

Food Landscapes: The Farmers' Market and Aunties Suitcases

By Hanifah Sogbanmu, June 2021

In response to the topic of New Spatial Realities, we explore the concept of food landscapes. Culturally specific foods and the spaces they are stocked, sold and consumed provide a sense of home for migrant communities, tell their stories and serve as a means of connecting them to trans-local and global built environments. I would like to share part of what makes up my own food landscape as a British-Nigerian Muslim of Yoruba heritage. Like many migrant families and children of the African diaspora, food is the main connection to our cultural heritage, history and identity - but is still shaped by the context of the geographic locations we find ourselves living in.

In my instance, whilst a lot of my diet is made up of yam, plantain, beans, okro soup, and the staple meal of rice and stew, the majority of our daily meals consist mainly of fresh organic produce from our local farmers market in North West London.

Our Nigerian household has a food landscape consisting of 2 main parts. The first is a strong practice of eating Halal, and whole foods sourced locally here in London. Whether this be through the markets as above mentioned, or through other small businesses that specialise in organic Halal produce or even our family friends who grow food in their back gardens. The second, being the cultural cuisine that includes food items 'imported' by way of a suitcase of a relative or family friend on their travels back to the UK from Nigeria.



Fresh produce from the Queen's Park Farmers' Market

In a lot of ways my family's food habits tell the story of my Mother's migration, travels and education. As a professional Pharmacist now studying Naturopathic Nutrition - a practice that stresses the use of whole and organic foods as medicine¹, we have been in the habit of ensuring our foods, Nigerian and otherwise are as wholesome as possible. She often makes

reference to the Islamic guidelines that prescribes Muslims to “eat food that is *halal* (lawful) and *tayyib* - which refers to clean, pure, safe, harmless and high quality food².

Born and raised in Lagos Nigeria, she grew up learning to cook foods from her Mother and Aunties, a lot of whom were trades women and food merchants, who would not only grow, but prepare, package and sell food to the community. She then spent her secondary education in boarding school in Azare, in northern Nigeria where she was exposed to the Hausa culture and learned the language as well as food recipes from the region. When she moved to the UK to continue her professional career and raise her British-Nigerian children, part of what connected us to our heritage was and still is the food.

Travels from Nigeria to the UK, not only for my family but for many others almost always involves bringing back a suitcase filled with various the spice blends, dried leafy vegetables, beans, grains and other culturally specific food products that would have been prepared with care by an Aunty to see you through your next few seasons away. It's through these foods that we eat on a daily basis that reminds us of who we are, where we come from and the diversity in what the soils of our homeland produce to nourish our bodies.

This practice of importing food ourselves often affords migrant families the ability to follow the activity of their food from the source; from where it's grown, to where it is prepared and packaged and then it's transportation to our households where we continue the process of preparing the food to cook and eat. We are able to witness and trust the quality of these food products as they are most times handled and processed with care. I was always fascinated by the several nylon bags and Nigerian Newspaper bundles my Mother would bring home from her Aunts filled with all sorts of foods that would literally fill our UK home with the earthy, warm smells of our truer home.

Our practices of food embody the wisdoms of our cultural heritage. /the physical ritual of bringing foods from the source, learning and understanding how to prepare, cook and consume them strengthens our relationship with our lands of origin. This is us preserving our cultural legacies, memories of home and informs our dreams of how to continue these practices in other forms culinary experiences. For a lot of us British-Nigerian youth, this extends to being open and willing to patronise food establishments that serve our cultural cuisine alongside learning the traditions of preparing, cooking and consuming these foods in our own current geographic locations. We carry an understanding of the value 'our' food holding space in the food landscape here, in this country, outside of our homes, will be a part of a different practice of preservation.

One that involves using our Black pounds to support the Aunties, Uncles and Cousins of ours who take care in providing us with new and yet familiar culinary experiences that tether us to our cultural roots, whilst allowing us to create our own traditions and practices informed by our own spatial realities.



Food Landscape graphic, Migrant's Bureau

About Food Landscapes

Langar, the food served at Gurudwaras, is served free to people without discriminating against anyone based on religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity. Mosques serve food for iftar. Campaign groups organise around food. Allotments, community gardens, farms are central spaces of organising for land, environmental and social justice. How can food tell stories of Bristol Neighbourhoods?

MB will be mapping different sites and neighbourhoods in Bristol to tell visual and sonic stories of political/social/religious organising, especially among migrant and disenfranchised communities, during the pandemic and before, through food.

<https://architecturefringe.com/m/new-spatial-realities/food-landscapes>

Trans-local: Across local areas or scales.

Halal: relating to food that has been prepared as prescribed by Islamic Law

1 CNM-College of Naturopathic Nutrition. What is Naturopathic Nutrition? (2021)

<https://www.naturopathy-uk.com/home/home-what-is-naturopathic-nutrition/>

2 Arif, S. and Sidek, S. (2015) Application of Halalan Tayyiban in the Standard Reference for determining Malaysian Halal Food.

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