

## **ABSTRACT**

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Food culture plays a significant role in the adaption of migrants when they leave their home country in search of a new home, acting as a constituent of a migrant community. This has been the case for the Ethiopian migrant community in Johannesburg.

The ways in which food culture plays a role in the formation of Ethiopian migrant communities in Johannesburg has been explored in this study. Furthermore, literature on the gendered roles of men and women regarding food cultural practices remains embedded within a masculine paradigm which results in the side-lining of the experiences that Ethiopian women face in Johannesburg.

Therefore, an attempt is made to understand the role that Ethiopian food culture plays in the socio-cultural identity formation of Ethiopian migrants residing in Johannesburg. This qualitative study consisting of interviews, informal discussions and observation of Ethiopian restaurant owners, Ethiopian restaurant workers and members of the community at large aim to accomplish the understanding of the role that food culture plays in Ethiopian migrant communities of Johannesburg.

Research findings showed that Ethiopian migrants in Johannesburg relied on their nationality to construct their socio-cultural identity in the host space. The expression of pride for their Ethiopian identity was easily evident. It was also found that there was a use of their food culture to dispel stereotypes about a 'starved' Ethiopia, usually by the mention of food ingredients that can only be found in Ethiopia. The 'transportation' of food culture can also be owed to the importation of Ethiopian food ingredients, a deliberate means of preserving one's identity. A performance of culture allows for

Ethiopian migrants to showcase and celebrate who they are. The practices found within Ethiopian food culture are held through community formation, passed on from generation to generation. The evolution of the roles of Ethiopian men and women also contributes to this study through its changing dynamics in an era where patriarchy and gender are being evaluated. This implies the need for the development of the study of Ethiopian food culture in Ethiopian migrant communities.

**Key words:** food culture, Ethiopian migrant, Johannesburg, gendered roles, socio-cultural identity.