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MOMENTS OF DELIGHT: UNIVERSITY ACADEMICS' EXPERIENCES OF TRADITIONAL CUISINE

***Constantino Pedzisai¹, Clotilda Kazembe² and Maria Tsvere³**

¹*Chinhoyi University of Technology, Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Living Heritage, P Bag 7724, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, +263774614800, pedzisaic@gmail.com*

²*Chinhoyi University of Technology, Department of Hospitality and Tourism, P Bag 7724, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, +263772257961, kazembetildah@gmail.com*

³*Chinhoyi University of Technology, Academy of Teaching and Learning, P Bag 7724, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, +263773365751, maria.tsvere@gmail.com*

*Corresponding author: *Constantino Pedzisai
Email: pedzisaic@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The consumption pattern of food is seen as part of self-fulfillment. Likewise, academics have likes, dislikes, options, and suggestions for traditional cuisine. This qualitative study used a self-reporting semi-structured online questionnaire to establish the experiences of academics, from a local University in Zimbabwe, toward traditional cuisine. Results indicated a strikingly pronounced growing appreciation for traditional food exhibited more by the mature aged academics. This indication hinged on how they regard the nutritional value and sustainability of traditional cuisine. Above all, traditional food accorded the academics their indigenous cultural identity. The study recommends a popularisation of traditional food for academics.

KEYWORDS

Traditional cuisine, consumer, academics, nutritional value, sustainability.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

Traditional food consumption, in the general context, is recognised as a collection of contextual and evolving social practices, where food no longer merely serves as sustenance but also a way to relate to other people in social, historical, cultural and political terms (Alvarez, 2018; Lai, Khoo-Lattimore and Wang, 2019). Food is considered as "... an expression of a society and its way of life" (Kaspar, 1986:14). Traditional food is based on ingredients grown or reared naturally in that region where the cuisine is prepared and is part of the community (Mapara, 2009; Burke et al, 2016). Traditional food has both cultural and symbolic meaning to the community, a significant identity builder that boosts local pride and contributes to tourism development (Sriwongrat, 2008; Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2019). On the other hand, food provides energy and essential nutrients needed for body functions, and thus, eating is at the same time regarded as an 'obligatory' activity (Richards, 2002). According to Katalin, (2009) and Mapingure *et al.*, (2013) traditional cuisine has become the mantra of today's health conscious generation. There has been a paradigm shift from looking at food for survival means to being connected with wealth, rituals, leisure and fanfare (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Traditional cuisines have also been famed for their authenticity. Okumus *et al* (2007) further argue that it is for this authenticity that consumption patterns are gradually increasing.

The Ndebele, Shona, Kalanga and Budya ethnic groups have a variety of traditional food. The diversity of Zimbabwean people and cultures that it can offer many traditional dishes. The dishes include of pap (*sadza*) from pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) and maize (*Zeamais*), road-runner chicken, dried vegetables, pumpkin leaves, black jack leaves (*mutsine*), leafy okra, spider flower leaves (*munyevhe*), cowpea (*nyemba*) fritters, cowpea sausages, mixture of dried cowpeas, roundnuts, groundnuts, beans (*mukundanzara*), polished brown rice (*Oryza glaberrima*) with peanut butter, mopani worms (*madora*), dried and fresh kapenta (*matemba*), grounded cowpeas (*rupiza*), dried cooked maize (*munhare*), biltong (dried meat) cooked with peanut butter (*chimukuyu chinedovi*) and moringa, meat from the hooves of a cow (*mazondo*), rabbit meat in peanut butter, buck meat in peanut butter and goat offals (*zvinyenze*), mixture of dried cowpeas, roundnuts, groundnuts, beans (*mutakura*), cowpeas moulded into small balls (*mabumbe*) and pumpkin leaves (*muboora*).

Vegetables can be fresh or dried cooked with oil or in peanut butter sauce. The dessert can be any of the pumpkins served with sour milk, traditional brew, pumpkin mixed with honey and groundnuts (*pfutare*), cucumbers (*gakareminzwa*), water melon (*nwiwa*), tangy fruit (*mutsiga*), or any of the seasonal fruits (Moyo *et al*, 2016).

Despite the popularity of traditional cuisine in the market there are still a few popular restaurants that offer this food fare in Zimbabwe (Kim, Eves & Scarles, 2009; Mkono, 2012; Parescoli (2016). Only a handful of hotels serve traditional dishes in Zimbabwe such as Gava and PanAfrika in Harare; BOMA and Mama Afrika in Victoria Falls and Paroots Restaurant in Chinhoi (which, however, has since closed shop), KombaHari, Nyama Choma and Little England. With restaurants closing there is an indication that the appreciation and consumption levels are still low in Zimbabwe. Such a limited number of establishments serving traditional dishes offer insights into the low consumption levels of traditional dishes and the need to establish the experiences of academics towards traditional cuisine.

Parescoli (2016) posits that in Zimbabwe and the rest of the African continent, local appreciation of traditional foods remains low. For most, they perceive traditional foods as common food for the marginalized communities (Dweba & Mearns, 2011). In Higher and Tertiary Institutions traditional cuisine is rare and low, yet eating can reveal different kinds of values in individuals. According to Moyo *et al.*, (2016); Bhoola and Singh, (2018); Promssivampallop and Kannaovakun (2019) traditional food is still associated with the mature, poor and marginalised communities and is looked down upon by the Zimbabwean society who lack of awareness of its value. This study established the experiences of academics from a local university in Zimbabwe towards traditional cuisine. To establish those experiences, the study determined the traditional cuisine preferred by university academics at the local university and ascertained the reasons for these preferences.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Radu (2000) "Food nourishes and poisons; it soothes and tortures, divides as well as unites individuals and groups of people..... (Food is) an object of intense desire, admiration, addiction, craving, fear, disgust, and loathing, or it may be ignored or rejected either intentionally or unintentionally". There is a growing recognition of the relationships between food and gastronomy where consumers want to enjoy local food for its distinctiveness. Guiné, Florença, Barroca and Anjos (2020) note that an increased appreciation of traditional food products has been noted in Europe with traditional dishes having become signature dishes to project European countries culture, heritage and identity. Not only that, a growing appreciation of traditional dishes has also been significantly growing in countries like Brazil, Mexico, Japan, United States of America and Costa Rica. On the same note traditional food has been found to be a sustainable resource and a contributor to food security (Belluco *et al.* 2013; Ghaly, 2009). However, despite this recognition Nzenza (2014) bemoans the fast disappearing healthy food that Zimbabweans used to eat from the calabash (*mbiya*), citing a need to civilize it and accept that it is deeply rooted in our memories. Academics alike as educated consumers have also become part of the niche market in this quest for consuming local cuisine but their perceptions regarding local cuisine are still to be documented. Many studies only centre on tourists perceptions on the consumption of local food at various events (Mkono, 2013); Du rand, 2006) motivation and behaviour towards local food (Green, 2013; Kim and Eves, 2012; Jahromy and Tajik, 2011; Seery, 2010; Hu, 2010). None have yet studied and documented academic perceptions of local food. Ironically traditional cuisine remains important for health and well-being, colonialism, superstition, folk lore, a unique reference point for national identity, a cultural heritage passed on from generation to generation, respects the environment and has symbolic meanings (Johnson & Bodirsky, 2008). 2008;Harrington and Herzog, 2007;Mapingure et al., 2013;Jahromyand Tajik, 2011;Hamideh, *et al.*, 2015; Ndlovu & Ojong, 2018).

It is most probably one of the last areas of authenticity that a community can boast of (Reynolds, 1993; Irigüler & Demir, 2018). Traditional food encompasses a host of exciting smells, tastes and flavours, brings out cultures forgotten, and it also provides learning opportunities (Mason & Paggiaro, 2009). It is a form of reflective eating if one wants to analyse more intricately traditional food. Academics being more at the forefront of research can best articulate these reflective experiences.

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There has been a lot of research in developed destinations in the field of indigenous cuisine consumption as a tourist experience. However the plethora of studies carried out, are more inclined towards explaining the nature of local cuisine as a tourist experience (Torres, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2009; Mkono, 2011, 2012). Academic preferences have been an overlooked component in the tourism arena. Despite the recognition that food (cuisine) is an important determinant in the overall perception of a destination by tourists, the literature discussing the attributes of local cuisine from an academic perspective is rather limited (Ab Karim *et al.*, 2011).However it is important to research academic preferences of local cuisine for a better understanding of relevant social values as well as cultural meanings beyond economic and sustainable development reasons.

4.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Which traditional cuisines are preferred by university academics at a local university in Zimbabwe?
- Why do the academics prefer the traditional cuisines?

5.0 METHODS

This qualitative study adopted the case study design to establish the experiences of academics from a local university in Zimbabwe towards traditional cuisine. Permission to carry out the research was sought from the University's Human Resources Department. A pilot study was done to validate the research instruments through a self-reporting semi-structured online questionnaire on ten academics. This allowed the researchers to attend to vague and ambiguous questions as well as gauge the length of the questionnaire. Data for the study were, thus, subsequently collected using a self-reporting semi-structured online questionnaire on all academics that

patronise the university restaurant. However, only a convenient sample of 57 academics responded to the online questionnaire. The data were analysed using thematic approach.

6.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Traditional cuisines preferred by university academics at a local university in Zimbabwe

The 57 academics who responded to the self-reporting online questionnaire had almost uniform preferences for the traditional food offerings. According to the findings respondents chose several starches, pap (*sadza*) prepared from rapoko (*rukweza*), millet (*mhunga*), sorghum (*mapfunde*). Of note was the mention of peanut buttered traditional whole grain rice as traditional delights. All these starches have high fibre content which is good for the digestion as it averts constipation. With respect to protein accompaniments the respondents noted the following local selections: offals (*maguru/matumbu*); beef trotters (*mazondo*); quail bird (*chihuta*); mopane worms (*madora*) with peanut butter; dried kapenta/baby bream fish (*matemba*) served with peanut butter or pan fried; Of particular mention was free range chicken often referred to as *road runner chicken*.

A lot of local vegetables grown in the fields and always available to provide the roughage or dietary fibre were also identified as *fresh leafy vegetables*: mustard vegetable (*tsunga*), pumpkin leaves (*muboora*), spindle pod cleome (*nyevhe*) served with peanut butter; *dried vegetable leaves* (*mufushwa*) of string beans, mustard vegetable (*tsunga*) and pumpkin leaves (*muboora*) served especially with peanut butter, blackjack vegetables (*bonongwe*) and okra also known as ladies finger (*derere*). There was an insatiable preference for the famous grandmother's pot (*potoyagogo*) which composed a mixture of green vegetables and boiled meat until well cooked in one pot.

It was also observed that there were selected edible proteinaceous flying insects served as snacks/ main meal. These included locusts (*mhashu/ madhumbudya*), termites (*ishwa/majuru*), tsambarafuta, stink bug (*harurwa*), chaffer beetle (*majenya*) all rich high in protein levels required in the human diet (Kinyuru, *et al* 2015). All these traditional varieties were noted by (Moyo *et. al*, 2016) as the most commonly found foods in Zimbabwe and academics listed almost all the varieties that they preferred to consume.

Of note was the respondents desire to have all these dish varieties cooked over the traditional firewood. Some of the common comments included:

- Food that is cooked over the fire always has that special smoke flavor that I like.
- Wood fires produce delicious food.
- There's something about the food that is cooked in a pot on the fire, you cannot compare it with the electrical or gas fired stoves.
- If I was to choose how my food is to be prepared, I prefer fire embers.

This brings in the notion of cultural recovery cited by Nzenza (2014).

Some of the most widely eaten flying and crawling insects found locally in Zimbabwe are shown below.



Ruspolia differens (*dhumbudya*) *Locusta* (*hwiza*)



Locusta migratoria (mhashu)



Brachytrupes (gurwe)



Macrotermes natalensis (termites)



Encosternum (stink bug)



Eulepida anatine (beetle)



Mopani worms microwaved



Gyanisa maia

As beverages wild fruit juices from monkey apple or Strychnos Spinosa (*matamba*), Ziziphus Mauritania (*masau*), baobab fruit Adansonia digitata (*muuyu*) and the traditional African sweet brew (*maheu*).

6.2 Reasons for the preferences of traditional cuisines by academics at the local university in Zimbabwe

The reasons for the preference of traditional cuisine by the academics at the local university are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Reasons for the preferences of traditional cuisines by academics at the local university in Zimbabwe
N=57

Justification	f
They are delicious; good taste	57
They are nutritious	48
Indigenous foods are healthy; paps are low in starch	41
A welcome alternative absent at home	39
Sustainable: readily and locally available and affordable	37
Represents the culture of a people (national identity)	36
They are a cultural heritage that should be passed on from generation to generation	35
Nostalgic moments; grew up eating the foods; some village memories due to rarity of the food in urban areas	35
Offers variety from the usual diet; a welcome alternative	34
Easy to prepare for many people	33
Rare food these days but a necessity	33
Not genetically modified	22

Table 1 above shows that all the academics (n=57) preferred traditional cuisine because they are delicious, hence have a good taste. This reason was followed by the fact traditional cuisine is nutritious (n=48). Ideally traditional foods are healthy. For instance there is high fibre in pap and low starch and sugar. Several authors (Richards, 2002; (Johnson & Bodirsky, 2008; Harrington and Herzog, 2007; Jahromy and Tajik, 2011; Mapingure *et al*, 2013) have noted this nutritional aspect. The nutritious nature of the food also extends to preferred vegetables as good sources of vitamins and fibre (the dark green vegetables contain more vitamin a needed for iron in the blood). The edible ants and insects were also found to be rich in high biological protein and unsaturated fats suitable for vegetarians /vegans. Respondents were delighted to eat these foods as they were also unique to Zimbabwe and delicious. This element of uniqueness could be associated with cultural identity that (Mason and Paggiaro 2009; Jahromy and Tajik, 2011) observed to be hinged upon consumption of traditional cuisine. In the same vein Nenza's (2014) assertion of memory and cultural recovery was mentioned by respondents as '*a feeling of nostalgia, remembering how our grandmothers used to cook in the village*'. This was captured from two respondents as shown below.

- '*We grew up eating most of these foods and them being cooked reminds me of the good old days*'
- '*I am being taken back to my roots, just like what gogo (grandmother) used to cook kumusha (at home)*'

Respondents noted that they saw traditional food as a natural heritage whose preparation and/ or cooking methods should be passed on from generation to generation. Nzenza (2014) reflects on the same village concept as rooted in the Zimbabwean memory. The lack of documentation of recipes even though easy to cook is still a topical issue that was raised by many respondents.

- '*If I wanted my sister or wife to cook for me this exact dish she will ask me how to do it, with a simple recipe it works but now she has to ask my mother how to cook it.*'
- '*Trying to cook from memory is not complicated but if it was documented then it becomes, you do not miss a process.*'

These points to the element of '*passed on from generation to generation by means of experienced praxis than written*' reflect cultural heritage.

National identity as a factor was also mentioned in the research as Zimbabwe dubs its local food as '*soul food*' meaning that it invokes a meaningful message to the soul. Some of the common responses to this were:

- *Our traditional food is prepared from the heart, with a lot of love and patience, the food needs time.*
- *You will always remember granny cooking by the fire place, with all of us talking and listening to her, the food has that special touch, not found anywhere.*
- *None cooks traditional food like my grandmother, she cooks with pride.*

This can be noted as a key unique feature found in local food varieties.

Local food is not only nutritious and easy to cook the findings noted the element of sustainability in them as well. Belluco *et al.* (2013) and Ghaly,(2009)concur with these findings noting that these foods contribute immensely to food security as they are sustainable resource. Respondent comments were indicative of this:

- *When I think that my ancestors were eating the very food that I am eating today, it shows that this food is not only healthy but has sustained many generations before us and into the future as well.*
- *We are privileged to still be consuming the same traditional foods they are accessible and still available.*

The local food is '*readily available and affordable*' indicating that as food security is concerned local varieties are in abundance despite climate change effects.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A strikingly pronounced growing appreciation for traditional food exhibited even by the young generation for local food consumption. This indication is hinged on how they regard the nutritional value and sustainability of traditional cuisine. Most respondents were interested in the way the local food is cooked using earthen ware pots and the traditional use of firewood cooking. The ease of cooking and the authentic flavours and nutrition were also key to the popularity of local food. Above all, traditional food accorded Zimbabweans their indigenous cultural identity.

There is a need for popularisation of traditional food for Zimbabweans for tourism and posterity in Zimbabwe. It is also recommended that local ingredients be mainstreamed for increased consumption and a need to document recipes. Further research studies into the effects of African cooking earthen ware and use of firewood on nutritional content and flavour enhancement needs to be carried out.

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