

FOOD AND IDEOLOGY: TOWARDS AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY OF FOOD

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Abstract

We have meaningful and complex relationships with food than we can think of. It is becoming clear that our food system involves immense problems which cannot be solved unless we change our thinking patterns. We need a practical approach and it is as part of such an approach that I would like to introduce philosophy of food to African studies. Philosophy in the contemporary world is aimed at exploring the various ways philosophy can be used to discuss issues of relevance to our society. From the perspective of history and philosophy of science, food is a fecund terrain of research because it raises basic questions concerning our lives (nutrition and health management), the validity of laws of nature (do we really know any law regarding metabolism?) commercialization and importation of food in Africa and the structure of scientific research (who finances the studies on the nutritional facts you find on the labels?). One of the objectives of this research is to shoot forth philosophical views concerning what is true, beautiful and good about food and discuss them on African philosophy of Food (an upcoming area in philosophy). From an epistemological standpoint; what makes something food: Nature? biology? politics? culture? Is there such a thing as 'natural' food? How do food ideologies and knowledge originate? Is it 'objectively' true to say that an ethnic food and specialty is better than another? Lastly, why Philosophy of Food matters in Nigeria and Africa? All these will form the fulcrum of this discussion.

Keywords: Philosophy, Food, Philosophy of Food, Human existence, Reason, Africa

Introduction

Thus the aim of this paper is to identify, clarify, develop, defend and criticize our philosophical beliefs about the ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics of food. A salient question here is: In what way(s) can we conceptualize food? The inability to conceptualize food has real consequences on our health, environment and economy. This

need to conceptualize food returns us to speculative philosophy, possibly metaphysics. The role of metaphysics here is to make implicit assumptions about food explicit. For instance, what is food? What property or properties can one use to qualify and quantify an object as food? What are the differences between natural and artificial food? How can we identify food overtime; raw? Cook? Canned? Spoiled? Is every edible substance food? What are the differences between food and water, mineral, drugs and animals? How best can we articulate a generally acceptable nature of food? We can ask as many questions as possible while struggling to get limited accurate answers on them. This study is going to fulfil the following objectives (a) discuss the historical flaws by philosophers and in philosophical texts on the idea of food from a philosophical perspective (b) categorize the scope of food in philosophical studies and (c) link up the importance of philosophy of food with contemporary essence of human existence. The thesis of this paper is that despite the neglect of food from the birth of philosophy discipline, food and its challenges repeatedly pops up because philosophers must eat and therefore must be concerned with the challenges associated with food and food path ways.

The purpose of this paper does not only consist in a philosophical intuition of the nature of food and its anthropological densities but also how the intellectual conception of food can apply to the African (Nigerian) context. Thus, the discourse on how the philosophy of food can help Nigerians develop food sustaining strategies that will revolutionize the nation and her economy forms a section in this paper. The justification of this study is that the role food plays to human existence cannot be over emphasized. It is an essential component to human survival and there is need to exercise philosophical rigors to proper articulate food and its importance to human survival.

The Idea of Studying Food from a Philosophical Perspective

Historical moments that provide occasions to re-think about food and human existence and experiences on food are many. The year 2020 is one of the historical moments that the world experienced pandemic arising from corona virus (corona virus). This gave rise to government measures that included lockdowns, movement restrictions and policies. These measures limited the citizens' access to basic necessities especially food. Large portion of the world population suffer from poor health caused by hunger, malnutrition and poor diets, unsafe food and water. These problems limit people's active participation in normal daily activities that improve the economy and human wellbeing. This calls to mind the basic question; is the rich morally obligated to feed the poor?¹ Who should be in-charge of feeding the nation? What government policies support favourable idea and

¹ Singer Peter, *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.229-321.

plans of food and nation building? This show the complex pathways food and nutrition have in human life and existence. Food has a multiple complicated relations to human life. Food is related to natural environment, agriculture, human life, human health, nutrition as well as economy and national development. There is need to engineer philosophical debates and perspectives on food, food studies, nutrition and health because, food insecurity is a basic human problem. Not only that, food and nutritional pathways are connected with climatic shocks, shifting weather patterns, political upheavals and instability in global markets. Food insecurity affects every aspect of human's well-being. Food insecurity overwhelmingly affects nearly a billion people.² It is when philosophical debates are appropriated on food (production, consumption, market, policies and strategies) that the issue of hunger and food insecurity can be eradicated. The reason is that only philosophical debates on food can bring about sustainable food policy in National and world development.

The centrality of food is deep and widely anchored on human, nation, world economic, political development, and power relations. Food is connected with the quality of citizenship; it provides nutrition and health needed to grow healthy, intelligent citizens. A healthy citizen works hard to increase creativity, productivity and economic growth. An unhealthy citizen adds nothing in terms of creativity and production thereby slowing down the economy. Food insecurity causes malnutrition, hunger, undernourishment, increased crimes, retards normal physical body and intellectual development and course a range of health problems. Food availability is a welfare policy that calls off hunger and poverty. Thus Alozie *et. al* writes

Food insecurity and malnutrition have profound implication for health and development, and presents major obstacle to attaining economic development.³

Why have philosophical analysis and theorization on food limited and narrowed in history of philosophy? Why has classical philosophy neglected food which is central to human health, existence and survival? Food as a philosophical issues was absent from the classical renditions of philosophy, and in instance where it appeared it was scanty and almost dismissed as a non-philosophical issue. Why has philosophers little to write on food? It has been argued that food is eschewed because of the perception that it is too

² FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the world*, Food and Agricultural organization (2012) retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/publications/softcopy/en>.

³ S.T. Alozie, O. C.Iweke, and S.O. Ibe, " Food Security among Households in Eastern Nigeria: A Descriptive Analysis" in *International Journal of Gender and Development Issues*, Vol,1, No.6, May 2016, p. 2.

physical and transient to deserve ideal mental consideration.⁴ Other perspectives have argued that food production, and preparation is seen as a domain of feminine affairs. It is not a male dominated profession and therefore not worthy of philosophical theorizing.⁵ Others still argue that the senses and activities around food (taste, eating and drinking) have traditionally been given a lower priority because it is too local, primitive and instinctual to analyse philosophically.⁶

Honestly, food analysis and research is complex and clumsy making it difficult for philosophical theorizing. Food studies belong to the disciplines of agriculture, economics, ecology, entertainment, hospitality industries and culture. It is in a complex web with vegetables, animals, farmers, fertilizers, cooks and deeply immersed in empirical and uncontrollable practical issues linked with food production and other food path ways. Food is also in a complex chain with health, chemist, nutrition, diet, hunger, malnutrition, public good and safety. These make food studies fall more on empirical research and applied ethics thereby posing difficulty for distinct philosophical challenge. Thus other academic disciplines, journalist, entertainers (food media networks) and citizens take food more seriously than philosophers.

Henceforth, the central philosophical concerns on food have to take a unique direction. It may not be mere empirical as with other discipline, but it has to put forth accurate theorizations, steer intelligent and responsible direction on food studies, and food pathways, in David Kaplan words:

The role of philosophy is to cut through the morass of contingent facts and conceptual muddle to tackle the more basics questions about food: what is it exactly? How do we know it is safe? What should we eat? ...other disciplinary approaches may touch on these concerning food but only philosophy addresses them explicitly.⁷

⁴ Elizabeth Teller, "The Pleasure of Eating and Drinking", *Virtue and Taste*, Dudley Knowles (eds.) Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993, 98.

⁵ Ucheoma C. Osuji (2017), "Kitchen Phenomenology: The Dilemma of Womanhood in Gendered Geography," in *Religion, Philosophy and Social Issues*, Olu E. Alana, John O. Onimhawa, & Benson O. Igboin (eds.) Oyo: Ajayi Crowder University Press, pp. 89-109. Also Shira Vandana, Women and the Gendered Politics of Food, in *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 37, no2. 2009, 17-32. Also Heldke Lisa, "Do you Really Know How to Cook?: A Critique of Plato's Gorgias Philosophy, in *Philosophy Now*, Vol.32, 2001, Pp. 12-15.

⁶ C. Korsmeyer, "Delightful, Delicious and Disgusting" in *Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism*, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2002, pp.217-225. Also C. Korsmeyer, "The Sensory Experience of Food" *Food, Culture and Society*, Vol. 141, No.41. No.4, 2011, pp461-495.

⁷ D. M. Kaplan, (ed.) *The Philosophy of Food*, California: University of California Press, 2012, p. 3.

Food is seen from different perspectives. Food is social good that is fundamental to the institutions of society, principles of justice and building of quality citizenship. Food is a substance that comes in from the environment in plants, animals and water. Food could be seen as nutrition; in this sense it consist of natural substances needed for metabolism by humans in order to sustain growth and repair of vital body processes; here the primary function of food is to provide nourishment to its consumers, thus satisfying human ends. Food is also a need, belonging to independent ecological relationship (food chain). Thus food is seen in harmony with nature, and natural food is essential for human development. Food can also be cultural; showing that food originates from culture. Mbamalu⁸ notes that human culture sprang from interactions between people and climate, food sources and other competing species. It is the cultural society that determines what food is, what is permissible to eat, how and when particular things are consumed. Here we talk about food laws, which mean food is normative, expressive and used in celebrating cultural identity and heritage. This goes a long way to show that food preparation and consumption are tired within cultures in terms of belief, traditional practices, in such a way that food can define culture and culture can as well define food. Food is also seen as the object to quench the appetite and the physical sensation of hunger caused by complex physiological reactions. Food then is a desideration.⁹

The conception of food cannot be exhausted. Food is spiritual when we consider the centrality of food in religious traditions around the world. Food in religious practice classifies metaphysical dimensions and its connotations of the supernatural as seen in different religious communities.¹⁰ Food is also perceived as aesthetics in two senses (a) as the objects of taste which appeals to the senses (judgement of delicious, satisfying, disgusting are pass on food) and (b) as primary model of visual presentation (we attribute the properties of elegance, sophisticated, simple, hearty are passed on food based on appearance). Thus different conceptions of food is generally based on beliefs and interpersonal judgments that is why it concerned with typical philosophical analysis comprising of epistemological, metaphysical ethical and aesthetics questions. This shall be discussed fully in section five. For the rest of the paper, we shall be discussing why

⁸ Chidinma O. Mbamalu, Environmental Factors and the Development of Widowhood Practices : The case of the Igbo” in *Women and Power in Africa in the Twentieth and Twenty first centuries*” Eno Blankson Ikpe (ed.), Lagos: Department of History and Strategic Studies, University of Lagos, 2009, p. 100. 100-109.

⁹ D. M. Kaplan, (ed.) *The Philosophy of Food*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Osuji, Ucheoma C. “Food in Igbo Thought: The Turn from Cultural to Ontological Functions” in *South Eastern Journal of Research and Sustainable Development*, (2021), 4(2) 46-72.

philosophy of food matters, and mostly in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. What comes next is the idea of food in western classical philosophy.

The idea of Food in Classical Philosophy

My aim in this section is to discuss well on all the instances in which food surfaces in philosophical discourse and to predict a brighter future for philosophy of food. Mere readings of philosophy's texts only suggest that philosophers just "think and live." This is seen in the popular dictums of philosophy: Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, Berkeley's *esse est percipii*, St. Augustine's *Si fallor sum*. The pre-Socratics philosophers were searching for the ultimate stuff of the universe and seen them in air, water, boundless, numbers, and none discussed food as a survival stuff for the universe. They did not remember that the thinking being is sustained by food. Philosophers spoil the joy of feasting and living. Plato and Aristotle did not bother to add that the absence of food have implication for mental and physical development as well as human behaviour. For instance, how should we behave when we are hungry? Descartes' "I think therefore I am" is deficient because the thinking thing is represented by the human body that is sustained by food. The philosophical ideas on food were estranged from the beginning of this discipline. Below will discuss the idea of food in classical philosophy from two perspectives of; Attitude of philosophers towards food (eating and drinking) and the writings of philosophers on food.

Philosophers attitudes on Food

From the history of western philosophy, it would seem that philosophers neither eat food nor think about it. Michiel Korthain notes that philosophers, as living beings are torn between being creatures that need and might perhaps enjoy food and being philosophers, who officially deny food and its significance.¹¹ This dates from Pythagoras who tried to resolve the metaphysical questions of the immortality of the soul. In the later phases of this creed, a belief in the immortality of the soul became prominent in order to ensure salvation of the soul. Pythagoras teachings shows preference of the soul over the body and the body was seen as an obstacle to attain eternal life, thus, to understand Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans there is need to have knowledge of the doctrines of a religious sect, *Orphism*. The *Orphism* believed that;

Man is a mixture of both divine and human elements. The soul is the divine element in man and is the essential aspect of man. ... The soul is doomed to the endless process of transmigration and reincarnation unless and until it achieves

¹¹ Michiel Korthain, "The Birth of Philosophy and The Contempt for Food" in *Gastronomica, The Journal of Food and Culture*, volume 8, no. 3, p.62

liberation (or release) and this can be achieved through ritual purification and an ascetic way of life, which includes among other things, abstinence from eating any animal flesh. If the soul is able to do this and it will therefore be released.¹²

This is how Pythagoras denigrated food and that body it sustains. This shows a limited understanding of the functions of food to the body as well as living a healthy life. He also devalues the function of human body and its major characterization as what makes us human and the contribution of food to the mental development of the human brain and mental activities. Plato's *Symposium* is the first place food appeared in his writings.¹³ Socrates denies that drinking and eating have relevance. He rather proposes an orientation of life based on absolute beauty¹⁴ and they explored the necessity of emancipating the soul from the body. Here is a striking dialogue of Plato in the *Phaedo*¹⁵

Socrates: Do you think that philosophers ought to care about pleasures- if they do call them pleasures of –eating and drinking

Certainly not, answered Simmias

I would say that a true philosopher would despise them

He would like as far as he can to be quit of the body and turn to the soul...

This shows that Plato denies food its due place in nurturing the body and mind. Food for them was not philosophical issues. There is no cognitive relevance of food to human life for both mind and body. Plato's statement on food is contradictory; he forgot that we are human because we live in bodies. If the bodies are sustained by food, definitely, denying food is denying the body its due. We cannot deny the body its due and make life enjoyable for both body and mind. The state of the body affects the mind, mental activities, thought patterns as well as productivity. This was transmitted to the medieval Christian apologist and philosophers who considered the soul as being more important to the body. These medieval philosophers could have developed different teachings on food if not for their influences from Plato and Aristotle's doctrines on the soul. In the first instance, there are food¹⁶ and food laws¹⁷ in the biblical teachings. The prosperity God promised the children of Israel includes food and other material things. That Christ feed

¹² J. I. Omeregbe, cited in O. K. Jeje, *A Short Account of the History of Western Philosophy (from Hesiod to Aristotle)*, Lagos: Prime Communications, 2003, p. 18-19.

¹³ Plato, "Symposium" in Plato, six great dialogues, *Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Symposium, The Republic*, Benjamin Jowett (trans.) New York, Dover, 2007, p. 176.

¹⁴ Plato, *Symposium*, p.211.

¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, in Plato, six great dialogues, *Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Symposium, The Republic*, Benjamin Jowett (trans.) New York, Dover, 2007, 64d.

¹⁶ *The Holy Bible*, Deuteronomy 14; 3-7, Revised Standard Version

¹⁷ *The Holy Bible*, Leviticus, 11:1-4, Revised Standard Version

thousands of people in the *Bible* was not seen as for bodily well-being; even last supper did not have bodily implications but were all seen from the spiritual perspective. The writings of medieval philosophers were dominated by platonic heritage .and thus the idea of what is food? How do we know what is food and lots of philosophical questions eluded this era. An example of the difficulties philosophers encounter in thinking in a reasonable way about food is seen in Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who never took food seriously. His biography read how Wittgenstein lived his last days while at Rostow, Ireland. He lived almost on tinned food ordered from a grocer's shop in Galway. Tommy (his house keeper) was concerned about his diet; "tinned food will be the death of you" he once said. "People live too long anyway" came the grim reply.¹⁸

Philosophical writings on food

Philosophical analyses of food have been scattered and scanty. Just like Plato, The Roman Stoics, Epicurus and Seneca, as well as Enlightenment philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, Marx, and Nietzsche, all discuss various aspects of food production and consumption. From the philosophical standpoint, modern philosophers did not develop meaningful philosophy of food. They did not consider food and agriculture as worthy of philosophic attention. They probably considered it unimportant because it is connected with ethical cultural, health, aesthetics and social implications. Jean Jacques Rousseau, during the European romantic period held food production in low esteem.¹⁹ He also expressed his dislike for European dietary system; he declared his stand for vegetarianism and a non-flesh diet. This is seen in his argument that flesh eaters are more cruel and furious than other men. He also advocates that children should be feed with natural food than non-natural food.

Karl Marx in the 19th century regarded agriculture as narrow-mindedness, slave and low productivity when compared with industrial production. He regarded farmers as "bags of potatoes"²⁰ that is nearly impossible to motivate politically. Nietzsche focused on the weakening and strengthening effect of food on the strong who acts independently; he saw diet consisting only of fruits and vegetables as weaken an individual's independence.²¹ In Nietzsche's perspective, natural food is the only tasty food that human's need. For J.S.

¹⁸ Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, London: Cape 1990, p. 425.

¹⁹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education*, Allan Bloom (Trans.) New York: Basic Books, 1979. Also, Maurice William Cranston, *The Noble Savage: Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1754-1762*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

²⁰ Karl Marx, *The Enlightenment Burman of Louis Bonaparte* New York;1897, p. 87.

²¹ F. Nietzsche *the Gay Sciences*, W. Kaufmann (trans.), New York: Vintage Books, 1974, p. 245.

Mill, food has no inherent quality that challenges philosophical reflection.²² Food belongs to the necessities of life and functions as a kind of survival mechanism. Food is fuel for the body and nothing more. Self-control over food was considered very important. For Kant, the brutish excess in the use of food and drink is misuse of the means of nourishment.²³ A man who drinks is an animal, not to be treated as human being. Thus slavish attitude to food should be controlled by individual's autonomy to choose what to eat. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) showed greater appreciation for food including nutrition, culture and agriculture. He identifies food as fundamental to religion especially Christianity.²⁴ The writings of Kant and Feuerbach showed more philosophical attention on food and food studies during the earlier modern era in philosophy.

The centrality of food in philosophical discourses appeared over ten years now. The twentieth century philosophers ushered in such issues as vegetarianism, agricultural ethics, food rights, biotechnology, and gustatory aesthetics. In the twenty-first century, philosophers continue to address these issues and new ones concerning the globalization of food, the role of technology, and the rights and responsibilities of consumers and producers. Some interesting publications on the philosophy and ethics of food came on board to tackle over 2,500 years arguments and analysis on food. The books like Elizabeth Teller's *Food for thought: Philosophy for Food* (1996), Carolyn Lorsryer's *Making sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (2002), Peter Singer and Jim Masow's *The Way we Eat: Why our Food Choices matter*, (2006) and others. It is from hence we can see philosophers' attention to the idea of food and what we put in our mouth as seeing a rational approach to the study of the nature of food. The study of food has now become an integral part of philosophic enterprise.

Food and Human Existence

The relation between human, food and nature is complex. The ways we define food affect our live styles and personal patterns. The idea that food is solely defined as fuel in affluent societies produces soaring rates of obesity and cardiovascular diseases.²⁵ We have made laws about what comes out of our mouth (freedom of speech and freedom of expression) and have not made laws about what goes in. This signifies the gap between

²² John Stuart Mill, "on Liberty" in *Mills Three essays*" Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp92-123.

²³ I. Kant, "What is enlightenment? In *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, L. W. Beck (trans. And ed.) Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949,pp.263-292.

²⁴ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen dis Christentums Franfort am Main: Suhrikamp. 1976, pp 512 , 652*, Cited in Korthan M. , "The Limit of Philosophy and the Contempt for Food, p. 67-8.

²⁵ M. Korthan , "The Limit of Philosophy and the Contempt for Food" p. 68.

the consumer and producer's in the study of food. This shows that the acts of eating has becomes integral part of human existence. We cannot continue to exercise the habitual ontological activity of eating without reflecting and rationalizing on food and food path ways (production, consumption and distribution) because food is strongly connected with nature and human survival.

Food, Nature and human survival: The Implications

In 2050, Earth is predicted to be the home of more than 9 billion people. To feed all these people the United Nations estimates that we need to double our food production. This is an enormous challenge for the food system in the coming decades. It is hard to see how we can do this without changing something substantial about how we produce our food and what we eat. Just to mention one example. Most of our protein now comes from meat (beef, pork and chicken). Something like 60 billion farm animals is slaughtered every year and we are going towards 120 billion. The implications of this large meat consumption are vast. Think about the increased production of corn to feed all these animals, the increased use of oil to produce that food (driving the tractors), the increased problem of housing all these animals, worry about avian flu, bird flu, increased use of antibiotics, the unusable bio-waste from all these animals, and so on. Not to mention the increased methane production contributing to global warming (the keeping of livestock is responsible for releasing more green-house gases into the atmosphere than the whole transportation sector). All this is just not sustainable. There are many well-known problems that will face us in the very near future. I think this is together with climate change the most difficult problem facing humanity. How do we find a new and sustainable way to produce food? This is where philosophical studies on food become timely and sensitive. Philosophical food studies is an ethical call towards adjusting our attitudes to what we eat, how to sustains human and planetary existence. In order words, what can we do to sustain nature harmony with our food ways? We need to think about alternative ways of getting protein, carbohydrate and other classes of food while maintain harmony with nature with what we consume.

Many people look to science to solve our problems. GMO's (Genetically Modified Organism) will become more and more common, but they have problems as well and as a philosophical analysis is concerned. We need to pay attention to this debate. What are the arguments for GMO's? Are they safe? Cultured meat, (that is, meat grown in a lab) is close to becoming generally available.²⁶ By placing philosophical values on food

²⁶ Henrik Lagerlund, *The Philosophy of Food, Philosophy in the Contemporary World*: apaonline.org. December 7, 2017, accessed January, 2020.

(production, choices and availability), global values that will enhance human rights and lives are sustained. More so, human thoughts about our food choices are realized in a new way. We can all contribute to making our world a little bit better. Incorporating these values into our choices and into our lives will change our lives significantly, but the first step is to become more reflective about food, our own values and choices, that is, to make our lives philosophical. This is one way philosophy can change the world.

African Philosophy of Food: Why it matters

The discussion on food is essential to human existence. This is also inescapable in philosophical arguments and analysis because it poses challenges to human existence in Africa and humanity at large. Thus importance of food as one of the best gifts for human survival and man's wider philosophical understanding is inevitable. Again it is on record that "Africa is the only continent in the world that has seen child malnutrition rise in the past decade, and it is rising in every sub-region of the continent." Indeed, the poorest countries in the world, according to Global Hunger Index, 2014, are located in Africa. Such hunger and starvation are caused by wars, overpopulation, low patronage of agriculture, corruption and unenlightened leadership. We inhabit a continent in which children are dying every minute because of malnutrition and our governments are not ashamed of it. The need to strongly encourage African leaders to stand confident against the onslaught of poverty and malnutrition in our food ridden continent is necessary. Africa is a land that is scandalously blessed, the most naturally endowed continent in the world. Africa has all natural endowments to feed the whole world: incalculable landmass, tubers of all sorts, grains of all colours, green forests replete with fruits, vegetables, animals, fishes and what have you. Identifying Africa with hunger and malnutrition should now be regarded as an insult to us all. Let us Africans be proud to produce and celebrate our common culinary cultural heritages and identity. Michel de Certeau notes "*Alimentation finds itself at the heart of the process of the formation of collective identity—religious, civilization, social and even family.*" Africa can be turned into a continent where nations could come and eat to their satisfaction.

Furthermore, Africa's passivity in food globalization should conscientiously give Africans profound economic concern. How can other races be universalizing their food products, while Africa's lot is begging? The importance of developing an African philosophy of food should prompt strategic policies that cancel such passivity and neglect; it empowers us today to self-determination in food production such that we would not only have enough to eat but also have excess to export to other parts of the world.

Why Philosophy of Food matters in Nigeria

Nigeria is an agrarian country. She is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh largest country in the world with a population of over one hundred and sixty million.²⁷ Adamu noted that one in four children is underweight in Nigeria.²⁸ Half of all the child death is as a result of malnutrition. More so forty-one percent of children in Nigeria are stunted, according to the 2008 Demographic and health surveys (DHS). Malnutrition in young children stunts both physical and intellectual development.

According to United Nations Development programme, 180 million children under the age of five suffer from serious malnutrition. Millions of people on poor diets suffer from deficiency diseases, like goitre, blindness caused by lack of vitamin A. The food value of what the poor eat is further reduced by parasites such as hookworm and ringworm which are endemic in conditions of poor sanitation...²⁹

Inadequate food remains miserable conditions to life. High and volatile food prices in the year 2020 and 2021 continue to pose increase risk of food insecurity. Food insecurity is associated with non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetic, cancer, which together causes two out of the three deaths in the world.³⁰ Nugent notes that eighty percent of those deaths are in developing countries.³¹ The rising cost of food prices in Nigeria has roots in policies and programmes of past government.³² Nigeria's policies surrounding agriculture in National Development have changed considerably throughout history. The affected policies and strategies used to address food security issues have equally changed over time. The structural Adjustment Programme of 1986 and new Millennium Agricultural policies implemented in 1999 are examples of food policies.

²⁷ U.S Census Bureau, 2012.

²⁸ Adamu Nigeria: "Child and Nutrition and the challenge of Food security in the North," *Daily Trust* Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201211010310.html>. (2012)

²⁹ Singer Peter, *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 317.

³⁰ S.T. Alozie, O. C. Iweke, and S.O. Ibe, " Food Security among Households in Eastern Nigeria: A Descriptive Analysis" in *International Journal of Gender and Development Issues*, Vol,1, No.6, May 2016, p.4.

³¹ Nugent 2011 Nugent R. (2011) Bringing Agriculture to the table, how agriculture and food can play a role in preventing Chronic disease in *The Chicago Council*, retrieved from http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/us.erfila/file/globalagdevelopment/report/bringing_Agriculture_to_the_table.pdf.

³² P. Okuneye P. (2001). Rising cost of Food prices and Food insecurity in Nigeria and its implication for poverty Reduction, *Economic and Financial Review*, retrieved from <http://www.cenbank.org/outpublication/EFi/RD2002/EFR, Vol. 39, pp4-6opdf>.

The problem with Nigeria is not that she cannot produce sufficient food to feed her citizens. She lacks adequate philosophical ideas to integrate an active national policy and strategy that could enhance food production, availability and distribution for her citizens. There are several Agricultural policies and programmes in Nigeria but these policies and programmes lacks the philosophical ideas and strategic food policy contents that makes then move the citizens out of hunger and thrive sustainable economy. With well-articulated food strategic policy and philosophy, Nigeria will provide food for her citizens on the use on improved agricultural techniques; thus the need for philosophy of food arises.

An Africa Philosophy of food draws our attention on the quality of citizenship and national development by learning how to eat wisely, in order to foster good national health. Many of us do not consider much that food has side effects. Most deaths have been cause by what is carelessly eaten. We are facing increasing hazardous health challenges such as obesity that is giving rise to diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Livingly healthily depends also on a little philosophic insight into what goes into our mouths. Abstinence, moderation, renunciation, from certain food items (smoking, and excess alcohol intake) might be necessary or not for a healthy living. This is why the aim of this paper is to propose a philosophy of food for Nigeria and Africa.

The pathways between Food and Philosophy

The Right to Food

The right to food is recognized as a human right in international law. The right to food implies the right of every human being to a means of production, procurement of food, of sufficient quality and quantity, free of advance substance and culturally acceptable.³³ The Rome World Food summit recognized the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food consistent with the right to adequate food as a fundamental human right to everyone to be free from hunger. This implies ensuring an enabling political, social, cultural, economic environment designated to create the best condition to eradicate poverty and sustain durable peace. This is based on the full and equal participation of men and women. This will ensures the right for everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food.

Why Philosophy of Food matters

The necessity of a new philosophy of food is to develop not a closed theoretical or philosophical system in the traditional forms of philosophy. It develops in an open

³³ D. Ddamulira (2002), "The Right to food in Sub-Sahara Africa" in *Journal of Economic, Social and Cultural Right*, Vol. 1, No.4, April-June, 2002, p.49.

discourse, in multi-dimensional analyses of food processes with cultural, social, political, economic and ecological knowledge components, and in knowledge syntheses to address complex problems and dilemmas of food production in late modernity. The practical solution of such complex problems is not done with knowledge transfer from science to politics. This solution is part of transforming the industrialized food system towards a sustainable one, another “great transformation” of society that comes on the agenda of the sustainability discourse, in response to the deficits and failures of the earlier sustainability process. It seems useful to decompose the broad sustainability process in different parts and more specific analyses to be able to deal with its complexity: beyond synthesized empirical studies this requires normative and theoretical thinking. In transformations of modern food systems a series of normative principles is required regarding environmental sustainability (ecological principles of resource use), environmental justice (including distributional fairness), and ecological citizenship (constituting new normative orders beyond national citizen rights, strengthening human rights). Theoretical analysis is developing with the unfolding debate of an interdisciplinary theory of nature–society interaction as discussed above.

Philosophy as integrative and synthetic thinking and knowledge use is not an exclusive approach to discuss the complexity and the future of food production, processing and consumption, but it cannot be neglected. Its methodological and epistemological approaches discussed above are even used in knowledge syntheses that are not arguing philosophically; normative reasoning, value-based judgments, epistemological and theoretical reflections are required in all forms of food discourses. Arguments in favour of a philosophical approach include the following: A renewed philosophy of food can help to understand the *contradictions of food related processes*: the interaction between contradictory social processes of unequal access to food, affluence and poverty, food and hunger. These dilemmas require as part of the solution a transformation of modern agriculture and new normative orders for regulating natural resource use.

More so, a long-time perspective of thinking about the future, although not in the trivial sense of eternal truths, is required in sustainability research and policy processes, including the themes of food production and consumption. Ecological research about risks, vulnerability, resilience and sustainability shows possibilities and forms of thinking to reflect temporal dynamics and perspectives that cannot develop from the established practices of planning, management, decision-making and prognostics. Inter-generational perspectives in the sustainability discourse can develop only with growing experience in interdisciplinary knowledge use and syntheses. There is need to rationalize the problems and risks of genetic modification of plant and animal organisms in agriculture require new ethical reflections of food production, ethics that work in collective decision-making and

action processes where food production and processing is negotiated and decided. Also the technical norms and standards for production need to be ethically validated. New ethics of food production require ethically reflective practitioners in food governance and continuous ethical discourses that guide the practices of food production and modification of food products³⁴

Normative, positive, scientific and local knowledge can be used in philosophical discourses in other forms than in their original and disciplinary contexts: for critical discussion, reflection, assessment and synthesis on food. Normative, especially ethical and aesthetic, knowledge and judgements are disputed and in continuous need of discussion and clarification. Values and norms of food production, processing and consumption are not eternal and unchangeable values or principles, but part of social - scientific, political, life world - processes and practices of action. Food production and the changing food related practices require continuous debate and interpretation in methodologically structured philosophical forms of reasoning

Food and Reason

The philosophy of food is a commitment to an examined life in relation to our daily food choices. To be a philosophical foodie means a necessity to examine one's own habits and decide to lead a life that upholds certain global values. Living this way would change not only one's own life but the world as well. This also means saying no to many things that are convenient and seeking alternatives that, for example, do not promote human rights violations, contribute to injustice and leads to a sustainable world that we can pass on to our children with good conscience.

Why should we do this? Ultimately, as humans, we always use values and our beliefs about the world to make choices and guide our actions. Ask yourself what kind of person you want to be and what kind of world you want to live in. Becoming a philosophical foodie is about asking these questions and allowing them to inform your choices. Now, I am not a fanatic, who perhaps Socrates was, and I realize that truth and reason need to be balanced. We cannot live up to our ideals. If we try, we will always fail, and as a result we will be very unhappy. Finding the right balance between living an examined life and the life you can live given your own real possibilities is part of the philosophy of food. But we must always examine our life using reason, and strive to know ourselves better as well as do better. We all have meaningful relationships to food—for some it is a mere means of survival; for others, a tool for athletic success; a helpless obsession; a billion-dollar

³⁴ Karl Bruckmeier1 "Eating the planet" - seeking a philosophy of food in the Anthropocene, *socio.hu* *The social meaning of food*, DoI: 10.18030/socio.hu.2015en.4 p.19

industry; the scourge of public health; an edible biography, family history or national identity; the worldly presence of God. Less obvious but just as true is that we also all have *philosophical* views about food, which inform and explain those other relationships.

The philosophy of food is obviously about food in all its aspects, but at the heart of it is a way of life. I believe we all need to face up to an alternative way of life in order for our world to remain a place where we will want to live and flourish. How would it affect your life to become a philosophical foodie? Firstly, you would need to examine your own values. What matters to you in your choice of food? Is it taste? Is it price? Is it health? Is it convenience? Is it some moral value, like animal rights or human rights? Do you eat local food? Does it matter to you where your food is produced? And, ultimately, are you happy with how you live your life? Philosophy is involved through its traditions of synthesis, epistemological, normative and critical reflection. Also in the research on nutritional, social, cultural and environmental aspects of food several philosophical disciplines play a role, beyond traditional forms of practical philosophy, such as the ethics of food. More important are newer forms of epistemology and theory of science, philosophical anthropology, cultural and social philosophy, developing in 20th century in interdisciplinary communication and knowledge use.³⁵

Central concerns of Philosophy of Food

What is a philosophy of food? It could be understood from different perspectives for different people. It may mean an ethics, food culture or as a way of life. This is seen by the way philosophy is understood in its broadest sense. In the restricted sense, from the philosophy discipline, philosophy of food belongs to the philosophy of infrastructures. This is where philosophy interrogates food; its meaning, production, distribution, significance and roles it plays in human lives. Most of our food originates from cultural and local knowledge. Philosophy needs to interrogate food consumption, and its nature. The need to ask epistemic questions on our knowledge, justification and truth about food is a necessary tool towards food universalization: a movement that can eradicate hunger in the food. Food entails life as well as luxury. People can afford the best food in the world while some others die in hunger and poverty. Ethical choices and political issues surround our food consumption and distributive patterns. Philosophy must come in to interrogate these issues. Thus we can classify philosophical studies among many of her branches such

³⁵ Karl Bruckmeier1 "Eating the planet" - seeking a philosophy of food in the Anthropocene, p. 2

as food metaphysics, food epistemology, food justice, food ethics, food politics (Food distribution and security), food aesthetics and much more.

Food metaphysics answer the questions about what food is. What is philosophy of food? What is the nature of food? It raises questions on food and its consumption. Food epistemology questions the sources of knowledge of food. It also raises the question on how perspectives of food knowledge justify beliefs differently. It questions the laws and institutions guiding the safety of food and their standards for justification and approval of food standards. It question food related practice, skills for food production, reason for preference of one food over another and food in traditional-bound activities and belief systems. There is also food aesthetics, which deals with our judgment on food, food values and visual presentation. Food ethics deals with food responsibilities to self and others. It also discusses food duties, food virtues (hospitality, temperance, table manners) and food choices (vegetarianism, animal consumption) food technology (Genetically Modified Food, animal biotechnology, non-natural food, functional food artificial food, Nanotechnology) and many more. Philosophy of food will open up interdisciplinary studies between philosophy and other disciplines for instance, philosophy of: agriculture, environmental ethics, Agricultural ethics, and Philosophy and food economics.

Conclusion

The philosophical discussions on food are difficult, not that it cannot be. This is because food is a material substance which is in complex relationship with agriculture, nature, food pathways, economics and ecological webs. This makes philosophical discussions on food difficult. Thus, food studies in philosophy have been neglected from the inception of the discipline. This is because food is seen as to be too mired with the body. Philosophers earlier in history of western philosophy thought that food is not essential in living the rational life. This is seen in the writings and attitudes of philosophers in classical western philosophy. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries' philosophers who were attracted to thinking about food from a rational perspective has launched this new upcoming discipline: the Philosophy of food. First it started with food behaviours, choices and self-control as seen in Nietzsche, Rousseau, and Kant. This launched the idea of food ethics. With this, the twentieth century philosophers' lavage on these and today we have the philosophy of food as a growing discipline in philosophy.

Food as we can see is essential to human life, existence and natural (planetary or environmental) wellbeing. It is one of the greatest factors in our natural relationships. Also Africa's passivity in food globalization should assiduously give Africans profound economic concerns. Thus it is the purpose of this paper to empower Africans to re-think

about food security and re-strategize on active food policies that will impact in the citizen's life and drive away hunger: Thereby making availability of safe food to all a fundamental human right.

Philosophical ontology on food has many pathways for instance; there is food metaphysics, food ethics, food politics, food epistemology, food aesthetics and many more. This has broadened the scope on philosophy. Philosophical study on food has widened its scope in terms of its connections with multidisciplinary and cross-cultural studies such as food science, technology, economics, agriculture and food commerce. This opens up invitations to contribute on philosophy of food from many perspectives. Contemporary philosophers are part of the food theory paradigm shift. This is a wakeup call to face serious intellectual challenges of understanding the nature of food and its anthropological ontologies: installing a rational insight to the nature of food and our lives.

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