AJSSE
African Journal of Social Sciences Education Vol. 2 (1), 2022, pp. 1-21
(ISSN: 2821-8809)

"FOOD BEFORE PRESSURE": FOOD AND FOOD CULTURE IN MUSLIM INNER-CITY IN MAAMOBI-ACCRA SINCE THE 1980s

Charles Prempeh[1]

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to analyse the cultural eating patterns and values, health beliefs, and nutritional practices and how Muslims review their dietary practices shape social relations in a Muslim inner-city of Maamobi, Accra-Ghana since the 1980s. I choose the 1980s as timeframe because the period marked the economic and political morasses in Ghana that came along with local and global religious resurgence. This necessitated the residents' incorporation of food for social cohesion and expression of we-feeling as coping strategies. The paper argues the function of food is because food is not just a substance that is eaten for its nutritional values, but a culturally nuanced substance that communicates deeply embedded socio-cultural and political issues. Thus, attention is paid to how men and women deploy food as a negotiating tool to formulate identity, destabilise unequal gender norms, press home their needs, and express conjugal love. More importantly, I explore how food serves as a means of forging religious ecumenism in a community that is increasingly becoming religiously plural. The paper also discusses the effect of globalisation in enhancing the mutability of food cultures in the Maamobi community. In all this, deploying the tools of ethnographic research techniques of in-depth interviews with residents in the community, my own immersion as a resident of the community for more than three decades, and cultural idioms of food pathways, the paper contributes to the growing literature on food cultures in Africa and across the world.

Keywords: Food culture, Muslims, Christianity, Maamobi, Family

[1] The author is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Cultural and African Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi–Ghana. He holds a PhD degree in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Cambridge, UK, since 2021. He also holds B.A. African Studies (First Class) and MPhil African Studies from the University of Cape Coast and the University of Ghana respectively. Prempeh has researched and published on various aspects of society in Ghana. His most recent publication is: Charles Prempeh Nima–Maamobi in Ghana's Postcolonial Development: Migration, Islam and Social Transformation (Bamenda/Cameroon: Langaa, 2022).

INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, food is important in establishing conviviality (Nyamnjoh, 2017). Conviviality emphasizes the incompleteness of the human person, which then demands socialised gregariousness and cooperation. In such communities, one was expected to invite one's neighbour when one gets a meal. This was so deeply emphasized that the Akan have a proverb that, 'If one alone eats food, one goes to the toilet alone.' The proverb implied that sharing food was coterminous to sharing the burdens of society. Since life's vicissitudes are real and could undermine the quest for a good life, one shares the burdens of life through the sharing of food.

At parties–usually naming ceremonies, "passing–out" (when one graduates from learning a trade/skill), and graduation ceremonies (when one finishes universities), one is not expected to attend with one's own prepared food. Food is supplied in abundance. Sometimes one may present a gift as a token of congratulating the new baby or new graduates, but one does not go to the party with one's own food. Going to a party and not eating is largely considered a mark of hostility. In Maamobi, it can be said that a party is equivalent to "come and eat and make merry." There is a joke that some people are always on the watch out foraging for social gatherings (including funerals) where food is in insufficient supply to be served. For funerals, one is served whether one was invited or not. Among the Ga of Accra, there is what is popularly referred to as Gbonyo party (merrymaking after a funeral) where food is served (Potocnik, 2017). This practice is shared among most of the southern cultures, including the Akan and Ewe people. The logic of serving food after a funeral is to spite death by saying life goes on even after death. It is also to assure the living that they cannot grieve forever, since in most of the southern cultures, death is not extinction but transition. More importantly, the bereaved families show their appreciation to those who have attended the funeral to commiserate with them through serving food (de Witte, 2003). Among the Kasena of North–East Ghana, during funerals, food is served to women who perform funerary rites for an old deceased person (Abasi, 1995). Muslims observe the same sharing of food during funerals as a form of friendship and condolences (Snodgrass, 2013).

Given the sociogenic role of food in human societies, the goal of this paper is to analyse the cultural eating patterns and values, health beliefs, and nutritional practices and how Muslims review their dietary practices in the Muslim inner–city of Maamobi. The paper assumes that food is particularly essential to establishing complex social ties, gender and religious relationships in the community. The centrality of food in the (re)construction of social ties is framed around the fact that food is not just a substance that is eaten for its nutritional values,

but a culturally nuanced substance that speaks deeply embedded socio-cultural and political issues. Thus, I focus on some common diets, meal patterns, special occasions, the role of food in society, and the therapeutic uses of food. The paper will also shed light on how the food culture of Maamobi is a microscopic reflection of major socio-cultural and political nuances of the community. Indeed, the growing population of the Maamobi community has increasingly become heterogeneous, moving toward a plurality of ethnic, religion, regional groups, social statuses, and political alliances. This implies that each group has a traditional food culture that differs slightly from the dominant foods in Zongo communities. But this notwithstanding, there are some common foods and cultures in Zongo communities that are shared by the heterogeneous ethnic and religious groups.

Anthropologists and sociologists have studied food as an important vector in understanding the social structure and political formation of a people (Osseo-Asare, 2005, 2002, Joseph, 1995). The importance of food is such that some individuals, including students, have used it to stage protest and dissent. At the Makerere University, the first strike of students was organised against the poor quality of food that the school administrators served students in 1952 (Byaruhanga, 2006). In c.1958, Ghanaian students at the University of Ghana also protested against the unequal sharing of eggs at the various dining halls.[2]In the 1950s at the Legon hall, students protested against going to church before taking their meal. This protest was framed around the mantra, 'no chop chop, no halleluiah.'[3]In the 1960s, some students protested against Kwame Nkrumah's (Ghana's first president) attempt at destroying university autonomy, as his party sought to subject the entire society under the control of the Convention People's Party ideological framework, using food as a metaphor. One student is reported to have said that, "We are fed 'Nkrumah' for breakfast, lunch and dinner, 'Nkrumah a la mode' is not tasty and lacks essential vitamins, but it is the only food we can get, even though it gives us indigestion" (Finlay, 1968: 59). Under the regime of Busia, university students protested against the monotony of free rice and chicken meal in 1971.[4] The tension was not just about food, but it was part of students' expression of disaffection with some of the policies of the Busia's government, such as the dismissal of 568 workers (Amenumey, 2018). In Burkina Faso, global crises such as food crisis resulted in intense local protests in the country in 2008 (Engels, 2015). In Samburu in northern Kenya and the Nuer of southern

---

[2] Canadian, American, and British students were entitled to twelve eggs per sitting during dining hours, whereas Ghanaian students were entitled to eight. This angered the Ghanaian students who protested. Nkrumah quickly intervened to ensure that Ghanaian students had an equal supply of eggs. This information was given to me by Prof. Nana Essilfie-Conduah on September 30, 2019.

[3]This information was given to me by Prof. Nana Essilfie-Conduah on September 30, 2019. 'Chop' is the popular Ghanaian word for 'eating'.

[4]Michael W. Kpessa, 'Students activism and Ghanaian politics in retrospect,' https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Students-Activism-and-Ghanaian-Politics-inRetrospect-120199, March 4, 2007; Accessed: September 28, 2019.

Sudan, people appropriated the lore of food to influence male 'political sphere' (Holtzman, 2002). It is increasingly becoming obvious that food is not just eaten for its nutritional value or keeping human beings from starving to death. Instead, food is now considered a significant marker of individual and group identity and an expression of the cultural language (material culture – food, clothes, buildings, and tools) and cultural grammar (immaterial culture – values, norms, and beliefs) of a people. Through the prism of food, it is possible to understand how the worldview of a people is embodied in stories and taboos that govern social ties. Intra and inter-ethnic relations, as well as avenues for dialogues, are formulated, using food as a mediator and metaphor.

Enid Schildkrout has observed that in a cosmopolitan environment like Zongo communities, made up of people with competing interests, carving a common front for mutual co-existence and interaction is usually a challenge (Schildkrout, 1970). The usual question in a heterogeneous society is how a 'stranger' could be made a 'friend'? How can one relate peacefully with another person with whom one does not share any kind of relationship, beyond common humanity and nationality? The idea of bonding disparate people was a bigger challenge as Ghana was emerging as a nation-state. The issue of uniting a group of people who had been superficially bonded under the colonial government became real to many African nationalists as they sought self-determination. This question preoccupied the minds of the cultural nationalists as well as the political nationalists.

In the Muslim inner-city of Maamobi, which, as indicated is culturally plural, food has become an important metaphor for ensuring community unity and a sense of collective belonging. While the common factor of marginalisation provides an important index for ensuring social cohesion, this paper argues that food culture -- expressed in sharing of food, trading in food items, sharing therapeutic values of foods, and observing common food taboos -- has become important pillars social ties in Maamobi. Food is deeply important in the social structure of Maamobi in the sense that the two main religions, Islam and Christianity, in the community have exclusive teachings that have the tendencies of jeopardising mutual co-existence. Both Islam and Christianity to a larger extent have an interest in religious proselytization. To convert, the proselytiser must disavow the religion of the potential convert. This is because, without the proselytiser challenging the truth claims of the religion of the potential convert, the conversion is not likely to take place. It is the premise of conversion that potentially imperils the Muslim-Christian social ties in Maamobi. While there are surreptitious tensions between Muslims and Christians in Ghana, which recently was expressed in the debate over the construction of the national cathedral and the refusal of some state institutions and schools to allow Muslim women to wear the veil, the culture of food in Maamobi has become a broker of peaceful co-existence between the

devotees of these religions.

Given that the paper focuses on food culture among Muslims (not necessary Islam), I also address how this food culture shapes Muslim-Christian relations in the community. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the study context and research methodology, conceptualising food and food culture, food and religious cooperation, food and individual and collective identity, food and therapeutic values, and the conclusion.

Study Context and Research Methodology

Maamobi is a migrant community that has been in existence since the 1950s. As a migrant community, it has residents from the various regions of Ghana, particularly the Northern Regions. The community has also attracted migrants from other West African countries, including Northern Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Niger, and Burkina Faso. After the end of the so-named World War II, some of the ex-servicemen were settled in the community. There are also Akan-speaking people from southern Ghana. While Maamobi is a Ga settlement, the community is generally made up of migrants. It continues to attract migrants from all over the country, particularly the Northern Regions. There are, therefore, people of Northern extract such as the Sisala, Gruni, Frafra, Dagari, Kasena, Builsa, and Busanga. There were also transnational migrants from neighbouring countries – Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso and Cote D'Ivoire. These include the Losso, Zabarima, Wangara, Fulani, Hausa, Kotokoli, Mossi, and Fulani.

Some male and female members of the community are engaged in urban farming, cultivating vegetables (lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, ayoyo, and onions) at Kawokudi (behind the Gold House building), Dzorwulu, Airport, Roman Ridge, and Cantonments. Irrigation of these urban farms is supplied by city streams and main drainage systems. The produce of these urban farms is sold to wayside food vendors in the community. Some are also consumed by the farmers themselves to reduce household expenditure on food.

The multicultural feature of Maamobi is expressed in the varieties of foods available in the community. Each ethnic group comes with their own peculiar foods. The Ga people have given the community 'Ga Kenkey', the Ewe have given the community Akple, the Akan have given the community fufu, and the Northern groups have given the community tubani, kwalulu, tuo zaafi, dafaduka, tuo shinkafa (rice balls), alele, and kunu. The market that serves as a confluence for all these foods, including those from neighbouring countries, is the Nima market. The Nima market (known as Kasoa Lariba – Wednesday Market) is also known in some quarters as the ECOWAS Market. The name suggests the multinational traders who travel from neighbouring countries to trade on Wednesdays. These traders,

usually women, bring their wares on Tuesdays and trade the following day.[5] Some return on Thursday or Friday after the Jama'a prayer (Friday congregational prayer) for those who are Muslims.

Food serves as a promising lens on life in Maamobi Zongo. Women usually prepare meals at home, whereas some men roast meat (popularly called "balango") in the community. The slaughtering of domestic animals for food preparation is also done by men. Eating culture is such that fathers usually eat alone, while mothers and the girl children also eat together. Boys are served to eat from the same bowl. Usually, ingredients for the food come from the market in the community or Nima, a neighbouring community. During the preparation of food, male children fetch water, while the female children assist their mothers to cook. Food sharing is also considered part of religious duty (I shall discuss this in detail in the subsequent section). Zongo foods are also unique from others because of the significant use of natural spices such as garlic, cayenne, allspice, curry, thyme, bay leaf, ginger, onion and negro pepper, African locust bean, and waakye leaves. The method of cooking some of the foods in Zongo, such as tubani is done through steaming, which keeps the nutrients from leaching out. The people of the Zongo also eat a lot of leafy vegetables (which is believed to have phytonutrients – considered very healthy). Given all this, Zongo foods are considered nutritious, healthy, and tasty.

Maamobi has a huge housing deficit with small spaces that would have qualified as toilet facilities and kitchens converted to bedrooms to accommodate people. Due to this process, most homes do not have kitchens where they could cook. The absence of kitchens in most homes, combined with the low-income status for most of the residents, has an implication for food culture. For example, many Muslims prepare basic beverages at home or buy kooko to eat breakfast. In the afternoon, most of them buy food from street vendors. It is usually in the evening that most homes cook.

The research is ethnographic, so I used the techniques of interviews and participant observation to gather data. As a non-Muslim resident of the Maamobi community since 1984, I understand the cultural nuances built around food and food cultures that shape social ties. But I developed an interest in writing about food culture in the community for the last two years. Since I conceived the idea of writing about food culture in the community, I paid particular attention to food-related values and practices that I had taken for granted. I also interviewed some residents of the community, including religious leaders, food vendors, market

[5]Given the similarity of climatic pattern in the West African sub-region, most of the traders from Burkina Faso, Togo, and Northern Nigeria bring beans, maize, okro, onions, tomatoes, yam. But Togolese traders usually bring agushi, dawadawa, red beans, and smoked cheese. The Hausa traders from Northern Nigeria also bring sobolo (hibiscus leafs), kanwa (saltpatre), and rice, while those from Burkina Faso bring groundnut and honey.

women, and domestic workers whose work is related to food to understand the complexities of food culture. I also visited street food vendors just to observe food-related cultures. Since my positionality as a resident of the community could impair the objectivity of the study, I applied the skills I had learned as a student of ethnographic research. While it is not always easy for one to empty oneself when studying one's culture, I tried to distance myself from the study to present a critical analysis of the data. Interviews were conducted in Twi and Hausa, the two most widely spoken languages in the community. As an Akan, I speak Twi with native competence and speak the Maamobi Hausa dialect with non-native competence. I analyse the data descriptively and analytically.

In this paper, I make a distinction between Islam and a Muslim. Islam is the religion that enjoins a total submission to the will of Allah. A Muslim, on the other hand, is a person who practices Islam by submitting his will to Allah. But I argue that while Islam provides the ideal for the Muslim to follow or mirror, a Muslim has his own subjectivity and cultural interjections that he brings to the religion. I use 'Muslim' to refer to the lived experiences of a person who practices Islam in Maamobi. So, Muslims in Maamobi may have cultural practices about food that are unrelated to Islam. They may also eat some foods and have food taboos that at face value may appear to be at odds with Islam. This nuanced identity that a Muslim has is because, in the global world, the Maamobi Muslim has multiple cultures about food that he/she incorporates into what Islam prescribes. Thus, while modernity was tipped to supplant all old stories about food, modernity through the mediation of technology has provided the Muslim in Maamobi with a portfolio of stories about food from which he can choose. The Muslims in Maamobi share the stories Islam has about food and the stories that other exotic cultures provide. In the end, the Muslims in Maamobi have a creative eclecticism about food.

Conceptualising Food and Food Future

Human beings rely on food for survival. It is axiomatic that without food human beings will cease to exist. Food is, therefore, described as the first of the essentials of life, the world's largest industry, and our most frequently indulged pleasures. As Warren Belasco has observed, this means food expresses creativity and diversity (Belasco, 2013). Anthropologists have argued that food is an important substance in mending human relations, including a cultic relationship with the spirits. Sidney Mintz and Christine Du Bois have observed that food is used to cement the sacred and to re-enact venerated stories (Mintz, 2002). Gillian Feeley-Harnik has rightly argued that, food helps clarify the ways people understand the sensory qualities of the words with which they are associated. She further noted that food and eating is central to ideas and practices of social reproduction existing

alongside – in counterpoint and competition – with an alternative based in other forms of sexual or nonsexual sharing or exchange, however, these may be understood (Feeley-Harnik, 1995). Feeley-Harnik made an important point that food is sacralized to consolidate the association humans have with supernatural beings (Ibid). Beyond the material world, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, writing about the Lord's Supper in Christianity, has observed that eating in a ritual context ensures interpersonal relationships (Feeley-Harnik, 1994). Mary Douglas provided an insightful analysis of how food communicates social relations. For example, she observed that drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen and family; while meals are for family, close friends, honoured guests (Douglas, 1972). In the same way, Audrey I. Richards observed that in some societies in Africa in the 1930s, food taboos shaped what people ate. For example, pregnant women must refuse to eat any animal with an unpleasant appearance for fear her child should be born resembling it (Richards, 2004). In Maamobi, especially among Muslims, food is not sacralised to mediate any human cultic relationship with the spirits. But there are some taboos about food that are observed.

All the above observations, highlight the importance of food that, some of which may not exist in the Maamobi community, since food cultures are dynamic. Be that as it may, the necessity of food in human life has led to the popular question, 'Do we eat to live or live to eat?' In Christianity, Christians are cautioned to avoid gluttony which tends to undermine God's work.[6] But this notwithstanding, it is clear that the Christian faith is not against food per se, as it is against gluttony. This implies that food is necessary for sustenance. Among the Akan, there is a proverb that, "You do not blow a trumpet on an empty stomach." Blowing a trumpet is a difficult task that requires a lot of energy. It is only through eating that one can garner the energy to blow the trumpet. In the same way, a popular saying in Maamobi is that "Abinchi (food) before pressure." Life is full of pressures and vicissitudes which could suffocate a human being. But one can survive the vicissitudes of life after one has eaten.

The dictionary defines food as a substance that people or animals eat or drink or that plants absorb to maintain life and growth. The dictionary definition of food emphasizes the nutritional value and the energy derived from food. Both nutrients and energy together maintain life. This feeds the proverb that, "If one feeds the vagina, one produces a new life, but if one feeds the mouth, one sustains life." Food as a sustainer of life is obvious to all human beings. But what one eats, when one eats, how one eats, and how one cultivates what one eats are all circumscribed by culture. There are particular and general beliefs that govern how food is used in any society. Different societies answer these

[6] The following texts counsel Christians on gluttony: Proverbs 23:31; 23:20-21; 28:7; Romans 13:14; 14:15-17.

questions differently. These indices complexify food as more than a substance that energises and maintains life. Food becomes a medium through which social relations are established and beliefs maintained and beliefs developed. Food is also more than nutrients. Pamela Kittler has rightly observed that humans use foods symbolically, due to relationships, association, or conventions (Kittler & Sucher, 2008).

Given the socio-religious function of food, Kittler, G. Pamela & Sucher, P. Kathryn conceptualised food culture as to how humans use food, including everything from how it is selected, obtained, and distributed to who prepares it, serves it, and eats it (Ibid). Food culture demonstrates the inherent human capacity to imagine and create meaning out of and into life. Given that food features prominently in human life, it holds that human beings would develop complex ideas that would position food as an important index in mending, solidifying, and helping people to cooperate well in society. Human beings have proclivities towards self-centeredness and conflict; they also tend to develop a hostile attitude towards 'strangers' and, finally, human beings need a shared common value to cohere peacefully in the same space. Historically, symbols and emblems have been used to achieve unity in a society. Sometimes basic things like newspapers have been used to achieve unity in nation-states (Anderson, 1991). But it is also true that food has served the sociological and political function of helping to run human societies. In a multicultural Maamobi, food is one substance that helps in ensuring mutual co-existence and interactions among people of disparate ethnic, political, and religious groups. But food culture also has a way of suppressing differences and imposing hegemonic norms on everyone. Those who deviate from food norms are singled out for stereotyping, marginalisation and sometimes physically attacked. For example, Muslims or Seventh-day Adventists who consume pork are simply profiled as having violated the beliefs of their respective religious food taboos.

Food and Religious Cooperation: The Symbol of Dafaduka

Food culture is an important gauge to understand how imagined social orders are created in human societies. It features prominently in the religious itinerary of many cultures. It is part of all rituals and ceremonies and has both sacred and profane dimensions (Fieldhouse, 2017). For instance, it has been observed that to allay the grief of death and bodily atrophy, mourners throughout history have supplied their dead with food and drink (Snodgrass, 2013).

Maamobi is a cosmopolitan community with different cultures and religions. The cultural and religious plurality in Maamobi has often thrown the community to the brink of conflict. For example, I observed that in 1998-1990s, there were skirmishes between Tijaniyya and Ahlu sunna Muslims in Accra and some parts of

southern Ghana (Mbillah, 1999). These conflicts were framed around differences in theological positions of some aspects of Islam, such as the veneration of the dead and chanting the name of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. There are also undercurrent tensions between Muslims and Christians in the community. Muslims have grievances including some state institutions and schools refusing to allow schoolgirls to wear veils, forcing Muslim students in public schools to attend church services, and Christian preaching on public conveyances. While on the side of Christian grievances, one could point to state sponsorship of the Hajj, the rhetoric around child marriage, and the effects of the campaign of fear associated with the global war on terror.

Sharing of food is one of the ways that trans-religious social ties are forged in Maamobi. In Maamobi, the sharing of food during social gatherings and religious festivals constitute an important basis for social interaction and mutual co-existence. Muslims and Christians have collaborated to clean the community and fight youth deviance based on food. For example, during religious festivals like Christmas and Easter for Christians, and *Id Fitr* and *Id Adhar* for Muslims, these religious groups share food among themselves.[7] In some households, Muslim men are requested to slaughter the fowls that Christians use to prepare meals during Christian festivals. The extension of an invitation to Muslims to slaughter animals to be cooked by Christians has become one of the important indices of bridging religious differences between the two religions.

During Islamic festivals, Muslims also share foods with Christians. The sharing of food feeds into the axioms of gifts giving. The French anthropologist, Marcel Mauss, observed that gift-giving is one of the key ways of lubricating social relations among pre-industrial people. Gift-giving follows three principles: there is the obligation to give a gift; there is the obligation to receive a gift, and there is an obligation to reciprocate a gift (Mauss, 2002). These logics of giftings imply that the failure to give, receive, and reciprocate gifts are indices of the extent of social cohesion in a society. When a Muslim gives a Christian a gift of food, the Christian is expected to accept it and vice versa. The refusal to give, receive and reciprocate a gift is considered a mark of hostility. In the 1990s, some members of some spiritual churches, specifically the Prince of Peace in Maamobi, were taught not to receive food from Muslims during the celebration of Islamic festivals.[8] The narrative was that these foods had been sacrificed to idols. But

[7]*Id Fitr* is the festival that of breaking 29 or 30 days of fasting and Id Adhar is an Islamic festival to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham. It is marked by the slaughtering and sharing of animals.

[8]These spiritual churches are also called African independent churches. They were established by African Christians for religious, social, and political reasons. For a discussion on AICs see: Allan Anderson (2001). African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century. Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc.

more recently, most of these Christians readily accept foods from Muslims during Islamic festivals.

There were some Muslims who also refused to eat foods prepared by Christians. In an interaction with a Muslim man, he said that, "Some of these Christian women are ritually unclean. They do not perform ablution."[9] Interestingly, there are also some Christians who feel that they cannot eat foods prepared by Muslim women since they do not properly wash their hands with soap after they have peed.[10] But these reservations are counteracted with some practices. For example, some female Christian food vendors use kettle (buta) when they visit the loo or pee. Other Muslim women also have visible soap at places where they sell to convince their Christian counterparts that they really wash their hands with soaps when they ease themselves. Christians also observe Muslim taboos such as not serving Muslims with pork. Throughout my stay in Maamobi, I have never seen a Christian food vendor who sells pork. In extreme cases where such foods are sold, they are kept out of immediate public view in order not to offend Muslims.

Food also features prominently in religious rituals. For example, as part of the ritual processing of seeking baraka (special favour), Muslim ritual experts (Mallams, known in Arabic as Mualim – teacher or scholar) prescribe the sharing of food to their clients. The commonest foods that are shared are massa and raw meat or roasted/fried meat.[11] Related to this is the practice of a female Muslim who for reasons like illness or pregnancy is unable to fast in the month of Ramadan is expected to share food with the poor and those who are unable to provide themselves food in the month of Ramadan. There is yet another practice of some people who voluntarily share foods to feed Muslims during Ramadan (foods to help them break the fast). These food sharing practices are ways of helping the privileged to identify and share what they have with the less endowed. Another related practice is sadaqa, where women share food freely with the poor in the community to attain a level of piety.[12]

One popular food that is common with Maamobi and other Zongo communities is dafaduka. Dafaduka is a Hausa term that means to cook them together. Dafaduka is a type of contemporary jollof rice. Its preparation involves the creative combination of tomatoes, pepper, onion, tin tomatoes, magi cube, salt, dried/salmon/tuna/meat, red oil/frytol, dawadawa. The measure of these

[9] Interview with Samudeen Mohammed on September 12, 2019.

[10] It is a ritual practice for Muslim women to wash their private part after they urinate or use the toilet.

[11] Massa is the most preferred food for rituals because it is believed to be one of the earliest common foodseaten by the people in Zongo communities. Personal conversation with Zubaida Salifu, one of the earliest settlersof Maamobi, on September 23, 2019.

[12] Sadaqa is giving freely to the poor without expecting anything in return from the benefactor in order to receive the blessings of Allah and also attain piety.

food ingredients is symbolic of how food can bridge the gap among people who are divided based on ethnicity, religion, and politics. Just as dafaduka can provide space for key food ingredients to mix to form a good meal, so is food generally able to restore peace when social relation is strained. For example, one practice that used to be common in the 1980s was for belligerent individuals to share food as a way of mediating and consolidating peacebuilding. In his paper on palaver sauce and juju, Professor Francis Nyamnjoh, of the Anthropology section at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, reflected on the capacity of palaver sauce to bring about peace as follows:

In a world where relations are sometimes conflictual, where human beings dispute and disagree every now and then, it pays to gather around a good meal from time to time to discuss, meditate, and resolve or iron out issues in the interest of sociality and shared humanity. Palaver sauce is a stew to encourage talking things over, easing tensions and forging consensus or agreeing on the way forward (Nyamnjoh, 2020: 29–30).

Food and the Creation of Fictive Families

The other form of food culture in Maamobi is eating food from the same bowl.[13] During social gatherings, particularly marriages, Muslim men and Christian men eat from the same bowl. Most importantly, during Islamic marriage, men tend to eat together from the same bowl. Christian men join Muslim men to eat from the same bowl during marriage ceremonies. A Muslim friend, Ibrahim Abdullah, shared his perspective on eating from the same bowl during marriages as follows:

> You know that Islam enjoins common brotherhood. When praying, we stand shoulder to shoulder. We observe the same rituals. We pray regular prayers at the same time. There is a sense of equality in religion. And so is eating from the same bowl. As we eat together from the same bowl, we affirm our Islamic brotherhood. And when we are joined by our Christian brothers, we express our common humanity in Abraham. Sometimes, people who are antagonistic to each other resolve their differences simply by eating together from the same bowl.[14]

In some cultures, eating from the same bowl creates a form of fictive family that enforces the ethics of families; mutual respect, defending one other's

[13] This food culture is also very common with male halls at the public universities in Ghana. At the Commonwealth hall (also known as Vandals) of the University of Ghana, it is common to see a group of four or five male hallers eating together from the same bowl. The same could be said of the University hall (also known as Katanga Hall) and Continental hall (also known as Unity hall) of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. At the Casely-Hayford hall of the University of Cape Coast (where I was a member), a cow that is used as a trophy for intra-hall football competition is slaughtered and used to prepare a meal for all members to eat together. This practice has a way of enforcing solidarity among the hall residents.

[14] Personal conversation with Ibrahim Abdullah on September 12, 2019.

interests, and building mutual trust. In Zongo, your brother is not just your biological brother, but also the one you share the same bowl with. The point of trust is important because eating from the same bowl is made possible if only trust is secured. This sense of being a brother' s keeper is partly fuelled by the sharing of meals and eating from the same bowl. Eating from the same bowl significantly makes 'strangers' brothers. Through food, group solidarity is established and new friends are made. While the introduction of disposable food packs appears to threaten the old practice of eating from the same bowl, the practice still persists in Maamobi. What has been added to the practice of eating from the same bowl is some people still go home with a pack of food.

The eating of food from the same bowl is not common with females. Usually, females who attend either Muslim or Christian marriage ceremonies tend to eat individually. The few occasions where females who attend Islamic marriage eat together is when they attend the social gathering as a group. Abiba, a resident of Maamobi, thinks that women tend to have a high view of themselves and that is why they hardly eat together until they know one another.[15] Through eating from the same bowl, identity is (re)constructed. For example, Zongo communities are known for the consumption of some foods, such as tuo zaafi, waakye, rice balls, kwalulu (Bambara beans), tubani (beans), allele, and dafaduka (these are also the core foods of the community). Not only are these foods considered essentially Zongo foods, but Zongo people are said to be the best cooks when it comes to these foods. There are also some foods for breakfast that are distinctively Zongo. These include Hausa kooko, kunu, kooko, daawa, akincha (in Chamba), koose, massa, agau, and pinkaso.[16] These foods are distinctively Zongo foods and persons who are noted for consumption and preparation are Zongo people. The extent to which Zongo people are identified with these foods is such that restaurants that serve these foods employ the service of Zongo women.

Food and Individual and Collective Identity

Persons who cook these foods are named as such. There is some form of teknonym where persons who are noted for cooking some foods lose their names to the name of the food. For example, there is one who has specialised in the preparation of kunu in the community. She is popularly called 'Mma Kunu' (Mama Kunu). Others are also identified for what they sell. Some are called Meikooko (kooko seller), meiwaakye (waakye seller), meigonda (pawpaw seller), and meikafa (seller of kafa). These teknonyms have deep social implications. For example,

[15] Personal conversation with Abiba Hamidu on September 23, 2019.

[16]These foods constitute the core foods of the residents of Maamobi. They are eaten on daily basis. The complementary foods are leafy vegetables. In the 1980s and 90s secondary foods in Zongo included perfumed rice. Soft drinks were also rarely consumed. There are also peripheral foods like dates that are widely eatenusually during the month of Ramadan. They are also common in the Northern regions of Ghana. Some of thefoods entered into Zongo from the Northern regions and Nigeria.

those known for cooking certain foods are contracted in the event of special events to cook. They also serve as the gatekeepers of keeping the traditional composition and quality of the food. They also help in easy identification. Names of some foods also ascribed ethnic identity. For example, groundnut is also known as Busanga tablet to refer to how the Busanga people are noted for their high consumption of groundnut. There is a joke song that, "Busanga man has died; he is to be put in a coffin, and he asked for groundnut. And groundnut was added to the coffin." The northerners in the community are noted for consuming tubani and kwalulu. The Fulani are noted for consuming cheese (wagashi). Butchers in the community are also identified as Muslims.[17]

Food also gives identity during the conversion of a person from one religion to the other. Conversion is generally the situation where one severs a relation with one religion to join another religion. In Zongo, when one converts to Islam, one is expected to avoid certain foods and beverages. For example, one must refrain from consuming pork and alcohol. One must also fast in the month of Ramadan. Some Muslims also fast on Mondays and Thursdays. Some non-Islamic taboos are associated with foods. For example, one does not have to turn slippers that are not in use upside down, since that can lead to food scarcity. One must not throw away or waste food since it is a mark of insensitivity to the person without food. One must not hit a male with a ladle, pestle, and wooden stick for preparing fufu, banku or tuo zaafi since that may lead to impotency. A Muslim man must also not share the same bowl with a non-kin female Muslim or non-Muslim. One must say bismillah before and alhamdulillah after eating.[18]

The observation of this food identity marks a collective association. Also, abiding by these food taboos is a daily affirmation of religious and cultural identity. At the transnational level, knowing that one observes the same food rules and rituals often at the same time in the case of calendar feasts, strengthens one's identity as a member of a faith community (Fieldhouse, 2017). In the same way, if one leaves Islam, one is likely to consume pork or alcohol if the new religion allows the consumption of these food items. The observation of food rituals and norms create the 'us' and 'them' society. When Muslims refrain from eating pork, it keeps them apart from most Christians who eat pork. In the same way, when Pentecostals refrain from alcohol, it sets them apart from the Jehovah's Witnesses who permit the consumption. When Adventists refrain from eating pork,

[17] Given the rituals that accompany the slaughtering of halal animals in Islam, most of the butchers in Maamobiare Muslims. In the few cases where non-Muslims work as butchers, they are supported by Muslims.

[18]*bismillah* is an Arabic word that means, "In the name of Allah." Given that it is the first word in the Qur'an andalso the Qur'an's opening phrase, Muslims say it to begin or open access to eating. Alhamdulilah is also an Arabicword that means "Praise be to Allah." A Muslim says that after eating to express gratitude to Allah for theprovision of food.

it keeps them separate from Jehovah's Witnesses who permit the consumption of alcohol. But it is also possible for all these groups to share commonly acceptable food, usually the core staple of their respective communities. We, therefore, see food creating a paradox that is resolved by the cultural norms built around food. In some cases, food is used to determine those who conform to the norms of religion.

Food also determines the social status of a person. For example, in some Muslim families when a fowl is slaughtered the thigh is given to one's father.[19] There is a special bowl reserved for only one's father. In the same breadth, during Islamic festivals, like Id Adhar, the bourgeoisies in the community slaughter cows as a show of their wealth, while the less endowed pool money to buy and slaughter a sheep. Eating from the same bowl was also a way of enforcing seniority and delineating juniors from seniors in terms of function. Usually, older siblings had control over the meat and fish. They had the burden of sharing the meat and young siblings must accept whatever portion is allotted to them. A younger person must always wash the bowls after they had shared a meal with an elderly person. In the same way, a younger person must not leave the dining table before the elderly person leaves. I have already discussed how the sharing of food and eating from the same bowl enforces collective identity and belonging. Some foods are related to games that enforce collective identity through the sharing of transmission of common values of civility. An example of such a game is kyem pe – share equally. Kyem pe is a Twi practice that finds its way into Maamobi. It involves a social contract in which two people decide to determine who is alert in life. If a contracting party catches one with food without one's awareness one is expected to share his food equally. When one who has food sees the other contract person first, one declares, 'no kyem pe' to show that one is in full control of his food and would not share. Kyem pe inculcates the spirit of we-feeling, caring, and watchfulness among children. More importantly, it shows the social status of one as either careful in life or callous.

Food and Therapeutic Values

It is said that Hippocrates, the western father of medicine, once advised that food should be used as medicine and medicine as food. It has been suggested that from "prehistory", culinary advice advocated flavourful foods that prevented and treated diseases (Snodgrass, 2013). In Maamobi, many factors affect people's health-seeking behaviours. Ghana's implementation of neoliberal policies, known generally as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s, which was mandated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, impacted

[19] In Maamobi a Muslim wife calls her husband maigida – the owner of the house. He is, therefore, accorded thatrespect by receiving the best of the meat.

negatively on the people of Zongo communities. The removal of the government's subsidies on social services like water, electricity, telephone and housing cost negatively affected the people of Zongo. The SAPs also led to a downsizing of the number of persons working in the civil and public services. This ultimately resulted in the laying off of thousands of workers, most of them unskilled and low-skilled personnel (Essaumah & Tonah, 2004). The removal of subsidies on health also shaped the health-seeking behaviours of the people in Zongo. Many residents in Zongo communities avoided going to hospitals and resorted to all kinds of self-medication (Ibid).

Given that the SAPs increased the impoverishment of most Zongo people, most residents of Maamobi resorted to other forms of medications. One of these was the appropriation of food. Some foods became prominent because of their perceived medicinal values. For example, pregnant women were encouraged to eat leafy foods like ayoyo, nunum (This is known as clove basil or African basil) kubewa (okro), shuaka, alefo, and shure. These leafy green vegetables were used to cook soup and were believed to give energy, ease labour pain, and when combined with palm nut soup, help in the expression and flow of breastmilk.[20] They also used leafy vegetables as accompaniment for starchy foods (Maundu, 2003). During pregnancy, women are expected to avoid drinking beverages like milo and other sugary foods. Zongo folkore has it that foods rich in sugar when eaten by pregnant women will cause the baby to grow fat, which will complicate delivery during labour. After delivery of her baby, she is to eat more green leafy foods and warm water mixed with tsimba. Groundnut soup, light soup, and any form of local soups also help in the production of breast milk. Light soup enhances the taste bud of the lactating mother, since after pregnancy she loses her appetite for food. She must consume more palm nut soup, since it is believed to help produce more breastmilk. Light soup (krakra/nkrakra) is also recommended for pregnant women as well as persons who are healing. Light soup (almost like pepper soup) is a creative mixture of pepper, tomatoes, onions, dried fish, and ginger. It is highly nutritious because peppers are rich in vitamins A, C and K, which help to prevent cell damage, cancer, and support immune function. Tomatoes are also rich in vitamin C, calories, protein, fibre, carbohydrate, and cholesterol. Onions are also believed to kill bacteria and viruses and purify the blood. Dried fish is a source of protein. Light soup, therefore, helps in the recuperating process of the sick person. Ginger, sometimes mixed with sugar, is believed to cure coughs of all types and relieve one of cold/flu. When one has diarrhoea, one is encouraged to eat bread (white bread) or drink a bottle of coke. Coke is said to contain carbonate that dehydrates the body. Also, white bread does not have fibre. Kola nut is also eaten to suppress thirst and hunger. It also keeps one alert.

[20] Leafy green vegetables are rich in vitamins, minerals and fibre and low in calories. It reduces obesity, heart disease, and high blood pressure.

CONCLUSION: Zongo Food and Globalisation

The population of the Maamobi community has increasingly become heterogeneous, resulting in a plurality of ethnic, religion, regional groups, social statuses, and political alliances. Each group has a traditional food culture that differs slightly from the dominant foods in Zongo communities. The differences in food cultures also give the community identity as multicultural. These foods coalesce to give Maamobi a unique identity. The goal of this paper has been to understand the cultural eating patterns, values, health beliefs, and nutrition practices and how Muslims review their dietary practices. I focused on some common dishes, meal patterns, special occasions, the role of food in society, and the therapeutic uses of food. I have also shown that food is very essential to ethnic, religious, and regional identity. The paper argues that the narratives and philosophies built around food and eating –mundane substance and practice– is emblematic of the human stupendous capacity to make sense of life. It also shows how food stirs the imaginative capacity of human beings to social construct and ascribe meaning to food to tease out social values and beliefs that guide human behaviours and conduct.

Given the ubiquity of food and its consumption is a conditio sine qua non for the existence of human beings, the discussion shows the ways food culture defines and shapes gender relations and forges social ties. In a community where the two monotheistic religions – Islam and Christianity – have the penchant of upsetting the religious Other, food is a good alibi in making the 'stranger' a 'brother'. It is also true that some of the beliefs and values framed around foods are recent (re)inventions.[21] They are invented to help contemporary residents of the community deal with challenges presented by globalisation. This is because globalisation provincializes some countries and marginalises others. Those who are marginalised by modernisation get disenchanted. And in Maamobi, one way of circumventing the negative effects of globalisation is to use food to persuade people to conform to the 'traditional' values. For example, the practice of sadaka is one way of reinventing "indigenous" social ethics to solve the problem of individualism and self-centeredness created by globalisation.

It is must also be mentioned that globalisation – defined as the integration of local, regional, and national phenomena into an unrestricted worldwide organisation – has affected food culture in Maamobi (Kittler & Sucher, 2008). The forces of globalisation, including social and electronic media, have made it possible for residents of Maamobi to have access to a variety of hitherto unknown food. For example, pizza is now widely consumed by most of the youth in the community. The presence of modern restaurants and fast food vendors

[21]For a full discussion of the invention of tradition, see: Terence Ranger & E.J. Hobbsawm, The invention of tradition. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1983).

has also increased the 'modernisation' of some Zongo foods like tuo zaafi. The serving of tuo zaafi at hospitality institutions like hotels has resulted in the commodification of the food. This is to the extent that most Zongo residents are hardly able to enjoy tuo zaafi served in hotels or high standard restaurants. In the same way, while apples have been consumed in Ghana for some years now, they were less consumed in Maamobi. But following the rapid transportation of foods across national boundaries, most of the residents of Maamobi now consume a lot of apples. A young lady on a date would prefer apples to oranges (even though oranges are equally nutritious and relatively cheap compared to apples).

It has been observed that globalisation threatens the quality of indigenous foods (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996). In the case of Maamobi, natural additives and spices, such as garlic, ginger, onion, dawadawa, kanafari, esuro wusa (masorodo), efom wusa (denyadi), tsimba (hwintia) and prekese are gradually losing out as traditional food ingredients to artificial ones like maggi cube and onga. The excessive use of artificial food spices may have health challenges. Many of the female youth I interviewed for the paper have also lost their traditional knowledge about the nutritious and therapeutic values of some traditional foods. The case of a vibrant young population that supports the import of beer, canned goods, fruits, ice cream, pastry, potato chips, powdered milk, sauces and seasonings, and wine, imperils the chances of local consumable drinks like 'Hausa beer' from surviving for long (Snodgrass, 2013). Certainly, foods crisscrossing national boundaries have been axiomatic in human history. For example, Portuguese traders imported cassava and maize to Ghana, Benin, and the Gambia around 1550 (Ibid, 25). But that perhaps did not result in the displacement of foods that were native to the people of these West African countries. The mediation of social media has made it possible for residents of Zongo to add new narratives to traditional foods. Climate change is also making it increasingly difficult for urban farmers in Maamobi to provide complementary foods from urban farming.

In summation, food culture is part of the attempts of residents of Maamobi to enhance relations in the public sphere. The values of the public sphere must be humane to nurture interactions. It is through food that this is achieved. The quest for unity and political order also gives significance to food culture in the community.

REFERENCES

Abasi, K. A. (1995). Lua-Lia, the 'fresh funeral': founding a house for the deceased among the Kasena of North-East Ghana. *Journal of International African Institute, 65*(3), 448-475.

Amenumey, D.E.K. (2018). *Ghana: A concise pre-colonial times to the 20th century*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.

Anderson, A. (2001). *African Reformation: African initiated Christianity in the 20th century*. Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

Belasco, W. (2013). *Food, future of: a history.* In Katz, H. S. (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Food and Culture, 676-678. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Byaruhanga, K. F. (2006). *Student power in Africa's higher education: A case of Makerere University*. New York/London: Routledge.

Clark, G. (2014). *From fasting to fast food in Kumasi*, Ghana. In Jakob, B. K. & Murcott, A. (Eds.). Food consumption in global perspective, 45-64. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

de Witte, M. (2003). Money and death: funeral business in Asante, Ghana. *Africa, 73*(4), 531-559.

Douglas, M. (1972). Deciphering a meal. *Daedalus, 101*(1), 61-81.

Engels, B. (2015). Contentious politics of scale: the global food price crisis and local protest in Burkina. *Social Movement Studies, 14*(2), 180-194.

Essaumah, M. & Tonah, S. (2004). Coping with urban poverty in Ghana: an analysis of household and individual livelihood strategies in Nima/Accra. *Legon Journal of Sociology 1*(2), 85.

Feeley-Harnik, G. (1994). *The Lord's table: the meaning of food in early Judaism and Christianity* (Second Edition). Washington, DC: Smithson Institute.

Feeley-Harnik, G. (1995). Religion and food: an anthropological perspective. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 63*(3), 565-582.

Fieldhouse, P. (2017. *Food, feasts, and faith: an encyclopedia of food culture in world religions*. California: ABC-CLIO, LLC.

Finlay, J. D. (1968). Students and politics in Ghana. *Daedalus, 97*(1), 51–69

Gramsci, A. (1995). *Antonio Gramsci: further selections from the prison notebooks* (edited and translated by D. Boothman). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Holtzman, J. (2002). Politics and gastropolitics: gender and the power of food in two African Pastoralist societies. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 8*(2), 259–278.

Jordac, G. (2014). *The voice of human justice (Sauta'l Adalati'l Insaniya) (Trans. M. Fazal Haq)*. Sweden: Meraj Educational Publishers.

Joseph, A. B. (1995). 'We got our way of cooking things': women, food, and preservation of cultural identity among the Gullah,' *Gender and Society, 9*(5), 535–555.

Kittler, G. P. & Kathryn P. Sucher, P. K. (2008). *Food and Culture* (Fifth Edition). California: Thomson Wadsworth.

Kittler, G. P. & Sucher, K. P. (2008). Food and Culture (Fifth Edition). California: Thomson Wadsworth.

Kuhnlein, V. H. & Receveur, O. (1996). Dietary change and traditional food systems of indigenous people. *Annu. Rev. Nutr. 16*, 417–442.

Maundu, M.P. (2003). *East Africa. In Katz, H.S. (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, 27–34. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Mauss, M. (2002). The gift: the form and reason for exchange in archaic societies. London: Routledge.

Mbillah, J. A. (1999). *The causes of present day Muslim unrest in Ghana*. Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham.

Mintz, W. S. & Du Bois, M. C. (2002). The anthropology of food and eating. Annu. Rev. *Anthropol, 31*, 99–119.

Nyamnjoh, B. F. (2017). Incompleteness: frontier Africa and the currency of conviviality. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 52*(3), 253–270.

Nyamnjoh, B. F. (2020). I*taru Ohta: The palaver sauce and juju of the African potential network*. In Ofosu-Kusi, Y, & Matsuda, M. (Eds.), The challenge of African potentials: conviviality, informality and futurity, 27–41. Bamenda: Langaa

RPCIG.

Osseo-Asare, F. (2002). 'We eat first with our eyes': on Ghanaian cuisine. *Gastronomica 2*(1), 49-57.

Osseo-Asare, F. (2005). Food culture in sub-Saharan Africa. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

Potocnik, M. (2017). *A history of death and funeral rites: a case of the Ga in Jamestown (Ghana)*. M.Phil diss., University of Ghana.

Ranger, T. & Hobbsawm, E. T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge.

Richards, I.A. (2004/1932). Hunger and work in a savage tribe. London: Routledge.

Schildkrout, E. (1970). *Government and chiefs in Kumasi Zongo*. In Crowther, M. & Obaro, I. (Eds.), West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence, 370-392. Ile-Ife: University of Ile-Ife.

Snodgrass, E. M. (2013). W*orld Food: an encyclopedia of history, culture, and social influence from hunter-gatherers to the age of globalization*. New York: Sharpe Reference.

William-Forson, P. (2013). *More than just the 'Big piece of chicken': the power of race, class, and food in American consciousness*. In Counihan, C. & Eseterik, P. V. (Eds), Food and Culture: A Reader (3rd Edition), 107-118. New York/London: Routledge.