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WE ARE STRONG BECAUSE OF OUR MILLET BREAD: STAPLE FOODS AND THE GROWTH OF ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN UGANDA

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Abstract. This paper examines the phenomenon of ethnicity in Uganda with a view to underscoring the role of staple foods in ethnic identity formation and maintenance. By way of qualitative discourse, predicated on both primary and secondary sources, the paper observes that Uganda's ethnic identities emerged and are maintained by, among others, the staple foods and delicacies of the respective people in question. Although food choices are largely determined by culture, the availability of various foodstuffs is a function of diverse edaphic, topographic, vegetative and humidity conditions across the country. Millet, cooking bananas, cassava and sweet potatoes are the major traditional foodstuffs, and members of different Uganda's ethnic identities are known by the traditional foods and delicacies they consume and how they consume them.

Keywords: staple foods, ethnic identity, delicacies, cuisine, millet, matooke

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1. Introduction

The construct ethnic identity can best be understood through an examination of its etymological origins. The term *ethnic* has Latin and Greek origins – *ethnicus* and *ethnikas* both meaning nation. It can and has been used historically to refer to people as heathens. *Ethos*, in Greek, means custom, disposition or trait. *Ethnikas* and *ethos* taken together, therefore, can mean a band of people (nation) living together who share and acknowledge common customs. The second part of the construct, *identity*, has Latin origins and is derived from the word *identitas*; the word is formed from *idem* meaning *same* (Trimble and Dickson 2014). Thus, the term is used to express the notion of sameness, likeness, and oneness. More precisely, identity means "the sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not

something else" (Simpson and Weiner 1989). Uganda is a multiethnic polity and staple foods are among the major identifying indices of ethnicity.

Identity is generally considered to involve the mental self-images that a person assigns to herself/himself based on everyday interactions with people, groups, and objects. Identities reflect multiple layers of meaning that are cultural, structural, social, and individual in origin (Bisogni, Connors, Devine and Sobal 2002). The behaviors surrounding food provision and consumption provide subtle, yet fundamental ways of defining social identities and structuring social relationships. An effort to make a distinction between 'we' vs. 'they' – 'food fight' – is often expressed through 'our' vs. 'their' staple food.

Studies in diverse populations have provided some insight into different aspects of eating identity (Bisogni eet al. t al.2012). Having a self-described healthy eating identity has been shown to be positively associated with healthy dietary behaviors, attitudes, and intentions (Brook et al. 2013). Among those who identify themselves as vegetarians and vegans, intersections between their relationships with animals and the environment as well as intersections with identities related to being ordinary and not being a ''health freak'' have been noted (Fox and Ward 2008). Intersections with other identities such as masculine identity and living alone have been examined in relation to eating identity, in particular meat eating, and food choice (Brook et al. 2013).

Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart. Food functions in social allocation, in terms of ethnicity, race, nationality, class, and, less precisely, individuality and gender as stated by Caplan (1997). Ethnicity is born of acknowledged difference and works through contrast. Hence an ethnic cuisine is associated with a geographically and/or historically defined eating community (Roqué et al. 2000). But ethnicity, like nationhood, is also imagined (Murcott 1996) and associated cuisines may be imagined, too. Once imagined, such cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity. Talking and writing about ethnic or national food can then add to a cuisine's conceptual solidity and coherence (Sidney and Christine 2002).

Ethnicity is thus complex and dynamic and the examination of ethnicity as a process in food choices reflects its multifaceted and changing c h a r a c t e r. The role of ethnicity in food choice is not adequately dealt with by treating ethnic variations as set food habits and food ways that operate as formulas that determine diets of different ethnic identities. Deeper dynamics are involved in ethnic food choices than descriptions of the food ways of various ethnic groups (Carol et.al 1999). The behaviors surrounding food provision and consumption provide subtle, yet fundamental ways of defining social identities and structuring social relationships. Ethnic bonds in Uganda, whether in rural or urban setting, are cemented not only by the types of foods eaten but also how they are prepared and eaten.

2. Methods

This was a phenomenological research. The discipline of phenomenology may be defined as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of 'phenomena': appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. This field of study is related to ontology (the study of being or what is), epistemology (the study of knowledge), logic (the study of valid reasoning), ethics (the study of right and wrong action), etc.

The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. In the human sphere, this normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s). Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, 'bracketing' taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving (Lester 1999).

I relied on interviews, narratives and observation in the territories of eight selected ethnic identities of Uganda, namely the Acholi, Iteso, Bagisu, Baganda, Bahima, Bakiga, Lugbara and the Jonam. Prior to each interview, I wrote brief memos about my own thoughts, feelings, experiences and expectations. After each interview, I wrote another brief memo about how my thoughts and suppositions were affected by what was said from my dialogue with the participant. After each interview, I reviewed the tape recording to become more familiar with the story and context that the participant had shared, and to get a sense of their reality and the meanings they constructed from it. I then transcribed each interview verbatim, after which each transcript was reviewed to explicate the meanings of what each participant said. After transcribing the interviews, the transcripts were reviewed to ascertain the units of general meaning.

This was followed by the process of reviewing each unit of meaning to ascertain what was relevant to the major research questions. To ensure that the meanings and themes which emerged from the interview represent the reality of the participants, I checked the validity of the summaries by asking the participants to review the data and make corrections if any data was misrepresented. I triangulated the narratives and came out with views that represent the generic feeling of people in the respective locality in the various regions of Uganda. I studied the Acholi with respect to Kwon Kal (Millet bread), The Iteso (Atap), the Baganda (Matooke), The Bahima (milk and its products), the Bagisu (Malewa), The Basoga (Sweet Potatoes), the Bakiga (Obushera), the Lugbara (Inya) and the Alur (Angara). In the proceeding presentation, I will discuss how these foods have been used for ethnic identification in Uganda.

3. Millet bread and Acholi ethnic identity in northern Uganda

The most important economic activity of the people of northern Uganda is crop cultivation. Almost the entire population of this region produces millet for sale, brewing beer and home consumption. To the Acholi, however, millet is the staple food. Acholiland has for long been the home of settled agricultural populations. For probably two thousand years or more, farmers in Acholi have used iron hoes to cultivate a wide variety of foods, especially millets and sorghum as the primary cereal crops and sesame as the main source of oil (Atkinson 1989).

Many lingua-ethnic groups that settled in northern Uganda including Central Sudanic peoples, Nilo-Hamites and the Riverlake Nilotics such as the Lwo. Luo speakers were the last of the three major linguistic groups to settle in Acholi; members of all three groups were primarily hoe agriculturalists, sharing the same basic means and mode of production; and the preponderance of numbers in the area that became Acholi was overwhelmingly Central Sudanic speakers in the west and Eastern Nilotic in the east (Atkinson 1989). The Acholi are identified among the peoples of northern Uganda by their over reliance on millet. Their neighbors such as the Madi, Alur and Langi also feed on millet but only to supplement cassava while the Karimojong to the east survive principally on milk and animal blood.

The Acholi are known by their love for millet bread (Kwon Kal) and the first crop to be planted by every Acholi farmer is finger millet. The main celebrant during such functions as honoring of twins, funeral rites, marriage and offering of sacrifices to the gods must eat millet bread. Specifically, the calling home of the spirits (Lwongo tipu) of those Acholi who died and were buried away from home is done using millet bread. Small pieces of millet bread are put inside a gourd, the name of the dead is called and he/she is told to come and eat millet because he /she has missed it for a long time. When the spirit (tipu) comes and enters the gourd, it is sealed.

The Acholi believe that eating millet makes one physically strong compared to cassava, potatoes, bananas or milk. Mzee Berenado Oyet, the clan head of Pamwa in the chiefdom of Palabek, put it plainly to me that "we are strong because of our millet bread". In his own words, "Kwon Kal oweko awobe Acholi nwang". Acholi men and women living in urban centers all over Uganda flock to local hotels that serve millet bread. During the Lord's Resistance Army rebellion, it became difficult to grow millet and many families resorted to planting cassava whose stems were distributed by government and local NGOs. Due to this change, the Acholi became nostalgic about millet and a local song depicted it. It goes in part as follows:

Camo muranga ki kwon gwana cwero cwinya do
Camo muranga ki kwon gwana weko ajony do
Camo muranga ki kwon gwana wango cwinya ba
Camo muranga ki kwon gwana weko adok twa!

Translated as:

> *Eating beans with cassava upsets me*
> *Eating beans with cassava makes me grow thin*
> *Eating beans with cassava causes me heart burn*
> *Eating beans with cassava makes me divorce my husband!*

This song is very popular and many radio stations in Gulu and Kitgum Districts play it regularly up to this day. Millet is a traditional food and a standard one for every Acholi family. To the contrary, cassava, among the Acholi, is eaten when conditions are really dire and mostly during famine. One who feeds his children on cassava is seen as a failure yet this food is the first choice of some of Uganda's ethnic identities.

4. Cassava bread (Inya) and the Lughbara ethnic identity

The Lughbara are a Central Sudanic people who are known for their delicious cassava bread (Inya). This ethnic group straddles the common border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo with the majority of their population in the Congo side of the border. Some live in South Sudan. Traditionally, the Lugbara are farmers who rear some livestock and poultry, mainly guinea fowl locally known as 'ope'. They are the predominant keepers of guinea fowl in Uganda. Lugbara occupy the West Nile region of Uganda and Arua, Maracha, Yumbe and Koboko districts of Uganda to be specific. The Lugbara are divided into many dialects which are easily understandable to each other. These include; Ayivu, Maracha, Terego, Vurra and Aringa. Tribes related to the Lugbara in dialect include Madi and Kakwa.

In the early days, the Lugbara were a mainly chiefdom based community. They did not have kingdoms and kings presiding over them like other ethnic groups in Uganda. They mainly had chiefs who were their leaders. They formed friendly alliances with neighbouring chiefdoms so as to ensure their security against attacks from other ethnic groups. The earlier Lugbara did not have soldiers or an army in their chiefdoms. Every able bodied man had the duty to protect his village hence all able bodied men were automatically considered soldiers although this was not a permanent duty.

The Lughbara ferment cassava, dry and mill it into fine powder called *inyaasa* which is poured into boiling water, stirred till it becomes solid and mingled until no flour is seen. The solid bread is eaten with any sauce. Hotels in Arua park in Kampala are known for serving inya and this is popular place for Lughbara working in Kampala. It is a meeting point as well. To harden the *Inya*, millet or sorghum flour is added to the cassava flour to produce thick sweet bread.

5. *Atap* bread and Iteso ethnic identity in northern Uganda

Like the Lughbara, the Iteso of eastern Uganda eat cassava bread. The difference is that theirs is mixed with millet and a little of tamarind juice to make it taste a bit sour. The preference of cassava by many Ugandan communities has made it one of the most popular crops in the country. Cassava production in Uganda averaged about 5 million metric tons annually from 2005 to 2007. As with cooking bananas, cassava is traded within Uganda, but because of high water content it is not traded in large volumes across international borders. As a result, cassava exports have been negligible, just 0.1% of production (Haggblade and Dewina 2010).

Traditionally, cassava has served as a food security crop, grown as a form of insurance against drought and the failure of other staple crops. Most planting is done in the first rather than the second rains of the year, and it is usually intercropped – often with sweet potato, beans and maize (Otim-Nape et al. 2000). Cassava can be harvested after 12 months, but it can also be stored in the ground for longer periods and harvested as needed.

Ivan Karp and Patricia Karp who carried out an extensive anthropological research among the Iteso in the 1960s noted the significance of this food and reported as follows:

> *Certainly one of the first and most continuous aspects of Iteso society that impressed us during the two years of our fieldwork was the importance (for the Iteso) of the sharing of food and drink. This is stressed in the etiquette of everyday greetings. It is proper to greet people and then to ask for any news. After an exchange of news, the persons involved enquire after each other's health. The Iteso are a forthright people and treat these enquiries as serious requests. After all these issues have been settled, two questions are asked. The first, 'An Ajoni'? asks at whose home beer is to be had that day. The second, 'Inyena inyam'ijo ore kon lolo'*, *can be translated as 'What kind of food is there in your home today?' We, as white Europeans, were always asked this kind of questions because the Iteso assumed that our eating habits would be very different from theirs. When we answered that we were eating* Atap*, people would go into gales of laughter. When asked why, they replied that* Atap *was their food and not for Europeans* (Karp and Patricia 1977).

The Iteso are Plain Nilotic people who are close relatives of the Karimojong. They travelled in one migratory wave with the Karimojong from the Horn of Africa and only split when they reached what eventually became Uganda. Their language, culture and morphology are related but the staple foods make them different. Whereas the Iteso enjoy *Atap*, the Karimojong depend principally on animal products like milk and blood.

6. Matooke and Baganda ethnic identity in central Uganda

Matooke, an East African Highlands cooking banana, is the lead staple food for the people in the great lake region of Eastern Africa, especially Uganda. The

matooke varieties in Uganda belong to the triploid *acuminate* genome group (AAA-EA), (a group that also includes juice/beer banana types or 'mbidde'). They are further classified into soft and hard cooking types. The latter have marginal market potential. Matooke are generally harvested between three-quarters to full maturity, peeled and boiled or steamed in banana leaves during which the color of the pulp changes from a creamy white to an almost golden yellow color depending on original maturity of the bunch (Muranga et al. 2007).

About 40% of Ugandan farmers grow plantains for food. That percentage is highest in the Western region (68%) and lowest in the semi-arid North (2%). About 15% of the farmers grow plantains for beer brewing. Originally, Matooke was the diet of the Baganda but today it is grown all over the country and many other Bantu ethnic groups have started enjoying it. Matooke (plantain) production in Uganda averages more than 9 million metric tons annually, making Uganda one of the largest producers in the world. Per capita consumption, at 172 kg, is also among the highest in the world. However, because of its low value-bulk ratio and perishability, there are no virtually recorded exports or imports of plantains. Therefore, the prices are determined largely by domestic supply and demand (Haggblade and Dewina 2010).

Cooking traditional and authentic Ugandan cuisine requires some tact. One extremely popular dish in the Ugandan cuisine is matooke which is made from bananas of the plantain type and is cooked or boiled in a sauce of peanuts, fresh fish, meat or entrails. Matooke goes really well with any relish. To the Baganda, matooke is not just a staple food, it is a cultural food. History tells us that Kintu the founder of Buganda kingdom came from the east with matooke. Researchers recorded matooke as virtually consisting of water and consequently associated it with the high prevalence of kwashiorkor, a form of Protein Energy Malnutrition (PEM), among the matooke diet-dependent populations (Muranga et al. 2007). In spite of this weakness, matooke is popular diet even among the educated Baganda. The reason for this is not quality but cultural identity. In all markets in urban Buganda (land of the Baganda) matooke is more expensive than more quality foods like sweet potatoes, rice, millet and maize flour but the Baganda will buy matooke.

The cooked matooke dough, popularly known as 'emmere' literally meaning 'the food' is served with any sauce and to a Muganda, if there is no 'emmere', there is no food. When asked whether they ate food, children returning from school or a visit having feasted heavily where they went, will always say 'we never ate food' if 'emmere' was not on the menu. Cassava, sweet potatoes, rice and posho (maize bread) are also popular among the Baganda but, in a standard meal, they must be served alongside matooke. Although other Bantu ethnic identities like the Bagisu, Banyankole, Batoro and Basoga also produce and consume matooke, it remains the identity of the Baganda.

7. Sweet potatoes and ethnic identity in eastern Uganda

The most popular food of the Basoga is sweet potatoes. More than 95% of the world's sweet potato crop is grown in developing countries, where it is the fifth most important food crop. African farmers produce about 7 million tons of sweet potato annually, mostly for human consumption. Children with vitamin A deficiency are at increased risk of severe morbidity from common childhood infections such as diarrheal diseases and measles, and in cases of extreme deficiency, can go blind. Orange sweet potato is an extremely rich source of beta-carotene, a naturally occurring pigment that the body converts into vitamin A. Eating orange sweet potato has been shown to improve vitamin A status of children (Harvest Plus 2014).

Uganda is one of the largest producers of sweet potatoes in Africa. Sweet potatoes are fourth in importance as a source of calories. About 44% of Ugandan farmers grow sweet potatoes, according to the 2005 Uganda National Household Survey. The proportion is highest in the Eastern region (57%) and lowest in the semi-arid Northern region (29%). It is highest in eastern Uganda because this is the land of the Basoga whose love for sweet potatoes (Embooli) is known all over the country. Sweet potatoes are grown in the same areas as cassava, though they are less tolerant of the semi-arid conditions in the north. Sweet potatoes are largely a subsistence crop with little commercialization. This is partly because they have a low value-bulk ratio and are perishable (Haggblade and Dewina 2010).

The Basoga bordered by Baganda, Banyoro, Bagwere and Banyole have had their diet influenced by those of the neighboring communities but their main cuisine remains 'Embooli n'envuluga' meaning 'sweet potatoes with ground nut sauce'. All over Uganda anyone who shows much appetite for sweet potatoes is asked whether his/she is a Musoga. What is known in the Western World as potatoes is, in Uganda, called 'Irish potatoes'. The Basoga produce both sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes but the latter is basically for sale. This is completely different from the case of the Bakiga in western Uganda who plant Irish on large scale for the market as well as domestic consumption.

8. Obushera and Bakiga ethnic identity in western Uganda

Obushera is a generic name in the Runyakitara languages of south western Uganda referring to a range of traditionally fermented and non-fermented, alcoholic or non-alcoholic cereal beverages. Obushera is mainly produced from flour from germinated or ingeminated grains of sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*) and/or millet (*Euleucine coracana*). It may be used as a thirst quencher, social drink, energy drink and weaning food (Muyanja et al. 2003). Sorghum is Africa's second most important cereal crop after maize; on a worldwide basis, however, it ranks fifth after wheat, maize, rice, and barley.

By its looks, obushera is a thin porridge made from grain. A malted coarsely ground sorghum flour (made by adding ash and water to the grain, germinating it overnight, washing off the ash, drying and grinding the grain) is often used. This drink is frequently seasoned by adding a generous amount of sugar, orange or lemon juice, mashed banana, sesame paste, or milk. One who drinks obushera is either a Mukiga or from one of the ethic identities from western Uganda.

The Bakiga are one of the Bantu ethnic communities of western Uganda. They migrated from Rwanda in about the seventeenth century and settled first around the Muhavura Mountains then moved gradually into the regions of Kabaale, Rukungiri and neighboring districts. The word Bakiga is loosely translated as 'people of the mountains' probably referring to Muhavura Mountain ranges where they first settled. The Bakiga are known for their liking of obushera. Every rural Mukiga family produces Bushera and unlike elsewhere where it is a drink for adults, among the Bakiga men and women, young and old, all partake in drinking Obushera. It is their identity.

9. Cow milk ghee and Bahima ethnic identity in western Uganda

In the cattle corridor of Uganda, there are four ethnic groups that depend principally on milk and its products. These are the Karimojong, The Baruli, the Bahima and the Basongora. Ghee is served as a delicacy among the Bahima and Baruli (Katushabe 2014) while the Karimojong prefer milk, blood and meat. The special meal of ghee is called 'eshabwe'. It is the main meal of the Bahima who also use ghee for frying other foods and as lotion. The Bahima are Bantu people but unlike their closest kins – the Banyankole who are crop cultivators, the Bahima are cattle keepers. Holtzman (2006) has argued that food – like the family, gender, or religion – must be understood as a cultural construct. The Bahima have constructed their diet to be of milk and milk products and this is due to their love for cattle.

Ghee is processed by heat clarification of butter fat known as *mashita* and is highly valued in the western part of Uganda. *Eshabwe*, a source made by mixing ghee with warm water containing rock salt was used as a royal pudding and is still used in Bahima cultural rituals. Meanwhile, *obutahe,* a perfumed body cream is also made of out ghee. Ghee has an attractive appearance, a grainy texture, a pleasant nutty aroma, a light yellow color, and is semisolid at room temperature. Its characteristic flavor serves as a major criterion for acceptance (Sserunjogi et al. 1998).

Dry *Themeda triandra* (Red hood grass) locally known as *Emburara* is burnt in a small fire pot referred to as *ekijunga*. The smoke is channeled inside approximately 2 L gourds locally known as *ekyanzi* and covered tightly with the lids prior to filling with milk. Milk is fermented in a cool place for about 12–48 and then poured into big gourds of about 20 to 28 L capacity locally known as *ekisisi*. The big gourds are filled half way to enable easy churning. Churning starts

immediately and it involves rocking the gourd back and forth for 1 h followed by sieving to drain out the watery (whey-like) milk while the *mashita* (cream) remains inside the churning gourd. Clean water is then poured into the churning gourd. The gourd is shaken and turned upside down so that the *mashita* can drain into the collecting bucket. *Mashita* is then stored in a closed bucket for one month as more cream is added each day or as often as it is being made. Impure salt extracted from Lake Katwe in Uganda is mixed with water and poured into the bucket. *Mashita* is kneaded with salty water, washed and the water drained off. Finally the *mashita* is scooped into the storage gourd. The *mashita* can then be heat clarified to make ghee or it is packed into polythene bags and marketed.

The love for ghee is expressed by the diaspora Bahima. On any visit to a relative or friend outside Uganda, a Muhima must carry ghee. Food-centered nostalgia is a recurring theme in studies of diasporic or expatriate populations (Holtzman 2006). This is why it has been stated that:

> *Ethnicity is one among the multiple sources of ideals in an individual's experience. People's ideals are acquired through socialization or acculturation into ethnic, family, and regional food traditions. Sometimes food choices are consonant with the ideals of a person's ethnic group and sometimes other sources of ideals, such as religion or age, are the major influences on food choice* (Carol et.al 1999).

The Bahima consume other foods both traditional and modern but are better off with their ghee. The ghee is also their identity in terms of those who sell it in the major towns of Uganda and in the roadside markets on the major high-ways. Whoever is seen selling or buying ghee anywhere in Uganda is known immediately to be a Muhima.

10. Amalewa among the Bagisu

The Bagisu of eastern Uganda are culturally distinguishable from the rest of the Bantu and non Bantu peoples of the region by two marks: the first is circumcision and the second, amalewa. Since the Moslem communities of the region also circumcise, amalewa remains the only unique feature of the Bagisu. Amalewa is a dish of bamboo shoot. The young bamboo is harvested, fermented, dried, cut into fine pieces and cooked to form a delicious relish consumed specifically by the Bagisu.

The Bagisu are the Bantu people occupying the foot of Mt. Elgon (locally called Masaba). They call themselves Bamasaba. The name Bagisu (Singular-Mugisu) is a colonial nomenclature said to have been given by Semei Kakungulu when the British imperialists in Uganda sent him to suppress the eastern region. The Bamasaba of eastern Uganda originated from a man called Masaba. He came, according to a legend, from Mt. Masaba and was the brother of Kintu, the first King of the Baganda. Masaba's wife was Sarah and they had three children: Wanale-ancestor of the people in central Bugisu, Mubuya ancestor of southern

Bugisu and Mugisu-ancestor of north Bugisu. Masaba is the local name of Mt. Elgon so Bamasaba are people of Mt. Elgon. In the annals of history, this people are called Bagisu and are known for farming. Mt. Elgon is a volcanic range and, like other volcanic ranges, has produced the most fertile soil in the region. Many of the foodstuffs found in the markets across eastern, northern and central Uganda are produced by the Bagisu from the fertile soils of Mt. Elgon. Mt. Masaba (Elgon) is the pride of every Mugisu. They are identified by this mountain not only because of the soil fertility it provides but also due to socio-cultural attachments. This mountain has, among others, bamboo forests where the Bamasaba go to harvest and preserve the malewa.

In a report for IUCN, Penny Scott describes how thousands of Bagisu people go to the forest during bamboo growing season, to harvest and dry bamboo shoots. They stay for three or four days, living under makeshift bamboo shelters. They sing and chant, shouting progress to neighbors and friends across the valleys, working until late in the night and sleeping only a few hours. "The bamboo shoots are not merely a source of food during periods of shortage," Scott writes. "The income generated from their sale is an important supplement to the household economy, particularly for residents of the forest-adjacent parishes of southern Mbale. Most important, however, is the cultural connection with ancestors, which is represented by the harvesting and consumption of bamboo shoots. The dish is an essential component of circumcision ceremonies and weddings" (Scott 1998).

Today, the consumption of Malewa is not confined to Bugisuland. All over Uganda, young men are seen carrying malewa on their backs and selling it in towns. This is because the Bagisu are now scattered across the country. It is a booming business because the Bagisu demand it wherever they are. Parrot et.al (2002) have argued that while the liberalization of trade in food continues apace we are simultaneously witnessing a reassertion of foods with local and regional identities. As another scholar put it:

> *No matter where one is from, obtaining food is about many things. For a lot of us, food simply appears in unquestioned ways on the shelves of the local market. It is predictably there, and usually tastes as expected, which is to say it has met standards and regulations. A rare few, however, have a far more profound understanding of where their food comes from and what has been involved in its production.... As they hunt, fish, or gather food the material and immaterial worlds blend together, with layer upon layer of meaning and understanding. The getting of country foods is about understanding the land in which one lives. It is about building an awareness and knowledge of one's place in the natural world of living and nonliving beings. It is about making sense of oneself in time and place. It is about `real life'. Ultimately, the getting of country foods is built upon and helps to maintain a whole set of moral principles about the world that contribute to, and reflect, people's construction of place* (Gombay 2005).

To the Bagisu, the sale and consumption of Malewa is a reminder not only of where they come from but also their ethnic distinction from the rest of Uganda. "I do not question," states Holtzman (2006) "that a powerful connection exists between food and memory. Their inexorable relationship is frequently offered to us."

11. Angara consumption and the Jonam identity

Angara is a fish species found exclusively in the Albert Nile. Over the years it has become a symbol of the Jonam people. According to Okello (2012), angara is normally caught using a standard net. It is then cut vertically making a large parting in the middle, just like a leaf. It is then dried using salt into what they call bungu. The salt acts as a preservative and should be applied well or the fish will go bad fast. After successful salting and drying it is then ready for the market. This is what appeared in the Daily Monitor about Angara:

> *As one approaches the admirably built Pakwach Bridge, the mind first rings to arguably the most delicious fish that is a symbolic landmark on entry to and exit from West Nile. The salted fish, Angara (Alestes Baremose), a delicacy among the Alur is characteristic of the markets, bus stops and some streets of Nebi District and is served in the hotels as well. Angara is not only delicious, but is also nutritious. However, its tasty property has also made its popularity transcend boarders. In other parts of West Nile and abroad, it is enjoyed by a variety of people. Visitors from abroad and non-resident Ugandans are known to pack some on their return home. Beyond its taste, the fish is held sacred for others reasons. It was once used to treat malnutrition. 57-year-old George Ogen narrates how he relished Angara in his early days. "When it is cooked, we were encouraged to drink the soup especially if it was well-cooked because of the salt in it," he says, adding that the meal is quite delicious. "If you do not eat Angara, then you cannot be intelligent," he asserts, revealing the popular belief* (Okello 2012).

Alur boys and girls are often nicknamed nyar-Angara or wod-angara meaning daughter of angara or son of angara respectively. And this is because angara is the identity of the people. The Angara is only found in Albert Nile possibly because it is less saline than Victoria Nile. If you visit an Alur and are not served angara, you are probably not an important guest to the family.

Jonam people are not only experts in catching and salting angara but also in eating it. With angara, you need to be an expert in sorting out the bones as these are many and quite tiny ones. Some parts of the fish are bone while others are fatty. Novices can spend a lot of time sorting through the bones, but Jonam experts use their tongue or teeth and you just see the bones coming out from both sides of the mouth. Thus, food – like the family, gender, or religion – must be understood as a cultural construct (Holtzman, (2006). You can tell a Janam by the way he eats angara sauce.

12. Conclusion

The evidence of the connection between food and identity does not need to be defended, but it is worth looking into the role of food in creating a sense of inclusion and stability among people. In the field of anthropology, ethnology, ethnography and sociology, it has been indicated that food is an ethnic marker

which carries out productive meanings recognized by the members of the same group, who through food-related rituals celebrate their belonging (Rabikowska 2010).

Our knowledge and experience of food comes first from home (whatever kind of home it was) whose memory is later perpetuated, contested, and negotiated in different ways. This is both a social and a personal experience which among many other cultural, political or religious experiences contributes to the net of social relationships and to our identities. My point here is that food making and food consumption project the concept of 'home', understood as a state of normalcy to be regained in face of the destabilized conditions of life (Rabikowska 2010).

In this paper, I have discussed how food is used for ethnic identification in Uganda. In terms of ethno-linguistic categorization, Uganda is simply divided into two –Bantu and Nilotics. But in reality, Uganda has more than sixty ethnic groups and food is among the major dividing marks. That Ugandans are known by their staple foods or delicacies in uncontestable. The identifiers are not just the food eaten but also how it is produced, secured, prepared and preserved . The Acholi eat angara just like the Alur but the way the latter cook and eat this delicacy is totally different from how the Acholi do it. An Acholi will first sort the bones and push only the flesh in the mouth while an Alur will push everything to the mouth and sorts the bones while chewing using the tongue. Only an Alur can do this meticulous exercise!

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