban Nigerian dwellers have for decades before the civil war, acquired a taste for imported food items. As shown by Korieh (2003) in his work on urban food supply in Nigeria during the Second World War, Nigerian urban dwellers depended not only on local food but also on large amounts of imported food items. Thus, with the increased German attacks on merchant ships during the war, there was a shortage of essential commodities and an increase in food prices. On a positive note though, as he noted during this time, the lack of imports briefly changed the colonial policy on food, which demanded more food-crops production over cash crops.

This said, the Biafra civil-war studies have extensive food-related records especially with regard to the use of food as a weapon of war and the humanitarian food aid. During the civil war, food became an important political issue on both sides, with the federal side restricting food supply to Biafra and the Biafran side also refusing food from certain quarters based on fear, fuelled by rumours of poisoning attempts (Nathaniel H. Goetz, 2001; Nkpa, 1977; White, 2004; Mudge, 1970, p. 228; Akpan, 1976, p. 135). One may say that, in a way, it was food that ended the war as the image of starving and dying people in the media, especially children, brought more global pressure on either side of the conflict and their supporters (de St Jorre, 1971).

Scholars of food in different parts of the world have utilised recipes and cookbooks as sources for historical data. Irrespective of the fact that

Nigerian cuisine is not yet fully a recipe-based one, this as a source of relevant information cannot be ignored. Over the years many private and government agencies have published different recipe books. Some of these publications were a result of efforts by multinational companies to promote some of their food products, as well as a follow-up to their television-sponsored cooking programmes. Some examples can be found in the “Family Menu” cookbook. This cook book features different Nigerian recipes from the Maggi sponsored TV programme.

As part of their presumed duty, various wives of politicians and women’s organizations have also published recipe books. The Imo state chapter of the defunct “Better Life for Rural Women Program”⁵, in 1990 published recipes from all the local government areas of the state. “The African Pot Nigerian”, sponsored by the Nigerian seasoning brand *Onga* seasoning powder, also published a recipe book with a foreword by the former Nigerian First Lady, Hajiya Turai Umaru Yar’Adua. Analysing these recipe books provides valuable historical data relevant not just for food studies. For instance, reading through the recipe book published by the Imo State’s chapter from “Better life”, one can see the radical changes the state has undergone, as many of the local governments presented due to political changes, are no longer part of the state. Not only this, many of the different groups in the state share similar dishes, although the recipe may differ. Some of the food and recipes featured have become less popular as more people live in an urbanized environment and do not have access to resources needed to make such dishes.

The content of these recipe books point to the intended target audience. “The African Pot Nigerian” recipe book includes a page on healthy eating by the Head of Dietetics, National Hospital Abuja. It also features pages on food shopping, storing and what is termed Nigeria must-have kitchen equipment. It is obvious that the target audience the *Onga’s* seasoning powder is aiming at, are the wealthy; not many ordinary Nigerians view yam pounder, a food processor, a vegetable peeler, a lemon juicer or

⁵ Established in 1985 by late Maryam Babangida, the wife of former military ruler General Ibrahim Babangida, the *Better Life For Rural Women* became a rallying point for women close to the First Lady, many of whom are in no way qualified as rural women or even have close contact with rural women. This gap between the purported rural women and those spearheading the program may have necessitated its change of name to the Better Life Women Program. A lot of resources were diverted to this project, which also empowered the First Lady, even though her role has no constitutional backing (Reno, 2004). Since then, every First Lady – as wives of presidents and governors are called in Nigeria – once the husband is sworn in, establishes a pet project or program. Although the Nigerian constitution does not recognise the office of the First Lady, public funds are poured into these projects, many of which are just avenues of looting public treasury.

a garlic press as must-have, neither do they shop for creamed corn, bacon, sausage, sesame oil, Worcestershire sauce or buttermilk, just to mention a few of the food items from the recipe book.

Many Nigerians living in different parts of the world have also published cookery books on Nigerian cuisine, as parts of books on Nigerian culture. Many of these publications target Nigerians in diasporas while some have included innovations from Nigerian cuisines (Asika-Enahoro, 2004; Jidefo, 2007; Komolafe and Komolafe, 2010; Taylor, 2010; Madubuike, 2012; Koleosho, 2012). Evidence shows that Nigerians living in diasporas who may have been challenged by what they see in the cultures around them, are now publishing more food and cultural books, as a way of stating who they are in their new “homes”. All these support the relevance of recipe books as necessary data for Nigerian food studies.

Among the post-nationalist Nigerian historians, some have done outstanding work related to food studies, even if this may not have been their main intention. Chima Korieh has focused on diverse historical food researches covering themes such as colonial rule, gender and food culture. Using the ban of gin in Eastern Nigeria (2003), he examined the British colonial economic policies; in 2007, he also studied the changes gender roles in Nigeria have undergone, especially in food production and provision. Toyin Falola’s vast scholarship has also produced a huge volume of historical material on Nigeria, with some interest in food-related issues. He covered themes such as cuisine, social customs and traditional roles (Falola, 2001).

There also exists a vast academic input on Nigerian agriculture, nutrition and other food-related topics. Akpanyung (2005) and Henry-Unueze (2010) examined the use of food enhancers such as bouillon cubes and MSG (Monosodium glutamate) in Nigerian cooking. Maziza-Dixon (2006) with other researchers at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture Ibadan, published “Cassava Recipes”, as a means of enabling household food security. As they noted, cassava consumption in Nigeria is mainly as fufu, whereas it has more culinary potentials, which they aimed to show by publishing these recipes that are claimed to be laboratory tested. This is also of great historical relevance as many, who claim cassava as a traditional Nigerian staple indigenous food, may be surprised to know that its origin is outside the African continent. Balogh (1990 and 1991) has written on African and Nigerian food, as part of the Oxford symposium on food and cookery series. She also examined the street food in Nigeria, especially the sources and types.

Badiru and Badiru (2013) wrote on Nigerian food in their work. Egwim *et al.* (2013) also examined the processes and prospects of

Nigerian indigenous fermented foods. These studies are all relevant to the Nigerian diaspora food studies because some of the writers are Nigerian migrants and, particularly, the foods being studied are relevant to the diaspora food culture.

From the above pages, it is obvious that there is much potential in Nigerian historiography, which other researchers should not hesitate to explore. This will insure that Nigerian food history achieves the same level of recognition as other academic areas. Having provided a historiographical survey of food studies in the preceding pages, which highlights the resources available for food historians, the next chapter will focus on contextualizing the events that enabled the making of a Nigerian nation and the cultural tenets that uphold its culinary practices and identity, especially how migration has impacted on its history and foodways.

3. Ethnicity, Culture and Diversity in Nigeria

According to Harris (1996, pp. 7-8), one cannot understand diaspora communities without an examination of their original homelands and the root causes and specific contexts within which they were dispersed. Moreover, diaspora communities still identify with and maintain connections with their country of origin. As already highlighted, many of the social, cultural norms, behaviours and attributes exhibited by migrants are reflective of their origins. Thus it is imperative that background information is provided on Nigeria and Nigerians. This will enable one to understand the depth of complexity and dynamics among the people within the Nigerian community in Belgium, their homeland and their host country. Therefore, I will first consider the emergence of the Nigerian nation, then I will look at the complexity of its inhabitants and traditions.

3.1. The Making of a Nation

In an essay in the British newspaper "The Times" of January 8th 1897, Flora Louise Shaw, the paper's colonial correspondent, suggested the name **Nigeria** for the area under the Royal Niger Company Territories in West Africa (Crowther, 1962; Afigbo *et al.*, 1986). Other works, though, have suggested that Flora Shaw may not have been the first to use the term "Nigeria". Ifemesia noted that as early as 1859-60 William Cole, a Liverpool trader, had used the term in reference to things, events and people of the area (Ifemesia, 1982). Despite this, it was not until January 1st 1914 that this suggestion by Ms Shaw was carried through (Osaghae, 1998).

In 1912, Lord Fredrick Lugard left his post as governor of Hong Kong, to return to the British territories of the Royal Niger Company. His charge was to amalgamate the southern and northern protectorates. This move was not welcomed in Lagos and happened with little input from the indigenes of the emerging Nigerian nation. The Emirs from northern Nigeria were the only ones who made a demand that external influence, especially from Christianity, be kept away from the region. Having embarked on the job of unifying this diverse people, a suitable name was needed for the new entity. The name Nigeria, suggested by Flora Shaw, now married to Lord Lugard, was chosen.

The main reasons for the amalgamation were administrative, financial and economic and not cultural or really political. Earlier in 1906, the southern Nigeria protectorate order in the council of February 16th 1906 merged the southern protectorate with the protectorate and colony of Lagos. The merging of these economically vibrant areas delivered a 250 percent increase in revenue for the colonial office within seven years. Thus, the idea of merging it with the northern protectorate, which relied on the British territory for its revenues, was appealing. Not only would it reduce the financial burden from the northern protectorate, it would also bring in more revenue for the British treasury (Carland, 1985; Geary, 1965).

The amalgamation did not take into consideration the diversity of the Nigerian indigenous political, social or cultural systems. Some scholars believe that by changing the traditional cultural systems of interaction, this reinforced negative ethnic allegiance, thereby setting the stage for conflicts in later years (Afigbo, 1972; Crowder, 1966). Furthermore, the amalgamation led to the emergence of the Nigerian North/South divide, which has been a challenge to national unity. Within this amalgamation more recognition was also given to the main ethnic groups in each region, which led to the dominance by major groups and submergence of small groups and their ethnic identity (Jega, 2000; Mbanaso and Korieh, 2010).

The British colonial government did not make any effort to create sentiments of nationhood among the people, as not all of the colonial officers believed the diverse ethnic groups should be one. Instead of blurring ethnic differences, the colonial policy heightened ethnic identity, while at the same time grappling with the creation of some sort of "Nigerian identity", first politically, later socially and culturally. This, though, did not in any way erode the strength of ethnic identity.

Map 1



The above map, created in 1979, shows the main linguistic groups in Nigeria. From <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/8819> <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/8819%08accessed online September 2008>.

The end of the Second World War heralded in a new world order, which led to huge consequences in the colonies. The new political order and the emergence of strong nationalism ideologies in the colonies paved the way for the end of the British colonial rule from Asia to Africa. Nigeria gained its independence from Britain on October 1st 1960. It is the most populated African nation, covering a land area of 910,768 sq. kilometres. According to the Nigerian census of 2006, its population is 140,431,790. However, due to inefficient and incomplete data collection, many estimate the population to be between 120 and 185 million people (Nigerian national population commission, 2010; Gordon, 2003). Located in West Africa, Nigeria is bordered in the north by Chad and Niger, in the west by Benin, Cameroon in the east and the gulf of Guinea in the south. The nation is divided into 36 states, with one capital territory. Efforts were made by the government to insure that people in the same states are of the same ethnic group or affiliated culturally (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Isichei, 1983; Crowder, 1966; Falola,

2001; Niven, 1965; Ogbaa, 2003; Gordon, 2003; World Bank, January 2009; United Nations country profile, 2009).

3.2. Nigeria: The people, religion and customs

Today, over 250 ethnic groups are estimated to live in Nigeria, with many divided into subgroups. There are as many languages with over 4,000 dialects. The major ethnic groups are the *Yoruba*, the *Igbo* and the *Hausa/Fulani* (UNDG, 2009; Nigerian mission to the United Nations, 2009; Gordon, 2003). Prior to colonisation, the people living within the various regions referred to themselves in the names of their towns or clans, as the languages although similar, had different dialects. With time, people, especially non-indigenes and colonialists, began referring to people who shared similar languages by the name of their language. Thus people were no longer *Egba*, *Ekiti*, *Ijebu* or *Oyo* but *Yoruba*, not *Onitshas*, *Owerri*, *Orlu* or *Mbaise* but *Igbo*, although using names of towns within the groups still applies (Peel, 2003).

In creating the nation Nigeria, there is no relation between political boundaries and ethnic boundaries. Like in most African boundaries, in drawing the national boundaries at the Berlin Conference (1884-85), which was further demarcated by the British colonial government, there was no respect for social or linguistic grouping in Nigeria (Falola and Genova, 2009; Blench, 1996; Nugent and Asiwaju, 1996). As a result, there are *Yorubas* in Nigeria and in Benin Republic, *Hausa/Fulani* in Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Ghana; *Efiks/Ibibios* in Nigeria and Cameroon. It is no surprise then, that culturally people can share more affiliation with members of their ethnic groups in other nations than with people of the same nation.

This said, there is some level of commonalities among all the groups, “which include patterns of status like the family, age grade groups, special persons in the society, institutions like marriage, customs, traditional way of governance, political personage and the like, traditional shelters, food and even drinks...”, all are things that helped to shape the modern Nigerian society and are still relevant today (Chigere, 2003, p. 28); although within the nation, there are variations of these common characteristics, with an overlapping of cultures and beliefs.

Nigerians have physical and social attributes through which they can differentiate people, their status, beliefs and localities. Not only do members of the same ethnic group share the same language or dialects, they also share a common history claiming the same ancestry (Falola, 2005; Isichie, 1997). The different groups have some physical attributes, which they use to differentiate themselves from other groups. Some have

2 tribal marks or symbolic scarification on their faces and bodies. These do not just tell where someone is from, but inform about their legal status (as a freeborn or otherwise) and if they are titled. Good examples are the facial marks of the Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani and the *Ichi* scarification of the Igbo and other ethnic groups, but these practices are not as widespread as they were in the 20th century or earlier.

Fashion covering mode of dressing, hairstyles and make-up are different. Each group's fashion differs and has evolved so much that each ethnic group now has fabrics, costumes and styles identified with them. It is worth noting though, that most of the fabrics and materials used by the various groups are not produced in Nigeria, but are imported. A good example is the Dutch wax fabrics used by the Igbos and the Swiss lace popular among the Yoruba. In spite of this, traditionally woven or dyed fabrics such as ashoke and adire are still very popular.

Within the country there are universally accepted social behaviours, like the respect for elders and titled people, although there exist differences, especially with regard to acknowledging elders and titled people. An Igbo from the east will greet an elder by shaking his hand (calling his title name if he has any), a Yoruba from the west will bow down or lie down completely on the ground (if the elder is titled). The Hausa on the other hand, will stoop down before the elder while greeting. Most of the time both hands are used in a handshake to greet superiors as a mark of respect, while the right hand only is used for equals or subordinates. However, in all regions women are traditionally expected to bow or kneel before elders or people of authority, as a sign of respect while greeting them. The common mode of greeting, though, is shaking hands when you meet or say a greeting, depending on what time of the day it is. Women may hug other women as a form of greeting, but not a man, unless someone they know very well (Okohie-Offoha, 1996; Griswold, 2008).

These variations and complexities are not restricted to just socialising, but pervade all aspects of life, as will be shown later with regard to food. Some of the issues highlighted in this section may not have a direct link to food, but the essence here is to portray how diversified Nigeria is. This, in turn, is reflected in the ethnic cuisines, which are influenced by the cultural milieu of their origin. More attention will be given to the cuisines, drawing from the diverse cultural background they emerged from and the inter-ethnic social perceptions in Nigeria.

The Nigerian traditional religious system professes various deities and adherents have dedicated responsibilities in various aspects of their lives including their food and eating habits. Foreign beliefs were later introduced: Christianity from the coastal south and Islam from the north, and these brought their own food ethics too. These new religions eroded the

influence of older traditional beliefs and the social structure of the communities. Presently the north is predominantly Muslim and the south/East predominantly Christian. The west is the most diversified Nigerian region in terms of religion, having Muslims, Christians, adherents of different cults and indigenous religions (Levitson, 2000; Martin, 2003; Kalu, 2011).

I must emphasise that providing a historical overview of the religious and other cultural practices is very important. These will help one to grasp a better and broader view of the changes Nigeria had undergone, because these are directly linked to the people's food and identity construction too. The Christian missionaries of various denominations from Europe worked hard to establish churches and schools in the various regions, especially in the southern part of the country. The diverse communities were more receptive to denominations that offered them favourable concessions, depending on their social and political needs. This is captured well in a quote from one of the works of the renowned Nigerian historian, Elizabeth Isichie, narrating an encounter between Presbyterian missionaries and natives of a south Nigerian community in pre-colonial times:

Mr Goldie expounded the law and exhibited the grace of God. At the close old Asuqa said, that they would think of what had been told them, and we must return the next morning and tell them again all things God liked and did not like; and then they would tell us, what things they could agree to, and what not; and as far as they could keep them, they would take oath to that effect (...) their plan of choosing and rejecting among God's law we could not sanction (Isichie, 1995, p. 158).

Christianity changed the indigenous systems and cultures of the southern region. The traditional political institutions fared better though, compared to others like social, religious and cultural institutions. Some of the societal values and rites were termed pagan and not acceptable for Christians, thus eroding their authority within society.

Many Nigerians, irrespective of what faith they profess, are open to influences from old traditional beliefs. These have led to a watering-down of traditional values within the society, as people can pick and choose what to attach importance to as it suits their agenda. This is also evident in the cuisines and eating habits of Nigerians, as this negotiation between choices available to them is continuous. Hence, it is not a question of completely forgoing the old and accepting the new but more of maintaining the old that poses no real challenge to their beliefs or adapting it to fit the new religious framework, just like incorporating new food and eating habits. In the following chapter, more details are presented on how Nigerians use

food to reflect their origins and the influences that helped create what is today viewed as the Nigerian foodways.

3.3. Geography, Agriculture and food production in Nigeria

It is imperative to highlight the geographical condition of Nigeria and how this has helped the growing of the crops that form the bases of the nation's cuisine. Nigeria has a tropical climate with high temperatures of between 33 and 38 degrees centigrade. There are only two seasons in the country, the rainy season which can be from March to November in the south, and from May to October in the north. The amount of rainfall and length of rainy season decreases as you move from the south to north, influencing the country's topography. The rainfall is heavier in the south, especially the south-east, with 3,000 millimetres of rain; the south-west has 1,800 mm and the north 500 mm. There is an interruption in the rains during the rainy season in August, known as "August break". The rest of the year is the dry season, characterized by the dry harmattan period, from November to February with its cool dry winds. During the harmattan the temperatures are lower, with a dusty atmosphere brought about by the north-easterly winds blowing down from the Arabian Peninsula across the Sahara towards the southern region of the country.

Since rainfalls influence the farming patterns and any delays may lead to crop failures or famine, thus regions' food production is reflective of the rains they get and also the vegetation patterns they have. Vegetation patterns can be categorized into three as determined by the climate. In the coastal area there are freshwater swamps, mangroves, and rivers which flow out to join the sea. Moving inland from the coast there are tropical rain forests and then grassland savannah with open grass shrubs as you go further north. There are also myriads of waterways, but the main rivers are the Benue and Niger. Both of these rivers have their sources outside the country and flow from the north west and northeast to form a confluence in Lokoja near the centre of Nigeria. They then run southwards through the middle of the country until they flow through the southern coastal waterways and into the Atlantic Ocean.

The northern part of Nigeria is an arid zone, with the Sahara Desert close to its northern boundaries. Due to the arid nature of the northern region, crops fail often as it is prone to extremes of either flooding, due to too much rain on vastly deforested land, or parched soil due to lack of rain. As a result, this region is prone to desertification and crop failures even in modern Nigerian history. It is also the lack of water in this region during the dry season that necessitates the annual migration

of herders with their cattle to the Middle belt region of the country. This in turn has led to constant clashes between the cattle herders and the predominantly farming communities of the Middle Belt and southern regions. Due to the volatile nature of these clashes, many in these affected farming communities no longer go to their farms for fear of attacks or putting in efforts to farm and losing their crops to herds of cattle. The attacks and conflicts have become so frequent and violent that it has now become a major political and ethnic issue (Rosenberg, 2001; Chapin Metz, 2002; Falola and Heaton, 2008; Levy, 2004; Udoh, 1970, pp. 1-9; Ofuoku and Isife, 2009).

Prior to colonialism, most of what Nigerians ate were locally produced. Land, which is the main resource in agriculture, holds great economic, cultural, ritualistic and political importance among the various Nigerian ethnic groups. This is well defined in a statement by the Yoruba traditional ruler, *Elesì of Odogbolu*, before the West African Land Committee set up by the British colonial government in the early 20th century, to review the colonial legal status concerning land use. He stated that "(...) I conceive land to belong to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living and countless members are still unborn" (Edevbie, 2007, p. 234; Amokaye, 2011, p. 61). In Nigeria, land can be owned by individual families or feudal authorities, like in the western and northern part of the country. In many Nigerian communities, lands are allocated to males in the family, sometimes only when they marry. Women do not own any ancestral lands but may receive a piece of land when they marry (from the husband's family), which is used as a home garden or farm depending on the location. This is different from the lands a husband provides for the family (including wives) to farm. The home gardens are prevalent in all parts of the country and play an important role in food production, as only edible crops are planted in these gardens. The gardens are on patches of land, cultivated near one's dwelling and are not exclusive to Nigeria, but are prevalent in other parts of the tropics. Usually a variety of food tree crops, vegetables and spices are planted in the home garden (Orodona Aweto, 2005, p. 706; Eno Blankson Ikpe, 2005). Among the Igbos, a newly married woman is "shown" a piece of land near her house by her husband or his family as a home garden. Not only does this signify her acceptance into her husband's family, but planting tree crops on it strengthens her claim to use it for life, especially if she had buried the detached umbilical cord of her kids under the tree crops. Yet, the land is not hers to dispose of, but belongs to her sons or husband's ancestral lineage. However, most of the food production is the primary responsibility of women on lands belonging to their husbands or fathers (Stock, 1995; Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke, 2003). During the colonial period, Nigeria was self-sufficient

in terms of food crops. Peasant farmers were the predominant class, and mainly women, but the policy of the British colonial government relegated the role of women to the background and encouraged male farmers to dedicate more time to cash-crop production for export, to the detriment of food-crop production. The colonial government also began the establishment of plantations for domesticated species of cash crops, such as palm tree, cocoa and groundnuts, which was also male dominated (Falola and Aderinto, 2010; Oyejide, 1986).

In Nigerian about 41.15 per cent of agricultural workers are women, even though the fact on ground tends to show women do more in the agriculture sector, although their role is not recorded or reflected in official data. They till the land, plant the crops, do the weeding and help with the harvest. This trend remains unchanged especially in rural areas where about fifty per cent of Nigerians live (FAO, 2015). Crops, farming and food production are traditionally classified along gender lines. So, the “male crops” are the valued crops, which grant status or financial rewards such as yam, while the “female crops” are mainly for the family consumption, with no attached social status (Deji, 2012; Martin, 1984). Women are provided with land by their husbands to plant these female crops like cassava, cocoyam, maize, legumes, vegetables and low-yielding yam species, which the family is fed with. In addition, they grow fruit trees and rear chicken, goats and sheep. The farming by the woman is done after work on the husband’s farm, so although vital to the sustenance of the family, her farming is accorded a lesser importance than her husband’s. The men, on the other hand, own the crops and animals that have more economic value.

This traditional definition of roles may account for the limited participation of women in modern agriculture in Nigeria, as it is still challenging to access the resources they need. Yet the indigenous knowledge they possess and the crops they produce are vital to the food security of their families and communities. This trend may yet change with the increasing interest of global agencies such as the FAO, in family farmers and empowering women in agriculture.

The present Nigerian farming encompasses mechanised farming, subsistence hoe farming, fish farming and dairy. Shifting cultivation is practised widely across the nation, with lands farmed on alternate years. Some sections of the country in the south are able to have two planting seasons a year, while the more arid north can only support one.

Of about 98.3 million hectares of land in Nigeria, 74 million (or 75%) are good for farming; even then, less than half is explored. Presently, 60 to 70 per cent of the Nigerian population is involved in farming, with agriculture contributing about 41 per cent of the national GDP.

Smallholder subsistent farmers constitute about 80 per cent of all the farming sector, with an average of about 1.0 to 3.0 hectares per holding. This contributes about 25 per cent of GDP and 60 per cent of non-oil exports. Although there has been an increase in the national food production, the food supply is not enough to meet demands, as a result of an astronomical population increase. There has been an increase over the years of food imports and a decrease in agricultural exports, due to the dependency on oil. This has changed Nigeria from a self-sufficient nation to a nation of import. Nigerian food imports represent a major share of imports into the country (FAO, 2012; Oyejide, 1986; Apter, 2005; Paulino and Sarma, 1988; Akande, 2005; Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009).

According to Paulino and Sarma (1988, p. 35), the three main factors that changed the trend of food production in Nigeria were the civil unrest and eventual war of 1966, with a great movement of people back to their regions, the creation of states with more people moving from rural areas to the new state capitals, and the emergence of oil revenues. All this prompted a reduction in rural farming households. Thus, as the demand for food increased, the local production decreased leading to outsourcing of food production.

Despite advances in technology and some mechanised farms in Nigeria, the agricultural sector is still stuck in ancient times relying mainly on subsistence smallholding farmers. If the notion that “households are food secure, when they have year round access to the quantity and variety of food their members need to lead active and healthy lives (...)”, then the majority of Nigerian households are not food secure (Mazija-Dixon, I.O. Akinyele *et al.*, 2003, p. 11).

Not only is there a problem with food availability, there is also the issue of it being affordable. Food insecurity ranks at the top of the development problems facing Nigeria. The level of food insecurity due to lack of access to adequate food doubled between 1986 and 2004, reaching about 41 per cent, and it is still high despite different policies focusing on the agro-food sector and the food security of the nation. There is widespread poverty, with about 70 per cent of Nigerians surviving on less than US\$ 1.25 per day. Nigeria was ranked 40th out of 79 on the 2012 Global Hunger Index and 156th out of 187 on the 2011 UNDP Human Development Index. Poverty is especially widespread in rural areas, where 80 per cent of the population live below the poverty line (IFAD, 2012; Ibrahim, 2009 *et al.*, p. 810).

Table 1. Production Quantity of major agricultural national commodities in Nigeria

Major crops (2012)	Quantity (tonnes)	Yield (hq/ha)	Yield Annual Growth
Cassava	6,401,996	50,950,291	1987-1997: 1.0% 1997-2007: -0.6%
Yams	4,487,946	37,318,900	1987-1997: 7.0% 1997-2007: -1.0%
Sorghum	5,099,815	5,837,106	1987-1997: 0.4% 1997-2007: 0.5%
Oil Palm Fruit	8,500,000	26,984	1987-1997: -0.1% 1997-2007: 0.3%
Rice	2863,815	5,432930	
Maize	5,751,300	8,694,600	
Livestock – Number of Live Animals (2014)			
Chickens	144,951,671		
Goats	72,466,698		
Cattle	19,542,583		
Sheep	41,326,780		
Pig (2012)	6,795,101		
Camel (2012)	278,561		
Meat Production (tonnes)			
Cattle Meat	381,080.37 (2014)		
Game Meat	270,742		
Pig Meat	136,037.92 (2014)		
Goat Meat	136,037.92 (2014)		
Fish Production (tonnes)	1997	2007	Annual Growth
Capture fish production	387,923	530,420	1987-1997: 5.22% 1997-2007: 3.67%
Aquaculture fish production	24,297	85,087	1987-1997: 30.48% 1997-2007: 25.02%

FAOSTAT, Countrystat, FishSTAT Aquastat World Bank IFAD 2014 Livestock figures are tentative

*The quantity consumed is higher for most of these foods, especially for rice, livestock and fish because the market also relies on huge amount of imports.

The household food expenditure in Nigeria is influenced by different factors that include education, occupation and income of the head of the household. Many Nigerian households spend a majority of their income on food. According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics 2009/10 report, the expenditure for food is 64.68 per cent of total spending (Oshadiya, 2010). There is also a difference between urban and rural dwellers, as the latter spend less on food. However, this is explanatory because, for rural dwellers, “own food” is part of quantifiable expenditure although they produce this food. Overall, tubers and plantains were responsible for the highest expenditure. This is not surprising though, taking into consideration the fact that these food items are some of the main staples in Nigerian cuisine. Yet rural households spend more on rice, maize, fruits, vegetables and yams than urban dwellers. Another explanation for this may lie in the fact that a huge percentage of the food produced in rural areas is sent to urban areas, where it is expected to sell at a higher price. However, rice makes up the largest share of household food expenditure in Nigeria due to its wide spread consumption (Ojogho and Alufohai, 2010; Nigerian National Bureau of statistics, 2012).

Nigeria, like other African countries, had to contend with external and internal influences, in mapping out the physical and cultural boundaries of the nation. With diverse ethnic groups and the tendency for many to promote ethnic agendas, creating a national consciousness is a continuous process amidst great challenges because of the ever-present weakness in political leadership, and the promotion of self-interests.

As shown in preceding pages, there are similar indigenous values and food habits across the ethnic groups. In as much as geography and topography determine which foods are available in the different regions, there are also long-established links and exchanges across the nation, which has enabled people from different regions to acquire food to boast any deficits in their own food production. Regional markets for centuries enabled exchanges of indigenous food items between groups, thus similar food items can be found and are utilized in the different ethnic cuisines. People who lived in the Niger Delta sold fish and salt in exchange for agricultural produce, which was impossible for them to grow in their mangrove environment.

Hausa caravans from the north travelled overland from Kano to Nupe land in the middle belt and took kola nuts (a highly valued crop among all the communities) from the west, which were exchanged for cereals. In the south the cereals from the north were then exchanged for palm oil and yams in various city stops along the network of established routes and markets. These trades also brought to the inland regions products and produce from other continents. Caravans from North Africa and the Sahara brought to Katsina and Kano in Northern Nigeria and the

major commercial gates into central Sudan a wide range of European goods which included Manchester cottons, French silks, Venetian beads, German swords and mirrors, Italian paper, as well as Saharan salt and dates; these caravans took away gold, grains, hides and skins, cloth, ostrich feathers, ivory, kola nuts, and slaves (Ifemesie, 1982; Ifeyirionwa-Smith, 1995).

Along the major rivers, especially the Niger River bank, were strategically located markets in towns like *Aboh, Onitsha, Asaba, Idah and Ikiri*, which thrived until the early encounters with Europeans. Thus, the regions around the Niger and its markets became a melting point of people from various regions such as *Ijaw, Igbo, Gwari, Kakanda, Igbirra, Idoma, Jukun* and many others. The powerful traditional rulers along these trade routes provided the political stability and protection necessary for business to thrive. By the late 19th century, this made confrontation with European businessmen and colonialists inevitable, as they made efforts to take control of these traditional markets from the local political leaders. Such conflicts led to the destruction of the political and economic power some of the towns had and provided to those who traversed through their territory. An example is the naval bombardment of Onitsha, ordered by the General Manager of the West African Company (later United African Company) on October 26th 1879. This attack was as a result of a trade dispute and the natives retaliated by boycotting European goods and the Christian religion. This led to more punitive measures from the Europeans (Okeke, 1997; Ifemesia, 1982).

3.4. The indigenous cuisines of Nigeria

In the next pages, I intend to elucidate how food can be a valid tool in examining wider engagements across groups and in showing changes within societies. Effort will be made to explore the factors that facilitate or challenge the concept of a Nigerian foodways. What does food mean to Nigerians, and how do they engage with each other using food? In pre-colonial Nigeria, people relied on food that their environment could provide. Where there is a limited access to food due to geographical location as stated earlier, people relied on exchange, trade or migration to get what food they needed. Legends and oral histories abound with stories of migration for food, either as seasonal movement of agricultural workers or relocation to a place with sufficient provision, in terms of soil fertility, irrigation and safety (Stock, 1995). In terms of staples, traditionally indigenous cereals were the staple in the north, roots and tubers in the east and west, with the south relying on seafood or food bought from the interior (Ifeyirionwa Smith, 1995).

The diverse ancient states, out of which modern Nigeria was created, needed food security to insure they had enough to eat for survival and also to fight the numerous wars, which expanded and secured their territories. This is evident as noted by Shaw (1976) “(...) a sufficient agricultural basis had been established by the 1st millennium to support ancient kingdoms as *Kanem Bornu*, the *Hausa states*, *Benin*, *Oyo* (...)”. Most of the ethnic groups in the pre-colonial era existed in independent states or kingdoms with political autonomy, social and cultural norms, which differentiated them from others. However, they were brought together to form what is today known as Nigeria. Among these diverse groups, although food was a pivotal necessity for their existence, it also was a means of maintaining ethnic group identity. Each ethnic group had its cuisine and food-related social and religious ceremonies. The food in Nigeria exposes the complexities of identity, people’s perception about themselves and how it may differ from how outsiders see them. This is also reflective of food based identification processes.

Each of the ethnic groups have food and cuisines produced in their areas, that they see as special, which people from the other groups believe has no taste or is repulsive. Some good examples are the Igbo’s African breadfruit porridge, the *Hausa-Fulani’s* dried baobab leaves in soup, the *Efik/Ibibio’s* cocoyam with periwinkle porridge or the *Yorubas’s* water yam porridge. Nigerians tend to have a condescending attitude towards cuisine from outside their ethnic group, irrespective of the fact that they may have adopted some of it. Each group believes in the popular saying, “my mother’s soup is the best”, which can be related to at micro and macro levels within the society. A good example is the Igbo reference to the Yoruba as “*ndi ofe nmanu*”, meaning people of the oily soup (believing their soups are too oily). Many other communities are referred to as “404” or “*imi nkita*” meaning that they eat dog meat (Oha, 2000). The Igbos and others are ridiculed also because they swallow balls of *fufu* without chewing it.

Among Nigerians, there are indigenous foods that not only have become the basis for the cuisine of the regions, but are also indicative of where they originate from. Irrespective of this, there are methods of cooking certain food, which have gained acceptance in different parts of the country and thus have set the foundation of what may be termed as the “Nigerian national dishes”. Some of these foods are either indigenous or introduced into Nigeria via the numerous external influences that the country has experienced.

With regards to ethnic indigenous food, these form the predominant cuisine in the rural areas and in the private domains of urban dwellers and diasporas. These foods are also seen in the public domain, in special restaurants or during communal festivals organized by those from the

ethnic groups where they are the main staple. The meals that can be used in viewing the sameness and diversity in Nigerian cuisine are the *fufu* and soup dishes. These two dishes are the staple in all Nigerian ethnic groups, and are sometimes derived from the same crop, yet neither the *fufu* nor the soups are prepared, cooked or consumed the same way among the divergent ethnic groups. Since the geography of each region affects what food can be grown there, it also influences the Nigerian ethnic cuisine and determines what and how they eat their *fufu*.

Among the Hausa/Fulani in the northern part of the country, their *fufu* “*tuwo*” is made from the milled flours of rice, millet or maize. Hence, *tuwo shinkafi* and *tuwo massa* are popular forms of their *fufu* and these are eaten with soups (*Miyan*) such as *miyan kuka*, *miyan Kubewa*, *miyan taushe* and many more. Due to the fact that they live in an arid region most of their indigenous soups are cooked with dried leaves of plants that thrive in such climate like the baobab tree. Cooking with these dry leaves gives the soups a dark green colour that non-northerners find unappetizing. In traditional Hausa/Fulani cooking unlike in other parts of the country, vegetable oils are used instead of palm oil which adds a yellowish hue to soups. Again, this is because this region is outside the palm tree growing belt, and does not have the plants or the indigenous knowledge to process and use it. Some Northerners use tomatoes to add some colour to their soups. However, with the migration of people of southern origin to this region, some of the food products of the south are available in urban centres of the northern region. Not only this, many non-Hausa/Fulani prepare *tuwo shinkafi* and other forms of *tuwo*, but serve it with soups from their own region. For each of the ethnic groups, what constitutes quality in a meal differs. For the Hausa, as noted by Etkins (2006), the food is assigned quality (apart from whether it is edible or not) based on the thickness or the thinness of the soups or porridges (*tuwo*).

One popular food that the Hausa cuisine has popularized all over the country is the “*suya*”. This local spices infused charcoal grilled beef can be found in all parts of the country although it is mainly prepared and sold by Hausa men or men of northern origin. This is different from what is obtainable in the Nigerian diaspora communities, where people from other ethnic groups prepare and sell *suya*. This trend abroad may be due to the absence of Hausa working-class migrants. The working-class northern Nigerians migrate less than their southern counterparts, thus most Hausas living outside the country (especially in Europe) are diplomats, students or white-collar professionals.

This trade in grilled beef (sometimes chicken) is one area of catering solely dominated by men. It is worth noting that, with the increased production of foodstuffs and spices for the Nigerian diaspora food markets, *suya* spices can now be bought in African food shops outside Nigeria.

Nonetheless, many Nigerians living in the diasporas still view the *suya* sold in Nigeria by the Hausas as the best, as it is believed to have a distinct taste lacking in the *suya* sold in the diasporas. The Hausa/Fulani also prepare and sell “*kilishi*”, another form of spicy beef. The *kilishi* is made with thinly sliced beef, which is tenderized, spiced with ingredients such as chillies, ginger, groundnut and then sun dried. The end product is almost paper-thin sheets of dried meat, which can be kept for months. People just break off pieces from it and eat. As it keeps well, *kilishi* is one of the popular Nigerian foods frequently requested as food gifts from visiting relations or friends living in Northern Nigeria, both within and outside Nigeria.

The popular drinks in the north are *kunu* made from millet, sorghum and *fura de nunu*. *Fura de nunu* is mainly produced by the Fulani pastoral communities. *Fura* is locally processed milk with the butter and fat removed while *nunu* is made from millet. This drink has become popular in other parts of the country too. *Zobo* (roselle juice), a non-alcoholic drink, is also widely consumed. Although due to the Islamic religious codes, alcohol consumption is forbidden, non-Muslims living in the “*sabon gari*” (strangers’ quarters) sell and consume alcohol within these quarters. In recent years with the introduction of sharia law in many states of the Northern Nigeria, the Islamic police have taken to raiding the *sabon gari* areas to destroy alcoholic drinks especially in cities like Kano. Many view these actions as being motivated by political and ethnic interests, rather than religious ones.

The middle belt region of the country is inhabited by the diverse smaller ethnic groups, spread across the vast plateau and savannah regions as shown in the Nigerian map indicating ethnic groups. They have over the years been submerged into the Hausa/Fulani-dominated northern region. Yet, they have cultural traits completely different from the Hausas and many are not Muslims. This region is the food basket of the nation, as its topography enables many of the foodstuffs consumed in Nigeria to be cultivated there (Ochonu, 2009). Being situated between the north and the south of Nigeria has left this middle belt region with culinary influences from both sides, alongside their indigenous cuisine. Some in this region prepare cereal-based *fufu* while others use tubers (yams or cassava) for their *fufu*, as is done in the southern region.

One unique thing about one of the ethnic groups that inhabit this region, the Idomas, is that it is the men that pound the yam to make the *fufu*. The women peel the yam, cook it and then the men pound the yam in mortars into *fufu*. Men from this group adduce many reasons for this act, which is not common in Nigeria, where domestic food preparation is not associated with masculinity. Some view this Idoma act as an expres-

sion of love, to help reduce the stress of domestic chores on the women. Although, the traditional ruler of the *Idomas*, *the Ochi Idoma* stated

I tried to investigate this issue in my formative years and my father told me that there were several reasons why men pound yam. Firstly, pounding yam is a masculine chore. Secondly, you don't talk or sing when pounding yam, to prevent spit (saliva) from entering the food and you know women will like to do all of these. There are so many other things involved, which we take for granted. Also, men do the pounding of yam to prevent sweat from entering the food. A woman will not be able to do this quickly as the man would do to avoid contaminating the food (Abah, 2013).

The popular indigenous soups from this region are a very viscous soup called *okobo* soup and groundnut soup. This region also has a lot of guinea fowls and popularized the consumption of guinea fowl eggs in Nigeria. The eggs are boiled and sold as street food in urban areas all over the country. As non-Muslim communities, the consumption of alcohol is part of their indigenous cuisine. *Pito* and *burukutu* are popular alcoholic drinks made from fermented cereals such as sorghum, maize, millet or guinea corn.

In the western region inhabited by the Yorubas, the landscape goes from sub-tropical to coastal topography. Seafood is very popular among the coastal Yorubas. This said, the most popular dish which defines the Yoruba indigenous cuisine is *amala fufu* and *ewedu soup*, although some parts of Yorubaland, like the Ekitis, are known to prefer yam *fufu*. *Amala* is made from yam peels (or yam that has gone off), which is brownish in colour unlike the milky or yellow colour of the freshly peeled yam consumed by most Nigerians. The peels and yam are dried and ground into flour, which is then cooked like porridge by stirring the flour into hot water and produces a soft dark brown *fufu*. The popular soups in Yoruba land are *ewedu*, *gbegiri*, *efo riro* and spicy stew. Vegetables are used sparingly in indigenous Yoruba soups and many of the Yoruba soups tend to be viscous, what Nigerians call "draw soup". In Yoruba cuisine, even the vegetable soup does not have as much vegetable as ethnic groups further south. Again this is because of the available indigenous vegetables in this region. There are other popular *fufu* made from cassava such as *lafu* or *garri*. The *fufu* is normally served with soup, which consists of a separately cooked vegetable sauce and spicy stew. Most of the meat or fish for the dish are in the stew.

The Yoruba assign quality to their meal by the quantity of meat and fish served. They popularized the method of asking for "*orishirishi*" or "assorted" while ordering or requesting a meal especially at local eateries. This means that the sauce should have a combination of different types (cuts) of meat, including beef, goat, bush meat, offal, chicken, snail, stock

fish and fish, or whatever is available. Another characteristic of Yoruba cooking is the amount of chilli pepper used, and their soups and sauces are found to be too oily and spicy by people from outside the group. As Falola (2001, p. 102) noted, “the Yorubas like palm oil and pepper, as the body that does not consume hot pepper is a weak one and the face of the soup is oil”. Unlike the other groups to the south, the Yoruba and some other ethnic groups in the north, tend to dish their *fufu* and soup in the same plate. Not only these, during meals once portions of the *fufu* is dipped in the soup it is chewed, unlike those further south who swallow their *fufu*.

The traditional drink in this region is palm wine and *ogogoro* – an alcohol distilled from palm wine. The peculiar street food found in Yorubaland are roasted plantain eaten with groundnut. From the Yoruba cuisine, Nigerians have adopted fried plantain, *akara* and *moimoi*. These are now very popular all over the country and are served as breakfast especially with *ogi* (a type of corn custard).

In the mid-western region and nearby delta areas are the *Edos*, *Ishans*, *Ijaws*, *Urhobos*, *Itsekiris*, *Isokos*, *Ika* *Igbos* and other smaller ethnic groups. Due to the fact that this area lies within the tropical forests and the waterways of the delta, their indigenous cuisine uses the edible plants and animals that thrive in this climate. The popular *fufu* among the Edo/Ishan ethnic group includes cassava and its by-product (*garri*), served with *ogbono* soup or black soup. Black soup is prepared with ground bitter leaves (*oyiuwo*) or basil (*ebhawonghor*) and snails, dried fish, and bush meat (Oyairo, 2012). It was from this group that the consumption of *ogbono* soup spread to other parts of Nigeria.

For those further down south in the riverine delta, seafood is the main stay of their indigenous cuisine. Hence, fresh fish pepper soup is very popular. For the river delta indigenes, *fufu* is yam pounded with very ripe plantain or cocoyam (*onunu*) and served with fresh fish soup. Soups like the *kalabari* soup is made with all sorts of seafood including mussels, periwinkle, prawns, fish, crayfish and crab. *Buro fulo* is also a popular dish of yam and fish pepper soup. “Starch” *fufu* (made from a cassava by-product and palm oil) served with *banga* or *owo* soup is popular among the *Urhobo*, *Ishekiri* and *Ijaws*, who occupy the delta creeks. The local gin *ogogoro* (*akpetashi*) and raffia palm wine are consumed in this region.

In the Eastern region inhabited by the Igbos, *the fufu* of choice is of yam, cassava or *garri* (a cassava by-product). The soups which are part of indigenous Igbo cuisine are *ofe olugbo*, *ofe oha*, *ukazi/ugu*, *nsala* and *ofe akwu*. The use of palm oil is very popular in the cuisine of this region. The topography enables access to a variety of plants and vegetables, which can be used for soup preparation, although efforts have not yet been made to domesticate some of these plants. Being in the palm belt,

wine from oil and raffia palms are very popular, as is the local gin distilled from palm wine. Popular snacks are *abacha lakpunmiri* (produced from cassava) eaten with coconut or groundnut, roasted maize with coconut or African pears.

Igbos are the most migratory ethnic group in Nigeria, thus they are resident in all parts of Nigeria. In turn their food and cuisine are evident in different parts of the country. The special dishes from this ethnic group that gained popularity in Nigeria include *isi ewu* (a goat head delicacy), *nkwobi* (spicy cuts of cow leg in palm oil sauce) and *ugba* (oil bean salad). For the Igbos, the food quality is determined by taste and quantity. Saying that there is no salt, pepper or oil in a soup means it is tasteless, inedible and prepared by a “bad” cook. Dried fish, snails and meat are used in soup preparation. In modern Nigeria, stock fish dishes have become an extravagant addition to Igbo cuisine (at home and abroad), which has spread to other ethnic groups.

Stock fish, called *okporoko* in Igbo, is dried cod fish imported from Norway and Iceland. Due to its widespread use as part of the relief food donations during the Nigerian civil war, some believe its origin to have been from that period (Essuman, 1992; Ikpe-Blankson, 2004; Falola, 2001). However, this era may have seen the spread of its consumption rather than being its origin. By the 1930s, stock fish was already imported into Nigeria based on an agreement between the national association of Norwegian stock fish exporters and a group of West African import merchants (Bauer, 1954).

According to Martin (2006, p. 50) the history goes even further back, because stock fish appeared in the southern protectorate’s customs statistics for the first time in 1900 and accounted for 2.13 per cent of the protectorate’s imports in 1913. Others have tried to establish a link between stock fish and the slave trade (Statoil magazine, 1993). The real impact of the civil war on stock fish consumption was that it became accessible to people from all classes of society. In present-day Nigeria, those who cannot buy a whole stock fish can buy the heads or pieces of tails and jaws packaged for lower-income consumers. The importation of stock fish over the years has been a subject of economic and political wrangling. The ban on stock fish importation after the civil war was perceived by some as an attempt to further undermine the ability of Igbos (who were the main importers) to recover economically. Igbos still dominate the stock fish import business in Nigeria.

Further down to the south-east coasts of Nigeria are the *Efiks*, *Ibibios*, *Anangs* and other ethnic groups. Although people from this region were among the first to have contact with Europeans and have aspects of their lives greatly influenced by European traditions (fashion, names), they

still maintained a strong traditional food culture. This region's indigenous cuisine attaches great importance to the art of cooking. Theirs is a meticulous preparation and combination of ingredients to achieve the ultimate taste. Periwinkle is not just shelled but can be cleaned and cooked in its shell in soups or cocoyam vegetable porridges. Effort and time are spent picking, cutting and grinding a variety of vegetables, which are then combined with meat and seafood in cooking just one pot of soup. Many Nigerians view their cuisine as extravagant but delicious. The main soups are *Afang*, *Edikaikong* and *Afiafere*. These are served with *fufu* of yam or cassava. Foods from this region, most especially the soups, have gained prominence in other parts of the country. They are also believed to have popularized the use of dried ground crayfish and shrimps in seasoning soups (Ikpe-Blankson, 1995, 2005). A popular snack, though, which is not common outside this region is eating cucumbers with fried groundnuts.

Although people eat what they are accustomed to for sustenance and social signification, they are also willing (and sometimes forced) to try new food. New food initially viewed with suspicion or trepidation, if liked (or a taste for it is acquired), is then incorporated into the traditional foodways. Different groups and communities in Nigeria utilize the same staple crops in their cuisine, but add their own flavours and style in the preparation, thus coming up with a variety of tastes in dishes. Like other ethnically diverse nations, the cuisine in Nigeria is of course not uniform, but is a compromise between indigenous ethnic food and introduced food (Mielsman, 1996; Marshall, 1995).

Nigerians have been able to come up with (sometimes) a fusion of indigenous and introduced food, just peculiar to their ethnic group or Nigeria as a whole. For example, rice dishes are very popular in Nigeria both as an everyday meal and for special occasions. A spicy dish from locally produced *Ofada* rice and palm oil sauce called *ayamashe* is very popular among the Yorubas and has become a popular dish at parties even for non-Yorubas. This rice and the sauce are served on fresh leaves. The Igbos make a similar type of rice called *Abakaliki* rice but the sauce (*ofe akwu*) is not made from palm oil but rather from the pulp produced from palm-nut flesh. This local rice dishes are named after rice growing towns, *Ofada* in western Nigeria and *Abakaliki* in the east of the country. Roasting is a popular method of food preparation hence roasted yam, plantain, potatoes and cocoyam are also popular, even in urban areas. These are eaten with spicy palm oil sauces.

There are dishes or food combinations that are common in all Nigerian cuisines. For example, *fufu* of yam, cassava or *garri* are served with *okro*, *egusi* or *ogbono* soups, which older Nigerians from the east term as new soups. There are also *jollof*, fried and coconut rice served with

Nigerian salad (which tend to use more vegetables and ingredients), *moimoi* or fried ripe plantain. There are chili and tomato stews with beef, chicken, fish or goat meat served with boiled rice, beans, yam or plantains. Eating bean porridge with soft white bread or “soaked” *garri* is another peculiarity common to most ethnic groups in Nigeria. *Garri* soaked in water with groundnut is popular, although constant consumption of this can be termed a sign of poverty. The preparation for “drinking” *garri* involves adding the desired quantity of *garri*⁶ in a bowl, to which cold water is then added. The sediments on top of the *garri* mixture are poured away and more water added. Depending on one’s economic abilities, salt with fried peeled groundnuts or fresh coconut are added, while insuring that the *garri* is at all times watery. Some may add sugar and milk into the *garri*, if they can afford it or so desire. Coconut consumption is also widespread not just as a cooking ingredient but it can be eaten with different foods like boiled or roasted maize. In the annex is a list of popular foods and dishes that make up the popular Nigerian cuisine.

Historically, two main groups contributed immensely to the Nigerian foodways – the Arabs and the Europeans. However, researchers are not always in agreement as to what food is indigenous, introduced, by whom or when. However, in the next section we will highlight what impact these diverse groups have had on the Nigerian foodways.

3.5. The External influences on Nigerian foodways; the Arabic and European Influence

There has been continuous contact through trade, religion and conquest between northern West Africa, North Africa and the Arab world as early as the 10th century. The chronicles of Arab travellers detailed the life, people and food of the inhabitants of this region.

The Arabs changed the indigenous food habits through the introduction of Islam. As a result, food and especially meat, has to meet Islamic diet specifications. This meant that pork and pig rearing ceased to be part of the agriculture and diet (Ifeyirionwa Smith, 1995; Levtzion and

⁶ *Garri* is a product from cassava. Its preparation involves peeling fresh cassava and grating it into a paste. The cassava paste is then tied in sacks, with weights placed on them to allow the poisonous liquid to drain out, sometimes for days. The *garri* paste is then broken down into granules and spread out in the open before frying. This enables the *garri* produced to achieve the dryness that many prefer. The *garri* is fried in special big pans (or platforms) over hearths until completely dry. Palm oil may be added to make the yellow *garri*. The end product is like semoule just a bit coarser.

Spaulding, 2003; Stock, 1995; Kittler and Sucher, 2004; Lewicki, 2009; Ikpe, 1994). Apart from also introducing items like sugar and tea, as is the case with most migrants, once they settled down in the northern city of Kano, the Arabs felt a need for a place where they could obtain their own food. Thus, an inn called *Al-Findiki* (from the Arabic word for an inn *al-Funduq*) was built. In the inn, wheat based foods such as *al-kaki*, *al-kubus*, *al-Garagis*, *Gurasa*, *Kuskus* and many other dishes were served and introduced into Hausa land. The newly introduced food attracted the attention of the Emir and the ruling class, who sent their female slaves to learn the new cooking techniques. It was from Kano that *al-Kama* (wheat-based foods) then spread to other parts of Northern Nigeria (Adamu, 2012). According to Naniya (2000), in Kano Arab dishes such as *gurasa*, *al-kubus*, *dashish* as well as *algaragis*, *alkaki*, *dubulan*, *bakilawa*, *nakiya* and *goreba*, became part of food and refreshments in festivities. *Gurasa* – a type of bread baked in oval-shaped earthenware pots (*Tanderu*) – according to Musa and Kwaru (2006), was formerly adjudged the rich man's speciality, as it was only found on the tables of royalty and the elites.

Furthermore, Blench (1997, pp. 96-98), in his work on the history of agriculture in North-eastern Nigeria, traced the origin of many plants to the Arabic regions and in some cases used linguistic similarities in names of plants to support this claim. For example, he posits that cress is still known by variants of its Arabic name *lafur*. Some of the plants allegedly introduced via the Arabs include sorghum, sesame, tiger nuts, date palm, red roselle, cucumber and bread wheat (*triticum aestivum*). The Arabs are also believed to have introduced wheat, barley, dates, broad beans, chickpea and several fruit trees.

The bitter variety of cassava is also believed to have been introduced into Adamawa from across the Sahara Desert. Some of the plants, that are thought to have originated in Nigeria, had been introduced across the desert to the Arabs only to be reintroduced later back to Nigeria by Arabs. One such crop is the sweet melon. Due to the constant interaction between the regions across the Sahara, the nomadic lifestyle of some of its communities and the difficulty in accessing records, it is difficult to evaluate fully what the contribution of Arabs to Nigerian cuisine has been.

The other group of foreigners that influenced the Nigerian food system arrived from the southern region of the country. Portuguese were the first Europeans to have contact with people in present-day Nigeria. Ruy de Sequeira reached Benin kingdom, Southern Nigeria, in 1472. The Portuguese initially exported pepper, ivory and gold from Nigeria and later added slaves to their exports. The Portuguese are believed to have introduced cassava, which is today's mainstay of many Nigerian cuisines, as it can be fermented as cassava *fufu*, grated and fried as *garri*; boiled, sliced and soaked overnight as "*abacha*" or dried and later prepared with

hot water, milk and sugar as tapioca custard. The consumption of cassava is so entrenched in the foodways that many do not believe that it is not an indigenous plant, as dishes from it are some of the food termed as “traditional food” in Nigeria. Crops accredited to the Portuguese include cocoyam, maize, plantains, coconut, pineapples, okro, sweet potatoes, oranges, limes, guavas and many more. Despite the Portuguese effort to maintain a monopoly over the trade with the Benin kingdom, in 1553 the British captain Wyndhem reached Benin where he bought a great quantity of pepper, thus opening up the way for other British traders (Ekundare, 1973, p. 26; Blench, 1997; Isichei, 1976). The Portuguese were also instrumental in the transfer of some indigenous Nigerian food and cuisine to different parts of the world as a result of the slave trade.

From the British Royal Niger Company, Nigeria got guavas, cashew nuts, coconuts and breadfruits, and also via their early trading networks from the new world came pineapple, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, tobacco, potatoes and avocado peas in the late 19th century (Isichei, 1970). The diffusion of these new foods occurred gradually and they were first only accepted in areas where the British were established as traders or missionaries. The coastal people, who have acted as middlemen for centuries, did not really like the infiltration of the Europeans to the interiors as it threatened their position (Ekundaro, 1973, p. 27). However, as the colonial system became established, more people in the hinterland were introduced to some of these new foods from within and outside the country. As late as the 1930s for example, some of what are known as the main soups of Nigeria were unknown in many parts of Eastern Nigerian. Mrs Sabina Uzoma, who is in her 80s, while responding to questions on what foods were available in her childhood stated

(...) all this new soup (...) *ogbono, okro, egusi* and so on, were unknown to us (...) when they came from *mba mmiri* (coastal lands) we did not eat them (...) now ask anyone they will say it is our soup (...) no one remembers our soups again, most of them are gone and if you make them now who will eat them (...)? (interview January 2006 in Nigeria).

Margret Green, in her research on Igbo villages in the early decades of the 20th century, noted that many people, especially the old, were still refusing to eat cassava (Green, 1947, p. 172). Now, however, it is an important food crop all over Nigeria and provides most of the carbohydrate. The spread of cassava consumption has also been attributed to returnee slaves from Brazil, the West Indies and Sierra Leone (Iwuagwu, 2012). These slaves were instrumental in the spread of European influences including food and eating habits in Nigeria and the region.

3.6. The British colonial influence: uniting a people and their food

As the British colonial rule created the Nigerian political entity, it also influenced the evolution of what is today the foodways of Nigerians. Although during the colonial period Nigeria had the smallest proportion of Europeans to Africans in the whole continent, Europeans were still able to influence the food culture (Coleman, 1971, p. 34). As part of the “civilising process” of the natives, food in Nigeria was not spared. As is well documented by Jonathan Robins (2010) on colonial cuisine in Northern Nigeria, British women were at the forefront of this effort.

When the Europeans ventured into different parts of Nigeria, they could not have access to all the European food they were used to. They relied on the Nigerians for most of their food supply and preparation. This food was sometimes obtained legitimately by purchasing it from the people, but at other times the colonialist demanded food to be made available to them or fixed the price at which it should be sold to them. The Nigerians, in turn, used food as a means of passive resistance by sometimes refusing to adhere to the demands of the colonialists. Nigerian cooks were trained to cater to some semblance of European culinary taste. This new cuisine was mainly a combination of European and African food cooked to a perceived or imagined European taste by these Africans. Hence through the colonial rule, a new cuisine and way of cooking emerged. This new way of cooking was adopted or fused with indigenous methods by Nigerian cooks and servants of the colonial workers in the different colonial quarters. The early domestic staffs of the colonial officers although rarely acknowledged, contributed immensely to the making of the modern Nigerian culinary history. Thus by the early 20th century, once the British rule was firmly established, adopting aspects of European habits including their food was viewed by many as a mark of distinction.

Efforts were made by the Europeans to build social boundaries with food, ascribing their food a position of superiority and relegating the food in Nigeria to an inferior position. This was well presented by Robins when he wrote that,

Local food was something to be colonized controlled, improved, and exploited to benefit European bodies – rather than a dangerous vector for race mixing that was to be avoided. It was only in the social contexts of preparation and consumption that foods became “Nigerian” or “British”. British colonial rule depended on indigenous foodways for its very survival, yet colonizers constantly sought to “reform” foods and local knowledge. Nigerian foods were deemed nutritionally inferior because they were produced and eaten by Nigerians; the same foods were transformed into “civilized” meals by the application of British methods. Boundaries between British and Nigerian

cuisine were created to protect the status and health of an outnumbered and vulnerable ruling class (Robins, 2010 p. 9).

In a bid to produce some familiar food, the British also sought ways of changing the food production by introducing new crops (especially vegetables like lettuce, aubergine, cabbage, tomatoes, carrots and new varieties of cereals) and new methods of farming. By the mid-1880s, the British colonial administration began establishing botanical gardens, which were meant to help preserve indigenous crops for export to other countries and also for the introduction of crops from other tropical countries. These botanical gardens were located in cities like Calabar in the south, Ibadan in the West and Jos in the middle belt of the country. The interest was mainly economic. So by 1900 under the colonial administration of Governor Macgregor, a directive from the Colonial Office meant the Forestry Department assumed responsibility for the botanical and agricultural department in the interest of the economy. Thus the Agricultural departments of the Northern and Southern Provinces were eventually merged to form a single Nigerian Agricultural Department in June 1921 (Dorward, 1979).

Initially the colonial government discouraged British men from bringing their wives and children, as they deemed the environment negative for their health and development. This meant the colonial staff had to rely on local male cooks (Sellick, 2010). It is also worth mentioning that this colonial administration dominated by men with Victorian patriarchal views introduced sex/gender hierarchies that were unknown in Nigeria. This undermined the traditional Nigerian female roles, because the colonial work environment was male dominated. However, these colonial women did not leave the task of colonizing the natives solely to their husbands. This helped reinforce the racial discrimination in the colonial system. These women geared their effort towards influencing and changing domestic life in Nigeria. They wrote guides and cookbooks to provide information for new colonialists and others about living in Nigeria. These pioneer food writers include Constance Larymore⁷ – *A resident's wife in Nigeria* (1911) and Sylvia Leith-Ross – *Practical West African cookery* (1908). Some of these books, like Mrs Muriel Tew's cooking book, had

⁷ The colonial British service was a masculine institution. The arrival of women changed the setting of the colonial homes and social life. Some believe it also brought a change to race relations, as interactions between the British and Nigerians became more restricted to suit the social etiquettes necessitated by the arrival of British women. Mrs Larymore was the first wife to accompany her husband to Northern Nigeria. Ms Leith-Ross arrived in Nigeria as a bride in 1907 but lost her husband the following year. After an initial return to Britain she came back to Nigeria several times. She was appointed first lady superintendent of education. She also worked as an anthropologist and as a member of the intelligence service during the Second World War (Callaway, 1993; Birkett, 1986).

some local dishes included (Falola and Aderinto, 2010; Strobel, 1991, pp. 17-18; Sellick, 2010).

It was from these divergent culinary encounters that the modern cuisine in Nigeria emerged, having been greatly influenced by the African colonial cooks, maids and houseboys who worked for the Europeans. The early efforts by Nigerian cooks to produce meals acceptable to the colonialists were a combination of trial and error, which rarely yielded the results desired by the colonialists. This is understandable, bearing in mind that the African cooks were venturing into new culinary horizons. From the narratives of colonial officers, much was expected of these cooks. However, many of the colonialists had to accept whatever meals the efforts of the Nigerian cooks yielded. In his memoir "Nigerian Days", A.C.G. Hastings (1925) narrated an encounter at *Burutu*, with Nigerians seeking jobs as cooks (and the references from their former employers which they presented) – "(...) a sleek crafty looking individual, posing as a cook, could show but one remark, (upon his dirty paper) 'I have not yet been poisoned'. But easily the best, a nutshell record ran: 'this cook leaves me, owing to illness – mine (...)".

The above scenario and comments show the disadvantaged position of Nigerians then (with regard to the reference letters) as one can be sure they would not have presented such references, if they had an understanding of the English language. The comments also equated the efforts of these cooks to a health hazard. In the later part of his book, on life in his Northern Nigeria station, he further stated "(...) thereafter we would gather at alternate houses, to smoke and yarn over drinks, or at some well-intentioned dinner devour the curious food which all our cooks unvaryingly served alike to the ruin of digestion" (Hastings, 1925, pp. 28, 69).

However, some of the early Europeans in Nigeria seem to appreciate the local cuisine. According to archival historical materials shared on "Nigeria Nostalgia Project – Pre Nigeria Discussion platform" by Mr Kehinde Thompson (2016); an American Acting Commercial Agent Joseph Hankinson Reading had the following to say about Palm oil Chop,

Old Calabar is famous throughout the whole length of the Coast for its palm-oil chop, which is here blacker, richer and more peppery than anywhere else. This excellent and healthy dish is everywhere a favourite with old Coast-ers, but new-comers partake of it somewhat gingerly, partly because of the peculiar flavour, and partly because it burns their throats. It is made of the pulp and oil of the fresh palm nut, stewed with various kinds of meats and fish, and a liberal amount of small chili peppers. Monkey meat and other game make the best chop, and the native cooks put in various ingredients unknown to the white man. At Batanga and some other points the flesh of the python is esteemed above all other, and is said by those who have eaten

it to be very fat and nice. Whatever difference of opinion there may be in reference to these details, certain it is that a palm-oil chop is a royal dish fit for a king – better food doubtless than most kings get to eat. It is healthful, nutritious, and very agreeable to the palate. A large and profitable business might be built up by making the chop without the meat, putting it into pint glass cans, and exporting it. There is not a country in the world where it would not be largely used as soon as it was introduced, and it would almost surely become as universally popular as tobacco (Reading, 1901).

Unfortunately, it will be more than a century before Nigerian palm oil sauces were canned and shipped abroad for Nigerians in diaspora. The cuisine has not yet gained the level of recognition and acceptance among non-Nigerians desired by the writer quoted above.

Despite the unfamiliarity of the European cuisine to the locals, they made efforts to accommodate it like their rapidly changing society, equipping themselves with the necessary food-related knowledge for economic and social gains. It was from this encounter that numerous dishes, including rice dishes, pastries and vegetable salad, became part of Nigerian cuisine. Eating a combination of different uncooked vegetables in salads was not easily accepted and, even in present-day Nigeria, some do not view salad as human food (Oha, 2000).

Through the British religious and government agencies, new festivals were introduced. Feasts like Christmas became associated with special food and gained more importance over traditional festivals, except in the north of the country. Despite the efforts of both Islam and Christianity to abolish local religious festivals, the people still continued celebrating some of the indigenous festivals as well as the new ones, even changing the context of some traditional festivals to accommodate the new faiths.

Formal dining according to British standards, including dress code, was practiced by the British colonial residents in Nigeria. It became proof of a civilized mind in some quarters to dine like the Europeans, not just in terms of the food but also the etiquette. Many educated and elite Nigerians began eating on the dining table with European cutleries (Callaway, 1993, pp. 232-236; Ikpe-Blankson, 1994). However, presently in some formal dinners many people dress in their formal ethnic attires, which differ from the everyday wears only in cost and style. Yet, formal dinners stipulating formal dress code (black tie, suits and evening gowns) are common among the elite and government circles.

It was from all these different influences that Nigerians had to choose and mix food, maintaining old eating habits while learning new ones, leading to what is now termed as the Nigerian food and cuisine. Reflecting the changes in society, the food in Nigeria has also evolved in line with other aspects of life in the diverse regions of the country.

CHAPTER TWO

Unity in diversity

1. A Reflection of the Nigerian Food Culture

As shown in the previous introductory chapter, Nigeria is a vast nation densely populated by people with historically different political, religious, cultural and even economic backgrounds. However, the nation and its people have been able to draw from its indigenous beliefs and norms, the influences of colonialism and other encounters in its history to build a nation, despite the diverse origins of its people. This does not in any way deny the daily challenges of maintaining the unity of this nation. Yet, it is in examining the emergence of the modern Nigerian food culture, that one can see unity in diversity in its true form.

The attitude of the various people of Nigeria tend to be strongly ethnic, which is reflected in the food and evolution of Nigerian foodway. Jane Fajan's statement about Brazilian food culture could be applicable to Nigeria as a very ethnically diverse country too. As she stated while describing Brazilian foodways,

(...) many of these differences can be traced in history, geography, climate and ethnicity. Particular ingredients and modes of preparation form a distinctive basis of regional foods and by association of identity of people who consume them. However there is more embedded in the regional cuisines than just ingredients and preparation. Ethnicity, race and class infuse all aspects of life including food (Fayans, 2008, p. 2).

The following pages will explore further the factors that facilitate or challenge the notion of a Nigerian foodway. What does food mean to Nigerians and how do they engage with each other using food? The commonalities inherent in all the ethnic foodways which have become part of the Nigerian food system and culture will also be highlighted.

1.1. Filling the national food basket: a new way with food

Despite its distinct origins, ethnic bias and modes, the colonial encounter left a visible mark on the Nigerian ethnic cuisines across the nation. By bringing more people into closer proximity for longer dura-

tion than was previously applicable, many social and cultural exchanges especially with regard to food, were made possible within the formative Nigerian nation. The colonial officials, Europeans and their African servants (cooks, maids, house helps) should be credited for creating what is now known as the modern Nigerian foodways. The European chose indigenous food they liked, taught some of their own cuisine to their servants, who in turn, spread these new culinary skills among the people in Nigeria (Eno-Blankson Ikpe, 1994).

As mentioned earlier, one prominent impact colonialism had, was on the gender relation inherent in Nigerian food culture. At first, people working with colonialists were male; they served as cooks and servants for the colonialists. Although these men had usurped roles traditionally reserved for women, cooking in this circumstance was seen as just a job in the colonial system (which was in line with colonial policy), and thus did not in any way undermine the masculinity of the man in his traditional environment.

Later in the colonial era, Nigerian women too were employed as domestic help in colonial homes and once they were deemed fit to be educated, were trained in domestic sciences to inculcate in them the principles of domesticity, including cooking, hygiene, sewing and so on, in line with the Victorian belief that a woman's place is at home. Under the guidance of female colonialists, mainly wives of British colonial administrators, these Nigerian women were taught the rudiments of cooking (using local ingredients), but they in turn added a local flavour to all the new cuisines, so much so that the cuisine is now uniquely Nigerian, which is why Nigerians can claim pastries like meat pie, chin chin, puff puff or buns as theirs.

In the absence of a local haute cuisine, the Nigerian elite, which emerged as a result of the British rule, acquired a consumption pattern that bore limited ethnic allegiance. Rather, people of this class from the diverse ethnic groups consumed the same expensive food and also select food from the different ethnic groups, which distinguished them from the rest. Not only did they have a different eating habit, the food preparation and eating patterns differed too. Trained chefs, cooks and house helps are employed in these households to do the food preparation and serving. The dining is also reflective of their position, not just through its formalities but also through the cutleries and dinnerware.

As Jack Goody pointed out, in as much as Africans adopted new food and new cooking methods, they still rely much on local crops and styles of cooking. The same way they are able to use the colonial language in certain contexts and their mother tongue in others, they can easily navigate the and indigenous culinary worlds, without losing track of their main cuisine (Goody, 1982, p. 184). Like the political entity the British created,

Nigerians have consistently combined the indigenous with the introduced to create an entity and way of life uniquely theirs. This is also true of their food, enabling them to maintain a multi-tiered, stratified foodway, which is constantly intermingling and evolving. So there is the ethnic cuisine alongside the national cuisine that is made up of local and foreign cuisine. Nigerians over the years, while straddling the traditional and introduced foodscapes, have expanded the content of their foodways.

As Nigerian society evolved, new cooking concepts and meals are also introduced. For example, since the mid-2000s, Nigerians from all ethnic groups began consuming *fufu* made from locally grown and milled wheat, as they see this as healthier than all other forms of *fufu*.

1.2. A new nation – Food, War and new realities

The different political changes in Nigeria, like in other countries of the world, have also impacted on the food culture of the nation. Like most colonies in Africa and Asia, by the late 1940s the lobby for independence had intensified in Nigeria. Despite the increased pro-independence nationalistic movements in Nigeria, ethnic interests and infighting soon reared its head in the movements, so much so that none of the political parties that later emerged from these movements could really claim to be a true national party. To further complicate issues, some regions, like the northern region, were not really ready for self-governance. Even when it eventually came with the independence of Nigeria on October 1st 1960, the politicians did not live up to the expectations of the people. The political events of this period have been adequately covered by various historical works, and hence it is not necessary to dwell on it. So the focus will only be on the impact of post-colonial events on the food culture of Nigeria (for pre-independence and post-independent history of Nigeria, see Richard Skalar, 2004; Godfrey Uzoigwe, 1999; Attahiru Jega, J. Dudley, 1968; Julius O. Ihonvbere, 1998; Robin Luckman, 1974; Falola *et al.*, 2008; James S. Coleman, 1971).

Although Nigeria embarked on major political changes from the late 1950s, not much was changed in terms of policies affecting agriculture. The system set up by the British was still maintained. Agriculture was still the main source of foreign income and remained so, until the 1970s. One of the main post independence events in Nigeria that impacted not just on the nation but also on its food culture, especially for those living in the east and south of the country, was the Nigerian civil war. With independence on October 1st 1960, Nigeria went through a lot of political upheavals, which eventually led to a civil war between 1967 and 1970.

Food was used as a weapon during this war. From 1968 onwards it was obvious that *Biafra*, the secessionist state, was facing a massive attack from another front, hunger, despite the *Biafran* propaganda stating the opposite. Many children began showing signs of *kwashiorkor*, but the *Biafrans* believed it was caused by eating too much banana. Attributing this illness to other things rather than hunger was good for the war propaganda. Later, rumour (which was common) blamed this sickness on poison, spread over *Biafra* by the Nigerian air force. Many in *Biafra* believed this as they had little access to information from outside the enclave and relied on the news of Radio Biafra, which was mainly a propaganda machinery (Nkpa, 1977, p. 339). Moreover, with famine and increased malnutrition, cases of stillbirths increased drastically all over *Biafra*. Yet again this was blamed on another poison that was spread by the federal side over the *Biafra* territory. Soon, not just children but adults too were suffering from *kwashiorkor* and *marasmus*. The cases spread so rapidly that the humanitarian agencies working within Biafra raised alarm over the impending disaster. An early fact-finding mission in 1968, conducted by ICRC Doctor Edwin Spirgi, found at least 300,000 children suffering from *kwashiorkor*.

By the summer of 1968, the ICRC reported that three million children were near death and they presented a report detailing the situation in *Biafra* (Nathaniel H. Goetz, accessed online in April 2010). With the world soon aware of the imminent disaster within *Biafra*, especially with pictures of malnourished children shown in media reports, countries were pressured by their citizens to intervene, at least with humanitarian aid. The need for such interventions was further heightened by constraints on certain globally known humanitarian agencies to act and act fast. For example, due to legal obligations regarding insuring food is for civilians only, the Red Cross was restrained in its initial operation. It was bound by Article 23 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which states:

All delivery of aid in this kind of situation was to be subordinate to the agreement of the contracting power, who had to be convinced that the relief would go only to the civilians to whom it was destined and that enemy troops would derive no gain or advantage from it (Nathaniel H. Goetz's Humanitarian issues in the Biafran conflict, accessed online in June 2010).

Since the Red Cross towed the official line and was officially based in the federal side, their work was initially hampered, although in June 1968 the Red Cross representative in Lagos stated that there were over 3,000 tons of food available for *Biafra*, but these were not reaching those that needed food urgently. In view of the negative publicity of the starved *Biafrans*, the federal side came under pressure to lift the blockade and offered a land route for humanitarian deliveries. This was not accepted by the *Biafra* side, as one of the conditions was that the flight and cargoes

will be searched, to insure they had only humanitarian aid (Rex Niven, 1970). The Nigerian leader Gowon and other moderates in the Federal side tried to find a solution to alleviate the suffering of the civilians in the Biafra region, but the hardliners on the federal side saw hunger as a solution to the conflict. Various utterances by prominent leaders in the federal side testify to this view; Obafemi Awolowo, the finance minister declared that “starvation is a legitimate weapon of war and we intend to use it fully”. Another top official – Anthony Enahoro, Federal commissioner of Information and Labour of Nigeria stated that, “starvation is a legitimate weapon of war”. Even the Nigerian military commanders shared the same opinion as the politicians. “I want to see no Red Cross, no Caritas, no world council of churches, no pope, no missionary and no UN delegation. I want to prevent even one Igbo having even one thing to eat before their capitulation”, stated Brigadier Benjamin Adekunle, Nigerian Army Commander (Mudge, 1970, p. 228). Such strong opinions meant that sending food to the *Biafra* sector was difficult to realize through the federal side.

However, images of skeletal children with grossly swollen stomachs were beamed via the media, into the sitting rooms of people across the globe. For the first time, various aid agencies overrode the ruling governments to reach out to people who were in dire need. The federal side later allowed the “mercy flights”, which they said, must be during the day. Some of the seriously malnourished children were sent to countries like Gabon for the treatment they needed.

Despite the amount of aid coming into Biafra, the situation on ground hampered effective food distribution. A great amount of the humanitarian aid ended up stolen, in the hands of Biafra corrupt officials or at black markets. Cargoes of aid were waylaid and robbed as they left airports to the warehouses. This is not surprising, taking into consideration the level of insecurity, availability of arms and lack of food in the region. Even soldiers lacked basic things like clothing and equipment, and they had to look for their own food too, most times harvesting abandoned planted plots or appropriating food from Biafra civilians. Sometimes they found food supply in unusual places. An ex Biafra soldier who as a young boy fought during the war, narrated an experience thus

we were fighting at the front from the delta Igbo area. We were tired, hungry, just nothing (...) then we came up to a clearing and there were lots of animals like antelopes (...) just lying around these huge field. As we approached they did not even try to run, then we noticed that the plants on the field were cannabis and the animals were affected from eating them. So you just catch them and killed (...) We camped there for a long time, leaving only when the Nigerians got close.

Although the majority of the people in Biafra were suffering, those in positions of authority had a lifestyle that had changed little. They still had access to the best of food and drinks. Working for the aid agencies, such as Red Cross or Caritas, became a way out for most people. Sometimes the food provided by the aid agencies, was not shared according to need. The *Biafra* staff of agencies catered for their families and friends first, before the people that really needed the food got anything. Singing was the *Biafran* means of coping with his horrible situation and songs reflecting the situation in the region were popular in different parts of the region. A popular song was,

“Store keeper, *nwanne* supervisor *I nweghi ike itacha okporoko*
Okporoko 1 and 6
Anyi ga na’Aba zuta garri nye ndi kwashiorkor (...)”
 Store keeper, the relation of the supervisor
 You cannot consume all the stock fish
 Stock fish for 1 and 6 (referring to 1 pound 6 shillings)
 Let’s go to Aba and buy Garri for the kwashiorkor victims...
 (I A, interviewed January 2006).

With the prospects of death through starvation staring people in the face, they ignored previously accepted norms and rules concerning food and eating. Previously unknown or unacceptable food became part of the daily menu. Plants that have become neglected over the years, including wild crops and forest resources, became sources of food as did all sorts of animals and even pets. To make up for the lack of vegetables, cassava leaves that were not eaten previously, became widely used for meals. There was also an increased consumption of the sweet cassava specie, which locally some called “*o buru orie*”, meaning “harvest and eat”, signifying how easy it was to use, unlike the bitter specie which had to be treated to remove the poisonous liquids. As refugees moved inland, with the collapse of towns in the northern and coastal sectors of the region, not only did they bring their food culture, but hunger also rendered them less sensitive to food norms and taboos of the communities among whom they sought refuge. The cocoyam leaves, which were not widely used in the inland areas, were introduced as a vegetable by those whose societies used them. Animals which were forbidden as food (mainly totemic animals) were killed and eaten by these refugees. People killed their pets for food or sold them to others for food. Some who could not do this, due to the attachment they had to the animals, had to be extra vigilant to protect the animals, especially dogs.

Irrespective of the war situation, some still were cautious of accepting food gifts from people. An informer, who worked for Caritas during the war, narrated how he managed to get a bag of salt, which was a scarce

commodity during the war. He took the bag home to share it among his kindred, but one of his relations sent back the portion given to him, requesting that the man should give it to him personally and taste it in his presence to show that it was “clean” (not poisoned). On reflection, he pointed out that this relative of his was merely preserving himself and his interests because he was an only son, with vast lands and had only a child at the time.

Hunger also drove people to steal planted crops, especially yam, which before the war was an abomination. Despite the war condition, culturally stipulated punishments were meted out to those caught stealing. This left a shameful tag on people, who had to bear this shameful tag even years after the war. The desperate war situation was not seen as enough justification for stealing, thus no mercy was shown to those caught. Some other people began eating their seed crops. Hence, by the time the war was over they had nothing to begin farming with. For many the lack of seed crops, especially yam, became the end of farming for them and also saw the emergence of cassava as the main staple food in the region (Korieh, 2002, p. 250).

In an effort to save lives, the relief agencies imported mineral fortified food products to help stop the spread of disease. At the height of their operations, the Red Cross and Joint Church Aid were sending in more than 25 tons of supplies a day (Akpan, 1976, p. 135). Some of the food aid, that many who witnessed the war still remember, were corn meal, dried egg yolk, stock fish, Quaker oats, powdered milk, corn beef, and salt. Corn meal became the staple for most people and was easier to prepare than most of the food they previously knew. For people used to spicy food, the bland taste was a challenge and with time, people began preparing it to taste like the food they were used to. Since the end of the war, dried egg yolk and corn meal have ceased to be part of the cuisine in this region or even the whole of Nigeria. When corn meal was imported during the 1980s Shagari government due to austerity measures, many did not take to it as people (especially in the East) felt it was a reminder of the war period.

1.3. New Realities; Food in a changing nation

The aftermath of the war led to years of military dictatorship, which further deepened the national political, economic and social crisis in Nigeria (Ukiwo, 2001, p. 10). With the end of the civil war and beginning of the oil boom, the Nigerian government shifted the economic reliance from agriculture to oil. Agriculture by the mid-1970s had lost its role as the main source of national income and Nigerian agriculture, which

post-war accounted for about 1 per cent of the world's agricultural export, had dropped to 0.1 per cent by the mid-1980s. The annual growth rate of export crops had declined by 17 per cent, while food-crop production fell by 2 per cent and the domestic food price soared (Walkenhorst, 2009, p. 441; Oyejide, 1986, pp. 10-11). The various post-war governments had varied solutions for improving agriculture (especially domestic food production) to pre-civil war levels, but achieved no results. These plans were guided mainly by the interest of the people in government, rather than the general good as these ventures proved to be just means of self-aggrandizement.

Just a few years after the civil war, in 1974, a panel set up under Jerome Udoji (a judge in the Nigerian justice system) to review the salary of public workers recommended an over 100 per cent increase, with arrears to be paid immediately. Although this saw an increase in availability of funds, it also led to massive inflation, which in turn led to the high cost of food. With the oil boom came an attitude that all things were possible. It also perpetuated the era of conspicuous consumption. People in public and private domains tried to showcase their status through how and what they ate. Thus, there was a rapid demand for imported food products with people spending up to a third of their household budget on foreign food items (Ayittey, 1998, p. 134).

Due to failures by various military and civilian governments to address the economic situation in the country and with corruption entrenched in government; there emerged two distinct economies and lifestyles within the society, yet the market for food remained the same. While one group had more money than it could handle or spend, the other lived in abject poverty. This, in turn, created a parallel consumption pattern, both relying on the same sources. The governments made promises and policies to alleviate poverty, which were never well implemented. Like in all societies, people always strive to move up in life to have a better economic and social status, and Nigeria is no exception. Those who feel they exist outside the economic power and all its attendant privileges, try gaining access to the circles that facilitate this power, and sometimes when they have limited or no access to its privileges, they try to emulate those with such powers, even in their consumption patterns. Where this economic and social mobility is not achievable within the nation, some seek alternative means of economic empowerment outside the country, and the first choice is migration. This will be addressed later.

The two food products that gained prominence in the post-war Nigerian food culture are rice and bread. Initially, a prestige festive food in the pre-civil war era, from the 1970s due to increased urban migration and convenience of preparation, more people began consuming rice and bread. Rice, which by the 1970s was grown in all parts of the country, assumed

a dual position. The locally grown rice was no longer popular, because people preferred the imported parboiled polished long grain, rather than the local brown or unpolished rice. The Nigerian-grown rice became food for the masses, while the imported rice was for the elite or those who aspire to such status.

With the increasing population of the nation and urbanization, rice imports have increased by over 10.3 per cent per annum since the 1970s, and local production by over 9.3 per cent. About 6.4 per cent (1.6 million hectares) of the 25 million hectares of total land cultivated in Nigeria by 2000 was for rice, while the per capita consumption rate stayed above 7.3 per cent per annum (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2005). Over the years, the acquisition of a rice importation license has become a sure way to quick money for those in power and their cronies. To attempt correcting the trend of high rice importation in Nigeria (sometimes for political reasons), the government used tariffs, import restrictions (especially between 1986 and 1995), and an outright ban in 2005 to bring some changes to the sector. This is understandable as the president at the time lamented publicly the huge sums spent on rice imports, which was about one billion dollars annually. The import-duty increase over the years still did not deter importers. Duty was raised from 50 per cent to 75 per cent in January 2001, increased further to 100 per cent in 2002 and to 110 per cent by the end of that year (FAO, 2003; UNEP, 2005). Irrespective of all these, little change is expected to occur in the popularity of rice dishes, which many now view as an important part of the Nigerian cuisine.

Bread is another food item that gained more popularity in post-war Nigeria. Like rice, the preference was not for the healthy brown bread; rather Nigerians prefer the soft white bread. Due to inadequate local sources for wheat, availability of flour can be erratic and expensive. So as a result of the difficulties of importation and costs, many Nigerian bakeries (especially those whose clients are the masses) became more innovative in their baking methods to cut cost or circumvent shortages. Bakeries utilize wheat flour mixed with flour from other grains, like maize or sometimes cassava. It must be pointed out that bread made from these flours are consumed in other parts of the world, especially south America, but is not usually consumed in Nigeria, at least not intentionally. In the absence of yeast, palm wine is also utilized as a raising agent since it contains natural yeast.

Many bakeries across the nation, especially in rural areas and poor neighbourhoods, produce a brand of very soft white bread with little nutritious value (Stock, 1985, p. 230; Andral and Beckmen, 1987). In spite of that, these breads, like the Ghana bread and the *Agege bread* sold mainly in Western Nigeria (Lagos), are very popular among the masses,

since they are affordable unlike other white breads produced by the more elitist bakeries. The recognition of the importance of bread in the food system and the lack of wheat flour may have informed the recent effort by the government of Dr Goodluck Jonathan to promote cassava flour production and utilization in baking. According to Sanni *et al.* (2006), substituting 10 to 20 per cent of cassava flour for wheat flour in bread would save substantial foreign exchange on importation of wheat flour in Nigeria. The government policy makers believed in the potential of the cassava flour, so much so that on July 1st 2006, the mandatory inclusion of 10 per cent cassava flour in bread production was promulgated into law. Despite these efforts, backed by the then president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan (in 2011), to promote cassava bread consumption, the idea was met with scepticism from the masses. Many viewed this as just a gimmick targeting the masses and not the rich, especially when the budget for food for the presidency was made public in 2012. People then saw that the food budget ran into billions of naira in the list of presidential expenses, which contributed to the anger unleashed by protesters during the national protests against the removal of the oil subsidy in Nigeria in early 2012. Some protesters made placards asking if the president eats “Louis Vuitton”, while other placards stated that “one day the poor will have nothing left to eat, but the rich” (Aljazeera stream, February 2012).

As stated earlier, traditional beliefs still hold much force among the people and can be employed to achieve business goals. Sometimes the success of a brand of bread opens it up to rumours by mischief makers, which could drastically harm its business. A good example is a bakery based in Onitsha in the 1980s, which produced the popular “our lady’s” bread. The bread from this bakery became very popular in the eastern region and beyond but, after a few years, rumours began spreading that the lady owner was a member of the mermaid cult⁸ and used human blood to mix the dough, hence affecting the popularity of the bread. Many stopped buying this bread because of the rumour, which none confirmed as true, and sales dropped massively. Although this may have been a rumour started by the competitors to break the hold of the brand in the market, on the other hand it also shows how popular bread consumption has become, for people to go to such levels just to destroy a business.

From the 1970s, no Nigerian cooking was complete without the use of stock cubes. First introduced during the colonial era, by the end of the

⁸ This is a cult or secret society for those who worship the mermaid spirit, which is believed to be a mystical beautiful woman who lives in the deep waters. Some believe that they can receive power from this spirit which they could use to harm people physically or spiritually. This power is supposedly given to them in exchange for services they are willing to render to the mermaid, such as donating or sacrificing human souls.

civil war these cubes have become an indispensable part of the Nigerian cooking. The most popular stock cube used nationwide is the *maggi* cube produced by Nestlé. Its popularity is such that stock cubes irrespective of the different brands are called *maggi* by Nigerians. Other brands have also been able to gain popularity too, like the *Knorr* brand, which some call *knorr maggi*.

According to Goody (1982), bouillon cubes were first developed by the French man, Appert, who had earlier discovered the method of preserving food by bottling. By the end of that century British entrepreneurs influenced by Appert's discovery had established canning factories and some of them supplied their products to military and civilian expeditions. One can infer then that bouillon cubes were introduced as part of European colonial food supplies. Their use became widespread in Nigeria from the 1970s. Amongst the older (70 years plus) Nigerians interviewed during my research in the eastern part of the country, many claimed that the use of "*maggi*" was initially unpopular, as it was believed to be used only by "bad" cooks to cover the lack of taste in their food. This in a sense is true, as the bouillon cubes are taste enhancers added to food to increase the taste properties of such food. The main ingredients in these cubes are salt, monosodium glutamate, vegetable oil, starch and spices (Akpanyung, 2005).

Such is the widespread use of bouillon cubes that the Nigerian Federal Government and the UNICEF children's fund consultative group selected it as the best food vehicle for fortification with micronutrients at the industrial level to help combat malnutrition (Henry-Unueze, 2010). According to the study by Henry-Unueze (2010) in Enugu state, about 98.3 per cent of the people consume food flavour enhancers (bouillon cubes and monosodium glutamate). This figure can be applied to most of the states in the nation, with little margin for error.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, Nigerians also increased their use of monosodium glutamate (MSG), which they popularly call "*white maggi*". These MSGs come as white granules packaged in sachets. Imported initially by traders from various Asian countries, the Japanese company *Aji-no moto* was to establish an office and factory in Lagos in the 1990s, from where the company's brand of MSG was successfully packaged and marketed throughout the country. Now, there are different brands of MSG products in Nigeria, although many experts have started challenging their health implications.

Since the 1970s, pre-packaged food has become entrenched in the Nigerian foodways. This ranges from canned fish, corned beef, vegetables, dairy products, beverages, pastries, noodles and many more. These are produced or marketed by multinational, indigenous or foreign companies.

However, because the quality of the products differs, pre-packaged food has become a means of differentiation, although their popularity in the country can be attributed to increased internal migration and a need for quick and easily prepared meals. A good example of such popular pre-packaged food items, are milk and chocolate beverages. These are consumed by all segments of the society, but the expensive evaporated milk brands, like *Peak* or *Carnation* and powdered milk like the *Nido* brand, are not affordable for the average Nigerian.

To bridge the gap and provide affordable dairy products to all segments of society, companies not only market less expensive brands but also began selling powdered milk in 50 kilo sacks, which retailers can then measure out in small quantities in cellophane bags and sell to the masses. This sale of bags of milk was first initiated by the company Cowbell (now known as Promasidor), then under the management of Simon Rose, one of the sons of the founder of the company. The company later introduced the 100 grams sachets of powdered milk into the Nigerian market. It became a huge success. Soon the older multinational companies with more expensive brands began selling their products in smaller sachets too. Now sachets of milk and chocolate powders are sold in all markets in rural or urban areas, with other pre-packaged beverages and food products.

Irrespective of the interest of Nigerians in foreign food, pasta products, despite their global popularity, have not been able to enjoy the same level of popularity as rice in the Nigerian foodways. Some street-food sellers (*mamaputs*), especially those owned by Francophone Africans in cities of Nigeria, serve pasta, but it is rarely used in homes as often as rice. In the late mid-1980s, noodles became popular in Nigeria. Companies like “De-United Food” in 1988 began producing and marketing a brand of noodles called “*Indomie noodles*”. Soon this gained popularity, which meant many more brands came into the market. The market for pasta and noodles in Nigeria increased between 2000 and 2004, growing at an average annual rate of 3.6 per cent; this increased to 6.1 per cent between 2004 and 2009, and instant noodles account for 89.2 per cent of the market for pasta.

Presently in Nigeria, there are about sixteen brands of instant noodles of different flavours and pack sizes. Some of these products are from old multinational food companies that have capitalized on the popularity of noodles to create their own brands. Dufil Foods now makes the *Indomie* brands (super pack, Hungry Man size, and ordinary packs); *Chiki* noodles is made by Chiki Foods Ltd; Honeywell Flour Mills Ltd makes Honeywell noodles and Golden Penny Nigeria Plc makes Golden Penny noodles. There are also *Mimee* noodles by May and Baker; Dangote Ready to eat and Dangote Snacks by Dangote Plc; and Cherie noodles by Grown Flour Ltd. The leading company in the noodles market by

2005 was Unilever. The second-largest marketer was Dangote Group (an indigenous company), with Nestle S.A. in third position. However, as at 2014, Indomie (the foremost instant noodles brand in Nigeria) controlled 72 per cent of the market value share (Obisesan, 2014; research and market resources, 2012; Euromonitor, 2013).

Despite the many multinational food companies in Nigeria, none has diversified into the production of packaged ready-made, cooked or frozen Nigerian indigenous food. This is despite a great percentage of the shareholders in the multinational companies being Nigerians. The production of pre-packaged indigenous food is not yet viewed as worthy of investing in. This is understandable because most Nigerians still prefer to buy their food raw from the market. Canned fish, tomatoes and, to lesser degree, canned beef are available in all markets, whether urban or rural, but many are foreign produce.

Huge malls and supermarkets are now springing up all over the country, although they tend to favour stocking non Nigerian food, as evidenced by a visit to one of the popular Shoprite malls in Lagos in 2013, which had rows of foreign food products and fresh produce but no Nigerian food products like fruits, vegetables etc. A follow up visit to the ShopRite in Lagos and Enugu in 2016, showed some improvement. Nigerian foods such as processed *fufu* flours, beans, assorted meat were available, yet most of their food products are not of Nigerian origin. Some other companies, such as Jobi Foods, strived to promote the production and packaging of traditional Nigerian food from as early as the 1980s. Yet not many Nigerians prefer their *Egusi* soup from a tin, rather than cooking it themselves with fresh ingredients.

Cadbury Nigeria now produces stock cubes called *dadawa* cubes, named after a local seasoning for soups. Nestlé has done tremendously well in promoting Nigeria indigenous foods, although it does not produce or package them, except for the crayfish, chicken and beef bouillon cubes. Not only was Nestlé the producer of the first culinary programme on national television in Nigeria, “the Maggi Kitchen”, it also published recipe books filled with dishes from all over the country that had been presented on its cooking program.

In 1982, the company started the Maggi cooking competition to help promote indigenous food consumption across the nation and bring it to international standard and notice. The contestants in this competition are provided with local ingredients, from which they are expected to develop a menu and cook a three-course meal, although three-course meals are a foreign concept. It is worth noting that most of the winners of this cooking competition have been men. This shows again how food can initiate and bring about change within society. Cooking is viewed as a feminine task

in Nigeria. However, society is not static and is prone to changes from internal or external stimuli. Since the colonial era, where and when there were economic gains to be made through cooking food, men have been active participants. In recent years, there has been an increase in male participation in public cooking, rather than in the domestic space. For those who win this competition, prizes range from cooking utensils and household goods to cars and monetary rewards. Over the years the contest has diversified to include concepts like “Maggi cook for MaMa” targeted at teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17 years. This contest according to the company is aimed at promoting the relationship between mother and child, thereby enhancing the bond between mothers, their children and the family (Omoruyi, 2002; Ekwuru, 2010).

Following in the footsteps of Nestlé, other companies and agencies began organising cooking competitions to promote their products or concepts. In 2012, Unilever in Nigeria began “Knorr Taste Quest”. According to the company, this cooking competition is a platform to bring back cooking by families, which was the norm and a habit passed down from parent to children as a means of survival and a way of sharing a cultural and information lineage from one generation to the next. The competition is opened to consumers from all walks of life, aged between 20 and 45 years old, who have the passion for cooking, see food as pleasure and think they have what it takes to win the ultimate prize (Akporowhe, 2012). There are also other food themed contests such as the *Onga* cooking competition and the “celebrate the Benue women and food festival” organised by the former first lady of Benue state Mrs Yemisi Suswan (Ogunleye, 2011; Emmanuel, 2012).

From the late 1980s, an American, Tonia Igiehon and her Nigerian husband Aib, through their entertainment promotion company Aibtonia, organised the “All Nigeria food and music festival”. Asked why they embarked on this mission, Mrs Igiehon stated that

What we have been trying to do since 1990 is to create awareness and expose Nigerians to the fact that this issue of food culture is not a kitchen palava. It is a very critical issue for economic development. In the first place, any nation that does not have a genuine food culture cannot say that it is moving or experiencing consistent boom pattern. For economic prosperity, you have to look at the ability of that community, region or nation to produce food for its people. In our own case, we (Nigeria) rely very heavily on imports (...) (Ekunkunbor, 2002).

During this festival, Nigerians from across the nation are given stalls at the venue to prepare and sell their traditional food. According to Mr Igiehon,

Through the Promoting Nigerian Food Endeavour, Aibtonia pioneered the concept of establishing a genuine Nigerian food culture, integrating all our ethnic and tribal food cultures into one national food pool, in order to promote national unity and enhance economic development. Aibtonia has lobbied the Federal Government for over a decade, to feed our school children in the primary and secondary schools, a selection of 10-20 different indigenous foods from the national food pool, as a means of: rooting a genuine Nigerian food culture in successive generations of Nigerians; enhancing the physical and mental development of the children; Nurturing a sorely needed sense of loyalty in Nigerians; and catalysing a return to productive agriculture (...) (Africa News service, 2005).

Despite the efforts of all these people and companies to encourage Nigerians to eat differently or to try using recipes from other parts of the country, apart from the nationally accepted foods afore mentioned, many Nigerians are still quite conservative in their diet, preferring their ethnic food choices. Many view the cooking programmes and food festivals as mere entertainment.

Over the past years, the indigenous companies were not able to compete in the large-scale Nigerian food sector, as they lacked the resources to break into a market dominated by big multinationals. This trend has changed since the late 1990s, with the increased demand for home food by Nigerians and other sub-Saharan Africans living abroad. This growing interest in home food from diaspora communities, have presented local entrepreneurs the opportunity to invest in producing and packaging different Nigerian indigenous foods for export. Some are able to operate as small business entities and have the contact for sourcing the ingredients like yam, beans, plantain, rice and cocoyam (which are also milled for flour), dried vegetables, spices, soup ingredients and condiments, dried fish and many more. As these are meant for foreign markets, not only do they have to pass the checks from Nigerian authorities, they also have to conform to the standards of receiving countries. Although some see the requirements from receiving countries as too stringent and geared towards reducing food exports by developing countries (Jaffee and Henson, 2004). In view of the challenges of food insecurity in Nigeria and the African continent, more research may be needed to examine the impact on the continent of these food exports.

Presently, the controls on food products are more robust due to the demands of the NAFDAC⁹ agency, responsible for the regulation of

⁹ NAFDAC is the acronym for the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control. This is a Nigerian government agency under the Federal Ministry of Health with the responsibility for regulating and controlling the manufacture, importation, exportation, advertisement, distribution, sale and use of food, drugs,

food and drugs in Nigeria. Unlike most parastatals in Nigeria, which are reactionary rather than proactive, under the late professor Dora Akunyili (2001 to 2008) changes were made in the regulation of food and drugs. Producers of packaged food for use in Nigeria or for export, had to be licensed and monitored in conformity with international standards. Akunyili declared an all-out war against fake or adulterated drugs and food. Such was the impact of her management that efforts were made several times to kill her (Okoye, 2012; Ogunro, 2010; Vanguard newspaper, 2013). Many believe that, since she left the agency, the standards have fallen. Despite the inherent challenges, the food regulations have facilitated an enabling environment for Nigerian indigenous companies to produce food and drinks, acceptable to the home market and Nigerian diaspora food markets. One of the major Nigerian exporters of food products to Europe is Ayoola Foods established in 1991. There are others that produce and package local food on behalf of companies in Britain, Holland and Belgium. This is especially the case with palm oil. There are still some indigenous Nigerian foods, packaged in small quantities by individuals who sell them to friends and acquaintances in the diaspora. These are mainly dried seafood, spices, vegetables and ethnic specialities, like the dried *ukwa* and *ugba* sold to Igbos in diaspora communities.

Nigeria has become part of intermingling global cultures and habits, while still retaining many aspects of its local food culture. Previously unavailable food items, especially fruits, are now easily accessible in many shops and markets. A good example are apples and grapes imported from South Africa and sold on Nigerian streets. As usual with all aspects of its society, Nigerians accept these changes to their food culture in their stride, seeking new ways of merging the new and the old with limited conflict.

1.4. The taste for new drinks

The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Europe meant that factories needed raw materials, some of which could be procured from Nigeria and other African countries. Not only was Nigeria a potential source of raw materials, it was also a great market for manufactured goods from European factories (Goody, 1982). One item that gained prominence from the early contact between Nigerians and Europeans from about the 15th century onwards was imported alcoholic drinks. These were distilled liquors such as whisky, rum, brandy and gin, which European

cosmetics, medical devices, chemicals and packaged water. Established by legislative decree No. 15 of 1993, under Akunyili the agency underwent a remarkable change.

traders brought as part of their trade. These gained such great significance that they were used to pay for slaves during the slave trade era. Despite the abolition of slave trade, the popularity of alcoholic drinks continued as the British colony expanded.

By 1914, when Nigeria was formed, it imported over four million gallons of gin, rum, whisky and many more (Heap, 1998, 1996). Many scholars regard alcohol during the colonial era as a tool of colonial control and revenue (Korieh, 2003). The alcoholic drinks in pre-colonial Nigeria were palm wine from the raffia or palm tree and beer from fermented grains such as burukutu from maize and pito from millet and guinea corn. The palm wine is consumed in the southern areas of the country, while the fermented cereal drinks were popular in the northern savannah areas. The alcoholic content is about 3 per cent for palm wine and lower for beer from fermented grains, whereas imported distilled drinks of the early colonial era were often higher than 40 per cent (Obot *et al.*, 2002; Obot, 2007). The amount of alcoholic drinks brought into the colony by European traders, especially after the slave trade, was such that the clergy and other concerned citizens began campaigning for a ban on the trade of gin. By the late 1880s, groups like the Aborigines Protection Society and the Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee were established in Britain to campaign for a ban on alcohol trade (van den Bersselaar, 1994, p. 11).

In pre and post-independence Nigeria revolts against colonial rule due to colonial food policies were not uncommon. In the 1940s and 1950s, the British tried to ban the consumption of the local gin distilled from palm wine (known locally as *kinkana*, *apetese*, *ogogoro* or *kaikai*) in favour of imported gin (Korieh, 2003), but this became a rallying issue used against colonialism for early Nigerian nationalists. Most of the alcoholic consumption of this era was in the southern and central part of the country, as the northern region due to its Islamic adherence prohibited the sale of alcohol. However, there was also a vibrant trade in clandestine alcohol and drinking (Heap, 1998; Olukoju, 1991). The preference for foreign alcoholic drink was not just a question of acquired taste, but more as a display of affluence and prestige among the elite. As in many societies, what was once exclusive food or drink eventually became common among all classes of society. Soon, all things imported, especially drinks, were deemed to be better than locally produced ones (Goody, 1982, pp. 178-179).

Although Nigerians brewed beer with fermented grains, they lacked the skills to brew lager beer or produce distilled alcoholic drinks. On July 14th 1949, the first “star” lager beer was manufactured by the Nigerian Brewery Limited in Lagos. From then on, the production and consumption of western-style beers grew rapidly. By 1962, after years of importation, the

first Guinness brewery outside Ireland and the United Kingdom was built in Nigeria, which produces a favourite drink of Nigerians – “Guinness Stout” (Heap, 1996; Obot, 2007). The popularity of Guinness stout may lie in the belief that it is better for one’s health because of its bitter taste, irrespective of its more than seven per cent alcohol content. Having the sales in Nigeria as its largest market, according to the annual report by Diageo the owners of Guinness, 54.3 per cent of the shares is owned by the parent company and the rest by Nigerian interests. Beer breweries are one of the fastest growing industries in Nigeria, and beer accounts for 96 per cent of alcohol consumed in Nigeria (Diageo Annual Report, 2013, pp. 29-75; Adewumi *et al.*, 2011).

There are also companies in Nigeria that either distil or market brandy, gin, whisky, rum and other alcoholic drinks. The Nigerian Distilleries Limited is the first indigenous and Nigerian owned distillery. Incorporated in 1961, it produces different brands of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks among which are the popular Seaman schnapps, which is a constant feature in many traditional events and rites.

The Nigerian Bottling Company, established in 1951, has the sole franchise for Coca-Cola drinks in Nigeria, while the Seven-up Bottling Company is the producer of Pepsi and all affiliated drinks. There are other indigenous companies that produce and market carbonated drinks, dairy-based drinks, fruit drinks and water. Produce as used here does not mean the products are made with indigenous food, rather many import the basic ingredients like dairy and fruit juices, which are then used for different types of food products. Different global brands of drinks are imported by Nigerians from all over the world, with some popular global brands opening outlets in Nigeria. According to Funke Osae-Brown of The Businessday Online (2014).

As Nigerian elites develop increasing taste for alcoholic beverages, more foreign alcohol brands are eyeing the market valued at \$2.84 billion, according to an International Wine and Spirit Research (IWSR) report. Ashok Capoor, president, strategy, United Spirits Limited (USL), manufacturers of McDowell Scottish whiskey, a new entrant into the Nigerian market, says about 13 million cases of whiskey are sold in the Nigerian alcoholic beverages market, which is growing at 6 to 10 per cent per annum. The spirits market, comprising whiskey, brandy and vodka, was estimated at \$2 billion in 2007 and has increased by 6 per cent every year since 2007. Although a large portion of the market share still goes to cheaper local producers, imported brands account for \$500 million of the spirits market.

This is a pointer to how lucrative the drinks market in Nigeria has become. Over the years, provision of drinking water for the citizens has not enjoyed priority from many Nigerian governments, so this in turn has

made what should be easily available a costly commodity. Prior to the mid-1990s, some urban areas still had access to public water from government owned reservoirs, and bottled water was not for the poor. Gradually this basic human need, clean drinkable water, became a scarce commodity. However, entrepreneurial Nigerians began packaging water in cellophane sachets of between 200 and 300 millilitres. Popularly called “*pure water*”, but soon many impure versions flooded the market, as all one needed was water and the small machine to seal the cellophane bags. As this was having a counter effect on the need for access to good drinking water by the masses, there was a need for more rigorous control of the producers by the Nigerian food agency. Presently all producers of “pure water” must be authorized, with allocated numbers displayed on the packaging, thus this “NAFDAC number” authenticates the product. Many individuals and communities have also resorted to digging boreholes from which they are able to get drinkable water, although many still believe this borehole water is still not hygienic.

Another non-alcoholic drink that has enjoyed consistently increasing consumption and popularity even in the diaspora is the malt drink. This is promoted as a wholesome nutritious drink by the producers, with names like *Malta Guinness*, *Amstel malta*, *Maltina*, *Power malt*, *Supermalt*, *Vitamalt*, *Hi-malt* and *Grand malt*. These names reinforce the image of quality and good health that the drinks claim, making them popular for those who for personal, religious or health reasons do not drink alcohol. The consumption of imported drinks such as wine, brandy, beers, non-alcoholic drinks and even water, has become a mark of social differentiation in Nigeria. Thus, individuals who have the finances either import these drinks or buy from special wine shops in the cities (Okon and Akpunyung, 2005; Obuzo and Ajaezi, 2010). It must be noted that some of the time these drinks are not of the same quality as products with the same name sold in more developed countries. The popular belief is that those that are not fake products are of less quality because importers request for a cheaper quality at less cost.

So far we have a general historical overview of the different components that contributed to the evolution of the Nigerian foodways. These showed how political and economic changes in the country are reflected in the food consumption. Like all things Nigerian, the creation of a national food culture was also influenced by events and changes from within and outside the country.

1.5. “A national foodway”, a journey of many paths

Internal migration during the early colonial enterprise laid the foundation for what is today the Nigerian foodways. Not only did the British colonial rule bring together independent autonomous nations into one large political entity, the migration of that era also meant that a vast network of cultural exchanges was initiated. This brought people in contact with diverse cuisines and food from all parts of the country.

These early Nigerian colonial workers brought along new food and methods of cooking as they moved to other parts of the country. Since the migrants interacted with people from the host communities and other parts of the country, there was to be a lasting influence on all sides. There was an exchange of cuisine with people adding their twist to it, to meet their taste or taking up like cuisines and dishes from other ethnic groups. It was from this pool of cuisines that Nigerians got the popular dishes that form the main national foods in Nigeria, especially among urban dwellers: *akara*, *moimoi*, *eko* or *akamu* came from the Yorubas; *suya* and cereal drinks from the north; *banga* from the Delta, while *edikaikong*, *afang* and *afia afere* soups were from the Efiks in the Southern region. *Isi ewu*, *ugba* and *abacha* were no longer exclusively for the Igbos (Udoh, 1972; Eno Blackson Ikpe, 1994). The spread of food and culinary exchanges amongst the different groups is also reflective of the Nigerian reality. Due to Northern Nigeria's effort to minimise external influence and tendency to be socially introverted compared to other groups, its cuisine has had limited input in the national foodway. Despite this, one of its contributions (*suya*) has received the widest spread in the nation.

The Nigerian foodways as shown in previous pages has a three-tiered feature. First, there is the indigenous cuisine, which is strong in the rural areas and in the private domain of urban dwellers including among Nigerians in diaspora. The second tier is what could be called the national cuisine. This is a combination of all the ethnic and non-indigenous food, which has become part of all cuisines in Nigeria. Finally, there is the foreign or intercontinental cuisine as it is popularly referred to. Foreign, as used here, depicts that the origins of the cuisine are not within present-day Nigeria. In the annex is a table detailing which foods, snacks or drinks are nationally accepted. It is important to emphasise that this list is not exclusive; rather, the dishes here represent the food all Nigerians are familiar with irrespective of their ethnic origin. These “national” dishes and the ethnic dishes form a strong part of the foodways of the various communities. As an example, in as much as someone from Igbo land may eat any of the *fufu* from different parts of Nigeria, he may choose to eat it with *oha* soup instead of any of the nationally known soups, the same way a Yoruba may choose to eat *fufu* with *ewedu* soup.

Mintz (1996, p. 104) argues that a national cuisine is an anomaly as it is contradictory, and he only acknowledges cuisines as regional. Yet, many nations have been able to shape a recognisable and acceptable national cuisine. Kravva (2008, pp. 211-212), quoting Zubaida's work, noted that countries and nations are expected to have things national including cuisines. Thus, the process of creating a national cuisine is most relevant to the producing and reproduction of ethnic identities and national ideologies. Nonetheless, Cusack (2003) rightly pointed out, for many African nations including Nigeria, the link between the nation and the complex multi-ethnic societies is very tenuous as a result of the origins of these nations. Thus, the elites in a bid for legitimate authority are committed to searching for some notion of national identity within the nations, to help promote a sense of national unity against the various divisive factors at play within the nations. As such, cuisines are not just innocent concoctions, but emerge as a result of several factors and contributions from divergent sources such as imperialism and colonialism. Furthermore, Cusack (2000) and Nugent (2010) highlighted the fact that "national cuisines" are often constructed by incorporating and building on different regional and ethnic recipes, which in turn reflects long and complex histories as well as domestic ideologies. Thus, it is not really an anomaly to expect nations such as Nigeria, with very diverse and complex ethnic groups, to be able to forge an acceptable "national cuisine" from amongst the myriad of past and present influences that are reflected in their food culture and eating habits.

In as much as the diversity of the Nigerian nation seems insurmountable politically, food indeed may be a means of building strong(er) sentiments of national identity. As shown in the pages above, Nigerians through diverse agencies promote a national consciousness when its benefits outweigh any other options. Thus, the notion of a Nigerian national cuisine is continually being reinforced through numerous avenues. Most of the Nigerian cookbooks, websites and magazines are termed national, even when the recipe of one region dominates. Not only this, food industries in Nigeria appeal to a national ideology rather than to ethnic sentiments in their adverts or promotions. Many of the cooking competitions sponsored by these companies are national competitions, although in some contests, regional competitions may be held for contestants to the final and most significant national competition.

For Nigerians in the diaspora, who create and utilize most of the media information on Nigerian food, references are often made to a national cuisine. Recipes are of no use if the ingredients are unobtainable, hence the recipes popularised are those with ingredients that are easily available both in Nigerian urban centres and in the diaspora. In as much as Nigerian cuisine is not a recipe-based cuisine, the evolution of recipes shows how

changes in society reflect changes to food. So long as Nigerians, within and outside the country, in the public domain keep actively presenting foods from the country on a national rather than ethnic platform, a full-fledged national cuisine is portrayed in certain occasions and places.

2. Food and Identity Construction in Nigeria

A Nigerian cuisine can be seen as a product of many factors and origins, which encompass not just recipes, ingredients and method of cooking but also etiquettes and the people's attitude to food. This is also reflective of (and is greatly influenced by) the people's group or cultural identity. Despite the diversity of the varied ethnic affiliations and norms there are many commonalities which are evident in the present Nigerian foodway.

2.1. The use of food in Nigerian homes: the kitchen as a mirror of society

Over the years, most meals in Nigeria have been prepared at home and all the food habits are acquired at home too. This is not unique to Nigeria. The family, like in all nations, is the bedrock of Nigerian society. It is at home that one's identity is moulded with regard to food. As Wilson (2006) noted, it is during meals that parameters of what is socially acceptable to eat are set and meal times are "a resource for socializing a relationship of identity between family members". The fact that local food products are used in traditional recipes for these meals, impacts on the identity formation of people as the link between their identity and their locality is consolidated further.

As many researches have shown, "kitchen" in works relating to food and identity can be referred to both in the abstract and as a defined space that is very relevant to all matters relating to food and cooking. It is not just a space for transforming crops into identifiable cuisines but it is also a place for performing identity, especially the female identity. However, the views about the kitchen and women are diverse as some see the kitchen as a woman's space and others see it as a woman's place. As her space, it is based on her choice and control but as her place, she is delegated there by others. Having said this, irrespective of what it means, a kitchen as a defined space can tell us about people and their food culture. The Nigerian kitchen can be used to reflect the merging of the traditional and the modern, which is an integral part of Nigerian society.

The content of each Nigerian kitchen, the food that is prepared in it and who prepares it show the class and social standing of the family and

its economic power. In the rural areas the kitchens are rudimentary and serve meals reflecting ethnic identities. Families living in rural areas tend to follow the customary norms regarding food and most issues that concern it.

Nigerian society is patriarchal. Despite the influence of Western values, monogamous marriages are not the exclusive form of marriage, and some men marry as many women as they deem right. The family is made up of a man, his wife or wives, children and even members of his extended family. Kitchens in traditional Nigeria households are exclusively controlled by women, thus what happens in the kitchen is their responsibility. They can determine who gets access to the kitchen, what is bought, what is cooked, how it is cooked and served, and who is eating what.

As part of her sending-off presents from her family, every new wife is given kitchen utensils. The financial status of the family determines what is given to the bride. In most cases it is a combination of traditional and Western kitchen utensils. This is to assist her in setting up her own kitchen, which is her domain as a married woman. Traditionally although she has all her utensils, she stays with her mother in law or the senior wife in their kitchen. This is to enable her settle into the family and “learn” from the older women and for them to observe her culinary abilities. With many living in urban areas now, many women have their kitchens from the day they move into the husband’s house but may have to still cook with the husband’s family when they go to his village.

In rich polygamous homes, each wife has her own kitchen, whereas those from less privileged homes share a kitchen, with each wife having a position for her hearth and cooking utensils in a general kitchen or open space. This can be a constant cause of friction as quarrels can arise over space usage, food cooked and its use. Yet, as Badiru and Badiru (2013) pointed out, a mix of dynamics occurs in every kitchen environment. In rural communal kitchens, housewives also congregate and interact to discuss recent affairs in the household and community.

In the rural areas and among less privileged urban dwellers, the traditional methods of cooking and the utensils are similar. The cooking is done over an open fire, on a tripod of stones, metal or earthen hearth. Fire is built with dry woods in the middle of the tripod, and then pots are placed on it for cooking. With the shortage of firewood, kerosene stoves are preferred among low-income urban dwellers and rural dwellers. For the better-off families, gas cookers are preferred. Due to the erratic electricity supply, electric cookers are not common.

The most common cooking utensil among the diverse ethnic groups is the mortar and pestle, although the shape and design may differ. This utensil made from hollowed and carved tree trunks is used for pounding food into *fufu*, meals and flour. The biggest mortars are for palm oil

production, then the ones for *fufu*, while the smaller sizes are used for grinding pepper and spices. Amongst some societies, the use of the grinding stone is widespread, this entails tomatoes, pepper, spices and the like being placed on a flat slab of rock, then a smaller round or oblong rock used to crush them. Different types of baskets are also used for food storage and preservation by hanging them or storing them above the cooking hearth. The heat from the hearth and the smoke helps dry the content of the baskets and preserve them for long periods of time. The traditional kitchen utensils are more in use among rural dwellers. For urban dwellers the kitchen utensils used are indicative of one's economic and social class. Some restaurants and urban dwellers (even wealthy ones) use some traditional utensils more for aesthetics, for example the use of traditional clay pots and plates in serving traditional specialities. With the globalization of market economies, kitchen appliances found in Nigerian kitchens are the same as what is seen in cities around the world, although some are Asian made, which are cheaper.

The kitchen is a place for the production, reproduction and sustenance of identity. Amidst the different food and utensils in a Nigerian kitchen are reflections of ethnic identity, as people not only have their ethnic foods but also the utensils needed to prepare meals from them, as some believe certain utensils help the dish achieve the desired taste. The taste and flavour that emerges from each kitchen is a continuation of culinary histories from diverse sources across the nation. The Nigerian kitchen helps define and reinforce the food-related roles within families and between genders, thus kitchens produce much more than food but these will be examined further later.

2.2. Nigerian meal patterns

Different societies have different interpretations of what constitutes a meal. In Nigeria, for food to be considered a meal, it must be cooked, spicy and warm. Uncooked food does not qualify as a meal, neither does cold edible food, which is seen as a snack. Applying Mintz's (1992) CFLP¹⁰ meal structure, a Nigerian meal constitutes of core foods of starchy carbohydrates (rice, cassava products, yam et cetera) and the fringe or flavour giving foods and legumes (sauces, stews, soups). The erosion of the CFLP pattern by processed sugars and high-fat foods, noted later by Mintz, is also evident in Nigerian foodways.

¹⁰ CFLP is the Core-Fringe-Legume Pattern. Mintz proposes this pattern as a more inclusive structure for meals, which is portable across cultures and can accommodate a range of meals. It also allows for comparison between cuisines (Marshall, 1995; Mintz and Schlettwein-Gsell, 2001).

There are three main meals eaten by Nigerians: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast for the less privileged or rural dwellers may be the heated leftovers from dinner of the previous day, while lunch and dinner may be *fufu* with soup or meals from any of the roots or grains, served with a stew or cooked with another food. A good example is beans and rice, plantain or beans and yam. On the other hand, the urban low-income dwellers, in addition to eating the same foods as the rural dwellers, consume a lot of rice dishes, many of which may have been cooked outside the home. Due to their locality, the rural dwellers have access to more fresh food and fruits, which helps balance their nutritional intake. However, when there is lack of fresh food due to the farming pattern, many in the rural areas may lack the resources to acquire supplementary food.

During meals for most Nigerians, there is normally only one service: no first course or dessert, the food is cooked and dished out. This is unlike the eating habits of the elite, which tend to be modelled as much as possible on Western meal patterns. The wealthier or higher up one is, determines what is eaten at home. For the elite and many urban dwellers, breakfast may comprise cereals, dairy products and hot beverages for breakfast as opposed to the poor Nigerian breakfast (leftovers from dinner). Breakfast for the rich may range from sausages, scrambled eggs, bacon, toasts, cereals and coffee, and to the less sophisticated bread, with hot chocolate drinks or milky tea. Indigenous Nigerian foods like fried plantain, fried yam and boiled or fried eggs are eaten for breakfast, as well as others deemed light like *akara* and *akamu*, or *moimoi*, while heavier foods are left for lunch and dinner. Often the lunch or dinner is of rice dishes or *fufu* and soup dishes.

The main methods of preparing meals in Nigeria are boiling, roasting or steaming. However, in more elitist homes baking and grilling are often utilized too. For all meals, the urban Nigerian kitchen is a melting pot of ethnic cuisines. Popular dishes from different parts of the country feature daily in the food menu of the people irrespective of their ethnic origins. European dishes, or some adaptation of them, are included daily in the menus but not necessarily in the way they are used in Europe. A good example is using white bread to eat beans porridge. Irrespective of the economic standing of Nigerians, ethnic food and traditional national dishes (see above) are served frequently in the homes.

Since European contact, new eating habits and etiquette have evolved, firstly among the elite and then a downward diffusion to all segments of the society. As stated earlier, sitting at the dining table (or using the table) for meals is not a Nigerian method of dining for families, whether for formal or informal gatherings. In many families, especially in urban centres, the dining table is now a common feature. These range from rudimentary tables and chairs commissioned from local carpenters to state-

of-the-art high-range imported ones. The families' income also determines the tableware used during meals.

The impact of the world market is evident in the tableware Nigerians buy. Although the old English chinaware is valued and utilized by many elitist homes, with the increased Chinese presence in Nigeria, much of the tableware is imported from China, irrespective of the fact that many view it as inferior to European tableware. These tablewares from China are bought by those aspiring to a more elitist social standing and dining setting. As a respondent noted, although she bought dinner sets and cutleries from England, some of her colleagues buy theirs when they travel to Dubai or from those who import them from China. Believing that tableware is befitting only in certain environments, some women save money to buy these, but keep them until they are living in accommodation they think is more befitting of their use. Even among diaspora Nigerians, women still buy dinnerware but many use them only for special occasions or as decorative objects. Nevertheless, the modes of utilisation are the same. Cutleries are used mainly for grains and cereals, while fingers are still used for *fufu* or boiled and roasted root crops.

In the more traditional homes or in rural areas, the man is served and eats separately from the wife and children. The children can eat together from the same dish or from separate dishes with their mother. In some homes though, the husband and wife eat together from the same dish, while the children eat together or separately. Each family has its way of dining, but in general the family eats all its main meals or most of them at home. Those living in urban areas tend to buy and eat some of their meals away from home. This in no way diminishes the importance of family meals for Nigerians. Like in the Western world, there is no ideal family meal setup (Short, 2006, p. 3), and sometimes families may eat the same thing but at different hours.

One common practise among all the ethnic groups is offering invitations to meals. Anyone who is present at meal times is offered a meal. Some form of delicate balancing though, is needed to know what offers to accept. How insistent the giver is, and how willing one is to eat the meal, taking into consideration the circumstances of the visit, guides one's response. Someone bearing bad news is not expected to eat before giving the news, although he may eat after. As for someone providing services, he can eat. Not offering a meal to people working for you will be interpreted as a sign of wickedness and meanness. While this still holds in rural areas, with the erosion of traditional ideals in urban areas, these long-held hospitality values are not always practised. Trust is another underlying factor and determinant as to which invitations to meals should be honoured. It is important in this exchange for the receiver to know that the food is given with a "clean heart" (i.e., with no evil intentions) and for the giver

that the receiver bears him no ill thoughts, or harbours no doubts that he may be harmed by the food. Thus, the practice among the Igbos is that the host takes the first taste of any drink or food offered to guests. This shows he bears them no ill feelings and that the food is clean (physically and spiritually). In the various regions, if a visitor is perceived as important but is unable or refuses to have a meal in good faith, a gift of foodstuff (especially yams, plantains, fruits, livestock or kola nuts) may be given. The gender of the visitor does not matter.

Within households, one's closeness to the family dictates if the person can take food on their own, without waiting for an invitation. If they can, there is still some food that cannot be taken without permission, even by people of the same household. A good example is the soup. The soup pot signifies a mother's love, as it is never empty, as well as her authority too. Although the main food of her family, the soup, is produced and stored in it, the soup pot is only accessible to those who the woman of the house gives permission. The value attached to the pot of soup is understandable, as *fufu* will be unappetizing without soup, and soup is cooked with any meat or fish that the meal may have. Taking into consideration how valued meat was (still is) in Nigerian cuisine, restricting access to the soup pot may be a way of insuring food is properly used. It is also the content of the soup pot that tempts people to steal from it and sanctions are severe for this.

At the same time, as pointed out above, the urban environment has changed (or lessened) the severity of some of the food-related rules. From observations during my research, although people still view access to the pot of soup as restricted, according to traditional norms, the practice of portioning cooked soup into containers and freezing these means the rules are less rigid, because taking the prepacked soup and thawing it, is viewed as less invasive. Yet the deep freezer for many women, has assumed the importance the pot of soup used to have, as many go to the extent of installing locks to restrict access to their freezers and even refrigerators.

All knowledge about food in society is sustainable because it is passed from generation to generation. Hence the ways people eat or participate in their food culture provide important elements to the very definition of community, which embodies not just the relationship between people but the interactions between them and their gods or communication between people and their dead (Counihan, 1998). These accepted eating habits and food-related norms become part of the people's identification attributes, which every member of the group learns to follow.

2.3. “That is not how we eat”: learning about food across generations

Since food beliefs and behaviours closely tied to the family are developed from childhood, children grow up observing and learning within their homes the social norms within the framework of their society and culture. All this experience they accumulate is what they later, may base their interpretation of the outside world on (Lupton, 1996; Macbeth and MacClancy, 2004). Family meal times are very significant in Nigerian homes. They serve as a means of training children on the right etiquette and social norms. Parents and members of the family are the main source (and teachers) of acceptable codes of behaviour within their culture. This enables people within societies to create cultures and norms that are unique to them and define them.

Every child starts learning about food and its meaning early in life. For most Nigerian ethnic groups, babies are breastfed, there is none of the inhibitions associated with breastfeeding in public in the Western world: women breastfed kids where and whenever the child needs feeding. In parts of Yoruba land though, force-feeding babies is still an acceptable practice (Ayodele *et al.*, 2006). However, in present day Nigeria with many women working and busy urban lives, breastfeeding is often combined with infant milk formulas. Children after breastfeeding are then weaned on custards or puddings prepared from maize or other grains. The common ones are corn pap (ogi or akamu and eko/agidi). From the late 1990s, the health agencies began promoting exclusive breastfeeding as best for the child, at the same time popularising the use of soya products as healthy alternatives. Depending on a family's income, babies are fed for different durations on baby formulas of milk and cereals. Many of these are manufactured in Nigeria while the more expensive brands are imported. The popular brands are *NAN*, *SMA*, *Cerelac*, *Similac* and *Nutrend*.

Gradually, the children are taught to eat the same food as the adults. Among the southern and eastern regions' ethnic groups, the first foods introduced to children are mainly plantains, yams, cocoyam or cassava *fufu* served with “draw soups”. These soups have a slimy or viscous consistency, which is believed to aid swallowing. Even in early infancy, the difference in ethnic identity is emphasized. In the eastern and southern regions, small portions of *fufu* are taken, rolled in the palm or between the fingers, dipped in the soup and swallowed without chewing, whereas in the west or north, a child will be chastised if he swallows his *fufu* without chewing. During meals they are expected to eat their fish or meat last in the eastern region, whereas in the north the best part of any meal should be eaten first, so they eat their meat first. It is not just the ways of eating that differ, the cuisines and ways of serving food are also different and

members of the different ethnic groups become aware early in life of what food-related behaviour is expected of them.

Among the western and northern regions' ethnic groups, *fufu* and the sauce or soup can be served in the same plate, whereas this is not acceptable in the east and south, as *fufu* and soup must be served in different plates. All these norms are taught to children and define for them what is acceptable within the cultural milieu they live in. The incorporation of food constructs a collective identity, but such foods and norms introduced in childhood signify also a daily reaffirmation of cultural identity (Kittler and Sucher, 2004, p. 4). As traditional food in Nigeria is eaten with the fingers, children are taught to eat with clean fingers of the right hand. Not just to eat, but also to give or receive anything with the left hand is not acceptable (Schleicher, 2008, p. 87). Children also learn that gratitude must be shown to the person(s) who provided the food and all those present, who are one's senior in age. So, no child leaves after a meal without saying thanks.

For children, self-discipline is emphasised by encouraging controlled behaviour and desire at meal times. It is believed that people can be poisoned or controlled through voodoo applied to their food. Moreover, perceived ill manners over food are viewed as signs of future bad habits (Zeitlin *et al.*, 1996, p. 420). The ability to control one's behaviour around food is to insure this does not happen. Eating too fast when eating from the same dish with others, or taking big portions, is seen as a sign of greed and for such acts, a child is chastised. Respect for elders at meal times is also important and taught at an early age. Shared meal portions are taken according to seniority from the oldest person down to the youngest. All these rules prepare children for social interaction outside the family.

It is all these culturally influenced food notions and habits that many people take with them wherever they go, even if these are not necessarily applied and may even be contested by others. This early food experiences influences what is deemed good as food, how it tastes, how it is eaten and what is avoided even in a new cultural environment. Sometimes in another cultural milieu, like diaspora communities, some of these values maybe at odds with acceptable norms in the new environment, meaning that the child will have to negotiate between the values within and outside his community.

So far, the dynamics and complexities inherent in Nigerian food and identity are continually being revealed. Without such an exhaustive examination, there will not be a solid basis to enable a comparable framework against which the diaspora food and identity can be gauged. In most homes, children are also taught what food-related gender roles they are

expected to play, stepping out of these roles often bring sanctions, thus as adults many still try to adhere to these rules.

2.4. Food and Gender in Nigeria

Food is a window through which gender roles in all cultures can be viewed. As noted by Counihan and Caplan, there is the power “society” allocates or denies men and women, through access to and control of food (Counihan and Caplan, 1998, pp. 1-2). In Nigerian society the acquisition and preparation of food is divided along gender lines. The Nigerian traditional values lead women to believe a man should be able to provide for his family to validate his masculinity. As stated earlier, women have less control over the land, which is vital for food production. Crops with high value, such as yam, are tagged as male crops while women’s crops are low economic value crops that are of no interest to men (Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke, 2003; Akintunde, 2010). With shifting economic expectations and more opportunities for women, their economic independence means that, in some food-related roles, changes are bound to occur especially in diaspora communities.

Irrespective of whether they are rural or urban dwellers, educated or illiterate, in Nigeria, food preparation and the kitchen is the domain of the women. Even where the women do not do the actual cooking but employ maids or cooks, they are held responsible for how the food is cooked and served. The traditional Nigerian society is not tolerant of men in the kitchen, since it is seen as feminine, an unacceptable trait in men. Thus the kitchen, like in other societies, has taken a feminine gender identity (Bell and Valentine, 1992; Counihan, 2004, p. 80). Granted, some men cook or help out in the kitchen in Nigeria, but do not wish for this to be known publicly, and their wives (if they are married) will not encourage such disclosure too, as it reflects negatively on them. This is because most of the food work done by women, such as providing meals for their family, is seen as an important aspect of being feminine (Charles and Kerr, 1988, p. 40).

In Nigerian polygamous homes, wives cook on the days they are entitled to sleep with the husband (Simmons, 1960). This arrangement is still the same in present day Nigeria. From ancient times, it is believed that as the wife has priority access to the husband during this period, some wives may use food (cooking specialities or resorting to voodoo love portions in food) to gain favours from the husbands (Talbot, 1915, p. 99)¹¹. In this

¹¹ Irrespective of their level of education, Nigerians adhere to the belief system that purports the ability for a person to influence or change the natural course of events by

instance, food can be a means of gaining more power within the family, because the wife whose food the husband prefers may be regarded as the favourite wife, whose requests he cannot refuse. Feeding the husband frequently means she has access to him more than the other wives, so she can make demands that favour her and her children.

From early childhood the gender roles in the Nigerian food culture are defined. The idea that being able to cook is an important aspect of their femininity is inculcated into girls, while for boys the opposite is the case (Falolu, 2001; Deji, 2011, p. 23). So, a man is not supposed to make his cooking abilities obvious, unless it is in a professional capacity. Every girl is expected to know how to cook before adulthood. Girls learn how to cook by helping out in the kitchen with preparing spices, vegetables and buying ingredients. Once they start cooking, eventually they are given more responsibilities like making complicated and demanding dishes like soups or *fufu*. Teaching and learning in the kitchen is done by observation and practical participation. Where recipes are handed down for specific family specialties, these are done orally and the methods memorised.

A woman who cannot cook is portrayed as an embarrassment and an object of shame. Tales and fables have been handed down through generations to help engrave this in the cultural fabric of the society. A good example is the following;

Once upon a time, a man had a daughter named Manu (oil). She was very tall and beautiful. Many suitors sought her hand in marriage, but they withdrew when the parents informed them that, though their daughter possessed many attractive qualities, yet she could neither cook nor work in the sun. Such limitations were fatal; no man in his senses would marry a girl who could not cook! (excerpt from G.T. Basden's recorded fables, tales and proverbs of the Igbos, 1912, p. 279).

Songs also exist ridiculing the bad female cook, including the modern wife who is a source of embarrassment to her husband because of her cooking. A good example is this Igbo maiden's song that is not only about a bad cook but also about the dangers of marrying a modern city girl.

“O were kerosene mere nmanu, were sugar mere nnu, yewere olugbu n'afoghi afo tinye n'ofe (...) onye detu onu, ole ibe ya anya, kulie sii, onye nwe ulo, imela, ihere

voodoo or black magic. People engage in all sorts of spiritual activities, ranging from prayers in churches, mosques to sacrifices before shrines, to gain love and sometimes to influence their love interest. Many spouses are accused of controlling their partners with negative powers especially if they are seen as controlling or gaining much favour from the person. Women are believed capable of putting “poison” in their husband's meal, not the type that does physical harm, but to enable her dictate to him what actions to take or not take. This belief is also inherent in diaspora, even when Nigerians are married to non Nigerians.

egbu o di ya! (...)" "She used kerosene for palm oil, sugar for salt, then added unwashed bitter leaves to the soup. As the guests tasted it, they glanced at each other, stood up and thanked the head of the home (husband); who felt greatly ashamed" (adapted from old concert songs of umuololo Amaimo, Imo state).

Women are expected to cook on time. There should be food available when the husband demands it. In a society where polygamy is rife and concubines common, every woman tries not to provide an excuse for her husband to eat outside the home, as society still believes men can be coerced to abandon their homes through "love portions" (voodoo) served in food or drinks. However, eating out or refusing food prepared by a wife is a long-established male method of showing anger at the wife's misconduct (whether real or imagined). Men violently displaying their anger over the food they are given, or not given, is common. Even after physical abuse or quarrels, women can be compelled to beg the men for forgiveness with food items, either by cooking a favourite meal or using food items like kola nut, chicken, goat and many more to ask for forgiveness even when they may be the victims of his anger or violent attacks.

Divorce based on unacceptable food-related behaviour by a wife is not unheard of. When British tabloids featured the news of a Nigerian man, Mr Olufade Adekoya, who divorced his wife of 25 years in Lagos Nigeria for "failing in her matrimonial obligations" by always cooking his meals late, the reaction from the Western readers was proof of how food can reflect how a society defines itself and others different from it (Fatusi and Alatise, 2006; Uthman *et al.*, 2011; Okemgbo *et al.*, 2002; Jay Akbar, 2015). In most homes it is always the preference of the man that dominates the food decisions, and the best part of the meal is reserved for him.

Food restrictions are placed on women, especially pregnant women, to varying degrees. The restriction is stronger in rural areas or when the food item is part of a ritualistic meal. This is common all over Nigeria especially among rural and (to some extent) urban dwellers too. Nevertheless, restrictions on pregnant women are widespread and are sometimes sustained by the women themselves. Pregnant women are advised to avoid eggs, as they will make the unborn child steal, not to eat *Okro* or *ogbono* soups and snails, as the child will dribble saliva constantly or progress slowly in life. These restrictions deprive women of the vital protein they need during their pregnancies (Ogbeide, 1974; Ologhobo, 2010). Women in some communities are not allowed to eat liver, eggs, gizzard, the heart of animals, chicken or even snails. However, in urban areas women can buy these things from food vendors, although some put these restrictions on themselves even when they are outside their cultural domain.

Despite the encounter with the Western world, the outlook of Nigerian society with regard to food and gender has changed very little within

the country. In the diaspora though, gender roles are some of the areas in migrants' lives that must undergo changes to enable them survive (economically and as a couple) in their new country. Even where the woman works outside the home in Nigeria, she is still expected to fulfil all the domestic duties society has placed on her. Some men insist on eating food only prepared by their wives, irrespective of how long she works outside the home. Thus, it does not matter if there is staff employed by the family for the kitchen: the wife has to be the one who cooks and serves the food to the husband. It is also the responsibility of the wife who has domestic helps to plan the meal, oversee its preparation and serving. This traditional outlook is still strong because all the major religious beliefs in Nigeria, be it Christianity or Islam, share similar beliefs concerning the place of a woman in the home and food-related gender roles. Thus people rarely challenge the imposed rules especially when it is termed as the tradition. It is the food-related traditions in Nigeria that has been more sustainable across the country especially when there are rituals associated with such food traditions.

2.5. The sacred use of food

In Nigeria food plays an important sacred role in the lives of the people. Among the various traditional religious adherents in the diverse communities, the ritualistic use of food is very important. Many Nigerian ethnic groups have traditional cults and secret societies (like the *Ekpe*, *Okonko*, *ogboni* and many more). These cults have priests, priestesses, custodians and adherents of the traditional religions, who adhere to a strict diet. There exist strong restrictions regarding what food they can eat, how it is cooked, who cooks it, and where they can eat, with whom and how. Some can only eat at home, while others cannot eat food prepared by a woman, especially a menstruating woman, or food cooked with certain ingredients. The Nigerian historian Elizabeth Isichei (1970) recorded her observation while on a visit to a sick man in hospital. The titled Igbo man, who was very sick, refused to eat any food given to him because the hospital environment was not conducive for the rites he needed to perform before eating his meals.

Using food for prayers and sacrifice is still an integral part of Nigerian traditional worship. Food is used in maintaining peace and cordial relationships among the living and between the living and the dead. Sacrifices of animals and drinks are offered to ancestral deities to maintain the traditional balance between the physical and the spiritual. Many non-adherents of the traditional belief system still use food and drinks to pray. At the naming ceremony of a new born baby, especially among the Yoruba, food items are used to pray for the new baby: honey and salt for a joyous life,

kola nut for long life, and gin (distilled from palm wine) for respect. These items, with a little pepper, water and salt, are placed on the tongue of the baby, while prayers are said. Divinations are also carried out for the child by a priest to know what his path in life will be. Although the practice is still maintained, non-traditionalists no longer call in the traditional priest for divination (Falola, 2001).

In all Nigerian societies, at funerals food is used for ritualistic and ceremonial purposes although rarely at the funeral of a young person. In all ethnic groups in the country during the burial of an aged person, people expect to be well fed. Where the deceased's immediate family cannot afford to hold the funeral rites, his clan will organise it. In Igboland, friends of the family and in-laws show their respect by presenting drinks and livestock to the family on arrival at the funeral. The children of the dead person are expected to go with a live goat (or cow) and drinks to the family of their mother (if she was the one who died), to inform them of her death. If the person who died is a man, depending on the financial capabilities of the children, they must give a goat or cow to their paternal grandmother's family. This is because of the traditional importance attached to a mother's family. Each of the social, cultural, clan, age grades, town and religious associations have a list of what food must be given to them at the funeral of a member, for them to participate in the funeral and burial ceremonies.

Today, more foreign food items make the list for funerals. These include bags of rice, biscuits, drinks such as cola or malt drinks, schnapps, gin, brandy and beer. None of the Igbos interviewed know the origins of these practices but, when asked, responded that it is the "*omenala*" (customs and tradition) that has been handed down from their forefathers, irrespective of the fact that their forefathers did not know many of the items on the list. Even within the diaspora communities, aspects of these practices have been adopted to suit their new cultural space.

The main food items that play important ritualistic roles are the kola nut, the yam, and palm wine or gin. Kola nuts, an indigenous Nigerian crop, enjoy a very high cultural and spiritual esteem within Nigeria, as they are utilized in all aspects of traditional worship which, in modern times, has transcended to them being accorded great cultural relevance, by even non-adherents of the traditional Nigerian belief system. Kola nuts are offered as a sign of peace, acceptance and welcome. In many homes, especially in the rural parts of Nigeria, a guest is first of all offered kola nuts before he states his mission or eats anything else. There are rituals surrounding the breaking and eating of kola nuts in the private or public domain especially among the eastern ethnic groups. No event from birth to death, spiritual or social, can start without the presentation of the kola nut (Duru, 2005). The kola nut rites could be likened to the communion rites in the west.

The yam, another indigenous food crop, is an important staple food with many species, some valued more than others. The new yam festival, which is held all around the nation to celebrate the beginning of the yam harvest, is a way of showing gratitude to the earth goddess (*Ani* amongst the Igbos) and *Ahijoku* (the yam deity). The festival could be likened to Christmas in the Western world. Many in Nigeria will not eat the new yam prior to these ceremonies. These old rites have survived into present-day Nigeria, despite influence from Islam, Christianity, colonialism and modernity. As a result, instead of taking the yam to traditional shrines, many Nigerians now take their crop harvest (some of which they buy as many no longer farm) to other religious worshipping places such as churches to be blessed. The yam and this festival were also exported with the slave trade to Caribbean countries, like Jamaica. Its importance among the Caribbean people was highlighted in a BBC TV broadcast in September 2009. The programme by Root Levi, aimed at showcasing Caribbean food, focused on the different yam-based cuisines and festivals in this part of the world, showing foods ability to link people and tell their story. Of note was also how cuisines from different parts of the world assume an identity that suits the place as shown by the evidence of Western influence on Caribbean yam dishes, especially with regards to roasted yam, with the substitution of palm oil sauce used in Nigeria (and West Africa) with mayonnaise (Roots, 2009).

Drinks and food play sacred roles in the different ethnic groups of Nigeria. Different alcoholic drinks are poured out as libation during traditional prayers. This is expected to appease the deities and ancestors, thereby facilitating a positive answer to the prayers. Even in modern Nigeria, when people buy new cars, alcoholic drinks are poured on them during their blessing, but some people now use water, as it is believed that it has a more positive influence on the car than alcohol. Yet, many of those who practice and adhere to this norms, will not term themselves as traditional religion adherents.

No formal occasion or request begins without the presentation of drinks, especially palm wine and other alcoholic drinks. For a man to indicate his wish to marry, the first thing he does is to present a drink to the family of the intended bride. Among the Igbos, the traditional wedding is referred to as "*Igba Nkwu*", "*Ibu Nmanya*" (which literally translated, means "pouring the palm wine" or "carrying the wine").

To indicate his intention to marry a woman, a young man will take a jar of palm wine or local gin to her family to "knock". If his drink is accepted, he is asked to go, and the bride will return the wine keg that was used in bringing the palm wine to her family. On this trip, she will be accompanied by friends and use this as an opportunity to examine closely her potential suitor's family. Among the Igbos, especially in years

gone by, if the wine keg fell and broke, it is termed a negative sign and the marriage may not go ahead. However, like all traditions there are bound to be exceptions or challenges. One of the respondents during my research in Nigeria, who was in her 80s, recalled that her sister's wine keg broke but the marriage still went ahead. According to her, the suitor was in the British colonial army and was held in awe by people because he was working for the white man. Thus he had an air of superiority about him. When he was told to go and that the bride-to-be would return the keg, he got annoyed, picked up the keg, walked out and smashed it on a tree at the entrance to their family compound. Despite this, the marriage still went ahead after his family apologised and the bride's family reasoned that she was not the one that broke the wine keg. Yet, in retrospect she stated that the belief was still upheld since her sister had a turbulent marriage. In modern times, the return of the keg is now ceremonial as many brides date their husbands before marriage and know all there is to know about his family, more than a bride in former years would have had an opportunity to know in years of marriage. After the introduction of a marriage proposal, if there are no objections to the marriage, a list of demands, in which food features greatly, is sent to the suitor, and once he provides all that is in the list the traditional marriage ceremony can then take place.

Traditional wedding is still greatly valued, as without it the marriage is not fully regarded as complete. In many areas, none of the other types of weddings can take place without the couple having done the traditional ceremony. This is because traditional marriages need family acceptance and involvement to go through, and because marriage is still a family affair, many believe a marriage without the support and blessing of the family is standing on faulty foundations. Among the Nigerian Diasporas, some parents insist on having all the traditional ceremonies irrespective of who their child is marrying, while others pick aspects of the tradition to perform. Sometimes all the ceremonies may be performed in absentia by the families of couples who met while living abroad and cannot travel home for the ceremony. Yet, this marriage even in absentia can only be at the request of the man.

In post-colonial Nigeria until the mid-20th century in the southern and eastern parts of Nigeria, young women before they marry are sent off to the so-called fattening rooms. The girls are kept in secluded huts, within or outside their family compound. They remain there for a specified period, not venturing beyond the thresholds or doing any work. While in seclusion, they are pampered with beauty treatments, fed delicacies and taught what is expected of them as wives.

This fattening room custom is very popular among the southern coastal Nigerian ethnic groups. The knowledge that these women gain in the fattening rooms also equips them with recipes for cooking delica-

cies for their husbands. The aim is to teach them how to treat a man and create a comfortable home for him. This training, plus the variety of cuisine which is indigenous to this region, has led people from other parts of the country to believe women from this region use “love potion” in food to entice, seduce and control men. Although the practice is no longer widely spread, grandmothers and mothers pass on the knowledge acquired in the fattening rooms to their daughters through the years. Yet, as Blankson-Ikpe (2005, pp. 4-5) pointed out, the “‘success’ of Calabar women does not depend on love potions but on their ability to take control of the circumstances around them and create an environment that enables pleasurable sexuality”. Although this practice of seclusion is greatly reduced due to Western influence, it has seen an increase in recent years among the Southern Nigerians of Efik and Ibibio ethnic groups (BBC, 2010; Nigeriacuriosity, 2007).

Many Nigerian communities have totemic animals. These are surrounded by myths, which link them to the origins of the group; stating the roles they played in averting disaster for the group in ancient times. These totemic animals are revered. If they are termed as edible within certain areas, indigenes of the towns whose totem they are cannot eat them even when they are outside their community. Beliefs and tales abound on the consequences of disobeying these rules and insure ethnic groups can control their members’ allegiance to their traditions, within and outside the group.

The fact that Nigerians tend to adhere to traditional beliefs to a certain level, irrespective of what faith they profess, cannot be over emphasised. Despite this, the Christian and Islamic religions still have sacred food habits as part of their doctrines. Food abhorrence, which is prescribed by the Islamic faith, is strictly adhered to. Thus pork is avoided and animals are slaughtered according to halal rules. Fasting, according to Islamic doctrine, is also followed by Muslims especially during the Ramadan.

For Christians, the role of food differs between the old churches like the Catholic or Protestant churches, and the new-generation Pentecostal churches. Not only do Christians in some of the older churches avoid certain food like meat on Good Friday, many fast for 40 days before the Easter period. With the rise to prominence of the Pentecostal Christian churches from the 1980s, the dictates of Christianity regarding food became more robust. As adherents to the fundamental biblical injunctions, fasting is no longer reserved for the lent period but rather is mandated as a part of the daily life of a Christian. Fasting is viewed as suppressing the body to allow spiritual growth and victory in one’s life. The fast may be for an individual or mandated for all members of the congregation. The belief is that, for prayers to be more effective, they need to be accompanied by fasting, which can be daily from midnight or 6 am to 6 pm for durations

that can range from 1 to 40 days depending on one's desire and strength. Where a situation is viewed as difficult and important, one may then go on what is termed a dry fast for the desired number of days. Dry fast means that the person will neither drink nor eat, to enable them acquire the spiritual strength to overcome whatever evil powers are behind their problems or to grow spiritually.

Olive oil, which is rarely used in Nigerian cuisine, is very popular in all Pentecostal churches as "anointing oil". The olive oil is prayed over to fill it with spiritual power and then is used to anoint self or others, or properties during prayers for deliverance or protection against evil forces. Alcohol consumption is forbidden, while food is to be taken without waste or over-indulgence. The Pentecostal Christians by their beliefs and practices try to maintain a strict demarcation between themselves and other religious groups. Their members do not participate in any of the traditional customs or rituals whether food-related or not. This is evident in the Nigerian diaspora, as many stay away from cultural associations or events. The religious practice of Nigerians is still greatly influenced from home, as many attend branches of Nigerian Pentecostal churches where they live. Not only that, when there is a reason for a family to fast and pray over any situation, members of the family no matter where they live are involved. For example, midnight prayers over problems are common in Pentecostal churches, so family members once informed will begin their own prayers at the Nigerian midnight hour, to insure everyone is praying at the same time. These practices again help maintain the link between those in the diaspora and their homeland.

One use of food and drink though that is common among the Christian denominations, is the communion. The breaking of bread and sharing of wine during church services is practised in all the churches, although some do not have communion at every service. Irrespective of the use of food in some rituals to pray for one's wellbeing, Nigerians are also careful regarding their food consumption and its effect on their health.

2.6. Food and Health

Despite Western influence, the average Nigerian's view of a healthy person is not just defined physically but mentally and spiritually too (Offiong, 1999). In seeking health related solutions, like in other aspects of their lives, Nigerians tend to combine the use of modern medicine and traditional medicine and beliefs (which rely on herbs, magic, ancestral worship and such acts), using one to fill any perceived gaps in the other. Thus, food is utilized as medicine to insure good health for all (Muhammad and Amusa, 2005; Okoli *et al.*, 2007). Although the at-

titude regarding health due to Western influence is gradually changing, its relation to food swings in two different directions. For the elite, due to conspicuous consumption, there is an increased awareness about the health implications of over-indulging in food. However, for those in the lower strata of society, there is the health implication of food security (Ajani *et al.*, 2006). Hence each seeks out solutions to address their peculiar problems.

For traditional healers, food is an important means of balancing the relationship between the gods, ancestors and the living, which is deemed important for good health. Foodstuffs and livestock are used for spiritual consultations and sacrifices, to appease the gods and dead ancestors, to forestall evil and sickness, or to request their intervention in healing. Irrespective of the doubts from many about the spiritual aspect of the traditional medicine, some of the traditional medicinal use of food has been found to be very effective even in modern times (Odugbemi, 2008). A good example is the leaves of the fruited pumpkin. For convalescing people who show signs of anaemia, the leaves are washed and crushed to extract the liquid, which is given to the person to drink. This iron-rich liquid has been known to hasten recovery. Herbs and spices are also used for hot pepper soups given to women after childbirth. This serves varied purposes. Some help the body expel the placenta and clean the womb, while others help stop excessive bleeding.

Different plants and leaves are also boiled and used for bathing women, who have given birth, or for sick people. Women are also encouraged to drink palm wine, as this helps to facilitate lactation for new mothers. Several food items are used for curative and preventive medicine. Herbs, barks, leaves and roots of different plants are soaked in bottles of water or gin made from palm wine. People use this infusion as a malaria cure, as aphrodisiac for men or for controlling the weight of unborn children to facilitate an easy birth, while others avoid them because of the lack of modern scientific support or proof of their efficacy (Muhammad and Amusa, 2005; Odugbemi, 2008).

Since the late 1980s, there has been increased publicity and awareness of the implications of obesity. This is in contrast to the earlier societal notion of the “big man” and “thick madam”, being perceived as a sign of wellbeing and wealth. Thus, as a result more people began taking drastic actions against obesity. This fitness zeal was kindled by individuals who, having returned to the country from abroad, established gyms and wrote columns in popular newspapers about the benefits of maintaining a healthy body. The trailblazer in this sector was Pamela Mojekwu who opened a gym called the Body shop. She also had a fitness segment on national television and wrote columns for popular Nigerian newspapers from the 1980s through to the 1990s (Nike Bakare, 2009). Many other

gyms and fitness classes have followed where she left off and those who cannot afford such services join other less costly exercise classes in open fields and sports facilities.

The societal attitude makes eating problems like anorexia and bulimia, difficult to dictate and treat. Some who have these problems are not aware of the seriousness of their condition while society does not really take it seriously as it is seen as attacks through voodoo (juju). With such limited awareness about these problems, sufferers do not get the medical support they need (Dike, 2009, pp. 26-29). This lack of awareness may be due to the fact that, in a society where many struggle to feed, it is unimaginable to many that someone can intentionally refuse to eat or vomit what they have eaten.

Alongside the various gyms established to help people keep fit and eat right, there are clinics that claim that weight and health problems that Nigerians are experiencing, are due to the increased consumption of foreign food from the Western world. They promote the use of indigenous food and herbs as healthy alternatives even for weight control. The progenitor of this back-to-traditional food movement was Elizabeth Kafaru, whose ideas concerning local food and herbs gained a lot of attention, even though many remained sceptical of therapies that included drinking one's urine. She wrote a column for the Guardian newspaper (one of the leading publications in Nigeria) for many years and published extensively on herbal and medicinal food (Amanze, 2011). She was soon joined by another Nigerian woman, Mrs Ayodele, who in 1996 opened the pioneer herbal slimming clinic in Nigeria, Quincy Herbal Slimmers. She claims to be able to use only indigenous herbs to help people lose weight. Most of her clients though are from the elite class. The elites are the ones who have enough to indulge themselves, as well as the financial resources to find solutions to meet the Western standards they come in contact with and have come to ascribe to. Since the mid-2000s there has been an increase in the consumption of different food supplements and teas for losing weight. Many entrepreneurs have franchise for different products each claiming great success via publicity in the media and word of mouth.

With the modern availability of information through various media, some Nigerians (the majority from high-income strata of society) aim to maintain the same standard of acceptable health and body image as they read or view in the media. Many of them watch what they eat, diet and exercise to meet the Western ideals of a healthy and great body. Yet even amongst Nigerians in diaspora, in as much as they are aware of the health implications of obesity, their idea of an ideal weight falls very short of Western expectations because being very slim within the Nigerian society is still viewed negatively. Medical professionals, in the face of increasing

health implications of the lack of nutritional food among the masses, offer advice on alternative healthy indigenous food. This also includes information about available ingredients and the suitable cuisines. These campaigns have led to the popularity of the soya bean and its by-products since the 1990s; also the increased utilization of local wheat and moringa products. However, there have been no quotable scientific tests validating the effects of these “new” products on the people. Despite these, Nigerians still see a fuller figure as a sign of wellbeing to aspire to. In the Nigerian psyche the body is proof of how well one is doing. In the Nigerian parlance of the “thick madam” and “big man” the notion of “eating out the body” is still an aspiration for people (Oha, 2000). This means “iri puta ahu” in Igbo – being economically able to eat enough food that changes in one’s physique are soon evident. This also connotes improved financial status, which not only enables one access to a varied choice of food but will also enable him to show his new power and prestige through food.

2.7. Food, Prestige and Power

Like most societies, Nigeria has its elite that was at the top of political or economic power from pre-colonial times, and many are still revered today. In ancient societies, elites were the traditional rulers, members of the secret societies and cults, wealthy traders, and farmers. With the colonial contact, their position was usurped by the British colonial officers and business operatives working in the country. The British elite in colonial Nigeria influenced and dictated the norms, Nigerians in this class followed. The cash-crops farmer and the first set of the colonial-educated Nigerian professionals were the first modern elites (Smythe and Smythe, 1960; Adeboye, 2003). The colonial period led to an interaction of Western and traditional values, producing a hybrid with a bit of both, thus producing an elite from the old class and those that emerged as a result of colonization. These changes are evident among the present Nigerian elite (Adeboye, 2003, pp. 281-282).

Prior to colonization, some scholars believe there was homogeneity in the food available to all the people as there were no differential foods or haute cuisine (Goody, 1982). On close observation, what may differ is the definition of haute cuisine and its application in the Nigerian society. The quality of the poor man’s soup and *fufu* will be different from that of the elite, as they do not have access to the same resources for acquiring ingredients and cooking knowledge. Those with the economic power are able to procure better food and service. The preparation and presentation are planned to garner prestige. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart*, a scene described where at a burial ceremony the mound of *fufu* served was so high that two friends who joined at opposite sides only knew of each

other's presence later. Most ethnic groups in Nigeria have oral histories narrating elaborate use of food for social signification.

Generosity, especially with food, is a mark of prestige and power. Nigerian societies respect a generous man and abhor the stingy. Most members of the traditional elite command allegiance and consolidate their position through their willingness to provide for people. This act has been transposed to the modern Nigeria, with many assuming positions of political godfathers through their generosity with food to the masses. A situation some in Nigeria now refer to as “*amala (fufu) politics*”, and seems to have become part of the Nigerian political scene with the emergence of the term “stomach infrastructure policy” in the 2014 political campaigns and elections in Western Nigeria.

In many of the ethnic groups, it was very common until recently for titles to be taken or given to individuals to portray their ability to produce and provide food, although these days some of these titles are symbolic depictions of the person's standing in their community. Among the Igbos there are titles like *Eze ji* (the yam king given to great yam farmers), *Ogbuefi* (he who kills cattle) and *Ogbuagu* (he who kills lions). Although these traditional titles are just symbolic and have been taken by many Nigerians within and outside the country, they are still valued within the communities. Titles are bequeathed on individuals based on the holder's ability to adhere to the traditional expectations, especially in terms of providing generously for people and supporting his community in times of need. A good example of this is shown in the *Oriki* (praise names) of Chief Adebisi Giwa, one of the leading Ibadan elites in the early 20th century in Western Nigeria (translated into English by Olufunke Adeboye). It states,

Adebisi of Idikan
Son of Ogboja
Adebisi, father of Gbadegesin
He-who-has food can cure abiku
Father of Sariyu
Who cooks the cow with its fore limbs
He cooks the cow with its hind limbs
And invites Ibadan people to come and feast
Adebisi, father of Gbadegesin
Anyone who is not satisfied after dinning at Adebisi's place must have taken up a
horse's stomach before going there
He-who-has-food can cure abiku
His pieces of meat are as big as bundles of elu
Son of ogboja
 (Adeboye, 2003, p. 293).

This *oriki* epitomises the respect Nigerians have for the generous person who is a good provider. With the extended family networks, it

is a sign of wealth and a thing of pride to be able to provide for people especially as the people cared for, most times will also reciprocate through their allegiance to the provider.

The use of food as a mark of power has undergone some changes since the colonial era, although its impact is not diminished. In pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria, the European traders, among other things, offered casks of gin to the rulers of areas where they had trading interests. In turn, they received gifts of food and were generously provisioned. It was these encounters that consolidated conspicuous consumption as a sign of one's place in society. Many of the new elite assumed they had to mimic all the mannerisms of the Europeans, to show they were "civilized" and better than their fellow countrymen who still did things the old way. This, though, was not a bandwagon effect. Rather, while some of the Western-educated Nigerians used Western food as a way of portraying their sophistication, others used Nigerian food as proof of their identity and a statement of their independence. In the novel *No longer at ease* (1960), Chinua Achebe presented a restaurant scene, involving the protagonist Obi Okonkwo who just returned from studying overseas and his friend Joseph:

Service' called Joseph importantly, and a steward appeared in white tunic and trousers, a red cummerbund and red fez. 'What will you have'? He asked Obi, the steward bent over waiting.

'Really I don't think I want to drink anything more'

Nonsense. The day is still young. Have a cold beer'

He turned to the steward, two Heinekens'

'Oh no. one will do. Let's share one'

'Two Heinekens' repeated Joseph, and the steward went to the bar and soon returned with two bottles on a tray.

'Do they serve Nigerian food here?'

Joseph was surprised at the question. No decent restaurant served Nigerian food. 'Do you want Nigerian food?'

'Of course I have been dying to eat pounded yam and bitter leaf soup. In England we made do with semolina but it isn't the same thing'

'I must ask my boy to prepare you pounded yams tomorrow afternoon'

'Good man' said Obi brightening up considerably. Then he added in English for the benefit of the European group that sat at the next table: 'I am sick of boiled potatoes'. By calling them boiled, he hoped he had put into it all the disgust he felt.

(Achebe, 1960, p. 31).

Although the above dialogue is fictional and set in the late colonial era, it captured the attitude of the new elite reflecting individual choices and their interpretation of who they were. This difference in attitude portrayed

above is still prevalent among Nigerians, as many use foods to show how they wish to be perceived.

Various types of previously unknown tinned food, beverages, packaged food and drinks were adopted by the elite and later diffused to all Nigerians. Initially the elites used these foods as a mark of class and the masses aspired to dine like them. A good example of these new types of food and cooking is the consumption of rice. Although there are indigenous species, it was not common to all the regions in Nigeria. It was such a prestige food that people ate it rarely and only on special occasions. Although it is now a favourite of all, it still enjoys the dual role of an everyday meal and the main dish in all special occasions. How esteemed rice was decades ago is reflected in a story my dad Chief G.I. Duru shared with me. He gave a description of what the attitude towards rice was, in 1930s Eastern Nigeria:

Now I see everyone eating *ariso* (rice) whenever they liked (...) as kids we used to walk a long distance if we heard someone was going to cook it (rice) there, we went just to watch. Oh the ceremony then, not like now, you just throw it into water (...) the cook took her time displaying the ingredients and all she would use in cooking (...) well now we know it was all just showing off, but how many people could afford it then? (...) so all that preparation before cooking, it was just to reflect how important they were to afford it. We were satisfied watching her cook and left happily narrating to others, we saw rice being cooked (...).

In today's Nigeria, a lot of celebrations are modelled after foreign festivals and ceremonies. Different types of weddings have become very popular. With the insistence of the Christian and Islamic faiths that their adherents must wed according to their religious rules, coupled with the legal registry marriages, traditional marriage is no longer the only legally recognized marriage. Until the early 2000s, in many Nigerian cities it was still the norm to close off major roads and streets for parties and celebrations. A person's economic, social and political power determined which streets they could close for their parties. At such events, ethnic and more nationally accepted food is served by contracted caterers. To show how wealthy one is, guests and anyone who is around are given food to eat and packages to take away.

With the ban on closing streets for parties in the cities, those with the economic power now use many of the expensive purpose-built reception and events halls. Unlike the poorer members of society, who depend on family and friends for cooking the party meals, the Nigerian rich engage the services of events managers and caterers during birthday, wedding, funeral or thanksgiving parties. This also means that the traditional concept of "anyone is welcome" is no longer strictly adhered to, as invited

guests are ushered into the venues after showing their invitation cards. Despite this, poorer people hang around such venues and are given food, which may be left over after the reception. With the growth in these prestige celebrations, many professional caterers and chefs vie to outdo each other. Impressive centrepieces and sculptures made with different foods are displayed. Not only are there wedding cakes for white weddings, for traditional weddings, cakes are baked and decorated to depict traditional themes like kola nuts, palm wine calabashes, beads etc. This growth in the catering sector now seen all over the country has its roots from the early food-related businesses in many cities of the country. Even these are also influenced by the evolutions in the Nigerian food culture.

2.8. Eating out-commensality and generosity

Food is utilized for building social networks among people in different parts of Nigeria. Many of the food-related behaviours in Nigeria, are in the public domain. One can categorise the food eaten in public into street food from vendors, *mamaput* (which could be mobile or in *bukas*), then food from local, and foreign restaurants. Nigerian societies had a long-established street-food tradition, although to varying degrees. The Muslims in the north and the Yoruba of the west have an enduring tradition of eating street food, and most people ate at least some of their meals on the street (Bhat *et al.*, 2000, p. 101; Tinker, 1997, p. 131). Despite the long history of street food in some parts of Nigeria, changes in the society helped define the structure.

As the British colonial infrastructural constructions and mining of mineral resources began in Nigeria, young men were recruited and sometimes forced to work at the sites (Falola, 1987; Obichere, 1982; Crowther, 1968; Bhat and Waghay, 2000). Since these men were not encouraged to bring their wives along to cook for them, they had to look for alternative sources of cooked food (Bhat *et al.*, 2000, p. 100). Thus, from the early colonial era, food was firmly established in the public domain and some people, especially those from the areas where the work was located, began to cook and sell food.

In Nigerian cities, most of the vendors of street food are women, and hence the name “*mamaput*” for cooked street food and the sellers. Eating establishments called *bukas* or *bukaterias* are common, especially in urban areas. Some of the women sell cooked food by carrying basins of food on their heads or wheelbarrows/carts, which they sell from street to street in urban areas. The street food vendors in Nigeria congregate around commercial centres, schools, leisure centres, motor parks or just anywhere people are bound to be found.

Street food has become so entrenched in Nigerian urban cities that its consumption cuts across social classes. Many of the elite still consume local street food although they may not go personally to buy the food. Some send their staff to buy the desired street food for them. Civil servants, skilled and unskilled workers and low-income families constitute the main patrons of street-food vendors. As a result, street food has become a constant means of affordable food in the towns and cities. Many, especially among the poorer strata of society, can afford to frequently buy food from the sellers because the food is sold according to the money someone has. People can request for food of different amounts of money, which determines the quantity and if they will be served meat, fish and other relish or not. Moreover, the food vendors provide a vital service to the society because many of those who patronise them do not have access to a kitchen, so cannot prepare meals. Yet, Nigerian street food is not just for people who, due to their housing situation, cannot cook but also for those on a budget or seeking specialised local food. It is assumed that today in different areas of Nigeria between 53.2 per cent at the lowest and 92.6 per cent at the highest of the total nutritional intake of people between 21 and 40 years comes from street foods and fast food (Akinyele, 1998; Olayiwola *et al.*, 2004).

Some *mamaputs* specialize in ethnic cuisine, like the “*Agonyi*” women selling boiled indigenous beans with palm oil sauce in the cities of Western Nigeria, or Igbo women selling “*abacha* and *ugba*” in the cities. There are also seasonal food sellers all over the country. These are mainly low-income Nigerians who set up stands or stalls along the road to sell whatever food or fruit is in season. The popular street foods include fried yam, plantain or *akara* and corn pudding (*akamu/ogi*), rice dishes, beans dishes, *fufu* and soups. There are also the popular “snacks” such as boiled or roasted maize with African pear or coconut, roasted yam with spicy palm oil, roasted plantain with fried groundnut or spicy palm oil. Some others are banana and groundnut, fried corn and groundnut, mangoes, oranges, African star apples. One can also buy pastries like buns, chinchin, egg rolls, meat pies, bread and many more.

In Nigeria, eating out including where is determined by social status (real or imagined). The more elitist or economically endowed may dine out in the various “intercontinental” restaurants – a generic name for restaurants of no defined national origin serving a fusion of world cuisines. There are also restaurants affiliated to foreign nationals catering to embassies, international organizations and the general public. These restaurants serve food typical of their countries of origin. Nigerian restaurants abound, geared towards catering for those who wish for the international ambiance in a restaurant but with an indigenous cuisine served. The local restaurants tend to specialise in the ethnic cuisines, while the foreign restaurants range

from those that serve continental food to a wide range of non-Nigerian food, especially from Asian cuisine.

Thus, in a Nigerian city like Lagos, which is the social and cultural capital of Nigeria, food of all qualities and prices can be obtained at all corners. Obalande with its concentration of Hausa/Fulani Northerners is the place to go to, for a taste of the northern cuisine and the best *suya*. The Hausas, mainly men (*mai tea or shai*), sell tea along the streets or in the Hausa quarters of different cities. One can get tea (normally poured with artistic dexterity), fried eggs and white bread even very late at night. Some people delight in seeking out restaurants serving the different ethnic cuisines. All Nigerian cities have sections with a myriad of specialised restaurants, each claiming their cuisine to be “authentic” and the best. Ostentatious consumption and offering food to people in the restaurants is still common. Sometimes this does not have just an ego-boasting motive behind it, but tends to be a reciprocal act between people. This means that the person that is paid for, although not mandated, is expected to reciprocate someday.

As stated earlier Nigerians have a high regard for a generous person, hence eating in public places provides a means of displaying not just one’s economic power but generosity too. This can be by eating or drinking in restaurants and bars with some attached status symbol or by paying for others patronizing the same establishment. It is not uncommon for someone to pay for the food and drinks of total strangers in bars and restaurants. On the other hand, one who rarely pays for others is not seen as thrifty, but is regarded as mean-spirited. Gender also defines the level of participation of Nigerians in public food consumption. Men tend to dine out more often than women, because women, especially married women, are not expected to visit public eating and drinking places often or alone.

As shown in the preceding pages, food in Nigeria is utilized in different contexts and fulfils diverse roles in the lives of people. It is this image of cuisine and food that is transported with Nigerians as they migrate. Even though they find themselves in a different environment, somehow they are able to recreate aspects of their culture away from home. This link to home and how it is built and maintained through food will be elucidated further.

The detailed examination of Nigeria, its people and food culture in preceding pages, has provided the background and comparable framework for examining the Nigeria diaspora food experience. The multi-tiered characteristics of the Nigerian foodways provide an insight into Nigerian society. Like in all societies, the making of a Nigerian foodways had to draw from indigenous and external foodways, which is reflective of different contacts established over the years. The level of influence of the

external factors highlights the power of colonial mechanisms in indigenous African culture.

The ability of Nigerians to negotiate between the old and the new, yet accepting both as part of their everyday life, is evident in their food habits. As a result, each cultural food attribute is given relevance in accordance to its perceived importance in given circumstances. Here, one can observe that no society is static, thus changes in food habits are also evidence of transformation in society. In the case of Nigeria, these changes are paradoxical as they maintain the old, create fusions from across cultures and also adopt new food habits from outside the country. Rather than diminish the importance of food habits in creating a sense of belonging, all these combinations enable the creation of a unique food culture peculiar to Nigeria. The various ethnic foods of the regional foodways, which can be so different, still dominate in rural areas but in urban areas, there is a convergence of popular dishes, which form the Nigerian “national” food.

When Nigerians migrate, not only do they look back on the home culture in creating their own space and sense of belonging in their new environment, but they also recreate more often a national rather than ethnic cuisine as a result of their new milieu. For these communities to be established away from home, which in turn gives rise to the use of “home” food, they will first move from the place called home to another place outside their place of origin. In the following pages, Nigerian migration trends and modern international migration will be examined, not just as it pertains to African migrants in Belgium, but to highlight the changes and significance of migration over the years, in a rapidly changing world, thereby highlighting the place of Nigerians in this changing world.

CHAPTER THREE

The routes to a Nigerian foodway in Belgium

Migration has been an integral part of human existence since the beginning of mankind (Adler and Gielen, 2003, p. xiii; Koser, 2007). Marsella and Ring (2003, p. 3) went as far as claiming that, “the impulse to migrate is inherent in human nature – an instinctual and inborn disposition and inclination to wonder and wander in search of new opportunities and new horizon. In addition, Manning (2005, pp. 1-2) in his study on migration stated that it is a study in world history as it addresses a long time period and explores experiences drawn from many regions of the earth. It also emphasizes the connection in the human experience, encouraging one to think of connections as every migration connects a point of origin and destination. This is illustrated clearly by international migration and brings into focus the fact that, when people move, there are those who stay behind, whose impact on migration is not fully researched. In as much as they did not migrate, they are also an important aspect of migration. Sometimes they are the reasons some leave, and they are also the lighthouses that guide migrants home, irrespective of the challenges. Many survive the often a times treacherous routes of migration and look homewards because of those left behind.

The presence of Nigerians in Belgium was precipitated by migration across continents, and the transnational links have been vital in maintaining a Nigerian foodways in Belgium. I will start this section by defining a migrant and Nigerian migrants over the years in Belgium. An international migrant, according to the United Nations, is a person who stays outside his or her usual country of residence for at least a year. In as much as migration is connected to important global issues such as poverty, development and human rights, as a multifaceted and challenging phenomenon, there are varied factors that influence the context of migration, old and new.

1. “*O je mba enwe iwe*”: perspectives on Nigerian migration trends

The Igbo adage “*O je mba enwe iwe*” portrays the mind-set and attitude of the people towards migration and can be applied to other ethnic groups living in Nigeria. Using a quote from the Igbo ethnic group is apt,

considering their high level of migration within and outside the country. Many believe they constitute the highest number of internal and external migrants from Nigeria (Van den Bersselaar, 2005; Nwolisa, 2003).

In Igbo language “*o je mba enwe iwe*”, in its simplistic translation, means the traveller (migrant) has (or harbours) no anger. Yet, like all idioms it carries a deeper meaning reflected in the contexts in which it is used. It highlights the traditional belief in the benefits of migration and promotes the notion that, if one cannot find the resources needed for a fulfilled life within one’s environment, then efforts should be made to seek these resources outside one’s community. The saying recognizes the fact that migration is filled with challenges, especially the tendency for the host community, or those one encounters on the way, not to be friendly or helpful. Moreover, this saying in supporting migration is not ignorant of the perils that migrants might face. This is further supported by the saying that “*e lima uzo lima ehi, were uzo hara ehi, ehi wu anu e rima ya e richa ya, uzo wu a gama uzo agwuagwu*”, meaning that if asked to choose between a cow and the road (a journey), chose the road because a cow is just meat that gets eaten up, but the road is endless. As idioms and proverbs are reflective of societies’ worldview, and get passed down generations, one can infer that migration is a long-existing phenomenon among the Nigerian societies.

Many of the inhabitants of eastern, central and southern Africa, Bantu speaking people are believed to have migrated to their present locations from Nigeria (Manning, 2008, p. 1). The people of Africa are perpetually on the move maybe more than in any other region of the world. Spatial mobility has indeed been a fundamental social and historical aspect of African life. Various forms of population movement in response to political, economic, religious and security situations have been recorded since early times (Adepoju, 1995, p. 87).

Prior to the arrival of Europeans to the shores of Africa, Africans were able to move freely from one region to the other. There were trade routes across the Sahara, between the north and west and via the sea between the east, west, south and central regions. The close cultural affinities between African nations even after the demarcation of nations, has blurred the division between internal and international migration in many regions (Adepoju, 2006). As we will see in the following pages, the modern migration that brought Nigerians to Belgium is just a continuation of age-long movement of people across the different regions of the world. We will examine the different directions of Nigerian history as, each of these migrations of people have also had an impact on the food culture as shown earlier.

Being a non-literate society, legends of origins abound, narrating the migration of people from different localities to settle down where their

ethnic groups are currently located. Many of these migrations were triggered by political instability, wars or the search for food, especially fertile lands for growing food (Johnson, 1921; Smith, 1988; Isichei, 1976). Prior to colonial rule, there was an unhindered fluid movement of people traversing regions for trade and as seasonal workers in the agricultural sector. However, people migrated to areas close to their home (Van den Bersselaar, 2005). This is no surprise considering the constant wars amongst groups and the attached insecurity.

Internally, migration patterns in present-day Nigeria can be rural to rural, rural to urban, urban to urban, international or intercontinental. Some of these trends have always been present in Nigeria, while others have become more prevalent in recent years. Thus irrespective of its long history of migration, the context and direction of Nigerian migration has changed (Adepoju, 1976; Mgbeafulu, 2003).

With the arrival of foreigners in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria began a new phase of migration. Firstly, Arabs and later European traders came across the desert in the north and across the sea in the south, to trade with the people. In the northern region the contacts with the Arabs introduced the inhabitants of that region to Islamic religion and culture. Many Nigerians from the north also migrated for different durations to the Middle East to fulfil the hajj, with some settling down for some period along the routes. It must be mentioned that those who were sold to the Arabs as slaves became permanent migrants, even though under duress, as they became part of the Arab nations. Many Arabs settled in Nigeria too and it was from this encounter that *Shuwa* Arabs emerged as an ethnic group in Nigeria. The lack of defined boundaries meant a fluid transnational movement was possible without the restrictions introduced in colonial era Nigeria (Afoloyan *et al.*, 2008).

By the 15th century, Europeans arrived on the coast of southern Nigeria, thereby opening up another front in the Nigerian migration. Although the earliest trades were on commodities and local produce, it soon degenerated into the horrible trade in humans that impacted negatively on Africa and the world. This phase of intercontinental migration was epitomized by the forced migration of captured people as slaves. Within Nigerian societies, most slaves captured during warfare were taken home by their captors and used as labourers or servants. Although the Arabs bought Nigerian slaves and took them back to the Northern countries and Arab world, its impact seems insignificant when compared to the transatlantic slave trade. Soon, through Arabs and later Europeans, these slaves were taken to countries thousands of kilometres away, after they were sold by their Nigerian captors. The volume of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from Nigerian coasts was such that between 1740 and 1807, which was the peak of the trade in slaves, two-thirds of all slaves came from the area of that is now known as

Nigeria. Hence, Nigeria was known as the “slave coast” until the middle of the 19th century (Law and Mann, 1999; Law, 1991; Smoot Coleman, 1971). The slave trade was a dark stain on the tapestry of Nigerian migration history due to the negative security and huge economic, social and emotional impact it had on the people (Ekundare, 1973).

With the abolition of the slave trade in the Western world in the 19th century, some of the slaves, who were originally from Nigeria, returned to Nigeria. These returnee slaves played important roles in the spread of the European sphere of influence, not just in Nigeria but in other African countries too, as they migrated to different regions working for the colonial interests. They worked for Christian religious groups as missionaries and acted as interpreters, clerks and security forces for the colonial administrators (Oduntan, 2003; Falola and Aderinto, 2010).

When the British government established a claim over what is now known as Nigeria, direct governance meant projects to facilitate further expansion and the establishment of control. Thus transport network, new towns and infrastructures were built. This was necessary because, with the abolition of the slave trade, new forms of legitimate trade were needed to maintain the economy. As a result, the British had to expand their control over the territory and also open up ways of harnessing the abundant natural resources further inland. This had a massive impact on Nigerians as it completely changed their political, religious, economic and even socio-cultural institutions. This era initiated the rural-urban migration within Nigeria, and for the first time people began living permanently in close proximity to people from other regions. As Mgbeafulu pointed out

(...) pre-colonial migration was restricted to the region, territory or clan from which the migrant originated, unlike the wider horizon which colonial rule brought with it (...) the relative peace and security introduced under British hegemony, the nature of labour needs, the development of intra and inter regional transportation systems were positive stimuli (...) (Mgbeafulu, 2003, p. 22).

The British colonial administration and the multinational firms such as United African Company (UAC), International Chemical Industries (IC), G.B. Oliviant, United Trading company (UTC), *Compagnie Française de l’Afrique Occidentale* (CFAO), and the *Société Commerciale de l’Ouest Africain* (SCOA), controlled the market economy of the country, removing the traditional custodians of the various markets and trades.

These early decades of colonial rule in Nigeria also brought other non-Europeans migrants to Nigeria, who eventually gained great economic control as middlemen between the Nigerians and the European companies. These sets of migrant traders were mainly Lebanese, Indian, Syrian, and Greek (Falola, 1990). Some of their descendants are still part

of the Nigerian population, whose economic role and power one can see in present day Nigeria especially in cities such as Lagos, Kano and Ibadan.

As colonialists and other affiliated entities moved from the coast to the inland areas, they took with them their Nigerian workers from the already annexed areas (Mgbeafulu, 2003, p. 24). The main thrust of the migration of this era was that its flow was mainly south to north. Taking into consideration religion and the prohibitions on Western education by the northern emirs, the southerners were the only Nigerians with the skills needed by the colonialists, as they had received education through Christian organisations. Nigerians from the southern part of the country were employed by the colonial agencies as porters, interpreters, court clerks, messengers, tax collectors and so on. Yet the British tried to restrict the migration of these southerners to the north, to preserve the pre-colonial agreements with the north. This restriction was a bid to curtail external influences in Northern Nigeria, whose rulers wanted limited Western or even other indigenous influence in their region. This protectionism policy favouring the north was an integral part of colonial policy and its negative impact is still evident in the Nigerian political system (Albert, 1999).

Arriving the newly annexed areas, these Nigerian migrants brought bits of their culture with them including their food. This was evident in the eastern region, where most of the interpreters came from the southern coastal regions. Although they spoke Igbo, it was a dialect that was strange to the hinterland Igbos. Many of the hinterland Igbos did not know what to make of these black men, with “strange men” (Europeans) who, while addressing them, said “*ikem sii*” meaning in hinterland dialects “my buttocks is saying” instead of the intended meaning of “I am saying”. However, these early colonial workers opened up the internal contact between the diverse ethnic groups through religious, trade and political networks.

With the beginning of the British colonial rule, many found the motivation to migrate due to the fact that the new system brought on by British colonialism created political, economic and social conditions which propelled migration. The colonial regime introduced changes in the economic sector like new methods of taxation, a uniform British currency and infrastructural development. People had to (or were forced to) migrate to work for the colonial system and earn a wage to be able to meet the new obligations the system imposed. This labour migration was facilitated by the improved transport network, which sometimes was the reason for much of the migration in the first place, as many worked to build the railway links between the southern and northern parts of Nigeria. Many of these migrants abandoned rural farm areas for jobs in the urban areas, where they could earn a steady income (Oyebade, 2003). People from rural areas in Nigeria migrated to these urban areas in search of improved

economic opportunities. As men from Southern Nigeria built the railway network to the northern part of the country, they settled in towns along the route. Initially prohibited from taking any family with them, they later brought along their wives or siblings to help with domestic chores.

The establishment of urban towns in administrative and economic centres began attracting people from within and outside the locality to the new towns. However, the context of this internal migration differed across the country. Some of these migrations were temporary, especially in the north, where peasant farmers usually migrated to the urban areas in search of jobs to supplement their earnings during the dry season.

Migrations from the south tended to be more permanent, although the migrants still maintained a close link to their hometowns. Yet over the decades, the nature of this type of internal migration has been a constant source of conflict between the migrants and the indigenes, who see the migrants as usurping their opportunities. Nigerians also migrated to many neighbouring countries, following the colonial routes. The main destinations were Ghana, Cameroun, Liberia and Sierra Leone, although they were later expelled from some of these countries, as was the case in Ghana in 1969 (Eades, 1994; Ochonu, 2009; Meagher, 1997).

Many Nigerians were sent abroad to study especially in post-secondary institutions and universities from the late 1940s. This was to enable them to take over some of the jobs when the British eventually left. The destinations for these students were mainly Britain and the United States, where they built networks and contacts with the old African diasporas and other Africans. They engaged with other Africans on a pan-African level, which was useful for the subsequent agitation for independence across the continent (Falola and Heaton, 2008; Coleman, 1963).

With the oil boom of the 1970s and a buoyant economy, Nigeria saw an influx of migrants from different parts of the world. The government facilitated some of these immigrations to help curtail the lack of labour in some sectors (Van den Boom, 2010). People from different countries were employed to fill the numerous positions that were created due to the economic expansion of the 1970s. This was not to last though, with the slump in oil prices in the later part of the decade and the subsequent economic downturn. Many migrants were expelled from Nigeria, with the government (as is always the case with politicians all over the world) blaming the foreigners for the economic difficulties (Abegunrin, 2003). These economic difficulties were compounded by the drought in the Sahel region in the mid-1970s, which saw an influx of people from the northern region and neighbouring countries into the southern part of Nigeria. Many of these were peasant farmers who hitherto relied on the land for

their livelihood and having lost it moved southwards to seek for a means of survival.

Among Nigerians, different variables influence out-migration as stated by Mberu (2005). The link between education, ethnicity, religion and migration exists at the national level. For instance, the Kanuri Shuwa Arabs (although descendants of early Arab migrants) are generally non-migrants, the Hausa Fulani and Yoruba are predominantly rural-rural migrants, whereas the Igbo-Ibibio and Urhobo-Isoko-Edo are predominantly rural-urban migrants. Not only these, Christians are significantly more mobile than Muslims, and the highly educated are more likely to migrate to an urban destination. This is also reflective of external migration from Nigeria. There are more southern Nigerians and highly educated migrants living outside the country.

There are some people within Nigeria though, for whom migration is an integral part of their lives. The political demarcations by European political powers have done little to stop their ancient way of life. Among this group are the nomadic Fulani of Northern Nigeria and the coastal fishermen of Southern Nigeria. Both groups play an important role in the food supply of the nation. The Fulani herd their livestock across the northern region into neighbouring countries and to the grasslands of the Nigerian savannah down to the southern regions. This migration of the Fulani to the central region of Nigeria, where the people are mainly farmers who rely on the land, has been a constant source of conflict over the years. Many of the conflicts are traced to lack of grazing lands for the herds or crop destruction blamed on herds. This has ignited much inter-ethnic violence in the middle belt of Nigeria, which has escalated since the mid-2000s, and has continued to spread southwards where many farming communities now claim they can no longer go to their farms for fear of attacks by cattle herders from the north. Some of the Fulani herdsmen have now escalated the attacks on communities in the middlebelt and southern region. The violence is now so gruesome since 2015 and 2016, with whole communities (in some cases) have been attacked and driven out of their ancestral lands. Some have given it ethnic and political connotations, accusing the Fulanis of land grabbing. Plans for grazing reserves across the nation for the herdsmen have also met stiff opposition.

By the 1980s, due to years of mismanagement and corruption in military and civilian governments, austerity measures were imposed by the international monetary institutions. This led to a drastic change in the economic circumstances of Nigerians. Many professionals were retrenched from their jobs and could no longer afford the basic needs of life. This led many to seek employment outside the country, triggering the brain drain of the 1980s and early 1990s. The destination countries were mainly Britain, the United States of America, South Africa and the Middle East.

Despite this, during this period too, due to the political instabilities in some West African countries (especially Liberia), Nigeria became a receiving country for refugees (Adedokun, 2003).

The economic and political failures led to the near destruction of Nigeria's dynamism because the impact was felt across all spheres of society. For example, an agent for Saudi Arabia in one go recruited 5,000 nurses and midwives and 260 doctors in Port Harcourt (Hoerder, 2002, p. 553). This recruitment of professionals was happening in other cities all over the country, in a densely populated country that needs its medical resources for its citizens, and the nation never recovered from its effects. The increasing impact of emigration was such that the then military regime, felt a need to use the media to appeal to the citizens to remain in Nigeria, so they produced an appealing dramatized message aired across the nation. In this television message, a Nigerian actor Enebeli Enebuwa, as "Andrew", lamented all the difficulties in the country and decided to leave the country too, but was entreated at the airport, with a song in pidgin English "*Andrew no check out o Nigeria go better (...) stay and build your country (...) Nigeria go better, Africa go (...)*". This short drama was constantly shown on national television in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Nigerians including this writer got so used to it that the accompanying song was widely known and sang. Although this song became a constant play in the government-controlled media stations from the late 1980s, instead of deterring the Andrews, it seems to have propelled them not just towards airports but roads, rivers and any possible means of leaving the country.

According to Gordon (2003) an estimated 15 million Nigerians live outside Nigeria, and with the continuous migration from the country this number will keep increasing. Like many former colonies, the first choice of Nigerians in their migration is always Britain and then other English speaking countries, but this route to Britain was diverted once, new British immigration laws required Nigerians enter Britain with visas. The divergence in migration from Nigeria in the late 1980s and 1990s changed the face of international migration from Nigeria and the attitude of the receiving countries, many of who were unfamiliar with having so many people of a different race and language. Some events were pivotal in this increased migration. For instance, with the collapse of the Nigerian economy under corrupt military and civilian rules and the subsequent IMF and World Bank imposed measures, many Nigerians found it difficult to afford things they formerly took for granted (Adams J.R., 1991; Adedokun, 2003; FOS, 1999; Nightingale, 2003).

From the 1990s onwards, the migration of Nigerians involved people from all classes and gender. No longer were the professionals the only people migrating – people from the working class, both low skilled and

non-skilled, wanted the better life that migration seemed to promise. This led to an increase in migration to non-English speaking countries from Nigeria. Yet with the tightening of immigration laws of European countries, it became more difficult to acquire a visa to travel out of Nigeria especially for those who lack sufficient economic resources. To circumvent this, many began using the ancient trans-Saharan routes to North African countries like Libya, Morocco, Algeria or Egypt, from where they attempted illegal entry into Europe. This recent international migration has brought a negative impact on Nigeria by criminalizing migration, as human trafficking became rampant, with unscrupulous people using the hardship in the country as an opportunity to exploit others. Most of the victims of the traffickers are girls, who are forced into prostitution and can only regain their freedom after paying tens of thousands of euros to their traffickers (Carling, 2006). Many of those trafficked may not even know to which country they are being sent to.

Many of the Nigerian migrants from the early stage of migrations to Belgium did not have the country as their ideal location. However, different factors influenced their settlement here and the way they began establishing communities in their host country as they tried to build a new life, but many believed their migration was temporary and hoped to return home once they had acquired the necessary resources for a better life in Nigeria as testified by these statements

For those of us who came in the mid-1970s, we just came here to study with scholarship from the government. I came in 1976 but there were others here before that time (...). Our country was rich and respected then, so they were sending us to different countries to study. So if you don't get to Britain or America, you take the next option, hoping to move to these countries later (...) We just wanted to finish studying and go home but Nigeria began changing during the military rule. Even when some of us got married and our wives joined us, we still believed we will go home after studying but things became worse (TF, 2009).

My coming to Belgium was not really planned by me. I wanted to go to America or Britain to study but there were difficulties in getting the admissions and scholarship sorted. So when my brother informed me that there was a scholarship to study in Belgium and asked if I was interested, I said ok. I knew nothing really about Belgium but I was tired of waiting for something in America or Britain. This was in 1964 (JI, 2007).

However, many married and children were born, thus making it more difficult to make a permanent return to Nigeria, especially with the lack of improved political or social and economic amenities. This lack of an improvement in all sectors of the Nigerian society, has led to more Nigerian diaspora communities across the world. Despite this, many Nige-

rian migrants endeavour to contribute to the economic wellbeing of their families and friends through monetary remittance and other supports too. Many Nigerians also engage in different forms of investment especially in real estate in Nigeria, as the mind-set still remains that proof of one's economic achievement should be seen at home.

As shown above, the migration pattern in Nigeria has changed in response to historical, economic, environmental and political influences. Some of these changes have been initiated by global rather than internal events, as will be shown in the following pages.

2. International migration trends: relating theories and concepts to the Nigerian migration context

Migration is not unique only to Nigeria and can be precipitated by global trends. Hence, the intention in this section is to understand how international migration theories are conceptualized and how applicable they are to the Nigerian situation. The question being raised here is this; taking into consideration the diversity of migrants and their routes, is it really possible to fully analyse migration or posit a universal representation applicable to all, including the Nigerian situation? Not only this, historically, what can migration tell us about people, society and the penchant for some people to move while others remain, and how the journeys have changed over the years from the African perspective, thus examining how those who left and those who remain, have been able to make an impact on each other's lives.

Migration has been an integral part of human existence since the beginning of mankind (Adler and Gielen, 2003, p. xiii; Koser, 2007). Marsella and Ring (2003, p. 3) went as far as claiming that "the impulse to migrate is inherent in human nature – an instinctual and inborn disposition and inclination to wonder and wander in search of new opportunities and new horizons". Furthermore, a study of migration, as Manning (2005, pp. 1-2) stated, is a study in world history as it addresses a long time period and explores experiences drawn from many regions of the earth. It also emphasizes the connection in the human experience, encouraging one to think of connections as every migration connects a point of origin and destination. This is illustrated clearly by international migration and brings into focus the fact that, when people move, there are some who also stay, whose impact on migration is not fully researched. In as much as they did not migrate, they are also an important aspect of migration. Sometimes they are the reason some leave and are also the lighthouse that guide migrants home amidst many challenges. Many survive the often at

times treacherous routes of migration and look homewards because of those left behind.

An international migrant, according to the United Nations, is a person who stays outside his or her country of residence for at least a year. In as much as migration is connected to important global issues such as poverty, development and human rights, as a multifaceted and challenging phenomenon, there are varied factors that influence the context of migration across the globe, including the old and new African migrations.

In present migration discourse, globalization is seen as having accelerated the movement of people and capital from one end of the world to the other (Obi, 2007, pp. 115-116). In his work, Obi also used the migration of Ogonis from the oil-producing Niger Delta area of Nigeria, to highlight how the economic interest of Western entities and government can propel migration, noting however, that while the developed countries are insisting on the opening-up of economies of poor countries, they are closing their doors to migrants from these countries. Looking back on history, one can then infer that the economic interest and policies of the developed countries have always tried to dictate and influence migration trends. Another good example of this is the mass migration of workers from former colonies as a result of the industrial need of the European nations. These workers were allowed in to help build the Western economies but restricted in later years when the migration is seen as of no major benefit or use to the receiving countries.

It is noted earlier that spatial mobility has indeed been a fundamental social and historical aspect of African life; hence various forms of population movement in response to political, economic, religious and security situations have been recorded since early times (Adepoju, 1995, p. 87). Prior to the arrival of Europeans on the shores of Africa, Africans were able to move freely from one region to the other unless in times of conflict. There were trade routes across the Sahara, between the north and west and via the sea, between the east, west, south and central regions. The close cultural affinities between African nations even after the demarcation of nations by European colonial powers blurred the division between internal and international migration in many regions (Adepoju, 2006). Not only was there increased internal migration, voluntarily or under duress to serve the colonial purpose, but Africans were also introduced to a new form of international migration. As the European focus shifted from trading to political annexation, some Africans became exposed to international migration as receiving nations, firstly through Europeans' arrival in Africa and then through Africans' travels to unknown parts of Africa and Europe, in aid of various colonial agendas and projects.

A major impact of external influence on African migration is the establishment of African diasporas in different parts of the world. The slave trade as horrific as it was and although the movement was not voluntary, still meant that Africans were moved due to the economic interest of Western powers and settled in various unfamiliar regions of the world, from which vibrant African diaspora communities have emerge.

There was also the African participation in international migration due to the First and Second World Wars. African soldiers were conscribed into the various European armies and sent to fight and die in different parts of the world (Vandervort, 1998; Killinggray, 2010; Waters, 1997). Many others, as a result of the introduction of Western education, were sent by colonial governments to study in their countries in the west. Migration for studies was the prevalent international migration trend in many African countries until the political and economic woes, which befell many nations from the 1960s onwards (Ngo, 2007). Many of the early Nigerian political and economic leaders benefited from this migration for studies abroad. It was also while studying abroad that these leaders became exposed to the pan-African political activism among students and African diasporas. This in turn propelled the demand for and eventual independence of many African nations.

With political independence in many African countries came political turmoil too. As many nations struggled to stabilise their nations, more crisis due to wars, failed economies and Western-backed sanctions brought more hardship. Thus, Africa became a major source of legal and illegal international migrants in the world.

So far we can see the complex nature of international migration across the world and evidence of the various theories postulated by different academic scholars. Some of the divergent theories as addressed by Massey *et al.* (1993) include theories hinged on labour and economic differences, such as neoclassical economic theory, the economics of migration theory, dual labour market theory, and world systems theory. However, Massey *et al.* (1993) recognised that migration is continuously evolving. Having said this, it is still obvious that many human migrations are a result of bad decisions by national governments, which eventually impacts negatively on the citizens. These could be bad policies or governance that affects the citizens' standard of living (Samers, 2010; Lucas, 2005). Not only these, as Massey and Taylor (2004) enumerated, some factors may include the disparity in wages and income between sending and receiving countries, the employment potentials of destination countries and the influence of emerging economies. This migration for economic opportunities has changed the flow of international migration. No longer did colonial ties or language determine where people would migrate to, but people now often move to countries with no previous ties to their nations as long as they

view such a nation receptive and offering opportunities for a better life. This trend is very much evident in the mass migration since the summer of 2015 across Europe, where many people from Syria, Afghanistan, north African countries and other countries with no conflicts, instead of seeking asylum or settling in the first country they reached, preferred to walk for days across other European countries to reach Germany where they feel there is a better future for them. Many more are camping at the Calais channel crossing, hoping to reach Britain.

If the above theories and hypothesis are applied to the Nigerian situation, the context of many Nigerian migrations are identifiable within them. The highest peak in Nigerian migration was during the corrupt military regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This also coincided with the IMF and World Bank imposed sanctions, which further increased the number of migrants drastically. Many of those who migrated, skilled and unskilled, were expecting a better income. Within the Nigerian diaspora community are many who left family and spouses behind to migrate, as a means of improving the families' economic situation. Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in the number of Nigerians migrating to different countries of the world where there is no colonial link or commonalities in culture or language. Presently there is a remarkable number of Nigerians waiting in North African nations to cross into Europe with many more losing their lives during the risky crossing of the Mediterranean in unreliable boats. Many of the migrants, irrespective of the obvious risks in trying to migrate, still see migration to countries deemed better than their homes as a necessary thing to do to improve their lives.

This is obvious from some of the response of migrants interviewed in Belgium (although the same reasons can be found in most migrant communities):

“(...) so after having a good job in insurance I had nothing (...) so I had to leave (...) I had the option of going to Holland but I decided to come to Belgium” (AB, 2008).

“I wanted an opportunity to make it (...) there is nothing back home compared to here (Belgium) for me and many others it is better even without paper, one day things will change” (TB, 2010).

Yet another stated, “we (with spouse) discussed it and decided it is better if one person travelled and the other stayed with the family. It was supposed to be him but when the person doing (arranging) the visa said it will be easier for a woman, we paid him for my own” (NI, 2010).

The number of migrants worldwide has increased from 152 million in 1990 to 173 million in 2000 and by 2015, 244 million people were

living outside their country of origin (IOM, 2016). This new trend challenges the homogeneity of many nations. The population of most nations, especially in Europe, has been irreversibly changed. By 2000, 7.7 per cent of the total European population was born outside Europe, while today according to the International organisation of migration, 3.3 per cent of the world population are migrants. Despite this, it is worth noting that the majority of migrants living in Europe are from within Europe (Penninx, Bergher, Kraal, 2006; Lucas, 2005; IOM, 2016).

With the increase in international migration and the change in the immigration policy of the developed countries, undocumented migration accelerated. Since many of these migrants rely on unconventional methods to migrate, many are exploited and lose their lives in the process of migration (Moses, 2006; Spener, 2009; Cohen, 2006). Some of the migrants from Nigeria on their way to Belgium or other European countries had to first travel overland to other African countries up north. As one of the interviewees TB (2011) stated,

We had to travel first to Kano, from there we went to Niger and then North Africa, I don't want to remember what I saw on the way (...). I stayed in Morocco for more than a year before moving to Libya. Morocco people are not like these ones you see here (in Belgium), I was surprised when I was told these ones are from there. The people are good, they will help you if you are in trouble, give food even money, they treat people well; the ones here are different. When people complain about Morocco people here, I tell them their people are not like these ones, it was in Libya that people were even bad, really wicked. I thank God my sister sent me money to leave and I was able to come to Belgium.

However, many were not as lucky as the above respondent, as many get stuck in the north African nations, where their situation became quite precarious during the political Arab spring uprisings and many more die en-route to north Africa and Europe.

A new development in international migration is the increased number of women migrants. About 49 per cent of migrants worldwide are women. This has been linked by some scholars to changing gender relations in countries of origin (IOM, 2011; Koser, 2007). Some of these women are victims of human trafficking, a very negative side of migration.

In the Nigerian post-colonial migration, women migrated mainly to join their spouses living abroad, but in recent years more women migrate independently or as a result of human trafficking. Until the mid-1990s, many of the trafficked women, who did not give their consent, were still sold to work as prostitutes. However, having paid off their sponsors (or owners) many of the women were able to accumulate enough wealth to build houses in Nigeria and change the economic status of their families.

Moreover, despite the stigma that prostitution normally carries in Nigeria, many of the women got married, further challenging the traditional notions about prostitution, since marriage added to the women's social and cultural value. Thus, other women then saw prostitution as a way out of their limited means of survival in Nigeria and sought out the traffickers, requesting to be brought to Europe to work as prostitutes. Although on arrival in Europe, some as a way of getting out of their agreements with the traffickers, claim they did not know they will be working as prostitutes.

Human trafficking and undocumented migrants have led to the criminalisation of international migration by politicians and some sectors of the public in the developed world. There has been an increase in anti-migration sentiments in Europe, as some people now see it as a threat to their national sovereignty and security. This view has been exploited by xenophobes to fan the embers of racism. Migrants in this rhetoric are portrayed as an economic pest, or worse, the enemy within (Koser, 2007; Cohen, 2006). These sentiments are also exploited by politicians, leading to more votes going to those with far right views. A good example of this new stance is the British referendum vote to leave the European Union, one of the main arguments for the Brexit team was immigration.

It is obvious that migrants make an immense contribution to economic growth in both their countries of origin and destination countries. Of the World Bank estimated 20 trillion dollars earned by migrant labour in the world, a majority is invested or spent in the countries where they work. Migrants also remit huge sums of money to their countries of origin. According to the international organisation of migration (IOM), 440 billion dollars was remitted by migrants to their home countries in 2010. Money that migrants send home is an important source of income in many developing countries, more than the official aid provided by richer countries (Koser, 2006). The socio-cultural impact of international migration has also been immense. As a result of international migration, many nations in the world have acquired some level of diversity through food, music, fashion and much more.

Irrespective of what scholars may believe influences or causes international migration; it has been consistent and continuous all over the world. Some scholars attribute this to the existence of migrant communities in different destination countries. Initial labour or economic migrations are soon followed by family reunification or other flows of migration through established networks. Migration network is defined (OECD, 2011) as sets of interpersonal ties which connect migrants in areas of origin and destination through ties of kinship, friendship and shared origin. Examples of this is also seen among Nigerian migrants,

I knew about Belgium at home but in terms of the *tokunboh* (second hand) cars. I never planned on living outside Nigeria not to talk of in Belgium. I was like Bel what? I met my husband in a party in Nigeria and we had the same circle of friends. However, the downside was the Belgium, I did not want to leave Nigeria for a country I knew existed but not for anything more than second hand goods. I had people interested in marriage from America and Britain but I said I would not be a posted wife. Be careful what you say because, not only was I posted to a husband, it was one in Belgium (AI, 2012).

I had lived in different parts of Nigeria before coming to Belgium. When I decided to travel out of Nigeria, I wanted somewhere that was a bit cool. Not a country that is rowdy and too fast. I knew someone who was living in Belgium, who told me that although it was a police state, there were jobs (AO, 2012).

I had no idea about Belgium but knew Europe existed. You know in school we have to read about places like Europe and I got information from newspapers too. To come here I had to move from Owerri to Port Harcourt, trying to find a way. I knew someone already living here and he told me it was a good place to come to. I sold property and everything I had to come here based on his influence. When I got here it was in November 1993 and my problems started from the airport (...) (NO, 2012).

For Nigerian migrants, as shown above, these networks are established from home, through friends and family members living abroad. Some of the Nigerians living abroad (Belgium included) insure that other members of their families also migrate to European countries or other countries in the world. This they do most of the time through paid agents or other migrants who are able to acquire visas for these relatives. These relatives could be a sibling, cousin, nephew, niece or spouse. Not only this, in Nigeria, there are agents touting visa-procurement services. They erect signboards on streets advertising offers of visas to various countries of the world. Many of these agencies collect huge sums of money to procure visas to countries in North Africa, Eastern Europe or Asia, promising an easy passage to Western Europe from these destinations.

As seen in the preceding pages, no concept or theory truly covers migration fully due to its inherent complexities, but rather each migrant has different reason(s) for leaving. The divergent migration theories to some extent are applicable to the Nigerian international migration trends. Most Nigerians were propelled by political, social and economic factors and networks to migrate to Belgium or other developed countries.

Moreover, developed countries like Belgium, through different government and non-governmental agencies, in a bid to accommodate the continuous inflow of migrants, have put in place mechanisms to meet the needs of migrants and assist with their integration into their host community. With all these structures in place, as many settle down they

are followed by others. Hence the mitigating factors for migration can be found in the sending countries as well as the receiving country. Having given a broad overview of migration in Nigeria 1.

3. The migration of Africans to Belgium

Belgium, with an ancient port in Antwerp, had contact with Black Africans long before it became a colonial power. In the 16th and 17th centuries there were blacks already in Antwerp. Most of these were slaves and servants brought back to Europe by their owners. In the 16th century, Antwerp and Lisbon had the greatest African colony (settlers) in Europe (Zana Etambala, 1993, pp. 1-7). Although it might just be to add an element of exoticism to their work, Africans can be seen on the paintings of some of the great Belgian painters. Examples are Peter Paul Rubens's portrait "*Vier studies van het hoofd van een moor*" (1615), Joos de Momper's "*Jachtpartij bij een kasteel*", and Hieronymous Francken's "*Het Kabinet van de Kunstliefhebber*" (1621).

By the late 1870s, the British Geographical Society's reluctance to support Henry Morton Stanley's exploration into the Congo provided King Leopold II of Belgium the perfect opportunity to realize his dreams of having a colony. The fact that the government and the people of Belgium were not keen on acquiring colonial territories did not deter him. So, indirectly and unintentionally, he laid the foundation for the direct contact between Africans of Nigerian origin and Belgium. The events that enabled King Leopold to achieve his goals, and its consequences in the Congo, have been adequately addressed by numerous scholars such as Adam Hochschild (1999), Guy Vanthemsche (2006) Ch. Didier Gondola (2002), Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002). Hence, I will address this era only as it concerns Nigeria and Nigerians' migration to Belgium.

Nigerians' contact with Belgium began in an indirect way, through Leopold II's Congo colony. At the inception of the Congo venture, personnel were needed to help administer the colony, and West Africa, especially Nigeria, provided many of this staff. As early as 1883, a contingent of Hausas (referring to Nigerians of varied origins), commanded by the English Captain Sawley (or Sanley), was in the Congo. This group consisted of mainly Yoruba with only two Hausas, and by 1886 there was already a whole company of Hausas in the Congo. Nigeria was the single source of recruitment from 1883 to 1901, with 5,585 recruits or 45 per cent of the total force for the Congo. This was possible at this time, because most of these freed Nigerian slaves spoke some English, which, with French was the main language of the colonialists. Besides as ex-slaves they were used to the ways of the Europeans (Samari, 1989, pp. 44). They were part of what

was called the Force Publique. It was composed of these “Hausas” (who were the elite of the new force), but included other Africans too. As these soldiers were skilled, used to the environmental conditions and the ways of the white men, they were supposed to make the Congo colonisation easier. Thus, Africans working against Africans became the irony of European occupation of Africa (Gaan and Duigan, 1979, p. 73).

For the Congo, administrative staff was also recruited from Nigeria. These Nigerians provided the services needed to build the foundation of the Belgian Congo. Ironically some of them also helped end the Leopold era, by liaising with people working to expose slave labour and inhuman treatment of the Congolese. Prominent among these early human-rights campaigners were the Congo Reform Association’s E.D. Morel, the British Consul Roger Casement and many clergies. They documented the atrocities in the Congo and used this to put pressure on Leopold’s Congo regime (Ewans, 2002).

Below is a map showing Nigeria, the Congo and Belgium, indicating the routes of early Nigerian migration to Belgium.

Map 2



Map from author.

A Nigerian who paid the ultimate price for helping Morel was Hezekiah Shanu. A Nigerian of the Yoruba ethnic group, born in Lagos in 1858, Hezekiah Andrew Shanu joined Leopold's Congo service in 1884. He worked as a recruiter for the Congo's Force Publique in Nigeria and later as a clerk and French-English translator in the office of the governor-general in Boma. In 1893, he established a successful business in Boma, Congo. Shanu was the first Nigerian on record to visit Belgium during this period. In 1894 he embarked on a European tour of Belgium, France, Germany and Britain. He also enrolled his son Ridley at the Tienen College in Belgium, a trend that, nearly a century later, many Nigerians would replicate. Shanu enjoyed enormous patronage from the colonial leadership in the Congo and Belgium, until he fell out of favour for assisting the investigators of the Congo human rights abuse and tragically committed suicide being bankrupt and ruined (Etambala, 1993, pp. 22-23; Nzongola Ntalaya, 2007, p. 25; Hochschild, 1999).

4. Nigerian migrants in Belgium

As African nations regained political independence, they established diplomatic relations with other nations, which previously may not have had any direct contact with their countries. These diplomatic relations were mutually beneficial politically, economically and sometimes socially. For nations existing in a world divided along ideological and political spheres, new diplomatic ties helped to emphasize their independence and build diplomatic relationships, which was necessary for foreign contacts and policies in the community of nations (Jackson and Rosberg, 1984).

Nigeria, a former British colony, established a consulate in Belgium in 1963 with Mr B.N. Okigbo, as the first ambassador. This was just three years after gaining independence. After diplomatic relations between Belgium and Nigeria were established, in 1964 ten students from Nigeria were offered scholarships through the Nigerian Ministry of Education to study in higher institutions in Belgium. In 1965, these students, made up of one female and nine males, and selected to reflect the ethnic diversity of Nigeria, arrived in Belgium. The Nigerian Embassy in Belgium arranged for them to live with French-speaking families in the Walloon region. The idea behind this arrangement was that it would enable them to master the French language, which would be the language used for their studies¹². Unlike other migrants that arrived later from Nigeria, this set was com-

¹² This immersion for language skills meant that those from this set and others who arrived to study in the early 1970s were able to learn and communicate well in the Belgian languages unlike later migrants.

pelled to learn and master the French language. This language skill was a necessity not just for studies, but also to build social networks outside their community. It must be noted that at the time of these students' arrival in Belgium, Nigeria with a fast-growing economy had a very good education system. So, when people opted to go outside the country to study, most tended to choose English-speaking countries. Any other destination was most times intended as a transit point to an English-speaking university. This was to change. The Nigerian Ministry of Education, in line with the diplomatic policies of Nigeria, offered (or received from countries) scholarships for students to study in countries that had diplomatic ties with Nigeria. Thus, students were sent to the USSR and other Eastern and Western European countries.

Between 1966 and 1970, Nigeria fought a civil war. This war, with the exposure and reactions it generated in Europe through the electronic and print media, brought Nigeria and its people into the lives and homes of Europeans, including the Belgians. As food was used as a weapon of war due to the actions of both sides of the conflict, starvation devastated the Biafra region. Images of people, especially children, dying of malnourishment particularly due to kwashiorkor, were seen all over the world.

A lot of Belgians got to know Nigeria through the Biafra war. The humanitarian agencies working in Biafra helped send people out of the war-ravaged region, to any country in Africa or Europe that would accept them. Some of these people followed contacts from the aid organizations and other international agencies to Europe. Those who got to Europe from the defunct Biafra were not particularly choosy about which country they went to. All they wanted was a safe haven to start life all over again. Some of them settled in Belgium. A Nigerian from the Biafran section, who was among the early migrants, stated that when his set arrived in Belgium after the Nigerian civil war in the early 1970s, Belgians knew very little about Nigeria, but kept asking if they were Ghanaians (which he did not know why)¹³, but when they said they were from Biafra, many knew about Biafra (JU, 2006).

The Biafra war news was widely carried in all the major Belgian papers of that era. Evidence from the archives showed that *Le Soir*, for example, at the beginning of the war in 1967, published 45 articles on Biafra, which rose in 1968 to 139, in 1969 to 129, and in the year the war ended (1970) 39 articles were published. *Le Peuple*, the social-democratic paper, also carried articles soliciting for donations to Belgian aid organisations (*Red Cross, Caritas Catholica, L'Entraide Socialiste, and Solidarité Libérale*) for

¹³ This may be because Ghanaian migration to Belgium precedes Nigeria's. In the official statistics of Belgium, Ghana has a dedicated entry of data when Nigeria was still referred to with other nationalities.

Biafra (*Le Soir* 1967-70, *Le Peuple* 1969). Moreover, some Belgians fought and died as mercenaries on both sides of the conflict. Belgium was also one of the countries that placed an arms-trade ban on both sides of the conflict due to the humanitarian campaigns (de St Jorre, 1972).

By the early 1970s, there were many Nigerian students, especially in the Catholic University of Leuven. The majority were priests or adherents of the Roman Catholic faith. These Nigerians came via the contacts their Nigerian church dioceses had established with Belgian Catholic societies and churches. It is worth noting that most of these Nigerians were from the eastern region. In this region, before the war, there had been a large number of foreign Catholic clergy. The Nigerian students from other regions of Nigeria studying in Belgium in the 1970s were mainly in the University of Brussels and other schools in the Walloon part of the country.

Presently in Belgium, there are Nigerian Catholic priests and nuns, and Anglican pastors, who work in different Belgian parishes especially in the French-speaking region. Anglophone Africans have been able to establish parishes in Brussels and Antwerp, through the efforts of Nigerian Catholic priests. The mass in the Anglophone parishes are in English, while the priests working in Belgian parishes had to learn the national languages.

For these Nigerian students who arrived in Belgium in the 1960s and early 1970s, with the Nigerian oil economy still strong and the rulers less corrupt, theirs was to be a temporary migration. Many of them had planned to return home after their studies, while some intended to move over to English speaking countries such as Britain, Canada or the United States for further studies before going home. The plan to return home after studying was thwarted by circumstances at home and in Belgium.

The economic downturn in Nigeria from the late 1970s and recurrent political instabilities due to constant military coups and corruption changed the context of Nigerian migration, especially to Belgium, as many Nigerians no longer saw Belgium as a transit point. It was this period that heralded the establishment of the present Nigerian diaspora community in Belgium, as people realized their migration was more of a long-term residence than the temporary one they (had) hoped for. If circumstances had been different at home, there may not be a Nigerian community in Belgium to speak of.

As the economic situation back home began having impact on Nigerian society, some of the students had their scholarships and financial support from Nigeria reduced or cancelled. However, they had already established a support network in Belgium, which helped to cushion the effects of these changes. According to an informant (who was a founding member of the association), the students formed an association of Nige-

rian students in Belgium. This was modelled on the Nigerian students' union in Nigeria. To acquire legal status and establish a strong presence in Belgium, they decided to register a non-profit organisation (*asbl* or *vzw* in Belgium). Since they lacked the skills and required legal status to register their union, they sought the help of a man from the Benin Republic, Mr Constant Donat Ajanohun. Mr Ajanohun had the experience and contacts needed in setting up the *asbl/vzw* as well as the language skills to run this organisation. This association was registered in 1975 in Brussels, as a non-profit organisation named "*Conseil général des étudiants étrangers en Belgique (C.G.E.E.B.)*" (Moniteur Belge, 1975).

The coordinator (Ajanohun) widened the scope of membership to facilitate its registration. With funds obtained from membership registration and organised activities, this association helped Nigerian students in need and acted as guarantor for students who had lost their funding and support from home. As having a guarantor was a requirement for enrolment in schools, many students, including non-Nigerians, got help from the association. This enabled them to continue studying or to be able to register at the communes and remain legally in Belgium. Many of these former students are now community leaders within the Nigerian community in Belgium.

Since they relied completely on Mr Adjanohun, soon there was a crisis of confidence because being the initiators and main fundraisers, the Nigerian students felt they had no control over the affairs of the association. Thus according to one of the founders they decided the association should fold up in 1978.

The migration from Nigeria in the late 1980s and 1990s changed not just the trend of international migration from Nigeria, but also the attitude of the destination countries and the Nigerian society. With the collapse of the Nigerian economy under corrupt military rulers and the subsequent IMF and World Bank imposed measures in the 1980s, many Nigerians found it difficult to afford their basic needs. Although the 6th oil-producing country in the world, there was (and still is) widespread poverty in Nigeria. This increased sharply between 1980 and 1985 and again between 1992 and 1996, with more than 70 per cent of the populace earning less than a dollar a day (Thomas and Canagarajah, 2002; Adedokun, 2003; FOS poverty profile for Nigeria 1999, F. Nightingale, 2003).

During the first phase of migration, due to difficulties posed by the working languages, cultural and legal requirements, Belgium was not one of the destinations for Nigerian professionals in the 1980s and early 1990s. Most of the highly skilled professionals were interested in going to destinations where they could still practice their professions. Yet, the spill-over effect of this phase of migration impacted on Belgium. Many low skilled

and unskilled Nigerians, determined to escape the hardship in the country, migrated to any country in Europe, Asia, America and even Africa that they can get into (Adepoju, 2008).

As the immigration policies of the destination countries became more rigid, migrants, including Nigerians, tried alternative means of gaining entry into the countries. They made efforts to beat all economic or legal obstacles, by travelling through the ancient cross-Saharan trade routes to North African nations and eventually try to gain access to Europe as I pointed out earlier (Barou *et al.*, 2012).

Nigerian professional footballers were the only group that moved to Belgium to practise their profession. Football in Africa is not just an important leisure activity, but footballers from the continent have become important symbols of recognition and achievement. Nigeria developed an interest in football, football clubs and competitions early in its modern history because of Europeans migrating to Nigeria. Over the years many Europeans have been employed as football coaches or managers for different clubs in Nigeria. Many of these European coaches and managers used their positions to recruit the best Nigerian players for European clubs, including Belgian ones. Football clubs in the Belgian Flemish regions, persuaded possibly by the bilingualism of the Belgian nation, recruited many players from English-speaking countries such as Nigeria.

By the 1990 to 1991 football season in Belgium, there were more Nigerians than Zairians (a former Belgian colony) in the top two divisions. For many of these footballers, their stay in Belgium became a launching pad for careers in other countries (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001; Aleg, 2010; Ming li *et al.*, 2011). Notable among the Nigerian football players in Belgium in the 1980s and 1990s were the late Sam Okwaraji, Ben Iroha, late Stephen Keshi and Philip Osondu at Anderlecht FC, Chidi Nwanu at K.S.K. Beveren, Etim Esin in Lierse, Daniel Amokachie in Brugge, while Ademola Adesina, Sunday Oliseh, Celestine Babayaro and many more played for several Belgian clubs. For a football-mad nation (many in Nigeria believe the only time of a true united Nigeria is during international football matches), following the careers of the members of the Nigerian national team playing in Belgian teams, created more awareness about Belgium. Sadly, many Africans including Nigerians, who migrated seeking the glory of international football careers, have been disappointed and exploited in Europe by unscrupulous football agents (Bodin and Sempe, 2011; Hallinan and Jackson, 2008; David, 2005).

The economic difficulties in Nigeria meant many could no longer afford to buy new products. As a result, the second-hand goods market for items from cars to underwear thrived. Nigerians began importing second-hand cars from European countries especially Germany, the Netherlands

and Belgium. This is because these countries use the left-hand-drive vehicles like Nigeria, while the cost of shipping was cheaper than from countries further out. This new trade in second hand goods was possible (and thrived) because the Nigerian students living in Belgium provided information and support to visiting businessmen, in terms of accommodation and contacts (and later became middlemen). As a result, Belgium became the centre for exporting second-hand cars, electronics and other things to Nigeria. So great was the volume of this trade that people began referring to second-hand goods as “Belgium” (Okoro, 2008, p. 247; Nwolisa, 2003). Many of the Nigerians who migrated to Belgium from the mid-1990s, knew the country because of the second hand imports.

This exportation of goods from Belgium was greatly facilitated by former students, who not only acted as middlemen but also had the funds to set up car depots or garages for vehicle exports. These vehicles, especially buses and trucks, were loaded with different second-hand products for sale in Nigeria. The wealthier businessmen also used shipping containers to send their products to Nigeria, this included cars which have been cut up for the spare parts market. This new second hand business trend meant many of the Nigerian students (or former students) and newly arrived migrants had access to financial resources to sustain themselves in Belgium. In view of the financial opportunity available to them and the worsening situation at home, many did not bother about making plans to go back to Nigeria permanently. With the situation worsening at home, the Nigerians who visited for business and those already in Belgium began the transition from temporary to permanent migration.

The increase in modern international migration necessitated a change in the role and approach of governments, labour, economics and Western agencies, as they now had to re-evaluate or reassess their approach to the migrants. Networks of Nigerians already resident in Belgium provided support to other migrants intending to migrate especially to Belgium. On arrival, the newly arrived migrants are coached by the older residents, regarding avenues for regularizing their legal status. For example, this involves information on where or how to date a European for regularization through marriage. Information and methods needed for asylum procedures were also provided. Sometimes these involved risky and dangerous procedures. According to J.I. (2009) when he arrived, someone invited him to join other Nigerians living in a dilapidated building, popularly called “*anti colongo*”, situated where the French community offices are now located in Place de l’Yser, Brussels. The house became a haven for migrants as there was no landlord, so older residents brought in more people – at times there were as many as 15 men in a 10 sq. metre room. In this house, would-be asylum applicants were coached by older residents on what to say during meetings with refugee agencies.

He further stated “one day (...) came in to join us as he has just arrived and when asked if he had “*eaten aduro*” (sought refugee status) before and he answered yes in Germany, (...) came up with the idea to use a candle light and burn all his fingertips, so that his finger print will not be matched to existing samples if checked” (JI, 2009).

The unique thing about this phase of migration was that, unlike previous Nigerians who came to study, many of these were poorly educated, unskilled and included many women, whose sole purpose was to make money by any means possible. Most of the women had been procured for prostitution by agents in Nigeria. Thus they knew they would be sold to work for “Madams” as prostitutes in Belgium or other European countries. This did not deter them as their aim was to make money and alleviate the poverty in their family. Moreover, having seen the wealth other women who migrated to Europe had amassed back home in Nigeria, as a result of their years as prostitutes, they saw prostitution as a way out. This started a vicious circle as the newly recruited prostitutes, once they had the financial resources, also recruited girls from Nigeria to work for them. This flow of migration due to its nature attracted the most negative reaction against migration from Nigeria to European countries, including Belgium. A Belgian Member of Parliament, Jean-Marie Dedecker, while speaking against Nigerian prostitutes in Belgium in the early 2000s, stated “The Nigerian Embassy helps them to falsify their passports. After petrol, the biggest export of Nigeria is people” (Knox, 2003). As most of this set of Nigerian migrants came from homes that were facing financial difficulties because of the change in the nation, all their focus was to help their families back home. On arrival many were shocked by their first experience of Belgium especially the weather;

My first impression was shock. My sister and my husband just mentioned that it would be cold that I should dress warmly, so I bought what I thought was a warm jacket and wore opened toe shoes. It was in the middle of winter. It was in Amsterdam that I knew something was wrong. While we were waiting for our connecting flight to Brussels, I mentioned to another Nigerian there, that why wouldn't these Europeans once in a while turn off their air conditioning because it was really too cold. He told me there was no air conditioning that it was winter. When we landed in Brussels, I was shivering. I also found the language difficult. I still prefer English speaking countries because it is easier to fit in there. Here I don't have any Belgian friends, where will I even meet them? (CG, 2010).

My first shock was the cold. The day I arrived, I came dressed like I was in Africa. They said the weather here was okay, only for me to get here and nearly died of cold, but people were walking around with normal clothes. Once I met other Nigerians, I felt okay except for the lack of paper. It is not like now. Then people will be in their houses just discussing and visiting each other and the next thing you will hear is a knock, police. Someone had called them to

say there are a lot of black people in so and so address. You wake up every day with fear following you around, especially of the Gendarmerie. When you see that their colour on a vehicle your heart will jump (AE, 2010).

You come with great hope but the reality is different. The language, the cold and lack of papers were great problems. On arrival, I applied for aduro and went to a centre in the Flemish area. I stayed there for just a few weeks. Once I filed (submitted) my papers, I left the centre and moved to Brussels (CM, 2010).

I arrived in November and the weather was a shock. The cold and snow we saw on TV back home was nothing. When you enter Belgium, you see the difference. Even if you were wearing three sweaters, you still felt the cold in your bone. Another shock for me was these people, these onyibos (white people) you see, their character is different; their view of life is different from our own. To see a husband and wife that live in the same house, leave their house and be kissing in public, holding each other. Everywhere you turn you see them. Is it a film, for what, so that people can see them or what? It was a shock and still is even today (FO, 2012).

Despite the shocks, these migrants were not bothered about their comfort: all their focus was on ways of getting employment and money. Once this was realized even in distressing circumstances, they sent most of what money they made home. The reason for this was the lack of official documents. They could not open bank accounts and also knew the risk of sudden deportation is real, so it made more sense to send money to family back home to help them invest or save, although many later realized this was a mistake as some of them stated,

Some of us including me were wearing only two trousers, while shipping all we got and had, back to Nigeria. It all went (is lost) but that is life. I have forgiven all. If I find money, I will just build a house for my children in Nigeria. Somewhere they can stay when they travel home (...) (FO, 2012).

(...) because I had no paper. I ended up living in more than 30 houses in Brussels. There is no commune I did not live (in) or at least sleep there for some time. There was a Ghana man that owned a restaurant then, we used to go there to eat and when there is nowhere to sleep, you can beg him and he will say ok but you have to go away until the customers are all gone. You are given a chair and sit there and sleep until morning, imagine. Early in the morning you leave and you are not allowed to use any water there, they will tell you water costs money. For a year, I moved from café to café, I had no home. My toothpaste and tooth brush were in my pocket always. When you tell these new ones (Nigerians migrants), they think it is just a story but it happened to many of us. The treatment then affected our lives, even when I had no place to sleep, I must ship a car every month and at the end of the day, did my relatives keep anything? When I got my papers and went home, I saw that my relatives have wasted everything (MJ, 2012).

Over the years, the Nigerian central bank has noted a huge increase in the monetary remittance from Nigerians living abroad, accounting for 6.9 per cent of the GDP. Remittance for 2004 was 2.3 billion USD, 2005 6.5 billion USD, 2006 10.6 billion USD and 2007 17.9 billion USD (Afolayan, 2009). The remittance from abroad is bound to increase more in the coming years. Many living in the country have seen their quality of life improved as a result of remittance from Nigerian diasporas.

The attitude and quest for financial growth by the Nigerians migrants from the 1990s, forced the earlier migrants who came to study since the 1970s and earlier, to reassess their position. One of those who came to Belgium to study in the early 1970s, had this to say about the difference,

those of us who came to study were still hoping things will improve at home so we can go back home but when it didn't, we just managed our lives looking for our daily bread but when this Babangida set (referring to the 1990s Nigerian military dictator) came, they made us realize daily bread was no longer enough (...) (TF, 2006).

Unlike the Nigerian migrants who arrived earlier and were legally in Belgium, the latter group was mainly undocumented. They used the crisis in various African countries to seek asylum and claimed various nationalities under different names¹⁴. Although many of them had their official addresses in areas deemed favourable for regularization of status (through marriage or asylum), sometimes they actually lived in areas with high migrant populations. Some communes in Brussels, especially Anderlecht, Molenbeek, Ixelles and later Schaerbeek, became a haven for Nigerians. Those who were fortunate enough got their status regularized through marriage or a successful asylum application. For Nigerian migrants, the main problems they faced differed, for those who came earlier their main challenge was racism while those who arrived later faced racism and also lack of residency permits. This was psychologically daunting and exposed many to a life of continuous fear and exploitation. Some were even exploited by their fellow Nigerians and the security agencies in Belgium, who took advantage of their vulnerable status as

¹⁴ In as much as Nigeria had economic a downturn in the 1980s and 1990s, it was not enough grounds for many Nigerians in Belgium to gain refugee status. Many had to claim to be from countries that had serious political crisis at the time. Some of those who succeeded to get a refugee status this way had to live with the consequences. Firstly, many bear names that were not their given names, because they had to take up names that are identifiable with where they claim to come from. As a result those that were educated in Nigeria cannot do anything with their certificates in Belgium. Some are left almost in a stateless situation in Belgium, as they could not get the passports of the countries they claimed to come from, and those who could, will have to apply for a visa to visit Nigeria. Not only that, some are unable to bring their families over to Belgium, because they did not state any links to Nigeria.

shown by the statements below. The experience shared by those I interviewed is something many of the early Nigerians in Belgium can relate to. The first narrative below captures the different challenges people encountered;

(...) I was taken to the centre (refugee) and I started calling this my contact but he was reluctant to pick the call. I will call, it was not even his phone but that of one Rwanda person but he felt he was too big to come out and meet me. He wouldn't even come out, how can a senior associate with a toad. It was horrible. After a month, two, three, I wanted to go mad, after everything, am here but without anything to do. The worse thing was when this my contact eventually spoke with me and asked if I had any money. I told him I came with 1,600 dollars. So he told me if the authorities saw me with the money they would deport me, so I gave him the money. I never saw him again for months and never got my money back. Even where he took me to stay after I left the centre, he just left me there and the people said I could not stay because I had no paper.

In St Gillis, we were living in a house with (...) and other Africans. Some of us had the orange paper but many had nothing. Around 3 o'clock in the morning, police opened our door, it was terrible and the brother of (...) you know him, jumped down from upstairs and scattered himself. I entered *poubelle sac* (refuse bag) and closed it.

(...) many people did not own a mobile phone and for a black man who gave you the guts to walk freely with one. In the first place how would you get it. This Jewish man (his employer) gave me a mobile phone so that he can reach me anytime he needed me. I used to put this phone in my pant, not my trousers, I hid it there always. One day as I was going on an errand the police in that their golf (car) saw me, they stopped arrested me but instead of taking me to their station, they took me to that stadium area in Anderlecht and began searching me. They found the phone and asked whose it was and I said mine. They took my phone, entered their car to leave but as they meant to drive off I jumped on their car and said they must give me back my phone. As I was talking I had no paper on me, not even newspaper but I was fed up and decided that whatever would happen should happen (...) actually it was money they were looking for. If you don't have paper, you cannot keep money at home or in the bank. You turn the inside of your trouser and sew the money into the waist, you wear your belt and it will cover it. Soon the police discovered that (money sewn into waist bands), so when they arrest you, they would take you somewhere else to search you. They would check how thick your waist band was and then loosen it (MJ, 2012).

The main problem then, was not even the lack of paper but the wickedness of the people and the police. A white person will dump things on the street, maybe electronics and things like that. The things are there on the street but when you picked anything from there, they would tell you to put it back or

they would call the police. Once, I was with (...) and we saw things dumped on the street but when we went to pick them, one white man angrily told us to leave them and (...) shouted back at him. The man then said he was calling the police, so we walked away. A few minutes later, a police car arrived and they saw another black man walking along the street and picked him up. He did not do anything but because we had no papers, we could not go to the police to say, see what happened and you have the wrong person. Many black people paid for things they knew nothing about, because for these people, all of us look the same (ZO, 2012).

The Belgian federal police were wicked then. It was only after that their Dutroux case that life became relaxed for us. Before that case they will stop you anywhere, at any time. We were making a lot of money through the car business. When you don't have an ID, you cannot open an account as such you will see people carrying thousands of dollars on them. Your pocket was your banker and because we all lived in houses where people come and go, most times you couldn't leave your money at home. If the police arrested you for not having paper, they would take all that money on you and the person was still sometimes deported. Who would you report to, when you don't have paper (VN, 2010).

The police searching and confiscating money from migrants was experienced by many of the early Nigerian migrants, who due to their undocumented status in Belgium then were too scared to report these police officers or seek redress. It is unlike presently when there are different charities and advocacy groups one can go to, for assistance even if the person is undocumented and the report is about a government official or agency. Despite the difficulties with the police, many were more accepting of that experience, than what they experienced from fellow migrants.

Are you talking of Belgians, some of our people were worse. Acacia (café) was the place we used to go. What did I eat that I would go to them and bring out my hand to shake their hands? Now we all sit to discuss, then (at the time) how dare you. These people did not even have strong papers, just orange card, only a few had papers through women. Did they have the guts to go to the women? Yet they would ask you on what level you were coming to them to shake their hands or talk to them. You would pay some to go with you to refugee centre to act as translator, you would say one thing and they would say another thing to the officials. Our people even became informants for the police and that was why I moved so many times (AJ, 2012).

The police were not our only problem then. We also had Nigerians, who, because they were married to Belgians or through other means had their papers were really exploiting other Nigerians without papers (...) Even in the cafes, you come in to sit down and they will be like, what is this one without papers doing here, go somewhere else and sit down. It was really bad but I see most of them now and how bad their lives turned out (AE, 2010).

It was horrible, the fear that followed you everywhere. Our people that managed to get their papers then turned into gods. Who are you to be in the same place with them or talk when they are talking? When you saw them or entered somewhere and greeted them, they would not answer you. Those of us that did not have paper were treated like rubbish; I have collected a slap from (...) for talking when he was talking. Why? as someone without paper, you were expected to buy the ones with papers drinks once they requested it from you. You would give someone money to keep for you and he would spend it all. There was nothing you could do about it. I remember (...) said he could get jobs for us and we paid him 6,000 Belgian francs each, there were 12 of us. When we all got to the farm in St Truiden area, the farmer chose only two people but (...) refused to refund the money we paid. He even threatened to deal with us if we disturbed him (EO, 2010).

Look at us now, enjoying ourselves. It was not the same in that early 1990s. Everybody lived with fear because we didn't have papers. Without papers it was as if you were an outcast. If you were about entering your own house, where you live; you would first of all, look left and right to see if there was someone in uniform around. We feared all uniforms; who cared if they were police or post man. If you sighted someone in uniform, you would just pass your house, really walk pass your door, as if you didn't live there. You would walk far away from there and return home only when you thought it was safe. The police were feared so much. If they arrested you, took all your money but still left you to go, you thanked God. You don't even worry about the money (FO, 2010).

Despite what many will term as negative experiences with Belgians, many of those interviewed also remembered the kindness of many Belgians and other Africans. They remembered retired and practising doctors and pharmacists who offered them medical care, when they could not go to hospitals because they had no papers and for fear of being dictated as undocumented migrants. Some of those who had official documents also allowed other migrants to use them to get medical treatments or travel to other countries to seek better opportunities or to work. A good example is the following testimony:

We also looked out for each other. There was a day we were drinking and papa came with his boys. Papa was an old policeman in charge of the Midi Bara area at that time. We all knew him; sometimes he just joked and passed, at other times they would come for control. We were at *Petit coque* there in Midi and soon the police were everywhere. Of all the Nigerians there, only one or two had papers, the rest of us had nothing. Some had their business money on them. We just thought that was it but, (...) stood up, advanced slowly to the door and then ran out of the cafe before the police could start their control. All the policemen, imagine their intelligence, left us and chased after him giving us the opportunity to run for our lives. Eventually when they

caught him, they realised he had his papers, actually he was the only one that had his papers. He only ran to try and divert the attention of the police from us (...) (VE, 2010).

Many Nigerian migrants were undocumented until the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the Belgian Parliament on December 22nd 1999 passed into law, the regularization of illegal foreigners living in Belgian territory (Fischer, 2001, p. 1). Most undocumented Nigerians were able to file for regularization under any of the four categories stipulated by the government. This mass regularization was precipitated in part by the reaction to the tragic death of an undocumented (supposedly Nigerian) female migrant, Samira Adamu. She suffocated while being restrained by the Belgian officers deporting her to Nigeria. The public outcry led to the resignation of the Belgian Minister of the Interior. Many of the Nigerians living as undocumented migrants in Belgium in the early 1990s, believe two unfortunate incidents in Belgium changed the public's attitude to Black African migrants and their lifestyle in Belgium. These were the death of Samira Adamu and the Marc Dutroux paedophile case. Firstly, by bringing into question the treatment of migrants. Secondly, by cutting down the power of the then dreaded gendarmes (the federal police) because of the credibility issues the case raised about their officers.

In line with article 74(7) of the 1980 Immigration Act and the 1992 Police Act (article 34 paragraph 4), before these sad incidents, the federal police could stop or check the documents of anyone of migrant origin, no matter where they were or what they were doing (Carling, 2005; IOM, 2004). With the changes mentioned above, many undocumented migrants in Belgium, as long as they broke no laws, could live in Belgium without having any encounter with the police. This has reduced the tension in most migrant communities, enabling the communities to thrive in Belgium. Many Nigerians, once they are granted legal residency, apply for Belgian nationality. On acquiring Belgian nationality some move to any of the English-speaking countries in the Western world, where they believe they will have better opportunities.

As at January 1st 2011, the Belgian office of statistics recorded the population of foreigners in Belgium to be 1,057,666 million people, an increase from 971,448 in 2008. Since Nigeria began having a distinct entry in the Belgian statistics, there has been a steady increase in the official population of Nigerians. According to the Belgian population statistics office, compared to all the population data for Africans in Belgium, in 2008 Nigeria accounted for 1.64 per cent of the total (2,275/138,422) and as at 2011, that stands at 1.75 per cent (2,941/167,971). However, the highest foreign populations are still from former Belgian colonies like

the Congo, French-speaking countries like Cameroun and those that had previous labour-migration agreements with Belgium, such as Morocco.

5. The demography of Nigerians in Belgium

Dealing with migration statistics from the developing world is difficult, as countries like Nigeria are yet to implement adequate migration policies that will help produce accurate data (Salt and Singleton, 1995, p. 85; Van den Boom, 2010, p. 321). Despite the official Belgian statistics, stating the actual number of Nigerians in Belgium is nigh impossible. The reasons for this are varied. Some Nigerians are undocumented and do not feature in the official data. Secondly, many have acquired Belgian nationality and some others have claimed asylum as nationals of other countries. Data from the Nigerian embassy are also incomplete, as many do not bother to register at the embassy. Membership of the various cultural associations and churches, although a good means of collecting data on Nigerians, is limited because quite a number of Nigerians belong to neither group. However, based on the data from associations, churches and the Nigerian embassy, but taking into consideration other variables; such as those who got their residency by claiming other African nationalities, have nationalised in Belgium or are undocumented, one can estimate the population to be far above the official data as at 2015, at least more than double that number.

The main Nigerian ethnic groups in Belgium are from the southern section of the country. The northerners are very few. They do not have any cultural or social impact within the community. The main Nigerian ethnic groups living in Belgium are Igbo, Yoruba, Edo and some from the different ethnic minorities in southern Nigeria. Nigerians living in Belgium can be categorised under different groups. The first group consists of the diplomatic staff of the Nigerian embassy. Due to the nature of their job, these people always get reposted to other countries or back to Nigeria. However, the embassy also employs Nigerians who are not members of the diplomatic corps, and many of them have worked at the embassy in Belgium for decades. They are actively involved in all aspects of Nigerian community life and are the first point of contact for Nigerians needing any form of assistance from the embassy. They act as an accessible link between the Nigerian community and the diplomatic staff. Some of the Nigerian diplomats during their tenure are also involved in various religious, ethnic, social and cultural activities within the community.

The second group belongs to the various ethnic and town unions or associations. The origin of these associations can be traced to internal migration in Nigeria during the colonial era. When people migrated to different parts of the country away from their regions, they set up these associations or town unions wherever they lived. The aim was to protect their interests, support each other and initiate development projects in their towns of origin (Coleman, 1971, p. 424; Honey and Okafor, 1998, p. 137). With the increase in long-term migrations to the Western world, many Nigerians began organising themselves into associations or unions, as they are popularly called. The aim is similar to such associations at home. However, in addition to developing projects back home, emphasis is also laid on promoting the culture and traditions of the ethnic groups, through language and cultural activities for children born abroad and non-Nigerian spouses. Not only do the unions organise cultural events in Belgium, they act as a support network for members of the community especially undocumented Nigerians. These unions also offer financial assistance to members, especially for funerals, repatriation of deceased members and burials (Abott, 2006; Sklar, 1963; Gordon, 2003).

Despite this, many Nigerians are not members of the unions or associations, but are affiliated to the Nigerian religious groups, especially the Christian Pentecostal churches and the indigenous Nigerian Christian denominations. There are still other Nigerians who, for personal reasons or where they live, do not relate with other Nigerians.

Nigerians in Belgium are more in the Brussels and Flemish regions than the Walloon region. Many believe that despite the Flemish nationalist parties' rhetoric when it comes to immigration, there are more opportunities for them in the Flemish region, in terms of training, education and jobs. Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent have the highest number of Nigerians and others live in the various towns and villages in the Flemish region.

Many of the associations are sought out by newly arrived Nigerians, once they get to Belgium. It is worth noting that, since the mid-2000s, many of the organisations are becoming registered charities (*asbl/vzw*); not only does this grant them official tax-exempt status, but it also enables them to ask for grants and subsidies to carry out projects within their communities. Below is a list of the main Nigerian organisations in Belgium in 2012.

Table 2

The main Nigerian Religious and Cultural organisations in Belgium	
Name	Location
The Redeemed Christian Church of God	Brussels and Antwerp
Association of Nigerian Priests in Belgium	Leuven
The Anglo--phone Catholic Community	Brussels and Antwerp
The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church	Brussels and Ostend
The Christ Apostolic Church	Brussels
The Celestial Church of God	Brussels
The Eternal sacred order of Cherubim and Seraphim	Brussels
The Grace of God mission	Brussels
Association of Nigerians in Belgium	Belgium
Ohanze ndi Igbo Belgium/ EU Chapter	Belgium
Igbo Union	Brussels
Igbo Union	Antwerp
Igbo Union	Gent
Otu umunwanyi Igbo Belgium	Brussels
Oduduwa descendants Union	Brussels
Urhobo Progressive Union	Brussels
Peoples Democratic Party Belgium Chapter	Brugge
Nigerians in Diaspora Europe (NIDOE)	Luxembourg
National Association of Nigerians Belgium	Brussels
Edo Women's Association	Antwerp
Association of Nigerians/Africans in Belgium	Antwerp
Noble Sister Association	Antwerp
Royal Women's Association	Antwerp
Delta State Association	Antwerp
Nwanne di na Mba Association	Boutersem
Edo Union	Heusden
Global Village	Ostende
The Nigerian Women Association Belgium	Brussels
There are also Town /Clan unions and associations for people from different parts of the country.	

This list was compiled by the author with additional information from the Embassy of Nigeria, Belgium.

Having explored the migration of Nigerians to Belgium, the subsequent pages will focus on the foodways of Nigerians in Belgium and how this is reflective of their identity. Irrespective of which group Nigerians belong to, their use of African food (Nigerian food) as defined earlier, is

one common factor among them. Nigerians in Belgium have divergent consumption patterns in relation to Nigerian food. This is influenced not just by their access to Nigerian food, but factors such as financial status, family composition and personal choice also come into play. How food is utilized within the homes and in relation to ethnic and national identity will be examined further.

The trajectories of African and Nigerian migration have had to change over the years. These changes highlight certain uniformity in migration, but are also reflective of the complexities of modern migration. Theories abound expounding reasons behind modern migration, yet as shown above, in certain areas of the world like Nigeria, diverse factors mitigate migration within and outside the country. In turn these factors have enabled an increased Nigerian migration to Belgium.

Adjusting to various changes at home and in Belgium is a continuous process that impacts on the lives of Nigerians in Belgium. This meant many have had to revalue their intentions and expectations, with regard to their stay in Belgium. Nigerians have made efforts to mobilise available resources in adjusting and creating an enabling environment, as they find their place in the new environment. Sometimes, events outside the group have provided the needed opportunities or push for change in their way of life in Belgium.

As shown in preceding pages, the host nation's policies via political or economic agencies have invariably impacted positively on the group. These benefits and a sense of group identity provide Nigerians with the confidence to create forums and possibilities for group affirmation and a sense of belonging within their community and in the host country. These identification processes through food has also evolved and manifests in different forms.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Nigerian foodways in Belgium

1. Is it like home? Seeking familiar food in Belgium

Other African migrant communities existed in Belgium prior to the migration of Nigerians to Belgium. Among the existing migrant communities were North Africans from Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, and East Africans, mainly from the Congo. Each of these groups has its foodways (which sometimes may be similar), but also partake of the host community's foodways. Hence, North Africans, especially from Morocco have a close culinary affinity with other Muslim and Arab migrant communities in Belgium. The Africans from sub-Saharan Africa share some similarities in their food, especially with regard to food items and spices, but not necessarily the way it is cooked.

For the Nigerian students, who were among the first group of migrants of Nigerian origin, it was to the Congolese that they turned as they negotiated and established social networks. These early contacts enabled them to lay the foundation for a group identity, needed to sustain their foodway in Belgium.

Firstly, they shared similar food and accessed desired food items through members of other communities. This is in line with Fox's (2006) assertion that "when various ethnic groups are forcibly thrown together, there is both an intensifying of food identity and a growing mishmash" (Fox, 2006). Despite the nostalgia and cultural conditioning, for migrants, availability, accessibility and affordability of familiar food are the key components necessary to transcend from "borrowing the cuisine" of the "other" to having a distinct foodway away from home. The migrant food is a symbol of personal and group identity and provides a base that enables individual choice, while still maintaining affinity within a larger group. It can also be a riddle of "stability and change, of borrowing and diffusion without growing similarity or loss of identity (...)" (Wilk, 1999, p. 248).

Migrants have to be flexible because change is a constant part of their lives. The ability to confront and adapt to changes in their everyday lives, but still be able to retain culturally ascribed food habits, is part of the enigma of food and migration. The new environment inadvertently

positions the migrant as the “outsider”, which necessitates him to realign his position, to affiliate and consolidate within groups that share some common identifiable traits, no matter how small. This builds identity markers that can distinguish how groups are similar and yet different. As Carole Counihan noted “food practises work as a conservative force, that prevents social change and obscures the political imperative, to acknowledge difference, while on the other hand, it is precisely in the field of cross-cultural experience that it has worked most powerfully and helped materialize, if not to resolve conflicts in positioning” (Counihan, 1999, p. 7).

The first Nigerian students who arrived in the mid-1960s, despite the various migrant groups in Belgium, sought out other African social contacts, especially the Congolese residents in Belgium. These Congolese contacts in turn granted them access to “familiar” social networks, which helped minimise their cultural isolation and shock. The Nigerians recognised that, as citizens of a former Belgian colony, these Congolese contacts would be helpful in their efforts at building new social networks in Belgium. Not only were the Congolese Black Africans, they also owned “cafés” with provision for dancing, drinking, eating and socialising. As Belgium was still very much divided along colour lines in the 1960s, these were the only establishments Nigerians could freely go to.

A Congolese respondent talking about this period said,

We were all Africans, the same. My sister, my brother (...) it is not like now (2004) (...) we were forced to go to our own places, then if you go to a Belgian café or club, they will allow us girls in, but not the men. Even where or when we go with the men, or see African men in clubs and go to dance with them (...) there is always trouble (...) fights. So we just go to our cafes (...) especially at Ixelles, you know the matonge area (...) (MA, 2004).

This relationship among black Africans was further highlighted by CH (2010),

(...) any African you see is your brother or sister. Wherever you see an African you will be happy not like now, you don't even say hello. I remember a friend of ours, said he was in a tram when he saw a black woman in another tram going to the opposite direction, they started waving frantically to each other and both got down at the next stop, rushed back towards each other only to realise they do not even speak the same language but they were happy and then such meetings will give you great joy.

These cafés provided the Nigerians the opportunity of eating “home food”. This quest to eat home food was not without difficulties as testified by the following statement from a Nigerian respondent:

The cafés are not really cafés, like you have now; they were just small spaces where people can dance and eat (...) they were mainly owned by Congolese women who were married to or staying with Belgian men (...) as you come in, the smell is just like home food but when you ask for the food and they bring it out (...) you just can't eat it, the cassava is different, soup, rice everything is different, so we only took fried plantain, white rice and hot sauce. It is not like now (...) (PI, 2008).

Although the food served in these cafés was prepared with food items known to Nigerians, yet the cuisine was unfamiliar. Moreover, visits to these cafés were rare, as the students could not afford the cost on their student's allowances. To deal with this shortcoming, they bought food (especially familiar items like meat, rice, potatoes and tomatoes) and cooked it to taste like "Nigerian food". This is really a reflection of the statement by Anderson quoting Bell *et al.*, that "to eat the familiar is to be home at least in the heart (...) and (...) sense of place is very much involved with the sense of taste" (Anderson, 2005, p. 135).

The urge to achieve the taste of home cooking and satisfy the nostalgia for home food was something that Nigerians prior to the 1990s experienced to varying degrees, and many created various coping mechanisms to support their quest for home food. Some of the respondents, who were students in the 1960s, narrated their experiences thus, "Our landlady was always surprised at the quantity of meat we bought, we made stew, used it for both rice and with spinach for *fufu*, the *fufu* is not like now. It was with potatoes flakes and flour. It was never the same but it was like home food to us then" (PI, 2008).

You can boil potatoes, rice but when you want to swallow like Africans do, now where on earth will you get things to pound, and that brings another level of problem. So gradually you have to try and adjust, trial and failure, or somebody will tell you I tried this and it worked and you start to make that. So that is how we started using potatoes for *fufu*. You know potatoes are like yam, so we use it but you know that for Europeans they prepare it with milk, which is their puree. So how will you be able to eat potatoes made with milk with our soup. We had to learn other ways of making it (CH, 2009).

Coming from a society where meat is a highly valued food item with ascribed prestige, this cultural influence from Nigeria was exhibited by these students by the quantity of meat they bought. The meaning attached to meat as a status symbol may not be unfamiliar to the landlady mentioned above, as most societies value meat highly. However, it took some time for the Nigerians to master how to cook this "soft" meat. They were not used to its tender texture, and cooked it for the same length of time they would cook the tough meat preferred in Nigeria. Initially ending up with

unsatisfactory results, they soon mastered how to achieve better culinary results. For some of these early migrants, the ability to shop posed another challenge in getting food in their new environment. Another respondent clearly articulated some of the challenges thus,

(...) Before even you know where to shop is another thing. You know at home you may be passing and see a shop and go in to get what you want to use in cooking. Here it is different, different things are in the shop in different places and you need to know where to look. Even if you want to ask the natives you have to know first, the name of the thing you want before the person can advise you. You don't know the name of that item in the language and that is a shock. You use gestures, flap your hands like wings, trying to indicate it is chicken you want. Soon you go with a dictionary and you point the thing out and they will go o chicken, you want to buy chicken. I remember initially when we wanted to buy chicken and I forgot the dictionary at home. However, by then we have started to learn the language, so I went to one of the staff, a very nice lady, to ask for chicken, you know you learn first in the language, father, mother and so on, after much demonstration, I asked for the mother of the egg. She sat down and thought for a while and went oooh and took me to the section for chicken (HC, 2009).

Culinary knowledge acquired through trial and error has helped migrants to satisfactorily utilize food from their new environment. This in turn is passed on to others within the community, forming part of the migrants' foodways, which has elements from home and the new place. A Nigerian who was a student at KU Leuven in the early 1970s, further confirmed the extent migrants can go to, for familiar food and the strong role nostalgia plays in the migrants' foodways. To satisfy the craving for Nigerian food, with his Belgian girlfriend (now his wife), they tried different unimaginable combinations. Explaining further she reminded him of their egg "egusi" and he stated that,

"Yes, we will make a sauce with spinach to be used as soup, then scrambled eggs and poured it into the sauce (...) the sauce will then look like egusi soup (...) we didn't have egusi then and it tasted nothing like egusi soup but it looked like egusi soup so we ate it and were satisfied" (EO and MO, 2009).

The remarkable thing about the above narrative is how it brings to the fore the role the senses play in eating (Cardello, 1996, p. 4). These students drew satisfaction from their sense of sight and visual concept of familiar food rather than taste. The efforts put in by these Nigerian students further highlights the importance migrants attach to food as a dynamic link to home, which is sustained by nostalgia and memory. When the opportunity presented itself, the Nigerian students made efforts to obtain real Nigerian food.

The staff of the Nigerian embassy in Belgium have over the years facilitated access to Nigerian food for some living in the Nigerian diaspora. Being diplomats, their access to Nigerian food from home has always been possible and easier. They sometimes give out the food items they bring or receive from Nigeria to Nigerian friends and acquaintances. This practice has not changed and many Nigerian leaders when on official trips to Belgium bring large quantities of food items, which they donate to the staff of the embassy.

Once in a while the embassy orders bags of rice and stock fish, which Nigerians can buy cheaply through them. However, being members of the Nigerian elite, a foreign diet has always been a part of their habitual diet. So, food amongst this group of Nigerians represents a dual cultural and social symbol, which changes depend on whether they are in Nigeria or living outside Nigeria. This implies that the environment people find themselves in can dictate the importance they accord to certain foods.

Sometimes, unusual methods may be employed by migrants to acquire familiar food as shown by some Nigerian migrants. During the 1970s and 1980s, the staff of the Nigerian embassy often provided other Nigerians with information that helped them acquire “home food”. During this period, the Nigerian National Shipping Line still had ships sailing the oceans of the world and whenever one of their ships was to sail into Belgium, the embassy staff informed Nigerians in Belgium, especially the students. These Nigerians, once a ship from Nigeria had docked at Antwerp port, collected used electronics from Belgians or salvage dumps and took these to the port. They exchanged these electronic goods for Nigerian food with the Nigerian sailors aboard the ships. As one respondent put it,

this was before they started buying and shipping all these second-hand goods, then we got them free, some Belgians will even thank you for helping them remove the things (...) gas cookers, television, fridge, all sorts of things (...) we will go to Antwerp and all the sailors will come out to pick what they want and we will exchange them for food like yam, egusi, ogbono, dried fish, dried vegetables, crayfish, garri (...) and we will go away happy, knowing we will eat real home food for a while (TF, 2009).

These Nigerians utilized the earliest form of acquiring goods, trading by barter, just to have a taste of home. This portrays the unique position culturally ascribed food has in the psyche of individuals. Away from home, their desire for home food and importance attached to it, over other types of food that they could have easily acquired, becomes another avenue of expressing who they are. Food for the migrant is not just about sustenance, but it is also an identity marker, because it sustains cultural identity from which people shape their individual identity (Harbottle, 1997, p. 87).

For Nigerian migrants in Belgium in the 1970s and 1980s, this system of acquiring food from Nigerian ships was not constant as the ships arrival was infrequent, as were also food parcels from Nigeria. This meant there was the need for a more consistent means of acquiring home food. This demand was eventually met with the establishment of Nigerian restaurants and African shops some of which were owned by Nigerians in Belgium.

2. Nigerian restaurants and the making of a diaspora foodway in Belgium

In many countries, migrants have initiated ethnic businesses to cater for the needs of their communities, which cannot be met by the mainstream community. Through these businesses they supply their communities with goods and services that are unavailable in the host community (Kerшен, 2002, p. 3). Moreover, becoming entrepreneurs reduces for migrants the difficulties posed by lack of skills and resources in the mainstream labour market (Sahin *et al.*, 2007, p. 105). These facts are applicable to the Nigerian situation in Belgium and led to the origins of Nigerian restaurants in Belgium.

With the influx of Nigerian migrants into Belgium in the late 1980s and early 1990s, constant access to familiar food became a necessity. Some of those who arrived earlier to study became owners of car-sales depots, while many of the undocumented Nigerians who lacked the permit to work became involved as middlemen or exporters. This car-sales business was attractive because it could be done regardless of one's legal status and gave fast returns. Hence, in the 1990s all Nigerians, irrespective of their legal status in Belgium, endeavoured to ship all forms of vehicles (loaded with goods) back home. The Midi area of Brussels, along Rue Bara, in the late 1980s and early 1990s became the main business area for car exports to Africa, including Nigeria. Today, the centre of secondhand car export to Nigeria and other African countries have shifted to Rue Heyvaert in Anderlecht. Most of the Nigerians who lacked business premises were often in the cafés around the Midi Station, especially the "Petit Coque". They were not in these cafés for the food only, but as contact for transacting business and drinking with associates. These cafés became the places for inquiring about available vehicles, who is selling what, where and at what cost. With many of the Nigerians being male and single (without families in Belgium), they needed somewhere they could eat familiar food. Going to other African restaurants had proved unsatisfactory, for reasons stated earlier.

The Ayeni brothers, who studied in Belgium, were one of the foremost Belgium-based car exporters to Nigeria. Due to the number of their clientele from Nigeria, a restaurant that would cater for them was a necessity

and a good business opportunity. As a result, as early as 1993, the first Nigerian restaurant was opened in Belgium. This was meant to cater for Nigerians on business trips to Belgium and for non-Nigerians who wanted a taste of Nigerian food. This restaurant, the African Taste, was opened on rue Wayez in Anderlecht by a close friend of the Ayeni brothers, Jimi Ogunjimi. In a correspondence with Mr Larry Ayeni (in 2012), who had relocated back to Nigeria, he stated that;

African taste restaurant was a combined effort of all of us at Car Trends then, but Mr Ogunjimi was the one that actually put everything together and (...) it was to provide a proper restaurant for our large clientele. We had earlier been providing a free in-house catering for the clients but when the lady in charge of cooking left and the client base grew, the African taste idea was born.

Efforts were made by the management to insure that this restaurant met the standard of classy restaurants in Nigeria. This made it impossible for many Nigerian migrants to patronize the restaurant, because it was too expensive for most of those living in Belgium. Many were students or undocumented migrants, eking out a living from lowly paid jobs from which they constantly remit money to their families back home.

To plug the gap created by the inability of Nigerians to eat at the “African Taste” restaurant and meet their demand for affordable cooked Nigerian food, some Nigerian women mainly from the Yoruba ethnic group, began cooking and selling Nigerian food. They sold cooked food at street corners, close to the business area where the car garages and businesses were located. Thus, Nigerians and other Africans, who solicited for jobs or engaged in petty businesses around this area, could buy food from these women. These food sellers were like “mamaputs” in Nigeria; one could pick and choose what was affordable from a variety of dishes. Soon, more unemployed Nigerians joined the street-food trade, increasing their numbers rapidly.

From the mid-1990s onwards, some of these Nigerian street-food vendors sought permanent locations in the Brussels metropolis. Soon, these “mamaputs” metamorphosed into Nigerian restaurants, although they had no official Belgian status as restaurants in terms of registration, taxation or even food safety controls. Some employees of these earliest restaurants bought over the restaurants from their employers, while others took over shut Belgian cafés and turned them into Nigerian cafés or restaurants.

When the population of Nigerians in Antwerp increased, with the arrival of mainly Nigerian women, especially those who worked the streets, Nigerian restaurants and clubs were also established to cater for the Nigerians living in that region. From the onset until now, the Nigerian restaurants in Belgium are owned by Nigerians, serve only Nigerian food and are sold to other Nigerians if need be. However, the position of the restaurants as the main source of cooked Nigerian food was eventually changed.

As more Nigerians acquired legal status in Belgium, those that had families in Nigeria began the process of family unification to bring their families over to Belgium, while many of the single men went back home to marry. Once their wives arrived in Belgium, most men stopped using the restaurants as their main source of Nigerian food. This was influenced by the dictates of Nigerian culture, which expects responsible married men to eat at home, while married women are often not expected to be in bars or cafés, which is how these restaurants are classified by Nigerians.

Presently, most of the patrons of the cafés are men, because for many, the cafés serve as a social meeting place for drinks with friends and associates. For some men, though, the restaurants are still the main source of cooked Nigerian food, especially for single men and those married to non-Nigerians, whose knowledge of Nigerian cuisine is limited. Since the 1990s, many of the restaurants operate at the edge of legality, thus tend to change ownership often or close down, especially once the aspirations of making huge profits are not realised. The early Nigerian restaurants in Brussels were located in the Anderlecht and Molenbeek communes.

Over the years, the restaurants' cuisines have become associated with the ethnic group of the owner or the person who cooks the food. None of these restaurants is owned by trained chefs or cooks. The Nigerians, who in recent years have been trained as chefs, kitchen helps or cooks' assistants, prefer working for establishments owned by Belgians or other Western nationalities. This is because most of the Nigerian restaurants hardly pay legal wages as they tend to focus on their profit margin. So, their staff is composed of mainly family members or non-documented Nigerians whose pay is about 25 euro for a day (in 2008) for nearly 12 hours of cooking, serving and cleaning; this has not changed much since then. Many newly arrived Nigerian migrants accept this as a stepping stone to better opportunities, as the people they meet in the cafés might help them build contacts and gather information about life in Belgium (Nwolisa, 2004). Being undocumented meant these workers cannot demand for the legal pay which for the tasks and hours they put in will be much higher.

Of importance also is that many of those who own these restaurants lack the necessary documentation and resources to legally operate restaurants in Belgium, and thus some are registered as belonging to charities catering for needy Nigerians. This is a way of circumventing the requirements they needed to fulfil to operate a café or restaurant in Belgium. This quest for shortcuts also reflects on the services in some of the restaurants. Since they cater to fellow Nigerians, some of who patronize them due to personal relationships, many lack adequate facilities and do not implement the necessary standards applicable in Western catering businesses. Over

the years, some have been shut down by the health inspection agencies. For the owners, maximising profit and moving on to better things seem more appealing than continuously improving the standard of their services and facilities.

Yet it was the restaurants and cafés, facilitated by the African shops that helped lay the foundation for a distinct Nigerian foodways in Belgium. Since the first restaurants were opened, they have been a constant and evolving source of Nigerian food in the public space. Below is a sample of a 2012 menu from a Nigerian Restaurant in Anderlecht.

Table 2. Menu of former Genesis Cocktail Bar, Gheudestraat 27, 1070 Anderlecht.

SOFT			CAFE		
Guinness	3.00 €		Coffee	2.00 €	
Becks	2.50 €		Hot chocolate	2.00 €	
Juppiller - small	2.00 €		Tea	2.00 €	
Juppiller - big	2.50 €				
Leffe - Brown & Blonde	4.00 €		APERITIF		
Red Bull	2.50 €		Muscador	10.00 €	
Aroma Biffon	1.50 €		Martini - Red & Rose & White	40.00 €	
Fanta, Coca cola, Water	2.00 €		Campari	40.00 €	
Malt	2.00 €		Bacardi	
Schweppes tonic	2.00 €		Pisang	
etc ...	2.00 €		EAT		
WINE			Semoule - With bitter leaf		
Red & White wine - bottle	10.00 €		Egusi, Ogbono etc soup	7.00 €	
Red & White wine - glass	2.50 €		Pounded yam - with bitter leaf		
J.P Chanet - big	12.50 €		Egusi, Ogbono etc soup	8.00 €	
J.P Chanet - smal	5.00 €		Fried or jollof rice	8.00 €	
Red / White wine	15.00 €		Beans	3.00 €	
etc...			Rice & Stew	7.00 €	
CHAMPAGNE			Plantain	3.00 €	
Champagne - First Class	70.00 €		Goat head	15.00 €	
Champagne - Second Class	60.00 €		Fish pepper soup	10.00 €	
Champagne - Third Class	50.00 €		Goat meat pepper soup	5.00 €	
Hennessy	70.00 €		Roasted chicken - full	15.00 €	
Remy Martin	70.00 €		Chicken wings	5.00 €	
Jack Daniels	60.00 €		Brochette - a stick	2.50 €	
J.B. Whisky - Red	40.00 €		Roasted gor meat	10.00 €	
J.B. Whisky - Black	60.00 €		Suya - a stick	2.50 €	
Martell Cognac	60.00 €		Grilled fish with salad	15.00 €	
etc...			Spaghetti bolognaise	8.00 €	
			Salad	5.00 €	
			Salad & Frites	7.50 €	
			Pondu - Sakasaka	
			Poulet à la moambe	
			etc...	



Explaining the content of the menu above will help shed more light on the Nigerian foodways in the public space. Note that the cover of the menu states African and European dishes, but this is more a way to appeal to (or claim) a client base that extends to non-Nigerians as European spouses or friends of Nigerians patronise them too. The “European” dish in this menu refers to the brochette, salad and fries and spaghetti. Although the management included two East African dishes on the menu, as indicated by the lack of price, these are not served in the restaurant. A plausible explanation for their inclusion in the menu may be because one of the owners has links to East Africa, and may want to appeal to migrants from there too.

The price of food in these restaurants is seen as affordable by Nigerians who patronize them. Those interviewed pointed out the pros, firstly, the satisfaction derived from eating home food and the quantity served, when compared to food from mainstream restaurants costing the same amount. The drink list, as shown in the menu, is diverse to accommodate all tastes. Not only this, the inclusion of champagne and other expensive drinks can be a means of social differentiation. Some Nigerians use food to display their economic and social standing while dining out, being able to afford the expensive drinks, not just for one's consumption but for friends too, bestows recognition of prestige and generosity.

Some of the food prices are also influenced by the content and the preparation time. Thus, the goat head delicacy, which needs some knowledge of special culinary skills, is expensive as is roasted chicken, which in Nigeria is a prestigious food. Food such as plantain and beans, which are easy to prepare, are among the cheapest on the menu. The suya, although very cheap, is not prepared the same way as those sold in Nigeria, but is more or less grilled or fried pieces of meat with pre-packaged suya spices spread over them.

In naming their restaurants, the owners do not necessarily choose names that reflect their Nigerian origin. The exceptions are Aso Rock, which is the name of the Nigerian presidential villa, and Wazobia, which is a combination of the word "come" in the three major Nigerian languages, Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. The others choose names that could be from anywhere or sometimes maybe the name of the owner. The location and ambiance in most of these restaurants can be compared to restaurants (cafés) in Nigeria that cater for low income people, although their drinks list is comparable to the best restaurants in Nigeria.

This is unlike the Nigerian restaurants in Britain or the United States of America, with standards comparable to the best restaurants in Nigeria (and some Western restaurants too). Many of the Nigerian restaurants in Britain and United States of America advertise their cuisine and facilities via their websites and other media outlets, offering online orders, which is not done by Nigerian restaurants in Belgium. An Internet search for Nigerian restaurants in London alone will yield many results through websites like Naijachops, London-eating or Spicebaby. This difference may be due to the resources available to Nigerians in these English-speaking countries because theirs is one of the oldest Nigerian diaspora communities. Moreover, their clientele base is wider than those in Belgium.

Another thing worth noting is that, whereas the menus of most Nigerian restaurants in Belgium contain all the food a Nigerian migrant may crave for (in a bid to appeal to a wider clientele), in Nigeria this combination is not the norm. What is obtainable in Nigeria is that fast-food outlets

serve fries, salads, chicken wings and roasted chicken. Special traditional restaurants or just grilling posts serve grilled fish, suya (spicy grilled meat) or grilled goat meat. Apart from these, the rest is what one gets in a Nigerian restaurant. The main restaurants in Belgium are in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent although others are opening up in smaller towns in the Flemish region. There are individuals who operate special weekend eateries in their homes. They are not open to the public, but friends and acquaintances go for drinks and traditional specialties, which they pay for.

Sometimes a restaurant or café may contract out its kitchen to a person who is not part of the management of the restaurant, while the bar remains under the control of the owner. In terms of working at the restaurants, there is no gender bias. Some of the cooks are men, while the servers are female or vice versa; it all depends on the management of the restaurant. Ethnic flavour is an integral part of the Nigerian cuisine. The region of Nigeria the owner or cook is from, influences the content of the menu of a restaurant. For example, a restaurant owned by someone from the east, apart from serving the “national food” as explained earlier, will not serve amala (the main type of *fufu* for those from the west), so those from the west will have to go to a restaurant owned by someone from that region to eat amala or other ethnic food from that particular region. This is also applicable to people from other regions. Although the facilities are quite basic in most of the restaurants, there are menu cards with prices indicated from which clients can order. A client may request a combination of dishes (e.g. soups), different from what is on the menu. It is left between him and the management to work out what should be an ideal price for that order.

Despite the changes within the Nigerian community, Nigerian restaurants still play an important role in the Nigerian food culture in Belgium. For most official events involving the Nigerian Government (the embassy), these restaurants may be contracted to cook or to represent Nigeria by serving Nigerian dishes at joint events, like the African Union Day celebrations or Independence dinner. Individuals also utilize the catering services of some restaurants for their events and parties.

As is the case with all developments within society, as the sector keeps on evolving and more Nigerians have the necessary resources, the sector may in future acquire the same status as other Nigerian restaurants in the Western world. Thus having adequate facilities and the right ambiance to attract people of all tastes and class, Nigerians and non-Nigerians. The list below represents Nigerian restaurants and cafés that were in business in Belgium between 2004 and 2015. Some facilities have changed management and some operators have sold their businesses and moved on to other things.

Since the mid-2000s there has been an increase in the number of Nigerian mobile food vendors. These mobile food sales are also operated by undocumented Nigerians, some of who formerly worked in restaurants. Due to their undocumented status, many of them do not advertise their services rather they carry their wares in shopping trolleys or coolers, visiting businesses and areas with a lot of Africans. They earn a living by selling cooked foods or pastries. Moreover, they work shorter hours, and what they earn daily is more than what they get paid as employees in the Nigerian restaurants. The food sold by these food vendors is mainly rice dishes, fried fish, chicken and Nigerian pastries like meat pie, buns, or puffpuff. More attention is paid to this in the section on eating out and street food.

Table 3. The main Nigerian restaurants in Belgium

Brussels	Antwerp	Gent
Genesis*	Chaise Garden	Ete's place
Home office	After Hour	
Tina's place	Black Rose	
Aso Rock	Tammy's spot	
Silver White	Wazobia	
	Stainless	
	Murphy	
	Our world	

List compiled by author (in 2013).

* Genesis was one of the earliest Nigerian restaurants opened in Brussels. Initially called Celestine's place (after a former owner), it has been sold several times since inception to 2013. At one point it was the popular Madam Pat's place before she sold it on to the Genesis owners, who are no longer in operation.

3. Whose food is it anyway: African shops and the making of a Nigerian foodway in Belgium

An important bedrock upon which the foodways of diverse migrant communities in Belgium is built, is the African shop. Utilizing the term "African" as a uniform entity devoid of diversity, is reflective of the Belgian and even Western myopic way of viewing the people of African origin in their midst. This has, in turn, been adopted by Africans themselves. These African shops have enabled Nigerians and other Africans of diverse nationalities to maintain distinct foodways despite the divergent origins of the food.

The name "African shops" also depicts the realities of migrant cuisine, as there is inter-dependence in their ability to acquire the "right food";

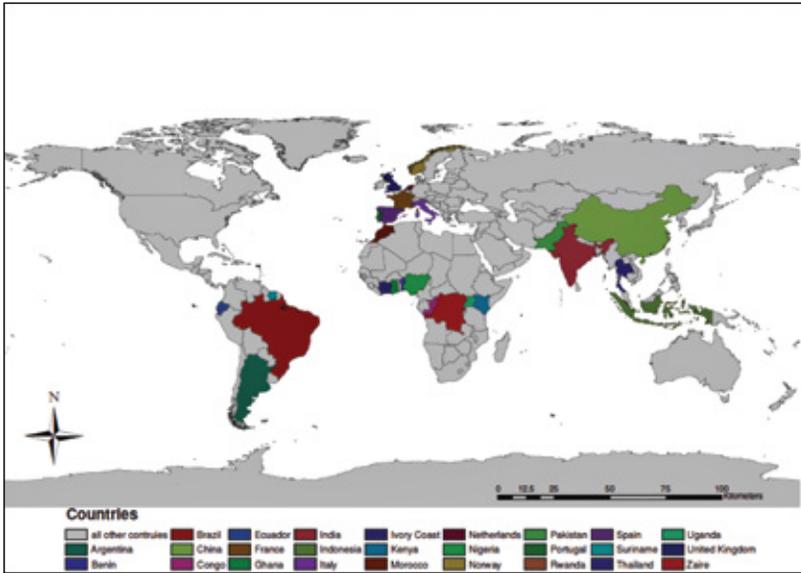
thus people of different nations can each sustain their foodways with food from the same space. This inter-dependence in migrant foodways is shown in the list and map below showing the origins of the “Nigerian food” sold in the shops. Not only this, examining the origins of this food also shows the link between food and migration. Not only do people move, food seems to follow the same routes to reach the diverse migrants across the globe craving for familiar home food. Many of the popular items in the African shops, have their origins outside Africa but yet, that has not reduced their significance in the African diaspora cuisine. Such items like rice have even created links and food bridges across continents linking the food from its origins in Asia to the diaspora and then to the continent (as food gifts shipped to family).

Table 4

Food	Country of Origin
Beef	Belgium
Black eyed beans	Spain and India
Brown beans	Nigeria
Cassava <i>fufu</i> flour	Cameroun, Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda and Congo
Chicken	Belgium and Netherlands
Chilli and bell pepper	Uganda, Rwanda and Congo
Coco yam	Kenya, Cameroun
Cocoyam flour	Ghana and Cameroun
Corn flour	Italy
Corned beef	Argentina
Cow leg	Belgium
Dried bitter leaves	Nigeria
Dried crayfish	Congo and Nigeria
Dried fish	Ghana, Congo and Nigeria
Dried prawns	Nigeria, Congo and Cameroun
Dried stock fish	Norway
Egg plants	Cameroun and Congo
Fresh bitter leaves	Cameroun, Ghana and Zaire
Fresh corn	Belgium
Fresh groundnut	Cameroun
Frozen mackerel	India and Morocco
Frozen thon	Portugal

Food	Country of Origin
Garri (cassava product)	Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin and UK
Giant African Snails	Nigeria and Cameroun
Goat meat	Belgium
Green	Congo and Belgium
Kpomo (cow hide)	Belgium
Maggi stock cubes	Cote d'Ivoire
Offal (beef, goat)	Belgium
Okro	Rwanda and India
Palm oil	Ghana, Brazil, Benin, Cameroun, Nigeria or as products of Africa from France, Britain, Belgium and Netherlands
Plantain	Ecuador and Congo
Plantain flour	Ghana
Pork	Belgium
Potatoes flour	Belgium
Rice	Thailand and Pakistan
Rice flour	India and United Kingdom
Salted stock fish	Norway and Portugal
Semolina ble flour	Belgium
Smoked fish	Surinam (via Netherlands), Congo, Cameroun, Nigeria and Belgium
Spices	India, Britain, Nigeria and Belgium
Spinach	Belgium
Sweet potatoes	Kenya
Tilapia frozen fish	China and Indonesia
Tinned coconut milk	Thailand
Tinned sardines	Morocco
Tomatoes	Italy
Traditional herbs and spices	Nigeria
Ube (Nigerian pear)	Congo, Cameroun and Zaire
Ukazi	Cameroun and Nigeria
Ukwa (African breadfruit)	Nigeria
Yam	Ghana
Yam flour	Nigeria, Ghana and United Kingdom

Map 3



Map showing the origins of the food that is used in Nigerian cuisine in Belgium.

As shown by the list and map above, food in the migrants' foodways can no longer be defined by its origin. Many of what are termed "Nigerian foods" have been shown to be food of "other" people of far and wide origins. Yet it is what these people, like Nigerians, do with the food (as shaped by their cultural identity) that makes it theirs.

The late 1970s marked the beginning of a fundamental change, not just to the Nigerian foodways, but also to the foodways of the sub-Saharan African migrant communities in Belgium. As stated earlier, prior to this time there was no constant source of raw Nigerian food in Belgium. All that was available to people was through private acquisition. When people had extra food to sell, it was very expensive for most Nigerians. Although irrespective of the challenges of acquiring familiar food, migrants will always try to find a way to prepare familiar food, even cooperating with each other to make it available within their community (Diner, 2001).

According to Tabuna (1999), the earliest trade in African food products was initiated in Belgium and France by students and interns from Central Africa. They brought food in their luggage while coming back to Belgium from holidays, but only a limited quantity could be brought into the country this way. Thus what was available was sold at what many found to be exorbitant prices. With the increasing population of African migrants in Belgium, the demand for familiar food was on the increase

too. This provided a lucrative business opportunity for people with the needed resources to tap into this sector, by importing food in more commercial quantities. However, these early large-scale importers of African food were not Africans but Europeans, who established contacts with African suppliers to acquire needed food products. For Nigerians, Madam Adelu's African shop on Chaussée de Wavre, Ixelles (a suburb of Brussels), became the place to go to, for Nigerian food items. This Italian lady was initially a stallholder at the Midi Market in Brussels. In 1978 she took a business decision that became part of the foundation for change in the Nigerian foodways.

Although Antwerp had a long-established African presence, the African shops in Brussels helped initiate the change in the Nigerian foodways. One of the reasons for this, is that prior to the early 1990s there were few Nigerians (and not many Africans) living in the Antwerp area. As a Nigerian respondent who migrated to Belgium in the early 1970s explained "our people were not really living in the Antwerp area, we only went there for clubbing, it has always been a fun area, it was only when these people (referring to Nigerian prostitutes) began coming in that we left it for them" (JU, 2007).

The presence of sub-Saharan Africans in Brussels provided the enabling environment for business-minded people like Mrs Adelu and others to set up African shops. Her shop was on Chaussée de Wavre at the heart of the "Matonge Quartier" of Ixelles. Matonge (named after a neighbourhood in Kinshasa, in Kalamu Commune formerly Camp Renkin) covers the areas around Porte de Namur, Chaussée de Wavre, Chaussée d'Ixelles, Rue d'Edimbourg, Rue de Dublin, Rue de la Paix, Quartier Saint Boniface and more neighbouring streets. This is a vibrant epicentre of Black African socio-economic life in Belgium. The existence of Matonge was made possible by the presence of students of Congolese origin whose residence, the Maison Africaine, was established nearby in the 1950s. There was also the Maison des Coloniales (l'Union des Femmes Coloniales) on Rue de Strassart, which served colonialists, or aspiring colonialists and their spouses. This made Matonge a meeting point for Africans and employees of the Congo colonial establishment. With Congolese independence, more businesses were established in the area by families of the Congolese ruling class, which in turn attracted more people of African origin to the area (Bitumba Tipo-Tipo, 1995; Diekmann and Maulet, 2009; Vincke, 2008; De Michele, 2011, p. 318). Hence most of the early African shops were located in the Matonge area of Brussels.

Mrs Adelu, who had no previous knowledge of African food, stated in an interview in 2009, that it was her Congolese friends in Brussels who informed her of the high demand for African food. Initially, she had to rely on Congolese contacts in Belgium to source for the food she imported and

sold. Later she was able to establish business contacts that shipped food directly to her from the Congo, which she supplemented with supplies from other contacts in Belgium. Even though these Congolese in Belgium had the knowledge about which food was in demand and where to get them, prevailing circumstances like lack of resources (financial and legal) made it impossible for them to own shops, so they became middlemen and suppliers.

For many Nigerians in Belgium, the African shop showed to their surprise that food items they thought were unique to Nigeria can be found in other countries, like the Congo. At the inception of these shops, many Nigerians could not or would not buy food from them due to the high cost. Not only this, Sabena airlines, the former Belgian national carrier, flew direct flights to Lagos, so Nigerians could still occasionally get what they needed from home. Although information regarding the origins of the flights to Nigeria is sketchy, at least by the 1960s Sabena was already operating Nigerian routes because one of its planes had a crash on July 13th 1968 near Lagos (Planecrashinfo, July 2010). Confirming the importance of Sabena's direct flights for Nigerians in the 1980s and 1990s, another respondent stated,

it was easier then to get food from home. Some of us did not bother with the shops in Belgium (...) I remember that in 1983, a return ticket to Belgium was about 380 naira now it is 160 thousand naira (...) moreover you could carry luggage up to 80 kilos now it is not even up to 50 and you still have to endure checks and confiscation, in Nigeria and in Belgium, plus the hassles of stopover for hours before getting to Belgium. I remember that I carry amala in big Ghana-must-go bags, now it will be difficult from Nigeria before you even get to Belgium (...) we used to carry palm oil which is no longer accepted (...) everything is changed (TO, 2007).

It was only in the late 1990s that the consolidation of the Nigerian foodways began in Belgium. This was due to the greater availability and affordability of food sold in African shops. A continuously increasing demand not just by Africans but also other migrants who use the same food items, greatly influenced this change too. From the Nigerian perspective, another plausible explanation for the evolution of the Nigerian foodways may be traced to the background of the Nigerians predominant in Belgium. As mentioned earlier, most of these Nigerians come from the southern part of the country, which has a sub-tropical and tropical topography. Thus, the same type of crops thrives in this region as in other tropical and sub-tropical countries (like the Congo, Cameroun, Ghana and many South American and Asian countries). Many of these food crops available in the African shops, as shown above, come from different

parts of the world. Irrespective of the connotation of the name, many non-Africans also supply and patronise the African shops.

Furthermore, most of those who arrived in the 1990s were from low-income families whose taste in food is more conservative than those of the higher-income families, who have more exposure to Western cuisine. Since they are conservative in their food choice and are accustomed to a certain taste, they were less willing to change their food habits completely. Yet, individual identity and aspirations are also expressed through food by some Nigerians. For instance, some, as a mark of social advancement, started to eat a more Westernised diet. Thus, by eating food which was unattainable to them in Nigeria due to the lack of economic resources, there is this sense of self-improvement in being able to afford different foods and eat differently.

Migrants of African and Asian origin began opening more African shops, thus changing the scope of the shops. This was made possible not only because of demand, but because of the ability of the migrants to access the necessary resources needed to fulfil the legal and financial obligations of running these shops. Having realised the business potentials in the migrant communities, more non-migrants joined in as wholesalers and bulk importers of African food products. Some packaged the food items bought from different parts of the world, under their brand names in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. So one can buy palm oil from Guinea, Brazil or Ghana, and yam flour from Nigeria or Ghana, which is packaged for European companies. This market, as highlighted earlier, has enabled indigenous Nigerian food companies to carve out a niche for themselves, amidst the dominance of multinationals in the home market. As the African food market grew, the Belgian government regulatory agencies began a closer monitoring of their activities. One of the first Africans to own a shop said that these controls had a double impact on the market. According to him,

These inspections and regulations seem to be a move to protect the big Belgian importers not really the consumers, thereby driving the Africans who could not compete into clandestine methods of bringing food in. Again inspections of food at the shops were carried out with little knowledge of the food culture of the people, who the shops serve. Thus applying the standards set for 'Belgian' food to African food (KK, 2009).

However, a spokesperson for the food agency of Belgium (AFSCA/FAVV), Dr Lieve Busschots when contacted on this issue (September 2009), pointed out that food to be consumed by humans is regulated the same way in Belgium irrespective of its origins or consumers. She stated, "we do not focus on some specific cultures or countries. All operators must meet the requirements in the same way and the measures are identical for

all and for each infringement”, referring to the Belgian and European regulations on food which can be found on the websites of the Belgian food agency and the European Union food agency (Lieve Busschots, 2009).

Another shop owner of Ghanaian origin stated that, “This (control) on the other hand can be a good thing, if they had the knowledge about African food. That way if a product is labelled yam flour, it should be yam flour, not a mixture of potatoes, rice, cassava and some yam flour” (FK, 2009).

This tighter control and monitoring by the food agency is seen by former and present shop owners as the main challenge they face. Even Mrs Adelu stated “I had to stop (in the late 1990s) because of problems with the agencies and the problems in Ixelles before then (...) you know fights, police and youths (...). it became too much (...) before, I just place my order over the phone and go to Zaventem and pick them up, no inspection, nothing (...) now (2009) it has all changed”. This, though, does not affect only African shops as Mrs Adelu’s daughter, who now runs a Brazilian food shop in the Midi neighbourhood, confirmed.

With the proliferation of African shops, this sector that initially operated at the fringes of the market economy in Belgium, is now gradually being integrated. Some Belgian supermarkets such as Delhaize, Colruyt and Lidl, have shelves for exotic food, which includes African food, while Cora now stocks raw cassava too. Since 2009, the controls and inspections have become more rigorous. Unlike previously, when frozen fish could be removed from the cartons and poured into deep freezers, presently all frozen food items must be individually packed in cellophane bags and sealed. There have to be expiry dates indicated on food, even for spices and some items like herbs, seafood, condiments, which Nigerians believe have no expiry date. However, many of the shops do not adhere strictly to these demands.

With the new guidelines and laws for the food industry, which stipulate what can be imported and under what conditions, people resort to using neighbouring countries to bring in goods. By going through other European countries like the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands, some of the importers avoid the robust controls direct imports to Belgium undergo. However, as the European Union becomes more regulated uniformly, this method is also becoming less favourable, and illegal indeed.

This use of neighbouring countries to circumvent legal requirements is not prevalent in Europe alone. One of the Ghanaian yam importers interviewed stated that, due to the quota system that the Ghanaian government had put in place regarding the quantity of yam that can be exported out of Ghana, he and other exporters carry the yams across the border to Togo and ship them from there, to different parts of the world, including Belgium.

Although some migrants go into the food business to supply their home food to their people, many more go into the food business as a means of

improving their financial standing and getting an economic foothold in their new community. Migrants becoming pioneers in food businesses, that have nothing to do with their place of origin, are not an exception as shown by Gabaccia (1998, pp. 1-8). In Belgium, migrants from Southern Asian countries with established contacts in the exotic food market in Britain changed the face of the African food market in Belgium. Not only are their goods able to bypass the checks reserved for imports from Africa, they provide more variety at a cheaper cost. This may be because, unlike Africans, they have the finances for greater quantities of goods, which reduces the retail price. Many of these shops do not just sell food items, but also cooking utensils and cosmetics, many of which are unfamiliar to Nigerians. In as much as their participation has further diversified the content of the shops, for Nigerians who buy from these shops these people do not serve as cultural ambassadors or consultants, but just providers of goods. Their inability to perform these roles is because only those from the communities can fulfil them, as they share the same food habits, which symbolise and mark boundaries of cultures (Gabaccia, 1998).

The varied methods of bringing in African food have made it impossible to have an accurate data of what quantity of African food is exactly imported into Belgium. The big importers of exotic food into Belgium also have offices in other European countries, thus goods sold in Belgium may have come in first into another European country. There are also small-scale importers who bring in food that is unique to their region. Lastly, there are individuals who bring in food when they travel home, which is not declared as for commercial purposes but end up in the food market. The main wholesalers and producers of the popular brands of African food bought by Nigerians are listed below. Those that do not have warehouses in Belgium have agents in Belgium who, in turn, distribute their products to shops.

Table 5. Wholesalers and producers of African food

Main companies that package and distribute African food brands Nigerians buy			
Name of company	Location	Specialty	
Top Africa	Belgium	wide range of products	http://topafricafood.com/
Tropiway	United States of America	flours for <i>fufu</i>	http://www.tropiway.com/
Island sun	United Kingdom	different brands/products	http://www.suryafoods.com/
MP Macphilips	United Kingdom	flours labeled produce of Nigeria, packed in Great Britain	
Ayoola	Nigeria	Flours and beans	http://www.ayoolafoodsng.com
Bluebay	United Kingdom	different brands/products	http://www.yadcofoods.com/

Many of the African shops are located in areas that are easily accessible and with a high population of migrants. In Brussels, for example, the highest concentration of African shops is around the Matonge area of Ixelles and between the Bara square and Anderlecht Abattoir. The communes of Anderlecht, Molenbeek, Schaerbeek, Ixelles and Saint-Josse account for the majority of the African shops in Brussels. There are about 50 shops located in these five communes¹⁵.

Going by the statement of some of the African suppliers, about 50 per cent of the African shops in Belgium today are owned by “Pakistanis” (referring to people of different southern Asian origin), and this number is expected to increase. This anticipated increase is because these southern Asians have access to loan facilities from non-Belgian banks that are not available to Africans. Hence they can start with either family or friends and, as more funds are generated, another shop is opened for someone within the circle to take over. A good example is the Sunshine shop located in the Gare du Midi/Bara area. Many shops owned by Asians owe their origin to this shop. The Midi/Bara area was where Mrs Adelu worked as a stallholder – the Sunshine shop is next door to her daughter’s Brazilian food shop.

The Sunshine African shop started as a little shop in 1984, but has grown enormously through the years. It now has its brand of food products including rice, which is exceptional as most of the other shops sell popular Asian brands supplied by wholesalers. Three of the African shops in the neighbourhood are owned by former staff of the Sunshine African shop.

With the emergence of Asian-owned shops, the content of African shops changed to include all food outside the mainstream cuisine, fashion accessories, traditional cooking utensils, cosmetics and so on. However, some within the African community do not look at this development favourably, as they believe the non-African shop owners are focused on just the economic gains, which should not be the case. As one African food seller pointed out, “people come here to ask me, how to cook something they want to buy, I tell them but ask one of the Pakistanis they don’t know”. Although this respondent believes this is detrimental to the spread of African cuisine within the wider community, he was quick to also blame the Africans equating it to, “allowing someone to come to rule your country, when they don’t know anything about it” stating further “most of the African food have no recipes attached, or instructions on the pack to help first time users” (FK, 2009). Despite the above statements, the approach of the non-African shop owners to their clients and the African food they sell differs. For some it is just a source of income, but others

¹⁵ Unlike mainstream food business, there are hardly any directories or brochures one can consult. Thus, communes had to be visited and shops counted. Additional information was provided by Nigerians in Brussels, Antwerp and African small-scale food suppliers.

put in more effort to understand the food, cuisine and culture behind it. A Moroccan African shop owner, whose family is among the few non-Asian or sub-Saharan Africans that sell “African” food (at the Abattoir food market in Anderlecht), mentioned that, when they started the business, they visited restaurants owned by some of their customers, to eat African food and also ask how different products are used (MM, 2009).

As a reflection of the role the Congolese played in the genesis of African shops, most of the food items are known by their Congolese names, except for food not available in the Congo. Hence, if the clients of a shop are mainly from a particular African community, the shop owner gets to know what the group calls the food items, and so, someone can ask for *mbika* in a shop and a Nigerian will ask for *egusi*, and both will get melon seeds. This can pose a problem for Nigerian shoppers, though, when they do not know what an item is called in Lingala, and the shop owner does not know the Nigerian name of the desired food item.

Shopping in an African shop is a fusion of European and African trading methods. Although all items have price tags on them, which is the norm in Belgium, shoppers still try to haggle for a bargain. As is the case in Nigeria, once one is established as a “customer” in a shop (meaning she/he shops there often), he/she can negotiate the price on any item, trying as much as possible to get the lowest price, and the shop owner tries also to please the customer while insuring he makes a profit. As more African shops are opened, many more are sold off, making African shops one of the migrant businesses in Belgium, which change ownership very rapidly. Some may have as many as three owners in two years.

A good example of how fast this business is growing can be seen in the two areas with the most clusters of African shops. Firstly, the Matonge area, especially the Chaussée de Wavre, has the highest concentration of African shops and restaurants, which is not surprising going by the number of Africans in the area. However, more than 90 per cent of the shops in this Brussels African diaspora neighbourhood is owned by Asians. Another area is about 500 meters from Place Bara across Avenue Clemenceau to Ropsy Chaudron, with two of the earliest African shops in Belgium at both ends (one owned by a Bangladeshi at Midi-Bara area and the other by a Congolese, almost opposite the gate of the Anderlecht Abattoir). For many years the two at each end were the only shops along this route leading to the weekend open markets at both ends – Gare du Midi market and the Abattoir market. However, by 2012 there were more than 18 African shops (not counting other shops that sell African food) located in this area. Another area that gives a good example of the rapid expansion of the African food market is the Brussels commune of Saint-Josse. In 2007 there were only three shops on Chaussée de Louvain and rue Eburon. By 2010, between Place Saint-Josse and Charles Quint there were about

11 African shops, many of them having passed through different owners in this short period. In late 2012, there were only about six still operational. This also shows that having knowledge about the food is not enough, as one needs to have the sales and administrative knowledge to succeed in running any business including African shops. Many underestimate the level of official documentation and requirements. However, more Asians have taken over shops previously owned by Africans.

Below is a sample list of African shop owners around Place Bara, avenue Clemenceau, Ropsy Chaudron and Anderlecht Abattoir obtained in 2012, according to nationality.

Table 6. African shop owners... (compiled by author)

Country of Origin	No. of shops
Nigeria	2
Rwanda	3
South Asia	8
Cameroun	2
Congolese	3
Morroco	3
Belgium	1

This growth is not limited to these areas, but is happening all over Belgium, with African shops opening in different towns whose African inhabitants previously depended on Brussels and Antwerp for their supply of African food. So, today one can find African shops in Denderleeuw, Aalst, Gent, Liège, Charleroi, Mechelen and Namur, to mention a few.

Despite this growth and expansion, few Nigerians have been successful in running African shops, especially in Brussels. Although since the late 1990s many have opened shops, they are sold sometimes in less than a year. During my research, interviews showed that many of the successful shop owners had previous sales experience. Some Nigerians, on the other hand, open African shops with no prior experience, believing the shops will be a means of fast profit. Their expectations are dashed once they are confronted with the daily challenges and requirements of running a shop. Many blame the difficulties of administrative requirements; the majority though overestimate the financial returns expected within a short time. The shops owned by Nigerians that have lasted are in Antwerp. These shops may also have survived because of the number

of Nigerians in Antwerp. Most of these Nigerians as noted earlier, are rather conservative in their food choice. They provide a constant and lucrative customer base.

The wholesalers of African food are also from different countries, including Europeans. Others (mainly Africans) act as middlemen and suppliers for food products that originate from their countries. These are small-scale importers compared to the huge establishments owned by the more financially capable Europeans and Asians. Some of these large-scale importers operate from their warehouses all over the country and at the Brussels vegetable and fruit wholesale market along the Quay in Schaerbeek. They concentrate on exotic food products, including African food. Many of the African shop owners in Brussels go to the daily wholesale market that opens from the early hours in the morning until 12 pm to buy what they need, while others depend on middlemen to supply what they need.

The demand for African foods in the diasporas has also contributed immensely to the development of small-scale food industries in different sub-Saharan African nations. Many companies in Nigeria buy, process, and package food for African diaspora markets. This has led to an increase in the consumption of packaged food products of Nigerian origin in Nigerian diaspora communities. Some of these food items, which are dried or milled and packed for sale abroad, are food Nigerians are used to eating fresh back home, and some do not have the same taste as the fresh ones. According to Renne (2010, p. 4), many buy these foods for their semblance to their memory from back home. Using the preparation of *ogi* (*akamu*), he noted that the taste of the packaged *ogi* is nowhere near the taste of the local, labour-intensive, freshly prepared version of this corn pap. The producers recognise this lack and invoke memories and imageries in the food packs that suggest the new products can be linked to the same back home.

Although most of the interviewed Nigerians maintained that they prefer the fresh Nigerian food items. However, one of the women mentioned that, having eaten the packaged food for so long, when she eats the fresh version of some dishes, she finds them less appetizing. She used *moimoi*, a pudding made from beans, to illustrate her point; stating that when she first arrived, she did not like the *moimoi* made from dried packaged beans powder, but over the years, she has come to prefer it (OC, 2010).

As shown so far, despite the names above the doors, no nation or even continent can really lay sole claim to the contents of the African shops. These shops draw their customers and produce from Africa, Asia, South America and Europe. Yet the customers claim products that feature in their

cuisine and term them as theirs, irrespective of their origin. Although each group tries to sustain a foodways it believes is authentic, unavailability of some food products has led to food innovations (or adaptations), which will be illustrated in the following pages.

For Nigerians and many migrants in Belgium, another cornerstone in the making of a distinct foodway is the abattoir market in Anderlecht Brussels. Established in May 1888, in recent years it has become the main source of meat and other food items for many migrants. Initially, Nigerians could only buy “European” type of meat there and relied on other migrants, especially Ghanaians, for meat prepared to the Nigerian taste, which involves animals being slaughtered by slitting their throat after which the hair on the hide is burnt off, giving it a smoky taste.

Many Nigerians interviewed remembered that, in the early 1990s, they could also get offal, ox legs and tails for free or at a very cheap price, but all this has changed. By the early 2000s, a Flemish family with a stall in the 2nd row within the old abattoir building began selling the type of meats Nigerians term as delicacies, mainly offal used as an important part of the Nigerian cuisine. Previously, these parts of cow and goat meat (prepared the way Nigerians prefer) were not easily available. However, presently one can buy things like offal (cow intestines, stomachs, tongues and legs), although the shop sells offal from pork, it is not a common feature in the Nigerian cuisine. In 2010, this shop added cow skin to its list of meat products. This type of meat, known as *kpomo* or *kanda* in Nigeria, previously could only be bought from Ghanaians who imported or prepared it in Belgium, but the supply was not regular.

Although some of these meat parts are cheap, Nigerians value them more than the expensive European meat cuts and buy them to satisfy their craving for delicacies that satisfy acquired taste. This offal is cleaned and prepared with the “African taste” in mind. Since 2010, the clientele of these shops has ceased to be mainly Africans. In the queue, one can now find Africans, Europeans, Asians and South Americans each buying what appeals to their taste, a testimony to the universal nature of most food. However, it would be wrong to assume that this shows a blurring of food-related identities, as nothing is further from the truth. For example, each ethnic group has its preference and habits, even when buying the same type of meat. The types of cow tripe sold to Europeans is completely white in colour and pre-cooked, whereas Nigerians prefer to clean it themselves or for it to be well washed, but not “bleached” white or pre-cooked. By 2011, all the stands that sell beef also stocked cow legs that have been blow-torched, to achieve the smoky burnt look, although lacking the smoky taste. This did not in any way discourage people from buying them.

By 2012 there were four halal shops within the abattoir. The first was “Anwar”, at the entrance to the third row of the old abattoir. These cater to the needs of Muslims, including Nigerians, some of whom although non-Muslim prefer their method of slaughtering animals. The halal shop “Anwar” began in 2008 to sell goat heads. Prior to 2008, Nigerians who wanted to prepare the specialty “isi ewu or ngwongwo” would have to pay a supplier who had contacts in one of the farms in the Flemish region. Farmers in this region are already known to these middlemen. In these farms the goats are slaughtered, the skin burnt off and then cut up according to specifications.

Over the years, some Nigerians living in East Flanders have been able to build their own contacts with the farming communities. The Nigerians living in Brussels and other cities contact them to help buy mainly goats from these farms. A family may buy a goat or share one with another family depending on the number of people in the family. Once contact has been established, other Nigerians also drive to these farms in East Flanders to buy goat meat. The prices of the goats range from 80 to 180 euros. At the farm, the buyer is taken to the animal pen where he/she chooses the goat. The goat is then killed by one of the farm assistants, the hair is burnt off, the stomach and intestines cleaned and the carcass cut into the desired size for the buyer. The meat is packed in small freezer bags and stored in deep freezers at home. With these developments, it has become possible for Nigerians to get the same cuts of meat as in Nigeria.

The abattoir has also emerged as a vibrant migrants’ market where everything from food, clothing and household tools could be bought at cheaper prices. The majority of the stallholders are migrants of North African origin, and most of the patrons are of migrant origins too. Not only is it a cheap alternative to the shops or supermarkets, there is a wide choice of products available too.

The food stalls, especially for fruit and vegetables, are a testimony to how globalised food has become. The fruit and vegetable sellers are mainly North Africans; Belgians are more concentrated in areas such as the meat sector. Belgians also own some of the seafood stalls and even one African shop. There are farmers from the Flemish region, who bring in their fresh produce directly to the market: such as eggs, butter, cheese, fresh milk, jams and marmalades.

Since early 2000, the patronage of this market has greatly increased, including people from outside the country. Advertisements and word of mouth among migrants may have helped publicise the market more. People of different nationalities converge there each weekend, while different food (or related) shops have sprung up in streets around the market, especially along *Rue Ropsy Chaudron* and *Avenue Clemenceau*, selling from

catering equipment to electronics and wholesale food products. Many of the Nigerians interviewed credit the market with its vast array of fruits, as having influenced them to try a wider variety of food products. The majority of the fruits sold in the market and consumed in Belgium were unknown to many Nigerians prior to their migration. However, this did not deter them from making them a part of their daily consumption. This shows that people can be “traditional and also innovative” if the opportunity arises. In recreating a “home” foodway, Nigerian migrants are not reluctant to add new foods to their daily food consumption and these further enriches their foodway rather than diminish its strength, as they are equipped from back home to compartmentalize their traditional food and new foods, each used differently and playing different roles in their lives.

4. So they eat that too? Food products: genuine and substitutes

Migrant food, although a symbol of the construction of group identity, is full of influences from other groups within the same environment. These influences may occur through complimentary use or substitution of food items, rather than a complete change of the cuisine. In foreign environments, with limited means of acquiring habitual food, groups “borrow” food items that help strengthen their foodways while leaving others, which may pose a challenge to their perceived group identity. A good example of this for Nigerians in Belgium is the fresh cassava. Although for Nigerians, cassava and its by-products are the staple food back home, the specie eaten is different from the Congolese cassava sold in Belgium. Hence, it does not feature in the diet of Nigerians in Belgium. The cassava leaves that are consumed in most East African countries as a vegetable are regarded as “poison” by Nigerians, because the specie consumed in Nigeria is toxic if not properly processed. Although Nigerians from the eastern part consume similar cassava species as the East African variety – and also its leaves as a vegetable during the Biafra civil war – it never featured in their cuisine after the war either at home or abroad. On the other hand, despite the fact that different types of cocoyam are sold in Belgium, the tender cocoyam leaves used in wrapping ground cocoyam paste for the special dish *Ikpankuko* is not available, so spinach is used.

For migrants, spatial change does not entail change to culturally ascribed values, beliefs and habits. All these aspects of their lives help them define who they are and how they represent themselves. How close to the remembered cuisine this representation is, depends on the availability of resources and the right environment for a constant affirmation of their culture and identity. Although the content of such cuisines and food cul-

tures may not be as culturally specified, the significance and sustenance of traditionally ascribed roles enables the participants to overlook minor changes in the content.

As long as there are avenues for building or sustaining their identity, Nigerian migrants are willing to accommodate the lacks or limitations in the process of achieving this. Nigerians accept the changes that although restrict their food culture from fully operating within a strict, traditionally defined framework, still enable them to stick to the main concepts of this food culture.

To further highlight the complexities inherent in migrant foodways albeit Nigerian, photos taken at African shops and food stalls in Brussels, are used below to show the links across food cultures. Moreover, evidence shows the food items despite the representations portrayed, are devoid of cultural value or knowledge. As can be seen in the pictures, the packages and shops appeal to the nostalgic link to food from “back home” in their representations, but still misrepresentations abound in depicting the products and their origins. Each of the pictures shows and explains important food items and developments in the African diaspora food market.

Picture 1. Fufu flours on display in an African shop



In this picture taken by the author at the Sunshine African shop Midi Brussels in 2009; on display are bags of yam flour, rice flour and potato flour, which are what Nigerians use in preparing the version of *fufu* they eat in Belgium. The packaging of the yam flour tries to claim some form of authenticity by appealing to the memories of home food. On the packaging is a drawing of two people using a traditional mortar and pestle to pound what one may infer is yam. This tries to present the product as “real” pounded yam *fufu*, despite the fact that it is a mixture of flours from different root crops. The rice and potato flour (right of picture) are made in Belgium as part of the mainstream cuisine. Yet Nigerian migrants, instead of using them as Belgians and other Europeans do, use them only to make *fufu*, which highlights the ability of migrants for innovations in their foodways.

Picture 2. An African food stall in the Anderlecht abattoir market



Picture by author taken in 2010.

Picture 2 shows a section of an African food stall owned by Moroccans in the Anderlecht abattoir market. The display in the open market is similar to food stalls in African markets and appeals to people's visionary memory of home. Shown in this picture are some of the products they sell, which include root crops, vegetables, fruits and spices, like cassava, bell peppers, okro, gingers and pineapples.

Picture 3. Another African food stall



Picture by author in Anderlecht 2010.

Picture 3 is of another stall owned by a Moroccan family. The display and content of the stalls are food termed "African" whereas many of the buyers are also Asian and South American. People from these regions also consume the plantain, cassava, okro, cocoyam, sweet potato and the like. On the lower right side of the picture are papayas wrapped to avoid bruising that may spoil them; beside them are avocado pears, garlic, sweet potatoes, plantains and so on.

Picture 4. A Moroccan African shop salesman



Picture by author Anderlecht, 2010.

In picture 4 is a Moroccan African food stall employee. It is worth noting that the foods on display are not part of the North African cuisine but mainly for sub-Saharan African consumers. In view are yams, cassava tubers, cocoyams, groundnuts, green plantains, okro and many others. Each item has the price written on a piece of paper and displayed on the food item.

Picture 5. Another Stall in the Abattoir market



Picture by author, 2010.

Another stall in the Abattoir with a variety of food items, avocado pears, green beans, pineapples, cassava, plantain, ginger, pepper. The food displayed here could be for any sub-Saharan or Latin American cuisine showing the interdependence of the migrant foodways. In this picture is a South American lady choosing cassava tubers.

Picture 6. A bag of sunshine rice



Picture by author 2009 in Brussels.

Picture 6 shows a 50 kilo rice bag packaged for Sunshine African shop, Brussels. Not only has the shop greatly expanded over two decades of existence, it has been solely managed by the owner who is gradually handing over to his son. It is the only shop that has its own brand of rice. Not only is the name displayed on the bags, its telephone and fax numbers are written on it too. Thus not only are they retailers of African food, they are now wholesalers of their own brand of rice.

Picture 7. An employee at the Sunshine African shop



Picture by author 2009 Brussels.

An employee of an African shop features in picture 7: behind him are displays of different products. To his left, on the topmost shelf are packs of melon seed (egusi), mint, tinned and packaged tomatoes. On the other shelves one can see products that have been repackaged in more affordable cellophane bags, such as semoule, cassava flours or rice. To his immediate right in containers are dry fish packed in bags as stipulated by law. These are utilized in Nigerian soup preparations with meat and other ingredients. There are also repackaged bags of yellow semoule behind him – this is mainly for those who do not want (or cannot afford) to buy the five kilo bags. There are also different types of tinned and packaged tomatoes behind him. These are brands from diverse Belgian supermarkets. The African shops buy and resell the popular tomatoes brands. The idea behind this is that sometimes, one may need tomatoes for stew and instead going to the supermarket just for that, it can be bought with the other ingredients in the African shop.

Picture 8. Bags of garri

Picture by author 2010 Brussels.

Picture 8 shows different packs of garri, a Nigerian staple made from cassava. The pack to the left of the picture is a very peculiar representation of the product. It shows a woman in a sari, picking some brown grains, but cassava from which garri is made is a root crop. From this root is produced white or yellow garri (which gets its colour from the palm oil added during the frying of the ground cassava). The pack to the right labelled yellow garri states “produce of several countries” thus making it impossible to know the origin or where it was produced. This may be to attract customers from very diverse countries or to avoid scrutiny in terms of the production method.

Picture 9. Bottles of palm oil



Picture 9 by author in Brussels 2010 shows different brands of palm oil, which is the main cooking oil for most Nigerian dishes. Each of the names and labels tries to claim a link to Africa as the “original” product which is one hundred per cent African. Thus some of the names reflect this notion of “home” and “authenticity”: Mama Africa, Villageoise, Oriental, Ghana fresh, and so on. Despite this, the majority do not state the geographical origin of the palm oil.

Picture 10. Tripes on display at the Anderlecht abattoir

Picture by author 2010 Brussels.

Picture 10 shows the only shop selling offal at the Abattoir market in Anderlecht. To the right are cow intestines, next to it is tripe. The tripe is of two types, the one Nigerians buy and the type favoured by Europeans. To the right of the picture, on display are also cow legs which have been blow-torched to give them a burnt look although they lack the smoky taste of cow legs consumed in Nigeria.

The pictures above are proof of the diversity and interdependence of foodways, although some of them were taken a few years ago, the issues noted then are still unchanged today. As the demand for “home” food increases, forces outside the migrant communities combine to insure access to the desired food items is met. This is clearly portrayed by Belgian, Asian and Moroccan involvement in selling and distributing food that is not part of their cuisine. On the other hand, it also shows the impact of migration and the universality of many food items, so much so that no one culture can claim exclusivity to many food items. However, their mark and identity comes to the fore, when it comes to what they do with these common food items and how they eat them. Sometimes, as is evident with Nigerians, the mode of cooking and combination of indigenous and new food, enable the creation of dishes termed uniquely Nigerian.

The efforts to acquire desired food by individual migrants are not limited by national boundaries. Migrant communities cooperate across different nations to build political, economic, religious and cultural affiliations that enable a stronger sense of belonging away from home. For Nigerians in Belgium, there tend to be more of a culinary link with the Nigerian diaspora communities in the United Kingdom than with any other Nigerian community in Europe. This is because, as a former British colony, there is a long-established Nigerian diaspora community in existence in the United Kingdom.

Many migrants from the Nigerian diaspora communities in Britain have the resources to establish a variety of food-related businesses that supply “home” food to the Nigerians in Britain. Thus, many ethnic foodstuffs that are difficult to get in Belgium are available in the British ethnic food market. This is made possible by direct air transport between Nigeria and Britain, thus some (delicate) foodstuffs can be procured and transported the same day, arriving in Britain fresh. With the population of Nigerians in Britain, it also means that a greater variety of ethnic food items is available in the market. With Nigerians moving from Belgium to the United Kingdom and others travelling between the two countries there is a strong link across the diaspora communities. Some Nigerians who travel to Britain from Belgium also buy food items including popular British brands known back home.

Creating a Nigerian foodways in Belgium brings to the fore the divergent attributes of Nigerian migrant communities. Not only are the Nigerian migrants’ avenues of creating a sense of belonging using food highlighted, the influence from their host-community’s foodways is also evident. Looking at food use in families, across generations and the emergent food gender roles amongst Nigerians in Belgium, one observes a modification of learned or previously acceptable cultural food norms. The Nigerian recreational and social uses of food have also found avenues of expression in Belgium. Amidst the obvious changes in the diaspora Nigerian foodways, are also the efforts to enact traditional food rituals and habits. In as much as these enactments may lack the exact attributes from home, their importance for group affirmation and belonging are not minimised.

Recreating home in a new place

The aim of this section is to further examine and highlight the various trajectories through which Nigerians reflect their self and group identity by using food. It also focuses on how food is (or is not) a means of connection within families and across the community.

The family is the foundation of most communities and, to understand the methods through which food can be employed for identity sustenance, the family is a good place to start. The use of food and its social representations and interpretations in Nigerian homes in Belgium provide an opportunity to elucidate the complexities intrinsic in the diaspora foodways. It was only from the late 1990s that the Nigerian foodways became consolidated in Belgium. It became possible then for a Nigerian living in Belgium to eat almost exactly as he would if he was living in any of the Nigerian cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt or Owerri. As a Nigerian (who, like many other women, migrated to Belgium to join her husband in 1999), I witnessed the transformation in the Nigerian foodways in Belgium. Unlike previous years, from the mid-1990s my husband's request from home no longer accorded priority to certain food items, because he could buy them in Brussels. Despite this, on my first trip to Belgium I felt that, as "the woman of the house", I should leave nothing to chance, so it was frustrating to realise that I should not have bothered. It seemed unnecessary when weighed against the difficulty of travelling with a child under two years and bags filled with yam, palm oil and many more products, in a flight that entailed stopping over in Vienna and taking another flight to Brussels (and then only to realise most of the food items could actually be bought in Brussels). This change in accessing desired food impacted on Nigerians in Belgium, with regard to their food use and eating habits.

1. The use of food in Nigerian homes in Belgium

The Nigerian families have a dual portrayal of their foodways, giving it a different representation in the public and private domains. Nigerians, irrespective of their ethnic group or religion, utilize every opportunity to celebrate. It could be private celebrations for a birth, naming ceremony, birthday, wedding, anniversary or funeral, or for a newly acquired item

like a diploma, car, house (even if rented), as this is seen as progress in life and worth celebrating. The celebration could also be more communal for religious or cultural reasons. These celebrations can be held any time of the year, whenever individuals or groups deem it right for them. However, the summer months and the end of the year are when most of the events are held. Depending on the hosts, attendance can be from ten people to hundreds of people.

The use of food in the “public” space by Nigerians is aimed more at satisfying others, from within and outside the group. The food is prepared primarily for others rather than immediate family members or friends. It is at such occasions that a Nigerian cuisine is featured. The main dishes will be composed of foods that, due to their general appeal to all the groups in Nigeria, have been elevated to national dishes, such as jollof rice, pepper soups, fried rice, *fufu*, stews, vegetable, egusi and ogbono soups. If, on the other hand, the food is for a cultural event organised by a regional or ethnic group, most of the dishes will be “ethnic” in a bid to meet the cultural specifications or expectations of what should be eaten at such events. A good example is the new yam festival among Igbos in Belgium. This will be given more attention in later pages.

As Shortridge and Shortridge (1998, pp. 130-131) noted in their work on American food, communities, when there is a need to present their food (which also means presenting themselves) in public, “make predictably safe choices”. The foods tend to strike a balance, which enables their acceptance as “exotic” enough to convey an ethnic image, but tame enough to appeal to the people from outside the group.

At such public events by Nigerians in Belgium, effort is made to accommodate the preference of others, especially non-Nigerians. This may entail a reduction in the quantity of spices. Ground chilies and sauces may be left on the serving tables, for Nigerians and others used to hot spicy food to add to their dishes, if they so wish. If on the other hand, an event involves people and food from other communities, as recorded during this research, Nigerians will first eat Nigerian dishes, and then spicy dishes prepared with familiar food items from other communities. Bland dishes will be eaten if there is no other alternative. However, it was noticed that non-Nigerians, especially Europeans at such events, tend to take the different types of food served on the same plate in combinations Nigerians would normally term unacceptable, for example eating soup, jollof rice, fried plantain and other foods together, all on the same plate. These non-Nigerians want to sample the different dishes or want a choice of tasted and liked dishes. Due to this, at such events, Nigerians in Belgium no longer feel at odds also in choosing food combinations that they will usually not eat at home. For example, one may combine rice dishes with other foods, including soups meant for *fufu*.

Below is a sample of food served at two weddings the author attended in 2008. The first is a wedding between Nigerians of the same ethnic group, the second is a wedding between a Nigerian and a Flemish Belgian. In the first, the menu included egusi soup, which is nationally accepted, and another soup (bitter leaf), which is a regional soup. With the exception of the bitter leaf soup, all the other items feature in Nigerian weddings irrespective of ethnic group. Although the second wedding had, what the bride termed a real Nigerian flavour, some of the dishes are unfamiliar to Nigerians and do not feature in their wedding receptions. For example, they had pasta salad and potato salad. The groundnut soup was a contribution from a Beninese family (friend of the couple), and people ate rice with the soup instead of *fufu*, as some ethnic groups do in Nigeria. Spring rolls were also another food item on the list. Nigerians know them and many like them, but they only eat them occasionally and definitely not as part of a wedding meal. Another difference is that, in the second wedding, the wine bar was lavish by Nigerian standards: the champagne was real and not some other sparkling wine.

However, one thing identical in both weddings was that food-related rituals for group identity affirmation were present, such as the kola nut rites. In both events, those who are entitled to receive kola nuts as the tradition stipulates, including the father of the bride (although he is Belgian), were given a kola nut.

Table 7

Food served at a wedding between Nigerians of the same ethnic group
<i>Jollof</i> Rice
Fried Rice
<i>Fufu</i> with <i>Egusi</i> , Vegetable or bitterleaf Soups
<i>Moimoi</i>
Salad
Fried plantain
Fried Chicken
Fried Fish
Fried Goat Meat
Buns and <i>puff puff</i>
Groundnut and chips
Kola nut, Garden Eggs and groundnut paste
Cava

Guinness Stout
Wine-red and white
Leffe beer
Jupiler Beer
Cola drinks
Fruit juice
Food served at the wedding of a Nigerian and a Flemish couple
Jollof Rice
Fried Rice
Beef Stew
Fried Chicken
Fried Fish
Fried Goat Meat
Spring Rolls
Groundnut Soup
Vegetable Salad
Pasta Salad
Potatoes Salad
Kola nut, Garden Egg and Groundnut Paste
Potatoes Chips and Groundnut
Champagne
Wine-red and white
Guinness Stout
Jupiler Beer
Leff Beer
Cola Drinks
Malt Drink
Fruit Juice

Compiled by the author.

The guest lists were also reflective of the origins of the couple. At the first wedding, almost all the guests were Nigerian with no European guests. At the second wedding, the majority of the guests were Belgians. Although the Flemish bride said she was happy her wedding was a Nigerian wedding,

many elements of it (and of the food) were termed as more “Belgian” by the Nigerian invitees.

At the above events and other public events, the food is served as a buffet. Drinks were served to guests on the table or at the bar. Few Nigerians in Belgium are able to have the high standard of service that is given at some weddings in Nigeria. It is only the Nigerian embassy’s annual Independence Dinner at the Royal Colonial Hall in Tervuren that comes close to the high level of service and ambience that is seen at such events back home. One may say this is because many of those who organise events or weddings have no access to the level of financial resources disposable to wealthy Nigerians at home. Again, in Nigeria for people with low income who are holding an event, systems and mechanisms have long been established, which means family and friends rally round, pull together infrastructures and resources needed to hold the event. This is only practised to a limited level by Nigerians in Belgium.

Prior to 2009, many of the events in Belgium were held in rented halls which allowed the celebrants or organisers to provide their own food, cutleries, cups, plates and sometimes drinks. Many of the plates and cutleries were disposable plastics, while all other services (cooking and serving) were provided by friends and family. Since 2009, more Nigerians contract people or restaurant owners to cook for their parties. The cost of their service is determined by which Nigerian dishes are cooked, and covers only the cooking, as serving of drinks and food is still left to friends and family. Less formal events, such as barbecues are very popular in the summer months. Different associations hold separate barbecues or as part of other events. The barbecues are with the same meat products as used in Belgium in addition to goat meat, fish, maize, plantain or yam. Nigerian suya spice is sometimes added to the beef meat, in an effort to recreate the popular Nigerian suya.

On a private level, how the family cooks and what the family eats is determined by the composition of the family. Nigerians married to people from the same ethnic group tend to maintain a more ethnic cuisine. When the couple is from different ethnic groups, popular dishes from both sides feature in the cuisine of the family. Yet, it is the food from the ethnic group of the person who influences the food choices that are more prominent. The fact that culturally based food habits are often one of the last traditions people change when they encounter other cultures (Kittler and Sucher, 2004), may be another explanation for the near total reliance on culturally specified cuisine from Nigeria.

Like all diaspora communities, Nigerians still have a strong “food bridge” which traverses the home country and Belgium. This insures a continuous circular exchange of food. Most of the families go home at least

once in two years to visit family in Nigeria. Prior to their departure many buy vehicles either for sale, to offset some of the expenses of the trip, as a gift for family members, or to use during visits home. These vehicles are loaded with various Belgian (or European) food items or drinks which are either scarce at home or are prestige foods. Some of these food items are given out and others used for the duration of the trip.

On the return trip to Belgium, these families buy Nigerian food that is either unavailable, expensive or presumed of low quality in Belgium. Friends and family members also give them gifts of Nigerian food. These food exchanges help maintain links within the family and the larger community. Even those that do not travel home still request or are sent – certain Nigerian food items from home, not by post but via other migrants visiting home or migrating to Belgium. The most popular food brought in from Nigeria are dried fish, crayfish, prawns, snails, vegetables, soup condiments, herbs and spices. This demand for food from home is not peculiar to Nigerians as shown by Harbottle's (2000) research on Iranian migrants' foodways in Britain, Abbot's (2011) publication on the Highland Ecuador foodways in America, and Salih's (2003) research on Moroccan women in Italy. This strong link to the family back home may be so strong because the majority of Nigerians living in Belgium are first generation and still have a strong attachment to Nigeria. Just as Cinotto (2010) noted, migrant identities are bound to the geography of multiple places. They tend to recreate where they come from and rely on it while they negotiate their place in their new milieu.

As shown in earlier pages, the majority of the Nigerian foodstuffs in Belgium are not from Nigeria but little effort is made by Nigerians, to incorporate the recipes from the countries of origin into their own cuisine. For example, okro is only diced and used in soups, semolina substituted for *fufu*, the same way mango, avocado pears or papaya are cut up and eaten as fruit, but not prepared as part of a dish. The attitude is, if we eat it in Nigeria it is Nigerian, why cook it differently. Moreover, there are divergent attitudes towards cuisines from "outside". This may be due to the nature of interaction between Nigerians and non-Nigerians. There is a reluctance or wariness by Nigerians to allow external contact beyond a formal environment. Hence on a personal level, a close social interaction where there may be active participation of others from outside the group, necessitating an input in their cuisine, rarely exists. Nigerians look inwards in building close social contacts. Not only this, unfamiliar cuisine is always looked at with suspicion. This is representative of all people, as human beings are brought up into particular worlds of taste, learning what to like and what to dislike from when they were very young (Diner, 2001). Even among the different ethnic groups of Nigeria, there is a reluctance to eat "typical" ethnic dishes from other groups. For example, an Igbo person

may love the way the Yoruba prepare jollof rice or stew, but will not eat ewedu or amala that forms the main traditional Yoruba cuisine. Making derogatory remarks about each other's food or cuisine is common among the diverse ethnic groups (Oha, 2000).

Food in the Nigerian diaspora is multi-faceted. What is cooked, presented and how, is determined by different reasons. The Nigerian migrants in Belgium have become used to adapting to different positions. Yet, they try to maintain their identity sentiments and enjoy the dividends that this brings. As they are confronted with diverse pressures within their new milieu, like other migrants, they create their own unique environment where they are able to express themselves and identify with others who share the same cultural values.

Nigerians, due to the many ethnic groups, have strong ethnic attachments and affiliations, rather than a strong national outlook. This is also reflected in the Nigerian diaspora. Although migrants in host countries are identified to differentiate them from the natives and other migrants, such identification tends to emphasise a national identity irrespective of how strong the ethnic identities are, where they come from. Thus, migrants are either Nigerians or Ghanaians, Ugandans and so forth, but not Igbo, Yoruba, Ewe or Ashanti. Yet Nigerians in Belgium socialise with people from their ethnic groups first, then with others from other ethnic groups within Nigeria, before with people from outside Nigeria. This level of interaction leaves limited room for any external influence on their cuisine. This leads to a heightened sense of group affiliation and identification.

2. Creating and negotiating identity in the Nigerian diaspora kitchen

Throughout the ages, the kitchen has been defined in many cultures as a female domain. Even in feminist academic arguments, the importance of the kitchen in all family- and female-related studies is still evident. According to Christie (2008, p. 1) the kitchen space (whether indoors or outdoors) is the place where food is prepared. She sees it as a "gendered site for social and cultural reproduction, where society's relationship with nature is inscribed in the patterns of everyday life and ritual celebrations". As the kitchen is at the centre of food preparation in all cultures, it can be a strong venue for identity construction, negotiation or innovations. Many studies have been dedicated to the kitchen and the diverse purposes it serves, especially as a woman's space (Mcfeely, 2001, p. 2; Avakian, 2005, p. 69). Abarca (2006, p. 10) noted that kitchens, instead of being sites of entrapment for women, can be spaces for survival as well as identity affirming processes. Christie (2008, p. 2) also noted that kitchens are not

community spaces, as in kitchens all over the world women assert control as it is one of the few places where men (have to) listen to women. Thus, women are able to create identity in the kitchen the way it suits them (Supski, 2007, p. 16). I argue that nowhere is this more reflected than among migrant women.

With migration, the kitchen assumes a wider significance for women, which goes beyond gender specifications (Anderson, 2010). For Nigerian women in Belgium, their kitchen assumes a unique position as a place for converging food cultures. Having been raised in a different cultural environment from the one they inhabit, the dual link they maintain with Nigeria and home is reflected in their kitchen through its content, the meals that emerge from there and the customs it upholds. Thus one finds Belgian cereals as well as Nigerian breakfast ingredients like akamu and akara, yam is stored side-by-side with potato, vegetable oils alongside palm oil and so on.

Women as the “custodians” of the foodways, tend to be resistant to any change to them and can significantly maintain them when they are in charge of family meals (Kalcik, 1984). This emphasises the paradox inherent in migrant foodways. Although Nigerians by the nature of their existence in Belgium are quite flexible, they can also be consistent in their ways, allowing changes in some areas, but not changing the fundamental context of their foodway. Nigerian women in Belgium still play the culturally ascribed role of overseeing foodways in the private and public domain (Charles and Kerr, 1998). The dynamic influence of Nigerian cuisine in Nigerian homes in Belgium is not really surprising, taking into consideration the fact that over 90 per cent of the Nigerian female respondents were married from Nigeria and brought to Belgium by their husbands. However, this does not in any way mean a total abhorrence to new inputs.

Migration for these women has led to a gain of economic status, which in turn has influenced the balance of power within the families (Buijs, 1993, pp. 8-9). All the women are either working or training for a profession, as women’s economic input is very important for migrant families (Williams, 1984). This female economic input allows the families the opportunity to enjoy a higher economic status than families with the same skills or qualifications in Nigeria. It also means that the women can contribute to decisions with regard to what the family needs and to expenditures too.

Through the kitchen women are able to create their own material space and sphere of influence. The kitchen is of course also reflective of the changes families and society have undergone over the years (Avakian, 2006; Inness, 2001). These changes are not just about food, but also about the technologies and methods utilized to produce meals and the meaning

or attitude attached to food. This is further supported by Snodgrass's (2004) stance that historical evidence documents the cultural practices in the kitchen in a unique way, with each instrument, method and invention responding to the environment in which people lived. All the kitchens of those interviewed may be basic, from a Belgian point of view, but they are equipped with utensils that back home would be far above average. This is facilitated by the constant electricity supply, which is different in Nigeria. The most prevalent kitchen technologies utilized by Nigerians in Belgium are the cooker, fridge, blender, fryer, microwave and deep freezer. Many of the women interviewed see their kitchens as well equipped, although less than 10 per cent of the women own a mixer (for dough and cakes), bread maker or dishwasher. On the other hand, kitchen utensils like the traditional pestle and mortar, are not used too. Some were amused at the idea of using this traditional utensil and saw their "improved" status as at odds with pounding *fufu* in mortars, while some claim not to have the expertise for pounding *fufu*.

Despite their stance, none of the women own an electric yam pounder that is normally found in the kitchen of wealthy Nigerians back home. This brings to light the fact that, although they may be willing to spend a considerable portion of their money on African food, all expenses need to be justified as worthwhile. The cost to make one meal of yam *fufu* from raw yam for a family of four is high. It will pay for about four 500 gram bags of yam flour, which will last for days. This, added to the labour-intensive effort needed to make yam *fufu*, discourages many. So yam *fufu* in Belgium is made with flours instead of boiled yam.

Williams (1984) pointed out that families and family foodways need a lot of efforts to build and maintain, and migrant women actively work on these. All food-related decisions are made by these women, based on what their families expect. This in no way validates their "gatekeeper role", as there are many factors that may dictate food choice (McIntosh and Zey, 1998). Menu planning and making the food-shopping list are mainly the responsibility of the women. However, there is a variation in menu-planning systems. Whereas some of the women have a written family menu, which indicates what will be cooked each day, the majority just buy the staple food that their families eat and prepare meals from that. These meals are still made up of a staple of carbohydrate served with soups or stews.

With the vast range of food in the Belgian supermarkets, open markets and African shops, much attention is paid by Nigerians to where, when and what they buy. As Salih (2003, p. 70) stated with Moroccan kitchens in Italy, Nigerian and European food are bought according to need. Thus, in Nigerian kitchen drawers, food from all over the world stands side-by-side. Some are picked and utilized to cook Nigerian dishes. For

example, the beans flour will be Nigerian, the eggs Belgian, the chilli from the Congo, the oil from Ghana, the maggi from Ivory Coast, and all these and more are mixed and cooked as moimoi, i.e. Nigerian beans pudding. In the same way they can use pasta and tomatoes from Italy, and oil and cheese from Belgium to create a different dish.

Food expenditure differs among the families. The feeding cost is determined by various factors. The main factors refer to the composition of the family, income, perceived social standing, and health needs. Thus, from the research findings, except for those in interracial marriages, whose purchase of African food is occasional, at the lowest 20 per cent of the food money goes to Nigerian food, while at the highest it is about 80 per cent.

Buying non-Nigerian food may be a mark of status. Some interviewees pointed out that they no longer shop in the budget supermarkets like Aldi or Lidl, but view Carrefour and Delhaize as expensive. Yet some who claim to shop only at Cora, buy mainly discount products like the Winny brands. The most popular supermarket patronised by Nigerians is Colruyt. One can infer that shopping there, with its wide range of products, provides a neutral status as it makes it difficult to determine one's status because the shop has products of all price range. One has to understand the Nigerian social system to appreciate the relevance of this.

In Nigeria, well-stocked supermarkets with products from Europe exist only for the rich, as many of the ordinary people cannot afford to shop there. Hence, it is a sign of social and economic elevation (which is really the point of their migration) to have access to a range of supermarkets, with the budget brands in Belgium being better than some of the best in Nigeria. Many have ascribed a reverse social status to the consumption of Nigerian food, especially the food that is expensive or difficult to get in Belgium. Having all types of Nigerian food and delicacies at home shows the consumers have the economic means, to travel home often or the contacts to acquire them.

Looking at the changes in other aspects of their lives and how expensive Nigerian food is compared to Belgian food, it may seem odd that Nigerians are reluctant to allow new cooking modes and ingredients in their kitchen. Their reaction when questioned on this, brings to light not just the role of group identity, but also the issue of self-identity, as people can use Nigerian food to portray themselves in a certain way within their community. Thus, serving special traditional foods to Nigerian guests has assumed the same importance as a Nigerian elite back home, serving his guests lobster, cheese, foie gras and wine. For those who lacked the financial means while in Nigeria to host people with the best Nigerian or foreign food, the ability to use both in Belgium is a source of self-gratification. This portrays the social distinction in the Nigerian foodway

because what, where and how people eat, within the Nigerian society bequeaths them some negative or positive distinction, irrespective of their ethnic group. The wealthy across the nation have access to foreign food that showcases their wealth, while the poor may also be distinguished by their access to garri for every meal.

Guided by what they already know and like, their choices (or reasons for them) highlight the importance people attach to taste in food (Rozin, 1996). This does not mean that Nigerians in Belgium live on a culinary island with no external influence, but rather they take their time to taste and eventually accept external culinary influence. Although their lifestyle in Belgium can also be a restricting factor, as it confirms that it is only when people venture beyond their socio-cultural thresholds and interact with others that there is then a heightened possibility of “sampling” and “borrowing” culinary styles from either side, rather than when they live a parallel existence within the same environment with occasional interactions. As they stay longer in Belgium and the next generation comes along, there are bound to be more obvious and effortless adaptations, although the level of this influence or culinary diffusion will still be subject to individual choices and less reliant on group affirmation. This is well portrayed by a sample of women’s responses shown below:

“What else can I cook, this is what I know I can cook very well and thank God now all the ingredients are here (in Belgium), the few that are not here I always have someone bring them from home for me” (NU, 2008).

“Funny enough it is like asking me why I am Nigerian” (EO, 2011)

“It is just what I know (...) but with the children going to school now, they eat in the school so I make the soups...not our own soup (...) for them, pasta, more potatoes because they like it but for me they have to eat our food too” (PE, 2009).

“What else is there to cook? Our food is good and tasty so that is what I cook” (BE, 2009).

“Although I cook mainly Nigerian food, if I eat something I like anywhere I ask the person, how they made it. You know the stuffed chicken wings, I make at parties, I ate it for the first time when a colleague from Rwanda brought it to our office party. I liked it and she told me how it is made, so I make it now and other people like it too” (SA, 2009).

“(...) I cook Nigerian food but since I started working, you know I work for a lot of Belgian and European families, sometimes they just give a recipe and ask me to make the food. I try if it is not good they tell me and I learn. Some even ask me to cook our food like okro soup, and they like it too. So in my

house now, I cook all these new things I learn at work, but not as the main food, the children may like them but my husband still has to eat” (NV, 2009).

However, the above sentences also show openness toward new food, especially when it has been tried and liked. It is also interesting to note the words “our own” and “what I know” in some of the responses.

Despite the importance of family income in determining what is spent on food, it is remarkable that none of the women attach great significance to the cost of Nigerian food in their choices. It is not as if they are not aware of the cost difference, as all those interviewed acknowledged the exorbitant prices they have to pay for Nigerian food compared to the cost in Nigeria and the cost of mainstream food. However, it is worth noting that even in economically precarious times, as seen with the first Nigerian migrants in Belgium, any available food is cooked according to the taste of home. It is no surprise then that, despite the cheaper options provided by the mainstream foodways, none has yet completely changed their eating habits and food choices.

Food and the kitchen has become an important place for building networks and friendship. As Abarca (2006, p. 19) noted “the kitchen as a woman’s space can represent a site of multiple changing levels and degrees of freedom, self-awareness, subjectivity and agency”. For the Nigerian women in Belgium, their kitchen is a place (or confirmation) of independence as many recalled the difficulties in kitchen spaces shared before migration either with mothers-in-law or other wives of the husband’s family. This sharing meant they had no control over what went on in the kitchen. Not only that, as newly married wives most of the cooking was left to them, not as a type of servitude but rather to gauge their cooking skills and how well they treated members of the husband’s family. For example, it mattered what portion of food she served them and how she served them. For an outsider this may seem irrelevant, but many have traced their problems with the extended family to food, either because they were accused of not allowing family members access to food or of exhibiting hostility towards them during meal times. The family members interpreted this as meaning that the new wife would not allow them access to their brother’s resources. All these challenges are absent in Belgium as the women mainly live with their nuclear family.

For women, food is a tool of socialization and the activities they engage in, so their kitchens are always an important part of their social lives (Peto, 2007, p. 162; Anderson, 2010). Among the Nigerian women in Belgium there is a constant exchange of food-related information. This could be about a new African shop, cheaper food items, new products or recipes. Food innovations, especially with available food that has achieved the desired results, are also passed on to friends. Close relationships are

established and defined through food by these women. Nigerian food items from home are often given out to close friends, who in turn reciprocate when they receive or bring food items from home. This sharing of raw food items or cooked specialties defines the closeness between these women. Giving out these food items can also be a way of reaching out to other women and establishing new relationships. This act is not peculiar to Nigerians, but it is prevalent among other migrant groups too (Harbottle, 2004, p. 47; Abbots, 2011).

Cooking is shared as a sign of support when someone is celebrating or hosting an event. In this way the cost of paying someone to cook is reduced or entirely removed. This enables a building of relationships across ethnic boundaries to a more national level, as women from different ethnic groups come together to help a friend or acquaintance. This communal cooking is also used to define boundaries of relationships. The celebrant would only invite those she deemed (or intended) as close friend or family to join in the cooking. People may take offence if they were left out by someone they consider as a close friend or family.

Not only this, friends rely on each other to help with the cooking in times of sickness. Although there are Belgian help agencies that provide support to families with housework, cooking and childcare, many Nigerians prefer relying on other Nigerians with regards to cooking. All the Nigerian women have received cooked food from others within the community especially after childbirth or while they were ill, and they have cooked for others too. Cooking for women that have had babies, is in line with the traditional Nigerian after-birth care of cooking spicy hot pepper soup for new mothers. This is meant to help cleanse their bodies and strengthen them. As many do not have their mothers or aunts in Belgium to fulfil this role, other women step in to help out. It is not unusual to have six women visiting a newly delivered woman, in hospital daily with different cooked meals. What the new mother cannot eat, the husband takes home. Thus, not only are they providing for her, they are also insuring there is less pressure on the husband with regard to food preparation.

The new mother also stocks her hospital room with drinks and snacks, which she gives to her visitors. This is in line with such acts of giving food or drinks to visitors back home when a woman gives birth. As shown above, the way people cook is reflective of the cultural construct of the moment (McFeely, 2001, p. 4), and the kitchen, being the centre for performance of food culture in the family and community, helps to portray the inherent trends in the identity construct of migrants. These women fully utilize their kitchen as it suits them. They have also learnt to make room for innovations as dictated by their new environment. Hence it can also “be seen as a zone of transition; a place where the ‘inside’ world, that of the home and family intersects with the products of the ‘outside’ world”

(Hirshon, 1981, p. 76). The kitchen as the centre of family food activity mirrors the prevalent cultural traits within society. So, although they dominate the kitchen, these women are open to greater participation by others within the family while they still maintain the main control of what goes on in the kitchen. The Nigerian kitchen in Belgium also highlights the peculiarities in migrant foodways. As many aspects are still based on practices learnt back home, other aspects of practices in the kitchen are formed as a result of influences from the new cultural milieu. The purchasing and preparation of food is not the only aspect of Nigerian foodway that has influences from home and Belgium, the way food is consumed is also reflective of this dual influence as will be shown in the following pages.

3. Nigerian meal times in Belgium

In Belgium, the composition and context of Nigerian meals have changed. This is common among migrant communities. As Ray (2004) also noted with Bengali foodways in America, due to their changed circumstances, the Nigerians' main meal during the week is dinner. Although from Nigerian perspective meals should mean hot meals, yet cold meals now feature in the daily menu of Nigerians in Belgium. These cold meals, though, are not part of the main meals of the day. The Nigerians interviewed still feel a real meal should be hot, but circumstances mean they have to be more open to some new tastes. The acceptable cold meals are quite limited and may not even qualify as cold meals in the European sense. For some respondents, there is a hint of revulsion, which is a common attitude towards non-spicy cuisines (Oha, 2000).

On inquiry about her consumption of cold meals, a Nigerian woman answered, "what do you mean by cold meal? If you are talking of those cold meat or worse, potatoes, pasta, with no pepper, no taste, some look like (...) I can't eat them. Salad, sandwich, tartine, I eat but that is it". Another respondent (NC, 2009) said "Before I will never consider sandwich as a meal but I now eat it and am okay". Some women, though, try to build a bridge between food from within their home, which is based on Nigerian food and food from (or eaten) outside. This is evident in the following response: "my husband can eat anything like sandwich, gauffre, croissant etc., sometimes when he is at work but once he gets home, he must eat *semo* (*fufu*) even if it is midnight" (AG, 2009). This food choice is not just in accordance with the husband's choice but also as a result of what the woman thinks an acceptable meal should be.

Nigerians who work in the informal sector, especially in Brussels, can eat all day as they would in Nigeria, which is due to a growing Nigerian street-food sector (as explained above). Food vendors, who are female like

mamaputs in Nigeria, carry cooked food (mainly rice dishes) or Nigerian pastries from one business establishment to another, selling to the staff and clients of these businesses. For the other Nigerian workers in Belgium, the work environment is not conducive for eating most Nigerian dishes. Some prepare food that *fits* in with the work environment, for example dishes that are not complicated or eaten with the fingers. One of the respondents (EW, 2012) said that when he is eating his home-made food in the canteen of his work place, his Belgian colleagues comment that his food smells good and want to taste it, so he began making more than he can actually eat to share with anyone that wants a taste. This truly shows food is a great way to build bridges across cultures and communities in Belgium. Although the other side also has to reciprocate to make it a balanced interaction, which unfortunately is rarely the case for this respondent, although he stated if the European colleagues offered him their meals, he will not eat because it is just bread (sandwiches).

Dinner has become the main meal of the day during the week, whereas at weekends it is both lunch and dinner. Breakfast consists mainly of cereals, bread, tea, hot chocolate drinks or coffee, which are easy to prepare. For the weekend, though, more effort is put into making breakfast. This breakfast may be meals from Nigerian cuisine such as fried eggs with fried plantain or yam, *akara* with *akamu*, pancakes or *moimoi*.

Self-made frozen food is an important part of the daily food intake of Nigerians in Belgium. The majority of those interviewed are working or studying, so they use weekends as a time to prepare demanding Nigerian meals such as soups, stews or traditional specialties. These cooked foods are packed in waterproof bags or plastic packs, and frozen. This reduces the time spent in meal preparation because the frozen food can be thawed and heated up in microwaves, in less time than cooking a complete meal. However, there is no investigation yet, into whether the nutrients in these meals are retained after weeks and even months in the freezer. It is only during the weekend that the daily Nigerian three-meal pattern is followed by most of the Nigerian homes.

The Nigerian kitchen has become a space for the fusion of the old and the new, to create an acceptable meal with the desired taste. Like in all communities there is still a diffusion of external influence from outside the group. In as much as Nigerians now incorporate other foods such as fries, pasta, lasagne into their family diet, these have not superseded the main foods in Nigerian homes. The staples are still carbohydrates of *fufu* or rice with soups and stews.

Although the feminist view portrays the female food work as subjugation (Abarca, 2006; Inness, 2001; Counihan and Kaplan, 1998; Counihan, 1999; Avakian and Haber, 2005), the Nigerian women interviewed portray

their food-related work at home as an important part of their lives. Not only that, the traditional position of the Nigerian woman as the cook affords her some powers too. Traditionally, Igbo women spend an average of 4 weeks with their daughters who have delivered a new baby as part of *Omugwo*. This ceremonial visit is to enable her to teach her daughter about childcare, help to cook special traditional meals for her daughter and see to her wellbeing. It also brings her dividends from her family, in-laws and well-wishers. She gets a break from her routine at home, cooks what she feels her daughter needs, with the best ingredients provided for her and receives monetary gifts from visitors. When eventually she has to go home, her in-laws will insure she leaves with different gifts, both material and monetary. Thus, her ability to cook serves some purpose that is beneficial to her, as no part of what she receives is for the man and no man can participate in this *Omugwo* rites. So one can say the idea of female subjugation may not be a universal given, in terms of food work.

None of the Nigerian women interviewed was willing to allow the man complete control of the kitchen. This may be due to cultural conditioning; many still believe fulfilling their roles at home is an important means of their self-identity. This is not because they are following a traditionally written guideline, but because there is the power which being a good mother and wife bequests within their community. In the Nigerian community in Belgium, as shown above, women and the food they prepare can express and uphold a society's deepest held values (Diner, 2006, p. 5).

4. Substitution and Fusion; some space for something new

Despite the tendency for most Nigerians to sustain aspects of their foodway in Belgium, unavailability of some food items has led to innovations. The changes in the food of a people, as Den Hartog *et al.* (2006) noted, can be either an increase or decrease in the use of known food. It can also involve the use of new food in addition to the existing ones. This new food is accepted easily, when it fits the acceptable idea of what is edible and if local culinary techniques can be applied. There has been a lot of food innovation in the Nigerian cuisine in Belgium, especially with new food to accommodate missing ingredients and cooking utensils.

With the main Nigerian vegetables especially the leaves of the fluted pumpkin unavailable, spinach, a rarely used vegetable back home, has become the main vegetable for Nigerian dishes such as soups, stews and yam porridge. It is also used in wrapping the cocoyam paste used for *ikpankuko*, a popular Efik/Ibibio dish of porridge with grated cocoyam, vegetables and seafood. Spinach is used for this dish because the tender

cocoyam leaves normally used for it in Nigeria, are unavailable in Belgium. Different species of *okro*, which were previously unknown to Nigerians, are now used for soups. Although Nigerians still prefer the varieties that they know from home, when these are not available in the shops they are not reluctant to use others. This tendency to substitute is also evident in other migrant foodways (Anderson, 2010).

Fufu of different food crops – especially yams and cassava – is the main food in Nigeria. Its importance has not diminished in the diaspora; rather its content has changed. The diaspora fufu is made mainly out of semolina, rice, cassava, potatoes, cocoyam, maize and plantain flours. With the lack of pestles and mortars or yam pounders, coupled with the time-consuming preparation, raw yams, cassava, cocoyam and plantain are rarely prepared for *fufu*. This is despite the fact that the taste of most of these packaged *fufu* is not the same as the fufu in Nigeria, especially for yam and cassava *fufu*.

In foreign environments with limits of acquiring familiar food, as stated earlier, groups borrow food items that help strengthen their foodways while leaving others, which may pose a challenge to them or their group identity due to their preconceived ideas regarding the food, how it is processed or cooked. A good example of such in Belgium is the fresh cassava. Although for Nigerians, cassava and its by-products are the main food back home, the specie is different from Congolese cassava sold in Belgium. Hence, it does not feature in the diet of Nigerians. Moreover, the imported processed or cooked cassava (*chikwanga*) sold in African shops, which is consumed by East and Central Africans, does not feature in the Nigerian cuisine in Belgium. Although it is wrapped in leaves, smells and looks like cassava fufu, the texture and taste are not the same, and hence the refusal of Nigerians to incorporate it into their cuisine. The cassava leaves eaten in most East African countries as a vegetable are regarded as poison by Nigerians, which may be due to the toxic content of the cassava specie in Nigeria.

Many Nigerians also buy frozen bitter leaves from Cameroun and the Congo at the African shops. Although bitter leaf is consumed in Nigeria, many buy fresh ones with the bitterness already washed out to a desired taste. However, the fresh ones sold in the shops are frozen without washing, so the buyer will have to spend some time thawing it and washing off the bitter liquid, so some prefer the dried washed leaves from home.

In as much as Nigerians reluctantly accept influence from “outside” cuisine in Belgium, especially when bland meals are involved, they have allowed the highest influence on their vegetable and fruit consumption. The reasons for this may be twofold. Firstly, vegetables and fruits are perceived as healthy food; secondly, many of the fruits and vegetables,

especially those for salads in Nigeria, are consumed by the elites, thus there is still the underlying notion of certain food signifying improved status, for those who previously had no access to such meals back home. Showing that sometimes the food consumed by migrants can be proof of food denied them back home as a result of their economic or social standing.

All the Nigerians interviewed stated that they and their families eat more varieties of vegetables and fruits than they would have done at home. Many of these fruits and vegetables were unknown to them prior to their migration to Belgium. Yet they were not reluctant to taste them and make many of these fruits and vegetables a constant feature in their homes and meals. It is worth noting, though, that none of the fruits (like apples) are utilized in cooking, but are just eaten raw. Again, despite the increased market in exotic fruits such as papayas, mangos, avocados, coconuts, guavas or soursop, Nigerians buy less of these fruits. They believe them to be too expensive and lacking in taste when compared to those eaten in Nigeria. This may be because the fruits are not allowed to ripen while on the fruit tree but are plucked for export while the fruits are still unripe. The main fruits Nigerians buy are apples, pears, bananas, peaches, prunes, kiwi, strawberries and kaki (Sharon fruit), also known as persimmons. During the Summer months many consume a lot of maize, either boiled or roasted. This is irrespective of the fact that the sweet corn variety consumed in Belgium is not the same as the Nigerian maize. Some of those interviewed, still view maize in Nigeria as better tasting than the corn in Belgium, which they view as sweet and watery. Despite this, they consume the maize as they do in Nigeria, boiled or roasted and served with African pears or coconut.

In Nigeria, pork consumption is not widespread, even among non-Muslim communities. Yet in Belgium pork meat and products are consumed across the community. On further probing, it became clear that the respondents view pork meat sold in Belgium with less aversion, as it is seen as more hygienically produced than in Nigeria. They believe the pigs are clean and what they eat is monitored, unlike most of the pigs in Nigeria, which tend to roam and eat literally eat anything available including waste.

The two most popular foods in Nigeria, especially for urban dwellers, are rice and bread. Although these two food items have not lost their prominence in the Nigerian cuisine in Belgium. Initially the Nigerians were wary of the different choices available, but many noted that they expanded their bread consumption to include brown bread, French bread and other varieties. The inclusion of these breads is influenced by external contacts at school and work and through children's eating habits at school. Many of these breads are unknown in Nigeria and rarely feature in the

meals of many of the wealthy Nigerians back home. It is worth noting that only two Nigerian respondents bake their own bread.

As noted in previous pages, the local West African rice and the long-grain parboiled rice are the main types of rice eaten in Nigeria. However, in Belgium many of the families rarely utilize long-grain parboiled rice or West African rice in their cooking. The latter is unavailable in Belgium, although packs of ofada rice are sold in Britain and America. There has been an increase in the consumption of various varieties of Asian rice such as basmati, perfumed rice, Thai rice and many more available in the Belgian food market. Of all the rice varieties consumed in Belgium, it is only the risotto rice that does not feature in the menu of Nigerians in Belgium. Rice still enjoys the dual privilege of an everyday food item and food utilized for special occasions. Despite the consumption of new varieties of rice, the preparation is still based on Nigerian rice recipes. Women share information regarding the types of rice that give the best results for Nigerian recipes. The popular rice dishes remain jollof rice, fried rice, coconut rice and rice with stew served with different side dishes.

The diet of Nigerian families in Belgium is not just for cultural affirmation, but of course it is also a means of nutritional intake. Some foods are procured in reference to their health implications, especially for children. This is shown in more detail in the pages below that deal with food of the younger-generation Nigerians.

What the above pages have again shown is that the foundation of the Nigerian foodways in Belgium is built on influences from home, but still, there is a willingness to utilize elements from the new place to create a more dynamic foodways unique to the new environment. Many of these new foods are chosen not just because they meet a need but because they also meet the taste expected of Nigerian food.

5. A meal on the interracial table

In that first month of my migration, I was busy losing my voice in small imperceptible ways. I was finding out that nothing I knew before seemed to be of consequence. Not language. Not social etiquette. The first morning at his parents' house, J woke me up to have breakfast. I was not hungry and I told him as much. 'No, darling,' he said. 'Everybody is at the table. They are waiting for you.' 'Why?' I found it baffling that I would be required to come down to breakfast – whether I was hungry or not – and certainly did not understand why anyone would wait for me before eating.

Back home in Enugu in south-eastern Nigeria, I ate whenever I was hungry. We had a gigantic dining table in the living room but we rarely used it and certainly not all nine of us at the same time (...). 'Besides,' I said, 'I still have

to take a bath.' We could never eat at home without first taking a bath. It was considered impolite. 'You don't need to bath. Here, take a bath robe. It'd be impolite for you to be late.' That was my first lesson in re-defining the parameters of politeness. The time staying with my in-laws was a lesson on how to navigate the social waters of my new home. Everything was regimented: breakfast at 8 am, dinner at 12 pm and supper at 6 pm. If one planned to miss any meal, one was expected to give notice. You could not sit in front of the TV with your dinner. No TV when there were visitors. Dinner was a ritual. table set. soup. main dish. dessert. Polite conversation running through the meal. I found it rather tedious, all the rules to abide by, teaching my palate to appreciate an alien cuisine, trying to follow a conversation I had no chance of understanding. Everything was strange. Not even the hot chocolate tasted like the one I was used to. Coffee: black. no milk. no sugar. more bitter than the instant coffee I drank during exams at university, to keep from sleeping when I ought to be studying. The bananas: perfect-looking, like plastic fruit but lacking the rich, sweet taste of the mottled bananas I bought in huge quantities back in Nigeria (Chika Unigwe, March 2013).

Although the above excerpt from an article by Chika Unigwe may be unusually long, it really captures the challenges Nigerians face in trying to fit into their foreign spouses' cultural environment. This award-winning Nigerian author, who is married to a Belgian, wrote about her migration to Belgium to start a new life with her husband, the adjustments and challenges she had to overcome. She aptly captures the different food-related changes and negotiations inherent in interracial marriages and homes. A meal on the interracial dining table is a testimony to the dynamics of migration and food. Interracial homes are a good place to observe the importance of food as an identity marker.

In a list of 19 potential trouble spots for intercultural marriages compiled by Romano (2008, p. 30), food and drinks ranked number two, after values. According to Romano (pp. 40-41), no other single cultural problem was cited as often as a problem by couples as food. Issues concerning food include what is eaten, how much of it, how it is prepared, when the main meal is served, where the meal is eaten, and with whom. Food-related issues are one of the major areas of negotiation, acceptance or concession in interracial homes (Smith and Oshundele-Smith, 2007, pp. 75-81).

When a couple comes from different cultural and culinary backgrounds, the question of whose cooking becomes the dominant one is a manifestation of power (Peto, 2007, p. 162). The interracial table in Belgium is a place of power because many of these marriages have been constructed from a position of weakness by the Nigerians. In a bid to get their legal status in Belgium, many sought out Belgians or Europeans who will help grant them an official stay through marriage. Thus the Nigerians

try to adhere to the wishes of their spouses even if it goes against their values. Many of the European spouses dictated (or still dictate) what was acceptable within the home, especially food. One may be tempted to state that the Nigerians are acting out of the affection they hold for their partners, however many have a Machiavellian view of it all, as part of what they had to endure to get what they need: a legal status and nationality. Moreover, some of the Nigerian men eventually marry wives from home and these women do not have such absolute power as is vested on the non-Nigerian/ African wives.

Among Nigerians in Belgium stories abound, what one may refer to as urban legends of food-related conflicts in homes, where the spouse is a non-Nigerian. There are tales of pots of soup thrown away because the smell was found offensive, refusal to cook or allow Nigerian food in the house because it was seen as unhealthy and even dirty. Thus, the Nigerian spouses can only eat Nigerian food if they visit other Nigerians or in Nigerian restaurants. As Romano (2008, p. 42) rightly stated, yearning for one's own food may play a powerful psychological role in marriage, especially for the spouses who have left their homeland to live with their partners.

For an interracial couple food can be reflective of how involved they are in each other's culture and how they negotiate their individual or group identity. Among Nigerian interracial couples, there are firstly those who share each other's food, then those who have parallel food tastes which occasionally meet, whereas others have a zero tolerance for Nigerian food and vice versa. A Nigerian lady mentioned how a Belgian husband told his wife that she can eat Nigerian food but should never give it to their child. This was the norm until her daughter's action changed the rule. She prepared food for the family and prepared Nigerian food for herself. As they all sat at the dining table eating, her daughter was eating and watching her, then left her European food and joined her mum and began eating the fufu with her fingers. Her husband was surprised, but said nothing and from then onwards Nigerian food became accepted as part of the meals for the children. Many of the Nigerians are open to influence from their culinary culture and that of their spouses featuring in their kitchen. They see it as part of impacting their dual identity on their children. Not only do the children from these homes eat Nigerian food, they also learn the food etiquettes, manners, and cooking.

The interracial kitchen is a place of culinary exchange for couples who value the different cultural dynamics of their varied backgrounds. A respondent stated that, when she married her Belgian ex-husband, she had to learn how to cook the Belgian food she liked and cooked some of the Nigerian food her husband liked. As she stated "I liked their soups and the salads, so I learnt those ones but I had to teach him how to cook rice

properly, not like the half done (half cooked) rice they eat” (AY, 2009). Another respondent (OH, 2009) stated that he tried all the Nigerian dishes the wife cooked and now has the ones he likes which are the Nigerian dishes she cooks often. Picking and choosing what foods to eat are ways partners negotiate and build a family menu from the two cultures reflecting aspects of their individual and group identity. Another respondent (FB, 2011) stated that,

We mix the food in our home (...) I eat many of the Nigerian food, I like okro but I don't like ogbono. I like the black eyed beans especially in moimoi. I don't like stock fish. I think it is just like children, a habit, you taste and you may like or not. With Stock fish, you have to wash, soak it and cook it, but the smell does not disturb me.

I have never been into light food. I have to eat heavy food (...) Then when I went for aduro (refugee status), I was not kept in the camp but I had my own house and cooked as I liked. Even before coming to Belgium, I knew how to cook because I love my food and cannot eat food that is not well cooked, so I cook. I cannot because they say women should cook, allow a bad cook to spoil my taste. At home here I cook always as I eat mainly Nigerian. She (Belgian wife) once downloaded a recipe for *jollof* rice and cooked it to surprise me, she did her best but it was not really the *jollof* we know (...) What is their food, is it not salad, potatoes, spaghetti, I knew these things before I came to Belgium, so they are not new. It is only the soup that I don't like, so she doesn't make that. Initially my wife and in-laws were eating everything I cooked but now it is only *jollof* rice and some light things (...) When we visit them too, I don't eat everything but I let them know what I will eat. Initially I found it strange that once you come in the television is turned off, now I tell them please not to turn it off, what will you be discussing all day or just sitting there. Now they know you can visit and watch TV too or even eat (NM, 2010).

As with most food-related issues, sometimes the difference may have to do with what one has been brought up to believe is an acceptable food and taste. During my research, an interracial couple had to buy meat at the Anderlecht abattoir. The Belgian man was open to all Nigerian food, except the cow skins. He could not get his head around the fact that people eat what he referred to as leather meant for shoes. Thus while the wife was choosing which offal to buy, he was loudly stating that no material meant for leather would be bought, much to the amusement of other African buyers present. The wife felt the need to explain to the other African buyers that her husband is not against African food but just would not eat the cow skin.

Of the non-Nigerian spouses interviewed, many have visited Nigeria at least once, while two have lived in Nigeria for over a decade before moving back to Belgium. These couples show that dining on the interracial table, despite the necessary adjustments, can be a worthy culinary adventure.

They are actively involved in each other's culture and have brought up their children to appreciate both cultures. One of the couples insisted that the traditional wedding requirements such as "knocking" and the "carrying of the wine" must be met for their daughters before the church or registry wedding, and for the Belgian men that married the daughters, they all fulfilled these demands. On the other hand, another pointed out that, although she was offended that her French son-in-law did not come to them to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage, she later calmed down when she remembered that she also had first married her husband in a civil ceremony before informing her family.

Sharing her experience in Nigeria, one Belgian spouse (MO, 2009) pointed out that for European spouses the difference in meals can be daunting. She noted that her greatest difficulty was the fact that all meals must be warm, unlike the Belgian meal patterns. Having to cook the three meals of the day, with extra added for friends or family who may drop in, took some getting used to. However, she indicated that she did not go in with an attitude, but worked hard to insure she and her children fitted in. As she pointed out, over the years she became well known to the Nigerian food sellers in the market and she could haggle for a bargain like any other Nigerian. This showed her acceptance within the Nigerian society. she was not viewed as an outsider (foreigner) who should be charged as much as possible, but part of the community who gets the same price as other local residents.

For non-Nigerian spouses, certain food also assumes an important significance while they are living outside Belgium. For one of the families, Sunday became known as the Belgian fries day. So, for afternoon lunch, in all the years they lived in Nigeria, no matter what it took, potato had to be bought and fried as frites. However, on their return to Belgium, the Nigerian food that the family enjoys became the special dishes.

Many of the spouses also use food to maintain family and friendship networks by cooking Nigerian meals or continental meals for family occasions, depending on which side of the family is involved. This, though, is not without challenges. One of the respondents further stated that, sometimes her husband informs her if a friend or family wants to visit to eat a particular Nigerian dish. She cooks whatever they request for, but finds it annoying when people invite her family over and, instead of cooking their own dishes, try to recreate the Nigerian dishes she serves in her house, which according to her does not have the desired taste, meaning the meal will not be enjoyable. She stated that she knows they cannot make the dishes as well as she does, so should only cook what they know how to. Another pointed out that he still finds it odd to be invited to eat at someone's house only to be served bread, cold cuts and wine.

For the non-Nigerian spouses, though, most of the main Nigerian meals are deemed to be too heavy to be consumed three times a day. Thus, even when they are visiting Nigeria, some insure the evening meals are light (sometimes just bread for sandwiches), which Nigerians viewed as odd.

As the children of those in interracial marriages begin to marry into other cultures, there is still negotiation for some acceptance and compromise as relationships can become more complex. Pointing out what she sees as the changing realities of the modern times, one of the respondents (AR, 2012) stated that, although she made sure all her children were involved in food-related chores and learnt how to cook, her daughter-in-law cannot cook at all. Thus, all the cooking in the son's family is done by him and she refuses to cook when she visits them unless the daughter-in-law requests. She took the decision not to impose herself on their family, which is different from how she would have been expected to act in Nigeria. Her stance is in recognition of the fact that the son comes from a dual cultural background and that expectations regarding the kitchen roles of the daughter-in-law have been changed by modern Western society.

The importance of food in relationships is also made more obvious in the interactions between the extended family members of interracial couples and can be a source of friction. Respondent AR also mentioned that, when she went to visit her son's family, since she was not cooking much, she decided to buy the dessert for dinner. It was her daughter-in-law's mother who took her to the supermarket. The lady also chose a special ice cream, which the respondent insisted on paying for, despite the protests from her son's mother-in-law. However, when they got home and after the meal, during dessert the in-law took just one spoon of the ice cream and set it aside, stating she did not want anymore. The respondent insisted that she must finish the ice cream. Why insist on this? Well, she pointed out to the in-law that they were getting to know each other as new in-laws and they seemed to be getting on well, but if she did not finish the ice cream then there would be no more relationship between them. Her son was not too pleased, but she questioned her in-law's reasons, whether she could not accept her paying or could not eat what a black person had bought. Based on this, the daughter-in-law insisted her mum must finish the ice cream. Although this may seem a very minor issue about an ice cream, it also shows how people from diverse cultural backgrounds interpret food-related behaviours and their ability to build (or destroy) relationships. These food-related tensions are also evident in first-generation Nigerian migrants (interracial) homes going by the following statement:

I made rice and corn. we were eating and his mother came, she asked if he is eating corn and he said yes, don't you see that is our dinner. She did not like the idea of her son eating corn, because she said it was chicken food. Next

time she came we decided we will serve her yam (...), So we decided to fry yam chips, when she came we served her the chips but did not tell her what it was. She ate it and was saying this seems to be a new type of potatoes, even better than the normal potatoes. We asked if she liked it, she said yes that it is really good. So when we finished eating, we brought the raw yam to show her what she had eaten was not potatoes, but Nigerian food, she was surprised but could not say anything negative because she had already said that it was delicious (CR, 2009).

The prevalence of non-Nigerian food in some homes may also be the choice of the Nigerian. Some claimed that European food is healthier than Nigerian food, so they accept the food as the best for the family. Yet, on further examination, one realises that this may be a carryover of the mentality that all things European are better, and those who imbibe European mannerisms are of a higher social status. This is understandable, especially if the Nigerian spouse is from a deprived background in Nigeria and has always aspired to a perceived elite status even if it is outside the country of origin. Many of the Nigerian spouses who have completely rejected Nigerian cuisine in their homes are also the least involved in cultural or community activities in Belgium, except if it is a high-status occasion like the hosting of a Nigerian dignitary or diplomatic events. Thus they ascribe to themselves a distinct position that they view as superior to other Nigerians who, in turn, do not accord them that special recognition which they strive for. As more of the children from the interracial homes get older, in future they may be more interested in investigating and learning more about their Nigerian heritage, which of course will include food. This will also help accord the Nigerian foodways more presence in wider Belgian food culture.

6. Feeding the next generation

The relationship between mothers and their babies with regard to food has received detailed attention from various scholars, who have explored the interplay between food, family and gender (Murcott, 1983; Charles and Kerr, 1988; Lupton, 1996). From birth, women are in charge of their children's food, which provides a unique opportunity for them to define for the child what food is. In line with this, Nigerian mothers in Belgium feed their newly born babies on breast milk and baby formulas. As the child gets older, the food is changed from cereals to mashed vegetables, yoghurt combinations and fruit compotes. These are mainly the bottled brands available in most Belgian food and pharmaceutical shops. These bottled vegetables and compotes were unknown to the women prior to their arrival in Belgium (they are not widely used in Nigeria). Yet, despite

the cost, none were hesitant about using them, because they felt it was for the good of their children, as well as convenient.

As noted by Macbeth (1997), intervention in children's feeding by external agencies is now common. With the media publicity about children's health and the advice provided by the Belgian family support services (especially Kind & Gezin and Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance – ONE), many have opted for exclusive breastfeeding, later preparing the vegetables and compotes themselves or buying the organic variety. Probed further on this change, the social differentiation abilities of food emerge. Here, the baby food proves the mothers' enlightenment or nutritional knowledge above their peers as well as their economic power. Accessing and using the different information about childcare is evidence of an enlightened mind willing to follow the right trend. Moreover, the organic food variety is expensive, so one needs to have the financial means to be able to use it constantly instead of the other varieties in the market. Thus feeding a child becomes not just about giving it the right nutrients, but assumes a different social meaning.

Irrespective of the social representation of this trend, it highlights the willingness of Nigerians to adopt new food if the food is perceived as providing greater rewards (socially and health wise) to the consumer. This is not exclusive to Nigerians, as people's food choices are shaped by social, religious, economic and political considerations, and thus, what they eat (or in this case, feed their babies) is a response to both biological and cultural stimuli (Fieldhouse, 1986, p. 1).

Like in all families, food choices are not devoid of challenges and tensions in Nigerian homes. Nowhere is this more apparent than with regard to children, as women have to continuously validate the traditional expectation of the mother nurturer (Lupton, 1996). Yet, according to Fischler (1980, p. 946), food habits of younger generations are no longer shaped by coherent, traditional matrilineal culinary patterns. As Bell and Valentine (1997) noted, to understand how the home functions as a consumption site, it is important to note how patterns of eating are negotiated and contested within households. For many of the Nigerian families, eating times are a time of conflict, as children have to be cajoled or forced to eat the food given to them. Often some parents vent their frustration by admonishing the children that, if it was in Nigeria, they would be grateful for what they were being served, implying that such food may not be commonly available to them in Nigeria.

The food that establish affiliation with a culture, are usually introduced during childhood (Kittler and Sucher, 2004). Most Nigerian children are introduced to Nigerian food while they are still less than one year old. Despite the Western dining setting, Nigerian food etiquettes are still

taught to children, especially with regard to the use of the right hand. The children learn early that, although cutleries are for eating, the fingers can be used for *fufu* and soup dishes. Again, although smelling meals served to them before eating may be acceptable in Western cultures, in Nigerian culture it is abhorred. Thus they are equipped with the cultural knowledge needed to live in their community.

Among Nigerians, from groups who swallow the *fufu* instead of chewing it, this cultural distinction is not strictly imbibed in the children. There are children from the ethnic groups who have mastered the act of using their fingers to roll small portions of *fufu*, dip it in soup and swallow; then there are others who just take portions, dip them in soup, chew and swallow. Thus, the possibility of knowing one's ethnic group from the way they eat, as is the case in Nigeria, is not tenable.

In Nigeria, respect for (male) elders is emphasised, especially at home: the father gets prominence above all members of the family. The adults in homes dictate which food is cooked and they are usually served first. However, all the interviewed families in Belgium indicated a greater influence in their food choice by their children. Again, all members of the family have access to whatever food is prepared in the house, for example children are not served food without meat, neither are the special or best foods reserved for the adults. Most times in Belgium, it is the Nigerian child rather than the adult who gets preferential treatment. Even in the Nigerian homes in Belgium with more conservative tastes, once the children start school they acquire a taste for food that is not the same as that of their families. Many of the women indicated a reduction in the quantity of spices they use, especially chillies, once their children start eating with them.

Some of the new additions to the Nigerian family cuisine in Belgium, such as chicken nuggets, fricadelle, fish fingers, spaghetti, lasagne, salami and pizza, are as a result of the children's demands. The children share food with friends in school and then demand that their parents prepare such food for them. This has led to some families now consuming the sausage merguez, Moroccan bread, couscous, pita rolls, feta cheese and salami, which some mothers stated they never tasted until their children started primary school. Many times, the other members of the family eat these "new" foods with the children, to avoid cooking separate meals. Sometimes though, the parents might eat these *new* foods, but view them as a snack to be followed by a "proper" meal.

The older children also influence the family food and eating habits, in terms of indicating what they think are unhealthy eating habits or food. A respondent (OO, 2009) stated that her daughter, who was studying to be a pharmacist, was always pointing out to them what needed changing in

their lifestyle, especially with regard to food choice, cooking methods or portions consumed. It is worth noting that none of the children described themselves as vegetarians, despite the relative popularity of vegetarianism in the Western world. This may indicate the strong influence that the first-generation Nigerians still have over the second generation despite their exposure to influence from other cultures.

Both older and recent female migrants to Belgium interviewed have made efforts to encourage change to the gender roles at home, to be more in line with (but not necessarily the same as) European standards. Boys and girls are expected to participate in food-related chores although to varying degrees. This may be reflective of the changed gender roles among the families in Belgium. Yet, chores like cooking are viewed as optional for boys and more mandatory for girls. Nigerians still do not share the view that it is acceptable for a girl (or woman) not to know how to cook, as many (especially women) still view it as an important quality in a woman (Mcfeely, 2000). As shown by this statement,

“I had to make sure my girls were in the kitchen with me, to learn. It is true we are in Europe but I don’t know where they will end up (...) how can they marry and say they cannot cook? What if it is in Nigeria? I started early now they have all graduated and are living in different places, so I have done my duty” (AF, 2009).

For this respondent it is important to her self-identity as a mother to insure her children learn how to cook, in respect of traditional values. Sometimes, when a mother does not really lay emphasis on this skill, society’s expectation makes her reconsider: “I was not bothered that (...) could not cook initially; then people began asking when they visit, if she can now cook and what she cooks, I realised I have to start teaching her; so I started with simple things, now she can cook although not yet soup” (AS, 2009).

Cooking in Nigerian homes, though, is a constant field of conflict between generations in Belgium, unlike what is obtainable in Nigeria. Many children do not adhere to the mandatory stance that they should know how to cook. As this statement shows, “They don’t do anything in the kitchen, I cook. They don’t want to do anything or learn; how can I have them and be in the kitchen everyday even when I am sick (...)” (complaining about her daughter’s inability or reluctance to cook (TF, 2009)). This statement is not just about cooking, but also about the children’s reluctance to fulfil the mother’s expectation of providing care, which for some may seem a harbinger of the way their children will treat them in future. This is worrisome, especially for one raised in a culture that expects children to take care of their parents in old age. The daughter, on the other hand, stated that, although she likes a lot of Nigerian food and

takes classes in school for a cooking course, she does not consider learning how to cook Nigerian food important because she will not marry a Nigerian. According to her the Nigerian men do not help much at home.

Even in some interracial homes, especially where the wife is Nigerian, emphasis is also laid on teaching the children how to cook by the mother (FA, 2010) “Although I am married to a Belgian, I insist my girls will learn the good aspect of our culture; they know their roles. We all cook, or if I am cooking, they are setting the table and after eating, they wash the dishes. I teach them how to cook our food and encourage them to learn others too”.

Going by the above statements, there are challenges and tensions inherent in efforts to teach the next generation to cook, which is non-existent in the home country, as the cultural environment views it as normal for a girl to learn how to cook from an early age. However, Nigerian children in Belgium operate in a multiplicity of cultural environments and tend to choose and pick what appeals to them. It is obvious that factors related to cultural expectations influence these women’s bid to insure the girls learn how to cook. The women feel it is their duty to teach their daughters, a duty propelled by “hope” that they may one day marry someone from their home country or preferably, their ethnic group. Thus if this occurs, the girls will not be found lacking in expected culinary skills.

Sometimes the parents’ experience influences what they allow their children to do, which is surprisingly contrary to traditional norms; for example,

I insisted that all my children boy or girl will be treated equally no matter what it takes. I come from a polygamous home and although all the girls in the family were brilliant in school, my father decided there was no need to educate us. He only educated the boys and the girls had to find their way. So I know what it means to be discriminated against because I am a girl. From the beginning I insured the boys and the girls do the same chores, cooking, cleaning and so on (SR, 2012).

The challenges in teaching the next generation how to cook may also lie in the technique employed. These women teach their daughters the way they were taught (by memories, oral instructions and observation), knowing by learned experience what the right quantity of ingredient or the cooking time should be. This is unlike what the children see around them, which is a more structured process, where menus have recipes that can be followed. The difficulty inherent in the teaching methodology of older generations, who learnt to cook by oral instruction, is not unique to Nigerians. As Sutton (2001) narrated in his work, the responses his father got from his aunt while trying to get some recipes portray the same

challenges, “when I ask how much flour to put in she says enough, when I ask how long it should bake she says till it is done”.

Among the Nigerian children from the age of 14 interviewed, although for them their identity in Belgium is stratified, food is still an important part of their identity. We will examine further how they use food in defining themselves and their place within their community and the wider Belgian community especially what these says about the identification processes of these young Nigerians in Belgium.

7. Eating, identity and being a young Nigerian in Belgium

Food habits, which are learned in childhood even before one can express oneself verbally, are rarely abandoned completely in later life. Thus, children raised in migrant families like most human beings have a strong attachment to their “home” food (Ueda, 2011; Kittler and Sucher, 2004).

From birth, Nigerian women are in charge of their children’s food, which provides a unique opportunity for them to define for the children what food is and the etiquettes associated with it. Feeding a child becomes not just about giving him/her the right nutrients, but a means of transferring different social meanings and norms attached to food, supporting Salazar’s (2008) stance that food is a “value-rich” material rather than just a “nutrient-rich” material. The Nigerian children born in Belgium are introduced to Nigerian food while they are still less than one-year-old. In most cases the majority of what they eat prior to going to school has a strong Nigerian influence. This is the case even for families that do not participate in Nigerian cultural events or associate closely with other Nigerians, sometimes out of personal choice or because of where they live. Yet, children, as rightly stated by Salazar, do not simply copy adults or eat whatever is placed in front of them thoughtlessly.

In as much as it may seem (that for many of them) what they eat is taken for granted, the narratives of these Nigerian children reflects a deeper knowledge about food, being different and the levels of adjustments they have to make as they build a life in Belgium. This also shows food’s ability to connect to, and expose, wider issues even in seemingly unrelated areas as shown by some of their comments.

Nigerian food has always been part of the food we eat at home. When we were younger, I think it was the only thing but as I got older I stopped eating some of the food like the semo, soups and beans. I still like the rice dishes and fried plantain. Apart from these, I don’t eat the others. I just eat what I

like, I don't think my food must come from any particular place. It could be Chinese, French, Belgian, just any food I like (NE, 2012).

I don't make the fact that I am Nigerian so obvious, most of the time. I don't wear Nigerian clothes. I have a more Western lifestyle. My own concern is to achieve something in life, I don't bother about race and all that. With food, I eat a lot of African (Nigerian) food. I cook a lot, I learnt from my aunties and mum; I just watch and see how they do things (BI, 2013).

My favourite food is pasta with bolognaise sauce. At home we have always eaten Nigerian food. It is just part of the food, like my family it has always been there, so I don't really think about it. Well I think we eat Nigerian food to keep in touch with where we come from. You may act like a Belgian but you have to eat Nigerian food to remember your roots. You cannot go to Nigeria and say I have never eaten semo (*fufu*). *Jollof* rice and fried rice are my favourite Nigerian food. I also like *egusi*, *okro*, beans and stew, *akara*, *moimoi* and plantain (NJ, 2012).

I have always eaten Nigerian food at home. I like gizzard, yam, *akara*, *akamu*. My favourite is pepper soup with meat. I used to like semo a lot but not anymore. I don't really know why I stopped liking semo. It is not only semo that I don't like anymore but pizza, lasagne, rice. Sometimes I eat *jollof* rice. I ate risotto for the first time in school and I like it a lot (IO, 2012).

Despite the familiarity of the children with Nigerian food, none has been able to master the ritualistic use of food, such as during kola nut rituals, libation and so on. Most of these rites can only be carried out by men, but the challenge for the children is the use of the Nigerian languages as Nigerians insist the rites and accompanying prayers must be in Nigerian languages. For example, the Igbo ethnic group often state that the kola nut does not understand English, so the breaking of kola nut must be done in Igbo language.

Irrespective of this cultural shortcomings and the Western dining setting, efforts are made by parents to pass Nigerian food etiquettes down to the children too. However what aspects the children chose to portray as they grow up is left to individual choices. Thus their dining habits also depend on where they eat. Many of the children establish more inter-ethnic relationships than their parents who tend to relate more with Nigerians from within their ethnic group. These early experiences and learned food habits also prepare the kids with cultural negotiation skills, since they display one set of food habit at home and another outside or with outsiders.

Having grown up in Belgium, these Nigerian children enjoy a diverse cuisine from different parts of the world, as is the case with many people in cosmopolitan cities. Many of the children become exposed to cuisine and food from other cultures once they start school. Although initially some of

those interviewed were not eating in school when they started, but soon enough they asked to be registered for meals in school, so they could join other kids to eat in school. Again, some of the parents prefer the children eat in school, as it reduces the pressure of providing meals during the week because many of the parents also work long hours. Hence, for the children the use of Nigerian food and language is restricted mostly to the private domain (with family, friends and relatives), unless during public celebrations by Nigerians. Some of these celebrations may be for cultural food festivals like the new yam festival, which some of these children attend.

In response to what Nigerian dishes they know, all first mentioned the food that features mainly in the public domain (of the Nigerian foodways) and then the ethnic foods they eat at home. Yet again, these children living thousands of kilometres away from Nigeria have also learnt from their homes, when necessary to differentiate along ethnic lines. Asked about cooking and the Nigerian food they can cook, those who claim to cook gave Nigerian recipes that have substituted unavailable ingredients in Belgium. Thus, some of their ideas about Nigerian soup ingredients, although acceptable in Belgium, will raise eyebrows in Nigeria. Having said this, all the children who have travelled to Nigeria noted the difference between Nigerian food in Belgium and in Nigeria, which has also enabled them to reflect more on life in Nigeria.

I liked the kitchen in the village because it is old and not like new kitchens in Belgium. They had so many things they use in making food that I did not know was possible. My friends did not believe some of my stories; you know, about the wooden things for grinding and pounding or even the place for cooking with the fire and how foods were put inside fire and then brought out and eaten. It tasted different, well with the ashes and God knows what, it should. In terms of food, I saw that they cook the food they know, the traditional food not like hamburger and things like that. The same Nigerian food that we eat in Belgium tastes better in Nigeria. I think it is because of the ingredients, it is not the same. They have food that I never saw (before then) but the Nigeria people don't know about some of our (Belgian) own foods too (NJ, 2013).

The food was the same as what we eat in Belgium. No, it was better. The akara was so puffy and we ate some delicious scrambled egg with fried yam. It was the best thing that I have ever eaten. I hated the bread and the milk. Powdered milk, yuck, can't they milk a cow or what. Why do they drink cocoa powder and water but call it tea? It is bizarre. They don't have Belgian food at all. My aunt bought pizza for us but it was also made with hot pepper and it was delicious. There was this place my uncle took us to; we ate this big spicy grilled cat fish served with salad. It was huge. It was later that I saw the pond with the fishes in it People choose the fish they want from the pond and it is

killed and grilled. They even call it point and kill, how horrible but the grilled fish was delicious (IO, 2013).

Unlike in Nigeria and some of their homes where most of the food-related chores are gender specific, the children's more westernised outlook on life has rubbed off on their attitudes regarding food and even gender roles. Some have even gone as far as associating cooking Nigerian food with male domination. So the "shame" that is normally associated with females (in Nigeria) who cannot cook or are bad cooks, is non-existent among these children, as each defines what is suitable for him/her, rather than adhere to cultural norms that they view as impractical in their new cultural milieu. Hence, even among those who claim to cook, none plans to cook all or only Nigerian cuisine in future. For them cooking and food involves eating and experiencing food from across the world not just Nigerian food.

I want to try most things before I marry and that is the only reason I drink; I want to taste as many drinks as there are. I want to try everything to know how it tastes, not when I marry I will be like I have missed something because I believe once you marry, there are certain things you can no longer do. So I have drunk different types of wine, brandy, vodka, whisky and others. There are still many more I want to try. If I marry a devout Muslim who does not like to drink or allow women to drink, I will accept that and stop drinking. It is not a question of European upbringing; what matters is how the parents have brought up their children. So when I marry and if we live in Europe we will share the expenses of food and everything equally, but if we are living in Africa, he will have to pay more (BI, 2012).

When I leave home, I will eat Nigerian food at least three times a week. I will buy the things I need to cook Nigerian food for my house. I also will expect any future partner to eat Nigerian food also. How can you say you love a Nigerian girl but you don't like her food? No, that means the person thinks he is better than me and can say what is good or not (NJ, 2013).

I don't know how to cook because my mum never forced me to learn. I was never obliged to know how to cook, although I know it is important. Moreover, I don't think I will marry a Nigerian. I don't even know a lot of Nigerians. My friends are mainly Europeans: Italians, Polish, French and Belgians. I also have African friends from Congo, Gabon and Cameroun. The main things we eat when we visit each other are pizza and pancakes (IO, 2012).

The only Nigerian food I cook is plantain. I can fry plantain and that is all. Well, my Mum always did all the cooking and did not teach me. I don't think I will marry a Nigerian man because they do not help at home. So what is the point of learning how to cook Nigerian food? It is not as if I have no interest in cooking, I do. In my school, every Thursday I study *Art Culinaire*. In the class, we learn how to cook European food, bake and things like that.

If I have my own house, I will not cook Nigerian food because it smells. You know things like stock fish and crayfish, they smell. Although I can't cook Nigerian food, I like different types of Nigerian food because that is mainly what we eat at home (PN, 2012).

At home we eat food from Nigeria and Europe. My favourite food is lobster. However, I love semo and okro soup. Cooked beans is the only Nigerian food that I don't like. I can cook very well; my mum taught me how to cook. In my family everyone cooks, whether male or female. Unfortunately, I cannot cook Nigerian food. It is very complicated and there are too many foreign ingredients to choose from (OU, 2012).

I can cook and I taught myself how to cook. It is not really difficult to cook Nigerian food. I watched and then cooked what I liked. Cooking is not really a woman's job, men can cook too. See, for my favourite Nigerian food all you need is garri, palm oil, bitter leaf, egusi seeds, pepper, maggi cubes, onions and you cook (XOO, 2012).

From the above comments, it is obvious that for the children born in Belgium, there are challenges and tensions inherent in efforts to acquire culinary knowledge across generations, which is non-existent in the home country. This is because the cultural environment in Nigeria has conditioned people to expect and view it as normal for a girl to learn how to cook from an early age. However, these children operate in a multiplicity of cultural environments and tend to choose and pick what appeals to them. Many of these children and adults living in the diaspora avail themselves of the modern media technology as a means of acquiring and sharing information about Nigeria, including the food. Many websites, satellite television stations and other applications offer Nigerian food recipes with easy-to-follow instructions which is more in line with what the children are used to.

Certain aspects of the Nigerian foodways which these children view as unique and good are more readily maintained. They have learnt and practise the Nigerian culture of offering food to visitors, even though the gesture may not be reciprocated. This shows their heightened sense of self and acceptance of the cultural difference inherent in cosmopolitan coexistence. The food offered to visitors range from Nigerian to European foods, depending on what they think is suitable for the guests. They also do not view it negatively if non-Nigerian friends or acquaintances offer no food when visited; rather they accept it as their (non-Nigerian) way of doing things. However, if the person is Nigerian or even African, the reaction to what is termed as lack of hospitality is less favourable. Cooking and eating with people also offer opportunities to try new food and build culinary knowledge from across the world.

(...) I have never taken Nigerian food into work, never. Moreover, we have a subsidised canteen and I get the opportunity to eat the things I have never tasted before or that I can't cook. It was there that I ate rabbit, which I have not eaten before. I am a Muslim, so I don't eat pork but any other thing I eat. Soups, I have to taste and if it is ok I will eat, if not I will not, especially as they do not use salt. I ask for recipes even from work. I asked our chef at work, the recipe for a pancake he made, which was delicious. I like to think I am a typically African woman but there are some things I will change in the future (...) In my class, I was the only black person, to adjust was difficult. All my close friends now are Africans. My closest friend is Ghanaian but I have friends from Nigeria and other countries too. When I invite them over, I cook what the guests will like. Although some of them may want Nigerian food, but what if they don't like it they will go home hungry, which is really bad. So I try to cook what they will like and some Nigerian food (BI, 2012).

I have friends from different nations, but my closest friends are French, Belgian and English. When they visit me, I always offer them food, I think most of the time it is pasta. But when I visit their homes, they offer me (potatoes) chips and not food (OU, 2012).

My close friends are mainly Congolese but I also have Italian, Cameroonian and Moroccan friends. When they visit I always offer them food, anything from rice and stew, plantain, spaghettis, *puff puffs*. They also offer me food when I visit. As to what they offer me, it depends, most of the time, white people offer biscuits or chocolate, my black friends offer me plantain, rice (...) and my Arab friends, tea and cakes (XOO, 2012).

All my close friends are either Africans or Arabs. In my school we have very few Europeans, so I don't have any European friends. My friends come from Congo, Kenya, Djibouti, Morocco and they can all cook. I have eaten chapatti made by my friend from Kenya and pondo with rice made by my Congolese friend but when my friends visit me, I don't give them Nigerian food because I don't know if they will like it. I always give them pizza (PC, 2012).

Food for most of these children is a symbolic connection between their lives in Belgium and Nigeria, even for those who rarely visit their "home" country. For some of the children spoken to, who have left their family, "Nigerian food" brings up nostalgia, not just of the home left in Belgium, but also the homeland Nigeria. Irrespective of this, sometimes their idea of the country Nigeria is filled with images, some of which may not relate to reality at all. These images are based on holidays spent with family in Nigeria, which can be compared to tourism where one sees only what creates a good experience and memory.

Most Nigerian children relate more to the new concept of "Naija" which is a social and cultural image of Nigeria. "Naija" for them is a land of exotic music, fashion and food, which is rich in culture and tradition, continuously highlighted by the media through the various satellite television

channels (BEN TV, NTA, AIT, Channels and many more) and websites (Labaran, 2010). These media outlets broadcast Nigerian popular culture, especially Nigerian music, comedy and films, which are very popular in Nigerian diaspora communities. Thus, the notion of “Naija” especially for children and even adults in diaspora, represents the aspects of Nigeria they wish to identify with, leaving out the political and economic woes.

I go to Nigerian websites sometimes. I go on irokovtv, naijalingo, ibakatv, igboguide. I also follow Nigerian news but mostly music (OX, 2013).

I have recently started following Nigerian news but it's more because I recently discovered Nigerian/African channels (on Satellite TV). But I am mainly interested in news that refers to Nigerian culture and in general, African culture (EU, 2012).

I get recipes from the internet and practise at home, how to cook it. Once I am satisfied, I can cook it for my friends or colleagues. I don't mix the foods that I cook like European and African, no they are separate. I cook fifty per cent African and fifty per cent European (OY, 2013).

The narratives of these children, as Attias-Donfut *et al.* (2012) also noted in their work, reveals the differentiated and shared experiences of parents and children regarding their migration experiences, citizenship and sense of belonging. Although there is the obvious attachment to Nigerian foodways, Belgium is still significant to their sense of self and identification modes, despite their perceived lack of full acceptance. Many view Belgium more as home than Nigeria, but the way others (especially some indigenes of the host country) identify them, means they also have reservations about their place in the country. This in turn necessitates them to look inwards for affirmation, first within their own group and then to other migrant groups. So although they may lay claim to the Belgian nation they operate outside its cultural, social and sometimes political milieu.

I know that I am Nigerian and identify myself as Belgo-Nigerian. I have both nationalities. When people ask me where I come from, I tell them Nigeria. Well, if they thought of me as Belgian, they wouldn't be asking me where I came from. The Nigerian culture is an important part of my life. I attend cultural events organised by Nigerians in Belgium. I also follow news about Nigeria especially sports related news. Nigeria and Belgium are both home for me. Nigeria, because that is where my culture lies and Belgium, because I actually grew up in this country (OU, 2012).

I tell people that I am Nigerian. On my Facebook page, I state that I am from Lagos, Nigeria. Sometimes when people ask where I come from and I say Nigeria, they ask why I am so fair (in complexion). Some assume I am mixed race but when I say I am not, they are surprised. Apart from the fact

that I speak English, I cannot really say there is anything that shows outsiders that I am Nigerian. I don't eat semo (*fufu*) in school. The musicians I listen to that are Nigerians are not really so Nigerian. For example, Tiny Tempah is Nigerian but lives in the UK and Ne-yo has a Nigerian father but lives in America. There is also Seal, who does not even see himself as Nigerian. Belgium is home for me. I have not been to Nigeria often and long enough to feel patriotic or attached to it. At the same time, I do not even think I am patriotic about Belgium, because I am not seen as Belgian Belgian, if you understand what I mean (IO, 2012).

In Belgium, I identify myself as Nigerian, although many call us Africans. I wear Nigerian clothes especially to parties, listen to Nigerian music and watch Nigerian films and programmes on satellite (TV). My parents always take us to Nigerian parties, weddings and other cultural events (...) I have friends from all over the world but I like associating with my Nigerian friends. We talk about Naija fashion, hairstyles, films and music. I have lived in Belgium all my life; I have Belgian nationality but I am a Nigerian. Although when we go home (to Nigeria) on holidays, it is also different, I don't speak the language and many things are different. Everyone is nice in Nigeria but I also feel when I am there that we are on holidays and after, will come home to Belgium, which is where I was born. I think I feel more at home here in Belgium because I have lived here my whole life and am more used to this country's culture than back home (...) It's really hard sometimes, to really know where you fit in. well, I think that Belgians would consider me more as an African before being Belgian, because if I meet any Belgian the first thing they ask me is where I am from. Also when I braid my hair and for example am in my school, for the white students it always seems very exotic and is very new to them (AA, 2012).

In my school, we have a lot of Africans in my class. I think we are in the majority, only two are not Africans but they too are not even Belgians. I was told we used to have a lot of Belgians in the school but it is different now. So my friends and I, identify ourselves by our nationalities (despite having Belgian nationality), Congolese, Rwandese, Cameroonian or Nigerian. My closest friends are from Congo, Morocco and Turkey. For me, home is somewhere you are used to and that is also part of your life. I was born in Belgium and that is home. Although I like Nigeria but it is for holidays (CJ, 2012).

Regardless of how closely involved (or not) these children are in the Nigerian community in Belgium, the Nigerian foodways is one aspect of their cultural identity each of them has been constantly exposed to, from a very young age. Yet, due to who and where they are, the affiliations of the Nigerian migrant children differ greatly from their parents, whose full acceptance in their country of birth grants them at least a place in which they are fully accepted and feel rooted. This is unlike the children, who as a result of the circumstances of their birth, may have to go through life constantly adjusting and building affiliations dictated by options outside

their realm of control. However, one important link, irrespective of how often it features in their lives, that makes them unique and differentiates them from others in Belgium, is the way they eat or do not eat and the etiquettes associated with their food, which is hugely influenced by Nigerian attributes. The Nigerian food also grants them a link to their ancestral home, although many of the children do not view it as home the same way their parents do.

The Nigerian migration to Belgium is recent, and only in future can it be investigated whether this generation is able to maintain the foodways and what culinary knowledge a generation can pass to the generation after it. Only a small per cent of children born to Nigerians in Belgium are married, thus it is difficult to state categorically how sustainable the food culture of Nigerians will be in Belgium in generations to come. As studies have shown (Kalcik, 1984, p. 37), the second generation is less likely to attach same values to culturally ascribed food as the parents, but the third generation of migrants is more likely to pick up the cuisine “abandoned” by the second generation.

However, the members of the Nigerian community in Belgium are actively taking actions to insure aspects of their culture are still maintained. Many of the Nigerian cultural organisations and ethnic unions, claim their main objectives as maintaining and propagating their cultural values (especially among the children), while also enabling integration into the Belgian society. These desires may seem at odds with each other but may be the only way to insure that some of the traditional values are passed on (and maintained) by the next generation. Thus the children are exposed early to Nigerian food at home and outside the home, during cultural and other events organised by Nigerians. Such group cultural events become opportunities to participate and also learn about certain food-related norms and rituals, which are important for the group cultural identity affirmation

8. Food-related gender roles in Nigerian households in Belgium

“Gender” as used in this section draws from the definition of Holmes (2007, p. 2), who views gender as the socially produced difference between being feminine and being masculine. This difference is produced within the context of society where people are taught what is socially acceptable or not. Migration of people does not just entail a change of location; it also means a distancing from cultures and familiar norms. Migrants initially view and evaluate their new environment by using known cultural standards (Cinotto, 2010). However, as they experience more of the host

culture and interact with people, they tend to reevaluate some of their previously held views, especially if they are in contrast to those of the host community, or devalue their views. When migrants establish their foodways in their new environment, the gender roles in their food culture become more complex. The importance of gender roles in food studies has been highlighted in a lot of academic work (Counihan, 1999; Murcott, 1983; Inness, 2001; Counihan and Kaplan, 1998).

In no other area is the change among Nigerian migrants more evident than in changes in gender roles. Food provision in a patrilineal society like Nigeria, as stated earlier, is mainly the man's responsibility. With modern economic and social changes, women play more roles in families, although Nigerian gender roles dictate that the man provides the food, or resources for it and the woman buys and cooks it. Among the Nigerians in Belgium, some still hold onto these traditional expectations, whereas circumstances imply that others have had to renegotiate their roles. This is well illustrated by the following comment:

Migration brings a lot of experiences. In Africa we know the man is the man, which is what the scripture says too. In Europe, you are working your wife is working and you know this thing is too much, so you have to help out. At home the culture makes it that the woman owns the kitchen, some women will even tell you, my darling I don't want to see you here, but in Europe no one owns the kitchen. it belongs to whoever gets home first or has more time. It is joint effort, you take care of the house and children together (TB, 2010).

Despite the understanding of some, like the man above, in most cases not only have women taken up new responsibilities, they still maintain the culturally ascribed roles. This is mainly as a result of the women themselves self-regulating what they think is or is not a culturally accepted role. Other women on the other hand do not see this change in roles as negative; rather they view it as an opportunity for some level of financial independence in terms of working and being able to use some of what they earn as they wish. Answering questions regarding who provides the money for food, the responses were varied:

yes here in Belgium, some men still provide for the food and everything ... you see especially among my Igbo friends (...) their wives work but they don't bother about that, they still pay ... it all depends on who you marry, and if they have the ability; but for me I think it is mainly people from the East, not us from the west, my best friend Mrs (...) has been working for more than 20 years since we have been here, but it is for her use (...) Her husband provides for everything, there are others like her but I think the younger ones are not like that in marriage, they are more like Europeans now (AF, 2009).

Another stated that,

it all depends on what arrangements you have in your family. For us I take care of food and he takes care of other thing like projects back home and so on. At least you know what you are doing and can even have more money for yourself, instead of working at the end of the month, you have nothing to show for it (...) give me this, give that, it is better now, everyone knows their responsibility (OP, 2009).

In her reply another stated, "My husband (...) is a good man, but you see when it comes to the house, he insists on that 50/50 completely; for me it is good. I have more independence with my money (...) at the end of the month everyone must pay their part" (AO, 2009).

Although these women have taken up greater roles in their families, yet they seem to see it as an advantage rather than a burden, as it allows them more financial independence. This attitude is reflective of the gender roles in their host community where men and women can assume near equal roles. For some of the men, providing for their families is a way of maintaining authority as head of the family and reaffirming their masculinity as dictated by their culture. This is vividly portrayed by the response of a male community leader,

Ask her (the wife) I provide all that is needed, if you are a man and do your part, can the woman say no to any of your demands? The problem is that some of us men want to be Europeans when it suits us and Africans when it suits us. A woman does everything, buys everything and then you think you will have authority over her as a husband, that is not true (DM, 2005).

For this respondent, gender performance within the context of cultural dictates, is still very important to him and he believes that, once he fulfils his own role, his wife should do the same. Again, as the wife was unemployed then (to look after the children), one may think once the children grow up the dynamics within the home may change. However, although the wife now works, he still views himself as the main provider for the family and her earnings as just supplementary income.

In the interracial homes, the responsibilities including provision of food are not the sole responsibility of the man. This may be attributed to present-day European gender roles. Some Nigerian men married to non-Nigerians would not be averse to providing for all, if they believe their own culturally ascribed roles will be retained,

"Of course I can provide for her but you know (...) they believe men and women are equal, so we do it their way" (CE, 2010). Another said "(...) unlike us even before marriage, you are told you have your own things, I have mine, so even if you end up having too much money tomorrow, you have to keep yours and I still keep mine (...) moreover what you pay sometimes changes nothing, everyone is equal at home" (EW, 2010).

One can pick up from these respondents that, despite their wish for an enabling environment to display their culturally ascribed roles as “man of the house”, the respondents believe the cultural environment within which they operate makes it impossible. They indicate the fulfilment of their gender roles, especially providing for their wives and home, should only be applicable if the non-Nigerian wife is willing to adopt the Nigerian female gender role. Again, they are quick to recognise the cultural difference and the fact that the orientation of their spouses is from a different cultural environment. Thus their limited performance of “traditional” gender roles in their homes does not in any way reflect on their masculinity.

Still, others married to Nigerians and non-Nigerians have a dedicated account for running all the family expenses. The couple add to this account based on what each earns. It is from this pool that food is also paid for.

Due to the influence from the host community, shopping for food is no longer a female chore. Men shop for the family food regularly at the supermarkets, African shops, abattoir and markets. Some attribute this willingness to change their role to the cultural environment in Belgium, “well we are in Europe, shopping can be done by anyone, not women alone”.

“I actually like going to the market, but if I was in Nigeria, everyone will be accusing my wife of using me (...) even the market women will be looking at you like (...) you shouldn't be there” (DU, 2009). Another said, “I don't mind, moreover this shopping here is different from shopping in Nigeria; I see what I want I look at the price, get them all and go and pay; back home I will end up arguing with one woman seller or another, you don't know what price to say and they will start calling you names” (AE, 2009).

The comments by these men also reflect the power of society in influencing people's actions or inactions. The cultural attitude, as indicated by the food sellers in Nigeria, may make the men reluctant to shop in Nigeria; on the other hand, the neutrality of the sellers in Belgium removes this challenge. This allows the men to play more food-related roles.

Cooking in all societies is feminized. This has a dual representation in the worldview. The woman is either an undermined, undervalued, long-suffering person (under male subjugation), toiling over hot stoves in kitchens to meet the expectations society demands of her, or she is the nurturer, the custodian of the family's wellbeing, lovingly providing nourishment to her family (Beoku-Belts, 2002). Whatever one's stance is, the important issue is that in all societies the participatory levels of men and women differ disproportionately in the kitchen, even in this era of the “new man” because women and food have always been associated for ages (Inness, 2001; Cairns *et al.*, 2010; Goody, 1982).

The Nigerian kitchen in Belgium is also a good place to view the re-negotiation and revaluation of gender roles that occurs when two cultures meet. In patriarchal societies, women tend to be assigned the daily task of cooking and feeding the household. Men only cook high-status dishes, for example roasting meat or preparing ritual meals. A good example is the slaughtering and cooking of communal or sacrificial animals in Nigeria (Pilcher, 2006). The Nigerian women, in a food diary they kept for a week (which as noted earlier was one of the data collection methodology) noted that they cooked the main meals while the men's cooking was limited to breakfast or preparing an accompanying dish to the main dish. Even this level of participation is rare among men in Nigeria. For example, in Belgium most of the men do not cook the soup but they prepare the semolina fufu or can get frozen food from the freezer and warm it up without expecting the women to do it. This is different from the norm in the home country, where the woman or her house helps have all the food-related chores.

It is good to bear in mind that these changes in gender roles have been a work in progress. This is a process that began for the men way before they married their Nigerian wives. Initially most of these men lived alone in Belgium and undertook all household chores, irrespective of their cultural orientation but like in all societies, they viewed it as a temporary state of affairs until a woman comes along to perform the daily cooking duties (Inness, 2001). Some of them were first married to European women, whose orientation leaned towards equal participation in the kitchen. However, when they get married to Nigerian women, the men revert to their culturally ascribed roles. This is irrespective of the fact that they may not be fulfilling all the requirements of this role, like providing for the majority of the family's expenses.

As was discovered during the research for this book, sometimes the women are reluctant to allow change in food-related roles in their home. Many see food-related decisions and roles as part of their being the "woman of the house". Charles and Nickie (1988, p. 40) argue that women, although responsible for food-related decisions, do not enjoy power or control with regard to what food the family eats. This is because they exercise their power in other people's interest, especially the interest of the partners. One can posit that the Nigerian families in Belgium may differ, in that women make food-related decisions based on what they deem is good for their families and convenient for them. Even for those who are not working, decisions on food and household expenses may be made to enable them to spend less, with the extra money spent on family back home or themselves. Coming from a society that, although patrilineal, accords certain distinct power and recognition to women over men as

daughters of the land, wives and mothers, Nigerian women do not operate from a position of complete powerlessness.

The majority of those interviewed, even if their husbands are willing to take up more responsibility in the kitchen, are reluctant to allow the men complete participation in the kitchen. Some of the respondents offer divergent reasons in support of the limited involvement of their men folk in the kitchen. This could be as a result of what is perceived as the man's lack of ability to manage the kitchen and food resources. One says,

yes he can cook, he has the things he likes to cook his own way, for example ogbono soup, he will use the biggest pot and ingredients I normally use for a month, I am not exaggerating, all sorts of meat, dry fish everything goes in (...) thank God it happens once in a while (WU, 2009).

No I prefer he does not cook. Most times it creates more problems for me, not just the ingredients, the kitchen will be upside down and I will end up cleaning everything, spending more time than I will take in cooking the meal (NU, 2009).

Others, on the other hand, appreciate the dual cultural environment they occupy as members of a diaspora community and their homeland. As such, they operate according to the dictates of any of the cultural environments they happen to find themselves in. A good example is one respondent speaking about the husband:

He loves cooking and here in Belgium, he does the shopping for food and does the cooking most of the time (...) but when we go home to Nigeria I don't allow him. The last time we went home, we got there late and he came to help get the stove going and assist. I quickly pushed him away (...) let everyone not start looking at me (...) saying that is how I use him (...), in Belgium. Okay but never at home (MO, 2009).

Food at home can be a gauge of the relationship between the members of any given family. Participation in food-related activities can also be a means of constant tension or of displaying displeasure by either of the genders. In Nigerian society, a man's refusal to eat a wife's food is a serious issue as is the wife's refusal to cook. Men's cooking is sometimes influenced by the relationship they are having with their wives. The following statements testify to this, "he only cooks when we are quarrelling and I refuse to cook, if there is a problem and I am not talking to him, I don't cook for him either. He has to look for his own food" (PE, 2009).

Speaking about men's cooking and domestic violence a respondent (EA, 2009) could not hide her disgust for a friend's husband "(...) that shows you what a horrible man he is (...) when he is quarrelling with (...) after all the beating, then you will see him proudly take over the kitchen

(...) cooking for himself all sorts of things, whistling and showing he is truly irresponsible (...) that is not a man”.

Despite the efforts of women to use cooking as a means of venting their anger, some of the men have also mastered ways of bringing these conflicts to an end. “I refuse to cook if he has really annoyed me or said something hurtful, it can be for a week. For me it is a time of rest, the children’s food is easy. He will cook and I am not bothered but he will use it as a way of getting me to talk to him again (...) please can you help me check this, if there is enough salt, please can you see if this is looking right, should I put all this (...) and if the children are around, I will oblige him but if they are not, he is on his own but he times it right always ...” (AI, 2009).

Although food-related domestic violence is prevalent in many societies, none of the respondents interviewed have been physically abused because they did not cook or provide acceptable food. Some of the women, though, noted that their husbands had been critical about something they cooked. Many of these occurred early in the marriage, when the then newly married women were trying to impress the husbands, with their knowledge of what they believed was European cuisine. The latter was always because the newly arrived wife from Nigeria wanted to make an impression with what she thought was the husband’s preferred European food habits.

The only time food was associated with violence by the respondents was in relation to alcohol consumption. Some of the women have (or know other Nigerian women who have) experienced physical and verbal abuse from their husbands while the men were drunk. For some, this is an occasional occurrence while others experience it often. It is worth pointing out that, with regards to alcohol-fuelled violence, some of the women are also perpetrators.

In all the homes, the taste of the spouses and children are taken into consideration while making the food to insure everyone is satisfied. All the Nigerian female respondents stated that they cook meals they know the family really likes. Thus many make provisions to cater for the taste of the different members of the family. Some are willing to cook separate meals to satisfy the children’s and husband’s tastes, believing that way food is not wasted because no one eats it.

I love cooking and I cook mainly Nigerian food because my husband does not like European food. If you look inside my freezer, you will see all sorts of cooked food. I try to make food that the children will like too. Like fish, I can make baked fish with Tilapia or Alaska, although I prefer Tilapia because it gets all the spices into it. I also roast plantain in the oven, while the children eat theirs with roasted tilapia or mackerel; I make palm oil sauce for my

own. I have also learnt to make new food combinations that I was not used to in Nigeria and they are delicious. For example, to use *ishi ewu* (goat head sauce) and eat rice, it is better than stew. I make a lot and freeze. Some days I make gizzard with paprika, tomatoes without the seeds, spring onions. Just parboil the gizzard and fry the vegetables in oil, then add the gizzard, salt, pepper and it is done. In one minute you can make shrimp with tomatoes, add maggi and food is ready. Potatoes porridge is also good, sliced chicken breast, a lot of carrot, spring onions but my husband will not eat it as dinner because he will get hungry later.

He likes things like beans and ripe plantain porridge, semo, heavy food that will hold him well. If you give him spaghetti, he will eat but you will give him something else later. I prefer cooking different types of food and freezing. I have about six different types of soup in my freezer now; there is *jollof* rice, fried rice, pepper soup, meat pie – different things. The only thing I don't freeze is white rice. Even the other things I portion for one person because once you defrost and put it back in the freezer, the taste is not the same (AG, 2012).

The majority also view cooking meals that they know their family love as an important part of the dynamics of their relationship. The interesting thing, though, is that the Nigerian women are not sacrificial in their food choices by ignoring what they prefer. They cook to please their husbands and children because they find it fulfilling, but that does not mean they allocate their own choices an inferior position. They all decide on the Nigerian cuisine in their homes, the menus are built on the food they know or have learnt to like, which in turn, is introduced into their homes. None of the husbands in Belgium handed down recipes to their wives after marriage, thus the choices are made from the wives' culinary knowledge. Even with regard to the new foods that feature in their meals, it is only the ones that the women are confident they can cook well – and achieve the desired taste – that are prepared at home.

The lack of financial restrictions and availability of different food removes the challenges of any food insecurity at home or difficulties accessing desired food. This abundance of food means that these women are no longer pressured into according lesser value to their food choice within the home. Moreover, in adhering to the taste of the men and children regarding food, the women see it not as subordination, but as an expression of love and care for their family.

In Nigerian tradition there are foods defined as male food, which in many communities women are not allowed to eat. This practice is still applicable in present-day Nigeria, especially with regard to ritual food such as kola nuts, sacrificial meals and animals. In Belgium, these tradi-

tional restrictions on food, are evident with regards to certain foods but sometimes not as a result of a communal imposition rather as a result of women themselves deciding what is “right” for them, especially during pregnancy. The Nigerian women in Belgium can cook and eat animal hearts, gizzard, liver and eggs if they want to, like other Nigerian women in urban and even rural areas of Nigeria. It must be mentioned, though, that with regard to food for traditional rites, these restrictions on female practices are still followed in Nigeria and the diaspora. This shows that, for Nigerians, foods that are deeply rooted in the ritualistic values of the people are the hardest to change.

In terms of food consumption, the Nigerian men and women have a slightly distinct consumption pattern. The portion of food served to the men is always the largest. It must be noted that they do not get this to the detriment of others. This is based on the premise that men eat more than women and children. Among the couples interviewed, many of the men still view fufu as a very important food and a dish that has to be a part of their daily or at least weekly food consumption. The women on the other hand, will consume fufu weekly or even less. This is not due to any dislike of the food but more in keeping with its supposed impact on their weight, which one may view as another influence from their new environment.

Nigerian women in Belgium follow all the latest health and fashion trends, especially through the media. Many no longer adhere to the traditional belief back home that fat (or being plump) shows wealth and beauty, so they aim for a moderate version of the modern body image. For example, a Nigerian lady being complimented on her weight loss stated that she has stopped the weight-loss programme; when asked why, she responded that she still needs some fat around her hips to hold her wrapper and, moreover, she does not want people to start speculating that she may have AIDs.

All the women interviewed claim to have added weight since moving to Belgium. This disposition for weight gain is blamed on the Western lifestyle of sweet drinks, junk food and fatty meals, which many migrants embrace with gusto when they first arrive. The most popular weight-loss method used by the women is dieting and medication (weight-loss tablets and drinks). Only very small percentage of the Nigerian women interviewed have regular exercise regime of jogging and gym. Although aware of the implications of obesity, they do not dwell on it, neither do they have great awareness about other eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia. A Nigerian has now developed the Shakuma fitness regime which is based on African music and dance steps. Efforts are made by the initiator of this programme King Franky, to promote healthy living and exercise routine among Nigerians. However, most of his clients are Europeans and non-Nigerians.

Many of the men have also changed their method of consumption due to dictates of ill health or fear of ill health later in life. For them, this is not dieting, as they associate that with women, but rather improving their health by avoiding something like excessive alcohol consumption and reducing the quantity of certain foods. As shown by other studies this view is not prevalent only among to Nigerian men (De Souza and Ciclitira, 2005; Monaghan, 2008, p. 73; Grogan, 2008, p. 93).

The viewpoint and practices of the Nigerians highlighted in this section, have shown the different ways gender can influence or modify food-related identification processes and reflect the inherent societal gender values. Despite the fact that they live in a different cultural environment from their homes, they have become adept at negotiating through the varied challenges that this may bring and reassigning gender roles which reflects where they come from and where they are.

9. Dinning out

In Nigeria people from all strata of society eat some of their meals away from home. This is supported by a vibrant street-food culture. As mentioned earlier, there are great varieties of street food: local, international and continental (restaurants). For those who wish to be seen as modern and aware of social trends, family outings have become part of the family routine. In Belgium, the lifestyles of the Nigerians sometimes pose a challenge to their ability to dine out as a family. Yet during the week many eat at least one meal away from home. This includes lunches at work and school. The Nigerians interviewed frequently patronise the street-food vendors in Belgium, who are not necessarily Nigerian. However, they go for street food which appeals to their “taste”, even though they had never eaten it prior to their arrival in Belgium. Popular street foods for Nigerians in Belgium are durum, kebab, frites, burgers and waffles.

The Nigerian families (with both spouses Nigerian) interviewed go out for a meal at least once in a month or every 3 months but mainly to fast-food restaurants such as Quick, McDonald’s and Hector Chicken. However, few go out to “proper” Western restaurants occasionally to celebrate, whereas those married to Western spouses go out more often to different restaurants and cafés.

Unlike those in mixed marriages, the Nigerian couples occasionally go out on their own. Although there still seems to be a strong cultural influence on their opinions, one sees more changes in attitude towards what may be viewed as contrary to traditional expectations, the longer people stay in Belgium. Initially, where an individual may have been willing to break with cultural inhibitions and go out, lack of resources, material and

human impeded such attempts. First, many did not have the confidence to enter *proper* restaurants, especially as they may not have had the legal right to be in Belgium. Thus they avoided places where they felt they might be given a negative reception or, worse still, have the authorities called in because of their presence. The financial resources were initially an impediment too, but with more couples working, the woman may initiate the outings to restaurants and also pay for it. This ability to eat in these restaurants is also seen as proof of social mobility.

The Nigerian traditional outlook is that a married woman should not go to restaurants, bars or cafés, except for family or cultural events. On the other hand a man is allowed to go out with friends and girlfriends. Going out with a wife to a bar or restaurant is not common. Coming from such a cultural background, the Nigerians in Belgium are still reluctant to break with this norm. Rarely do married women go out for a drink or a meal alone in any of the cafés, especially those owned by Nigerians. The view is that a responsible married woman has no place in a café. Thus, even when a couple have been visiting the café while dating, once they are married, the woman is expected to reduce or to stop visits to these cafés. The man can still go out with friends for drinks or to socialise but is expected to reduce or stop eating in these cafés. If he must eat there, it should not replace the home as the main source of his meals or become a frequent occurrence.

Some of the women interviewed indicate a break from tradition. As many began working, going out with colleagues for drinks and office dinners has become common. Through their various women's associations or network of friends, some women have also started initiatives which involve going out for meals as a group or with their husbands. Such dinners are planned months ahead to afford each couple the time to organise their agenda. The women also arrange for paid babysitters to look after the children at designated homes of different members of their association or circle of friends.

Gender relations in Nigerian homes rely on both the traditional Nigerian norm and aspects of the European values they are now constantly exposed to. In the interactions between the genders, they make room even subconsciously for the impact of the Belgian socio-cultural milieu on gender roles. Hence Nigerian couples adjust to fit in with expectations of the Belgian society, by adapting to some of the Western gender roles. When both spouses do not participate equally in this process of adaptation, there is always tension, as has been noted in other Nigerian diaspora communities too (Hagher, 2011, p. 127). This in many cases has led to the breakdown of the marriages or relations. It is such inability or refusal to accept the reality on ground regarding gender roles or negotiate to fit into acceptable roles that has led to some cases of domestic violence and

even death in some Nigerian diaspora communities. This however, does not mean such acts are condoned by the Nigerian culture. Not at all, the Nigerian traditional norms have means of meting out punishment for such acts, which the western tradition will never permit.

Despite the changes in gender roles and the adjustments needed for life in the diaspora, certain aspects of the Nigerian food culture still try to operate within the same traditional context and retain the same values.

10. “*Omenala ga adi*” (traditions and customs will remain) but with something new too

“*Omenala ndi diri ha*” means, let every group’s traditional norms remain relevant for them. This not only epitomises the respect for one’s culture and traditions, but that of others as well. This may be the reason no Nigerian truly sees himself or herself, as belonging permanently to any other place than their home towns. In the mind of most of the first-generation Nigerians in Belgium, irrespective of how long they have lived in the diaspora (some having even acquired Belgian nationality), Belgium is not seen as “home” the same way Nigeria (irrespective of ethnic sentiments) is represented as home. This viewpoint, the continuous cultural interaction within the communities and the link to home, means that people still uphold personal and group food-related rituals. Some of these food-related rituals are religious, cultural or social.

Commensality is a very important aspect of Nigerian culture. Traditionally, the kola nut rite is utilized as a sign of welcome, goodwill and for spiritual ritualistic purposes. In Nigeria guests are offered kola nuts as a sign of welcome, so much so that all edible items offered to a guest are termed “kola” (Duru, 2005). Nigerians in Belgium still utilize the kola nut during group cultural events for the kola nut rites but rarely do individuals offer kola nuts to guests at home. However, they may be offered “kola” in the form of drinks, snacks and food. This is expected irrespective of the occasion or relationship. A refusal to offer or receive this is viewed negatively.

Marriages are celebrated amongst Nigerians in Belgium in very different ways. For couples from Nigeria, the Nigerian traditional marriage is still valued above all others. Some parents, whose daughters were born in Belgium, still insist that all the traditional marriage rites are performed before any civil or religious ceremony. For these marriage rites, the groom with his family or friends (in the absence of family) goes to the bride’s family with a drink to “knock”. Later, they go back for the “wine carrying” which is the main traditional marriage. The difference in these traditional marriage rites from those held in Nigeria is that, in the absence of the clan

members who oversee such events, close family friends step in to play these roles. Sometimes, two Nigerians who are living in Belgium but are unable to go home (due to financial or legal reasons), may ask their families to carry out their traditional marriage in Nigeria, which gives them the recognition as a married couple even if they are yet to carry out a civil marriage in Belgium. Just like many Nigerians, although invitation cards are printed, there is no restriction in terms of number of guests. Marriage is viewed as a thing of joy, so anyone even if not invited, can drop in to join the party.

Child births are celebrated by fathers with offers of drinks to friends and well-wishers. Those who visit the family are well feted; in turn they give material and monetary gifts. In Belgium there are no specific limitations as to when these visits can happen: ideally from the day the mother and child return home to about the 6th month, although people can still visit much later. Many use the opportunities provided by the baby's naming ceremony or Christian baptism to present a gift to the family. Naming ceremonies are still celebrated among the various groups, although there is an ethnic variance. The Yorubas adhere to a strict traditional naming-ceremony code which stipulates a naming ceremony must be on the 8th day of the baby's birth. The other groups either perform a quiet naming ceremony or have a party to celebrate the baptism and dedication of the child in church. Food and drinks are used as part of the ritual for the naming ceremony and also for entertaining guests.

Funerals among Nigerians in Belgium are held the same way they are done in Nigeria and food plays an important role. In Belgium, most of the traditional food demands for funeral rites are reserved for the funeral or burial in Nigeria because most Nigerians who die in Belgium are repatriated back home. Many of the funerals organised in Belgium are either for Nigerians who died in Belgium or relatives who died in Nigeria. The host is expected to provide adequate food and drinks such as rice dishes, fufu and soups, chicken, fish, and ethnic specialties for the people who attend the ceremony. Sometimes, close friends to the bereaved may donate money or food items, to help with the funeral party or actual burial in Nigeria.

The lives of Nigerians in diaspora are embodied with cultural roles and norms about food carried over from the home land. Although the content of such traditional programmes may not be as authentic as culturally specified, the significance and sustenance of traditionally ascribed roles enables the participants to overlook minor changes in the content. A good example of this is the new yam festival in Belgium. As part of an effort to sustain their group identity, the various Nigerian ethnic groups in Belgium organise themselves into various cultural associations or unions, as they are popularly called. Within the framework of these associations, festivals which are of traditional significance to their ethnic groups of origin are

enacted in Belgium. The aim of many ethnic and cultural associations in Belgium is to uphold their cultural values, thus they hold cultural events aimed at strengthening their group identity in Belgium and insure it is passed on to the next generation.

The main objectives of these organisations are to foster unity among the people, uphold their customs and tradition, while building affinity with their host community (Plaza and Ratha, 2011; Faist *et al.*, 2013). Many of these unions celebrate traditional festivals that are important to their ethnic groups. Among the Igbos in Belgium, the new yam festival and the kola nut rites are of great importance. The various Igbo unions in Belgium celebrate the new yam festival, a traditionally symbolic food festival which is celebrated to varied degrees in other parts of the country. During this festival, yam (a member of Dioscorea), an ancient staple food (with *D. Rotunda* and *D. Cayenensis* grown in West Africa before the Iron Age) is honoured (O'Brien, 2000, pp. 212-5).

Amongst the Nigerian Igbos in Belgium, the new yam festival still holds a strong cultural and symbolic status. As I explained earlier in this book, in pre-colonial times the festival was to thank Ani (the earth goddess) and Ahiajoku (the yam deity) after the yam harvest, for providing a bountiful harvest of “the king of all crops” or to appease them if it had been a bad harvest. With the advent of the colonial era and Christianity, thanksgiving and harvest services were no longer held in traditional shrines but in churches. Igbos in Belgium began to celebrate this festival in 1998 (which was when they actively began organising their unions) as a means of bringing Igbos together and showcasing their culture to non-Nigerians. All aspects of this festival were tailored as closely as possible to the celebrations in Nigeria. Even the challenging task of roasting whole tubers of yam was performed by Igbo women who, although financial members like the men, were only allowed traditionally prescribed roles i.e., cooking and serving during this festival and also presenting female traditional dances to entertain guests (Duru, 2005).

Since yams are rarely exported from Nigerian, all the yams used for this ceremony were from Ghana, which produces most of the yams sold in Belgium. At the new yam festival, like every formal occasion involving Igbos, the breaking of the kola nut, which is the epitome of Igbo cultural identity, is performed too. The tradition stipulates that *Oji Igbo* (*cola accuminata*) is the only kola nut worthy of this ritualistic blessing. For both events in Belgium, despite the strong symbolic roles attached, the organisers were not hesitant about buying the kola nut and yam in Belgium, knowing their origin is nowhere near Nigeria (Duru, 2005). Yet, in as much as they are keen on sustaining their foodways, like in every other aspect of their lives in Belgium, when necessary, they are not reluctant to compromise.

Beliefs and norms about totemic animals are still respected and upheld. Where people have inadvertently eaten what they believe is forbidden, they exhibit a severe case of revulsion. A respondent described it thus, “I went to the house of (...) and he brought out this soup that smelt so good. We started eating, it was delicious, then I ate the meat but couldn’t really place it so I asked him what it was and when he said rabbit, my insides turned upside down. I ran to the toilet and vomited (...)” (PV, 2009). Those who come from areas that abhor certain food items such as snails or cocoyam still hold onto such taboos. Although none could proffer a rational effect eating these items will have on them; that it is a taboo back home seem to be all that matters.

On a personal level, different individuals also strive to sustain rituals that are symbolic to them as a result of their family orientation. One of the Nigerians who has resided longest in Belgium during an interview stated that, having spent over 40 years in Belgium, there are certain areas of home which, because of many changes, he does not recognise anymore when he visits. However, he stated that,

although I have been away for a very long time, whenever I dream, I dream in my native language (...) I am the youngest of my dad’s male children and as a little boy until he died (...) we had this big cupboard where he kept all his hot drink with cups (...) he will ask me to get a drink and the cup. You know the little shot (...) I will pour the drink for him, he will drink (...) with me kneeling down, he will place his hands on me, pray and bless me. Although I am married to a Belgian I do the same with my only child, a daughter, although I don’t drink I make sure I keep a hot drink always at home. From when she was a little girl, I will ask her to get a drink for me, as my father did, she will pour a little in a cup and I will drink and she will kneel and I bless her as my father blessed me (...) she understands this is something important, it began from somewhere (PI, 2007).

This narrative shows the complexities in food, migration and identity. This Nigerian migrant valued the traditional custom by his father but did not allow his new milieu or the fact that his child is a girl, dictate how he should enact this important act.

It is not only with regard to Nigerian traditions that food-related rites are sustained, but in different religious guises too. Many of the adherents of the different religions still follow strictly the dictates of their religious organizations even when it is contrary to the norm in the new milieu as is the case with Christian practices. Among the Muslims fasting during Ramadan is practised, with the slaughtering of the ram during Eid festivals. The popular practice in Nigeria of giving out meat and food to extended family, friends and neighbours during Eid is made more challenging in Belgium, by the lifestyle of the migrants and resources needed

for this, especially financially. Thus many of the Muslims do not distribute food to their friends and acquaintances but may invite close friends to celebrations in their homes.

Among the Christians, food plays an important role in all their festivals. During Christmas, rice dishes are the main meals of the day. Normally in Nigeria, chicken is the meat of choice for all important celebrations but in Belgium, families serve roasted turkey, chicken, seafood such as lobster, salmon and prawns with the rice dishes. Moreover, some of these seafood and even turkey are not common choices in Nigeria. Yet many have adopted them as part of their celebratory meals, bringing the influence from the west and combining it with their already established culinary knowledge. Like in all societies, the Christmas celebration is always a period of conspicuous consumption, which is another commonality between Nigeria and Belgium (Morrill, 2009; Albala, 2011; Fieldhouse, 1986).

The community also does not organise traditional music or dance displays like in Nigeria. During the festive Christmas period in Nigeria, some traditional dance troupes may visit homes and put up performances for which they get money, while others hold events to showcase their arts. However, Nigerian migrants in Belgium still visit each other and spend Christmas together. Moreover, in Belgium summer has replaced the cold winter Christmas period as the favoured period for traditional events, parties, communal and private celebrations, whereas in Nigeria, the Christmas period is the busiest with all sorts of socio-cultural events.

Nigerian members of the old Christian denominations maintain the lent fasting period before the Easter celebrations. Meat is also not eaten on Good Friday. These practices are prevalent, especially among the Catholics. For the more fundamental Christian groups such as the Pentecostals, Evangelicals and even the Nigerian “traditional” Christian sects, fasting is an integral part of being a Christian and not reserved for certain periods. Many Nigerians who belong to these Christian groups, do not participate in all Nigerian ceremonies to avoid acts which may be contradictory to their beliefs. Among these groups as mentioned earlier, fasting is believed to be a strong weapon of spiritual warfare-intense prayers. It also disciplines the body and grants the spirit control over the body. This enables one to have more spiritual strength and enter into a closer communion with God.

Coming from a country that believes that evil spirits and agents can harm or hinder people’s progress, many Nigerians and their families back home constantly fast to ward off perceived evil attacks. Some Nigerian migrants constantly make requests for spiritual assistance from home, regarding whatever problems they think they may be having. Some people

also believe their problems may be as a result of what is termed as demonic possession or attacks, so they fast in preparation for spiritual deliverance. These acts are common in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches, which are also different in style of prayers and worship from Pentecostal or evangelic churches in other communities.

Fasting in this stance may sometimes be what is referred to as dry fasting. This means no food, water; nothing is consumed throughout the duration of the fasting, just prayers and songs for a given number of days. Within these Christian congregations, group fasting and individual fasting are constantly organised. A good example is the annual 70-day fasting organised worldwide by the Mountain of fire and miracles church from its headquarters in Nigeria. The most popular fasting method is the “6 to 6”, which means 6 am to 6 pm. Some go on 24-hour fasts or more, depending on what they are aiming for. Normally the fast is broken first with liquids and then fruits followed by other foods. Sometimes the fasting may entail going without food and breaking the fast with fruits and eating only fruits and uncooked vegetables throughout the fasting period.

Many adhere strictly to the fasting regimes because of the expected testimonies of changes in their circumstances, after each fasting and prayer period. There has been a widespread initiative by Nigerians in Diaspora (including Belgium) to open branches of Nigerian Pentecostal and traditional Christian fundamentalist churches. Many of these have Nigerian members but have also reached out to the wider community (Ogungbile, 2010). The Nigerian “traditional” Christian denominations like the Aladura, Cherubim and Seraphim, Celestial church of God; popularly called “white garment churches” in Nigeria, still wear white garments and walk barefooted in their churches.

Among the churches the role of olive oil is very important during prayers, since it is used as anointing oil. However unlike in Nigeria, where many only use olive oil for religious purposes, in Belgium some of those interviewed use it as a healthier option in their cooking and also as dressing for salads. None of these people prior to their migration to Belgium used olive oil in cooking. This again shows that no foodways is truly devoid of new inputs but will always adopt new cuisines, if found favourable to their needs.

Nigerians, as stated earlier in this book, irrespective of their religious orientation, still adhere to traditional beliefs and customs. Avoidance of certain foods during pregnancy is also practised by some of the women in Belgium. Food which is deemed harmful to the child’s well-being is not consumed (harmful not in a proven physiological way but based on superstitious beliefs).

Upon delivery of a new baby, different types of herbs and spices are used to cook for the new mother. This is believed to help cleanse the body and enable adequate flow of breast milk for the baby. Pregnant women buy and consume edible clays during their pregnancy; these can be salted clay or the harder, slate-like edible variety. Previously in Belgium, these edible clays could easily be bought in African shops until the health and food authorities banned their sale.

The traditional practice of having mothers visit after child birth to take care of the new mother and baby, called *Omugwo* among the Igbos is still practiced in Belgium. Despite the immigration challenges, mothers living in Nigeria are often invited by their daughters' families in Belgium to visit and play the traditional role, as would have been the case if they were living in Nigeria. At the end of the *Omugwo* the mothers are also given the expected gifts when leaving for home. For those who due to some reasons; ranging from inability to get visa, lack of financial resource or the inability of a mother to visit, they have to rely on other Nigerian women for support.

There are also Nigerians, who despite their access to a modern health service in Belgium still believe in the efficacy of traditional Nigerian medicine. Individuals acquire and sell traditional herbs infused in alcohol for diverse ailments or just as a health boost, despite the fact that these infusions have no scientific backing. Their usage is rooted in the belief that not all problems can be solved by modern medicine and science. Many of those interviewed strongly believe in seeking alternative solutions (through traditional priests, Christian or Islamic religious leaders) for physical ailments and other challenges they may be facing.

In public cultural settings and private domains, many of the special Nigerian dishes that are not part of the everyday diet are still prepared. Dishes such as pepper soup, *isi ewu* (goat head), *nkwobi* (cow leg), *ugba* (oil bean), stock fish and other foods that need special ingredients or are time consuming, are still viewed as speciality dishes and prepared less often than other Nigerian dishes.

It is the totality of these foods and practices that embody the Nigerian identification processes using food. It is worth noting that they do not operate from an isolated position but are part of wider global migrant foodscapes. Yet each migrant community relies on the link to that place called home, for aspects of what makes its foodways unique and defines their position in the new place.

Conclusion – Foodscapes and Migrant Identity Formation

1. Migrants' foodways in contemporary foodscapes

Once people began moving from their homes to different parts of the world, so did their food and food-related customs or norms. These encounters between people of different cultures, do not lead to a simple adaptation to new food but usually give rise to a fusion of the new and the indigenous, to create entirely new foodways and culture. Often as shown in this book, these food fusions will give rise to relatively new dishes unknown in the homeland but accepted in the new place as authentic, which further challenges the notion of authenticity in food cultures and traditions.

Over the years these new food encounters meant that the cosmopolitan cuisines of many Western nations, have received inputs from cuisines from far flung parts of the world which eventually become part of their culinary culture. Think of pasta and pizza dishes that are now consumed all over the world, curry dishes from Asia popularised in Britain and other parts of the world and Chinese eateries dotted all over different cities of the world.

Many of these diverse cuisines took decades to become part of the modern urban foodscape. The promoters of these foodways no longer accept being submerged in one broad identity. They seek to reflect their national, regional or ethnic identity in their cuisine. Those who patronise them have also come to recognise the difference in the background of the people and their food, even when they come from the same region.

Despite the stringent immigration restrictions put in place by many nations to minimise the influx of migrants and refugees into their territories, more people will still move within and between nations. Once they settle down, they will try to build communities and recreate aspects of their home culture, including the taste of home. Since we live in a market-driven society, food is also big business. The need of people for familiar food gives rise to the demand for these foods.

The market economy enables access to these foods, through people who are not necessarily from within migrant communities, but have the

right resources and ability to supply the needed *ethnic* foods. Thus migrants are able to maintain their distinct food culture as availability of some desired ingredients are guaranteed and the main aspects of the home food habits and culture can be reproduced in the host environment. All these, coupled with the continuous link and affiliation to home countries, delays the possibility of complete integration within the host community. Even for the new generation of diasporas or migrant communities (including people born in the host nations), the host nations' political decisions focused on protecting nationalistic interests means many migrants look inwards to their own groups, in seeking a place of affirmation for themselves. This heightens their group identity, rather than diluting its intensity despite years of living away from their home countries. Since there are still obstacles to their full acceptance as members of the host communities, the need to maintain proper sentiments of belonging is stronger than embracing the culture and identity of the host communities.

Having said this, it does not mean there is no influence from within their new environment. As shown in this work, every diaspora community that exists has had to adapt. Skills, such as language and social norms deemed necessary for survival in the new environment, are learnt to varying degrees. The emphasis is given to knowledge needed to survive within the legal demands of the country, as contravening the rules will bring undesirable problems. However, food due to its nature, exists mainly outside these legal confines.

Modern cosmopolitan society is a melting pot of world cuisines. People become exposed to food which they would never have encountered in their home countries. The popular dishes or meals from these cuisines are accepted and become part of the daily meal of people, although they do not necessarily reflect the origins of such food. Hence sometimes there is more exchange of cuisine between diaspora communities than between them and the host communities.

In as much as food plays the same role in the identity construction of migrants and diaspora communities, by indicating those who are in and those who are out of the groups, their realities differ. Thus this determines how they engage with or within their new environment using food. Levitt and Jaworsky rightly pointed out that "many scholars now recognise that migration has never been a one-way process of assimilation but rather that migrants to varying degrees are embedded in the multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields in which they live" (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007, pp. 129-56).

Early Western accounts portrayed Black Africans as an inferior race. Events and attitudes throughout history have not been able to dispel this assumption completely. Within many Western academic communities,

the history of Africans and African societies tends to be Eurocentric. For years the focus of Africanist historians was just on political history rather than the social history of the people or accounts that would help refute the negative portrayals. These negative attitudes sometimes manifest as racism in many Western communities, including Belgium. It also gets extended to the food and cuisine of Black Africans. Many people have no idea which foods they consume and even the communities that have African shops imagine all sorts of unacceptable things being sold as food. Some believe monkeys or dogs are sold in the shops. One might say this is understandable as some African communities consume them, but that argument is flawed the Chinese in their country eat things even Africans abhor but their food does not get the same stereotype.

The study of Nigerian diaspora food, albeit African food, is a showcase of the global nature of food. It has shown in particular that human beings draw from the same food basket, to create their own cuisine influenced by their culinary history and where they are. As indicated above, it took years for some of the popular migrant cuisines to become fully accepted. So as more people interact closely with Africans through marriage or friendship and become familiar with African food, inevitably with time the cuisine of Nigerians and other sub-Saharan Africans will also become more widespread in Western communities.

According to Seweryn (2005, p. 22), contemporary migrants are a far more diversified group in comparison to migrants of the beginning of the 20th century. As such, migration brings change at the macro level of societies in their entirety, at the micro level of families, and at the personal level. Modern society is a paradox because in as much as diverse people are living within the same space, people are also becoming more protective of their cultures and identities. Hence, supported by legal frameworks which recognizes and grants them the right to maintain those aspects of their culture deemed fundamental, migrant communities and foodways are thriving. Yet, there are also provisions and allowances made for others, which makes attaining a truly diverse society difficult in practice.

It seems that the emergence of people of diverse origins within the same space, creates anxiety among people in the host communities. With the influx of more migrants and establishment of diaspora communities, nationals of receiving countries are becoming more protective of their resources and wary of immigration. In doing this, many have inadvertently isolated the migrant communities, denying or limiting their full access to the opportunities and resources open to nationals of the host countries. Following from this, as receiving countries become more “paranoid”, diaspora communities are forced to become more introverted as they lean more towards their communities and various nations, rather than identifying with their resident countries (Harbottle, 2000, p. 3). Even when the

migrants have acquired the nationality of the host nations, culturally and socially they identify with their home countries.

Unlike in past eras when stronger groups submerged smaller ones with no challenge, times are different. Global agencies support and promote the protection of cultures and identities, so smaller groups can sustain a distinct culture and identity as part of their human rights as long as it does not infringe on the rights of others. When people interact more closely, they tend to strive to manage and maintain some elements of their uniqueness, what differentiates them from others, identifying with those who share the same cultural traits with them. Food festivals and rites are maintained to help build and maintain a sense of identity among the groups through generations. The content of some food cultures has changed from that practised back home. It is worth remembering, though, that foodways and cultures are continuously evolving. So these foodways, despite the intent of adapting to the norm back home, also reflect the input from within the new environment.

2. “Their food is good but ours is still the best”. Food, eating and being Nigerian in Belgium

Food and its use by Nigerians in Belgium is reflective of the multiple-layered links that enable the diaspora communities find their place and sense of self in a strange land. As shown in preceding pages, identities highlighting differences are only noticeable when compared to others, as they are not so visible otherwise. Just by their presence in Belgium, there is already a marked difference between Nigerians and the host community, which needs no actions on their part to highlight it.

Nigerians in Belgium, although from a multi-ethnic nation with strong ethnic allegiances, have been “forced” to see themselves first as Nigerians, before any ethnic identity. As the first mode of identification delineates ethnic modes, Nigerian national forms of identification have become more prevalent especially in their foodways. The representation of Nigerian food in the public space is drawn from foods acceptable to the different ethnic groups, which use the same ingredients to create the same dishes. Thus, public events are avenues of showcasing and fortifying a Nigerian food in Belgium as foods served are aimed at portraying a Nigerian identity. As Nugent (2010) pointed out, African diasporas have played important roles in mediating national forms. These national forms with regard to food are also evident in the home country. Just like Cusack (2003, p. 2) stated, the emergence of national cuisines is part of the process of assembling a national culture, making food a crucial contributor to the individual’s and then a group’s collective sense of identity.

This present convergence of Nigerian food on a national platform in Belgium, is also enabled by the limited availability of ethnic cooking ingredients; bringing more familiarity to the Nigerian cooking. In a sense, the market forces inadvertently enable a national culinary identity. Food is great business, as shown earlier in the book, so importers and sellers will only stock food items that are widely used, as this guarantees more returns. Hence the national food ingredients are more available and people rely on food bridges to Nigeria, for their ethnic foodstuffs.

Although as shown earlier, the same foods Nigerians claim ownership of, are also consumed by a vast number of different nationalities. What makes food Nigerian though, is the way of preparing, cooking, serving and eating it. For example, the main food of Nigerians in Belgium is still fufu and soups, eaten with fingers even by children born in Belgium. Yet what is used for fufu by Nigerians (wheat, ble, potatoe flours), is prepared in a different way by people from other communities. This in no way implies the extinction of ethnic culinary influences in Nigerian cooking in the diaspora but rather like Hall (1996) noted, it is still possible to project a one-people (sameness), stable unchanging, continuous frame of reference and meaning, irrespective of the shifting divisions and variations of our actual history. More so, when you live in a different milieu devoid of the constant ethnic agitations at home, emphasising the commonalities rather than difference is more beneficial.

According to Nugent (2010), Nigerian restaurants in diaspora often make a virtue of regional variations that themselves represent a form of codification, but in Belgium this variation is only obvious from within. None of the restaurants in Belgium identify themselves on ethnic terms. They all claim a national identity, although those within the community know which ethnic cuisine is dominant in each restaurant. Moreover, this does not remove the ethnic identification processes, especially in private spaces.

In the private domains where possible (which can be most times), ethnic cuisine rather than a national cuisine is produced. Even national dishes are cooked with an ethnic flavour. Eating habits and etiquettes are often maintained and taught to children. Within the community, the ethnic differences are recognised, although one may say that it has lost some of its vicious edges, which are always present at home.

There are still commonalities irrespective of ethnic origins, which epitomizes the Nigerian food culture at home and the diaspora. Maintaining such acts as food sharing or using food-related items to show prestige and generosity, are common features of commensality among Nigerians. However, whether these will be maintained by the younger generations born outside Nigeria, is yet to be seen. One can only be hopeful. Evidence from older diasporas have shown a continuation of culinary knowledge, food habits and

cultural identity thus the next generation of Nigerian in Belgium can replicate and maintain, (if not all) certain aspects of the Nigerian food culture.

In Nigerian diaspora homes, in as much as there has been a remarkable change in gender roles, most of the food-related work is still done by women. This is mainly because many still view their food-related work as important to their sense of self, so the men are not really allowed complete “ownership” of the kitchen. In a sense it is the women who actively dictate the role of men in the kitchen, by either allowing them into this supposedly feminine space or restricted them. As the views of younger Nigerian women (even the older ones) change, there may yet be more changes in the gender roles.

Migrants including Nigerians, occupy multiple cultural spaces and their identification processes tend to conform to where they are. When need be, they are able to compartmentalize their lives and actions to achieve their goals, be it professionally, economically or culturally. This may involve some compromise, changes or innovations. The food that emerges from the Nigerian kitchens in Belgium bears witness to the capability of migrants to maintain tradition on one hand, and bring in innovations on the other. The Nigerians can buy different cuts of meat products unknown prior to migration, at the same time they are buying the goat head and cow leg or tail, needed for Nigerian traditional dishes. New ingredients are used to substitute unavailable ones or to create something new. It is from such innovations that migrants of other generations and older times, have been able to create dishes that have impacted on the foodways of many western nations. There are now ice cream shops and trucks on all street corners, curry restaurants, pizzas and many more in western cities. Thus with consistency and persistence, popular Nigeria dishes may gain more acceptance in the wider community. This will bring not just cultural benefits but economic ones as well.

Children born to the migrants are vehicles for change in their community, as they traverse diverse food cultures, picking and mixing cuisines. Although their use of food may show some ambivalence in their identification processes, this does not in any way reduce their affiliation to their parents’ cultural origins. Prevailing circumstances have made it challenging for them to find a “place” they can lay complete claim to. However, what they eat and how they use food to portray their link to the Nigerian diaspora in Belgium and to Nigeria, can also create the synergy they need to be able to fit into multiplicity of roles and milieus. Through these multi links, new culinary influences are brought into the community that otherwise may not have been possible.

Nigerian children, some of whom rarely go to Nigeria, have been brought up eating Nigerian food and being exposed to different aspects

of its culture. Thus the Nigerian parents are not just custodians of cultural knowledge but teachers of indigenous Nigerian cultural skills. A role which sustains the affirmation of group identity and expectations. Many of these children have become skilled at living between different cultural milieus, drawing more food experience not just from the Nigerian diaspora community, but from other migrant groups and the host community.

Nigerians proactively maintain food-related rituals and norms. As shown in previous pages, irrespective of the occasion or place, the esteem given to kola nut rites has not diminished. They also re-enact traditional food festivals deemed important to their identity, such as the new yam festival. The forms of these traditions may not be truly authentic, but what is really important for Nigerians is what they represent, who they are and what differentiates them from others.

In as much as Belgium may be termed a Christian nation, Nigerians have also shown the difference between them and others, through the same Christian faith. The Nigerian churches in Belgium are popular as worship places, reminiscent of the Nigerian mode of worship at home, with music, songs, dancing and even eating together often in church. The indigenous Nigerian churches in Belgium have also portrayed their uniqueness through what they eat, and what they do not eat, especially how they fast.

For many Nigerians, even though it is not necessarily an issue that they dwell on, eating Nigerian food is part of being Nigerian. Food, like language and other forms of group affirmation, is part of what differentiates them from others and gives them a sense of belonging. Like many aspects of society, food is not static but evolves with time, while taking up forms that fit into where and how it is being used. Nigerians have adopted different foods into their cuisine, both at home and in the diaspora, but still view the end result of the cooking as Nigerian.

Despite the distance from home, these migrants maintain links to Nigeria utilizing all available resources. In turn recreating cultural identity affirming norms, which define those within the community and those who do not belong to the community. Knowledge of any of the foods mentioned in the Nigerian cuisine, can define one's part in the community as an insider or outsider. Even for those who do not belong to the community, narrating their knowledge about the cuisine and mentioning foods they enjoy is a sure way of creating a link from one's outsider position to those inside the group; again showing foods ability to break barriers and build relationships.

The above pages have been geared towards exposing not just the foodways of Nigerians in Belgium but also the different culinary engagements and changes in their foodways. This is reflected in the prevalence of food

habits and engagements modelled after the remembered food patterns from home. However, aspects of these patterns have had to change to accommodate lacks or influences necessitated by their new cultural environment. This means old habits are substituted for new ones, which are deemed necessary for the survival of the community in their new place. Foods which are perceived as good for the family are incorporated into the daily diet of the people. This inter-cultural link is further strengthened through interracial marriages among the first generation migrants and also the Nigerian children of migrants; extending the bridges across more cultures. Although in some interracial relationships one culture (including food culture) may be dominant, each partner's culture leaves an indelible mark on the family and eventually the community.

In as much as Nigerians had to adjust to their new environment, food-related rituals are still accorded strong recognition and utilized in building and maintaining group identity in the host community. It is at such performances that food-related identities are reflected at their strongest among Nigerians in Belgium. Yet even these ritualistic food use, are not devoid of certain adjustments in the process of their performances rather than the content; a good example is the acquisition of the food items used. Efforts have been geared towards examining not just the foodways of Nigerians in Belgium, but also the different culinary engagements and changes inherent in this foodway. This is reflected in the prevalence of food habits and engagements, modelled after the remembered (and partly imagined) food patterns from home.

Although Nigerians had to adjust to their new environment, food-related rituals are still accorded strong recognition and utilized in building and maintaining group identity in the host community. Whereas the identity-sustaining-role of food in the public domain is well thought out and deliberate among the Nigerian migrants; at the private domain, the foodway is so ingrained in the people's everyday life that its role in identity sustenance is not given any deliberate thought. Eating Nigerian food or cooking like a Nigerian is just normal for many, a part of who they are and what they know. It is at such performances of food traditions which come without prior deliberate plans, that food-related identities are reflected at its strongest among Nigerians in Belgium. Yet, it is also at this level that one sees the influences and adjustments that Nigerians have made to accommodate the influence from their new environment. This in turn has added value to their foodway, by providing resources to cover the gaps that would have challenged the sustainability of a Nigerian foodway in Belgium.

Just like the quote used in the beginning of this section stated, Nigerians recognise the uniqueness of other foodways and may even enjoy some of them, yet view the Nigerian food as better. And this, like in all cultures and society, is what distinguishes groups. The belief that they and their

acts within their cultural knowledge and milieu are unique, influences their identification modes.

Having said this, some of the circumstances that propel migrants including Nigerians to look inwards for cultural affirmation, were as a result of external pressures. Many nations including Belgium promote diversity and in such environments, cultures including food should play a prominent role. However many within migrant communities still feel they exist in a parallel world to the host communities, where they have limited acceptance and all that concerns them and their values are unknown to others outside their community. This is even the case for children born in Belgium, as shown in their narratives. Food's ability to build bridges is evident and hopefully by experiencing the Nigerian and other African food cultures, the "outsiders" may be more accepting and have a better understanding about them.

Food's economic potentials is enormous as shown by resources available to operators of the African diaspora food market. Although they are the main consumers, the African diaspora in Belgium does not control the market unlike other diasporas. As a result, many of the acceptable food processes are ignored or circumvented by those who focus solely on the economic gains.

The link to home that enabled the emergence of a Nigerian foodway in diaspora, is strong with far reaching implications. The affirmation of individual and group identity through food, can only be possible with access to culturally ascribed foods. Thus access to acceptable and healthy food are a necessity for the sustenance of the Nigerian foodway. For this foodway to continue to thrive, there has to be vibrant food systems in the continent able to supply all that is needed. Hence, African diasporas may also consider investing in agriculture and food processing in the continent, to supply quality food to the diaspora food market.

Irrespective of the limited cultural food knowledge, the disregard for food safety by many of the operators when it comes to African food also needs addressing by relevant agencies, at home and in the diaspora. On the other hand, the agencies in Belgium need to have more Africans with the professional and cultural knowledge to monitor this sector. Many of those who use these foods are Belgian citizens too, so should have the same level of food safety controls available to all consumers.

Despite the afore mentioned challenges, the Nigerian diaspora foodway has proven to be a good window for a historical observation of the macro and micro interactions within, and of course, outside the group. It showcases the identity affirming mechanisms and methods open to the people and how they operate in a different cultural environment.

Appendix 1

Glossary

Abacha	A type of Cassava flakes usually consumed with coconut or groundnut
Abakaliki rice	Local rice grown in Abakaliki area of Ebony state
Afang soup	Cross-river and Akwu Ibom states soup made with ground ukazi leaves and water leaves
Afiafere	White soup
Akara	Beans cakes
Algaragis	Similar to al-kaki but baked not fried
Al-kaki	A small cake or biscuit made from sugar, wheat flour etc. and then fried
Al-kubus	Wheaten pudding eaten with soup
Amala	The main Yoruba fufu made from yam flour
Asbl	Association sans but lucratif, a French term for charities
Ayamashe	Palm oil stew used in eating for ofada rice
Bakilawa	Sugary pastry
Chikwanga	Cassava product from East Africa
Draw soup	Any viscous or slimy soup
Dubulan	Pastry prepared with flour, fresh eggs, sugar syrup or honey, baking powder, yeast and water
Ede	Cocoyam in Igbo
Edikaikong	Soup with fluted pumpkin leaves and water leaves, from Cross River and Akwa Ibom areas of Nigeria
Egusi	Melon seed soup
Gurasa	A type of flat wheaten bread introduced by the Arab into Northern Nigeria
Isi ewu	A spicy traditional Igbo dish made with (cooked and cut) goat head, potash, palm oil, uziza, utazi and other spices
Kalabari soup	Seafood soup from the Kalabari group of the Niger Delta
knock'iku aka	First official visit to a bride's family to ceremonially inquire if she is available for marriage
kola	Anything given as an act of welcome or to show goodwill

Lafu	Cassava fufu eaten in Yoruba areas
Mbika	Melon seed in Lingala, a Congolese language
Miyan kubewa	Okro Soup
Miyan Kuka	Soup made with dried leaves of the baobab tree, consumed in the northern region
Miyan Taushe	Pumpkin soup
Nakiya	Prepared with local rice and spices popular in Northern Nigeria
Nkwobi	Spicy cow leg pieces prepared with palm oil, potash and local spices (uziza, ehuru, utazi etc.)
Nsala	Also called white soup – popular soup cooked without vegetables and sometimes without palm oil
Ofada rice	Cooked local rice, grown in ofada area in Yorubaland served with ayamashe
Ofe akwu	Spicy soup made with pulp of the palm nut
Ogbono	A viscous, slimy soup made from <i>Irvingia Gabonensis</i>
Ogi	Custard from corn flour also called akamu
Oha	Tender leaves (<i>Bridelia Micrantha</i>) used for soup popular among the Igbos
Olugbo	Bitterleaves (<i>Venonia amygdaline</i>) used in soup preparation
Omugwo	The period a mother spends in the home of her mother after she delivers a baby, supporting her and also receiving presents for her visit
Orishishi	All sorts – refers to food served with different types of meat, fish
Tapioca	Pudding made from dried processed cassava granules
Tuwo	fufu made from flours of different grains and popular in the north of Nigeria
Ugba	Popularly called African salad, it is thinly sliced fermented oil bean prepared with meat, dry fish or stock fish and palm oil, potash, hot pepper, crayfish, garden eggs
Ugu	Igbo name for leaves of the fluted pumpkin
Ukazi	Vegetable also called Afang, used for cooking different vegetable soups
Vzw	Vereniging zonder winsttoogmerk, a Flemish term for charities
wine carrying/ ibu mmanya	Traditional wedding

Appendix 2

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
Kola nut – <i>Cola acuminata</i>
<i>Cola nitida</i>
Bitter Kola – <i>Garcinia kola</i>
Alligator Pepper – <i>Aframomum melegueta</i>
Pepper Fruit – <i>Dennettia tripetala</i>
Aerial Yam – <i>Dioscorea Bulbifera</i>
Guinea Yam (white yam) – <i>Dioscorea Rotundata</i>
Bush Yam – <i>Dioscorea Praehensitis/D. Abyssinia</i>
Yellow Yam – <i>Dioscorea Cayenensis</i>
Water Yam – <i>Dioscorea Alata</i>
Three Leaf Yam – <i>Dioscorea Dumentorium</i>
Bitter Yam – <i>Dioscorea Prachensilis</i>
Cocoyam – <i>Colocasia Esculenta</i>
<i>Xanthosoma Maffafa</i>
<i>Colocasia esculenta</i> Var
<i>Xanthosoma Sagittifolium</i>
<i>Colocasia spp</i>
Cassava – <i>Manihot Esculenta</i>
African Rice – <i>Oryza Glaberrina</i>
Asian Rice – <i>Oryza Sativa</i>
Plantain – <i>Musa Paradisiaca</i>
Banana – <i>Musa Sapiantum</i>
Irish Potatoes – <i>Solanum Tuberosum</i>
Sweet Potatoes – <i>Ipomea Batatas</i>
Bullrush Millet – <i>Pennisetum Typhoides</i>
Finger Millet – <i>Eleusine Cozo Cana</i>
Guinea Corn – <i>Sorghum Bicolor</i>
Barley – <i>Hordeum Vulgare</i>

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
Sorghum – Sorghum spp
Common Wheat – Triticum Aestivum
Winged Beans – Sphenostylis Sterocarpa
Ground Beans – Kerstingia Geocarpa
Beans – Vigna Unguiculata (Cowpea)
Soybeans – Glycine Max
Vigna Sinensis
Pigeon Pea – Cajanus Cajan
Groundnut – Arachis Hypogea
Bambara Groundnut – Vigna Subterranea
Maize – Zea Mays (Corn)
Jack Bean – Canavalia Ensiformis
African oil Bean – Pentaclethra Macrophylla
Locust Beans – Parkia biggibosia
Breadfruit – Artocarpus Communis
Buchholzia Coriacea
African Breadfruit – Treculia Africana
Dika Nut Seed – Irvingia spp
Pumpkin Seed – Telferia spp
Cucurbita spp
Melon Seed – Citrullus Vulgaris
Citrullus Lanatus
Castor Seed – Ricinus Communis
Ogbono – Irvingia Gabonensis
Bitter Leaf – Veroia amygdaline
Water Leaf – Telinum triangulare
Green – Amaranthus viridis
Ukazi/Afang – Gnetum africanum
Atama – Heinsia crinita
Ewedu – Corchorus olerius
Cam wood leaf – Pterocarpus soyauxil
Oha – Bridelia Micrantha
Cocoyam leaves/Flower – Colocasia spp

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
African spinach – Amaranthus Hybridus subsp Cruentus
Pumpkin – Cucurbita pepo
Kuka – Adansonia digitata
Okro – Abelmoschus esculenta
Hibiscus Esculentus
Lemon Grass – Cymbogon citratus
Roselle – Hibiscus Sarattensis
African Egg plant – Solanum melongena
Curry leaf – Thymus Vulgaries
Mint – Ocimum Gratissimum
Bird Eye pepper – Capsicum annum
Pepper – Capcicum frutescens
African Black Pepper – Piper guineense
Uda – Xylophia aethiopica
Ehuru – Mondora myristica
Castor oil seed (fermented) – Ricinus communis
Melon Seed (fermented) – Citrillus vulgaris
Black Timber seed – Brachystegia eurycoma
Velvet Bean – Mucuna flegelipes
Tomatoes – Lycopersicon esculentum
L esculentum var cerasiforme
Onion – Allium cepa
Garlic – Allium satiram
Ginger – Zingiber officinale
Cucumber – Cucumus Sativus
Lettuce – Lactuca sativa
Cabbage – Brassica oleracea capitata
Carrot – Daucus carota
Green Pepper
Green Peas – Pisum Sativum
Palm fruit – Elaesis guineensis
Orange – Citrus sinensis
Citrus aurantium

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
Lime – Citrus auranthifolia
Lemon – C. Limon
Pawpaw – Carica papaya
Bush Mango – Irvingia spp
Pear – Dacryodes edulis
Avacado Pear – Persia americana
Monkey Apple – Pachystela brevipes
Pineapple – Ananas comosus
Soursop – Ananas muricarta
Mango – Mangifera Indica
Guava – Psidium guajava
Velvet Tamarind – Diallum guinense
Pomegranate – Punica granatum
Nigerian apple (udara, agbalumo) – Crysophylum Albedum
Grape – Citrus Paradise
Date palm/fruit – Phoenix dactylifera
Icheku, Awin, Tsamiya – Daliun Guinenses
African walnut – Tetracordium Conophorum
Coconut – Cocos Nucifera
Native Pear – Dacryodes (Pachylobis) Edulis
Cashew – Anacardium occidentale
Tiger Nut – Cyperus esculenta
Date Palm – Phoenix dactylifera
Sugar Cane – Sachanim Officinarum
Shea Fruit – Vitellaria Paradoxa
Meat
Beef
Sheep/Mutton
Chicken
Goat
Offals-tripe, intestine, heart, lungs, tongue, liver. Goat head, cow leg and cow skin
Dog Meat (domestic and wild dog)
Pork (domestic and wild pig)

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
Guinea fowl
Turkey
Partridge
Local Pigeon
Duck
Chicken eggs
Guinea fowl eggs
Turkey Eggs
Bush meat-(not everyday food)
Antelope
Grass cutter
Deer
Hyena
Snakes
Porcupine
Alligator
Monkey
Squirell
Rabbit/Hares
Tortoise
Snails
Sea food
Trunk Fish
Cat Fish (very popular now due to increased fish farming in Nigeria)
Snake fish
Mackrel
Croaker
sardine
Tilapia
Stockfish
Barracuda
Shrimp

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
Crayfish
Crab
Mussels
Periwinkle
Water snails
Insects
Beetle
Cricket
Termite
Grasshopper
Locust
Palm Larvae
Raffia Palm larvae
Drinks
Fura de nunu
Local gin-kaikai, akpetash, shinkana, push-me-I-push-you
Palm and raffia Wine
Pinto
Zobo
Beer
Brandy
Fizzy Drinks – coa cola, pepsi and other products
Gin
Malt drinks
Whisky
Wine
Dairy Products
Fresh Milk (mainly used in the north)
Evaporated milk
Powdered milk
Butter
Cheese – locally produced in the northern region

The Common Edible plants and animals in Nigeria
Breakfast
Cornflakes
Quaker Oats
Corn pap
Agidi (corn pudding)
Eggs (boiled, fried)
Custard
Bread
Margarine
Jam
Tea
Hot chocolate drinks
Coffee
Cooking oil
Palm oil
Groundnut oil
Vegetable oil
Coconut oil

Appendix 3

List of Interviewees			
Names	Interviewed	Names	Interviewed
AB	2008	KK	2009
AE	2010	MA	2004
AE	2010	MC	2009
AE	2009	MJ	2012
AF	2009	MM	2009
AF	2010	MO	2009
AF	2009	MO	2009
AG	2012		
AI	2012	NC	2009
AI	2009	NE	2012
AJ	2012	NI	2010
AO	2012	NJ	2012/2013
AO	2009	NM	2010
AR	2012	NO	2012
AS	2009	NU	2008
AY	2009	NU	2009
BE	2009	NV	2009
BI	2012/2013	OC	2010
CE	2010	OH	2009
CG	2009	OO	2013
CH	2009/2009	OP	2009
CJ	2012	OU	2012
CN	2010	PC	2012
CR	2009	PE	2009
DM	2005	PE	2009
DU	2009	PI	2008
EA	2009	PI	2007

List of Interviewees			
EO	2010	PN	2012
EO	2009	PV	2009
EO	2011	SA	2009
EW	2012	SR	2012
EW	2010	TB	2010/2011
FB	2011	TB	2010
FK	2009	TF	2006/2009
FO	2012	TF	2009
FO	2010	TO	2007
GG	2010	VE	2010
HC	2009	VN	2010
IO	2013	WU	2009
JI	2007/2009	XOO	2012
JU	2006/2007	ZO	2012

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European Food Issues

For several decades now, our attention has been drawn to expanding agricultural output and the proliferation of powerful food companies. At the same time, in the process of European integration, the adoption of the Codex Alimentarius (1963), the Food Law (2002), and the recognition of PGIs for many products have contributed to the creation of a common European “food space”. Today, these systems of supply and distribution have between them given Europeans quite varied dietary possibilities. This situation stems from various developments, linking the economic to the technical and amounting to a long-term trend. Cultural issues bear upon this, whether culinary transmission from generation to generation or the increasingly diverse catering sector, and political decisions also contribute through the establishment of standards and regulations. Hence, traditions and ruptures, innovations and continuities are permanently unsettling the European diet. Using original sources, doctoral theses, conference papers, monographs and testimonies, this series examines historical developments at the national scale and also, more generally, in a transnational perspective. The series hopes to make a significant contribution to understanding the processes of food innovation, which are powerful factors of difference and identity in contemporary Europe.

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