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Cooking up food memories: A taste of intangible cultural heritage

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the author conceptualizes food memories as a form of intangible cultural heritage: an immaterial inheritance enacted and ritualized in everyday foodways. Informed by Marcel Proust's literary writings on food and memory alongside David Sutton's gustemology, this study investigates how a community's local residents construct food memories as forms of intangible cultural heritage. The author conducted a fifteen-month qualitative inquiry with eight local families in Oklahoma, United States. Specifically, the author applied a series of ethnographic methods and cooking as inquiry: a qualitative method using foodmaking as a collaborative activity during the fieldwork. Findings show food memories entail a narrative structure revolving around five constructs: people and communality, foodmaking and the body, sense and synesthesia, emotional reveries, and evocative sceneries. Contributions related to areas of intangible cultural heritage, food memories, gustemology, and practice are discussed.

1. Introduction

Food is an emotive and experiential product, one that is central to tourism, hospitality and gastronomic experiences (Ellis et al., 2018; Jeaheng & Han, 2020; Lee, 2022; Lin & Mao, 2015; Long, 2004; Mohamed et al., 2021). Food provides nourishment, pleasure, and an intimate connection that bridges the taster to their spaces and places of eating (Bessière, 1998; Ellis et al., 2018; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Lee, 2022; Sims, 2009). From a cultural perspective, food offers people a communal way to understand a community's culture, offering an in-between space that transcends beyond the tasting of food, but also an invitation to world-travel into a destination's local foodways and way of life (Lee, 2022). Food is often referred to as an ephemeral pleasure, one that dissipates and perishes once swallowed (Kuehn, 2005, 2012). Yet, the tongue remembers the sensations of the ingested, the nose reminisces the aromas and scents, while the heart and mind register the experience in memory. Perhaps one of the most mysterious phenomena of food is not what food does in consumption, but how it lingers *in memory* (Holtzman, 2006; Sutton, 2010).

Food memories are one's remembrances of food related pasts (Holtzman, 2006). They are reassembled fragments of past narratives that tie individuals to their respective ancestral histories, sociocultural identities, ethnicities, ways of life, tastes, and preferences (Holtzman, 2006; Sen, 2016). Food memories do not only comprise material and sensorial aspects of food, but also the nuanced remembrances of social surroundings, communal practices, and bodily knowledge (Abarca & Colby, 2016; Sutton, 2001, 2008). At the individual level, one's memories of food can become powerful indicators and taste preferences that make up one's identity (Gould, 2017; Heldke, 2016); while at a collective level, food memories can define a family's shared values or a community as a whole, becoming a food narrative shared across different people threading time and space (Abarca & Colby, 2016; Sen, 2016; Sutton, 2001; Truninger, 2013).

In this study, the author conceptualized food memories as an *intangible cultural heritage* (ICH). UNESCO (2011b) defines ICH as "traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants" (p. 3). In this vein, food as ICH does not represent the actual tangible qualities of food/cuisine per se, but the "cultural and social processes associated with foodways" and the "ritual, cultural, and social expressions of a community" (Bortolotto & Ubertazzi, 2018, p. 411). Therefore, food as ICH represents an immaterial inheritance enacted and ritualized in everyday foodways: a form of cultural expression that transcends the food's physical properties to include the cultural symbolic properties of narratives, traditions, embodied knowledge, and *memories* that thread past to present (Bessière, 2013; Bortolotto & Ubertazzi, 2018; Cang, 2018; Di Giovine & Brulotte, 2016; Ichijo, 2017).

The cultural aspects of food have gained formidable attention in tourism research, particularly from the viewpoint of how the cultural properties of food could be commodified as a tourism offering (Bessière, 2013; Ellis et al., 2018; Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Kim & Iwashita, 2016). However, no studies to date have explored food

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memories and how they are socially constructed and remembered. These elusive elements are imperative to the understanding of food as an ICH, as food memories are not easily retrievable and stored inside our minds but are rather "enacted and reproduced in everyday life, in ritualized food practices of shopping, cooking and eating" (Truninger, 2013, p. 159).

Food memory research in tourism and hospitality management is very faint, if not nonexistent. Marschall (2012) reasons that memory plays a crucial role in tourist behaviors during, before, and after their travel, arguing that it is memories, both in the creation of new and reliving of old, that inspire tourism. The role of memory is likewise essential to food tourism in such a tourist' memorable food experiences during a visit may serve as 'mental souvenirs' taken home after a visit (Stone et al., 2018, 2019). However, while the memories of inbound tourists are deemed important, the current study posits that the similar essentiality should also apply to those of a destination's local residents, as it is the locals' practices and foodways that give character to the tourist destination (Sims, 2009). The absence of such standpoints poses a considerable gap in the literature linking food, tourism, and memory, as the majority of existing works focuses primarily on memories and food as a touristic product through the viewpoint of the consumer/tourist lens (e.g., Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Karim & Chi, 2010; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Roozbeh et al., 2013; Silkes et al., 2013) thus forgoing the 'hosts' and the milieu in which these food offerings and attractions transpire from (Jenkins & Romanos, 2014).

Designing studies to elicit food memories can be challenging, as past studies have noted that memories are not only difficult to detect in attainment but are also uneasy to retrieve through one's repository (e.g., Köster & Mojet, 2015). To rectify, this study employed ethnographic methods while using cooking with participants as a method of inquiry. Specifically, this study employed Jennifer Brady's (2011) methodological conceptualization of "cooking as inquiry," which as the name suggests, is a qualitative method that positions the researcher in an active-participatory process of cooking with participants to help facilitate the underlying questions of interest (Brady, 2011). In this study, the author set out on a fifteen-month ethnographic journey, learning and cooking alongside eight families across the state of Oklahoma, United States. The purpose was to uncover how food memories were constructed among Oklahoman local residents and how these memory constructions reflect the ICH of its community. This study asked the central research question: "How are food memories constructed among a community's local residents?"

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Madeleine de Proust and gustemology

In *Remembrance of Things Past*, French novelist Marcel Proust (1992/1913) discusses an intricate tasting encounter when consuming a madeleine—a shell-shaped, bite-sized cake. The narrator dipped and soaked a madeleine in hot tea. Upon taking a bite, the narrator experienced a sudden shudder. "An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses," he wrote, "but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin" (p. 60). The crumbles from the madeleine and warm liquid from the tea tapped into a hidden memory of the narrator, a memory buried so deep in his subconscious, he had no way of locating or comprehending it. After numerous attempts of working and reworking the mystery of the madeleine's taste, he managed to recall the memory into existence. Vivid sceneries, buildings, and people from the forgotten past suddenly emerged from the depths of a dormant remembrance—a childhood memory featuring memories with his aunt, a humble madeleine, and lime-flower tea. What Proust describes is an extraordinary experience that ruptures the laws of time and space, one in which aesthetic philosophers today would consider as an aesthetic experience sprung entirely from the tasting of madeleine crumbs soaked in hot tea (Kuehn, 2012; Leddy, 2021; Malpas, 1994).

Often known as "Madeleine de Proust," "The Proustian Effect," or "The Proust Phenomenon," Proust's madeleine narrative serves as the premises of what we now know today as the contrast between voluntary and involuntary memory. To date, researchers from neurosciences, sensory, philosophy, and anthropology have adopted Proust's notions in exploring the relationship between memory and senses, showcasing how a novelist's poetic excerpts moved even those of the hard sciences (Bray, 2013; Malpas, 1994; Smith, 2016). In this study, the author turn to anthropologist David Sutton's (2001, 2010) use of Proust's literary conception in his writings on food, senses, and memory, particular in his conceptualization on *gustemology*.

Gustemology, as Sutton contemplates, is a theoretical approach that considers how food and the sensory experience of food become central in studying people and their relations with the cosmos, worldviews, and ways of life (Sutton, 2010). To take a gustemological approach, is to consider the larger roles that food experiences play in the complexity of human life (Sutton, 2010, 2011). While Sutton offers multiple perspectives for operationalizing gustemology as a food inquiry lens (e.g., food as cultural metaphors, terroir and placemaking etc.), he particularly advocates for memory as a central focal point when studying people's sensorial and philosophical relations with food. Sutton invites food scholars to consider memory as an analogical "sixth sense," not necessarily as a sensorial receptacle but as a creative channel that communicates oneself and the world. By incorporating memory as a sense, one opens up new avenues for understanding people's *gustemic* lives. Just as how Proust described the madeleine's reverie, Sutton considers memory as powerful vessels buried within us, which once provoked, could "create channels of communication between past and present moments" (Sutton, 2011, p. 472).

Since gustemology's conception, numerous food researchers have adopted the concept to study everyday food encounters. For example, Meah and Jackson (2016) have explored how home kitchens can serve as thought-provoking sites of remembrances, where kitchen tools and utensils passed down from one generation to another become tools filled with symbolic significances, resembling materialized forms of vicarious memories. Sutton and Hernandez (2007) terms such kitchen tools as "inalienable possessions," referring to valued objects "that have the potential to become voices in the kitchen, speaking to us of other times and places as they go about the business of preparing our daily fare" (p. 76). In addition, the autobiographical writings of both Heldke (2016) and Gould (2017) showcase how one's everyday domestic food preparation is riddled with nuanced *gustemic knowing* as both scholars explored their personal identities and family heritage in relation to preparing their respective comfort foods. Through the memories of their social pasts and the combined provocation of their senses during cooking, Heldke (2016) and Gould (2017) shows that the human body are rich libraries of accumulated memories, capable of channeling symbolic energies from past to present. Gustemology has also made an appearance in Lee's (2022) philosophical inquiry on the intersection among culinary arts, aesthetics, and tourism. Particularly, Lee (2022) contemplates that each individual, regardless of one's culinary experience, background or training, carries a unique set of gustemic knowing. As a person cooks, one subconsciously consults one's own inner gustemic voice, using one's repository of food memories as a means to make the inedible edible. The nuanced differences in gustemic knowing explains why when different foodmakers approach a standard recipe, the outcomes render considerably unalike. Foodmaking in this sense resembles an artistic creation—an expression of one's gustemic self (Lee, 2022).

To take on a gustemological approach is to embrace a vicarious view and appreciation for Marcel Proust's madeleine episode in viewing human relations with food and memory. In this inquiry, the author mobilizes the ideas of Proust and Sutton, using them as a theoretical lens to unravel how food memories are constructed among a community's local residents.

2.2. Food memories as an intangible cultural heritage

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) consists of the non-physical processes of cultural expressions that carry essential meanings and symbolic representations to communities (Bortolotto, 2007). This includes oral traditions and expressions, social practices, rituals, festivities, knowledge, traditional craftsmanship, and performing arts that are passed down from one generation to another (UNESCO, 2011b). ICH is the practices and processes that keep cultural diversities alive, built upon a process social construction, which has increasingly been viewed as a valuable economical resource for tourism initiatives (Kim et al., 2019; Tan et al., 2018).

Food memories represent a form of ICH, which include not only the remembrances about food tangible properties, but also sociocultural elements and processes (Di Giovine & Brulotte, 2016). Such sociocultural elements include one's local knowledge and practices about food sourcing, foodmaking, traditions, knowledge, skills, stories, symbolisms, and the communality of food sharing (Gould, 2017; Heldke, 2016; Meah & Jackson, 2016; Sutton, 2001, 2008). Food as ICH represents more than its material remembrances but considers "one's beliefs and fundamental imaginary structures" (Bessière, 1998, p. 23), and it is these "fundamental imaginary structures," when shared and passed down within a group, that formulates an identity marker of the group, becoming a heritage that is ritualized in continuity (Bessière, 1998, 2013).

The intersection between food, memories, and ICH can reveal a lot about a person's identity, especially one's relation to political, socioeconomical, ethnical, familial, and cultural backgrounds (de Jong & Varley, 2017; Ingram, 2016). For example, Sen's (2016) study in a Chicago fish market showcased the ways the symbolic spatial character of Bangladeshi-owned grocery stores awoken the sociocultural memories of Bengali immigrants. His findings showed that the everyday practice of grocery shopping in the ethnic marketplace triggered intimate reflections into one's ancestral and collective food pasts, reminding them of their home and foodways. Ultimately, the provocative elicitations of food remembrances provided them a sense of symbolic refuge, comfort, belonging, and peoplehood while away from their places of origins (Sen, 2016). Truninger's (2013) work on the other hand, investigated the food memories of rural British residents and urban Portuguese residents. Her findings illuminated how conversations about food prompted vivid accounts of different periods and historical changes in rural British residents' lives. Truninger's inquiry stimulated memories in her participants about wartimes causing food scarcities, as well as the gradual introduction of new foods attributed to the growth of food imports (Truninger, 2013). Both Sen's and Truninger's studies support a core character of food memories as ICH: food memories are never static but always in construction, insinuating that memories, however wholeheartedly preserved, evolves in the relevance of time and context (Abarca & Colby, 2016; Bortolotto, 2007).

Tourism initiatives often use the multifaceted heritage elements of food to boost rural communities and to enhance the destination's identity for touristic gains (Bessière, 1998, 2013). For example, Gyimóthy and Mykletun (2009) portrayed how a Norwegian dish, *Smalahove* (smoked sheep's head), was purposefully developed to become a trademark in Voss, Norway. Marketed as an authentic dish specifically for thrill-seeking tourists, *Smalahove* resembles an inseparable symbol of Voss, showing how a rural meal can become an emblem for a destination. Another example is found in the Japanese heritage of udon noodles in regions of Mizusawa and Kagawa (Kim & Ellis, 2015; Kim & Iwashita, 2016). Both regions have become unique tourism spots that pride themselves on their historical ties to wheat flour and udon production, becoming "a signifier of local and regional identity" that contributed to the revival of both regions (Kim & Ellis, 2015, p. 152). In essence, the listed studies here showcase the ways how different heritage properties of food could represent "a banner beneath which the inhabitants of a given area recognize themselves" (Bessière, 1998, p. 23), which could create new avenues for regional development and touristic gains.

3. Research design and methods

Ethnographic methods were employed. Hammersley (2018, p. 4) posits that an ethnographic study comprises, among many things, prolonged data collection in a subject matter's natural occurring setting, fieldwork involving participant observation, researcher engagement in the inquiry, and a variety of data collection methods that aims specifically to understand how people assign meaning to objects, phenomena, themselves, and their culture (see also Dewan, 2018). In this ethnographic work, the researcher spent fifteen months visiting eight Oklahoman families in their kitchens and communal dining spaces. For the most part of this project, the researcher employed cooking as a collaborative method of inquiry for understanding food memories.

Originally conceptualized by Jennifer Brady (2011), cooking as inquiry is a qualitative method that uses cooking as a "means of garnering understanding about food, identity, and the body" (p. 323). Brady argues that foodmaking is a sensual way of unravelling meaning pertaining to one's embodied knowledge and identity, by recognizing both the researcher's and participant's bodies as "instrument[s] of sensory data collection" (p. 323). In this study, the researcher cooked with participants from eight different sites across a fifteen-month period. By cooking together, the researcher became part of a relational, embodied, and experiential "in-between space," allowing meanings to unfold in the relationships created and fostered between the researcher and the researched (Caine et al., 2013). All data generated amid this process were not simply a delivery transference from participants to researcher, rather, they were co-created encounters within an embodied and visceral in-between space of cooking.

3.1. Research context and the researcher

The research took place in the state of Oklahoma, United States. The state is a major producer of natural gas, oil, and agriculture, and was once known as the land of opportunity given the boom of the oil industry in the 1890s through 1920s (e.g., Hurt et al., 2012). However, as a destination, Oklahoma is best defined as a flyover or drive-through state, one that tourists typically pass over in a plane without thinking about visiting or pass through by car during interstate road trips. Although Oklahoma may not be deemed as a tourist destination, Oklahoman food has a strong identity associated to familial ties, values, and comfort (Bentley, 2004). Long (2017) described Oklahoman cuisine as "epitome of [American] comfort food," "straightforward" with "no surprises" and prepared "with love" (p. 132). Oklahoma is also one of only two states in the United States (the other being Louisiana) to formally recognize an official state meal, which comprises a unique combination of staples and cultures attributed to its historical amalgamation of Native American, Texan, and Southern influences (Everett, n.d.). The official Oklahoma state meal comprises "fried okra, cornbread, barbecue pork, squash, biscuits, sausage and gravy, grits, corn, strawberries, chicken fried steak, pecan pie, and black-eyed peas" (State Symbols USA, n.d.). Such food reflects the state's historic and present-day agriculture as well as the cultural backgrounds of Oklahoma's residents.

Qualitative researchers are integral to the research process. Not only is the researcher the research tool but also the interpreter of the researched culture's meanings, values, and ways of living (Patton, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that the researcher makes his/her position and subjectivities known (Lichterman, 2017). In this study, the primary researcher is a culinarian: a former culinary practitioner who has worked in commercial and educational settings in both Malaysia and the United States (see Lee, 2021). Originally from Malaysia, the researcher has lived and worked in Oklahoma for six years. While the researcher was not a native to the research context, he had however, assimilated with Oklahoman foodways in his six years of residency: not as an expert on the region's culinary ways but as an individual who

possesses prior experiences relative to the region's gastronomic scene. In other words, the researcher resembles an "in-betweener" to the research context, one who carries values as both an outsider and insider, as Dewan (2018) explains: "We can never be complete insiders or natives, outsiders or non-natives; rather, we keep jumping between these roles in the process of our ethnographic journeys" (p. 200).

3.2. Sampling and data collection

Upon obtaining IRB approval (institutional review board) from the researcher's affiliated institute, eight Oklahoman families were selected and visited over a fifteen-month period from December 2018 to February 2020. Each family possessed at least three generations of residency in Oklahoma, three of which owned multi-generational local restaurants. Each family was visited in-person from two to three occasions, with each visit persisting at least four hours while several involved overnight stays. Restaurant sites were visited during operational hours but less frequent compared to the family households due to operational constraints. The home sites were visited during participants' everyday food activities, such as weekend afternoons after church and special occasions such as the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. During each visit, the researcher cooked with participants, conducted interviews, collected material artifacts, journaled, and followed up with additional visits and discussions over texts and phone.

During each visit, the researcher cooked and shared meals with different household members. The researcher videotaped each cooking processes with a GoPro camera to capture the embodied experiences and conversations that transpired during foodmaking. This collaborative activity allowed the primary investigator to co-experience an embodied activity alongside participants, building rapport, trust, and relationships sparking numerous food remembrances and conversations (Bell, 2015; Jolliffe, 2019; Walter, 2017). The collaborative effort also echoed the philosophical concept of "world-traveling with culinary arts" (Lee, 2022), an intimate aesthetic exchange that allows one to identify with another through food as an artistic medium (Kuehn, 2012; Lee, 2022). Through cooking together, the researcher was able to open conversations with participants that would otherwise remain hidden, particularly conversations about one's familial and social ties pertaining to food. In other words, the foodmaking activity was purposefully embedded in the inquiry as an in-between space for both the researcher and participants to foster a relationship: creating safe environment for inquiring and sharing (Brady, 2011; Caine et al., 2013).

Unstructured interviews were conducted with participants after each cooking activity and were reflective of the foodmaking experience. Some common questions included "What food do you believe best represents Oklahoma?" "What memories do you associate with this dish/recipe?" and "Who taught you how to make this recipe?" Majority of questions were tailored specifically to reflect the occasion, time, and/or context of the particular visit. For example, when cooking alongside the participant on Thanksgiving Day, questions were tailored to reflect the memories of the particular holiday such as "What are your fondest food memories of Thanksgiving?" and "Who usually does the cooking on Thanksgiving?"

Numerous material artifacts also emerged in the inquiry. Upon consent each material artifact was photographed including foods, recipe binders, pages of recipes, kitchen settings, kitchen tools, and the foodmaking process itself. In addition, the researcher also kept a personal journal to record fieldnotes. The journal included jottings and written accounts about conversations that were not audio-recorded, personal reflexive accounts, and preliminary analyses that occurred during the fieldwork. All written accounts in the journaling process were created with the intention to transform "witnessed events, persons, and places into words on paper" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 12).

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted in several layered phases. All data—cooking videos, interview transcripts, photographs, and fieldnotes—were first organized according to each site and arranged into specific visits. The researchers then reviewed each interview transcript and fieldnote line-by-line, examined each video file scene-by-scene, and wrote a reflexive narrative report on each visit narratively to recapture the visitation. Based on these individual narrative reports, the primary researcher then coded for resonant narratives about food, using a narrative coding lens that takes both the context and field texts into consideration (Mura, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). A narrative coding lens was adopted because each participant naturally adopted storytelling as a means of expression when talking about food; each memory took on a *storied* form, comprising a narrative structure with characters, plots and settings.

The next phase of the analysis was performed through *writing*, in which the researcher "wrote to discover," and treated the writing process as both "a method of discovery and analysis" (Richardson, 1994). Each specific food remembrance was isolated and written with relevant quotations, visuals, photographs, and reflexive interpretations. To ensure the portrayals were authentic and credible, the primary researcher also conducted member checks with the involved participants, conducting additional interviews with them to check for accuracy, fill in gaps in narratives, and omit certain details. As these written accounts neared completion, the primary researcher conducted another layer analysis, using the theoretical underpinnings of Proust, Sutton, and literature on ICH as different lenses to analyze the written accounts, resulting in the discovery of five constructs labelled (1) *people and communality*, (2) *foodmaking and the body*, (3) *sense and synesthesia*, (4) *emotional reveries*, and (5) *evocative sceneries*.

4. Findings

When explaining food memories, participants naturally adopted a storytelling as a means of expression. Stories of food memories also threaded generations, carrying the various values and meanings passed down from one generation to another, resembling a form of "inherited narratives," that are hereditary passed down from our forebears causing us to bear the semiotic cultural markers from our pasts (Goodall Jr, 2005, p. 497). In the context of this study's Oklahoman participants, these stories often thread the values of family, as food memories accentuate on familial cooking and communality. Five interlinked constructs were found threading participants' food memory stories: (1) *people and communality*, (2) *foodmaking and the body*, (3) *sense and synesthesia*, (4) *emotional reveries*, and (5) *evocative sceneries*—or (1) *people*, (2) *embodiment,* (3) *senses,* (4) *emotions*, and (5) *sceneries* for short. Together, the constructs form a gustemic gestalt (see Fig. 1) that intertwines and filles in missing gaps of a fragmented food related pasts.

4.1. People and communality

The first and most prevalent construct was *people and communality*. This construct represents the individuals associated with the food memories, suggesting that food activities are highly communal activities that renders meaning only when shared with others. When inquiring about food memories, participants never shied away from the meals prepared by their immediate family members, specifically by the mothers of the household. One participant, Pete, shared one of his earliest memories from his family dinner table, which brought him back to the sixties in Oklahoma, where homemade casseroles from "leftovers in the refrigerator" were put together by his mother to feed a family of six.

> We never had much, so we had to share everything. Mom would use leftovers in the refrigerator … Dad would ask "who wants dessert?"

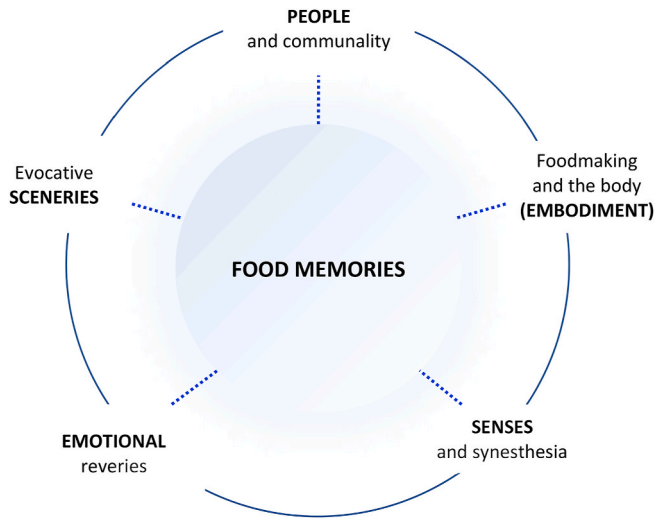

Fig. 1. Five food memory constructs.

at the end of the meal, and it would be *an apple split six ways across the table* [mentioned with emphasis]. The food was boring, but meaningful. If you ask me about my fondest of food memories, I would say that it isn't really about the food per se, but the people we had the food with.

While many would associate Marcel Proust's (1992/1913) madeleine experience to the involuntary recollection of specific food and foodways, what often received lesser notice is his recollection of his aunt in the experience. Participants tend to reference the people surrounding their past food experiences rather than the food itself. From the preparer of meals to those one communally shares with at the dinner table, people stood out most predominantly in all conversations, suggesting that one's memories of food are social and communal ties with food are highly resonant memories that connects us back with the people of one's pasts.

4.2. Foodmaking and the body

The second construct involves *foodmaking and the body*. The construct of embodiment involves not only one's motion through food, but also one's vestibular and proprioceptive senses, which engenders the bodily movements, balance, and awareness informed by the muscle memories from past experiences. One awakens one's embodied knowledge through the sense of doing.

During the researcher's fieldwork, Ginger, a retired Oklahoma school principal at her farmhouse, made chicken noodles from scratch, a dish that symbolizes comfort in many American households served during colder seasons or when a family member falls ill. Using a family recipe that dates back five decades, the video records show Ginger dancing and swaying throughout the foodmaking process. There was a certain rhythm and groove to her cooking, as she lowered her hips and whirled her rolling pin against her egg noodle dough (see Fig. 2). Looking back at the video footages, the conversations with Ginger were richer when she was moving, as she transitioned from kneading, to dancing, to swaying; all while maneuvering a rolling pin transforming dough into a thin sheet. Each motion sparked new entries into old memories, most of which, involved the reminiscences of her late mother:

> Now this rolling pin right here is my momma's. Momma took pride in making her noodles really tiny. She would hand-cut them really thin and narrow … *[Ginger rolls her dough thinly all while swaying to a tune she hummed herself]* … In her later years, she got this fancy pasta machine and started making noodles with it all in one uniform shape and size. But you know what? We didn't like them. We wanted momma's hand-cut ones.

This example showcases how Ginger's embodied movements extended to different kitchen tools, functioning as extensions of the human nervous system during foodmaking. Ginger's use of her late mother's rolling pin served as a thought-provoking artifact—one filled with symbolic significance, resembling materialized forms of vicarious memories (Meah & Jackson, 2016). Sutton and Hernandez (2007) call such kitchen tools as "inalienable possessions," resembling valued objects "that have the potential to become voices in the kitchen, speaking to us of other times and places as they go about the business of preparing our daily fare" (p. 76). The body does not only house developed foodmaking skillsets, but also elicits memories of one's familial and food past. Through cooking and the "inalienable possessions" one uses, one awakens one's memorial past, creating a channel communicating one's past with the present.

4.3. Sense and synesthesia

The third construct involves the human *senses*. This includes not only one's gustatory system (taste), but also the olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (sound), and visual (sight). The interplay among these five senses anchors a memory in sensory—a process known as *synesthesia*. Synesthesia refers to how one sensory system informs and stimulates another, which collectively forms a sense impression of the particular food item. Past studies explained that the ability to recall specific food remembrances is rooted to through the synesthetic

Fig. 2. Ginger dancing to hand-cut noodles.

crossover of all senses, formulating an intertwined register that cements in memory (Sutton, 2010, 2011). For an example, one participant, Bill, shared the resonant aromas of cinnamon cookies and pecan pies baked by grandma on Sunday weekends after church. He notes:

We would always spend Sunday afternoons at grandma's house after church. We would knock on grandma's door. And when she opens the door, all we could smell is freshly baked cinnamon cookies and pecan pies. My brothers and I, we would say 'hi' on our way into the kitchen, walking right past grandma without giving her a hug.

In line with Proust's madeleine description, Bill's explanations of cinnamon aromas and baked buttered pastry smells connects him with communality, time, and place. Not only was he able to recall the food itself, but he immediately remembered the occasion where the memory was situated.

Interestingly, when participants describe their foods during food-making, synesthesia tends to perplex the ways participants describe food. Consider the following *in vivo* statements on several Oklahoma favorites dishes:

- "Look at our pies! I just love that smell. You could already *smell how crumbly it is.*"
- "You see that white smoke from the grill? That's flavor right there. You can literally *see the flavors in the smoke.*"
- "You would know a good chicken fried steak when you cut into one. You would hear it. It's that crackling slice that *brings music to our mouthfeels* … It's the sound of the thick crispy batter that determines good Oklahoman cooking."

Through the integration of different senses, synesthesia perplexes how one describes flavors and senses. One does not "smell a crumble," "see flavors in smoke" or "listen to music through the mouth." Although should be objectively described through one's sense of taste, participants tend to *re-represent* food descriptions by blurring different sensorial adjectives from different sensory descriptors. The *in vivo* examples above showcase how participants describe food synesthetically, connecting one sense to another, or as Sutton (2011) describes "you can listen to that smell" (p. 470). This sheds light on the limitations of language when studying the sensory experiences or memories associated with food, as one could not fully describe food through words or text, but experientially through one's multiple senses. Hence, to uncover one's proper food experience, one needs to consider sensual methods, such as cooking (Brady, 2011).

4.4. Emotional reveries

The fourth construct—*emotional reveries*—entails a myriad of feelings and emotive states, both positive and negative that functions as energies that brings the memory into fruition. Participants tend to plunge deeper into their memories when their emotions are tapped into. From the deepest of sorrows to the greatest of joys, these emotions become a form of energy that fuels their narrations, sharing their stories in full light. Emotions, becomes an energy that brings one's reverie of the past back to life.

A prime example is Ginger's narration of her memories about her late mother, all while looking through a series of recipes in a recipe binder (see Fig. 3). The binders contained a wealth of handwritten recipes that date as far back as the fifties and passed down from her mother and her mother before her. Revisiting the binder, she narrated:

> Momma had the prettiest handwriting and a tremendous cook. She has beautiful penmanship, don't you think? *[Ginger grins as her eyes begin to water.]* We would have dessert with every meal. From fried pies to peach cobblers, momma makes everything from scratch. *[She flips through the pages of the binder.]* These right here are her fruit jams. Those were the best! *[She points to the recipes of berries and peach jams.]* Every Fall, when it gets colder, we would all be outside on the farm harvesting the final crops. We had all kinds of berries and peaches, and we would turn them into jam! Until today I still have the mason jars that we kept them in. *[She grins as her eyes begin to water.]*

Fig. 3. Ginger's binder of handwritten recipes.

The quote above, although centered on jams, were specifically brought to life through the emotion of *saudade*—a nostalgic or melancholic longing for someone (or something) that causes one to feel a sense of lack and incompleteness. The memories of harvesting fruits, the mason jars, the recipe binders, and her mother's handwriting, were fueled by Ginger's emotions, allowing her to dwell and even world-travel into the reveries of the past, reliving them in memory. From a gustemic perspective, one's felt emotions in the present, allows one to dig deeper in one's repository of the memories, functioning as an energy source for one to perform memory work.

4.5. Evocative sceneries

The fifth construct—*evocative sceneries*—symbolically represents the occasions and events in which the memory took place. These sceneries analogically provide a textured backdrop that contextualize the food memories, giving credence to the physical settings of the past. A prime example would be Pete's earlier description of "casserole memories" and "an apple split six ways" took place in a family dinner table of the sixties, which cinematically captures the memory with a backdrop, offering an imagined physical place of a family table and the temporal settings of the sixties in Oklahoma. In the later interviews, Pete provided greater details to the dinner table scene in the sixties, explaining the socio-economical statuses of his family that led to the types of meals shared. Pete attributed it to a time when his parents were struggling to raise a family of six. A time where "casseroles made from leftovers" and an "apple split six ways" were the only means to nourish. To Pete, the food during that time were "boring" but carrying traits of resilience when looking back.

> Another example would be a Fourth of July occasion with Janice, a lady who does not cook regularly but only during important family traditions. She narrated:
>
> I am trained to cook for my family when the timing calls for it … I don't cook often, but when I do, it would be a feast. Thanksgiving

and Fourth of July are my thing. I had a tremendous teacher in my momma and grandmomma. My grandmomma was enslaved to cook for a wealthy family when she was only six years old. Can you imagine that? That, only a few generations ago we were living in a society that functioned on child slavery? Grandmomma was an amazing chef. I was lucky to learn from her. Me, I'm no chef *[she laughs]*. I'm more of a provider for my family. I guess you can say I am trained for such occasions, you know? It keeps the family traditions going.

Passed down from her mother and mother before her, Janice's duty as a mother in upholding the traditions of celebratory feastings came from a long tradition of observing and cooking alongside her late-family members. Through this *scenery*, she remembers the *people* that passed on her *embodied* trainings; she dwelled in the "unimaginable" tales of her grandmother's enslaved pasts, triggering and a series of *emotions* that fueled the vividness of her food narratives alongside her late family members; she remembers the taste (*senses*) of her mother's and grandmother's cooking.

Apart from the everyday occasions of the family dinner table, participants also highly referenced special and celebratory occasions as scenic occasions. These include outdoor barbeques during the summer, tailgating during college football season, as well as the lavishly prepared dishes on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. These sceneries situate a particular memory contextually and temporally, gustemologically affecting and encapsulating one's memories of people, bodily knowledge, senses, and emotions.

5. Discussion and conclusion

As a summary, the five constructs—*people*, *embodiment, senses, emotions,* and *sceneries*—represents different pieces of a remembered past, fragments of one's heritage that resonates in mind and heart. The *people* element functions as a social element tying communal meanings to the specific food remembrances, while *embodiment* locks in various vestibular and proprioceptive muscle memories acting as vehicles that support and trigger one's *senses* and *emotions*, which are all painted together on an analogical canvas that provide a rich *scenery* contextualizing the memory with a time and place. In a Proustian-gustemic fashion, each construct interacts and intersects with one another synesthetically in bringing the memory to the present. Together, the constructs form a gustemic gestalt (see Fig. 1) that intertwines with one another by filling in missing gaps of a fragmented food related pasts.

The question thus remains: "So, how does the findings pertain to hospitality and tourism?" Foremost, the ideas of commodifying one's foodways and heritage has always been the fore, if not core, for food-service business and food tourism initiatives (Bessière, 1998, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Lin & Mao, 2015; Sims, 2009). The economic potential of food and cuisine is widely acknowledged and explored, particularly in how a cuisine or food item is mindfully planned, executed, and aligned in synergy among the local community, businesses, and destination marketers (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Kim & Iwashita, 2016). However, the immaterial elements of food—memories in specific—remain a highly puzzling and unexplored heritage entity, which leaves any efforts to commodify or promote the memory bedeviling and muddied. As such, this study addresses the aforementioned gap by offering an account to comprehend how food memories as an ICH are socially constructed among a local community. In the following closing sections, the implications for theory and practice are discussed.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to hospitality and tourism literature in three ways. First, this study offers a five-construct framework (i.e., people, embodiment, sense, emotions, sceneries) to better understand food memories as a form of ICH. The discovery of the five constructs and the ways they interrelate as a synesthetic nexus suggest that the remembrance process of food is beyond the *senses*, but also through the interplay among one's communal ties with *people*, *embodied* knowledge and remembrances, *emotional* energies, and vividness of *sceneries*. Each construct functions as different puzzle pieces that fills in gaps in one's memory. Similar to the Proust Phenomenon, when one piece of the puzzle is evoked or tapped into, the others gradually find form, bringing the memory into its possible fruition. The starting point for such remembrances is completely arbitrary, hence future researchers are encouraged to follow suit with this study's efforts inquiry to possibly unravel the cause of such remembrances.

The second contribution lies in the importance of embodiment in food memories. The participant's bodily moments in the foodmaking process were the main sparks that triggered conversations about one's past and one's memory of food. Each participant's narrations were most fluent and potent when their senses and body were engaged in activity. Any inquiry investigating human accounts of food should not omit the bodily knowings of the foodmaker. Thus, future researchers are encouraged to embrace foodmaking as an intimate and sensual process of knowing and performative knowledge (Brady, 2011; Gould, 2017; Heldke, 2016). Hereafter, future researchers should consider theoretical frameworks and research methods that embraces the role of the body (i.e., Proust, gustemology, cooking as inquiry) in the construction of hospitality and tourism knowledge.

The third contribution lies in the narrative structure of food memories. The description of participants' food memories naturally takes on a narrative structure, embodying a *story* comprising characters, plots, and settings. These stories thread generations, carrying semiotics and meanings from one's past to help one make sense of one's present, echoing what Goodall (2005, p. 497) refer to as "inherited narratives." The conceptualization food memories as stories is imperative because it specifically acknowledges food memories as a living entity. As Proust suggests that although some memories are buried and dormant, they are still alive awaiting awakening, which oftentimes come to fruition through one's embodied presence and participation (highlighting once again the importance of embodiment). Because food memories are storied, one must also be cautious of the storied memories' ever evolving nature. As a socially constructed and valued concept, food memories are subjected to change over time, particularly as one narrates and layers in new interpretation. Food memories in this sense are never stagnant: as one remembers and narrates a memory, one essentially (re)constructs a remembered past, altering its meaning by dramatizing, monotonizing, or concealing specific details. Acknowledging food memories' living nature is crucial not only for researchers but also for practitioners interested in commodifying its heritage potential.

Understanding food memories' never stagnant and ever evolving nature is imperative for practitioners. A heritage is after all, as Ashworth (1997) defines, a contemporary and selective use of a past. Regardless in the forms of tangible relics, memories, or documented history, a heritage is never stagnant but an evolved past that has undergone several, if not multiple, layers of interpretation. What is understood as one's heritage today hence reflects a substantially interpreted idea, which leaves efforts in instigating strategies inevitably challenging (Apaydin, 2020; Ashworth, 1997). Nevertheless, this study proposes that although food memories are always evolving, the five constructs are expected to remain as resonant. Hence, future researchers interested in investigating food memories' evolution are encouraged to explore the five constructs (i.e., people, embodiment, sense, emotions, sceneries) to identify how they alter through time.

5.2. Practical implications

The five constructs serve as a useful scaffolding tool to identify food memories' properties for practical use. UNESCO (2011a) advises that for ICH to be adequately preserved or commodified, mindful and systemic identification practices and processes are required. Based on this study's

findings, practitioners could begin by first identifying and inventorying a community's food memories by attending to the five-construct framework of people, embodiment, senses, emotions, and sceneries. Each element represents an identification and analysis area. In this vein, tourism bodies and supporting businesses could begin by first identifying the different elements according to the five-construct framework to scaffold what is unique and intrinsically hereditary to a local community. In Oklahoma's case for example, this study found that the strong familial ties and American comfort food were the most common threads recounted by the study's participants. The evidence of the resonant familial/comfort theme can be traced down to the five constructs, such as the parental figures behind each meal (people), family kitchen heirloom tools and utensils that aids in one's foodmaking ways (embodiment), Midwestern favorite flavors such as pecans, cinnamon sugars, and battered-and-fried food (senses), the emotional connections tied to their family figures and ancestral pasts (emotions), and the evocative family gatherings and American celebratory occasions that situate the memory in place (sceneries).

While it is easy to suggest tourism marketers and supporting businesses (e.g., restaurants) to capitalize on these food memory elements and design more believable food/tourism offerings, such initiatives must be executed with extreme caution. Any efforts to commodify food memories as tourism offerings must be matched with safeguarding measures to avoid potential cultural dilution and diminishment. Commodifying food memories runs risk of romanticizing and fantasizing the heritage's true value, bearing the dangers of causing irreverence, dilution, and potential adulteration (e.g., Apaydin, 2020; Shepherd, 2002). Practitioners must collectively ponder whether they have the right to transform, (re)use, or (re)interpret people's food culture and its associated memories. Not only that, but practitioners must also consider the ethical ways of going about such processes and how consensus or accord can be attained. Such considerations are no easy tasks, but at the very least, need to involve stakeholders of the local community.

Hence, as a start, it is recommended that any commodification efforts of a destination's food memories must begin with the consent and involvement of the local community. The commodification process must be organic and sustainably planned, in such that both the tourism bodies and the local community need to engage in constant dialogue with one another—a reciprocal and transparent exchange allowing each party to see the values, opportunities, and purpose of one another. For example, tourism marketers and authorities can help local community businesses (e.g., local restaurants) better structure and scaffold one's food memories into a succinct and marketable product (e.g., using the five-construct framework); in similar token, the local community must also advocate for their own cultural heritage to be authentically portrayed and properly disseminated, making sure that whatever is presented respectfully executed and not at all distorted or misappropriated. Only through such mindful dialogue between both parties, could tourism bodies and local communities sustain and safeguard a community's ICH while concomitantly benefiting from its socio-economic value (Kim et al., 2019).

5.3. Limitations and final remarks

The narratives and quotes presented in this manuscript are exclusive to the participants and the context in which they emerged from. Readers need to be attentive of this issue when forming interpretations. Serving as a source of ideas, future research could adopt the present study's conceptualization for future inquiries. Nevertheless, it is imperative to mention that the exact replication of this study's procedures is impossible, as each participant-researcher relationship is individually unique. Nonetheless, the methodological concepts and procedures (e.g., cooking as inquiry) could still serve as a useful template for future qualitative researchers to adopt and apply. A final note concerns research ethics. Researchers inquiring into aspects of heritage and personal memories must always have the participants' interests and comfort in mind and at heart. Consent and permissions should always be sought and resought throughout the research process.

Declarations of competing interest

N/A.

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