

PHILOSOPHY OF FOOD (FOODISM); HEALTH AND SAFETY AMONG NIGERIANS

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Abstract

From ab intio, man-like every other species on the planet has intermingled with nature according to one prevailing essential: survival. Therefore, we have more meaningful and complex relationships with food than we can think of. It is becoming clear that our system involves immense problems which cannot be solved unless we change our thinking patterns and some unhealthy approaches to food. We eat to live and not necessarily live to eat, this is why our approach to food (what we eat) should be healthy enough, and so the philosophy of food turns out to be imperative here. Food remains inseparable from man. It is a social good that is fundamental to the institutions of society, principles of justice, and the building of quality citizenship. Supposedly, food is seen in harmony with nature, and natural food is essential for human development. Food can be cultural, showing that it emanates from culture. This goes a long way to show that food preparation and consumption are tied within cultures in terms of belief, and traditional practices in such a way that food can define culture, and culture can as well define food. Nigeria for a case study has many cultures with assorted wonderful cultural foods, and since we eat to live, the attitude towards food remains a topic of discussion for Nigerians. This paper shall try to look at the understanding of food, especially in connection to Nigerians with regards to their attitude to food, health, and safety, and by extension make a presentation of philosophers' contributions to the subject, food. Food safety is an integral part of food and nutrition security. Hence, the foundation of food safety is built upon a quality-safety culture, compliance with food laws, regulations, policy, traceability, and food safety management systems encompassing documentation.

Keywords: Food, Health, Nigeria, Philosophy, Safety

Introduction

Food as a product of nature remains an incontrovertible support to humanity. Food can likely do without man but man cannot do without food. This is not because we live to eat but we eat to enhance our living. Little wonder, a poetic old saying has it that, "You are what you eat." In 2010 the global burden of food-borne disease (FBD) was estimated at 600 million illnesses and 420,000 premature deaths. Most of the burden of illness is shouldered by children under five years of age (38%) and people living in low- and middle-income countries (53%).¹ The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) also reported that diarrhea is a leading killer

¹WHO, (2015), Estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.https://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/foodborne_disease/fergreport/en/ [Accessed 15 July 2020].

of children, accounting for approximately 8 percent of all deaths among children under age 5 worldwide in 2017.²

This translates to over 1,300 young children dying each day, or about 480,000 children a year, despite the availability of simple effective treatment. Food safety, defined as the assurance that food will not cause harm to the consumer when it is prepared or eaten according to its intended use,³ is an integral part of food and nutrition security. Food safety systems can apply to private sector approaches to controlling food safety hazards within a food chain, or to businesses seeking to ensure that their food products are safe for consumption.⁴ This system encompasses the scientific discipline of handling, preparing, distributing, and storage of food in a way that will prevent foodborne disease outbreaks and illnesses. Food safety involves not only the avoidance of food-borne pathogens, chemical toxicants, and physical hazards, but also nutrition, food quality, labeling, and education.⁵ The foundation of food safety is built upon a quality-safety culture, compliance with food laws, regulations, and policy, traceability and food safety management systems, and corrective action.

FBDs are common in Nigeria because of the prevailing poor food handling and sanitation practices, tokenistic and inadequate food safety laws, weak regulatory systems, lack of financial resources to invest in safer equipment and infrastructure, and a lack of education for food handlers. Food safety concerns in Nigeria include biological, physical, and chemical contamination, adulteration, misbranding, aflatoxin contamination, illegal food trading, and weak control over imported and exported foods.⁶ Poor food hygiene and limited oversight along the value chain to widespread FBD: there are an estimated 173 million cases of diarrhea caused by food-borne diseases annually in Nigeria and about 33,000 deaths from these illnesses.⁷ The costs of treating these illnesses are estimated at USD 1.7 billion annually—with a considerably larger economic toll if the cost of lost labor and productivity are considered.

Nigerian food safety policy sets out the principles, values, priorities, and strategies necessary to enable the development of actions to address the main concerns of the sector. In order to advance food safety in Nigeria, it requires a robust, comprehensive, and sustainable food safety interconnected system with coherent national food safety policies and strategic action plans. However, the food safety policy situation in Nigeria has not been moving in the expected direction despite efforts of policy redress over the years including the formulation of the NPFSIS in 2014. In addition, poor eating habits, poor food hygiene awareness, and poor food handling practices attributed to increases in urbanization and the number of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is a challenge. Therefore, the need for a robust and functional food safety policy in Nigeria and its effective implementation is imperative and urgent.

² UNICEF, 2019. UNICEF, (2019), Diarrhoeal disease data. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/diarrhoeal-disease/> [Accessed 15 July 2020].

³ FAO/WHO, (1997), Codex Alimentarius Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems, (CAC/GL 26-1997). FAO/WHO, Rome.

⁴FAO & WHO, (2007), FAO/WHO *guidance to governments on the application of HACCP in a small and/or less developed food businesses*, FAO Food and Nutrition Paper 86. ISSN: 0254-4725. Geneva: Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses, WHO.

⁵Institute of Medicine National Research Council (IMNRC), (1998), *Ensuring Safe Food from Production to Consumption*. National Academy Press Washington, D.C.

⁶Ezirigwe, J. *Much ado about food safety: Implications in Nigeria*. Afe Babalola University. Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy, (2018). Vol. 9.

⁷D. Grace, et al, *Food safety investment expert advice*, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria. Nairobi: (2018), ILRI.

What is Food and What is Not Food: Cultural Classification of what is Edible

Increased mastery of language and the developed intellectual capacity of *Homo sapiens* do not mean that deciding what to eat has ever been an easy choice. In fact, unlike animals with a more selective diet, omnivores continuously find themselves in the situation of having to decide if a given edible substance is good or bad for you. For man, the problem was born of the situation which, as Pollan notes, “*there is probably no nutritional source on the Earth that has not been eaten by someone somewhere—insects, worms, dirt, fungi, lichens, algae, rotten fish; roots, sprouts, stems, bark, blossoms, flowers, seeds, fruit of trees; every part imaginable of every animal imaginable.*” This ability for dietary adaptation greatly aided the evolution of the species, but it has also created ongoing problems for man in recognizing those foods that are recommended to eat. As Pollan notes:

“The omnivore’s dilemma comes into play each time we decide whether or not to eat a wild mushroom, but it is also involved in our less-primordial encounters with what is supposed to be edible: when we muse over the nutritional claims of a box in the cereal aisle; when we choose a diet to lose weight (low fat or low carb?); when we decide to try the new chicken nugget recipe at McDonalds; when we weigh the costs and benefits of buying organic strawberries compared with normal ones; when we choose to follow (or disobey) Kosher or Halal dietary rules; or when we decide if it is ethically defensible or not to eat meat.”⁸

The concept of the omnivore’s dilemma dates back to the writings of Rousseau and Brillat-Savarin, but it was officially singled out and identified as such by Paul Rozin, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1976, Rozin wrote an article entitled “*The Selection of Foods by Rats, Humans, and Other Animals*” in which he compared the existential condition of omnivores, such as rats and man, with that of animals with selective eating habits. Animals have no doubt about what to eat since their preferences are genetically determined. These animals waste no thought or emotion on understanding what to eat or not. For these animals, the natural and instinctive mechanisms function perfectly because their digestive systems are able to extract everything the body needs from a small range of foods.

Omnivores (such as man), on the other hand, must dedicate time and thought to try to understand which of the innumerable foods offered by nature can be eaten without risk. When an omnivore runs into something new or potentially edible, it/he is faced with two contrasting sentiments: *neophobia*, the fear of eating an unknown substance, and *neophilia*, the desire to try new tastes. These “feelings” are totally unknown in animals with a specific diet.

As an omnivore, man is equipped with extraordinary abilities of recognition and memory that allow him to avoid poisons and to search out more nutritious foods. In this process, man is aided by the sense of taste that spontaneously leads him towards what is sweet—a sign of energy-rich carbohydrates—and away from what is bitter, characteristic of many poisonous alkaloids synthesized by plants, just as a sense of disgust marks substances that are potentially harmful, such as overripe or rotten foods.

⁸ M. Pollan., *Il dilemma dell’onnivoro*, Adephi, 2006.

For man, the fact of being omnivorous and, therefore, generalist, is both an advantage and a challenge. The flexibility offered by the absence of dietary specialization has allowed human beings to colonize all the habitats of the globe and adapt to all the different types of food offered. On the other hand, omnivores must spend time and energy understanding what to eat on the basis of what is, ultimately, a Manichean approach to food: on one side, what is good, and on the other what is bad.

In addition to having to count on their own senses and memory in selecting food, individuals base themselves on culture and traditions which preserve the accumulated knowledge and experience of innumerable “tasters” who have gone before them. Culture codifies the rules of a prudent diet with a complex series of taboos, rituals, recipes, rules, and traditions.

Although man as a species is ready to swallow anything, it should be said that various human societies tend to limit considerably the concept of what constitutes a food. It is well-known that grasshoppers and termites are considered a delicacy in many African countries, while in the West; they are normally looked on with disgust. There seems to be a very fine line between delicacy and disgusting, and this line is almost always culturally dictated. As Rozin notes, disgust (a word with a more general meaning, but whose etymology derives from the alimentary concept of *gusto*, or taste) is the fear of introducing substances that would be harmful to the body. However, few things have the power to disgust individuals from all human societies: bodily fluids and secretions, corpses, and rotten meat. From this standpoint, disgust is a question of adaptation that is very useful because it prevents the ingestion of toxic and infected substances.⁹ But specific societies express forms of disgust that are much more idiosyncratic that often have no other reason than the cultural development of norms and habits. Even in Western societies, depending on the region and social group, foods such as snails, frogs, and offal can be considered delectable or repellent.

The choices involving what can be considered edible in many countries become means of classifying the world. The anthropological standpoint involving this is clearly illustrated by Douglas who states that, for man, “*the body social determines the way in which the physical body is perceived*”. At the same time, “*the physical experience of the body, which is always conditioned by the social categories through which it is manifest, provides support for a particular view of society: there is a continuous exchange of meanings between the two types of corporal experience, and each reinforces the categories of the other.*”¹⁰ For this reason, what we ingest—or refuse to ingest—says more than a simple food preference. Every culture tends to divide the world in terms of what can be eaten from what cannot, and entering into this subdivision are many elements of symbolic nature which, starting from the physical body, orient towards a certain perception of the body social, and vice versa. As shall be seen later, the crucial significance for these processes of classification involves, above all, the concept of purity.

The alimentary order has its own precise relationship to power. Its order of rank establishes the rules for access to food, and this is also true for many other animal species. Although they are the leading figures in hunting, lionesses do not touch the prey before the male lion has finished eating. Among many, control over food has historically been one of the major resources of power. In the Middle Ages, banquets of noble families contrasted with the endemic hunger among the peasant masses, and in various parts of Europe, those caught poaching on the land of the king or local lord would be put to death. Countless battles have been fought between livestock breeders and farmers in many parts of the world, the prize at stake always being that of

⁹ Rozin, P., *The selection of foods by rats, humans and other animals*, 1976.

¹⁰ Douglas M., Isherwood B., *The world of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, 1979.

the predominance of a specific way of producing food. On the African continent, these conflicts continue to this day.

Food can also be a mark of power in terms of social prestige. But it is interesting to observe that the cultural perception of these types of prestige is quite complex and sometimes even contradictory. The categories of Levi Strauss' culinary triangle also make it possible to clarify this aspect. According to his analysis, boiled food is a more evolved form and communicates a more refined sense than roasted food. But this relationship in terms of prestige and power can also be reversed because boiled food often tends to be associated with a more intimate, family-oriented way of cooking (braised or stewed dishes), food predominantly cooked by women. Roasted food, on the other hand, can be served during public festivities, often out of doors and in full view, which tends to be associated with a male world.¹¹ In our contemporary society, a very significant example of this latter form is the barbecue, especially as a part of American social habits.

Relationship between Food and Gender

There is no question but that alimentary practices give rise to a range of hierarchical forms and that in many societies this tends traditionally to place women in a subordinate position. In fact, while some scholars maintain that from her position of designated food preparer in the home women can draw the pleasure of an activity no less intelligent and imaginative than others normally consider being superior, such as music, others stress the fact that women remain in a much less advantageous hierarchical position.

For example, Allison notes that Japanese mothers, in the meticulous and dutiful preparation of the *obentō*, the lunch box for pre-school children, tend to reproduce an ideology of their own role that is quite limited and strongly influenced by state institutions.¹² DeVault, on the other hand, shows how feminine activities in providing food for the family, although they can be gratifying for those involved in them, are part of subtle yet pervasive inequitable inter-relationships of subordination that reinforce the "natural" sense of deferring to the needs of men and undermine progress towards forms of food culture based on reciprocity.¹³ It can be seen from these various profiles that the relationship between nature and culture is a fundamental basis in studying the role of food in human society. This perspective will underpin the entire analysis that follows.

However, cooking is an essential part of Nigerian society, and it is deeply ingrained in the culture. Women are typically expected to do most of the cooking, and this expectation is often reinforced by societal norms and gender roles. As a result, cooking can be suppressive for women in Nigeria in several ways.

Firstly, cooking is often viewed as a primary domestic duty, and women are expected to prioritize it over other activities, regardless of their personal preferences or career aspirations. This can limit women's opportunities to pursue education, establishing careers, or engaging in other activities outside the home.

Secondly, the expectations surrounding cooking can lead to a heavy workload for women, particularly in households with large families. Women may have to wake up early to prepare meals, be responsible for feeding the family and guests, and clean up the meals. This

¹¹ Levi-Strauss C., *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, Puf, Paris, 1962.

¹² De Certeau and Giard, 2008

¹³ Devault, 2008.

workload, combined with other domestic responsibilities, can limit women's time and energy to pursue their interests.

Thirdly, the expectation that women must excel in cooking can put a lot of pressure on them. Cooking is often seen as a measure of a woman's worth, and women who fail to meet these expectations may face criticism or judgment from families and friends.

Overall, the traditional gender roles and cultural expectations surrounding cooking can be suppressive for women in Nigeria. As society progresses, it is essential to challenge these expectations and redefine gender roles to create a more equitable society.

Practical Scenarios of Food Safety Issues in Nigeria

Incidents of food safety issues resulting from poisoning and infection, due to poor food safety practices, unhygienic environments, and infectious and toxic agents, are rising in Nigeria. There have been countless cases of food safety issues resulting in deaths in the last few years. Despite this worrying scenario, Nigerians have been largely unaware of this silent killer; however, when it strikes it causes a lot of problems. Interestingly, the rising cases of foodborne illness in Nigeria are not only linked to the misuse and abuse of agrichemicals on agricultural products but are also related to people's poor food safety practices. In this section, we highlight some of the major food safety issues that have rocked the country in the last decade regarding poor food safety culture in Nigeria.

In April 2021, in Kano (one of the biggest commercial states in Nigeria), ten people died and a further 400 were hospitalized after drinking fruit juice that had expired over a year ago. It was believed that the incident was caused by a chemical called dansami.¹⁴ This scenario highlights the poor culture of checking the "use-by" or "best before" dates of foods and ensuring that any food product beyond its "use-by" date should not be consumed, even if it looks and smells good. In March 2021, 25 people died after eating fried meat served at a bar in Alagbole-Akute, Ogun State.¹⁵ Surprisingly, the deaths were classified as ritual killings and were not considered to be a food poisoning issues. The main cause of the death has not been confirmed to date. Clearly, this highlights the lack of an organized system for monitoring food safety issues in Nigeria. In November 2020, in Joi village of Plateau State, around 20 people were treated for acute gastroenteritis after taking kunu, a local drink made from millet. It was found that the grains, which were looted from a COVID-19 palliative storage unit, were bought from a petty trader in the community's market.¹⁶

From July to August 2017, a diarrheic ailment caused by zoonotic bacteria in meat and water resulted in 62 deaths in Okoloke village, Yagba West in Kogi State, a settlement that is

¹⁴ Saharareporters 10 Dead, 400 Hospitalised after Drinking Juice in Kano. Available online:<http://saharareporters.com/2021/04/15/10-dead-400-hospitalised-after-drinking-juice-kano> (accessed on 4 May 2021).

¹⁵ Saharareporters over 20 Dead after Eating 'Fried Meat' Served by Yahoo Boy at a Bar in Ogun. Available online:<http://saharareporters.com/2021/03/29/over-20-dead-after-eating-%E2%80%98fried-meat%E2%80%99-served-yahoo-boy-bar-ogun> (accessed on 4 May 2021).

¹⁶ Olufemi, A. Plateau Community Head, Others Suffer Food Poisoning Allegedly Caused by Looted Palliatives. Available online:<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-central/427604-plateau-community-head-others-suffer-food-poisoning-allegedly-caused-by-looted-palliatives.html> (accessed on 4 May 2021).

predominantly inhabited by Fulani herdsmen.¹⁷ Notably, this outbreak, which was initially called “a strange disease outbreak,” was eventually traced from slaughterhouses to neighborhood food canteens, stalls of itinerant food hawkers, and standard decent eateries and restaurants in the community. Again, this scenario highlights the lack of an organized system for monitoring food safety issues, which explains the inability of authorities to ascertain the true nature of the crisis, and thus, the attribution of the deaths to a “strange disease.” In February 2016, thirteen people died, while ten others were hospitalized for food poisoning caused by *Clostridium perfringens* in Abuja Nigeria’s capital.¹⁸ *Clostridium perfringens* is a bacterium that occurs in the soil and contaminates food and, subsequently, the intestinal tract of human beings.¹⁹

In July 2013, no fewer than 30 guests were hospitalized, and eight persons died after eating a suspected poisoned delicacy Ugba (an alkaline fermented African oil bean seed), in a christening ceremony in Owerri Imo State.²⁰ On 4 June 2012, in Kafur Kastina State, 26 people comprising 20 children and six adults suffered severe gastroenteritis after consuming locally made food (Tuwo, a maize meal) prepared with treated guinea corn.²¹ Unfortunately, this guinea corn was meant for planting and not for human consumption. Again, in one incident in 2011 in Rivers State, 112 people were reported to have been hospitalized after eating beans preserved with pesticides.²² Likewise, 120 students of a secondary school in Doma, Gombe State, suffered severe gastroenteritis after eating bean cake contaminated by pesticides.

In 2008, in Bekwara Cross River State, 112 people were hospitalized and two children died due to the ingestion of moi-moi and beans. The moi-moi and beans were said to have contained a large dose of highly toxic pesticides.²³ The laboratory report from the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) revealed that the beans were contaminated with very high concentrations of organophosphates, carbamates, fenitrothion, and chlorpyrifos, all of which are highly toxic pesticides. In a different report, over 120 students of Government Girls Secondary School, Doma, Gombe State were hospitalized after consuming beans.²⁴ Samples of the meal analyzed by NAF DAC showed that the meal contained very high levels of lindane (an organochlorinated pesticide commonly called Gammalin), which may have been used to preserve the beans from ants and pest attacks.

¹⁷Nation, T. Dangerous Meat, Toxic Waters 3: Nigerians Die from ‘Food Poisoning’. Available online: <https://thenationonlineeng.net/dangerous-meat-toxic-waters-3-nigerians-die-food-poisoning/> (accessed on 4 May 2021).

¹⁸Africanews 13 Die of Food Poisoning in Nigeria. Available online: <https://dailytrust.com/update-13-people-die-of-food-poisoning-in-abuja> (accessed on 4 May 2021).

¹⁹Mehdizadeh Gohari, I.; Navarro, M.A.; Li, J.; Shrestha, A.; Uzal, F.; McClane, B.A. *Pathogenicity and virulence of Clostridium perfringens*. *Virulence* **2021**, *12*, 723–753.

²⁰Iyadi, R.C. *Consumers’ Perception of Safety of Food In South–South And South–East of Nigeria*. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, 2015.

²¹Times, P. 26 Persons Survive Food Poisoning in Katsina. Available online: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/5436-26_persons_survive_food_poisoning_in_katsina.html (accessed on 4 May 2021).

²²Adegbola, J.; Bamishaiye, E.; Olayemi, F. *Merchants’ attitude towards the use, and ban of the pesticide Gammalin in Dawanau International grain market, Kano, Nigeria*. *Adv. Bio Res.* **2011**, *2*, 47–51.

²³Iyadi, R.C. *Consumers’ Perception of Safety of Food In South–South And South–East of Nigeria*. Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, 2015.

²⁴Hopkins, M. *Nigeria Bans 30 Pesticides after Deaths*. *AgriBusiness Global*. Available online: <https://www.agribusinessglobal.com/markets/africa-middle-east/nigeria-bans-30-pesticides-after-deaths/> (accessed on 14 May 2021).

These high-profile food safety issues indicate that the unhygienic and unsafe handling and treatment of food have seriously impacted public health in Nigeria by causing numerous chronic and non-chronic diseases. Shockingly, the root causes of most of the food safety issues highlighted above were never identified, deeply investigated, and/or communicated to the public in a detailed manner. This highlights the regulatory failures to combat the current food safety problems persisting in Nigeria.

Health Risk of Public Food (s) [food vendors, funeral or ceremonial food(s)] in Nigeria

Eating public food in Nigeria, such as food at funerals or from food vendors, can pose health risks due to poor food handling practices, inadequate sanitation, and lack of regulation. Some of the health risks associated with eating public food in Nigeria :

1. Foodborne illnesses – Prone to food poisoning and other foodborne illnesses caused by bacterial, viral, or parasitic contamination of food.
2. Infections – Ingesting contaminated water or food sources, which may contain harmful bacteria, viruses, or parasites, can lead to infections that can cause diarrhea, vomiting, and fever.
3. Food adulteration – The practice of adding harmful substances to food, such as formalin or other preservatives, for preservation or sale of sub-standard products.
4. Poor food handling – Unhygienic food handling practices during preparation, cooking, and storage of food, can lead to bacterial contamination and food poisoning.
5. Contamination by insects and pests – Food stored or open to the outdoor environment is exposed to insects and rodents which can contaminate the food with dirt and insects.
6. Exposure to pollutants – Some of the food vendors operate near the roadside where there is high pollution, and the airborne pollutants may settle on foodstuff.

To mitigate these health risks, it is essential to practice good hygiene habits, including washing hands before and after meals and choosing food vendors that practice good health hygiene habits. Also, it is vital to avoid raw or uncooked food and drink only bottled water to ensure safe and clean drinking water. Furthermore, Nigeria's regulatory bodies need to enforce food safety regulations to ensure that food vendors operate in clean and safe environments, implement proper hygiene practices, and secure food from contamination.

Limitations in Promoting Food Safety Culture in Nigeria

Issues around food preparation, safety, sale, and the consumption of street foods in inappropriate places are on the rise in Nigeria, making it exceptionally challenging to promote a food safety culture in Nigeria. Although most of these informal food vendors provide cost-friendly alternative sources of food, the safety of foods sold in these places is substandard due to unhygienic ways of handling foods and a lack of sanitation, running water, refrigeration, and disinfection.²⁵ Sadly, the public's laissez-faire attitude to food safety measures, uncoordinated approach to food control, and poor enforcement of legislation and regulatory limits has exacerbated issues related to food safety practices and food-borne toxicants in Nigeria.²⁶ Furthermore, an inefficient food supply chain, poor traceability, and a lack of understanding of

²⁵ Ezirigwe, J. *Much ado about food safety regulation in Nigeria*. J. Sustain. Dev. Law Policy, **2018**, 9, 109–132.

²⁶ Omojokun, J. *Regulation and enforcement of legislation on food safety in Nigeria*. Mycotoxin Food Saf. Dev. Ctries. **2013**, 10, 251–268.

food safety and quality standards have contributed to these challenges.²⁷ The lack of data on the incidence of food-borne disease outbreaks in Nigeria and the lack of the awareness of the socioeconomic consequences of food safety issues have not helped either.²⁸

Other key obstacles to food safety in Nigeria include the lack of a positive attitude towards risk management and an unwillingness to learn from accidents, near misses, and safety performance indicators.²⁹ As reported in several studies, foods are often prepared in unsanitary conditions, regular washing of hands is somewhat rare, and foods are often exposed to flies and other insects.³⁰ Among certain ethnic groups, keeping and preparing foods in advance for consumption is a common practice, while in some communities, food poisoning is often associated with evil spirits and ancestral curses.³¹ All of these fundamental challenges have crippled efforts to promote food safety practices among Nigerians,³² and the relaxed attitudes of the consuming public and the regulators have gained worrying traction. Efforts to overcome these challenges with an intensive public education campaign on food safety have also not yielded the expected results, because most food handlers and consumers preferred their cultural food safety practices passed on to them through previous generations. In addition, climate change presents an emerging threat to global food safety and security and will also negatively impact consumers in Nigeria.

Therefore, there is a great need to employ adaptive strategies, such as establishing a food safety management program in Nigeria which would expound on the need to detect food hazards and promote food safety culture. A starting point may be for the government to show more regulatory oversight. There is a consensus that regulatory oversight and better relationships with food producers could improve the current food safety deficiencies in Nigeria.³³ The government should constantly review food safety elements such as leadership, communication, risk perception, self-commitment, and management support.

Eat to Live: Health Benefit of Good Food

We eat to live. Eating good and healthy food is essential for our physical and mental well-being. In Nigeria, eating a balanced diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and healthy fats has numerous benefits, including:

²⁷Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition. Nigeria Policy, Monitoring Systems Analysis and Stakeholder Mapping Report. A USAID EatSafe Project Report. 2020. Available online:

<https://agrilinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Report%20on%20Policy%20and%20Monitoring%20Systems%20Analysis%20and%20Stakeholder%20Mapping-FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 5 May 2021).

²⁸ Abejegah, C.; Abah, S.; Awunor, N.; Duru, C.; Eluomma, E.; Aigbiremolen, A.; Okoh, E. *Market sanitation: A case study of Oregbeni market Benin-city Edo State, Nigeria*. Int. J. Basic Appl. Innov. Res. **2013**, 2, 25–31.

²⁹ Chikaire, U.; Atoma, C.; Oyem, A.; Akeni, T. *Displaced Farmers Perception of Resource-Use Conflicts as an Obstacle to Household Food Security and Food Safety in Abia State, Nigeria*. J. Commun. Commun. Res. **2020**, 5, 228–233.

³⁰ Fasoro, A.; Faeji, C.; Oni, O.; Oluwadare, T. *Assessment of food safety practices in a rural community in Southwest Nigeria*. Food Public Health **2016**, 6, 1–6.

³¹ Oyemade, A.; Omokhodion, F.O.; Olawuyi, J.F.; Sridhar, M.K.; Olaseha, I.O. *Environmental and personal hygiene practices: Risk factors for diarrhoea among children of Nigerian market women*. J. Diarrhoeal Dis. Res. **1998**, 16, 241–247.

³² Kilders, V.; Caputo, V.; Liverpool-Tasie, L.S.O. *Consumer ethnocentric behavior and food choices in developing countries: The case of Nigeria*. Food Policy **2021**, 99, 101973.

³³Nwaiwu, O.; Itumoh, M. *Chemical contaminants associated with palm wine from Nigeria are potential food safety hazards*. Beverages **2017**, 3, 16.

1. Improved immune system – Eating a balanced diet with a variety of nutrient-dense foods supports a healthy immune system, which can help protect against infections, diseases, and other health problems.
2. Improved energy levels – Consuming healthy foods provides our bodies with essential nutrients to fuel our energy needs, hence improving productivity.
3. Improved heart health – Eating a balanced diet low in unhealthy fats, sugar, and sodium can help to protect the heart health, lower blood pressure, and prevent cardiovascular disease.
4. Reduced risk of chronic diseases – Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains has been linked to a reduced risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and obesity.
5. Improved mental health – Eating a healthy diet can contribute to better mental health by improving mood, reducing anxiety, and improving brain function.

So, eating good food and healthy food is essential for our health and well-being, and in Nigeria, it is crucial to promote healthy eating among the population to reduce the burden of preventable chronic diseases and improve overall health.

The Philosophical Contributions to the Subject, Food

Philosophers have made significant contributions to the philosophy of food and safety by bringing a critical and reflective perspective to the complex ethical, epistemological, and social issues involved in food production, distribution, and consumption.

1. **Ethics of Food Production:** The moral justification of using animals for food is a significant ethical issue in the philosophy of food. Tom Regan, in his book “The Case for Animal Rights,” argues that animals have inherent moral values and that humans have a moral obligation to treat them with respect and not use them as mere means to human ends.³⁴ Similarly, Peter Singer argues in “Animal Liberation,” that animals have the right to equal consideration of interests and that is morally wrong to cause unnecessary harm to them.³⁵
2. **Food Justice:** The concept of food justice has been explored by various philosophers. For example, Alison Bailey argues in “Uneasy Allies: The role of Social Justice in the Food Movement,” that social justice is a necessary component of food politics and that addressing food injustices is a moral imperative.³⁶ Julie Guthman, in “Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism,” analyzes the ways in which social inequalities and capitalism contribute to food injustices and argues for the need to restore the food system to prioritize social and environmental sustainability.³⁷
3. **Epistemology of Food Safety:** The Epistemological challenges involved in assessing food safety risks have also received attention from philosophers. In “The Philosophy of Food Safety,” Kendall Thu argues that the uncertainty and complexity of the food system require a precautionary approach to food safety regulation.³⁸ Similarly, Dominic Wilkinson and Julian Savulescu argue in “Risk, Precaution, and the Social Ethics of Novel Foods,” that

³⁴Regan T. *The Case for Animal Rights* (University of California Press, 1983).

³⁵ Singer, P. *Animal Liberation* (Harper Collins, 2002).

³⁶ Bailey, A. *Uneasy Allies: The Role of Social Justice in the Food Movement* (Agriculture and Human Values, 2012), 29(4), 557-567.

³⁷Guthman, J. *Weighing In: Obesity, Food, Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism* (University of California Press, 2012).

³⁸Thu, K. *The Philosophy of Food Safety* (Springer, 2018).

the moral obligation to prevent harm to consumers requires an approach to food safety that goes beyond narrow risk assessments.³⁹

4. **Cultural Significance of Food:** The cultural significance of food and its role in shaping identity and social relationships has been analyzed by various philosophers. For example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, in “The Ethics of Identity,” examines the moral implications of cultural appropriation and argues that individuals have a moral obligation to respect the cultural norms and practices of others.⁴⁰ Ann Barnhill, in “Food and Identity: Ethical Considerations,” explores the ways in which food practices can contribute to the formation of personal and collective identity.⁴¹

Evaluation/Conclusion

From the foregoing, the paper has been able to examine how inseparable humans and food are and tried to use Nigerian people as a case study, thereby, considering how inappropriate management of food can lead to health risks. It also considered the importance of food safety, regulations, philosophical contributions to food, and appropriate eating, especially to eat to live.

The existing literature on food safety culture in Nigeria paints an incomplete picture of a problem that needs to be addressed. Most research has focused on the knowledge, attitude, and practices of food safety among food businesses (both informal and formal) in Nigeria. More research is needed to answer specific questions such as: What is the consumer demand for food safety in Nigeria? Does the demand for food safety in Nigeria differ between rural and urban consumers? Can consumers correctly discover food safety risks? What type of quality/safety certifications or food safety testing in Nigeria are considered more reliable by consumers? How do demands for food safety change throughout economic development and underdevelopment? How and to what extent does consumer demand get transmitted to producers, and who are the key players that influence this transmission? Are farmers and food businesses willing to change and improve their practices in response to consumer demand? Has the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) been living up to the aims and objectives of its establishment? While these questions may seem complex, they are not insurmountable.

Therefore, Food safety is an integral part of food, nutrition security, and health. So, the foundation of food safety is built upon a quality-safety culture, compliance with food laws, regulations, policy, traceability, and food safety management systems encompassing documentation.

³⁹Wilkson, D., & Savulescu, J. *Risk, Precaution, and the Social Ethics of Novel Foods*. Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics (2013), 26(2), 321-335.

⁴⁰Barnhill, A. *Food and Identity: Ethical Considerations*. Philosophy Compass (2014), 9(8), 578-586.

⁴¹Appiah, K. A. *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

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