Taste of Home:
Food as a Form of Nostalgia among Nigerian Migrants in New Zealand

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Abstract

For many migrants, particularly Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand, culinary experiences often become emotional and cultural anchors, sustaining identity and continuity in unfamiliar settings. Although food has been extensively examined in relation to migration and identity, Nigerian foodways and their role in evoking nostalgia among migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand remain underexplored. This study investigates how Nigerian food evokes nostalgia among migrants in New Zealand, with particular attention to the intersections of food, nostalgia, identity, and cultural education. Adopting an interpretivist paradigm, the study uses autoethnography to examine the researcher's lived experiences as a Nigerian migrant. Data were generated through reflective journaling and narrative accounts, capturing how everyday food practices shape memory, belonging, and meaning over time. The study also draws on secondary sources and document analysis related to migration, food, nostalgia, and cultural transmission to contextualise the experience and produce a holistic view. The study demonstrates how Nigerian food acts as a sensory bridge linking past and present, supporting cultural continuity, and enabling forms of knowledge-sharing that can extend beyond the migrant community. Ultimately, this study contributes to migration, food, and hospitality scholarship by offering nuanced insights into how culinary practices sustain emotional ties to home while shaping cultural learning in New Zealand and highlighting the role of food in fostering intercultural connection across diverse social and hospitality environments.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use) nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Glossary of Nigerian Food and Spices

akara	a deep-fried bean fritter made from blended black eyed peas
ata dindin	a slow fried Nigerian pepper sauce made from tomatoes, peppers and onions
ata lilo	a mixture of tomatoes, peppers, and onions
ata rodo	*habanero* pepper
eba	a staple made from dried cassava flour stirred into hot water to form a dough-like meal
efo riro	a rich spinach-based stew cooked with peppers, tomatoes, and assorted meats
egusi	a thick, flavourful soup made with ground melon seeds, vegetables, and meat or fish
ehuru	calabash nutmeg (sweet, nutty, deeply fragrant)
fufu	a smooth, stretchy swallow made from fermented cassava; often eaten with soups
grains of Selim	see *uda*
iru	fermented locust beans used as flouring or seasoning
jollof rice	a one-pot rice dish cooked in a tomato-pepper base, known for its smoky, spicy flavour
miyan kuka	an earthy tasting soup from Northern Nigeria, made with baobab leaves, meat or fish, and other spices
pepper soup	a warm, aromatic Nigerian broth used for comfort, healing, and deep flavour
pounded yam	a soft, stretchy swallow made by pounding boiled yam until smooth
puff-puff	sweet, deep-fried dough balls like doughnuts

swallow	a soft, dough-like staple food such as eba, fufu, wheat rice or pounded yam made to be eaten with soups and stews; typically rolled by hand and swallowed without chewing
tuwo shinkafa	a savoury rice-based dough commonly eaten with soups; like fufu and swallow
uda	the seeds of an evergreen tree that grows in tropical parts of West and East Africa; also called grains of Selim
uziza leaves	an aromatic West African black pepper leaves with mildly spicy flavour
uziza seeds	West African black pepper

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

Food is more than sustenance. For migrants, it can function as a sensory and emotional link to home, carrying memory, identity, and belonging across place and time. Studies of migration and food have shown that familiar dishes can evoke nostalgia, support continuity, and sustain relationships with home through taste, smell, and everyday practice (Abarca & Colby, 2016; Arcadu, Reyes-Espejo, et al., 2025; Sutton, 2017). At the same time, food is not experienced only as memory – it is lived through cooking, sharing, and eating in the present, making it an important site where migrants negotiate who they are and how they belong in new social environments (Boccagni, 2023; Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023).

This study is situated within that broader conversation, but it focuses specifically on Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although Nigerian foodways are rich, diverse, and socially significant, they remain underexplored in relation to nostalgia within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Existing scholarship has shown that food can sustain cultural identity, transmit memory, and support belonging in migration (Boccagni, 2023; Sutton,2017), yet less attention has been given to how Nigerian food is experienced sensorially and emotionally in everyday migrant life in Aotearoa New Zealand. This matters because food is not only a cultural symbol but also a lived practice through which migrants make sense of home, absence, continuity, and change.

Nigerian foodways are particularly significant because they carry social meanings that go beyond taste and nourishment. Food is embedded in family life, hospitality, and communal responsibility, and it often communicates care, respect, and connection (Ojo, 2018; Okech & Timothy, 2023). For migrants, these meanings may become even more visible when ethnic foods are prepared in a new environment. In the diaspora, food can become a way of holding on to relationships and cultural knowledge while also navigating the emotional complexities of migration. This study explores those complexities through the lens of nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural education.

1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore how Nigerian food evokes nostalgia for migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how food practices sustain cultural identity, carry personal and collective meanings, and function as a form of cultural education within the host community.

To achieve this aim, the study asks the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How does Nigerian food evoke nostalgia for migrants and act as a bridge to their homeland?

RQ2: In what ways do food practices enable migrants to sustain and express cultural identity?

RQ3: What meanings do Nigerian migrants attach to ethnic dishes, and how do these meanings shape their lived experiences in their new community?

RQ4: How do Nigerian food and food practices function as a form of cultural education within the host community?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to scholarship on migration, food, and nostalgia by centring Nigerian food experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand, a context that remains underrepresented in research on migrant food practices. While existing studies have examined food, memory, and identity in migration more broadly, fewer have explored how Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand experience food as nostalgia, embodiment, and cultural meaning. By focusing on everyday food practices, this study offers insight into how food continues to matter after migration not only as a reminder of home, but also as a living practice through which migrants negotiate belonging in the present.

The study is also significant because it brings attention to the sensory and embodied dimensions of migrant experience. Food nostalgia is often discussed as a feeling or a symbol, but the present study shows that it is also something enacted through the body, through cooking rhythms, taste, smell, and repetition (Boccagni, 2023; Sutton, 2017). In doing so, the study helps deepen understanding of how migrant identity and belonging are carried, remembered, and reworked through ordinary food practices.

In addition, the study has relevance for hospitality and cultural education. Nigerian food in this research is not only personal or private; it also becomes a way of introducing culture, sharing knowledge, and creating connection with others. This makes the study useful for thinking about how food can function in multicultural settings, hospitality spaces, and everyday encounters where cultural meanings are communicated through shared meals.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study, outlines the background, states the aim and research questions, and explains the significance of the research. Chapter Two reviews the literature on nostalgia, sensory food practices, migration, identity, cultural education, and Nigerian foodways, and develops the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework. Chapter Three presents the research design, including the interpretivist paradigm, autoethnography as methodology, researcher positionality, reflexivity, data sources, analysis, and ethics. Chapter Four presents the findings through five analytical autoethnographic vignettes. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the literature and the research questions. Chapter Six concludes the study by drawing together the main insights, reflecting on the method, outlining the study's contribution, identifying limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Defining Nostalgia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Nostalgia is widely recognised as a complex emotional response to remembering the past, and scholars increasingly treat it as a psychological resource or a consequence of displacement. Sedikides and Wildschut (2018) frame nostalgia as an adaptive emotion that strengthens identity, social connectedness, and psychological wellbeing, positioning nostalgia as a stabilising force that helps individuals navigate uncertainty. In contrast, Boym (2008) argues that nostalgia cannot be separated from the historical, cultural, and political conditions through which experiences of migration, memory, and belonging are produced, a point further developed by May (2017) who emphasises that nostalgia is shaped by the cultural contexts in which it is expressed. These contrasting perspectives reveal that nostalgia is not a fixed emotional state, but rather, a dynamic process shaped by broader social conditions. This matters for the present study because Nigerian migrants' nostalgic experiences are not only emotional but also embedded within cultural histories, migration trajectories, and everyday food practices.

Historically, nostalgia was not celebrated as an emotional resource but pathologised as a medical disorder. Hofer's 1688 description of nostalgia as an illness affecting soldiers separated from familiar surroundings reflected scientific assumptions that framed emotional suffering as pathology (Dodman, 2023). Becker (2018) argues that these interpretations reveal more about the cultural anxieties of the period than about nostalgia itself. Lijtmaer (2022) extends this critique by suggesting that nostalgia functions as a cultural explanation for discomfort associated with increasing mobility, exposing societal fears surrounding displacement rather than identifying an objective medical condition. These perspectives demonstrate that nostalgia is socially constructed, with its meaning changing alongside evolving understandings of mobility and belonging.

As societies changed through urban expansion, nostalgia moved from pathology to psychological resource. Sedikides and Wildschut (2023) argue that nostalgic reflection promotes self-continuity, reinforces interpersonal relationships, and enhances meaning in life. Batcho (2021) similarly suggests that nostalgia helps individuals integrate past experiences into coherent identities. While influential, these psychological perspectives have been criticised for privileging internal cognition over the lived realities within which nostalgia emerges. Boccagni and Lacroix (2026)argue that nostalgic attachments are

produced through everyday encounters with displacement, material environments, and social relationships rather than through internal processes alone. Lijtmaer (2022) likewise contends that nostalgic longing cannot be detached from unequal histories of migration, loss, and belonging. These critiques suggest that nostalgia is not simply an emotion individuals possess but a relational experience shaped through everyday life.

Boym's (2017) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia further complicates these debates. *Restorative nostalgia* seeks to recover continuity through the reconstruction of familiar traditions, rituals, and cultural practices, whereas *reflective nostalgia* acknowledges that the past cannot be fully restored while remaining attentive to the emotional significance of longing. Zanoni (2018) argue that migrants frequently move between these orientations as they negotiate everyday life, while Jacobsen (2024) contends that nostalgic experiences often involve simultaneous feelings of attachment, uncertainty, and emotional ambiguity. Boym's framework is particularly valuable for studies of food because preparing familiar meals may recreate feelings of home while simultaneously reminding migrants that the people and places through which those meals acquired meaning remain geographically distant, as reflected in sensory migration research (Bascuñan-Wiley, 2021).

Nostalgia is not experienced as isolated recollection but is continually shaped through everyday practices. Boccagni (2023) argues that nostalgic longing becomes salient when migrants encounter disruptions to belonging, while Cuervo and Cook 2019) show that memories of home help migrants maintain continuity as identities are renegotiated across places. Felder (2021) extends this discussion by demonstrating that belonging is sustained through ordinary domestic routines that recreate familiarity within unfamiliar environments. This positions nostalgia as a lived practice, a dynamic illustrated in Johnston amd Longhurst's (2012) study of migrant women in Hamilton.

Despite extensive scholarship on nostalgia, food, and migration, the relationship between foodways and nostalgic experiences among Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand remains underexplored. Existing New Zealand research has examined how food practices contribute to cultural identity, family relationships, and belonging among different migrant communities (Johnston and Longhurst, 2012; Sayadabdi, n.d.). However, the experiences of these communities cannot be assumed to represent those of Nigerian migrants, whose foodways are shaped by distinct culinary traditions, cultural histories, and migration

experiences. Aotearoa New Zealand provides an important context for examining these experiences because Nigerian food practices are negotiated within a different food environment and through everyday encounters with diverse cultural traditions. Access to familiar ingredients, the preparation of culturally significant meals, and opportunities to share food across cultural boundaries may influence how migrants maintain connections with home while developing a sense of belonging in a new environment. Yet limited attention has been given to how this everyday food practices evoke sensory memories, sustain cultural identity, and shape nostalgic attachments among Nigerian migrants in New Zealand. Examining these experiences offers an opportunity to understand how foodways function as sites of memory, identity, and belonging within a specific migration context, while extending broader discussions of how migrants negotiate continuity, difference, and connection through food.

2.2 Sensory Nostalgia, Food, and Continuity in Migration

Nostalgia is not experienced through memory alone (Wildschut & Sedikides, 2021). Many experiences associated with home emerge through sensory encounters that reconnect people with earlier places, relationships, and routines without conscious effort. Walker et al. (2023) observe that memories often surface unexpectedly through ordinary moments, while Larsen (2019) argues that sensory experience can collapse temporal distance, allowing the past to be encountered as part of the present. Food is central to this interplay because it engages taste, smell, touch, sight, sound, and bodily movement, and unlike photographs or written narratives, which rely primarily on visual or cognitive recall, food requires active participation (Spence, 2017). Parasecoli (2014) highlights that food is woven into practices of care, celebration, responsibility, and family relationships, at the same time Abarca and Colby (2016) emphasise that food memories are inseparable from the people and places through which they were first experienced. These insights suggest that nostalgic food derives its emotional force not from flavour alone but from the social worlds that food memories continue to evoke.

Sensory research consistently shows that taste and smell are closely linked to memory and emotion. Nikielska-Sekuła and Desille (2026) emphasise that flavour is produced through the interaction of taste, smell, expectation, and prior experience, which helps account for the immediacy with which food can evoke past events. Yet sensory activation alone does not explain why identical flavours carry different meanings for different people. Korsmeyer

and Sutton (2011) argue that these differences emerge from lived experience, as flavours acquire emotional significance through repeated participation in everyday life. Thus, the meaning of nostalgic food lies as much in cultural and personal history as in sensory perception.

Food memories are equally shaped by culture because sensory knowledge develops through participation rather than biology alone. Miranda-Nieto and Gubrium (2026) conceptualise taste, smell, and texture as cultural competencies learned through everyday practice, while McCrickerd and Forde (2016) demonstrate that repeated engagement with particular cuisines establishes shared expectations about flavour, aroma, and texture. Sensory preferences therefore emerge through socialisation rather than existing as universal human responses. Abbots (2016) illustrates how these embodied sensory repertoires accompany migrants across borders, influencing how unfamiliar food environments are recognised, interpreted, and evaluated. Earlier sensory experiences continue to organise later encounters with food, allowing memories of home to remain embedded within everyday acts of tasting, cooking, and eating (Abarca & Colby, 2016).

This embodied understanding shifts attention from food as a cultural symbol towards food as lived practice. Lee (2023) and Sutton (2017) locate culinary knowledge within habitual movements, gestures, and sensory rhythms acquired through repeated cooking and eating, where memory is carried through the body rather than stored solely in the mind. Jackson et al.'s (2022) concept of *synaesthetic memory* demonstrates that taste, smell, touch, movement, and emotion become inseparable through repetition, enabling a single sensory encounter to evoke complex social and emotional worlds. Abarca and Colby (2016) similarly show that culinary knowledge is transmitted through observation, imitation, and participation, while Song et al. (2021) position hospitality as a multisensory experience through which familiarity and belonging are felt rather than simply understood. Remembering home, in this sense, depends not only on what migrants know about food but also on what their bodies have learned to recognise through everyday practice.

The importance of embodied food practices becomes particularly evident after migration, where familiar sensory environments are disrupted by geographical movement. Bascuñan-Wiley (2021) describes relocation as a disruption of established relationships with ingredients, food spaces, and everyday culinary routines, while Abbots (2016) argues that settlement requires migrants to negotiate unfamiliar food systems alongside broader

experiences of displacement. Even so, continuity is often rebuilt through ordinary culinary practices. Bailey's (2017) study of Indian migrants in the Netherlands found that transported spices, utensils, and recipes became material anchors through which the participants recreated aspects of home. Likewise, Sayadabdi (n.d.) observed that Iranian migrants in New Zealand experienced cooking as a visceral means of reconnecting with previous homes while establishing everyday life in New Zealand. These accounts reposition nostalgia as an ongoing practice of everyday life rather than a passive attachment to the past.

Food does not, however, resolve the emotional uncertainties of migration. Familiar tastes may restore feelings of closeness while simultaneously exposing the distance separating migrants from the people and places in which those tastes first acquired meaning. Boym's (2017) concept of reflective nostalgia captures this tension by recognising longing without assuming that the past can or should be recovered. Bascuñan-Wiley (2021) similarly argues that sensory encounters often intensify awareness of absence precisely because they recreate moments of familiarity, while Gandhi (2024) cautions against reducing nostalgic food to comfort alone. The same meal may evoke reassurance, grief, gratitude, and longing in equal measure, suggesting that the emotional significance of food lies in its capacity to hold these experiences together rather than resolve them.

Altogether, these debates show that nostalgia is shaped not only by emotional reflection but also by the cultural, historical, and migratory conditions through which longing is produced. Yet existing scholarship pays limited attention to how nostalgia emerges through everyday food practices, particularly within African diasporic contexts. This absence is significant because West African migrants in the diaspora negotiate longing within a multicultural environment where their foodways remain largely invisible (Tat Shum, 2020). Understanding nostalgia in this study therefore requires moving beyond psychological interpretations towards a culturally and materially grounded exploration of how longing is lived through food.

2.3 Food Practices, Home-Making and Hospitality Landscapes in Migration

Domestic routines form the backbone of everyday life, and food practices are among the most significant of these. Boccagni (2023) highlights how ordinary household activities shape the experience of settlement, positioning cooking and eating as central to rebuilding daily rhythms. Food holds a distinctive role in domestic life because cooking and eating

organise everyday routines through which familiarity and stability are reestablished (Sutton, 2017). Lin et al.'s (2020) study of Taiwanese migrants in Belgium provides empirical evidence for this: participants described preparing familiar meals not simply as remembering home but as re-establishing domestic rhythms within unfamiliar surroundings. Lin et al.'s work reframes settlement as an everyday practice, suggesting that belonging is negotiated as much around the kitchen as through wider structures of migration such as employment, housing, and formal integration pathways.

This conceptualisation of settlement also reshapes how home is understood. Rather than treating home as a fixed destination or nostalgic return, Boccagni (2023) argues that home is a relational process sustained through everyday practices that generate familiarity and attachment. Mata-Codesal (2023) extends this view by emphasising how home emerges through ongoing interactions with people, objects, and sensory environments. Tat Shum's (2020) study on the West African diaspora in Hong Kong illustrates how these negotiations are shaped by social visibility, showing that migrant foodways can be marginalised or misunderstood within mainstream culinary cultures, a dynamic that resonates with African and Nigerian experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Culinary continuity, in this context, depends on the material and embodied resources migrants carry with them. Recipes, utensils, ingredients, and cooking techniques form a repertoire that enables familiar practices to be re-established in new environments. Zanoni (2018) describes these elements as cultural carriers that allow food traditions to adapt without losing emotional significance, while Nyamnjoh (2018) demonstrates how homeland dishes sustain continuity precisely through their repeated preparation in new environments. Studies of African migrants in the United States show similar patterns, with everyday food items functioning as repositories of family history and identity (Asifat, 2025; Williams-Forson, 2017) even when access to African ingredients or infrastructures is limited.

However, the continuation of familiar food practices should not be viewed as a uniform experience among African migrants. Shared continental origins do not necessarily produce similar food preferences or practices. Ho's (2018) study of African student migrants in China shows how food practices reflect differences in social positioning and individual experiences. While some students maintained ties to African food as a reminder of home, others integrated Chinese food into their daily routines or sought Western food as an expression of cosmopolitan identity. Similarly, Tat Shum (2020) shows that food practices

within the West African diaspora in Hong Kong involve both solidarity and social friction, with culinary spaces becoming sites where boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are negotiated. Osei-Kwasi et al. (2023) further highlight variations in African migrants' dietary practices, showing how food choices are shaped by intersecting social, economic and cultural circumstances. These studies challenge the assumption that shared geographical or continental origins necessarily produce similar food preferences, practices or experiences of belonging. They also suggest that food can connect people through shared cultural experiences while revealing differences within migrant communities.

Access to food environments further shapes how migrants sustain these practices. Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni (2020) argue that ethnic grocery stores and restaurants operate as cultural infrastructures that enable migrants to maintain familiar routines. Okech and Timothy (2023) note that African-owned food businesses provide spaces where culinary knowledge, social relationships, and cultural familiarity are actively maintained. Tat Shum (2020) adds that informal food sharing within African diaspora communities creates networks through which ingredients, recipes, and everyday support circulate. These studies show that the hospitality landscape can shape the conditions under which cultural continuity becomes possible.

The relationship between food access and inclusion is not always straightforward. Food can also create tension in multicultural living environments, particularly when institutional food arrangements do not accommodate residents' different cultural practices. Patgiri's (2022) study of university hostels in New Delhi demonstrates this complexity. Although hostel meals and shared dining arrangements were intended to foster togetherness and community, the food provided also became a source of exclusion for some residents. In particular, students from northeastern India found their regional food traditions absent from hostel menus, while negative perceptions of certain ingredients' smells reinforced their sense of difference. Ankeny and Agutter (2020) examination of historical Australian migrant hostels similarly shows that communal food provision, despite being plentiful and nutritious, was often experienced negatively by residents because it failed to respect the food traditions and homelands they had left behind. Together, these studies demonstrate that providing food or creating shared dining spaces does not necessarily produce meaningful hospitality. Rather, the extent to which different food traditions are recognised and accommodated can influence whether communal food practices foster belonging or reinforce cultural exclusion.

The experiences of belonging also depend on how migrant food practices are received within wider social environments. Radford (2017) argues that feeling at home is shaped not only by domestic routines but also by whether those routines are socially recognised and valued. A sense of attachment develops through routine encounters in which migrants' practices are accepted, questioned, or disregarded (Boccagni, 2016; Moskal, 2015). Recognition becomes particularly evident when food enters into public settings such as workplaces, restaurants, events, and community gatherings. Nikielska-Sekuła and Desille (2026) show that migrant cuisines are interpreted through cultural expectations that determine whose food is regarded as familiar, exotic, authentic, or out of place. For Nigerian foodways, which are not widely recognised within Aotearoa New Zealand's culinary landscape, these interpretations can produce misrecognition or exoticisation, turning shared meals into moments where belonging is actively negotiated.

Home-making in migration is therefore less about recovering what has been left behind than about continually reproducing familiarity under new material and social conditions. Cooking, sourcing ingredients, and sharing meals allow migrants to negotiate continuity and recognition, illustrating that home is sustained through practice as much as memory (Abarca & Colby, 2016; Boccagni, 2023).

2.4 Food, Identity and Cultural Negotiation in Migration

Food plays a central role in how migrants understand and communicate who they are. Identity is not carried across borders as a fixed cultural possession; it is continually negotiated through everyday social practices (Bhandari,2021). Among these practices, food is especially significant because it is repeatedly prepared, shared, discussed, and interpreted within interactions with others. Culinary practices become everyday sites through which belonging is expressed, recognised, and sometimes contested within diasporic life (Nyamnjoh, 2018).

Understanding food in this way requires moving beyond simple interpretations that treat ethnic cuisines as static expressions of national culture. Poeggel (2022) argues that culinary meaning emerges through the social relationships within which food is prepared and consumed, while K. S. Lee (2023) demonstrates that recipes and eating practices carry histories, values, and collective memory that are continually reinterpreted across

generations. Feldman and Wunderlich (2022) reject the notion of cuisines as fixed cultural artefacts, emphasising that traditions remain meaningful precisely because they evolve through repeated participation. What endures is not the fixed form of practice but the social connections and evolving meanings that allow the practice to matter across time.

Migration complicates these relationships by placing familiar food practices within unfamiliar cultural settings. According to Jiemuratova (2025) and Arcadu et al.(2025), foods that once passed unnoticed within everyday life frequently become visible markers of cultural difference when interpreted through new social norms. Sutton (2017) argues that migration transforms routine culinary practices into public expressions of identity because they become open to observation, interpretation, and evaluation by others. Preparing traditional meals, celebrating with culturally significant foods, or introducing unfamiliar dishes therefore involves more than maintaining personal preferences; these practices become occasions through which migrants negotiate recognition, belonging, and cultural legitimacy.

Questions of *authenticity* often emerge within these encounters. Although authenticity is frequently invoked as if cuisines possess an original and stable form, scholars increasingly argue that such claims overlook the historical mobility of food traditions themselves. Le et al. (2019) show that authenticity often functions as a social expectation rather than an objective characteristic, encouraging migrant cuisines to be measured against idealised versions of cultural tradition. Abbots (2016) and Parasecoli (2014) suggest that authenticity pressures are frequently inconsistent, leading migrants' ethnic foods to be criticised for being simultaneously overly traditional and not authentic enough. Rapport and Dawson (2023) contend that these debates reveal less about culinary practice than about the authority to define cultural legitimacy. Authenticity therefore operates as a negotiation over recognition rather than a fixed standard against which migrant food can simply be judged.

These negotiations become even more visible within hospitality landscapes where migrant cuisines increasingly enter restaurants, food festivals, markets, and multicultural events. Lugosi et al. (2023) suggest that such spaces create opportunities for intercultural encounters by bringing diverse food traditions into everyday public life. Greater visibility, however, does not necessarily translate into deeper cultural understanding. Heldke (2015) argues that ethnic cuisines are often consumed through narratives of novelty and exoticism that privilege sensory experience while overlooking the histories and cultural meanings

embedded within them. Reddy and van Dam (2020) similarly observe that multicultural food consumption can celebrate diversity without engaging seriously with the lived realities of the communities producing those foods. Cirillo (2022) reminds us that public recognition of cuisine does not automatically produce recognition of culture, illustrating the uneven relationship between visibility and belonging.

Identity therefore emerges not from food itself but from the social meanings attached to preparing, sharing, accepting, and interpreting it. Everyday food practices become significant because they transform ordinary meals into moments where belonging is continually negotiated rather than simply remembered (Bailey, 2017).

2.5 The Cultural Complexity of Nigerian Foodways

Nigeria's foodways emerge from one of the most culturally diverse societies in Africa, with more than 250 ethnic groups whose ingredients, cooking methods, and traditions differ widely across regions (Asifat,2025). Ugoala (2025) and (Ojo, 2018) explain that describing Nigerian cuisine as a singular national category is misleading because it hides this deep internal diversity. Everyday dishes such as *jollof* rice (a rice dish cooked in a tomato-pepper base, known for its smoky, spicy flavour), *egusi* soup (a thick soup made with ground melon seeds, leafy greens, meat or fish), pounded yam (stretchy *swallow* made from pounding boiled yam), or *efo riro* (a spinach-based stew cooked with peppers, tomatoes and assorted meats) carry multiple layers of meaning expressing regional heritage, family memories, social identity, and national belonging. Nigerian foodways also operate within social systems of hospitality, kinship, and communal responsibility. Ojo (2018) illustrates that shared meals at gatherings reinforce social cohesion, while Okech and Timothy (2023) emphasise that African culinary traditions more broadly communicate generosity and collective obligation.

This cultural complexity becomes especially important in migration. Nigerian migrants often draw on ethnic foods as sources of continuity, comfort, and nostalgia, particularly in environments where their culinary traditions are not widely recognised. In Aotearoa New Zealand, where the Nigerian population is small and predominantly first-generation (Stats NZ, 2023), food becomes a key medium through which migrants recreate emotional ties to home. The richness of Nigerian foodways therefore underpins how migrants use food as memory, identity, and cultural connection within a multicultural landscape.

2.6 Nigerian Foodways in Diasporic Life

Studies of Nigerian migrants across global contexts show that food practices play a central role in sustaining cultural identity, memory, and social belonging. Duru's (2017) study of Igbo families in Germany shows that everyday food practices operate as subtle indicators of cultural attachment, with parents interpreting their children's engagement with Nigerian meals as evidence of ongoing connection to heritage. Brown et al. (2019) similarly observe that Nigerian communities in the United Kingdom maintain core culinary routines across generations despite exposure to new food environments, suggesting that culinary practice functions as an enduring cultural anchor.

Diasporic foodwork also carries a sense of responsibility. Umukoro et al. (2026) describe how Nigerian migrants in the United States frame cooking Nigerian meals as a deliberate act of cultural preservation. Lee's (2023) theorisation of food as everyday cultural practice helps explain this dynamic, showing how collective identities persist because they are continually enacted through routine activities.

Although these studies provide insight into Nigerian foodways in large diaspora settings, no research has examined how Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand engage with food or how nostalgia operates within this context. New Zealand scholarship on migrant cultural practices shows that small communities often rely on everyday routines to sustain identity and transmit cultural memory, particularly when public visibility is limited (Cassim et al., 2020; Guerrero-Rondon, 2026). Research on migrant food nostalgia further demonstrates that familiar dishes can serve as important sites of memory and cultural continuity during resettlement (Hughes, 2019; Reid et al., 2023). These insights offer a conceptual foundation for analysing Nigerian foodways in New Zealand.

2.7 Food as Cultural Education and Knowledge Transmission

Food operates as a key site for cultural learning in migrant life, where knowledge is transmitted through embodied practice rather than formal instruction (Wong, 2024). Culinary skills are acquired through participation, observation, and repetition, making food work a medium through which cultural meanings are enacted. Civitello (2026) highlights how cooking and eating embed historical and social values within everyday routine, while Herrera (2018) emphasises that learning emerges through the act of doing rather than through explicit explanation.

Within migrant households, this form of embodied learning becomes central to intergenerational cultural transmission. Lin et al. (2020) emphasise that food preparation communicates values surrounding care, responsibility, and cultural continuity, indicating that domestic food work carries moral and relational significance beyond the recipe. Kim's (2024) study of Korean diasporic families similarly demonstrates that everyday cooking prompts conversations about family history, etiquette, and collective identity, reinforcing the idea that cultural knowledge is sustained through ordinary domestic rhythms.

Cultural learning also extends into public and semi-public settings (Ocadiz Arriaga & Dyer-Williams, 2024). When migrants bring food to workplaces, share meals with friends, or encounter familiar dishes in places such as night markets, these moments often prompt questions about ingredients, preparation methods, and culinary traditions. Kraff and Jernsand (2023) illustrate how explaining food practices connects everyday cooking to broader cultural narratives, while Bietti et al. (2019) show that storytelling frequently accompanies food sharing, turning routine meals into moments of interpretation. Such interactions make aspects of migrants' cultural worlds accessible to others through demonstration, explanation, and narrative.

Nigerian foodways exemplify these dynamics. Dishes such as jollof rice, egusi soup, efo riro, and *fufu* (a stretchy dough/swallow made from fermented cassava often eaten with soups) commonly elicit curiosity about regional variation, preparation techniques, and eating customs. Ibrahim (2025) argues that African cuisines communicate histories of agriculture, trade, and cultural interaction through everyday culinary practice, and Williams-Forson (2017) demonstrates that explaining how food is prepared often becomes a way of conveying family traditions, communal values, and social relationships. These examples show how Nigerian culinary practices operate as informal educational tools through which cultural knowledge is articulated and shared.

However, the educational potential of food is not guaranteed. Heldke (2015) cautions that ethnic cuisines are often consumed as novelty, with little engagement with the cultural knowledge they carry. Ardika et al. (2026) similarly argue that meaningful learning depends on curiosity, dialogue, and sustained social interaction rather than sensory experience alone. These critiques highlight a tension within the literature: while food creates opportunities for cultural transmission, understanding emerges only when social conditions support interpretive engagement.

2.8 Ambivalent Meanings of Food in Migration

Food often sustains relationships, identity, and cultural continuity, yet these experiences are rarely emotionally straightforward. The same meal that evokes familiarity can intensify awareness of distance and irreversible change (Strand, 2023).) Nostalgic food practices are described as emotionally ambivalent, characterised by the coexistence of comfort and loss rather than the resolution of either (Liere & Sremac, 2025; Lijtmaer, 2022; Simpson et al., 2024). Much of this scholarship, however, examines ambivalence within large or well-established migrant communities, leaving less understood how these dynamics unfold in smaller diasporas where cultural foodways are less visible.

Ambivalence frequently arises from the tension between sensory familiarity and geographical separation. Batcho (2021) shows that remembered flavours evoke mixed emotions, while Williams-Forson (2017) demonstrate that reproducing homeland dishes abroad can heighten awareness of absence because such meals recall experiences that cannot be fully recovered. These studies highlight how sensory recognition can simultaneously anchor migrants and remind them of what remains out of reach.

Nostalgia theory helps explain why familiar food may comfort in one moment yet unsettle in another. Boym's (2017) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia clarifies how migrants navigate longing without assuming that the past can be reconstructed. Ore (2018) extends this view by arguing that nostalgic food practices become everyday ways of living with uncertainty rather than eliminating it. Ambivalence is thus not an anomaly but a central feature of nostalgic experience.

Temporal change further complicates nostalgic meaning. Strand (2023) argues that food memories shift as migrants' lives unfold, while Sutton's (2017) work on synaesthetic memory shows how sensory encounters draw earlier experiences into present contexts without collapsing their differences. In new cultural settings, ethnic dishes may therefore acquire additional layers of significance as they are re-interpreted through changing relationships, routines, and environments, functioning not as either comfort or sorrow but as practices that both hold experiences in tension and allow migrants to navigate ongoing transformations of place and self (Ore, 2018).

Empirical research reinforces this complexity. May (2017) shows that nostalgic practices often produce simultaneous belonging and estrangement, while Baldassar et al. (2016) demonstrate that food practices among transnational families recreate intimacy while

highlighting separation. These studies illustrate how ambivalence is embedded within everyday migrant experience.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for understanding a research phenomenon and guiding its interpretation (Kivunja, 2018; Varpio et al., 2020) Within qualitative research, theory is not used to test hypotheses or establish causal explanations. Instead, it offers concepts that help researchers explore, interpret, and make sense of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). This study draws on Diaspora Theory and Embodied Practice Theory to interpret how Nigerian food practices produce nostalgia, sustain cultural identity, and enable cultural knowledge transmission within migrant life. These theories were selected because Nigerian food experiences involve both an ongoing relationship with homeland and the embodied practices through which those relationships are experienced.

2.9.1 Diaspora Theory

Diaspora Theory offers a way to understand how migrants sustain connections to homeland while negotiating belonging in new places. Hall (1990, as cited in Garner, 2010) and Clifford (1994) challenge assimilationist models by showing that migrants do not simply move on from home; instead, cultural memory and emotional attachment continue to shape everyday life. Brah (1996) extends this by arguing that diaspora is not a fixed relationship to an origin but a dynamic process in which migrants continually remake home through practice. These perspectives are crucial for this study because Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand maintain cultural continuity through routine food practices that link present life to remembered places.

However, Diaspora Theory has been criticised for the very assumptions that make it analytically powerful. Brubaker (2005) warns that the term diaspora can become overly elastic, grouping diverse migrant experiences under a single label and masking internal differences and uneven forms of belonging. Hall (1990, as cited in Garner, 2010) cautions against treating cultural identity as a stable inheritance rather than a negotiated, historically contingent process, suggesting that diaspora must be understood as a negotiated and historically contingent process rather than a fixed attachment to origin. Anthias (1998) further warns that diaspora scholarship can romanticise homeland and overlook the

fragmented, ambivalent, or contested nature of migrant memories and identifications. Brah's (1996) concept of *diasporic space* responds to these critiques by emphasising that diaspora is produced through intersecting histories, power relations, and everyday negotiations rather than through a simple homeland–hostland division. These critiques matter for this study because Nigerian foodways in Aotearoa New Zealand emerge within a small, less publicly visible African community, where meanings of home are not simply remembered but actively reconstructed under changing social conditions.

Diaspora theory has increasingly informed food studies, offering insight into how migrants use food to sustain cultural ties. Boccagni (2017) argues that home is not a location but a set of practices that generate familiarity, and Ore (2018) extends this by showing how cooking can reconnect domestic life in the host country with memories of homeland, producing a sense of continuity across distance. Nyamnjoh (2018) and Strand (2023) further demonstrate that food operates as a sensory and mnemonic medium through which migrants maintain cultural and emotional ties even when physical return is impossible. These contributions help explain why Nigerian migrants continue preparing ethnic dishes after relocation and how food practices anchor identity within new environments.

Yet these strengths also reveal the limits of Diaspora Theory for this study. While diaspora scholarship explains why migrants maintain attachments to homeland, it pays less attention to how those attachments are felt, enacted, and reproduced through the body. Diaspora Theory does not fully account for the sensory and affective dimensions of food in terms of how taste, smell, movement, and routine culinary practice evoke memory or how identity is lived through embodied action (Baldassar et al., 2016; Sutton, 2017). For Nigerian migrants, these sensory and bodily processes are central to how food becomes a site of nostalgia, belonging, and cultural transmission, highlighting the need for a complementary framework that can address the lived, experiential dimensions of culinary practice.

2.9.2 Embodied Practice Theory

Embodied Practice Theory offers a way to understand how memory, identity, and cultural knowledge are produced through the body rather than existing only as cognitive or symbolic constructs. Csordas (2002) positions embodiment as the primary ground of experience, arguing that people perceive, act, and interpret the world through bodily engagement. Merleau-Ponty's (1964) phenomenological work reinforces this view by showing that perception is always situated within lived, sensory experience rather than

abstract thought. Food scholars extend these insights: Abarca and Salas (2015) demonstrate that culinary knowledge is acquired through participation and sensory apprenticeship, while Avieli (2017) shows that cooking practices rely on embodied judgement developed through repetition and engagement, and Sutton (2017) illustrates how food memories are activated through sensory cues and habitual routines. Through this lens, preparing Nigerian food after migration is not simply an act of remembering the past; it is an embodied practice through which cultural knowledge and relationships with home are reproduced in everyday life.

Holtzman (2006) argues that food memory emerges through sensory cues embedded in everyday practice, yet sensory experience alone cannot explain how these memories are reshaped by migration. Bailey (2017) shows that migrant foodways are influenced by shifts in domestic environments, social relationships, and everyday opportunities for cultural participation. Boccagni and Baldassar (2015) further emphasise that sensory and affective experiences are always shaped by broader social contexts, including family structures, cultural expectations, and the emotional dynamics of resettlement. For migrants, embodied food memories are carried into host communities, but they are lived within new social settings, rhythms of daily life, and interpersonal contexts that differ from those in their homeland (Abbots, 2016).

Practice theorists Cetina et al. (2005), Reckwitz (2002) and Warde (2005) emphasise that social life is organised through recurrent practices involving materials, meanings, and competencies. From this perspective, food is not a static cultural symbol; its meanings are continually produced through the practices of preparing, sharing, and consuming meals. This lens enriches Embodied Practice Theory by highlighting how bodily actions are situated within organised patterns of everyday life. For Nigerian migrants, food practices remain meaningful because they are enacted through familiar competencies, shared routines, and culturally shaped ways of doing, not because recipes change but because practice itself carries cultural knowledge (Duru, 2017). Everyday food routines become a site where cultural belonging is enacted through embodied competence and social interaction (Arcadu, Tubertini, et al., 2025).

Embodied and practice-based approaches have been critiqued for underplaying the wider historical, political, and geographical contexts that shape migrant experience. While embodiment explains how food memories are carried through the body (Holtzman, 2006), it does not address the transnational social fields through which migrants sustain emotional

and cultural ties across distance (Vertovec, 2009). Nor does it explain why certain culinary memories become significant after displacement or how food-making becomes part of the affective labour of diasporic home-building (Boccagni, 2017). Practice Theory highlights routine action but pays limited attention to the material and affective attachments that infuse those routines with diasporic meaning. As Tolia-Kelly (2004) argues, everyday material practices are shaped by histories of movement, longing, and cultural inheritance. Without incorporating diaspora and transnational belonging, embodied and practice-based perspectives risk presenting food practices as individual sensory encounters rather than relational outcomes of displacement, cultural continuity, and resettlement. For migrants, food practices are shaped not only by bodily memory and routine but also by diasporic attachments, social histories, and the ongoing negotiation of identity in a new cultural landscape.

2.10 Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework

The review of Diaspora Theory and Embodied Practice Theory demonstrates that both perspectives offer valuable insights for interpreting migrant food experiences, while also leaving certain dimensions less fully addressed when used independently. Diaspora Theory highlights continuing relationships between homeland and host society, including processes of belonging and identity construction across distance (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994). However, it provides limited guidance for explaining how nostalgic connections are produced through sensory experience, bodily learning, and routine culinary action. Conversely, Embodied Practice Theory clarifies how memory and cultural knowledge are experienced through the body and sustained through repeated practices (Csordas, 2002; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Yet without diaspora perspectives, embodied accounts do not fully explain how migration, displacement, and transnational belonging shape the meanings attached to those embodied experiences.

In response, this study develops the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework, presented in Figure 1, as the combined interpretive tool for analysing Nigerian food practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. The framework does not treat food nostalgia as a simple recall of a previous place or as a cultural practice preserved unchanged across borders. Instead, it conceptualises Nigerian food practices as ongoing, relational experiences through which migrants negotiate relationships with homeland, carry cultural knowledge through embodied routines, and produce meanings within new social environments. This approach

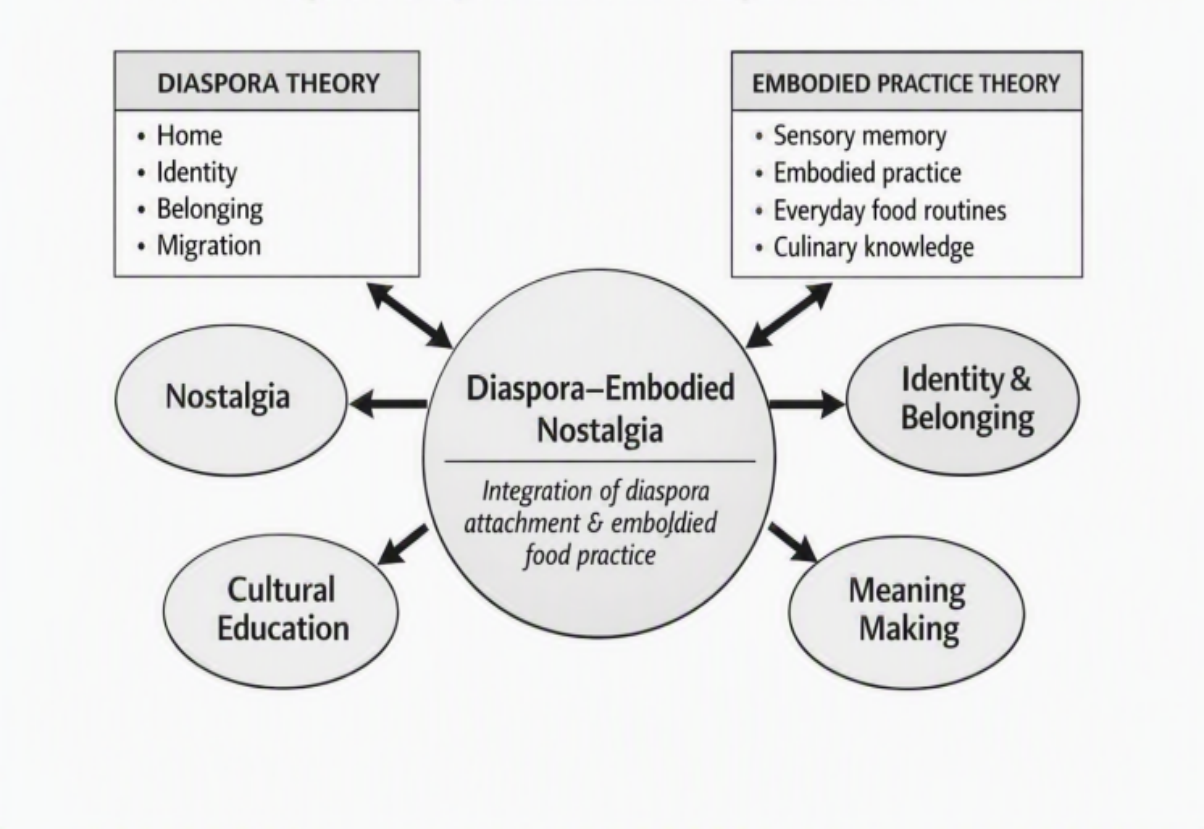
aligns with Vertovec's (2009) understanding of transnationalism as a field of sustained cross-border connection, Boccagni's (2017) view of home-building as an affective and embodied project, and Tolia-Kelly's (2004) argument that everyday material practices carry diasporic memory and attachment.

The framework consists of three interconnected dimensions: *Diaspora* emphasises the continuing negotiation between homeland and host land, recognising that migration involves both separation and sustained connection (Shuval, 2000); *Embodiment* highlights how culinary knowledge, memory, and cultural practices are carried through sensory experience, bodily skills, and repeated participation (Csordas, 2002; Merleau-Ponty, 1964); and *Nostalgia* captures the emotional relationship migrants maintain with the past, recognising that connections to home may involve comfort, continuity, longing, absence, and ambivalence (Boym, 2017). Together, these dimensions provide an interpretive lens for examining Nigerian food practices as experiences that are simultaneously personal, cultural, sensory, and relational.

The Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework guides attention towards how food becomes meaningful through acts of cooking, sharing, remembering, and introducing cultural practices within the migrant environment. It supports an analysis of Nigerian food not only as a connection to homeland, but also as a practice through which identity and belonging are continually negotiated in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Figure 1

Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Conceptual Framework


DIASPORA THEORY
• Home
• Identity
• Belonging
• Migration
EMBODIED PRACTICE THEORY
• Sensory memory
• Embodied practice
• Everyday food routines
• Culinary knowledge
Nostalgia
Diaspora–Embodied Nostalgia
Integration of diaspora attachment & embodied food practice
Identity & Belonging
Cultural Education
Meaning Making

Finally, the conceptual framework functions as a sensitising framework rather than a fixed analytical model. Following Blumer's (1954) understanding of sensitising concepts, it provides interpretive direction while remaining open to meanings emerging from lived experience. In this study, the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework informed the analysis of the autoethnographic narratives while allowing the specific meanings of each food experience to emerge through reflection and interpretation.

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter presents the research design used to explore how Nigerian food evokes nostalgia among migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand. It outlines the paradigm, methodology, positionality, reflexivity, sources of data, analysis, and ethical considerations that shape the study. These methodological choices are aligned with the study's aim of understanding the lived and sensory meanings attached to Nigerian food in relation to nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural education.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study is situated within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm because it seeks to understand how Nigerian migrants make meaning of food as a source of nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural education in everyday life. Constructivist-interpretivism assumes that social reality is not fixed or objectively measurable but is understood through lived experience and contextual interpretation (Crotty, 2021). This orientation is appropriate for a study concerned with the meanings migrants attach to Nigerian food within the context of migration to Aotearoa New Zealand.

The ontological position underpinning this research is *relativism*. Relativist ontology assumes that reality is multiple, socially constructed, and experienced differently by different individuals (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Manik et al., 2024; Singh, 2024). From this perspective, concepts such as home, nostalgia, identity, and belonging are not objective entities but meanings that are continually produced and negotiated through lived experience. This is particularly relevant to migration research because the same food may carry different emotional and cultural meanings for different migrants.

The epistemological position of this study is *subjectivism*. Subjectivist epistemology assumes that knowledge is produced through engagement between individuals and the world rather than existing independently of human experience (Code, 2012; Nonaka & Peltokorpi, 2006). Knowledge is therefore interpreted rather than discovered, and the focus of this study is on how migrants construct meanings around food and how those meanings shape experiences of migration, identity, belonging, and cultural education.

Constructivist-interpretivism also recognises that researchers are not detached observers, but active participants in the production of knowledge Levitt and Pierorazio (2026). Because this

study is autoethnographic, these interpretive assumptions also apply to my own lived experience as the researcher, making reflexivity and positionality central to the research design.

3.2 Autoethnography as Methodology

This study adopts autoethnography as its primary methodology because it enables personal experiences of Nigerian food to be examined as culturally situated experiences through which broader questions of nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural education can be understood. *Autoethnography* combines autobiographical writing with cultural analysis, allowing the researcher to move beyond describing personal experience and to examine how those experiences are shaped by wider social, historical, and cultural contexts (Chang, 2016; Tarisayi, 2023). The methodology is therefore well suited to a study that seeks to understand how everyday encounters with Nigerian food illuminate experiences of migration in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Autoethnography is consistent with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm guiding this research. Both recognise that knowledge is produced through interpretation and lived experience rather than objective observation (Denzin, 2013; Ellis et al., 2011). This alignment is important because the study does not seek to establish whether Nigerian food objectively causes nostalgia. Instead, it explores how nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural education acquire meaning through migrants' everyday experiences of food.

The choice of autoethnography is also shaped by the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Food nostalgia is often experienced through ordinary moments of cooking, tasting, shopping for ingredients, sharing meals, or encountering familiar aromas (Reid et al., 2023). These experiences are sensory, emotional, and embodied, and they are difficult to capture through methods that depend only on retrospective description. Autoethnography makes it possible to examine these moments as they unfold in everyday life, allowing the study to explore subtle relationships between food, memory, and migration in greater depth (Bhattacharya, 2018). The food experiences discussed in this study were purposively selected based on their personal significance and their relevance to the research aims. They represent different dimensions of my experiences of food, memory, cultural identity and belonging before and after migration. The selection was not intended to represent Nigerian cuisine, as a

whole, but to explore how particular food practices and encounters acquired meaning within my lived experience.

Memory occupies a central place within this methodological approach. Autoethnography treats memories as interpretations that are continually revisited and reconstructed in relation to present circumstances (Allen, 2015). This is especially relevant in migration, where relationships with home are often sustained through acts of remembering. In this study, memories associated with Nigerian food are understood not simply as recollections of meals previously eaten, but as reflections on family relationships, celebrations, cultural traditions, and everyday practices that continue to shape life after migration. Food therefore functions as an everyday archive through which home, identity, and belonging remain accessible despite geographical distance.

A distinction must also be made between autobiography and analytical autoethnography. While *autobiography* is primarily concerned with recounting personal experience, analytical autoethnography situates those experiences within broader cultural and social processes (Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011; Lapadat, 2017). This distinction is fundamental to the present study. The purpose is not to narrate my migration journey for its own sake, but to use personal experience as culturally situated data through which wider questions concerning food, nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural education can be explored. Personal narratives are therefore treated as material for analysis, not as ends in themselves.

Autoethnography has nevertheless attracted criticism, particularly concerning subjectivity, researcher bias, and the limited generalisability of findings (Poerwandari, 2021). These critiques raise important questions about the extent to which personal experience can contribute to scholarly knowledge. However, proponents argue that the value of autoethnography lies in its ability to generate rich, contextually grounded insights into cultural life (Ellis et al., 2011). Credibility in this approach depends on reflexivity, transparency, and critical interpretation rather than claims of objectivity.

Within this study, autoethnography provides the methodological approach through which everyday encounters with Nigerian food are examined as culturally meaningful experiences. Reflective journals, narrative accounts, and everyday food experiences constitute the primary sources of data, while the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework provides the analytical concepts that guide interpretation. In this way, autoethnography enables the study to examine

how food evokes nostalgia, shapes identity and belonging, and facilitates cultural education within the everyday lives of Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

3.3 Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality refers to how a researcher's social identities, personal experiences, cultural background, and values shape the research process and influence the production of knowledge (Darwin Holmes, 2020; Muhammad et al., 2015; Secules et al., 2021).Within interpretivist research, knowledge is not viewed as independent of the researcher but as emerging through the interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin, 2013). Reflexive engagement with positionality is therefore important because it enables researchers to acknowledge how their perspectives inform the questions they ask, the experiences they attend to, and the interpretations they develop. This is especially relevant in autoethnographic research, where the researcher's lived experience becomes both a source of insight and a site for critical examination (Allen, 2015).

My interest in this study is closely connected to my experiences as a Nigerian migrant living in Aotearoa New Zealand. In February 2025, I left Nigeria to begin postgraduate study in Hospitality Management after more than three decades in familiar cultural, social, and culinary environments. Migration involved not only geographical movement but also separation from routines, relationships, and sensory experiences that had shaped everyday life (Bascuñan-Wiley, 2021). Like many migrants, I arrived carrying memories, habits, and cultural practices that remained significant despite physical distance from home. These experiences shaped my understanding that food can evoke nostalgia, belonging, and cultural continuity through sensory memory, taste, and smell.

Prior to migration, I worked as a chef, developing Nigerian-inspired menus, creating recipes, and catering across diverse social and cultural settings. That background gave me familiarity with ingredients, preparation techniques, flavour systems, and the cultural meanings attached to food practices. Food has therefore never been only a matter of consumption for me; it has also functioned as a medium of creativity, hospitality, social connection, and cultural expression. My sensory memories of Nigerian food such as the heat of *ata rodo* (*habanero* pepper), the aroma of smoky jollof rice, and the texture of fufu, form part of the interpretive lens through which I approach this study.

These combined experiences position me as both an insider and a researcher. My familiarity with Nigerian food cultures provides access to meanings that may not be readily available to researchers without similar experiences. At the same time, familiarity requires continual questioning so that culturally shared assumptions are not presented as universal migrant experiences. Insider status also brings challenges, because personal attachment and professional experience may shape how nostalgia, identity, and belonging are interpreted. Rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity, I treat my experiences as situated knowledge that must be critically examined in the same way as other narratives within the study (Ellis et al., 2011).

Making my positionality explicit strengthens the transparency of the study by showing how interpretation is shaped by experience, knowledge, and reflexive awareness. It also provides the basis for interpreting the autoethnographic narratives critically, ensuring that personal experience functions as a source of analytical insight rather than as self-evident truth.

3.4 Reflexivity

Reflexivity formed an integral component of this study because analytical autoethnography requires the researcher to critically examine how personal experience shapes interpretation (Koopman et al., 2020). Within interpretivist inquiry, researchers are recognised as active participants in the construction of knowledge rather than detached observers (Rapley, 2018). *Reflexivity* therefore involved continually questioning how my experiences, assumptions, emotions, and interpretations influenced the meanings I developed from encounters with Nigerian food.

Throughout the research process, I deliberately questioned interpretations that initially appeared self-evident. Familiarity with Nigerian food created a risk of assuming that particular tastes, smells, or culinary practices would carry similar meanings across migrant experiences. Rather than treating those meanings as fixed, I asked how my own perspective may have shaped what I noticed and whether alternative interpretations were possible. Reflexivity therefore became an ongoing practice of questioning rather than confirming first impressions (Pillow, 2003).

One recurring area of reflexive engagement concerned my understanding of food nostalgia. My initial tendency was to associate Nigerian food with comfort, continuity, and belonging. However, some encounters generated disappointment, emotional distance, or unfamiliarity,

particularly when familiar dishes did not evoke the feelings I anticipated. Reflecting on these moments through Boym's (2017) distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia encouraged me to see nostalgia as complex and sometimes contradictory rather than uniformly positive. Reflexivity remained an ongoing part of the research process, ensuring that interpretation stayed open to questioning rather than assuming personal experience as self-evident evidence.

3.5 Sources of Data

This study draws on two sources of data. Autoethnographic reflections form the main source of data for this research. Reflective journals, field notes, and narrative accounts were used to document everyday encounters with Nigerian food practices, including meal preparation, ingredient sourcing, food sharing, and community experiences. These accounts were analysed as culturally situated experiences that reveal meanings connected to food, memory, and belonging. Analytical memos were also maintained to record emerging interpretations and connections across the narratives (Stephens & Breheny, 2013).

The study was complemented by secondary data used to situate the autoethnographic accounts within wider cultural and social contexts. These data supported the interpretation of narratives by connecting personal experiences with broader discussions of diaspora, food practices, and cultural identity. They were not treated as a separate data set or used to validate personal experiences, but rather as contextual resources that informed the analysis (C. Lee, 2019).

3.6 Reflexive Thematic Analysis Informed by Narrative Analysis

The analytical approach adopted in this study was designed to preserve the richness of individual autoethnographic narratives while also enabling interpretation of recurring meanings through which Nigerian food evokes nostalgia, shapes identity and belonging, and functions as a form of cultural education. To achieve this, the study employs reflexive thematic analysis informed by narrative analysis. This combination allows individual experiences to be understood within their narrative context while also identifying patterns of meaning across the autoethnographic accounts.

Narrative analysis is based on the premise that people make sense of their lives through stories, organising experiences into accounts that connect past events with present

understandings (Riessman, 2022). Experiences of migration, food, and nostalgia are rarely expressed as isolated events. Instead, they are embedded within narratives that connect memories of Nigeria with everyday life in Aotearoa New Zealand. Attending to these narratives makes it possible to understand not only what was experienced but also how those experiences are interpreted and given meaning over time.

While narrative analysis preserves the sequence and context of individual experiences, the analytical purpose of this study extends beyond understanding single stories. The study seeks to identify broader patterns in how Nigerian food evokes nostalgia, sustains identity and belonging, shapes the meanings migrants attach to familiar dishes, and contributes to cultural education within the host community. *Reflexive thematic analysis* provides the analytical framework for interpreting these patterns across the accounts (Riessman, 2022).

The analysis began with repeated reading of the reflective journals, field notes, and narrative accounts to gain close familiarity with the data. Meaningful segments of text were then coded in relation to the research aim and questions. Through continual comparison and reflexive engagement with the narratives, conceptually related codes were refined into broader themes that captured recurring patterns across the accounts.

Braun et al.'s (2022) six-phase approach informed the analysis, with familiarisation, coding, theme development, and refinement treated recursively rather than as a fixed sequence. Reflexive analytical memos were maintained throughout the study to capture emerging interpretations, emotional responses, moments of uncertainty, and questions arising during analysis. Questions such as Why does this experience feel significant to me? How are my own memories shaping this interpretation? and What else could this moment mean? helped keep the analysis open and prevented early assumptions from becoming fixed conclusions.

The Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework informed this interpretive process by shaping attention to relationships with home, nostalgia, identity, belonging, embodied food practices, and cultural education. The framework did not function as a fixed coding template. Instead, it guided the interpretation of the autoethnographic accounts and helped connect individual experiences to the broader conceptual structure of the study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are central to autoethnographic research because personal experience is often intertwined with the lives of others (Lapadat, 2017). Although this study draws

primarily on my own experiences as a Nigerian migrant in Aotearoa New Zealand, some reflections may involve family members, friends, or community interactions that form part of everyday food practices. For this reason, care has been taken to omit, alter, or anonymise identifying details where necessary so that individuals cannot be recognised. This approach reflects the ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of others while still representing cultural experiences respectfully and accurately (Winkler, 2018).

Autoethnography also requires attention to the ethics of self-disclosure, as writing about personal migration experiences can create emotional vulnerability for the researcher (Kinitz, 2022). Decisions about what to include in this study were therefore guided by personal boundaries and by the potential implications of disclosing emotionally charged food-related experiences. Particular care was taken to avoid unnecessary detail that could expose private relationships or intensify distress while still allowing the research questions to be explored honestly and critically.

In addition to protecting others, the study also required consideration of the ethics of the self. This involved reflecting on whether any account might cause harm through in-depth personal revelation and setting appropriate limits around what would be written about and analysed. Ethical approval was obtained in accordance with Auckland University of Technology requirements, and the study was conducted in line with the University's guidelines for responsible and ethical research practice.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings as a series of analytical autoethnographic vignettes. Each vignette emerged through lived moments, sensory encounters, and reflection rather than through detached description. The narratives are presented in a way that keeps the analysis inside the story, showing how food evoked nostalgia, shaped identity and belonging, and carried cultural meaning in everyday migrant life.

4.1 The Moment the Distance Collapsed

I had been living in a hostel in Auckland's central business district for only a few weeks when I began to understand how exposed migration can make a person feel. The shared kitchen was constantly active. Someone was frying noodles, someone else was cooking rice in a rice cooker, and somewhere music was always playing (too loudly). Different smells, languages, and routines existed together in the same space. A family of three from the Middle East often cooked a crispy rice dish with raisins, the burnt edges deliberate, part of their own tradition. I watched them sometimes, fascinated by how their food carried its own story. I was the only African residing in the hostel, and even when no one made me feel unwelcome, I was constantly aware of myself in that kitchen space – my food, my rhythms, my presence.

Most evenings I ate quickly, relying on takeaway food or whatever required the least effort, moving through dinner without much thought. But this particular day resisted that routine, although I did not recognise it at the time. Earlier in the afternoon, I had picked up fresh peppers, tomatoes, onions, and spices from a small shop, an unplanned purchase that I made almost absentmindedly. It was only later, when I stood in the kitchen looking at the ingredients spread out before me, that I realised that something had shifted. I still did not know exactly what I was making; I only knew I wanted flavour, something that required time and attention. Was I cooking because I was hungry, or because I needed something familiar to hold onto? At the time, I did not know the answer, but the question itself mattered.

The hostel kitchen was busy as usual. The receptionist had put on a Rema song, and hearing a Nigerian voice in that shared space unsettled me in a way I did not expect. The room was still full of noise, but that song made the kitchen feel both closer to home and further away from it at the same time. I paused, spoon in hand. Why did that sound matter so much in

that moment? Because it reminded me that home was not only a place I had left; it was also something I carried with me, sometimes unexpectedly, through sound, rhythm, and memory.

When the *ata lilo* (a mixture of tomatoes, peppers, and onions) met the hot oil, the aroma slowly filled the kitchen. The familiar combination of heat, sweetness, and spice immediately brought back memories of home. Before I could prepare myself, Lagos came back to me, not as a neat memory but as a bodily presence. My grandmother's kitchen returned with its heat, its noise, and the way she moved through the room. I had learned by watching, by standing nearby, by absorbing what mattered without being told it mattered. In that moment, the hostel did not disappear, but it was interrupted. The smell did not simply remind me of home; it pulled home into the present. I could feel that the distance between where I was and where I came from had collapsed for a moment into the same kitchen.

Someone in the shared kitchen noticed the aroma and asked what I was preparing. I turned and said, "*Ata dindin*." The words felt small, but they also felt important. In naming the dish, I was not only answering a question; I was placing Nigerian food into a shared space and, in doing so, making it legible to someone who had not grown up with it. Was that cultural education, or was it simply conversation? At that moment, it felt like both. I was learning that food could speak for me before I had the words to explain what I was feeling.

As the stew thickened, I became aware of how much I had been carrying without naming it: the loneliness of migration, the pressure of beginning a master's degree in a new country, the effort of being new, and the fear of disappearing into a place that did not yet know me. I had not said any of this aloud, but the cooking had already begun to speak for me. The pot held more than ingredients. It held memory, pressure, and the desire to belong without giving up home. I began to understand that nostalgia was about looking back. It was also about trying to remain connected while learning how to live elsewhere.

Later, a Chinese resident, who had often seen me cooking in the shared kitchen, asked if he could taste the food I had prepared. I nodded. He spooned some onto his plate, took a bite, and smiled. "This is wow," he said. I smiled too, but the moment stayed with me because it felt like recognition. What made the exchange meaningful was not simply that he enjoyed the food, but that ata dindin, a dish deeply familiar to me, was being appreciated by someone whose culinary traditions, flavours, and cooking practices were different from my own. My

food was speaking across cultural difference, and I was hearing myself through his response. In that exchange, food became connection, but it also became translation: a way of carrying a piece of Nigeria into a shared migrant space and offering it to someone else without losing its meaning.

I served the ata dindin with parboiled white rice, boiled eggs, and beef chunks cooked within the sauce. I ate slowly, almost carefully, as if the food might disappear if I was not paying attention. Each bite felt like a negotiation between two worlds: the one I had left and the one I was trying to enter. Could both exist in me without tearing something apart? Could I carry home without losing my place here? By the end of the meal, the hostel kitchen had become something else for a short while. Lagos and Auckland had met in the same space. The distance had not disappeared, but it had been interrupted. Food had not solved migration, but it had made home feel reachable. At the same time, the experience reminded me that shared spaces are never entirely uncomplicated. The aroma that connected me so strongly to Nigeria was unfamiliar to others in the hostel kitchen, just as many of their foods had initially been unfamiliar to me. Living and cooking alongside people with different food practices made me more conscious of how sensory experiences are culturally shaped. What I experienced as comforting and familiar could be perceived differently by someone whose food experiences were shaped by another cultural background. This created a subtle tension between my desire to express familiarity through food and my awareness that I was doing so in a shared environment where those meanings were not necessarily understood by others. The hostel kitchen therefore became a space where connection, difference and the negotiation of cultural identities existed together.

4.2 What I Carry Across Borders

Sundays in my childhood had a rhythm that could be felt before the day fully began. After the first church service at 7 a.m., my mother, my siblings, and I would often head to Ogba Market in Lagos to buy ingredients for the family meal. The market was never quiet. The sounds arrived before the details: okadas (motorcycles) moving between vehicles, keke (tricycle) horns cutting through conversations, traders calling out prices, and people negotiating over almost everything. The air carried a mixture of fresh produce, spices,

smoke, and movement. It was crowded, imperfect, and sometimes overwhelming, but it was also familiar. It was one of the everyday environments that shaped my understanding of food, family, and community.

My mother moved through the market with purpose, selecting the ingredients she needed for jollof rice. After we finished shopping and made our way towards the car park, we would buy *puff-puff*, the warm fried sweet-dough balls wrapped in paper, which served as our small Sunday snack. They were never meant to fill us up; they simply kept us from getting hungry while the jollof cooked at home. We liked to reserve our stomachs for the main meal, so puff-puff became a bridge between church, the market, and the anticipation of Sunday lunch. Looking back, I realise that these moments were not only about food: they were about routine, connection, and the quiet ways family traditions become embedded in everyday life.

At home, preparing jollof followed a familiar rhythm that shaped our Sundays. My mother seasoned the chicken, prepared the stew base, and allowed the flavours to develop slowly. The smell travelled through the compound, often attracting neighbours who stopped by to talk, taste, and share conversation. Music played in the background. Discussions moved between family matters, politics, and everyday life. Jollof was not simply the meal we ate on Sundays; it was the centre around which relationships gathered.

My first jollof in Auckland happened during Easter week, in the middle of my first mid-semester break. My uncle and my young niece were visiting from Australia, and I remember thinking that if they had travelled this far, they should taste something familiar. I wanted them to experience a small piece of home, but I also realised that I was cooking for myself as much as I was cooking for them. Perhaps I was trying to reconnect with something I had not realised I was missing.

I woke up at 6 a.m., before the hostel kitchen became busy. The building was old, the walls were thin, and by 8 a.m. the shared kitchen usually became crowded with different routines, smells, and conversations. Residents prepared cereal, oat porridge, sandwiches, dumplings and various rice dishes, reflecting food practices different from those I had grown up with. In Lagos, my everyday food environment was more commonly shaped by aromas of pepper stew, *akara* (deep-fried bean fritters made from blended black-eyed peas), fried yam or jollof. Here the sensory landscape was different. Although food was being prepared constantly in both places, the ingredients, flavours, and familiar cooking practices surrounding me in

Auckland were different. I prepared the chicken quietly, allowing the smoke from the grill to rise slowly, and stirred the jollof stew base until the flavours developed into something similar. When the rice finally steamed, and I tasted the first spoonful of jollof, the experience felt unexpectedly emotional. It was not simply the taste of the food; it was the feeling of encountering something familiar in a place where the food culture around me felt unfamiliar.

The reaction from my family reinforced that feeling of connection. Hearing that the food reminded them of my mother's kitchen in Lagos made me reflect on how food can hold shared memories even when people are physically separated from the places those memories belong to. Later, when I shared some of the meal with a fellow resident from Argentina, her interest in the dish made me consider another dimension of the experience. Her response reminded me that food could become a point of connection even when people did not share the same culinary background. The meal was no longer only about returning to my own past; it was also becoming a way of creating connection in my new environment.

Over time, Sundays in Auckland began to develop their own rhythm. After church, I accepted invitations to lunches, walks, and gatherings because I was trying to create a life that felt meaningful rather than simply replacing the one I had left behind. One Sunday, a visit to Avondale Market with a friend brought an unexpected sense of familiarity. It was not Lagos, and it was not the markets I had known growing up, but the movement, colours, sounds, and interactions created a feeling I recognised. I noticed myself relaxing in a way I had not expected.

I began cooking jollof more regularly after that. Jollof was not just another meal for me. It was one of the dishes most closely associated with family gatherings, celebrations, Sunday lunches, birthdays, and visits from relatives and friends while growing up in Lagos. It was one of the foods through which I experienced my mother's hospitality and the importance of sharing food with others. Preparing it in Auckland therefore involved more than recreating a familiar meal; it brought back memories of family routines and relationships that had shaped my understanding of home. One weekend, after returning from the market, I placed the ingredients on the kitchen counter and felt a familiarity that came before conscious thought. My hands moved through the process almost automatically: preparing the ingredients, blending the base, stirring the sauce, tasting, and adjusting the flavours. As cooked, I wondered why this practice felt so grounding. Was it simply because I enjoyed the food, or

was something deeper happening through the act of preparing a dish so closely connected to memory, family and identity?

As the pot simmered, I became aware that the practice itself had remained with me. The ingredients available in Auckland were not always identical to those I had used in Lagos. The tomatoes were often less sweet than those I was accustomed to, some varieties of fresh peppers were difficult to find, and I sometimes substituted locally available products for ingredients I would have used at home. Even the rice cooked slightly differently from the long-grain varieties I commonly used in Nigeria. Despite these differences, the basic preparation remained familiar. I still blended tomatoes, peppers, and onions, seasoned the meat, allowed the stew base to reduce slowly, and tasted repeatedly to achieve the desired balance of flavour. The cooking conditions had changed, but the embodied knowledge remained. The rhythm of preparation, the attention to flavour, and the patience required to allow the dish to develop carried something familiar across distance. I began to understand that continuity does not require physical closeness to home; it can be sustained through the practices, memories, and embodied knowledge that migrants carry with them.

After leaving the hostel, I moved into a shared apartment with a flatmate from Chile. Sharing a kitchen created opportunities for everyday cultural exchange through food. We often prepared different meals at the same time, and conversations naturally emerged about ingredients, cooking techniques and family traditions. I was curious about the herbs, spices and sauces she used in Chilean cooking, while she often asked questions about Nigerian dishes, particularly jollof. When I prepared jollof, questions about the ingredients, preparation process and flavours often followed. I found myself explaining not only how the dish was made but also why it mattered to me, describing its association with family celebrations in Nigeria. In turn, I learned about the foods that shaped her own experiences of home. These exchanges transformed ordinary meal preparation into a space for intercultural learning and mutual recognition. The conversations were not simply about introducing Nigerian food; they became opportunities to share aspects of our histories, identities and memories through everyday cooking practices rather than relying on general assumptions.

As jollof became part of my life in Auckland, I noticed that it increasingly became a way through which I introduced myself to others. I prepared it for gatherings, shared it with

friends, and brought it to occasions where food created opportunities for connection. Each time someone asked about the dish, the conversation often moved beyond ingredients and cooking methods. It opened space to talk about my childhood, my family, and the experiences that shaped me. I began to recognise that sharing food was also sharing a story.

At times, preparing jollof felt like a conversation with my mother. She passed away before I moved to Aotearoa New Zealand, and there were moments when I paused while cooking, wondering whether continuing this practice was a way of keeping a connection with her. Jollof was one of the dishes most associated with her: something she prepared for family, celebrations, and visitors. Through cooking it in Auckland, I found myself carrying not only a recipe but memories of care, generosity, and belonging.

Looking back, I realise that jollof became more than a familiar meal after migration – it became a practice through which I negotiated my relationship with home while building a life elsewhere. The people around the table were different, the environment was different, and the circumstances had changed, yet the values attached to the food remained. The warmth, generosity, and sense of gathering continued.

Sometimes, as I lifted the lid of the pot and watched the steam rise, I found myself thinking differently about migration. Perhaps home is not only a place left behind or a place to eventually return to. Perhaps home can also exist through the practices, memories, and relationships that migrants carry with them and recreate in new places.

4.3 The Ache Inside the Aroma

Egusi soup was never a ceremonial dish for me, but it was always a taste that felt deeply Nigerian. It belonged to ordinary life, eaten with rice, pounded yam, fufu or eba (a staple made from dried cassava flour stirred into hot water to form a dough-like meal).

Some of my strongest memories of it are not connected to celebrations, but to quiet moments of care. When my nephew was younger, I would portion the lumps of fufu for him, shaping them so they were easier for his little hands to hold and scoop the egusi soup. We ate with our hands, dipping, scooping, and sharing from the same bowl. These moments were simple, but they carried a closeness that remained with me long after leaving Lagos.

I did not realise how much meaning those moments held until I migrated. Egusi was not a dish I consciously searched for every day, yet its absence slowly became noticeable. What lingered was the relationships around it, the familiarity of knowing who prepared it, the

conversations that unfolded around the meal, and the unspoken understanding that came from sharing food with people who already knew its meaning. This quiet longing sat beneath my everyday life in Aotearoa New Zealand, becoming more visible during periods of stress and uncertainty.

During the period when I was developing my dissertation proposal, I found myself spending long hours thinking, writing, and questioning my direction. The mental exhaustion was not only academic – there was also the quieter challenge of trying to build a sense of stability in a place where many things still felt unfamiliar. One evening, a friend from Zimbabwe noticed the tiredness in my voice during a phone conversation. She did not ask many questions. She simply offered to take me out for some fresh air and drove us to an Auckland night market.

I was not expecting anything from the evening. I only wanted a break from my own thoughts. Then I saw a stall selling African food.

Egusi.

The reaction came before the taste. I felt a sudden awareness of what I had not realised I was carrying. Why did seeing a familiar dish create such an emotional response? Was I responding to the food itself, or to everything the food represented?

I ordered the soup almost immediately. When I washed my hands and took the first handful with fufu, the feeling was unexpected. There was comfort, because I recognised something familiar. But there was also sadness, because the familiarity was incomplete. The flavour was close enough to remind me of home, yet distant enough to remind me that I was no longer there. It tasted like home filtered through distance.

I found myself thinking about my nephew, about feeding him with my hands, about the everyday acts of care that had once seemed ordinary. I realised that what I was missing was not simply egusi as a dish; I was missing the relationships, routines, and sense of belonging that had given the dish its meaning. The soup had become connected to memories of family and responsibility, to the role food played in expressing care without needing words.

The feeling returned later when a fellow Nigerian prepared egusi for a community gathering in Auckland. I expected the experience to bring me closer to home. The gesture itself felt meaningful because it represented familiarity and connection. Yet as I tasted the soup, I noticed that something still felt different. The ingredients were recognisable, and the

cultural connection was present, but the emotional response was not exactly what I remembered.

I found myself asking: Was the distance in the food, or was it in me?

Had my palate changed after migration? Or had the meaning of egusi become heavier because it now carried memories of what I could no longer access in the same way? That question stayed with me longer than the taste itself.

Later, when I found melon seeds at an African store, I felt a renewed sense of possibility. I cooked with an anticipation that made my hands move faster than my thoughts. I imagined that preparing egusi myself would restore something I felt was missing. I searched for the familiar rhythm: grinding, seasoning, adjusting, tasting. I expected the first spoonful to collapse the distance between Lagos and Auckland.

Instead, the experience felt incomplete.

Without some of the ingredients I associated with home, particularly the flavour of iru (fermented locust beans used as a flavouring and seasoning), and the distinct freshness of uziza leaves (aromatic West African pepper leaves with a mildly spicy flavour), the soup lacked the depth and complexity I remembered from Lagos. Although the dish looked familiar, subtle differences in flavour reminded me that I was cooking in a different food environment. I stared at the pot and wondered why a dish I knew how to prepare could still leave me feeling disappointed. The cooking had not failed. The problem was that I was trying to recreate more than a recipe. I was trying to recreate a moment, a relationship, and a version of myself that existed within a different place and time.

Through these experiences, egusi became a reminder of both connection and absence. It carried memories of family, care, childhood, and belonging, but it also revealed the emotional complexity of migration. I began to understand that nostalgia is not only about remembering what was once present; it is also about recognising what cannot be fully recovered.

Looking back, I realised that the emotional response began even before the aroma or taste. The sight of the egusi stall at the night market produced an immediate sense of recognition. Before I smelled the soup or tasted it, I had already identified something familiar within an unfamiliar environment. The visual encounter triggered memories, expectations, and feelings

of connection that were later reinforced by aroma and taste. Yet while seeing the dish created an initial sense of closeness, tasting it revealed the distance that migration had introduced. The aroma offered comfort, but the taste revealed difference.

In that tension, I came to understand the meanings ethnic dishes can hold for migrants. Egusi was not simply a food I missed; it became a link to my past, a reminder of relationships that shaped me, and a way of negotiating who I was becoming in Auckland. These experiences showed me that food can travel across borders, but the meanings attached to food are shaped by the people, places, experiences, and sensory memories that surround it. In my experience, recognition did not emerge through taste alone. The sight of a familiar dish, the aroma that evoked memories of home, and the taste that simultaneously connected and distanced me all shaped how I understood egusi after migration. These sensory encounters revealed that food carries not only flavour but also memories, relationships, and emotions across borders.

4.4 The Knife, the Spice, and the Winter Kitchen

Winter in Auckland arrived with a kind of cold that felt unfamiliar, the sort that settled slowly into the body and made even ordinary tasks feel heavier. I remember one week last July when I was too sick to leave my room. My throat felt tight, my head felt heavy, and even simple movements required more effort than usual. After spending two days indoors, I knew I needed to get up and do something for myself. I wrapped myself in a thick winter jacket, pulled the hood over my head, and walked towards Karangahape Road.

The wind cut through my clothes, my fingers ached inside my gloves, and I wondered why I was making the journey when I could have chosen something easier. I was not searching for comfort food in the usual sense. I was searching for ingredients that would help me recreate a taste my body already knew. I went to buy dry chilli peppers to deepen the pepper soup spice blend I had carried with me from Nigeria.

At that moment, I realised I was not simply looking for ingredients. I was looking for familiarity.

Back in the kitchen, I reached for the knife I had brought with me from Nigeria. It was not an expensive knife, nor was it something that anyone else would consider significant. Yet, holding it in that Auckland kitchen felt different. It was the same knife I had used through

culinary school, the knife that had been present through mistakes, corrections, pressure, and progress.

As I chopped the carrots, celery, and ginger for the pepper soup, my hands moved almost automatically. The movement felt familiar before I consciously thought about it. The sound of the blade meeting the chopping board, the rhythm of preparing ingredients, and the careful attention required to create balance in the soup connected me to a part of myself that existed before migration.

I found myself thinking about how much knowledge is stored in the body.

How many things had I learned without realising I had learned them?

The knife carried more than my culinary training. It carried memories of discipline, failure, improvement, and the confidence that came from repetition. In that moment, it became a reminder that some forms of knowledge travel with you even when everything else around you feels unfamiliar. Migration had changed my environment, but it had not erased the skills and practices that shaped who I was.

I crushed the dry chilli between my fingers and added it to the pepper soup spice blend. The aroma of *uda* (grains of Selim), *ehuru* (calabash nutmeg), and *uziza* seed (West African black pepper) began to rise as the broth simmered. These were not just ingredients; their smell carried memories of Nigerian kitchens, of warmth, of care, and of the kind of food often prepared when someone needed comfort.

I remembered my culinary tutor describing pepper soup spice as a “body-healing spice” during one of our African cuisine classes. His words returned to me as the broth slowly developed: “Let the heat travel through you.”

As the aroma filled the kitchen, I paused.

Why do certain smells feel like memory before the taste even arrives?

Why can an aroma transport me somewhere before I have consciously chosen to remember?

The answer, I realised, was that food memories are not only stored in the mind – they are carried through the body. The smell, the movement of preparing the ingredients, and the familiarity of the cooking process created a connection between my past and my present.

A few days later, a Nepalese colleague at my workplace arrived feeling unwell. Her voice was quiet, her energy was low, and she was clearly struggling through the day. Watching her reminded me of my own experience of being sick in a new country and how vulnerable illness can feel when familiar forms of care are far away.

That evening, I prepared fish pepper soup using the spice blend and chilli I had searched for in the winter cold. When I offered it to her the following day, she tasted it slowly and paused.

“This has a warmth I didn’t know I needed,” she said.

Her response stayed with me because it showed me that food could communicate something beyond its ingredients. She did not need to know the history of the spice blend or understand the memories attached to it. The act of preparing and sharing the food itself became a form of care.

In that moment, Nigerian food moved beyond being something I used to maintain my connection with home. It became something I could offer within my new environment.

Soon after, my flatmate became unwell as well. I noticed the signs before she mentioned it: the coughing and her restless night washroom breaks. The following morning, I warmed the leftover fish pepper soup and offered it to her.

Later that day, she told me she felt lighter and that the warmth had helped her feel better.

Her response made me reflect on the role food was beginning to play in my life in Auckland. I had initially thought of Nigerian food as something that connected me backwards, something that helped me remember where I came from. However, these experiences showed me that food could also connect me forward. It could help me form relationships and create belonging in a place where I was still learning how to fit.

Sometimes, when I cook in our small flat, I still pause without meaning to. The knife meets the chopping board with a rhythm I recognise. The spice blend fills the air with a familiar aroma. For a moment, I am reminded of the kitchens where I learned, struggled, improved, and grew.

I often ask myself why these ordinary objects feel heavier after migration.

Why does a knife become a memory?

Why does a spice become a responsibility?

Why does preparing Nigerian food in a winter kitchen in Auckland feel like protecting something that could disappear if I stop paying attention?

I began to understand that these objects were not valuable because of what they were physically – their meaning came from what they carried. The knife carried my training and the person I became through cooking. The spice carried memories of home, care, and cultural knowledge. Together, they represented the parts of myself that migration did not take away.

The knife and the spice travelled across borders with me, wrapped carefully in *adire* (a traditional indigo-dyed Nigerian fabric) and placed inside my suitcase. They entered a new kitchen where I was creating a life in Auckland. They reminded me that home is not only a place left behind – sometimes it exists through the practices, skills, and memories that continue with us.

Through pepper soup, I realised that Nigerian food was not only a way of preserving the past; it was also a way of creating connection in the present. It allowed me to offer care to others while maintaining a relationship with my own history. In that winter kitchen, far from Nigeria, I was not simply cooking a meal – I was carrying knowledge, memory, and belonging into a new place.

4.5 When My Food Enters the Room First

The potluck was meant to be simple. It was the end of the semester, and everyone was bringing a dish connected to home as a way of celebrating the completion of another term together. My classmates came from different cultural backgrounds, and I was the only Nigerian student in the room. I wanted to bring something that represented me, something that could carry a part of Nigeria into that space before I arrived.

I decided to prepare *miyan kuka*, a Northern Nigerian baobab leaf soup traditionally made with dried and ground baobab leaves, meat, fish, spices, and other ingredients that create its distinctive earthy flavour. I found the baobab powder at an African store in Auckland, a small shop hidden among cafés and other businesses. Walking inside always gave me a familiar feeling. The smells, the products, and the conversations around me created a brief connection to a place thousands of kilometres away.

Alongside the soup, I prepared *tuwo shinkafa* (a smooth, swallow-like rice dish eaten with soups and stews in Northern Nigeria), a soft rice-based dough commonly eaten with soups in Northern Nigeria. As I stirred the cooked rice until it reached the texture I remembered, I thought about how food carries knowledge that is often learned through watching, touching, and participating rather than through formal instruction.

Carrying the food into the classroom felt like carrying a memory from Kaduna, where I first tasted miyan kuka. When I opened the container, the aroma immediately entered the room. Before anyone knew what the dish was, they noticed it.

My food had entered the room before I did.

A few classmates leaned closer.

“What is that smell?” one asked.

“It smells different,” another said. “Why is it green?”

Their curiosity made me pause. I realised that before anyone tasted the food, they were already trying to understand it. They were encountering something unfamiliar and searching for a way to place it within their own experiences.

The questions came naturally.

“Is it like mochi (sweet Japanese rice cake) or niangao (Chinese sticky rice)?”

“Do I eat it with chopsticks or a spoon?”

“Is it spicy?”

“How is it eaten?”

Their comparisons were not attempts to replace the meaning of the dish. They were ways of making sense of something outside their own food experiences. They were reaching for familiar references to understand something new.

I found myself reflecting on how often food carries meanings that cannot immediately be seen. A bowl of soup may appear simple, but behind it can exist geography, family relationships, memories, and histories.

So I told them the story behind the miyan kuka.

I explained that I first tasted it in Kaduna during my elder brother's wedding. As someone from a Yoruba background, travelling to Northern Nigeria exposed me to a different regional food culture within my own country. My brother had married into a Northern Nigerian family, and during the wedding celebrations, the bride's family prepared traditional meals for their guests. They also sent food back with us as part of the hospitality and welcoming practices extended to family members.

Among those dishes was miyan kuka.

I remembered being surprised by how much I enjoyed it. The earthy flavour, the texture, and the way the soup paired with tuwo shinkafa stayed with me. That journey became connected to another significant memory because shortly after returning home, my father passed away after a brief illness.

Over time, the taste of miyan kuka became connected not only to a region or a dish, but also to a period of my life shaped by family, loss, and love. Cooking it in Auckland brought those memories close again. I realised that food not only preserves happy memories; sometimes it carries complicated emotions, moments of joy, change, and grief existing together.

As I shared this story, the room became quieter. My classmates were no longer only asking what the food was. They were learning about Kaduna, about regional diversity within Nigeria, and about how a single dish can carry stories of movement, family, and belonging.

When they finally tasted the food, they approached it differently. Some asked if they could try eating it with their hands after I explained the tradition. They took small portions of the tuwo shinkafa, dipped it into the miyan kuka, and experienced the dish in the way it was intended to be eaten.

One person commented, "It feels different when you eat it this way."

Another said, "I didn't know food could taste earthy like this."

Their reactions stayed with me because they showed that understanding food is not only about knowing ingredients – it is also about experiencing the practices and meanings surrounding it.

Watching my classmates engage with the dish made me question the role Nigerian food plays in my migrant experience.

Why does my food sometimes introduce me before I speak?

Why does it create questions before it creates understanding?

Why does sharing a dish feel like sharing a part of myself?

I began to see that Nigerian food in Auckland was not only something I prepared to maintain a connection with home; it also became a way of creating connection in my new community. Through *miyan kuka* and *tuwo shinkafa*, I was able to share a part of Nigerian culture without reducing it to a simple explanation.

The food carried its own story.

It carried Kaduna, my family, my father's memory, and my own journey across borders.

In that classroom, Nigerian food did not simply arrive as a meal. It arrived as knowledge, memory, and an invitation for others to encounter a culture they may not have previously known.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the meanings that emerged from my autoethnographic exploration of Nigerian food practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. Drawing on the five food experiences presented in Chapter 4 – ata dindin, jollof rice, egusi soup, pepper soup, tuwo shinkafa and miyan kuka – the discussion situates these lived experiences within broader scholarship on migration, nostalgia, food, and belonging.

To interpret these experiences, I apply the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Conceptual Framework (see Figure 1) developed through this study. Rather than treating diaspora, embodiment, and nostalgia as separate processes, this framework examines how Nigerian food practices enable migrants to carry memories, cultural knowledge, and relationships across geographical boundaries while negotiating belonging in a new social environment.

The chapter is organised around four themes. First, it examines Nigerian food as embodied nostalgia and a bridge to homeland. Second, it explores food practices as expressions of cultural identity. Third, it considers the meanings migrants attach to ethnic dishes and how these meanings are shaped by personal and collective histories. And finally, it examines Nigerian food as a form of cultural education and knowledge transmission within Aotearoa New Zealand and concludes with a summary.

5.2 Nigerian Food as Embodied Nostalgia and a Bridge to Homeland

This section addresses RQ1 by showing how Nigerian food evokes nostalgia and acts as a bridge to homeland. The findings demonstrate that nostalgia emerged through embodied experience rather than symbolic association. Sensory cues, domestic rhythms, and familiar cooking routines made homeland feel present in the body, supporting Sutton's (2017) view of food memory as synaesthetic and Boccagni's (2023) argument that home is produced through everyday practice. In this study, Nigerian food did not simply recall Nigeria as a distant place; it reactivated lived relationships that remained emotionally and bodily accessible after migration.

The jollof experience illustrates how this bridge is enacted through routine rather than abstraction. Preparing jollof in Aotearoa New Zealand drew me back into the embodied rhythms associated with home. The timing, seasoning, tasting, and waiting felt familiar and

grounding, and the meaning of the dish lay as much in the process as the final meal. This resonates with Longhurst et al.'s (2009) study that cooking can rebuild domestic familiarity in migration and with Boym's (2017) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. In this study, the aim was not to reconstruct Lagos exactly; rather, cooking jollof sustained a sense of continuity that travelled across distance while acknowledging that migration had altered the conditions of home. This finding shows that continuity in migration is produced through embodied routine, reinforcing the framework's emphasis on reflective nostalgia.

The egusi experience complicates this sense of continuity. Unlike jollof, which produced recognition and warmth, egusi intensified awareness of absence. The dish was tied to intimate family memories, and encountering it in Aotearoa New Zealand did not simply restore those memories. Instead, it exposed the emotional distance between remembered home and present life. This aligns with Abarca and Colby's (2016) argument that food memories remain inseparable from the people and places in which they were formed, and with Bascuñan-Wiley's (2021) observation that sensory encounters can heighten awareness of absence because they recreate familiarity without recovering the social world that gave it meaning. Boym's reflective nostalgia captures longing without assuming that the past can be fully restored. Egusi therefore illustrates the dual nature of embodied nostalgia. It reconnects migrants to homeland while revealing the emotional and relational gaps that cannot be bridged through sensory memory alone.

The pepper soup experience extends this argument by showing that nostalgia is not only about remembered flavour but also about the values and relations attached to food. Preparing pepper soup during illness reactivated a Nigerian emotional world of warmth, care, and responsibility, making the food feel like a form of comfort rather than simply a meal. This aligns with Parasecoli's (2014) view that food is woven into care, celebration, responsibility, and family relationships, and with Boccagni's (2023) argument that home is sustained through ordinary practices rather than through a fixed destination. In this sense, pepper soup demonstrates how diasporic home-building operates through everyday acts of care, echoing Bunn et al.'s (2023) argument that home is reproduced through embodied and relational practice rather than geographic proximity. Pepper soup did not recreate home literally, but it carried forward a familiar way of feeling and relating that made home present in the moment of cooking and sharing.

5.3 Food Practices as Expressions of Cultural Identity

This section addresses RQ2 by examining how Nigerian food practices enable migrants to sustain and express cultural identity. The findings show that identity is not carried unchanged from Nigeria or dissolved in migration. Instead, it is continually negotiated through embodied routines such as cooking, introducing dishes to others, and sharing meals. Through the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework, identity becomes meaningful through sensory practice, bodily memory, and relational encounters that allow Nigerian culture to be enacted within Aotearoa New Zealand.

The ata dindin vignette illustrates this process clearly. In the hostel kitchen, being the only African made my identity immediately noticeable, yet cooking changed how that visibility was experienced. The aroma of ata dindin drew curiosity and created a moment where Nigerian identity became encounterable to others. Introducing the dish was not only an explanation of what I was preparing; it was a way of presenting a part of myself within a shared environment. This moment reflects Brah's (1996) idea of diasporic space, where identity is shaped through interactions rather than fixed origins, and aligns with Jeong and Lee's (2021) argument that food makes cultural presence perceptible through sensory cues. Through embodied practice, Nigerian identity and Auckland life were negotiated together rather than positioned as separate worlds.

The jollof vignette reinforces this understanding. Preparing jollof in Auckland carried forward the rhythms of Sunday life in Lagos. The familiar movements of seasoning, tasting, stirring, and waiting brought embodied memories into a new context. (Abbots, 2016) explains that migrants carry sensory repertoires across borders, and Sutton (2010) shows that food knowledge is sustained through repeated participation. In this study, the familiarity of jollof came from these embodied repetitions rather than from attempts to preserve an unchanged tradition. The dish was prepared for different people and within different relationships, which shows that identity remained active because it was being practised in changed circumstances. Clifford's (1994) work on diaspora helps explain this, as it emphasises identity as an ongoing cultural production rather than a static continuity.

5.4 Meanings Attached to Nigerian Dishes: Beyond Ingredients

The findings show that the meanings attached to Nigerian dishes were shaped by relationships, memories, and emotional histories rather than by ingredients alone. Meaning

develops through lived experience, echoing Bailey's (2017) view that food becomes meaningful through participation, and Abarca and Colby (2016) argument that food memories remain tied to the people and places in which they were formed. In this study, the meanings of Nigerian dishes shifted across migration, where the same food could carry continuity, grief, care, and longing at the same time. Nigerian dishes therefore operated as relational forms of memory that gathered different parts of a person's life into a single meal.

The different meanings carried by jollof and egusi show how closely food is tied to personal history. In the jollof vignette, the dish represented motherhood, celebration, and continuity because it was connected to my mother's cooking and the rhythms of Sunday life. In the egusi vignette, the same broader category of Nigerian food carried a different emotional weight. Egusi was associated with care, intimacy, and the quiet routines of feeding my nephew, yet migration made those meanings more fragile because the dish also brought absence into view. This difference shows that ethnic dishes do not carry one stable meaning across all contexts. Rather, their significance depends on which relationships they activate and which memories they make present. This extends Strand's (2023) argument by showing that food memories are not simply preserved; they are reworked through migration, where what is remembered and what is missing can sit together in the same dish.

Miyan kuka illustrates this even more clearly because its meaning was layered across region, family, hospitality, and grief. Nigerian foodways are internally diverse, and scholarship on Nigerian cuisine emphasises that regional dishes cannot be reduced to a single national story (Asifat, 2025; Ugoala, 2025). The findings confirm this point. Miyan kuka was meaningful not only because it was "Nigerian", but because it carried Kaduna, a Northern Nigerian food tradition encountered through family marriage, and the memory of my father's death shortly after that journey. Ojo's (2018) discussion of shared meals as expressions of social cohesion and Okech and Timothy's (2023) work on hospitality and collective obligation help explain why the dish carried both welcome and loss. What the study adds is that a single dish can hold several kinds of meaning at once: regional identity, family hospitality, emotional transition, and grief. In this sense, the dish became a biography of relationships rather than a description of ingredients.

Across these dishes, the meanings migrants attach to Nigerian food are not interchangeable or reducible to taste. Jollof, egusi, and miyan kuka each carried different emotional and

social histories, and those histories shaped how the food was experienced in Aotearoa New Zealand. These findings move beyond treating ethnic dishes as general cultural symbols. They show that dishes become meaningful because they condense family relationships, regional histories, and personal turning points into forms that can be tasted, remembered, and shared.

5.5 Nigerian Food as Cultural Education

The findings show that Nigerian food practices acted as a form of cultural education and knowledge transmission, but not in automatic or straightforward ways. Food did not teach simply by being present. Learning emerged through participation, curiosity, and dialogue, echoing work that positions food knowledge as something carried through practice, observation, repetition, and storytelling rather than formal instruction alone (Herrera, 2018; Lin et al., 2020; Wong, 2024). At the same time, the findings challenge the assumption that ethnic food always educates others. As Heldke (2015) and Ardika et al. (2026) note, meaningful understanding requires engagement with the cultural meanings behind a dish, not just exposure to it. In this study, Nigerian food became educational when it prompted explanation, interpretation, and social interaction.

The miyan kuka and tuwo shinkafa vignette illustrates this clearly. When I carried the food into the potluck, the aroma entered before I did, and the dish immediately became an object of curiosity. My classmates' first responses were not limited to taste – they wanted to know what the dish was, how it was eaten, and where it came from. Their comparisons to foods they already knew were attempts to make sense of something unfamiliar. This aligns with Kraff and Jernsand's (2023) view that explaining food practices connects everyday cooking to broader cultural narratives, and with Bietti et al.'s (2019) observation that food sharing often becomes a moment of storytelling. In this sense, the learning that occurred was not only about the dish itself; it was about how the dish opened a conversation about Kaduna, regional Nigerian foodways, and the social world that had first given miyan kuka its meaning.

The vignette also shows that cultural education through food depends on the labour of translation. I had to explain the regional origins of the dish, the role of tuwo shinkafa, and the practices through which it is eaten. That explanation was part of what made the food legible to others. Williams-Forson (2017) notes that describing how food is prepared often becomes a way of conveying family traditions, communal values, and social relationships,

and Ibrahim (2025) argues that African cuisines communicate histories of interaction and movement through everyday practice. The findings support these arguments while showing that migrant food knowledge must be actively narrated if it is to move beyond being treated as novelty. Helke's (2015) critique is important here because it reminds us that ethnic food can be consumed as curiosity without deeper engagement. The classroom moment became educational only because curiosity was followed by listening, explanation, and participation.

These dynamics show that Nigerian food does not teach simply through taste. It teaches when sensory encounters are joined to cultural explanations and when migrants can speak to the meanings of their own foodways. Ocadiz Arriaga and Dyer-Williams (2024) describe food practices as sites for co-creating sensuous knowledge, and that was visible here, although the process was not equal. I carried the responsibility of translating embodied knowledge into words, while my classmates had to decide whether to stay with the food long enough to learn from it. Cultural education therefore emerged as a relational process shaped by both offer and reception, where knowledge transmission depended on more than exposure to an unfamiliar meal.

5. 6 Summary of Discussion

Across the discussion, the findings show that Nigerian food practices shaped migrant life in Aotearoa New Zealand through interconnected experiences of nostalgia, identity, meaning, and cultural learning. These processes did not operate separately; rather, they worked together through embodied practice, sensory memory, and social interaction, revealing how food remained central to negotiating belonging in everyday life.

Nostalgia emerged through cooking routines that made homeland feel present in the body, while identity was expressed through the visibility and interaction that food created in shared spaces. The meanings attached to Nigerian dishes were shaped by the relationships and histories they carried, showing that food held different emotional worlds depending on what was remembered, what was missed, and what migration had changed. These meanings became educational when they entered encounters with others, where explanation, curiosity, and dialogue allowed Nigerian foodways to be understood beyond taste alone.

Together, these insights show that Nigerian food practices were not only sources of comfort or cultural expression, but also active sites where migrants sustained memory,

communicated identity, reworked personal meaning, and shared cultural knowledge within everyday life in Aotearoa New Zealand. The conclusion chapter builds on these insights to reflect on the broader contributions of the study and its implications for understanding food, migration, and hospitality.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion of the Study

This study set out to explore how Nigerian food practices shape experiences of nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural knowledge transmission among Nigerian migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through an autoethnographic exploration of five food experiences involving ata dindin, jollof rice, egusi soup, pepper soup, and tuwo shinkafa and miyan kuka, the study examined how everyday culinary practices carry memories, relationships, and cultural meanings across migration.

The findings demonstrate that Nigerian food practices are not simply acts of remembering a place left behind. Rather, food provides a way through which connections to Nigeria continue to be experienced within everyday migrant life. Cooking, tasting, smelling, and sharing food allowed memories and relationships to become present in new settings, while also revealing the emotional complexities of migration. Food could create feelings of continuity and connection, but it could also highlight absence, distance, and the aspects of home that cannot be fully recreated.

The study further shows that Nigerian food practices are active expressions of cultural identity. Rather than representing a fixed cultural inheritance preserved unchanged after migration, food became a practice through which identity was continually negotiated through relationships and everyday encounters. Preparing and sharing Nigerian dishes allowed cultural knowledge, family histories, and personal meanings to remain present while becoming part of new experiences within Aotearoa New Zealand.

The findings also demonstrate that food operates as a form of cultural connection beyond the private experience of the migrant. When Nigerian dishes were shared with people outside the Nigerian community, food created opportunities for curiosity, dialogue, and cultural learning. However, these exchanges also required migrants to translate knowledge, meanings, and practices that may be familiar within their own communities but unfamiliar to others. Food therefore functioned both as a means of connection and as a practice involving cultural labour.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Nigerian food experiences in diaspora are simultaneously sensory, emotional, cultural, and relational. Food is not only carried from the past but continuously created through practices, relationships, and encounters in the

present. By examining food through an autoethnographic lens, this research highlights the importance of attending to the lived and embodied dimensions of migrant experiences that may remain less visible through approaches focused only on representation or cultural symbolism.

6.2 Reflection on Autoethnography as a Method and Researcher Learning

Autoethnography was an appropriate methodological approach for this study because it enabled an exploration of the sensory, emotional, and relational dimensions of Nigerian food experiences that were central to the research aim. By examining my own experiences as a Nigerian migrant in Aotearoa New Zealand, the method provided a way to explore how memories, cultural knowledge, and feelings of belonging are experienced through everyday practices. Rather than treating food as only an object of cultural meaning, autoethnography allowed attention to be given to how food is lived, felt, and interpreted within migrant experience.

The process of writing and analysing the five food vignettes changed my understanding of these experiences. Practices that initially appeared to be ordinary food practices became recognised as complex encounters involving memory, relationships, cultural knowledge, and belonging. Through reflection, I became more aware that food memories were not only expressed through conscious recollections but also through embodied practices and learned ways of doing. This reinforced the importance of examining food as a lived practice through which meanings are continuously produced.

Autoethnography also required critical reflection on my position as both researcher and participant. My personal history, cultural background, and relationship with Nigerian food shaped what I noticed, remembered, and interpreted. Rather than attempting to separate myself from the research process, autoethnography required acknowledgement and examination of how my position influenced the production of knowledge. As Chang (2008) argues, autoethnography involves systematic analysis of personal experience within broader cultural contexts rather than simply presenting personal stories. Therefore, my experiences were interpreted in relation to wider questions of migration, belonging, identity, and cultural education and knowledge transmission.

Through this process, I also developed a more complex understanding of nostalgia and migrant food experiences. I initially understood Nigerian food primarily as a way of

maintaining connection with home; however, the research process revealed that food practices also involve negotiation, uncertainty, and emotional complexity. Food can create continuity and belonging while also revealing distance, absence, and the challenges of maintaining relationships across places. Overall, autoethnography contributed to this study by making visible the embodied and relational dimensions of migrant food experiences and providing a methodological pathway for understanding how cultural meanings are carried, transformed, and recreated through everyday life.

6.3 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to existing understandings of migrant food experiences by demonstrating that food practices in diaspora are not only expressions of cultural continuity or reminders of a homeland left behind. Through an autoethnographic exploration of Nigerian food experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand, this study shows that food also operates as an embodied, emotional, and relational practice through which migrants negotiate relationships with home, experience identity, create belonging, and transmit cultural knowledge within new social environments.

A central academic contribution of this study is the development of the Diaspora-Embodied Nostalgia Framework. Existing scholarship on migrant food has provided valuable insights into nostalgia, identity, belonging, and cultural transmission; however, these dimensions are often examined as related but separate processes. This study contributes by bringing these dimensions together through a framework that conceptualises migrant food experiences as emerging through the interaction between diasporic attachments, embodied practices, and nostalgic meanings. The framework proposes that nostalgia is not only an emotional response to the past, but an embodied process through which memories, relationships, and cultural knowledge are carried and reactivated through everyday practices of cooking, eating, and sharing food.

The significance of the framework lies in its ability to move beyond approaches that position migrant food either as the preservation of an unchanged cultural identity or as evidence of adjustment to a new environment. Instead, the framework provides a way of examining how migrants negotiate continuity, change, and belonging through ordinary food practices. By bringing diaspora perspectives together with embodiment and sensory practice, the framework offers a conceptual tool for analysing how food meanings are shaped through both movement across places and experiences within the body. Although

developed from Nigerian migrant experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand, the framework has potential relevance for examining other migrant food experiences where questions of memory, belonging, identity, and cultural knowledge intersect.

A further methodological contribution of this study lies in demonstrating the value of autoethnographic inquiry for exploring sensory and emotional dimensions of migration. Food experiences are often deeply connected to personal histories, bodily knowledge, and memories that may not be easily separated from everyday practice. Through the use of personal narratives as analytical material, this study demonstrates how autoethnography can illuminate connections between individual experiences and broader cultural processes. The contribution is therefore not the use of autoethnography itself, but the knowledge generated through applying this approach to embodied migrant food experiences.

Beyond academic contributions, this study has practical implications for the hospitality industry in Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings suggest that ethnic food should not be understood only as a cuisine category or commercial product, but as a carrier of cultural knowledge, memory, relationships, and identity. Hospitality businesses that engage with migrant food traditions may benefit from recognising the meanings attached to dishes rather than reducing them to simplified ideas of authenticity or representation. This has implications for menu development, staff cultural awareness, customer engagement, and the design of food experiences that acknowledge the cultural histories behind the dishes being presented.

The study further highlights the importance of recognising migrants as holders and contributors of culinary knowledge within hospitality spaces. Migrants are not only consumers or providers of ethnic cuisine; they can also contribute histories, stories, and embodied knowledge that enrich hospitality experiences. Greater recognition of this knowledge may support more inclusive hospitality practices that move beyond symbolic diversity towards deeper engagement with cultural meanings and migrant experiences.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation relates to the use of autoethnography as the primary methodology. By focusing on my own lived experiences as a Nigerian migrant in Aotearoa New Zealand, the study provides an in-depth interpretation of one migrant food experience rather than a representative account of Nigerian migrant experiences more broadly. While

autoethnography enables detailed examination of sensory, emotional, and embodied meanings, the findings cannot be generalised statistically to all Nigerian migrants or wider African migrant communities. Instead, the value of the study lies in the depth of understanding it provides into how food practices become meaningful within a particular migrant context.

A second limitation concerns my position as both researcher and participant. My cultural background, memories, and relationship with Nigerian food influenced the experiences selected, the meanings identified, and the interpretation of the findings. Although reflexive engagement was used throughout the research process, another researcher or migrant may interpret similar food experiences differently based on their own histories, identities, and migration experiences.

A further limitation relates to the scope of the food experiences examined. The five vignettes focused on selected Nigerian dishes and personal encounters with food practices. Although these experiences revealed important meanings related to memory, identity, care, and cultural education, they cannot represent the full diversity of Nigerian cuisines, ethnic groups, regional traditions, and migrant experiences. Nigerian food practices are shaped by different historical, religious, geographical, and social contexts that extend beyond the experiences explored in this study.

Finally, while this study identifies implications for hospitality practice, it does not directly examine the perspectives of hospitality providers, customers, or industry stakeholders. Therefore, the study highlights possibilities for more culturally responsive hospitality practices but does not evaluate how migrant food knowledge is currently incorporated within hospitality settings.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could explore how the analytical approach developed in this study applies across different migrant food contexts. As this study examined Nigerian food experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand through an autoethnographic lens, further research could investigate whether the interplay between diaspora attachment, embodied practice, and nostalgic meaning is experienced similarly among other migrant communities. Comparative studies across diverse cultural groups and migration settings would help assess the broader

usefulness of this conceptual framework for understanding how food, memory, and belonging intersect within migrant lives.

Future studies could also extend understanding beyond individual migrant experiences by exploring how embodied food knowledge is shared within families and communities. While this study focused on my own lived experience, food knowledge is often relational and transmitted through interactions between generations, family members, and community networks. Research examining how younger migrants learn, reinterpret, or negotiate culinary knowledge from previous generations could provide deeper insight into how food practices continue, change, or acquire new meanings within diaspora communities.

Further research could investigate how migrant food knowledge is recognised within hospitality settings. Existing discussions of ethnic food often focus on representation, authenticity, or consumer experiences; however, less attention has been given to how migrant communities themselves contribute knowledge about the histories, practices, and meanings associated with their cuisines. Future studies could examine how hospitality organisations collaborate with migrant communities in developing menus, interpreting cultural foods, and creating dining experiences that move beyond the commercial presentation of ethnic cuisine.

From a hospitality practice perspective, organisations may consider approaches that position migrant food knowledge as a form of cultural expertise rather than simply a source of menu diversity. This may involve creating opportunities for meaningful collaboration with migrant communities, recognising the stories and knowledge connected to dishes, and supporting staff understanding of the cultural contexts behind the foods they serve. Such approaches may contribute to more respectful and informed representations of migrant cuisines within hospitality environments.

Finally, future research could examine the emotional and social experiences of migrant food encounters between hosts and migrants. While this study explored how Nigerian food became a form of cultural education and knowledge transmission, further investigation could consider how these encounters are received by host communities and whether food-based interactions contribute to deeper intercultural understanding and belonging.

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