

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF AFRICAN
TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS FOOD ETHICS IN THE TRADITIONAL
FOOD PRACTICES OF LARTEH, GHANA.

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BY

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Thesis submitted to the Department of Religion and Human Values of the Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy degree in Religion and Human Values.

JUNE, 2014

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Name: Alexander Hackman-Aidoo

Candidate's Signature: Date:

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

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ABSTRACT

Several works have explored the relationship between religion and food. Such works posit that the two are undeniably close (Meyer-Rochow, 2009; Norman, 2003). Inferring from Eastern Buddhist and Christian monastic traditions, one observes the significant roles these religious centres played in maintaining the traditional foods of a people. The preservation of such foods was possible because they were often associated with religious rituals and ceremonies. In much the same way, we can ascribe similar roles to indigenous African shrines. Thus, using an interpretive paradigm mainly through observation and interaction, this study set out to investigate the role indigenous Ghanaian shrines are playing in maintaining the traditional foods of a group, using the people of Larteh in Ghana and the Akonedi shrine as the basis. The study pointed out that there is a strong affinity between religion and food and that unknown to many, the Akonedi shrine has preserved the traditions associated with food habits in Larteh because of their close connections with religious ceremonies. The study, however, also found that religion, as dysfunctional as it could be sometimes, has also contributed to the loss of some traditional foods such as aprapransa, apiti and others because they are associated with witchcraft. In view of this, it is recommended that Ghana could consider following the example of India where the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) continues to push for indigenous foods. Besides, the study recommends that traditional religious leaders need to strengthen religious institutions particularly those associated with traditional foods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present state of this thesis comes from the support of many people who deserve mention. I am, first of all, grateful to my supervisors, Rev. Prof. Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh and Mr. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid for their invaluable contributions and suggestions which have resulted in the successful completion of this thesis. For Mr. Hamid, I still remember that you initiated this process. Nonetheless, I am also indebted to my friend, father, brother, mentor and boss, Rev. Dr. Simon Kofi Appiah under whom I have worked as a Senior Research Assistant. ‘Prof.’ your useful comments, suggestions, contributions and tutelage has resulted in the current state of this work. You did not just show me the way; you practically taught me the scientific way of writing.

Many thanks to the Chief of Larteh Kubease, Nana Kwatei Agyemfra II, the Osofo of the Akonedi shrine, Okomfo Tano, Okomfo Kyao, C5, Evans and my chief informant, Otu Dankwa, for the invaluable information and warm reception they gave me throughout my research. My sincere thanks to Mr. I. Wilson Parry in whose house I stayed in Larteh for my studies. Throughout the period, you fed me and led me to the individuals I could talk to. God bless you.

I am thankful to Dr. Yaw Sarkodie Agyemang (Wofa Yaw), Head of the Department of Religion and Human Values, University of Cape Coast for his encouragement. I owe Rev. Prof. E. B. Anum many thanks for the confidence he showed in me as a student and encouraged me to work hard. I am also grateful to Ms. Joyce Buruwaa Mensah who bought me a laptop computer when I started postgraduate studies and Ms. Naana Essien who

willingly offered me her laptop to use when my own got stolen. My heart also goes out to Ms. Resi Bokmeier in Stuttgart, Germany, who consistently sent me emails to find out the progress of work.

My heartfelt thanks go to all my post-graduate colleagues including Mr. George Anderson Jnr, Jude Cudjoe Tsikata, Rev. Fr. David Obeng Paintsil and Ms. Linda Adu. I enjoyed studying with you. Mr. Mohammed Abubakar Abdul Moomeen and Ms. Mercy Adzo Klugah, who both read earlier drafts of this work and provided useful comments to improve it, deserve a word of thanks for their time. Thank you very much Mr. Nicholas Parry; you left your own studies in University of Ghana just to be with me in Larteh.

DEDICATION

To:

The late Joseph Acquah Hackman

Rev. Dr. Simon Kofi Appiah

Mrs. Lucy Afriyie Danquah

Abena Anane

Ms. Joyce Buruwa Mensah

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Content	Page
DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
DEDICATION	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF PLATES	xi
GLOSSARY	xii
CHAPTER	
ONE GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
Background to the Study	1
Statement of the problem	3
Theoretical framework	4
Conceptual Clarifications	5
Food, Ethics and Taboo	5
Purpose of the Study	11
Objectives of the Study	12
Research Questions	12
Significance of the Study	13
Methodology	13
Research Instruments	14
Research Population	15
Sampling Procedure	16

	Data Analysis Procedure	16
	Review of Relevant Literature	17
	Anthropological Perspectives of Food	17
	Sociological Perspectives of Food	22
	Religion and Food Practices	30
	Delimitation	33
	Ethical Considerations	33
	Organization of the Study	34
TWO	SITUATING THE STUDY	36
	Introduction	36
	Geographical Location of Larteh	37
	Profile of Larteh	39
	Larteh Social Structure	46
	Larteh Political System	49
	Larteh Indigenous Religion and Colonial Experiences	51
	The Akonedi Shrine	53
THREE	SOME CLASSICAL MODELS OF RELIGION AND FOOD PRACTICES IN THE LIGHT OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION	61
	Introduction	61
	Food Habits in Ancient Greece	62
	Food Conduct During the Roman Period	65
	Food Discourse in Medieval Christianity	68
	Contemporary Food Discourse	70
	Indigenous Religious Food Practices	73

FOUR	PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS	79
	Introduction	79
	Data Production Procedure	80
	Discussion	96
	Conclusion	116
FIVE	SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	118
	Summary of the Study	118
	Methodology	122
	Findings	123
	Conclusion	126
	Recommendations	127
	REFERENCES	130
	APPENDICES	
	A Interview Outline	148
	B Introductory Letter	150
	C Fieldwork Transcript Sample	151

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Fieldwork Activities	81
2	Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	83
3	Shrine Functionary	83
4	Non-Shrine Functionary	83
5	Knowledge of Indigenous Larteh Foods Among The People	85
6	Popularity of Indigenous Larteh Foods in Present Times	87
7	Religious Regulations Covering Larteh Food Habits	89
8	Ethical Implications of Larteh Food Habits	92

LIST OF PLATES

Plate		Page
1	A Group Photograph Showing Some Shrine Functionaries	57
2	Map of Akuapem North District	58
3	Pictographic Bowl of the History of Food and Morality Relations	76
4	Inspection of Ingredients For the Preparation of <i>Pinpineso</i>	104
5	Ingredients For the Preparation of <i>Pinpineso</i>	106
6	Preparation Stages of the <i>Pinpineso</i>	107
7	Joyous Moments of the <i>Ohum</i> Festival	108

GLOSSARY

This portion of the study provides a list and a description of unfamiliar terms which were used in the thesis.

Term	Description
<i>Adadi</i>	Singular term for <i>ndadi</i> . It refers to the head of a <i>brong</i> .
<i>Adumfo</i>	Traditional executioners.
<i>Adwen</i>	Tilapia fish.
<i>Akoned</i>	It is the major god of religious influence in Larteh.
<i>Ampesi</i>	A popular traditional dish in which yam or plantain, cocoyam, cassava, or a mixture of these is boiled and served with garden eggs stew, gravy, or kontomire stew.
<i>Apiti</i>	This is an indigenous steamed cake which is made from over-ripe plantain. It is prepared by first pounding the over-ripe plantain and mixing it with spices such as pepper, ginger, onions and flour.
<i>Aprapransa</i>	Aprapransa is a traditional Ghanaian meal/dish made with fresh or left over palm nut soup and roasted corn flour.
<i>Akyeame</i>	Linguists/ spokespersons.
<i>Akyeremadefo</i>	Traditional drummers

<i>Awu onomu</i>	House leader.
<i>Baamuhene</i>	Custodian of royal mausoleum
<i>Bobo</i>	Traditional lantern
<i>Eba</i>	Also known as <i>pinpineso</i> , <i>eba</i> is the Larteh traditional meal made from roasted corn flour.
<i>Egyitase</i>	A combination of three or four brongs
<i>Fufu</i>	A traditional meal popular in Ghana and some other West African countries. It is made from either cassava, yam or cocoyam. It is usually a combination of plantain with any of the above named foods.
<i>Kenkey</i>	A meal made from fermented corn dough by boiling balls of fermented cooked corn meal and raw corn dough which are wrapped in corn husk. There are basically two types; Ga kenkey and Fante kenkey. Whereas the Ga kenkey is wrapped with corn husk, the Fante kenkey is wrapped with dry plantain leaves. However, the method of preparation are almost the same.
<i>Konkonte</i>	This is also a common Ghanaian dish made from dried and pounded cassava complemented with either groundnut soup or palm nuts soup. It is popularly known among Ghanaians as ‘face the wall’ although among the Akan groups it assumes names like <i>abitie</i> or <i>lapewa</i> .

<i>Kontomire</i>	Cocoyam leaf which is used for the preparation of several Ghanaian dishes.
<i>Kube</i>	Coconut
<i>Kyao</i>	One of the principal gods of Larteh.
<i>Kyebomu</i>	Egg fried in multiples and eaten with a slice of bread.
<i>Mkpeni ese</i>	An expression which described the first place of settlement for people of Larteh Ahenease in present day Larteh society.
<i>Mkpeni mkpowura</i>	The stool name of the first leader of Larteh Ahenease.
<i>Ndade</i>	Plural form of the title <i>adadi</i> . See explanation above.
<i>Nkoguasafohene</i>	Head (Chief) of the custodians of the stools.
<i>Odwira</i>	A major traditional festival of the Akuapem state including Akropong and Larteh and other communities also.
<i>Ofam</i>	This is similar to <i>apiti</i> . Unlike the <i>apiti</i> , <i>ofam</i> is baked.
<i>Ohum</i>	The traditional festival of the people of Larteh
<i>Okomfo</i>	Akan word for a traditional religious priest
<i>Osofo</i>	A leader/assistant in the Akonedi shrine who interprets what the priestess says when she falls into trance.
<i>Oto</i>	Mashed yam mixed with pepper and red oil and

	usually eaten with a boiled egg
<i>Otutu</i>	Another god of Larteh
<i>Oyidan</i>	A traditional love feast which usually takes place after the burial of a family member.
<i>Pinpineso</i>	The main traditional dish eaten during the Ohum festival
<i>Sanaahene</i>	Traditional treasurer.
<i>Tatale</i>	Same as <i>ofam</i> except that this is fried.
<i>Trotro</i>	This is a form of public transport in Ghana involving mostly mini buses which do inter-town or inter-city kind of transportation. Many these trotros travel fixed routes and relatively cheaper to travel with.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“No other fundamental aspect of our behaviour as species except sexuality is so encumbered by *ideas* as eating; the entanglements of food with religion, with both belief and sociality, are particularly striking”.

Sidney W. Mintz (as cited in Logue 2004, p. 87)

Background to the study

In many cultures, there is clear relationship between religion and food practices. Food plays a ritual role in all of the world’s religions (Norman, 2003). Religious centres served as preserve of certain foods. Examples of such religious preservation and control of food practices abound in the history of the Buddhist and Christian monastic traditions respectively. Certain food practices were preserved at such centres because they were often associated with religious rituals or ceremonies. Monks had specific food items to depend on and they preserved certain traditions associated with eating. They also maintained the cultivation of the foodstuff that constituted the main stay of the people; Christian monasteries in Europe kept particular herbs, grew olives and grapes and had some of the best wineries (Jotischky, 2011). Such religious institutions also kept rules that governed what was to be eaten at a given time of the year, how much of it and sometimes even the manner of preparation.

The example of Christian monasteries is revealing. They ate fish on Fridays, and measured the quantity of sugar one may add to sweeten foods in the season of Lent.

One may not lightly compare indigenous African shrines to monasteries, but they would seem to share some similar characteristics. The indigenous African religion like any traditional religion espouses ethical values on diet. These indigenous food practices were held in high esteem, since food in the traditional community was an avenue for deepening a sense of togetherness. This act of food sharing was often associated with religious celebrations. For example, during traditional festivals specific foods were prepared. Specific individuals under specific conditions prepared such foods. A case in point is the preparation of *oto* or yam *fufu* during the Odwira festival. On many occasions, the ingredients used in the preparation were carefully selected to achieve a specific purpose. Indigenous food served religious as well as health purposes. Sick people had specific food items to consume and such foods were believed to add to efforts at restoring one's health to normal. Examples of indigenous foods vary according to ethnic group and geographical area. Some Guans may focus on yam products, complemented with vegetables, while other sub-Guan peoples may focus on 'red rice' or 'plantain' among others.

Today, the streets of Ghana are dotted with 'fast food' joints where 'foreign' foods such as fried rice and instant noodles are sold. There are speculations that such foods lack nutritional value and are therefore responsible for the spate of diseases such as hypertension, and diabetes, among others. The study of religions and religious ethics provide great

opportunity for documenting knowledge of traditional food practices as enshrined in traditional religious food ethics. Between the traditional and contemporary dietary systems is a gulf that could be filled through systematic inter-disciplinary research. This study adopts the religious studies approach since human culture, to a great extent, can be properly understood through a full appreciation of religion. For example, regarding traditional food practices, religious institutions are most likely to succeed in preserving the purity of food traditions of particular peoples and their religion. Such institutions would also preserve the ideas, beliefs as well as the philosophy that maintained particular dietary systems among the people. In understanding the religious ideas underlying traditional food habits, one is likely to generate a dialogue between the past and the present more successfully.

My motivation for studying indigenous food practices stems from the fact that many people are today concerned about diet and health, and are wondering what role religion can play in reverting people to healthy lifestyles. Besides, many wonder whether or not there are lessons to be learnt from indigenous African food ethics.

Statement of the problem

There is a popular belief in several sectors of the Ghanaian population about the tremendous changes taking place in connection with food practices and values. Many people think that such changes have had more negative than positive consequences on traditional Ghanaian food practices, which are believed to be more wholesome to health and food-culture, than contemporary food practices. In contrast to traditional food practices, many Ghanaians today

may eat whatever they want, wherever and at whatever time they deem fit. Particular Ghanaian indigenous foods are almost extinct or are no more considered fashionable. There are few or no food taboos being observed in different places in Ghana. Given the close connection between religious traditions, food practices and values, the question arises as to the lessons that can be learned from the ways in which Ghanaian traditional religion regulated the food heritage of various groups and the extent to which we can ascribe a positive influence to religion in reshaping negative food habits in Ghana. This study investigates the role of religion in keeping important values in the traditional food practices of a people using Larteh as the basis. This is because many people are today concerned about food and health and wondering what role religion can play in reverting people to a healthy lifestyle. Granted that we can ascribe some positive influence to religion, is it also the case that the present situation allows religion to regulate food habits? In effect, this study explores the role of religion as an agent of preservation of indigenous food values.

Theoretical framework

Food ethics has been approached from different perspectives. The predominant body of literature tends towards vegetarianism (Maurer, 2002), food and health, food habits and environmental protection, preservation of species (McDonald, 1977; Begossi, 1992; Patnaik, 2007), food symbolism (Bynum, 1987), food as an art and food in relation to religious beliefs (Meyer-Rochow, 2009; Coveney, 2006; Snyder (1999)). This study posits that there is a strong relation between religion and food, and is therefore more closely related

to theories that deal with food in relation to religious beliefs. There is some evidence that religion usually plays an important role in preserving the food values and practices of a people. The reasons adduced for some food practices may change over time, but critical historical surveys usually reveal the original religious roots of some of the rules governing a people's food habits. The literature review elaborates on this theory and the historical evidence between them.

Conceptual Clarifications

Studies related to food often tend to discuss permissibility or non-permissibility of eating properly designated as 'food taboos'. To eliminate possible cases of ambiguity, it is imperative to clarify key terms associated with the subject of food in order to put the current study within certain boundaries. In view of this, this portion of the study takes into account conceptual ideas regarding food, ethics and taboos.

Food, Ethics and Taboo

Taboo as a concept is not easily reducible as modern interpretations suggest (Freud, 1950; Steiner, 1956). Contemporary understanding of the term implies two contradictory views. On one hand it refers to that which is 'sacred' or 'consecrated' (Steiner, 1956). On the other hand, it points to something 'forbidden' or 'dangerous' (Freud, p. 21). In a sense, taboo refers to prohibitions regarding objects or persons. The term is of Polynesian origin and was first used by Captain Cook after his third voyage around the world (Steiner, p. 23; Allan & Burrige, 2006). Cook described the Islanders of Atui

as people who acted cautiously. For this group, obedience was more important than seeking explanations to things. Thus, the term taboo was not “conspicuous in its use” and that the people lived it rather than explained it (Steiner, 1956, p. 23). The most common etymology of the term is ‘*tabu*’ which means “unlawful and/or sacred” which implies that ‘*taboo*’ is an Anglicized form of the word ‘*tabu*’.

Modern usage of the term presents a concept with religious underpinnings. However, Freud thinks that religious interpretation of the concept is an external imposition and a later addition to the concept. According to him, taboos as used by the Polynesians, had no basis in divine sanction. Freud seems to share similar thoughts with scholars like Wundt (1906) who argues that taboos predate religion. For Steiner the term taboo is not easily reducible as to connote two meanings. He claims that there are no Polynesian words, which mean ‘holy’ as modern usage of the term connotes. Thus he states, ‘the distinction between prohibition and sacredness cannot be expressed in Polynesian terms...taboo is single,...not undifferentiated concept’ (Steiner, 1956, p. 34).

Mead (1937) and Steiner (1950) argue that punishment for the violation of a taboo was intrinsic and automatic without any external mediation. Thus, the punishment was inherent in the violated taboo. It was later when the idea of gods and spirits emerged that penalty for violating a taboo assumed a divine nature (see also Freud, 1950). This brief conceptual explanation of the term taboo points to the fact that the concept is difficult to reduce into comprehensible forms. Out of this conceptual challenge emerges

the question, how appropriate is the term 'food taboo? The subsequent paragraph, however, attempts to answer this question.

Food, in the minimal sense, may refer to any edible substance, either liquid or solid, which when consumed is expected to enhance growth and not cause harm to the body (Ezard, 1980). It is the raw material of labour (Crawley, 1994). According to Bascom (1970) there are three main uses of food in all cultures. These are subsistence, trade and prestige. Food forms part of cultural tradition. Its role in human life is paramount. It is a source for pleasure, comfort and security. In some societies, it is a symbol of hospitality, social status, and religious significance. Human food habits regarding what to eat, how to prepare it, how to serve it, and even how to consume it have a bearing on specific group culture (Ayeomoni, 2011). Thus, food habit is strictly a culture specific concept, as what may be eaten in one community may be abhorred by another (Hartog, 2003). The implication is that people who have the same cultural identity share the same food habits, while people of different cultures share different food habits (Chang as cited in Ayeomoni, 2011).

Elsewhere and depending on scholars like Freud (1950), Steiner (1956) and Mead (1937), it has been argued that it is difficult to think of a term as connoting meanings of what are nearly two extremes. In view of this argument, the term "food taboo" would seem to be too ambiguous a term to employ in this study. Besides, if one were to provide a working definition of 'food taboo', one could think of a concept which spells out inedibility of a particular food because of its harmful and sacred nature. Indeed, for many scholars, prohibition may arise as a result of the danger a particular food may

pose to health. However, studies have also shown that the cow is tabooed for consumption in the Indian society not because it is harmful but because it is considered a sacred animal (Harris, 1977). Inferring from the above argument, one observes that it is not always the case that food is tabooed because of its harmful nature but also because of its sacred nature. Nevertheless, what is even more confusing is that in some societies, motivation for consuming a certain food is also because it is sacred as for example milk and milk products in India (Meyer-Rochow, 2009; Patnaik, 2007). Even though aspects of Larteh food habits reflect portions of these concepts, they are only important for the ideas governing food conduct in Larteh. Besides, the primary focus of this research is to find out how religious ideas have served to preserve the traditional foods of a group of people. In essence, the current study extends beyond simply drawing a distinction between edibility and inedibility of food substances to treat the social and religious implications of food. For consistency and clarity, this study adopts the concept ‘food ethics’ as an umbrella term for describing and interpreting the guiding principles associated with traditional foods in Larteh generally. This clarification is necessary because of the extensive use of the term in the main thesis. Nonetheless, the justification for its adoption will be considered in the paragraphs that follow immediately after this.

The term ethics has several interpretations. Many scholars accept as adequate the definitions that refer to the term as a set of standards of right or wrong conduct put forward by a group and imposed on all members (Boss, 2008; Moore, 1993). This set of principles outlines the limits to human behaviour. It is coined from the Greek *ethos* which means ‘cultural custom or

habit' (Boss, p. 5). Many scholars often equate ethics to the term morality, an English rendition of the Latin *moralis*, which also means 'custom'. Nonetheless, some scholars make a distinction of the two. For example, Appiah (2000) argues that whereas ethics deals with the study of a set of principles of behaviour, morality concerns itself with actual execution of those principles. For him, morality is simply ethics in practice. For the purposes of convenience, the current study identifies itself with the other side of the divide that sees both terms as referring to the same phenomenon – cultural norms or customs. But it is important to stress that ethics extends beyond the concept of rightness or wrongness of conduct to include the study of values and guidelines underlying behavior (Boss, 2008). Thus, it is a way of life, which involves active engagement in the pursuit of a life consistent with a set of moral values (Boss, 2008). Appiah (2000) summarizes these ideas in his definition when he states that ethics is “a systematic analysis of a people’s way of life, regarding the desire to do the good and the retraction from evil through the use of scientific principles”. This implies that every culture has a pattern of life acquired from years of experience mainly through experimentation and selection. Thus, while acknowledging that several interpretations exist (see for example Gofton, 1996), the term ‘food ethics’ is used loosely in this study to refer to the guiding principles underlying food and food habits in Larteh society. In this way the study shifts focus from merely drawing a distinction between forbidden and permitted food in a given society.

The influence food has on morality is inescapable. Indeed, there is a relationship between food and morality. The preparation of food, its distribution, and consumption endorse social and moral as well as beliefs and values of a society. Mealtimes are avenues for the socialization of persons into competent and appropriate members of a society. This is because these times ensure the production of sociality, morality, and local understandings of one's environment (Ochs & Shoet, 2006). This implies that, food habits create self-consciousness among humans. Leon Kass puts it this way:

We human beings delight in beauty and order... sociability and friendship... song and worship. And, as self-conscious beings, we especially crave self-understanding and knowledge of our place in the larger whole... The meal taken at table is the cultural form that enables us to respond simultaneously to all the dominant features of our world... (Kass as cited in Neely, 2007).

Kass' argument points to the fact that food discourse hover around issues of morality and social relations. Nonetheless, since this study treats 'traditional foods' (used interchangeably with the term 'indigenous foods'), it must also be stressed that the term is used here in the sense that Kuhnlein and Receveur (1996) use it. According to these authors, traditional food(s) refer to 'all food within indigenous cultures available from local natural resources and culturally accepted. It also includes the socio-cultural meanings, acquisition/processing techniques, use, composition, and nutritional consequences for the people using the food' (Kuhnlein & Receveur, p. 418)

Purpose of the Study

Many suspect that an attempt to discuss values is an attempt to impose values on others. This view, as indicated by Joas (2000) is popular among some liberal and postmodern critics. This study did not attempt to make a certain food value system obligatory. Rather it sought to study the values associated with Larteh indigenous food practices and the role of the Akonedi shrine in preserving their food ethics and the possible lessons that we can learn.

Indeed the social sciences and philosophy have fed the public with the analysis and issues of the change in and loss of values. Unfortunately such disciplines have not offered practical and permanent ways of dealing with the consequences of the change in or loss of values. Thus, social science and philosophy have created a vacuum for other disciplines to fill in the attempt to salvage what is left of traditional values associated with food. One of such disciplines is the study of religion. An area, which generates worry among many today is indigenous food ethics. This research examined the role of indigenous religion in preserving traditional food practices and the relationship between food habits, religion and morality using Larteh traditional religion and the Akonedi shrine as the focus of the study. It also explored the state of Larteh indigenous food practices and the values associated with them in the wake of globalization and the democratization of values.

Objectives of the Study

The research had the following objectives;

1. To explore the relationship between food habits and religion using Larteh and the Akonedi shrine as the main focus of the study.
2. To study the role of the Akonedi shrine in such food practices.
3. To collate some of the food ethics associated with traditional Larteh food habits.
4. To describe contemporary patterns of food habits among the Larteh.
5. To study the spiritual, social, economic and health related implications of indigenous food ethics.
6. To extract lessons for contemporary use.

Research Questions

1. What are (or were) the traditional food practices among the Larteh?
2. How were such foods prepared?
3. What is (or was) the food ethics associated with it?
4. When were such foods prepared and by whom?
5. What has changed?
6. How is the change to be evaluated?
7. Which religious ideas are most significantly represented in traditional Larteh food practice? Are the ideas designed for any of the following;
 - i. Social control?
 - ii. Health care or disease prevention?

- iii. Maintaining spiritual relations with the sacred, as for example spiritual purity of mysticism, eschatology, or transcendence/transformation?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its ability to infer how religious ideas and beliefs of a people help to shape and maintain certain conventions and values about food. The research also opens a discussion on how religion can help bridge the gap between the past and the present by reconnecting with traditional religious ideas and practices associated with food habits. By relating food practices that existed among the Larteh to the Akonedi shrine, the study proposes a paradigm for interpreting indigenous religious food ethics. By projecting religion as a valid variable in shaping food practices, the study challenges the different religious traditions in Ghana today to rise up to the challenge of providing positive interventions in Ghanaian food ethics and food practices.

Methodology

The study was largely phenomenological with data being produced mainly through interviews and participant observation. This scientific approach to the study of religion allowed the researcher to observe traditional food practices in Larteh. In using this approach, two basic principles to the study of religion were employed namely *epoche'* and *eidetic* (Husserl, 1931 as cited in Cox 2006). On one hand, the principle of *epoche* requires the process

of bracketing one's faith. By implication, the principle of *epoche* forbids the researcher from making value judgments on the phenomenon under study. The *eidectic* vision on the other hand exposes the researcher to the nature of the phenomenon. Eidetic intuition, enjoined the researcher to participate in some food ceremonies in order to explore their importance in Larteh religious life. Thus, through the eidetic vision the researcher attempted to see things the way the indigenes of Larteh see them. Moreover, the approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to study food practices in Larteh without being judgmental. In this regard, the possible biases of the researcher were dealt with.

Research Instruments

The main research instruments for 'data production' (as an alternative to the term 'data collection' (Glesne, 2011) were interview and participant observation. By interview, reference is made to the kind of interaction whereby the interviewer solicits answers from the interviewee without strict adherence to some written down questions. Thus, interview guide involves an extended and open-ended interaction between an interviewer and interviewees (Cohen, 2006). This instrument was appropriate for this study because of the flexibility it gave the researcher to engage the respondents in a conversation on the topic under study. Conversations were recorded with an audio recorder and complemented with field notes.

The participant observation process mentioned here as part of the research instruments was informed by the type of methodology for the study which was largely phenomenological. In this method, the researcher employed

Edmund Husserl's principles of *epoché* and *eidetic* visions. Whereas the principle of *epoche* kept the possible biases of the researcher in check, *eidetic* intuition required the researcher to participate in traditional Larteh religious ceremonies and food practices. With these as the working tools, the researcher became intimate with the phenomenon under study (Kumekpor, 2002). This was also complemented with a focus group discussion which compromised about twelve (12) people.

Research Site/Sample

The study area is Larteh in the Akuapem North District of the Eastern Region of Ghana. At the time of this research, details of the 2010 Population and Housing Census had not been made public. The research was compelled to depend on results of the 2000 Population and Housing Census which puts the total population of Larteh at eight thousand, three hundred and ten (8310) with three thousand, five hundred and twenty seven (3527) and four thousand, seven hundred and eighty three (4783) being males and females respectively. There are one thousand, two hundred and seventy four (1274) houses in Larteh, which constitute one thousand, nine hundred and sixty one (1961) households (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). The targeted population for the study was limited to some indigenes of the community as a representation of the larger community (Newman, 2000). This selected group showed a deep sense of knowledge on traditional religious food practices.

Sampling Procedure

The purposive sampling technique was used in this study. This technique involves the process whereby a sample is selected in a conscious and non-random manner for the purposes of achieving a specific goal. In other words, the researcher preferentially enlists subjects whom he/she considers to have the best knowledge and experience in an area (Babbie, 1992, p. 41). To achieve this, the researcher employed network sampling (Glesne, 2011), otherwise referred to as snowball, to enlist respondents often through the lead of someone who knew of their knowledge on the issue (see Patton, 2002). The research also made use of library as well as unpublished research works.

Data Analysis Procedure

Given that the research leans towards the interpretive paradigm (phenomenological) (Glesne, 2011) whose central purpose is to create understanding, the study used descriptive and analytical tools for analyzing data mainly based on inference. In this regard, the study described, explained and compared ideas where necessary. Nonetheless, the analysis was based on themes crafted from the research questions. Prior to the analysis, the researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews and compared with field notes to ensure consistency and reliability. These were complemented with 'analytic files' (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) which the researcher kept for future use. The analytic files kept track of useful information which were produced before, during and after the one week of intensive data production.

Review of Relevant Literature

As indicated earlier, the subject of food has been studied from various perspectives. The predominant body of literature on food leans towards issues of vegetarianism, nutrition and health, food symbolism, food taboos just to mention a few. However these areas of study, which often constitute the main point of departure in food discourse, fall under three main disciplines namely Anthropology, Sociology, and Religion (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Cushing, 1974; Pence, 2002) although there are works that treat just the physiological or chemical components of food (Deaton & Drèze, 2009) and even the oral processing of food (Lucas, Prinz, Agrawal, & Bruce, 2002). For the purposes of relevance, this study reviewed related literature focusing on these perspectives as stated above.

Anthropological Perspectives of Food

Anthropological interest in food discourse has a long history (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). However, there seem to have been some expansion and changes in anthropological studies over the last three decades (Mintz, 2011). Christian Du Bois and Sidney Mintz in 2002 sought to document the various anthropological studies on food habits. The focus of these scholars was to identify the major areas of interest to food anthropologists. According to them anthropological interest in food came about by a distinctive attempt to describe food within a cultural context. Thus for earlier anthropologists, studying a group of people's way of life also implied studying how they acquired and used food (Mintz, 2011). It is convenient therefore to say that anthropological studies on food have been to investigate the origins of food,

food habits as well as the symbolic/cultural meanings of food to a group. Frank Cushing's essay on the *Zuni Breadstuff* which first appeared in 1920 and Franz Boa's work on salmon among the Kwakiutl (1921) are examples of such works which have examined the cultural aspects of food. Both works point to the fact that conducts around food did not only take place within the society, but that food activities were also considered important for the survival of a group's culture. Cushing (1974) demonstrates how food featured prominently in the ceremonies in society by tracing the origin of corn and examining its importance in the life of a society known as Zuni. According to the author, corn forms an integral aspect of Zuni life including the industrial, mythological and particularly religious life of the people. He argues that in Zuni mythology, five things are considered necessary for the survival of the Indian society. These include the Sun (considered to be the father of all), the earth (considered to be the mother of men), water (considered to be the grandfather), fire (considered as the grandmother) and corn (which is considered to be one's brothers and sisters). Several other works following Cushing (1974) have explored the importance of corn. Arturo Warman's work on *Corn and Capitalism*, which appeared in 2003, is also a point of reference under this subject.

Like in many other African cultures and particularly Ghana, corn (maize) is a staple food which features prominently in daily dishes in many homes. Corn has several uses and can be used for many types of foods (Morris, Tripp, & Dankyi, 1999). For example, a popular Ghanaian breakfast meal known as *kooko* is either made from corn or millet. The ritual significance of corn in Ghana is well acknowledged. Among some Ghanaian

groups like the Akan, indigenous religious rules allow for *pito* (a native beer brewed from fermented corn or millet) or corn flour mixed with water to be used for libation purposes (Sarpong, 1996). The main meal during the *Homowo* festival of the Ga people is *kpokpoi*, which is made from corn (Dijk, 2001). However, the importance of corn will be explored further during the data analysis.

The focus of some other anthropological works have been to establish a relationship between food and identity/power (Mintz, 1985). In what seems like a field experience, Sidney Mintz shares his experiences in a work he did among the community on the Southern Coast of Puerto Rico which resulted in his famous book *Sweetness and Power*. Mintz argues that although the book is on sugar, it was rather an attempt to examine the rise of capitalism in the West (Mintz, 2011). The author explains that much of the social as well as the economic fabric of the Puerto Rican society depended on sugar production but it indirectly formed the basis of some form of social class. Indeed the book discusses how ‘holders of power’ in the West established themselves outside Europe and related with the labouring classes in other parts of the world (Mintz, p. 5). The social and economic class system came to be established, individuals within the society coined their identity from what they consumed. Several other scholars following Sidney Mintz have reiterated the point about how food creates identity in society. In discussing this, Pence (2002) and Bourdieu (1978) become points of reference. For example, in Pence’s own words,

The decisions we make about food define who we have been, who we are now and who we want to become. How we make those choices says much about our values, our relationship to those who produced our food and the kind of world we want (Pence, 2002: vii).

Although this research does not attempt an investigation into the powerful and the powerless in society, Mintz's work points to the fact that anthropologists have also been concerned about the various impacts of food on humans in view of their identity, hence its relevance to this work. It would seem also that food anthropologists have not only been interested in the rise of national cuisine but also how technology and the industrial revolution influenced eating patterns across the globe (Goody, 1982).

Jack Goody examines the various methods of preserving food tracing the practice from Europe through to Northern Ghana. The major points of Goody's discourse hinge on salt, sugar and ice as means of preserving food. According to the author, the most basic form of preserving fish and meat especially in Northern Ghana was through drying. This method of preserving food enabled fish and meat to be distributed in time and space. Certain vegetables like okro were also dried and that prolonged their use into the dry season (Goody, p. 154). After the drying method, followed the practice of salting as a means of preserving food and then sugar which became the main item used for the preservation of fruits. By 1795, the technique of canning food had been invented by Nicolas Appert. This was used along with the artificial method of freezing using ice. The author points out that not only did the industrial revolution affect diet, even methods of cooking responded to

technological changes. It is important to stress that, this work does not attempt a chronological projection of the changes which have occurred in Larteh food habits in view of technology. Rather, the relevance of Goody's work to this study is in the extent to which it becomes necessary for discussing how technological changes and contemporary food ideas have influenced people's food habits.

One cannot also lose sight of the gender dimension on the conduct around food. In Carole Counihan's *Anthropology of food and body: gender, meaning and power*, one observes a correlation between gender and food ideas. Counihan (1999) dwells on the culture of an American College campus and the Italian domestic home. She argues that college life is woven around college cuisine and food habits have implications for gender construction. In her view, people, particularly male and female's food habits influence their own perception about their roles as gender species. This is clearer in her examination of how globalization has had an impact on indigenous food habits in Italy focusing on women. She observes that the introduction of new foods as well as women's upward shift in the workforce gave birth to new dimensions to gender roles in the Italian society. This shift affected mother-daughter relations. According to the author many young Italian ladies of today have difficulties following in the steps of their mothers in order to be ideal wives to their husbands and mothers to their children. Two deductions are important here for this study. The first is that food habits have gender implications giving women the ultimate control over domestic space in terms of cooking or preparation of food. The second is that women are at the beginning of the food preparation chain. Therefore, they play a significant role

in transferring the traditions associated with food from one generation to the other.

This brief anthropological discourse on food, has highlighted the focus of anthropologists about food habits. We have seen that the interest of scholars within this field have been to understand people's culture through food. The works discussed also point to the fact that women play a central role in food conduct and that what people consume as food reflect the food found in their immediate environment.

Sociological Perspectives of Food

Sociological studies concerning food, food habits as well as food choices began recently (Murcott, 2011; Murcott, 1983; Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo, 1992). Indeed, until the turn of the 1990s, there were very little works on food within the field of sociology (Ceccarini, 2010). Until 1992, even the British Sociological Association did not see the need to devote attention to study the social implications of food (Murcott, 2011, p. 1). This crop of earlier writers focused on the ways in which food and dietary habits influence human relationships and societal conditions (Sherwood, 1973, p. 1108). There are also sociological studies on food, which examine the social chain of food production, distribution and consumption (Germov & Williams, 2005, p. 5). However, it would seem that the major factor of influence causing a rise in food interest among sociologists is the shift in sociological research interest on consumption, gender and policy issues (Beardsworth & Keil 1997; Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo, 1992). Indeed, the bulk of the literature, which examines the sociological perspectives of food, tends also to give

attention to food in relation to nutrition and public health. In view of this, the research finds it appropriate to discuss the physiological perspectives of food together with the sociology of food. Some of the works worth mentioning under this theme include Stephen Mennell's *All Manners of Food* published in 1985, Anne Murcott's *The sociology of food and eating* published in 1983 as well as Murcott (2011), Sherwood (1973) among others.

Writing from a sociological background with a focus on nutrition, Sherwood claims that a number of the elderly are malnourished as a result of poor nutritional content in their food. This according to the author often creates social and health problems for the elderly. She believes that the aged are not informed about appropriate nutritional practice and this factor accounts for the poor nutritional quality resulting in sickness. Sherwood observes that because old age is usually a time of physical, economic as well as social loss, the aged are often left alone. The effect is that their food choice is often of poor nutritional status. The author thinks that this lack of knowledge on nutritional qualities has created a gap between the aged and the young who are better informed on nutrition issues (Sherwood, p. 1108). To bridge the gap, Sherwood suggests that physicians and other individuals who work with the aged should strive to understand the dynamics of old age so that they are better informed to handle them. Sherwood does not state from the beginning the setting of her paper but it becomes clear in the end that she wrote for an American society. Yet much of her claims assume universal posture and therefore could be misleading. In addition, there is no proof for certain claims the author makes. For example, one would expect Sherwood to provide statistics as proof of the claim that the aged are malnourished. However, an

aspect of Sherwood's work, which is of interest to this research, is her examination of the social functions of food. She argues that food is an instrument of social life which can be used as currency, as a pleasurable activity, as sources of aesthetic and as supernatural events offering religious significance. This research will further explore the social dimensions of food among the Larteh.

For scholars like Ceccarini (2010) sociological interest in food and eating stems from the fact that food creates social identity. But according to this author, interest did not become visible until recently. She explains that the major fact accounting for this is that eating has always been taken for granted because it is a daily routine. Moreover, food as a topic for discussion has been the focus of other disciplines such as psychology which for a long time investigated eating disorders among people (Ceccarini, p. 2). As mentioned earlier, Anthropologists have long discussed the origin of people's food habits.

Ceccarini (2010) claims that sociological interest in globalization account also for the sociological interest in food. According to the author, sociology of food developed just at the same time when 'globalization' became a major topic in sociological discourse and that studies on food and globalization have always been around issues of consumption. This is the point of departure in her discussion of sociology of food. The author does not attempt a definition of the term globalization to give the reader a clue to what she means by globalization. Rather she highlights the existing debate regarding an empirical definition of the term. However, from the examples she gives, one gathers that the work attempts to establish the continuous spread of food and cuisines across the globe. Ceccarini argues that in order to

understand people's food habits, it is imperative to pay attention to the culture of the group. In tracing the culture, one must focus on the tangible, visible and audible aspects of culture. The cultural objects can be understood against history. She claims that although there are foreign cuisines in Japan and some parts of Asia, the introduction of these new cuisines into Japan has not driven away the traditional meals of the people. The author admits that there is every possibility for a new cuisine introduced in a new environment to change consumer culture and have effects on people's food habits completely. But the state had a role to play in the introduction of new food into the country. In Japan for example, foreign dishes found their way into military menu along with rice which continued to remain a staple food (Ceccarini, 2010). But then the State also sees it as a duty to encourage citizens towards traditional Japanese foods.

She focuses on the influx of foreign cuisine and role restaurants and chefs in aiding the trend in Japan. In the main, Ceccarini's work tries to look at how social structures have preserved traditional food against the influx of foreign foods. Indeed there is no place in Ceccarini's work where she makes reference to the role of religion in the preservation of food. However, the work is of significant relevance to this research not only because it omits the role of religion in food discourse, but the implications foreign foods have on indigenous foods. In view of this it is expedient to also examine the extent to which 'globalization' has affected people's food habits. This is certainly a point to pick on during the data analysis in the Larteh situation.

Christian Coff dedicates a chapter in his book *The Taste for Ethics: An Ethic of Food Consumption* to the social meaning of food. Coff (2006) notes

that food habits have always had communal sense and that though food is usually eaten on the individual level, the social meanings are never left out. He claims that during the shared meal period, people transcend beyond their individualities and are transformed in a social interaction (Coff, p.4). In the author's view, the social meal creates the sense of same blood, same flesh among the eaters. This he argues should be understood metaphorically. He explains that the ties of blood refer to the ties among the individuals in a community. In this way, social meal eliminates traces of what he calls 'egoism' and binds individuals together in a 'common identity' (Coff, p. 4). Through this food creates a communal sense among a group and solidifies their bond of friendship. Coff remarks that eating, though 'the lowest and the most egoistic common denominator' (Coff, p. 14), it is the most fundamental of all human activities and that "individuality and sociality are reconciled in the meal" (Coff, p. 15). Coff uses arctic Inuit societies and claims that, in such societies, it is considered ethically wrong for one to show appreciation for a meal offered to him/her. He explains that the society sees it as the individual's right to share in a meal and therefore it is customary to divide among themselves the food or game that hunters bring home.

A similar work by German Sociologist, Georg Simmel in 1910 discusses these same ideas. Indeed Coff (2006) dwells on Simmel in treating his theme of social meaning of food. Simmel (1910) argues that the social implications of food cannot be overlooked. According to him food habits have implications on social relations. In his view, food constitutes symbols for community and solidarity. In his own words the author remarks;

Communal eating and drinking, which can even transform a mortal enemy into a friend for the Arab, unleashes an immense socializing power that allows us to overlook that one is not eating and drinking the same thing at all, but rather totally exclusive portions, and gives rise to the primitive notion that one is thereby creating common flesh and blood (Simmel, p. 130).

Thus, by Simmel's comment, one observes that food promotes social interaction. Leslie Gofton summarises this idea by arguing that food does not only project cultural values, but is also the basis for establishing and expressing social relations (Gofton, 1996, p. 121-122).

Nutch (2007) in discussing the social implications of food claims that food shapes and maintains individual cultural identities. In his view, there is much truth in the maxim that "we are what we eat" than is usually acknowledged (Nutch, p. 39). For Nutch, food is "a function of culturally mediated relations to nature" (Nutch, p. 39). He argues that, humans by their nature select objects they consider as food. This selection, according to him, is an interaction between nature and culture. The process of selecting, cooking and eating are 'historical and cultural variables' (Nutch, p. 39). The author argues that food habits define humans and shows an intersection between "biology and culture, nature and society, the individual and social life" (Nutch, p. 39). This intersection of biology and culture underlines the ways of viewing aspects of nature as food. The implication is that food is the production of human interaction with the environments (Dewey, 1973). This engagement with the environment affords humans two opportunities in food choice. The

first opportunity, Nutch calls the ‘unadulterated’ and ‘unadorned’ foods such as honey, fruits, vegetables among others. These food items are consumed directly with little alteration to their ‘natural’ state. The second opportunity involves processing and transforming food with technology. According to this author, all cultures are exposed to these opportunities but available foods differ from culture to culture. Nutch thinks that this difference is what often creates ‘gastronomic culinary centricism’ (Nutch, p. 40). This view holds that one’s cultural food habits are better than others. One can only conclude that food habits mark the boundaries of cultures (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 8).

Nutch believes that humans need to recognize the importance of food to people as well as its centrality to individuals and cultures. In this regard, people must not only look at the processes of selection but also the social and cultural dynamics associated with food (Nutch, p. 41). Thus depending on Nutch, there is sufficient reason to believe that apart from the physiological needs, food also provides humans with their social needs and that social relations are established and maintained around food conduct. In his view, societies are identified by their food habits in two extremes of intimacy. One social element, which often makes visible the issue of intimacy, is ‘feasts’. These are often special occasions where people are united by foods and rituals (Nutch p. 45). This will be further explored in the data analysis.

Miller’s (2011) recent study among the Larteh deserves mention here because of its direct connection with food. The author argues that about four-per cent (4%) of the Larteh population is food insecure while another eight-per cent (8%) is vulnerable to food insecurity (Miller, 2011). Miller measured economic status against food accessibility. The major themes of inquiry

centred on knowledge, cost and affordability of food by the Larteh populace. She asserts that about three-quarters of the Larteh population is food insecure. The basis of this food insecurity, she argues, is the cost of food in Larteh. According to the author, most people in Larteh cannot afford decent meals and are compelled to skip either breakfast, lunch or supper. Besides, many lack nutritional knowledge and are therefore prone to a number of health risk.

The point has already been made that Larteh is not economically self-sufficient and therefore many engage in jobs outside Larteh, specifically in Accra or other cities, to make a living. Nonetheless, food affordability in Larteh is not as alarming as Miller would want us to believe. Besides, it is not clear how she arrived at the conclusion that three quarters of the population is food insecure. Granted that about twelve per cent (12%) of the Larteh population is food insecure (4% + 8%) as she had argued earlier, that figure would not be enough to constitute three-quarters of the Larteh population. In my stay in Larteh, I discovered that farmers usually brought to the house food items from the farm for household use. Those who have more to spend may depend on food sold on the streets whereas those who cannot afford depend on their farm produce. Miller's argument about the absence of nutritional knowledge among the people could also be misleading. The author may have measured a European knowledge of nutrition against a traditional Larteh idea of nutrition. In my interaction with the people of Larteh, it became known that the people do not lack nutritional knowledge. However, this is a point to pick on during the data analysis.

Religion and Food Practices

Religion and food are inseparable. Proof of this assertion is seen in the multiplicity of dietary laws that are found in nearly all religions or communities (Meyer-Rochow, 2009). These religious dietary laws regulate communal food ethics regarding the types of food one may eat, how it is prepared, who prepares it and even the manner of eating. As indicated in the background of this study, Western monasteries have served as centres for the preservation of traditional food ethics. The implication is that religion has been and continues to be a variable for preserving a group of people's food practices. However, this assertion is considered misleading by some contemporary food scholars such as (Coveney, 2006). Such scholars argue that religion has lost its hold on food practices which has now been taken over by science.

Coveney (2006) for example is convinced that religion no longer has a role to play in people's food habits as well as their moral consciousness and that 'science now articulates the basis of our moral concerns'. Coveney is of the view that the growing interest in nutrition was chiefly motivated by what he calls 'moral panic' which shook the political spectrum of Britain and elsewhere about the effects of diet-related illness on the health and efficiency of the population. Indeed, in contemporary times, it would seem that much of what is chosen as food is partly determined by nutritional facts but that is not the only determining factor. A careful search for a group of people's food practices would show that, one's urge to eat or not to eat a particular food is largely determined by a religious idea. For example, a Muslim may not eat pork because the Qur'an prohibits its consumption. A Buddhist may not eat

the flesh of a cow because the animal is believed to be sacred (Meyer-Rochow, 2009). It would therefore be misleading to think that science has taken over the role of religion completely in food choice. Religion continues to influence people's food habits and offers them ritual significance.

However, contemporary dietary discourses extend to cover attractiveness, mass marketing, health and fitness, longevity and the rationalization of the efficiency of the food supply. For Turner, concerns about what to eat are dependent on the regard of others; what he calls the 'the looking glass self' (Turner, 1985: xiii). Coveney therefore depends on Turner and proposes "a framework that modern dietary concerns, characterized by nutrition, function for modern subjects by providing an empirical understanding of the body, health and food through an elaboration of knowledge about nutrients, pathologies and disease..." (Coveney, p. 52). This concern about nutrition also provides for modern subjects an ethic, "an askesis, which allows them to produce themselves as moral individuals with proper concerns for their bodies and their souls" (Coveney, p. 52).

Food is believed to influence a spiritual discipline. Tryon (1695) argues that good diet is for a healthy body and "foundation laid for the building upon an excellent and accomplished person" (Coveney, p. 54). This view is also elaborated by George Cheyne who thinks that food that has not been characterized by an elaborate and unnecessary treatment has a lot of benefits to the body (cited in Coveney, 2006; Turner, 1982). Cheyne's work is said to have influenced John Wesley who believed that health was greatly affected by passions. According to Wesley right food should sit 'light and easy on the stomach' and that highly seasoned food is unwholesome (cited in

Coveney, 2006). Thus, early Christians focused on eliminating seasonal pleasures associated with food which was the main method of religious discipline.

The works of 16th and 17th century writers on diet focused on the health of the body, the elimination of disease and the purity of soul. This theology of the body paved way for strict adherence to dietary practices (Coveney, 2006). But during the 18th and 19th centuries, issues about the body and food changed. The focus, according to Coveney (2006) was now on the wholesomeness of body and diet (Coveney, 2006). One Sylvester Graham, a Presbyterian minister focused on preaching about whole food. His major concerns centered on health and moral problems associated with the consumption of meat. Meat was deemed to ‘excite vile tempers and habits’ (as cited in Coveney, p. 56) and spicy food was believed to ignite sexual appetite among people (Levenstein, 1988).

According to Coveney, the Seventh Day Adventist movement which started in 1830 by William Miller had its message centered on “healthy, holy, happy” theology (Maxwell, 1977, p. 8). The dietary rules that formed the foundation of its teachings were believed to have been revealed to a founding member by name Ellen White on 21st May 1863 at a gathering near Battle Creek, Michigan (Coveney, 2006). The list of items to be avoided included animal food especially meat from pigs- believed to cause decline of human race (Maxwell, 1977). The vision was also against the intake of alcohol, tobacco, tea and coffee. These interdictions were to be a Christian’s duty to care for the body as well as the soul (Deutsch, 1977 cited in Coveney, 2006). Maxwell (1977) describes the forbidden foods as ‘unwise food’. It is said that

Ellen White and her husband established an infirmary known as the Health Reform Institute in 1876.

From the foregoing emanates the view that there is a strong correlation between food and religion. Religion has been a fence around a group's food practices guarding it against invasion of foreign food values. The Akonedi shrine, as a prototype of Western monasteries, would seem to be an avenue for the preservation of the indigenous food practices of the Larteh given the fact that the shrine is the pivot around which Larteh indigenous religion evolves. It is based on this presumption that this study sets out to explore how indigenous religion has helped to preserve traditional food practices.

Delimitation

This research was delimited to the traditional food practices in Larteh. It examined how religious ideas have served to preserve traditional foods using the Akonedi shrine as the basis. In view of this, data were collected from only the indigenes of Larteh including the chief of Larteh Kubease, the *Osofo* of the Akonedi shrine and other shrine and non-shrine functionaries.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure confidentiality and to protect the identity of research participants, the research was conducted with some ethical guidelines. The researcher sought the consent of all participants before their involvement in the study. With the exception of the Chief of Larteh Kubease, Nana Kwatei Okatakyie Agyemfra II and other shrine functionaries who consented to have their names mentioned, the researcher used pseudonyms for all other

participants. Apart from this, the researcher made available to the participants the first draft of the finished work as a way of cross checking data they had provided (Dicks, et al 2005; Glesne, 2011).

Organization of the Study

Chapter one of this study is an overview which comprise the background to the study, statement of the problem, theoretical framework, conceptual clarifications, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, methodology, research instrument, research population, sampling procedure, data analysis procedure, review of relevant literature, delimitation, ethical considerations and the organization of the study.

Chapter two concentrates on the profile of the Larteh as a group. Issues that featured prominently in this chapter include the social structure, the political structure, religious life as well as the food practices of the Larteh people. The chapter also gives a brief description of the Akonedi shrine and the activities associated with it.

Chapter three treats classical models of food habits in the light of African Traditional Religion focusing on ancient Greece and Imperial Rome. The chapter also took into cognizance the contemporary food ideas hinging on the major points of departure in contemporary food discourse.

Chapter four is based on the presentation and analysis of data on the traditional food practices of the people teasing out the role of the indigenous religion, (i.e. the Akonedi shrine), in preserving Larteh traditional food practices.

Chapter five presents a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

SITUATING THE STUDY

Introduction

Despite their fame in Ghanaian culture and religion, it is surprising that there would seem to be scanty literature on the Larteh people, and even less on the Akonedi shrine. For example, a search in the archives of the University of Cape Coast School of Graduate Studies and Research reveals that no research work has been done on the Larteh people and on the Akonedi shrine, at least for the last forty years. The University of Ghana Graduate School at the time of my search had only three research works on the Larteh people recorded in its archives. Nonetheless, there seems to be a growing interest in the study of the Guan groups generally in recent times. Kwame Ampene's *A History of the Guan-Speaking peoples of Ghana*, published in 2011, is a useful source in constructing the history of the Guan-speaking groups in Ghana generally. However nearly all the existing studies on Larteh return to David Brokensha's *Social Change at Larteh*, published in 1966 as the main source in constructing the history of the Guans particularly the history of Larteh. Brokensha's work captures in detail the history and culture of the Larteh people, including their religious traditions. This research is therefore compelled to also dwell on Brokensha and some other secondary sources in constructing the profile of

Larteh. The data from Brokensha is also complemented with oral sources from the field.

Geographical Location of Larteh

Larteh is a small town in the Akuapem State in Southern Ghana. It is situated on the top of the *Akonobepow*, the range of hills which cross Akuapem from South-East to North-West. Larteh is representative of several other West African communities with several features including an agricultural system based on both cash such as cocoa and food crops such as maize, cassava, cocoyams, yams and plantains. It is close to Accra, the capital of Ghana. In terms of distance, it is about thirty-two kilometres (32km) away from Accra (Siaw, 2003). It takes about thirty-five minutes (35 minutes) for one to travel from Madina, a suburb of Accra, to Larteh. Larteh is also accessible to Koforidua and other important cities in Ghana. Because of the proximity to the city, many travel in and out to either work or transact businesses. This is because Larteh is not economically self-sufficient and many would have to engage in other economic ventures to make a living. The proximity to the city according to Brokensha (1966) has accelerated the process of social change. He however admits that although the world is accessible to Larteh, the converse is not true because its physical isolation has helped it to retain much of its culture.

There are three languages in use in Larteh. These are Guan, commonly referred to as Lete (Ansah, 2010), Twi and English with Guan being the predominant language spoken in Larteh. But most indigenes prefer to use Twi as a medium for communication. Guan belongs to the Kwa group of languages

and is structurally close to Akan languages to which it shares lexical resemblance (Brokensha, 1966, p. xvii). There are equally other Guan-speaking communities in the Akuapem State like those in the Kyerepon towns which have linguistic connexion with Larteh. Brokensha (1966) argues that many of these towns have lost their original language and now speak Twi. According to him, the reason Larteh has retained its language is partly because of its isolation. Larteh consists of two towns namely Larteh Kubease and Larteh Ahenease, each with its own chief and political system although oral sources say Larteh Kubease exercises political authority over Larteh Ahenease (Nana Kwatei Agyemfra II, personal communication, September 24, 2013)

The original name is 'Late' which is translated in Guan language as 'firestone'. Oral sources say that the forebears of Larteh carried with them stones to ignite fire whenever it was necessary. However, European contacts with the town produced several versions of the name. For example, the Danes spelt it Lathe and the Basel missionaries called it Date. Other versions of the name included Leta, Larter, Larrter, Lartey, Data, Dateh and the current spelling Larteh (Brokensha, 1966, p. xvi). This implies that the current spelling of the name, as Brokensha puts it, is etymologically inaccurate. However, for the purposes of clarity and consistency, this research adopts the contemporary spelling 'Larteh' throughout the study.

As indicated earlier, Larteh is one but politically divided into two, Larteh Kubease and Larteh Ahenease. Oral sources say Larteh Kubease became known as such because some members of the group carried with them coconut (translated in Twi as *kube*) to plant at where they settled. With time, the coconut became a point of reference in describing the first part of Larteh

(I.W. Parry, personal communication, September 21, 2013). Indeed, upon entering Larteh, one observes that most economic activities as well as other social amenities such as the market, schools and clinics are located in Larteh Kubease. The major place for social events is also located in Larteh Kubease. This public ground stands directly opposite the Akonedi shrine.

Profile of Larteh

It is difficult to construct the history of Larteh without making reference to the Akuapem (also spelt Akwapim) in general. This is because the history of Larteh is closely linked with the history of the Akuapem. Until 1962, the leading scholar in the history of the Akuapem was a Ga pastor by name Reverend Christian Reindorf whose *A History of the Gold Coast and Asante* published in 1895 became a point of reference in tracing the history of the Akuapem. However, Ivor Wilks through his anthropological, archaeological, archival sources and linguistic studies modified what seemed to be inaccuracies in Carl Reindorf's work (see Brokensha, 1966). But generally many scholars agree that by the sixteenth century, there were Guan-speaking communities on the Akuapem hills and they had settled there for some time. The Dutch would seem to have known about the existence of these Larteh groups already in the 17th century (Brokensha, 1966). Scholars find evidence for this connection from a 17th century map called "map of Latebe", which seems to cover the domain of the Larteh groups. (Wilks, 1957; Brokensha, 1966; Kwamena-Poh, 1972).

Historians describe the Larteh in general as being Guans and they share historical link with the Ga, Osoduku, La, and the Ningo of present day Ghana (Ampene, 2011; Brokensha, 1966). Oral sources indicate that they migrated from Israel with the Ga. The people of Larteh trace their ancestry from Israel through Ethiopia down to Sudan. The oral narrative says they moved from Israel to Ethiopia. However, war broke out within the Ethiopian empire which forced them to move further to Sudan. Their stay in Sudan was also brief as another war forced them out of the place (O. Dankwa, personal communication, September 21, 2013).

According to the Chief of Larteh Kubease, the next available destination was Nigeria where they settled in the Oyo State. Nonetheless, the settlement in the Oyo state was also short lived because of constant struggle and conflicts. The conflicts produced two groups. The first group moved to North-Western Ghana and settled in places like Sunyani and Techiman. The second group which included the Larteh moved along the coast with the Ga, La, Osu and Ningo and settled in Benin for a while. But the group was further disintegrated and forced to move after a brief stay. The Larteh began moving towards the area, which is now described as the Volta Region of Ghana. At this place, some further moved to settle in Upper Volta and other areas of the Volta Region of Ghana. This group included the Kete Krachi, Denteh, Salaga and others (Nana Kwatei Agyemfra II, personal communication, September 24, 2013).

The current Larteh group moved further along the coast to settle along the shorelines of Ningo where they settled with the La, Osoduku, and Ningo. Shortly afterwards, war broke out among them which forced some of the

Larteh people to move further towards their current place of abode. The chief explains that it was the quest to find a fertile and peaceful land which led them to their current place. It is important to note also that before their arrival at their present place, they briefly settled in places like Effiakoh (Fianko enya) behind Shia hills, Odokum, and Awenbi. Part of the group also moved to Sefwi and Oda areas to engage in cocoa plantation. The rest of the group at Awenbi moved to the hill where Larteh is currently (I. W. Parry, personal communication, September 21, 2013).

Throughout the journey, their war leaders were Gyampo, Brafo Asiedu and Otu Ete. The spiritual backbones were *Otutu* and *Kyao* (also known as *Kyawe* among the Krobo). Gyampo Oloku led the Larteh Kubease group to its current place. Brafo Asiedu's group moved towards Bruma to Mampong to a place called Akpre, towards Amanfo to Mamfe. The first group that settled in Larteh Kubease is the group that constitute the Agyampode brong. With time, Asante territorial expansion threatened the group at Amanfo to move and join those on the hill in Larteh Kubease. In much the same way those at Odokum abandoned the plains for the Prampram and joined their comrades in Larteh Kubease (Nana Kwatei Agyemfra II, personal communication, September 24, 2013).

The legend says that when the people of Larteh Kubease settled at their current place, the warriors continued to look for land and they did this through hunting expeditions. It happened that on one occasion the warriors moved down the hill around Ayikuma and Abonse and found a group of people and captured them and brought them to settle at a place originally named *Mkpeni Ese* which means "those who do not know". These were in groups of five

which comprised the Ewe, Hausa, Wangara and others. The warriors continued to capture other smaller groups and added to the number. Nonetheless, because this was a mixed group, there were constant scuffles between them. To deal with this situation, one person was selected from among them to whom all complaints were first made before they reported to the chief of Larteh Kubease. The selected individual at the time was called Domfo Mante who was also the group's leader at the time they were captured. Therefore, Domfo Mante became the leader of the mixed group. His stool name was *Mkpeni Kpowura*. However, oral sources say that Akwamu supremacy over the hill of Guan communities marked the beginning of what seemed to be the independence of Larteh Ahenase.

In our attempt to free ourselves from Akwamu dominion we sought assistance from Ofei Kwesi Agyeman and his followers. Word was sent to Akyem Akropong to Ofori Panyin for his assistance. Ofori Panyin therefore sent his brother Ofori Kuma and some other warriors to assist us in the war. When the warriors came, they wanted to know whether we were ready for the war and so they asked "the people we have come to help, what do they have?" When they examined us, they found guns and gun powder and therefore concluded in Twi saying "*wokura apem*" and that became Akuapem. So the Akyem were the first to use the term Akuapem to describe all the Akuapem groups. The guns and gun powder convinced them to join us to war against Ansah Sasraku and his people. So we attacked Ansah Sasraku and his men from Yanoase and chased him

down to Dodowa forest all the way to Akwamu and beyond until he could not be traced anymore (E. Ampeke, personal communication, September 21, 2013).

After the war, the Larteh and other Guans could not entertain the fear that Ansah Sasraku (an Akwamu war lord) was gone for good simply because they could not capture him physically. They feared that he could re-organize himself and launch a surprise attack on them. They approached Ofori Panyin for the second time and asked him to allow his brother Ofori Kuma to stay with the Akuapem and protect them. This, Ofori Panyin did and sent Ofori Kuma to the people and was settled at a place called Amamprobi – a place downhill Mamfe (where the Mamfe had their first cemetery). It was later that the Larteh people brought them up the hill of Mamfe. Ofori Kuma and his men later demanded a seal to the verbal agreement between them. This resulted in what is now called the ‘Abotakyi Accord’. This was followed up with rituals at Obosomase-Kyenku. In that covenant they prayed for the success of the union between the Akyem and the Akuapem.

To strengthen this accord, Ofori Kuma sought to appoint divisional chiefs in all the Akuapem states. All the groups that constituted Akuapem were invited to that meeting including Larteh. Surprisingly the captured group in Larteh (Mkpeni Ese) got to the meeting earlier than Larteh Kubease people. Thus Ofori Kuma in appointing the divisional inquired from this group saying. ‘whose descendants are you’ which in Twi will read, ‘ehena asefo ni?’ and then they replied, ‘Brafo Asiedu

asefo ne yen' and that became 'Ahenease' (Nana Kwatei Agyemfra II, personal communication, September 24, 2013).

Portions of these oral narratives certainly corroborate Brokensha (1966) in that the first group to move to the present location of the town were the people of Kubease followed by the people of Ahenease. However, what is difficult to accept is the aspect that explains the origin of the name Akuapem. According to Brokensha (1966), Akwamu supremacy reached its peak during the seventeenth century. Both the Akwamu and the Akyem moved to settle among the Guan hill communities. Historians believe that the reason for this movement must have been the emergence of new trade routes leading inland. By this, the Guan communities including the Larteh had associations with other Twi-speaking groups who influenced their political institutions (Brokensha, 1966). Given that the associations allowed the Guan communities to learn from their new comers, there is ample reason to believe that the intrusion was peaceful and that a relation between them was cordial. As Brokensha (1966) remarks, the willingness of these Guan communities to learn from their new comers implies that the people were receptive to new ideas.

However, in 1646 the Akwamu captured the Western parts of Akuapem and were receiving gold tributes from Accra as part of conditions to allow merchants from the interior to use the routes on the hill areas until 1730 (Brokensha, 1966). In 1729, some Guans in alliance with some Akyem settlers revolted against an unpopular Akwamu king known as Ansah Sasraku (Brokensha, 1966). This rebellion resulted in the formation of a new and independent State named Akuapem in 1730. The rebel organization got

converted into a political organization and was formally inaugurated at a meeting at Abotakyi. They called themselves 'Akua-apem' which according to Brokensha (1966) means the 'thousand companies'. After the decline of Akwamu supremacy and their subsequent expulsion, the Akyem settlers became dominant in the new state and their leader became the Akuapem-hene (Brokensha, 1966). This Akyem alliance is visible even today.

Later European activities among these groups led to further disintegration of the Akuapem state (Brokensha, 1966). British commissioners were stationed at towns such as Akuse, Prampram, Mampong but never at Akropong or at Larteh even though government officials visited these places frequently because of territorial influence and trade. The European influence and internal rivalry between states such as the Akwamu and the Akuapem affected to a great extent the social organization of Larteh. Ampene (2011) and Brokensha (1966) note that in the pre-Akwamu period Larteh had no political structure distinctive of itself. Each group was divided into seven quarters, each with its own leader who had both ritual and 'rudimentary' leadership role (see also Brokensha, 1966).

In summary, historical data particularly on colonial activities in Ghana point to the fact that Larteh has been under the Akwamu, Asante, Danes, Dutch and the British but in spite of the varying degree of influence Larteh has had from these groups, the community and its people have worked to retain most of their traditions and customs (Brokensha, 1966) and therefore presents itself as an indigenous society worth studying.

Larteh Social Structure

Larteh consists of twenty-three major and twelve minor quarters or brongs, social units with both kingship and territorial dimensions. Brokensha (1966) uses the term *brong* as a corruption of the Twi term, *brono*, which was originally translated to mean 'a street' but has been extended to mean 'a ward', or 'block', or 'quarter' in the sense of a division of the town. This description is important as it prepares the ground for a detailed description of the social structure of Larteh.

The *brongs* in Larteh are based on a concept of each *brong* being composed of a number of houses grouped closely together and are separated by lanes which run parallel to each other at regular intervals, at right-angles to the main street. The number of houses in each *brong* ranges between 1 and 105 (Brokensha, 1966). The picture constitution of the quarters today is slightly different. At least one sees additions of new buildings to the older ones. One would also find two main Mission quarters known to the people as Gyaman (German) and Ngresi (English) after the German Basel and the English (Methodist) missionaries.

Most of the *brongs* consist of several patrilineages. The term commonly used is *awu*, which is a Guan word referring to both the political structure of a house and the people. It is argued that most *brongs* have major or minor lineages. A minor patrilineage reaches back to no more than four or five generations so that members can trace their origin from a common ancestor and their relationship to each other. The importance of the major lineages lies in their entitlement to political succession. The head of the lineage is given the title '*awu onomu*' which is translated as 'house leader'

(Brokensha, 1966). The term *abusua panyin* is equivalent to this term in Twi-speaking communities. The *Awu onomu* has the responsibility of organizing members to help and to care for one another. This may be done either in cash or in kind. In the event of death or sickness, members of the clan or *brong* (also called *ewe-ebi*) are expected to assist the affected member.

Apart from the individual *brongs*, a combination of three or four *brongs* form what is known among the people as *egyitase*; which is translated to mean 'ward'. According to Brokensha (1966), this is an indication of early formation of alliance for military purposes. He argues that traditional accounts (oral tradition) support this assertion. The term expresses locality rather than kingship. However members of an *egyitase* live close to each other and have their own verbal responses to a greeting. One's family name is traced to his *brong* but there are names that are common to several *brongs* (Brokensha, 1966). For example the name '*Gyampoh*' is common to the Egyamkpode *brong*, believed to have been the first settlers of Larteh Kubease (O. Dankwa, personal communication, August 23, 2013). In the 1960s there were twelve major *brongs* with four lesser *brongs* in Kubease while Ahenease had fourteen large *brongs* and five lesser *brongs* (Brokensha, 1966). The *brongs* in Larteh Kubease include the *Adabiri*, *Abiade*, *Ahimso* (which includes *Apemsusu* or *Akpemsusu*), *Akremede I*, *Egyamkpode*, *Asantede* (believed to have been founded by Asante men), *Akantsede* or *Akantsane* (also believed to have been founded by Fante), *Abode*, *Akremede II (Akitibi)*, *Amansode*, *Ahiankode* (includes *kpana*) and *Agyemansu*. The Asante *brong*, *Asantede* provides the *mankrado*- the second most important post in Larteh Kubease.

The people of Larteh celebrate two festivals in a year namely *Odwira* and *Ohum* which is their traditional festival. They celebrate *Odwira* because they form part of the Akuapem State. The *Odwira* festival, which usually takes place within the month of September, is intended to celebrate the harvest of the new yam. Major activities during this weeklong celebration include series of ritual practices such as cleansing of ancestral stools and making sacrifices (Nana Kwatei Katakylie Akyemfra II, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Because the festival commemorates the harvest of the new yam, most of the foods that feature in this celebration include yam *fufu* and *oto* (mashed yam mixed with red oil). For example, during this period, shrine functionaries in the Akonedi shrine as well as the chief of the Larteh prepare yam *fufu* for inhabitants to share in a communal meal. The *Ohum* festival which is the traditional festival of the people of Larteh share characteristics with the *Odwira* festival. There are series of rituals ranging from the offering of libation to the making of sacrifices. During this period the traditional meal that features prominently is known by the people as *pinpineso* or *eba*. Chapter four of this research provides a full description of this meal and how it is prepared.

However, it should be stressed that many of the *brongs* in Larteh have dietary prohibitions such as abstention from eating pythons, tortoise, pigs or horn bills (Brokensha, 1966). For example members of the *Egyamkpode* family of Larteh Kubease are not to eat snails. This same *brong*, according to Brokensha (1966), prohibits the eating of kenkey on Thursdays and Saturdays. It is important to note that in Larteh, ‘customs are seen as a guide to behaviour rather than as rigid rules’ (Brokensha, 1966, p. 18).

Economically, the formal occupations include teaching, health service and police service. The informal sector includes trading, farming, and artisanship such as carpentry, masonry, tailoring and dressmaking, hairdressers among others. However, as indicated earlier on, majority of the people engage in farming activities. The major agricultural activity is food crop cultivation coupled with livestock rearing (Siaw, 2003). Many farmers avoid farm activities on Tuesdays and Fridays. The people believe these are sacred days of the earth goddess. Coincidentally, these days are the days on which major economic activities take place (O. Dankwa, personal communication, September 21, 2013). Many of the indigenes go to the market to either sell their wares or buy food items for domestic use. Commercial activities in Larteh could be categorized into those women who have stores at the market, street vendors, and hawkers (see also Siaw, p. 33).

Larteh Political System

Elsewhere, and depending on Ampene (2011) and Brokensha (1966), it has been argued that the Guan communities including Larteh had no political structure until their association with Twi-speaking groups. The political structure of the Larteh follows closely with that of the Akan with some slight modification (Brokensha, 1966). Typical Akan political system has its essence in the blackened stool, which serves as the symbol of chieftaincy and of the political unit. The occupant of the stool, the chief, is the overall head of the system. Traditional office holders comprising military, administrative and honorific ranks surrounded the chief (Brokensha, 1966).

In both Kubease and Ahenease there are *brongs*, each of which has its stone with some symbolic importance. The head of the *brong* called *adadi* used to sit on the stone to discuss *brong* affairs. Even today, there are places in Larteh where there is a circle of such stones still used on ceremonial occasions. Some *brongs* have *ndadi* as their leaders whereas others have a priest of a shrine or both (Brokensha, 1966). Such a leader is called *osofo*. But in *brongs* where there is only an *adadi*, he performs ritual functions as well. It is interesting to note that in spite of the dominant Akan political influence in the Larteh political system, the people have retained their patrilineal system of succession to political office (Brokensha, 1966). Succession to political office in Akan culture is strictly matrilineal. Political offices in Larteh are distributed among the *brongs* so that nearly all have one traditional office of some importance. These offices include but are not limited to the following; linguists (*Akyeame*), treasurers (*Sanaahene*), custodians of royal mausoleum (*Baamuhene*), head of the custodians of the stools (*Nkonguasafohene*), drummers (*Akyeremadefo*) and executioners (*Adumfo*). The implication is that each *brong* is politically represented. The multiplicity of traditional offices ensures the diffusion of power rather than it being centralized (Brokensha, 1966).

Politically, the chief of Larteh Ahenease, on one hand, doubles as the *Benkumhene* (leftwing chief) of the Akuapem State. The towns that fall under his jurisdiction include Larteh Ahenease, Mamfe, Abotakyi, Mampong, Obosomase and Tutu (Siaw, 2003). According to Siaw (p.33) this political responsibility was further increased in 1995 when he (Chief of Larteh Aheanase) was appointed the Paramount Chief of the Guan in the Akuapem

North and Asuogyaman Districts. The towns that became part of the chiefdom include Abiriw, Adukrom, Dawu, Anum and Nkonya. The Kubeasehene on the other hand is the *Kyidomhene* (leader of the rearguard) of the Akuapem State. These two chiefs rule in consultation with a council of elders which comprises brong leaders, the *Omankrado* (the mayor), *Ankobeahene* (Stool-father), *Safohene* (head of the Asafo Company), *Kyeame* (linguist) and the *Obaahemaa* (Queen Mother), (see Siaw, p. 33). Larteh traditional political office shares close link with religious beliefs. The dominant belief is that the ancestors and the gods are custodians of the political offices and therefore the occupants may not do what pleases them. Political office holders must work for the collective interest of the living, the dead and the yet to be born.

Larteh Indigenous Religion and Colonial Experiences

Larteh religiosity shares similar characteristics with other African communities. Traditional Larteh religion exhibits belief in the Supreme being, the gods, the ancestors and other spirits. Several works that treat the traditional religion of the African have discussed these religious characteristics extensively (See Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973; Ray, 1976). However, to appreciate the traditional religion of the people, it is important to examine the external influences it has battled with over the years. According to Brokensha, among the Akuapem, Larteh became the most important town or city for missionary activities even though there was no mission in Larteh until 1855. The Basel Mission established the Presbyterian Church in Larteh. This was followed by the establishment of other churches. Methodism for instance, was introduced in Larteh in 1879; Anglicanism touched the soils of Larteh in 1913;

Salvation Army in 1925 and the Faith Tabernacle in 1929. Besides these, one also finds the Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church and a few Charismatic churches. An important thing to remember in Larteh church genealogy is that, members of the new churches were 'ex-Presbyterians' (Brokensha, 1966).

Before association with Europeans and the subsequent introduction to Christianity, Larteh had its traditional belief system (or religion) distinctive of the culture. The foundation of such indigenous beliefs was found in shrines which, like the Christian monasteries served as the religious centres around which all religious ceremonies evolved (Brokensha, 1966). Even today, one observes that the influence of traditional belief on Larteh social, economic and political life is very strong. Even though many have switched to either Christianity or Islam, the grips of traditional religion on Larteh are and will, probably be difficult to loosen. There seem to have been little or no alteration to the indigenous faith of the people of Larteh despite the fact that Christianity has been there for nearly two centuries. It is difficult to explain away the strong adherence to traditional belief among the people but what is evident is that one finds stone (s) laid in front of family houses. The researcher discovered that these stones receive annual rituals performed by a ritual specialist appointed within the family/clan to perform such function (M. Gudu, personal communication, June 14, 2013).

Perhaps the closest one could come in finding answers to the strong adherence to traditional belief is by examining the initial attitude (in this case psychological preparedness) of the people to a foreign religion like Christianity. Indeed, the Omanhene of Akuapem is reported to have told a

Basel Mission representative, Andreas Riis (whose duty was to see to the establishment of churches in Akuapem state)

Your missionaries are welcome to Akropong, even if a hundred more come, we would not mind. But the fetishes at Aburi, Larteh and Adokrom are too powerful to allow you to open schools there as you intend (Brokensha, p. 10).

The inference David Brokensha draws from this statement is that initially 'missions were equated to schools'. Indeed Ansah (1955) reports that in September 1847, when the Reverend George Widmann (Senior Missionary at Akropong) visited Larteh, 'the Kubeasehene promised him some children for education' (see Brokensha, 1966, p. 10). The Omanhene's statement, herein referred to, suggests that Larteh has been a strong traditional religious town for a long time basing its religiosity on traditional belief. The Akonedi shrine has been the main pivot around which Larteh traditional religiosity revolves. In the subsequent paragraphs, we shall take a look at the Akonedi shrine and its core functions in the indigenous religious life of the people.

The Akonedi Shrine

The Akonedi god is important in Larteh spirituality. The god speaks none but Guan language in its original state (Ampene, 2011). With its global headquarters in Larteh Kubease, the Akonedi god is revered by those who worship it and feared by all (Ampene, 2011). Its orders are carried out without any question. This is regardless of whether one is a Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Zoroastrian or belong to any other religious tradition. The shrine is found in a large, well-built house at the upper end of the town. It is

situated in the *Agyemansu* brong, directly facing the town hall, also known as the plaza (Brokensha, 1966). The shrine is divided into two major courts, an outer court and an inner court where most of the ritual activities such as sacrifices and libation prayer take place. The door leading to the inner court has the inscription, *nokware fi* which means 'house of truth'. The *Osofo* of the shrine argues that the Akonedi god requires truth from all clients and worshippers. In view of this, one may not enter the shrine with a dark-coloured attire since, according to him, it is difficult to identify a stain in such clothing.

The staff at the shrine is quite large. There is at least a priestess and other officials such as *osofu*, secretary and shrine attendants (messengers). However, the researcher discovered from the field what seems to be another shrine of the Akonedi god. This place is towards the end of the town. Through an interaction with the *Osofo* of the *Global Headquarters* of the Akonedi shrine, the researcher was informed that this second Akonedi shrine, was established by a former priest trainee in honour of the Akonedi god.

The origin of the name is traced to a girl called Nedi whose father was called Akoh. Thus, in effect Akonedi is a compound name Ako-nedi (see Ampene, 2011). Akonedi simply means Ako's daughter Nedi. How the name came to be associated with the shrine is contained in an oral tradition which says that the girl Nedi became pregnant but died in the process of delivering. This death is said to have occurred in the bush under strange circumstances (Ampene, 2011). When they launched a search for her body, they found only an ant hill. The tradition has it that shortly after the death of Nedi, her spirit possessed a Larteh Kubease woman called Adwo who became the first Chief

Priestess of the new shrine for many years (Ampene, 2011, p. 58). After the death of Adwo, her spirit possessed a woman by name Anima whose husband was a presbyter and was herself a presbytriss. The point must however be made that before Anima took over as the Priestess of the Shrine, Adwo's daughter by name Nana Nkoma cared for the shrine and assisted in the training of some priestesses upon the death of her mother (Ampene, 2011).

After Anima, came Okomfo Ama Ansah who was a grand-daughter of Adwo. Her priesthood was between 1927 and 1957. She assisted in the training of Nana Okomfohene Akua Oporebea who also later became one of the greatest priestesses to have served the Akonedi god. Okomfohene Akua Oporebea succeeded Okomfo Ama Ansah in 1957 until her death in 1995. She was the daughter of Anima's sister and was a shrine attendant at a branch shrine known as Asuo Gyebi at Aburi. A story is told of a white dove which descended into the premises of the shrine and perched on her head delivering the message of her appointment as the High Priestess of the Akonedi Shrine (see Ampene, 2011). Another legend indicates that Okomfo Ama Ansah, on her death bed, sent for Okomfohene Akua Oporebea who was then under training at the Asuo Gyebi shrine to come and take charge of the Akonedi Shrine. After the death of Okomfohene Akua Oporebea, the Akonedi shrine priesthood seat became vacant for seven years. It is quite clear that the spirit of Akonedi had not found a servant who could fit into the shoes of the earlier priestesses. However in 2003, Nana Ansah Asabea (also called Nana Ansah Oporebea, see Ampene, p. 58) became the Okomfopanyin at the Akonedi Shrine. To date Nana Ansah Asabea is the Okomfopanyin of the Akonedi Shrine. Because the Akonedi god is a spirit, one may not find sculptures that

characterize most African shrines. Perhaps the following comment offers a reason for the absence of images in the Akonedi shrine;

Our god is not represented with any sculpture or image. The Akonedi god is a spirit. We don't know where he came from but we know that when he descends on the priestess, he tells us what he wants us to do. We also get the opportunity to ask for what we want. His name is Nana Akonedi (Akonedi Osofo, personal communication, September 21, 2013).

There exists other branches of the Akonedi shrine in other parts of Ghana. A greater number of them are concentrated in the Eastern Region and two each in the Volta and Ashanti Regions respectively (Brokensha, 1966). The priestesses who are in charge of the other branches received their training from the global headquarters at Larteh Kubease and are required to return to the shrine for an annual convention during the Odwira festival. These branches are also required to send one-third of the fees they charge to the headquarters at the end of every year (C 5, personal communication, September 21, 2013).

Clients who employ the services of the Akonedi shrine include indigenes of Larteh Kubease, some Akuapem people and others from places such as Accra or Kumasi. Indeed what Brokensha (1966) documented about the caliber of clients can be corroborated today. The *Osofo* of the shrine confirmed that the shrine is visited by people from different social classes ranging from government officials to 'very ordinary' people (Brokensha, 1966). The Akonedi shrine is famous in Ghana and it plays an important role in the religious life of the people of Larteh. Antobam (1963) asserts that at best, the Akonedi god could be described as not just a community god but a

state god. The shrine continues to exert a greater influence on the life of the people. Thus, David Brokensha remarks;

Despite all the changes, it is remarkable that traditional forms and beliefs continue, exhibiting a strong syncretic adaptability. The evidence indicates that the shrines will continue to play an important part in the social organization of Larteh for many years, and that the gods and ancestors will continue to be honoured (Brokensha, p. 188)

Those who patronize the shrine come with different requests. These clients may include barren women who desire to have children or women who lose their children at infancy. Some clients also come to get cured from strange diseases and yet, even today some visit the shrine to seek vengeance against people who have wronged them (Brokensha, 1966). There are quite a number of clients who seek success in their businesses or want their crops to do well and therefore visit the shrine for such purposes. Others simply want an explanation to their misfortune. Consultation is always with a fee. It usually follows after a presentation of a bottle of schnapp and some money. In my quest to interact with the *Osofo* and some shrine functionaries, I had to present a schnapp and an undisclosed amount of money. The high point of all the activities at the shrine is the point at which the priestess goes into a trance resulting from fresh experience of possession by the Akonedi god. It is during this time that the priestess makes oracular statements.

The office of the priestess observes some dietary rules. For example she may not eat left-over food for fear of being poisoned or kenkey on Tuesdays or Fridays because these are the sacred days of the Akonedi god

(Brokensha, 1966). Priest-trainees are also forbidden from eating ripe plantain (Opoku, 1978). It is believed such foods could increase a person's desire to have sex. The Priestess and Osofo of the shrine believe that a man's passions must always be brought under check. They argued that sexual intercourse reduces a person's ritual status and sends him/her away from the gods. When this happens, such individuals fall out of the protection of the gods and are spiritually vulnerable.

Conclusion

Generally, it is clear that the Akonedi shrine has played an important role and continues to provide significant assistance to the spiritual life of the people of Larteh. Its national and international recognition also deserve mention. According to the *Osofo* of the shrine, there are branches of the shrine overseas. During annual festivals, many of the priests in the numerous shrines return to the *Global Headquarters* to renew their allegiance to the god.



Plate 1: A Group Photograph Showing the Researcher and Some Shrine Functionaries at the Akonedi Shrine.

The above plate shows the researcher in a group photograph with some shrine functionaries. From the left is the *Osofo* of the Akonedi shrine, next to him is *Okomfo* Kyao, the researcher and finally *Okomfo* Tano.

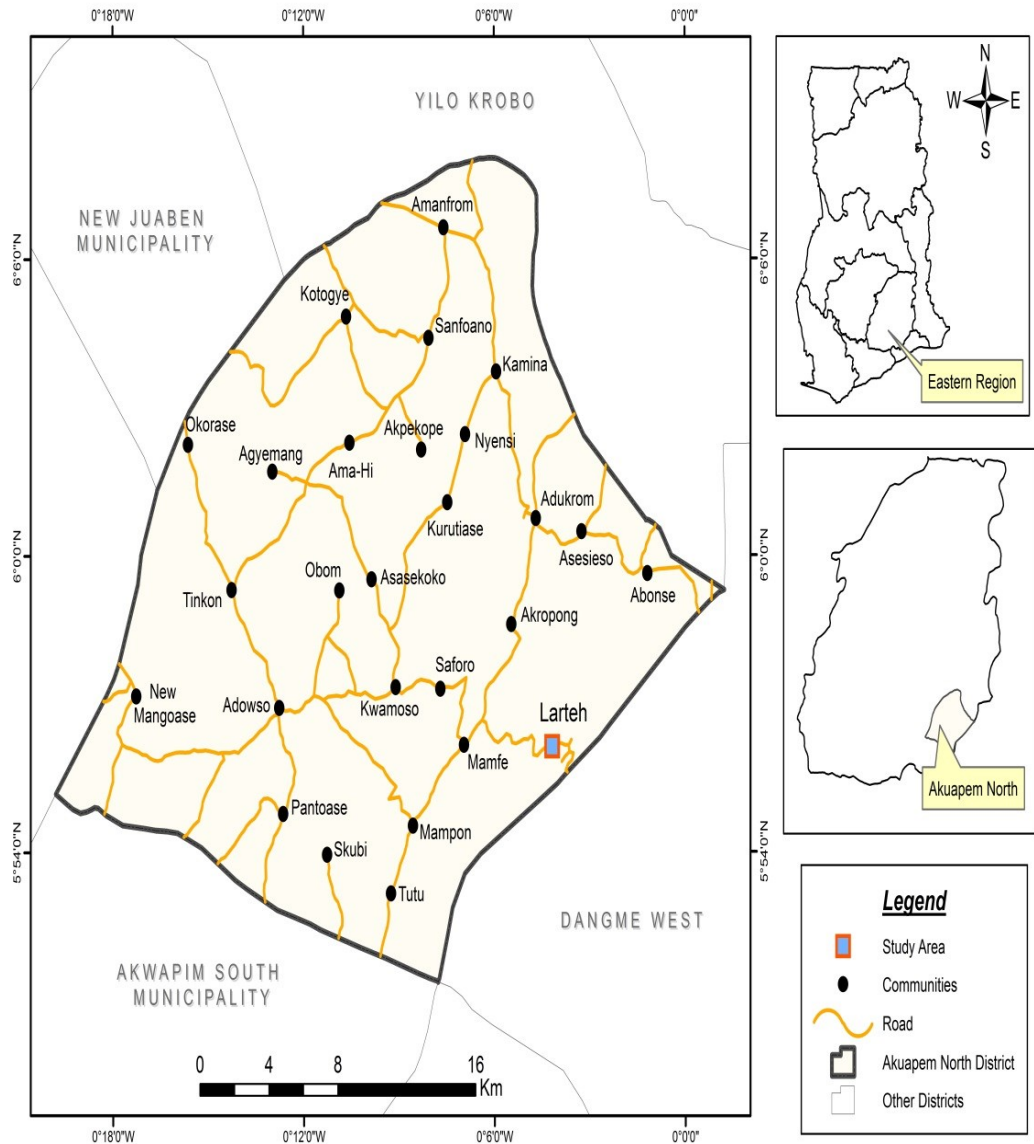


Plate 2: Map of Akuapem North District.

The above plate shows the map of Akuapem North District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It is in this district that the study area is located. Larteh is identified in the map by a deep orange spot with a light blue background.

CHAPTER THREE
SOME CLASSICAL MODELS OF RELIGION AND FOOD
PRACTICES IN THE LIGHT OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL
RELIGION

Introduction

In order to understand trends of contemporary food discourse especially with regard to concerns for health and nutrition, and particularly, the role of religion, the historical specificity of food conduct must be established. For the sake of convenience, we can choose to consider three important epochs. The first is ancient Greece (during the Fourth Century BC), the second is imperial Rome (Second Century AD) and third is the early to high Middle Ages spanning from 1200 through to 1400 (Coveney, 2006). It is convenient to limit this study to these three epochs because it is possible to trace some forms of traditional religious practices to the periods under consideration. But most importantly, these periods reveal models of food and morality relations. These models can serve as comparative food practices generally and in relation to food practices in Larteh. However, because the chapter discusses classical models of food conduct in the light of African Traditional Religion and contemporary food discourse, an attempt will also be made to discuss the nature of contemporary food ideas.

Food Habits in Ancient Greece

Several sources have explored beliefs towards food and food habits in Greek and Roman times. For example in volume two of his work entitled *The History of Sexuality: Volume Two, The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault details the attitude of ancient Greece and Rome to sex and food. According to him citizens of ancient Greece and Rome formed themselves ethically and sexually. This ethic of the people was more of personal choice in order to live a beautiful or virtuous life - a life in union with nature. This attitude to life and the emphasis on living a virtuous or moral life was key in some Greek schools of philosophy such as Stoicism and Epicureanism (Foucault, 1992b; Bogomolov, 1985, p. 291).

According to Foucault the Greeks understood food or eating and sex as activities which resulted in one goal, which is pleasure. The type of food one ate had the tendency to either incite one's sexual instincts or promote union with one's object of worship. One can infer from Foucault's argument that the attitude to food during this period was more concerned about keeping the lower instincts of a person in check, especially sexual instincts. The relation between food and nutrition was given little attention. Instead, the emphasis was on how to manage the pleasure derived from food, self-denial and discipline, using a series of processes (Foucault, 1992b). Here, the close connection between food habits and morality can be deduced.

The citizen of ancient Greece, according to Foucault, was free only in the extent to which he/she was an 'ethical subject' (free man). As such, citizens were expected to conform to certain morals (Coveney, 2006). Their level of success as moral subjects was measured in terms of how well they

managed bodily pleasures and the level of success in the management of bodily pleasures was believed to depend on a person's food habits. This close connection between citizenship, morality and food habits is what was captured in the concept of dietetics. *Dietetics* was not confined to food regime alone in ancient Greece as contemporary understanding suggests. It meant conduct of everyday life - a mode of living. It was a combination of health, medicine and philosophy of living (cf. Coveney, 2006, p. 27). There was much emphasis on the right amount of food, sex, sleep and so on at the right time. This means the underlying principle of dietetics was moderation. Over indulgence in food or sexual act was regarded ugly and improper (McHoul & Grace, 1993). The concept of dietetics must be understood in its proper context. But inferring from the above one can identify some traditional forms of religious expression similar to the idea of dietetics. Traditional Africans show clearly the relationship between food and sex. Indeed among some tribes of Africa and particularly the Larteh, certain food items have the tendency to affect one's sexual instinct. For instance, a trainee priest at the Akonedi Shrine is forbidden from consuming ripe plantain. For it is believed that the sweetness of the ripe plantain can incite the trainee priest sexually (Opoku, 1970).

The second aspect of moderation concerned discipline in the form of a general reduction of one's appetite for pleasure. This was an indication of self-control or self-mastery, which was required for political life. Indeed pleasure was measured in as far as forming the ethical subject was concerned. The third aspect of the moderation was the concern for food and the health of the individual. For the Greeks understood it as a way to natural reason (Coveney, 2006). But as briefly mentioned earlier, the Greeks understood that food and

health were closely related. According to Coveney (2006) the Greeks, identified food appropriate for the sick and food that could endanger one's health. Thus one can infer that food habits among the Greeks were concerned about curtailing the bodily desires, avoidance of food wastage and health.

This sketchy discussion about what food meant to ancient Greeks has shown that the emphasis was on good character formation so as to enhance intra group cohesion. To be an ethical subject was to be a freeman and to be a freeman was to be a citizen. Citizens were to conform to the rules of society. Such rules included eating the right food to control one's lower instincts. We have also seen that, in the indigenous African society, although the relationship between food and sex is evident (as in the case of the trainee priest of the Akonedi shrine), it is not as emphasized as it was during the time of the Greeks. However, an aspect of life of the Greeks which shares resemblance with African traditional society is the African sense of communalism and the emphasis on morality and character formation in relation to "citizenship". A human being, in African thought, is the one who conforms to the rules of the community. The individual forms him/herself ethically bearing in mind that his actions do not affect him alone but the entire community. To be a member of the African community is to be human and to be human is to abide by the rules of the community. This idea is expressed properly in the words of John S. Mbiti;

Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is a part. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is

to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community (Mbiti, 1969, p. 2).

Mbiti like Ray (1976, p. 136) reminds us that Africans define a person in view of the social groups to which they belong. One is part of the community and it is the community that defines a person. According to these scholars, the African view of man maintains a balance between the collective identity of the society and the personal identity of an individual. Thus, humanness is determined in so far as one is a member of the community. The implication of such an argument is that whatever the individual does, in terms of his moral conduct, must be that which the society approves of. Therefore to be part of the community is to conform to the rules of the community. In the chapter that follows after this, we shall see how the Larteh carefully and consciously work out community dietary rules in relation to their morality.

Food Conduct During the Roman Period

The period under consideration here was the Second Century AD. It was the period that saw the development of ideas that propelled Rome to the peak of her civilization. During this time, Foucault (1990b) for example, takes a look at the development in knowledge which indicates a gradual transition of knowledge from mere codes of conduct, to knowledge of medicine and then a shift in knowledge of ethics of self-care. According to him, even though the Romans had considerable knowledge about how science/medicine provides solution to sickness, they still believed that one needed to take care of one's health by eating and drinking properly. Later on, especially during the late

Roman period, the processes towards self-mastery would see a shift, based on the growing influence of Christianity. This means the initial Greek model that saw a close connection between citizenship, morality and food habits will now receive expression through Christian traditions. For example, the stress on self-control and the denial of bodily and sexual pleasures, which existed in Greek times, remained. But in Roman times, self-control was now expressed through self-denial and voluntarily inflicting discomfort or pain on the body as means to purity and control of bodily pleasures. An important food habit, among others, came to be fasting, i.e. denying oneself of food (Foucault 1986 in Coveney, 2006; McHoul & Grace, 1993). We can infer from the above that whereas the ancient Greeks emphasized on eating the right foods and in moderation, the Romans will add the new element of fasting and mortification. In this way we see a close connection between morality, religion and food habits.

These two important elements of early Christian morality, mortification and self-denial in addition to the practice of confessing one's thoughts formed the core elements of monastic life. Yet, because of the use of food as a means of self-control and taming bodily pleasures, food habits posed peculiar challenges to the early Christians.

The first of these challenges is the assertion by John Cassian (AD 360-435) that greed especially for food and drink is linked with fornication in the sense that both food and fornication are products of a "natural appetite"- a certain innateness which is very difficult to cure (Coveney, p. 32). Cassian even thought that over indulgence in food and drink fuels the desire to commit

adultery (Coveney, 2006, p. 228). The challenge here is how to establish the validity of such a claim and the rigid association of morality with sexuality.

The second challenge of early Christian food beliefs was dualism, compelling a negative view of the external world (Curran, 1989, p. 104). Early Christians who isolated themselves from the outside world did so because they did not want to be polluted. The pollution here was not limited to the body but pollution of thoughts resulting from erotic dreams or through deeds such as excessive eating (Foucault, 1990b, p. 236).

The third problem is linked with the Augustinian theology which believed in the power of original sin. According to St. Augustine, life was a struggle between the soul and the body and which required them to fight for survival or available energy –limited in supply. Both body and soul were antithetical forces. The soul was under the continuous manipulation of the passions which shifted its attention from the things of the spirit to the things of the senses (Hinnebusch, 1965, p. 133). Fasting and celibacy were therefore the means of redirecting the power to the soul by listening to an edifying verse while eating in order to enliven the mind, nourish the spirit and strengthen the individual in the life of grace.

In comparison with the indigenous African Religion, there is little or no information to the effect that the whole community is urged to fast as a way of controlling bodily pleasures or a means of union with their object of worship. Mortification is usually on the individual basis and for specific people who have special relations with a certain deity. In African traditional society, people will fast because the gods say so and not because they want to have an experience of hunger. For example, one may be asked to fast as part

of a cleansing process (Awolalu, 1976). Here, fasting becomes a religious act requested by the deity but for Christians in ancient Rome, one fasted just to satisfy a religious quest to be in union with one's object of worship.

Food Discourse in Medieval Christianity

This period, spanning from 1200 to 1400 AD, witnessed the peak of Christian religious practices. Chief among these was the Christian idea of the Eucharist. It was believed to be a meal for uniting fellow Christians and their object of worship. It was instituted at the Last Supper in which bread and wine were consecrated and consumed in remembrance of Christ's death. This implies that, the use of food imagery was popular during the Middle Ages. Moreover, the sharing of food was an expression of love-agape-which is selfless, sacrificial and creates values. The agape feast was a ritual to celebrate the joy of eating, pleasure and company. It was a time of fellowship (Coveney, 2006). Feasting joined Christians to the rhythm of nature (Bynum, 1987). Abstinence from food, which was seen as a mark of self-control during the fourth century in Greek would now become more of an offer to God in propitiation for Adam's sin of greed and disobedience (Bynum, 1987). Indeed food and eating in medieval Europe was an activity that marked off fire calibrations of social status and a source of pleasure so intense and sensual that the renunciation of it was at the core of religious world denial. But most importantly was the fact that eating was an occasion for union with one's fellows and one's God. The food practices that demonstrate this idea was the Eucharist as was mentioned from the beginning of this section.

There exist forms of religious practices in African Traditional Religion similar to the Eucharist or at least the idea behind the Eucharist. For example ritual meals at shrines and the various food offerings/sacrifices at graves and shrines or stool rooms point to this similarity. Furthermore, in most African communities, as we shall see later in Larteh food practices, eating together is often an avenue for family reunion as well as deepening a sense of unity among people.

Another revealing aspect of food habits during this period was the role of women in food practices. According to Bynum (1987), the medieval food discourse revolved around the activities of Christian women. They played a role in the selection and the cooking of food. Food historians have noted that, apart from the spiritual significance attached to food in medieval times, food was also an important motif in medieval women's piety than it was in men. According to Bynum (p. 4), women all over Europe served Christ by feeding others. In this way, they donated to the poor food that husbands and fathers felt proud to be able to save and consume. It is important to stress that medieval attitudes toward food are more diverse. To the religious women, food was both a way to control one's body and environment (Bynum, 1987). It is difficult to compare medieval women to women in African traditional society but at least one can identify similar trends in the role women play in food discourse. In Larteh for example, there are women appointed to oversee the cooking of some ritual meals. This way, they play a role in the preservation of some indigenous food practices. In chapter four of this work, the role of women in traditional food practices is further explored.

In summary, we can say that, in medieval period, not much of the Christian ideas about food, morality and religion changed. If anything some of the ideas received new interpretation in relation to the Eucharist and enforced mainly for reasons of physical purity. Acts of fasting became more elaborate and developed until such a time that specific days were set by the church for corporate fast. The West, for example set aside Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays as days for corporate fast (Bynum, 1987). Lent, distinct from the Easter fast and seen as a time for purification, also emerged in the fourth century.

Contemporary Food Discourse

Unlike the early Greek or medieval times, contemporary food discourse lends itself to issues concerning nutrition, longevity, ecology and environmental ethics (Williams, 2008, p. 299). In contemporary times, we can observe a complete change of model regarding food ethics. The role played by religion in the threefold relation of morality, citizenship and food habits will give way completely. Religion will now be replaced by sensibility for health, longevity and environmental sustainability. There are basically, two major blocks in this category of food discourse. The first block introduces scholars such as Brian Melican and Edward Maxwell, who argue from the perspective of climate change in relation to global warming and carbon emissions and the safety of the food we eat. These scholars express worry about the processes the foods we eat today go through before they finally land on our table for consumption. They argue that the food we eat today is produced in a more carbon-intensive way and travels for longer distance on carbon-fueled

transport, than ever before. According to Melican and Maxwell (2008) industrial farming and production methods reduce the nutritional quality of the food. They note that there seems to be little concern on the part of the public about the safety of the food they consume. This worry perhaps explains the emergence of organizations like the *Slow Food*. Such organizations are dedicated to restoring the quality of food produced and eaten. *Slow Food* proposes a 'living law' that gives a series of offers including encouraging local food production and local food consumption. In a sense, the injunction to eat or not to eat is now based completely on food production, preparation and its effects on the individual and the environment. Ethical concerns about food habits here drop ideas about values and citizenship, morality and character formation.

The other divide of contemporary food discourse is even less concerned about earlier models of a relation between food, morality and religion. Scholars of the second block think people should be allowed to make a choice of what they eat. Williams (2008), for instance, believes that the noise in modern food discourse which tends to offer the consumer an advice to make what may be called good food choice should be a thing of the past. The author thinks people should be seen as being intelligent enough to make good choices. People should be given the freedom to make bad choices without being treated as bad children. Nobody should be forced to eat anything on the basis of nutrition. Williams uses herself as an example and argues that she has taste for butter even though she has heard in a countless number of times the nutritional proclamations about the healthy nature of margarine. She says people have taste for what they eat and therefore their taste should be

respected. Eating, according to this author, should be natural and pleasurable. This scholar's argument is valid only to the extent that it spells out individual freedom in food choice. One wonders if this will apply to the African traditional religious society. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the individual's freedom is only meaningful in a communal sense. The communal welfare supersedes that of the individual even though one's freedom is respected. We shall see later in chapter four of this work, how communal dietary rules bind the entire community.

This work does not seek to join the debate in contemporary food discourse. Yet it is necessary to point out how the discourse makes the study significant. Indeed, contemporary food discourse brings to the fore the worry many express about the state of food in modern times. In African traditional societies, particularly in Ghana, there is sufficient evidence of the people's awareness of change in their food habits. As reported later in the data presentation, respondents expressed worry about the complete rejection of certain traditional foods and how the youth have embraced modern types of food which the elderly generally consider as unhealthy. Not only does the state of food habits in contemporary Larteh point to changes, but to the very loss of those food values of old due to liberalization and secularization. Secularization is used here in the sense in which Hans Joas explains it. He defines the term to mean an 'emancipation of societal spheres from direct religious control' (Joas, 2009, p. 6). There is a lot of freedom to food choice and many think religion should not influence what they choose to eat as food. But the research also reveals that the situation in some African traditional religious societies like Larteh has not lost to secularization completely. Besides, some Muslims will

still not eat pork no matter the situation. In the same way, some Christians will drink no alcohol at all.

Indigenous Religious Food Practices

Attitude to food in traditional Africa finds roots in religious beliefs of the people. Among some Guan groups like the Krachie of Upper Volta, one may not eat and talk at the same time. It was believed that were one to violate this rule, one was sure to lose a parent (A. Anane, personal communication, November 21, 2013). It was also against the ethics of food to eat and have one hand on the flour. Among some groups of Northern Ghana, it was unethical to consume one's meat when one has not yet finished consuming the whole meal. In some cases, children were served food without fish or meat. They would later line-up for meat after consuming the main meal. It was believed that, if a child ate meat first before the main food, he would grow up to be a thief (M. Abdul-Hamid, personal communication, December 2, 2013). Among the Akan groups, a chief may not eat in public. A traditional public office holder like a priest may not eat from anyone apart from his wife or the woman assigned to cook for him. The *Osofo* of the Akonedi shrine is not only banned from travelling by car, he equally cannot eat food prepared by anyone except his wife.

The list of foods and how they affect morality is long and varies from one community to another. For example, among the Akan groups, which comprise the Asante, one would not feed her child with eggs at an early stage. There is popular belief that were one to feed his or her child with eggs at an early stage, such a child may grow to become a thief. Pregnant women who

feed on eggs are sure to give birth to children who will grow up to be thieves (Sarpong, 1974). Pregnant women were barred from taking ripe plantain, *okro*, snails, salted tilapia popularly called *koobi* in Ghana, beans, *kantomire* and other foodstuffs. Okro and snails are believed to make the baby to slime. If a pregnant woman consumed salted fish as well as dried fish her baby may not be brilliant in the future. She could also have swollen feet (Azumah, 2010). Beef dries the breast milk of a lactating mother and makes a baby grow to become a thief. Duck eggs cause asthma in babies.

There are also foods associated with apprenticeship to a traditional religious office. As mentioned earlier, a trainee priest in the Akonedi shrine may not consume ripe plantain (Opoku, 1970). If he violated the rule and ate ripe plantain, he was increasing his sexual desires. Another aspect about food can be seen in the way Africans relate with some animals. In most African societies like the Akan of Ghana, certain animals are regarded as totems and therefore consumption of such animals as food is prohibited. Some of the Akan clans include the *Nsona*, the *Twidan*, the *Kona*, the *Aboradze*. An *Nsona* may not eat the flesh of a fox or crow, a *Twidan* may avoid eating the flesh of a lion. The *Kona* have much regard for the eagle and therefore would not harm it. The *Aboradze* may not eat plantain. The reasons for these prohibitions can best be explained in Akan mythology which usually spells out the progenitors of the clans. There are also foods associated with gods, whom in Akan thought, are responsible for specific days of the week. For example the worshippers of the *Awukudae* god may not eat particular specie of yam on Wednesday (L. Bosiwa, personal communication, January 31, 2014).

It is obvious, at least, from the foregoing that the traditional food models of food ethics expressed in the three fold relation of religion, morality and food habits was strong and lingers on to some extent in traditional Ghana. However, apart from the close relation food has with religion in African religious thought, one also observes the connection Africans attach to food and morality. Indeed, food choice and eating are believed to shape the moral character of the 'eater' and there is sufficient proof for this assertion. Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, point to the moral implications of food. We must remind ourselves, here, that this is not a new field of inquiry. This has been explored by food historians for a long period and therefore the conceptual categories of food and morality can be traced to antiquity. Kramer (2008) for example suggests that the communal approach to the hunting and gathering of food could be the major source for the evolutionary development of the capacity for moral reasoning itself. Kramer (2008, p. 147) even thought that what we eat matters because they have moral implications. Mauriello (2008) writing about food ideas in Europe during the nineteenth century states that food was a tool for molding the moral character of children especially middle-class children in Europe. The suitability of a certain food or the deprivation of a certain type of food included strategies to bring up a child morally. According to this author, throughout Europe, schools or educational institutions were strictly regulated in terms of the food that was given to children to eat during school hours. Food historians such as Drummond and Wilbraham, for example write,

Great care was taken in the choice of a wet nurse, in view of the widespread belief that the moral and spiritual character of the child would be influenced by the milk it imbibed. If the nurse was a dolt or a drunkard, the child would certainly take after her: if there was a trace of blood in her milk the child might grow up to be a murderer (Drummond & Wilbraham, 1939, p. 65-69).

Children under seven were prohibited from eating sausages, pork, cabbage, stewed potatoes and pastries of all description (Holt, 1903). Holt does not offer explanation for these prohibitions. But it is known that potatoes were believed to lead to slovenly and beastly habits among the poor (Burnett, 1979). According to Mauriello (2008) food was not only a moral concern; it was also used to distinguish between the poor from the working class or the wealthy. For instance butter and vegetables were avoided by the wealthy for centuries because of its associations with farm labourers.

Conclusion

We can sum up the ideas of this chapter in the words of Peter Garnsey, who states that food carries a system of symbolic meanings and these symbolic meanings are often religious (Garnsey, 1999). A simple example from antiquity, which he alludes to, include foods such as eggs, apples, pomegranates among others. These foods according to him represent life and fertility and commonly make appearance at marriages and funeral ceremonies. But above all, there would seem to be a long standing relation between religion, morality and food habits. The model in Greek antiquity was

concerned about molding a moral subject. To the extent that food habits determined a person's morality, we could say that for the ancient Greeks, being a citizen depended to a great extent on right choice of food. These ideas about food in ancient Greece will continue to hold sway for the Greeks until the period of transition to Roman culture. During the Roman period, food ideas were largely influenced by Christian traditions or practices such as fasting. Fasting constituted an avenue to deny oneself of food just to be in union with one's object of worship. Thus whereas ancient Greek focused on forming a citizen on earth, ancient Rome encouraged the individual to become a citizen of heaven. The Christian ideas about food continued into the middle ages until food became associated with the Eucharist. The Christian Eucharist emphasized union with one's object of worship and one's fellow human. In contemporary times, food discourse concerns itself with issues of ecology, longevity, nutrition, mass marketing, and individual freedom among others. Thus inferring from the above, one is tempted to say that religion seems to have lost its hold in food choice. Such a conclusion will, indeed, be premature. In the chapter that follows after this, we shall see how religion has helped and continues to play a role in the food practices of the people of Larteh.

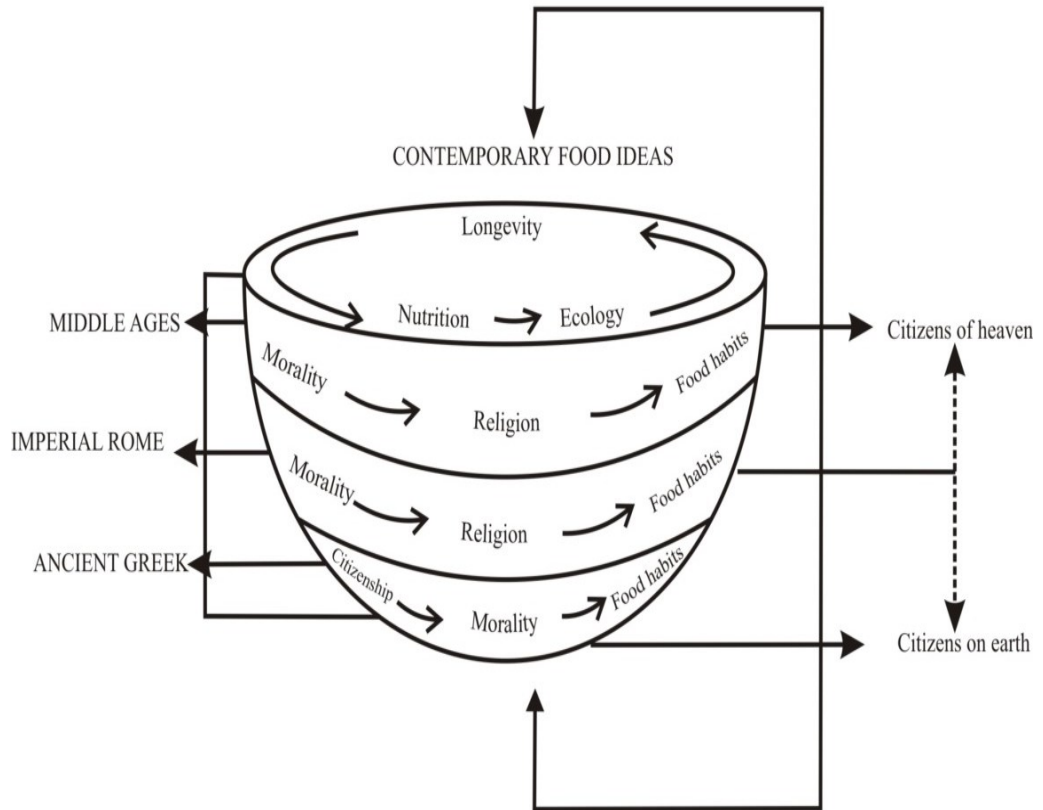


Plate 3: Pictographic Bowl of the History of Food and Morality Relations

The above plate demonstrates the various epochs of food history as discussed in this chapter. At the base of the bowl are ancient Greek ideas of food with emphasis on forming an ethical citizen on earth. During the Roman period, attention shifted to forming a heavenly citizen when food ideas became associated with the Christian idea of fasting. This idea continued to hold sway until the medieval period where the idea of the Eucharist also dominated Christian practices. The surface of the bowl shows contemporary ideas governing food, which lean towards issues of health, longevity and nutrition.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents data on the indigenous foods of Larteh that have been preserved, and the role of the Akonedi Shrine in the preservation, and how indigenous food habits of the Larteh have been maintained. This is however preceded by a recap of what the study set out to do in chapter one.

The study was motivated by the observation of the strong relationship between religion and food and indigenous life in Ghana. Evidence of this assertion is seen in the numerous dietary laws in almost all religions. Religion has been a decisive factor in what people choose or avoid as food (Meyer-Rochow, 2009). In certain religions, for example, Islam, what is lawful to eat must be selected, cooked, served and eaten under strict religious rules. The above argument can be summed in the following verse of the Qur'an what states, "O mankind! Eat of what is permissible and good on earth, and do not follow the footsteps of satan; truly he is an open adversary to you" (Al-Baqarah 168).

Inferring from Western and Eastern culture, religious centres would seem to have served as custodians of the rules governing food habits among a people. For example in the history of Buddhist and Christian monastic traditions, religious centres have always served to preserve certain foods

(Jotischky, 2011). Such preservations were possible because they were often associated with religious rituals or ceremonies. Besides this preservation process, the ideas, and conventions associated with eating were kept. The result is that such religious centres also maintained the food stuff that constituted the main stay of the people (cf. Jotischky, 2011).

It is difficult to compare indigenous African shrines to Western monasteries, but we can carefully work out some similarities. For example indigenous African religions have also been centres of ethical values on diet. We can refer particularly to shrines and festive occasions where particular foods are prepared by specific individuals under specific conditions. Festivals were usually celebrated with strong religious elements. Under this religious influence, ingredients used in the preparation were carefully selected. There is reason to believe that in addition to religious concerns, such food practices must also have had health purposes. Thus the study of religions and religious ethics provides great opportunity for exploring the values of traditional food practices as enshrined in what we might call traditional religious food ethics. Between the traditional and contemporary dietary systems is a gulf waiting for systematic inter-disciplinary research. In view of this, the study set out to use the Akonedi Shrine of Larteh Kubease to explore the role of religion in the preservation of the food practices of the people of Larteh.

Data Production Procedure

The phenomenological approach to the study of religion, as described in chapter one, was employed for the data collection. This scientific approach to the study of religious food practices allowed the researcher to study the

observable aspects of the daily life of the people. In order to observe and critically describe the religious food practices of the people, the researcher lived in Larteh for a considerable number of weeks to observe and to participate in some food celebrations, particularly the *Ohum* festival. This was necessary because the phenomenological approach to the study of religious food practices demands of the researcher to bracket his faith and to put himself in the position of the ordinary Larteh people to explore the very essentials of Larteh food practices. This approach is enshrined in the principles of *epoche* and *eidectic* vision respectively (Hursel, 1931). With these principles as the researcher's working tools, not only did he attempt to feel or see things the way the Larteh people would see, but he also tried to study Larteh food practices as they have been preserved. That is not to say that this study turns a blind out to the challenges associated with this particular method but to a large it allowed the researcher to observe, converse and to participate in some food rituals.

The instruments used in the data collection were mainly participant observation and unstructured interview (Glesne, 2011, pp. 102-103). This form of interview, on one hand, allowed for interaction in which the researcher sought answers from the interviewees without being restricted to some specific questions but to themes. In this regard, there was ample flexibility on the part of the researcher in the questions as well as follow-up questions that were used to collect data. The participant observation, on the other hand, gave the researcher enough opportunity for critical observation of the food practices of the Larteh people.

As described in chapter one, the techniques used for sampling were the purposive and simple random sampling. Using the purposive sampling technique, the researcher selected a sample in a conscious and non-random (systematic) manner for the purposes of achieving required data (Babbie, 1992, p. 41). For example, in the case of the Akonedi Shrine, the researcher preferentially enlisted respondents considered to have the knowledge and experience to contribute to the study. Such respondents included the *Osofo* of the Shrine, the priest of the *Kyao* god, the priest of the Tano god as well as other shrine functionaries. However, non-shrine functionary respondents were randomly selected.

Intensive fieldwork lasted for one week, during which the researcher stayed in Larteh. Apart from the one-week intensive interaction, the researcher also paid occasional visits to Larteh. The occasional visits that occurred before the one-week long stay were to prepare the grounds while those that followed the one-week were used to clarify inconsistencies that occurred after transcribing the field notes. The data presented in this chapter include the outcome of personal interviews with both the “young” and the “old”. The “young” in this study refers to respondents who were between 17 and 25 years of age. “Old” refers to the respondents who were 50 years and above. On two occasions, the researcher conducted “informal interviews” as he visited market places, and joined *trotro* (a form of public transport in Ghana) and had conversations with people respectively. Taking care to respect the ethical rules of research, such as not imposing any research on unwilling respondents and not to interrupt business, the researcher initiated conversations with one market woman to which many others willingly joined. *Trotro* within the

Ghanaian context refers to passenger buses which convey people from one point to the other on commercial basis. In Ghana, public transport is an avenue for all manner of social interaction. People would usually discuss issues ranging from national to domestic concerns. For example, women will openly discuss in general terms, challenges of marriage or family life or the current state of governance in the country. The researcher was allowed a round trip on a bus from Larteh to Madina and back. Madina is a suburb of Accra, South West of Larteh. From Larteh to Madina is about 35 minutes' drive down the Akuapem ranges into the coastal valley of Accra. On joining the bus, the researcher initiated conversation with two people (a man and a woman) on board to discuss Larteh food habits to which four other people willingly joined. This practice is customary and not offensive.

In all, 25 people were interviewed. These included seven (7) males and three (3) females from the Akonedi shrine. With the non-shrine functionary, fifteen people were interviewed. They included nine (9) females and six (6) males. The fifteen people included the Chief of Larteh Kubease, Nana Kwatei Okatakyire Agyemfra II and other elderly people. Chief among the shrine functionaries, were the Osofo of the Akonedi shrine, the *Osofo* of the *Kyao* god of Larteh and *Okomfo Tano* also of Larteh. With the exception of the Chief of Larteh Kubease and the other priests herein mentioned who consented to have their names mentioned in the work, the researcher chose to use pseudonyms for all other respondents for the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity. An outline of research activities over the one-week period of intensive data production can be found in table 1 below. The demographic

characteristics of the respondents follow immediately after the research outline in tables 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 1: Fieldwork Activities

Day	Activity	Subject	Duration
Day 1	Interview with Chief of Larteh Kubease, Nana Kwatei Okatakyie Agyemfra II	History of Larteh The role of religion in Larteh food habits	3 hrs in two sessions
Day 2	Interview with Akonedi Sofo, Okomfo Tano, Okomfo Kyao and other functionaries in the Shrine	History of the Akonedi Shrine The role of the Akonedi shrine in Larteh food habits	3 hrs in two sessions
Day 3	Informal conversation in a public transport from Larteh to Madina and back.	Folk knowledge/popular opinion about Larteh food habits (past and present)	1:10 mins (in and out)
Day 4	Formal conversation with 5 “old” people	Formal knowledge about the role of religion in Larteh food habits	4 hrs in two sessions
Day 5	Focus group discussion with both “old” and	Larteh Food habits	1 hr

Table 1 Continued

“young”			
Day 6	Interview with men	Larteh food Habits	1 hr
	Participant observation	Religious rituals	
	of ritual practice of	regarding Larteh	45 mns
	libation prayer	food habits	
Day 7	Interview with “old”	Larteh food Habits	1hr
	woman at the Akonedi	and the Akonedi	
	Shrine	shrine.	

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 2: Shrine Functionary

Bio Data	Characteristics	Number of respondents
Sex	Male	7
	Female	3
Total		10
Ethnicity	Guan Larteh	10
Shrine status	Osofo	1
	Priest	2
	Other functionary	7
Religion	Traditionalist	10
	Christian	0
	Muslim	0

Table 3: Non-Shrine Functionary

Bio Data	Characteristics	No. of respondents
Sex	Male	6
	Female	9
Total		15
Ethnicity	Guan Larteh	15
University status	Graduate	0
	Non-graduate	15
Religion	Traditionalist	2
	Christian	13
	Muslim	0

The interview questions were crafted from the research questions and designed under four main themes as follows:

- A. Knowledge of indigenous Larteh foods
- B. Popularity of indigenous Larteh foods in present times
- C. Religious regulations covering Larteh food habits
- D. Ethical perspectives of Larteh food habits.

A. Knowledge of Indigenous Foods Among the People of Larteh

The focus under this theme was to assess how much knowledge respondents had concerning indigenous Larteh foods. Here, a series of questions were considered. For example, the researcher sought from respondents names of traditional dishes and how some of the foods they mentioned were prepared, who prepares them and when they are prepared. Among the indigenous Larteh foods mentioned included *fufu*, *apiti*, *aprapransa*, *ofam*, *pinpineso* (also called *eba*), *kenkey*, *konkonte ne ho*,

ampesi. The researcher observed two levels of engagement when respondents tried to answer the question. First, they engaged in a deliberate recall in order to name the dishes. Secondly, when they had to describe the method of preparation and the role of religion, it was clear that their answers were cued by the previous recall they had done. These non-verbal data will be elaborated during the data analysis. The table below shows a tabular presentation of the responses to the first set of questions.

Table 4: Responses to Category A of the Questions

Question	Categories	No. of people	%
Describe three of the oldest typical Larteh traditional dishes/foods that you know.	Those who had good knowledge of the indigenous foods.	19	76%
	Those who mixed contemporary with indigenous foods,	4	16%
	Those who do not know.	2	8%
Supposing I contracted you to prepare one of such foods for me to eat, what will be the ingredients to buy and	Those who demonstrated a good know how of ingredients that matched the type of indigenous food identified	16	64%

Table 4 Continued			
how will you prepare it?	Those who were not sure	7	28%
	Those who did not know	2	8%
Who qualifies to prepare such foods especially the festive foods like <i>pinpineso</i> , and the <i>yam fufu</i> ?	Anybody at all	5	20%
	Special people, particularly old women	13	52%
	If you are ritually clean as a woman.	7	28%
When are such foods eaten?	The gods must declare some of the food wholesome to eat before one can eat	15	60%
	During festivals	6	24%
	Any time of the year.	4	16%

B. Popularity of Indigenous Larteh Foods in Present Times

Under this category, the researcher sought to know if the indigenous foods mentioned in category A feature prominently in Larteh food practices today. Here the researcher asked; are these foods still popular in Larteh today? Responses to the question gave the researcher the impression that, some of the

foods mentioned have been lost. This prompted followed up questions such as “what has changed and what accounts for the changes?” Here too, the researcher observed that some indigenous foods such as *aprapransa*, *apiti*, and *ofam*, are almost extinct and respondents had more difficulty remembering these foods. The reasons for the loss are religious. For example the respondents asserted that an indigene of Larteh would not buy *aprapransa* from the street, because it has been tagged with witches. It is believed to be food for witches and is in most cases prepared by witches. As we would see later in our discussion, we find here a reversal of roles. Naturally one would expect the Larteh religion to preserve native foods. But in the case of *aprapransa*, religious beliefs rather led to its extinction. This somehow confirms the thesis that religion has not only helped in preserving some foods; it is also responsible for the loss of some foods. Below is a tabular representation of the responses to the questions in this category.

Table 5: Responses to Category B of the Questions

Questions	Categories Responses were sorted into	No. of people	%
1. I have been in Larteh for some time now but I hardly see some of the foods mentioned on the streets of Larteh, why?	1. Now some of them cannot be sold on the streets, because of beliefs attached to them	14	56%
	2. Some of them are seasonal	7	28%
	3. I learnt how to eat some of the food from the house	4	16%

Table 5 Continued

	because my mother used to prepare them.		
2. What do you think is responsible for the scarcity of such foods on the streets of Larteh?	1. Death of the old ones who know how to prepare such foods	11	44%
	2. Failure on the part of government to include indigenous foods in catering as a subject of study in the JHS and SHS	3	12%
	3. Religious beliefs		
	4. Modernization and the reluctance on the part of the young ones to learn from the elderly.	7	28%
		4	16%
3. In which areas does the Akonedi Shrine exert influence in the lives of the people of Larteh?	1. In religious regulations regarding food and its symbolic meanings	10	40%
	2. In health	8	32%
	3. In arbitration of cases	2	8%
	4. In spiritual growth of the community.	5	20%
4. How does the Akonedi Shrine	1. It is custodian of the rules governing food	8	32%

influence eating among the people?	2. It must declare certain foods fit before all of us can eat	7	28%
	3. It cooks food for Larteh people in the form of a feast	6	24%
	4. I don't really know how	4	16%

C. Religious Regulations Covering Larteh Food Habits

There exist a number of religious regulations regarding food and when food can be consumed in Larteh. Under this category, the researcher tried to illicit from the respondents rules governing Larteh foods. It came to light that some foods are seasonal and can only be taken at certain times of the year. Such foods include *pinpineso* and yam *fufu*. These foods are prepared amidst rituals and eaten during festive periods. Apart from these, eating in Larteh is religiously regulated. For example, one may not consume maize until the gods in Larteh have declared it fit and the necessary rituals are performed. In the same way, the new yam cannot be eaten upon harvesting until rituals have been performed. One may not also pound *fufu* after six 0' clock in the evening. Other religious regulations concerning food include the prohibition of the sale or eating of *kenkey* (Ga *kenkey*) on Tuesdays and Fridays which are believed to be sacred days of the of the Akonedi god. Some respondents claimed that the gods consume such foods on those days and therefore it would be regarded competing with the gods on the part of humans, to also eat *kenkey* on the said

days. A priest trainee is prohibited from eating ripe plantain. Below is a tabular presentation of the responses to the questions under this category.

Table 6: Responses to Category C of the Questions

Question	Category Answers were sorted into:	No. of people	%
1. What are some of the religious rules that govern food in Larteh?	1. It is a taboo to pound <i>fufu</i> after six in the evening.	6	24%
	2. Rituals must be performed before one can eat or sell the new yam or corn	8	32%
	3. It is against the rules to eat or sell <i>kenkey</i> on Tuesdays and Fridays	6	24%
	4. Pork is forbidden in this town.	5	20%
2. Do you know the rationale behind these rules?	1. These instructions come from the gods and we cannot question them	7	28%
	2. That is how our forefathers lived and we must continue in that direction	8	32%
	3. Some of them are for security reasons	6	24%
	4. Not sure		

Table 6 Continued

		4	16%
3. What is likely to be the consequences if one violates the rule?	1. The gods will punish you	7	28%
	2. You may fall sick and die	7	28%
	3. One would not dare to break the rule because we have internalized the rules.	11	44%
4. Who ensures that the rules are obeyed?	1. Your neighbour serves as a check	4	16%
		8	32%
	2. The presence of the shrine	8	32%
	3. The priests and priestess	5	20%
5. Mention some of the seasonal foods associated with religious ceremonies	4. Traditional leaders		
	1. <i>Pinpineso, yam fufu</i>	19	76%
	2. Not sure	6	24%
6. How long have these rules existed?	1. We came to meet rules	18	72%
	2. Don't know	7	28%

D. Ethical Perspectives of Larteh Food Habits

The food practices of the Larteh people are built on ethical principles as well as religious beliefs. The major theme under this category was to illicit from the respondents, the ethico-religious ideas behind food rules in Larteh. Other areas of interest which featured in this category of questions were to assess the social and the health benefits in keeping these rules. It would be recalled that in category C, it came to light that until rituals were performed one could not

bring into the town, eat or sell the new yam or corn/maize. The researcher was informed that such a rule is for social control. It came to light also that the religious ideas about food in Larteh are associated with feasts. A sort of traditional love feast known as *oyidan* is usually organized after a funeral ceremony in a particular home. It is a form of reunion and an avenue for settling disagreements which must have occurred among family members during the funeral. The last aspect of the questions in this category explored the people's awareness of any changes in their food practices. The table below gives an outline of the responses to the questions in this category.

Table 7: Responses to category D of the questions

Question	Category	No. of people	%
1. In your own view, what implications do these dietary rules have on your moral life?	1. It ensures sanity in society because it prevents people from stealing from other peoples' farms	11	44%
	2. It puts us in union with our ancestors	6	24%
	3. It breeds a sense of honesty in us	8	32%
2. Mention any food practice or rule or	1. <i>Oyidan</i>	8	32%
	2. The rule that prevents	10	40%

Table 7 Continued			
type of food that directly affects your moral life	people from harvesting their crops before the rituals are performed		
	3. <i>Pinpineso</i>	7	28%
3. Do you notice any changes in	1. A shift towards modern foods such as fried rice	8	32%
<hr/>			
Larteh food practices lately and what are they?	and Indomie (noodles)		
	2. Some form of freedom in what people choose as food.	6	24%
	3. A shift towards unhealthy foods fried rice, highly seasoned foods etc.	11	44%
4. In view of these changes, do you envisage that in few years Larteh would lose its traditional foods?	1. Those associated with religious ceremonies will remain	13	52%
	2. Not really, because these rules have been internalized	7	28%
	3. Not all but some will be lost because of 'modernity'	5	20%

Discussion

The discussion uses descriptive and analytical tools based mainly on inference from the data gathered. This way, key issues, patterns of ideas, and concepts are synthesized.

A. Knowledge of indigenous Larteh foods among the people of Larteh

The first category of responses points to the fact that Larteh food rules leave no traces of ambiguity. Rules regarding where, when, how, and who prepares food are clearly defined. The researcher discovered two main blocks of traditional dishes. These include, what may be termed as, ‘ceremonial’ or ‘ritual’ foods and ‘non-ceremonial’ dishes. The ceremonial meals are associated with festivals whereas the non-ceremonial meals constitute those that people eat ordinarily or regularly. Examples of the ordinary meals include *ofam*, *aprapransa*, *apiti*, *fufu*, *tatale*, *kenkey*, *konkonte ne ho*, and *ampesi*. The ceremonial ones include *pinpineso*, (also called *eba*), *yam fufu*, and *oto* (mashed yam). The ceremonial meals are prepared by people deemed to be experts and are ritually clean. By this, the study refers to women who are not within their menstruating period at the time of the cooking. Most of these experts are elderly women. *Pinpineso* which is the main ceremonial meal eaten during the annual *Ohum* festival of the people of Larteh is prepared by elderly women.

What is important in this segment is respondents’ ability to demonstrate knowledge of the indigenous meals and to distinguish them from exotic foods. Many of my respondents showed a high sense of indigenous foods pointing the ideas and ingredients needed for their preparation. For

example, an 'old lady' describes how to prepare an indigenous meal called *aprapransa*:

You must first prepare your palm nut soup because that is what you will use to cook the dish. Palm nut soup is prepared from palm fruits. You first boil them together with water in a pot until they are soft. When this is done, remove the fruits from fire and pound in a mortar until the fibres remove from the kernel. When you finish, take out everything into a basin and mix with warm water. Squeeze the juice out of the fibre with your hand. You then strain the juice with a sieve into a pot and add already steamed-smoked-fish, salted fish, tomatoes, onions, pepper, and any other thing you may want to add. Allow the soup to simmer until the desired thickness is achieved, but palm nut soup for *aprapransa* should not be very thick. Now to prepare the *aprapransa*, scoop a few ladles of it into a different cooking pot and allow it to boil. Pour a reasonable amount of the roasted corn powder into the pot and stir until the desired texture. You may like to serve it with palm oil from the soup or a tomato stew prepared separately. I know some people eat it with beans (M. Mante, personal communication, September 23, 2013).

The excerpt reveals that although knowledge of some indigenous foods is still present with the people, its currency is a matter of concern to the people themselves. This is because as indicated earlier, the researcher observed two levels of engagement when respondents attempted to mention some of the indigenous foods they knew. Whereas some respondents engaged in a

deliberate (delayed) recall, others also engaged in spontaneous recall of some of the names. The delayed recall is suggestive of the near-extinction or non-availability of some indigenous foods in traditional Larteh society.

B. Popularity of indigenous Larteh foods in present times

With the exception of the ‘ceremonial’ foods, many of the ‘non-ceremonial’ foods are almost extinct. As table 5 indicates, about 56% of the respondents disclosed that foods like *aprapransa*, *apiti*, *ofam* are no longer available on the streets for sale. The reasons for this extinction are partly religious. *Apraprantsa*, for example, would not be sold on the streets of Larteh because it is associated with witchcraft. Many of the respondents argued that many people believe *aprapransa* in the spiritual realm is human feces. *Ofam* or *apiti* for example, is made from ripe plantain. The knowledge of the method for preparing them rest with the elderly women in society. During the season when there is abundance of plantain, the surplus is used to prepare the *apiti* or *ofam* for household members. For the purposes of clarity, here is an interviewee’s description of how *ofam* is prepared.

The ingredients for the preparation of *ofam* include ripe plantain, ginger, pepper, onion. You must pound the ripe plantain in a mortar together with the ginger, pepper, onion. When you pound to obtain the texture you want, you pour it into a pan and bake it in an oven. You can serve it when it is cooked. There is a similar one called *apiti*. You need the same ingredients for *ofam* for the *apiti* too. When you have finished pounding the ripe plantain and the other ingredients, you put

small portions into leaves and either boil or bake them (A.

Nsowa, personal communication, September 25, 2013).

An interesting point to make here is that, many of my respondents disclosed that they acquired the taste for *ofam* and *apiti* from the home because a grandmother prepared it or used to prepare it. Surprisingly, most of my respondents, within the category of the 'young' admitted that they had never eaten *ofam* or *apiti* before. During the focus group discussion, some participants openly confessed that they would not eat food prepared by 'old women' for the fear of being bewitched. According to some respondents, particularly the 'old', this situation is very worrying as these elderly people continue to die with the knowledge of the traditional foods as well as the ideas associated with them.

From the foregoing, flows knowledge of the people's awareness of changes in their food habits. But is the change measurable? If it is, how are they able to measure? Watson (2007) contends that for indigenous peoples, food establishes a historical link with the local environment and cultural practices, which serve as the foundation for communal life. Thus, food assumes a social role in differentiating one group from another. Watson thinks that when this happens individuals regain consciousness of their own indigenous life as well as their belongingness to a group. The implication is that beyond the physiological components of food, "indigenous food actually signifies the complex range of social and cultural relations that sustain 'traditional' identity as lived and realized through localized relationships with the land" (Watson, p. 131). This collective identity is protected from all external forces that may seek to alter a sense of sociality and communalism.

Any external influence on indigenous life, as Memmott and Long (2002) argue, is an attack on indigenous culture and a renunciation of indigenous identity. The present Larteh situation shares resemblance with the argument put forward by Memmott and Long. For the elderly in Larteh, the extinction of some traditional foods is not just a break of the socio-religio-cultural link with the living but also an attempt to sever links with future generations. The people of Larteh believe that their indigenous foods have more nutritional quality than contemporary ones and the reasons for the changes in food habits, according to them, are numerous.

For some of the respondents, the gradual loss of some of the traditional foods results from over subscription to Western attitudes and tastes. The Chief of Larteh Kubease, Nana Kwatei Okatakyie Agyemfra II lamented about the state of traditional Larteh foods today and his comments are worth reporting verbatim.

The foods our forefathers ate, these days you cannot find them anymore. This is because we don't make conscious effort to look for such foods. All of these are factors accounting for the numerous sicknesses – *kyebomu* (fried eggs) and highly seasoned foods account for diseases these days. If you get your boiled plantain, plus your grounded pepper, *kantomire*, groundnut, tomatoes and fish, it is healthy. The highly seasoned foods these days do not help us. So our indigenous foods like *aprapransa*, *obodokunu*, *pinpineso* and others were healthy food. Other foods like *ofam*, even *ofam* these days I don't see it

anymore. Have you eaten one before? (Nana Kwatei Okatakyie Agyemfra II, personal communication, November 13, 2013).

The chief's comments point to a gradual leaning towards exotic foods. Throughout the study, the researcher observed that the types of food sold on the streets fall under the category we may call 'contemporary' foods, such as, instant noodles, fried rice, fried egg with bread, bread with cheese or butter. On one occasion, the researcher sat beside a 'fast food' joint in town from about six 0' clock in the evening to ten in the night, to observe the number of people who came in to buy food. The customers included the 'young' and the 'old'. The same observation was made the following morning as the researcher sat beside a woman who sold *tatale* by the road to observe patronage. The researcher discovered that although the food was patronized by both the 'young' and 'old', it seemed for the old, it was an attempt to lure children who felt reluctant to go school. But for some respondents, the loss of some indigenous foods is the negligence of the Education Ministry to incorporate traditional dishes or meals into the school curriculum such that it can feature prominently as part of 'Catering' as a subject of study.

The above comment also reveals the people's strong belief that indigenous foods carry with them a lot more health benefits than contemporary foods. However, this line of argument must be taken with some degree of caution. One cannot dismiss outright the fact that indigenous foods carry with them healthier benefits than exotic foods but accepting this idea wholly exposes one to what Nutch (2007) calls 'gastronomic culinary centricism' which is the view that one's cultural food habits are better than others. What is being said here is that our attempt to salvage what is left of

traditional foods or promote indigenous way of life must not compel us to romanticize the issues. Such cultural romanticism could lead to exaggeration and inconsistencies in facts. When this happens, substantial issues will remain unresolved. In sub-saharan Africa especially in developing countries, it has been established that socio-economic changes are responsible for the changes in peoples dietary patterns or food habits. These changes in people's food habits are believed to be responsible for the spate of diseases in some communities in Africa (Smith, 1998). Smith argues that changes in dietary habits could be explained against the background of the contact with Arab travellers and colonial rulers. These colonial masters as well as the Arab travellers introduced into the West African sub-region, new crops from the home countries. With time, these introduced crops became part and parcel of the people's diet causing many to show preference for them. The above comment also does not seem to corroborate Miller (2011) who argues that most people in Larteh lack knowledge of nutritional qualities of food. The research found out that the people of Larteh place their indigenous food over and above any other type of food. They argued traditional foods are more nutritious than what they describe as 'contemporary food'.

C. Religious regulations covering Larteh food habits

As indicated in chapter two of this study, the Akonedi shrine is the base of indigenous Larteh religiosity. Its influence in the lives of the people could be seen in virtually every facet of life including legal, social, health, political and particularly in religious regulations regarding food. The shrine is the custodian of the rules governing food and eating in Larteh. Seasonal foods

such as yam, maize must be ritualized before anybody can eat or sell. In the year 2013, the ushering in of the new yam co-incided with the celebration of the *Odwira* festival.

It is customary as well as a religious rule in Larteh that until the rituals are performed to usher in the new yam or corn, no one may bring the new yam to town to sell or eat it. The people consider this an important ritual, which must be observed every year. According to the people, it is a way to show gratitude, first to God (*Onyame*), and the gods for having caused rains to fall on the crops to do well. Some also believe that this practice has a cultural-historical basis. The Chief of Larteh asserts that, their forebears migrated from a portion of present day Israel and journeyed along the coast to settle at present day Larteh. He compares the lifestyle of the biblical Israelites and concludes that Larteh could not have acquired this practice from anywhere but from the links with the people of Israel. The biblical similarities of the Chief's argument reflect the following passages;

“And the first of all the firstfruits of all [things], and every oblation of all, of every [sort] of your oblations, shall be the priest's: ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house” (Ezekiel 44:30: K J V).

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest” (Leviticus, 23:10-14: K J V).

From the religious perspective, we realize how the Larteh traditional religion symbolized by the Akonedi shrine, gives expression to its agrarian past and how the community is forced to negotiate the transformation from an agrarian tradition to an evolving culture. In a reverse, the relationship between Akonedi and food practices in Larteh also documents the processes of cultural transformation. Farmers whose crops reach maturity stage must take the first fruits to the Akonedi shrine for rituals to be performed before they could harvest for sale or for domestic use. The *Osofo* of the Akonedi shrine believes that the rule, if violated, could result in severe consequences. The comment also ties in well with the history of the origin of the Guans generally as having migrated from Israel. Biblical scholars argue that the practice of bringing the first fruits into the house of God should always be understood against a historical background (A. M. Mensah, personal communication, June 30, 2014). This historical link falls outside the scope of this work. However, what is important to stress is the fact that for the people of Larteh, allowing rituals to be performed before tasting the new yam or corn (maize) is only a way to show appreciation to the gods and the ancestors for a good harvest.

The Akonedi shrine observes two ritual meals in a year. The first is during the annual *Odwira* festival and the second is during the *Ohum* festival, which is the traditional festival of the people of Larteh. During the *Odwira* festival, which is celebrated together with the people of Akropong, the shrine prepares *yam fufu* for the people of Larteh to eat in a form of ceremonial meal or feast. During the *Ohum* festival, they prepare a typical traditional Larteh meal which the people call *pinpineso*. This food is made from roasted corn flour and eaten with stew and soup. Family heads or the *ndadi* are expected to

see to its preparation in family homes. The Akonedi shrine also prepares the same meal during the festival. People are invited to come and eat. The last *Ohum* the researcher observed took place on Monday 11th November, 2013. In the Akonedi shrine were women who had been tasked to cook. The researcher went to a couple of houses where the same event was taking place. He observed particularly, in the family house of the *Okomfo* (priest) of the *Kyao* god, that the ingredients were inspected by an old lady after which the priest offered libation prayer and gave the women the permission to start the cooking. The ingredients include *kantomire* (cocoyam leaves), *okro*, dry pepper, tomatoes, palm oil, smoked fish, roasted corn flour, garden eggs, and salt. Below is the description of how *pinpineso* is prepared.

The food we the Guan Larteh eat is called *eba* (*Ohum* or *pinpineso*). *Eba* is made from roasted corn which has been turned into powder form. It is prepared as if one is preparing *banku*. In this regard one boils water and when it is hot, one adds some quantity of the powder to the boiling water and stirs to get the desired texture until it is cooked. This food is served with soup prepared with *okro* or small cocoa pod (traditionally called *eho*) *kantomire*, palm oil and fish specifically from Volta Lake (*adwen* - tilapia). This is done during the *Ohum* festival. Every house prepares this kind of food. This is where we show love towards one another. This is because everyone would take portions of the food and give it to his/her neighbour. We share the food in such a way that even the gods have their share. This is our seasonal or ceremonial or festive food. It is also a proof

of bumper harvest and we do this every year to show our appreciation to the gods (O. Dankwah, personal communication, September 20, 2013).

The researcher was informed that it used to be the case in every year that after the meal, it rained. Surprisingly, just after the meal, the clouds gathered and shortly afterwards there were some rains. When the researcher sought to inquire about the reasons for those particular ingredients and whether they have any ritual significance, many of the respondents attributed it to tradition which they inherited from forebears. For some other respondents, it is not just a question of tradition. Many argue that, the whole ceremony is seen as a feast with both the living and the dead. They argue that, *okro* for example, is added to the food to make it possible for particles of the food to fall to the ground for the gods and ancestors.

The picture below shows a well-endowed woman who by Ghanaian standards qualifies to be called an ‘old lady’. She is resident in the house where the shrine of the *Kyao* god is situated in Larteh. As mentioned earlier prior to the preparation of the food, all the ingredients were placed in front of her for inspection.



Plate 4: A display of Ingredient for the Preparation of *Pinpineso*

When she certified that the items were up to, the *Okomfo* (priest) *Kyao* prayed to the gods and the ancestors inviting them to partake in the meal. The text that follows shows the libation prayer offered by the priest;

We call on all Larteh clans to come for drink

Larteh *kyao* we call you

We call you

We call you

We call for you, life!

Enyine Agyamkpode kyao

Today we are celebrating *eba*

We have gathered all the ingredients for it

We are not doing this for children

We are not doing this for mothers

Neither are we doing this for any individual

We are doing this for the entire community

For unity and long life

Years pass and we welcome new ones

What is important is life

We pray for life in the coming years

A life full of strength

He who is against what we are doing and finds every means to destroy its beauty

Deal with that fellow (*Okomfo Kyao*, November 2013)

Although the main scope of this research falls outside a linguistic analysis of a libation text, the above prayer points to some cultural traits of the Larteh society, which are worth discussing. For instance, we see in this text a

close affinity between community members as well as belief in ancestors and divinities. There is ample reason to believe that the celebration is a re-union with the living, the dead and yet to be born. Besides, the prayer shares similar structure with ritual prayers as outlined by some African scholars like Mbiti (1991) and Gaba (1973). John Mbiti asserts that African traditional religious prayers are often offered by a priest and on behalf of a community. It usually begins with invocation or thanksgiving, declaration of purpose of prayer and request. The request may be for health, prosperity, security or preservation of life among others (Mbiti, p. 61). The above prayer text reflects this description.

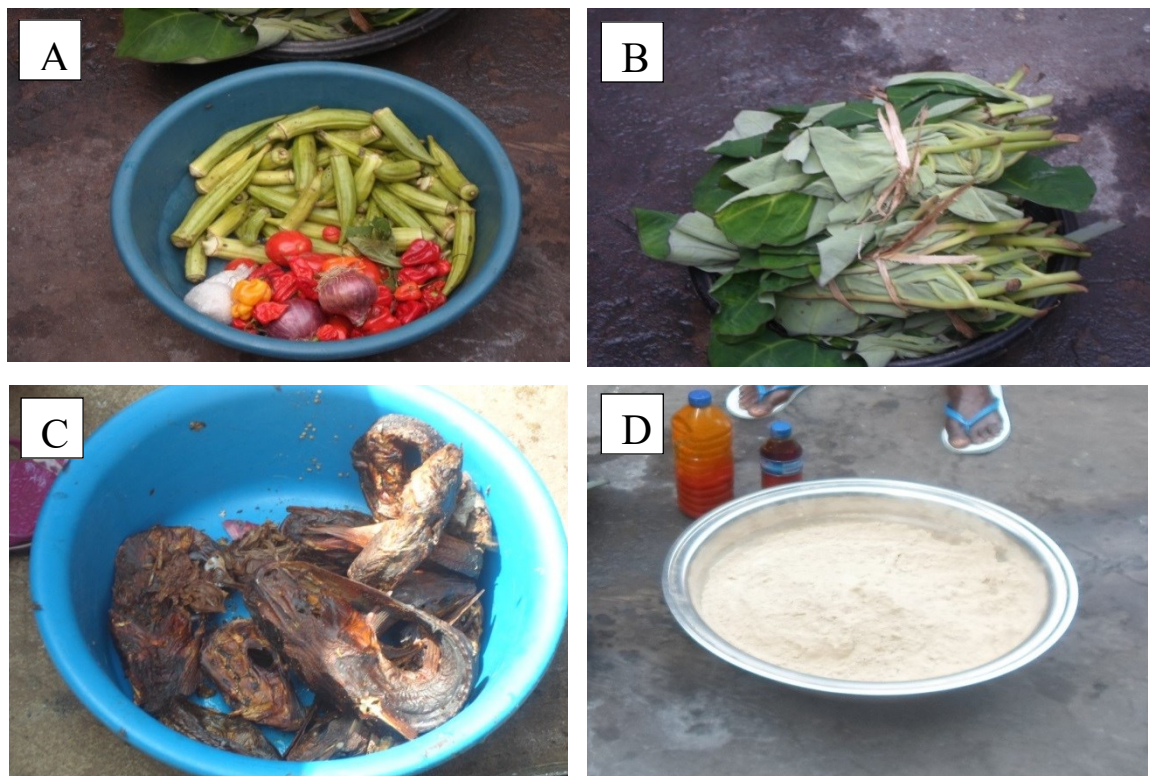


Plate 5: Ingredients For the Preparation of *Pinpineso*. (A) Shows a Bowl Containing *Okro*, Onions, Pepper, and Local Salt; (B) Shows a Bowl with *Kontomire* (Cocoyam Leaves); (C). Shows a Bowl with Smoked Fish for the

Preparation of Soup and **(D)** Shows a Bottle of Palm (Red) Oil and Container with Roasted Corn Flour.



Plate 6: Preparation Stages of the *Pinpineso*. (A) Shows a Pot with Vegetables and Fish on Fire; (B) Shows a Woman Grinding the Cooked Vegetables in an Earthenware Bowl for Stew; (C) Shows the Soup Made With the Stock From the Vegetables and (D) The Preparation of *eba* Made From Roasted Corn Flour.

The whole ceremony assumes religious as well as social dimensions. On the religious front, it unites humans with the gods and the ancestors whereas it unites humans with their fellow humans on the social level. The cooking was done amid singing and dancing as shown plate 7 below.



Plate 7: Joyous Moments of *Ohum* Festival.

The joy with which the food was eaten reveals the social dimensions of food. As was already discussed in the literature review, food creates social identity (see Ceccarini, 2010). For many scholars, a society's food habits mirrors its culture or traditions. The components of the culture are seen in the ideas associated with food. Coff (2006) posits that although food is often eaten on the individual level, it always carries with it a communal sense. Coff contends that during the shared meal time, people transcend their individual personalities and are united in a social interaction. This communal sense creates the notion of same blood, same flesh among the eaters. In this regard, the sense of 'egoism' is eliminated and the eaters find strength in a common identity (Coff, p. 4). One gathers from the above argument that food does not only expose the culture of a group, but it also serves as the bedrock for

establishing and maintaining social relations (Gofton, 1996). Like the Christian sacrament of communion, these ceremonial meals in Larteh carry with them the sense of communalism and unity among the people. Conveney (2000) argues that the term communion is equated to the word 'company' which is made up of two Greek words- 'communis' which means common and 'panis' which means bread. Thus as the grains of wheat unite in one bread, people who partake in this meal are urged to stay together in unity. This oneness was demonstrated as people came from their homes to the Akonedi shrine to share in the meal.

Another ceremony or ritual meal is one associated with death and funeral rites, traditionally called *Oyidan*. This is a feast, which usually takes place on the Monday following the Saturday a deceased person is buried. For the people, it is an avenue to show love and iron out any conflict which must have started before or during the funeral. Perhaps, this belief is proof of Benjamin C Ray's argument that in most African societies, death presents social as well as spiritual imbalance which must be dealt with. In his own words Ray argues;

At death, new problems of social and spiritual identity arise. When a family loses one of its members, especially a senior member, a significant moral and social gap occurs. The family together with other kinsmen must close this gap and reconstitute itself through a series of ritual and social adjustments (Ray, 1976, p. 140).

For the people of Larteh, one of such series of rituals is through *Oyidan*. The *Oyidan* is food prepared to be shared among people especially outsiders. This

food is usually prepared when someone dies in the family. The food can be prepared on either the Monday or the Thursday that follows immediately after internment. The *Oyidan* can be *ampesi* or *fufu*. The family that prepares the food appoints a woman to go to the market to buy the ingredients. If the family decides to pound fufu, fish for the soup is carefully selected. The people of Larteh Kubease use fish from the Volta Lake but the Larteh Ahenease people combine goat meat with fish. The people seem not to know the rationale behind this choice but they consider it as a tradition. According to them, it is a simple way to part company with the dead physically. However, the *Oyidan* is limited to houses which consider it as customary and therefore one's failure to observe the ritual could incur the wrath of the dead on the family.

Responses to category C of the questions demonstrates a strong religious influence on food and eating in Larteh. The researcher was informed that pounding fufu after 6 pm is a taboo. According to them, and particularly the chief of Larteh, the reason is as a result of experiences from the past.

Our ancestors realized that many people were dying as a result of a common practice. In the past, our ancestors were using *bobo* - traditional lantern. In the night, it attracted insects. Some of these insects are very harmful and poisonous. Some could enter your eye and it hurts like pepper. So for example in the night while they were pounding the fufu, these insects, unknown to the people, would fall into the *fufu* and the soup on fire. They would eat and then during the night they will die. The entire village would wake up the following morning and realize that a whole family had been wiped out. This continued

until the elders made a rule banning the pounding of *fufu* after six in the evening. So here in Larteh it is a taboo to pound *fufu* after six in the evening. We are told the gods hate this practice. So there are a lot of things our forefathers put in place just for our safety (Nana Kwatei Agyemfra II, personal communication, September 24, 2013).

It is also a religious regulation not to sell 'Ga' kenkey from the streets of Larteh on Tuesdays and Fridays. The researcher observed that nobody sold 'Ga' kenkey from the street on Tuesdays and Fridays. My respondents, particularly the *Osofo* of the Akonedi shrine, think that it is just a rule by the gods and should be kept as such. He believes that seeking explanation to the rule is tantamount to questioning the authority of the gods. This attitude to the rule seems to have given way for speculation and conjecture by some indigenous people of Larteh especially the youth. For example, in a focus group discussion, some participants explained away this rule saying that the gods eat 'Ga' kenkey on those said days and therefore humans also should not eat it since that could be interpreted as equating themselves to the gods.

It seems that the rules governing food and eating in Larteh have been internalized and therefore the people observe them without hesitation. To them these are practices which they inherited from their forebears and must therefore keep them. The researcher does not, by this research, suggest that every individual in Larteh today observes this tradition through and through. Indeed as John S. Mbiti argues, individuals may hold different opinions on various subjects, rituals, ceremonies and beliefs and therefore when there is an assertion that a group of people believe in something or engage in a particular

practice, the assertion should be understood in a corporate sense (Mbiti, 1969). Hence, Larteh food rules constitute corporate beliefs and there cannot be unanimity in their observance.

Indeed some of my respondents especially the 'Christian youth' consider these foods and the entire ceremony as devilish and unbiblical. Many of such respondents confirmed that they had never participated in the ritual or ceremony. But is it as easy as that to ignore some of these rituals? I was reliably informed that there was an instance where a Christian lady lost her mother. As part of funerary rite, she was to see to it that the ritual meal known as *Oyidan* was observed. According to my informant, the lady refused to observe the ritual and in no time she also died. My informant claims that the entire village believed the person had died out of disobedience. When she was buried, the family observed the ceremony for both mother and daughter. My informant argues that although she is Christian, she believes it is a tradition and should be observed. From the above discourse flows the idea that religion has and continues to be a force behind Larteh food habits.

D. Ethical Perspectives of Larteh Food Habits

The study also revealed some ethical perspectives of the traditional food ideas in Larteh. As indicated earlier, the study found that it is against religious rules for one to bring new yam into the town either to eat or sell before the necessary religious rituals have been performed to thank the gods and the ancestors for the season's harvest. The rule applies to the new corn (maize) which must first be offered to the gods accompanied with rituals as a way to show appreciation for a good harvest. Nevertheless, the rule, according to my

respondents, has moral implications. For them the rule ensures sanity in the community as it prevents people from stealing from other people's farm. They explained that the rule by its nature teaches the virtue of hard work and discourages people from enjoying what they have not worked for. Here too, we see a close affinity between religion, morality and food habits as was the case in ancient Greece and Rome discussed in chapter three of this study. Food ideas have in most cases been associated with moral values. For example, among the Akan of Ghana, a mother may not feed her child with egg for fear of raising a child who would turn out to be a thief. Among some tribes in northern Ghana, meat was the last item a child could have after eating the main meal also because of belief that the child may be a thief. In the Greek model, right food at the right time was the only way to raise ethical citizens. Thus, citizenship was not attained by virtue of birth but depended greatly on eating the right food and in moderation.

In addition, the ethical aspect of Larteh food habits points to the communitarian (or communal) nature of African moral system which was briefly discussed in the third chapter of this thesis. As indicated by Mbiti (1969) and Ray (1976), Africans believe that although the individual human being has autonomy and dignity, he or she depends on the society for the realization of his or her goals (see Gyekye, 1997). The individual's role in this goal achievement process depends also on a socially worked out moral system. This implies that the individual must show a great sense of moral uprightness in his or her conduct. As a representative of most African societies, Larteh traditional moral system is communal in nature (Brokensha, 1966). Data from the field corroborate Gyekye's (p. 35) argument that the moral status of an

African shares light on the African concept of personhood (Gyekye, p. 35). Because the individual is not self-sufficient, he or she must depend on the relationships with the rest of society for the achievement of his or her goals. The implication is that the socio-ethical roles of the individual must be in the collective interest of the entire society (Gyekye, p. 36). Indeed many Africans believe that a miscalculated act could endanger the welfare of the whole community. In Larteh for example, many may avoid harvesting their farm produce until rituals are performed for fear of putting the society's welfare in danger. This practice may be difficult to understand, however, the people of Larteh believe the practice awakens the moral senses of individuals to avoid stealing and to be hardworking. As Kwame Gyekye writes;

Moral or normative matters may be expressed in sophisticated and elaborate conceptual formulations; but they do, as practical matters, have their best and unambiguous articulation or translation in the actual way of life of a people (Gyekye, p. 36).

Conclusion

Larteh, like ancient Greece and Rome demonstrates a set of boundaries around which food businesses are conducted. In ancient Greece for instance, obedience to food rules was a mark of good citizenship (Coveney, 2000). During the Middle Ages when food became associated with Christian religious practices, it assumed a symbolic character and was eaten with much symbolic meaning. Women played important roles in food conduct ranging from the selection to its preparation (Bynum, 1987). In the case of Larteh, it was observed that knowledge of the indigenous dishes as well as methods of

preparation rests with the aged in society especially the women. In the Akonedi shrine, for example, there are women tasked with the responsibility of cooking ritual meals. The implication is that food conduct in Larteh, particularly its preparation, revolves mostly around women. This assertion is not suggestive of the fact that men have little or no knowledge of indigenous Larteh foods. The rituals associated with eating in Larteh are often performed by the men. It is interesting to note also that the indigenous Larteh foods reflect the crops that constitute the main stay of the people. The hilly and rocky area of Larteh supports the growing of crops such as maize, yam, cassava, cocoyam and vegetables such as garden eggs, tomatoes, and pepper (Brokensha, 1966). Many of the farmers in this area are engaged in subsistence farming and produce, primarily, to feed their families and sell the surplus only when there is.

CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

In general, the study found that there is a strong relationship between religion and food in the indigenous traditions of Larteh. The ideas and rules regarding food habits in Larteh are clear and require no further explanation. This strong relationship between religion and food is evident in the role the Akonedi shrine has played over the years in maintaining the food traditions of the people. Significant among the roles are that traditional foods such as *pinpineso*, *oto* and *yam fufu* continue to feature in the food habits of the people because of their close affinity with religious ceremonies. Nonetheless, as discussed extensively in chapter four, it was discovered that some traditional meals such as *aprapransa*, *ofam*, *apiti* no longer receive attention because of their association with witchcraft lately. The study also identified a threefold relationship between religion, food and morality in Larteh. For example one may not bring new yam or corn (maize) into the town until religious rituals have been performed.

Chapter one was an overview of the study which discussed the problem under investigation and the various objectives guiding the study. It stressed that the study was occasioned by the observation of the relationship

between food and indigenous Ghanaian life. Many Ghanaians would or would not eat certain foods because their religions demand of them to act in that regard. Thus, the injunction to eat or not to eat is very much influenced by religious ideas. Besides, many people bemoan the state of traditional foods (which are considered to be healthy) in Ghana today and are wondering the role religion can play in reverting people to healthy eating lifestyles. Thus, using the Akonedi shrine as a prototype of Eastern Buddhist and Western Christian monasteries which served as centres for the preservation of certain cultural foods (Jotischky, 2011), this research set out to investigate whether indigenous Ghanaian religious shrines have played or are playing a similar role in preserving the indigenous food habits of a people - the people of Larteh.

The chapter also reviewed relevant literature under three main themes; namely the anthropological, the sociological and the religious perspectives of food. In sum, the study stressed that anthropological works on food deal with how a group of people's food habits reveal their culture. Under this theme, works like Mallery (1888), Mintz and Du Bois (2002), Mintz (2011), Cushing (1974), Boa (1921), Mintz (1985) and other scholars were discussed. The study pointed out that the focus of these works was to establish the origins of national cuisines, how food creates identity and the relationship between food and culture. From the sociological perspective Ceccarini (2010), Murcott (2011[1983]), Mennel, Murcott and van Otterloo (1992), Sherwood (1973), Mennel (1983) and others were considered. It came to light that the sociological discourse on food examines the social implications of food although many tend also to focus on the nutrition and the health implications

of food. Many of the works considered here point to the fact that food establishes and maintains social relations. In treating the relationship between religious beliefs and food, Meyer-Rochow (2009), Coveney (2000[2006]), Garnsey (1999), Azumah (2010), Sarpong (1974) and others became points of reference. This theme established the fact that religion and food are inseparable. Nevertheless, the religious ideas concerning food are often intended to shape the moral character of an individual. Thus, these showed how religious conduct around food creates a moral being.

In order to situate the study, the profile of Larteh was discussed in chapter two as one of the towns found on the Akuapem hills in the Akuapem North District of the Eastern Region of Ghana with a population size of eight thousand, three hundred and ten (8310) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2005). Ampene (2011) describes them as being among the 'hill Guan groups'. It is predominantly a farming community with a focus on subsistence farming. By Ghanaian standards, majority of the houses are of middle class status with essential amenities like potable water, light, place of convenience among others. The social life of the people is organized around kinship formalized in brongs or minor quarters whereas their political system shares some resemblance with the Akan political system. They are the only Guan group that speaks *Letɛ* as a language (Ansah, 2010; Ampene, 2011; Lewis, 2009). On the indigenous religious life of the people, it was discovered that although many of the people have switched from the indigenous religion to others like Christianity and Islam, at the base of Larteh religious belief is the Akonedi shrine which continues to exert influence on the people (Brokensha, 1966). Its major areas of influence are in the area of health, sociality, spirituality among

others as well as food practices of the people. The shrine performs rituals before either new yam or corn (maize) could be brought into the town to be sold or eaten. Beside this role, the shrine also plays a central role in the annual *Ohum* festival of the people of Larteh as it prepares food for indigenes to eat.

The thesis that religion closely relates to food practices and beliefs is not peculiar to Larteh. Therefore, chapter three dealt with some classical models of food practices generally with an attempt to identify points of convergence within the indigenous African religious food ethics focusing on ancient Greece and imperial Rome as well as contemporary ideas about food. In doing so, the study found that the Greek model of beliefs and practices about food was concerned about molding a moral subject. The chapter contended that for the Greeks, being a citizen depended to a great extent on right choice of food. These ideas about food in ancient Greece continued to hold sway until the period of transition to Roman culture. During the Roman period, food ideas were influenced by Christian practices such as fasting. Conduct around food was an attempt to be in union with one's object of worship. Thus whereas ancient Greece focused on forming a citizen on earth, ancient Rome encouraged the individual to become a citizen of heaven. The Christian ideas about food continued into the Middle Ages until food became associated with the Eucharist which emphasized eating to be in union with one's object of worship and one's fellow humans. It was argued that contemporary ideas about food tend towards issues of ecology, longevity, nutrition, mass marketing, and individual freedom among others. The chapter concluded that there is a long-standing relationship between religion, morality and food habits. This threefold relationship was evident in the traditional food

practices of the Larteh also. It was discovered that women in Larteh play a similar role women played in maintaining food traditions during these classical periods. Generally, the social meaning of food which was seen in the Christian Eucharist is seen in the Larteh *Ohum* festival and the *oyidan* feast.

Methodology

The research was largely phenomenological and the instruments for data collection were interview guide and participant observation. Using network sampling technique, often through the lead of someone, twenty-five (25) people were interviewed, with ten respondents from the Akonedi shrine and fifteen people from the non-shrine functionary. This was complemented with a focus discussion comprising twelve (12) individuals. Intensive fieldwork lasted for one week although there were occasional visits to Larteh before and after the one week of intensive fieldwork. Data presented in chapter four show that Larteh food habits leave no traces of ambiguity. The research identified two main blocks of food types in Larteh namely the 'ceremonial' and the 'non-ceremonial'. Examples of the 'non-ceremonial' meals include *ofam*, *aprapransa*, *apiti*, *fufu*, *kenkey*, *konkonte ne ho*, and *ampesi*. The 'ceremonial' ones include *pinpineso*, (also called *eba*), *yam fufu*, *oto* (mashed yam) and a traditional feast known as *Oyidan*. The ceremonial meals must, as a matter of necessity, be prepared by women who are deemed ritually clean. Men who had sex during the night before the ceremony must take their bath before they could associate with the ceremony.

Findings

Major findings were categorized under four main themes as follows:

- A. Knowledge about indigenous Larteh foods
- B. Popularity of indigenous Larteh foods in present times
- C. Religious regulations covering Larteh food habits
- D. Ethical perspectives of traditional Larteh food habits.

A. Knowledge About Indigenous Larteh Foods

Many respondents demonstrated a great knowledge of traditional Larteh foods as well as the traditions associated with them. Two blocks of traditional dishes were identified namely the ‘ceremonial’ or ‘ritual’ foods and the ‘non-ceremonial’. Whereas the ceremonial meals find close ties with festivals, the non-ceremonial meals feature prominently on the daily menu of many households. Examples of the ordinary meals include *ofam*, *aprapransa*, *apiti*, *fufu*, *tatale*, *kenkey*, *konkonte ne ho*, and *ampesi*. The ceremonial ones include *pinpineso*, (also called *eba*), *yam fufu*, and *oto* (mashed yam). The ceremonial meals are prepared by women who are ritually clean and are free from their menstrual period at the time of the cooking. This portion stressed that given the task, many Larteh indigenes would be able to distinguish indigenous meals from non-traditional Larteh food.

B. Popularity of Indigenous Larteh Foods in Present Times

The study revealed that although knowledge of some indigenous foods is still present with the people, its currency is a matter of concern to the people themselves. This is because the researcher observed two levels of engagement

when respondents attempted to mention some of the indigenous foods they knew. Whereas some respondents engaged in a deliberate (delayed) recall, others also engaged in spontaneous recall of some of the names. The delayed recall is suggestive of the near-extinction or non-availability of some indigenous foods in traditional Larteh society.

C. Religious regulations covering Larteh food habits

Within the third block regarding the religious implications on food in Larteh, the study also found that traditional religion, particularly the Akonedi shrine, continues to exert much influence in what people choose as food. Religion, as a marker of tradition has played a role in preserving certain indigenous foods as well as the ideas and traditions associated with them. Ceremonial meals such as *pinpineso*, *oto*, *yam fufu* and the traditional feast known as *oyidan* continue to feature in the food practices of the people of Larteh. In this regard, one may safely conclude that indigenous Ghanaian religious shrines play a similar role as one would find with Western Christian and Eastern Buddhist monasteries. However, it also came to light that the religious influence on food habits in Larteh has not always been positive. Religion, as dysfunctional as it could be sometimes, has contributed to the loss of certain foods such as *aprapransa*, *ofam*, *apiti* because these foods were associated with witchcraft. Data from the field would seem to suggest that religion is not the only agent causing extinction of indigenous foods but 'secularization' and what the people themselves call 'over subscription' to Western ideas and attitudes. For the young people in Larteh, one must respond to contemporary ideas and attitudes and not be stuck to 'old' ways of doing

things. The researcher observed that the youth have taste for contemporary dishes. They describe traditional meals as archaic and less nutritional.

D. Ethical perspectives of traditional Larteh food habits

The study also revealed some ethical perspectives of the traditional food ideas in Larteh. It was discovered that as part of prohibitions, one may not bring new yam into the town to eat or sell until the necessary religious rituals have been performed to thank the gods and the ancestors for the season's harvest. One may also not bring the new corn (maize) into the town until rituals have been performed to thank the gods and the ancestors. This practice as explained in chapter four must be understood against a certain historical background (see pages 112 to 114). Nevertheless, the rule, according to my respondents, has moral implications as it deters people from stealing other people's farm produce. They explained that the rule by its nature teaches the virtue of hard work as it discourages people from enjoying what they have not worked for. They argued that although many feared to break the rule for fear of being punished by the gods, individuals also served as checks on one another to ensure strict adherence to the rule. The study also discovered that one may not pound fufu after six o'clock in the evening. This act, according to the people, is against the wish of the gods and the ancestors. However, the researcher was informed that it was as a result of their experiences with snake bites and insect poisoning in the past.

Conclusion

Most of the traditional meals reflect the foodstuffs that constitute the main stay of the people. For example, yam features prominently in ‘ceremonial’ meals such as *oto*, yam *fufu* during the *Odwira* festival. Corn, also a staple food, features predominantly in some traditional meals of the Larteh such as *obo dokono* and particularly the ceremonial meal called *pinpineso*. This meal is made from roasted corn flour. This cultural reliance on corn could be seen in other Guan groups in Ghana such as the Effutu, the Senya, etc. (source?). The researcher observed that prior to the preparation of the *pinpineso*, part of the roasted corn flour was mixed with palm oil and sprinkled at doorposts for the ancestors and the gods as a way of inviting them to share in the meal. We may recall that as part of literature review, the importance of corn to other world cultures was discussed (cf. Cushing, 1974; Warman, 2003). It was clear that corn has both ‘profane’ and sacred relevance. A ritual prayer text was analyzed showing the people’s link with religion and food.

On the social level, the study showed that the religious rules regarding food regulate social relations and ensures harmony among people. The example of not being allowed to bring new corn or yam into the town until the necessary rites are performed attest to this assertion. However the social meaning of food is echoed properly during the *Ohum* festival and the *oyidan*. This social aspect of food was discussed during the literature review and the data analysis (cf. Murcott, 2011; Murcott, 1983; Mennell, Murcott & van Otterloo, 1992; Ceccarini, 2010; Sherwood, 1973:1108).

Another aspect of Larteh food habits which came to light during the research borders on the role of women in food conduct. This feminine role in food habits was discussed extensively in the third chapter of this work. The research revealed that the religious role in the preservation of some traditional Larteh foods has been possible because of the role women play in Larteh food conduct. Larteh women are at the preparation stage and therefore possess a wealth of the traditions and ideas associated with traditional Larteh foods. The study discovered that many young women in Larteh have little knowledge of these traditional foods mainly because of the leaning towards 'modern' foods and their absence from home as a result of schooling. But some respondents believe this vacuum exists because of what they call 'over-subscription' to modern foods.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made: It is recommended that Ghana may consider following in the example of India where the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) continues to push for a re-examination of human food conduct from the perspectives of indigenous life (see Watson, 2007 or visit iitc@treatycouncil.org). The primary objective of this organization is to promote indigenous food production as well as consumption of traditional foods. In this regard, stakeholders, restaurant operators and traditional food vendors can incorporate indigenous cuisines into their menus.

In addition, it is recommended that restaurant operators and particularly traditional food vendors could consider revising some of the values associated

with Ghanaian foods. The researcher believes that such a move could have positive influence on the Ghanaian attitude to traditional foods.

Moreover, traditional food vendors could unite as a group for a common goal. The researcher believes that such an association offers traditional food vendors a voice to influence decision even at the national level. For example, several months to the start of the 2014 FIFA world cup in Brazil, organizers of the event took a decision to allow only sponsors into the stadium to sell their products. The decision did not sit lightly with a group of traditional food vendors in Brazil known as Association of Bahian Acaraje Sellers. This group started a campaign to force FIFA to reverse its decision which it did (Sandy, 2014). Traditional food vendors could make their voice heard through a re-activation of the national orientation programme launched in 2007 if we desire to have results in selling Ghana to Ghanaians and the rest of the world.

Particularly, in view of the question the research set out to answer, it is recommended that food values become an important element in inter-religious dialogue. This is because various religious groups meet already. In the Christian denomination for example, there are groups which meet to discuss spiritual issues and sometimes issues of national concern. Such fora could be used to discuss ideas about traditional food values. At such fora, it is recommended that people desist from demonizing values associated with traditional food values and harness them for use.

Traditional religious leaders have a role to play in strengthening religious institutions particularly those associated with traditional foods. We see the close affinity between religion and food practices preserved through religious

ceremonies in Larteh. The agent of this preservation is the Akonedi shrine which serves as the custodian of the religious injunctions regarding food.

At the academic level, it is recommended that departments for the study of religions in collaboration with departments of food and nutrition should undertake more research in the area of food and make their findings available to the public. This way Ghanaians shall be in a position to know how traditional religious values can help to maintain and improve traditional foods for future generation.

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APPENDIX A

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

FACULTY OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAMME (M.Phil)

Interview Outline

Thesis Topic: To eat or not to eat: A study of the role of African Traditional Religious food ethics in the traditional food practices of Larteh, Ghana.

This interview guide was designed along four major themes to generate conversation. Each theme considered sub questions which sought to illicit from interviewees, every idea they had on the themes.

A. Knowledge on the indigenous Larteh foods

Data on:

- i. A list of some indigenous Larteh foods
- ii. How such foods were prepared
- iii. When such foods were prepared
- iv. Who prepared them

B. Popularity of such foods in recent times

Data on:

- i. Their continuous existence or extinction
- ii. The role of the Akonedi shrine in the preservation or otherwise of the situation.
- iii. Factors accounting for the continuous existence or extinction

C. Rules (ethics) influencing Larteh food habits

Data on the purpose of such ethics:

- i. Whether for social control
- ii. For religious significance
- iii. For healthcare

D. Lessons for contemporary use

Data on:

- i. The specific areas of influence

Sample questions for conversation

1. Describe three of the oldest Larteh traditional dishes/foods that you know.
2. Supposing I asked to prepare one of such foods, which ingredients with you consider and how will you prepare it?
3. In my hometown, menstruating women are not permitted to cook especially food that has ritual significance. What is the situation like in Larteh?
4. When can one eat what food and why?
5. Tell me about the foods that are prepared and eaten on specific occasions in Larteh.
6. Are the foods you have mentioned still popular in Larteh today?
7. What accounts for the current state of Larteh traditional foods?
8. Explain to me why people would or would not eat certain foods in Larteh

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION AND HUMAN VALUES**

**Tel/Fax: 03321: 30943
E-mail: religion@ucc.edu.gh**



**University Post Office,
Cape Coast, Ghana.**

Our Ref: RHV/G/6

14th May, 2013.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Mr. Alexander Hackman-Aidoo is an M. Phil student of the University of Cape Coast undertaking his programme in the Department of Religion and Human Values.

As part of the programme, he intends to visit your outfit to collect data which will aid him to write his thesis.

We shall be very grateful if you will grant him all the courtesies he deserves.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Gloria Nyame (Miss)

Principal Administrative Assistant

For: Head of Department

APPENDIX C

FIELDWORK TRANSCRIPT SAMPLE

Interview with Chief on Oral History of Larteh

The name Larteh was originally 'Late'. We are/were part of the Ga. The Germans corrupted the name to 'Date'. The name continued to undergo transformation and modifications until its current use. The modern spelling of the name is Larteh. The stories concerning Larteh's origin abounds. But our conversation would concentrate on how the people came to settle on this hill. The Larteh in general are Guans by tribe. We are siblings with the Ga, Osoduku, La, Ningo. The history indicates that we came from a part of Israel with the Ga. There is a song by the Ga which traces their ancestry from Israel through Ethiopian down to Sudan. We moved with them from Israel to Ethiopia. There in Ethiopian Empire, war broke out which forced us to move further to Sudan. There in Sudan too, war broke out after a short stay and the empire collapsed and therefore we were forced out of the place. We moved down to Nigeria and settled in Oyo State. Our stay at this place too was brief because of constant struggle and conflicts. The group that moved to settle in Nigeria was now disintegrated into two.

The first group moved to North-Western Ghana and settled in places like Sunyani and Techiman. In these places, you are likely to meet people who speak Larteh dialect but there is a slight difference. That group moved to that area in Ghana to settle there. The second group which was our group (Larteh group) moved along the coast with the Ga, La, Osu and Ningo and came to settle in Benin for some time. After the break down of the empire, that group

was further disintegrated and forced to move. But our group began moving towards Ghana. When we got to Volta-Ghana, some moved to settle in Upper Volta and other areas of the Volta Region of Ghana. This group included the Kete Krachi, Denteh, Salaga and others.

Our group (the current Larteh group) moved further along the coast to settle along the shorelines of Ningo. We settled there with La, Osoduku, Ningo and stayed there for a while. Sooner than later, war broke out between ourselves and that forced some of us (the Larteh) to move further towards this hill where Larteh is currently situated. But before we finally got here, settled in a place called Effiakoh (Fianko enya), a place behind Shia hills. We were the first to break the virgin forest to settle there. We moved from there to settle at another place called Odokum. But we left because the land was too waterlogged to support our farming activities. The group that remained on this land included the Ningo and Prampram people. It was our quest to find a fertile and peaceful land led us to another place called Awenbi. Here too our stay was brief. Don't forget that some of those we left at Odokum were later dissatisfied with the nature of the land and therefore moved to join those in Awenbi. Thankfully it was during this time that Tetteh Quarshie introduced cocoa to Ghana. This attracted some of the group to Sefwi and Oda areas to engage in cocoa plantation.

The rest of the group at Awenbi moved to this hill where Larteh is currently. The war leaders who led the group to this place included Gyampo, Brafo Asiedu and Out Ete. Our spiritual backbones were Otutu and Chao (the Ningo call him Chawe). Gyampo Oloku led us to this hill. Brafo Asiedu's group moved towards Bruma to Mampong (to a place called Akpre), towards

Amanfo (where Benkum Secondary School is) to Mamfe – Akropong to Ampeniease. All those lands belong to the Larteh. Those who moved to this hill later heard that the Asante were expanding their territories and were looking for slaves. During this period, the Asante would come under the pretext that they were looking for a wife for the Asantehene. When that happened, we would assemble all the ladies and choose the most beautiful lady and give her out to be sent to Asantehene as a wife. In fact our ladies were beautiful. We knew for sure that, refusal to give the lady out could result in war. But when the lady is finally taken away, we would organize a funeral for her as though she was dead. But to cut the long story short, Gyampo led us to this place.

The first place our forefathers settled here was called the Abode (also spelt Aboade). They are the Agyampode and they are the landlords of this town. With time the rapid expansion of the Asante threatened the group at Amanfo and therefore they moved to join us here in the hills. Thus Amanfo was abandoned. Likewise those at Odokum abandoned the place and came to join us here. They abandoned the plains for the Prampram people to farm. So if today we claim that we have lands in Prampram, that is the reason.

The Larteh Kubease land is divided into brongs and they are fourteen in number. We have the Agyampode, Ahimso, Abiare, Apamsu, Pama, Effiankore, Amansore etc. Larteh is one but politically divided into two. We have Larteh Kubease and Larteh Ahenease. Larteh Kubease got the name because, some members of our group carried with themselves coconut as we moved along the coast and therefore when we finally settled here they planted it. With time the coconut became a point of reference in describing the first

part of Larteh. Indeed Larteh proper is Kubease. Larteh Kubease people were originally called Antre Ese (which means those who called the people to come). This will lead us to explain the origin of the name Ahenease.

When we settled here for some time, our warriors were still scrambling for land. This they did through hunting expeditions. One day they moved down the hill around Ayikuma and Abonse and found a group of people and captured them and brought them to settle at a place we originally named Mkpeni Ese (which means those who do not know). This was a mixed group. They were groups of five and they were our subjects. The warriors continued to capture other smaller groups and added the number. But because this was a mixed group- which include Ewe, Hausa, Wangara, etc, there was constant scuffle between them. The chief of Larteh Kubease always received complaints about a group having attacked another group. To be able to deal with this situation, we asked them to select one person among themselves to whom all complaints should first be made before even the chief of Larteh Kubease gets to know. That respectable individual they selected was called Domfo Mante – the group's leader at the time they were captured. We therefore performed rituals and official installed him leader of the mixed group. He was called Mkpeni Kpowura.

The name Larteh Ahenease came about as a result of the following. After 1933, the famous Ansah Sasraku was a threat to us. We therefore ran to Ofei Kwesi Agyeman and his people from Kamena (somewhere in the Volta) for assistance. Indeed we admitted that we could not fight Ansah Sasraku and his people for the Akwamu were a force to reckon with. Ofei Kwesi Agyeman and his people agreed to assist us in a war against the Akwamu. Word was

sent to Akyem Akronpong to Ofori Panyin for his assistance. Ofori Panyin therefore sent warriors to come and assist us. When the warriors came, they asked “the people we have been asked to help, what do they have?” When they examined us, they found guns and gun powder and therefore concluded in twi saying “wo kura apem” and that became Akuapem. So the Akyem were the first to use the term Akuapem to describe all the Akuapem groups. The guns and gun powder convinced them to join us to war against Ansah Sasraku and his people. So we attacked Ansah Sasraku and his men from Yanoase and chased him down to Dodowa forest all the way to Akwamu and beyond until he could not be traced anymore.

We returned home but we were still not satisfied because we could not capture Ansah Sasraku physically. We feared that he could re-organize himself again and attack us surprisingly. We sent word to Ofori Panyin that he should let his brother Ofori Kuma come and stay with us at Akuapem and help us. Ofori Panyin agreed and sent his brother Ofori Kuma to us. Ofori Kuma came with a full regalia and we settled them at a place called Amamprobi – a place downhill Mamfe (where the Mamfe had their first cemetery). It was later that Larteh people brought them up the hill of Mamfe. Ofori Kuma and his men sat down with us and demanded that there ought to be a seal of the verbal agreement between us so that one day the Akuapem will not get up and deny ever inviting them to stay with us. We all moved to Abotakyi seal the agreement. The agreement is what has become known as the Abotakyi Accord. This was followed with rituals at Obosomase-Kyenku. In that covenant they prayed for the success of the union between the Akyem and the Akuapem.

To strengthen this accord, Ofori Kuma sought to appoint divisional chiefs in all the Akuapem states. All the groups that constituted Akuapem were invited to that meeting including Larteh. Surprisingly the captured group in Larteh (Mkpeni Ese) got to the meeting earlier than Larteh Kubease people. Thus Ofori Kuma in appointing the divisional inquired from this group saying, 'whose descendants are you' which in Twi will read, 'ehena asefo ni?' and then they replied, 'Brafo Asiedu asefo ne yen' and that became 'Ahenease'. Thus Larteh Ahenease.

Food Habits

Are there foods one can eat and those one cannot eat?

Yes there are things like that. I have already told you that when our forefathers got here, they were led by two principal gods. These were Otutu and Chao. Throughout the journey to this place, if we got to anywhere and there was shortage of food or there was no food, the gods would perform miracles and food would be available for our people to eat. Then Chao will provide fire. That explains why the Ga people call us La te (providers of fire) because we could strike stones to light. We have customs surrounding food habits in Larteh. In those days, even today we have ndade, who reveal secrets and asofo who speak the revelations of the ndade to the people (mouthpiece of the ndade).

We have taboo foods. These are seasonal foods. It is so because during the harvest, each farmer must first bring part of his harvest to the chief for the chief to eat some first before any other person including the farmer himself could eat. This has a biblical foundation in the sense that the Israelites where

asked to bring the first harvest of their produce to the priest before everybody can eat. I have already mentioned to you that we came from a part of Israel, therefore our customs and practices are similar to theirs. When we do this, we believe that one rather receives blessings and shows appreciation to God and the gods for a bumper harvest.

The food we the Guan Larteh eat is called eba (Ohun or pinpineso). Eba is made from roasted corn which has been turned into powder form. It is prepared as if one is preparing banku. In this regard one boils water and when it is hot, one adds some quantity of the powder to the boiling water and stirs to get the desired texture until it is cooked. This food is served with soup prepared with okro or small cocoa pod (properly called eho) kontomire, palm oil and fish specifically from Volta Lake (adwen - mad fish). This is done during the Ohum festival. Every house prepares this kind of food. This is where we show love towards one another. This is because everyone would take portions of the food and give it to his/her neighbor. We share the food in such a way that even the gods have their share. This is our seasonal or ceremonial or festive food. It is also a proof of bumper harvest and we do this every year to show our appreciation to the gods.

Let me reiterate that at Effianko, we had madfish from the lake and therefore when we left the place, those who remained there as part of paying homage to us would every year put a sizeable quantity of the fish into baskets and bring it to us for our festival. We would perform rituals and then share the fish among the ndade who would use them for the preparation of the food. So we had a relationship with the Ningo and the Prampram people. Again the Ningo people also had a Kyao god at their end and therefore during our

festival they will bring fish to the Kyao Osofo to perform rituals for them so that when they go fishing they will have a good catch. Not only that indeed the Ningbo and the Prampram people during the Odwira festival will bring a cow to us for the festival. Unfortunately that tradition has been destroyed now. Chiefs after chiefs changed that custom and therefore at a point, instead of the items like fish, they demanded money. Even the money was not forthcoming regularly. But the custom is still there.

Apart from these, every year we try to share food with our forefathers specifically chiefs and others. This is because when they were alive they ate with us and therefore we continue to share meal to strengthen the bond we have. We prepare mashed yam (eto) and sprinkle it around. In addition to this we give food to our water bodies. In the olden days our forefathers even though they were not scientists, they made laws that made them appear as scientists. They made laws regarding the use of water bodies i.e. rivers and streams. They would leave a grove around the river just to protect it from pollution and band people from stepping into the water or urinating or taking their bath in the water, why the water was the only one which the people drank and cooked with it. They would usually say, if you violate the rule, the gods will punish you or you will die. This is because people could go that side of the river and pollute it and make it unsafe for drinking thereby causing a lot of sicknesses. Up to date it is a taboo for one to defecate along the banks of the river here in Larteh. You cannot fell trees at places where there are rivers. All these are to protect the water. So here in Larteh when the taps are not flowing, we are not worried because we depend clean water from the rocks like

Eburunkumi. We have other rituals we perform for Otutu – our god. In those days every law that was passed was for a specific purpose.

Unfortunately some people consider these things ‘fetish’ but they are not. These are the real things that happened. It is our modern youth like you who think that these things are ‘fetish’ but you know what there is wisdom in ‘fetishism’ (abosomsem). If you want a wise person to give you counsel, consult the priest or priestess. He/she knows how to get you out of trouble and then tell you the truth. The point is that here in Larteh and especially where the shrine is, one cannot pass in front of it with fire wood tied at the two ends.

Why this rule?

Nana: Our forefathers realized that many people were dying as a result of a common practice. In the olden days, our farms were closer to our homes. We would occasionally go to the farm lands and gather firewood and tie them together and heap them. This firewood will be picked one after the other and be sent home for cooking. Unknown to them, the firewood became the hiding place for snakes and they carried them to the house. So in the evening when they are cooking the snake could come out of the firewood and bite one or two people in the house. By the time they will get treatment for the snake bite, the victim must have died.

From that time they made the law that no one should bring firewood tied at the two ends. If you bring it, when you get to the outskirts of the town, untie it, re-arrange it then and then use a rope to hold it together in the middle before you enter the town with it. When you do so, if there is any snake or harmful animal in it, you will detect it early. During those times too, our forefathers were using bobo - traditional lantern called bobo. In the night it

attracted all sorts of insects. Some of these insects are very harmful and poisonous. Some could enter your eye and it hurts like pepper. So for example in the night when these insects around and they are pounding the fufu and the soup is on fire and the insects fall into the fufu and the soup and pound them together with the fufu. So people would eat and then during the night their stomach will pain them and then they will die. The following morning it would be news that some people or a whole family died during the night after eating fufu the previous night.

This continued until the elders made a rule banning the pounding of fufu after 6pm. So here in Larteh it is a taboo to pound fufu after 6pm. We are told the gods hate this practice. So there are a lot of things our forefathers put in place just for our safety. When a woman or a girl menstruates, she is not allowed to go the kitchen to cook for the family. This is because at that time, she is ritually unclean and is therefore not in a position to cook hygienic food.

Are the foods that are seasonal or festive oriented the only food?

Nana: We have yam (from the cocoa farm- kookooase bayere). When the year ends, the chief has to purchase/get a few tubers of the yam and add a sheep to it and show it to his subjects that the year has ended. So after that we would pound fufu in this palace and everybody is entitled to come and eat. This is to create awareness that the year has ended. Then we would use some of the yam for eto and sprinkle it around to our ancestors and the gods to receive blessings for the coming year. Here in Larteh we celebrate our festival a year. This usually happens three weeks before the Odwira.

During the Odwira, all the chiefs would slaughter sheep, pound fufu in their various homes and invite people come and eat. This usually takes place

on Thursday. The fufu is either cocoyam or yam proper and everybody can come and eat. It is a merry making event but it is this time too that we feed our gods and ancestors to remember them for their role in our lives. But apart from these we have other foods that I would say we have developed taste for (akonode). Those were the foods our forefathers ate. These days you cannot find these foods anymore.

Why is this so?

Nana: Because we do not make conscious effort to look for such foods. All of these are factors accounting for the numerous sicknesses – kyebomu (fried eggs) and highly seasoned foods account for diseases these days. If you get your boiled plantain, plus your grounded pepper, kontomire, groundnut, tomatoes and fish, it is healthy. The highly seasoned foods these days do not help us. So our indigenous foods like aprapransa, obodokunu, pinpineso and others were healthy food. Other foods like ofam, even ofam these days I do not see it anymore. Have you eaten one before?

Interview with Otu - Dankwa

I have heard that before you eat yam in this town, the chief priestess has to perform rituals and eat some first before anybody else can eat or sell yam in this town and I mean the new yam. Likewise during the farming season, when they plant maize, those whose corn would be ready for consumption will have to inform the shrine-the priestess and her people. The fellow will have to bring the first corn harvested from the farm to the shrine for rituals to be performed and the priestess and her elders in the Akonedi

shrine to eat first before fellow and everybody in the town can eat. We do this every year even this year we did it. Anyone who violates this rule and secretly eats corn would cough and the gods will deal with the fellow.

What about the yam?

That one too every year we do it. This year we did it.

Why these rituals?

We have some gods that one holding this town. These are Otutu, Kyao, Brofo. Otutu is the god of war/defense, Kyao is the god that provides fish. Brofo is the god that ensures that our food crops do well-the god harvest. So it is only a sign of appreciation if we perform rituals to show that we are grateful to him for what he has given to us.

Has anybody violated the law and suffered the consequences for it?

Well since I was born I have not seen that before. The point is that because it is a taboo, people even fear to violate the rule. Larteh people obey their traditional laws and rules. Again it is a small place and therefore we know ourselves. That helps us to easily identify strangers among us.

What is the ritual like for the yam?

When the new yam is ready for the harvest, the men would have communal labour and clear the path to the farm lands. That evening the priest of the brofo god would go and sleep in the forest alone and perform the rites and return home the following morning with tubers of the yam. He would be met on arrival by the elders of the town. This would be followed by performing rituals throughout the town before everyone can eat the new yam. Those who sell yam, would go to him for him to perform rituals and ask for blessings for them to succeed in their economic activities.

When is the Odwira?

September-October

Are there foods that are prepared for specific occasions?

Every year when the rituals have been performed, three weeks before the Odwira, the Chief cooks (pounds yam fufu) for his subjects, and everyone is invited to come and eat in his palace. During the Odwira itself, food is prepared for people to come and eat.

What are some of the traditional foods in Larteh?

Ofam, apiti, aprapransa, pinpineso, konkonte, ampesi etc.

Are these foods still available?

No these foods apart from pinpineso and the yam fufu which are still common, the rest if you cook, apiti, aprapransa etc nobody will eat.

Why?

Because they don't know how to eat such foods. My small child, if you give him apranpransa, he doesn't know what it is. Again the pastors have said a lot of things about our old ladies in a such way that when they cook, we refuse to eat because we believe that they are witches. Even konkonte is almost gone. People don't eat it anymore.

Why?

Because of the idea of witchcraft. Old women are associated with witchcraft. Nobody buys aprapransa from the streets because people believe it is food for the witches.

Will the indigenous food ever surface again?

Well we have a festival during which such foods are prepared. They are prepared by the leaders of the brong. The stones you see there represent them. They prepare pinpineso for everyone to eat.

Why pinpineso?

It is an indigenous food of our forefathers. It is made from roasted maize flour and prepared like banku. It is eaten with soup made with kontomire, garden eggs, pepper, okro, palm oil and fish specifically from the Volta Lake. Now you prepare and some people express disgust for it because it is mostly prepared by old women. Our old ladies still prepare the indigenous foods like ofam, apiti, but even these now we don't have plenty of plantain.

Is it not because these foods are not associated with customs that is why they are lost?

Oh our old ladies still prepare such foods and eat. My own grandmother is about 96 years now but she still depends on the indigenous food. If you cook rice for her in a rice cooker, she would not eat. If she wants to eat kenkey tomorrow, she would buy from it today. In the past people ate indigenous food and they lived longer. I was asking someone that why is it that rich people's children are always falling sick against the background that they have always been taking medicine to boost their immune system. It is from the food they eat. Those foods do not have any nutritional value. A doctor friend of mine told me that those who have gone beyond forty years are safe, but those of us who are below forty years, it would be difficult for us to live up to forty years because the food we eat these days generate diseases for

us. My grandfather was 97 years before he died but even at that age he could have erection, why? Because he ate well.

So what accounts for this? Is it our leaders who are not teaching us?

No it is over learning. We have learnt someone else's own and we have relegated our own to the background. Today if you ask your daughter to grind pepper in an earthenware bowl for you, she would prefer a blender not that it grinding the pepper in the earthenware bowl will be a bit of time wasting, but the simple truth is that she does not know how to do that. But our forefathers knew for sure that the clay that was used for the earthenware bowl is itself medicinal.

Why don't you eat kenkey on Tuesdays and Fridays?

Every community has what it frowns upon. Our god does not eat kenkey on Tuesdays and Fridays. He hates it. It has a meaning and when you enter the shrine they would explain it to you. You can eat it outside the Larteh town but you will not get it here to eat. You can cook it in your own home and eat but not for sale.

What other foods exist?

Oyidan is also another food ceremony associated with Larteh beliefs. You are a Christian, tell me what brings people together? It is food. Yes, you go for communion and the rest eating together. In the past when someone dies, among the family members, people often quarrel over issues of finance. Many would do this under the influence of alcohol. The end result is that people turn to have bitterness against each other during this period. So the after the burial, the Abusuapanin would bring all members together and cook food specifically ampesi and fufu with palm nut soup with fish from the Volta Lake for all

family members to eat. Now people think that is fetish. It is not, it is just a party to unite all family members.

Is this done in every home?

Some families have cancelled that because it is beyond the family's resources. Having incurred cost after burying the deceased, there is usually little or no money left for such an event. But one must fulfill the customary rites needed for the cancellation. In my family for example, we have cancelled it. After an uncle's funeral, the Abusuapanin called for a meeting and in that meeting he stressed that, the oyidan we had for my uncle was the last in the family. He asked people to speak if they any objection and nobody raised any objection and so we offered libation and prayed to the gods and the ancestors to deal with us kindly if we don't do that again. The purpose as I said was sort of unite members.

Has there been any incidence where somebody died because he failed to do that?

Oh you will do it. You see, it is be done immediately after burial, usually the first Monday after the burial on Saturday and so if the time passes and you have not done it, the Akonedi priestess would send delegates to your house to ask you why you have not done it. The second issue is that, before you hold the oyidan, it is required by tradition to inform the chief and the Akonedi shrine and some cases the entire town what killed your family member. If the fellow died through road accident or committed suicide the ceremony would not be held because our tradition does not associate with such manner of death.

Do you still have the fourteen brongs in Larteh?

Yes but the number of houses in each brong has increased because people are either expanding family houses or putting up new houses but the brongs remain fourteen. Each brong has its own leader. They are called ndade. Each brong has its own deity but all of these deities are under the Akonedi Shrine.

In which aspect of life are the youth expected to behave well?

We have water bodies that if you are menstruating, you do not have to near. The water is not accessible Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you would enter the water, you will have to remove your slippers because that is where the chief's stools are cleansed. That river is down there, it is called Efité.

Which people prepare such foods?

The festive foods are prepared by elderly women. In the case of the Shrine, there are women who have been tasked to prepare the food. These are old women. But the unfortunate thing is that the Christian pastors have tuned our minds to other things for us to think that these are fetish. So I can say for a fact that, in 20 years' time, there would be no one to prepare such foods because the old women are dying. The worse of it is that when they are cooking, the young ones would not be there to learn because they consider these things are 'fetish' or 'colo'. So we have no hope.

Some Interview Session at the Akonedi Shrine

Osofo: This shrine was established by our forefathers years ago. There are a lot of people who perform different functions in this shrine. We work on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. On those days you would find all my elders in

this shrine everyone busy doing one thing the other. Before you enter this courtyard, you will see an inscription on the doorpost which reads, 'Nokware Fi'. Here in this shrine we require the truth and worship our god in sincerity. Our god is not represented with any sculpture or image. The Akonedi god is a spirit. We do not know where he came from but we know that when he descends on the priestess, he tells us what he wants us to do. We also get the opportunity to ask for what we want. His name is Nana Akonedi. I am the Osofo – these are priests. People from all walks of life come to this shrine. They range from people who want business success to those who seek marriage partners, to people who have spiritual problems etc. If you are cursed by someone, we can overturn the curse but I can say with a lot of confidence that if the Akonedi god curses you, no god or shrine can overturn that curse.

If you are suffering from a strange disease and you want to be healed, when you come here we would perform the necessary rituals and ask the gods the herbs that can treat your sickness. If the need be, we would take you through spiritual exercises. This is the global headquarters of the Akonedi shrine. There are branches in other places including overseas. This shrine was renovated in 5/8/1935. So it has been there for years.

Okomfo Tano: If you feel cheated by a business partner, when you come here we are able to take what you have lost for you. If you have a court case and want to win the case, we are able to assist you in that regard. We arbitrate cases. Whatever your problem is, we are able to help you out of your problem – childbirth, marriage, loss of capital etc. But you must come back here to thank the gods if your problem is solved for you.

Okomfo Kyao: There are specific customs that are performed to mark the events in the year. We have times within the year that we give the gods food. In that regard all the priests/priestesses under the Akonedi god from all over Ghana and beyond come and help in this celebration. This is during the yam festival starting from Thursday to the following week Thursday.

C5: We judge cases like they do in the law court. There are times within the year that Nana Osofo and his elders do not eat yam. So during the yam festival, all the priests/priestesses under him will come and perform rituals and taste the new yam and declare it wholesome before anybody else can eat.

Why do we have another Akonedi shrine down there?

Okomfo Tano: Don't confuse yourself. The priest over there was trained in this shrine or by the Akonedi god and after the training he opened his own shrine and named it after the shrine that trained him

How has the Akonedi shrine influenced the Larteh people in terms of food?

C5: Here in Larteh, on Tuesdays and Fridays, we don't eat kenkey (Ga kenkey) especially those who are functionaries in the shrine, we refrain from any food prepared with corn dough.

Okomfo Tano: Including those who submit to Akonedi god.

Why this practice?

Osofo: It is a taboo for the Akonedi god. It is an abomination for him. He owns the town, this community and therefore when he says he does not like something we must obey and do his will. We cannot ask him to explain to

us why he is making such a demand. He says he does not like it and that is final. Again it is a custom here in Larteh. If you violate the law, you will be punished. But the amazing thing is that the people in this community respect the instructions of Akonedi Shrine and so on such days, you will not even see kenkey on the streets for sale.

Is it about every meal prepared with corn?

C5: Let me tell you something, there are farmers in this town. When they plant corn and is ready, the one whose becomes ready first to harvest has to come and inform nana and his elders. In this regard he will bring about ten or twenty of them to the shrine for rituals to be performed. Nana will perform rituals and pray to thank the gods, cook what was brought and share with his elders to eat before anybody else in the town can eat of the corn. That is before even those who will buy and sell can buy. Don't forget that you cannot even buy from outside and bring it to the town. It is an offense. The rituals must be performed first before anybody can eat. If you violate the rule, you will suffer the consequence for it.

Okomfo Tano: It is a tradition. It has been there long before we were born. Nana Chao for example has to perform some rituals in the course of the year to usher in a certain type of fish. If he has not performed that ritual, no one can eat that type of fish.

Does the shrine invite people to share in a meal?

Osofo: Yes, if you were here last week, you would have seen things for yourself. But this is something we do every year and everybody comes to eat the food unless you don't want to eat. You know there are some people who say they are Christians and therefore consider things like this as fetish. We

cook food and place it there for people to come and eat. We do this for a week. We also sprinkle oto- that is made from yam. We give that to the gods and the ancestors. We pound fufu and prepare soup with goat meat for people to come and eat. It means we are giving nana Akonedi's children food to eat. It is a sign of unity. Thus throughout the year, if someone wronged you, or you wronged someone, that is the period we eat together to bury our differences.